



Bringing Northwestern Virginia's History
into the Classroom

It happened near me . . .

Pieces of the Past from Where *I* Live

County: Loudoun

Date: 1865

Topic : Early Days of Reconstruction after the Civil War

Background: The Civil War ended in April 1865 and soon all efforts were devoted to reconstructing the defeated South. With the end of slavery and the massive destruction brought by the War, Loudoun's newspaper *The Democratic-Mirror* had choice tidbits.

June 1865—**Leesburg begins to wear the appearance of former times.** The hum of business gladdens the ear as in days of yore. There is a post-office in Leesburg, and a daily mail to Point of Rocks [Maryland], placing us once more in communications with the world at large.

June 1865—**General Orders, No. 2, Hd.Qrts., Military Sub-District of Leesburg, Va., May 18th, 1865**—The delusion which many Colored persons, formerly slaves, are laboring under concerning their rights and privileges . . . has deemed necessary to correct it, and explain what are the true relations their changed condition places them in towards the Government and their former masters . . . Their error consists mainly in the belief that with their liberty they acquire . . . rights in the property of their former masters, and that they are entitled to live with and be [supported] by them, without being obliged to labor or give any remuneration for their support. Many even believe that the entire property of their former owner belongs now to themselves, and that the owner remains with them only by their sufferance . . . *It is, therefore,* stated for the information and guidance of Negroes, formerly slaves, and for the benefit of themselves, their former masters and society where they live, that the . . . existing laws . . . make[s] them *free*, but [does] not . . . give them any claim whatever upon . . . the property of their formers owners. They are at liberty to make any contract or agreement concerning themselves that a white man may, and equally bound to abide by it. Their former master has the right to refuse them anything that he might deny to a perfect stranger, and is no [longer] bound to feed, clothe, or protect them . . . They may remain with him if he and they both agree on the terms . . .

September 1865—**Confiscation in Loudoun**—We see in the Richmond *Republic* of Friday last, over five columns of advertised property confiscated in Virginia by the United States Government, 2 ½ columns of which, embracing 81 pieces—are in Loudoun county alone. We had hoped that the Government did not [plan to carry out] the provisions of this law, passed at a time when civil war raged throughout the land, and passions and prejudices of men were inflamed . . . it seems we were mistaken . . .

October 1865—**Public Lecture**—A lecture will be delivered in Hillsboro', at the Methodist Church, on the 21st just, by J. MORTIMER KILGOUR,; for the purpose of raising the means to procure a Leg for THOMAS TORRETSON, and an Arm for RODNEY MATHEWS, young men who in their devoted service to the cause which they espoused have been maimed for life. Those whose sympathies were with them and the South . . . cannot fail to come forward and contribute something towards purchasing a substitute for their flesh and bone . . .

November 1865—**A young man of this County was arrested in Leesburg**, on Saturday last, by military authority, confined in the guardhouse until Monday morning , and then sent to Winchester, in irons, for huzzahing for Jeff. Davis. It was improper conduct on the part of the offender . . . but we had hoped the day of military arrest had passed.



Oak Hill, above, a handsome residence built by President James Monroe in 1823 near Aldie, belonged to Confederate Colonel John Fairfax in 1865. It was one of the properties listed as going to be confiscated by the U.S. government. Below, the Middleburg office of the Freedmen's Bureau opened in 1865 to help former slaves in southern Loudoun.



Making Sense of Evidence from the Past.

1. Could mail be sent from Virginia to Maryland (or Baltimore, Philadelphia, or New York, Americans top three cities) legally during the War? Why is the re-establishment of mail service between Leesburg and Point of Rocks in June of 1865 important?
2. Notice General Orders No. 2 from the Union occupation forces. What problems are white farmers evidently having with their former slaves? What promises had been made by some politicians to the slaves for after the War? Are these involved?
3. In General Orders No. 2, what is the U.S. Government telling the freed slaves they need to do?
4. Did confiscation of the land of Confederates whose property was worth at least \$22,000—81 properties in Loudoun—*last*? Was it ever returned to them? Explain.
5. Traditionally, it is said the 622,000 soldiers lost their lives in the Civil War. How many like *Thomas Torretson* and *Rodney Matthews* were maimed or wounded? Did artificial limbs (arms/legs) exist in 1865? When were they invented?
6. Who was *Jeff Davis* that a man was arrested after the War for huzzahing? Who would have arrested him? Were there other regulations governing the occupied South to *de-Confederate-ize* the Southern population? What would be the result?