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Michigan Regimental Round Table Newsletter—Page 1

September 2025

SEPTEMBER 29, 2025, ROUNDTABLE MEETING

Our September meeting will be on Monday, September 29, 2025, at 6:30 pm in the lower level of the Farmington Library – corner of Grand River and Farmington Road. Our guest speaker, Dr. Scott Ellsworth, a professor at the University of Michigan, will begin around 7:00 pm, after our 6:30 pm business meeting. We must leave the library by 8:45 pm.

ROUNDTABLE WEBSITE

The Roundtable has a great website, created by our friend, Gerald Furi. We are no longer connected to the Farmington Library. The website is: <https://www.mrrt.us> Please note that the s after http is necessary to get on the website. The website is well worth visiting.

SEPTEMBER'S SPEAKER – DR. SCOTT ELLSWORTH

The Roundtable is happy to introduce our September speaker, Dr Scott Ellsworth, who will speak on “Midnight on the Potomac: The Last Year of the Civil War, the Lincoln Assassination, and the Rebirth of America.”

An excellent review of Dr. Ellsworth’s book appeared in the August 12, 2025, edition of the *Wall Street Journal*. The review was passed out to all the attendees at our August meeting. When the 1864 Overland Campaign began in May 1864, a Union victory in the war was not assured. “*The fate of the United States of America lay in the balance*” Mr. Lincoln would have to worry about both the military situation and the presidential election in November. His opponent would be George McClellan, former extremely popular commander of the Army of the Potomac.

1Dr. Ellsworth discussed the activities of African Americans who joined the Union Army in large numbers. Sojourner Truth and Frederick Douglass visited the White House, helping to make possible the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery after the war ended.

As the war ended, desperate Southerners tried to change the outcome of the war. The actor John Wilkes Booth murdered the President, making Reconstruction even more difficult.

Dr. Ellsworth discussed the consequences of the war. The Civil War was not only “*a conflict between armies and generals but a fight for the very soul of the nation.*”

Dr, Ellsworth earned his PhD at Duke University. Today, he teaches courses at the University of Michigan on African American history, Southern literature, race and sports, and crime and justice in contemporary U.S society. He wrote *Death in a Promised Land*, the first full-scale history of the horrific 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. He is working on the effort to find the graves of the victims of the riot.

He has worked as a historian for the Smithsonian Institute, the *New York Times* on American history, and several other radio and TV outlets.

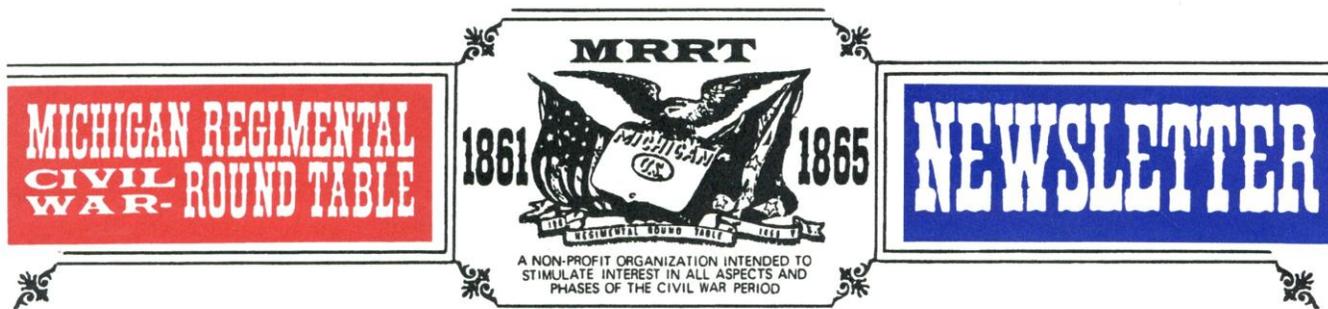
This will be a great presentation!

GETTYSBURG TRIP!

Everyone has paid for the tour. Thank you very much!

