

**August 24, 2003**

### **Diary places Yankee raid on Lumberton in perspective – William S McLean**

George Washington Chaffin, a circuit-riding Methodist minister, was based in Lumberton during the years 1865-1869. His diary is now housed in the Special Collections Library at Duke University. It contains his description of the Yankee raid on Lumberton in the final phase of the Civil War and conditions before and after.

To place the raid in perspective, General Sherman, after his march to the sea in Georgia, burning Columbia, SC., and marching through Cheraw, crossed the North Carolina line at Laurel Hill, moving toward Fayetteville. Sherman was a threat to the west of Lumberton. The Yankees having captured Fort Fisher and Wilmington were also a threat to the east of Lumberton.

Rev. Chaffin, a native of Stokes County, was 50 years old when Sherman's troops raided Lumberton on March 9, 1865, one month before Lee surrendered at Appomattox.

#### **The raid**

Entry of 3/8/65 – *Rumors still afloat – A Confederate officer hauling out cotton to burn, considerable excitement.*

Entry of 3/9/65 – *Woke at day. Cotton was burning in different heaps. Great excitement. The Yankees are said to be in two different places near here – I am incredulous, just as I penned the last word in the last line, two couriers came straining their steeds down street from Major Blount's hollowing, "The Yankees are coming, the Yankees are coming." They were not couriers, but a part of the raiding party. Almost in an instant the streets were swarming with Yankee cavalry charging in every direction. There were some 300 to 500 of them, I suppose. They robbed me of Mrs. Chaffin's watch – Also stole Kate. They burned the county bridge, R. R. bridge, and depot. Entered many houses & committed many deprivations – They did not come into our house. Whence they came from and whither they went, I know not. My wife was greatly excited. I have owned Kate 5 years, 11 months & 17 days – She has never been sick – I traveled with her on horseback 17,102 miles.*

To place the loss of the watch in context, Mrs. Chaffin was a Yankee herself, of impeccable New England lineage, a great granddaughter of Israel Putnam of Revolutionary War fame. A native of Vermont, she became the second wife of Rev. Chaffin before the Civil War. She kept up her contacts with her native state and returned there for the birth of one of her children. Rev. Chaffin met mother and child in New York City in order to bring them back to North Carolina. The watch may very well have been associated with her New England background. Who knows, after being stolen, it may well have found its way back to Vermont.

#### **A great loss**

And as horses went, Kate was to Rev. Chaffin what Traveler was to General Lee. Chaffin made this entry in his diary two years before the raid.

Entry of 3/24/63 – *I have owned Kate 4 years today – Have traveled with her 11, 465 miles, besides pleasure rides with her. She has never been sick that I am aware of, has never performed badly in harness. Is now well, healthy fat & sleek. I would not take for her \$500 in cash. She is good and true everywhere.*

Although based in Lumberton, Rev. Chaffin also served the churches at Salem, St. Pauls, Regans, Union, Pine Grove, New Hope, Asbury, Bethesda, and Hopewell, and he traveled

courtesy of Kate. Could he buy another horse? Probably, other horses in the neighborhood had been “liberated” as Kate had been. Even if available, there was no money to buy a substitute – Chaffin had \$250 in Confederate currency; \$150 of that bought four otter skins to be tanned for leather and the other \$100 was delivered to someone “to dispose of.”

Did he stay home? No, he walked to his “appointments.” Sometimes he would walk part way and be offered a cart ride, but he made his “appointments.” He did not make the first complaint in his diary about his misfortune. He just added a new entry to his diary. Heretofore, he recorded traveling by horse, carriage, or rockaway. After Kate was stolen, he recorded walking 31 miles in March and 20 miles in April.

### **On guard**

Entry of 3/22/65 – *Out on guard duty last night until 1 A.M. Left this morning to reach my appointment, 12 miles on foot, arrived in time after wading in swamp. Quite windy.*

Life went on – Chaffin preached nine sermons in March and 17 in April 1865. Also, during March and April, he planted Irish potatoes, watermelons, millet, corn, and sowed poppy seeds. He hauled two loads of wood, made a hoe handle, and set out Cape Jasmine.

