



The Dispatch
Newspaper of the

CAPITAL DISTRICT CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

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MARY SURRETT FOUND GUILTY! SCHEDULED TO HANG TOMORROW



(JULY 6, 1865) Pictured above is Mary Surratt and the boarding house she owned where the Lincoln conspiracy was discussed. After a trial in which hundreds of witnesses appeared, the military commission held its last session of June 29 and then retired to deliberate. The judges presented their findings to President Andrew Johnson, who approved them on July 5. Major General John Hartranft, Commander of the Old Arsenal Penitentiary, walked from cell to cell and read aloud the sentences to Lewis Powell, Mary Surratt, David Herold, and George Atzerodt. They had been found guilty and will be hanged tomorrow between the hours of 10:00 A.M. and 2:00 P.M. Last minute pleas by Mary's lawyers and her daughter, Anna are being made.

**MAY MEETING
FRIDAY, MAY 14th**

**Mary Surratt – An Accomplice to
John Wilkes Booth
Kate Larson**

**Guilderland Public Library
Western Ave. (Route 20) Guilderland**

Social Hour	6:00 pm-7:00 pm
Business Meeting	7:00 pm-7:30 pm
Presentation	7:30 pm-8:30 pm
Q&A	8:30 pm-9:30 pm

CDCWRT MEETING

The next meeting of the CDCWRT will be on Friday, May 14, 2010. Our special guest speaker will be Kate Clifford Larson, historian and author, and her topic will be “Mary Surratt – An Accomplice to John Wilkes Booth.”

Dr. Larson’s presentation will be based on her 2008 book entitled The Assassin’s Accomplice: Mary Surratt and the Plot to Kill Abraham Lincoln.

Though she was the first woman to be executed by the Federal government of the United States for her participation in the plot to assassinate President Lincoln, Mary Surratt’s image as the victim in a wicked Radical Republican game of vengeance stood unchallenged for generations. Since the 1970s, scholars have unearthed damning evidence that sustains the guilty verdict, yet the myth of her innocence, like that of Dr. Samuel Mudd, persists. Dr. Larson will discuss these findings and highlight some of the reasons why so many remain steadfast in their refusal to acknowledge Surratt’s complicity.

Surratt, a Confederate sympathizer, ran the boarding house in Washington where the conspirators--including her rebel son, John Surratt--met to plan the assassination. When a military

tribunal convicted her for her crimes and sentenced her to death, five of the nine commissioners petitioned President Andrew Johnson to show mercy on Surratt because of her sex and age. Unmoved, Johnson refused--Surratt, he said, "kept the nest that hatched the egg."

Kate Clifford Larson, PhD., is an historian and author of The Assassin’s Accomplice: Mary Surratt and the Plot to Kill Abraham Lincoln (Basic Books, June 2008). With degrees from Simmons College and Northeastern University, and a doctorate in history from the University of New Hampshire, Larson specializes in 19th and 20th century U.S. Women’s and African American History. Dr. Larson is also a leading Harriet Tubman scholar and the author of Bound For the Promised Land: Harriet Tubman, Portrait of an American Hero (Ballantine/One World, 2004), one of the first non-juvenile Tubman biographies published in six decades. She has been working as a consultant and interpretive specialist for numerous museum, community, and public history initiatives related to Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad in Maryland and New York, and also served as the consulting historian for the National Park Service’s Harriet Tubman Special Resource Study, resulting in the introduction of the Harriet Tubman National Historical Park Act, now awaiting approval in Congress. Dr. Larson has been a guest instructor at numerous professional development workshops for teachers, including National Endowment for the Humanities and Teaching American History programs, on the topics of American Slavery, the Underground Railroad, Abolition, and Harriet Tubman. She teaches at both Simmons College and Wheelock College in Boston. The Assassin’s Accomplice is due out in paperback this spring.

BOARD MEETING

A Board Meeting of the CDCWRT was held on April 12th. The treasurer reported \$2647.81 in the general account and \$5579.79 in the preservation account. At the March meeting there was \$141 in book and t-shirt sales and \$35 in donations. Membership reported there are 107 paid members and 2 lifetime members. This is much different than the archaic membership list of almost 200 members that was previously used. A final request has been made to unpaid members.

The paring down on unpaid membership mailings and the use of email mailings for many organizational mailings and some membership mailings will save money and allow the RT to maintain dues at the present level.

A postal cancellation is being arranged for the 147th Anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg. Up-coming events were discussed.

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.

