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Michigan Regimental Round Table Newsletter—Page

January 2025

MEMBER RENEWAL

The MRRT celebrates its 65th year in 2025 – and now is a wonderful time to show your support by renewing your membership! (Or become a new member!). Membership is \$25 a year – or \$5 for students. Checks should be made out to Treasurer Jeanie Graham (the bank does not like checks made out to the RoundTable) and can be mailed to her home at 29835 Northbrook, Farmington Hills, MI 48334-2326. Cash is always welcome at our meetings.

Our January meeting will be on Monday, January 27, 2025, at 6:30 pm in the basement of the Farmington Library – corner of Grand River and Farmington Road. Our guest speaker, Jim Epperson of Ann Arbor, will begin around 7:00 pm after our 6:30 pm business meeting. We must leave the library by 8:45 pm.

The Roundtable has a great website, created by our friend, Gerald Furi. We are no longer connected to the Farmington Library. The website is: <https://www.mrrt.us> Please note that the s after http is necessary to get on the website. The website is well worth visiting.

The Roundtable is proud to welcome as our January 2025 speaker. Jim Epperson of Ann Arbor, who will share with us the story of “Shiloh and the Removal of Major General Lew Wallace, USA” General Wallace was one of the more interesting personalities of the Civil War. He and his command got “lost” during the First Day of the Battle of Shiloh. Of course, after the war he wrote *Ben Hur*, complete with the chariot race. He was also Governor of the Arizona Territory.

Jim became interested in the Civil War when his father bought the *American Heritage Illustrated History of the Civil War*. This is a common occurrence for those of us that grew up during the Centennial of the Civil War in the 1960’s. Jim is a retired mathematician with a degree from the University of Michigan and a PhD from Carnegie-Mellon in Pittsburgh. This will be an educational and entertaining evening!

The Roundtable appreciates President Abraham Lincoln’s (our friend Ron Carley) discussion of his long trip from Springfield, Illinois to Washington, D.C. to become President of the United States during our November 2024 meeting.

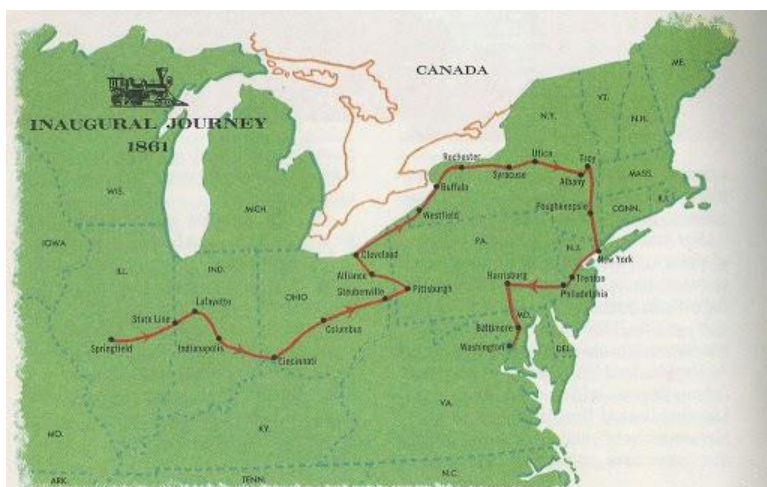
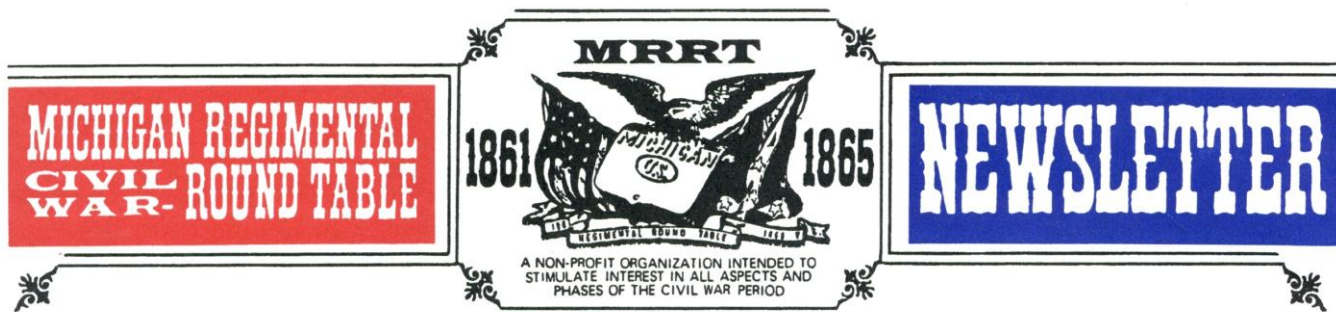
Abraham Lincoln left Springfield, Illinois for Washington on February 11, 1861 (the day before his birthday). He was nervous and sad because he did not want to leave Springfield. The Lincoln family had lived in Springfield for 25 years. The whole town came to see him on a rainy, cold, and overcast day.

