

Vol LXII, #4

Michigan Regimental Round Table Newsletter—Page 1

April 2022

## MEMBER RENEWAL

The MRRT celebrates its 62<sup>nd</sup> year in 2022 – 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, Don Limpert, 94, died during February 2022. Don was one of the original members of the Roundtable, which began in 1960. He was the driving force for the new GAR Museum in Eaton Rapids, MI (near Lansing). Roger Heiple, who has spoken to us, is the only remaining original member of the Roundtable. Roger is an expert on the GAR.**

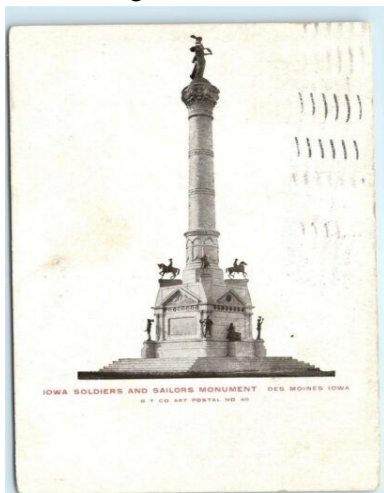
**We are very fortunate that our April speaker will be author Tobin Buhk, speaking on “True Crime in the Civil War”.** Tobin’s presentation (and book of the same name) will cover several topics including currency counterfeiting, tyrannical actions of General Benjamin Butler, the murder of Confederate General Earl van Doren, the Fort Pillow massacre, the Andersonville prison conditions and the fate of the Lincoln assassination conspirators. Tobin has written other true crime books including *True Crime Michigan: The State’s Most Notorious Criminal Cases*, and *Cold Case Michigan (True Crime), Murder and Mayhem in Grand Rapids*. **Tobin’s Civil War book will be available for purchase.**

Tobin lives in Jenison, MI (in the Grand Rapids area). He travels the state giving true crime presentations. **Tobin’s presentation will be a unique experience that we will really enjoy.**

**Please visit our great website at <http://www.farmlib.org//mrrt>. Links to interesting Civil War programs are available.** Gerald Furi of the Farmington Library is doing a terrific job keeping the website up to date.

**Wearing a mask during our meeting is a personal decision. Masks will be available for your personal use.**

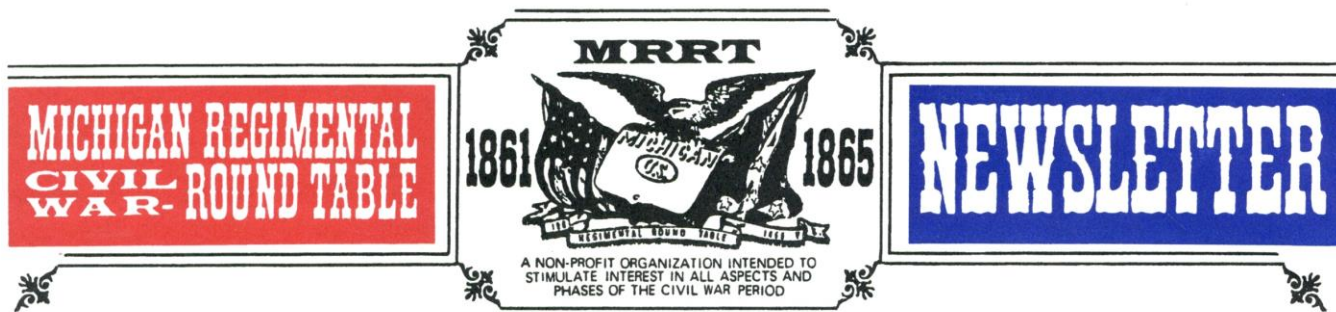
**The Roundtable thanks long-time friend David Ingall for his educational and entertaining presentation on “Michigan’s Civil War Sites and Stories”.** Michigan was very much involved in the War, even though there were no battles fought in our state.



### The most prominent Michigan Civil Monuments and Statues include:

- Soldiers & Sailors in Hackley Park – Muskegon the statue includes General Grant, General Sherman, Admiral Farragut, President Lincoln, and President McKinley (picture left).
- Michigan Soldiers and Sailors in Campus Martius – Detroit.
- Withington Park in Jackson – “*In Defense of the Flag*”.
- Capital Lawn in Lansing – 1<sup>st</sup> Michigan Sharpshooters, 1<sup>st</sup> Michigan Engineers and Mechanics, Civil War Governor Austin Blair and two 10 lb. Parrott cannons.
- Burke Park in Dowagiac – Soldiers and Sailors in granite
- Soldier’s Home Cemetery in Grand Rapids – Soldier with bowed head

There are at least 20 other prominent Monuments and Statues located all over the state.



