



The Dispatch

Newspaper of the

CAPITAL DISTRICT CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

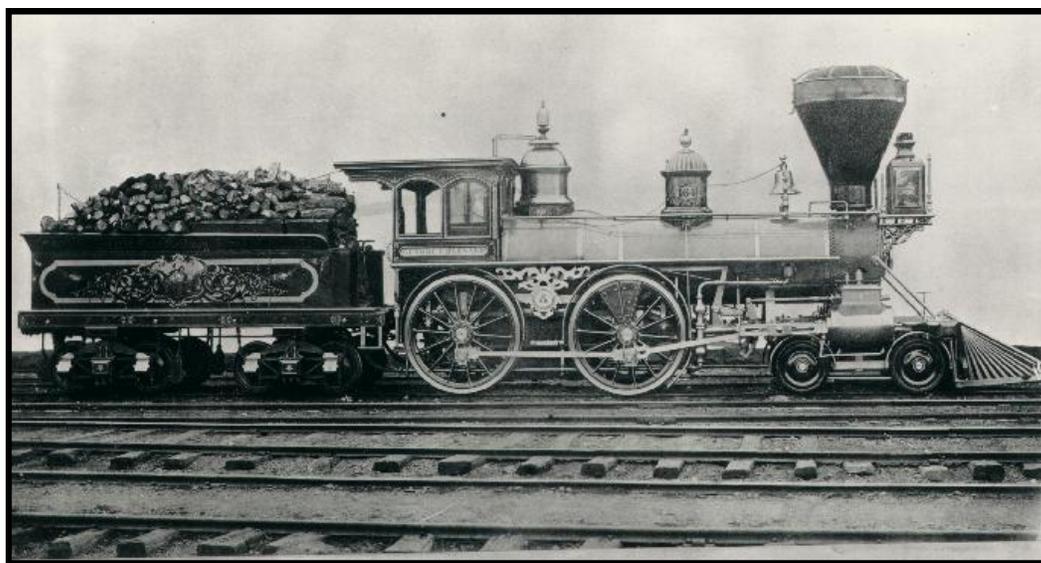
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The Shohola Train Wreck of 1864



The military order designating Barracks 3 of the Military Depot in Elmira, NY as a prison camp for captured Confederate soldiers was dated May 18, 1864. The first contingent of battle weary rebels arrived at the new detention camp on July 16th. What was to be the fourth group destined for imprisonment at the camp met with a horrible and terrifying catastrophe near the small hamlet of Shohola, PA on the Delaware River, 18 miles west of Port Jarvis on the main line of the Erie Railway. To a country hardened by three years of war, the news of the accident was shocking and heart rending.

On July 12, 1864 a contingent of 844 Confederate prisoners-of-war departed from the overcrowded Federal prison at Camp Lookout, MD accompanied by 125 Union soldiers and three commissioned officers of the 11th and 20th regiments of the Veteran Reserve Corps as guards. The group arrived at New York City at 3 p.m. on the 14th. They boarded a Pennsylvania Railroad train and were taken to Jersey City. At 4:00 a.m. on the 15th, *(continued on page 4 inside)*

APRIL MEETING

FRIDAY, APRIL 14, 2017

QUALITY INN

611 TROY-SCHENECTADY ROAD

LATHAM, NY

Barracks to Prison Pen Elmira's Civil War Experience President Lincoln

By Terri Olszowy

Social Hour	6:00 – 7:00 p.m.
Business Meeting	7:00 p.m.
Presentation	7:00 – 8:00 p.m.
Questions & Answers	8:00 – 8:30 p.m.

PLEASE NOTE THE CHANGE IN VENUE TO THE QUALITY INN!

The regular meeting of the CDCWRT will be held at the Quality Inn at 611 Troy-Schenectady Road in Latham, on Friday, April 14, 2017. The CDCWRT was informed that our usual meeting site would not be available on April 14th. Rather than cancel the meeting, an alternative site was found.

Our guest speaker will be Terri Olszowy, and the title of her presentation is "Barracks to Prison Pen: Elmira's Civil War Experience."

From a growing village to a incorporated city, whose citizens were at times outnumbered by Union troops, Elmira's journey was one shared by only a handful of communities and the only one of its kind in NYS. The American Civil War is a story surrounded by misconceptions, myth and misinformation, and Elmira is no exception. From the firing on Ft Sumter, to the surrender at Appomattox, Elmira's legacy

was forged by industrial, military political and climate forces, culminating in its notoriety today, as a Confederate prisoner of war camp.

