

First Coast

FreeThinker



The newsletter of the First Coast Freethought Society

February 2007

Volume 5, Issue 2

Inside this issue:

President's Message for February 2007

Celebration of Betty Ann Borresen's Life 3

FCFS Letter to the T-U Editor 3

Forgiveness Requires Accountability 4

Abraham Lincoln and Slavery 5

Carrie Renwick

Board members, several FCFS committee chairs, and member Beth Perry enjoyed a most comprehensive combination Annual Planning Meeting and Board Meeting on January 14, 2007.

The meeting opened with a general brainstorming session designed to generate ideas in three areas: monthly meeting programs, our next big project, and long-range planning actions appropriate to meet our goals. We then proceeded with board business at hand.

Some 2007 programs

have already been scheduled: Judith Ochrietor, Ph.D.; Joe Wolf, President, Florida Citizens for Science; and Ellen Wagner, Ph.D. Known "winners" whom we hope to schedule include Erich Freiberger, Ph.D.; David Schwambaird, Ph.D.; Christine Rasche, Ph.D.; Ken Hur-

of Humanists of Florida; and author and editor, "BC" Crandall. Hugo Borresen has offered an "End of Life Choices" program. If you have any program ideas, by all means, let Curtis (or me) know.

We agreed that our next big project would ideally provide the FCFS with broad exposure, would be cost effective, and would require a realistic amount of work given our limited staff-power. Possibilities include sponsoring a "big-name"

(Continued on page 7)



The FCFS is entering 2007 in fine shape!

ley; Tony Rossi, Ph.D.; Julie Ingersoll, Ph.D. Persons who have expressed interest in speaking to us include Jim Strayer, who links global warming with humanism; Lance Stoll, Ph.D.; Frank Besag, Ph.D.; Jennifer Hancock

"We are a diverse group of concerned parents, educators, employers and just about everything else under the Florida sun united in a common cause. We defend and promote good science, especially in the public school classroom."

—Florida Citizens for Science website - <http://www.flascience.org>.

February 2007 Meeting

Joe Wolf, President, Florida Citizens for Science

"Science's New Pep Squad in Florida"

Monday, February 19, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

(Upstairs in the Sanctuary - Doors open at 6:00)

Unitarian Universalist Church • 7405 Arlington Expressway • Jacksonville, FL

HUMANIST BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP

- When:** 2:00 p.m., the third Sunday of each month.
- Where:** Borders Books, 8801 Southside Blvd., 519-6500, books are usually in stock.
- What:** Books/magazines planned for discussion:

- February 18, 2007 - *The Moral Animal: Why We Are, the Way We Are: The New Science of Evolutionary Psychology*, by Robert Wright
- March 18, 2007 - *Writings of Mark Twain*



The reading selections for March are found on a website: www.positiveatheism.org/tochtwai.htm. There you will find the following printable writings of Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens): Battle Hymn of the Republic; Bible Teaching and Religious Practice; Contract with Mrs. T.K. Beecher; Letters From and To Librarian Asa Don Dickinson; Little Bessie; Little Nelly Tells a Story Out of Her Own Head; The Ten Commandments; Thoughts of God; Letters From the Earth; and The War Prayer. The latter two writings (only) are published in *The Great Short Works of Mark Twain*, a book that Borders Book Store is holding for our purchase (\$14). (Ed. Note: The “Historical Writings” page on “Positive Atheism,” link above, is great!)

As noted at the Wikipedia website (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mark_Twain), “Clemens enjoyed immense public popularity and his keen wit and incisive satire earned him praise from both critics and peers. American author William Faulkner called Twain ‘the father of American literature.’”

For more information, contact moderator Jewell Kross at JKross@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org or call 904-996-1553.



**First Coast
FreeThinker**

The *First Coast FreeThinker* is published for members of the First Coast Freethought Society, other freethinkers, and potential freethinkers. We exchange newsletters with other freethought groups and obtain information from many diverse sources.

