

The Civil War Comes to the Farm

The muttering of the storm low down on the horizon, where the faintest glow and flash of the lightning of the Civil War began to be seen and heard was now approaching to overwhelm the country in sorrow, and one of the chief causes was Negro servitude. Of course there were others so called, but the prominent act remains that slavery was the first one. It could be seen when neighbors would meet, the question was debated pro and con, often with bitter feelings. The controversy was accentuated by the John Brown raid at Harpers Ferry, which happened in Oct., 1859, which I distinctly remember though only five years of age. The image that is most distinctly imprinted on my mind is the picture of Brown's hanging in Harpers Weekly, Dec, 1859, when he was executed at Charlestown, Va., now WVa.

I will now pass on to the opening of the greatest Civil War in history and only surpassed by the awful conflict now just closed in Europe.

The first incident I recollect was a company of regular cavalry who had lost their road and camped one night on the place. They were commanded by West Pointer, Col. Beasley. The officers were invited to supper by my father and spent some time before returning to camp telling stories of their life on the frontier among the Indians, which I listened to with open-mouthed wonder. This happened in the first year of the war, 1861.

The next incident impressed on my mind was a visit by some of the members of the 1st New York cavalry, who had their camp at Oldtown. A different set of men from the regulars, it seemed as if these men were out on a chicken stealing excursion. There was no one home at the time but my brother Singleton and sister Emily with myself. Our mother had gone on a visit to some of the neighbors and father was working in a distant field. He told my sister (she being the eldest), in the event of anyone coming, to blow on a conch shell which generally was used for a dinner horn to call the hands from the fields. When the soldiers rode into the barnyard and commenced shooting at everything in sight that had feathers, my sister seized the shell and blew a blast that was heard by our father, but the brave troopers, on the alarm being sounded, put spurs to their horses and disappeared in short order, minus chickens.

After this, visits by the soldiers were quite frequent. One day a single cavalry man, a raw German, gave us a call. He had dismounted and tied his horse at the gate and was coming along the path towards the house. One of our dogs, a large Newfoundland, made a rush for him, and the German, in drawing his sabre for defense, made a step backward and fell over the scabbard that was hanging at his side. If the dog had not been called off, the Dutchman would have suffered severely.

There was a young trooper by the name of Cropp Valentine who brought a beautiful little horse to be taken care of on the farm. The owner was an affable young man and was well liked by all. Finally orders came for the regiment to break camp and join Gen. McClellan's army at Washington for the invasion of Virginia. The young soldier came for his horse and bid us all farewell, and we never heard of him again.

Recruiting for the army of the North was now in full blast, and a majority of the people sided with the Union cause. The young men volunteered and server in a regiment known as the first Maryland Home Guard. The fever for a military life was so great among the young fellows that they in a manner [ran] over each other to join the company. Just at this time my father was in

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the midst of his harvest and two or three of the neighbor boys of military age were helping out. But these young fellows threw down the cradle, scythe and rake and hid themselves in Oldtown and joined the company. They thought it would be a picnic: the war would only last for a few months, the South would be soundly whipped back into the Union, and they then could return to their homes. It was four years before it was all over, and some never came back.

... The field between the station and the river was where the Federal soldiers had made their camp sight [sic] and was littered with the usual debris of such places. The blockhouse at the station was still standing entire and was constructed of beautiful hewn timber of oak and was finally bought by Jno. W. Carder for a song, and torn down and hauled and boated to the mouth of Town Creek. Sawed into plank with which he fenced his farm, situated just below the depot at Green Spring, it is now one of the most beautiful places in Green Spring Valley.

