

Sumter to Appomattox

The Official Newsletter of the New South Wales Chapter of
The American Civil War Round Table of Australia

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Special Edition

Please visit our website www.americancivilwar.asn.au

A Message from the Chairman –

This special edition of our Newsletter has been prepared to apprise members of some key decisions taken by your Committee at a meeting held earlier this month.

We have been concerned for some time now of the small attendances at our regular meetings and have been considering changes that need to be made to ensure we go beyond the “boutique” style that has characterised our meetings this year. To this end, we are circulating the enclosed survey/questionnaire from which we hope to capture all members’ wishes for the structure of our program and the format of our meetings. It will be on the basis of your responses to this survey that the Committee will seek to set in place some longer term goals for our Chapter and establish a worthwhile program for 2008 onwards.

In the meantime, your Committee considered that some immediate action was required to ensure our meetings for the rest of 2007 remain viable. The unanimous view of the Committee was that our initiative of having monthly meetings was not working and needs to be changed as soon as possible. It was noted that the monies collected from the normal raffle did not cover the cost of the room hire and that we have needed to dip into our reserve funds to pay for the hire of the venue. Indeed, at some of this year’s meetings, the attendance was so small that it was not even viable to hold the raffle! To address these problems, your Committee has taken the following decisions:

1. Effective immediately, the program of monthly meetings are to be discontinued and a return to meetings every two months initiated with the next meeting scheduled for September;
2. For all metropolitan Sydney members, introduce a \$10 “room hire” levy in lieu of the regular raffles as a more reliable means of paying for our meeting venue.

These decisions were not made lightly and taken only after exhaustive consideration and discussion of all options open to us.

I trust that members will see that these actions were necessary to ensure our viability as an active group and support your Committee in its planning for the future.

Having spread all this “doom and gloom” I can report that our July meeting, where the award-winning History teacher, Bruce Dennett, lived up to our expectations with his lively and informative presentation – *Lincoln – The Man and the Myth*. I must say that having a professional historian and outstanding teacher and speaker like Bruce provide the quality presentation we experienced was a very real privilege. He has set a standard that, whilst most difficult to surpass, we must surely seek to emulate!

Included, also, with this Special Edition of our Newsletter is the invoice for your annual subscription to the Chapter for 2007 – 2008. It would be greatly appreciated if you would forward your subscription to our Secretary/Treasurer, Brendan O’Connell, as soon as possible. Please remember that these annual subscriptions are the primary source of income for the running of our Chapter’s activities.

Lastly, let me remind you that Brendan O’Connell still has a number of copies of Civil War maps, originally published in National Geographic magazine in 1961 as part of the War’s centenary. These maps were provided by the magazine to support our activities and may be obtained from Brendan for a small donation. These maps, which are printed double-sided on a large high quality A-2 paper, is a “must have” resource for all Civil War scholars and enthusiasts alike.

I look forward to seeing you at our meetings for the remainder of this year and hope that you will be in a position to provide the Committee with feedback via the enclosed survey/questionnaire to ensure we are meeting your needs.

Paul Kensey

Our Next Meeting

Our regular meetings of the NSW Chapter of ACWRTA continue at the **Roseville Memorial RSL Club, Pacific Highway, Roseville**. The meetings commence with a bistro-style dinner at the Club from 6pm with the proceedings of the meeting proper commencing at 7:15pm. The next meeting to be held on **Monday, September 10** and will be the first of our "double-barrelled" presentations on topics by two of our members:

1. **"Lincoln – The Devil Incarnate - A Southern Perspective (David Smith);**
2. **Lincoln – Lessons on Leadership (Bruce McLennan).**

As has been our practice in the past, papers based on each of these presentations will be available to members at the conclusion of the meeting. Members from outside the Sydney Metropolitan Area will have these papers mailed to them with the next edition of our Newsletter. Other members may receive these papers, on request.

Help Wanted

We need three of our members to join Brendan O'Connell in an interesting presentation now scheduled for November –

"Will the Real Abe Lincoln Stand Up"

You will each be provided with a script and required to read from the script a number of questions about Lincoln posed to you. No special skills are required but it would be helpful if think you can "ham it up" a little.

Volunteers for this great opportunity to be part of our program on Lincoln should contact John Cook as soon as possible (telephone 9412 3214) to enable you to get your script to read on the night.

Further Help Needed

We have been contacted by a visiting university lecturer from America who is interested in looking at the question of why Australians have an interest in America's Civil War. Dr Jane Schultz from Purdue and Indiana Universities is a visiting lecturer at the University of Sydney and will be in Australia until August when she will return to the United States for the beginning of their new academic year.

Dr Schultz has asked whether some of our members might have the time to complete a short questionnaire on their particular Civil War interests and how they came to be interested in War.

John Cook will have copies of this questionnaire for interested members and will be chasing you to be involved in this project over the coming months.

What's On for the Rest of 2007?

