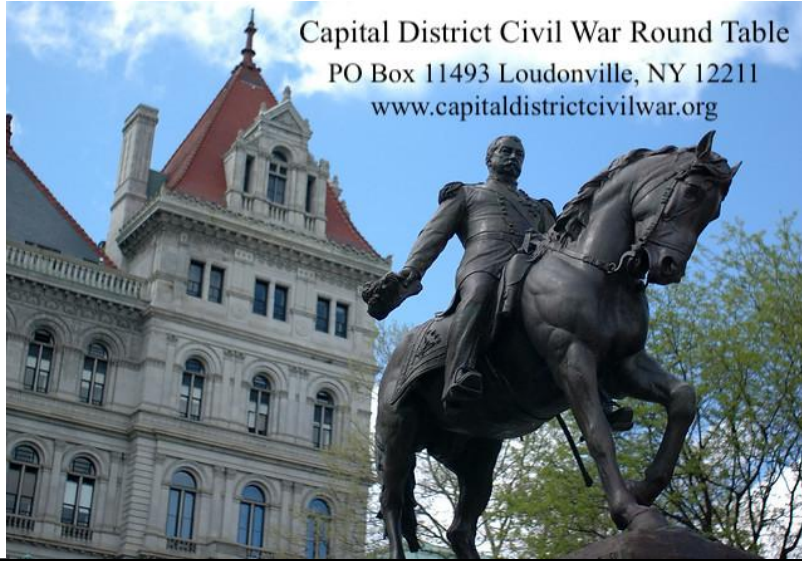


The Dispatch

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The Life and Death of Gen. Ulysses S. Grant



General Grant and his family sitting on the porch of the cottage where he spent his final days composing his memoir.

SEPTEMBER MEETING

Friday, September 8, 2023

AT THE WATERVLIET
SENIOR CENTER

Ben Kemp

*“General Grant: A
Compensating Generosity”*

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

Ulysses S. Grant witnessed and experienced the worst things humanity could do to one another. Join Grant Cottage Historic Site Operations Manager Ben Kemp as he explores what helped Grant retain his faith in the goodness of humanity through the most difficult periods of his life. Dying of cancer and struggling to restore his family's financial future at the end, support would come from some of Grant's closest friends but also from unexpected sources. Grant's final year proved that "no man is an island", and how at his weakest moment his resolve was bolstered by the support of family, friends, and a grateful nation. Kemp is the author of a chapter in the new book *Grant at 200: Reconsidering the Life and Legacy of Ulysses S. Grant* and will have some copies on hand for a book signing with sales benefitting The Friends of the U.S. Grant Cottage.

Ben Kemp was born and raised in the Saratoga region of New York. He is a

living historian, speaker, and researcher who has been featured by C-Span, PBS, the National Park Service, and on the 2020 History Channel documentary *Grant*. Ben has been a staff member at Grant Cottage Historic Site since 2014. His research into Grant has been primarily focused on the lesser-known private life of U.S. Grant, especially his family life. This research has revealed a relatable figure and fostered a fresh appreciation for the man who saved the Union.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

October 13: Chuck LaRocca will present on the 124th NY regiment

November 10: John Hennessey's topic is yet to be finalized

December 8: Carolyn Ivanoff returns to speak on letters from the 17th Connecticut

MEMBER UPDATE

If you've been a member of the CDCWRT for a few years, you probably know J.J. Jennings. He was an active member of our Board and regular attendee of meetings until health issues forced him to take a step back. Importantly, JJ, his wife Bernadette, and Fran McCashion, are responsible for getting newsletters in the mail.

In mid-August J.J.'s family shared on Facebook that his health problems have significantly worsened. He can't reply to email or text, but if you have his email (or his wife Bernadette's), send a note to let him know he's in your thoughts.

BOARD UPDATES

The Executive Board met via Zoom on June 19.

The Preservation Account balance at this time is \$3,397.95. An upcoming expense for this account is payment for the storage shed that houses RT books and other merchandise. The Operating Account balance is \$3,591.76.

The Board continued to discuss ways to recruit new members, especially younger members who are important for the long-term health of the organization. We're looking forward to hearing what was discussed at the Round Table Congress conference.

GRANT'S EARLY MILITARY EXPERIENCE HELPED MAKE HIM THE COMMANDER HE EVENTUALLY BECAME

by Rosemary Nichols

As President and Commanding General Grant sat on the famous porch at Grant Cottage in Wilton, NY in early summer 1885, he knew without possibility of confusion he was experiencing the closing days of his extraordinary life.

Creating a memoir or, in his instance, a two volume personal papers, forces one into introspection of one's life. I have often wondered, sitting on that same famous porch at various times a century and a half after Grant last did, how much he thought of the earliest days of his military career and what weight he placed upon them to explain why and how he became the

exceptional military leader he was during the Civil War.

Grant attended West Point from 1839 to 1843. He graduated in June of 1843 ranked 21st of 39. He was promoted on July 1 to the rank of brevet second lieutenant and was assigned for four years of service to the largest military base in the western United States at Jefferson Barracks near St. Louis, Missouri.

