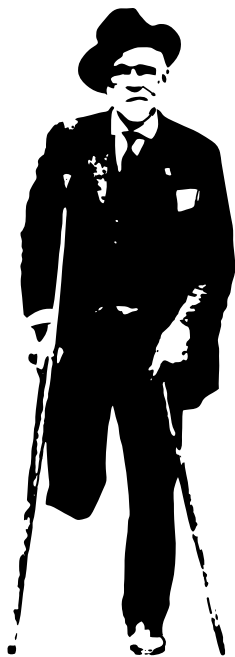


GEORGE RABB

The CIVIL WAR MEMOIR
of a CATAWBA COUNTY TAR HEEL



Edited by REBECCA IKERD ALGHRARY
with a foreword by MICHAEL HILL

GOOSEPEN STUDIO & PRESS
CONOVER, NORTH CAROLINA

Copyright © 1994, 2008
by Rebecca Ikerd Alghrary.

All rights reserved.

Designed by, set in
Adobe Jenson Pro by,
and published by
Nathan W. Moehlmann
Goosepen Studio & Press
Conover, North Carolina.
WWW.GOOSEPENPRESS.COM

Printed and bound
in the United States of America
by Thomson-Shore.

The paper in this book
meets the guidelines
for permanence and durability
of the Committee on
Production Guidelines for Book Longevity
of the Council on Library Resources.

ISBN 978-0-9793631-1-5

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

vii

PREFACE

xi

INTRODUCTION

19

GEORGE RABB'S STORY

31

APPENDIX

61

NOTES

73

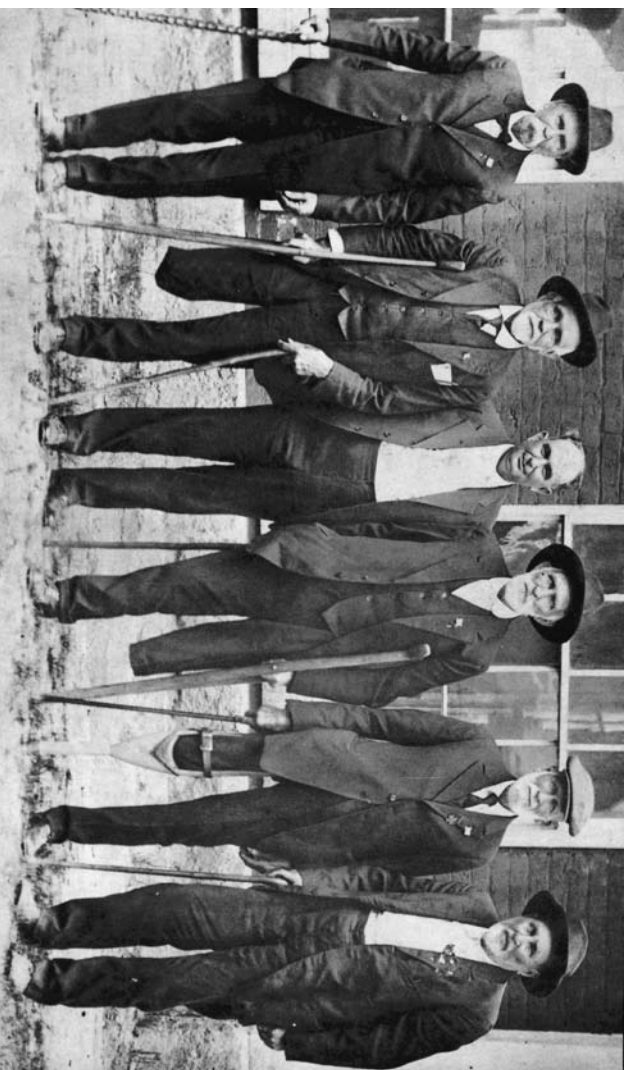
BIBLIOGRAPHY

75

FOREWORD

It is an indelible image, that of the aging Confederate veteran, and George Washington Rabb of Newton, North Carolina, fit it to a “T,” right down to the white goatee and the missing leg. A classic photograph of Rabb, in a grouping with other veterans, adorns the covers of two works: Gary R. Freeze’s 1995 Catawba County history *The Catawbans: Crafters of a North Carolina County* and Ansley Herring Wegner’s 2004 account of the state’s artificial limbs program entitled *Phantom Pain: North Carolina’s Artificial-Limbs Program for Confederate Veterans*. With the publication of Rabb’s memoir, edited by his grandniece Rebecca Ikerd Alghrary, we gain insight into the man in the picture.

