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"Fare Fac - Say Do"

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1861-1865



2011-2015

Franklin camped at Fairfax Court House. Approximately 36,000 men from Indiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, were crowded around the courthouse. While here, events elsewhere caused General McClellan to meet with his Generals and adopt an alternative strategy. Consequently, Fairfax Court House became the starting point of the ill-fated *Peninsula Campaign*.

After the humiliating and disastrous defeat and retreat of the Union army after the Battle of First Manassas in July 1861, another even greater tragedy was set in motion. An increasingly desperate President Abraham Lincoln summoned General George B. McClellan to Washington, D.C. General

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McClellan at Fairfax Court House

First Advance of Army of the Potomac

by William Page Johnson, II



One hundred and fifty years ago this March Union General George B. McClellan and the Union Army of the Potomac occupied Fairfax Court House for four days during their first *shake out* march. This was the first campaign of the Army of the Potomac. Although the two armies did not clash here momentous future events were decided in tiny little Fairfax Court House.

By March of 1862, Fairfax Court House had changed hands several times during the first year of the Civil War. Consequently, the small village had played host to several leading figures on both sides of the conflict. Five months after Confederate President Jefferson Davis visited Fairfax Court House and conferred with his Generals at the home of Thomas R. Love, Union General George McClellan did the same. For four days in March 1862 Gen. McClellan and a portion of the Army of the Potomac, consisting of the Divisions of Generals Irwin McDowell, Fitz-John Porter, and William B.



Major General George Brinton McClellan c. 1861
 Photo courtesy: Library of Congress

Fairfax, Virginia, March 2012-

Greetings from the President--

This year will be one of notable anniversaries for several institutions related to the history of the City of Fairfax. This is the 20th anniversary of the Fairfax Museum and Visitor Center, which has become a central element in presenting our history to the public. This is also the 30th anniversary of Historic Fairfax City Inc. Finally, 2012 is the 200th anniversary of the Ratcliffe Allison House in the historic downtown.

Throughout the year we will have special events to commemorate these anniversaries. The first event will be a HFCI General Membership meeting on April 11. For this meeting we will have a noted Civil War author, Adam Goodheart. Mr. Goodheart is the author of 1861, The Civil War Awakening. The meeting, which is being cosponsored by the Fairfax City Sesquicentennial Committee, will be held at the Stacey Sherwood Community Center and will begin at 7:30 pm. The meeting will be open to the public so it will be good to arrive early.

Another part of our anniversary celebration this year will be the installation of a commemorative brick sidewalk in front of the Museum. For a number of years HFCI has sold commemorative bricks but the location for the bricks has been subject to decisions about the development of the downtown. We have decided that we should proceed with placement of the bricks and chose the Museum as an appropriate site. We plan on formally dedicating the walkway on July 4th and there is still plenty of time to order a brick if you would like to have one in place for the opening. A single brick can be purchased for \$100. Forms for purchasing bricks can be obtained at the Museum and soon from the HFCI website.

The Board has also been actively engaged in discussions about development in the George Mason Square area of the City. This block, bounded by Main Street, University Drive, North Street and Old Lee Highway, contains a concentration of important historic resources. The City has decided to develop a park at the intersection of University Drive and North Street that will incorporate the Kitty Pozer Garden and provide important open space in the historic downtown.

After a number of false starts, we will be launching the new HFCI website in the near future. We think this

website will provide you with more up to date information about our activities as well as a platform for educating the public about the history of the City of Fairfax.

Thank you for your continuing support.

David L. Pumphrey

At the Fairfax Museum...

Temporary Exhibition- February 5 – March 31, 2012, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily

From Morning to Night: Domestic Service in the Gilded Age South

This traveling exhibition tells the story of a predominantly African American labor corps in the late nineteenth century that worked in white households as cooks, maids, laundresses, nursemaids, butlers and chauffeurs.

Location: 10209 Main Street, Fairfax, VA 22030

Second Sunday Program Series...

Sunday, April 15**

"Tea and Chocolate"

Frances and Ginger Park will read from their book, *Chocolate Chocolate*, and share stories of running their Washington, D.C. chocolate shop. \$20 per person. Reservations and pre-payment required. Contact: Susan Gray at (703) 385-8415. ****Date changed due to Easter Sunday on April 8.** **Location: Historic Blenheim, 3610 Old Lee Highway.**

Sunday, May 13

Ratcliffe- Allison House at 200

Special program commemorating the Bicentennial of the oldest house in the City's historic District. **Location: Ratcliffe-Allison House, 10386 Main Street**

McClellan was the architect of early Union victories at the Battles of Phillipi and Rich Mountain, now in West Virginia. He was also well connected politically and, at just 34 years of age, had attained the rank of Major General. Only the aging Lt. Gen. Winfield Scott outranked him. When President Lincoln appointed McClellan to command the military defenses of Washington, D.C. in July 1861, he threw himself into the task and began creating the Army of the Potomac. During the ensuing buildup, McClellan dramatically improved morale in the army and was very popular with his troops and the northern public. However, McClellan was popular with his troops for the same reason that frustrated Lincoln. McClellan, in building the *Grand Army of the Republic*, cared greatly about the morale and welfare of his men and was not eager to see either destroyed.

When General Scott retired in November 1861, President Lincoln named McClellan as his successor.¹ However, tragically for the nation, General McClellan possessed significant character flaws that ultimately cost him and the country dearly. In less than a year he lost Lincoln's confidence, his job, and worse, his inaction arguably prolonged the Civil War and led to the needless deaths of tens of thousands of young Americans.

By the end of 1861, thanks to McClellan's efforts and a willing Congress, the Union army was the largest standing army of the United States up to that point. By the spring of 1862 it was formidable with a total strength of 220,000.² General McClellan was a brilliant organizer but famously cautious, hesitant and even reluctant to go to battle until he felt the odds significantly favored him. This abundance of caution empowered his detractors and would ultimately lead to his downfall.

By the late summer of 1861, McClellan had come to believe the total strength of the Confederate army was nearly 300,000 with 150,000 troops in Northern Virginia directly threatening Washington, D.C. In truth, there were never more than 50,000 Confederate troops in Northern Virginia at that time and they were poorly trained and equipped by comparison.³ Consequently, in spite of significant pressure from President Lincoln, McClellan refused to move against the Confederates until he felt he had overwhelming superiority in men and material.

President Lincoln Asserts Control

By January of 1862, Lincoln was running out of patience with his young General. On January 10th, the President held a conference at the White House which was attended by U.S. Secretary of State, William H. Seward, Treasury Secretary, Salmon P. Chase, and Generals Irvin P. McDowell and William

B. Franklin. General McClellan did not attend as he was ill with typhoid fever. In McClellan's absence a frustrated President Lincoln said to the assembled group:

*"If General McClellan does not want to use the army, I would like to borrow it for a time."*⁴

The President wanted action. Following this meeting, on January 22nd, and without consulting General McClellan, the President issued General War Order No. 1 calling for a general movement of all United States forces against the insurgents on February 22nd.⁵ The President was beginning to take control and was attempting to force McClellan into action. Several days later, the President issued another supplemental order. Special War Order No. 1 was specifically directed at General McClellan and the Army of the Potomac:

*"Executive Mansion,
Washington, January 31, 1862*

President's Special War Order, No. 1.

Ordered: That all the disposable force of the Army of the Potomac, after providing safely for the defense of Washington, be formed into an expedition for the immediate object of seizing and occupying a point upon the railroad southwestward of what is known as Manassas Junction, all details to be in the discretion of the commander-in-chief, and the expedition to move before or on the 22d day of February next.

*A. Lincoln"*⁶

On March 3, 1862, again over McClellan's objections, President Lincoln issued War Order No. 2 which established the first five army Corps in the Army of the Potomac. Lincoln appointed Generals McDowell, Sumner, Heintzelman, Keyes and Banks as the new Corps commanders.⁷ McClellan had wanted to delay this reorganization ostensibly until he had a chance to judge his divisional commanders strengths in battle.⁸

In a 22-page letter to the President, General McClellan vigorously objected to the President's orders and revealed his own war plan. McClellan's plan called for floating the army down the Chesapeake Bay and up the Rappahannock River to Urbana, Virginia. From there the Union Army of the Potomac would turn south, flank the enemy, and take Richmond virtually unopposed.⁹

In addition to being abundantly cautious, McClellan was also famously secretive. He consistently refused to share his war plans with anyone, even excluding his own top generals and the commander-in-chief, President Lincoln. Naturally, this drew the ire of both. However, McClellan was justifiably concerned about this. He feared that as soon as he revealed his plans they would be leaked to the enemy.



