The Story of Corinth Resident Walter A. Overton

I've told you about the famous generals and soldiers, the nurses, even a teacher, but what about that average Joe who made Corinth his home? Just an ordinary guy trying to make a buck and raise a family in a quiet little railroad town. In this case the everyman was Walter A. Overton.

In the early days of Corinth everybody was from somewhere else, and that included Walter. He was born in Georgia and attended Mercer University and for some reason settled with his wife Fannie and two kids in North Mississippi. He celebrated his 30th birthday in 1860 and if he wasn't the richest man in town, he wasn't the poorest either.

He was a mason, socially and professionally, and made bricks for 1.50 a thousand. He owned a slave, John, who was a bricklayer and they worked together on chimneys and pillars for the new homes cropping up in town. Walter also pulled in an income from plaster work, rental properties, loaning money, as well as serving in the post office and as a local magistrate.

Walter kept a small diary and the entries record the events that shaped the nation's future as well as the day to day events of a working man.

May 1 (1860), "Spent the day in town. They took a man up there to-day for running away with another man's wife & gave him a pretty good whipping. He was a scamp & a coward or he never would have submitted to it."

June 16 (1860), "They caught a thief in town last night and committed him to jail today. They had a prize wrestle in town this evening. I am fearful that the morals of Corinth are on the decrease."

In politics Walter was a moderate. He was a democrat but he didn't embrace the cause of the fire-eaters who called for secession. He went to the political meetings as the presidential candidates made their way from town to town and listened to the speeches of Stephen Douglas, John Bell and John C. Breckenridge. In January of 1861 there was a convention in Jackson to determine if the State would secede. Like most of Tishomingo County, Walter voted the "Union ticket," when elections were held for county delegates.

Jan 10 (1861) "They finished laying the track of the Mobile & Ohio. Mississippi passed by her convention yesterday an ordinance of immediate secession, and hence we are out of the United States now. I fear great trouble is close at our doors."

In no time at all Corinth was teeming with soldiers of the new Confederacy. Not all of them were saints, and not all of them were what they appeared to be.

Aug 5 (1861) "Spent the day in town…there were a good many soldiers there and they were a bad set. I saw one ring fight, and several minor fisticuffs. I expected to see some of them killed but there was not. They started for Memphis just before sundown. They had two women with them dressed in men's clothing, going soldiering."

Walter was a member of the local militia company "The Corinth Rifles" but dropped out prior to their departure to Pensacola, Florida. He drilled with a cavalry company for a time but his only active service came in September of 1861 with the 2nd Mississippi Infantry in the "Army of 10,000." The "army" was called up for a mere 60 days of service. Walter was sent up to Kentucky and returned at the completion of his time having never seen the enemy.

In early March the Confederate Army of the Mississippi began to gather in Corinth. Thousands of tents popped up around the countryside, several of them in Walter's backyard.

Mar 3(1862) "A regiment of soldiers have camped on my land and there is no telling how much damage they are doing it. They are cutting all the timber and burning all the rails. If they stay long they will ruin it."

A frustrated Walter went to see General Adley Gladden to make his complaint.

Mar 25 (1862) "General Gladden this evening sent out some of his aides and the Provost Marshal to see what damage they had done me, and they came back and said they had done me no damage. If that is the way our friends treat us, Lord deliver us from our friends."

The Battle of Shiloh began on the 6th of April and the following day Walter made his way north to help.

Apr 7 (1862) "I started to the battlefield this evening but could not get there. I stopped at Atkins' and helped to dress the wounded until 11 o'clock. The road is crowded with troops making their way back to Corinth.

The last entry of the small diary was made on May 28, 1862, the day the Confederate forces abandoned Corinth to the enemy. Walter had taken Fannie and the children to Holly Springs but had returned in time to see the retreat. He pulled up stakes, as did most of the residents, but he eventually came home to Corinth.

The Overton's had three more children and eventually found the quiet life they hoped to find in Corinth. Walter resumed his brick making but he gave up the physical work and became a teacher. He taught school in the old Cruise Street Building that had seen duty as a church and an arsenal before it became a seat of learning. In his final years Walter became a Justice of the Peace and passed away in 1900.

Walter and his beloved Fannie are still in Corinth. You can visit them in the old City Cemetery over on the west side.