

*Eerguson*

The WPA Life Histories Collection

[Longstreet Gantt]

W10090

Beliefs Customs - Folkstuff

Accession no.

10090

Date received 10/10/40

WPA L. C. PROJECT Writers' UNIT

Title Social customs of the past. Longstreet

Gantt (white)

Place of origin Winnsboro, S. Car.

Date 6-28-38

Project worker W W Dixon

Project #1655

W. W. Dixon,

Winnsboro, S. C. 3/25/35 trans  
SOCIAL CUSTOMS OF THE PAST  
LONGSTREET GANTT  
(white) 82 YEARS OLD.

Mr. Gantt is a citizen of Winnsboro, Fairfield County, South Carolina . He resides with his wife and widowed daughter, Evelyn Ferguson, on West Liberty Street, which is one block west of St. John's Episcopal Church, of which he in a devoted member.

"I was born near the courthouse in the town of Barnwell, Barnwell County, S. C. July 10, 1855. My father and mother were Richard A. Gantt and Lousia Hay Gantt. My grandfather was Judge Richard Gantt. Edwin J. Scott, in his 'Random Recollections' says: 'Judge Gantt with the kindest heart in the world always leaned to mercy's side and took the part of the accused; insomuch that the prosecuting attorney, General Caldwell, used to say that he kept a tally of the prisoners tried, where he put down all acquittals on the Judge's side and all the convictions on his own.' I think he was the first public advocate of temperance in the State, in which he was followed and far outdone by Judge O'Neill. He was extremely afraid of fire, and, when holding court in Columbia, he always lodged on the ground floor. Sometimes, to avoid the apprehended danger, he stayed at the home of John Smith, a pious Methodist. One night when he was there, Mr. Smith conducted family prayer, and, when it was over, grandfather said: 'Smith you sure are a d--- swinge cat at prayer.'

"Once when a clergyman spent the night at grandfather's house, the whole household was called in for family worship, and at the minister's request the Judge agreed to lead the devotions. While thus engaged, a little dog in the room discovered that something unusual was going on, and commenced sniffing, barking, and jumping around the kneeling Judge, who tried by raising his voice to drown the noise made by the little dog. But it had the contrary effect, and, when his Honor could stand the annoyance no longer, he suddenly changed his tone and turned to a slave, saying, 'Damn that dog; take him out,' then resumed and concluded his prayer.

"There were no graded schools in my boyhood. Wealthy families had tutors, but there was a school in Barnwell that charged tuition that I attended. It had but one teacher, The Rev. Havaner. There was about one hundred pupils. The

beginners were taught their A. B. C's; these were charged a dollar per month. The old blue-back speller was the first book. When pupils reached the column 'Baker,' they were charged one dollar and fifty cents a month. When pupils reached long division in arithmetic, they were charged thereafter two dollars a month. At recess the small boys played marbles, mumble peg, roly-poley, and I spy. The larger boys and girls played antony-over. Every pupil, on Friday, had to get up and declaim. 'Marco Bozzaris' was a favorite; 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Star' was shouted by the small boy; 'Good-bye Little Birdie' was murmured by the small girl, while the more ambitious recited Shakespeare's 'Romans Countrymen and Lovers,' 'Brutus' Speech,' and 'Regulus' Return to Rome.'

"What parties were the most popular? You mean in a social sense? Well, 'pound parties.' These were assemblies in private homes; each couple brought a package of something to eat for the table. Some Negro fiddler was on hand, and steal partners, the Virginia reel, and the cotillion were danced; but round dancing was so much preached against that our neighborhood didn't dare indulge in it. There were sewing bees among the ladies, before the war. They would take the slaves who were handy with the needle to a neighboring home and make clothing for the household and the slaves. Some of these 'bees' were carried on during the Civil War; making garments for the Confederate Soldiers. Oh, yes, we had candy pullings, before and after the war, when I was a boy.

"The 4th of July was generally celebrated with a barbecue and a public speaking. Christmas was the day of days to the small boy and girl, with the hanging up of stockings and socks the night before Christmas; the joyous shouts of the early morning day; the popping of firecrackers; and the thrilling cry of, 'See what Santa Claus brought me?' Everybody, white and black, old and young shouted around, 'Christmas give!,' and expected something if caught.

