



POTTERTOWN BRIDGE-BURNERS



Unionists Pay the Ultimate Price

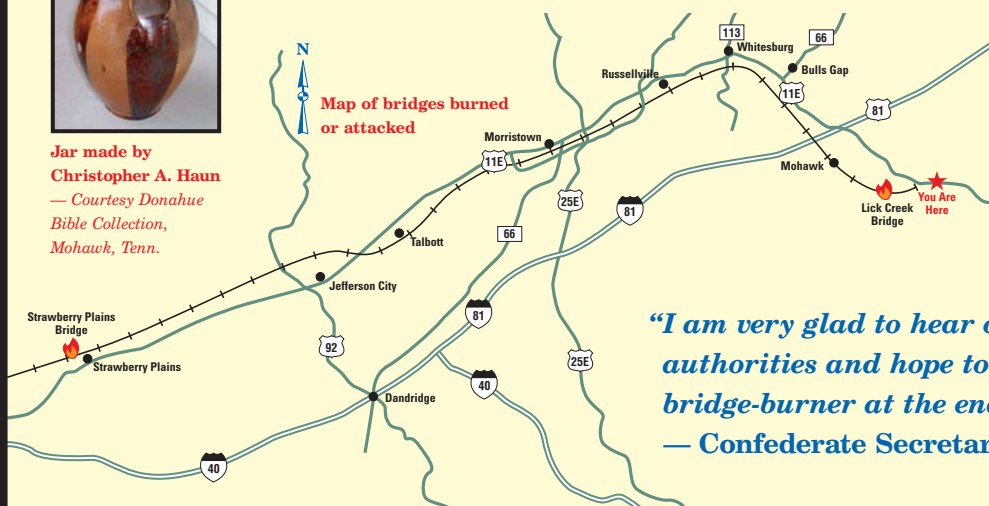


When Tennessee left the Union in June 1861, Greene County was a hotbed of divided loyalties. Several Unionists were among the occupants of the nearby community nicknamed “Pottertown” who crafted multi-colored earthenware pottery (still highly valued). That autumn, celebrated antebellum potter Christopher Alexander Haun conspired with other residents to cripple the Confederate-controlled rail system by burning railroad bridges. The Rev. William Blount Carter, a local minister and Unionist, devised the plan. President Abraham Lincoln approved, and promised that Federal forces would protect the bridge burners’ families.



Jar made by Christopher A. Haun — Courtesy Donahue Bible Collection, Mohawk, Tenn.

Capt. David Fry, Co. F, 2nd Tennessee Infantry (U.S.), came from Kentucky with orders to burn the bridges. With



Capt. David Fry (left) and Sgt. John McCoy — Courtesy Donahue Bible Collection, Mohawk, Tenn.

his help, Carter finalized the plan to burn all major railroad bridges in East Tennessee in one night. On November 8, 1861, local Unionists arrived at the home of Jacob Harmon, Jr., another local potter, and were sworn into Fry’s command.

About sixty men then went to the Lick Creek railroad bridge, where they captured Confederate

pickets. After burning the bridge, they released the Confederates, a decision they soon regretted. Although the president had promised military protection, Confederates later captured several men associated with the bridge burning and hanged Haun, Henry Fry, Jacob Harmon Jr., Henry Harmon, and Matt Hinshaw. Confederate President Jefferson Davis pardoned Harrison Self.



“Execution of Jacob Harmon and His Son Henry,” from Parson Brownlow’s Book (1862)

“I am very glad to hear of the action of the military authorities and hope to hear they have hung every bridge-burner at the end of the burned bridge.”

— Confederate Secretary of War Judah P. Benjamin

The Harmons are buried here in the family cemetery. Haun’s pottery kiln stood a few hundred feet up Pottertown Road to the right, and the Bridge-Burner Memorial marker and flagpole is on the left.