The Roundtable will be visiting the Gettysburg Battlefield on Saturday and Sunday, November 1st and 2nd, 2025.

Linda Gerhardt has done a wonderful job putting our trip together. **As of September 20th, 33 people have signed up for our trip!** Our guide will be Chris Army (correct last name). He was our terrific guide, along with Clark “Bud” Hall. for the Culpepper and Brandy Station trip. He passed the difficult Gettysburg guide test, discussed in our January 2025 newsletter. Chris will meet with us at the Breakfast Cottage at the hotel on Friday evening at 7:00 pm.



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GETTYSBURG HOTEL

Please call the Quality Inn Battlefield to make your reservation very soon.

We have reserved a block of rooms at the *Quality Inn Battlefield*, 380 Steinwehr Avenue, Gettysburg, that our President, George Crouch, recommended. The Inn is right on the Battlefield, in view of President Lincoln's Gettysburg Address monument. **The telephone number is 717.913.4923.** Prices are \$170 each for Friday and Saturday. Sunday nights are \$90. This fee includes breakfast. **The rooms are reserved under the Michigan Regimental Roundtable MRRT, held until October 1, 2025.**

The Inn includes the Reliance Mine Saloon where many historians gather. William Frassanito, Garry Adelman, and Tim Smith are regular visitors.

GETTYSBURG TOUR COST

The tour costs \$275 per person (for thirty-four participants):

- The Tour guide fee and tip.
- Baily Coach will provide bus transportation around the Gettysburg area.
- Gettysburg Visitor Center Movie, Cyclorama, and Museum Entry.
- Box lunches are on Saturday and Sunday. Saturday evening buffet at the 1776 Dobbin House Tavern. The menu includes a 25-item salad bar, fresh bread, three main entrees, four vegetables, four desserts, and a selection of coffee, tea, and iced tea. **At the September meeting, Jeanne will ask the group about any food allergies.**

If our participation increases, the individual Tour Cost will decline.

ITINERARY

The itinerary will include General Meade's Headquarters, Culp's Hill Observation Tower, Michigan Cavalry Brigade Monument, and Gettysburg National Military Park Museum & Visitor's Center. All the key sites on the battlefield.

SIGN UP

Sign up for the tour at a MRRT meeting or contact Linda Gerhardt (586.588.2712, lindagerhardt99@gmail.com).

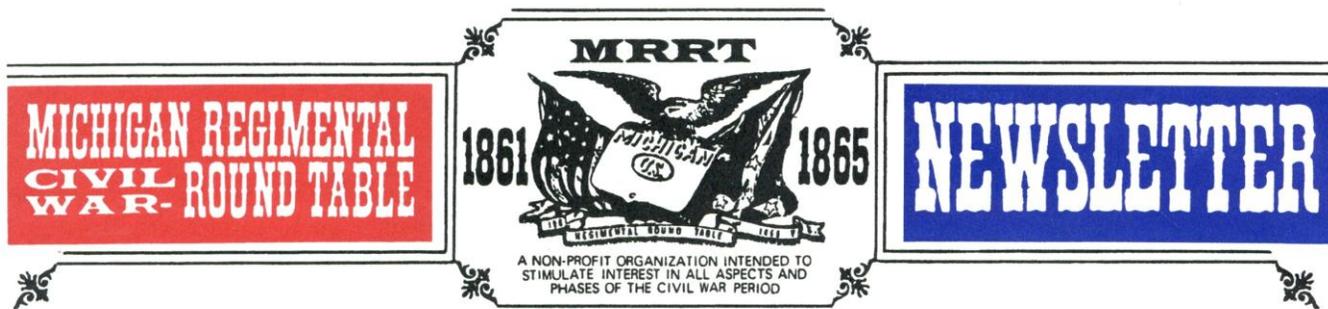
Please note that each participant is responsible for his/her travel to and from Gettysburg.

