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# Greene County Magazine

Harper's Weekly Civil War Reports,  
and One Thing Leads to Another

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Greene County Historical Society

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(pages 21 - 24)

*Harper's Weekly Civil War Reports,  
and One Thing Leads to Another....*

*Contributed by Jackie Pamenter*

The article and illustration that was so important to C. G. Page, when he read it in Nevada in 1865 also seemed important in the history of Stanardsville during the Civil War, so that it prompted a search by Barbara Zorn for a copy that we could purchase and donate to the Greene County Historical Society. Barbara found a pristine copy, which is now a part of the Society's inventory. It contains much interesting information about life and times in the America of 1864, to be shared in a future issue of the Greene County Historical Society Magazine.

Researching this issue of Harper's Weekly led to the University of Virginia Library, and The Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library. This library contains a treasure trove of original historic and rare works, including annual editions of Harper's Weekly. The eighth annual volume of Harper's Weekly was published in 1864. Many readers today may know that this newspaper was published in New York, and that the publishers espoused the Union cause. Consequently, the reporting seems, and is, biased. In places it raises the hackles of those who are Southerners by birth and by adoption. Nevertheless, it is an eyewitness account, and the only one that appears to exist.

The publishers included a paragraph at the beginning of the volume explaining their approach to Civil War reporting:

"For four years the public thought has centred [sic] on the great war now raging. Harper's Weekly has aimed from the outset to furnish, with pen and pencil, a complete view of the events and scenes of this great struggle, with Portraits of the men who have borne and are bearing prominent parts in it. Fully One Thousand illustrations have been given, tending to illustrate the war...."

"...When the war broke out the Publishers deemed it their duty to take a clear and decided stand upon this subject and all questions directly connected to it. The Paper has advocated the National Cause, wholly irrespective of mere party grounds. It has given a firm and cordial support to the present Administration, because, in the judgment of its Proprietors and Conductors, President Lincoln and his Cabinet have honestly and earnestly endeavored to uphold the supremacy of the Constitution, and to secure the perpetuity of the Union. It would have supported any National Administration which should have honestly and wisely aimed at these paramount ends. It would have opposed, and will oppose, any Administration which fails to do this...."

Obviously, the Publishers were in the business of selling as many copies as possible. So, the notice at the beginning of the volume also contained a little advertising, touting the advanced technology of the paper, and the low price of the annual volumes:

"... The Publishers believe that the paper possesses a permanent as well as a temporary value. Every page has therefore been electrotyped, so that they are able at any time to supply any Volume or Number from the commencement.... Each Volume ... neatly bound in cloth, will be furnished for Six Dollars, and will be sent by Express, *freight paid by the Publishers*, [their italics] to any part of the United States reached by Express, within the distance of three thousand miles from New York."

The story of Custer's raid, including the burning of the mill, appeared as the lead item on the front page (page 193), with the illustration, by Alfred Waud, as a double-page center spread on pages 200 and 201. A little filler paragraph entitled "General Custer's Raid" appeared on page 194, describing the reporting as a model of intelligent journalism:

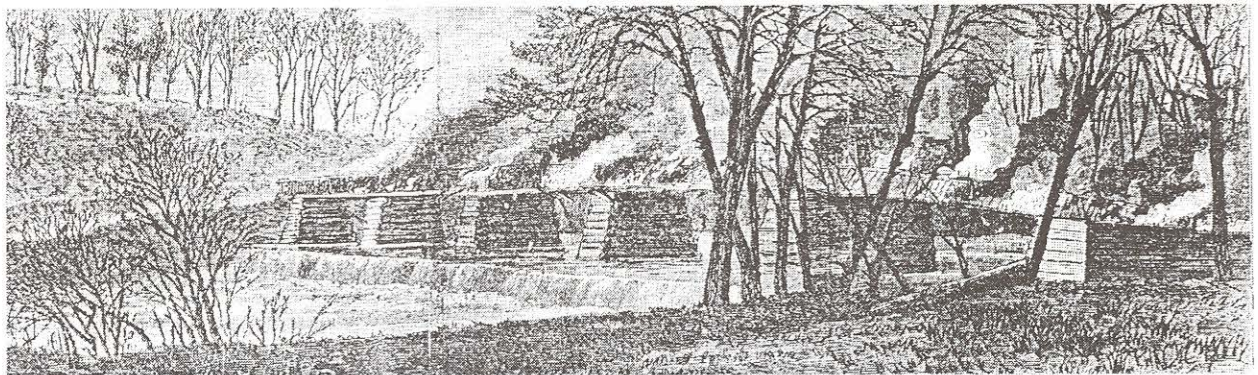
"In another part of this paper there are illustrations of General Custer's late diversion in favor of Kilpatrick, and an account of it so simple and graphic that we are glad to call attention to it as a model of intelligible description."