As said a few lines back, the fields were strewn with the ruins of former camps of soldiers guarding the Baltimore & Ohio RR. They used here one of those ironclads already described, with steam always ready in the locomotive to be moved up or down the road or wherever danger threatened from the Confederates in the numerous raids to destroy the railroad. It was when the Southern generals, McCausland and Bradley Johnson, made their expedition thru western Md and Pa. in the last year of the War [that] the above-mentioned ironclad was put out of commission by what is said to have been two of the best artillery shots of the War. As near as I can judge the distance across the river from the hill where the battery was in position at the lowest guess is close on to a mile distant. The battery was located on the hill at Oldtown where Capt. Michael Cresap built the stone house which was standing at the time. The artilleryman who sighted the gun was certainly master of his trade. The first shot went thru the boiler of the locomotive and put it out of commission. The second shell went thru the port hole of the ironclad and exploded, with the result that this creation of Yankee ingenuity was scattered all over the landscape. In cleaning up the field to make ready for the plow, I helped to gather up the chunks of iron and especially I remember the shelter of the port hole, which was a heavy, solid piece of iron. Several of the crew of this war machine were killed and wounded.

...the summer of 1863. The long hot days, how they dragged slowly away. It was torture for we boys and girls. One day in July when it seemed that as if all of nature should be at rest on account of the fierce heat, we were aroused by the usual noise and commotion that could be heard from the road a short distance from the house. Lessons were forgotten as we heard a firm step on the porch and a Confederate officer appeared in the doorway and saluted the old school master and warned him to dismiss the scholars in a hurry as a force of Confederate troops under Gen. Imboden were getting ready to break the iron railroad bridge down with heavy artillery. The school house being almost in direct range, it was necessary for all hands to get out, which was done in a hurry. They planted a gun with a range at right angles with the bridge and cut the beams as if they were soft pinewood with solid shot, and at the eleventh shot the bridge fell with a terrible crash.

The noise made by the cannon balls when they struck the iron was louder than the explosion of the gun and was heard miles away. As we trudged homeward a mile down the river, the road was crowded with the boys in gray. This was my first sight of Southern soldiers. Their uniforms were tattered and ragged but they looked like warriors who would do their duty and did, on many hard fought fields.

The happiest period of my life was the time spent at the Stone House Farm: the great war was raging in all its fury and what brought sorrow and fear to the grown ups, was wonder and

mystery to me. Life was one long adventure bubbling over with excitement and laughter. Ah! The happy days of childhood, the springtime of life, the unrestrained joy of it, the will to live, to grow up to be a man, with no thought of responsibilities thus entailed, the rough knocks to be encountered. What a blessing the veil is not lifted for youth to see the breakers ahead. There was [sic] many incidents at this place I can relate that made no impression on me at the time, only of wonder, on account of the many visits of the Union soldiers often with hostile intent. One such happened one day when they came to search the house for arms. An order had gone forth that all guns found in possession of the people along the border had to be surrendered on request.

A detail of soldiers came to the house and posted guards at the front and rear doors. The remainder entered and made a complete search from cellar to garret and all that was found was my father's old flintlock rifle, spoken of a few pages back, which they carried off, with a small revolver left with my father for safekeeping by a Union soldier home on leave. Among other things carried away was [sic] a lot of family papers kept in an old hair trunk in the attic, which would be invaluable now in completing these recollections. Parties of soldiers would often come to the house, generally without evil intent, except two who happened by one day. My mother had a large cast iron kettle sitting in the yard used for boiling soap, which was always manufactured on the farm in those days. After passing a little beyond where the kettle was standing, one of them raised his gun to his shoulder and fired and sent a ball completely through the kettle, which ruined it. My mother gave them a sound tongue lashing.

One other time an incident happened that might have had a tragic ending. It was during one of the Confederate raids on the B & O Railroad. I think the one when this took place was the same when the bridge was destroyed as before related. A party of Confederates were [sic] detailed to destroy the track and telegraph line that skirted the farm from one end to the other and [they] were busily engaged in this work but were surprised by a regiment of Federals stationed at Paw Paw, a few miles below, under the command of Captain Petrie. These troops were loaded on flat cars with an iron clad ["tent"] attached, which was constructed from rails taken from the road and made in this shape A and mounted on car wheels with an eighteen pound piece of artillery within. All this came around the point of the mountain very quietly until they came in range of the Confederates who were so very busy at their work that the Federals were almost on them before they were observed. My brother and I had been sent to the meadow bordering the railroad to turn over hay so it could dry in the sun. We were in the direct line of fire, for by this time the Union troops had begun discharging their muskets at the Confederates who were in a manner defenseless as they had stacked their arms in order to do the work. Therefore they had nothing else left but to run for it, which was done in short order. Some surrendered and were taken prisoners.

