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Des Moines Civil War Roundtable

May 2025
Headquarters District Iowa
General Order No. 501

- The **Fifth meeting** of the Spring campaign will **May 21** at the **The Machine Shed**

  The bar will open at 5:30 with the meal served at 6:30.

- Our program **Professor Diane Muttibuke (U of Missouri,Kansas City) The First Morning of Their Freedom: The End of Enslavement in Missouri**

- Meal choices **Pork Loin and Hickory Smoked Chicken** at **$24.00**

- **Reservations & payment will be accepted until May 11.**

By command of Brigadier General Gordon McKenzie

Ronald R. Nurmi
Colonel & Adjutant
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Our web address www.dmcivilwar.com

This is an invitation for your organization or members to make a difference by participating in a unique event to mark and honor 15 Civil War veterans buried in Glendale Cemetery in Des Moines.

May is Cemetery Appreciation Month in Iowa and of course Memorial Day is approaching.

What: Placing gravestones on 15 unmarked Civil War veteran graves

Where: Glendale Cemetery, G.A.R. Section, 4909 University Ave, Des Moines, IA 50311

When: Thursday May 15, 2025, 4:30 PM

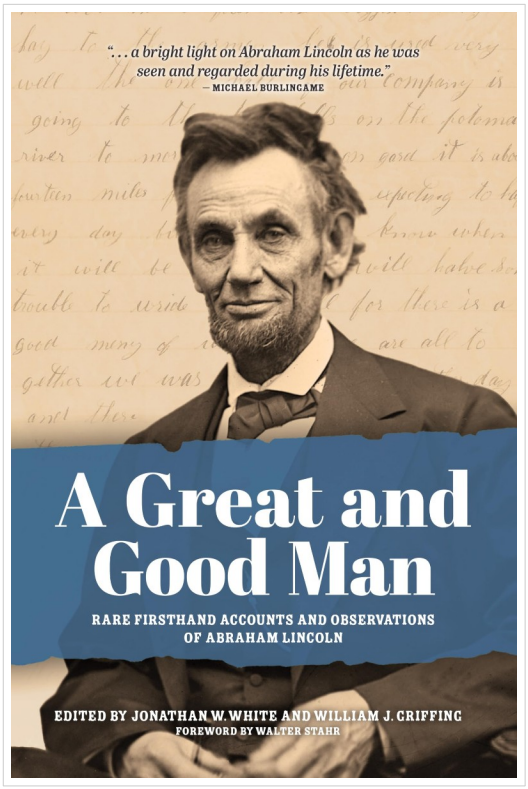
Contact: Mike Rowley, (515) 975-0498 -- MJR1825@gmail.com

For over 100 years at least 15 Union Civil War veterans have laid in unmarked graves in the Grand Army of the Republic section of Glendale Cemetery.
With the assistance of the Des Moines Cemetery staff, the research of retired Des Moines firefighter Bob Niffenegger and the documentation work of several groups including the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, the Sons of the American Revolution, the General Society of the War of 1812, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Colonial Dames and others these soldiers and their families will be remembered by the placement of 240 lbs granite stones from the VA.

At the time of enlistment these soldiers ranged in age from 17 to 35. They were from NY, MN, PA, OH, IN, MO, IL, AL, and Iowa. At the time of their death, they ranged from 27 to 86 years of age. All chose Iowa as their final home.

We may never know why they were unmarked for over 100 years but, now that will be corrected.

Respectfully,
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A Great and Good Man: Rare, First-Hand Accounts and Observations of Abraham Lincoln.

Edited By Jonathan W. White and William J. Griffing. St. Louis, Missouri: Reedy Press, 2024. Softcover, 155 pp. $22.50.

Reviewed by Kevin C. Donovan

"It can't be true, it is too good to be true" rejoiced one Northerner upon hearing that Abraham Lincoln had been assassinated. Another sniffed, "if he had been to church instead of a theatre, it might not have been." But others were distraught. One man compared Lincoln to Moses, as both "got in sight of the promised land but [were] not permitted to enter it." An army surgeon bemoaned: "We feel that we have lost a father." A soldier in Tennessee described beating rebel sympathizers who were celebrating the murder before torching their house.

