



April 2007
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The Battlefield

Newsletter of the Onondaga County Civil War Round Table

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Meeting Site *The Warehouse*

**Syracuse University
School of Architecture**

**350 West Fayette St
Syracuse, NY
Room 3 Ground Floor**

Anthony F. Gero
Black Soldiers in the Civil War

**Thursday
April 19, 2007
7 PM**

Meetings are held at 7 PM on the third Thursday of the month from September through June and are free and open to the public.

April 19th Meeting

Anthony F. Gero has spoken to us once before. He was our speaker at the very first meeting of the Onondaga County Civil War Round Table in November 1994. We thought after a 12 year hiatus it was time to ask him to return.

Mr. Gero has a B.S. in Secondary Education from S.U.C. at Oswego and a M.A. in History from S.U.C. at Cortland. He has retired from public school teaching and is now an adjunct history instructor at Cayuga Community College. As a Fellow of the Company of Military Historians, he is the holder of its Distinguished Service Award. An author and co-author of 3 books and 150 articles on Military History, Mr. Gero concentrates primarily on New York State's Militia, the National Guard and African-American soldiers. Join us on the 19th for Mr. Gero's perspective on *Black Soldiers in the Civil War*.

President's Message

Spring is here and the Round Table is going to be on the move. On Saturday, April 28th we will be participating in the *Adopt-A-Position* program at Gettysburg. All those joining us should meet at the Gen. George S. Greene statue at Culp's Hill summit at 10:00 A.M. Please dress for outdoor work. A pizza party at Dino's will follow.

Peterboro weekend will be Saturday and Sunday, June 9th & 10th. We will need volunteers to help out on Saturday between 10am and 5 pm and Sunday between 10 am and 4 pm. There will be a sign-up sheet at the April and May meetings. Please consider coming on either day to help promote the OCCWRT.

A nominating committee will be formed at the April meeting to select candidates for next year's officers. If anyone is interested in being on the committee or serving as an officer, please let me know. Ballots will be in the May newsletter and results will be announced at the June meeting.

We have an interesting speaker this month in Anthony Gero. His topic *Black Soldiers in the Civil War* should answer a lot of questions people have regarding their involvement. Please try to make it



WANTED!

A Black Top Hat

**Needed by a Living Historian
Sue Greenhagen**

greenhsh@morrisville.edu

**for an accurate portrayal of Sheriff William F. Bonney
who pursued the outlaws of Madison County.**

Further Recognition for Douglas

February 2007 saw another honor for Frederick Douglas (1818-1895), orator, publisher, abolitionist, and international advocate for human rights. Last month we learned about New York City's plans to recognize him with a 15 million dollar portrait statue. Controversy surrounds the statue design which has him standing on an apocryphal slave/code quilt.

In late February, Douglas was honored with a plaque and portrait in the House Press Gallery of the US Capitol celebrating him as the first black reporter allowed in the Capitol press gallery. Douglas was a member of the congressional press from 1870-1874, his name noted in the Congressional Directory which continues today to print a list of all who sit daily in the press gallery.

Douglas spent much of his adult life as a journalist. He first published the *North Star*, an abolitionist newspaper in Rochester, NY. Some historians believe he lived in Rochester because he was close to the Canadian border and able to slip away easily if pursued. Douglas arrived in Washington, DC in 1870 after accepting the post of editor of the *New National Era*, a chronicle of black progress throughout the country. The paper folded in 1874 during the post-Civil War financial crisis. Douglas remained in Washington for the remainder of his life and continued to visit the Capitol where he listened to lawmakers on the floors of the House and Senate.

Members On The Go

Darothy DeAngelo and Sue Greenhagen continue to raise funds for the General Sumner tomb restoration with their presentations on General Sumner to various groups. In late March, the Greater Liverpool Historical Society welcomed Darothy and Sue to their meeting. On April 14th, Darothy and Sue will present to the Clay Historical Society and on the 18th to the Town of Onondaga Historical Society. These are two busy members.

