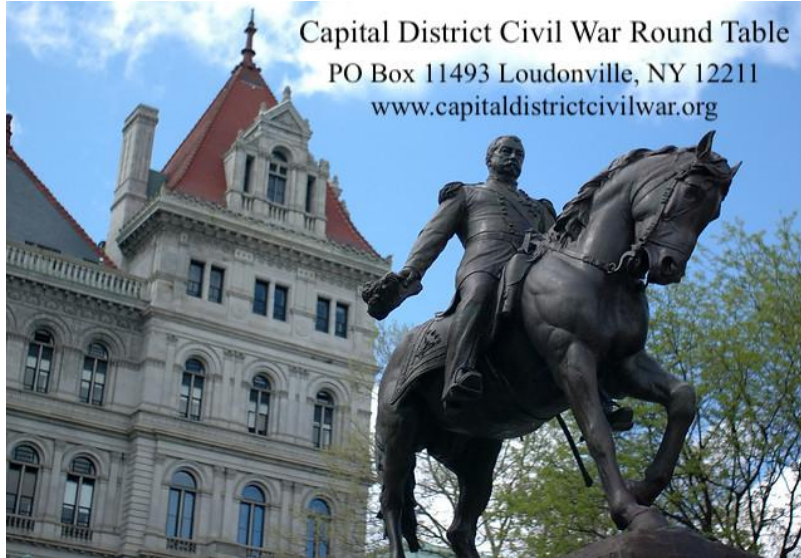


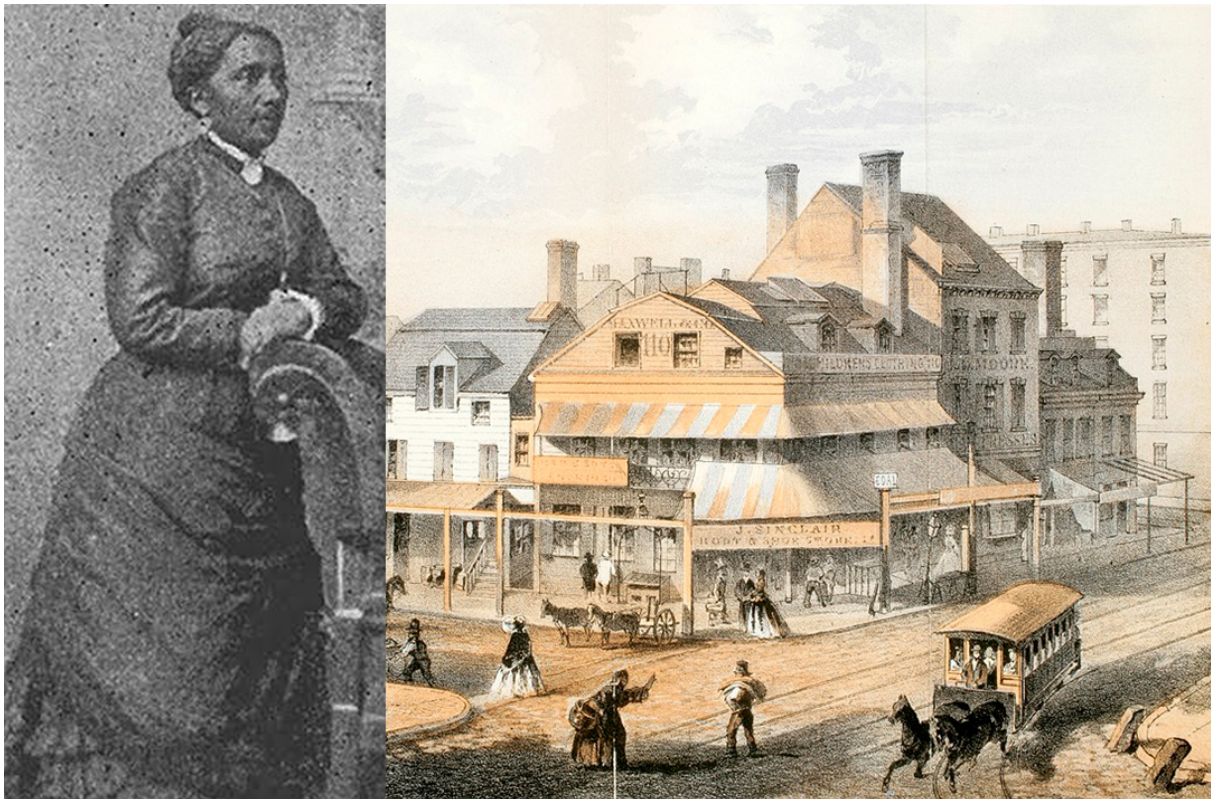
The Dispatch

Volume 39, Number 3

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America's First Freedom Rider



