

The Dispatch

Newsletter of the

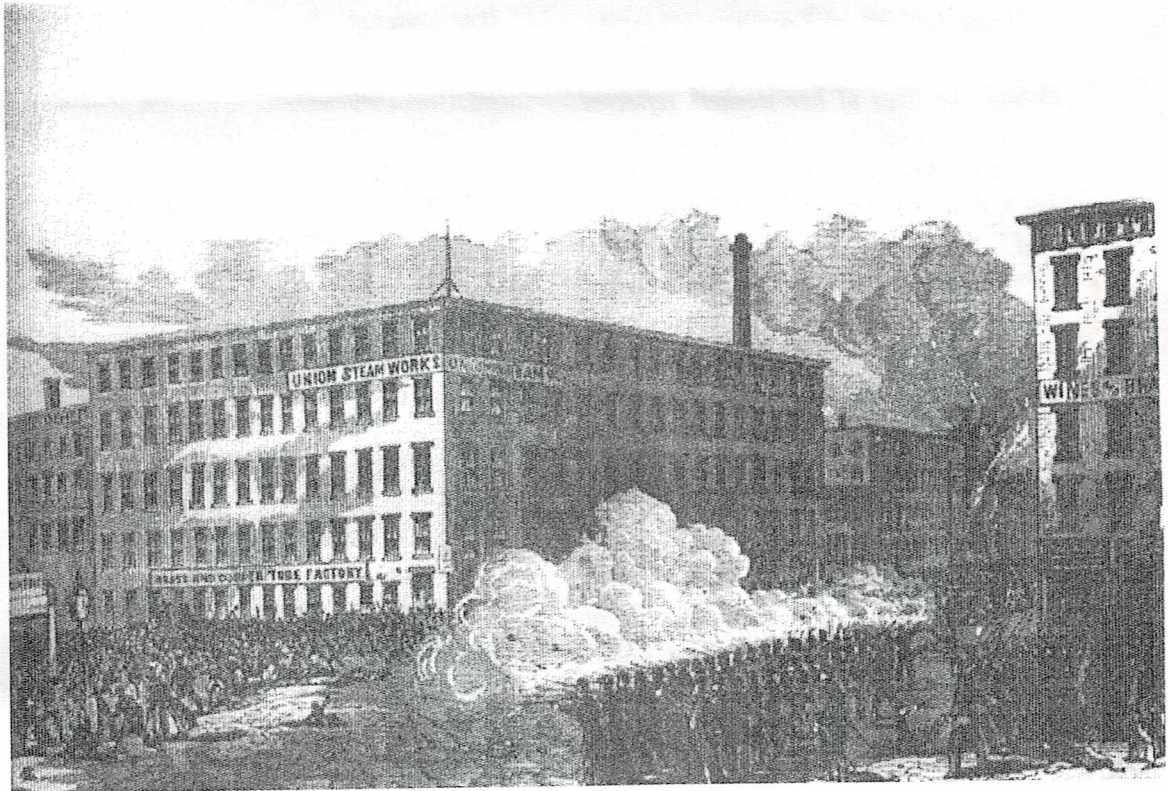
Capital District Civil War Round Table

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

CDCWRT's web site: timesunion.com/communities/cdcwrt

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This *Leslie's* engraving reveals the fury of the New York City draft riots in July 1863 just days after names were drawn in New York's first draft on July 12, 1863. By the following day, the mob had grown to 50,000. The poor were infuriated by the rich man's exemption, and bitter over social injustices, aggravated by wartime hardships. For four days violence ruled the city, until troops returning from Gettysburg, were brought in to quell the riot.

The June Meeting
Friday June 8, 2001

GUILDERLAND PUBLIC
LIBRARY
ROUTE 20 WESTERN AVE.
GUILDERLAND, NY

SOCIAL HOUR 6:00 P.M.
BUSINESS MEETING 7:00 P.M.
PRESENTATION 7:30 P.M.

CDCWRT MEETING

The next regular meeting of the Round Table will be Friday, June 8th at the Guilderland Public Library. Our speaker will be Michael Barrett, and his presentation is entitled, THE DRAFT RIOTS OF TROY, NEW YORK.

