

Vol LXIII, #4

Michigan Regimental Round Table Newsletter—Page 1

April 2023

MEMBER RENEWAL

The MRRT celebrates its 63rd year in 2023 – 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**. Cash or checks to pay for membership are always welcome at our meetings.

Sadly, long-time member and friend Chuck DuCharme, 83, passed away on March 28, 2023. Chuck enjoyed our meetings and field trips for many years. He was one of our long-time Grosse Pointe members. A memorial service will be held on Friday, May 12, 2023, at 11:00 AM at Gross Pointe Memorial Church in Grosse Pointe Farms. Our deepest sympathies to his family and Mary Jo.

Our April 2023 meeting will be on Monday, April 24, 2023, at 6:30 pm in the basement of the Farmington Library – corner of Grand River and Farmington Road. **Our speaker, John Simmons from Grand Rapids, MI,** will probably begin his presentation shortly after 7:00 pm after completion of the 6:30 pm business meeting. **We must leave the library by 8:45 pm.**

The Roundtable's great website is 20 years old in 2023. Please visit our website at <http://www.farmlib.org/mrrt>

Update on Fall 2023 Roundtable Trip – An initial vote on our Fall trip destination was held.

The “finalists” include Vicksburg, the Nashville Area (Stones River, Franklin, Spring Hill), and Mobile Bay. We plan to have the final vote for our destination at the April meeting.

The Roundtable is proud to welcome back as our speaker, John Simmons from Grand Rapids, who will speak on “General John Bell Hood”. John will discuss General Hood, one of the best fighters and controversial members of the Confederate army. Previously, John shared with us the interesting story of “*Gettysburg: The Civilian Viewpoint*”. John is an active member of the Grand Rapids Roundtable. He is retired from the food business.

March 2023 Speaker – Ken Baumann

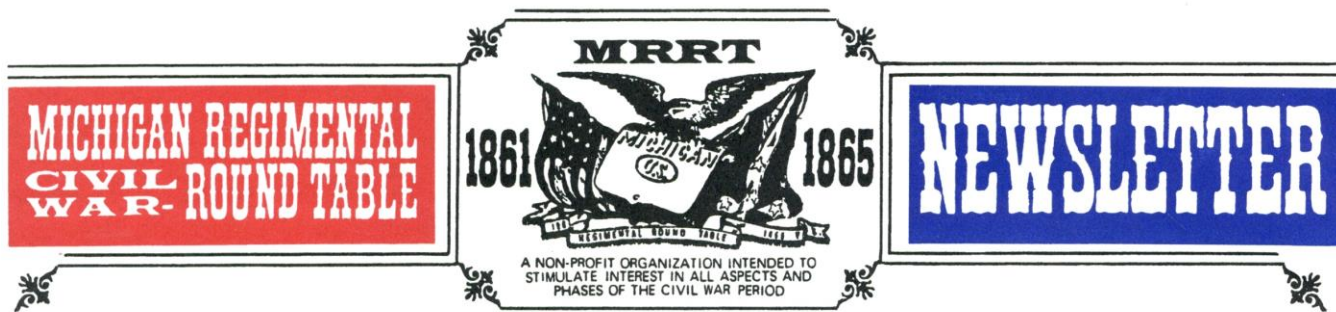
The Roundtable thanks Ken Bauman for his outstanding presentation on “The Heavy Battery” at Fort Donelson & Shiloh”. Edward McAllister of Plainfield, Illinois wrote a manuscript detailing the Civil War activities of the Plainfield Light Artillery, which was founded in 1855 with just one artillery gun to its name.

The Plainfield Light Artillery was organized for three months service on April 19, 1861, one week after Fort Sumter surrendered. After the three months expired, McAllister reorganized the battery. The unit went to Fort Defiance, north of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, which led them to participating in the Battle of Belmont, Missouri with General Grant.

Next were the battles at Fort Henry and Donelson. Their 24-pound guns destroyed several Confederate guns at Donelson. **The unit then participated in the Battle of Shiloh, one of the bloodiest battles of the war, as a member of McClermand' s Corps.**

The battery protected the left flank of the Corps, keeping the field clear. The battle raged continuously for two hours. The unit's men and officers were cool and determined. Sargeant Major Cooper brought up ammunition when needed. There was little protection from the musketry and artillery fire. Horses were killed or badly wounded. The Confederate 7th Tennessee Infantry lost 158 men when they attacked the battery.

