

Chester gave Charlotte crowd a rollicking time at 1878 picnic

The year was 1878. The Yorkville Enquirer was one of the best newspapers in the state and the only one of wide circulation in York County. The six-page weekly devoted a page or a page and a half to local news.

Correspondents in various communities reported happenings in exchange for free copies of the paper. Letters to the Editor were regularly printed from Rock Hill, Chester and Clover and occasionally from Fort Mill, Sharon, Blairsville and Hickory Grove.

Louise Pettus



NEARBY HISTORY

From Clover, May 25, 1878: Our little town is trying to keep up with the times. We have a telephone, though rudely constructed, in successful operation. It connects the stores of Carroll & Co. and W.B. Smith, a distance of about 100 yards. The clerks in the respective stores, and the lovers of ease, can now sit back in the shade and hold sociable converse at an unsociable distance.

The railroad companies of the time made a great effort to court potential riders. Railroad agents and publicists would set up contests such as baseball games or shooting matches between towns along their routes. Bands often accompanied the players and their fans.

In June 1878, the Chester correspondent reported at length about an excursion train from Charlotte made up of 700 persons on 10 coaches. The Charlotteans included the Pioneer Fire Engine Company and a detachment of the Hornets Nest Ri-

fles.

The host town always tried to have welcoming parties and often provided picnics or barbecues. In the case of Chester, the correspondent wrote that the train stopped at Brice's grove, not far from the Charlotte depot. There the North Carolinians were welcomed by Chester's Stonewall Fire Engine Company and a considerable crowd of local citizens.

J.J. Hemphill of Chester made a welcoming speech. Dr. T.J. Moore of Charlotte spoke at length. Moore was a former member of the N.C. state Senate and noted for his oratory. After the speeches, dancing began, which continued, at intervals, throughout the day. The picnickers spent considerable time beholding the beauties of the town.

In the afternoon there was a shooting match between the Charlotte and Chester boys, contrary to the wishes of the latter, who were not in practice.

Notwithstanding the preparation of the Charlotte team for the match, they were badly beaten, to their great chagrin. After that the Chester firemen served the Charlotte firemen a delightful beverage known as Stonewall soup, whiskey being the principal ingredient. The result of the imbibing was, of course, much floppiness.

At 5 p.m. the 700 visitors boarded the coaches for the return trip to Charlotte.

A letter from Fort Mill, dated July 26, 1878, reported that Fort Mill the day before had entertained more than 1,000 visitors who represented a combination of Pomona Grange members and the surviving soldiers of Company B, 6th Regiment of the S.C. Volunteers.

People came in storms from the western portion of York to the eastern portion of Lancaster County.

Speaker stands were set up in the grove around the Fort Mill Academy. At noon the food, which had been stored in baskets, boxes and trunks, was placed on long tables for all to enjoy.

After the dinner the Grangers held an election and appointed John R. London of Rock Hill as the agent of the York County Pomona Grange.

The afternoon was devoted to debates between the York politicians, who favored a convention system to nominate candidates for general elections, and Lancaster men who favored the primary system. Feelings were strong on each side, but no blows were struck.

However, three weeks later, the Fort Mill correspondent reported that he went over to Lancaster County to observe the primary method at work. He found 49 candidates running for seven offices.

The voting was so close that fights erupted. The winners were reported to be those who could whip, holler loudest or kick highest, with the managers having very little to say about the matter.

A big storm came up and the more peaceable citizens went home. The rest crowded into a house out of the rain but too close for comfort. Not fewer than 20 men were involved in a melee, some using, as weapons, walking sticks, some wagon spokes, some brass knucks and many with drawn pistols.

The correspondent concluded that it was fortunate that no one was seriously hurt in the voting exercise.