



Welcome back for the start of the MRRT’s 49th year! Once again we promise a wonderful slate of speakers and another exciting Fall Field Trip in October.

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His long flowing wig and nearly complete loyalty to the Lincoln Administration set him apart from the other Federal cabinet members. Gideon Welles, a 59-year-old Connecticut-born journalist and former Jacksonian Democrat, was outwardly an odd choice for Secretary of the Navy. Despite his lack of naval background and some initial blunders, however, Welles proved an effective Naval Secretary.

At the war’s outbreak Welles was given the responsibility of blockading 3500 miles of Southern coastline. At his immediate disposal were merely 42 ships and 7600 men. Making matters worse, 322 naval officers had resigned their commissions and offered their services to the Confederacy. Although Welles was resourceful in securing a blockade fleet, he was slow to realize the potential of ironclads. Once convinced of their value, however, he pushed for their construction. He also supported the development of armored cruisers, heavy ordnance, and steam machinery. Under Welles’ tireless work the navy greatly increased in production and power. The number of workers in navy yards swelled shortly from 4000 to 17,000. Over 200 vessels were built, and some 400 others were purchased as the Union navy grew from a pathetic 90 ships in 1861 to 671.

Quick to reprimand persons he believed negligent or incompetent, Welles often angered some high-ranking officers and personnel. Throughout the war Welles was under constant attack—from the press, from greedy contractors, from Congressional critics, and from rivals in the cabinet. *“But I have no reason to complain when I look at the results,” he confided in his diary in 1865, “Others could have done better, perhaps, yet...I see very little to regret in my administration of the Navy.”*

His 3-volume *Diary*, an opinionated, brilliant insider’s account and analysis of events and personalities of the war years, was, unfortunately, edited by Welles to reflect favorably on himself. Welles died on February 11, 1878, at age 75 in Hartford, Connecticut.

This month MRRT member Larry Hathcock will present *“Yankee Neptune: Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy.”* A retired elementary school teacher, Larry was honored by the American Legion as Teacher of the Year in 1999. He spent 6 years in the Naval Reserve with half of them on active duty with the U.S. Navy. In 1996 Larry was one of only two Michigan teachers to go on a “turn around” cruise aboard the *USS Constitution* in Boston Harbor. Larry has presented many fine talks for the Michigan Regimental over the years, and you’ll certainly want to be in attendance for this one—**MONDAY, JANUARY 26.**

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If you missed John Moore’s November program, “The Aristocracy and Meritocracy—Promotion and Turnover of Senior Military Officers North and South,” you missed an exemplary talk. John’s claim that “the overall generalship in the Union armies was of a far better caliber by war’s end” than the Confederate armies, was substantiated with diligent research. Our thanks to John for an absolutely stellar performance.

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YEARLY DUES: Now’s the time to make your payment--\$20 for ALL MEMBERS. Envelopes have been provided for your convenience. Simply put in your check (made out to Carroll Tietz), put on a stamp, and mail it in.



50TH ANNIVERSARY COMMITTEE: We will again meet in the same room in the Farmington Public Library as our normal meeting, but simply an hour earlier (5:30 P.M.).

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Our recent Vicksburg Field Trip can be relived if you click on the website: <http://www.farmlib.org/mrrt/fieldtrip2008.htm/> Be sure to click on the [Video Link](#) at the bottom of that page. [Special thanks to Norm Carver for putting this outstanding show together!]

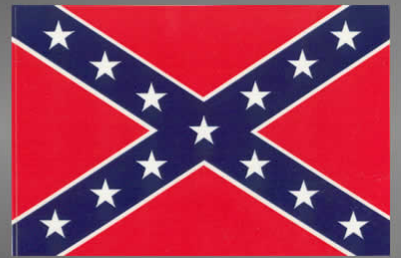
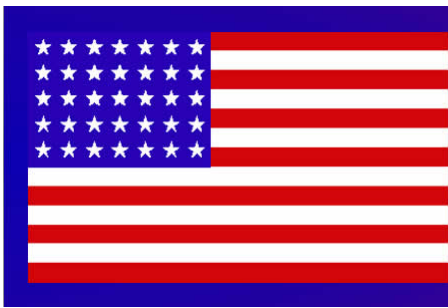
QUIZ: Cabinet Members

1. What was the only Union Cabinet position the Confederate Cabinet did not have? And, which two people held this post during the war?
2. Who were the only two Federal cabinet members to hold their positions throughout the Civil War?
3. Who were the only two Confederate cabinet members to hold their posts throughout the war?
4. Which Confederate cabinet member was born at “Monticello,” was a grandson of Thomas Jefferson, and served in the U.S. Navy? And, which critical piece of legislation, passed during the Civil War, was he responsible for, the first of its kind in American history?
5. Which ex-governor of Ohio served in Lincoln’s cabinet as Secretary of the Treasury? And, which anti-Lincoln letter proposing himself for president in 1864 led to his resignation?
6. Which Confederate Attorney General, from September 1861 to March 1862, served two terms as North Carolina governor prior to the war? And, who was his far more famous brother?
7. At the beginning of the war, what radical proposal did Secretary of State William Seward come up with to bring the seceded states back into the Union? And, prior to the war what two inflammatory words did Seward use in describing the fact that a civil war could not be avoided, words that were harmful to his presidential aspirations?
8. Which Confederate Secretary of War fought as a general in both theaters during the war? And, which political distinction did he have prior to the Civil War that has never been duplicated?
9. Which Kentucky-born, graduate of West Point in 1835, served as Lincoln’s second Postmaster General? And, in which pre-Civil War highly notable court case did he serve as defense attorney?
10. Which political extremist served as the Confederacy’s first Secretary of State and was a severe critic of Jefferson Davis? And, in which Civil War battle did he lead his badly outnumbered men and receive a severe wound?