On March 7th, in response to McClellan's letter, the two men met at the White House. An angry exchange ensued. President Lincoln favored a direct confrontation with the Confederate army then encamped at Centreville and Manassas. McClellan, however, was firm and stuck with his Urbana plan. The President relented but insisted that Gen. McClellan present his plans to the scrutiny of a Council of War comprised of his top generals. A vote would then be taken on McClellan's proposal. The President then informed McClellan that he would be replaced as general-in-chief if his plan was voted down, or if approved, he did not move his army within ten days.^{10,11} In reality, President Lincoln already had serious doubts as to McClellan's leadership abilities.

Later that day, Gen. McClellan convened a Council of War of his senior generals at the War Department. In addition to McClellan and his father-in-law, General Randolph B. Marcy, the day-long Council of War was attended by Generals Irvin McDowell, Edwin Sumner, Samuel Heintzelman, Erasmus Keyes, Fitz-John Porter, William B. Franklin, George McCall, Louis Blenker, Andrew Porter, John Barnard and Col. Henry Naglee, representing General Joseph Hooker. McClellan presented his plan then left the room with General Marcy. McClellan's Urbana Plan was approved with Generals McDowell, Sumner, Heintzelman and Barnard recording their opposition. At the request of President Lincoln, the Generals, minus McClellan and Marcy, then walked over to the White House and briefed the President and Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton.¹²

The next day the President issued General War Order No. 2 that required McClellan in implementing his plan to 1) use no more than two of the five corps in the Army of the Potomac (approximately 50,000 of 125,000 troops); 2) the Potomac river was to be cleared of all obstructions and enemy batteries; and, 3) that he move on or before March 18th.

Fate then quickly intervened in McClellan's plans. While General McClellan was meeting with the President and his generals, Thaddeus S.C. Lowe, Chief Aeronaut of the recently formed United States Balloon Corps had been gathering intelligence on the position and movement of the Confederate forces in Northern Virginia. On March 6th & 7th he and Col. Hiram G. Berry, of General Heintzelman's staff ascended high above Pohick Church in Fairfax County and discovered what they believed to be a general withdrawal of the Confederate army from their positions along Occoquan River, Fairfax Court House, Centreville and Manassas. This information was quickly passed on to General McClellan in Washington, D.C.

To make matters worse, over the next several days, March 8th & 9th, Gen. McClellan received several telegrams informing him of the engagement of the ironclads, C.S.S. *Virginia*

(formerly U.S.S. *Merrimac*) and U.S.S. *Monitor* at Hampton Roads. The two ironclads had fought to a tactical draw, but not before the *Virginia* had destroyed the Union sloop-of-war U.S.S. *Cumberland* and frigate U.S.S. *Congress* and caused the steam frigates U.S.S. *Minnesota*, and *Roanoke*, and frigate U.S.S. *St. Lawrence* to all run aground. The *Virginia* then withdrew to Norfolk protecting the James River approaches to Richmond, leaving the *Monitor* in control of Hampton Roads. With the Confederate army now retreating to the south below the Rappahannock River and the *Virginia* still a viable threat to Union transport ships arriving at Hampton Roads, McClellan's plan to sail into Hampton Roads and up the Rappahannock was in serious jeopardy.

The Army of the Potomac Advances "Like the Feathers of a Fan"

All of these events conspired to force McClellan to finally advance his Army of the Potomac into Virginia.

On Sunday, March 9, 1862, President Lincoln and U.S. Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton were at McClellan's home, two blocks from the White House, on the corner of 15th & H St., N.W., Washington, D.C. when McClellan received word that the Confederates were evacuating Manassas.¹³ Presumably this information came from General Philip Kearney and the First New Jersey Brigade which was engaged in a scouting mission into Fairfax County. McClellan then left his guests and rode to General Porter's headquarters at Hall's Hill in Alexandria Co. (now Arlington Co.), near the present site of Arlington Hospital, to obtain the latest information and "to act according to circumstances."¹⁴

At Hall's Hill, McClellan ordered two cavalry regiments, the 3rd and 8th Pennsylvania, under the overall command of Colonel William W. Averill out to Manassas to verify the Confederate withdrawal.¹⁵ He then ordered a general advance of the Army of the Potomac to Manassas by various routes. The advance was to begin at 4 A.M. the next morning. Most of the Army of the Potomac was already encamped on the Virginia side of the Potomac River. In addition to Porter's division at Hall's Hill, General McDowell and his division were nearby at *Arlington*, the home of Confederate General Robert E. Lee, and General William B. Franklin and his division were camped at the Fairfax Seminary west of Alexandria. At Hall's Hill Gen. McClellan received additional information, probably from Kearny's command, that Sangster's Station and Fairfax Court House were in possession of Union Forces. This information he relayed to President Lincoln by telegraph.¹⁶

Just before the movement of the army was executed, a tense telegraphic exchange occurred between Gen. McClellan and Secretary Stanton. McClellan informed Stanton that it

would not be possible to form the army into corps for the advance as the President had directed.

"I am obliged to take groups as I find them and to move them by divisions. I respectfully ask a suspension of the order directing it till the present movement be over."

An angry Stanton replied back, insinuating McClellan was insubordinate:

*"I think it is the duty of every officer to obey the President's orders...."*¹⁷

At 1:00 A.M., March 10th, McClellan responded:

"You have entirely misunderstood me & the idea I intended to convey."

Stanton relented,

"...move just as you think best now...."

At nearly 3:00 A.M. McClellan replied to Stanton,

*"...The troops are in motion. I thank you for your dispatch. It relieves me much, and you will be convinced that I have not asked too much of you."*¹⁸

Gen. McClellan, with an entourage that included some 49 aides and a bodyguard of several thousand cavalry accompanied Porter and Franklin's divisions to Fairfax Court House.¹⁹ Their route took them through Falls Church then to Fairfax Court House. General McDowell's division left first having been given the honor of leading the advance of the army into Fairfax County, Virginia. McDowell's route to Fairfax was by way of the Columbia Pike to Annandale and the Little River Turnpike to Fairfax Court House.

The roads were in terrible shape from several days of rain, particularly the Columbia Pike, which one soldier recalled was choked with *"the most villainous red mud you ever saw."*²⁰ Although a weak chilly sunrise greeted them, at about eight o'clock it began to rain again and did not let up until the army reached Fairfax Court House. It quickly became apparent that the countryside had been devastated by the war.

"The route to Fairfax was a faithful picture of vandalism. For a distance of six or seven miles not a whole house was to be seen. Where the buildings had not been burned down, the cavalry pickets had torn off the weatherboards for firewood, and used the structures as horse stables... the out skirts of Fairfax were a few rifle-pits. The town was a small one, comprising about twelve houses. Before the war it no doubt had been a very pleasant little place of

*residence. The buildings were mostly frame. Some were of plain brick, and compared very favorably with Northern houses, others had been cemented over and presented a very neat appearance. It contained a court house and jail and three churches which were entirely despoiled of any pretensions to pulpit or pews. The fences around the public buildings were all gone, and in many instances, around the private residences. But three or four houses were tenanted by their original owners, and there were few families yet remaining in the place. When the battery passed through, the houses were all occupied by Union troops, who had arrived the day before [First New Jersey Infantry]. The battery encamped for the night on the same ground where McDowell had placed his army before the opening of the Bull Run battle."*²¹

*"We passed several rebel fortifications before we entered the town of Fairfax. At this place is General Geo. B. McClellan's Headquarters. There are some fine buildings here, which attract a great deal of attention from the boys. In some of the dwellings we could see sweet smiling faces, as they appeared at the windows. Here the word was given to halt, the Fifth's band commenced playing sweet strains of music (Star Spangled Banner), after this was over, the 6th Maine's band was invited to play, when they struck up the tune of Dixie."*²²

At about 10 A.M. Col. Averill's advance guard of the 3rd & 8th Pennsylvania Cavalry passed through Fairfax Court House which they found already occupied by elements of Gen. Kearny's, First New Jersey Brigade. A cavalryman in Kearny's brigade chronicled their arrival:

"This picturesque old town, with its comfortable and airy residences, began to change its appearance in a few hours after the troops had entered it. Here I am compelled, reluctantly, to record scenes of plunder and wanton destruction on the part of our troops, disgraceful alike to those who took part in them and those who permitted them. ...The Pennsylvania soldiers, always more ready to steal than fight, joined with the Teutons of our German battalion, never of much value as soldiers, and both were soon active in the work of destruction. They broke open the venerable old Court House and other buildings, destroyed the county records, tore up old valuable parchments, and strewed the floors a foot deep with papers and books. Many papers valuable as historical reminiscences, connected with and bearing the signatures of the Washington, Custis, Fairfax and other Virginia

families distinguished in the nation's history, were carried off by the soldiers. Many of these valuable papers and parchments fell into the hands of sutlers and the very worst class of camp followers, who I afterwards found offering them for sale in Washington."²³

Guards were then placed around the courthouse and the principle buildings in the town.