Member Courtney Tucker recently addressed the Fabius Historical Society. Courtney gathered his research and discussed the Fabius connection to the Civil War.

Member John Rudy will be graduating from Gettysburg College in May and will go on to grad school at American University in DC in the fall. He will spend his summer as a National Park Service Ranger and interpretive guide at Harpers Ferry. During the last week in June, John will be at the week-long Civil War Institute at Gettysburg College not as an scholarship attendee- his introduction to the CWI while a junior in high school- but as a guide for the Thursday morning tour of Gettysburg. His tour, called *Pennsylvania College and the War of the Rebellion*, will highlight the 19th century activities of the College from the Abolitionists of the 1850's through Lincoln's visit to the town in 1863. Other tours will be offered by legendary guide Ed Bearss and Dr. Jim McPherson. John is in with the "big" guys this year and your editor has elected his tour for her Thursday morning activity. Sorry Jim. Sorry Ed. Make room for John!

Cost of Research on the Rise

If a proposed rate increase by the National Archives in Washington, DC passes, researchers will have to dig deep into their pockets to pay for copies of their finds. The most inordinate rise will be for a Civil War soldier's full pension file- from the present \$37 to the proposed \$125. The cost of a military service file would rise from \$17 to \$25. A pension documents packet

which includes selected records of military service and genealogical information would cost \$25 from its present \$14.75. Copies made by the researcher would increase by 10 cents, and a copy made by an Archives employee would rise from 50 cents to 75 cents. Federal law requires the Archives to recover the actual cost of making copies "to the extent possible." A public-comment period is now under way until April 27th. You may send your comment to the Regulation Comments Desk, Room 4100, Policy and Planning Staff, National Archives Records Administration, 8601 Adelphi Rd., College Park, MD 20740-1850.

General Longstreet and Fried Chicken

Not only did Confederate General James Longstreet become a Republican after the war, but he also became the owner and operator of the Piedmont Hotel in Gainesville, Georgia. A half million dollar historic reconstruction on the third of the building still standing is nearly complete. The Piedmont is the oldest and most historic building in Gainesville. It will not be on the National Registry because more than two thirds of the building no longer exists.

The General was known to welcome luminaries from the period to stay at the hotel and enjoy his famous fried chicken dinners. The Georgia Poultry Federation designated the hotel as "the place where the poultry industry began" because many of the local farmers were kept busy raising chickens for the General's dining room. No word on whether the hotel will be open for an overnight by tourists with fried chicken on the dinner menu.

Lee Symposium

For any student of the Civil War who questions Robert E. Lee's place in history, an April 28th symposium in Arlington, VA will address the question "General Robert E. Lee: Hero or Traitor?" The Stephen Dill Lee Institute of the Sons of Confederate Veterans will host the event. Speakers include Ron Maxwell, producer-director of *Gettysburg* and *Gods and Generals*, scholar Kent Masterson Brown, author of *Retreat from Gettysburg*, and authors Thomas DiLorezo and John W. Dwyer. The symposium will consider if Lee "was a hero whose valor and leadership were surpassed only by his honor and humanity or a traitor whose military skill served a bad cause and prolonged an immoral rebellion against his rightful government." The Key Bridge Marriott Hotel will host the event. For information, call 804.389.3620. If any newsletter reader attends this event, please let us know what decision is reached. This event is just one of many in a year long celebration of Lee's 200th birthday.

Laura Keene, April 14, 1865

April 14 marks the 142th anniversary of Lincoln's assassination. That evening Lincoln was at Ford's Theatre enjoying a production of *Our American Cousin* starring Laura Keene when John Wilkes Booth struck. Laura Keene, 1826 (England) - 1873 (USA), somehow made her way through the mob and into the president's box where she cradled the president's head until he was moved to the Peterson's boarding house where he died a few hours later. Keene owed her own company in San Francisco before returning east in 1855 as Broadway's first successful female actor/manager/producer starring in comedies and musical burlesques. She never escaped the shadow of Lincoln's death. No longer in demand after 1865 in the East, she toured and lectured in the Western states, dying at age 47.

