

"THEN AND NOW"

Reminiscences and Historic Romance, 1856 to 1865

BY JUDGE D. F. MORROW

Rutherfordton, N. C.

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CHAPTER 14

Corn Shuckings and Other Community Working, 1856 to 1865.

There never has been a time in the history of the human race, when co-operation and the spirit of community interest was stronger and practised with such success, as was done in the Southland for years before the War and for some time afterward. The people were simply estatic when there was a chance to help a neighbor in any of his laudable undertakings, be it a laborous or pleasant undertaking, the pleasure seemed to be the same; for they were glad to help each other in those days. We mourn the loss today of that good fellowship of community interest and brotherly helpfulness, but it seems to be passing in a measure. Of course the necessity for it, today, is not what it was sixty years ago, for modern invention has come to the relief of the individual and he can do with machinery today alone which it took a community to do back in the sixties. But I must stop this and go to the corn shucking. The principal crop grown in our settlement before the war was corn. There was of course some cotton grown, further south, but not much, like today.

For there is large crops of cotton grown in our section at this time, but then there was none, except a very small patch for home use and this was hand-picked and hand-ginned, as there were no gins in this section at that time to speak of. I think it safe to say, there was none grown in our county for the market before the war. Last year we grew eighteen hundred bales for the market and have millions of dollars invested in manufacturing of it, in this county to day, whereas sixty years ago there was none. The cotton gin, invented by Eli Whitney, a New England school teacher, who came South to teach school and while teaching down in

South Carolina, Yankee like, saw the necessity of such an instrument or machine. He put his mind to work and the result was the gin that now bears his name, "Whitney Gin", which was a wonderful invention and had stimulated the growing of cotton in the South so much so that there were quantities of it being grown then in the eastern Carolinas, and many other states of the South. But this gin was invented, I believe in 1834.

But I must go to the corn-shucking, or it will be over before I get there and all the "tater" (potato) pudding eaten up. Not only this but the brandy and whiskey prepared for the shucking gone, too.

Now corn shucking, or husking, was one of those community workings we have spoken of heretofore and everybody who were invited were expected to go, and they did, for it was to help a neighbor.

Before there could be a shucking there must be a pile of corn, and the farmers vied with each other to see who could have the biggest pile at shucking time. I know this was so in Burnt Chimneys settlement. That very spirit prompted each farmer during the summer to do and have all done that could be, that he might have a big pile at shucking time for his neighbors would then see it. It was not a spirit of enmity but kind good-will rivalry that will make people do things.

When the corn was ripe and ready for gathering and in this climate it was about the last of October and first of November; the farmer and his help, either negro servants or his own boys and hired help, would be in the fields by day light in the morning. Some would pull the corn from the stalk and throw it in heaps, along some one of the corn rows. The wagon, drawn by two, three and some times four or six mules or horses and a number of hands would follow

along this row of heaps and gather up the corn and toss it into the wagon body. When it was full or loaded the driver would turn the team toward the barn. In the lot around the barn this corn was tossed out again. This work of gathering was continued from day to day until the whole crop of corn was placed in one long row in the lot; about fifteen feet wide at the bottom and from five to six feet high and tapered out in a cone or roof-like shape and as long as there was corn to make it in this shape. The pile would some times be as much as a hundred feet long. For many farmers made as often as a thousand bushels and much more; and this in the shuck would make a big long pile of it. When thus ready it was the custom to send and invite the neighbors to the shucking.

Annie Lightfoot and her father on October 25, 1863, sent old Charles over the settlement, to ask the neighbors to come to their corn shucking, which was to be on the 29th, for she had her corn gathered as we have described and it was in the lot ready for shucking.

The time to be there was 8:00 o'clock in the morning and remain until the corn was all shucked and this often required till late in the night.

How well I remember that beautiful October day at the Lightfoot home and corn shucking on October 29, 1863.

The neighbors had gathered in on time. For folks got up in these days the same time the sun rose, and long before, often, on corn shucking days. And on this particular morning all were on time. Now certain number of the ladies of the settlement went to those big corn shucking as well as men and there were several here on this day. Not to help with the corn, but to be with Annie and help eat the good things which was no small part of the show. The white men, usually, went in the day and shucked during the day and talked and mostly talked, for it was generally understood that the negroes on the home farm and those from the neighboring farms would come at night and finish up the job of shucking. And in order to insure the finish of the corn pile by them, the owner or land-lord would always put a five-gallon jug of corn liquor or brandy under the corn pile and it belonged to the crowd that found and shucked the last ears, for the judge was there and the negroes never failed to complete the job of shucking and drinking to their fill of the reward. Then supper for the colored folks, even if it was late at night for old "Nell" was at the "pot" fixing it for them.

