



'Sandusky' played critical role in 1864 Virginia house's name stems from Ohio experience

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SPECIAL TO THE REGISTER



SANDUSKY

In the summer of 1790, the Ohio River was a very dangerous place.

Determined to keep the Ohio country for themselves, groups of Shawnee Indians patrolled the north shore looking for would-be settlers and other river travelers who they could kill or capture.

In March 1790, a Shawnee war party attacked a group of men traveling to Kentucky on a surveying mission. Two of the men were killed outright, and one was burned at the stake.

The remaining survivor, 20-year-old Charles Johnston, was taken more than 200 miles north to Lake Erie. His fate would be ransom or death by torture. Luckily for Johnston, he was able to convince a French fur trader, Francis Duchouquet, to ransom him from the Shawnee for 600 silver brooches and other trade goods.

On April 28, after five weeks as a Shawnee captive, on his 21st birthday, he and Duchouquet left Sandusky, as the Indians called it, for Detroit and freedom. After such an ordeal, it is easy to understand how the word Sandusky stuck with him.

Charles Johnston met with President George Washington on his return to Virginia. Washington was interested in what the post revolutionary British were doing in the Ohio country.

He returned to Lynchburg, Va., as a local hero, married, and in 1808 built a beautiful, federal-style home, which he called "Sandusky." In time, it became the hub of a large and successful 1,200-acre plantation.

Johnston became friends with Thomas Jefferson and once hosted Andrew Jackson during an 1815 visit to Lynchburg. Johnston died in 1833.

By the time of the Civil War, Sandusky was owned by former U.S. Army Major George Hutter. Hutter's three sons went off to fight for the Confederacy, leaving Hutter, his wife and teenaged daughter to run the plantation.

James Risque Hunter, only 17, joined the 11th Virginia Infantry. Two years later, now a captain, his unit was part of George Pickett's division and a lead element in what became known as Pickett's Charge, the climax of the Battle of Gettysburg.

The day after the battle Hunter, slightly wounded, was captured by Union forces. Ironically, he was promptly transported to Sandusky and the Confederate Prison on Johnson's Island.

Captain Hunter had the dubious distinction of twice being a prisoner on Johnson's Island. He was paroled in late 1864 and promptly rejoined his regiment only to be captured again April 1, 1865, at the Battle of Five Forks in Virginia. He arrived in Sandusky on April 4 and was released July 25, following the end of the war.

In early summer 1864, General David Hunter, under orders from U.S. Grant, led 18,000 Union troops toward Lynchburg, a key transportation hub in western Virginia.

His goal was to capture the city. His opponent was Confederate General Jubal Early. For two days, June 17-18, General Hunter's headquarters was Sandusky.

The Hutter family was treated courteously by Hunter and his staff, as the men had known each other slightly in the pre-war Army. However, they were still prisoners in their own home.

Hunter ordered his men to cut a hole in the roof for sentries and signalmen. His staff conducted a council of war in the parlor the night of June 17 to plan the next day's battle.

General Hunter's staff included two future presidents of the United States: Rutherford B. Hayes and William McKinley, both certainly familiar with Sandusky, Ohio. Hayes' regiment, the 23rd, included a number of Erie County soldiers.

The battle itself was a Confederate victory. After a day of back-and forth results, Hunter believed the Confederates were being heavily reinforced.

However, it was a ruse, as the Confederates used a single locomotive going back and forth to simulate arriving trains, complete with blowing bugles and yelling.

The next day, short of ammunition and believing Early had been reinforced, Hunter and his army retreated. Hunter did not burn Sandusky, as had been the fate of many Shenandoah Valley plantation homes, perhaps because of his relationship with the Hutter family.

Some of his men did help themselves to household items. He left behind 90 badly wounded Union soldiers in the barn.

The Sandusky House remained in the Hutter family for several generations.

The Sandusky House is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It is currently operated by the Historic Sandusky Foundation as a house museum related to the American Civil War.

More information about the Sandusky House is available through the Historic Sandusky Foundation. Go to historicsandusky.org.

Note: Information for this article was obtained from a recent newspaper article by Darrell Laurant, "The Taking of Sandusky," which appeared in the June 15 issue of The Lynchburg News & Advance.