

The Wide Awake Bulletin



The Lincoln Group of New York FEBRUARY 2012
DEDICATED TO THE STUDY OF THE LIFE AND TIMES OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

President's Letter



Paul Ellis-Graham

Dear Members,

Interest in Abraham Lincoln remains strong all over the country despite the end of the Lincoln Bicentennial. Is it because the Sesquicentennial of the Civil War is upon us now or is it because the life of Abraham Lincoln has such broad appeal to people of all ages in all countries? I believe that both are possible explanations. We at The Lincoln Group of New York have tried to keep current

with the latest books, speakers, and movies, which capture the public interest. I am very proud to serve as your president knowing that we have a dedicated group of members and participants, executive committee members, and officers who value the study of our sixteenth president. I look forward to seeing you again this year at the programs that we have scheduled and the ones yet to come.

On a personal note, I, along with you, mourn the loss of Father Alfred Isaacson and Hal Gross. They were great men and wonderful advocates for The Lincoln Group of New York. God Bless them.

Sincerely,

Paul Ellis-Graham
President

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Mark E. Neely Wins Award of Achievement for 2011



Mark E. Neely

Lincoln and the Triumph of the Nation: Constitutional Conflict in the American Civil War by Mark E. Neely Jr. is the

winner of The Lincoln Group of New York's 2011 Award of Achievement for the best Lincoln work of the year. We will honor Dr. Neely, McCabe Greer Professor in the American Civil War Era at Pennsylvania State University, and present him with the Award at

our February 15, 2012 meeting. Neely is one of the country's most prominent civil war era historians, publishing numerous books and articles. He won The Pulitzer Prize for his 1991 book, *The Fate of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln and Civil Liberties-1877*.

Editor: Steven R. Koppelman

**Photographer & Artist:
Henry F. Ballone**

2011 Meetings Review

2011 showcased extremely high quality meetings and guest speakers as attendees were treated to some of the nation's top scholars offering their insights and views on the life and times of Abraham Lincoln, as well as a fascinating dramatization...



February 15, 2011 The evening began as The Lincoln Group of New York President, Paul Ellis-Graham, announced that Joseph Truglio had been nominated and voted on to the Executive Committee. In addition, he stated that Stuart Schneider would be joining the Award Committee replacing outgoing member Steven Koppelman.

Mr. Koppelman, as the 2010 chair, then presented the 2010 Award of Achievement to DeWitt Clinton Professor of History at Columbia University Eric Foner for his book, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery*. In bestowing the award, Koppelman stated, "This is not the old time-honored portrayal of Lincoln as the 'The Great Emancipator.' Nor is it one of these newer biased diatribes depicting him as a racist. It is rather, the true Lincoln, evolving and growing, blemishes and all, when it comes to race relations and slavery. Nothing here is out of context, nothing twisted to make a point—it is simply the essential truth, analyzed



Joseph Truglio, Steven R. Koppelman, Eric Foner, Paul Ellis-Graham & Joseph Garrera

and dissected by one of the nation's top professional historians, and frankly, in my opinion, it is the final word on Lincoln and slavery."

Professor Foner accepted his award and then proceeded to present the address for the evening as he discussed elements and aspects of his book. He asked the question, "Why another book about Lincoln?" His own response was that most recently there seems to be a narrowing of vision about Lincoln, not looking at the wider world around him. His aim was to place Lincoln within the "broad complex of the anti-slavery enterprise" which was really a very diverse group. Foner noted that the "hallmark of Lincoln's greatness was the capacity for growth," this is essentially the core of his book. Ultimately, Lincoln saw slavery as a "theft of labor" and he borrowed Henry Clay's phrase in stating that his goal was to put slavery on the road to "ultimate extinction." Professor Foner emphasized that the key word here was 'ultimate.' One other interesting point was that in the sub-title of his book, Foner uses the term "American Slavery," as opposed to simply slavery or even southern slavery. The reason he gave for this was that Lincoln saw both the North and South as culpable for its existence and it is how he himself phrased it in his second inaugural address. With that, this truly insightful and enlightening presentation concluded with a substantial amount of in-depth questions from the audience—Professor Foner's responses were a true testament of this award-winning scholar.

