

# The Civil War Comes to Shepherdstown

## September 1862



An Historic Shepherdstown Museum Exhibit, Autumn 2017.

After the Battle of South Mountain, Lee's Army of Northern Virginia made its way towards Sharpsburg. Other troops crossed the Potomac River at Shepherdstown.



**Captain James Dinkins** enlisted in the Confederate Army before his sixteenth birthday, and served as a private in Company C, Eighteenth Mississippi Regiment, eventually becoming Captain at nineteen years of age. He fought in nearly every major battle of the Civil War. His book, *1861 to 1865: Personal Experiences in the Confederate Army*, was published in 1897.

*About daylight we reached Shepherdstown on the Potomac River, and crossed over to the Maryland side.... The river at Shepherdstown is over a half a mile wide and very shoaly. A gallant little Irishman, belonging to Company C, Eighteenth Mississippi Regiment, Tommy Brennan... was of very small stature, but brave as a lion. In crossing, he held his gun, cartridge box and shoes on his head to keep them from getting wet. When with about twenty yards of the shore he halloed out: "Boys I am over dry shod." But as he looked back to make the announcement, he stepped into a deep hole and went under head and ears, gun and all. When he arose he said, as if to finish the remark: "After I get on some dry clothes."*

*We soon arrived at Sharpsburg.*

Already inundated with wounded from the Battle of South Mountain and other skirmishes, Shepherdstown awaited another wave of Confederate wounded from the battlefield at Antietam Creek, just a few miles away.

*We could hear the incessant explosions of artillery, the shrieking whistles of the shells, and the sharper, deadlier, more thrilling roll of musketry; while every now and then the rolling echo of some charging cheer would come, borne by the wind, and as the human voice pierced that demoniacal clangor we would catch our breath and listen, and try not to sob, and turn back to the forlorn hospitals to the suffering at our feet and before our eyes, while imagination fainted at thought of those other scenes hidden from us beyond the Potomac.*

**Mary Bedinger Mitchell, *A Woman's Recollections of Antietam***



**Mary Bedinger Mitchell**, who lived in Shepherdstown with her widowed mother and two siblings, was only 12 years old during the Battle of Antietam. In 1887 she published her memories of the war years under the pseudonym, Maria Blunt.



As the day progressed, more wounded Confederates arrive in Shepherdstown.

**September 18, 1862**

*I am writing at the Parlor window & have in sight Ambulances filled with wounded, who fill every house in the place. We have the Chamber & little room occupied by three dangerously wounded. The most desperate battle of the war is going on in M'd.*

*...Ellen says they are cooking for them all day. We keep two pots on the fire all the time, with tomato soup, w'h is dealt out to the sick & indeed all who apply the number is immense who have no place but the street.*

*...Corn bread & soup is dealing out all the time to those who come to the doors & windows to beg for it.*

**Letter of Sarah Page Andrews to her son, Page Andrews**



Sarah was the wife of the Reverend Charles Wesley Andrews, the vicar of Shepherdstown's Trinity Episcopal Church. Their son, Matthew Page, worked at the paymaster's office in Richmond.

Following the battle, Confederate forces retreated back across the Potomac River. Many of the wounded would remain in Shepherdstown.

*In the morning we found the Confederate army in full retreat. General McClellan followed to the river and got a battery in position on Douglas's Hill, and began to shell the retreating army and, in consequence, the town. The retreat became a stampede.*

