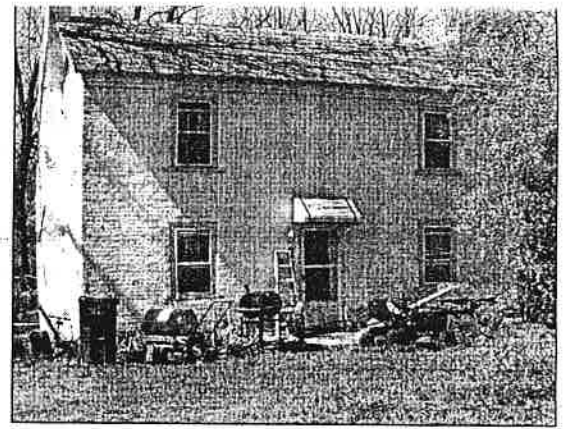


The Sherfey home in 1911



Tony Duncan/Johnson City Press

The home at 282 Woodlyn Road today

Sherfey home took in war casualties

By **JAMES BROOKS**

Press Staff Writer

jbrooks@johnsoncitypress.com

When war came to the ridges and valleys of East Tennessee in 1863, local people were caught up in it in ways that can hardly be imagined.

The decision of whether to serve in Confederate gray or Union blue frequently found individual families represented on both sides. In other cases it was neighbors or members of the church, but the civilian point of view was largely directed toward concern for their men in service, no matter which side they fought on.

Those pursuing their genealogical record today must weave through a labyrinth of documents, letters, diaries and official sources in trying to get a handle on what it was like for their ancestors.

When Love's North Carolina infantry engaged the 100th Ohio Volunteers at Carter's Station, on Sept. 6, 1863, it was the first real action for the young men from up north, and they did not fare well.

Although casualties in this action are not well documented, there was a steady stream of wounded that were taken back to the home of Magdalene A. Sherfey, an ancestor of Margaret Sherfey Holley.

Most of what we know of this incident is in the form of claim documentation filed in 1872 with the commissioners of claims. They awarded Mrs. Sherfey \$55 "for services rendered by her while her house was occupied as a hospital by the United States Army."

A deposition filed by J.W. Mongh in support of the claim described her as "one of the best friends of the Union cause ... and her husband was very positive in his opposition to the Rebellion." He described himself as attending physician of



Magdalene Garst Sherfey in her flower bed at home at age 83 in the summer of 1899

the soldiers left after the Army fell back, and said Mrs. Sherfey "had to nurse and care for the wounded men until they died and (or?) were taken from the house as prisoners of the rebels."

Another account by Clara Lee Lane says some 25 or 30 wounded filled three rooms and an out-building, and she helped with the nursing.

The defeat of the 100th Ohio Volunteers at Limestone Station did not end the conflict.

Fannie Fain, a Blountville resident, wrote in her diary, "For two

or three days it was said the Federals were approaching, but both times it all turned out false. This week the Confederates moved up all cattle, wagons, etc. ... while the force has gone below Jonesboro."

Fain's diary, transcribed by Betty Jane Hylton, is a gripping account of a woman doing the farm work from mending to hog killing to dealing with children who were "wormy and teething." These women kept working while their men were off in battle being killed or wounded, and soldiers continually came onto their farms, burned their rail fences for campfires, plundered the food they put up and stole their horses.

Union Gen. Ambrose Everett Burnside did not give up after Limestone Station. He continued with his campaign to drive the Confederate force from East Tennessee. On Sept. 22, 1863, Union Col. John W. Foster engaged the Confederates under James E. Carter at Blountville, shelling the town, and forcing the rebels to withdraw in a flanking movement.

On Oct. 10, 1863, Confederate Gen. John S. Williams fought Union Gen. Samuel P. Carter's cavalry division at Blue Springs (Mosheim). After several days of skirmishing the Union attacked, inflicting heavy casualties and forcing Williams to withdraw into Virginia.

Lt. Col. James L. Bottles, whose knowledge of the area served the Confederacy well at Limestone Station, was killed by a rifle ball through the lungs on Oct. 19, 1863, as he led a charge at Zollicoffer (Bluff City). He was brought home for burial at Washington College.

Unfortunately a rumor reached Union headquarters that the

Home

◀ Continued from Page 4A

funeral would be attended by 500 Confederate cavalymen, and the 103rd Ohio Infantry Regiment was dispatched along with two companies of the 12th Kentucky with a couple of 12-pounder cannons.

Gen. Ohio Bryan of the 103rd has his notes collected in the unit's Journal and History by Phillip C. Hayes.

"Of course the idea of hunting down cavalry with infantry is ludicrously absurd," Bryan wrote. "But at that time there were some very unmilitary men in command of the Union forces in East Tennessee."

Learning that the funeral was to be at Washington College, the forces carefully approached. "But alas, our hopes of capturing this force and thus ending the rebellion were dashed to the ground at once, when we learned there was no rebel cavalry in that vicinity, nor had there been for weeks. The only rebel soldier we found was the one who was

buried, and the only mourners were a score or two of women and a few old men."

The folks at the funeral saw it differently, according to family tree notes transcribed by Gil Bartles of Texas. "During the funeral the Yankees charged up the hill and horses hooves struck the casket while they (shouted?) and said "there is John Morgan." They dragged old great-grandfather Simm down the hill and left him for dead."

Confederate cavalryman John Morgan was leading his

raid into Ohio about this time, a feat which cost the Confederacy 700 of their best cavalry. Morgan was captured and later escaped from prison. Ironically he was assigned to East Tennessee, where he was killed in ambush at Greeneville on Sept. 4, 1864, a year later. He spent his final peaceful night at the DeVault Tavern in Leesburg.

The fact that East Tennessee was so divided between Union and Confederate sympathies, and that most of the military presence here was irregular in

nature made it especially difficult for the civilians. Many of the troops were little more than thieves.

Becky Poteat Simms was fond of relating how her ancestors hid their horse in an upstairs bedroom of their brick home on the Old Jonesborough Highway whenever soldiers came around.

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