

ESTATOEE

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE YANCEY HISTORY ASSOCIATION
Volume I, Number 1 January, 1986

ESTATOEE (ěs-tä-tō-ē): Also spelled Estootowie in early records. A Cherokee Indian place name, shortened to Estatoe/Estatoah, from which the Toe/Towe River is derived.

History of the Association:

Initial organization of the Yancey History Association began in the early 1980's by Paul Kardulis, Robert Oldham, Rush Wray, and perhaps others. A Charter was formulated in order to secure 501C tax-exempt status.

As the County's sesquicentennial year (1833-1983) approached, the Commissioners appointed a Committee to make plans for it. Committee members were: Lloyd Bailey, Joan Y. ("Jody") Higgins, Kenneth Nelson, and Bill Young. The two groups later combined in order to plan for the utilization of an appropriation by the State Legislature. Theresa Blankenship served as secretary and member ex-officio. The Commissioners later added Roy Hensley to the group.

Late in 1985 a decision was made to revitalize the Association, with the organizational meeting to be held in January, 1986, in conformity with the old Charter. Lloyd Bailey then agreed to present the first program, to be entitled, "The

Toe River Valley and the War with Mexico," and to prepare this the first edition of a quarterly newsletter.

Subsequent editions of the newsletter may contain the following regular items, among others:

1. Minutes of the previous business meeting of the Association;
2. Agenda and program for the next meeting of the Association;
3. Coming events of interest in the W.N.C. area;
4. A brief summary of a book or other publication that illuminates local history or culture;
5. A brief genealogy of a Yancey County family;
6. A summary of the previous program, to be provided by the speaker.

CONTENTS OF THE PRESENT ISSUE:

Documents related to the program topic: Yancey's regiment in the War with Mexico.

pp. 2-7: recent accounts of the regiment's activities, from the Yancey Journal (articles by Lloyd Bailey);

pp. 8-10: clippings from Asheville and other newspapers during the War;

p. 11: Notes from the Adjutant-General's correspondence and from the Minutes of the County Court;

pp. 12-24: the Tilmon Blalock Papers (selections);

p. 25: a bibliography.

Yancey County

1833-1983

BY LLOYD BAILEY, SR.
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Veterans of all of America's wars during this century yet survive to remind us of their valor. We may remember seeing a soldier who served in the Spanish American War, or even in the War Between the States. Few there will be, however, who can even name one of Yancey's soldiers who served in the Mexican War of 1846-48. And yet, they were there, nearly 100 in all, and many of them never returned to their native county. This article is perhaps the first attempt ever made to tell their story.

James Knox Polk, a native of North Carolina, was elected President in 1844. His platform had called for admission of Texas to the Union, and Congress shortly thereafter provided for its annexation. Mexico was unhappy about this state of affairs, and especially about the location of the border, at the Rio Grande River. She dispatched a body of troops to the area, and the U.S. responded with an army of its own: 4,000 men, under Gen. Zachary Taylor ("Old Rough and Ready"). This was approximately one-half of the total U.S. Army. Increasing hostilities, including several major battles, led to a declaration of war in May, 1846. The Whig party opposed the war, but Polk's Democrats supported it. At the time, Yancey was represented in the State Legislature by Samuel Fleming, a Democrat. (The famous battle at the Alamo, which had prepared the way for the independence of Texas from Mexico, had happened back in March, 1836.)

It was apparent that the army regulars were insufficient to deal with the crisis, and a call was issued for volunteers. The national goal was 50,000 men, with N.C. to supply a single regiment (10 companies of 100 men each). Local militia commanders were directed to assemble their units, explain the nation's needs, and speedily send in a list of volunteers. (The official call, affecting Yancey County, appeared in the Asheville newspaper, the *Highland Messenger*, on June 5, 1846.) By mid-June, 32 companies had volunteered, far more than were needed from N.C. Yancey was not among those counties from which a company was raised. It was decided that the 10 companies would be selected by lot. It was November before the resultant regiment could actually be "called up," and by then a good portion of the 12-month enlistment period had already passed. The War Department then decided that the men should re-enlist, this time for the duration of the war! Only one of the companies was willing to accept these new terms, and the others disbanded.

A new call for volunteers was made, but by now some of the enthusiasm for battle had worn off. By January 1847, only 9 companies had been formed, and one of them was from Yancey. The primary organizer was Tilmon Blalock, who held the rank of Lt. Col. in the Militia. He likely was the son of Revolutionary War veteran John Blalock, who lived just across the river from the present Spruce Pine, N.C. in an area once called the Kim Thickets. It was then in Yancey County.

Apparently, one could enroll at Burnsville and Bakersville, since enlistment-papers mention one or the other. The official roster of the company, published by the state in 1887, lists 79 infantrymen and 6 senior officers (Roster of N.C. Troops in the War with Mexico). However, Capt. Blalock's own notes list a total of 94 names. Since the company was not quite "full" (100 being the proper number), volunteers from other counties, primarily Orange, were added to it.

The groups set out for Charlotte, the rendezvous-point for companies from the west, with their supplies on a two-horse wagon. (The expense-list, from Capt. Blalock, includes: a two-horse wagon, and two men to drive it, 15 days at \$1.50 per day, \$22.50. Presumably, the two drivers returned to Yancey with the wagon.) The company arrived in Charlotte on January 28, only to find that no overnight housing had been provided. The Rowan company, considering this an omen of ill-organized things to come, deserted and returned home. (Note of the Yancey company's arrival is in the *Highland Messenger*, Feb. 18.) Blalock's men then marched to Fayetteville, where they boarded a steamboat which conveyed them to Wilmington. (Their arrival, in early February, is mentioned in the *Messenger* of Feb. 25.)

The company was officially mustered-in on Feb. 25 at Smithville as Co.D, 1st Regiment of Foot Volunteers. On Feb. 27 they sailed for Mexico aboard the brig (sailing-ship) Samuel N. Gott. No sooner were they at sea than a fierce storm arose, of five-days duration. They were forced to remain below deck, almost all of them deathly sea-sick. On March 7, they passed by Cuba, and on the 8th one of them died. Thomas Curren, a native of Granville Co. who had been assigned to the Yancey Company, was buried at sea. In full dress uniform, he was sewn into a military blanket, his feet weighted, a brief ceremony conducted, and he was dropped into the Gulf. One observer of such events wrote: "The ceremony is simple but most impressively awful, and brought the tears to

many a soldier" (so a letter to the *Raleigh Register*, June 4.)

On March 15, they arrived at Brazos Island, an army depot and the jumping-off-point for arriving troops. Here, another fatality occurred in the Yancey company. Because of rough seas, a steamer was sent out to bring the Gott into port. It bumped the Gott's rigging and a large piece of timber was torn away. It fell upon private William Keith, Jr., fracturing his skull.

The regiment, rather than being assigned to combat, was given the duty of transporting supplies to the front. They marched to the mouth of the Rio Grande, 9 miles to the south, crossed over to the south bank, then journeyed upstream some 30 miles to Matamoros. It is unclear whether this leg of the journey was on foot or by boat. Matamoros was a pleasant little village that Gen. Taylor had captured after two battles during the previous year. From there, the task was to transport the supplies, by wagon-train, up-river to Camargo, a distance of some 100 miles. It was a hot, dusty, and dangerous trip, with nothing to drink other than water from "frog ponds...and muddy, filthy and bad smelling as it was, I assure you we were glad to get it." Men from another regiment reported that those who had drunk at one site all subsequently vomited and frothed at the mouth. Some of the regiment spent Easter Sunday in a small village on the way, named Reinoso, and were shocked at the dirtiness of the place. One of them wrote, "Some of our officers ordered corn

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 bread..and a young lassie of about 16 commenced her labors, and while she was dividing the dough...she run her hand under her armpit, scratching out a _____ (apparently an insect), killed it, and continued in her bread-making" (Register, May 14). On April 7, six of the companies reached Camargo, apparently including the one from Yancey. The three other companies had remained behind to handle provisions at the depot at Brazos.

Bad water, insects, and fatigue now took effect in the form of diseases: diarrhea, typhoid, and yellow fever (which the Mexicans called "the black vomit," and counted upon it to reduce the Americans in significant numbers). "Of all the places in Mexico," one member of the regiment wrote, "Camargo is the worst." The troops settled in a camp nearby, called Camp Taylor. Here, on April 17-18, Yancey's John Ledford died, as did David Poor on the 26th. The sick-list, on a given day, was likely to be more than 100 out of a total regimental strength of 1000. More than two-thirds of the casualties were from diarrhea. By Feb., 1848, when the fighting actually ended, the regiment had suffered 172 deaths and 62 had been discharged for disability. It has been estimated that almost half of those discharged from Taylor's army died before they reached home. As for the Yancey company, it lost 14 by death and 14 through discharge, a loss of about 32 percent.

From Camargo, the various companies were used to escort supplies further toward the front. The next leg of the journey was to Monterey, a grueling overland journey of some 150 miles. Now, they were subject to attack by bandits and Commanche Indians, and from these causes some few members of the regiment died (none from Yancey, as far as I can determine). During the month of May,

Yancey's Thomas Butler died, and on June 8, George Hensley. The latter death took place in Buena Vista, to which the supply-line extended beyond Monterey. A dairy, kept by John Keener, indicates that the Yancey company was in Saltillo on Sept. 12. He comments, concerning the church there, that it is "the finest piece of workmanship that ever came under my observation." Trooper Ashbury Ray died in October.

A peace treaty was ratified on June 19, 1848, and thereafter the troops began to return home. Yancey County's company left Brazos on the schooner 'Major Barbour' on June 28, and arrived in New Orleans on July 2 (so the Register, July 15). How they reached N.C. from there I have not been able to discover. They were "mustered out" of the service at Smithfield, N.C. on August 7. Some cities, among them Raleigh, held public celebrations when their troops arrived. Whether there was such recognition for the men from Yancey, most of them gaunt and sickly, likely will never be known.

Curiously, a co-captain of the company, named Jacob Constable, is mentioned as they are mustered-out. Formerly, he held the rank of 2nd Sergeant.

A few details about Yancey's 14 fatalities may be found in the Minutes of the county's Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions. Therein Capt. Blalock testifies in behalf of widows and dependents: George Hensley left a widow named Sophronia and a small child; Wm. M. Keith, Jr. was single; George Smith's widow and children are named, and a guardian is appointed. Mary Ray came into court and testified that she "was always reputed to be Ashbury's mother."

