

March Meeting

Friday, March 14, 2025

Watervliet Senior Center

1501 Broadway Watervliet, New York

***"A Hudson Valley Reckoning"
One Writer's Research into
Ancestry, Slaveholding,
& the Civil War
by Debra Bruno***

Social Hour 6:00pm
Business Mtg 7:00pm
Presentation 7:00-8:00PM



A Hudson Valley Reckoning

**One Writer's Research into Ancestry,
Slaveholding, and the Civil War
by Debra Bruno**

When she was growing up in New York's Hudson Valley, she had no idea that the state had once been a slave society. And when she discovered that her Dutch ancestors had been some of the fiercest advocates of holding onto slavery for as long as they could, she knew she had to learn more.

Her connection and friendship with Eleanor Mire, who descends from people her family enslaved, further enriched the story, which she described in a 2020 Washington Post Magazine article.

A Hudson Valley Reckoning: Discovering the Forgotten History of Slaveholding in My Dutch American Family is a combination of memoir, history, and many unanswered and unanswerable questions. New York Times bestselling author Jonathan Eig called it "an enthralling story and important work of history, impressively researched and beautifully told." Historian Myra Young

Armstead said it will “read like a cannon blast for those unfamiliar with this difficult past.”

For the March meeting’s presentation, Debra Bruno will concentrate on several stories concerning the Civil War, individual stories of African American men in New York who signed up to serve the Union as well as her own family history of Confederate ancestors in Macon, Georgia.

2025 NEW MEMBERSHIP NOTES

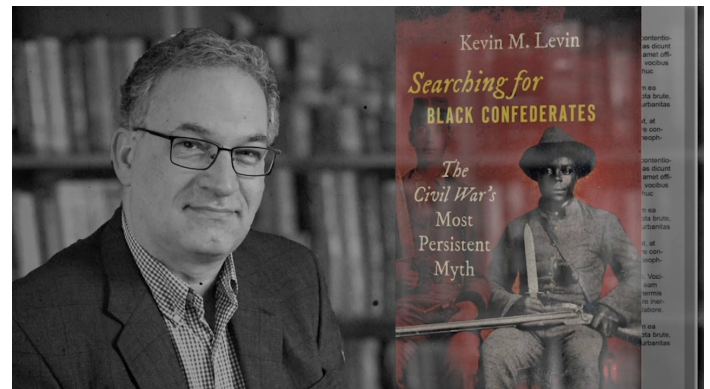
We wish to thank those members who have already renewed their memberships for 2025, and especially those members who no longer live locally but continue to support our organization. We urge past members who have not renewed yet to do so before the end of March. At that time anyone who has not renewed will be dropped from our membership rolls.

Our members continue to be generous. So far we have received donations to the Operating Account and/or the Preservation Account from the following members: John Assini, Terry Fraser, Mary Ellen Johnson, Dean Long and Luanne Whitbeck, Steve Muller, Robert Mungari, Rik Scarce, William Schreiner, Joyce Brooks, Shawn Connery, Mark Koziol, Rosemary Nichols, Bruce Reed, Mary Bonczar, Jeffrey Falace, Edward Kokoski, Norman Kuchar, Leo McGuire and Byron Moak.



The following article has two purposes. For those of you who may not know his work, I wanted to introduce you to Kevin M. Levin, a Civil War scholar who is writing some of the most cogent prose I have seen lately. Kevin is the scholar who finally put the stake in the heart of the persistent Lost Cause myth of black Confederate soldiers in his fine, very detailed book, *Searching for Black Confederates: The Civil War's Most Persistent Myth* (2019).

Second, this article (which I reproduce with permission) talks about something that we in the Northeast are probably not especially aware of: the extent to which communities in our nation for the first time are truly trying to honor the amazing service of the USCTs in the Civil War and afterward as the 'Buffalo Soldiers' in the West. – Rosemary Nichols



OUT WITH THE CONFEDERATE SOLDIERS, IN WITH UNITED STATES COLORED TROOPS

by Kevin M. Levin

The news of the past few weeks on the history front makes it easy to lose sight of the larger picture. There is certainly a great deal to be concerned about and we need to remain vigilant and find ways to combat the new administration's war on history, but I remain optimistic.

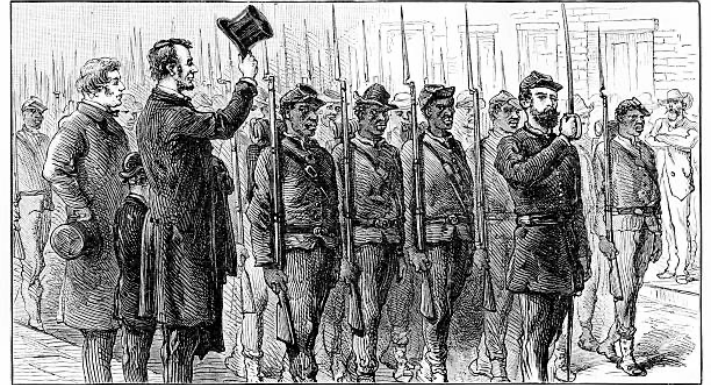
Public memory of the Civil War has changed dramatically over the past two decades. We've witnessed a dramatic change to our Civil War monument landscape with the removal of hundreds of Confederate monuments in cities and towns across the country.



