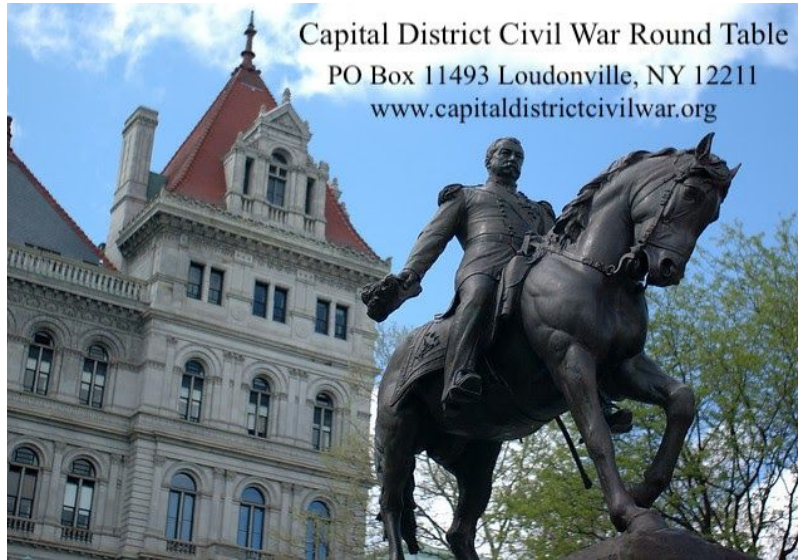


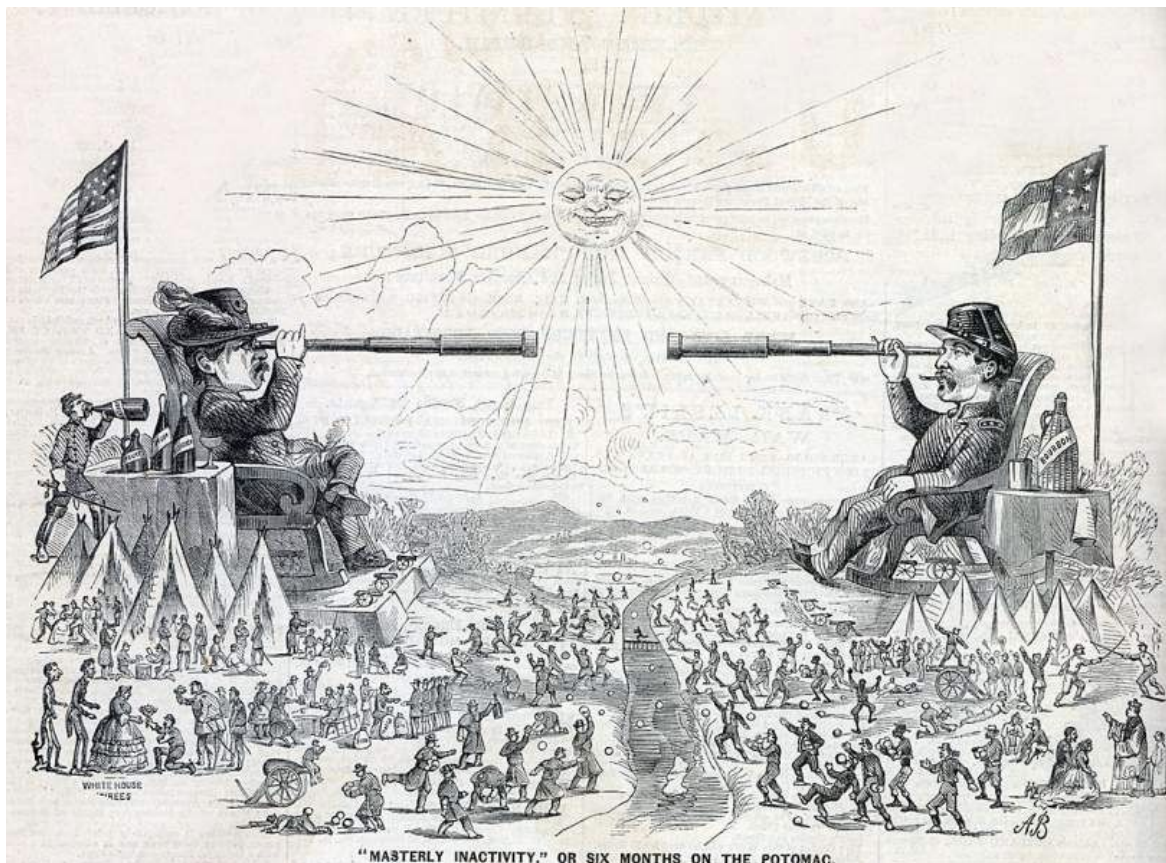
The Dispatch

Volume 37, Number 7

November 2020



“MASTERLY INACTIVITY” or Six Months on the Potomac



From *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, February 1, 1862, *House Divided: The Civil War Research Engine* at Dickinson College, <http://hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/node/37689>.

NOVEMBER MEETING

Friday, November 13, 2020

VIRTUAL MEETING USING ZOOM

BILL HOWARD The Battle of Ball's Bluff

| | |
|---------------------|------------------|
| Business Meeting | 7:00 p.m. |
| Presentation | 7:00 – 8:00 p.m. |
| Questions & Answers | 8:00 – 8:30 p.m. |

Bill Howard is a New York-based author and historian who has published numerous books and articles about military and social history. Howard has written about such diverse topics as the New York National Guard on the Mexican Border in 1917, the career of the vaudeville actress, Elsie Janis and the Civil War battle of Ball's Bluff.

Beginning in 2011, Howard authored a series of articles about the Civil War that appeared in the Albany Times Union newspaper. The articles followed the chronology of the war and commemorated the conflict's 150th anniversary.

Howard graduated from Manhattanville College (BA, 1983) with a degree in American Studies and was a Herbert H. Lehman Fellow at the University at Albany Graduate School of Public Affairs (MA, 1984). During the course of a long career in state government in which he served as a key advisor to two New York governors, Howard was named a Henry Toll Fellow by the

Council of State Governments and completed the Program for Senior Executives in State & Local Government at Harvard's JFK School of Government. Howard was awarded the NYS Defense of Liberty Medal for his service during the September 11th attacks.

