



# YORKTOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P. O. Box 355 - Yorktown Heights, NY 10598

<http://www.yorktownhistory.org>

## NEWSLETTER

Preserve the Past - Enlighten the Future

Spring/Summer 2004

By: Joan J. Fyfe, Editor

Welcome back! The second Chapter of "Images of America Yorktown" will take us on a journey of The Civil War Years.

Background: Civil War, American, was a military conflict between the United States of America (the Union) and the Confederate States of America (the Confederacy) from 1861 to 1865.

The American Civil War is sometimes called the War Between the States, the War of Rebellion, or the War for Southern Independence. It began on April 12, 1861, when Confederate General P. G. T. Beauregard opened fire on Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina, and lasted until May 26, 1865, when the last Confederate army surrendered. The war took more than 600,000 lives; destroyed property valued at \$5 billion, brought freedom to 4 million black slaves, and opened wounds that have not yet completely healed more than 125 years later.

The chief and immediate cause of the war was slavery. Southern states, including the 11 states that formed the Confederacy, depended on slavery to support their economy. Southerners used slave labor to produce crops, especially cotton. Although slavery was illegal in the Northern states, only a small proportion of Northerners actively opposed it. The main debate between the North and the South on the eve of the war was whether slavery should be permitted in the Western territories recently acquired during the Mexican War (1846-1848), including New Mexico, part of California, and Utah. Opponents of slavery were concerned about its expansion, in part because they did not want to compete against slave labor.

In 1851, Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote an antislavery novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, that was published serially in a newspaper in 1851 and in book form the year after. It was widely read in the United States and abroad and moved many to join the cause of abolition. The South indignantly denied this indictment of slavery. Stowe's book increased partisan feeling over slavery and intensified sectional differences.

The election of Abraham Lincoln as president was viewed by the South as a threat to slavery and ignited the war.

### Chapter two "The Civil War Years."

Although slavery was abolished in New York State in 1827, the assisting of a runaway slave was a violation of the Fugitive Slave Act, passed by Congress in 1850. The law allowed that any runaway slaves, regardless of how long they had been free or where they were living, had to be apprehended and returned to their owners. Abolitionists in the Northern states were instrumental in helping fugitive slaves find their freedom. There was great danger inherent in protecting freed slaves. Since large monetary rewards were offered for their capture and return, avaricious bounty hunters roamed the roads, and streets, seeking runaway slaves for profit.

The Underground Railroad, which was organized and started prior to the Civil War, came into full form during the war. It was a route that enabled some 50,000 slaves to escape slavery in the Southern states and find refuge in the Northern states and Canada.

The name of the Underground Railroad was due to the popularity of railroad terminology in the American vernacular of the era. Railroad terms are sprinkled throughout the language of the movement. For instance, citizens who helped the slaves move from place to place were called "conductors" The secluded havens where the slaves were given shelter were called "stations.:" The slaves were sometimes referred to as "packages" or "freights" and were taken into the Northern states by different routes or "lines."

Harriet Tubman, a former slave herself, is considered to be one of the most famous "conductors" and is credited with helping more than 300 slaves to freedom. On January 31, 1865, Congress approved the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the Constitution, outlawing slavery in the United States.

..... Abraham Lincoln argued for compensated emancipation for the slaves. At that time, 15 of the 31 were slave states, and the country was divided by the issue of slavery and thrown into political turmoil.....during the Civil War, the town of Yorktown responded promptly to Lincoln's call for troops. Yorktown was one of the few towns that reimbursed all individual expenses to those residents who were unable to secure a substitute to fight in their stead.....the population of Yorktown in 1860 was 2,231. The number of volunteers who enlisted in the army was 281.....the number who fell in battle or died in the military was listed as 19. They were buried in local cemeteries.

By: Joan J. Fyfe

A special thank you to Alice Roker, Yorktown Town Clerk for permission to excerpt the book, "*Images of America Yorktown*" and to Monica Doherty for her composition of the chapter.

The Davenport House, built in 1750, was best known as the Northern headquarters for Gen. George Washington's Troops throughout the American Revolution. However, it was believed to be a safe house in the Underground Railroad, use to shelter runaway slaves.

### **WOMEN IN THE MILITARY**

Women served in combat during the American Civil War in far larger numbers and in more significant roles than has so far been fully recognized in history text books. New stories from diaries, memoirs, and family letters and new access to historical information on the internet have added to the previously published accounts of women who served on the battlefields. The conclusion is inescapable that those who served as soldiers or combat nurses must have been many times larger than the commonly accepted estimate of about 400.

At the outset of the war in April 1861, tens of thousands of young men left their homes and rallied to the flag when President Abraham Lincoln called for the states to provide soldiers to "put down the insurrection." Although it was not fully comprehended at the time, hundreds of young women also enlisted in male disguise. Their purpose commonly was to be with their husbands or lovers, but many served alone simply out of patriotism or the desire for adventure and excitement.

