

LIFE IN ALEXANDRIA COUNTY DURING THE CIVIL WAR

By

Ruth Ward

Following the Civil War, the Southern Claims Commission was established under an Act of Congress of March 3, 1871. Its purpose was to adjudicate the claims made by proven loyal U. S. citizens that they had suffered losses of property to Union forces during the Civil War. More than one hundred such claims were made by citizens of Alexandria County and were decided upon by the Commission.

The transcripts of the testimony given by these claimants before the Commission present an insight into the changes and turmoil caused by the presence in Alexandria County of large numbers of Federal forces.

When the war started, the county was a rural area, consisting of small farms, usually of less than fifty acres. The Arlington estate, of over one thousand acres, was the only large land holding. The total population of the county in 1860 was 1486.

Federal troops crossed the Potomac River during the night of May 23-24, 1861, and the simple, rustic pattern of everyday life in Alexandria County was changed abruptly.

As a consequence of the need to build fortifications in Alexandria County for the defense of the Federal City, wood was in great demand. Standing trees, fences, and buildings were confiscated to meet the need.

In claim #20709, before the Commission, Thomas Jewell testified:

"In 1861 they took our land for Fort C. F. Smith for guard and mess houses; in 1864 the barn was pulled down and moved to Ft. Albany. The dwelling house stood on ground now occupied by the fort; it was torn down by the government." A witness in the same claim, Alexander Jones, a former soldier, stated, "I worked on the fort. The house was in the middle when we staked out the fort, so we tore it down. We used it for a headquarters while we built the fort, and removed it in 1863."

In almost every instance, the Southern Claims Commission allowed much lower amounts of compensation for losses claimed than the supplicants had requested.

In the case of Malvina Hayes, in claim #286 she asked for \$3150, and was awarded \$1263, for use of lands, wood, timber and forage. She was the widow of Alonzo Hayes, a Congregational preacher, who died in 1858. They had bought the farm in January 1854 from William Ball, cleared the land, built a house and called it "Sunnyside", and made other improvements to the sixty-six acres. A neighbor, Marcus Pearl, testified on behalf of Mrs. Hayes:

"I knew Alonzo Hayes in his lifetime. He owned a farm in Alexandria County, Virginia, about two miles west from Georgetown, D. C., containing about sixty-six acres The farm was well fenced . . . some post and rail and some worm fence . . . The timber was oak, chestnut, hickory, and pine. Seven-eighths of the whole, and more, was oak and chestnut . . . the best lot of timber in that neighborhood. . . large fine trees of heavy growth . . . much of it would cut eighty cords of wood to

the acre. On the morning of the 24th of May, 1861, the United States forces crossed over and took possession of that part of Virginia. Two regiments of infantry and a squad of cavalry, commanded by Major Wood of the regular service, encamped within a few rods of the claimant's land . . . it was called Camp Union. They remained there several weeks, and soon after their removal, the 13th New York and 4th Michigan, the 2nd Wisconsin, and the 79th New York Regiments came there. The 79th Regiment camped in the peach orchard on the claimant's farm. It was commanded by the late Col. Cameron, a brother of the Secretary of War. The Regiment numbered about 1000 men. The camps and their appurtenances covered some twelve or fifteen acres. These troops first took the fences for fuel, and used it in their camps. These regiments remained until about the first Battle of Bull Run, and immediately after that battle several regiments came there; the 3rd Pennsylvania Cavalry, and also the 8th New York Mounted Rifles encamped there. These troops went on the timberland and took the timber for fuel and to build quarters, stables, guard houses, and store houses. It was done under the direction of the officers. They made stables for about 1200 horses. They used the claimant's farm for transporting timber, drawing loads, watering their horses, etc. The farm was so occupied by the troops as to deprive the claimant of the use of it. The land was cut up and trodden down so as to become useless."

"The U. S. Engineer Department were erecting fortifications in the Summer and Fall of 1861, and have continued ever since in the vicinity of the claimant's farm. The nearest are Fort Smith, Fort Strong, Fort Woodbury, Fort Whipple, Fort Cass, Fort Tillinghast, and Fort Craig, with a continuous line of rifle pits connecting. These fortifications have been built, manned & garrisoned since May 1861. On the east line of the claimant's farm was a piece of timbered land which was cut down soon after the first Battle of Bull Run by direction of the Engineer Department because it interfered with the range of the forts. It was all felled flat, and this timber was afterwards used by the troops for various purposes."

