



# The Regimental Bulletin

Phil Kearny Civil War Round Table of Northern New Jersey

Visit our website to register for all our monthly meeting presentations and updates  
[www.PhilKearnyCWRT.org](http://www.PhilKearnyCWRT.org)

\*\*\* NEXT MEETING \*\*\*  
Wed, March 18, 2026 @ 7PM - Online Zoom Presentation

Volume 22 Issue 3  
March 18, 2026

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## A Civil War within a War

New York City Draft Riots of July 1863

With Evan Portman

In July 1863, as the nation was gripped by the monumental struggles of the Civil War, another kind of conflict exploded in the streets of New York City, one that revealed deep fractures within the Union's own social fabric. This month's presentation will feature historian **Evan Portman**, speaking on the topic of "A Civil War within a War: The New York City Draft Riots of July 1863."

The New York City Draft Riots, which raged from July 13 through July 16, were triggered by widespread opposition to the federal Conscription Act passed earlier that spring. For the first time, the Union government instituted a mandatory draft to bolster its armies after staggering losses on battlefields across Virginia and Pennsylvania. But opposition in New York was about more than military policy. Many working-class residents, particularly recent Irish immigrants and other ethnic groups, viewed conscription as deeply unfair, especially since wealthier men could avoid service by paying a commutation fee. Resentment simmered over economic hardship, job competition, and political corruption, turning protest into panicked violence.

What started as demonstrations quickly devolved into one of the most violent civil disturbances in American history. Mobs attacked draft offices, government buildings, and symbols of authority. Strong racial animosity fueled some of the worst brutality; African Americans were viciously targeted, their homes and businesses destroyed, and many were murdered. Churches and institutions serving Black residents were burned as the city descended into chaos. Federal troops, diverted from pursuing Confederate forces after Gettysburg, were recalled to restore order and suppress the uprising.

When the smoke cleared, the human toll was staggering, with well over a hundred dead, thousands wounded, and countless psychological scars on the city and nation. The Draft Riots exposed bitter divisions within Northern society and highlighted the complex intersections of class, race, and national purpose during the Civil War.

Evan Portman is a PhD student at West Virginia University. He earned his bachelor's degree in history and secondary education at Saint Vincent College and a master's degree in history at Duquesne University.

Evan is a Copie Hill Civil War Fellow with the American Battlefield Trust as well as a contributing member of [Emerging Civil War blog](#). In addition, he has written for the Westmoreland County Historical Society, Emerging Revolutionary War blog, Civil War Monitor, the Catholic Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, the Antietam Institute, and the Central Virginia Battlefields Trust.



Evan Portman

Evan's research interests include German American, Catholic, and Pennsylvania connections to the Civil War. He now has his own [YouTube channel](#) dedicated to exploring lesser-known sites and of the Battle of Gettysburg.

You must register with this new link before the meeting

<https://us06web.zoom.us/join/RCc119vPSI28r3Y01CF-Qw#/registration>

# The Irish Brigade and St Patrick's Day in the Army of the Potomac, 1862 to 1863

- Jim Madden



Within the winter camps and muddy bivouacs of the Irish Brigade, St Patrick's Day was far more than a festive diversion. In 1862 and 1863, as the Army of the Potomac grappled with the brutal campaigns of the Peninsula, Second Manassas, Antietam, Fredericksburg, and Chancellorsville, March 17 offered a reaffirmation of heritage, faith, and fighting spirit. For a brigade composed largely of Irish immigrants and Irish Americans, the day reinforced bonds that had been forged both in New York neighborhoods and on blood-soaked battlefields.

Originally organized in 1861 under Thomas Francis Meagher, the Brigade's core regiments, the 63rd, 69th, and 88th New York, carried distinctive green silk flags embroidered with the Irish harp and golden sunburst, Fenian Brotherhood symbols. These colors, frequently noted in battle reports, were proudly displayed during St Patrick's Day parades within camp. Even after staggering losses in 1862, the survivors took special care that their appearance on March 17 reflected discipline and pride.

The day typically began with a Catholic Mass celebrated in the open air. Chaplains constructed makeshift altars from camp tables, ammunition chests, or stacked knapsacks. Sermons invoked Ireland's long struggle for liberty and connected it directly to the Union cause. In doing so, clergy and officers alike reminded the men that their service proved both their patriotism and their claim to full American citizenship.