Rising tension with Mexico over the annexation of Texas brought a declaration of war in 1846. During the conflict Grant was distinguished as 'a daring and competent soldier'. Before the war President John Tyler had ordered Grant's unit to Louisiana as part of the Army of Occupation under Major General Zachary Taylor. In September 1846, Tyler's successor, James K. Polk, unable to provoke Mexico into war at Corpus Christi, Texas, ordered Taylor to march 150 miles south to the Rio Grande. Marching south to Fort Texas, near Brownsville, to prevent a Mexican siege, Grant experienced combat for the first time on May 8, 1846, at the Battle of Palo Alto.

Grant served as regimental quartermaster, but yearned for a combat role. When finally allowed this service, he led a charge at the Battle of Resaca de la Palma. He demonstrated his equestrian ability at the Battle of Monterrey by volunteering to carry a dispatch past snipers. He hung off the side of his horse, keeping the animal between him and the enemy. Both Lieutenant Grant and his horse survived.

Before leaving the city Grant assured some wounded Americans he would send for help. This promise, as a regimental quartermaster, Grant was able to honor.

Polk became wary of Taylor's growing popularity. He divided Taylor's forces, sending some troops (including Grant's unit) to form a new army under Major General Winfield Scott. Traveling by sea, Scott's army landed at Veracruz and advanced toward Mexico City.

The army met the Mexican forces at the battles of Molino del Rey and Chapultepec outside Mexico City. For his bravery at Molino del Rey, Grant was brevetted first lieutenant on September 30. At San Cosmé, Grant directed his men to drag a disassembled howitzer into a church steeple, then reassembled it and bombarded nearby Mexican troops. His bravery and initiative earned him his brevet promotion to captain. Grant was one of the rare US soldiers in the Mexican War to be brevetted twice.

On September 14, 1847, Scott's army marched into the city. In the negotiations Mexico was compelled to cede the vast territory that comprises, in addition to what was the Republic of Texas, major portions of New Mexico, Arizona and Southern California. That cession took place on February 2, 1848.

During the war, Grant established a commendable record, studied the tactics and strategies of Scott and Taylor, and emerged as a seasoned officer, writing in his memoirs that this is how he learned much about military leadership. In retrospect, although he

respected Scott, he identified his leadership style with Taylor's.

However, Grant also wrote that the Mexican War was morally unjust and that the territorial gains were designed to expand slavery, stating, 'I was bitterly opposed to the measure ... and to this day, regard the war which resulted as one of the most unjust ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation.' He opined that the Civil War was divine punishment on the US for its aggression against Mexico. During the war, Grant discovered his "moral courage" and began to consider a career in the army.

We can look to Grant's service in the Mexican War as demonstrating a variety of experiences and observations that were important later in the general's career. He learned the value of the quartermaster function. Even though not glamorous, it was essential to allow his unit to function at highest efficiency. Grant proved he was a capable and courageous military officer, one who could inspire the people below him in his command. He also began to develop his moral courage, stating plainly that the Mexican War was one of aggression on the part of the United States against a weaker opponent.

– Rosemary Nichols (I have two Marine sons, one who went into the service as an officer after four years of ROTC at Rochester Institute of Technology and the other who joined as a private after 9-11. I think what I know of their experiences helped me appreciate what Grant learned in the Mexican War and his other pre-Civil War postings.)

BUFORD'S VIEW

by Matt George

At the end of August I'll be traveling to the Civil War Round Table Congress Conference in Gettysburg. Hopefully I'll be able to pick up some new ideas and suggestions on how our Roundtable can attract more members and raise money. The Friday reception will be at the Seminary Ridge Museum and Conference itself will be held at the new Adams County Historical Society. The Saturday night Awards Dinner will be at the National Park Visitor's Center.

While some Round Tables throughout the country no longer exist, there are a few that have survived. Roundtables, historical societies and a variety of other non-profits have all suffered a loss of membership. The problem seems to be an unwillingness by our younger generations to make a commitment to any organization. The reason was often tied to real or perceived fears of economic insecurity. Of course, the primary detriment to membership was the months of the COVID pandemic. However, the economy is improving. The pandemic threat has eased. Are there other root factors causing the unwillingness of younger people to get involved, to make commitments? If so, perhaps some realistic solutions might be suggested at this Conference.

At a talk by historian Chris Mackowski given at Grant Cottage a couple of weeks ago, I met an officer in the Buffalo Civil War Round Table. He invited me to attend their September meeting. I'm giving it some consideration. The Buffalo Civil War Round Table has two meeting venues. They seem to rotate back and forth. Mackowski's newest book is an anthology of articles on Grant. One of the chapters was written by Ben Kemp from Grant Cottage. He will be our September speaker.

Our October 13 speaker is Chuck LaRocca who will talk on the 124th New York ("the Orange Blossoms"). He has written a book on this regiment. Chuck is affiliated with the Ulster County Civil War Round Table. They are still active, but only meet every other month. I've talked with Joel Craig, one of their officers. He provided me with information on Chuck LaRocca. I hope to develop a further exchange of ideas and speakers between their Round Table and ours.

TRIVIA: Email answers to this month's trivia questions to jbuford63@aol.com

The movie Gettysburg has a five-second scene where the Colonel of the 124th N.Y. was killed in the "triangular field". What was his name?

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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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