

The Dispatch

Newspaper of the

CAPITAL DISTRICT
CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

PO Box 14871 Albany, NY 12212
www.cdcwrt.net



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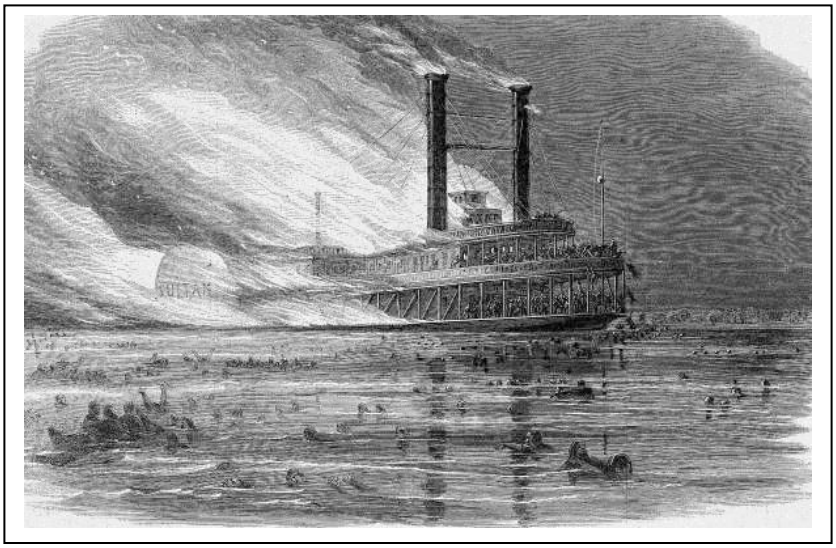
STEAMER *SULTANA* EXPLODES FEARFUL LOSS OF LIFE – SABOTAGE SUSPECTED



(Memphis – April 27, 1865)
The 1719-ton *SS Sultana,* a Mississippi River paddlewheel steamboat, exploded, burned and sank last night about 2:00 a.m., ten miles north of Memphis. The boat was constructed in 1863 and made regular runs between St. Louis and New Orleans, frequently carrying Union soldiers. Although the legal capacity was 376 passengers, it was estimated that some 2400 were crammed onto the vessel. Many were soldiers from Ohio who had just been released from prisoner-of-war camps. It was estimated that some 1600 died immediately in the explosion, fire and frigid river waters. Some 500 survivors have been rescued but many are badly burned and are not expected to survive. Two days ago the boat underwent hasty repairs to a leaking boiler at Vicksburg. Thinner that original boiled plate was riveted over the leaking sections. A boiler explosion may have occurred in the weaker section. Some officials, however, suspect sabotage by Confederate agents using coal torpedoes. These are cast-iron bombs that look like lumps of coal, but are filled with explosives and are designed to cripple ships by damaging boilers when detonated.

DECEMBER MEETING
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2012
WATERVLIET SENIOR CENTER
1541 BROADWAY
WATERVLIET, NY

THE CONFEDERATE COAL TORPEDO

JOSEPH THATCHER

Social Hour	**6:00 – 7:00 p.m.**
Business Meeting	**7:00 – 7:30 p.m.**
Presentation	**7:30 – 8:30 p.m.**
Questions & Answers	**8:30 – 9:00 p.m.**
More Socializing	**9:00 – 10:00 p.m.**

CDCWRT MEETING

The December meeting of the Capital District Civil War Round Table will be held on Friday, December 14, 2012. This meeting will be held at the Watervliet Senior Center, 1541 Broadway in Watervliet. Our speaker will be CDCWRT member Joseph Thatcher and his topic will be* THE CONFEDERATE COAL TORPEDO, *which was invented by one of his relatives.

"It looked like an innocent lump of coal, but in reality, it was a block of cast iron with a core containing about ten pounds of powder. When covered with a mixture of tar and coal dust, it was impossible to detect its character. They could be placed in coal piles on barges from which Federal vessels took their supplies, and exploded with terrible effect in their boilers."