The Northshire Bookstores (Saratoga and Manchester, VT) have copies of Bill's book The Battle of Ball's Bluff: All the Drowned Soldiers in stock.

Bill has also donated a copy to the Round Table to give away in a raffle during Friday's program. Join the Zoom meeting for an opportunity to win Bill's book at the conclusion of the meeting.

ZOOM DIRECTIONS

- 1) **Download** Zoom program from Internet at: <https://zoom.us/download>
- 2) Once in Zoom, **create** a username and password **OR log in** through other methods such as your Facebook account username and password.
- 3) On the Zoom main page, you will see four icons. To join a scheduled meeting, click **"Join"** in the upper right side. Enter the meeting ID number and passcode. **Meeting ID: 889 6036 3141**
Passcode: 578865
- 4) Your computer **camera** will turn on. A pop-up box appears and asks if you want to join with **computer audio**. Click the blue **"Join"** icon.
- 5) Click the **"mute"** button seen on the left side of the bottom black bar so a slash appears across the microphone.

Please keep your microphone MUTED during the presentation to eliminate interruptions of background noise.

To Activate the Chat Feature:

1) Move your mouse cursor to the bottom black bar of the video screen. Click **“chat”** (comic word bubble) and the vertical chat box appears.

2) Type the question you wish to send to the speaker.

You can also dial in using a telephone.

+1 646 558 8656 US (New York)

+1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)

You will need the Meeting ID and passcode above.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Dec. 11: Bob O’Brien will speak on the Confederate raid on St. Albans, VT.

