Dear Members & Friends,

Once again, a new year presents exciting opportunities and new challenges. As I reflect on the past year, I do so with gratitude and appreciation.

I’m thankful for our outstanding speakers this past year. Professor James Oakes and award-winning screenwriter Tony Kushner were also headliners at the 18th Annual Lincoln Forum Symposium this past November. After eighteen years of building their organization and prestige, the Lincoln Forum has developed into the largest most significant gathering of Lincoln enthusiasts and scholars in the nation. What we enjoy three meetings each year at The Lincoln Group of New York also occurs non-stop at the Forum for three consecutive days of outstanding scholarship and presentations in Gettysburg.

Our joint meeting with the Civil War Roundtable of New York last year was a memorable occasion. I’m grateful to Harold Holzer for suggesting that we convene such a meeting and for his skillful assistance in the planning process. Everyone in attendance will long remember Harold’s penetrating interaction with Tony Kushner. I’m especially grateful to my friend William Finlayson, president of the Roundtable for his outstanding cooperation with this event.

As an organization, we have much to be grateful for. For more than ten years, I’ve enjoyed serving with Steve Koppelman in various capacities; most notably with him as our vice-president, but perhaps equally important through his role as editor of our informative bulletin, *The Wide Awake*. Steve is an excellent editor; he constantly brings out the best in our contributors. He rarely needs to make corrections to his final manuscript or to extend publication deadlines. Moreover, he produces a superior publication we can all be proud of. My hat is off to Steve and his commitment to excellence for making our bulletin an informative and reliable resource in the Lincoln historical community. One of our members in the state of

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**David Von Drehle Wins Award of Achievement for 2013**

The Work that has done the “most to encourage the study and appreciation of Abraham Lincoln” as selected unanimously by The Lincoln Group of New York Award Committee is *Rise to Greatness: Abraham Lincoln and America’s Most Perilous Year* by David Von Drehle.

Committee chair Paul Ellis-Graham stated that:

“In this engrossing story of 1862, David Von Drehle lays out the complexity and challenge for Lincoln as he works tirelessly to keep the nation on a steady course during its most severe crisis in its history. The author’s well-organized and continued on page 7

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**In Memoriam**

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2013 Meetings Review

2013 stood out as an impressive year of meetings and guest speakers as attendees were treated to some very special presentations on the life and times of Abraham Lincoln...

February 28, 2013: Though many believe that what is commonly known as “awards season” ends with the presentation of the Oscars, this year, that simply was not the case. That’s because just four short days after the Academy Awards were presented (and if I may say, in many cases to the wrong recipients), The Lincoln Group of New York (and The Civil War Round Table of New York, who joined us in a combined meeting) presented Tony Kushner, screenwriter, with our annual Award of Achievement for Steven Spielberg’s film, Lincoln (the film also won the Barondess Award presented this evening by The Civil War Roundtable of New York).

Mr. Kushner, already a recipient of a Pulitzer Prize, two Tony Awards, an Emmy Award, and an Oscar nomination, now adds these prestigious awards to his impressive collection.

After welcoming remarks by Presidents Henry Ballone of The Lincoln Group of New York and William Finlayson of The Civil War Round Table of New York, Harold Holzer introduced Mr. Kushner and then led a conversation with him spanning multiple aspects of his work on the film. Mr. Holzer, who pointed out that the 13th Amendment, the focus of the film, is an area that had been severely lacking in Lincoln scholarship, praised Mr. Kushner and Steven Spielberg for bringing this important topic to the forefront.

Amongst many other things, Mr. Kushner discussed his meetings and dealings with Daniel Day-Lewis as well as how he researched Lincoln prior to beginning his writing. He also stated that one of his favorite scenes in the film was when Lincoln is shown at Petersburg, and as the soldiers are passing him you can see their shadows across his face. The discussion closed when Mr. Holzer eloquently and adroitly stated that, “The man and the hour met when Steven Spielberg asked Tony Kushner to write this screenplay.”