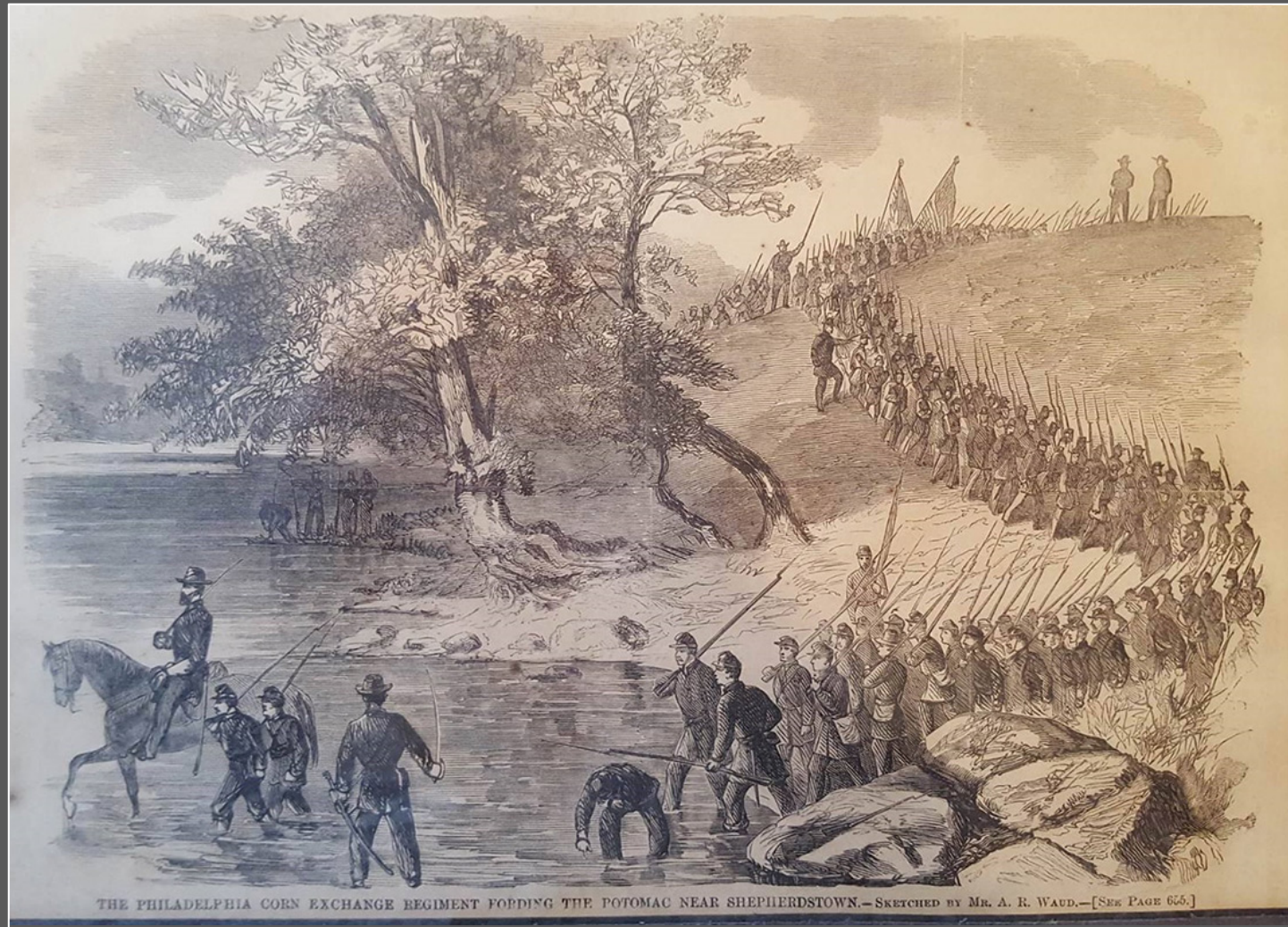
*Someone suggested that yellow was the hospital color, and immediately everyone who could lay hands upon a yellow rag hoisted it over the house. The whole town was a hospital; there was scarcely a building that could not with truth seek protection with that plea, and the fantastic little strips were soon flaunting their ineffectual remonstrance from every roof-tree and chimney.*

