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Michigan Regimental Round Table Newsletter—Page 1

March 2022

MEMBER RENEWAL

The MRRT celebrates its 62nd year in 2022 – and now is a great 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**

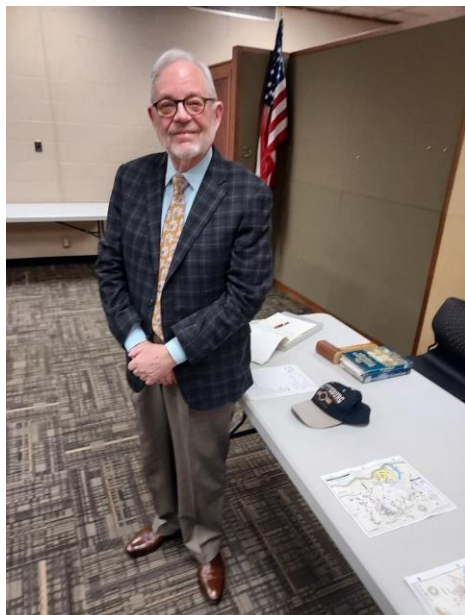
Sadly, Mollie Galate passed away on March 14th after a long illness. Our great friend Mollie was a member for 30 years who served in many functions including Secretary for 20 years, providing refreshments, greeting guests and new members with great enthusiasm, and serving on our trip committee for several years. She will be greatly missed by all of us.

We are very fortunate that our March speaker will be our long-time friend and frequent speaker, David Ingall. David will speak on “*Michigan’s Civil Sites and Stories*”. Even though no Civil War battles were fought in Michigan there are numerous forts, gravesites, markers, monuments, museum exhibits, and still-standing buildings to visit. Examples include the GAR building in Detroit and the Sailors and Soldiers monuments in Detroit and Muskegon. David has spent extensive time researching Monroe County’s role in the Civil War, including that of the Custer family. David has spoken to our group several times on General Custer and is working to maintain the Custer statue in Monroe.

Please visit our great website at <http://www.farmlib.org//mrrt>. Links to interesting Civil War programs are available. Gerald Furi of the Farmington Library is doing a terrific job keeping the website up to date.

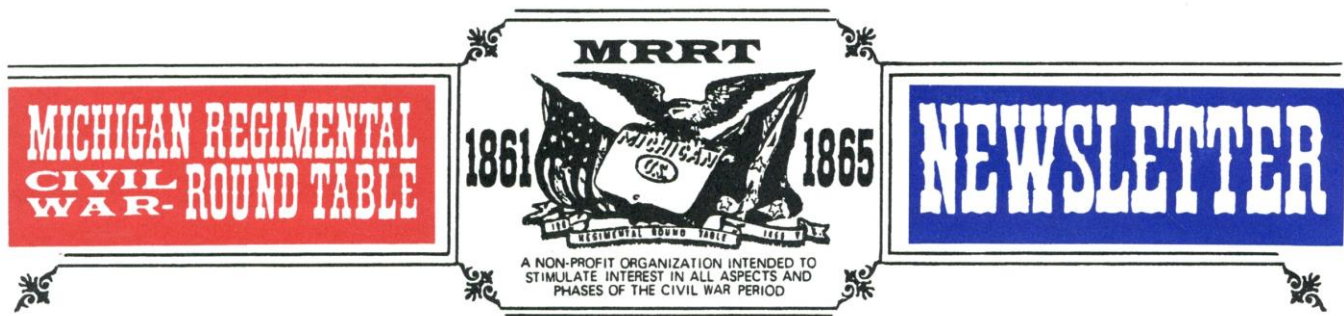
Wearing a mask during our meeting is a personal decision. Masks will be available for your personal use.

February 2022 Speaker – The MRRT was impressed and educated by Bruce Zeller’s presentation of the First American Breakup which detailed the forces and missteps which led to the Civil War. In his presentation, he drew parallels between the divisions running through the country in that pre-war period and the tensions and divisions in present day America.



