

THE CALLING CARD – May 15, 2022

## *The Calling Card*



**The monthly e-newsletter of the  
Society for Women and the Civil War**

<http://www.swcw.org>

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## **The 2022 Conference on Women and the Civil War**

***Women of the Shenandoah Valley***

**Harrisonburg, Virginia**

**July 22-24, 2022**

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Conference Highlights:

Living History and Reenacting Workshop

First Person Impressions of Rose O'Neal Greenhow and Margaret Junkin Preston

Dr. Jonathan Berkey speaking on the  
Women of the Shenandoah Valley

Juanita Leisch Jensen displaying a rare Confederate homespun dress

Jess Pritchard-Ritter speaking on Belle Grove's Free and Enslaved Populations

Ashley Sonntag and Susan Wall speaking about living history and docenting

Farm to Table Dining  
Friday night Welcome Party  
Saturday night Banquet  
Silent Auction

Space is limited. Register now!

[EmailMe Form - SWCW 2022 Conference Registration Form](#)

Registration deadline: July 15, 2022

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Image Courtesy of The Valentine.

The venue is the Hotel Madison and Shenandoah Conference Center

Our special conference rate for rooms is \$119 + tax per night,  
plus \$5 parking per day.

To reserve your room, call the hotel at 540-564-0200,  
or go online to [Hotel Madison and Shenandoah Valley Conference Ctr  
\(travelclick.com\)](http://HotelMadisonandShenandoahValleyConferenceCtr.travelclick.com)

To ensure the special conference rate, reserve your room by **June 17, 2022**

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Purple velvet dress, 1861. Elizabeth Keckley, designer.  
In the collection of the National Museum of American History.

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## Shenandoah Valley: Historical Site Spotlight

### *Frontier Culture Museum, Staunton*

[Frontier Culture Museum – Bringing the Past to Life \(frontiermuseum.org\)](http://frontiermuseum.org)



The mission of the Frontier Culture Museum is to interpret the formation of the distinctive American folk culture created in the Shenandoah Valley from the blending of European, African, and indigenous peoples. During your self-guided tour, the following permanent exhibits can be toured: a 1600s English farm; a 1700s German farm; a 1700s Irish farm and forge; a 1700s American Indian settlement; a 1700s West African farm; a 1700s American settlement;

an 1820s American farm; an 1850s American farm; and an early American schoolhouse.

**A field trip to this world-class museum is part of the  
2022 Conference!**

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Striped evening dress created for Mary Todd Lincoln, 1863. Elizabeth Keckley, designer. In the collection of the National Museum of American History.

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## News of Note

### Upcoming Conferences.

- July 30, 2022. *Civil War in the Shadows: Spies, Scouts and Raiders in the Shenandoah Valley*, presented by the Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation. Front Royal, Virginia. [2022 Conference: “Civil War in the Shadows”: Spies, Scouts, and Raiders in the Shenandoah Valley | Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation \(square.site\)](#)
- August 6, 2022. *11th Annual Civil War Symposium*, presented by the Jefferson Historical Society and Museum. Jefferson, Texas. [Jefferson Historical Society & Museum \(jeffersonmuseum.com\)](#)

### Gettysburg Lincoln Railroad Station.

Located at 35 Carlisle Street in downtown Gettysburg, *Ticket to the Past -- Unforgettable Journeys* is Gettysburg's first history-based virtual reality experience. One of the individuals featured is nurse Cornelia Hancock. [Ticket to the Past—Unforgettable Journeys | Gettysburg Foundation](#)

### Guided Tours of Cedar Creek Battlefield.

Beginning on May 29, the Cedar Creek Battlefield Foundation is offering guided tours of the battlefield on select weekends through September. Check out the schedule: [Cedar Creek Battlefield Foundation \(givebutter.com\)](#)

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Christening dress, 1866. Created by Elizabeth Keckley for her goddaughter.  
Collection of the National Museum of American History.

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**Research Resource:**

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## ***Fashion and Costume Museums in the US***

**Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology**

[Museum \(fitnyc.edu\)](http://fitnyc.edu)

**The Anna Wintour Costume Center at the Metropolitan Museum of Art**  
[Exhibitions - The Metropolitan Museum of Art - The Metropolitan Museum of Art \(metmuseum.org\)](http://metmuseum.org)

**Museum of the City of New York**

[Costume & Textiles | Museum of the City of New York \(mcny.org\)](http://mcny.org)

**Historic Costume Museum at the University of Hawaii at Manoa**

[Historic Costume Museum – Museum Consortium \(hawaii.edu\)](http://hawaii.edu)

**Chicago History Museum**

[Chicago History Museum - See Chicago's History Unfold](#)

**The Goldstein Museum of Design at the University of Minnesota**

[The Goldstein Museum of Design \(GMD\) | College of Design \(umn.edu\)](http://umn.edu)

**The Kent State University Museum**

[Gallery of Costume | Kent State University](http://kentstate.edu)

**Fashion Collection at the College of Visual Arts and Design at the  
University of North Texas**

[Texas Fashion Collection | Texas Fashion Collection \(unt.edu\)](http://unt.edu)

Fashion Archives and Museum of Shippensburg University

[FA&M \(fashionarchives.org\)](http://fashionarchives.org)

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Mary Todd Lincoln's "Strawberry Dress," 1862. Elizabeth Keckley, designer.  
In the collection of the Lincoln Presidential Library.