A small group of individuals interesting in preserving a significant piece of local history, formed the Friends of the Elmira Civil War Prison Camp (FECWPC) to enhance an accurate understanding of Elmira's history. The group acquired a small piece of property that was part of the original site of Barracks #3 which served as a Union training & Confederate prisoner of war camp. Approximately thirty years ago, a building attributed to the camp was identified, disassembled and placed in storage. After 3 decades of movement between multiple storage locations, the building finally had a home. During the summer of 2016, a group of dedicated volunteers, reassembled the building and this spring it will be moved to its final location. Future plans include interpretive displays chronicling Elmira's complete history from 1861-65, a full-scale reproduction barracks building, section of stockade fencing, facsimile of the observation tower and a memorial garden.

Terri Olszowy and Doug Oakes are volunteers for the Friends of the Elmira Civil War Prison Camp. Terri is a graduate of Syracuse University and former US Army Ordnance officer. Doug is a former combat engineer and a 40-year veteran of the New York State Department of Corrections. Both are actively involved in living history, research and community activities. In addition to researching Elmira's Civil War history and fund raising events for the Friends, they are working on a regimental history of the 86th New York Volunteer Infantry.

Directions to Airport Quality Inn

From Albany: Northway to Exit 6; take exit ramp for Route 7 west to Schenectady; Inn is on the right behind Japanese Steak House; take right exit onto Forts Ferry Road.
Phone 785-5891

UP-COMING MEETING/EVENTS.

On Friday, May 12, the regular meeting of the CDCWRT will sponsor Sandra Weber and David Hodges in a dramatic performance of the life of Mary Day Brown, wife of John Brown. The previously scheduled speaker, Chris Mackowski, had to cancel but will be rescheduled in 2018.

On Friday, June 9, the regular meeting of the CDCWRT will sponsor Amy Bracewell who will talk about Battlefield Preservation at Cedar Creek and Saratoga.

BUFORD'S VIEW – APRIL

(A column by our Program Chair by Matt George.)

The weekend of September 15-18 will see the initial meeting (on the 16th) of a nationwide CWRT Conference in Centerville, Virginia. The hosts will be: the Bull Run CWRT, the Brunswick, N.C. CWRT, the CWRT of Scottsdale, Arizona and the Puget Sound CWRT. Speakers include Matt Borowick of the Civil War News and Mike Movius of the Puget Sound CWRT (State of Washington). Topics include: Best practices in membership recruitment, governing your RT effectively, techniques in raising and having fun in the process, and governing your organization effectively. I and a few other members of our Round Table will be attending. If you have an interest please contact me.

The Connecticut CWRT in Torrington is also going to be sending a representative. Over the past several years, at least 64 RTs across the nation have closed their doors. These tragic closures were often caused by insufficient membership, a poor sustaining organizational structure, poor programming, and insufficient funding. Often it has been a combination of these problems. This Conference will attempt to help the remaining RTs across the country avoid these problems by listening to how the leaders of successful RTs have addressed these issues.

The Brunswick CWRT in North Carolina has 1,185 members. The Scottsdale CWRT in Arizona has hundreds. Additionally, the Conference will provide opportunities to interact with presenters renew old friendships and make new friends with those who have a similar love for Civil War history. It should be noted that our RT took a noticeable nose dive in membership a few years ago but, in

recent months it has remained static and perhaps increased a tiny bit. I have worked hard not only to bring quality speakers to our meetings but, to encourage participation in events geared towards education and fund raising. Unfortunately active involvement by too many of our members still leaves a lot to be desired.

The Underground Railroad History Project Conference at SCCC this past weekend was excellent. Rosemary Nichols and I attended. We also had a vendors table set up and we made \$105.00. We could have perhaps made more, but we had to leave the table unattended for long periods of time while we attended several activities. The Keynote speakers on Friday night and Saturday morning were superb. Our May speaker Chris Mackowski from St. Bonaventure University had to cancel because job commitments at the University (Dean's orders). I am currently working on a substitute speaker who could be confirming shortly.

On Saturday, April 1 at 2:00PM the Schenectady County Historical Society will host a book talk and signing entitled "Black Soldiers of New York State" by Anthony Gero. The SCHS is located at 32 Washington Ave., Schenectady. Admission is \$5.00. The Siena Living History Day is Saturday, April 8, 10:00 to 4:00 on the front lawn. The RT will have a booth to raise funds. We could always use more help. Sunday May 7, 12:00- 4:00 PM is the Ten Broeck Mansion Living History Day. Again the RT will have a fund raising table there as well. If you want to join me let me know.

