
NEWSLETTER

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Society of Civil War Historians

Summer 2009

Lincoln to be Topic of Meeting

The Society of Civil War Historians will meet in November at the Marriott Downtown in Louisville, Kentucky. Presentations will be given by Orville Vernon Burton and Mark Neely.

Vernon Burton will speak on the "Age of Lincoln during this Lincoln Bicentennial." He will focus his remarks on two related areas—Lincoln's legacy of liberty and his changing image among African Americans, especially among African American historians. Burton will explore some of the implications of my interpretation and the reaction to it.

Prior to the Civil War era competing notions of American freedom galvanized the age, and differing views on freedom helped justify opposing positions. The fulcrum around whom ideas swirled and violence erupted was Abraham Lincoln, who, despite his own modest appraisal, did more to control events than events did to control him. Considering matters both ethical and practical, Lincoln could not tolerate the expansion of slavery because that institution thwarted the extension of free-market opportunity and the attainment of God's purpose for America.

Lincoln proclaimed early in 1865, that the Emancipation Proclamation was "the central act of my administration and the great event of the nineteenth century." But instead, Burton has argued it was Lincoln's understanding of liberty that became the greatest legacy of the age. Lincoln revolutionized personal freedom in the United States. He assured that the principle of personal liberty was protected by law, even incorporated into the Constitution. Thus Lincoln elevated the founding fathers' (and Andrew Jackson's) more restricted vision to a universal one. Basically Lincoln inserted the mission statement, the Declaration of Independence, into the rule book, the Constitution of the United States.

This legacy of Lincoln and liberty has been changing. At the 1909 centennial of Lincoln's birth, the emphasis was on the reunion of North and South. Conspicuously absent were African Americans. But in the African American community, Abraham Lincoln was heralded as the Great Emancipator. As a member of the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission Foundation, this bicentennial year, Burton can assure you that African Americans are central to the commemoration. Ironically, however, Lincoln's image among many

African Americans has shifted from the Great Emancipator to the white honky. This change began to take hold with the Civil Rights Movement, when historians shifted interest from slavery to race and racism. With this new focus, Lincoln's gradualist policy was seen as inadequate, so much so that Mark Neely found the Great Emancipator characterized as "the perfect embodiment of Northern racism" in the path breaking book *North of Slavery* (1961) by white scholar Leon Litwack in 1961. At a session this fall on Burton's book, *The Age of Lincoln*, at the Association for the Study of African American History and Life, every African American scholar younger than the speaker could not say anything good about Lincoln. An attempt to get right with Lincoln by African Americans was dramatically personalized by Skip Gates' documentary on PBS, "Looking for Lincoln." Burton plans to explore some of the reasons for this shift in the legacy of Lincoln.

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Tom Watson Brown Book Award

The SCWH is pleased to announce the First Annual Tom Watson Brown Book Award. The inaugural Tom Watson Brown Book Award will recognize an outstanding scholarly book published in 2009 on the causes, conduct, and effects, broadly defined, of the Civil War with a \$50,000 prize to be awarded at the November 2010 Southern Historical Association meeting in Charlotte, North Carolina. All genres of scholarship within the field will be eligible, including, but not exclusive to, monographs, synthetic works presenting original interpretations, and biographies. Works of fiction, poetry, and textbooks will not be considered. Jurors will consider nominated works' scholarly and literary merit as well as the extent to which they make original contributions to our understanding of the period. This annual award is sponsored by the Watson-Brown Foundation, which funds undergraduate scholarships, historic preservation, and grants for southern studies.

The deadline for submissions is December 31. Submission instructions can be found on p. 3 and http://scwh.la.psu.edu/book_award.shtml.

BOOKS IN REVIEW

Christopher J. Einolf. *George Thomas: Virginian for the Union.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007. Pp. 413. \$29.95.

George Thomas, the “Rock of Chickamauga,” has long deserved a fresh, balanced, and penetrating biography. Now Christopher J. Einolf has produced one.

Unlike previous accounts of Thomas’s life, which centered almost solely on the Virginia Unionist’s military career, this profile offers a broader interpretation of the general’s story. Seeking to show “how choice, social context, and contingency interact in the life of an individual,” Einolf presents Thomas as a Southern man whose wartime experiences challenged the teachings and racial views of his native culture. What gives this volume special value are its judicious treatments of Thomas’s stressful decision to fight for the Union, rather than Virginia, and of the evolution of his thinking about African Americans and their role as a Federal fighting force. Einolf superbly traces Thomas’s transition from an officer who opposed the use of black troops to one who, having observed their valor and sacrifice in the Battle of Nashville, asserted their full humanity and vigorously protected their rights during Reconstruction.

