

General Longstreet Museum by Tim Massey

The General Longstreet Museum in Russellville, TN has situated itself among the popular destinations of Civil War enthusiasts. The centerpiece of the museum is the Nenney home where Confederate Lt. General James Longstreet billeted during the winter of 1863-64. The home was scheduled for demolition a few short years ago to make way for a retail store, when suddenly the newly formed Lakeway Civil War Preservation Association under the leadership of Reece Sexton and Mike Beck, swooped in saving it from the clutches of modern progress.



To say the group has made a lot of improvement of their own in a short amount of time would be an understatement. Longtime president Beck calls it a gathering of multitalented leaders who share a likeminded desire to preserve local, as well as regional history. The Nenney home was not the fanciest house in the area and Longstreet likely chose it because of its close proximity to the railroad with telegraph lines which were moved inside the house. It also sat at a crossroad on "The Great Road" making it a true communications center. Longstreet's adjutant, Moxley Sorrel, was in charge of communications. During



ing their stay here many documents were generated as well as the continuous roar of the telegraph. Sorrel kept the southernmost wing of the Army of Northern Virginia in touch with the Confederate government as it planned the retaking of Knoxville, and the continued control of East Tennessee. The communications room of the Gen. Longstreet Museum is the only such representation in the state. As one stands listening

to the "chatter" of the telegraph, it is easy to wonder back in time and visualize Sorrel and his aides as they busily kept up the communications flow.

Few today realize the hotbed of activity that swirled in the eastern part of Tennessee. The most

important asset of the region was its railroads from Bristol to Chattanooga which both sides prized and wanted to control. To control the railways as well as the waterways meant eventual victory. Longstreet realized the vital role of the area and gave it his best shot. It was a difficult time as this proved to be the coldest winter on record, as well as difficulty's related to feeding an army in an area well picked over. Short on materials and needed back in Virginia, Longstreet would rejoin Lee's army in the spring 1864, but not before spending another month in nearby Greeneville. With Longstreet's return to Virginia, the region around the Nenny home would become more volatile as both armies would vie for control of the area. Many unknown men of both sides sleep today in the soil of what was once the Nenny farm. The Longstreet Museum remembers the toils of the region in its many interpretative panels which reflect the struggles of the war period.



Tennessee State Historian Dr. Van West of Middle Tennessee State University has worked diligently making the panels and offering direction in the continued development of the museum. On January 8, 2014, the general's 193rd birthday, Dr. West returned to the museum to complete the final two exhibit rooms. The most important was Longstreet's Bedroom. Mike Beck, Steve Street, and Linda Lammers worked to make sure this day came off without a hitch as the General's Bedroom was transformed to look as if the General had just stepped out to smoke a "ceegar."

The interpretative panels throughout the home take the visitor down the timeline of the Civil War in East Tennessee. One of the new panels tells of the Bridge Burners of 1861, whose plan was to disrupt the rail transportation system in the pro-eastern end of the state. Approved by Lincoln, the plan had been for the Union army to invade eastern Tennessee just as the bridge burners carried out the covert operation of setting fire to nine bridges from Bristol to Chattanooga, and totally disrupting traffic between Virginia and Georgia. Too late to stop the bridge burners from their clandestine actions, William T. Sherman decided not to invade at the last instant. Five of the nine bridges were destroyed and with the promised support of the Federal government, vanished into vapor. The bridge burners were rounded up and prosecuted. Some of the Bridge Burners gave their lives for their actions, being hung, and left near the very trestles that they had torched. One such bridge, the Lick Creek Bridge and its nearby Bridge Burners Park

is just a few miles from the Longstreet Museum. Two of the Bridge Burners are buried inside a small family cemetery at the park. The museum has a timber from the burned Lick Creek Bridge as well as other railroad and related artifacts.



Other panels at the museum reflect the war in Morristown, the battle around Bethesda Church, Longstreet himself, and the Battle of Beans Station. A backroom of the house is set aside as a civilian gallery and gives a glimpse of the Nenney family. One of the treasured items is the wedding dress of Lucy Nenney who married Hugh Patterson, son of Union General Patterson of Philadelphia. This collection includes crocks, sewing machines and

many of the items a family of the period would have used. Many items in the house are original to the Nenney family and have been returned to the home.

One of the exhibit rooms includes artifacts found in the fields in the surrounding the area. These many items offer a glimpse into the soldier's daily life. This artifact display is one of the best around and is a tribute to the support of the museum by local enthusiasts.

It is only proper to mention panels on Andrew Johnson. Johnson, from nearby Greeneville, was appointed military governor of the state by Lincoln. He was in Nashville serving this post while Longstreet was here, and then would go on to become Lincoln's Vice President, and President of the United States following Lincoln's death.

The office used by General Joseph B. Kershaw was moved here from a nearby farm and is undergoing restoration, and is a nice addition to the Longstreet Museum. The visitor's center, which includes a gift shop, features a research center that includes a full set of the OR's and other reference materials. The collection continues to grow making this a prized reference resource for the area.

The crown jewel of the museum is manager Linda Lammers, she has a passion for General Longstreet and a deep knowledge of the period. Her enthusiasm makes touring the museum a pleasure.

The Longstreet Museum represents the best in Civil War interpretation, giving visitors a glimpse into the past, and an understanding of the war in the region. The museum is a reflection of those with vision, those with knowledge and talents, capped with those knowledgeable in restoration, and interpretation coming together in concert. The Longstreet Museum will be on everybody's Civil War roadmap soon. Make your plans to visit before the word gets out!