Initially, two shared values of all (white) Americans were strong enough to bridge the geographic and economic differences between the sections of the country. **These were Exceptionalism-the idea of the degree of freedom enjoyed by Americans and the pride in Democracy, the level of suffrage among white males.** Both were unique to the U.S. in the late 18th and the first half of the 19th centuries. They masked the growing division between the increasingly commercial and industrial north and the agricultural south with its large plantations. As time passed, the rise of cotton as a profitable crop in the early 1800’s meant the need for black slaves in the south expanded rather than diminishing as expected. With the disappearance of slavery in the northern states, resistance to slavery among some northerners appeared. Likewise, the south disliked paying for railroad and canal improvements which mostly benefitted the north.

These tensions came to the surface in 1820 with the **Missouri Crisis. Two camps appeared on the question of admission of Missouri as a state:** southerners led by John Calhoun insisted that slavery should be allowed to spread to new territories while many northern politicians wished to restrict it to the original slave states. An uneasy compromise allowed Missouri in the Union



as a slave state offset by the newly created state of Maine as a free state. Thomas Jefferson coined the phrase “*fire bell in the night*” in a letter in which he expressed his fear that the accomplishments of 1776 would soon be thrown away by the growing passions of the slavery debate.

The proposed addition of the Republic of Texas as a state added to the tensions. Americans, mostly from the south, who had settled in what became Texas in the early 19th Century had ignored the 1821 Mexican Constitution’s prohibition of slavery. They resisted Mexican attempts to free slaves, and this helped cause the rebellion which created the republic. The status of slavery in the Texas Republic made northerners unwilling to support its admission as a state until the threat of British annexation of Texas and President Polk’s trickery regarding the Oregon Territory forced their hand.

Added to slavery was the thorny issue of import tariffs. Intended to help shelter the still-developing industries of the north from foreign competition, they were resented in the south as they raised prices for many goods imported by southerners.

California, acquired during the Mexican War, seemed unlikely to enter into the debate over the extension of slavery to new territories. Congress assumed its population would stay too low to be considered for statehood for many years, but the gold rush brought many Americans to California looking for wealth. Most were northerners. The U.S. military urged creation of a state to rid it of the burden of civil administration there. The debate vexed Congress for nine months and many compromise attempts were put forward.

After the Nashville Convention of nine slave state in June 1850 narrowly defeated a secession proposal, **Congress managed to pass the Compromise of 1850.** It permitted California to become a free state but included several statutes supported by the south. **The most controversial part was the Fugitive Slave Act.** It forced northern police agencies and even individuals to help capture escaped slaves. Most northerners resented and resisted the law.

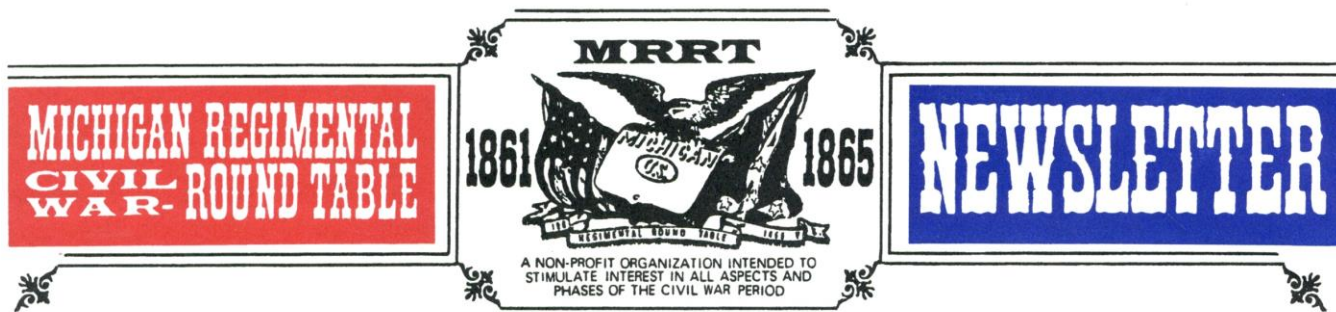
The rapid growth of California drove interest in a transcontinental railroad to connect it with the rest of the country. Stephen Douglas of Illinois promoted Chicago as the eastern terminus, but the south wanted New Orleans. **To help drive the Chicago choice, Douglas sponsored the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act.** The law left the decision on slavery in each new state to the will of the inhabitants – **Popular Sovereignty.**

This proved to be a huge error because people from neighboring states flocked into Kansas to vote illegally. **Violence resulted in “Bleeding Kansas” years before the start of the Civil War.** One of the “Free Soil” proponents was John Brown who committed violence in Kansas and went on to lead the infamous raid at Harper’s Ferry in 1859. His last remarks before he was executed aroused abolitionists and infuriated slave owners.