One hundred years before Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat, a twenty-four-year-old Black New Yorker stood her ground on a streetcar. With courage and perseverance, she won the first recorded legal victory for equal rights on public transportation. Image from the New York Transit Museum
<https://www.nytransitmuseum.org/elizabethjenningsgraham/>

MARCH MEETING

Friday, March 11, 2022

IN-PERSON MEETING AT THE WATERVLIIET SENIOR CENTER

JERRY MIKORENDA

“America’s First Freedom Rider”

Social Hour	6:00 p.m.
Business Meeting	7:00 p.m.
Presentation	7:00 – 8:00 p.m.
Questions & Answers	8:00 – 8:30 p.m.

Jerry Mikorenda is the author of *“America’s First Freedom Rider: Elizabeth Jennings, Chester A. Arthur, and the Early Fight for Civil Rights,”* the Jennings and Arthur’s families, the struggle for equality, and race relations. It’s the history of America at its most despicable and most exhilarating. Yet few historians know of Elizabeth Jennings or the impact she had on desegregating public transit.

Mikorenda’s work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Boston Herald*, *The Gotham Center History Blog*, and the *2010 Encyclopedia of New York City*. His short stories have appeared in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *BULL*, *Cowboy Jamboree*, and *Gravel Magazine* as well as other journals. His historical novel, *“The Whaler’s Daughter”* was published by Regal House in 2021. For more information, check out his website at www.jerrymikorenda.com

MASKS ARE REQUIRED, REGARDLESS OF VACCINATION STATUS.

We will not have refreshments available.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

April 8: Lynn Herman will speak on the Allegheny Arsenal Explosion in Lawrenceville, PA.

May 13: Leon Reed will present “New York Mobilizes for War”

June 10: Wayne Motts will talk about Gettysburg Park renovations.

THANK YOU, MEMBERS

The Round Table wishes to thank Wayne Aiken, Larry Arnold, Jeffrey Falace, Matt George, Byran Moak, Paul Spofford, Norbert Soltysiak, and Michael Speranza for their donations to the Operating or Preservation funds.

CDCWRT TRADITIONS

by Rosemary Nichols

Every February or March for many years our Round Table has had an opportunity to learn more deeply about the nineteenth century experience of New Yorkers of color. We have learned about Harriet Tubman, who had relatives in Troy and who settled for many years at the end of her extraordinary career in Auburn. The Round Table joined the celebration of the friendship of Harriet Tubman and New York Governor and Secretary of State William Seward in 2019 with a

bronze statue installed outside the Schenectady County Public Library.

We have learned about the tribulations of Charles Nalle, a freedom seeker who escaped being enslaved to his half-brother in Maryland, and lived peacefully for many years in the town of Sand Lake and the city of Troy before being betrayed by greedy lawyer Horace Averill, after whom Averill Park is named. The Round Table has suffered with Solomon Northup, lured into danger and then sold into slavery by deceit. Northup served twelve years enslaved on a Louisiana plantation until his family finally learned where he was and were able to send a white friend and a lawyer south to obtain Solomon's release.

Mary Liz and Paul Stewart, founders of the Underground Railroad History Project, have told our members on a number of occasions about their years long and ultimately successful resurrection of the history of a vibrant and open Capital Region effort to aid freedom seekers escaping from enslavement to freedom in New York and Canada, spearheaded by, among others, Stephen and Harriet Myers, out of the historic house the Stewarts and their colleagues have identified, rehabilitated, and now present as the heart of their organization to educate the Capital District public and celebrate the courage and persistence of nineteenth century civil rights workers in our region.

Paul and Mary Liz, with other members of the civil rights history community in the Capital Region, arranged the celebration of the lives of previously unknown enslaved people on the Schuyler Flatts farm on the border

between the city of Watervliet and the village of Menands in the town of Colonie. This multiyear effort went from the discovery of historic burials along current Route 32 when the town of Colonie was installing new infrastructure, to scholarly identification of the enslaved people represented only by their bones, to an elaborate celebration by artists creating beautiful miniature coffins to house the discovered bones, and ultimate burial following joyous ceremony in a donated portion of Albany Rural Cemetery where the bones will lie in honored peace going forward.