**Michigan college men participated in the war in large numbers.** The University of Michigan sent 1,500 men, the most of any college in the state. Surprisingly, Hillsdale College was second followed by Eastern Michigan and Michigan State. Michigan State began in the 1850's with the first graduating class going off to the war. The Jackson Military Heritage Museum is located where Camp Blair was. Michigan soldiers trained and returned home from the war there.

**Michigan Union generals included:**

- Charles Wilcox
- Elon Farnsworth – he was expelled from the University of Michigan and was killed at Gettysburg.
- Robert Minty – he was in the Western Theater with the 4<sup>th</sup> Michigan Cavalry. Robert had 10 children with two sisters that he was married to at the same time.
- Henry Hunt – Artillery chief of the Army of the Potomac. His father was the second mayor of Detroit.
- Orlando Poe – helped build the Poe Locks at the Sault Locks. He was General Sherman's main engineer on the March to the Sea.
- Isreal Richardson – from Pontiac, known as "*Fighting Dick*" he was mortally wounded at Antietam – dying two months later in November 1862. He was highly regarded in the Army of the Potomac.
- Alpheus Williams – He was Michigan's best citizen soldier as he did not graduate from West Pointe. His statue proudly sits on Belle Isle. He wrote a war memoir, titled *From the Cannon's Mouth*.

**Michigan Residents who helped the Union cause included:**

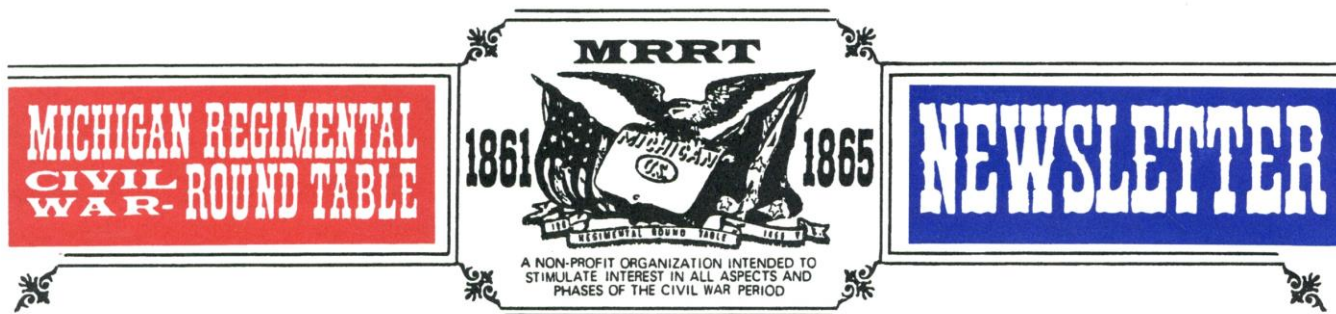
- Sojourner Truth – she spoke out against slavery and recruited black troops. She is buried in Battle Creek. The State of Michigan blocked the Fugitive Slave Law in 1855.
- George DeBaptiste – he helped slaves get from the Detroit area into Canada.
- Jonathon Walker – he was arrested for assisting escaped and then his hand was branded SS (slave stealer). He lived in Muskegon.

**Michigan Civil War Sites to Visit:**

- Fort Wayne – Detroit – Fort Wayne was built from 1842 to 1849 with Montgomery Meigs as chief engineer. Fort Wayne was located at the narrowest point between Detroit and Windsor, Canada to help fight the British if needed. Fort Wayne was involved with the U.S. Army through the Vietnam War. The new Gordie Howe is being constructed right by the Fort.
- Detroit GAR Hall – the most expensive part of redoing the building was cleaning up the pigeon waste.
- Lansing Historical Museum – the Michigan Civil War flag collection is kept here. The most famous flag is that of the 24<sup>th</sup> Michigan, which endured significant casualties on July 1<sup>st</sup> at Gettysburg.
- Monroe County Historical Museum – General Custer's HQ flag from when he commanded the Michigan Cavalry Brigade is located here. It is the second most important Civil War battle flag in Michigan.