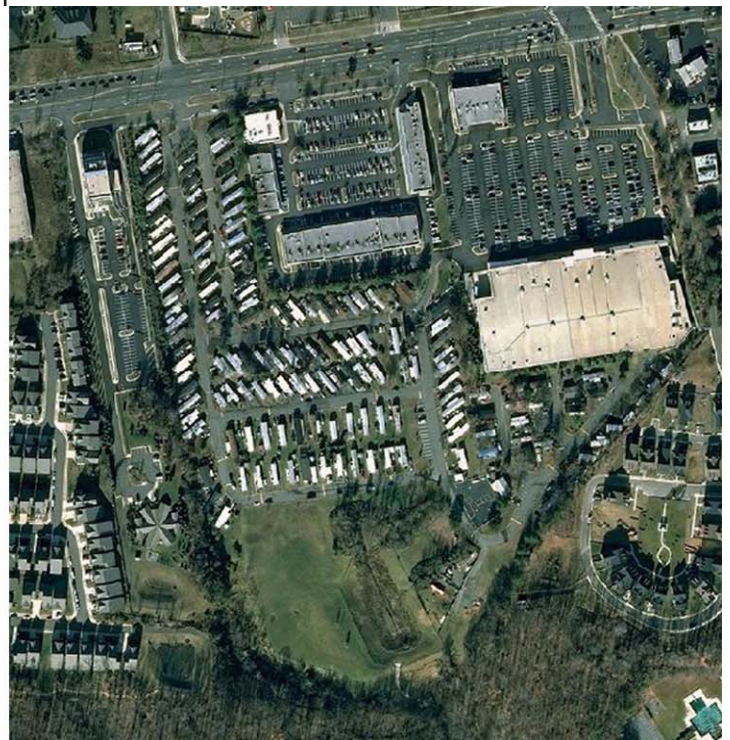
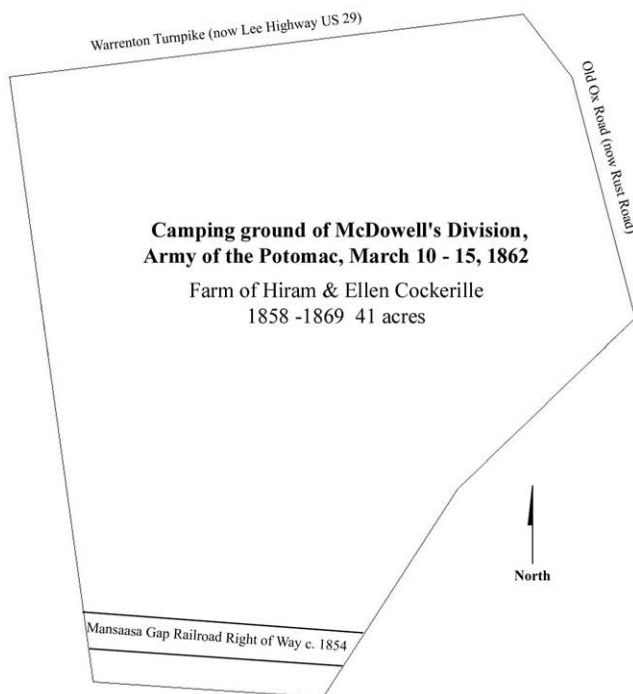
By 11 A.M. it had stopped raining. McDowell's division passed through Fairfax Court House at about that time and went into camp on the farm of Hiram & Ellen Cockerille, on the south side of the Warrenton Pike one and a half miles west of the courthouse.²⁴ The encampment was dubbed *Camp King* by the soldiers of King's Brigade. McDowell made his headquarters in the Cockerille's small farmhouse.²⁵ Deed research has identified the Cockerille's 41-acre farm site as the present-day location of Bloom Grocery, Wal-Mart, and Waple's Mobile Home Park just west of the City of Fairfax.²⁶

The 2nd Wisconsin Infantry, King's Brigade, McDowell's Division were among the first soldiers of the Army of the Potomac to enter Fairfax Court House.²⁷ In a letter home, one infantryman described their entry into Fairfax:

"King's Brigade

Fairfax Court House, Va., March 11, 1862

...On reaching Fairfax Court House about 2 p.m., the earth works of the rebels were there but that was all, the troops in our advance had cleared the way and we had nothing to do but march on in peace. Our band struck up 'Red White and Blue' and we marched through the town more joyfully than when I last was there on the night of the 21st of July last. We camped for the night about a mile out of the village, having marched about 18 miles, and here we are... comfortable in fine weather... It cleared away yesterday afternoon and now it is delightful; just cool enough to be comfortable. I am sitting upon my knapsack beneath my little tent writing by candle light. Close by the band is playing 'Old Folks at Home.' It is a lovely evening. The sky is cloudless and the moon shines brightly upon us. Our encampment looks like a field covered with patches of snow or white capped waves upon the dark blue sea. We are encamped in the edge of a piece of woods on the summit of a gentle hill from which in the day time can be seen the bare heads of the mountains of the Blue Ridge beyond Manassas."^{28,29}



(Left) Farm of Ellen (& Hiram) Cockerille, from metes & bounds description, DB A4, Pg. 29, Fx. Co. Cir. Ct. Clk. (Right) Aerial view of Cockerille Farm c. 2012. Top - Lee Highway; Right - Rust Road; Right Center - Bloom Grocery & Wal-Mart; Left Center - Waples Mobile Home Park. Ghost outline of Cockerille Farm can still be seen in the photo image on the right.

Illustration credit: Page Johnson. Photo credit: Google Maps 2012.

Another 2nd Wisconsin soldier also described the arrival of the brigade into Fairfax:

*"In the Woods, near Fairfax Court House, Va.
Friday, March 14th, 1862*

*Dear Tribune... By eleven o'clock we had arrived at Fairfax Court House, where we found a New Jersey Regiment. We marched through this deserted place, once so thriving a village, our band playing "Hail Columbia," to the grove just in sight of Germantown, now entirely in ruins, where we are at present encamped.... Rebels are being brought in every day, many of them taken on the other side of Manassas. Our cavalry are continually scouring the country, and the Fairfax jail presents the fruits of their labors in the shape of over one hundred and fifty prisoners."*³⁰

A soldier in the 7th Wisconsin Infantry described the destruction at Germantown and the graffiti left in houses there by rebel soldiers:

*"We are encamped about two miles from Fairfax, four from Centerville and near Germantown, a noted place consisting of six deserted houses and the site of four which have been burned. It was the rendezvous for rebel troops and all kinds of pictures, figures and various pieces of writing are found upon the walls. As a fair sample of the latter I quote the following: 'I love the Yankee girls,' 'Yankees what made you run at Bull Run? Come to Centerville you d—d *-* Yankees you are doomed to die.' This exhibition of rebel feeling tells its own story but with all their vaunted bravery, if they continue to flee as they have done, before next Saturday night the Army of the Potomac will occupy Richmond. Before night the day we camped here a large hog made its appearance in Camp on four feet and it was not long before the savory smell of fresh pork emanating from the frying pans of our camp fires greeted our hungry comrades and made Mr. Hog quite welcome. Pigs, calves, geese, chickens, ducks, honey, etc. make their appearance without long intervals."*³¹

Shortly afterwards, General McClellan and the divisions of Gen. Fitz-John Porter and Gen. Franklin arrived in Fairfax. Gen. Porter made his headquarters in the home of Dr. William Presley Gunnell, now the Truro Rectory. His men went into camp around the courthouse. McClellan entered Fairfax with General Porter. A young Lt. on Porter's staff made the following observations in a letter to his father:

"Fairfax Court House, March 10, 1862.



Dr. William P. Gunnell House c. 1835. Headquarters of Gen. Fitz-John Porter, March 1862. Now the location of the Truro Episcopal Rectory.

Photo credit: Unknown, Date Unknown.

Photo courtesy: Lee Hubbard, Fairfax, VA.

