Ladies and Gentlemen:

I hope you will forgive me for beginning my remarks by saying something that is completely obvious to all of you: namely, that to stand here before you, in this beautiful place, for this particular reason, is a great and stunning honor. I can assure you that I do not expect to experience a similar honor again in my lifetime, even if I live another fifty years!

I have sat on the Gilder Lehrman Lincoln Prize jury before, so I know what it means to consider, with the utmost seriousness and care, the contributions to the field of Lincoln and Civil War studies of more than a hundred scholarly works in a given year. The task requires long hours of quiet reading followed by more hours of thoughtful conversation and deliberation. It would be interesting, indeed—breathtaking, perhaps—if one could calculate the number of human hours that go into the decision making process. Better still, what about the number of human hours that go into the research, writing, editing, and production of a single year’s “Lincoln Prize crop” of, say, a hundred and twenty books? Conservatively speaking, my own book, Lincoln’s Forgotten Ally: Judge Advocate General Joseph Holt of Kentucky, is the result of ten years of labor. And of course this figure does not take into account the hundreds of hours expended by all of the individuals who carefully collected—first privately and then professionally—the mountains of archival material that ultimately become the foundation of my understanding of Joseph Holt’s life. It does not take into account the hours expended by all of the individuals who—from before Holt’s birth in 1807 to long after his death in 1894—produced and then preserved those materials, including not just Holt himself, but also his friends and family members, his enemies,
the colleagues who worked with him during the different stages of his fascinating career, other scholars, archivists. . . . The list goes on.

And it must be noted that in order for the mountain of archival material to come into existence, there had to be a life, an eighty-seven year-long life, to be exact, during which Holt made a remarkable journey. Indeed, in those 87 years, Holt traveled a long distance on many levels: physically, or geographically, he traveled from his childhood home in tiny Stephensport, Kentucky, to Bardstown, Danville, Lexington, Elizabethtown, and then Louisville, Kentucky, and then on to Vicksburg, Mississippi, then Europe and the Middle East, and then to Washington, D.C., only to return, after his death, to Stephensport. Holt’s life journey took him to many new and interesting places on the map. But it was also a journey of the mind and heart: in his 87 years Holt went from being a slaveholding son of the South to being one of the era’s most determined supporters of the Union, and of emancipation and black Americans civil, political, and human rights. He went from being one of the most beloved and profoundly revered representatives of the antebellum “Southern Democracy” (Holt’s numerous supporters pleaded with him to seek the national presidency in 1860), to being—in the eyes of his detractors—one of the most fiercely reviled representatives of vengeful, postwar Radical Republicanism. Indeed, it is clear that the remarkable journey of Joseph Holt’s has continued posthumously, taking him from fame, to obscurity, to the silver screen, where a curious and distorted version of Joseph Holt appeared in the recent film, “The Conspirator.” And now, unexpectedly, almost a hundred and twenty years since his death, Holt’s posthumous journey has brought him here, in the spring of 2012, to the Union League Club of New York. Lincoln’s forgotten ally is forgotten no more.

Let me turn from my musings to a different task, the task of offering thanks, and then I will tell you a wonderful story.
I would like to thank, first, the Gilder Lehrman Institute—Richard Gilder, Lewis Lehrman, and James Basker, the staff of the institute, and the members of the advisory board—for creating, funding, and sustaining this prize over so many years. Thank you for this award, and that you also for everything else you do, in so many settings, to support and encourage excellence in the study of American history. I thank the jury—Professor Craig L. Symonds, Stanley Harrold, and Elizabeth Brown Pryor—for honoring my scholarship in this very kind and generous way. Thank you, too, to Diane Brennan of Gettysburg College for her work in putting this event together. I have attended the Lincoln Prize dinner many times, and I have always been impressed by how smoothly it runs. But I am more impressed than ever, now, with the work that Diane and her helpers do year after year to coordinate this grand event. Because now I realize how much additional time, energy, patience, and diplomatic skill is required to deal with the prize winner or winners, their guests, and all of our special needs and quirks. . . . This should not be thankless work, and so I want to say thank you.

I want to thank my fellow historians, and particularly those I count as my “Civil War buddies,” who set high standards and encourage scholarly excellence in the field, and in the classroom. I have been fortunate to teach for the last twenty years at Colby College, where the faculty in my department are splendid teachers, highly accomplished and dedicated scholars, and fine colleagues. But my professional community extends well beyond the halls of Colby’s Miller Library. I thank you all—those who are here tonight and those who could not attend—for your fine work. It took me a long time in my early life to figure out what I wanted to be when I grew up, and I mean, a long, long time. But I found my way into the field of history, I have never regretted it. The discipline itself offers endless allure, to be sure: who among you can imagine a vacation more enjoyable than one in which you could spend 8 hours a day alone in the
manuscripts reading room at the Library of Congress, poring over old letters and diaries? And yet, one cannot live by archival research alone, and I thank the many fellow historians whom I know and respect, not just in Maine but across the United States and even beyond its borders, who provide me with the professional community I have needed over the years in order to thrive.

Among that community of historians, I want to thank in particular Professor Gary Gallagher—the John L. Nau III Professor in the History of the American Civil War at the University of Virginia—for welcoming my book into his “Civil War America” series with the University of North Carolina Press, and then reading it with exquisite care and providing invaluable advice. And I want to thank J. Matthew Gallman, of the University of Florida, for plowing through the manuscript in his usual incisive but good-natured way, and helping me to see how I might shape the book much more effectively. Thank you, too, to David Perry—assistant director and editor-in-chief at UNC Press—for his willingness to publish this big fat book, and for his and his staff’s fine work to make it so much better. And to everyone along the way who has helped to make me a better researcher and a better writer, thanks.

