



The Dispatch
Newspaper of the

CAPITAL DISTRICT CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

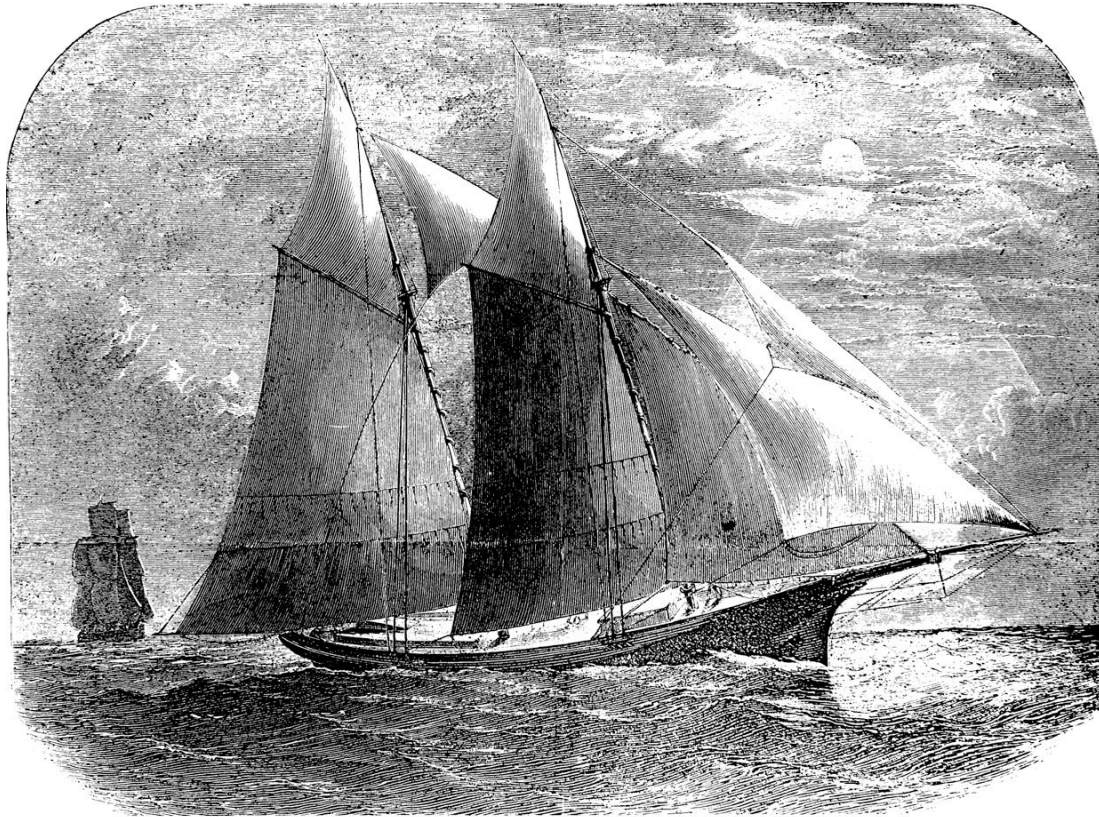
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April 2019

FIRE-EATERS TRY TO REOPEN AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE



THE YACHT "WANDERER."

APRIL MEETING

Friday, April 12, 2019

WATERVLIET SENIOR CENTER

1541 BROADWAY

WATERVLIET, NY

Chuck Veit: Farragut's Passage of the Forts

Social Hour	6:00 – 7:00 p.m.
Business Meeting	7:00 – p.m.
Presentation	7:00 – 8:00 p.m.
Questions & Answers	8:00 – 8:30 p.m.

The regular meeting of the CDCWRT will be held at the Watervliet Senior Center on Friday, April 12, 2019. Our guest speaker will be Chuck Veit.

Chuck is author of a growing number of original research books, including A Dog Before a Soldier: Almost-lost Episodes in the Navy's Civil War; Sea Miner: Major E. B. Hunt's Rocket Torpedo; and two books focusing on the salvage exploits of Massachusetts native John E. Gowen: Raising Missouri and The Yankee Expedition to Sebastopol. Sea Miner claimed the 2017 award for Narrative Non-fiction from the Independent Publishers of New England, and Yankee Expedition is currently a finalist in the Perennial Seller category.

