

Vol LXII, #6

Michigan Regimental Round Table Newsletter—Page 1

June 2022

Sadly, long-time friend and MRRT member Gary Pritchard died on May 31st. Gary was a decorated United States Marine Corps veteran who proudly served in the Vietnam War. He was a founding member of the 17th Michigan Company E, a stellar reenactment group. Gary was the Historical Commissioner for the city of Livonia. He and his wife, Sandra, were married for 56 years and had two children. Gary will be remembered by all of us.

Our June meeting will be on Monday, June 27, 2022, at 6:30 pm in the basement of the Farmington Library – corner of Grand River and Farmington Road. Our speaker will begin around 7:00 pm after a 6:30 pm business meeting.

Our May speaker, Jack Dempsey, is the President of the Michigan Civil War Association (MCWA). His group is raising money for the proposed Michigan monument at Antietam. If you would like to send him a donation check, the address is: MCWA c/o Jack Dempsey 350 South Main Street, Suite 300, Ann Arbor, MI 48104. Jack will be grateful for any assistance that we provide! Please make your check out to “MCWA”.

We will really enjoy our June speaker, Dan Packer of Livonia, who will speak on Confederate General John Mosby. Dan is an active volunteer at the Plymouth Historical Museum and the Yankee Air Museum in Ypsilanti. He has interviewed several World War 2 veterans to preserve their experiences during the war for future generations. Dan is a Vietnam War veteran.

General Mosby, “The Grey Ghost”, was a Confederate cavalry battalion commander who seemingly appeared and disappeared at will. His most famous raid was in March 1863, when he captured Union General Edwin Stoughton inside Union lines at Fairfax County (VA) Courthouse. After the war ended, he and Union commander General Grant became very good friends. This will be an entertaining and educational presentation!

Yes, we are planning for our October trip to Culpepper, Virginia, where we will tour the Brandy Station Battlefield and other Civil War sites! We already have almost 20 signed-up (early June) for the field trip.

The tour dates are Friday evening, October 14th through Sunday afternoon, October 16th.

Our tour guide will be Chris Army – with assistance from Susan Ralston and Chuck Laudner. Chris and Susan operate the new “Culpepper Battlefield Tours”. Their website is <https://www.culpepperbattlefields.org/>

Hotel – Best Western Culpepper (block of rooms has been reserved at \$119.99 per night plus taxes. To reserve a room (Block under MRRT Bus Tour), call 540.825.1253

Tour:

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2022

7:30 pm to 8:30 pm Meet and greet with guides to discuss the tour.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2022

9:00 am to 4:00 pm

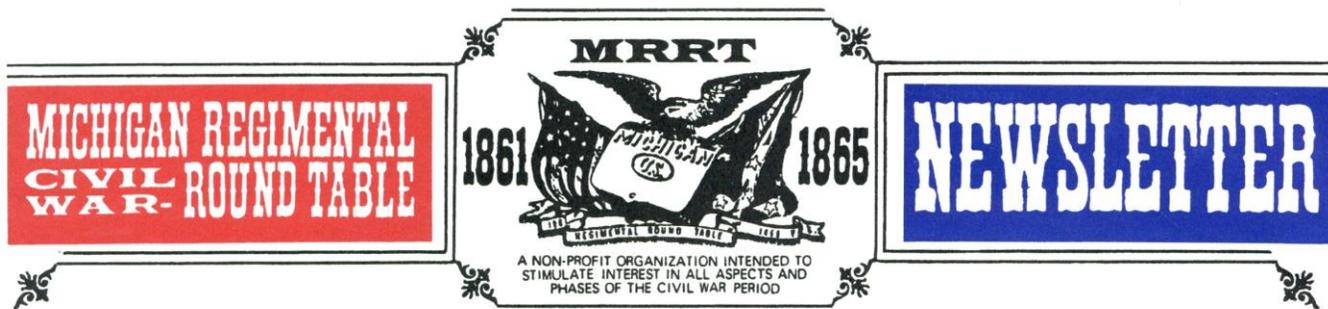
- Campaign Plan and beginning of the Brandy Station battle
- Buford’s Knoll and Fleetwood Hill
- Lunch – Linn Park (Stevensburg) – box lunch delivered by local deli
- Stevensburg action and Hansbrough’s Ridge

