

## THE SKIRMISH AT LOCKRIDGE MILL IN WEAKLEY COUNTY, TENNESSEE

May 6, 1862

William W. Chester

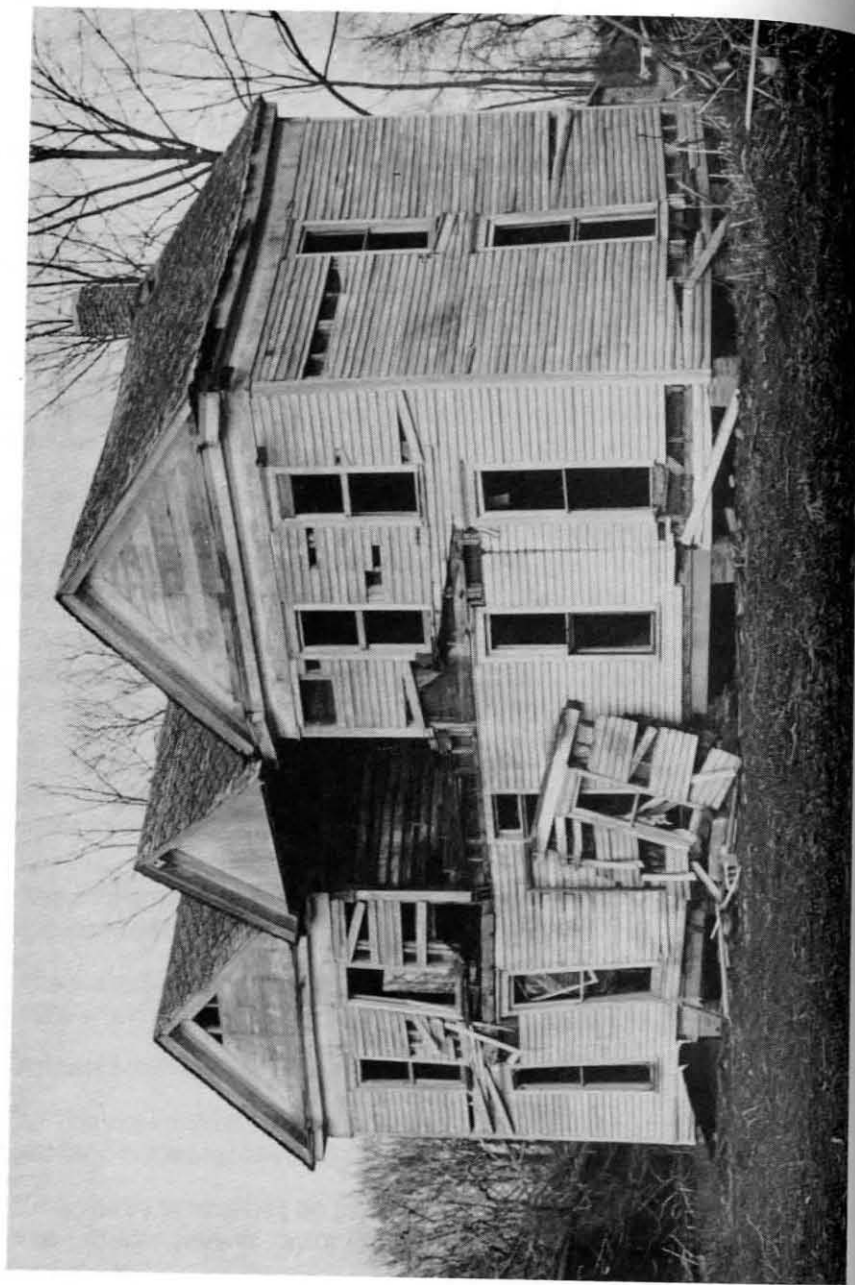
There were hundreds of skirmishes that occurred in remote areas during the War Between the States. On each side, many men fought and died in these skirmish areas. Many of these areas have since become smothered by wilderness and forgotten by historians. The epitome of such is Lockridge Mill in Weakley County, Tennessee. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to unfold this skirmish historically in order that future generations of the area will have a greater appreciation of local history.