The two awards were then formally presented to Mr. Kushner by the Chair of The Lincoln Group of New York’s Award Committee, Stuart Schneider, and the acting Chair of The Civil War Round Table of New York, Cindy Hochman. In accepting the awards, Mr. Kushner, referencing the recent results from the Academy Awards, gushed that, “Finally, I get to make this speech! Thanks for not selecting ARGO!” Needless to say, this humorous moment was extremely well received by the huge gathering who ultimately gave Mr. Kushner a much-deserved standing ovation!

April 11, 2013: This evening’s meeting began with a very much deserved presentation by President Henry Ballone of a plaque and gift certificate to former Treasurer Diana Garrera for her many years of dedicated service in helping us honor the life and times of Abraham Lincoln. The standing ovation she received was a testament to the affection the membership has for her as well as their appreciation for her superior performance. Diana remains as a member of our Executive Committee.

After the conducting of our popular book raffle (with 40 items raffled off, this may have been an all-time record!), Michael Kauffman, a leading expert on the escape of John Wilkes Booth, took the podium to present his lecture, Pursuits in Search of Lincoln’s Killer. Extremely detailed with maps of the route and photos of the stops along the way (both then and now!), Mr. Kauffman explained why Booth chose the route that he ultimately took. We learned of the role that southern Maryland played in this great drama (both from a social as well as political point of view), the key people that Booth connected with along the way, and...
perhaps most importantly, the mindset along the way of John Wilkes Booth.

Booth, the great Shakespearean actor, the American Brutus (to quote the title of Mr. Kauffman’s book on John Wilkes Booth), quoted Macbeth twice during his escape according to Kauffman but it’s perhaps this quote from Macbeth, that Mr. Kauffman ended his presentation with, that maybe, just maybe, entered Booth’s mind at his death:

Out, out, brief candle!
Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.
Macbeth Act 5, scene 5, 23–28

During a spirited question and answer session that followed the presentation, among other things, Mr. Kauffman made a strong and compelling case for his contention that Booth did not break his leg as a result of the leap from the box at Ford’s Theatre but rather from a fall while on his horse during the escape. His certainty is based on his reliance of first-hand accounts of the witnesses from the assassination scene as well as medical records as to the type of break Booth suffered and how it is consistent with a horse falling and rolling over one’s leg. This is still a much discussed and debated subject within the assassination field.

November 6, 2013: As is the tradition at the November meeting, the formal festivities began with the reading of the Gettysburg Address. On this 150th anniversary of Lincoln’s immortal appropriate remarks, Richard Sloan gave a moving and thoughtful interpretation of the speech. Lincoln may have originally thought after giving his speech that perhaps it “was not entirely a failure,” it can be said however that Richard Sloan’s reading was entirely a success!

Guest speaker, Dr. James Oakes, two-time recipient of the Gilder Lehrman Lincoln Prize (The Radical and The Republican, 2008, and Freedom National, 2013), presented a lecture on slavery’s ultimate eradication, combining his research and conclusions from Freedom National, as well as his upcoming book titled The Scorpion’s Sting. He began by focusing on Harriet Beecher Stowe’s article in the January 1863 issue of Atlantic Monthly talking of the two current (at that point of time) policies of eradicating slavery, military emancipation and state abolition. By themselves, these two policies were inadequate but they “intertwine” and culminate with the Emancipation Proclamation.

Dr. Oakes spoke of the Republican Party’s original idea (stated in the 1860 party platform) that they would not interfere with slavery where it already existed. The interesting point here is that this states what they would not do; it does not state however what they would do. The theory here being that slavery, like a scorpion surrounded by a cordon of fire (in this case the Free states and the Atlantic Ocean), would sting itself to death.

Much of Oakes’ presentation focused on this idea and the various policies leading to the ultimate abolition of slavery via the 13th amendment. The question is, would this idea of the “scorpion’s sting” have worked by itself if the war had not come? As Dr. Oakes stated, “Had things been different, things would have been different—such is counter-factual positing.” When asked during the question and answer period following his presentation if Lincoln was the “Great Emancipator” or the “Reluctant Emancipator,” Dr. Oakes stated, “he was a Republican, committed to their principles as an anti-slavery party, as it moves, he moves.”