5:30 pm to 7:30 pm

- Banquet at Inn of Willow Grove restored plantation in Orange, VA (**tentative**)

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2022

- Sites of the Federal Winter Encampment and Culpepper National Cemetery



- Clark's Mountain (provisional)
- Lunch – Linn Park (Stevensburg) – box lunch delivered by local deli.
- Continued sites of Winter Encampment and USCT Monument (dedicated November 2021)
- Visit/hike to Germanna Ford

The final price is TBD. Will be a great trip. **If you want to sign up or have question(s) please contact Jeanie Graham at grahamjeanie@hotmail.com, 248.225.7596, or Linda Gerhardt at lindagerhardt@comcast.net 586.588.2712. We will send via e-mail or with the monthly mailing any updates to the trip.**

Please note that each participant must provide their own transportation to and from Culpepper, VA, as in past years.

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.

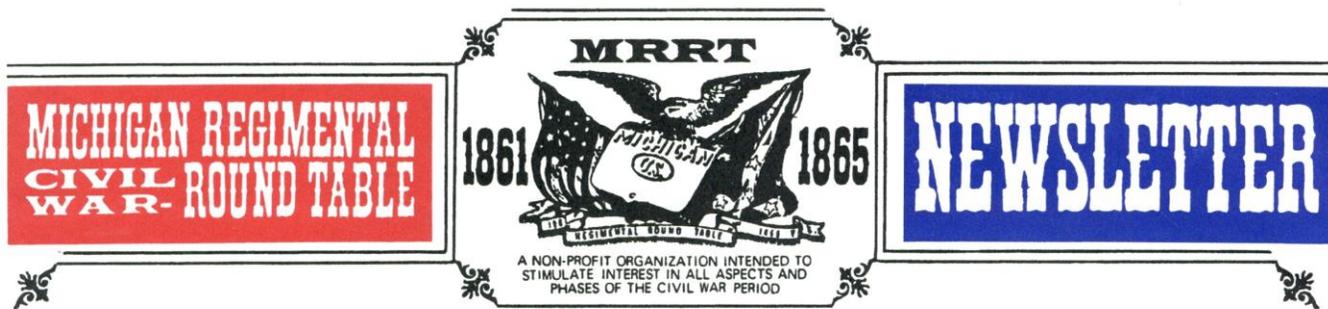
May 2022 Speaker – The MRRT was pleased to welcome back Jack Dempsey for his illuminating presentation on Michigan General Alpheus Williams. Jack told us of his long interest in Civil War history and how he had come to be involved in the efforts to erect a monument to Michigan soldiers at the Antietam battlefield – **where despite the role of Michigan regiments there, no recognition had ever been given to them.** Since most such markers had been erected before the 50th anniversary of the war, he believes that Michigan's veterans who fought there did not seem to feel the need to tell the story of their actions there.

Alpheus Starkey Williams is one of the forgotten heroes of the war. He did not write an autobiography, nor did he engage in the self-promoting tactics used by other generals to gain promotions and history's notice.

He was born in Connecticut in 1810. **Crucially, he attended a university (Yale) rather than West Point – a factor which Jack believes would greatly impact Williams' Civil War stature.** He settled in Detroit in 1836 where he practiced law. Because Williams became involved in the militia before the war and traveled to Mexico during the war with that country (he did not see action in the major battles, however), Michigan governor Austin Blair called on him to help train Michigan's regiments as they were formed at the beginning of the Civil War.