Dear Father, — Safe in the former headquarters of General Beauregard in the house of Dr. Gunnell, once a physician here but now a surgeon in the rebel army. The house, now General Porter's headquarters, is one of the best in this town, being built of brick and being two and a half stories in height. It stands back from the road some 300 feet, and has a straight avenue leading to it, with medium-sized trees planted on each side. Still it has the true Southern look about it, viz., the air of neglect, of something wanting to complete the estate, as if the owner had begun with the idea of making a fine place and had been stopped short for want of funds. The fences round the place are of the most common kind, such as we see in our pastures. What adds to the air of shiftlessness is a sow with a litter of a dozen pigs rooting around the trees and in what used to be a garden. She threatened to bite me to-day when I went too near her young ones... She was a fierce and ugly creature....

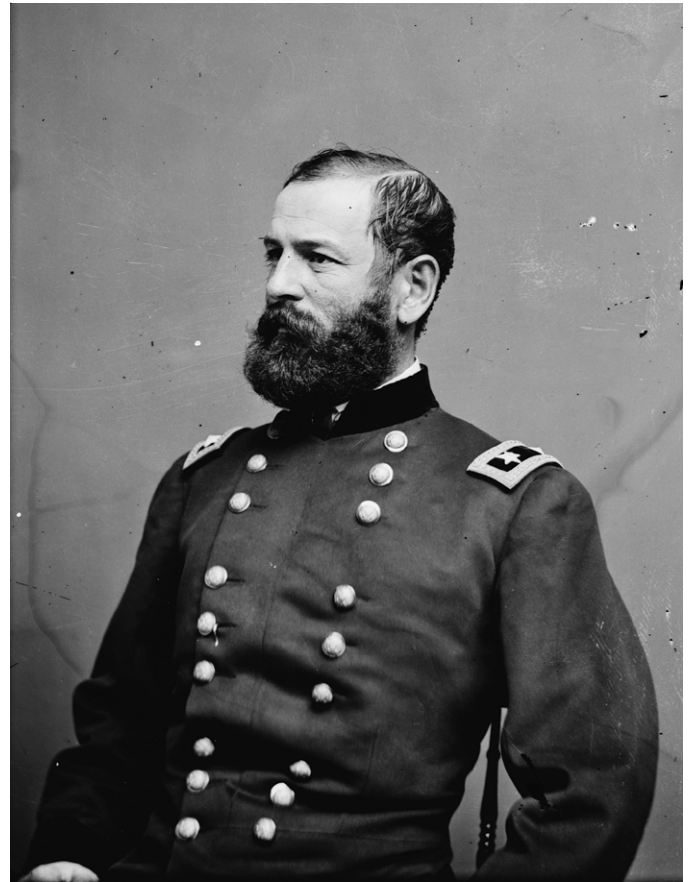
...My room here is a large pleasant one, with a big open fireplace, in which I have some enormous logs burning, casting a very pleasant light over the apartment. It is occupied by Batchelder, McQuade and myself. I have my buffalo-robe blanket, and canvas bag filled with changes of clothing, etc., with me, and can get along quite comfortably with my present conveniences for three or four weeks.

As we approached Fairfax we found a slight earthworks which had been hastily thrown up by the rebels some time ago, commanding all the country

round the town, for some distance. They don't amount to anything and were probably occupied by the rebel pickets some time ago. On entering the town we struck the turnpike, which is quite a decent road, and which forms the principal street of the town. The Court House is situated on it and is an old-fashioned brick building with a portico in front. We should call this a small village in Massachusetts, but here it is quite a city in the estimation of the F.F. V.'s...."³²

"Coming in from Hall's Hill yesterday I was struck with the picturesque scene which I saw in the village. It was about half an hour from sundown, the air soft and balmy as could be, and resembling some of our delightful autumn or spring days. It was just the hour when the camps are busiest, and present their most lively appearance. First we came to a cavalry regiment with their horses fastened to a long rope stretched along parallel with the road, and eating their supper, neighing, biting and snapping at each other. On my right was an undulating space cleared of all trees and with some slight breastworks put up by the enemy. This large plain was covered with camps full of life and activity, soldiers marching to a review by McClellan, with bands playing and their colors flying, and a hum arising from those not yet in ranks. All this was delightful to me, but to one who is accustomed to it it loses its beauty in a great degree. Following this road till I came to the turnpike, I turned to the right, and came on a scene which I thought must resemble some European city. Here were all these old-fashioned houses, with queer windows and porches, guards before many of the doors, and soldiers in many cases sitting in the porches talking with the women of the house. The street was full of soldiers in every imaginable attitude, and in performance of all sorts of duty. Here was the provost guard clearing the stragglers from the street, there a man with two oxen who would go in opposite directions and he in despair, for no sooner would he get them straight than some band of soldiers would on their march come across his path, to the infinite delight of the bystanders. Then again all the soldiers would be talking in groups, which seemed quite picturesque from the variety of uniforms. Sutlers' wagons, ambulances, baggage trains and a large corral of cattle also appeared. I never was so well pleased with any such sight and would have given a great deal if I had been able to sketch it."³³

General McClellan's entry into Fairfax was witnessed by a member of the 1st New York Cavalry, Kearny's Brigade, who were already there:



Major General Fitz-John Porter, Divisional Commander. HQ at the home of Dr. William P. Gunnell (now Truro Rectory), Fairfax Court House, March 10th - 15th, 1862.

Photo credit: Library of Congress

"We arrived in Fairfax at 6 p.m. and drew up on the side of the road to see the division pass. General McClellan passed at that moment and beckoned [General William B.] Franklin to accompanying him. We followed General McClellan's bodyguard and the whole cavalcade entered Fairfax at a gallop. The troops cheering 'Little Mac' as we passed. Our company was quartered in an old brick church, each man having a pew to himself, and the officers took possession of a lawyer's office close by."³⁴

By March 1862 Fairfax County had been without civil authority, of any kind, for nearly a year. Unionist and secessionist citizens suffered equally as the competing army's occupied various points in the county. Tensions were running high. To illustrate the point, when the Army of the Potomac arrived at Fairfax Court House in March the following notice was found:

"Fairfax C.H.

Dear Friend:—I wish to inform you that the excitement thro the state has been so great, that the Citizens have

formed a Committee of Vigilence[sic] for the County to drive all Abolitionist of it, and they have heard from good authority that you have expressed such and entotain[sic] them and opininn[sic] of several here that you must leave this County. I give you this notice that you had better do it immediately to prevent exposure to Linch[sic] Law that to certain extent now prevails in this and together slave states.

Take warning in time.

One of the vigilents commitye[sic]”³⁵

While the Army of the Potomac lay at Fairfax Court House and waited, a correspondent for the *New York Times* walked around the town and filed the following descriptive report:

“During the past week the slopes and hills in the immediate vicinity of Fairfax Court-house were thickly dotted with Union soldiers’ tents, and exhibiting groups of baggage-wagons, lines or ordinance, masses of artillery and cavalry horses, and the fittings and trappings of a large army, the soldiers themselves lounging carelessly upon the turf, or engaged in various pursuits, presented an attractive and interesting spectacle. At the headquarters of the Commanding-Generals, couriers and orderlies were continually passing in and out....

Passing up the main street, I was greatly impressed with the old, neglected appearance of the store and dwellings on each side. They evidently not receiving a coat of paint for a half a century, and some portions of the wood-work were in the last stages of decay. Approaching a group of three men decently dressed in citizen’s clothes, who I rightly conjectured to be original inhabitants of the place, I engaged them in conversation and learned from one that he was the proprietor of a small, dingy-looking building on the opposite side of the way, which he occupied as kind of a grocery store. The doors and windows were securely fastened, and, as an additional precaution against any attempt of intruders to force entrance, he took his present position that he might watch the premises, and, in case of necessity, appeal to the Provost Marshal for protection.... The other two persons were rather uncommunicative, and leaving them, I entered the old Court-house. This, as well as most of the other buildings, was guarded by our troops, an order to that effect having been issued by Gen. McCLELLAN on the arrival of the army. The exterior appearance of the Court-house was far from inviting, and the interior would almost shock a person

of gentle sentiment. The benches had been broken up, and, doubtless, consumed for fuel. The Judge’s desk, surrounded with railing, also the railing around the witness stand, by some chance had not been removed, but the repulsive feature of the scene was the indecorous caricatures and scribbling in charcoal with which the walls and ceiling were literally covered, and which plainly indicated the tastes and sensibilities of the rebels. It was amusing to notice with vigor the bell was rung, by way of compliment, by some Massachusetts boys, whenever a coming regiment appeared in sight.

