# Lucinda Hardage (1848 – 1940): The Last Living Link to the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain

## "Miss Lucinda"

On June 25, 1939, Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park held its dedication ceremony and first battle anniversary program. There to help raise the American flag over the visitor center was a special guest of honor: 91-year-old Lucinda Hardage, one of the last surviving eyewitnesses to the fighting at Kennesaw Mountain in June 1864. "Miss Lucinda" spent most of her life living along Burnt Hickory Road at the base of Pigeon Hill. In the 1930s, when the Civilian Conservation Corps first opened the Battlefield's historic features to the public, Miss Lucinda answered tour guides' questions and pointed out key locations that would never have been found without her help. With her keen wit, youthful energy, and vivid memory she served as a priceless resource for Battlefield park staff and historians alike. Until her death in 1940, she remained one of Cobb County's most beloved and treasured citizens.

## The Hardages: A Pioneer Family

In 1836, Lucinda's father, George Washington Hardage, moved from Hall County to Cobb County with his wife, Mary Ann. They settled in the small, sparsely-settled farming community of New Salem (named after the closest Baptist church) on the south side of Burnt Hickory Road, just below Pigeon Hill. One of fourteen children, Miss Lucinda was born on January 14, 1848 in a one-room log cabin that stood about fifteen yards east of the present-day trail head.

When Lucinda was two years old, her father built a larger frame house about fifty yards east of the first. A sign reading "Hardage Home Site (1864)" marks the spot. Lucinda lived here until 1850, when a sudden malaria epidemic struck, and a local doctor advised George Hardage to move his family farther away from the swampy regions of Nose's Creek. Accordingly, a new home one mile to the west was chosen. Lucinda remembered riding in a carriage on moving day: "I held an umbrella over my brother, sick with malaria."

The Hardages' third home stood on the north side of Burnt Hickory Road. It was a two-story, six-room house with a veranda -- small, but big enough for a growing family. When the armies marched through the New Salem community in June 1864, Mary Ann Hardage became a refugee, taking the infant children east of Atlanta and out of harm's way. Sixteen-year-old Lucinda opted to stay at home with her father, older sisters, and two younger brothers.

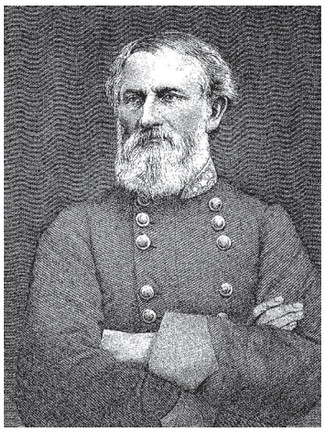
## The "Boy General" at the Hardage Home

When General Joseph E. Johnston's Confederate army entrenched on the heights of Kennesaw Mountain, three of his subordinate generals headquartered at the Hardage house. Since two of Lucinda's older brothers had already gone off to fight for the Confederacy, the family cheerfully offered hospitality to high-ranking officers in grey. "They were just like guests while they were with us," Lucinda remembered.

The first such guest was 24-year-old Brigadier General John H. Kelly who was, upon his commission in 1863, the youngest Confederate general. According to Miss Lucinda, "He was the best looking. He was the handsomest man I saw during the whole war." She described him as "a blond type, and taller than average." Kelly and his staff encamped in the shady grove east of the house. Miss Lucinda recalled that he "was very fond of my two little brothers and would have them come into his tent every day and entertained them in some way."

The Hardage Home, 1864

## The Hardages' Next Houseguest: The "Fighting Bishop"



Lieutenant General Leonidas Polk

After Kelly left, Lieutenant General Leonidas Polk headquartered at the Hardage home. Polk was General Johnston's second-in-command -- and the Episcopal Bishop of Louisiana. Lucinda's father built a small room off the veranda in which General Polk was invited to stay. Polk's staff's wall tent stood close to the back door, while several smaller tents covered the yard and fields.

Lucinda remembered Polk as "heavy-set, very religious, and quiet. He was a very nice man – and very strict with his men. Among all the soldiers who came back and forth to the house, I only heard but one oath." One day, while Polk sat on the front porch, a mounted soldier outside the picket fence shouted a curse word. Polk immediately stood up and reprimanded him for his behavior. The alarmed man fearfully spurred his horse. "He literally flew from the gate," Lucinda said.

