

Was Confederate Veterans photo made at reunion of 1889?

By Rebekah Davis
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One of the best things about my job is you never know what fascinating piece of the Limestone County history puzzle is going to walk through the door that day.

On Monday, Archives patron Lakin Boyd walked in with a copy of the photo you see here, and with a question.

He knew that the photo was taken at a Confederate Veterans reunion before the turn of the century, but the question was, "When?" The Archives had a poor quality reproduction of the same photo, identified as the Confederate Veterans reunion of 1880, but Boyd said according to his family members, the photo was taken closer to 1888.

So I did a little digging and found this article from The Alabama Courier of Aug. 29, 1889:

THEY WORE THE GRAY
Veterans of the Lost Cause Gather at Athens,
Immense Crowd, Plenty to Eat and Speech-Making

Last Saturday was a good day for all Limestone and especially the Confederate soldiers of this county-the occasion of their reunion, and there were present, as handed us by the officer of the day, Capt. Geo. King, in line 336, but this did not near the number those present for there were many stragglers.

Early in the morning, just as the early streaks of the sun were beginning to show themselves, wagons filled with men, women and children were seen coming into town from every direction, and also hundreds came on horseback and on foot, all bent on seeing the many old "verterans" that would meet, many for the first time since the days when they last met on the field where the "dead and dying lay." It was a sight not often seen, and many tears ran down the cheeks of the sturdy old soldier as he grasped again the hand of the man that had stood beside him in the thickest of the fight, where shot fell as hail from the enemies' guns. They had many things to talk of and each one wanted to make the other the hero and the bravest man of the war, which they all succeeded in doing to the satisfaction of each other.

Early in the morning, the splendid brass band, from Cullman, Alabama, which had been secured for the occasion, was in the court yard and sweet strains of music greeted the old soldier as he came in town and as soon as he had hitched his horse or mule, he would join the ranks over in the county's grassy yard of justice, and such a greeting as one could see if he were on the outlook, and as each new arrival came there would be words and handshaking. As each old soldier would register his name, the editor of the Courier, who had printed about five hundred beautiful badges, bearing the following "C.S.A.", would pin on each of the dear old soldiers showing where he stood, and it was a pleasure to see how happy it made them feel.

At half past ten o'clock, the order to fall into line was given by Col. Gaines C. Smith, as well as if it had been yesterday, did they understand what it meant, and they formed a line, two deep reaching across the court yard, and then at the well-known tap of the drum, they took up the line of march and followed the band to the beautiful college grove at the Male College Grounds, where they were addressed by Gen. Joe Wheeler who many of them followed through the thickest of the fight, then following an address by Maj. E. C. Gordon, and then that great and grand man, Gen. Wm. B. Bate, of Tennessee, one of the grandest leaders of the Southern Confederacy, made the old soldiers a speech such as he alone can make.

After his beautiful and able address, the immense crowd present, were invited to the long tables that were weighted down with the richest and best prepared barbecue meats and all the other things that were needful to such an occasion, and bade to help themselves, and to say that one or any of the crowd went away hungry would, we think, be to tell an untruth. There were about one hundred cues nicely prepared, and sent up to the tables. When such men as Charley Tyrone, John Owen, Thomas J. Carter, Dan Hare and Newt Hodges were at the head of affairs, all may know that it was prepared fit for the gods to have enjoyed. The pit where the meats were cooked, on Friday night about ten o'clock presented a beautiful appearance and when the scribe took them in, and found the above named gentlemen at the head of the cooking department, we were satisfied it was a success.

So my question to you is: Is this the photo that was taken that day? I don't know for certain, but I'd love to. If you can answer that question, call me at the Archives, 256-233-6404, or come by and see us in the old green depot at 102 W. Washington St. And while you're here, you might even want to take time to scroll through some of the 150 years worth of Limestone County newspapers we have on microfilm yourself!

About the Archives:

Limestone County Department of History and Archives

Established: 1980

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