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# Battle Cry

Founded 1961,  
Newsletter of the Sacramento Civil War Round Table  
P.O. BOX 254702  
Sacramento, CA 95865-4702  
<http://sacramentocwrt.com/>



## President's Message

As students of the United States' Civil War, we tend to think of the North as antislavery good guys and the South as proslavery bad guys. We know there were 4 slavery states, and later, a 5th slavery Northern State, West Virginia. This is an over simplification.

At the time of the American Revolution, all 13 colonies had slavery. Between 1780 and 1804, many Northern states, beginning with Pennsylvania, passed legislation abolishing slavery, although that did not usually mean "freeing the slaves." In general, it meant only that the commerce in slaves, was abolished or driven underground. Massachusetts ratified a Constitution declaring all men were equal. That principle brought an end to slavery in that State. In New York, slaves became indentured servants who became totally free in 1827.

New Jersey passed a gradual Emancipation Act in 1808. Part of it gave slave holders \$300 for each slave freed. This established a minimum value. Young slaves were moved to slave states and sold for more. In the census of 1860, there were still 16 legal slaves in New Jersey.

In 2008, the New Jersey State Legislature passed a resolution of official apology for slavery, becoming the 3rd state to do so.

**Dennis Kohlmann, President**

**MINUTES**  
**SACRAMENTO CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE**  
Wednesday, February 10, 2021  
HOF BRAU RESTAURANT, 2500 WATT AVENUE, SACRAMENTO

**ATTENDANCE – 0:**

**MEMBERS – 0:** No meeting and no Members.

**GUESTS – 0:** No meeting and no Guests.

1. No meeting. Meetings are cancelled until further notice due to COVID-19. The Hof Brau is still closed to inside dining.
2. The next Board Meeting is unknown at this time.

**George W. Foxworth for Vacant, Secretary**

**Treasurer's Report**

The cash balance on February 10th was \$4,477.60. No meeting and no raffle.

**George W. Foxworth, Treasurer**

**EX-MEMBER WE LOST**

Russell Gilbert Knauer, born in West Lafayette, Indiana on December 12, 1935, and entered into rest on February 7, 2021 in Sacramento. Russell passed from complications of Parkinson's. He was 85. He is survived by Marjorie, his wife of fifty years, also a member of the SCWRT. Due to COVID-19, there were no services. (Most of this information was taken from the Sacramento Bee.)

Russell joined the Sacramento Civil War Round Table in October 1996. Russell was actively involved with our successful hosting of the 16th Annual West Coast Civil War Conference in November 2000.

# Coming Programs for 2021

Date	Speaker	Topic
March 10th	"No Speaker"	"No Topic"
April 14th	"To Be Determined"	"To Be Determined"
May 12th	"To Be Determined"	"To Be Determined"
June 9th	"To Be Determined"	"To Be Determined"
July 14th	"To Be Determined"	"To Be Determined"
August 11th	"To Be Determined"	"To Be Determined"

## 2021 Membership

The 2021 membership renewal was due as of January 1, 2021. The dues are \$30.00 and you can renew and send to the Treasurer through the mail. For all checks, make them payable to **Sacramento Civil War Round Table** and send them to:

George W. Foxworth  
9463 Salishan Court  
Sacramento, CA 95826-5233

**NOTE: 2020 memberships are good for 2021 due to COVID-19.**

## NEWSLETTER CIVIL WAR ARTICLES

Civil War articles/book reviews are welcome. The submission deadline is the first of each month for that month's **Battle Cry**. However, you can submit articles at anytime. Please submit your items in Microsoft Word or regular email to:

[gwofforth@sbcglobal.net](mailto:gwofforth@sbcglobal.net)

The **Battle Cry** is the monthly newsletter of the Sacramento CWRT. Submissions are subject to availability of space and size limitations. Submissions do not necessarily reflect the views of the organization or the Editor. The official address of this organization is: Sacramento Civil War Round Table, Post Office Box 254702, Sacramento, CA 95865-4702. <http://www.sacramentocwrt.org> is the web site address. Check the web for past newsletter editions and information about the group.

## **Friends of Civil War Alcatraz**

The Friends of Civil War Alcatraz (FOCWA) is a group of individuals interested in the Civil War history of Alcatraz island. We are made up of teachers, veterans, historians, and others who like to research and read about how Alcatraz became an important Fort for the protection of San Francisco during the Civil War.

