

Remembering the Civil War-era South

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Alice Buchanan Walker, a widow, was 82 in 1938. When an interviewer named Dixon visited her at her home on South Congress Street in Winnsboro, he recorded her as "a cultured gentlewoman."

He inquired as to her schooling. Walker said she had been taught her alphabet and reading by her mother and then was sent to a succession of private schools.

One of the private school teachers was Catherine Ladd, who taught a school for girls. Ladd had taught at Brattonville Female Academy in York District from the fall of 1839 to December '41 or January '42.

Her husband, George Ladd, was a portrait painter. The two had moved to Feasterville on the Winnsboro-Newberry road and had been in Winnsboro for a quarter-century by the time Alice Buchanan was ready for her. Ladd

was noted for training her students for concerts, in which Alice sang.

Walker was 9 years old when Sherman's troops came through Winnsboro. "My parents did not permit me to see the Yankees nor anything of the confusion in the town caused by Sherman's bummers, but the glare of burning homes and the sky-piercing flames from St. John's Episcopal Church awed and terrified me greatly," she wrote.

The rector of St. John's had kept one of the schools she had attended. Some 1,200 slaves from the area followed the federal army up the west side of the Catawba, which was in flood stage. Many of the slaves drowned while attempting to cross on rafts or flatboats. All but two of the Buchanan slaves left, and all the plantation's livestock was taken by the army except for three cows and an old horse.

Those were hard times, and Walker preferred not to remember them but instead look back to the days before the war when life was much gayer.

The interviewer asked Walker about her style of dress and was told that the hoop skirt was before

her day. She wore bustles and corsets.

The hair was worn high on the head. Women were much admired if they had an abundance of hair. In order to achieve the desired appearance, "it was the custom to save every strand as it clung to the tooth of the comb, and when the strands became sufficient in numbers a switch was made of them and replaced in the coils of the living hair."

If a girl was susceptible to freckles, she washed her face in butter-milk every night and wore a hat or bonnet whenever she was in the sun. Gloves were always worn, no matter how hot the weather.

For more formal occasions, in the summer women wore wide-brimmed hats with a wreath of flowers wrapped around the top of the brim. Long streamers of ribbons floated down the side and could be tied under the chin. Winter hats were frequently decorated with ostrich plumes and feathers.

Alice loved to ride horseback with her friends; sometimes the girls borrowed a pack of hounds and went fox hunting with the

men. She went to dances in Thespian Hall and danced the polka, the gallop and the waltz.

The social event of the year was an annual military ball always held on May 2. First, the Gordon Light Infantry gave a prize drill and a picnic. There were speakers and prizes. Visitors came from all over the state.

Walker had been a part of aristocratic society and gave the interviewer her notion of rank in that society. At the top were the large planters; next came lawyers, and in descending order, physicians, clergy and bankers. It was after the Civil War that shopkeepers or merchants were admitted.

She said that society got its ideas from the reading of Sir Walter Scott's novels. (Mark Twain once said that Scott was the cause of the war.)

Walker firmly believed that it was possible for chivalry to still exist, as defined by Scott, even though women were working outside the home.

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