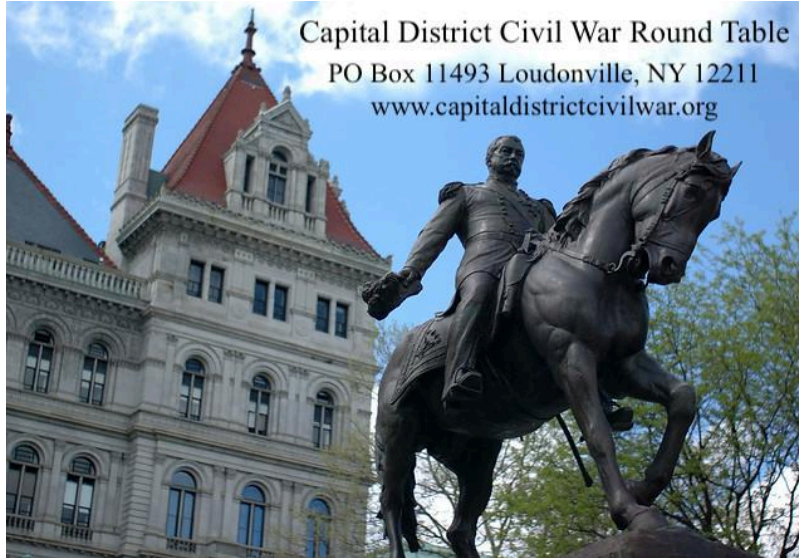


# The Dispatch

Volume 41, Number 2

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## A U.S.C.T VETERAN IN TROY, NEW YORK



The headstone of Richard C. Kelley, located in New Mount Ida Cemetery, Troy N.Y.

Image from <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/59285225/richard-c-kelley>

## **FEBRUARY MEETING**

**Friday, February 9, 2024**

**AT THE WATERVLIT  
SENIOR CENTER**

**Jennifer Burns**

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

Jennifer Burns, PhD, is a professor of history in the Africana Studies Department at the State University of New York at Albany. Her concentration is in American history, including the story of black citizens of Troy, NY and their work in abolition prior to the American Civil War.

Professor Burns is a commentator on WAMC's Roundtable Program, is a board member of Underground Railroad Education Center and the Hart Cluett Museum, and is active in curriculum development and community education. She has received her Masters and Doctoral degrees from the State University of New York at Albany.

Dr. Burns has presented at numerous community events and conferences, received numerous awards, and has contributed to Civil War Slave Database in Virginia (2011-2012), and *Slavery By Another Name* (2012).

## **UPCOMING EVENTS:**

March 8: Jan Wojcik returns to speak on the Pivot Point at Appomattox.

April 12: Chuck Veit returns to present on the Monitor Raid

May 10: Derek Maxfield will speak about Sherman.

## **DUES ARE DUE**

Just a reminder, the membership year began in January. Anyone may renew or join at the meeting, send memberships or donations to the Round Table's P.O. Box. or renew or join through our website: [www.capitaldistrictcivilwar.org](http://www.capitaldistrictcivilwar.org) Donations to the Operating Account and/or Preservation Account are always welcome.

## **THANK YOU, MEMBERS**

The Round Table wishes to thank Terrence Fraser, Edward Kokowski, Dean Long and Luanne Whitbeck, Leo McGuire, Byron Moak, Steve Muller, Bob Mulligan, Robert Mungari, John Portelli, Bruce Reed, Rik Scarce, Bill Underhill, Erin Baillargeon, Mary Ellen Johnson, Norman Kuchar, Rosemary Nichols, and Matt George for their donations to the Operating or Preservation funds.

## **BOARD UPDATES**

The Executive Board met via Zoom on January 15. Treasurer Steve Muller presented the 2023 full-year accounting for both the Operating

Account and the Preservation Account. The Operating Account had a balance of \$3,451.98 at the end of the year, which is down \$318.99 from the end of 2022. The Preservation Account was down \$242.58 from the end of last year; its ending balance was \$3,915.26.

We've received \$881.04 in donations to the Preservation Account already in 2024. The Board decided to donate \$500 to the American Battlefield Trust for their campaign for Tennessee and Kentucky: a \$117 to \$1 match.

**ELIZABETH JENNINGS,  
*FREEDOM RIDER*  
CHESTER ARTHUR,  
*CIVIL RIGHTS LAWYER*  
by Rosemary Nichols**

Rosa Parks is justly famous for her courageous refusal to give up her seat on a Montgomery, Alabama bus on December 1, 1955. Properly celebrated for her courage and the changes that December decision eventually brought to public transportation in America, Parks was not the first Freedom Rider to integrate a transportation system.

In 1852, the Third Avenue Railroad Company obtained a franchise to construct and operate a street railway service in parts of Manhattan. The company installed steel rails in the surface of some Manhattan streets and, in July 1853, began a streetcar service consisting of carriages pulled along these rails by horses. Passengers could board or leave the carriages at various points along the route. Some carriages carried a

placard "Colored Persons Allowed," but these carriages ran infrequently and Black New Yorkers were often permitted to board the general streetcars at the discretion of the driver and conductor, provided none of the other passengers objected.

On Sunday, July 16, 1854, Elizabeth Jennings, a 24 year old Black school teacher, left her family home to travel to the First Colored Congregational Church at what is now 228 East 6th Street in Manhattan, where she was an organist. (It was a musical family. Her brother James was a professional musician.)

