

Rekindled thoughts about the Battle of Gettysburg and the Dark Days of the Civil War

By Dr. Warren Hollar

A group of our church members took a tour bus to Pennsylvania with Gettysburg as one of the stops. As I walked in the area of Picket's Charge, I remembered my research of the near total destruction of the 38th NC Infantry on Day 3 of the Battle of Gettysburg and the deadly impact on Alexander County soldiers in this battle. Picket's Charge began at 2:00 p.m. One could almost hear the belch and roar of the cannon and the yell of the troops as they came out of the grove on Seminary Ridge to hurl themselves through open ground to attack the well-entrenched Northern troops and the unrelenting fire of the Union batteries to be annihilated in a blaze of cannonade remembered to this day. It was an extremely eerie feeling to ponder the fate of the 40 soldiers in this charge who called Alexander County home. In reviewing the list of 40 names, I saw many familiar last names who were probably neighbors or family members of ancestors of present-day citizens.

The Civil War was a time of great consternation for the residents of Alexander County. The population of our county was somewhat over 5,000 residents at the outbreak of the Civil War. From this population, an exceedingly high percentage of young men joined the Confederate Army. The county was not a hotbed of feeling concerning the issues of slavery, but there were strong feelings concerning States Rights. A number of residents were also conscripted into mili-

tary service by act of the Confederate Congress with less than zealous attitudes concerning their service. Poorer counties such as Alexander were hit hardest by the Conscription Act.

According to the ncgenweb site, approximately 717 men served during the Civil War from Alexander County. Many of those who joined became part of the 7th, 38th, or 56th NC Infantry. Many fought and died in the major battles of the war including Gettysburg. Ninety percent of the 38th Infantry was killed or wounded during the famed Pickett's Charge on Day 3 of the Battle of Gettysburg. Alexander County lost about 18% of its total troops in this one charge.

The fate of Alexander Civil War soldiers included internment in prison camps, death from disease, maiming for life, and the ramifications of desertion in attempts to return to Alexander County. In an unofficial tally of the ncgenweb site, a review of 134 soldiers from Alexander County with names ending in A and B showed 22 killed, 26 died of disease, and 54 wounded. It also showed 26 as POW's, 9 with disability discharges, and 18 desertions. One can only imagine the difficulties of coping with this magnitude of human suffering for both the men and their families.

Wittenburg Township had its share of war casualties and sad stories of those who joined the Civil War. Times were extremely difficult for those who were not in military service near the end of the Civil War. Almost every man fit for military

service was in the army. This resulted in many county residents being at the mercy of bands of deserters and rogues who pillaged the countryside leaving little food, clothing, etc. for these residents.

William White in his History of Alexander County tells the sad and pathetic story of William Starnes. Starnes married a beautiful woman, Matilda White, a relative of early settlers of the Bethlehem area. He had also acquired most of the Samuel Austin grant of land where Bethlehem School and Bethlehem Baptist Church now stand. He went to the Civil War because of the conscription laws of the time. Starnes made it through a number of battles and remained in service until the end of the war. He was even at Appomattox when Lee signed the surrender papers. After it was all over, he turned his war-ravaged body toward Bethlehem and his beautiful wife. As he neared his home area, he stopped at a friend's home to get something to eat. They told him that his attractive and loyal wife had died about two weeks before his arrival after enduring the loneliness and hardships of their separation. Though dead-tired and malnourished, he stopped eating and dragged himself home, where he laid down and died himself.

Many men in the Wittenburg Township area were forced to serve in the Confederate Army because of the Conscription Acts. William Fox was the father of eight children. Even this responsibility did not keep him from being conscripted

into service. He was killed in the battle of Hanover Junction by a ball through his head. The Fox family paid a heavy toll for their service during the Civil War. William's brother, Solomon Fox, was killed in the same manner at Antietam. Another brother was killed at Petersburg, one of the last battles of the Civil War. The story of the Fox family could be repeated numerous times by other families in our county.

A number of Alexander County Civil War soldiers, many who entered the service under the Conscription Acts, attempted to desert the army and return to Alexander County and Wittenburg Township. Home guard units of the army dealt with deserters in serious ways including hanging and imprisonment. Interestingly, the army of the North had higher desertion rates than the Army of the South. Many deserters would hide near their homes when word was spread of the approach of the home guards. One story, passed down through the generations, told of a deserter who hid in a cave on the South side of Hogan's Mountain. The cave commonly known as the Mun Tunnel had existed since Revolutionary War times. My grandfather once showed me buttons with CSA printed on them that supposedly came from the cave.

The misfortunes of Alexander County soldiers during the Civil War had a devastating effect on the future development of our county. One can only imagine the negative impact of the loss of many of the best and brightest men of our area.

Sources

- History Net.com
- History of Alexander County by William White
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Desertion>
- http://www.ncgenweb.us/alexander/alexco_civil-war.html

Bethlehem Baptist plans October events

Bethlehem Baptist Church is hosting two community events during late October:

- Tuesday, October 19 -- Alexander Central High School Chorus Concert, 7:00 p.m.
- Wednesday, October 20 -- Bethlehem Baptist Church is having a community Trunk or Treat from 6:30-8:00 p.m.

Bethlehem Baptist Church is located at 7500 NC Hwy. 127, Taylorsville, NC 28681.