A brief knowledge of the early activity of the Fifth Iowa Cavalry Regiment is necessary to the understanding of the skirmishes at Lockridge Mill. This regiment, originally named the "Curtis Horse" but subsequently called the "Fifth Iowa Cavalry," was organized at Benton Barracks, near Saint Louis, Missouri, on December 20, 1861. The field officers were Colonel W. W. Lowe, Lieutenant Colonel M. T. Patrick and Major Carl Schaffer de Boernstein. In addition, Charles C. Nott was Captain of Company F and Henning Von Minden, Captain of Company G. The other line officers were selected for the additional companies prior to the Fifth Cavalry's moving to Fort Henry, Tennessee, on February 11, 1862.

After the fall of Fort Donelson, the regiment was engaged in scouting. A few prisoners and horses were captured, but the regiment did not encounter a significant body of Confederates during the period of operations.

On March 27, 1862, immediately after the battle of Paris, Companies C, I and M under the command of Major Alfred B. Brackett were conveyed by steamer to Savannah, Tennessee. This detachment rendered valuable service to the Telegraph Corps during the advance of the Union army from Pittsburg Landing to Corinth, Mississippi. On June twelfth the detachment marched toward Humboldt, Tennessee, where it arrived on June fifteenth and went into encampment. After capturing several Confederate soldiers, large quantities of sugar, tobacco and other property, this detachment of three companies was relieved from duty there and assigned to the regiment at Fort Heiman, Tennessee, on August 29, 1862.

At the same time Major Brackett was operating with the Union army in Mississippi, other detachments from the Fifth Iowa Cavalry Regiment were operating in Northwest Tennessee. For example, on May 3, 1862, in accordance with orders from Colonel W. W. Lowe, a detachment under command of Major Carl Schaffer de Boernstein, consisting of Companies E under Captain Nott, F under Captain Haw, and G under Captain Von Minden left Camp Lowe to reconnoiter beyond Paris and in the vicinity of the upper North Fork of the Obion River.



Lockridge Mill Home  
March, 1862

During the afternoon, the detachment was ordered to the Atkins farm, some three miles west of Paris. After food for the companies and forage for their animals were obtained, the detachment bivouacked in nearby woods for two nights.

Although the weather May fifth was rainy and drizzly, the detachment headed for Como, Tennessee. This was new country for most of the Federals. While the residents seemed cheerful, the Union officers doubted any expression of patriotism in this part of Tennessee. By noon, the troupes reached Como, where they stopped in several barnyards of secessionists. Again Companies E, F and G found food and forage. Most of these supplies came from the Hurt farm two miles east of Como. After a few hours' rest, Major Boernstein's orders were to push westward toward Dresden, Tennessee, with Captain Nott and a small party to serve as rear guard.

Near night, Captain Nott was forced to make rapid retreat toward the main detachment because three thousand Confederate riders were reported at Caledonia. A messenger was sent to inform the Major of the gravity of the Captain's situation.

The cavalry detachment's main body, bivouacked at the Irving farm, was soon joined by Captain Nott and his troops. After consultation with Captain Nott and other officers, Major Boernstein decided to proceed toward Dresden.

The road toward Dresden plunged down into dense woods on the dark, rainy night. Because wagons became snagged or entangled in stumps and trees, it was three in the morning before the troops reached Dresden. Pickets were posted on the different roads; horses were crowded into barns, where the men, soaking wet, rested on the hay.

At one in the afternoon of May sixth, the detachment moved northward toward Paducah, Kentucky. Unlike the road from Como to Dresden, the road toward Kentucky was of a good, hard surface. As the sun dried the men's wet clothing, the spring afternoon appeared promising for the Union men's continued retreat. At 5 p.m., the sun slipped lower into the west as the Union column descended into the valley of the Obion River.