For the recent sesquicentennial, Chuck transcribed newspaper articles from the War of the Rebellion and published a

four-volume compendium, Upon the Best Authority. A fifth research book, Alligator: The Navy's First Submarine, is expected in 2018, as well as a sixth, The Paymaster, which details the wartime exploits of Acting Assistant Paymaster John Stevenson.

Chuck is a frequent speaker on 19th-century naval topics at area historical societies and Civil War roundtables, as well as at the Naval War College in Newport, RI. Other venues have included the NOAA Maritime Heritage Education Conference, Mariners' Museum Civil War Navy Conference, the Naval Order of the United States in St. Petersburg, FL, the 10th Maritime Heritage Conference, and the Portsmouth Navy Yard's 238th Anniversary Ball. Chuck has also had numerous articles in Naval History magazine, American Historical Print Collector Society's Newsletter, Historical Diving Times, Civil War Navy, and the Company of Military Historians' Journal.

Chuck is President of the Navy & Marine Living History Association, an organization dedicated to sharing America's naval history with the modern public through the medium of in-the-field events, where he speaks with several thousand visitors annually. Despite his intense focus on Navy history, he remains happily married after 36 years to his best friend and editor, Lori.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Our friends in the Ulster County Civil War Round Table will offer a program in which some of our members may be interested. On Thursday, April 18, 2019,

beginning at 7 p.m., Pat Schroeder will speak about the "Surrender at Appomattox" in the Ulster County Legislative Office Building (6th floor), 244 Fair Street, Kingston, NY. This is a nice group, a nice meeting space, and a speaker who we enjoy regardless of his topic. The program is, as always, free. For more information, please contact Regina Daly at 518-943-2569. Her email address is rwdaly@yahoo.com. Or contact the chair, Joel Craig, at jcraig@valstar.net or jcraig@gtel.net. See you there.

The May 10, 2019 meeting's speaker will be actor and historian Patrick Falci, who will talk about the movie *Gettysburg* -- 25 years later. As we all will recall, Pat played an amazing A.P. Hill in that movie, as well as in the follow-up *Gods and Generals*.

The June 7, 2019 meeting of the CDCWRT will feature historian and author Will Greene. He is the former director of the Pamplin Historical Park and National Museum of the Civil War Soldier. His topic will be an aspect of the Petersburg Campaign.

June 14-19 is a Civil War Conference at Gettysburg College. The Civil War Institute of Gettysburg, in partnership with the newly formed Civil War Round Table Congress, is hosting this event. Because of our Round Table's affiliation with the CWRT Congress, our members qualify for a 15% discount.

For the period of June 29-July 3, the Round Table will be fundraising in Gettysburg during the reenactment. Contact Matt George for details.

There will be no Round Table meetings in July and August 2019. We are still

planning a picnic for Friday, August 16, at Schuyler Flatts.

During August 2-4, the 6th Annual Emerging Civil War Symposium will be held at Stevenson Ridge in Spotsylvania County in Virginia. For details about this excellent annual conference, please check their website: emergingcivilwar.com for the 2019 symposium information.

A LEGACY OF SLAVERY: FIRE-EATERS TRY TO REOPEN THE AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE

by Rosemary Nichols

On November 28, 1858, a ship called the *Wanderer* slipped silently into a coastal channel and unloaded its cargo of more than 400 African captives intended for lives of slavery in the southern states onto Jekyll Island, Georgia, 38 years after the African slave trade had been made illegal in the United States in 1807. So far as we know, this was the third-last ship ever to bring a cargo of enslaved Africans to the United States.

For a variety of reasons, primarily the persons who were involved in the voyage and the exceptional beauty and celebrity of the ship, the *Wanderer's* enslaved people became more lastingly famous than other captured Africans.