An Invitation

Member Mary Raye Casper extends the following invitation to the OCCWRT:

The John W. Jones Chapter #2651, United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Guy-Thurmon Camp #1920, Sons of Confederate Veterans invite you to attend a Confederate Memorial Day Ceremony honoring the Confederate Soldiers interred at the Woodlawn National Cemetery, 1825 Davis Street, Elmira, NY on Saturday, April 21, 2007 at 2:00 P.M.

From July 6, 1864 to July 11, 1865, Elmira, New York was the site of a Civil War Prison Camp. 12,123 Confederate prisoners passed through its gates during the single year of its existence. Nearly 3000 of the prisoners died there. Today three flags, Old Glory, the Stars and Bars, and the city of Elmira flag, fly above a monument that commemorates the site of the prison. A mile and a half away is the 10.5 acre Woodlawn National Cemetery where just under 3000 Southern prisoners from the prison camp are buried in a 2.5 acre Confederate section. Michael Horigan, author of the 2002 *Elmira, Death Camp of the North* and a retired history teacher from nearby Horseheads High School who addressed our round table in May 2003, states that "a national cemetery reminds the town and its visitors of the atrocities committed by Americans against Americans."

Horigan also states that "residents of Elmira and descendants of the camp's casualties have come to terms with the infamous legacy attached to the town." John W. Jones, an escaped slave who found his freedom in Elmira and became the sexton of Woodlawn Cemetery was the agent of civility who buried the

dead with "kindness and respect" and kept meticulous records of each Confederate burial he made each day in the cemetery as the previous day's deaths at the prison camp were sent to him by wagon. When the federal government was authorized to erect marble headstones at each grave in 1907, it was possible to inscribe each stone with the soldier's name, company, regiment, and grave number based on Jones' records. Very few of the Confederate remains were moved back to the South by relatives who came to Elmira to claim the bodies and were satisfied that their relatives had been respectfully buried. In 1937, the United Daughters of the Confederacy dedicated a bronze figure and granite monument which faces the 2.5 acre plot and honors the memory of those buried in the cemetery's Confederate section in barracks style surrounded on all four sides by the graves of Union soldiers.

Also within the cemetery is the Shohola Monument erected in 1911 by the federal government to commemorate a tragic railroad accident that took the lives of both Confederate and Union soldiers during the Civil War. On July 16, 1864, 853 Confederate prisoners and Union guards were being transported by rail to Elmira from the Union prison camp at Point Lookout, Maryland when the train was hit by a 50-car coal train near Shohola, Pa. The engineer and conductor of the coal train were the only survivors of either railroad crew. A total of 49 Confederate soldiers and 17 Union guards from the 11th Regiment Veteran Reserve Corps were killed. Survivors buried the dead alongside the railroad track in crude pine coffins until 1911 when the remains were brought to Woodlawn National Cemetery.

Spend Saturday, April 21 in this remarkable national cemetery.

Onondaga County Civil War Round Table

New Membership/Renewal Form

Membership dues of the OCCWRT are:

Please Check one of the Following

_____ \$20.00 a year

_____ O.H.A. members \$10.00

_____ Seniors and Students \$15.00

_____ Family rate (2 or more) \$30.00

Dues may be paid at meetings or sent to:

Onondaga County Civil War Round Table

ATTN: Dave Osborn, Treasurer

2 Thistlewood Lane

Fayetteville, NY 13066

**Please find \$ _____ enclosed in form of
Circle One:**

Check M.O. Cash

Date _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____

**Please check if you prefer an emailed newsletter
and can receive an Acrobat (pdf) file.**

E-Mail _____

The Onondaga County Civil War Round Table was organized in 1994 and is now an incorporated non-profit educational organization. Meetings are held on the third Thursday of the month from September through June. The purpose of the OCCWRT is to stimulate and encourage interest in the American Civil War, to assist in community service in order to enhance the study and understanding of the Civil War, to provide educational and historical research of the period, and to promote historic preservation.

Onondaga County
Civil War Round Table PO Box 175 Tully, NY 13159-0175