

THE DISPATCH

The Civil War Round Table of New York, Inc.

Volume 66, No. 9

610th Meeting

May 2017



- Guest:
**Fletcher Pratt Winner
John Strausbaugh
City of Sedition**
- Cost:
**Members: \$50
Non-Members: \$60**
- Date:
**Wednesday,
May 10th**
- Place:
**The Three West Club,
3 West 51st Street**
- Time:
**Dinner at 6:00 pm,
Doors open 5:30 pm,
Cash Bar 5:30 – 7 pm**

*You must call
718-341-9811 by
May 3rd if you
plan to attend the
May meeting.
We need to know how
many people to order
food for.*

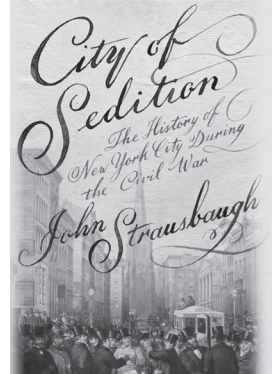
Fletcher Pratt Winner John Strausbaugh for City of Sedition

Our Fletcher Pratt winner, John Strausbaugh, originally from Baltimore, now living in Brooklyn Heights, is a cultural commentator and host of The New York Times Weekend Explorer video podcast series on New York City. Among other topics, he is an authority on the history of New York City.

He is a contributor to the New York Times, the Washington Post, Forbes Magazine, NPR, The Baltimore Sun, and Cabinet magazine.

City of Sedition has won universal praise from critics, as this quote from author Richard Brookhiser illustrates:

“What a terrific job! Strausbaugh paints New York in a vortex of treason and war, profit and chaos, idealism, energy and and murderous violence. City of Sedition is bright, urgent and fast as a fire truck.”



Mr. Lincoln Sends A Message to Congress

It could not be seen very clearly, and the words which could express the things so dimly seen had to be groped for; but here in fact was a remorseless revolutionary struggle, stated as clearly as might be by a man who felt the immense values that were involved. And Mr. Lincoln closed by saying, “The struggle of today, is not altogether for today – it is for the future, also.”

Yet the future was hidden by a blinding mist. Both Richmond and Washington were reaching out for the future with uncertain hands, unable to see what they groped for, unable to know that the very act of reaching was going to create unending change. In his sketch of an Ideal America where most people neither owned nor were owned, Mr. Lincoln was describing the country he knew, the magically lighted, subtly fading land of small farms and village industries, simple, uncomplicated, transitory, the breeding ground for the homeliest and loveliest of virtues. Far ahead, beyond the vision of any living man, lay Pittsburgh and Detroit, Gary and Los Angeles, the industrialized American empire with all its greatness and infinite complications, a

society in which no man could ever again be an island, something which Mr. Lincoln could neither foresee nor prevent: something enduring only if the loss of the kind of independence the president was talking about could be accompanied by the everlasting acquisition of a moral and political freedom broad enough to preserve somehow the concept of a society in which the unattached individual was the man who really mattered.

Mr. Lincoln could no more see how this would come out of the war than Mr. Davis could see that before the war ended he himself would be calling on the government to embrace the very thing his government had gone to war to prevent – emancipation. Each president was trying to project the present into the future, and each man was compelled to do things which would send the present back into the abandoned past. Perhaps each man was haunted by a dim awareness that this might be so.

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2017 • MEETING SCHEDULE • 2017

• June 14th •
Chris Bryce
Petersburg

• September 13th •
TBA

• October 11th •
TBA

President's Message

As is usual in this merry month of May, we are presenting the 61st annual "Fletcher Pratt Award," one of the preeminent literary awards of the Civil War community. This year's honoree is John Strausbaugh for his book "City of Sedition: The History of New York During the Civil War."

I'm sure you have often thought "Well, just who was Fletcher Pratt (whose name has graced this most distinguished award for literary excellence for over sixty years)?"

Fletcher Pratt, born in 1897, became a popular published writer in the 1920's, eventually becoming the Military Affairs Editor for *Time Magazine*, and a regular reviewer for the *NY Times Book Review*. Just prior to WWII, Pratt (an avid wargamer) created a rather complex mathematical formula for use in maneuvering fleets of model warships. This was soon published (rather portentously) as "Fletcher Pratt's Rules for Naval Warfare." This led him to pen a dozen subsequent books on the same or similar subjects. Additionally, by now also a keen student of the Civil War, the prolific Mr. Pratt produced a half dozen works on our favorite conflict, including, "Ordeal by Fire," "The Monitor and Merrimack," "The Civil War on Western Waters," and "Stanton: Lincoln's Secretary of War."