The **Lecompton Constitution**, which was intended to protect slavery in Kansas, was passed by a tainted vote. Although endorsed by President Buchanan, it was rejected by the Congress.

The violent confrontation between pro and anti-slavery factions even extended to Congress when, in May 1856, **Preston Brooks, a South Carolina Representative, brutally attacked noted abolitionist Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts, with a walking cane** because of Sumner’s recent anti-slavery speech.

The final major miscalculation leading to the war would be that of **Chief Justice Roger Taney** and the majority of the U.S. Supreme Court who ruled in 1857 that **blacks, such as Dred Scout, were not citizens of the U.S.** and thus had no legal rights. **They also opined that the Federal Government lacked authority to prevent slavery in any state or territory.**



These trends and political missteps led to the most destructive war in U.S. history. **Do present tensions and divisions in the U.S. portend another civil war?**

Quiz Questions: This month's questions pertain to the state of Michigan during the Civil War:

1. What is the claim to fame of the 4th Michigan Cavalry's Lt. Col. Benjamin Pritchard of Allegan? Also, what was Orlando LaValley of the 23rd Michigan Infantry's claim-to-fame?
2. Who commanded the 24th Michigan Infantry of the famous Iron Brigade and was wounded and captured at Gettysburg? What distinct honor was given to the 24th Michigan at the war's end?
3. Which major event occurred, beginning on March 6, 1863, in Detroit and what precipitated it?
4. Which doctor graduated from the University of Michigan's medical school in 1860, eventually became surgeon of the 5th Michigan Infantry, and after the war was a member of the Detroit Board of Education and a founder of Wayne State University? What famous song did his wife, Winifred Lee, write?
5. Which famous Detroiter, Lt. Col. Of the 6th Michigan Cavalry and Colonel of the 5th Michigan Cavalry, was severely wounded at Boonsboro, Maryland? Which important government post did he hold during the Spanish-American War?

Our thanks to "Old Sarge" for his help with these great questions.

Civil War Essentials – A Train Collision on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad

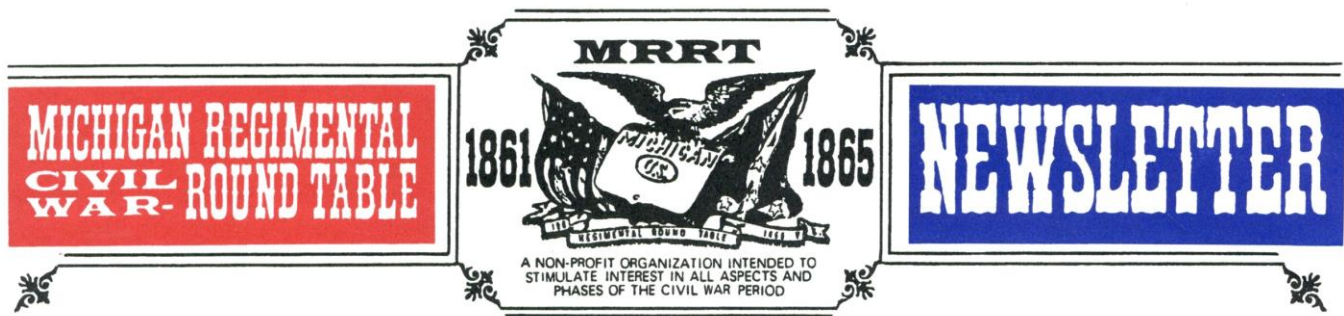
Railroad travel was much more dangerous during the Civil War than it is today, 160 years later. Railroad travel during the War involved risking life and limb in traveling from one city to another. Civil War accidents usually occurred when carrying men to and from the war. An accident on October 24, 1864, was especially difficult for one town and one Union regiment.

