

OCTOBER 15, 2020



The Calling Card

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

<http://www.swcw.org>

At Home and In the Field

In a few days, SWCW members can access the October issue of *At Home and in the Field*, our society's quarterly journal, in the "Members Only" section of our website, www.SWCW.org. Members will receive an email notice regarding access.

Our theme this month is the significance of letter writing to the women of the South during the Civil War.

Prior to the war, most Americans died in their beds surrounded by family. The Civil War changed that, as thousands died hundreds of miles from their homes, and families could not engage in traditional death and mourning rituals. Indeed, a family might not know a loved one was lost until long after the death. The fortunate received a notification letter, sometimes from a friend of the fallen, or written by a nurse who cared for him in his last hours. (Other families were left to wonder, sometimes forever, about the fate of their loved one.) Condolence letters usually followed from friends and relations of the grieving. How did the two types of letters differ? What protocols dictated the form of a condolence letter? How were both compassion and coercion (yes, coercion) incorporated into the letters Southern women sent to one another? Did letters from war widows differ from letters written by women who had not lost their husbands? These questions are answered in "If Heart Speaks Not to Heart," reprinted from *The Journal of the Civil War Era*.

And how did notification and condolence letters make their way to their destinations? SWCW Board Member J. White discusses the genesis and operations of the CSA Postal Service, including how letters crossed the lines separating North and South, in her article "Confederate States of America Postal Service Across the Lines During the American Civil War."



Letter smuggled to a CSA Congressman in Richmond from his wife in US Army-occupied New Orleans, 1863. (Courtesy of Robert A. Siegelman Auction Galleries)

Also in this issue, meet two Mystery Ladies, and read poetry by SWCW member Lisa Samia and others.

If you are not yet an SWCW member, now is a great time to ensure you receive this and future issues of our journal. Membership dues are only \$25 for individuals and you can sign up now via our website

-- <http://www.swcw.org/join-the-society.html>

At Home and in the Field welcomes contributions.

Send your offering to the editor, Jim Knights, at swcw1865@gmail.com

The Conference on Women and the Civil War

Register Now!

Our 21st Conference, *The Women of the Shenandoah Valley*, will be held July 23 - 25, 2021, in Harrisonburg, Virginia.

For conference details, click here: <http://www.swcw.org/2021-conference-details.html> To register for the conference, click here: <http://www.swcw.org/2021-conference-details.html>

Our venue for the 21st Conference is the **Hotel Madison and Shenandoah Valley Conference Center**. www.hotelmadison.com

Our special room rate is \$99 per night (single or double occupancy) + tax. Parking fee is \$5 per night. Reserve your room by calling 540-546-0200 or going online at www.bit.ly/31o8SoP. **The discounted room rate is available to conference attendees only, for the dates July 20 - 28.** So come early and stay late!

News of Note

Botanical Encyclopedia Published.

Floriography: An Illustrated Guide to the Victorian Language of Flowers, by **Jessica Roux**, is a beautifully illustrated, full color guide to the historical uses, coded significances, and secret meanings behind an impressive array of herbs and flowers. This book will tell you what flowers to send to your lover, and what bouquet is more suited to your enemy. Available at Amazon (<https://www.amazon.com/Floriography-Illustrated-Victorian-Language-Flowers/dp/1524858145>) and other bookstores.

Just in Time for Halloween.

The **Blue and Gray Education Society** has posted *Where to Find Civil War Ghosts*, by **Barbara Noe Kennedy** at <https://www.blueandgrayeducation.org/2020/09/where-to-find-civil-war-ghosts/>.



The Beauregard-Keyes House in New Orleans,
reportedly haunted by the spirits of Gen. P. G. T. Beauregard, his family and staff

Virtual Cemeteries.

Find a Grave website has curated its memorial sites for Confederate women into a virtual cemetery: <https://www.findagrave.com/virtual-cemetery/305666?page=1#sr-28120040>.

A similar, but smaller, virtual cemetery for women with a relationship to the Civil War has also been created: <https://www.findagrave.com/virtual-cemetery/954898>

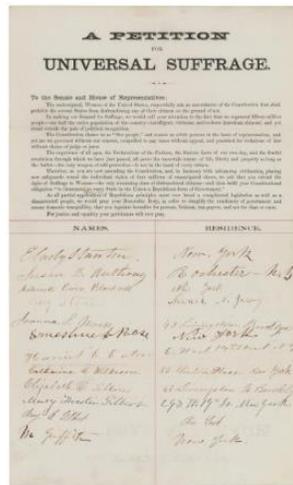
Death and Remembrance.

On October 31, 2020, the **Governor Richard Caswell Memorial State Historic Site** in Kinston, NC, will present *Gone But Not Forgotten*, a program exploring death and remembrance in the 19th century. Learn about the common causes of death, the rituals and etiquette of mourning, and how Victorians embalmed and buried their dead. For more information, visit this Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/events/s/gone-but-not-forgotten/622406588387172/>

The National Archives Celebrates the 19th Amendment.

