



THE drum roll

395th Regular Meeting Volume 40 Number 7 Mar. 3, 2023



The March meeting will be at Arlington Hts. Public Library on Friday, March 3, 2023, at 7 PM. Our speaker this Friday will be Rob Girardi whose bio and details of talk follow.

THE CIVIL WAR CENTENNIAL

Sixty years ago, our nation was in the midst of the Centennial remembrance of the Civil War – a reflection influenced by the early 1960's world situation and unfinished business from the 1860's. On February 3, Mary Abroe took the Round Table through this memorable event.

As Abroe related, the approach of the Centennial of the Civil War saw the United States in the early phases of the Cold War. Commemoration of the watershed conflict of 1861-65 would be a welcome diversion from the concerns of the global struggle, and a reaffirmation of basic American values. The planning, including formation of the Civil War Centennial Commission, actually began in the late 1950's.

Ulysses S. Grant III (grandson of the general/President, and himself a general) was chosen as the chairman, with businessman Karl Betts as executive director.

Commemoration of the war had originally begun late in the 19th Century, among the veterans themselves, with the establishment of the first National Military Parks. The goal then had been to stress unity and the military prowess of both sides; to give the reunited country something all could be proud of. This approach required selective memory, though. The African American issues, both recognition of their own record as soldiers and their ongoing unequal status as citizens (Jim Crow being adopted at about this same time) were swept under the rug. The same basic approach was taken as the Centennial approached. The sectional reconciliation and valor/military prowess of both sides – “American values” now providing inspiration in the face of the Communist threat in the early Cold War – were once again stressed, with slavery and race (despite the increasing importance of the civil rights struggle) being subsumed. The goal was to allow the South to

feel good about itself as well as the North. In the early going, not only Ulysses S. Grant III but the grandson of John Pemberton – US Grant’s Vicksburg foe – were involved. And when the Centennial celebration officially kicked off on January 8, 1961, official ceremonies were held both at Grant’s Tomb in New York City and the Lee Shrine in Lexington, Virginia.

It didn’t take long for racial issues to rear their ugly head. A mere three months after the official kick-off, a national assembly was scheduled in Charleston, South Carolina. An African American member, Madeline Williams, was unable to find lodging in the segregated city. Several Northern state delegations, including New York, New Jersey, and Illinois, threatened to boycott the assembly. President John F. Kennedy intervened to shift the assembly to a U.S. Navy facility (the armed forces being non-segregated); in response, the southern delegates “seceded” to a different Charleston location, forming their own Confederate assembly. (Again!)

In the aftermath of this split, US Grant III resigned, and executive director Betts was fired, their places being taken by historians Bud Robertson and Alan Nevins. Efforts were also made to commemorate the United States Colored Troops, heretofore ignored in the proceedings. But more racial troubles were unavoidable when it came time to commemorate the Emancipation Proclamation. Southern organizations refused to do so, once again forming their own breakaway groups. When Nevins insisted that ALL state celebrations honor the Proclamation, President Kennedy – needing the political support of Southern Democrats – declined to intervene this time. (His brother Robert, as well as Illinois’ Adlai Stevenson, dissented from this position. Stevenson even questioned whether the United States deserved the description of freedom fighters.)

Drilling down from the national level, most states had their own individual commissions, which further branched to the community and individual levels. Naturally, businesses got involved as well, following the overarching national tendency to avoid controversy. They presented a mix of idealism and commercialism, the latter not always seen as a good thing.

One of the most controversial aspects of the Centennial celebration, while also being one of the most popular, was battlefield re-enactment. The concept spurred interest in the war – especially among youths – but also met with some criticism, particularly from historians like the legendary Bruce Catton

(who was concerned about the seeming glorification of bloodshed and destruction.) The first major reenactment was of First Manassas. Held on the battlefield itself, it continued the tendency to sweep the troublesome issues under the rug while stressing the valor and reconciliation of both sides. But the “living historians” of 1961 were, in general, neither as accurate nor as careful as those of 25 years later (when Civil War reenacting was perhaps at its peak). There were a handful of bayonet wounds at the Manassas event, raising the specter of potential lawsuits. A later sham battle at Antietam had many of the same problems, spurring the National Park Service to ban battle reenactments on NPS land – a ban that continues to this day.

Ultimately, despite the efforts of some, the Centennial celebrations failed to face up to the underlying race issues, and even occasionally gave voice to the racists (Alabama’s George Wallace spoke out against segregation at a July 1963 monument dedication in South Carolina.) Instead, the mainstream presentations exhibited what Abroe termed “historical amnesia,” perhaps exemplified by a 1965 Hubert Humphrey speech in which the Minnesotan, anxious to avoid alienating the South, warned against replicating the “radicalism” of Reconstruction – echoing the infamous Dunning school of thought on the subject, which even at that time was discredited by serious historians.

