

THE CALLING CARD – March 15, 2021



The Calling Card

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

<http://www.swcw.org>

The Conference on Women and the Civil War

WE ARE GOING VIRTUAL!

In response to the comments and concerns of our membership and supporters, the Board of Directors has decided to postpone our annual live conference to 2022, in Harrisonburg, Virginia. In lieu of our annual in-person gathering,

*we are pleased to present, in conjunction with the **CWRT Congress**, the **21st Conference on Women and the Civil War**:*

A LIVE ZOOM EVENT!

Resilient Women of the Civil War

July 24 – 25, 2021



Image courtesy of the Library of Virginia

Presentation Schedule:

Saturday, July 24, 1:00 – 4:00 pm

- **Jonathan A. Noyalas** will speak about Rebecca Wright McPherson, the Union spy who was critical to the success of Sheridan's 1864 Shenandoah Valley Campaign.
- **Sarah Bierle** will give us a civilian-focused tour of New Market Battlefield in the Shenandoah Valley.

Sunday, July 25, 1:00 – 4:00 pm

- **Megan Hildebrand** reviews the relationships between Roman Catholic nuns serving as nurses and their Protestant soldier patients.
- **Steve Magnusen** discusses the Cutler, Dawes, and Gates women of Marietta, Ohio.

Registration fee: \$25. Zoom log-in information plus an electronic "conference notebook" will be emailed to participants in advance of the event.

More information: [2021 Virtual Conference Details - Society for Women and the Civil War \(swcw.org\)](#)

Registration: [SWCW 2021 VIRTUAL CONFERENCE REGISTRATION FORM - Society for Women and the Civil War](#)

News of Note

Faces of Civil War Nurses.

Ronald S. Coddington will be live on Zoom on **March 17** at 7 pm Eastern Time, presenting his outstanding lecture, *Faces of Civil War Nurses*. Using identified tintypes and cartes de visite of women on both sides of the war, many of them never before published, Coddington relates the personal histories of each individual. [Faces of Civil War Nurses | American Battlefield Trust \(battlefields.org\)](https://www.battlefields.org/program/faces-of-civil-war-nurses)



Resource for Out-of-Print Books.

If you are interested in reading biographies, diaries and memoirs from women of the Civil War era, you may wish to look into the offerings on www.BigByteBooks.com. They offer e-books, paperbacks, and audio books, so you can stock up on some excellent Civil War titles. The *Civil War* section has a subsection on “Women in the Civil War,” and the “Medical Corps” subsection includes many titles on nurses.

African American Intellectual History Society.

The **AAIHS** is a scholarly organization that fosters dialogue about researching, writing, and teaching black thought and culture. The organization supports the research of scholars in the field through an array of fellowships, awards, and prizes, and publishes the popular blog, *Black Perspectives*.

Two recent blog posts concerning African American women in the Civil War can be found here: [Women's Experiences during the American Civil War | AAIHS](#) and [Black Women, Agency, and the Civil War | AAIHS](#)

