



The Dispatch
Newspaper of the

CAPITAL DISTRICT CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

PO Box 14871 Albany, NY 12212
www.AlbanyCivilWar.org



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MARY TODD LINCOLN DECLARED INSANE BY COOK COUNTY COURT



Robert Todd Lincoln petitioned the courts today to declare his mother, Mary Todd Lincoln, is *non compos mentis*. The petition states that it would be for her benefit and for the safety of the community that she be confined in the Cook County Hospital or the Illinois State Hospital for the Insane. Robert filled out the petition this morning, May 19, 1875, and the judge signed a warrant for Mary to appear before his court at 2:00 P.M. on the same day. Four physicians stated in letters that she is insane, even though three of them did not actually examine the widow. Counsel was appointed for Mary and the trial began. A number of witnesses from the hotel where the widow was staying, testified about her unusual demands and activities. Robert Lincoln then took the stand and testified that he was gravely concerned about his mother's spending habits. He was the last of 17 witnesses. Mary's lawyer presented none. The jury deliberated for ten minutes. Judge Wallace declared the most suitable facility was Bellevue Place.

**MARCH MEETING
FRIDAY, MARCH 11, 2011
WATERVLIET SENIOR CENTER
1541 BROADWAY
WATERVLIET, NY**

**“The Dark Days of Abraham
Lincoln’s Widow”
Jason Emerson**

Social Hour	6:00 – 7:00 p.m.
Business Meeting	7:00 – 7:30 p.m.
Presentation	7:30 – 8:30 p.m.
Questions & Answers	8:30 – 9:00 p.m.
More Socializing	9:00 – 10:00 p.m.

CDCWRT MEETING

The March meeting of the Capital District Civil War Round Table will be on Friday, March 11th. This meeting will be held at the new trial location at the Watervliet Senior Center, 1541 Broadway in Watervliet. Our special guest speaker is Jason Emerson, historian and author. His topic is entitled “The Dark Days of Abraham Lincoln’s Widow, As Revealed by Her Own Letters.”

“Written in 1927 but barred from timely publication by the Lincoln family, The Dark Days of Abraham Lincoln’s Widow, as Revealed by Her Own Letters is based on nearly two dozen intimate letters written between Mary Lincoln and her close friend Myra Bradwell mainly during the former’s 1875 incarceration in an insane asylum. By the 1920s most accounts of Mrs. Lincoln focused on her negative qualities and dismissed her as “crazy.” Bradwell’s granddaughter Myra Helmer Pritchard wrote this distinctly sympathetic book at the behest of her mother, who wished to vindicate Mary Lincoln in the public eye by printing the private correspondence. Pritchard fervently defends Mrs. Lincoln’s conduct and sanity, arguing that she was not insane but rather the victim of an overzealous son who had

his mother committed.

The manuscript and letters were thought to have been destroyed, but fortunately the Lincolns’ family lawyer stored copies in a trunk, where historian Jason Emerson discovered them in 2005. While leaving the manuscript intact, Emerson has enhanced it with an introduction and detailed annotations. He fills in factual gaps; provides background on names, places, and dates; and analyzes Pritchard’s interpretations, making clear where she was right and where her passion to protect Mrs. Lincoln led to less than meticulous research and incorrect conclusions.

Following one of the most revered and reviled, famous and infamous of the First Ladies, this book provides a unique perspective of Mary Lincoln’s post-White House years, with an emphasis on her commitment to a sanitarium. Emerson’s contributions make this volume a valuable addition to the study of the Lincoln family. This fascinating work provides a chance to read an intriguing interpretation of the former First Lady that predates nearly every other book written about her.”

Jason Emerson is an independent historian and a free-lance writer living in Cazenovia, NY. He has published numerous articles and reviews in popular magazines and peer-review journals. His first book, entitled The Madness of Mary Lincoln, was published in 2007. It was followed by Lincoln the Inventor. Due for release this fall is Giant in the Shadows: the Life of Robert T. Lincoln.

He has worked as a National Park Service Ranger at the Lincoln Home National Historic Site, the Gettysburg National Military Park and at the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial (the Arch) in St. Louis.

Several of his books will be available for purchase and autograph at the meeting.

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. Details of Sesquicentennial Civil War events can be found on the web-site:

www.nycivilwar150.hotmail.com

Friday, April 8, 2011 is the regular meeting of the CDCWRT. Our speaker will be Maj. Joseph Scott of the United States Military Academy at West Point. He will speak on the topic of Lowe's balloons and their use during the Civil War. This meeting will be held at the Watervliet Senior Center.

