



It Happened Near Me: The War comes to Warrenton

County: Fauquier

Date: 1862

Background: Susan Elizabeth Caldwell lived in a fine Victorian house in Warrenton with her husband, children, and enslaved servants. While her husband Lycurgus was away doing war work in the Confederate capital at Richmond, Susan kept busy with letters to him always calling him “Dearest Papa.” Warrenton, like many Northern Virginia towns, was engulfed by the federal invasion of Virginia in March and April of 1862. In her letters, we see the fear and changes.

Warrenton Fauquier Co.
Thursday April 10th 1862

Dearest Papa:

We went to the Baptist Church and our friend Dr. Bacon had gone through with the usual singing and prayer—and opened the Bible to take his text . . . He commenced by remarking that this Sabbath had been the first Sabbath since the retreat of our army that we had met for public worship—that it was right and proper that we should meet in public to implore divine aid to strengthen and guide us through our days of trial . . .—when a colored man entered the pulpit in a very excited manner and remarked the Dr. had better dismiss the congregation, the Federal Army was approaching the town! You can better imagine than I describe the panic produced. Mr. Finks called the servant and inquired if they were in town—“Yes Sir at every point you will meet them.” We all started for home—and what a sight to behold . . . On looking down the road you could see them coming as far as the eye could take in—every lady was at her door . . . seem[ing] anxious to see what the yankee soldiers were made of. Col. Geary’s brigade arrived in the morning, and about 3 O’clock . . . the Dutch [soldiers from Pennsylvania] arrived. During the afternoon Mrs. Brooke was waited on by several officers demanding a Secession flag which she had [been] waving to our soldiers on their retreat . . .

Warrenton, Fauquier County
May 7, 1862

Dearest Papa—

. . . Mr. Samuel Bailey whipped one of his Servant women, whereupon she went to the yankee camp and brought home with her quite a number of Yankees. They entered the house. Mrs. Bailey was alone, and [they] went into her trunks taking out every article of dress that was nice and made this servant woman dress in them and took her in the parlor, seated her down and bade Mrs. Bailey wait on her . . .



Left, Warrenton as it appeared in 1862. The Baptist church Mrs. Caldwell was attending when federal troops arrived is in the right center of picture, and still sits along Main Street. On the right is a photo of the Caldwell house as it looks today.

Making Sense of Evidence from the Past.

1. Susan notes that “a colored man entered the pulpit.” Did whites, slaves, and free blacks go to the same churches in 1862 Virginia? Why?
2. “Mrs. Brooke was waited on by several [Union] officers demanding a Secession flag which she had [been] waving,” writes Mrs. Caldwell. What flag is this? Why do the United States soldiers want this woman’s flag?
3. How did the white women feel about the United States troops marching into town? Give at least one example.
4. In the second letter, what did the soldiers have the servant woman do? Why?
5. How do you think enslaved people felt when the United States troops marched into town? Give at least one example.