

PETTUS

UNITED CONFEDERATE VETERAN  
CONVENTION —ROCK HILL

Rock Hill witnessed one of its liveliest conventions ever in late April of 1916 when members of the United Confederate Veterans rolled into town from all across the south. Since it was more than 50 years after the Civil War had ended the average age of the veterans had to be in their 70s or above. That did not seem to dampen their enthusiasm.

Exactly how many came is not recorded but every spare bedroom in town, it was said, was pressed into service. Some of the old veterans brought bedrolls with them and bunked in the livery stables. They prided themselves on still being tough enough to camp out.

Downtown Rock Hill stores bedecked themselves in Confederate flags and bunting and set up drinking fountains on Main Street. In the Reed lot alongside the old post office building a large tent was set up to handle all of the donated food that would be prepared for the veterans. There was a special tent at the Air Dome lot for Governor Manning and his staff. Maj. Gen. G. H. Teague, head of the South Carolina Confederate Veterans, and his staff were given the Chamber of Commerce auditorium as their headquarters. The preparations even included the printing of all the words of the songs to be sung at the convention so that the citizens could sing along with their guests.

The songs printed were: "Tenting on the Old Camp Ground," "Maryland, My Maryland," "Old Black Joe," "America," "Dixie," "My Old Kentucky Home," "Star Spangled Banner," and "Swanee River."

The parade was led by Gov. Richard I. Manning on a large white horse. He was followed by old grizzled veterans on foot, a few old former slaves, disabled veterans in cars, the Tirzah band, Boy Scouts, Schumacher's Band of Columbia, Rock Hill's chief of police, Capt. J.W. Marshall, the Catawba Rifles, and the Carhartt Band.

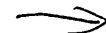
Mrs. Alexander Long, who headed the local United Daughters of the Confederacy, rode in a car draped in white and Confederate moss. Gen. Irvine Walker, dressed in Confederate gray, rode in another car with the young president of the Children of Confederacy holding a laurel wreath over Walker's bare head.

The opening exercises were at Friedham's Hall. Governor Manning told the conventioners that the main issue of the war was local rights, and not slavery.

The next afternoon Winthrop College gave a reception and that night there was a musical on the Witherspoon lawn.

The following night there was square dancing on Main Street downtown where the Virginia Reel was most popular. Old veterans from 76 to 82 years were reported to have danced until one o'clock in the morning.

One of the favorite performers at veteran's conventions was Robert G. Graham, better known as "Peg Leg" Graham. A native of Pineville, North Carolina, Peg Leg had taken up residence in



Lancaster, South Carolina after the war in which he lost a leg. Crowds loved to watch and listen to Graham sing, play his harmonica, and dance, with the pegleg "enhancing rather than marring" his performance. Peg Leg had danced for Wade Hampton when he was running for governor back in 1876, an election that had marked the end of federal occupation of South Carolina.

Amidst all of the frolicking there were moments of sadness as participants listened to the roll call of the members who had died since the last annual meeting. York County veterans weren't officialy counted until 1902 and then the listing numbered over 1900 names. However, this list had some duplicates and included all of those who originally served, not just those who were still alive in 1902. In 1916, York County probably had less than two hundred surviving veterans.

The last night of the convention there was an elaborate annual ball at Friedham's Hall. Again, the old veterans were active participants. The executive committee had agreed that Birmingham, Alabama would be the site of the next year's convention. All agreed that Alabama could not possibly be more hospitable or have finer weather than that enjoyed by the Confederate veterans in Rock Hill.