

Confederate valuables found

THE CHARLOTTE OBSERVER

new homes in Chester

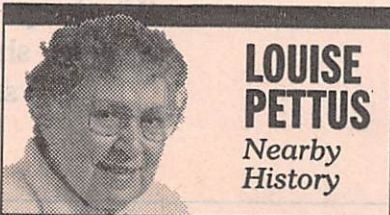
In April 1865, Felix Gregory DeFontaine, who had served with an S.C. company as a military correspondent with the rank of major, was in Chester.

DeFontaine had returned to Charleston, found his family and brought them to Chester, where he managed to rent the attic of a country store.

DeFontaine heard that a train had just arrived from Richmond. He hired a wagon and hurried to the depot. DeFontaine later said:

"Soldiers and civilians were looting the place. Two or three men had been shot and their bodies tumbled out on the railroad track and all present, save a few helpless officers, were intent on securing their share of the plunder."

DeFontaine went to the opposite



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*Nearby
History*

side of the depot and found 20 or 30 ironbound boxes. He loaded as many as he could onto his wagon. When he opened the boxes, he found they housed valuable Confederate records, including both the provisional constitution and the permanent constitution.

DeFontaine later sold both constitutions. The provisional one ended up in the Confederate Museum in Richmond. The permanent constitution now is owned by the University of Georgia.

John H. Simpson found a boxcar empty except for a box and trunk (it may have been the same boxcar not quite emptied by DeFontaine). The box Simpson found was full of books. A Mr. Robinson, the depot agent, gave Simpson permission to take the box and trunk.

When he opened the trunk, he found a Confederate surgeon's uniform, a pistol, surgical instruments, letters and a diary. The trunk had belonged to a Confederate surgeon and had an address.

Simpson forwarded the trunk to the owner, but in 1908 could not remember whether the surgeon was from Sumter or Darlington. Simpson said his daughters, who lived in Oklahoma and California, had the diaries that he had kept from 1860 to 1867.

The box contained books be-

longing to the Confederate president, Jefferson Davis. Davis' name was in many; others had the name Varina Davis, the maiden name of his wife. Some had the name Eliza Davis. Simpson was afraid that Yankee soldiers would search all Confederate property and confiscate or destroy the books.

"This caused me to tear out the names in the books so that no one could say they belonged to President Davis. I knew the Yankees were trying to get him, but I was determined that they should not get any of his books in my care."

Two men dressed as citizens stopped at the Simpson home and asked for lodging, saying they were Gen. Braxton Bragg and a Mr. Johnson, one of Jefferson Davis' secretaries.

The next morning Simpson

showed them the books of President Davis. Johnson picked out a half-dozen of the finest books and told Simpson he would take them to Davis. Simpson told Johnson he would save the balance for Davis and gave his name and address. He never heard from Gen. Bragg or Col. Johnson or Jefferson Davis.

Except for nine volumes of the American Encyclopedia, the books were placed in care of Simpson's sister, Mrs. J.W. Baird, who placed them in her attic. Later, a tornado destroyed her house, and the books were lost.

The morning that Gen. Bragg left, he gave Simpson a handsome battle flag that had been captured from a New Jersey company in what Bragg said was the last battle of the war.

Simpson thought the heavy blue

flag with its painted eagle to be beautiful. The men took it off the staff and rolled it tightly and put it away.

"For a year or more it remained under the garret floor, and when it was taken out, it fell into pieces, a ruined mass of silk strips and paint, and then it went up in smoke as many Southern homes had done ..."

John Simpson, a minister of the gospel, 43 years after the end of the war, added the words: "If I had that beautiful flag now, I could fold it up with a Palmetto flag and send it back to New Jersey in token of peace and friendship."

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