

Civil War Parallels, Part II

The South—and North Carolina—had considerable infighting. Brigadier General Lawrence O'Bryan Branch, who had no military training, did not realize that the Northern Army was coming by land against the capital, "New Berne." When Zeb Vance found that his 26th North Carolina, along with the 23rd, had been abandoned by Branch, he cut west for the swamps, reached Brice's Creek, and plunged in on his horse to show his men that crossing the creek was safe. But it was not just deep but "mean." He lost his seat, went down "like a brick," and had to be rescued. President Jefferson Davis used this as fodder for why he withheld promotions and medals from North Carolina boys. Why he really did, according to Vance, was their independence. They sent their cotton out by blockade runners and used for themselves the supplies they received in exchange. They also stood firm upon the rule of law, and North Carolina was the only state that never suspended the writ of habeas corpus. Vance would later serve twice as its Governor.

In a final category of "parallels," two figures on opposite sides of the Civil War experienced similar career results, though, technically, one won and the other lost when they met. They also give us more insight into the Battle of Olustee, the largest Civil War conflict in Florida but not so well-known as it should be. It is one of that war's bloodiest encounters.

Brig. Gen. Truman Seymour (1824-1891)

attended Norwich University two years before moving to West Point in 1842; he was graduated in 1846. At the outbreak of the Mexican-American War, he was in the 1st Artillery and was made a first Lieutenant for his meritorious conduct in the Battles of Contreras and Churubusco. After that war, he returned to West Point, where he taught for three years. He had been to Florida before the Battle of Olustee, serving in the Seminole War (1856-1858). When the Civil War began, he was stationed at Fort Sumter and was brevetted Major for his actions there. After recovery from a severe wounding in the charge on Battery Wagner (from Charleston Harbor), he took command of the District of Florida. He saw service in the defense of Washington, became Brigadier General of Volunteers (28 April 1862) and commanded during such battles as Mechanicsville, Malvern Hill, Second Manassas, South Mountain, and Antietam.

A year after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation (1863), the Yankees came inward from Florida's coast, not just to cut off supply lines to the Confederates and procure outlets for cotton, lumber, and other goods, but to find African-Americans to join their cause. They were also to "inaugurate measures" for returning Florida to the Union. In February 1864, Seymour's division went to Florida and captured Jacksonville.

Seymour took his 5,000 men toward Lake City and met scant resistance until nearing Olustee but was ultimately blocked by Joseph



Finegan's 5200. With Seymour already were three Black regiments, many of whose troops were lost. In fact, at Olustee, of the approximate 11,000 who fought, 2,806 men (1,860 Unionists and 946 Confederates) were killed. The battle lasted some six hours in the woods near Olustee Station and just south of Ocean Pond, a two-mile-wide pond on the edge of Olustee. It is sometimes called the "Battle of Ocean Pond."

After his defeat at Olustee, Seymour retreated to Jacksonville, was relieved of his duty, and became part of the Army of the Potomac. Harper's Pictorial History of The Civil War has correspondence indicating that he "disobeyed orders." In the Battle of the Wilderness, he was captured by Confederates. When he was exchanged, he was put in charge of the Third Division of the VI Corps, led during Union battles in the Shenandoah Valley and during the siege of Petersburg and at Appomattox and was on hand when Lee surrendered to Grant.

The winner at Olustee, Joseph Finegan (1814-1875), did not attend West Point. He had immigrated from Ireland to Florida when he was barely 20, became a farmer and a lawyer,

helped in Florida railroad construction, and was appointed by the Governor to its Secession Convention (1861). He was commissioned a Brigadier General and was in charge of the District of Middle and East Florida.

Finegan sent out a brigade to meet the first of Seymour's forces, who were repulsed. The battle raged, but the Union line finally broke. While notably perspicacious in his tactic of surprise and use of the swamp, Finegan was blamed for not taking advantage of his enemy's retreat and thus allowing most of the Union forces to flee back to Jacksonville. Some three months after Olustee, he was sent to serve with Lee's Army of Northern Virginia.

Both leaders evinced flaws related to Olustee, but so, it is said, did President Lincoln, whose "too sanguine hopes" for the "Florida Expedition" "conducted to the embarrassment of military operations."

We know that war is horrible, but how often do we think of the ravages it serves up to friends, families, and the human spirit in general? Perhaps we should think more deeply about the epithet the "Great Divide" as a fitting assessment of not just the War Between the States but of war in general.