Popular with his subordinates, Polk quickly became a friend of the Hardage family. "He held religious services in our home at least twice and in the grove several times," said Miss Lucinda. Colonel W. D. Gale, General Polk's aide-de-camp, recorded one such scene on a foggy, rainy morning. "The family sitting-room was made ready, and the audience assembled," Gale wrote. "The [house was] filled with men in gray, and…quite a number stood near the windows and doors under the dripping eaves. …[Some] sat on chairs, some on the floor, and others stood during the whole service, while those without, drawing their hats down over their necks, stood patiently while the pouring rain ran in rivulets down their shoulders." Gale watched as the "general read the service…and joined in the singing of a psalm and hymn."

**Death of General Polk**

On the clear morning of June 14, George Hardage entered Polk's room and found him on his knees in prayer. Soon after breakfast, General Johnston rode up to the porch. Lucinda remembered Johnston as "short and bald headed, and the best leader of the Confederate army." She watched as the two generals pored over maps together. Polk then mounted his horse and rode with Johnston to Pine Mountain to examine troop positions. Lieutenant General William Hardee, "a large man" according to Lucinda, joined them on the way. That morning, as Polk stood on the crest of Pine Mountain, he was killed as a shell from a nearby Federal battery ripped through his chest. Two hours later, a courier came dashing up to the Hardage house on Polk's horse. Polk's son and staff officer, William, "was sitting on the well curb" when he heard the bad news. "The son jumped on the horse and cleared our picket fence by three feet" in his haste to ride to his father, recounted Lucinda. In the early afternoon, an ambulance pulled up in the yard, carrying Polk's remains. "They asked if they could bring his body in the house," she said. "Then they decided they'd better take him where he could be embalmed for he was so broken up." The body lay in state between two large oak trees in the Hardage's front yard. Staff officers asked the family if they would like to view the Bishop one last time, but they declined. "We had rather remember him as he left home that morning," said Lucinda. "All of his officers cried at his death," she recalled, but William Polk was inconsolable. "His son just rolled on the ground," Lucinda recalled. "It was pitiful to see him."

Later on that evening, it rained. The Hardages watched several ambulance wagons splash past their home, bearing the casualties of war to the makeshift Confederate hospital at nearby New Salem Church. Wounded men groaned as the wagons jolted along the rough, muddy lane. Blood seeped through the cracks in the wagons, leaving a long trail of red down the length of Burnt Hickory Road. The scene, Lucinda recalled, "made our grief worse."

## Major General William Wing Loring's Visit

The Hardages' next houseguest was William Wing Loring, who had taken over command of Polk's division. According to Lucinda, Loring "did not have the same turn for making friends in the home that General Polk had." Nonetheless, he tried to protect the family. Soon after his arrival, Lucinda and one of her sisters went outside to pick butterbeans for dinner. As bullets whizzed over their heads, the general pleaded with them, "Ladies, for God's sake, please go back into the house! I'll pick your beans for you." The girls acquiesced, and Loring immediately sent an orderly to complete the task. But as the firing increased, Lucinda recalled, "the beans were never picked…because the soldiers came back as soon as we did."

## Refugees

Refugees fleeing a war zone in the 1860s. Courtesy National Archives.

On the evening before the battle of Kennesaw Mountain, Lucinda watched as fifty thousand Confederate soldiers marched past: "It was a strange sound, all those marching feet." During the fighting on Pigeon Hill, Federal shells began to plow furrows in their garden. Lucinda and the rest of the family also became refugees, joining her mother and youngest siblings at Stone Mountain. For the next few weeks the Hardages lived in an empty boxcar. After receiving news that the armies had finally moved away from Kennesaw Mountain, they returned home. Although their house was still standing, the community was in shambles. Most of the buildings, including the New Salem Church itself, had been burned, shelled, or torn down.

Over time, the damaged farming community was rebuilt and revitalized. New Salem Church, erected in a new location, still holds services to this day. When the federal government acquired the Battlefield in the 1930s, park staff found Miss Lucinda living with a nephew in a small house near the base of Pigeon Hill.

## Miss Lucinda Remembered

When Margaret Mitchell's best-selling book, *Gone with the Wind*, received a Pulitzer Prize in 1937, Miss Lucinda was suddenly thrust into the spotlight. A genuine lover of people, she was thrilled to recount her experiences for anyone who would listen. Miss Lucinda never turned down an invitation to attend a civic gathering or commemoration program.

After her death in 1940, she was laid to rest in the cemetery behind the new New Salem Church. Although Miss Lucinda never married or had children, her legacy lives on through the Battlefield Park she helped preserve.

Bulletin created by Angela Tooley, Kennesaw State University history student, in cooperation with Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park.