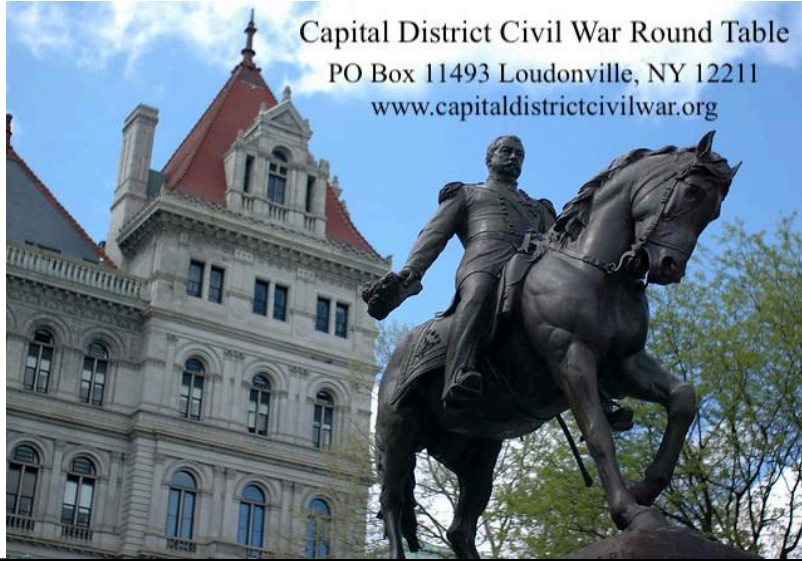


The Dispatch

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November 2024



The *Sultana* Tragedy



“Helena, Arkansas. April 26, 1865. Ill-fated Sultana” gelatin silver print from photographer T. W. Bankes,
<https://lccn.loc.gov/2013647457>

NOVEMBER MEETING

Friday, November 8, 2024

AT THE WATERVLIET

SENIOR CENTER

The Sultana Tragedy

Social Hour	6:00 p.m.
Business Meeting	7:00 p.m.
Presentation	7:00 – 8:00 p.m.

THE SULTANA DISASTER

from the American Battlefield Trust, July 21, 2014 • Updated November 21, 2023

In the early hours of April 27, 1865, mere days after the end of the Civil War, the *Sultana* burst into flames along the Mississippi River. The *Sultana* was a 260-foot-long wooden steamboat, built in Cincinnati in 1863, which regularly transported passengers and freight between St. Louis and New Orleans on the Mississippi River.

On April 23, 1865, the vessel docked in Vicksburg to address issues with the boiler during a routine journey from New Orleans. While in port, it was contracted by the U.S. Government to carry former Union prisoners of war from Confederate prisons, such as Andersonville and Cahaba, back into Northern territory. In order to fulfill the lucrative contract, J. Cass Mason, the *Sultana*'s captain, opted to patch the leaky boiler rather than complete more extensive and time-consuming repairs. Fearing that his colleagues were taking bribes to transport prisoners on other boats, Union Army Captain George Williams, who oversaw the operation,

hastily ordered that all former prisoners at the parole camp and hospital at Vicksburg be transported on the *Sultana*. Although it was designed to only hold 376 persons, more than 2,000 Union troops were crowded onto the steamboat - more than five times its legal carrying capacity. Despite concerns of overloading from several officers, Williams refused to divide the men, insisting that they travel on one vessel.

The *Sultana* steamed north up the Mississippi, but the severe overcrowding and faster river current caused by the spring thaw put increased pressure on its newly patched boilers. Shortly after leaving Memphis, Tennessee on April 27th, the overstrained boilers exploded, blowing apart the center of the boat and starting an uncontrollable fire. Many of those who were not killed immediately perished as they tried to swim to shore. Of the initial survivors, 200 later died from burns sustained during the incident. Researchers indicate that 1,195 of the 2,200 passengers and crew died, making the *Sultana* incident the deadliest maritime disaster in U.S. history.

AN URGENT COMMUNIQUE FROM HEADQUARTERS

We are approaching a crisis point for the Round Table. We need more people who are willing to serve on the Executive Board, we have to address the financial challenges that threaten the continued operation of the Round Table, and we need to grow the number of Round Table members.