Rev. Chaffin made regular comments on events of the day. He afforded his fellow ministers compliments when they deserved but did not hesitate to criticize a fellow minister who rambled off course. At Pine Grove in September 1865, he heard three preachers in one day.

Entry of 9/3/65 - *...Presbyterian in Lumberton preached on the subject “No night in heaven.” There was neither thought nor point in his sermon, that I saw. It was an insufficient effort at show and display – all eloquence without life.*

Chaffin concluded about the three: *Bobbitt’s sermons abounded with beautiful little imagery (the Presbyterian minister) with discursive rambling. Roby was majesty especially last part of sermon.*

Politics and politicians raised his ire: *Entry of 3/10/64 – I read the speech delivered by Gov. Z. B. Vance at Wilkesboro. I regard it as a tissue of demagogueries, falsehood, hypocrisy, sycophancy & vulgar wickedness, unworthy of the head or heard of a high toned gentleman.*

Entry of 4/24/64 – *Heard Gov. Vance speak at Lillington. Was disappointed in appearance of the man. He is a large man, large limbs, low forehead, dull eyes, sallow complexion, long black hair and not handsome. His voice is not pleasant – his delivery not good – is much given to levity bordering on profanity, he is a politician. Has no regard to language or arrangement, is intolerably severe on his opponent & brags no little. Upon the whole, I am sorry that I heard him speak for I was proud of him before that.*

Entry of 5/17/65 – *I learned that the Negroes were on the 15<sup>th</sup> (May) declared free from the courthouse door. That is the last act, thus for the glorious work of secession.*

Entry of 7/25/66 – *district political convention assembled here today. Such conventions are a great curse to the country and to society.*

Rev. Chaffin admired Alexander Stevens, vice president of the Confederate states, a pre-war Unionist who, after the first year or so of the War, went home to Georgia.

Entry of 4/15/64 – *Read Alexander Stevens speech delivered in Milledgeville, GA. It is a great affair. He is thoroughly States Rights. I am glad to know that I hold the same views that he so forcibly set forth.*

### **Admiration of Lee**

General Robert E. Lee inspired his total confidence. After Lee's surrender, Chaffin took pains to quote verbatim the last general order of General Lee in which he extolled his men and their service without rancor toward anyone. After entering the order in his diary, Chaffin commented as follows: *Which was a virtual ending of the great war. Alas, that it continued so long.*

On 5/14/65 Chaffin gave the following prayer in his church: "In our nation may all malice, & hatred & wrath be laid aside – that there be no more sectional animosity, so that violence shall no more be heard in our land, wasting nor destruction in our borders. May the President of the nation have the piety of Joseph, and his counselors – wisdom- may they be good men & disposed to measures of peace, that there may be peace in all our borders & that all the people may engage in the industrial pursuits of life."

After quoting his prayer, he noted, "Exception, I learn has been taken to it."

Chaffin's entry of 10/18/65 illustrates one family who may have taken exception: *"Visited Mr. J. Pope's family – a nice family- they are strong secessionists and hate Yankees."* Despite the sentiment expressed, Chaffin received a gift of potatoes.

### **The last days**

The entries in Rev. Chaffin's diary described daily life and conditions in the area during the last months of the Civil War. Despite hardships, Confederate forces and Civil authorities were still functioning in their duties.

Thirteen days before the raid on Lumberton, 500 Confederate Marines passed by Lumberton on their way to Fayetteville from Charleston.

Four days after the raid, six Confederates passed through Lumberton with seen Yankee prisoners.

A civilian guard of 18 men was formed in Lumberton six days after the Yankee raid, with Chaffin strongly opposing a secret police guard.