When she and her friend Sarah Adams reached the corner of Pearl and Chatham Streets, Elizabeth didn't wait to see a placard announcing, "Negro Persons Allowed in This Car." Such cars ran much less frequently than not-labeled cars. She hailed the first horse-drawn streetcar that came along.

As soon as the two black women got on, the conductor balked. Get off, he insisted. Jennings declined. Finally he told the women they could ride, but that if any white passengers objected, "you shall go out or I'll put you out."

"I told him," Jennings wrote shortly after the incident, that "I was a respectable person, born and raised in New York, did not know where he was born and that he was a good for nothing impudent fellow for insulting decent persons while on their way to church."

Replying that he was from Ireland, the conductor tried to haul Jennings from the car. She resisted ferociously,

clinging first to a window frame, then to the conductor's own coat. "You shall sweat for this," he vowed. Driving on, with Jennings's companion left at the curb, he soon spotted backup in the figure of a police officer. He boarded the car and thrust Jennings, her bonnet smashed and her dress soiled, to the sidewalk.

But, like Mrs. Parks a century later, Elizabeth Jennings had her own backup. She had grown up among a small cadre of black abolitionist ministers, journalists, educators and businessmen who stood up for their community as whites harshly reasserted the color line in the decades after New York gradually abolished slavery in 1827. Her father, Thomas L. Jennings, was a prominent tailor who helped found both a society that provided benefits for black people and the Abyssinian Baptist Church, which later moved to Harlem.

Elizabeth had worked in black schools co-founded by a conductor of the Underground Railroad. Her own church -- First Colored American -- was a place of learning and political rebellion, where, one evening in 1854, addresses on God and the Bible alternated with talks on "The Duty of Colored People Towards the Overthrow of American Slavery" and "Elevation of the African Race."

After the incident aboard the streetcar Jennings took her story to this extended family. Her letter detailing the incident was read in church the next day; supporters forwarded the letter to *The New York Daily Tribune*, whose editor was the abolitionist Horace Greeley, and to *Frederick*

*Douglass' Paper*, which both reprinted it in full.

Meanwhile, her father made contact with a young white lawyer named Chester Arthur.

Arthur, who would go on to become president upon the assassination of James Garfield in 1881, was at the time a beginner in his 20's only recently admitted to the bar. He was the junior partner in the firm of Culver, Parker and Arthur. He nevertheless won the case against the Third Avenue Railway Company.

Brooklyn Circuit Court Judge William Rockwell ruled that "colored persons if sober, well behaved, and free from disease" could not be excluded from public conveyances "by any rules of the Company, nor by force or violence," according to newspaper reports. "Our readers will rejoice with us" in the "righteous verdict," remarked *Frederick Douglass' Paper*.

Jennings's legal victory did not complete integration of city transit. But blacks actively tested her precedent, in part through the Legal Rights Association which her father founded for that purpose. In 1859 another case brought by that group resulted in a settlement, and by the following year nearly all the city's streetcar lines were open to all.

If in this month celebrating Black History you enjoyed this brief introduction to Elizabeth Jennings, you can read more on-line. In addition, this valiant young woman has finally received an excellent biography. [America's First Freedom Rider: Elizabeth Jennings, Chester A.](#)

Arthur, and the Early Fight for Civil Rights (2019) by Jerry Mikorenda is available in many libraries and the usual places for purchase. Mikorenda spoke to the CDCWRT in March, 2022.

## **BUFORD'S VIEW**

by Matt George

On February 2 I'll be driving to Longwood University in Farmville, Virginia for Pat Schroeder's one day Civil War Conference the next day. There I'll be meeting with Matt Farina, who is our past President and the current Newsletter Editor of the Rufus Barringer Civil War Round Table. Matt and I will share a room while we are there. Speakers include James Morgan, Zachary Pittard, Kurt Luther, Keith Harvey and William C. Davis. Davis will be discussing the battles of New Market and Piedmont. The other speakers will speak on the battles of Secessionville, the battle of Staunton, the battle of Lynchburg and Civil War photo sleuthing. I hope to drive home on Monday, February 5. Of course, the entire venture depends on the absence of major snowstorms. Also, if the weather permits, I hope to visit Appomattox on Feb. 4, the day after the conference.

Our February speaker is Dr. Jennifer J. Thompson Burns, PhD Lecturer, Africana Studies at SUNY Albany. Her topic will be Richard C. Kelley who was born enslaved in Lawrenceville, Virginia. Using the Eastern Shore Underground Railroad system, he escaped and ended up in Hoosic, Rensselaer County, N.Y. When the Civil War commenced, Richard signed up with the 20th U.S.C.T. They served in the Louisiana and western Mississippi Valley area. After the War he settled in Troy, New York. He became a Minister at the AME Zion Church in Troy. He had a son named George in 1884. Richard became active in the G.A.R. He was influential in Troy's Association of the NAACP.

His son George graduated from Cornell with a degree in Civil Engineering in 1908. George served in WWI and became a leader in the Troy NAACP. George passed away in 1942 just three years before yours truly was born.

TRIVIA: Within 10,000 how many African American soldiers served in the U.S.C.T.? How many died in service to their country?

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

\_\_\_\_\_ If checked, we had not received your membership renewal as of Jan. 13.

*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](http://www.capitaldistrictcivilwar.org)  
or email: [cdcwrt@hotmail.com](mailto: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		