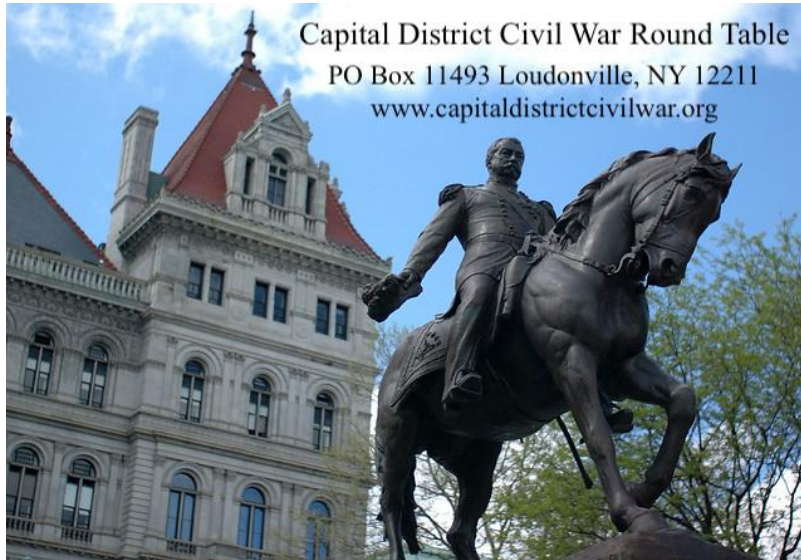


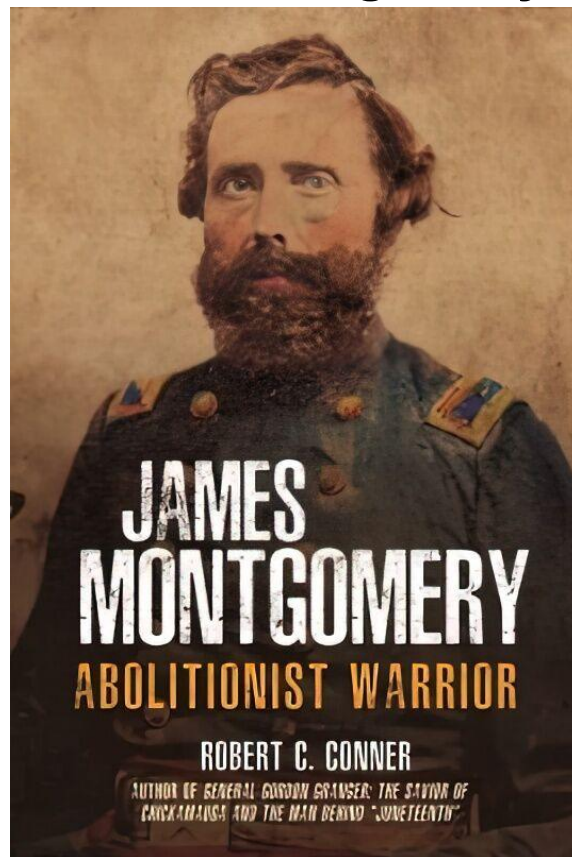
The Dispatch

Volume 40, Number 3

March 2023



Fighters for Freedom: the stories of Col. James Montgomery and Charles Nalle



MARCH MEETING

Friday, March 10, 2023

AT THE WATERVLIET
SENIOR CENTER

Robert Conner presents
“James Montgomery:
Abolitionist Warrior”

Social Hour with light refreshments	6:00 p.m.
Business Meeting	7:00 p.m.
Presentation	7:00 – 8:00 p.m.

James Montgomery was a leader of the free-state movement in pre-Civil War Kansas and Missouri, associated with its direct-action military wing. He then joined the Union Army and fought through most of the war.

A close associate and ally of other abolitionists including John Brown, Harriet Tubman, Colonels Thomas Wentworth Higginson and Robert G. Shaw, Montgomery led his African-American regiment along with Tubman and other civilians in the 1863 Combahee River raid, which freed almost eight hundred slaves from South Carolina plantations. He then commanded a brigade in the siege of Fort Wagner, near Charleston.

Robert C. (Bob) Conner, a former journalist, is the author of the biography *James Montgomery: Abolitionist Warrior*. It was published in April 2022 by Casemate, which has also reissued in paperback his 2013

biography, *General Gordon Granger: The Savior of Chickamauga and the Man Behind "Juneteenth"*. He also wrote the historical novel *The Last Circle of Ulysses Grant*, which was published in 2018 by Square Circle Press. He won two first-place writing awards from the New York Associated Press Association for newspapers with circulation between 50,000 and 200,000, and is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of New York University. Bob Conner and his wife Barbara have three grown children. They live in upstate New York, where he volunteers at Grant Cottage and the Saratoga County History Center at Brookside Museum, and is an active Rotarian.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

April 14: Codie Eash will speak about General Buford's signalman: Aaron Jerome at the Seminary and Beyond

May 12: Vic Vignola will present on New York regiments at Fair Oaks

June 9: Tom McMillian's presentation will be on Armistead and Hancock: beyond the legend.