Entry of 3/15/64 – *An effort was made to form a strong secret military association in our town. The leaders were Mr. Parsley, Col. James Sinclair, Dr. R. Norment. I opposed it with all my ability, so did Col. McLean and Mr. Leach. The effort was a failure and mortification of the parties favoring it. We organized a police guard – no secret about it.*

Entry of 4/5/65 – *On guard all night, some Negroes making their way to Yankees captured last night – men to be sent to the army.*

### **Inflation**

Inflation was rampant. Corn was \$4 a bushel in 2/63. His diary comment "the people should rise in their majesty and stop it. Are we not subjugated when prices are ranging thus?" Yet his entry on 1/16/65 had no comment, even though corn was \$34 a bushel.

People were, no doubt, trading and bartering rather than relying on currency. Chaffin received gifts – three bars of soap, suspenders, a pitcher, a quarter of beef, a dressed turkey, a barrel of wheat flour contributed by several different people. No doubt this took the place of a salary that would not buy anything. At least some people were getting by despite inflation.

### **Deserters**

Entry of 2/14/65 – *Desertions are very numerous, & increasing in numbers every day.*

Entry of 2/25/65 – *Deserters are doing much mischief in this country. Visited house where they had torn up and destroyed much.*

Entry of 2/28/65 – *The deserters are committing numerous depredations in the country around Lumberton.*

### **Refugees**

Entry of 2/29/65 – *People from this and other counties are running to and from and know not what to do.*

### **Rumors**

Entry of 3/26/65 – *Hardee whipped Sherman in Averysboro. Longstreet whipped Sherman at Goldsboro. At both places Sherman's army cut to pieces. Killed & wounded 19,000 of Sherman's troops.*

Entry of 4/16/65 – *1. The French have taken Charleston SC and blockaded all US ports. 2. Sherman has Raleigh N.C. 3. Lee & Grant fought at Charlotte N.C & Lee whipped Grant. 4. Foster with his negro troops within 40 miles of Lumberton.*

Communications were so bad; it was only on 4/17/65 that Chaffin received the correct news of Lee's surrender at Appomattox, seven days after it happened.

### **Summary justice**

Entry of 3/30/65 – *Learned that the Home Guard arrested, tired, and killed 2 men on Wed. last. Awful state of affairs.*

Entry of 4/30/65 – *The Regulators have recently hung & shot 9 thieves. Society is in an awful condition.*

### **Man of the community**

Rev. Chaffin recorded no more criticism of the citizens of Lumberton and Robeson County other than the lawless ones and the hapless minister of the Presbyterian Church. Rather, he appreciated the many gifts he received and the invitations offered and accepted to dine and spend the night, on multiple occasions, with the Regan, Holly, Nance, Roberts, Major Blount, Barnes, Oliver, Ashley, Powers, Carlisle, Grantham, Smith, Paul, Norment, McNeill, and Patrick Lowrie families.

He himself entertained the McLeods, provided overnights for the Powers, McNeills, and visiting ministers. Nor was he critical of having a good time.

Entry of 1/17/66 – *A party at B. Godwin's tonight. This place is ahead of anything I know of in the frolick business.*

Rev. Chaffin was a careful reader of the newspapers, a shrewd observer of prices, and never missed a daily entry in his diary for the weather.

Entry of 2/16/66 – *So cold ink was frozen.*

Entry of 7/17/66 – *At 11 A.M. mercury 125 degrees in the sun.*

An optimist, the arrival of a cookstove was a crowning postwar event.

Entry of 2/26/66 – *We put up our cooking stove. It arrived last Wed. It cost \$25.14. It seems quite convenient. Hope it will do well.*

Entry on 2/27/66 – *The cooking stove is splendid, first rate. Good.*

George Washington Chaffin possessed a keen mind, was discriminating in his judgment of people and events. He quickly became a leader in the community and counseled against any type of secret order; yet he was willing to serve in the capacity of a guard in order to preserve law and order. After hostilities ended, he was quick to lead the flock away from rancor and

recrimination. Rev. Chaffin served Lumberton and Robeson County with a rare balance during a trying time.