

The Dispatch

Newspaper of the

CAPITAL DISTRICT
CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

PO Box 14871 Albany, NY 12212
www.cdcwrt.net



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FRANCES ELLEN WATKINS HARPER TO SPEAK



(1866 – A.P.)

Noted abolitionist, orator and poet, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, is expected speak at the Eleventh National Women's Rights Convention at the Church of the Puritans in New York City on May 10, 1866. This is the first convention since the War ended. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, President of the National Women's Rights Committee, will call the convention to order. Addresses will be delivered by Stanton, Wendell Phillips and Lucretia Mott among others. The last convention was in 1860 and was attended by 800 participants.

With the coming of the Civil War, women's rights activism was focused on the issue of emancipation for slaves. As an African-American activist, Harper is expected to address the issue of racial discrimination and the women's rights movement.

MARCH MEETING
FRIDAY, MARCH 14, 2014

WATERVLIET SENIOR CENTER
1541 BROADWAY
WATERVLIET, NY

FRANCES HARPER
AND
BLACK WOMEN
ABOLITIONISTS

JOHANNA ORTNER

Social Hour	**6:00 – 7:00 p.m.**
Business Meeting	**7:00 – 7:15 p.m.**
Presentation	**7:15 – 7:45 p.m.**
Discussion	**7:45 - -8:15 p.m.**

CDCWRT MEETING

***The March meeting of the Capital District Civil War Round Table will occur on Friday, March 14, 2014 at the Watervliet Senior Center. Our special guest speaker will be Johanna Ortner, and the topic of her presentation is entitled,* "'I pledge myself to the anti-slavery cause': Frances Ellen Watkins Harper and Black Women Abolitionists."**

In the early 1830s the Radical Abolition Movement emerged in the Northern United States and called for an immediate end to the institution of slavery. Among its participants were formerly enslaved and free black women whose activism was crucial to the movement to end the enslavement of America's black population. This talk will examine black women abolitionists, such as Frances E.W. Harper, who dedicated their lives to the fight for freedom and equality by defying racist stereotypes and gender conventions of the early 19th century. Through their literary productions and public speeches, black women activists strengthened the anti-slavery cause leading up to the Civil War.

Johanna Ortner is a Ph.D. candidate in the W.E.B. Du Bois Department of Afro-American Studies at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. She began her undergraduate studies in her home country Austria, but transferred to Rutgers University in New Jersey to study African American history. She graduated with a BA in African-American Studies and began her graduate studies at UMass Amherst in 2009. She's currently working on her dissertation "'Whatever concerns them, as a race, concerns me': The Life and Activism of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper" and her research interest focuses on 19th century African American women's activism.

This talk is fortuitously but appropriately timed, because it follows the Oscar's best movie of the year, "Twelve Years a Slave," which also calls attention to the horrors of slavery for the general public. Hopefully this will translate into increased attendance at our Round Table Meeting and the up-coming Underground Railroad Conference in June.

DUES ARE NOW DUE

The CDCWRT operates on the calendar year. This means that the annual dues of $25 for individuals are now due. Treasurer Fran McCashion will be collecting dues at the meeting, or dues can be mailed into the Round Table at the address on the front page. Student and family dues are posted on the last page of the newsletter, and may be discussed with Fran.

Members whose dues are in arrears after the March newsletter, will be dropped from the mailing list.

UP-COMING EVENTS

The following list of up-coming events is provided to help Round Table members plan their long term calendars. These are events that involve our Round Table, especially events that provide opportunities to raise funds for our preservation activities. Some events may change as the year progresses, so members should check the list monthly. Other events have a Civil War connection and are sponsored by other groups. Details of Sesquicentennial Civil War events can be found on the web-site: www.nycivilwar150.org.

