



The Dispatch

Newspaper of the

CAPITAL DISTRICT CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE

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www.AlbanyCivilWar.org



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UNION ARMY SENDS CHILDREN TO FIGHT! HOW WIDESPREAD IS THE PROBLEM? SECRETARY OF WAR HAS NO COMMENT

It has come to our attention that a number of children under the age of 17 years are soldiers in the Union Army. John Joseph Klem, born in 1851, apparently ran away from home and attempted to join the Army. After being rejected by two different regiments, he was adopted by the 22nd Michigan Volunteer Infantry as a drummer boy. Officers of the regiment stated that John had been following the regiment in the field anyway. They agreed to each contribute part of their pay towards John's regular "pay" of \$13 per month.

It is said that John was nearly killed at the Battle of Shiloh when a shell fragment pierced his drum and knocked him unconscious. Following the battle he was called "Johnny Shiloh." It seems unlikely to be a true story, since the 22nd Michigan Regiment was not formed until after the Battle of Shiloh. John was at the Battle of Chickamauga as a soldier and apparently shot a Confederate Colonel.

In October of 1863 he was captured by Confederate cavalry in Georgia. A short time later he was exchanged. Confederate newspapers learned of his capture and his age, and immediately printed and widely circulated the story that the Union Army was having great difficulty finding new soldiers in spite of the unpopular draft. Quoting a Southern paper, his case shows "what sore straits the Yankees are driven, when they have to send their babies out to fight us."

General Grant's and General Thomas' headquarters had no comment.

APRIL MEETING
FRIDAY, MAY 13, 2011
WATERVLIET SENIOR CENTER
1541 BROADWAY
WATERVLIET, NY

“Father Abraham’s Boys”

Michael Aikey

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 May meeting of the Capital District Civil War Round Table will be on Friday, May 13th. This meeting will be held at our new location at the Watervliet Senior Center, 1541 Broadway in Watervliet. Our special guest speaker is one of the founders of the Capital District Civil War Round Table, Michael Aikey. Mike’s topic is based on an article he wrote in the past, entitled, “Father Abraham’s Boys” and it is about some of the young boys from New York State who served in the Union armies during the Civil War.

Women may know Gustave Sherman as an exclusive designer of women’s jewelry, but to Mike, Gustave Sherman was a twelve year old lad from the mid-Hudson region who joined the Union Army with his father. He served in a number of military engagements, but also played with Tad Lincoln. Gustave was mustered out at the age of 15 years, but he was not that unique. As many as 8000 lads, aged 9-17 years, served in the Union armies.

Mike Aikey will discuss the lads from New York State during the Civil War. Mike is

Executive Director of the New York State Military History Museum and Veterans Research Center. He is a recognized expert in NYS military history and printing history.



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.hotmail.com

On Sunday, May 15, 2011 the Department of New York of the Sons of Union Veterans will commemorate the death of Col. Elmer Ellsworth, the first Union officer killed in the Civil War. The Col. George L. Willard Camp No. 154, Albany, NY, SUV will re-enact his funeral at Ellsworth monument and gravesite at Hudson View Cemetery in Watervliet, NY from 9:00 – 12:30pm. The CDCWRT will be participating and will sponsor a 150th Commemorative Postal Cancellation. The public is invited to attend. There are more details on the Sesquicentennial web-site.

Saturday, June 4th and Sunday June 5th mark the dates for the Civil War Encampment at the Troy Masonic Hall. The camp opens to the public at 9:00 am each day. There will be displays, sutlers, and skirmishes. The CDCWRT will have a tent and volunteers are asked to contact Matt George.

Friday, June 10, 2011 is the regular meeting of the CDCWRT. Our speaker will be Patrick Schroeder, historian at the National Park at Appomattox. His presentation is entitled "The Fire Zouaves at Bull Run: Heroes or Humbugs?"

Saturday, August 20th and Sunday, August 21st are the dates for the Civil War Heritage

Days at Schuyler Flatts.

