

The History Behind WOODLAND SCHOOL

The land surrounding Woodland School, several hundred acres, was bought by John George from William Fairfax. John George settled here with his family around 1750, and it was his great grandson, Samuel George and his wife Eliza, who donated just over an acre in 1884 on which to build this schoolhouse known as Woodland School.

It was called Woodland because at that time there was an oak grove located right here, but sadly not many trees are left.

The first school in this area was erected just across the road from us, at the entrance to the lane of John George Jr.'s house sometime in the 1850's during John Jr.'s latter years. It was of log construction and was known as George's Mill Schoolhouse. Although a free school system had been established throughout the state, this was a pay school, with the area parents reimbursing the schoolmaster.

It became a public school in the 1870's and became known as the Old John George Schoolhouse. During the civil war the school Grounds were a favorite camping ground for the Union Troops on their way to Harper's Ferry, and a lot of flirting went on with the older schoolgirls. The troops accompanied them to church and apparently sleighriding was their favorite pastime.

The thinking of the log school soon became too dangerous and so THIS plot was sold on April 5th, 1884, to the Trustees of the Free Public Schools of Lovettsville for \$125, which was actually 5 times the typical price for a schoolhouse in Eastern Loudoun County.

When Woodland School was built it originally consisted of two rooms; one stone and one frame wing. Around 1922 fire destroyed the frame wing and the school closed for about a year.

It reopened as one room and continued functioning until it closed for the last time in 1936. The next year it was auctioned off and it fetched a marvellous price of \$200. It was sold again in 1939 to Merle and Joe Franks who converted it to its present state in 1944.

We have some interesting first hand information from Esther Johnson, Samuel George's granddaughter, who just recently passed away. First of all, the schoolroom had a coal burning stove in the middle with the pipe running across the ceiling to the chimney. There was a row of hooks on the right of the room on which hung the lunch buckets, a row on the left on which hung the hats and coats. The desks were against the wall and the teacher's desk was at the far end. Esther said water had to be fetched each day from the spring in the woods and there was no shortage of volunteers as there was a grapevine swing that they all just loved to play on. The water eventually came back and there was one tin mug that each child dipped into the bucket to take a drink.

Woodland School History, cont'd

School lasted about 8 or 9 months with 3 months off in the summer. The starting age was 7 and there were two teachers, one of whom was the principal and depending on how many children there were, the classes would be divided into 1st, 2nd, 3rd combined, and then 4th, 5th, 6th, and 7th grades. The 7th grade students were encouraged to go directly to college and not to go to high school, which is in fact what Columbia Johnson did (Esther's sister). She went right into her sophomore year and when she graduated, ended up teaching her former classmates.

The following is some interesting information taken from "The 2nd Calvary Brigade at Lovettsville, circa 1800's (civil war era):

Winter quarters were established for General Devin's 2nd Brigade, north of Lovettsville, between the Short Hill and the Berlin Turnpike. "Fairly good quarters" were constructed and Frank Myers later claimed that the material was obtained by the troopers by stripping buildings in the vicinity of the camps. The 6th New York Regiment camped in the vicinity of George's Schoolhouse and there built small cabins, sided with logs and with roofs of stretched shelter tents. Four to eight men occupied each of the huts. Today the field behind the George's School House is still known as the "campfield" to older residents of the Dutchman Creek area.

Mobberly, Lum Wenner and others scouted Devin's winter encampment for Colonel White. With "great difficulty", according to Frank Myers, they discovered that only 250 men were present in the camp of the 6th New York Regiment. The camp was located in the vicinity of George's Schoolhouse, on the far westerly end of the brigade's encampment, near the Short Hill. The wooded slopes of the hill could provide good cover for an attack and it was clear that the regiment was understrength. The camp was an enticing target.

At Woodgrove, on the night of January 17th, approximately 80 men of White's command, along with a few of Mosby's men and even Colonel R. P. Chew of Stuart's Horse Artillery, assembled. They started north at 9:00, riding in the valley "between the hills". Passing Neersville and near the St. Paul Church, they turned east and rode up and across the short Hill by a narrow mountain path. They were only 5 miles from the garrison at Harper's Ferry.

The outpost of the 6th New York was near an old blacksmith shop about a mile from camp. The reserve post was located on the Harper's Ferry-to-Lovettsville Road, between the outpost and the sleeping encampment. Jefferson Dykeman, the sentry on duty at the outpost that cold night, observed a body of mounted men approaching, sometime between midnight and 1:00. It was not a dark night and Dykeman said he could make out

the "blue overcoat", which the foremost riders wore. Challenging the horsemen, "Halt! Who comes there?" he heard the reply, "Friend". Taking it for granted that the riders were a returning Union scouting party, he then gave the customary order, "Dismount, one friend, advance and give the countersign". As the story was told in later years, Dykeman, while waiting for the dismounted men to advance, was suddenly seized before he could resist or warn his comrades, when the whole column unexpectedly dashed forward.