Mr. Joseph Thatcher is the great-grand-son of Thomas Edgeworth Courtenay, who built the coal torpedo. An article was originally published in the "Military Collector and Historian", the journal of the Company of Military Historians, Vol. XI, Spring 1959, Washington, DC. Mr. Thatcher mentions that he has "heard rumors that a photograph was taken of Jefferson Davis's office in the Confederate White House when the Union army marched into Richmond and that one of the coal torpedo castings is on the desk." A photo has never been found.

HOLIDAY PARTY

The December meeting is also our holiday meeting. The Round Table will provide the usual refreshments, but members are encouraged to bring a plate of holiday treats to share with others. Cookies and other similar snacks will help brighten the short, dark days of the solstice month!!

P.S. – Bring your checkbook also. There will be Civil War sweat shirts, cachets and some books for sale as holiday gifts for your Civil War friends.

DUES, DUES, DUES

This is just a reminder that annual dues of $25 are payable in January 2013. Regular dues are used to cover any speakers' expenses for regular meeting, meeting refreshments, web site charges, and for the mailing of newsletters. This account is separate from the preservation account, the revenues of which are generated by the sales of books, t-shirts and commemorative cachets, as well as the monthly book raffles.

Postage rates will increase again on January 1, 2013. Our dues have not increased in almost 10 years now. This is in great part due to the ability of our program chairs to seek out excellent speakers whose charges have been generally minimal or have been waived by the speakers. Our printing costs have been minimal and printed newsletters have been donated to the CDCWRT because we are a 501c3 educational organization. If you wish to receive your newsletter by email, please contact any board member. This saves us postage, and allows you to receive the newsletter several days before the regular mailed newsletter arrives.

UP-COMING EVENTS

The following list of up-coming events is provided to help Round Table members plan their long term calendars. These are events that involve our Round Table, especially events that provide opportunities to raise funds for our preservation activities. Some events may change as the year progresses, so members should check the list monthly. Details of Sesquicentennial Civil War events can be found on the web-site: www.nycivilwar150.org.

On Friday, January 11th, the regular meeting of the CDCWRT will be the annual Potpourri Meeting. New member Tom Baker will bring his collection of photos of the Gettysburg monuments. Lindsay Davenport, a Siena history major, will speak about the mutiny of the 20th NYVI. Lisa Potarcar, a local author, will speak about her historical novel about a woman who enlisted as a man in a Minnesota regiment. Stu Lehman will also talk on a topic. Elections of a new Board will also occur at this meeting.

In February 2013, Tom Craughwell will talk about "Stealing Lincoln's Body."

March 2013 is still open as to speaker.

In April 2013, Tony Zarnecki will talk about Mr. Lincoln's secret visit to West Point in 1862.

In May 2013, Wayne Mott will speak on the Civil War Museum in Harrisburg, PA, and will bring some fascinating artifacts to see.

WHAT SOME OF YOU MISSED

On October 25th the Hudson Mohawk Industrial Gateway honored the CDCWRT at its Annual Gala held at the NYS Museum at the entrance to the new Civil War exhibit which will be on display until September 2013. The food was excellent. Tom Carroll spoke about the progress of the Gateway this past year. The Gateway now has an international reputation. Childs Burden, the great-great-grandson of Henry Burden, spoke briefly about the later Burden family and his impressions of the Gateway. Emmy Award winner Karl Kriegskotte spoke briefly about underwater Civil War archeology. Actor, Stephen Lang (a.k.a. George Pickett and "Stonewall" Jackson) then did a dramatic reading of some of Rice Bull's writings during the War. A few of Bull's artifacts were on display from the Rensselaer County Historical Society.

The CDCWRT was then honored for our preservation activities, including those for the Burden Ironworks Museum, and we were presented with a $500 check (read the Board Meeting to see what we did with that check).

On November 2-4, 2013 our 1862 conference was held at Siena College. We were surprised with last minute publicity in the ***Altamont Enterprise,*** the **Schenectady *Gazette*** (which included an interview with Chris Kolakowski), the ***Times Union***, AND the ***Wall Street Journal***! The dinner Friday night was excellent and Chris Kolakowski gave an excellent overview to events of 1862.

