

Memoirs, Traditions, History Rocky Mount And Vicinity

This is the seventh installment of "Memoirs, Traditions, and History of Rocky Mount and Vicinity" by the late L. M. Ford. We are printing the history in installments as space permits.

Boating

After the completion of the Santee canal in 1800, boating from Rocky Mount to Charleston grew to be of considerable importance. The farmers' produce was carried and their supplies were brought back on flat boats. Nattie and Dickie Barnett were the noted boatmen of that day. William Nichols was the boat builder and one Farrar kept a warehouse near Rocky Mount ferry. This was before the day of streamers and the railroad.

Rocky Mount Canal

This canal begins above the head of the falls and extends some distance below Rocky Mount ferry. Several locks were built on it to raise and lower the boats at the declivities. They are splendid specimens of stone masonry, and are well preserved and seemingly as firm and tight as when they were first built.

I am indebted to Thomas Caine for the date of the digging of this canal. He left Liverpool, England, in 1816 and landed in Charleston the same year. Briggs and Thomas were the contractors of the Fishing Creek canal, which they began to dig in 1817, and Thomas Caine came up to do their smithing. A picnic was given at Beckhamville July 4, 1823, to celebrate its completion.

Shortly after this picnic, Robert McCullough, contractor, began to dig the Rocky Mount canal, and completed it in the early thirties. Thomas Caine did his smithing also. After this canal was finished, Thomas

Caine did the smithing for the farmers around Beckhamville as long as he was able to perform the labor. He died 1883, nearly 90 years of age.

About a mile below the road entering the picnic grounds at the falls, a rock house was built for the lock keeper. The stone walls are in good condition still; the wood part has decayed and disappeared. John McCullough, contractor, was the first occupant of this house, Green Roberts the second, and Hulda Arledge and her family were the last who lived in it. Jonas Backstrom, the first and only lock-keeper, never occupied it. He resided on his own farm nearby.

It is said this canal cost the state \$300,000. William Wall, Beckhamville section, used the entire length, and William

Nichols and Jerry Gaither below the ferry, but very few boats ever passed through it. Shortly after its completion, the South Carolina railroad reached Columbia and the trade of this section was diverted to that city, and transportation was carried on in wagons.

While digging the canal, John McCullough, contractor, was married to Miss Sallie Kingsbury at the residence now occupied by the family of the late William Nichols, then by James Westbrooke.

From this union sprang Miss Sallie McCullough of Columbia, who produced a sensation as a vocalist in the sixties and seventies. She married Brignoli, an Italian tenor singer. A few years afterward a divorce was obtained. His last song in her presence on the stage was "Googbye, Sweetheart". This was in New York. The last heard of Miss Sallie

she was singing in a choir in New York and receiving a handsome salary therefor. This was many years ago.

Kingsbury's Ferry

In the early years of the last century our ferry was known as the Kingsbury ferry from the owner and operator, John Kingsbury. He was the father of Mrs. John McCullough and the grandfather of Sallie McCullough, the vocalist. His residence was the

old rock house at the eastern end of the ferry. It is told of him that he kept his coffin under his bed for some years before his death. He died in 1820 and a costly monument marks his grave on the brow of the hill above his house.

Wire Grass

Bermuda grass, or wire grass as we call it, was first sown on the banks of the old canal to protect them against the washing rains and high river waters. From there it has been scattered by birds, animals, and farmers until this whole section is badly infested with it.

(To be continued)

THE CHESTER REPORTER,

Wednesday, March 13, 1963

Memoirs, Traditions, History Rocky Mount And Vicinity

This is the nineteenth installment of "Memoirs, Traditions, and History of Rocky Mount" by the late L. M. Ford. We are printing the history in installments as space permits.

Antique And Curious

J. A. Nichols has a pocket silver pen holder which was given him by one of Sherman's men. It is very wonderful that it was given to a white child.

A young lady on leaving the boarding school was given a stick of candy for her oldest child. The candy was shown to the oldest child when about 40 years old, but not given to him.

William T. Scott still has the canteen which he used in the Army. It was taken from the body of a Yankee who had been killed in the battle. The name, S. G. Scruggs, and the number of a Michigan regiment was scratched on the side. As all this had disappeared, Mr. Scott remembers only the name and the state.

