

**FAIRVIEW IN FAIRFIELD AND ITS FAMOUS FOLKS  
BY: JOHN C. BLACKBURN**

**THE COMING OF THE BLAIRS**

**ATTILA**

**The winter's night is fraught with fright  
Blanched faces are wind-bitten.  
Sad hearts are numb,  
Awded voices dumb,  
Their fate in red is written.**

**The sky o'erhead is molten lead  
Its face with flames is litten.  
The lurid glow  
Of fires below  
Emblaze a city smitten.**

**The roads o'er-shroud with sulphur-cloud,  
Show where the foe has ridden.  
Those columns high,  
That smoke the sky,  
Soroll deeds of shame unhidden.**

**The Sun as past; the land's aghast,  
The embers still are burning.  
Those ruins charred,  
That scorched sod,  
'Whelm bitter hearts with yearning.**

There are few names, if any, more frequently met in the history of Reformed Scotland, and in the annals of the Presbyterian Kirk of Shet country, than that of Blair. Some of this family moved with the first western tide to the much-sought and greater liberty of the western wilderness. There are Blairs found in both Virginia and Pennsylvania between the migratory period of 1720-1750. Some of the Virginia Blairs moved up the valleys of the Piedmont, and settled in western Pennsylvania. One of the Virginia families, that of Thomas Blair (1762-1840), moved with their manservants and maidservants, with their bags and trunks (one is still in existence), and settled in the Broad River section of Fairfield County. Thomas Blair brought his money with him, and bought a plantation in the Dawkins neighborhood. Here he raised fine crops and a fine family – Margaret, Maratha, Nancy, and William.

At the death of Thomas Blair, who was buried in 1840 in Salem Cemetery, at Salem Church, a church of which he was a charter member, William, the only son, inherited a part of his father's estate. Soon afterward, the Means' mansion, Fairview, together with the plantation of some four hundred acres, was offered for sale. This plantation extended from the Ashford Ferry Road to Broad River, and from the Jacob Canamore hill on the south to the Rock Creek on the north.

William Blair bought this beautiful home, with its fertile river lands and fruitful hills, and moved his family there. This plantation was worked with about one hundred slaves, one of whom was the cook, "Aunt Nellie", who had come with the family from Virginia and lived to be one hundred years old, and is buried in the Rock Creek cemetery (white Baptist Church). Another servant was Dick, the dependable colored foreman, who in the dark days of the War Between the States, "when all the men folks were away at the battle front", managed four of the five Blair plantations. Here William Blair planted his good acres, and made a goodly roll of money in the days when the South was a "Cotton Kingdom", and "Cotton was King". His

hospitable home was open to family and friend alike. Here lived Mary Blair Frazier, a daughter of the family, with her little son, James Blair (1857-1950), who father died before his birth.

It was Friday, February 17, 1865. All day the gusty winter wind had been moaning around the bleak walls of the old mansion on the hill. Inside were gathered the family of William Blair, together with others of his family connection in the neighborhood. All faces were serious and conversation was subdued. The Yanks army under Sherman the Vandel was not many miles off. Perhaps at that very hour his cannons were pounding Columbia, forty miles southward. The sun had set in florid light beneath the ragged, wind-torn clouds beyond the ridges – beyond the River. Out in the log kitchen little seven year old Jimmy Frazier, with the other children of the neighborhood, pressed around “Aunt Nellie’s” yawning fireplace, where supper was being cooked on the spits and coals. Childhood questions this certain evening failed to rouse “Aunt Nellie”. She shook her old white head, muttered under her breath, and poked in the ashes on the hearth. “Aunt Nellie” wasn’t very far up from the jungles of Africa, and the regions of black art and ebony witches. She tottered over to the door and peer out into the night. “Lukt deh!”

She raised her palsied hand and pointed her crooked finger into the blackness of the south. The children, standing behind her and clutching at her dress, stared out into the darkness. Far over the hills a strange light was glowing, springing up from the earth as from a hidden volcano. Its lurid reflection lit the cloud banks above. “Dat whut I tel yuh! Him de debbil! He in de saddle and he ridin’ hard. He gonna bun up du wyte foks – al un um!”

The children, listening in terror, screamed out, and burst through the door and dashed for the “big house”. Little Jimmy was pushed down and left behind in the mad rush of the horrified children. Then a strange thing happened. As if pulled by an unseen hand, Jimmy was led to the door of that awful cellar. Right down into the fearful darkness Jimmy went. Way over in the darkest corner Jimmie fell on his knees in the mud, and in anguish and terror of soul called out to the God of his mother to save him from an unknown danger. Suddenly, he seemed to hear a voice answering, a light seemed to shine around him, and the voice, in consoling tones, told him that he was saved. Jimmy arose and in quietness of spirit went into the house.

