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# ROCHESTER HISTORY

## **A Hard Road to Travel Out of Dixie**

Part 2

by W. H. Shelton



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*Author William H. Shelton.*

*Front cover: In Greenville Jail. Painting by William H. Shelton.*



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Dear *Rochester History* Reader,

Many people believe history is just about facts, but I believe history is also about stories. One hundred and fifty years ago, the United States was in the early stages of war, a Civil War that would challenge the strength and endurance of a still relatively young country. History books can tell us the number of casualties at each battle or the routes that were traveled by troops, but this issue of *Rochester History* will give you a compelling look at the experience as lived by one man. This account would likely be forgotten if not for the efforts of a group of historians who recognize the importance of stories. A century and a half later, Rochester historians still value a good story and how it provides context for historical facts. This issue is a testament to the marriage of factual and anecdotal history as related by a Rochester resident.

Patricia Uttaro, Library Director

## About *Rochester History*

*Rochester History* is a scholarly journal that provides informative and entertaining articles about the history and culture of Rochester, Monroe County, and the Genesee Valley. In January 1939, Assistant City Historian Blake McKelvey published the first quarterly edition of *Rochester History*. Subjects researched and written by him and other scholars were edited, published, and distributed by McKelvey with the goal of expanding the knowledge of local history. Studying local history as a microcosm of U.S. history has brought insight and understanding to scholars and researchers around the globe.

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*Rochester History* invites submissions of manuscripts of 5,000-6,000 words that further its mission of increasing knowledge of and interest in local history and culture and of placing local issues into a national or global context. To receive a copy of the journal's complete submission guidelines, send a request to [HistoryJournal@libraryweb.org](mailto:HistoryJournal@libraryweb.org) or call (585) 428-8095.

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# Introduction

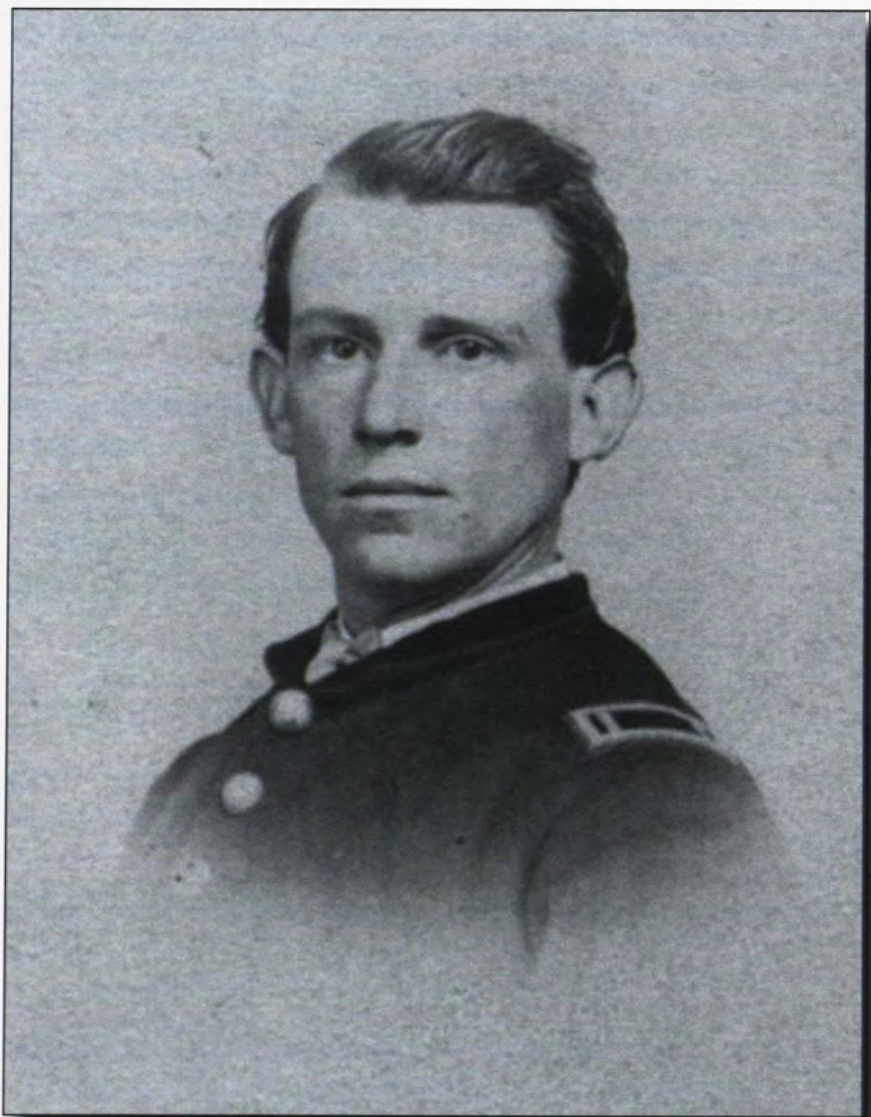
In this issue of *Rochester History*, we pick up with Part 2 of Lt. William Henry Shelton's Civil War narrative. The story of a Rochester-area soldier who fought in the Union army, Shelton's tale began in early May 1864 at the bloody and chaotic Battle of the Wilderness in Virginia. Wounded and taken prisoner in the midst of this skirmish, Shelton later provided a gripping, firsthand account of his capture, imprisonment, and ultimate escape from Confederate forces. Originally published in *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* in October 1890, Shelton's story reappears for a modern audience in the pages of our journal.

When we last left Shelton, he and two comrades had escaped from a Confederate camp in Columbia, South Carolina, and were making their way westward over the southern Appalachian mountains into East Tennessee. Waiting at the home of their guide, Emanuel "Man Heady" Headen, Shelton and his fellow refugees heard a knock at the front door. Believing it to be other members of their party coming to join them, Shelton threw open the door with an enthusiastic "Come in, boys!" After a suspenseful pause, we now revisit Shelton and his companions on that snowy mountaintop in late December 1864 to find out what happened next—and how this story ends.

Michelle Finn, Assistant Editor







*Portrait of Shelton around the time he was captured.*

# A Hard Road to Travel Out of Dixie<sup>1</sup>

## Part 2

by W. H. Shelton

*Continued from vol. 73 no. 2 (Fall 2011)*

About midnight came a rap on the door. Thinking it was Tom Hancock<sup>2</sup> and some of his companions, I threw it open with an eager, "Come in, boys!" The boys began to come in, stamping the snow from their boots and rattling their muskets on the floor, until the house was full, and yet others were on guard without and crowding the porch. "Man Heady"<sup>3</sup> and his wife were already prisoners at the mill, and the house had been picketed for some hours awaiting the arrival of the other refugees, who had discovered the plot just in time to keep out of the toils. Marshaled in some semblance of military array, we were marched down the mountain, over the frozen ground, to the house of old Roderic Norton.<sup>4</sup> The Yankee officers were sent to an upper room, while the refugees were guarded below, under the immediate eyes of the soldiery. Making the best of our misfortune, our original trio<sup>5</sup> bounced promptly into a warm bed, which had been recently deserted by some members of the family, and secured a good night's rest.