"In the Winter of 1861-62, a further destruction of the wood was made by the troops in the Division of Gen^L. Fitzjohn, and by his order. A road was built connecting the Aqueduct road with the old road from Alexandria to Chain Bridge for the purpose of hauling heavy ordnance and military stores in a muddy time. It was a corduroy road and a large quantity of timber was taken from the claimant's farm to build this road and bridges. There were some half a dozen bridges. There was also timber taken from this land to build a large slaughter house on the claimant's farm."

"After the Second Battle of Bull Run, General Sigel's army encamped within a few yards of the claimant's land, and remained there several weeks. They used the fences and timber and swept everything, so there is now nothing remaining but the house and a few scattering trees."

A note from the Quartermaster's office was attached to the claim made by Mrs. Hayes, and stated that "Frequently the Government Horses and Mules would break from their fastenings and do great damage by running through grain fields, over the garden, into the orchard, destroying property as they ran."

In the case of Charles E. French, claim #95, he claimed \$5208.00 for damages,

and was awarded \$1302.42. French had a 126 acre farm one mile from Falls Church Village - - one side ran up to Minor's Hill. He testified:

"I was asked by General Scott to investigate the hills in Arlington before the war. I did spend the night out there, ten or twenty feet from Arlington House. I think Lee was still there." He stated the house on his farm was burned by Union soldiers "for the cannon range, I was told," and that "my wagon had been used by the Rebels and they had fixed it up in such a way to make it appear like a cannon in the distance."

Marcus Pearl, administrator for his father, Elijah C. Pearl, filed claim #9080 for \$1297.00, and was allowed \$315.00. He owned a thirty-five acre farm two miles from Aqueduct Bridge, bounded west by Robert Ball, north by Horatio Ball and Mr. Hoover, and south by the road leading from the Aqueduct to Balls X Roads. He testified: "In the winter of 1861-62 a corduroy road was built to connect the Aqueduct Bridge road with the old road from Alexandria to Chain Bridge. Gen. Sigel's army encamped within a few yards of the land: now nothing remains but the house and a few scattering trees; as soon as the Army of the Potomac went down to Tennessee, I was appointed Superintendent of Arlington Park in the Quartermaster's Department."

Bazil Hall entered claim #2422 for "wood, forage, Etc" for \$42,450.00 and was allowed \$10,729.00.

Mr. Hall's sworn testimony before the Commission: "I reside at Hall's Hill, Alexandria County. I am a farmer by occupation. I am about eight miles from Alexandria, near Ball's Cross Roads. My farm contains upwards of 327 acres in one body. In 1861 I had about 100 acres perhaps under cultivation. At the time of the breaking out of the war I was there. I have been on that farm since 1850. I was born in Washington, but for many years I have been in South America and California. I have been a whaler from Massachusetts. I was never anything else but a loyal man in no shape or manner. I voted against the ordinance of secession at Ball's Cross Roads. I don't think there were over ten or fifteen there who voted against it. I was one of that number, and my name is recorded as having voted against it."

"After the second battle of Bull Run, Union forces came on to my place in the night. When they called on me in the morning I found my hay was all being taken, and I went and reported the fact to the officers. I think it was General Porter or General Sigel. I told him there was such a quantity of hay there left, and asked if they were going to take it and give me nothing for it. He said no, and said what hay there was there they would pay me for, and he went and put a guard on the balance of the hay, but they had taken all the rest of the hay before I got there, except what they gave me these vouchers for. I had eight stacks and a stable full of hay. There were about two tons in the stable. That was clover hay. This occurred two or three days after the second battle of Bull Run in 1862."

Concerning an item 8 in his claim, for two horses taken by Col. Baker's cavalry in 1863, Hall said, "I was not at home when they were taken. They were carried

to Fort Ethan Allen. I went there and tried to get my horses, and they ordered me here to Washington to get them. After I brought my papers to show that they were my horses, Gen. Doubleday sent me here for them. I could not find them here nor in Alexandria. They kept me running for a week, but I could not find them, and let them go. One was a two-year old colt that I had bought from a neighbor, and the other had been a condemned horse but was a very fine horse. The man who took them came to me afterwards and told me that he was told he had done me a piece of injustice."

