

# An Account of the Civil War in Montgomery County

By George E. Graham, Christiansburg

[edited for clarity]

At the time of Averill's raid through [Christiansburg] in 1863, a fourth son of my grandfather, the youngest who was 16 years old and a student at Hampden-Sydney College, was at home on a visit. When word spread through the town that Yankee troops were coming up the Lynchburg road, he and another boy, Hank Woolwine—to get a good view of them—ran up the hill past the court house and climbed to the top of a rail fence near where the cemetery is at present. Some of the approaching cavalymen—for reasons unknown—fired at the two boys on top of the fence. Alexander Price was shot through the chest and fell to the ground, mortally wounded. In a few minutes, some of the troopers rode across the field and one of them picked up the wounded boy, laid him across his horse, and carried him into town. My mother—then a girl of ten years—was sitting on the front porch of her home. I have heard her tell about the horrible experience of having her dying brother laid at her feet by a Yankee soldier. According to my grandparents, the officer commanding these troops was never able to determine who fired the shot that killed this lad, and it is believed that no one was ever punished for the deed.

Mrs. Reagan S. Wyatt of Blacksburg sent me a paper she wrote for her scrapbook some time ago which relates what happened at "Woodbine", the home of her grandfather near Blacksburg, where she was born and which she now owns. It has to do, apparently, with the same raid on which young Price was killed. Averill had come from Salem, where his troops had camped on the grounds of the Poor House and had "departed with all the bacon and hay of that institution." They also burned a considerable quantity of Confederate supplies in a commissary

at Salem and did some damage to the railroad. After leaving Christiansburg they appeared to have foraged extensively over Montgomery and Pulaski Counties, and to have stopped at Blacksburg for several days. Some of the soldiers took over a little inn in the village, but the main body—including General Averill—went into camp on the "Woodbine" farm about two miles north of Blacksburg. They made camp after dark. Mrs. Wyatt's paper says: "Next morning the old gentleman who owned the place, his two daughters, and his slaves saw, to their horror, the encampment—soldiers all over the place—and three officers approaching the house. The old gentleman—a dyed-in-the-wool Rebel—regarded this as an intrusion and desecration. He entered his home, loaded his gun and declared he would shoot the first 'damn Yankee' that crossed his threshold.'"

His older daughter quieted the irate old Rebel and persuaded him to keep in the background and let her take charge of the situation. She met the officers at the door. At first they were very demanding, ordering breakfast for fifty officers. The young lady assented graciously and apologized for not serving coffee as she had had none for three years. Their expressions changed. They thanked her, saluted, and left. Within an hour, a soldier brought a bucket of green coffee to the kitchen where it was roasted. Next morning, an old fashioned Virginia breakfast was served. When the young lady saw twenty officers approaching, she sent the frightened Negroes to their quarters, and she and her little sister served the meal. The officers said their general was wounded and was lying in his tent. When they left, a tray was given them for the general. General Averill sent a message to the little girl saying that if she would come to his tent he would give her a beautiful riding horse. Mahogany furniture that had been hidden was returned to the house. A guard was placed around the premises. An excited officer rushed up to say that a battle was imminent and it would likely be over the house, but the inmates need not be alarmed because all would be evacuated in time. But the inmates did not sleep that night. However, the battle did not take place, and the troops moved out the next night.

General Averill and his troops left Woodbine the night of the third day. They went to Covington in Alleghany County where they set fire to the bridge after crossing it. The women of Covington rose heroically to the occasion. They formed a bucket brigade and put out the fire. General Averill and his troops went on into Greenbrier County [WV], where, two miles west of Lewisburg, they ran into a body of Confederates and a fight ensued with not much loss on either side.

When the troops left Blacksburg, one of the officers staying at the inn forgot his saber and left it in his room. It has been, on occasion, displayed at the Blacksburg bank.