

Vol LXIV, #3

Michigan Regimental Round Table Newsletter—Page 1

March 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 March meeting will be on Monday, March 25, 2024, at 6:30 pm in the basement of the Farmington Library – corner of Grand River and Farmington Road. Our speaker, Kim Crawford from Clarkston, will begin around 7:00 pm after our 6:30 pm business meeting. We must leave the library by 8:45 pm.**

**During our February meeting we voted on this year’s trip destination. Franklin, Tennessee (which would also include Stones River, Spring Hill, and Nashville), was the winner. Linda will be working on the planning of our trip to this great Civil War location.**

**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 Kim Crawford of Clarkston as our March 2024 speaker. Kim will speak on “The Fourth Michigan Infantry.”** The 4<sup>th</sup> Michigan was mustered into service in Adrian, MI on June 20, 1861, with 1025 men. The regiment participated with the Army of the Potomac in the 1862 Peninsula Campaign in 1862. The regiment suffered 263 casualties during this bloody campaign. The fourth was held in reserve during the Antietam battle and then suffered fourteen casualties at the battle of Fredericksburg.

The regiment’s biggest battle was in the Wheatfield at Gettysburg, PA on July 2, 1863. Commander Colonel Harrison Jeffords rallied the regiment when it was surrounded. Colonel Jeffords was killed there at the age of twenty-six. The regiment suffered 165 casualties during the Gettysburg battle.

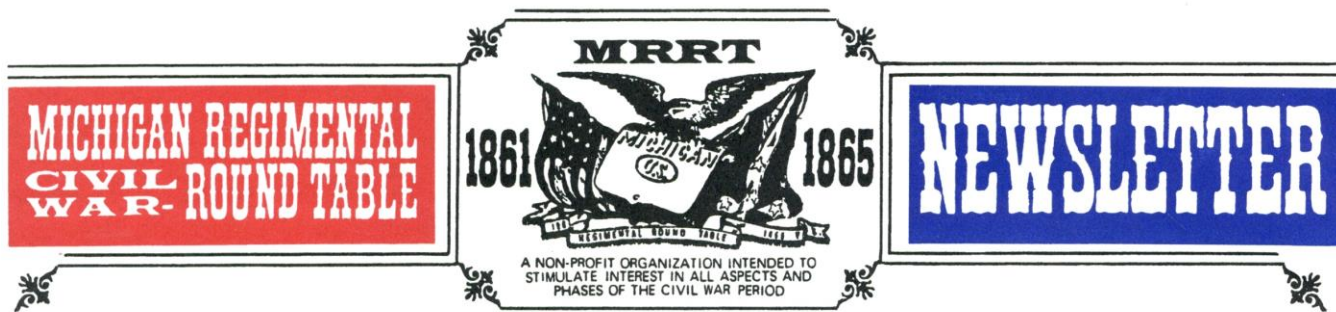
The 1864 campaign began with 150 men returning home to Michigan as they decided to not reenlist. After heavy casualties in May and June 1864 the regiment was combined with the 1<sup>st</sup> Michigan.

Kim and Marty Bertera wrote, “*The 4<sup>th</sup> Michigan Infantry in the Civil War*” and Kim also wrote, “*The 16<sup>th</sup> Michigan Infantry in the Civil War*” and “*The Daring Trader: Jacob Smith in the Michigan Territory*”, all published by MSU Press. He has authored articles for Michigan History magazine.

**This will be an educational and entertaining presentation.**

**February 2024 Speaker – The Roundtable thanks Dan Packer for his educational and enlightening presentation of “Lasalle (Sally) Corbell Pickett & Elizabeth Bacon Custer: The Guardian Widows”.** These two women became the guardians of their deceased husband’s reputations,

**Elizabeth Bacon Custer** Elizabeth (Libby) authored several books on her husband, George Custer. She wrote Boots and Saddles in 1885, Tenting on the Plains (1887) and Following the Guidon (1890), to glorify her husband’s memory. She also authored articles and gave lectures extolling the legacy of George Custer. Both George Custer and George Pickett finished last in their class at West Point. Confederate General Henry Heth, also of Gettysburg “fame”, was George Pickett’s first cousin and last in his class at West Point.



**Boots and Saddles** did not discuss three major events in George Custer's military career. During 1867, he went AWOL to visit Libby (picture left), six hundred miles away. He was found guilty at his court-martial and was suspended from the Army for one year. During the 1868 Battle of Washita, a cavalry charge resulted in Chief Black Kettle and indeterminate number of men, women and children were killed. The Indians said that eleven warriors were killed, and the remaining ninety-two dead were women and children. Custer sent Major Joel Elliott and twenty men to chase the retreating Indians. The Indians turned on the soldiers and killed all of them. Custer withdrew without determining the fate of Elliott's. This created a deep resentment among the other officers that never healed. The Battle of the Little Big Horn was also not discussed in **Boots and Saddles**.

