

# James Hemphill Maclay:

His Civil War Letters

43rd Regt. 1st Pa. Light Artillery  
Battery B

To *James Hemphill Maclay*

*His service and dedication to his country are inspirational.  
His devotion to the battlefield was extraordinary.  
He was a true American hero.  
I am proud that he was my great-grandfather.*

*Richard Rogers*

James Hemphill Maclay, the only son of John Herron Maclay and Margaret Hemphill Maclay, was born in Lurgan Township, Franklin County, Pennsylvania on June 12, 1839. His only sister, Jane Ellen, had been born in 1837. James' great-great-grandfather, Charles Maclay, was born in Ireland in 1703 and had emigrated with his wife, Eleanor Query, and their infant son, John, to Pennsylvania in 1734. He and his family finally settled (about 1742) in what was to become Lurgan Township. Charles built a grist mill on a site on the west side of the Conoquinet Creek and the area came to be known as Maclay's Mill. The mill continued in operation throughout the years and was taken over by James' father when his father died in 1839.

Certainly James had some farming and mill chores to do in his youth. But the countryside was rural and quaint with winding dirt roads, and James had a horse and must have enjoyed riding to visit his aunts, uncles, cousins and friends. Most Americans in 1860 felt they were the luckiest and happiest people anywhere.

Poet Walt Whitman wrote in I Hear America Singing in 1860:

*I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,  
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe and strong,  
Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,  
The day what belongs to the day - at night the party of young fellows, robust, friendly,  
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.*

This idyllic world came to an end on April 13, 1861 when a Rebel flag flew over Fort Sumter after a thirty-four hour, 4000 shell bombardment caused the Union forces to surrender. Fort Sumter was Federal property, a brick fort on an island near the mouth of Charleston Harbor in South Carolina. When Fort Sumter fell, the country's army had only about 16,000 men. Volunteer state militias would have to be organized and a call to arms brought vigorous recruiting throughout the North. A huge wave of patriotism in support of the Union and the constitution spread as appeals were made (this one on a poster) to "all patriots and lovers of their country to step forward at this most important crisis, in aid of their beloved country, in her efforts to preserve the Union and protect her constitution."

At twenty-two years of age, James answered the call "to share in the heroic sentiment of the time" by enlisting in the Union Army, serving in Battery B, 1st Pennsylvania Light Artillery, 43rd Regiment, 14th Reserve Union Army. The command was formally mustered into service on June 28, 1861, attached to General John F. Reynolds' First Brigade of General George A. McCalls' Division of Pennsylvania Reserves. James was mustered in at Harrisburg on August 5, 1861. This battery came to be known as Cooper's Battery B, after Captain James H. Cooper, who commanded it more than three years. It was part of the Army of the Potomac that saw action in Maryland, Virginia and Pennsylvania and whose main goals were to defend Washington and capture Richmond. James' original enlistment was for three years and when it expired in early 1864 he still believed so strongly in preserving the Union that he reenlisted for the duration of the war, attaining the rank of Sergeant.

James came from a very close-knit, religious family, and when he found himself away from home he carried on a letter-writing correspondence with his family. The letters he wrote home have been preserved over the years by family members. It seems that it was mainly his sister, Jane Ellen, whom he called Jennie, who took on the responsibility of receiving and answering James' letters.

James could have waited to be drafted as others did that he knew, but he would have none of that. He had strong opinions of those who chose to be drafted rather than enlist. In an October 29, 1862 letter to Jennie he stated:

So Hugh Frasier is drafted. Good for him. No man but a coward would permit him self to be driven into the service but such men. I think such men ought to be in the Rebel Army where all the conscripts are.

And on November 10th:

So Ditzler says he is not hired to Uncle Sam. I think he has done worse for Conscripts are Uncle Sam Slaves. The old Rebels don't like the idea of filling up their Regt. with drafted men. They say they want men that will fight & not these Baby Conscripts.

Those acquaintances who were in for a short time received James' criticism also:

Well, Sister. I must tell you what I have been doing to day. This morn. I left Camp about 7 o'clock & went to visit the 126 Regt. which is 7 miles from me. I saw most of the Lurgan Township Boys. They are looking well and hearty. They are making great calculations on going home soon. You ladies must not pet these worn & mangled veterans whose time of 9 months is about to expire. Some of the Patriotic boys of Franklin Co. is greatly discouraged. They think playing soldier is not what is cracked to be.