[Union] Lieutenant Knapp,<sup>6</sup> who had imprudently indulged in frozen chestnuts on the mountain side, was attacked with violent cramps, and kept the household below stairs in commotion all night humanely endeavoring to assuage his agony. In the morning, although quite recovered, he cunningly feigned a continuance of his pains, and was left behind in the keeping of two guards, who having no suspicion of his deep designs left their guns in the house and went out to the spring to wash. Knapp, instantly on the alert, possessed himself of the muskets, and breaking the lock of one, by a powerful effort he bent the barrel of the other, and dashed out through the garden. His keepers, returning from the spring, shouted and rushed indoors only to find their disabled pieces. They joined our party later in the day, rendering a chapfallen account of their detached service.

We had but a moderate march to make to the headquarters of the battalion, where we were to spend the night. Our guards we found kindly disposed towards us, but bitterly upbraiding the refugees, whom they saluted by the ancient name of Tories.<sup>7</sup> [Confederate] Lieutenant Cogdill, in command of the expedition, privately informed us that his sympathies were entirely ours, but as a matter of duty he should guard us jealously while under his military charge. If we could effect our escape thereafter we had only to come to his mountain home and he would conceal us until such time as he could despatch us with safety over the borders. These

mountain soldiers were mostly of two classes, both opposed to the war, but doing home-guard duty in lieu of sterner service in the field. Numbers were of the outlier class, who, wearied of continual hiding in the laurel brakes, had embraced this service as a compromise. Many were deserters, some of whom had coolly set at defiance the terms of their furloughs, while others had abandoned the camps in Virginia, and, versed in mountain craft, had made their way along the Blue Ridge and put in a heroic appearance in their native valleys.<sup>8</sup>

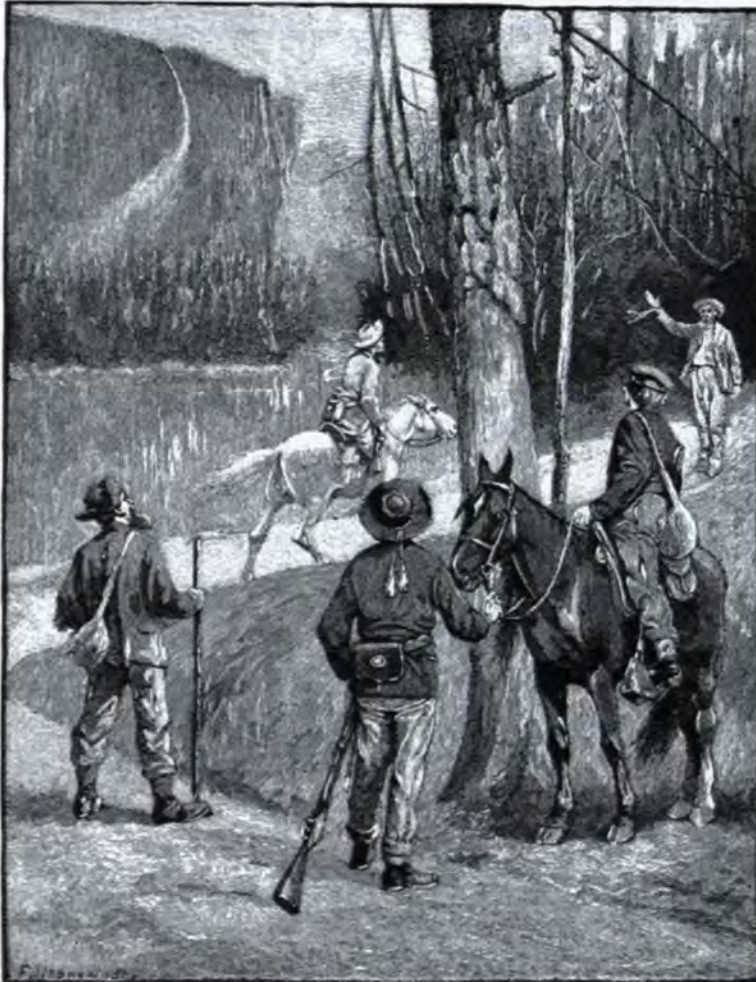
That night we arrived at a farm-house near the river, where we found [Confederate] Major Parker, commanding the battalion, with a small detachment, billeted upon the family. The farmer was a gray-haired old loyalist, whom I shall always remember, leaning on his staff in the middle of the kitchen, barred out from his place in the chimney-corner by the noisy circle of his unbidden guests. Major Parker was a brisk little man, clad in brindle jeans of ancient cut, resplendent with brass buttons. Two small piercing eyes, deep-set beside a hawk's-beak nose, twinkled from under the rim of his brown straw hat, whose crown was defiantly surmounted by a cock's feather. But he was exceedingly jolly withal and welcomed the Yankees with pompous good humor, despatching a sergeant for a jug of applejack, which was doubtless as inexpensive to the major as his other hospitality. Having been a prisoner at Chicago, he prided himself on his knowledge of dungeon etiquette and the military courtesies due to our rank.

We were awakened in the morning by high-pitched voices in the room below.

Lieutenant Sill and I had passed the night in neighboring caverns of the same miraculous feather-bed. We recognized the voice of the major, informing some culprit that he had just ten minutes to live, and that if he wished to send any dying message to his wife or children then and there was his last opportunity; and then followed the tramping of the guards as they retired from his presence with their victim. Hastily dressing, we hurried down to find what was the matter. We were welcomed with a cheery good morning from the major, who seemed to be in the sunniest of spirits. No sign of commotion was visible. "Step out to the branch, gentlemen; your parole of honor is sufficient; you'll find towels—been a prisoner myself." And he restrained by a sign the sentinel who would have accompanied us. At the branch, in the yard, we found the other refugees trembling for their fate, and learned that Headen had gone to the orchard in the charge of a file of soldiers with a rope. While we were discussing the situation and endeavoring to calm the apprehensions of the Georgians the executioners returned from the orchard, our guide marching in advance and looking none the worse for the rough handling he had undergone. The brave fellow had confided his last message and been thrice drawn up towards the branch of an apple tree, and as many times lowered for the information it was supposed he would give. Nothing was learned, and it is probable he had no secrets to disclose or conceal. Lieutenant Cogdill, with two soldiers, was detailed to conduct us to Quallatown, [North Carolina], a



Cherokee station at the foot of the Great Smoky Mountains.<sup>9</sup> Two horses were allotted to the guard, and we set out in military order, the refugees two and two in advance, Headen and Old Man Tigue<sup>10</sup> lashed together by the wrists, and the rear brought up by the troopers on horseback. It was the last day of the year, and although a winter morning, the rare mountain air was as soft as spring. We struck the banks of the Tuckasegee [River] directly opposite to a feathery waterfall, which, leaping over a crag of the opposite cliff, was dissipated in a glittering sheet of spray before reaching the tops of the trees below. As the morning advanced we fell into a more negligent order of marching. The beautiful river, a wide, swift current, flowing smoothly between thickly wooded banks, swept by on our left, and on the right wild, uninhabited mountains closed in the road. The two Vincents were strolling along far in advance. Some distance behind them were Headen and Tigue; the remainder of us following in a general group, Sill mounted beside one of the guards. Advancing in this order, a cry



*The escape of Headen. Illustration by William H. Shelton.*

from the front broke on the stillness of the woods, and we beheld Old Man Tigue gesticulating wildly in the center of the road and screaming, "He's gone! He's gone! Catch him!" Sure enough the old man was alone, the fragment of the parted strap dangling from his outstretched wrist. The guard, who was mounted, dashed off in pursuit, followed by the lieutenant on foot, but both soon returned, giving over the hopeless chase. Thoroughly frightened by the events of the



morning, Headen<sup>1</sup> had watched his opportunity to make good his escape, and as we afterwards learned, joined by Knapp and Tom Handcock, he conducted a party safely to Tennessee.