Board Membership

The Round Table's Executive Board has seven elected positions. For several years running, two or more of those positions have been left vacant. At this moment, more than half of the Board positions do not have a nominated candidate. The current slate of nominations for the 2025 Board is:

- ☐ President: Mark Koziol (current V. P.)
- ☐ Vice President: _____
- ☐ Treasurer: Stevel Muller (continuing in this position)
- ☐ Secretary: _____
- ☐ At-Large: Matt George (current Program Chair)
- ☐ At-Large: _____
- ☐ At-Large: _____

The Round Table needs people to commit to serving on the Board in order for the Board to function. What does that commitment entail? Attending the majority of membership meetings and the majority of Board meetings. The Board meetings are held once per month (during the CDCWRT season) via a 40-minute Zoom meeting. The election of Board members will occur at the January membership meeting. Candidates can be nominated from the floor at that meeting, so you have time to consider serving before the election.

General Membership

Membership in the Round Table has been gradually declining for several years, and Covid accelerated the decline. In 2015 we had close to 75 paid members in addition to several permanent/complimentary members (who are mainly nationally-known historians). This year we have 33 paid members. As those of you who have attended meetings can attest, our audience size is even smaller. Members fund the Round Table; without members we do not have the finances to fund our mission.

Finances

The purpose of the Capital District Civil War Round Table is "to promote, educate, and further stimulate interest in, and discussion of, all aspects of the Civil War period; and to support the preservation of Civil War sites and monuments." Our funds are split between two accounts. The Preservation Account holds and disburses funds that support historic preservation. This account can easily be balanced by adjusting our outgoing-donation amounts relative to the donations that come into this account and its related expenses.

The Operating Account can be more difficult to balance as its income is driven by the fluctuating size and generosity of the membership, and its expenses are affected by the rising costs of items like newsletters, postage stamps, the post office box rental, and

(the largest expense) speaker-related costs such as hotel rooms and honorariums for speakers.

As you will see from the numbers, in 2024 we have spent nearly \$1,000 more than our income in the Operating account. Our Program chair, Matt George, works very hard to arrange for quality speakers to present at our meetings. In recent years, it has become more difficult for him to find local speakers with new topics to present, and the hotel costs for out-of-town speakers have increased substantially.

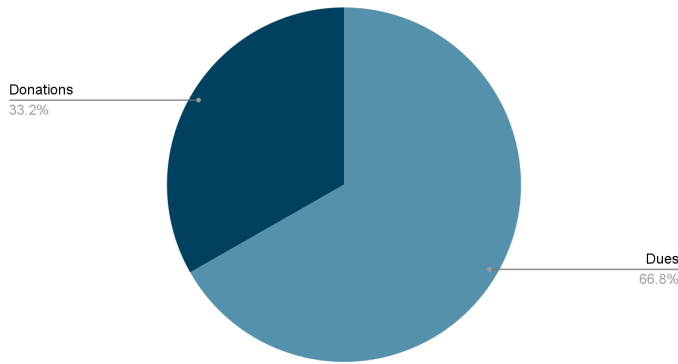
2021 final amounts	2022 final amounts	2023 final amounts	2024 as of October
income: +\$2,164.36	income: +\$2,731.87	income: +\$1,642.62	income: +\$1,865.05
<u>*expenses: -\$2,121.56</u>	<u>expenses: -\$1,770.43</u>	<u>expenses: -\$1,962.89</u>	<u>expenses: -\$2,783.55</u>
balance: \$2,834.43	balance: \$3,770.87	balance: \$3,451.98	balance: \$2,542.77

*2021 expenses: these expenses include the Round Table's insurance (\$502.29) and six-months of rent on the storage unit (\$564.00). Typically these expenses are paid from the Preservation account as they are necessary in order to have books, etc. to sell to raise preservation funds. In 2021, the Board voted to pay these from the Operating account as there was income there to support them and doing so would keep a healthier running balance in the Preservation account. Adjusting for these additional expenses, the 2021 Operating expenses would have been \$1,055.27 and the 2021 Operating balance would have been \$3,900.72.

