

# THE DISPATCH

The Civil War Round Table of New York, Inc.

Volume 65, No. 7

598th Meeting

March 2016



**You must call 718-341-9811 by March 2<sup>nd</sup> if you plan to attend the March meeting.**  
**We need to know how many people to order food for.**

- Guest:  
**David Kincaid**
- Cost:  
**Members: \$50**  
**Non-Members: \$60**
- Date:  
**Wednesday, March 9<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**

## David Kincaid

Singer David Kincaid was best known as the front man for the roots-rock band the Brandos when he took a break from contemporary life and music to join the 116th, a Civil War reenactment troop. His fascination with history led him to begin researching the obscure songs sung by Irish Union soldiers during the Civil War. After a long and arduous search, Kincaid assembled enough material to record the 1998 solo effort *The Irish Volunteer*. David's songs have been used in several documentaries of authentic Irish songs of both the Union and the Confederacy.



## Bad Breath

Americans had poor oral hygiene in Lincoln's era. Rotted teeth and foul breath were common (halitosis was not yet a social evil). Calomel frequently prescribed by doctors for fevers caused many people to have loose teeth. Dentistry was plagued by ignorance and quackery. Barbers were the usual practitioners of tooth extraction, wielding the dreaded "turn-key" used to twist out stubborn teeth. Various craftsmen tinkered at creating dentures, including carved ivory, metal plates that occasionally featured old sheep's teeth, or even hickory plugs soaked in creosote. After Dr. Amos W. French arrived from New York in 1848, he soon acquired a reputation as one of the best "mechanical dentists" in the West. He was also a book collector; his upper-floor office looked more like a library than a dentist's office. He and Lincoln studied German together – but Lincoln kept the class in turmoil with his storytelling. After the Civil War, French participated in the scientific revolution that transformed the dental profession.

From Lincoln's Springfield by Bryon C. Andreassen

## The Seizure of the Planter From a plaque in Charleston, S. C.

Early on May 13, 1862, Robert Smalls, a slave who was the harbor pilot aboard the *Planter*, seized the 149-foot Confederate transport from a wharf just east of here. He and six crewmen (all slaves) took the vessel before dawn when its captain, pilot and engineer were ashore. Smalls guided the ship through the channel, past Fort Sumter, and out to sea, delivering it to the federal fleet which was blockading the harbor.

## 2016 • MEETING SCHEDULE • 2016

• April 13<sup>th</sup> •

Judge Andrew Napolitano  
Lincoln and the Constitution

• May 11<sup>th</sup> •

Fletcher Pratt Award winner  
James McPherson  
*Embattled Rebel - Jefferson Davis as  
Commander-in-Chief*

• June 8<sup>th</sup> •

Chris Bryce  
*Grant's Overland Campaign*

## President's Message

Last month, we awarded the best in recent Lincoln scholarship with the Civil War Round Table of New York's 54th annual Barondess/Lincoln Award to the book, "*Lincoln and the Jews*," co-authored by Jonathan D. Sarna and Benjamin Shapell, in an extraordinary joint meeting with the New York Lincoln Group, who had chosen to honor the same work with their own annual award.

This month, showing your Round Table's dedication to exploring all aspects of this most significant of all American historical events, David Kincaid, an expert in the Irish music of the era (and the instruments upon which they were played) that was adopted by Americans, both North and South, for their own entertainment, will both entertain and educate us with a selection of Union and Confederate songs inspired by music from the Emerald Isle.

Music played a prominent role during the war for both soldier and civilian alike, as a diversion, recreation, and to boost morale. In May, and again, in July 1861 the Union War Department issued regulations requiring each infantry, artillery, and cavalry regiment to form a 16-24 piece band, with two musicians from each company. Although, as the war went on, this requirement was often ignored (as the units needed infantrymen far more than musicians), by December 1861, the Union Army had about 28,000 musicians (1 soldier out of 41) in over 600 bands. This ratio was thought to be similar in the armies of the Confederacy.

When General Phil Sheridan took command of the Union cavalry, he made sure his mounted bands were given the best available horses and special uniforms. After the war, he was quoted as declaring, "Music had done its share, more than its share, in winning the war." On the other side, General R.E. Lee (himself), averred, "I don't think we could have an Army without music!". Battlefield musicians included buglers, who had to learn about 50 different calls (more than that in the cavalry), and drummers, including many young boys, like the famous Johnny Clem, who had to memorize about 40 different beats, 14 for general use, the remainder for marching. The opposing armies had famous "Battle of the Bands" across the Rappahannock River in both 1862 and 1863, with both sides joining in the finale for a mass playing of "Home Sweet Home," a concept certainly appealing to all who were present.

Composer and publisher George Root, who was later to write "The Battle Cry of Freedom," among many other tunes, published his song, "The First Gun is Fired," three days after the bombardment of Ft. Sumter. Southern publishers in Charleston, Macon, Mobile, Nashville, and New Orleans (at least as long as they stayed in Southern hands), responding to public demand, published five times as much sheet music as popular literature.

