

Vol LXIV, #2

Michigan Regimental Round Table Newsletter—Page 1

February 2024

MEMBER RENEWAL

The MRRT celebrates its 64th year in 2024 – 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 February meeting will be on Monday, February 26, 2024, at 6:30 pm in the basement of the Farmington Library – corner of Grand River and Farmington Road. Our speaker, Dan Packer from Livonia, will begin around 7:00 pm after a 6:30 pm business meeting. We must leave the library by 8:45 pm.

Great news! Long-time members, Ken Baumann, and Don Kadar attended our January meeting. Both are doing well!

During our January meeting we had our first discussion of this year's trip destination. The three locations nominated were (in alphabetical order) Bentonville and Durham Station, North Carolina, Franklin, Tennessee (which would include Stones River, Spring Hill, and Nashville), and Gettysburg. We will have some more discussion and most likely a final vote. Please nominate another site if you desire to go there.

The Roundtable has a great new 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.

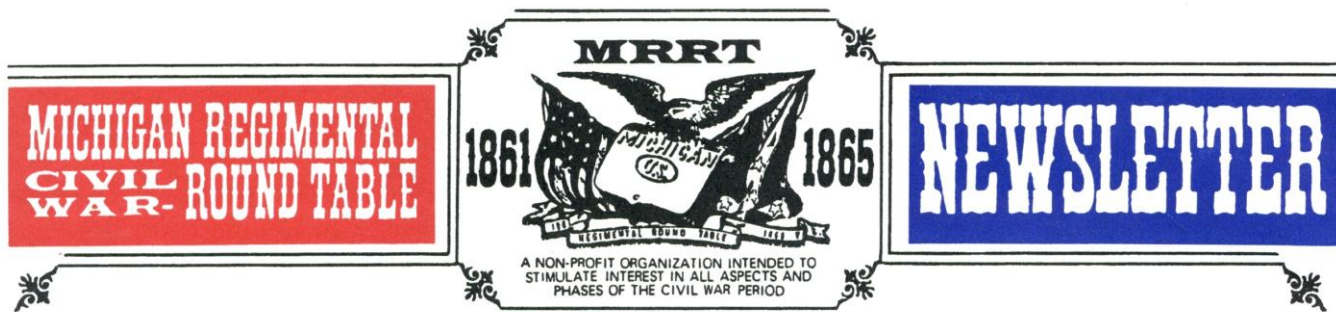
The Roundtable is proud to welcome back Dan Packer of Livonia as our February 2024 speaker. Dan will speak on "Lasalle Corbell Pickett & Elizabeth Bacon Custer the Guardian Widows. Lasalle Corbell Pickett, widow of General George Pickett and Elizabeth Bacon Custer, widow of Colonel George Armstrong Custer, became the guardians of their deceased husband's reputations. Through their own writings, orations and lectures they sought to portray their respective husband's military reputations in the most positive manner including creating, embellishing, and sometimes omitting the truth. Both women authored several books about their husband's military careers that were well received when published but falter under the scrutiny of critics and the other personages that were part of the legends they portrayed. Dan will discuss the bending and omission of facts in their books and why they desperately cling to their husband's legends that they help create. **This will be an educational and entertaining presentation!**

Dan previously spoke to our group on Confederate General John Mosby and the Assassination of President Lincoln. Dan volunteers at the Plymouth Historical Museum and the Yankee Air Force Museum in Willow Run after retiring from the IRS. He is a Vietnam veteran. He and wife Lena live in Livonia.

January 2024 Speaker - Tom Nanzig's presentation of Civil War Tales with a Twist was thoroughly enjoyed by the MRRT as evidenced by the considerable number of questions and comments at the end of his remarks. Tom said the idea of presenting these kinds of little-known facts came from a FAQ column he wrote for the Ann Arbor Round Table newsletter. This talk was the third such 10-Facts presentation he has given.