Private Shehen, Co. A, 5th Regiment, S.C., took the canteen from the corpse on the battle field and used it until he was killed. It was taken from his body and sold. Sgt. Wesley Plyler was the purchaser. He was killed wearing it. It was again put up to the highest bidder. Lieut. Ben Dunlap then became the owner. After thinking of the number of men who had lost their lives with it on them, he gave it to William T. Scott. All these belonged to the same company.

Scott wore it during the remainder of the war. He was wounded once while wearing it. In another battle a Yankee bullet went between this canteen and his frying pan, both of which were hanging by his side. It was considerably indented. He carried it to a neighbors in 1865 and brought it home full of cider, which sickened him. Since then it has never been used. It still has the cloth strap on it he used in the war. The canteen is now in the possession of J. W. Keistler, Jr.

D. B. Lumpkin has a Spencer rifle which once belonged to Frank F. Howser, one of Sherman's men. Howser was in the squad which engaged in a skirmish with some Confederates at Stroud's mill. He was wounded and seeing that the Confederates were getting the best of it, threw his gun into Stroud's mill pond and began to retreat.

He was overtaken by the Confederates near Mrs. Sibley's and forced to march along with them. Arriving at Turkey Branch, he died on the bank and was buried there later by some of the neighbors. Before his capture he told a Negro man where he could get the gun. The Negro got it and gave it to W. D. Benson, at whose death, D. B. Lumpkin came into possession of it. He had a blood curdling experience with this gun in 1889.

J. L. Ford owns a Sharps rifle which has some history connected with it. John Chambers, Chester county, and Brown, Lancaster county, Hampton's Scouts, rode into Wadesboro, N. C., in February 1865, and met with a lone Yankee trooper. He was ordered to surrender. He caught this rifle in his hand as if to deliver it, instead he put the muzzle to Chambers' breast and pulled the trigger. The cap exploded, but the gun missed fire. As quick as thought he raised the gun and hit Chambers a terrific blow on the head, after which the Yankee was shot dead by Brown. Chambers took the dead Yankee's gun.

In the charge upon Kilpatrick's camp, J. L. Ford captured a very fine Army pistol. For this pistol Chambers gave the Sharps rifle and \$300. Ford says that he has ever since regretted the trade.

He used this gun in the battle of Bentonville, the last one fought east of the Mississippi river, and in the daily skirmishes during the last weeks of hostilities. It was used on the last night of picket duty in Johnson's Army. Coming into camp on the night of April 17 and learning that the Army would certainly surrender the next day, he and a few kindred spirits shouldered their guns, mounted their steeds, and left the camp, expecting to join Kirby Smith's command beyond the Mississippi and still further battle for their country.

THE LANCASTER NEWS,

LANCASTER, S. C.

Rocky Mount Has Rich History

By ANNE COLLINS

A significant and interesting vignette of history occurred on the southeastern border of Chester County in 1865.

Four miles south of Great Falls, near Rocky Creek Power Plant, there stands today a large two and a half story home, built in the manner of the Old South, with four handsome white columns sitting at its front, and with an unusual fan-shaped window over its double front doors.

It was in this home that General William Tecumseh Sherman made his personal headquarters for a time on his march through the South during the War Between The States.

An interesting story surrounds the home, one as interesting as the reddish-haired, handsome general in the blue uniform of the Union Army, who stopped there in the early part of 1865. That visitor, who has been roundly cursed by many a stout-hearted Southerner, was found by the residents of the home to be a gentleman with a "pleasant and courteous" manner toward his men and others.

HOUSE BUILT IN 1830.

The house was built in 1830 by James Barkley, a wealthy planter and slave owner, and named Rocky Mount, the name by which the community was also known. The brick used in building its three large chimneys were made in England and had been brought to South Carolina to build Fort Mifflin, a Revolutionary fort near Great Falls. After the fort was no longer in use, Mr. Barkley bought the brick to use in building his chimneys.

James Barkley Johnston, a grandson of James Barkley, often told the story of the happenings at Rocky Mount during Sherman's visit. He was born February 23, 1857, and was eight years old when the Union troops stopped at Rocky Mount after they had been delayed in crossing the Catawba River by high waters.

Mr. Johnston recalled vividly some incidents which occurred during the visit of General Sherman.

