



The Dispatch
Newspaper of the

CAPITAL DISTRICT CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

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



Volume 36, Number 6

June 2019

Two Famous Auburn Friends: William Seward and Harriet Tubman



photograph from *The Daily Gazette*, Schenectady, Thursday, May 17, 2019

JUNE MEETING

Friday, June 7, 2019

WATERVLIET SENIOR CENTER

1541 BROADWAY

WATERVLIET, NY

Will Greene:
***Grant's Second Petersburg
Offensive***

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, June 7, 2019.

NOTE: this is one week EARLIER than our typical meeting date.

Our guest speaker will be historian Will Greene. He is the former director of the Pamplin Historical Park and National Museum of the Civil War Soldier.

A. Wilson Greene recently retired from a forty-four-year career as a battlefield preservationist, National Park Service historian, and museum director. He is the former president and CEO of one of the American Battlefield Trust's predecessor organizations, the Association for the Preservation of Civil War Sites. He served as a historian and manager at five national historic sites and led the development and operation of Pamplin Historical

Park and the National Museum of the Civil War Soldier for twenty three years.

Mr. Greene, a Chicago native, did his graduate work at Louisiana State University under the renowned Civil War historian, T. Harry Williams. Greene is the author of six books and more than twenty five published articles on the American Civil War and Southern history. His latest book, A Campaign of Giants: The Battle for Petersburg won the Distinguished Book Award for American Military History in 2019.

He is a much sought-after Civil War battlefield guide and has led tours for Smithsonian Journeys since 1989 and is a frequent lecturer around the country.

UPCOMING EVENTS

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 during the reenactment. Contact Matt George for details.

There will be no Round Table meetings in July and August 2019.

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

Spotsylvania County in Virginia. For details about this excellent annual conference, please check their website: emergingcivilwar.com for the 2019 symposium information.

The Clarksville Historical Society's "Heritage Day" celebration will be August 3.

Our annual picnic is on Friday, August 16 at Schuyler Flatts. The living history timeline event will be Saturday, August 17 and Sunday, August 18. Look for a flyer to be mailed and emailed during the summer with details.

September 13 is our next Round Table meeting. Ron Kirkwood will speak on the Eleventh Corps field hospital on the Spangler farm in Gettysburg.

Joe Collea will speak at our October 11th meeting. His topic is Lincoln's two presidential trips through Albany.

October 18-20: The Round Table will be at Cedar Creek, Virginia for the 155th anniversary of the battle (Oct. 19). We will be raising preservation funds at the reenactment. Look for details in future newsletters.

TWO FAMOUS AUBURN FRIENDS

by Rosemary Nichols

On Friday, May 17, 2019, the life sized bronze statue of two famous New Yorkers, Harriet Tubman and William Seward, was unveiled in front of the Schenectady County Library. Lead project organizer Frank Wicks and others presented the project to our Round Table at our annual January

2019 potpourri meeting. The Round Table and individual members were among those sponsoring the \$62,000.00 fee for sculptor Dexter Bennett.

As we know from the presentation, this project – like its subjects –suffered baptism by fire. A fast-moving blaze on Nov. 1, 2017 destroyed the barn that housed Dexter Benedict's foundry and sculpture studio in Penn Yan, in Yates County in the Finger Lakes. Everything was lost: clay, tools, equipment and several large-scale sculptures in progress. The nearly completed life-sized molds of Tubman and Seward were ruined by the intense heat of the fire, made worse by exploding propane tanks used in the foundry.

A less determined sculptor might have viewed the comprehensive destruction as a cosmic notice to the 74 year old it was time to hang up his hammer. Benedict rebuilt his studio/foundry and rescheduled his work, including the Tubman/Seward statue.

The inscription on the Mohawk Valley dolomite base of the statue reads: "William Seward and Harriet Tubman. Leaders for freedom, diversity and friendship. Gift by the people for the people." Seward holds a walking stick and Tubman is depicted with a shepherd's staff.

Wicks said in his January presentation, "Biographies of Seward and Tubman include very little about their friendship. We thought it was important to celebrate the ways in which their lives intersected and

lessons we can take away today from them."

