

Harry Shriver's war: A misadventure

Founded in 1797, the Union Mills Homestead was home to six generations of the Shriver family over 160 years. Henry Wirt "Harry" Shriver (1870-1938) was among the fourth generation of the Homestead, a great-grandson of Homestead founder Andrew Shriver.

Harry's mother, Mary Winebrenner Shriver, wrote in her 1898 diary: "when war was declared to free the Cubians, Volunteers was called for and Harry enlisted." His cousin, Admiral Winfield Scott Schley, would sail to glory commanding the American fleet that won the Battle of Santiago de Cuba.

Enlisting with the 1st D.C. Volunteer Infantry, Harry was encamped at Tampa, Florida in May. He and his messmate "Spunky" were tasked with cooking. In the original sketches now in the collection of the Union Mills Homestead Foundation, you can see the camp on Tampa Heights and the cookfires where they worked.

When he wasn't drilling or cooking, Harry was worrying about his future wife Alice back home. He wrote in his small daybook that doubled as a chronicle of letters: "My Darling I wonder where you are just at this time and what you are doing also my only love I hope that god may grant me your love and may you some day please me by your saying that you will love me."

His father Henry Wirt Shriver Sr., a Civil War veteran, thought the service would do Harry some good: "This experience will be a good one for Harry, if he ever gets back again, and now he talked about work on the old farm, as a delightful prospect for the future! How hard I tried to get him to see the merits of 'life on a farm', when he was here _ but, he would not."

While pulling food from the fire, Harry suffered a hernia and was not permitted to join the regiment when they shipped overseas. "O If I could only go along with them," he wrote on June 28, "and to stay with the Captain and when I gave him good by I could not keep up any longer and tears came in my eyes." Sent to recover in a military hospital in Chickamauga, Georgia, he then contracted malaria.

Harry ended the war without ever leaving the States. In the blue letter here, an army lieutenant assured his mother of Harry's return in September and dismissed his conditions as "nostalgia." Mary remembered the welcome celebrations at the Homestead: "they trimmed the dancing hall, with flags and flowers...had a gay old time, we were glad indeed to have him home again." Harry's uncle Louis E. Shriver also remembered the party as the family celebrated with "general jollification" until past midnight. Harry and Alice were married in 1901.

His misadventure was not over. Despite being honorably discharged for medical reasons, Harry's pension was initially accepted and then rejected. The pension board did not believe a man of his age and condition could suffer a hernia. He was arrested in 1902 on pension fraud and forced to pay \$1,000.

It was not until 1928 that his pension was restored, but no acknowledgement of error or attempt at restitution for his arrest and fine was ever made.

Harry's story was nearly forgotten until the Union Mills Homestead Foundation was approached by Fritzie Blizzard, who had inherited his papers. Fritzie generously donated letters, sketches, legal correspondence, and the daybook Harry kept throughout his service. These form the core of the collection that is now on display in the library at the Historical Society of Carroll County in Westminster. Come see the temporary exhibit while you have the chance. It runs through October.

Kyle Dalton is the Executive Director of the Union Mills Homestead.

*Image 1: Source: Union Mills Homestead Foundation Collection
Henry "Harry" Wirt Shriver, Jr sketch. "Tamp. Hight. Florida," 1898*

Caption: Detail from

*Image 2: Source: Union Mills Homestead Foundation Collection
Shriver seated in his D.C. National Guard uniform outside the family home in Union Mills*

Caption: Harry