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A Housewife's Perspective on the Occupation of Huntsville, Part III

Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society

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A HOUSEWIFE'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE OCCUPATION
OF HUNTSVILLE, PART III

[Editor's Note: This segment of the Diary of Mrs. W. D. Chaddick, whose husband was the minister of the local Cumberland Presbyterian Church and also a Colonel in the Confederate Army, covers the period from July 11 to September 1, 1862.]

July 11. Went out to Mrs. White's today for blackberries, taking Eddie, Georgie and Jimmy Mayhew with me. Passed a camp and three sets of pickets on the road. Spent a delightful day and came home loaded with berries, apples, eggs and honey, the two latter a present from Miss Cassie.

Mrs. Bradford called in just at dark to tell me that news had just come that Jesse Jordan, Willie Heklin and a son of Chambers Steele were all killed before Richmond. There is news also that our armies are marching on Nashville. If so, "now is the day of our deliverance at hand."

July 14. Mrs. Mayhew and I took a ride this evening out to Mrs. James Robinson. We came in just ahead of a portion of Gen. Buell's army who are apparently moving towards Nashville. The division occupied nearly two hours in passing. Heard today that our troops had retaken Murfreesboro.

July 17. There have now been no mails for three days. Rumor afloat that Nashville, Columbia and Shelbyville are retaken. Visited Lieut. Coffee in his prison this evening and learned tidings from W.D. He was on his march, two weeks since, in this direction.

Went with Mrs. Bradford and Mrs. Gooch to visit Gen. Rousseau at headquarters. Were very cordially received and agreeably

entertained. The general is a handsome, fine looking man. He spoke very strongly on the Union question and especially of our "rattlesnake government," as he was pleased to call it. Judge Lane and Jere Clemens coming in, we immediately took leave. As we were leaving, we met Gen. Buell and, having a curiosity to see him, took a good look at him, a small gray-headed man. Gen. Rousseau, being so large, perhaps made him appear smaller in comparison. Did not get a good look at his features.

July 18. Visited Gen. Rousseau again this morning in company with Mrs. Cowan and Mrs. Van Horton to ask permission for them to go out of the Federal lines, which was immediately and cordially granted. Had a most pleasant interview and came away more pleased with him than we thought it possible to be with any Federal officer. Rumor about the taking of Nashville unfounded.



The Reverend Frederick A. Ross was minister of the First Presbyterian Church from 1855 to 1875. The church building was dedicated May 17, 1860 and still stands at the corner of Lincoln and Gates.

: A Housewife's Perspective on the Occupation of Huntsville, Part I

July 19. Went again this morning very reluctantly to see Gen. Rousseau with Mrs. Jim Ned Horton to ask for a pass for her to leave his lines, which was granted without hesitation. He also gave me a general pass to go when and where I pleased. Sue also called on him with Mrs. Scott Robinson to ask for the release of the Robinson boys and the Christians, which was also granted.

Dr. Ross was arrested this evening on account (it is alleged) of a war sermon he preached last Sunday. Proved the accusations false, but was ordered to prison, as he would not promise to keep his tongue. Upon Mrs. Ross' solicitations, was paroled for the night.

John is very strangely affected tonight. The doctor thinks it is a chill. Hope it is not congestive.

July 20. This has been a sad day. Clara has been sick, and poor little John has been in a state of collapse for hours and died about dark. Drs. Sheffey and Leftwich were both called in, and everything has been done that could be done, but all in vain. Corinna takes it quite hard.

July 21. Today is the anniversary of the Battle of Manassas. It brings up sad memories in the hearts of many.

Little John was buried this evening, and we miss him sadly.

This has been a day of news, but whether reliable or not, is another question. We hear of the presentation of cannons, et cetera, to the Southern Confederacy from the Liverpool merchants. Also that there has been another battle in Virginia, in which we were victorious. Also at Battle Creek, where

it is said we took 2,000 prisoners, and one at Mud Creek, where Gen. Mitchell's famous bridge of cotton bales was burned, two companies taken prisoners and one cannon. It is also rumored that Corinth is retaken. Heaven send it all may be true! Gossip adds that Gen. Buell is ordered to Washington to answer to the charges against Gen. Mitchell.

July 23. Made my first visit to Monte Sano this morning, in company with Mrs. Bradford and Mrs. Figures, with Willie Gale and Joe Bradford for an escort. Rode old Henry in true equestrian style. Mrs. Figures rode a mule. Passed the pickets just beyond the tollgate. They viewed us with a great deal of curiosity, but declined looking at our passes.