In 1951, Pratt became a founding Charter Member of the CWRT of New York, serving as President from 1953-54. Tragically, he died suddenly in 1956, at age 59. Within days of his death, the club's Board of Directors unanimously voted to create the "Fletcher Pratt Literary Award." Presented to the author or editor of the best non-fiction book about the Civil War, published in the previous calendar year. It rapidly became one of the most prestigious and sought after awards in the Civil War community, and remains so to this day.

Previous award winners are a veritable "Who's Who" of Civil War literary lions. Just a partial listing includes such notables as Bruce Catton, Alan Nevins, Harry Hansen, Clifford Dowdy, Edwin Coddington, William C. Davis, Stephen Sears, Edwin Longacre, James "Bud" Robertson, Noah Trudeau, Wiley Sword, Steven Woodworth, Gary Gallagher, Gordon Rhea, Joseph T. Glatthaar, Allen Guelzo, Ed Bearss, and, of course, most recently, James McPherson. (PHEW!)

This year's winner is John Strausbaugh, author of "City of Sedition: The History of New York During the Civil War," which details the events of the war years on the sidewalks and salons of NYC, which, despite being full of (and often run by) Confederate-sympathizing Copperheads, supplied more money, material, and men to the Union war effort than any other city.

Don't miss the chance to reserve your seat for a fascinating look at our favorite city during our favorite era.

Call (718) 341-9811 RIGHT NOW for a great dinner and show.) - just off Broadway!

Hope to see you there!

Paul Weiss

CWRTNY 60TH ANNUAL BATTLEFIELD TOUR

"Petersburg...And The Start Of The Appomattox Campaign"

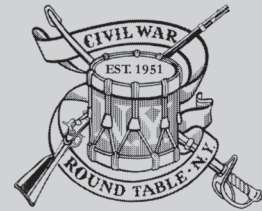
Thursday to Sunday | October 12-15, 2017

For the past two years, we've traveled the "Bloody Roads South" with the valiant Army of the Potomac. This year we will continue with the Army of the Potomac and the Army of Northern Virginia as they face each other for 10 long months at Petersburg and City Point. We have added an extra day so our tour will cover the Battles of the Crater and Forts Steadman, Gregg, Whitworth, and Mahone...we will travel to Dinwiddie, the White Oak Road, and Five Forks... plus we will break through the lines with the Federals at Petersburg...visit A.P. Hill's death site...and follow Lincoln into Petersburg as Grant and Meade begin their pursuit of Lee on his final retreat!

TO RESERVE YOUR PLACE:

Send your \$100 check (Made out to "CWRTNY") and your complete contact information with your phone number, cell phone and email address to: Martin Smith/CWRTNY Tour, 158 West 81 Street #24, New York, NY 10024.

THE DISPATCH



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May During the Civil War

1861

16 – Kentucky decides to remain neutral in the war. And they sort of do it until General Leonidas Polk sticks his two cents and his army in.

21 – Reversing Horace Greeley's advise to go west, the newly minted C S of A moves east to their new capital in Richmond, Va.

1862

8 – Stonewall Jackson and his foot cavalry defeats Robert Milroy's federals. What else is new?

9 – David Hunter frees the slaves in S.C., Ga., and Fla. Lincoln unfrees them on the 19th.

1863

5 – Fed up with his oratory, the government orders the arrest of The Old Copperhead, the anti-war Democrat, Clement Vallandigham.

22 – President Lincoln offers a prize to Darius Couch (how do you pronounce his name?) - command of the Army of the Potomac. He demurs but recommends a Pennsylvania man who ended up fighting a pretty good battle in a small town in his home state.

1864

5 – Chancellorsville all over again, Déjà vu in the Wilderness.

9 – Don't ever disparage Southern marksmanship. John Sedgwick learns this at Spotsylvania whilst discussing distance and elephants.

Insuring Slaves' Lives

New York Life, the nation's third-largest life insurance company, opened in Manhattan's financial district in the spring of 1845. The firm possessed a prime address – 58 Wall Street – and a board of trustees populated by some of the city's wealthiest merchants, bankers and railroad magnets.

