

The Bugle



Quarterly Journal of the
Camp Curtin Historical Society
and Civil War Round Table, Inc.

Fall 2015
Volume 25, Number 3



Five New Wayside Markers Unveiled

"The field upon which we now stand will be known as classic ground, for here has been the great central point of the organization of our military forces. When my administration of public affairs will have been forgotten and the good and evil will be only known to the investigation of the antiquarian, Camp Curtin, with its memories and associations, will be immortal."

- Governor Andrew Curtin, 1865

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Bearss Nominated for Congressional Medal

Our good friend and fellow CCHS member, Edwin Bearss has been nominated for a Congressional Gold Medal in recognition of his contributions to the preservation of American Civil War history and continued efforts to bring our nation's history alive for new generations through his interpretive storytelling. He was nominated by Virginia Congressman Gerald Connolly. You can support Ed's nomination by signing a petition on the Civil War Trust website at www.CivilWar.org.



Marker Project Special Thanks

Many people and organizations helped in bringing our latest wayside marker project to completion. The Camp Curtin Historical Society would especially like to thank:

The Borough of Camp Hill, Hampden Township, and Dr. Joseph Gensbigler, owner of the Albright House, for providing land for the markers.

The Cumberland Valley Visitors Bureau for a tourism grant that provided the major funding for the project.

The reenactors from Cooper's Battery B, 1st Pennsylvania Light Artillery, for a living history encampment in Willow Park and an artillery firing demonstration at Hampden Park.

Cover: Dedication of the Albright House Wayside Marker (front row, left to right) David Getz of the Hampden Township Veterans Recognition Committee, Cooper Wingert, whose research provided much of the information on the markers, Shireen Farr, Chief Operating Officer of the Cumberland Valley Visitors Bureau, James Schmick, President of the Camp Curtin Historical Society, Nathan Silcox, Hampden Township Commissioner. Members of Cooper's Artillery Battery, portraying Union and Confederate soldiers, are in the background.

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Marking Local History

The Camp Curtin Historical Society is dedicated to bringing our local Civil War history to life. In recent years, we erected monuments to the Union and Confederate forces at Fort Couch and the Rupp House. In 2013, we placed a wayside marker at Negley Park telling the story of Fort Washington and the defenses of Harrisburg.

On June 13, we unveiled five new wayside markers at three locations to more fully explain what transpired in eastern Cumberland County during the Civil War. The markers were funded by a grant from the Cumberland Valley Visitors Bureau, with additional donations from the Historical Society of Camp Hill, Capital Area Genealogical Society, Hampden Township Veterans Recognition Committee, Hershey Civil War Round Table, and members of the Camp Curtin Historical Society.

Below are the full texts of the new markers.

SPORTING HILL June 28, 1863 Hampden Park Recreation Building Entrance 5002 Hampden Park Drive, Mechanicsburg

Spearheading the Confederate advance on Harrisburg, Confederate General Albert G. Jenkins captured Mechanicsburg on the morning of Sunday, June 28, 1863. From there, Jenkins split his 1,200 man cavalry force—sending some 300-400 northward via the Hogestown Road to the Carlisle Pike. At the request of his fearful fellow citizens of Hogestown, Jacob Otstot destroyed 45 gallons of brandy so that the incoming invaders could not indulge themselves.



Gen. Jenkins

From Hogestown, this band of Confederates, commanded by Lt. Col. Vincent A. Witcher, continued east on the Carlisle Pike until he

reached a commanding ridge which was the home to the former Salem Church. This church, located at the 6200 block of Carlisle Pike, is the final resting place for numerous local Civil War veterans and features many unique gravestones. From there he eyed Union General Joseph Knipe's force of two New York infantry regiments (the 8th and 71st New York State National Guard) and a Philadelphia artillery unit a little more than a mile and a half away, near the Samuel Eberly barn at present-day 5100 block of Carlisle Pike.