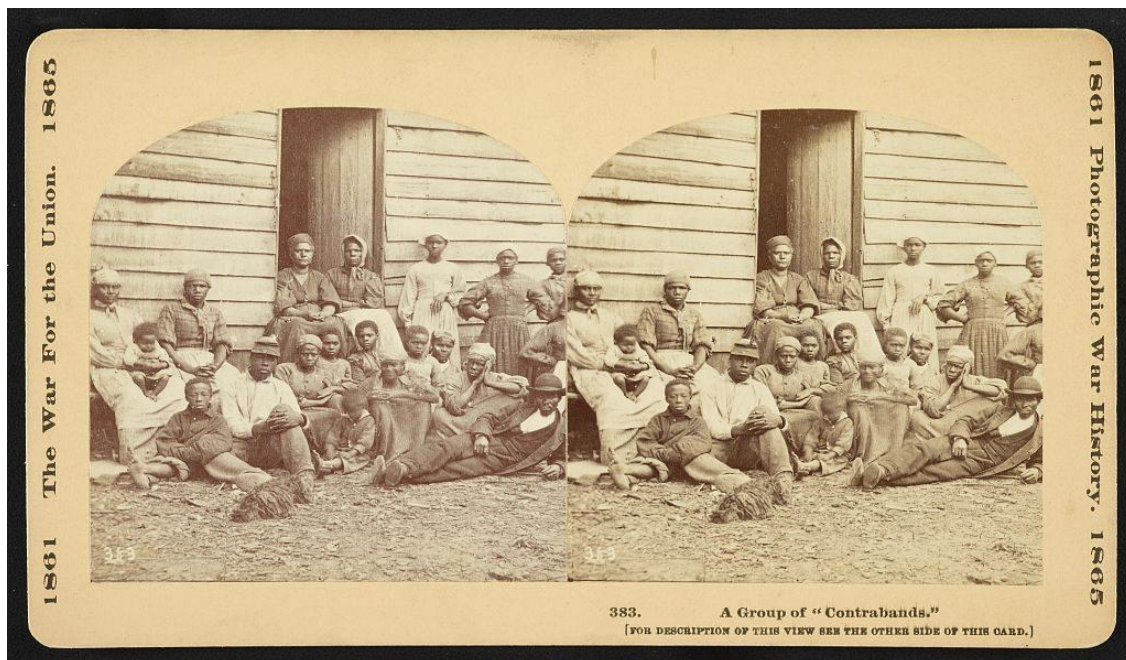


Photo credit: Library of Congress.

Professional Development for Historical Interpreters.

The **National Association for Interpretation (NAI)** offers training with professional level certifications for volunteer and professional historical interpreters, guides and hosts around the world. Anyone who meets the minimum qualifications can apply for certification, regardless of their current or previous employment status. NAI programs for certification are used by prestigious sites such as Colonial Williamsburg. Information on NAI training

and certification programs can be found

at https://www.interpnet.com/NAI/interp/Certification/nai/certification/NAI_Certification.aspx?hkey=0c08ac07-c574-4560-940f-82fba3a22be9

Longwood University/Appomattox Court House NHP Virtual Civil War Seminar.

On February 6, **Longwood University** and **Appomattox Court House National Historic Park** held their 22nd annual Civil War Seminar in a virtual format. If you missed it, the video is available now for your enjoyment and enrichment:

<https://www.nps.gov/apco/learn/photosmultimedia/index.htm>



Photo credit: National Park Service

Conferences!

SWCW members and friends may be interested in the following conferences scheduled for 2021:

- *The Wars That Forged America*, presented by **The American Battlefield Trust**, June 2 - 6 in Chantilly, Virginia. [Annual Conference | American Battlefield Trust \(battlefields.org\)](#)
- *Born of Fire: West Virginia and the Civil War*, presented by **The Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation**, July 31 in Martinsville, West Virginia. [Born of Fire: West Virginia and the Civil War – Shenandoah at War](#)

Research Resource:

Philadelphia Area Archives Research Portal

The Philadelphia Area Archival Research Portal (PAARP) provides access to descriptions of more than 5,000 collections from over 200 regional institutions documenting the region's vital role in our national collective history, from colonization to the present day, from the everyday person to some of America's best known thinkers and celebrated citizens. On this site, researchers will find catalog descriptions (finding aids) to collections relating to local, national, and world history; the natural and social sciences; medicine; literature; religion; art and architecture; business and industry; the performing arts; and other topics.

Searchable by creator, topic, repository, and keyword, this diverse and

ever-growing group of finding aids is an ideal starting point for researchers to discover related collections across regional repositories, large and small. Access the portal here: [Philadelphia Area Archives Research Portal \(PAARP\) \(upenn.edu\)](https://paarp.upenn.edu)

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://swcw.org)

Society Notices

SWCW has a Facebook page!

Our public Facebook group is a moderated forum for discussions and information about women in the Civil War. Research queries are welcome. Please join us at [\(1\) Society for Women and the Civil War | Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/swcw.org), and invite your friends!

