

# The Dispatch

Newsletter of the

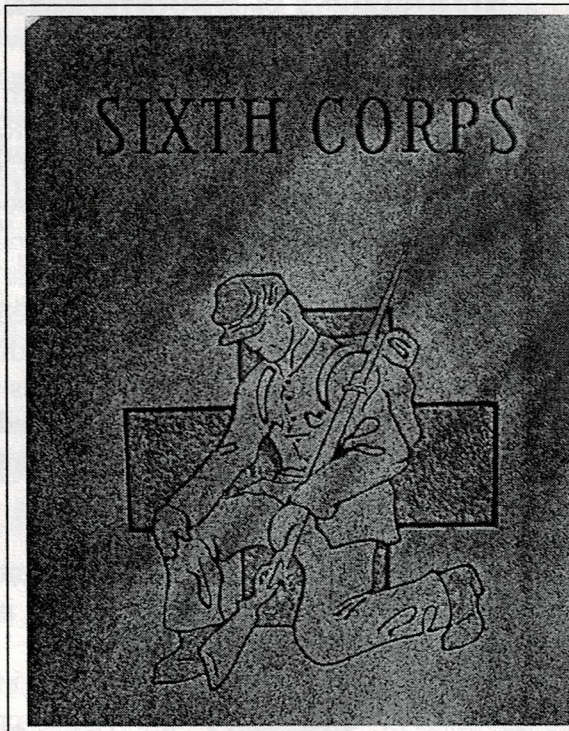
## Capital District Civil War Round Table

P.O. Box 14871, Albany, NY 12212-4871

CDCWRT's web site: [timesunion.com/communities/cdcwrt](http://timesunion.com/communities/cdcwrt)

Volume 21 Number 9

May 2004



Our guides for the Wilderness and Spotsylvania trip were Frank O'Reilly (upper left and lower right) and Chris Kolakowski (lower left and upper right). Both were extremely knowledgeable, and complimented each other style and area of expertise. Both were personable and committed to their beliefs and professions. The 6<sup>th</sup> Corps monument photo is dedicated to Chris, staunch champion of the 6<sup>th</sup> Corps.

## May Meeting

Friday, May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2004

Guilderland Public Library

Route 20 Western Ave.

Guilderland, NY

SOCIAL HOUR	6:00PM
BUSINESS MEETING	7:00PM
PROGRAM	7:30PM

### CDCWRT MEETING

*The May meeting of the CDCWRT will be held at the Guilderland Library on Friday, May 14<sup>th</sup>. The topic announced last month has been canceled because the reproduction of the original slides has not yet been completed. We have been most fortunate to schedule two speakers who will discuss a topic that is close to all New Yorkers who share an interest in the Civil War. This topic will also tie-in with next Saturday's open house at Peebles Island which is listed in our up-coming events.*

*Friday's presentation is entitled, **Conserving New York's History: The New York State Battle Flag Preservation Project.** Our first speaker will be **Christopher Morton**, Assistant Curator at the New York State Military Museum. Chris is curator for the New York State Battle Flag Preservation Project. He received his Masters degree in public history from SUNY Albany and has been with the Military Museum since 1998.*

*Chris will be joined by **Sarah C. Stevens**, Assistant Textile Conservator, who came to Peebles Island in 2000 specifically for the Battle Flag Preservation Project. She received her MS in Historic Costume*

*and Textiles from the University of Rhode Island, and then spent a year at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City on a Mellon Fellowship. She also spent nine months at the Cooper-Hewett National Design Museum as Assistant textile Conservator.*

*New York State has nearly 1000 battle flags in its collections, including over 600 Union and Confederate flags. This is the world's largest collection of Civil War battle flags. The flags were last conserved in the early 1900's by swing them to a backing. Many of the flags are in dire condition, and the State more recently has begun a preservation project. A small fraction of the collection has now been treated. Our speakers will review this monumental task.*

### **Wilderness & Spotsylvania**

The trip to central Virginia with tour guides, Frank O'Reilly, author and Ranger for the National Park Service, and Chris Kolakowski, former NPS guide and soon to be Masters candidate and CWPT employee, were a tag team that made this trip phenomenal. The weather co-operated and the company was great. The bus bathroom worked, and the driver not only got us to all the sites safely, he even videotaped our activities. The trip covered the Battle of the Wilderness and Spotsylvania.

The tour started at Elwood Plantation where Jackson's left arm is buried in the Lacy family cemetery (but that was 1862). Elwood served at 5<sup>th</sup> Corps HQ in the Wilderness Campaign in 1863. Warren and his chief medical officer, Dr. Lock, discussed the casualty lists for 5<sup>th</sup> Corps on May 5, 1863. The dead were "too many" and Warren ordered the doctor to reduced the KIAs, and list them as MIAs. There were 18,000 Union casualties in 36 hours

from May 5-6. Warren and Grant are aware of the political consequences that the Wilderness Campaign might have in the upcoming fall presidential election.