At Webster, [North Carolina], the court town of Jackson County, we were quartered for the night in the jail, but accompanied Lieutenant Cogdill to a venison breakfast at the parsonage with Mrs. Harris and her daughter, who had called on us the evening before. Snow had fallen during the night, and when we continued our march it was with the half-frozen slush crushing in and out, at every step, through our broken shoes. Before the close of this dreary New Year's day we came upon the scene of one of those wild tragedies which are still of too frequent occurrence in those remote regions, isolated from the strong arm of the law. Our road led down and around the mountain side, which on our right was a barren, rocky waste, sloping gradually up from the inner curve of the arc we were describing. From this direction arose a low wailing sound, and a little farther on we came in view of a dismal group of men, women, and mules. In the center of the gathering lay the lifeless remains of a father and his two sons; seated upon the ground, swaying and weeping over their dead, were the mother and wives of the young men. A burial party, armed with spades and picks, waited by their mules, while at a respectful distance from the mourners stood a circle of neighbors and passers-by, some gazing in silent sympathy, and others not hesitating to express a quiet approval of the shocking tragedy. Between two families, the Hoopers and the Watsons, a bitter feud had long existed, and from time to time men of each clan had fallen by the rifles of the other. The Hoopers were loyal Union men, and if the Watsons yielded any loyalty it was to the State of North Carolina. On one occasion shortly before the final tragedy, when one of the young Hoopers was sitting quietly in his door, a light puff of smoke rose from the bushes and a rifle ball plowed through his leg. The Hoopers resolved to begin the new year by wiping out their enemies, root and branch. Before light they had surrounded the log cabin of the Watsons and secured all the male inmates, except one who, wounded, escaped through a window. The latter afterwards executed a singular revenge, by killing and skinning the dog of his enemies and elevating the carcass on a pole in front of their house.<sup>11</sup>

After a brief stay at Quallatown we set out for Asheville, [North Carolina], leaving behind our old and friendly guard. Besides the soldiers who now had us in charge, a Cherokee Indian was allotted to each prisoner, with instructions to keep his man constantly in view. To travel with an armed Indian, sullen and silent, trotting at your heels like a dog, with very explicit instructions to blow out your brains at the first attempt to escape, is neither cheerful nor

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<sup>1</sup>[The following note and all footnotes hereafter appeared in Shelton's original text.] A short time ago the writer received the following letter: "Casher's Valley, May 28, 1890. Old Manuel Headen and wife are living, but separated. Julia Ann is living with her mother. The old lady is blind. Old man Norton (Roderic), to whose house you were taken as prisoner, has been dead for years. Old Tom Handcock is dead.—W. R. HOOPER."

ornamental, and we were a sorry looking party plodding silently along the road. Detachments of prisoners were frequently passed over this route, and regular stopping-places were established for the nights. It was growing dusk when we arrived at the first cantonment,<sup>12</sup> which was the wing of a great barren farm-house owned by Colonel Bryson. The place was already occupied by a party of refugees, and we were directed to a barn in the field beyond. We had brought with us uncooked rations, and while two of the soldiers went into the house for cooking utensils, the rest of the party, including the Indians, were leaning in a line upon the dooryard fence; Sill and Lamson were at the end of the line, where the fence cornered with a hedge. Presently the two soldiers reappeared, one of them with an iron pot in which to cook our meat, and the other swinging in his hand a burning brand. In the wake of these guides we followed down to the barn, and had already started a fire when word came from the house that for fear of rain we had best return to the corn-barn. It was not until we were again in the road that I noticed the absence of Sill and Lamson. I hastened to Smith and confided the good news. The fugitives were missed almost simultaneously by the guards, who first beat up the vicinity of the barn, and then, after securing the remainder of us in a corn-crib, sent out the Indians in pursuit. Faithful dogs, as these Cherokees had shown themselves during the day, they proved but poor hunters when the game was in the bush, and soon returned, giving over the chase. Half an hour later they were all back in camp, baking their hoecake in genuine aboriginal fashion, flattened on the surface of a board and inclined to the heat of the fire.<sup>13</sup>

That I was eager to follow goes without saying, but our keepers had learned our slippery character. All the way to Asheville, day and night, we were watched with sleepless vigilance. There we gave our parole, Smith and I, and secured thereby comfortable quarters in the court-house, with freedom to stroll about the town. Old Man Tigue and the Vincents were committed to the county jail. We were there a week, part of my spare time being employed in helping a Confederate company officer make out a correct pay-roll.

When our diminished ranks had been recruited by four more officers from Columbia, [South Carolina], who had been captured near the frozen summit of the Great Smoky Mountains, we were started on a journey of sixty miles to Greenville in South Carolina. The night before our arrival we were quartered at a large farm-house. The prisoners, together with the privates of

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<sup>13</sup> Sill and Lamson reached Loudon, Tennessee, in February. A few days after their escape from the Indian guard they arrived at the house of "Shooting John Brown," who confided them to the care of the young Hoopers and a party of their outlying companions. From a rocky cliff overlooking the valley of the Tuckasegee [River] they could look down on the river roads dotted with the sheriff's posse in pursuit of the Hoopers. So near were they that they could distinguish a relative of the Watsons leading the sheriff's party. One of the Hooper boys, with characteristic recklessness and to the consternation of the others, stood boldly out on a great rock in plain sight of his pursuers (if they had chanced to look up), half resolved to try his rifle at the last of the Watsons.



the guard, were allotted a comfortable room, which contained, however, but a single bed. The officer in charge had retired to enjoy the hospitality of the family. A flock of enormous white pullets<sup>13</sup> were roosting in the yard. Procuring an iron kettle from the servants, who looked with grinning approval upon all forms of chicken stealing, we sallied forth to the capture. Twisting the precious necks of half a dozen, we left them to die in the grass while we pierced the side of a sweet-potato mound. Loaded with our booty we retreated to the house undiscovered, and spent the night in cooking in one pot instead of sleeping in one bed. The fowls were skinned instead of plucked, and, vandals that we were, dressed on the backs of the picture frames, taken down from the walls.

