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A FEW FACTS
ABOUT SHERMAN'S ARMY PASSING THROUGH
LIBERTY HILL

The 22nd of February 1865 is indelibly stamped upon the hearts of the inhabitants of our peaceful little village, Liberty Hill. 'Twas a beautiful sunshiny day. The children had holiday (it being George Washington's birthday) and so had enjoyed a delightful dinner, the last one we ever had the pleasure of eating in our lovely home.

'Twas just after the burning of Columbia, giving Sherman's Army time to cross the country, we never dreaming of them coming through our hilly country. When Sherman burnt Columbia, we could see the reflection very plainly even though it was fifty miles away. We went to our upper piazza from where we had a fine view -- which filled our hearts with horror; but we did not for a moment feel that we would so soon have war with all its horror in our midst.

Part of Sherman's Army crossed the Wateree River at Peay's Ferry, 5 miles from Liberty Hill; another part crossed at Rocky Mount, 8 miles above Liberty Hill.

The first intimation we had of Sherman's Army crossing the river was the burning, just before they crossed over, of the elegant mansion owned by Col. M. A. Peay. Then after they crossed, a large distillery was burned and from there until they reached Liberty Hill, all gins and barns were burned. The first building burned after entering the village was our beautiful two-story academy.

The first excitement, about three o'clock, was seeing two of our soldiers, who were home on furlough, racing at full speed past our gate with Yankees in pursuit. They did not follow them far for they were afraid of getting into trouble. Then about 4 o'clock a Company of Cavalry came dashing in and

in a short time our yard and house were covered with soldiers of all descriptions. The first soldier who stopped at the door of the room filled with frightened women and girls bowed and said, "Ladies, I am a Yankee." I replied, "I am aware of that fact." With this he wheeled around and walked upstairs with his sword and spurs clanking. You may imagine my consternation, a young woman with six young girls under my care -- we were huddled together in our sitting room. By that time others had come in demanding our guns, pistols, gold and silver. I told them that our soldiers had our guns and that our gold and silver had been sent off and that we had no idea where they were hidden. From that hour for over a week our house was never free from the vandals. The stream of soldiers did not molest us. They went about the house at will. Later we went to see what was broken. They had pulled out drawers and thrown them down after getting what they wanted. Some general or captain made our house his headquarters, every night going in and out at will. It depended upon the style of man the officer was whether the house was quiet or otherwise. One night a Capt. Hinson with his men took possession of the house, except the one room we were in which was the dining room, and the one we occupied as long as the army was passing through. In the room next to us we had 3 young Negro girls and three boys about 18 who begged us to let them stay in the house and that the boys would keep up the fire for us (which they did).

The Captain was a rough, uncouth man. He allowed his men to take great liberties throughout the house. Some of his men had the basement, beneath the dining room where we were. They knocked off the splashing and chipped off pieces from the joices [joists]. I appealed to the Capt. for protection from such treatment. He replied in a sarcastic manner, "Oh, they are only getting a little kindling." Then in the morning, when they were ready to start (go), one of the men came to our door and said, "We left a nice piece of beef for you all." When I looked in my room, for it was my room, I saw the carpet covered with soft soap and a feather bed opened and spread over it. ~~I did not enter the room for fear of the soldiers.~~

Everything was abused in the room. The piece of beef was laid on my pretty work table with kerosine oil poured over it. I did not enter the room but our good cook, Aunt Sophie, went in and with tears in her eyes she said, "Missie, I never knowed there was such men in the world."

If it had not been for Aunt Sophie, I don't know what we would have done; she would manage some way to get something for us to eat. We were really hungry sometimes and my dear little girl would cry. The second day after the Yankees commenced to come we all got very hungry. Our cook would cook what she could get and just when she started to bring it to us then it would be snatched from her. That evening General Charles Smith came and made his headquarters with us. He was told how we were being treated and he expressed his sympathy. He and his staff were gentlemen and that was the only night during the raid that any of us slept. The general told me that I might feel perfectly safe as long as he and his men were in the house. He said he would order a good supper and would leave supplies with us for several days. We had all been staying in our dining room but gave it up to them to have their supper in. All of us, Gen. Smith and staff, too, were in our parlor until their supper was ready. Then the folding door was thrown open and it was a beautiful sight. The silver fairly sparkled in the bright light and the table was covered with a feast of good things. We were invited to eat with them but just that minute our cook came in with a feast for us. After supper the general and staff, who seemed to be perfect gentlemen, came in the parlor and asked for some music. Our young ladies didn't wish to play so some of his men went to the piano and played Yankee Doodle and other of their war songs. That made our girls go and play Lixie, Bonnie Blue Flag, for them.