Directly opposite the Court-house is a large brick building, formerly used as a hotel. Our troops had taken possession of the lower floor, and were seated round a brisk fire, telling stories, smoking pipes, and otherwise enjoying themselves. When my presence was made known, I was asked if I had come to see the old woman. This inquiry was followed by an explanation, by which I was informed that an elderly lady – the owner of the property – occupied a single room above the stairs, and upon being pressed into conversation, would unhesitatingly assert her belief in secession doctrine. She had, concealed in her apartment, Confederate bills, amounting in fictitious value to over \$600. This was the only obstinate case of secession adherent that came within my notice. Generally, the people were either lukewarm or strong for the Union. SURGEONS CLARK and CHAMBERLAIN, of the Fourth Michigan Regiment, for whose hospitality I am indebted, can testify to the kindness of one Union family, who supplied them daily with hot biscuits, fresh milk, preserves and other palatable viands.

The houses in the immediate vicinity of the Court-house appeared to be deserted. They bore the marks of having passed through a rough siege, and in many instances the windows were shattered and the doors broken in. Scarcely any furniture remained, although occasionally isolated articles would be discovered in some secluded corner, and on one occasion, a magnificent piano was revealed. Before reaching the centre of the town this complete desolation and desertion is even more apparent. Farms and orchards have been made into common roads, fruit trees are uprooted, forest burned, fences destroyed, and the whole country presents a melancholy air.³⁶ A large building on the west side of the village has been used as a hospital and in it I am now writing upon a box marked ‘C.S. Hospital Stores.’”³⁷

At first the remaining native inhabitants of Fairfax Court House remained wary of their new guests. However, they quickly adapted and the boldest even took advantage of the opportunity.

*"The citizens of Fairfax are already beginning to derive much benefit from their sales of provisions and stores to our forces. To-day a farmer offered for sale to a Union Quartermaster a quantity of bacon. He demurred to the price fixed by the Quartermaster, saying 'the Confederates paid more.' The Quartermaster offered to pay three times the Confederate price, if Confederate bonds would be taken in payment. The shrewd farmer gladly consented to accept the smaller price in Union currency."*³⁸

Also accompanying the army were many camp followers in the form civilians, reporters and particularly Sutlers, private entrepreneurs who were happy to sell anything and everything to young soldiers at exorbitant prices. In many cases, Sutlers simply took over deserted property and set up shop:

"Fairfax Court House. 6 P.M. – Long trains of forage wagons are coming up. The air is quite warm this evening. The roads are somewhat dusty, and cabs and carriages are coming up, notwithstanding orders against passes."

*Sutlers are bringing forward heavy reinforcements of beer. The INQUIRER is now delivered to the whole army here by J. LUCAS, News Agent, daily, by noon the day it is published, and several thousand are required daily. His office is in the Court House."*³⁹

*A large number of sharpers are following in the wake of the army waiting for pay day. Venders of intoxicating beverages are also in the train and several grog shops have been easily opened at Fairfax Court House. A party of the Thirty-Fourth New York (Oneida county) regiment behaved in a most disgraceful manner at Camp California on Wednesday night last. Some two hundred of the regiment entered the camp of the Fifth New Hampshire regiment and made an unprovoked attack upon Mr. White, the Sutler, and his assistants. The Sutler's tent was demolished. The officers present were unable to suppress the proceedings."*⁴⁰

*A number of itinerant speculators went to Fairfax Court House on Thursday, and took possession of the vacant stores to commence business. The Provost Marshal however ejected them promptly."*⁴¹

Also streaming through the streets of Fairfax Court House were hundreds of newly freed slaves from Centreville, Manassas and beyond. In 1861 the United States Congress passed the first of two Confiscation Acts, which declared all property of the Confederacy subject to confiscation. Slaves, much like livestock were considered chattel, or property. Consequently, when the United States Army happened upon slaves they treated them as a *contraband* of war. As such they were not to be returned to their former masters. The word *contrabands* became synonymous with escaped slaves. These *contrabands* understood that the presence of the Union army meant freedom. Consequently, they flocked to Fairfax Court House and the safety of Union lines. From here they made their way to Freedmen's villages in Alexandria (Arlington) and Washington, D.C. A newspaper correspondent witnessed these newly freed slaves coming into Fairfax Court House:

*"Picking my way carefully through streets full of soldiers, I emerged from the village. The first sight that met my eyes was a family of contrabands, escorted by a group of rejoicing soldiers. Cheers from the squads in the fields on either side sped the parting chattels. First, marched Uncle Tom and Aunt Chloe, their sooty faces in a broad grin on unmitigated delight. After them trudged six or eight younger members of the family, carrying scanty store of goods. 'Where do you come from?' I asked. 'From Virginia, Mas'r,' said a boy of twenty touching his battered hat. He thought, evidently that the Union lines were the boundaries of the State. I met two or three such families during the first mile, the cheers of the soldiers invariably announcing their approach."*⁴²

Accompanying McClellan to Fairfax as part of his entourage were several French dignitaries, Prince Louis Philippe d'Orleans, the Comte (Count) de Paris and his brother, Prince Robert d'Orleans, Duc (Duke) de Chartres, both sons of King Louis Phillipe of France, and their uncle Prince de Joinville. Prince Louis Philippe and Prince de Joinville would later write detailed accounts of their wartime experiences. Several newspaper correspondents, including Bayard Taylor, a correspondent for the *New York Tribune* also traveled with the army and filed several reports. Governor William Dennison, of Ohio, Gen. McClellan's original benefactor, Mrs. McClellan, and several ladies rode out to Fairfax from Washington on March 12th for a visit.^{43,44,45} For the benefit of his guests, Gen. McClellan formed the Army in a line of parade and formally reviewed the troops with Governor Dennison and General Porter.⁴⁶

A United States Congressional delegation, *The Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War*, followed the Army of

the Potomac out to Manassas “to investigate affairs there.”⁴⁷ Travelling in private carriages were U.S Representatives George W. Julian (R-IN), John Covode (R-PA) and Moses Odell (D-NY).⁴⁸ This committee was formed by Congress in December 1861 following the Union defeat at the Battle of Ball’s Bluff near Leesburg, Virginia, in October. The committee quickly became associated with the *Radical Republicans* who wanted more aggressive action in the prosecution of the war. General McClellan was one of their favorite targets, who along with many of his senior general officers, would be called to testify before the committee within the year.

At Centreville and Manassas, contrary to what they had been told by General McClellan, the Members of Congress were shocked by the apparent small number of Confederate troops which had been encamped there as demonstrated by the quarters and fortifications. The committee returned to Washington in a “wrathful mood...from the bloodless field of Manassas...They counted 55 embrasures at Centreville, in 35 of which wooden guns were mounted.”⁴⁹ After touring the Confederate stronghold, *New York Tribune* reporter, Bayard Taylor, who had travelled to Fairfax Court House and visited Manassas with General Slocum’s Brigade, also lamented:

*“For seven months we have waited, organizing a powerful army, until its drill and equipment should be so complete that we might safely advance against the ‘Gibraltar’ of rebellion.....their retreat is our defeat.”*⁵⁰

Privately, in a letter to his wife he was more critical:

*“The fortifications [at Manassas] are a damnable humbug and McClellan has been completely fooled.”*⁵¹

General McClellan Slept Here

Based on a contemporary newspaper account, General McClellan is believed to have spent that first evening, March 10th, sleeping in the old Fairfax County Court House.

Fairfax village was deserted, the ancient Court House, built long ere the Revolution, being occupied by Gen. McClellan and staff, and such unfortunate Bohemians as were permitted to sleep on the floor with the musty records for a pillow.

Boston Herald, March 15, 1862, p. 4, c. 1. ⁵²

General McClellan seems to confirm this in a letter to his wife, Ellen, the next day:

“Fairfax Court House, March 11, 1862

*...None of our wagons came up until after I rode out this morning, so we got along as best as we could last night. Someone lent me some blankets, and somebody else a cot, so I was very well off. To-night I have my own bed.”*⁵³

Contemporary newspaper reports lauded and heralded the Union advance into Virginia with daily accounts:

*“Fairfax Court House at nine P.M. ... the whole army moved at sunrise...all the divisions...converged like the feathers of a fan toward the handle, and are now encamped...about the Court-House....”*⁵⁴

While the fact that General McClellan made his Headquarters at Fairfax Court House during this campaign is indisputable, the exact location of that headquarters has remained a mystery.