Jan. 8: Ken Aslakson’s topic is still to be finalized; it will likely involve a discussion of political aspects of the war.

Feb. 12: Steve Phan’s presentation will be on the Civil War defenses of Washington, D.C.

THANK YOU, MEMBERS

The Executive Board would like to thank the following people for their support and donations to the Preservation Fund: Matt George, Sue Bonczar, and Lee and Cindy Schechter.

1861: A HOUSE DIVIDED

reprinted from Ken Burns’ *The Civil War*, 1990, p. 75-81

“‘The true course in conducting military operations,’ George McClellan declared from Washington, ‘is to make no movement until the preparations are complete.’ On paper, McClellan’s projected movements looked promising. The Union forces were to mount a three-pronged assault on the Confederacy: one army would drive into Virginia and take Richmond; another would secure Kentucky and Tennessee for the Union, then push into the heart of the Confederacy and occupy Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, while the navy cleared the Mississippi, surrounded the Confederacy by sea, and choked off supplies.

“‘But as summer turned to autumn, it became increasingly clear that, having made a magnificent army, George McClellan had no immediate plans to lead it anywhere.

“‘Republicans in Congress grew impatient. If the Union did not soon avenge Bull Run, they feared, Europe would see it as a sign that northern resolve was weakening and recognize the Confederacy. Even Horace Greeley again began to clamor for action.

“‘From the first, George McClellan had demonstrated an apparent self-confidence that bordered on vainglory. ‘I find myself in a new and strange position here,’ he had told his wife upon arriving in the capital. ‘President,



Major General George B. McClellan, lithographed and published by J.H. Bufford, 313 Washington St., Boston, c. Oct. 8, 1861. Library of Congress <https://www.loc.gov/item/2003653340/>

cabinet, General Scott and all deferring to me - by some strange operation of magic I seem to have become *the* power of the land. I almost think that were I to win some small success now, I could become *Dictator*, or anything else that might please me. ...But nothing of that kind would please me - therefore I won't be Dictator. Admirable self-denial!

“Now, as the pressure built for him to move against the enemy and the newspapers began to make fun of the daily bulletins of ‘All quiet on the Potomac’ that had once seemed so reassuring, he responded to President, cabinet, and Congress alike with arrogant contempt. ‘I am becoming

daily more disgusted with these wretched politicians,’ he told his wife. ‘They are a most despicable set of men. ...Seward [is a] meddling, officious, incompetent little puppy. ...The President is nothing more than a well-meaning baboon... “the original gorilla.””

“For his part, Lincoln was patient with his commander, even when he called at his home late one evening and waited in his parlor until McClellan returned from a wedding party, only to be told by the butler that the general could not see him; he had retired for the night. The President’s secretary was outraged at this insult, and urged that McClellan be dismissed immediately. Lincoln forbore: he would gladly hold the general’s horse, he said, if it meant victories, and when the general insisted that it was General Scott, not he, who was responsible for all the delay - he alleged that the old hero was either ‘a *dotard* or a *traitor*’ - the President allowed Scott to retire and made McClellan general-in-chief as well as commander of the Army of the Potomac. ‘I can do it all,’ McClellan assured him.

“McClellan did nothing. Allan Pinkerton, now his personal secret operative reinforced his chief’s natural caution, assuring him that a Confederate army of at least 150,000 men under Joseph E. Johnston was within striking distance of Washington - three times as many troops as were actually anywhere near the capital. Others told McClellan that Pinkerton

was wrong, but it was Pinkerton he wanted to believe. He would not move, he said, until he had 270,000 men of his own.

“In September, when rebel pickets withdrew from an exposed position a few miles southwest of Washington, Union troops found that the great cannon that McClellan’s spies had assured him were trained on the city were nothing but mammoth logs, painted black to look like artillery; a scornful reporter called them ‘Quaker guns.’