As the evening concluded one thing seemed certain, Dr. Oakes cemented his status as a leading expert on slavery’s ultimate destruction and extinction.

Harold Holzer Immortalized in Paint

Civil War Artist Mort Künstler’s Mr. Lincoln Comes to Gettysburg was painted to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Gettysburg Address. It also immortalizes Harold Holzer, whose likeness Künstler included in the crowd (as reported in Newsday, November 17, 2013).
The Lincoln Conspiracy Trial Courtroom

by Richard E. Sloan

This article could not have been written without the help of my friends Betty Ownsby (Lewis Powell’s biographer), and John Elliott who has been digging deeply into the trial, the conspirators’ incarceration, and their hanging, for a unique book he is writing.

Washington, D.C. offers great restored Lincoln-related sites such as Ford’s Theatre, the Petersen House (where Lincoln died), and Lincoln’s Cottage at the Soldiers’ Home. A visit to each is truly a memorable trip back in time, and can provide fresh perspectives. A new three-year long restoration has just been completed, and I had the opportunity to visit it on March 18th with three of my friends. It is the room in which the trial of the Lincoln conspirators was conducted, and it is located on the third floor of the oldest building at Fort Lesley J. McNair, situated on the southern tip of the city. Eight defendants were rounded up and charged with either conspiring with John Wilkes Booth and Jefferson Davis, and/or with helping Booth to escape. They were Mary Surratt, Dr. Samuel Mudd, David Herold, Lewis Powell (alias Paine/Payne), George Atzerodt, Michael O’Laughlen, Samuel Arnold, and Edmund Spangler. (One trial reporter called them “the motley crew.”)

The trial building, known for years as “Building 20,” had once been part of both a huge arsenal built circa 1794, and a federal penitentiary built at the arsenal in 1836. (Incidentally, President Lincoln frequently went to the arsenal to watch small arms experiments.) Since most of the arsenal and the penitentiary were razed in 1867, it’s remarkable that the little building survives. When the penitentiary was abandoned in 1862 (by order of President Lincoln), its prisoners were transferred to other penal institutions. So when Secretary of War Edwin Stanton needed a place to detain and try the eight alleged Lincoln conspirators, he had to look no further than the old penitentiary and its vacant cells. He ordered that a room be found there that could accommodate the trial.

It was only through the good offices of the staff at Fort McNair and Betty Ownsby of Richmond, Virginia that we were able to visit the newly restored courtroom just two weeks before it officially opened. As we approached building 20, I noticed a shiny new plaque officially naming it “Grant Hall,” in honor of General Grant (who just happened to be one of the very first witnesses at the trial!). We were warmly greeted by Susan Lemke, who is the Chief of Special Collections at the fort’s National Defense University. Ms. Lemke told us that with the exception of the trial room and two adjacent rooms that serviced the trial, Grant Hall now serves as headquarters for the ACSS—the African Center for Strategic Studies.

We followed her up three steep flights of stairs and suddenly there we were in the historic room, as though we had been transported back in time. The re-creation is well done, but not perfect (I’ll explain later). The room’s exact appearance and layout are well documented, thanks to a diagram that appeared in some of the contemporary published transcripts of the proceedings, woodcuts that appeared in Harper’s Weekly and Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper, and some eyewitness descriptions. The room measures about 45 by 27, with an eleven foot-high ceiling. In the rear stands a slightly raised platform with a long wooden railing that serves as the prisoners’ bar, where the prisoners sat with guards stationed between and behind them. Eight chairs have been placed there for the accused. I noticed that the railing and the platform are not long enough to accommodate eight defendants; they need to be extended by a few feet. Additionally, as Betty Ownsby told me, “There should be two long benches for the accused, not those chairs,” adding, “I’ll build ‘em myself if I have to!” Near the center of the room is the witness stand. (Leslie’s woodcut shows a witness standing in it, but the Boston Advertiser reported that a common arm chair was placed in it.) I was surprised to see that the prisoners’ bar and the witness stand are constructed of rough, unfinished pine, and look so crude. I never realized it before, but that’s exactly the way they should be, because it was, after all, a makeshift courtroom. In the foreground, on the right side of the room, a large table replicates the one used by the members of the Military Commission. On the left side is a longer and narrower table, intended for the press. These two tables were part of the trial set from the 2010 movie, The Conspirator, and were donated by the producer when he learned that the historic courtroom was being restored. Running through the middle of the room are three newly constructed support columns, appearing just as they do in the woodcuts, and finished in a beautiful dark brown stain. (John Elliott pointed out that they should have been painted white!) The modern windows in the room have been removed and replaced by windows more in keeping with the period, and with iron bars, just as they appear in the woodcuts. The heavy iron-grated door behind the prisoners’ bar, which led to the prisoners’ cell block, is gone, but a mock-up has been created (today such a door would lead to nowhere!). Imitation gaslights and a pot belly stove, just like those visible in the woodcuts, complete the picture. The stove was also donated by the film’s producer (there were actually two stoves, though).

