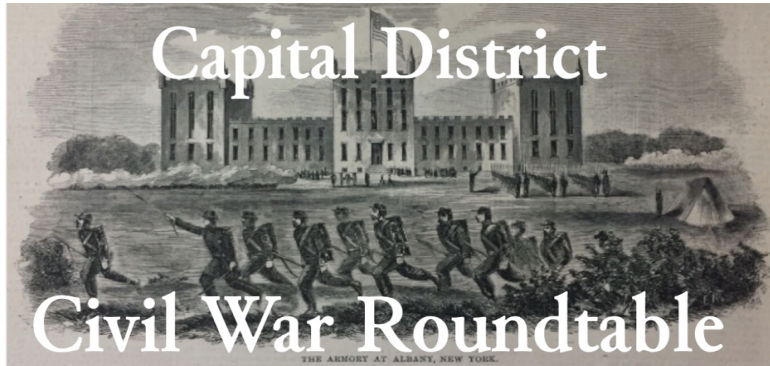


# THE DISPATCH

VOLUME 43, NUMBER 02

FEBRUARY 2026



P.O. Box 11493 Loudonville, New York 12211

[www.capitaldistrictcivilwar.com](http://www.capitaldistrictcivilwar.com)



**FEBRUARY MEETING**  
**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2026**  
**WATERVLIET SENIOR CENTER**  
**1501 BROADWAY WATERVLIET, NEW YORK**

**SOCIAL HOUR @ 10:30AM**  
**PRESENTATION @ 11:00AM**  
**BRIEF BUSINESS MEETING PRIOR TO PRESENTER**

## CIVIL WAR MEDICINE: MYTH & MEMORY

### ZOOM presentation by Dr. Matt Farina

Dr. Matt Farina will be our first remote, Zoom speaker giving his presentation to the membership gathered at the Watervliet senior center. Matt summarizes his talk: "Civil War medicine has been described by the 3 "B's" – butchery, barbaric and brutal— by many of the "talking heads" on The History Channel and The Civil War Journal—and some of them were physicians too, (who lost perspective on the history). We must look at medicine and even soldiering in the context of the time in which it occurred. Civil War medicine was flawed; but whether we realize it or not, great advances occurred in medicine because of the War. This presentation will deal with some of the truths and myths about 19th Century medicine and will cover the practical advances that occurred during the War but are often overlooked."



Dr. Matt Farina is a retired pediatric cardiologist and Clinical Professor of Pediatrics at Albany Medical College in Albany, NY. He now lives in Southern Pines, NC. He is President of the Rufus Barringer Civil War Round Table and is editor of their newsletter since 2008. Matt is a past president and editor of the Capital District Civil War Round Table and past president of the Moore County Historical Association and has been editor of the Association's newsletter since 2019. He was a Major in the U.S. Army Medical Corps from 1971-73 and earned a Medal of Commendation.



## **Upcoming Presentations**

March 14, 2026

**The Virginia Campaigns of 1862**

ZOOM presentation at the WSC

by Chris Kolakowski

April 11, 2026

**The History of the 125<sup>th</sup> NY Vol Infantry**

**Through Artifacts**

by Mike Marchand

May 9, 2026

**John Wilkes Booth & His Sister Asia**

**Booth Clark: A Special Relationship**

by Lisa Samia

June 13, 2026

**Gettysburg's Unknown Soldier: The Life,**

**Death & Celebrity of Amos Humiston**

by Mark Dunkleman

## **Semi-Annual Book & Clothing Sale**

The RT will have its bi-annual gently used book and clothing sale on Saturday February 14. Doors will open at 10 so come and browse the books, t-shirts, sweatshirts, polo shirts, ties, and fine art for sale at reasonable prices.

### **Civil War Books, Clothing Sale**

"Come one, Come All" to the annual Capital District Civil War Roundtable's book, t-shirt, sweatshirt sale,

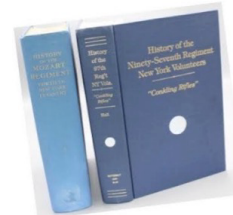
on Saturday **February 14** at the Watervliet Senior Center, 1501 Broadway (next door to public library), from 10 to 11 am.

We welcome you to stay and attend the January meeting.



Many

books are \$5 for hardcovers,  
\$3 for paperbacks



Regimental history books  
priced higher



Unique neckties and shirts

## **January Financial Report**

As of the January 14 Board Meeting, the RT has a healthy balance of \$8,500 in our bank account. In addition to receiving dues renewals, numerous generous members have donated extra money in the past month. So far, the RT has received \$745 earmarked to the Operating Account and \$305 to the Preservation Account. We thank the thoughtful members for their extra, charitable contributions. Some of this

money will be used to book and pay travel expenses for out-of-town speakers presenting their talks to the membership.

Also, at the January meeting, the board voted to donate \$500 to the American Battlefield Trust's campaign to help save 417 acres of (privately owned) the Pamplin Park/Breakthrough battlefield. With the match being 17 to 1, the RT's contribution is an \$8,500 gift.



