The Dispatch

Newspaper of the

CAPITAL DISTRICT CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

PO Box 14871 Albany, NY 12212
www.capitaldistrictcivilwar.org

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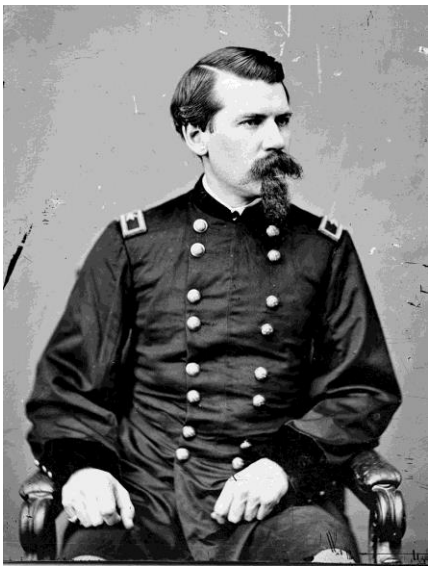
WHAT STORY DO THESE PICTURES TELL?









MAY MEETING
FRIDAY, MAY 13, 2016

WATERVLIET SENIOR CENTER
1541 BROADWAY
WATERVLIET, NY

How the American Revolution Echoed Through the Life of Brigadier-Gen. Horace Porter

Mike Reetz

Social Hour	**6:00 – 7:00 p.m.**
Business Meeting	**7:00 p.m.**
Presentation	**7:00 – 8:00 p.m.**
Discussion	**8:00 - 8:30 p.m.**

CDCWRT MEETING

The May meeting of the CDCWRT will be held at the Watervliet Senior Center on Friday, May 13, 2016. Our special guest speaker is re-enactor, Mike Reetz, and the title of his presentation is, **"How the American Revolution Echoed Through the Life of Horace Porter."**

Horace Porter was born on April 15, 1837, in Huntingdon, PA., the son of the governor of Pennsylvania. A good education got him into West Point where he graduated 3rd in the class of 1860. His specialty was ordnance. He was assigned to the Watervliet Arsenal near Albany, New York when the war started in April 1861. He served under several generals through the war mostly as chief of ordnance.

Porter's life after the war was also fascinating and interesting, especially in bring home the body of an American hero decades after his death. Who!?

Come and hear the presentation.

Mike Reetz comes from a military family. He met a fellow Living Historian portraying General Grant on the Gettysburg battlefield several years ago. Mike had been doing living history as a 1st Sergeant of artillery. After a brief conversation, he discovered that they had lived only one mile apart in Anaheim, California but had never met. Since the Grant re-enactor lived in Gettysburg and Mike was looking to move to Gettysburg, he was offered a position on Grant's staff as his aide-de-camp, Lieutenant Colonel Horace Porter.

Reetz readily accepted the persona of Horace Porter since he had read his book, Campaigning With Grant. But the book was more of a character study of Gen. Grant, but Mike found a biography of Porter written by his daughter in 1927. He was surprised by the life of Horace Porter after the civil war. It had been quite fulfilling.

This presentation will be a home-coming of sorts for Porter since he started out at the Arsenal, and for Reetz who portrays Porter.

CDCWRT'S NEW WEBSITE

After several months of problems with the old website, our webmaster has set up a new website. It is:
www.Capitaldistrictcivilwar.org
The new website is also listed in the letterhead of the newsletter.

UP-COMING MEETING/ EVENTS

On Saturday and Sunday, June 4-5, 2016, the CDCWRT will participate in the King Solomon Masonic Lodge Civil War Days in Troy, NY. Details to follow.

On Saturday and Sunday, June 11-12, 2016 the CDCWRT will participate in the Peterboro Civil War Weekend in Peterboro, NY. This village is an historic center for the Underground Railroad. Saturday 10am-5pm. Sunday 10am to 4 pm. Adults $8 Children 6-12 $3. Go to: www.civilwarweekend.sca-peterboro.org

On Friday, June 10, 2016, the regular meeting of the CDCWRT will sponsor David Hochfelder, who will talk about the Freedman's Savings Bank.

On July 1-3, 2016, the 153rd Anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg will take place in Gettysburg, PA. The CDCWRT will be sponsoring a postal cancellation at two locations. A cancel stamp has been designed for the 3 day event. A cottage has been rented for attendees from the round table and volunteers are encouraged to talk to Matt George. More details will follow.

On Friday, Saturday and Sunday, August 19-21, 2016 at Schuyler Flatts on the Hudson River, the annual historic military weekend will occur. The CDCWRT has scheduled its annual picnic on Friday of this weekend. Save this date.