**Tenting on the Plains** discussed the Battle of Washita in one sentence and the Battle of the Little Big Horn was covered in two paragraphs. The AWOL episode was not discussed. Her third book, **Following the Guidon** included fifteen pages discussing the bad winter conditions at the Battle of Washita. The

Little Big Horn was written about in this book.

Libby toured the country to honor George's memory. General Custer's statue of him on his horse at the Battle of Gettysburg was dedicated in Monroe with President Taft and 15,000 to 20,000 visitors on June 4, 1910. Her dream was realized.

Libby died in 1933, four days short of her 91<sup>st</sup> birthday with an estate of \$100,000. Her regret was that she did not have a son to continue George's name.

**LaSalle Corbell Pickett** (picture right) In her autobiography, **LaSalle (Sally)** wrote that she met her future husband, George Pickett, at age nine. George said that she will be a little girl and his wife. George was 23 years older than Sally. George's first wife was also named Sally. LaSalle later wrote several versions of this story.

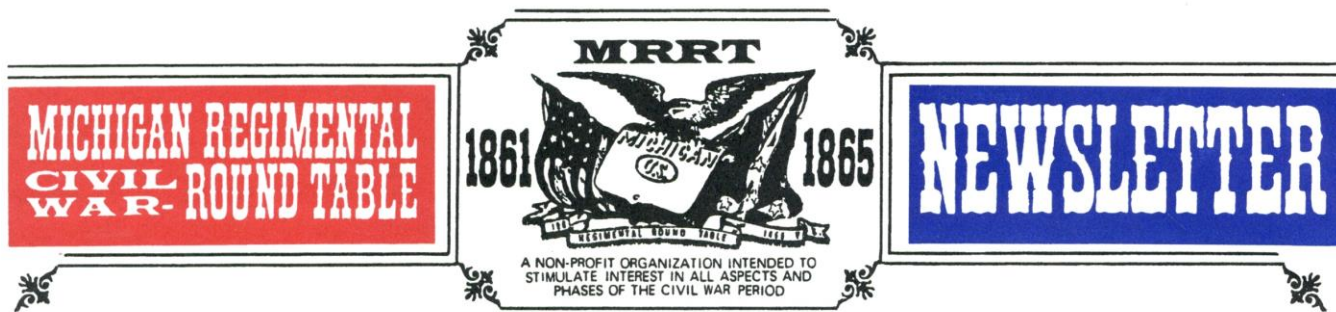
George, of course, was most famous for his role in Pickett's charge. After the shad bake disaster at the Battle of Five Forks in April 1865, General Lee exclaimed at Appomattox, "Why is he here?" One month after the surrender, Pickett spent several months in Canada. George claimed that Abraham Lincoln was an "old friend," and that President Grant had offered him a position after the war.

George died in 1875, leaving Sally in debt and with a 10-year-old son. She then started writing about 34 years after the war ended. She spent the remainder of her life, until 1931, honoring her husband and shaping his image as a Confederate hero. Sally was not always sure of fact and fiction in her writing.

Her first book was **Pickett and His Men (1899)**. George had come under scrutiny for his failure at Gettysburg. Sally transformed him into an ideal "Lost Cause" hero. Present day Civil War historian Gary Gallagher wrote that Sally plagiarized significant portions of this book.

Gary also wrote that Sally fabricated her entire wartime correspondence with George. She wrote **The Heart of a Soldier, As Revealed in the Intimate Letters of General George E. Pickett (1913)**. Sally wrote at least twelve books, including **Yule Log (1900)** and **Bugles of Gettysburg**. Thank you, Dan.





### Civil War Essentials: USS Hartford – Farragut’s Workhorse



The *USS Hartford* (pictured left) became famous as the ship used by David Farragut as his flagship during the Civil War. She represented the latest incarnation of the wooden steam sloop of war used by the US Navy. Five such ships, which were completed a few years before the southern states started to secede, were identified as the *Hartford* class. Such was the tension in Washington at this time that some southern senators refused to approve the ships until they confirmed that they drew too much water to be able to enter most southern ports.

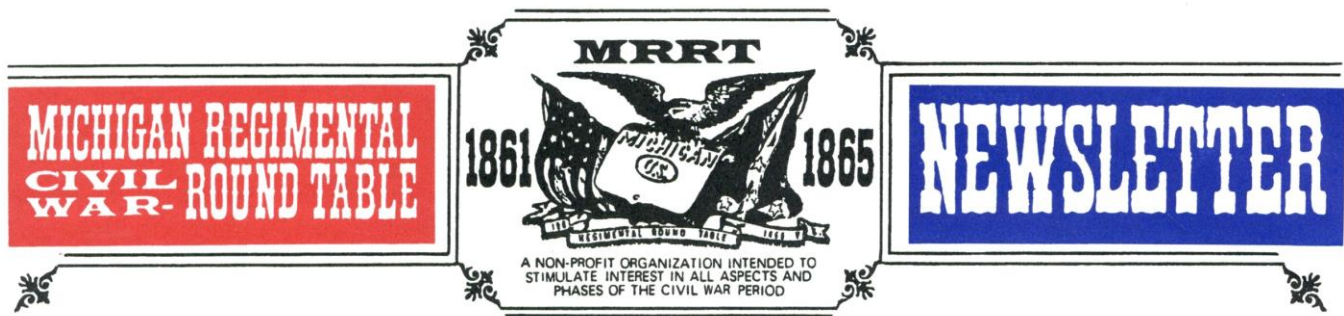
**These sloops of war were ocean going ships with three masts and a full sailing rig, but they also had a steam driven propeller (see photo of model) for maneuvering in port or during actual combat.** The sails were used during long voyages at sea since the steam engines of the era were too inefficient to be

