




REMINISCENCE

OF THE

CIVIL WAR

By Susan Cosby Rowlett

 In the Spring of 1865, my brother, Charles¹, my senior by six or seven years, took me in his double buggy, driving his two grey horses, Hector and Tom, to visit my oldest brother², an Episcopal minister living in Boydton, Mecklenburg County, Virginia. Our home was in Halifax County, about forty miles away.

We had not been at my brother's home³ many days before we heard many rumors of the coming of (General) Sheridan's cavalry⁴, and of their many acts of brutality, etc. We were driving out in the country when a messenger arrived saying Sheridan was in town and making his headquarters at Randolph-Macon College, the Methodist Theological Seminary.

Sheridan had 35,000 men. When we got home, we found everything in confusion. My two brothers immediately walked to town to get a guard to protect us and our home. I was a young girl and very much afraid of the Northern soldiers. While my brothers were away, a servant came in to say some soldiers -- Germans -- were demanding the smoke house key and threatening to break into the house if she did not give them the key. My brother's wife⁵ was sick in bed, but she said they should not have the key. I tried to give the servant the key, but before I found it two men, seemingly drunk, were climbing up to the window and trying to break in. I looked out the window and saw my brothers returning and I waved my handkerchief. Immediately my brother Charles began running and soon reached us. He knocked the men down and threatened them with the guard, and all was quiet for a while, but the stragglers stole all our cakes and bread from the kitchen. Sheridan's officers were taking all the horses they could find. Our two horses were locked in the smoke house and my brother managed to keep them.


Sheridan was on his way to (join General) Sherman⁶ in Georgia, but he heard (General) Johnson had surrendered and he turned back North the next day. They were very much excited having heard of Lincoln's being shot⁷.



The Rev. John C. Cosby

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 In a day or two Sherman passed our house with 40,000 foot soldiers. I can never describe the great terror which seized me during their stay. I never left my brother's side. I slept by him and followed him around like a dog. A very tall General said he would be guard while they passed as he wanted some water. We had heard how they bullied our women, ruined their greenhouses, etc. This General had a bouquet of flowers on his coat. He took it off and handed it to me. I took it, then thought what my brothers, cousins and friends would think of me, and unconsciously I dropped the flowers and put my foot on them. The General was furious and left us, but I have always been glad that I did prove I was not such an arrant coward after all.

The next morning Sherman's army left Boydton for the army in Virginia, but for several days stragglers were passing in groups decked out in jewelry and other things they had stolen. My brother recognized some of the watches, breastpins, etc., but tho' he wished to take them from them, my brother Charles said, "No, I have Susie to take care of and you, your wife and we could only get into more trouble interfering."

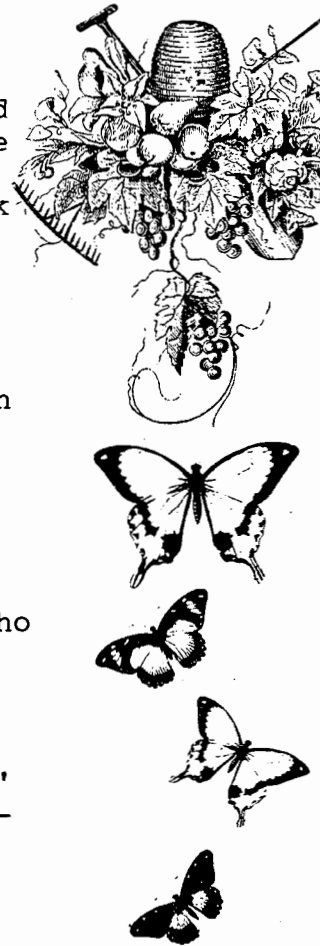
One day I saw Col. Thomas F. Goode⁸ pass three stragglers who were on very poor horses, and they made him dismount, took his fine horse he had in the army and gave him an old shabby horse. He stood for a while overcome by anger and confusion, then he walked off leading the horse.