April 5, 2011

Anthony S. Pitch, distinguished author of "They Have Killed Papa Dead!" addressed the group, presenting the terrible events of April 14 and 15, 1865 not in a matter-of-fact way, but rather in a most emotional manner, as he focused on the actual human beings involved in the drama giving us their thoughts and fears as events evolved.



Anthony S. Pitch

Although we may know the story, hearing it from this perspective made it seem all too real. He drew some strong comparisons of the assassination story to the events of 9/11 from a "terror" point of view stating, "People did not know what was coming next," as their nation was under some kind of attack, grief turned to rage."

Mr. Pitch also referenced being drawn to Lincoln by his wonderful writing ability. He stated his belief that Lincoln's letter of January 26, 1863 to General Joseph Hooker, placing him in command of the Army of the Potomac, is "almost as good" as the Gettysburg Address, questioning, "Can you imagine another president writing that?"

Continued on page 3

2011 Meetings Review, continued

The original letter, from The Alfred Whital Stern Collection of Lincolniana in the Library of Congress, reads as follows:

Executive Mansion
Washington, January 26, 1863

Major General Hooker:
General.

I have placed you at the head of the Army of the Potomac. Of course I have done this upon what appear to me to be sufficient reasons. And yet I think it best for you to know that there are some things in regard to which, I am not quite satisfied with you. I believe you to be a brave and a skilful soldier, which, of course, I like. I also believe you do not mix politics with your profession, in which you are right. You have confidence in yourself, which is a valuable, if not an indispensable quality. You are ambitious, which, within reasonable bounds, does good rather than harm. But I think that during Gen. Burnside's command of the Army, you have taken counsel of your ambition, and thwarted him as much as you could, in which you did a great wrong to the country, and to a most meritorious and honorable brother officer. I have heard, in such way as to believe it, of your recently saying that both the Army and the Government needed a Dictator. Of course it was not *for* this, but in spite of it, that I have given you the command. Only those generals who gain successes, can set up dictators. What I now ask of you is military success, and I will risk the dictatorship. The government will support you to the utmost of it's ability, which is neither more nor less than it has done and will do for all commanders. I much fear that the spirit which you have aided to infuse into the Army, of criticising their Commander, and withholding confidence from him, will now turn upon you. I shall assist you as far as I can, to put it down. Neither you, nor Napoleon, if he were alive again, could get any good out of an army, while such a spirit prevails in it.

And now, beware of rashness. Beware of rashness, but with energy, and sleepless vigilance, go forward, and give us victories.

Yours very truly
A. Lincoln

Pitch worked on, and researched his book for nine years choosing the topic because he felt that it was the "saddest story in American history." A sad story, true; but from the talented pen of Anthony Pitch it is a story that jumps off the page with deep emotional impact. His presentation on this evening was much the same. In fact, to quote Richard Sloan, it was "lyrical."

Lincoln Group of New York photos & many more Lincoln & Civil War photos can be seen on Henry F. Ballone's web site at: civilwarnut.com

November 22, 2011 Executive Committee member Richard Sloan and John Howard, a member of the Surratt Society, performed "The Witness & the Collector." Based on the 1901 correspondence between Louis Weichmann portrayed by Mr. Sloan and Osborn Oldroyd portrayed by Mr. Howard, this absorbing dramatization (written by Mr. Sloan) captivated the audience and provided quite an interesting perspective on the events of the Lincoln assassination.



Richard Sloan & John Howard

Very much a research paper in the form of a dramatization, and a true examination of Weichmann, the government's chief witness at the Lincoln conspiracy trial, the presentation marked a nice deviation from the typical lecture. One member was overheard saying, "Great script, great job, I was really impressed."

