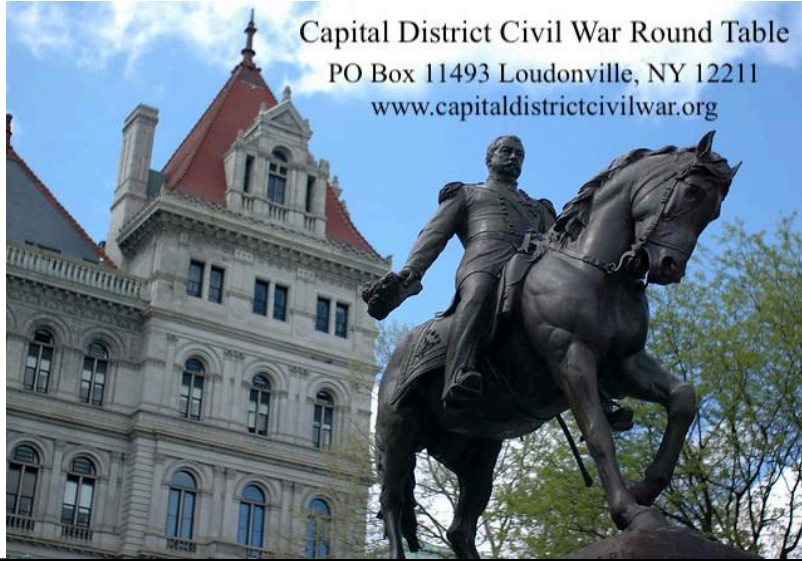


# *The Dispatch*

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## **Attack on Culp's Hill, Gettysburg**



**Painting by Peter E. Rothermel (Smithsonian Institution)**



## JUNE MEETING

Friday, June 14, 2024

AT THE WATERVLIET  
SENIOR CENTER

Chris Bryan

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

After initial success where it nearly defeated Stonewall Jackson's command, the II Corps, Army of Virginia suffered a bloody and demoralizing defeat at the Battle of Cedar Mountain on August 9, 1862. This talk will describe the fighting at Cedar Mountain in detail and will also briefly describe the aftermath for the II Corps that summer. These events and conditions would later shape the conspicuous success of the future XII Corps, Army of the Potomac at Antietam.

Chris Bryan is a native of Franklin County, Pennsylvania. After graduating from the United States Naval Academy with a B.S. in History, he served as a naval aviator for eight years. He has since worked as a project manager, during which time he earned an M.A. in Liberal Arts from St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland and a Masters in Historic Preservation from the University of Maryland, College Park where his studies focused on architectural investigations of antebellum domestic and agricultural outbuildings in the Chesapeake Bay

region. He currently works as a cultural resource manager. Chris Bryan lives in Southern Maryland with his wife and two kids.

## UPCOMING EVENTS:

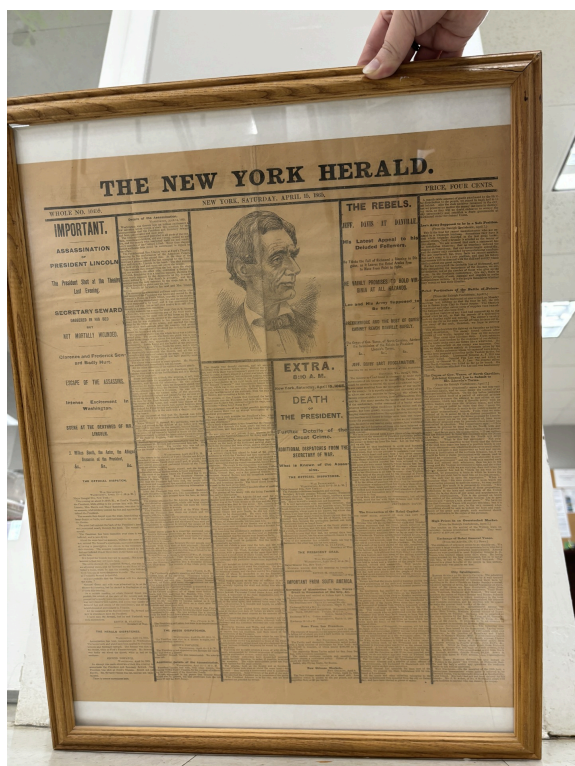
September 13: Phil Vitiello: the Rains Brothers

## BOOKS, BOOKS, IMAGES, AND MORE BOOKS!



The Round Table will, again, bring more books than usual to the June meeting for sale. These are some of the titles we'll have at 6pm.