Naturally, the bulk of the book *does* deal with the general’s brilliant military career. It is a piercing, well-researched chronicle of the Chickamauga hero’s service from his West Point days to his Nashville triumph. The author’s assessment of Thomas’s strengths and weaknesses as a commander is commendably balanced, and his final chapter—“Thomas in Historical Memory”—provides invaluable historiographical insights.

Lloyd A. Hunter, Franklin College (Emeritus)

Phillip E. Myers, *Caution & Cooperation: The American Civil War in British-American Relations.* Kent State University Press, 2008. Pp. 332. \$55.00.

In this impressively researched volume, Philip E. Myers puts forth a provocative interpretation that Great Britain never seriously considered intervening in the American Civil War. Myers argues that despite the doomsday rhetoric from correspondents at the time of the Trent Affair or the late summer of 1862, there was never any real danger of conflict. He argues that decades of cooperation meant that neither side would do anything during the Civil War to jeopardize their mutually beneficial relationship. He follows the Anglo-American

relationship beyond the war to the Treaty of Washington in 1871. Myers’ prose is occasionally dense, and he frequently belabors his points. Not all scholars will be convinced by the argument he makes that intervention was never a serious possibility. The evidence he cites indicates that many in Great Britain did give it serious thought, and he never clearly reconciles the rhetoric with the results.

Judkin Browning, Appalachian State University

Jack Hurst. *Men of Fire: Grant, Forrest, and the Campaign that Decided the Civil War.* Basic Books, 2008 Pp. 464. \$18.95.

Jack Hurst, who fifteen years ago gave us a fine biography of Nathan Bedford Forrest, returns with a book on the Union campaign against Forts Henry and Donelson and the capture of Nashville in 1862. This book, like the Forrest biography, is meant for a wide audience; the campaign is one of the few important ones without wide, stand-alone coverage. Readers will appreciate the ease of Hurst’s pen, as well as his attention to naval operations. Unfortunately *Men of Fire* is marred in spots by overcooked prose and a few equally overdone interpretive thrusts. The subtitle suggests the whopper; Hurst’s claim that Grant’s decision to attack Donelson on February 15 was one of the most crucial decisions in all of American history naturally, if incredibly, follows from it. Moreover, Forrest appears no more often, and in no greater role, than C.F. Smith or Gideon Pillow or any other minor figure in the campaign—which, while faithful to Forrest’s role, undercuts a narrative oversold as a dual biography.

Paul Christopher Anderson, Clemson University

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Lincoln to be Topic of Meeting (con'd.)

Mark Greely, McCabe Greer Professor in the American Civil War at Pennsylvania State University, will also speak on Lincoln. Professor Neely notes that questions about terror, torture, military commissions, and habeas corpus come up whenever he speaks about Lincoln. These themes have dominated discussions about the record of the sixteenth president for eight years now. He is constantly asked to assess the relevance of the measures taken by the Lincoln administration on civil liberties, and he plans to continue to find ways of answering such questions at the meeting in November.

Tom Watson Brown Book Award Information

Former SCWH president George Rable, Charles G. Summersell, Professor of Southern History at the University of Alabama, will chair the first prize jury. The other members are Elizabeth Leonard, John J. and Cornelia V. Gibson Professor of History at Colby College, and Peter Carmichael, Eberly Family Professor of Civil War Studies at West Virginia University. Publishers are asked to send nominated books (only those published in 2009 will be considered) directly to the jurors and to the Foundation no later than January 1, 2010. The winner will be announced by August 1, 2010. The award will be presented at the SCWH banquet during the Southern Historical Association meeting, where the winner will deliver a formal address that will be published in a subsequent issue of *Civil War History*.

