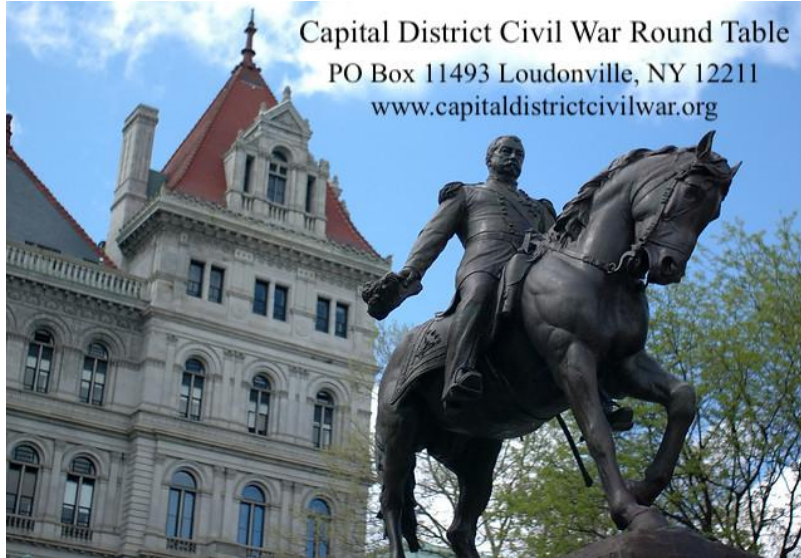


The Dispatch

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Weather and the War



Winter Campaigning. The Army of the Potomac on the move. Sketched near Falmouth--Jan. 21st by Alfred R. Waud. Image from the Library of Congress <https://locn.loc.gov/2004660450>

JUNE MEETING

Friday, June 9, 2023

**AT THE WATERVLIT
SENIOR CENTER**

Jan Wojcik: The Civil War Between the Mountains

Social Hour with light refreshments	6:00 p.m.
Business Meeting	7:00 p.m.
Presentation	7:00 – 8:00 p.m.

The Continental geology of the United States created a large land funnel between the Rockies to the West, and the Appalachians to the East. Cold Northern air mixed with warm moist air rising from the Gulf of Mexico. The States that formed the Deep South found their land and climate ideal for raising cotton and tobacco with enslaved labor. They forced a Civil War to protect their right to use the weather and the land this way—and in the hopes of expanding this right into the lands of the Western Territories secured by the Northwest Ordinance and the Louisiana Purchase, and the War with Mexico.

The Northern military strategy of aggression prevailed over the Southern military strategy of the defense of the mountains, mountain passes, river valleys, and navigable rivers and plains not only because of the superior military tactics of the North exploiting those natural features—but because of the different ways the rivals had

chosen to develop the social and economic resources of those features during the hundred years between the Revolution and the Civil War.

The slide presentation illustrates how weather and geology determined why and how the Civil War was fought—and won.

Jan Wojcik was educated at Boston College and Yale. He taught literature at Purdue and Clarkson Universities, was a member of the Saint Lawrence County Historical Society's Civil War Roundtable and was president of the Board of Trustees of the Potsdam Public Museum. He has given presentations on women in the Civil War, the Battles of Spotsylvania and Appomattox, and Gettysburg, the recruitment of formerly enslaved men into the Union Army, and the military service in the Civil War by Saint Lawrence County soldiers Thomas Hickey and William Elderkin.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Matt George is actively recruiting speakers for the fall and winter presentations. As a reminder, our next meeting will be the second Friday in September (the 8th).

THANK YOU, MEMBERS

The Round Table wishes to thank Jeffrey Falace, Matt George, and Michael Phelan for their donations to the Round Table.

BOARD UPDATES

The Executive Board met via Zoom on May 15. President Erin Baillargeon agreed to be the *Secretary Pro Tem*.

The Preservation Account balance at this time is \$3,653.19. The April donation to the American Battlefield Trust brought our total donations to the ABT for the year to \$1,000. This keeps us at Regiment Color Bearer status.

The Operating Account balance is \$4,036.39. It paid for our website maintenance, and shortly will pay for the post office box. Matt George let us know that he made several contacts at the conference he attended.

The Board also discussed ways to reach new members through connections with other local Civil War-related groups. This was a focus of the Civil War Round Table Congress's conference, and we are eager to hear from our attending members what was discussed.

WEATHER AND THE CIVIL WAR

by Daryl Black published by the American Battlefield Trust, 2021
<https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/weather-and-civil-war>

Weather operates beyond the control of politicians, military leaders, soldiers, and civilians. Despite efforts of Civil War-era Americans to overcome rain, snow, wind, and heat, these elements set real limits to how armies moved, how crops flourished or failed, how transportation worked or did not work,

and how soldiers and civilians felt in the elements. In an event that took place largely outdoors, the outdoors played a critical role in shaping the nation's critical conflict.