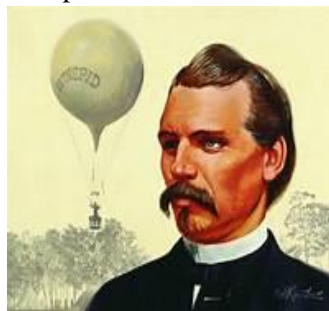
The ten stories he presented included:

- At the beginning of the 19th Century, a Scottish pastor who happened to be an avid bird hunter, decided to improve on the flintlock ignition system used to fire his shotgun. In windy, rainy Scotland, **the flintlock design**



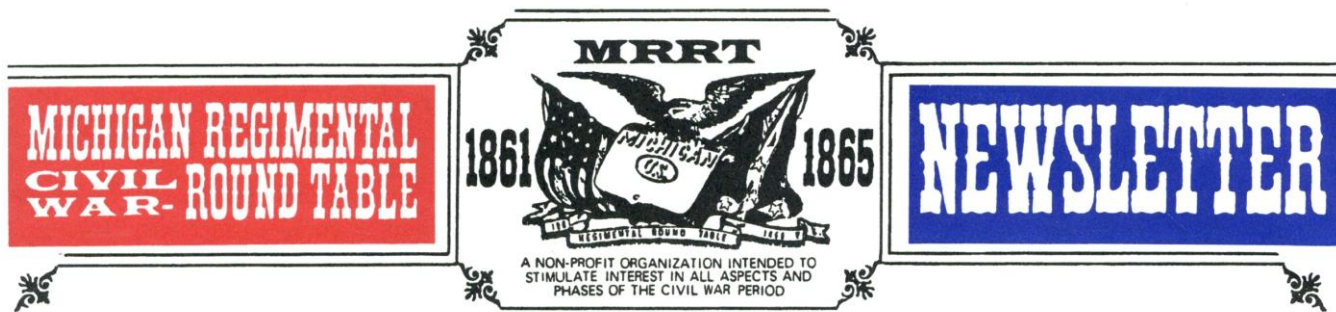
was **unreliable** and slow. He developed what was called the “scent bottle” design (after its shape) which enclosed the primer in a bottle shaped device replacing the flint and the pan. Around 1816, this was improved on by the expendable primer filled metal cap which all Civil War enthusiasts known as the **percussion cap**. **Tom suggested that the Civil War was therefore fought with “cap guns”!**

- Thomas Corwin, a prominent politician from Ohio, attempted to mollify the southern states who were leaving the Union in early 1861 by introducing a draft **13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution which would strictly reserve the right to regulate the status of slavery to the states rather than the Federal government**. Although it passed both houses of Congress, it was never ratified by enough states, and was replaced by the “real” 13th Amendment which **prohibited slavery**.
- Traditionally, the opening shot of the Civil War was fired at Ft. Sumter in April 1861. There is however evidence that **a brief exchange of small arms fire took place in January** between Florida militia and the Federal garrison of **Fort Pickens in Pensacola harbor**. Ft. Pickens was the only one of three installations guarding the harbor still occupied at that time. An uneasy standoff continued there until the real beginning of the war at Charleston.



- **Thaddeus Lowe, the famous American balloonist** (picture left), **nearly became an early casualty of the war**. He set out in his balloon from Cincinnati in April 1861 to cross the mountains to travel to Washington, but adverse winds pushed his balloon south instead and he wound up landing in South Carolina. **There he was arrested as a spy but saved by a person who had witnessed one of his early flights**. Sent to Columbia, he was again arrested and again saved, this time by the president of the University of South Carolina.

