

The Wide Awake Bulletin



The Lincoln Group of New York FEBRUARY 2015
DEDICATED TO THE STUDY OF THE LIFE AND TIMES OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

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Editor: Steven R. Koppelman

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

President's Letter



Steven R. Koppelman

Dear Members,

As I sit back and contemplate my first year as President of The Lincoln Group of New York, I'm struck by the enthusiasm that's been shown by so many of our members. Enthusiasm for Lincoln and his times of course, but also a genuine passion for our meetings as both social gatherings and as great learning experiences.

One thing that's been very much a constant at our meetings is that during the cocktail hour, people frequently speak very enthusiastically about the various Lincoln-related items they own. Whether a true Lincoln collector or just someone who enjoys owning a piece of Lincoln memorabilia (or "Lincolniana"), people are typically very proud of their "piece of history." With that in mind, I would love to hear from you about what you may own that's special to you—it may be a valuable item or it may be something that's just meaningful to you (books, artwork, statuary, autographs, photographs, political items, etc.). Perhaps we'll have a section in the next *Wide Awake* featuring member's collectables. If you would like to be included, send me an email describing your item(s) and since sometimes it's the "hunt" or the "find" that makes a great story or an item special to you, include how you came to acquire it. Please also feel free to include a photo.

Here's one more thing to be enthusiastic about—our commemoration of the sesquicentennial of the Lincoln assassination conspiracy and his New York funeral will take place on Saturday, March 28, featuring a half-day symposium and we will also be offering a special walking tour along Lincoln's funeral procession route which will take place on the exact anniversary of the event, Saturday, April 25. The symposium, supported, in part, by The Lincoln Forum, will be a very special and unique event as we kick-off what will undoubtedly be a national remembrance of the 150th anniversary of the Lincoln assassination with other events taking place in Washington, D.C., as well as Springfield, Illinois.

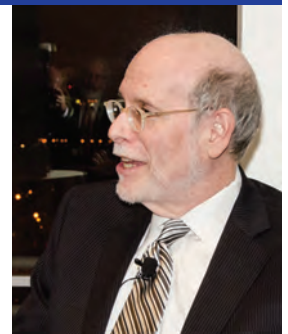
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Harold Holzer Wins Award of Achievement for 2014

by Paul Ellis-Graham

Lincoln and the Power of the Press: The War for Public Opinion by Harold Holzer has been selected as the winner of our annual Award of Achievement for the work that has done the most to encourage the study and appreciation of Abraham Lincoln in 2014. We will be presenting the award to Mr. Holzer at our upcoming February meeting.

When we think of the political world that we live in today, we cannot help but go to those sources that affirm what we hold close and dear to our hearts, unless we are a candidate seeking office and trying to figure out how to win the position we most desire. If we seek a liberal spin on



Harold Holzer

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2014 Meetings Review

2014 was yet another year of outstanding meetings with notable guest speakers as attendees enjoyed provocative presentations on the life and times of Abraham Lincoln...

February 19, 2014: The evening began as President Henry F. Ballone announced to the membership that the current officer terms had ended and that he decided not to seek another term. As a result, the Executive Committee recommended the following new officers: Steven R. Koppelman as President, Paul Ellis-Graham as Vice-President, and Robert G. Langford as Treasurer. The entire slate was approved unanimously by the membership in attendance and thus the changes went into effect immediately.

After Mr. Ballone made some heartfelt parting remarks, Mr. Koppelman thanked him on behalf of the entire membership for his hard work, dedication, and success in his two years as president, referring to him a “true professional.”

With that, Chair of the Award of Achievement committee, Paul Ellis-Graham, presented the evening’s guest speaker, David Von Drehle, with the 2013 Award for his book, *Rise to Greatness: Abraham Lincoln and America’s Most Perilous Year*. Referring to the



John Bodnar, Paul Ellis-Graham, David Von Drehle, Henry F. Ballone & Steven R. Koppelman

fact that this work so expressively brought all the disparate issues that Lincoln faced during 1862 into a most concise and effective book, Mr. Ellis-Graham commented that it’s easy to see after reading it that 1862 was indeed Lincoln’s most perilous year.