I was curious about the friendship between a distinguished upstate attorney and a formerly enslaved abolitionist who rescued at least seventy people from slavery on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. As I researched I became convinced that, just as it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a determined family and community to support two extraordinary advocates. I also decided that there should be some public acknowledgement of a third party in the Seward Tubman friendship, Seward's wife Frances.

In his long career, Seward was a New York State Senator, New York's governor for two terms, a U. S. Senator from New York for two terms, and a presidential candidate, who is generally recognized by scholars as one of our nation's great secretaries of state, serving both Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson during their entire terms.

Seward was born in 1801 to a large, well-to-do, slave-holding family in Florida, in Orange County. In his early years one of his playing companions was a boy named Zeno, a young slave from a neighboring household. One day Zeno told Seward that he had been brutally beaten. The next day he tried to run, was caught, and was forced to wear an iron yoke around his neck. He soon broke the yoke and made good his escape;

Seward never saw him again. Writing later, he remembered that such events "determined me, at that early age, to become an abolitionist."

In 1846, Seward became the center of controversy in Auburn when he defended, in separate cases, two felons accused of murder. Henry Wyatt, a white man, was charged with fatally stabbing a fellow inmate in prison; William Freeman, an African American, was accused of breaking into a house after his release and stabbing four people to death.

In both cases the defendants were likely mentally ill and had been abused while in prison. Seward, having long been an advocate of prison reform and better treatment for the insane, sought to prevent each man from being executed by using the relatively new defense of insanity. Seward gained a hung jury in Wyatt's first trial, though he was subsequently convicted in a retrial and executed despite Seward's efforts to secure clemency. Freeman was convicted, though Seward gained a reversal on appeal. There was no second Freeman trial, as officials were convinced of his insanity. Freeman died in prison in late 1846.

In the Freeman case, invoking mental illness and racial issues, Seward argued, "he is still your brother, and mine, in form and color accepted and approved by his Father, and yours, and mine, and bears equally with us the proudest inheritance of our race—the image of our Maker. Hold him then to be a Man."

Although they were locally contentious, the trials boosted Seward's image across the North. He gained further publicity in association with Ohioan Salmon P. Chase when handling the unsuccessful appeal in the United States Supreme Court of

John Van Zandt, an anti-slavery advocate sued by a slave owner for assisting African Americans escaping on the Underground Railroad. Chase was impressed with Seward, writing that the former New York governor "was one of the very first public men in our country. Who but himself would have done what he did for the poor wretch Freeman?"

Seward's home in Auburn was one of the stops on the Underground Railroad. It was in that context that he and Harriet Tubman initially became acquainted. Seward was a benevolent man, helping people of various backgrounds with housing and other needs. However, for much of his political career Seward was inevitably away from Auburn, serving in Albany or Washington, DC. The torch of abolitionism in his absence was carried most prominently by his wife Frances and his children. One of the ongoing sources of friction in the marriage was Frances' regular urging that Seward use his high position and influence to further aid the cause of black freedom. But Seward was a unionist. His abolition sentiments, while sincere, were always moderated by his desire to preserve the federal union.

Sometime during the late winter or early spring of 1859 Seward offered Tubman a small parcel of property on the outskirts of Auburn. He had inherited a seven-acre farm from his father-in-law, Elijah Miller. He sold the property to Tubman for \$1,200.00 on favorable terms.

Kate Larson, who has written the best biography of Tubman, explains why

such a sale was a dangerous thing to do:

"Seward was selling the property to a woman, a black woman at that, with no obvious or steady means of income. Property ownership by women was uncommon in this period,

and Seward could have required that the property be sold to Tubman's father, who was legally free. But Tubman must have made a strong argument for selling the property to her and her alone. There were legal considerations, however What if her husband, John Tubman, appeared and demanded his rights to the property? Did her suffragist friends advise her as to the best legal course of action to protect herself, her property, and her family? As a New York resident, Tubman would have had limited citizenship rights. But her status as a fugitive slave added legal complexity to an already unusual legal transaction. Tubman was not a citizen; she had no rights either as a free black or as a slave. The Dred Scott decision, handed down by the Supreme Court in 1857, had denied that blacks, free or enslaved, could be citizens. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 also placed Seward in a precarious position. Seward was probably committing an illegal act by selling the property to a known fugitive slave. Conceivably he could have been arrested for aiding Harriet Tubman." Kate Clifford Larson, *Bound for the Promised Land: Harriet Tubman: Portrait of an American Hero*, pages 164-5.