- **There is an enduring tale of “Stonewall” Jackson sucking on a lemon** as he discussed affairs in the Shenandoah Valley with Richard Taylor, President Zackary Taylor’s son, and a Confederate general. While there is no definitive proof that this ever happened, devoted **Jackson fans continue to leave lemons on his gravestone** as a remembrance.
- **Elon Farnsworth, born in Michigan, joined the army in the 1850s** after being expelled from the University of Michigan after a fatality at his fraternity house. **General Judson Kilpatrick and Captain Farnsworth engaged (so the story goes) in an intense argument at Gettysburg** after Kilpatrick ordered Farnsworth to charge a Confederate position. Farnsworth made the charge, which failed, and was killed along with some of his troopers. **The story of the argument came from a Confederate source who claimed he had heard voices from the Union lines**. The legend of the argument grew from this slender evidence.
- The oft-told tale of **Gouverneur Warren’s** action on Little Round top includes his ordering a cannon shell fired into what he thought were hidden rebel positions and observing the sun glinting off their bayonets as they reacted to the shell. Scientific experiments have shown that the sun was in the wrong position to reflect onto Little Round Top at the time of day the episode took place. Instead, **signal corps personnel on the hill contended that Warren was made aware of the enemy presence by being grazed by a musket ball** fired from the concealed Confederate position.



- A man named **Walter Williams**, who died in 1959 in Texas, claimed to be the **last surviving Confederate soldier** from the war. His claim has continued to be disputed by some historians, but he was given an elaborate funeral at the time. Another Civil War soldier, 22-year-old **John J. Williams**, may well have been the **last battlefield fatality** of the war, lost in a meaningless fight in May 1865 at Palmetto Ranch in Texas.



- In 1857, a **Cadet named Henry M. Robert** (picture left) **graduated fourth in his class at West Point**. His high standing caused him to be assigned to the engineers. During his various assignments, including during the war, he encountered several occasions where **meetings he attended or even chaired descended into disorder and worse, chaos**. As a result, in 1876, he compiled and published a manual of parliamentary procedures for governing meetings. Still popular today, we know it as **Robert's Rules of Order**.
- In the **Shenandoah Valley**, there is a tradition that **Erwin Rommel**, the famous World War II German military leader, visited the Civil War battlefields in the Valley during the 1930s. This is incorrect as there is no evidence that Rommel ever came to the U.S. However, the Nazi military attaché assigned to the German embassy in Washington prior to the U.S. entry into the war, **Friedrich von Boetticher**, did. It is questionable how much he learned from this; his faulty intelligence reports about the U.S sent back to Berlin painted America as a dissolute, isolationist country incapable of fighting a major war.

We thank Tom for another great presentation!

Quiz Questions: This month's questions pertain to the Common Soldier

1. What was a "*dogrobber*"? A) a company cook B) a common thief C) a mediocre quality of shoes D) a forager
2. What were tenaculum, raspators, catlins, and sounds? A) an artillery apparatus B) nickname for foods C) types of medical instruments D) medical tools
3. What were the standard shoes called, worn by both Confederates and Federals, which came slightly above the ankle and tied at the front? Canned rations were first served during the Civil War. What did the soldiers call canned meat?
4. How much pay did a Union private receive per month in 1861? How much was a Confederate private's pay at this time?
5. What percentage of Union soldiers were foreign born? A) 10% B) 15% C) 20% D) 25% E) 30%

The Colonel Writes – Soldiers had numerous difficulties surviving the War.

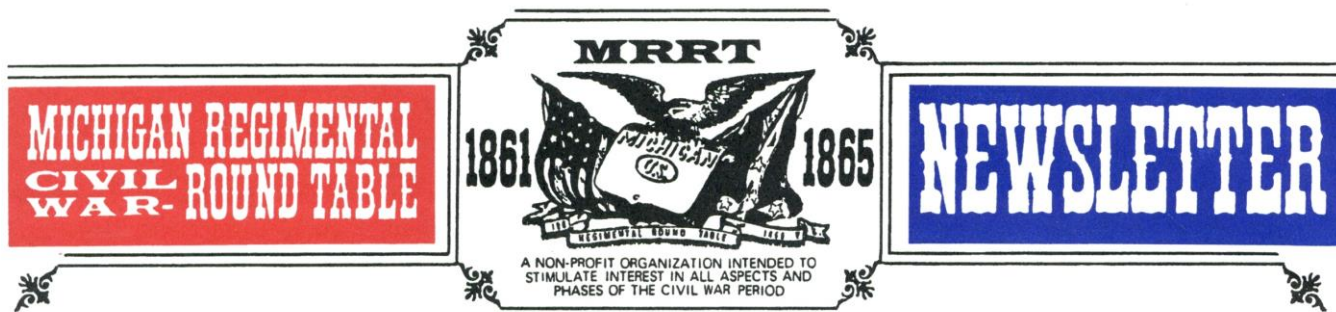
Twenty-fifth Wisconsin, Company G: --"Geo. W. Ide; died June 2, 1864, at Dallas, Ga., of sunstroke."