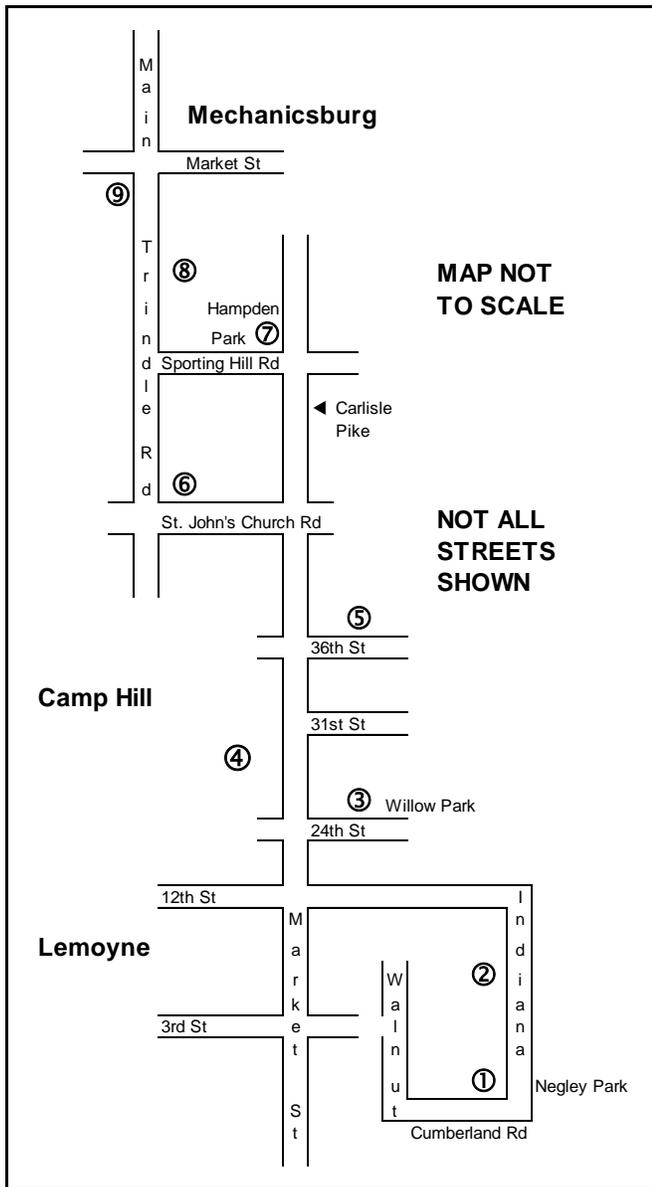


Gen. Knipe

Witcher deployed two Confederate cannons at the church, and the two sides engaged in artillery fire around noon. According to a Confederate lieutenant, General Jenkins rode north from Mechanicsburg to the church where he surveyed the action from atop his horse.

After about half an hour, Knipe left his advanced position and headed back towards Oyster's Point (present-day Camp Hill) and the safety of Union lines. The New Yorkers reported an orderly withdrawal; a local, however, less politely recounted: "They [Knipe's men] were fired on by rebel pickets or imagined they were, when they all took to their heels dropping blankets, knapsacks, canteens, guns and haversacks never looking back till within the fort." The truth may lie somewhere in between.

The New Yorkers fell back to about the present-day 3100 block of Market Street in Camp Hill, at a road junction then popularly known as Oyster's Point. Witcher's Confederates continued their probe towards Harrisburg, and cautiously pursued the New Yorkers eastward on the Carlisle Pike, until setting up camp in the vicinity of the 4700 block of Carlisle Pike, on the high ground above Orr's Bridge.



West Shore Civil War Trail - A variety of markers, placed by the Camp Curtin Historical Society (CCHS), Pa. Historical & Museum Commission (PHMC), and the Pa. Civil War Trails Project, tells the story of the Confederate invasion of eastern Cumberland County and the Union defense of Harrisburg. (New wayside markers in boldface.)