Bushwhacked about on the top of the mountain and spent a couple of hours with Mrs. Toney, who is rustivating up there, and returned home about dinner time. As we passed the house of Dr. Wilkinson, the Federal band was there seranading.

A most laughable occurrence took place this evening. The Redman family, who keep a little bakery here, got into a fuss with the Yankees and, while one of the latter was in deadly conflict with Mr. Redman, Mrs. Redman took another by the collar and make him "see sights." The Misses Redman cried, "Havoc!" and let fly the rocks, with the most undaunted bravery. Every volley told on the enemy, about 25 strong, till one of the misses saw the provost guard heave in sight. She exclaimed, "Thank God! Here is the guard!" The foe retired heels foremost by the Big Spring.

Mrs. Jordan arrived this evening from Richmond with the body of her son, who fell at Mechanicsville. She brought the news of the death of Tom Patton and Willie Acklin.

July 24. The funeral of Jesse Jordan took place this evening. There were 50 carriages in the procession. The Federalists stood at every corner, and many of them at the grave, and looked on with much curiosity. There is a great deal of sickness here among the latter, and there are five or six burials daily.

July 25. Very busy today fixing off Jennie, who is going to Fayetteville with Brother DeWitt. Went to Gen. Rousseau's tent with Willie for a pass, which was kindly and cordially granted. They got off at 5 o'clock for Meridianville.

Sunday, July 27, 1862. Went to hear Dr. Ross preach this morning. Text: "I am not mad, most noble Felix, but speak forth the words of truth." A most excellent discourse followed--first sermon since his arrest.

After speaking before Gen. Rousseau two or three times and maintaining his finesse, and "proving his points" with that gentleman, he (Ross) was not further molested. Gen. Rousseau thus far has been very kind to the citizens and has made a very favorable impression, as has Gen. Buell, to the great dissatisfaction of his soldiers.

Took Georgie and Clara this evening and went out to see Mrs. Vincent. She is very low and can last but a few days. Real glad to see me, and said her heart desire was to see W.D. before she died.

In going out, we passed a Federal camp beyond the depot. They had 75 pieces artillery and looked quite formidable. Some of the vulgar horde were in the creek, bathing right in the ford. Others were roasting corn in abundance plundered from the neighboring fields, which are already nearly

Seven thousand of Buell's army passed tonight toward Stevenson. They plundered and destroyed as they came all the way from Tuscumbia, "in revenge," as they said, for an attack at Courtland from some of our men, in which they had one killed and 12 wounded.

July 28. Last night, the Federals burned Whitesburg, leaving the women and children houseless and homeless. The light of the conflagration was distinctly seen from here. Richmond was taken again tonight.

July 30. Received a present of flour and butter from Mrs. James Robinson yesterday. Another sack of flour today from Mrs. John Robinson, and some salt from Mr. Stoddard. Truly I have some kind friends in Huntsville.

Georgie Saunders arrived last night from our army and says relief is at hand, that the advanced guard of Price's army is at Tuscumbia. "Ye Gods, speed it on its way."

August 2. Mrs. Dillard, who suffered so severely at the hands of the Yankees (her son killed a Federal soldier who had come to raid the smokehouse), came down day before yesterday to see Generals Buell and Rousseau to get restitution. Failed, of course. She made her stay with me and left this morning.

Mrs. Vincent died night before last and was buried yesterday evening. On my way out was favored with another sight of the bathers, who, when I got sufficiently near, turned a few somersaults for my benefit.

The enemy is in our midst. Must have heard some news this morning. They commenced erecting fortifications and have been pressing blacks all the morning to work upon

: A Housewife's Perspective on the Occupation of Huntsville, Part I
them.

R. M. Brickell, who went away with Mrs. Walker, returned a day or two since and was immediately arrested and is still in "durance vile." Why did he not go to the army, when once away from here!

Night. He has been released. The Federal generals have been holding a council of war this evening. Wonder what is to pay? There is a rumor that our army is advancing. Fearful it is not true.

August 4. The Yankees are using the negroes today by the wholesale, and have commenced their fortifications around the town. Patton's Hill is being fortified, as it commands the town.

Five hundred blacks were sent off on the train this morning toward Nashville to erect fortifications. There is a great panic among the negroes. But few are willing to go, and they are running and hiding generally.

They (the Yankees) are talking largely about burning the town, and if the "low-down pirates" are left to do as they please, they would soon sack and burn it. An officer said the other day that these people were too pampered in their pride, and he would like to see some of their fine houses destroyed.

Another pirate said that he liked to stay in Huntsville amazingly, that we have so many delicacies, and the climate is no warmer than in the North.