The most famous weather impact of the war was Burnside's Mud March in January 1863. Though started in reasonable weather, a strong storm with numbing temperatures, howling wind, and heavy precipitation bogged down a bold plan and led to dramatic and demoralizing failure. But the list of campaigns determined by weather is long. Heavy rain slowed George McClellan's Spring advance up the Virginia Peninsula. Dry weather and heat had helped stop Don Carlos Buell's advance through North Alabama toward Chattanooga in the summer of 1862. William T. Sherman and Ulysses S. Grant encountered heavy rain and flooding that stymied two attempts to capture Vicksburg in late 1862 and early 1863. Unusually wet weather in Virginia in Spring 1863 hindered Joseph Hooker's rejuvenation of the Army of the Potomac and made chaos out of the army's initial offensive moves in April 1863.

On the Confederate side, the situation was the same. Stonewall Jackson's Bath-Romney Campaign in January 1862 ground to a halt because of numbing cold, icy roads, and a blizzard. Heavy rain, fog, flooding, and mud thwarted the Confederates at the Battle of Mill Springs, Kentucky, on January 19, 1862. Bad water and drought limited Braxton Bragg's army in northern Mississippi in the spring and summer of 1862. After Gettysburg, the deluge that soaked the defeated soldiers of the Army of Northern

Virginia led to the rapid rise of the Potomac River and imperiled Robert E. Lee's escape into Virginia. Soldiers in James Longstreet's First Corps suffered through a miserable winter near Knoxville, Tennessee, in 1863-1864 as rain, cold, and snow limited movement. In late 1864, John Bell Hood's Tennessee Campaign collapsed in the face of fierce winter weather including snow, ice, fog (that helped George Thomas conceal his preparations for smashing attacks on December 15 and 16) and freezing rain that helped shred unit cohesion in the rebel ranks.

Across the nation and through the entire war, weather played an outsized role in how the armies moved or did not move. Indeed, officers and soldiers from both sides had occasion to declare, as did Rice Bull of the 123rd New York Infantry at the conclusion of the Battle of Chancellorsville "it seemed that all nature had conspired against us."

But bad weather affected other aspects of both the United States' and Confederate States' war efforts. Drought, frost, and heavy rain interrupted planting seasons, destroyed crops in the field, and dramatically impacted crop yields across the North American continent. As historian Kenneth Noe has pointed out, perhaps one of the most under-appreciated events of the Civil War was the 1862 drought that destroyed crops across the Confederacy. The failure set off a cascade of consequences that created short and long-term problems for the Confederacy. That auspicious weather conditions led to excellent harvests in

the north at the same time made the southern crop failure even more acute.

Weather impacted morale as well. Soldiers in the field endured extreme cold, deep mud, rain and snow, stifling heat and dust that made simply breathing difficult. Both on the march and in camp, weather conditions could brighten or darken soldiers' dedication to their respective cause. Civilians suffered as well. This was particularly true in the Confederacy where the drought fueled crop failures of 1862 led the Richmond government to impose some of its most unpopular policies – impressment – that caused many to become enemies of the Confederate government.

The same crop failures laid the foundation for civil unrest in Richmond where thousands of women rioted over steep food prices and shortages in April 1863 and led many rebel soldiers to leave the ranks to help desperate and starving families at home. The famine's impact was perhaps most poignantly expressed in "The Widow's Appeal" that appeared in the *Athens Southern Watchman* on April 3, 1863. "Stranger have you corn? Can you my wants supply? My infant, early born, Needs succor, or else' twill die."

While many Civil War-era Americans held to a whiggish view that human agency could overcome nature, the experience of the war-years showed clearly that some conditions of climate and weather simply defied human agency. By thinking about how the weather shaped the ways people acted, how they struggled, and how they bent to the will of nature helps us to better understand the friction of war in its

fullest sense – both on the field of action and on the home-front.

BUFORD'S VIEW

by Matt George

In the late summer and fall I will or am planning to attend three conferences. August 25-27 is the Civil War Round Table Sustainability Conference in Gettysburg. Although we will be in different locations, the meetings will be concerned with various means by which we can improve our Round Table. This includes increasing membership and raising money. The reception on Friday night is at the Seminary Ridge Museum. The Conference and dinner on Saturday is at the brand new Adams County Historical Society building. Sunday is a tour of the Spangler Farm (XI Corps Field Hospital).

In the next month (Oct.6-8) I plan to attend the Piedmont Heritage Association "Art Of Command Conference" in Middleburg, VA. I think I have missed only one in the last decade of their conferences. Although not publicized as much as the big national conferences, they're excellent conferences with great speakers. This year the topic is "Grant Takes

Command". Speakers include: Gary Ecelbarger, Frank O'Reilly, Scott Patchen, Jeffery Wert, Gordon Rhea, and Eric Wittenberg. This is certainly a star-studded lineup. On Sunday there will be a tour of the Wilderness and Spotsylvania battlefields.

Finally, in November I would love to attend the Lincoln Forum Conference in Gettysburg. It attracts almost every known Lincoln author. I last was there a couple of years ago. It was top notch and edifying in a number of ways.

One side benefit from attending these conferences is that it helps me preview and find future speakers for our Round Table.

I apologize for the late change in June speaker. With just about three weeks before the meeting, our original speaker notified me he was canceling. He emailed me from France explaining that he and his wife were touring Europe and the weekend of the meeting he would be at the Grand Banks. I was fortunate to engage Jan Wojcik who will speak to us about "How Geology and Weather Shaped the Battles and Determined the Winner." Jan is from Potsdam, New York.

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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 \$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
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or email: cdcwrt@hotmail.com

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