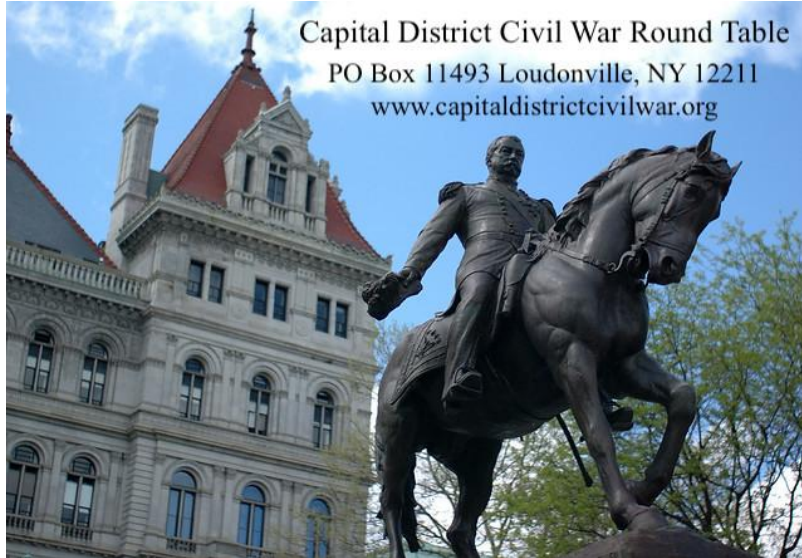


# *The Dispatch*

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## **The Orange Blossoms at Gettysburg**



**Col. Augustus Van Horne Ellis, 124th New York Infantry, "Orange Blossom" Regiment, on Houck's Ridge (Devil's Den). Ellis was an American lawyer, tax commissioner, fireman, sea captain, and soldier.**

## **OCTOBER MEETING**

**Friday, October 13, 2023**

**AT THE WATERVLIET  
SENIOR CENTER**

**“Tell them my voice is still  
for war!” The Orange  
Blossoms at Gettysburg**

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

The 124th New York State Volunteers was one of the great fighting regiments of the Civil War. At Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, the Wilderness, Spotsylvania Court House, Petersburg, and many more battles, the “Orange Blossoms” earned a reputation for sacrifice and bravery, eloquently put into words by Private Henry Howell. As he lay wounded, Howell described the charge that broke the Confederate line at Spotsylvania—“everyone was borne irresistibly forward. There was no such thing as fail.”

In his books on the 124th NY, LaRocca has used letters, diary entries, and remembrances, many of them previously unpublished, to present a view of the war as the men in the ranks saw it. They also include a roster of all who served in the regiment and numerous photographs of individuals.

Chuck LaRocca was a NYS public school teacher for thirty-three years.

He also taught a Civil War course at Orange County Community College and a Social Studies Methods course at SUNY New Paltz before retiring.

He has written or contributed to several articles and books, including “The 124th New York State Volunteers in the Civil War: a History and Roster,” “This Regiment of Heroes: a compilation of primary materials pertaining the the 124th New York State Volunteers in the American Civil War,” an historically annotated edition of “The Red Badge of Courage,” and “The Red Badge to Gettysburg: a Sequel to Stephen Crane’s The Red Badge of Courage.”

## **UPCOMING EVENTS:**

November 8: the NYS Archives Partnership Trust is holding their annual Empire State Archives & History Award program. This year’s honoree is Jon Meacham. Go to <https://www.nysarchivestrust.org/> for tickets and more information.

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

December 8: Carolyn Ivanoff returns to speak on letters from the 17th Connecticut. She spoke to us previously about Clara Barton

January 12: our annual Potpourri Night. Contact Matt George if you are interested in making a short presentation (15 - 20 minutes)

## BOARD UPDATES

The Executive Board met via Zoom on September 11. The Preservation Account balance at this time is \$3,096.08. We've made all anticipated expenditures for the year, including our goal of donating \$1000 to the American Battlefield Trust for battlefield preservation.

The Operating Account balance is \$3,591.76. There will be continued expenditures from this account for newsletter printings and program expenses.

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 discussed changes to how the Civil War is taught in schools, and the overall decline in participation with reenactments.

## THE WAR THE ORANGE BLOSSOMS FOUGHT

by Rosemary Nichols

*Much of this material was extracted from the information in the New York State Military Museum web page, especially an excerpt from The Union Army: A History of Military Affairs in the Loyal States, 1861-65 (1908) volume II.*

'Orange Blossoms.' It is a frivolous sounding nickname for a New York Civil War fighting unit. Newcomers to knowledge of the 124th NYVI had to be told the moniker honored the county in the Hudson Valley from which the soldiers had been recruited in 1862.

They were organized at Goshen and mustered into federal service for three years on September 5. Their colonel was Augustus Van Horn Ellis, a successful local lawyer, sea captain and soldier, who died at Gettysburg. He was 36. Van Horn had earlier commanded a part of the 71st regiment of the National Guard as a captain. On their return from their second three months' service in the federal army, the 71st under their familiar commander formed the nucleus of the 124th NYVI.

The unit left the state 930 strong; served for several weeks in Virginia; then joined the Army of the Potomac at Harper's Ferry under Irwin McDowell. They connected to Burnside's army on its way to Fredericksburg. The corps was only lightly engaged at Fredericksburg and the loss of the 124th was small.

The Orange Blossoms were 'hotly engaged' at Chancellorsville in May of 1863, losing 28 killed, 161 wounded and 15 missing—a total of 204 out of 550 engaged. The heroic efforts of Colonel Ellis during the battle evoked general commendation.

