

1902 Black's Mill Pond drownings

Unusually deep water and the urge to help friends cost three cadets from the Kings Mountain Military Academy in Yorkville their lives

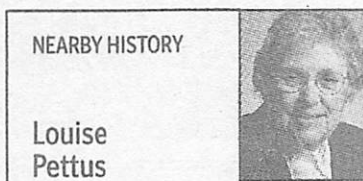
One sunny Saturday – May 3, 1902 – a group of 16 cadets under the leadership of Col. R.T. Stephenson, commandant of Kings Mountain Military Academy in Yorkville, hiked to Black's Mill Pond.

The pond had been a popular swimming place for generations of Yorkvillians and was said to date to before the Revolution (making the pond older than the town). So far as anyone knew, there had never been a drowning in the pond, which was then owned by Fred and Norman Black.

Fred Black, the miller, was present and cautioned the group that the once-shallow pond was deeper because the dam had broken after several freshets that had sent torrents of water down the main channel. Black estimated that the bottom was now 10 to 12 feet down. Stephenson instructed the boys not to swim in the center unless they could swim well.

Eddie Meek Nichols, 19, couldn't swim well. He was walking across the dam when he slipped and fell into the water, quickly disappearing from sight. Cadet Marsh Morrow of Gastonia was a good swimmer and was nearby. Morrow jumped in and pulled Nichols out of the water. Nichols had swallowed a large amount of water, and it was some time before he got rid of it and seemed OK.

Black and Stephenson then told the poor swimmers to shift to a shallow end where the water was three or four feet deep. Two swimmers crossed over the deep water to join the poor swimmers. Cadet Harry G. Ste-



vens, according to a report in the Yorkville Enquirer, was "a strong, active young man, who though able to swim only a few strokes, had in some way created the impression that he was at home in the water. He struck out boldly across the channel; but presently he went under. Wild excitement followed."

Eddie Nichols, who had nearly drowned not long before, jumped into the water intending to save his friend Stevens. Cadet J. Frank Lindsay, 17, immediately jumped in, calling out, "Boys, Stevens is drowning!"

Next Fred Black jumped in. Described as "6 feet tall and a powerful swimmer," he jumped in fully dressed. Black was able to lift Stevens out of the water, but Stevens slipped back and Black went under. Still, Black was able to crawl out onto the bank, "utterly exhausted and half-drowned."

While Black was struggling, Cadet Marsh Morrow went running for a plank. It probably took two minutes for him to find one. Morrow jumped in, found Nichols and was able to get Nichols out, and then went back in with the plank and got Stevens out also. Norman Black had twice gone in after Lindsay and failed, but Morrow found Lindsay's body after the pond was partially drained. It was too late, though, for Nichols, Stevens and Lindsay.

Within 15 minutes of the first

drowning, Fred Black was able to get the word to four Yorkville doctors, who rushed to the scene and for nearly two hours tried to revive the three drowned cadets. News traveled fast. A Yorkville Enquirer reporter wrote that it was no more than an hour before at least a hundred people were present. Among the first were T.J. Nichols, the father of Cadet Eddie Meek Nichols; and Capt. and Mrs. J.R. Lindsay.

The reporter described the methods used by the doctors: "The chilled bodies were restored to lifelike warmth by vigorous rubbing with whiskey and other restoratives, strychnine was injected. ... There was no such thing as a barrel to be had, but men got down on their hands and knees to allow the bodies to be rolled over their backs. This was continued for nearly two hours."

Representatives of Kings Mountain Military Academy attended all three funerals. Harry Stevens' funeral was at First Presbyterian in Rock Hill and burial was in Laurelwood cemetery. J. Frank Lindsay's service was in Yorkville Presbyterian Church and burial was in Rose Hill cemetery. Cadet Eddie Meek Nichols' funeral was at his home and burial was in Bethel cemetery.

K.M.M.A. closed in 1909. There is no indication that the drownings caused the closure of an institution that had opened its doors in the 1850s.

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