There was no sleep in the “big house” that night. Grandfather Blair, a man of three score years, and unable to be in the army, went upstairs and looked out of the back window. Up came all the women of the house with the numerous children. None dared be left behind. The children crowded in the broad casement windows, and plastered their little faces against the panes in awed silence. Wider and wider grew the reflected flames on the cloud-billows above. “Grandpa” Blair said not a word. His lips were drawn tight and fire flashed in his eyes. Now and then he left the window to walk restlessly a few times across the floor, and then resumed his silent watch before the window. The women signed deeply, but suppressed their moans for the children’s sake. The young children sobbed fitfully – at what, they did not know. But the old folks knew what the red billows overhead betokened – the Yankees were burning the capital of their beloved state.

Up from the servant quarters came an increasing volume of lamentations, weird and frantic calls to Heaven for mercy. Old “Aunt Nellie’s” dreadful warning and dire prediction, that this was the Devil’s work, and that he was setting fire to the earth, was every whit believed down there. Once William Blair went down to his servants to reassure them and to stop their frantic cries. All night the red glare lit those upper rooms and drove all sleep from every eye.

Next day came the reports, like a magnetic wave – from plantation to plantation – that Sherman had burned Columbia. His soldiers had robbed and killed. None has been spared insult and dishonor, men or women, young or old, black or white – and his army was heading for Fairfield County.

That day dragged; new reports kept coming of atrocities and vandalism. All faces were filled with dismay; all hearts were numb with fear. Wild stories were spreading among the negroes and among the whites there crept like a paralysis that unspoken terror – an uprising. The stock were hastened down to the river and hid on the island. The meat was hidden in the nearby wood, and the silver was turned over to faithful Dick, the black plantation foreman.

Dread and anticipation had no time to cool; the Yankees came, but not exactly as expected. It was the middle of the morning. There came the sound of hoof-thuds on the clay ruts of the Strother road; then more thuds, and more and more. A troop of horsemen were coming, coming in a gallop! Out of the woods they swept. What a sight! Jimmie had never seen such a sight in all his short years of plantation life. The horsemen, in column of twos, circled the top of the hill, passed under the big oak, and rode up the drive to the front gate. It was a General, a big, handsome rider on a magnificent horse, and with him his staff. All were superbly mounted, resplendent in gold braid, gold corded hats, blue uniforms with brass buttons, and shiny cavalry boots with spangly spurs. Jimmie couldn't keep his eyes off of the horses and those shiny spurs – and those big revolvers.

Grandfather Blair came mout of the door of his home, walked slowly down the walk and stood in the gate. Little Jimmy followed closely behind; the ladies stood in the door or looked out of the windows. The General and the Planter looked each other over. They looked strangely alike, somehow. There was a moment of silence. (The circle of officers looked on – such as could hold their mounts still.) Then the General broke the silence:

“I saw your house on top of this hill from the ridge over yonder”, he tapped the field-glass at his belt, and pointed across the river; “I inquired who lived over here and was informed that this was the Blair home. Are you Mr. Blair?”

There came a curt “I am”, from the home owner.

“I am General Frank Blair of Pennsylvania”, continued the officer, in an affable tone, “I'm very much interested in the Blair history. I have collected considerable records of the American branches' of the family. We Pennsylvania Blairs are kin to the Virginia Blairs. Your folks were from Virginia, I believe.”

The sentence had scarcely escaped his lips when the northern Blair stared with amazement at the change his few words had wrought in the southern Blair. His features were transformed into a haughty scorn; from close set teeth, the lips curled in utter contempt; beneath the furrowed brow his black eyes were instinet with anger. In the mind of William Blair there shuttled back and forth, like bolts of summer lightning, the memories of four long years of wrongs, deaths, and arson. The flame lit by that fire in the southern sky was burning fiercely in his heart and mind. Slowly the straightened his aging form and lifted his head until the black hair fell from his furious brown. Deliberately his hand went to his waistcoat pocket. Drawing it out with equal deliberation, he slowly opened the blade of his pearl-handled knife and held it up before the astonished General's eyes.

“Do you see this knife?” he asked in a supremely controlled drawl.

“Yes!” came the terse reply.

“If I thought I had a single drop of Yankee blood in these veins I'd take this knife, and cut them open and let every last drop run out on that ground.”

The knife was poised aloft, his left hand pointed eloquently to the ground. There as an ominous hush. Jimmie's heart beat thump, thump, thump. The leather saddled creaked audibly. The General's big chestnut pawed the ground and shook the brass rings of his martingales. All the while electric sparks leaped back and forth from eye to eye, as “Yank” and “Reb” glared at each other. Then the big chestnut broke the current; he pranced and did a double spin. The

General brought him under control with a stoke of his gauntleted hand, and faced his enemy again. Then in chilliest of tones,

“I guess some people might feel that way about it.” There was another pause. “The foragers will be coming along here presently – They might start a fire up there,” indicating the house, “will you have a guard?”