As the war lengthened, volunteerism began to fall off so new recruiting methods had to be devised. The Congress passed a conscription act in March of 1863. It required all men of the age of twenty to forty-five to be liable to military service. However, it exempted anyone who paid \$300 or provided a substitute. It was a terrible loophole and James didn't like it at all. In August, 1863 he wrote:

I am glad to hear of Hugh Frazer being drafted. I hope he & all the rest of drafted men may turn out in the field. This thing of drafting men & let them pay there 3 dollars is not much of a benefit to our Army. We will never fill up the ranks in this way of doing things. Every man that drafted should feel it his duty to respond to his countrys call. The way it sees best to call upon him. If the people of the North wants peace, why dont they come themselves & not send there 3 dollars. It is men we want not money. But I suppose they think if they pay us soldiers we will fight it out for them. (Stay at Home towards & treaters) A man that buys his independence in the field should never call U. States his Home, or at least he should never be treated as an American citizen.

James enjoyed his military life at first. He wrote on August 12 and September 3, 1861:

I am enjoying my self finely. Better by far than I expected. I keep good health and take the living first rate.

I like Soldiers life very well far better than I expected. We get plenty to eat & drink. And for sleeping we are furnished with Uncle Sam Beds that natuhal gave him which is very pleasant only in rainy weather.

James was very interested in the social goings-on at home and regularly asked for news about his friends:

How is Carrie getting along. Does she have as many boys as usual. Who pays the most attention to her.

And:

What has become of Ras. Frazer. Is she going to return to the West. Have you any quire meeting this Fall. What has become of Walt Means. Is he gallanting any of the ladies, & Martha Hays Mueks & McCunes. Are there any gens paying attention to them. (I want you to answer all these questions.) Yous they must be better posted in the young peoples affairs in the Neighbor hood.

In a letter to his parents early on, he kidded Jennie about one of his friends who continued his social visits even though James wasn't now at home:

Papa I think you must let Billy Linn's horse loose when he comes to our house. I always thought he came to see me but I must have been mistaken by what I hear.

He was always interested in the ladies and who might get married:

Sister now are the Newburg ladies getting along. Who pays attention to Mily Smith or Snubaker. Is Dr. Lam married to Miss Green. I wonder who might be married next. I know (perhaps you silly)

Jennie must have written and told James that she wasn't enjoying her social life as much now that he was away:

Sister, I think you should attend the pic-nick. You must not stop attending parties & so on in account of my being away. You think about when evered you can.

James engaged in some gossip of his own:

So Brose Nesbit has been paying Cumblod Valley a visit. Do you think Miss Brown will marry a batch so old as him. There is a mistake to his riches somewhere. I can pretty nearly give you amt. of his wealth. He made 3000 doll. in Cal. and that is all it is worth at this time. He will come here to his fathers estate when he dies so the Line may be worth 10,000 doll.

It wasn't long before they saw action. James was at Big Falls, Potomac River, Maryland. He wrote to Jennie on September 12, 1861:

I suppose you have heard of the skirmish we had here. We were fired at by Six cannon on Last Wensday morning from the other side of the River. There was no person killed or hurt. Except W. Harper from Shippensburg. He was slightly wounded in the arm he is almost well. They fired at our guns for 1 1/2 hour. The Col. would not let us fire our guns at them till we were reinforced for we could not hold the number of Rebels there was. So we went back out of reach of their guns. When they were firing at us before we left we laid flat on the ground & let the balls pass over us. Some of them passed pretty close to us. You can see rockets almost every night flying up from the other side of the River.

He told his parents on September 26:

How are you all getting along by this time? If you are getting along as well as I then it will be pleasantly. I could not wish for Better times than I have. I am in a tent with fine fellows. We came back to camp Tennally last Monday one week ago. I do not know how long we will remain here. I hope not long. I would like to get over to Virginia soon. We were paid off today. I got 12 dollars. We were paid for one month. ... We have received our new U. States uniforms which are very nice. If you were to meet me you would barley know me to see me in a new bright uniform & high hat.