A CDCWRT member donated a *New York Herald* newspaper cover page of Lincoln's assassination, and another member is offering a framed image of Lincoln with a CW campaign medal for sale.



## BOARD UPDATES

The Executive Board met via Zoom on April 13. The Operating Account balance was \$3,403.94. The Preservation Account balance was \$4,043.49.

The feedback survey to get input on meeting logistics, speakers, and dues is still active. If you received a digital copy of the newsletter, you have a direct link. If you get a paper copy, you can type the web address below into your Internet browser to reach the survey (the letters are case specific, so capital letters need to be capitalized). Please reply one time, only.

<https://forms.gle/eNSQxCXU2gBtzsc4A>

Grant Cottage is hosting a NYS Parks Centennial Community Day Celebration on June 15 from 10 am - 4:30 pm. For more information go to <https://www.grantcottage.org/events>

## DID NEW YORKERS IN THE XII CORPS AT GETTYSBURG SAVE THE UNION?

by Rosemary Nichols

BATTLEFIELD GUIDE CHARLIE FENNEL HAS BEEN SAYING THAT FOR AT LEAST THIRTY YEARS.

Some thirty years ago was the first time as a new member of the Round Table I went to a Gettysburg July event to raise money for battlefield protection. Our then Program Chair Sue Knost thought I should take a guided visit to get the best initial experience of the battlefield. My nine-year-old son and I, on Sue's recommendation, were able to engage experienced battlefield guide Charlie Fennel to introduce us to the Gettysburg fight.

Any of you who have had the privilege of touring the battlefield with Charlie know he regularly ends his excellent Gettysburg presentations at Culp's Hill. Last month as part of the annual meeting of the American Battlefield Trust I had the privilege of spending a full day with Charlie studying the Culp's Hill ground in detail.

A number of years ago John Latschar then Gettysburg park superintendent led a detailed study planned to require at least a decade of work to return the battlefield to its 1863 appearance. There is and always has been tension between the advocates for Gettysburg as a park, a place for people to enjoy a beautiful peaceful landscape, or Gettysburg returned as close as possible to its 19th century appearance. The two visions are not mutually exclusive but they do require

a firm guiding hand to achieve the landscape goals.

The restoration forces have won. We now have a peach orchard full of actual peach trees. They may still be young, but they are definitely peach trees and they give a completely different impression of that important element in the second day's battle than the mowed or grazed field that for many years preceded that planting.

The change to the physical appearance of Culp's Hill is even more significant. Where before it was not possible to get a good sense of the challenges confronted by Confederate troops as they sought to take the rugged hill, now the terrain cleared of inappropriate vegetation displays a scene that matches the post-war descriptions of soldiers who fought on that ground. (Don't be concerned. All the surviving witness trees are still present.) The 19th and early 20th century placement of monuments and unit commemorations now make sense. You can see where these men fought and died in support of their cause.

Culp's Hill plays an important part in the second and third days of the Gettysburg battle. Lee's instructions on July 2 was for attacks to be made on both ends of the battlefield to destroy the sanctuary that was Cemetery Ridge. On the north end of the fish hook line was the justly famous battle of Chamberlain's 20th Maine following the placement of troops on Little Round Top by New Yorker Strong Vincent.

At the southern end of that long line, Ewell's instruction was to seize the heights 'if such was feasible'. He is reported to have believed that Culp's

Hill was not occupied and therefore a good target for his troops. By the time Ewell's Third Division under Maj. Gen. Edward 'Allegheny' Johnson tried to occupy the steep slopes, the hill was under the control of the 7th Indiana, a part of the I Corps. Ewell's failure to take Culp's Hill or Cemetery Hill generally that evening is considered one of the great missed opportunities of the battle.

