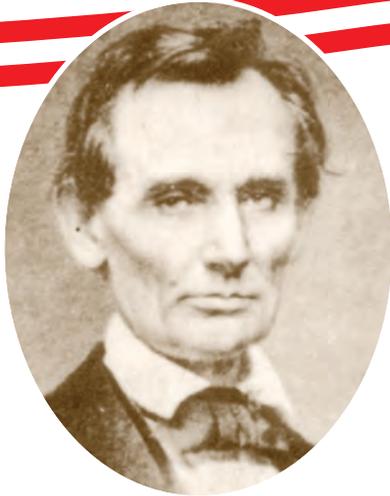




The Wide Awake Bulletin



The Lincoln Group of New York FEBRUARY 2020
DEDICATED TO THE STUDY OF THE LIFE AND TIMES OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

President's Letter



Paul Ellis-Graham

Dear Members,

It is with great pleasure that I write this year's annual message to you. We are settled into our new venue at the Villa Mosconi Restaurant in Greenwich Village where manager Gerry Leonardi and his staff provide us with tasty food at reasonable prices. We look forward to continuing there, particularly as the officers and Executive Committee worked hard to locate a venue that is both affordable and close to public transportation and parking—NOT an easy task in Manhattan!

Our three dinner meetings this year brought in guest speakers who are accomplished writers who have achieved much success over their long careers and provided many insights into the life and legacy of our favorite president (You ALL know who he is!). This year's topics were very personal to me in a number of ways. William Freehling, who won our 2018 Annual Award of Achievement for his book *Becoming Lincoln*, is well known for his work in the field of Civil War studies. When I was an undergraduate at UMass Amherst studying under Stephen B. Oates, we read Dr. Freehling's book on the Nullification Crisis in 1832, *Prelude to Civil War*, a work that I later frequently used in my advanced placement US History classes. Meeting Dr. Freehling and hearing his presentation at our February meeting was a real thrill!

In April our own Harold Holzer presented his latest book, *Monument Man*, on sculptor Daniel Chester French, a truly "monumental" work that captures the true genius of America's most accomplished artist. When I was growing up in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, I lived only twenty miles from French's studio in Stockbridge, so it was a great pleasure for me to have Harold bring back those memories, and to learn about other sculptural works my wife and I can visit when we travel.

Finally, in November we heard former Newsweek and Time journalist Douglas Waller deliver a synopsis of his most recent book, *Lincoln's Spies*. His presentation shed light on the evolving use of army intelligence during the Civil War, as well as on Lincoln's willingness to take advantage of those new means of intelligence gathering to defeat the Confederates. One of the major figures in his work was General George Sharpe from Kingston, New York, whom Waller credits as being the person most responsible for establishing the fundamentals of espionage used by the US government today. I live only one-half hour south of Kingston, and as Past NY Department Commander for The Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, I feel such appreciation for him as one of our own that my wife and I went to the Wiltwyck Rural Cemetery to visit the general and offer our thanks and prayers for a job well done.

We come to the Lincoln Group of New York for many reasons—for the food, for the comradery, for inspiration, or just for the chance to hear intelligent discussions by accomplished authors whose works highlight newfound insights into the life of Abraham Lincoln. Nothing, however, is accomplished in a vacuum. I need to thank all the officers and members of the Executive Committee, especially Rob Kaplan and Bob Langford, for their continued work and support. Last year was a particular pleasure for me, and I hope that this year will be the same for you.

Sincerely,
Paul Ellis-Graham

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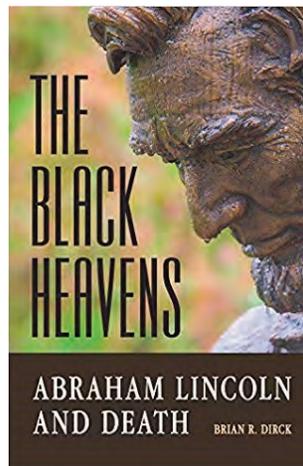
The editor would like to express his appreciation to Paul Ellis-Graham, Steven R. Koppelman, and Henry F. Ballone for their assistance in preparing this issue of *The Wide Awake Bulletin*.

Editor: Rob Kaplan
Editor Emeritus: Steven R. Koppelman
Photographer: Henry F. Ballone

Brian Dirck Wins Award of Achievement for 2019

Brian Dirck, author of *The Black Heavens: Abraham Lincoln and Death*, has been chosen as the recipient of the Lincoln Group of New York's 2019 Award of Achievement. The award, presented to the individual or organization that has done the most to encourage the study and appreciation of Abraham Lincoln during the year, has been conferred annually since 1988. Professor Dirck, who teaches history at Anderson University in Indiana, is also the author of numerous articles and several other books about our 16th president, including *Lincoln and Davis: Imagining America, 1809-1865*; *Lincoln the Lawyer*; *Abraham Lincoln and White America*; *Lincoln and the Constitution*; and *Lincoln in Indiana*.

