

Liberty Hill Visited And Richards' Home

State - Nov. 20, 1936

Beautiful Places Built Before the Confederate War. Five Counties May Be Seen From the Former Governor's Piazzas—His Hunting Horns and Fox Hounds—Glimpse at Camden, Great in History With Many Illustrious Sons.

BY FITZ HUGH McMASTER

It is just about 106 miles for the round trip from Columbia to Liberty Hill and the home of former Governor John G. Richards. But it is worth the effort to see this most philosophic-minded of recent governors, the historic town of Liberty Hill in its wonderful setting, to pass through Camden, one of the most historic and beautiful towns of the state, and to see other things along the route as one passes over the Jefferson Davis highway for 31 miles and over the 18 miles of surface-treated roads from Camden to Liberty Hill.

One is lost delightfully in the musings over the past, the contemplation of things of the present, including the great accomplishments of the South Carolina highway department, and a reckoning for the future.

A Philosophic Man.

Former Governor Richards is called "one of the most philosophic-minded of recent governors." And so he has ever seemed to the writer, ever since they were thrown together as members of the legislature in 1900—Governor Richards was then serving his second term. But it was the first term, the writer believes, of such men as M. L. Smith, Frank Lever Eugene Blease, Dick Whaley, Huger Sinkler, Tom McLeod and several others who have written their names large in South Carolina history. A philosophic-minded man, he has ever seemed though the writer has differed most radically at times with him.

But that is neither here nor there. He has ever seemed a most thoughtful man, even when the picture of

him is in that most exhilarating of sports, fox hunting, of which he is a devotee, as his father, a Presbyterian minister, was to his dying day, when he was past 80 years of age—though the latter generally wished that the fox would escape. And Governor Richards is said to wish this, too, especially when the wily "canine mammal" swims one of the arms of the back waters from a Wateree dam and the hunters have to cross a bridge to head him off.

Hounds and Hunting Horns.

Many trophies of the sport adorn his home. Among these are three hunting horns, one presented by the late Senator Legare of Charleston, then president of the South Carolina Fox Hunters' association, one by John S. Cunningham of an old Liberty Hill family and one by the late Abb Hill, formerly solicitor in the Spartanburg circuit. The latter is a horn which had been in the Hill family for nearly 100 years. It is the one of which Governor Richards is particularly fond, and with which he can make the echoes ring, as Gray tells in "the rosy call of incense breathing morn," or as Sir Walter Scott tells "when the stag at eve had drunk his fill."

"But when the sun his beacon red Had kindled on Benvoirlich's head, The deep-mouthed bloodhounds heavy bay

Resounded up the rocky way, And faint, from father distance borne,

Were heard the clanging hoof and horn."

It is great sport, and one can hardly imagine a finer setting for it than around Liberty Hill with its high hills and deep valleys.

And what more is needed to visualize the race than when Governor Richards opens his back door and giving a call, up dash "Ring," "Bugle Ann," "Rock," "Wild Jim," "Rube" and "Hill," ready to go at command. When these are joined by eight or ten other hounds a pack for "music" is formed hard to beat.

And yet the sport has its comical side, for the writer remembers the dear late Jim Verner saying on a frosty morning, about 3 o'clock, near Boyden's Arbor, as we listened to locate other hunters, "Why should we ride eight miles at this time of night to hear a 'yard-dog' bark?"

Many Mementoes.

But there are many other mementoes of his past life in Governor Richards' spacious homes with its 15 rooms, eight bedrooms "and more needed," he explains, when his children and grandchildren are gathered for Christmas and other special days. For it must be remembered that the governor and Mrs. Richards have nine daughters and many grandchildren. (His only son gave his life for his country in the World war. The communion service used at the Liberty Hill Presbyterian church is a memorial to him.)

Among the many things that he prizes highly is a very handsome repousse, hand-chased silver service given him after he had retired from office "because it was given me by those who could expect no favors," he says.