As soon as we boys comprehended what was going on, we threw ourselves down and crawled to the river bank and rolled over. Just before we made our haven of safety, an eighteen pound shell passed over our heads. If ever there were two scared boys it was just then. We ran down under the bank and came up back of the house where another fearful scene came into view. Our father who had taken a walk to the upper end of the place to see that no fencing was destroyed from piles of burning ties, ... was on his return home just as all this occurred, and the Federals, taking him for a Confederate the whole force opened fire on him. How he ever escaped being killed I don't know. The river bank was but a few feet away but he disdained to go over but faced all that musketry fire without a tremor. The men who were doing the firing were more excited than he was, as was evident afterwards by their actions and demeanor as

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they came charging on the house in line of battle with fixed bayonet, expecting the house to be held by the Confederates. My brother and I who were in a good safe place could hear and see all that was going on. After our little adventure at the riverbank, I heard one young fellow say to his companion, as his teeth were chattering with fear, "do, do, do you know what we are up against"; a brave lad was he.

After they had surveyed the premises and found no enemy, these brave warriors concluded it was time for refreshments. After this strenuous battle and charge on an empty house, so they proceeded to confiscate everything eatable and drinkable about the place. It fell to my lot to carry out to them buckets of milk, which they drank with great gusto. They teased me and wanted to know if I was Union or Secesh. I told them I was for Jeff Davis, whoever he was, and said they would have to keep me a prisoner, but soon I noticed the men began to file on the cars and preparation made to leave in a hurry. They had received word the Confederates were planting a battery on a neighboring height to shell them. In a few moments the whole outfit disappeared around the mountain and that was the last of them for the time being.

These are the main incidents impressed on my mind during those troublous times. Of course many minor things took place such as the raids of horse thieves to capture mules and horses from the boatmen on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, and the only ford on the river between Okonono and French's Station happened to be at our place. These gentry found it convenient to cross there with their stolen property after setting on fire the boats loaded with coal. I saw two or three boats burning at one time and, as they crossed the river at our ford, my father was supposed to know something about it. Once during such an occurrence, after the raiders had gotten away safely with their booty, a detail of Yankee soldiers came to the house and put my father at the head of the column and went in pursuit and, after marching him all of a hot summer day, he returned home in the evening almost exhausted.

At one other time after the potato crop had been put away for winter use, a company of soldiers came with wagons and began to carry out of the cellar all they could lay their hands on, also husked corn in the field, until my father appealed to them to leave something for his helpless family. They became ashamed and desisted, for living was hard enough during that war between the states. People were hard put to it for where with all to eat and drink and clothes to wear. A great many of the necessities and all of the luxuries of life had disappeared from the border. For coffee we used parched corn and wheat. The bread was mostly made from corn ground at two mills far apart, one on Little Cacapon run by David Ginnervan, the other by Christopher Wagner on Town Creek. Many a grist I took to both of them of shelled corn. This is the last story of the War between the States as I saw it. I trust those times may never return. Of all wars civil strife is the most bitter and malignant, family quarrel on a vast scale. May the souls of those who were lost in that conflict rest in peace.

The last I saw of the Union soldiers was in May, 1865, when a brigade of cavalry encamped on the place a day or two on their march to Cumberland. The river being in flood, they were unable to cross until a flat boat was obtained from somewhere, on which they ferried over after stretching a rope across the stream to guide the boat.

I was sitting on the bank looking on when a young cavalryman came to me and offered me a beautiful revolver to hold his horse in the boat whilst crossing, as he was afraid. I asked my father but he said no; and I wanted that pistol awful bad. The camps were now deserted; the armies were no more. The blockhouse at the South Branch bridge was still, these two or three

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years after the war, closed. It was built of beautifully hewn oak timber. The Confederate soldiers, what were left of them, began to arrive home.