That night we heard of the burning of our house on the plantation in Lancaster Co., five miles away. The general saw that we had heard something to worry us. We told him and he asked if the house was occupied. When told what was in it he said if it had been occupied it would not have been burned. We asked if there was any chance of the one we were in being burned. He said no, unless we left it. When the general left next morning

he left a guard and told him to see that we had another before he left which each guard did as long as the army was passing.

General Smith did give us enough provisions to last us several days. We divided the sugar and coffee and each one hid it about their person. We had a bag of meal in the barn and when we went to get some the Yankees would come with a cup and get some of it, too.

We had a very faithful servant, Fannie, who took charge of our little girl Annie. They would be out on the piazza most of the time. (It was not cold.) The Yankees would try to pet little Annie and offer her money but she would turn proudly away. They would say to Fannie that a child is a _____. At the same time the dear old nurse would be watching what the soldiers were doing. Three different times she came running in saying, "They are going to set fire to the house, Missus." I would rush out to some man who seemed to have some heart, and beg him to stop that man from burning the house. Each time they would order them off. Once the man took the torch to our neighbor's barn and set fire to it.

Sherman's men came into Liberty Hill Feb. 22 1865. After burning Col. Peay's houses and all gin houses, cotton barns, stables, between Liberty Hill and Peay's Ferry, burnt for us (at Liberty Hill):

Mill on Creek

2-story Academy

2 stores (cotton)

Wiley Patterson house

Chum Cureton's house

John Brown's barns and stables, houses at Tanyard, and his store

R. B. Cunningham's beautiful 2-story home, barns and stables

R. B. C. Plantation house

Some days later the beautiful two-story house where these incidents took place and in which these people were living was completely burned by some of Sherman's soldiers.

Two of the most cruel tricks committed by the soldiers was the compelling of an old colored man to walk with the army until he was completely exhausted and did not live long afterwards. The other was the taking of a poor crippled boy, Tom Brace, from his home, a few blocks from our house, and notwithstanding his old father and mother's pleading they compelled him to walk so ~~far~~ that he was taken sick and died about twenty miles from home.

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This story is true and told to me by my grandmother Nelle Thompson Cunningham, who married Mrs. M. E. Cunningham's son.

In 1907 after 42 years a letter from Quincy, Ill., was received addressed to M. E. Cunningham, Liberty Hill, S. C. It was a letter telling of having a small hymn book picked up at a spring near Liberty Hill in the spring of 1865. The letter asked if the owner were still living and wanted the book, he could reply. The writer was Uriah Lawber who said he was getting old and wished to return the book.

M. E. Cunningham was Mary Ellen Cunningham, my great-grandmother. She wrote a letter to Uriah Lawber saying she was the owner and would like very much to have the book returned to her.

Written on the back fly leaf of the hymn book, 2 x 3 x 1 1/2 inches in size, is this notation :

"This is from Uriah Lawber
Co. K, 78 Regt., Ill. Vol. Inf.
Quincy, Ill., 802 Nee St.
(1907)"

On the front fly leaf is the name —
M. E. Cunningham 1859

This hymn book is bound in leather with gold embossed design on front and back covers. Although over 100 years old it is almost in perfect condition.

In my great-great-grand^{papa's}~~father's~~ (James S. Thompson's) house a big barrel of molasses was in the cellar. The bung was pulled out and the molasses ran out all over the dirt floor.

At my great-great-grandpapa's (John Whitaker's) house in Camden, S. C., the molasses was poured out on the floor and feathers from pillows were mixed up in it.