With the rationalisation of our 2007 program, the following meeting is then scheduled for **Monday, November 12**. This meeting will be another "double-barrelled" presentation with the topics being:

1. **The Gettysburg Address (Paul Kensey)**
2. **"Will the Real Abe Lincoln Stand Up" (various members of the Chapter)**

The final activity for the year is to be our brief but necessary Annual General Meeting followed by the End-of-Year Christmas Party. These activities are scheduled for the evening of Friday, November 30. Further details of the AGM and Christmas Party will be available later in the year but you may assured that the AGM will be short and painless and the Party will be a great one.

Your 2007 – 2008 Subscriptions

Enclosed with this edition of our Newsletter is the invoice for your annual subscription for 2007 – 2008. As our Chairman has pointed out, we have introduced a "room hire" levy of \$10 for members in the metropolitan area of Greater Sydney as a more reliable alternative to the monthly raffles we have used in the past to cover our venue hire costs. It is hoped that members will see the need for such an initiative and support its introduction.

Brendan O'Connell will appreciate your early attention to paying this subscription noting that these subscriptions are the primary source of funding of the Chapter's activities. Payment should be forwarded to Brendan at:

PO Box 200
ST IVES NSW 2075

Receipts will be issued by Brendan, on request.

Famous Last Words

"Now by God, I'll put him through. That is the last speech he will ever make"

- John Wilkes Booth, April 11, 1865

This publication is the official newsletter of the New South Wales Chapter of the American Civil War Round Table of Australia. All inquiries regarding the Newsletter should be addressed to the Secretary/Treasurer of the Chapter by telephone on 9449 3720 or at PO Box 200, St Ives, NSW, 2075 or by e-mail to secretary@americancivilwar.asn.au

Christmas in July – Civil War Holiday Traditions North and South...

Many of the traditions associated with the Christmas holiday celebrations in the United States today began during its Civil War. Without a doubt it was the loneliness and insecurities of war that prompted citizens and soldiers alike to re-create the solace and comfort of the homes they had left behind. They did this by re-establishing familiar European traditions, thus creating the illusion of love and peace in a time when very little of that existed in their daily lives.

Christmas had always been celebrated in Europe with eating, drinking and dancing often to excess. It was the Puritans that sought to break from what they considered indulgent behaviour and were successful in this when they immigrated to America. With their arrival in their new land, Christmas became a serious occasion, the purpose of which was to introspectively ponder sin and religious commitment.

It took almost 200 years for the United States to move away from this Puritan ethic and begin to enjoy the Xmas holiday season once more. In 1830, Louisiana was the first state to declare Christmas as a public holiday and other states soon followed but it was not until 1870 that Congress legislated to make Christmas a federal holiday. The religious revivals of the mid-19th Century also added to the trend to celebrate and recognise Christmas.

Christmas cards, carols, special foods and the holding of winter dances all date back to the late 1850s. During the Civil War it was common to cut down small fir and pine trees and take them into the home for decorating often with mistletoe as a sign of bringing good fortune to the household. Letters from Union soldiers during the War mention decorating their camp Christmas trees with salt-pork and hard tack.

It was the development of the modern Santa Claus that embedded Christmas into the American way of life. In 1861, Thomas Nast, a German immigrant working as a writer and artist for *Harper's Weekly* was asked to provide a drawing to accompany Clement Clark Moore's poem, *T'was the Night Before Christmas*. Nast called on his childhood memories of Bavaria. To create what is now the modern image of Santa Claus. His cherubic Santa, thin by today's standards, was depicted as bringing gifts of *Harper's* to the soldiers, thus, for the first time combining imagery (Santa Claus) and commercialism (selling *Harper's*) in the American marketplace.

Santa brought children gifts and these gifts were always hand-made. Children were satisfied to receive just small hand-carved toys, cakes oranges or apples. Many Southern diaries tell the story of Santa running the blockaded Southern ports to fill children's stockings with what little the parents could spare to make the day special for them. Even General Sherman's soldiers played Santa to the impoverished Southern children by attaching tree branch antlers to their horses and bringing food to the starving families in the war-ravaged Georgia countryside.

The most famous Christmas gift of the War was sent by telegram from William Tecumseh Sherman to Abraham Lincoln on December 22, 1864. It said:

'I beg to present to you as a Christmas gift, the city of Savannah, with 150 guns and plenty of ammunition, also about 25,000 bales of cotton'

The gift, of course, was not the guns, ammunition or the cotton, but the beginning of the end of the Civil War!

Quiz Question – Who Am I?

The question in this edition of our Newsletter is different from Previous questions in that it focuses on a 20th Century Civil War scholar. Notwithstanding the different focus of this question, the first correct answer submitted will win the usual prize – a bottle of fine wine. The question is:

During World War 2, I worked in the field of military intelligence initially with the Signal Intelligence Agency and the Army Security Agency before they became the National Security Agency (NSA). I was later to become the NSA's Chief Intelligence Officer.