Some of our members are also National Park Service volunteers who assist the rangers in giving public programs, in uniform, about the Union soldiers stationed on the Island and interesting events that occurred there between 1859 and 1865. We publish a newsletter every month, which can be found on our website [www.friendsofcivilwaralcatraz.org](http://www.friendsofcivilwaralcatraz.org).

We also visit schools and organizations to tell that early history of the Island, long before it became the notorious Federal prison. And we conduct living history days twice a year, in conjunction with the American Civil War Association, to give the public an idea of what the Island was like as a Union Fort.

**Submitted by Steve Johnson**

# Woman Believed to be Last Remaining Widow of US Civil War Soldier Dies

## The Guardian

Helen Viola Jackson's 1936 marriage to James Bolin was unusual to say the least: he was 93 and in declining health, and she was a 17-year-old schoolgirl.



Bolin was also a Civil War veteran who fought for the Union in the Border State of Missouri. Jackson was almost certainly the last remaining widow of a Civil War soldier when she died on 16 December 2020 at a nursing home in Marshfield, Missouri. She was 101.

Several Civil War heritage organizations have recognized Jackson's quiet role in history, one that she hid for all but the final three years of her life, said Nicholas Inman, her pastor and longtime friend. Yet in those final years, Inman said, Jackson embraced the recognition that included a spot on the Missouri Walk of Fame and countless cards and letters from well-wishers.

"It was sort of a healing process for Helen: that something she thought would be kind of a scarlet letter would be celebrated in her later years," Inman said.

Jackson grew up one of 10 children in the tiny south-western Missouri town of Niangua, near Marshfield. Bolin, a widower who had served as a Private in the 14th Missouri Cavalry during the Civil War seven decades earlier, lived nearby.

Jackson's father volunteered his teenage daughter to stop by Bolin's home each day to provide care and help with chores. To pay back her kindness, Bolin offered to marry Jackson, which would allow her to receive his soldier's pension after his death, a compelling offer in the context of the Great Depression.

Jackson agreed in large part because "she felt her daily care was prolonging his life," Inman said.

They wed on 4 September 1936, at his home. Throughout their three years of marriage there was no intimacy and she never lived with him. She never told her parents, her siblings or anyone else about the wedding. She never remarried, spending decades “harboring this secret that had to be eating her alive,” Inman said.

After Bolin’s death in 1939, she did not seek his pension.

She also realized the stigma and potential scandal of a teenager wedding a man in his 90s, regardless of her reason. In an oral history recording in 2018, Jackson said she never spoke of the wedding to protect Bolin’s reputation as well as her own.

“I had great respect for Mr Bolin, and I did not want him to be hurt by the scorn of wagging tongues,” she said.

Inman and Jackson were longtime friends. She was a charter member of the Methodist Church where he serves as pastor. One day in December 2017, she told Inman about her secret marriage to a much older man. She mentioned in passing that he fought in the Civil War.

“I said, ‘What? Back up about that. What do you mean he was in the Civil War?’” Inman said.

Inman checked into her story and found that everything she told him was “spot on.”

Officials at Wilson’s Creek National Battlefield sent him copies of Bolin’s service information. She identified where he was buried, in Niangua.

She also kept a Bible that he gave her, in which he wrote about their marriage. Those written words were good enough for the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War and other heritage organizations to recognize Jackson’s place in history.

After a lifetime of avoiding her past, Jackson embraced it in her final years, Inman said. She spoke to schoolchildren and had a Facebook page dedicated to her. She enjoyed getting cards and letters.

She also found new peace. A stoic nature that kept her from shedding tears at her own siblings’ funerals seemed to evaporate.

After Bolin’s relatives found out about Jackson’s role in his life, they went to the nursing home and presented her with a framed photo of him.

“She broke down and cried,” Inman recalled. “She kept touching the frame and said, This is the only man who ever loved me.”

**Submitted by Silver N. Marvin & Bruce A. Castleman, Ph.D.**

# Captain Nathaniel Gordon

Nathaniel Gordon was born in Portland, Maine on February 6, 1826. His family had arrived in Maine nine generations before (circa 1621). Nathaniel was the fourth in his family to bear that name. All his forbears had made their living from the sea. So did Nathaniel. He was the captain of a slave ship, importing stolen humans into lives of misery and degradation.