Great is the view from the 240 feet of piazzas which practically surround the former governor's home. Five counties may be seen, Kershaw, Chester, Fairfield, Richland and Lancaster. Now and then when atmospheric conditions are particularly good, the skyscrapers in Columbia may be seen, and more often glimpses of Winnsboro and Camden.

There is one object the governor always points out, a cedar tree, a true juniperus Virginiana.

"When I was with my company at the Manassas celebration in 1906, I found that tree, then a mere switch, near the monument marking the spot where Gen. Barnard E. Bee fell—you remember he said, 'Look at Jackson! There he stands like a stonewall!'" (The world remembers that!) The tree now pyramidal in shape is about 30 feet tall.

Over 100 Years Old. Part of Governor Richards' home

(it has been added to) was built more than 100 years ago by Joseph E. Cunningham, one of the earliest millionaires in South Carolina and a grandfather of the late Thomas J. Cunningham of Chester, who served this state in several public offices. It is a home of the old-time South, where open house is kept the year round, and generous hospitality abounds. There is no more gracious hostess than Mrs. Richards.

Allusion was made to the fox hunting inheritance of Governor Richards from his Presbyterian parson father, whose name he bears. The Rev. John Gardiner Richards went to Liberty Hill as pastor of the Presbyterian church there in 1858—there was then no other church for white people there and there is not today. There he remained for about 30 years, an intermission being when he served as chaplain of the Tenth (Manigault's) South Carolina regiment in the Confederate war.

It was said of him that he always preached his best sermons if he had been fox hunting on Saturday morning.

It may be said that former Governor Richards is not only a "child of the manse," but he has been a devoted Presbyterian all his life and for more than 30 years has held the highest office in the gift of a Presbyterian congregation, that of ruling elder in the Liberty Hill Presbyterian church.

Let me close this sketchy account of Liberty Hill by a quotation from "Kershaw County: Economic and Social," by George H. Wittkowsky and J. I. Moseley, Jr., "Liberty Hill, too, in the extreme northern part of the county, was a community of rich planters, who built beautiful homes and lived sumptuously."

Many of the beautiful homes remain, and let us hope the occupants live sumptuously. But it is doubtful if they may now be termed "wealthy planters."

Camden, the Historic.

As we passed through Camden, going and coming, there was the thought that the people of Columbia should visit this historic old town frequently.

Here was a village 30 years before the legislature ordered Columbia to be laid out. "Pine Tree Hill" it was called in 1758, and Camden, after Lord Camden, a friend of the colonists, in 1768. It is a quaint and beautiful old town, whose attractions draw thousands of people from the North each year, and which should be more intimately known by the people of South Carolina. Truly Camden was an important center of military operations in the state during the Revolutionary war. Six engagements were fought in what is now Kershaw county.

"Kershaw county was the birthplace of six generals of the Confederacy, Maj. Gen. J. B. Kershaw, Brig. Gen. James Cantey, Brig. Gen. James Chesnut, Brig. Gen. Zack Cantey Deas, Brig. Gen. John D. Kennedy and Brig. Gen. John B. Villipigue."

In the World war two Kershaw county boys, Richmond Hobson Hilton and John Cantey Villipigue, were among the 78 from the whole United States who won congressional medals.

Camden is full of monuments to illustrious dead and has several examples of the architecture of Robert Mills.

It is more than worthy of a separate article, and maybe, some day, may have it from this pen.

The pleasure of the trip to Liberty Hill may be increased if the return trip is made through Great Falls and Winnsboro. This adds only ten or 15 miles to the round trip. It is worth it.

Old Accounts Throw Light Of Life at Liberty Hill

Historic Settlement Sent Many to Fight for Confederacy But Young Blades Had Their Light Moments and Innocent Fun.

State - Dec. 15, 1935

BY MARY G. MURRAY.

Special to The State.