After the formal presentation of the Award, Mr. Von Drehle presented his very compelling lecture on Lincoln and 1862. Indicating that the genesis of his book sprang from among other things, his visit to Lincoln’s boyhood home and David Herbert Donald’s biography, *Lincoln* (1995), he took us through the events of 1862 as if we did not know what was going to happen next. In other words, the very way Lincoln lived them. In detailing this most dramatic year, perhaps Mr. Von Drehle’s most poignant argument in support of his view was when he pointed out that the United States went, “from the lowest New Year’s Day in 1862 to the proudest in 1863.”



David Von Drehle

Von Drehle’s presentation was very well received—to quote one attendee, “it was a terrific meeting with a great speaker.” Quite frankly, that sums up the evening. ~

April 8, 2014: A large and enthusiastic group gathered on this evening to experience a very different aspect of the Lincoln assassination story—the perspective of events from the actors and stagehands who were working at Ford’s Theatre on that horrible night. Dr. Thomas A. Bogar was the guest lecturer as he spoke on his new book, *Backstage at the Lincoln Assassination*.

Before Dr. Bogar took the podium though, a special presentation was made to past president Henry F. Ballone by President Steven R. Koppelman. Koppelman presented Ballone with a plaque, thanking him for his “successful efforts and devotion as our president for the past two years.” A well-deserved ovation for Mr. Ballone followed.



Steven R. Koppelman & Henry F. Ballone

In beginning his lecture, Dr. Bogar put things in perspective by asking everyone to imagine what it would be like to have the president of the United States assassinated in your workplace by a co-worker and friend who you perhaps had spent time with that very day. This is exactly what it was like for the 46 actors and stagehands working that evening at Ford’s Theatre. He went on to describe many of the key players that evening, where they were, what they were doing, and what they went through in the immediate aftermath of the assassination, at one point raising the issue of just what Booth friend, actor John Mathews (who played Mr. Coyle, attorney in *Our American Cousin* that night) really knew of the assassination plan and the letter that he had received from Booth earlier that day.



Thomas A. Bogar

In addition, Dr. Bogar spent a good deal of time detailing President Lincoln’s love of theatre, experiences at various theatrical events, and his almost “need” for it as an escape from his day-to-day burdens.

To enhance the theme of the evening, Richard Sloan brought in some relevant items from his personal collection: 1) a letter from Harry Hawk, the lone actor on stage when Booth fired his fatal shot, 2) a Joseph Hazelton signature, Hazelton was the program boy that evening, 3) a letter from orchestra leader William Withers, Jr., and 4) John T. Ford, the owner of Ford’s Theatre, a signed cover from a play he published. **continued on page 3**

2014 Meetings Review, continued

Between Dr. Bogar's vivid words and these actual artifacts, attendees truly experienced a different view of the events of April 14, 1865. ~

November 6, 2014: As is tradition at the November meeting of The Lincoln Group of New York, the formal activities began with a reading of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Henry F. Ballone was called upon to perform the honors and he did not disappoint as he gave a very heartfelt and poignant rendition.



Henry F. Ballone

Steven R. Koppelman

The main event followed as President Steven R. Koppelman introduced Harold Holzer, the evening's guest lecturer. Mr. Holzer's latest book, *Lincoln and the Power of the Press* would be the basis for his talk. With so many diverse subjects in the book to call upon, Holzer selected one that truly resonated with the audience—a somewhat controversial area—the suppression of the press. From the closing down of newspapers to the destroying of printing presses to newspaper establishments being attacked by union troops, these subjects were all revealed and expounded upon by Mr. Holzer.



Harold Holzer

Lincoln of course would save the union even if he had to resort to suppressing certain constitutional guarantees—freedom of the press was one of the first of these. There is a fine line between dissent and treason and sometimes that line can be easily blurred as Mr. Holzer pointed out. He explained that really, it was early in the Civil War, in 1861, especially after the defeat of the Union army at Bull Run that much of the suppression of the press took place. He further pointed out, and most importantly, that Lincoln never shut down or suppressed newspapers during elections, both the 1862 mid-terms and the 1864 presidential election. He did not interfere with the people's right to choose (when he easily could have), believing that without democratic elections, all was lost anyway.