In a letter dated November 16, James was in Camp Pierpont, Virginia. He wrote to one of his friends:

What kind of weather have you in Newburg. we have the most disagreeable weather here I ever saw. This evening it is blowing a perfect hurricane. About every ten minutes you can hear some one hollering Ketch that tent. It is blowing over. We have roll call at 8 o'clock at night and at sunrise in the morning. We drill almost every day. We drill 4 hours a day & the rest of the time we have not anything to do. We get plenty of hard bread, not very good at that. I get along about as well as any of the boys & I think a little better for I have not been unwell an hour since I came into the Army. We have some ten or twelve sick at the present time. We received our pay today. We were paid of in silver and gold. Just fresh from the mint. Some of the boys said it had hardly got cold yet.

He had been promoted to corporal on October 10, 1861 and wrote on December 4:

I am on guard to night. I have got an above standing sentry. I have been promoted to a high Corp. Birth, but as I said I am on guard. I am Sargt of the guard. All I have to do is to relieve the guards every two hours.

The soldier got a lot to eat, but some of it was not very good. The basic ration, especially while on the march, consisted of salt pork and hardtack. Hardtack was a large, thick, tough soda cracker. It could be good when fresh, but unfortunately it sat around in warehouses for quite a time until it was finally used. They also had coffee and sugar. The average northern soldier had an average height of five feet eight and a quarter inches and weighed 143 pounds. James was five feet ten and a half inches tall. There were times when he ate very well. He wrote:

If I keep on getting fatter I'll weight 200 lbs by Spring. I weigh 175 lbs at the present time. (Dont say soldiers dont live well.)

And later:

Mother, if you were to see your Big Son you would hardly know him, for he has got to be quite a big punchy fellow. I weigh 180 lbs. Some of the boys says I look more like a geldman or a larger bear than a soldier, to let the truth I never felt better than I do at the present time.

Sometimes they had to buy their food and sometimes they foraged for it:

We recvd our pay last sabbath. We have to pay 20 cts for a loaf of bread & then it ways only 20 oz. And potatos sells for 5 cts per pound.

We had a big Reconnoissence the other day. In the direction Leesburg. We all came back safe. Without seeing any of the Rebels. I cant say without seeing any for we took 3 or 4 prisoners. We had some wagons along for forage. Wich we filled with Rebel grain & hay & whatever we could find. We took some 50 fat hogs.

They had not been paid for a while in November of 1862, so food was hard to get:

We have not yet been paid & its hard to tell when we will. We are rather hard up at the present time. We hardly can get as much as we can eat. Some days we only get 10 crackers and other days they dont get anything to eat. We get plenty of fresh beefs.

No cooks were enlisted in the Union army throughout the entire war. Each soldier was expected to cook for himself. James and five fellow soldiers were living together in January of 1863. They worked out a plan for sharing food costs: We have what is called a mess fund. We all pay so much & then buy whatever we want. So we generally have something good to eat. We buy such things we cant draw from the comensary. We buy such things as potatoes.

James took his turn at cooking for his group and told Jennie he'd like to cook her one of his meals:

This is my week for cooking. We all take our turn at it. So I come on cooking every six weeks. Well I must tell you what we had for dinner. Coffee cup & soft bread. We generally have better dinners but just in present we are somewhat short of rations. We get soft Bread four days in a week. Sister I am getting to be a splendid cook. If I was at Home I'd get you up a regular Army meal just to show you how I cook.

Sutlers were civilians who chose or followed the army with their wagons full of provisions such as wines, brandies, Bourbon, cakes, canned fruits, cheeses and other delicacies, which they sold to the soldiers. They usually charged exorbitant prices. On February 14, 1863, James wrote to Jennie:

We have been living very high on good things for the last few days. In the shape of jellies can fruit pickles candies & I must tell you how we got them. We looted them from a Sutler. The Sutlers gets to asking to much for three goods. So we get two or three together and take three goods from them. That's what we call hooting them. Our mess got a box of jelly and dozen herring.

In a letter dated December 31, 1862, he described a great meal they had on Christmas Day:

I had a splendid Christmas dinner. I must tell you what we had. We had rather a costly meal. We bought two cans of tomatoes, which we had to pay 2 and one half dollars for. 25 cts. of sugar cakes & aples. We had to pay 5 cts a peace for them. So you may judge we lived richly. To Morrow is New Years. I do not know how I spend it. If I was at Home I think I know how I would spend it. I would be shure of a good dinner. I think you would get up something extra for me.

