



## Letters from the Battlefield: Stories of Washington's Civil War Soldiers

May 1 to October 30, 2011

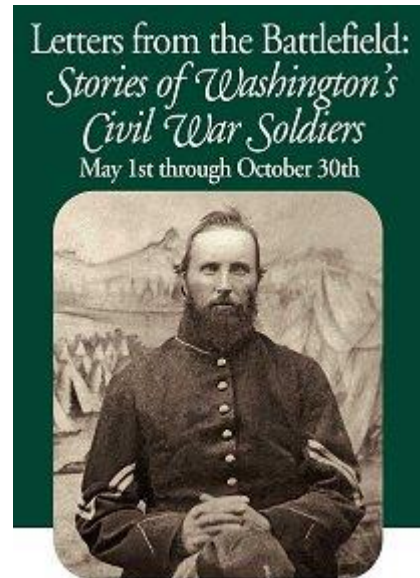
We participated in the statewide commemoration of the 150th Anniversary of the Civil War. Our exhibit, **Letters from the Battlefield: Stories of Washington's Civil War Soldiers**, won [three awards](#) for this show and its programs.

The exhibit traced the evolution of Washington from a slavery-supporting community to one that came out strongly on the side of the abolitionist forces. Civil War letters, pictures and artifacts from both local families and the collection of the Museum were used to explore the lives of Washington's soldiers, sharing their stories of bravery and horror.

The exhibit included the research of the Shepaug Valley Middle School's 8th grade students who transcribed Civil War letters from the collection of the Gunn Museum; fascinating Civil War artifacts from noted collector Thomas Zanavich and others; beautiful Civil War murals painted on the walls of the Museum by local artists Keith Templeton and Chris Zaima; and Gunnery student Zachary Bodnar shared his research on Frederick Gunn's abolitionist views and the students he prepared for war. This collaborative research project and exhibit of the Gunn Museum, Shepaug Valley Middle School and The Gunnery was generously supported by [The Backhus Foundation](#) and The [Community Foundation of Northwest Connecticut](#).

The show kicked off on May 1, 2011 with a Civil War Encampment on the grounds of the Museum with numerous living history re-eneactors depicting soldier and civilian life. Abraham Lincoln, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Frederick Gunn and others were in attendance to witness military drills, camp life, wartime medical practices, blacksmithing, firing demonstrations, and more. An authentic Civil War Gatling Gun was fired throughout the day. A Civil War Church Service was conducted at the First Congregational Church on Washington Green with period hymns, sermon and re-enactor participation. Descendants of Washington's Civil War soldiers from across the country were present for a Remembrance Ceremony at the Museum to honor their ancestors. Edith Nettleton, the 102-year-old granddaughter of Washington Civil War soldier Samuel Jay Nettleton, was the guest of honor.

Our research from the exhibit can now be found through the link below. Our research continues, and new information will be added to the site. If you have material on soldiers



from Washington and New Preston to share, please [contact us](#).

For more information, please explore:

- [Letters from the Battlefield: Stories of Washington's Civil War Soldiers](#)
- our [YouTube channel](#) and these blogs:
- [The Civil War Letters of Gunnery Student Charley Goodyear](#)
- [The Soldiers of Washington Connecticut](#)
- In 2011 our Annual History Project with the Shepaug Valley Middle School 8th Grade resulted in the student-produced book [New Preston Soldiers in the Civil War: Through Their Letters](#).
- the Central Connecticut State University [Civil War site](#)

**Click here to watch an introduction to the exhibit:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZCwgB6wQSZE>

## Related Programs

### **March 12, 2011: Connecticut Goes to War: The Fort Sumter Crisis and the Call to Arms**

Dr. Walter L. Powell gave a lecture exploring the political reaction to the Fort Sumter Crisis, the role of Connecticut Governor Buckingham and Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles (a Connecticut native), and the efforts to mobilize the state for War after President Lincoln's "Call For Volunteers" in April 1861.



Walter L. Powell is a historic preservation consultant and adjunct professor of History at Mount Saint Mary's University in Emmitsburg, Maryland, where he teaches courses in American history and the "Age of the American Civil War." He is also an Adjunct Professor of Historic Preservation at Shepherd University in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. For 17 years he served as Director of Planning and Historic Preservation for the Borough of Gettysburg, where, among many other projects, he directed the restoration of the Gettysburg Railroad Station (built 1858) and served as the Borough's principal liaison to the National Park Service Project Team that planned the exhibits and restoration of the David Wills House, where President Abraham Lincoln completed the Gettysburg Address. The former President of the Association of Licensed Battlefield Guides and the Gettysburg Battlefield Preservation Association, he has written and lectured widely on the Civil War, the Battle of Gettysburg, and Battlefield Preservation, including, most recently, *Letters from the Storm: The Intimate Civil War Letters of Lt. J.A.H. Foster, 155th Pennsylvania Volunteers* (Chicora, PA: Mechling Press, 2010).