On Friday, September 9, 2016, the regular meeting of the CDCWRT will sponsor former Capital District resident (but still a member of the CDCWRT), Bruce Venter. Bruce will talk about the Kilpatrick-Dahlgren Raid. This is based on his book, ***Kill Jeff Davis,*** which was released with good reviews in January 2016.

On Friday, October 14, 2016, the regular meeting of the CDCWRT will sponsor Vernon Benjamin, who will talk about the Hudson Valley during the Civil War.

On Friday, November 11, 2016, Veterans' Day, the regular meeting of the CDCWRT will sponsor Neil Yetwin, who will talk about Reverend Day.

On Friday, December 9, 2016, the regular meeting of the CDCWRT will sponsor Ed Bonekemper, who will talk about the Myth of the Lost Cause.

FROM THE SOUTH

This is a continuaton of the Rufus Barringer CWRT of Southern Pines, NC April exhibit in the library of the Sandhills Community College. For the past 5 year, there has been an exhibit of events that occurred that year in the sesquicentennial cycle – 1861, 1862, 1863, 1864 and 1865.

This year's exhibit deals with events up to the 50th reunion at Gettysburg in 1863. It is an overview of the period which is often ignored in public school education.
The main theme is:

Reconstruction & Remembrance: Binding Old Wounds & Inflicting New Ones

PRESIDENTS OF THE GILDED AGE

Ulysses S. Grant: 18th President (1869-1877)
Despite minimal political experience, General Grant's popularity made him the obvious choice for the Republican nomination. Although Grant was scrupulously honest, the selection of former military friends and politicians for Cabinet positions proved disastrous. Many were implicated in major scandals in Grant's second term. The Senate achieved its peak power, and Congress would take the lead in running the country. For much of the rest of the 19th century, the pattern of weak, one-term presidents would continue.

Important events during Grant's administration included: completion of the transcontinental

railroad; the gold market collapse of 1869; the readmitting of the remaining former Confederate states into the Union; the Enforcement Acts to end the KKK; the ratification of the 15th Amendment; a treaty with the Kingdom of Hawaii; passage of the Civil Right Act which was never enforced and which was declared unconstitutional in 1883; the massacre of Custer at the Little Big Horn; statehood for Colorado; the Centennial of the U.S.

Democrat Samuel Tilden won the popular vote by 250,000, beating Rutherford B. Hayes in the November presidential election. But Tilden was 1 electoral vote shy of a majority. Republicans disputed the returns from Florida, South Carolina, Louisiana and Oregon. Grant asked Congress to establish an Electoral Commission to sort out the election. The Republicans had an 8-7 majority and eventually awarded the electoral votes to Hayes. The Republicans had secretly met with southern Democrats who agreed to elect Hayes with the condition that federal troops be removed from South Carolina and Louisiana, bringing the end to Reconstruction.

Rutherford B. Hayes: 19th President (1877-1881)

Hayes had been a major general during the Civil War. The back-room deal with the Democrats earned him the nickname "Rutherfraud." However he was determined to restore the integrity of the presidency and was scrupulously honest.

He ordered civil servants not to participate directly in any political activity, and fired Chester Arthur, a future president, when Arthur, as tax collector for the New York Custom House, violated that order. This angered the Senate's powerful Republican, Roscoe Conkling. Hayes vetoed a popular bill than banned immigration from China because he considered it racist.

His independence and honesty made him popular with the general public. Hayes vowed to be a one-term president, and gladly left politics and dedicated himself to public education, prison reform, and the right for freedmen.

James A. Garfield: 20th President (March to September 1881)

Garfield also was a major general during the War. In the election of 1880, the Republican Party split. The Stalwarts under Roscoe Conkling favor a 3rd term for Grant, while the Half-Breeds supported Maine senator, James Blaine, as a reform candidate. After multiple deadlocked convention votes, Garfield's name was put forward and quickly a compromise, dark horse candidate won the nomination.

Although Garfield won by less than 1% of the popular vote, he easily won the electoral vote. He chose Blaine as his Secretary of State, angering the Stalwarts, who attempted to shut down the government. The Senate however ended the deadlock by approving Garfield's choice of collector of taxes for the New York Custom House, one of the most powerful civil service jobs.

Charles Guiteau, an insane and dissatisfied seeker of a civil service appointment by Garfield, shot Garfield in the back in a railroad station. Garfield died of complications of his wound more than 2 months later.

Chester A. Arthur: 21st President (1881-1885)

Arthur had been elected Vice-President under Garfield as a token to the Stalwart Republicans. Unexpectedly, he found himself president after Garfield's death. He stunned his party by ignoring his supporters.