Friday, May 14, 2010 is the regular meeting of the CDCWRT. Kate Larson will present a program entitled, “Mary Surratt – An Accomplice to John Wilkes Booth.”

Saturday & Sunday, June 5-6, 2010 marks the return of Civil War Weekend at the King Solomon Temple in Troy. Several years ago this event was moved to the park in Troy. The following year, no group wanted to assume the role as organizer, and the Troy Civil War Weekend ended. Now it is back at its original site. The CDCWRT will be present manning a table.

Friday, June 11, 2010 is the regular meeting of the CDCWRT. Patrick Schroeder, historian at Appomattox Court House, will return to present a living history program entitled, “George Peers, County Clerk of Appomattox.”

July 2010 – no meeting scheduled

Saturday & Sunday, August 21-22, 2010 is the Civil War Weekend at Schuyler Flatts. The CDCWRT picnic may be held at the site on this weekend.

Friday, September 10, 2010 is the regular meeting of the CDCWRT. The speaker will be our own resident historian, Bob Mulligan. Bob will present

his first person portrayal of Corporal Tanner, who was the recorder of events in the Petersen House the day Lincoln died.

Friday, October 8, 2010 is the regular meeting of the CDCWRT. Chris Kelly will present a program entitled, “The Civil War Art of Thomas Nast and Winslow Homer.”

Friday, November 12, 2010 is the scheduled date for the regular meeting of the CDCWRT.

Friday, December 10, 2010 is the regular meeting of the CDCWRT. This will also be our holiday meeting. The scheduled speaker is TBA.

APRIL’S MEETING

Folks attending CDCWRT’s April 12th meeting became acquainted with Hauptmann Joseph De Schmidt of the Garibaldi Guards, the 39th New York Volunteer Infantry Regiment. Willi Runk, authentically garbed in the 39th’s distinctive Italian influenced uniform, recounted with a realistic guttural accent the details of De Schmidt’s early life in Prussia, the development of his democratic ideals and his desire for German unity. His involvement in the failed German Revolution of 1848 and subsequent exile to Switzerland eventually led De Schmidt to join thousands of other Germans relocating to the United States. Once settled in New York City De Schmidt joined a turnverein, a traditional German athletic club that also emphasized marksmanship.

Horrified at the break up of his new country after the secession of the Confederate states, he enlisted in the Garibaldi Guards, attracted by Colonel Frederick D’tassy’s promotion of the Guards as a rifle regiment to be equipped with the latest firearms. The 39th New York was a three year regiment composed of immigrants, mainly from European countries with some French Canadians as well. Its companies were divided by nationality: German, Swiss, Hungarian, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese and French Canadians, the regiment earning the nickname “Lincoln’s Foreign Legion.” Captains were bilingual, speaking both English and the language of their company. De Schmidt was elected Hauptmann or Captain of Company B, made up of German speaking Swiss.

Once in Washington, Colonel D'tassy proved to be an exceptionally corrupt, dishonest and unethical officer. Instead of issuing the promised rifles, he provided smooth bore guns whose ramrods were rusted, outraging the captains who were responsible for adequately equipping their men. After they filed a protest petition, D'tassy retaliated by reassigning these captains to companies where they would be unable to communicate with their men. The regimental discontent was so great that it led to a mutinous march that got them as far as Washington's Long Bridge where cavalry turned them back.

Shortly after at Bull Run, the regiment was held in reserve until late afternoon when they were moved forward to help cover the Union retreat, then retreating in good order themselves. Back in Washington, not only was the morale of the 39th adversely affected by the corrupt dealings of its colonel, but discontented officers began transferring out. De Schmidt, torn between concern for his family and the possibility of joining another regiment, resigned apparently returning to his family.

To make matters worse for this unfortunate regiment, they were assigned to the Shenendoah Valley, with the result that they were including in the humiliating surrender at Harpers Ferry in September 1862 and internment at the infamous Camp Douglas in Chicago. After great suffering from the camp's deplorable conditions, two months later they were ordered back to the defenses of Washington.

By the spring of 1863 D'tassy was dishonorably discharged, sentenced to Sing Sing Prison for a year. The 39th was a shadow of its original size as the result of deaths, desertions, and transfers. Finally the opportunity came to overcome the humiliation of Harpers Ferry when they were ordered to march to Gettysburg with the Army of the Potomac in June 1863. There on the second day, they helped to secure Cemetery Ridge and Culps Hill. A day later they were moved to the stone wall to help to turn back Pickett's charge. Self respect was finally restored.

