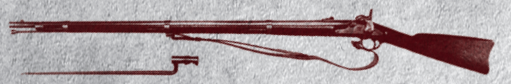
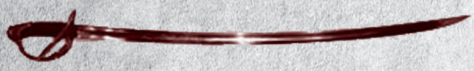
Michigan in the American Civil War



" Thank God for Michigan! "

~President Abraham Lincoln



1861	1862	1863	1864	1865

MICHIGAN IN THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

Prepared by the Michigan Legislature

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Michigan in the American Civil War
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(10/2015)

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Lincoln says, "Thank God for Michigan!" The men pictured above are part of the Fourth Michigan Infantry Regiment. More than 90,000 Michigan men (and at least one woman posing as a man!) fought in the Civil War.

Introduction

After the election of Abraham Lincoln as president of the United States in November 1860, eleven Southern states announced they were **seceding**, or withdrawing from the **Union**. Up to that time, the "Union" referred to all of the states, north and south, east and west, joined together to make the United States of America. When the southern states seceded, they tried to form a new country, the "**Confederate States of America**," also known as the "**Confederacy**." After that, the "Union" referred to the anti-slavery states, mostly in the north. Northern states often referred to the southern states as "**rebels**" for trying to break away from the United States.

Lincoln had been elected on a policy of stopping the expansion of slavery beyond the states where it already existed. All eleven seceding states depended upon slave labor for their economies. When Southern troops fired on a federal fort in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina, on April 12, 1861, Lincoln called on all loyal states to supply troops to put down the rebellion, and the Civil War began. From April 1861 to May 1865, the war raged from Pennsylvania to Florida and from Missouri to Arizona. When it was over, the American Union was saved, slavery was ended – and Michigan played a key role in it all.

Slavery

Slavery means owning other human beings as your personal property and forcing them to work without pay.

On July 13, 1787, Congress adopted what became known as the "Northwest Ordinance." An **ordinance** is a law or command, and this ordinance said that slavery was forever banned in the Northwest Territory, a large region that eventually became Michigan and four other states. However, people living in the territory were allowed to keep slaves they already owned.

In Michigan, slavery began after the arrival of the French in the 1600s. When the British arrived in 1761 they discovered Native American and African slaves. In 1782, a **census**, or count of the number of people living in an area, showed 78 male and 101 female slaves living in Detroit. The number of slaves declined after the British left Detroit in 1796. Only 15 African-Americans lived in Detroit in 1805. It is unclear how many were slaves, but businessman Joseph Campau owned ten slaves at the time.

Most Michiganders neither owned nor approved of slavery. In 1807 a Canadian living in Windsor demanded that his two escaped African-American slaves – then living in Michigan – be returned to him. Territorial Judge Augustus Woodward denied the request. He declared that slavery did not exist in the Michigan Territory and that every "man coming into this Territory is by law of the land a freeman."

The 1830 U.S. census showed 32 slaves living in the Michigan Territory, but these numbers dwindled quickly. Michiganders became more critical of slavery and many began calling for its **abolition** – the act of officially ending something. As the Civil War neared, some worked in the **Underground Railroad** to help people escape from slavery.

The Underground Railroad

The Underground Railroad was not a real railroad; "**Underground**" means secret or hidden, and the name referred to secret routes used to move escaping slaves, as well as to the homes where they were hidden. Traveling by night and hiding by day, escaping slaves often wore disguises as they made their way north. Railroad terms were used as code words. Most southern Michigan towns had "conductors," people who helped escaping slaves by hiding them in barns or homes, called "depots." At night slaves were moved to a new depot in the next town on foot, in wagons, or by horseback. Some slaves stayed in northern states like Michigan, where they could be free. Others crossed the Detroit River to freedom in Canada. Escaping was dangerous. If caught, slaves were often whipped or

President Lincoln and Sojourner Truth

beaten and placed in chains. Nonetheless, many who made it to the North worked to help other slaves escape using the Underground Railroad.

An African-American woman named Sojourner Truth escaped from slavery in 1827. Later, she made her home in Battle Creek. As an **abolitionist**, a person who worked to end slavery, she made powerful speeches denouncing the practice. She was one of many Michiganders who fought against slavery and worked to extend equal rights to all people.

Michigan Answers the Call

After President Lincoln called for volunteers to put down the rebellion, quotas were assigned to each of the loyal states. Michigan Governor Austin Blair promised that Michigan could furnish more, but was called upon to supply only a single regiment of **infantry**, or foot soldiers. Many rushed to volunteer and on May 4, the Michigan legislature authorized money to help their families.

The First Michigan Infantry Regiment in the Campus Maritius in Detroit, May 11, 1861. This grand ceremony marked the presentation of the regiment's battle flags shortly before leaving for the battlefield.

The First Michigan Infantry Regiment was formed largely from militia companies from Adrian, Ann Arbor, Burr Oak, Coldwater, Detroit, Jackson, Manchester, Marshall and Ypsilanti. On May 13, 1861, the regiment left for Washington, D.C., the first regiment from the Midwest to reach and defend the nation's capital. Greeting the First upon its arrival, Lincoln gratefully exclaimed, "Thank God for Michigan!"

