

“Calamitous War” Mecklenburg County, Virginia, and the War Between the States

“God grant some better day may come.”

Mecklenburg County, Virginia, emerged from the Civil War unscarred by battle within its boundaries. The only obvious physical evidence now that the war had even touched the county is a marker or two and the statue of a Civil War soldier before the courthouse. No earthworks. No cannonballs in the sides of buildings. The scars the war did leave are harder to see.

The Scene Is Set

When the war started, Mecklenburg and neighboring counties were generally known as being rich counties. In the July 4, 1861, issue of the Richmond, Virginia, *Daily Dispatch*, a correspondent noted that “Old Mecklenburg is by no means the least among the counties of Virginia in size, wealth and numbers. In refinement of its population, she is among the first rank, and ... in patriotism perhaps the first of the State. Glorious Old Dominion!”

The correspondent had mentioned a point to keep in mind: *Virginia* — the glorious Old Dominion. For many Southerners, loyalty to one’s state was paramount. Many U.S. Army and Navy officers resigned their commissions, followed their home states out of the Union, and accepted Confederate commissions. They included Mecklenburg County natives J. Thomas Goode (Lieut. Col., CSA) and William Conway Whittle (Commodore, CSA). Robert E. Lee resigned from the U.S. Army as well, “[p]erhaps ... tugged by what his cousin Anna Maria Fitzhugh called ‘a sweet binding to this spot of earth, this soil of Virginia that is irresistible.’ ” In 1853, writer J.G. Baldwin, with tongue firmly in cheek, observed:

Patriotism with a Virginian is a noun personal. He loves Virginia ... He loves to talk about her. It makes no odds where he goes he takes Virginia with him. He never gets acclimated elsewhere. He never loses citizenship in the old home. He may breathe in Alabama, but he lives in Virginia.

Mecklenburg County was formed in 1765 from Lunenburg County (to the north), which in turn had been formed from Brunswick County (now Mecklenburg’s eastern boundary) in 1745. Euro-Americans were settled in the area that eventually became Mecklenburg prior to at least 1722. African American slaves were possibly there then also; they were definitely in the future Mecklenburg by 1733. Native Americans had been there long before that.

Mecklenburg is a large county — about 625 square miles. The Meherrin River to the north; the Roanoke River and North Carolina to the south; Brunswick County on the east; and Halifax and Charlotte Counties to the west. At the time of the Civil War the county had farming operations of various sizes, up to plantations of thousands of acres. Then, and into the 20th century, gristmills

and/or sawmills — large and small — operated on rivers and creeks. There were blacksmiths and tanneries (both often part of the plantations); country stores; doctors, dentists, and lawyers (and most not within a town or settlement); at least one pharmacist (in Clarksville); various means of education (including but not limited to academies — male and female — and a college, for men — Randolph-Macon College, in Boydton, the county seat); one reasonably navigable river, the Roanoke; the terminus at Clarksville of a short (22 miles) railroad, between Clarksville (Virginia; western Mecklenburg) and Ridgeway, North Carolina; large brick tobacco factories; two coach factories; a wagon factory; a plow manufacturer or two; saddle makers; ferries across the Roanoke and bateaux plying the river; a mineral springs resort west of Clarksville; in Clarksville, a branch of the Exchange Bank of Virginia; a newspaper (*The Tobacco Plant*); taverns; bars; privately owned stills; and a multitude of churches.

Many horses had prestigious bloodlines. Before this war the area was famous for its horses.

The county did not lack for small mercantile establishments. Often located at intersections or along well-traveled roads, a store might serve as post office, polling place, meeting place to transact business — both public and private, and a general socializing site. A great place to catch up on the local news. They sold just about anything:

- Bacon (in prewar eastern Mecklenburg, 10 pounds would cost you \$1.67)
- Salt (1 sack, \$3.25)
- Coffee (10 pounds, \$2.00)
- Spices (2 ounces of mace, \$0.33; 2 ounces of cloves, \$0.25)
- Bunch of violin strings (\$0.13)
- Toothbrush (\$0.13)
- Pair of spectacles (\$0.50)
- Vest buttons (6 for \$0.06)
- Pair of black garters (\$2.00)
- Hoop skirt (\$0.75)
- Old Dominion coffee pot (\$2.00)

There were plank roads, in various states of repair or disrepair. Dirt — often mud — roads, with stream crossings that ranged from fords that were in such bad shape that they weren't really fordable, to good fords, to bridges that were there only in theory, to bridges kept in good repair.

Storms and often-resulting floods could change travel conditions quickly. Creeks might leave their banks after a severe storm, flooding out onto the lowgrounds beside the streams. The Roanoke often did the same, with results proportionate to its size. When there were no crops on the lowgrounds, the floods were a positive — depositing rich organic matter over the lowgrounds and making the lowgrounds very desirable farming acreage and more expensive per acre. But when crops were in those fields, flooding was economically disastrous. Almost a hundred years later that problem was dealt with by the construction of a massive concrete dam just upstream from Bugg's Island, with gates that could control the water levels of the reservoir behind it, how much water was allowed to move downstream, and how much electrical power was generated by water turning the turbines in its powerhouse. Of course the lowgrounds are now permanently flooded, by both Kerr Lake (Buggs Island Lake) and Lake Gaston, downstream.

As the 1860s began, unfortunately, the Boydton and Petersburg Plank Road (east from Boydton), although only a few years old, was already in disrepair and its bridge over the Meherrin River had collapsed. But the plank road extension west from Boydton to the ferry landing opposite Clarksville was in good shape and the county purchased the section from Boydton east to Lombardy Grove (north of present-day Big Fork; where Rts. 1 and 58 split, south of South Hill), after the Boydton and Petersburg Plank Road Company went out of business, prewar. In 1857, in northwest Mecklenburg, such part of the Christiansville and Keysville Plank Road as had been completed was open and collecting tolls. (Christiansville is present-day Chase City; Keysville is in Charlotte County.)

The Roanoke Navigation Company had been chartered in 1812 in North Carolina, to construct and maintain canals and locks in certain parts of the river and to collect tolls. In 1859 river traffic using the canals having become so light, the company was relieved of its obligation to keep up those canals. However, it remained in business, and continued to collect tolls on all river traffic.

The Roanoke Valley Railroad, with its office and terminus in Clarksville, had begun operation in 1855. The county had been overjoyed to finally have a railroad outlet. The 22-mile track ran from Clarksville southeast to a junction with the Raleigh and Gaston Railroad at Ridgeway, North Carolina, and provided an outlet for agricultural goods from “the fertile Valley of the Roanoke River.” By the opening of the war an extension of the railroad, crossing the Roanoke and running north to join the Richmond & Danville Railroad at Keysville, was well on the way to completion, but the original stretch of the Roanoke Valley Railroad was already in poor condition.

However, despite the state of the railroad, its existence did initially prove beneficial for the Confederate war effort. The Confederate States of America (CSA) had quickly set up in Mecklenburg part of its overall quartermaster system, with Clarksville as the base. And commodities vital to the war effort were soon being produced in Clarksville — saddles, bridles, harnesses, and even (human) shoes — and were being shipped out on the Roanoke Valley Railroad.

Many people — in both the county and the Confederate military — pushed for the completion of the extension of the railroad to Keysville, seeing it as vital. As early as May 1861 Major General Robert E. Lee (then of the Virginia forces, not USA or CSA) had expressed that “[a]s a military road ... the [Roanoke Valley Railroad] would be both desirable and important [as] ... an additional means of communication between Richmond and the South ... [and] ... in the event of obstruction on one road, the other might be kept open for travel and transportation.” He did, however, recognize that Virginia did not then have sufficient financial resources to take that on.

The Roanoke Valley Railroad Company felt the pressures of the “calamitous war” almost immediately. The company president, in his 1861 report to shareholders, noted that freight and travel were less than half what they had been, the road needed repair, and their locomotives had not been serviced in a year and yet were unable to get repaired because the shops in Richmond, Petersburg, and Raleigh were refusing the work. Not until almost a year later was the president able to persuade a shop to take them.

In 1862 the railroad company president's report brought good news: income had improved, the track was in "fair order," they had repaired their boxcars, and on all the bridges at least some trestles had been repaired or replaced and were "believed to be perfectly safe." The president was optimistic and was not even discouraged by the continued suspension in construction of the Keysville extension.

Unfortunately, within three months of his report the Confederate government was ordering the impressment of the rails, both laid and unlaid, of several railroads in North Carolina and Virginia, including the unlaid rails of the Keysville extension. The rails were needed for repairs to other, more vital roads, and for the construction of the Piedmont Railroad. Then, a few short months later, the CSA also impressed the laid rails of the active Roanoke Valley Railroad, as well as its rolling stock and scrap iron. In spring 1864 the CSA did reimburse the company — not enough according to its president — and the company did invest the money: in 8 percent bonds issued by the CSA, which of course became worthless. The Roanoke Valley Railroad became a casualty of the war.

Statistics

To place the county and its residents in perspective, mathematically:

When the 1860 federal census was taken, Virginia had 148 counties, two independent cities (Petersburg and Portsmouth), and a total human population of 1,596,318. (1,047,299 white, 58,042 free persons of color [here they will be referenced as free blacks], and 490,865 slaves.)

Southern Virginia had a concentration of slaves and slaveholders. In Mecklenburg County the total population of the county was 20,096. Of that total, 6,778 were white, 898 were free blacks (so, total free population, 7,676), and 12,420 were enslaved, held by 760 households.

Five counties or cities in Virginia had more slaves than Mecklenburg. Slaves accounted for about 62% of the total population in Mecklenburg. In Halifax County the enslaved accounted for 56% of the population; in Charlotte, 64%; in Lunenburg, 61%; and in Brunswick, 62%.

To be defined (in the census) as a slaveholder one had to own at least one slave, as did 77 of the 760 slaveholding households in Mecklenburg in 1860. The 760 slaveholders account for approximately 48% of the 1,595 households in Mecklenburg; 17 counties or cities in Virginia had a higher total number of slaveholders.

The cash value of Mecklenburg's 726 farms was \$3,606,956.

The value of personal property was \$12,090,434; eight counties/cities in the state had higher valuations.

Mecklenburg also had industry: 65 manufacturing establishments, with an annual value of products totaling \$518,398. These businesses employed a total of 629 persons, 489 male and 140 female.

Timeline to Secession

By the Virginia constitution in force then, the county court was the governing body of the county, with both executive and judicial powers. The day each month that the court was to meet in each county was set by law, but not all counties had the same day, which allowed lawyers to attend courts for clients in different counties. “Everyone” came to Boydton on court day, for official business but also to trade or sell horses, or other wares; for socializing and hearing the news from around the county; and to hold a meeting on a particular topic, give speeches to the meeting, and make decisions.

On the eve of the war, although the citizens of southern Virginia were not unanimous in their opinions, those who supported states’ rights, slavery, and secession were in the majority and were certainly the most vocal and demonstrative. Those who did not support “the cause,” being fewer, were harder to hear.

Following the “invasion of our soil at Harper’s Ferry” some “citizens of Mecklenburg county” met in Boydton, on court day, November 21, 1859. They appointed a chairman (Henry Wood), secretary (John G. Boyd), and then a committee (John G. Boyd; William Baskervill, Jr.; Col. Thomas F. Goode; Dr. W.H. Jones; and Dr. W.W. Oliver) to prepare resolutions. Among other things, the committee concluded that citizens of the county could no longer “depend on the North for any material support, and that ... as a prudent people [they needed] to look alone to [their] own resources for the protection of [their] property and [their] lives, against the incursions of [their] enemies.” Furthermore, on “motion of Henderson L. Lee, it was then resolved unanimously, that, in view of the present troubled condition of the county,” the “meeting recommend the immediate organization of two or more efficient volunteer military companies in the county.”

The county, as did the rest of Virginia, had militia companies already, equipped and regularly drilled. The commonwealth, from its founding until post Civil War, had a compulsory militia system, and county musters were held regularly. Most counties had one regiment; Mecklenburg County, because of its size, was divided into two regiments: the 98th (eastern/“lower” end of county) and 22nd (western/“upper” end), designations that were used for both militia and civil purposes. By law each regiment of “infantry of the line” was to consist of between 300 and 400 men.

As discord increased, the militia companies were revitalizing their supplies and arms.

The vocal, eloquent, offended citizens met. Speeches were made. Resolutions were passed. By December 1860 several Virginia counties had held meetings and were requesting a convention to decide what course of action the state should take.

On court day, December 17, 1860, citizens of Mecklenburg — so upset that they met “irrespective of party” — elected Col. William Townes chairman of the meeting and called for a state convention. They demanded security measures in concert with the other southern states; they authorized the chief magistrate of the county to purchase, at county expense, “such arms as may be necessary to complete the equipment of the recently formed Troop of Cavalry, under the

command of Capt. Thos. F. Goode.” They also authorized two “Light Infantry companies” to be raised in the “22d and 98th regiments” and once they were uniformed, to be armed, at county expense, “with Minnie [Minié] muskets and revolvers.”

On December 20, 1860, South Carolina seceded from the Union.

On January 21, 1861, a “very large and exciting” public meeting was held in the courthouse in Boydton. The reporter to the Richmond *Daily Dispatch* pointed out that “January seldom witnesses such an imposing assemblage.” Although it was court day, “[v]ery little business was transacted in Court. The condition of the county was the absorbing topic of conversation.” Majority opinion was unmistakable: while they expressed loyalty to the U.S. Constitution, they opposed “Republican tyranny. Several gentlemen addressed [the] tremendous meeting ... taking decided ground in favor of putting Virginia immediately out of the Union.” Among those speakers were Tucker Carrington (of Clarksville’s Sunnyside plantation) and Thomas F. Goode (from Boydton), candidates for the Virginia Peace Convention.

Virginia’s convention to decide her course of action — the Virginia Peace Convention — convened in Richmond on February 13, 1861. Mecklenburg had elected Thomas F. Goode delegate to the convention, where he fervently advocated that Virginia secede. On March 16, 1861, endorsing “the high character of the citizens he represented” and paying “tribute to their gallantry,” he “presented a series of resolutions adopted by the citizens of” Mecklenburg “declaring it the duty of Virginia at once to withdraw from the Union, and place herself by the side of her Southern sisters.”

Meanwhile, back in the county, men of prominence gave more fiery speeches and boasted of the “formidable army” that would be formed, the very sight of which would cower those folks in Washington.

On April 4, the Peace Convention voted down secession by 80–45. They continued to talk.

On April 8 the convention appointed a three-man committee to “wait on the President of the United States ... and respectfully ask him to communicate to this Convention the policy which the Federal Executive intends to pursue in regard to the Confederate States.”

On April 9, in the morning, that committee left Richmond by train. “[T]hey were, however, prevented by injuries sustained by the railroad from a violent and protracted storm, from reaching Washington until eleven o’clock on Friday, the 12th ...”

On April 10 — on a lighter note — nonpolitical, nonmilitary life was sailing along. At about 6 p.m., “Mr. Wells, the Aronaut,” and his balloon ascended into the quiet sky over Raleigh, North Carolina. He and his balloon drifted peacefully along the general line of the Raleigh and Gaston Railroad to near Ridgeway, North Carolina, where they caught a different air current and started moving west. The balloon’s course took Wells over Clarksville, Virginia, at about 5 a.m., on April 11. Wells landed without incident near Clover Depot, Halifax County, Virginia.

On April 12 Confederate troops opened fire on Fort Sumter, in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina; the following day the U.S. troops within the fort surrendered it.

Also on April 12, the committee from the Virginia Peace Convention finally arrived in Washington. They “called on the President” at 1 p.m. “and requested him to designate an hour at which it would be agreeable to him to receive [them].”

On April 13 the committee saw President Lincoln at 9 a.m. and explained their mission. However, newspapers had already carried the story of the committee’s journey, which Lincoln had read and consequently had already written a reply to their query. He read them the response.

In answer I have to say that having at the beginning of my official term expressed my intended policy as plainly as I was able, it is with deep regret and some mortification I now learn that there is great and injurious uncertainty in the public mind as to what that policy is, and what course I intend to pursue. Not having as yet seen occasion to change, it is now my purpose to pursue the course marked out in the Inaugural Address. ... As I then and therein said, I now repeat: “... there will be no invasion, no using of force against or among the people anywhere.”

However, having heard of the possible (he had not confirmed it yet) attack on Fort Sumter, he was considering ceasing U.S. mail service to the seceded states, and he reserved the possibility of needing to “land a force deemed necessary to relieve a fort upon the border of the country.”

On April 14 Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteer soldiers.

On April 17, the Virginia convention voted to secede from the United States, by a vote of 88 to 55.

On that same day, a correspondent to the Richmond *Daily Dispatch* sent a report: six secession flags were flying in the town of Clarksville. Another correspondent from Clarksville reported that town citizens “were the first to declare for secession per se, and first in the State to ratify the secession by a grand illumination and torch light procession.”