By midmorning of July 2, 1863, the XII Corps arrived and fortified the hill. Brig. Gen. George Sears Greene at 62 was the oldest Union general on the field at Gettysburg. He was a brigade commander in the division of Maj. Gen. John W. Geary. As a civil engineer before the war, he had a natural understanding of the value of defensive works. Neither his division nor corps commanders believed they would be stationed long at Culp's Hill. The commanders did not share Greene's enthusiasm for constructing breastworks, but they did not oppose his decision. Greene set his troops to felling trees and collecting rocks and earth to create very effective defensive positions that can be seen today.

Union commanding general Meade was occupied with the fierce fighting on his left flank. He was scrambling to send as many reinforcements as possible. He ordered Maj. Gen. Henry Slocum, in command of the right wing, to summon the XII Corps to strengthen the threatened Union line.

Only the brigade commanded by Greene was permitted to remain on Culp's Hill. While the breastworks offered a measure of security, the fact remained that Greene's troops on the hill held an incredibly vulnerable and



tenuous position. Greene's five regiments, a total of just 1,350 men, had to occupy the vacated works created to hold the entire XII Corps. As dusk set in, Greene ordered his 60th, 78th, 102nd, 137th, and 149th New York to stretch out in a line one man deep, with one foot of space between them. The fortified trenches were nearly half a mile long.

By 7:15 pm skirmishers of the 60th New York spied Confederates crossing Rock Creek, near the foot of Culp's Hill. Greene dispatched a courier to XI Corps commanded Maj Gen O. O. Howard and to I Corps Brig Gen James Wadsworth 1st Division with an urgent plea for reinforcements.

As dusk settled in, Ewell launched an entire division at Greene's single understrength brigade. About 8 pm the 71st Pennsylvania arrived to reinforce the defenders. This unit for reasons never explained withdrew after firing only a few volleys at the height of the attack.

About this time, units from the I and XI Corps began to reach Culp's Hill. New York's 14th Brooklyn and 147th NYVI, with the 6th Wisconsin, arrived first. Though 755 men from the I and XI Corps bolstered the five New York regiments, Greene never had more than 1350 troops in line to face 4000 to 5000 Confederates.

Greene maintained his bristling defense of the hill by using his limited resources wisely. He rotated troops to and from the battleline to restock their cartridge boxes and clean their weapons. The Union troops cheered to their comrades as they raced back and forth, encouraging each other to greater and greater heights of fervor

and determination. Greene rode up and down the line, showing no regard for his personal safety.

About 10 pm the Confederate attacks stopped. At the same time, Union Brig. Gen. Thomas Kane's 2nd Brigade of the 2nd Division returned. They were followed soon by the other XII Corps units. For the second time that day, a Union flank had bent but not broken. The left flank was severely pressed on Little Round Top, but Chamberlain and his 20th Maine had stood firm. Now the right flank had been tested. It too had been saved by a small gutsy force and a gallant, smart leader.

For the History Channel Eric Ethier summarized the XII Corps defense of Culp's Hill this way: "The magnitude of Greene's heroic defense of Culp's Hill cannot easily be overstated. Had Ewell's forces overwhelmed the small Union force, the Federal rear would have been exposed to direct attack, and the Army of the Potomac, with Confederates already in place in its left and center fronts, would then have been encircled. The fight that Greene's stalwart New Yorkers put up on the night of July 2 ranks among the best of any Civil War brigade. Anything less than their tireless, courageous effort would have given the Confederates victory. Greene offered his troops his 'heartly commendations for the good rendered their country.' Greene also credited Slocum, who had seen the danger in leaving the hill unprotected, with 'having saved the army from a great and perhaps fatal disaster.'

You decide: Did New Yorkers save the Union by their defense at Gettysburg's Culp Hill on July 2 and 3?

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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](mailto:cdcwrt@hotmail.com)**

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