At Greenville we were lodged in the county jail to await the reconstruction of railway bridges, when we were to be transported to Columbia. The jail was a stone structure, two stories in height, with halls through the center on both floors and square rooms on each side. The lock was turned on our little party of six in one of these upper rooms, having two grated windows looking down on the walk. Through the door which opened on the hall a square hole was cut as high as one's face and large enough to admit the passage of a plate. Aside from the rigor of our confinement we were treated with marked kindness. We had scarcely walked about our dungeon before the jailer's daughters were at the door with their autograph albums. In a few days we were playing draughts<sup>14</sup> and reading Bulwer,<sup>15</sup> while the girls, without, were preparing our food and



*Greenville Jail. Illustration by William H. Shelton.*

knitting for us warm new stockings. Notwithstanding all these attentions, we were ungratefully discontented. At the end of the first week we were joined by seven enlisted men, Ohio boys, who like ourselves had been found at large in the mountains. From one of these new arrivals we procured a case-knife<sup>16</sup> and a gun screwdriver.<sup>17</sup> Down on the hearth before the fire the screwdriver was placed on the thick edge of the knife and belabored with a beef bone until a few inches of its back were converted into a rude saw. The grate in the window was formed of cast-iron bars, passing perpendicularly through wrought-iron plates, bedded in the stone jambs. If one of these perpendicular bars, an inch and a half square, could be cut through, the plates might be easily bent so as to permit the egress of a man. With this end in view we cautiously began operations. Outside of the bars a piece of carpet had been stretched to keep out the raw wind, and behind this we worked with safety. An hour's toil produced but a few feathery filings on the horizontal plate, but many hands make light work, and steadily the cut grew deeper. We recalled the adventures of Claude Duval, Dick Turpin, and Sixteen-string Jack,<sup>18</sup> and sawed away. During the available hours of three days and throughout one entire night the blade of steel was worrying, rasping, eating the iron bar. At last the grosser yielded to the temper and persistence of the finer metal. It was Saturday night when the toilsome cut was completed, and preparations were already under way for a speedy departure. The jail had always been regarded as too secure to require a military guard, although soldiers were quartered in the town; besides, the night was so cold that a crust had formed on the snow, and both citizens and soldiers, unused to such extreme weather, would be likely to remain indoors. For greater secrecy of movement, we divided into small parties, aiming to traverse different roads. I was to go with my former companion, Captain Smith.<sup>19</sup> Lots were cast to determine the order of our going. First exit was allotted to four of the Ohio soldiers. Made fast to the grating outside were a bit of rope and strip of blankets, along which to descend. Our room was immediately over that of the jailer and his sleeping family, and beneath our opening was a window, which each man must pass in his descent. At eleven o'clock the exodus began. The first man was passed through the bars amid a suppressed buzz of whispered cautions. His boots were handed after him in a haversack.<sup>20</sup> The rest of us, pressing our faces to the frosty grating, listened breathlessly for the success of the movement we could no longer see. Suddenly there was a crash, and in the midst of mutterings of anger we snatched in the rag ladder and restored the piece of carpeting to its place outside the bars. Our pioneer had hurt his hand against the rough stones, and, floundering in mid-air, had dashed his leg through sash and glass of the window below. We could see nothing of his further movements, but soon discovered the jailer standing in the door, looking up and down the street, seemingly in the dark as to where the crash came from. At last, wearied and worried and disappointed, we lay down in our blankets upon the hard floor.



At daylight we were awakened by the voice of Miss Emma at the hole in the door. "Who got out last night?" "Welty." "Well, you was fools you didn't all go; pap wouldn't a' stopped you. If you'll keep the break concealed until night we'll let you all out." The secret of the extreme kindness of our keepers was explained. The jailer, a loyalist, retained his position as a civil detail, thus protecting himself and sons from conscription. Welty had been taken in the night before, his bruises had been anointed, and he had been provisioned for the journey.

We spent the day repairing our clothing and preparing for the road. My long-heeled cowhides, "wife's shoes," for which I had exchanged a uniform waistcoat with a cotton-wooled old ducky on the banks of the Saluda [River], were about parting soles from uppers, and I kept the twain together by winding my feet with stout cords. At supper an extra ration was given us. As soon as it was dark the old jailer appeared among us and gave us a minute description of the different roads leading west into the mountains, warning us of certain dangers. At eleven o'clock Miss Emma came with the great keys, and we followed her, in single file, down the stairs and out into the back yard of the jail. From the broken gratings in front, the bit of rope and strips of blanket were left dangling in the wind.

We made short work of leave-taking, Captain Smith and I separating immediately from the rest, and pushing hurriedly out of the sleeping town, by back streets, into the bitter cold of the country roads. We stopped once to warm at the pits of some negro charcoal burners, and before day dawned had traveled sixteen miles. We found a sheltered nook on the side of the mountain open to the sun, where we made a bed of dry leaves and remained for the day. At night we set out again, due west by the stars, but before we had gone far my companion, who claimed to know something of the country, insisted upon going to the left, and within a mile turned into another left-hand road. I protested, claiming that this course was leading us back. While we were yet contending we came to a bridgeless creek whose dark waters barred our progress, and at the same moment, as if induced by the thought of the fording, the captain was seized with rheumatic pains in his knees, so that he walked with difficulty. We had just passed a house where lights were still showing, and to this we decided to return, hoping at least to find shelter for Smith. Leaving him at the gate, I went to a side porch and knocked at the door, which was opened by a woman who proved to be friendly to our cause, her husband being in the rebel army much against his will. We were soon seated to the right and left of her fireplace. Blazing pine knots brilliantly lighted the room, and a number of beds lined the walls. A trundle-bed before the fire was occupied by a very old woman, who was feebly moaning with rheumatism. Our hostess shouted into the old lady's ear, "Granny, them's Yankees." "Be they!" said she, peering at us with her poor old eyes. "Be ye sellin' tablecloths?" When it was explained that we were just



from the war, she demanded, in an absent way, to know if we were Britishers. We slept in one of the comfortable beds, and as a measure of prudence passed the day in the woods, leaving at nightfall with well-filled haversacks. Captain Smith was again the victim of his rheumatism, and directing me to his friends at Caesar's Head [on the border between North and South Carolina], where I was to wait for him until Monday (it then being Tuesday), he returned to the house, little thinking that we were separating forever.

I traveled very rapidly all night, hoping to make the whole distance, but day was breaking when I reached the head waters of the Saluda [River]. Following up the stream I found a dam on which I crossed, and although the sun was rising and the voices of children mingled with the lowing of cattle in the frosty air, I ran across the fields and gained a secure hiding-place on the side of the mountain. It was a long, solitary day, and glad was I when it grew sufficiently dark to turn the little settlement and get into the main road up the mountain. It was six zigzag miles to the top, the road turning on log abutments, well anchored with stones, and not a habitation on the way until I should reach Bishop's house, on the crest of the divide. Half way up I paused before a big summer hotel, looming up in the woods like the ghost of a deserted factory, its broken windows and rotting gateways redoubling the solitude of the bleak mountain side. Shortly before reaching Bishop's, "wife's shoes" became quite unmanageable. One had climbed up my leg half way to the knee, and I knocked at the door with the wreck of the other in my hand. My visit had been preceded but a day by a squad of partisan raiders, who had carried away the bedding and driven off the cattle of my new friends, and for this reason the most generous hospitality could offer no better couch than the hard floor. Stretched thereon in close proximity to the dying fire, the cold air coming up through the wide cracks between the hewn planks seemed to be cutting me in sections as with icy saws, so that I was forced to establish myself lengthwise of a broad puncheon at the side of the room and under the table.