After a certificate in relation to the horses was filed, Hall testified: "They were seized at the time as government property, and I went to Gen. Doubleday and showed him my papers and showed him that this colt never was a government horse. The colt was not old enough to be used in the cavalry. He was three years old then. Bowen took both the horse and the colt. About that time they were taking condemned horses and everything else over our way."

Hall also stated that his place was shelled by the Confederates from Upton's Hill, that the whole place was covered with cabins and log houses of the soldiers; that the government took his mules before they got his corn. He said, "I built the house - - it was burnt by the Rebels. I saw them. My barn and other buildings were also burnt; but I did not charge the government for them, only charged for items the soldiers took. I had not a bed to lie on nor a roof to put it under when I left the place."

The Provost Marshal of D. C. issued a pass on August 31, 1861, for "The Bearer, Mr. Basil Hall, who I have known for many years, desires a pass to go over the river in order to see if he can approach his farm and dwelling which he had to leave on the twenty-ninth inst. in consequence of the attack of the Rebels on his house. He will be guided by our officers within our lines as to how far he may go with safety. He is all right."

On September 11, 1861, a pass was issued to Hall, which said, "Pass Basil (sic) to and from Washington to attend to his property from which he has been driven away by the Rebels. Good today and tomorrow."

Another claimant, John M. Young (claim #12705), claimed \$16,409.00 and was allowed only \$3198.50. John Young had a 108 acre tract of land which he had bought in 1850 from Orlando Fairfax, executor of the Fairfax estate. (The lovely home "Alcova" at 3435 South 8th Street is on the property John Young owned.)

The report of the Commissioners in this claim stated: "On September 2, 1862, Young was ordered by General Whipple, Commanding United States Forces south of the Potomac, to remove at once with his family to Washington, as the military authorities intended to take entire possession of his farm for Government purposes. He was allowed until twelve o'clock at night to make preparations to depart, but was not permitted to take his household goods and personal property. He left, and the troops took entire possession of the farm, buildings, crops, lumber, and personal property, and very shortly thereafter the dwelling house and ten outbuildings were taken down and the materials used for Government purposes."

Sewell Corbett, a neighbor of John Young, testified at the hearing: "I live on

the farm opposite Young's. The Columbian Turnpike separates our land. I knew the farm before Young purchased it fifteen years ago. He bought it from the Fairfax estate, and built the house in 1852 or '53. The farm is three miles from the Long Bridge. It has a blacksmith shop, carriage house, barn, stable, cornhouse and other buildings. Forts Woodbury, Tillinghast, Whipple, Craig, Albany, Richardson, Berry, Barnard and Blenker are within one-half to one mile from our farms. A large number of troops were stationed on these lands - - from 10,000 to 100,000 men. It was Blenker's officers and men that came in October 1861 and took over. We (Corbett and Young) were ordered to leave in 1862. We did so. Our farms were badly damaged, our buildings destroyed, and the crops gone."

The Superintendent of the Botanical Gardens in Washington testified: "The Young farm had a swamp of about two acres. I visited this swamp often to obtain moss for the plants at the Gardens. I was trained at the Kew Gardens in London. It was a lovely farm, with excellent varieties of plantings and trees."

Samuel Ball, as executor of Horatio Ball's estate, claimed \$1210.00 for the loss of fence rails and timber, and was allowed \$298.00. The Commissioners' report of their review of this case stated:

"Horatio Ball died in Feby. 1873 in the 87th year of his age. He was an old line Whig, and in sympathy a strong Union man. His age and infirmities kept him at home, so that he did not go away from his home during the war. His neighbors fully attest his loyalty."

"He owned about forty acres of land in the vicinity of Ball's Cross Roads, about six miles from Washington. It was well fenced when the war begun, and there were about seven acres of woodland. In 1861 and 1862 large bodies of U. S. Troops were camped on the borders of his land. They took his rails for fuel and cut down and hauled away all his wood and timber. We allow for the rails \$131.40."

"The taking of the wood from the quantity of land as charged is proved - - but the amount of wood is over-estimated and the price greatly too high. We allow in all \$298.00 and reject the rest."

Bricks.

Wood and timber were not the only materials taken by the Union forces for building fortifications in Alexandria County - - the brickyards in the area at the end of the Long Bridge provided bricks for chimneys, foundations, lining the wells dug at the forts, and other uses. Wells were generally thirty to sixty feet deep, eight to ten feet in diameter, and the walls were curbed with brick or stone.