November 4th and 5th are the dates for our conference on New York in the Civil War. Mark those new calendars now, so that we can have a 90% membership attendance!

BOARD MEETING

The March Board Meeting was held on April 26th. The treasurer reported \$2140.63 in the general account and \$5420.90 in the preservation account. There will be two commemorative postal cancellations this month. The first will occur on Sunday May 15th in Mechanicville at the re-enactment of Elmer Ellsworth's funeral. The second will be a memorial stamp honoring Sue Knost as a preservationist on Memorial Day Weekend.

The Board thanked the volunteers who worked at the Siena College Civil War Event and the Schenectady County Library Event at the Maybee Farm. The weather unfortunately did not cooperate. Volunteers are being sought for the Troy Masonic Hall Civil War Weekend on June 4th and 5th.

APRIL MEETING

Major Joseph C. Scott, U.S. Army, took us up, up and away at our April Meeting describing "*The Infernal Balloon: Union Aeronautics During the American Civil War*." With the outbreak of the war in 1861 Thaddeus C. Lowe, a prominent balloonist eagerly offered his services to the Union, convinced that aerial observations would be of military advantage. Having obtained the backing of Salmon P. Chase, a meeting was arranged with President Lincoln who was curious enough to agree to watch the launch of a demonstration balloon from the grounds of the Columbia Armory. On board, in addition to the telescopes necessary for observation, was a telegraph connected by fine wire to the ground. Shortly after the ascension Lincoln received the first ever air to ground telegraph message.

General McDowell was sufficiently impressed with the experiment to invite Lowe to bring his balloon to his headquarters near Falls Church. Because of poor visibility, these observations were inclusive, although a topographical map made from the balloon proved to very accurate and ascensions began to be made with regularity. Lowe was not the only balloonist offering his services to the Union. John La Mountain, a rival aeronaut, was invited by Benjamin Butler to do aerial reconnaissance at Fortress Monroe, a job he did successfully. Unfortunately for La Mountain, Lowe had greater political and military backing including generals who felt Lowe's practice of taking a telegraph aloft was a key to a military balloon's usefulness. Once Butler was reassigned, La Mountain was pushed out.

Beginning with the Battle of Bull Run, Lowe began observations, his balloon tethered to the ground to prevent winds from carrying him out over Confederate territory. Once it did float loose, drifting near Federal lines, Union soldiers, unsettled by its presence after having heard rumors of Confederate balloons, almost brought it down with friendly fire. Fortunately shifting winds carried Lowe away from danger, only to land him in a grove of trees where he spent the night dangling until rescued in the morning.

By this time Lincoln was agreeable to the formation of an aeronautic branch and, pressured by Lincoln, skeptical General Scott agreed that the government could employ Lowe as an aeronaut, officially appointing him to observe Confederate military operations. Soon the first of several balloons was built at government expense and an official Balloon Corps was formed. Initially the gas in the balloons was coal gas from city gas works, expensive and inconvenient. Soon a generator was invented to supply hydrogen gas in the field by combining scrap iron and acid, a gas supply that would enable the balloons to travel to a higher altitude. Both the generators and balloons could be transported

along with the army on the march. No balloons were ever hit by enemy fire, but were very vulnerable to being struck when ascending or descending. Troops in the nearby vicinity of the takeoff or landing spot were in great danger as the shells rained in when the Confederates attempted to hit the balloons.

Lowe's observations, which turned out to be reasonably accurate, began in earnest in August 1861 ascending daily, weather permitting. The constant surveillance set the Confederates on edge, and in an effort to stymie Lowe, resorted to camouflage and Quaker guns to give the impression of greater strength. It has never been clear whether Lowe could distinguish between real cannon and the Quaker fakes. With the outbreak of the Peninsula Campaign, Lowe had two balloons, making almost daily ascensions unless bad weather interfered as the high winds at the time of Seven Pines. At Yorktown even though Lowe saw no evidence of a huge Confederate presence, McClellan continued his siege. Although fog, thunder storms, high winds, icing in winter weather, and the haze of battle all interfered with observations, the balloons were used at Chancellorsville and Fredericksburg as well as between battles to watch for troops movements and build-ups.