“Hush Talking”

Also excited about developments, although for a different reason, was Sam, a slave of John H. Winckler (who lived in Boynton area). Sam made the mistake, however, of expressing his views before white citizens, Robert A., William D., John, and Sally Adams. Sam was later arrested and brought to trial on the charge of plotting an insurrection. In his deposition Robert Adams reported that “on a Sunday in April 1861” Sam had declared that he figured they would

all be free pretty soon ... [F]rom what [he could] find out, Old Lincoln is coming down the Mississippi river and will free everything as he goes ... [A]nd ... if his master were to tell him that he had to go to fight for the South that he would not go, and that if he had to

fight it would be a different way to that, that most of the white folks thought he was a fool but that he had as much sence [sic] as most of the white folks and [had] as good leaders.

Not heeding Sally Adams's admonishment to "hush talking such talk as that," Sam replied "that if they prosecuted him, they could not prosecute all that were left behind — that he knew there were no negroes in his district that would join the South ... if he could see every southern man's head cut off, he would not put his hand near to save their lives."

Sam was found guilty and sentenced to be sold beyond the "limits of the United States." The governor commuted that sentence "to forced labor on the public works, which likely meant Confederate defensive fortifications."

"The Call of Their Country"

Col. William O. Goode, commanding the 22nd Regiment of the state militia, issued an order for the officers and noncommissioned officers to be in Boydton on April 22 through 24, armed and equipped according to law, for instruction in the Manual of Arms. On April 25 the officers, noncommissioned officers, and privates of the regiment were to attend a regimental muster in Clarksville.

The male citizens responded "with alacrity to the call of their country." By April 25 at least three volunteer companies — including the Boydton Cavalry (also called the Mecklenburg Dragoons) — were organized and had for several days been awaiting orders to report to the governor. Two of the companies put on a display at the county muster, most likely held in either Boydton or Clarksville.

On April 27, men from the upper (that is, the western) end of Mecklenburg had met at Red Oak Grove, further west, in Charlotte County, with men from the lower end of that county to form the Bluestone Home Guard, a mounted unit, which was to drill at Red Oak Grove. Dr. P.C. Venable was chairman of the meeting and A.G. Jeffress was secretary. A committee was formed to "obtain additional names to the list forming said Guard"; the committee consisted of John F. Moseley, John N. Bruce, Col. Royall Lockett, George R. McCargo, James M. McCargo, and A.G. Jeffress.

Three years later, when Richmond & Danville Railroad's bridge over the Staunton River was threatened by Union soldiers determined to destroy it, the home guards of counties in the area were called out and were among those who saved the bridge; we do not know if the Bluestone Home Guard participated. But soldiers from Mecklenburg did.

In early May the commonwealth of Virginia began to accept the services of equipped volunteer companies, to form a provisional army. Once the secession was made official in the state by the popular vote, these troops were transferred to the Confederate government.

Some white citizens did not remain silent in their opposition to the war and slavery. William G. Rook was tried, and found not guilty, of slandering the institution of slavery. In early May 1861 Henry Kinker was arrested for having been “using incendiary language” since the first of the year and wishing that the state would be overrun by the North “and the slaves freed, in order that every one might be forced to work like himself.” His case was dropped at May court.

On May 14 the Boydton Cavalry (the only cavalry company to be formed in Mecklenburg) assembled in Boydton, and many additional men enlisted that day. After being treated by the proprietor to dinner at the Boydton Hotel, with much fanfare, new sabers and belts, and a battle flag gifted to them by the ladies of Boydton, the company moved out before 4 p.m. Under the command of Capt. Thomas F. Goode, who had resigned from the Peace Convention and hurried back to the company, they rode east, presumably on the Boydton and Petersburg Plank Road. The cavalry stopped for the night at Lombardy Grove Tavern, then owned and run by Joseph H. Jones, son of the long-time previous owner, William. The next morning they continued their journey north on the plank road. One young lady who saw them en route that morning described the event later to a friend, and declared “Captain Tom Goode ... decidedly the most handsome man my eyes ever flashed on,” a sentiment echoed the next day by a young lady in Dinwiddie Courthouse.

A traveler leaving Boydton by the plank road would first have been heading east, following Coleman’s Creek, a route later also taken by the Norfolk & Western Railroad and now the Tobacco Heritage Trail path, which is on the roadbed of the abandoned railroad. Then the traveler’s route would have been more or less as present-day U.S. Rt. 58 runs, to present-day Midway — where Rt. 669 crosses Rt. 58. There the route of the plank road went off toward the northeast, initially following present-day Routes 669, 673, and 663, and continuing cross-country, eventually to a millpond on Miles Creek (now Gordon’s Lake), there turning east to Lombardy Grove Tavern. The traveler might have stopped at the tavern, where both he and his horse could get food and drink, and the traveler could catch up on the local news. If the traveler were in a stagecoach, it would have stopped at the tavern, for fresh horses if nothing else. When proceeding on the journey, the traveler(s) would have taken a right angle at the tavern and continued in a northeasterly direction. A current county road going into the town of South Hill still carries the name Plank Road. As the road’s formal name suggests, Petersburg was the other terminus.

When the Boydton Cavalry left southern Virginia in mid May, it was still attached to the 22nd Regiment of the Mecklenburg militia. When it was mustered into the provisional army of Virginia, initially, the unit became first Co. E, 3rd Virginia Regiment, General Magruder’s Brigade. When transferred to the CSA, it became Co. A, 3rd Virginia Cavalry, with Thomas F. Goode as captain. From their camp of instruction in Ashland they were ordered first to Williamsburg, to report to Gen. John B. Magruder. They were later one of the companies Gen. Magruder ordered to burn Hampton, August 7, 1861. This they accomplished under the guns of U.S. forces.

Goode, who prewar had been a colonel in the state militia, rose rapidly in the ranks of the CSA, from captain to major (August 24, 1861) to lieutenant colonel (October 4, 1861) to colonel (April 26, 1862). After the Battle of Seven Pines he was recommended to be a brigadier general.

However, before that recommendation could be acted upon, poor health forced him to retire, effective November 18, 1862. In signing off on Goode's resignation request, Maj. Genl. J.E.B. Stuart stated his regret "that the services of so gallant an officer as Col. Goode should be lost by reason of ill health."

In mid May the Clarksville Blues (later Co. E, 14th Virginia Regiment) and the Chambliss Grays (later Co. F, 14th Virginia Regiment) encamped and drilled near Clarksville, near the Clarksville Male Academy. The first had enlisted in Clarksville, the second at Lombardy Grove. After two long weeks of drilling, they finally received their orders and were able to move out for Richmond. After a military parade in Clarksville they departed by way of the Roanoke Valley Railroad, which went south and then east from Clarksville. At its terminus they would have gotten a Raleigh and Gaston Railroad train north to Richmond. Later they were sent from Richmond to join 1,400 other soldiers at Camp Allen on Jamestown Island, to build a hospital and fortifications.

On May 23 Virginia's voting population approved the secession.

By the end of May "wealthy citizens" of the county had taken out a loan for \$8,000 from the Exchange Bank of Virginia, which had a branch in Clarksville, "for arming and equipping" the volunteer soldiers. A few weeks later the county court "appropriated \$35,000 for arming and equipping the volunteers." Provision was made for the three companies already at their camps of instruction: the Boydton Cavalry (Co. E/after Co. A, 3rd Virginia Cavalry; Capt. Thomas F. Goode), the Clarksville Blues (Co. E, 14th Virginia Regiment of Volunteers; Capt. George W. Finley), and the Chambliss Grays (Co. F, 14th Virginia Regiment; Capt. Robert Dortch Baskervill), and "for five additional companies."

At June court 1861 J.J. Daly was appointed agent of the county to sell county bonds, to raise more money for the troops the county was sending off. Despite the vocal patriotism only one bond sold and the county again borrowed from the Exchange Bank. In August the county made another attempt at selling bonds, this time Confederate State bonds.

The Oliver Greys (Co. C, 21st Regiment Virginia Volunteers; Capt. John Oliver), composed of men chiefly from the Christiansville (now Chase City) area, enlisted there on June 20 and mustered into service on June 22.

Also on June 22 the Mecklenburg Spartans — men from the lower (eastern) end of the county (Co. B, 56th Regiment Virginia Volunteers; Capt. George W. Davis) — enlisted and presumably drilled at Tanners Store, a store and post office just west of where Belfield Road joins present-day Marengo Road (then, St. Tammany Ferry Road), about a mile south of La Crosse (which did not exist in 1861). On July 4 Dr. Latinus Rose, of Rosemont, on what is now Blackridge Road, made a \$2.00 donation to those volunteers. The company moved out on July 10, probably south on the St. Tammany Road (St. Tammany, most of which is now under Lake Gaston, was incorporated in 1792 and became present-day Bracey in 1900), crossing the Roanoke on the St. Tammany Ferry (which was just east of the I-85 bridge over Lake Gaston), and camping that night in the grove at Presley L. Hinton's house. The next day they and other troops boarded trains at Weldon, North Carolina, and headed out for Richmond. "Along the way parts of the

tracks were lined with people, especially females, cheering the troops on their way.”

In October 1861 Dr. Rose traveled to Richmond to treat and/or examine the Mecklenburg Spartans, in camp, as they awaited assignment to a regiment. For this, a short time later he received \$108.85.

The Mecklenburg Rifles (Co. G, 38th Virginia Regiment Volunteers; Capt. William Townes, Jr.), which enlisted in Boydton, and the Confederate Guards (Co. I, 38th Virginia Regiment Infantry; later Co. G, 14th Virginia; Capt. John S. Wood), which enlisted in Clarksville, left the county on June 25, undoubtedly on the Roanoke Valley Railroad.

From the Bluestone Creek area, the Mecklenburg Guards (Co. A, 56th Regiment Virginia Volunteers, Capt. Thomas T. Boswell) enlisted on July 8, at Ephesus Church. On July 31, 1861, the *Richmond Daily Dispatch* reported that the 80 men of that company had on Sunday, July 28, left their camp at Ephesus Church, headed to Scottsburg (Halifax County), to begin their journey to Richmond via the Richmond & Danville Railroad the next morning. The reporter declared that they were a “fine set of fellows, and will fight the Yankees with a vim.”

Infantry companies went to the Camp of Instruction, established at the then-fairgrounds in Richmond (present-day Monroe Park), not only for instruction but also to wait for orders.

In January 1862 men enlisted in Co. D, 2nd Virginia Artillery, at Lombardy Grove, under Capt. James T. Alexander. The company was in the field in February. In May 1862 the regiment was reorganized, becoming finally the 22nd Battalion Virginia Infantry.

Mecklenburg Heavy Artillery, under Capt. Thomas Taylor Pettus), was raised in the Christiansville (Chase City) area. In Confederate Service it was first Co. B, 4th Virginia Heavy Artillery and later, after March 1864, Co. B, 34th Regiment Virginia Infantry.

The 4th Regiment Virginia Heavy Artillery, later the 34th Regiment Virginia Infantry, was commanded by Mecklenburg native Col. John Thomas Goode, previously of the U.S. army. Late in the war he was recommended to be a brigade general. Col. Goode was paroled at Appomattox.

They Also Went

While much of the white male population of Mecklenburg went off to war, so too did some of the black and mulatto (mixed races) men, although not to fight. These men were among the slaves and free blacks — ultimately in the thousands — who worked for the Confederacy. The practice covered the Confederate States, not just in Virginia. Over the course of the war men “of color” were sent off to labor: constructing Confederate fortifications, in Norfolk, Petersburg, or Richmond, for example; working in hospitals, factories, mines, quarries; in the ordnance, saddlery, and harness shops in Clarksville; and so on. Free blacks went, as well as slaves. The former were paid (fed and clothed, like the soldiers were), but nevertheless most free blacks were sent by force and threats. The first to go traveled by railroad to the Norfolk area, to build fortifications. According to letters to (Virginia) Governor John Letcher from John C. Blackwell

of the board of directors of Boynton's Randolph-Macon College and Professor William B. Carr, also of Randolph-Macon, the free black men had been pressed into service by B.D. Cogbill. Blackwell reported on June 26, 1861, that "[a]lready about 150 have been sent off ... torn from their families, in the most violent way, leaving their crop without a cultivator & their families to charity or starvation." Both Blackwell and Carr were requesting intervention by the governor; it, however, became a moot point when a draft of "all able bodied male free negroes between the age of 18 and fifty" went into effect and in August 1861 the county court ordered the sheriff, Samuel G. Farrar, to enforce the draft.

Fortifications, as the term was used then, are defensive works constructed of dirt and wood. In 1861 "there were roughly 12 miles of fortification protecting Richmond. By 1864, they ... [grew] to nearly 120 miles including several batteries and forts located strategically around the city." Three types of fortifications surrounded Richmond: "artillery batteries strategically placed to maximize the effectiveness against approaching troops, forts to house more artillery along with soldiers and supplies, and simple trenches that maintained a line of defense for soldiers." It "was backbreaking and arduous labor" to dig and construct the fortifications.

In November 1861 Sheriff Farrar summoned 80 free blacks to fill a requisition from the CSA Engineers Bureau. William Crowder was paid to transport them by wagon to Keysville (Charlotte County); from there they would have gotten a train. The next summons was for 75, who went to Norfolk, from the Clarksville depot of the Roanoke Valley Railroad. In January 1862 a total of 125 free black men — more than a quarter of the total free black men in the county in 1860 — were sent to Richmond from Mecklenburg.

Later in the war enslaved men were also sent, to labor, not fight, as a result of drafts imposed by the Confederate government on slaveholders. There were at least three calls for slaves. The county was divided, on paper, into eight districts, for practical purposes — for drafting slaves, for helping poor families, for impressing goods and services, and so on. In each district a commissioner was appointed to handle meeting the county's quota of slaves to send on each call. The number impressed was determined by the total number held by each owner, as well as by factors such as the health of the slave(s) and of the owner. Most slaves were sent to work on fortifications. Not all lived to return home.

George, slave of Robert Burton of Christiansville, worked as a laborer, apparently on defensive works, in the Navy Yard in Richmond for 26½ days in May and June 1862. For George's labor, Burton received 50 cents a day.

Some slaves were also hired — from the slaveholders — for specialized jobs. Charles and Eaton, two of the approximately 200 slaves of Mark and Sallie Alexander of Park Forest (at present-day Red Lawn), went to Stokes County, North Carolina. They had probably been hired to work at the Moratock Iron Furnace, a smelting furnace dating from the 1840s that supplied iron to the Confederacy. The furnace itself is constructed of granite blocks. Charles was a brick and rock mason, as well as a carpenter and plasterer. Eaton was also a mason and plasterer.

Others were hired to drive wagons, to transport goods on the Roanoke River, to tan leather, or to construct buildings, such as one at Alexanders Ferry (not far upstream from the U.S. Rt. 1 bridge), used to store forage until it could be sent to wherever it was needed.

Some slaves accompanied their master or son of their master off to war: for example, William Boyd accompanied Sergeant Robert A. Boyd, 1st Engineers Troop, as his cook. William was paroled with Robert at Appomattox. Easily more than a thousand male slaves from Mecklenburg County between the ages of 18 and 55, usually involuntarily, served the Confederacy at some time during the span of the war. Of the free blacks from Mecklenburg who went, more than a hundred are known by name.

Personal information is known about 20 of these free blacks and former slaves, because they applied for and received pensions from Virginia for their service, which was categorized on each pension as “Servant”:

Free Black Name

John Brown	(Free)
William Harris	(Free)
Jim Valentine	(Free)

Slave Name **(name of owner)**

Allen Alexander	(Mark Alexander)	
Reuben Baskerville	(Buck Baskervill)	
Jim Boyd	(Alfred Boyd)	
William Boyd	(Alfred Boyd)	
William Henry Boyd	(Richard Boyd)	[Applied in Danville]
Hilary L. Brooks	(John Mayo Oliver)	
David Davis	(Benjamin Davis)	[Applied in Brunswick County]
Plummer Farrar	(Samuel Farrar, Sr.)	
Henry Hutcheson	(Joseph C. Hutcheson)	
Sam A. Jones	(Mary Jones)	
Wiley Jones	(William Jones)	
Henderson D. Moore	(Samuel T. Moore)	[Applied in Brunswick County]
Ben Fuller Skipwith	(Fulwar Skipwith)	[Applied in Charlotte County]
Richard Taylor	(John Taylor)	
Washington Taylor	(Conway D. Whittle)	
Willie Taylor	(John Taylor)	

Born in Mecklenburg, served from Halifax:

James Wilkerson	(Mark A. Wilkerson) [Applied in Halifax County]
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On March 27, 1865, General Robert E. Lee wrote the secretary of war requesting official orders to proceed with raising “colored troops” and recommending that “[a]s far as practicable” the men sent out to recruit slaves should be “known in the communities to which they are sent and have influential connections.” Lee mentions three specific soldiers he considered suitable to initiate this effort: two from Petersburg and “Lieutenant [Charles] Alexander, of the Virginia Battalion,

now acting as provost guard.” Lee recommends sending Alexander “to his residence in Mecklenburg County” for this purpose. “He has good reason to believe he can raise some men.”

