

York re-creates its Civil War occupation

Rebels in town, again

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Bil Bowden - YDR

Scott Butcher, portraying Confederate Gen. Harry T. Hays, introduces Maj. Gen. J.E.B. Stuart during Friday night's Patriot Days candlelight tour. Butcher noted that Stuart never made it to York, but used his encampment to show how he lived.

On June 28, 1863, 6,000 battle-tested Confederate soldiers marched through the heart of downtown York. As residents looked on, their nerves trembled. Occupation was upon them and no one knew what to expect.

Friday night, the York County Heritage Trust brought those events back to life via a living history event called Patriot Days. It was divided into three parts — a Civil War celebrity tea, a Civil War drama and concert and a candlelight walking tour of significant homes of the period.

More than 20 actors, some from as far away as New York, put on their Union and Confederate outfits. They portrayed various soldiers, including the rebels who held the county's fate in the barrels of their guns. Eventually, the Confederates left York to engage in the Battle of Gettysburg.

Other actors played civilians who lived in York at the time. One was a negotiator. Another wrote her observations in letters. Still another was a nurse and protector of the flag.

All spent the afternoon and evening in character, sharing tales about York's Civil War history.

Intermittent rain forced Friday night's tea, which was scheduled to be at the Bonham House at 152 E. Market St., to be moved to the Heritage Trust's building at 250 E. Market St. About 130 people attended.

The trust brought out one of its best antique silver tea sets for the

event. Justine Landis, trust curator, said she wanted guests to have a true Victorian experience. On the balcony above the trust lobby, the Susquehanna Travellers band played period songs such as "Hard Tack Come Again No More."

The song was a protest against hard tack, which was a water and flour cracker.

"Tack was notoriously bad," said band member Craig Herschok. "But it's what the soldiers lived on."

Back down on the floor, Scott Butcher, playing the role of Gen. Harry T. Hays, said the troops had it rough, especially his. He was the leader of a group known as the Louisiana Tigers. They were known for their drunkenness and thievery.

"But they were also known for their fierceness in battle," Butcher said. Nearby, Butcher's wife Debbie was portraying local Cassandra Small. Aside from her uncomfortable dress, Debbie Butcher said she was enjoying answering peoples' questions.

"I don't think the hoop skirt is going to make a fashion comeback anytime soon," she said with a laugh.

She said many of the questions she fielded had little to do with the war or the occupation. Instead, many women wanted to know about domestic life.

"That's one of the things that made this event so special," she said. "It was a look at York from a lot of angles and perspectives."

The Bonham House staged a tent area, which belonged to Maj. Gen. J.E.B Stuart and his wife Flora. The roles were played by real-life husband and wife Joe Jr. and Carol Posinski of the Civil War Heritage Foundation of York.

As Darrell and Pat Hoffman of Spring Grove surveyed the tent, Darrell Hoffman smiled as memories of his grandfather, Asa William Hoffman, returned to him.

"He was my first teacher of local history," he said. "I think he would have enjoyed this."

Later, at the re-enactment, Jennifer Kitzmiller of Windsor Township and her 9-year-old daughter Morgan Stambaugh said their family had taken advantage of just about everything the trust offered for Patriot Days. Morgan particularly enjoyed herself in the trust museum, noting that she had seen a kids' room without a TV.

"That wouldn't bother me, since I don't watch a lot of TV anyway," she said.

She watched the re-enactment unfold with her family. When the show was over, Stambaugh's grandmother, Barb Kitzmiller of Washington Township, praised the event.

"I learned some things about Civil War life in York, and I hope they do it again next year," she said.