

The 8th Virginia Infantry Regiment

By Barbara Glakas

During the Civil War (1861-1865) Virginia had seceded from the Union. Many people who lived in the Herndon Station area (which is what the not-yet-named town of Herndon area was then called), had split sympathies. However, some of those Herndon men who decided to serve in the Confederate Army served in the 8th Virginia Infantry Regiment.

According to the book *8th Virginia Infantry* by John E. Devine, the unit originated in 1859 as the Hillsborough Home Guards in Harper's Ferry (which was then part of Loudoun County, Virginia, and is now part of West Virginia). After John Brown's Raid at Harper's Ferry, this home guard unit was formed to protect two Potomac River bridges.

In April of 1861, two days after Virginia voted to secede from the union, the Hillsborough Home Guards were accepted into state service. They made up Company A of the 8th Virginia Infantry Regiment, which was organized in Leesburg. Throughout the spring and summer of 1861 other men were recruited from the counties of Loudoun, Prince William, and Fairfax. By July of 1861 the 8th Virginia had ten companies, A through K.

According to a military records website called *Fold3*, the 8th Virginia served in 21 different battles in locations throughout Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania. They included: First Bull Run, Ball's Bluff, Williamsburg, Seven Pines, Gaines Mill, Malvern Hill, Second Bull Run, South Mountain, Antietam, Fredericksburg, Siege of Suffolk, Middleburg, Upperville, Gettysburg, Gettysburg: Pickett's Charge, Cold Harbor, Five Forks, High Bridge, Sailor's Creek, High Bridge (again), and Appomattox Court House.

For about the first half of the war, the 8th Virginia was commanded by Eppa Hunton, but later it was also commanded by George Pickett, Richard Garnett, Nathan Evans, Edmund Berkeley, and Norborne Berkeley.

The regiment suffered a near fatal blow at Gettysburg in July of 1863, participating in Pickett's Charge and losing a significant percentage of its soldiers. But Hutton and the Berkeley brothers managed to keep the unit alive, often using conscripts to replace the many farmers who had comprised much of the regiment. Prior to the Battle of Sailor's Creek on April 6th of 1865, the 8th Virginia Regiment was comprised of no more than 110 men, with few of the original veterans from 1861.

About Sailor's Creek, Devine said,

“The 8th Virginia Volunteer Regiment died that day at Sailor's Creek. Surgeon Ellzey's final comment for April 6th was, ‘That hideous day ended at last.’ Several of those who escaped started home, not waiting for the final humiliation... at Appomattox on April 9... as the Confederate Army formally surrendered, only eleven men of the 8th Virginia were shown on the rolls of those paroled; three of these had fought with the regiment at First Manassas.”

Devine listed over 1,000 soldiers who had served in the 8th Virginia Infantry Regiment over the course of the war. Company G of the 8th Virginia had been recruited from Fairfax County, and

was called "Thrift's Company," named after Captain James Thrift, who did much of his recruiting "at Dranesville." In Devine's book, about 42 men are identified as those who Captain Thrift recruited at Dranesville. A handful of those men were known to have lived or worked in or near what is now the town of Herndon.

Muster cards were created by officers for every soldier, listing his status at the time: present, absent, hospitalized, on medical furlough, missing, or killed in action. Although muster cards indicate where soldiers enlisted, they do not indicate the location of the soldiers' residences. Also, old census documents from the 1850s, 1860s and 1870s have spare information on them, and often do not mention the specific location of its residents, other than to say they are living "in Fairfax County," or "in the Dranesville District," which then stretched from Route 50 near Chantilly to the Potomac River. Regardless, below is an overview of a few men who served in the 8th Virginia Infantry Regiment whom we either know or believe lived or worked in or near the Herndon area.

Captain Henry B. Bicksler

Henry B. Bicksler was born c. 1833. He was described as 6' 3" tall, with dark hair and blue eyes. According to Bicksler's muster cards, he enlisted in June of 1861 and served in both Company G and Company I of the 8th Virginia. He was elected as First Lieutenant in April of 1862. In March of 1863 he was captured in Loudoun County. Sometimes captured men would either escape, or be paroled after being released on a prisoner exchange after taking an oath of allegiance to the Union. The circumstances of Bicksler's release are not known; however, in January of 1864 he was promoted to Captain. He was captured again at Sailor's Creek in April of 1865 and sent to Johnson's Island, a prisoner of war depot in Ohio. He was released on an oath in June of 1865.

Confusingly, there were at least three Henry Bickslers living in our area during this time. A Captain Henry F. Bicksler, born c. 1835, also served in the Civil War, but in the 49th Regiment. He married into Herndon's Barker family and later became a farmer in Herndon with a large family.

Another Henry Bicksler (with no middle name) was born in c. 1802, and was a farmer-turned-hotel keeper in the Dranesville Post Office area of the Dranesville District, not far north of what would later become the town of Herndon. It is within this family that we found Henry B. Bicksler living in the 1850 and 1860 census documents, as a 12-year-old and a 23-year-old, respectively. In 1860 census, the 23-year-old Henry B. Bicksler was listed as a farmer.