continued on page 5
The government decided upon a military trial for the accused, because President Lincoln had been Commander-in-Chief and his murder was considered an act of war committed by supporters of the Confederacy. (There is still debate as to whether or not the defendants were entitled to a civilian trial and if the outcome would have been any different.) Nine high-ranking officers were selected to conduct the proceedings. And so it was, during a forty-nine day period from May 12th to June 29th, 1865, that 371 witnesses testified here. Sometimes the sessions were tedious. Sometimes they were dramatic. Sometimes (quoting from Michael Kauffman’s book, American Brutus) they were acrimonious, especially when one of the prosecution lawyers, John Bingham, “scolded, mocked, and intimidated his adversaries.” When the defendants were marched into court on the first day, they were—with the exception of Mrs. Surratt and Dr. Mudd—hooded, manacled, and weighed down with heavy iron balls that guards had to carry when they escorted them to and from the courtroom. (Some say that Dr. Mudd was chained, but not “heavily.” Perhaps he wore manacles, but did not have the ball and chain on his feet.) The canvas hoods were only “heavily.” Perhaps he wore manacles, but did not have the ball and chain on his feet. The prisoner was directed to stand up; his manacles were removed; and he was instructed to put on the hat and coat he had worn that night, so that Bell could identify him. It was one of the trial’s most chilling moments.

The female spectators were dressed in all their finery and constantly chatted, whispered, and chuckled about the defendants. Many of them considered the proceedings simply a form of entertainment. They flipt their fans in a futile effort to cool off, as the temperature in the crowded room sometimes soared to 100 degrees! Mrs. Surratt used a palm leaf fan, but as the summer progressed, the heat became unbearable for her, despite the fact that there were four windows in the courtroom. She was eventually permitted to sit in the doorway of the nearest side room for a few days, where the air moved a bit, and where she could still be seen by the Commission. During another portion of the trial she was allowed to sit with her lawyer at his table in front of the prisoners’ bar. (The Conspirator movie took the liberty of placing that table in front of a window along the right side of the room.) Mrs. Surratt became ill during the trial and for a while would not eat. She was so ill that she was removed from the cell altogether during the last two weeks of the trial and allowed to remain in that side room, instead. Her daughter, Anna, attended her there. That room must have been crowded, since it was also used to hold witnesses waiting to testify, and for doctors who spent two days examining and interviewing Lewis Powell in an effort to learn if he was insane (a second adjacent room was used solely by the Military Commission, its staff, and by the prosecuting attorneys).

Ms. Lemke showed us both of these equally historic rooms, which contain some neat items donated by the producers of The Conspirator. These include replicas of the conspirators’ knives and guns, and the black dress worn by Robin Wright, who starred as Mrs. Surratt. There are also photographs, woodcuts, newspapers, sheet music, and a beautiful rare antique fan illustrated with scenes related to the assassination story. Ms. Lemke told us that she had personally gathered together some of these last-mentioned items.

