

VISITOR RECALLS BURNING BRIDGE IN COLUMBUS AT END OF THE CIVIL WAR

[Continuing park bench reminiscences of earliest recollections]

The huge cloud of smoke that rolled up when loyal residents of the town set fire to the old wooden bridge over the Chattahoochee River, between Girard, Ala. and Columbus, Ga., to prevent Wilson and the Union raiders from crossing from one town to another at the end of the Civil War, is the first outstanding impression to be definitely fixed in his mind, B.M. Hearn, visitor in Bartow from Graceville, Fla., recalls.

Mr. Hearn, an old sawmill man, who says he has made his living following pine trees around, is in Polk County visiting his son, Charles Hearn in Bartow, and his daughter, Mrs. Harry L. Askew in Lakeland.

He was four years of age at the time the bridge was burned near the close of the war when Union raiders, under Wilson, came through his home town, Girard, in April 1865. The burning of the bridge, however, did not prevent the bluecoats' crossing since they hurriedly erected a pontoon bridge and came across just the same, this old timer recalls, explaining that the last Confederate soldier to be killed as a result of the war between the states was killed in Girard after Lee had surrendered. Communications were so slow, however, that word of his surrender did not reach this town for some time after it actually took place.

Mr. Hearn's parents owned considerable property before the war but were reduced to dire straits after the war because of the ravages of the northern army and the destruction of railroads. And it was then that his father learned, he added that one might have one's family literally starve not for want of gold, of which he still had a good supply, but for bread and meat, fruit, and fresh vegetables.

Boys in those days did things that they could not do now, he points out, further recalling that he earned 50 cents when he was nine years of age by riding an old horse. Molly, to Columbus, 12 miles distant, and getting home again by noon. He spent the entire 50 cents on a pound cake and for once had all the cake he could eat, Mr. Hearn recalls, further explaining that flour was so expensive some families had biscuit only once a week and many not at all.

Mr. Hearn also recalls the installation of the first telephone in Columbus in 1872 and saw the first air-brakes used on railroads in 1873. These, however, were not satisfactory since they wouldn't work when they were supposed to, and again would stick when they should release, and trains using them would often run by stations without being able to stop and would have to back up. It was several years before the improvements were added to make them really effective. He sawed the lumber for the first electric car to be used in the U.S. This car, put into operation in Montgomery, succeeded the old horse cars drawn by small Texas mules.

He remembers, too, the day, a Sunday in 1887, when the standard gauge tracks were put into operation all over the U.S. Before that, the tracks were of varying widths and short lengths. In 1889, consolidation of these lines was begun, and companies reorganized squeezing out the little men who had actually furnished much of the cash for the building.

Speaking of these experiences of other years and the many changes that he witnessed, Mr. Hearn says, "If I could have picked a time to live, I would rather have lived in my time than any other because there have been more improvements during that period than any other."

"I would be glad to live my life over again, but wouldn't want to travel exactly the same way. I would like to straighten out some of the rough places."

"The generation of the present day has no idea of what we old fellows went through to make the country what it is today."