

A Black Soldier in the Civil War

During the Civil War, in July, 1862, Congress authorized President Lincoln to use "persons of African descent" in military service, and the Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863 sanctioned their enlistment. About twenty African-American men from Middletown answered the call to arms. Others from around Connecticut also heeded the call.

Kevin Johnson portrays one of these soldiers in his one man play "The Life and Times of William Webb: An African-American Civil War Soldier from Connecticut." The presentation will be held on Tuesday, March 24 at 7:00 pm in the Hubbard Room at Russell Library, 123 Broad Street, Middletown.

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 war. The presentation is based on extensive research in the collections of the Connecticut State Library and the Museum of Connecticut History in Hartford.

Mr. Johnson is an employee of the State Library's History and Genealogy Unit. He has been presenting William Webb for more than nine years and has given more than 320 presentations. This program is free and open to the public and is part of the ongoing series of programs designed to highlight the Society's new exhibit, "Hard & Stirring Times—Middletown and the Civil War."



Kevin Johnson as Private William Webb

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SOCIETY NEWS

President's Message

Change has come to America...and to the Historical Society! I am pleased to announce that long time Board member, past President, Vice President, Secretary, and Chairwoman of Buildings and Grounds, Deborah Shapiro, has been appointed to succeed Donna K. Baron as the Society's new Executive Director.

Debby, who received her Bachelor of Arts degree in History from Connecticut College, has been active in the Society for over 25 years, and, in addition to the many offices she has held, served as chairwoman of the capital campaign, "A Future for our Past", which raised funds to restore the Mansfield House.

Indeed, we have been very pleased with the momentum we have built in the community over the last two years under the leadership of Donna Baron, who thankfully will remain as a volunteer at the Society and who will also serve on the Board of Directors. At the same time, we are very excited and pleased that Debby has agreed to be our Executive Director. With her extensive



knowledge of Middletown's history, our archives and collections, and her wide-ranging network of contacts in the greater Middletown community, she will be able to continue and further our goal of being at the forefront of the cultural life of our city.

The attendance at our exhibit opening and recent programs has been overwhelming and feedback has been positive, and we hope this enthusiasm continues throughout our upcoming events. In honor of Abraham Lincoln's 200th birthday, the Mansfield House will have expanded hours in the month of February—Sunday's, February 8, 15, and 22 from 12:00 to 3:30—and there will a special exhibit of Lincoln memorabilia drawn from the Society's and private collections. We invite you to join us at the Society to honor Honest Abe and share in the excitement.

Bill Ryczek, President

From the Executive Director

Dear Members,

As the holidays approached, little did I know that the opportunity to devote more time to educating our community and preserving our area's history would present itself. Although, I, like the rest of the Board, was sad to see Executive Director Donna Baron leave to pursue other opportunities—especially in light of the fine job she has done to increase our visibility in the community—it also gave me a chance to return to my first love, the study of history.

As I write this, I have been serving as Executive Director of the Historical Society on a part-time basis for three weeks...and a busy three weeks it has been! A number of researchers have come in to look for information in our archives and genealogical collection; an enthusiastic class from Independent Day School sat around our big conference table and learned how to research in original sources; over 60 people attended Matthew Isenburg's talk on early photography; we had 120 people at our opening night reception for our new

exhibit, enhanced by the choral group, the Middletuners, singing Civil War era songs; Debbie Rossi, the curator of the exhibit, gave a talk highlighting Middletown's Civil War experience; and I have fielded calls from all over the country, demonstrating that people with Middletown roots have spread far and wide! I am pleased to report that the Mansfield House is a lively place indeed!

We are very lucky that we have a committed group of members. But an organization such as ours can only thrive by continually welcoming new members into our midst. If any of you have friends or family who are interested in history, please encourage them to come to the Mansfield House to view our exhibits and perhaps even become members. We further welcome members who have special interests to write articles for the newsletter. There is something for everyone here at the Society, and I am very excited, and honored, to be a part of it.