Clearly the publishers were anxious to retain the services of Mr. Waud, who both wrote the article and drew the illustration. The article in its entirety, is as follows:

"We present our readers this week, in a double page sketch by Mr. A. R. Waud, several interesting scenes in General Custer's late movement against the rebels. This movement not only accomplished a successful diversion in favor of the commands directly engaged in Kilpatrick's raid, but served also the equally important purposes of a reconnoissance. [sic] "Leaving Madison Court House, a handsome town at the foot of the Blue Ridge," says our artist, who was the only civilian accompanying the expedition, "soon after midnight, Custer's command rapidly pushed on in the still night through a country alternately open and woodland toward the Rapidan. All went quietly until we reached Wolftown, where the Sixth Pennsylvania Cavalry, being in the advance, was fired upon by a rebel force; but drawing their sabres they dashed on, putting the enemy to flight without loss, and the head of the column soon reached the Rapidan. Having captured a wagon loaded with ham and two negroes, the command forded the river without opposition and pushed on, seizing all the horses on their way and all the male civilians - as a precaution against bushwhacking and to prevent information being given to the enemy.

"As we proceeded we found a tolerably well-cultivated and high rail-fenced country, the farmers plowing in the fields; when the horses were worth it they were taken in the name of the United States; and occasionally some of the men would make a descent upon the poultry while their officers were not looking. In one place a very handsome lady, quite young, expostulated loudly with a cavalryman for taking the farm-horses. 'My dear Miss,' said the soldier, 'we do not want to take your horses; ours are much better; and besides it goes against our feelings, but military necessity requires this step, and we are merely agents of unrelenting destiny.' In spite of her concern the pretty creature laughed at such eloquence from a rough cavalryman.

“At a turn of the road we met a couple of children on a horse; that horse the men did not take; they looked too innocent to be molested. In the town of Stannardsville [sic] the people came out to see the procession, as if it were a show got up for their amusement. The men were exceedingly disgusted when they found that they had to accompany the column as temporary prisoners. The female relatives of one person hung about him with outcries and shrieks, as if they imagined he would be led at once to execution. In the afternoon we reached and crossed the Rivanna River, and found the enemy in force near Charlottesville. A squadron of the Fifth Regulars, under Captain Ash, scouting on our left, came so suddenly upon an artillery camp that the gunners had barely time to run off the guns by hand. Before they had recovered their surprise the camp was in flames, the caissons blown up, harness, forges and battery-wagons destroyed, and our handful of dare-devils off again. At this time train after train came up from Gordonsville with troops, and the General recalled his column, which was at this time being shelled in a random way by the enemy’s artillery, answered by our two little guns, which checked an effort to turn our left. Recrossing the river, the pioneers soon put the bridge in flames, and destroyed a large mill full of Government corn and meal, the enemy’s infantry keeping up a wicked but harmless skirmish-fire the while. Returning, the troops were halted about four miles from the river to feed and rest. The night was rainy, and all had to lie upon the ground and get wet through. It was difficult to get fires to burn and the rain began to freeze upon the limbs of the trees, so that by morning everything appeared to be cased in crystal; and when the enemy’s forces got in our way, to contest the return of the troops, the cannon-shot made a wonderful crashing among the frost-bound limbs of the forest. After two or three pretty little skirmishes, in which our troops invariably had the advantage, General Custer inveigled them down a wrong road, and then, having started them upon a false scent, quietly recrossed the Rapidan, without the loss of a man, and with but few wounded, bringing with him a large number of horses and refugees – colored people – and some thirty prisoners, soldiers; the civilians all being allowed to return to their homes when it was no longer possible for them to do us damage. Like lost children the command was welcomed back into the lines by the forces of General Sedgwick, who was not without anxiety that we should be all used up when he heard the distant guns in the morning.”



*BURNING A BRIDGE OVER THE RIVANNA  
HARPER'S WEEKLY, 26 MARCH 1864*

The account of Custer's movement given above by our artist represents faithfully the incidents that usually enliven a cavalry expedition within the enemy's lines. The most striking of these incidents he has related with the pencil. Thus he has given us a portrait of Captain Ash, who surprised Stuart's camp. In this connection he has presented us a scene representing the destruction of the rebel caissons by Captain Ash's command. This was in the vicinity of Charlottesville, the point which our forces had reached when they were compelled, by the superior numbers of the enemy, to retrace their steps towards the Rapidan. The rear-guard, as General Custer's command was leaving Charlottesville, has also received its share of attention from Mr. Waud. He has also sketched for our readers the burning of the mill at Stannardsville, which contained a great amount of grain belonging to the Confederacy; also the burning of the bridge across the Rivanna, one of the tributaries of the James. One of the skirmishes in which our troops were engaged with Stuart's forces in the retreat has also been portrayed. Not the least pleasant of these *tableaux* is that one which represents the negroes leaving their plows in the field to join our troops in the movement Northward.



THE FURLOUGHED MAN A PRISONER  
HARPER'S WEEKLY, 26 MARCH 1864