I never could have anticipated these sweeping changes, but in focusing on monument removals we've missed an equally important trend. Since 1998, we have witnessed a wave of new Civil War monuments that commemorate United States Colored Troops. This trend is part of a larger shift in our memory of the war that now centers on the story of emancipation.

We can see this shift in our collective memory at historic sites, museums, in Hollywood movies, in our classrooms, and especially in

new scholarship. This narrative has largely supplanted the Lost Cause from public memory. This will undoubtedly continue.



In 1998, Ed Hamilton's "Spirit of Freedom" was dedicated in the Shaw neighborhood of Washington, D.C. It was the first major addition to the monument landscape, commemorating Black soldiers, since the unveiling of the Shaw/54th Massachusetts monument here in Boston in 1897.



Since then we have seen new monuments dedicated all over the country, in prominent public spaces, in cemeteries, and on Civil War battlefields. The Contemporary Monuments to the Past website has a helpful list of some of these new monuments.

Some of the most recent additions to the monument landscape can be found in Wilmington, North Carolina.



North Carolina artist Stephen Hayes crafted the first figurative sculpture in the state to honor the USCT, featuring life-size depictions of Freedom Fighter soldiers marching to battle. He created it using the cast features of 11 African American men affiliated with the site and its story – USCT descendants, reenactors, veterans and community leaders – to connect the USCT Park with those who have personal history with the battle. Hayes hopes his work brings both light and awareness to the community and highlights the area’s history.



In 2021, the city of Franklin, Tennessee dedicated its own statue.

On October 23, 2021, Franklin, Tenn. commemorated the contributions of the USCT and Black Americans with the installation of a statue of a USCT soldier in its town square. The monument is positioned directly across from a Confederate monument. The installation was the culmination of an agreement reached through “A Fuller Story,” a project initiated by Reverends Hewitt Sawyers, Chris Williamson, Kevin Riggs, and historian Eric Jacobson. These four residents of Franklin—two Black men and two White men—got together to address the controversy over Confederate monuments, and the result was an agreement to erect a statue of a USCT soldier and five interpretive markers honoring both the suffering and resilience of Blacks. Franklin’s mayor and aldermen unanimously approved the

agreement. No USCT troops took part in the 1864 Battle of Franklin, but this statue commemorates the approximately 300 Black men from Franklin County, most of whom were formerly enslaved, who joined the USCT.

Some people view the decision to leave the Confederate monument in place as a stain on the memory of African Americans, but I think this is a case where placing the two monuments in conversation with one another offers some interesting opportunities for reflection and education.



Finally, in 2021 a monument honoring three Black soldiers executed by Confederates was unveiled in Culpeper County, Virginia.

What about future dedications?

I, for one, am very much looking forward to the dedication of a statue honoring Robert Smalls on the grounds of the state house in Columbia, South Carolina. Though not a soldier, Smalls was responsible for one of the most dramatic military exploits of the war when he stole a Confederate ship to sail his family and a dozen others to freedom in 1862.

Of course, that is just the beginning of his incredible story.



It's true that we have also seen the dedication of new Confederate monuments during this same period of time. But here is the difference. Those monuments have all been dedicated on private property and made possible by private donations, almost exclusively from within the Confederate heritage community. As a result, they represent nothing more than the interests of those individuals involved.

In contrast, the new monuments honoring the roughly 180,000 African Americans who helped to save this nation and bring an end to slavery are located on public property or on the grounds of major institutions such as museums. The funds raised have come from grants, public funds, and large institutions. As a result, these monuments reflect the values and shared history of a much larger cross section of the American people.

Of course, they should be embraced by all of us. I am confident that they will endure because they celebrate and represent a quintessential American story.



FROM THE SHELVES OF SHAWN

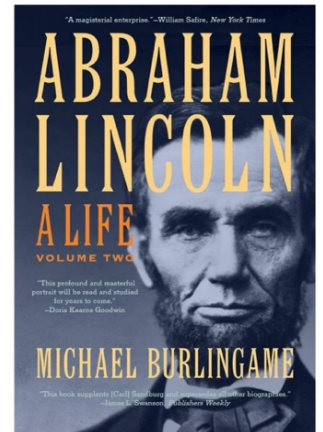
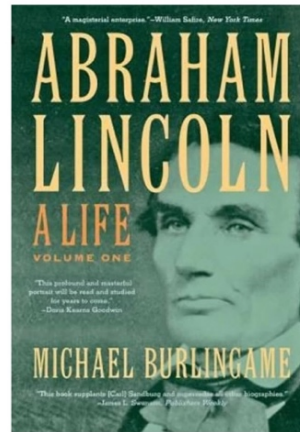
Before I moved to the Capital Region, I created a History Book Club back in 2006 that ran right up through 2019. We started meeting at the coffeehouse/bookstore I ran and later moved to the Seymour Public Library. I enjoyed being able to share my love of books and offering recommendations to others, helping to find their favorites as well. I thought that I would continue sharing my love of books with the roundtable by starting a column that shares both my current Civil War read and highlights upcoming works and older titles that I love. I hope you find some great recommendations from the books I highlight in the coming months.