Debby Shapiro, Executive Director

Tool Handle Makers, Buell Brothers and Leander L. Hull

by Dick Dickerson, long time Society member and third in his series of articles on Middlesex County tool makers.

Clinton had two tool handle makers, Edgar and Andrew Buell and Leander L. Hull. They are the only makers I've found in Middlesex County. In fig.1, the first and second handles are Buell and the third is Hull. The dark wood is cocobolo and the lighter maple. Both Buell handles contain 10 tools and the Hull 12.

Tool handles were cobbler's tools but could be used in woodworking also. They are still available in various configurations. They were made by many manufactures including the Stanley Tool Company of New Britain. Fig. 2 shows the tools in the Buell handle. It contained four brad awls of various sizes, gimlet (screw starter), scratch awl, countersink, chisel, screwdriver, and tack lifter.

I have three handles in my collection with three different logos. All three have either "BUELL BROS or BUELL BRO. &CO. with CLINTON, CONN". One has a patent date but is unreadable. However, it is patent 289,501,4 December 1883, issued to Edgar Buell. The patented feature is the jaws for holding the tool. Edgar has three other patents and he joined with Andrew on one¹.



Fig. 1

Inventor(s)	Patent Number	Item	Patent Date	Assigned to
E. Buell	122151	Windlass	26 Dec. 1871	Not Assigned
E. Buell	267060	Tool Handle	7 Nov 1882	A & E Buell
E. Buell	289501	Tool Handle	4 Dec. 1883	A & E Buell
E. Buell	289502	Bit Stock	4 Dec 1883	A & E Buell
A. & E. Buell	399490	Saw Set	12 Mar 1889	A & E Buell



Fig. 2

Andrew was born about 1845 and Edgar about 1847 in Connecticut. Unfortunately, the census records for both are incomplete. In 1870 Edgar was listed as a boot repairer, in 1880 and 1920 as an inventor, and as retired in 1930. Andrew is listed in 1900 as a manufacturer of tools and in 1910 as a manufacturer².

Leander L. Hull was born in Connecticut about 1829. In the 1880 census he is listed as a manufacturer's agent and in 1900 as a capitalist³. Fig. 3 is the Hull tool handle with 11 of the 12 tools. Marked two lines "L.L. HULL / CLINTON . CT. U.S.A.". He represented a number of manufacturers, including The John S. Fray CO. of Bridgeport, a maker of braces, hand drills, tool sets, etc.⁴ This type of tool handle is listed in ref. 4, page 39 as a combination shaft. This handle was patented by Stephen Henry of Marshfield, MA. 23 June 1874, number 152,228.

The tool handles are very well made. All at least 100 years old. Also, the Clinton Historical Society⁵ operates the Buell tool museum.

