

# THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

Volume LIX, Number 2

Chicago, Illinois

October 1998

## TWENTY-FIFTH ANNUAL NEVINS-FREEMAN ADDRESS William C. (Jack) Davis on "Myths and Realities of the Civil War"

by Barbara Hughett

THE NEVINS-FREEMAN AWARD, named in honor of distinguished historians Allan Nevins and Douglas Southall Freeman, was established by The Civil War Round Table of Chicago in 1974. It is presented to individuals to honor their outstanding contributions to the preservation of American history, especially that occurring between the years of 1861-1865.

On October 9, noted Civil War scholar William C. (Jack) Davis will become the twenty-fifth annual recipient of the Nevins-Freeman Award. The title of his acceptance address will be "Myths and Realities of the Civil War."

In his presentation, Mr. Davis will first explore the nature of mythology in modern cultures and the kinds of people and events that produce modern myths. He will then look at about a dozen of the more prevalent—and often amusing—long-standing myths to grow out of the American Civil War. For reasons he will elaborate upon in his address, most—though not all—Civil War mythology sprang from, or relates to, the Confederate side of things.

The key point he will seek to make is that we should not reject our mythology, because of what it tells us about ourselves, in what we choose to believe—in the face of evidence to the contrary; but that we don't need it either to explain or apologize for what our ancestors did. Davis says he once thought of titling the talk, "Something to Offend Just About Everybody," because we don't take kindly to have our cherished myths challenged.

William C. (Jack) Davis is one of the most prolific Civil War authors of all time, in addition to being a popular lecturer and a frequent commentator on television programs about the Civil War. He received both his bachelor's and master's degrees in history at Sonoma State College (now Sonoma State University) in Rohnert Park, California. Among the important editorial positions he has held are those of editor of *American History Illustrated* and *Civil War Times Illustrated* magazines (1972-1976) and executive editor (1982-1984) and corporate editorial director (1984-1986) of Historical Times, Inc. He is currently a consulting editor at Stackpole Books.



William C. (Jack) Davis

Davis serves as historical



### 574th Regular Meeting

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### NEVINS-FREEMAN ADDRESS

William C. (Jack) Davis on "Myths and Realities of the Civil War"

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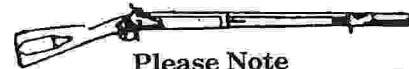
Friday, October 9

★ ★ ★

Union League Club  
65 West Jackson Boulevard

Cocktails at 5:30 p.m. Dinner at 6:30 p.m.  
\$25 - The Civil War Round Table of Chicago members  
\$30 - Nonmembers

*Entree:* Roast Cornish Game Hen stuffed with Wild Rice or Catch of the Day



### Please Note

Make your reservation by Wednesday, October 7, by calling Registrar Carole Le Claire at 847-698-1438. People who attend without having made a reservation will pay a \$5 walk-in charge. If you make a reservation and then find you cannot attend, please call to cancel or you will be billed for a dinner. **No last-minute orders for the Catch of the Day can be honored. The chef must have at least twenty-four hours notice.**

The Union League Club is located at the corner of Jackson Boulevard and Federal Street. Federal Street runs north and south between Dearborn and Clark Streets. Parking is available at the General Parking lot, just south of the Union League Club, at the rate of \$5 per car.

consultant and frequent on-camera commentator for many Civil War presentations on television. He is perhaps best well known for his many appearances on the Greystone Communications/Arts and Entertainment/History Channel series, "Civil War Journal." He is also a historical consultant

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## THE CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE



Founded December 3, 1940  
601 South La Salle Building, Suite C-817  
Chicago Illinois 60605  
Phone: 847-698-1438

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The only requirement for membership in The Round Table is a genuine interest in the Civil War and its era. For information, address Membership Committee, 601 South La Salle Building, Suite C-817, Chicago, Illinois 60605.

## BATTLEFIELD PRESERVATION

☆ UPDATE ☆

by Roger E. Bohn

**A Battlefield Preservation largess from Ralph G. Newman:** Shortly before he died, Ralph did one last favor for The Civil War Round Table of Chicago and for subjects that were near and dear to his heart for most of his life: the promotion of interest and education in our American history, the life and works of Abraham Lincoln, and the preservation of Civil War sites as a means of furthering those ends. Specifically, he donated over six hundred volumes from his personal library to the Round Table to put his "money" where his mouth (and his heart) really were. These books include many that are hard-to-find, out-of-print, and expensive. In order to make them most fairly available to the largest number of our members and friends, an assortment of volumes will be offered at a Silent Auction, to be held each month at our regular meeting.