She was built in the North as were most of the great American 19th -century racing yachts. The *Wanderer* was a little sailing yacht, 114 feet long, a glistening, gorgeous schooner with billowing sails and softly glowing brass work. She had been built on Long Island, in the shipyard of William J. Rowland in East Setauket, to be one of the most luxurious and fastest yachts ever to date – and she was. She earned the

distinction of joining the New York Yacht Club in her first year of sailing. She was also to be put to a wicked purpose as an African slaver, hauling captured people from interior Africa to lives of toil in the cotton fields of the southern United States.

While there were many “triggers” and irritants that credibly led to the Civil War, to me among the oddest were the activities of some of the southern “Fire-Eaters” seeking to reopen the African slave trade. In the end, the voyage of the *Wanderer* was more than a notorious cruise. It was an incident that rocked the nation, pushed the country closer to war, and established Charles Lamar as one of the most cunning radicals of his time.

Why were ship captains so flagrantly violating the federal law against importing African slaves even though death was the penalty for conviction of that crime? Partly it was for money. Partly their behavior was triggered by a desire to bring on a civil war other sensible people were trying to avoid. While many of the Fire-Eaters were only willing to talk and write, Charles Lamar, a wealthy Savannah man from a distinguished family, wanted to act. So he did.

The money issue divided into three parts: the comparative wealth of the northern and southern states; the expense of illegal slave running versus the anticipated revenue from that activity; and the rising price of domestic enslaved people versus the lesser cost of newly imported Africans.

Comparative economic statistics of the northern and southern states are instructive. Erik Calonius in his book,

The Wanderer: The Last American Slave Ship and the Conspiracy that Set Its Sails, analyzes the growth and prosperity of Savannah, Georgia. In Savannah “by 1858 the push for progress that had begun in the mid-1830s seemed to be paying off. Nine steam locomotives a day arrived in Savannah now, each pulling twenty or thirty cars piled ‘mountain high’ with fluffy white cotton.”

Additional businesses, new textile mills, iron factories, and brickyards were operating. In 1852, the city was building half of its freight cars locally, rather than importing them from the North. In 1855, the city added a machine shop, coppersmith’s shop, boilermaker’s shop and a pattern shop to its railroad depot. Henceforth, Savannah made all its own railroad cars and laid plans to build its own steam locomotives. Other southern cities showed similar progress.

Yet for all the appearance of progress, the South was slipping further and further behind the achievements of the North. In 1810, the South had surpassed New England in its manufacturing might, according to the census of that year. Georgia alone had manufactured more yards of cloth than Rhode Island. But by 1860, New England was manufacturing three times as much as the South. Taken from another perspective, the South had about 34% of the nation’s population in 1860, yet the region employed only 8.4% of its workers in industry and was producing only about 8% of the nation’s manufactured goods.

In fact, the capital invested in manufacturing in the South actually declined between 1840 and 1860, from 13.6% to 9.5% of that invested in manufacturing nationwide. One after

another of the southern factories failed or was forced along in a sickly existence, poorly managed and even more poorly capitalized. Even southerners stopped buying southern-made products, preferring the cheaper and better constructed goods “just in from New York.”

In 1857, when a financial crisis suddenly stopped the sale of cotton, southerners began to realize how beholden they were to the financiers of the North. “With plenty of money in assets,” wrote one southern businessman, “it is locked up one way or another in cotton and until that begins to move there is no ‘Balm in Gilead’ for us . . . we cannot help ourselves. . . Unless cotton sells we and all here must be submerged.”

The price for enslaved people in America was continually rising. As the new cotton lands in the West (Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, East Texas) expanded, so did the perceived need for enslaved people to work those fields. Many of those workers were “sent South” from the older cotton states of Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia, and Kentucky. But there were never enough fit workers for a price the owners of the newly expanded plantations thought they could afford.

An African captive, purchased for \$50 in Africa, sold fresh from the *Wanderer* for \$500, and sold again to an ultimate owner for about \$1,000, was a valuable commodity. According to one value calculator, \$50 in 1858 had the same buying power as \$1,513.27 in 2019 dollars. \$500 in 1858 had the same buying power as \$15,132.66 in current dollars.

