

## Stacy Gittleman: Lectures examine race issues, Civil War

Feb. 10

democratandchronicle.com

---

If you go

What: Discussion of *Heroes in the Attic: The Untold Story of Two Civil War Soldiers*.

When: 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 19.

Where: Fairport Historical Museum, 18 Perrin St., Fairport.

In the 14 years of being a Rochesterian, I've developed a strong appreciation for the city's role in the abolitionist and women's suffragist movements.

At the Rochester Museum & Science Center, I learned about the many local stops along the Underground Railroad. My bucket list before leaving town still includes destinations such as the Susan B. Anthony House and Frederick Douglass' grave at Mt. Hope Cemetery.

As February marks Black History Month, several lectures have been set that will discuss race relations in Rochester as well as how its citizens fought in the Civil War.

Retired school librarian Dennis Bielewicz was a teenager when in 1962 he discovered within a secret room of an abandoned house in Mount Morris a trunk containing the military service of Civil War soldiers Hiram Seymour Hall and Benjamin Coffin.

It compelled him to research further and publish his book, *Heroes in the Attic — the Untold Story of Two Civil War Soldiers*. He will discuss the book and sign copies of it from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 19, at the Fairport Museum. The event is sponsored by the Perinton Historical Society. For more, go to [www.perintonhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.perintonhistoricalsociety.org) or call (585) 223-3989.

"I was wandering near a farm and found this house completely abandoned. It was like a time capsule," said Bielewicz, a resident of Ontario, who said he literally fell through a wall that revealed the secret room.

Coffin and Hall were students at Genesee College when they decided to join the Union Army during the Civil War. Bielewicz said that Coffin held racist viewpoints about the slaves and his motivations for enlisting were purely to preserve the Union.

However, his college friend Hall moved up through the ranks of the Union Army and served as lieutenant colonel in the 43rd United States Colored Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers. Bielewicz is writing a second book on Hall's efforts to win freedom for the slaves.

Race relations took a bleak turn during the riotous 1960s. The League of Women Voters of Rochester invites the public to its lecture, "Five Decades After the Riots: What has Changed in the Community?" from 6 to 8 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 26, at Asbury First Methodist Church, 1050 East Ave., Rochester. For more information, go to [www.lwv-rma.org](http://www.lwv-rma.org) or call (585) 262-3730.

Webster resident Georgia DeGregorio, president of the Rochester League of Women Voters, lived in Massachusetts at the time of the riots but said she still felt their impact when she moved here in 1972.

“The riots seemed to cast a shadow over the city long after they were over. I knew few suburbanites who ever wanted to go downtown,” said DeGregorio.

The evening will include a screening of a recent documentary about the 1964 riots. Participants will examine the underlying issues that sparked the riots that still affect Rochester’s inner city. Bishop Willie Davis of Emanuel Missionary Baptist Church will facilitate the discussion. This forum is part of a larger community dialogue, “Facing Race Embracing Equity.” For further information regarding this effort, go to [FaceRaceRoc.org](http://FaceRaceRoc.org).

Contact Stacy Gittleman at [dnceastextra@gmail.com](mailto:dnceastextra@gmail.com) with news from east-side towns.