Next we went to Saunders Field in the Wilderness, where our guides explained why Grant stopped in the middle of the Wilderness, thus blunting the North's advantage in men and cannon. Grant was tied to his massive wagon trains, which could not roll through the Wilderness in one day. Lee ordered Ewell on the Orange Turnpike and Hill on the Orange Plank Road to attack the Union Army in its flank as it marched almost at a right angle to the Orange roads. Hill was delayed, and Lee ordered Ewell to wait. Ewell camped on May 4<sup>th</sup> on the edge of Saunders Field, unknowingly almost within sight of the Union wagon trains. Fighting began on May 5<sup>th</sup> at Saunders when Warren was ordered to attack Ewell's position across the open field.

You can read about Saunders Field, but to understand the impact of topography on line of sight and maneuver, you must walk the terrain. Only then can you appreciate the killing zone in front of the Confederate line. The Zouave "Rochester Racehorses," also known as the 140<sup>th</sup> NYVI, lost their Colonel, Lt.-Colonel, Major and three Captains, leaving only two surviving officer. We walked in the wooded edges of Saunders Field and saw trench earthworks that crisscrossed in three different directions as lines shifted through the May 5-6 fighting.

This ended day one of the trip. We retired to the motel and "leisurely" showered and dressed to be back on the bus in 20 minutes for a trip to Fredericksburg and our banquet. The Maryland crab cakes and prime rib were delicious. Chris Kolakowski was surprised to discover his parents, sister and grandmother had been invited to the

banquet. Frank O'Reilly was surprised to discover he was the proud recipient of a Georgia regimental flag honoring the regiment's canine hors d'oeuvre. A boisterous evening was had by all.

Saturday we moved to the Orange Plank Road where Hill's attack has faltered. Our guides show us location of one of three "Lee to the rear" episodes. Lee was attempting to rally his retreating units without success, when he spied John Gregg's Texans come onto the field. The Texans were in Longstreet's Corps and their presence indicated that Longstreet was nearby. Much to Gregg's surprise, Lee wanted to lead the Texans into battle but they refused unless their army commander moved to the rear and safety. Like the many pieces of the "true cross," there were hundreds of Texans who claimed to be the soldier who stopped Lee's horse and convinced him to go to the rear. Frank related however that Lee's staff officer, Charles Venable yelled at Lee, "Damn it, General Lee, you've been looking for General Longstreet. He's on the backside of the field where you best confer with him!"

In his advance to support Hill, Longstreet discovered an unfinished railroad cut which paralleled the Plank Road to the Brock Road, which the Union army was using to cut through the wilderness. Longstreet started his flanking attack from the railroad cut, and had Union forces trapped in the middle. Converging Confederate units spied each other, and in the smoke and confusion of battle, fired at each other with Longstreet and his staff in the middle. He was seriously wounded in the shoulder and neck by friendly fire about one mile from where Jackson had been wounded one year earlier. Lee suspended the attack

On May 7<sup>th</sup>, Grant moved south, having pulled up the pontoon bridges. His decision was primarily political – there could not be another Union withdrawal before the fall elections. The march was stumbling, blundering, and sporadic. Lee reached Laurel Hill first. Once again our guides made us walk the Union attack, and once again we saw the impact of terrain. Frank showed us a high-water mark Maryland monument erected by Charles Phelps, Medal of Honor winner. Phelps bought the land himself, and erected the monument. This is the first land purchased for preservation, after the Civil War ended.

Our guides cover the feud between Meade and Sheridan, and the consequences of Sheridan's handling of the cavalry. Grant "solved" the problem by allowing Sheridan to take almost the entire cavalry corps and follow JEB Stuart. We earlier stood on a valuable crossroad where Union cavalry could have significantly delayed A.P. Hill on May 5<sup>th</sup> in the Wilderness. (Whenever we stood on a crossroad, there were often honks and shouts from indigenous male members of the crimson nape variety.) Chris then took us to the monument to "Uncle" John Sedgewick, the highest-ranking officer to die in the Civil War. Sedgewick of course, was commander of the 6<sup>th</sup> Corps.

Next we drove the few more miles to Spotsylvania. We walked the route of Upton's compact assault into the Mule Shoe Salient. Volunteers were sought to represent the regiments employed. JJ Jennings was an unwilling volunteer, but we think Frank was just getting even for the Airedale.

On Sunday we followed the route of the corps attack on the Mule Shoe Salient. Lee misread Grant's movements as the start of a retreat, and pulled all but five pieces of artillery out of the Confederate defenses.

