Caring For The Wounded: Civil War Medical Service In Shenandoah County, Virginia 1861-1865

The Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War 1861-1865

Virginia Tourism Corporation www.virginia.org

Shenandoah Valley Battlefield Foundation www.shenandoahvafoundation.org

Virginia Civil War Trails www.civilwartrails.org

Shenandoah County is 36 miles long and 13 miles wide. Like most localities in this bountiful Shenandoah Valley, fertile soil and ample water supplies produce fields of wheat, barley, millet and other grains and hearty livestock of all manner. So bountiful was the land that at the time of the Civil War it was known as the “Breadbasket of the Confederacy.”

In 1860, the County’s population was 13,400. At the outbreak of the War (Virginia seceded on Apr. 18, 1861) most young men joined local Confederate regiments forming in the area. It is estimated that 1,875 men served from Shenandoah County (which means that 3 out of every 4 men between the ages of 15 and 39 likely participated in military units).

This placed a tremendous burden on women, children and those men that remained. Local citizens, young and old often faced difficulties at every turn in dealing with the crisis that was very much a war at their doorstep. Many government services, such as circuit courts, were suspended, churches were used as hospitals, schools were closed, goods and mariculture were hard to obtain and even family loyalties were tested.

Throughout the War both Union and Confederate troops camped, fought, and passed through Shenandoah County—men, horses, artillery and wagons moved up and down the Valley Pike purchasing hays (often taking supplies they needed). Beginning in May 1864 until the Spring of 1865 Valley residents were continuously in the midst of military engagements. Four bloody battles occurred during that year in Shenandoah County (including the Battle of Cedar Creek which took place in Frederick County but joined over into northern Shenandoah County and Strasburg engaging those areas in its wake). In September 1864 Union General Philip Sheridan, with an army of 40,000, advanced the Valley to lay siege to the Confederacy’s “Bread Basket” and prevent further advance of northern troops toward Washington. Union forces burned and destroyed mills, homes and much of the available crops leaving many families destitute.

As you travel along our scenic byways and visit our charming towns, parks, battlefields and museums, we hope you will learn about Shenandoah County’s bountiful history including the lesser known stories of simple acts of kindness that helped heal the wounds of war.

For additional information, please visit the website that accompanies this brochure at www.shenandoahvafoundation.org. Other informative websites and books include:

The Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War www.virginiacivilwar.org

Shenandoah Valley Battlefield Foundation www.shenandoahvafoundation.org

National Museum of Civil War Medicine www.nmcm.org

The Town of Edinburg www.townofedinburg.org

Mr. Jackson Museum (540) 477-3951

New Market Battlefield State Historical Park www.seneca.museum

Strasburg Museum www.strasburgmuseum.com

Woodstock Museum www.woodstockmuseum.org

Harpers Ferry National Park www.nps.gov/hidf

Four Valiant Years By Laura Virginia Hale
A Diary with Reminiscences of the War and Refugee Life in Shenandoah Valley 1861-1865
By Mrs. Cornelia McDonald

The Burning By John Hamrock
Voices of the Civil War Shenandoah 1862
Tami L. Book

Alexander Neil and the Last Shenandoah Valley Campaign: Letters of an Army Surgeon in His Family, 1864
By Richard E. Duncan

Confederate Surgeon: The Personal Recollections of E.A. Crutchfield
By Harry B. Douglass

Shenandoah County in the Civil War: The Turbulent Years
By Richard B. Kleene

Valley Thunder: The Battle of New Market and the Opening of the Shenandoah Valley Campaign, May 1864
By Charles E. Southerly

A History of Shenandoah County, Virginia
By John W. Weyland

Doctors to the Rescue: The Confederate Medical Service
By H.H. Casselthwaite

Glorious and Grisly: Medical Care during the American Civil War
By Charles F. Dothan

The Photography of the Civil War: Prisons and Hospitals
By William M. Britton

The Civil War: Tenting Tonight, the Soldier’s Life
By Jamie E. Robertson

In The Hospital By William Imbell Sheppard
“We doubt there is an acre of land in all the Country which has not had buried within it bones of the spinning shepherds and the suffering maimings of both the Confederates and Union forces.”
Mount Jackson

No town in Sherando County was more directly engaged in caring for the wounded soldiers throughout the War than Mt. Jackson. Its location on the Valley Pike, and at the western terminus of the Manassas Gap Railroad, prompted the Confederate government to establish a military hospital there in the Spring of 1861, with Dr. Andrew Russell Meem appointed surgeon-in-charge. Information about the hospital can be found at its original site at the current Holtman Oil Headquarters across the street from the Union Cemetery in Mt. Jackson.

Official Confederate records show that 15 Virginia surgeons served at the Mt. Jackson Hospital. Periodically, the Union Army took over the hospital, including the aftermath of the Battle of New Market (May 15, 1864). Surgeon Alexander Neil of the 12th West Virginia Infantry noted in a letter to his family that... “We brought away two or three hundred of our wounded, filled three hospital buildings in Mr. Jackson and with all our whole medical force worked hard with them until some time in the night, many mortally wounded dying on our hands.”

Local residents shared the bounty of their farms with military hospitals, a vital service given the Confederate’s chronic need of supplies and transportation. “Contributions to the Hospital in Mr. Jackson for the week ending October 19, 1861” was published in the Rockingham Register in November of that year:

Mrs. Allen - ½ bu. tomatoes; four gallons of buttermilk
Mrs. A. R. Rude - One jar pickles, one basket apples, one demijohn milk, one crock apple butter, one peck tomatoes
Mrs. (Dr.) Koontz - two shirts; two pairs of drawers
Mrs. Rebecca Coffelt - three gallons butttermilk
Mrs. Sam Lantz - four gallons butttermilk
Mrs. Joseph Allen - 10 lbs. butter, nine pounds cheese, five heads cabbage, apple butter…

Also in October 1861, Mrs. A. R. Meem, organizer of the local “Soldiers Relief and Aid Association” and wife of Dr. Meem, helped furnish: milk daily, onions, linen, tomatoes, apples, pepper sauce, peaches, pumpkins, beets, shirts, drawers, blankets, books, bread, eggs and many other items to bring comfort to the sick and wounded.

The Mt. Jackson Union Church (built circa 1825) sheltered both northern and southern troops as documented by writings found on its walls.

Woodstock

Private John Worsham of the 21st Virginia infantry, who was shot in the knee on September 19, 1864 near Winchester, later recalled the ambulance ride that carried him south to Woodstock.

Edinburg

During the fall of 1864, the Edinburg Mill (now a museum) was one of only a handful of grist mills not destroyed by PhilipSheridan’s army. One area resident wrote… “We had no cattle, hogs, sheep or horses… the fences were gone… the barns were all burned… bridges all destroyed, roads badly cut up…”

New Market

While armed of both sides were familiar sights to New Market residents throughout the Civil War, the battle fought there on May 15, 1864 brought all the horrors of combat and casualties to this quiet community. As they took their place in the Confederate line during the afternoon, the cadets from the Virginia Military Institute received the full force of Union fire across the valley within the Valley.” Confederate soldiers home on leave, as well as deserters and marauding scoundrels brought germs to the susceptible families of the area. John Boyer wrote his brother Andrew, a soldier in the 33rd Virginia, in the late summer of 1863, “We have a good deal of sickness in the Fort.”

Tourism Office

Orkney Springs

The original hotel at Orkney Springs (now part of the Shrine Mont Conference Center), approximately nine miles west of Mt. Jackson, was so “off the beaten path” that soldiers who were fortunate enough to recuperate there found quiet respite while taking in the “healing waters of the Chalybeate Springs.”