Sales were sluggish that year so the company looked south. There, in Richmond, Va., an enterprising New York Life agent sold more than 30 policies in a single day in 1846. Soon advertisements began appearing in newspapers from Wilmington, N.C. to Louisville, Ky., as the New York-based company encouraged Southerners to buy insurance to protect their most precious commodity: their slaves.

Alive, slaves were among a white man's most prized assets. Dead they were considered virtually worthless. Life insurance changed that calculus, allowing slaves owners to recoup three-quarters of a slave's value in the event of an untimely death.

James De Peyster Ogden, New York Life's first president, would later describe the American system of bondage as "evil." But by 1847, insurance policies on slaves accounted for a third of the policies in a firm that would become one of the nation's Fortune 100 companies.

Georgetown, Harvard and other universities have drawn national attention to the legacy of slavery this year as they have acknowledged benefitting from the slave trade and grappled with how to make amends. But slavery also generated business for some of the most prominent modern-day corporations, underscoring the ties that many contemporary institutions have to this painful period of history.

Banks absorbed by JPMorgan Chase and Wells Fargo allowed Southerners seeking loans to use their slaves as collateral and took possession of some of them when their owners defaulted. Like New York Life, Aetna and US Life sold insurance policies to slave owners, particularly those whose laborers engaged in hazardous work in mines, lumber mills, turpentine factories and steamboats in the industrializing sectors of the South.

US Life, a subsidiary of AIG, declined to comment on its slave policy sales. Wachovia, one of Wells Fargo's predecessor companies, has apologized for its historic ties to slavery as have JPMorgan Chase and Aetna.

More than 40 other firms, mostly based in the South, sold such policies, too, though documentation is scarce and most closed their doors generations ago.

New York Life survived. Its foray into slave insurance business did not prove to be lucrative: the company ended up paying out nearly as much in death claims – as it received in annual payments. But in the span of about three years, it sold 508 policies, more than Aetna and US Life combined, according to available records.

Policy No. 447 covered Nathan York, a slave who toiled in the Virginia coal mines where the earth often collapsed on its subterranean work force. Policy No. 1141 insured a slave known as Warwick, who fed the fiery furnaces on a Kentucky steamboat. Policy No. 1150 covered Anthony, who labored amid the swirling blades of a sawmill in North Carolina.

Slavery was finally abolished in New York in 1827. But the plantations in the South continued to generate business in the city in the decades before the Civil War, according to Eric Foner, a historian at Columbia University.

New York City's merchants helped finance the nation's premier export crop, cotton, and the purchase of the land and slaves needed to grow it. They controlled the boat companies that shipped the cotton to Europe, leading one Southern editor to describe New York city as "almost as dependent upon Southern slavery as Charleston."

And some of these businessmen assumed important positions at New York life.

N.Y. Times 12/19/17

By Rachel L. Swarns

Election Slate

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For each president had to listen to a categorical imperative. "Get on with the war." This could not be escaped. This made each man a prisoner. The time for preparation was over, and now the war itself, with its imperious demands on all Americans, was about to take charge.

The Attorney General of the United States, the same Edward Bates who had contested with Mr. Lincoln for the Republican presidential nomination early in the summer of 1860, closed this year's entry in his diary on December 31 by lamenting the slowness of Federal military movements. Enormous efforts, Mr. Bates believed, were being made and great battles were about to take place, yet there seemed to be no central direction; Mr. Bates recalled that he had recently warned Mr. Lincoln that it was time for the President to take effective control.

"I insisted," wrote Mr. Bates, "that being 'Commander in Chief' by law, he must command in chief – not in detail, certainly – and I would know what army I had, and what the high generals (my Lieutenants) were doing with that army.

At about the same time Judge David Davis, out in Illinois, got a letter from a friend in Washington who had been digesting the president's message and who felt that it was not belligerent enough. Things around the capital, said this man, looked and felt much as they had

before Bull Run, with the same desperate eagerness for action raising war's demands to an unendurable pitch; "There is springing up again both in Congress & the country a good deal of restlessness & impatience. At the apparent inactivity of the immense army we have in the field. And you need not be at all surprised if there should be in a very short time another tremendous 'On to Richmond' cry."

From *Terrible Swift Sword* by Bruce Catton

DRESS CODE

Ladies and gentlemen: PLEASE

No sneakers, no jeans, no tee shirts. Gentlemen, please wear a collared shirt. Let's dress like we are attending a business meeting.

Thanks, The Management

NEW RECRUITS

Peggy Eason from NYC who heard about us on Ask The Lawyer, Mike Connor's radio program



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OF NEW YORK

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