DONOR LIST

The Society gratefully acknowledges the following individuals for their contributions to our Scholarship Fund:

Claudia Floyd

Doris Hayden

Jim Hayden

Brenda McKean

Individuals wishing to donate to our General Fund, Scholarship Fund, or the Bonnie Mangan Memorial 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.

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

Woman of the Month

Mary Boykin Miller Chesnut

Writer and Political Influencer, CSA



Portrait by Samuel Osgood, 1856

Born March 31, 1823, at Mount Pleasant plantation, SC

Died November 22, 1886, in Camden, SC

Mary Boykin's father, Stephen Decatur Miller, served as a US congressman, member of the South Carolina senate, governor of the state of South Carolina, and US senator, before retiring from politics to develop plantations in Mississippi, all prior to the Civil War. She was the namesake of her mother, Mary Boykin Miller, who was her father's second wife, and who was left in debt upon her husband's death when their daughter was fifteen. The political life and indebtedness left by Mary Boykin's father was an early influence upon the young woman.

Mary Boykin was first educated at home, and, later, from the age of thirteen to fifteen, she received her formal education as a boarding student at Madame Talvande's French School for Young Ladies in Charleston. Along with other young daughters of the planter class elite, she received a high caliber education. She excelled in studies of literature, history, rhetoric, foreign languages and the sciences, as well as in the arts. She remained a voracious reader throughout her life.

At seventeen, she married recent Princeton graduate James Chesnut, Jr. Her new husband was eight years older than she, but she had known him since she began as a student in Charleston. Despite her husband's position as the sole surviving son of one of the South's wealthiest plantation owners, the junior Chesnuts received only a small allowance from his parents, and lived on the income of James Chesnut's law practice. While living in her father-in-law's home, Mary Boykin quietly taught the enslaved persons to read and write, a continuation of a practice which she had begun as a child.

When Mary Boykin was thirty-five, her husband, already a successful attorney and state politician, was elected a US senator for South Carolina. James Chesnut was considered a moderate in politics, but both he and his wife believed fervently in states' rights. Two years into his term in the senate, upon South Carolina's secession from the Union, James resigned and returned home. Mary Boykin and James did not support slavery; however, they believed that states had the right to make their own decisions on the issue. During the war, James served at various times as a high-level member of the Confederate government, as an aide to President Davis and as a general officer with field and reserve command responsibilities.

Admired as a woman of sharp intelligence, great wit, grace, poise and gracious hospitality, Mary Boykin Chesnut played a critical role in her husband's political and military career, as well as in his private legal practice. She excelled at entertaining and political networking, both of which were elemental to her husband's success. She served as his administrative aide, and assisted him in the drafting of speeches and correspondence. While building important relationships in support of her husband, Mary Boykin evolved into an extraordinary political and social influencer in her own right. Serving as a salon for the elite of Washington, DC, and later for the Confederate leadership, her drawing room was a locus for networking and political decision-making. This access afforded her a rare role in informally contributing to political leadership, which was available to extremely few women of the time.

The roles held by James provided her an eyewitness seat at critical junctures prior to, and during, the Civil War. This, coupled with her own acuity of observation and well-honed writing ability, positioned Mary Boykin Chesnut to be an important chronicler of key events during the war. She began a diary of her wartime experience on February 18, 1861, and kept it until June 26, 1865. Conscious of the historic significance of the events to which she

was a witness, she prefaced her writing with the statement that “This journal is intended to be entirely objective. My subjective days are over.”

Her diary recorded not only the historic events happening around her, but her strong condemnation of the decisions made by Confederate leadership. It recorded her own service as a nurse and in aid society work, her experiences as a refugee, along with personal exposure to battles, and her mourning of lives lost. Her writing also reveals her strong support for women’s rights. This diary has come to be a defining description of the war from a perspective of privileged civilian access.

As one critic put it, “she had the sense of the South's living through its time on a world stage, and she captured the growing difficulties of all classes of the Confederacy as the society faced defeat at the end of the war...Chesnut analyzed and portrayed the various classes of the South through the years of the war, providing a detailed view of southern society and especially of the mixed roles of men and women. She was forthright about the complex and fraught situations related to slavery, particularly the abuses of women's sexuality and the power exercised by white men. For instance, Chesnut discussed the problem of white planters' fathering [mixed-race](#) children with enslaved women within their extended households.”