While the city of Troy was a bustling industrial center during the Civil War Period, the lives of her workers reflected the same social, financial and emotional upheaval that had torn the nation apart. Local economic and political disparity had lead to the early and successful organization of labor, and related political affiliations. These factors were compounded by the enactment of the first military conscription act in American history, which included provisions that many considered to be onerously weighted against the laboring class.

This turmoil lead to what has been called the second most destructive draft riot in the nation, necessitating some rather unusual governmental responses. This slide illustrated lecture is a true story about the people who don't always make it into the history books.

Michael earned a B.S. in Criminal Science at Russell Sage College, and went

on to earn a Juris Doctor degree from Western New England School of Law in Springfield, MA. From 1985 to 1992 he maintained an office as Attorney and Counselor of Law in Troy.

Since then, he has concentrated on his passions of woodworking and history. Michael is the owner of Decorative Woodcraft, specializing in custom woodworking, furniture making and repair, and the decorative arts. He has won several awards for craftsmanship.

He is a member of many local historical societies, and has lectured at, or led historical tours for literally dozens of different organizations. Michael is an expert on Troy's Oakwood Cemetery and its denizens. He is presently working on a project to identify and record every Civil War veteran in the cemetery, which number over 700. Michael now serves as Tourism Coordinator for the Hudson-Mohawk Industrial Gateway and the Burden Iron Works Museum in Troy.

Michael is a long-time member of the CDCWRT, and has served as past Chairman and Editor for over three years. He is affectionately known as "Mr. Troy." Like "Uncle Sam" Wilson, Michael repeatedly reminds us of the important role that Troy played during the Civil War. The city is steeped in Civil War history. We often forget that we don't need to drive to Gettysburg to immerse ourselves in 19th Century history, but just a short 20-minute ride puts us in one of the crucial industrial regions of the country where the material to defeat the Confederacy was manufactured.

CDCWRT NEWS

MAY MEETING

In 1863 Frank Wilder wrote the words and music for a song that reflects incidents attending the medical examinations of young men who volunteered or were drafted for service, but who failed.

*I wanted much to go to war,
And went to be examined,
The Surgeon looked me o'er and o'er,
My back and chest he hammered.
Said he, "You're not the man for me,
Your lungs are much affected,
And likewise both your eyes are cock'd,
And otherwise defected."*

*So, now I'm with the Invalids,
And cannot go and fight sir!
The Doctor told me so, you know,
Of course it must be right, sir!*

A number of verses then go on to describe the 4F types that were excluded from regular service and wind up in the Invalid Corps. The song serves to demonstrate the misconceptions of the Invalid Corps, even at the time of its formation in the spring of 1863. However, at the May meeting, 45 members and friends heard Professor of History, Paul Cimbala, enlighten his audience about the Corps.

The I.C. was supposed to be showcase corps, a Corps of Honor, composed of men, many who had been wounded, but were unfit for combat. By October of 1863, the Corps consisted of 18,500 men in 16 regiments, and 203 companies. They were divided in a 1st Battalion, consisting of men who could march and shoulder a musket, and a 2nd Battalion, who could not march, but who could work in various areas such as hospital. Professor Cimbala gave brief bios of some of the men, to show their mettle. He also talked about the problems that existed in the I.C. which earned it the nickname, Inspected, Condemned.

In March of 1864, the name was changed to the Veterans Reserve Corps, to include veterans.

The VRC uniformed was changed to distinguish VRC troops from regular army troops who might have been shirkers behind the lines. Several re-enactors from the CDCWRT demonstrated the uniforms to the audience.

The VRC defended Harrisburg and the vital railroads. Members were involved in recruiting, guarding prisoners, functioning as the police arm of the Provost Marshall, and enforcing the draft, among other duties. Lincoln's Honor Guard during the long funeral procession to Springfield consisted of VCR sergeants.