The first in-depth analysis of Abraham Lincoln's encounters with death, *The Black Heavens* begins with the familiar stories of the deaths of those closest to him—his mother, sister, Ann Rutledge, and sons Edward and William, placing them in the context of his overall experience, the prevalence and progression of disease during the 19th century, and contemporary



conventions regarding death. Turning then to the almost inconceivable carnage of the Civil War, Professor Dirck extrapolates from Lincoln's words and actions the evolution of his understanding of the meaning of death, in political, personal, and, most importantly, spiritual terms, particularly in light of his growing belief in God's involvement in the affairs of men. As a result, as Gerald J. Prokopowicz, professor of history at East Carolina University and member of the advisory boards of the Lincoln Studies Center and the Lincoln Forum, has said, "Reading this book is like looking at a familiar Lincoln portrait hung at a new angle on a different wall, letting fresh sunbeams reveal more of what was always there."

The award committee members for 2019 were Rob Kaplan, Tom Dames, and Steve Aronson. The award will be presented to Professor Dirck at our February 2020 dinner meeting, when he will speak on the subject of the book.~

2019 Meetings Review

From a new and different perspective on Lincoln, to a famous sculptor and his greatest work, to tales of Union espionage, topics discussed at this year's Lincoln Group of New York meetings were as varied, informative, and enjoyable as ever.

February 4, 2019:

Our first meeting of the new year, celebrating Abraham Lincoln's birthday, was held at a new venue—Villa Mosconi on Macdougall Street in Greenwich Village. After welcoming everyone, Acting President Paul Ellis-Graham provided a report on the annual Executive Committee's meeting held earlier in the evening. Although not an LGNY election year, Mr. Ellis-Graham explained, due to the resignation of former president John Bodnar, it was necessary for the committee to make changes in the officers. The committee had accordingly named Mr. Ellis-Graham as president, and Rob Kaplan, editor of "The Wide Awake Bulletin," as vice president. In addition, as co-treasurers Bob Langford and Lorraine Figarelli had expressed their wish to retire from their positions, Mr. Ellis-Graham asked any of the members who might be interested in becoming treasurer to contact him. Finally, since committee member Joe Garrera had also tendered his resignation, it was announced that he would be replaced by Paula Hopewell, chair of the Award of Achievement Committee. The president's remarks were followed by dinner—a family-style meal consisting of a variety of particularly delicious Italian dishes—and our regular book raffle.



Paula Hopewell

After the auction, President Ellis-Graham introduced Ms. Hopewell, who presented this year's Award of Achievement to Professor William W. Freehling, author of *Becoming Lincoln*. Singletary Professor of the Humanities Emeritus at the University of Kentucky, Freehling is also the author of the two-volume *Road to Disunion* and the Bancroft Award-winning *Prelude to Civil War: The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 1816-1830*. After expressing his thanks for receiving the award, Professor Freehling proceeded to explain that until he wrote the book his professional interests had focused more on the Civil War than on Lincoln. He had, however, always been personally interested in Lincoln. Having grown up near Lincoln Park in Chicago, he'd been fascinated by Augustus Saint-Gaudens' famous statue, and had wondered why Lincoln's face always appeared to be so tormented.

When he did turn his professional attention to the Great Emancipator, what he found most interesting was not Lincoln's years as president but, rather, what had happened before his election, that is, how he became Abraham Lincoln. What struck Freehling most forcibly in his research was **continued on page 3**

2019 Meetings Review, continued



William H. Freehling

that Lincoln was, as he put it, “one of the biggest losers in American history.” He failed in his first effort to be elected to the Illinois House of Representatives in 1832, and later that year saw the New Salem store he owned with William F. Berry fail. He was subsequently elected to the legislature in 1834, and re-elected in 1836 and 1838, but he lost his bid to be Speaker of the House later that year. He was subsequently re-elected to the legislature in 1840 and elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1846. However, he went on to lose two elections to the United States Senate—in 1855 and in 1858.

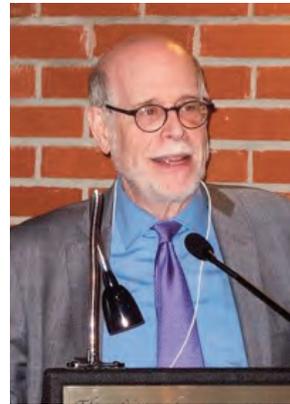
And yet, as Freehling pointed out, despite his failures, or perhaps because of them, Lincoln learned how to succeed. He did it, Freehling said, in two ways. First, by accepting responsibility, beginning with taking on all the debt from his business failure. And, second, by not only accepting but also actively seeking assistance from many others, including Bowling Greene, John Todd Stuart, Joshua Speed, and Norman Judd, all of whose help enabled him, ultimately, to become Abraham Lincoln.