The white folks had both dinner and supper and plenty of brandy and honey and in the big house there was music and dancing. At the corn pile the negroes were singing, "Round up Corn," and as soon as supper for the colored or negroes was over, they too, would sing, pick the banjo and dance out in the yard till the wee wee hours of the night, for they had found the jug and had supper and nothing more to do.

Just at eleven o'clock Squire Flaxen, Captain Morrow and others were making the speeches of the evening, the dancing and music had stopped for this and just as the cheering sound of the crowd in the big house ceased after the speeches there was quiet. And right at this moment, there were several gun shots fired near the house and much commotion outside among the negroes. Everybody rose and rushed for the doors and halls. The negroes were running for their cabins and some of them hollering "O Lordy."

The Patrolers were after a runaway negro and this had caused the stampede and excitement among them. For as you know the appearance of a patrol was the signal for the negro to run to cover. They were always safe in their cabins. Annie, pale and trembling, ordered Charles to follow the negroes to their cabins and see they were all in and lock the stockade. He did and soon returned and said, "Missus, Tobe's gone." This meant, of course, that old Tobe had attempted to run away, while the dance was on in the yard and had succeeded in breaking thru the cordron of home guards and patrols, which had been thrown around the house that night as a precautionary measures because of the excitement in the neighborhood about the negroes going to rise. There were other shots heard down the river for Tobe had escaped and was running and patrols after him.

William Buster had been invited to the corn shucking, but for some reason had not come. It was this fact that had made Annie pale and nervous all day. But just then it was that he came to the door and fell. His cap was off and he was bloody and mud and dirt on his clothes. Annie fainted and Rena caught her in her arms. Thus ended the corn shucking. For by community work the corn had been shucked, all in one day.

(To Be Continued)

"WHAT FOOLS THESE MORTALS BE"

By A. B. CHAPIN



FLORENCE MILL NEWS

A large crowd from here attended the tent meeting at Henrietta Sunday and reported a good time.

Mrs. Bud Deck and children were pleasant visitors of Mr. and Mrs. Howard Freeman, Sunday.

Mr. Gilbert Rippy and family, of Cherokee, S. C.; Mrs. Rhoda West, of Spindale, Mr. Johnnie McDaniel, of Great Falls, S. C., were the dinner guests of Mrs. Cindia Rich Sunday.

Mrs. Edd Blanton and little daughter, Lucille, visited relatives here Sunday.

Mrs. Lola Hardin and daughter, Jeanette, has returned to their to their home at Easley, S. C.

ELLENBORO R-3 NEWS

Death Of Mrs. Amanda Callahan Ellenboro, R-3, July 6.—On last Tuesday night the death angel entered the home of Mr. Fred Callahan and claimed as its own his mother, Mrs. Amanda Lee Callahan. She had been sick for a long time and she bore it with patience. She was 70 odd years old. Death was not unexpected. She was a good mother, a kind neighbor, was a member of Bethel Baptist church. She leaves three sons and two daughters, a host of relatives and friends to mourn her passing. She was laid to rest in Bethel cemetery last Wednesday, Rev. Z. D. Harrill and J. D. Hunt conducting the funeral services. The bereaved ones have the sympathy of the community. The floral offerings were many and beautiful.

The community was blessed with a good rain Monday evening of which was greatly enjoyed.

Master Jessie Harrill, of Ellenboro, spent the day Monday, with Mr. Hassell Rabb.

Mr. Guy Harrill and sisters, Misses Essie and Ora, of Spindale, visited at Mr. Julius Beam's Sunday and Misses Mattie Beam and Annie Mae Rabb accompanied them home to spend a few days.

Mr. and Mrs. John McKinney spent Sunday with their daughter, Mrs. Ollie Harrill.

Mr. Ben Biggerstaff and family spent the week-end with Mrs. Biggerstaff's parents, Mr. and Mrs. J. P. Wright.

Mrs. Allie Harrill was the guest of Mrs. Julius Beam one day last week.

Mr. Clell McDaniel was the guest of Mr. Glenn Wilson Sunday.

Mrs. Margaret Harrill and adughter, Texie, visited relatives in this section last week.

Mr. and Mrs. Julius Beam and daughter, Mrs. Bessie Rabb, Mrs. Margaret Harrill and daughter, Texie, Mrs. Arrie Wilson visited at the home of Mr. and Mrs. J. S. Beam Sunday.

Miss Fola Wilson is visiting her

sister, Mrs. A. R. Beam at Forest City.

Mr. Elmer McKinney and family of Shelby, spent Sunday with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. S. J. McKinney.

Mrs. Clifford Green and children, of Mooresboro, spent one day last week with her mother, Mrs. Ollie Harrill.

Mrs. Roxanna Wood and family,

and Mrs. Wonie McBee and children, of near the state line, spent Sunday at Mr. J. P. Wright's.

Mr. Foster Beam and son, Whiten, visited at Mr. Julius Beam's one afternoon last week.

Kerosene him yesterday, he hasn't benzine since.

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