Fifty-second Indiana, Company B: --"William Tyler; frozen to death near Fort Pillow, December 31, 1863." (The rolls of this company show that Lieutenant Edwin Alexander and five men were frozen to death in a snowstorm on an island in the Mississippi river, while on a scouting expedition.)

First Kentucky Cavalry (Union), Company H: --" Geo. W. Eller; killed Feb. 10, 1863, in a personal difficulty, in Wayne Co., Ky."

Thirty-eighth Ohio, Company K: --" Jacob Thomas; killed Nov. 17, 1861, by the falling of a tree, at Wild Cat, Ky."

Eighth New York, Company A: --"A. Lohman; died of poison while on picket, by drinking from a bottle found at a deserted house."



Thirtieth Wisconsin, Company C: --" E. Olsen; killed in a draft riot, September 10, 1863, at New Lisbon, Wis."
One Hundred and Twelfth Illinois, Company A: - "Lorenzo Brown; kicked to death by a mule at Somerset, Ky., April 23, 1864."
Fifty-sixth New York, Company F: --"John Hoffman; killed by lightning at Cashtown, Maryland."
Fifth New Hampshire, Company G: -- "John Velon; shot for desertion near Petersburg, Va., October 28, 1864."

So, you see, even after you passed your physical examination with the surgeon and passed through some dangerous battles, there were still some risks to soldiering.

Our thanks to Tom Nanzig for another great piece on the war.

Civil War Essentials – Last Civil War Pensioner Dies

Irene Triplett (1930-2020) was the last recipient of a Civil War pension. Her father fought for both the Confederacy and later the Union Army during the war.

She was born in 1930 to Moses Triplett, age 83, and Elida Hall, age 34. She was one of five children, of which only her and a brother survived to adulthood. Moses was 78 years old when he married her mother.

Irene grew up on a farm in North Carolina. She suffered a difficult childhood as she was beaten by both her parents and schoolteachers. Classmates denounced her father as a “*traitor.*”

Irene was mentally disabled. Her education ended in the sixth grade and in 1943, she moved with her mother and father to a poor house, where she lived until 1960. She later lived in private nursing homes until her death in 2020.

After her father died in 1938 at the age of ninety-two, Irene collected a \$73.13 per month pension from the Department of Veterans Affairs. She inherited her father’s pension because of cognitive impairments which she had, qualifying her as the helpless child of a veteran. The total amount of benefits she received was approximately \$73,00, or \$344,000 adjusted for inflation.

After the 2018 death of Fred Upham, the son of William H. Upham, Irene became the last surviving child of a Civil War veteran. William Upham (1841-1942) had a distinguished career. He was wounded and captured at First Bull Run. Later, he was appointed to West Point by President Lincoln. After the war, William was chosen governor of Wisconsin. William married the much younger Grace Mason in 1914, two years after the death of his first wife. His son, Fred Upham (1921-2018), was only three years old when William died. Fred served in the Army Air Corps during World War 2.

The last Confederate widow, Maudie Hopkins, died in 2008 at age 93, while the last Union widow, Gertrude Janeway, died in 2003, also at age 93.

Quiz Answers:

1. A) a company cook
2. D) medical tools
3. “*Davis boots*” and “*Embalmed Beef*”
4. \$13 for the Union private and \$11 for the Confederate private
5. C) Approximately 20% of Federal soldiers were foreign born