While doing research in the Manuscript Department at Duke Library recently, I was astonished to find a collection of Capt. Blalock's papers, purchased somewhere at auction. They include the following items: his commission as a Lt. Col. in the militia in 1832; a letter empowering him to raise a company from Yancey; his will, made in Mexico early in

Yancey County ~ 1833-1983 ~

1847; a list of his men and of the supplies issued to each of them (jackets, blankets, shirts, drawers, etc.); a list of the deceased Wm. Keith's equipment (musket, cartridge-box, bayonet, breast-plate, etc.); and the list of supplies for the company (2 wall tents, 15 common tents, 15 camp kettles, 8 axes, 90

knapsacks, etc.) These documents will, I hope, be published in a future ses-
quicentennial volume.

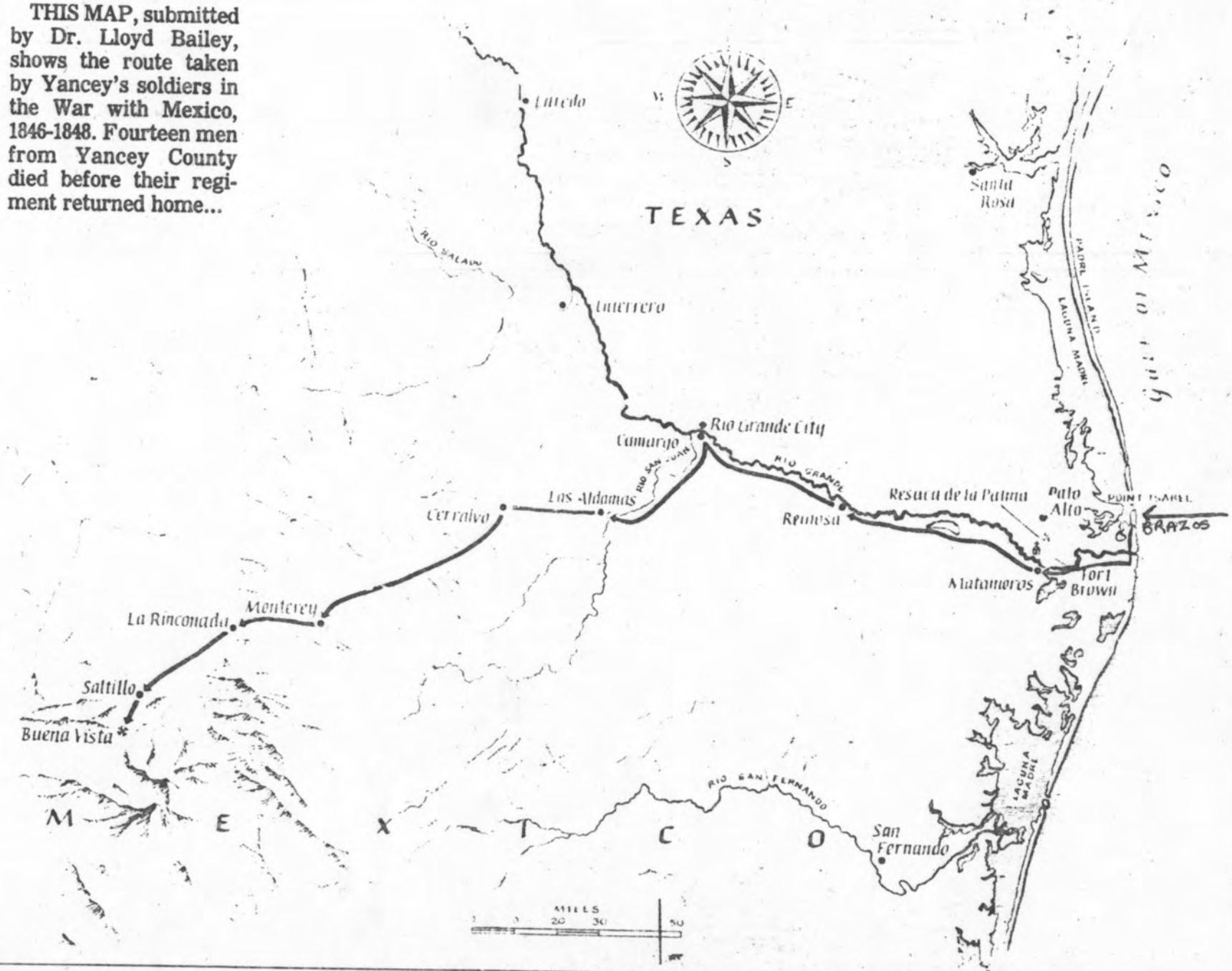
Events in the war with Mexico were thereafter reflected in the names given to children in Yancey. Among them are Mexico Ray, Beuna Vista Bailey (Beuna a mis-spelling of Buena, pronounced

Bwena), and Sidney Stokes Peterson (named for Major Sidney Stokes, of Wilkes Co.). Perhaps one should also list the name Winfield, for Gen. Winfield Scott. Beuna Vista Street (Mrs. Elbert Bailey), when asked about her name by her grandchildren, would reply, "I was named for some old battle in Mexico!"

A final note of interest: the Yancey company contained 4 brothers, A.F. (Alfred?), William M. (who died), J.A., and Riley C. Keith. Two-thirds of the men in the company were married, and more than two-thirds of them belonged to the Whig party. Capt. Blalock's wife was named

Sarah, and in the census of 1850 he has children named Joseph McDaniel (aged 16), Samuel Woodfin (aged 5), and Sarah Buenavista (aged 2). I would appreciate hearing from anyone who knows of his place of burial or if a photo of him survives. (4122 Deepwood Circle, Durham, N.C. 27707.)

THIS MAP, submitted by Dr. Lloyd Bailey, shows the route taken by Yancey's soldiers in the War with Mexico, 1846-1848. Fourteen men from Yancey County died before their regiment returned home...



Yancey County

~ 1833-1983 ~



BY LLOYD BAILEY, SR.
(copyright, 1984)

I'll sling my knapsack on my back,
my rifle on my shoulder;
And to Mexico I'll proudly go,

to be a gallant soldier!

The company of men from Yancey may have sung this song of the time as they march off to war in the spring of 1847. Some of the doubtless were motivated by patriotism after hearing a fiery speech by local politicians. Others, especially the restless youth, saw it as a respite from the ceaseless toil of the farm and an opportunity to see faraway places. Thus an orator in Davidson County put it: "If you go, you will get to see the whole Southwest, without the expense incident to traveling" (Smith and Judah, *Chronicles of the Gringos*, p. 14). Still others, penniless and with needy families, were attracted by the promise of \$7 per month pay, with three months of it in advance. In addition, they were to receive 160 acres of western land upon honorable discharge from the service. Recruiting officers, who were sometimes paid \$2 per volunteer, promised them anything: "roast beef and two dollars a day," "plenty of whiskey," "pretty Mexican gals," and "golden Jesuses" (Smith and Judah, p. 19). They made no mention of, nor did they even imagine, such realities as thirstily marching in 112 degree heat, steamboats that blew up with troops aboard, attack by bandits, resistance by able and determined enemies, and the constant presence of what the Mexicans call the "vornito."

The official roll of Company D, First Regiment of Foot Volunteers, made up mostly of men from Yancey but filled-out with residents of Orange County, is as follows: Tilmon Blalock, Captain, Jacob H. Constable, Captain, Shepherd K. Nash, 1st Lieut., Stephen Nichols, 1st Lieut., Alfred Keith, 2nd Lieut., James Jones, 2nd Lieut., John C. Kenner, 1st Sgt., Jackson Stuart, Sgt., Alexander J. Jones, Sgt., James Collis, Sgt., William G. Dake, Corp., Thomas C. Davis, Corp., William Robertson, Corp., John Ollis, Corp., William Murey, Musician, William T. Johnson, Musician. **Privates:** Egbert N. Blalock, Mordecai B. Barbee, Levi Bailey, David Blalock, Robert Boon, Anderson B. Carr, John Crabtree, David Caroway, Charles Cook, John Dickerson, Andrew Davis, John W. Davenport, More Daniel, William Davenport, Adolphus Green, Isaac Howard, Chesley P. Horn, William T. Harris, Theodore Hicks, John M. English, James R. Jennings, Samuel Jones, William R. King, John Lile, Peter Ledford, Merrot McKinney, George J. McCanley, Henry Neal, Henry Nichols, Edward J. Nutall, George Ollis, Merret B. Penland (Penley), Benjamin Pritchard, George Pate, Oliver H. Poor, Thomas J. Phillips, Jacob Ray, Leander T. Ray, John Samson, Morris Sharp, David Stout, William R. Stuart, Alfred Sisemore, Washington Troutman, Obediah Webb, Isaac L. Webb, William White,

Franklin Wilkinson. **Discharged during service:** Robert B. Breton, Nathaniel G. Brooks, Oren Branley, Anderson Brookwell, Thomas Barton, David Duckworth, Robert W. Dickson, James A. Keith, Riley C. Keith, Thomas Scarleth, George W. Smith, Thomas T. Turner, John Tipton, Underwood Vance. **Died during service:** Thomas S. Butler, Thomas Curen, William (Flintoff?) Flurtoff, Silas M. Green, George Hensley, Lignal Jones, William M. Keith, John Ledford, George Miller, Goldman Maney, David Poor, William Smith, Berry Ray, Joseph Washburn. (This concludes the list as officially published by the State in 1887. I have corrected a few obvious misspellings.) The *Raleigh Register* (semi-weekly edition) for late April or early May, 1847, has a slightly different list, including: R.G. Brittain, David Blalock, W.O. Duke (same as Wm. A. Dake?), Thomas

David, D.T. Jones, L.T. Terry. (Slightly different still are lists of volunteers kept by Capt. Blalock and Sgt. Kenner. Perhaps some of those who volunteered to the officers did not actually go along and muster-in.)