Our guides painted a picture of poor decisions, lucky decisions, unlucky choices, and positive blind luck decisions that shaped the battle. Lee's poor decision was offset by Ewell's decision to keep the infantry in the trenches because of rain. It is further offset by the Union officers decisions to NOT attack as Upton had. Only ¼ of the forces deployed in a compact stack, while ¾ attacked in line. Only Barlow easily penetrated deep into the salient. Lee's army faced its greatest crisis to date when it was nearly cleaved in two. Yet the base of the salient was held by Gordon, perhaps the best man at the most important place at the critical time. Lee lost 7 general officers on May 12<sup>th</sup>. For the third time in less than a week, Lee tried to lead small units into action, only to be told to go to the rear. He agreed, but sent units in piecemeal with the pledge, "I will leave, if you drive those people out." Lee traded lives for time while the fortifications at the base of the salient were improved.

Perhaps the most brutal fighting in the Civil War occurred from May 12<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> before the Confederates withdrew to their new defensive line. In the rain and mud and confinement of the trenches men shot at each other a few feet away, stabbed at each other with bayonets, and bashed each other with clubbed muskets and hatchets. Bodies lay stacked as deep as 5 or 6, with wounded buried under the dead. The savagery was such that both sides later recoiled at the realization of the horror of that fight. Nowhere again did such brutality take place in large scale in the war, except perhaps at the crater in Petersburg where racial attitudes again unleashed men's demons. This was not the killing of one's enemy at a distance, but was personal face-to-face combat of the days of old.

This somber story at the "bloody angle" where "no other land has drunk so deeply of blood" was lightened by the opportunity to visit the privately owned Beverly House. Dan Spears is a friend of Frank's, and he purchased the Beverly farm, restored a building that was present at the time of the battle and is preserving some unique 9<sup>th</sup> Corps fortifications on his land. We were the first round table to every see these sights (and sites). We were privileged to tramp his land as his guests.

Well, that was our trip in a nutshell. The flight home had the funniest flight attendants we had ever seen. Even JJ, who hates flying, was regaled with laughter. "In the unlikely event we thought we might experience a sudden drop in cabin pressure, we would have called in sick." "First place the oxygen mask on your face, and then select your favorite child."

## UP-COMING EVENTS

**MAY 18<sup>TH</sup>, TUESDAY – CIVIL WAR FILM FESTIVAL AT 7:00 PM AT THE GUILDERLAND LIBRARY**

### *THE GREAT LOCOMOTIVE CHASE*

This film date is a change from the date of May 6<sup>th</sup> as previously reported. This is the true story of the Andrews Raiders, a team of 22 Union spies who, in 1862, captured a Confederate train near Atlanta. The train was pulled by a steam locomotive, *The General*, which is on display today at the Cyclorama in Atlanta. The Confederates pursued in a locomotive, *The Texas*, running in reverse.

The guest speaker for this film will be David Gould, who was supervisor of exhibit planning for the New York State

Museum. His love for railroads is evident in his present occupation as a conductor for Amtrack. Mr. Gould will discuss the importance and contributions of railroads during the Civil War.

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**CIVIL WAR FILM (AND LECTURE) FESTIVAL continues on Wednesday, June 9<sup>th</sup>, at the Guilderland Library at 7:00 with the movie, *The Red Badge of Courage*. This series is jointly sponsored by the Library and the CDCWRT.**

*The Red Badge of Courage*, by Stephen Crane, was an immediate bestseller when it was published in 1895. It has been read by millions since then, and is required reading for most high school and college students today because it is very likely the most perceptive and powerful exploration of the psychology of the individual in combat, the essential nature of courage and cowardice.

Other movies to follow are:

*Glory* – July 14<sup>th</sup>.

*Friendly Persuasion* – August 11<sup>th</sup>.

*Andersonville* – September 15<sup>th</sup>.

*Shenandoah* – October 20<sup>th</sup>.

The first large display case in the library corridor will be made available to the RT throughout the year for exhibits that will tie-in the movie. Please look for the item in the display case, and if you have an item that is pertinent to the movie, and would like to display it, please contact Lew Warner at 458-2282.

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On May 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>, the Round Table will be at Ellwood Plantation (where 'Stonewall' Jackson's arm is buried) and

**at the 140th Anniversary of Spotsylvania.**  
If you are interested in assisting at this event, please contact Sue Knost or Joe Stracuzzi. A special postal cancellation will be carried out by the RT and the Postal Service.

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The Albany Civic Theater is producing *The Andersonville Trial* on the weekends of **May 7-9, 13-16, and 20-23**. The theater is on Second Ave. at the top of the hill. Thursday, Friday and Saturday performances are at 8pm, and Sunday matinee is at 3 pm. Ticket are \$12, and reservations can be made at 462-1297. Members of the RT are encouraged to attend a performance. There are three Italian restaurants in the area of the theater. Sam's Restaurant is on Southern Boulevard, Nicole's is on Delaware Ave., and Cavellari's is on Second Ave. just above the theater.