McClellan was embarrassed by the discovery, but his confidence was not bolstered. And he was genuinely unsettled in October, when a Union force ordered to probe Confederate defenses at Ball’s Bluff, Virginia, was trapped on the bank of the Potomac and shot to pieces. Among the wounded carried from the field was a young Massachusetts lieutenant, fresh from Harvard, with two musket balls in his chest, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. Colonel Edward D. Baker, an Oregon senator for whom the Lincolns had named their second son, was killed. ...

“In December, in the wake of this second Union disaster so dangerously close to the capital, Congress established a Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War to search out those responsible and ensure that the administration prosecute the war with suitable vigor. Its chairman was Senator Benjamin Wade of Ohio, a Radical Republican eager to get on with the struggle - and deeply

distrustful of conservative Democrats like George McClellan. General Charles P. Stone, another Democrat, who had already angered the Radicals because they thought he had been overly eager to return runaway slaves to their owners in Maryland, was blamed for the Ball’s Bluff defeat. He was falsely accused of disloyalty, given no opportunity to defend himself, and imprisoned for 189 days in New York Harbor, not far from Bedloe’s Island, on which he would one day build the pedestal for the Statue of Liberty.

“McClellan took his great army into winter quarters, continuing to blame others for his own inactivity. He had been ‘thwarted and deceived by ...incapables at every turn...,’ he assured his wife. ‘It now begins to look as if we are condemned to a winter of inactivity. If it is so the fault will not be mine.’”

BOARD UPDATES

The Executive Board met via Zoom on October 19. The Operating Account has \$2,727.19 in it after paying for printing the September newsletter. The Preservation Account has \$1,584.40 after donating \$500 to the American Battlefield Trust (ABT) and receiving \$175 in donations.

The Board voted to donate \$100 to ABT in memory of Ed Bearrs, and \$400 to their Bristoe Station campaign, which had a match of \$529 to every \$1 donated. This leveraged our donation from \$400 to \$211,600! Check out the “Save a Battlefield” page of the ABT

website for more information about Bristoe Station and other donation opportunities: <https://www.battlefields.org/give/save-battlefields>

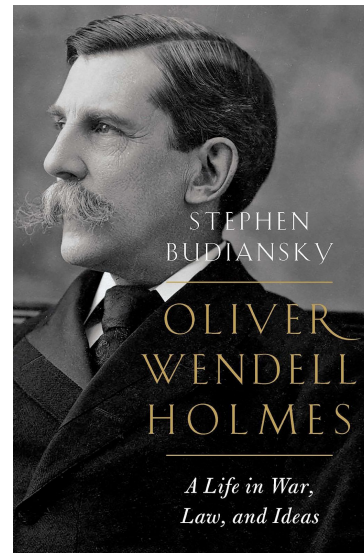
We are also looking for a new person to join the Executive Board as an At-Large member. What would your responsibilities be? Honestly, not that much. At-Large members are asked to attend monthly Board meetings that usually last one hour and help the other members run the organization. The intensity of your involvement is up to you.

BUFORD'S VIEW

by Matt George

Yesterday I attended the Grand Opening of the new Harriet Myers Exhibit at the Underground Railroad Education Center in Albany. The initial ceremonies were held outside and then groups of five people were able to view the new exhibit on the second floor. 20-30 people wearing masks and socially distancing were in attendance. The exhibit, entitled "Yours For the Oppressed, Harriet Myers" was the work of Derek Healey, the Special Collections Curator. Part of the new exhibit was a painting of Harriet Myers called "I Was Here" by Danielle Collins, an artist and poet from Troy. It was refreshing just to be able to talk to people about history even if through a mask. There have been a number of improvements and updates at the Myers house including a more convenient back staircase.

I just finished a biography of Oliver Wendell Holmes (1841-1935) entitled "Oliver Wendell Holmes –A Life in War,



Law, and Ideas" by Stephen Budson. He served on the Supreme Court from 1902 to 1932. Born into a Boston Brahmin family, Holmes joined the 20th Mass. Regiment during the Civil War and was wounded three times (severely at Ball's Bluff and Antietam).