Tilmon Blalock, who recruited the Yancey Company and thus was elected to the rank of Captain, resigned at Saltillo, Mexico, on August 31, 1847. He may have done so as a consequence of a mutiny against the N.C. Regiment's commanding officer, Col. Robert Treat Paine of Edenton. Reportedly because of his excesses in discipline, a riot against him, led by men from Virginia and Mississippi with the aid of some North Carolinians, broke out on August 15. It came to a head, apparently by accident, inside the camping-area of Yancey's Company. His own guard refused to assist him, and apparently the various Captains

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 did not order their men to his aid. He narrowly survived, after discharging his pistol and killing one of the rebels. Shortly thereafter, he reports that "every Company officer in camp save...two" sent him a written request to resign his commission. (Whether they did this out of malice, or from desire to end the incident, depended upon whom one asked.) In any case, the commanding General (Cushing) took it as an act of mutiny and gave the signers 48 hours to retract their signatures or to be dishonorably discharged. All, save four, sent in their resignations on the 17th. (See Smith and Judah, pp. 424-431.)

Blalock's resignation does not come until nearly two weeks later, and shortly thereafter he left Mexico for home in Yancey. He was replaced by Jacob. H. Constable, who commanded the company until the end of the war.

That Blalock actually signed the document requesting that Col. Paine resign his commission is attested by a document reproduced in the *Raleigh Register* for Oct. 27, 1847. Several of the Lieutenants of the Yancey Company signed it as well, including Nash, Keith, and Nichols.

It is doubtful if many of the company's men ever obtained possession of the 160 acres of western land that was rightfully theirs. Speculators descended upon New Orleans, the point of return of soldiers from the front. They offered to buy the soldier's land-warrant, worth about \$100.00 (payable in cash in 10 years, with 6 percent interest), for \$50.00 or less. The soldier who was desirous for a spree on the way home, or for cash to take to his struggling family, would have seen little value in far-away land or have been willing to wait a decade for his cash-certificate to mature.

The following Proclamation has just been made by Gov. Graham :



By his Excellency WILLIAM A. GRAHAM,
Captain General and Commander-in-Chief of
the Militia of the State of North Carolina :

A PROCLAMATION.

WHEREAS, under the provisions of the Act of Congress, entitled "An act providing for the prosecution of the existing War between the United States and the Republic of Mexico," approved the 13th of May instant, the President of the United States hath made a requisition on the State of North Carolina, for one Regiment of Infantry Volunteers, to be "enrolled and held in readiness for muster into the service of the United States"—the said Regiment to comprise 10 Companies, each consisting of

- 1 Captain
- 1 First Lieutenant
- 1 Second Lieutenant
- 4 Sergeants
- 4 Corporals
- 2 Musicians
- 64 Privates.

And being fully assured that the citizen soldiers of the State are ready to meet this call to patriotic duty with promptness and alacrity, I do hereby enjoin and solicit that 10 Companies of Volunteers, each of the number and with the Officers aforesaid, be as soon as practicable formed and enrolled, to the end that they may be returned to the Secretary of War, as ready to be mustered into the service of the United States. No private or non-commissioned Officer can be received "who is apparently over 45 or under 18 years of age, and who is not in physical strength and vigor." Every Company, when the requisite number is enrolled, will be entitled to elect the Company officers; and Field Officers will be appointed for the Regiment, by the time of the completion of the enrolment.

As soon as any Company may be completed as above set forth, the Captain thereof will make report to the Adjutant General. If a greater number of Companies or men, shall be offered, than that required, a selection from those tendered will be made by lot. Early information is desired to be communicated to the Adjutant General of the progress of the enrolment: and all Military Officers in the State will cause this requisition to be made known generally to those under their command—that all who duly estimate the high honor of their country and are inclined to rally around her banner in this crisis, may be afforded the opportunity to volunteer their services.

Given under my hand, and attested with the Great Seal of the State of North Carolina, at the City of Raleigh, this 22d of May, A. D. 1846, and of our Independence the 70th.

WM. A. GRAHAM.

By his Excellency's command,
WM. HILL, Secretary of State.

Head Quarters 5th Division N. Carolina Militia,

BURNSVILLE, May 25, 1846.

General Order--No. 1

To the Colonels Commanding the different Regiments composing the Division.

Intelligence has just reached me of the declaration of War by our Government against the Republic of Mexico, and of the passage of an act by Congress, authorizing the President to accept the services of fifty thousand Volunteers. In order, therefore, that such of our citizen Soldiers as wish to proffer their services in this emergency, may have a fair opportunity of doing so, you are hereby commanded to call together your respective Regiments immediately and explaining to them the provisions of the Act, receive the names of all such as choose to volunteer.

Report to me at Head Quarters as speedily as possible the number and names of the Volunteers; the names of the Company Officers whom they may elect, and the branch of service, whether Cavalry, Infantry, or Riflemen, in which they propose to serve, in order that I may make a prompt return to the Secretary of War. Receive none but able-bodied men.

ALEXANDER F. GASTON,
Maj. Gen. 5th Division N. C. Militia.

Highland Messenger,
June 5, 1846

THE YANCY COMPANY.

We learn from the Charlotte Journal that the Yancy Company of Volunteers, Capt. Blalock, arrived at the rendezvous in that town, on the 28th ult., and on the following Sunday took up their line of march for Wilmington.

Highland Messenger,
Feb. 18, 1847

THE YANCY COMPANY AGAIN.

The Fayetteville Observer, of the 16th inst., says that the Yancy Company reached that City on Saturday previous. On their arrival, they were entertained with a collation served up by the citizens and afterwards escorted to the steamer which was to convey them to Wilmington by the Independent Company, the Riflemen, and a large concourse of citizens.

The following are the names of the officers.

- Tilman Blalock, Captain.
- A. F. Keith, 1st Lieutenant.
- John C. Keener, 2d Lieutenant.
- Fleming Vance, 2d Lieutenant.
- Robert G. Britain, 1st Sergeant.

The Observer continues, We learned some facts in regard to this Company whilst they were here, which are of interest. In the first place, be it remembered, that Yancey is the county which sent that ranting Locofoco, Fleming, (whom Mr Rayner did not think it worth while to skin more than once,) to the Legislature. Well, that being a Locofoco county, one might have expected to find a majority at least of Locofocos in this gallant Company who go to Mexico to fight Polk's war. But not so.

All the officers, and all the non-commissioned officers but the 4th Corporal, and from two thirds to three fourths of the privates, are Whigs. Capt. Blalock was the whig opponent of Fleming for the Legislature. One who heard Fleming roar in the House of Commons against the "Mexican whigs," might have fancied that he would like no better fun than to eat up the whole Mexican Republic, and wash it down with something stronger than the Gulf stream. But where is that loud mouthed patriot? Snugly ensconced at home, whilst these "Mexican Whigs" are enduring the privations of a march of 250 miles, and expect to face the enemy's cannon.

It is a common remark of the Locofoco papers, that two-thirds of the Regiment at least belong to that party. Is that true? We rather guess not. There is the Orange company, with only 4 Locofocos in it; the Yancy company with about three whigs to one Loco; the Cabarrus company with a large majority of Whigs.

To return the Yancy company. There are four Brothers in the company, of whom Lieut. Keith is one. Two thirds of the whole number are married men.

Highland Messenger,
Feb. 25, 1847

OUR REGIMENT.

Notwithstanding the default of the Rowan and Mecklenburg Companies, there will be nine full Companies at the Wilmington Rendezvous, when Capt. BERRY, of Cabarrus, and Capt. HENRY, of Rockingham, shall have arrived there. The Yancy Company, which we have no doubt is on its way, will complete the Regiment.

But the Secretary of War has informed Governor GRAYSON, that he will take some additional Companies; so that if Mr. ELLIS, at Salisbury, and Mr. WARRICK, at Milton, should raise their Companies, no doubt need be entertained of their reception.

Feb. 15, 1847

THE YANCY COMPANY.

We learned some facts in regard to this Company whilst they were here, which are of interest. In the first place, be it remembered, that Yancy is the county which sent that ranting Locofoco, Fleming, (whom Mr. Rayner did not think it worth while to skin more than once,) to the late Legislature. Well, that being a Locofoco county, one might have expected to find a majority at least of Locofocos in this gallant Company who go to Mexico to fight in Mr. Polk's war. But not so. All the officers, and all the non-commissioned officers but the 4th Corporal, and from two-thirds to three-fourths of the privates, are Whigs. Capt. Blalock was the whig opponent of Fleming for the Legislature. One who heard Fleming roar in the House of Commons against the "Mexican whigs," might have fancied that he would like no better fun than to eat up the whole Mexican Republic, and wash it down with something stronger than the Gulf Stream. But where is this loud mouthed patriot? Snugly ensconced at home, whilst these "Mexican Whigs" are enduring the privations of a march of 250 miles, and expect to face the enemy's cannon.

It is a common remark of the Locofoco papers, that two-thirds of the Regiment at least belong to that party. Is that true? We rather guess not. There is the Orange company, with only 1 Locofoco in it: the Yancy company with about three whigs to one Locofoco: the Cabarrus company with a large majority of Whigs.

To return to the Yancy company. There are four Brothers in the company, of whom Lieut. Keith is one. Two-thirds of the whole number are married men.—Fayetteville Observer.

Feb. 23, 1847

THE N. C. REGIMENT.

John A. Lane, a private in the Cumberland and Bladen company, died on Thursday last, of hemorrhage of the lungs.

There is nothing like the sickness among the troops that there was a week or two ago.

The Orange Volunteers, being a detachment only, have been divided and apportioned off to other deficient companies, chiefly to the Yancy, so that by this and other changes, nine complete companies have been made up, leaving one to be gathered yet. Towards this, some twelve or fifteen men from one of the Western counties came down on the Rail Road on Monday, and Lt. Col. Fagg has gone to Buncombe for more recruits. By the apportionment of the Orange Volunteers among the other companies Capt. Cameron is left without a command.

The nine companies range alphabetically thus: A. Edgecombe, Capt. Wilson; B. Wayne, Capt. Roberts; C. Cabarrus, Capt. Shive; D. Yancy, Capt. Blalock; E. Edgecombe, Capt. Duggan; F. Caswell, Capt. Williamson; G. Rockingham, Capt. Henry; H. New Hanover, Capt. Price; I. Cumberland, Capt. Kirkpatrick. Companies A, and E, left for Brazos Santiago on the 15th inst., in the Schr. E. S. Powell. Companies B, C and D, will, it is expected, leave to-morrow, in the Brig Samuel N. Gott. Major Stokes will go with them.

The Schr. Harrison Price has been contracted for by Lieut. Fremont, the Government agent, and will probably get away in four or five days, taking companies H and I.—Wilmington Chron.