Alexander lived at Boxwood, on the south side of the Roanoke and near the southern terminus of Alexanders Ferry. His location was roughly south of Park Forest (present Red Lawn), where his brother, Mark, lived. Neither house exists now.

“You Can Beat A Heap Of Men Managing”

Women and others left at home — if they were physically able — were busy keeping up the farms, and, to some extent, manufacturing clothing for soldiers. The women who supported the cause sent food, pillows, socks, chickens, butter, wine, vinegar, soap, and money — \$2 here, \$50 there — wove cloth, and made clothing of all sorts (from “drawers” and socks to shirts and uniforms) for their own men and for others. In the July 4, 1861, of the *Richmond Daily Dispatch* a correspondent reported that the “ladies are bearing a noble part in this strife — all have, as with magic, become tailoresses; and; with the greatest energy, uniformed our gallant boys.”

On October 14, 1861, Charles W. Thomas, private, in the Mecklenburg Spartans, wrote his wife, Mary, with detailed instructions on the uniform he needed her to make for him:

I send you 5 yards of flanel to make me 2 par of draws, 2 yards of goods to line the sleeves back of my coat and buttons you must put them on in one row strait down before and 4 behind 2 on each sleeve, 1 on each shoulder to fasten the straps like our other suit the ris band is open and these buttons on the rist is to fasten the cuff with straight breast trim ... with black tape.

Private Thomas also reported that the soldiers “dont draw no shoes without paying \$4.00. I drew 46 dollars and I am going down town now to get me a blanket,” which, he told her the next day, had cost him \$4.50.

Both the Mecklenburg Spartans and Mecklenburg Guards had been waiting in camp, in western Richmond, to be made part of a regiment so they could go fight. On the 18th Thomas happily announced to his wife that the company was finally part of a regiment, and then he slightly altered his directions on the uniform: “I wrote to you to have cuffs on the sleeves but you need not. Just have them like our old coat as to the sleeve. Frock coat, strait breast, no trimming on the sleeves.” She had finished his uniform and sent it to him, probably via Claiborne Drumright, a Mecklenburg justice of the peace and attorney, by November 8, when Thomas wrote, “I have the praise of all the soalders in uniform they praised my suit most powerfull. they say my suit is worth \$20 they ant none in our company that can beat it.”

The Thomas family lived in southeastern Mecklenburg, near the Brunswick County line. They got mail at the St. Tammany (which became Bracey) post office.

Some of the county women even volunteered to fight! “Celestia,” from Clarksville, declared on May 20, 1861, in the May 24 edition of the *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, that

[i]f ever there was a time when a great deal devolves on females, that time is now on us, when it is getting so common to say the women are going to fight, too. We at first thought the idea most preposterous, but every day brings stronger evidence of the necessity of it; but they will have to proceed in a kind of Indian fashion, not meeting the enemy on the open field, but from windows, behind walls, batteries, &c.

The want of labor in the county was sorely felt, and very quickly. It was spring, after all, and crops and livestock — the means to food and/or money — needed attention. But the men — many or most were not slaveholders — had left. The families adjusted as best they could, long distance: husbands wrote home with detailed instructions, even as they discovered how smart their wives were. Thomas, quoted above, a farm laborer who owned no land, wrote his wife on December 1, 1862, from Fredericksburg:

I want you to buy about \$50.00 worth of corn right away and more than that if you dont have any. Corn is going very high. ... Be sure and make you[r] meat fat and if you can get salt, cure it in bacon but if not and you have any to spare, sell it in pork. Do just as you think best for James says you can beat a heap of men managing.

Providing “Necessities”

The county, as well as citizens “of means,” stepped in to help citizens in need.

Care by the county for her needy was not new; it was accepted and expected. The county had a ten-room “Poor House,” erected in 1848, east of Boydton, on the property on which the high-security Mecklenburg Correctional Center opened in 1977. The prison closed in 2012.

The 10 single-story rooms of the poor house measured 18 by 20 feet each. The building’s walls were brick, and each room had one fireplace, one door and two 12-light windows. If built according to original instructions, the building was ten rooms long.

As its soldiers marched off to war, the county took on the responsibility of care for those additional families left in need. For families of indigent soldiers and free black men laboring for the Confederacy, care from the county began in spring 1861. In late summer the *Richmond Daily Dispatch* reported that the August 1861 county court of Mecklenburg had “made further and ample provision for the families of the volunteers; determined that nothing shall remain undone that can supply the absence of their brave and patriotic husbands and fathers.”

In 1862 the county again appointed J.J. Daly to sell bonds, now for the purpose of raising money for the support of these families. Later he was authorized to sell the bonds at auction, in December 1863 with the aim of raising \$50,000; in July 1864 to raise not more than \$100,000 (or to borrow it from the Exchange Bank in Clarksville); and in January 1865 to raise \$50,000. In October 1864 he was authorized to borrow \$40,000 for the use of the county itself, either from the Exchange Bank or privately.

In 1863, to meet the growing need, the Virginia General Assembly authorized localities to collect “tax in kind” or to impress supplies if necessary. In Mecklenburg, Col. Charles S. Hutcheson was made treasurer of the Soldiers Family Fund and commissioners Harwood A. Lockett, P.M. King, James H. Jeffries, John A. Brame, John Davis, T.C. Reekes, and John Wood were appointed to collect and then distribute the commodities or to distribute money to the families. Each commissioner was assigned to a district — the county was administratively divided into eight districts, #1 through #8. By 1870 when George B. Finch published a somewhat updated and colorized copy of the 1864 map of the county done by the Confederate States Engineer Corps, the districts had received names: Christiansville, Bluestone, Clarksville, Palmers Springs, Boydton, Buckhorn, Flat Creek, and South Hill.

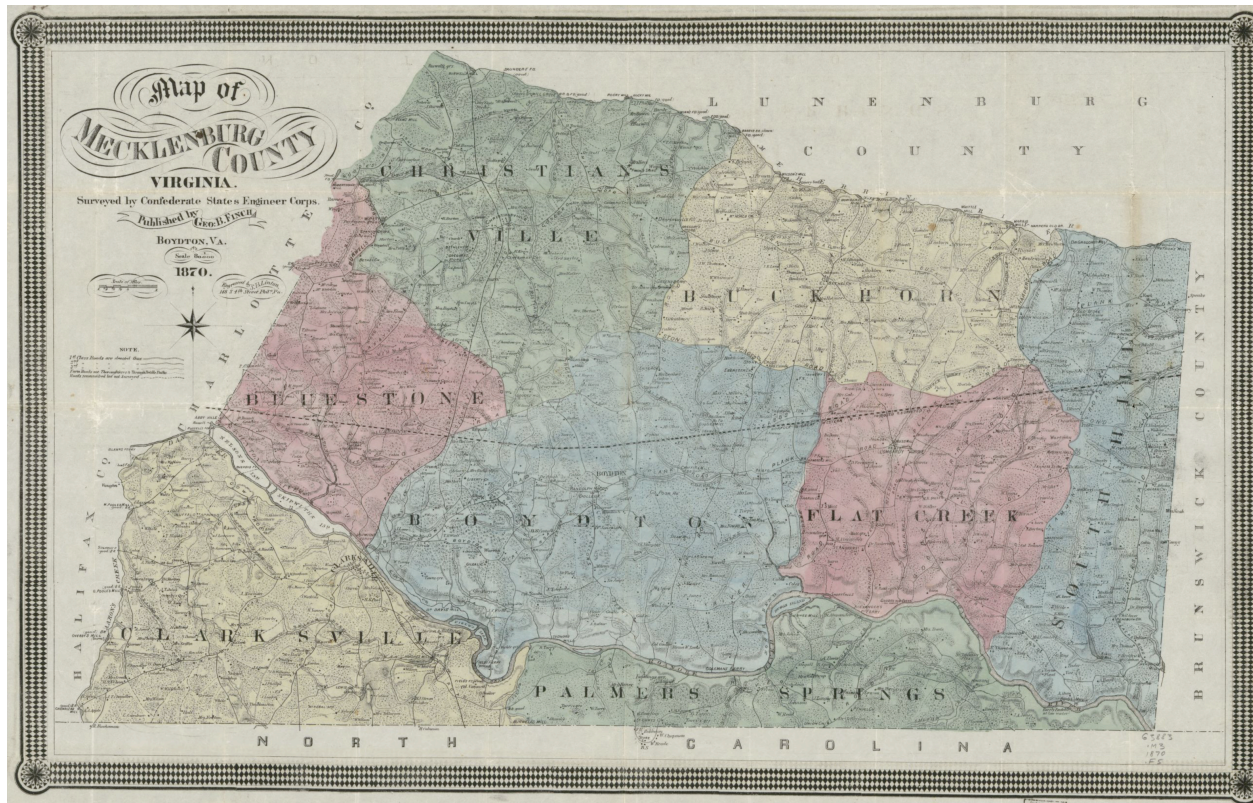


Figure 1: Library of Congress.
Map of Mecklenburg County, Virginia; published by George B. Finch, 1870

In his report for the period between March 9 and June 11, 1863, John A. Brame (commissioner for District 4) noted that on March 9 he had received \$200 from Col. Hutcheson. Brame had then purchased and delivered corn and bacon to 27 people, including children, in his district, “nearly all of whom are without any means of support except what is furnished them” by him; he paid \$372 for that food, \$172 out of pocket. The commissioners’ having to spend more than the cash advanced to them was a common occurrence, and in December 1863, Brame sent a note to Hutcheson requesting him to use his “influence to get me a discharge from attending to soldiers families. So many new ones have called for help & corn & meat is so high my [account] is right high.” He was by then delivering to 47 people. And corn was selling for \$80 to \$90 a barrel. By the end of 1863 the commissioner for District 7, Harwood A. Lockett, had found it necessary to expend \$134.30 more than he had received from Col. Hutcheson.

Those in need were not restricted to the indigent families of soldiers in service, but also included wounded soldiers (for example, P. Mullins, his wife, and four children; Archer Carter; and Robert Ezell), families of deceased soldiers, and families of free black men who had been impressed into service for manual labor. Among the last category were wives Henrietta Marks; Nancy J. Thomas; Martha Cypress; Athenea George; Eliza Steward; Nancy Mayo; Mary Soward (Seward), wife of James Soward, who had been conscripted to work on fortifications; and “Jim Volintines [Valentine’s] wife.”

By April 1864 the county was providing “necessities” to a thousand families and had ascertained that it was “impossible either by purchase or impressment, both of which means have been resorted to, to supply those families to a moderate extent with the actual necessities of life, until the next harvest.” The county therefore appointed Thomas F. Goode a committee of one to request of the quartermaster general that he “release to the county authorities a portion of the tithe of corn and bacon, say two hundred barrels of corn and seven thousand pounds of bacon,” which they believed to be “the least which will enable the County authorities to make a very moderate provision” to those families.

To reiterate, according to the 1860 U.S. census, the county had 1,595 households. Of those, in a few short years, approximately 1,000 needed assistance from the county just to survive.

Private citizens also gave directly to neighbors in need. Dr. Latinus Rose of Rosemont, next door to present-day Rosemont Winery, recorded in his detailed account book supplies given to Mrs. Mary Edwards and her two children, from July 1861 to July 1862: a bushel of corn, 3½ pounds of flour, 2½ pounds of bacon, a half gallon on salt, a pound of butter and “cash sent by Mrs. Crowder — 2 cents.”

The philanthropy of the county was not confined to the needy families or even to the care of just its own soldiers. In November 1862 the county appointed a committee of seven men — Dr. John W. Williamson, Samuel G. Johnson, E. Binford, Thomas C. Reekes, William H. Gee, James T. Walker, and James McCargo — to “attend to the ... sick and wounded soldiers now in the war especially [but not exclusively] those from this County.” The county, which was covering the expenses, requested that the “War Department render to said committee every necessary facility in accomplishing the object of this order.” The court appropriated \$20,000 and appointed Capt. Thomas T. Pettus to administer the program. On December 20 Capt. Pettus (Co. B, 4th Regiment Virginia Heavy Artillery) petitioned his commander, Col. J. Thomas Goode, for a seven-day leave of absence to go to Mecklenburg “and attend to this business.”

At the start of the year the “Soldiers’ Aid Society, of Oakley, Mecklenburg county, Va.,” had sent a “large and valuable box of clothing” to the Kanawha Rifles, part of the 22nd Regiment Virginia Volunteers, whose men hailed from Allegheny, Boone, Craig, Jackson, Nicholas, and Wyoming Counties. The “company is composed of residents of Kanawha, who were forced to leave their homes in Wise’s retreat.”

The citizens (who were being taxed to support the county, state, and nation; the soldiers; the soldiers' families; the war; and the poor) and the county both felt the ever-increasing burden. Even as early as March 1862 the state tried to do its part to relieve money shortages, by printing money and by authorizing a currency of paper money, to be issued by banks and by governmental units. Counties (such as Mecklenburg), cities, and towns could issue currency of a dollar or less.

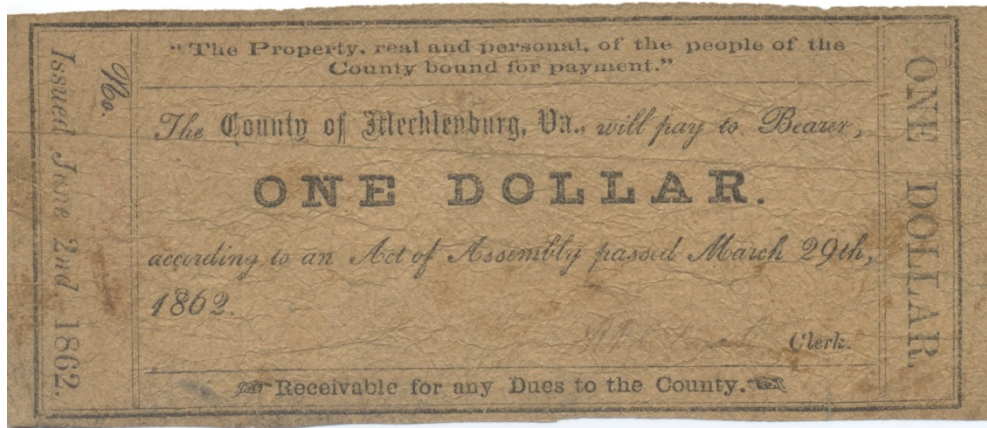


Figure 2: Collection of the author.
Mecklenburg County currency, 1862.

Precious Salt

“Indispensable” salt. “Even before Major Anderson surrendered Fort Sumter on April 13, 1861, leaders in the future Confederacy knew salt had become a valuable, even an invaluable, commodity.”

Salt, the primary chemical in most meat curing processes of the time, also proved a critical element in human and animal nutrition and health, as well as leather tanning and industrial processes such as affixing dyes in uniforms. Without salt, the manufacturing of shoes was next to impossible – leading some Southern manufacturers to make wooden shoes.

Salt was in short supply, essential ... and valuable. On November 12, 1861, the *Richmond Dispatch*, denouncing the “grinding, grasping system of speculation and monopoly ... now rife in the Confederate States,” applauded news they had heard of an act they described as “a public benefaction.” Earlier in the year a merchant in another urban center had “consigned to a merchant of Clarksville a considerable quantity of salt.” The selling price had fluctuated, although in general rising, but still the price was “some five dollars lower per sack than in the city market.” Then the order came for the remaining salt to be returned, and the Clarksville merchant proceeded to do so, sending 50 sacks out by the Roanoke Valley Railroad, on November 6. However, 69 sacks remained and Henry Wood, president of the Roanoke Valley Railroad, stepped in and forbade their transport on his road: no other salt was available “to meet the necessities of the people” and Wood knew that once the salt reached the city market “it could

never be gotten out of the hands of speculators at any price.” On behalf of his fellow citizens, Wood was acting on the law of self-preservation. They were willing to pay a fair market price, but being deprived of the salt “without a prospect of supply from other sources” was not acceptable.

With passage of an act of the Virginia General Assembly on May 9, 1862, the county courts were authorized “to purchase and distribute salt among the people, and provide payment for the same.” The governor was to designate locations for “the sale and distribution[,] ... prescribe rules and regulations for the sale of the same, and the prices at which it shall be sold,” and employ agents to handle the sales. At May court, J.J. Daly was appointed as Mecklenburg’s agent and was instructed to secure a contract for obtaining salt for county residents and to have it delivered for distribution to Clarksville, Boydton, and Jones’s Tavern at Lombardy Grove. In December 1862 Mary Thomas wrote husband, Charles, (Co. B, 56th Virginia Regiment) that she drew 13 pounds of salt monthly, at a cost of 65 cents a month. However, she also reported that she had lacked a half bushel of salt of having enough to finish salting her meat (probably hogs) but that she’d solved that by sending to Petersburg for it, with satisfaction telling him that she hadn’t had “to give but thirteen dollars for it either.”

