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A monument to E.E. Smith

My Favorite Root

(Editor's Note: The following essay received first place honors in the Charles W. Chesnutt Essay Contest.)

By REBECCA M. BOWMAN

My great-great-great grandmother, Laura Ann Taylor is my favorite ancestral root. The tales of her bravery and steadfastness have been passed through the family from one generation to another. Laura Ann was born in September 1846 and was only fifteen when the War Between the States began.

Being the daughter of James Madison Taylor, Captain in the Army of the Confederate States of America, had its disadvantages for Laura Ann. It was not easy for her to have abolitionist views in her home state of South Carolina which advocated, allowed, and supported the institution of slavery. Laura Ann deeply believed in freedom for all, no matter what the color, and she had the courage to live up to those beliefs.

With the aid of her mother, Mary Welch Taylor, Laura Ann was an active member in the Underground Railroad from the time she was fourteen until the end of the war at Appomattox, Virginia, on April 9, 1865. During those hard times, one reached maturity at an early age, and apparently Laura Ann was a strong-willed woman with definite ideas of freedom by the time she had reached puberty.

Being Captain Taylor's daughter also had its definite advantages. Laura Ann was allowed access to free travel between farms and plantations. She

distributed food and supplies to those less fortunate than the Taylor family. With the help from some of the Negroes on her father's plantation, a false bottom was built into the buckboard wagon that Laura Ann and her mother drove. This allowed two or three runaway slaves a "safe" hiding place while being transported from one "freedom station" to another.

Confederate patrols in the Wachalla area of South Carolina were familiar with "Missy" Laura Ann and the charitable works that she was going for the hungry and destitute victims of the war that tore our nation asunder, parted families, and set brother fighting against brother. She always had a kind word or a tin of hot coffee for those watchers of the road--the "paddyrollers". They were puzzled by the stepped-up activity of the Underground Railroad, and their inability to find any clues to the whereabouts of runaway slaves. Little did they realize that Laura Ann, too, was fighting her own personal war against bigotry and the enslavement of any man, woman or child.

I admire her courage deeply and wonder at the great risk that she took, putting herself in danger. The severe consequences of her father's wrath, the possibility of shame and imprisonment, and even the finality of death, when weighed against her beliefs seemed insignificant to Laura Ann. The deep satisfaction she felt every time that a runaway slave was safely transported through the "stations" to

freedom more than compensated for any fears she possibly could have had.

The next "freedom station" belonged to a German immigrant, John Henry Dege. Although surprised at first to see a young Southern gentlewoman being a part of the Underground Railroad, he greatly admired the work that Laura Ann performed. Over the span of the war, John Henry and Laura Ann often came in contact with each other whenever a "package" was passed from one "freedom station" to another. Their mutual admiration grew and blossomed into a warm, abiding love, but they both agreed to wait until the end of the war to be married. Neither one wanted to put the "freedom stations" in jeopardy, so they kept their love a secret. They put the safety and lives of those unknown runaway slaves, those frightened men, women and children that were so desperately grasping for freedom, above their own desires and personal happiness.

Laura Ann did not keep count of the lives of the men, women and children that she helped to escape to freedom. It is estimated that ninety to one hundred runaway slaves had safely passed through the "freedom stations" of John Henry Dege and Laura Ann

Taylor. Those slaves then traveled the remaining great length of the Underground Railroad to get off as free men, women and children in a "safe" state or Canada.

After the end of the war, Laura Ann and John Henry were married in 1866 at Wachalla, South Carolina. The Underground Railroad had become unnecessary and slaves all over the South no longer were slaves, but enjoyed the taste of freedom. Laura Ann was never given a gold star, purple heart, or recognition for her work. She had fought her private war above and beyond the call of duty, putting her personal happiness aside until that war was won. She had the complete satisfaction that no matter what the cost, she had the courage to live up to her beliefs of freedom and equality for all. How many of us can say that we have the courage to live up to our beliefs?

I am proud to know that the blood of Laura Ann Taylor Dege flows through my veins. She has passed to her descendants those strong beliefs that no matter what the cost, you must pursue your vision. She had a vision; she pursued it, and she was able to hold it in both of her hands--that beacon of freedom!

Intramural Basketball

By WILLIE SMITH

This year's intramural basketball season started in October, 1980. After a very long and difficult season, sixteen (16) teams "bit the dust," leaving Alpha Phi Alpha, Staff, Omega Psi Phi, and Force as the final four. In further elimination games, Alpha Phi Alpha and Staff squared off as did Omega Psi Phi and Force to determine who would be the final two teams to compete in a three-game series for first place position. Staff and Force were victorious and the series were started the very next week.

In the first game, Staff went into the half leading by a score of 65-59 and went on to defeat Force by a final score of 125-115. The next game was just the opposite as Force, determined to even the score, lead at the half 47-37. But

this ten point lead dwindled in the second half of action. However, Force held on to the lead and ultimately went on to win the contest by the very close score of 103-101.

The final game was the game-of-games. Both teams went all out to eliminate the opposing team. At the half, the difference in score wasn't enough to even guess who might come out victorious as Staff lead by only three points with a score of 52-49. But as the second half came to a close and the final buzzer rang, it was Staff as victor as they forced Force to taste the bitter dust of defeat. The final score was 112-93 in favor of Staff.

Andra Green of Staff was chosen as the championship series' Most Outstanding Player. Green averaged roughly sixteen (16) points per game in the series.



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