From Friday, April 8 through Sunday, April 10, 2011 is the Underground Railroad Conference which will be held at Russell Sage College in Troy, NY.

Saturday, April 16, 2011 is Civil War Living History Day sponsored by the Schenectady County Historical Society and the Schenectady County Public Library. It is from 10:00am to 4:00pm at the Society's Mabee Farm located in Rotterdam Junction.

Friday, May 13, 2011 is the regular meeting of the CDCWRT. Our scheduled speaker is Michael Aikey of the Military Heritage Museum at Saratoga. Mike's topic is based on an article he wrote for the New York Archives Magazine entitled "Father Abraham's Boys: The Union and New York sent its share of men to fight in the Civil War, but some of them were children."

On Sunday, May 15, 2011 the Department of New York of the Sons of Union Veterans will commemorate the death of Col. Elmer Ellsworth, the first Union officer killed in the

Civil War. Activities are being planned by the Col. George L. Willard Camp No. 154, Albany, NY, SUV and will include a re-enactment of his funeral at Ellsworth monument and gravesite at Hudson View Cemetery in Watervliet, NY from 9:00 – 12:30pm. The CDCWRT will be participating and will sponsor a 150th Commemorative Postal Cancellation. The public is invited to attend. There are more details on the Sesquicentennial web-site.

Friday, June 10, 2011 is the regular meeting of the CDCWRT. Our speaker will be Patrick Schroeder, historian at the National Park at Appomattox. His presentation is entitled "The Fire Zouaves at Bull Run: Heroes or Humbugs?"

Saturday, August 20th and Sunday, August 21st are the dates for the Civil War Heritage Days at Schuyler Flatts.

November 4th and 5th are the dates for our conference on New York in the Civil War. Mark those new calendars now, so that we can have a 90% membership attendance!

BOARD MEETING

The February Board Meeting was held on February 14th. The treasurer reported \$2277.62 in the general account and \$5831.33 in the preservation account. Donations collected for the Sue Knost Memorial Fund now total \$1830 and will continue to be collected until the November 4th and 5th, 2011 conference in her memory. That conference will be held the NYS Military Heritage Museum in Saratoga.

The CDCWRT has three local events in the next several months that will require volunteers to man tables and help in set-up. The events include the Siena College Living History Day on April 9th, the Schenectady Historical Society Civil War Living History Day on April 16th, and the Ellsworth Funeral event in Mechanicsville on May 15th.

FEBRUARY MEETING

CDCWRT members were treated to a double bill as Kate Larson and Scott Christianson shared the program *Harriet Tubman and Charles Nalle on the Eve of the Civil War* at our February 11th meeting. The topics meshed perfectly, the perfect choice for Black History Month.

Kate Larson, author of *Harriet Tubman: Portrait of an American Hero*, began by explaining she had been discouraged by other scholars from researching Harriet Tubman's life because after all, what primary sources of information would be left behind by an illiterate former slave? Larson managed to discover extensive information relating to Tubman in Southern archives as well as among the papers of England abolitionists.

Born in 1822 on the eastern Chesapeake shore, Harriet Tubman was one of a large slave family owned by a doctor. Her early years were documented in court papers detailing a lawsuit between stepfather and stepson. At age six she was hired out to work for an abusive man, bearing lifelong scars resulting from his cruel treatment. A life changing injury occurred at age 13 when a heavy weight thrown by an enraged overseer at a runaway slave struck Harriet instead, leaving her senseless for a day. Upon regaining consciousness she was ordered out to work in the fields, only to collapse a second time. Her brain trauma resulted in headaches, visual problems, seizures and visions which sometimes made her feel as if she were floating over the earth. Becoming a deeply religious person, she learned to accommodate her disability.

Hired out to work in the area where her father was, at the various jobs she was made to do, Harriet acquired survival skills in the woods and navigation techniques, becoming exceptionally physically strong as she labored. It was at this time that she married John Tubman. 1849 was a watershed in her life when she learned she and two of her brothers were to be sold by their debt ridden master's impoverished widow. The three of them ran away, documented by an advertisement

seeking their return. The runaways soon came back, having had no idea of where to run.