**Mary Bedinger Mitchell, A  
Woman's Recollections of Antietam**





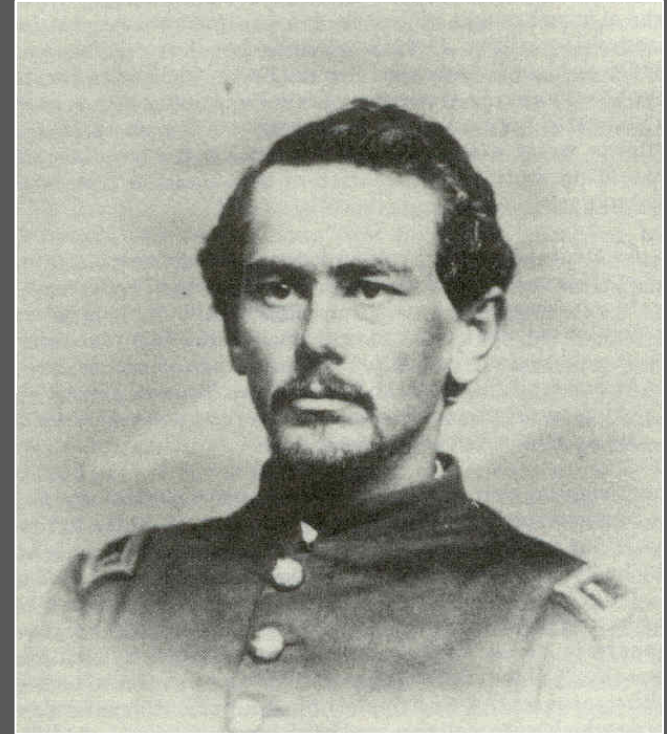
At dusk on September 19, two Federal Regiments crossed the Potomac at Boteler's Ford in pursuit of the retreating Confederates, capturing several artillery pieces. The next morning more Union troops are ordered across the Potomac.



THE PHILADELPHIA CORN EXCHANGE REGIMENT FORDING THE POTOMAC NEAR SHEPHERDSTOWN.—SKETCHED BY MR. A. R. WAUD.—[SEE PAGE 655.]

*Cross the river again at daybreak.... Boys forage. Get flour, geese and turkeys and return, recross the river. After we cross the rebels drive our men back, sending the 118<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania down the river bank. We are brought up in line of battle and remain all day wet and weary. Beautiful country.*

**John Milton Bancroft Diary Entry,  
September 20, 1862**



**John Milton Bancroft** enlisted in Company I of the Fourth Michigan Volunteer Infantry as Sergeant on June 20, 1861 and was promoted to First Lieutenant in 1862. He kept a detailed diary from 1861- 1864 eventually adding drawings, newspaper clippings and photos.



*Made an attempt to cross the Potomac at Shepherdstown, and providentially Escaped Extermination. The infantry which had already crossed were less fortunate. The ambushed enemy came charging upon them in solid Column with "Another Ball's Bluffs" for their battle cry. Our Batteries immediately opened and for a short time the fighting was terrific, but shortly quieted down somewhat.... I know nothing of the losses of the night or this morning, but believe it to be heavy on both sides. Shepherdstown seems one vast Hospital. Hospital flags can be seen on every house, and church, and barn, not only in S, but throughout the vicinity.*