However, the next day's meals weren't all that great:

This is a cold frosty morn. I wonder what you are doing to day. I had a cup of frozen potatoes for breakfast this morn. I expect to have some sweet potatoes for dinner. We have to pay 10 cts. pr. pound for them.

James was determined to maintain his up-bringing and abide by what his parents had taught him:

If it was not for the bad company I could always be a soldier. Nothing I hate more than swearing & bad company. We have some hard cores in our company. But I hope I'll never be one of them.

In a letter to his mother:

We have not had much preaching in our camp till lately. Mr. Furguson has preached to us several times. I always attend services whenever I get an opportunity. There is a great deal of wickedness in the Army. I have always tried and lived up to the rules that you taught me. And I hope that I may never be led astray from them. I think if my life is spared to get through this War, it will be a benefit to me in after years.

James was very pleased to report in March of 1863:

We had preaching in our camp by a young Rev. Mr. Furguson of Lawrence Co. He is a brother of Mrs. Sharp Fullerton. He is a splendid speaker. He is not yet licensed to preach. But was appointed by some Commisioners Society to preach in the Army where there are no chaplains. He was a classmate of Ralph McClellan, at Canonsburg & also of Tom Orrs at Allegheny. He is making his Home in our tent for the present. Quite highly honored are we not. Its not every soldier that can say they have a minister in there tent.

James was always looking for letters from home and from friends:

I want you to send me all the news that you can have when you get your letter. Tell Uncle Jack I have not got any Letters from him yet. I want you all to write Soon. Good bye from one that will always remener friends.

Occasionally he would scold Jennie or complain about not getting enough information in the letters:

Sister why cant you send me the names of who was drafted & who went to the Army. You never mention the name of any one of those goes. If I had the convenience of writing you have I think I could do it more justice than you do. But sitting here in the cold one cant do much at writing.

In another letter he answered his mother's concerns for his health and then complained to her about Jennie's lack of the kind of news he would have liked to receive:

Mother you need not trouble your self for I am enjoying good health. The reason why I do not write oftener is the weather has been so cold I am scarcely can write. Do you & Father keep good health this winter. Sister hardly ever tells me how you are all. She has so much to tell me about her preachers friends & so on that I dont care any thing about it. I think she might give me more news than what she does. Why dont Father sit down & write me a good long letter. I think he might, dont you.

In a January 1, 1863 letter to his mother, he asked her help again in getting his father to write more often:

Why dont Father write to me more frequently. I think he has plenty of time to write once a week to me. So I would always get two letters from Home a week. I am looking every day for a letter from home.

He was really disgusted in August 1864, when he wrote:

I had thought of not writing for two or three weeks, for I had not recvd. any from you since the 10th of this month. So hereafter if you dont write more regular you cant expect me to be regular. You plead not time. I have to incur more difficulties for doing better fighting, marching, digging breastworks & many other things I can hardly write. We had a shingled roof & a table to write on it I would write more frequently. But as I have neather claim table or covered roof, you must pardon me for not writing often.

Many people in the North were opposed to the war. Members of an anti-war group that was very active and especially vocal were called Copperheads - they wore lapel pins that were cut from Indian head copper pennies. They were pictured for the first time in 1863. So I started for a while in the Army without warning. On June 7, 1863 James wrote:

All we soldiers want is the friendly feelings & sympathy of people of the North. While we have so many traitors at Home. This war will never prosper. I would give my next years pay to lead a Regt. of our troops in the field up North to muster up some of the copperheads. I would rather make them come up to the mark or strech necks.

He asked on January 6, 1864:

How does the people like the way they are drafting this time. How is the Genl. on War matters at this time. Are they as many Copperheads around in the section as there was some time ago.