March 2, 1847

Extract of a Letter, from a Raleigh Volunteer:

Brazos Santiago, March 22d, 1847.

MR. GALES: Having a few minutes to write, I hasten to give you the news. The Schooner, Florida, has borne us safe over 1700 miles of old Neptune's domain, and now rides at anchor off this point. I am "ashore" once more, thank Heaven. The North Carolina troops which arrived before us, are now at Matamoras. Col. Paine is in good health and spirits. We are to land in the morning, and march immediately for the mouth of the Rio Grande—9 miles from this place—thence by water, to Matamoras.

You will have heard by the papers, that General Taylor has had a battle with Santa Anna, near Saltillo, on the 22d and 23d of February. [Here follows an account of the engagement, the particulars of which our readers have already seen.]

FROM THE N. C. VOLUNTEERS.—A friend has favored us with the sight of a letter from an officer of the North Carolina Regiment, one of the passengers in the S. N. Gott, which vessel was supposed to have been too much crowded. We are happy to say that the fear entertained of loss of life from that cause, are shown not to have been well founded, except that one man, out of the 250, died on the passage, viz: Thos Curren, a private in Capt. Blalock's Company, a native of Granville county. He was originally a volunteer in Capt. Cameron's Orange Company, which was united with Capt. Blalock's. The commencement of the voyage was rough, a gale for four days, all the troops confined below, and all sea sick but one or two.—Fayetteville Observer.

April 9, 1847

Articles from the Raleigh Register (Semi-weekly), concerning Yancey's Company D during the War With Mexico

Documents in Adjutant-General's file (N.C. Archives) that relate to Yancey's troops in the War With Mexico: in List of Volunteers by Counties (AG 11).

1. A letter from Alfred F. Keith, Col. of 92nd Rgmt., N.C. Militia, from Burnsville on 12/30/1846: says he has made a call for volunteers, as directed; Tilton Blalock was elected Captain of the militia at the meeting of last May 22; requests notice of when a company of volunteers should start their march to Wilmington; may be able to raise two companies in Yancey, one of them in Pinkney Anderson's company (= present Madison County).

2. On 1/9/1847, Adj.-Gen. responds: Blalock's company of volunteers is to proceed as soon as possible to Charlotte, and make contact with the appropriate person (named).

3. On 1/18/1847, Blalock sends in his list of volunteers, writing from Grassy Creek; expects to arrive in Charlotte on Feb. 4-5; expresses deep dissatisfaction with the way that Col. Keith has handled things. (It is in response to the latter that we find a letter in Blalock's papers in the Duke Univ. Manuscript Department: "...can be handled only by court martial...") The muster-roll is toward the end of the book, and shows the county from which each volunteer came: 45 from Yancey.

(Col. Keith is presumably A.F. Keith, later General in the militia. He may have been murdered in Burnsville in 1859. See Lloyd Bailey, News From Yancey, p. 33.)

Yancey County Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, Minutes:

Spring Term, 1848:

1. George Hensley died at Beuna Vista, Mexico, June 8, 1847. Heirs include widow Sophronia and a single child.
2. David Poor died at Camargo, Mexico, April 26, 1847.

October Term, 1848:

1. William M. Keith died "near the Brazos," March 15, 1847. He was not married, and was the son of William, Sr.
2. Mary Ray claims to be the mother of Ashbury Ray, who died in Mexico in Oct., 1847.

July Term, 1852:

1. George Smith, killed in Mexico; wife and children are listed, and a Guardian appointed.

The Tilmon Blalock Papers

The following documents have been selected from a collection in the Manuscript Department, William R. Perkins Library, Duke University, entitled: "Blalock, Tilmon. Letters and Papers, 1825-1861. Yancey County, N.C."

Permission (attached) has been granted to reproduce them in the Newsletter of the Yancey History Association only.

The selected documents are:

1. Blalock's commission by the Governor to hold the rank of Captian in the N.C. Regiment, Jan. 16, 1847.

2. A letter from the Governor, dated Feb. 3, 1847, instructing Blalock and his Company to proceed to Charlotte and then to Fayetteville and Wilmington.

3. Blalock's will, dated Jan. 31, 1847, made in view of his departure for the war.

4. A statement of allowable expenses (\$69.42) for trnas-
porting his company's baggage from Yancey to Charlotte: a two-horse wagon and two men.

5. Invoice of camp equiptment issued to the company at Ft. Johnson (Smithville, N.C.) in Feb., 1847, just prior to departure.

6. Receipt for the military effects of private William M. Keith, who died by accident as the ship arrived at Brazos Island on March 16, 1847.

7. A list of those who, by an unspecified date, have been granted a pension for their service, the monthly amount, and (apparently) the attorney who handled their case.

8. Statement of fees in connection to the land claim and pay due Mrs. William A. Erwin (Mary), although his name is not on the muster roll. Note that, of \$30.44 due her, (attorney?) fees consumed more than 50 percent.

9. Court document concerning the pension due the children of Joseph Washburn (who died during the war).

MANUSCRIPT DEPARTMENT
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The Manuscript Department hereby grants permission to
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Tilmon Blalock Papers: entire collection
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Date: December 27, 1985

Robert L. Byrd

Robert L. Byrd
Curator of Manuscripts

To *Simon Blalock*

Greeting:

January 16, 1847

WE, reposing special trust and confidence, in your patriotism, valor, and military skill, do hereby commission you a *Captain* in a Company of Infantry belonging to the first Regiment of Volunteers from this State, under a requisition of the President of the United States, by virtue of an Act of Congress entitled "an Act providing for the prosecution of the existing War between the United States and the Republic of Mexico," to continue therein during said War, unless sooner discharged, you have been thereunto elected by the Members of said Company and your services accepted by the Governor; and (after taking such oath or oaths as are necessary for your qualification) you are hereby vested with the authority and command belonging to said office, that you may promptly and diligently perform the duties thereof, as prescribed by law and military discipline: In the discharge of which, all officers and soldiers under your command are required to yield to you their ready obedience.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, HIS EXCELLENCY, WILLIAM A.

GRAHAM, our Governor, Captain General, and Commander in Chief, hath signed with his hand these presents, and caused our GREAT SEAL to be affixed thereto.

Done at our City of RALEIGH, on the *Seventeenth* day of *January* in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and forty *seven* and in the *71st* year of our Independence.

BY THE GOVERNOR:

W. A. Graham

W. P. Graham

Private Secretary.

Executive Office

Raleigh Feb. 3rd 1847.

Sir

In the absence of the Adjutant General, who has been despatched to Wilmington, where nine Companies of the Regiment of Volunteers will be, before this reaches you, I hasten to inform you, that I regretted to learn by the last mail, that Lieut. Fremont the mustering officer of the United States would leave Charlotte on the 30th of Jan^r. Your last letter to the Adj^t General, promises, that your Company will be there, by the 4th or 5th of Feb^r. In the event, that you do not find him there, you will apply to William Johnston Esq and receive the bounty of the State for your Company, and proceed with your command to Fayetteville, where boats will be furnished to transport you to the rendezvous at Wilmington; ~~at that place~~ ^{at that place} with report to Lieut. S. S. Fremont as mustering officer of the United States, or to the commanding officer at that rendezvous.

The Adj^t General said before me your letter ^{stating} some difficulties in the organization of the

Company, which can only be inquired into by a
Court Martial.

I deem it proper also to apprise
you that I perceive, efforts are being made,
to create mutiny & ~~disaffection~~ among the
volunteers. I hope your Company will proceed
straight forward in the performance of its duty,
and suffer nothing to break the engagement
into which they have entered to serve their
Country.

I have the honor to be
With high respect
Your Obedt Servant

Wm. A. Graham

Capt. Silmon Blalock
Comd'g. Camp of Volunteers.

[From Silmon Blalock Collection]

In the name of God amen know all Person whom it may concern

That I Silmon Blaylock Farmer of the County of Vance in the State of North Carolina having rendered my services to the Government of the United States (my native County) to aid in Prosecuting the war the United States against Mexico and my services having been accepted by the United States and the great distance and perilous Route and other incidences attending the Adventure makes it uncertain whether I ever arrive safely at my native home again. I therefore do hereby make the following disposition of such my little Estate as it has pleased God to Bless me with in this life

My Will and desire is that my well Beloved Wife Sarah Blalock have all my Estate Both Real and personal (after paying all my just debts during her natural life) and at her death that the same be Equally divided between my well Beloved Children viz Lewis - Joseph - M. D. and Woodfin and any other Child in my right to them and their heirs and I do hereby by these presents constitute and appoint my Trusty friends My Wife Sarah Blalock and Thos. Vance my sole Executor and Executor to this my last Will and Testament Given under my hand and Seal this 31st day of January 1847

Signed sealed published and signed and attested declared in Presence of

J. Hovey
M. D. Wisson

The United States

G. Gilman Blalock

Dr

For the hire of his two horse wagon and two men for
the purpose of transporting the baggage and stores
of his Company of N.C. Volunteers from Yancey
to Charlotte a distance of _____ miles, from the
day of _____ to the day of _____ 1846,

15 days at \$1.50 per day ~~~~~ \$ 22.50

For the ~~board~~ of provisions furnished _____ men of his
Company on the march from Yancey to Charlotte
between the above dates. ~~~~~ 28.90

For 1 drum for use of company. ~~~~~ 2.50

For the following articles of clothing, ferrage &
furnished the said company viz

(Here give a list of the clothing, ferrage,
and other expenses you paid, and if you
have any receipts for any of it send
them also.)

15.50

\$ 69.42

Fort Johnston

N. C.

February, 1847

Feb'y.

1847.

19

Invoice of Camp and Garrison Equipage this day issued to Capt.

Forinnag. Comp'y. , North Carolina Volunteers.

No.

2	Wall tents
2	Wall Tent flies.
2	Sets of Wall Tent Poles.
15	Common tents.
15	Sets of Common Tent Poles.
294	Tent Pins.
15	Camp Kettles
30	Mess Pans.
8	Axes.
8	Axe handles.
17	Matchets.
17	Matchet handles.
4	Spades.
90	Knapsacks.
90	Sets of Knapsack Straps.
90	Carstons
90	Carstons Straps.
90	Knapsacks.

(SIGNED IN DUPLICATE.)

J. L. Mumford

1st Lieut. 3d Artillery,
Act. Asst. Qr. Master U. S. Army.