At the Saturday conference we had nine vendors or history organizations with displays. The two history student presentations were excellent presentations based on their own research into Civil War events. The quality of the presentations by speakers was superb and many attendees commented on this ("The best Civil War Conference I have attended"). The large Civil War chess set was chosen by the first prize winner of the raffle.

The BONUS was the 80 free passes to see a pre-release showing of Spielberg's ***Lincoln*** movie donated by Dreamworks. This occurred at Colonie Center on November 8th. All of this was for only $120 for the whole weekend, about the same you pay monthly for a no-frills phone with some texting

capabilities. Remember that when we present next year's conference, which By The Way, WE ARE ALREADY PLANNING.

BOARD MEETING – 11/12/2012

The Minutes of the October board meeting were approved. The Treasurer reported $2,153.65 in the regular account and $10,888.07 in the Preservation account. Some of the expenses and revenues for the conference were reported. Revenues: $100 in additional raffle ticket sales; $204.92 in speakers' book sales. Expenses: $169.71 for coffee/donuts; $872 for motel rooms for speakers; $819.33 for speakers' books from the Book House. Additional speakers expenses included honoraria and travel expenses. Speakers' meals were provided by the CDCWRT. Graciously and generously Frank O'Reilly, Chris Kolakowski, John Hoptak, Bruce Eelman, Dennis Gaffney, Steve Muller and Tom Carroll did not request an honorarium. R.L. Murray donated 10 of his books to be sold. Food expenses are not yet complete. A final tally will appear in next month's newsletter. Read more about the conference in this newsletter.

A $500 donation was made to the NYS Archives Partnership Trust in October. An award of $500 was presented to the CDCWRT by the Hudson Mohawk Industrial Gateway at the Gala honoring the Round Table. This was matched by $500 from our preservation account, and the total of $1000 was approved for the Civil War Trust to preserved over 1000 acres of battlefield land at Appomattox Court House, Sailor's Creek and Kelly's Ford. This was a $56.42 to $1.00 match, so our donation was leveraged to the amazing figure of $56,420! The total contributions for the CDCWRT to date are now $871,321.66 !!!!

The Nomination Committee has proposed the following slate of candidates for the Board. The election of the slate will occur at the January Meeting.

President: Rosemary Nichols
Vice-President: Gene Gore
Treasurer: Fran McCashion
Secretary: Mary Ellen Johnson
Program Chair: Matt George
Membership: Mike Affinito
At-Large: Art Henningson
At-Large: Steve Muller
At-Large: Erin Baillargeon
Ex-Officio: Matt Farina

Land Mines in the Civil War

By Daniel L Hopping, SVC

On the 4th of May 1862, a cavalry scout riding along a road near Yorktown, VA was killed when his horse stepped on a land mine. He was the first casualty of a pressure activated land mine. Confederate Brigadier-General Gabriel J. Rains had his men take artillery shells and bury them just below the surface of the road to explode when stepped on.



8-inch Columbiad artillery shells. The one on the right still has part of the fuse.

During the retreat from Yorktown, Rains found loaded 8- and 10-inch Columbiad artillery shells equipped with sensitive fuse primers in a broken-down ammunition wagon. These were ones laid in the road just below the surface. They were very effective.

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Confederate Brig.-Gen. Gabriel Rains

During the next winter Rains spent weeks designing a primer that would explode from very light pressure. He lost the forefinger and thumb of his right hand during this time. After this Rains decided to use a pressure of 7lb to activate the mine. By spring these Confederate mines were being used throughout the area. By 1864 Rains had deployed over 1,300 mines on the approaches to Richmond that the Confederates could explode with trip wires. By the end of the war, over 2,000 of Rains' mine were deployed causing many casualties.

In 1960 five landmines with Rains fuses were recovered 98 years after they were laid. They were still active and still dangerous. The black powder was still dry and ready to blow. Mines still continue to be an incredibly dangerous tool of warfare.