**Samuel J. Gilpin Diary Entry: September, Saturday, 20, 1862**

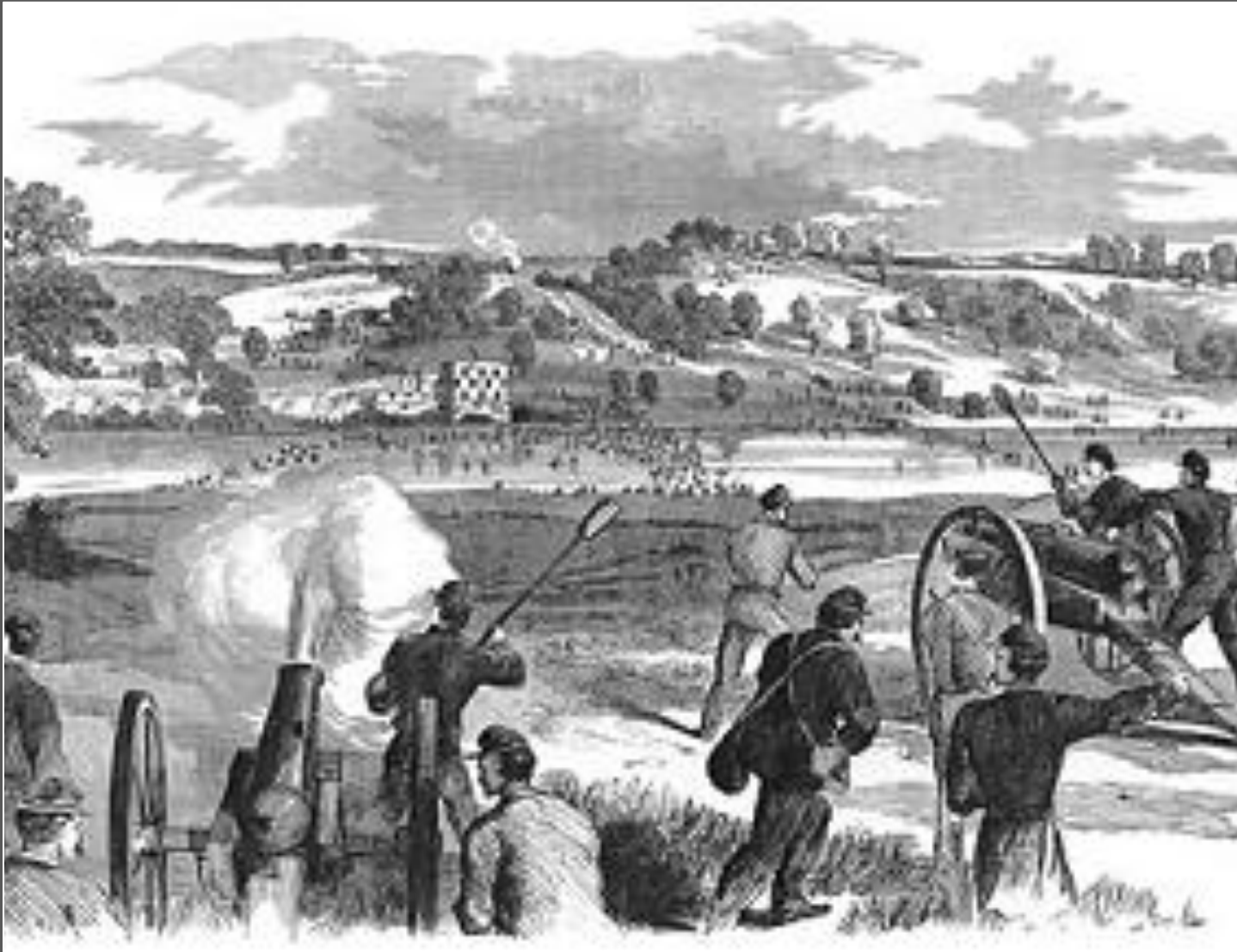


Company E, Third Indiana Cavalry

**Samuel J. Gilpin** was born at New London, Ohio, in 1837. He enlisted as a corporal in Company E, Third Indiana Cavalry and fought with the Army of the Potomac in Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia, reaching the rank of Commissary Sergeant.



Under heavy Confederate fire, Union forces retreat across the Potomac at Boteler's Ford.

