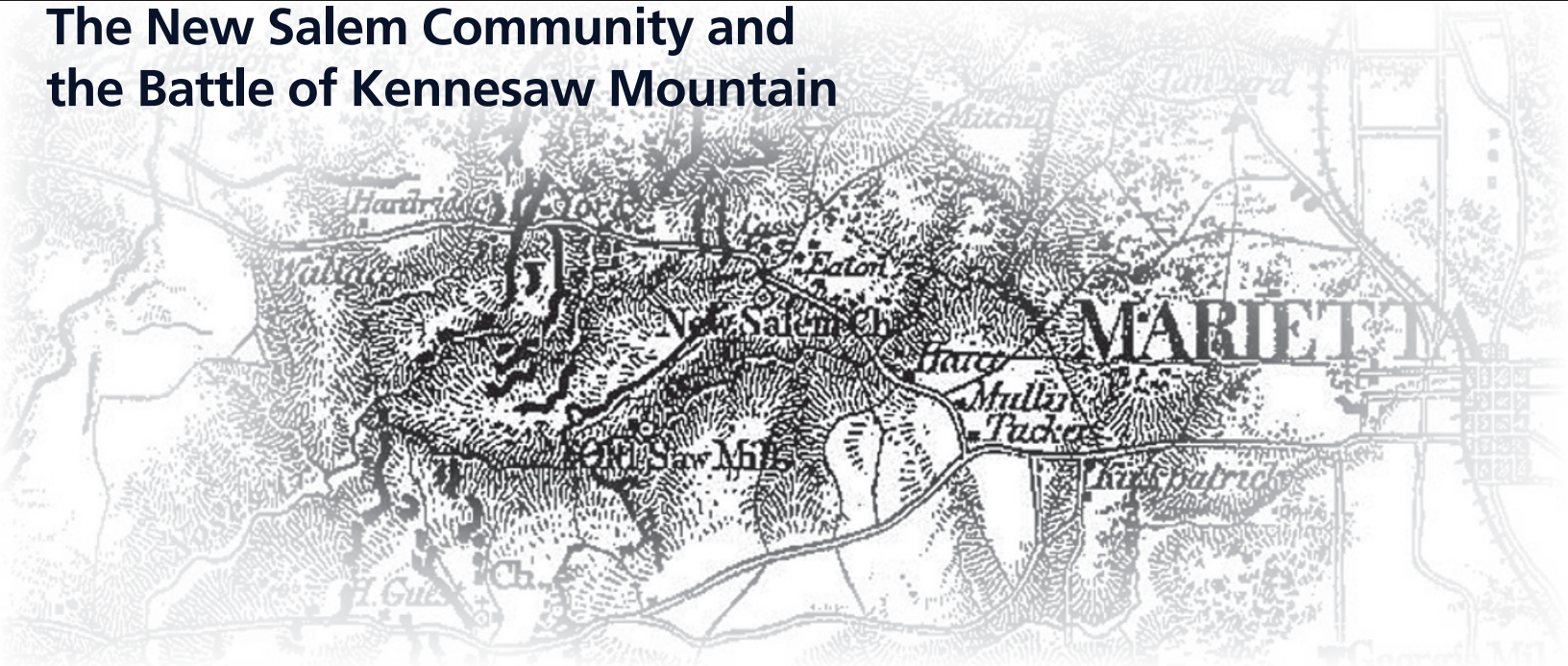




The New Salem Community and the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain



Before Kennesaw Mountain erupted in violence in June 1864, the New Salem community, with its several small farms, Baptist church, saw mill, and small schoolhouse, stood along the Burnt Hickory Road at the base of Pigeon Hill. From the 1830s to the 1860s, Northwest Georgia families lived, worked, studied, and worshipped in this peaceful and thriving agrarian neighborhood. But the march of Confederate and Union forces brought all-out war to Cobb County, changing the landscape – and residents’ lives – forever.

A Small Farming Community



Farmer with plow, 1858

In the mid-1800s, most landowners living on the Burnt Hickory Road were small farmers. A typical yeoman farming family consisted of a husband, a wife, and lots of children, all of whom lent their labor to the enterprise. Yeomen were, after slaves, the poorest members of the community. Most small farmers did not own slaves because they could not afford to buy them.

