

*Historical Notes* to accompany letter dated:

5/31/63: 082

By the date of Cyrus Hardaway's letter home of May 31, 1863, the Confederate army across the river had begun its preparations for movement out of the Rappahannock Valley and into the Shenandoah Valley and its invasion of the north. Hardaway and his fellow Sharpshooters would not break camp until June 10th. From that date forward, the Army of the Potomac was in rapid pursuit of Lee's Army of Northern Virginia as it invaded the North for the second time. Unlike the engagement at *Chancellorsville*, Lee's army was at nearly full strength for this campaign. Longstreet's divisions had rejoined Lee's army and constituted one of the three corps under the commands of Generals Longstreet, Ewell, Hill with the flamboyant J.E.B. Stuart in command of the cavalry's six brigades. Total strength exceeded 90,000 men.

On a personal level, Hardaway's letters often referred to his half-brother "Sommers." Nathan Summers Beardslee was the child of Jesse Beardslee and Cyrus Hardaway's mother, Mary Ann Hardaway Beardslee. Born in 1848 "Sommers" did write a "good letter." His expressed desire to attend West Point or Annapolis did not happen but he did become an engineer-surveyor and a very successful businessman in the salt industry located near Syracuse, New York. Upon the 1879 death of his father, Jesse Beardslee, he inherited one half of the Pittsfield homestead and remained active in the farm's operations until his own death in 1916. His affection and connection to Pittsfield/New Berlin remained a constant. Readers of these letters may have noticed the plaque to "Sommers" just inside the front door of the New Berlin library commemorating his testamentary gift to the village.

Hardaway's letter also acknowledged the "other" major campaign commanded by Union general U.S. Grant underway near Vicksburg, Mississippi. Grant's military style was very different from that of McClellan, Burnside, and Hooker. His relentless and constant pressure upon the Confederacy was showing signs of success. Grant and his staff of "western" generals, Sherman, McPherson, and McClernand had fought a number of preliminary engagements and commenced the siege of Vicksburg on May 18, 1863.

It is unlikely that Cyrus Hardaway, or for that matter anyone else, correctly anticipated the climactic events which are about to happen as he wrote his May 31st letter home. The South, although handicapped in its ability to supply its armies, had successfully thwarted the Union at *Bull Run*, *Peninsular Campaign*, *Antietam*, *Fredericksburg*, and *Chancellorsville*. Within the next 40 days the South's momentum would be halted and start its decline with the reversals at *Vicksburg* and *Gettysburg*.