Finally, in detailing some of the various events of attacks on the press, Mr. Holzer told an intriguing story of something that took place in New York City during the draft riots of 1863. "Republican" papers were attacked by the mobs. Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune* building was assaulted—the building, not to mention Greeley himself, as well as all employees was literally under attack. Henry Raymond, editor/owner of the *New York Times*, electing to protect his brand new *Times* building (and the lives of the *Times* workers) at all costs, obtained some Gatling guns which he posted on the second floor of the building to repel potential attackers. The building and all inside emerged unscathed. It was perhaps in doing this Holzer suggested, that the United States, if not the world as we know it, exists today. "How can that possibly be?" was the common thought amongst all eagerly listening to the story. Mr. Holzer explained that Raymond's partner, who assisted him in this endeavor, was a man named Leonard W. Jerome. Jerome's life, which would have been in jeopardy had the mobs attacked, was of course among those "saved." This turns out to be an especially important event not only for the United States but the entire free world—Jerome would go on to have a grandson by the name of Winston Churchill! ~

President's Letter, continued

Our half-day symposium will take place at the renowned Cooper Union and will begin at the Great Hall with a talk by Harold Holzer (author of *Lincoln at Cooper Union*) about the Lincoln-related events that took place in that historic room, a lecture on the assassination and military tribunals by retired Rhode Island Supreme Court Chief Justice Frank J. Williams, an address on African Americans at Lincoln's New York funeral by New York historian Barnet Schechter, a panel discussion on the assassination conspirators moderated by Richard Sloan with panelists, Michael Kauffman (*American Brutus: John Wilkes Booth and the Lincoln Conspiracies*), Kate Larson (*The Assassin's Accomplice: Mary Surratt and the Plot to Kill Abraham Lincoln*), and Betty Ownsbey (*Alias "Paine": Lewis Thornton Powell, the Mystery Man of the Lincoln Conspiracy*), an appearance by "Walt Whitman" reciting some of his famous Lincoln prose, and finally, we will have a keynote speech on "Lincoln's Legacy."

The April 25 walking tour of a portion of the actual funeral procession route will be led by Richard Sloan and will begin at City Hall where Lincoln's body lay in state. Richard will be pointing out many of the important locations and historic buildings along the actual route Lincoln's hearse traveled (some are still standing!), as well as describing the Lincoln-related history that took place at many of these sites including those with connections to Mrs. Lincoln and John Wilkes Booth.

I look forward to seeing you, not only at these special events, but at our regularly scheduled meetings as well throughout the year!

Sincerely,
Steven R. Koppelman
 President

Who Was Private George F. Robinson?

by Steven R. Koppelman

Dating back to the days of the Revolutionary War, Congress has awarded gold medals as its “highest expression of national appreciation for distinguished achievements and contributions.” Originally, these medals were awarded to war heroes such as George Washington (the first recipient), Winfield Scott, Andrew Jackson, and Zachary Taylor. The range of the recipients has grown from its inception to include athletes, authors, entertainers, explorers, humanitarians, lifesavers, notables in science and medicine, public servants, and even foreign recipients. Note though that these medals are not easily awarded. All Congressional Gold Medal legislation must be co-sponsored by at least two-thirds (290) of the Members of the House as well as at least two-thirds (67) of the Senate before it will even be considered.¹

During the Civil War, only one soldier, Ulysses S. Grant received the Congressional Gold Medal. It should be noted though, that Cornelius Vanderbilt, at the request of President Abraham Lincoln, also received the medal during the war, for his “unique manifestation of a fervid and large-souled patriotism” in making a “free gift to his imperiled country of his new and staunch steamship *Vanderbilt*.”² However, Civil War soldier, Private George Foster Robinson, who served in the 8th Maine regiment as a Private in Company B during the war, was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal on March 1, 1871. Why? Who was he?