Rabb enlisted in Company A (the “Catawba Rifles”) of the Twelfth Regiment North Carolina Troops, saw action during the Seven Days campaign around Richmond in 1862, was wounded at Chancellorsville in 1863, and lost his leg at Fisher’s Hill in 1864. After the war Rabb returned to Catawba County where he operated textile mills, served as county treasurer, and was elected to a single term in the State House. In 1907 he spearheaded the effort to erect a Confederate monument on the courthouse grounds. Rabb lived to the ripe old age of ninety-three and died



Five Catawba County veterans of the Civil War, in 1925. From left to right: Ike Williams, George W. Rabb, (Luther F. Long, former Newton mayor), R. H. Reitzel, John Arndt, and John Sherrill. Rabb and Reitzel would buy a pair of shoes together; Rabb wore the left shoe, Reitzel the right. (Photo courtesy of the Catawba County Historical Association.)

in 1935. He penned his remembrances of the 1860s at the age of eighty-eight. Evidently, he had a remarkable memory or was something of a scholar of the war, as his eye for detail was extraordinary. Editor Alghrary found only a few discrepancies between his work and the historical record.

As we hurtle toward the sesquicentennial of the Civil War, public awareness of the events of 1861–1865 is bound to increase (not that it has ever waned to any perceptible degree) and it may be helpful to situate this account among the many other studies of the war. First-hand accounts, such as Rabb's, are among the most valuable sources on the conflict and are especially welcome. The rush to tell the story of the war began soon after Appomattox and, in North Carolina, peaked with the publication in 1901 of Walter Clark's five-volume *Histories of the Several Regiments and Battalions from North Carolina in the Great War*. Bell Irvin Wiley's *The Life of Johnny Reb*, published in 1943, remains a starting point for scholars investigating the experience of the common soldiers during the war. More recently, Princeton professor James M. McPherson outlined the motivations that drove these fighting men in his *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (1997).

In the summer of 2008, Oxford University Press published *The Making of a Confederate: Walter Lenoir's*

Civil War, based on a memoir of the war held for many years in the Southern Historical Collection at UNC–Chapel Hill. That book, edited by William L. Barney and based on the writings of a member of the prominent Lenoir family of “Happy Valley” in neighboring Caldwell County, makes an excellent companion study to the present work.

Particularly noteworthy in Rabb’s memoir is his eyewitness account of the naval battle between the *Monitor* and the *Merrimac*. His matter-of-fact description of the carnage and the loss of his leg also distinguish his story. His place in Catawba County history has long been assured (his obituary referred to him as “Uncle George”) and now Rabb can take his place in Civil War annals.

MICHAEL HILL

Research Supervisor

North Carolina Office of Archives and History

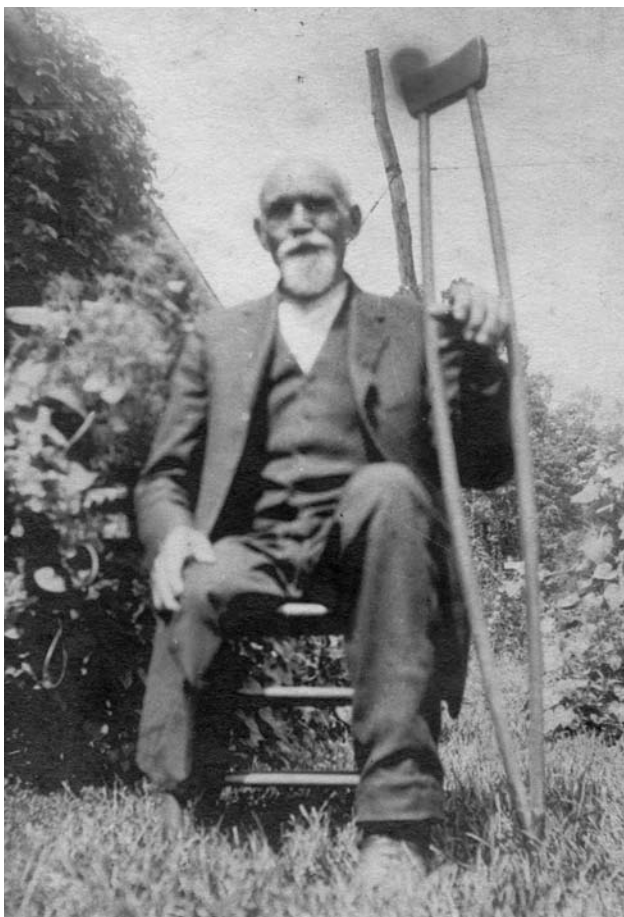
PREFACE

As a child playing in the big front room at my Grandmother Rabb's in Newton, North Carolina, I discovered a tall crutch hanging from a nail in the closet. I had a fascination with this crutch and often took it down to examine and play with it. But my grandmother had warned me that it was not to be taken out of the room. This was "Uncle George's crutch and was very old."

Also in that same room sat an old pigeon-hole desk, or secretary. I loved to play at the desk and pretend I was working in a post office. Each little cubby hole was the perfect place to sort my papers and games. There were still a few papers in the pigeon-holes, but I paid little attention to them. Likely they were left over from George Rabb's work in his many ventures throughout Catawba County.