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The Society for Women and the Civil War is dedicated to recognizing the efforts of women who lived through or participated in the American Civil War, and those who research, reenact or otherwise honor these women of the past.

Join our efforts and become a member.

[Join the Society - Society for Women and the Civil War \(swcw.org\)](https://www.swcw.org)

**A special Members-Only Pop-Up Store filled with SWCW merchandise will run from May 18 - 31. Members will receive an email notification with their special link to access the store on the morning of May 18. Watch your inbox!**

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Mary Todd Lincoln's green plaid day dress, 1862. Elizabeth Keckley, designer.

In the collection of the Chicago History Museum.

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## Society Notices

### Help Wanted!

Do you want to be more involved? The Society is seeking volunteers!

COMMITTEES – We have a full listing of our committees on our website. Take a look at the descriptions and see if one (or more) might fit your interests. <https://www.swcw.org/committees--publications.html>

National Registry of Women's Service in the Civil War (NRWSCW) -- The mission of the registry is to identify women who served their nations during the Civil War, maintain their identities in a searchable database, and support that database with files of documentation. Full training will be provided for volunteers on this task.

Annual Conference on Women and the Civil War -- We can always use more hands to help in various areas, like check-in, room set-up, bus helpers, and boxed lunch distribution. Volunteering at the conference is a great way to make new friends!

Please visit our volunteer page on our website: [Society Volunteer Opportunities - Society for Women and the Civil War \(swcw.org\)](#)

### DONOR LIST

SWCW gratefully acknowledges the following individuals  
for their contributions:

Maria Carrillo Colato

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Ann Kilian

J. White

Individuals wishing to donate to our General Fund or Scholarship Fund should visit our website at [Donations - Society for Women and the Civil War \(swcw.org\)](https://www.swcw.org). SWCW is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and all donations are tax-deductible.

The Society extends its thanks to SWCW member **Kurt DeSoto**, President of the Washington DC Civil War Round Table. Kurt tipped us off to a program PayPal offers for discounted fees for IRS registered 501(c)(3) organizations. Our Treasurer, Gary Ryan, signed us up for this program and we are now able to take advantage of this cost savings for the Society. If you represent a 501(c)(3) organization, check out this program at [PayPal Confirmed Charities](#).

Former SWCW Board Member **Sara Bartlett** has narrated several audiobooks for Audible.com. To learn more about narrating audiobooks, contact Sara at [firstpersisters@gmail.com](mailto:firstpersisters@gmail.com).

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Ca. 1870 quilt created by Elizabeth Keckley, believed to incorporate fabric from dresses she designed for Mary Todd Lincoln.  
In the collection of the Kent State University Museum.

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**National Register of Women's Service in the Civil War  
(NRWSCW):  
Woman of the Month**

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# Elizabeth Hobbs Keckley

fashion designer, dressmaker, activist, author

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Born in February 1818 in Dinwiddie, Virginia

Died in May 1907 in Washington, DC

Buried at National Harmony Memorial Park, Landover, Maryland

Elizabeth Hobbs was born enslaved on the Burwell family plantation in Dinwiddie, Virginia in February 1818. Her mother, Agnes, was seamstress, and responsible for clothing the 12 members of the Burwell family and the 70 people they enslaved. Elizabeth's biological father was her enslaver, Armistead Burwell, but she considered George Hobbs, who was married to her mother, to be her father. Both Agnes and George were literate, and they taught their daughter. One of the early traumas of Elizabeth's childhood was losing her father when he was sold away.

From the age of four, Elizabeth worked as a nanny to the youngest Burwell child, who was an infant when placed into her care. She also learned to sew from her mother and helped in clothing the residents of the plantation. At the age of 14, Elizabeth was sent to serve eldest son Robert Burwell, and his wife, Margaret, who took an instant dislike to Elizabeth and treated her cruelly. Beatings were frequent. When Elizabeth was 18, she was given to a neighbor, Alexander Kirkland, who routinely raped her. Elizabeth bore his son in 1839, and named him George in honor of her father.