Harriet still sought freedom and this time, assisted by a white woman who was most likely a Quaker, she reached Philadelphia, joyous to be free at last. Determined to rescue family and friends, she made approximately 13 trips south, bringing out almost 70 family members and friends including both her parents and four brothers. Aiding her rescue operations were both white sympathizers and African Americans who helped as Harriet followed different routes in her quest. Most of her escapees crossed into Canada near Niagara Falls and settled there. She passed through the Albany area many times.

As Harriet Tubman's reputation grew she became part of the inner circle of prominent abolitionists who respected her for her courage, intelligence and accomplishments. She also knew Frederick Douglass and John Brown, judging Brown to be a great man. In 1859 William Seward offered her and her family a seven acre farm on the outskirts of Auburn. By 1861 she settled there, becoming a permanent resident in post Civil War years. During the war she went to South Carolina as a spy, assisting in the liberation of 756 slaves and the burning of plantations. In her later years Tubman became a supporter of women's suffrage, angry at Frederick Douglass for his refusal to also support the movement. Her eventful life ended in March 1913.

Scott Christianson, author of *Freeing Charles*, completed the second half of our double program, recounting the local story of Charles Nalle, an escaped slave who had settled in Sand Lake, NY. He was discovered by Horatio Averill, a local lawyer who betrayed him in April 1860 to his owner Blucher Hansbrough of Culpeper, Virginia. In the meantime Charles Nalle moved on to Troy where a network of African Americans provided assistance in getting him resettled, helping him to obtain an excellent job as the coachman for Uri Gilbert, a wealthy local industrialist. Enter Henry Wale, a slave catcher whose expertise was capturing escaped slaves, to be returned under the

provisions of the Fugitive Slave Act. He had been hired to capture and return Charles Nalle to Hansbrough.

Charles Nalle was arrested in Troy while waiting on Mrs. Gilbert's coach. Soon news of his arrest spread and a crowd of both blacks and whites gathered, growing bigger by the minute. By coincidence Harriet Tubman, who was in Troy at this time, put in an appearance at the chaotic scene, moving into the hallway of the building where Nalle was being held. When officials attempted to move Nalle from the building, a melee surrounded the officers and their prisoner with Tubman grabbing onto Nalle, clinging to his clothes, then to his arm, helped by the mob. Finally after a violent tussle the battered and bloody Nalle was freed from the officers' grasp. The liberated slave was next put on board a skiff and rowed across the Hudson to West Troy (now the City of Watervliet). At the water's edge the exhausted man was told to run for his life.

Because news of his escape had been telegraphed across to West Troy, Nalle was immediately put under arrest. Led by Tubman, as many of the Troy mob as possible commandeered the local ferry and any boat available, crossed the river and sought out the location of the building where Nalle had been taken. West Trojans joined the huge crowd, surrounding the building and then storming inside. Shots were fired, the door battered down and finally Nalle was freed. His rescuers raced him down to the Arsenal and from there managed to get him on the road to Schenectady. Finally he reached Amsterdam where he went into hiding. In the end citizens of Troy and West Troy raised funds to purchase Nalle's freedom.

We came away from this program appreciative of the many risks that were taken not only by fleeing slaves, but by both the whites and African Americans who aided them in their flight.

DRIVING AND PARKING DIRECTIONS TO THE WATERVLIET SENIOR CENTER

From the south: Take Interstate 787 north from Albany to exit 8 (Watervliet & Green Island). Turn left at the light on the exit ramp onto 23rd Street. Go 2 blocks to second traffic light and turn left onto Broadway. Go 0.4 miles and arrive at the Center on your right.

From the north: Take Interstate 787 south from Cohoes to exit 8. Turn right onto 23rd Street, In one block at light, turn left onto Broadway as listed above.

From the west: Take any road that intersects 787 (Interstate 90, route 378, route 155, or route 7) and follow the above directions. Or take route 2 (Troy-Schenectady Rd) which become 19th Street into Watervliet, and turn right on Broadway before going over the bridge into Troy.

From the east: look across the river and go.

Parking Options for the Watervliet Senior Center.

There are three parking lots directly behind the Center, and there's another one across 1st Ave. just north of the Center. In addition, one street parking is available on Broadway, 1st Ave. and 15th St. Both these directions and the map are available under the "**Meetings**" section on our web-site:

<http://capitaldistrictcivilwarroundtable.club.officelive.com/default.aspx>

WHO'S MYRA BRADWELL?

