

# Big bashes after the Civil War

■ One usually doesn't think  
of Reconstruction parties.

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In late November of 1866, Dr. Blair Hunter sent out a large number of invitations for a party in early December. He requested his friends and neighbors to assemble at his York County plantation at 10 a.m. for an event the Yorkville



Nearby  
history

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Enquirer was later to call "The Bethel Tournament."

Men on horseback, costumed as knights and wearing sabers, were "formed in a martial array" by Hunter. Seated on his horse, Hunter paid the usual compliments to "the softer sex" and then announced the rules of the contest for "the head of the ring." He introduced the judges who would watch the events from a specially constructed stand.

In the contest for the head we are told that "Three heads were arranged in a line a suitable distance apart — each swordsmen had 3 passes at these." The knights were judged on their horsemanship as well as their ability to decapitate one or more of their targets.

After each knight had a go at the heads (which were, we presume, dummy targets the size and shape of a man's head), the spearing of the ring with a lance followed.

Several hours elapsed before all the assembled horsemen had displayed their skill. N.B. Campbell, "Knight of the Southern Cross," was judged to be the champion. His reward was the opportunity to crown the "Queen of the Day," Miss Maggie Wallace. J.A. Campbell, "Knight of the Sunny South," came in second. He crowned Miss Maggie Armstrong as "Maid of Honor." W.S. Adams, "Knight of Sobieski," crowned Miss Lou Lawrence as second "Maid of Honor."

Then the dance began. Dancing lasted until the "wee hours" of the morning with time out for a sumptuous banquet furnished by the host.

How many such affairs occurred is not recorded but we know of at least another that would not only have rivaled for color and ostentation but may have surpassed Hunter's extravaganza.

At Fort Mill on Nov. 18, 1868, at the invitation of Col. John M. White and Col. Andrew Baxter Springs, a huge crowd gathered at 10 a.m. to listen to the jaunty music of the Charlotte Brass Band.

At 11 a.m. a trumpet sounded and 24 knights rode on the field. Twelve of the knights represented the east side of the Catawba and 12 represented the west side. Their bouts lasted a long time because three of the knights tied six times. Finally, the tie was broken by the "Knight of Indian Land" who crowned the "Queen of Love and Beauty."

A "grand supper was served" at the Fort Mill Academy and then the dancing began. An eyewitness described the event as "equal to a wedding party."

The two events described here occurred in 1866 and 1868 — in a period historians call the Reconstruction Era. It was not long after the devastating defeat of the Civil War. The Bethel tournament was only a year and a half since Jefferson Davis and the Confederate cabinet had passed through Fort Mill and Yorkville in their flight from Union troops.

Usually we think of the Reconstruction period as one of economic ruin and uncertainty. We visualize men still recovering from wounds, fatherless homes and continued mourning. It is difficult to reconcile the dark side of Reconstruction with the events just described.

Mark Twain once remarked that Sir Walter Scott was the cause of the Civil War. Were the Bethel and Fort Mill displays of "ye gallant knights and faire ladies" a refusal to admit defeat? What was the purpose of the tournaments? To turn back the clock to a happier time?

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