

# HISTORICAL SOCIETY DOCUMENTS AND NOTES

## THE CONFEDERATE RAID AT MORGANTOWN, WEST VIRGINIA

Edited by MYRON B. SHARP

*Among the Mathiot Papers, at the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, is a letter telling about the Confederate raid at Morgantown, West Virginia, on the 27th of April 1863, a newspaper account of part of the same action and then some comments about one of the men involved. The first letter<sup>1</sup> is from Mrs. Ann Mathiot Dorsey to her brother, Jacob D. Mathiot.<sup>2</sup> No changes were made in punctuation or wording.*

Rose Hill,<sup>3</sup> May 8, 1863

Dear brother,

Yours of the 4th has just been received and I hasten to reply. The rebels made their appearance on the 27th at about 11 o'clock and you

<sup>1</sup> Mathiot Papers, Box 3, File 3, No. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Jacob Davies Mathiot, 1788-1865, was a well-known industrialist in the Ligonier Valley from about 1818 through 1856. In 1813, at the age of twenty-five, he was made manager of Isaac Meason's Mount Vernon Furnace in Fayette County. By 1818 he had saved enough money and gained the confidence of Isaac Meason to such an extent that he became a partner in the Ross Iron Works and soon thereafter was installed as manager. After a few years Meason retired and the firm of Meason, Mathiot and Paull became just Mathiot and Paull. The furnace operated continuously, except for repair shutdowns, until 1852, when it was banked for the last time. During this period Mathiot was active in the business of the Washington Furnace in Westmoreland County, Madison Furnace in Armstrong (now Clarion) County; and he and his son-in-law, Dr. Samuel P. Cummins, built and operated the California Furnace in Ligonier Township, Westmoreland County. This furnace was rebuilt in 1966. More can be learned about all of the above furnaces and many others by reading *A Guide to the Old Stone Blast Furnaces in Western Pennsylvania* by Myron B. Sharp and William H. Thomas, published by The Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, 1966.

Mathiot engaged in many enterprises with other men throughout Western Pennsylvania. Noah Mendell, Robert Graham, James T. Paull, Jr., and Isaac Lightner of Pittsburgh and others were his partners at various times and in many kinds of businesses. He was a director of the Portage Railroad in Westmoreland County and a director of the Johnstown and Ligonier Turnpike Road, served a term in the state legislature, speculated in land in many of the counties in Western Pennsylvania. His activities took him to Pittsburgh, Harrisburg, Washington, D.C., and many towns between. He is buried in the cemetery in Ligonier, Pa.

<sup>3</sup> Rose Hill was the name of the farm located about five miles southeast of Morgantown, West Virginia, on today's State Road 7, owned by George Washington Dorsey.

were right in supposing their line of march would be on the road leading past our house. On Sunday night they camped about three miles from Kingwood from which place their campfires were distinctly seen. During the night some of the citizens fearful for their personal safety escaped on foot to Morgantown with their valuable papers. At daylight they called a meeting and made a call for men to go out and reconnoitre the road leading past our house, which was responded to by Col. Evans of our place. When he came this far he wrote to Capt. Hackman, also of our town, to place a guard at the bridge and if they were coming not to surrender the town without giving them battle. He with 6 others passed on saying if they were coming he would give us word in the course of an hour or two. It was not more than 20 minutes until a part of the men came galloping back saying they were just behind. Before the men were out of sight the Rebels were upon us. Some dashed by pursuing the men while about 50 rode up to the gate demanding something to eat. By this time an officer rode up a very polite and Gentlemanly looking man, asking for food for himself and men. One of the soldiers jumped over the fence but the officer ordered him back (which order he instantly obeyed) saying no man should enter that yard. We gave them what provisions we had cooked and they ate them out in the road, notwithstanding it is currently reported that we had a splendid dinner prepared for them. Mr. Dorsey had 4 of our horses sent to the back part of the farm thinking they would be safe but the rebels scoured the country about three miles on each side of the road taking grain, meat, store goods and horses. They took 6 horses from us, 4 working ones and Mr. Dorsey's riding horse. They captured Henry, took from him a horse worth \$125, and then released him, then passed on to town, sent in a flag of truce. The town was at once surrendered without firing a shot . . . There was no soldiers there. The men all fled with the exception of a very few, leaving the women and children to take care of themselves. They took all the horses they could find in town. It being court day the town was full of people and horses. They pillaged the stores but did not commit any depredations on private houses. They burnt one small house in the outskirts of the town owned by a strong Yankee as they term all opposed to them. About dusk they left by the same road they came. We all hoped they had left but about 10 o'clock they began to pour in by hundreds. They had encamped 8 miles from town and met a reinforcement so they returned and got about 40 more good horses. People hearing they were gone flocked to town to hear the news and so lost their horses they saved the day before.