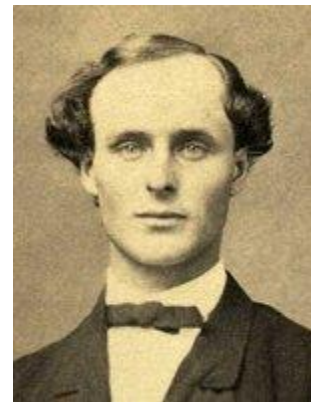
### **April 4, 2011: From the Archives of the Gunn Museum: Washington's Gift to the Civil War**

Staff from the Gunn Museum presented one in a series of coffee hour readings from the archives of the Gunn Memorial Museum at the Washington Senior Center. Curator Stephen Bartkus shared photos and *A Historical Sketch Written and Delivered by Samuel Jay Nettleton at the Memorial Service Held May 28, 1911 on the 50th Anniversary of the Opening of the Civil War*. Attendees learned about Washington's gift to the cause, and who fought in the Civil War from town.

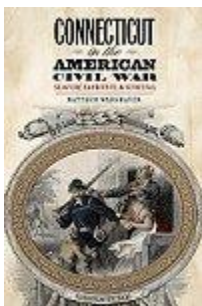
In 2011 the Gunn Museum's Annual History Project with the Shepaug Valley Middle School 8th Grade was supported by a grant from the S. E. & L. C. [Backhus Foundation](#) and resulted in the student produced book [New Preston Soldiers in the Civil War: Through Their Letters](#).

### **May 19, 2011: A History Bites lecture with Zachary Bodnar**

Zachary Bodnar, the 2010-11 Gunn Scholar, presented a lecture, "Gunn's Soldiers: Tales of Civil War Soldiers from The Gunnery," in the Wykeham Room of the Gunn Memorial Library. Frederick W. Gunn's abolitionist ideals were very well known to everyone around him, and his principles were imprinted onto his pupils, some of whom left to fight in the Civil War. Charles Goodyear and Romulus Loveridge are two such students, whose stories include the joining of colored regiments as officers. This program, presented by the Gunnery School's senior class Gunn Scholar, focused on the stories of these two soldiers and their friends, as well as other students mentioned in the letters of Charles Goodyear.



Zachary has compiled his research into a book which is available for purchase. Visitors also viewed the Museum's exhibit, "Letters from the Battlefield: Stories of Washington's Civil War Soldiers," before and after Zachary's presentation. This presentation was part of the History Bites lecture series. History Bites is a ten-week lunchtime lecture series presented every spring by ten history organizations in Litchfield County. History Bites 2011 is being generously sponsored by the Connecticut Community Foundation.



### **June 9, 2011: Connecticut in the American Civil War**

Dr. Matthew Warshauer presented a talk based on his new book, "Connecticut in the American Civil War: Slavery, Sacrifice and Survival." Dr. Warshauer is Professor of History at Central Connecticut State University. The author of three books, he is a specialist on 19th century political and constitutional history. He serves as co-chair of the

Connecticut Civil War Commemoration Commission, and is helping to coordinate activities across Connecticut to focus on the importance and lasting legacies of the American Civil War and Connecticut's involvement in it. Although most may not immediately think of Connecticut when considering the Civil War, the state was extensively involved in the conflict. We sent more than 30 regiments to the front, had an extensive industrial capacity, and an active home front. Connecticut is also home to more than 130 Civil War monuments. Dr. Warshauer signed copies of his book after the presentation.

We recorded this presentation. You can see it on YouTube in four parts: [Part 1](#) - [Part 2](#) - [Part 3](#) - [Part 4](#)

### **September 11, 2011: Mary Lou Pavlik Brings Civil War to Life**

Civil War re-enactor Mary Lou Pavlik assumed the role of Mary Ann Lewis Bronson, a young wife during the Civil War. Dr. George Bronson married Mary Ann Lewis on September 5, 1861 and five weeks later, enlisted in the Union Army with the 11th Connecticut Volunteer Regiment. Much to his newly-wed wife's horror and disbelief, George enlisted as a Private. This rank was to be short lived and he served proudly for four years as Hospital Steward. The only contact that the newlyweds had was through their correspondence. The family has preserved forty-four of George's original letters to Mary Ann. Six of those letters will take you from the docks of New York City on December 17, 1861 as the 11th Connecticut Regiment sets sail for Maryland to the fall of Richmond in April, 1865, where George's regiment was the first to enter the city.