On account of these stragglers we could not return home tho' we were anxious about my father and our home. Sometimes the Confederate soldiers at home on parole were seen chasing the stragglers for some insult they had given their families.

After three or four days we decided to go home. My brother borrowed two pistols. He gave me his pistol and told me if we met more stragglers than he could manage that I must obey him if he told me to shoot. I knew how to shoot well, for he taught me. I went forth with a faint heart, but we had no accident on the way.

When we reached "Woodside", our home, they were at dinner, a long table full of refugees. Accompanying (President) Jefferson Davis on his retreat from Richmond were his two nephews, Watson (Van Benthuyzen) and Jefferson Davis Van Benthuyzen. They had left (President) Davis in Danville and had camped at our spring. Capt. Watson Van Benthuyzen went on South but left his wife, his sister⁹ and his son at our home.

There had been a small scouting party of Federal soldiers in Halifax who had taken all the horses and what they wanted. My father had one horse left to him, a big black horse named "Raven". The soldiers told Matt, a tall negro man, to get on him, but Matt said Raven was Master's only horse and he did not want to leave. They made him mount and go on with them. Five or six days after this occurred we girls were out in our yard when one of us exclaimed, "Yonder comes Matt on Raven" and sure enough Matt came riding through the gate. He was so excited he could hardly talk, but he made us understand that they took him as far as Petersburg, when he turned down a side street and evaded the party, finding his way back home. Of course, he was a hero to us.



THE CIVIL WAR 

EDITOR'S NOTE: This memoir by Susan Cosby Rowlett (1843-1933), daughter of Dabney Cosby and Margaret (Curd) Cosby of "Woodside", Halifax County, was written some years after the War. Since she was writing years later of the events there is some confusion in the dates and events; it remains, however an interesting account of the events in Boydton in April 1865 when General Phillip H. Sheridan and his cavalry camped there for two nights.

Our special thanks to Clarence Derrick, of Gainesville, Florida, great hephew of Susan Cosby Rowlett, for his permission to reproduce her reminiscences.

¹Charles Edward Cosby (1837-1897)

²The Rev. John Curd Cosby, eldest son of Dabney Cosby. A graduate of the Virginia Seminary in Alexandria in the class of 1858, and rector of St. James' Church in Boydton, 1858-1866.

³The rectory, located between Boydton and Randolph-Macon College, is still standing and is owned by the Kindley family.

⁴General Phillip H. Sheridan had been dispatched, along with three divisions of cavalry, from Petersburg on April 24 to join the Sixty Army in North Carolina. When he reached Boydton on April 26, General Sheridan camped for two days while pontoon bridges were being built across the river. His camp was at "Cedar Crest" and in the fields surrounding. With so large a troop, quite possibly they also camped at Randolph-Macon College. On April 28 Sheridan left Boydton and proceeded to Abbeyville where he learned of General Johnson's surrender and that he was ordered to Richmond.

⁵Elizabeth (Chalmers) Cosby, daughter of Daniel Chalmers of "Springfield", Halifax County. Her health was not good; she died in November 1869.

⁶General William T. Sherman, actually in North Carolina, was in command of the Northern Armies of Georgia and Tennessee. The army crossed the Roanoke River at Taylor's Ferry and at Haskin's Ferry on their way to Richmond.

⁷President Abraham Lincoln was killed on April 14, 1865

⁸Colonel Thomas F. Goode enlisted in 1861 and was appointed Captain of the Boydton Cavalry; he was quickly promoted to Colonel in charge of the 3rd Regiment of Virginia Cavalry but resigned in November 1862 because of ill health.

⁹His sister, Mary Van Benthuyzen, later was married to Charles Edward Cosby. Jefferson Davis Van Benthuyzen married Cornelia Cosby, younger sister of Susan Cosby. The Van Benthuyzen family was from New Orleans