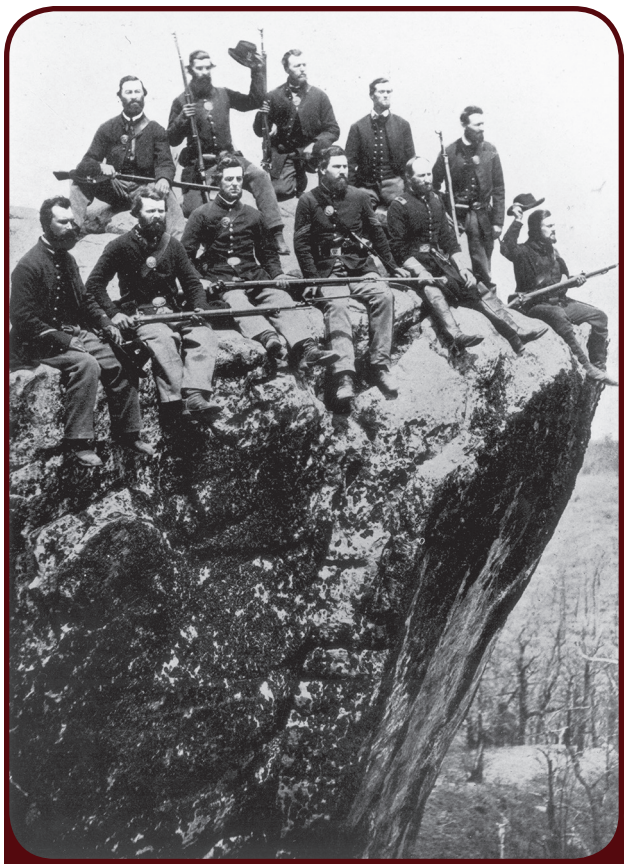
A Civil War **regiment** was approximately 1,000 soldiers, including officers and men – and sometimes boys. A regiment was made up of ten **companies** of around 100 soldiers each. Each company was led by a **captain**, while the whole regiment was led by a **colonel**. Regiments were gathered into **brigades**, which in turn were organized into **divisions**, then into **corps**, or a wing, of an **army**.

The best way to communicate to a large group of soldiers, especially during battle, was through the beat of a drum. Drummer boys who were not old enough to fight were recruited to go with their regiments into battle and signal actions to their comrades. An example was John Lincoln Clem. At age ten, Johnny Clem tagged along with the Twenty-Second Michigan Volunteer Infantry Regiment and was eventually enrolled in the regiment as a drummer boy. His courage under fire at the battle of Chickamauga, Georgia, on September 20, 1863, made him famous.

John Lincoln Clem

Quite a number of Michiganders volunteered for the **cavalry**, mounted troops who fought on horseback. They acted as scouts, gathering information on the enemy, as well as a swift force to attack or defend points difficult for foot soldiers to reach. One of the most famous mounted units of the Civil War was the Michigan Cavalry Brigade, composed of four Michigan cavalry regiments.

Michigan also furnished **batteries** of light artillery. A battery consisted of six cannons, each pulled by a team of horses. Batteries did not fight together. Instead, they were split up and sent to different armies in both the Eastern Theater (from Pennsylvania to Georgia) and the Western Theater (from Kentucky to Alabama).



The First Michigan Engineers and Mechanics at Lookout Mountain, Tennessee.

Several hundred Michiganders served in the United States Navy. Given Michigan's location on the Great Lakes, their experience came in handy aboard ship.

Michigan also supplied a regiment of **engineers and mechanics** and a regiment of **sharpshooters**. These regiments were devoted to special purposes. The engineers and mechanics built bridges, maintained railroads, and fought as well. Sharpshooters were skilled marksmen. One company of the First Michigan Sharpshooters, Company K, was composed almost entirely of Native Americans.

Michigan raised and sent to the front lines more than 90,000 soldiers. This represented one-fourth of the entire male population of the state.

Battle of First Manassas, or First Bull Run

The first major battle of the war – called the battle of "First Manassas" by the South and "First Bull Run" by the North – took place on Sunday, July 21, 1861 near Manassas, Virginia, only 30 miles south of Washington, D.C. It was a very confusing fight. Some Southern regiments wore the blue uniforms usually worn by the North, while some Northern regiments wore grey uniforms like the South. Neither army had been trained very well. Armies were larger and their generals did not know the proper way to lead and command them. At one point, the Union army appeared to be winning, but Confederate reinforcements arrived by train and turned back the Northerners, who beat a hasty retreat back to Washington, D.C.

First Michigan Infantry Regiment staff. Colonel Orlando Willcox is seated.

The First Michigan Infantry fought bravely at a key part of the battlefield. Its commander, Colonel Orlando Willcox of Detroit, was wounded and taken prisoner. He was not released for a year. For their valor, he and his aide, William Withington of Jackson, received the Medal of Honor, America's highest military award.

Civilians from Washington rode out in carriages to picnic and watch the battle, thinking it would be a quick Union victory. When it proved to be a Confederate victory, both sides realized two things: the war would not end quickly, and it would cost many lives. Indeed, over the four years of the war, approximately 750,000 Americans died from battle wounds or disease.