Celebrations continued with music and athletic contests. Regimental bands played familiar airs such as "Garryowen" and "The Wearing of the Green," tunes that carried from tent rows across parade grounds. Officers sometimes hosted modest dinners when rations permitted, and extra whiskey was not uncommon. The highlight of many observances was the Brigade steeplechase. Mounted officers raced over improvised courses marked by fences, ditches, and natural obstacles, drawing loud cheers from enlisted spectators. Footraces, wrestling matches, and boxing bouts further animated the festivities.

In March 1863, following the horrific casualties at Fredericksburg, the mood was more reflective, yet the tradition endured. Illustrated newspapers such as Harper's Weekly published sketches of these celebrations, and artists including Winslow Homer captured both the pageantry and resilience of the Brigade's camp life.

Through St Patrick's Day observances, the Irish Brigade strengthened its esprit de corps. Amid war's uncertainty, these celebrations reaffirmed identity, sustained morale, and underscored why the Brigade remained one of the most renowned fighting formations in the Army of the Potomac.

## 2026

**Wed, Mar 18th**

**Evan Portman**

*A Civil War within a Civil War:  
The New York City Draft Riots*

[Register](#)

**Wed, Apr 15th**

**Kevin Levin**

*Col Robert Gould Shaw*

[Register](#)

**Wed, May 20th**

**Roseann Garza**

*War on the Rio Grande*

[Register](#)

**Wed, Jun 17th**

**Sarah Nierle**

*Gallant Pelham*

[Register](#)

**Wed, Sept 16th**

**Neil Chatelain**

*Privateers in San Fran*

[Register](#)

**Wed, Oct 21st**

**Sean Chick**

*Don Carlos Buell at Shiloh*

[Register](#)