April 22, 2019:

President Ellis-Graham opened the meeting by welcoming everyone, including Executive Committee members in attendance and several first-time attendees, made some brief announcements, and then announced dinner would be served. After dinner, and a particularly spirited book raffle, he proceeded to introduce the evening’s speaker—Harold Holzer, the Jonathan F. Fanton Director of Hunter College’s Roosevelt House Public Policy Institute in New York City. Mr. Holzer is a renowned Lincoln scholar, a founder and current chairman of the Lincoln Forum, an LGNY executive committee member, and the author of more than 60 books and almost 600 articles, including, most recently, *Monument Man: The Life and Art of Daniel Chester French*.

French, Mr. Holzer explained, was one of the most acclaimed and prolific American sculptors of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, best known for his iconic statue in the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC. Born in Exeter, New Hampshire, in 1850, he was brought up in Concord, Massachusetts. His training included a year at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology as well as several years in Florence, Italy, and he established his reputation by winning

the commission—at the age of 23—for the now-famous “Minute Man” statue in Concord celebrating the centennial of the Battle of Lexington and Concord. Mr. Holzer also discussed, and illustrated with photographs, several of French’s other early works, including “Death and the Sculptor” in Boston, “Alma Mater” at Columbia University in New York, “John Harvard” in Harvard Yard, and the giant “Statue of the Republic” for the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, as well as a number of other well-known commissions.



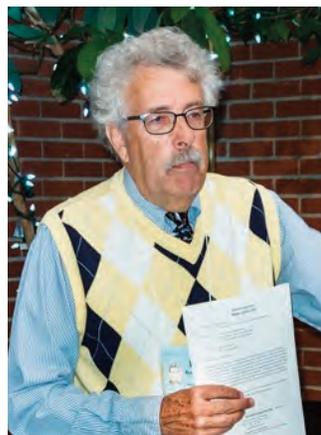
Harold Holzer

Mr. Holzer then turned to French’s work on the statue of Abraham Lincoln in the Lincoln Memorial, discussing the successively larger plaster models he made for the statue, and his collaboration with the Piccirilli Brothers of the Bronx, New York, who, drawing on French’s model, carved the 21 marble blocks that make up the statue. Mr. Holzer also discussed how closely French worked with Henry Bacon, the Memorial’s architect, including French’s suggestion that the size of the statue be increased from the original 13 feet to 19 feet because it would have otherwise been dwarfed in the building. Mr. Holzer also noted that, ironically, when the Memorial’s dedication ceremony was held in 1922, African American attendees had to sit separately from whites.

In closing, Mr. Holzer related how, although the Memorial was initially seen as a symbol of reunification between the North and South after the Civil War, seventeen years after the dedication it took on a different meaning. On Easter Sunday in 1939, when African American contralto Marian Anderson was refused permission by the Daughters of the American Revolution to perform in Constitution Hall because of her color, Eleanor Roosevelt arranged for her to sing on the steps of the Memorial to an integrated crowd of 75,000, as well as a national radio audience. As Mr. Holzer wrote in his book, “The meaning of the Lincoln Memorial would never again be the same; it had been transfigured at last, in the course of a single hour, from a monument to sectional reunion into a touchstone for racial reconciliation.” And since then, as he pointed out, it has served as a backdrop for numerous other historic events, most notably the March on Washington in 1963 and Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” Speech.

November 4, 2019:

Our last meeting of the year opened with President Paul Ellis-Graham’s welcome, followed by introductions of the LGNY officers and committee members in attendance, several first-time attendees, and Stan King, one of the founding members of the group. This being November, the next order of **continued on page 8**



Paul Ellis Graham

The “Other” Lincoln Movies

by Rob Kaplan

The first motion picture ever made—Eadweard Muybridge’s 15-second film of a galloping horse—wasn’t created until 1878, thirteen years after Abraham Lincoln’s death. Even so, according to Mark S. Reinhardt in his *Abraham Lincoln on Screen (Second Edition)*, with almost 300 dramas or documentaries about or including Lincoln through 2009, and numerous others since, our 16th president is the “most frequently portrayed American historical figure in the history of the film and television arts.” Most of these productions are short films or television shows, the vast majority of them featuring Lincoln but not specifically about him. These range from the sublime—*The Birth of a Nation* (1915), to the ridiculous—*Bill and Ted’s Excellent Adventure* (1989).