General Orlando Willcox

Battle of Antietam

In September 1862, Confederate forces under the command of General Robert E. Lee invaded Maryland in the hope of winning foreign recognition and enlisting Maryland into the Southern Confederacy. Elements of the opposing Union army were led by Michiganders including Orlando Willcox, William Withington, Israel Richardson of Pontiac, and Norman Hall of Monroe. Future cavalry generals George A. Custer and Elon J. Farnsworth served as staff aides.

The bloodiest single day of the Civil War took place across Antietam Creek near the little town of Sharpsburg, Maryland on September 17, 1862. The Union Army of the Potomac attacked the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia on its left in the morning, in the middle at midday, and on the right toward the day's end. By nightfall, the two armies suffered 23,000 **casualties**, meaning those killed, wounded, missing or captured. Michigan's casualties were high. The Seventh Michigan Infantry Regiment attacked across a field and into a wooded area. Among Michigan's losses were Lieutenant John A. Clark of Monroe and the state's highest ranking general, Israel Richardson of Pontiac, who died of wounds suffered in the battle.

At day's end, Lee's army retreated into Virginia. Michigan's vital role in winning the battle contributed to a new birth of American freedom.

General Israel Richardson

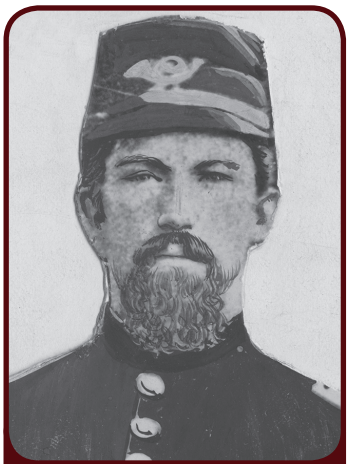
Just five days later, President Lincoln issued the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, calling for the freedom of four million slaves in the Confederate states by January 1, 1863.

Michigan's contributions also involved the famous "Lost Order." Lee had ordered his army to split up into sections. A copy of the order was lost when the Confederate army broke camp near Frederick, Maryland. There it was soon discovered by a Union soldier. It was handed up through the ranks to General Alpheus Williams of Detroit, whose aide recognized it as genuine. Without the vital information it provided, Antietam might not have been a Union victory and the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation might not have been issued when it was.

Battle of Gettysburg

Perhaps the most famous battle of the war – and certainly the bloodiest overall – took place at the little Pennsylvania crossroads town of Gettysburg. For three days, July 1-3, 1863, hundreds of thousands of Americans fought in the streets and on the fields and hills around the village. The campaign that led to the battle began in June 1863 when the Army of Northern Virginia invaded Maryland and Pennsylvania. The Army of the Potomac followed. Neither side expected a battle at Gettysburg. A small fight on the morning of July 1 increased in intensity as both sides rushed reinforcements down the many roads that met in the square. By the end of the three days, more than 51,000 Americans were casualties.

Some historians regard the battle as the turning point of the Civil War. It occurred midway through the four-year war, and Confederate forces were mostly confined to the South after losing this battle.


Colonel Harrison Jeffords

At least 4,000 Michiganders served in the Union army at Gettysburg. When the battle ended, more than 1,110 of them were listed as casualties. Many of the dead were buried in the Gettysburg National Cemetery. President Lincoln dedicated the cemetery in November 1863, delivering what is probably the most famous speech in American history – the **Gettysburg Address**. In the speech he encouraged Americans to remember the sacrifices made by Union soldiers:

> *"…we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth."*

Years after the Civil War, veterans of the battle placed stone monuments where their regiments had fought on the battlefield. The Gettysburg National Military Park today is home to ten monuments to Michigan regiments. One monument honors the 26-year-old commander of the Fourth Michigan Infantry. On the second day of battle, Colonel Harrison Jeffords of Dexter was mortally wounded defending his regiment's flag in hand-to-hand combat. The most impressive Michigan monument at Gettysburg, however, standing 40 feet tall, belongs to the Michigan Cavalry Brigade. Many in the brigade had never been in

General George Armstrong Custer

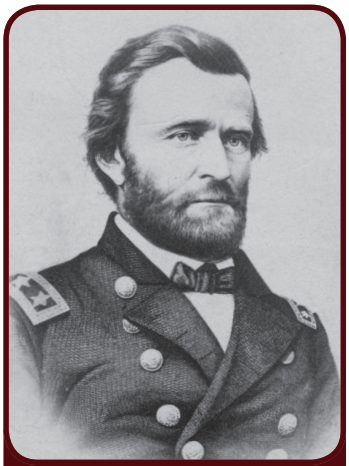
battle before. Their commander was 24-year-old General George Armstrong Custer of Monroe. This was Custer's first battle as a general. The monument was placed where the Cavalry Brigade stopped the rebel cavalry in one of the most dramatic charges of the war.

Vicksburg Campaign

With Washington and most of the major newspapers and journals located in the East, the entire theater of the war west of the Appalachian Mountains took a backseat in the public mind. Many historians, however, point to the Western Theater as the place where the North really won the war by defeating all of the Confederate armies and occupying Tennessee and major portions of Mississippi and Northern Georgia. Vital to this success was taking control of the Mississippi River from southern Illinois all the way to New Orleans and the Gulf of Mexico.

Key to controlling the river was capturing the city of Vicksburg, Mississippi. It sat high above the river, and its cannons kept the Union army and navy forces away. General Ulysses S. Grant, who would be elected president after the war, went around Vicksburg and carried on a 98-day campaign. His army defeated several Confederate forces and trapped them in the city. After several weeks, the Confederates finally surrendered on July 4, 1863.

