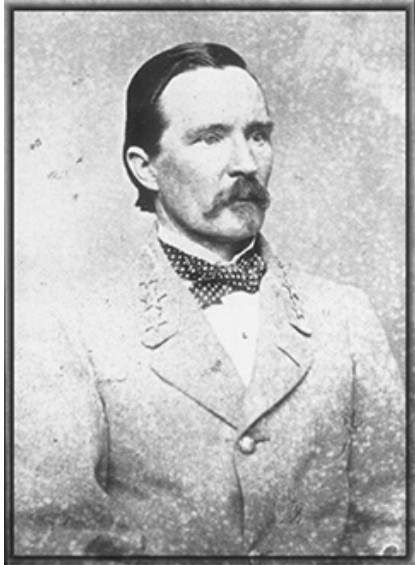


## Captain Henry Heth

Charter Member of Rocky Mountain Lodge No. 205 A.F.&A.M.

by George F. Winters, Historian

Heth was born at Black Heath in Chesterfield County, Virginia on December 16, 1825<sup>1</sup>. Son of United States Navy Captain John Heth (1798-1842), and Margaret L. Pickett (1801-1850). He was a cousin of George Pickett. He usually went by "Harry," the name also preferred by his grandfather, American Revolutionary War Colonel Henry Heth, who had established the Heth family in the coal business in the Virginia Colony after emigrating from England about 1759<sup>2</sup>.



**Major General Henry Heth CSA**  
*U.S. Military Special Collections, West Point*

Heth entered West point Academy in 1844. He was wounded at West Point in 1846 with a bayonet stab to his leg. In his own words, "During the early part of my third class encampment, was engaged with a number of my classmates in the enjoyable occupation of deviling a plebe on his post; the plebe became enraged and threw his musket, bayonet foremost, into the crowd. The bayonet struck me in the thigh, missing the femoral artery by about an eighth of an inch, and passed through my leg. I fell as though I had been struck by a cannon ball..."<sup>3</sup>. Heth graduated 38<sup>th</sup> in his class from West Point on July 1, 1847<sup>4</sup>, with a brevet to 2nd Lieutenant, 1st Infantry.

After service in the War with Mexico, he was promoted to 2nd Lieutenant, September 22, 1847. He was in garrison at Jefferson Barracks, MO, 1848; on Frontier Duty at Ft. Atkinson, KS, 1848-1849 and 1850-1852; conducting prisoners to Ft. Laramie, Dakota territory, 1852; at Ft. Atkinson, KS, 1852-1853; and Ft. Riley, KS, 1853-1854. He was promoted to 1st Lieutenant, 6th Infantry, June 9, 1853.

He next was on Frontier Duty at Ft. Kearny, NE, 1854-1855, serving as Quartermaster, 6th Infantry, November 24, 1854-March 3, 1855. He was promoted to Captain, 10th Infantry, March 3, 1855.

Heth was on the Sioux Expedition, 1855, being engaged in the Action of Blue Water, NE, September 3, 1855; on Frontier Duty at Ft. Laramie, Dakota Territory, 1855-1856; at Platte Bridge, NE, 1856; and Fort Snelling, MN, 1856.

On April 7, 1857, at Norwood, Powhatan County, Virginia, Captain Heth married Harriett Christiana Selden (1834-1907). They had five children, twins Cary Selden Heth (1860?-?) and Jennie Heth (1860?-?), Ann Randolph Heth (1861-1921), Roberta Heth (1867-?), Henry Heath (1869-1900), Hattie Heath (1871-?) and Magilton Heath (1855-?)<sup>5</sup>.

He served on a Board for testing merits of breech- loading rifles, August 12, 1857-January 15, 1858.

Captain Heth arrived in Utah Territory the spring 1859 and while Stationed at Camp Floyd, 1858-1860, he was assigned to command company E 10<sup>th</sup> Infantry. When the letter requesting a new Lodge at Camp Floyd was drafted, Captain Heth was one of the 23 signers making the request. Next to his signature, he indicated he was a Master Mason, inferring that he received his degrees in another Lodge prior to arriving in the Utah Territory. During October 1860, Heth received news that his child was ill,

and he requested a short leave. While on leave of absence, Virginia seceded on April 18, 1861, he resigned his commission (April 25, 1861)<sup>6</sup>.

Shortly thereafter, he was commissioned as a Colonel, 45th VA Infantry under General Floyd. On January 6, 1862 he was promoted to Brigadier-General and sent to Lewisburg, Virginia where he was trounced. He next took part in the Kentucky Campaign in Kirby-Smith's column. Heth joined the Virginia Army in February 1863 and was given command of a brigade in A. P. Hill's division, which he led at the Battle of Chancellorsville. When Stonewall Jackson fell, Heth was left in command of the division. With the re-organization that followed this battle Heth obtained his own division and a promotion to Major-General, to rank from May 24, 1863.

It was Heth who touched off the Battle of Gettysburg. The evening before the conflict a reconnaissance by Pettigrew's brigade had developed the presence of Union troops in the town. The following morning Heth, against orders, but with the abetment of A. P. Hill, advanced his four brigades against General John Buford's Federal cavalry. Heth was severely wounded in the battle when a Mini bullet walloped him on the head cracking his skull and incapacitating him for the balance of the three-day battle. He recovered and was able to participate in all subsequent engagements, though he spent the rest of his life attempting to justify his actions at Gettysburg.



On July 14 Heth and his division comprised the rear guard during the Confederate withdrawal across the Potomac River at Falling Waters. A serious error was made and hundreds of men from the Virginia brigade were encircled and made prisoners. For the remainder of the war he commanded his division in II Corps. At the Wilderness he fought his old friend, Winfield Scott Hancock, to a standstill on May 5, 1864 but being unable to consolidate his position was routed on May 6. Heth distinguished himself in the defense of the vital positions south of Petersburg and won praise for personally carrying the colors into the Union breastworks at Reams' Station on August 25.

After the War Heth engaged in the insurance business in Richmond; a Civil Engineer in the service of the United States, 1880-1884; and Inspector of Indian Agencies, 1884-1890. He died of Bright's Disease at Washington, D. C., September 27, 1899 and was buried in Hollywood Cemetery, Richmond Virginia.

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<sup>1</sup> Heth, H., 1974 "The Memoirs of Henry Heth" Edited by James L. Morrison, Jr., Greenwood Press, page 9

<sup>2</sup> Ancestry.com, <https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/person/tree/3454485/person/270193402221/facts> visited 6/8/2021

<sup>3</sup> Heth, H., 1974 "The Memoirs of Henry Heth" Edited by James L. Morrison, Jr., Greenwood Press, page 14

<sup>4</sup> West Point Officers in the Civil War – Class of 1847, <https://civilwarintheeast.com/west-point-officers-in-the-civil-war/class-of-1847/> visited 6/8/2021

<sup>5</sup> Hughes Family Tree, Ancestry.com, [https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/person/tree/3454485/person/270193402221/facts?\\_phsrc=dtU502&\\_phstart=successSource](https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/person/tree/3454485/person/270193402221/facts?_phsrc=dtU502&_phstart=successSource) visited 7/4/2021

<sup>6</sup> Heth, H., 1974 "The Memoirs of Henry Heth" Edited by James L. Morrison, Jr., Greenwood Press, pages 148-49