Henry Thomas and his brother Lorenzo Thomas, Jr., filed claim #6 for "a stable, four long sheds, three brick kilns, machinery, horse, etc." They claimed \$52,899.00, and were allowed \$6500.00.

Lorenzo Thomas, Jr. testified: "I was a second lieutenant in the regular Army - - my appointment was April 1861. My brother Henry was a clerk in the War Department. We were joint owners of a large, extensive and valuable brickyard comprising thirteen and a half acres on land near the Virginia end of the Long Bridge and upon the canal. There were many buildings on the premises, a two-story dwelling house,

engine house and shed, stable (very large and fine), four long sheds to cover bricks, three brick kilns with shingle roofs, a steam engine, boiler and other machinery, which was all destroyed. The buildings were all taken down and the materials used to build a government stable, bake house and blacksmith shop, also the soldiers built with our bricks a cook and a mess house later. This was done by order of Colonel Alexander."

A witness, James C. Roach, testified: "I am a farmer and reside on my land in Alexandria. The Thomas brickyard was a quarter mile from my residence. Fort Albany was within 100 yards of my barn, and Fort Runyon was one-quarter mile from the brickyards. The first troops that came across were the 25th New York, the 1st Massachusetts and the 14th Massachusetts. Colonel Green had twenty-five teams on Thomas' land - - the brickyards were located on the old Dodge place. In September 1861 the army went into winter quarters on the brickyards. These buildings were torn down and the government-built buildings were later sold at auction in 1865. These were the bakehouses, a stable and cookhouses. A Mr. Thorton bought them and moved them to Fairfax."

William Benner testified: "I was the foreman of the brickyards. I came here after the army crossed the river. I built the yard for Mr. Robert Dodge sixteen years ago, and Mr. Henry H. Dodge sold it to the Thomas brothers. There was nothing like it in a thousand miles - - it was the best and most up to date yard ever built."

Joseph Collins testified: "I am a brick-maker and layer. I lived in Georgetown, and was sent over to these yards by the government to take and use these bricks. I built bake houses, stables, and other buildings with them. I used some for guttering. Mainly I used them to brick up the wells in the forts. I employed men to dig the wells (with the soldiers helping them), and I walled the wells up with the bricks. The well at Fort Scott was 152 feet deep, it took 52,000 bricks. Other wells I made were for Fort Corcoran, Fort Ethan Allen, Fort Craig, No. 1, 2, 3, 4, Fort Tillinghast, and Fort DeKalb. Nobody had any control or direction over the property (the brickyards) - - I had to set a guard to protect it from the soldiers coming and taking the bricks for chimneys in their camps."

Alexander Brown, in claim #18662, claimed \$2609.52, and was allowed \$145.00. He testified: "I lived in Washington during the war - - moved to Buckeystown in 1863. I was a member of Colonel Lane's company got up for the defense of the White House and Capitol in 1861. I made brick in Alexandria County near the canal. I lived there in 1861 and had been there several years before. I went backwards and forwards across the bridge during the war. They took my property when they commenced building Fort Runyon in 1861. I had sold a portion of my brick works before that time. The machine was my own patent - - been in use since 1853, for compressing the clay into bricks. I have no idea what the soldiers did with my machine."

James Piper and his sister-in-law, Sarah, widow of his brother, filed claim #18112. for \$1306.00 for loss of house, stable and bricks.

James Piper stated: "I leased a farm from Mrs. Dangerfield of one hundred acres, four miles from the City of Alexandria. My brother and I rented the farm for two years before the war. Blenker's Brigade camped on the farm and used and

destroyed the premises. I am a brickmaker, carried on a brickyard, and rented part of the farm from Dangerfield to raise stock. I had three houses burned in Alexandria City by the Rebels. We were Union, that is why we lost so much. In 1861 I opened a grocery store on the farm. I lost all I was worth through the war. The farm was four miles from Alexandria City, near Mr. Custis' mill. It ran right up to the railroad. The Four Mile Run divided me from the railroad. Mr. Dangerfield was deranged, so he could not have been a secess (Rebel) - - He lost his mind years before the war. Blenker's whole brigade camped on my place. They tore down my house, burned my stable, and destroyed my bricks after the battle of 1st Bull Run."