able to propel the ship for exceptionally long distances without running out of fuel. As a result, these ships needed both traditional sailors and an engine room gang. Most of their armament was arranged along each side of the ship’s single gun deck so that one side or the other had to be presented to a target to hit it.

**The *Hartford* herself was 225 feet long and displaced 2,900 tons.** Initially she carried twenty-four guns, twenty of which were 9-inch Dahlgren smooth bores – her armament would be altered during her career. She was launched at the Boston Naval Yard in November 1858 and commissioned the following May. During the period between her commissioning and the outbreak of the Civil War, she served in East Asia as flagship of the East India Squadron (the peacetime Navy had six squadrons of which only one was stationed in home waters).



**At the outbreak of war, the *Hartford* sailed back to the US to become the flagship of the West Gulf Blockading Squadron where David Glasgow Farragut would make her a household name in the North.** After assembling a fleet including mortar boats under David Porter, Farragut planned to enter the Mississippi River and attack the city of New Orleans. To do so, the fleet had to pass over the mud bank (referred to as the *bar*) deposited at the mouths of the river. The larger sea going ships like the *Hartford* could do this only with great difficulty because of their deeper drafts. Guns and other heavy material had to be removed from these ships to raise them enough to pass over the bar and then remounted once they were in the river. Only the 4780-ton *USS Colorado* proved unable to enter the river even after



having every movable item removed.

**In mid-April 1862, Farragut's fleet began the bombardment of two forts – Jackson and St Philip.** (picture bottom of page 3). These masonry forts were located about one quarter of the way from the mouth of the river to the city. They were sited across the river from each other to prevent enemy ships from passing upriver. After the mortars had pounded them for days with limited effect, Farragut led his fleet past them at night on April 24. Despite the heavy cannon fire from the forts as well as fire rafts and a Confederate ironclad, the fleet succeeded in passing them with only moderate damage and casualties.

**The most dangerous moment for the *Hartford* was when it temporarily grounded on a mud bank and a rebel tug pushed a blazing fire raft against it.** Both Farragut and Hartford's crew kept their nerve. The ship backed away off the bank, its guns drove the tug and fire raft away, and the fires on board were quickly extinguished. The next day the fleet arrived at New Orleans and the biggest city in the south was Confederate no more. Baton Rouge and Natchez were both quickly captured but Vicksburg proved to be a tough nut to crack. Its defensive batteries were mounted so high on bluffs above the river that the Union fleet's guns could not be elevated enough to fire at them. Although the *Hartford* and the other ships of Farragut's fleet were able to assist in cutting off supplies for Vicksburg, the capture of the city would have to be accomplished later by the army.

**After the Mississippi was opened, Farragut transferred his attention to Mobile, Alabama,** a port, and a manufacturing center. On August 5, 1864, he led a fleet of wooden warships and monitors into Mobile Bay to cut off the city from the Gulf. The *Hartford*, which had had some of its Dahlgrens replaced by two 100 lb. Parrott rifles, was again his flagship. It was positioned just behind Brooklyn which led to the file of wooden ships. The lead monitor *Tecumseh*, the last Union warship to arrive before the battle, struck an underwater torpedo (mine) which opened an enormous hole in its hull. It sank so quickly that it took most of its crew with it. This disaster caused consternation in the fleet and the *Brooklyn*, and other ships slowed or stopped. **Farragut famously is said to have ordered, "Damn the torpedoes, four bells, Captain Drayton, go ahead."** His luck and Hartford's luck held as the rest of the torpedoes failed to detonate. The fleet entered the Bay where in a desperate battle it defeated the small Confederate fleet led by the ironclad *CSS Tennessee*. Soon after, the forts guarding the Bay were forced to surrender.



**Mobile Bay proved to be the last combat action for Hartford.** + It returned to New York for repairs and refurbishment then sailed to the Pacific where it remained until 1887. It was rebuilt at Mare Island Naval Yard near San Francisco in the 1890's then transferred to the Atlantic where it was used as a training ship. Its final decommission took place in 1926. Various parts of the ship reside in museums and parks around the country (left - photo of the 9-inch Dahlgren at Mackinaw City). **Sadly, the *USS Hartford* itself was allowed to deteriorate and sank at its berth in 1956, 98 years after it was built.**