Arthur prosecuted Republicans for mail fraud and vetoed pork barrel spending projects.

During his shortened term he declared his support for the Geneva Convention of 1864 which the Senate finally ratified. He also supported the Pendleton Civil Service Reform Act which mandated positions be awarded on merit, not as political patronage. He kept his poor health a secret and died of renal failure two years after leaving office.

S. Grover Cleveland: 22nd President (1885-1889)

In the election of 1884, the private lives and morals of the candidates took center stage, while political issues were pushed into the background. The Republican candidate, James Blaine, lost New York by a razor-thin 1200 vote margin. Cleveland insisted on honesty and efficiency regardless of political affiliation.

During his term, the states of North and South Dakota, Montana and Washington were admitted to the Union. He argued unsuccessfully for lower tariffs and vetoed the dependent pension bill, angering veteran groups.

Benjamin Harrison: 23rd President (1889-1893)

Harrison was a brigadier general in the Civil War, and a loyal but non-descript Republican who was the grandson of William Henry Harrison, our 9th President who died one month after his inauguration. Harrison had a scandal-free record, and defeated Cleveland in the election of 1888. Harrison campaigned almost entirely from his front porch while party leaders poured millions of dollars in contributions from big businesses into key swing states.

After his election, he signed bills for higher tariffs and Civil War pensions. The huge Treasury surplus that Cleveland had left, was spent quickly as pensions became one of the largest expenses in the federal budget. The Oklahoma Land Rush occurred in 1889, and although the Sherman Anti-Trust Act was passed, it was rarely enforced. Hawaii was formally annexed after Sanford Dole set up a provisional government.

Grover Cleveland: 24th President (1893-1897)

By the election of 1892, Americans were dissatisfied with both parties. A third party, the People's Party, won some electoral votes. But opposition to the high Republican tariffs, allowed Democrat Cleveland to win a second term as president with a very decisive electoral victory.

Cleveland withdrew from the treaty to annex Hawaii after he learned Dole had overthrown the native government. The Panic of 1893 saw the failure of 600 banks and 194 railroads, along with mass unemployment. Garment workers and Pullman Car workers went on strike over wages and conditions. The Supreme Court ruled that segregation was constitutional as long as blacks are given "separate but equal" facilities. Gold was discovered in the Klondike in Alaska.

In his second term, Cleveland was not afraid to use the power of the presidency. He vetoed more bills that all the presidents that had served before him, combined.

William McKinley: 25th President (1897-1901)

McKinley was the last of six presidents who had served in the Civil War. He had been a major in an Ohio regiment. In the election of 1896, the Republicans raised millions of dollars from corporate America and out spent the Democrats 12:1.

One year into McKinley's term, the battleship, *Maine,* exploded and sank in Havana Harbor. This led to the Spanish-American War, which

the U.S. easily won. As a result, the U.S. acquired Puerto Rico and Guam, and took temporary control of Cuba and held the Philippines as a U.S. territory. McKinley reversed his position on high tariffs, and negotiated trade agreements with other nations such as China. This helped end the Gilded Age of protectionism and Congressional control.

With the economy now strong, McKinley was elected for a second term with Theodore Roosevelt, a hero of the Cuban campaign, as Vice-President. Six months into the presidency, Leon Czolgosz, an anarchist, assassinated the President. Teddy Roosevelt assumed the presidency and will reshape the position with his actions.

CUSTER AND THE LITTLE BIG HORN

In mid-1876, the U.S. was preparing to celebrate its centennial. It had been more than 10 years after the Civil War and the country as a whole, was feeling positive. There was westward expansion and the onset of the second industrial revolution. But there was that nagging Indian problem, and the Army had decided to take action.

With the signing of the Treaty of 1868, the US Government granted the Lakota Indians most of the modern state of South Dakota along with the hunting rights to more than 22 million acres of prime buffalo territory to the west and north in modern North Dakota and Montana. In 1873 a financial panic gripped the U.S. and a cash starved economy was saddled with a $2 billion debt. There were rumors of gold in the sacred Black Hills of the Sioux Indians in the Dakota Territory. In 1874, George Armstrong Custer, a hero of the Civil War, led a government expedition that confirmed gold "right from the grass roots." By November 1875, there were over 15,000 miners in the Black Hills.

