

October, 2004

417th Meeting

Vol. 26 #2

Tonight's Program:

Henry Wager Halleck

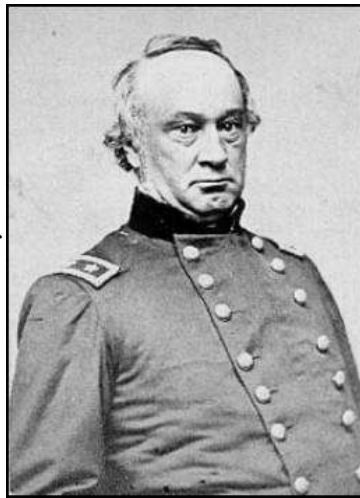
Born in New York, the West Point graduate of 1839 was an engineer and earned some honors in the Mexican War. He also worked at fortifications, taught at West Point, and studied the French military. Because of his "scholarly pursuits," he earned the (later derogatory) nickname "Old Brains."

Resigning from the Army in 1854, he became a highly successful San Francisco lawyer and remained involved in the militia, earning the trust of respected general Winfield Scott.

At the beginning of the Civil War, he earned the rank of major general. He commanded the Department of the Missouri and, at the pinnacle of his military career, became the commander-in-chief for two years (between 1862 and 1864). He was then relegated to chief of staff, after Grant was promoted to commander-in-chief.

Although he was a gifted tactician and organizer, he was not aggressive enough in field campaigns. He effectively communicated President Lincoln's orders, but in his only field campaign (Corinth, Mississippi), he advanced at a very slow pace, then entrenched. His subordinates' victories (especially those of Grant) earned him his promotions, and he was rather effective in his position as chief of staff.

He died in Louisville, Kentucky while commanding the Department of the South.



Tonight's Speaker:

John Marszalek

John F. Marszalek was born July 5, 1939, in Buffalo, New York. He earned a bachelor's degree from Canisius College and a master's and PhD from Notre Dame. He taught at Canisius College and Gannon University before joining the faculty at Mississippi State University in Starkville in 1973, where he was named the William L. Giles Distinguished Professor in 1994. He has written or edited fourteen books and published more than 150 articles over the course of his career. He retired in 2002, but currently serves as a consultant for several historical commissions.

Date: **Wednesday,
October 13, 2004**

Place: **The Cleveland
Playhouse Club
8501 Carnegie Ave.**

Time: **Drinks 6 PM
Dinner 7 PM**

Reservations: **Please Call
JAC Communications
(216) 861-5588**

Meal choice: **Breast of Chicken
or Vegetarian Pasta**

CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE

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1985 Brian Kowell	1961 Charles Clarke
1984 Neil Evans	1960 Howard Preston
1983 William Victory	1959 John Cullen, Jr.
1982 John Harkness	1958 George Farr, Jr.
1981 Thomas Geschke	1957 Kenneth Grant

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

OCTOBER, 2004

Our September speaker, George Buss, got our year off to a good start with his "Voices from the Prairie" during the tumultuous 1850s. One of those voices, of course, was Lincoln's. When George spoke Lincoln's words in his voice, I felt, as others may have, that I may actually be hearing Abe's voice as if recorded long ago.

Our raffle included some wine - "Rebel Rose" - which was won by Dale Thomas. (This month's featured wine will be "Winfield Scott White.") Dan's quiz winners - Answer: Steven Douglas came to Illinois as a young man from Vermont - had a choice of two Civil war songbooks. We'll look forward to some singing. (Civil War Warblers?)

Last November, Dick Crews and I had the wonderful experience not only of a James McPherson-led tour of the Antietam battlefield, but also of having McPherson almost to ourselves for over an hour on the tour bus as we returned to our hotel in Gettysburg. We of course took advantage of this unique opportunity to pick his brains on everything we could think of about all aspects of the war.

I was reminded of this great day recently when I read McPherson's book, "Crossroads of Freedom." Its subtitle is "Antietam," but it is not so much about the battle as it is about what led up to it and its overall significance. McPherson is an excellent researcher/writer and all of his talent is displayed in this thin volume in which he covers the cultural, political, social, and military facets of that terrible conflict.