Slave importation had been made illegal in 1820 in the United States and was a capital offense. But forty years later, no one had ever been executed or even harshly punished for this crime. Ironically, it was illegal to import slaves but not illegal to sell them. The system made so little sense that President James Buchanan even said he would “never hang a slaver.”

In 1842, the United States signed an agreement with England to band together to stop the slave trade. Within six years, England caught over five hundred ships containing over 40,000 captured Africans. In that same time, Americans stopped six ships. A slave bought for \$40 of trade goods in Africa could be sold for \$350 - \$1,200 in the U.S. One ship load of slaves could bring in hundreds of thousands of dollars. For most sea captains, it was well worth the risk. Slaves repopulated themselves and so the demand for slaves in the United States had dwindled. However, Brazil and Cuba were desperate for workers to toil on their sugar cane and coffee plantations. Many of the slave smugglers met in “Sweet’s Restaurant” on Fulton Street in downtown Brooklyn, New York to make their plans.

Nathaniel Gordon became known as “Lucky Nat.” By 1860, he had made four trips to Africa and then sold his human cargo in Brazil and Cuba. He had become a very rich man. His and most slave ships were outfitted in New York Harbor. The city profited

greatly from the cotton trade in the nineteenth century and looked the other way when ships were built to accommodate human cargo.

In 1860, Captain Gordon bade his wife, Elizabeth Anne Kenney, and his two year-old son, Nathaniel, a tender good-bye and sailed to Cuba. His ship, The Erie, was filled with tons of rice, whiskey, and farina. After selling his cargo, he headed to the Congo River. There he loaded 897 slaves onto the vessel in under an hour. Half were children, some as young as six months. No thought or care was given to their comfort, their feeding or the most basic sanitation.

On August 8, 1860, Gordon's luck ran out. His ship was stopped by the USS Mohican of the African Slave Patrol. Gordon was arrested and imprisoned in the Eldridge Street jail in New York City. There he lived in relative comfort while waiting for his indictment. In the evening, he would hand his jailers \$50 for "parole" and was allowed to wander New York and have dinner with his wife. He was always in his cell by morning.

Gordon was offered a \$2,000 fine and two years imprisonment if he would give the names of the men who had financed his journey. He felt he could get a better deal by going into court. No one before him had ever served a lengthy jail sentence. Most were given a slap on the wrist, a small fine, and set free. His trial began on June 18, 1861. It was in the same courtroom where Gordon's father had once been tried (and exonerated) twenty five years before for smuggling in one slave. This time, the jury was deadlocked 7 to 5. The judge declared a mistrial. It was widely believed that members of the jury had been bribed.

For his second trial, Gordon was moved to the New York Hall of Justice aka "The Tombs." This time the jury was sequestered. The country was deep in the middle of a Civil War and the Lincoln Administration intended to set an example. One of the crew testified that twenty-nine souls had died of neglect and were thrown overboard. The witness went on to describe the filth, the running sores, and the unbearable stench of the prisoners. It took the jury less than thirty minutes to declare the captain guilty. He was sentenced to hang on February 7, 1862.

Appeals for clemency flooded into the President's Office. Lincoln was not moved. There could be no mercy for a man whose trade was trafficking in humans. But Lincoln felt Gordon had been misled by his attorneys and friends into thinking that he would certainly be freed. Lincoln gave Gordon a stay of two weeks to make his peace with God and settle his affairs.

Gordon's wife, young son, and mother had moved to New York shortly after his incarceration. Now they went to Washington to beg for his life. Many newspapers claimed that they arrived on February 20, 1862, the same morning that Willie Lincoln died of typhoid. It is said that somehow they were able to gain an audience with Mary Lincoln and Elizabeth Gordon presented her with this poem:

