

Civil War – Housing

During the Civil War, Stafford's housing declined due to over 1,000 men serving in the Confederate army. Materials for repairs were less available and construction and maintenance standards, never good, declined. Confederate occupation was brief (one year) and respected their citizens' property. Throughout the war, those Staffordians who remained (many "refugeed" south) lived as best they could. The first Union occupation (April-September 1862) was brief and not terribly disruptive. But the winter of 1862-1863 brought on a new kind of housing boom. With the arrival of 135,000 Union soldiers, with 70,000 horses and mules and 6,000 wheeled vehicles (wagons and ambulances), winter encampments covered the entire landscape of central Stafford and occupied nearly 100 square miles of camps. Larger houses and churches were used for hospitals, headquarters and shelters for men and animals.

The winter 1863 occupation required construction of over 30,000 crude and makeshift shelters – equivalent to the number of today's family homes in Stafford. The typical shelter was dug into the ground two or three feet with log walls and space for four soldiers. Usually a crude chimney was constructed for heat and cooking. Bedding areas and makeshift furniture and shelves were constructed of wooden cracker boxes. Roofs were covered with the soldiers' light canvas shelter halves. Drainage ditches were dug around the huts and company streets were formed. Throughout the entire seven month period, excepting time spent in the battles of Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville, manning the outer defensive perimeter, and construction work, the Union Army of the Potomac occupied these shelters. Not until the 21st Century did Stafford again have so many houses!