1. Fort Washington CCHS Wayside Marker
2. Fort Couch CCHS Monument
3. **Oyster's Point & White Hall CCHS Wayside Markers**
4. Oyster's Point PHMC Roadside Marker
5. **Albright House CCHS Wayside Marker**
6. Peace Church PHMC Historic Site
7. **Sporting Hill CCHS Wayside Markers**
and PHMC Roadside Marker
8. Jenkins CCHS Monument at Rupp House
9. Capture of Mechanicsburg Pa. Civil War Trails
Wayside Marker

SAMUEL ALBRIGHT HOUSE

50 North 36th Street, Camp Hill

(Private residence but marker may be seen on the east side of the house.)

In the late days of June 1863, Samuel Albright's house and farm were used as a Confederate bivouac site and an artillery position. In the 1860 Census, Samuel Albright was listed as born "about 1823" and living in what was then East Pennsboro Township. William Eppley rented the Albright House and resided there during the Confederate invasion.

In early June 1863, Confederate General Robert E. Lee began shifting his units northward through the Shenandoah Valley and into Maryland and Pennsylvania.



By June 27, Lt. Gen. Richard S. Ewell's Confederate Second Corps had reached Carlisle. On the morning of June 28, Brig. Gen. Albert G. Jenkins, leading the army's vanguard, moved east towards Harrisburg and captured Mechanicsburg. He then split his brigade, sending some to the Trindle Road and the remainder to the Carlisle Pike.

White Hall citizen Zacheus Bowman ventured from his home westward on the Carlisle Pike. He ran into advance Union pickets on his westward walk to the Albright House. Bowman recalled: "We went up to Albright's house; Eppley was the tenant. We saw a lot of milk in the cellar of the house. We heard a calf bawling in the barn and went out to let it loose. The calf was loose, though. I told Philip [Kepford] to go into the house and get a crock of milk for it. He got the milk and we fed the calf."

Bowman next gives very good detail as to the farm's condition during the Confederate occupation: "There was a little house in the field, we went around to the barn. We had to go around the upper part of the house and met the 'Johnnies' there face to face. Philip started to run, and I said

‘Don’t run, you fool!’ We saw the battle line of the rebels, and the outside pickets,—I guess about a half dozen. . . .”

Lt. Col. Vincent A. Witcher, 34th Virginia Cavalry Battalion, then decided to unlimber his artillery. With him, he had two pieces of Jackson’s Kanawha Horse Artillery. These pieces, according to Lt. Micajah Woods of the battery, were a howitzer under command of Lt. Randolph Blain and a three inch Ordnance Rifle (below) under command of Woods himself.



Woods also wrote of his piece: “We remained with our brigade for a day or two [in front of Harrisburg], attacking the enemy at exposed points each

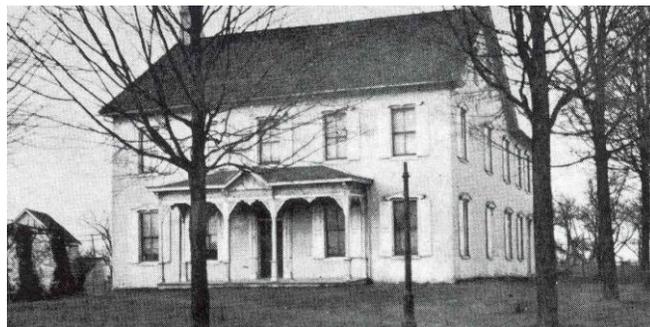
day. During all the Engagements our Battery played a conspicuous part, and especially the rifled gun in my section, which was called upon more often than the other pieces because of greater range. The Enemy brought little artillery to bear against us hence we had a fair chance to make good shots with comparatively little exposure.”

From Oyster’s Point Nicholas Rice of the 30th Pennsylvania Militia could see “. . . [a] column of cavalry and formed along a rise of ground, then a battery swung into position, and tested our metal with a few well directed shot[s] . . .”

Witcher camped behind the Albright House. He returned on June 29 and kept up a fire for between one and two hours. Later, Witcher led a cavalry charge to Oyster’s Point from the Albright House with his own 34th Virginia Cavalry Battalion. This diversion allowed Jenkins to observe Harrisburg’s defenses from Slate Hill and the heights west of New Cumberland. Early the next day, June 30, Witcher retired to Silver Spring Creek and later fought at Sporting Hill. This ended the Confederate occupation of the Albright House.