These sentiments, and many more contemporaneous statements about Lincoln, come from accounts found in an unlikely research source–*eBay*–published in an unusual book. *A Great and Good Man: Rare, First-Hand Accounts and Observations of Abraham Lincoln* presents Lincoln-related excerpts culled from over 200 letters or journals transcribed by the book's co-editor William Griffing. Dr. Jonathan W. White of Christopher Newport University adds information about the accounts' authors and certain events described by them. White also provides some previously unpublished documents to the collection.
lains that years ago he was struck by the large number of unpublished Civil War era letters and diaries being circulated for sale on eBay by private collectors without ever being available for viewing by the

wider public. He arranged with one of the largest eBay sellers to transcribe the documents and provide background research. This would enhance the sale value. In return, Mr. Griffing won the right to publish, and thus publicize, the documents on his website, *Spared and Shared*. This led to *A Great and Good M*
Mr. Griffing exp*an*.

The editors present the writings chronologically, primarily covering the period June 1860 through May 1865. Authors' names, place and date of drafting and where appropriate, military unit, are provided. Endnotes offer brief information on persons or events mentioned in the documents.
The editors make no attempt to analyze the writings they present. Rather, they let the authors of the documents speak for themselves. That is a strength of this book. By editing the documents generally to focus them just on those parts in which the writers discuss Lincoln, the editors have created a valuable Lincoln-centric archive of primary sources.

Many of the writers had personal interaction with Lincoln. They describe his appearance. "[W]hen he begins to speak, his whole face lights up with one of the most pleasant and heartfelt smiles. . . ." A Massachusetts soldier, recounting a visit by "honest old Abe," commented "at least he is homely enough to be honest." Another described how Lincoln visited their camp, "lit his cigar" from their fire, then sat down to chat.

Others comment on Lincoln's policies. A Canadian fears that his administration, stung by military losses, will try to unite the North by starting a war to annex Canada. Many address the Emancipation Proclamation, one cheering it as "Abraham's war missile."

There are wonderfully colorful comments throughout. One writer condemns Lincoln's generals as "prominent Republican politicians who . . . know as much about Military matters as a cat does of his grandfather." Another dismisses Lincoln and his Cabinet with the old saying that "Pigmies perched on Alps are pigmies still."

There are useful historical nuggets. One writer discloses that it was he who suggested that Ulysses S. Grant avoid the crush of the crowd at the White House reception introducing him as the new commander-in-chief by mounting a sofa, adding to this otherwise well-known story the detail that the secretaries of State and of War as well as an unnamed woman joined Grant aloft. Another writer was an eyewitness to Lincoln narrowly escaping being shot at Fort Stevens. And remarkably, a Maine soldier reported that Maj. Gen. Winfield Scott Hancock made a speech urging them to vote for George McClellan for president.

While not highlighted by the editors, readers can spot changes in writers' opinions of Lincoln. One New Jersey soldier had bitterly denounced "Abe the Butcher and n---er worshiper" in an August 1864 letter, later predicting that the soldier vote would go against Lincoln, "who would like to see us soldiers mary [*sic*] [blacks]." Yet that same rabid Lincoln-hater was so disgusted by the Democratic Convention ("a regular Secesh concern") and platform that he became a Lincoln supporter. Other writers reflected such a conversion. One Pennsylvania soldier said that he had been a McClellan man but "he chose bad company."

Multiple writers praised Lincoln, one calling him "a grate [*sic*] and good man" (118) but some seemed to feel that Andrew Johnson was better for dealing with the defeated South, precisely because Lincoln was too merciful.

A Great and Good Man is a rich source of contemporaneous commentary about Lincoln. The editors have done a fine service in presenting to the public a treasure trove of interesting and often entertaining historic accounts that one need not bid for on eBay.

Illinois' Slain but Glorified Son

With permission of Walter Coffey

Lincoln that had begun in Washington continued its

The funeral procession for Abraham westward journey, arriving at Chicago as May began. Residents gathered along Lake Michigan as



The Chicago procession | Image Credit: Harper's Weekly; May 20, 1865; Vol. IX, No. 438

Lincoln's funeral train entered the city. The bearing of Lincoln's coffin and hearse began at 12th Street and Michigan Avenue; some 50,000 people joined the procession while thousands more lined the streets as it passed. The escort included 36 schoolgirls dressed in white, representing the 36 states of the Union.