In this family "the gray mare was the better horse," and poor Bishop, an inoffensive man, and a cripple withal, was wedded to a regular Xantippe.<sup>21</sup> It was evident that unpleasant thoughts were dominant in the woman's mind as she proceeded sullenly and vigorously with preparations for breakfast. The bitter bread of charity was being prepared with a vengeance for the unwelcome guest. Premonitions of the coming storm flashed now and then in lightning cuffs on the ears of the children, or crashed venomously among the pottery in the fireplace. At last the repast was spread, the table still standing against the wall, as is the custom among mountain housewives. The good-natured husband now advanced cheerfully to lend a hand in removing it into the middle of the room. It was when one of the table legs overturned the swill-pail that the long pent-up storm burst in a torrent of invective. The prospect of spending several days

here was a very gloomy outlook, and the relief was great when it was proposed to pay a visit to Neighbor Case, whose house was in the nearest valley, and with whose sons Captain Smith had lain in concealment for some weeks on a former visit to the mountains. I was curious to see his sons, who were famous outliers. From safe cover they delighted to pick off a recruiting officer or a tax-in-kind collector, or tumble out of their saddles the last drivers of a wagon train. These lively young men had been in unusual demand of late and their hiding-place was not known even to the faithful, so I was condemned to the society of an outlier of a less picturesque variety. Pink Bishop was a blacksmith, and just the man to forge me a set of shoes from the leather Neighbor Case had already provided. The little still-shed, concealed from the road only by a low hill, was considered an unsafe harbor, on account of a fresh fall of snow with its sensibility to tell-tale impressions. So we set up our shoe factory in a deserted cabin, well back on the mountain and just astride of that imaginary line which divides the Carolinas. From the fireplace we dug away the cornstalks, heaping the displaced bundles against broken windows and windy cracks, and otherwise secured our retreat against frost and enemies. Then ensued three days of primitive shoemaking. As may be inferred, the shoes made no pretension to style. I sewed the short seams



*Pink Bishop at the still. Illustration by William H. Shelton.*



at the sides and split the pegs from a section of seasoned maple. Rudely constructed as these shoes were they bore their wearer triumphantly into the promised land.

I restrained my eagerness to be going until Monday night, the time agreed upon, when, my disabled companion not putting in an appearance, I set out for my old friend's in Casher's Valley, [North Carolina]. I got safely over a long wooden bridge within half a mile of a garrisoned town.<sup>22</sup> I left the road, and turned, as I believed, away from the town, but I was absolutely lost in the darkness of a snow-storm, and forced to seek counsel as well as shelter. In this plight I pressed on towards a light, glimmering faintly through the blinding snow. It led me into the shelter of the porch to a small brown house, cut deeply beneath the low eaves and protected at the sides by flanking bedrooms. My knock was answered by a girlish voice, and from the ensuing parley, through the closed door, I learned that she was the daughter of a Baptist exhorter, and that she was alone in the house, her brother away at the village, and her father, having preached the day before at some distance, was not expected home until the next morning. Reassured by my civil-toned inquiries about the road, she unfastened the door and came out to the porch, where she proceeded to instruct me how to go on, which was just the thing I least desired to do. By this time I had discovered the political complexion of the family, and, making myself known, was instantly invited in, with the assurance that her father would be gravely displeased if she permitted me to go on before he returned. I had interrupted my little benefactress in the act of writing a letter, on a sheet of foolscap,<sup>23</sup> which lay on an old-fashioned stand in one corner of the room beside the ink-bottle and the candlestick. In the diagonal corner stood a tall bookcase, the crowded volumes nestling lovingly behind the glass doors—the only collection of the sort that I saw at any time in the mountains. A feather-bed was spread upon the floor, the head raised by means of a turned-down chair and here I was reposing comfortably when the brother arrived. It was late in the forenoon when the minister reached home, his rickety wagon creaking through the snow, and drawn at a snail's pace by a long-furred, knock-kneed horse. The tall but not very clerical figure was wrapped in a shawl and swathed round the throat with many turns of a woolen tippet.<sup>24</sup> The daughter ran out with eagerness to greet her father and tell of the wonderful arrival. I was received with genuine delight. It was the enthusiasm of a patriot eager to find a sympathetic ear for his long-repressed views.<sup>iii</sup>

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<sup>iii</sup> The Rev. James H. Duckworth, now postmaster of Brevard, Transylvania County, North Carolina, and in 1868 member of the State Constitutional Convention, in his letter of June 24, 1890, says: "I have not forgotten those things of which you speak. I can almost see you (even in imagination) standing at the fire when I drove up to the gate and went into the house and asked you, 'Have I ever seen you before?' Just then I observed your uniform. 'Oh, yes,' said I; 'I know who it is now.' . . . This daughter of whom you speak married about a year after, and is living in Morgantown, North Carolina, about one hundred miles from here. Hattie (for that is her name) is a pious, religious woman."





*Arrival at home of Baptist minister. Illustration by William H. Shelton.*

When night came and no entreaties could prevail to detain me over another day, the minister conducted me some distance in person, passing me on with ample directions to another exhorter, who was located for that night at the house of a miller who kept a ferocious dog. I came first to the pond and then to the mill, and got into the house without encountering the dog. Aware of the necessity of arriving before bedtime, I had made such speed as to find the miller's family still lingering about the fireplace with preacher number two seated in the lay circle. That night I slept with the parson, who sat up in bed in the morning, and after disencumbering himself of a striped extinguisher nightcap electrified the other sleepers by announcing that this was the first time he had ever slept with a Yankee. After breakfast the parson, armed with staff and scrip,<sup>25</sup> signified his purpose to walk with me during the day, as it was no longer dangerous to move by daylight. We must have been traveling the regular Baptist road, for we lodged that night at the house of another lay brother. The minister continued with me a few miles in the morning, intending to put me in the company of a man who was going towards Casher's Valley on a hunting expedition. When we reached his house, however, the hunter had gone; so, after parting with my guide, I set forward through the woods, following the tracks of the hunter's horse. The shoe-prints were sometimes plainly impressed in the snow, and again for long distances over dry leaves and bare ground, but an occasional trace could be found. It was past noon when I

arrived at the house where the hunters were assembled. Quite a number of men were gathered in and about the porch, just returned from the chase. Blinded by the snow over which I had been walking in the glare of the sun, I blundered up the steps, inquiring without much tact for the rider who had preceded me, and was no little alarmed at receiving a rude and gruff reception. I continued in suspense for some time until my man found an opportunity to inform me that there were suspicious persons present, thus accounting for his unexpected manner. The explanation was made at a combination meal, serving for both dinner and supper, and consisting exclusively of beans. I set out at twilight to make a walk of thirteen miles to the house of our old friend Esquire [Larkin C.] Hooper.<sup>26</sup> Eager for the cordial welcome which I knew awaited me, and nerved by the frosty air, I sped over the level wood-road, much of the way running instead of walking. Three times I came upon bends of the same broad rivulet. Taking off my shoes and stockings and rolling up my trousers above my knees, I tried the first passage. Flakes of broken ice were eddying against the banks, and before gaining the middle of the stream my feet and ankles ached with the cold, the sharp pain increasing at every step until I threw my blanket on the opposite bank and springing upon it wrapped my feet in its dry folds. Rising a little knoll soon after making the third ford, I came suddenly upon the familiar stopping-place of my former journey. It was scarcely more than nine o'clock, and the little hardships of the journey from Caesar's Head seemed but a cheap outlay for the joy of the meeting with friends so interested in the varied fortunes of myself and my late companions. Together we rejoiced at the escape of Sill and Lamson, and made merry over the vicissitudes of my checkered career. Here I first learned of the safe arrival in Tennessee of Knapp, Man Heady, and Old Tom Handcock.