OCTOBER PROGRAM

Mark Dunkelman, author of *Gettysburg's Unknown Soldier: The Life, Death and Celebrity of Amos Humiston,* had the CDCWRT audience's rapt attention at our October 12th meeting as he related the tragic story of Amos Humiston, an unidentified Union soldier lying dead on the battlefield after the fighting ceased. Clutched in the dead man's hand was an ambrotype of three young children. A Philadelphia doctor who found this single sad clue to the soldier's identity took the photograph with him back to Philadelphia where he gave a detailed written description of the image to the city's newspapers which in the 1860s did not have the technology to reproduce the photograph in their pages. Copied by newspaper after newspaper, this poignant story spread throughout the North until a woman in western New York's Cattaraugus County, after reading the description in *The American Presbyterian,* recognized that this might be the photograph she had sent to her husband. Having received no letters from him since the Battle of Gettysburg, she made an inquiry and with receipt of a carte de visite copy of the ambrotype, she sadly realized she was now a widow.

The dead soldier was now positively identified as Amos Humiston, a member of New York's 154th Regiment whose wife had sent him a picture of their children soon after Chancellorsville. A great wave of sentimental response in the form of songs, poems and stories followed once the tragic story became known. The Philadelphia doctor capitalized on this emotional outpouring by raising funds to build an orphanage in Gettysburg. Mrs. Humiston and her three children lived there for a time.

Dunkelman continued his program by explaining his personal interest in the 154th, his great grandfather's regiment, which inspired him to write a history of the regiment. Becoming curious about the incident after reading an anecdotal version of the Humiston story in a Gettysburg guidebook originally published in 1920, he began to seriously research Amos Humiston and his life before the war. His search for descendants of the three children in the ambrotype led him to the grandson of the youngest son, a professor in Calgary, Canada who mentioned the family moved to New Hampshire after time spent at the orphanage. The professor has a treasure trove of Humiston family memorabilia, but there was next to nothing about Amos and his immediate family. The family had apparently not wanted to be reminded of the tragedy and

resulting publicity.

Eventually contact with another branch of the family led to the discovery of the letters Amos has sent home to his wife before being mortally wounded. Dunkelman found it quite revealing that, unlike most soldiers' letters of the time, Amos' were openly expressive of love and affection for his wife and children. One letter, written soon after Chancellorsville, mentioned his pleasure at receiving the ambrotype of his children whom he hoped to see again. Dunkelman's research of Amos' early life uncovered the information that he had sailed on a lengthy whaling voyage out of New Bedford. One voyage was enough for Amos, who turned to harness making before he enlisted. The program ended with the unsavory details of the Gettysburg Orphanage where sadistic treatment of children by the matron and embezzlement of funds by the doctor who founded it eventually led to the closing of the orphanage and the Humiston family finding obscurity.

This excellent summary was provide by the Secretary of the CDCWRT, Mary Ellen Johnson

Sue A. Knost Memorial Sesquicentennial Conference

Summaries by Rosemary Nichols

The Capital District Civil War Round Table hosted the second of its planned series of five conferences celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Civil War. This program was held over parts of three days with the co-sponsorship of Siena College, where the conference was held. Following are brief notes on the presentations made at the conference. Longer versions of these notes will be posted on the Round Table web page after they are reviewed and approved by the presenters.

Friday evening's keynote speaker was Chris Kolakowaski, who presented "An Overview of Events in 1862". In his inimitable style, Chris gave a summary of all the significant, and some of the less significant but very interesting, events of 1862, positioning the conference attendees to understand the events of that important year. As more scholarship is pointing in that direction, the emphasis of Chris' remarks was on the western theatre.

To more fully understand the year, Chris urged us to forget everything we know and watch events unfold in real time. After a successful spring and summer with western victories in February in Kentucky at Fort Henry and Tennessee at Fort Donelsen, Nashville had been captured. In April the battle of Shiloh had been won by General Grant, and Commodore Farragut had taken New Orleans by sea. The Anaconda Plan espoused by General Winfield Scott was working was evidenced by the capture in the west of New Madrid and Island No. 10 in March and April, Memphis in June, and in the east with Roanoke Island in February, New Berne in March, and Fort Pulaski in April.