The battery moved 400-500 yards beyond the line of battle. They were the last Union battery to reach Pittsburg Landing, where their monument is located today.



On the 2nd Day of the Battle of Shiloh, the battery defeated a Confederate battery. Both the men and horses were very tired from the battle. **The unit used 14,700 lbs. of ammunition at Shiloh, more than any other artillery unit. We thank Ken.**

Quiz Questions: This month's questions pertain to Michigan in Civil War.

1. How many Michigan men are buried in the Gettysburg cemetery? A) 107 B) 212 C) 415 D) 621 E) 97 and how many Michigan men are known to be buried in the Andersonville Cemetery? A) 1103 B) 291 C) 735 D) 954 and E) 421
2. Which two women wrote the lyrics to the song, "*Michigan, My Michigan*"? In which Detroit newspaper did the words of the song first appear on April 20, 1863?
3. Which radical Michigan Senator stated on February 11, 1861, "*Without a little blood-letting, this Union will not, in my estimation, be worth a rush*"?
4. Of whom was Governor Austin Blair referring to when he dejectedly asked President Lincoln, "*Why not try another man*"?
5. Which Michigan politician is credited with persuading John C. Fremont to withdraw from the Presidential race of 1864? Although the Michigan delegation at the Republican or Union Party convention of 1864 cast its 16 votes unanimously for President Lincoln's re-nomination, which candidate did it strongly support for Vice-President?

We thank "Old Sarge" for these questions and answers.

Civil War Essentials – Ranald S. Mackenzie – Capable but Unlucky

At the March MRRT meeting, Al Diebel mentioned an Army office named Mackenzie in his fascinating book report about the Comanche Indians – this is a brief summary of that officer's career.

Ranald (not Ronald) Mackenzie was a Union officer who performed very credibly during both the Civil War and in the fighting with the plains Indians after the war. **He was also a magnet for bullets and suffered many combat injuries** which may have contributed to his mental decline and early death.

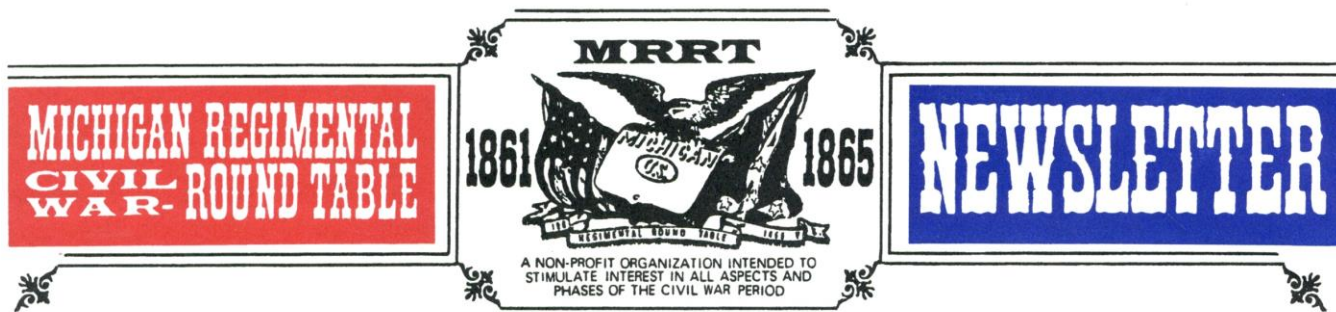
New York native Mackenzie was born in 1840 into a family which produced other notables – his father and brother (both named Alexander) were naval officers, and his uncle was John Slidell, the Confederate envoy to the French court during the war. After attending Williams College for several years, he was then admitted to West Point. **Mackenzie graduated in 1862 at the top of his class was assigned to the engineers** as were most of the top-ranked graduates in each class.