At the conclusion of the war, the Chesnuts returned to Camden, South Carolina, and lived modestly. Partnering with her former maid, Molly, Mary began a small dairy business, with their products sold in Charleston for nearly twenty years. For some time, this was the only source of income. James eventually returned to private legal practice and local politics. To the end of his life, however, he was encumbered by the effort to untangle the post-war debts of his father’s estate. The economic challenges and post-war financial status of the Chestnuts mirrored that of their peers in the period.

During the two decades following the war, and with the intention of future publication, Mary edited and polished the content of her war-time diary. Simultaneously she wrote essays and a family history, as well as preparing a translation of French poetry. She also completed two novels which were published in 2002: *The Captain and the Colonel* and *Two Years of My Life*. A third novel, *Manassas*, was still in draft at her death.

In 1886, shortly before she died, Mary Boykin gave her diary to her closest friend, Isabella D. Martin, for publication. With editing by Miss Martin and journalist Myrta Lockett Avary, it

was first published in 1905 as *A Diary from Dixie*. In the first edition, the editors exercised considerable license and imposed their own political and social perspectives upon the text. The editors also suppressed much of Mary's personal observations, which they deemed inappropriate for publication while the subjects were still alive. Other editions, with varying degrees of editing and addition of materials followed. C. Vann Woodward's 1981 edition of the diary, titled *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, is considered the most successful, and earned a Pulitzer Prize for history in the next year. This edition was used as a primary source by Ken Burns in his acclaimed television documentary, *The Civil War*, with actress Julie Harris reading excerpts from the diary.

According to assessments by, amongst others, the *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* and the University of North Carolina's *Documenting the South*, Mary Boykin Chesnut's diary, while "valued as a rich historical source" is also "generally acknowledged today as the finest literary work of the Confederacy." Confirming the assessment of her diary's role in recording history in the making, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* describes Mary Boykin Chesnut as "the most cited chronicler of the American Civil War."

She was also known in her time as an avid collector of photographs and cartes de visite; however, until recently, those photographs had been lost to her family. Recently recovered, her collection of photographs of leading personalities of the Civil War now resides at the University of South Carolina, along with surviving originals of individual manuscripts of the diary. The university has recently published a book of the photographs.

The National Portrait Gallery mounted an exhibition of Civil War-related portraits in the 1980s, and Mary Boykin Chesnut's was the only portrait of a woman included in the show. A further honor came when the US Postal Service chose her, along with Clara Barton and Phoebe Pember, to represent women in its series of stamps commemorating the Civil War.

The full text of the 1905 edition of the diary, with additional biographical information, may be found at <https://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/chesnut/menu.html>. The authoritative 1981 edition is widely available in print.

Sources available upon request.



ca. 1860s, unknown photographer

Partner Organizations Spotlight



The mission of the **CWRT Congress** is to assist Civil War Round Tables (CWRT) become or remain sustainable. Nearly 70 CWRTs have closed their doors for good in the last ten years. As experienced CWRT leaders, the Congress offers training, mentoring and advice in governance, program, fundraising, marketing, assessments, and many other organization development services. As a 501(c)3 nonprofit, CWRT Congress does not have members, and it does not charge dues. To use their service, one only needs to ask.

Last winter, the pandemic began. CWRTs around the world stopped meeting in person. Realizing that that could be an existential threat, the Congress began holding a series of online lectures by noted academic and living historians. They also began mentoring CWRT leaders so they, too, could hold online meetings. In addition, the CWRT Congress held a series of interviews of leaders in the Civil War community so CWRTs and their members could understand the challenges they were facing and support them financially. The Congress is now planning online training for CWRTs as we all face a “new normal.”

To learn more about the CWRT Congress, visit their website: [CWRT Congress](#)

The Calling Card accepts submissions.

We are eager 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.

Please send your submissions to swcw1865@gmail.com, and please write 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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