

Henry C. Rhodes, 43rd Virginia Cavalry

Henry C. Rhodes, born circa 1844-1845, in Frederick County, Virginia, was the son of Joseph M. and Mary A. Rhodes. He grew up in Middletown, Frederick County, where his father was listed as a tavern keeper in the 1850 census.¹ Henry's father died between 1850 and 1860. He and his mother and younger sister, Emma F. Rhodes, continued to reside in Middletown until sometime after August 1860 when they moved to Front Royal, Virginia.²

There are no accounts of Henry C. Rhodes involvement in the war up to September 23, 1864. Learning that Captain Samuel F. Chapman, leading a party of Mosby's men, was planning a raid on an outpost of the 6th New York Cavalry in Chester Gap, Rhodes made the fateful decision to join Chapman's party. Chapman decided to attack an ambulance train returning to Front Royal from Milford only to learn that it was being followed by the Reserve Brigade of General Wesley Merritt's cavalry division. Chapman's men were greatly outmatched and decided to employ the patented "skedaddle" strategy. Several of the men were cut off in their retreat, the result of which six of Chapman's party, including Henry C. Rhodes, were captured in various locations around the south side of Front Royal.³

Thomas Ashby witnessed Chapman's attack on the wagon train and subsequent retreat from the yard of his home in Front Royal. He wrote of the capture of Rhodes noting: "a boy by the name of Rhodes was captured and brought through the village between two cavalymen and taken a half-mile north and shot under a walnut tree. The boy had been a schoolmate of mine, and was only 17 years of age. He had not been in the army, and that morning he borrowed an old horse from one of the citizens to join in this raid so that he might capture a horse to enable him to become a member of Mosby's command. The old horse broke down in the retreat, and Rhodes was taken prisoner. I doubt whether he fired a gun. As he was led through the village, he passed the door of the house where lived his widowed mother and single sister, but he was not permitted to stop and say good-by to them. His dead body was left on the ground where he was shot, and was afterwards brought to his home by some of the citizens."⁴

Another witness was thirteen-year-old R. Cary Buck who wrote an account of the Front Royal incident for the *Warrenton Virginian* in 1896. Concerning Henry Rhodes, he wrote: "Rhodes was lashed with ropes between two horses, and dragged in plain sight of his agonized relatives to the open field of our town, where one man volunteered to do the killing, and ordered the helpless, dazed prisoner to stand up in front of him, while he emptied his pistol upon him. Rhodes was my friend and playmate, and I saw him shot from a distance, but did not at the time know who it was."⁵

After being drug down Chester St., Henry Rhodes was taken to Richardson's field at the foot of "Rose Hill." The Richardson family witnessed the events noting, "such excitement and cruelty as never was witnessed here before. Poor Henry Rhodes should be shot in our field, nearly in front of our door. We could see the crowd assembled around him. Then we had the pain of seeing the shock passing over him before his body could be removed. His poor mother is almost crazy."⁶

The body of Henry C. Rhodes was taken to Prospect Hill Cemetery in Front Royal and buried. Small stone markers stand in the soldier's circle to Rhodes and three other victims of the tragedy: Carter, Lucian Love and David L. Jones. Henry Rhodes' marker reads: "H. C. Rhodes / Mosby's Va. Cav. / Died / Sept. 23, 1864". Henry Rhodes' name is inscribed on the monument erected in Prospect Hill Cemetery on September 23, 1899 by the survivors of the 43rd Virginia Cavalry to the memory of their comrades who were martyred there 35 years earlier.

After the war, Mary A. Rhodes and her daughter, Emma, again moved and are found living in the Smithfield P.O. area of Jefferson County, West Virginia in 1870.⁷ There is no record of either of them after 1870.

Editors Comments: Most accounts indicate that Henry Rhodes was 16-17 years old at the time of the executions in Front Royal. The 1850 census of Frederick County, Virginia lists his

age as 6 years. The 1860 census of Frederick County, Virginia lists him as 15 years old. Thus, he would have been 19 to 20 years old at the time of the Front Royal incident.

James J. Williamson in his book *Mosby's Rangers*, 1st edition, incorrectly identifies Rhodes as Lafayette Rhodes of Company D.⁸ He corrects the mistake in the publication of the 2nd edition of his book.⁹ He identifies Henry Rhodes as a member of the 'Artillery Company'. The confusion may be that there is evidence that a Lafayette Rhodes served in the Artillery Company.¹⁰ There is no evidence that Henry Rhodes ever served with the 43rd prior to September 23, 1864.

Let us never forget the sacrifice of Henry C. Rhodes.

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¹ 1850 United States Federal Census, Frederick County, Virginia, Series M432, Roll 945, page 325.

² 1860 United States Federal Census, Frederick County, Virginia, Series M653, Roll 1347, page 684.

³ Keen, Hugh C. and Mewborn, Horace, *43rd Battalion Virginia Cavalry Mosby's Command*, Lynchburg, VA, H. E. Howard, Inc., 1993, pages 175-6.

⁴ Ashby, Thomas A., *The Valley Campaigns*, New York, The Neale Publishing Company, 1914, page 293.

⁵ Urwin, Gregory J. W. and Fagan, Roberta E., Editors, *Custer and His Times – Book Three*, Conway, AR., Little Big Horn Associates, Inc., and the University of Central Arkansas Press, 1987, pages 29-31.

⁶ Hale, Laura Virginia, *Four Valiant Years in The Lower Shenandoah Valley 1861-1865*, Front Royal, VA, Hathaway Publishing, 1986, page 433.

⁷ 1870 United States Federal Census, Jefferson County, West Virginia, Series M593, Roll 1689, page 432.

⁸ Williamson, James J., *Mosby's Rangers*, First Edition, New York, Ralph B. Kenyon, Publisher, 1896, pages 240-1.

⁹ Williamson, James J., *Mosby's Rangers*, Second Edition, New York, Sturgis & Walton Co., 1909, pages 240-1.

¹⁰ The Library of Virginia, "Index to Virginia Confederate Rosters", On-line publication, Vol. 13 of 20, Reel 7 of 10, page 366.