Between 40 and 80 acres of cleared land served a small farmer’s immediate needs. Wood-frame houses or log cabins with five rooms or less provided shelter for the family, while outbuildings like tool sheds and detached kitchens stood in convenient locations inside the farm. Families owned livestock, including oxen to help pull a wagon or plow, a milking cow, a

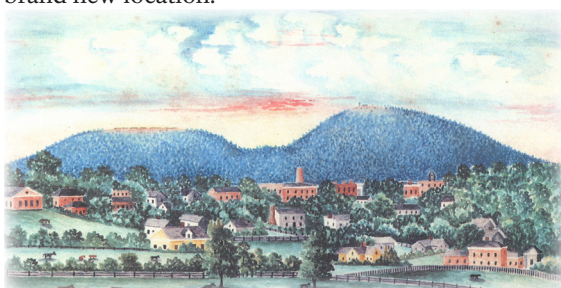
hen to lay eggs, a sheep or two for wool, and a few hogs. Rough-hewn worm-rail fences snaked around fields, prevented free-ranging animals from invading crops.

Farmers grew wheat, maize, sweet potatoes, cotton, peas, beans, and oats. Some families also owned beehives for wax and honey. Although yeoman farmers worked primarily for survival, they sold any excess production on the open market.

Farm life was difficult. The constant labor was physically and mentally exhausting. Sunday, a day for attending services at New Salem Baptist Church, socializing, and resting, offered hard-working families a welcome respite from farm chores.

New Salem Church and New Salem Academy

Standing on top of a wooded hill on the south side of Burnt Hickory Road, the log-built New Salem Baptist Church was the center of community worship and social activity. Each Sunday, area residents walked, rode their horses, and steered their carriages up the narrow, steep lane leading to the church house. Taking their pews, they listened to the Reverend Springer deliver his sermons. But weekly services stopped abruptly in June 1864 when a Confederate division entrenched in the churchyard. For two weeks, New Salem Church was used as a Confederate field hospital. Troops needing logs to construct their earthworks tore down the church, displacing its congregation. Nearly ten years passed before New Salem Church was finally rebuilt in a brand new location.



Around the corner from the church stood New Salem Academy, the neighborhood schoolhouse. Area children, including those of the Hardage, York, Wallis, and Kirk families, attended classes to learn reading, writing, arithmetic, and penmanship. A typical classroom scene in 1862 showed thirty young students of various ages sitting together in one room, answering their teacher’s questions and writing in notebooks. During breaks, children drank water at a nearby spring or played pranks on one another in the wooded schoolyard. But the laughter ceased when families fled the New Salem Community for safety purposes during the Civil War. The Battle devastated the area, and many residents never returned to their land after the armies moved on. New Salem Academy ceased to operate after 1864.

Marietta, Georgia in the shadow of Kennesaw Mountain, 1860

The Hardage Houses and Sawmill

In a field on the south side of Burnt Hickory Road across from Pigeon Hill stands a sign reading “Hardage House Site (1864).” The sign commemorates property once known by the Hardage family as the “Orchard House.” Cobb County pioneer and small farmer George Washington Hardage built it in the 1840s for his wife and fourteen children.

About 1,000 yards south of the Orchard House, George’s steam-powered sawmill operated on Nose’s Creek. George’s brother John worked there during the day. Lucinda, George’s daughter, later remembered that as a child she was allowed to “ride the lumber carriage over the water at the mill” for fun.

Before the war, on orders from a local doctor, George traded homes with John, whose own house stood one mile down the road. The swap was arranged after several of George’s children came down with malaria due to the Orchard House’s proximity to marshy Nose’s Creek. Thereafter, George and his family lived in a five-room house about a mile west of Pigeon Hill on the north side of Burnt Hickory Road.

While George and his family occupied John’s house, war came to the New Salem community. Several Confederate generals, including Lieutenant General Leonidas Polk (who was killed on Pine Mountain during his stay), Brigadier General John H. Kelly, and Major General William W. Loring, used the John Hardage house as headquarters. That house survived the war, but artillery fire from Pigeon Hill wrecked the surrounding farm, yard, and fields.

On June 27, 1864, the yard of the abandoned Orchard House became a battleground when advancing Union forces attacked an entrenched Confederate skirmish line. Southern artillery shelled the position, destroying the house and yard.