It was at Chancellorsville that the 124th NYVI earned its nickname. Colonel Ellis said to the regiment as they moved into battle. He admonished the soldiers, "Let the girls of old Orange hear a good report of this day's work." The regiment lost 40% of its strength at Chancellorsville.

In the 2nd brigade, Birney's (1st) division, 3d corps, the 124th marched on the field at Gettysburg with 290 officers and men. 28 were killed, 57 wounded and 5 reported missing. Both

Colonel Ellis and second in command Major James Cromwell were killed in the battle.

A beautiful monument has been erected by the regiment at Gettysburg, surmounted by a life-sized marble statue of their heroic colonel. It marks the spot where Colonel Ellis lost his life.

On the second day of action at Gettysburg, they found themselves posted on Houck's Ridge near the large rocks of Devil's Den. Because of the heavy casualties at Chancellorsville, the 124th only numbered 18 officers and 220 men when it went into action against John Bell Hood's Confederate division on July 2.

Their position fronted a triangular-shaped field. As Benning's brigade attacked the 124th, Ellis and his field officers remained mounted on their horses. An officer in the regiment protested, but Ellis' major, James Cromwell simply stated "The men must see us today." This phrase gave title to a painting by Civil War artist Don Troiani that depicts Ellis and the 124th at Gettysburg.

By all accounts, Ellis was brave and cool during the fighting. He remained in the saddle, sword drawn, urging his men to stand firm among the extreme chaos and smoke of the fighting. At the height of the fighting, a bullet slammed into Ellis's forehead. He pitched dead off his horse.

The regiment was mustered out, under Colonel Charles H. Weygant, June 3, 1865, near Washington, DC, after having a place in the first day of the federal Grand Review. The 124th was a

hard fighting regiment that played a role in all the subsequent battles of the Army of the Potomac after Gettysburg.

The total enrollment during service was 1,320, of whom 11 officers and 137 men, or 11.2 per cent, were killed and mortally wounded; 1 officer and 94 men died of disease and other causes; 11 men died in Confederate prisons. A total of 516 officers and men were killed and wounded.

Private Archibald Freeman and Corp. George W. Tomkins were awarded medals of honor by Congress for the capture of battle flags, the first at Spottsylvania and the second near the Watkins' house in the Appomattox campaign, respectively.

I have found I can usually tell the kind of war a regiment had by looking at their flag. Before it was restored within the last twenty years at Peebles Island, the battle flag of the 124th NYVI had been reduced to shredded silk. It has now been successfully returned to the glory it had when presented at the beginning of the war.

## **BUFORD'S VIEW**

**by Matt George**

Although Veteran's Day is a little over a month away, I decided to dedicate this month's column to the many veterans present and past who sacrificed so much. What many of them endured facing death and the unfathomable horror of war is something I can't imagine. In a type of literary exercise of "compare and contrast," what follows are excerpts from two poems by two men in two different eras.

## THE DYING SOLDIERS

A waste of land, a sodden plain,  
A lurid sunset sky,  
With clouds that fled and faded fast  
In ghostly phantasy;  
A field upturned by trampling feet,  
A field uppled with slain,  
With horse and rider blent in death  
Upon the battle plain.

The dying and the dead lie low;  
For them, no more shall rise  
The evening moon, nor midnight stars,  
Nor day light's soft surprise:  
They will not wake to tenderest call,  
Nor see again each home,  
Where waiting hearts shall throb and  
break,  
When this day's tidings come.

Two soldiers, lying as they fell  
Upon the reddened clay—  
In daytime, foes; at night, in peace  
Breathing their lives away!  
Brave hearts had stirred each manly  
breast;  
Fate only, made them foes;  
And lying, dying, side by side,  
A softened feeling rose.

"Our time is short," one faint voice  
said;  
"To-day we've done our best  
On different sides: what matters now?  
To-morrow we shall rest!

. . .

"To-day we sought each other's lives:  
Death levels all that now;  
For soon before God's mercy seat  
Together we shall bow.  
Forgive each other while we may;  
Life's but a weary game,  
And, right or wrong, the morning sun  
Will find us, dead, the same."

## ANTHEM FOR DOOMED YOUTH

What passing-bells for these who die  
as cattle?  
— Only the monstrous anger of the  
guns.  
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid  
rattle  
Can patter out their hasty orisons.  
No mockeries now for them; no prayers  
nor bells;  
Nor any voice of mourning save the  
choirs,—  
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing  
shells;  
And bugles calling for them from  
sad shires.

What candles may be held to speed  
them all?  
Not in the hands of boys, but in  
their eyes  
Shall shine the holy glimmers of  
goodbyes.  
The pallor of girls' brows shall be  
their pall;  
Their flowers the tenderness of patient  
minds,  
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of  
blinds.

TRIVIA: Email answers to this month's  
trivia questions to [jbuford63@aol.com](mailto:jbuford63@aol.com)

- 1) The author of poem #1 was anonymous. What war was it about?
- 2) Who was the author of poem #2? (hint: he did not survive the war) What war did it come from?

**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](http://www.capitaldistrictcivilwar.org)  
or email: [cdcwrt@hotmail.com](mailto:cdcwrt@hotmail.com)

**THE OFFICERS**

President	Erin Baillargeon	Vice-President	Mark Koziol
Treasurer	Steve Muller	Secretary	(open)
At-Large	Rik Scarce	At-Large	(open)
At-Large	(open)		

**THE NONCOMS**

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Refreshments	Dean Long and Luanne Whitbeck		
Webmaster			
Education	Matt George		
Newsletter	Rosemary Nichols and Erin Baillargeon		