Readers are invited and encouraged to reprint our original materials provided they give credit to this publication.

The officials of the FCFS are not responsible for opinions or other statements expressed in this newsletter. It is intended to convey ideas to stimulate discussion on a variety of subjects.

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We welcome submissions. The deadline is the **FOURTH SATURDAY** of each month for the following month’s issue. Submit contributions by e-mail to Hugo (see above), or U.S. mail to Hugo Borresen, 8831 Taurus Circle South, Jacksonville, FL 32222. Submit web site contributions to Carrie Renwick at the e-mail address above.

Celebrating The Life of Betty Ann Borresen

Wilhelmina Walton

The wife of Hugo Borresen, editor of the *FreeThinker*, died on December 22, 2006. She was being taken to Chattanooga where her family lives.

Most of us did not know Betty Ann, but a few had the opportunity to become acquainted with her when we had some newsletter-folding get-togethers several years ago. She also attended the 2005 Fall Frolic with Hugo. You did not have to be around her very long before you discovered she was a very outgoing person who was involved in making the very best of life for

herself and those who were fortunate enough to know her.

She was a cosmetologist, an accomplished seamstress, and a volunteer at Hubbard House (a shelter for abused women). She worked with the American Cancer Society, managing programs to help cancer victims for which she received two awards. She, herself, coped with cancer treatments as well as severe osteoporosis. She survived breast, lung, and arm cancer.

She found time for traveling in the United States, Canada, Alaska, and northern Mexico. She was extremely outgoing and sometimes came home with the names and telephone numbers of

people she had just met. She was very devoted to Hugo and her family. She was a very generous and caring person.

She was a cancer survivor having undergone six operations and other treatment as well. But the treatment destroyed her immune system, so she succumbed quickly to leukemia.

She was a member of the First Coast Baptist Church which will hold a “**Celebration of the Life of Betty Ann**” on Saturday, March 3, from 1:00 to 3:00, at 7587 Blanding Blvd., in Jacksonville. Hugo invites all to attend the celebration, but indicates it will contain some religious talk.



FCFS Speaks Out for Secular Humanism

The following letter was written to the Florida Times-Union in response to an excellent letter by CSH's Norm Allen, and appeared on January 19, 2007, on the editorial page.

SECULAR HUMANISM Ethics derived from within

Thumbs up to the executive director of the Council for Secular Humanism for his defense of secular humanism!

As the voice of secular humanism on the First Coast, the First Coast Freethought Society applauds his contention that secular humanists are just as moral, brave, and patriotic as religious people.

Churches demonize secular humanists in the pulpit, but look around. I am your neighbor. I am your co-worker in the cubicle next to yours. I am your doctor. I am a member of your family.

Unless I tell you that I am a secular humanist, you will think that I am good, joyful, moral and happy because of God or religion.

Humanists affirm that ethics are derived from the application of reason and from within, not from religious scripture like the Bible.

We reject the supernatural. We affirm science as the best way to understand the natural world and our place within it.

We believe that this Earth is

the only home we have.

Therefore, we must treat it with care for the benefit of future generations.

We affirm that life in this world is the only life we have, so we should live it to the fullest and be as kind to each other as possible.

If you agree with these affirmations, you could find a home in our group.

You can find out more about us at http://www.firs_tcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/

CARRIE RENWICK, president
First Coast Freethought Society
Jacksonville



Forgiveness Without Accountability Means Nothing

Curtis Wolf

JESUS DIED FOR YOUR SINS.

This is the Christian message that you hear from many pulpits on Sunday morning.

Granted, it might sound good at first. Who wouldn't want to be forgiven for one's sins?

Let's ignore the idea that Jesus's atonement for our sins reconciles us with a god that I personally do not believe exists. Whether or not Jesus's death as a saving act for us all before God is even true does not matter. If we believe that it is true, we will be influenced in everything that we do.