Some 14,000 Union soldiers died in Andersonville prison, almost one-third of its population. *"Had Americans ever brought so many Americans to death in such limited acreage before? . . . No great battle was ever waged within the confines of a twenty-eight acre patch."*

Captain Henry Wirz was Swiss-born and was the Superintendent of Andersonville. He was arrested and was tried for his role in the death of many prisoners. His defense is straightforward. *"I carry out orders! They tell me to be superintendent of the stockade, so I serve. I am superintendent. I do my duty."* There is a twentieth century echo to Wirz's claims. And as I write this, there is now another reverberation to this in Iraq. This play deals with the wide view of human accountability on the scales of history.

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**May 15<sup>th</sup>, Saturday, will be a busy day. Chris Kolakowski will be graduating from SUNY with his Masters degree. Chris has accepted a position at the Civil War Preservation Trust in Washington, D.C. He will be working directly with the preservation of Civil War battlefields across the country.**

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**May 15<sup>th</sup>, Saturday, is also the Annual Open House at Peebles Island from 9:00 am to 4 pm.** This is an opportunity to explore the state historical preservation facilities. There are demonstrations in various preservation and restoration techniques. The RT will have an information table at the site, along with numerous other groups. Take 787 to Cohoes-turn right onto route 470 (Ontario St.) – turn left onto Delaware Ave just before the bridge over the Hudson. The facility is about one mile down the road.

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**From May 15<sup>th</sup> to December 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Rensselaer County Historical Society in Troy will present an exhibit entitle, "War on the Home Front from 1775-2003."** Hours are from 12 noon to 5 pm on Tuesdays through Saturdays. More information can be obtained from the website, [www.RCHS.online.org](http://www.RCHS.online.org).

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**The June meeting will be on Friday, June 11<sup>th</sup>, and our speaker will be Ray Wemple.** Ray will talk about the Confederate Signal Corps.

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**Other up-coming events in which you Round Table is involved, are listed below:**

**June 12-13<sup>th</sup> Peterboro Civil War Days**

**June 14<sup>th</sup> Cooperstown, Game Day**

**June 26-27<sup>th</sup> Civil War Days at the Masonic Temple in Troy**

**July 1-5<sup>th</sup> -Gettysburg 141<sup>st</sup> Reenactment**

**July 18<sup>th</sup> - Sunday -CDCWRT Picnic at the Pruyn House – Save the date!**

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**On July 9-11, 2004, Bruce Venter, former CDCWRT member, will lead a Civil War Education Association tour of THE KILPATRICK-DAHLGREN RAID ON RICHMOND.** Bruce is an expert on Union cavalry, and one of his hero's is "Kill-cavalry" Kilpatrick. Bruce has authored the most detailed tactical account of the raid in *Blue & Gray* magazine, volume XX, no.3, 2003. The registration fee is \$245 and does not include lodging or transportation to Richmond. Lunch is included Saturday and Sunday. Phone 800-298-1861, Fax 800-550-1347, E-mail cwea@earthlink.net

## **JOE'S JOTTINGS**

**By Joe Stracuzzi**

**Just a quick note about the inserts in this month's newsletter.**

**First is the petition to get the Congress to support the President's request to budget at least \$5 million to finance the Civil War Battlefield Preservation Program. All it will cost is 37 cents to mail it back to us, unless you bring it to an event. Make copies if you need them to get more names. (President Bush did**

*Congress one better and hiked the proposed annual federal matching funds for Civil War battlefield preservation to \$5 million for the Fiscal Year 2005, more than double the administration's request for \$2 million in the current year. Both the House and the Senate have approved the \$2 million in matching funds. They will decide in the next several months whether to authorize Bush's higher figure. Ed.)*

Second, is an application to join *Civil War Preservation Trust (CWPT) for only \$10. However, if you can, join at the regular membership of \$35.* I suggest that if you already have a membership, take out another and give the magazine to you local school library. (*Civil War Times Magazine also has a proposition to combat school and library budget cuts that have removed magazines from libraries. You can sponsor a library with the CWT magazine for \$17.95/year for as many libraries as you would like. If interested, contact Matt Farina. Ed.)*

Once again Sue arranged another outstanding spring tour for us. I didn't hear any grumbling, and I think everyone enjoyed the weekend.

Remember, you do not have to be a member of the CDCWRT to participate in any of our activities. If you get our three months of complimentary newsletters or hear about us from a friend, feel free to join us.

## **TRIVIA**

John Wilkes Booth had a tattoo. What was the tattoo, and on what specific part of his body was it etched.? The first correct answer MAILED to me at 1176 Delaware Turnpike, Delmar, NY 12054 will win a prize.