



The Dispatch

Newspaper of the

CAPITAL DISTRICT CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

PO Box 14871 Albany, NY 12212
www.capitaldistrictcivilwar.org



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CANALS: 1825 - 1860



The Erie Canal turned the commerce of the Northwest states away from the Ohio and Mississippi river systems and moved that traffic to New York City. Votes of the Northwest politicians and the beliefs of its people gradually turned against slavery as immigrant populations moved into northern Illinois, Indiana and Ohio. The Southern states realized that they were to be deprived of a slave system on which their economy was based. In New York State, the factories and companies found in canal towns like Utica, Ilion, Syracuse and New York City helped the war effort in many ways. The Erie Canal was used for stops on the Underground Railroad and served as a link economically, socially and politically between the Midwest and the Northern Atlantic States. The C & O Canal was in the heart of the fighting and was considered the “lifeline of the Union Army.” The Confederates repeatedly tried to stop navigation on the C & O Canal.

DECEMBER MEETING

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2017

WATERVLIET SENIOR CENTER

1541 BROADWAY

WATERVLIET, NY

While He Was Away: The Roles Of Women of the Canal Corridor during the Civil War

By Pamela Vittorio

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.

The regular meeting of the CDCWRT will be held at the Watervliet Senior Center on Friday, December 8, 2017. Our special guest speaker will be Pamela Vittorio, and the topic of her presentation is “While He Was Away: the Roles of Women of the Canal Corridor during the Civil War.”

During the Civil War, many women in the canal towns volunteered for organizations like the U.S. Sanitary Commission. The wives of boat captains and canal laborers did their part to keep their soldier husbands' businesses going. This lecture and Power Point presentation

reflects on how the Civil War impacted the wives of boatmen and canal businessmen who joined the Union Army.

Pamela Vittorio is an Associate Teaching Professor at the New School University in NYC. She has done extensive research on NY State Canals and is a professional genealogist, specializing in canal family heritage. Like the Erie Canal boatmen of long ago, she divides her time between the banks of the Erie Canal in Madison County, NY and the shore of the East River in Brooklyn, not far from the Atlantic Basin.

DUES! DUES ARE DUE!

This is a reminder that the annual dues of \$30 is due in January 2018. Checks may be mailed to Treasurer, Fran McCashion at the CDCWRT address in the newsletter letterhead. Cash or check may be given to Fran directly at the December or January meetings. Payment in gold, greenbacks or Confederate money is also acceptable.

NOVEMBER BOARD NOTES

At the November 13 Board meeting the regular account had \$647 and the preservation account had \$3510. Christmas cookies will be available at the December meeting. The proposed changes in the by-laws will be voted upon by the membership in December. J.J. Jennings and a nominating committee will propose a slate of candidates that the membership will vote upon in January. Matt George has speakers for most meetings in 2018. Members should visit the RT Facebook page and website.

UP-COMING MEETING/EVENTS

The January 12, 2018 meeting of the CDCWRT is our Potpourri Meeting. It will feature two speakers from the Friends of Grant's Cottage. Rosemary Nichols will talk about her relative, G.W. Nichols, who fought under Gen. John Gordon as a member of the 60th Georgia Infantry.

The February 9, 2018 meeting of the CDCWRT will feature Gretchell Hathaway who will speak about Moses Viney and Eliphalet Nott.

The March 9, 2018 meeting of the CDCWRT will feature Chuck Veit. His presentation is titled "Sea Miner – E.B. Hunt and the Navy's 1st Torpedo Development."

A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

It's that time of year, again; Thanksgiving has passed and the winter holidays are in sight. This year, as you're counting your blessings and thinking of ways to express your love and appreciation of friends and family, please think about the Capital District Civil War Round Table.

Members of this organization work incredibly hard in a variety of ways. They find speakers and schedule their presentations. They provide goodies to munch upon at our meetings. Members raise awareness of our organization through social media. They donate their time to speak to school and community groups to teach others about the Civil War. They sit at tables, sometimes in cold, drizzly weather, to sell books and

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tee-shirts. They write our newsletter, get it printed, and mail it. All of this takes time, and rarely does it receive acknowledgement and thanks. Let me take a moment here to say "Thank You". Thank you for graciously donating your time and talents to our organization.

As we've seen in recent events, some people have a selective interpretation of the Civil War. They mold and manipulate events to fit their preconceived notions of why men fought and how they should be remembered. This makes our work in preservation and education all the more important. We need to remain committed to securing and sharing knowledge of the war: the good, the bad, and the ugly. We need tangible reminders of the human cost of this war. We need additional research into men's motivations and experiences. It is only through truly understanding our victories and our flaws that we can grow as a nation.

To this end, I ask you again to contribute to our end of the year Preservation Drive. Please bring a monetary donation to our holiday party in December. All monies will be added to our Preservation Account to further our mission of preservation and education. I look forward to being awed by your generosity.