My grandmother, Mama Rabb, was known around Newton by those who visited the State Theater as "Miss Mollie," the ticket lady. She was the wife of Uncle George's youngest brother, William. They came to Catawba County from the mountains in the late 1920s to live with him and help care for him. He was aged and had lost a leg at Fisher's Hill, Virginia, in the Civil War.

My mother also lived in the house until she was



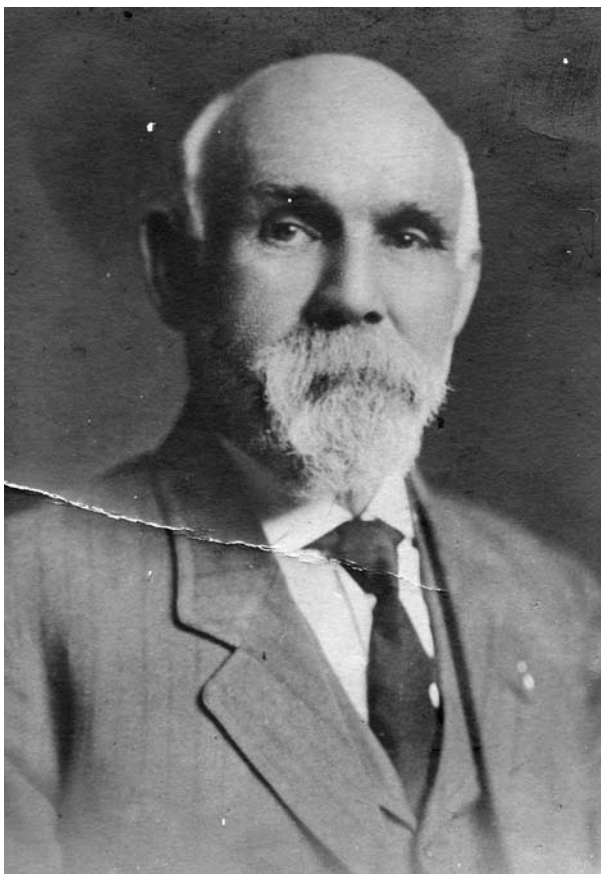
George Washington Rabb in likely the late 1920s. His crutch is in the collection of the Catawba County Museum of History, a site of the Catawba County Historical Association, in Newton, North Carolina.

INTRODUCTION

Fifteen days after the Confederates fired on Fort Sumter, April 12, 1861, a young man from Catawba County, North Carolina, George Washington Rabb, enlisted in the Confederate Army. Born December 21, 1841, he had spent his youth working on his father's farm, seldom, if ever, traveling out of the county. All of that was about to change.

When nineteen year old George left Newton for the army, he was in the Catawba Rifles. Captain John Ray was officer in charge. After many changes and renamings of regiments and companies, George's unit became known as the Catawba Rifles, Company A – Regiment 12. He and many of his boyhood friends were considered sharpshooters, and this was the capacity in which he was to serve in the Twelfth Regiment. George went to Salisbury and on to Raleigh, where he and his unit stayed several weeks at the old fairgrounds. He was then sent to Richmond, where he stayed two weeks, and then to Norfolk.

After spending the summer marching and training, George went to Camp Fisher at Sewell's Point, Virginia, probably in the fall of 1861. There nothing memorable happened until March 8, 1862. On that day, the naval battle between the *Monitor* and *Merrimac* occurred at Hampton Roads.



*George Washington Rabb (December 21, 1841–December 8, 1935)
at around sixty years of age in the early 1900s.*

GEORGE RABB'S STORY

The Threat of War

I was thirteen years old when my family moved from near Beatty's Ford in Lincoln County to this county. My father finally settled on a farm about four miles south of Newton where I grew up very much as any other farm boy of that time did. I helped with all the work about the place and found recreation in hunting. With my schoolboy companions, J. M. Arndt, Robert Cline, John Sapaugh, Daniel Moose, Noah Propst, Silas Smyre, all who lived in the community, I hunted squirrels and became a good shot.

There was nothing much eventful until there began to be talk about state's rights and secession. Then the countryside became alive with talk. A mass meeting was called and Reverend Polycarp Henkle was appointed to represent the county at a state convention at Raleigh to determine how North Carolina stood on the issue. Slavery did not enter into the question. My father was no slave owner and that issue never came into my mind.

But excitement grew. I felt a patriotic duty to serve the state. All my schoolboy companions with whom I hunted were joining the army. And, too, a year earlier, in 1859, when the completion of the railroad to

Newton was celebrated, a group of soldiers from Salisbury made a deep impression on me. I didn't know much about the issue, but enthusiasm, patriotism, and the fact that all my companions were enlisting, made up for the lack of knowledge and decided me.