The 39th New York continued in combat with the Army of the Potomac at Mine Run, The Wilderness, Spotsylvania, Cold Harbor, Petersburg and finally at Appomatox Court House. With the coming of peace, the remnant of the Garibaldi Guards, containing only a few of its original recruits, marched in the Grand

Review. Willi Runk, using the persona of Joseph De Schmidt and an excellent power point presentation, gave us the story of one of the Union Army's more unusual regiments.

This excellent summary of the meeting was provided by our secretary, Mary Ellen Johnson.

NEW YORK AND THE DEFENSES OF WASHINGTON

By Steve Muller

This May marks the 149th anniversary of the beginning of the construction of the extensive defensive works built by the Union to defend Washington, D.C. By the end of the Civil War these defenses comprised 68 major forts and batteries with emplacements for more than 1,000 guns, as well as about 100 lesser fortifications. All were made of earth. The defenses formed a ring 37 miles in circumference around the capital, with the most numerous and strongest positions across the Potomac River in Virginia. Artillery deployed at the defenses ranged from six-pounder field artillery to 15-inch Rodman guns capable of throwing a 500-pound cannonball a distance of three miles.

President Lincoln, still hoping to avoid a conflict, was initially cautious in responding to early Confederate provocations beginning with the shelling of Ft. Sumter in mid-April. As the situation deteriorated, and spurred by Virginia's decision to secede on April 17, Lincoln finally ordered Union troops to move into Alexandria, Arlington and Fairfax, Va. on the night of May 23-24. (Ironically, voters in Arlington and Alexandria voted against secession in the Virginia secession referendum.)

As New York was one of the first states to answer Lincoln's call for volunteers to defend the Union, it should not be a surprise that troops from New York played a major role in establishing the new fortifications, and as the state providing more troops than any other, New York also provided many of the garrison troops for these fortifications during the war.

In an incident that is well known to members of the Round Table, Col. Elmer Ellsworth of the 11th New York (Fire Zouaves) was killed during the initial occupation of Alexandria. One of the first forts built in

Alexandria was named for him. Fort Ellsworth was constructed by the 11th New York itself, and later manned by a series of New York units including the 17th New York Infantry, 26th New York Infantry, 11th Independent Battery New York Light Artillery, 12th Independent Battery New York Light Artillery and 2nd 3rd, and 15th New York Heavy Artillery.

During the Civil War forts were often named after the officers that were in charge of their construction or after officers killed in combat. Forts that were named for New Yorkers in this way included:

- Fort Corcoran (Arlington): Named for Col. Michael Corcoran, 69th New York State Militia, whose soldiers constructed the fort in May 1861. Father Thomas Mooney, the Roman Catholic chaplain assigned to the 69th, was reassigned by the church after he baptized one of the guns at the fort and christened it with holy water. The fort also served as a Signal Corps station.
- Fort Bennett (Arlington): Named for Capt. Michael P. Bennett, 28th New York Infantry, who supervised the fort's construction.
- Fort Willard (Alexandria): Named for Col. George Willard, 125th New York Volunteer Infantry, killed at Gettysburg. Manned during the war by the 10th and 15th New York Heavy Artillery.
- Fort O'Rourke (Alexandria): Named for Col. Patrick O'Rourke, 140th New York Infantry, also killed at Gettysburg and manned by the 15th New York Heavy Artillery
- Fort Haggerty (Arlington): Named for Lt. Col. James Haggerty, 69th New York State Militia, died of wounds received at First Battle of Bull Run. Manned by 69th New York State Militia and 2nd New York Heavy Artillery.
- Battery Cameron (Washington): Named for Col. James Cameron, 79th New York (Highlanders), also killed at First Battle of Bull Run.
- Fort Davis (Washington): Named for Col. Benjamin F. Davis, 6th New York Cavalry, killed at Brandy Station, June 1863.

In addition, two forts were named for New York cities – Fort Albany (Arlington) and Fort Saratoga (Washington) – and Battery Kemble (Washington) was named for Gouverneur Kemble, pre-war superintendent of the West Point Foundry in Cold Spring, N.Y.

Several other forts have interesting New York

connections. Fort Stevens, attacked by Confederate General Jubal Early during the climax of his July 1864 raid on Washington, was defended by a hurriedly assembled force of Union soldiers and civilians. Union casualties totaled 59 killed and 145 wounded. There are 40 graves at the national cemetery site at Fort Stevens, including soldiers from the 43rd, 77th and 122nd New York Infantry and 49th New York Cavalry.