Second Campaign Mexico 21st Aug 1847 of S.A.
 Moore Capt. Surgeon U.S. Army. The following Ordnance and
 Ordnance stores, the effects of Private Keith. No. 104
 1/2 1 Musket Bright Unserviceable
 1/ 1 " Cartridge Box
 1/ 1 " " Belt
 1/ 1 " " Plate
 1/ 1 " Waist - Belt
 1/ 1 " " Plate
 1/ 1 " Breast Plate
 1/ 1 " Bayonet Scabbard
 1/ 1 " Brush & Stick
 1/ 1 " Screw Driver
 1/ 1 " Gun string

Signed (Superior) J. G. Barrett
 Lofgren

A List of persons residing in Yancey and Cherokee Counties belonging to Companies D & K, North-Carolina Volunteers, who have been pensioned, with the rate of Monthly Pension allowed, and the names of the Agents who prepared and transmitted the papers.

Boon Robert private Company D, Yancey Co	\$8	mo	J B Woodfin
Bennett William	\$4	"	do
Davis Andrew	\$8	"	do
English John M	\$8	"	do
Fox Robert	\$8	"	do
Green Adolphus	\$8	"	C W Bennett
Hicks James M	\$8	"	J B Woodfin
Huonk Isaac	\$4	"	C W Bennett
Keith James A	\$8	"	J B Woodfin
^{Ledford} Ledbetter Peter	\$8	"	do
McKinney Merrett	\$6	"	do
Ollis John	\$8	"	do
O'Ferrill Thomas	\$8	"	Thos Webb
Pate George W	\$8	"	J B Woodfin
Raper John	\$8	"	Felix Apley
Robinson Lefuro	\$8	"	J B Woodfin

Rogers Ancil, private, Company K, Cherokee Co \$8 Wm. H. Axley
 Stewart Jackson, Supt " D, Yancy Co, \$8 J. B. Woodfin
 Sams Warren, private " K, " " \$4 do
 Sherman James " " " Cherokee Co, \$6 H. Axley
 Stradley John R. Jr, " " Buncomb Co, \$8 J. B. Woodfin
 Troutman George W, " D, Yancy Co \$4 do
 Tipton John " " " " \$8 do

List of Claims on file, but not yet allowed pensions

Andres John, private, Company K, Buncomb Co J. B. Woodfin
 Stewart Wm R " " D, Yancy Co do
 Vance Underwood N, " " " " do
 Webb Isaac L " " " " do

Washington D.C.
July 13. 1852.

Mrs. Mary Erwin
Care Capt. Blalock.

Grassy Creek No. 1. Dear Madam.

I obtained and sent you to the care of Capt. Blalock on the 5th January last a Land Warrant for 160. acres of land, as mother of Wm. A. Erwin deceased.

I obtained a settlement in short time since of your claim for arrears and three months extra pay amounting to \$30.44, As the papers forming the claim were drawn up by me, no printed form being applicable I presume you will not be dissatisfied with any charging the usual fee viz \$10. for the warrant, and 20 per cent for the arrears &c. The account stands thus -

	Amount received	\$30.44.
Fee for Land Warrant	\$10.00	
" for using claim	6.08	
Postage paid by me	.25	16.33
		<u>\$14.11</u>

For which balance of \$14.11 I enclose you a certificate of Depoite of Bank of Bainbridge. New York No. 563. for \$15. for which when received you will please send me a receipt. also send receipt for the Land Warrant. Capt. Blalock not having done so.

Very Respectfully
Yours Obedt. Servt
L. W. Bennett

State of North Carolina } Be it known
 Yancey County } that before me
 W. H. Dale a Justice of the peace in and for
 said County personally appeared James Washburn
 Guardian of Martha Matilda and Henry Washburn
 minor-heirs of Flora Washburn Widow of Joseph
 Washburn deceased, and made oath that he is
 entitled to a pension. The identical person named

~~in the original certificate~~ in his possession of
 which I certify the following is a true copy:
 Department of the Interior, Orphan's Claims
 I certify that Martha M. Washburn and Henry
 Washburn minor children of Joseph Washburn
 who was a private of Company D, N. C. Vol's.
 in the service of the United States, are entitled,
 under the provisions of the act of Congress ap-
 proved June 5, 1858, to receive pay at the rate
 of three dollars and fifty cents per month,
 commencing on the twenty fourth day of
 December 1854, and terminating on the six-
 teenth day of September 1862, to be divided
 among them equally whilst under the age
 of sixteen years respectively, and that the same
 is payable to James Washburn, guardian.

Given at the Department of the Interior, this
 4th day of February, one thousand eight hun-
 dred and fifty nine
 Counter signed
 George Whiting
 Commissioner of pensions
 of the interior

That they now reside in Yancey County and have resided
 there all their lives of the truth of which statement I am
 fully satisfied sworn to and subscribed this the
 15th day of March 1860.
 Obtained of J. H. Dale J. H. Gomis Washburn Guardian
 of the property of
 Wm M. Wiseman
 & C. Green

Bibliography: War with Mexico

- Smith, George Winston, and Charles Judah. Chronicles of the Gringos. Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1968; 523 pp. (973.628 S648C)
Accounts of eyewitnesses and combatants, concerning recruitment, travel, camp life, battles, etc.
- Schroeder, John H. Mr. Polk's War: American Opposition and Dissent, 1846-1848. Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1973. (973.62 S381M) 184 pp.
Concerned with congressional differences between Democrats and Whigs, nonpolitical dissent, antiwar strategy; includes contemporary cartoons, etc.
- Johannsen, Robert W. To The Halls of The Montezumas. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985; 363 pp. (973.62 J65 T627 1985)
Subtitled "The Mexican War in the American Imagination," this volume is concerned with the attitudes of the civilian population as expressed in newspapers, novels, poetry, music, art, etc.
- Nichols, Edward J. Zach Taylor's Little Army. New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1963; 280 pp. (973.623 N617Z)
Chronicles the movements of Taylor's troops in a very readable style; nice pictures and maps.
- Hoffmann, William S. North Carolina In The Mexican War, 1846-1848. Raleigh: State Dept. of Archives and History, 1959. 48 pp.
Several pictures and drawings.
- Wallace, Lee A. "Raising A Volunteer Regiment For Mexico, 1846-1847." N.C. Historical Review, 35 (1958), 20-33.
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THE TOE RIVER VALLEY AND THE WAR WITH MEXICO

By Lloyd Bailey, Sr.

It has been 140 years now...since the U.S. fought its first war on foreign soil. It was a struggle which produced rhetoric and emotions...which remind one of the Vietnam era. There was ardent patriotism, partisan politics, and vigorous dissent.

SLIDE: [Sheet-music from the Mexican War period: "General Worth's Quick Step" (from Johannsen, p. 235).] ~~I had hoped to find some of this music, and let you listen to it...but this far, I have not been successful.~~

Opinions about the war were expressed in speeches at great public rallies, in printed prose and poetry, in art, and in music.

Musical compositions (a specimen of which is shown here) included: "Rio Grande Quick March"; "Santa Anna's March"; "General Taylor's Encampment Quick Step"; "A Little more Grape, Captain Bragg"; and "Yankee Doodle in Mexico." (I had hoped to find some of this music, and let you listen to it---but thus far, I have not been successful.) In addition, there were "old standards" from previous times, such as "The Girl I Left Behind me."

SLIDE: [A publication from the Mexican War period: "Incidents and Sufferings in the Mexican War" (from Johannsen, p. 140).]

The War brought new words into the average American's vocabulary. Among them are: adobe, sombrero, lasso, corral, peon, calaboose, and patio.

It was the first conflict to be covered by newspaper correspondents in the field. Many such reports, printed in the New Orleans Picayune, were reprinted in papers throughout the country...including N.C.

This was the war which helped to solidify the national self-image that is still with us: that of "manifest destiny"...the right to expand, and to intervene for supposedly just causes, throughout the hemisphere.

One might think that all such things were quite removed from the Toe River Valley...isolated as it was from the mainstream of national life...and even from involvement in the life of the State. Alas...that was not the case. And I say "alas," because the War brought death to thousands, and debilitating disease to many more...including your relatives.

SLIDE: [Newspaper notice about a meeting of the militia (from N.C. Illustrated, 1524-1984, p. 234).]

The great drama was played out locally...in passionate recruitment speeches at the militia mustering-ground, in hard-fought political campaigns, and in the hardships which the soldier's absence caused his family.

The newspaper notice shown here is a bit later than the war...I chose it because of the drawing. For a genuine one in local newspapers, see p. 8 of your Newsletter (Estatooe).

It may seem surprising, therefore, that this war, which was the talk of the day, has faded from local memory. Other wars, we remember! People take pride in the fact that they descended from a soldier in the Revolution. DAR chapters are still functioning in W.N.C. The Civil War is still fresh in the minds of many residents of the Valley. On the one hand, the Union's Col. George Kirk is denounced in vehement terms. On the other hand, one may hear the mis-deeds of "them old Confederers" (meaning the Home Guard). Yancey's last veteran of that conflict died as recently as 1951! Almost any adult can remember a Spanish American War veteran...and those of the later wars are still among us.

All of this may be contrasted...with the fate of the soldiers who fought in Mexico, in 1846-1848. All memory of them has faded; they are truly the forgotten veterans. Even the war itself has been largely forgotten by the residents of the Valley. The average person is apt to identify the Mexican War with the Spanish American War, that happened a half-century later. It seems appropriate, therefore, that they be memorialized at this, the first formal program of our History Association.

What tangeable evidence is there, still among us, that our soldiers fought in that conflict? To what can one point as a relic, or consequence? The answer is...not much! Even so, there is more than I thought in the beginning. It is as follows:

I. **SLIDE:** tombstone of "Mexican War" soldier. Only a few of the soldiers received a "government" tombstone at their death. At least, I have been able to discover only about a half-dozen. This one, and one other, is in an abandoned cemetery at Loafer's Glory (Burleson Cemetery). Even a relative, who lived nearby, thought that this might refer to the Spanish American War! The graves of a few other veterans of the struggle are buried in privately marked graves...but most of them, I'm afraid, are unmarked.

(Such tombstones, by the way, are provided by the Government at no cost...even for veterans of the Mexican War to this day... if we knew where they were buried.)