In August 1861, he received a commission and joined General Banks' Fifth Corps. During several succeeding battles in the Eastern theater including the Shenandoah Valley, Antietam, Chancellorsville, and Gettysburg Williams' division fought well although sometimes in a Union Army defeat. **On several occasions, he was called on to assume command of an army corps and led it well. In each case, however, he was not promoted to official command of the corps but reverted to divisional command after the battle.** Jack cited three such instances:

- **At Antietam,** Williams replaced J.F.K. Mansfield who died early in the battle. His division contained the troops that found General R.E. Lee's famed "*Lost Orders*". This intelligence coup led General McClellan to aggressively pursue General Lee, resulting in the bloody Antietam battle. During the battle, after Mansfield's death, Williams' forces progressed the farthest toward the Dunker Church. After the battle, Alpheus Williams was replaced as Corps commander by General Henry Slocum.
- **At Chancellorsville,** after General Stonewall Jackson's surprise attack from the west routed the Federal XI Corps, Williams' division fought a defensive battle to slow down the rebels, allowing the rest of the Federal Army to retire to fight again.



- Again, **at Gettysburg** in July 1863, many historians believe Williams’ positioning of his division helped convince Confederate General Ewell not to try to attack Culp’s Hill on the first day, July 1st. Most of his troops were called away by Meade from Culp’s Hill the next day to help save General Sickles’ Corps from destruction – this action almost resulted in the loss of Culp’s Hill which would have been fatal, but Williams convinced Meade to let him retain one brigade which just managed to withstand determined Confederate assaults throughout the evening and night of July 2nd. On the third day, his XII Corps returned to Culp’s Hill and pushed the rebel troops back from the positions they had taken the day before. Meade’s official report filed after the battle made no mention of General Williams role in protecting the Union right flank. Once again, he was returned to his division command after the battle.



These episodes of temporary Corps command followed by revision to divisional command after major battles would continue after Alpheus Williams was transferred to the Western theater in 1864. Williams led “his “Corps through the Atlanta Campaign, on to Savannah, and up through the Carolinas. Nonetheless, **after Bentonville, General Sherman gave General Joseph Mower, a West Point graduate, the official command of the XX Corps and Alpheus Williams was once again returned to division command.** The sole recognition he was given a promotion to brevet Major General of Volunteers in January 1865.

After a brief post-war stint as a military governor of southern Arkansas, Williams returned to Detroit. He later entered politics and was elected to Congress. **He died in the U.S. Capital Building in 1878 and is buried in Detroit’s Elmwood Cemetery.** In 1921, a well-executed equestrian statue of Williams was erected on Belle Isle and there is a road named after him on Culp’s Hill at Gettysburg. A collection of his wartime letters as published during the mid-20th century.

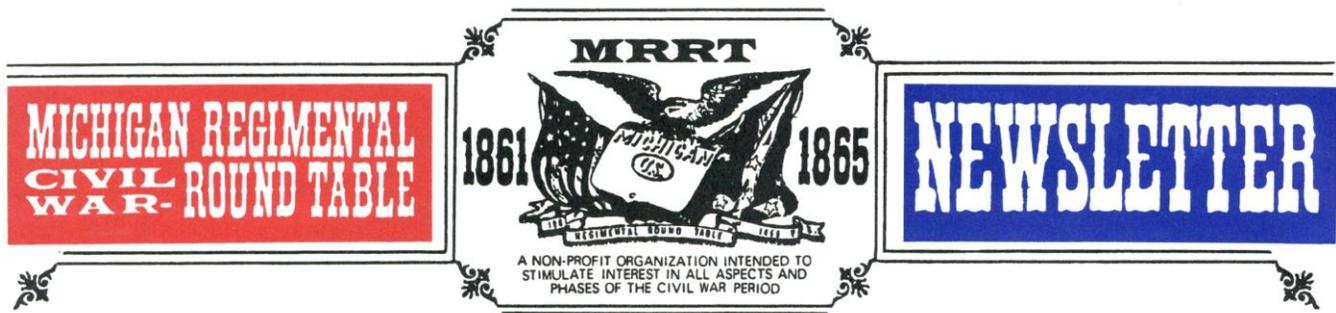
Status of Michigan Monument at the Antietam Battlefield

After his presentation on General Williams, Jack recapped the status of the planned Michigan monument at Antietam. **Some money has been raised but more is required. A statue model has been created.** The image of **Colonel Norman Hall of Monroe**, who commanded the 7th Michigan, will be the personification of all Michigan soldiers on the monument.