For those of you not familiar with the workings of a Silent Auction, a few words of instruction will help facilitate the matter. One box of about twenty assorted books will be offered each month, and a Bid Sheet will be with each book. The Bid Sheet will explain that there is a minimum bid of \$5.00 per book, and a minimum raise of \$1.00 per bid. Simply write your name on the first available line and indicate your dollar bid. Someone wishing to raise the bid places his/her increased bid on the next line, increasing by \$1.00 or more.

Keep an eye on the sheets during breaks and upgrade your bids as you see fit. Five minutes after the end of the speaker's presentation, the bidding will close, and the last/highest bid is the "winner." At that time, you may pay (by cash or check) for your successful bids and take your "treasures" home. If you must leave before the closing of the bidding, the books which have your winning bid will be held for you until the next meeting. Remember, as in any auction, your name and your bid are a "contract" to purchase.

It will take about three years to go through the whole six hundred books. The selections include a wide range of titles from Ralph's wide range of interest in our American history. The money brought in by the auction each month will be donated by the Round Table, in Ralph's name, to the sites selected by the Battlefield Preservation Fund Committee. What better way to honor Ralph, help a worthy cause, and treat ourselves to some real "treasures," than by participating in the monthly Silent Auctions?

**To honor the memory of Round Table Founder Ralph G. Newman,** Lincoln College in Lincoln, Illinois, has created a professorship chair in Abraham Lincoln and Civil War Studies. Donations to The Ralph Newman Chair would be appreciated and may be sent to: The Ralph Newman Chair, Lincoln College, 300 Keokuk Street, Lincoln, Illinois 62656.

For additional information, contact Marvin Sanderman (847-520-3525) or Barbara Hughett (773-973-5822 or via e-mail, linbarb@aol.com). Thank you.

"Lincoln at Gettysburg: Man, Myth, and Monument" is the theme of the Third Annual Lincoln Forum, to be held in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, on November 16-19. Speakers include Richard N. Current, Harold Holzer, James M. McPherson, Edna Greene Medford, Stephen B. Oates, John Y. Simon, Louise Taper, and Frank J. Williams. A special award will be given to Dr. John Hope Franklin. For information, contact Frank J. Williams, 300 Switch Road, Hope Valley, Rhode Island 02832, 401-539-7979, or by e-mail at alincoln@worldnet.att.com.



## ☛ SEPTEMBER MEETING ☛

by Roger E. Bohn

On September 11, Brian Pohanka addressed 123 members and guests at the 573rd regular meeting of The Civil War Round Table of Chicago. His topic was "When History Meets Hollywood." Pohanka was a researcher and writer for Time-Life Books for ten years, and for the past ten years has been an historical consultant for various productions, including the films "Glory," "Gettysburg," and the very popular television series "Civil War Journal." He is a graduate of Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and for twenty years has been a Civil War reenactor with the 5th New York Zouaves.

A series of slides illustrated the History-versus-Hollywood theme. Pohanka was very critical of some of the productions in which he had worked. Many times, the wrong rifles are being carried, the battle is incorrectly played out, or the characters are portrayed in a non-factual way. He made the point, however, that students of the Civil War today are drawn to this topic, or are bored away from it, by the way in which the subject is presented to them. His point is that if one child or one interested person is drawn to history or to the study of the American Civil War by way of these "inaccurate" Hollywood versions of history, the result may well be an ongoing search for more information. A lifetime of satisfaction and enjoyment may well result.

One slide he showed was a photograph of a group of officers which had been taken by Alexander Gardner. In Gore Vidal's "Lincoln," however, the shot is attributed to Matthew Brady, whom Pohanka says probably never personally took a field photograph, due to failing eyesight and the demands of running his various studios. The director, even though informed of the error, kept Brady as the source of the shot, because "everyone has heard of Brady." The director said: "It may not be good history, but it's good Hollywood!" It is all the more frustrating when we realize that Hollywood has available thousands of photographs that were taken of the actual scenes and people involved.

Many of the aging veterans of the Civil War lived to see one of Hollywood's first presentations of that war, "The Birth of a Nation." They were outraged by the portrayal of blacks and the KKK, but not at all concerned about which unit carried what rifle or who had on which uniform buttons ... because, according to Pohanka, many of them didn't remember for certain themselves!

"Gone With The Wind" is another famous "Civil War" movie. Pohanka noted that in the vast sea of wounded Confederates in the field hospital scene in Atlanta, Scarlett is shown wearing a fantasy-gown that was, no doubt, designed for the 1930's taste, with no regard to what the women of the 1860s actually wore. The character Melanie, however, wore the rather plain and much more practical costumes that Victorian women would really have worn ... but it might have been considered "too drab," even if historically correct!