It was during this campaign that the confederates responded with their own short lived aeronautical corps. At first a hot air balloon went up, able to remain in the air only about a half hour. A more serious balloon threat came with the appearance near Richmond of a multicolored gas balloon created from strips of dressmakers' silk material filled with illuminating gas from the city's gas works. The Federal troops got the misimpression it was overseeing Confederate preparations for a major attack. Porter Alexander had had it towed by steamer to Drewry's Bluff where he could view the Federal camps on the James. In early July the Confederate balloon corps came to an end when, after a failed

ascension, Alexander had stored the balloon on a tug on the James which was captured by a Union gunboat shortly after.

The Federal Balloon Corps was first placed under the Topographical Engineers, then the Quartermaster Corps, then the Corps of Engineers and finally the Signal Corps. None of these placements worked well for the Balloon Corps especially since many of the Balloon Corps members were civilians, although several regiments also provided support. Because of its shifting assignments, the Corps faced difficulties in dealing with expenses, transportation and procurement of supplies. The significant costs of the manufacture and operation of the balloons as well as Lowe's salary, equal to that of a colonel, caused problems, especially under the Corps of Engineers' Cyrus Comstock, whose pressure caused Lowe to resign by April 1863. When General Hooker ordered the Signal Corps to take over, that corps felt it couldn't handle the additional assignment and the Balloon Corps was disbanded in June 1863. Their situation had become complicated when many officers in the field were neither sold on the military value of balloon observations nor had an understanding of the needs of supply or transport and the demands of ascensions and landings. In addition by 1863 many of the officers who had been enthusiastic about Lowe's work earlier in the war were no longer in positions to support him.

The Balloon Corps showed the promise of aerial observation, and that it was possible to do aerial photography and telegraph information from the air, but never really came into its own during the Civil War. In the long run the use of balloons did not affect the outcome of the war.

This excellent summary was provided by the Round Table's secretary, Mary Ellen Johnson.

GETTYSBURG FALL TRIP

Regina Daly, a member of the CDCWRT and the Greene County Historical Society has organized a Columbus Weekend trip to Gettysburg for the Historical Society. The trip is open to members of CDCWRT and it sounds like a real bargain. It is 3 days and 2 nights, October 8-10. for \$370.

Package Includes:

- 2 Nights lodging at the Quality Inn on Steinwehr Street
- 2 Hot Breakfast Buffets
- 1 Box lunch on Sunday
- 2 Dinners
- Gettysburg Museum & Visitor Center
- Cyclorama Painting
- "A New Birth of Freedom" Film
- 3 two-hour Historic Gettysburg Battlefield Tours given by Licensed Battlefield Guides
- Eisenhower Farm OR Town Tour
- Souvenir Gift
- Luggage Handling
- Taxes, Meal Gratuities and Driver Gratuity
- Motorcoach Transportation to and from Exit 21 of the NYS Thruway

To reserve your ticket, send \$25 deposit to the Greene County Historical Society by June 30th. The deposit is refundable until August 15th. The final payment of \$345 is due by August 15th. The per person rate of \$370 is based on double occupancy. Singles are available at additional charge. For further information contact:

Greene County Historical Society
Box 44

Coxsackie, NY 12051

www.gchistory.org

Dave Dorpfeld (518)817-8771 or

Regina Daly at rw Daly@yahoo.com

**CDCWRT
P.O. BOX 14871
ALBANY, NY 12212-4871**

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 \$25. The purpose of the organization is to promote, educate, and further stimulate interest in, and discussion of, all aspects of the Civil War period.

THE OFFICERS

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Vice-President	Gene Gore	439-4569
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