

Sherman in Fairfield

It was a cold February day in 1865 when Sherman's army left Columbia in ashes. There were many rumors as to the route he would take to North Carolina.

Filled with fear and excitement, the people of Fairfield County hoped he would go by Camden. One rumor was that they had orders not to burn Winnsboro.

If Sherman and his army did come, everyone was advised to keep perfectly quiet for a word out of place could cause much unpleasant suffering.

Around the 18th of February, Sherman's army entered the southwestern part of Fairfield County and destroyed everything in their path. With the exception of a few homes in the upper part of the county and several over on Cedar Creek near the Richland County line, no home-

no matter how small or out-of-the-way - escaped their attention. The cavalry would gallop up, rush into the homes, and ransack every closet, chest, and trunk looking for gold and silver. Sometimes they would even take the ring from a lady's finger. Nothing but the smoking ruins and insulted people were left behind.

The old Hawthorne house was saved by the Masonic "sign of distress." Before the Yankees got there, the Hawthornes hid all their valuables; but the cook, when almost choked to death, told all she knew and more. After they had found all the valuables, the Yankees piled rugs, quilts, and furniture in the living room; then they set them on fire. The Hawthornes' daughter, Mrs. Wilkes, ran out on the piazza and gave the Masonic "sign of distress."

A Yankee soldier saw it and went to help. The fire was soon put out, and the house was saved.

The Yankees stripped Fairfield of its horses and mules. The only horses or mules left were broken down and could not work. This made it harder for the farmers to get a new start.

Not only homes but churches were damaged. One example of this was the Episcopal Church which was burned.

A Yankee officer was reported to have questioned a Fairfield citizen about the Episcopal Church to make sure they were not going to destruct the wrong church. The people of Fairfield believed that the church was burned because the sermons Dr. Lord preached were patriotic and secession proclivity. They also believed it was burned with Sherman's knowledge and consent.

Before the Yankees set the church on fire, a coffin was dug up from a graveyard adjacent to the church and put in an upright position to "witness" the burning of the church. As the sacrilegious wretches burned the church, secular tunes were played on the organ which was brought out of the church before the fire was started.

Another example of the destruction of the churches was Ebenezer, an Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, known to many as "The Old Brick Church." The brick used to build the church were made in England. When sailing ships came to America from England, they were empty; and the bricks were used for ballast. The bricks were hauled from Charleston by wagon to build the church. Ebenezer Church is located about twelve miles from Winnsboro on

Little River, near the scene of a battle between the Confederates and General Kilpatrick's Union Cavalry. The Confederates had burned the bridge over the river and were stationed on the ridge above it. The Yankees used the pulpit, pews, floor, and other woodwork of the church to build a bridge that would enable them to get beyond the ridge out of range of the Confederates' shots.

Later this note of apology was found carved in some of the woodwork left in the church:

"To the citizens of this county -
Please excuse us for defacing
your house of worship.

It was absolutely necessary to
effect a crossing over the Creek.

(Signed) A Yankee"

Ebenezer Church was restored, and services were held there for many years. Now services are held there once a year.

Since Sherman's visit, Fairfield County has grown economically and industrially. It is one of the leading pulpwood-producing counties in the nation. Fairfield offers great opportunities in textiles, cattle-raising, lumbering, and quarrying. "Winnsboro Blue Granite" is known throughout the nation as "The Silk of the Trade," and many structures in this county are built of native Fairfield rock.