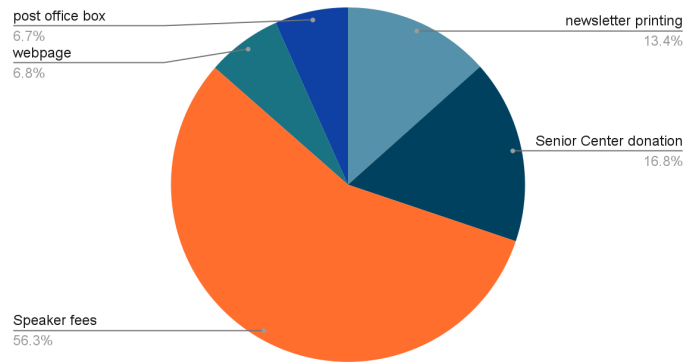
The Board has spent significant time over recent years discussing the declining membership income and the rising operations expenses. At our October Board meeting, we considered several options that we would like to discuss with the membership at our November meeting. In no particular order, here are some of the questions we asked ourselves and our thoughts.

- ☐ Do we dissolve the Round Table at the end of this year (December 2024)? The Board feels like this would be a hasty decision, and no one supported it.
- ☐ Do we raise dues? Board members are concerned that this approach will not generate enough income to sufficiently address the problem and that raising dues might cause membership to decline.
- ☐ Do we pay speakers from the Preservation account? While education and preservation are both elements of the CDCWRT's mission, this decision would be an accounting change that does not address how to fund our operations.
- ☐ Do we meet less frequently? This approach would limit the speaker fees that make up close to half of the Operating expenses. It would require further discussion to decide when to meet. Meetings could be every-other month, or we could meet in the late spring and fall with breaks in the winter and summer.

2024 Operating Income as of October



2024 Operating Expenses as of October



- ☐ Do we dissolve the Round Table in June, 2025? Again, Board members are not advocating for dissolution, but they worry the Round Table cannot continue in the long term without a commitment of members to serve on the Board even if the meeting schedule is adjusted to reduce its costs.

The Board cannot make this decision alone. We urge members to attend the meeting on November 8 to share your concerns and thoughts. If you are unable to attend in person but would like your thoughts shared at the meeting, please email the Board (cdcwrt@hotmail.com) by Thursday, November 7.

Buford's View by Matt George

I'll be traveling to Gettysburg November 18-20 for the Remembrance Day ceremony at the cemetery and the Lincoln Fellowship Luncheon that follows. This year the luncheon will be held at the new Adams County Historical Society Museum. The main speakers this year will be Harold Holzer and Craig Symonds. This is always a great event. I've attended many times in the past and heard speakers that included former Governor Pataki, Liz Cheney, Levar Burton, and historian John Hope Franklin.

Hopefully, the weather will be reasonable. One year it was quite warm. Another year it snowed. One of most moving aspects of the cemetery activities is the swearing in of a dozen or

more new citizens of the United States from many different countries around the world. It is heartwarming to see the smiles on their faces as they are pronounced citizens and given a small American flag. Usually, the luncheon that follows is held at the Wyndham but they backed out because of a scheduling conflict. Fortunately, the Adam's County Historical Society volunteered to be the host.

The featured book at this month's book raffle will be the newly released "Destruction of the Steamboat Sultana" by Gene Eric Salecker. Almost 1200 people, including many released prisoners from Andersonville, died in the maritime disaster.

I am looking for presenters for Potpourri Night on January 10. Let me know if you are interested.

**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**
or email: **cdcwrt@hotmail.com**

THE OFFICERS

President	Erin Baillargeon	Vice-President	Mark Koziol
Treasurer	Steve Muller	Secretary	(open)
At-Large	Rik Scarce	At-Large	(open)
At-Large	(open)		

THE NONCOMS

Program	Matt George	518-355-2131	Jbuford63@aol.com
Membership	Erin Baillargeon and Steve Muller		
Refreshments	Dean Long and Luanne Whitbeck		
Webmaster			
Education	Matt George		
Newsletter	Rosemary Nichols and Erin Baillargeon		