

Civil War vets held a rousing

THE CHARLOTTE OBSERVER

reunion in Blacksburg

After the withdrawal of federal troops from South Carolina in 1877, Civil War veterans began planning reunions. At first they were generally small, but as the state began recovering economically and railroads began offering special rates, the reunion groups became larger and met more frequently.

In August 1889, the 17th S.C. Volunteers held their 25th reunion in what was described as "the biggest entertainment of the kind ever held in the Upcountry." The 17th had a considerable number of York County soldiers (four companies), along with Chester (two companies). Lancaster and Barn-



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well counties had one company each.

The reunion was in a park called Overlook Place on Whitaker Mountain near Blacksburg.

(Whitaker Mountain earned its name in an unusual fashion. Sally Whitaker had once lived with her family in the gap of a nearby mountain. One day Sally took her

little brother with her to search for the family's cows. The boy was attacked by a large panther. Sally carried a rifle and managed to kill the panther. The mountain was named Whitaker Mountain in Sally's honor.)

The old soldiers arrived in every way possible: by train, wagon, horse or mule-back, even on foot. Blacksburg had several hotels that quickly filled, and a number of citizens invited veterans to their homes. Some camped in wagons or tents on the outskirts of the town.

Col. F.W. McMaster met the veterans at the depot to shake their hands and distribute badges to 109 of his old comrades. McMaster

then mounted a white horse and led a parade through the main street of Blacksburg, then headed to Overlook Mountain where the special events would take place.

An observer noted that some marchers were vigorous while others were "weak and tottering." He also noted empty sleeves and here and there, a wooden leg.

Originally the 17th had 1,035 enlistees with 230 of that number either transferred or dismissed.

At the end of the war, the regiment had 410 survivors.

At Overlook Place there were present some 2,000 to 3,000 people to cheer the veterans. A "sumptuous feast" was laid out on tables. The band played "Dixie" and

"Yankee Doodle."

The orator of the day was Col. William Blackburn Wilson, captain of Company F and then a distinguished Yorkville lawyer. Wilson was followed by Col. McMaster, who opened with a resounding "Comrades!" followed by a long pause. "Visibly affected," the colonel added, "friends of my might!" He spoke in glowing terms of those soldiers who had sacrificed their lives.

When the speeches were over, a resolution was presented to have the next year's reunion at the Columbia fairgrounds. Within a few years most state reunions would be at the State Fair on the same grounds. The State Fair was

generally in late October when farmers were likely to have sold enough of their crops to have money to spend.

Later, a huge tent was erected yearly on the fairgrounds to house the Confederate veteran groups. United Daughters of the Confederacy would serve the old veterans food and drink contributed by various businesses. This practice, along with free admission, lasted as long as there were veterans who could manage to travel to Columbia.

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