

Colonel Gilmore's New Year's eve at Orkney Springs

Confederate Colonel Harry Gilmore was a colorful figure from the Civil War who served with Gen. Thomas Rosser's Laurel Brigade. A story taken from Gilmore's book, *Four Years in the Saddle*, written in 1866, illustrates his lively character.

Confederate troops were preparing to move in to Western Virginia on a raid and Gilmore and his men had orders to go to Moorefield, in Hardy County. They left the Valley on December 31, 1863, crossing North Mountain by the bad, steep road at Orkney Springs. The weather was very cold and it was snowing, but the troops continued on their way from Orkney Springs. Gilmore and some of the other officers, however, decided to seek shelter at the Springs until the storm abated. Here is Gilmore's description:

“Mr. Bradford, the proprietor, received us with his usual kindness and soon had our horses put up, and a large fire built in a separate well-furnished cottage. Peach brandy and honey, the old Va. drink, passed around briskly and when summoned to supper, we were as “happy as lords”. The supper was excellent, for our host is celebrated for good living, and with appetites whetted by the keen air, to say nothing of the peach and honey, great piles of buckwheat cakes vanished as fast as snow would on the griddle that baked them. After supper we took a look at the weather and decided unanimously that it was not judicious to attempt crossing the mountain in such a storm and accordingly repaired to the snug little cabin, in which we found a roaring fire. We determined to escort the old year out and welcome the new one in in regular old VA. style; so we made a large tin bucketful of eggnog and another of milk punch and went in for making a night of it.”

The next morning Gilmore and the other officers, after breakfast, climbed the mountain and found the troops, ordnance wagons and artillery stuck there at the top, for the western slope was a solid sheet of ice. Eventually they made their way down to the valley, called the Cove, and stopped at a distillery there. To their disappointment they found that their commander, Gen. Rosser, had ordered that no liquor be sold to the troops. Not to be outdone, Gilmore, wearing a new uniform, wide-brimmed slouch hat with long plume, gold band and crossed sabers in front, had himself introduced to the elderly lady of the house as Gen. Lee. He was said to be almost perished with cold and desperately in need of refreshment. The simple hearted old woman, honored to have Gen. Lee in her home, dug from an old trunk a bottle of golden liquor which, when opened, filled the room with delicious peach perfume. The brandy had been a wedding present from the woman's mother 33 years before and had never been opened. Gilmore confessed to feeling ashamed of his duplicity, but, nevertheless, he and his officers partook of the excellent brandy, leaving not a drop. They left some silver and gold coins with the family, who came onto the porch to see the General off!

This moment from the past was presented by the Shenandoah County Historical Society.