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*October 2021*

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## *War on the Homefront in Hardeman County License Plate to Dover Cemetery*



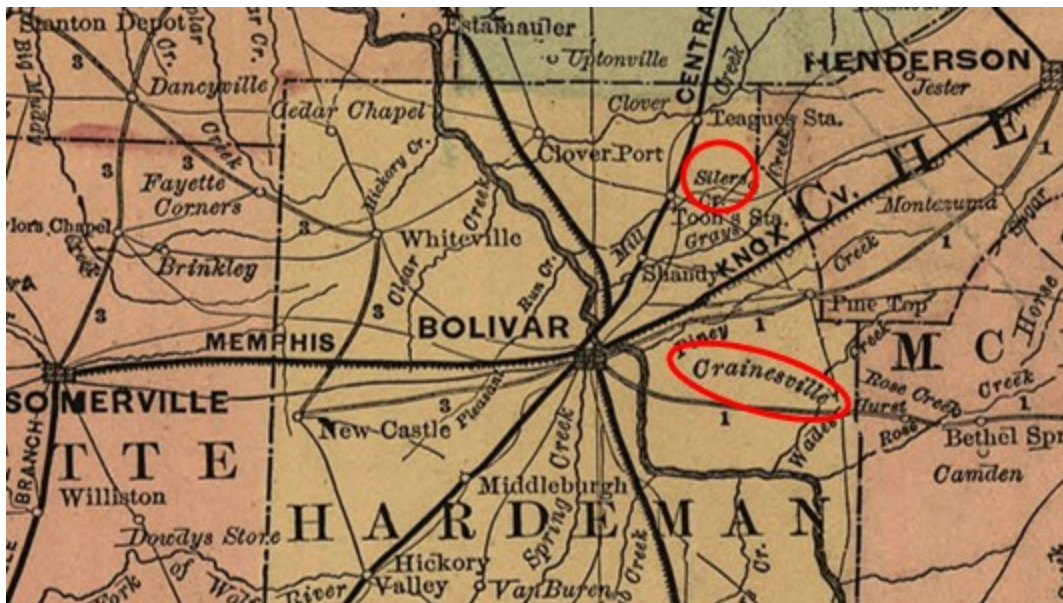
*This battlefield supporter visited the Dover Cemetery, also referred to as the Old Dover Cemetery. The cemetery is located on Church Street across from the First Christian Church. By February 6, 1862 Company B, 51st Tennessee Infantry, found themselves at Fort Donelson on the Cumberland River where they were posted in the Old Dover Cemetery and detailed as artillerymen with Captain A.H. Parker's light artillery (Ross's Artillery Battery).*

Often conducted outside the sanctions of military authority, guerilla warfare operations during the Civil War could bring violence to the doorstep of Union and Confederate families alike—such was the case of Joseph Henson and his family in Hardeman County, Tennessee.

As a young man, Joseph Henson had travelled with his family from North Carolina and settled on

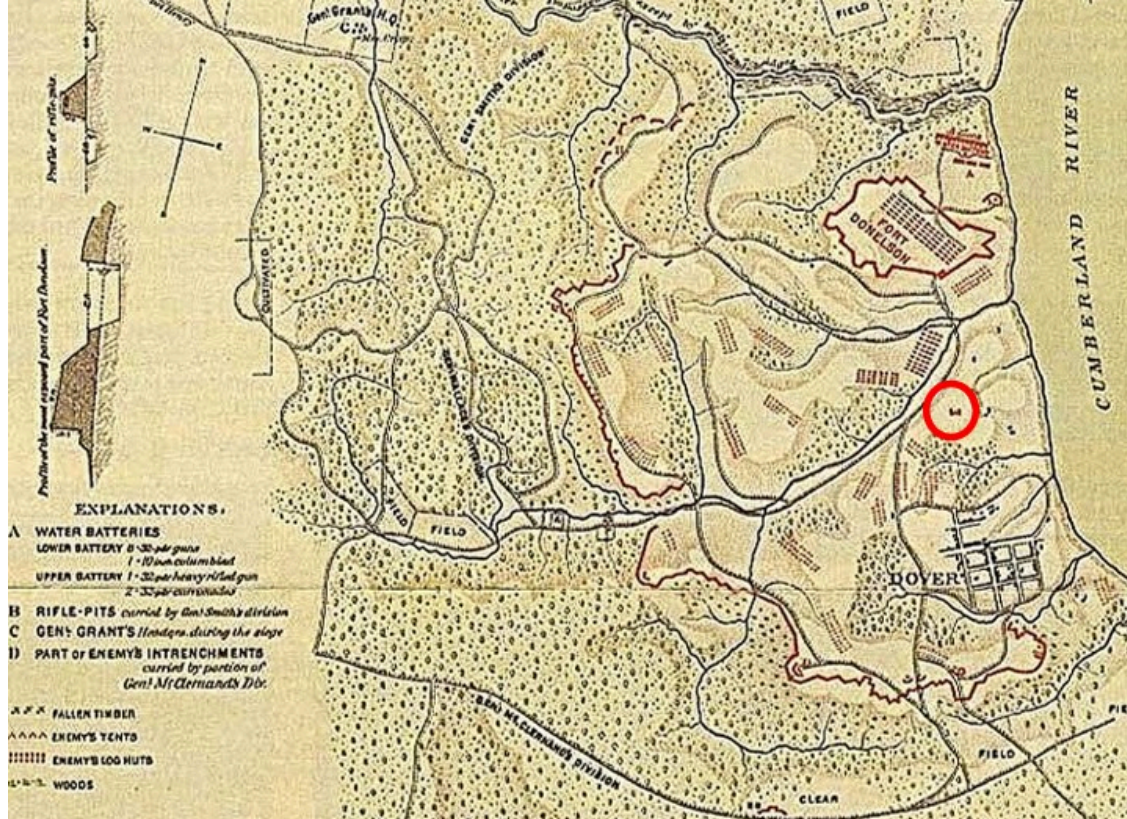
500 acres of land near Crainesville, Tennessee that had been purchased at auction from the State of Tennessee by his father, William, in 1846. By 1860 Joseph was living with his wife (the former Sarah Catherine Ray) and five children at Silers (now Silerton). The families of both Joseph and Sarah were known to be “Union people”—a circumstance that would force difficult family decisions, if not survival, as Civil War came to Tennessee.