The Sixth West Virginia Infantry (Union) was known as the largest infantry regiment recruited for Union Army during the War. The regiment had company names running from A to P while most infantry regiments had companies going from A to only K (J was excluded from company designations). The Sixth was the size of most brigades. Nicknamed the "B&O Regiment" the Sixth West Virginia was broken for the entirety of its service, with companies used as guards along the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, from south of Cumberland, Maryland, stretching west to the Ohio River, approximately a distance of 200 miles.

Company F of the 6th West Virginia was unique. The company was organized in September 1861 at Rowlesburg, West Virginia, a crucial location. There were three important bridges there, one crossing the Cheat River, another crossing Buckeye Ravine, and the third at Tray Run. The Tray Run viaduct was a very impressive engineering feat, running 445 feet long and standing 54 feet off the ground. Confederate General Robert E. Lee said that severing the B&O at the Cheat River "worth to us an army."

Company F was comprised mainly of railroad workers from Rowlesburg and would spend the entire war stationed at Rowlesburg. This meant that they were guarding their homes and livelihood. This area was quiet most of the most until the war eventually found them.

Confederate General John D. Imboden and 300 cavalymen captured 34 men of the Company at St. George, Virginia. The captives were paroled immediately but would need three months to be exchanged and return to the regiment. Another attack occurred on April 26, 1863, when Confederates under General William "Grumble" Jones tried to destroy the B&O infrastructure at Rowlesburg. The 6th West Virginia successfully saved the railroad structures.



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Most of Company F decided not to reenlist when their term of service expired on October 18, 1864. When they did not receive their final paycheck, they decided to go to the paymaster. On October 23, 1864, twenty-one men from Company F boarded a train bound for Wheeling, where they would be paid off. Several officers, civilians and railroad employees were also aboard the train.

Approximately 2:00 am on October 24th the train was passing through Grovers Gap, the westbound passenger train collided with an eastbound train filled with horseflesh. This section of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad was dangerous as four serious accidents occurred there during the War. The accident was attributed to a time difference kept by the two conductors, a major issue before the age of standardized time.

The accident scene was described as “*most terrible one*” with “*the shrieks of the wounded and the general alarm and confusion.*” Men and animals were thrown into the air or crushed by twisted wreckage. Almost everyone in the passenger car was seriously injured, with most of the wounds being life threatening. The Sixth lost one man killed, three mortally wounded, and sixteen others seriously injured plus three deaths in the B&O crew.

Only one man would walk away from the accident uninjured. Medical attention would not arrive for seven hours. Several survivors required many months to recover. Private Phillip Lynch suffered a compound fracture of his left leg, deep lacerations and scalding on the right leg, and died comatose ten days after the accident. Corporal Henry Felton Sr. was 63 years old (he lied about his age when he enlisted) at the time of the accident. He died from four fractured ribs and a dislocated sternum.

Today, there is no sign erected recognizing that this horrific train accident happened.

Quiz Answers:

1. His unit captured Jefferson Davis at the end of the war, and he was Michigan’s last surviving soldier, dying on April 19, 1948, exactly five months before his 100th birthday.
2. Henry A. Morrow and the regiment was chosen as the Military Escort for Lincoln’s funeral procession as it passed through Springfield, Illinois.
3. Riot in which some Blacks were beaten and killed with the Negro section of the city burned. A Black man, William Faulkner, was falsely accused of raping a white child.
4. Dr. Henry F. Lyster and “*Michigan, My Michigan*”.
5. Russell A. Alger (the wife of late member Hudson Mead was descended from Russell) and Secretary of War

Civil War Note – Artillery Shell Found at Kennesaw Mountain A group of professional archeologists discovered an unexploded Civil War era artillery shell within the boundaries of Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park during March 2022. The team was surveying the route for a new hiking trail using approved metal detecting devices to protect themselves and future visitors. The discovered 10-pound Parrott shell had an un-ignited fuse still attached. The Cobb County Police sent a bomb squad for the removal of the shell for disarming and artifact preservation. The shell was found only ten inches below the ground’s surface.