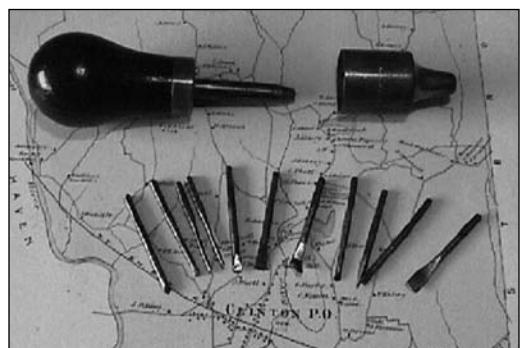
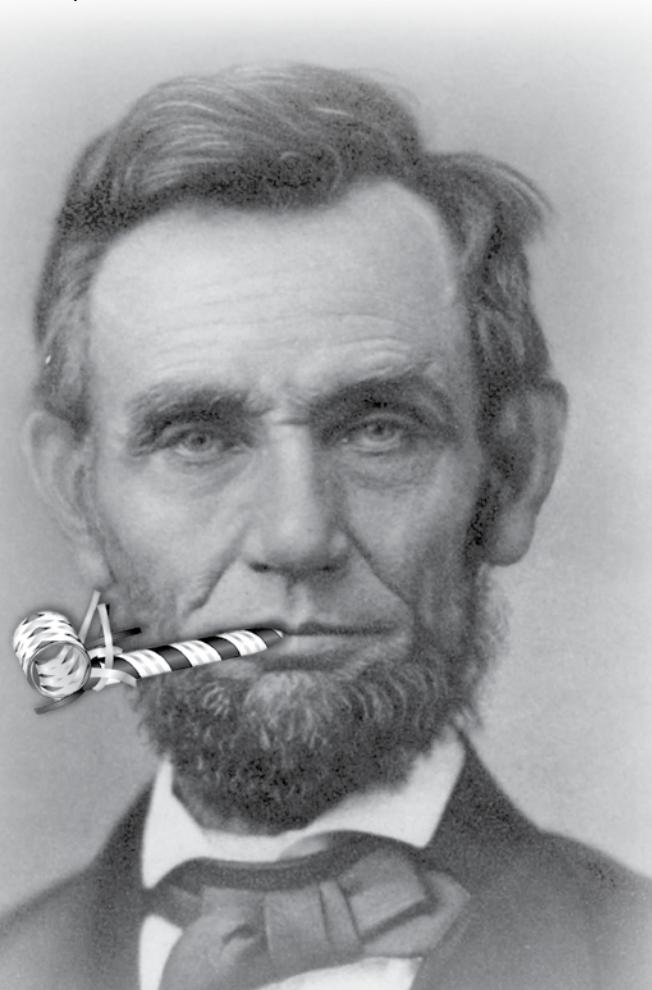


Fig. 3

Ref.

1. The Connecticut patents Project <<http://www.cslib.org/patentSrch.asp>>.
2. Ancestry.com. <<http://www.ancestry.com/>>.
3. Beers, J.H.. Commemorative Biographical Record of Middlesex County Connecticut. 1st.. 1908. Page 636.
4. The John S. Fray Co. Catalog No. 26. 1911. (Reprint 1994).
5. <<http://www.clintonchistory.org/>>.



Everyone Loves a Party!!

Honest Abe Lincoln turns 200 on Thursday, February 12, 2009. *That's a cause for celebration!* Come join us to mark the occasion with some of President Lincoln's favorite foods and drinks on the 12th from 5:30 to 7:30 pm at the General Mansfield House. A special feature will be an exhibit of Lincoln memorabilia drawn from the Society's and private collections.

To continue the celebration, the museum will be open Sundays, February 8, 15, and 22 from 12 to 3:30 for viewing of the current exhibit, "Hard & Stirring Times: Middletown and the Civil War"



Have you renewed your membership?

Please check your records. Many of our valued members have not yet submitted their renewals.

This year, the Historical Society is planning an ever-growing calendar of events, many of which will focus on Middletown & the Civil War. Society members receive advance notice of many events, invitations to special events, and registration discounts. Members also receive *The Historical Observer*, the Society's newsletter. Increased production and mailing costs mean that only members who are up-to-date with their dues will continue to receive their copies.

Please, continue to support your Historical Society and help preserve community memory and renew your subscription today. If you are not sure whether you have renewed, please call the Mansfield House, 860-346-0746, and I will be happy to check for you.

Thank you for your interest and support,

Debby Shapiro, Executive Director

Membership Application

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____

E-mail _____

Membership Levels

<input type="checkbox"/> Student \$15	<input type="checkbox"/> Business \$50
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual \$25	<input type="checkbox"/> Patron \$100
<input type="checkbox"/> Family \$35	<input type="checkbox"/> Life \$500

Please make checks payable to:
The Middlesex County Historical Society

Detach and send to:
General Mansfield House,
151 Main Street, Middletown, CT 06457

“They Called Me Lizzy... from Slavery to the White House”

The recent inauguration of Barack Obama included much news coverage of the fashions that First Lady Michelle Obama wore to the many events and of the people who created them. The need for First ladies to be fashionable is not new. First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln was well known for her extensive wardrobe some of which was created by her dressmaker, Elizabeth Keckly.