The **National Archives** in Washington, DC, is celebrating the centennial of the ratification of the 19th Amendment with *Rightfully Hers: American Women and the Vote*. Learn about the suffragists and the fight for voting rights through primary sources, a virtual exhibit, and a curator-led online tour. Get started

here: https://www.archivesfoundation.org/women/?goal=0_267af3e1d5-eaad9b1ffa-53991509&mc_cid=eaad9b1ffa&mc_eid=77fbob5b9f



Petition of E. Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Lucy Stone, Antoinette Blackwell and others asking for an amendment to the Constitution prohibiting the disenfranchisement of citizens on the basis of their sex, ca. 1866. (National Archives)

Research Resource:

The National Women's History Museum

To celebrate the centennial of women winning the right to vote, the website of the **National Women's History Museum** is loaded with excellent and informative content on the fight for women's rights.

The Woman's Suffrage Timeline, 1840 - 1920:

<https://www.womenshistory.org/resources/timeline/womans-suffrage-timeline>

Suffragist Biographies,

from Susan B. Anthony to Ida B. Wells:

<https://www.womenshistory.org/celebrating-centennial/suffragist-biographies>

Primary Source Sets, from the Early Republic
through the National Women's Party:

<http://www.crusadeforthevote.org/primary-documents-1>

The history of the suffrage movement,
from Mary Wollstonecraft to Alice Paul:

<http://www.crusadeforthevote.org/history>

Recommended Reading List:

<http://www.crusadeforthevote.org/bibliographies>

Society Notices

The **American Battlefield Trust** has, to date, created 102 videos for their *In4* series, which are short (4 minute) presentations on a wide range of subjects relating to the Revolutionary War, War of 1812, and Civil War. SWCW Board Member and author **DeAnne Blanton** discusses the role of women in the Civil War in a video posted at <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/videos/women-civil-war>



To find all the *In4* videos, start here:

<https://www.battlefields.org/learn/videos/in4>

SWCW SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITY

The **Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation**, one of our Organizational Partners, is developing an audio tour for the **New Market Battlefield** area in Virginia to be debuted at the end of this year.

One of the 25 tour stops will elaborate on the “Civilians of New Market,” detailing their experiences and involvement as this 1864 battle swept through their town.

Each of the tour stops is available for sponsorship by individuals or organizations for a fee of \$1,000. The sponsor’s name will be mentioned at the beginning of the audio tour stop. The SWCW Board believes that sponsorship of the “Civilian” tour stop is an innovative way to put our organization’s name out

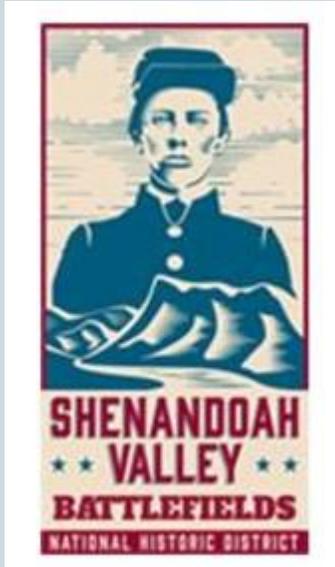
in the community, and one which fully aligns with our mission of “recognizing the efforts of women who lived through or participated in the American Civil War.”

We are asking our members and readers to join the effort to make this a reality, and are seeking your donations, in any amount, toward the fulfillment of this sponsorship opportunity.

We are happy to announce that anonymous donors have offered to match \$1 for every dollar donated to this effort. So your donation will be doubled with this challenge grant!

To contribute to this sponsorship, visit our “Donations” page at <http://www.swcw.org/donations.html>. Go to “General Donations” and use the “Comments” section of the PayPal link to let us know you want to help with the “Audio Tour Sponsorship.” Or you can send a check to our mailing address: SWCW – Audio Tour Sponsorship – P. O. Box 3117 – Gettysburg, PA 17325.

Please make your contribution by November 30, 2020. Many thanks!



SWCW Historical Markers Committee

This committee has begun entries into a database which will be a nationwide listing of existing monuments, memorials, markers and plaques honoring women's Civil War service. Initial entries include the monuments honoring Emma Sansom in Alabama, Georgia and Texas; the sculpture of Harriett and Dred Scott in St. Louis; the sculpture of Elizabeth Thorne in Gettysburg; and the Monument to North Carolina Women of the Confederacy in Raleigh.

The Committee solicits input for this database: identification of the site; the honoree; the location of the site; and the sponsor of the site, if known (along with contact information). A photo or other imagery would be much appreciated as well. Information will be happily received addressed to the attention of the committee at SWCW's email address – swcw1865@gmail.com.



