

The Civil War in Fairfax County, Virginia

The Civil War in Fairfax County, Virginia was the most divisive and destructive period in the county's history. Soon after President Abraham Lincoln was elected President on November 6, 1860, local citizens began holding a series of public meetings at the courthouse to discuss whether Virginia should remain in the Union or secede and join the nascent Confederate States of America.

Remain or Secede?

Resolutions were adopted to expel pro-Union, anti-slavery men from the county. Several resolutions passed defending slavery. Other resolutions supported arming and funding local militia. The Fairfax Cavalry, under Captain M. D. Ball, and the Fairfax Rifles, under Captain William H. Dulany, drilled and paraded together on the courthouse yard throughout early 1861.

Within ten days of Virginia's vote to secede on May 23, 1861, the first armed conflict occurred in Fairfax County on June 1, in and around the same courthouse grounds where those public debates on secession began. Captain John Quincy Marr of the Warrenton Rifles was killed in the skirmish with Company B, Second U.S. Cavalry. He has been memorialized as the first Confederate officer to die in the Civil War.

South Controls Western Half of County Through March 1862

In July, roughly 18,000 soldiers of the Army of Northeastern Virginia under the command of Union General Irvin McDowell advanced through the county. The Federals marched to the Battle of Blackburn's Ford (July 18) and subsequently the Battle of First Manassas or Bull Run (July 21). The Federals were routed and retreated through the county foreshadowing a costly, protracted war.

CSA Generals Beauregard and Joseph E. Johnston subsequently established their headquarters at Fairfax Court House. The Confederates controlled most of the western one-half of Fairfax County through March 1862. They retreated from their winter quarters at Centreville that spring to defend Richmond. The Union then reasserted its military and civilian control, establishing the Restored Government of Virginia. On May 22, local Fairfax men voted to establish a pro-Union county government.

Continuing Confederate Raids

Yet, even under Union control, Fairfax County was subjected to continuing Confederate raids, in 1862-1863 by General J. E. B. Stuart and later by Colonel John Singleton Mosby, from 1863 through the war's end. Fairfax County remained part of "Mosby's Confederacy" until the end of the war's end, with stealth raids conducted relentlessly against U.S. troops.

Battle of Ox Hill (Chantilly) September 1862

The largest single battle in Fairfax County, the Battle of Chantilly (or Ox Hill) occurred on September 1, 1862. Confederate forces under the command of General Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson battled General John Pope's defeated and retreating Union troops as they retreated to

Alexandria and Washington after the Battle of Second Manassas (Second Bull Run). Union Generals Isaac Stevens and Philip Kearny were killed in action among 1,500 casualties. Today, their deaths are memorialized at Fairfax County Park Authority's Ox Hill Battlefield Park.

Defenses of Washington

As the war progressed, the Federals strengthened their defenses surrounding the nation's capital, particularly in southern Fairfax County, where more than fifty known actions occurred along the Woodlawn-Accotink-Pohick corridor. Local citizens - including young Quakers, free blacks, and former slaves - formed the Accotink Home Guard, a fully integrated volunteer company. Established initially as a defense against raids by Mosby and Captain James Kincheloe's Chinguapin Rangers, these volunteers later joined Federal troops - such as Unassigned Company A, U.S. Colored Troops, stationed at Accotink - to conduct offensive operations in Fairfax and neighboring Prince William County.

Last Raid in Fairfax County

The Orange and Alexandria Railroad was a favorite target of Confederate raiders, with numerous actions at Fairfax Station and Sangster's Station. The last raid in Fairfax County occurred on April 10, 1865, one day after General Robert E. Lee surrendered to Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House, when two Mosby companies attacked Burke's Station.