SKIRMISH OF OYSTER’S POINT Willow Park, 24th & Walnut Sts., Camp Hill

Confederate General Albert G. Jenkins’ trot towards Harrisburg was stalled as he neared Oyster’s Point, named for a tavern owned by the Oyster family at the junction of the Carlisle Pike and Trindle Springs Road. In 1863, these two roads met to form a fork or a “point” around the 3000 block of Market Street. Recognizing the strategic advantage of controlling these roads, select Union forces advanced from the defenses of Harrisburg and gathered in the vicinity. The Oysters’ quaint tavern, a mere three and one-half miles from the state capital, would soon become the focal point of hostilities in the hours before Gettysburg.



Oyster’s Point Tavern (no longer standing)

The nearby community was then known as White Hall, consisting of about a dozen homes. In the days before the Confederate arrival, Union militia had looted and plundered the local homes and farmsteads. “It seemed as if our soldiers thought they were in an enemy’s country,” recalled one exasperated local. “The contents of the store of David Denlinger were strewn along the picket line... Packages of tea, coffee, muslin, calico could have been obtained... with but the asking for them...” The New Yorkers and Pennsylvanians alike freely took preservatives, meats and blankets, and frequently killed local livestock at their own decree.

Fighting at Oyster’s Point commenced in the early afternoon of June 28, 1863. Confederates lobbed artillery shells into the vicinity from the Peace

Church and the Samuel Albright House on North 36th Street. Confederate skirmishers were countered both north and south of the Pike by Union pickets, and the lines moved back and forth throughout the afternoon, with skirmishing primarily between the 3100 and 3300 blocks of Market Street. On June 29th, General Jenkins was under orders to scout Harrisburg's defenses and notify the infantry in Carlisle, and therefore devised a ruse. For about two hours he bombarded the Union position, and then some Confederates on horseback charged down the Pike, driving back frightened Union militia, and getting as far as Limekiln Lane (present-day 28th Street, Camp Hill). This marked the farthest advance toward Harrisburg by any Confederate force. They remained under fire for at least another hour, effectively occupying the Union attention while General Jenkins rode south to observe the defenses of Harrisburg.

SPORTING HILL June 30, 1863
Hampden Park Recreation Building Entrance
5002 Hampden Park Drive, Mechanicsburg

After an eventful two days of probing Harrisburg's defenses, Confederate General Albert G. Jenkins had received the welcome orders to stand down. Lieutenant General Richard Ewell's two Confederate infantry divisions currently in Carlisle, numbering some 15,000 men, would be marching on the state capital on the morning of June 30, 1863, or so Jenkins had been told. But later on, the fateful orders from General

Robert E. Lee arrived for Ewell to turn back and link up with other Confederate forces near Gettysburg.

Inexplicably, Jenkins had not been informed; he merely withdrew a short distance west to the cover of Silver Spring Creek, where he and his men waited for Ewell's troops to overtake them and perhaps mount an assault on Harrisburg's defenders. In the meantime, Union commander General Darius Couch had reports from scouts of Ewell's new course, and he decided to turn the tables, probing to find, and perhaps cut off, Jenkins. For the mission, he chose the inexperienced General John Ewen and his similarly green brigade of New York State National Guardsmen. Like Ewen, most of these New Yorkers were businessmen and store clerks from the streets of New York City, and few had ever been tested in battle.

In the early afternoon, some advance Union cavalymen had clashed with Jenkins' outer picket posts. Jenkins panicked as he learned simultaneously that Ewell was no longer supporting him in Carlisle. He dispatched his largest regiment with some 500 men to Carlisle to protect his retreat route. Fearing a large Union force would soon be bearing down on him from the east, Jenkins ordered Lieutenant Colonel Vincent Witcher and a motley assembly of some 300 men and 2 cannons to "hold the enemy in check at all hazards."



The two Sporting Hill markers are at the entrance to the Recreation Building in Hampden Park off Sporting Hill Rd.

