

Confederate president proved mettle at marbles

More odds and ends: **Presidential marbles:** Springfield, an old plantation home owned by the Close family of Fort Mill and used as headquarters for Leroy Springs Recreation Inc., witnessed an interesting event in April of 1865.

On their hands and knees, the president of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis, and three members of his Cabinet laughed and played marbles on the parlor rug with young Eli and Johnny Springs.

The game of marbles was later described by Stephen R. Mallory, ex-secretary of the Confederate navy, this way:

"It was a novel sight to see Mr. Davis and Mr. Reagan (postmaster

general), with a little son of their kind host as their ally, playing an animated and well-contested game of marbles against his second son . . . supported by General Breckenridge (Secretary of War) and another Cabinet officer.

"The game lasted nearly an hour; and notwithstanding the skill of his opponents, Breckenridge, who plays the best game of marbles of any leading public man since Judge Marshall (former chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court), and who had his usual good luck, came off victorious."

Mallory, calling Eli and Johnny Springs "two bright, intelligent Southern boys," said they would never forget playing marbles with Jefferson Davis, who used the marbles-playing terms of "knuckle down at law" and "roundings" with them.

Long life: James P. Belk, at the age of 10½, traveled up the Camden-to-Charlotte road with his father, Brittain Belk, to be present at

the signing of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence in May 1775.

When the Centennial anniversary ceremonies were planned in 1875, the 110-year-old Belk was invited to be on the platform along with former N.C. governor Zebulon Vance.

Belk had lost a leg when he was 70 after falling on a pitchfork. He had gotten by with a crutch for 40 years but when told that to be on the platform he would have to negotiate three flights of stairs, he fashioned himself a peg leg. He arrived at the top accompanied by deafening applause.

When Belk reached 100 years the Charlotte papers had noted that he was able to read ordinary print and use a rifle accurately without glasses. In his hundredth year he had made a spinning wheel, a reel and a chair.

Belk was married twice and was the father of 22 children.

The morning that Belk died he

ate a hearty breakfast and then told his family that he was going to die. Someone asked if he was sick. He said, "No, but the day of my death has come," and "he lay down and died without a struggle." Belk had lived 111 years, 3 months and 5 days.

The other great flood: Great floods of the Catawba River are rapidly passing human memory. The last one was in July 1916 and for local inhabitants has proved to be the great flood of the 20th century.

The great flood of the 19th century occurred in February 1865. That one was known as Sherman's Freshet for it held up Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman's Union Army for nearly two weeks on the Lancaster side of the Catawba River.

Tales of gold: The Kings Mountain area became quite a gold-mining country following the opening of the Martin mine in 1827. In 1856 a quartz rock, described as being about the size of a man's head, was

turned up that had inside it pure gold calculated to be 4,400 pennyweights, worth at that time \$4,000. The miners called the nugget "Bee Gum."

It was the miners' firm belief that every large nugget such as Bee Gum had a "fellow" nugget, but little additional gold was found. Martin's 30-acre lot for many years to come was dug into time and time again until not one foot of it lay unexplored.

Before the Civil War, York County had 23 active gold mines. Lancaster County had 14 (with Haile gold mine near Kershaw yielding more gold than any mine east of the Mississippi River). Cherokee County had four mines; Union County, S.C., four mines and Chesterfield County, five. No other S.C. county boasted a single gold mine.

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