Daniel Alexander Skelly

Daniel Skelly was 18 years old and one of the seven children of Master Tailor Johnson Skelly and his wife Elizabeth. The family lived on West Middle Street near the Fahnestock Brothers General Store, the largest store in Gettysburg. In late June 1863, Daniel was working in Gettysburg as a clerk at the Fahnestock store.

The month of June, 1863 was an exciting one for the people of Gettysburg and vicinity. Rumors of the invasion of Pennsylvania by the Confederate army were rife. We knew the Confederate Army, or a part of it at least, was within a few miles of our town and at night we could see from the housetops the campfires in the mountains 8 miles west of us. We expected it to march into our town at any moment... We little dreamed of the momentous events which were soon to happen right in our midst.

July 1 – Daniel sits atop a tree on the Mummasburg Road, with a friend:

We could then hear distinctly the skirmish fire in the vicinity of Marsh Creek, about three miles from our position. Shot and shell began to fly over our heads. Being anxious to see more of the battle, I concluded I would go up on the observatory on the store building of the Fahnestock Brothers, situated on the northwest corner of Baltimore and West Middle Streets, and just across the street from the court house.

At about 10 AM, I observed General Howard and his staff coming down Baltimore Street from the south of the town. I went down and told them that if they wished they could go up on the observatory on the store building. Upon reaching the housetop, the general, with his field glass, made a careful survey of the field west and northwest of the town; also of the number of roads radiating like the spokes of a wheel from the town.

He leaves store and heads toward the town square, called the Diamond:

We went down Carlisle Street to the McCurdy warehouse, just below the railroad, where the wounded were being brought in from the First Corps, then engaged west of the town. No provision had yet been made for their care in the town and they were laid on the floor. Then the court house as well as the Catholic, Presbyterian and Reformed churches and the school house on High Street received the injured soldiers, until those places had reached their capacity, when private homes were utilized, citizens volunteering to take them in and care for them. I went into the court house with buckets of water and passed from one to another of the wounded, relieving them as best we could under the circumstances.

July 2
I spent the afternoon in the yard back of the Fahnestock store on West Middle Street ... About 4 o’clock, our conversation was interrupted by a terrible cannonading off to the southwest of the town ... Our town being in the hands of the Confederates and cut off from all communication with the outside world, we knew nothing about our army. I slept in a room above the Fahnestock Store, with a number of other boys. This room had a window in it opening out to the street ... Not making any light we would remain quietly at the window trying to catch the conversation of the Confederate soldiers who were lying on the pavement below the window.

July 3
And then an ominous calm ensued. What did it mean? We did not know, nor could we surmise ... The alleys and (Baltimore) street leading up toward the cemetery were barricaded and the Confederate soldiers behind them in the line of battle, were preparing to defend any attack from Cemetery Hill.

July 4
About 4 A.M., there was another commotion in the street. Going hurriedly to the window, I looked out. Ye gods! What a welcome sight for the imprisoned people of Gettysburg! The boys in blue, marching down the street, fife and drum corps playing, the glorious Stars and Stripes fluttering at the head of the lines.

July 5
On this morning, my friend met me on the street and told me that down at the Hollinger warehouse they had a lot of tobacco. ‘We can buy it and take it out and sell it to the soldiers.’ (They were still in their lines of battle.) We had little spending money but we concluded we could try and raise the cash in some way. I went to my mother and consulted her about it and she loaned me ten dollars. Gus also got ten, all of which we invested in the tobacco. We cut it up into ten cent pieces and each of us took a basket full and started out. We went up High Street to the jail, where we turned into a path leading down to the old Rock Creek ‘swimmin’ hole’.

The boys head toward Culp’s Hill, passing dead Confederate soldiers along the way.

The soldiers helped us over the breastworks with our baskets and in a short time they were empty and our pockets filled with ten cent pieces. The soldiers told us to go home and get some more tobacco, that they would buy all of our supply, and paying back our borrowed capital we each had more money than we ever had before in our lives.

Aftermath
Emergency hospitals were set up on the field. Surgeons were busily at work with the restricted equipment at their command, performing the necessary amputations among the severely wounded men remaining in the hospitals. The desperately wounded were being cared for, many of them dying and being carried away for burial or friends taking charge of their bodies.

Fahnestock Brothers received numerous inquiries about wounded soldiers who were scattered over the field in the hospitals. With Mrs. Fahnestock, I frequently rode back and forth among these stations, looking for wounded men about whom information was sought. Sometimes it was difficult to locate them. Fences were all destroyed. Shot and shell, guns, pieces of shells and bullets were strewn about the fields in every direction. The Trostle house was entirely deserted. In their kitchen, the dinner table was still set with all the dishes from the meal, and fragments of food remained, indicating that the family had gotten up from their meal and made a hurried getaway. On the Codori farm, there were still some dead Confederates who had not been buried. They were lying on their backs, their faces toward the heavens, and burned as black as coal from exposure to the hot sun.

Daniel Skelly lived in Gettysburg the rest of his life, writing the memoirs quoted here in 1932. He continued working at the Fahnestock Store, eventually taking over its operation.