The President-elect gave a farewell address: “*My Friends: No one not in my position can appreciate the sadness I feel at this parting. To these people I owe all than I am. Here I have lived more than a quarter of a century; here my children were born and here one of them lies buried. I know not how soon I shall see you again....*”

Mary and their sons Tad and Willie stayed behind. She had a tantrum at the hotel just before Abraham left for the train station. “*She will not let me go,*” Abraham said. They would meet later in Indianapolis, Indiana.

There were four cars on the train that traveled approximately thirty miles an hour. The train visited 80-100 towns and cities on the 1,904-mile trip to Washington. The train was refurbished for the sad trip home to Springfield in 1865. **The President-elect did so some short talks at most of the numerous stops on the way.** His impromptu speeches were usually not particularly good.

The first crisis of the trip occurred when son Robert misplaced his father’s Inaugural speech at the Bates Hotel in Indianapolis. His father became incredibly angry. The satchel containing the speech was found then lost again and finally found again. Robert was not allowed to touch the satchel on the remaining trip to Washington.



Grace Bedell, a young lady in Westfield, New York, (an hour south of Buffalo), wrote the President-elect a letter asking him to grow a beard. Beards were immensely popular with the ladies at that time. The letter is now at the Detroit Public Library. Passing through the town, they met.

When the train reached Harrisburg, PA, the railroad people heard stories of possible Assassination attempts from detective Allen Pinkerton. Doris Duke, Pinkerton's first female detective, played the role of Lincoln's sister as they went through the secessionist city of Baltimore. The group traveled through Baltimore during the middle of the night as the railroads did not meet. Mary, Tad, and

Willie came through on the next train.

Other interesting notes. Robert Lincoln and his wife Mary are buried across the street from the President Kennedy memorial at Arlington National Cemetery. They are not buried in Springfield like the others because the two Mary's did not get along.

The war cost \$1 million per day when it started. By the end of the war, it cost \$4 million per day. The national debt increased from \$60 million to \$2 billion by the end of the war.

There are approximately 120 pictures of Lincoln in existence today, only four of them show him wearing a hat.

Our thanks to Ron Carley for his Lincoln presentation.

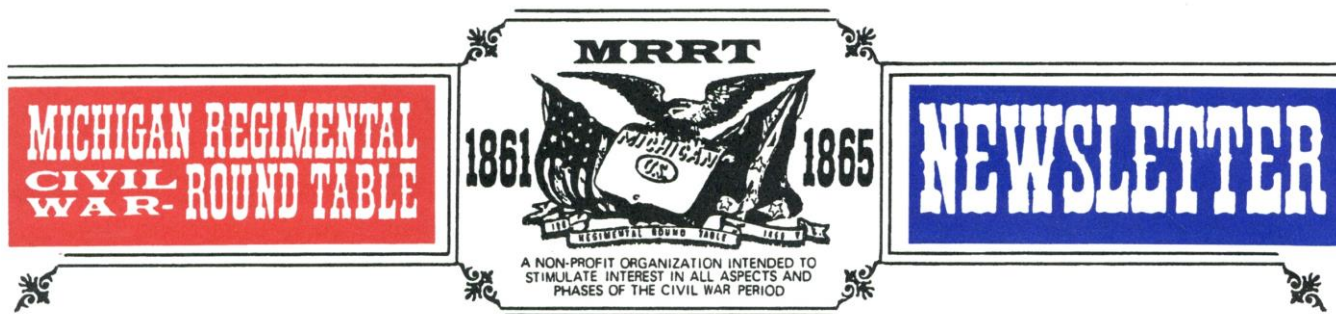
HELP WANTED – GETTYSBURG BATTLEFIELD TOUR GUIDES

The Gettysburg National Military Park needed tour guides, so the Park Service administrated the required exam in December 2024, the first time since 2017. Passing the difficult exam requires an encyclopedic knowledge of the battle as well as the events leading up to it and its aftermath. The exam requires answering up to 180 questions and writing three essays.