In the period photograph (below), Civil War photographer, Timothy O’Sullivan, identified the photo simply as “*Fairfax Court House, Va. House used as a headquarters by Gen. G.B. McClellan and Gen. P.G.T. Beauregard.*”⁵⁵ Anecdotal evidence recently uncovered (See *Council of War at Fairfax Court House*, *Fare Facs Gazette*, v. 8, n. 2, Fall 2011), confirms that this house was the home of Thomas R. Love, also known as *Dunleith*. However, an intriguing contemporary newspaper account also indicates that while at Fairfax Court House, McClellan resided with a “*Dr. Low.*”



Dunleith, the home of Thomas R. Love at Fairfax Court House, built c. 1842. Used as a HQ by Gen. P.G.T. Beauregard (1861) & Gen. George B. McClellan (1862).

Photo credit: Timothy H. O’Sullivan 1863. Photo courtesy: Library of Congress

According to the U.S. Census of 1860 there are no individuals with the name “Low,” or *Lowe*, in Fairfax Court House. There were *Lowe*’s living elsewhere in Fairfax County, but none that were doctors. While this is not conclusive, I believe that “*Dr. Low*” is actually a garbled reference to Fairfax attorney, *T.R. Love*, as Thomas R. Love was often identified in contemporary accounts.

**GEN. M’CLELLAN,
On Monday night, was at Fairfax Court-House, in
the residence of a most notorious Rebel, named Dr.
Low.**

New York Herald-Tribune, March 13, 1862, p. 8, c. 2. ⁵⁶

Late on the evening of March 10th, confirmation of the Confederate withdrawal from Centreville and Manassas reached the Union army headquartered at Fairfax Court House. There was universal disappointment among soldiers of the Army of the Potomac that there would be no engagement with the enemy.

Early the next morning, March 11th, General McClellan issued orders halting the advance and fixing the position of his forces in place.

**“HEADQUARTERS ARMY OF THE POTOMAC
Fairfax Court House, March 11, 1862, 9 a.m.**

General R.B. Marcy, Chief of Staff:

The troops to-night will be as follows: McDowell at Centreville and Germantown; Porter and Franklin here; Smith, Flint Hill; McCall, Hunter’s Mill; Blenker near Burke’s Station; Sumner at Sangster’s or at Union Mills if railway can be repaired in time; Cooke at Centreville; Headquarters here. See that supplies reach. No new orders given the regular infantry and Hunt’s artillery; they halt.

George B. McClellan”⁵⁷

Shortly afterward General McClellan, accompanied by Generals McDowell, Porter, Barnard, Smith, Franklin, and Stoneman, and their respective staffs, went to Centreville and Manassas. They were escorted by several thousand cavalymen of General Cooke and Colonel Davies commands.⁵⁸ The party toured the Confederate works at Centreville and Manassas Junction as well as the battlefield at Manassas. McClellan, who fervently believed that a vast Confederate army awaited him in Northern Virginia, must have been truly dismayed by the relatively small defensive works he encountered at Fairfax; and the works at Centreville and Manassas, while formidable, indicated a much smaller Confederate force than he had

estimated. Adding insult to injury, at Centreville and Manassas the imposing artillery emplacements he encountered consisted of only logs painted to resemble cannons – harmless *Quaker Guns* – which were designed to deceive the prying eyes of long range balloon reconnaissance.

That night McClellan returned to Fairfax Court House and telegraphed Secretary Stanton indicating that he had “*just returned from a ride of more than forty miles.*”⁵⁹ The hasty withdrawal of the Confederate army and the presence of the C.S.S. *Virginia* at Hampton Roads caused McClellan to make adjustments to his Urbana plan. In the same telegraph he informed Stanton that “*circumstances may keep me out here some little time longer.*” The presence of the C.S.S. *Virginia* was of particular concern to McClellan. On March 12th, from Fairfax Court House, he sent several telegrams to Gustavus V. Fox, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, and General John E. Wool, then at Fort Monroe. He inquired of both men if they thought the U.S.S. *Monitor* could keep the C.S.S. *Virginia* “*in check*” in order for Union transports to arrive at Fort Monroe.⁶⁰ McClellan’s chief engineer, Gen. John G. Barnard, also telegraphed Secretary Fox stating the issue more plainly:

*“The possibility of the Merrimack appearing again paralyzes the movements of this army by whatever route is adopted.”*⁶¹

Secretary Fox and General Wool both replied that they thought the *Monitor* would destroy the *Virginia*.⁶² McClellan then summoned his new corps commanders to Fairfax Court House for a Council of War and so notified Secretary Stanton.⁶³

Sometime during the day McClellan was told that the following order of President Lincoln had appeared in that morning’s edition of the *Daily National Intelligencer*, a Washington, DC newspaper.^{64,65,66} He was astonished at what he read:

*“Executive Mansion, March 11, 1862
President’s War Order No. 3*

*Major General McClellan having taken the field at the head of the army of the Potomac until otherwise ordered, he is relieved from command of the other military departments. He retains command of the military department of the Potomac. Abraham Lincoln.”*⁶⁷

That night McClellan telegraphed his wife, Mary Ellen, to reassure her:

*“Do not be at all worried by what has occurred & say nothing about it. I have meant well for my country – & God will not desert me.”*⁶⁸

Council of War

The next morning, March 13th, the new corps commanders of the Army of the Potomac arrived at Fairfax Court House. Gen. McClellan presented his new plan. Because the enemy had withdrawn below the Rappahannock River, McClellan's plan called for repositioning of the Army of the Potomac from Alexandria to Fort Monroe by transport ships for an assault up the peninsula between the York and James Rivers to the enemy capital of Richmond, Virginia. McClellan's new plan had several stipulations. First, the C.S.S. *Virginia* had to be neutralized before any movement could take place. Second, that transport ships sufficient to move the entire Army of the Potomac and all of their equipment simultaneously was required. Third, that the Confederate artillery batteries on the York River be neutralized. And lastly, that a force be left to cover Washington sufficient to "to give an entire feeling of security for its safety from menace." If any of the foregoing could not be accomplished then it was agreed that "the army should then be moved against the enemy behind the Rappahannock at the earliest possible moment."⁶⁹ The plan was unanimously agreed to by all the corps commanders.

McClellan then transmitted the news of this plan to Secretary Stanton by telegraph. Gen. McDowell was also dispatched to Washington to carry the details of plan directly to Secretary Stanton and the President. Stanton, not waiting for the arrival of McDowell, impatiently telegraphed the following to McClellan: "Whatever plan has been agreed upon, proceed at once to execute without losing an hour for my approval."⁷⁰

President Lincoln approved the *Peninsula* plan that evening.⁷¹

McClellan then issued General Order No. 151 to the army which completed President Lincoln's War Order No. 2 calling for the reorganization of the Army of the Potomac into five corps.⁷²

The Peninsula Campaign thus being initiated, General McClellan then revealed to his men in a written address the purpose of the recent march and hinted that something big was about to happen. The address was printed and distributed to the various divisions scattered across Fairfax County. It was read to the troops by staff officers of their respective regiments or brigades during morning parade. The Adjutant, of King's Brigade, McDowell's Division read General McClellan's address (opposite) to the assembled brigade.

On March 15, 1862 Gen. McClellan then ordered the Army of the Potomac back to Alexandria. The advance to Fairfax accomplished little other than preparing both McClellan

Headquarters Army of the Potomac,

Fairfax Court House, Va., March 14, 1862.

SOLDIERS OF THE ARMY OF THE POTOMAC!

For a long time I have kept you inactive, but not without a purpose: you were to be disciplined, armed and instructed; the formidable artillery you now have, had to be created; other armies were to move and accomplish certain results. I have held you back that you might give the death-blow to the rebellion that has distracted our once happy country. The patience you have shown, and your confidence in your General, are worth a dozen victories. These preliminary results are now accomplished. I feel that the patient labors of many months have produced their fruit; the Army of the Potomac is now a real Army,—magnificent in material, admirable in discipline and instruction, excellently equipped and armed;—your commanders are all that I could wish. The moment for action has arrived, and I know that I can trust in you to save our country. As I ride through your ranks, I see in your faces the sure promise of victory; I feel that you will do whatever I ask of you. The period of inaction has passed. I will bring you now face to face with the rebels, and only pray that God may defend the right. In whatever direction you may move, however strange my actions may appear to you, ever bear in mind that my fate is linked with yours, and that all I do is to bring you, where I know you wish to be,—on the decisive battle field. It is my business to place you there. I am to watch over you as a parent over his children; and you know that your General loves you from the depths of his heart. It shall be my care, as it has ever been, to gain success with the least possible loss; but I know that, if it is necessary, you will willingly follow me to our graves, for our righteous cause. God smiles upon us, victory attends us, yet I would not have you think that our aim is to be attained without a manly struggle. I will not disguise it from you: you have brave foes to encounter, foes as well worthy of the steel that you will use so well. I shall demand of you great, heroic exertions, rapid and long marches, desperate combats, privations, perhaps. We will share all these together; and when this sad war is over we will all return to our homes, and feel that we can ask no higher honor than the proud consciousness that we belonged to the ARMY OF THE POTOMAC.