II. The next evidence is of quite a different nature: the personal names which were given to newborn children in the Valley. The returning veterans...and their neighbors...memorialized both heroes and places..by naming boys and girls after them. Some of those names, which came into vogue just after the War, may still be heard in the Valley. Here are some examples:

SLIDE (Gen. Taylor) a. The general of the northern army in Mexico, under whom soldiers from our Valley served, was named Zachary Taylor. He was a folk-hero, and became the 12th President of the U.S. in 1849, dying in office in 1850. ~~Shortly thereafter~~, His name, usually shortened to "Zack," was given to children far-and-wide. A conspicuous ^{local} example, about whom you can read in the book Cabins in the Laurel, is "Zack" ^(Zachary Taylor) McHone, born about 1847. He was the son of Kimbrel and Nancy, who lived just across from the present town of Spruce Pine. The area ^{was then} ~~came to be~~ known as the "Kims Thickets," and the present McHone Road is named for his family. Just across the River, ^{near} where the town now stands, lived Tilmon Blalock, who organized the company of soldiers who went to the War.

SLIDE: **SLIDE** (Beuna Vista) b. Early in the War, Taylor's army fought a famous battle at a place called Buena Vista (meaning something like "good view"). The Americans tended to mispronounce it as: Beuna...and when they returned home, Beuna Vistas ^{were born} ~~sprang up~~ all over the Valley. Such children were usually called "Beuney," or "Visty." Capt. Blalock

named one of his daughters, born in 1848, Sarah Beuna Vista. Another person of this name, Sarah Beuna Vista Street (2nd wife of Elbert Bailey), died in 1940. When her grandchildren asked about her name, she would tell them that she was named for "some old battle." Closer to home, the mother of Edgar Hunter, Jr. (former Supt. of Schools in Yancey), who died about 1984, was also named Beuna.

c. A Major in the N.C. Regiment, born in Wilkes County, was named Montfort Sidney Stokes. He also served in the Confederate Army...and ~~was~~ had a double opportunity for children to be named for him. And thus it probably is...that the names "Sid" and Stokes became common in Yancey. More precisely, there was even a Sidney Stokes Peterson.

d. The commander of the southern part of the army in Mexico... was an old vet of the War of 1812, named Winfield Scott. He ran for President in 1852 (Whig) but was defeated by Franklin Pierce (Democrat). Not surprisingly, therefore, his name is found thereafter in the Valley, e.g., Raburn Winfield Garland.

III. The next bit of local evidence of the Mexican War...is to be found in the Minutes of the County Court. It is doubtful if many people read them anymore...they are long, tedious, and faded. Tucked away in them, are a few references to ~~families who seek~~ pensions for the services of a deceased husband or father. ^{The} Testamony of Capt. Blalock, in the Spring of 1848, is; that George Hensley died at Beuna Vista on 6/8/1847, leaving widow Sophronia and a child; that David Poor died at Camargo on 4/26/1847. At the Oct. Session of Court, he reports; that William M. Keith, Jr., a single man, died near the Brazos on 3/15/1847. Then, Mary Ray appears in Court, a widow, concerning the death of Ashbury Ray in Oct., 1847. She claims that she was "always reputed to be the mother" of this soldier.

July 1852 - George (W.) Keith's children in War in Indian ch. 1852

IV. The next bit of evidence takes a different literary form...and this one I was astonished to find. One of the soldiers, ^{2nd Lieut. (later Sgt.)} ~~Sgt.~~ John C. Keener, kept a diary...and against all odds, that diary has survived to the present day! It was made available to me by its present owner (Marie Holland of Spruce Pine), and I was able to decipher and make a typescript of it. I will refer to its contents several times as we go along.

Mention should also be made, at this point, of a letter from Sgt. Keener's friend (and apparently, his pastor), back on Jacks Creek.

It was written to Mexico in April, 1848, by the Rev. Jehu Patterson, a Methodist. In it, he makes reference to a few veterans who have already returned home...including Capt. Blalock, who resigned his commission as the result of conflict with superiors.

- V. A final bit of local evidence is equally surprising...and technically speaking, it is no longer local. As part of my research on Yancey history in general, I decided to see if there were any items in the Manuscript Department of Duke University. There were a few... among them was a folder entitled, "The Tilmon Blalock Papers." They had been purchased at an estate sale, but there was no indication of "when" and "where." As I turned through them, to my unbelieving eyes there appeared a wealth of information: commission as a ~~recruiting~~ officer, a list of volunteers, a list of equipment which the State has supplied, bills for transportation, materials relating to soldiers' pensions, and so on. I have been granted permission to reproduce it, and parts of it are included in The Yancey History Association's first NEWSLETTER.

In addition to such "local" sources, I have consulted a number of items in other locations: various contemporary newspaper accounts, published in Raleigh and Asheville; ~~papers~~ the correspondence of the State's Adjutant-General, in Raleigh; and pension applications in the National Archives.

Well...so much for sources and remains! Let us now use them... to reconstruct the history of the times, as it applies to soldiers from the Valley.

SLIDE: [Map of Territorial Expansion, 1783-1853. (From F.P. Wirth, Development of America, p. 234)]

The conflict has its roots in the so-called Louisiana Purchase of 1803. (The area is shown in purple on the map.) This ^{addition} extended the boundary of the U.S. beyond the Mississippi River, and began the great "Westward Movement." There was some doubt about ^{the location} ~~part~~ of the southern border...in the area now known as Texas...and this soon brought tensions with Spain...and then with Mexico which became independent of Spain. The matter was settled, temporarily, in 1819, when Florida was acquired by the U.S. (yellow on map), and all claim to Texas was renounced.

At first, Mexico was positive toward settlement in Texas, making land available at 12.5 cents/acre, about 1/10 its cost in

in the U.S. But then, tensions developed, and the Mexican government forbade further immigration, in 1830. In 1836, the Texans declared their independence, and this led to their defeat at the Alamo...but ultimately ^{it led} to the Republic of Texas. Soon thereafter, an appeal was made for annexation by the U.S. (*Note the location of the southern border!*)

To that proposal, however, there was serious opposition, because of the slavery question. Every new state brought with it two ~~more~~ ^{more} senators...and this had the potential to change the ^{Congressional} power structure. Since Texas was good cotton country...and therefore favored slavery... there was opposition from abolitionist states. Presidents Van Buren and Harrison were opposed to annexation, but John Tyler avored it. Then came the Presidential election of 1844, when James Polk ~~was~~ was elected...on a platform which called for adding Texas to the Union.

SLIDE: James Knox Polk, Democrat of Tennessee, 11 the President of the U.S., 1845-1849.

The annexation resolution had already passed through Congress by the time Polk took office, and he was only too happy to sign it. This led Mexico to sever diplomatic relations, since territory which she had regarded as her own had now been incorporated into the U.S. To make matters worse, the U.S. insisted that the border be at the Rio Grand, whereas Mexico claimed that it should be ~~to~~ ^{to} the north, at the ~~the more northerly~~ Nueces River.

In anticipation of hostility, the President sent approximately 1/2 of the U.S. Army, ~~a bit less~~ ^{a bit less} than 4,000 men, to Corpus Christi, Texas, just south of the Nueces River. They were under the command of Zachary Taylor, with orders to keep Mexican forces out of the area north of the Rio Grande. There were those who suspected that Polk meant to gain control of the entire west...and ^{that he} ~~intended~~ ^{intended} ~~even~~ to provoke the Mexicans into action...as a pretext to take their territory. In any case, that is precisely what took place.

SLIDE: Cartoon of 1846/47, satirizing American attitudes toward Mexico.

Opponents of the President...referred to his actions as "Mr. Polk's War." They regarded U.S. territorial claims as flimsy, ^{believed that} ~~the~~ the Mexicans ^{were} incapable of defending themselves, and ^{that} the President guilty of "baiting" them. The President's opponents, in the Whig Party, derided his policies, but tried to sound patriotic at the same time...hence the cartoon.

In Feb., 1846, the President ordered the army south, into

all the way
disputed territory... to the Rio Grand, some 180 miles south.

SLIDE: Taylor's army in camp, at Corpus Christi, a contemporary drawing (from Nichols, after p. 136).

Mexican delegations protested the army's advance, but it continued, and the Rio Grande came into sight on March 28. The troops settled into camp, received supplies sent by sea, and all seemed to be going smoothly. *However,* ~~to be sure,~~ the Mexicans kept moving in ~~more~~ more troops across the river at the city of Matamoros, until their numbers reached about 6,000... nearly twice the size of Taylor's army.

[war of bells to influence Catholic soldiers; naked girls to encourage deserters.]
 In April, there were small skirmishes, and several Americans were killed. When word of this reached the President, he announced to Congress... that the Mexicans had "shed American blood upon American soil. ... War exists by the act of Mexico alone." This was *regarded as* a sufficient ~~to~~ *for* cause ~~a~~ declaration of war.

We must now begin to "make a long story short"... and move to the involvement of Yancey's troops. It was clear that the regular army was too small to deal with the crisis now at hand. *So,* the declaration of war was accompanied by a call for 50,000 volunteers. In many areas, there was an out-pouring of patriotic spirit: mass rallies, brass bands, placards reading "Mexico or Death," and "Ho! for the Halls of Montezuma." In ~~some~~ *other* areas, however, there was dissent. Some leaders, particularly in the North, saw "Mt. Polk's War" as an opportunity for pro-slavery territory to be expanded.

Since the volunteers were not to be inducted *all at once,* ~~at large,~~ but rather *in specified* ~~to come in stated~~ numbers... from ~~selected~~ states in a certain sequence, this meant that problems developed both ways. In some cases, there were far more volunteers than were needed... some of them obviously unfit for service. In other cases, the quotas were not filled, and inducements to "join up" were offered: "comfortable quarters, \$10/month, \$21 in advance, 160 acres of western land, a chance to travel, "pretty Mexican gals," and as one critic *the* sarcastically put it: "gold Jesuses!" In some cases, ~~a~~ *the* recruiters

were paid ~~much~~ per head...which made them quite willing to sign-up anything that could move...and they sometimes did.

The resultant volunteer force was useless without ^{long}~~much~~ training... and instead of being sent to camps for months of that, they were sent directly to Mexico. The regulars in the army was very uneasy about having to rely upon them. Many had not received training in the local militia; they were resistant to discipline, and quickly became angry about the realities of camp life: it wasn't at all like the recruiters had led them to believe; they were careless about food and drink, and thus became sick much more easily than than the army regulars; and they liked to drink ^{whiskey}, and sometimes became mean as rattlesnakes. Officers often spent a lot of time in drill, not merely to get them ready for battle, but also to keep them busy and tired...and thus from being problems!