Weichmann has always been a controversial figure intriguing Lincoln scholars over the years. Perhaps we all now have a better understanding of the man through Richard Sloan's interpretation.

Mark E. Neely Wins Award, continued

The Award Committee for 2011 was comprised of Joseph E. Garrera, Chair, Joseph A. Truglio, and Stuart Schneider. It is the objective and mission of the Award Committee to select the work that does the "most to encourage the study and appreciation of Abraham Lincoln." The committee agreed unanimously that this book was the most outstanding in 2011. As Joe Garrera emphasized, "Who better than Mark Neely, who will go down in history as one of the great Lincoln and Civil War scholars, can examine constitutional conflict as definitively as he does in this book?"

History of The Lincoln Group of New York

We Cannot Escape History... even our own, and that being the case, it seems altogether fitting and proper that *The Wide Awake* reprint the below which originally appeared in The Lincoln Group of New York 25th Anniversary Commemorative Publication (2003).

History of The Lincoln Group of New York

By Joseph E. Garrera

On March 6, 1978, a gathering of more than thirty students of the Lincoln theme participated in a special meeting in New York City. Their objective was the establishment of a local organization dedicated to studying the life and times of Abraham Lincoln.

New York had not always been without an organization devoted to Lincoln studies. Seven decades earlier, on February 12, 1908, an organization known as "The Lincoln Fellowship" convened their first meeting in New York City, attended by many luminaries engaged in Lincoln studies. The Lincoln Fellowship of 1908 was so enormously rich with national talent that it selected seven distinguished scholars to serve as vice presidents. Among those selected were Ida Tarbell, Alexander McClure, Alonzo Rothchild, Joseph B. Oakleaf, Judge Daniel Fish, General James Grant Wilson, and Charles W. McLellan. Sadly, nothing is permanent, and the Lincoln Fellowship of 1908 was no exception. In less than a decade, it faded out of sight. For too long residents of New York and the tri-state area had to journey to Springfield, Illinois, nearly halfway across the country, to hear and participate in Lincoln symposia. Now that was all about to change.

The man who initiated the process was William Kaland, a prominent figure who in the period between 1950 and 1975 developed an engaging career in television and radio. As an executive producer at Westinghouse Broadcasting, Kaland had the privilege of interviewing Carl Sandburg on television and producing the award-winning television series, *The American Civil War*. Kaland, a devoted student of Lincoln and a Lincoln collector, possessed numerous historical relics including a rare edition of Frederick Hill Meserve's album of prints made from Mathew Brady's original glass plate negatives.

Legendary rare book and manuscript dealer Ralph G. Newman of Chicago alerted Kaland to others in the New York metropolitan area who shared an affinity for Lincoln studies. Among Kaland's earliest contacts was Richard Sloan, who, during the 1970s, published *The Lincoln Log*, a specialized newsletter that delved into the Lincoln assassination and other related topics. Almost immediately, this committed group of Lincoln students

began to take shape. In retrospect, several of those early pioneers have advanced to become noted figures in the Lincoln historical community. Harold Holzer, perhaps currently America's most prolific Lincoln author, offered his support. Arnold Gates, who for twenty years was among the nation's leading reviewers of Civil War and Lincoln books, was also among the group's pioneers. Hal Gross, a successful New York entrepreneur, and Milton Seltzer, a New York school administrator, signed on as early supporters.