Myra Colby Bradwell came from a family of Revolutionary War patriots. Her parents were prominent in the antislavery movement in Illinois. She was intellectually gifted and started to read for the law following her marriage to a young attorney James Bradwell. She was thirty-eight when she took the Illinois bar exam and passed with the highest honors. Her formal application for a law license was denied twice by the Illinois Supreme Court, first "by reason of the disability imposed by your married condition" and then when that logic was questioned on appeal, simply because she was a woman.

When Myra appealed to the United States Supreme Court, the country treated her lawsuit

as a comedy. The press stated the only way she could win, was if all nine justices went crazy. The state of Illinois considered the case such a foregone conclusion that when oral arguments were heard before the Supreme Court in 1873, it did not even send an attorney to make a presentation. The vote was 8 to 1 against Myra with the majority declaring in derogatory language that the idea of a married woman taking on a career independent of her marital duties was “repugnant” and must be resisted. “The Paramount destiny and mission of woman are to fulfill the noble and benign offices of wife and mother. This is the Law of the Creator” read the decision. Only Chief Justice Salmon P. Chase dissented.

(Adapted from The Last Lincolns by Charles Lachman)

UNION HOMECOMING

For 145 years in Zion, NC, five hand dug graves, marked only by small piles of white stones, were the final resting places of five Union soldiers. In October 2010 the Richmond County Historical Society sponsored a memorial service during which five official grave markers were unveiled with the newly identified remains. Among the invited guests were ancestors of the Union soldiers. A color guard of re-enactors from the Sons of Confederate Veterans was appropriately present because ironically, it was the honor of a Confederate soldier that kept the memory of the 5 Union soldiers from vanishing forever.

On March 7, 1865, the five soldiers from Sherman’s Army were foraging near the Lassiter Farm when they encountered remnants of the Richmond Home Guard. Records show that more than 35 Union Army deaths occurred during running skirmishes and scattered house to house fighting that took place in Richmond County in the waning days of the war.

When Daniel Lassiter returned home a few weeks later after the surrender of Joe Johnston’s Army at the Bennett Farm, he learned of the 5 fresh graves. Lassiter expressed sympathy for the deaths of his former enemies, and pledged that the graves would be marked and never disturbed as long as his family owned the farm. The farm was sold in 1974, but the new owner agreed to continue to honor the graves.

In 2008, during a casual conversation with a fellow member of the historical society, Neil Cadieu Jr. learned of the presence of the graves. A campaign was undertaken to try to identify the soldiers and obtain official Army grave markers. Eventually, Army records were able to identify a group of five foragers who had failed to return to the column on March 7, 1865.

They were:

1. Cpl. Reed Alcorn of the 8th Indiana Cavalry
2. Pvt. Matthew Ross of the 8th Indiana Cavalry, from Carroll County, IN, who stood 5 feet 8 inches tall and had just turned 18 years old
3. Pvt. David Woods who was 5 feet 5 inches tall and hailed from Cumberland County, PA and who enlisted on New Years Day 1865
4. Pvt. Henry Stennett from Carlisle, PA who enlisted in Harrisburg on August 26, 1861
5. Pvt. Calvin Simpson, a shoemaker who had also enlisted in Harrisburg in 1862.

Thirty years after the war, the brother of Henry Stennett went to Richmond County searching for his brother’s grave. He was reportedly unsuccessful. The daughter of Calvin Simpson received an \$8 a month death benefit for fifteen years until she died.

Taps were played by a single bugler off in the sunlit pine forest and a three shot volley was fired by the honor guard. In a clearing in the pines the new grave stones were draped in blue cloths. One by one the cloths were removed. Two of the stones were unveiled by an ancestor of the soldier. Just like our Saratoga soldier, these five also finally came home.

THE ROAD TO WAR – Part 5

Maj. Anderson spent Christmas Eve at the Fosters quarters. He did not mention that he had decided on a bold stroke. He was going to move the garrison across to Ft. Sumter in small boats. He knew from newspapers that the secession commissioners were departing for Washington to demand the forts be turned over to South Carolina. He guessed they would meet Buchanan on December 26th. Anderson suspected Buchanan would not yield and the commissioners would telegraph the President’s reply on the 27th. Therefore, he would have to make his move on Christmas night, hoping that the spies and the two patrol boats would be less vigilant then.