Michigan soldiers played an important role in this campaign, as well as in the entire Western Theater. Today, an imposing monument to the "Spirit of Michigan" marks the contributions of Michigan troops in the Vicksburg National Military Park.

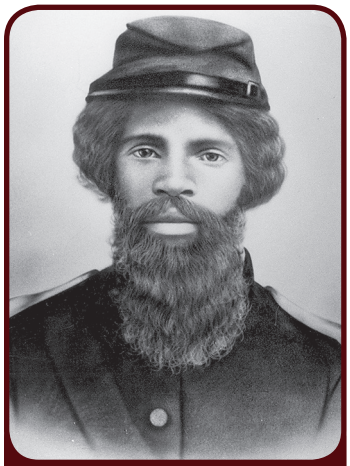


General Ulysses S. Grant

African and Native Americans

When the Civil War began, African-Americans wanted to join the Union army. Their offers to become soldiers initially were refused. In 1862, conditions changed. Congress eliminated slavery in the District of Columbia and passed laws that allowed escaped slaves to serve the army in support roles.

In the third year of the war, however, the North needed more soldiers. The Emancipation Proclamation, issued on January 1, 1863, declared slaves in rebel territory to be free and permitted African-Americans to join the military. Some northern states moved quickly to organize African-American regiments. In August 1863, Michigan Governor Austin Blair received permission to organize the First Michigan Colored Infantry Regiment. Near the end of 1863, the regiment toured cities in the southern Lower Peninsula to recruit more volunteers to join its ranks. It stopped in Ypsilanti, Ann Arbor, Jackson, Kalamazoo, Marshall, Cassopolis, and Niles. On March 28, 1864, the regiment



Kinchen Artis from Battle Creek enlisted as a private in the First Michigan Colored Infantry Regiment in 1863. He was promoted to corporal in May 1864.

left Detroit for action. Since Michigan transferred the regiment to the control of the federal government, its name was changed to the 102nd U.S. Colored Infantry. The regiment served in South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida and was engaged in several battles. The heroism of black men in blue uniforms serving in the deep South where slavery was the most strongly defended is remarkable. Like all black regiments, Michigan's African-American infantry played an important role in winning the Civil War. These black soldiers, who won the respect of their white comrades, also helped win freedom for their race.

Although Native Americans were not citizens of the United States, many volunteered to serve in Union regiments. One of the most famous examples was Company K of the First Michigan Sharpshooters. Members of the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi nations served. Recruited for their skill with a rifle, and noted for personal bravery, they distinguished themselves in several key battles, including the terrible Battle of the Crater at Petersburg, Virginia, in July 1864.

Memorial to the Seventh Michigan Infantry Regiment in the Gettysburg National Military Park in Pennsylvania.

There is a special section for the graves of Civil War veterans in Detroit's Elmwood Cemetery. Just as in war, they lie side by side, regardless of their racial or ethnic backgrounds.

Home Front

When men went off to war, they left their farms, their stores, their businesses and their homes behind. Usually, it was women who kept it all humming. Michigan was mostly rural in 1861-65. Most people worked on farms or as laborers. Very few people worked in offices, compared to today. While Michigan farms helped feed the troops, Michigan forests provided lumber for war materials and Michigan mines produced copper and iron critical for the survival of the Union.

In addition to taking charge in the absence of so many men, women supported the war in other ways. They gathered food supplies and sent them to the soldiers at the front. They formed Soldiers' Aid Societies to send clothes, blankets, and books to enrich the lives of the troops.

Women did not always limit themselves to helping from home. Wives of officers could join their husbands in camp, and some women went to the front lines as nurses. A famous example was Annie Etheridge from Wayne County, who received a medal for her courage tending to the wounded under fire on the battlefield. And at least one woman disguised herself as a man so she could serve as a regular soldier. Sarah Emma Edmonds joined the Second Michigan Infantry as "Franklin Flint Thompson."

Her disguise was so good that she fooled everyone and fought alongside her comrades on the battlefield. Her fellow soldiers spoke highly of her even after her disguise was discovered, and called her a good soldier.

Annie Etheridge, known as "Gentle Annie," received the Kearney Cross, awarded for heroic acts of bravery under fire.

Michigan was very loyal to the Union during the four years of the war. It voted for Lincoln in 1860 and 1864, for Governor Blair in 1860 and 1862, and Governor Crapo in 1864. All three leaders refused to allow the Union to be defeated.

The Final Year

In the spring of 1864, two major Union armies faced off against their Confederate counterparts. In the east, General Grant took overall command and ordered the Army of the Potomac to move against General Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. In the west, General William T. Sherman led three combined armies against General Joseph E. Johnston's Army of Tennessee. There would be another presidential election in November. By that time, the war would have been dragging on for almost four years. Many wondered if President Lincoln could be reelected.

Sherman's first goal was to capture Atlanta, Georgia, a major railroad and supply center for the South. On September 2, four months and many battles later, the Confederates were forced to flee the city. Sherman sent a **telegram** – the first form of electronic communication – to the president, announcing, "Atlanta is ours, and fairly won." Coming so close to the election, the victory helped reelect Lincoln for four more years. Something else helped Lincoln to victory: Union soldiers were allowed to vote in the field, and they voted for Lincoln by a margin of 3 to 1.