The cases against Arnold, O’Laughlen, and Spangler were the weakest, but all eight defendants undoubtedly felt that their case was hopeless and that they were bound to be found guilty to some extent. The most damning testimony against Mrs. Surratt and Dr. Mudd was provided by John Lloyd and Lewis Weichmann, who took the stand within the first couple of days of the trial. The “bibulous” Lloyd (a great word once used by author Lloyd Lewis in describing him) was Mrs. Surratt’s tenant in lower Maryland. He testified that she gave him a message on the afternoon of the assassination to have rifles ready for someone who would call for them that night. Weichmann was the very next witness. (I wonder if he was able to hear any of Lloyd’s testimony from the side room in which he sat as he waited to testify. Perhaps the door to the room was deliberately kept shut, to preclude that possibility). Weichmann was the 23-year-old former school chum of Mrs. Surratt’s son, John. He had rented a room at her D.C. boardinghouse (sharing it with John) where, as he told the Court, he observed strange activities and whispered conversations between some of the defendants, John Surratt, John Wilkes Booth, as well as between Booth and his landlady (Mrs. Surratt). It all made him suspicious. He also continued on page 6
testified that Booth held a private conversation (outside of his hearing) with John Surratt and Dr. Mudd in Booth’s hotel room, while they left him seated in a side room. On the afternoon of the assassination, he was sitting right next to Mrs. Surratt when John Lloyd claimed she gave him the message about the guns, yet he claimed not to have heard a word of it. Weichmann’s testimony was actually more devastating to Dr. Mudd than to Mrs. Surratt. He spent the rest of his life defending himself against charges that he was privy to the conspirators’ original plan to abduct Lincoln and that he had been forced by Secretary of War Stanton to testify for the government in order to save his own neck, at the expense of Mrs. Surratt’s life. Having researched Weichmann for a play I wrote, I found it to be a unique experience to actually stand in the witness box and recall his testimony. (As I stood there, I imagined him sweating it out as Mrs. Surratt and Dr. Mudd sat just a few feet away). All eight of the defendants were found guilty to various degrees. Powell, Herold, Atzerodt and Surratt were sentenced to be hanged. The others were banished to Fort Jefferson in the Gulf of Mexico, to serve various sentences. Although most people looked upon Mrs. Surratt as the mother hen and “the female fiend incarnate,” few expected her to be executed, owing to her sex. In fact, five of the nine Commissioners attached a petition of clemency to their findings, asking President Johnson to commute her sentence to life imprisonment, due to her sex and her age (although she was only in her forties). Joseph Holt, the Army Judge Advocate General—the man who headed the prosecution for the government—personally delivered the findings and verdicts to President Johnson. (However, the president later claimed he never saw the Commission’s plea). A scaffold was hastily erected next to building 20, and the four were hanged on July 7, 1865. Their bodies were cut down and buried just a few feet away, in plain pine boxes.

Warner Baxter as Dr. Mudd in The Prisoner of Shark Island (Collection of Richard Sloan)

I brought with me to Fort McNair my replica pair of lilly-irons, hoping that I’d be allowed to pose for a picture wearing them at the prisoners’ bar, just as Warner Baxter did when he portrayed Dr. Mudd in The Prisoner of Shark Island, a 1936 movie containing so many abuses of historic license in its telling of the Dr. Mudd story. (Nevertheless, it remains one of my favorite Lincoln movies!). I thought the photograph would be a unique way to remember my visit.

This restoration is a work in progress because some small, but nevertheless important, tables are still missing—one for the official court reporter who took down the testimony, two or three for the defense and prosecuting attorneys, and one for the trial exhibits. Also missing are chairs and benches that had been set up for people lucky enough to get those spectator passes (the chairs, benches, and small tables from the movie’s trial set were not among the items donated, for some unknown reason). Unfortunately, funds have run out, and donations will be needed in order to purchase them. In spite of this, the restoration has gotten off to a very good start, and certainly gives visitors a unique experience and a very good idea as to how the room appeared when it played host to “the trial of the century.” I wondered how accessible Grant Hall will be to the public in the future, since visiting the Fort is so restricted and we needed special clearance (since our visit, the current President of the Surratt Society, Louise Oertly, reported that plans now call for the room to be open several Saturdays each year).