Most appealing of all for the money hungry, \$1,000 in 1858 (the price a seller could expect for one young African in Alabama) had the same buying power as \$30,265.33 in current dollars. The 409 enslaved people from the *Wanderer* multiplied by \$30,265.33 yields \$12,378,519.97, a lot of 1858 money.

Some slavers were “loose packers” who believed in giving the captives more room, so that more would live to be sold profitably at the end of the voyage. Others were “tight packers” who argued that regardless of the increased deaths, more bodies would provide more profits.

In the best of the slave ships, each captive was given the amount of space they would have in a coffin – about 16 inches in width, 32 inches in height, and 5 feet 11 inches in length.

But the *Wanderer* conspirators were greedy. They set the enslaved people as if they were spoons in the available space, allowing 12 inches of width, 18 inches in height, and less than 5 feet in length per person. Given a choice, they proved to be the cruelest of the cruel.

As was typical of slave-trading ships in the 19th century, the *Wanderer* was fitted up and financed on Wall Street in New York City despite the fact that the African slave trade had been outlawed in 1820.

The slaver captains who strode the streets of New York’s financial district and dined in the city’s finest restaurants provisioned their ships and sent them off to Africa annually. They were purported to be sailing to Africa to send their human cargo to the thriving slave markets of Cuba.

What they did was blatantly illegal in New York but they were protected by their influential investors and a corrupt judicial system, headed by U.S. District Judge Samuel Rossiter Betts, who presided over the Southern District of New York, which included all of Manhattan. In Betts' courtroom, the evidence was never sufficient to convict a slave trader of anything, to the frustration of federal prosecutors.

The *Wanderer* had some 490 captives on board when it left the mouth of the Congo. These captives had been seized by African slave traders from the interior of the country and marched toward the coast.

Despite the substantial efforts of the African Squadron, 19 ships of the British Navy and 9 United States Navy vessels, slave ship captains were more likely to be entertained than arrested. The ship appeared off the coast of Georgia on November 28, 1858. It dropped its 409 surviving captives on Jekyll Island after a grueling trip from the Congo, stinking as only a "blackbirder" stunk, with tattered sails and damaged woodwork.

The slave deck was removed and discarded. The *Wanderer* was scrubbed down with lye and vinegar. A local seaman was paid \$100 to sail her into the port of Brunswick, ten miles away.

Federal authorities seized the *Wanderer* on charges of slaving. The details of the effort of the federal court in Savannah to prosecute the owners and crew of the *Wanderer* are probably only of interest to lawyers or legal scholars. The summary of the colorful proceedings

was that the jury found the defendants not guilty.

Months earlier the *New York Times* had said in an editorial, "For if they fail to hang the men who engaged in it – if their officials are so lax, or their juries so perjured, as to permit this trade to be carried on with impunity, in face of all our laws against it—they will suffer all the consequences of an actual complicity in the proceeding itself . . . the entire population of the North will wage upon it a relentless war of extermination."

Perhaps that's why the verdict was taken so quietly in the South. There were no parades, no public rejoicings. It was as if the outcome of the trial was merely another step toward a war that was increasingly inevitable. Eight days later, John Brown was hanged.

On December 20, 1860, South Carolina voted itself out of the Union. Two weeks later, Georgia's delegates did the same. Later investigation found that Georgia's secession had been approved by less than 1,000 votes, many fraudulent.

Charles Lamar, the spark plug behind the *Wanderer* adventure, had the dubious distinction of being the last officer who fell in organized struggle for southern independence at the last battle of the Civil War. He died at the Battle of Columbus, April 16, 1865, while attempting to lead a charge against Union troops.

At this point, you may have two last questions: what happened to the *Wanderer* and what happened to the Africans?

During the Civil War, Union forces took over the ship and used it for various military roles. It was decommissioned in 1865, converted to merchant use, and lost off Cuba in 1871. It had sold for much less than its value, no one wanting to be associated with such a notorious ship.

In November 2008, the Jekyll Island Museum unveiled an exhibit dedicated to the enslaved Africans on *Wanderer*. That month also marked the unveiling of a sculpture on southern Jekyll Island memorializing the slaves who were landed there.