They shot two of our near neighbors who were so thoughtless as to fire upon them. They wounded 3 others but they will get well. On Tuesday evening they crossed the wire bridge and encamped 5 miles on the road to Fairmont. They had a battle there on Wednesday, whipped our men and after pillaging the town they left in the direction of Clarksburgh but they left that country soon and we have no tidings of their where abouts. You need not place any reliance on what you read of the raid. We have seen many accounts of it but not one with the shred of truth. Had they intended a raid into Pa. there was nothing to have prevented them. They could have crossed Cheat, as hundreds of others did with their horses or they could have gone by way of Brownsville. The people in Pa. were more alarmed than we were. Henry had a horse of his own and Albert had three which he succeeded in hiding from them. The first day he thought he might lose them so he started Henry with them to Smithfield. The Rebels pursued him to the river but he made good his escape. When he reached Smithfield the people were all running and sending their horses so he with many others pushed on to Uniontown. But there all was confusion. Merchants packing up their goods, men running, women and children screaming and running to and fro like crazy people. They then pushed on to Brownsville only to see the same scene enacted. They then went 7 miles below Brownsville where they remained 6 days hearing from time to time all kinds of reports. Sometimes they would hear that Uniontown was burnt when not one Rebel crossed Cheat. I have such a pile of letters to answer from friends who like yourself were anxious to hear how we fared.

We are beginning to feel alarmed at the prospect before us as regards the crops. There has not been a grain of corn planted and but little ground plowed in consequence of the continued wet weather, the horses have nearly all been stolen and on Monday last all the able bodied men from 18 to 45 years of age were ordered to report themselves in Morgantown to start immediately for Clarksburgh to be organized into a company of home guards to be stationed at the latter place. Most of the men are indignant at the call under the circumstances. Our Governor has left us unprotected until the rebels came and robbed us and now he makes a call for our men. If the corn crop is not planted during the present month it will not mature. I suppose he means to starve us out which it will not take long to do as there is but little grain in the country. The earth is completely filled with

water and still the rain is pouring down. If we *had* horses there could not be a furrow run for days.

I do assure you things look gloomy but still we must hope for the best. Albert [her son] is exempt from the call in consequence of his imperfect sight.

I see Valandringham has been arrested, one reason why our army has been so often defeated. There is so many traitors in high places.

.....  
Ever your affectionate sister  
Ann M. Dorsey

*There follows an excerpt from a letter of May 11, 1863, from George D. Mathiot to his father, Jacob D. Mathiot:*<sup>4</sup> In the Pittsburgh Dispatch I saw an account of the Morgantown raid in which it said that a wealthy farmer near Morgantown of the name of Washington Dorsey, to show his secession proclivities, gave a dinner to thirty or forty of the secessionists, and much to his astonishment, when they left took eight of his horses, all that he had. Looks as if it might be true.

George D. Mathiot

*Next is a paragraph from a letter written by Jacob D. Mathiot, May 18, 1863, to his daughter Catherine:*<sup>5</sup> In this letter he retells the story of the raid just as told to him by his sister in her letter of May 8. He then continues: I do not exactly know what are the sentiments of Mr. Dorsey as regards the rebellion. He is a Virginian and has a great deal of state pride, and is besides a slave holder, and there is no telling how far those feelings may influence him. I have the impression, however, that he was favorable to a division of the state, and his proclivities may be in favor of the Union. I hope, at least, that such may be the case. ....

<sup>4</sup> Mathiot Papers, Box 3, File 3, No. 35.

<sup>5</sup> Mathiot Papers, Box 3, File 3, No. 31.