McCormick, Dec. 14.—A recent house cleaning in McCormick brought to light an old account book kept by a merchant at Liberty Hill nearly 100 years ago. Examination reveals many interesting facts concerning the life in this settlement, which was a part of Edgefield county until 1916, when McCormick county was formed.

Some of the items that aroused interest in the early settlers are: One bunch fiddle strings at 12 1-2 cents; one-half pound indigo at \$1.50; one vial laudanum at 12 1-2 cents; one finger ring at \$2.25. These entries were made during the year, 1848.

The exact date of the settlement of Liberty Hill is unknown, but tradition says that a tribe of Indians beat out the first trail. Numerous Indian relics found along Cuffeytown creek in this vicinity suggest an Indian massacre in the early days of American settlement. It is said that during the American Revolution the first Liberty pole was erected at the intersection of the Scott's ferry and old post roads, hence the name, "Liberty Hill." Several tombs near Liberty Hill bear dates in the early part of the 18th century.

Two Old Churches.

This settlement boasted two churches, old Bethany Baptist church and a Methodist church, which in later years was abandoned. Bethany was built with a gallery for the slaves, and the first two deacons were Hezekiah Edwards, George J. Sheppard. The Rev. John Trapp was the first pastor. Today Bethany stands remodeled into a model country church with the Rev. A. Thad Persons of McCormick as pastor.

Liberty Hill was a noted educational center in the days before the Confederate war and boasted one of the best schools in the state with George Galphin as teacher. Some of the distinguished men who were educated at this school include such men as Gen. M. C. Butler, Governor John C. Sheppard, Orlando Sheppard, C. C. Fuller, United States Senator B. R. Tillman, Dr. Scott Sheppard, Dr. Charles Burchalter, Abner Bushnell, William H. ("Pony") Yeldell, Dr. J. L. Lewis, Dr. J. C. Lanier and many others members of the Quarles, White, Timmerman, McDonald, Harrison, Cosey, Hibler, Callison and other families.

Sent Many to War.

At the beginning of the Confederate war James Oscar Sheppard, along with 99 other boys from this section, volunteered for service. In the Battle of Travillian young Sheppard lost his life, June 11, 1864. Before going into battle he gave to his body servant, Simon, his gold watch and after three weeks this faithful Negro, having suffered hardship and suffering, rode his horse into the yard of the palatial home of young Sheppard's father at Liberty Hill and delivered the watch along with letters from Colonel Ferguson, Captain Humphrey and others.

In 1860 the Liberty Hill Female academy was built and continued to function until 1916 when it was destroyed by fire. At this time McCormick county was formed and the school was rebuilt near Bethany church and is today a thriving rural school.

By virtue of its location, Liberty Hill was a good business center and there were during the period before the war two general merchandise stores, two shops and a tanning vat. All farming implements, nails, vehicles, clothing and shoes were made by hand. Prominent among the establishments were two flourishing grog shops.

The richest resident of Liberty Hill section was Capt. W. B. Dorn, who became a millionaire through the discovery of a gold mine on his property. He was also the owner of a grist mill there.

Good, Clean Fun.

Liberty Hill was always a lively social center and also boasted a race track. One pastime that old residents like to remember is the "gander pulling" that was engaged in by the young men at the conclusion of a race. A frisky gander was caught and stripped of the feathers on his neck; the neck was greased and the gander suspended by the feet from the limb of a large tree. Riding at full tilt the one who was able to pull the gander's head off was awarded a prize. Festivities lasting for several

days when relatives from a distance gathered was not uncommon.

Spiritedly patriotic citizens in this community were among the first to rally to the Red Shirts and Ku Klux.

Like many other country settlements which were once thriving centers of industry, Liberty Hill has yielded to the influence of good roads and modern inventions. Her loss has been the gain of nearby McCormick, Abbeville, Greenwood and Edgefield. One store is still operated and the families of R. H. Quarles and W. E. Sheppard remain to keep alive the traditions of their forefathers in living to make Liberty Hill, for them, the "garden spot of the world."