Robinson, born on August 13, 1832, enlisted in the army on August 15, 1863. On May 20, 1864, he received a severe wound in his leg from canister shot during an attack by the confederate army at Bermuda Hundred. After convalescing at Douglas Hospital in Washington, D.C. for almost a year, though his wound was not quite healed, on April 14, 1865 he was assigned as a nurse to Secretary of State William H. Seward.³

Seward had been injured on April 5, 1865 during a carriage accident. His coachman had temporarily dismounted from the carriage within which Seward riding, to fix a door that wouldn't remain closed, and the horses were somehow startled and started to run. Seward in attempting to stop them ultimately fell to the ground on his right side, breaking his arm (close to the shoulder joint) and completely fracturing his lower jaw on both sides, knocking himself unconscious.⁴

Though his name is certainly not generally known, these events led Robinson to his date with history and the Congressional Gold Medal. In most written descriptions of the Lincoln assassination conspiracy, when detailing the Lewis Powell (also known as Paine or Payne) attack on Seward, there is almost always reference to the “nurse” who helped to fight off Powell. Robinson was that “nurse.”

After Powell gained entry into William Seward's house by claiming to have medicine that the doctor wanted delivered, and then into Seward's bedroom by bludgeoning Frederick Seward (William's son, and Assistant Secretary of State), he was ultimately fought off and pulled off of the Secretary of State after having stabbed and slashed him multiple times, by “nurse” George F. Robinson (often times not even named in written accounts). Robinson himself was stabbed and seriously injured during the melee. He had saved the life of Secretary Seward who would miraculously survive his wounds, albeit with a disfigured face.



Fight with Assassin in Seward's Room, *National Police Gazette*, April 22, 1865
www.mrlincolnwhitehouse.org

Though almost six years would pass by, at the urging of the state of Maine, in 1871 the United States Congress did approve a resolution voting a gold medal (and \$5,000!) to be awarded to Private George F. Robinson. The resolution, in part, reads as follows:

That the Secretary of the Treasury be, and is hereby, directed to cause to be prepared and presented to the said George F. Robinson a gold medal with appropriate devices and inscriptions, commemorative of the heroic conduct of the said Robinson on the fourteenth day of April, eighteen hundred and sixty-five, in saving the life of the Honorable William H. Seward, then Secretary of State of the United States, the expense of said medal to be paid out of any money in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated.⁵

Porter Sheldon, Representative of New York's 31st district in the United States Congress from 1869 to 1871, served on the Committee on Foreign Affairs. In that role he issued a report supporting Congress' approval of the resolution. The report, in characteristic Victorian era language and sentimentality, detailed the step-by-step events of Robinson's heroic act:

At 10 o'clock that night Robinson was on duty in Mr. Seward's room, when the assassin Payne, sought that room to murder the feeble, wounded, helpless Secretary, in pursuance to the great conspiracy which ended with filling the whole civilized world with horror... Robinson hearing a disturbance in the hall opened the door... on the threshold stood the athletic assassin, a revolver in one hand and a huge bowie knife in the other... he caught the gleam of that terrible knife aimed at his throat; instinctively he struck up at the assassin's arm to ward off the knife, partially succeeded, but received the blow upon his head, and was prostrated to the floor. Bounding over him, Payne rushed on to the bed, and commenced wildly striking with the knife at the throat of the Secretary. Already he had cut the flesh off from one cheek to the bone, and the blood gushed in torrents over the pillow. This soldier, just from the hospital, with his wounded leg not yet healed, enfeebled from his year of suffering and pain, just prostrated to the floor by a blow from that terrible knife, springs to his feet, and without one moment's hesitation, without one moment's thought for himself, save, as he swears,

Who Was Private George F. Robinson?, continued

the thought that he must die to save the Secretary; without a weapon of any description, with a bravery never surpassed in the annals of any country, he opposed his naked hands, his wounded and enfeebled body, to the terrible knife of the gigantic and desperate murderer. He seized the assassin just as the deadly knife was about to bury itself in the throat of the Secretary, and then commenced an unequal struggle which seemingly can only end in the death of the brave soldier. Having succeeded in dragging Payne from off the bed, he receives over his shoulder two deep wounds down his back, inflicting injuries from which one side of his face and two fingers of one hand are still partially paralyzed. He received two more wounds under his left shoulder blade, which proved nearly fatal, and received blows about the head and face from the revolver. At last Payne, probably becoming alarmed for his own safety...fled.⁶

Robinson himself, in his own recounting of the details from that day, picks up from here what happened next:

