

Greenville Local History Group Newsletter

April 2015, Issue 242

Abraham Lincoln—With High Hope

Note: No May Meeting
June 8 resumes—O'Hara's Corners

A showery early-April Wednesday evening gave promise to the end of a winter to which we stick-
arounds were more than ready to relinquish.

The GLHG combined with the Civil War Round Table for the third time in five years. This combination, along with good advertising, a worthy topic, and perhaps a good night to get out of the house led to a throng of forty-five crowding the Community Room. I recognized more than half but there were at least a dozen who clearly came for the Civil War material. Among those I recognized: Nick & Mary Lou Nahas, Bob & Marie Shaw, Stephanie Ingalls, Red & Bruni Sutton, Christine Mickelsen, David and Judy Rundell, Betty Hayden and friend, Orrin and Shirley Stevens, Stanley Maltzman, Mary Heisinger, Dave Tschinkel, Jack VerPlanck, Jack Kelly, and obviously more than I captured in my memory cells. If you were there, and I missed you, and you want the record revised, let me know and I will do so in the next newsletter.

What a **tour de force performance!**

Peter Lindemann, as President Lincoln, gave an unrivalled performance that held the rapt attention of all during his forty-five minute monologue. Although I think no one can look exactly like Abraham Lincoln, Lindemann's general features and cragginess led us to believe our sixteenth President was talking to us this evening.

The timing for the evening was the 150th anniversary of the war's end, as well as the assassination of the President. After enduring four tumultuous years by April 1865, the country was facing promising prospects.



-Mrs. & President Lincoln-
Photo courtesy of Dave Tschinkel

This "High Hope for the Future" program took its title from a phrase in Lincoln's Second Inaugural.

The President rose to speak, reviewing the past four years and highlighting some of the major events and speeches he had given. (He allowed himself the pleasure of mentioning a thought or two that happened after his death.)

Also present was Mrs. Lincoln, re-enacted by Judee Synakowski, dressed in period garb, who addressed the audience after the President's speech. (Mrs.

Lincoln has faced the CWRT at least once before this evening.)

The President reviewed the events of the previous year. Actually, he did mention the secrecy of his entry into D.C. for his first inauguration four years earlier, the same exact route that was traced to carry his body to its final resting place four years and a month later.

Inaugurations used to be on March 4 (four months after Election!). He had ridden in an open carriage with James Buchanan, and scaffolding enveloped the Capitol dome. **His speech was about 3500 words**, addressing the seceding states and urging that:

“...We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.”

We were just settling in, anticipating listening to a great storyteller.

1864 held great optimism and great despair. For much of the year, Lincoln had prepared himself to be defeated at November’s polls and to use the four months after the election to protect the Union.

Some of the despair came from the Battle of Cold Harbor in June with massive Union casualties so egregious that even Grant expressed regret for the uselessly bloody assault.

The summer and early fall meant convention time. The Republicans met in New Baltimore with one of the platforms calling for the extirpation of slavery. For 32 years, no President had been re-elected, and current events were looking grim for Abe.

He wanted the election to be a referendum on the war, and thus absentee ballots were granted to all soldiers in the field—quite an undertaking. A vote for the Democrats would mean a probable cessation of hostilities, and what had been the United States would be two countries.

The Democrats met in Chicago but they were divided. The war Democrats would keep fighting but favored no abolition. The peace Democrats were, as Mr. Lincoln humorously explained, like a “stork in a pond, and not sure which leg to stand on.” McClellan, an early Union general for Lincoln, became the Democratic candidate.

Things turned Lincoln’s way when Sherman entered Atlanta in September, while Farragut was “damning the torpedoes” at Mobile Bay.

November 8, Election Day, arrived, and President and Mrs. Lincoln anxiously awaited the results, with Abe checking the telegraph often. The Irish Catholics in NYC were key in NY’s close victory for Abe.

Lindeman recounted the speech to Mrs. Bixby who lost five sons in the war, and the country’s need to continue the war. (Later, it was revealed “only” two sons were killed, but those were two too many, the President thought later.)

In January 1865, President Lincoln urged passage of the 13th Amendment. **“Clothed with immense great power,”** the President cajoled every last vote in the Congress. It finally passed. And then on to the States. What was anticipated to take a few years passed by year’s end.

Meanwhile, the President met with Confederate representatives as it became obvious that the North would win. Lax terms of surrender were sought but not given.

And DC was a confusing place with a number of insurgents in the capital.

One-eighth of the population was colored slaves—a powerful but peculiar interest, the President thought. He went on to ponder that both sides read the same Bible, prayed to the same God. How could God deliver for both sides? The offence of slavery had resulted in the scourge of war. And he addressed this idea in his **Second Inaugural** (reproduced next).