There have also, however, been several full-length feature films or dramatic television miniseries focusing on Lincoln, some of which have come to be considered classics. These include D.W. Griffith’s *Abraham Lincoln* (1930), with Walter Huston; John Ford’s *Young Mr. Lincoln* (1939), starring Henry Fonda; and John Cromwell’s *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* (1940), with Raymond Massey in the title role. More recently, between 1974 and 1976, NBC broadcast six hour-long specials cumulatively titled *Sandburg’s Lincoln*, directed by George Schaefer with Hal Holbrook as Lincoln. Another NBC series, *Gore Vidal’s Lincoln*, directed by Lamont Johnson and starring Sam Waterston, aired in 1988. And, finally, there was Steven Spielberg’s multiple Academy Award-winning *Lincoln* (2012), starring Daniel Day-Lewis.

All of these films and series were critically well-received, albeit to different extents, and are still generally well considered. History fans have, of course, pointed out inaccuracies in all of them, although more so in the earlier films than in those of more recent vintage. There have also been, and will no doubt continue to be, arguments about which Lincoln portrayer is closest to the original. These differences of opinion may be the result of a generation gap—older Lincoln devotees who first experienced Huston, Massey, or Fonda as Lincoln on late-night TV may continue to favor them, while younger fans may find Day-Lewis’ depiction more convincing. There have, however, also been several lesser-known—although not necessarily deservedly so—feature films that either focus on Lincoln or provide a story in which Lincoln is a minor but essential character, even if he doesn’t actually appear on screen.

The earliest of these is *The Prisoner of Shark Island* (1936), directed by John Ford (who also directed *Young Mr. Lincoln*) and starring Warner Baxter as Dr. Samuel A. Mudd. Mudd, of course, was the Lincoln conspirator imprisoned at Fort Jefferson in the Dry Tortugas for his part in the assassination plot, but, because he provided medical assistance there during a typhoid

epidemic, was pardoned by President Andrew Johnson in 1869 (both of which did in fact occur). Scripted by Nunnally Johnson, and apparently based on Mudd’s daughter Nettie’s 1906 biography of him, it portrays Mudd as entirely guiltless, a man simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. Although Lincoln appears in this film only long enough to be assassinated, and Mudd’s guilt is still being debated, the film is well made and serves as an interesting footnote to the Lincoln story.



The next film is a particularly well-made noir-ish thriller called *The Tall Target* (1951), directed by Anthony Mann. It stars Dick Powell as New York City detective John Kennedy, who has learned of a plot to assassinate the president-elect in Baltimore on his way to Washington in 1861 (another event over which there is still some debate). Virtually the whole film takes place in the cramped confines of a dimly lit train in which, not surprisingly, Kennedy

manages to foil the would-be assassins. In the only scene in which Lincoln appears, we see him step safely off the train in Washington. Even so, the film is sufficiently suspenseful to enable viewers to suspend disbelief long enough to worry, at least a bit, whether or not Lincoln will, in the end, escape with his life.

The following year, with television still in its infancy, saw the premiere of what was essentially an early miniseries titled “Mr. Lincoln.” This five-part series, written by James Agee, began airing on CBS in the first year of a show called “Omnibus,” an early effort to encourage quality programming on TV. Directed by Norman Lloyd, and based largely on Carl Sandburg’s biography, the series covers Lincoln’s life from his birth until he left New Salem. Unfortunately, the five original 30-minute shows no longer exist, but a condensed 74-minute version that was first broadcast in 1955 is available. Starring Royal Dano as a particularly believable Lincoln, it has been called “among the finest—perhaps it is *the* finest—film about Abraham Lincoln ever made” by film historian Frank Thompson. It’s also the subject of a 2004 book entitled *James Agee, Omnibus, and “Mr. Lincoln”* by William Hughes.

Another noir-ish feature is the 1957 film, *The Abductors*. It is based loosely on the true story of the 1876 attempt to steal Lincoln’s body from his tomb and hold it for ransom until an imprisoned forger is released. Although presumably intended to be suspenseful, the fact, which viewers know, that the Secret Service is aware of the plot from the beginning, and accordingly is able to handily foil it, makes it a rather less than exciting cinematic experience. Directed by Andrew McLaglen and starring Victor McLaglen (the director’s father) and George Macready as two of the plotters, it has the look and feel of a noir classic from the Thirties or Forties, although unfortunately without their style. (This film, incidentally, is the only one cited that is not readily available.)

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Lincoln Books 2019

In the January 1936 issue of *The American Historical Review*, James G. Randall, perhaps the preeminent Lincoln historian of his day, published a paper titled “Has the Lincoln Theme Been Exhausted?” His answer to the question—not surprisingly—was that “a confident negative may be returned.” He went on to say that “What further products the historical guild will produce and what advances in Lincoln scholarship will appear fifty years hence...can only be imagined.” One can’t help but wonder what he might have to say today, more than four score years later, about the annual crop of new Lincoln books. As we’ve done in recent years, to make LGNY members aware of this year’s crop, we have compiled an annotated list of Lincoln titles published in 2019. As before, though, we must note that the list does not include all the books dealing with Lincoln that were published last year. It includes only new—or new editions of—adult nonfiction books published in hardcover and/or paperback by traditional publishers (i.e., not independently published) that are largely if not entirely about our sixteenth president.

