



Bringing Northwestern Virginia's History  
into the Classroom

*It happened near me . . .*

## Pieces of the Past from Where *I* Live

**County:** Loudoun

**Date:** December 3, 1864

**Topic:** The Civil War--life at home in Northern Virginia

**Background:** In November 1864, U.S. General Philip

Sheridan ordered that all of western Loudoun County be *burned*—all barns, sheds, chicken coops, stables, corn cribs, grist mills, saw mills, crops, farm equipment—everything but houses. Western Loudoun county housed, fed, and hid Mosby's Rangers [43<sup>rd</sup> Virginia Cavalry] of the Confederate Cavalry (soldiers on horses) who made many sneak attacks on the U.S. Army as it invaded Virginia. The Rangers lived on people's farms; now they would be burned out. There were some people who sided with the Union in Western Loudoun who also had their barns burned and their farm animals taken. Here is a letter telling of it from Carrie Taylor, a Unionist Quaker girl who lived south of Purcellville. She is writing to her sister Hannah off in Philadelphia.

*My Dear Sister Hannah,*

*We have passed through three of the most . . . exciting days and are now waiting to see what is yet to come. We still have a roof over our heads but we have been fearing every day that we would not have much longer. [For] word came last third day [Quaker for **Tuesday**] evening that the Yankees were coming and were burning everything before them. We felt quite uneasy though could not believe the full extent of what they were doing, but the next evening we heard it again and directly saw the smoke rising all around us from our neighbors' barns, stockyards, and cornfields. It was too true!*

*Alice and I went to work packing up; we felt sure the house would go if they burned the barn . . . The next day, fifth day [Thursday], about one o'clock [Union cavalry] came riding up to the house by the dozens. Our feelings cannot be described. We went out to talk to them; they first wanted our horses. We begged them out of taking one we had here beside our blind horse, and they rode away. [But] others kept coming . . . A few minutes more and the smoke was rising from every shock of corn in the field. We soon spied a soldier riding around the barn taking a survey of it. We all went out to him and began to beg him not to burn it. He said, "I am an officer and I have orders to burn." Alice and I got around him and began begging as though we were begging for our lives . . .*

*Oh what destruction there is in the neighborhood! Everything was burned up in Uncle B C's barn; wagons, all kinds of farming implements [equipment] . . . They took all his cows and cattle and sheep, a colt, his watch, and they are just stripped. Uncle Yardley's barn is burned also. Richard Henry's barn, H. Smith's, William Smith's, Thomas Smith's . . . [and] Asa Moore Janney's mill, all burned .*

*Alice says she has much to tell thee and would write but is too near crazy. Do write me.*

*Lovingly, Thy Sister--Carrie Taylor.*



The Potts-Neer Mill near Hillsboro in the Loudoun Valley was burned by Union “barn burners” on November 30, 1864 during the burning raid. The miller was away; Mrs. Neer fed the Union officers and soldiers lunch, hoping they would not burn the mill. They told her not to bother with washing the dishes—they then burned the mill, which caught the house on fire and destroyed both. Above, the mill still sits in ruins by the side of the road, photographed at Hallowe’en. Many of those who were burned out were Quakers, attending the Goose Creek Friends Meeting seen at left below in today’s Lincoln (then the village of Goose Creek). Samuel Janney, an abolitionist Quaker who ran a girl’s school in his large home “Springdale” at Goose Creek seen below at right, may have helped slaves escape on the Underground Railroad. There are unexplained hiding places to be found in Springdale. Still, Union soldiers burned his barn. Fellow abolitionist and neighbor Yardley Taylor suffered the same fate. Union soldiers were sure these Quakers and their German-American neighbors were selling grain to Mosby as horse feed. Often, they were forced to do so. Some who suffered the most in the Civil War were those who never rebelled at all, wishing just to be left alone—by both sides.



## Making Sense of Evidence from the Past.

1. Quakers were a Protestant religious group who had settled Loudoun in colonial times. They did not believe in war or slavery, and treated men and women equally. Find two examples of differences in the way they write English from people today.

One—

Two--

2. Quakers send their older children to Philadelphia for more schooling (like sister Hannah) and always have. We know as Quakers they were against the Civil War, but do you think they tended to *lean* towards the Confederates or the Union? Why?
3. Why burn out a Quaker farm family who does not support the War?
4. Why burn a [grist] mill, like Asa Moore Janney's? What *is* a *grist* mill?
5. With no farm animals or horses left and their crops burned, how will this family survive the winter?
6. What do you think will be the *result* of burning Loudoun's farms and grist mills? What will this burning raid *do*? Will it work the way the Union army thinks?