The procession stopped at the Cook County Courthouse, where Lincoln's body lay in state for two days. A courthouse sign read, "Illinois Clasps to Her Bosom Her Slain, but Glorified Son." By nightfall on May 2, some 125,000 people had passed by the coffin to pay last respects. The funeral train then continued southward via the Alton Railroad, traveling through Joliet around midnight and arriving at Springfield on the morning of the 3rd.

The mayor of St. Louis loaned an ornate carriage valued at $6,000 that was decorated in gold, silver, and crystal. Springfield officials used this carriage to convey the president's coffin to the Illinois Statehouse. Lincoln's body lay in state where he had argued over 200 cases as a trial lawyer and inflamed passions in both North and South with his famous "House Divided" speech. Over 75,000 people paid last respects while others gathered at Lincoln's former home at 8th and Jackson streets.

On the 4th, Major-General Joseph Hooker, former commander of the Army of the Potomac, led three divisions through the rain from the Statehouse to Oak Ridge Cemetery. They escorted the bodies of both Lincoln and **his son Willie**, who had been disinterred in Washington to be buried with his father. The bodies were placed in a receiving vault as a choir sang, "The Dead March in Saul." Prayers were offered and more songs were sung, and Lincoln's second inaugural address was recited. Bishop Matthew Simpson delivered the eulogy. He began:

"Fellow-citizens of Illinois, and of many parts of our entire Union, near the capital of this large and growing State, in the midst of this beautiful grove, and at the mouth of this vault which has just received the remains of our fallen chieftain, we gather to pay a tribute of respect, and to drop the tear of sorrow around the ashes of the mighty dead."
The bishop noted the enormous crowds that had come out to pay their final respects to Lincoln throughout the journey from Washington and declared that they all shared a common bond: a love for the president. He then turned to the war and the North's supposed reason for fighting it:
"There are moments which involve in themselves eternities. There are instants which seem to contain germs which shall develop and bloom forever. Such a moment came in the tide of time to our land when a question must be settled, affecting all the powers of the earth. The contest was for human freedom. Not for this republic merely. Nor for the Union simply, but to decide whether the people, as a people, in their entire majesty, were destined to be the government, or whether they were to be subject to tyrants or aristocrats, or to class-rule of any kind."
The bishop predicted that Lincoln's everlasting legacy would be to have worked so hard to abolish slavery:

"But the great act of the mighty chieftain, on which his fame shall rest long after his frame shall moulder away, is that of giving freedom to a race. We have all been taught to revere the sacred characters. We have thought of Moses, of his power, and the prominence he gave to the moral law; how it lasts, and how his name towers high among the names in heaven, and how he delivered those millions of his kindred out of bondage. And yet we may assert that Abraham Lincoln, by his proclamation, liberated more enslaved people than ever Moses set free, and those not of his kindred. God has seldom given such a power or such an opportunity to man."

Simpson noted the benevolence that Lincoln had expressed in his second inaugural address, but he did not follow Lincoln's example of extending goodwill toward the South. The bishop grimly declared:

"Let every man who was a Senator and Representative in Congress, and who aided in beginning this rebellion, and thus led to the slaughter of our sons and daughters, be brought to speedy and to certain punishment. Let every officer educated at public expense, and who, having been advanced to position, has perjured himself, and has turned his sword against the vitals of his country, be doomed to a felon's death. This, I believe, is the will of the American people. Men may attempt to compromise and to restore these traitors and murderers to society again, but the American people will rise in their majesty and sweep all such compromises and compromisers away, and shall declare that there shall be no peace to rebels."

The bishop clarified that the harsh retribution he called for should only be brought against Confederate leaders. According to Simpson, the southern people themselves should fall under Lincoln's umbrella of "malice towards none, charity for all." The bishop announced:

"But to the deluded masses we shall extend arms of forgiveness. We will take them to our hearts. We will walk with them side by side, as we go forward to work out a glorious destiny. The time will come when, in the beautiful words of him whose lips are now forever sealed, 'the mystic cords of memory which stretch from every battlefield and from every patriot's grave shall yield a sweeter music when touched by the angels of our better nature.'"

In all, as many as seven million people had witnessed some part of the funeral procession along its journey from Washington to Springfield. This ended 20 days of national mourning, and the presidency of Abraham Lincoln passed into history.