Secesh were those who believed in seceding for the South. James heard about some of them back home:

And E. Ditzler he is turning Secesh is he. Tell him if it Secesh that it would not be good for him if I was at Home for I could have taken revenge on Secesh. I never want it to be said after the war is over that there were traitors living near Maclay Mill. If I was at home and I heard any of person speaking in favor of the South I would rather let have him tieded up for a tree that I dont believe it is right when them that want come and fight for three country to say any thing about it, for them that can come and dont come when this War is over. They will barly have the life of a dog. They will be like the three huters. one of them shot a large bear. And the other two came up to where it was lying & said "Wasant that a fine bear you shot." So it will be with some of the boys that stayed at home. When this War is over they will say "wasnt that a big battle we had" or so on. When they had no part in it.

And he didn't want Jennie to socialize with any of them. He asked about the choir leader at her church:

Who are you going to have for a leader in your quire meeting. I hope you will not have such a Secesh as Billy Means. Will you take my advise & stay at home with Father & Mother. It will do you more good than attending such meetings.

James stated in a letter dated September 6, 1862 the trouble he had in returning to his outfit after a furlough home:

I must try & give you an account of my many travels since I left Home. I did not leave Harrisburg till on Thursday. I could not take transportation till then. That's why I did not get off sooner. There were some 100 of us left together for Fortress Monroe. We were under charge of a Col. So he had to turn us over to our Regements. As I was the only Corp. I had to stay & take charge of some men. I stayed at Fortress Monroe two weeks. I heard our Div. had shipped for Aquia Creek. So I went with them to their company. Two other men of our Div. came along with me. Arrived at Falmouth on the 22nd. Our Battery had left three days before I got there. Our troops were fighting some at the Rappahock Station. So I with some other boys of our Div. started on foot for it to overtake them. We waggons out all night. The next morn. we started bright & early. We traveled some 15 miles & we came up with our waggons which had been left behind. I was quite glad to see some of our boys. That day we reached Warrentown Junction. We had to stay here for two days till we could find out where our Battery was. We heard it was at Warrentown. So off we started. We reached the Battery that eve. I found the boys all in good spirits.

James was among the many enlisted men in the Army of the Potomac who greatly admired General George B. McClellan. McClellan was a graduate of West Point's class of 1846 and was a veteran of the Mexican War. His first assignment was to command an army that was being formed in Ohio. He led to western Virginia and easily defeated a small Confederate force there and continued on and handily defeated a larger Confederate army of 4,500 men. His activities were somewhat exaggerated in the press. After a fusio with green troops at Bull Run, it was determined that a real army would have to be put together. McClellan was placed in command of the Army of the Potomac on July 27, 1861. McClellan was very adept at organizing his army and made his men feel like soldiers. They in turn gave him their confidence and deep affection.

Throughout the winter of 1861-1862, McClellan was pressured to take the offensive, but he wrote "the necessity for delay is not my fault." He began to be distrusted by the radical Republican politicians in Washington, including Secretary of War Edwin Stanton. They questioned his will to fight and some even claimed he was willing to let the enemy win the war.

McClellan lost the Peninsular Campaign and Lincoln shuffled generals around. He made General John Pope head of a new Army of Virginia in northern Virginia, some 50,000 men. At Second Bull Run, on August 30, 1862, some of McClellan's divisions had joined Pope and had joined in the battle. McClellan was off somewhere else and was not at Second Bull Run. But Pope's Army was badly defeated and driven north in disarray. A few days after the battle, on September 6, James was near Munson Hill and wrote to Jennie:

Well Sister we were in the 4 days fight at Bull Run & it was a perfect run for some of the troops. Frivous fight was the hottest fight our Battery was ever in. We losted 4 men killed & 15 wounded. .... Several of our boys had their limbs shot of. Some of them were cut in two. That day the Rebels fired at us our Battery with 3 Batteries of Artillery. Our Infantry did not stand that ground. On Saturdays fight we fired our man killed & 7 wounded. In all we losted 5 killed & 22 or 23 wounded. Saturdays fight was a hot time. We losted 1 our man killed & 7 wounded. The Infantry gave way & run. We were our Campions & some 24 hours. The Rebels struck at me with his musket. But we did not me to get our guns off. I was waiting to limber up & that was a Rebel struck at me with his musket but did not hurt me any. They drove us for some distance. We fell back to Centerville on Sunday Morning. Monday we went to Fairfax Court House. Tuesday day we went to Arlington Heights. Wednesday we went to the Arlington House. Thursday we came here & are here yet. Do not know how long we will remain here. .... If we had Gen McClellan on the field in place of Pope & McDowell we would have captured the whole Rebel force. McClellan is a perfect traitor & a Rebel. Our troops says they will never fight under him again. They will fight for no Gen. but McClellan. How does Gen. McClellan stand in old Penna. Has he still as many enemy as when I left. If you hear any person speaking against him tell them that he had better fight under him first before they say anything against him for they know nothing about him. I know one thing if we would have had him at Bull Run we would have fought better. Our troops have no dependence on Pope or McClellan. .... The Rebels the first day fight fired so fast with his safe that he scarcely fired our guns for as fast as we would go up they would drive us back. I cant see how we gott off so safe.