A party of them went to the house of the Widow Scruggs last week, and, after robbing the place of every peach, melon and turkey, they returned again in large numbers and surrounded the house, knowing that there were no whites on the place except three ladies.

They (the women) bolted the doors and windows, and ran upstairs for safety, while the brutes, aided by three negroes, uttering the vilest language, accompanied with curses and imprecations, clamored for admittance. A neighbor, seeing what was going on, started a servant on horseback to the courthouse, and an officer and guard soon made their appearance, whereupon the wretches dispersed and, of course, escaped punishment.

There is a negro colonel walking around town today as large as life. His regiment is said to be above here on the railroad. So they are arming the blacks. Truly their course must have become desperate.

Heard an anecdote today on one of the Misses Malones of Athens, which is worth relating. One of her friends had been taken prisoner and kept standing tied to a tree all night. She was very indignant and went to Gen. Nelson to remonstrate. Her language was severe, to which the general retorted in good humor and finally told her that she "talked like she had the mania petu." She replied, "I expect I have, for I have heard that in that disease they see blue devils, and I have seen nothing else since the 12th of April." And added that she would be glad to be rid of the disease.

August 6. Matt Steele was arrested yesterday on the old charge of pulling Wilson, the tailor's, whiskers, for being civil to a Federal officer. Gen. Rousseau treated it as a very grave offense and an insult to the U.S. government, and asked him "if he did not know that it was a very cowardly act." Mr. Steel replied that he thought it was, as Mr. Wilson did not resent it.

Gen. Rousseau remarked among other

: A Housewife's Perspective on the Occupation of Huntsville, Part I
things, and accompanied by an oath, that they "had got us down and trot us through, and when we got them down, we could trot them through."

Mr. Steel added that he did not object to the fairness of the thing, but thought it rather hard that he should have the first trotting. His case is yet to be disposed of.

August 7. Accompanied Mrs. Watkins to see Mrs. Jere Clemens to ask her to intercede with Col. Burke for Dr. Hadden, who was arrested on a charge of throwing a brick bat on a moon-light night at Mr. and Mrs. Clemens and Col. and Mrs. Burke, who were at the town spring. Dr. Hadden was arrested from the fact of his sleeping near the scene, and was found in bed and fast asleep at the time. He is a plain, unassuming gentleman, incapable of such an act. She promised to use her influence to get him a hearing, or have him released.

August 8. The trains were again fired into last night, between Elkton and Pulaski. Gen. Rousseau declared that he intends to make Drs. Ross and Bannister (Presbyterian and Episcopal ministers, respectively) run the trains, as they are prepared to die, and his men are not.

Spent the day with Mrs. Watkins, in company with Mrs. Powers. Mr. Fennel's cotton burned last night. Supposed to be work of his own negroes.

Several houses were burned in Jackson county yesterday. Also several markets, among them Mrs. Vincent's, Mr. Crutcher's, Mr. Spragins', Mr. Sledge's and Mr. Word's. They kicked Mrs. Word out of doors and slapped Miss Anna's jaws.

It is rumored that Bragg's division has

gone to Chattanooga. I know not where W.D. is, or when I shall again hear from him. The suspense is dreadful. Heard yesterday of the death of his mother, but learned of no particulars, as the news was brought by a negro.

August 11. Yesterday evening was all excitement. The picket came tearing into town, saying that there was a large force of the Confederates in the neighborhood of Bird Spring. Nearly all the troops in town were sent out to meet them and drawn up in battle array. It proved to be a false report.

The citizens are a good deal excited, alternately hoping and fearing that deliverance is at hand, fearing that, in case of a battle here, our beautiful town should be destroyed. Matters are evidently working toward a crisis, and our cavalry are closing in all around us. We could be patient, were it not for our great anxiety to see and hear from W.D. If the coast were clear, I think we could soon effect a meeting. We cannot even hear where Bragg's division of the army is at present located.

Still pressing negroes for stockading the town. The latter say they are regularly drilled every day before commencing their labors. Can it be true that they are going to arm them!

August 12. Spent the day with Mrs. James Robinson. About dinner time, a body of cavalry came tearing by in pursuit of some guerrilla they had heard was in the neighborhood. Of course, they did not find him.

The picket was bribed in the evening, and several horses and mules were taken by the Confederates from the Federals. Mr. Robinson came home and said he wanted some of his finest fruit gathered for Gen. Rousseau,

: A Housewife's Perspective on the Occupation of Huntsville, Part I
as he wanted to show his appreciation for having been particularly kind to him, and as he had to go to his plantation, Miss Queeny and myself must receive him and present the fruit.