After a day's rest I climbed the mountains to the Headen cabin, now presided over by the heroine of the heifer bell in the absence of her fugitive husband.<sup>27</sup> Saddling her horse, she took me the next evening to join a lad who was about starting for Shooting Creek, [North Carolina]. Young Green was awaiting my arrival, and after a brief delay we were off on a journey of something like sixty miles; the journey, however, was pushed to a successful termination by the help of information gleaned by the way. It was at the close of the last night's march, which had been long and uneventful, except that we had surmounted no fewer than three snow-capped ridges, that my blacksmith's shoes, soaked to a pulp by the wet snow, gave out altogether. On the top of the last ridge I found myself panting in the yellow light of the rising sun, the sad wrecks of my two shoes dangling from my hands, a wilderness of beauty spread out before me, and a sparkling field of frosty forms beneath my tingling feet. Stretching far into the west towards the open country of East Tennessee was the limitless wilderness of mountains drawn like mighty furrows across the toilsome way, the pale blue of the uttermost



ridges fading into an imperceptible union with the sky. A log house was in sight down in the valley, a perpendicular column of smoke rising from its single chimney. Towards this we picked our way, I in my stocking feet, and my boy guide confidently predicting that we should find the required cobbler. Of course we found him in a country where every family makes its own shoes as much as its own bread, and he was ready to serve the traveler without pay. Notwithstanding our night's work, we tarried no longer than for the necessary repairs, and just before sunset we looked down upon the scattering settlement of Shooting Creek. Standing on the bleak brow of "Chunky Gall" Mountain,<sup>28</sup> my guide recognized the first familiar object on the trip, which was the roof of his uncle's house. At Shooting Creek I was the guest of the Widow Kitchen, whose house was the principal one in the settlement and whose estate boasted two slaves. The husband had fallen by an anonymous bullet while salting his cattle on the mountain in an early year of the war.

On the day following my arrival I was conducted over a ridge to another creek, where I met two professional guides, Quince Edmonston and Mack Hooper. As I came upon the pair parting a thicket of laurel, with their long rifles at a shoulder, I instantly recognized the coat of the latter as the snuff-colored sack in which I had last seen Lieutenant Lamson. It had been given to the man at Chattanooga, [Tennessee], where these same guides had conducted my former companions in safety a month before. Quince Edmonston, the elder, had led numerous parties of Yankee officers over the Wacheesa trail [across the southern Appalachians into eastern Tennessee] for a consideration of a hundred dollars, pledged to be paid by each officer at Chattanooga or Nashville.

Two other officers were concealed nearby, and a number of refugees, awaiting a convoy, and an arrangement was rapidly made with the guides. The swollen condition of the Valley River made it necessary to remain for several days at Shooting Creek before setting out. Mack and I were staying at the house of Mrs. Kitchen. It was on the afternoon of a memorable Friday, the rain still falling in torrents without, that I sat before the fire poring over a small Sunday-school book; the only printed book in the house, if not in the settlement. Mack Hooper was sitting by the door. Attracted by a rustling sound in his direction, I looked up just in time to see his heels disappearing under the nearest bed. Leaping to my feet with an instinctive impulse to do likewise, I was confronted in the doorway by a stalwart Confederate officer fully uniformed and armed. Behind him was his quartermaster sergeant. This was a Government party collecting the tax-in-kind, which at that time throughout the Confederacy was the tenth part of all crops and other farm productions. It was an ugly surprise. Seeing no escape, I ventured a remark on the weather; only a stare in reply. A plan of escape flashed through my

mind like an inspiration. I seated myself quietly, and for an instant bent my eyes upon the printed pages. The two soldiers had advanced to the corner of the chimney nearest the door, inquiring for the head of the family and keeping their eyes riveted on my hostile uniform. At this juncture I was seized with a severe fit of coughing. With one hand upon my chest, I walked slowly past the men, and laid my carefully opened book face down upon a chest. With another step or two I was in the porch, and bounding into the kitchen I sprang out through a window already opened by the women for my exit. Away I sped bareheaded through the pelting rain, now crashing through thick underbrush, and now to my waist in swollen streams, plunging on and on, only mindful to select a course that would baffle horsemen in pursuit. After some miles of running I took cover behind a stack, within view of the road which Mack must take in retreating to the other settlement; and sure enough here he was, coming down the road with my cap and haversack, which was already loaded for the western journey. Mack had remained undiscovered under the bed, an interested listener to the conversation that ensued. The officer had been assured that I was a friendly scout; but convinced of the contrary by my flight, he had departed swearing he would capture that Yankee before morning if he had to search the whole settlement. So alarmed were we for our safety that we crossed that night into a third valley and slept in the loft of a horse-barn. On Sunday our expedition assembled on a hillside overlooking Shooting Creek,



*Surprised at Mrs. Kitchen's. Illustration by William H. Shelton.*



where our friends in the secret of the movement came up to bid us adieu. With guides we were a party of thirteen or fourteen, but only three of us officers who were to pay for our safe conduct. Each man carried his supply of bread and meat and bedding. Some were wrapped in faded bedquilts and some in tattered army blankets; nearly all wore ragged clothes, broken shoes, and had unkempt beards. We arrived upon a mountain side overlooking the settlement of Peach Tree, [North Carolina], and were awaiting the friendly shades of night under which to descend to the house of the man who was to put us across Valley River. Premature darkness was accompanied with torrents of rain, through which we followed our now uncertain guides. At last the light of the cabin we were seeking gleamed humidly through the trees. Most of the family fled into the outhouses at our approach, some of them not reappearing until we were disposed for sleep in a half-circle before the fire. The last arrival[s] were two tall women in homespun dresses and calico sun bonnets. They slid timidly in at the door with averted faces, and then with a rush and a bounce covered themselves out of sight in a bed, where they had probably been sleeping in the same clothing when we approached the house. Here we learned that a cavalcade of four hundred Texan Rangers had advanced into Tennessee by the roads on the day before.<sup>29</sup> Our guides, familiar with the movements of these dreaded troopers, calculated that with the day's delay enforced by the state of the river a blow would have been struck and the marauders would be in full retreat before we should arrive on the ground. We passed that day concealed in a stable, and as soon as it was sufficiently dark we proceeded in a body to the bank of the river attended by a man and a horse. The stream was narrow, but the current was full and swift. The horse breasted the flood with difficulty, but he bore us all across one at a time, seated behind the farmer.

