

Pettus

## DR. CHARLES BETTS' CIVIL WAR DIARY

Dr. Charles Bowen Betts (1828-1903), a Tennessee native, was an Erskine seminary graduate who was a minister of the A.R.P. (Associate Reformed Presbyterian) church.

Reverend Betts was in Winnsboro on January 28, 1861 when for 85 cents he bought a book with blank pages and began keeping a diary, or day book.

Recently one of Betts' descendants, a retired Rock Hill medical doctor, Robert W. Patton, Sr., transcribed and published the diary titled *The Civil War Diary of the Rev. Charles Bowen Betts, D. D.* The 240 page book covers the first year of the war (the diary ends February 23, 1862).

The diary reveals life on the farm—constructing fences, raising pigs, cutting sprouts, buying seeds. “I feel my love for manual labor is about to interfere with my studies. Have not written a word this week on my sermon . . . .” on March 8th Betts wrote, “ Spoke to Col. Rion he gave me the appointment of chaplain.” On April 2nd Betts had his name put on the roll of Boyce’s guards.

On April 11th Betts rose early, put on his uniform for the first time and went into the town of Winnsboro to board the train for Charleston with his fellow soldiers. The following day’s entry told of the attack on Fort Sumter. His company was quickly moved to Fort Pickens Battery Island. “The men had no tents, took the weather, rain all night. I with a few others was under shelter.”

August 15th, Betts describes in detail the most harrowing experience of his life. He and three other men were in a small boat went on a two-hour trip to Fort Palmetto. On their return, “. . . a flume struck our sail and capsized the boat.” The men were able to hold on to the boat but could not maneuver it to shore. In agony they drift a mile and a half past their camp. But their cries were heard and 4 or 5 men come to their rescue. The four had been in the water for 3 hours and Betts lost his coat and cap.

On the 24th of April Betts was back in Winnsboro with his family on leave until May 8th. The entries for the month of May reveal a great deal of confusion and little training for the demands of war. By May 25, Betts is compelled to write, “Considerable disorder in camp today, the men are perplexed, not knowing what is required of them.” The captain and 1st lieutenant of the Fencibles resigned, some 200 of the men were on furlough.

By the end of May the mosquitoes were unbearable in the low-country swamps. Betts’ company went back to Charleston. Other than preaching sermons on Sunday, Betts had little to do and wandered over the town and the countryside.

On June 14th Betts asked Capt. E. J. Means to receive any money due him. “So ends my camp life. Two months and three days. What good I did I know not, I hope I did no harm.” He bought candy for his children and caught the train for home.

Betts returned to his church and farm work. Then on September 26th he goes back to camp, visiting his old company at Lightwood Knob (present-day Fort Jackson). Returning home he was asked to participate in night patrol.

On October 17th, Betts was called back into service. This time he went to Virginia but still managed to get home for Christmas and to stay until January 9th before returning to the battlefield.

Betts' diary, above all else, illustrates how woefully unprepared South Carolina troops were for a war that they over-confidently thought would last only a few months.