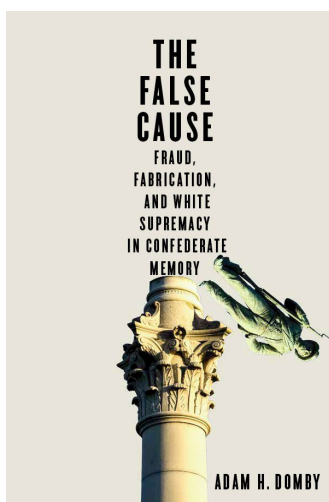
He began his career as a conservative but ended with a reputation as a liberal. He was a brilliant, educated, literary man who was not adverse to change in himself and in his legal opinions as a response to a changing American society and culture. He cannot be easily classified as an "activist" judge but, viewed his interpretation of the Constitution in respect to how the majority of the American people were changing, how society evolved and how what he called a "reasonable man" of his time would see the law. He retired from the bench at 91 and died at 93.

He did not see himself as a "radical leftist" (although many of his closest friends, like Harold Laski, were). Although he once said his purpose as a judge was not to "do justice but to interpret the law," he nevertheless

changed his outlook on the law and the Constitution over his lifetime to reflect a changing America. So, he also was not a strict “constructionist” or an “originalist”. His outlook towards big business laissez faire economics versus labor rights changed perceptibly.

Near the end of his career, his outlook toward Civil Rights had begun to change. Yet, his sympathies still were with the Eugenics movement. The law was simply not a dry preserved set of bones but, rather a reflection of what a changing American society understood it to be. Not surprisingly, as he grew older, his closest friends, assistants and confidants were not the older generation like himself but, the younger nimblest legal minds in the country.

I’m also half finished with a very challenging and controversial book dealing with white supremacy and Confederate statuary and post-war history. It’s called “The False Cause –Fraud, Fabrication, and White Supremacy in Confederate Memory” by



Adam H. Dobby (2020). Dobby is Assistant Professor of History at the College of Charleston. It’s a study of white supremacy in respect to such topics as Confederate monuments (including “Silent Sam”), Confederate heroes, desertion, pension fraud, and “black Confederates” I’m sure this will not be a very popular book in some areas of the South. But, he makes some new and very interesting observations based on research in his controversial conclusions. His epilogue is entitled “Why the Lost Cause Still Needs To Lose.”

Finally, our possible October, 2021 speaker (on General John Reynolds and his fiancée Kate Hewitt) has made me aware of a “GoFundMe” Fundraiser to purchase a marker for Catherine Hewitt Pfordt who is buried in St. Agnes Cemetery in Menands just two to three miles south of our meeting place. If you are interested, it is <https://www.gofundme.com/f/marker-for-catherine-hewitt>



**CDCWRT
P.O. BOX 11493
LOUDONVILLE, NY 12211**

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 \$35. The purpose of the organization is to promote, educate, and further stimulate interest in, and discussion of, all aspects of the Civil War period.

Contact the Capital District Civil War Round Table through
our website: www.capitaldistrictcivilwar.org
or email: cdcwrt@hotmail.com

THE OFFICERS

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|-----------|------------------|----------------|------------------|
| President | Erin Baillargeon | Vice-President | Nick Thony |
| Treasurer | Steve Muller | Secretary | Rosemary Nichols |
| At-Large | J.J. Jennings | At-Large | Mark Koziol |
| At-Large | (open) | | |

THE NONCOMS

| | | | |
|--------------|---------------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Program | Matt George | 518-355-2131 | Jbuford63@aol.com |
| Membership | | | |
| Refreshments | Dean Long and Luanne Whitbeck | | |
| Webmaster | | | |
| Historian | | | |
| Education | Matt George | | |
| Newsletter | Rosemary Nichols and Erin Baillargeon | | |