Refuge

From early in the war Mecklenburg and neighboring counties were seen as safe havens from the dangers of war. Of those who could go, many sought security there or at least sent family members. If fortunate enough to already have family in the area, they joined them. Or visited friends or friends of friends. The refugees came from “sections which had been over-run by the enemy, or where fighting was anticipated.”

Or they retreated to a hotel, perhaps to one of the two hotels in Boydton — Boyd’s Tavern and the Exchange — or the resort at Buffalo Lithia Springs, west of Clarksville. Buffalo Springs had

never [been] intended for a winter resort, and there must have been considerable discomfort in the frame buildings with their open fire-places, the very airiness which was so desirable in summer, making itself unpleasantly manifest in cold weather; but who are refugees, to pick and choose? They survived

Or they bought property and moved, or sent the wife and children. In Clarksville, CSA General William Mahone bought a house and lot, and his wife and children passed the war years there. (This house is now known as the Judge Henry Wood, Jr., home.) A captured Union soldier recalled after the war that while the POWs were being escorted, overland, to their prison that the group bivouacked near the village of Clarksville. The officers were “quartered in an old school-house near by.” But the regular soldiers were exposed to the viewing public; “[i]t was here ... that Mrs. Mahone, wife of the rebel general, with her twin boys, came down ‘to see the Yanks.’ ”

Samuel Page, of Petersburg, moved to St. Tammany by late 1863 and then purchased the plantation on which he was already living. Apparently his purpose in moving had been only to escape the violence, not to become a farmer, because as soon as there was peace, he left for

Richmond, where he seems to have been in 1866. In 1871 he (and his brother) were advertising the house and farm for sale. It was strategically located, at the intersection of the River Road and the St. Tammany Ferry Road, about a mile north of the ferry. The house is not standing now.

Or people moved into family property, as the Coles family did in leaving Albemarle County to move to Elm Hill (north bank of the Roanoke, then overlooking Buggs Island, downstream of the present John H. Kerr Dam. The house burned June 25, 2014.). Mrs. Tucker Coles (Selina Skipwith Coles) had shortly beforehand inherited the plantation from her father, Humberston Skipwith (son of Sir Peyton Skipwith). Her brother, Fulwar Skipwith, had inherited Prestwold and moved there from Elm Hill.

Life Went On

Some individuals were required to stay on the homefront. Exempted from service were some “agriculturalists”; some men working at foundries and mills, because these establishments were vital; county officials, such as justices of the peace and the sheriff; and at least one pharmacist in the county.

Those on the homefront strove for a life as near normal as possible, and the routines of daily life continued.

White children continued to be schooled. Families (white) still hired teachers, individuals (male and female) opened small schools in their neighborhoods, Clarksville still had at least the female school in operation, and Randolph-Macon College attempted to stay open. The latter did not last long and by 1862 they were attempting to operate it as a military school; that failed also.

Doctors and dentists still treated patients, regardless of race.

Coroners “held inquisitions in cases when persons met a sudden, violent, unnatural, or suspicious demise.” The Brunswick County (Virginia) coroner was called in after Hannah, a slave then owned by the estate of the late Elizabeth H. Harwell of eastern Mecklenburg County, died at the (Brunswick) home of James and Eliza Clary, who had been renting Hannah from the estate. The Clarys, neighbors, and others who had visited the Clary place all gave testimony. Then a doctor examined the body and gave testimony. “After examining the body and hearing testimony, the coroner and his jurors determined that ... the ‘deceased [Hannah] came to her death by abuse inflicted on her person at sundry times during the present year and in various ways by choking and by blows inflicted on her head, body, and limbs,’ and some of the blows appeared ‘to have been inflicted with switches and by other heavier weapons we know not what in the hands of James Clary.’ ”

In the fall of 1860 Charles Hudson, a farmer living near Drapersville [on present-day Rt. 47], was tried in the late term of the Circuit Court of Mecklenburg and convicted of second degree murder in the death of one of his slaves, Jane. Hudson was sentenced to 18 years in the penitentiary; since he was then 68, the sentence was in a sense for life imprisonment. Hudson

had, on July 4th, whipped Jane for three hours, until, as the judge told him, “in the language of counsel, ‘the angel of death delivered her from the hands of her tormenter.’ ”

Lawyers practiced law. And often handled affairs when a soldier died: for example, delivered his last pay to the family, and collected and returned to his family any personal property.

Blacksmiths, tanneries, mills, foundries, and taverns continued to operate.

At St. Tammany a confectioner — Thomas McLin, Sr., a free man of color — sold his wares, in 1860 at least. McLin was then 90. Dr. Latinus Rose (mentioned earlier) was a customer.

Women spun thread on spinning wheels and wove fabric on looms. On large plantations slaves who specialized in those jobs did that work. In 1861 the spinners for the Alexanders of Park Forest were Edy, Jinnie, Dunmore, Jim, Frank, Roger, Betsy, Nancy, L. Lucinda, L. Dunstan, Old Lucinda, and Sally.

Shoemakers made shoes for local sale. On large plantations slaves made the shoes; plantations were, after all, for the most part self-contained. For a while in Clarksville, during the war years, a full-scale shoe manufactory was in operation for the soldiers.

Stores sold goods, as long as they were able to acquire goods to sell, and people had the money to buy them. Surviving store account ledgers show sales of coffee, sugar, pins, fabric, plow points, and violin strings, among many other things.

People continued to be born, and to die. In her diary Sallie Park Alexander, wife of planter and former congressman Mark Alexander, of Park Forest, recorded life events that held some meaning to her — births and deaths of their slaves, of friends, of young children of friends. On May 3, 1863, Sarah was born to Violet, one of the Alexander slaves. Two days later slaves Betsy and Pink also gave birth. Earlier in the year Mrs. Fulwar Skipwith, a wealthy and close neighbor at Elm Hill, gave birth to a son. In January 1863 another Alexander slave, Emily, had given birth ... but that child died.

In early January 1863 Perry, Allen, Ephraim, and Simon, also Alexander slaves, were impressed to work on the fortifications at Richmond. Simon did not return, dying on January 31 in a hospital. And, on December 11, 1864, Austin, another Alexander slave, “died down at the fortifications near Richmond.” In January 1863 Mrs. William Townes, a neighbor not far upriver at Cuscowilla and wife of the medically discharged captain of Co. G, 38th Virginia Regiment, died; Sallie Alexander went to pay her respects. On May 19, “[l]ittle Gordon Coleman,” white, died of scarlet fever. On October 12 or 13, 1864, captured CSA cavalryman R.F. Hampton died in prison at Elmira, New York, of chronic diarrhea; a member of the Boydton Cavalry, he had been captured at Front Royal on August 16, 1864.

People also continued to get married. Another member of the Boydton Cavalry married while home on leave; on December 2, 1863, Private A.H. Bracey married Miss Martha (Pattie) Jones, whose family had owned and run Lombardy Grove Tavern for decades. Later in that month, at Lombardy Grove, C.H. Strong of Atlanta, Georgia, married Lucy H. Lockett, “second daughter”

of Harwood A. Lockett, of Lombardy Grove, and sister of a then-very-young Myrta, future author (Myrta Lockett Avery, author of *A Virginia Girl in the Civil War* and *Dixie After the War*).

Social life continued. People visited within their neighborhoods, or across the county, or traveled beyond the state. Among the places some people are known to have gone were Richmond, Petersburg, Surry, Mississippi, and Atlanta.

Ferries — which were privately owned — crossed the Roanoke: above Clarksville, at Clarksville, at Taylors Ferry (south of Randolph-Macon College), Alexanders Ferry, St. Tammany, and other locations. And the CSA used the ferries — for men, for horses, for mules — and reimbursed the owners. In April — probably 1864 — a South Carolina cavalry regiment, part of Hamptons Brigade, traveling north to join the fighting in Virginia, encamped south of the Roanoke. George Tarry of Ivy Hill went down to the river to meet with them and arrange for them to be taken over the river the next day.

Clarksville hosted both the quartermaster and the ordnance departments operating in the county. In general the quartermaster is responsible for equipping and distributing provisions to troops; the ordnance department is charged with maintaining, testing, and distributing weapons and related supplies needed in battle.

The quartermaster department for the county was anchored in Clarksville, and the assistant quartermaster, Capt. James Haskins, was stationed there. Supplies (fodder, corn, bacon, soap, candles, etc.) sold by citizens or impressed by the department were first stored in rented “depots” around the county (Boynton, Christiansville, Drapersville, St. Tammany, Hendricks Mill [under present-day Poplar Creek on Lake Gaston]), then transported to Clarksville and distributed from there. At some depots local free blacks (such as Nile Cypress and M. Feggins at St. Tammany) occasionally earned money for labor such as stacking fodder.

From the depots near the Roanoke supplies were transported upriver to Clarksville. The temporary boatmen seem to have been mostly free blacks, such as Tom Cousins and William Cousins (who had been working for Humberston Skipwith) but the quartermaster department also hired slaves — such as Henry, Carey, Philip, Cyrus, Sandy, William, Grandison, Burwell, Thomas, Hiram, George, Davy, Hezekiah, Dick, Harry, Jack, Jim, Quincy, and Peter, hands of Humberston Skipwith of Prestwould (near Clarksville).

Boatmen such as free blacks George Maclin and Plunkett Mayo, both of whom worked from St. Tammany and/or downstream at Horseford Mill for Armstead Goode (A.G.) Boyd, probably had a fairly steady business.

For a few years the Roanoke Valley Railroad continued on, carrying passengers and freight between Clarksville and Ridgeway.

Preachers preached and saved souls. On September 9, 1863, Charles Thomas’s sister Annetta wrote him and mentioned “the great revival we had at Rehobeth [Methodist Church; Blackridge

Road]. Mary and Brother Robert profest.” On October 25, 1863, Bishop Johns [Episcopal] preached in Boydton and confirmed 16 people.

On February 8, 1864, Sally (Tarry) Hamilton, in reporting all the news of the neighborhood to her brother, Joe Tarry (Co. K, 34th Virginia Infantry, not a Mecklenburg company, but Tarry was from Clarksville; he enrolled at Chaffins Bluff), passed along that she’d been told about seven people they knew who were going to “be confirmed when the Bishop comes.” It was Sally Hamilton’s opinion, however, that they had “been making poor preparation for it [by] dancing all the winter.” In June she told her brother of “16 confirmed, 14 white persons & 2 colored.”

Hamilton, then a widow, was from Mecklenburg and a niece of George Tarry of Ivy Hill, south of the Roanoke River.

The women prayed that their husbands/brothers/cousins/uncles/friends in the field would find religion before it was too late.

In August 1861 Private Charles Thomas wrote his wife:

You requested of me to prepare to meet god, for which I am trying to do. ... I ant curst an oath in some time and stop drinkin in a measure and praying to god for his assistance. I sometimes feal that my heart will burst or I will choke to death but I still keeping up pan praing to god to release me of my sins and have me for one of his worthy children. Oh that I could tell you of what feelings I have when I am in praer, you would not believe it but if I am lost, I intend To be lost by praer.

Sally Hamilton had similar hopes for brother Joe. In April 1864 she wrote him of secondhand information she had that “there were a great many of your company very serious on the subject of religion and soon had professed. I wish I could hear that you & Sam was determined to lead a new life. It would be so gratifying to me.” “May God bless you my dear brother & may you be a sincere christian is the constant prayer of your ever affectionate sister.”

The year 1864 was eventful in Mecklenburg: Drought, which meant less food and less income. A battle too close for comfort and the June raiders (see below). Extreme inflation; between 1861 and 1865 the subscription price of the local newspaper, *The Tobacco Plant*, rose from \$2 per year to \$30 per year. Extreme shortages: the county did not have sufficient supplies to care for the indigent families, nor was it able to supply much to its men in service; many military companies had no meat, and neither did many families on the homefront, even in this agriculture-based economy. Even sorghum molasses was in short supply in the winter of 1864.

But these problems did not stop social life. The evening of February 17, 1864, a ball was given at the Exchange Hotel in Boydton. Formal invitations were sent to hundreds of people by some members of the Boydton Cavalry and other prominent local men (Lt. William Townes Boyd, Lt. John P. Puryear, Charles C. Wimbish, John W. Young, Charles Henry Harriss, Thomas James Hardy, T[homas?] L. Jones, and John W. Mackasey, all members of the Boydton Cavalry; and Lt. B[ennett?] B. Goode, S[terling?] P. Thower [Thrower?] [possibly an attorney], M.M. Jordan [doctor in Boydton], and B.D. Cogbill [county sheriff]). Prior to the event Sally Hamilton

mentioned it to her brother, telling him that “John Boyd is very anxious for us to attend but I told him I didn’t think it right for us to attend parties these times especially during Lent.”

But many other people attended. Sallie Alexander, after recording in her diary that the temperature was 10° F, noted that “Fannie, Beck & the Gents went to [the] Cavalry ball in Boydton.” And if the reports that Sally Hamilton heard later were correct, they were not alone! A week after the ball, Hamilton reported to her brother that she had “heard there were 500 people at it. I am surprised at people going to such places [in] these times.”

Not that Sally Hamilton and family and friends were adverse to socializing and to parties on a more intimate scale. In the same letter she told brother Joe about a two-week visit with “Aunt Mary” in Littleton, North Carolina, where a band that was nearby came over three times and played for them. Relatives, friends, and total strangers dropping in and often stayed for several days or weeks. In June she told Joe that they “had a house full & company all the time & saturday night 22 staid all night here. Etta & Effie staid with us nearly six weeks. The Bishop dined with us one day.” A few weeks before that the 5th Battalion North Carolina Cavalry, on its way to serve in Virginia, had stopped over long enough for the ladies in the household to “get acquainted with several officers, & one or two privates.” The ladies “enjoyed their company exceedingly. Two of the privates sang delightfully ... & played very well on the piano.”

Saving The Staunton River Bridge / The June Raiders

The spring of 1864, aware of the increasing danger of a visit by enemy forces, the county court ordered the clerk of court to remove the counties records “to some place of safety” if he or the court considered the records to be in peril.

That peril arrived in late June when about 5,500 U.S. cavalry troops and many pieces of artillery, under the command of Brig. Gen. James Wilson and Brig. Gen. August Kautz, left their lines at 3 a.m. on June 22, 1864, for the purpose of destroying the Confederate Army’s supply lines coming to Petersburg from the southwest — the last supply line still open for the CSA.

Over the course of four days the raiders moved about 40 miles a day down the railroad lines, toward the prize of the bridge of the Richmond & Danville Railroad that crossed the Staunton River between Halifax and Charlotte Counties. Their orders included the destruction of that vital bridge and they did not expect any difficulty in accomplishing that goal.

The raiders tore up and burned 60 miles of tracks of the South Side and the Richmond & Danville Railroads. In his official report later, Gen. Wilson wrote that “[e]very railroad station, depot, water tank, wood pile, bridge, trestle-work, tool-house, and sawmill, from fifteen miles of Petersburg to the Roanoke [Staunton] River, had been burned. Most of the track of the South Side road north of Burkeville and all of the Danville road from the Junction to the Roanoke [Staunton] bridge were destroyed.” A dispatch a few days after their return reported that the railroads “could not be repaired in less than forty days, even if all the materials were on hand, and ... [that Wilson had] destroyed all the blacksmith shops where the rails might be

straightened out, and all the mills where scantling [i.e., sawn timber] for sleepers [i.e., railroad ties] could be sawed.”

