

## William Armstead Braxton, 43<sup>rd</sup> Virginia Cavalry

William Armstead Braxton was born about 1825 in Virginia, the son of Corbin Braxton and Mary Williamson Tomlin. He was the grandson of Carter Braxton, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence.<sup>1</sup> William Armstead Braxton married January 2, 1855 in New Kent County, Virginia to Henrietta Garlick who was about 11 years younger than he and had been a servant or maid residing at the estate of his father in King William County since 1850.<sup>2</sup> By 1860, William and Henrietta Braxton had four children: Mary, Fannie, Corbin and Catherine. They were listed in the 1860 census as residing near Ayletts Post Office, King William County, Virginia. Braxton's worth at that time was listed as \$30,000 real estate and \$25,000 personal property.<sup>3</sup>

William Armstead Braxton enlisted December 16, 1861 in Company D, 87<sup>th</sup> Regiment Virginia Militia, by Captain J. Beverly Green at King William Court House. Braxton is shown on muster roll for the period Dec. 16 – Dec. 31, 1861 as “absent; detailed by Lt. Col. T. R. Gresham as Courier.” He is shown on a muster roll dated Feb. 1, 1862 as “absent; on furlow granted by Lieut. Col. Gresham.” Braxton is shown on an undated muster roll for the period Jan. 1 – Feb. 21, 1862 as “absent; detailed as courier Jan'y 20.” On a Dec., 1861 Regimental Return, Braxton is listed as “Detailed as Col. T. R. Gresham orderly.” On a Jan. 1862 Regimental Return, he is listed as “Detail by Maj. Saunders as orderly.” The 87<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Virginia Militia was discharged February 21, 1862.<sup>4</sup>

Braxton served as a captain in the Quartermaster Department during 1862. There is no record of his date of enlistment or appointment to this position. On June 16, 1862, he received an appointment to the 13<sup>th</sup> Virginia Artillery Battalion. He accepted the appointment on June 21, 1862 but later declined. There was no further record of his service with the C. S. Quartermaster Department.<sup>5</sup>

William Armstead Braxton enlisted March 25, 1864 in Company A, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Virginia Cavalry – Local Defense Troops at Richmond, Virginia. No further record is known of Braxton's service in this organization.<sup>6</sup>

Braxton enlisted October 21, 1864 as a private in Company F, 43<sup>rd</sup> Virginia Cavalry by Captain Walter E. Frankland in Fauquier County, Virginia. Even though he enlisted in Company F, he may have been serving in Company D, Captain Richard P. Montjoy's company.<sup>7</sup> Braxton was mortally wounded on November 16, 1864 in an engagement between a detachment of Company D under Montjoy, and a group of Richard Blazer's Independent Scouts. This occurred near the “Vinyard,” the home of Mrs. Philip Pendleton Cooke located in Clarke County, Virginia, about 1-½ miles due north of Berry's Ferry on the Shenandoah River.<sup>8</sup>

There are three somewhat differing accounts of the death and burial of William Armstead Braxton. John Esten Cooke, brother-in-law of Mrs. Cooke of the “Vinyard,” wrote in some detail of this event in his post-war book, *Wearing of the Gray*. Some relative excerpts from this book include:

Before the door, sitting his horse, was a trooper, clad in blue – and at sight of him the ladies shrunk back. A second glance showed them that he was bleeding to death from a mortal wound. The bullet had entered his side, traversed the body, issued from the opposite side, inflicting a wound, which rendered death almost certain.

“Take me from my horse!” murmured the wounded man, stretching out his arms and tottering.

The young girls ran to him.

“Who are you – one of the Yankees?” They exclaimed.

“Oh, no!” was the faint reply. “I am one of Montjoy's men. Tell him, when you see him, that I said, ‘Captain, this is the first time I have gone out with you, and the last!’”

As they assisted him from his saddle, he murmured:

“My name is William Armistead Braxton. I have a wife and three little children living in Hanover – you must let them know.”

Then the poor fellow fainted; and the young ladies were compelled to carry him in their arms into the house, where he was laid upon a couch, writhing in great agony.

“You are about to die,” said the Lieutenant. (Lieutenant Cole of Blazer’s Scouts who along with some other troops had entered the Cooke home.) “There is no hope. I am a Christian, and I will pray for you.”

As he (the lieutenant) spoke he closed his eyes, and remained on his knees, silent and motionless, was evidently offering up a prayer for the dying man, who continued to writhe and toss, in his great agony.

\_\_\_\_\_ At six o’clock the next morning poor Braxton breathed his last, still holding the hand of the young lady, which seemed to be all by which he had clung to life.

\_\_\_\_\_ The length was thus determined, and the boys set to work, assisted by the girl, sawing, hammering, and nailing together the rude box which was to contain all that remained of the poor youth.

\_\_\_\_\_ This rude pine coffin differed from the rosewood; the funeral cortege which ere long appeared, differed, too, from the long line of shining carriages. It consisted of three hundred horsemen, silent, muffled, and armed to the teeth, for the enemy were close by in heavy force. They appeared, without notice, about three hours past midnight, and at the head of them, we believe, was Montjoy.