**Fri-Sat Nov 6th-7th**

*Gettysburg Trip, Gettysburg, PA*

**LBG Jim Hessler**

**Sat, Dec 5th - 1pm**

**Holiday Dinner**

*Bistro 107, Moonachie*

**Speaker TBA**



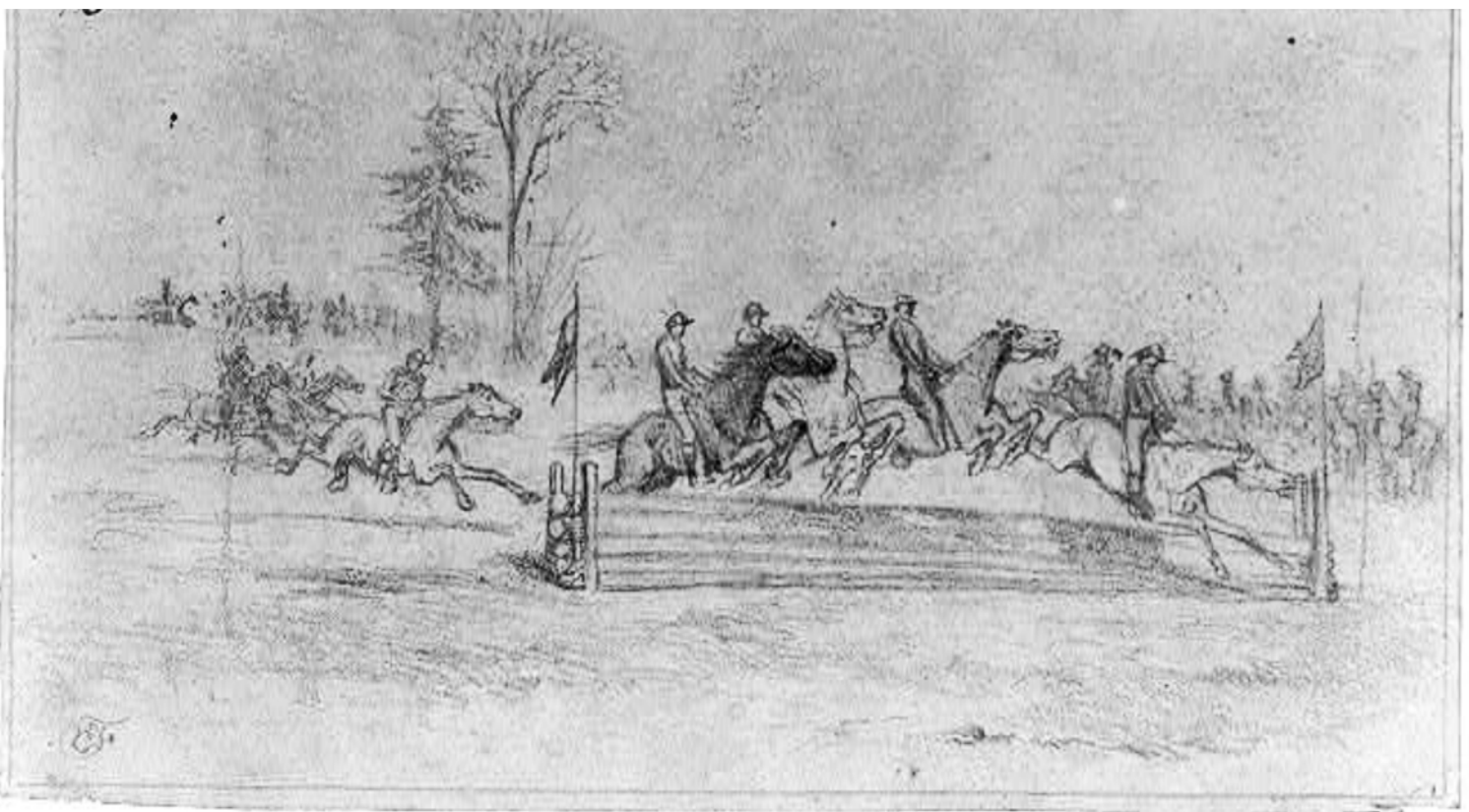
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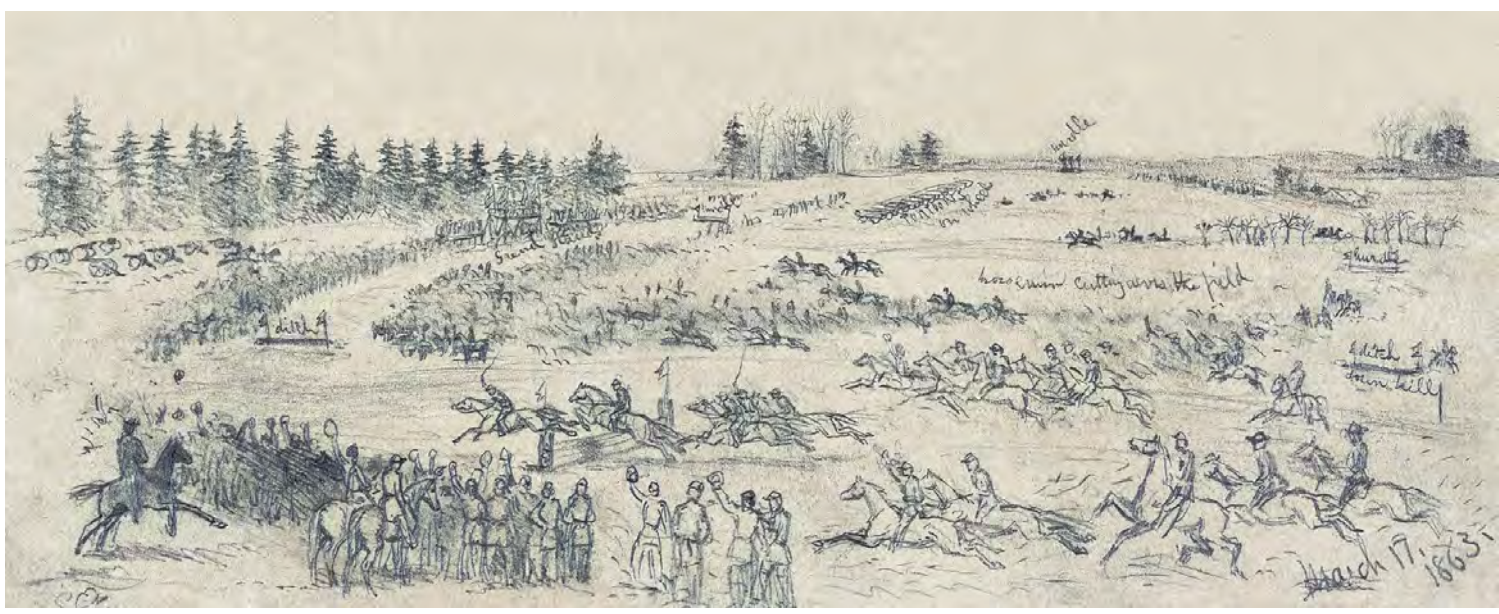