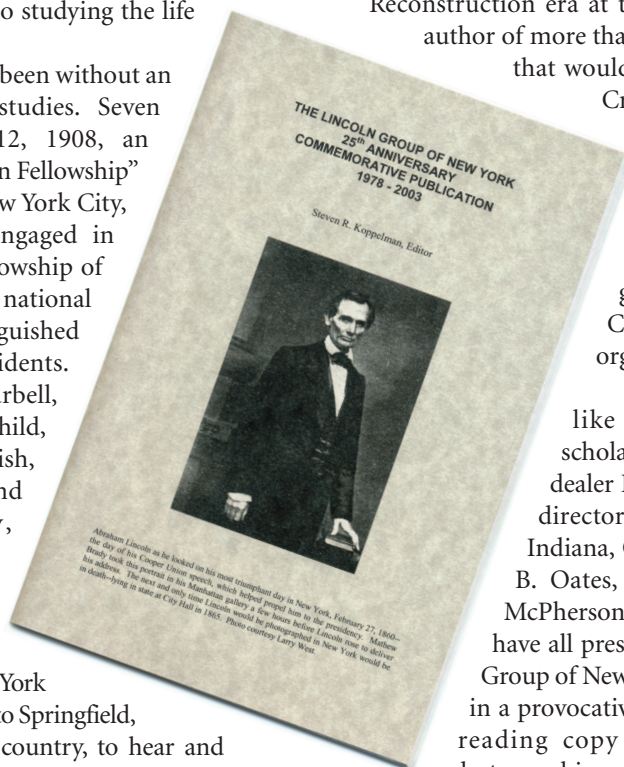
Also joining was John Lattimer, a noted military physician at the Nuremberg military trial in 1945. Lattimer was a nationally recognized collector of artifacts associated with the Lincoln assassination and the author of several important books. Offering his support was Hans L. Trefousse, a specialist on the Civil War and Reconstruction era at the City University of New York and the author of more than a dozen books. Rounding out the roster

that would convene that first meeting were George Craig of the Civil War Round Table of New York, and Larry West, a serious collector of Lincoln photographs who would serve as the Lincoln Group of New York's first president. On March 6, 1978, thirty plus charter members gathered at the William Club in New York City to hear Dr. Mark E. Neely, Jr., deliver the organization's first lecture.

Today the roster of past speakers reads like an award-winning cast in Lincoln scholarship. Lincoln manuscript and rare book dealer Ralph Newman, R. Gerald McMurtry, past director of the Lincoln Museum in Fort Wayne, Indiana, Gabor Boritt, Lincoln biographer Stephen B. Oates, Frank J. Williams, Professor James M. McPherson, and the legendary David Herbert Donald have all presented notable lectures before The Lincoln Group of New York. Lloyd Ostendorf once made the case in a provocative lecture that he had discovered Lincoln's reading copy of the Gettysburg Address. Noted photographic expert Grant Romer of the Rochester, New York George Eastman House once made a presentation that attempted to validate the authenticity of the circa 1843 Hoffmann daguerreotype, an image previously promoted as the earliest photograph of Abraham Lincoln. In 1982, Joan Chaconas of the Surratt Society in Clinton, Maryland, and past president of the Lincoln Group of Washington, DC, presented a lecture that detailed the destructive storage conditions surrounding the Osborn Oldroyd Lincoln Collection owned by the National Park Service. Eventually Chaconas's efforts marshaled support to correct the substandard storage conditions.

In 1988, the group instituted an annual "Award of Achievement." The award committee consists of three dedicated members with one rotating off each year. The award committee is responsible for reviewing every new Lincoln publication, documentary, and project in the country, ultimately selecting the contribution that has done the most to encourage the study and appreciation of Abraham Lincoln.

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History of The Lincoln Group of New York, continued

The membership rolls and meetings attract a diverse group of participants from those interested in an occasional Lincoln lecture to others fully engaged in researching and writing their own books. One trait that every member has in common is an interest in hearing the latest thoughts and research presented by leading authorities in the Lincoln field.

The Lincoln Group of New York convenes three times each year in New York City. Most meetings are scheduled to coincide with a special date in Lincoln's life. The November meeting opens the Lincoln season and is scheduled as close to the anniversary of the Gettysburg Address as is reasonably possible. The February meeting convenes between the first week and the third week of the month, close to Lincoln's birthday. The April meeting convenes as close to April 14 as possible – its theme is typically the Lincoln Assassination.