Waited until toward night, and as he did not come home, I returned. Brother Mitchell called soon after my return to tell me that he had a pass to go to the army in search of his son, and would take a letter to W.D. if I would get Gen. Rousseau to indorse it. Wrote a long letter.

August 18. Breakfast half an hour earlier this morning and, taking Sue and Georgia, proceeded to headquarters with my letter. Was kindly received and the letter indorsed, although I rather suspect from the length of his absence in another tent, that he made himself acquainted with its contents.

Went from there to Mrs. Buckell's to see Brother Mitchell, thence to a ladies' auction at Mrs. Weaver's. Heard that W.D. was in Richmond for his commission as colonel of a regiment of cavalry.

August 14. Gens. Buell and Rousseau reported to be in great ferment when they heard this morning of the great victory in Virginia. Jennie returned this morning from Fayetteville, much pleased with her visit. Reports that both Federals and Confederates are alternately occupying the town.

August 15. News today of the taking of Baton Rouge by Breckinridge's forces and the exploits of the ram, Arkansas. Gen. Buell's ill humor yesterday was caused by Gen. McCook allowing our forces to cross the river somewhere above here. Buell's telegraphed to him not to suffer them to cross. He replied that they were crossing, and he could not help it.

Corinna got into one of her rages this morning, whereupon I sent for Mrs. Franks (constable), when she suddenly disappeared. Supposition is that she has gone to the Federals.

They are playing the mischief with the negroes, and the poor ignorant creatures don't know which way to turn, or who are their real friends. The Yankees can be seen at the corners, in the alleys, in confidential chats with them.

Four days later (Sunday); Corinna has returned and says she did not go to the Federals, but stayed with an old woman at the depot. She makes very fair promises and seems truly ashamed of her conduct.

Granville has been observed to be very intimate with the Yankees and, for the last two or three days, his conduct has been suspicious. Communicated my suspicions to his master yesterday. Today, he and Vienna are missing with all their plunder. Tonight finds me heart-sick and yearning for the society of W.D. Wonder where the dear fellow is tonight!

Young Isaac Coles was arrested yesterday upon asking for a pass to go to his mother's plantation in Jackson county. The presumption was that he was going to join the guerrillas.

Dr. Fearn was asked to sign a paper denouncing guerrilla warfare and to effect his release, which he refused. Dr. Fearn accompanied his mother to Capt. Ward (assistant provost). She told the latter gentleman that the boy was too young and had no such intentions and that he did right not to sign the paper, as that kind of warfare was recognized by our government.

: A Housewife's Perspective on the Occupation of Huntsville, Part I

"Your government! What government?" was the query. "The Confederate government," was the reply. Whereupon, he was ordered out of the presence of the august captain and, on his return home, received a note to consider himself under arrest, and not to leave the limits of his own gate, by order of Lt. Col. Burke, provost marshal.

August 19. Vienna and Granville left on the train Sunday for parts unknown. Mr. Sledge kindly called this morning and offered me a servant to assist in washing every week. Mrs. I. G. Wilson also offered me assistance. Vienna helped herself to a nice carpetbag and Eddie's money. Granville also acted the rascal, borrowing and collecting money due his master and putting it in his own pocket.

August 20. Mrs. Bradford left for Mississippi this morning. Went to the bank and drew \$50 for the benefit of the widow of Mr. Moore, who served at the hospital, and took it to her. She seemed very grateful.

Went from there to Mr. Gordon, to see if he had heard anything from Vienna or Granville. He had written to Columbia to have them arrested should they go that way. Mr. Trotman called this evening and advised me to write to some friend in Nashville to put the police on the watch for them.

Mr. Donnegan called to tell me that he had heard from W.D., and that he had resigned his position as lieutenant colonel and gone to some springs for his health. Feel great anxiety about him. His regiment was 10 miles from Chattanooga.

August 24. Great stir in town today among soldiers. The 10th Ohio, "the heroes of Carnifax," have moved their camps up by the graveyard, and we now have all the

Federal force in our neighborhood. They appear to be moving their sick and stores, and the rattling of the wagon wheels along the streets is terrible to one with the headache.

Noon. Mr. Coltart, the mayor, has just called me to tell us that the Federals will evacuate our town at 4 o'clock this afternoon, and no matter how great our joy is upon the occasion, no demonstration must be made on our part while it is going on.

Gen. Lightte sent for him and requested him to tell the citizens this, as he could not be answerable for the conduct of the troops when leaving. He had received kindness from the hands of the citizens, and did not wish them to be molested. We have heard of people being intoxicated with joy. That is precisely our condition at the present. As night approaches, many of them appear to be drunk. From present appearances, they will not get off tonight.

