

Member Renewal

The MRRT celebrates its 64th year in 2024 – 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, our long-time friend and member Michael Wright has passed away. He and his family enjoyed our meetings and field trips for many years. He will be missed.

Our November 2023 meeting will be on Monday, November 27, 2023, at 6:30 pm in the basement of the Farmington Library – corner of Grand River and Farmington Road. Our speaker, Worley Smith, probably begin his presentation shortly after 7:00 pm after we complete our 6:30 pm business meeting. We must leave the library by 8:45.

MRRT's new and updated website

Our friend, Gerald Furi, has created a great new website for us. Our website is no longer connected to the Farmington Library. Please visit our website at <https://www.mrrt.us>

Worley Smith – Our November 2023 speaker

The Roundtable is proud to welcome as our speaker, Worley Smith of the Abraham Lincoln Roundtable, who will share with us his story of the CSS Hunley “Fish Torpedo Boat” The Mission, The Crew. The Roundtable visited the *CSS Hunley* on our trip to Charleston, South Carolina.

Worley became interested in the Civil War during a family vacation that visited the Manassas Battlefield when he was in the 8th grade. Worley is a US army veteran. He retired from GMSPO after 35 years of service. He and his wife live in Holly. They have two children and five grandchildren.

September 2023 Speaker – Dave Jordan – South of the Border – The French Attempt to Take Over Mexico 1862-1867 The MRRT thanks **Dave Jordan** for presenting a comprehensive review of the *other* war in North America during the 1860's – “*South of the Border – The French Attempt to Take Over Mexico 1862-1867*”. Dave mentioned that, having just completed it, we were the first group to hear his presentation.

Mexico won its independence from Spain in 18921 after a long struggle. **The new country was politically divided.** The conservative elite favored a strong central government, like the Spanish had employed, which would protect the interests of the Catholic Church and the large landowners. The Liberals wanted a government more like the US where the great mass of the population would have a say in running the country. **Land redistribution was a major point of contention – the Church owned a large amount of land and the rich owned most of the rest.**

Prelude to War in Mexico

Mexico had continual problems paying the debts it owed foreign governments and individuals. In

1838, there was a skirmish with the French, since called the “*Pasty War*”, over damages claimed by a Frenchman for losses to his bakery. Other foreigners, particularly the French, had complained of damages to their property due to the periodic political unrest in Mexico. After a battle at Vera Cruz, the Mexican government agreed to pay 600,000 Pesos in compensation. As with most such debts, this was not paid.

The American annexation of Texas and subsequent war with Mexico added further to the chaos. Governments and strong men such as Santa Anna rose and fell. Much of the compensation paid by the US for the Mexican territory seized during the war and 1853 Gadsden Purchase disappeared into the pockets of corrupt officials. **In 1858, the so-called Reform War was fought between the two political factions over the remaining terms of the 1857 constitution.** The liberals won the major battles but unrest and guerrilla warfare continued in parts of Mexico as the conservatives resisted the loss of their power and land contained in the new constitution. **By the early 1860’s, the government was in the hands of Benito Juarez (photo below), a Liberal politician who was the first indigenous President of Mexico.**

French Invasion of Mexico in 1862-1863



Faced with an unmanageable budget deficit, in June 1861 Juarez began to suspend payments on debts owed to the French and others. In the Treaty of London, France, Britain, and Spain agreed to force Mexico to pay up by occupying Vera Cruz and collecting the tariffs on imports. **The British and Spanish soon withdrew their forces, but Napoleon III desired to create a French empire in Mexico.**

The French soon combined with Mexican conservative elements who saw this as the only way to restore their dominance. They began an invasion during the spring of 1862. **The major battle of the war was fought on May 5, 1862 when the defenders of Puebla resoundingly defeated the French and their conservative allies – hence the observance of *Cinco de Mayo* as a major Mexican holiday today.** Additional French troops landed and, with a new commander and a better plan for approaching the city, it was finally captured in May, 1863. The French and conservatives entered Mexico City in June after Juarez and his government evacuated the capital. The French then attempted to set up a puppet government which reversed the reforms of the 1857 constitution. **In the midst of its own Civil War, the US could not intervene but it continued to recognize the Juarez government as the legitimate one.**