After a cocktail hour, banquet meal, and several brief

announcements, the guest speaker takes the lectern presenting a scholarly lecture lasting an average of forty-five minutes. At the conclusion, questions are taken. The question-and-answer period can be the most fascinating aspect of the program, ultimately revealing the depth of the speaker's knowledge.

One great strength of the organization lies with the governing executive committee, which after a quarter of a century is composed almost exclusively of charter members. Remarkably, their primary objectives have remained consistent, including keeping matters simple, not allowing the organization to be strangled by unnecessary regulations and by-laws. And most importantly, a paramount desire is to make every meeting a memorable occasion for all that attend. As The Lincoln Group of New York celebrates its twenty-fifth anniversary, it remains committed to its primary objective – studying the life and times of Abraham Lincoln.

Book Review

Book Review by Joseph A. Truglio, Executive Committee, member of Award of Achievement Committee (2009 – 2011)

Killing Lincoln: The Shocking Assassination That Changed America Forever
by Bill O'Reilly and Martin Dugard

“Now he belongs to the ages” is the quote attributed to Edwin Stanton at the death of Lincoln. It is appropriate considering Lincoln is perhaps the most written about person in history. This book details the last two weeks of his life leading up to the assassination. Considering the author, I was eagerly anticipating this book, not that I needed another Assassination saga. The book is billed as having new information, and promised to ‘clear up the mysteries!’ Wow!! I couldn't wait. Well, let me tell you the results of that anticipation. The good news is that it is a very well written book and certainly an entertaining read. The bad news is that it was nothing I expected.

Mr. O'Reilly writes the story with the average person in mind, not a serious student of Lincoln or the assassination. The first few chapters give a brief history of the Civil War and attempt to spark interest and educate the novice in the events. With this in mind I expected to find a great deal of documentation, footnotes, and a strong bibliography supporting the ‘facts’ presented.

What I read was more of the age-old innuendo and myths that have lingered around for decades, without much support from the community of Lincoln scholars, both pro and con.

For example, O'Reilly relies heavily on the conclusions concerning the death of Lafayette Baker written by Dr. Ray A. Neff.

O'Reilly insinuates that this theory, which has been around for ages, is the truth behind the assumption that Edwin Stanton was instrumental in the assassination plot.

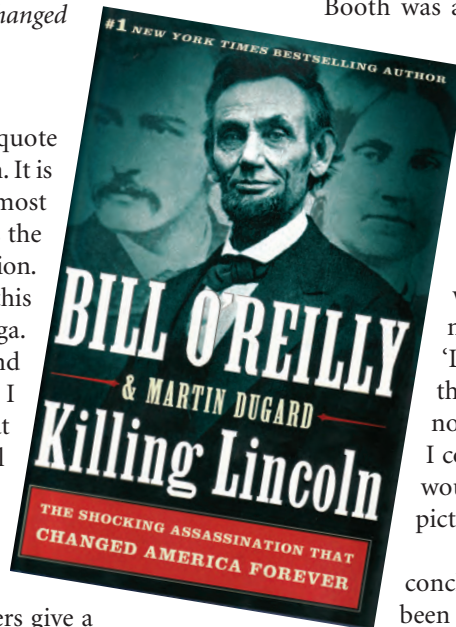
Another blatant misdirected accusation is that John Wilkes Booth was a Confederate agent and took his orders directly from Jefferson Davis (pg.96).

Okay, show me the proof! Where did you learn this? What is the source? I thought of these questions often while reading this book, but to no avail. There is no relevant bibliography, footnotes, or any mention of first-hand accounts.

That does not mean that the book is without merit. Bringing the story to a multitude of new readers is a boon to us ‘Lincoln students’. However, correcting all the false impressions the book will create is not a task this ‘scholar’ is willing to undertake. I could have mentioned more errors but that would be redundant and I think you get the picture.