To this effort, the State of N.C. had been asked to supply a regiment: 10 companies, of about 100 men each. The response was overwhelming: by mid-July (1846), 32 companies had volunteered. It did NOT include a company from Yancey. A drawing was held, to determine which 10 companies would go...and the "winners" included Buncombe and McDowell.

In the meanwhile, the War was progressing. Taylor had taken his army across the Rio Grande into the city of Matamoros (May 18)... with the Mexican army withdrawing as he approached. News of this... anticipation of an easy final victory...spurred enlistments. They began to arrive in droves, often under-equipped, and straining Taylor's supplies. Getting recruits is one thing...supplying them was quite another...and the government back home turned out to be quite inept in this regard.

By mid-June, Taylor's army numbered about 8,000...and they were enjoying Matamoros. They drank plenty of "red eye," watched

rooster fights, and found a sufficient supply of the promised "pretty Mexican gals." They also became sick, sometimes 25 percent at a time...with dysentery and ~~feavers~~ ^{fevers} of various sorts...but thus far, they escaped what the Mexicans called the "vomito" (yellow fever).

In July...with the N.C. regiment just now forming...Taylor started up-river.

SLIDE: Route of Taylor's march into Mexico.

Inland marched the army...with wagons of supplies and strings of pack-mules...through Reinosa to an advance depot at Camargo. "Of all the places in Mexico," said one recruit, "Camargo is the worst." It was a hot, humid, ^{and} sea of mud and disease. There were times when no more than half the volunteers could answer roll-call. In all, about 1,500 people died here before the war was over. While new recruits were left behind to ~~train~~ ^{drill,} and to bring in supplies from the coast, Taylor pushed-on with a force of about 6,000.

SLIDE: ^(Monterey) A fierce battle raged at Monterey on Sept. 20-24. On one day alone, nearly 400 of Taylor's men were killed. When it was over, there was a brief armistice, and the Mexican army withdrew to Buena Vista.

SLIDE: Antonio de Lopez Santa Anna.

Part of the reason for stiffer Mexican resistance...was that Monterey had been well fortified. Another was...that a new general had assumed command. His name was well known to the U.S. troops, for he had been the commander of Mexican forces at the Alamo, years before. He had killed the Texans to the last man...reportedly some of them after they were wounded, or had surrendered.

Meanwhile, back in N.C., the regiment had all but collapsed. Enlistment, at mid-summer, had been for a maximum of 12 months.

November came before they were actually called up...with half their

anticipated time of service already gone. The government now insisted that they re-inlist...^{this time} for the duration of the war, however long that might be! Nine of the ten companies refused...and so a new call was made for volunteers. This time, one of the companies was from Yancey County.

The ~~recruiting~~ officer was Tilmon Blalock...likely the son of old "Revolutioner" John Blalock. They lived just outside Spruce Pine, somewhere around where the Hardee's restaurant is now located. He had been appointed a Lt. Colonel in the Burke County Militia as far back as 1832, so it is not surprising that the volunteers elected him Captain of the company.

I'm not sure how many men actually set out for Mexico. Blalock's enlistment ~~list~~^{Roll} has 94 names; one kept by ~~Sgt.~~^{Lieut.} Keener has 81 names. There may have been some changes of heart, as the moment of departure drew near. The official list, published years later by the State, shows 85 names...some of them from Orange County, in order to "fill out" the regiment. The Adjutant-General's list has 45 soldiers from Yancey.

SLIDE: Map showing the route of march from Yancey Co. to the coast.
(Based on John C. Keener's diary)

Toward the end of January, 1847, the company was ready to go. They must have gathered at Blalock's house, since that would be one the way. They loaded their belongings on a two-horse wagon, and set out. ~~The two wagoners, who were to go only to Charlotte, were paid \$1.50 per day.~~ Their line of march, according to ~~Sgt.~~^{Lieut.} Keener's diary, took them to the "cave at Brown's" the first night. Since the Brown family were pioneers at Ashford...and since this would be on the way...they must have gone up to Ingalls, then to the crest of the Blue Ridge...and then down the North Cove toward Marion. But...is there a cave? Linville Caverns would not do; it was narrow, and wet. What was needed was a "dry" cave...a large overhang, where a ~~large~~^{of men} number could camp. I'm told that there is

just such a cave below Linville Caverns...and another near the North Cove School...although I have seen neither.

Thence, the line of march took them through Morganton, Mull's (Mulls Mills, near Hickory?), Lincolnton, Ransell's Ferry, and to Charlotte. This was to be rendevous-point for companies from the western part of the State. Here, the wagoneers apparently returned home, having drawn a salary of \$1.50 per day for their services. Through a bureaucratic snafu, no preparations had been made for the troops' arrival. The company of volunteers from Rowan County, considering this an omen of things to come, "threw in the towel" and returned home. (This they could do, since they were not yet officially mustered-into the service.)

Two days later, the soldiers resumed their march, and shortly thereafter reached Fayetteville. The local newspaper took note of their arrival...and that the vast majority of them were Whigs. After all, it said, it is the opposing Democrats (Mr. Polk's party) who are baying for war with Mexico! Speaking of Yancey's Democratic representative to the State Legislature, it says:

One who has heard (Samuel) Fleming roar in the House of Commons...might have fancied that he would like no better fun...than to eat up the whole Mexican Republic, and wash it down with something stronger than the Gulf Stream. But where (now) is that loud mouthed patriot? Snugly ensconced at home, whilst the Whigs ...expect to face the enemy's canon!

The article goes on to state that there are four brothers in the company (Keith family), and that two-thirds of them ~~are~~ ^{Regiment is} married. (See attached newsletter.)

From Fayetteville, they took a steam-boat, down the Cape Fear River...past Wilmington...to Fort Johnston. There, on Feb. 15, ^{N.C.} they were officially sworn in, as Co. D, 1st/Rgmt. of Foot Volunteers.

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On Feb. 25, they boarded the sailing-ship Samuel N. Gott and set sail for Mexico.

SLIDE: sketch of a brig, similar to the Gott.

On board were companies B (Wayne Co.), C (Cabarrus Co.), and D (Yancey Co., with its numbers filled out with men from Orange Co.).

No sooner were they at sea, than a storm arose, of five-day's duration. The soldiers had to remain below decks, most of them too sea-sick to move around anyway.

SLIDE: Sea route to Mexico.

Lt. Keener records that they passed "the British Islands" (Bahamas?), sailed by "the islands of Cubiy" (Cuba), entered the Gulf of Mexico, and landed near the mouth of the Rio Grande on the 15th of March...after a voyage of 19 days.

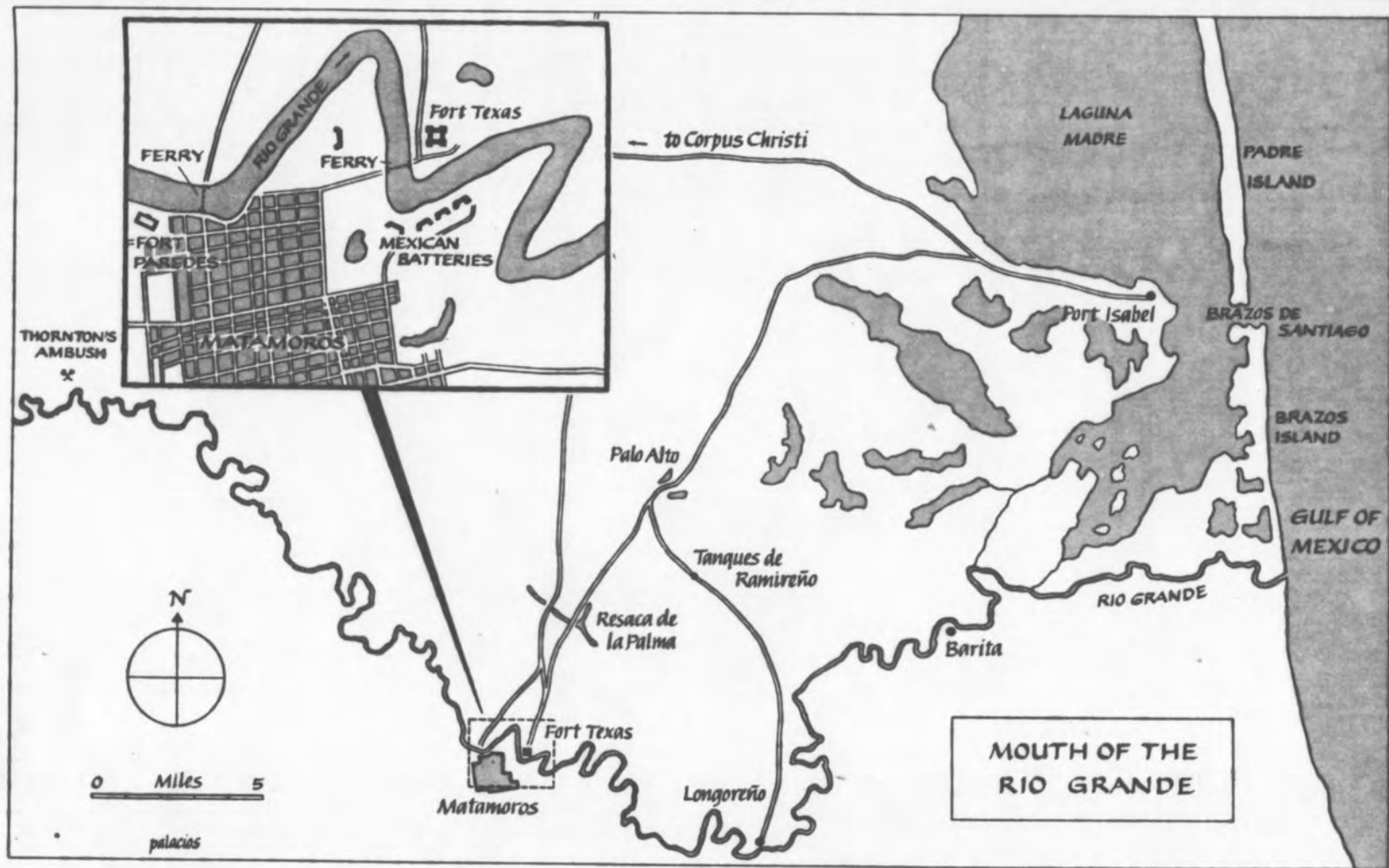
In transit, the Company lost the first of its men: Thomas Currin of Granville Co., who had come in with the Orange Co. additions to the Company. He apparently died from disease...contracted back at Fort Johnston, ^{The place had been} ~~which was~~ rife with diarrhea and typhoid. Currin and he ~~was~~ buried at sea. A soldier from another company described the ceremony in such cases:

The burial service for the sea is peculiarly solemn and impressive. They were buried in their full uniform, closely sewed in their military blankets; and with sinkers to their feet, were thus consigned to their watery graves. The ceremony is simple, but most impressively awful, and brought the tears to many a soldier's eye...and produced in the minds of many, serious considerations for their final dissolution and destination.