CURRENTLY READING

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: A LIFE

By Michael Burlingame

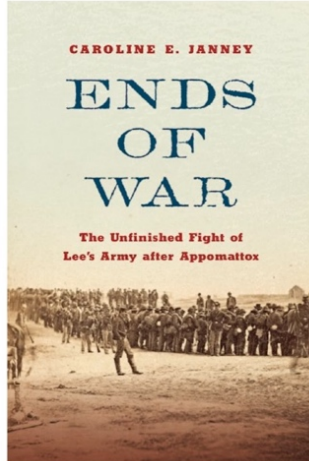
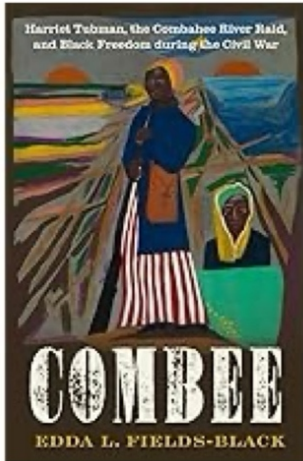
John Hopkins University Press (2012)



While several classic biographies like William Oates *With Malice Towards None: The Life of Abraham Lincoln* and Carl Sandburg's *The Prairie Years* and *The War Years* seem to convey every aspect of the life of Lincoln, Michael Burlingame's *Abraham Lincoln: A Life* offers modern readers an in-depth look at the life of the nation's 16th President. Poring over the work of previous biographers and their sources, Burlingame goes deeper into the historical record with previously ignored or neglected and unknown sources to offer new aspects of Lincoln's life.

Tackling a massive volume, or in this case volumes, of everything you ever wanted to know about Honest Abe is truly not for the faint of heart and it's something that is not going to be completed in a weekend. Covering over 2000 pages in 2 volumes with over 60 chapters and print that will make anyone with 20/20 vision make an appointment with their eye doctor, *Abraham Lincoln: A Life* is truly going to be a major undertaking but, for anyone who wishes to dive into the depths of all that is Lincoln, I'm sure the journey will be well worth it.

RECOMMENDED TITLES



Combee: Harriet Tubman, the Combahee River Raid, and Black Freedom During the Civil War by Edda L. Fields Black

This recent 2025 Gilder Lehrman Institute Lincoln Prize winning book covers the daring Civil War life of Harriet Tubman and her role in aiding the Union Army and their march into the heart of the Confederacy and the raid up the Combahee River near Beaufort, South Carolina. Author Edda L. Fields Black, a descendant of one of the participants of the raid, uncovers previously unexamined primary sources to bring to life this crucial campaign in the fight for Union and freedom.

End of War: The Unfinished Fight of Lee's Army after Appomattox by Caroline Janney

Another former winner of the Gilder Lehrman Lincoln Prize, University of Virginia's John L. Nau III Professor of the American Civil War offers a glimpse into the aftermath of Robert E. Lee's surrender to Ulysses Grant. While we recognize the date of April 9, 1865 as the official end of the Civil War, the conflict was far

from over. While many Southerners stacked their arms and left for home, many still fought and struggled with their own interpretations of the end and if the end was actually at hand. Janney's research outlines how fragile this newfound peace was in the face of the Lincoln assassination, deliberations between U.S. government authorities and military leaders and the uncertainty of established concessions, and the thoughts and fears of over 18,000 of Lee's troops trying to reconcile themselves with the newfound peace, and the origins of the birth of the narrative of the Lost Cause mythology.



Membership Form

2025 Calendar Year

Name: _____

Membership Dues All dues go into the Operating Account to pay for newsletters, program expenses, and the use of the meeting space. (circle appropriate level)

Regular memberships can choose between emailed or mailed newsletters.

Regular: \$35

Student memberships come with only emailed newsletters.

Student: \$10

Additional Donation for the Operating Account _____

Donation for the Preservation Account _____

(Preservation money pays for donations to preserve historic sites/lands, rental of the storage shed, and the Round Table's insurance)

Total: _____

Newsletter Preference: Email _____ OR Mailed Copy _____

_____ Email/Mailing address is the same as last year

If not: _____

Please mail your payment to: CDCWRT
P.O. Box 11493
Loudonville, NY 12211-0493

* Early payments will be held and deposited in January.

* Credit/Debit card payments can be made through www.capitaldistrictcivilwar.org

Capital District Civil War Roundtable
P.O. BOX 11493
LOUDONVILLE, NY 12211

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: **cdcwrtd@hotmail.com**

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