

## CENTRAL COAST CONFERENCE: *Seldom Heard History of the Civil War Era*

### • SCHEDULE •

(All presentations will be held in the Stanton Center Theatre)

#### FRIDAY EVENING (May 1, 2026)

5:30–6:30 **REGISTRATION & RECEPTION:** Stanton Theater Lobby

6:30–6:45 Opening Remarks (theater)

6:45–7:30: — **DEAN CALBREATH** • *The Strange Odyssey of Sgt. Nicholas Said: From the Heart of Africa to the Frontlines of the Civil War*

Born into wealth in a 1,000-year-old nation in Central Africa, Nicholas Said traveled through the Ottoman Empire and Europe, picking up nine languages and meeting kings, czars and emperors, before arriving in the US on the eve of the Civil War. After joining the 55th Massachusetts, he fought in the Carolinas, Georgia and Florida, serving as a sergeant. After the war, he remained in the South to help the freed slaves. Through his eyes, we can see how different regions in the world tackled questions of slavery, racial prejudice, religion and war.

7:45–8:30: — **DAVE POWELL** • *The Battle Above the Clouds*

The subject of one of his books, Dave recounts the first half of the campaign to lift the siege of Chattanooga, including the opening of the “cracker line,” the unusual night battle of Wauhatchie, and one of the most dramatic battles of the entire war: Lookout Mountain. including the opening of the “cracker line,” the unusual night battle of Wauhatchie, and one of the most dramatic battles of the entire war: Lookout Mountain.

#### SATURDAY (May 2, 2026)

9:00–9:50 — **KEVIN LEVIN** • *The Cornerstone of Robert E. Lee’s Army: Confederate Slaves at Gettysburg*

This talk explores the role of the thousands of enslaved laborers that accompanied the Army of Northern Virginia during the Gettysburg Campaign. These men deserve to be brought out of the shadows, especially in connection to such a monumental battle. Their presence was crucial to the performance of Lee’s army even as its outcome determined the futures of these very same men and their families.

10:00–10:50 — **BROOKS SIMPSON** • *Lincoln, Grant, and the Summer of 1864*

When the summer of 1864 began, the fate of the Union war effort hung in the balance. The promise of spring had given way to sieges, first at Petersburg and Richmond, eventually at Atlanta. Confederate forces would soon make their way to the outskirts of Washington. The Lincoln administration was stumbling: people questioned whether the president could secure a second term. We’ll learn more about challenges of that summer, the responses of Lincoln and Grant, and the eventual turn toward victory.

11:00–11:50 — **GORDON RHEA** • *Seldom Heard History of the 1864 Overland Campaign*

The Overland Campaign in the spring of 1864 is famous as the meeting engagement between Generals Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee. Less known is the fact this was the first time African American regiments fought in the Union Army of the Potomac. We will examine the performance of these regiments during the battles of the Wilderness, Spotsylvania Court House, the North Anna operations, Cold Harbor, and the movement to Petersburg. Central themes will revolve around the role that the commanders, all of whom were White, assigned to them, and how their image within the army evolved.

12:00–1:30 — **LUNCH BREAK** (on your own). Enjoy one of the many fine eateries in the neighborhood of the Plaza, downtown, or nearby at the Old Fisherman’s Wharf

1:30–2:20 — **LESLEY GORDON** • *Dread Danger: Combat and Cowardice in the American Civil War*

Dr. Gordon will discuss her recent book which explores allegations of cowardice against two regiments, focusing on how they coped and tried to make sense of such shameful allegations.

2:30–3:20 — **LORIEN FOOTE** • *The Yankee Plague: The Mass Escape of 3000 Union POWs*

During the last winter of the Civil War, nearly 3,000 Union prisoners escaped from Confederate prisons in the Carolinas and fled toward Union army lines. Black and white southerners fed, hid, and guided the fugitives across hundreds of miles of dangerous terrain. Lorien Foote will share what the journey of escaped prisoners reveals about Union soldier’s experiences in the final months of the war and the transformation of the home front to a battle front inside the Confederacy.

3:30–4:30 — **BOOK SALES and SIGNING in the LOBBY**

Bookshop Santa Cruz will be selling a limited number of books, one title by each of our six presenters, who will be available to sign them.

#### SUNDAY (May 3, 2026)

9:00–9:50 — **GORDON RHEA** • *Charles Whilden, the Confederacy’s Most Unlikely Hero*

For the first forty years of his life, Charles Whilden led an existence noteworthy for mediocrity and failure. Then, in a remarkable series of events, the aging, epileptic desk clerk from Charleston found himself plunged into some of the civil war’s most brutal killing fields, including the Wilderness and Spotsylvania. Chance placed him near a critical section of the Confederate line called the Bloody Angle, where Charles performed an astounding feat of bravery foreign to anything he had accomplished in the past. Biographies of generals are common, but the stories of common soldiers have often been lost to history. Charles’ story raises much to ponder.

10:00–10:50 — **BROOKS SIMPSON** • *Sherman’s Grant*

William T. Sherman once remarked of Ulysses S. Grant, “to me he is a mystery, and I believe he is a mystery to himself.” Yet Sherman came to see in Grant the man who could lead the Union--and Sherman--to victory, although it was sometimes an uneven journey. How did Sherman’s view of Grant evolve over time? To what degree did Sherman ever glimpse why he came to trust Grant as he did and thus form the partnership that proved critical to wartime success?

11:00–11:50 — **LORIEN FOOTE** • *Rites of Retaliation: Sherman’s Pillagers and Hampton’s Murderers*

During William T. Sherman’s campaign through Georgia and South Carolina, the general ordered the execution of 43 prisoners of war as an act of retaliation for the execution of his army’s foragers. Lorien Foote will share how Union and Confederate commanders used retaliation to try to shape the conduct of military campaigns and how this practice at times worked to alter the behavior of armies in the field.

12:00–1:30 — **LUNCH BREAK** (on your own). Enjoy one of the many fine eateries in the neighborhood of the Plaza, downtown, or nearby at the Old Fisherman’s Wharf

1:30–2:20 — **DAVE POWELL** • *Sherman and McPherson in the Atlanta Campaign*

A discussion of the bewildering relationship between William T. Sherman and one of his army commanders, James Birdseye McPherson during the campaign to capture Atlanta. Sherman tended to ignore a number of his subordinate’s missed opportunities. Despite the famous reprimand at Snake Creek Gap, Sherman, somewhat inexplicably, continued to allow McPherson a long leash at places like Dallas, and on the Kennesaw Line.

2:30–3:30 — **LESLEY GORDON** • *Wartime Mobile*

This talk will offer a reassessment of the port city’s role in the war, emphasizing the significance of thousands of impressed laborers compelled to build its formidable defenses.