August 25. We hoped to wake this morning and find the enemy gone, but no such good news. The work of evacuation is still going on, and they say they will leave this evening.

Mrs. Fackler has just called and says Judge Lane and family got off yesterday, taking Gen. Rousseau's sick son with them, also Mr. Larcomb and family. They all rode to the depot in a wagon, such was their panic. They were looking for our forces every hour yesterday. There is a rumor prevailing today that the train they were on was captured.

4 o'clock. Good heavens; What a sinking heart! The order for going has been countermanded, and they are actually pitching their tents. They are rejoicing, and shouts

are going up in every direction. Disappointment is the lot of all, and we must try to endure it a little longer.

We were fondly dreaming that W.D. could now come to his home and spend the remainder of his furlough with us. The Reds say they are ordered to remain until Rosecrans comes up. There is another rumor that Price has whipped them badly at Tusculumbia. The excitement and disappointment together make us ready to go to bed. We are actually sick.

August 28. And go to bed we did, where we have been ever since, with a most terrible nervous headache. We are needing rain badly. Since we have had the addition of the "Ohio 3rd" and the "bloody 10th" in our neighborhood, we are in danger of death by suffocation.

Their rattling wagons and clattering of hoofs ring on the ear from morning till night. They ride their poor steeds to desperation and never go any place slower than a gallop.

Last night, the Federal band serenaded the Misses Lewis. The first morning of our illness, Mrs. John Robinson called and brought me a present of two nice hams. Mrs. James Robinson also sent me corn and fruit.

Gen. Rousseau has left, and Gen. Lightte is in command. There is news that judge Lane and party arrived safely in Nashville.

August 29. Corinna is sick today. Had to cook for the entire family, being the only well person on the place who knows how to make a biscuit. Sue and Jennie ironed and cleaned up the house--a foretaste of what we will have to go through with when the rebellion is quashed, and the wonderful "Yankee nation" gets possession of "Niggerdom."

My kind friend, Mrs. John Robinson, gave me a cartload of green corn today for the purpose of drying for the Winter. Great stir among the Feds this morning. Perhaps they are going to leave us at last. It is certain the 15th Kentucky, camped at Green Academy, are cooking rations.

Georgie and Uncle Tom just came from Mrs. Robinson's with the corn, and say that the Feds have barricaded the pike and are looking for an immediate attack from our cavalry.

August 31. Awoke a little after midnight by the sound of heavy tramping of feet, the sound of voices, uttering the most dreadful curses, the rattling of wagons in the street. Sprang out of bed and looked through the shutters to see what it meant, when, lo and behold, it was the Lincoln army making their anxiously wished for exit from Huntsville. Could hardly believe it, so joyful the thought!

All the children were up and in a state of great excitement. Joined them on the back porch to look at lurid glares of fires burning in different directions, fearing they had set fire to some parts of the town. Learned since that it was corn, meat and other articles being destroyed to prevent them from falling into our hands.

This is like the Sabbath morning we once enjoyed, except that there is a perfect rush by the negroes to the different camps to bring away the plunder, and the people cannot suppress their joy.

2 o'clock. Learned that the army, as they marched out on the pike, took all of James Robinson's negroes but one. Frank Gurley has been in and arrested Gen. Hickman

: A Housewife's Perspective on the Occupation of Huntsville, Part I
and John King, and gone again. Returned at 5 o'clock with a company of cavalry. A perfect crowd of ladies and gentlemen rushed to the square to greet them, and Capt. Gurley was literally crowned with wreaths of ivy and flowers. Some Feds, who had been out on picket duty, came in, not having received notice that their army was gong to leave, and gave themselves up.

September 1. All my thoughts, feelings and ideas are centered in the return of W.D. O, if he could just learn that the coast is clear! Am terribly uneasy lest his furlough should be out before he hears it.

There has been some Confederate cavalry in town today. They arrested the Federal sick, who were left in the hospitals, and shut up some of the Jew stores, who had been purchasing goods from the Feds.

Visited with Mrs. Mayhew the hospital at the Calhoun house, and was struck with the extreme neatness of the place, and the attention to the comfort and cleanliness of the sick. Was greatly interested in a young Philadelphian who is very sick of typhus fever. He is on Buell's staff. He drew his Bible from under his pillow to show us his mother's picture. A beautiful and interesting face she had. I shall visit him again. Our visits seem to cheer all the poor fellows, who are now left at the mercy of strangers and foes.



Home of Meredith Calhoun, used as a hospital during the Civil War and afterwards as a federal courthouse. No longer standing.
<https://louis.uah.edu/huntsville-historical-review/vol17/iss2/4>