Most interesting however was the fact that many VCR officers stayed on after the War in the Freedmans Bureau to preserve the fruits of victory. They had an idealist goal to show former slaves how to become successful farmers and businessmen in the south. The harsh realities of Reconstruction and the lack of funds and men from the federal government, eventually wore them down.

BOARD MEETING

The May Board Meeting was held on Wednesday, May 16th. The treasurer's report indicated \$962 in the general fund and over \$6600 in the preservation fund. The banquet was a great success ---a superb speaker, a good turnout, and a very successful book and stamp sale. After all expenses were paid, there was a positive balance of \$831, which was added to the Hennessey Preservation Fund. Many of Norm Sebastian's books were sold. Others will be raffled at future events

Future events were outlined and discussed. It was noted that five members attended the Vermont combined round table dinner, and as usual, friendships were rekindled, future speakers were scheduled, and a good time was had by all. The next scheduled Board Meeting will be Wednesday, June 20th. Any member wishing to attend, should speak to any Board member for location and time.

PRESIDENT'S PODIUM

By Tom Smith

During June 1861, the North and South were making preparations for war in a variety of manners.

For example, along the Atlantic coast, “the enthusiasm in Southern seaports for the combined opportunity of striking the Yankees and pocketing a neat profit was feverish.” On June 2, Charleston’s first privateer, the schooner *Savannah*, armed with one 1812-style 18-pounder, set out for a brief but unfortunate cruise. Again in June, a brig named for Jefferson Davis, armed with five 1801 English guns, captured a Philadelphia freighter and Massachusetts schooner.

“On land, meanwhile, the time had come for harder blows. North and South, the clamor for fighting grew ever more strident.” General Winfield Scott, head of the United States’ armies, commanded three groups that had taken shape in Virginia. Major General Benjamin Butler’s forces were at Fort Monroe, Major General Robert Patterson was in the Harper’s Ferry area, and Brigadier General Irwin McDowell settled in Alexandria with his troops.

Nevins asserts, “Northern forces were loose, clumsy, and inharmonious. The aged Scott reigned without actually ruling.”

On June 10, Butler moved to capture two Confederate posts –Big and Little Bethel. It resulted in a debacle for the North and even the commanding officer admitted, “Everything was mismanaged.” Ultimately, the Union forces withdrew.

“Patterson repossessed Harper’s Ferry – after the Confederates had carried off all the valuable arsenal machinery,” on the 16th.

Meanwhile, On June 17, McDowell reviewed “the most imposing military display yet made.” Although there was little marching, exercises, and target practice for the recruits, “had the war been a contest in drill-ground evolutions, the army would have done well.”

By the end of the month, it would be McDowell’s fate to face C.S. A. General Pierre Beauregard across twenty miles of broken Virginia countryside, “like to wrestlers glowering at each other across the ring.”

(Primary Reading Source: Nevins, The War for the Union: The Improvised War, 1861-1862, 1959, p.p. 158-214.)

UP-COMING EVENTS.

The Round Table will have an information booth and cachets for sale at **Richmondville on Saturday June 2nd**. Richmondville is on Route 20 about ten miles beyond Esperance. This is one of several events were are attending this year in order to promote and support local Civil War activities.

The Ninth Annual Civil War Weekend will be held in Peterboro, NY on Saturday and Sunday June 9-10. The CDCWRT will be present and a stamp cancellation is planned. Hours are from 10-5 on Saturday and from 10-4 on Sunday. Admission is \$5 for adults, \$2 for children 6-12, and no charge for those under 6.

Activities include soldier encampments, drills and skirmishes. There will be sutlers’ booths, crafts, books, and food stands. Walking tours will also be available in this town, which was a stop on the Underground Railroad. The whole town is closed off for the event, which is always educational and entertaining. Peterboro is on Route 20 near Syracuse.

Tom and Sheila Smith will lead a group of regulars, but additional **volunteers** are always welcome. Call Tom or Sue for details.

Our annual picnic will be Sunday, July 15th. The picnic speaker will talk about researching your Civil War relative. More details will follow in a July newsletter, but in the

meantime, mark this date on your summer calendar.