On behalf of the Round Table, I would like to thank Mary Abroe for delving into the very much double-edged Civil War Centennial of sixty years ago.

Pat McCormick

Rob Girardi

Abraham Lincoln and the Common Soldier. U.S. Presidents are the commander in chief of the military. Historically, most have had some military experience, and several generals have risen to office based on their wartime exploits and reputation. Although Abraham Lincoln had the flimsiest military experience, he was commander-in-chief during our most critical national emergency. There was not a day of his presidency in which Lincoln was not with or near soldiers. He interacted with them and cared deeply for their welfare. Lincoln came to be revered as "Father Abraham," by the Union Army during the Civil War. This is a discussion of that process.

Robert I. Girardi has a Masters Degree in Public History from Loyola University. He is a lifelong student of the American Civil War and has studied all aspects of the conflict. He is a past president of the Chicago CWRT and is the author or editor of nine books and numerous articles and book reviews.

He was a board member of the Illinois State Historical Society and was guest editor for the 2011-2014 Sesquicentennial of the Civil War issues of the *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*. His most recent article, "Reconsidering Major General Gouverneur K. Warren," appeared in the July 2020 issue of North & South Magazine. He is currently working on a military biography of Warren.

His other books are:

Captain H.W. Chester, *Recollections of the War of the rebellion*, (Wheaton History Center, 1996)

The Military Memoirs of General John Pope (UNC Press, 1998)

The Memoirs of Brigadier General William Passmore Carlin, U.S.A., (Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1999)

The New Annals of the Civil War, (Stackpole, 2004)

The Soldiers' View (Military History Press, 2004)

Campaigning with Uncle Billy: The Memoirs of Sgt. Lyman Widney, 34th Illinois Volunteer Infantry, (Trafford, 2008)

The Civil War Art of Keith Rocco (Crimson Books, 2009)

Gettysburg in Art and Artifacts (Crimson Books, 2010)

The Civil War generals: Comrades, Peers, Rivals in Their Own Words (Zenith Press, 2013)

He is a recipient of the Chicago CWRT's Nevins-Freeman Award (2010), and the Milwaukee CWRT Iron Brigade Association Award (2014). He speaks to audiences of all ages on various aspects of the Civil War. For more information, his website is www.robertgirardi.com

Speaker lineup:

Sept. 9: Laurie Schiller. The 29th USCT at the Crater

Oct. 7: Jerry Allen. 8th Wisconsin

Nov. 4: Phil Angelo. Morgan's Raid

Dec. 2: Dave Powell: Tullahoma

Jan. 6: Pat McCormick. North Anna

Feb. 3: Mary Abroe. Civil War Centennial, Rhetoric, Reality, and the Bounds Of Selective Memory

Mar. 3: Rob Girardi. Abraham Lincoln and the Common Soldier

April 7: Michael Wynne. The Real Story of The Rock Island POW Camp. This Program will be on ZOOM.

May 5: Wayne Rhine. The Kersage

June 2: Banquet. David Zarefsky. The Strategy of Lincoln's First Inaugural Address

On a sad note, we received word that long time member Phil Thornton has passed away. Our condolences go out to Carol and his family. Services were held.

On Saturday February 18, 2023, Pat McCormick finished our discussion of the battle for Atlanta and the march to the sea, Savannah, and north through South Carolina, and the subsequent surrender of Johnston. On April 17, 1865, they received the news of Lincoln's assassination. Johnston knew it was the worst possible news for the South.

On Saturday, March 18, 2023, our discussion will be on Chancellorsville—On the Way to Gettysburg. The tour of Gettysburg in the fall will be a great culmination to the coming Saturday discussions. Join us on ZOOM.

I have published a list of books for sale. Anyone interested in these can contact me, Jerry Rodosky.

Please email Laurie or Wayne if you are interested in volunteering for an open position. Also, please think membership! We need new people!

We have two new members: Dave Dailey from Flossmoor, IL and Tony Brcich from Arlington Heights, IL. Thank you, Wayne.



THE NORTHERN ILLINOIS CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

THE drum roll

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Appointed Positions

Book Raffle	Vacant
Newsletter Editor	Jerry Rodosky gjirosky@gmail.com

Upcoming Events

As a note the board has decided not to collect dues for the 2022-23 year.