On March 17, 1863, Irish Brigade commander Thomas Francis Meagher hosted elaborate festivities to mark St. Patrick's Day. The celebration featured a number of races and prizes, and, as one Union soldier in attendance, Josiah Marshall Favill, (1st Lt, Co E, 57 New York Infantry) noted, "the strongest punch I ever tasted." Among those in attendance was Edwin Forbes, special artist for Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper. Forbes made six sketches to record the day, which are below. The day was a great success, as Favill noted. "All were invited to partake and such a gathering of jolly, handsomely dressed fellows, I never saw before. The Irish brigade was in its glory. It understood the situation, was master of it, and quite immortalized itself."

Josiah M. Favill, 57th New York Infantry



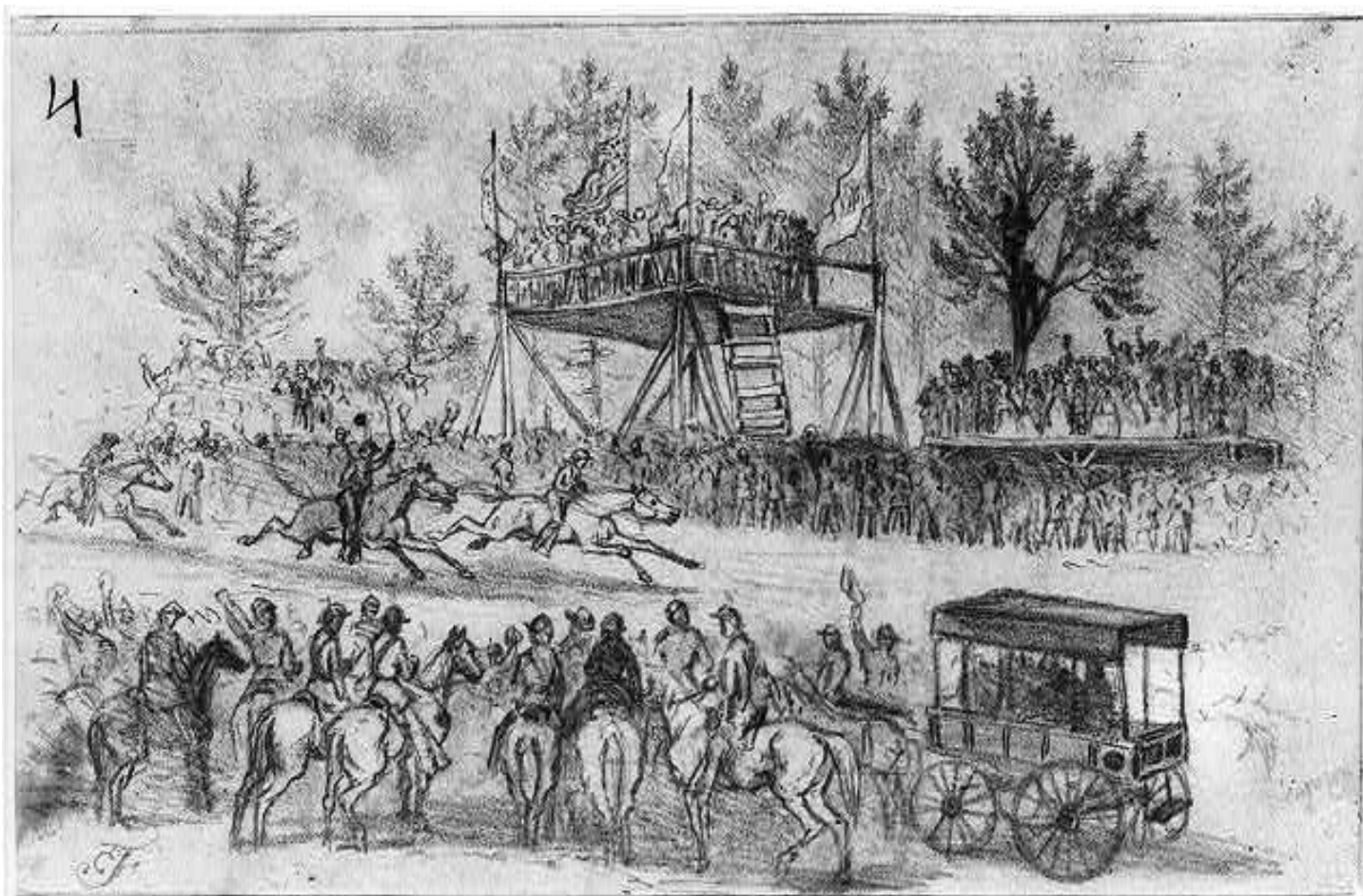
**"Mar. 17 1863 - St. Patrick's Day at the Army of the Potomac Sports of the Irish Brigade, Genl. Meagher. A Hurdle Race"** by Edwin Forbes. Participants jump a five-foot-tall hurdle as part of the competition. Before the contest began, another rider used the hurdle to show off her riding skills. According to Favill, "Amongst many notables riding in the train of the commander-in-chief, was the Princess Salm Salm, a beautiful and fearless horse woman. When she first came on the ground, she rode her horse up to a five foot hurdle and nonchalantly took a standing jump, clearing it handsomely."