We should also note, however, that in addition to the books on our list, there were numerous others published in 2019 that, while not fitting our criteria, may also be of interest to Lincoln devotees. One of these is *Monument Man: The Life and Art of Daniel Chester French* by Harold Holzer (Princeton Architectural Press, 368 pages, hardcover, \$35.00), a biography—by one of the country’s leading authorities on Lincoln (and an LGNY executive committee member)—of the American sculptor who designed, among other great works, the statue in the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC. There are also two significant new histories of the Civil War—*Hymns of the Republic: The Story of the Final Year of the American Civil War* by S.C. Gwynne (Scribner, 416 pages, hardcover, \$32.00) and *Armies of Deliverance: A New History of the Civil War* by Elizabeth R. Varon (Oxford University Press, 528 pages, hardcover, \$34.95). In addition, there are two noteworthy books on the postwar period—*The Impeachers: The Trial of Andrew Johnson and the Dream of a Just Nation* by Brenda Wineapple (Random House, 576 pages, hardcover, \$32.00) and *The Second Founding: How the Civil War and Reconstruction Remade the Constitution* by Eric Foner (W.W. Norton, 256 pages, hardcover, \$26.95). And, finally, there is a children’s book titled *O Captain, My Captain: Walt Whitman, Abraham Lincoln, and the Civil War* by Robert Burleigh & Sterling Hundley (Abrams Books for Young Readers, 64 pages, hardcover, \$19.99), a charming and beautifully-illustrated volume about poet Walt Whitman’s connection with the 16th president, drawing on quotations from his work.

We hope you will find this list helpful, and that you will share with us any thoughts you may have about it.

Abe’s Youth: Shaping the Future President by William E. Bartelt & Joshua A. Claybourn (Indiana University Press, 320 pages, hardcover/paperback, \$65.00/\$24.00) A selection of essays originally written as part of the Lincoln Inquiry, an effort by professional and nonprofessional historians in the 1920s and 1930s to document Lincoln’s life in Indiana from age 7 to age 21

Abraham Lincoln’s Statesmanship and the Limits of Liberal Democracy by Jon D. Schaff (Southern Illinois University Press, 280

pages, hardcover, \$34.50) A professor of political science’s argument that Lincoln not only believed in limited presidential powers but also dedicated his presidency to restraining its scope and range

All the Powers of Earth: The Political Life of Abraham Lincoln Vol. III, 1856-1860 by Sidney Blumenthal (Simon & Schuster, 784 pages, hardcover, \$35.00) The third of a projected five-volume biography, which details Lincoln’s life from his reentry into politics to his election as president. (In 2017 the LGNY gave its Award of Achievement to the second installment in this series, *Wrestling with His Angel*.)

The Black Heavens: Abraham Lincoln and Death by Brian R. Dirck (Southern Illinois University Press, 240 pages, hardcover, \$29.50) This year’s recipient of the LGNY Award of Achievement—an examination of Lincoln’s experiences with death, from both personal and political perspectives, and how his thinking about it evolved, particularly in light of his belief in God’s involvement in the affairs of men

John George Nicolay: The Man in Lincoln’s Shadow by Allen Carden & Thomas J. Ebert (University of Tennessee Press, 360 pages, hardcover, \$52.00) The life of Lincoln’s principal secretary and biographer, who devoted much of his life to crafting Lincoln’s image for history

Lincoln in the Illinois Legislature by Ron J. Keller (Southern Illinois University Press, 176 pages, hardcover, \$24.95) A concise survey of Lincoln’s legislative activities between 1834 to 1842, during which, despite his relatively lackluster performance, he honed the traits that would enable him to excel in politics and ultimately define his legacy

Lincoln Road Trip: The Back-Roads Guide to America’s Favorite President by Jane Simon Ammeson (Red Lightning Books, 232 pages, hardcover/paperback, \$60.00/ \$15.00) A guided tour of well-known as well as off-the-beaten-track sites where Lincoln lived or visited in Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio, and even Michigan

Lincoln, Seward, and US Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era by Joseph A. Fry (University Press of Kentucky, 256 pages, hardcover, \$60.00) An overview of the foreign policy decisions that resulted from Lincoln’s partnership with his secretary of state and the legacy of those decisions.