Much of the music played during the war remained in popular culture long after, and formed the basis of a significant part of what became American folk music. Songs such as "Dixie," "Maryland, My Maryland," "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," "Tenting on the Old Camp Ground," "When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again," and many others from that era certainly resonate today.

SO DON'T DELAY - CALL (718) 341-9811 - to reserve your place for dinner and a show!

See you there!

*Paul Weiss*

## 59th Annual Battlefield Tour

*Join Us As We Continue Down The "Bloody Roads South" For...*

### Grant's Overland Campaign 1864 — Part 2!

Friday to Sunday...October 14-16, 2016

This year the Round Table will continue to travel the same roads South to **NORTH ANNA, COLD HARBOR** and **PETERSBURG** with the already battered, bruised and bloodied armies of Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee after their colossal struggle in The Wilderness and Spotsylvania. This year's Tour Guides **BOB KRICK** from the Richmond National Battlefield and **CHRIS BRYCE** from the Petersburg National Battlefield will complete the dramatic story of Grant's Overland Campaign and dig deeply into the offensive strategy and defensive tactics of its heroic commanders.

#### To Reserve Your Place:

Send your \$100 check (made out to "CWRNTNY Tour") and your complete contact information with your phone number, cell phone and email address to:

Martin Smith/CWRNTNY Tour,  
158 West 81 Street #24,  
New York, NY 10024.

# THE DISPATCH



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## Lincoln's Greatest Escapade

by Richard Wightman Fox

The remembering of Abraham Lincoln has its own history. As time passes, some features of his career gain traction in Americans' minds, while others fade from memory.

...A fascinating book could be written titled *Lincoln in American Forgetting*...

One chapter in *Lincoln in American Forgetting* might dwell on his sneaking through Baltimore under cover of night in February 1861 to foil an assassination plot. His advisers believed the danger was real- it had been confirmed by two independent sources – and he willingly embraced their ruse, hiding out, lightly disguised in a soft cap and long overcoat, on the night train to Washington. When the newspapers, Republican and Democrat alike, discovered the subterfuge, Lincoln was lambasted for cowering in the face of a threat, and for doing so at a symbolically delicate juncture: the moment when citizens received the president-elect into the national capital and confirmed their choice of him.

.....

### March During the Civil War

All comments in this column come from *The Civil War Day by Day*  
by E.B. Long and Barbara Long

#### 1862

**8** – “The enemy is again far away in the Boston Mountains. The scene is silent and sad. The vultures and the wolf now have the dominion over the dead. Friends and foes sleep in the same lonely graves.”

This from unsung Union hero Samuel Curtis after the Battle of Pea Ridge.

**11** – President Lincoln relieves Little Mac of the onerous duties of the general-in-chief but leaves him as head of his bodyguard, the Army of the Potomac. McClellan still cannot figure out what the amateur military man Lincoln wants from him.

#### 1863

**3** – President Lincoln signs an act for enrolling and calling out the national forces. This prices a One-A draftee at \$300.

**15** – Skirmishing in Hernando, Mississippi. Rebel forces take shelter in Hernando's Hideaway.

#### 1864

**2** – One-legged Ulric Dahlgren and his men, deserted by Judson Kill Cavalry, are ambushed, leaving Dahlgren dead. Was he carrying murderous orders on his person? Who knows?

**25** – Confederates are driven out of Paducah, Ky. After occupying it for a while. Who is buried there? Mr. Scopes of the famous Monkey trial. Where is H.L. Mencken now that we need him?

#### 1865

**4** – President Lincoln offers malice toward none and his new VP, Andrew Johnson, offers a rambling and incoherent address toward all.

**24** – There is fighting near Moccasin Creek, N.C. For the first time in battle all combatants wear soft shoes.

In a republic, the new chief magistrate was supposed to show that sort of deference to the people. Lincoln had chosen the course of a timid potentate, concerned for his own safety, not the path of a stalwart, republican representative.

His supposed flight from danger was well remembered in both North and South for the next four years. In April 1865, after his assassination, newspapers and orators referred often to the Baltimore episode and did not bother to spell it out; they took for granted that everyone knew the story. With Lincoln gone, the press retroactively absolved him of cowardice as president-elect, for now it seemed obvious that true peril must have been lurking in Baltimore, too. The tale of Lincoln's weak-kneed debut in Washington was erased as new stories emerged to recall his steely personal and political courage.

One such narrative grew to major significance in 1865 for the very reason that it so perfectly refuted the impression left by the Baltimore debacle. The apprehensive Lincoln of 1861 was replaced by the audacious Lincoln of April 4, 1865, who had marched through the crowded streets of Richmond, Virginia, leading a mass procession. That was the day after the city fell to Union troops, and ten days before Lincoln fell to John Wilkes Booth's derringer ball. In 1861 the national press had judged him harshly for failing to enter his own capital with confidence; in 1865, countless Northern speeches and newspaper editorials let him make up for it by shepherding a throng of citizens through the former rebel capital. In 1861, he had followed his advisers' orders; in 1865, he made his own orders, casting caution aside and revealing his inner core.