The Government attempted unsuccessfully to buy the Black Hill from the Sioux, but the land was sacred to them. President Grant's administration had initially pursued a peaceful policy towards the Lakota, but later greed and politics poisoned every one of Grant's best intentions. The Lakota were ordered to surrender themselves to the Indian agencies by January 31, 1876, or they would be brought in by force. To the Sioux it was madness to move from winter camps in January. Gen. Phil Sheridan planned a spring campaign to hunt down, capture and return the Sioux to the agency lands.

In May, three Army columns began to move into the Yellowstone region of Montana where a large Indian camp was reported to be located. On June 17th the 1100-man column from the south was stopped at the Battle of the Rosebud River. News of this was never sent to the other main column. On June 22nd Custer and the 7th Cavalry separated from the slower infantry column led by Gen. Terry. Scouting reports suggested the Indians were gathering for a traditional summer Teton gathering in the Big Horn River Valley. Custer was to circle south and move into the valley from the south, while Terry and the infantry would move into the valley from the north.

Custer pushed his column hard and on the morning of June 25th saw a large Indian village in the valley of the Little Big Horn River. Custer refused to believe his scouts who indicated there was an Indian horse herd numbering 20-22,000 ponies. Custer divided his command into 3 groups. Capt. Frederick Benteen with 120 men was to move southwest to scout a series of ridgelines. Benteen felt he was on a fool's errand.

Maj. Marcus Reno was to take his column (131 men and 35 Indian scouts) and attack the south end of the village, while Custer with his column would attack the northern end of the village. The village was over 2 miles long and consisted of over 1000 teepees. There was

also a fourth column (124 men) that was left behind to guard and bring up the ammunition and the mule train.

Reno's charge was met by over 700 braves, and shortly he was flanked and had to retreat up the valley to high ground now known as Reno Hill. His command suffered high casualties. Meantime Benteen decided to abandon his fruitless search and return to the main column. He arrived at Reno Hill in time to reinforce Reno whose men were low on ammunition fighting off repeated Indian attacks. Messages had been sent back by Custer but no one knew where he was. At 5:00 p.m. the ammunition and mule train arrived at Reno Hill. A column was sent north on the high ground above the village where fighting could been seen miles ahead. A mile from Reno Hill, a large mass of mounted Indians were seen returning towards Reno Hill. The column retreated to the hill.

What happened to Custer? Sioux Indian interviews, Indian lore, messengers from Custer and archeological evidence suggest this tale.

Custer divided his commanded of 215 troopers into 2 wings. He apparently realized the size of the village and sent messengers back to bring up the ammunition train and to recall Benteen. He then unsuccessfully attacked the middle of the village, and then unsuccessfully the north end of the village. The running fight now became static as the remaining troopers reunited and formed a defensive position from Calhoun Hill to Last Stand Hill. It appeared Custer was waiting for Benteen to arrive with reinforcements and ammunition.

Contrary to artists' renditions of this last assault, the Sioux did not attack on horseback but crept up in the tall buffalo grass and popped up to fire their rifles. In the meantime thousands of arrows rained down on the troopers from Indians firing arching trajectories. The whole fight took less than 2 hours, and Custer's column was destroyed.

That night and all day on June 26th, there were repeated attacks on Reno Hill. Twenty troopers would earn Medals of Honor that day. On the 27th, the Indians and the entire village were gone. Later that day Gen. Terry and his infantry column marched in from the north to unite with the remnants of the 7th Cavalry.

Of the 750 men of the 7th Cavalry, 268 were killed and 68 wounded for a casualty rate of 44%. Indian casualties were 60-100 killed and wounded.The Indian village held approximately 10-12,000 with 3-4000 braves.

What drove Custer to this action? Custer told friends he needed a victory against the Sioux. The timing of a military victory was perfect, only a few days until the opening of the Democratic Convention in St. Louis and the Centennial celebration. If news of a victory could reach the telegraph office and then to the Convention by June 28th, it would be read by his friends, James Bennett of the NY Herald or railroad mogul Jay Gould. A popular swell could make Custer the Democratic nominee instead of Tilden.

Custer was aware of the fact that the nation gave the presidency to such men as Washington, Taylor, Jackson and Grant. Surely the man who ended the twenty year Plains Indian Wars would be no less rewarded. There was probably never a better year to stampede a political convention than in St. Louis in 1876. And Custer was well aware of the fact that no one voted against an American hero.

Editor's note: The story of Custer in the exhibit was accompanied by the Anheuser-Busch sponsored representation of Custer's Last Stand. There was also a collection of 6 original cabinet cards – George A. Custer, his brother Tom, Low Dog, one of Custer's scouts, James Calhoun, one of Custer's officers, Annie Oakley, and Buffalo Bill Cody. The set is valued at $30,000.

There will be more of the exhibit in next month's newsletter.