

# THE DISPATCH

The Civil War Round Table of New York, Inc.

Volume 62, No. 9

570th Meeting

May 2013



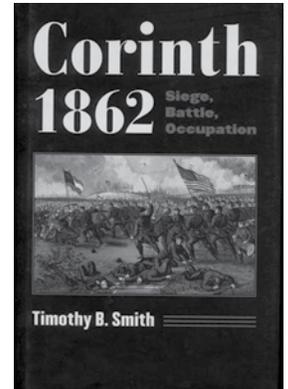
- Guest:  
Fletcher Pratt  
Award Winner  
**Tim Smith**
- Cost:  
**Members: \$40**  
**Non-Members: \$50**
- Date:  
**Wednesday,**  
**May 8<sup>th</sup>**
- Place:  
**The Three West Club,**  
**3 West 51st Street,**
- Time:  
**Dinner at 6:00 pm,**  
**Doors open 5:30 pm,**  
**Cash Bar 5:30 – 7 pm**

**You must call 718-341-9811 by May 1<sup>st</sup>, if you plan to attend the May meeting.**

**We need to know how many people to order food for.**

## Fletcher Pratt Award Winner **Tim Smith for *Corinth 1862***

Our May guest and Fletcher Pratt Award winner comes to us from Adamsville, Tennessee. He received his PhD from Mississippi State University in 2001, is a veteran of the National Park Service, and currently teaches history at the University of Tennessee at Martin. In addition to numerous articles and essays, he is the author, editor, or coeditor of twelve books, including *This Great Battlefield of Shiloh* (2004), *Champion Hill* (2004), *The Untold Story of Shiloh* (2006), and *Mississippi in the Civil War: The Home Front* (2010). He has recently signed a contract with the University Press of Kansas for a new book on Shiloh.



## **GEORGE B. MCCLELLAN AND DIVINE PROVIDENCE**

McClellan's view of divine providence was simpler and more self-serving. Though he used the formulas of Christian humility, he read the disaster to his nation's government and its army as divine vindication of his own actions and his beliefs, confirmation of his standing as the agent of divine providence for the salvation of the republic. The defeat of the army led by Pope and McDowell was "a signal act of retributive justice" - God's work, not the result of his own action or inaction: "I have done nothing towards this." God has been "trying me in the fire," but now that I was in command, "I believe that God will give us the victory" "Again I have been called upon to save the country - the case is desperate, but with God's help I will try unselfishly to do my best & if He wills it, accomplish the salvation of the nation. I know that the interests at stake are so great as to justify his interference - not for me, but for the innocent thousands, millions rather, who have been plunged in misery by no fault of theirs."

Within the week McClellan would enjoy a piece of luck so outrageous and unearned that he might be pardoned for thinking himself favored by providence.

From *The Long Road to Antietam* by Richard Slotkin

## **56TH ANNUAL BATTLEFIELD TOUR UPDATE**

October 11th, 12th + 13th 2013 | Shenandoah at War – 1864

The time to enlist in the Army of the Valley is now! At New Market, you will walk on the field of lost shoes with the VMI cadets. In Lexington, you'll witness a special ceremony on the parade grounds, have lunch at VMI, and then pay your respects to General Lee at his chapel (where he is buried) on the anniversary of the day he died in 1870. Then you will draw your sabers as you ride with George Custer at Tom's Brook. All this, and the climactic Battle of Cedar Creek between Jubal Early and Phil Sheridan.

So saddle up with a \$100 deposit now and the remainder by August 1st (total cost - \$750). Our tour guides are Col. Keith Gibson and Dennis Frye.

Make your check out to **CWRTNY Tour**. Mail it to our HQ at 139-33 250th Street, Rosedale, N.Y. 11422.

For details call 718-341-9811.

## 2013 • MEETING SCHEDULE • 2013

• June 12<sup>th</sup> •  
**September Suspense:  
Lincoln's Union in Peril**  
Dennis Frye

• September 11<sup>th</sup> •  
**The Poetry and Prose of the  
Emancipation Proclamation**  
Harold Holzer

• October 9<sup>th</sup> •  
TBA

## President's Message

There was no doubt that Robert E. Lee was a gambler. In the Spring of 1863, he was confronted with one of the greatest challenges that he would ever face. The Army of the Potomac, under new commander Joseph Hooker, was a mighty host, and counted some 130,000 troops of all ranks. Hooker was aggressive, and had a plan to divide his forces with one wing holding Lee in place at Fredericksburg, while the bulk of his army marched to the west, crossed the Rappahannock, and moved upon Lee's rear. Common sense would dictate that the Confederates would have to fall back towards Richmond, or if they tried to make a stand on ground of Hooker's choosing, they would most likely be overwhelmed by superior numbers.