I will end this observation with a few conclusions of my own. This book could have been great history. Unfortunately, it reads more like historical fiction. Every author is entitled to

his opinions. Had Mr. O'Reilly revealed his sources for his ‘facts’, verification could have lent credence to his conclusions. Without that effort, a serious student can only dismiss this book. It looked to me like another celebrity cashing in on his or her name recognition. The poor research done here is beneath the stature that Mr. O'Reilly has attained, albeit in a different venue. I think that this effort has seriously altered my opinion of the catch phrase familiar to those who know Mr. O'Reilly's TV show: The ‘no spin zone’ has died.



In Memoriam: Hal Gross

A *founding member* of The Lincoln Group of New York, and longtime Executive Committee member, Hal Gross, passed away on August 3, 2011. He was 92 years old.

Hal received his bachelor's degree at City College. After a long career as president of the Allied Paper and Packaging Company, he returned to Queens College as a senior citizen student, majored in political science, and received yet another degree of which he was extremely proud. In 2005, he donated hundreds of his Lincoln books, journals, letters, and documents to Queens College. Hal also generously contributed the Hal and Ida Gross Endowment for Lincolniana and 19th century American literature, which allowed the college to purchase books on mid-19th century American history, particularly the Civil War.

Hal was a person of wisdom, of philosophy, and concern for others. He found the positive in all that life offers. Most importantly, he was a compassionate and generous human being.

The remarks made at Hal's funeral service by his children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, and friends were insightful, poignant, and at times humorous. These wonderful comments included the following:

"A quote from Robert Louis Stevenson catches the essence of my father... 'That man is a success who has lived well, laughed often and loved much, who looked for the best in others, and gave the best he had.'"

"He was my hero before I knew the true meaning of the word. As I grew up, I always knew that my grandfather was something special. Anyone can attest to their grandfather being special, but I just knew that my relationship with him was something to treasure."

"When I think of him I feel comforted... In my heart I know he's with grandma, and I know there's no place else he'd rather be."

"He was the kind of man that faced life realistically... he brought joy to all of our lives, he enriched our lives. He was a gentle man, with a good soul. We will miss him immensely, but he will always be in our lives and thoughts. We have one life to live, and we are grateful that Hal was in ours."

Hal's favorite poem, "Do not stand at my grave and weep" written in 1932 by Mary Elizabeth Frye, was read at the service. It tells us much about the man that Hal Gross was:

Do not stand at my grave and weep,
I am not there; I do not sleep.
I am a thousand winds that blow,
I am the diamond glints on snow,
I am the sun on ripened grain,
I am the gentle autumn rain.
When you awaken in the morning's hush
I am the swift uplifting rush
Of quiet birds in circling flight.
I am the soft starlight at night.
Do not stand at my grave and cry,
I am not there; I did not die.

When asked in 2003, how it was that he came to appreciate and study the life and times of Abraham Lincoln, Hal provided the following story:

Abraham Lincoln was my first authentic hero--even towering above Babe Ruth, Jack Dempsey, Red Grange, and other sports idols of my childhood.

I am a first-generation American, whose parents were part of those "huddles masses, yearning to breathe free." Although our circumstances may not have included a log cabin, my father was a laborer, and we lived in a cold water flat when I was a boy. As I was growing up during the depression, the only luxury seemed to be the books I could freely borrow from the public library. It was there that the Lincoln legend began to envelop me.

Lincoln grew up under the most difficult circumstances. He lost his mother at an early age. He garnered what little education he could and rose above all this to the highest office in the land. This brought the message to me loud and clear - Lincoln was the promise that was America. This was the land of opportunity, and my own modest beginnings were not a lifetime sentence, as they had been to those in countries like my own folks had come from.