Is the idea that someone else can pay the price for our sins, and we come off scot-free, really such a great idea? This idea is the crux of Christianity. Does it benefit the human race and make us better people? I will argue that it does not. If anything, it could have the opposite effect.

We hurt each other every day. From unkind words to vicious murders, we cause much of the suffering in the world. Sometimes, we do not do it deliberately, but we still hurt each other, even the ones that we love.

So, does believing that our unkind acts towards others are forgiven through the substitutive punishment of someone who did nothing wrong lead us to stop

hurting others and reconcile with those that we have wronged? It would seem at first that the selfless sacrifice of Jesus on the cross would motivate us to become better persons and treat others kindly.

However, let's look at it from a different angle. Does the fact that someone else takes the rap for us help us to take responsibility for our actions, good or bad? If my mother sent my sister to her room for everything that I did wrong, I would not have had the motivation to be a good person. Why should I, when I was not being held responsible for my own actions?

We have to be aware of the consequences of our actions and act in such a way that allow others to live the good life whatever that may be.

After his conversion to Christianity, Roman emperor Constantine was not baptized until just before his death on the belief that all of his sins, which were many (i.e., the murder of his wife and son), would be cleansed by the atoning death of Jesus as represented by baptism. (http://www.infidels.org/library/historical/joseph_mccabe/religious_controversy/chapter_16.html). Why not do whatever he wants when he has the equivalent of a "get out of jail card" when he comes before the cosmic judge?

Now Constantine is an extreme case. I am not saying that all Christians pile on the sins against others right before confessing Jesus as lord. However, at best, the atoning sacrifice of Jesus takes our eyes off the people that we have hurt and places it upon heavenly pursuits. The wrongness of our acts has nothing to do with whether it violates God's laws and requires the saving death of God's son to hold off God's wrath.

Instead, we are wrong because the people that we hurt have just as much a right as we do to live a happy and fulfilling life. Since we are social animals and want to live together with other people, we have to take into account the needs of others when we act. We must be aware of the consequences of our actions and act in such a way that allows others to live the good life whatever that may be.

None of this will come from shirking our responsibility for our actions by looking to God to save us from all the rotten things we have done. True forgiveness comes only to him who accepts responsibility for his actions, makes restitution, and accepts any other punishment due him -- and shows that he has really changed by doing unto others as he would want them to do unto him.



Abraham, Martin and Charles: Part 1, Abraham Lincoln and Slavery

Fred W. Hill

During the winter months, the birthdays of three unique champions of freedom are observed: Martin Luther King, Jr., born January 15, 1929; and Abraham Lincoln and Charles Darwin, both born on February 12, 1809. Each, in his own way, advanced the cause of human freedom, hammering at the chains of racial and religious dogma. Each, though long deceased, continues to be at once revered and reviled, and often misunderstood or willfully misrepresented, by both advocates and detractors.

Abraham Lincoln justly earned his common sobriquet, "The Great Emancipator," because his leadership ensured the ultimate abolition of slavery in the United States. Yet, not one slave was freed on the day he signed the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863. But by doing so, he rededicated the Union effort not just to preserving the nation but to ending slavery as well.

Those who note that the Act applied only to those regions still in rebellion fail to understand Lincoln's reasons. Lincoln did not recognize the legitimacy of the Confederacy and held that he remained the sole President of all the states, including those in rebellion. Further, Lincoln perceived that only Con-

gress, not he, had the Constitutional authority to abolish slavery in any area under federal authority.

His feelings were reflected in a statement he made in 1864 to a delegation of Kentuckians who had misgivings about the recruitment of slaves in their state to fight as Union soldiers: "If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong. I can not remember when I did not so think, and feel. And yet I have never understood that the Presidency conferred upon me an unrestricted right to act officially upon this judgment and feeling."