Ranald Mackenzie in the Civil War

Mackenzie fought in most of the battles in the eastern theater, starting with 2nd Bull Run. He was wounded three times by mid-1864, including losing several fingers of his right hand at Jerusalem Plank Road. At some point, possibly from his post-war Indian adversaries, he acquired the nickname "*Bad Hand*" from this wound. He took command of a Connecticut Heavy Artillery regiment in July 1864. **As part of the VI Corps, he helped stop General Jubal Early from entering Washington and went on to a brigade command in the same corps.**

He was wounded twice more, the second time a serious lung wound at Ceder Creek. He was promoted to Brigadier General of Volunteers in early 1865 and led the cavalry of the Army of the James in the battles at Five Forks and Appomattox. **U.S. Grant wrote that he considered Ranald Mackenzie to be ". . . the most promising young officer in the army" who had not achieved high public**



recognition because he only achieved corps command late in the conflict. Grant added “*This he did on his own merit and without influence.*”

Ranald Mackenzie in the Indian Wars

Post-war, he was promoted to brevet Major General of Volunteers backdated to March 1865, an honor, but he was returned to his regular army rank of captain. **He fought successfully against the Plains Indians, an almost unique record among Civil War generals.** Initially he commanded a regiment of Buffalo Soldiers, something most officers refused to do. He suffered a final (arrow) wound during one of these campaigns. He won several battles against Cheyenne, Kiowas and Comanches including the September 1874 Battle of Palo Duro Canyon in the Texas Panhandle which effectively ended the Red River War.

In November 1876, he defeated the Northern Cheyenne at the battle of Red Fork (also known as the Dull Knife battle) partially avenging Custer’s Last Stand. During 1878 he was able to stop Indian raids into Texas from Mexico and was promoted to brigadier general.

Sometime during this period, he began to show signs of mental deterioration possibly caused by his many wounds or a fall in which he suffered a head injury. He retired in 1884 due to his condition and died in 1889. Ranald is buried in the West Point Cemetery.

Quiz Answers:

1. B) 212 at Gettysburg and C) 735 at Andersonville
2. Winifred Lee Brent and her mother, Mrs. Jane W. Brent the *Advertiser and the Tribune*
3. Senator Zachariah Chandler
4. George McClellan (after Antietam)
5. Senator Zachariah Chandler and current Vice President Hannibal Hamlin of Maine; the Michigan delegation was the last one to swing over to future President Andrew Johnson

Civil War Essentials – Major Henry Rathbone and the Lincoln Assassination

Henry Rathbone was born in Albany, New York, one of four children of Jared L Rathbone, a wealthy businessman. After he died, his mother married Ira Harris, who became a U.S. Senator from New York. **Ira’s daughter, Clara, became Henry’s stepsister and they eventually became engaged shortly before the Civil War began.**

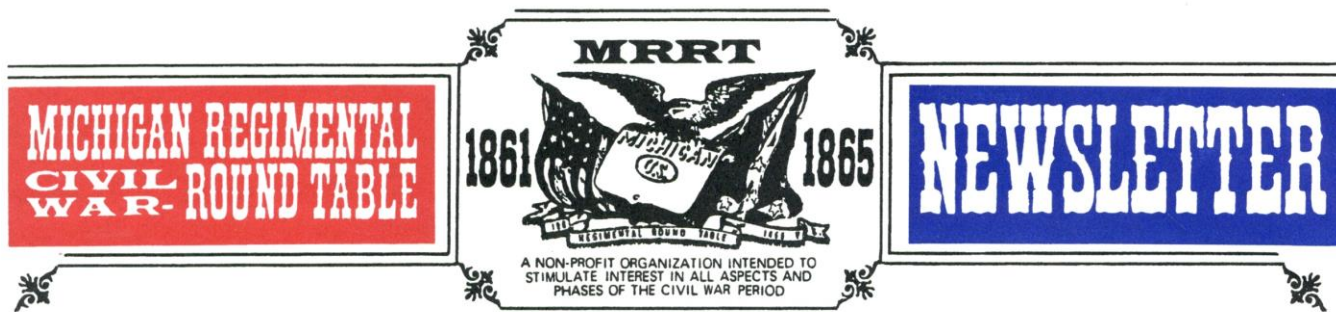
Henry joined the Union Army at the beginning of the war and served as a captain at the Battles of Antietam and Fredericksburg. During 1863 he was given a desk job. When the war ended, he had been promoted to Major.