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Perhaps the most controversial and most brilliant of the Confederate cabinet members was Judah Philip Benjamin. Often called “*the brains of the Confederacy*” or “*that ever-smiling Jew*,” Benjamin held the distinction of being the only person to hold more than one cabinet post—and he actually held three. He would also become the most trusted advisor of Jefferson Davis.

Born on St. Croix in the Virgin Islands on August 6, 1811, Judah P. Benjamin was the son of English-Jewish parents. His parents would soon move to Charleston, South Carolina where their son received his preliminary education. Later the family established residency in Wilmington, North Carolina. He entered Yale at age 14, but before graduating, he was forced to leave at age 17; he had been accused, not of cheating, but of stealing. Young Benjamin landed in New Orleans where he would carve out a highly successful career as an attorney. He would acquire a splendid sugar plantation, Bellechasse, and was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1852. Prior to the Civil War he took issue with Mississippi Senator Jefferson Davis on the constitutional authority for building a transcontinental railroad and once challenged Davis to a duel for implying that he was a liar. Davis quickly recognizing the injustice of his remark apologized before the Senate.



Benjamin resigned his Senate seat in February of 1861 to become the Confederacy's Attorney General. On September 17 of the same year he was chosen to replace the ineffectual Leroy Pope Walker as Secretary of War. Benjamin's tenure as head of the War Department was brief and stormy. Totally unsuited to this cabinet position, Benjamin became thoroughly disliked by numerous outstanding generals. He constantly criticized Joseph E. Johnston and Pierre Beauregard, complaining to President Davis, who, in turn, found greater fault with these two. Perhaps his gravest error as Secretary of War occurred during the famous Loring-Jackson incident. By overruling Jackson, he nearly caused Stonewall to resign. *"With such interference in my command I cannot expect to be of much service in the field,"* wrote Jackson, *"and, accordingly, respectfully request to be ordered to report for duty to the Superintendent of Virginia Military Institute....Should this application not be granted, I respectfully request the President will accept my resignation from the army."* Luckily Jefferson Davis, Joe Johnston, and Virginia Governor John Letcher intervened with Letcher chastising Benjamin to his face. Meanwhile William Loring was transferred from Jackson's command. Benjamin's rocky six months as Secretary of War ended as well; he was now selected by Davis to serve as Secretary of State.

In this post, which he held throughout the remainder of the war, Benjamin excelled. Davis would call him *"a master of law, and the most accomplished statesman I have ever known."* Yet Benjamin remained an enigma. His habitual half-smile and ironical comments led people to question whether he took his responsibilities seriously. He was a careless dresser but carried a gold-headed cane. He loved good food and was always a cheerful conversationalist. His only vice was an indulgence in gambling. He visited Paris, France annually to see his French Catholic Creole wife and daughter. (His wife refused to live in America with him, but he provided liberally for her.)

On May 3, 1865, Benjamin avoided capture by separating from the Jeff Davis' party at the Savannah River in Georgia. Disguised, he went on to Florida, sailed to the West Indies, and eventually arrived in England. There he became a successful London barrister in 1866. He quickly rose to Queen's Counsel for Lancashire County, becoming so successful that by 1877 he would accept no case for a fee of less than 300 guineas (\$1500). When he retired in 1883, the Bar of England honored him with a farewell dinner. Judah P. Benjamin, the *"smiling Jew"* and enigma died in Paris on May 6, 1884, at age 72.

QUIZ ANSWERS:

1. Secretary of Interior/ Caleb B. Smith and John P. Usher
2. William H. Seward (State) and Gideon Welles (Navy)
3. Stephen R. Mallory (Navy) and John H. Reagan (Postmaster General)
4. Sec. of War George W. Randolph and conscription
5. Salmon P. Chase and the "Pomeroy Circular"
6. Thomas Bragg and Braxton
7. Provoking a war with Great Britain and "irrepressible conflict"
8. John C. Breckinridge and the youngest vice president at age 35
9. Montgomery Blair and the Dred Scott Case
10. Robert A. Toombs and Burnside Bridge at Antietam

Mark those new 2009 calendars now—**MONDAY, JANUARY 26**—for **Larry Hathcock's** program: *"Yankee Neptune: Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy."* We will start the meeting at 6:30 P.M. at the Farmington Public Library (Grand River and Farmington Road). See you there.....Also try our website: <http://www.farmlib.org/mrrt/>.