**Quiz Questions: This month's questions pertain to Spies and Espionage**

1. Of whom did General James Longstreet say, "[his] reports on Union troop movements are more accurate than a force of cavalry could have secured"?
2. Which Confederate courier/spy was part of the Lincoln conspiracy as a kidnapper? And, after he escaped to Europe, what unusual job did he hold in Italy?
3. Which female spy gave PGT Beauregard valuable information which helped him defeat Union forces at First Bull Run? And what was her final outcome?



4. What method of deception did William Quantrill and his Bushwhackers often use to fool Federal troopers? One raider, Marcellus Clarke, who supposedly rode with Quantrill for a while, was captured and hanged. Because of his long hair and frail appearance what name did Northern newspapers give him?
5. What did Jonesville, MI man, C.G. Birbeck, suggest to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton as the ultimate weapon of the Civil War? What ingenious idea did New York City's Charles Perley have for combat?

Our thanks to “Old Sarge” for his help with these great questions.

### Civil War Essentials – Ben Butler’s Big Boom Boat

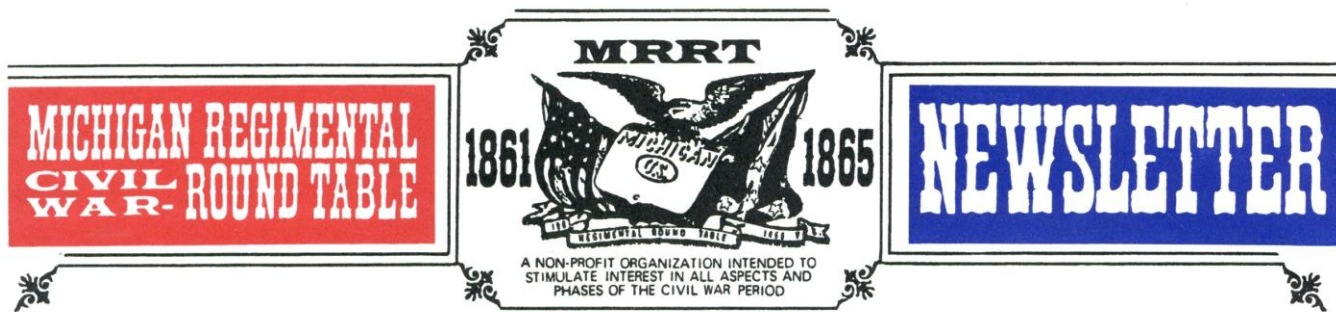
Benjamin Butler, nicknamed “Spoons” because he was supposed to have confiscated valuable silverware from a female resident of New Orleans, was nothing if not durable. **Honest, no: a competent military officer, certainly not: but he was a political survivor of unmatched caliber.** No one else could survive the military blunders he had made or escape censure for the instances where he used his army command to enrich himself and his older brother during his Civil War career. He had used the fact that he was a War Democrat from politically crucial Massachusetts, and thus invaluable to the Lincoln administration, to fend off repeated calls for his dismissal or prosecution.

**By late 1864, Lt. General U.S. Grant finally agreed to mount an expedition to capture Fort Fisher, North Carolina** at the mouth of the Cape Fear River. This would seal off Wilmington, N.C., the last major east coast port open to blockade runners and provide an ideal supply port for General Sherman’s army as it moved into the Carolinas. He chose General Godfrey Weitzel to command the land force. Unfortunately, **Butler was Weitzel’s superior officer and insisted on preempting him as overall army commander on the expedition.** Weitzel would be allowed to lead the actual land assault, of course – Butler was an obese, ugly man and would make an inviting target for the Confederate defenders who hated him above all other Yankees.