Memo: the address for sending a donation is included on Page 1 of the newsletter.

This month’s quiz questions pertain to the Common Soldier:

1. Approximately what percentage of Federal soldiers were foreign born? A) 10% B) 15% C) 20% D) 25% E) 30%
Also, approximately how many American Indians served in the Confederate forces? A) 6,000 B) 17,000 C) 12,000 or D) 20,000
2. What was a crude Confederate homemade shelter of brush and oilcloths arranged over a framework of poles called? What was the Dutch word, very common during the Civil War, meaning “to undertake low offices”?
3. What was unique about the 37th Iowa Infantry? And the shortest Union soldier was in the 192nd Ohio Infantry. How tall was he at age 24 when he enlisted?
4. What were “gallinippers”? And what were ‘wagon dogs’?
5. What was the term for a mounted sentry on picket duty? And who were called “goober grabbers”?



Civil War Essentials – Spartans (1861) Go to War

The State of Michigan established the State Agricultural College in 1855. Six years later, in 1861, the campus consisted of three buildings, including a barn built on a 200-acre field. Hundreds of recently cut stumps covered the clearing. **Classes began in 1857 and by November 1861 the first class was ready to graduate. However, commencement was cancelled as the seven graduates marched off to the Civil War.**

By the attack on Fort Sumter in April 1861, most of the college’s young men were drilling in a student militia called the “*Plough-Boy Guards*”. They participated in competitive musketry drills and other military exercises.

In September 1861, General John C. Fremont, commander of the Department of the West, created a special signal corps unit. Fremont assigned Professor E.P. Howland, a Michigan native, to recruit a group of skilled engineers. Captain Howland went to his home in Battle Creek, MI, to recruit fifty men to join “Howland’s Engineers”. All seven men (picture below) from the State Agricultural College were accepted for “Howland’s Engineers”. Junior George Haigh replaced Adams Bayley.

The unit left Battle Creek on September 25, 1861, for Fort Augustine in St. Louis, Missouri. A month later the unit moved to Tipton, one hundred sixty miles west of St. Louis. Their first assignment was to guard \$1,000,000 of government property stored in Tipton. The men had to get used to guard and picket duty.



Unfortunately, General Henry Halleck ordered the unit out of service on January 8, 1862, because the Engineers existed outside of Federal Army standards. The men then went on separate paths for the remainder of the war. Henry Benham fought with Michigan General George Custer on July 3, 1863, at the Battle of Gettysburg. Later, in 1864, Henry became a first lieutenant of the 1st Michigan Colored Infantry. Benham died of disease at Beaufort, SC on July 2, 1864.

Charles Hollister returned to Michigan and became a farmer. He died in 1900. **Albert Prentiss** returned to the Michigan Agricultural College and became a very popular professor of botany and horticulture. He died in 1896.

Gilbert Dickey returned to the war when he enlisted in the famous 24th Michigan Infantry. **On his first wedding anniversary, July 1, 1863, he died during the brutal fighting in the Herbst Woods at Gettysburg. Colonel Morrow of the 24th describe Dickey as “a young officer of great promise”. George Haigh also enlisted in the 24th Michigan. George survived the war.**

Quiz answers:

1. C) 20% and C) 12,000
2. “Shebang” and sutler
3. Nicknamed the “Greybeards” it had 145 soldiers at age 60 or older. The shortest Union soldier was 3’4” when he enlisted at age 24.
4. Nicknames for mosquitoes by Confederate soldiers and nickname for Confederate soldiers who pretended to be ill and dropped back to the wagon trains.
5. Vidette and a nickname for Georgia soldiers who had a zest for peanuts.