

Fighting words nothing new, part of our heritage

There was a time when local politics could become so heated that opponents were known to physically attack each other. In the pre-Civil War era, gentlemen in political life resorted to the duel.

With dueling outlawed in this state in the 1880s, that left to violent types the options of verbal or physical attacks on candidates and their supporters.

It was dangerous to be an office holder.

Witness Sen. Ben Tillman of South Carolina threatening to use a pitchfork on the body of President Grover Cleveland.

land, and Tillman's brother, George, killing the editor of The State over something printed in the newspaper.

Editor W.D. Grist of the Yorkville Enquirer was not one to pull any punches.

In 1908, Grist wrote a derogatory editorial about Cole Blease (an avowed racist and future governor).

Two York County supporters of Blease, W.H. Windle (200 pounds) and Thompson Jackson (350 pounds) attacked the 160-pound Grist with walking sticks.

The York County Clerk of Court, J.A. Tate, also a Blease supporter, witnessed the attack and stood aside but did suggest to Windle and Jackson that they de-

sist, that they had gone far enough.

It was the third attack on Grist in two years.

Sometimes the fisticuffs at political rallies ended in laughter.

There was a picnic rally for Ben Tillman in Lancaster County's Belair community in the early 1890s. Tillman was not present, but one of his spokesmen, described only as a "fiery tempered white man," was at fever pitch in his oratory when the bass drummer of the band began making idle taps.

The speaker, infuriated by the interruption, seized the drummer and knocked him down.

The rally turned into a free-for-all.

Law enforcement officers moved in to stop the fights.

Just as everything quieted and the crowd was ready for the speaker to continue, a small man appeared who had hidden in the church when the fight started.

A Charlotte Observer columnist at the time wrote that the little man "straightened himself up to his full height and shouted, 'Get out of the way! A man has appeared on the scene.'"

In the hilarious uproar that followed, everyone held onto his neighbor for support and the rally ended in good humor.

When Gen. William Sherman's troops left Columbia burning in late February 1865, they headed north.

Most of the Union troops got no farther than the Rocky Mount area of Chester County, but others roamed the countryside looking for any valuables they could find.

One group of these "bummers"

came as far north as the Harmony Station community in York County, near Neely's Creek ARP church. Mary Roddey, a 27-year-old spinster, heard the Union troops were coming and was determined to save her prized possession, a fine Arabian horse. At this point, the Union army was short of horses and were taking any horse not lame or blind.

Roddey backed her prize horse into the springhouse and bravely stood with it, holding the reins in one hand and a heavy old "horse pistol" in the other.

Meantime, Union soldiers were stripping the house of valuables. She could hear the men as the

smokehouse, barn, sheds, etc., were looted.

A startled Union soldier opened the springhouse door and saw Roddey holding a gun pointed at his head. According to a nephew years later, Roddey said, "If you try to take my horse, I'll kill you."

The soldier replied, "Little lady, if you want that horse bad enough to kill for him, then you can just keep him."

The soldier left and no one else came to the springhouse.

Roddey's sweetheart was killed during the war, and she never married. She died at the age of 84 and is buried in Neely's Creek ARP cemetery.

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