In the east McClellan's massive campaign on the Peninsula to capture Richmond from the south opened with the epic confrontation of the Monitor and the Merrimac/Virginia in March in Hampton Roads, and terminated after the Seven Days campaign with the "repositioning" to the James River after the battle of Malvern Hill.

The large Eastern battle of Second Manassas/Bull Run in August was a major Union defeat which led Robert E. Lee to the Maryland Campaign, ending in the Con-federate defeat at Antietam in September. The year ends with the battle of Fredericks-burg in the east in December and the battle of Perryville in October and Chickasaw Bluffs and Stones River/Murfreesboro in December in the west.

The pattern of battles was a seesawing of dominance between the North early in the year, a strong resurgence by the South in midyear, with the battle of Antietam the fulcrum from which President Lincoln was able to issue the draft Emancipation Proclamation, helping to forestall European

intervention in the war.

During the day long program on Saturday, November 3, the conference presenters included Siena students Lindsay Davenport on the little known Mutiny of the 20th NYVI and Cassandra Jane Werking on Orsell Cook Brown of the 44th NYVI as openers for a longer presentation by Siena Professor Bruce Eelman on "Ellsworth's Avengers", the 44th NYVI. R. L. Murray used in-formation from Union soldiers' letters to talk about "New York's Soldiers in the Civil War: Their Views and Experiences". After lunch John Hoptak talked about the Battles of South Mountain and Antietam and Frank O'Reilly ended the day with an exciting discussion of "Fredericksburg: From Stonewall (Jackson) to (the) Stone Wall at Marye's Heights".

The conference concluded on Sunday morning with three presentations and a tour. Dennis Gaffney shared "Local Connections to the Civil War". Steve Muller shared his latest research on local Monitor connections and how the Monitor was financed and constructed. John Quarstein talked about the Battle of the Ironclads *Monitor* versus *Virginia* with emphasis on the sailors and their experience. As a final treat, P. Thomas Carroll gave a tour of the Burden Ironworks headquarter building in Troy, where much of the horseshoes used in the Civil War were produced.

Civil War in New York Historyhostel/Teacherhostel

Experience the Civil War in New York with the new exhibit at the New York State Museum and representatives from related historic sites on Saturday, January 12, 2013 at a free Historyhostel/Teacherhostel event sponsored by Institute of History, Archaeology, and Education.

9:30 Welcome: Peter Feinman, IHARE

9:45 The Civil War in NY: A Grave Experience - Peter Hess, Albany Rural Cemetery
The Civil War was fought in the South but many of the burials occurred in the North including of Confederate soldiers. What is a rural cemetery and who are the people who are buried in the Albany Rural Cemetery, free and slave, North and South, male and female, who are connected to the War?

10:30 "An Irrepressible Conflict: The Empire State in the Civil War": The NYS Museum Exhibition Civil War Workshop - Truemaster Trimingham, Museum Educator-NYSM.

11:30 "An Irrepressible Conflict: The Empire State in the Civil War": Guided tour of the exhibit with Robert Weible, the NYS Historian.

12:30 Lunch (bring your own)

1:00 The Civil War in New York: The Columbia County Experience -Diane Shewchuk Executive Director/Curator and Ina Griffin-Guilzon Museum Educator, Columbia County Historical Society
An overview of the exhibition Civil War Panorama: Columbia County 1860-1865 will highlight specific objects. While the exhibition focuses on men and women from Columbia County, the experiences and the themes are not unlike those from residents of all over New York State..

2:00 Exhibitor Display Walk Through - New York State Museum has invited numerous historical organizations to set up display tables in the Museum as part of its annual Museum Day program. Participants will have the opportunity to see these display tables during this time slot.

3:00 Teaching the Civil War in New York WrapUp:PeterFeinman
What do you teach at present on the Civil War? How might the session today change that? What would you like to see in the Common Core Curriculum? Should the 7th grade curriculum continue to end with the Civil War or should be extended to include the Reconstruction

Program Registration-email: feinmanp@ihare with Name, School or History organization if appropriate.