

**Celebrating Cape May and South Jersey's role in the Civil War
Hosted by Cape May Historical Society, Historic Cold Spring Village, East Lynne
Theater, and Cape May Film Society**

The New Jersey Council for the Humanities has provided a grant to the Cape May Film Society to host three admission-free panel discussions on the topic of "The South Jersey Experience: Civil War Biographies." The final discussion will take place at Historic Cold Spring Village (Rte. 9 Entranc) on March 25. Jim Stephens, Deputy Director for Historic Cold Spring Village in Cape May, is the moderator for the discussion.

"One of the first issues we'll look at is dispelling the myth that Southern New Jersey sympathized with the Confederates during the Civil War," said Stephens. The southern part of this state was very much in favor of Lincoln and the war effort in general. Some would even argue there was more support down here than there was in the northern part of the state."

Joining Stephens will be Joe Bilby, Assistant Curator for the National Guard Militia Museum of NJ and author of the book, "New Jersey Goes to War" which details some of Southern New Jersey's great war heroes.

"We will definitely get into the different units, the unique personalities, even a few idiosyncrasies," said Bilby.

According to Bilby's book, "As a result of the large numbers of casualties at the battle of Gettysburg in July 1863, the military requested civilian medical assistance. [Salem County's Cornelia Hancock] arrived at Gettysburg two days after the battle and without any official support or supplies, she helped wherever she could. Despite her innate dislike of alcohol, she dispensed with scruples and began to serve what would become a trademark 'punch' of condensed milk laced with whiskey."

William Still, born in Burlington County, was the eighteenth child of two former slaves from the south. From Bilby's book: "As a conductor on the Underground Railroad, he also worked closely with Harriet Tubman. His book, 'The Underground Railroad: A Record of Facts, Authentic Naratives, Letters, etc.', published in 1872, is considered perhaps the most important reference on that institution."

"One of the other great stories and personalities of the war is Cape May's Captain Henry Sawyer," says Gayle Stahlhuth, Artistic Director of the East Lynne Theater Company and another panelist. Stahlhuth wrote a play about Sawyer's time as a prisoner of war and his ultimate release as a way for Cape May school students, who first performed the play, to better understand their own history.

"There are several different, sometimes competing stories of Sawyers release," says Stahlhuth, "but you get closer to a consensus the more you read about it." She will also provide some of the grim details and spectacular encounters from a book she recently acquired about the great escapes of the Civil War, which was first published in 1885.

"One of the challenges of studying New Jersey's part in the Civil War is that, unlike Maryland, Virginia, and the Carolinas, we didn't have physical battles in the state," says another panelist and Professor for Monmouth University, Richard Veit. "However, there were important military hospitals, graveyards, and training grounds here. Cemeteries from throughout the region tell us so much about the individuals of the war effort, such as the African Americans who received military issue headstones to commemorate their heroic achievements in ways never done before."

The panel discussions will also be accompanied by a selection of period songs performed by Barry Tischler, who specializes in acoustic performances of historical songs. The entire presentation will be filmed for a new educational DVD that will be distributed to schools, libraries, and historical societies throughout Southern New Jersey. For more information about this program, contact Historic Cold Spring Village at 609-898-2300 or the Cape May Film Society at 609-884-6700 or visit www.capemayfilm.org.

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