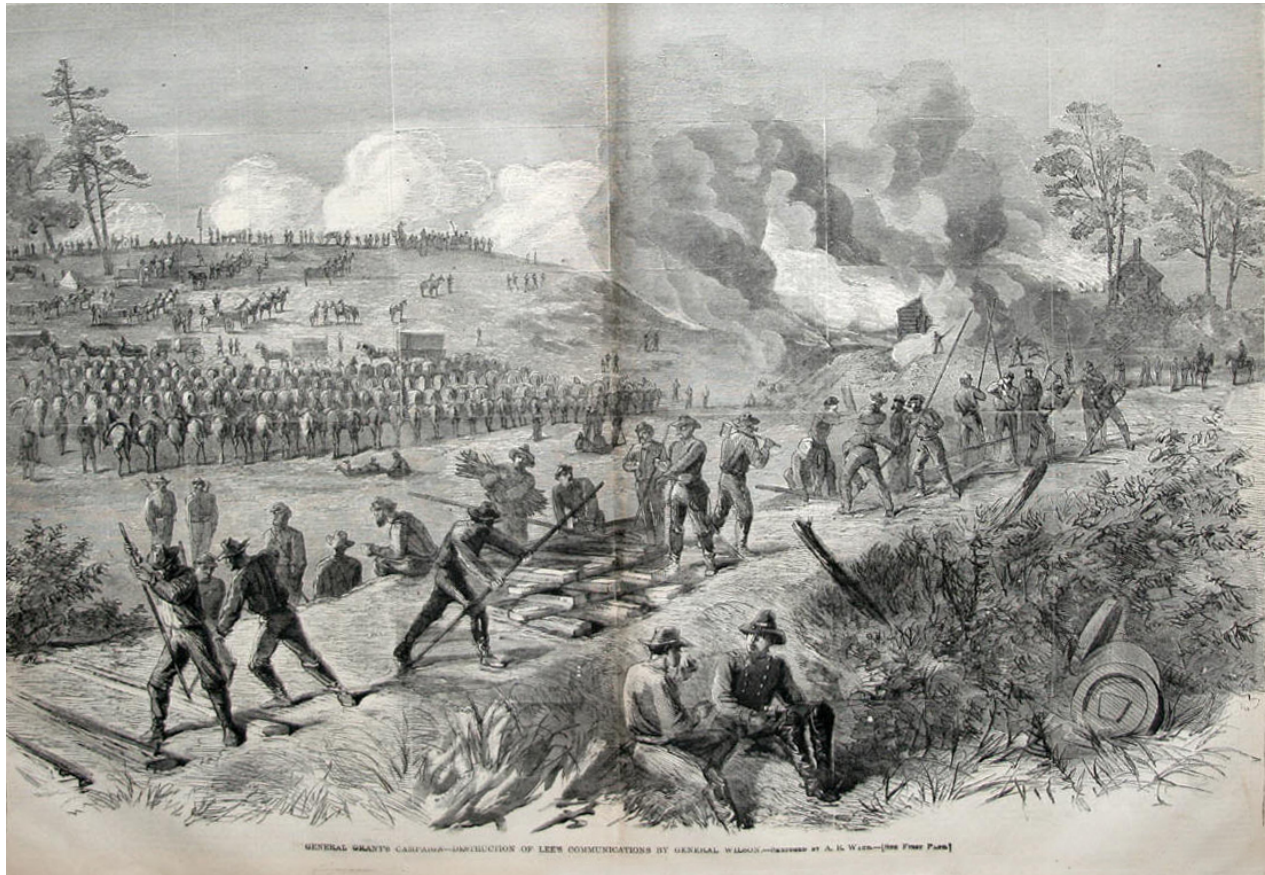


Figure 3: Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs.

Division Troops under Gen. Wilson destroy railroad line. A.R. Waud, artist, “Destruction of Genl. Lee’s Lines of Communication in Virginia by Genl. Wilson.” Published in *Harper’s Weekly* (July 30, 1864), p. 488

They also destroyed two locomotives and many railroad cars, but fortunately much of the rolling stock of the Richmond & Danville had been moved south of the Staunton River bridge. The only river crossing for miles, other than poled ferries, the 600-foot-long bridge was substantial, with weatherboarded sides and a tin roof. Replacing it would be difficult; it had to be saved. The Richmond & Danville had become “the only line of railway then open for the transportation of soldiers and supplies to Lee’s army, which was concentrated around Richmond and Petersburg.”

The regular defense for the bridge was the CSA reservists of Farinholt’s Battalion of Virginia Reserves (also known as the Staunton River Battalion) (alleged to be 296 men), under the command of Lieut. Col. Benjamin L. Farinholt. That battalion included Mecklenburg men (or boys), at least in Companies A and C, who were enrolled in April through June (at least) 1864, in Boydton, by Capt. R.L. Henley, enrolling officer. At least four Mecklenburg men in Farinholt’s Battalion were:

- In Company A, N. W[ilson] Baptist of Mecklenburg, son of R.B. Baptist (a lawyer), was elected 1st Lieutenant, but early in 1865 he was ordered to transfer to the regular forces, since he had reached their minimum age of 18.
- Henry Harvey Chambers, of Boydton, was elected captain of Company C. When the war started Capt. Chambers was about 14 and enrolled at Randolph-Macon College (in Boydton). When Randolph-Macon closed during the war, Chambers apparently then went to the University of Virginia, at least until his enrollment in the Virginia Reserves.
- Peter R. Piercy enlisted in Boydton, June 1, 1864, as a private, and served in Company C. Private Piercy apparently fell into the “old men” category, being about 38 when he enlisted. In November–December 1864 he was on special duty as a “Negro Guard.” He was appointed 2nd sergeant February 15, 1865.
- B.D. Pennington, born about 1847, was enrolled in June 1864, in Boydton. Elected a 2nd lieutenant in Company C, in the last quarter of 1864 he signed, as commanding the company, a special requisition for clothing and blankets for the men of the company, they being in need. Also, at the end of February 1865 he signed the company muster roll as commanding the company.

Approaching the bridge from the direction of Petersburg, a mile and a half before the Staunton bridge, the railroad crossed a trestle bridge over the Little Roanoke, a “deep creek, which flows into the Staunton river a mile and a half, or thereabouts, below the railroad.” After crossing that bridge, the railroad “ascend[ed] a steep grade to Roanoke station, half a mile distant. The half mile between Roanoke station and Staunton river bridge [was] down grade, the road running across wide and open bottom land, the low ground of Staunton river. ... A county road crosse[d] the Little Roanoke a mile above the railroad, and ran south to Roanoke station.”

Having received a warning, with orders, from CSA Gen. Robert E. Lee of the approach of the federal cavalry, Farinholt made preparations. No companies of regular troops were available for the defense, so he had to look elsewhere.

Couriers were sent to Halifax, Charlotte, and Mecklenburg counties, urging citizens to come to the defense of the bridge, and ordering local companies — the home guard units — to assemble at once.

The defenders came from all over: the home guard units; citizens from surrounding counties; soldiers recuperating at the CSA hospital in Danville; guards at the (POW) prisons in Danville (other soldiers were brought in to replace them); soldiers — including many from the 1st Palmetto (South Carolina) Sharpshooters — arriving in Danville by trains from the south, on their way to the front to rejoin their companies. A detailed company from Richmond, under Capt. Riddick and returning from taking prisoners to Andersonville, by chance arrived in Danville in time to join the men leaving for the bridge. The contingent from Danville, which apparently eventually came under the command of Capt. James A. Hoyt of the Palmetto Sharpshooters, left in boxcars at about 4 p.m. on Friday, June 24. With them went arms, ammunition, and rations. The train arrived and stopped near the bridge, between 8 and 9 p.m., after a 48-mile journey.

Added to these were soldiers home on leave and on sick furlough. And citizens — males too old and too young to be in service and perhaps not even able to join the reserves. From his plantation at Abbyville in Mecklenburg, Richard Russell, accompanied by Lt. Col. John Withers, on sick furlough and a guest of Russell, went to the bridge. Abbyville was on the north bank of the Staunton River and almost in Charlotte County; the site is now under the waters of Kerr Lake (Buggs Island Lake).

Entrenchments were quickly dug on both sides of the river at the bridge. In his official report, Farinholt took credit for the trenches on the north side of the river and for the battle plan as it, successfully, played out; however at least one contemporary labeled Farinholt's actual plan as flawed and assigned the successful plan to Col. Henry Eaton Coleman, of Granville County, North Carolina, 12th North Carolina Regiment. Coleman was on wounded furlough and had command of the militia in the trench north of the river, on the left. The hastily formed "companies" under Capt. Hoyt deployed into the trench on the right.

By the morning of the battle on June 25, according to Farinholt, 642 reinforcements had arrived; he reported a total of 938 men and boys defending the bridge. Among them was one company (probably the Home Guard) from Mecklenburg; it might have been (but there is no proof) Henry Pride's Company, raised in the county and assigned to the (CSA) Leather Works in Clarksville.

According to some reports, Farinholt also practiced some psychological warfare. Knowing that Union scouts were already observing his defenses, he had some of the Richmond & Danville stock on his side of the river frequently arrive, within sight of observers on the north side, and unload troops. What the observers could not see was that he was recycling the soldiers he had in uniform, who would reboard the train further south on the tracks, come back, and get off the train. His efforts were reinforced by the lady of the house of Mulberry Hill plantation, on the north side of the river, who informed the federal officers that there were easily 10,000 men defending the bridge and more arriving.

Having destroyed the bridge at Little Roanoke, the Union cavalry troops crossed the creek by way of the county road upstream. When these federal soldiers appeared at his front, in late afternoon on June 25, Farinholt immediately directed artillery fire at them. A U.S. battery "got into position on the high ground near Roanoke station" and began shelling the defenders at the Staunton River bridge. Farinholt's men had six artillery pieces; the U.S. troops had either 12 or 16 and were shooting from "a very commanding hill." Quickly they got the "exact range of [the CSA] battery [and] threw their shell and canister into [the CSA] artillerymen and their supports with great precision."

The U.S. cavalry troops dismounted and advanced, confident of getting close enough to ignite the bridge. When within close range of the northern entrance to the bridge, they were surprised to be met by a "withering fire" from the entrenched men on the north side of the bridge, who had been well hidden and, on command to fire, appeared from the trenches with the rebel yell. According to Col. Samuel Spear, commanding the 2nd U.S. Cavalry Brigade, his men held their position "until compelled to fall back by the superior force of enemy and their being protected by earth-works, while my men were exposed to all their fire." The commander of the 1st (U.S.)

Cavalry Division observed that “a large force was apparently in possession of” the earthworks; Gen. Kautz reported the bridge “was strongly defended by a force quite as large as the assaulting party.”

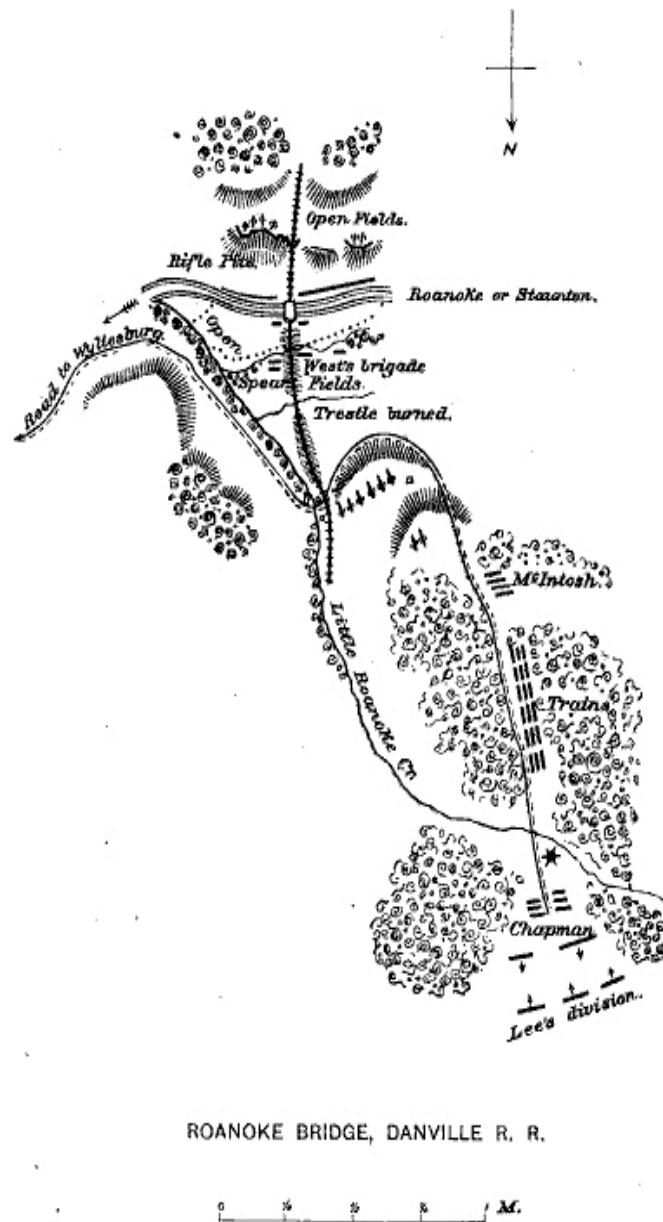


Figure 4: War of the Rebellion, Series 1, Vol. 40, Part 1, p. 631.

Map, which accompanied Union report, showing lay of the land and troop disbursements at Battle of Staunton River Bridge.

Four times the U.S. troops tried, with the same result. The arrival of the long-awaited CSA cavalry under Gen. W.H.F. Lee provided welcomed distraction by attacking the rear of the Union forces.

In his report to CSA Brig. Gen. James L. Kemper, Farinholt credited this “remarkable victory” to the “inexperienced troops,” who “deserve the gratitude of both the army and the people for the gallantry and coolness displayed by them in meeting, with the resolution and unshaken firmness of veterans, the repeated charges of the enemy, so superior in numbers, equipage, and artillery.”

Capt. Hoyt wrote about the battle 31 years later.

The three principal officers being wounded, it is high praise that the men deserve for their unflinching fidelity to the end of the fight. Gathered from every quarter of the Confederacy, and belonging to all arms of the service, strangers to each other and serving under officers who had never met before, this heterogenous command did not quail for an instant, and displayed rare intrepidity and steadfast courage. Each man was actuated by a feeling of his own responsibility for the successful termination of the fight, and no army that ever trod the earth has produced a braver band than the 300 who saved the day at Staunton River.

The engagement is often referred to as the Battle of Old Men and Young Boys.



Figure 5: Virginia Historical Society.

Section of western Mecklenburg County, showing approximate route of retreating June Raiders. From map of Mecklenburg, Brunswick and Greenville counties, Va., Sheet no. 3, created by Chief Engineer's Office, CSA, 1864.

Gen. Wilson, having determined that the bridge could not be won or burned and that his troops were in a rather dangerous position, ordered a return to Petersburg. With Wilson's division in the advance, followed by the 1st Brigade of Kautz's division (5th Pennsylvania and 3rd New York Cavalry), the federal forces started withdrawing to the southeast at about midnight, along a road "running to the southeast along the foot of the bluffs and within 500 or 600 yards of the enemy's guns." They left many of their dead on the battlefield and headed east into Mecklenburg County.

After a 10-mile march the advance of the Union forces reached Wylliesburg (Charlotte County) at daylight and halted for two hours. Resuming the march, they reached Christiansville (present-day Chase City, in Mecklenburg) about 2 p.m.

Citizens in whatever area the soldiers were in were well aware of their presence. On June 25, 1864, Anita Dwyer Withers, wife of Lt. Col. John Withers (an assistant adjutant general for Jefferson Davis) and both guests of Richard Russell, recorded in her diary that "[t]he Enemy came within ten or eleven miles of Mr. Russell's place [at Abbyville]. A great many of the neighbours went on the other side of the river for safety. We were not much alarmed."

The 2nd (U.S.) Cavalry Brigade, acting as rearguard, destroyed Roanoke Station before finally leaving the field, at 5 a.m. on June 26. They had barely pulled out and perhaps were then crossing Roanoke Creek near Carrington's Mill, in Charlotte County, northeast of the bridge, when they found themselves being harassed and followed by the CSA cavalry. A lady living near the route of retreat, in Charlotte County, described it in a letter to her brother.

Imagine my joy while I was standing talking to one of the [Yankee] wretches, the firing commenced; I did not know our cavalry was in pursuit, and I exclaimed, "Oh! What's that?" "The D___ rebels," replied the Yankee, and in an instant he was mounted and flying. I shouting "Hurrah for the rebels" and in my perfect frenzy of joy screaming to the Yankees I hoped they would be shot before they could leave our yard. Before they got out of the outer gate there were a dozen Confederate soldiers around me asking information about the enemy. They were covered with dust and dirt, but I told them they were splendid and glorious and I don't know what other foolishness I said, for I was nearly crazy with excitement and anxiety.

Part of the North Carolina cavalry under Gen. Rufus Barringer, CSA, was on the important mission of annoying the raiders, of not letting them rest if possible, of staying in their rear.

Those who had been chosen to follow the retreating federal troops — and they had been individually chosen — were selected based not on the cavalryman but on the horse under him. Was the horse sound, in good shape, able to keep moving? Those troopers followed the raiders. The rest moved back toward Petersburg and a change of horses.

Paul B. Means, a private in the North Carolina cavalry, later recorded that

Wilson was hurt and hastened and horrified most by a select detail of men and horses ... who followed in his immediate track and rear and harassed him *continually*. They could not strike hard, but it was like the blows of enraged birds on the hawk. They were

demoralizing and driving. And driving the enemy right into the ruin prepared for them, when they expected peace and rest.

The 1st District of Columbia Cavalry and the 11th Pennsylvania Cavalry (the 2nd Cavalry Brigade), alternating as rear guard of the Union column, were “attacked by small parties of rebels,” the brigade commander later reported, but added that the latter “were successfully repulsed.” The rear guard also halted at Wylliesburg for two hours before continuing on to Christiansville, which they passed through at 7:30 p.m.

At Christiansville the federal cavalymen found “a large quantity of grain ... belonging to the Confederate Government” and in the words of one of the quartermasters, “of course we took whatever we needed for our horses.” They also took whatever they did or did not need (ladies petticoats, for example) from area homes along their route, a charge that General Wilson later indignantly denied. One family, according to family lore, was liberated of all food and for a while survived on gifts of food from their slaves and neighbors. At St. John’s Episcopal Church in Lunenburg County someone helped himself to the communion set, which was recovered a few days later, at Reams Station (see below), Dinwiddie County, at the “ruin prepared for them” to which Private Means had referred.