The body, still in its rude coffin, was lifted into a vehicle; some hasty words were exchanged with the young ladies, for a large force of the enemy was near Millwood within sight, a mile or two across the fields; then the shadowy procession of horsemen moved; their measured hoof-strokes resounded, gradually dying away; the corpse was borne through the river, ascended the mountain- and at sunrise the dead man was sleeping in the soil of Fauquier.<sup>9</sup>

Historian, Everard Kidder Meade, wrote a series of short histories concerning the Civil War for the Clarke County, Virginia Historical Association in 1948-9. One of his histories was titled “A Night Burial” which read:

After calling on his Whiting kin at Clay Hill in Clarke the afternoon of Nov. 15, 1864, William Armistead Braxton rode off to rejoin Co. D of Mosby’s command. He encountered some of Capt. Blazer’s men and was mortally wounded, but managed to escape capture and ride to The Vinyard, nearby.

There Mrs. Phillip Pendleton Cooke and her daughters made him as comfortable as possible, and sent word to Clay Hill. Wm. Wilmer Whiting got Dr. Benjamin Harrison. Despite their efforts, Braxton died about 9 o’clock that night. The county was full of Yankees and since it was considered dangerous to have even a dead Confederate found in the house, it was decided to bury the body immediately on Calmes Neck, This was done in the dead of the night, which was very dark.

Years later when Mrs. Henry Dallam came to Clay Hill trying to locate her brother’s grave, no trace of it could be found, nor even its location identified.<sup>10</sup>

William Armstead Braxton’s widow Henrietta Braxton made application in April, 1888 for a Confederate Widow’s pension from the state of Virginia. Supporting the application was an affidavit written by Maria P. Duval, a citizen of Staunton, Virginia which stated in part:

I knew Wm. Armstead Braxton who was the husband of Mrs. Henrietta Braxton his widow and now resides in the city of Richmond Va. and who has never remarried. That on or about the month of November 1864. I think that was the date but I am not positive. I was sleeping at the house of my Aunt Mrs. P. J. Cook in Clarke County, Va. The said Armstead Braxton rode to the house desperately wounded, being shot through the body, he died in a short time after reaching the house, his body lay in the house for some twenty four hours, during which time a box was procured and the body placed therein for burial, but before being buried some young men from Col. Mosby’s Command to which said Braxton was attached at the time of his death, came to the house and took the body in an

ambulance across the River for burial and I always understood buried it under a Persimmon tree in Fauquier County.<sup>11</sup>

**Editor's Comments:** The latter two versions of the death and burial of Braxton seem to support one another and do seem plausible. John Esten Cooke whose residence "The Briars" was about five miles northwest of the "Vinyard," was noted for embellishing his memoirs of the War to the point they were more like novels than histories. This is unfortunate as he likely had sufficient facts to have provided the best detail of the event.

If Braxton's body was, indeed, buried on Calmes Neck on the east side of the Shenandoah River, it was not buried in Fauquier County as they noted. They would have had to take the body over the Blue Ridge Mountains to have buried it in Fauquier County which doesn't seem plausible given that the burial took place at night. Calmes Neck is in Clarke County and less than a mile northeast of the "Vinyard" which does make sense for the final resting-place of William Armstead Braxton.

William Armstead Braxton's younger brother Tomlin Braxton served in several organizations in the Army of Northern Virginia as an assistant surgeon and surgeon.<sup>12</sup>

Let us never forget the sacrifice of William Armstead Braxton.

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<sup>1</sup> Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. International Genealogical Index, Vol. V. Online ed. ([www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)). Family Group Record #288038680, Corbin Braxton; Campbell, Charles. *History of the Colony Ancient Dominion of Virginia*. Philadelphia, PA: Lippencott and Co., c.1859, page 652.

<sup>2</sup> Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia, Confederate Pension Rolls, Veterans and Widows (Applications), Online ed. Application of Henrietta Braxton dated April 14, 1888; National Archives, 1850 Federal Census, King William County, Virginia, Series M432, Roll 955, page 244B.

<sup>3</sup> National Archives, 1860 Federal Census, King William County, Virginia, Series M653, Roll 1357, page 601.

<sup>4</sup> National Archives, Washington DC Record Group 109, War Dept. Collection of Confederate Records. Compiled Military Service Records for soldiers serving in the 87<sup>th</sup> Virginia Militia. Microfilm 324, Roll 1050, record #14.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, Confederate States General and Staff Officers, Microfilm 331, Roll 31.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Virginia Cavalry – Local Defense Troops. Microfilm 324, Roll 15, record #39.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 43<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, Virginia Partisan Rangers, Microfilm 324, Roll 207, record 160.

<sup>8</sup> Keen, Hugh C. and Mewborn, Horace, *43<sup>rd</sup> Battalion Virginia Cavalry Mosby's Command*. Lynchburg, VA: H. E. Howard, Inc., 1993, pages 215-7; Scheel, Eugene M. Map of "Clark County", Virginia. Warrenton, VA: Piedmont Press, 1990.

<sup>9</sup> Cooke, John Esten. *Wearing of the Gray*. Reprint Ed. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1959, pages 529-534.

<sup>10</sup> Meade, Everard Kidder. *Notes on the History of the Lower Shenandoah Valley, Proceedings of the Clarke County Historical Association*, Vol. XIV, 1956-1957, page 86.

<sup>11</sup> Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia., Confederate Pension Rolls, Veterans and Widows (Applications), Online ed. Application of Henrietta Braxton dated April 14, 1888.

<sup>12</sup> National Archives, 1850 Federal Census, King William County, Virginia, Series M432, Roll 955, page 244B; National Archives, Compiled Military Service Records for Confederate States General and Staff Officers, Microfilm 331, Roll 31.