Years after the conspiracy trial was held, the courtroom and the two side rooms were used as offices and then as officers’ quarters. Residents who had heard what had taken place there began having weird experiences. The tormented ghost of Mrs. Surratt (dressed in black, of course!) was seen walking the halls and climbing the staircase. Moans and groans were heard. Children claimed that Mrs. Surratt’s ghost visited them. A father reading to his daughter one night felt a hand on his shoulder, turned around, and discovered no one else was in the room. Does Mrs. Surratt’s restless ghost really haunt the building? Or did those observations simply come from the fertile imaginations of the people who lived there? I’ll leave the answer up to you.

When my friends and I left Grant Hall and headed back to our cars, we walked along the edge of tennis courts that stand just a few feet away. In doing so, we passed over the exact spot where the scaffold had been erected and, just a few feet further on where Mrs. Surratt, Powell, Herold, and Atzerodt were unceremoniously buried.

The 150th anniversary of the trial in 2015 will reportedly be marked in the historic room with a re-enactment of highlights from the trial. I hope that all the missing pieces of furniture will be in place and that the event will be televised. As for the ghost of Mrs. Surratt, unless she floats through the room during the re-enactment and is captured by cameras, television audiences will just have to use their imaginations!
The Lincoln Conspiracy Trial Courtroom, continued

There are far too many excellent books about the Lincoln assassination to recommend here, but I am compelled to list the following essential works that provide excellent information on Ft. McNair’s history, the trial, and the execution: Alias ‘Paine’, by Betty Ownsby (McFarland, 1993); The Lincoln Assassination Conspirators—The Letterbook of John Frederick Hartranft, Edward Steers & Harold Holzer, eds., (Louisiana State University Press, 2009); Lincoln’s Assassins—A Complete Account of Their Capture, Trial, and Punishment, by Roy Z. Chamlee Jr. (McFarland & Co., 1990); Silent Sentinel on the Potomac, Fort McNair, 1791-1991, by Phyllis McClellan (Heritage Books, 1993); Lincoln’s Assassins—Their Trial & Execution, by James Swanson & Daniel Weinberg (James Crump, 2001); and The Trial [Ben Pitman’s transcript with essays by noted scholars], Edward Steers, ed. (University Press of Kentucky, 2003). For the most colorful, entertaining, but not always factual book about the trial, the executions, and Louis Weichmann, I suggest one of my favorites—The Assassination of Lincoln, by Lloyd Lewis, Mark Neely, ed. (MJP Books, 1994). This is a reprint of Lewis’ 1940 book, Myths After Lincoln. I also highly recommend these websites: Randall Berry’s www.Lincoln-assassination.com, John Elliott’s www.facebook.com/itw1865, Dave Taylor’s www.BoothieBarn.com, and Roger Norton’s www.Rogerjnorton.com/LincolnDiscussionsymposium.

President’s Letter, continued

Oregon maintains his membership specifically so that he can receive our bulletin; other out-of-state members do so too.

My activities as president are extremely rewarding because of the assistance and support of our executive committee. They are a distinguished committee of professionals who promote excellence and service for our membership.

Most of all, it’s you, every member; you represent our most important asset and greatest resource. Serving you is an honor I never take lightly. It’s our members who continue to invite their friends, associates, and other like-minded people to our meetings. That’s what keeps us thriving and moving forward.

Many of our new members are introduced to us through our existing members. Let’s all embrace a New Year’s pledge to bring a guest and to each enroll at least one new member this new year. That simple act of support will keep our sails to the wind and our ship headed in the right direction.

Our February meeting promises to be a memorable event. The winner of our coveted Award of Achievement for 2013 is David Von Drehle for his book Rise to Greatness: Abraham Lincoln and America’s Most Perilous Year. I am already excited to greet Mr. Von Drehle for what is certain to be an engaging and informative evening of Lincoln scholarship.

Best wishes to all for a prosperous and healthy 2014.