McPherson is one of this generation's great Civil war historians, as is our speaker this month - John Marszalek. John has authored fourteen books and over one hundred fifty articles, but is perhaps best known for his definitive work on William T. Sherman, "A Soldier's Passion for Order." This book published in 1993 was selected by the Civil War Society as one of the best twenty-one biographies ever written on the Civil War era. Now he has written a book - "Commander of all of Lincoln's Armies" - on Henry Wager Halleck, perhaps looking for someone as different from Sherman as possible. Some might say a better title for the Halleck book would be "Clerk of all Armies."

Was "Old Brains" Halleck really as bad as many of us think he was? I'm looking forward to finding out on the 13th. See you there...

Mel Maurer

**CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE
2004/2005 SCHEDULE**

September 8, 2004



Lincoln and Douglas

**Voices of the
Civil War:
D o u g -
las, Lincoln,
and Echoes on
the Prairie**

George Buss

October 13, 2004

**Henry
W.
Halleck**



John Marszalek

November 10, 2004

**Winfield Scott
Hancock**

**Dan
Zeiser**



December 8, 2004



**Ghosts of
Gettysburg**

**Neil
Glazer**

January 12, 2005

The Great Debate

*Which is the best book, fiction or
non-fiction, on the Civil War?*

Moderator: William Vodrey

February 9, 2005

**Stonewall
Jackson in the
Valley**
Bob Boyda



March 9, 2005

**Myths of
Shiloh**

Tim Smith
Shiloh National Park Historian



April 13, 2005

**Abraham
Lincoln**
Portrayed by
Jim Getty



May 11, 2005

**U. S. Grant Seen
and Heard**

Harold Holzer



Civil War Bookshelf

by William F.B. Vodrey

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Every once in awhile, a Civil War book makes it to the bestseller lists, appealing to a broader audience than history fans. Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* was one such book, in its day; so was Shelby Foote's magnificent trilogy, *The Civil War*. And so, too, is Jay Winik's *April 1865: The Month That Saved America* (HarperCollins 2001). Winik's book was on *The New York Times* bestseller list for quite awhile, and President Bush was seen with it tucked under his arm not long after 9-11.

However, I come not to praise Winik, but to bury him. *April 1865* simply isn't a very good book. The author has neither the writing skills nor the commitment to historical accuracy, unfortunately, to craft a good book about that momentous month.

Winik, a college professor and former congressional and Pentagon staffer, describes the last month of the Civil War as "the thirty most pivotal days in the life of the United States." He writes, "April 1865 is a month that could have unraveled the American nation. Instead, it saved it. It is a month as dramatic and as devastating as any ever faced in American history – and it proved to be perhaps the most moving and decisive month not simply of the Civil War, but indeed, quite likely, in the life of the United States." Winik retells all the familiar stories of the last days of the war, arguing that the decisions made by President Abraham Lincoln, Generals Robert E. Lee and Ulysses S. Grant, and John Wilkes Booth had a tremendous impact on the immediate postwar era and in all the years since.



Richmond, 1865, Church Hill, in ruins.

From Lincoln's policy of "letting 'em up easy" and not imposing harsh Reconstruction terms on the states of the defeated Confederacy, to Grant's pursuing that policy at Appomattox, to Lee's decision not to wage guerilla warfare despite the urging of many around him, to Booth's decision to murder Lincoln when the Confederate cause otherwise seemed all but lost, the decisions of these men shaped the country in which we now live. Winik notes how easily things could have gone differently, and how much worse the aftermath of the Civil War might have been, with endless guerilla warfare, reprisals, persecution and civil strife fatally wounding the young republic. He will get no argument from me there, although it is hardly an original hypothesis.

Unfortunately, Winik is a poor writer, with an often hyperbolic and overwrought style. He makes every point with a sledgehammer. Twice in two pages he tells us that Lincoln was the "first ever" assassinated president. He writes that the war "climaxed to a close," that the U.S.

Constitution was “quite unique,” that Lincoln was “rather unique,” and that the Framers were (take a deep breath, now) “boldly obliged to repudiate a political axiom that had behind it the domineering authority” of Montesquieu. Whew. Everything about which Winik writes seems to be the biggest, most important, most earth-shattering, most significant...whatever. Sometimes it seems that every other sentence should end with an exclamation point. Winik also has several irritating writing tics, such as using “Unionists” and “Union troops” synonymously.