Indignation and anger had thrown precaution to the wind.

“Nothing from you! And if you want to burn it, burn it! Your scoundrels have burned everything else in their path!”

The General lifted his eye to the house as the master pointed, and his eyes rested on his country’s seal, standing out in bold relief above the lintel of the door. He gazed pensively for a moment – then tightening rein, he spun his horse, touched spurs to his flank, and down the hill he went, his staff wheeling two by two behind him. Jimmie saw them disappearing at a gallop toward Rock Creek.

At the bottom of the hill under a pine the leader reined up his charger. Swiftly his officers surrounded him, each face clouded with indignation and resentment.

“General, are you going to stand for talk like that? Let’s go back and burn that Old Rebel out.”

General Blair lifted his eyes to the house upon the hill, then turning to his staff, half-frowning, half-grinning, “Listen here, if he had talked any other way, he wouldn’t have been a Blair. He’s my kin, all right.” He turned to his aide: “Major, send a man back up there with orders that the first man who puts a torch to that house will be court-martialed”, and over the hill he rode.

And the foragers did come – riding up from every direction. They found and drove off the stock from the island. They located the meat and took all of it. The kegs of molasses they left behind. They couldn’t take it away on horseback so they poured sand through the bungholes and “left it be.” They searched the house for valuables, but found none. One of the “hands” told on Dick, that he had hid the silver, and so Dick had. Not only “Marse William’s stuff”, but a number of others’ as well. The men were all gone, and nobody else could be depended upon like Dick. Single-handed he had put it away and not a soul, white or black, knew where it was, but Dick – and he could be counted on to keep his business to himself.

The soldiers set out to find Dick, and they hunted until they came up on him. Now Dick was one of those “tony” negroes, brought up right in and around the white folks, almost like a member of the family. He took great pride in being steward of all that his master had. He had a high sense of honor in rendering an account of all that was committed to his trust. Under his hand his master suffered no loss, or hurt, to his property. When Dick mounted the carriage seat and drove the lady folks to Greenbrier for a visit, “Marse William” had no fear, for the powerful and brave black would have given his life in defense of the women and children in his care. But there was one class of whites that Dick had no respect for – “po” white trash” – and the aristocratic servant was at no pains to hide his contempt for such.

When the Yanks spotted Dick – he made no effort to hide – he was up by the “big house” where he might be needed, they had a problem on hand – how to get the trusty foreman to tell where he had hidden the valuables. He readily admitted burying the things. He was proud of it. After a secret conference, the soldiers surrounded the stalwart negro and tried to cajole him into telling them where the silver was hidden. All they got from him was that the things of the different families were in “different places”. Then the Yanks tried bribery: “Didn’t we come down here to set you folks free? Is this the way you’re going to treat us?”

Apparently it was. Another horseman made another rally – “If you want a good job, and a good house to live in, and a chance to make plenty of money, go dig up that stuff and come with us.”

Then the leader of the troops became angry. “Look here, you old fool, if you don’t tell us where you put those things, I’ll cut your kinky head off.”

His furious face and threatening gestures were suited to his words. His hand went to the hilt of his savor and with a quick move the blade flashed from the seaboard. The cavalymen jerked their horses back to clear the stroke. With a dexterous back-hand sweep the saber swept with a s-w-i-s-h over Dick’s bare heard.

“Now, where’r those things?”

“I dun tole you I ain gone tel yuh. Yan kin kilt me if yuh wanna, dat won’t git yuh nuttin.”

The black man stood his ground stubbornly. Once more the trooper prepared for a slash. He measured the distance to the negro’s head with his eyes; pulled in closer to be sure of his stroke; raised himself in his stirrups; and lifted his right arm with the blade curved over his shoulder – “Where’s that stuff?”

The slave’s lips were visibly pressed together. Down came the saber in a sweeping, hissing curve for the negro’s head. A finger breadth of awkwardness and Dick’s scalp and skull would have been severed. Two of the troopers flinched at the rashness of the slash.

“Leave him alone, Bill,” blurted out one of the men. “There’s plenty more coming. You’re going to get us all in trouble with the Provost.”

Bill took a last baleful look at black Dick, standing stolidly dumb, his secrets buried like the white folk’s treasures, safe in his sturdy chest. Clucking to his mount, the would be raider went in pursuit of the fast retreating raiders.

Note: This was retyped from the original typed document that was given to Mr. and Mrs. J.B. Frazier, III from John C. Blackburn.