*Field Hospital Battle of Savage's Station, June 29, 1862*

## ***A Brief History of Civil War Medicine From the American Battlefield Trust***

by Ina Dixon

From the stench of putrefying flesh wafting through unsanitary and crowded camps to the unglamorous illnesses of syphilis and dysentery, our modern disgust toward Civil War medical practices is generally justified. However, while “advanced” or “hygienic” may not be terms attributed to medicine in the nineteenth century, modern hospital practices and treatment methods owe much to the legacy of Civil War medicine. Of the

approximately 620,000 soldiers who died in the war, two-thirds of these deaths were not the result of enemy fire, but of a force stronger than any army of men: disease. Combating disease as well treating the legions of wounded soldiers pushed Americans to rethink their theories on health and develop efficient practices to care for the sick and wounded.



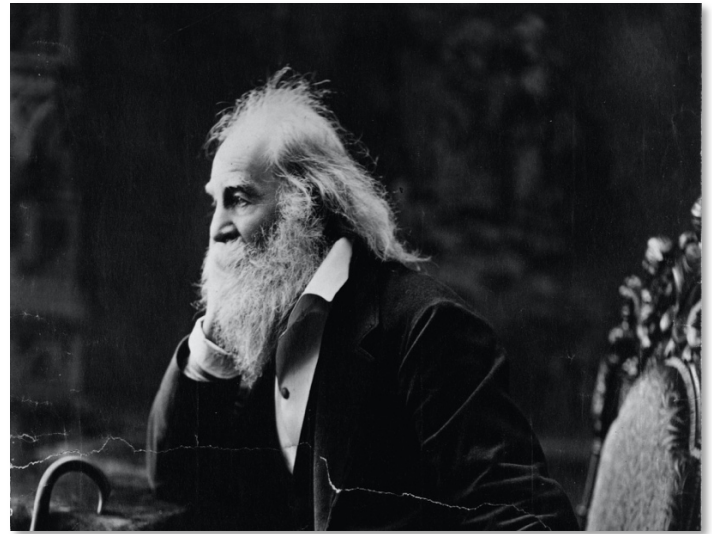
*Civil War Pharmacy Kit*

At the beginning of the Civil War, medical equipment and knowledge was hardly up to the challenges posed by the wounds, infections and diseases which plagued millions on both sides. Illnesses like dysentery, typhoid fever, pneumonia, mumps, measles and tuberculosis spread among the poorly sanitized camps, felling men already weakened by fierce fighting and meager diet. Additionally, armies initially struggled to efficiently tend to and transport their wounded, inadvertently sacrificing more lives to mere disorganization.

For medical practitioners in the field during the Civil War, germ theory, antiseptic (clean) medical practices, advanced

equipment, and organized hospitalization systems were virtually unknown. Medical training was just emerging out of the “heroic era,” a time where physicians advocated bloodletting, purging, blistering (or a combination of all three) to rebalance the humors of the body and remedy the sick. Physicians were also often encouraged to treat diseases like syphilis with mercury, a toxic treatment, to say the least. These aggressive “remedies” of the heroic era of medicine were often worse than patients’ diseases; those who overcame illness during the war owed their recoveries less to the ingenuity of contemporary medicine than to grit and chance. Luck was a rarity in camps where poor sanitation, bad hygiene and diet bred disease, infection, and death.

The wounded and sick suffered from the haphazard hospitalization systems that existed at the start of the Civil War. As battles ended, the wounded were rushed down railroad lines to nearby cities and towns, where doctors and nurses coped with the onslaught of dying men in makeshift hospitals. These hospitals saw a great influx of wounded from both sides and the wounded and dying filled the available facilities to the brim. The Fairfax Seminary, for example, opened its doors twenty years prior to the war with only fourteen students, but it housed an overwhelming 1,700 sick and wounded soldiers during the course of the war.



*Walt Whitman*

On his many tours of these improvised hospitals, the great American poet and Civil War nurse Walt Whitman noted in his Memoranda during the War the disorderly death and waste of early Civil War medicine. At the camp hospital of the Army of the Potomac in Falmouth, Virginia in 1862, Whitman saw “a heap of amputated feet, legs, arms, hands, &c, a full load for a one-horse cart” and “several dead bodies” lying near. Of the “hospital” itself, which was a brick mansion before the battle of Fredericksburg changed its use, Whitman observed that it was “quite crowded, upstairs and down, everything impromptu, no system, all bad enough, but I have no doubt the best that can be done; all the wounds pretty bad, some frightful, the men in their old clothes, unclean and bloody.” Of the division hospitals, Whitman noted that these were “merely tents, and sometimes very poor ones, the wounded lying on the ground, lucky if their blankets are spread on layers of pine or hemlock twigs or small leaves.”