Sherman's next move was to march from Atlanta to the Atlantic Ocean. His goal was "to make Georgia howl" and show the South that the Union army could not be stopped. On December 22, after reaching the port city of Savannah, he sent a telegram to Lincoln saying, "I beg to present you as a Christmas gift the City of Savannah." Then Sherman left Savannah, marching north to join up with General Grant in Virginia.

By the end of the summer, after a series of bloody battles in the east, the Union army surrounded Richmond, the capital of the Confederacy. Lee's army was still too strong to be defeated, however, and it was not until March 1865 that the Union army broke through the Confederate defenses and entered the city. Lee retreated toward North Carolina, hoping to join rebel forces trying to stop Sherman's armies as they marched through the Carolinas. Instead, Lee and his army were trapped in western Virginia near the little town of Appomattox Court House, where Lee surrendered on April 9, 1865.

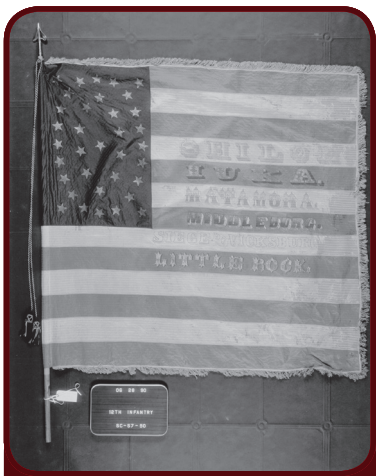
During the final year of the war, Michigan soldiers played a vital role in winning the war for the Union. Eighteen Michigan regiments fought in the Army of the Potomac. Thirteen more – including regiments of infantry, cavalry, artillery, and engineers and mechanics – fought with Sherman, making it possible for his armies to march continuously until he accepted General Johnston's surrender on April 26, 1865. And General Custer and his Michigan Cavalry Brigade had distinguished themselves as well, heading off General Lee to cut off his retreat.

The Battle Flags

Civil War battlefields were dangerous, terrifying, and sad places. They were also confusing. The air was filled with the shouts and screams of fighting and dying men, the roar of cannons, the rattle of guns, horses neighing and bugles trumpeting. Combined with clouds of dust and gun smoke, it was easy for a soldier to become lost and separated from his regiment.

Battle flags directed the men on the battlefield and encouraged them to keep fighting. The large (6 x 6½ feet), brilliantly colored flags, held aloft on 10-foot staffs, were easily seen and stood as markers even in the dust, smoke and confusion of battle. The men knew their regimental banners well and could instantly recognize them. "Follow me!" shouted the **color bearer** (the man assigned to carry the flag), and the regiment advanced or retreated by following its flag. Or, when the color bearer planted his staff in the ground, the men knew to rally round the flag and stand their ground. The honor of carrying the flag was given to the tallest and bravest men of the regiment, as well as those of the finest character.

Battle flags were presented to regiments in touching farewell ceremonies before they left for battle. They were often presented by the ladies of the towns and cities where the regiments were recruited and organized.



Civil War Battle Flag, 12th Infantry.

Each regiment normally received two silken flags: a "**national**," or stars and stripes, and a "**regimental**," or dark blue flag emblazoned with the coat of arms of the United States: an eagle, its wings outstretched. Often Michigan's coat of arms appeared on the flags as well.

Defying regulations, mottoes were sometimes painted or embroidered on the flags. Examples include:

"At Her Country's Sacred Call Her Patriot Sons Will Peril All"
Second Michigan Infantry Regiment

"From the Ladies of Adrian to the Fourth Michigan – DEFEND IT"
Fourth Michigan Infantry Regiment

"Do Your Duty"
Sixth Michigan Infantry/
Heavy Artillery Regiment

"Presented to the Tenth Regiment by the Citizens of Flint"
Tenth Michigan Infantry Regiment

"We Come to War Not on Opinions But to Suppress Treason"
Fourteenth Michigan Infantry Regiment

"In Jure Vincimus – We Conquer in Right"
Fourth Michigan Cavalry Regiment

"Fear Not Death Fear Dishonor"
Sixth Michigan Cavalry Regiment

These flags stood for everything the men were fighting for: family, community, country and Union. Regiments – and particularly companies – were recruited from specific areas within the state. The men who joined a company often knew each other well: they had grown up together, gone to school together, and attended church services together. Many belonged to the same family. It was common to have fathers and even grandfathers serving alongside sons, grandsons, uncles and nephews. 135 pairs of brothers served

in the 24th Michigan Infantry Regiment, including two uncles of Henry Ford, the founder of the Ford Motor Company.

Soldiers on both sides understood how important the flags were and promised to protect them no matter the cost. Losing a flag to the enemy in battle disgraced the entire regiment, but capturing an enemy's flag was a great honor. Both sides tried to capture each other's flags by training their fiercest fire on the men carrying them. This meant that serving as a flag bearer was incredibly dangerous. Flag bearers on both sides suffered the greatest casualties of the war. Despite the danger, many men were willing to risk their lives for the honor of carrying their regiment's flags. The very first Medals of Honor, America's highest military award, were given during the Civil War, most often for incredible acts of courage in defending the regiment's flag or capturing a Confederate flag. Sixty-nine Michigan men received the Medal of Honor.