We turned up the gas and gave attention first to the Secretary. He was bleeding profusely. The pool of blood in which he lay, the gaping gash in the cheek, the wound in his shoulder and his ghastly pale face all made a frightful sight...I brushed the blood from my face and helped at stanching the flow from the Secretary's cheek and shoulder...while we were washing the bloody face of the Secretary he slowly opened his eyes, and said faintly, "I am not dead; call the police; get physicians; close the house." When did I hear of President's Lincoln's assassination? When Surgeon General Barnes came...the surgeon showed deep anxiety and thoughtfulness... "How badly is the Secretary hurt?" asked he. I can't tell you had best see that for yourself, was my reply. The Surgeon General came to take my place at the bedside. As he did he moved close by my side. "Don't say anything, but President Lincoln has just been shot at Ford's Theater," he whispered. Where's Stanton and Johnson whispered I in alarm. "What do you mean?" he said. Why I mean that this looks like a scheme to kill off the whole government, said I, thinking of the threatened raid of Mosby's guerrillas.⁷

Of course, this account, written by Robinson 33 years after the actual events could certainly be embellished at least to some degree. Would Robinson really have had the presence of mind to immediately associate the events that night to a plot to "kill off" the entire government? Perhaps so, because he had stated that when he was first assigned to Seward's care, on April 11, 1865, military authorities in Washington were fearful that Mosby's guerrillas, "would make a last concerted and desperate raid on Washington when least expected."⁸

In any case, he certainly performed a heroic act, and given the significance of the events of April 14, 1865, he earned his gold medal. The medal itself, on the obverse, has a bust of Robinson facing left with the legend:

"TO GEORGE F. ROBINSON. AWARDED BY THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES, MARCH 1, 1871. FOR HIS HEROIC CONDUCT ON THE 14 DAY OF APRIL 1865. IN SAVING THE LIFE OF THE HONORABLE WM. H. SEWARD, THEN SECRETARY OF STATE OF THE UNITED STATES."

The reverse is a detailed scene depicting Robinson fighting off Powell with a bed-ridden Seward in the background. In his book, *Medals of the United States Mint: The First Century 1792 – 1892*, R.W. Julian asserts, "The reverse must be judged as one of the better of the past century." He was not quite as enthusiastic about the obverse though, calling the design one of "rather poor quality."⁹ He elaborated on this latter thought in 2011 by stating that, "The obverse design has no special merit, the head of Robinson perhaps being smaller than ought to have been the case. It is a good representation, however."¹⁰



Photo: American Numismatic Society, www.numismatics.org

After 1873 when the gold medal was finally presented to Robinson, the mint struck copper-bronzed medals for anyone who had an interest in owning one. Then, in 1901, the Mint began using real bronze with a sand-blasted finish. To date, the United States Mint last struck bronze versions of the Robinson medal around 1985.¹¹ The Mint is long since "sold out" but the medals can still be found, though not at all frequently, on eBay, as well as other secondary market locations.

The accolades and rewards that Robinson received did not end with his gold medal. The 1867 purchase of Alaska by the United States, otherwise known as "Seward's Folly," ultimately led to yet another honor for George F. Robinson. Perhaps based on the logic that had Robinson not saved Seward's life, Seward would not have been able to make the Alaskan purchase, a 10,167 foot mountain in Alaska (in Matanuska-Susitna County) was named for Robinson in 1965, the centennial of his heroic act. Ironically though, it is called "Mount Sergeant Robinson," not "Private," as there was some confusion as to which George Robinson had actually saved Seward's life (apparently there was a Sergeant George Robinson who also served in the Civil War, but he was from Ohio, and was not the Private from Maine who was Seward's nurse). Despite the error, the incorrect name has remained. Clearly though, it was Private George F. Robinson that saved Seward's life as the congressional resolution voting him the medal (that was in part quoted above) states, "George F. Robinson, late a private in the Eighth Regiment of Maine Volunteers."

Perhaps the confusion as to private or sergeant is also in part due to the Lincoln assassination conspiracy trial transcript compiled in 1865 by Benn Pitman. Pitman refers to Robinson, obviously a key witness against Lewis Powell, as "Sergeant George F. Robinson" in detailing Robinson's testimony of May 19, 1865.¹² Of course, one wonders where Pitman got the idea that he was a sergeant. Regardless though, the confusion only adds to the lack of general knowledge of Private George F. Robinson.