A Civil War Memorial Service to honor African-American Soldiers will be held at Catskill Point, Catskill, NY on August 25-26. A Civil War encampment and re-enactments will take place, including infantry, artillery and cavalry. In addition there will be portrayals of Harriet Tubman and the wife of John Brown. Your editor had the opportunity to listen to Kathleen Thomas' one-woman show at John Brown's farm last August. For 45 minutes she talked about her life with John Brown, and in the audience you could hear that proverbial pin drop. If you go to only one Civil War event this summer, this should be it.

For more information, contact Lt. Col. Charles Swain, P.O. Box 77, Athens, NY 12015 or phone (518) 943-5241.

MISCELLANEOUS

The RT received a letter from Dr. John A. Latscher, Superintendent, Gettysburg National Military Park, thanking the RT for a \$500 donation for the preservation of the Park's archival photograph collections.

BOOKS, BOOKS, AND MORE BOOKS

We still have copies of several books at significant discount. These can also be ordered, or purchased at the meeting..

-Pickett's Charge in History and Memory – Carol Reardon, \$20

-Charlie's Civil War – Brand Livingstone, \$20

-Lee's Retreat-A Field Guide, Chris Caulkins, signed \$8

-The Civil War in Depth, Bob Zeller, 3-D photographic history, 1st volume \$18, 2nd volume \$20, 3rd volume \$18, all three \$55. Volume II was just favorably reviewed in *Civil War News*.

On May 26th, the Ulysses S. Grant Cottage Historical Site at Mt. Macgregor opened for the season. It is reached from Exit 16 of the Northway. Hours are 10-4, Wednesday-Sunday. Admission is charged for tours and events. Call 587-8277 for information. Civil War Days will occur on July 21-22, a Sons of Union Veterans Encampment on August 4-5, and a Victorian Picnic on August 19th. Do not miss this gem, which is an hour's drive away.

Members of the CDCWRT again presented the Life of the Civil War Soldier at the Farnsworth Middle School in Guilderland. A total of 114 students attended the sessions. How did we do? Here's the raw data.

Overall rating of the Program

85 excellent

27 good

3 fair

2 poor

Would you recommend this to others?

109 yes

5 no

Well, paraphrasing, you can please most of the people some of the time, but no all of the people some of the time. Great work team!

The open house of Historic Preservation Resource Center at Peebles Island on May 19th was a success. A number of people learned about the activities of the CDCWRT, and hopefully some new members may join. Cachet and T-shirt sales earned about \$130.

After 42 days of dry weather, the rain of Memorial Day weekend, discouraged the crowd from attending Freedom Fest 2001. On and off rain Saturday during the day, and heavy rain Saturday night, lead to a cancellation of the event on Sunday. A number of prospective members signed up for newsletters. Stamp and T-shirt sales were about \$100.

Amazingly, the Revolutionary War skirmish between regular and militia units of the United

States and British Regulars took place during a downpour. And most managed to keep their powder dry, and fire their muskets! A July 4th picnic and fireworks are being planned to make up for the cancelled activities.

MEMORIAL DAY & TAPS

There are several stories behind the haunting song, "Taps." It has been attributed to Dan Butterfield, but here is another equally moving story.

Reportedly, it all began in 1862, when Union Captain Robert Ellicombe was with his men near Harrison's Landing in Virginia. The Confederates were on the other side of a narrow strip of land. During the night, Capt. Ellicombe heard the moans of a severely wounded soldier on the field. Not knowing if it was a Union or Confederate soldier, the captain decided to risk his life and he recovered the stricken man for medical attention. When the captain reached his own lines with the wounded man, he discovered the soldier was a Confederate. However the man had died during the ordeal. Capt. Ellicombe looked at the soldier in the light of a lantern, and was shocked to discover it was his own son. The boy had been studying music in the south when the War broke out. Without telling his father, the boy enlisted in the Confederate Army.

The following morning, the heartbroken father asked permission to give his son a full military burial, despite his enemy uniform. The captain had also asked for the regimental band to play a funeral dirge. The request was denied, but the captain was given a bugler. Ellicombe asked the bugler to play a series of musical notes he had found on a piece of paper in the pocket of his dead son. It of course was the melody "Taps."