### **September 25, 2011: Popular Music of the Civil War with the "Virginia Serenaders"**

Inspired by the 1840's group of the same name, the Virginia Serenaders represent the sound of a formative era — the "national music" of the 19th century. They feature familiar works by Stephen Foster known as the "Father of American music", whose songs include "Oh Susanna", "Camptown Races" and "Old Folks at Home" (Swanee River),

and Dan Emmet, who is best remembered for his compositions "Blue Tail Fly", "My Old Aunt Sally" and most notably, "Dixie" — music which the soldiers of the North and the South either carried-off or learned as part of their shared experience. The Serenaders use



antique or reproduction instruments, fiddles, guitars and fretless banjos, strung with gut and headed with natural skin, which serve to capture the sound as originally performed. The dynamic and unusual percussion instruments include a combination of tambourine, triangle, fireplace tongs and jawbone. The result is a blend of historical research mixed with the interpretation of the musicians.

The ["Virginia Serenaders"](#) is led by John Dwyer, lecturer and performer along with vocalist and guitarist, Brad Lewis. Both musicians have participated with the Ethiopian Serenaders, Canebrake Minstrels, Clatter Valley String Band, Cinnamon Sky and the 2nd South Carolina String Band, as well as reenactment groups including the 22nd Virginia Volunteer Infantry and the 2nd Connecticut Heavy Artillery. They have regularly performed at Gettysburg, and for Historical and Legacy groups throughout the Northeastern States.

### **October 9, 2011 Connecticut at Antietam**

Keven Walker, Antietam National Battlefield Historian, gave a presentation about Antietam, known as the bloodiest single-day battle in American history with about 23,000 casualties after 12 hours of savage combat on September 17, 1862. Twelve Washington men fought at the battle of Antietam in Sharpsburg, Maryland. Attendees learned about what these men faced and endured in one of the Civil War's signature battles. Keven Walker is a long-time employee of the National Park Service and the author of the book, *Antietam Farmsteads: A Guide to the Battlefield Landscape*.



This program was made possible by the support of the Community Foundation of Northwest Connecticut.

### **October 15, 2011: Civil War Artifact Appraisal Day with Thomas Zonavich**

The public was invited to bring their Civil War artifacts to the Museum to be evaluated by Thomas Zonavich, a long-time dealer, collector and the guest curator of the current exhibit. He answered questions and verbally appraised items for estimated age and value. There was no charge for admission or appraisal. This program was made possible by the support of [The Community Foundation of Northwest Connecticut](#).



## **October 22, 2011: The Life and Times of William Webb, An African-American Civil War Soldier from Connecticut**

Kevin Johnson gave a living history performance as William Webb, an African-American Civil War Soldier from Connecticut. Private Webb was an actual soldier, a native of Hartford. He was recruited in 1863 and served in the Twenty-Ninth (Colored) Regiment, Connecticut Volunteer Infantry in several battles in Virginia. Johnson's presentation of Webb is told from an emotional and exciting first-person perspective that vividly illustrates the struggle of the African-Americans in the Colored Infantry during the Civil War. He tells of his early life in Hartford, his recruitment and training, and the traumatic final battles of the Civil War. The presentation is based on extensive research in the collections of the Connecticut State Library and the Museum of Connecticut History. Kevin Johnson is an employee of the State Library's History and Genealogy Unit.

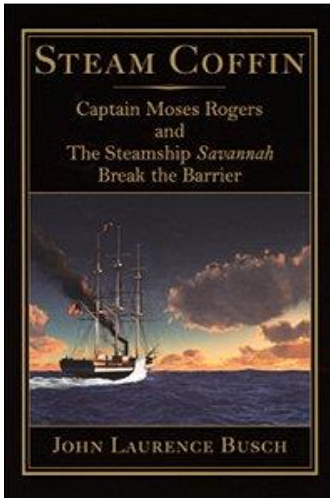
This program was made possible by the support of [The Community Foundation of Northwest Connecticut](#).