After the war, Henry B. Bicksler is found on an 1870 census living in the Springvale Post Office area of the Dranesville District, closer to Great Falls. He is still a farmer but appears to be living with an unrelated group of adults who are mostly farm hands and domestic servants, leaving the impression that he might have been residing in a boarding house. By 1880, Henry B. Bicksler is living alone in the Dranesville District and is still a farmer. Based on the names of his neighbors on the census document, he appears to be living back in the Dranesville Post Office area again.

It is unknown when Captain Henry B. Bicksler died or where he is buried.

First Lieutenant Conrad R. Bitzer

Conrad Bitzer was born in 1838. According to his muster cards he enlisted in April of 1861, and served in Company A of the 8th Virginia. He was elected First Lieutenant in April of 1862. He resigned in September of 1862 on a medical discharge.

Bitzer appeared to be sick throughout his service. In October of 1861 he was at home sick for five days. In February of 1862 he was absent from duty, sick on furlough, although he returned to duty in March of that year. Finally, Bitzer wrote, "In consequence of my unhealth, I respectfully resign my commission as 1st Lieutenant in Company A of the 8th Regiment." In September of 1862, the unit surgeon wrote:

"I hereby c[er]tify that Lt. C. R. Bitzer of Co. A., 8th, VA Regt., has been laboring for months under valvular disease of the heart, and that, in consequence thereof, he had been unable to discharge his duties, and I think it necessary that he should leave the Army. 11th Sept, 1862, R. H. Edward, Surgeon, 8th VA Regmt."

Bitzer became a saw miller in Loudoun County after the war. In 1883 he and his wife bought property on Grace Street in Herndon and he became a merchant.

Bitzer died in 1901 at the age of 62. His obituary said in part:

"Mr. C.R. Bitzer, one of the best known citizen of this county, died at his home... of a short illness. He had been in failing health for some time past, and retired from active business on that account a few years ago. A more upright, honorable man than Mr. Bitzer would be hard to find, always ready to lend a helping hand to all that needed assistance in any; always kind, thoughtful, and generous to the needy. Thus another friend has gone, leaving an example worthy of imitation..."

Bitzer is buried in Herndon's Chestnut Grove Cemetery.

Pvt. George W. Farr

George Washington Farr was born c. 1830. Muster records indicate that he enlisted in June of 1861. He went AWOL in December of 1862, deserting from a camp near Fredericksburg. He was captured in Dranesville in January of 1863. He was sent to the Old Capitol Prison in Washington, D.C.

According to census documents, in 1850 he was a 20-year-old farmer living with his family in Fairfax County which, based on the neighbors listed on the census document, appeared to be in the Dranesville area, not far from what would later become the town of Herndon. In 1860 he was listed as a 31-year-old teacher, living with the Hurst family in a similar area. After the war, in 1880, documents show that he was still living in the Dranesville District, now a laborer.

Farr died in c. 1892, but his burial place is unknown.

Pvt. James W. Kidwell

James Kidwell was born in 1835. According to muster records, he enlisted in June of 1861. He was wounded at Gaines Mill in June of 1862. He went AWOL for a month, July to August of 1863. He was detailed to fish in April of 1864. He was listed as "absent sick" in June of 1864

but then returned to duty in December of 1864. He was captured at Sandy Creek in April of 1865. He was released from Maryland's Point Lookout Prison on an oath in June of 1865.

In the 1860 census, Kidwell was listed as a laborer in Fairfax County. It appears he lived either in, or very near, the Herndon Station area, based on the names of his neighbors on the census document.

Kidwell barely survived the war as he died in June of 1865 on his way home from prison. He is buried in the Saint Mary of Sorrows Catholic Church Cemetery in Fairfax Station.

Sgt. Lewis H. Robey

Lewis Henry Robey was born in 1837. According to muster records, he enlisted in June of 1861 and served in company G of the 8th Virginia. He resigned as corporal in April of 1863. He was wounded in the foot while at Gettysburg and then returned to duty in November of 1863. He was marked as "present" in December of 1864.

Lewis was the son of William F. and Anna Robey, and was the younger brother of William Isaac Robey, of Herndon. His brother, William, also served in the 8th Virginia. In 1860 Lewis was working as a laborer for the Hawxhurst family. He married in 1867. In 1870 he was listed as a farmer, living with his wife and children in Herndon. He continued to live in the Dranesville District for many years and in 1910 he and his wife are shown as living on Elden Street in Herndon, with a 7-year-old granddaughter living with them.

Lewis died in 1911 and is buried in the Frying Pan Meeting House Cemetery on Centreville Road.

Pvt. William Issac Robey

William Isaac Robey was born in 1832. According to muster records, Robey enlisted in June of 1861 and served in Company E of the 8th Virginia. He was listed as having deserted near Winchester in August of 1863. However, other biographical information indicates that he was wounded in the Battle of Chancellorsville, which occurred between April 30 and May 6 in 1863. Therefore, his record of desertion could have possibly been related to his injury in Chancellorsville.

