

Richmond County Historical Society

September 2017 Newsletter

'Those who don't remember their ancestors don't deserve to be remembered!'



Ed Snyder in uniform Going camping Civil War style

Pictures taken of soldiers during the Civil War in America are usually posed with individual pride or casually-staged in groups to portray confidence in their cause.

Pictures may be worth a thousand words, but they hardly tell what was reality behind the camera.

On September 18 at 6:30 p.m. at Rockingham City Hall, Ed Snyder, Civil War reenactor and member of the Richmond County Historical Board of Directors, will take us behind the lens of cameras telling about the life of the common soldier during the war.

Many engravings portray heroic battle scenes of one side charging the other with flags waving.

One in eight Confederate soldiers (95,000) were said to have died in combat.

The less heroic battles were against disease. One in five (165,000) of those soldiers died of disease.

Camp pictures often portray officers sitting around tables with neat tents in the background.

The reality around them was abysmal conditions breeding disease in filthy circumstances.

Snyder has been involved in Civil War study and reenactment long enough to be able to present a true picture of what the common man suffered in the ranks of the armies.

Whatever pictures of Civil War soldiers we have had might be changed by reality explained by Ed at the meeting.

Society Notes

* For reservations for the October 16 meeting at Discovery Place KIDS at 6:30 p.m., call Neal Cadieu at 895-1660 or John Stevenson at 997-2595.

*Designing is under way for a model of Richmond Mill to be installed in the display case at Rockingham City Hall in coordination with Arts Richmond.

* The Society is contributing short history articles with pictures to the RichmondObserver.com. The article on the second page was a recent one.

*Richmond County Commissioners donated \$5,000 to the RCHS in recognition of years of contributions to the county's citizens.

* Work is under way to install private historical markers honoring Judge Henry Frye in Ellerbe and Hinson Lake and the CCC at Hinson Lake, Rockingham.

* A new roof is being installed at the Bostick School by Southern Builders.

One memorable flood in Rockingham history

On Sunday, September 16, 1945, Betty Walters and Jim Smith were married at 8 p.m. in Rockingham. The reception followed at the Leak- Wall House. In those days before air conditioning, weddings were often held at night when it was cooler.

It was raining. In fact, it had been raining for the past five days for a total of 11.01 inches by that time.

Immediately after the reception, the new couple left in a heavy downpour for their honeymoon.

Some twelve hours later and 3.75 inches more of rain, Rockingham was to experience its worst flood disaster that the Smiths were unaware they had just escaped.

The state at that time was experiencing the rain effects from a tropical storm coming up the coast.

A chain reaction began on Hitchcock Creek when the Ledbetter Dam holding back 700-acres of water broke at 7 a.m. on September 17 sending a flood of water racing down the creek wiping out the dam at Pee Dee Mill No. 1 several blocks down hill on Steele Street from the Leak-Wall house.

The entire first floor of the mill was covered with 15-feet of water. Every one of the 260 looms was completely covered with water, filth and mud.

At McLaurin Ice & Coal Company on Hitchcock Creek, located near what is now U.S. 74 Business west, Gene McLaurin's grandfather, Bert McLaurin, and young Joe McLaurin, Gene's father, went to the roof of the plant with other employees and "there they remained in the steady downpour of cold rain from around 11 a.m. to 5:30 that afternoon," the Rockingham Post-Dispatch newspaper said. McLaurin had no water insurance.

Several children were trapped in schools because roads were flooded. Some of the stranded children were taken in by families until parents could arrange to collect them. Some 25 younger students had to spend the night in

private homes because roads were flooded, and 22 high school students slept on cots at the USO in Rockingham.

"The town and school district is indebted to the teachers, the Red Cross and the USO for so quickly (moving) on this relief job. It was well done," the newspaper said.

The final rainfall of 14.76 inches had eclipsed previous rainfall records of 9.49 inches in 15 days in June-July 1943; and 6.85 inches in a 40-hour period in October 1929.

Fortunately there was no loss of human life, however, "Two dead cows were seen careening over the Pee Dee Dam - probably now in the Atlantic Ocean, food for the sharks," reported the newspaper two days later.

Pigs and chickens also were killed. "Remarkable to say, not only was no life lost in this horrible calamity, but no one was injured," the newspaper said.

"Worst flood in history of county. Pee Dee River was 2 1-2 feet higher than ever before" the headline said. It was long remembered as "Black Monday."

The Rockingham Railroad lost three trestles and would be out of commission for several weeks.

Betty's uncle and aunt, Henry and Elizabeth Wall, with whom she lived, were major stockholders in that railroad.

The Pee Dee River was the highest in its history flowing some 14 feet over the top of Blewett Falls Dam. The power plant shut down because it was flooded. "Juice was being made by the Cape Fear steam plant near Moncure," the newspaper said. "Thus power was continued without interruption."

Partial breaches were reported at the Everett's pond and Midway pond dams.

The last time Ledbetter Dam broke was in 1889 followed by dams breaking at the Roberdel and Pee Dee mills.

Downstream from Pee Dee Mill pond, the Methodist Church had 14 feet of water inside. The Baptist Church had water up to the piano keyboard.

Overall damage was estimated close to \$1 million, which would be equal to some \$13.5 million today.

Loss of the dam at Pee Dee Mill No. 1 did not stop production. By 1945 it had converted to electric power. With the loss of the dam and its pond, the local swimming hole was gone never to be restored. It wasn't until the creation of the Greenway by the City of Rockingham that the "pond" acreage was restored to use as a walking trail.