



On Wednesday, May 24, 1865, thousands of veterans of the Federal Western Armies marched down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C., before throngs of cheering spectators in what was called The Grand Review. One of the units represented was the Michigan Engineers and Mechanics, a regiment that had proudly served for four years. It had been mustered in on December 11, 1861, in Marshall, Michigan under the command of Col. William P. Innes, a civil engineer, of Grand Rapids, and consisted of 1032 officers and men. Within a week this unit embarked for Louisville, Kentucky and beyond to participate in a variety of campaigns and battles—Corinth, Perryville, Stones River, Chattanooga, the March to the Sea, and the continuation of the march into the Carolinas. The Michigan Engineers and Mechanics would build dozens of railroad trestles, bridges, fortifications, buildings and block-houses, while repairing railroad track, as well as fighting the enemy. In virtually every instance the men of this unit received high praise for their endeavors.

While the Battle of Stones River was progressing, the Michigan Engineers and Mechanics, under the command of Colonel Innes, were ordered by Gen. William Rosecrans to remain in the rear of the army to protect the valuable baggage trains on the road between Nashville and Murfreesboro. On January 1 the Michiganders quickly formed a large half-circle of logs and brush as a makeshift fortification. Soon, Rebel cavalymen (3000-4000 troopers with a unit of light artillery) approached under the command of Gen. Joe Wheeler. Numbering merely 391, the Michigan Engineers and Mechanics fought for five hours, defending valiantly against seven separate charges. Some of the Rebel horses actually got on top of the breastworks and Wheeler's artillery killed 40 or more Yankee horses and mules while damaging some wagons. Three times Wheeler sent a flag of truce to Innes demanding surrender, but each time Innes refused. "*I can't see it,*" remarked the Colonel, "*so long as my ammunition holds out.*" Darkness compelled Wheeler to withdraw with estimates of his own losses at over 100 killed and wounded. The Michigan unit suffered one killed and six wounded. Gallantly, the rear of the army and virtually all of its baggage was secured.

Rosecrans praised the Engineer and Mechanics efforts for repulsing "*a charge from more than ten times their number...*" A war correspondent, witnessing the episode, wrote: "*The scene was at times thrilling beyond description. The rebel horde, exasperated at the successful resistance of the little force, dashed their horses against the circular brush fence....with infuriated shouts and curses. But the Michigan troops were cool and determined....Horses and riders recoiled again and again until they despaired, and soon swept away through the dense forests, leaving over fifty of their dead upon the field, which were buried by our forces. The ground all around that small circle of brush was strewn with dead horses of the rebel troopers, and with their clothing, guns, etc. Truly this was one of the most gallant affairs of the campaign.*" **Horace Greeley of the New York Tribune** lauded it as a "*most gallant defense,*" while another correspondent called it "*a most brilliant and decisive affair.*"

The Michigan Engineer and Mechanics, now under the command of Col. John B. Yates of Ionia, mustered out on September 22, 1865, in Nashville. It arrived in Jackson, Michigan three days later, was paid off, and disbanded on October 1. During its four years of illustrious service, it had 364 officers and men who died, including 13 killed or mortally wounded, and 351 who perished from disease.

On **MONDAY, FEBRUARY 25**, the MRRT welcomes **Mark Hoffman** who will present a talk based on the title of his book, *My Brave Mechanics: The First Michigan Engineers and Their Civil War*. Mark earned a degree in History from Michigan State University and is currently Deputy Director, Michigan Department of History, Arts and Libraries. He is a resident of Mason and a member of Camp #17, Sons of the Union Veterans of the Civil War. Mark, who hopefully will bring along a few of his books to sell, will focus on three points in his talk: the unique challenges and experience of volunteer engineers during the Civil War, the service of the 1st Michigan Engineers, and the experience of Michigan Engineers with local (Farmington/Plymouth/Nankin) ties. Mark your calendars for this one!



The Michigan Regimental wishes to thank last month's speaker, **Rand Bitter**, for his fine presentation on Robert Horatio George Minty and his 4th Michigan Cavalry, "*Minty and His Cavalry: A History of the Saber Brigade and its Commander.*"

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FALL FIELD TRIP: This is the meeting when we will discuss and vote on our next venture for the Fall of 2008. Our normal pattern is to alternate theaters, so you should be thinking of a Western trip to chat about. Since we also have begun planning for two years in advance, you might want to share your thoughts for an Eastern trip for the Fall of 2009. Either way, prepare to vote at this meeting.

QUIZ: CIVIL WAR MILITARY ENGINEERS.....

