



The Dispatch

Newspaper of the

CAPITAL DISTRICT CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

PO Box 11493 Loudonville, NY 12211
www.capitaldistrictcivilwar.org



Volume 36, Number 3

March 2019

“The Road to Liberty: a station on the Underground Railroad”



Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Photographs and Prints Division, The New York Public Library.

MARCH MEETING

Friday, March 8, 2019

WATERVLIET SENIOR CENTER

1541 BROADWAY

WATERVLIET, NY

Mary Liz and Paul Stewart: the Underground Railroad as the First Civil Rights Movement

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

The regular meeting of the CDCWRT will be held at the Watervliet Senior Center on Friday, March 8, 2019. Our guest speakers will be Mary Liz and Paul Stewart.

Mary Liz and Paul Stewart are the co-founders of the Underground Railroad History Project of the Capital Region, Inc. (URHPCR). Its mission is to “research and preserve the local and national history of the Anti-Slavery and Underground Railroad movements, their international connections, and their legacies to later struggles; it engages in public education and dialogue about these movements and their relevance to modern society.”

In addition to being the Executive Director of the URHPCR, Mary Liz Stewart has been a registered nurse at Albany Medical Center and an elementary classroom teacher at Berne-Knox-Westerlo Central School District.

Paul Stewart serves on the Board of the URHPCR and is the Director of Training at Community Loan Fund of the Capital Region. In 2009, Paul was appointed by Governor Paterson to the state Board of Historic Review with the NYS Office of Parks.

“LibertyCon 2019 – Seeking Sanctuary: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness” is the 18th Annual Underground Railroad Public History Conference, March 29-31, 2019, and will be held at Siena College and at The Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence. For information, go to: undergroundrailroadhistory.org

DUES ARE DUE!

If you have not yet paid your dues for 2019, please mail a check or bring \$35 dollars to the next meeting. We are still accepting donations to the Operating account and/or Preservation Fund.

DONATION CORRECTION

Editor Emeritus Matt Farina identified a second error in our annual update of donations and matches. We originally announced an actual donated amount of \$272,276 over the

course of the Round Table's life. This was corrected last month to be \$215,908 because a leveraged amount had been accidentally included instead of the actual amount.

This correction totaled the actual donations through December 2017, not 2018. The updated figure for the end of 2018 is \$219,195.

Thank you to Matt for keeping a close eye on our donations.

UPCOMING EVENTS

March 29-31 is the Underground Railroad History Project Conference. Our Round Table supports this event every year, and we will again have a display/information table there as well.

The April 12, 2019 meeting will feature a speaker to be announced.

The May 10, 2019 meeting's speaker will be actor and historian Patrick Falci, who will talk about the movie *Gettysburg* -- 25 years later. As we all will recall, Pat played an amazing A.P. Hill in that movie as well as the follow-up *Gods and Generals*.

The June 7, 2019 meeting of the CDCWRT will feature historian and author Will Greene. He is the former director of the Pamplin Historical Park and National Museum of the Civil War Soldier. His topic will be an aspect of the Petersburg Campaign.

June 14-19 is a Civil War Conference at Gettysburg College. The Civil War Institute of Gettysburg, in partnership

with the newly formed Civil War Round Table Congress, is hosting this event. Because of our Round Table's affiliation with the CWRT Congress our members qualify for a 15% discount.

For the period of June 29-July 3, the Round Table will be fundraising in Gettysburg. See Matt George for details.

There will be no Round Table meetings in July and August 2019. We are still planning a picnic for August.

During August 2-4, the 6th Annual Emerging Civil War Symposium will be held at Stevenson Ridge in Spotsylvania County in Virginia.

THE LEGACY OF SLAVERY

In 1998, PBS aired a six-hour television series called "Africans in America." It detailed the history of racial slavery in America from the Transatlantic slave trade to the end of the Civil War.

The companion website of the same name provides visitors with access to hundreds of resource items, including biographies, historical documents, and commentaries excerpted from the original interviews with historians.

