

# Hunter's Raid on VMI, June 1864

## Fannie Wilson Account

**About this letter:** This account was published in the *Rockbridge County News (Lexington, Virginia)* in the 1920's. The whereabouts of the original letter is unknown. In 1864, Fannie Wilson was sixteen years old; she was living with her aunt and uncle, Mr. and Mrs. Lyle Wilson. Fannie died a year after the letter was written.

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### ***Full text of the newspaper article, ca. 1924***

[Headline]

#### **Shelling of Lexington in 1864 Recalled in a Letter then Written by a Young Lady**

[Article]

The shelling of Lexington in June 1864, by the Union forces under General David Hunter, is cleverly and graphically recalled in a letter written at the time by a young lady of Lexington, which has reached the *County News* office, having been preserved for nearly sixty years. The letter follows:

"Lexington, Va.  
June 17, 1864

My dear Papa

You are no doubt anxious to hear what has become of us all since the unexpected arrival of the Yankees and how we were treated by them. On last Thursday we were enjoying undisturbed quiet, having heard the Yankees had suffered a severe defeat from General Breckinridge.

Imagine our surprise and fright on Friday evening when a courier came in stating that McCausland with his small force was at Cedar Grove and the Yankees at Brownsburg. A few minutes later another one brought news that the Yankees had reached Cedar Grove and McCausland had encamped on Colonel Cameron's farm, about three miles from town where they intended remaining for the night. Great excitement prevailed in town; many persons sent off their servants together with wagons loaded with provisions, and nearly all the gentlemen of town went out into the mountains, in that way hoping to escape capture by the enemy; among them the cadets, and professors of both Institute and College with many of the citizens. On Saturday morning McCausland crossed the river and burnt the bridge, he deployed his men on the cliffs of the river above and below the mill where a stubborn resistance was made by our men, who at last retreated.

Meanwhile the Yankees had reached an elevated field just opposite the town and planting their artillery in full range of the main street, they commenced shelling it; afterward assigning as a reason that they wanted to clear the streets of the "Rebels" who were passing up at the time; in which they were much mistaken, for McCausland being aware of their intention retreated up the back street.

The first shell that struck our part of town passed through Mrs. Johnston's house; the next one above ours tearing a circular hole just the size of the ball. We were standing in the front door when the ball passed over our heads, and fearing danger we went to the cellar, thinking that was the safest place, and were standing on the steps when we heard the whizzing near us; we found that another one had passed through our garret wall and struck the rafter, exploding with a thundering noise. It knocked nearly all the plastering off and all the sash out of the windows, made a great many large holes in the wall and floor. One piece passed through the ceiling of the passage, two small pieces perforated the ceiling of grandpa's room just above the head of his bed in which he was lying at the time in a doze, and was aroused by the fall of the plaster. I seemed to have spent a lifetime in one day. I never before had an idea of the terror caused by the shelling of a town, never seemed to realize what it meant.

In a few moments the alarm of fire was given; shells were flying thick and fast. Uncle was the first to run up to the garret and burst the door open where he was almost suffocated by the smoke which was discovered to proceed from the explosion and [not] from fire as was supposed. Not long after several white flags were hoisted by some of the citizens when the enemy in turn raised one and the firing ceased.

The Yankees foiled in the expectations of crossing the bridge soon made a good ford and in about half an hour after the shelling ceased, the wretches galloped into the town yelling and whooping like so many savages. We kept the doors locked and the windows closed all the time they were here.

Sunday morning about 10 o'clock the Yankees set fire to the Institute, blew the walls down and destroyed the mess hall and professors' houses, and if General Smith's daughter, Mrs. Morrison, had not been very ill they fully intended destroying his elegant mansion. All the Point property except the miller's and toll houses was burned. Governor Letcher's house was burnt with but five minutes notice. The Yankees took Mr. Matthew White, Jr. prisoner and he was seen Sunday afternoon marching out of town with a squad of soldiers, who shot him for bush-whacking; all the time deceiving his parents by telling them he was at home. His body was found unburied in the woods near Mrs. Cameron's house on the evening the Yankees left.

Last Wednesday there was scarcely a Yankee to be seen anywhere in town, and our scouts captured the few stragglers that remained. On Tuesday morning I was aroused early by the rumbling of the artillery racing out of town with all its speed; before breakfast the whole front street far as the eye could see up and down was jammed with their wagon trains which seemed to be in the greatest possible hurry, and before 12 o'clock all were gone except a few horsemen who seemed to be left as scouts. We were in high spirits you may know, and there never was so much rejoicing in town.

I have heard of a great deal of destruction by the Yankees and a great many shells have struck houses in town. We heard that Uncle Thomas Wilson was in the woods with his servants and stock when some Yankees fell upon them, wounding him in the head and capturing his wagons, etc. Two of his servants came here night before last bringing us news about him. We hope he will recover. Colonel Massie came home yesterday; said he had seen you and spent a very sick night at your house where he received kind attention for which he seemed very grateful, thinks a great deal of you.

We have it reported here this morning (20th) that the Yankees have gotten a good whipping at Lynchburg and are retreating. I hope they will not come this way. Uncle and Aunt write me in love to

yourself, Mama, my brother and sisters and all friends. Do let us hear from you soon. Your affectionate daughter, Fannie M. Lyle Wilson.

P.S.

We heard from Uncle Thomas last night. He was wounded right badly. He eye was shot out and the pistol was placed so near to his face that his hair was burnt. There are several deep saber cuts on his head; his wound is painful but not dangerous. Fannie."