McClellan didn't accomplish much for six weeks after the Battle of Antietam and then when he began a new offensive he moved slowly with much deliberation. The President lost confidence and gave the Army of the Potomac to Major General Ambrose E. Burnside. McClellan was in retirement. General John Reynolds led the First Army Corps to which Battery B was attached. On December 18, 1862, a few days after the Battle of Fredericksburg, James wrote to his father:

I suppose you have heard of the late battle having been fought near here. No doubt you have got news from it that. I can give you but I'll try to give you some news. We crossed the River on Friday a mile below Fredericksburg on a pontoon bridge. That day we marched to the front of the lines. All was quiet except a few guns that kept up a firing at our troops crossing. Saturday morn. we took our front on the left. We advanced one mile when we were fired upon by the Rebel Batteries. They opened fire on our position & right flank. We were soon engaged in hot contest. The Rebel Sharp Shooters were only 50 yds from our Battery. All the men we had wounded were hurt by them. We had five men wounded by them. ... About 1 o'clock that day our Div. made a charge on the enemy under the cover of our Battery. They drove the enemy before them for some time when they were reinforced & drove our men back. They our Infantry broke & fled in a hurry. The Rebels still following them till they up to within 75 yds of our men. When they halted & draved up in line to take our Battery. By this time there was a Regt of Infantry had come up to support us. The Rebels advanced in near mass to capture our guns. When to their sorrow we let loose with double charge of canister & the Infantry raised up and poured in volley after volley. They did not stand it long but fled. Gen. Reynolds stood by our battery & cheered the boys on. After the enemy had fled he came up to Capt. Cooper & put his hand on his shoulder & said if it had not been for you our left would have been turned. That he had send a regular stampedee. We had a hotter fight this time than we ever had before. The Reserved losses in killed wounded & missing 2100 men with the loss of one Brig. Gen. Gen. Jackson Comd. 1st Brigade. ... Our guns blew up several of the enemys caissons. Sabbath night at 8 o'clock we began to recross the river by day light. All our troops have crossed safely. I forgot to tell you I escaped safely & dont feel any the worse of the fight. I think if we would of had Killer Mac [McClellan] to lead us we would not have been whipped.

The Army of the Potomac had a new leader by the early months of 1863 - Major General Joseph "Fighting Joe" Hooker. James answered Jennie's question about Hooker on February 7, 1863 and continued to praise McClellan:

You inquired I thought of Hooker or Fighting Joe. think he will soon be like all the rest. (Soon play out) I think if we want to bring this War to a close soon we will have to get a new set of men at Washington & Gen. McClellan to take command of the Army.

Hooker mishandled the army at Chancellorsville during the first week of May and the Army of the Potomac suffered another defeat. James wrote on June 7, 1863:

This was heavy canonading up the River. Have not heard the result of it yet. I dont think it is the intention of Gen. Hooker for to cross all his force near this place. If Hooker gets defeated this time I think he had give this rout up. For every time the Army of the Potomac was beaten in a fight we have been whipped. I hope that we may be successful this time for it will soon be time we are doing something in this department.

In July, Gettysburg was a turning point for the Union. Still, James was promoting McClellan in August of 1863:

I suppose the people of the North say put in that Gen. & this Gen. to command the Army & then we will soon whip the Rebels. I would like to know how the people of the North & the know men we have a good & bad general when they never worked under him. When the soldiers had a man that they would fight to the last for we could not keep him. Give us back Gen. G. B. McClelland & we will protect U. States right. But must quit talking such language or you will take me as one out of his wits.