Yet [Lincoln] achieved greatness due to his capacity to overcome his prejudices and to lead a predominantly racist nation to struggle to hold itself together and, as assured by his proclamation, thereby ensure "a new birth of freedom."

Finally, the Dred Scott decision issued in 1857 by U.S. Chief Justice Roger B. Taney loomed deep in Lincoln's thoughts. Taney, in summary held that, "Africans residing in America, whether slaves or free, could not become United States citizens and the plaintiff therefore lacked the capacity to file a lawsuit. Furthermore, the parts of the Missouri Compromise creating free territories were unconstitutional because Congress had no authority to abolish slavery in

Federal territories." Not until 1864 did Taney die, to be replaced by Salmon P. Chase, a staunch abolitionist and advocate for Negro rights.

In his powers as Commander in Chief of the armed forces, however, Lincoln saw a loophole that he believed would withstand a Constitutional challenge, enabling him to confiscate any property held by forces in rebellion, including slaves, particularly if doing so would help end the rebellion. Another key consideration was the potential involvement of the British and French empires: both were keen to see what they perceived as the growing threat of the United States be cut down to size, and as long as the U.S. Civil War seemed to be over nothing more than territory, they felt little compunction about help-

ing the Confederacy gain independence. Once Lincoln specifically added freeing enslaved people to the Union goals in continuing the war, however, the empires resolved to remain neutral, fearful of arousing the ire of their working class masses if they were perceived to be supporting the cause of slavery.

Although the war would last over two more years, ultimately the Confederacy was overwhelmed, and slavery abolished throughout the reunited nation



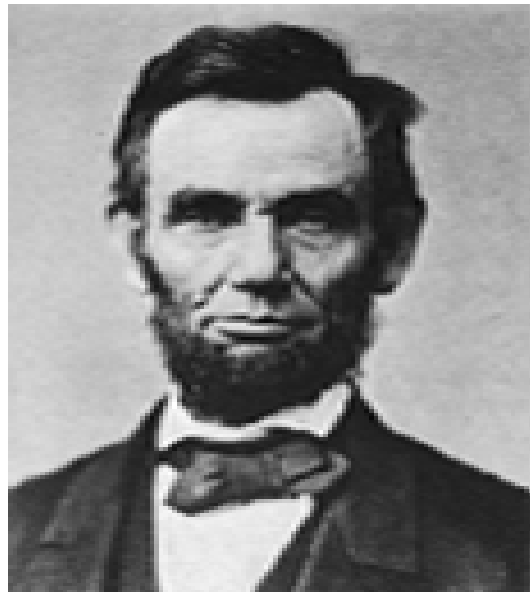
by ratification of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution. First proposed in January 1864 by Missouri Senator John B. Henderson, at the reputed urging of Lincoln who believed it would garner broader support coming from a representative of a slave state, it failed to pass an initial vote in the House that year. But further private prodding by Lincoln and abolitionist Congressmen resulted in its passing a second vote held on January 31, 1865, and the President signed it the next day, unnecessarily as determined later. Before enough states had ratified the proposal to make it an actual amendment, Lincoln would be dead, slain by a famous actor who expressed outrage at Lincoln's comment in his last public address that he would prefer the right to vote be "now conferred on the very intelligent, and on those who serve our cause as soldiers," referring to Negroes, and thus hinting at full citizenship for all American Negroes.

But he had played the key role in ensuring that the blight of slavery would lose legal sanctity in the "land of the free." One may take issue with Lincoln's aggressiveness in overcoming the rebellion, but any claims that slavery was not the underlying main cause of the U.S. Civil War and that Lincoln had no concern for the welfare of American Negroes, free or slave, cannot be sustained by a full, objective examination of the known facts.

Lincoln's immediate predecessor, James Buchanan, had likewise signed a Congression-

ally approved proposal that, had it been ratified, would have become the 13th Amendment -- one that would have permanently protected slavery in the United States (<http://showcase.netins.net/web/creative/lincoln/news/tlmdocument.htm>).