AUGUST SPEAKER – DAVE INGALL – GENERAL CUSTER DURING THE CIVIL WAR

Our August 2025 meeting was highlighted by David Ingall, speaking on "The Forgotten Custer" – General George Custer during the Civil War. Dave grew up in Monroe, MI and some of his relatives knew some of George's relatives. George was a 2nd Lieutenant at The Battle of Bull Run in July 1861 with the U.S. Cavalry. He had recently graduated from West Point as the "Goat (last academically) "in his class. Memo: Two future Confederate generals, Henry Heth and George Pickett, first cousins, were goats of their classes in the early 1850's.

Captain George Custer was a Typographical Engineer on General McCellan's staff during the Peninsula Campaign in 1862. One-time, General McCellan wanted to know how deep the river was that they were trying to cross over. So, Captain Custer went into the river on his horse and said half-way over, "*This is how deep, General!*" He was one of the first men in the Union Army to go up in a balloon.

George played an active role during the Battle of Antietam in September 1862. **President Lincoln visited General McClellan at the Grove Farm after the battle. Custer was in the famous picture of McClellan's staff.**



During the prelude to the Battle of Gettysburg, George joined General Pleasanton's cavalry. He fought at Brandy Station on June 9, 1863, and Aldie, VA, on June 17th.

Then the major event of George's Civil War career happened. Pleasanton promoted three young captains to Brigadier General. General Custer was now the youngest general in the Union Army.

The Michigan Cavalry Brigade (monument at Gettysburg below) was introduced to General Custer on June 7, 1863, in Hanover, PA. The Brigade was the number one cavalry unit in the Union Army.



General Custer's brigade was with General Gregg's unit at Gettysburg's East Cavalry Field on July 3, 1863. The field was quite a distance from Gettysburg. At Rummel Farm, the 5th Michigan Cavalry set up a skirmish line. The 7th Michigan, least experienced unit, charged Confederate Fitz Lee's unit, the battle ending in a draw.

Custer now became a well-known brigadier general. He led a charge with "Come On, You Wolverines!" This charge was at the same time as Pickett's Charge. The Union Cavalry played a key role in the Gettysburg victory.

General Custer's brigade followed the retreating Confederates to Monterey Pass, on July 4th and fifth. His unit fought numerous battles with General JEB Stuart's unit going back to the Potomac River. The

last battle was at Falling Waters on July 14th as Henry Heth's men completed the crossing of the Potomac. The Union cavalry captured eight hundred men.

Custer was wounded for the only time at Culpepper, Virginia on September 13, 1863. He was struck by a Confederate artillery shell.

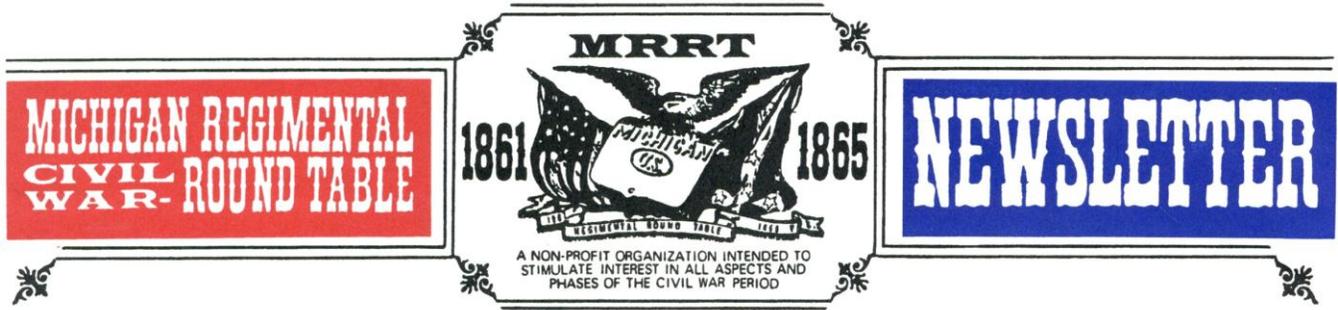
George and Libbie Bacon were married in Monroe at the 1st Presbyterian Church on February 9, 1864. Libbie never remarried after the Battle of the Little Bighorn. During the war, some of Libbie's lover letters were captured by the Confederates.