GEO. B. McCLELLAN,
Major General Commanding.

Address of General G.B. McClellan to the Army of the Potomac, March 14, 1862.

Courtesy: Fairfax Museum & Visitors Center, Fairfax, VA.

and the soldiers of the Army of the Potomac for the tougher campaigns of the coming year. Appropriately, it rained the entire way back.

General Philip Kearny & 1st New Jersey Brigade Arrive First Skirmish at Sangster's Station

Simultaneous to the above events, General Philip Kearny and the 1st New Jersey Brigade left Alexandria, Virginia on March 7th for an extended reconnaissance patrol up the Orange and Alexandria Railroad into Fairfax County. This patrol was in direct response to reports from several sources that the Confederate army was about to move, namely through the observations of Thaddeus Lowe at Pohick Church, *contrabands*⁷³ and local Unionist citizens. The one-armed General Kearny, a veteran of the Mexican-American War, led a brigade consisting of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, & 4th New Jersey Regiments and Cos. A & H, of the 1st New York, *Lincoln Cavalry*. The



brigade arrived at Burke Station at 1:00 A.M. on March 8th. After daylight, Gen. Kearny advanced his brigade to Fairfax Station, leaving a portion of the 1st New Jersey Infantry in reserve at Burke's Station. At Fairfax Station he divided his force. Leaving the 4th New Jersey to occupy Fairfax Station, Kearny and the 2nd & 3rd New Jersey Infantry with a squadron of Co. H, *Lincoln Cavalry* continued west along the Orange & Alexandria Railroad to Sangster's Station. The remaining companies of the 1st New Jersey Regiment and Co. A of the *Lincoln Cavalry* were then sent north along Payne's Church Road (Rt. 123) to scout the vicinity of Payne's Church, Farr's Crossroads (Rt. 123 & Braddock Road) and Fairfax Court House. A squadron of cavalry was also sent south along the Payne's Church Road to scout towards the Occoquan River. At Fairfax Court House, the village was found to be recently evacuated by the Confederates. The 4th New Jersey then returned to Payne's Church which it then occupied for the night.

The next morning, March 9th, at Sangster's Station the *Lincoln Cavalry* squadron, led by Lt. Henry B. Hidden and supported by the 2nd & 3rd New Jersey Regiments, moved forward to scout for Confederate pickets. Near the station, they encountered and charged into a small Confederate picket force composed of Co. F, 1st Maryland Infantry. In the engagement Lt. Hidden was killed and 14 members of the 1st Maryland Infantry were made prisoners, including a former cadet of the United States Military Academy, 2nd Lt. Joseph H. Stewart.^{74,75} Gen. Kearny witnessed the charge himself from a nearby hill and wrote of it in his official report.⁷⁶ This small event constituted the only significant engagement during the advance of the army into Northern Virginia.

The next morning, March 10th, an advance guard of Co. B, 1st New Jersey Infantry entered Centreville followed by the balance of that regiment, Gen. Kearny, and the 3rd New Jersey Infantry. The next morning the Gen. Kearny and 3rd New Jersey Infantry continued on to Manassas Junction, Virginia which they found completely deserted by the Confederates.^{77,78} The New Jersey men camped for the night in Manassas. The next morning, March 11th, they moved to Fairfax Court House by way of Centreville. Arriving at Fairfax Court House after dark they went into camp, *Camp Kearny*, with the rest of their brigade near the courthouse.⁷⁹

The news of Kearny's expedition to Sangster's Station and Fairfax Court House was immediately sent to Gen. McClellan who then immediately telegraphed President Lincoln:

*"Hall's Hill, March 9, 1862
To Abraham Lincoln, Edwin Stanton*

*We have Sangster's Station and Fairfax Court House. I am arranging to move forward to push the retreat of the rebels as far as possible. I have ordered railway & telegraph repairs to be pushed tomorrow. I shall return late tonight & start out early in the morning.
G.B. McClellan
Maj. Genl."*⁸⁰

News of Kearny's occupation of Centreville and Manassas was not immediately communicated to the Union troops arriving at Fairfax Court House however, because the telegraph lines from Manassas to Centerville had been cut. In fact, when Col. Averil's 3th & 8th Pennsylvania Cavalry Regiments, which led the advance of the Army of the Potomac, arrived in front of Centreville they were surprised to see a Union flag, courtesy of the First New Jersey Brigade, already flying from on top of the fortifications.⁸¹

When President Lincoln ordered the reorganization of the army, Gen. McClellan offered a divisional command to Gen. Kearny in Gen. Sumner's new corps. Gen. Kearny who had little respect for Gen. McClellan declined, choosing to remain with his brigade.⁸² He informed the commanding general of his decision during a visit to his Fairfax Court House headquarters:

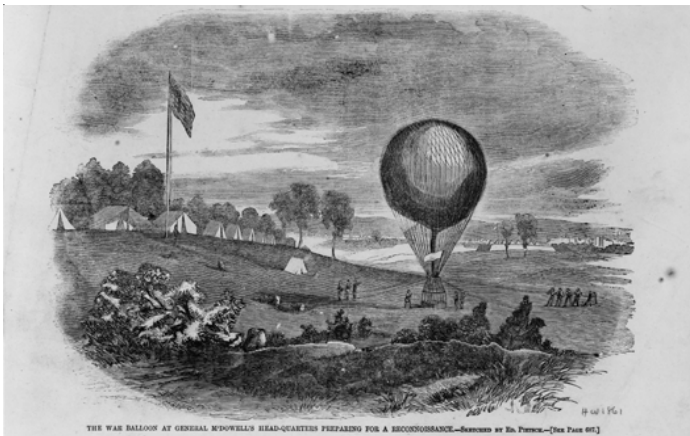
"On Kearny's return from McClellan's headquarters he was obliged to pass by the camp ground. When he appeared on the road the men started to cheer. The General rode into camp, the men surrounding him and manifested their joy in repeated cheers. Kearny was much moved by this manifestation of their love and loyalty and could only say, 'Thank you boys.'" ⁸³

Inexplicably, General McClellan left out all mention of General Kearny's contribution in his official report.⁸⁴

The War Balloon Union at Fairfax Court House

During the Civil War the use of manned balloon flights for reconnaissance was a new technology. The first recorded use of a balloon reconnaissance during the Civil War was a tethered flight of the balloon, the *Union*, which occurred at Taylor's Tavern, Falls Church, Virginia in August 1861.

Reconnaissance balloons were very popular with both Union and Confederate commanders because of the obvious intelligence advantages they provided. Scientist and inventor, Professor Thaddeus Lowe personally persuaded President Lincoln to use this technology during the war. The United States Balloon Corps was created and placed under the supervision of the U.S. Topographical Engineers, but the corps



War Balloon Union.

Photo credit: *Harper's Weekly*, October 26, 1861, p. 679

was always under the personal direction of civilian, Professor Lowe.