George Enlists

When I told my father, he wanted to persuade me not to go. "No, don't go, George, and I will send you to school," he told me.

He warned me that I was not going into a frolic, but I wanted the excitement. And when I left, he went with me as far as Salisbury. I enlisted for a year, but when my time was out, I was more than glad to re-enlist.

It was a fine company of eighty-seven young men who left this county for Raleigh. We were all fresh from the farm, strong and healthy. Our average age was not over twenty-one years. We had lived out of doors almost all of our lives and represented the finest type of young men. We were all single except Captain Bradburn.

We gathered on the steps of the old John Wilfong home and received our uniforms which the women of the neighborhood had made. They bought the cloth

and met at the home of Mrs. John Wilfong, who had the only sewing machine in the community, and put together our first uniforms. They were good suits and fitted well. We were given a great send-off when we boarded the train for Salisbury.

I was nineteen years old December 21, 1860, and it was on April 27, 1861, that I joined the Confederate Army, Catawba Rifles, Company A, Regiment 12. My father was with me when we left Newton. We remained in Salisbury three days and my father boarded with me at a hotel. Then I told him goodbye, and we went on to Raleigh where the convention was still in session. We were quartered in a church and pitched a small camp in the yard. Although we were without guns, we stood guard to lend a military touch.

North Carolina Secedes

Within a week after we reached Raleigh, the state seceded. Immediately, there was the biggest show of enthusiasm I had ever seen and I experienced the biggest time of my life. A full battery of artillery was fired, there was hollering everywhere, and bells were ringing. It was a great demonstration and all the sentiment, as I caught it, was to go to the army.

*Winter Quarters – Camp Fisher, Sewell’s Point*⁶

We remained in Raleigh two weeks. We arrived just too late to be included in the First Regiment to be organized in the state. But the Second Regiment was completed with ten companies and we left for Richmond. There we went into camp and continued to do a little guard duty although we still had no guns. We stayed in Richmond about two weeks and went from there to Norfolk where we went into camp about a mile from the city.

Six weeks after arriving in Norfolk, Captain Bradburn resigned and Pinkney L. Rowe was elected captain. Through the summer we drilled every day.

When fall arrived we moved to Camp Fisher fourteen miles away and built good winter quarters. At Norfolk we had been quartered in cloth tents, but here we built log cabins with accommodations for twelve men to the house. The camp was located seven miles across the bay directly opposite Newport News which was then in the hands of the Federals.

Here we drew our first guns. These were out-of-date smooth bore flint and steel muskets. With them we were given four rounds of cartridges. We continued our intensive drilling. There were squad drills in the morning, company drills at eleven o’clock, regimental



Shortly after 1842, when Catawba County was partitioned off from Lincoln County (which was comprised of present-day Catawba, Lincoln, and Gaston Counties), Newton was designated the county seat. Its first permanent courthouse (pictured), a Greek Revival structure, opened on June 14, 1847. The Confederate monument (foreground) was erected in 1907 and dedicated that year at Soldiers Reunion. Rabb was a generous supporter of the fund drive. Soldiers Reunion, taking place the third Thursday in August, in Newton, began in 1889 and is one of the oldest continuous veterans celebrations in the United States. In 1924, the antebellum courthouse was replaced with a Renaissance Revival courthouse, now the Catawba County Museum of History. In its collection are the water trough (foreground, right) and portions of the wrought iron fence (foreground). The monument stands today in the same place, facing north. (Photo courtesy of the Catawba County Historical Association.)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Catton, Bruce. *The Army of the Potomac*. New York: Doubleday, 1952.
- Montgomery, Walter A. "Twelfth Regiment." In *Histories of the Several Regiments and Battalions from North Carolina in the Great War 1861-'65*, vol. 1, edited by Walter Clark. Raleigh: State of North Carolina, 1901.
- Cullen, Joseph. *The Battle of Chancellorsville*. Eastern Acorn Press, 1990.
- Douglas, Henry K. *I Rode With Stonewall*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1940.
- Evans, Clement, ed. *Confederate Military History*, vol. 4, North Carolina. Secaucus, NJ: Blue and Grey Press, 1899.
- Hahn, George W. *The Catawba Soldier of the Civil War*. Hickory, NC: Clay Printing, 1911.
- Jordan, Weymouth T., Jr., and Louis H. Manarin. *North Carolina Troops 1861-1865: A Roster*, vol. 5. Raleigh, NC: Division of Archives and History, 1975.
- Preslar, Charles, Jr., ed. *A History of Catawba County*. Newton, NC: Catawba County Historical Association, 1954.
- Robertson, James, Jr. *Civil War Sites in Virginia: A Tour Guide*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1991.
- Scott, Col. Robert, Sec. of War. *War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1989.