

WAR COMES TO MADISONVILLE



Enjoying “forced hospitality”

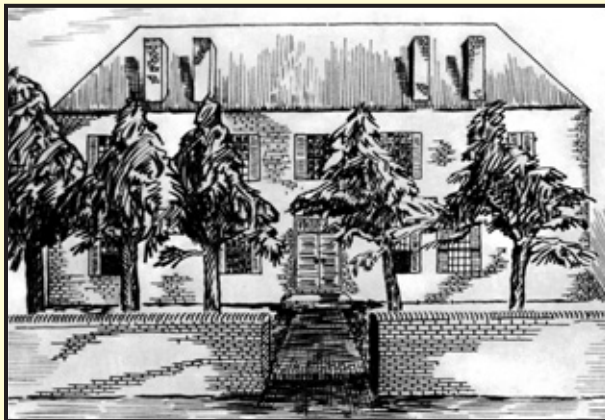


KNOXVILLE CAMPAIGN

On November 4, 1863, to divert Federal forces from Chattanooga, Confederate Gen. James Longstreet led two reinforced divisions from the city to attack Union Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside's garrison in Knoxville. Burnside confronted Longstreet outside Knoxville, then withdrew to his fortifications on November 17, and Longstreet besieged the city. In Chattanooga, after Union Gen. Ulysses S. Grant's army defeated Confederate Gen. Braxton Bragg's forces at the end of the month, Grant ordered Gen. William T. Sherman to reinforce Burnside. As Sherman marched toward Knoxville, Longstreet withdrew on December 4. Sherman soon rejoined Grant.

Madisonville, the seat of Monroe County, was divided during the war. A monument erected years later on the courthouse square commemorates residents who joined Confederate and Federal units.

Each side occupied the town at different times. On June 9, 1863, the *Knoxville Daily Southern Chronicle* reported that “the young ladies of Madisonville and vicinity gave a series of Tableaux together with a Concert, for the purpose of raising a fund in the relief of our sick and wounded soldiers. They realized the Pretty little sum of one hundred and eighteen dollars on the occasion. ... There is not a town in the Confederacy where there is more unity of feeling and purpose respecting the Confederacy and its final triumph than Madisonville.”



This drawing by local artist C.F. Hunt shows the post-Civil War courthouse, which stood on this site until 1896, when it was demolished to build the present courthouse.

On December 7, 1863, during the Knoxville campaign, Union Gen. William T. Sherman ordered Gen. Jefferson C. Davis to occupy Madisonville. A soldier in the 86th Illinois Infantry who remained in town that night recalled, “The regiment lived well while here, nearly every family being set to work baking cornbread, cakes, and such. It passed a pleasant night with the good folks of this inland village,

“We marched 15 miles today and camped 5 miles South of Maddisinville a little town better looken then most of towns of the same size. Some 300 rebs cleared out as we advanced.” — John Hill Fergusson Diary, December 7, 1863

only regretting that it could not remain longer and enjoy more of their forced hospitality.”

The year 1864 was disastrous for Madisonville. Federal troops burned the courthouse and, together with local citizens, they demolished the



Gen. Jefferson C. Davis –
Courtesy Library of Congress

county jail for its building materials. No image of the burned courthouse is known to exist. According to county court records, local officials first considered repairing the building but then decided to raze the damaged structure and build a new courthouse in 1868.