None of the Africans made it home. Most of them spent their lives after the war working as sharecroppers on other men's land.

BOARD UPDATES

The Executive Board met on March 18, 2019. The Operating Account has \$2,413.79. In the past month, we have taken in six membership renewals and paid for one newsletter printing and hosting our website for the year. The Preservation Account has \$2,395.41. In the past month, we also have taken in nearly \$300 in donations, raffles, or merchandise sales and have paid for the storage shed.

Nick Thony and Steve Muller have been hard at work arranging for a PayPal account. This will enable the Round Table to accept online payments or donations. People can make automatic monthly donations or one-time donations. PayPal is currently accessible through our website; we're working on linking it to our social media pages. Our Facebook account is:

Capital District Civil War RoundTable. Our Twitter account is: @civilwar1867.

Nick also posted some book recommendations to the homepage of our website. Check them out and let us know if you have suggestions.

Finally, we still have an At-Large position open on the Executive Board. This position involves attending monthly E-Board meetings and helping to make decisions regarding fundraising events and donations. See a member of the Executive Board if you are interested.

BUFORD'S VIEW

by Matt George

I had a very enjoyable and informative two weeks away, beginning with my second visit to Fort McHenry in Baltimore. I then spent four days in Charlestown. During this time, I went to see Fort Sumter and the *Hunley*, both for the first time. Both were impressive.

The *Hunley* is still being "soaked" to remove the final salts. How its crew died remains a mystery. A docent's personal theory was that the submarine was too close to the Housatonic when the charge went off prematurely. The force of the explosion knocked the crew unconscious and they just peacefully suffocated.

The next day I went to Fort Sumter. New Yorker Abner Doubleday had given the order for the fort to return fire when the Confederates first opened fire. As many of you know, the only Union casualty following hours of bombardment occurred after the fort surrendered. At the flag-lowering ceremony, before

Union soldiers left the fort, a cannon misfired, killing one man.

Even though only a fraction of the original fort is left, what remains along with the cannons give a pretty good idea of its original appearance. Like so many of our 19th-century forts, additions were made during the Spanish American War and World War II.

While visiting family in Kissimmee, Florida for four days, I attended a Civil War reenactment in Narcoossee, Florida. It was billed as the Battle of Narcoossee Mill. It was implied that this was a very small engagement that occurred when some Confederate cavalry taking cattle to the Confederate armies met some Union soldiers. However, the pamphlet I received says, "Although the Battle of Narcoossee Mills is not an actual battle, it is an authentic representation of how a battle may have taken place in this area 155 years ago." Nevertheless, it was a surprisingly large reenactment with 100-200 reenactors from all over Florida and several cannons and pyrotechnics. The 54th Massachusetts and the 115th NYVI, both of which fought at Olustee in northern Florida, were represented.

On my way home, I spent a day with Matt Farina in Southern Pines, North Carolina. We visited the North Carolina Museum of History in Raleigh, which has an absolutely wonderful exhibit on World War I, with many amazing artifacts and interactive displays.

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To the Board and membership of the CDCWRT from Matt Farina

Hello from Southern Pines, NC. Matt George visited me for 24 hours last week on his way back to Schenectady. He presented me with a gift from the Round Table a print of the marker for Camp Letterman Hospital at Gettysburg. The beautiful print was signed by the artist, Paul Martin. The print means a great deal to me, not only because Jonathan Letterman was Medical Director of the Army of the Potomac, but also because I was assigned to Letterman Army Medical Center from 1973 to 1975 during the Vietnam conflict.

I want to thank everyone for the gift. It will be framed and placed on the wall in my library. It will serve as a reminder of my time and friends in the CDCWRT. It has been my honor to have served the Round Table as treasurer, vice-president, president, and editor of the newsletter. I will send occasional reports from the South which I hope you will find interesting. I am placing on a thumb drive my 20 years of newsletters and letters about the Round Table in my role as a board member and officer. As I sort through these, there are many fond memories. I will close with a Civil War sign-off.

Your obedient servant,
Matt Farina

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.

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