Emperor Maximilian

Napoleon III sought a malleable figure who would appear to be independent but would run Mexico for the benefit of the French. **He found a suitable person in the Austrian, Archduke Maximilian (photo on page 3), the younger brother of Franz Joseph, the Austro-Hungarian Emperor.** Maximilian had no administrative experience (or talent) and his only military service had been in the tiny Austrian navy. His interests were in the area of naturalism rather than administration or politics. He was married to



Charlotte, a daughter of the King of Belgium. **His value was enhanced by the French leader's desire to mend fences with Austria in view of the growing threat from Prussia.**

Maximilian, not enthusiastic about becoming the Emperor of Mexico, sought approval from Britain but the British government disapproved of France's aggressive actions and so did not agree. Emperor Franz Joseph, who viewed his brother as a threat to his imperial crown, saw Napoleon's proposal as a way to remove that threat, so he encouraged his brother to accept provided he renounced his claims in the Austro-Hungarian dynasty. The archduke reluctantly agreed to the plan.

1864 Treaty of Miramar and the 1865 Black Death Decree

By the April 1864 Treaty of Miramar, Mexico under Maximilian was required to pay France for the expense of the French army occupying the country. The Pope sought to restore the property taken from the Catholic Church and end religious freedom in Mexico. Maximilian refused to agree to either demand, a decision which lost him support from the Mexican clergy. **The infamous 1865 Black Decree declared further resistance to Maximilian's government to be treason punishable by death.** These and other actions caused resistance to his rule to continue.

Napoleon III, frustrated at this continued unrest, was concerned about the rising threat to France from Prussia, and observed that the Union was finally winning the long, bloody US Civil War. He decided to cut his losses and pulled his military support for the *Second Mexican Empire* of Maximilian; the last French troops departed in 1867.

The End of Emperor Maximilian in 1867

The empire, without the support of the French military and facing pressure from the reunited US, could not last. The conservatives who had collaborated with Maximilian's regime could not defeat the Liberals (**who received some covert aid from the US**) and the last imperial strongholds fell soon after

The French departed. Maximilian himself was captured, tried and on June 19, 1867, was executed along with two conservative leaders.

Dave noted that almost all of the players in the intervention war came to grief in its aftermath.

Benito Juarez was the exception as his reputation as a patriot has grown since then-he is a national hero in modern Mexico.

MRRT Field Trip to Vicksburg, Mississippi – November 4th and 5th

The Roundtable enjoyed a great trip to the Vicksburg National Military Park and some of the surrounding area. Our guide, Terry Winschel (picture below on Page 4) was terrific. The weather was also great, 80 degrees and no rain! We thank Linda Gerhardt and Jeanie Graham for their great work on the trip.



General Grant and his Army embarked on what turned-out to be an 18-month campaign to capture Vicksburg, the “*Gibraltar of the Confederacy*”. President Lincoln said that the War could not be brought to a close without Vicksburg being captured, thus opening up the “*Father of Waters*” all the way to the Gulf of Mexico.

On Saturday, November 4th, Terry shared with us some of the most important sites outside the Vicksburg National Military Park. These sites included:

- *USS Cairo* Gunboat and Museum (picture below)
- Grant’s Canal – a failed Union Army effort to have the Mississippi River to bypass Vicksburg.
- Champion Hill Battlefield – the major battle that resulted in the Union Army surrounding the Confederates inside Vicksburg.
- Big Black River Bridge – a major Confederate defeat that ensured the Confederate army being trapped in Vicksburg.

Saturday evening, we went to a great restaurant in Vicksburg, **the Auhuca Historic Mansion and Inn**. Some of us even tried grits for the first time!

Sunday, November 5th we toured the Vicksburg Military Park and honored the soldiers in the National Cemetery, of which 13,000 are unidentified. Vicksburg was a natural fortress.