Today it is sometimes hard to understand why soldiers literally risked their lives to save their flags. Probably the best way to understand it is to read what soldiers themselves had to say.

The Sixth Michigan Infantry Regiment left the state for war in August 1861. On the way, the regiment spent the winter in Baltimore, Maryland. There the colonel of the regiment, Frederick Curtenius, received a beautiful silk battle flag for the regiment, the gift of the citizens of Kalamazoo. In accepting the flag, Colonel Curtenius said to his men:

> *"To a soldier, a good soldier, the colors of his regiment are a priceless treasure. For their honor he will submit willingly to any sacrifice, and a stain cast upon them is a stigma upon his own character. In the hour of peril he will rally round them heedless of the din of battle and he considers his life of no value in their defense."*

In September 1863, shortly after the battle of Chickamauga, First Lieutenant Willard Eaton of the Thirteenth Michigan Infantry Regiment wrote his niece:

> *"You speak of guarding the flag. Now I am aware that thousands of people have little thought about a flag, or that it is of any importance. Let such take the field and go forth to battle under a flag and bear it through the storm of death until half their number have fallen under its folds and then they will be prepared to appreciate it."*

Not long after writing this letter, Eaton was promoted to colonel. He was killed in action on March 19, 1865 at Bentonville, North Carolina, just one short month before the end of the war.

With the war over, regiments were released from military service and sent home. A year later, on July 4, 1866, in a moving ceremony in Detroit attended by at least 70,000 people, Michigan's scarred, bloody, and bullet-torn battle flags were presented to the state by the men who had carried and fought under them. General Willcox spoke on their behalf, remarking that the flags were "tattered but not stained, emblems of a war that is past. We shall ever retain our pride in their glorious associations, as well as our love for the old Peninsular State."

In accepting the flags on behalf of the state, Governor Henry Crapo promised that "they will not be forgotten and their histories left unwritten. Let us tenderly deposit them, as sacred relics, in the archives of our state, there to stand forever, her proudest possession."

On January 1, 1879, the flags were placed on display for the first time in a military museum in the new Michigan State Capitol in Lansing. Adjutant General John Robertson watched as crowds packed the museum to press their faces, wet with tears, to the glass cases for a sight of "the dear old flags."

In 1909 the flags were moved to glass display cases in the rotunda, where they hung for the next 80 years. But constant light, heat, and dirt in the crowded cases were taking their toll: the fragile silk flags had become brittle with age and were beginning to turn to powder. Something had to be done!

In 1990, the flags were removed from their cases in the Capitol and sent to the Michigan State Historical Museum only a few blocks away. Here the flags are being properly cared for, making sure that Michigan keeps the promise that Governor Crapo made on that hot July day in 1866.

Replica flags replace tattered originals in cases in the rotunda at the Michigan State Capitol.

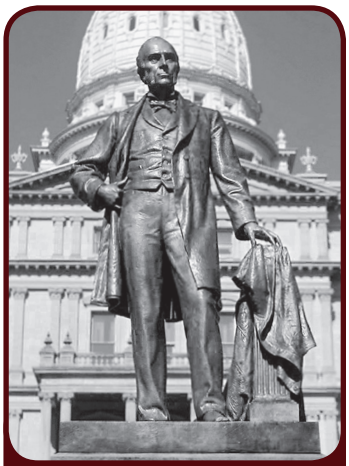
But proper care is expensive, and you can help Michigan keep Governor Crapo's promise. If you would like to know how to help, please contact:

SAVE THE FLAGS
MICHIGAN STATE CAPITOL
P.O. BOX 30014
LANSING, MICHIGAN 48909-7514
(517) 373-5157

By taking care of these precious reminders of our past, we honor the men who died defending them. Perhaps this will help make their sacrifice worth the incredible price they paid.

After the War

As the war came to an end with a Union victory, the nation turned to the question of what should happen to the freed slaves. In 1865, Michigan leaders helped write and obtain passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, which forever banned slavery in America. They were also important in getting the Fourteenth Amendment passed in 1868, which granted equal rights to all persons born in the United States. The Fifteenth Amendment, which passed in 1870, gave black males the right to vote (women of all races were not allowed to vote until 1920!). All three amendments were important in changing the country from one that allowed slavery and the mistreatment of people based on race to one in which all people are equal under the law.



Austin Blair, Michigan's "Civil War Governor," his hand resting lightly on a column draped with a Civil War battle flag.

Look Around You

Our state's motto, dating back to 1835, includes the Latin word "**Circumspice**," which means "Look around you." This is good advice. Although there were no Civil War battles in Michigan, many places around the state have Civil War monuments. A good example is Capitol Square, the grounds surrounding the Michigan State Capitol in Lansing. Directly in front of the capitol is a statue of Austin Blair, Michigan's beloved "Civil War Governor," who led the state through much of the war. Other monuments include a memorial to the First Michigan Engineers and Mechanics Regiment, the First Michigan Sharpshooters Regiment, the Women's Relief Corps and two replica Civil War Cannons honoring Battery A of the First Michigan Light Artillery Regiment and all Michigan Veterans.