There were about two dozen wives and families of men at Moultrie. He announced that he wanted to put the families out of harm's way and to house them temporarily in the empty structures at Ft. Johnson. The enlisted men's families had been ordered to pack their belongings, along with a large amount of commissary stores. Local spies of course learned of the coming transfer, but remained unconcerned, because the removal of families was not a threat and seemed quite appropriate. Anderson also worried that once he abandoned Moultrie, there would be a period of time that his men would be vulnerable in the boats and unloading supplies at Sumter. He decided to spike the guns at Moultrie and burn the wooden gun carriages.

December 25th dawned with nasty weather and Anderson postponed for 24 hours, still informing no one of his plans. On December 26th it was foggy with a misty rain. Anderson told only Capt. Foster about the real mission. In the early afternoon the families were placed on board and at 3:00pm Anderson told Lt. Hall the plan. Hall was to take the 3 schooners to Ft. Johnson but keep everyone on board on the excuse that Hall had to determine the best place to land them. When he heard 2 signal guns from Ft. Moultrie, he was to head for Sumter.

Around 5pm Anderson informed Capt. Doubleday of the move to Sumter. Doubleday was to have Co. E. ready to move in 20 minutes. The same message went to Co. H and the rest of the command. Anderson's plan was for the garrison to cross in two waves. Capt. Foster would remain with a rear guard to spike the guns and burn the carriages of the cannon facing Sumter. When the boats finally returned for the rear guard, they were also to grab as much ammunition as they could.

As the second wave left Moultrie, a steamer appeared. The rear guard prepared to fire their cannon, but the steamer passed oblivious to the boats in the channel. Moultrie then fired the two signal guns, and Lt. Hall headed for Sumter with the families and provisions. They arrived just before 8:00pm. Much still needed to be done. Fifty-five of the workmen were trusted and were asked to stay; the rest would be landed in Charleston. Although 15 cannon had been mounted, they all pointed out to the Atlantic and were long range guns. The guns could not prevent an assault on the esplanade or gorge wall. The embrasures on the first tier were chest high and were covered with simple wooden shutters which could be knocked aside; the embrasures on the second tier were all 8 foot by 8 foot openings easily accessed by troops with scaling ladders.

Just after dawn on December 27th, smoke was noted over Sullivan Island and the astonishing news arrived in Charleston that Anderson had skipped over to Sumter and Moultrie was burning. The leaders of South Carolina were apoplectic. It was one thing for their state to secede from the U.S., but it was completely unacceptable for Anderson and Sumter to consider seceding from South Carolina. A delegation was sent to meet with Anderson. The delegation stated the governor wanted him to return to Moultrie. Anderson respectfully declined and sent a message to Pickens who ordered the militia to seize Castle Pinckney and Ft. Moultrie. Gov. Pickens was committing an act of military aggression against the United States, thus making any prospect of peace unlikely. Three militia companies left by boat and landed at Pinckney at 4:30pm. Lt Meade and the ordinance sergeant occupied the fort. Several of the militia scaled the wall, opened the gate and entered the fort. The American flag was pulled down and it was replaced. Meade was allowed to go to Sumter. A second group of 200 militia sailed to Moultrie arriving at 8:00pm. Two men scaled the wall and unlocked the gate. Only the ordinance sergeant was present in the fort.

After the delegation had left Ft. Sumter, Anderson ordered everyone to gather on the parade ground. Anderson had served his entire adult life under the flag and understood that the army emphasized that the flag's honor had to be defended. The soldiers were on the parade ground along with the workmen, women and children. Anderson stood by the flagstaff with the flag draped over the hands of a sergeant. Maj. Anderson took off his hat, knelt on the ground and bowed his head. Others knelt and Rev. Harris thanked the Lord the garrison made it safely across. He prayed the flag they were preparing to raise, would soon float over a united nation that would remain prosperous and at peace. He asked God that this flag never be dishonored. Anderson then rose to his feet and the huge garrison flag rose in the air as the band, on the rampart, played The Star Spangled Banner. The men shouted great huzzahs. The rear guard, still at Ft. Moultrie, cheered when they saw the flag.

Anderson's simple, normal act of raising the flag a couple of weeks later was depicted in Harper's Weekly and Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper simultaneously. By then Sumter had stopped being one of dozens of forts in seceded states. Sumter had been "important" for several weeks, but now it became an emotional magnet and deeply stirred national patriotism. Anderson's transfer to Sumter, then his raising of the flag above it, tied the hands of first Buchanan and then later, Lincoln. December 28th was fair, but it started to rain on the 29th and became nasty on the 30th. The next day 1860 passed into the history books.

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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