The author also commits serious errors of historical judgment and emphasis. He is overly critical of Sherman and his policy of total war, making Sherman and his men seem little better than Visigoths and (other than in his endnotes) overlooking much recent scholarship on how carefully calibrated and measured Sherman’s waging of war actually was. Sherman’s men did not, for instance, “massacre able-bodied males” in Atlanta or send “the city library and archives... up in flames, for the sheer naked joy of it.” Winik is also far too sympathetic to the Southern view of secession and its consequences. Did secessionism have earlier antecedents in New England than in the South? Certainly. Would an objective historian find that the U.S. Constitution “appeared to be largely on [the South’s] side,” and that Confederate secession was “but one more thread of a very long, even honorable rope in American... history”? Hardly. Winik consistently downplays the significance of slavery as a root cause of the war and grossly overstates the Confederate leadership’s willingness to free and arm slaves.

He also makes factual errors, large and small. The Jamestown settlers’ ship in 1607 was the *Susan Constant*, not the *Sarah Constant*. John Brown was not “summarily executed,” as Winik writes, but was convicted after a trial (whose outcome was, to be sure, almost preordained). Simon Cameron was Lincoln’s first secretary of war, not of the treasury. Joshua L. Chamberlain had not been awarded the Medal of Honor by the time of the surrender at Appomattox, and he was not a brigadier general then, but a brevet major general. Benjamin Wade was a U.S. senator and not a congressman throughout the Civil War. Salmon P. Chase, as chief justice, was not a member of Lincoln’s Cabinet. Winik misspells the names of Chief Justice Roger B. Taney, Secretary of State William Seward, and Confederate Sen. Robert Toombs. In his acknowledgements, the author thanks five people, by name, for proofreading his manuscript, but errors like these make me wonder what else he got wrong that I did not notice. Did Lincoln drop in on Gen. George Pickett’s astonished wife and infant while visiting Richmond? Did Secretary of War Edwin Stanton actually tender his resignation to Lincoln in the last days of the war? Winik says they did, but I have never read these things anywhere else, and I have little



confidence in the author’s ability to get such details right.

In his celebration of Southern heroes Jefferson Davis, Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson, and Lee,

Winik ignores those southerners such as David Farragut, George Thomas, Sam Houston, and Andrew Johnson who remained loyal to the Union. He quotes Confederate Vice President Alexander Stephens and Lincoln to good effect, however. During the February 3, 1865 Hampton Roads conference aboard the steamer *River Queen*, Stephens said, "Mr. President, if I understand you correctly, you think that we of the Confederacy have committed treason; that we are traitors to your government; that we have forfeited our rights, and are proper subjects for the hangman." To which Lincoln replied, "Yes... that is about the size of it." Fortunately, the better angels of Lincoln's nature led him away from any bloodthirsty retribution. The author draws on his personal familiarity with the aftermath of far too many Third World civil wars to show just how lucky we were that our own ended as well as it did.

To give him his due, Winik writes interesting, concise, and largely accurate portraits of the major figures of the war, and has a thoughtful chapter on those innovative figures of postwar American society – Samuel Clemens, Henry Ford, Thomas Edison and others – whose lives might have been cut short, or wastefully diverted, had the conflict descended into a fratricidal guerilla war. He explores the evolution of the law on presidential succession, correctly noting that Lincoln's assassination and Andrew Johnson's assumption of power had the potential, under the circumstances of the times, to lead to a debilitating constitutional crisis. Winik writes in true Dickensian style, "April 1865 was marked by tumult and bloodshed, heroism and desperation, freedom and defeat, military prowess and diplomatic magnanimity, jubilation and sorrow, and, finally, by individual and national agony and joy."

This is some of his best writing, and his essential point is sound: April 1865 was a key month in American history, when the national die was cast for many years to come. For a far better exploration of the subject, however, I recommend Noah Andre Trudeau's *Out of the Storm* (Little Brown 1994).

Honor the *Monitor*!
by William F.B. Vodrey

As we decided at our April 14, 2004 meeting, the Roundtable has begun a national grassroots campaign. We want the U.S. Navy to honor the famous ironclad U.S.S. *Monitor* by bestowing her name on a new submarine.