Members of the Seventeenth Michigan Infantry Regiment pose for a photograph. Note the soldier holding the regiment's battle flag tightly wrapped (or "furled") around its staff.

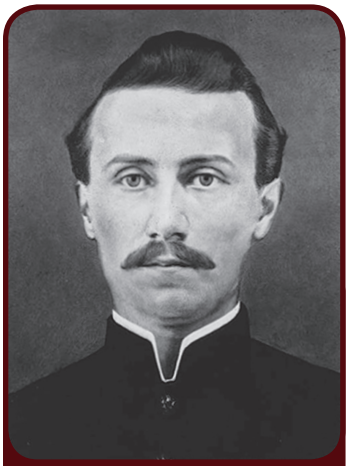
At home, look around. Investigate whether your community has markers, statues, or memorials to the Civil War. Ask family members. Do some research. Find out if there are any local branches of the Sons and Daughters of Union Veterans of the Civil War, men and women who are descended from Civil War soldiers and who study and learn about their history. Find out if **you** are related to a Civil War soldier.

The Foster Family: The Impact of War

It may be difficult today to understand the thoughts and feelings that led young men to volunteer for duty in the Civil War, knowing that this decision could well end in death. Perhaps the best way to understand is to learn about one family and one young soldier who paid the ultimate price.

Theodore Foster was born in Rhode Island in 1812. At age 16 he moved to Dexter, Michigan, to be near his older brother. Theodore worked as a store owner, flour mill operator, tax collector, and school teacher.

He also worked to end slavery in America. He ran an anti-slavery newspaper called *The Signal of Liberty*. He was a conductor on the Underground Railroad, helping slaves escape to Canada. Theodore often hid runaway slaves for days until they could be safely moved to the next stop in Ann Arbor or Ypsilanti.

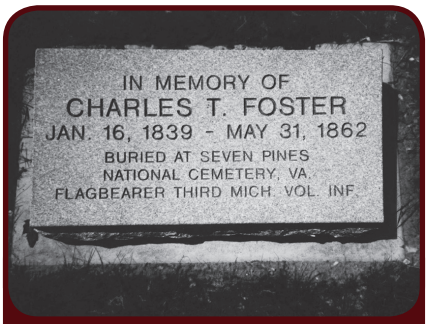


Charles T. Foster

In 1855, Theodore moved to Lansing with his family, where he became superintendent of a reform

school and served as the city clerk. His eldest son, Charles, born in 1839, enrolled at Michigan Agricultural College, then being built nearby. In addition to his studies, Charles dug stumps of recently-felled trees to clear land for the new college. He must have had an independent nature: after his schooling he struck out alone for Pike's Peak, traveling more than 2,500 miles there and back, more than half of it on foot. When he finally returned to Lansing, however, he took a job as a clerk in Turner's Dry Goods store.

In recalling his big brother, Seymour said he had a high forehead, a light complexion, big blue eyes, and a handsome mustache. He stood 5 feet, 10 inches tall, sang beautifully in the church choir, and had a friendly manner which made him "a general favorite with all who knew him."



Charles T. Foster memorial marker in the Mount Hope Cemetery in Lansing, Michigan.

The day after the attack on Fort Sumter, a rally was held at the old wooden capitol in Lansing. Representative Hall was so crowded that young Seymour and other boys scrambled up the walls and perched in open windows to better see and hear what was going on. The Hall rang with cheers as each speaker called for the defense of the Union. The last to speak was Judge Tenney, a respected city leader, who – ending his speech with the plea that "the Union one and indivisible must and shall be preserved!" – called for volunteers to come forward and sign up to defend the nation.

Immediately, the cheering stopped. In the silence, the drop of a pin could have been heard, and no one moved. Then, from the back of the room, Seymour could see that a single person was making his way through the crowd, but he couldn't tell who it was. Suddenly the judge's voice rang out, "Charles T. Foster tenders his services and his life if need be to his country and his flag." Seymour's only brother had become the first of thirty Lansing men to volunteer to serve in the Union army.

The men traveled to Grand Rapids to enlist in the Third Michigan Infantry Regiment. Rebecca Richmond, daughter of the mayor, wrote about the city's presentation of a magnificent battle flag to the regiment on June 4, 1861.

A group of 34 young women, including Rebecca, dressed in the colors of the American flag and representing each state in the Union, presented the flag. It had been completely hand embroidered front and back by Maggie Ferguson of Grand Rapids. On the reverse were the words, "The Ladies of Grand Rapids to the Third Regiment Michigan State Infantry."

The Third went off to war. On May 5, 1862, during the battle of Williamsburg in Virginia, an officer shouted, "Who of the sergeants will volunteer to carry the colors through this fight?" The regular color bearer could go no further. Charles Foster stepped forward. Writing to his mother the next day, he explained:

> *"When the Major called for volunteers and none of the Sergeants seeming to want to take the responsible and dangerous position, I felt it my duty to do so, for someone must do it, and if none*

would volunteer, a detail would have to be made and the lot might fall on one who had a wife and children at home or a dependent father or mother, and could not be spared, whereas I was single and free and would not be missed if I should be killed."

A few weeks later on May 31, 1862, at the battle of Fair Oaks in Virginia, the color sergeant was again unable to do his duty, and the major turned a second time to Foster. Charles again agreed to carry the flag. He carried it through charge after charge until he was suddenly struck by a bullet. As he fell, he tightened his grip on the staff and called out to his comrades: "Don't let the colors go down!"

