

Carroll Yesteryears

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Remembering the Johnson-Gilmor Raid Through Carroll in 1864

By David Buie

Although the month of July marks many historic events, it is understandable why few people remember the Johnson-Gilmor Raid through Carroll County of 1864.

The raid was staged to divert Union attention away from Confederate General Jubal Early's attempt to capture Washington, D.C., after his victory at the Battle of Monocacy outside Frederick. It was part of an elaborate Confederate plan hatched by General Robert E. Lee that also called for the Confederates to land 800 marines on the beaches near Point Lookout, a Union prison camp in St. Mary's County, while Confederate General Bradley Johnson's forces attacked the camp by land and freed the prisoners. Johnson protested that Early's timetable gave him and his men too little time to accomplish their risky mission, but Early expected them to give it their best shot.

The Carroll County portion of the raid commenced at dusk on July 9, 1864, when Johnson sent Confederate Major Harry Gilmor and 20 troopers to Westminster ahead of the rest of his troops occupying New Windsor. Gilmor was thrilled to be back operating in his home state after years campaigning in Virginia. Warned that 150 Union soldiers occupied Westminster, Gilmor ordered his men to close ranks, draw sabers, and gallop at top speed down the main street, whooping and hollering to provide the impression that a regiment had arrived. The ruse worked. The Federals fled toward Baltimore, and Gilmor's men sent out pickets and began to cut telegraph wires.

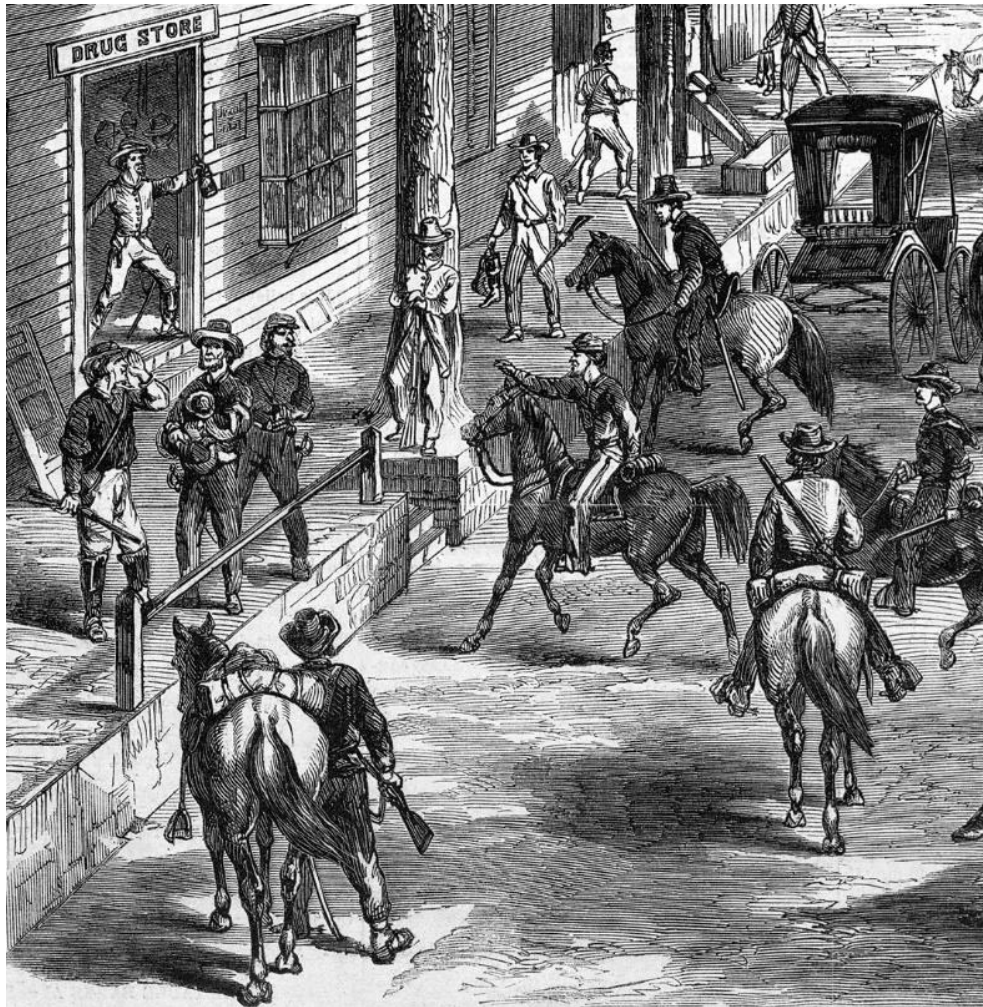
Meanwhile, Johnson and 1,500 troopers plus an artillery battery looted shops in New Windsor hoping to get desperately needed clothing. Johnson wanted Gilmor to do the same in Westminster, sending a courier ahead and ordering Gilmor to demand that the citizens provide 1,500 suits and pairs of boots or face the burning of the town. But when Johnson and his men joined Gilmor in Westminster, they were disappointed. Not only had Gilmor not taken any suits or boots, but he also pleaded with Johnson to spare the town. Gilmor later wrote of his Westminster experience that he "shook hands with my friends, lots of whom I have there." When the Confederates departed in the predawn darkness of July 10, Westminster stood unharmed, and many of the invaders remained barefoot.

Johnson and Gilmor continued their rampage through Baltimore and Harford counties, cutting more telegraph lines, capturing trains, and spreading fear throughout the region. On July 11, the troopers stopped two northbound trains from Baltimore. After evacuating the passengers, they set fire to the second train and backed it down the tracks onto a bridge where it burned through the draw section. Aboard the first train was convalescing Union Major General William B. Franklin who was captured and escorted to Virginia.

Before getting no closer to Point Lookout than Towson, Johnson and Gilmor's mission was withdrawn and the men were left to find their way back to Confederate lines as best they could.

After the war, Harry Gilmore returned to Maryland, wrote a book about his exploits, served in the Maryland National Guard as an officer and as Baltimore City Police Commissioner. He died in Baltimore March 4, 1883, at the age of forty-five and was interred in Loudon Park Cemetery.

*David Buie is a Taneytown resident who has a passion for Carroll County and its place in history.*



*Photo Caption: New Windsor native Frederick Dielman sketched the men of Confederate General Bradley Johnson's cavalry looting stores there in July 1864.*

*Source: Historical Society of Carroll County*