

I am aiming to give some impressions of my old home, Chesterville; and of the Civil War occurrences, as I can recall them. Dates, I shall have to ignore in most cases as I get them mixed up.

Chesterville was an old ancestral home in possession of the Winder family for many, many years. It was planned and built by Thomas Jefferson and Chancellor Wythe - I mean planned by one (I forgot which) and built by the other. It was built of old english brick, the front stuccoed and extended in front from cellar to top. The front consisted of five arches, three in front and one each side and a long portico the length of the house. It was a handsome old house, and though a mile from the main road or highway, was frequently visited by tourists stopping at Old Point, all of whom seemed interested in its unique history. The house was burnt by explosion of an oil stove in the spring of 1911. A year ago I visited the place to find it in ruins with only the bare walls and buttresses of the arches standing as a memorial of the past.

War was declared in the Spring of 1861, though for months previous there had been threatenings and deep toned mutterings of future trouble. I was a girl of fourteen years and remember in a confused way the hurrying and skurrying of soldiery everywhere. The town of Hampton, under the great excitement of the citizens at the cry of "The Yankees are coming" repeated from mouth to mouth by both blacks and whites, was burned by its own people, many owners applying the torch to their own homes. The whole country for miles around was lighted up by the devouring flames. I heard a friend from Williamsburg, thirty miles north of us, say the reflection was plainly visible in that city. It was a fearful time. People were seeking refuge some where, and the negroes were terribly demoralized from this time on. All or most of the men and boys in that section had joined the army and went forth "to conquer or to die". The famous battle of Bethel, fought on June 10th, 1861, was really the first horror that we children knew of war. The day before that battle our family, consisting of Mary DeCormis (our double first cousin who virtually had care of us children after our mother's death just a year previous), and seven of us children of whom Annie and myself (twin sisters) were oldest, stood on the long portico watching with tearful eyes and terrified faces the panorama in the yard. Several men, all from the county, rode up on prancing steeds, my father joining them. They were armed and there was much loud talking and gesticulating among them. Among them, I remember by name Colonel Phillips, Colonel Carey and Robert Vaughan. My father, rather a large man, was mounted on a favorite horse "Tuscarora" and what he said as the squad rode off will go with me to my dying day. He said, waving his sword, "Goodbye Chesterville, I may never see you again". He had, before mounting, kissed us all goodbye. Soon after the soldiers rode off, my Uncle John's family consisting of Cousin Julia and Sarah with Anna and Georgie, children like us, came for us to go with them home. They lived on the next farm to us, two miles distant. The farms adjoined. Theirs was "Myrtle Cottage". Cousin Mary DeCormis (afterwards Mrs. Hughes) gathered all our possessions that could be put in bags and large packages and went over to Uncle John Winder's. There we found quite a large crowd of people, women and children assembled - among them Cousin George Garrett's family, a wife and two little girls, also our pastor; Rev. Dr. Adams with his wife and three grown daughters and a little son, George, Jr. How we spent the night, I don't remember, nor where our soldiers were. Constantly troops of northern soldiers were passing the gate. We were very near the public road here. Soon news came that a "big battle" was going on at Bethel, two miles from us. We did not need to be told, as we could distinctly hear the firing and booming of cannon. We children, a dozen or more of us, stood at the gate and counted the "booms", as we called them, until they came in such quick succession we couldn't distinguish one from another. I remember our brother, Levin, saying every once in a while "I reckon that is Pa who is shot". Late in the afternoon the soldiers came straggling back, stopping wherever they could find rest. They were "Yankees" and were "making" for Old Point I suppose. Our "elders" called us in the house and bade us keep quiet, all on the alert to hear from those who had gone from us. Late at night General somebody, I believe it was "Magruder", issued an order that for safety all women and children must seek refuge somewhere as there might be

general pillaging and incendiarism all along the route to Old Point, the war clouds being dark and lowering. It was late when the edict was heard, and there followed hasty getting together of clothing, bedding and such things as we needed for special use, and by eight or nine o'clock at night a carriage, a "rockaway", a buggy and, as well as I remember, a cart with what provisions could be gotten on the place. We wended our way to Williamsburg. We had to pass through the battle field at Bethel and were halted by the uplifted finger of the several sentinels stationed on the road. We were allowed to pass without trouble. I don't remember what time we reached Williamsburg, but I do remember what a tired out, hungry cavalcade we were as we were stopped at the "Williamson" house in the city, not far from Dr. Garrett's, one of our relatives, a resident of that place. Four families were crowded in this one house, and across the street and in different parts of the city we learned that many crowds of the Hamptonians had fled for refuge. We had left "Chesterville" in the hands of negroes believing they would protect and keep safely the household goods. Before this, about the time the cry came, "The Yankees are coming", "the woods and roads are full of them", we lived in hourly distress and endeavored to conceal some of the valuables. Cousin Mary packed a box of jewelry and silver - hers and my mother's - and old Aunt Dizzy and Aunt Millie volunteered to hide them from the Yankees. They were entrusted with the boxes, two of them and they, with Cousin Mary, buried them under a huge pear tree down back of the garden. These "trusties" later led the Yankees to the very spot where the hidden treasure lay and voluntarily gave them up.

We did not return to "Chesterville" until 1865 after the war; we found that negroes had been occupying the house and every thing was in a most pitiable condition. My father had trouble at first getting possession of the place as, like many of the homes on the Peninsula, it had been "confiscated" and was in the hands of the enemy. The piano had been taken to Fortress Monroe and, years afterwards, was discovered and identified and returned to us much used and abused. It had at one time been in the home of General Wool. Along with other vandalisms and acts of destruction, we found the old family portraits, oil paintings etc. still suspended from the walls as we left them, but with the canvas cut and slashed by swords or sabres of the vandals and hanging in ribbons from the frames.

There was much pilfering and highway robbery perpetrated a little later on, during the days of the Ku Klux Klan. One night after we had all retired, we were suddenly awakened by firing of pistols in our yard. Our good watch dog "Fido" barked and snarled and howled so we knew that something terrible was happening. My father raised a window, but before he had time to say a word, many voices loud and angry warned him to "keep quiet" or his head would be blown off. He was a man of fiery temper and declared his intention to go down and investigate, and was only kept from this rash act by the tearful entreaties of us children. My brother, Levin, held him by the legs and implored him to stay with us and protect us. Discretion got the better of valor and we all nine, including Pa, huddled together and kept as still as we could. We heard them ripping the boards from the smoke house and all the time they were keeping up a regular fusillade around the house. When Fido ceased to bark, we knew he had been killed, which the next morning revealed. The faithful dog lay dead under our window, and all the meat - hams, shoulders, middlings etc. - which were hung high and low in the smoke house. They found the house so securely locked they had resorted to tearing it down.

A few days after this happened, my sister Laura wrote a girl friend, Fannie Hunt, of it in Washington, and to Pa's surprise, he read a full account of it in one of the Washington papers and recognized the natural and childish way Laura had expressed herself.

I have a confused recollection of many other items or incidents, but not sufficiently clear to write them out. I have written this for you, Winder, and you will have to put it in better language as it has been written by piece meals and rather hurriedly.

(Signed) Sue Segar

September 14, 1915