Days before the Yankees' arrival, Mr. Johnston recalled that the noise of cannon could be heard at Rocky Mount. Rumors of the cruelty and destruction of Sherman's Army swept over the Country, filling the people with terror.

Mr. Johnston's mother, his

grandmother, Mrs. Barkley and Miss Sarah Barkley were kept busy directing the slaves in hiding valuables and food. They carried the flat silver, weighty and burdensome though it was, in large invisible pockets in their dresses and it was saved. Most of the other valuables which were hidden were found and carried off by the Yankee Soldiers.

The meat was hidden between the weather boarding and ceiling of the garrett, and the soldiers never found it although there was a strong smell of smoked meat in the garrett. **SOLDIERS PLUNDERED**

When the first Yankees arrived, Mrs. Johnston thought they were some of General Joseph Wheeler's men, but in a short while swarms of soldiers wearing blue uniforms were every where plundering. A

silver pitcher was found in the greenhouse, and the walls were soon torn down in the search for more silver. The yard fence was burned, the first night of Sherman's encampment, as was a large supply house full of tobacco, and other stores. The gin house full of cotton seed, the barn and stables were all in flames shortly after the arrival of the Yankees. During the eight days the soldiers were there, the women lived in terror of having the house burned.

General William Tecumseh Sherman arrived soon after February 17, 1865, and his soldiers pitched camp at Rocky Mount. He is described as "striking in appearance, tall, handsome, clean-shaven with reddish hair".

To the young Johnston boys who proudly wore brass "rebel buttons" on their jackets, Sherman's shining boots and neat uniforms were envied possessions.

Sherman stayed a week and a day impatiently waiting for the waters of the Catawba to drop and allow his men to pass. When he left it was on a great black horse with a negro boy as a valet, according to Mr. Johnston's memoirs.

Sherman went into the house every day and talked with the women. Miss Sarah Barkley was high-tempered and her eyes flashed with fire when she had hot discussions with the general. Mrs. Johnston lived in terror that Sherman would grow angry and have the house burned. Usually Miss Sarah and Mrs. Barkley sat by the

fire with large bonnets pulled down over their faces.

The officers had their quarters in the house. The first morning after they arrived, Mrs. Johnston invited several of them to breakfast. The menu included rye-coffee with no sugar, bread and meat. Later the officers showed their appreciation of the invitation by preventing the soldiers from piercing the portraits with their bayonets and breaking up the furniture. They also stopped the soldiers from tearing up the floor and using the planks to patch the pontoon bridge across the river.

PRISONERS WERE HELD.

Captain Isaac Withers of Winnsboro and a young man named Keller from Broad River were held prisoners by the Yankees while they were at Rocky Mount. Captain Withers came to the house for food, but

stopped after the soldiers complained to the officers that rebel soldiers were being fed.

As the Yankees were leaving Rocky Mount, some of General Wheeler's men came up and there was a brief skirmish about the house. Wheeler warned the women and children to lie flat on the floor during the fight. The Yankees thought Wheeler's entire army was in pursuit and left hurriedly.

One of the rebels chased a Yankee through the house. The Southerner's gun was cocked and fired in the hall, leaving a mark which is still to be seen. Bullet holes from the skirmish are still visible in the weather boarding of the house. During their stay at Rocky Mount, the Yankees threw rifle pits in the garden and breast works and rifle pits were dug in the old canal near the river. One bridge at the ferry was broken, but the Yankees erected another at the canal. The approach which was cut for it can still be seen.

When the soldiers were gone, there was nothing left but the house and land. The place was ravaged, bleak and bare. So far as the Barkleys and Johnstons were concerned the Confederacy was at its lowest ebb. The time for rebuilding had come.

Barkley Johnston caught an old crippled horse which had missed being shot. The horse, called Billy Sherman, plowed the first crop after the war. A small steel mill was found near the camps, and this mill ground corn picked up from the camp, washed and dried for food. There was meat still in the garret.

"Those were hard times",

according to James Barkley Johnston's description in his memoirs. He lived to see the glory and prosperity of the antebellum South reduced to abject poverty and hardship. He also lived to see and help the South rebuild on the wreckage of the war.

Two of his daughters now

live in the historic Johnston home at Rocky Mount. The house has always remained in the Johnston and Barkley families.

—Excerpts from Johnston Memoirs.

The Chester News,

June 19, 1968,