Here are some questions posed to historians on the legacy of slavery in the United States and their answers.

Question: Why is it important to study the history of slavery?

James Horton, Benjamin Banneker Professor of American Studies and History at George Washington University, responded:

“The problem of race in America at the end of the 20th century is not the problem of slavery. If it had been the problem of slavery, it'd have been over in 1865. But as a Christian nation, a nation that saw itself as a Christian nation, as a nation that saw itself built on the principles of freedom, we had to tell ourselves that there was something about the slave that justified slavery. It is that justification of slavery that we are still trying to deal with, more than 100 years after the abolition of slavery.

“It would have been so much better if we could have said: I have the power to hold slaves. Therefore I hold slaves. Has nothing to do with the slaves. Has to do with my power. Then, when I no longer had the power, slavery is over, we could move forward. But because we are America, because we have this vision of ourselves, we had to say to ourselves that there's something wrong with the slave. And when we said that, it put us in the position of then having to deal with that notion of racial inferiority, long past the end of slavery.”

Deborah Gray White, Professor of History at Rutgers University, responded to the same question, saying:

“I don't think you can understand race relations today without understanding slavery. And until we

come to grips with it, until we understand people's prejudices, their origins, we really can't even begin to work on getting rid of them and working together as a people. Even though people will say, "Well, I didn't do it," and white people will say, "I didn't do it. My father didn't do it. Even my grandparents, they didn't do it." One of the things that's essential is to know that slavery is not just a southern institution. It's an American institution.

And it was an institution that everyone bought into. The North bought into it. The South bought into it. It was cotton that made this country king in 1850 and 1860. It was cotton that fueled the early Industrial Revolution in this country, particularly in New England. So without understanding the past, we really can't understand the future. We can't understand why people have the prejudices they have, how black people and white people came to be at opposite ends on certain issues, like civil rights, human rights.”

Question: What kinds of changes came about during the Civil War and Reconstruction?

Noel Ignatiev, Writer and Historian at Du Bois Institute and Harvard University, and Visiting Associate Professor at Bowdoin College, responded:

“Now, that period from 1863 through the period of Reconstruction was a period in which traditional race lines were broken down in America. That before the war, the difference between

black and white had roughly corresponded to the difference between slavery and freedom. Now, the abolition of slavery transformed that eliminated that distinction. And the country faced, for the first time in its history, the possibility of moving beyond being a white republic to being a universal republic, and what that might mean for the possibility of progress for all its citizens. That was a very frightening prospect to a number of people. Black people, of course, faced the problem of how to adjust to the requirements of being independent actors in an economy. And there's a tremendous literature on how they adjusted to that. And white folks faced the possibility of how they would live without the special protections of the white skin, what a colorless American democracy might mean.

“Now, that's not what happened. The overthrow of Reconstruction meant the restoration of the white republic on a new basis. No longer corresponding to the difference between freedom and slavery, it now corresponded to the difference between those who essentially had the rights of citizenship and the rights to work in a general economy, and those who were condemned to peonage, debt slavery, and disenfranchisement in the South. The result of that was that railroads and banks and large corporations replaced the slaveholders as the dominant group in American society after 1877.

“The aftermath of the Civil War... brought black folk into political power

in a number of places in the South. The first South Carolina state convention, 60 [out of] 125 delegates to the convention were former slaves. Another 30 owned no property and paid no taxes. In other words, there was never a purer working class parliament in the history of the planet than this constitutional convention of the state of South Carolina in 1868. And the government that was set up out of that was a government that had important black representation. Black people did not dominate the government, but they certainly exercised an important influence within it. And as a result, South Carolina passed the most progressive legislative measures that it had ever passed before or since: measures for public school system, for roads, for asylums for the aged, the infirm, the insane, women's rights to own property, to participate publicly. A number of measures were passed during that period that indicated in a small way what the possibilities of a genuinely free republic might have been. There was talk about seizing the plantations and dividing them among the laborers, black and white. Now, that was not carried out. They were not strong enough to do that. But that indicated some of the possibilities of what an American republic might have meant.”