Winding between great oak and elm trees, the column came upon Lockridge Mill and a four-hundred-acre farm owned by Marshall Lockridge and operated by a number of Negroes. On the right was a large white house surrounded by a garden; on the left sat a barnyard enclosed by a high rail fence. The mill was located near the bridge spanning the Obion River.

The detachment encamped for the night near the Lockridge home. Company F, serving as rear guard, camped half a mile from the other two companies on the road toward Dresden. Pickets were thrown out as part of the usual precautions taken to guard against a surprise attack. The men from Companies E and F picketed their horses in the yard and prepared supper.

A short time later, while troops were eating and relaxing, a Confederate Cavalry force of 2,000 men under command of Colonel Clayborne attacked the rear guard and main camp at the same time. Captain Nott recalls the attacks as follows:

"Saddle up, and fall in," I shouted to the men; "and you men in the house call the major; tell him we are attacked."

My men were in line, but a disorderly stream of flying men and riderless horses was pouring past. I looked for the major, but he was not in sight, and I found myself the ranking officer there. "I must act, it is not time to wait for orders," I said, as I looked up the valley, and saw the head of the rebel column. They were coming on a gallop, their shotguns and rifles blazed away, and their wild yells were louder than the volleys they fired. Between us were the last of the rear guard and the horses of those who had fallen, "wild and disorderly." Turning the other way, I saw the river and the bridge. "We must check their advance," I thought, "and then cross the river and tear up the bridge; it is our only hope. I will charge them." I touched my good horse as I drew my sabre, and he flew round. I was giving the orders, "Draw sabre. By platoons, left wheel," and the squadron was executing them, when the men of the second squadron rushed frantically round the barnyard fence and into my line. In an instant all was confusion. There was no time to restore order, the rebels were not the width of a city block distant, and their buck shot flew thickly, wounding men and horses, while there rose the thundering sound of cavalry at full speed. I still had a hope of the bridge. In another instant they would be upon us. I cried, "gallop and form across the bridge."

Across the narrow bridge we went safely, though it swayed and trembled under the trap of galloping horses. As the men wheeled and reformed, I moved to the right and looked back. I saw, far up the valley, a solid unbroken column of perhaps a thousand men. Between them and the bridge were a few men, and many flying horses, which ran madly. The enemy were armed with guns, and my men had but sabres and pistols.

It was a fearful ride across the valley. The road, level and straight, did not shelter us from the enemy. Trees had fallen across it, and there were deep bog holes, into which horses plunged and fell. As you rode, you came upon a man whose horse had fallen in leaping a tree, or mired in struggling through a mud hole. Here was one who had risen and was trying to escape to the nearby woods, and there another, who could not extricate himself from his fallen horse. The enemy fired upon prostrate men and it looked as if no quarter was given.

At length we emerged from this, to a dark vale, and felt our horses tread firm ground. We had gained a little on the enemy, and were just beyond the reach of their guns. I got the men formed into a column and the retreat became orderly.<sup>1</sup>

A short distance from the river, the retreating Federals were attacked once again by a small party of Confederates. During this attack, Captain Nott was severely wounded when his horse fell upon him. After suffering almost incredible hardships, he reached the Union lines at Paducah, Kentucky.

Major Boernstein was mortally wounded near the bridge and died the next day. Captain William W. Haw, while bravely endeavoring to cut his way through the Confederate ranks, fell at the head of his company severely wounded in the head, back and side, and was taken prisoner. Captain Von Minden was also wounded, and captured, with fourteen other men of his company. All in all, twenty-four of their number were killed and wounded while thirty-eight managed to cut their way out and escape.

The dead were buried in unmarked graves across the road from the Lockridge home. The prisoners were all sent to Jackson, Mississippi, and with the exception of the officers, were paroled and rejoined the Fifth Iowa Cavalry Regiment on June seventh. The officers were held captives until October fifteenth, when they were paroled to rejoin their regiment in January, 1863.