For a long time, a few basic books on Lincoln provided me with all I knew about the man. That was soon to change, however. In the early 1960s I was caught in a fire, necessitating twenty-five operations and a series of hospital stays over a four-year period. What better time to catch up on my reading, I decided. It started with Sandburg's six volumes, which my wife Ida brought me one afternoon. Then it was on to Eisenschiml, who whetted my appetite for the assassination (despite some glaring inaccuracies). I soon began collecting Lincoln literature in earnest, and today have a modest library of hundreds of books, and countless pamphlets and articles.

All this activity has brought the sad realization that I will never live long enough to read all the books about Lincoln. Fortunately, the Lincoln Group of New York satisfies a craving for Lincolniana that I would never be able to satisfy anywhere else.



Hal Gross

In Memoriam: Rev. Alfred Isacson

Father Isacson, a charter member of The Lincoln Group of New York, passed away on September 6, 2011 after complications from kidney disease. He was 79 years old. Born in Brooklyn, New York, he was the former parochial vicar and pastor of Transfiguration Church in Tarrytown, New York.

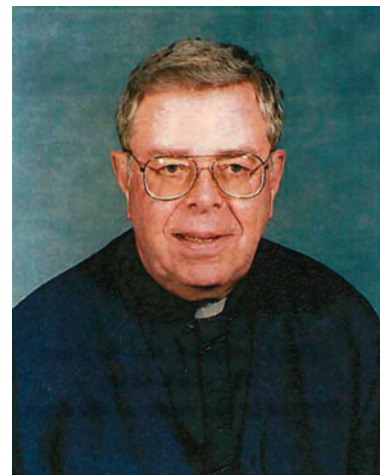
Known to longtime Lincoln Group of New York members as a most caring and compassionate individual, he was also a pioneer in researching the escape of John H. Surratt, as well as his connections with the Roman Catholic Church. In 1976, he discovered a letter that the public had never seen. The letter was part of the controversy surrounding a request made by a Catholic priest to visit Mrs. Surratt while she was in prison.

In 1988, Rev. Isacson was asked about his thoughts on Lincoln, he responded as follows:

I have often wondered exactly what it was that attracted me to Abraham Lincoln. I believe it is certain characteristics of his personality, such as his quaint, but solid homespun philosophy; his enduring patience with characters like his wife and Edwin Stanton; his concentration on the preservation of the union, and his

constant attention to the conduct of the war, despite the presence of incompetent generals; his great humanity (as expressed in his pardons); his familial devotion despite ever-present conflicts, and his endurance of a hostile congress. I've spent a lot of time with Mr. Lincoln, and feel that it's been well-rewarded in my own personal enrichment and pleasure.

Those who were privileged to spend time with Father Isacson were equally rewarded with enrichment and pleasure!



Rev. Alfred Isacson

Did You Know...

The last living direct descendant of Abraham Lincoln passed away in 1985.

See the all too small Lincoln Family Tree below:





Officers and Executive Committee

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Stuart Schneider

Richard Sloan

Joseph A. Truglio

Larry West

**ATTENTION MEMBERS:
YOUR GENEROUS
HELP IS REQUESTED...**

As you're certainly aware, one of our most popular Lincoln Group of New York meeting events is the book raffle. What you might not know is that our members donate all of the books. That's where your help is needed. To keep this raffle going with high quality Lincoln publications, we respectfully request that if you have any books that you can spare for the raffle, simply bring them to the meeting and see one of our Executive Committee members to ensure that they're included in that night's raffle.

Thank you, in advance, for anything you can contribute.

Award Committee: *A special thanks to our dedicated members that served on the 2011 award committee.*

Joseph E. Garrera, Chair • Joseph A. Truglio • Stuart Schneider

THE WIDE AWAKE is a publication of The Lincoln Group of New York. We welcome your feedback, letters and comments, as well as news of your Lincoln related activities. Please direct your correspondence to:

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Lincoln & Civil War event photos can be viewed at: civilwarnut.com