THANK YOU, MEMBERS

The Round Table wishes to thank the following members for their donations to the Round Table (received between 1/17 and 2/11).

Mary Bonczar, Stuart Lehman, William Schreiner, Michael Speranza, and Bob and Noreen Underhill.

BOARD UPDATES

The Executive Board met via Zoom on February 13. The Board decided to rotate the Secretary's duties as that position is still vacant. Treasurer Steve Muller graciously agreed to act as Secretary *Pro Tem*.

The Preservation Account balance at this time is \$4,503.92. For the year so far we raised over \$800 in donations to this account. There was no income from the February meeting as we didn't have merchandise to sell or raffle.

The Operating Account balance is \$3,355.90. Membership dues paid as of the Board meeting accounted for \$1,435. As Steve noted, membership renewals have slacked off, but renewals and new memberships are still welcomed any time throughout the year.

Vice President Mark Koziol manages the CDCWRT's Facebook account. He shared that our Facebook page has approximately 2,000 "likes" or "follows." Statistical data from Facebook indicates that most of our audience are males 65+ years of age. This reminded Board members of an ongoing-challenge of groups such as ours: the need to bring in more and younger members.

One way you can help with membership is to bring a friend to meetings. There is no fee, and they might decide to join as a new member.

Another way is to "like" and "share" CDCWRT Facebook posts. This raises our visibility in the digital realm and helps to get our name out there.

Matt George, our Program Chair, has speakers scheduled through the fall of 2023.

REMEMBERING THE RESCUE OF CHARLES NALLE

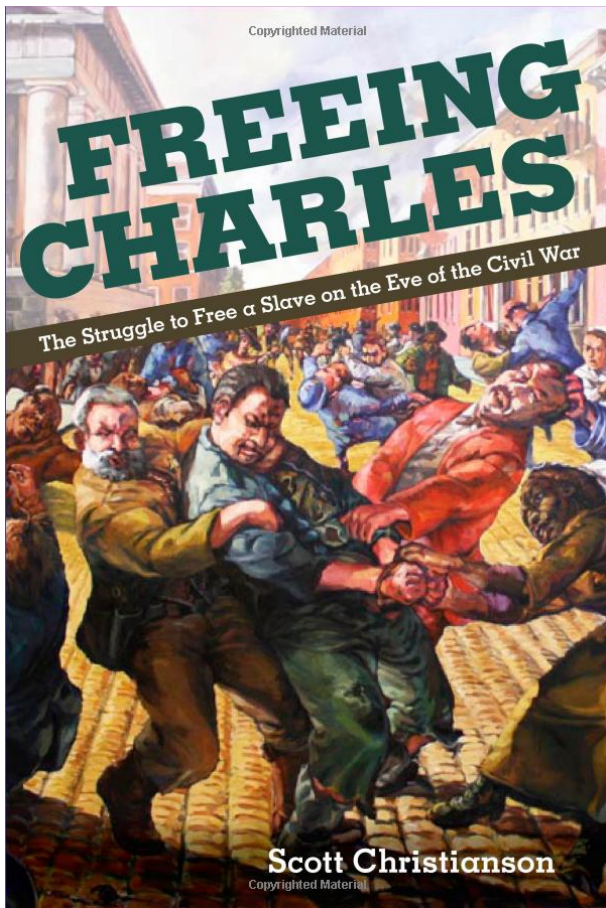
By Rosemary Nichols

In 2010, local author Scott Christianson did students of the nineteenth century in the Capital District a considerable favor. He excavated the fascinating story of Charles Nalle, resident of Troy, escaped from slavery in Virginia, then rescued from authorities in Troy and Watervliet by local abolitionists. One of those rescuers was Harriet Tubman.

In some ways Charles' story was unusual. In other ways, it stands as an archetype of successful freedom seeking in upstate New York. The April 27, 1860 rescue certainly demonstrates the willingness of residents and visitors to the Capital District to risk their own lives and freedom to assist a local resident to maintain his hard-won liberty.

Charles was born to his white enslaver father, Peter Hansbrough, and Lucy, an enslaved light skinned mulatto mother, probably in 1821. Peter died in 1843 and his enslaved people, together with his horses and other livestock, descended to his son Blucher. Charles' work as a coachman continued.

Cole Hill, the Blucher Hansborough plantation, experienced a financially devastating fire in the fall of 1847 in the wheat barn. Blucher felt compelled to sell Charles, his two brothers Henry and John, and three other men.