We had now left behind us the last settlement, and before us lay only wild and uninhabited mountains. The trail we traveled was an Indian path extending for nearly seventy miles through an uninhabited wilderness. Instead of crossing the ridges it follows the trend of the range, winding for the most part along the crests of the divides. The occasional traveler having once mounted to its level pursues his solitary way with little climbing.

Early in the morning of the fourth day our little party was assembled upon the last mountain overlooking the open country of East Tennessee. Some of us had been wandering in the mountains for the whole winter. We were returning to a half-forgotten world of farms and fences, roads and railways. Below us stretched the Tellico River away towards the line of towns marking the course of the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad. One of the guides who had ventured down to the nearest house returned with information that the four hundred Texan Rangers had burned the depot at Philadelphia Station [southwest of Knoxville, in eastern Tennessee] the day before, but were now thought to be out of the country. We could see the

distant smoke arising from the ruins. Where the river flowed out of the mountains were extensive iron-works, the property of a loyal citizen, and in front of his house we halted for consultation. He regretted that we had shown ourselves so soon, as the rear guard of the marauders had passed the night within sight of where we now stood. Our nearest pickets were at Loudon [East Tennessee, outside of Knoxville], thirty miles distant on the railway, and for this station we were advised to make all speed.

For half a mile the road ran along the bank of the river and then turned around a wooded bluff to the right. Opposite to this bluff and accessible by a shallow ford was another hill, where it was feared that some of the Rangers were still lingering about their camp. As we came to the turn in the road our company was walking rapidly in Indian file, guide Edmonston and I at the front. Coming around the bluff from the opposite direction was a countryman mounted on a powerful gray mare. His overcoat was army blue, but he wore a bristling fur cap, and his rifle was slung on his back. At sight of us he turned in his saddle to shout to some one behind, and bringing his gun to bear came tearing and swearing down the road, spattering the



*The meeting with the Ohio Heavy Artillery. Illustration by William H. Shelton.*



gravel under the big hoofs of the gray. Close at his heels rode two officers in Confederate gray uniforms, and a motley crowd of riders closed up the road behind. In an instant the guide and I were surrounded, the whole cavalcade leveling their guns at the thicket and calling on our companions to halt, who could be plainly heard crashing through the bushes. The dress of but few of our captors could be seen, nearly all being covered with rubber talmas,<sup>30</sup> but their mounts, including mules as well as horses, were equipped with every variety of bridle and saddle to be imagined. I knew at a glance that this was no body of our cavalry. If we were in the hands of the Rangers the fate of the guides and refugees would be the hardest. I thought they might spare the lives of the officers. "Who are you? What are you doing here?" demanded the commander, riding up to us and scrutinizing our rags. I hesitated a moment, and then, throwing off the blanket I wore over my shoulders, simply said, "You can see what I am." My rags were the rags of a uniform, and spoke for themselves.

Our captors proved to be a company of the [Union's] 2[n]d Ohio Heavy Artillery, in pursuit of the marauders into whose clutches we thought we had fallen. The farmer on the gray mare was the guide of the expedition, and the two men uniformed as rebel officers were Union scouts. The irregular equipment of the animals, which had excited my suspicion most, as well as the animals themselves, had been hastily impressed from the country about the village of Loudon, where the 2[n]d Ohio was stationed. On the following evening, which was the 4th of March [1865], the day of the second inauguration of President Lincoln, we walked into Loudon and gladly surrendered ourselves to the outposts of the Ohio Heavy Artillery.



## Editor's Epilogue

A little over a month after Shelton's safe return to the Union lines, he was once again mustered into service as a first lieutenant in Battery "L," 1st New York Light Artillery, his original unit. Two months later, on June 17, 1865, he was mustered out with this battery at Elmira, New York. With the war over, Shelton returned to his family's farm in East Bloomfield, New York. In 1871, he left the small rural community in Ontario County to begin a new life as an artist and writer in the hustle and bustle of New York City. The big city suited Shelton; he lived there until his death in 1932.

Over the course of what proved to be a rather successful career, Shelton wrote and illustrated many articles and books. He was a regular contributor to *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, *Harper's*, *Leslie's Weekly*, *Scribner's*, and other of the day's leading publications. He also published several novels, most with Civil War themes.

Friends with many of the New York artists of the 1880s and 1890s, Shelton was a founding member of the Salmagundi Club, one of New York's oldest and most respected artist organizations. He later became the librarian of the group, a post that he held for the remainder of his life. Shelton, a lifelong bachelor, eventually took up residence at the Salmagundi Club, which is still located at 47 Fifth Avenue in Manhattan.

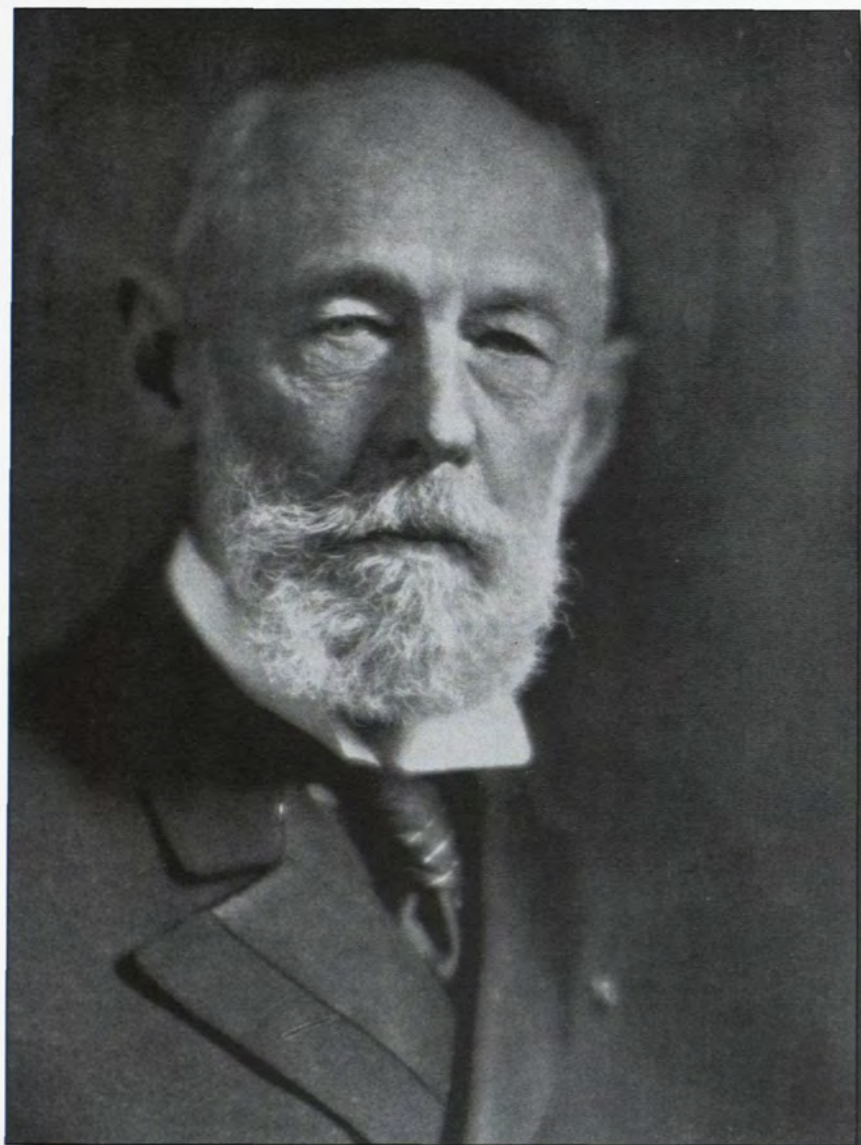
In his 70s, Shelton became the curator of the Jumel Mansion, Manhattan's oldest house and George Washington's headquarters during the Revolutionary War. While in this position, he authored a book about the mansion and its history. After a very long and remarkable life, William Henry Shelton died on October 4, 1932. He was 92 years old.