"My father, Richard Gantt, lived in town but had a plantation in the country. He had slaves for the farm and special household slaves in town. My older brother, Richard Plantaganet Gantt, managed, in a great measure, the plantation and slaves. The blacksmith, the carpenter, and the stable man had special privileges. Old Uncle Ransom took care of the jackass that did service for the surrounding neighbors. Uncle Ransom was a slave preacher. I

remember to this day the words on his pass permitting him to go about from place to place. They were:

'This is to let Rave Ransom pass  
On his feet or on his ass,  
Till sale day December next,  
To preach a sermon and a text.  
For ten miles through the country 'round  
I hope his ass won't throw him down.'

(signed)

R. P. Gantt.

"Gen. Johnson Hagood was a cousin of mine. He was the first Confederate soldier. He accounted for it in this way. South Carolina was the first state to secede from the Union. Governor W. H. Gist called for volunteers to defend the State's action. General Hagood was authorized to raise a regiment and the assembly of volunteers took place near Barnwell Courthouse. Gen. Hagood had long tables of rough lumber in rows. On these tables were laid out the muster rolls for the signatures of the men. He dismounted from his horse, on the occasion, made a speech to the crowd, explaining the gravity of the enlistment, and, at the conclusion of his talk, stepped forward, took a pen, and was the first to sign the enlistment papers. Thereafter, when the Confederate States of America were formed, President Jefferson Davis called for 75,000 volunteers. The brigade as formed by Gen. Hagood was transferred as a body to the Confederacy and is known in history as 1st S.C. Brigade (Hagood), to distinguish it from 1st S.C. Brigade (Gregg) N.B. (One can see how Gen. Hagood could justly make this claim).

"No one can live on earth eighty-two years and observe the splendor and lordly lavishness of the old land and slaveholding aristocracy; the alarming strife; bloodshed and stress of the uncivil war (I call it); and feel the stings of the outrageous scalawag and carpetbag governments and the thrills of participation in the Hampton redemption, without a profound sense of gratitude to such men as Hampton, Butler, Gary, Bratton, Hagood, Aldither, and Haskells. And George and Ben Tillman must be remembered, too, for the part they took in the Ellenton riot.

"I had just attained my majority of twenty-one years and was in the heat of the conflict to redeem the State under such Barnwell County leaders as Gen. Hagood, Col. [Rub't?] Aldrich, Col. Claude [A.] Sawyer, Duncan Bellenger, and Carroll Simms. At that time I owned a beautiful bay horse, named 'Wade Hampton', and I was a horseback courier. I carried a peculiar banner in the red-shirt parades. The banner pictured a rascal in flight carrying a carpetbag and a young boy in pursuit, kicking the carpetbagger vigorously in his posterior median anatomy. On one side of the banner was emblazoned

Boy- 'Leave here John and steal no more.'  
Radical -'I'm gwine now don't kick me so.'

Robert

On the absolve side of the banner were the words:

'We will, of course, vote for F. H. Gantt, and woe to the  
Rad who says we shan't; and Hampton shall be governor!'

"My brother F. H. Gantt was elected solicitor in this campaign of 1876. I am the only one living now of twelve children. This lady's gold watch is an heirloom, bought by my maternal grandfather, Frederick H. Hay, in Liverpool, England, one hundred and eighteen years ago, and was presented to my grandmother, Susan Cynthia Hay. You can see her initials faintly engraved on the case, 'S.C.H.' This timepiece descended to my mother, who lived to be eighty-one years old; next, to my brother, Richard Plantaganet Gantt, who wore it all thru the Civil War; and it came to me on my twenty-first birthday. Its mechanism must be good, as it has needed no repair nor adjustment in the past forty-seven years.

"Other great men I have known were Bishop Ellison Capers and Dr. Cerradore. I was admitted to the bar in 1888 and practiced with my brother, F. H. Gantt, until I was elected Probate Judge of Barnwell County.

"I am a member of St. John's Episcopal Church, Winnsboro. I married Lavinia Skinner in Trinity Church, Columbia. Mr. Class performed the ceremony. We have four girls and one boy. Evelyn, Mrs. Ferguson, lost her husband last summer and lives with us. Joe lost his life over seas, as a soldier in the World War. Louise is the wife of State senator, J. M. Lyles. Annie died, unmarried. Julia, the youngest, is Mrs. LaBruce, and her home is in Georgetown, S. C. I often visit her and enjoy watching the waves of the harbor lapping the shores of the beautiful bay of old Georgetown.

"Well, I have rambled a good deal. I guess I have tired you, but your compensation must be that you have given me great joy by listening so patiently to an old octogenarian who seldom gets anyone to talk to of the years that are gone."