They were taken to Richmond to be auctioned. Even though Charles was not sold at this time, any loyalty he might have had to his brother enslaver was destroyed.

Although Charles and his wife, Kitty, were married, they were enslaved to different white owners in Culpepper County, Virginia. In 1858, when Charles sought his freedom in the North, he and Kitty had four children. Kitty and the children had already been freed on the death of her white father.

Kitty's father, Col. John Thom, died in circumstances that required the sale of many of the Berry Hill plantation's enslaved residents. This was the occurrence that triggered Charles' initial escape. Kitty and the children could not stay in Virginia once they

were freed and Blucher refused to allow Charles to free himself.

Charles made contact with the local conductors on the Underground Railroad and successfully escaped to the North, through Philadelphia and on to New York. Instead of traveling on to Canada, Charles and his fellow freedom seeker sought the aid of Albany's Stephen and Harriet Myers. They placed one man, an experienced blacksmith, in West Troy and got Charles a job in Sand Lake driving lumber wagons. Both men hoped that staying in New York would allow them to better reconnect with their families who were living in precarious freedom in Washington, DC before being forced to flee to rural Pennsylvania.

One of the things Charles most wished to achieve in New York, other than reunion with his family, was to learn to read and write. There were educational institutions in Sand Lake and educated people in the boarding house where Charles lived. As he was developing one of his letters to his master, seeking release of himself from any claims by Blucher with installment payments, a failing and corrupt lawyer overheard him. Horatio Averill was looking for any moneys to support himself. He had friends contact Blucher Hansborough, tell him where Charles was living and working, and recommend Averill to represent him in a proceeding to reclaim Charles under the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law. Blucher cooperated in favor of his pocketbook and against his brother.

At the time his world collapsed around him, everything seemed to be looking up for Charles. Scott Christianson

summarizes Charles' situation in April 1860. "He had found a decent place to live, in an exciting city full of interesting and supportive people, he had landed lucrative employment doing something he liked (driving a fine carriage for Mrs. Uri Gilbert, the wife of one of the richest men in upstate), and now he would be exposed to all sorts of bright opportunities. All this meant that he would soon be able to reunite with Kitty and the children, thereby attaining the prize he had escaped for in the first place."

The hammer of post-1850 federal slave law was about to fall on Charles' unsuspecting head. From that point in Scott's book to its end, Charles' rescue reads more like a modern adventure story than a freedom seeker's narrative. Whether it is Harriet Tubman disguised as a dim-witted old woman controlling the rescue from a window on the building's second floor, or the furious and muscular men who broke into the Troy office of the federal commissioner and by force pushed a handcuffed Charles out the second story window to the crowd below, or the mob of angry black and white citizens of Troy doing all in their power to interfere with the local marshall and the slave catchers Blucher had hired, Charles was rushed the short blocks to the Hudson River where a ferry was seized for the short trip across to West Troy (now Watervliet).

The brawl in the third floor of the Corporation Hall building that housed the West Troy constable's office was more violent than the tussle in Troy. The Watervliet fight included doors broken by a blacksmith's hammers and gun fire. The result was the same:

Nalle's rescuers succeeded in taking him back downstairs so he could escape in a wagon to Niskayuna, bloody but free.

The outraged citizens of upstate New York quickly raised \$650.00 they offered Blucher for Charles' freedom. After the money was raised and accepted, Charles was free. His dramatic escape was a local wonder but quickly subsumed in the chaos of the seceding states and the frantic efforts to avoid civil war on the part of Union interests.

Scott Christianson's *Freeing Charles: The Struggle to Free a Slave on the Eve of the Civil War* (2010) is a great read. It is available in local libraries and bookstores and on ebook reading platforms. If you have never read this book, I recommend it to you. The copious end notes to each chapter are worth your time because Scott places Charles' rescue in all the extraordinary events occurring in the decade and one-half before the opening guns of the Civil War.

BUFORD'S VIEW

by Matt George

[Matt's regular column is on hold this month due to his health. We hope Matt feels better soon, and we are confident he will be back as soon as he can. If you know Matt, you know two of his loves are baseball and the Civil War, and there is not much that can keep him away from either one.

- Erin Baillargeon]

**CDCWRT
P.O. BOX 11493
LOUDONVILLE, NY 12211**

___ If marked, your membership was not renewed as of Feb. 16.

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

President	Erin Baillargeon	Vice-President	Mark Koziol
Treasurer	Steve Muller	Secretary	(open)
At-Large	Rik Scarce	At-Large	(open)
At-Large	(open)		

THE NONCOMS

Program	Matt George	518-355-2131	Jbuford63@aol.com
Membership	Erin Baillargeon and Steve Muller		
Refreshments	Dean Long and Luanne Whitbeck		
Webmaster			
Education	Matt George		
Newsletter	Rosemary Nichols and Erin Baillargeon		