In 1958, I made a remarkable discovery in the National Archives in Washington D.C., where I found amongst miscellaneous records of the Army of the Potomac, the operational files of the Army's Bureau of Military Information. These files had remained undisturbed since the end of the Civil War, 94 years before.

It was from these papers that I was able to formulate the first authentic history of the Civil War including crafting an "intelligence history" of eight of the major Civil War campaigns. I was able to provide, for the first time, answers to some most tantalizing "whys" of the War.

My work provided, also, analyses of the successes and failures of both Federal and Confederate intelligence up to and including the Gettysburg Campaign.

Who Am I?

Your answer to this question should be forwarded to John Cook by telephone or e-mail to

jcook@bigpond.net.au

In view of the envisaged difficulty of this question it is proposed that the prize will be of superior quality.

Bruce Dennett Wows Us!!

Members who were present at our July meeting were treated to a magnificent presentation on Lincoln by Bruce Dennett, historian and teacher extraordinaire. Bruce, who teaches History in one of our large Government schools in Sydney, tells us he has assiduously avoided promotion with its administrative responsibilities so that he can continue with his opportunities to teach and impart his love of History to students. In his presentation to us Bruce showed clearly why, without exception, our members would be more than happy for him to teach History to our children and grand-children!

The subject of Bruce's presentation was:

Lincoln – The Man and the Myth

Bruce started his presentation with two challenges to us when we are considering any particular historical event and/or person:

- First, never trust anyone who is reporting on or recounting any set of historical events;
- Before you judge the accuracy or otherwise of a particular set of events in history, look at who is the author of the text that provides the report of it.

Bruce then went on to explain that the events that led to Lincoln's assassination and the systems of values that characterised Western society for the century after his death coloured the perceptions of Lincoln and it only in recent times that a more objective historiography of America's 16th President man is emerging and the "sainthood" bestowed on him by his contemporaries and historical writers over the following 100 years. The myths of Lincoln that prevailed over this time provided, at best, an incomplete picture of the man. Lincoln is still regarded as one of the most outstanding presidents in the history of the United States and the task of present-day historians is to pick through the myriad stories of his personal and political life, in particular, the years of leading up to his nomination and his presidency, to separate the myth from the man.

It is not disputed that Lincoln was the consummate politician, extremely shrewd and ambitious. He out-maneuvred his better known rivals for the Republican nomination for the presidency but, then displayed a remarkable level of self-confidence in bringing these rivals (together with some former Democrats) into his war-time cabinet to successfully pursue the War and preserve the Union,

He was a person who made mistakes in throughout his political career instanced by the hasty and unwise appointment of Simon Cameron as Secretary of War at the beginning of his first presidential term. Although Lincoln established himself as no other president before him as the country's Commander-in-Chief, in hindsight, we observe that he was slow, on occasion, to remove under-performing military commanders during his presidency, as instanced by the "generous tenure" accorded General George McClellan as commander of the Army of the Potomac.

In recounting some of Lincoln's political shortcomings, Bruce used the example from Lincoln's single term as a Congressman in the 1840s when he spoke out against the constitutionality and justice of Mexican War. Yet in his election campaign for Congress, however, this opposition to the War was, at best, muted. Whilst it can be argued that his opposition was justified in terms of President Polk's expansionary grab for territory, Bruce suggested that Lincoln's opposition to the War might have been more justified if he had spoken out against it during his election campaign while the country were still at war and not after the conflict had ended viz., when Lincoln entered Congress.

Editor's Note: In Lincoln's defence, it should be noted that his speeches in Congress were in response to the Democrats' introduction of resolutions blaming the War on Mexican aggression. Lincoln was reported to have said it would have been preferable to remain silent on the questionable origins of the War. The problem was, however, the Democrats wouldn't let the Whigs "off the hook"

(Inserted as a response to Bruce's first exhortation not to trust anyone reporting such events) .

The question of whether Lincoln was racist provided the opportunity for Bruce to canvass the issue of whether Lincoln should be judged in terms of today's standards or whether he should be judged by the prevailing standards of his time. Certainly, by today's standards some of Lincoln's statements and actions had racist overtones, yet by those of his day they were not. Indeed, it was Lincoln who displayed a leadership role with the Emancipation Proclamations in laying a political foundation to address the complex issues of race that are still be worked out in the United States to the present day.

Interestingly, all of the assertions made in his presentation could be challenged (as Bruce would wish us to do!), but the fact remains that a most convincing case was presented of Lincoln's political and personal profile, supported by evidence, that did separate many of the myths about Lincoln that have had currency over the years. In doing this, Bruce has certainly challenged our views on America's 16th President and may well have forced, albeit gently, some of us to modify our views on the man.

Those members for whom the rain and temperature featured as reasons for their not coming to our meeting, I can only say you missed one of the best meetings our Chapter has ever had! In preparing this summary of Bruce's presentation, however, your reporter is acutely aware that this report is but a pale image of a magnificent presentation.