Following the Concord-Buckhorn Road (part of present Rt. 47), the Union troops passed through Drapersville and Greensborough. On that route, near Mount Horeb Church, about 300 of the North Carolina cavalymen under Gen. Rufus Barringer attacked the U.S. flank. Perhaps that was the incident later reported by Lieut. John S. Wiley, Company F, 5th North Carolina Cavalry (63rd North Carolina State Troops): “I led a detachment of Company F in the immediate rear of Wilson from Staunton river until they were driven into our infantry. This detachment, at one time charged Wilson’s rear and captured several men and horses.” Sergeant David F. Ratcliff, Company D, 5th North Carolina Cavalry (63rd North Carolina State Troops), “‘captured in that rear pursuit of Wilson a Federal Colonel on a magnificent gray horse, which he swapped to General Barringer and the General rode it till he was captured.’”



Figure 4: Virginia Historical Society.

North-central Mecklenburg County, showing approximate route of retreating June Raiders. From map of Mecklenburg, Brunswick and Greensville counties, Va., Sheet no. 3, created by Chief Engineer's Office, Department of Northern Virginia, CSA, 1864.

According to reports by Union officers, the raiders bivouacked at Buckhorn Creek, in the late night of June 26 or the early hours of June 27, camping “for the night, or rather for four or five hours.” The 1st Connecticut Cavalry was sent to “hold and occupy Saffold’s Bridge during the night.” About 6:30 a.m. they moved out, crossed the Meherrin River — and out of Mecklenburg County (the Meherrin is the northern boundary of Mecklenburg) — at the bridge. The 1st New Hampshire Cavalry was in the advance. The brigade in the rear crossed the Meherrin at about 8:45 a.m. on the 27th. Saffolds Bridge (now on Rt. 635) spans the Meherrin, between Mecklenburg and Lunenburg, upstream from Whittles Mill.

The “June raiders,” as they became known locally, were heading as quickly as possible back to their own lines, intending to cross the Petersburg-Weldon Railroad in the vicinity of Reams Station, about 12 miles south of Petersburg and in Dinwiddie County. Generals Wilson and Kautz had no doubt that the area would be under the control of the Union Army — they had been told that it would be — and that their men could finally get some rest. They had marched or ridden, so long as the horses held up, hundreds of miles, in addition to fighting and destroying railroads, often in temperatures exceeding 100 degrees. Within a span of 81 hours they had received no more than six hours’ rest. They were hungry and falling asleep as they marched or rode, and the annoying Confederate cavalry kept hounding them.

To add cruel insult to injury, about 30 raiders had earlier detached from the main body and headed south as the other troops moved southwest. These troopers were doing their own raiding and were apparently very cocky about what they could accomplish, even by themselves behind enemy lines. Capt. George D. White of the Boydton Cavalry, on furlough attempting to recover from a wound received at Gettysburg (July 1863), was somewhere in Brunswick County, possibly visiting his grandmother. He quickly rounded up about seven or eight neighbors, and horses and guns for everyone. Getting everyone in proper position, White led them to confront the raiders, then dismounted and eating. The CSA “cavalry” suddenly appeared, in such a position that the raiders could not tell how large the force was behind them. Captain White demanded their immediate surrender. Thinking they were before perhaps some of General W.H.F. Lee’s cavalry, they surrendered ... to eight or nine men, some possibly also home on sick leave and some who had probably been plowing.

During the afternoon of June 28 the June raiders attempted to return to their lines first by a route by the Stony Creek Depot. That night “a fierce fight ensued” and General Wilson realized they needed a new route back. As he prepared to, he assumed, break through the CSA line between Reams and the Six Mile House, he learned to what must have been his horror that “no part of the Weldon Railroad was in possession of the infantry investing Petersburg, and that instead of my command being in the immediate vicinity of our lines the enemy held the road and interposed a strong force to prevent our junction.” He tried another route, but found there “a heavy line of skirmishers deployed across the fields through which I proposed passing. I found not less than a brigade of infantry with guns in position.” Scouts reported troops on their extreme left flank.

As Gen. Robert E. Lee reported that evening to the CSA Secretary of War: “[w]hen they reached Reams’ Station they were confronted by a portion of Mahone’s division, who attacked them in front, while their left flank was turned by General Fitz Lee’s cavalry. The enemy was completely

routed, and several pieces of artillery, with a number of prisoners, wagons, ambulances, etc., captured. The cavalry are in pursuit.”

Gen. Wilson reported that, “[s]eeing no possible chance of getting through to our lines by this route and fearing the loss of my entire command, I ordered the immediate destruction of the wagons and caissons and that the whole force should move by the stage road. At Stony Creek the bridge being bad and the creek unfordable, at one time the situation was critical in the extreme.” That night he learned that “Chambliss’ Brigade had left Stony Creek that morning to intercept us. This caused my column to expedite its movements.” The advance reached the Blackwater River ... and found the bridge gone and the river “utterly unfordable.” They repaired the bridge ... three times before, at 3 a.m., it actually held and didn’t collapse. The entire command was over by 6:15 a.m., and the bridge was destroyed.

Wilson had left Kautz to his own devices, which found his men abandoning artillery and wagons in the heavy undergrowth and mire of a swamp. He lost all his guns, which were later retrieved by CSA troops. Horses were lost to the enemy. It had become every-man-for-himself, cutting their ways through the tangle.

Among Gen. Fitzhugh Lee’s cavalry awaiting the raiders was Co. A, 3rd Virginia Cavalry — the Boydton Cavalry — which, according to their official unit report, “engaged Wilsons Raiders in Dinwiddie County assisting in the complete rout & pursuit of them.”

The extent of the Union loss varied in the telling, even in official reports. Roughly a thousand men, give or take a few hundred, killed, wounded, or missing. “Twelve field guns, 4 mountain howitzers, and 30 wagons and ambulances were abandoned and fell into the enemy’s hands.” And almost 5,000 horses lost or killed.

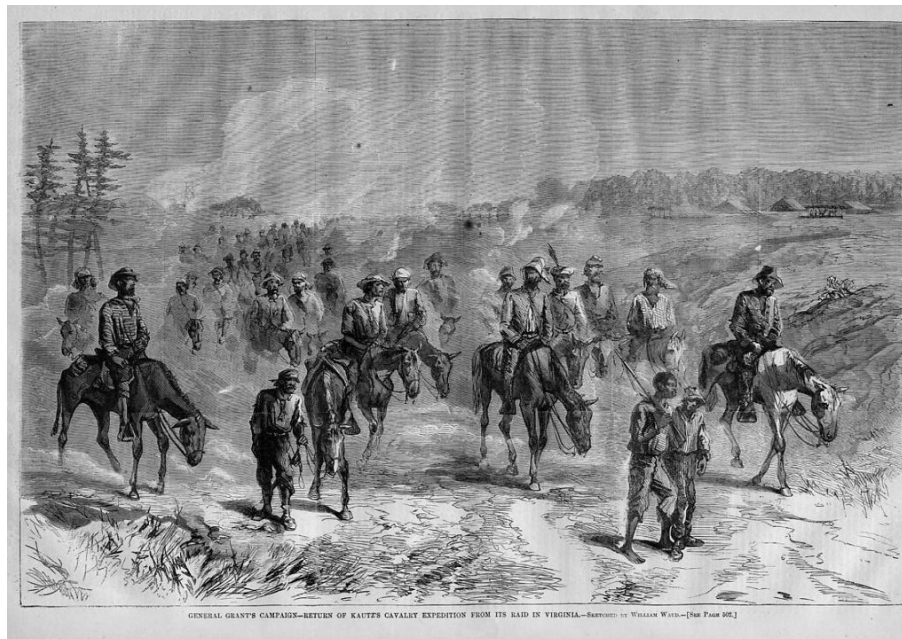


Figure 5: Lib. of Congress. Gen. A.V. Kautz’s exhausted Union cavalry, returning from engagements with “the enemy,” June 1864. William Waud, artist, “General Grant’s Campaign—Return of Kautz’s Cavalry Expedition from its Raid in Virginia.” *Harper’s Weekly*, Aug. 6, 1864.

Accompanying the raiders were (formerly) enslaved people, hoping for emancipation. Depending on which side was telling the tale, they either were enticed or forced or stolen away from their safe and comfy homes, or they just followed the U.S. troops, unbidden and unwanted. By the time of the rout at Reams Station, the followers numbered in the hundreds, some historical reports said as many as a thousand — men, women, and children of all ages. As the situation at Reams Station disintegrated into every-man-for-himself, they were left entirely to their own fates. Confederate forces “took horses, arms, and equipments, and about four hundred negroes who were following the vandals.” In addition, reportedly at least 120 had made their own quick retreat from the field of battle and started the long walk back home.

A correspondent to the Richmond *Daily Dispatch* on June 30 pointed out that it was “proper to add that the Yankees took only such negroes as were willing to go,” and Union reports stressed that the enslaved had followed the federal troops despite orders and protests to the contrary. Wisely, however, the newly re-enslaved apparently told the Confederates what they wanted to hear: “[t]hey say they have had nothing to eat for three days, and they have been forced away from home, and are glad to have escaped the Yankee freedom.”

At one Mecklenburg plantation the U.S. cavalry had acquired the company of Fred, escaping slave. At their next stop, the plantation of Dr. John Boswell, the soldiers demanded a meal be prepared for them, and while there, Fred, who had received a gun (and a new suit) before leaving his plantation, threatened Dr. Boswell. Then, in addition to the food and Boswell’s hidden mules, the party acquired Jesse — a slave of Rebecca Wagstaff — who had been visiting his wife at Boswell’s. At the next plantation, that of Robert Burton, the party broke into Burton’s house and stole sugar and clothing. When they left, Fred was wearing Burton’s pantaloons and Jesse his great coat.

From the farm of E.R. Puryear, George and Richard had also joined the raiders.

Local newspapers soon carried notices of the names and ownership of the recaptured humans, who were in the custody of the provost marshal of Petersburg. Would the owners come and get them, please?

Union reports, however, painted an entirely different picture: “[t]he Confederates had no mercy on man, woman or child if found in our company. ... [A]t Ream’s Station, I saw a battery with infantry fire into a struggling mass of blacks.”

Two of the followers not happy to be returned home were Fred and Jesse. In July they were tried in Mecklenburg court for conspiring to rebel. Fred was found guilty and sentenced to be hanged. Jesse escaped the felony charge but was convicted of a misdemeanor; he received 39 lashes.

One property the raiders passed through, on their way to Christiansville, was a Bacon plantation and slave quarters. At least one Bacon slave, Henry, apparently accompanied them when they left and succeeded in escaping. By January 1865 Henry was in Northern Virginia, probably having accompanied some part of the Union army up there. On January 26, 1865, at Camp Casey, near Arlington, Virginia, Henry Bacon, a then-former slave, who had been born in Mecklenburg County, Virginia, enlisted in the U.S. army. He signed his registration with an X,

which implied that he was not able, at that time, to read or write. But by January 4, 1870 — when he opened accounts in the Freedman’s Savings and Trust Company for himself, his widowed mother (China), brother (Repps), and two of his three sisters (Clarissa and Mona) — he not only could sign his name, but to top it off, his occupation was teacher.

Mending The Gap

The CSA Engineer Bureau responded quickly to the damage done by the June raiders. The raiders hadn’t even reached Reams Station when Major-General J.F. Gilmer, chief of the bureau, had learned of the destruction on the Richmond & Danville Railroad. He immediately sent Lieut. Col. John J. Clarke to Charlotte, North Carolina, “with orders to remove iron from the Charlotte and Statesville road and forward it to Danville [Virginia], the same being a military necessity.” By July 1 Col. Clarke and Capt. E.T.D. Myers, engineers, had organized working parties and were on-site at the breach in the line “to give professional assistance.” But the vital supplies for the Confederate army still needed to be kept moving and Gen. Gilmer recommended to James A. Seddon, secretary of war, that “as many wagons and teams as possible should be put on the break to haul forward the supplies most needed by the army. Maj. J.N. Edmondston, inspector of field transportation at [Greensborough, North Carolina], [had] been very successful in his efforts to collect draft animals in” that area “for artillery and transportation purposes (over 500), which he [was] forwarding as rapidly as possible to Clarksville, Va., subject to the orders of” the chief inspector of field transportation. “If these animals or a part of them [could] be spared for hauling across the break in the road, they [would] be near the point when at Clarksville.” Secretary Seddon forwarded the letter to the quartermaster general “for attention in so much of the letter as relates to the horses sent to Clarksville, and such prompt action as he deems judicious.”

In addition to whatever action was taken with those particular horses, four-horse wagons with teams and drivers were rented from the local citizenry, for \$6.50 a day plus rations, to keep the supplies moving across the “gap.” During July numerous citizens in Mecklenburg furnished wagons, horses, and drivers, some for only one day, several for up to seven days. E.L. Baptist was paid for six days’ service as a wagon master. In the meantime local newspapers ran advertisements looking “for able-bodied men to repair the Richmond and Danville Railroad. Four hundred dollars a month and board offered.”

In early July, the Augusta, Georgia *Daily Constitutionalist* reported briefly on the raid and sanguinely observed that “with the immense cavalry force Grant [has] with his army, we will have to expect an almost indefinite succession of raids in the future” given Grant’s obvious intention to employ some of this troops “in cutting our communications, foraging our country and harassing and impoverishing our people.” However, while other raiders did go through Lawrenceville, in neighboring Brunswick County, Mecklenburg was spared another visit until April 1865.

Battle Of The Crater

The summer of 1864 also saw the Battle of the Crater, on July 30, during the CSA defense of Petersburg. About 13,000 to 18,000 Confederates were in the trenches before Petersburg, facing an anticipated assault of probably more than 50,000 Union soldiers. Among the troops present in the line before Petersburg, and temporarily under the command of Mecklenburg native Col. John Thomas Goode (CSA), was Wise's Brigade, consisting of the 26th Virginia, the 34th Virginia, the 46th Virginia, and the 59th Virginia. Company B of the 34th Infantry had formerly been the Mecklenburg Heavy Artillery.

Educated at Virginia Military Institute, when the war started Goode was an officer in the U.S. army, on the western frontier. His loyalty was first to his state and (U.S.) Lieut. Goode resigned his commission. Driving a mule team, he, his wife, and two small children reportedly traveled alone from Salt Lake City across more than a thousand miles. At the Missouri River they reached "civilization" and were able to return to Virginia, probably by train. He offered his services to the CSA and, like his cousin Thomas F. Goode, rose rapidly in the ranks. First captain (July 1861), then major and lieutenant colonel, on May 15, 1862, J. Thomas Goode was appointed a CSA colonel, commanding the 4th Virginia Heavy Artillery, which later became the 34th Virginia Infantry. Late in the war he was recommended to be a brigade general. Col. Goode was paroled at Appomattox.

The Union had dug a tunnel from their lines to under Pegram's Salient in the Confederate line defending Petersburg. Into the tunnel and under the CSA line, they packed explosives, which were detonated at 4:44 a.m., under South Carolina troops. At least 278 Confederates (mostly South Carolinians and Virginians) were killed in the initial explosion.

The Confederate troops and commanders quickly recovered their presence of mind and covered the breach in their line. Not only did the federal troops not break through the Confederate line, but they also suffered a great loss of men. Their officers ordered them forward, into the crater created by the explosion, with the goal that the troops were to exit on the other side and into the damaged Confederate line. But the troops were not able to sweep on out of the crater of slippery red clay, and they became fish in a fish bowl, fired into by angry soldiers desperately defending their line. On both sides of where the Union soldiers were entering the crater Confederate troops were positioned in such a way that the federals advancing to the Crater — and any trying to retreat — were caught in a deadly crossfire. The superior federal artillery tried to dislodge them, and could not. The troops under Goode's command, which included men from Mecklenburg, constituted one side of the deadly crossfire. According to Goode's obituary in *Confederate Veteran*, his command played a vital part in defending the lines before Petersburg on that day, "against overwhelming odds."

Following the Battle of Sailor's (Sayler's) Creek, April 6, 1865, during Lee's retreat from Richmond and Petersburg, Goode was recommended for promotion to brigadier general. However, although it was approved, before he could actually receive the promotion, Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered his army on April 9, 1865. Goode surrendered with his command at Appomattox.

Millbank, Whittle's Mill, Meherrin River

Another Union officer to resign and join Confederate service was William Conway Whittle, the oldest of 11 sons born to Fortescue and Mary Ann Whittle of Millbank, at Whittle's Mill on the Meherrin River, in Mecklenburg. When Virginia seceded Whittle was serving as an officer in the U.S. Navy. He resigned and enlisted in the Confederate States Navy, in which he was made a commodore. "He commanded the naval defense on the York River, Virginia and the Confederate flotilla on the upper Mississippi River, as well as the naval station at New Orleans."

One of Commodore Whittle's children, Lieutenant William C. Whittle, Jr., was executive officer of the CSS *Shenandoah*.