Lowe and the United States Army eventually built and used at least half a dozen balloons during the war. They were constructed of fine silk and sealed with a varnish. Two sizes were used, 13,000 and 32,000 cubic feet. Each balloon was given a distinct name (e.g. *Union*, *Intrepid*, *Enterprise*, etc.) and was decoratively painted. Hydrogen gas was used. In the field, it was generated through the use of iron filings dissolved in tanks of sulfuric acid. The hot hydrogen gas which resulted from the chemical reaction was drawn off through a six inch hose and cooled by passing through a secondary tank of water and finally a tertiary, purifying tank, of lime water before being transferred directly into the balloon.⁸⁵ The iron gas generators consisted of two tanks, made of wood and lined with metal, mounted on wagons pulled by four-horse teams. The acid was hauled separately in a two-horse acid cart. The balloon, too, was hauled by a wagon, although early on in the war, balloons were occasionally filled directly at a gas works on the Mall in Washington, D.C. and towed into Virginia. In the field it took just three to four hours to set up and inflate a large balloon. The whole apparatus was technically considered portable, however it was extremely cumbersome and proved difficult to maneuver on the muddy roads of Virginia. This eventually led to the demise of the balloon.⁸⁶

However, on March 9, 1862 a large 32,000 c.f. balloon, the *Union*, was inflated on the Mall in Washington, D.C. and towed across the Potomac River to Fort Corcoran, the official headquarters of the Balloon Corps. From there it accompanied Porter's divisions to Fairfax Court House. Thirty-five men from Porter's Division, the "*balloon boys*," were detailed with the balloon and towed it all the way to Fairfax Court House.^{87,88} The *Union* was the first aircraft specifically designed for war and was decorated with a gigantic spread eagle on one side and

the Stars and Stripes on the other.^{89,90,91} It must have presented quite a spectacle bobbing along the roads to Fairfax Court House.

It has not been documented in any contemporary account, yet found, that the *Union* actually made a reconnaissance flight while at Fairfax Court House. Nor is it even known where the balloon may have been kept while here. But it *was* here, hovering and bobbing near the courthouse. The lack of a documented flight may be due to the fact that by the time the balloon arrived at Fairfax Court House on March 10th, the news of the Confederate withdrawal from Centerville and Manassas had already been verified by the Union cavalry. Therefore, any flight after March 11th would not have been a necessity.

However, General Fitz-John Porter, to whose division the *Union* was assigned, was known to have been a proponent of the balloon for military purposes and was personally enamored with balloon technology. He even made several balloon ascensions himself from other locations in Northern Virginia.



Graffiti drawing of Civil War era balloon at *Blenheim*, the home of the Willcoxon family, Old Lee Highway, Fairfax, VA.

Photo credit: Andrea Loewenwarter

According to Dr. James L. Green, Director of the Planetary Science Division at NASA, and a recognized expert in Civil War ballooning:

*"If Porter had it [the Union] for a few days it is a sure thing."*⁹²

Also supporting the theory that the *Union* was actually used at Fairfax is the documented presence of Thaddeus Lowe, Chief Aeronaut and Jacob C. Freno, Head Aeronaut of the United States Balloon Corps, with the *Union* at Fairfax Court House.⁹³

Another possible tantalizing clue is the presence of a drawing of a balloon (previous page) in the graffiti left by Union soldiers on the walls of the Willcoxon home, Blenheim, on Old Lee Highway. The first documented graffiti coincides with the appearance of the Army of the Potomac at Fairfax Court House in March 1862. Nearly a quarter of the more than one hundred signatures on the walls of the Willcoxon home are from men of the 22nd Massachusetts, 44th New York Infantry and 83rd Pennsylvania Infantry of Porter's division. Could these men have been among the thirty-five men from Porter's division detailed with the balloon *Union*?⁹⁴ Was the *Union* stationed on the high ground at Blenheim in March 1862? Was whoever drew the balloon attempting to document what he actually witnessed while at Fairfax Court House?

(Endnotes)

- ¹ Wagner, Margaret E., Gallagher, Gary W., Finkelman, Paul, eds., Library of Congress Civil War Desk Reference, p. 334, © 2002, Simon & Schuster, NY, NY.
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- ⁷³ **Contraband**: was a term commonly used in the United States military to describe escaped slaves. Congress officially determined, through two Confiscation Acts, that the US Army would not return escaped slaves who made through Union lines to their former Confederate masters and thus classified them as *contraband* of war.
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From the *Home Guard*...

Home Guards Repudiated by the Ladies.

A correspondent sends us a report of the proceedings of meeting of young ladies, held at Legansport, Ind., on the 30th of September, by whom it was

Resolved, That we deem it to be the duty of every young unmarried man to enlist and fight for the honor of his country, his flag, and his own reputation.

2d. That the young men, in this time of our country's peril, have but one *good* excuse for not being a soldier, and that is COWARDICE.

3d That the young man who now fails to respond to the call of his country, is not worthy the kind regrets or the smiles of the young ladies of our native Hoosier State, and that none but ladies of *doubtful age* will smile on such men.

4th. That we will have nothing to do with young men who refuse to go the war, and that "Home Guards" must keep their distance.

5th. That the young man who has not pluck enough to fight for his country, has not the manliness to make a good husband.

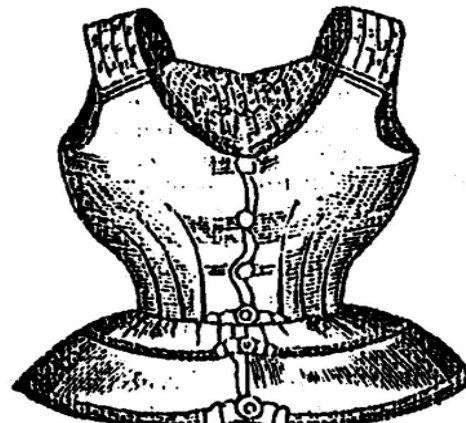
6th. That we will not marry a man who has not been a soldier.

7th. That we will not marry till after the war is over, and then, "Home Guards!" *No! Never!!*

Wisconsin Weekly Patriot, October 26, 1861, p. 3, c. 3.

LADIES' "HOME GUARDS."

PATENTED



DECEMBER 20, 1859.

BROWN'S SUSPENSION WAIST
AND
IMPROVED SKIRT SUPPORTERS,

Cleveland Leader, May 27, 1862, p. 4, c. 3.

At Blenheim Civil War Intrepretive Center...

Saturday, March 24th, 2 p.m.

The Union Army Comes to Fairfax: Soldiers at Blenheim in March 1862

This 150th anniversary will be interpreted by living history re-enactors from the 83rd Pennsylvania Infantry, whose members were the first to sign their names in the Historic Blenheim house. The event also will feature a biographical sketch of Warren Lee Goss, U.S. Army 1st Battalion Engineers, who signed his name at Blenheim in March 1862. Rod Leigh, a Bergen County, N.J. historian, will present the talk on Goss, who became a writer after the Civil War.

Sunday, March 25, 2 p.m.

Everyday Life Behind the Lines 1860 –1861: Baltimore, Washington, Fairfax

What happened to local inhabitants who were thrust into the turmoil of the Civil War? Lloyce Ann West has discovered an interrelationship in the experiences of inhabitants in Baltimore, the District of Columbia, and Fairfax, during this most formative time in our country's history. Miss West is a local genealogist and historian.

**Cosponsored by the Historical Society of
Fairfax County and Historic Blenheim.**

Wednesday, April 11, 7:30p.m.**

Semi-Annual Meeting of Historic Fairfax City, Inc.

**ADAM GOODHEART, author of
1861: The Civil War Awakening**

Cosponsored by HFCI and the City of Fairfax
Sesquicentennial Committee

****Special location at the Stacy C. Sherwood
Center 3740 Old Lee Highway, Fairfax, VA
22030.**

Saturday, April 14, 4p.m.

JOHN V. QUARSTEIN, will discuss the "Battle of the Ironclads"

Book purchase and signing follows.

Sponsored by the City of Fairfax Sesquicentennial
Committee.

Location: Historic Blenheim, 3610 Old Lee Highway.



Update...

As a result of the article on the *Council of War at Fairfax Court House* published in the last issue of the Fair Facs Gazette, Fall 2011, v. 8, n. 2, some new information has been provided by Andrea Loewenwarter of the City of Fairfax Department of Historic Resources. According to a regimental history of the 8th Illinois Cavalry Regiment, *Dunleith*, the home of Thomas R. Love of Fairfax, was destroyed in November 1864.

*"The finest houses in Fairfax were used as headquarters; the men built excellent huts for their protection and barracks were erected for the horses. When building their huts some soldiers asked permission of General Gamble to take bricks from an elegant mansion, the 'Love House,' to construct their chimneys. The General gave permission to take none but loose bricks. In forty-eight hours that fine building was a heap of ruins. When questioned as to exceeding their permit the soldiers replied that they brought away 'none but loose bricks.' A fine church building was in like manner made to contribute to the comfort of the men."*¹

Thank you Andrea Loewenwarter for providing this new information.

¹ *History of the Eighth Cavalry Regiment, Illinois Volunteers, During the Great Rebellion*, p. 316, Hard, Abner, M.D., © 1868, Privately published, Aurora, IL.



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HFCI is a non-profit corporation--a 501c(3) organization. Your membership helps fund preservation of our historic structures and cultural identity.

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