**Louis Henry Carpenter Part 1 the Civil War Years By John Richards**

**My maternal great-grandfather, Arthur Wheeler married Sara Carpenter. Sara had two brothers, Louis Henry Carpenter and James Edward Carpenter who both served in the Union Cavalry during the Civil War. I wrote about James Edward Carpenter this past summer and his experience in the “Charge of the Eighth Pennsylvania Cavalry” during the Battle of Chancellorsville. In this essay, I would like to tell you about Louis Henry Carpenter, who served in the Sixth U.S. Cavalry. One of the more interesting, but completely lop-sided Civil War battles that he fought in was the Battle of Fairfield, a cavalry action which was part of the Gettysburg campaign.**

**Louis Henry Carpenter was born on February 11, 1839 in Glassboro NJ. In 1843, the Carpenter family moved to Philadelphia, which Henry called home for the rest of his life. He graduated from Central High School in Philadelphia in 1856. In 1859 he matriculated to the University of Pennsylvania, but dropped out of college at the age of 22, to join the army in July of 1861, shortly after the Civil War began. He enlisted as a private and served in the United States Army for 38 years, retiring in 1899 with the rank of Brigadier General**

**During the Civil War, he served in the following campaigns: Peninsula, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, Overland (as aide –de-camp to Major General Phillip Sheridan), Siege of Petersburg and the Shenandoah Valley. In September of 1864, he transferred to the District of Kentucky, and served with the 5th U.S. Colored Cavalry as its regimental commander. After the Civil War, Carpenter stayed in the U.S. Army and was an active participant as a leader of the Buffalo Soldiers in the Indian Wars. He retired in 1899 to Philadelphia and spent his time as a writer and lecturer. He never married and had no children. Louis Henry Carpenter died on January 21, 1916 at his home in Philadelphia and was buried in Swedesboro, NJ.**

**As a 24 year old Second Lieutenant, Carpenter was the acting adjutant of the Sixth U.S. Cavalry at the time of the Gettysburg Campaign. On the morning of July 3, the regiment was ordered by their brigade commander, Gen. Wesley Merritt, to Fairfield, which was behind the Confederate lines some eight miles from Gettysburg. Their objective was to search for and capture a train of Confederate wagons which had been reported in the area by a local farmer.**

**The Sixth U.S. Cavalry commanded by the 52 year old veteran Major Samuel Starr, numbered about 400 troopers when it marched to Fairfield, about 150 under its normal strength due to detachment for other duties. Among the troopers who were dispatched to be part of General Pleasanton’s headquarters escort that day, was another relative of mine, my paternal great- great uncle, Reid Graham Bracken from Butler County, PA, a member of Company K.**

**When the Sixth U.S. Cavalry arrived in Fairfield, they asked some local citizens about the whereabouts of a Confederate wagon train, and were told the wagon train left town just minutes ago heading north on the road to Cashtown. The troopers headed out on the Fairfield- Orrtanna Road. About a mile north of town, the troopers saw some wagons on the road ahead, and started forward to capture them. Unbeknownst to Major Starr, the wagons were protected by General W.E. “Grumble” Jones brigade of Virginia Cavalry, which included the 6th, 7th, and 11th Virginia Cavalry regiments plus Chew’s 5 gun battery of horse artillery. The Confederate cavalry brigade had some 1,478 veteran troopers, so obviously the U.S Sixth with 400 troopers, was no match for the Virginians. The regiment fought the Confederates bravely, but didn’t have a chance from the beginning, and suffered severe casualties. Some have speculated that the local farmer, who told the Federal cavalrymen about the wagon trains and rode with them to Fairfield, was actually William Richardson, a noted Confederate spy, who allegedly had set a trap for the Sixth U.S Cavalry at Fairfield. Incidentally, Richardson was hung on July 6 at Frederick Maryland by John Buford after he was captured.**

**The result of the Battle of Fairfield was not surprising. The Sixth U.S.Cavalry had 232 casualties of the 400 reporting for duty that morning. All five officers who commanded squadrons that day were either killed or captured. The regimental commander, Major Starr was wounded and had his arm amputated later that day. Only three officers, all lieutenants, including Carpenter, reported for duty the next day. Louis Henry Carpenter was the senior officer on the field at the end of the day on July 3rd, 1863.**

**Carpenter was a prodigious letter writer, and during his military years, he averaged more than a letter a week to his family at home, often times covering the same battle with letters to different members of his family. Fortunately, these letters have been saved, and the bulk of them are preserved at the Pennsylvania Historical Society in Philadelphia. My brother, Donald Richards of Fairmont Minnesota made transcripts of many of Carpenter’s letters and four of his letters written to his father around the time of the Battle of Fairfield are attached.**

**Louis Henry Carpenter continued his Civil War service until the end of the war. During the Overland Campaign in May of 1864, Carpenter served as Aide- de- Camp to the leader of the cavalry corps, General Phillip Sheridan. During that campaign, the cavalry corps carried out the very successful mission known as the Richmond or Sheridan’s Raid. During that raid, near an abandoned hostelry named Yellow Tavern about six miles north of Richmond, Sheridan’s corps did battle with Jeb Stuart’s corps of Confederate cavalry on May 11, 1864. During that battle, the Confederate cavalry commander, Jeb Stuart was mortally wounded, and died the next day. Yellow Tavern was a crushing defeat for the Confederates. Fitzhugh Lee asserted that Stuart’s death, “was more valuable to the Union cause than anything that could have happened, and his loss to General Lee was irreparable”. Carpenter’s treatise on “The Battle of Yellow Tavern” suggests that he had more than a little influence on that action.**

**In 1865, Louis Henry Carpenter was transferred to Kentucky, and took over command of the Fifth U. S. Colored Cavalry regiment and served in that capacity until the end of the War. In my next essay, I intend to report on Louis Henry Carpenter’s service with the “Buffalo Soldiers” in the Indian Wars. For his bravery in one of those battles, he was awarded the Medal of Honor.**

**Respectfully submitted,**

**John Wheeler Richards**