The untimely death of Major Boernstein was deeply deplored by the regiment. His body was forwarded to Dubuque, Iowa, and attended to the tomb by a large concourse of citizens.

One of the Federal troops, a Shiloh veteran name John George Bauer, having been wounded and left at the battle scene, was befriended by a woman living in the Lockridge community. She treated his wounds for a few days and on his departure gave him a patchwork quilt to use as a blanket. This quilt has remained in Mr. Bauer's family and is now in the possession of Mr. John Graber of Burnsville, Minnesota.

Upon learning of the disaster that had occurred to the detachment of three companies, Colonel Lowe started in pursuit of the enemy, with the remaining force of his Fifth Iowa Cavalry Regiment. When within four miles of Paris, however, the Colonel received an order from General Halleck to abandon the pursuit. Since Union Colonel Clayborne had retreated to Jackson, Tennessee, Federal troops under Colonel Lowe were not deemed large enough to risk an advance so far into the interior of the state as Paris. Colonel Lowe's Fifth Iowa Cavalry Regiment then returned to Camp Lowe, between Paris and the upper fork of the Obion.<sup>2</sup>

1. Nott, Charles C. *Sketches of the War*, New York: Anson D.F. Randolph, 1965, pp. 172-132.

2. *Report of Adjutant General of Iowa*, 1865, Vol. 2, Page 977.

## FRED CULP AND PERPETUATION OF THE CROCKETT TRADITION

Marvin L. Downing, Ph.D.

Prominent among Gibson Countians maintaining the David "Davy" Crockett tradition has been Fred Culp of Route 1, Trenton, Tennessee. His two publishing vehicles for presenting information about Crockett have been **Gibson County, Past and Present** and a series of five articles in the Trenton **Herald-Register** during 1967. The first article covers general biographical material about Crockett and his family. In a second article Culp concerns himself with the travels of Smith Rudd of Bronson, Michigan, to learn personally as much about Crockett as possible during the 1880s.<sup>1</sup>

The third and fourth articles cover a distasteful debt controversy between Crockett and the Reverend David Gordon that surfaced in an area newspaper during Davy's successful bid for the U.S. Congress in 1829. During late September, 1829, the **Jackson Gazette** published the Congressman's account of differences between the two men. As Culp informs his readers, Gordon helped form the Old Gibson Primitive Baptist Church in 1825, and the Eldad Missionary Baptist Church in 1828, an interesting activity considering doctrinal differences between those Baptist churches. Davy accused the parson of having been partisanly active during the 1829 campaign and having set aside his religious beliefs in order to "take a set at me."

The Congressman was especially distressed at the Reverend's actions because Crockett had befriended the minister several times. The first occasion happened during the autumn of 1824, when Gordon, whom Davy described as "the old man," met with Crockett about locating 235 acres for Gordon to settle on. An uncompensated Crockett marked out a plot onto which Gordon moved, and Davy was proud to have the Gordons as neighbors. However, when the parson's wife—a very fine woman in Davy's opinion—died, inexplicably the widower became hostile to Davy. Crockett did not know what the clergyman's problem was—derangement, dotage, or otherwise—but something caused him "to fall out with and traduce the reputation of his best friend,"—Crockett.<sup>2</sup>

Davy continued recounting his kindnesses toward the Gordons. During the household move to the new neighborhood in 1824, the Gordon family members overworked themselves so greatly that most of them were sick. In fact, the father was in such bad health for weeks that neighbors thought he would not live. Davy supplied the unfortunate family with water daily until a well could be dug. Additionally, in the crisis stage of the illness, Davy twice rode about forty miles to Huntingdon for a doctor to examine Gordon and his daughter. Thus, Davy concluded, "I was pleased and gratified I had it in my power to accommodate him and render what I conceived to be very essential service to himself and his family."

At this point Davy introduced other persons involved in the debt difficulty. David C. Phillips, a county resident who called himself a millwright, for an