CHANGE: On April 11, 2014, the CDCWRT will meet at the Senior Center. Our special guest speaker will be Professor Bruce Eelman from Siena College. His presentation is entitled "Malice Towards All – Northern Violence in Response to Lincoln's Assassination. "

On May 9, 2014, the CDCWRT will meet at the Senior Center. Our guest speaker will be Bob Conner, and the title of his presentation is "General Gordon Granger: The Savior of Chickamauga and the Man Behind Juneteenth." (But you thought General George Thomas was the "Rock of Chickamauga! Come and hear the whole story!)

On June 13, 2014, the CDCWRT will meet at the Roger Bacon Hall at Siena College at 6:00 P.M. Our guest speaker will be Ron Coddington, and the title of his presentation will be "African American Faces of the Civil War." This program is co-sponsored by the Underground Railroad Workshop.

FORT WOOL

During the American Revolution the British sailed in and out of Hampton Roads without hindrance. In January 1776 they bombarded Norfolk. In May 1779 they raided Portsmouth and destroyed 137 ships. In December 1780 a force under Benedict Arnold settled in Portsmouth and was joined by Cornwallis, and remained there until moving to Yorktown in 1781. In the spring of 1781 they landed at Newport News and raided inland as far as Big Bethel.

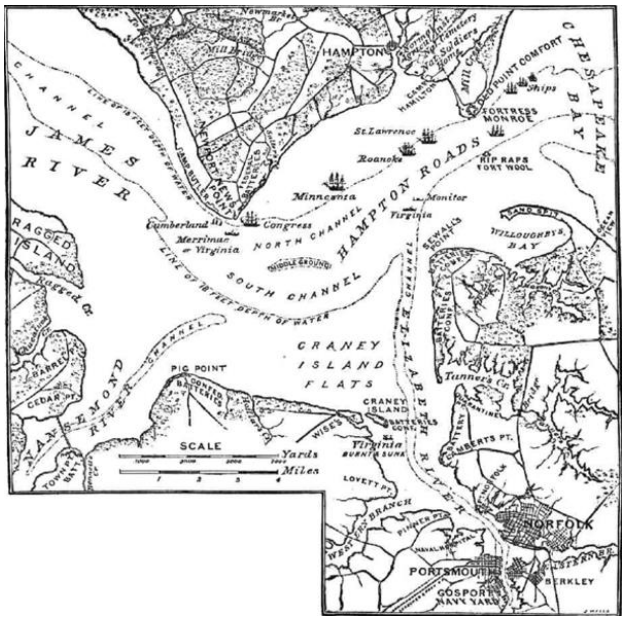
In the War of 1812, a British fleet blockaded Chesapeake Bay in February 1813, and harassed ships from Norfolk to Richmond. In June 1813 they again raided Hampton. During 1814 the British fleet ranged up the Chesapeake Bay, raiding Washington and bombarding Baltimore. The Treaty of Ghent ended the fighting, but it was an uneasy peace afterwards, with concerns that fighting might start once again.

In 1816 the French military engineer, Brig.-Gen. Simon Bernard, arrived and was immediately given a commission in the U.S. Army. The Bernard Board was given the task of securing the American coastline. Hampton Roads was a most important component of a coastal defense, and the key to Hampton Roads was Old Point Comfort, the long, narrow, hook-shaped sand spit projecting into Chesapeake Bay. The tip of Old Point Comfort touches the north side of the ship channel. Hampton Roads, which stretches from Old Point Comfort to the mouth of the James River at Newport News, is an incomparable anchoring place. A fortification at Old Point Comfort would protect the anchorage of our navy and close the gateway of waterborne attacks on Norfolk, Hampton, Portsmouth, Newport News, Suffolk and Richmond. It would also dominate the approach to Washington.

The width of the channel at Old Point Comfort is about one mile, more than the range of early 19th-Century cannon. The Bernard Board recommended a supplementary fort be built on the Rip Raps shoal on the south side of the channel. The two forts would provide a cross-fire in the channel. The fort at Old Pointe Comfort was started in 1819 and was completed in 1834, and was named after James Monroe, 5th U.S. President. The

polygon fort had 7 fronts and 7 bastions and covered 63 acres of ground. The much smaller Rip Raps fort was planned as a tower battery with 3 tiers of casements, mounting 232 guns, and covering 15 acres.