"North & South II," which Pohanka declared "a drug-store romance with a little bit of history thrown in," was shot in Natchez and was one of the first films to make use of modern-day reenactors. This is a good deal for the film companies. After all, these people already have all the costumes, rifles, and accouterments that are needed; they already know how to march, drill, and fire; and they'll work for \$50 a day! However, Hollywood always follows the novel, and the novel doesn't always (or seldom does) follow history. Sharpshooters charged where sharpshooters did not charge,

and Spanish moss grew in "locations" where Spanish moss does not grow. So much for authenticity.

The film "Glory" portrayed the 54th Massachusetts Infantry, the first regiment of black troops recruited in the North, and Pohanka had the assignment of "recruiting" their modern counterparts. Recruiting, equipping, arming, and drilling these "troops" gave Pohanka the feeling of frustration and of accomplishment that must have been felt by Colonel Shaw and his men at Fort Wagner. We've heard of many of the "moments" in the film that were Hollywood, not history, i.e., the film was shot with the ocean on the wrong side (better camera angle!); Morgan Freeman was a very nice man to work with (but was old enough to be the father of the actual first-sergeant!); and the bulk of the characters were "war-movie stereotypes," not following the actual participants' personae (it plays better this way!). Pohanka feels that the final charge on Fort Wagner would have been much better if they had just filmed the spontaneous reactions of the reenactors. The cameras, however, were always out of range and set to "shoot the final take tomorrow!" We will always wonder if the stuntmen that were "trampolining" over the fixed bayonets knew that the reenactors all had real, not rubber, bayonets.

"Gettysburg" was based on Michael Shaara's novel, *Killer Angels*; and again, Hollywood followed the novel, not the history. Pohanka recounted point after point about the actors, the characters they portrayed, and how these were used/misused. His "word pictures" handled Martin Sheen's version of Robert E. Lee, James Longstreet's beard and hat, riders afraid of horses, the British officer's "half-right" non-red coat, the reenactors' respect for Jeff Daniels's portrayal of Joshua Chamberlain, the dog breed that was not a period breed, a runt-like Winfield Scott Hancock, no women at all in Gettysburg (?), budget cuts, "dead horses," and the half-hearted death struggles.

At the final sunset scene of "Gettysburg," Pohanka felt that somehow, the old Civil War veterans "upstairs somewhere" were saying: "we know this Hollywood version of what we went through is flawed, and they never seem to get it right ... but we do know that they somehow keep our legacy alive." That about summed it up for all of us.

### JERRY SLECHTA

(December 7, 1906-September 5, 1998)

We are sad to announce that longtime member and former president (1959-1960) Jerome (Jerry) Slechta, after a long battle with cancer, on September 5, in Jefferson, Wisconsin, where he had practiced law for fifty years prior to his retirement in the 1980s. Former President Brooks Davis and Betsey Davis attended the funeral in Jefferson on September 10. Brooks described Jerry as "a dear friend and a great CWRT member in his day, bright, funny, active, and knowledgeable..." Jerry gave his extensive Lincoln and Civil War collection to the Hoard Museum in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin. A special room was built to house it; Jerry attended its dedication in 1996. He came down from Jefferson monthly for our Round Table meetings for many years and was a frequent battlefield tour participant. Over the past decade, he attended a number of meetings. He was here for our Fiftieth Anniversary festivities in October 1990; he spoke at the 80th Birthday Party the Round Table gave for founder Ralph Newman in November 1991; and he came down several other times more recently. Jerry is survived by two sons, six grandsons, two granddaughters, and three great-granddaughters. Our sincerest condolences go to them all. We will miss him.

## The New Books

Compiled by C. Robert Douglas



McCaslin, Richard B. *Portraits of Conflict: A Photographic History of North Carolina in the Civil War*. U. of Arkansas Press. 1997. \$75.00.

McKenzie, John D. *Uncertain Glory — Lee's Generalship Re-examined*. Hippocrene Books. 1997. \$29.95.

McPherson, James M. *For Cause and Comrades — Why Men Fought in the Civil War*. Oxford U. Press. 1997. \$25.00.

**WILLIAM C. (JACK) DAVIS** (continued from page 1) for the History Channel series, "Movies in Time."

In addition to having contributed chapters or introductions to more than fifteen separate anthologies and regularly writing articles for major magazines and professional journals, he has written or edited—since 1974—more than forty books on the Civil War! Among these are *Breckinridge: Statesman, Soldier, Symbol* (1974); six volumes in *The Image of War, 1861-1865* series (1982-1984); *Commanders of the Civil War* (1990); *Jefferson Davis: The Man and His Hour* (1991); *The Civil War Cookbook* (1993); *"A Government of Our Own": The Making of the Confederacy* (1994); *Brothers in Arms* (1994); and *The Cause Lost* (1996).