We are pleased to present the East Haddam Stage Company's production “They Called Me Lizzy...from Slavery to the White House” on Thursday, February 19, 2009 at 7:00 pm at Oddfellows Playhouse, 128 Washington Street, Middletown.

Written and directed by Kandie Carle, this one hour drama tells the life story of Elizabeth Keckly. Born in Dinwiddie Courthouse, Virginia, Elizabeth Keckly lived through the harrowing experience of slavery and its inherent cruelties to mind and body, to emerge triumphant. Through her talents as a seamstress, this quietly proud and resourceful woman was able to achieve freedom, travel to Washington, D.C., set herself up as a business woman in the dressmaker's trade, and meet with great success. She came to the attention of Mary Todd Lincoln, became her personal dressmaker/designer, as well as what is referred to today as a stylist. She also became Mary's confidante and intimate of the entire Lincoln family. It was her connection to this family that defined the rest of her life.

During the Civil War she created the Contraband Relief Association, which provided for newly freed men and women pouring into the area. She also was instrumental in a number of other charitable causes through her church and community. Included in these was the Home for Destitute Colored Women and Girls. She lost her son, George, who had passed for white when joining the Union Army early on in the conflict. He died early in the war at the battle of Wilson's Creek, Lexington, Missouri.

She was there day after day, in the White House, for the duration of Lincoln's presidency, and the aftermath of the assassination. In defense of Mary Todd Lincoln, Mrs. Keckly wrote a book, “Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House.” It was met with scorn and rejection by most,

Elizabeth Keckly



including Mrs. Lincoln, who saw it as a betrayal. She severed all connections between herself and Lizzy.

Elizabeth, while not formally educated, went on to become the head of Wilberforce University's Department of Domestic Arts and Sciences in Xenia, Ohio. While there, in the early 1890's, she suffered a mild stroke. She resigned her position and returned to Washington, D.C. to live out the remainder of her life in solitude and poverty at the very Home for Destitute Women and Girls she had helped to found years earlier.

Elizabeth Keckly is portrayed by actress Tammy Denease Richardson, who comes to this role with a rich background in storytelling and historical interpretation. Born in Columbus, Mississippi, Ms. Richardson spent countless hours with her grandmother and great-grandmother (a former enslaved person who lived to be 125!) enthralled with the stories of the family's ancestry. As a result, Ms. Richardson brings a unique personal experience to her portrayal of Elizabeth Keckly.



The program is open to the public. The cost is \$3.00 per person and free to Society members. Parking is across from Oddfellows Playhouse in the municipal lot.



THE MIDDLESEX COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Bylaw Revision

*T*he Bylaw Revision Committee, headed by John Shaw, has been meeting for several months to review and propose updates to the Society's bylaws. They welcome input from the membership and will be happy to provide a copy of the current bylaws to members who would like to read them in detail.

One issue the committee is discussing is whether

the Society needs voting members. At present, the day to day running of the Society is handled by the Board of Directors, but major issues, such as the adoption of the budget and election of the board and officers, are voted on at the annual meeting of the Society with 11 members constituting a quorum. John invites comment at johnfshaw@aol.com.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

The Museum at the Mansfield House	OPEN	Tuesdays & Wednesdays	1:00 to 4:00
		Thursdays	10:00 to 1:00
Expanded February Hours:		Sundays, February 8, 15, 22	12:00 to 3:30
Abraham Lincoln Birthday Party		Thursday, February 12	5:30 to 7:30 pm
"They Called Me Lizzy – from Slavery to the White House"		Thursday, February 19	7:00 pm
Oddfellows Playhouse, 128 Washington Street, Middletown			
"The Life and Times of William Webb: An African-American Civil War Soldier from Connecticut"		Tuesday, March 24	7:00 pm
Hubbard Room, Russell Library, 123 Broad Street, Middletown			

*Note: All events will be held at General Mansfield House unless otherwise noted.

visit us on the web at www.middlesexhistory.org