The youngest brother of Commodore Whittle was Col. Powhatan Bolling Whittle, born at Millbank. Powhatan Whittle moved to Georgia, and when Georgia seceded, he enlisted in the Jackson Artillery Company (GA), rising to 1st lieutenant. However, since the Georgia governor would not release that company to go to fight in Virginia and Whittle was determined to serve in his home state, he resigned his commission and joined the Macon Volunteers, which was going to Virginia. Once in Virginia, Whittle was commissioned a lieutenant colonel and worked "with Colonel Edward C. Edmonds, Major Isaac H. Carrington and his brother James Whittle" to recruit "for the newly forming 38th Virginia Regiment." Seven companies were raised, two from Mecklenburg (the Mecklenburg Rifles [Co. G] and the Confederate Guards [Co. I]).

Lieut. Col. Whittle went on to give distinguished service to the Confederate States. Wounded five times in the course of his service, he, and the 38th Virginia, participated in the Battle of Williamsburg; the Seven Days' Battles (at Malvern Hill, the 38th was in center position in the assault, with no cover and up the hill; Whittle was dangerously wounded and lost an arm); and in Gen. George Pickett's infamous charge on Cemetery Ridge at Gettysburg, which "was a blood bath from which the Confederacy would never recover." With the death during the Gettysburg battle of the regiment's commander, Whittle became commander; he was himself eventually stopped, but it took three musket ball wounds to do it. Even then, "Major Isaac Carrington reported that Whittle was still commanding his regiment from a stretcher during the final charge at the stone wall." The regiment engaged in "fierce hand-to-hand fighting at the position often called the 'High Water Mark' of the Confederacy," when the 38th Virginia Regiment breached the Union line and "made the deepest charge into the Union lines." Whittle, once reasonably recovered, went on to the position of judge of the military court in (CSA) Gen. A.P. Hill's division, and was promoted to full colonel.

Economics

As 1864 drew to a close Mark Alexander, Sr., former U.S. congressman, a planter, and father of three sons in Confederate service, wrote CSA Senator Robert M.T. Hunter his opinions on matters economic, especially as they related to the planters. Some newspapers and (Confederate) congressmen were maligning planters, implying that they lacked patriotism for not paying more, giving more, loaning more. In Alexander's opinion, those who seemed to think that the planters

were “capable of supporting the whole weight of this expensive war” needed to “properly look[] ... into their condition.” Excessive drought, floods on the Roanoke and contributing creeks that destroyed crops in the lowgrounds, failed wheat crop, no market for tobacco, communications cut off from their market town of Petersburg, county expenses, support of the poor, support of the soldiers’ families, low prices for any surplus sold but highly inflated prices for everything purchased. “Plows from \$50 to 100 dollars, [plow] points \$50, leather \$300 per pound, iron and everything else in proportion.” Horses and mules were being impressed for service; to replace them, if they could be found, would cost two or three thousand dollars each.

The Confederate government relied

upon the production of the country for the support of its army ... yet [t]he country, it seems, gets no credit for the labour it furnishes the Govt. I may say almost gratuitously. I have recently sent upon their draft twelve of my most efficient hands, five of them for 12 months. Now with a large family of negroes, one half whom are consumers only, and upon whom a heavy tax is levied, I cannot under the most favorable circumstance expect to do more than support my family. ... It is a great mistake to suppose that planters are monied men.

Alexander ended the letter with a lament and prediction:

I cannot see how this war, if continued, can result in our independence, but must end in the utter ruin and destruction of the country and what would independence be worth to us, if that were the case? It seems to me, it would have been better to have fought for our rights under the constitution than to have brought this calamity upon us.

Compare prices Alexander mentions above to pre-war store prices in the same area, in account book entries from late 1860 and pre-war 1861:

a side of leather around \$1.50 to \$2.50
three sides of leather, \$4.00

one 19½ plough [plow], \$6.00
on April 8, 1861: one No. 0 plough, \$3.25

plow points ranging at price points \$0.20, \$0.50, or \$1.00, depending on size

As for the pre-war prices of horses and mules: in spring 1856 William Rust Baskervill bought a pair of carriage horses (iron gray) for \$700 and in the fall of 1860 he bought a pair of mules for \$285.

Confederacy Falls

The “calamity” was not destined to continue much longer. As the army of Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman (USA) rolled over the cities and country, moving north from Georgia, Lee’s army

(CSA) was having an increasingly hard time getting supplies so they could continue holding Grant's army (USA) out of Petersburg and Richmond.

On April 2, 1865, the Confederate government evacuated Richmond, going to Danville, Virginia, as Lee abandoned his defensive position. On April 9, 1865, Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia to Gen. U.S. Grant at Appomattox Courthouse, Virginia. The starving Confederate soldiers were paroled and, after many accepted the hospitality of Union soldiers to share their rations, started walking home. Most needed to get home to plow and repair fences.

A letter written at "Buck Horn" on April 14, 1865, provides its writer's opinion on the new state of things: If Lee had just had enough men ... "we would not now have been subject to yanke ... rule but as it is we cant help it and we aught to submit with as good a grace as possible, but I tell you I hate it very much, but if it is the will of the Lord we aught to be reconciled."

Lee's surrender applied to his army alone; there were still Confederate armies in the field, most significantly (because of its size), Gen. Joseph E. Johnston's Army of the South (CSA) in North Carolina, which was facing off with Gen. Sherman's army. When on April 16 Johnston received word of Lee's surrender, he requested a meeting with Gen. Sherman, to negotiate a surrender. They met, for the first time, on April 18 and agreed on terms far more generous than those Lee had been offered. Sherman then sent the information on to Washington, expecting approval of the surrender. The terms, and Sherman, however received outrage for being too lenient. The truce was off.

Concerned about the possibility that Johnston's army might slip away into the mountains of North Carolina in the west, on April 22 Gen. Grant ordered (U.S.) Gen. Philip Sheridan's cavalry to proceed with haste to Greensboro, North Carolina, to block Gen. Johnston's possible escape route. He also ordered a corps of infantry to go to assist if needed. The infantry chosen, the 6th Army Corps, left from Burkeville Junction (Virginia) on April 23, marching to Danville, Virginia. They did not need to go farther than Danville unless later instructed otherwise. Sheridan's cavalry took a different route (see below).

The 6th Corps accepted the surrender of Danville on April 27, 1865. "Some of the printer boys in the First division" quickly took "possession of the printing office of the Danville Register and issued therefrom a little sheet entitled 'The Sixth Corps,' which did not omit to mention the fact that the corps had outmarched Sheridan's cavalry in the race to Danville." On the same day, most of Sheridan's cavalry crossed the Roanoke (Staunton) and Dan rivers in far western Mecklenburg and were still 30 to 40 miles away.

Highwaymen

Gen. Sheridan, the cavalry (about 5,000 troopers strong), and all the wagons that must accompany the military moved out from camp at Petersburg at 6 a.m. on April 24, 1865.

They proceeded down the Boydton and Petersburg Plank Road. The day was warm, the road dry and dusty, and the road's "dilapidated condition added seriously to the difficulties of the march.

Troublesome creeks and rivers, where bridges had been destroyed, were to be crossed and occasioned no little delay.” In late morning they stopped to rest at Dinwiddie Court House, then continued to Birchett’s/Burchett’s Bridge over the Nottoway River where they camped, after a journey of 25 miles through wooded country. “Rebel officers and soldiers of Lee’s army now and then were met, many of whom, not yet paroled, strolled to the column for protection, a parole, or out of idle curiosity.”

The next morning the column crossed the “old and very rickety bridge” over the Nottoway, and later in the day crossed Waqua and Great Creeks. “About one mile beyond the latter, [they] took the road to the left in the direction of Lawrenceville; turned to the right, crossed Red Creek at the mill on Doctor Price’s plantation.”

Southern Virginia was little touched by the war, until “Sheridan’s raiders” came through. The countryside showed “comparatively few evidences of ... civil strife,” reported Major Henry Edwin Tremain, aide-de-camp to Gen. George Crook, commander of the 2nd Cavalry Division of the Army of the Potomac.

The general impression of the people along the route of march was that Johnston’s army had already surrendered. They had heard of the first truce that had been agreed upon between Sherman and his opponent and had taken it for granted that the latter’s terms would be acceded to, or that the armistice must end in a surrender. They believed that the present march of Sheridan through the country was entirely uncalled for. They were unable to appreciate the policy of subjecting their beautiful country of Southern Virginia, hitherto scarcely visited by troops from either army, to the devastation and scourge of war.

However, the war was still on, and one thing one side does while moving through the country of the other side is to forage. Much to the dismay of the inhabitants, “ ‘Sheridan’s scouts,’ ... were more ubiquitous than ever.” What they wanted particularly was horses, and knowing that they did not need to be cautious about enemy military forces and “[b]eing in appearance undistinguishable from the ex-Rebel soldiers, who were by this time well dispersed through the country,” the “[r]egular and irregular foraging parties” ranged out for 10 to 25 miles “on each flank of the column, and woe to the innocent quadrupeds which fell in their path.” “[N]ot a few of the people openly disputed the right of roving troopers to inspect their stables. This fact only increased their misfortunes and led to a more vigilant and determined search.” Major Tremain lamented that “it was harsh to leave the plow standing in the furrow. ... But we sadly needed the horses in the column.”

The soldiers knew two important things: that “[t]he region along the Dan and Staunton rivers ... enjoyed a favorable reputation for its [horses], and ... that few, if any, troops had ever visited [the region]” As a result, “every nerve was strained to discover and seize its horses. ... The news of [the cavalry’s] approach spread through the country as if by telegraph, and farmers rushed their animals to the woods and swamps, endeavoring in every imaginable way to secrete them from the search of the omnipresent troopers.” That usually failed.

Oral history, legal papers, correspondence, memoirs, and angry notations in account books mark some of the paths the foragers took within Mecklenburg.

Ten miles south of the plank road, near Joyceville, Armstead G. Boyd wrote in a notebook that on April 25, “Sheridan’s raiders” had taken property worth \$360.90, under his supervision but owned by another man, Thomas Wade. At a house a few miles west, a 10-year-old Confederate girl defiantly stood on her front porch and defended the Confederacy to a yard full of Union cavalymen, who took it in good humor and supposedly presented her with a U.S. flag. Continuing west on the River Road, among other things they took the silver flatware from William Rust Baskervill, Lombardy Grove area; in later years occasionally when the family would sit down to dinner the elderly patriarch would demand to know why they weren’t using their silver [a dozen tablespoons, ten spoons, a large ladle and a small ladle, large forks, dessert forks, and salt spoons]. Someone would remind him gently that Sheridan’s raiders had taken it. Meanwhile the spinster daughter was daintily wiping her mouth and quietly getting up from the table, to go out of earshot of the language that she knew was about to erupt from her father.

In an account book with records kept on his farm’s horses and mules, Baskervill made notations in margins and between lines: “stolen by Sheridan’s highway men,” “stole by Sheridans cut throats,” “a band of men representing themselves to be Sheridans men.” His notes indicate that the raiders came twice, on two different days.

These “incursions and excursions ... were not without profit,” personally as well as militarily. Goods beyond just horses and mules were taken, and usually not politely. Although due to conflicting testimony the commissioners disallowed the claim of David Smith, owner of one quarter’s interest in Whittles Mill on the Meherrin, the Commissioners of Claims of the Southern Claims Commission did concede “that the soldiers plundered the house in a lawless manner.” At the home of Dr. William H. Jones, near Boydton, the troopers allegedly tied up the head of the household, then forced their way into the bedroom of his dying wife, broke into her “bureau and carried off what valuables they could find.”

At Lombardy Grove, Baskervill make a list of all the property taken, inserting as an afterthought, “forcably.”

On the south side of the Roanoke, south of Clarksville, family lore places the raiders at the Lewis homestead, Cedar Grove. They broke into the wine cellar; what they could not drink, they made sure no one else would either and dumped the rest. They also “chopped the posts off grandma’s walnut tester bed” to use as logs. And as in many other places (Dr. Jones’ plantation, for example) they took “the pick of [the] stable. ... However, they did not figure on Uncle Len and some faithful allies. They followed the raiders, and within a few days came proudly home on their own mounts which in the middle of the night they had retrieved.”

Beyond the horses and mules the raiders took hams, bacon — the entire contents of smokehouses, bushels of “bread” corn, barrels of excellent-quality flour, brandy, jewelry, blankets, clothing, a gentleman’s heavy gold watch, lady’s gold watch and chain, leather, demijohns of brandy. From David Smith, near Whittle’s Mill, they took: a barrel of sorghum molasses, 25 pounds of butter, 15 pounds of preserves, silver flatware (tablespoons and

teaspoons, heavy), a razor, a new saddle and a side saddle, “a parcel of books,” silver spectacles, 20 pounds of honey, 250 pounds of bacon, a barrel of flour, a blanket, 2½ gallons of brandy, clothing, six barrels of corn, and two mules.

Some citizens were successful in hiding some things, usually by having accessible other food or objects. A brother of that 10-year-old girl on the porch succeeded in hiding their horses and mules. At Lombardy Grove Tavern a ham was successfully hidden, and was served a few years later at a wedding reception; the ham was apparently made all the tastier because the Yankees had missed it.

When the Work Projects Administration interviewed former slaves — not in or of Mecklenburg — during the 1930s, one lady described what she had observed during the Civil War, as a six-year-old, on the Eastern Shore of Virginia. (Minus the dialect the WPA workers so carefully wrote): “Them Yankees sure had their way. They went in all the white folks’ house; took their silver, and anything they big enough carry out. They ruin Missus furniture; get up on the table and just cut capper. Nasty things!”

The main column of Sheridan’s cavalry reached the Meherrin River (in Brunswick County) in the mid afternoon of April 25 — probably where Gee’s Bridge should have been. According to one source, the bridge had been burned almost a year earlier, at the time of Wilson’s Raid. Sheridan’s troopers repaired the banks of the ford, and Gen. Sheridan’s headquarters wagon successfully was crossed. That of Gen. Merritt damaged the banks of the ford so much that the crossing of that wagon and of most of the troopers was delayed until the next day. While most of the column encamped on the northern side of the Meherrin, the First Brigade, First Division was ordered across, to stay with the headquarters wagons. They and the HQ wagons camped two miles south of the river. Again the day had been warm and dusty.

A report from the federal Quartermasters’ Department described the Meherrin as “peculiarly a Virginia river, with high, steep banks, shallow water, but very swift current.” The next morning, of April 26, the decision was made that attempting to have the supply trains ford the river was “impracticable. A small detail,” apparently from the First Division, began “to build bridges,” about 7 a.m. By noon “two substantial bridges, each 200 feet long, had been built from the trees on the river banks, and by 2 P. M. the entire train had crossed without accident.”

Still following the Boydton Plank Road, the main column crossed the county line from Brunswick into Mecklenburg on that day, April 26th. The “weather was delightful, the road cool and shady, all nature was becomingly dressed in the garb of early spring. Even the grim warriors appreciated the beautiful surroundings, and gathered bouquets of rare wild flowers.”

The headquarters wagons, with the command, and escorted by part of the 1st Division, being on the south side of the Meherrin already on the morning of the 26th, were able to get a reasonably early start (6 a.m.), and they moved on down the plank road. Halting two hours during the day, “to rest the command” — oral history suggests in the yard and surrounding property of Lombardy Grove Tavern — they reached Boydton at 4 p.m. Gen. Merritt established his headquarters at Dr. M.M. Jordan’s house. According to legend, Gen. Sheridan stayed that night

at Cedar Crest in Boydton, a Goode home, and the entire open ground between the house and Jones Street was filled with camping Union soldiers.

Ahead of the generals and the headquarters wagons was the advance guard. Soon after reaching Boydton they went to inspect the bar of William A. Homes. The captain of the guard asked Homes if he had any brandy; Sheridan would want brandy that evening. Homes later told what happened next: "I ... drew a pitcher of brandy out of my barrel and carried it into Mr. Mackasey's back room so that while they were drinking I might get my stud horse out of the stable and run him off." Then, after drawing more brandy, this time into a demijohn that he left in the bar, Homes "took the barrels and rolled them down in the yard and buried them in the manure pile[.] ... [T]hey never found" that brandy.

The 3rd Division (under Gen. George Custer) entered "the pretty little village of Boydton," "with light hearts and buoyant spirits. ... All the bands were playing 'Hail Columbia!' The entire population of the village repaired to the main street to view the cavalcade." The 2nd West Virginia, 3rd Brigade, 3rd Division, at least, camped near the grounds of the abandoned Randolph-Macon College. The 2nd Brigade of the 1st Division, and perhaps others, camped "near Boydton," apparently east of it because the next morning they moved "through Boydton," with the wagon train.