Forward nominated books to:

George Rable

2927 Hawthorne Circle
Tuscaloosa, AL 35406

Elizabeth Leonard

3 Cedar Street
Waterville, ME 04901

Peter Carmichael

308 Euclid Avenue
Morgantown, WV 26501

Tad Brown, President

Watson-Brown Foundation, Inc.
310 Tom Watson Way
Thomson, GA 30824

For more information, go to the SCWH website at scwh.la.psu.edu/

Grady McWhiney Award of Merit

Richard B. McCaslin, chair of the history department at the University of North Texas in Denton, is the 2009 winner of the Grady McWhiney Award. The award, named in honor of one of the SCWH founders, Dr. Grady McWhiney, is presented annually to an individual or organization that has contributed significantly to the scholarship or preservation of Civil War history by the Dallas Civil War Round Table. McCaslin earned his Ph.D. from the University of Texas at Austin in 1988 and has published extensively on the Civil War. His most recent book is *A Soldier's Letters to Charming Nellie: J. B. Polley's Civil War*, published by the University of Tennessee Press in 2008. He is currently working on several projects, including a book for the University of Nebraska Press entitled *A Distant Thunder: The Civil War in the Trans-Mississippi*.

Historians of the Civil War Western Theater Meet in May

The 11th annual meeting of the Civil War Historians of the Western Theater was held May 14-16, 2009, in Nashville, Tennessee. There were sixteen in attendance, and the group met at the Visitors Center of Fort Negley, one of the Union fortifications at Nashville. Topics of discussion were the battles of Franklin and Nashville, with a specific focus on personalities of officers and how the Tennessee campaign fit into the overall picture of the war. The members voted to make Chattanooga our official headquarters. The organization will meet there next year, May 13-15, and continue meeting there every other year. In the in-between years, meetings will be held in other places chosen by members. For more information you may contact John Marszalek at johnmarsz@yahoo.com/jmarszalek@library.msstate.edu or Mike Ballard at mballard@library.msstate.edu.

Naval Academy Professor Wins Austin CWRT Book Prize

Craig L. Symonds, professor emeritus at the U.S. Naval Academy, has won the Fourteenth Annual Daniel M. & Marilyn W. Laney Book Prize given by the Austin Civil War Round Table, Inc., for his important new work, *Lincoln and His Admirals* published by the Oxford University Press. The Laney Prize was presented to Symonds in the amount of \$2,000 at the June 18 meeting of the CWRT. For more information on the book prize, contact the president of the Austin Civil War Round Table, Inc., David White, at 512-996-4194 or e-mail: h.white@freescale.com.

SCWH Call for Papers:

The Society of Civil War Historians will host a conference from June 17 through 19, 2010, at the Marriott Richmond in Richmond, Virginia. The deadline for receipt of proposals is September 15, 2009. Proposals should include a title and abstract for the papers (approximately 250-300 words) and a short curriculum vitae of participants. Panel submissions should have an overall title and statement about the thrust of the session. Submit all proposals to Dr. William Blair, Director, Richards Civil War Era Center, The Pennsylvania State University, 108 Weaver Building, University Park, PA 16802.

Telephone: (814) 863-0151

Email: RichardsCenter@psu.edu

Website: <http://www.richardscenter.psu.edu>

Women of Civil War Washington

The 11th Conference on Women and the Civil War will be held July 24 through 26 at the Arlington Court Suites Hotel, Arlington, Virginia 22201, with the theme being "Women of Civil War Washington."

The conference will feature a number of presentations and a variety of tours. For more information on registration, go to the website at SWCW.ORG.

New Civil War Naval Encyclopedia

ABC-CLIO publishers has just initiated a project for *The Civil War Naval Encyclopedia*. The lead editor is Spencer Tucker. Paul Pierpaoli and William Whyte are assistant editors. For contributions, contact William Whyte at wwhyte@rcn.com.

The SCWH webpage can be found on the Pennsylvania State University website at:

scwh.la.psu.edu/

Consult this webpage for information about annual or upcoming meetings, conferences, and instructions for submitting works for the Tom Watson

Annual Meeting Dates/Sites

2009 - November 5-8

[Marriott Louisville Downtown](#)

Louisville, Kentucky

2010 - November 4-7

[Westin Charlotte](#)

Charlotte, North Carolina

2011 - October 27-30

[Sheraton Baltimore City Center](#)

Baltimore, Maryland

2012 - November 1-4

[Renaissance Riverview Plaza Hotel](#)

Mobile, Alabama

2013 - October 31 - November 3

[Millennium Hotel St. Louis](#)

St. Louis, Missouri

2014 - November 13-16

[Hilton Atlanta](#)

Atlanta, Georgia