Work was begun in 1819 but was slow. It was to be named after John C. Calhoun, Secretary of War under Monroe, although it was usually called the Rip Raps fort. During the Civil War on March 18, 1862, it was renamed Wool, after Maj-Gen. John E. Wool, Mexican War hero. Wool was also the commander of Fort Monroe during portions of 1861 and 1862. Although it was still unfinished, its function to provide cross-fire was unimportant, since the U.S. Naval Fleet was stationed off Fort Monroe after the Norfolk Navy Yard was abandoned to the Confederates. Instead the guns of Ft. Wool were turned away from the channel and towards the Confederate batteries on Sewall's Point.



The batteries on the point were the most forward of all Confederate batteries, and could harass ships plying between Ft. Monroe and Newport News. They also provided observation of activities at Hampton Roads and Chesapeake Bay. An experimental rifled gun, the Sawyer gun, was mounted at Ft. Wool on May 30, 1861, and could easily fire a 48-pound shell over the 2.5 miles to entrenchments at Sewall's Point.

Gen. Benjamin Butler had authorized the gun and its civilian inventor, Sylvanus Sawyer, to conduct the experiment. This of course caused friction at Ft. Monroe where a Capt. Dyer preferred charges against Butler, there being a clause in army regulations forbidding interference by any officer with the Ordinance Department.

Firing from the Sawyer gun continued through June, July and August. Plans to land Union troops against Sewall's Point were abandoned because of the Rebel's 29 guns that included eighteen 32-pounders, six 9-inch guns, two rifled 32-pounders, and three 42-pounder carronades. Ft. Wool by comparison had only 10 guns: seven 8-inch columbiads, two rifled 42-pounders, and the Sawyer gun on the wharf. Regular firing occurred over the next 6 months.

On March 8th and 9th came the great Battle of Hampton Roads with the Merrimack and the Monitor. Although the fight was a draw, it was assumed the Merrimack would come out again. However when it appeared the Merrimac would be laid up for some time, the 100,000-man Army of the Potomac was landed at Ft. Monroe and Newport News from March 17 to April 1, 1862. Gen. McClellan asked for naval support but Commodore Goldsborough concentrated the fleet at Hampton Roads, fearing the Merrimack would come out.

On April 11th, the Merrimack did make her second appearance at Hampton Roads. The Monitor however was under orders to remain under the protection of the forts. And thus began one of the greatest stalemates in American history. McClellan's 100,000 men sat before Yorktown, while Goldsborough's fleet of 25 vessels with 140 guns, maintained a vigil at Hampton Roads. McClellan would not attack Yorktown without more naval support, and Goldsborough would not send any more naval support as long as the Merrimack was

lurking near Hampton Roads. After three weeks, Lincoln came to Ft. Monroe on May 6th to meet with Gen. Wool and Goldsborough. The joint decision to eliminate the Merrimack from the equation, was to eliminate its base of operation.

On May 8th the Monitor and a group of gunboats attacked Sewall's Point in preparation for a troop landing, but then retreated when the Merrimack came out. It was then decided to land troops where the Merrimack could not oppose the landing. Ocean View on the Chesapeake Bay shore was selected as the site for a landing attempt. In order to oppose the landing, the Merrimack would need to run the channel between Forts Monroe and Wool. Goldsborough had added two huge experimental guns at Ft. Monroe: a 15-inch smoothbore Rodman and a 12-inch Dyer rifle. Additionally he had six merchant ships fitted as rams.