The Battle of Trevillian Station, on June 12, 1864, became known as "Custer's 1st Last Stand". It was a miracle that he was not killed or wounded.

General Custer became a division commander on September 19, 1864, thus leaving the Michigan cavalry brigade. At Cedar Creek, VA, on October 19, 1864, he helped lead the rally that resulted in a major Union victory. George had become famous, appearing on the cover of *Harper's Weekly*. His brother Tom served on George's staff. Tom would be awarded two Medals of Honor during the war. He captured a Confederate flag at the Nazarene Church, VA, during the Appomattox Campaign. He died at the Little Big Horn.

Custer's division arrived first at Appomattox Court House on April 8, 1865, capturing supplies for General Lee's Army. The Confederate Army then surrendered the next day. General Custer was not in the McLean House during the surrender ceremony.

We thank Dave for his discussion of General Custer's (and the Michigan Cavalry brigade) efforts during the War!



Civil War Essentials – Champ Ferguson: Criminal or Confederate Martyr?



The arrest, trial, and execution by hanging of Heinrich (Henry) Wirz, the Andersonville prison camp commander, is a well-known tale to most people interested in the Civil War. **There was a second individual arrested at the end of the war and charged with multiple murders.** That person was a Confederate partisan leader named Champ Ferguson (picture left). He was also hanged after a lengthy trial.

The mountainous nature of eastern Tennessee and lack of strategic targets meant that conventional military forces were not always present. **As a result, the region experienced frequent conflict between Unionist and Secessionist groups, during which conventional wartime protocols were frequently disregarded.**

Ferguson, born in 1821 in Kentucky, moved to eastern Tennessee before the war. He was married with children and farmed but had already acquired a reputation as a violent man by then. At the war's beginning, **Ferguson supported the Confederacy** unlike the rest of his siblings including a brother who died fighting for the Union. His motives are unknown.

He gathered a band of pro-secessionist partisans together to attack any Unionists they could find. Ferguson sometimes functioned as a Confederate partisan ranger loosely attached to either John H. Morgan or “Fighting Joe” Wheeler and may have received a Confederate captain's commission. **Legends of his sadistic tendencies circulated in the area.** He was believed to murder prisoners and to commit other heinous acts such as decapitation. It was reported that, at one time, he was detained by Confederate authorities on allegations of murdering a local official; however, he was released due to insufficient evidence. **Among other crimes, he was accused of murdering wounded Union prisoners after the first battle of Saltville, Virginia in October 1864.** These victims were Black Federal soldiers and their white officers of the 5th US Colored Cavalry. Confederate General Felix Robertson allegedly also participated in these atrocities but was never prosecuted.

At the end of the war, Ferguson disbanded his followers and went back to his farm. **There he was arrested in late May 1865 and charged with the murder of fifty-three soldiers.** He was taken to Nashville where he was tried in a widely followed trial which lasted for months. **Champion contended that the only men he killed were because of lawful combat and that others he was accused of killing died at the hands of other men.**

On October 10, 1865, Ferguson was found guilty and sentenced to hang. At the sentencing, he denied that he had received a fair trial and reiterated his claim that he had only killed men in combat and asked that he be buried in “good Rebel soil.” **He was hanged on October 20th.** His guilt remains disputed, as supporters argue the trial was unfair due to false witnesses and judicial bias. Following his death, reports emerged suggesting that, like other figures in American history such as John Wilkes Booth, Billy the Kid, Jesse James, John Dillinger, and Lee Harvey Oswald, Ferguson may not have died on the gallows as recorded in official accounts. Somehow, so the tale goes, he escaped alive with the connivance of the Union officer in charge of the execution!!

His greatest crime was to survive the end of the war unlike other notorious rebel partisans such as “Bloody Bill” Anderson and William Quantrill.