Fort Lyon in Alexandria was built by the 27th New York Infantry in 1861 and manned during 1863 by German immigrant soldiers of the 3rd Battalion of the 15th New York Heavy Artillery. The battalion was known for its singing, lager beer and numerous pet dogs. In June 1863 an accidental explosion set off eight tons of powder that killed 21 men and destroyed a section of the fort. The accident was so spectacular that President Lincoln and Secretary of War Stanton visited the fort the next day.

Fort Foote was built on the eastern shore of the Potomac River in Prince George's County, Md., south of Washington to protect the city from a river attack. Secretary of State William Henry Seward's son, Lt. Col. William Henry Seward, supervised the construction of the fort 1863-65 and served there as well. The fort was constructed by the 2nd Battalion, 9th New York Heavy Artillery, and was garrisoned by elements of that unit until the end of the war. The fort's riverside location and its two 15" Rodman guns made it a favorite site for visits by Washington dignitaries. However, the site also made its garrison prone to malaria and typhoid. Lt. Col. Seward was ill for many months with malaria, finally returning to Auburn, N.Y., for recovery.

Round Table members visited Fort Ward in Alexandria during a recent trip to Washington. This fort, one of the best-preserved of the remaining forts, was constructed by elements of the 18th, 31st, 32nd, 38th, and 40th New York Infantry and the 15th New York Engineers. During the war it was manned by the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 9th New York Heavy Artillery.

Information for this article is from *Mr. Lincoln's Forts: A Guide to the Civil War Defenses of Washington*, by Benjamin Franklin Cooling III and Walton H. Owen II. Steve Muller lived for a number of years in Arlington, Va., between Fort C.F. Smith and Fort Ethan Allen, and worked for a while not too far from Ft. Corcoran.

**An Essay on “The Blue and the Grey”
– A Poem by Francis Miles Finch
By Robert E. Mulligan, Jr.**

Memorial Day is something of a hobby of mine. As a native New Yorker, of course I support the claim of Waterloo, NY to be the place where the first Decoration Day was observed in 1866.

In the spring of 1867, the women of Columbia, Mississippi decorated the graves of those fallen in the late war: Blue as well as their own Grey. Francis Miles Finch, a kindly, well-educated and literate judge of Ithaca, NY, heard of this incident. He wrote a poem of which a contemporary said: “that all the orations and sermons and appeals for the restoration of kindly feelings between the two sections have been exceeded in real effect upon the national heart, by this poem.”

“Garlands,” “robings of glory,” “laurel,” “lovely laden with flowers” . . . the words and the images were those the Victorians cherished. And the subject of reconciliation appealed “to the better angels of our nature” to use Lincoln’s deathless phrase. For the next generation, this poem was heard every spring, across the entire land, wherever a little girl in a white dress, stood to recite the poetry part of the ceremonies.

So a judge sitting in his cool, quiet library “high above Cayuga’s Waters” wrote a poem in 1867. The year before, a mob in New Orleans rioted against the Yankee-led police and were sternly repressed by a general from Albany. That same year a general from Memphis was busy forming the Ku Klux Klan. A year later, the President of the United States would be impeached for his softness in “punishing” the South.

Four incidents...of which three were vindictive, violent, and rejected the verdict of history... attempted to overturn what had already happened. One incident sought to reconcile, to accept, to forgive, to restate once again in poetic meter, what Lincoln had said in his First Inaugural: “Suppose you go to war. You cannot fight always.”

Remember our honored dead on Memorial Day, May 31, 2010.

THE SIGNAL CORPS

By Ray Wemple

I have been by my fellow Civil War Signal Corps enthusiast that a very formal presentation will be made on Memorial Day Weekend, May 30th, 2010 at Forest Lawn Cemetery in Buffalo, NY. This is the resting place of my favorite Civil War soldier, Chief Signal Officer, Brigadier General Albert James Myer. As you know, he was raised by his Aunt Serena in Buffalo, NY after his mother passed away in 1835 and his father left him in charge of his aunt.

His father-in-law, Ebenezer Walden, was a very influential person in the area, being an attorney by practice. He also served as mayor of Buffalo from 1838-1840. He later became the Erie County Court Judge and owned much property in that county. Myer inherited some of the Judge’s riches when the Judge passed away on November 10, 1857, without a will.