**St. Patrick's Day celebration Army of the Potomac - The Steeple Chase, March 17, 1863 by Edwin Forbes**



**St. Patrick's Day in the army--Jumping the ditch by Edwin Forbes.** Only commissioned officers from the Irish Brigade's division were eligible to participate in the horse races. Shown here: soldiers attempt to jump a ditch while on horseback.



**"St. Patrick's Day in the army--The Grand Stand" by Edwin Forbes.** Riders pass by the grandstand, which contained a number of prominent Union generals and their wives.



**“St. Patrick’s Day in the army – The mule race.** Another event that day was a mule race, which, from Forbes’ sketch of it, looked rather dangerous. As Favill noted, “[T]here...were many falls, many horses injured and a lot of riders.”



**“St. Patrick’s Day in the army - Gen. Meagher distributing the prizes”.** General Meagher hands out prizes at the end of the festivities. The Irish-born general, noted Favill, was “glorious in [a] fancy undress uniform liberally covered with gold braid.”

Edwin Forbes writes: “The weather was all that could be wished – a fine warm sun shining on the rolling hills, dotted with camps, presented a most beautiful and picturesque scene. [...] The scene at the commencement of the races was very animated, the thousands of gay horsemen dashing about, spattering the mud in all direction, the spectators on foot in crowds around the grand stand (where an excellent band was discoursing music) and near the hurdles and ditches (where the fun was expected in seeing an unlucky horseman or two tumble into the mud), continued to make a night worth a long journey to witness.” (“St. Patrick’s Day in the Camp – Games on the Rappahannock,” Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper, 25 April 1863: 75



Edwin Forbes  
1839-1895

# The Irish Brigade's Famous Punch and Tradition

The Irish Brigade punch was part of the brigade's famous St. Patrick's Day celebrations in the Army of the Potomac during the Civil War. The ceremony centered around a large ceremonial punch bowl from which officers and soldiers drank after formal toasts honoring Ireland, the Union, and fallen comrades. It became one of the most distinctive traditions associated with the brigade commanded by General Thomas Francis Meagher.

The tradition began soon after the brigade was formed in 1861. Meagher, an Irish nationalist and former Young Ireland revolutionary, encouraged the brigade to celebrate Irish heritage even while serving in the Union Army. Each March 17, when conditions allowed, the brigade would hold a large celebration in camp that included a Catholic mass celebrated by the brigade chaplain, music and speeches, athletic contests such as steeplechases, formal toasts delivered by officers, and the presentation of the large ceremonial punch bowl. Contemporary newspaper correspondents and artists covering the Army of the Potomac frequently described the celebration because it was colorful and unusual for an army encampment.