Lincoln’s Greatcoat: The Unlikely Odyssey of a Presidential Relic by Reignette G. Chilton (McFarland, 208 pages, paperback, \$39.95) The story, by an LGNY member, of the overcoat Brooks Brothers made for Lincoln’s Second Inaugural, its disappearance after his death, and its reappearance more than a century later.

Lincoln’s Confidant: The Life of Noah Brooks by Wayne C. Temple (University of Illinois Press, 304 pages, hardcover, \$34.95) The first full-length biography of the journalist and editor who was a close friend of Abraham Lincoln’s and author of *Washington in Lincoln’s Time*.

Lincoln’s Informer: Charles A. Dana and the Inside Story of the Union War by Carl J. Guarneri (University Press of Kansas, 520 pages, hardcover, \$39.95) A portrait of the newspaper editor’s controversial career as **continued on page 6**

The “Other” Lincoln Movies continued

Much more recent, and also related to a plot, is *The Conspirator* (2010). Directed by Robert Redford, the film stars Robin Wright as Mary Surratt, whose guilt, unlike that of Samuel Mudd in *The Prisoner of Shark Island*, is presented as ambiguous. The story is seen through the eyes of Frederick Aiken, played by James McAvoy, the attorney who defended Surratt during the conspiracy trial, and is as much if not more about him than about his client. (In fact, the film focuses to such an extent on Aiken and Surratt that the other conspirators are barely mentioned.) Aiken at first takes his client’s guilt for granted, but later apparently comes to believe that she may be innocent. Of course, despite the young attorney’s best efforts to have her acquitted, and pardoned after she is found guilty and condemned, Surratt is executed along with co-conspirators Lewis Payne, George Atzerodt, and David Herold.



Two years later, shortly before the release of Spielberg’s *Lincoln* in 2012, there were two other films that treated the Great Emancipator with considerably less reverence than any of the earlier features. The better known of the two is *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*. Directed by Timur Bekmambetov and written by Seth Grahame-Smith from his best-selling book, it stars Benjamin Walker as Lincoln and, surprisingly, includes a number of real events in Lincoln’s life. It also, however, portrays Lincoln as a boy seeing his mother killed by a vampire and then spending a good deal of the rest of his life hunting and killing vampires to avenge her. Fictional though it may be, it’s also rather imaginative, and if one can sufficiently suspend disbelief to get into the spirit of the movie, it can be quite enjoyable. Curiously, a month prior to the release of this film there was a similar movie—albeit an even more ridiculous one—released (only on video) under the name *Abraham Lincoln vs. Zombies*. Written and directed by Richard Schenkman, and starring Bill Oberst, Jr. as Lincoln, it is, as one reviewer put it, “...just too silly to be taken seriously and wasn’t nearly campy enough to keep you entertained.”

Another relatively recent film is *Saving Lincoln* (2013). It’s an unusual movie, in part due to its use of a production process director

Salvador Litvak calls “CineCollage,” which employs contemporary photographs instead of sets to provide the background for each scene. The film stars Tom Amandes as Lincoln and Lea Coco as his friend Ward Hill Lamon, who came with him from Illinois, and who serves as the narrator of the story, which is based on his written recollections. Covering the period from their first meeting through Lincoln’s presidency, and including a surprising number of correct details, it’s still a less-than-successful movie that ultimately feels more like a not-particularly-well-made television docudrama than a feature film.



The most recent feature specifically about Abraham Lincoln is 2014’s *The Better Angels*. Unlike any of the earlier movies, it’s a dreamlike film that focuses on Lincoln as a child growing up in Indiana between 1807 and 1820. Written and directed by A.J. Edwards and filmed in black-and-white, it stars Braydon Denney as young Abraham. Interestingly, although the film opens with Lincoln’s famous quote about his “angel mother” and glimpses of the columns of the Lincoln Memorial, there are no further direct references to who the boy or his family are. As a result, it could be seen more as a meditative look at childhood in the American wilderness of the early 19th century than as a biographical film. However, those familiar with Lincoln’s story will recognize his relationships with his difficult father and loving mother and stepmother, as well as many of the events known to have occurred during his childhood. In that respect, the film could be viewed more as an exploration of how Lincoln was affected by his physical and emotional environment growing up, and as such present a different and unusual perspective on his life.

As noted, these films and television series vary in dramatic quality as well as historical accuracy. Their mere existence, however, is significant in that they demonstrate the extent to which Lincoln’s story is ingrained in our national consciousness. And it is certainly noteworthy that even 150 years after his death our 16th president continues to attract audiences. ~

Lincoln Books 2019 continued

an informant, investigator, and adviser to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton and Abraham Lincoln.

Lincoln’s Spies: Their Secret War to Save a Nation by Douglas Waller (Simon & Schuster, 624 pages, hardcover, \$35.00) An ensemble biography of four individuals who conducted espionage on behalf of the Union during the Civil War.