Michael Lentz, a 37-year-old from Colorado, moved to Gettysburg in 2019 to prepare for the exam, even though he did not know when it would take place. Over five years, he has visited the battleground hundreds of times, attended lectures and seminars, and read numerous books, memoirs, and contemporary accounts of the battle. One of his prized possessions is a book-sized atlas of the battlefield that he keeps in a special bag.

National Park licensed guides are the only people allowed to provide paid tours of the battlefield. The Park keeps the number of guides at around 150 and only gives the exam on an as needed basis. Since COVID the number of guides dropped to 130, thus creating opportunities for new guides.

The December 2024 exam attracted 160 applications, with only a small fraction expected to pass. The *Civil War Monitor* called it "the hardest test in history." Lawyers who have taken both the bar exam and the Gettysburg tour guide exam, have said that the Gettysburg exam is harder.



Passing the written exam is just the beginning of the process of becoming a licensed tour guide.

- Park rangers and seasoned guides weed out candidates who lack the necessary communication skills.
- The remaining candidates must spend an intensive weekend learning and showcasing their geographical knowledge of the battlefield.
- During the spring candidates must conduct a two-hour tour where they are evaluated on their ability to keep the tour moving and to tailor the experience to the interests of visitors. Candidates' driving ability is also evaluated as they may be driving visitors' vehicles.

The 2017 exam resulted in nine out of ninety-seven participants receiving the coveted license.

A tour guide may make \$50,000 per year. There is no pension, no health care, and no sick leave for the guides.

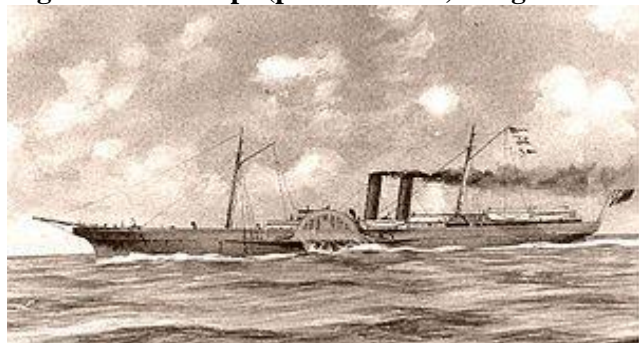
Pittsburg mechanic Michael Rupert competed five times, and ten long years, to earn his license. When he was told in 2017 that he had earned his license he said that *"I almost didn't believe them"*. His wife encouraged him not to give up. Now he gives tours during the summer and part of the fall.

Some test-takes form study groups to prepare for the exam. Mr. Lentz and two other test takers go over maps, tour the park together and quiz each other about President Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. One of the group members, Jaimee Unstadd, with her husband and two children, moved to Gettysburg in 2021. Jaime writes the order of battle for each army daily. **The third member of the group, Debbie Jones, moved from a Detroit suburb to Gettysburg. She said, "I'm going to keep trying until I make it."** Good luck to Debbie and the other test takers.

Our thanks to the *Wall Street Journal* article of December 5, 2024, by James Fanelli

Civil War Essentials – Union Blockade Running Ports

Once it became clear in early 1862 that enormous profits could be made with blockade running, British yards began to build ships (picture below) designed for blockade running. The vessels were long, narrow, of shallow draft,



and low freeboard. The ships were painted grey to reduce visibility at night. Anthracite coal was used because it generated little or no smoke, and the smokestacks could be telescoped down to stubs.