Fellow-Countrymen:

AT this second appearing to take the oath of the Presidential office there is less occasion for an extended address than there was at the first. Then a statement

somewhat in detail of a course to be pursued seemed fitting and proper. Now, at the expiration of four years, during which public declarations have been constantly called forth on every point and phase of the great contest which still absorbs the attention and engrosses the energies of the nation, little that is new could be presented. The progress of our arms, upon which all else chiefly depends, is as well known to the public as to myself, and it is, I trust, reasonably satisfactory and encouraging to all. With high hope for the future, no prediction in regard to it is ventured

On the occasion corresponding to this four years ago all thoughts were anxiously directed to an impending civil war. All dreaded it, all sought to avert it. While the inaugural address was being delivered from this place, devoted altogether to *saving* the Union without war, insurgent agents were in the city seeking to *destroy* it without war—seeking to dissolve the Union and divide effects by negotiation. Both parties deprecated war, but one of them would *make* war rather than let the nation survive, and the other would *accept* war rather than let it perish, and the war came.

One-eighth of the whole population were colored slaves, not distributed generally over the Union, but localized in the southern part of it. These slaves constituted a peculiar and powerful interest. All knew that this interest was somehow the cause of the war. To strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this interest was the object for which the insurgents would rend the Union even by war, while the Government claimed no right to do more than to restrict the territorial enlargement of it. Neither party expected for the war the magnitude or the duration which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the *cause* of the conflict might cease with or even before the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces, but let us judge not, that we be not judged. The prayers of

both could not be answered. That of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes. "Woe unto the world because of offenses; for it must needs be that offenses come, but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh." If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."

With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.

March 23, 1865, showed the major Northern leaders in City Point, VA, on the River Queen, where they agreed that the defeated Rebels were to be treated liberally.

The President recounted a strange dream—a dream where he is in the White House, with subdued sobs, invisible mourners, no living soul in sight. Puzzled, Abe goes to the East Room, and sees who is dead – himself, and violently awakes.

On April 3, he goes to Petersburg which had just been vacated by Rebel troops.

On April 4, thousands of black citizens poured onto Richmond VA streets to see and welcome Father Abraham. In Richmond, Abe

visits the empty southern White House, and sits in Jefferson Davis's chair.

On Palm Sunday, Lee surrenders in full military dress to the less than dapper Grant.

The Rebs go home, with no charge of treason facing them, with the enlisted men taking their horses with them.

On April 14th, Good Friday, Lincoln has a Cabinet meeting and awaits word from General Sherman. He would have a dream about a fast moving vessel on the water, another of his noted dreams. That afternoon, the US flag was raised over Fort Sumter. And in the evening, he attends one of the very few forms of public entertainment, the theater, and you know the rest of the story.

Lindemann finished with lines from Walt Whitman:

O Captain! My Captain!

By Walt Whitman

O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won,
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring;
But O heart! heart! heart!
O the bleeding drops of red,
Where on the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.

O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
Rise up—for you the flag is flung—for you the bugle trills,
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths—for you the shores a-crowding,
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;
Here Captain! dear father!
This arm beneath your head!
It is some dream that on the deck,
You've fallen cold and dead.

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still,
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will,
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done,
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won;
Exult O shores, and ring O bells!

But I with mournful tread,
Walk the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.

Thus ended a mesmerizing performance, and then Lindemann entertained questions from the floor. He first had memorized the Gettysburgh Address as a boy, and stayed interested in Lincoln. He has been re-enacting and practicing for the past half-dozen years, even imitating Lincoln's hand gestures and holding onto the lapels of his suit. Lincoln's noted high-pitched voice might have come, Lindemann suggested, as the result of speaking to large crowds, to thousands of people without amplification.

Lindemann was "practicing" this program on Greenville in anticipation of delivering the same program to Bridgewater a week and a half later.

I hope I have given a fair representation of the evening. We were indeed honored to see this talent funneled into a time piece like this.

Although Lindemann never specifically mentioned the effect of the war on Greenville, readers of Civil War history and its effect on Northern towns can expect that Greenville felt relieved, hurt from its losses, rejoiced in the maintenance of Union, and then proceeded to get on with its life. The fact that no battle scarred its face enabled Greenville and thousands of Northern towns too far away to be physical injured to continue in normal ways that Southern cities and towns, and a few Northern towns, could not. And we still play out this conflict today not only historically but also, as some claim, culturally and politically.

May 2015 - NO meeting. Arrivederci, Greenville.

Our June 8 meeting will feature O'Hara's Corners' Peter and John O'Hara describing one of the most bucolic corners of our town, giving a look back over 200 years of family history. Shown on June 8 will be photos of O'Hara houses and family, one of the earliest ideas of a Catholic Church in the area, the Hunter-Lexington branch of the O'Haras, the O'Hara connection with an early 20th century NYC mayor, and more. I know these great-great-grandsons will do the immigrant proud.

A thank you goes to Mary Heisinger for organizing the CWRT. One challenge will be to continue now that the war is "over." I'll be waiting, Mary!

And a thank you goes to the combined refreshment committees!

Take care,