Though Tubman tried to pay down the mortgage over time, she was only intermittently successful. The Seward

family made no effort ever to foreclose the debt. Ultimately, as part of Seward's estate on his death in 1872, her debt was essentially forgiven. The property is now part of the Harriet Tubman National Historical Park.

The two old friends sleep near each other in the historic Fort Hill Cemetery in Auburn.

BOARD UPDATES

The Executive Board met on Tuesday, May 21 to discuss the business of the Round Table.

The Operating Account had \$1,826.09 in it after paying for the May speaker and printing the April newsletter. The Preservation Fund had \$2,710.81, which includes \$82 from the May book raffle.

Matt George provided an updated program list. We have speakers scheduled through January, 2020, and Matt has several leads for potential spring 2020 speakers. Matt also shared his experiences at the Tubman/Seward statue unveiling.

Nick Thony will attend the Civil War Conference in Gettysburg. He plans to record several podcasts that can be published through the summer months. Nick also reported the video of Pat Falci's presentation has been viewed multiple times on Facebook.

Board members are in the process of planning several fundraising events for the summer. Matt George is taking the lead for the Gettysburg fundraiser. Rosemary Nichols will ask Matt Farina

for assistance designing and submitting the postal cancellations for the 155th Cedar Creek celebration on October 19 and 20 (Saturday and Sunday).

The next meeting of the Executive Board is Monday, June 17, 2019. If you wish for more information, please contact any board member.

BUFORD'S VIEW

by Matt George

The dedication and unveiling of the new William Seward and Harriet Tubman statue on Saturday, May 17 at the Schenectady County Library was a great success. There were so many people in the McChesney room for the Dedication Program that people were forced to sit on the floor. At the request of Laura Lee, I attended in uniform and promoted the Round Table every chance I had. The pictures of U. S. C. T. troops who had been amputee patients of Dr. Bonticou of Troy were very much of interest. Thanks go to Matt Farina for providing these for me. I met a gentleman named Steve Rockwell whose great, great grandfather William Henry Hershey of the 4th Ohio Volunteers fought at Gettysburg. Steve has a number of letters and other memorabilia. Steve indicated he might be interested in briefly talking about these at our potpourri meeting in January.

On Saturday I drove to Connecticut to attend a meeting of the Connecticut Civil War Round. The speaker was Phil Vitiello whose topic was the "Hunley". His power point

presentation was not only interesting but entertaining. Steve has agreed to be a speaker for in the spring of 2020. Later, at the house of Blair and Mary Pavlik, we had lunch with the speaker (who is also Vice President of the South Central Connecticut Civil War Round table), and other area Civil War Round table representatives. Discussed were ways Round Tables in the northeast geographical areas could cooperate and support each other. Mary Pavlik told me about a possible symposium they might be planning for next October. I told her to send me the details when they are available and we might be able to support this in one way or another.

We now have a speaker confirmed for April 10, 2020. His name is Ralph Siegel and he will be speaking about his newest book: "Peach Orchard: The Battle of Gettysburg Reconsidered".

On May 28 I'll be driving to Lexington, Kentucky for the Civil War Trust Conference. I plan to return June 3.

On June 7th I'll be doing a living history presentation for students of various schools in Peterboro. I'll be returning in time for our regular meeting featuring A. Wilson Greene.

I'll be in Gettysburg for the Civil War Institute Summer Conference. This is co-sponsored by our friends at the National Civil Round Table Congress.

The Conference runs from June 14th to the 19th. Since we are affiliated with the Civil War Congress I receive a 15% discount.

I'll be returning to Gettysburg June 28th through July 4th or 5th. On June 29 Round Table members Mark and Janet Allen and I will be attending the popular Seminary Ridge Museum barbecue.

We have been asked by the Clarksville Historical Society to participate again in their Heritage Day Celebration on Saturday, August 3. Usually I attend this event with our tent and a table to raise money. However, there is a possibility I may not be here that weekend so, it would be nice if we could get another volunteer.

**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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