William Issac Robey was the son of William F. and Anna Robey, and the older brother of Lewis H. Robey, who also served in the 8th Virginia. Shortly after the war, in 1867, Robey married Mary Ellen Kidwell. In 1870 census documents he was living in Herndon as a sawyer (one who saws timber) and was living at the corner of Monroe and Madison Streets. By 1880 Robey was listed as a general merchant. In 1881 he bought a half-acre lot in Herndon on the north side of Pine Street. And in 1882 he bought 2.6 acres between Station and Monroes Streets, which would later be subdivided into the Robey subdivision.

Church records from Herndon's St. Timothy's Episcopal Church indicate that Robey – a church Vestryman, Senior Warden and Trustee – operated a grocery store on Lynn Street, in what is now known as the Nachman building at 718 Lynn Street (now home to Green Lizard Cycling). Former resident, Lottie Dyer Schneider, who lived in Herndon between 1879 and 1920, recalled in her memoir how, "Bill Robey kept a grocery store which was a place the men liked to loaf and

talk, sitting on kegs or boxes.” She also recalled, “I can remember how my mother...would buy eggs at Mr. Robey’s for ten cents a dozen.”

William and his wife had several children. Their oldest son, Ernest Lee Robey (b. 1869), attended the College of Pharmacy at Howard University (established in 1868) while clerking at a drug store in Falls Church. Ernest passed his Virginia State Pharmacy Board examination before turning 21. William helped his son Ernest start a drugstore in Herndon called “Wm. I. Robey & Son” in about 1888. It was located at the lot William had previously bought at the northeast corner of Pine and Station Streets (now the lot where the Zeffirelli Restaurant is located). By November 1900 William left the drug store in the hands of his son, refocusing his full attention to his grocery business.

William I. Robey died at his home in 1906 and is buried in Herndon’s Chestnut Grove Cemetery.

Pvt. Samuel Underwood –

Samuel Underwood (b.1839) was a native of Fairfax County. Samuel had a brother, John, and a cousin, Bushrod (who later became an adopted brother). They all lived together and served in the Civil War. All three ultimately served with Colonel John Singleton Mosby as part of Mosby’s Rangers, the 43rd Virginia Cavalry Battalion.

The location of the Underwood family home was either in western Fairfax County or possibly near a street currently named Underwood Lane, which is located about 1.5 miles west of the town of Herndon’s corporate boundaries, off Old Ox Road. (This was the location of Samuel’s home after the war). In an interview, a descendent of Samuel Underwood stated that Samuel “lived near Herndon after the war on Underwood Lane in Sterling where his farm was.” Also, in his memoir, Mosby described his meeting of Samuel Underwood’s brother, John, at their family home:

“We started from the neighborhood of Middleburg for Fairfax County, and proceeded to the house of a farmer who lives near Herndon Station, on the Loudoun and Hampshire Railroad [later the Washington and Old Dominion Railroad]. As we approached the dwelling, Mosby observed a man pass rapidly out of the back door into the pines which cover the rear of their house with their dense growth... His name was John Underwood.”

Samuel Underwood’s muster records indicate that he enlisted in June of 1861, and served in Company E of the 8th Virginia. He was wounded in Darbytown, Virginia, in June of 1862. He deserted in August of 1862 on the march near Manassas. He was captured in September of 1862 and sent to the Old Capitol Prison in Washington, D.C. (At some point he must have been released because...) He transferred to Mosby’s Cavalry in January of 1864. He was described as one of Mosby’s personal favorite scouts and most noted men.

Both Samuel and his brother, John, were valuable scouts for Mosby. John notably led Mosby’s men into Herndon for Mosby’s raid of Herndon Station in March of 1863. John Underwood did not survive the war and was killed near the Oatlands Plantation near Leesburg in 1863. Samuel’s

adopted brother, Bushrod, initially served in a light artillery unit, but also later transferred into Mosby's 43rd Cavalry Battalion. Bushrod survived the war and later lived in Washington, D.C.

Samuel Underwood married in 1868. He became a farmer. The 1870 census documents indicated that he was still living on the family farm in the Eastern District of Loudoun. The 1900 and 1910 census documents were more specific, saying he and his wife and children were living in the Broad Run District, on a road that was described as going from "Herndon to Sterling Road."

Samuel Underwood died in 1917 at the age of 78 and is buried in Herndon's Chestnut Grove Cemetery.

About this column: "Remembering Herndon's History" is a regular Herndon Patch feature offering stories and anecdotes about Herndon's past. The articles are written by members of the Herndon Historical Society. Barbara Glakas is a member. A complete list of "Remembering Herndon's History" columns is available on the Historical Society website at www.herndonhistoricalsociety.org.

The Herndon Historical Society operates a small museum that focuses on local history. It is housed in the Herndon Depot in downtown Herndon on Lynn Street and is open every Sunday from noon until 3:00. Visit the Society's website at www.herndonhistoricalsociety.org, and the Historical Society's Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/HerndonHistory> for more information.

Note: The Historical Society is seeking volunteers to help keep the museum open each Sunday. If you have an interest in local history and would like to help, contact HerndonHistoricalSociety@gmail.com.