Fortunately, that version failed to be ratified by enough states. That it got as far as it did illustrates further the context of Lincoln's era and the culture he lived in. Undoubtedly, Lincoln said many things and



held opinions that would be regarded as deeply racist in the present. Yet he achieved greatness due to his capacity to overcome his prejudices and to lead a predominantly racist nation to struggle to hold itself together and, as assured by his proclamation, thereby ensure "a new birth of freedom."

As anyone familiar with the history of racial relations in the U.S. is well aware, that birth was nearly snuffed out in its crib. Legal slavery was done with, and the Dred Scott decision was voided by ratification of

the 14th Amendment in 1868, granting citizenship to "All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof." Further, the 15th Amendment, ratified in 1870, guaranteed that "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude."

However, passage of those amendments had been due to the political dominance during the Reconstruction era of the "Radical" Republicans -- considered "radical" and reviled in many high school history textbooks over the next century for advancing the notion that all people were morally entitled to the same rights and privileges regardless of the color of their skin. By 1877 their influence had largely waned and in order to maintain a hold on the Presidency that year, Republicans struck a deal with southern Democrats to end Reconstruction in exchange for their electoral votes ([http://en.wiki](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_presidential_election,_1876)

[pedia.org/wiki/United_States_presidential_election,_1876](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_presidential_election,_1876)). As a result, in regards to protecting the civil rights of American Negroes, the new amendments were largely nullified by "Jim Crow" laws that prevailed in the South and many other parts of the country until the passage of the Civil Rights acts of the 1960s.

A discussion of Martin Luther King's role in the struggle to end legal discrimination in the United States follows, next month.



President's Message for February 2007

(Continued from page 1)

speaker, hosting our own Comcast local-access channel freethought program, holding a student essay contest, and sponsoring a program on NPR such as "All Things Considered." In keeping with our goal of gaining community exposure, we agreed that we should be ready at a moment's notice to participate in fairs or events such as those held by "Earth Day" or "Wage Peace," should the opportunity arise.

As for the business portion of the meeting, Earl Coggins was

appointed Board-Member-at-Large, and Tom Bowen was appointed Parliamentarian. Committee chairs are remaining the same, with one exception: I have agreed to act as Publicity Committee chair for the present. Depending upon the scope of our next big project, we may be seeking a Publicity chair and/or a Fundraising chair. I will certainly keep you posted. The Board approved the 2007 operating budget.

June Applen and Wilhelmina will continue their work with the Adult Literacy programs. At the last board meeting, Wilhelmina had volunteered to facilitate

starting a secular student group at UNF. Soon thereafter, she learned that two young men are already starting one! She has been communicating with them and has offered them FCFS support. Jay Huebner has agreed to be their faculty liaison. Beth Perry has agreed to be our historian and organize newspaper clippings, correspondence, etc..

Lastly, the long-rang goals, which were published in the October 2006 *FreeThinker*, have been approved by the Board, and Curtis Wolf will draft an action plan before the next board meeting. The FCFS is entering 2007 in fine shape!



Ongoing FCFS Activities

Dinners For Atheists (and Freethinkers, Humanists, Agnostics, etc.)

Sign up to attend or host a dinner yourself. Sign-up sheets will be at the back table at the monthly meetings. For further details on how this works, see page 9 of the February 2006 *Freethinker*, or ask the hospitality ladies at the back table.

Atheist Sunday Morning (or Sunday Morning in the Park)

For those of us seeking more freethought fellowship, conversation and camaraderie, here is an opportunity to get together on Sunday mornings. Contact June Applen at JApplen@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org or call 904-762-0627.

No Atheist Left Behind (or Are You Going My Way?)

If you are seeking a ride to an FCFS event, contact **Hugo Borresen** at HBorresen@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org or call 904-779-6883.