Michelle Finn, Assistant Editor



*Christmas Shopping. Illustration by William H. Shelton.*





*Portrait of Shelton in 1927.*

## Notes

1. This article first appeared in *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 40, no. 6 (October 1890). The first half of the article was reprinted in *Rochester History* 73, no. 2. The second half appears here.

2. Hancock was a mountaineer in Jackson County, North Carolina, who was helping Shelton and his companions escape from the Confederate army.

3. “Man Heady” was Emanuel Headen, the Blue Ridge resident who had planned to lead a party of men, including Shelton, across the mountains from North Carolina into East Tennessee.

4. Norton was one of Headen’s mountain neighbors. He once stole a hog from Mrs. Headen, thereby incurring her wrath.

5. Shelton’s original traveling companions were Lieutenants Edward E. Sill and Albert T. Lamson. As recounted in Part 1, the three men had escaped together from the Confederate “Camp Sorghum” in Columbia, South Carolina.

6. Knapp was a Union officer and a member of the party planning to head west into Tennessee.

7. During the Revolutionary War, American Tories supported royal rule and, calling themselves Loyalists, fought on the side of the British. In calling the refugees Tories, the Confederate guards were likely connecting them to these former opponents of American independence and freedom.

8. For readers with only a casual interest in the Civil War, the extent of loyal Union sympathy among the southern mountain people may be surprising. As Shelton reveals, even the home guard troops were often less than enthusiastic about serving the Confederate cause. A good survey of the divided sympathies of the southern highlanders can be found in Phillip Shaw Paludan, *Victims: A True Story of the Civil War* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), chapters 1 and 3. A comprehensive account of union “loyalism” in the southern mountains is found in Richard Nelson Current, *Lincoln’s Loyalists: Union Soldiers from the Confederacy* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992). Thanks to Preston E. Pierce for this note.

9. The Cherokee were one of a handful of Indian tribes that actively took part in the Civil War. Most Cherokees favored the South over the North, blaming the federal government and former U.S. President Andrew Jackson for their tribe’s previous dislocation and suffering on the Trail of Tears. Recruited in 1862 by William Holland Thomas, the Confederate Cherokee unit in the southeast was stationed near Knoxville, Tennessee. Its job was to hinder Union forces attempting to travel through the mountains of eastern Tennessee and western North Carolina. As



Shelton's story indicates, they also served as guards and scouts for the Confederate army.

10. Tigue and "the two Vincent boys" were three refugees from Georgia, who had joined Shelton's escape party in Part 1.

11. As Shelton indicates, the Hooper-Watson feud was an ongoing skirmish between two families that lived in the mountains in southern Jackson County, North Carolina. According to American Studies scholar Stephanie Burt Williams, the Civil War exacerbated the feud, as the Hoopers and Watsons took opposing sides. The feud was brutally violent, captured by gruesome images not only of skinned dogs, but also of severed human heads posted on stakes and hanging from tree limbs. The Hoopers' attack on the Watsons, which Shelton recounts here, may well have been the legendary Massacre at Cold Springs. Stephanie Burt Williams, *Haunted Hills: Ghosts and Legends of Highlands and Cashiers, North Carolina* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2008), 75-81. The tale of the Massacre at Cold Springs can also be found in T. Walter Middleton, *Trouble at the Forks* (Alexander, NC: Land of the Sky Books, 2006).

12. A cantonment is a temporary, nonmilitary lodging for soldiers.

13. A pullet is a young female chicken.

14. Draughts is the British name for the board game that Americans call checkers.

15. Edward Bulwer-Lytton was a nineteenth-century English writer who wrote popular novels for a mass audience. He originated such famous phrases as "The pen is mightier than the sword" and "It was a dark and stormy night."

16. A case-knife was a simple table knife (cutlery), so named because it was carried in a case, often a small wooden box.

17. Civil War soldiers carried special tools for using, maintaining, and repairing their firearms while in the field.

18. Claude Duval, Richard "Dick" Turpin, and John "Sixteen String Jack" Rann were well-known highwaymen of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Though executed, they live on as legends in the tales of their criminal exploits.

19. Mentioned in Part 1 of Shelton's account, Smith was a Union officer who had also escaped from the Confederate prison in Columbia, South Carolina, and had joined Shelton and his fellow refugees at Headen's house, where they were eventually recaptured.

20. Haversacks were leather or linen bags used to carry food rations.

21. Xantippe was the wife of the ancient philosopher Socrates. She was known as being ill-tempered, quarrelsome, and nagging.

22. A garrisoned town is one in which military troops have been stationed.

23. Foolscap refers to a size of commercially cut writing paper. Measuring around 12½ x 16 inches during the Civil War, foolscap got its name from the cap and bells watermark that had once been associated with this size paper.

24. A tippet is a long stole or scarf worn especially by members of the clergy.

25. In this instance, scrip most likely refers not to paper money, but to a small bag or pouch as typically carried by a pilgrim, shepherd, beggar, or similar wanderer.

26. Shelton introduced Hooper in Part I. Hooper was a neighbor of Tom Handcock. He and his family had welcomed Shelton and his companions into their home, where they enjoyed several days of warm hospitality.

27. In Part I of his story, Shelton introduced Mrs. Headen, an impressively vigorous woman who once snuck into a pasture to reclaim the bell off a cow she had recently sold. Her husband had wanted to keep the bell, but the new owner refused to let her take it, so she cornered the cow when he was not watching and took it back. Hence Shelton dubbed her “the heroine of the heifer bell.”

28. Shelton is likely referring to “Chunky Gal” Mountain, in Clay County, North Carolina, near the Georgia border. The ridge gets its name from a Cherokee legend about a young woman who defied her father’s wishes and ran away to be with the man she loved.

29. The Rangers were members of a law enforcement division that was officially formed in 1835 to protect the settlers who flowed into Texas following the Mexican War of Independence. After Texas seceded from the Union in 1861, many Rangers enlisted with the Confederacy. Their bravery, skill, and fierceness distinguished them as formidable fighters.

30. A talma is a large cape or short, full cloak worn in the nineteenth century.



*Foraging in the Wilderness. Illustration by William H. Shelton.*



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*The Battle of Gettysburg. Painting by William H. Shelton.*



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