The grave of Charles T. Foster can be found today in the Seven Pines National Cemetery in Richmond, Virginia. A marker placed in Lansing's Mount Hope Cemetery in the Foster family section preserves his memory in Michigan.

The Foster family home still stands at 317 North Chestnut Street, just a few short blocks from the Michigan State Capitol.

The Foster family home, 317 North Chestnut Street, Lansing, Michigan.

Additional Reading

These books go into greater depth about aspects of Michigan's role in the Civil War. You can find them through your local public library.

Bruce Catton, *Banners at Shenandoah: A Story of Sheridan's Fighting Cavalry*. Enlisting in the Union Army, a seventeen-year-old from Michigan ends up in the cavalry under "Fighting Phil" Sheridan headed for Virginia (fiction).

Jack Dempsey, *Michigan and the Civil War: A Great and Bloody Sacrifice*. With lively narration, telling anecdotes and vivid battlefield accounts, this book presents the story of Michigan's heroic role in saving the Union.

Raymond Herek, *These Men Have Seen Hard Service: The First Michigan Sharpshooters in the Civil War*. This book weaves together an account of the only Michigan regiment of sharpshooters, insight into the medical community of the time, the draft, and Michigan's Native American contingent.

Mark Hoffman, *"My Brave Mechanics": The First Michigan Engineers and Their Civil War*. As volunteer engineers for the Union army, this Michigan regiment was made up of skilled craftsmen, railroad men, and engineers whose behind-the-scenes work in constructing and repairing a staggering number of bridges, blockhouses, fortifications, railroads, and telegraph lines was crucial to the Union victory.

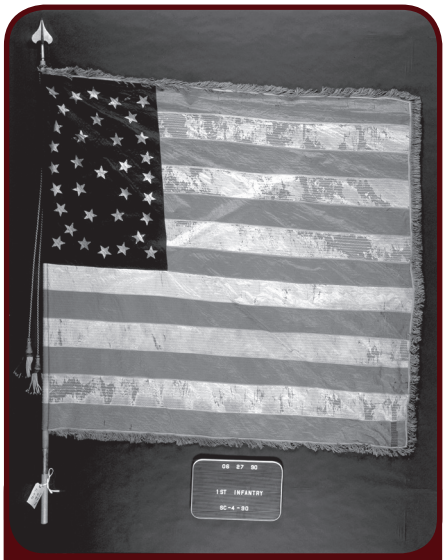
James H. Kidd, *Riding With Custer: Recollections of a Cavalryman in the Civil War*. This book is a rousing and vivid illustration of cavalry in the Union army. Kidd raised his own company, engaged in more than sixty battles, and after conspicuous valor succeeded General Custer as commander of the Michigan Cavalry Brigade.

David Ingall and Karin Risko, *Glory, Valor and Sacrifice: Michigan Sites Significant to the Civil War*. This unique guidebook provides information about sites all around Michigan related to the Civil War.

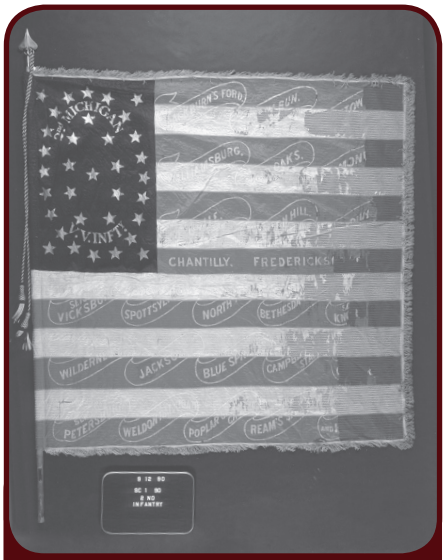
Milo Quaife, *From the Cannon's Mouth: The Civil War Letters of General Alpheus S. Williams*. Listed as one of the best Civil War books, this collection of letters, mostly to his daughters, recounts the service of a Detroiter who had a solid combat record and the respect of his soldiers as a brigade, division, and corps commander in the Eastern Theater before heading to the Western Theater where he participated in the Atlanta campaign and the March to the Sea.

Arlene Reynolds, *The Civil War Memories of Elizabeth Bacon Custer*. In her first year of marriage to General Custer, "Libbie" Custer witnessed the Civil War firsthand. Her experiences of danger, hardship, and excitement add striking, eloquent details to the Civil War story as she describes her life both in camp and in Washington.

Frederick D. Williams, *Michigan Soldiers in the Civil War*. This book reveals the powerful and moving stories of Michiganders who fought to save the Union.



Battle Flag of the First Michigan Volunteer Infantry Regiment.



Battle Flag of the Second Michigan Volunteer Infantry Regiment.

Civil War Battle Flags

Battle Flag of the Third Michigan Volunteer Infantry Regiment. This is believed to be the flag that Charles T. Foster died defending.

Battle Flag of the Fourth Michigan Volunteer Infantry Regiment.

Survivors of the 24th Michigan, at the Dedication of their Monument at Gettysburg, June 12, 1889. 1st (Iron) Brig., 1st Div., 1st Corps.

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The information in this publication is available, upon request, in an alternative, accessible format.

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