On the evening of May 9th, a successful landing was made at Ocean View, unopposed by the Merrimack. As the Union column advanced, the Confederates abandoned Norfolk and Portsmouth and set fire to the Navy Yard. Norfolk was surrendered by the mayor, and the Merrimack was blown up at Craney Island by the Confederates. Goldsborough then hastened ships up the York and James Rivers to support McClellan. Captured by the column at Sewall's Point were 38 mounted batteries, none spiked, and consisting of three 80-pound rifles, seven 9-inch smoothbores, twenty-two 32-pounders, and six 42-pound carronades. There were seven dismounted batteries. The Confederates were preparing four 80-pounder rifled guns to challenge the Sawyer gun at Ft. Wool.

For the next year, Ft. Wool also served as a prison for about 50-60 prisoners. Work resumed on completing the fort, but was stopped in 1864 by which time, all guns had been removed. Work was resumed in the Spanish-American War when reinforced batteries accommodated six 6-inch disappearing rifles. In World War I, the fort was garrisoned and a submarine net was laid between it and Ft. Monroe. During the Second World War the fort was armed with 3-inch, 6-inch and anti-aircraft guns. In 1967 the fort was turned over to the state of Virginia.

Among the famous people who have visited or spent time at Ft. Wool are: Lafayette, Robert E. Lee, President Andrew Jackson, President John Tyler, Lincoln and of course the ghosts of Butler, Sawyer and Capt. Dyer.

(from a paper by Chester Bradley entitled OPERATIONS AT FT. WOOL DURING THE CIVIL WAR)



Fort Wool after deactivation after WWII

150TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE H.L. HUNLEY MISSION

Monday, February 17, 2014, Presidents' Day, also happened to be the 150th anniversary of the first successful mission of a combat submarine. The Confederate submarine, the *Hunley,* sank the *U.S.S. Housatonic* in Charleston harbor. The *Hunley* is presently being conserved in an immersion tank in Charleston. Over the past decade a number of artifacts have been conserved and are on display. The state of South Carolina recently announced that a permanent museum will be established about ¼ mile away from the present site of the facility where the *Hunley* is presently located.

The remains of the 3rd crew were recovered from the sub, and using forensic anthropology, the faces of the crew have been reconstructed from their skulls. An honor

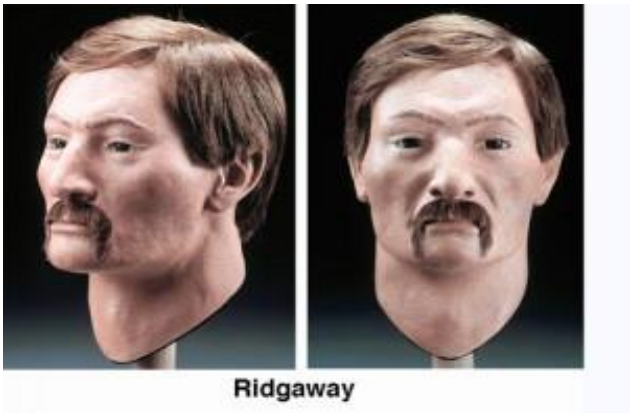
guard of Confederate re-enactors was present on the anniversary date, and the guard was changed every 30 minutes throughout the day. A sunset memorial service was held at a church at the launch site of the submarine on its final mission.

One of the crew members was Joseph Ridgaway who was born in 1833 on the East Shore of Maryland. His father was a sea captain, so Joseph became an experienced seaman at age 16. He joined the Confederate Navy on August 29, 1862 in Richmond, VA, and was assigned to the *CSS Indian Chief* in Charleston Harbor. Initially, Ridgaway was one of the crank operators on the submarine, but in early 1864 Dixon (sub commander) promoted Joseph to second in command.

Ridgaway was older and was one of the most experienced sailors on the Hunley. He may have demonstrated that he understood the importance of the ballast system. In his eighth position, he was responsible for securing the aft hatch and manning the seventh crank, the seacock and the flywheel. Most important, Ridgaway was in charge of the aft pump. Not keeping the appropriate levels of water in the open or topless forward and aft ballast tanks had proven to be a fatal error for a previous crew. The task had to be performed precisely and in coordination with Dixon, who controlled the forward ballast tank.