*Major Jonathan Letterman*

However, the heavy and constant demands of the sick and wounded sped up the technological progression of medicine, wrenching American medical practices into the light of modernity. Field and pavilion hospitals replaced makeshift ones and efficient hospitalization systems encouraged the accumulation of medical records and reports, which slowed bad practices as accessible knowledge spread the use of beneficial treatments.

Several key figures played a role in the progression of medicine at this time. Jonathan Letterman, the Medical Director of the Army of the Potomac, brought “order and efficiency in to the Medical Service” with a regulated ambulance system and evacuation plans for the wounded. As surgeon general of the Union army, William A. Hammond standardized, organized and designed new hospital layouts and inspection systems and literally wrote the book on hygiene for the army. Clara Barton, well-known humanitarian and founder of the American Red Cross, brought professional efficiency to soldiers in the field, especially at the Battle of Antietam in

September of 1862 when she delivered much-needed medical supplies and administered relief and care for the wounded. Disease and illness took a heavy toll on soldiers, but as these historic characters show, every effort was made to prevent death caused by human error and ignorance through the development of organized and more advanced practices.

The sheer quantity of those who suffered from disease and severe wounds during the Civil War forced the army and medical practitioners to develop new therapies, technologies and practices to combat death. Thanks to Hammond’s design of clean, well ventilated and large pavilion-style hospitals, suffering soldiers received care that was efficient and sanitary. In the later years of the war, these hospitals had a previously unheard of 8% mortality rate for their patients.



*Civil War Era Ambulance*

Though the mortality rate was higher for soldiers wounded on the battlefield, field dressing stations and field hospitals administered care in increasingly advanced ways. Once a soldier was wounded, medical personnel on the battlefield bandaged the

soldier as fast they could, and gave him whiskey (to ease the shock) and morphine, if necessary, for pain. If his wounds demanded more attention, he was evacuated via Letterman's ambulance and stretcher system to a nearby field hospital.



*Field Hospital after Battle of the Wilderness 1864*

Under Hammond and Letterman's encouragement of triage organization that is still used today, field hospitals separated wounded soldiers into three categories: mortally wounded, slightly wounded and surgical cases. Most of the amputations performed at field hospitals were indeed horrible scenes, but the surgery itself was not as crude as popular memory makes it out to have been. Anesthetics were readily available to surgeons, who administered chloroform or ether to patients before the procedure. Though gruesome, amputation was a life-saving procedure that swiftly halted the devastating effects of wounds from Minié balls (which, by the way, not many "bit" to fight the pain—the chloroform usually did the trick).

In field hospitals and pavilion-style hospitals, thousands of physicians received

experience and training. As doctors and nurses became widely familiar with prevention and treatment of infectious diseases, anesthetics, and best surgical practices, medicine was catapulted into the modern era of quality care. Organized relief agencies like the 1861 United States Sanitary Commission dovetailed doctors' efforts to save wounded and ill soldiers and set the pattern for future organizations like the American Red Cross, founded in 1881.



*U.S. Sanitary Field Commission Lodge, Alexandria, Va. 1863*

Death from wounds and disease was an additional burden of the war that took a toll on the hearts, minds, and bodies of all Americans, but it also sped up the progression of medicine and influenced practices the army and medical practitioners still use today. While the Union certainly had the advantage of better medical supplies and manpower, both Rebels and Federals attempted to combat illness and improve medical care for their soldiers during the war. Many of America's modern medical accomplishments have their roots in the legacy of America's defining war.



*The Dispatch*  
Newspaper of the

**CAPITAL DISTRICT  
CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE**

PO Box 11493 Loudonville, NY 12211  
[www.capitaldistrictcivilwar.org](http://www.capitaldistrictcivilwar.org)



# Membership Form, 2026 Calendar Year

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Membership Dues All dues go into the Regular Account (circle appropriate level)

Regular memberships can choose between emailed or mailed newsletters.

Regular: \$35

Student memberships come with only emailed newsletters.

Student: \$10

## Additional Donation for the Operating Account

Pay for newsletters, program expenses, and the use of the meeting space.

\_\_\_\_\_

## Donation for the Preservation Account

(Preservation money pays for donations to preserve historic sites/lands, rental of the storage shed, and the Round Table's insurance)

\_\_\_\_\_

Total: \_\_\_\_\_

Newsletter Preference: Email \_\_\_\_\_ OR Mailed Copy \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Email/Mailing address is the same as last year

If not: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Please mail your payment to: CDCWRT  
P.O. Box 11493  
Loudonville, NY 12211-0493

\* Early payments will be held and deposited in January.

\* Credit/Debit card payments can be made through [www.capitaldistrictcivilwar.org](http://www.capitaldistrictcivilwar.org)

**CDCWRT**  
**P.O. BOX 11493**  
LOUDONVILLE, NY 12211

*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  
our website: [www.capitaldistrictcivilwar.org](http://www.capitaldistrictcivilwar.org)  
or email: [cdcwrt@hotmail.com](mailto:cdcwrt@hotmail.com)

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