Given his family’s loyalties, it is surprising that when Tennessee issued a call for volunteers, Joseph Henson enlisted at nearby Henderson Station on December 4, 1861 to serve one year in the Confederate army as a Private in Company B of the 51<sup>st</sup> Tennessee Infantry. Henson’s motivation to enlist is not known, but perhaps it was a strategy to protect his family living in a country that was largely Confederate sympathizers. Although by contrast, four of his wife’s brothers enlisted in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Tennessee Cavalry Regiments, USA.



*1888 Map of Hardeman County Tennessee Showing Silers and Crainesville*

On January 28, 1862 the 51<sup>st</sup> Tennessee was ordered to guard bridges on the Tennessee River near Danville. Reports for Company B indicate that the soldiers were without arms and very inefficiently drilled, but by the time the regiment had marched to Fort Henry, they had been issued double-barrel shotguns. By February 6 Private Henson and Company B found themselves at Fort Donelson on the Cumberland River where they were posted in the Old Dover Cemetery and detailed as artillerymen with Captain A.H. Parker’s light artillery (Ross’s Artillery Battery). Notably, in the battle of Fort Donelson that followed, Parker’s artillery was commended for “gallant conduct during the action.” Following the Confederate defeat and surrender on February 16, Private Henson managed to escape with most of his regiment and retreated back to Henderson Station. There, he was re-equipped with a “sporting rifle” before being ordered to Corinth, Mississippi and then marching to Tupelo on May 29. In the weeks that followed, records for Company B note that most of the soldiers were either sick, on furlough, missing, or deserted. Indeed, Private Henson was listed as having been “sent to hospital” on June 30. There are no further military records for Joseph Henson, but he did manage to return home to Hardeman County.



*At the Battle of Fort Donelson (February 11-16, 1862), Company B of the 51<sup>st</sup> Tennessee Infantry was detailed to Parkers Light Artillery (Ross' Artillery Battery).*

For the next 16 months Henson likely stayed within the area of Silers evading Union patrols or Confederate authorities recovering stragglers and enforcing conscription laws. Henson had after all left the 51<sup>st</sup> Tennessee 6 months prior to completing his service and could be considered absent without leave. Operating in that area at that time were several partisan or guerilla units including one known as “Street’s Band,” sometimes recognized as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mississippi State Cavalry commanded by Capt. Solomon Street. Newspaper accounts of the time (October 11-25, 1863) suggest that Henson may have been among “stragglers” rounded up by Street or another “gang of thieves” commanded by a George Allen. The worst was to happen, however, as records of the Western Sanitary Commission relate that Joseph Henson was subsequently “murdered by guerillas.” Henson family history provides more grim detail noting that he was shot in the abdomen by “bushwhackers” in front of his home after they robbed the family. Soon after Joseph’s death, his father (William) sought assistance from the federal Provost Marshal’s office in Pocahontas, Tennessee to protect the family. On the Marshal’s recommendation William and his family, Joseph’s wife, and her children were declared “Union refugees” and placed in the care of the Western Sanitary Commission in Memphis. By November 9 the family fled Tennessee and was transported to Quincy, Illinois where they would unite with William Henson’s brother.

Two of Joseph Henson’s brothers, Nathan and Daniel, returned to Hardeman County after the War and rejoined their brother, William Jr., who had curiously remained behind when the family fled to Illinois. Questions remain about the potential divided loyalties of Joseph Henson and his family, and the imprecise history of guerilla warfare makes it more difficult to determine. A sad epitaph is that Joseph’s gravesite is yet to be found—perhaps a hasty burial on the family farm before they fled the Civil War in Tennessee.

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