1. Prior to the Civil War, this Union general helped design and build Fort Wayne in Detroit. He also worked on additions to the wings of the House and Senate and the Capitol dome. At the outbreak of the war he was chosen Quartermaster of the U.S. Army. During the war, he lost his son, John, in a controversial shooting. Name him and the resigning Confederate he replaced as Quartermaster.
2. After graduating second in his class at West Point, he served as superintending engineer of St. Louis Harbor and supervised the construction of Fort Carroll in Baltimore Harbor. As a captain of engineers, he served heroically in the Mexican War. Before the Civil War he served as Superintendent of West Point. Name him and the derogatory nickname he was given early in the war due to his penchant for digging entrenchments.
3. His military career spanned 62 years, the last 26 as chief engineer of the Army. His engineering projects included fortifications in New York City, Long Island, and Newport, R.I. Name him and the war in which he served as Winfield Scott's chief engineer.
4. He graduated from West Point in 1845 with the highest grades up until that time. His efforts made Fort Fisher the strongest fortress in the Confederacy. Wounded at Fort Fisher he died a month before the war ended. Name him and the famous soldier who outdid his West Point grades when he graduated in 1903.
5. After graduating from West Point in 1841, he served in the Ordnance Department during his pre-war career. He was appointed Chief of Ordnance of the Confederacy in 1861. Name him and the Southern university he served as President after the war.
6. After graduating second in his West Point class in 1838, he served as an engineer under Winfield Scott. He was Superintendent of West Point for less than a week just before the Civil War. He would oppose his former classmate at First Bull Run as commanders of their respective armies. Name him and his classmate.
7. After graduating from West Point in 1835 he resigned to pursue a career in civil engineering. He would return in 6 years as an officer in the Corps of Topographical Engineers. He was a hero at Gettysburg although criticized afterward. Name him and the country where he was born.
8. Graduating third in his West Point class in 1836, he was later appointed chief engineer for Alabama. During the war, he superintended the defenses at Mobile, laid out Braxton Bragg's lines at Chattanooga, and was later chief engineer for Joseph E. Johnston. Name him and the general he accompanied on the Knoxville Campaign.
9. Perhaps the Confederacy's most talented military engineer, he served as chief engineer to Albert Sidney Johnston at Shiloh. Later he was chief engineer of the Department of Northern Virginia as well as the Confederate War Department. Name him and his West Point classmate, also an engineer, known as "Old Brains," or by others, "Old Wooden Head."
10. Graduating number one in the 1854 West Point class, he helped with fortifications around Richmond. He also served on the staff of Jefferson Davis. He was captured at Saylor's Creek but was paroled because of the illness of his mother. Name him and his more famous brother who was a general in Jeb Stuart's cavalry.



At the last meeting Chuck Du Charme announced that a sizable selection of quality Americana and Civil War books is up for sale. This collection, containing some first editions and out-of-print books ranging from the 1860's to 1900 includes Regimental Histories, copies of such classics as John Robertson's *Michigan in the War* and *The Long Arm of Lee* by Jennings Cropper Wise, biographies of George Meade and Ambrose Burnside, etc. Anyone interested in more details should call Chuck at 800-852-6693.

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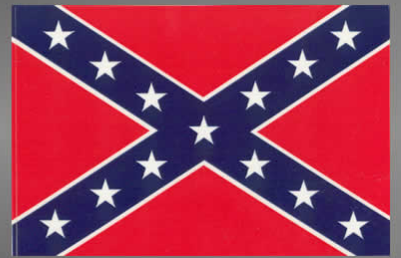
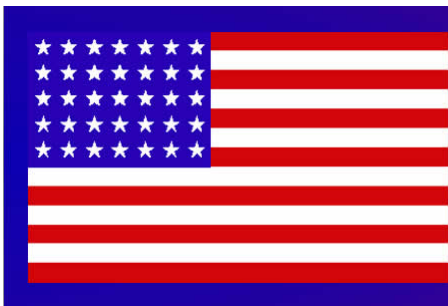
Jefferson Davis married his second wife, Varina Howell, on February 26, 1845, at the bride's home in Natchez, Mississippi. Varina was 19, Jefferson 36. They would remain happily married for nearly 46 years until his death on December 6, 1889, at age 81. Varina passed away in New York City in 1905. The marriage produced 6 children—4 boys and 2 girls—only 2 of whom outlived their parents. Samuel, their first child, born in July 1852, died in less than 2 years of a childhood illness. Joe, born in May 1859, died tragically, falling from the Confederate White House balcony on April 30, 1864. No narrative of the Davis children, however, is more heartrending and mysterious than the story of a black child, Jim Limber, who for all intents had been a member of the Davis family.

