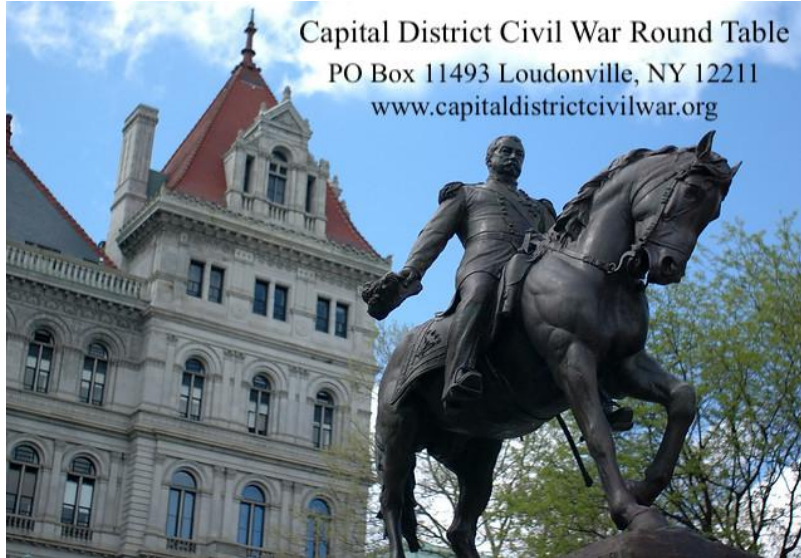


The Dispatch

Volume 39, Number 4

April 2022



“The Arsenal of the Union” The Allegheny Arsenal, Pennsylvania



Established during the War of 1812, Allegheny Arsenal's entrance featured bronze British cannons (foreground) captured at the battle of Saratoga in 1777 and pyramids of stacked cannonballs (background).
<https://www.heinzhistorycenter.org/blog/western-pennsylvania-history/cannonballs-unearthed-at-the-allegheny-arsenal>

APRIL MEETING

Friday, April 8, 2022

IN-PERSON MEETING AT THE WATERVLIIET SENIOR CENTER

LYNN and JULIANNE
HERMAN

“Tragedy in Lawrenceville, PA - the
Allegheny Arsenal Explosion”

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

Lynn and Julianne Herman will present their program on the Allegheny Arsenal Explosion. They have presented programs to Civil War Round Tables on their Civil War travels. These include “Civil War in the Far, Far West,” “Civil War Florida,” and “The New Mexico Campaign and the Battle of Glorieta Pass: the Gettysburg of the West.”

Lynn Herman is the former State Representative in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives serving the 77th Legislative District, largely Philipsburg, Port Matilda, and State College areas of Centre County for twenty-four years (1983 – 2006). He is currently a Government Relations/Business Development Consultant and President of Hometown Sports Magazine. Julianne Herman retired after forty-five years employed as a Registered Nurse in the Operating Room, graduating from St. Joseph’s Hospital School of Nursing. She has

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served as Secretary on the Pennsylvania Military Museum Board of Directors and as Chairperson of the Friends of the Pennsylvania Military Museum Speakers Series. Both Mr. and Mrs. Herman are Civil War reenactors and share an interest and passion for all American history. They have served the Central Pennsylvania Civil War Round Table for several years as president and secretary, respectively.

MASKS ARE OPTIONAL.

We will not have refreshments available.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

May 13: Leon Reed will present “New York Mobilizes for War”

June 10: Wayne Motts will talk about Gettysburg Park renovations.

September 9: Chris Mackowski’s program is yet to be finalized.

THANK YOU, MEMBERS

The Round Table wishes to thank Matt George, Rosemary Nichols and Cindy Schecter for their donations to the Operating or Preservation funds.

BOARD UPDATES

The Executive Board met on February 28, just after the last newsletter was printed, and again on March 14.

The Operating Account balance as of the March Board-meeting \$4,709.50. This account is funded by dues (from 39 paid members) and donations. The Preservation Account balance is \$3201.96. Over the past two months,

this account received almost \$700 from donations, merchandise sales, and book raffles. The account paid out just over \$1,500 for our storage shed and two donations to the American Battlefield Trust. One of these donations to the ABT was \$500 for a \$29 to \$1 match for land at Cedar Creek and Cedar Mountain. The second donation was \$500 for a \$163 to \$1 match for land at Williamsburg. These two donations maintain our Regimental Color-Bearer status with the ABT.

The Round Table has some items from the 135th Antietam anniversary and five Vicksburg first day of issue with a Grant image and signature on the left and Ed Bearrs numbered original signature on the right. These will be available for sale at the next meeting.

A WATERVLIIET TRAGEDY? by Rosemary Nichols

Did children die working at the Watervliet Arsenal during the Civil War? The planned April program on the Allegheny Arsenal Explosion in Lawrenceville (now part of Pittsburgh but on September 17, 1862 a separate Pennsylvania municipality), caused interest among some members of the Round Table about a rumored similar event alleged to have occurred during the Civil War in Watervliet.

Intensive research into all the written history of the Watervliet Arsenal, the

oldest still operating such facility in the United States, has failed to yield anything but evidence of much less damaging incidents periodically during the Civil War. None of the works celebrating the Arsenal from its earliest days in 1813 to the present makes any mention of any wartime tragedies.

The newspaper record, supported by information in publications of the Arsenal, is that while there were rare instances of accidents or fatalities involving manufacturing in the Civil War years, Watervliet was blessed, or sufficiently carefully managed, so as not to have major deaths among workers, especially not the boys and girls who served the Union cause.

