



## MEMBER RENEWAL

The MRRT celebrates its 60<sup>th</sup> year in 2020 – 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**; or simply bought to the meeting and given to Jeanie. Cash is always welcomed.

**Our first meeting of 2020 will be on Monday, January 27, 2020. We meet in the basement of the Farmington Library (corner of Grand River Avenue and Farmington Road) at 6:30 pm. Our speaker will be member Gary Rembisz, who will speak on “Five Assassination Attempts on President Lincoln”.**

Please visit our website at <http://www.farmlib.org/mrrt>

**Our January meeting will begin the process of selecting our 2020 trip destination. Please bring your trip ideas for our consideration. Voting will begin during the February 24<sup>th</sup> meeting, with the final vote probably also occurring at the February meeting.**

**Recent field trips include:** 2006-Franklin and Nashville, 2007-Gettysburg, 2008-Vicksburg, 2009-Chancellorsville & Fredericksburg, 2010-Wilderness & Spotsylvania, 2011-Springfield, Illinois, 2012-1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Bull Run, 2013-Charleston, SC, 2014-Appomattox, 2015-Perryville, 2016-Antietam & Harper’s Ferry, 2017 – Shiloh, 2018 – Chickamauga & Chattanooga, and 2019 – Savannah, Georgia.



**The Roundtable welcomes member Gary Rembisz for his presentation on “Five Assassination Attempts on President Lincoln”. Gary will discuss five assassination attempts on President Lincoln and at least three other opportunities John Wilkes Booth had to murder the President.** Gary’s discussion will answer several questions regarding the assassination including: was there a conspiracy to destroy the Union government? How did Booth escape? How were the perpetrators captured so quickly? Was their trial fair? Were other government officials involved? Did President Davis have any knowledge of the event beforehand? Was there a Booth connection to the Confederate government?

Gary has written **Black Feathers in Black Hats**, the story of the 24<sup>th</sup> Michigan of the Union Iron Brigade, which became famous on July 1, 1863 at the Battle of Gettysburg. He earned a Master’s degree from Eastern Michigan and has traveled extensively to do research on the Civil War.

Gary is a member of two Roundtables in the area, including the Michigan Regimental, and the Historical Society of Michigan where he made a presentation last March. Presently, he is working on Congress granting a Medal of Honor to Lt. Col. Albert Edwards of the 24<sup>th</sup> Michigan

**Join us for what will be a fascinating presentation!**

**The Roundtable thanks Mark Laubacher for his educational and fascinating presentation on “Weapons of Mass Destruction Considered during the Civil War”.** This was a new topic for most of us to explore. During the War, several individuals proposed the use of chemical and biological weapons by both Confederate and Union forces. A civilian proposed in June 1861 to drop poisonous bombs on Union-held Fort Pickens in Pensacola, Florida. Another proposal was to use red pepper and veratria in artillery shells to bombard Fort Pickens. Neither proposal was put into use.

**During early 1862 there was a lot of proposed activity involving both the U.S.S. *Monitor* and the C.S.S. *Virginia*. Only two days after the climactic battle between the two ironclads, a letter was sent to President Lincoln proposing that the C.S.S. *Virginia* be bombed with cyanide pepper. There were more than 1,500 schemes to eliminate the C.S.S. *Virginia*. A month later a plot to poison the U.S.S. *Monitor* with a deluge of chloroform in the**



interior of the ship was proposed. This would have created insensibility on board the U.S.S. *Monitor*. None of the plans were implemented.

An April 1862 letter to Union Secretary of War Stanton proposed to use liquid chlorine in 10" artillery shells to attack the entrenched enemy. Nothing was implemented as the Union Army was too busy to work on the project. Chlorine gas was used 53 years later during World War 1.



Both sides worked on implementing biological warfare. At the siege of Yorktown in 1862 it was proposed to shoot chloroform via fire engines onto enemy troops. The shot would probably have been 50 yards. In September 1862 it was proposed to snuggle blankets infested with yellow fever into New Orleans, the second largest city in the Confederacy. A Confederate doctor suggested in March 1863 that cyanide hydrochloric acid be added to artillery shells. A Union proposal was to use solidified Greek fire to get rid of the Rebels at Fort Sumter by “stinking them out”. None of these suggestions were actually implemented during the Civil War.

**Doctor Lucas Blackburn, M.D., a physician turned Confederate agent, instituted a plot to “release” yellow fever through the distribution of infected clothing, including specific items being sent to President Lincoln. The plot failed because the Civil War era did not understand that the disease was transmitted by the bite of infected**

**mosquitos instead of direct contact with those infected with disease. Infected shirts were received by the White House. This was considered to be an assassination attempt on the President.** Infected clothing was sent from Bermuda to Halifax, Canada to poison Northern cities. Dr. Blackburn was acquitted in a Canadian trial after a Confederate double agent told the U.S. consul in Toronto about the plot. He was elected governor of Kentucky!