Dr. Lynn Veach Sadler, of Burlington's The Village at Brookwood, a former college president, is widely published in academics and creative writing and works as a writer and an editor. As Central Region Gilbert-Chappell Distinguished Poet 2013-2015, she mentored student and adult poets.

There's a sweet, sweet spirit in this place

by Melody Troncale

Saturday morning, as I walk out my door the aroma of goose berry flowers, damp earth and the cool breeze on my face and arms assails my senses. It is a beautiful morning of blue skies and birds singing. Life is bursting forth in Chatham.

Traveling down 902 towards Bear Creek the morning colors are brilliant with late morning dew. I wave to my friend William, walking to see his niece Ann and her husband Dexter. He lifts his staff and smiles.

William is 88 years old and a native of Chatham. He lives in the family home place. He went to Bonlee School then to Columbia University. He traveled the world and taught school on the Island of New York before coming home to Chatham. He is one of Chatham's crown jewels of love, laughter, kindness and wisdom. We have lunch on occasion; he has been a guiding light for me over the last 28 years in Chatham.

Heading toward Bear Creek I make a detour into the Meroney Church grounds just to see the beautiful church; smile at memories of pot lucks, pork BBQ's, and community float through my mind.

I am on a mission so head for Goldston. The mission is a Saturday morning tradition: "Breakfast at Rufus's Restaurant." There I meet Thurman and Charlotte and various members of their clan. "We have a new baby," her big

brothers are proud. It is blended family of native Chathamites and outlanders who welcome me amid coffee, sausage, eggs, pancakes, and laughter.

After breakfast heading up to Pittsboro two hawks glide in the azure sky and cattle are munching in the cool morning sun. I fear no evil. Green pastures, Chatham County at its finest. An old hymn comes to mind: "there's a sweet, sweet, spirit in this place" and a smile on every face. Gratitude wells within me. A gratitude that would soon be disquieted. Chatham sometimes seems so small. However, I am soon reminded how worldwide Chatham truly is.

Thinking of my list; go by St Bart's to tease Gaines and others at the Community Garden; Chef Geoff at Piedmont Biofarms; St. Bart's needs help with the fund raiser to support the Community Luncheon; the Cora food bank donation. Oh yes, the ATM. Stop, get some cash.

At the grocery store; get to the checkout. Oh no! I left the card in the ATM, how did that happen? (Because now our cards are held hostage by the machine. The new chip is useless most places but on occasions have to give it up. Years of swiping are hard to break.) Blast the new card! Maybe the card is still there. Forgetting the food, I rush back to the ATM. The card is gone.

Now into my glorious day, ominous brooding thoughts don't just threaten my day but have taken over. Where has my gratitude and

serenity gone? What wonderful things has my card bought?

I immediately call the bank; get put on hold. The automated lady can't understand the words: CUSTOMER SERVICE. (I don't know about others but I do not carry my bank account number around).

Starting what seems to be an infinite journey home cell reception is lost three times. Beginning to feel a growl form in my throat. A human finally answers the phone and the card is canceled and I hang up the phone.

Once the card is canceled my phone immediately rings, "Hey Melee, it's Francis. A friend who works with me, his sister, Flower, found your ATM card. He has the card and has asked you call and come get it. Here's his number." Wow! Amazing; the down time of lost card is less than 1.5 hours.

Here is the depth people went to in order to return my card: Flower called her brother; he called Francis; Francis called his mother; friend Lib texted me and told me she gave her son; Francis my phone number. Francis called left a message while I was on hold with the bank.

Meantime waiting for me to answer his message, Francis finds my son, Steve in Spain through Facebook. Steve called left me a message to tell me Francis found my card. The post to Facebook then brought people from all over the county and different parts of the world that

knew one of us in the chain custody to me. They offered solace if I needed help. Awesome!

After looking at all the messages, I call the family that found the card. Speaking with him I find a family originally from outside the US that has settled in Chatham. Pulling into his beautiful neighborhood in Pittsboro, tables are being set up for a dinner party. As I exit my car the man approaches, smile on his face, and hands me the card. I thank him.

"No problem, we are community!" he says. Now the gift of the Chatham Community and its ties into the wide world make me even more grateful. Smiling, I think about caring and community.

The word community comes from communion, which is the sharing or exchanging of intimate thoughts and feelings, especially when the exchange is on a mental or spiritual level.

Thank you Chatham for your "sweet, sweet Spirit!"

Melody Troncale has lived in Chatham County over 29 years. A teacher, artist, and technical analyst, she has worked with numerous non-profits.

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