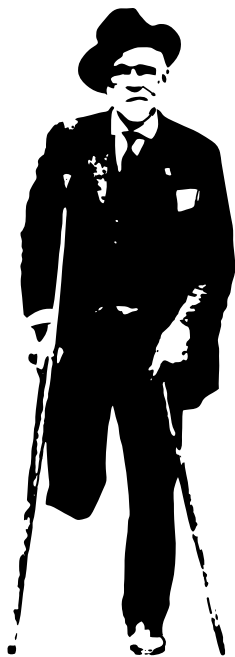


GEORGE RABB

The CIVIL WAR MEMOIR
of a CATAWBA COUNTY TAR HEEL



Edited by REBECCA IKERD ALGHRARY
with a foreword by MICHAEL HILL

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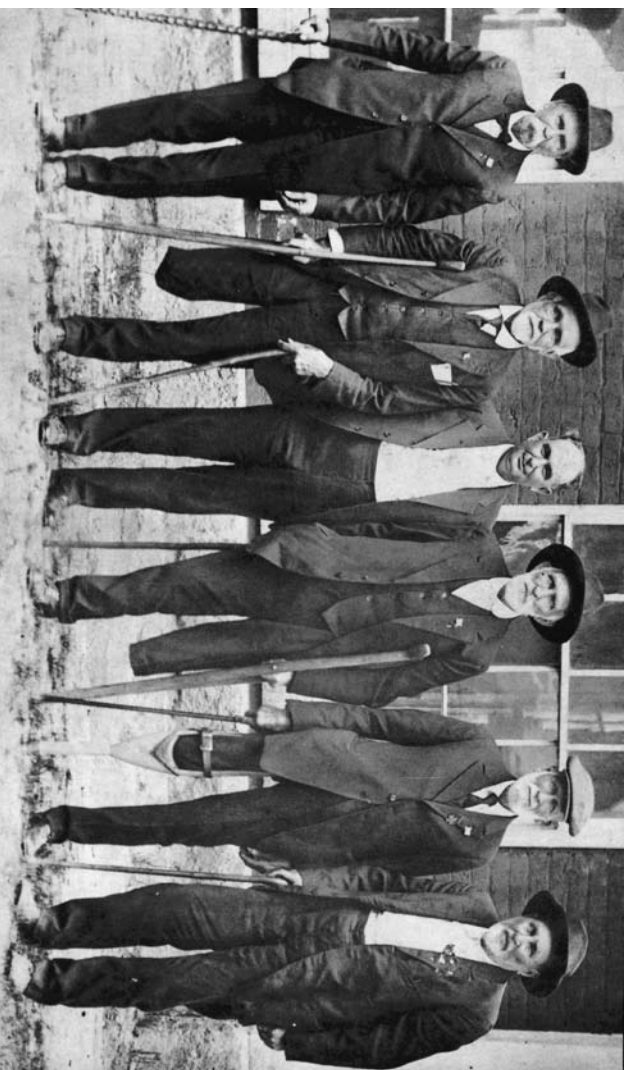
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FOREWORD

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 Arnolds, 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.)

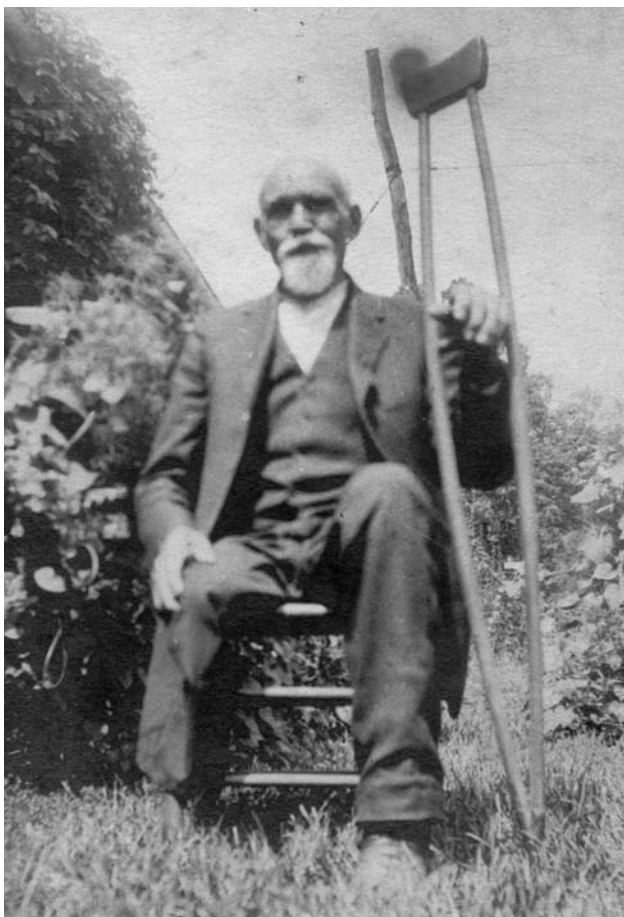
PREFACE

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."

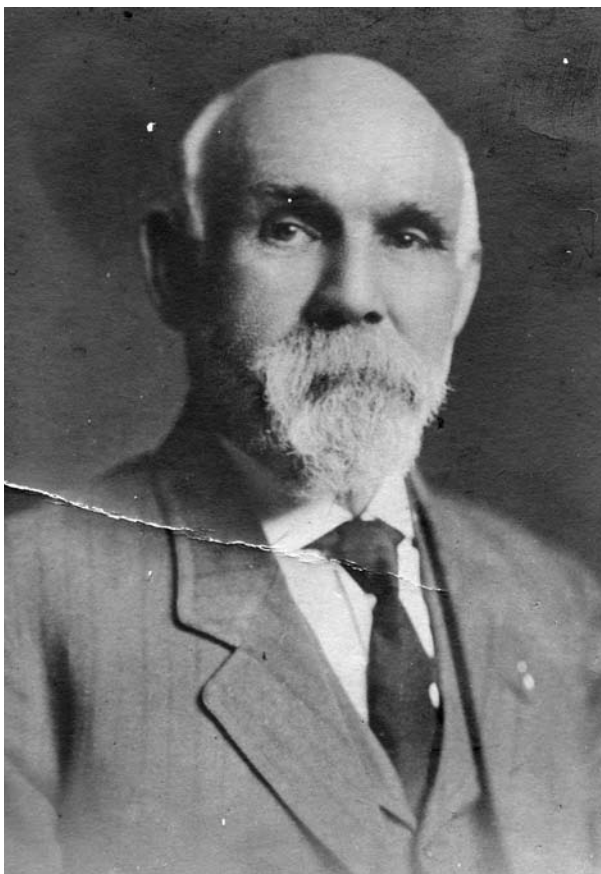
Also in that same room sat an old pigeon-hole desk, or secretary. I loved to play at the desk and pretend I was working in a post office. Each little cubby hole was the perfect place to sort my papers and games. There were still a few papers in the pigeon-holes, but I paid little attention to them. Likely 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.



*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.

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