All the while, Lee commanded a reduced Army of Northern Virginia. James Longstreet had been detached with much of the First Corps to take part in the ill advised Suffolk Campaign, and Lee was left with Stonewall Jackson and only about 60,000 men. When he realized what Hooker was up to, he made his first gamble. He split his forces, leaving a contingent in the lines to hold Fredericksburg, and then marched west to confront the main Federal threat. The armies came in contact on May 1st, and Lee soon learned that Hooker's right flank was in the air. Going against all military logic, he gambled once again, splitting his forces a second time, sending Jackson with most of the army on an all day flank march to get around behind Hooker. All through the long day of May 2nd, Lee held his lines with only 15,000 men against many times that number, while he waited for Stonewall to get into position. It was one of the greatest risks that he would ever take in the field, but by the late afternoon, Jackson was in place, and would unleash a massive attack, forcing Hooker's flank to crumble. It was a great success for Southern arms, but confusion reigned, and the mighty Stonewall would be wounded that night. And with the two wings of Lee's army still separated, all could still be lost.

Without hesitation, Lee assigned JEB Stuart to take command of Jackson's Corps, and to renew the attack. And in the late morning of May 3rd, they drove the Federals from Chancellorsville, and succeeded in joining the two wings of the army. With a shaken Joe Hooker in retreat, Lee and his army had prevailed. But then a new threat emerged back at Fredericksburg, where Gen. Sedgwick and the Sixth Corps had driven the Confederates from their lines, and was now advancing upon Lee's rear. For a third time, Lee divided his army, and sent a force to contain this threat at a place called Salem Church. There, they would turn those Federals back, too, and against all odds, Lee had won his greatest victory.

In the late morning of May 3rd, 1863, Robert E. Lee, astride his favorite mount Traveller, rode into the clearing by the burning Chancellor house. As he emerged into the sunlight, not a man who was there would ever forget moment. He was once again victorious, and his men started to cheer him all along the lines. As Lee looked out on his proud army, one could understand why he felt that they could do anything he asked of them. In his eyes, they were invincible. Particularly so on a hot July afternoon in Pennsylvania just two months later. Never afraid of risks, Lee was no doubt a gambler.

— Bill Finlayson

## Book Review

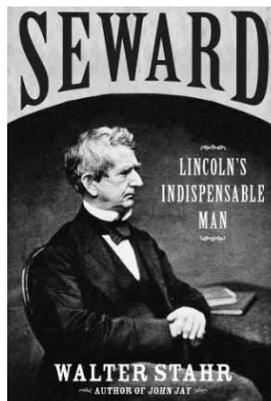
### William Seward, Lincoln's Indispensable Man

by Walter Stahr

Walter Stahr's book, *William Seward, Lincoln's Indispensable Man*, states that, except for presidents, Seward was perhaps the most outstanding statesman of the 19th century. Probably anyone would stack up well against Fillmore, the Harrisons, Pierce, Buchanan, Andrew Johnson, etc., however, it might be little more difficult with Henry Clay (to whose role in the Senate as a compromiser or mediator, Seward aspired). Still he ranks high and had there never been a Civil War, his pre-war and post-war career would still have given him considerable status. Fortunately, Stahr goes into all of this in great depth.

Seward's role in the administration has given him a reputation of being Lincoln's "right arm" and other titles that suggest that only Lincoln's forcefulness kept him from becoming a de facto prime minister. It is little wonder that John Wilkes Booth marked him for assassination on that fateful night

*Continued on page 4*



## THE DISPATCH



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## May during the Civil War

### 1861

3 – General-in-chief Winfield Scott suggests that with the aid of a powerful blockade it was possible to envelop the states along the entire length of the Mississippi River in order to subjugate them. This becomes known as the Dread Scott Decision.

24 – Ben Butler's shining hour (he didn't have too many) at Fortress Monroe where he refuses to return 3 escaped slaves to their owner, calling them contraband.