Harriet and Dred Scott Memorial, St. Louis, Missouri

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.

<http://www.swcw.org/join-the-society.html>

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

Woman of the Month

Sarah Antoinette Gilbert Slater

“The Veiled Lady”

Secret Agent and Courier, Confederate States of America

Born on January 12, 1843, in Middletown, CT

died on June 20, 1920, in Poughkeepsie, NY

Sarah Antoinette Gilbert was the daughter of French-descendant parents John Gilbert, a jeweler, and his wife, Antoinette Reynaud. She moved with her father and brothers from Connecticut to North Carolina in 1851. On June 12, 1861, she married Rowan Slater, a dance instructor in New Bern, and shortly afterwards, the couple moved to Goldsboro, where Rowan first worked as an

agent selling supplies to the Confederate Army, and later enlisted in a North Carolina infantry unit.

In January 1865, Sarah went to Richmond to obtain a travel pass to visit her mother in New York City. While in Richmond, she came to the attention of Secretary of War James A. Seddon, and Secretary of State Judah P. Benjamin, both of whom she impressed. Secretary Seddon recruited her to serve as a secret agent and courier to Confederate agents in Montreal, Canada. The expectation was that, should she be detained by US authorities, she could claim to be French Canadian. Tasked with a sensitive secret foreign mission, the young and inexperienced Sarah went on to fulfill Seddon's expectations.

Sarah was usually heavily veiled during her travels, and, combined with other techniques, she was exceptionally effective at concealing her identity. Those who encountered her often identified her merely as "the French woman" or "the lady in the veil." Such was her success at concealment, she was often misidentified by other Confederate agents and sympathizers, as well as by her enemies. Of the multiple aliases she used – or was mistakenly thought to have used – the only ones confirmed as being in her use were "Kate Brown" and "Mrs. Brown."

Her northward courier route usually took her from Richmond to a border crossing on the Potomac River at City Point, Virginia. Between City Point and Washington, she was accompanied by blockade runner Augustus Spencer Howell. Between Washington and New York, and then on to Montreal, she was accompanied by John Harrison Surratt, Jr., a Confederate Secret Service agent and son of Washington boarding house owner, and later convicted John Wilkes Booth co-conspirator, Mary Surratt. The Surratt boarding house was a regular way station for Sarah. The same agents also accompanied her on the return journey to Richmond.

During her stops at the Surratt boarding house, Sarah became acquainted with Booth and his co-conspirators. While there is no evidence that she supported the plans to assassinate Lincoln, or was even aware of them, the US War Department later investigated whether Sarah was a link between the Confederate government and Booth.

In February 1865, her first assignment was delivering funds and documents to Montreal in support of Confederate soldiers who had conducted the October 1864 raid in St. Albans, Vermont. The raiders had fled to Canada, where they were captured and held by the Canadian government. The US government sought their extradition as criminals. The Confederate documents carried by Sarah proved to a Canadian court that the raiders were agents acting on the lawful orders of their government. Extradition to the US was denied and the men were freed.

Sarah's third and last mission began on April 1, 1865, tasked with carrying funds from Richmond to Montreal, and then to arrange shipment of those funds, as well as Confederate funds already in Montreal, onward to London. On April 3, accompanied by John Surratt, she reached Washington. They left the city the next day, after meeting with Booth. At some point between Washington and Montreal, Sarah Slater and John Surratt disappeared. Sarah may have reached Montreal, but the final disposition of the Confederate funds in her possession is a mystery.

In the wake of the assassination of President Lincoln, and following interrogations of the co-conspirators, US War Department agents managed to find and arrest Sarah Slater, suspecting that she was the hidden link between John Wilkes Booth and the Confederate government. She was held in custody from May 1 - 12, 1865. Unable to prove that she was involved in the conspiracy, Sarah was released. And once again, she vanished. For a while, at least.

Sarah Slater went on to live a comfortable life with other family members in the New York City area. She reunited with Rowan, then was granted an uncontested divorce from him in 1866. She was twice remarried and twice widowed. At the time of her death from kidney disease, her probated will identified her as Sarah A. Spencer. Her generous estate contained bequests of several pieces of property in multiple states, substantial amounts of cash, and a considerable amount of fine jewelry.

No evidence has surfaced regarding the fate of the Confederate funds which Sarah had in her possession in April 1865.



Mary Surratt's Boarding House

****This article was written by SWCW Board Member J. White, with substantial and generous contributions from three SWCW members and authors, whose current and future books address the myriad elements of this story: Dr. Jeanne M. Christie; Brenda C. McKean; and Martha D. Taylor. An expanded version of the article will appear in a future edition of SWCW's quarterly journal, At Home and in the Field. Sourcing is available upon request****

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

We want 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.

Send your submissions to swcw1865@gmail.com, and please write Calling Card in the subject field. (Submissions may be edited for brevity and 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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