Hickory Choral Society 2021 Fall Concert set for October 24

The Hickory Choral Society Fall Concert has been rescheduled for Sunday, October 24, at 5 p.m. Under the Sails on Union Square in Downtown Hickory. This concert was originally scheduled for September 26 and was postponed due to the pandemic.

The concert, titled "Walking Together," will open with André Thomas's "I Hear America Singing." The original text and tune celebrate a return to in-person singing. The selection also includes the African American Spiritual "Walk Together, Children," a title and conviction that inspired the concert's programing.

Other selections tied to the walking/journeying/travel theme in the mostly-pops program include "Walking on Sunshine," "Just a Closer Walk With Thee," "Chattanooga Choo-Choo," "On the Atchison, Topeka and the Santa Fe," and "Don't Stop Believing." The concert will also highlight "togetherness" through the performance of popular music and Broadway tunes.

All of HCS singers and staff are fully vaccinated. They encourage concert goers to social distance when possible and wear masks when in close proximity to attendees from another household.

United Way 365 initiative to help small businesses

Dianne Little, United Way of Alexander County President, has announced a new program designed to give local small businesses more exposure. The "365 Drive" is open to businesses of fewer than 25 employees in exchange for a yearly contribution of \$365 (one dollar per day). Businesses may manage their contribution in several ways. They may pay the entire amount, divide their payment into installments, host an in-store promotion where proceeds go towards their pledge, or engage their employees in a business-wide campaign.

In exchange for their contribution, businesses will receive a decal for display as a "Small Business Circle" member; have their business listed on the UWAC website and Facebook page, the UWAC

Annual Report and other publications, and in The Taylorsville Times; receive invitations to United Way events; and have opportunities for networking and social media recognition on "Small Business Saturday."

In commenting about the importance of the United Way's "365 Drive," Little stated, "We know that our small businesses play an invaluable role in Alexander County's economic development, and we so excited to provide them this opportunity to increase their exposure in our community as well as the surrounding area."

The United Way of Alexander County Board of Directors will visit local small businesses to explain the program and to recruit members of the "365 Small Business Circle."

Activities planned at Fellowship A.C. Church

Fellowship Advent Christian Church of Bethlehem is looking forward to a busy month of community outreach events. The public is encouraged to join in any of these upcoming activities.

Homecoming and Revival Services, October 17 - 20

Sunday, October 17, will be Homecoming at Fellowship Church, featuring a very special 9:30 a.m. worship service, followed by Sunday School for all ages at 10:45, and a cook-out and picnic in the parking lot at noon. Everyone is invited! That same evening, revival services will commence, running Sunday through Wednesday at 7:00 nightly.

A special mini-concert at 6:15, on Sunday evening, will kick off the proceedings, featuring gifted musicians Robin and Pam Buchanan of Blowing Rock, NC. There will be no admission charge or offering received, and everyone is welcome! Music will also be a major feature of

the revival services each night at 7:00. Guest speaker for Homecoming and Revival is Rev. Jim Lee, originally from Pittsfield, MA, and currently pastoring at Calvary Advent Christian Church of Lenoir. Jim previously pastored in Charleston, SC and has served as a beloved leader at Calvary Church for more than 4 decades.

We Love Bethlehem Sandwich Giveaway

Each year Fellowship Church shares their love for the Bethlehem community by having a day when they freely give away several hundred grilled hot dog and hamburger meals (including chips and drink). Look for them this year on Thursday, October 21, at the former Evans Drugstore site at Hwy. 127 and Chigger Ridge Road (near the Hickory bridge), serving free food from 11:00 until about 6:00 p.m. (or as long as supplies last!)

Halloween Trunk or Treat October 30

On Saturday evening, October 30, from 6:00 - 8:00

p.m., Fellowship Church will host their annual Halloween Trunk or Treat event in the church parking lot, for children of preschool, elementary, and up through middle school age. Costumes are welcome, but not required. The event features several fun games, snacks, and special activities for kids, all with the purpose of sharing a basic gospel message. No admission is charged and all are welcome! This will be a safe place for kids to enjoy their Halloween celebration.

Fellowship Church is located one mile west of highway 127 in Bethlehem, at the intersection of Icard Ridge and Fellowship Church Roads (one mile south of West Middle School).

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Volunteers needed for Mt. Pisgah Good Samaritan Food Pantry

The Mt. Pisgah Food Pantry is open to serve residents of Alexander County on Monday from 3:00-5:00 p.m. and Friday from 1:00-3:00 p.m. Frank Simmons, Food Pantry Director, encourages any resident in need of food to come to the pantry located to the rear of Mt. Pisgah Lutheran Church on Highway 127 in Bethlehem.

The pantry is supported by the churches, clubs, scouts, businesses, and individuals in the area and serves an average of 200 families each month. Simmons expressed the belief that everyone deserves not to go hungry. The mission is to provide

for those in need. If anyone would like to support the pantry through donations, please drop donations by the church or send monetary donations to the church with a note indicating money is for the Food Pantry.

Also, volunteers are needed to help in the Pantry. The volunteers are needed during operation hours. Support is also needed a couple of times per month to help unload and stock food. The Second Harvest Food Bank in Winston Salem supports the Pantry. Volunteers should contact Frank Simmons, Food Pantry Director, at 828-766-9722 for more information.

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