### 1862

4 – In command for the only time in his combat career, Henry (Cautious to a Fault) Halleck, advances another 1/4 mile towards Corinth.

5 – A new, aggressive leader of Union troops appears in Virginia and directs gun boat operations against Sewell's Point on the James River. His Name? A. Lincoln.

### 1863

5 – In one of his greatest victories, Robert E. Lee loses 12,500 men, nearly 20% of his forces at Chancellorsville. One loss is heavier than the others: Stonewall Jackson.

19 – Weary of Clement C. Vallandigham and his anti-war diatribes, President Lincoln commutes the Copperhead's sentence for treason and ships him across the lines to the Confederacy.

### 1864

11 – Phil Sheridan and his riders reach a small town some 6 miles north of Richmond: Yellow Tavern. First Jackson was lost. Now it is Jeb Stuart's turn.

15 – VMI's cadets learn about military life the hard way. They join John Breckinridge's men in defeating Franz Sigel at New Market, Va.



**NEW | NEW | NEW | NEW**

We are testing the emailing of the Dispatch. If you want it sent via email, please let the editor know: [EABudlivingston@gmail.com](mailto:EABudlivingston@gmail.com).

## A CLARIFICATION

In a recent issue of this newsletter [the Surratt *Courier*], mention was made in the Civil War chronology section about Lincoln's disgust with McClellan's use of the cavalry of the Army of the Potomac in the fall of 1862. This is a standard treatment of the general's failure to pursue Lee after Antietam, but historian William L. Richter lends some qualifications.

One of the reasons that McClellan could not move was that the entire horse herd of the Army of the Potomac was foundered and nearly 10,000 animals had to be put to death. Founder, or laminitis, is where the horses' hooves come apart at all the various connective tissues that hold the hoof wall and the bone structure together (the laminae). It is still a serious problem with horses today. It can be caused by too much water before a well-used horse has had time to cool off, overuse on hard road surfaces, too much green grass, and several other conditions. This is why the cavalry would walk their horses for a half-hour to an hour after coming into camp after a long ride.

Unlike the Confederates, the US cavalry recruits during the Civil War had very little experience with riding horses. The Yankees were more familiar with azoturia, or Monday morning disease, where a plow horse would have his muscles knot up after a day's rest.

So Lincoln was correct as to McClellan's inactivity, but wrong as to what caused much of it.

From the Surratt Society *Courier* March 2013

### New Recruits

**Irwin Hirshberg**, a friend of Martin Gilbert  
**Scott Ives**, a friend of Paul Weiss

### NEW SLATE – 2013-2014

*Here's the new slate of officers:*

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in April 1865, recognizing what most informed people knew - the secretary of state's important role in government made his death as meaningful as that of the president. Seward, the author notes, was perhaps a leading candidate and the best qualified man to be president. But he was not acceptable to the [Salmon B.] Chase faction, and others whom he had alienated during his brief career in the Senate as he tried to reconcile both sides and prevent secession. In addition, he was not acceptable to the remnants of the Know Nothing Party which had shown well in the 1856 elections. They viewed his support for new immigrant groups with hostility, and now, with the demise of their party, were looking for a home, and found it in the newly formed Republican party. In short, he was qualified, preferred by many, but unelectable. He would give way to a relatively unknown Illinois lawyer who came without serious political baggage. Stahr makes a good case for Seward who has previously been studied by Van Dusen and Taylor. All agree on his virtues, his liabilities, and his key role in the Lincoln administration. This book has, of course, the advantage of even more literature on the subject and a profound and contemporary understanding of politics. It is readable, comprehensive, well researched and an excellent example of a superb political biography. Does it make the case for him as one of the great figures of the period? I'll leave that to each individual reader. Incidentally, Mr. Stahr is also the author of an excellent biography of John Jay.

Tom Ryley



It is the Stonewall Brigade, it is the streams  
of the Shenandoah, marching,  
Ewell goes by,  
The little woodpecker, bald and quaint of speech,  
With his wooden leg stuck stiffly out from his saddle,  
He is muttering, "Sir, I'm a nervous Major General,  
And whenever an aide rides up from General Jackson  
I fully expect an order to storm the North Pole."  
He chuckles and passes, full of crotchets and courage,  
Living on frumenty for imagined dyspepsia,  
And ready to storm the North Pole at a Jackson phrase.

From *John Brown's Body* by Stephen Vincent Benet



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