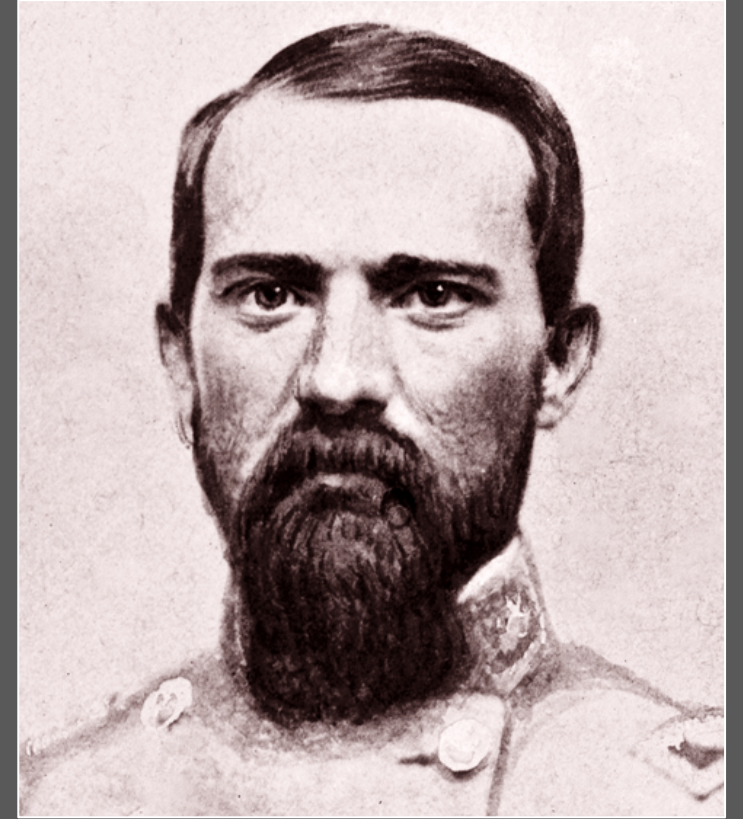


*I shall never forget the scene as I worked my way cross the dreadful causeway. The bullets struck all around me, men were shot in various places of the body, some falling, other staggering and struggling to make the other side, and all hurrying wildly on with the consciousness of the desperate chances they were taking. When nearly midway across, one poor fellow just ahead was shot, and in falling rolled over and over.*

**Lt. Francis Adams Donaldson**, of the Philadelphia Corn Exchange Regiment, on retreating across the Potomac at Boteler's Ford. His wartime correspondence was published "*Inside the Army of the Potomac: the Wartime Letters of Captain Francis Adam Donaldson*".

*Our division had a hard fight day before yesterday. Some of our miserable people allowed the Yankees to cross the Potomac before they ought and ours ran away making it necessary for us to go and drive them back. We did it under the worst artillery fire I ever saw troops exposed to. They continued to shell us all day.*

**Dorsey Pender to his wife, Fanny, September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1862**



**Gen. Dorsey Pender**, of North Carolina, was a West Point graduate, quickly rising to the rank of general. He was killed on the second day of battle at Gettysburg.



*Necessity & duty compels me to take the liberty of writing to you about the manner in which the Army is destroying my property. They have intirely divested my farm of its fences, over my private gardin is thrown open to the ravages of stock. My Barn was burned down last winter and now the Army is cutting down my timbers so that I will have nothing left to rebuild my barn or reconstruct my fences. I hope you will be pleased to take some measures at once to stop the destruction of my timber.... I hope you will also send me an order to have my yards & the property protected. Several of my out houses have been in part or in whole demolished by the pickets about the premises, for instance my pig sty is intirely torn down also my ice house & part of my Black Smith shop.*

**Letter of Robert Douglas to Maj. Gen. Fitz-John Porter, 24 October 1862**

*... a beautiful farm was laid waste, its fences disappeared up to the doors of the mansion house, artillery parks filled the wheat fields; corn and fodder and hay soon became contraband of war. In front of the house, which from its high eminence looked into Virginia, were rifle pits; and several rifled cannon, with their angry muzzles pointing across the Potomac decorated the lawn. **Henry Kyd Douglas, I Rode with Stonewall***



On a bluff overlooking Shepherdstown, **Ferry Hill Plantation**, home of the Douglas Family, was occupied by the Army of the Potomac following the battle of Antietam.

The scars of war were still present a year later when Confederate troops passed through Shepherdstown on their way to Gettysburg.

*Camp on the Potomac, Shepherdstown, Va, 20 June 1863*

*We have many horses and cattle in plenty coming over the river every day, and we will take plenty to feed and equip our army. I think that we are going to end the war now Mollie.*

*We are camped right where A. P. Hill ran the yanks into the river last year, and the trees are considerably lacerated by the shot & shell. Here's where the river was almost damed with their dead, and we can see some of their bones now, where they were dashed over the precipice this side of the river.*

**Harrison Wells to his fiancée, Mollie Long**



**Harrison Wells** (1840-1894) was a commissary sergeant with Company A, 13th Georgia Infantry Regiment. A graduate of the University of Georgia he enlisted as a private in the Confederate Army in July 1861. Throughout the war, Wells kept up extensive correspondence with his fiancée, May (called Mollie) Long of Baldwyn, MS.