In 1840, Elizabeth was returned to the Burwell family, and sent to serve Ann Burwell and her husband Hugh Garland. She was reunited with her mother, and when the Garland family moved to St. Louis in 1847, Elizabeth, Agnes and George accompanied them. Elizabeth had become an accomplished seamstress and dressmaker, and by 1849, Elizabeth was earning enough money to support the Garland family.

Elizabeth tirelessly negotiated with Ann and Hugh for her freedom, and in 1852, the Garlands agreed she could purchase it for herself and her son with the sum of \$1200 (or nearly \$35,000 in today's money). In 1855, still having not earned the necessary funds, Elizabeth's patron, Lizzie Le Bourgeois, took up a collection among her friends and loaned the \$1200 to her. She and her son were manumitted on November 15, 1855. At some point prior to her manumission, Elizabeth had married James Keckley. Elizabeth and James lived in St. Louis

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together while Elizabeth worked to repay her loan. By 1860, Elizabeth had left St. Louis and her husband behind.

She enrolled her son in Wilburforce University in Ohio, the first college owned and operated by African Americans, and then she moved to Washington, DC. Through the patronage of a Miss Ringgold, she obtained her "free black" license and opened a dressmaking shop on 12th Street. Her dressmaking skills, along with her "refinement and grace," combined to make her business a success. In short order, her clients included Mary Custis Lee, Margaret McLean, and many other white socialites. By 1861, Elizabeth employed a staff of 20 seamstresses while she focused on designing, draping, and fitting of the garments. Keckley designed sophisticated Victorian dresses, with clean lines and minimal ribbon and lace.

Elizabeth was introduced to Mary Todd Lincoln in March 1861. She was immediately employed as Mary's dressmaker, but also quickly became Mary's friend and confidante. In August 1861, Elizabeth experienced immeasurable grief. Her son George had enlisted as a white man in the Union Army, serving in the 1st Missouri Infantry. He was killed in action at the Battle of Wilson's Creek. By 1862, Elizabeth was so close with the First Family that she was welcomed into their private White House quarters. Elizabeth was adept at helping Mary through her periods of agitation, depression, and grief. When Willie Lincoln died of typhoid fever in February 1862, Elizabeth was one of Mary's primary comforters. Indeed, Elizabeth was present with the Lincoln family throughout their tenure in the White House, and she travelled with them to Richmond at the end of the war.

The war years were quite busy for Elizabeth. She continued her business, devoted a great deal of time to the Lincolns, and also established The Contraband Relief Society, to aid the newly-freed African Americans coming to Washington. Contributors to the Society included the Lincolns and a number of white Washingtonians, as well as prominent figures in the black community, including Frederick Douglass. In 1864, the name was changed to the Ladies' Freedmen and Soldier's Relief Association, to "reflect its expanded mission" of also assisting the soldiers of the USCT.

The assassination of President Lincoln deeply affected Elizabeth, as she had greatly admired him. She later wrote: "I loved him for his kind manner towards me, ' ... for he treated her like 'the white people about the house.'" Elizabeth accompanied Mary and her children back to

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Illinois after his death and stayed with them for many months.

In 1868, prompted in part by a desire to financially assist and improve the public reputation of her friend Mary, Elizabeth penned her memoir, *Behind the Scenes, or Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House*. The book was part slave narrative and part a portrait of the Lincoln family. While modern readers of the memoir are struck by her rise from slavery to businesswoman to White House confidant, readers at the time were outraged by the perceived violations of the privacy of the Lincoln family. The book transgressed so many Victorian codes surrounding privacy and race. It didn't help matters that her editor sought to sensationalize the memoir, and included copies of letters that Mary had written to Elizabeth. Robert Lincoln convinced the publisher to halt distribution of the book, and it was not republished again until 1900.

Elizabeth lost dress clients as a result of her memoir, and her business never regained prominence in Washington society. By 1890, her main source of income was her survivor's pension for the loss of her son during the war. In 1892, she became head of the Department of Sewing and Domestic Science Arts at Wilburforce University, but had to resign this position after a year when she suffered a mild stroke. Elizabeth returned to Washington, DC and moved into the National Home for Destitute Colored Women and Children, which she had helped found. She died in May 1907.

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MADAM ELIZABETH KECKLEY  
Modiste to Mrs. A. Lincoln

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***The Calling Card* accepts submissions.**

We are pleased to share the achievements of our members, and to advertise the activities of the Civil War and Women's History communities. We also welcome individual research requests, and notifications about educational and archival resources.

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Please send your submissions to [swcw1865@gmail.com](mailto:swcw1865@gmail.com), with *Calling Card* in the subject field. (Submissions may be edited for brevity or clarity.)

*The Calling Card* is distributed on the 15th of each month, and our deadline for same-month submissions is the 10th.

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([swcw.org](http://swcw.org))

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