***Please renew  
your membership***

***Type of Memberships***

Individual	\$ 10
Family	\$ 15
Senior	\$ 8
Senior Family	\$ 12
Student	\$ 5
Corporate	\$100
Sustaining	\$ 25
Life/Benefactor	\$250
Institutional	\$ 50

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This is all the more remarkable when you consider the status of American women in 1861. As Margaret Leech reported, society in Washington, D.C., at the outbreak of the war "permitted an unusual freedom to ladies. Moving breathlessly and without privacy in a shower of white kid gloves and calling cards, they had a role to play in the parlors; and might still enjoy homage at an age when in other American cities they would have been relegated to knitting at the fireside."

Women in the mid-19th Century were severely restricted in their ability to travel freely or to participate fully in the human adventure, except in a subordinate role to men. At the outset of the war, even the notion of female military nurses was considered outlandish, though this would change rapidly as the war progressed and pioneering women such as Dorothea Dix pitched in to establish hospital systems.

Whether there were more women who went undetected than were found out is impossible to say. For the large majority of female soldiers who were discovered, their real names were not recorded and are not known today, whereas their male pseudonyms sometimes are known. We are left with large numbers of Unknown Female Soldiers.

(contd. from page 2)

Civil War graves hold a lot of secrets, among them (as has been demonstrated) occasional forensic evidence that women served in the ranks disguised as men. Considering that the armies on both sides totaled about 1.5 million soldiers, it would not be surprising at all to learn that several thousand of them, at least, were women.

Some of the secrets of the unknown Civil War female soldiers have gradually come to light, and more possibly will in the fullness of time.

**“KNOWN BUT TO GOD”: FEMALE SOLDIERS IN THE CIVIL WAR**

By Richard Hall - *(Civil War Women - Internet Services)*



Dr. Mary E. Walker, M.D., a Civil War physician, was awarded the Congressional\*\* Medal of Honor in 1865. Dr. Walker’s Medal of Honor was rescinded in 1917, along with some 900 others. Some believed her medal was rescinded because of her involvement as a suffragette. Others discredit that opinion as 909 other medals rescinded were awarded to men. The stated reason was to “. . . increase the prestige of the grant.”

For whatever reason she refused to return the Medal of Honor and wore it until her death in 1919. Fifty-eight years later, the U.S. Congress posthumously reinstated her medal, and it was restored by President Carter on June 10, 1977.

**She is the only woman of the Civil War, or any war, to have been awarded the Medal of Honor. *(Civil War Women - Internet Services)***

**YORKTOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

**At its recent Annual Meeting on  
May 19, 2004,  
elected the following officers**



President	Thomas Travis	2006
1 <sup>st</sup> Vice President	Tony Hoch	2005
Recording Secretary	Nancy Lockhart	2006
Treasurer	OPEN	2005
Corresponding Secty	Linda Kiederer	2005

**Note: Anyone wishing to volunteer to be the YHS Treasurer, please call President, Tom Travis at: 914-962-5406**

## Yorktown Historical 2004 Calendar of Programs

**Thursday, September 23, 2004 – 8:00 p.m.:** Yorktown Community Cultural Center, Senior Meeting Room: *Remember the Ladies, Music of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century*. Presented by Linda Russell, Fold Balladeer and former Music Historical at Federal Hall Memorial in New York. Through Song, she will explore the lives and contribution of 18<sup>th</sup> century American Women and Men.

**Thursday, October 28, 2004, 8:00 p.m.:** Yorktown Community Cultural Center, Senior Meeting Room: *Somers Home of the Early American Circus*. Terry Ariano, Curator of the Somers Historical Society, will show slides and talk about the purchase of one elephant in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of a new American entertainment form that evolved in Somers and its locale. She will review what remains of the curious segment of local history, and the pioneers whose innovations are still in use today.

**Thursday, November 18, 2004, 8:00 p.m.:** Yorktown Community Cultural Center, Nutrition Center, *Raptors and Eagles*. Tom Lake, a naturalist with the State Department of Environmental Conservation, who specializes in the history of the Hudson River Estuary, will discuss the return of eagles to the Hudson Valley area after 100-years absence and their needs for long-term survival.

**Sunday, December 5, 2004, 1:00 p.m.:** Yorktown Museum, Yorktown Community Cultural Center, Top Floor. *Holiday Program*. Join us for a special holiday program, co-sponsored with the Yorktown Museum.

*All programs are free and open to the public.  
Visit our Website at [www.yorktownhistory.org](http://www.yorktownhistory.org)*



### GIFT FOR ALL SEASONS



#### “Eternal Vigilance”

June 1779, Crompond (Yorktown) NY  
Image size 11" x 17"  
Release Date: October 2002  
Edition size 500: 500 A/P: 25  
Remarques  
Price: \$175 to \$275

You can view the artwork of Paul Martin at the Yorktown Historical Website:  
<http://www.yorktownhistory.org>  
and also place an order for a limited edition of this terrific print.

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