...On April 4, 1865, in a spontaneous physical act, he showed many of his contemporaries – as they never tired of saying after his assassination- the essence of who he was. Sometime after 3 pm, holding his twelve-year-old son, Tad's right hand with his left, Lincoln strode slowly through the streets of Richmond at the head of a column of citizens that apparently grew into the thousands (Head is the perfect word for it; Lincoln led from the front, and his head bobbed above everyone else's in the river of humanity.)

Twelve sailors had just rowed Tad, his father, and four military men – Admiral David Porter, Captain A.H. Adams of the Navy, Captain Charles Penrose of the Army and Lieutenant W.W.Clemens of the Signal Corps- ashore at the downtown dock near the spot where today's Seventeenth Street meets Dock Street. To a twenty-first-century reader, it may seem inconceivable that no army vehicle was on hand to conduct Lincoln to his destination: The Confederate White House evacuated by Jefferson Davis on April 2nd and occupied by twenty-nine-year-old General Godfrey Weitzel and his staff. The president of the United States was simply left standing on a wharf wondering what to do next. Should he wait for the “ambulance” that Weitzel was supposed to provide, or should he strike out on his own?

... Moreover, no one in Lincoln's entourage had any idea how to find the Confederate White House, another incredible fact. As they were supposed to be met at the river by a carriage of some sort, they had not bothered to consult a map before departing that morning from General Ulysses Grant's downstream headquarters at City Point, Virginia. As John Nicolay and John Hay, Lincoln's secretaries-turned-biographers, noted in 1889, “One cannot help wondering at the manifest imprudence of both Mr. Lincoln and Admiral Porter in the whole proceeding.”

From *1865 America Makes War and Peace in Lincoln's Final Year*

Edited by Harold Holzer and Sara Vaughn Gabbard

## A Very Unusual Pennsylvania Oil Man

John Wilkes Booth closed his acting season at the end of May to search for oil in Pennsylvania. On June 9, 1864, Booth and Joe Simonds left New York for Western Pennsylvania. They arrived in Meadville the next day and stayed overnight at the McHenry House. The neophyte oilmen embarked on a stagecoach the next day for Franklin, twenty miles to the south. Upon arriving, Booth wrote to John Ellsler, asking him to come to the oil region and informing him that Thomas Y. Mears was going to Cleveland, Ohio, to buy supplies. Mears had been working with the oilmen for \$90 a month. Booth claimed to be short of funds and asked Ellsler to contribute more money.

On June 14th Booth started a two-day walking tour of the oil region. He inspected land along Pithole Creek, seventeen miles up the Allegheny River from Franklin. Several Boston men had formed the Boston Oil Well Company and had purchased promising oil land near the creek for \$15,000. Booth invested \$1,000 in the venture. During the summer, Simonds became the manager of both the Boston Oil Well Company and the Dramatic Oil Company, which was owned by Booth, Ellsler and Mears. When Booth returned to Franklin he wrote to Ellsler:

*I want to see you here bad. This may be a big thing for us or it may be nothing. The last sure if we do not give it our attention. Throw things overboard and come as soon as possible. I must see you. I have seen all the oil regions. I got back the other day from a two days walk of 48 miles. And I know more about these things than anyone can tell me.*

Ellsler soon arrived in Franklin and later wrote:

*As arranged Wilkes preceded me to the base of operations, and when I reached him, I found him hard at work, dressed in a slouched hat, flannel shirt, overalls, and boots. He was a sight to behold..."Shades of*

*Shakespeare!" I exclaimed. "Look down in horror! And behold your Prince of Denmark, digging for the oleaginous, on the banks of the Allegheny!!"*

Booth, Ellsler and Mears had leased three and a half acres of land on the Fuller Farm, one mile south of Franklin on the east bank of the Allegheny River. When Booth was introduced to Henry Sires, who had been hired to drill the well, Sires apologized for his greasy hands. Booth replied, "Never mind, that's what we are after." The Dramatic Oil Company's well, christened "The Wilhelmina" in honor of Mears' wife, was drilled to a depth of 1,900 feet. Work soon began on a second well.

Booth's visit to the oil region of Pennsylvania lasted eighteen days. On June 29, on his way out of the area, he again registered at the McHenry House in Meadville. Later that summer the hotel housekeeper noticed words scratched on the windowpane of room 22. "Abe Lincoln Died August 13th/64 By poison." Whether Booth had anything to do with the scratched message is a matter of speculation. He had stayed in another room.

By July 6 Booth was back in New York. Edwin, Junius Jr. and John had planned a mid-July performance of *Julius Caesar* to raise funds for a statue of Shakespeare to be placed in Central Park, but the plans fell through. Edwin wrote to a friend:

*Julius Caesar did not take place on account of J. Wilkes' absence – hunting up oil wells in Pennsylvania, and is now postponed until the 9th of August when I hope it will be cool enough to proceed with it. Wilkes was to have played Anthony and JB [Junius Brutus Booth, Jr.] to play the role of Cassius.*

From *John Wilkes Booth: Day by Day* by the late Arthur F. Loux

Editor's Note: The *Julius Caesar* performance finally went on the evening of November 25, coincidentally the very night Confederate agents tried to burn New York down. Quite a coincidence that John Wilkes Booth was in town on that very night.



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OF NEW YORK

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