

Physical Remains of the Confederate Invasion of 1863

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The Confederate invasion of Cumberland County in June and July of 1863 has left marks remaining to be seen 135 years later. All who are familiar with Robert G. Crist's pamphlet on the "*Confederate Invasion of the West Shore-1863*"¹ know of the effort to fortify the higher points of Hummel Hill at Bridgeport (later Lemoyne). Its purpose was to defend the approaches to the bridges over the Susquehanna River to the State capital of Harrisburg, in anticipation of an attack by Confederate troops already in the Valley.² Major General Darius Nash Couch,³ newly designated commander of the hastily created Department of the Susquehanna, ordered a fort to be constructed; trees were felled and earth trenches dug on the highest point of the hill, nearest to and looking down on the Susquehanna and the approaches to it. The earth works so erected were



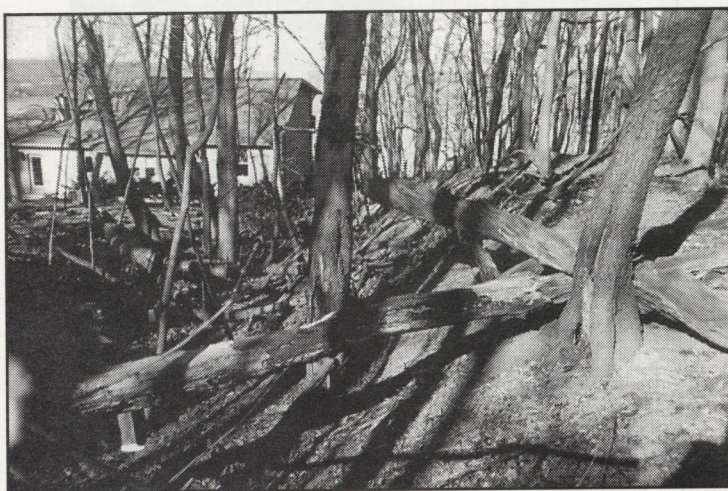
RESTORATION OF FORT COUCH, OCTOBER 13, 1954.
(Harrisburg) *Evening News*, October 15, 1954.



FORT COUCH, 1997. Photo by Tom Rogers.

designated “Fort Washington.” At a second high point on the hill, west of Fort Washington, at a point believed to be necessary to protect that fort, other breastworks were dug and designated “Fort Couch” in honor of the commander.⁴

Never tested in combat, as feared invasion of the State capital was called off to meet the threat to Meade’s army at Gettysburg,⁵ the trenches were quickly abandoned, and houses of an expanding borough of Lemoyne have long since covered most of the hill. The borough owned land on top of the hill at Eighth Street, between Ohio and Indiana Avenues. Part was in use for a water tower, but an-



FORT WASHINGTON, 1998. Photo courtesy of the author.



FORT WASHINGTON, 1998.

other part remained to be overgrown by trees and vines, the receptacle for trash and debris of all kinds, an unsightly spot in a neighborhood of fine houses with splendid views of the Susquehanna and the Susquehanna Water Gap.

One of those living nearby in the 1950's was Mrs. Fred E. Bentley, chairman of the Garden Division of the Lemoyne Civic Club. Mrs. Bentley was aware that this informal dump was a part of the former Fort Couch and, accordingly, in 1952, she sought help from state officials to clean it up and cause it to be preserved and properly marked. Informed that the state had no funds for the project, she took her proposed project to the Civic Club, then under the leadership of Mrs. Raymond W. Sawyer, Jr.⁶ The Club took the restoration on and saw it completed. Through the effort of its Garden Division of the Club and the borough of Lemoyne, the tract was cleaned up. Undergrowth and some trees were removed;⁷ grass, evergreens, spring bulbs, and climbing roses were planted, and the whole tract, bounded by Indiana and Ohio avenues on the north and south and Eighth Street and West Park avenue on the east and west, was newly enclosed with split rail and post fencing.⁸

Two state historical markers were put in place. The one on Indiana Avenue bears the legend:

FORT COUCH

Remains of breastworks, at Eighth and Ohio Streets, built before the battle of Gettysburg, to oppose the expected southern drive on Harrisburg. June 29, 1863, a few Confederate Scouts neared here but withdrew.

The marker on Ohio Avenue had slightly different wording:

FORT COUCH

Remains of breastworks built in June 1863, to oppose an expected attack on Harrisburg by Confederate troops. Site then known as Hummel's Heights. Fort was named for Gen. Couch, Commander, Eastern Pennsylvania Military Department.

The completion of the restoration of Fort Couch was celebrated on October 13, 1954, during Pennsylvania Week, marked by the presence of a band, a speaker, flag and and a flag pole, placed by the VFW.⁹

Photographs made in the winter of 1997 show the good condition in which the tract is maintained by the Borough.¹⁰

Resolved to see whether similar remnants of Fort Washington also could be found, the author enlisted the help and interest of Christine Myers Crist, born and raised in Lemoyne, who had not closely examined Fort Couch, but had heard rumors of the existence of remaining portions of the works of Fort Washington. Together, we began a search. Guided by Raymond W. Sawyer, Jr., former County Commissioner and longtime resident of Lemoyne, we were taken to the circle to the end of Old Fort Road, the top of the hill, then went slightly to the left of a house occupied by Kathryn Heckert, into woods, where, plainly to be seen, though covered by trees, vines and underbrush, is an obvious ditch entrenchment, a part of Fort Washington, running down hill and ending at Cumberland Road in Lemoyne.