The *Utica Daily Observer* of August 27, 1861 reported that the 1,500 employees of the Arsenal had begun to manufacture "infantry equipment". An article from the *Delaware Gazette* out of Delhi dated August 28, 1861 declared

Engraving from the Albany Institute of History and Art
https://www.albanyinstitute.org/system/html/u1990.212.2_Watervliet%20Arsenal-772156e9.jpg



that Watervliet was the largest arsenal for “construction of military implements other than small arms and cannon.”

The Arsenal worked very hard to produce massive quantities of munitions for the Union Army all during the four year conflict. An article in the *New York Herald* of September 29, 1861 reports that on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of the previous week (September 23, 24, and 25) five million cartridges were sent from the Arsenal to Washington. Four complete six-pounder batteries and six thirty-two pounder batteries were sent in the same shipment.

Reports of production thereafter indicated even more aggressive shipment of material regularly during the remainder of the war. When the Arsenal was able to procure enough materials to keep the cartridges rolling from the facility, shipments of as many as ten million were sent at frequent intervals, some of which went directly to the battlefield accompanied by a delivery agent and guards to assure the material arrived.

The 2,000 at peak Arsenal workforce quickly came to include substantial numbers of children from the Port Schuyler and West Troy neighborhoods around the Arsenal. As the completely male work force came under pressure or encouragement to fill the ranks of Union regiments, first boys and then girls were added to those who worked in the Arsenal. In 1864 Colonel Hagner made a virtue of necessity and hired 225 girls to make cylinders which were filled by the boys brought in to replace the adult males.

One of those girls reported her

experience. Miss Elizabeth Owens, 90 years old in 1942, said, “I was nine years old and all of us little girls sat on a long bench, our feet not quite touching the floor, and we filled cartridges all day long. I worked from seven in the morning until six at night.” Miss Owens reported that her father worked even longer hours, until 10 p.m.

One can only conclude at this point, that the local “knowledge” of the tragic deaths of children working for the Union war effort at the Watervliet Arsenal is nothing but an urban legend. Whether through good luck or better management, what became the City of Watervliet was spared the tragedy that beset the children and women employed at the Allegheny Arsenal, at Lawrenceville in Pennsylvania, and the comparable disaster at the Watertown, Massachusetts facility.

BUFORD’S VIEW

by Matt George

In the past few years a number of books and articles have been published on disasters on the home front during the Civil War. A number of these occurred at the arsenals where munitions were made. In 2016 a book by Tanya Harrison entitled “Gunpowder Girls – True Stories of Three Civil War Tragedies” was published. It described what happened at the Washington Arsenal, the Allegheny Arsenal and the Confederate States Laboratory in 1863. In 2012 “Washington Arsenal Explosion – Civil War Disaster in the Capital,” written by Brian Begin, described the 1864 disaster that happened in the Washington Arsenal. It killed twenty-one young women immigrants (many Irish immigrants). A number were

small children because their fingers were small enough to stuff the paper cartridges and to varnish percussion caps.

By far the worst tragedy occurred in 1862 at the Allegheny Arsenal in Lawrenceville, Pennsylvania (near Pittsburgh). This explosion caused the highest loss of civilian life during the Civil War. Dozens of women and children assisting in the war effort were killed. The disaster received very little coverage by the press since it happened on the same day as the Battle of Antietam. Our speakers in April, Julianne and Lynn Herman will be giving a detailed account of what happened at the Allegheny Arsenal.

This happened at least twice at the Watervliet Arsenal during the war. The first incident happened a few days before a newspaper report I found dated November 12, 1861, not in a local newspaper, but in the *Chicago Tribune*. Six men were terribly injured when hot wax was accidentally poured on loose powder and cartridges causing an explosion. The *Tribune* got the story from the *Troy Times*. The second accident occurred in January of 1862. It was reported in the *New York Tribune* on January 28. The article was entitled "Serious Explosion at the Watervliet Arsenal." According to the report, "Owing to a fortunate combination of circumstances, no person was injured, but the escape from a disaster even more serious than that which occurred in the Fall of 1861, was narrow." Until recently powder and shell were stored within the exploding distance "to where 6,000 fuses were accidentally ignited". The *Tribune* also got this report from a *Troy Times* article on January 26. The mention of the

explosion that happened in the previous Fall could be a reference to that first incident reported in the Chicago paper.

Were these to only two accidents that occurred at the Watervliet Arsenal during the War? A few days ago, I briefly discussed this with Tom Rogosta, President of the Watervliet Historical Society. He said he would see what he could find. I'll pass along what I learn.

TRIVIA QUESTIONS: Any one who responds with the correct answers to these three trivia questions will earn a free book at our April meeting. Email your responses to: jbuford63@aol.com

- 1) What American company still in operation today began during the Civil War and made "gum blankets" (rubber on one side) for Union Civil War soldiers?
- 2) What does this company make today?
- 3) Another company supplied huge amounts of sweetened condensed milk for soldiers' field rations. It originally was called Eagle Brand. What was the last name of its founder? (It, too, is still in business.)



**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

| | | | |
|------------------|------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| President | Erin Baillargeon | Vice-President | Mark Koziol |
| Treasurer | Steve Muller | Secretary | Rosemary Nichols |
| At-Large | Joyce Brooks | At-Large | (open) |
| At-Large | (open) | | |

THE NONCOMS

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