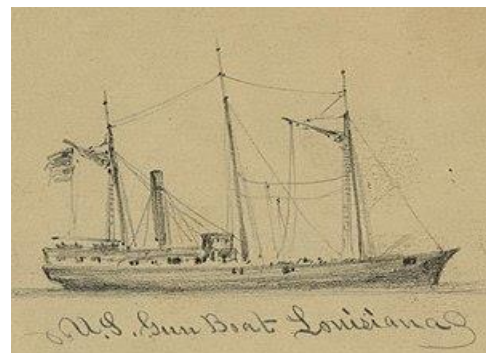


**Among other traits, Butler was fascinated by military experiments and novel schemes.** Earlier, he had read a newspaper report that several barges with gunpowder had accidentally exploded at a dock along the Thames River near London, England. The account claimed that the force of the explosion had caused massive damage and many casualties over a wide radius around the site and rattled windows 10 miles away. His first reaction was to propose that a hulk be packed with 1,000 tons of gunpowder and somehow propelled into Charleston Harbor to wreak havoc on the shipping and the city. That scheme went nowhere **but he now saw a possibility to use the idea at Fort Fisher.** Admiral David D. Porter, the naval commander of the expedition, doubted that it would work but saw no reason not to try it. Any damage it did, however slight, could make the final attack on the fort a little easier. Porter supplied Butler with the 295-ton *USS Louisiana*, a flat-bottomed screw gunboat previously part of the blockading fleet, which he had delivered to Hampton Roads for conversion. It was hoped that by removing the masts, adding a second (false) smokestack, and painting the hull flat gray, the *Louisiana* would look like a blockade runner (drawing below). **215 tons of black powder were stowed**

**onboard and several redundant fusing schemes were employed to ensure the boat would indeed explode.** Anxious to reap the fame he foresaw if the powder boat worked, Butler hovered over the *Louisiana* during its conversion.



In late December after a number of delays and after enduring one of the awful storms which seemed to dog most major Union naval operations along the Atlantic Coast, the attack on the fort was ready. On December 23<sup>rd</sup> at dusk, Porter had a Union gunboat escort the *Louisiana* in towards the fort. **Onboard the hulk, Commander Alexander Rhind led an all-volunteer crew.** The blockade runner disguise apparently allowed them to anchor fairly close to the fort's walls where the crew lit the fuses. **At about midnight the crew left the *Louisiana*. The gunboat with the crew onboard headed away from the boat as fast as possible as the fuses were cut for 90 minutes.** Once they reached the fleet well away at sea, everyone waited.



At 1:30 AM, a series of intermittent explosions accompanied by bright flashes were observed. After 10 minutes, a single large explosion took place. That was it. **Although some Confederate soldiers in the fort tumbled out of their beds and a number of fish were killed, Butler's "pet" was a bust.** Several members of the garrison assumed at the time that the noise came from a boiler explosion aboard a Union warship in the blockade fleet! Watching from the fleet, Commander Rhind commented "*There's a fizzle*".

After the failure of the powder boat explosion, Union authorities concluded that there were several reasons why the results were so disappointing. Only 215 tons of powder was used instead of the 300 tons originally planned. Also, the powder actually used was apparently lower quality than had been specified. Evidently, the powder was not packed tightly enough to ensure one big explosion – instead some of the top layers of bags and barrels may have gone off individually during the 10 minutes. **Even if all had been done perfectly, it seems unlikely the experiment would have had a major impact on the fort.** The sloped, seagrass covered sand mounds that made up Fort Fisher's walls seemed perfectly suited to deflect the shock wave of a major explosion safely upward.

In the aftermath, Butler's attempt to position troops ashore for an assault was a fiasco; Butler had counted on the *Louisiana* doing great damage and was unready to direct a land assault. Porter's fleet sailed away in disgust. **Butler had failed one time too many and, after President Lincoln's reelection, the president knew it was politically safe to sack him.**

With a new army commander, the second attack on Fort-Fisher in mid-January 1865 succeeded albeit at a very heavy cost in lives. **Butler was about to testify before Congress that the fort could not be when paperboys outside the Capitol building began crying the news that Fort Fisher had been captured!** It was reported that even he chuckled at the comic irony of the situation.

#### Quiz Answers:

1. James Harrison (prominent character during the beginning of the *Gettysburg* movie)
2. John Surratt (son of Mary Surratt) and he was a Papal Zouave Guard for Pope Pius IX at the Vatican.
3. Rose O'Neal Greenhow and she drowned on October 1, 1864, when her lifeboat overturned in a storm. She was dragged down by \$2,000 in gold she carried on her person.
4. Rode in Federal uniforms and Sue Mundy.
5. Artillery shells filled with cayenne pepper which would descend upon Confederate forces like a "*destroying angel*" and dropping explosives from hot air balloons.

**Civil War Note – Lincoln Assassination** – Union sergeant Boston Corbe shot and killed John Wilkes Booth. He received \$1,654 as a reward for that. His yearly salary as a U.S. sergeant was \$204.