Who Was Private George F. Robinson?, continued

The only memento that Robinson obtained and held onto from April 14, 1865 was a very significant one indeed. He acquired the knife that Powell had used on that fateful night. Powell had reportedly dropped the weapon when he mounted his horse during his escape. After the conspiracy trial had concluded and Powell had been condemned to death, Judge Advocate General Joseph Holt gave Robinson the bowie knife.¹³

It was on May 19, 1865 (ironically, the same date as his conspiracy trial testimony), that George Robinson was discharged from his Maine regiment. He spent some time thereafter working for the Treasury Department in Washington D.C., where it can be imagined that he was treated as quite the hero. In January 1869, he re-enlisted in the army and was assigned to the quartermaster corps.¹⁴

Robinson was one of the early organizers of the Grand Army of the Republic (essentially a veterans organization, the GAR became a strong political arm of the Republican Party most especially during the period of reconstruction). In 1879, Rutherford B. Hayes at the behest of Republican minority leader of the House James A. Garfield, and Senator John A. Logan (note that Logan was one of the initial leaders of the GAR and was its Commander-in-Chief from 1868 to 1871), appointed Robinson paymaster in the United States army with the rank of Major. In August of 1896 Major Robinson retired from the army having reached its mandatory age limit, and lived out his years in a house in the midst of a "beautiful orange grove" in Pomona, California.¹⁵

Robinson died at the age of 75 in August 1907. He is buried at Arlington National Cemetery, where heroes are interred, only a few miles from the site of his most heroic act. Robinson

lamented the fact that he had never known how he came to be detailed as a nurse to Seward,¹⁶ but the nation that he served was certainly grateful that he was assigned accordingly.

So, who was Private George F. Robinson? Was he nothing more than a "footnote" to the history of the Lincoln assassination conspiracy? He was in truth, a man deserving to be known; a Congressional Gold Medal recipient who performed a most heroic act on one of the seminal days of our nation's history.



George F. Robinson, Courtesy of Arlington National Cemetery Website

¹ United States House of Representatives, *Congressional Gold Medal Recipients*, <http://history.house.gov/Institution/Gold-Medal/Gold-Medal-Recipients/>

² J.F. Loubat, *The Medalllic History of the United States of America 1776-1876*, (New Milford, CT, N. Flayderman & Co, 1967, reprinted from 1878 original), 407

³ Ibid., 432

⁴ Walter Stahr, *Seward: Lincoln's Indispensable Man*, (New York, Simon & Schuster, 2012), 431

⁵ Loubat, *Medalllic History*, 431

⁶ Ibid., 432-433

⁷ "How I Saved Secretary State Seward from Assassin Payne," *The San Francisco Call*, August 21, 1898, 19

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ R.W. Julian, *Medals of the United States Mint: The First Century 1792 - 1892*, (The Token and Medal Society, 1977), 219

¹⁰ R.W. Julian, "Mint Medal Salutes Forgotten Hero," [www.Numismaster.com](http://www.numismaster.com/ta/numis/Article.jsp?ad=article&ArticleId=22855), August 12, 2011, <http://www.numismaster.com/ta/numis/Article.jsp?ad=article&ArticleId=22855>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Edward Steers Jr., ed., *The Trial: The Assassination of President Lincoln and the Trial of the Conspirators*, (Lexington, KY, The University Press of Kentucky, 2003), 155

¹³ "How I Saved Secretary State Seward from Assassin Payne," August 21, 1898. Note that the knife exists today in the collection of the Huntington Library in San Marino, California

¹⁴ Julian, "Mint Medal"

¹⁵ "How I Saved Secretary State Seward from Assassin Payne," August 21, 1898

¹⁶ Ibid.