Ridgaway's remains were found associated with a slouch hat, wooden pipe and a pencil. He also wore around his neck the ID tag of a Union soldier named Ezra Chamberlin, who had died in the battle of Morris Island in 1863. Some sailors from the CSS Indian Chief served on picket duty on Morris Island, so Ridgaway may have picked up the tag while on picket duty.

Ridgaway was 5 feet 10 inches tall. After he was lost at sea, his friend brought his personal effects to his family in Maryland. His friend eventually married Elizabeth, one of Joseph's four sisters. Joseph was positively identified through DNA match from a maternal relative, namely Elizabeth. Her grave was in Drexel Hill in Pennsylvania, and with permission a a great-granddaughter, a DNA sample was obtained.



(Information from the Friends of Hunley)

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS

I received an email from a long-standing, long distance member of the CDCWRT, namely, Bruce Venter. Bruce is now the President of the Richmond Civil War Round Table, a position of honor for a Yankee, especially a Yankee who likes Judson Kilpatrick!! Bruce extends a warm welcome to CDCWRT members to attend meetings of the RCWRT if they are in the area. The RCWRT meets on the 2nd Tuesday of the month at the First Presbyterian Church, 4602 Cary Street Road, Richmond. They meet all year round and have a website, www.rcwrt.org. Older members may recall meeting Bruce on the tour of Mosby's Confederacy.

If you needed another reason to see George Clooney in the movie, *The Monuments Men,* go to Ancestry.com. The movie is a fairly accurate docudrama about a small select group of soldiers in WWII who were responsible for identifying, protecting, and repatriating art work that the Nazis had stolen and secluded. Clooney is Lincoln's half first cousin, five times removed. Both figures are linked to Lincoln's maternal grandmother, Lucy Hanks.



The Cavalry Charge of Lt. Henry B. Hidden, painted by Victor Nehlig, 1862.

On March 9, 1862, a small detachment composed of 14 dragoons from Co. H of the 1st New York Cavalry launched a valiant charge against 1 150-man element of Gen. Joe Johnson's infantry. The Union men were led by a youthful, well-connected, New York City-born Lt. Henry Hidden.

The Confederates were menacing the site of a bridge that Union forces were building at the Sangster Railroad Depot near Fairfax Station, VA. Hidden's surprise thrust initially scattered the larger force, and the dragoons captured 13 men. But at the peak of the brief and furious action, a bullet struck Hidden in the neck, killing him. He was only 23, and the outnumbered dragoons quickly fell into enemy hands. The Battle of Sangster Station might have been entirely forgotten, had it not been for the large canvas that painter Victor Nehlig (1830-1909) exhibited at the National Academy of Design in 1863.

The action occurred on the same day at the duel between the Monitor and the Virginia, and one day after the Battle of Pea Ridge. The newspapers had much more significant stories to report on, but the Hidden family had the means to fund this project so that the story of Henry and his small band would be remembered. The result created an immediate stir and generated a lasting memory.

In an era of war art that romanticized reassuring depictions of stoic cavalier officers and lounging enlisted men safely gathered around tents and campfires, Nehlig's painting cast a new light on the harsh realities of war,that depicted genuine danger. Here was modern war in contemporary art. America was yearning for a level of history painting equivalent to the conflict it was experiencing.

The painting was donated to the Historical Society in 1875 by Hidden's brother-in-law, William H. Webb. The Webb family were prominent shipbuilders, and wanted Henry to be remembered. In 1890, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* published an engraving of the skirmish in its publication, ***The Soldier in Our Civil War.*** Poet, William Cullen Bryant, published a poem called "First to Fall" inspired and dedicated to Hidden. Nehlig would take on a much larger theme: the 1862 Battle of Antietam.

As for Lt. Hidden, his bravery, sacrifice and lost promise earned him a significant place in art and poetry. His action also earned him a place in history, for scholars generally acknowledge Henry B. Hidden to be the first Union cavalry officer killed in action in the Civil War.