

Caught in the Crossfire: Civilians on the Monocacy Battlefield

(Music)

Joy Beasley- Cultural Resources Program Manager, Monocacy National Battlefield

We're standing in front of the Thomas House which was constructed sometime in the last quarter of the 18th century. C.K. Thomas purchased this farm in 1860. He was a partner in a successful dry goods firm in Baltimore and knowing that the war was coming, he thought that he and his family would be safer if they re-located away from the big city. He was here only a short time before the war actually broke out and because of the Monocacy Junction and the bridges and the other transportation arteries that come together here, there were both Union and Confederate forces that were active in the area throughout the Civil War and of course in 1864 the Battle of Monocacy occurred and much of the heaviest fighting during the Battle of Monocacy was actually focused right here within the historic building cluster of the Thomas farm.

C.K. Thomas' son Samuel and two of his friends had come to visit for the weekend. They were actually captured by the Union Army and impressed into service. They were eventually released and managed to escape to James Gambrill's mill where they hid out for the rest of the battle. They were eventually reunited with their families back here at the Thomas farm. When the battle broke out, C.K. Thomas and his family were forced to hide in the Cellar during the course of the one-day battle.

On the morning of July 9th, a Union officer named Peter Breedenburg came to the Thomas farm to warn the Thomas family that the battle was imminent and he suggested that they hide down here in the cellar, which is where we are now. So at least nine people were hiding down here for somewhere between eight and twelve hours during the course of the battle and all the while, the battle was raging all around them. There were both Union and Confederate sharpshooters that occupied the building. The building was being actively shelled by artillery and the house actually changed hands three times during the one-day course of the battle. And at some point during the course of the day, Peter Breedenburg actually came back here to check on the Thomas family to make sure they were okay and brought them a bucket of ice water.

Mamie Tyler was a friend of the Thomas family who was visiting that weekend and was among the group that hid in the cellar during the battle. She later married Hugh Gatchell, who was one of the three boys briefly conscripted by the Union Army. Many years later, she wrote a memoir of that day and gave the following account:

"Imagine if you can the sight that greeted the eye when released from our prison cell. The soft carpet of grass had become the resting place of dead and dying soldiers, a battlefield in verity and truth. One poor soldier as we passed begged for a pillow to rest his dying brother's head upon, remarking 'I am the last of five brothers, all slain in battle.'"

Barely a month after the battle, a Union soldier named John Rodgers Miegs passed by the farm and in a letter to his mother, he gave the following description:

"I stand at the house of Mister Thomas the other day where our headquarters were camped on the Monocacy battlefield. I have rarely seen a house more scarred by battle than was his. His daughter, Miss Alice, a lovely and accomplished girl was driven for safety with her mother and the rest of the family to the cellar. She declares that she did not feel very badly frightened though the muskets were popping out of the windows and the balls were rattling against the house until a shell crashed through the wall of the dining room and burst just over their heads with only a thin flooring between. Seven shells struck the house and I counted the marks of twenty-six musket balls on one side of the house and discovered many more afterwards. Her father, she thinks, caused them a great deal of unnecessary anxiety by continually going upstairs to see how the fight came on. Our men and the rebels fought hand to hand around the house and the marks of the bloody contest were everywhere visible."

And you can still see bullet holes from the battle on the inside of the house today. Here's one here in the paneling and another one here in the doorway.

Mary Gatchell also remembers nursing wounded and dying soldiers through the course of that evening and into the next day. And that next morning, she and Alice Thomas were asked to be witnesses to the burial of a couple of members of General Gordon's staff who were buried right here somewhere in the front yard of the Thomas farm. They were later reinterred elsewhere.

Throughout the war years, both Union and Confederate forces were active on and around the Thomas farm and the Thomas family, in spite of whatever their personal feelings may have been with regard to the Civil War, had to find a way to exist within that environment.

About a month after the battle, Ulysses S. Grant held a meeting with other Union leaders at the Thomas farm and one morning after he ate breakfast with the Thomas family he lifted young Virginia Thomas onto his lap and inquired:

“Well, Virginia, what are your father and mother? Are they Rebels or Yankees? To which the little girl replied ‘Mama, she’s a Rebel, but Papa, he’s a Rebel when the Rebels are here and a Yankee when the Yankees are here.’”

Tracy Shives- Park Ranger, Monocacy National Battlefield

This is the site of the Worthington farm. Part of the Battle of Monocacy took place on this farm. The family that lived here, they moved to this farm in 1862. The house itself was built in 1851. When they moved here, John and Mary Worthington had three sons. All of them would take refuge in the house during the battle. Early in the morning they could start hearing the cannons firing toward the junction area and around eight o’clock in the morning, John Worthington had his field hands, who were gathering wheat in the fields, come on in and take some of the horses that were on the farm towards Sugarloaf Mountain. Many of the neighbors were doing this, hoping that the Confederate’s army would not take their horses. The field hands took the horses to Sugarloaf Mountain and the rest of the servants and slaves were in the basement with the family, as well as the Manse family. That was the railroad agent who lived at the junction area not too far from here. They took refuge in the cellar. The windows that were above ground were boarded up. Water was brought in barrels and tubs throughout the day, and they were able to watch the battle from the cracks in the boarded windows.

On the afternoon of the Battle of Monocacy, General Breckenridge set up his headquarters here at the Worthington farm. John Worthington came out to greet him, and when he did, upon shaking his hand, a sharpshooter shot at them and knocked the cane out from under John’s hand. At that point, Breckenridge suggested to Worthington that he take cover in the house. Worthington was also concerned about Breckenridge’s safety and suggested that he take cover. Breckenridge reminded him that it was his duty to be here and so Worthington went back into the house and took cover with his family.

While his family took refuge in the basement John Worthington watched part of the battle from the upstairs windows. When the Confederates made their first attack on the Union battle line between the Worthington and Thomas farms, he was watching from the second story and remarked that the Confederates marched into the Union battle line as if on parade. That’s because he could see that Union battle line hunkered down behind a fence, but the Confederates could not see them. After the first attack, obviously, sharpshooters could see upstairs just as well as John Worthington could see out there. The only damage that the interior of this house sustained was from a sharpshooter who took a shot through the window and it went into the plaster in the back wall.

Glenn Worthington was six years old at the time of the battle and he watched in the basement with his family. One of the places we know that he was watching was from the window down here in the basement. It was partially above ground and the battle made quite an impression upon him. After the battle as his family tended to the wounded and the sick, he saw a bayonet in one of the fires and decided that he wanted a souvenir. At that point, he took a stick and tried to retrieve the bayonet from the fire and it caught onto a powder cartridge and it exploded in his face. They wrapped his face and his eyes in bandages and twenty-four hours later they took the off and he was fine, fortunately. He grew up on the battlefield and as veterans came back, they would tell their stories and it became very important to him to have this battlefield memorialized. He became a judge in Frederick and then became part of an advocacy group for the battlefield. In 1928, he went before Congress and also wrote a book about the battle, trying to have it made into part of the military park system. In 1934, a full-length account of the battle that he wrote came out called *Fighting for Time* and at that point the battlefield was named part of the military park system and eventually established within the National Park System.

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