Sergeant Carpenter, in command of the reserve post, was the next to hear the hoofbeats of the approaching horsemen. He also saw the blue uniforms worn by the column's leading horsemen. But this time, when the order to halt was given, the sudden dash toward the sergeant was answered by the blast of a revolver. In the ensuing medley 8 or 10 defenders at the reserve post were captured and 2 were left dead or dying. Tracks later showed that both vedettes had been surprised by dismounted men.

At the sound of gunshots, Colonel White immediately rode to the action. There he found Mobberly and Frank Curry amidst the blood stained snow. Thinking that the element of surprise had been lost and "knowing that success depended on surprising the camp", the entire raiding force put their horses to the spur and charged the sleeping camp less than half a mile distant. A number of confederates were left to guard the captured men and horses.

The men of the 6th New York remained sleeping. Nobody had heard the shooting, and secure from the cold in their tents and huts "nobody even dreamed that there was an armed foe within 20 miles of the camp". Adjacent to the main camp, sleeping alongside the road in tents, was a newly arrived detachment of recruits from the Remount Camp. The regimental history shows that 199 men had arrived as reinforcements the previous day. Frank Myers believed the actual number to be over 300. Whatever the number of recruits, Colonel White and his 80 men were facing up to 500 Yankees. He was in for a surprise.

The raiders charged, firing and shouting. One group concentrated on the tent camp and others rode to the horse lines and began to cut the animals loose. The recruits, "dazed by the suddenness of the onslaught", thought that the "whole rebel army was upon them". Running from their tents into the streets of the camp, over 150 Union troopers soon found themselves about to be captured. It was then that fortune turned on the raiding party.

Colonel White suddenly realized that what he thought was the main camp was only the outskirts. The recruits were only protected by canvas walls, but the main camp consisted of strong log huts and the men inside them were veterans. Within 3 minutes from the beginning of the attack, Captain Bell had formed 200 of these veteran troopers in the

streets opposite the raiders. Bareheaded and barefoot, with carbine and pistol, these men now advanced quite unexpectedly on White's men. Quickly realizing the situation and aware of the danger of being outflanked, the raiders turned to ride west to safety, or as Frank Myers has written, "retired precipitately". Several wounded men were supported on their horses by other riders during the retreat. The dismounted Yankees chanced them for over a mile across the frozen landscape.

Saddling what horses could be caught, or had remained tied, troopers from the 6th that night followed the raiders all the way to Purcellville. Frank Myers claimed that about 50 horses and a dozen prisoners were captured by the rebels in the attack. This at a cost of one man dead and one wounded. A newspaper account stated that one wounded rebel was captured. General Devin in the official report written 2 weeks after the attack wrote that 3 of White's men were found dead and that 8 horses were lost. However, 11 wounded horses of the enemy were left by the raiders alongside the road and captured by his men. From the number of wounded horses, Devin surmised that 11 rebels had also been wounded "more or less severely", and carried off by the others. The Yankees were convinced that the leader of the attack was mortally wounded.

The "Midnight Attack" was the last major action for the men of White's 35th battalion of "Comanches" in Loudoun County. It was also one of the last Confederate onslaughts, if not the last one, near the Potomac frontier.

Among the older residents of Lovettsville, there is a story that a soldier's burial ground is located on the Riddlemoser's farm, opposite George's Schoolhouse, next to the old Lovettsville-to-Harper's Ferry Road. It is quite possible that some of the dead of the midnight raid might still lie there, unperceived to the passerby. There they might rest, close to the old camp ground, in forgotten and unmarked graves. Struck down on a cold winter's night, so many years ago, they have been lost to the memory of all. In this hallowed ground they might still sleep awaiting the final reveille.

Forget not the humbler dead
The nameless brave
Who stood in the tempest dread
The land to save

Who swept through the wrath
Of the fiery fray
And breasted the surges of death,
That glorious day.

D.D.
5th New York Artillery
Harper's Ferry, VA
January 31, 1865

Additional interesting facts: The George children were faced with the prospect of carting stone down from the Short Hill for the new Woodland Schoolhouse. The Roller brothers built the building, and the school was called by two names, George's Mill and Woodland, for the huge oaks that stood in the yard.

Fortescue Whittle, come up from the James and remembered as "having that southern cultrue that people up here didn't have", taught school there in the early 1900's. He told his bright 7th grade students not to go to high school, but to go directly to college because he had a knack for teaching the right preparatory subjects.

Woodland School closed for the last time in the fall of 1936. Sue Hickman was its last teacher. The following year they auctioned off the one acre and stone schoolhouse. It brought \$200.