**Sincerely,
Erin Baillargeon**

BOARD ELECTIONS 2018

J.J. Jennings, as the nominating committee has interviewed the present Board individually. All have agreed to serve for 2018 in their present capacity with **one exception. Fran McCashion**

Imade the decision to step down as treasurer. **Steve Muller**, who has been an **at-large** member of the Board, will run as treasurer. Fran has agreed to serve as an at-large member for 2018.

However, Fran would prefer that a younger member of the CDCWRT step up and take her position as an at-large member.

Voting for the Board will occur at the January meeting. Any member of the CWRT in good standing (dues paid) may be nominated from the floor to any board position. Fran would love to see some heroic, younger member step forward and volunteer to be an at-large member. She would graciously vacate that position at the January election.

So, how-about-it! It's a two hour commitment, once a month, for ten months of the year. There will be both social and gastronomic rewards.

GUEST VISITOR

Pictured below is Mike Movius of the Puget Sound CWRT which boasts a 400+ membership even though no Civil War battles were fought in the state of Washington. Mike organized a CWRT conference in Virginia this past September to help round tables survive and grow in a time when many are shrinking or dissolving. Mike traveled through our area last month and met with members of our Board to discuss such issues. We in turn took him to see some local Civil War sites and sights.

The picture shows Mike at the cemetery monument and Medal of Honor plaque of William Hart in the Union Cemetery in Halfmoon.

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BUFORD'S VIEW – DECEMBER

I just returned from Gettysburg where I attended a number of the Remembrance Day events. The Keynote speaker at the cemetery ceremony was New York's own Harold Holzer who addressed the Confederate monument controversy throughout much of his speech. It was a fair and balanced assessment of the issue. In summary he recognized many of the arguments on both sides of the question and it seemed to be well received. Unfortunately, the day before was a miserable day in respect to the weather. It was cold, wet and dreary. It put a real damper on the annual parade. The Lincoln Fellowship Luncheon was excellent. I met a number of Lincoln enthusiasts at my table (including a gentleman from the Union Generals Living History organization who portrays

President Lincoln's private secretary John Nicolay). The luncheon speaker (Dave Wiegars) gave a very unique power point presentation on several of the hundreds of Lincoln statues across the country. He might be interested in possibly coming to our Round Table in 2019 to give his presentation.

During my stay, I was taken on a tour of several area Civil War venues by Round Table member (and my cousin) Mark Allen. We visited a number of sites in Frederick, Maryland, including another visit to the Civil War Medical Museum, and Roger Taney's grave. We also were in Martinsburg, West Virginia to see the historic R.R. Round House and the location of Stonewall Jackson's theft of Union locomotives and railroad cars. We visited the local historical society, located in the house of Confederate spy, Belle Boyd. We concluded our touring with a quick stop at the Antietam battlefield.



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The picture shows Mark Allen in front of the memorial marker for General Richardson who was killed at the Sunken Road in Antietam. Mark is a member of the CDCWRT who lives in York, PA. Mark has helped our RT in Gettysburg cachet sales for many years.

January is our Potpourri Night. One presentation will be by Dave Hubbard and Melissa Swanson of Grant Cottage who will describe the various Civil War history events at Grant Cottage. A second presentation by our Round Table's Secretary and author, Rosemary Nichols, is entitled, "G. W. Nichols of the 60th Georgia Regiment". I'm in the process of trying to find a third and final presenter. Anyone who would like to briefly discuss their research, interest, or Civil War artifact, etc. should contact me as soon as possible.

Finally, on December 11, I will be traveling to New York City for a meeting of the Civil War Round Table of New York and to see our old friend, Pat Falci (A. P. Hill). The speaker will be Bud Robertson. On January 13, our Round Table will be represented at the New York State Museum's annual "Great Places and Spaces" event. The hours are 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM. In March the Underground Railroad History Project's Conference runs from the 9th to the 11th.

JANUARY 70 YEARS AGO

This is from the Times Herald dated January 6, 1948.

Mrs. Jessie Lincoln Randolph, granddaughter of Abraham Lincoln, died Sunday in a Bennington, Vt. Hospital, her family here revealed yesterday. She was the daughter of Robert Todd Lincoln and the last descendant born to the name.

Her exact age was not available, but she was born in Chicago, where her father was practicing law, about 75 years ago. When he was secretary of war from 1881 to 1885, she live in Washington with him at 3014 N St., NW. She accompanied him to London during his service as minister to Great Britain 1889-1893.

She was married twice. Her first husband was Warren Beckwith, an Iowan. She was wed to Robert J. Randolph, an electrical engineer, in 1927.

Her Washington home at 2908 N St., NW, is just a few doors from the one in which her father lived. It is known as Foxhall house and was built before the American Revolution. In her later years, Mrs. Randolph lived quietly in Washington, but since 1945 had spent most of her time at the family summer estate, Hildene, at Manchester, Vt.