Marching sluggishly on the Carlisle Pike, Ewen's 1,400 New Yorkers did not arrive at Sporting Hill until around 3:30 p.m. on the afternoon of June 30. Once there, they were welcomed with a volley of musket fire from 50 Confederates taking cover in Moses Eberly's barn. Witcher and the main contingent of his Confederates had positioned themselves to the rear, in Gleim's Grove. Pinned down on the Carlisle Pike, two companies of New Yorkers were moved into the woods near the Confederate position (along present-day Van Patten Drive).

Later, Ewen deployed his full brigade, with about 400 men south of the Pike and even more north of the Pike, directly fronting the barn. Several men, including a drummer boy, were wounded in the northern wing. Witcher's Confederates held their own, remarkably, until a Philadelphia artillery unit, commanded by Captain Henry Landis (brother-in-law of General John Reynolds of Gettysburg fame) arrived. They commenced to load their piece fuse first (essentially backwards) but were stopped, given a brief lesson, and their first shot struck the barn square in the center. The bother-some Confederates evacuated the barn and eventually left the field after a brief artillery duel. Some 16 dead Virginians lay on the field of battle, and Witcher brought anywhere from 20-30 wounded with him, some of whom died on the retreat. Ewen's New Yorkers suffered no fatalities, but 11 men were slightly wounded.

WHITE HALL SCHOOL

Willow Park, 24th & Walnut Sts., Camp Hill

In May 1866, the White Hall School (above right) for soldiers' orphans opened in the 2100 block of Market Street in what is now Camp Hill. Within a year it had 121 boys and 80 girls under its roof, with a faculty of five and staff of twelve. The students wore uniforms and adhered to a strict schedule of academic classes and trade instruction for the boys and homemaking skills for the girls. Students were encouraged to use the library of 350 books, participate in singing and music, and attend religious services at the nearby Camp Hill Church of God.



Drawing of White Hall School

They also worked on the school's farm and grew and preserved much of their own food as part of their practical education. Each year the students were tested, including a public oral examination. Being the closest school to Harrisburg, governors and legislators often visited to ensure that standards of care and education were met. At age sixteen, students graduated and were sent into the world, thus known as "Sixteeners."



The new Oyster's Point and White Hall School wayside markers flank the original Sixteeners Monument in Camp Hill's Willow Park.

The White Hall School closed in 1890 when enrollment became too small, and the remaining students were sent to other schools. The alumni "Sixteeners" of the White Hall School erected a small monument to the school in 1926 in Willow Park. Originally, there was a small statue of a student in a military uniform on the top of the monument, but it disappeared years ago.

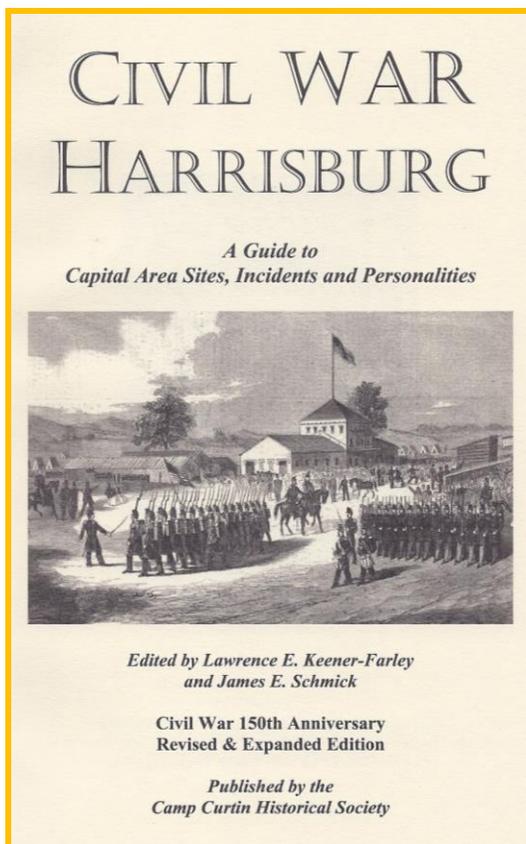
For pictures of the dedication ceremonies and close-ups of the markers, visit our website at www.CampCurtin.org.

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