

written by
man ~~Bill~~ Seymour Crisland 1916
which won the U. D. C. Medal that year

SHERMAN'S MARCH THROUGH WINNSBORO

by Mary Belle Lemmon Crosland- 1916

About the 18th of February, immediately after the fall of Columbia, Sherman's Army crossed the south-western boundary of Fairfield, sweeping over the country like a hurricane or tornado, carrying destruction in its progress, leaving behind it smoking ruins, an insulted, robbed people, many impoverished families and desolated homes. Long will the inhabitants remember the last ten days of February, 1865. A people are not likely to forget the memorable period when they were pillaged and plundered and perhaps burnt out. They can never forget the day when their homes, upon which they had spent the labor of a lifetime, and where they had collected many comforts and cherished reminiscences, were reduced to ashes.

In the Memorial Issue of the News and Herald, May 25th, 1910, some one writes "The scenes that followed from early morn to dewy eve cannot be compared with anything but some of those in 'Dante's Inferno', so unlike civilized things seeing these creatures turned loose to prey upon women, children, and old men of the South. It could hardly be believed that civilized men committed some of the outrages done."

The Yankees are said to have been lenient to the town of Winnsboro; they credit themselves with this. To be sure, in comparison with the atrocities committed in Columbia, they may be said to have been merciful. Liquor destroyed Columbia; the destruction of liquor previous to the raid saved Winnsboro from a like fate with our beloved capital. Consequently, the destruction of Winnsboro, so far as it went, was committed by sober deliberate malice. Glutted by the rich harvest of treasure--- the abundant barbarities from Columbia to this place, they had come upon our town overburdened.

From the Winnsboro News, April 6, 1865, Winnsboro is said to have been burnt by Kilpatrick's infantry, those who followed the main army, but we know they had orders given to do it, as a guard was heard to say, "Madam, we have to strictly obey orders." The men were maliciously set against us, not only to take all they needed, but to destroy every thing besides. Then the officers came with soft words, but with war in their hearts. I was told by Mr. Lauderdale that the night before they reached Winnsboro, they camped about a mile from Winnsboro, and the next day moved up to Mt. Zion College, and used the College as a hospital, but did not damage it to any great extent.

In proportion to size, Winnsboro suffered severely. In the Winnsboro News, April 18, 1865, it was printed that twenty four houses were burned, cotton and other valuable things destroyed. Among the sufferers were Dr. Boyleston, John Cathcart, Charles Cathcart, Dr. Aiken, Dr. Lauderdale, Messrs. Wolfe, McCully, Hilliard, Elder, Jackson, Cremer, Mrs. Ladd and others. I was told by Mr. John Lyles that Sherman's soldiers entered the Court House and destroyed some of the records.

Then too, the Episcopal Church became a prey to the vindictive spirit. A coffin was taken from an adjacent grace, and put in an upright position to witness the burning, as the sacrilegious wretches alleged, while secular tunes were being played on the organ, which was brought out of the Church before the fire was put out. The bell of this church has never been seen since.

Mrs. K.L. Cureton, of Pickens, S.C., writes how her mother, Mrs. Catherine Ladd, saved the Masonic jewels. Mrs. Ladd was well known throughout the South as one of the most successful teachers of her day, but she gave up her loved work in the beginning of the struggle between the States, and devoted herself wholly to the cause of the Confederacy. At the last, when they lived in dire dread of the Yankees coming through, she still showed her noble patriotism. Rumors were afloat that they had orders not to burn Winnsboro, and as they swooped down upon it like wild Indians, and house after house succumbed, Mrs. Ladd and a member of the Masonic Fraternity rushed into the already blazing Masonic Hall, and seizing the box containing the Masonic jewels, put it in a place of safety.

Several old soldiers have told me that no class of persons escaped insult and robbery from the Yankees, neither sex, nor age, nor condition in life, nor respectability of character, nor eminently public services, nor great moral worth, nor persuasiveness of address or conversation, nor complexion of political opinions, afforded any exemption from rudeness and maltreatment.

If you were a high toned secessionist, you must be punished for that crime, your house burnt over your head, your person insulted, and your means of subsistence destroyed. If any were neutral in reference to the present war, caring little for either party, they were cursed for their lukewarmness and ridiculed as a drone. If you were a Union man, and expressed your satisfaction in receiving them, you were denounced as a hypocrite and treated as a Malfactor.

We are told that widows and orphans in destitute circumstances were pillaged of their little all. The negroes, for whose benefit the Federals professed to wage this war, were robbed. "Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in Askelon." Nor was this robbery limited to a few isolated cases. It was perpetrated all over the country. Their shoes were taken from their feet,

their coats and shirts from their backs, their hats from their heads, and their knives and money from their pockets..

Gentlemen of the first respectability were collared with rudeness, pushed about the house and yard, cursed, threatened to be shot with pistols, pointed and snapped at their heads, while others, some being seventy four years of age, were actually hung by their necks by a rope, and kept suspended until they were past consciousness. A certain professional gentlemen, characterized for modesty of expression, when asked by some friend if he had not been visited by rough men, alluding to the Federal soldiers, said that he was visited by a legion of devils, not by men.

The air of decency and refinement, much more than that of piety, was shocked with the profanity of the Federal army. The testimony in the case is, the invaders were horrible, shockingly, profane. They cursed in a good humor, they cursed in a bad humor, they cursed those who tried to please them, they cursed young ladies, they cursed old men and old women, they cursed those white and black, the good and the bad, pouring out their bitter execrations upon all in their presence.

They robbed most of us without mercy--- some they overlooked, because they could not carry more plunder. The Cavalry galloped up at full speed, dismounted, rushed into the houses without speaking to anyone, or observing any of the civilities of civilized life, went upstairs and down stairs, into garrets, cellars, parlors, closets, family apartments, sleeping rooms, breaking open boxes, chests, drawers, bureaus, trunks, secretaries, desks, sideboards, clothes presses, wardrobes, abstracting all desirable articles, such as blankets and fine quilts, which in many instances they put on their sore-backed horses Ladies' clothing, and gentlemen's clothing, and elegantly wrought pillow cases, which they converted into flour bags, sometimes strewing the contents of the bureaus and wardrobes all over the floor and occasionally tearing fine silk dresses into shreds. Ear-rings and finger rings, bracelets, bracelets, brooches, watches, medallions and other jewelry were rudely torn from their persons, and in some cases by the hands of their own negro men, who were forced to do it by a pistol or bayonets presented to their breasts. Gold and silver and ardent spirits were the most coveted.

In the same article we see this: "Fairfield represents a melancholy spectacle. Passing up the road from Winnsboro from Winnsboro to Chesterville for eight miles the demon of destruction had done its worst. Their raid was but an insurrection of wicked doers, encouraging themselves in mischief."