We followed up on other information and located on a high portion of Walnut Street, in an area being developed and on the downward slope of the southern side of the hill, we found a more extensive area of ditches, overgrown as elsewhere.

That so many residents of the West Shore, and even of Lemoyne, had no idea of what can still be seen so readily of these Civil War fortifications, suggested this note.

PILLAR OF COUNTY COURT HOUSE, SHOWING DAMAGE BY CONFEDERATE SHELLING. Jim Bradley, Mother Cumberland Collection, Cumberland County Historical Society.

Not so hidden, in and about the center square of Carlisle, other reminders of the invasion may be observed. While it may be known that on the first day of July 1863, the town was shelled by the Confederates, it would be interesting to know the extent of the public's knowledge of the existence of scars of that shelling that can be seen even now.

On one of the sandstone columns of the Old Court House in the center of town, one may see where a portion of the flutes of one column was knocked away by shell fire and below, in white paint, is the date July 1, 1863. On the bottom of the sandstone lintel of a lower window on the right facing the new Court House, a round hole and chipped area can be seen, and underneath again the date July 1, 1863.

On the eastern part of the front of the building, formerly the home of J. Herman Bosler, more lately the YWCA and now a part of Farmers Trust Company building, above the first floor level can be seen a square white stone insert in the brick face of the building bearing the date of July 1, 1863.¹¹

Finally, during the shelling, a ball went through the window of the residence of James Wilson Henderson¹² and shattered a part of the top of a banquet table. To that table descended to the late Ann Hayes Jacobs and bore a small brass plate next to the hole bearing the date July 1, 1863. That table, now in custody of Ann's daughter, Elizabeth Jamison Boyle of Brooklyn, New York, is at the Society in the current exhibition on the Civil War in Cumberland County. A photograph of the table can be seen on page 65 of "Carlisle Old and New.

Notes

1. Robert G. Crist, *Confederate Invasion of the West Shore-1863* (Lemoyne, PA, 1963; reprinted 1995).

2. Ibid, 6.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., 19.

5. Ibid., 37.

6. Grace Sawyer was of considerable assistance in the preparation of this note. She shared a scrapbook of her year as president of the Lemoyne Civic Club, and newspaper articles and photographs of the celebration of the restoration of Fort Couch. She and her husband Raymond

(repeatedly elected a commissioner of the county) are longtime members of the Cumberland County Historical Society.

7. (Harrisburg) *Sunday Patriot News*, October 17, 1954.

8. Lemoyne Civic Club, *Annual Report, 1954-55*. The Club was awarded first prize in the State for this restoration. *Annual Report, 1955-56*.

9. *West Shore Times*, October 8, 1954.

10. *Carlisle Old and New*, (Harrisburg), 1907, 64.

11. An interesting story concerning the white stone is mentioned *ibid.*, 65.

12. *Ibid*, 65.

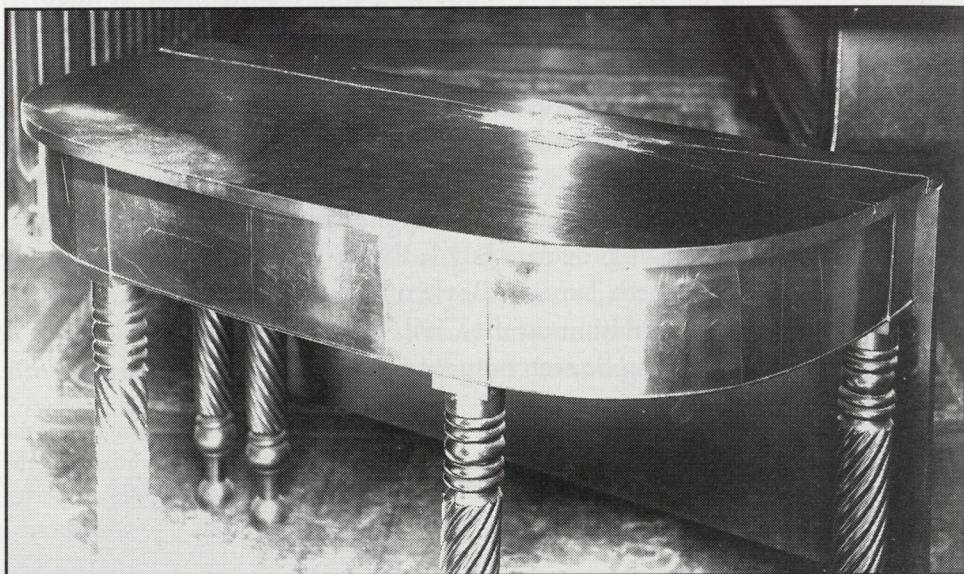


TABLE DAMAGED BY A CONFEDERATE SHELL. Photographed in William Henderson's house, about 1900. Photograph collection, Cumberland County Historical Society.