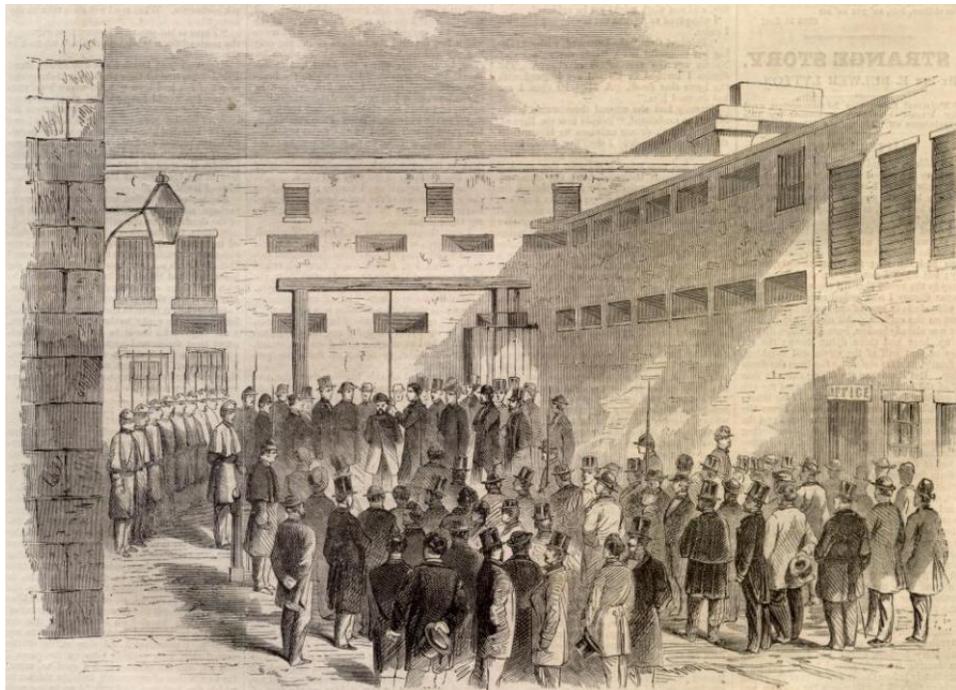
"Within your power it lies to save  
My husband from an early grave  
And rescue from a life of shame  
The wife and child who bear his name"

The same papers say Mary, touched by Elizabeth's plight, tried to speak with Lincoln about

clemency but he refused to compromise on this matter. (It is impossible for me to believe that on the day of Willie's death Lincoln conducted any business or Mary spoke with anyone at all.)

The night before his hanging, Gordon smoked several cigars laced with strychnine. Prison guards discovered him having convulsions. Doctors were called and worked all night to revive him, using brandy and a stomach pump. Upon recovering, Gordon begged to be allowed to commit suicide rather than face a public execution. A last minute plea for a reprieve was sent to Lincoln by Governor Edward Morgan. It went unanswered.

The execution was moved from the originally scheduled 2:00 PM to noon to make sure that Nathaniel Gordon would not die first and cheat the hangman. Gordon was given a large shot of whiskey and then carried on the back of a deputy to the gallows. So drunk that he could barely stand, he was allowed to be seated. Four hundred soldiers and reporters were there to witness his hanging in the courtyard of The Tombs. Gordon had to be helped to his feet when the death warrant was read to him. His last request was that his ring and a lock of his hair be given to his wife. His head was covered with a hood. The noose was then positioned around his neck and the trap door snapped open. On February 21, 1862, Captain Nathaniel Gordon became the only American ever executed for being a slave trader.



His body was taken to Cypress Hills Cemetery in Brooklyn, New York where he was buried in an unmarked grave, Lot 403, Section 4, Grave 13.

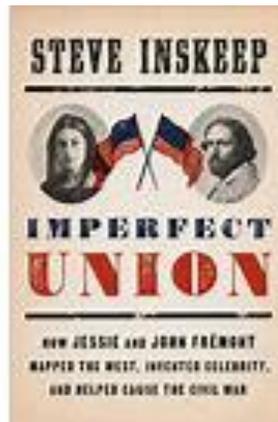
Elizabeth Gordon remained in New York and eventually remarried. Her son, Nathaniel, went back to Portland where he earned his living as a submarine diver. His son was the sixth and last Gordon to be named Nathaniel.

**Submitted by Judith Breitstein**

# Imperfect Union: How Jessie and John Frémont Mapped the West, Invented Celebrity, and Helped Cause the Civil War

By Steve Inskeep. New York, Penguin Press, 2020. Illustrations. xxix + 449 pp. \$32.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7352-2435-3.

Reviewed by Jennifer Andrella (Michigan State University). Published on H-CivWar (July, 2020). Commissioned by Madeleine Forrest.