*Day is done
Gone the sun
From the lakes
From the hills
From the sky.*

*All is well,
Safely rest.
God is nigh.
Fading light
Dims the sight
And a star
Gems the sky.
Gleaming bright
From afar,
Drawing nigh,
Falls the night.
Thanks and praise,
For our days,
Neath the sun,
Neath the stars,
Neath the sky,
As we go,
This we know,
God is nigh.*

Amid all the sales, the complaints about the price of gas, the unofficial start of summer, the hoopla about the balance of power in the Senate, and the projections on the size of the tax cut we will receive, I hope we all remembered the true reason for this holiday was to remember our honored dead. Poetically, perhaps the week of rain was appropriate if it was symbolic of the tears that have been shed for all those sons and daughters, fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, who gave their last full measure, in one way or another, to assure us that we have the right and privilege to attend those sales and picnics.

ON A LIGHTER NOTE

The following item was found in the letter-box of John J. Dyer of Bucks County in Pennsylvania. He was a Civil War relative of Lincoln artist, John Dyer, who has spoken to the CDCWRT on two occasions. John gave me permission to use it in a newsletter. The item is a printed page, possibly torn from a book or pamphlet. It is entitled, "He Advertised for Lye."

To procure saltpetre for the manufacture of gun-powder, the Confederates had to resort to all kinds of devices, such as leaching the earth from old smoke-houses, barns and caves, and

making artificial beds of nitrogenous refuse, having agents for the purpose in every town and city. The agent in Salma, Alabama, was particularly energetic and enthusiastic in the Salma papers:---

The Ladies of Salma are respectfully requested to preserve the chamber lye collected about their premises, for the purpose of making nitre. A barrel will be sent around daily to collect it.

**JOHN HARROLSON
Agent Nitre and
Mining Bureau**

This attracted the attention of one of the army poets, and the first of the two effusions following resulted. It was copied and privately circulated all over the Confederacy, and finally crossing the lines, an unknown Federal poet added the Yankee view of it.

The Confederate Effusion

**John Harrolson! John Harrolson! You are a wretched creature;
You've added to this bloody war a new and awful feature;
You'd have us think while every man is bound to be a fighter;
The ladies—bless the dears---should save their P for nitre.**

**John Harrolson! John Harrolson! Where did you get the notion
To send your barrel 'round the town to gather up the lotion?
We thought the girls had work enough in making shirts and kissing
But you have put the pretty dears to patriotic pissing.**

**John Harrolson! John Harrolson! Pray, do invent a neater
And somewhat less immodest mode, of making your saltpeter.
For it's an awful idea, John, gun-powdery and cranky,
That when a lady lifts her shift, she's killing off a Yankee.**

The Yankee's View of It

**John Harrolson! John Harrolson! We've read in song and story,
How woman's tear thro' all the years have moistened fields of glory;
But never was it told before, how 'mid such scenes of slaughter
Your Southern beauties dried their tears, and went to making water.**

**No wonder that your boys were brave; who couldn't be a fighter,
If every time he fired his gun he used his sweetheart's nitre?
And, *vice versa*, what could make a Yankee soldier sadder
Than dodging bullets fired by a pretty woman's bladder?**

**They say there was a subtle smell that lingered in that powder,
And as the smoke grew thicker, and the din of battle louder,
That there was found to this compound one serious objection---
No soldier boy could sniff it without having an e-----n.**

Now I thought hard and long about using this item. I had never seen anything like it, but Thomas Lowry did repeat the story in his controversial book, *The Story the Soldiers Wouldn't Tell*. We all have read or heard about coarse or bawdy stories including Joe Hooker's ladies and the Red Light District in Washington, DC. We know these things existed, and they too are a part of Civil War history. From what I have read about President Lincoln, he enjoyed a good joke. Even though it was not written in Carl Sandburg's books, I feel certain Lincoln had a good laugh when he heard the story of John Harrolson.