And now, to some thanks of a more personal sort. First and foremost, it must be said that, truly, I would not be standing before you here tonight were it not for my two sons, Anthony and Joseph, who have enriched and given such clear purpose and direction to my life, and who have strengthened and improved me as a representative of the species in ways that are simply impossible to calculate or express. I would also like to thank my father, the Reverend Richard Leonard, for his unflagging support for more than half a century, and for his unfailing good humor and good counsel over the years. If anyone in this room appreciates the fact that I adhere to deadlines (including the deadline for completing these remarks), you have my dad to thank for that (among other things). And while I’m on the subject of family, please let me thank Lenore
Sundberg: for being here tonight, and also for all the meals we’ve cooked and eaten together, the hours we’ve spent paddling vigorously across Queen Lake, the laughter our families have shared playing games and eating turkey in your lovely home in the Berkshires, and more. Who know that having a sister could be so much fun?

If time permitted, I could surely come up with at least a few hundred other people to thank for one thing or another. But time does not permit. So, instead, let me close by telling you a little story, a version of which you can also read in the preface to *Lincoln’s Forgotten Ally*.

Here we go. In 2004, I published a book entitled *Lincoln’s Avengers: Justice, Revenge, and Reunion after the Civil War*. This book, my third, focused on the aftermath of the Lincoln assassination, and by necessity, therefore, it dealt in some measure with the man who prosecuted the Lincoln assassins: Judge Advocate General Joseph Holt. A few months after the book came out, historian James M. McPherson wrote a generous review of it in the *New York Review of Books*, and not long after that I received a letter from a woman named Catherine Rose, who lives in California. As it turns out, Cathy is a direct descendant of Joseph Holt’s younger brother, Thomas, and Thomas’s wife, Rosina; in other words, Cathy is Joseph Holt’s great, great-grandniece. Interestingly, as I read Cathy’s letter I learned that although Thomas and Rosina Holt and their children had all staunchly supported the Confederacy while Joseph Holt supported the Union, Mary Holt Rose—Thomas and Rosina’s granddaughter and Cathy’s grandmother—had always spoken of her great, great, grand-uncle, Joseph Holt, with reverence and affection.

Indeed, Cathy explained to me that she and her siblings had been raised to consider *my* Joseph Holt a hero. Moreover, Cathy’s father, Joseph Holt Rose Sr., and her brother, Joseph Holt Rose Jr., were both named after him. “In his own life and in what he tried to teach us,” Cathy went on, “my father emphasized the importance of honor, integrity, fairness, and responsibility,” qualities
he associated with Joseph Holt, for whom his “admiration . . . became a part of his own character.”

In the years since Cathy Rose first wrote to me, she and I have maintained a warm and regular correspondence, although we did not have the opportunity for some time to meet in person, given that she lived in California and I lived in Maine, and we both had very busy lives. But then, in the fall of 2008, I decided that I needed to take a research trip to Kentucky and I mentioned the plan to Cathy. To my surprise, Cathy immediately suggested that it might be fun to join me there. To my even greater surprise, she indicated that her sister, Margaret, would probably want to come too. And so, in January 2009, the three of us travelled from our respective homes in Maine and California to Louisville, where we met for the first time, rented a car, got out our maps and guidebooks, and embarked on an adventurous week touring sites that were relevant to the lives of Joseph Holt and Abraham Lincoln. While in Kentucky we visited the old Holt family mansion in Stephensport, where we wandered through the badly vandalized old structure imagining its former magnificence, and paid our respects in the family graveyard that Cathy, Margaret, and their brother still pay to maintain. While there we also met most of the very few people in the state who were, at the time, interested in Joseph Holt’s life story. Notably, we met the wonderful local book collector, Norvelle Wathen, and his wife Cindy, who welcomed us into their home and introduced us to all of their then-seventeen cats. We also met a woman named Susan Dyer, whose courageous drive to preserve and restore the old family mansion deserves enormous praise. Following our trip to Kentucky, in the spring of 2009 I traveled to California for a conference and had the pleasure of meeting Cathy and Margaret’s brother, Joseph Holt Jr., who goes by the name “Holt,” and his wife, Halaine. Holt and Halaine graciously allowed me to bring back to Maine several large manila envelopes full of family
documents relevant to the Holt family’s long history, which have been invaluable in helping me to get to know and understand their ancestor. Subsequently, the four of them worked diligently together to make it possible for me to have, as the frontispiece for the biography, a picture of the never-before-published portrait of Holt as a young man that remains in their family’s possession.

It is in appreciation for their generosity, insights, kindness, and friendship that my biography of Joseph Holt, *Lincoln’s Forgotten Ally*, is dedicated to Cathy, Margaret, and Holt. And I know that Cathy and Holt, as well as Holt’s wife, Halaine, all send you their warm greetings and—to the Gilder Lehrman Institute and the Lincon Prize jury—their strongest words of appreciation. But what about Margaret? Doesn’t she care? Well, she’s does care. And she’s here. Won’t you please join me now in recognizing Judge Advocate General Joseph Holt’s great, great grandniece and my dear friend, Ms. Margaret Rose Badger? Thank you.