In addition to her husband, she is survived by a daughter, Mary Lincoln Beckwith of Vermont; a son, Robert Lincoln Beckwith, who lives at 6215 Ridgewood Ave., Chevy Chase; and a nephew, Lincoln Isham of New York.

Funeral services will be held in Manchester at 2 p.m. tomorrow. The body will be placed in a receiving vault until a burial spot is decided upon.

THE WASHINGTON ARSENAL FIRE

The Washington Arsenal was located along the banks of the Potomac River where everyday workers produced a wide variety of material needed for the Union war effort. On average, the employees at the Arsenal could create,

box, and ship out 21,000 rifle cartridges a day. Young children, employed for their small hands, varnished 7,000 percussion caps an hour. In the middle of the Arsenal grounds was the laboratory, where a corps of 110 women labored in 12-hour shifts, producing the bullets that would soon be sent to Petersburg and other battlefields. These women ranged in age and social status, but most fell into their early twenties and had been hired because of the economic need.

The women worked at long tables inside the laboratory, sitting next to each other on hardened benches. Wearing bulky dresses, it was nearly impossible to quickly get up from the benches; if a woman in the middle of the bench wanted to get up, the whole row had to slide off the end and allow her exit. This time-consuming process would have deadly ramifications on June 17th. The women worked mostly at "choking" cartridges. This entailed taking paper cartridges that had already been partially filled with black powder and inserting the rifle bullet, then tying, or 'choking' the whole round with some thread. The choked cartridges were then loaded into boxes of 1,000 each. The end result, while filling boxes quickly, also left loose powder lying about the tables and floor.

Early in the morning of June 17, the Washington Arsenal pyrotechnist, a man named Thomas Brown, began to produce fireworks for the upcoming Independence Day activities in the nation's capital. Brown created hundreds of stars, a type of firework made up of wet clay packed tight with black powder and other explosives. Laying the stars out on large sheets, Brown put the sheets behind a large pile of timber so that they could dry throughout the day. June 17

was a hot day in Washington: by 7 a.m. it was 72 degrees, and by 2 p.m. the mercury was recording a temperature around 92 degrees. But by 2 o'clock, disaster had already struck at the Arsenal. The sun's rays did more than dry Thomas Brown's stars—they cooked them. Behind the pile of timber, no one noticed when the fireworks began to smoke and fizzle. Then, around noontime, they exploded.

Nearby, the laboratory's windows had been thrown open to allow any breeze into the stuffy confines near the benches. But when the fireworks exploded, the flames sped alongside the wind and the fire leapt through the open windows. Sparks and flames lapped at the benches, and before anyone could do anything about it, the loose powder and choked cartridges became engulfed in a massive fireball.

Women, trapped at their workbenches, were soon enveloped in the flames, and many died instantly, the oxygen burned from their lungs. Others managed to make it out of the building, but were still victims of the fire, with the *Washington Evening Star* reporting, "One young lady ran out of the building with her dress all in flames, and was at once seized by a gentleman, who, in order to save her, plunged her into the river." If the workers managed to escape the confines of their stations, their clothes also acted as conduits for the fire. Their big burly dresses became fully immersed with flames, with the horrifying result, "of a number of the bodies nearly burned to a cinder being caged, as it were, in the wire of their hooped skirts."

The large explosion and ensuing pall of smoke drove many to the Arsenal

grounds, but there was little they could do. By the time that many arrived, all they could do was help extinguish the flames and then begin the work of retrieving the dead. Making their way through the debris of the explosion, many of the recovery teams were forced to, "place boards under each one in order to remove them from the ruins," because of the condition of the corpses. The dead were placed under large canvas tarps with the hope that they could be later identified. Many weren't.

When all was said and done, the Washington Arsenal explosion killed twenty-one women. Washington had seen its share of death and suffering throughout the war, but this was different. The women killed were not soldiers on a battlefield in Virginia, or Georgia. They were not *supposed* to die. The *Daily Morning Chronicle* eulogized the victims, "These poor girls died stainlessly, in the midst of youth and beauty; died in their efforts to maintain themselves and parent; died with the June flowers perfuming the air..." On June 19, two days after the explosion, most of the victims were buried in a funeral that Noah Brooks, a close friend to President Lincoln, described as a, "remarkable and imposing funeral pageant... it is estimated that over 25,000 persons were present." Remarkably, Thomas Brown, the man behind the explosion, faced no repercussions for the deaths. He did not even lose his job at the Arsenal, leaving Noah Brooks to write, "Gross carelessness.... Was the cause of hurrying to a premature grave this band of young, lovely, and estimable women."

From Brian Bergin's book, THE WASHINGTON ARSENAL EXPLOSION, History Press, 2012.

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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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