Editor's comments:

Matt's comments about the demise of RTs is sobering. In North Carolina this past year, the Durham CWRT folded. Yes, amid the academic institutions of Duke University, NC State University at Chapel Hill, the State of North Carolina University, Shaw University (of 54th MA fame), and numerous smaller colleges and community colleges there was not enough interest in Civil War history.

The meeting site was the auditorium in the Visitor Center of Bennett Farm Historical Site where the largest surrender of American troops took place (almost 92,000), when Joe Johnston surrendered to Billy Sherman. So, the RT failure was not due to the venue.

Shohola Train Wreck (continued)

they were loaded onto a special train of the Erie Railway which was scheduled to leave at 5 a.m., but whose departure was delayed until 6 by the escape of a few of the prisoners. The fugitives were retaken and the train got under way behind Engine # 171 with Engineer William Ingram and Fireman Daniel Tuttle in the cab.

The train consisted of eighteen cars, the first three being box cars and the remainder being passenger coaches. The box cars each contained about 32 rebels and five guards, while the next dozen coaches held about 61 or 62 prisoners each. The last three cars carried the off-duty guards, their officers and equipment.

The run to Port Jarvis was uneventful and at 2 p.m. the wood-burning engine left that station with a renewed supply of wood and water. The double track of the railroad ended at Port Jarvis and for the next twenty-three miles the single track followed the Delaware River to Lackawaxen and beyond. Throughout the distance the right-of-way was a succession of sharp curves, with the river flowing on one side and the forest clad hills bordering on the other. While Engineer Ingram coaxed his straining 30-ton locomotive, Fireman Tuttle fed 3-foot length of cord wood into the furnace. In the cars the Southerners dozed or lazily scanned the passing landscape from the closed windows. The Union guards, two to a platform, stood alert, rifles ready. In the last cars the off-duty guards amused themselves with card playing or idle talk. The train chugged along at a speed of 20 to 25 miles per hour. At about 2:50 p.m. the troop train passed the Shohola station, the operator there signaling the train onward with a clear signal.

Twenty-three miles west of Port Jervis and four miles west of Shohola, the Hawley Branch from the Scranton coal fields merged rails with the main line at Lackawaxen Junction. A coal train of fifty loaded cars halted on the Hawley Branch with Engine # 237 and Engineer Samuel Hoitt. The train was enroute to Port Jervis and had to pass over the single track eastward from the Junction. Conductor John Martin hurried to the operator's station where the telegrapher, Duff Kent, sat. Kent had been intoxicated the night before and later investigation brought forth this fact. "Is the track clear to Shohola?" Conductor Martin inquired.

"The track is clear," was the reply. "All trains due have passed." This despite the fact that Kent had been issued orders to detain all trains at his station until the troop train had passed that point. Martin swung a "highball" to the engineer, and as the train vanished from his sight, Duff Kent realized that he had just started a train to its doom when he received the signal from Shohola!

About midway between Shohola and Lackawxen Junction, the track curved northward following the river bank, then swung sharply south, thus forming a convex "s." A high hill shut out the view of the opposing trains until they were 100 yards apart. Indeed it was impossible for Engineer Ingram to see the coal train until almost at the very second of impact. Engineer Hoitt was the first to sight the rapidly approaching danger, for he leaped from the engine and thus escaped death. The trains met head-on in a crash that shook the earth and rattled stones from the river bank. The reverberations startled the farmers in their fields and brought the farm women from their kitchens.

The leading box-car of the troop train was reduced to kindling wood as the second car knifed through it, forced there by the pressure of the cars behind it. The tender of the locomotive was heaved upward and fell back upon the wreckage. Of the 37 men riding in the car, 36 were killed outright. The lone survivor was thrown clear. The greatest loss of life was suffered in the first three cars where over a hundred rebels and Federal guards were riding. Seven or eight of the next cars were so badly damaged that they were later declared as useless, and no car escaped undamaged. Prisoners and guards were hurled over heels by the collision, killing some, injuring many. Most of the Union guards riding on the open platforms lost their lives as the wooden coaches telescoped into one another, some splitting open and strewing their human contents onto the berm of the right-of-way where flying glass, splintered wood, and jagged metal killed or injured them as they rolled. Other occupants were hurled through windows or pitched to the track as the car floors buckled and opened. The other crewmen of both trains were crushed to death when the tenders of their engines were lifted up and forced against the cabs as the two locomotives were raised high in the air, face-to-face.