The President's Emancipation Proclamation took effect on January 1, 1863. It broadened the war by declaring that the Northern government was against slavery. James was critical and becoming disillusioned with the war in a letter dated March 6:

But I hope this War will soon terminate. So that we soldiers may return to our peaceful vocation & think no more of armed rebellions & bloody battles. But we will have many hard battles to fight yet before we close this War. I am afraid we will have some bigger fight than we have had yet. Since the Presl. proclamation I am nothing but a 13 dollar traitor for Uncle Sam. What does he care for a white soldier. Nothing. They have done nothing in Washington this winter but talk on the Nigger question. I think if the North ever wants peace they will all every man shoulder his rifle or musket & march down through Dixie & back to Washington and burn it. Then we may talk peace.

And on March 17:

For Old Honest Abe I have not much to say. But I am beginning to think he has lost the first part of his title or at least Honest. I think we had better leave the Nigger question alone for the present & try & have peace restored once more. Fight will never end this Rebelion. It will have to be done by peace parties and that by people out of office. Or at least November 3, 1918. after seven months of illness & a complication of diseases. She was 74 years old. James died at his home in Shippensburg on Saturday evening, August 20, 1921, aged 82 years. Interment was made in the Middle Spring Presbyterian Church cemetery.

This was the final letter in the collection of war letters. Cooper's Battery B was involved in twenty-five engagements over the four year period; among them were Second Bull Run, Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, the Wilderness Campaign and the Siege of Petersburg. James was there for all of them except when he was on furlough. He had three furloughs home. One in the summer of 1862, thereby missing the Seven Days' Battle on the Peninsula, a second after the battle of Gettysburg, and a third in February of 1864 when he reenlisted. His father visited him in northern Virginia shortly after he entered the Army, and Jennie visited him at Sharsburg, Maryland in September of 1862, after the battle of Antietam. It is also said that he was thought to be dead at the Battle of Gettysburg and that his father went there to find him.

On September 11, 1889, First Lieutenant James Gardner of Cooper's Battery B turned in an address at the dedication of a monument that commemorated Battery B's actions at Gettysburg. He stated, "During our guns and munitions of war, we were mustered out at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, June 9, 1865, after full four years' service."

James operated the family mill after he returned from the Civil War in 1865. He met the woman he would marry and in a letter dated June, 1867, he wrote:

Annie, it seems that I cant content my self for an hour at a time. My thoughts are always on you. I feel as if I was not worthy half the love and interest you take in me. Would I that I were a Christian that I might pray to God more sincerely and with a better heart to guard and protect us from all sin. That we might walk through this world unspotted by sin, and when death lays his cold hand upon us that our souls will go to the one who died for us. Oh, how pleasant would it be. Had the rich hearts to ask God's blessing for every thing we do. I feel my heart is a little changed to what it used to be. But I am far, far from being a Christian. It seems that God is trying me or else I do not pray in the right way. Annie, write to the when you receive this for you know your absence casts a sort of melancholy gloom over me. But I must go to bed. So Good Night and a kiss on this paper for you.

James married Anna Margaret Fickes (b. June 6, 1844) on September 19, 1867 in the Middle Spring Presbyterian Church. Anna was the daughter of Joseph and Elizabeth Fickes of Roxbury, Franklin County. They had eleven children, six girls and five boys, over a period of nineteen years. James ran the mill until his eldest son, Ralph Fickes Maclay (b. February 4, 1868, d. November 20, 1957), was able to manage it from about 1888 until it no longer operated because of improved methods of grinding grain.

Descendants recall that throughout later life James enjoyed reunions with Civil War comrades who were frequent visitors and camped at the Maclay homestead at Maclay's Mill. Perhaps James and members of his family were in attendance at the dedication event at Gettysburg in 1889. The address included a brief description of the actions of Battery B throughout the war.

James and Anna celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary in September 1917. They moved from Maclay's Mill to Shippensburg, a distance of about six miles, in 1918. Anna died at their home there on Sunday evening, November 3, 1918, after seven months of illness and a complication of diseases. She was 74 years old. James died at his home in Shippensburg on Saturday evening, August 20, 1921, aged 82 years. Interment was made in the Middle Spring Presbyterian Church cemetery.