Sincerely,

Henry F. Ballone

President, The Lincoln Group of New York

David Von Drehle Wins Award of Achievement for 2013, continued

superbly written text brings into play the wide-ranging host of issues that confronted the president at that time. Von Drehle details how Lincoln delicately balances the political considerations necessary to keep both Republicans and Unionist Democrats loyal to the overall objectives of the war. On the foreign policy front, Lincoln weighs decisions that are meant to prevent intervention from Europe as he readies his decision to free the slaves. Both political and diplomatic considerations were, in large part, dependent on the military successes and failures of the Union army in the field. The relationship between President Lincoln and his generals is given proper treatment because so much of what happens on the ground affects the outcome of the war.

Lastly, Von Drehle deeply appreciates the personal sacrifices of Lincoln the man, who goes through the death of his beloved son Willie while also trying to care for his troubled wife and youngest son. One cannot be anything but sympathetic to the President who had to endure so much so often in a war that would ultimately cost him his life.

This is a special book and that is why we chose it as our award winner for 2013.”

The first book received by the committee after selecting the 2012 winner (Spielberg’s Lincoln), it stood up against all subsequent submissions for the year and came away as an extremely enthusiastic choice by the committee! The committee was comprised of Paul Ellis-Graham, John Bodnar, and Stuart Schneider.

David Von Drehle will be our guest speaker at the upcoming February meeting, speaking about his book and of course, accepting his most-deserved award. ~
Hannibal Hamlin from Maine was born in the same year as Abraham Lincoln, 1809, and served for four years as Lincoln's first vice-president (1861-1865), during one of the most tumultuous and epic periods in our nation's history. Yet, today, little is known of Hamlin and he has essentially been reduced to nothing more than an afterthought, regarded as an inconsequential player overshadowed by Lincoln of course, but also virtually all of Lincoln's cabinet members. Is this due to the vice-presidential position itself or the man, Hannibal Hamlin, himself?

From the Biographical Directory of the United States Congress:

Hannibal Hamlin (mrlincolnswhitehouse.org)

Could Hamlin, had he been more dynamic and had a more aggressive personality, have had a greater influence on Lincoln and the events of the time? Would Andrew Johnson, had he been Lincoln's first Vice-President have had a greater role than Hamlin within the administration? One suspects so. While many have speculated what a President Hamlin administration would have been like had he remained as Vice-President during Lincoln's second term, it was something that many thought was going to happen during Lincoln's first term in 1862 as Robert E. Lee led his confederate army into Maryland.

At that time, legal scholar and political philosopher Francis Lieber encouraged Hamlin to mentally form his cabinet in case the capital should fall to the enemy. Hamlin replied that he thought the possibility unlikely but, “Should however the emergency to which you refer, arise, assured I will be ready to act at once with all the energy and efficiency I possess.”

Also, in 1863, when Lincoln returned from Gettysburg with what ultimately turned out to be a mild case of small pox, many in and around Washington wondered about Hamlin's qualifications for the presidency. As Hamlin's biographer, H. Draper Hunt (Hannibal Hamlin of Maine, Syracuse University Press, 1969), so succinctly put it, “With Lincoln’s recovery, however, the Vice-President could be safely forgotten again.” He was the “fifth wheel of a coach.”

Shortly after Hamlin returned to Maine upon completing his vice-presidential term, on the morning of April 15, 1865, in Bangor, he heard that Lincoln had been assassinated. He returned to Washington in order to attend the president's funeral. While at the White House, ironically, he stood next to Andrew Johnson at Lincoln’s casket. He was that close to having been our 17th president, and now, simply a footnote to the Lincoln story.

From the Biographical Directory of the United States Congress:

