

Richmond County Historical Society

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

March, 2020 Newsletter

The Richmond County Historical Society will meet on Monday, March 16 at 7 p.m. in the Rockingham City Hall. The program will be given by John Hutchinson. His subject will be the many changes in American life in the 1920s

Richmond County at the end of the Civil War

By Anne Thrower

Early March, 1865: Sherman's troops move through Richmond County (Notes derived from *No Ordinary Lives: a History of Richmond County, North Carolina 1750-1900* by John Hutchinson)

Sherman's army burned Columbia, SC in the middle of February, 1865 and continued north. By the end of February, the general's troops were gathered in Cheraw, SC. On March 5, the Federal troops began moving toward Richmond County. They were preceded by refugee families from South Carolina and retreating Confederate troops. These troops, under General Butler, passed through Rockingham beginning Friday, March 3, and ending early Monday, March 6. The Confederates sought food and other supplies as they moved through, putting a strain on local resources.

Richmond County citizens rushed to prepare for the coming invasion, hiding valuables such as money, tools, and silverware. By 9:00 pm on Sunday, March 5, the Federal troops began crossing the Pee Dee River. The march continued all night, with Bvt. Maj. Gen. Kilpatrick's cavalry in the lead. Several skirmishes took place, but by Tuesday, March 7, Kilpatrick was established in Rockingham. He chose Dr. Steele's Fayetteville Road home as his headquarters. (Family tradition says twelve-year-old Robert Steele stood with his pop-gun to defend his home against the invaders. A Yankee captain took the gun and broke it over his knee. This is found in *The Architectural History of Richmond County*.)

General Sherman himself camped a few miles below Rockingham and traveled with his command east toward Fayetteville. He passed through lower Richmond (now Scotland) County, where his troops committed vandalism in at least one church.

While Kilpatrick's troops were in Rockingham and the surrounding area, assorted acts of violence were recorded. Rosin stores from the turpentine industry were set on fire, while homes were raided for food and household goods. Animals were stolen or killed for fun. In Laurinburg, the train depot and railroad shops were burned. Three-quarters of a mile of railroad track just east of Hamlet was destroyed.

Kilpatrick issued orders to burn the Richmond Manufacturing Company on Falling Creek, a special target due to its manufacture of cloth for Confederate uniforms. On the evening of March 7, soldiers wrapped thread and material on the ends of sticks and dipped them in tar. They lit these torches and tossed them back and forth across the creek, finally using them to set the building on fire. Plans to burn the courthouse as well were withdrawn when some citizens pled the case of an old couple living next door.

The water wheel of the burned mill continued to turn for several days. As it rotated, it grated on some damaged metal, making a terrible screeching sound. The sound must have been a distressing reminder of all that had been lost. By March 9, Kilpatrick's command moved on, leaving ruin and near starvation behind.