This month's presentation features author Jerry Mikorenda's 2020 book, "America's First Freedom Rider: Elizabeth Jennings, Chester A. Arthur, and the Early Fight for Civil Rights." With Mikorenda's presentation, our Round Table is invited to consider and celebrate nineteenth century civil rights work on the broader canvass of New York City.

BOARD UPDATES

The Executive Board is scheduled to meet on February 28, three days after this newsletter goes to print. An update will be provided at the March meeting, and the information will be included in the April newsletter.

The Round Table has some items from the 135th Antietam anniversary and five Vicksburg first day of issue with a Grant image and signature on the left and Ed Bearrs numbered original signature on the right. These will be available for sale at the next meeting.

BUFORD'S VIEW

by Matt George

On Friday February 25, I'll be leaving for Gettysburg for the Seminary Ridge Museum's one day symposium on the "First Day at Gettysburg." Speakers include Jim Hessler, Stuart Dempsey and Eric Linblade. Jim Hessler is most well-known for his biography of Dan Sickles. He also was a speaker at one of our Round Table Sesquicentennial Conferences a number of years ago. I'm also considering attending the Civil War Institute's Conference in July and the Emerging Civil War Conference in August.

One never knows when you'll meet a person with a family interest in the Civil War. Last month at an Olde Tyme Schenectady Baseball Club breakfast, a man named Marty Canavan introduced himself to me. He had heard I had an interest in the Civil War and wondered if I was interested in the research he had done on one of his ancestors. This veteran of the Civil War was a member of the 5th U.S. Regulars and had fought at Gettysburg and Cedar Mountain. Naturally I was interested and after further discussion, Marty agreed to be one of our speakers at our January 2023 potpourri meeting. Marty has compiled an entire booklet on all his Irish ancestors including the Civil War veteran.

This month's speaker is Jerry Mikorenda whose book "America's First Freedom Rider" has many connections to our area. One hundred year before Rosa Parks, a young African American woman named Elizabeth Jennings was physically thrown off a N.Y.C. horse car because

she was black and refused to wait for the "colored" car. She hired a young lawyer and took her case to court and she won! The lawyer (and later President of the United States) was Chester A. Arthur.

Arthur is, as many people know, buried in Albany Rural Cemetery. Arthur was the son of a minister. When he was young he lived in a number of local communities including Whipple City, later called Union Village (now Greenwich, N.Y.). At fifteen he attended the Lyceum Academy in Schenectady. It was located near the corner of Yates and Union Streets. His father took the job as Pastor of the First Baptist Church in Watervliet, N.Y. While he was still fifteen he wrote an essay which still exists called the "Influence of the Press." He opens with the statement that nations shouldn't be judged by their territorial size or wealth, but rather on "the superiority of virtue and intellect" of its people, who are "the best standing army that can be set for the defense of liberty." The most powerful auxiliary to a nation's prosperity is the press. "A lying press is as bad as a lying tongue, and commonly does more mischief." In 1845 he was accepted at Union College. He graduated in 1848. During the Civil War Arthur was the Quartermaster General of New York State.

The story of Elizabeth Jennings and her family is just as remarkable and interesting. Her vital role in integrating the New York City Transit system is proof that "one person can change the world."

**CDCWRT
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___ If marked, your membership was not renewed as of Feb. 20.

Created in 1984, the Capital District Civil War Round Table is an incorporated non-profit educational organization. Meetings are held monthly in various locations in the Capital District. This newsletter is published eleven times per year. Annual dues are \$35. The purpose of the organization is to promote, educate, and further stimulate interest in, and discussion of, all aspects of the Civil War period.

Contact the Capital District Civil War Round Table through
our website: www.capitaldistrictcivilwar.org
or email: cdcwrt@hotmail.com

THE OFFICERS

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Treasurer	Steve Muller	Secretary	Rosemary Nichols
At-Large	Joyce Brooks	At-Large	(open)
At-Large	(open)		

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Refreshments	Dean Long and Luanne Whitbeck		
Webmaster			
Education	Matt George		
Newsletter	Erin Baillargeon and Rosemary Nichols		