SLIDE: Map of the Mouth of the Rio Grande.

Once they arrived at Brazos Island, it was no easy matter to get off the ships. The opening through the outer banks was too shallow for sea-going vessels. Supplies and men were often

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K. Jack Bauer, The Mexican War

dumped onto barren Brazos Island, to ~~be~~ be transported to Point Isabel (Fort Polk) by lighter vessels...usually steam-boats. Here, an accident befell a member of the Company...this one from Yancey. Here is how a witness described the fate of William Keith, one of the four brothers, of Rock Creek:

(He) was killed by the falling of some of the timbers of the vessel, which was broken off by the steam-boat which went out to land them at the Brazos. The sea was rough, and before the steamer could be fastened to the vessel, she caught a part of her rigging; a large piece of timber was broken off, and fell on him, fracturing his skull and producing death in a short time.

not of his efforts; newsletter, 7, 20

SLIDE:

(landing-area)

Rather than march up Taylor's old road to Ft. Texas, the soldiers went down the outer-bank to the mouth of the Rio Grande, and went by steam-ship to Matamoros. After a week at Matamoros, they were assigned to transport supplies upstream to Camargo, ~~to supply Taylor's army~~. And so they set out...with a caravan of 65 wagons, for their destination which was ^{about 100} ~~200~~ miles away. It was hot and dusty, with only bad water to drink, and ^{there was a} ~~the~~ constant fear of attack by bandits or Indians. Members of another company "vomited and frothed at the mouth" after drinking water from "frog ponds" along the way.

They stopped at a ranch for food, and the following memorable event took place:

Some of our officers ordered some corn bread...and a young lassie of about 16 commenced her labors. While she was dividing the dough into the proper sized parcels, she ran her hand under her arm-pit, scratched out an insect, killed it, and continued on in her bread making.

After two weeks at Camargo, the Company set out, with a supply-train of 106 wagons, for Monterey. A number of them were too sick to travel, and were left behind in camp. There, John

Ledford died on April 18, George Miller on the 25th, and David Poor on the 26th, just as the Company was returning. The cause of death...was typhoid fever. Miller was from Orange Co., but the other two were from Yancey.

The Company seems to have shuttled back-and-forth between Camargo and the front, hauling supplies to Taylor's army. Disease again took its toll: Thomas Butler^{died} on May 31 at Saltillo; George Hensley on June 8 at Buena Vista; Lignal Jones on July 13 at Saltillo; Galen Maney on Aug. 5 at Saltillo; and Silas Green on Aug. 25 at Saltillo. A number of others, apparently no longer able to perform military duty, were discharged and sent home. A large percentage of them died, somewhere on the way.

Silas Green's family, by the way, is one of the few in the Valley, which remembers their ancestor's service in the War. He left a small son, Silas Jr., who lived until 1926. Among Jr.'s children was Mrs. Lyda Woody (of Spruce Pine)...and Fred Greene, now aged 84, of Mine Creek. Fred remembers hearing that his grandfather "was buried at sea during the war," but he did not know what war, or what sea. (The story is problematic, by the way, since Grandpa died several hundred miles from the Gulf.)

As far as I can determine, there are no military cemeteries in which soldiers in Taylor's army were buried. The only one in all Mexico...is from Gen. Scott's campaign in the south. It is in Mexico City, and is a mass grave of some 700 unknowns. Taylor's men lie in unmarked graves, with no records of specific location. And there are hair-raising accounts of desecration of corpses, and killing of the wounded by Mexican troops.

On Aug. 15, there was a near-riot in the camp of the N.C. Company, aided by soldiers from Va. and Miss. The commanding Colonel of the N.C. Regiment...was named Robert Paine, and he was

a strict disciplinarian. There was rock-throwing ^{and} threats...and the Col. defended himself by shooting one of the troublesome soldiers. The next day, various officers, Tilmon Blalock among them, signed a petition asking Paine to resign. The commanding general, however, put pressure on the signers to retract, and many of them did. Apparently, as a consequence of this action, Blalock resigned as Captain on Aug, 31, and set out for Yancey County.

Blalock's actions were ~~apparently~~ not well received by the folks back home. Thus, the Rev. Jehu Patterson writes to Lt. Keener, who is still in Mexico (April, 1848):

Be a good soldier, and try to live above suspicion, that you may get an honorable discharge, and return home where you will receive the praise due to a faithful (soldier); not like the most of those who have come home out of your Company. For be ye well assured, that very few men speak in the praise of the two ^{officers} Cols. that went from here, and I do not think that they ever will regain their lost reputations in the sight of the good people of old Yancey; although Blalock is acting as Deputy Sheriff...and A.F. Keith as Constable...not much to the satisfaction of the people, I can tell you!

Alfred Keith, another of the brothers, was a Lieut. in the Company, and had also signed the complaint against his superior officer. He also left the regiment, apparently under pressure.

The regiment then elected a new Captain in the person of Jacob Constable. My guess is that he was actually from Tenn., as John Keener seems to have been.

The turning-point of the War in the north..was the terrible battle of Buena Vista, on Sept. 23-24. The Mexicans, vastly superior in numbers, fought valiantly to dislodge Taylor's army from high ground, but finally withdrew. The N.C. troops were again in the supply-column, rather than in actual combat. Blalock, who named his daughter for the battle, was now well on his way back

to N.C.

SLIDE: Map of Gen. Scott's operations.

A few words must now be said about the war in the south, which led to the surrender of Mexico. Scott's army ^{left the Rio Grande and} settled at Tampico (Nov., 1846); then, moved against Vera Cruz by sea, where a terrible battle was fought (March, 1847); and then, began to move toward Mexico City. In the final drive, some North Carolinians were involved, and this time in battle.

Not only was there a volunteer regiment, part of Taylor's army which we have been discussing all along...but also President Polk had called for two companies to join the regular army, as part of the 12th infantry. They came mostly from the eastern part of the State, but some of them were from Lincoln County. There was also a company in the Third Dragoons, from Mecklenburg Co. They arrived in time for the final push, in August, 1847...many of them exhausted from marching and from dysentery. After a number of hard-fought battles, Mexico City surrendered in September. After negotiations about the boundary, and terms for the purchase of New Mexico and California, a treaty of peace was declared on June 19, 1848.

SLIDE: Painting of Gen. Scott in Mexico City.

Meanwhile, back in the north, Taylor's army was in camp, with the N.C. regiment keeping it supplied. Sgt. Keener's Morning Report Book, which has also survived, gives us regular status reports. For example, on April 14, 1848, at Buena Vista, 50 Yancey men were available for duty, 6 were sick, and 8 were under arrest.

Once the treaty was signed, the regiment left for the coast. They sailed from the Brazos for New Orleans on June 28. Here, ^{one had} ~~there~~ was an opportunity to see the sights, talk to soldiers from other

and units, ^{and} buy some stylish clothing for the trip home. (Keener tells us that he bought such an outfit, and ^{an} a trunk for his possessions). It was also a good opportunity to lose the land that had been promised to you. One of the inducements to enlist, was that ~~that~~ ~~been that~~ you would be given 160 acres of land in the West. Not many of the soldiers ~~w~~er expected to go out there and live, so they were more interested in the cash-alternative: \$100.00, payable in 10 years with 6 percent interest. But alas, 10 years seemed a long way off...especially if the pleasures of New Orleans awaited, or if you wanted money for your struggling family back home. Realizing this, land-speculators descended like vultures, offering the soldiers \$50.00 or less for their claim...and to most of them, it seemed like a good deal.

Finally, it came time for the trip home. Keener (and perhaps the others in his company) sailed on the 10th of July, and landed at Smithville, N.C. (Ft. Johnston) 14 days later. Here, they were officially mustered-out of the service. The remaining task... was to get back to Yancey County. Would one have to walk most of the way, as they had done at enlistment? It was more difficult now, with many of them sick or weakened. An alternative was provided. They sailed to Charleston, S.C., from which they could travel by rail at least as far as Columbia, if not to Greenville. Keener concludes his diary by remarking: "Landed at home on the 14th of August, 1848."

County Historical Society To Meet

The Mitchell County Historical Society will meet on Saturday evening, March 26th at 7:30 p.m., in the Courthouse Annex Building (County Commissioners Board Room) in Bakersville. The public is cordially welcomed to attend.

The election of officers will take place, and an update of local history projects recently undertaken will be a part of the meeting's business agenda. Following the business, the meeting will feature special guest speaker, Dr. Lloyd Bailey, a Yancey County native and author of numerous local history articles dealing with the history of the Toe River Valley. For the program presentation, Dr. Bailey's topic will be: "Soldiers from the Toe River Valley in the War with Mexico, 1847-1848." This slide presentation, with Dr. Bailey narrating, will highlight the company of soldiers who assembled in Bakersville and Burnsville and marched off to participate in their country's first foreign war.

The story of their hardships, sickness, deaths, and return home will be reconstructed from letters, newspaper articles, documents kept by a Captain, and a diary which miraculously survived. The program will allow

for public questions and comments, and will conclude with the serving of light refreshments.

For more information about the Mitchell County Historical Society, call 765-4866 or your local public library.

Yancey History Annual Meeting

Yancey
Journal
12/26/
1985

The Annual Meeting of the Yancey History Association will be held on Sunday afternoon, January 26, 1986, at the Yancey County Public Library in Burnsville.

A 2 p.m. Business Meeting will be held for the members and for public which is cor-

dially invited to attend. The program, "The Toe River Valley & The War With Mexico", will be a slide presentation narrated by Dr. Lloyd Bailey. Plan now to attend this important Annual Meeting of the Yancey History Association.