Recent efforts to reconsider the causation of the American Civil War have begun to reveal a much more complex story about the relationship between politics, geography, and conflict. The Frémont name often surfaces throughout this tumultuous period, first through western exploration and then in politics. John C. Frémont, best known for his famous treks to chart newly acquired US territory and his influential role in shaping the nascent Republican Party, serves as an ideal protagonist to examine these many facets of the late antebellum period. Frémont's rise to fame, however, could not have been possible without the close advisement of his wife, Jessie Benton Frémont, an ambitious female politician and strategist. Steve Inskeep's *Imperfect Union: How Jessie and John Frémont Mapped the West, Invented Celebrity, and Helped Cause the Civil War* offers a comprehensive yet thoughtful view of the Frémonts' rise to national stardom. Unlike many biographical works, *Imperfect Union* centers the lives of Jessie and John Frémont as a lens to examine key historical moments and themes. In a form that is both accessible and well researched, this portrait of the Frémonts convincingly argues that there were many "imperfect unions" that "disrupted the old political order"--the union of Jessie and John, the union of North and South, and the union of East and West (p. xxvi).

Inskeep organizes *Imperfect Union* with sixteen distinct chapters that build a chronological narrative from 1813 to the immediate post-Civil War period, although the majority of the book traces the years 1842 to 1856. The book integrates four major events that contributed to the growing political crisis: Texas annexation (1845), Mexican-American War (1846 - 48), the Gold Rush in California (1849), and the 1856 Presidential Election. John's early career in the US Army Corps of Topographical Engineers attracted the notice of Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton, who shared a keen interest in the mapping of the West. John often visited Benton's home and quickly fell in love with Benton's second daughter, Jessie. From an early age, Jessie shared a close bond with her father who

inspired her to become "assertive and self-confident ... and politically astute" (pp. 20 - 21). Once Jessie and John were married, the couple spent most of their time independent of one another; John traveled thousands of miles away for months at a time, while Jessie worked to manage their growing family and to strategize John's access to public fame and high political circles. In addition to letters, Jessie had to rely on newspapers to learn updates about her husband while he traversed overland routes to the Pacific and maneuvered throughout California. Inskeep's background as a journalist brings a profound perspective to the importance of news media in this history and also demonstrates his masterful ability to piece together fragmentary evidence from newspapers, letters of correspondence, and personal writings to reconstruct the way Jessie and John interacted with each other and the world around them.

One of *Imperfect Union's* strongest contributions is the treatment of the Republican Party's dueling antislavery and nativist platforms, which complicated party cohesion over race, citizenship, and belonging in the mid-Nineteenth Century. Inskeep traces the evolution of nativist sentiment among predominantly White Protestant politicians from fears of Catholic immigration to Chinese exclusion in California, all while paired with increased activism against slavery. In so doing, *Imperfect Union* contributes to a well-established body of literature that identifies a recurring paradox throughout American history: that the freedom of some would be defined according to the exclusion and oppression of others. Although Inskeep alludes to such issues like racial prejudice and the consequences of manifest destiny, he is careful not to be too critical of the Frémonts throughout this work. Consequently, themes like conquest and empire building are portrayed in a more positive light than deserved. For example, while Inskeep acknowledges the preexisting diversity, economy, and global connections of the American West, he also eschews any discussion of John Frémont's participation in the violence and exploitation of resources and Indigenous communities, especially in California. Additionally, one wishes that Jessie Frémont's experience as a female politician was distributed more evenly throughout the book. Inskeep attributes her personal success within the context of women's political activism in the 1840s, although other studies have shown that there was a much longer tradition of women participating in politics during the early Republic. Due to the scant availability of sources about or from Jessie, Inskeep heavily relies on discussions about the latest happenings in newspapers to infer Jessie's reactions and thoughts. There are a few intriguing moments when Jessie vigilantly asserts power, such as the time she advocated on her husband's behalf to President Abraham Lincoln. Given the apparent challenges of piecing together the fragments of Jessie's life, *Imperfect Union* resolves a significant vacancy to develop Jessie as a major historical force.

Despite these minor critiques, *Imperfect Union* offers an engaging and insightful look into the lives of two people who shared a stake in so many unique facets of American history. Inskeep's clear writing makes this narrative of complex stories and people intriguing while also being sensitive to historical issues of exceptionalism, racism, and prejudice in the Nineteenth Century. Although designed to reach a broad readership, *Imperfect Union* equally demonstrates Inskeep's ability to carefully glean the historical record and envision the lives of the Frémonts in a rapidly changing America.

**Submitted by Bruce A. Castleman, Ph.D.**