After speeches and toasts, the punch bowl was placed on a table before the assembled brigade. Officers filled tin cups or glasses and passed them among the soldiers. The ceremony reinforced both Irish identity and loyalty to the Union cause while strengthening morale among the men of the brigade.

Descriptions from period accounts indicate the punch was a traditional Irish whiskey punch, similar to recipes popular in the nineteenth century. Under normal circumstances the drink often contained champagne and Irish whiskey along with sugar and citrus. However, circumstances in the field sometimes required improvisation. During the winter following the Battle of Fredericksburg in December 1862, champagne was extremely difficult to obtain while the army occupied the devastated town. General Meagher reportedly substituted Vichy water, a popular bubbly mineral soda water of the period, allowing the brigade to maintain the festive character of the traditional drink despite the scarcity of supplies.

One of the most famous punch bowl ceremonies occurred in March 1863 while the army was encamped near Falmouth, Virginia, following the heavy losses suffered by the brigade at the Battle of Fredericksburg. Despite the devastation of the previous campaign, the celebration became a moment of pride and unity for the brigade.

The punch ceremony served several purposes. It helped maintain Irish cultural identity within the army, honored the brigade's fallen soldiers, strengthened morale after heavy combat losses, and demonstrated the brigade's loyalty to the Union cause. For newspaper readers in the North, these celebrations helped cement the reputation of the Irish Brigade as one of the most colorful and distinctive units in the Union Army.

## Traditional Irish Brigade St. Patrick's Day Toasts

Contemporary descriptions of the Irish Brigade's St. Patrick's Day celebrations indicate that the toasts followed a formal order typical of nineteenth century military and patriotic gatherings. The first toast was always given to the President of the United States, reflecting the brigade's loyalty to the Union cause. A reconstructed version of the order of toasts likely followed this pattern:



Officers of the Irish Brigade gather around a large ceremonial punch bowl during a St. Patrick's Day celebration in camp with the Army of the Potomac. Raising their tin cups in a traditional toast, the officers celebrate Irish heritage and regimental pride while honoring Ireland, the Union, and the fallen soldiers of the famous Irish brigade.

First Toast: "To the President of the United States, may the Union be preserved and the cause of liberty triumph."

Second Toast: "To the United States, the land that has given us shelter and liberty, and for whose Union we proudly fight."

Third Toast: "To Ireland, the land of our birth and the home of our fathers, may her memory live forever in the hearts of her sons wherever they may serve."

Fourth Toast: "To the Irish Brigade, may its valor in battle and its fidelity to duty bring honor to Ireland and glory to the Union."

Fifth Toast: "To the memory of our fallen comrades who have given their lives for the cause of liberty."

Sixth Toast: "To the ladies of Ireland and America, whose prayers and devotion sustain the soldier in the field."

After the final toast, the assembled officers and soldiers of the brigade often concluded the ceremony with three cheers for the Union and three cheers for Ireland, before continuing the festivities of the day.

Today the tradition continues even today by the 69th New York National Guard regiment, whose Civil War predecessor formed the core of the Irish Brigade. They still prepare and serve the traditional Irish Brigade punch at regimental and commemorative ceremonies, preserving a living link to one of the brigade's most famous wartime traditions.

## The 69th New York Regimental Cocktail:

- Irish whiskey
- Water, often hot water
- Sugar
- Lemon or citrus juice
- Nutmeg or spices, occasionally mentioned

The mixture would be stirred in the large bowl and ladled out into cups. The recipe followed a classic Irish punch formula known at the time as "one of sour, two of sweet, three of strong, four of weak."

1 part lemon juice  
2 parts sugar  
3 parts whiskey  
4 parts water

Slices of lemon or orange might also be added.

sláinte agus saol agus



# Phil Kearny Civil War Round Table

## Membership Form

# Dues are \$25 a year

Please send a check or money order payable to:

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**REMINDER:** New and returning members, Renew your membership in the Phil Kearny CWRT, which is \$25 annually.

Each Phil Kearny CWRT Bulletin Newsletter there is always a reminder, and we do accept renewals at any time. Our "membership year" has always been from April to March. So, if you have not yet paid your dues for 2025(*thank you to those who have already*), now is the perfect time to write that check! You can find my address on the front page of every PKCWRT newsletter as well as on this membership form.

Thank you,  
Norm Dykstra  
PKCWRT Treasurer