Ten Lincoln Group of New York Members Attend 2014 Lincoln Forum in Gettysburg

Proving the dedication and interest that Lincoln Group of New York members have for all things Lincoln, a large contingent made the journey to Gettysburg this past November to attend the 19th annual Lincoln Forum. The theme of the Forum for 2014 was "The People Say Lincoln! Fighting for Military and Political Victory in 1864." This was year five of a six-year focus on the Civil War Sesquicentennial by the Forum. ~



Pictured above from L to R: Paula Hopewell, Stuart Schneider, Jim Santagata, Bob Langford, Steve Koppelman, Karen Bodnar, John Bodnar, Harold Holzer, Hank Ballone, and Paul Ellis-Graham

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

Harold Holzer Wins Award of Achievement for 2014, continued

events, we might go to MSNBC or if we want a conservative perspective we might check out Fox News. While the means of our communication varies widely in both speed and technology from that of the nineteenth century, we still often depend on OUTSIDE sources for our news, as our predecessors did as well.

In the era of Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War, the press was that source of information. And like today, the news media of the nineteenth century was often biased, depending on which political party you belonged to or took an interest in. No book has done a better job at studying the role of the press during the Civil War than Harold Holzer's *Lincoln and the Power of the Press*.

Exhaustively researched and superbly written, Holzer's work captures the critical role of the press during that time, the men that shaped it, and those leading politicians, like Abraham Lincoln, who followed it and used it to his advantage. Beginning with the historical importance of the press in the early part of the nineteenth century, Holzer brings us along for a wild ride through the tumultuous Civil War Era, as he follows the path of New York City's most influential editors, James Gordon Bennett of the *New York Herald*, Horace Greeley of the *New York Tribune*, and Henry Raymond of the *New York Times*, who write about the war as the President, Abraham Lincoln, attempted to guide the nation onto victory at Appomattox in 1865.

Through a plentiful use of primary source documents, political cartoons, and press editorials, Holzer notes the significant influence that editors of major New York newspapers exercised in shaping public opinion as other newspapers and press agencies relied on them for information for news to their readers. The recent invention of the telegraph, occurring just several years before the war began, gave the press even more power in setting public opinion as a nervous nation waited breathlessly for the latest news from eastern and western military campaigns.

Readers will be surprised about the quasi-political role that these editors played in both reporting the news and seeking either political patronage for themselves or their friends! Some, like Horace Greeley and Henry Raymond for example, actually sought out political office while doing their jobs as journalists.

Finally, Abraham Lincoln, an astute and devoted reader of newspapers ever since his days in New Salem, was ever careful and even brilliant in using these men to persuade and support the causes for which he would become inextricably linked, saving the Union and permanently securing emancipation for all coming time, even while allowing his generals to shut down treasonous newspapers and opponents in doing so! The Civil War presented President Lincoln with unforeseen challenges in the areas of classified military movements of troops, suspension of the writs of habeas corpus, and the arrest of those most dangerous to the war effort. All of these considerations are fully analyzed in this exciting new book.

The Award Committee of The Lincoln Group of New York is pleased to give its annual Award of Achievement to Harold Holzer for this groundbreaking and most fascinating study of the press during the mid-nineteenth century. Each year the committee requests and receives numerous examination

copies of books, movies, and documentaries to consider for the award. On behalf of the Award Committee, I wish to thank fellow members John Bodnar and Frank McKenna for their time, their counsel, and their commitment to both the committee and The Lincoln Group of New York. ~

In Memoriam: Ursula Viscardi (1927–2014)

On September 29, 2014 The Lincoln Group of New York lost a very special member, Ursula Viscardi, the mother of longtime member Rose Viscardi. Ursula will really be missed, she seemed to truly enjoy being with us at our meetings. Rose writes the following about her mother:

My mom remembered so clearly the Memorial Day parade in Downtown Brooklyn when I think she was eight years old (I believe there is actual footage of it in the Ken Burns Civil War series). There were Civil War soldiers in the parade, being the oldest soldiers at the time, and she said that some were still walking a little bit while others were riding in cars. It stuck in her mind always. She always loved history and instilled her love of it in me, though the Lincoln part developed for me in school. My mom felt so intellectual coming to The Lincoln Group of New York meetings with me and would talk about them to everyone! She felt that she was a part of something important (which she was). She was also very adamant about civil rights which was unique for someone from her generation. She was the most wonderful mother in the world.



Ursula Viscardi, February 19, 2014



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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 2014 award committee.*

Paul Ellis-Graham, Chair • John Bodnar • Frank McKenna

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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