The first of a new class of nuclear-powered attack submarines (NSSN) has been named the U.S.S. *Virginia*. There will be thirty such subs, and for the sake of history, tradition and symmetry, one of them ought to be named the U.S.S. *Monitor*. She was one of the most famous ships in American history, but there hasn't been a warship of that name on active duty since a troop transport, LSV-5, launched late in World War II.

Pulitzer Prize-winning historian James M. McPherson of Princeton University supports our campaign. He wrote, "It would be most fitting to name one of the new submarines of the *Virginia* class the U.S.S. *Monitor*, in honor of the original *Monitor* that battled the first *Virginia* to a standstill in the world's first clash between ironclad warships on March 9, 1862, and thereby ushered in a new era of naval history."

What can you do to help? Write to the President, members of Congress, and the Navy leadership. If you have useful contacts among any of them, please let me know. We've sent word of our campaign to 28 national and local media outlets, and to 23 Civil War, Navy and historical organizations.

Want more information? Go to the Committee to Honor the *Monitor*'s website (expertly set up by webmaster Dale Thomas) at www.clevelandcivilwarroundtable.com/honor_the_monitor.htm, or call me at (216) 664-3643.

TEN MOST THREATENED BATTLEFIELD SITES

As Dale Thomas mentioned at the September meeting, the Civil War Preservation Trust (CWPT) each year releases the report *America's Most Endangered Battlefields*, identifying the most threatened Civil War sites. The top ten sites for 2004 are below:

1. Chancellorsville, Virginia, April 30-May, 1863. Lee defeats Hooker, but loses Stonewall Jackson. A developer is seeking to buy a 790 acre parcel of the battlefield.
2. Fort Donelson, Tennessee, February 11-16, 1862. Grants siege leads to the surrender of 15,000 Confederates. The National Park Service owns only one-fourth of the site. Most of the Union siege line is unprotected.
3. Franklin, Tennessee, November 30, 1864. One of the sites on this year's field trip. Past local governments have rejected attempts to preserve portions of the battlefield.
4. Glendale, Virginia, June 30, 1862. Lee nearly breaks the Union line during its retreat to Malvern Hill. Most of the battlefield is unprotected and a 107 acre housing development has begun on part of it.
5. The Hell Hole, Georgia, May 25 - June 1, 1864. Joseph E. Johnston tries to halt William T. Sherman's advance on Atlanta. Unprotected parts of the battlefield face commercial and residential development and roadway construction.
6. Mansfield, Louisiana, April 8, 1864. Richard Taylor's victory over Union forces secures the Red River Valley for the Confederacy. Coal mining has already destroyed large parts of the battlefield.
7. Morris Island, South Carolina, July 10-September 7, 1863. Scene of the assault on Fort Wagner by the 54th Massachusetts. Ten luxury mansions are slated for a development that includes the site of the fort.
8. New Bern, North Carolina, March 14, 1862. Union troops seize the strategic port and rail hub. Only twenty-seven acres of the battlefield are protected; commercial development threatens the remainder of the site.
9. South Mountain, Maryland, September 14, 1862. Confederates delay George B. McClellan's advance; the two armies clash days later at Antietam. Burgeoning Washington D.C. bedroom communities may overwhelm unprotected areas.
10. Wilson's Creek, Missouri, August 10, 1861. The first major battle west of the Mississippi and a Confederate victory. A planned 1,500 house development on 2,333 acres will encroach on the battlefield.

DR. ROBERT BERNE

Over the summer, we lost one of our own, Dr. Robert Berne. He passed away in July at the age of 86. Dr. Berne was a retired dentist and a devotee of the Civil War. He was able to recruit his son, Paul Berne, and grandson, Jeff Berne, as members of the Round Table.

Dr. Berne attended many a meeting in recent years. He and I spoke often. He enjoyed the quizzes and contributed questions. He will be missed. The Round Table extends its sympathy to his family.

NEXT MONTH

BACK BY POPULAR DEMAND

DAN ZEISER

WINFIELD SCOTT HANCOCK

HANCOCK THE SUPERB

Ohio Must Lead: Ohio's Significance in the Civil War

Thursday, October 7, 2004, 7 PM

At the Brunswick Public Library

Please join Dr. George Knepper, Distinguished Professor Emeritus at the University of Akron, as he discusses Ohio's monumental contribution to the Civil War. Dr. Knepper analyzes how Ohio's location, transportation, industry, population, and agriculture benefited the Union forces.