Mary Lincoln for the Ages by Jason Emerson (Southern Illinois University Press, 224 pages, paperback, \$29.50) An annotated guide to sources of information about the life of Mary Todd Lincoln both before and after her marriage.

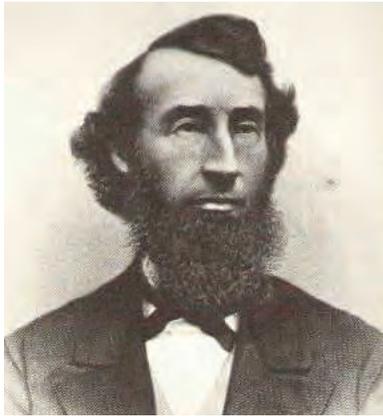
Old Whigs: Burke, Lincoln, and the Politics of Prudence by Greg Weiner (Encounter Books, 184 pages, hardcover, \$23.99) A noted conservative’s comparative study of Abraham Lincoln and 18th-century Anglo-Irish statesman and philosopher Edmund Burke, focusing on their belief in the virtue of prudence.

Thirty Days With Abraham Lincoln: Quiet Fire by Duncan Newcomer (Front Edge Publishing, 112 pages, hardcover/ paperback, \$19.99/\$16.99) A unique and thought-provoking collection of **continued on page 7**

A British Perspective on Abraham Lincoln, c. 1862

by Rob Kaplan

In 1820, under the Act to Protect the Commerce of the United States and Punish the Crime of Piracy, slave-trading was made a capital offense in the United States. Between then and 1860, 74 individuals were charged with the crime. The vast majority of these weren't even tried, much less convicted, and none were executed. So in 1862, when



Captain Nathaniel Gordon

Nathaniel Gordon, captain of the *Erie*, was convicted as a slave trader, everyone assumed he would be spared the rope. Abraham Lincoln, however, took a different view. Although he was famous for pardoning soldiers during the Civil War, this was a crime Lincoln could not pardon, and Gordon was hanged on February 21, 1862.

This story is the subject of the 2006 book by Ron Soodalter titled *Hanging Captain Gordon*. As the author points out, one of the important aspects of the story is that it all took place while Lincoln was striving to keep the British government, which had long since banned the slave trade, from recognizing the Confederacy, a move which might have doomed his efforts to maintain the Union. After the hanging, Soodalter notes, "As Lincoln had anticipated, London had been following the case with interest. On March 8, the *London Daily News* published an article reflecting British response to the execution." And, as Soodalter rightly points out, "It is exceptional in its concise evaluation of the significance of the event, and of Lincoln's role in it."

"Our American telegram yesterday," the newspaper reported, "contained the short and simple statement that 'Captain Gordon has been hanged.' It would not be strange if, in the absence of all explanation, some who read this said to themselves, that that was the Captain's affair. Yet Captain Gordon's execution was by no means an event of merely personal interest. On the contrary, throughout America it is understood to be full of significance. It is an index of the quality of Mr. Lincoln's government, of its strength of principle, and the consistency of its policy, and it *marks the end of a system*. Gordon

was tried and convicted as the Captain of a slaver and was sentenced to death. Under Pierce, Buchanan and Presidents of their stamp, his condemnation would not have caused his friends any serious alarm. It was well understood on all sides that there were legal forms, decent, proper in a Christian and civilized nation; and solemn sentences passed on persons proved to have participated in the African slave trade were not at all objected to as long as they were not carried out. The prospect changed, however, when Mr. Lincoln was made President.... Still when a slave captain was actually convicted and sentenced to death, it was very generally doubted whether the government would hold firm. Presidents who [were] quite prepared to condemn the African slave trade... recoiled from the thought of strangling a white man who had removed some black men from a state of barbarism to a Christian country. Mr. Lincoln, they said, although a free soiler, was not a fanatical abolitionist and would think twice before he sacrificed the life of a man of Anglo-Saxon blood to a sentiment in favor of the negro. These people, however, forget the difference between principle and sentiment....

"There is not a kinder man in the world than Mr. Lincoln; but neither is there a man who better understands how cruel may be this indulgence of fond sentiment at the expense of duty. Captain Gordon would have a better chance had his life depended on the decision of some impulsive negro-ophile, instead of being at the disposal of the severe, deliberative, but inflexible tenant of the White House, a man who, amidst the severest trials has never swerved a hair's breadth from the policy which he professed when he was a candidate for office. Those who knew President Lincoln well said that he would not lose the precious opportunity to strike a blow at a system which costs hundreds of lives yearly.... They said Gordon would certainly be hanged. They were right, and from the Bight of Benin to the Coast of Cuba the man-stealer will tremble."