Claim #20877 was filed for the estate of Phillip Minor, for forage, bricks, etc., in the amount of \$4115.00, of which \$1275.00 was allowed.

Oliver Cox testified: "I work in the clerk's office of the Quartermaster's Department. I am also engaged in the ministry, and have had charge of a church for some time. I have known the Minors for years. I boarded at their place while I had charge of a church (Mt. Olivet Methodist) and was preaching in that neighborhood. It is five miles from Washington, three and a half from Georgetown. The Minors took care of sick soldiers. The girls' mother (Mary S.) was truly loyal in word and action - - unusually so for Virginia ladies. There was a raid made on the house by Confederate soldiers when she had Union men there, and she placed herself between them and saved the lives of one or two (they hid in the cellar). This was in the middle of September 1861. I did all the preaching nearby, the Methodist Protestant Church. I helped to bring the Minor family to Washington. They had to come by walking, they were right between the lines and could not get anything out. They lost everything in the world except a few clothes. Their dwelling house was brick, two stories with attic, and there were several outbuildings. The soldiers were camped all over the place - - not less than 20,000 when McClellan's army moved south. The property was three-quarters of a mile from the railroad - - the nearest station was Carlin Springs."

Luke Carter, who filed claim #11573, for "Fowls, rails, forage, and a horse", claimed \$2070.50, and was allowed \$33.00. He testified: "I was a slave, so my wife who was born free held the property - - two acres a mile from the end of Chain Bridge, right between Forts Marcey and Ethan Allen. I rented other land near here, and we live there. The 4th New York Artillery took my corn. When I got my freedom I ran away. I belonged to Mr. Allison Nailor, who had a livery stable on the Avenue in Washington. I worked to pay for the land, bought it of Mr. Bowen. Loyal? I was on the side Mr. Abram (sic) was trying to get up."

William Vaugh testified in the case: "I knew Luke for twenty years. They got a little house there, right between the forts - - if you talk loud in his house you can hear it in the forts."

The Commissioners commented on this claim: "Rarely has a claim so grossly exaggerated as this come under our observation."

Susan Cruitt filed claim #372, for loss of barn, hay barracks, fences, pastures, rent of the house for a hospital, etc." She was the executor of her father Robert

Cruitt's estate. She testified that her father had been killed when he was thrown from his carriage on his farm in Alexandria County in November 1861, and that the farm "was not occupied by my family - - we had a tenant caretaker. The 3rd and 8th Pennsylvania Cavalry were camped on the place. There was a wagon train in the yard. The house was used as a hospital, and the other buildings were occupied and filled with government stores."

James Hyson, (Col^D) filed claim #20754, "for forage confiscated". He testified that he had "Lived in Washington for part of 1861, because the times were pretty hot in Alexandria County and I couldn't stay there," but he returned to his home, adjoining Mr. Shreve's place, where he was raised, in Alexandria County. It was part of the Upton Hill farm, and he agreed to pay Mr. Shreve \$48 a year rent, part in money and part in labor. He couldn't remember which year he moved back to Virginia, but said it was after the second Battle of Bull Run, because he was there "when the army advanced back, and knew it was Cox's Brigade when they fell back just before General Kearney was killed." He was sure "it was the second advance back."

John Hyson, brother of the claimant, testified that he knew about the hay his brother lost to the army, because he had helped cut the hay. One day his brother James had hired six hands, and they worked hard all one day, racing, cutting against each other, and there was a good deal of hay cut. When asked if he knew what army got the hay, he answered, "There was no other army around there but that one. It was General Cox's Brigade. They came back from the front and camped there. They had had a fight and were falling back."

Daily life in Alexandria County was difficult during the war, for residents and Union forces alike. The fact that the hardships and losses suffered by the residents were commonplace is reflected in comments made by the Southern Claims Commissioners in claim #20752 (George Herrick), where they said, "This land was in the midst of camps, hospitals and other military establishments it suffered the common fate stripped of everything that could be carried away"

Living conditions for the Union men were also far from ideal. One soldier sought to improve his sleeping accommodations by "borrowing" a door to use for a bed. In claim #15326, Henry Birch, son of John Birch, stated: "I followed a 8th New York Regiment soldier who had a door from the house in his hands. When I saw the mud he slept in, I just let it go."