

within sight of their own front porch. It stood facing north in the town center, in the shadow of the stately courthouse they had seen built there a quarter-century earlier. It stood, in fact, in the very center of civic life in the county that London had chronicled in his newspaper for three decades, and would for one more. Over the years, London had made himself a fixture at veterans' reunions all over the south. For him and Bettie, remembrance of the war provoked a passion and a deep commitment to public service. Now as they entered into old age, they could point to an embodiment of that passion, in the form of a durable stone-and-bronze figure that would watch over the affairs of Chatham County for years to come.

PART 2: THE EVENT

Clouds covered the sun all day on August 23, but it didn't rain like the day before. By ten o'clock that cool morning, thousands had arrived in Pittsboro by rail and wagon to view the unveiling of the Confederate monument. They streamed past houses decorated with Confederate flags and red-and-white bunting, and filled the town square on the north side of the courthouse, where chairs sat waiting for the ceremonies. In the hour leading up to the event, a brass band played from the portico of the courthouse.

The home of Henry A. London, a block-and-a-half from the courthouse, would have stood out among the houses trimmed for the occasion. London, Chatham RECORD editor and former courier with the Confederate army, would serve as master of ceremonies, and his wife, Bettie, dedicate the monument as president of the Winnie Davis Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. In the window of the store owned by London's brother William a dummy stood garbed in the shopkeeper's old Confederate uniform; a hole in the front showed where a bullet passed through William's body at Winchester, September 1864. Some 300 veterans milled among the crowd of 6000, and doubtless many of them could give evidence of the wounds that war left them.

The veterans gathered on the south side of the courthouse at 10:30 and began marching behind John R. Lane, "the last colonel of the famous 26th North Carolina regiment," who rode on horseback. The six-year-old grandson of William London followed Lane on a "Shetland pony not much larger than a Newfoundland dog." The procession headed northward up Hillsboro Street to the London home and there emitted a "rebel yell" for the day's guest orator, the Daughters themselves, and the children who would disrobe the statue. Then they marched back toward the courthouse and mounted a four-foot high stand to await the speakers.

Rev. A.H. Perry, himself a veteran, said a prayer, and then Henry London introduced the orator. North Carolina Chief Justice William Clark had what could be termed a "small-p populist" approach to the issues of the day. Clark ran as a Democrat but won support from Populists and Republicans. He attacked the tobacco and railroad trusts and supported reforms such as popular election of U.S. senators, income tax and women's suffrage. The "Fighting Judge" [article available to JSTOR subscribers] stirred

up controversy as he labored for "socialized democracy" with a fervor that presaged the New Deal. Yet for his audience of Lost-Cause warriors on the day of Chatham's unveiling ceremony, he tucked into a states'-rights stemwinder to warm whatever cockles pulsate in the heart of a modern-day Southern Strategy Republican.

The hopes of our perpetuity as a government and the maintenance of our liberties as a free people depend upon upholding this guarantee of the rights of each state, in its integrity. There are a few good men who panic stricken at the result of the war of 1861-5 have declared that "state's rights died at Appomattox." Nothing is farther from the truth. [...]

It is true that there is the fourteenth amendment which was passed solely (if indeed legally adopted at all) to secure the rights of the newly emancipated colored people. The monopolies and plutocracy of this country quickly seized upon it as a device to draw all jurisdiction of all questions concerning them from the state courts, whose judges are mostly elected by the people, and responsible to them, into the subordinate federal courts whose judges are in most instances selected by the great capitalistic combinations and hold for life. "Like sappers and miners," to quote the words of Mr. Jefferson, they have been at work night and day to wrest the fourteenth amendment into something very different from its true meaning, and to make it repeal both the tenth and eleventh amend-

ments and, indeed, nullify the whole spirit of the constitution.

Should this succeed, there would be no longer use for state judges or state legislatures, and even the acts of Congress would be set aside at will by judges appointed for life at the selection of Wall Street.

Clark's reputation as a liberal and forward thinker on social and economic issues resonate still in the literature that recalls him. But he

conformed to the damning social conventions of the time in his recognition of the color line. In 1920, Clark would deliver the commencement address at historically-black St. Augustine's School of Raleigh, and utter the following:

It is true that our colored people wear "the shadowed livery of the burnished sun" and there is no social equality between the races, but the latter condition exists in every country where there are two or more distinct races of people. The colored people do not wish social equality, and the white people would not tolerate it, and there the matter ends. It is not a matter of debate, but is settled and not a cause of strife like the divergence in language, in religion, in national aspirations which exists in nearly every other country.

THE CHIEF JUSTICE OF NORTH Carolina came to Chatham County for the unveiling of the Confederate monument and held forth with a populist-tinged but recognizable "states' rights" argument against the U.S. constitutional amendment that enfranchised African-American voters and guarantees due process and equal protection under the law. In the next post in this series, the Rabbit will draw a connection between the Chatham memorial and race, and some



Chatham County historian, former educator, and Pittsboro Commissioner, Gene Brooks, addresses the Chatham County commissioners regarding the Confederate monument.