A Representative and a Senator from Maine and a Vice President of the United States; born at Paris Hill, Oxford County, Maine, August 27, 1809; attended the district schools and Hebron Academy; took charge of the family farm and worked as a surveyor, compositor in a printing office, and school teacher; studied law; admitted to the bar in 1833 and practiced in Hampden, Penobscot County, until 1848; member, State house of representatives 1836-1841, 1847, and served as speaker in 1837, 1839, and 1840; unsuccessful Democratic candidate for election in 1840 to the Twenty-seventh Congress; elected as a Democrat to the Twenty-eighth and Twenty-ninth Congresses (March 4, 1843-March 3, 1847); chairman, Committee on Elections (Twenty-ninth Congress); unsuccessful Democratic candidate for election to the United States Senate in 1846; elected as a Democrat to the United States Senate in 1848 by the anti-slavery wing of the Democratic party to fill the vacancy caused by the death of John Fairfield; reelected in 1850 and served from June 8, 1848, to January 7, 1857, when he resigned to become Governor; chairman, Committee on Commerce (Thirty-first through Thirty-fourth Congresses); Committee on Printing (Thirty-second Congress); left the Democratic Party in 1856; Governor of Maine January to February 1857, when he resigned; elected to the United States Senate as a Republican and served from March 4, 1857, until his resignation, effective January 17, 1861, to become vice president; elected Vice President of the United States on the ticket with Abraham Lincoln 1861-1865; appointed collector of the port of Boston in 1865 but resigned in 1866; again elected to the United States Senate in 1869; reelected in 1875 and served from March 4, 1869,
Illinois Governor Pat Quinn announced in November that the state would be spending $633,000 to repair and restore the interior of the Lincoln Tomb in Springfield’s Oak Ridge Cemetery. In a news release, Quinn stated, “The Lincoln Tomb is the main reason that Oak Ridge is the second most visited cemetery in the nation, behind Arlington National Cemetery. It’s vital that we keep the tomb in top condition to accommodate the hundreds of thousands of people who visit the 16th President’s final resting place each year, including those who will visit for the 150th anniversary of his death in 2015.”

Interior finishes needing repair and renovation will be fixed, and new interior lighting will be added. Repair or restoration of decorative plaster moldings, granite wall panels and brass plaques are reportedly also part of the project. Work was set to begin December 2013, and the interior of the tomb will be closed through March 2014 when the project is expected to be finished.

Herbert Mitgang (1920-2013), author, editor, journalist, playwright, and producer of television news documentaries passed away in his home on November 21. He was 93 years of age. Mr. Mitgang wrote or edited 15 books, including two on Abraham Lincoln. One of two plays he wrote, Mr. Lincoln, had a successful run at Ford’s Theatre in Washington D.C.; moved on to Broadway briefly in 1980; then helped inaugurate the Hallmark Hall of Fame series on PBS when it moved from network to public television the following year.

Arthur F. Loux (1944-2013), charter member of The Lincoln Group of New York, passed away on December 29th in Kansas, he was 69 years old. He was our first Secretary and a member of the original Executive Committee.

Art was a thoughtful, quiet, modest man who had many friends and was greatly respected. By profession he had been a brilliant computer systems manager with a New Jersey based insurance company. He moved to Kansas with them many years ago, but remained a loyal member of The Lincoln Group of New York until he died.

He was the author of an important article, The Mystery of the Telegraph Interruption, for the Winter, 1979 issue of the Lincoln Herald. He was prompted by one of the many questions raised by Otto Eisenschiml in his book, Why Was Lincoln Murdered? (1937). The specific question was, “Why was the telegraph service out of Washington interrupted for two hours at approximately the same time as the attack on Lincoln?” Eisenschiml himself stated that it was a commercial line that had been cut, not the military one, but he still deliberately gave it a conspiratorial connotation. Art uncovered the innocent details—that one commercial line was deliberately cut, but solely to avoid interference with the military’s efforts to capture Booth. His work was duly noted by Professor William Hanchett in his book, The Lincoln Murder Conspiracies (1983) and in such other works as Sic Semper Tyrannis (2008) by William Richter, and Right or Wrong, God Judge Me (1997) edited by John Rhodehamel and Louise Taper.

Art was also a consultant on the recent and historically accurate National Geographic documentary, Killing Lincoln, narrated by Tom Hanks. Erik Jennderson, the project’s screenwriter and executive producer, praised Art for having played a very valuable role in the writing of the script, and singled him out for praise at during his presentation at last year’s Surratt Society Conference banquet.

Below, see a picture from the February 12, 1981 meeting of The Lincoln Group of New York of Mr. Mitgang and Mr. Loux:
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 2013 award committee.

Paul Ellis-Graham, Chair • John Bodnar • Stuart Schneider