Also on April 26, 1865, Sheridan's scouts, as they checked out the country, had discovered a river the column could not ford or construct a bridge over. The Roanoke was deep, turbulent, wide, with a rapid current. And it was swollen by recent rain. So Sheridan's scouts went to work conquering the river by the only means they had available: the flat boats locally used as ferries, both private and public. Many flat boats. During the night of the 26th into the 27th, up and down the Dan, Staunton, and Roanoke, the scouts had dispersed to find the boats. And the locals had helped them gather. As a matter of fact, in the opinion of the acting aide-de-camp to Gen. Merritt, "[t]oo much credit cannot be awarded to the inhabitants of this part of the country for the energy and zeal displayed to facilitate the crossing of the command." And he also observed that "[t]o Major Young and his scouts, for their energy during the night of the 26th in procuring the boats to build the bridges, credit is also partly due." The boats were poled to Abbyville, secured to each other and the shore, and anchored when an "anchor" could be found. The resulting flatboat bridge spanned at least four hundred feet.

The next day, the 27th, the march of the main column resumed, west from Boydton on the Boydton Plank Road extension, at 6 a.m., headed to Abbyville and a crossing of the Staunton and Dan Rivers as they meet upstream from Clarksville.

The road was deemed to be "excellent." En route they "saw some of Lee's men on their way home," and "[g]reat crowds of people, white and black, thronged the road and camp. The joy of the negroes was great, and they afforded considerable amusement for the troops, who now, more than at any other period of the war, could see fun in almost anything."

On the 27th of April much of the column crossed the improvised bridge before dark, but the 1st Brigade had to encamp on the north side of the Staunton River; headquarters was established at Richard Russell's house at Abbyville.

In all, according to one source, more than 8,000 — troopers, artillery, and more than 200 wagons — safely crossed the flat-boat bridge, with the loss of only one wagon.

The column continued west, but upon reaching near what is now South Boston, in Halifax County (Virginia), Sheridan received word that Johnston had surrendered on the same terms as Lee. Sheridan's troopers were ordered to return. A few days later (May 8, 1865) a newspaper in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, reported that "Sheridan's cavalry, which was on the 'rampage' from the vicinity of Petersburg towards Danville, has been recalled."

Even More Union Soldiers

The war was officially over but the citizens' problems with soldiers were not. Gen. Sherman's army was still in the field down in North Carolina, and they needed to get to Washington, D.C. They were ordered to march, "by easy stages to Richmond, Virginia," by orders of Gen. Sherman. The routes they were to take were established for them. The 14th Army Corps and the 20th Army Corps (AC) moved together; the 15th AC and 17th AC moved together.

On April 29, leaving another corps in Raleigh, North Carolina, to help parole those of Johnston's army who had not already walked away, Gen. Sherman left all the soldiers in camp at Raleigh. Traveling by rail to Wilmington, North Carolina, and then by steamer, south, he reached Port Royal, South Carolina, on May 1. On that day the four army corps began their march north from Raleigh to Richmond.

On May 2, as Gen. Sherman was again traveling by water, the 14th and 20th army corps were near Oxford, North Carolina, and the 15th and 17th near Warrenton, North Carolina. On the following day the 14th and 20th army corps crossed the Roanoke River, on a pontoon bridge that moved with them, at Taylors Ferry in Mecklenburg, south of Boydton, and continued marching north and northeast through the county. The 15th and 17th also crossed the Roanoke on a pontoon bridge, downstream, at Robinsons Ferry, in North Carolina; on May 4; they moved north through Brunswick County, Virginia.

Their orders were, basically, to behave: they were a peacetime army and were not to help themselves to the contents of houses and smokehouses; Gen. Sherman was adamant about that. Still reeling from Sheridan's raid, the county had almost 30,000 soldiers march through; even if they did no other harm, they still at minimum took fences down and burned them for firewood. Alexander Spotswood Boyd, a Boydton resident, reported in a letter of June 16, 1865, that after crossing at Taylors Ferry the infantry had "done considerable damage at Sister Ann's"; unfortunately Boyd did not give details.

On May 7, as the army corps reached the Petersburg area, Gen. Sherman and his party were able to resume their sea voyage north, having spent the previous days in safe harbor at Morehead City, North Carolina, while a storm at sea held them up. On the 8th Sherman arrived in City Point, Virginia (present-day Hopewell) on the *Russia*. He then moved by land to Petersburg and by railroad to Manchester (south Richmond), Virginia, and rejoined his army.

A few days later the two armies started their march north, to Washington, D.C. Sherman accompanied them on that march.

Of course even after Sherman's army had passed, Mecklenburg County (Virginia) was host to some of the U.S. Army; the South was under military law. A.S. Boyd lamented in June 1865, "[O]ur brave & noble old State has been overrun and lies subject to the mandates of military power. I would like to wright ... much on this subject but ... our communication is restricted."

A New World Begins

The war itself had been devastating. Its conclusion turned lives upside-down.

On the good side, for approximately 61 percent of the population of the county, their legal status changed in the course of one day. They had been enslaved and suddenly they were free. April 9, 1865, was emancipation day here.

According to Myrta Lockett Avery in *Dixie After the War; an Exposition of Social Conditions Existing in the South During the Twelve Years Succeeding the Fall of Richmond*, "[a]s victorious armies went through the country, they told the negroes, 'You are free!' Negroes accepted the tidings in different ways. ... After every Yankee army swarmed a great black crowd on foot, men, women, and children. They had to be fed and cared for; they wearied their deliverers." Myrta had grown up at Lombardy Grove, where her father not only farmed but also ran the tavern.

For the former slaves (unfortunately none in Mecklenburg) then living in Virginia who were interviewed in the 1930s by Work Projects Administration workers, initial reactions among the newly freed ranged from being very happy but also a bit unsettled to being very happy but also terrified. Emotions in Mecklenburg were probably the same. As at least one of the former slaves in the WPA interviews pointed out, there are good and bad people (such as "masters") everywhere.

In some cases, when the former owners had been kind and the former owners made the offer of an economic arrangement, some ex-slaves stayed put. "When master told us we was free it didn't take much 'fect on us. He told us ... that we didn't have to work for him any more 'less we wanted to. Most of us slaves stayed right there and raised our own crops. Master helped us much as he could."

Myrta Lockett Avery wrote in *Dixie After The War* her memory of how things were at their plantation. Her father spoke to his former slaves from his back porch, while all were gathered in the backyard, "a great green space with blossomy altheas and fruit-trees and tall oaks around, and the scent of honeysuckles and Sweet Betseys making the air fragrant."

"You do not belong to me any more. You are free. ... I want you all to do well. You will have to work, if not for me, for somebody else. Heretofore, you have worked for me and I

have supported you, fed you, clothed you, given you comfortable homes, paid your doctors' bills, bought your medicines, taken care of your babies before they could take care of themselves; when you were sick, your mistress and I have nursed you; we have laid your dead away. ... I have been trying to think out a plan. ... Now, you can stay just as you have been staying and work just as you have been working, and we will plan together what is best. Or, you can go. My crops must be worked, and I want to know what arrangements to make. ... [Y]ou needn't promise for longer than this year ... If you want to go somewhere else, say so—and no hard thoughts!”

Many of the formerly enslaved individuals stayed, at least for a while, because they had nowhere to go. Uncle Andrew, one of the Lockett ex-slaves, told Mr. Lockett: “I ain’ got nowhar tuh go if I was going!” Some like the family of Mrs. Minnie Fulkes (originally of Chesterfield County, Virginia and interviewed in 1937 in Petersburg, Virginia) “didn’t have nuthin’ and no where to go ... so we all ... just took and stayed ’til we was able with God’s help to pull us selves together.”

“Ah, Lord child,” Mrs. Fulkes continued to the interviewer, “them was terrible times too, oh! it makes me shudder when I think of some slaves had to stay in de woods an’ git along best way they could after freedom done bin’ declared; you see slaves who had mean master would rather be there then where they lived.”

Others left, sometimes of their own free will and sometimes not. In mid June 1865 Alexander S. Boyd observed to a friend in Petersburg, Illinois, that “the negroes are behaving themselves very well. [A] good many have left their masters & a good many sent off by them.”

A memoir describes an exchange in 1865 between one formerly enslaved man, Jack, who lived near Danville, Virginia, and Col. Fletcher, the federal provost marshal in Danville. The freedman had come, he informed Col. Fletcher, to get his land that was allotted to him. The request startled Col. Fletcher, who explained that the land still belonged to the owners and the U.S. government did not own any. This in turn surprised Jack, who voiced his “disgust and contempt”: “ ‘If you had the right to take Master’s n---rs you had the right to take Master’s land too. And what good will freedom do the n---rs if they get no land to work to make their bread?’ ” Col. Fletcher could only respond that the U.S. government had no land to give out.

Lockett, as did many other farmers, made contracts with the freed workers — “a bond for a year’s work and wages or part of the crop. ... At first,” explained daughter Myrta years later, “contracts had to be ratified by a Freedmen’s Bureau agent, who charged master and servant each fifty cents or more.”

From plans like this, twentieth-century sharecropping evolved.

Some former slaves went to cities, expecting the assistance of the U.S. government. Many went to Washington, D.C., an imagined heaven. A former slave, born in Dinwiddie County, Virginia, to a slave mother and the master, Elizabeth Keckley, who had purchased her freedom and was living in Washington, explained:

Some of the freedmen and freedwomen had exaggerated ideas of liberty. To them it was a beautiful vision, a land of sunshine, rest and glorious promise. They flocked to Washington, and since their extravagant hopes were not realized, it was but natural that many of them should bitterly feel their disappointment. The colored people are wedded to associations, and when you destroy these you destroy half of the happiness of their lives. ... [T]he emancipated slaves, in coming North, left old associations behind them, and the love for the past was so strong that they could not find much beauty in the new life so suddenly opened to them. Thousands of the disappointed huddled together in camps, fretted and pined like children for the “good old times.” ... [D]ependence had become a part of their second nature, and independence brought with it the cares and vexations of poverty.

... [O]thers went to work with commendable energy, and planned with remarkable forethought. They built themselves cabins [in the Freedmen’s Village], and each family cultivated for itself a small patch of ground.

Decades after emancipation one Mecklenburg formerly enslaved woman just had happy memories and she stood up at a religious gathering, at Boydton Institute in Boydton:

“Bless the Lord, I’m free, I’m free. The bottom log is at the top and top log at the bottom, now, and I’m free. When ole mass was ’live news came one day, ‘Lee has surrendered, Richmond had fell;’ and I asked them where it had fell. I knew, all the time. They were all crying because Richmond had fell, but I knew all about it.”

“ ‘Deliverance has come.’ ”

Emancipation Day

In Mecklenburg County, April 9th was recognized and celebrated annually for many years — especially in Boydton, as Emancipation Day; in 1950 the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, reported that the celebration “has been an institution here from the time when the memory of man runneth not to the contrary, but all the oldtimers hereabouts are pretty sure that the first celebration was held soon after Appomattox.” In 1907 it had been 41 years. The custom had begun by at least 1868, when a worker lost \$0.50 for a day’s pay, having been at the “Celebration at Boydton.” Thousands attended (in 1873 at least 3,000 and at least a thousand in the “line of procession”; 3,000 in 1903). The day was observed with a parade and speeches, including such prominent speakers as John Mercer Langston, “the first black man to represent Virginia in the U.S. House of Representatives,” and Luther Porter Jackson, professor, author, and “one of Virginia’s most important civil rights activists of the 1930s and 1940s.” The celebration continued at least as late as 1962. It was open to all and was enjoyed by African Americans — both local and those who traveled to Boydton — along with white residents of the town.

On the flip side of the lives-turned-upside-down coin, many within 34 percent of the population (i.e., white) had in the blink of an eye lost the largest parts of their net worth. The previously “monied” families of the county were almost instantly in an “impoverished condition.” “[T]he wealthiest men in the country are reduced to penury & no products on hand to realise money from except a little Tobacco. [E]very thing is confusion.”

In June 1865 Alexander S. Boyd wrote,

... a more poverty stricken people throughout the entire South (if I may judge from this community) the annals of history will yet have to reveal – at one fell swoop – one moiety of the wealth of the South (the slaves) is destroyed – with the painfull consciousness of such a state, of facts – our slow and tardy ability for recuperation of our impoverished condition is a melancholy reflection, humiliating in the extreme.

Looking at this in terms of economics only, slaves were an investment, often a very substantial investment, and that investment was gone.

The liquid assets? Those were worthless. Confederate currency was useless, although it did make a good fire starter. According to family lore, one Mecklenburg cavalryman, seeing what was coming, spent all the Confederate currency he had for a good meal in Petersburg, before Lee’s retreat. Bonds? Any patriotic investments in the Confederate States ... those assets were also gone. Few people had any U.S. currency. Few had gold, the definitely preferred medium of exchange. Barter, of course, still worked in many situations; pay the doctor in eggs or shoe repair or manual labor. U.S. greenbacks would only slowly enter the economy.

Sergeant Robert A. Boyd, 1st Engineers Troop, CSA — with his “servant,” William Boyd, the sergeant’s cook during his service in the war — left Appomattox on April 12, 1865, and arrived at the home place in Mecklenburg — Oakley — before Sheridan’s raid. During the raid, the federal soldiers demanded the apple brandy (apple jack) the sergeant’s father had and the contents of his smokehouse. They would have taken what they wanted, but Sgt. Boyd turned a negative into a positive and sold first the brandy and then meals to the federal troopers, who happily paid. (He “got the old cook, Aunt Maria, to prepare good dinners for them of the hams, bacon, etc.”) He ended up with U.S. greenbacks and felt rich! “[I]n that way our empty pocket-book was repleted with Uncle Sam’s currency, and there was no fuss or feathers about it either. Every man paid for his dinner.”

Many of the county’s white families would, soon or within a few decades, have to declare bankruptcy and sell their land and homes.

Of course, not everyone in the county fell into either category: those who had been free anyway (black and white) but did not own slaves. They had not lost most of their net worth with Lee’s surrender; they had probably lost more when Sheridan’s raiders’ took their only mule off the plow in the middle of the field. But others lost, in addition, their provider; papa would not be coming home. And still others had started the war with nothing and ended it the same way; sadly, the county still had use for its poor house.

Some few people also prospered during the war. For example, John G. Boyd, “came out of the war rich by speculating in cotton,” according to his brother, Sgt. Robert A. Boyd, mentioned above (who started farming one of their father’s properties, Egypt, in western Mecklenburg).

Statistics from the first postwar federal census, that of 1870, bear witness to the economic hit the county (and the rest of the South) took. Mecklenburg’s population count did not change much — 20,096 in 1860 and 21,318 in 1870. And there were more farms in 1870 than in 1860, not surprising considering the number of farmers who had been freed from slavery. Yet despite the increase in the number of farms, the cash value of the total fell: in 1860 there were 726 farms, with a cash value of \$3,606,956; in 1870, 1,038 farms together were valued at only \$2,197,841.

The county had 65 manufacturing establishments in 1860, and 62 in 1870. The 1860 product value was \$518,398; in 1870 it was \$234,079. In 1860, 629 people had been employed in manufacturing; in 1870, it was 127.

(U.S.) Brevet Major George Ward Nichols, aide-de-camp to Gen. Sherman, observed in 1865: “The South is crushed almost beyond hope of speedy resurrection. Its armies are destroyed; its manufactures ruined; its work-shops and public building in ashes; its commerce and agriculture swept away. For us and for them a new era begins. A great work is to be accomplished in the rehabilitation of a wasted region.”

By September 1865, Alexander S. Boyd could already see that new era beginning: “Our folks are ... striving to make a living[.] [Making a] fortune is obsolete[.] [I]t’s a living now.” Boyd saw “a gloomy prospect in this country[.] [A]ll the labor destroyed at one dash & some years must elapse before any industrial system can be established[.]”

The situation had not improved by 1866–1867, as described by a contemporary.

Labor disorganised and almost worthless ... the land owners without stock or tools or money, and often without houses; the merchant without capital; the mechanic without ... without pay; a cloud of threatened confiscation hanging over the real property so that it would not sell; the political horizon overcast with gloom ... bad men prowling about, still more disturbing the unsettled relations between the two races...

The “sad and deplorable consequences” of the war that William Baskervill, Jr. — of Buena Vista, in southeast Mecklenburg, on Goode’s Ferry Road (present-day Rt. 903) — bemoaned in 1867 remained long after surrender. And long after Reconstruction.

In the late 1880s a Northern observer wrote: “I find that all the Southern people date everything now in their history to ‘the surrender,’ ‘when Lee surrendered,’ or ‘before the war,’ or ‘since the surrender.’ This is the date upon which their country had started anew.”

Two Sides Of A Coin

“ ‘Deliverance has come.’ ”

–1830s hymn sung by students at
Boynton Institute, late 19th century

“My ole mistress promised me
When she died she’d set me free.
She lived so long her head got bald
And I thought she’d never die at all”

–Sung by Willie Valentine
Bracey, Virginia, about 1920s

“... a mighty revolution which has swept
away alike the property, the social
landmarks, the happiness & prosperity of a
whole people ...”

–Armstead Goode Boyd
St. Tammany, Virginia
1868