## **October 28, 2011: Civil War Cemetery Tour**

The 4th Annual Washington Green Cemetery Tour, with a special Civil War theme to honor Washington's Civil War soldiers and commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the Civil War, took place the Friday before Halloween.

Costumed guides led groups of visitors every ten minutes from the Museum to the Washington Green Cemetery where the town's departed citizens from the Civil War were stationed at their gravestones to tell their tales. Tour groups followed a path of 1,000 luminaries spanning a quarter of a mile through the shadowy cemetery and heard the dramatic experiences of Washington's soldiers in their own words, from the actual letters they wrote that are now in the collection of the Museum. Features of this magical theatrical evening included President Abraham Lincoln, Confederate soldiers, Abolitionists, along with Washington's soldiers and their wives. This one-time event was sponsored by the [Connecticut Community Foundation](#).





## November 10, 2011: Steam Coffin: A Lecture on the Steamship Savannah

Historian and author John Laurence Busch lectured on his new book, *Steam Coffin: Captain Moses Rogers and The Steamship Savannah Break the Barrier*. He signed copies of his book after the presentation.

Busch's book is an account of the development and construction of

the steamship Savannah and the passionate career of its Captain, Moses Rogers of Connecticut. Busch discussed the history of the development of the steamship and the struggle of Savannah backers to introduce a radical, next-generation steam powered vessel to the sea. Running steamboats on rivers, lakes and bays became a normal and accepted part of American life but taking such a vessel on a voyage across the ocean was a different proposition altogether. Busch explained why the proposition of making the first crossing of the Atlantic Ocean on a "steamship" was met with a mixture of skepticism and fear. Traditionally-minded mariners looked upon its unnatural means of propulsion with the greatest suspicion. To them, it was not a "Steam Ship;" instead, it was a "Steam Coffin."

## November 20, 2011: A Jezebel Among Us: Abby Kelley Foster Returns to Washington!

In 1840 Quaker Pacifist, Radical Abolitionist and Women's Rights Activist Abby Kelley Foster of Worcester, Massachusetts spoke publicly in Washington, Connecticut. Lynne McKenney Lydick of the Worcester Women's History Project presented a one-woman play in the same Congregational Church on Washington Green, based on Abby Kelley's letters and speeches, to give the flavor of her shocking and controversial visit.

Abby Kelley Foster was 29 when she broke with social convention dictating that women remain silent, submissive and obedient by claiming her right to speak out against slavery. In doing so, she helped lay the foundation for the women's rights movement.

Foster was one of the first women to speak publicly against slavery and during her first speech a mob threatened to burn down the hall where she spoke. As a radical abolitionist,



Collections of the Worcester Historical Museum, Worcester, Massachusetts



Mrs. Foster gained notoriety by traveling around the country as an anti-slavery lecturer and she was never derailed from her belief that all people are created equal. Sponsored by Sheriff John Gunn and others, Abby spoke to large audiences in Washington, Connecticut in 1840. The minister of the Congregational Church, Gordon Hayes, denounced Abby Kelley's presence in town proclaiming her "a jezebel and servant of Satan in the garb of an angel of light with the aim to entice and destroy this church."

This program was made possible by the support of [The Community Foundation of Northwest Connecticut](#) and was sponsored by the First Congregational Church and Gunn Museum.

### **May 14 - June 11, 2012: Shepaug School Civil War Exhibit — Samuel Jay's Story**



The Shepaug Middle School's exhibit, "Life Through Letters: Samuel Jay's Story," commemorated Washington Civil War soldier Samuel Jay Nettleton of the 8th Connecticut Regiment and was displayed in the entrance mall of Shepaug Valley School from May 14 - June 11, 2012. The exhibit traced the life of Samuel Jay Nettleton, from his perspective, and his journey through the War. Civil War letters, pictures and artifacts from the Gunn Museum were creatively used by the students to explore his life and share his stories.

This exhibit was part of the national, [award-winning](#) annual history project with the Gunn Museum, now in its 6th year, that teaches history to students using local primary source documents from the Gunn Museum. Eighty-six 8th grade social studies students at Shepaug School transcribed (forty) letters by this civil war soldier, and researched his life. Their research included family genealogy, an oral history interview with Samuel Nettleton's 103-year-old granddaughter Edith Nettleton, a field trip to the Washington Cemetery and the Nettleton Family Homestead. The students also compiled their transcriptions, original research and interpretation, consisting of poems, essays and illustrations in a book. Copies of their book are for sale at the school and the museum.