**Dr. Richard McCulloh, a former chemistry professor at Columbia University, moved to Richmond, Virginia where he received an assignment to develop a lethal gas to “bring terror”. He did nothing for four years even with pressure from the Confederate government. Finally, in February 1865 he gave a demonstration to several high-level Confederate officials. Several cats died from the release of a vial of liquid. The vial of liquid would have killed every member of the U.S. House of Representatives.**

**Doctor McCulloh took so long to share his work with the authorities because he did not want to kill people.** He left Richmond in 1865 and was captured off the coast of Florida and then spent two years in the Virginia State Penitentiary. The Doctor did not save any notes of his work and could not replicate the formula that he had developed in 1862.

**Both Presidents disapproved of unconventional warfare because they feared reprisals from the other side. Union General Order 100 on April 24, 1863 stated “use of poison in any manner....excluded from warfare”.**

**Quiz Questions: This month’s True or False questions pertain to the Assassination Attempts on President Lincoln.**

1. A cipher letter found among John Wilkes Booth’s possessions was of the same cipher as found in President Jefferson Davis’ office in Richmond.
2. There were 18 sheets missing from Booth’s diary/appointment book. Much later FBI investigations revealed 43 pages missing.
3. Lewis Powell while he was in prison implicated Mary Surratt.
4. The Surratt Boarding House is now a Chinese Restaurant called the Wok and Roll.
5. The Garrett House and Tobacco Barn are open to visitors.

**Civil War Nugget** – Sherman’s March to the Sea was hard on the uniforms of the Union soldiers. By the end of the march many soldiers were wearing Confederate gray, from supplies captured by the Union army.

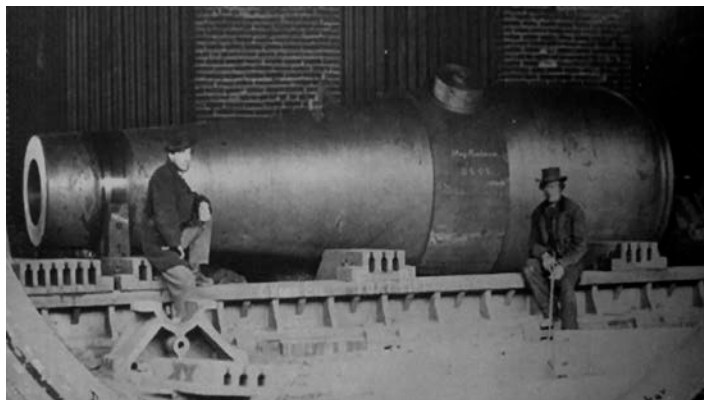


**Civil War Essentials - Size Does Matter – the 20 Inch Rodman Cannon**

**The largest artillery piece produced during the Civil War was a huge Rodman muzzle-loading gun intended for coastal defense.** This weapon, and the smaller bore guns like it, was the brain child of an Army officer named Thomas J. Rodman. Born in Indiana, he graduated 7<sup>th</sup> in his class from West Point in 1841. Particularly interested in ordnance, he was assigned to the Allegheny Arsenal in Pittsburgh.

After the tragic explosion of a 12” cast iron gun aboard the USS Princeton in 1844 (which killed two of President Tyler’s cabinet members among others), **Rodman decided to pursue improvements to eliminate the manufacturing process flaws which plagued large cast iron cannon.** These were due to the uneven cooling of the casting – the outside cooled down faster than the inside creating cracks or voids. His Arsenal position provided the resources to pursue remedies. **His solution was to use a casting with a hollow core which was cooled by water to ensure that it cooled from the inside out.** Although high-bred Ordnance Department superiors initially rejected his new process, he was able to apply for a patent. Soon guns cast at McClurg’s Fort Pitt Foundry proved clearly superior to conventionally cast guns. **For example, his gun survived 1500 test firings before failure versus 299 for the prior design.**

**In 1860, the War Department authorized the casting of a 15” gun which was installed at Ft. Monroe in March 1861.** It could fire a 450 lb. solid shot or a 330 lb. shell. During the Civil War, the US government bought 286 15” Rodman cannon and about the same number of smaller bore Rodman guns. They were made at Ft. Pitt or at West Point, NY. Mortars, also cast using the Rodman hollow core process, were made at Ft. Pitt and other northern foundries. Now a major, Thomas Rodman also developed an improved black powder which increased muzzle velocity by burning slower. **Rodman now proposed an even larger version which he reckoned at 20”.** Unlike the 15” model, it could be for



coastal defense only – too heavy for shipboard use. It took three years to perfect the design and processes. It was so large that Ft. Pitt’s largest furnace lacked enough capacity by itself.