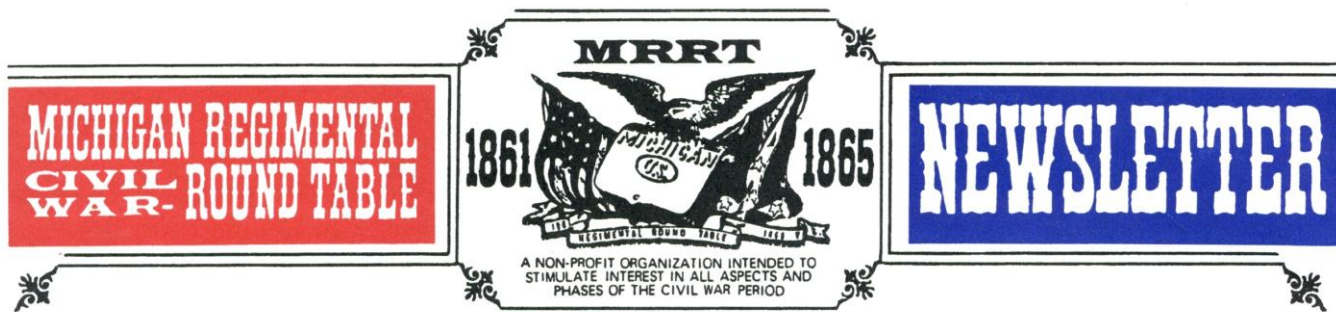
The blockade runners had little trouble with the dangerous offshore shoals and sandbars. The numerous unemployed licensed coastal pilots were able to take the ships in through channels that the Federal ships were unable to navigate.

The two major ports involved in the blockade running trade were Nassau, the Bahamas, and Wilmington, North Carolina.

Nassau, Bahamas

Before the Civil War, Nassau, the Bahamas, was a sleepy town where little happened. **Once the war began, Nassau became the most important station on the sea road to the Confederacy.** This meant that fortunes could be made quicker than any place else. The harbor was packed with ships, and the wharves were piled up with freight. Men with money to spend and little time to spend it crowded the streets, inns and bars.

Nassau was a neutral port within easy reach of the Confederate coast. The blockade runners picked up their cargoes here, which mostly came from England. They also delivered the cotton which the world wanted so much.



The profits were unimaginable. Freight charges in Confederate imports were as much as fifty pounds sterling per ton, sometimes up to eighty or one hundred pounds. **A cargo of five hundred bales of cotton could earn fifty pounds for each bale.** Sailors made the unheard amount of \$100 for a round trip plus a \$50 bonus. A ship captain could earn \$5,000 for a round trip plus carry some freight on his own account, a license to print money. Toothbrushes could be sold for seven times their cost. Corset stays could be bought in Liverpool for twenty-seven cents apiece and then sold in Wilmington for three dollars.

During the War 397 ships sailed from the Confederacy to Nassau. The return trip to the Confederacy included 588 ships. A trip from Charleston, South Carolina to Nassau required 48 hours of sailing to cover five hundred miles.

Wilmington, North Carolina

Wilmington was located on the Cape Fear River, the hardest river on the coast for the Federal Navy to occupy. **The main entrance, protected by a dangerous shoal, was guarded by Fort Fisher. The Fort was so strong that the Federals did not try to capture it until 1865. Batteries guarded the little inlets. The Confederates had signal stations all along the coast to tell the blockade-runners the best route to take. The Federal Navy could slow down the traffic but could never stop it.**



Wilmington (map left) became what we call a “gold-rush” town. It was one of the busiest and most important places in the Confederacy. Speculators came from all over the Confederacy for the weekly auctions of luxury goods. As usual in a boom town, rogues were up to no good. It was unsafe to go on the streets after dark, murders and robberies were common, and in the daytime, there were fights between the sailors from the merchant ships (most of whom had plenty of money) and the soldiers stationed in Wilmington. Agents and employees of the importing companies lived very well. Food prices increased so much that they were out of the reach of ordinary citizens. During the summer of 1862 yellow fever broke out, probably because of non-enforcement of ordinary sanitation procedures.

The Wilmington Ladies’ Committee set up to provide meals for soldiers on sick leave was better financed than any other committee in the Confederacy. The soldiers who ate at the long tables in the railroad station ate very well.

Across the river from the city, steam cotton presses were set up, and here the outward-bound steamers received the cargos. The wharves were heavily guarded to prevent the escape of men trying to avoid conscription.

Trade created another opportunity to become rich. Cotton trading between the North and South became a major industry during the War. A future article in the newsletter will discuss the serious issues involved in cotton trading.