PHOTO: CHRIS TELESKA

may protest. But let's make it clear—the featured orator on the day of the monument's dedication put forward the very arguments that held fast against racial equality until the civil rights movement cut them down to size.

A good orator finds ways to connect whatever cause he or she is addressing to past causes that resonate with the audience, and Clark went all the way back the Regulators and the Battle of Alamance Creek:

In short, I hold with that grand old patriot, James Hunter, who declared after the battle of Alamance was lost, "I believe that the people are as much master now as ever." That was in 1771. At Mecklenburg in May, 1775, at Halifax in April, 1776, at Philadelphia in July, 1776, his declaration was taken up and repeated and its echoes have been rolling down the years ever since and will never cease.

Clark went on to speak in some detail discussing the history of the various companies in which Chatham's men served. The RECORD reports that he spoke for fifty minutes.

Following Clark's speech, Bettie London "delivered a few appropriate remarks" in her capacity as president of the Winnie Davis Chapter of the Daughters of the Confederacy. Oran A. Hanner, a veteran of the 26th Regiment, made "an appropriate response" on behalf of the veterans. The RECORD did not reproduce their remarks. Then it was time for the unveiling.

Twenty children dressed in white, each bearing a red shield with the regiment and letter of a company in which Chatham men served, tugged red streamers attached to the top of the statue. The white covering "began to fall gracefully, first exposing to view the bronze soldier and then gradually the entire monument." London goes floral describing the audience reaction:

A cheer from the upturned faces and the "rebel yell" from the veterans greeted that bronze figure as it was first seen, standing there as a silent sentinel with his empty musket at parade rest. And then tears filled the eyes of many veterans and others as that life-like figure recalled to their minds the "long ago" with all its sad associations. The unveiling of that bronze soldier was like the raising of one dead, and like uplifting the shroud that covered the corpse of some loved one long since passed away!

A dinner followed for veterans in the corridors of the courthouse, then a meeting of the Leonidas J. Merritt Camp of United Confederate Veterans. The agenda included elections and the presentation by the Daughters of "crosses of honor" to selected veterans. Reading of verses, short speeches and then singing wrapped it all up, with the final number, "When the roll is called up yonder" echoing in the afternoon as the meeting adjourned.

London estimated the crowd at 6,000 strong and "only three men at all under the influence of liquor." He called it "the grandest occasion ever known in Chatham" and suggested that the crowd would have been larger if not for the threat of rain earlier in the day. In any event, some of the young people of the town took advantage of the gathering to socialize. The RECORD reported the following:

The dance which was given in the old Academy building Friday evening by the young men of the town complimentary to the visiting young ladies was largely attended and was one of the most successful affairs of the kind that has taken place here in several years. The music was furnished by the Chapel Hill string band.

NO DOUBT SOME OF THE VISITORS left Pittsboro immediately following the ceremonies, but it's no stretch to imagine many of them remaining in town at least an evening, visiting with old friends, spending time together perhaps one last time. The Rabbit's imagination may be overstimulated in seeing a couple or two wriggling free from the chaperones at the Academy building where it stood on the corner of Chatham and Fayetteville Streets, and setting out for a stroll in the meadows beyond the Rectory two blocks southwest, or over to the groves of Kelvin off of West Street.

The RECORD had reported the day before on a comet "visible an hour so before daydawn in the sky a little north of east." In fact, Daniel's comet appeared for two months in the skies that summer. Maybe a handful of old friends stayed together reminiscing through the night, so they were awake in the early morning hours to lay eyes on the comet for the few minutes that it rode low on the horizon.

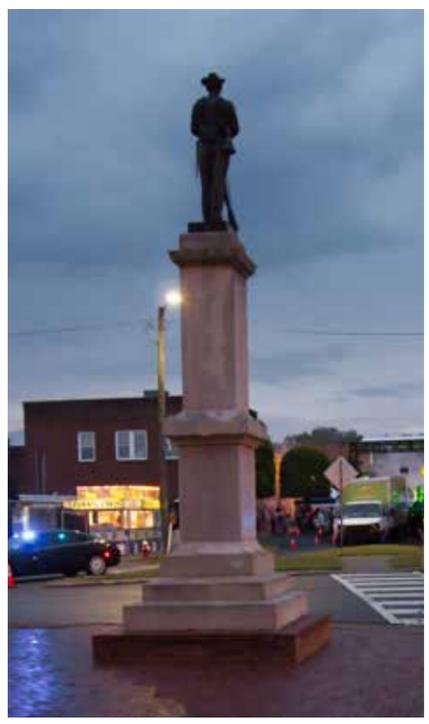


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