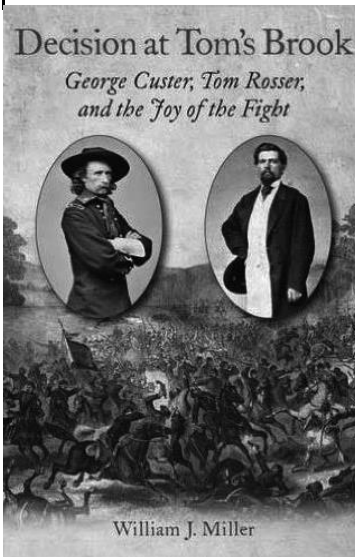


## New Book



### ***Decision at Tom's Brook - George Custer, Tom Rosser and the Joy of the Fight***

By:

William J. Miller

[The following is a review by SCHS member and Civil War scholar, R. Patrick Murphy]

On Route 11 at the southern end of the town limits of Tom's Brook is a highway historical marker that reads in a single sentence: "Action of Tom's Brook: Here Early's cavalry under Rosser and Lomax was driven back by Sheridan's cavalry under Torbert, October 9, 1864." There is a Virginia Civil War Trails marker in the nearby Shenandoah County Park. Neither of these signs does credit to what happened on that cold October day. This action or fight—it hardly rises to the dignity of a battle—was the penultimate fight in the Shenandoah Valley during the Civil War, the almost total destruction of Confederate cavalry in the Valley, and the worst defeat of Confederate cavalry in the War. In a remarkably well written and well researched book, author William J. Miller provides a detailed analysis of the action. *Decision at Tom's Brook: George Custer, Thomas Rosser, and the Joy of the Fight* (Eldorado Hills, CA: Savas Beatie LLC, 2016) is for sale by SCHS for \$31.00.

The action at Tom's Brook was really two fights, one between Union Brigadier General George A. Custer and Confederate Brigadier General Thomas L. Rosser on the Back Road and one between Union Brigadier General Wesley Merritt and Confederate Major General Lunsford L. Lomax on the Valley Pike. The fight between Merritt and Lomax was not much of a fight at all; Lomax was completely overwhelmed by Merritt's greater numbers, better horses, and superior weapons. The fight between Custer and Rosser on the Back Road, around a geographic feature known as Coffman's Hill, was far more interesting because of the psychological makeup of Custer and Rosser. Miller posits that both Custer's and Rosser's personalities were informed by gaudium certaminis, the joy of the fight. In a well-balanced analysis, Miller concludes that "the fight on Coffman's Hill was not the triumph of courage, fighting ability, and leadership Rosser claimed, but an unnecessary, poorly managed, humiliating misadventure in recklessness" that led to the precipitous, 26-mile, panicked Confederate retreat from Tom's Brooks to Meems Bottom south of Mt. Jackson, known as "the Woodstock Races."

Custer's post-war life has been examined ad nauseam; Rosser's post-war life is less well-known.

[Continued in next column]

## New Books

### On the Horizon

We are pleased to announce that we will soon have two long-awaited books to offer for sale:

*The Rinkers of Virginia, Their Neighbors & Kin and The Shenandoah Valley* by Daniel Warrick Burruss, II. This book has been out of stock for over a year and we even have several people on the wait list. The Shenandoah County Historical Society has recently obtained exclusive permission from the daughter of Mr. Burruss to reprint the original book. Plans are already underway and we hope to have copies available in time for holiday purchasing. If you are interested, let us know and we will notify you as soon as it is available. It will be available at \$26 (\$25 for members)

*The Neff Gang Story* by Philip Crown has been in the works for a couple of years. Former SCHS Board member, Philip Crown has compiled information on this infamous gang from the Walker Chapel area of Shenandoah County who had a lot of people terrorized in the early 1900's. The idea for the book began when a group of people in the area met to reminisce and compare stories about this gang that had been handed down through the years. Philip moved to North Carolina when most of the research was completed and the project slowed down. The book is now at the printing stage and will be available soon at \$18. (\$17 for members)

### Tom's Brook - [Continued]

Although Rosser was a successful builder of railroads in the United States and Canada, he was obnoxiously pugnacious until his death. In particular, he tried to blame his humiliating defeat at Tom's Brook that plagued him the rest of his life on his superior, Lieutenant General Jubal A. Early, and his subordinates, Colonels Thomas T. Munford and Richard W. Carter.

Well-illustrated and well-indexed, *Decision at Tom's Brook* contains three useful appendices: orders of battle; strengths and losses, with the names, so far as discernable, of both Union and Confederate killed, wounded, and prisoners of war; and notes on maps and topography. It is happily formatted to have footnotes as opposed to endnotes. This book is one of this reviewer's favorite Civil War books, not only because it is particularly well written, but also because this reviewer has been over the ground on which the action at Tom's Brook took place and was able to visualize exactly what happened and where. Any person interested in the Civil War in Shenandoah County should have this book in their library. Price: \$31.00 (Members: \$30.00)