The Lincoln Assassination

Major Rathbone and Clara Harris accepted an offer from President Lincoln to accompany him and his wife, Mary, to Ford’s Theater, on the evening of April 14, 1865. The evening was supposed to be a great night of celebration as General Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia had surrendered five days earlier.

Henry and Clara met the President and First Lady at the Harris residence at 8:20 pm. They were late arriving at Ford’s Theater as the comedy “*Our American Cousin*” had already begun. The crowd cheered and the orchestra played “*Hail to the Chief*” as the party made its way to the presidential box. In the box **Major Rathbone would be seated farthest away from the door on a walnut sofa with Clara Harris to his right.** Around 10:15 pm, actor John Wilkes Booth slipped in through the door of the Presidential Box. At this time, actor Harry Hawk said the line that received loud



laughter from the audience. This is when Booth fired his shot into the back of the President's head.

The smoke from Booth's gun filled the Presidential Box, but Major Rathbone was able to see the assassin. Henry testified on May 15, 1865, at the conspiracy trial that *"I instantly sprang toward him and seized him... He wrested himself from my grasp and made a violent thrust at my breast with a large knife. I parried the blow by striking it up and received a wound several inches deep in my left arm, between the elbow and the shoulder."*

As Booth broke free from Rathbone's grip, Henry lunged at Booth again; however, he was able to grab a piece of clothing as Booth made the twelve-foot leap onto the stage. *"As he went over upon the stage, I cried out, stop that man!"* The crowd could only watch as Booth ran across the stage with his now broken leg.

Major Rathbone then looked after the President. He said that the President had not changed positions, but his head was *"slightly bent forward and his eyes were closed"*. The Major hurried to the door of the box to seek medical attention for the President. Unfortunately, Booth had barred the door shut with a piece of plank. After several attempts Major Rathbone successfully opened the door to the box.

Dr. Charles Leale was the first doctor to reach the President. He wrote that *"(Major Rathbone) his arm had been severely wounded and was bleeding. He came to me holding his wounded arm in the hand of the other, beseeching me to attend to his wound. I placed my hand under his chin, looking into his eyes an almost instantaneous glance revealed that he was in no immediate danger..."* Doctor Leale then attended to the President.

Doctors Leale, Charles S. Taft, and Albert F.A. King decided that the President was too badly wounded to be taken back to the White House. They moved him to the Peterson House across the street from Ford's Theatre.

Mary Lincoln was assisted across the street by Henry and Clara. Mary called out, *"oh! My husband's blood"* every time she saw Clara's blood-stained dress. This blood was probably Henry's. Major Rathbone felt light-headed out in the hallway of the Peterson home. He passed out and was taken back to the Harris home. Clara stayed with Mary Lincoln for a while, but then left to take care of her fiancée.

Henry was very pale at the Harris home. He became delirious and continued talking about the shooting of President Lincoln.

The Aftermath of the Assassination

The assassination haunted Henry for the rest of his life. He felt guilty that he was unable to stop Booth. As time passed, Henry's knife wound healed, but his mental health did not. Clara told a friend of hers that she was unable to forget about the assassination of the President and the wounding of her husband, Henry Rathbone.

Henry retired from the Army in 1870 due to his sickness. He and his family went to Germany in 1882. Henry was plagued by medical problems including *"neuralgia of the head and face"*, heart palpitations and difficulty breathing. After arriving in Germany, Henry's health continued to fail. He became depressed and felt that Clara was leaving him with their three children.



Murder of Clara Rathbone

On Christmas Eve, 1883, Henry lost all control. He grabbed his revolver and knife and walked to his children's bedroom. Clara distracted him and had Henry follow her into their bedroom. Henry shot and stabbed her until she died. His suicide attempt then failed. Afterwards, their children lived with their uncle, William Harris.

Henry Rathbone was declared insane and was never allowed to be prosecuted for the crime of murder. He lived out the remaining several years of his life at the Provincial Insane Asylum, where he died on August 14, 1911.