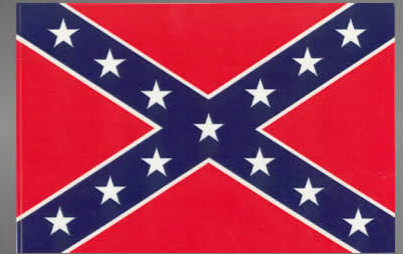
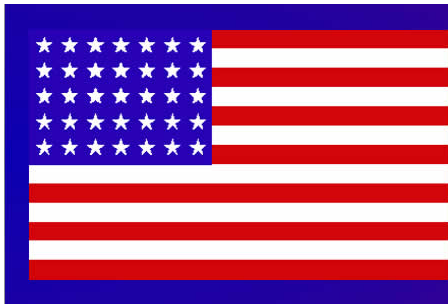
New casting procedures were developed by Rodman so that all six furnaces could be coordinated to pour the first barrel. This was done over one week in February, 1864 under his supervision. **The finished machined barrel weighed over 116,000 lbs.** (about the same as a mid-20<sup>th</sup> century US Army M60 tank) **and was 20 ft., 3 inches long - see photo.** The gun was shipped to Ft. Hamilton in New York harbor on heavy duty railroad cars. Installed on a special 36000 lb.

barbette carriage made at the Watertown NY Arsenal, **it was designed to fire a 1080 lb. solid ball or a 725 lb. explosive shell.**

At the first test on October 25, 1864, an initial failure was traced to the inability of the Army’s standard friction primer to project its flame down the deep vent hole. Once corrected, the gun was then fired several times. **The gun was never fired in anger during the war.** In 1867, in another test session, it attained a maximum range of 8000 yards. Several additional 20” guns were cast but the designs practical value was limited – it could not traverse fast enough to track a moving ship.

The original gun is still located at Ft. Hamilton which is now a park. **A replica is on display at the Heinz History Center in Pittsburgh which is coincidentally located near the site of the Ft. Pitt Foundry.**

**Civil War Nugget – The sewing machine,** perfected in the 1850’s, produced wool uniforms ten times faster than could be stitched by hand. **The McKay boot-stitching machine** turned out 50 pairs of shoes in the time it took to hand-sew a single pair. Both inventions were extensively used in Northern factories.

**True or False Answers to Quiz:**

1. True
2. True
3. False
4. True
5. False

**Civil War Essentials – Company K, 1<sup>st</sup> Michigan Sharpshooters** the 1<sup>st</sup> Michigan Sharpshooters were organized in Kalamazoo and Dearborn, Michigan, mustering into the Union Army on July 7, 1863. **Native Americans, primarily from the Ojibwa, Odawa and Potawatomi nations, enlisted in Company K. Co. K became the most famous Indian unit in the Union army.**

**Enlisting was a major social victory as many Indians unsuccessfully tried to enlist in 1861 as were the African Americans trying to enlist. By 1863 this had changed and the Native Americans enlisted in the Union Army (as well as African Americans).**

**The Native Americans were renegotiating the treaties with the United States and enlistment in Company K “would hopefully secure political leverage to secure new treaties, new land rights, equal social standing, and financial security”. These Native Americans supported the Union because they were opposed to slavery.** Gaminoodhich, an Odawa correspondent for the Grand Traverse *Herald* wrote, “*For equality among including slaves, to be driven to the man-market for sale, we think, a rank offense before the Great Spirit, and foul blot on the Grand Republic*”.

**Public hostility to Indian enlistment still existed.** The Detroit *Advertiser and Tribune* wrote “*that as a race [the Indians] have not yet reached that degree of civilization which should entitle them to all rights, and place on them all the responsibilities of citizenship. At best they are but semi-civilized . . . a poor, ignorant and dependent race*”.



**Company K first fought at the Battle of the Wilderness, then at the Spotsylvania Court House battle. The Native Americans displayed their bravery at Spotsylvania.** “*In this desperate encounter, the little band of Indians was commanded by Lieutenant Graveraet....Under a perfect storm of lead their number seemed to melt away, there was no sign of faltering. Sheltering behind trees, they poured volley after volley at the zealous foe, and above the din of battle their war-whoop rang out with every volley. At dusk the ammunition gave out, but with the others the Indians ran forward at the shout of “Give them steel boys!” from the twice wounded but still plucky Colonel Deland. When darkness came to end the bloody day, Lieutenant Graverot was among the one hundred and seventeen wounded sharpshooters and a few months later he died of his wounds.*”

**During the battle Company K lost about 17 men. William Reed of the U.S. Sanitary Commission found four of the wounded Native Americans.** “*In a group of four Indian sharpshooters, each with the loss of a limb, of an arm on the shoulder, of a leg at the knee, or with an amputation of the thigh, never was patience more finely illustrated. They neither spoke nor moaned, but suffered and died, making a mute appeal to our sympathy, and expressing both in look and manner their gratitude for our care.*”

**Company K’s last battle was the battle of the Crater, fought on July 30, 1864 where they had little ammunition and were surrounded by the Confederates.** Lieutenant William Randall wrote that the Native Americans “*showed great coolness...Some of them were mortally wounded, and clustering together, covered their heads with their blouses, chanted a death song, and died-four of them in a group.*”