

Christopher Alex Haun: Bridgeburner and Potter

by Paula Gammell

The War Between the States was particularly rough in upper East Tennessee. Christopher Alex Haun, of Greene County, was arrested, charged with burning strategic bridges and railroad trestles, and was taken to Knoxville where he was tried before Confederate authorities, and convicted.

Before sentencing, C.A. Haun wrote his wife and family:

Knoxville, Tenn., Dec. 10, 1861.

Dear Elizabeth Haun, children, mother, brother and sisters, neighbors and friends: I have had my trial, but I have not heard my sentence. I fear it will be bad. They may take my life and they may not.... When I hear my sentence I will write again. If I should not reach home soon I want you all to do the very best you can. Betsy, take care of your corn for bread. There are going to be hard times about bread. And have that ware finished off, and get shoes and clothing and something to go on....

Children, be good to your mother and to one another, and serve God....

C.A. Haun to Elizabeth Haun

It was bad. The sentence was death. By hanging. The next day he wrote again. His thoughts were not on the war or his own fate, but were for his wife and children, who he knew he would never see again.

How do you write one last letter home when your hanging is imminent? C.A. Haun did it this way:

Knoxville, Tenn., Dec. 11, 1861.

Dear Elizabeth:... I want you to move where we used to live on Arthur's place, where he can see to you and the children, and work for him in place of working to and fro among strangers; and make the children read the Testament every Sabbath they are not at preaching...keep them away from all bad company. Do not suffer them to use bad words or quarrel with one another, and learn them manners; it will be for their benefit. If any one comes to you hungry turn them not away empty if you have it... Let Arthur or some one relate your situation and cause of my death to the government authorities, and the government will surely do pretty liberally for you and the children in the way of support and education.... Have Bohanan Henshaw or Sam to finish off that ware, and do the best you can with it for your support....Dear friends one and all, farewell for a little season.

C.A. Haun

Colonel Baxter: I have to die today at twelve o'clock. I beg of you to have my body sent to Midway P.O. directed to Elizabeth Haun. This much I beg of you to do.

C.A. Haun

Dear Elizabeth: I have the promise this morning that my body shall be sent home to you. Oh! live for Heaven. Oh! my bosom friend and children, live for Heaven. Meet me in Heaven, I pray. My time is almost out. Dear friends, farewell in this world. Farewell earth and earthly troubles.

C.A. Haun

'Home' was in Greene County. His body was indeed sent home, and was buried in the Harmon Cemetery. 135 years later the Office of Memorial Programs of the Department of Veterans Affairs placed bronze markers on his grave, as well as on the graves of the other bridge-burners who were hanged. (The others were Jacob Harmon, Henry Harmon, Henry Fry, and J.M. Hinshaw.)

Notice the reference to 'finish off that ware'? C.A. Haun was a potter and made all sorts of utilitarian ware: jugs, crocks, pots, pitchers, plates, dishes. Back then his creations sold for pennies; today the pieces that still survive are highly sought-after treasures, and sell for hundreds, even thousands of dollars apiece.

Nevertheless, I suspect he would rather be remembered for bridge-burning. What do you think?

You can read the entire text of his letters home in Volume 8, Number 3 of *East Tennessee Roots*.