On a wooded slope just to the north of the sawmill, Federals and Confederates placed their trenchlines no more than 160 yards apart and skirmished with each other on a near-constant basis for two weeks. Since the armies routinely used logs and wooden planks to build their earthworks, it seems unlikely that the sawmill survived the 1860s.

The Christopher and Cass Houses



Widow and daughter, 1860s

The Christopher family, a young couple with five children, lived in a small house on the south side of Burnt Hickory Road about 200 yards west of the Orchard House. H. F. Christopher lived and worked on George Hardage’s farm. He and his wife, Narcissa, were illiterate. Their children did not attend the New Salem Academy. On June 27, 1864, the vacant Christopher House stood directly in the path of the Federal assault on Pigeon Hill. It probably did not survive the battle. The Christophers never returned to Cobb County after the war.

A sign on Burnt Hickory Road marks the 1864 site of the Cass House. This was the vacation home of Johanna Cass, an Irish-born widow who owned and operated a hotel in Savannah. To escape the malarial

swamps of coastal Georgia, Mrs. Cass, like many other lowland residents, would ride north in the summertime. Her youngest daughter, Agnes, accompanied her. Here they would live for several months in a small, two-room frame house with a large front porch. Agnes, seven years old, attended the New Salem Academy. Although the Cass family was Catholic, they rode out to the New Salem Church on Sundays. However, they never entered the church house – instead, Johanna and Agnes would sit on the horse-block just outside the door to listen to the sermon. The Casses temporarily abandoned their vacation home while the fighting erupted around Kennesaw Mountain. After the war, the house was burned down by a burglar. Mrs. Cass bought her next vacation home in Smyrna.

The Eaton and York Houses



Georgia historical marker at the Cyrus York House site, Burnt Hickory Road

A mystery enshrouds the site of the Eaton house, which stood on a hill on the north side of Burnt Hickory Road in 1864. Existing documentation identifies the structure as a wood-frame house with five rooms and a veranda. But the identity of the family that lived there during the 1860s is unclear. A July 1863 list containing the names of needy residents who received salt from the State of Georgia suggests that the house may have been occupied by the widow of a deceased soldier named William Eaton. Whoever lived there fled the area before the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain, leaving the house vacant.

In 1860, small farmer Cyrus York lived with his wife and six children in a two-story frame-built house on

a wooded lot. It stood on the north side of Burnt Hickory Road just below Pigeon Hill. Before the war, neighborhood children would play on a swing hanging from a limb of a tall tree in the yard. Two other people also lived on the property, a white tenant farmer and a female slave owned by the York family. A roadside historical marker attests to the fact that General Joseph E. Johnston used the York house as his headquarters from June 10 to June 19, 1864. The house, used as a refuge by Union sharpshooters during the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain, burned down when Confederate cannonneers bombarded it with hot-shot. After the war, the York family did not return to Cobb County.

The Kirk House



Union entrenchment in the fields of the Kirk House (center), 1864. Little Kennesaw Mountain and Pigeon Hill stand in the background.

In 1860, the small farm of George W. Kirk lay about 650 yards north of the York house. George, his wife, and five young children lived in a two-room log cabin with a breezeway through the middle. A grist or cane mill stood nearby. When the armies invaded the area, Confederate General William W. Loring used the cabin as his headquarters for a short time. A Federal division constructed earthworks in the Kirk’s yard and fields before attacking Pigeon Hill on June 27, 1864. Solid shot crashed through the home’s hallway during the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain. George W. Kirk did not return to Cobb County after the war. His brothers Fleet and Cleveland Kirk took possession of his farm after 1870.

Conclusion

Residents who lived in the New Salem community during the mid- to late nineteenth century never forgot the scenes of destruction they witnessed. Those who returned to their homes, and those who acquired property near Pigeon Hill after the war, made the area inhabitable again by building new houses, repairing or tearing down damaged structures, removing debris, plowing down earthworks, and planting new crops. Even though a peaceful suburban community rests just outside park boundaries today, the armies’ earthworks are still visible on private and public lands, bearing silent witness to violent, bloody days in June 1864, when the Civil War came to the Burnt Hickory Road.

Bulletin created by Angela Tooley, Kennesaw State University history student, in cooperation with Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park.