For more information, check out the “Africans in America” website:

www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/home.html

BOARD UPDATES

The Executive Board met on January 14, 2019. There is \$2,344.37 in our Operating Account. There is \$3,572.17 in the Preservation Account.

Expenditures from the Operating Account since the December 2018 meeting were \$125.00 for the newsletter. There was a deposit of \$61 representing two donations in memory of Stan Bergman.

PROGRAMS: Matt George has speakers scheduled into next year, as well as information about some other possibilities. There will be some speaker charges for the 2019 year but an effort will be made to control these.

The Brandy Station field trip being planned by JJ and Bud Hall for May 17-19, 2019 will not be held due to scheduling complications.

We will continue to plan for the Cedar Creek event in October 2019.

OLD BUSINESS: Some of our books may be valuable enough to be sold as special items. Nick Thony is going to conduct a Google books experiment to determine value for specialty or Civil War Classic books which we may have.

We are still seeking another at-large member for the Board. If you are interested contact any Board member.

BUFORD'S VIEW

by Matt George

J.J. Jennings and I just recently returned from the Civil War Trust Conference in New Orleans. Other than the usual problems we've come to expect flying, the Conference was excellent and personally rewarding for me. We stayed the Monteleone, a big beautiful hotel downtown near the French Quarter. On Saturday, I toured the battlefield at Fort Jackson. Farragut had to bypass this fort, built prior to the Civil War, on his way to capturing New Orleans. A typical star pattern, the fort is now closed because of Hurricane Katrina and the lack of funds to reopen it for visitors. However, it was opened just for our tour group. We were warned, however, to be aware of the possibility of meeting snakes. We didn't.

On Sunday, I took a half-day tour of the World War II Museum. I can't express enough what a wonderful, beautiful and expansive museum this is. A number of years ago when it first opened, I became a charter member. I also paid to have my father's name on some kind of plaque there. Until this trip, I was never able to verify the plaque's existence.

It turned out better than I expected. I was directly down a hall to a 20' by 30' lighted sign. It was touch sensitive (like some computer screens). I typed my father's name (same as mine) and within seconds, there appeared my dedication to my father for his service in WWII. It was very impressive and personally

gratifying. The people at the front desk were also kind enough to make an 8' x 11' paper copy for me. The Museum itself is so huge (several buildings) it would take days to properly see everything.

I saw a very moving special film on Bob Hope's performances for the soldiers during the war. There are beautiful exhibits on every theatre of the war, including the home front. There are hundreds of actual artifacts include a Higgins boat and a B-17 hanging from the ceiling. If you ever get to New Orleans, this is a must place to visit.

I'm always amazed as I travel across the country as to what a small world it is. When I went into the WWII Museum gift shop and bookstore, I struck up a conversation with the man working at the cash register. His name was Bill Humphreys. He noticed my name tag said I was from Schenectady. He said he was originally from New York. I asked him where and he answered Broadalbin. When he observed that I was with the Civil War Trust, he told me he had an ancestor that served in a Civil War Regiment from New York. It turned out the ancestor was Sergeant Gould in Company K of the 115th NYVI (Montgomery/Fulton counties).

I told Mr. Humphreys that one of our founding members, Mark Silo, had written the most recent regimental history of the 115th and said that if I could get a copy I would mail him one. Mark provided me with an

autographed paperback edition and I sent it to Bill.

From March 13 to the 26th, I'll be taking my "southern tour" by train. Although slower than plane, it is not only cheaper but much more enjoyable and relaxing, and far less stressful. Besides I'll get to read several books while traveling.

I will go to Charleston, South Carolina for four days, where I plan to visit Fort Sumter and see the CSS Hunley. On my return trip, I hope to visit Matt Farina in Southern Pines, North Carolina for a couple of days.

A final thought....spring is near. High school baseball practice begins statewide in about ten days!

**CDCWRT
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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.

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