Those riding in the last cars of the troop train escaped death, though many were injured. Union officers quickly threw a ring of uninjured guards around the scene to prevent a mass escape of the

Confederates, though few of the prisoners entertained such thoughts at the time. Despite this precaution five rebels took advantage and were never retaken. Before the dust had settled, those of the rebels and guards who were able, began to pull the wreckage apart to remove the dead and injured. With nothing to work with but their bare hands, their efforts were slow and often futile. A messenger was dispatched to Shohola for assistance. Persons living nearby flocked to the wreck. The two ruptured engine tenders towered over the wreckage, their massive floor timbers snapped like matchsticks. Driving rods were bent like wire. Wheels and axles lay broken.

Superintendent Hugh Riddle of the Delaware Division of the railroad dispatched a relief train with extra cars attached for use by doctors. The railroaders and doctors were shocked at what greeted them at the scene. On an embankment near the wrecked engine lay a group of rebel dead many mangled beyond recognition. A second such group lay in orderly rows beside the wrecked cars. To the rear of the troop train the dead members of the V.R.C. lay wrapped in their blankets at the edge of a field of rye. Some of the rebels had been covered with grass and leaves to conceal the terrible sight. The relief work continued with renewed efforts as the sun went down. Most of the dead and injured had been removed, but the wrecking crane unearthed more. Forty rebels had been killed with 14 of the Federal guards.

The injured were conveyed to Shohola on the wagons and carriages of farmers and villagers. Six doctors rendered medical attention, assisted by volunteers from Shohola and Barreville, a small hamlet north of the river. The ladies of both villages worked tirelessly, bestowing tender care to both Southerner and Northerner. Many prepared hot soups in their kitchens or brought jellies and other delicacies for the parched and fevered men. Clean bed sheets were ripped into bandages.

At 10 p.m. a second relief train arrived from Port Jervis with fresh provisions. Most of the injured had been moved to Shohola and about sixty were quartered in the freight and passenger rooms of the station with the overflow placed on the adjoining platform. a few had been sheltered in the Shohola House and two of the rebels were taken to Barreville where they died of their injuries and were buried at that place.

It was decided to impanel a jury for an inquest on the spot. This was done and it was decided to bury the dead beside the track without further delay. All persons connected with the accident were exonerated, including Duff Kent for some unexplained reason. Later it was found that while the task of clearing the wreckage was in progress the telegrapher attended a dance and was in high spirits, but as public sentiment mounted against him he suddenly dropped from sight and was not heard from again.

Railroad men, assisted by rebels, were set to work digging a trench 76' long, 8' wide and 6' deep between the track and the river. Other men began to hammer together rough coffins, the wood of smashed cars being used for this purpose. Shortly before midnight a train arrived with plain pine boxes for the Union dead. When the mass grave was ready the task of placing the bodies in the coffins and then into the grave was illuminated by the light of huge fires fed with wreckage. Four Confederates were allotted a single coffin and a single pine box was supplied for each Union soldier. After a record had been made of the corpses and the position of each coffin marked, the workers began filling in the hole. In some cases it was impossible to identify the bodies, but the graves were noted as clearly as possible. Before the burial was complete four of the more severely injured expired and were placed in the grave. The extent of their wounds had forbidden movement to Shohola.

During the night the railroad was opened for traffic, the first train passing through at 9 the next morning; after which, at 11, the prisoners and guards were placed onto a new train provided by the Erie. Most of the wounded were also taken aboard, among them being seven cases requiring amputation which could not be done at Shohola. Seven of the worst cases were left behind. Four deaths occurred before train departure and the bodies were wagoned to the wreck site and buried with the others already there. The new train consisted of twenty cars, the first six being fitted up with hay covering the floors. The first two cars were assigned to the injured V.R.C. guards and the remainder allotted to the suffering rebels. Word was flashed to Elmira of the departure of the train and officials of the Elmira Prison Camp and the citizens of Elmira began preparations to receive it. At 9:30 p.m. the train pulled into the city. Total dead were 75: 48 prisoners and 17 guards. Injured included 93 prisoners and 16 guards. Five prisoners escaped & were not found.

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Created in 1984, the Capital District Civil War Round Table is an incorporated non-profit educational organization. Meetings are held monthly in various locations in the Capital District. This newsletter is published eleven times per year. Annual dues are \$30. The purpose of the organization is to promote, educate, and further stimulate interest in, and discussion of, all aspects of the Civil War period.

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