His many awards and honors include four Jefferson Davis Awards from the Confederate Memorial Literary Society (1974, 1978, 1994, and 1995); an Honorary Degree from Lincoln Memorial University (1976); the Fletcher Pratt Award of the New York Civil War Round Table; the T. Harry Williams Memorial Award of the Baton Rouge Civil War Round Table (1988); the Harry S. Truman Award of the Kansas City Civil War Round Table (1993); and the Daniel Laney Prize for Best Book in Civil War History, 1996, for *The Cause Lost*.

This will be the fourth time Jack Davis has addressed our Round Table. In January 1975, he spoke on "The Battle of New Market"; in January 1982, on "The Siege of Charleston, 1861-1865"; and in December 1995, on "Davis, Beauregard, and Johnston: The Triple Play that Crippled the Confederacy."

### Previous Nevins-Freeman Honorees

Bruce Catton, 1974	Harold M. Hyman, 1986
Ralph G. Newman, 1975	James T. Hickey, 1987
T. Harry Williams, 1976	Robert K. Krick, 1988
Lloyd D. Miller, 1977	Mark E. Neely, Jr., 1989
Bell I. Wiley, 1978	Marshall D. Krolick, 1990
E. B. (Pete) Long, 1979	Gary W. Gallagher, 1991
Edwin C. Bearss, 1980	Shelby Foote, 1992
James I. Robertson, Jr., 1981	Stephen B. Oates, 1993
Frank E. Vandiver, 1982	Alan T. Nolan, 1994
John Hope Franklin, 1983	Richard N. Current, 1995
Richard B. Harwell, 1984	James M. McPherson, 1996
John Y. Simon, 1985	Wiley Sword, 1997

### David Herbert Donald to Receive 1999 Nevins-Freeman Award

The Executive Committee of The Civil War Round Table of Chicago voted at its Summer meeting to award next year's Nevins-Freeman Award to renowned Abraham Lincoln and Civil War scholar David Herbert Donald. Dr. Donald will give his acceptance speech at our October 8, 1999, meeting.

## BULLETIN BOARD



### FUTURE MEETINGS

Regular meetings are held at the Union League Club, 65 West Jackson Boulevard, the second Friday in each month, except as noted.

*October 9:* Nevins-Freeman address: William C. (Jack) Davis on "Myths and Realities of the Civil War"

*November 13:* Robert O'Neill on "The Federal Cavalry in the Peninsula Campaign"

*December 11:* Paul Finkelman on "Lincoln, Emancipation, and the Limits of Constitutional Change"

*January 15, 1999:* Marshall D. Krolick on "Council of War: Meade and His Generals on July 2, 1863" (**This is the THIRD Friday**)

*February 12:* Edwin C. Bearss, topic to be announced

*March 12:* Peter Cozzins; topic to be announced

*April 9:* Gary Gallagher, topic to be announced

*April 29-May 2:* Annual Battlefield Tour, Fredericksburg

*May 14:* Michael Andrus, topic to be announced

*June 11:* Thomas P. Sweeney, topic to be announced

### NEW MEMBERS

Rick Branham, 946 Forest Road, LaGrange Park, IL 60526, 708-352-3768

Manuel Gosch, 1871 Glendale Avenue, Northbrook, IL 60062, 847-559-8660

James Sanford, 902 Ridge Square, #106, Elk Grove Village, IL 60007-4170, 847-228-1538

Ms. Gerry Sczygiel, 2 Atrium Way, #207, Elmhurst, IL 60126, 630-832-3208

### CHANGES OF ADDRESS

Betsey and Brooks Davis, One East Schiller Street, #6A, Chicago, IL 60610-2173, 312-944-5082

Rocco deGrasse, 775 W. Summerdale, Chicago, IL 60656, 773-775-775-5805

David Silver, 3713 Vantage Lane, Glenview, IL 60025, 847-564-0688

Robert Walter, 645 S. Route 83, Elmhurst, IL 60125, 847-670-9121

**Member Jim Davids will address the Union League Club Civil War Round Table luncheon on Monday, October 26.** His topic will be "John C. Breckinridge: Statesman, Soldier, and Refugee." Lunch is served at noon; the cost is \$15. For reservations, call 312-435-5000.

### Schimmelfennig Boutique

The history of The Round Table, *The Civil War Round Table: Fifty Years of Scholarship and Fellowship*, by Barbara Hughett, is available for \$30 per copy. You may purchase the book at the monthly meeting or order it from Morningside Bookshop, 260 Oak Street, Dayton, Ohio 45401 (1-800-648-9710). Add \$2.50 for postage and handling.

In addition to The Round Table history and *The Continuing Civil War*, the essays from the Fiftieth Anniversary Proceedings, the following items are available at each monthly meeting: Lapel pins, Mugs, Meeting Tapes, Civil War Buff posters and T-Shirts, CWRT T-shirts, polos, and sweatshirts.

Proceeds from the sale of these items go to support the programs of The Civil War Round Table.