Caring Tree

If a telephone call to any member or anyone interested in our group might serve a purpose--such as a ride to our meeting or some other personal need, please contact **Nita Pitts** at 904-996-0879 or e-mail her at pitrymnd@comcast.net. Otherwise, leave a notation on the sign-in sheet at the front table during one of our meetings.

First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.
P.O. Box 550591
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<http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org>

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the First Coast Freethought Society is to serve the needs of the nonreligious of Northeast Florida, to promote freethought and secular humanism, and to provide an opportunity for agnostics, atheists, skeptics and other free-thinkers to exchange ideas.

Meetings

The FCFS meets the THIRD Monday of each month at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Jacksonville, upstairs in the sanctuary, 7405 Arlington Expressway, Jacksonville, Florida 32211. (904) 725-8133. Doors open 6:00. Meeting time: 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

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February Social - All Welcome!

WHERE: STEAK & ALE at Baymeadows and I-95 South

WHEN: TUES., FEB. 27, 2007. Gather in Lounge at 6:00 p.m., Dinner at 7:00 p.m.

RSVP: CarrieRen@att.net (or 268-8826) by February 26, if you plan to attend!

First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.

P.O. Box 550591, Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591 • (904) 288-6291

2006 Membership Application



Name		Date	
Home address	City	State	Zip Code
E-mail address	Home phone	Business phone	
Occupation	Areas of interest and/or expertise		

How did you hear about us? _____

Membership level (please select one):

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Regular (\$30/yr.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Carl Sagan (\$50/yr.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Charles Darwin (\$200/yr.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student (\$15/yr.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Bertrand Russell (\$75/yr.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Robert Ingersoll (\$500/yr.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Senior - 65+ (\$15/yr.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Thomas Paine (\$100/yr.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Lifetime (\$1,000) |

I'm interested in getting involved in the FCFS as a(n):

- General member Committee member Officer Financial supporter

Do you object to your name appearing on our membership list, which is only distributed to other members? YES

Comments: _____

***You can make a lasting impact on the future of
freethought and secular humanism in this community
...if you provide for the First Coast Freethought Society in your Will.***

Your bequest will ensure that the FCFS continues to be a beacon for freethinkers on the First Coast and to remain a vital Voice of Reason in the Northeast Florida area. Several options are available for establishing a bequest (specific, percentage, residual, or contingent). We will be happy to provide the appropriate wording to you and your attorney, depending upon your wishes.

For further information, contact
Carrie Renwick, P.O. Box 550591, Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591 or
904-288-6291 • CarrieRen@att.net • <http://www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/>
All inquiries are held in the strictest confidence.

(Advertisement)

CONCERT!

Wage Peace (www.wagepeace.net) is sponsoring a **Presidents Day Gathering** of the local Progressives on **Sunday, February 18th, 2007**, with entertainment provided by the

phenomenal **Dave Lippman**. **Political Satire** doesn't get any better!. See: (www.davelippman.com)

WHO: Sponsored by **Wage Peace**.

WHAT: A Concert featuring political satirist Dave Lippman (aka **"George Shrub, the singing CIA Agent"**).

WHEN: Sunday, 18 February 2007, 3:00 p.m. (doors open at 2:00 p.m.).

WHERE: San Marco Theatre, 1996 San Marco Blvd., Jacksonville.

COST: \$10 Suggested Donation.

TICKETS: On sale at the door, starting at 2:00 pm.



Next deadline for article submission: February 24, 2007

First Coast Freethought Society 2007 Events

February	19 - Monthly meeting	18 - Book discussion group	27- Social at Steak and Ale
March	19 - Monthly meeting	18 - Book discussion group	27- Social at Steak and Ale
April	16 - Monthly meeting	15 - Book discussion group	24- Social at Steak and Ale

Visit our website at <http://www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/>.

(In the Adobe version, the links are **LIVE!** Ctrl & Click will take you there.)

Return service requested



First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.
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