On February 15, 1864, Varina Davis, riding in her carriage through the streets of Richmond, observed a small, thin black boy being beaten harshly by a Negro man (some accounts say the man was the boy's "*savagely cruel father*," others that he was "*a vicious caretaker*" in charge of young boys). Mrs. Davis ordered the driver to halt the carriage. She then pulled the boy into her arms and returned to the White House. There she and her maid Ellen bathed him and doctored his cuts. Mary Boykin Chesnut, an intimate friend of Varina's, arrived at the home the following day and found the child "*happy as a lord. He was very anxious to show me his wounds and bruises.*" The child could only tell them his name—Jim Limber—his age estimated to be about 5 or 6. President Davis found out the child was "*a little orphan free Negro Boy*," and Varina recorded that her husband "*went to the Mayor's office and had his free papers registered to insure Jim against getting into the power of the oppressor again.*" The Davises installed the child as a member of their household and virtually adopted him.

When little Joe Davis, Jim's inseparable playmate, fell to his death, Jim grieved, cried, and prayed with the rest of the family. Two months later, on June 27, a baby girl, Varina Anne was born to the 37-year-old mother and 56-year-old President Davis. The new addition, called "*Winnie*" by her parents, was nicknamed "*Piecake*" by Jim and the other Davis children. In less than a year, however, with the Confederacy crumbling, the Davis family was forced to leave Richmond to escape advancing Federal forces. Varina left before her husband with her five children, including Jim Limber. The refugees traveled by train, ambulance wagon, and on foot—"*I walked five miles in the darkness in mud over my shoe tops*," wrote Varina, "*with my cheerful little baby in my arms.*" Jefferson Davis finally caught up with his family near Milledgeville, Georgia.

Then on the morning of May 10, the entire party was captured near Irwinville by Federal cavalry. The Davises and Jim Limber were taken first to Macon, and then to Port Royal, outside Savannah. There Jim Limber was taken away from the Davises, to the extreme distress of the entire family. A member of their Union escort, Captain Charles T. Hudson, who was, according to Varina, "*an extremely rude and offensive man*," had been making threats concerning the boy during the trip from Macon. He said, "*he intended to take our poor little Negro protégé as his own.....solicitude for the child troubled us more than Hudson's insults*," but the Davis children and Jim were not aware of the situation. When Jim Limber learned he was to be separated from his "*family*" and "*sent to Washington*," he wildly protested, and "*fought like a little tiger.*" In the last view the sobbing Davis children had of him he was struggling and screaming to join them.

Hoping to prevent Jim Limber from falling under the "*degrading influence*" of Captain Hudson, Varina sent an appeal to Jefferson's old friend, Federal General Rufus Saxton, to take charge of him, and Davis wrote Saxton a note requesting



him to look after the boy's education. But the Davises, overwhelmed with their own problems during the following months and years, were unable to learn Jim Limber's fate. Whether their numerous appeals and letters reached the proper hands was never known. The several mentions of him they saw in Northern newspapers were all false. One quoted Secretary of War Edwin Stanton as saying Jim was one of Jefferson Davis' poor slaves who had been brought to Richmond from Brierfield, the Davis plantation in Mississippi. Another moaned that Jim Limber would bear to his grave the scars from beatings inflicted on him by the Davises.

In the decades that followed the Civil War, the Davises mentioned Jim Limber many times in their writings, always with regret that their efforts to locate him had failed. As late as 1890, Varina Davis wrote of Jim: "*I hope he has been successful in the world*" inferring she still did not know what had happened to the man who had grown from the boy she rescued—the lovable little boy who had for a time been one of "*that gang of Davis children.*"

QUIZ ANSWERS:

1. Montgomery Meigs and Joseph E. Johnston
2. Robert E. Lee and "King of Spades"
3. Joseph Totten and the Mexican War
4. William H.C. Whiting and Douglas MacArthur
5. Josiah Gorgas and the University of Alabama
6. P.G.T. Beauregard and Irvin McDowell
7. George Meade and Spain
8. Danville Leadbetter and James Longstreet
9. Jeremy Gilmer and Henry Halleck
10. George Washington Custis Lee and W.H.F. "Rooney" Lee

A reminder of our meeting—**MONDAY, FEBRUARY 25**—for **Mark Hoffman's** presentation of *My Brave Mechanics: The First Michigan Engineers and Their Civil War*. 6:30 P.M. is our starting time at the Farmington Public Library (Grand River and Farmington Road). See you there.

Also try our website: <http://www.farmlib.org/mrrt/>.