"This," as Soodalter concludes, "was the response that Lincoln had sought, and it paved the way for the Seward-Lyons agreement, known officially as the Treaty Between the United States and Great Britain for the Suppression of the Slave Trade." Afterward, there was no further thought of the Confederacy being recognized by Great Britain, or any other country, and Lincoln was free to pursue the war without fear of outside interference. ~

Lincoln Books 2019 continued

nonsectarian meditations on Lincoln's spirituality by a psychotherapist and minister.

Thomas Lincoln: Abraham's Father by Daniel Cravens Taylor (Beacon Publishing Group, 472 pages, paperback, \$24.99) A detailed study of the life of Abraham Lincoln's father that strives to counteract the negative image of him presented in much of the historical literature.

The Tyranny of Public Discourse: Abraham Lincoln's Six-Element Antidote for Meaningful and Persuasive Writing by David Hirsch & Dan Van Haften (Savas Beatie, 192 pages, hardcover/paperback, \$32.95/\$24.95) A guidebook to learning how to use logic and reason in writing, drawing on examples from Abraham Lincoln's speeches and letters, and how doing so can raise the level of public discourse. ~

Award Committee: *A special thanks to our dedicated members who served on the 2019 award committee.*

Rob Kaplan, Chair • Tom Dames • Steve Aronson

2019 Meetings Review, continued



Paul Ellis-Graham

November 2nd at 89, and asked for a moment of silence. Finally, President Ellis-Graham conducted our regular book raffle, after which dinner was served.

After dinner Mr. Ellis-Graham introduced the evening's speaker, Douglas Waller, a veteran correspondent for both Newsweek and Time, and author of numerous books, including most recently *Lincoln's Spies: Their Secret War to Save a Nation*. Mr. Waller began by explaining that the Civil War was not only a new war technologically but also one in which armies had to develop new tactics, for which they needed new types of information. These included the position of the enemy, the number of hostile troops, who was commanding the opposing armies, and the location of those commanders' headquarters, all of which made the need for intelligence even greater. In addition, the ability to gather this intelligence was enhanced by such new technologies as the telegraph, photography, and aerial reconnaissance. Mr. Waller also explained that neither the Union nor the Confederate governments had any overall agency for gathering intelligence, and that individual commanders were responsible for doing so. Lincoln and his generals completely understood and appreciated the value of having such information. Confederate commander Robert E. Lee, however, considered using spies to be ungentlemanly and, as a result, the Union developed a much better system of espionage.

In telling his story, Mr. Waller focused on four spies, the first of which was Allen Pinkerton, a Scottish immigrant who founded a private detective agency and later became a spymaster for George McClellan, creating a network of spies that included women, slaves,

business was our annual reading of the Gettysburg Address, which was presented by Tom Dames, a long-time member and outgoing member of the Award Committee. Before proceeding further Mr. Ellis-Graham mentioned the passing of Civil War historian, author, and retired Virginia Tech professor James "Bud" Robertson, who died on

and others. His failing, however, was that he was inclined to tell McClellan what he wanted to hear rather than the truth, which contributed to McClellan's poor decisions. And when McClellan was finally relieved of command, Pinkerton went with him.

The second spy was Lafayette Baker, a drifter who was involved in a variety of unscrupulous schemes before the war, but when the war began convinced head of the army Winfield Scott to take him on as an agent. He subsequently worked for Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, but tended to focus more on counter-espionage than intelligence gathering, and accordingly made a less substantial contribution than he might have.

The third operative was George Sharpe, an attorney who commanded a company of local militia when the war began and, although he had no previous experience in espionage, subsequently developed successful spy networks for generals Joseph Hooker, George Meade, and U.S. Grant. His most important achievement was using the newly created Bureau of Military Information



Douglas Waller

as a clearing house of information from a variety of sources, which enabled him to provide the Union army with better intelligence.

The fourth and final spy was Elizabeth Van Lew, a wealthy young woman from Richmond who was educated in Philadelphia and, being rabidly anti-slavery, used much of her wealth before the war to help slaves escape. Once the war began she worked with George Sharpe and developed a sophisticated ring of several dozen agents in Richmond, including operatives within the Confederate government.

The meeting closed with a few additional announcements from President Ellis-Graham, including that regular membership dues were being raised from \$20 to \$25 a year, although he also urged attendees to consider joining at the Sustaining Member rate of \$50. He noted, too, that the price of our dinner meeting would remain at \$60 for members but increase from \$65 to \$70 for guests.~

THE WIDE AWAKE Bulletin is the annual newsletter 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 correspondence to: Rob Kaplan, Editor, The Wide Awake Bulletin, 399 Furnace Dock Road, Cortlandt Manor, NY 10567 - robkaplan@optonline.net. For more information about the Lincoln Group of New York visit our website at www.lincolngroupny.org.