There is a Walden-Myer Mausoleum at the cemetery and the site already has a NYS Historical Marker crediting Gen. Myer with being the founder of the Union Army Signal Corps and the National Weather Service. In addition to the new plaque presentation, a full day of events will take place at the “Muster in the Meadow.” The Chief Signal Officer of the U.S. Army will be present to make brief comments about the Signal Corps and signal soldiers in general. Demonstrations by Civil War Signal Corps re-enactors will take place throughout the day under the command of Lt. Mark Hageman, Signal Officer. There will also be a brief ceremony at the gravesite of Ben Maryniak, local historian, Buffalo CWRT member and friend of the CDCWRT. Ben died this past year. Any member wanting more details should contact me.

LINCOLN MEN AND SONS OF DIXIE: OUR CW ANCESTORS

Several years ago Matt George suggested this column. Letters and family histories were requested from members of our Round Table. Several families were highlighted, but then the supply of letters ceased. As editor, I revived this column in the newsletter of the Rufus Barringer CWRT in my winter home in Southern Pines, NC. It seems there are either more preserved letters in the South, or Southerners are more proud of their ancestors! In any event, I have received

a number of letters over the past several months. Many of them have never been published, and I would like to share them with the CDCWRT memberships. Some deal with local battles in North Carolina, and some are about Union regiments.

Nathalie Scott joined the RBCWRT in September 2009. On the maternal side of her family, there are several relatives with Civil War connections. The first is a cousin from Buford, SC. Letter from Beverly Brantley to his sister:

Dear Sister Ashland May 14th/62

We have had another long march from Fredericksburg to this place which is twelve miles from Richmond on the Richmond end of the Potomac line. The march was not as long as disagreeable. We left Ducksburg (?) on the 8th. It commenced raining the night before we started and rained steadily during the whole march until we got to Milford Station where we took the cars for Richmond and rode 26 miles in the wet clothes at night (cold as thunder) on platform cars. I will never forget. We had no blankets and we had to sit by fires all night trying to keep dry. We started on the second days march wet and hungry. No sleep. The second night was the same and the third. We reached here day before yesterday and slept five nights without blankets. The blankets got here this morning and I suppose we will be here for some time. I have just been called off for a few minute but during that time we have received orders to cook three days rations. To move this evening but where to is more than I can tell. When we first started it was for Yorktown but I don't know where we are bound now but will write as soon as possible. Give my love to all. And write soon.

Your affectionate brother Bev

Beverly Brantley was killed in the Battle of Bull Run (Second Manassas) in 1862 at the age of 18.

The second letter is a long letter to Dr. F.P. Porcher from Dr. Thomas Lewis Ogier (1810-1900), dated November 7, 1889 in Charleston, S.C. Dr. Ogier is the great-great-grandfather of our Round Table member. Dr. Porcher had asked about Dr. Ogier's professional life as a medical student in Paris from 1830-1833 . I have selected some sentences from the long letter that are of general interest.

“- - it was then (July 1830) that the French revolution and the expulsion of Charles X occurred. For three days the streets were barricaded and the hospital filled to overflowing with wounded men, women and children. Every kind of wound was to be seen, -gun shot, saber, bayonet, and contused wounds in every part of the body. They were indeed glorious times for the medical student - -.The Asiatic Cholera suddenly broke out in Paris—the hospital were crowded and many of the nurses and attendants were swept off whilst attending the sick. — I was just then taken sick with symptoms of cholera myself.

Magendie (one of the greatest physiologists in the world) ordered me to my room.He stopped my simple diet and ordered hot flannels to the abdomen, weak brandy and laudanum injections— and stopped my simple diet and ordered tenderloin steak and a pint of old Bordeaux wine. —I felt better after the first meal, and I have like Bordeaux ever since. Like other epidemics, the cholera became more manageable in about four or five weeks from its commencement. Occasionally we had a spare bed for six or eight hours.Upon leaving Paris I visited relatives in England and then came home and at once began practice, was successful, made a fortune, expected to be at ease in my old days. The Civil War came on, got the appointment of Chief Surgeon of the troops in the field, then Medical Director of South Carolina, Georgia and Florida. When Charleston was evacuated we went out with General Hardee, marched through North Carolina. Attended the wounded at the battle of Averysboro and Bentonville where many of my young friends were killed and wounded, where Genl. Hardee's only son was killed under the very eyes of his father.

I do not think I had such an anxious time in all my perils in Paris, for here all the wounded were my friends and some my relatives. Soon after the battle of Bentonville when we thought all was right, we got the news of Lee's surrender and Hardee's army was disbanded. My fortune was gone and I had to begin over again and work professionally as hard as ever to support my family, - - so you see I was not to have as easy a time in my old age as I expected.

Thomas Lewis Ogier

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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 \$25. 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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