

## Between Fort Mill and Rock Hill

# Is There a Confederate Cannon

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Special to The State

FORT MILL—A Confederate cannon rumored to be buried in the sand and silt of the Catawba River between Fort Mill and Rock Hill has stirred up a controversy in the town of Fort Mill.

It all began when Lonnie E. Key, proprietor of a combination grocery store and service station in Leslie, reported to the Fort Mill Chamber of Commerce he had seen the cannon in 1928.

Key, an avid fisherman, said he was fishing near the railroad crossing at historic Nation's Ford when he saw an object protruding from the water, which was extremely low at that time.

"I drew my boat near and moored it to what proved to be the muzzle of a cannon," Key said.

"I could see it was on a carriage and was resting right side up with the muzzle pointing up the river. I took my pocket knife and scraped away at the sediment encrusted upon the collar. Underneath the surface was shiny and looked like brass. The knife slipped out of my hand and fell into the barrel. I have never seen the cannon since that day but I could still take you within 50 feet of it. I would know the position by the location of rocks in the water."

After Key's story appeared in a local paper half of the town went over on the river to look for the cannon and the other half stayed home to scoff.

Members of the Chamber of Commerce were among those looking. The Chamber met last April and gave unanimous approval to back a search for the relic.

Since the chamber's action at least 20 persons have reported sighting the cannon (some report seeing two) to the chamber's committee, headed by Dr. Calvin Rea. The latest report came from a 23-year-old Fort Mill man who claims to have discovered the location Saturday, May 11. "There can be no doubt it was a cannon. I could feel the rifling inside the barrel. I used some dynamite to blast away some of the sand and silt that was partially covering it and slightly moved the cannon," the man told Rea. "If you are ready I'll take

## in the Catawba?

you over there right now and show you the location," he added.

Rea told him he couldn't get away at the present but if he was available they would go Sunday and if the cannon was located he would receive a \$25 reward. Sunday Rea was waiting with 15 chamber members and interested persons, but the man failed to show.

The search made by the chamber is only one of many that have been made in the area for the legendary cannon.

Some 60 or more years ago, a Yankee veteran wrote Capt. Samuel White, the founder of Springs Mills, and told him he was among the Federal troops who dumped the cannons into the river on April 19, 1865. White, who was engaged in the building of a Confederate Memorial Park, took a group of veterans and young men along and made a search but failed to locate the cannon.

The cannons were reportedly captured and dumped into the river by members of the 12th Ohio Cavalry during the last skirmish of the Civil War.

Major E. C. Moderwell and 250 Yankee soldiers reportedly took the 60 Confederate soldiers by surprise who were

guarding the bridge of the Charlotte and South Carolina railway and captured the garrison without firing a shot. The bridge was soaked with oil and gunpowder and set afire.

Aunt Rhoda, one of the slaves at the Alexander Fewell plantation, saw the flames

and said, "At first we thought God had sent de Sun down on top of the bridge, but twan't long fo' we realized that it was nothing more dan dose devilish Yankees ablazing dat bridge."

A group of Confederate soldiers under the command of General Samuel F. Ferguson

had a rumor that the Yankees were going for the bridge and set out from Charlotte to prevent it but arrived too late.

However the Yankees were still there when they arrived and a two-hour skirmish took place in which at least one Confederate soldier was mortally wounded.

He was taken to the A. E. Hutchinson home on Nation Ford and laid on the porch until he died. His bloodstains remained until the house was torn down some years ago.

Before the Yankees withdrew they took the rifles from the garrison and broke them

into pieces over the railroad track. The two captured cannons were damaged as much as possible and thrown into the river.

After the Yankees left a train came down from Charlotte and an officer bearing a white flag told the man Lee had surrendered April 9.

## Fort Mill Chamber of Commerce seeks old cannon, Confederate War relic

Herald: March 30, 1963

FORT MILL — A Confederate cannon lying buried in the silt and sand of the Catawba River for nearly a century will be the object of a search conducted by the Fort Mill Chamber of Commerce this summer.

The Chamber has appropriated funds for the search on the basis of a story told by a grocery store operator Lonnie E. Keys of Leslie.

Keys claimed to have seen the cannon in 1928. "At the time the water was very low" Keys said. "I was fishing in the vicinity and saw an object protruding from the water. I drew close to the cannon and tied my boat to the barrel. It was encrusted with silt and rust. I took out my fishing knife and scraped away the rust. Underneath the surface was shiny and had a brassy color. It looked to be made of brass or copper and was on a carriage. The knife slipped

out of my hand and fell in the barrel.

"I haven't seen it since that time but I could take you within 50 feet of it and if the floodgates of the dam were closed I believe you would be able to walk out to the spot."

The cannon was reportedly captured and thrown into the river by the 12th Ohio Cavalry during the last skirmish of the Civil War.

At dawn on the morning of April 19, 1865, 250 men under the command of Major E. C. Moderwell set out to destroy the bridge of the Charlotte and South Carolina Railroad over the Catawba River. The bridge was guarded by 60 Confederate soldiers and a cannon.

The Southern guards were taken by surprise and the bridge soaked with oil and gunpowder and set afire.

Aunt Rhoda, one of the slaves of the Alexander Fewell plantation saw the flames and said "At first

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we thought God had sent down the Sun on top of that bridge but twan't long before we found out that it was nothing but the devilry of those Yankees a-blazing that bridge".

A force of Confederates under the command of Brig. Gen. Samuel F. Ferguson heard a rumor that the Yankees were attempting to destroy the bridge and set out from Charlotte to try to prevent it but arrived too late.

However the Yankees were still there when Ferguson's men including two South Carolina companies arrived.

The Northern forces had mounted the captured cannon on a hill-top on the Rock Hill side of the river. A two hour skirmish took place and at least one Confederate soldier was mortally wounded.

He was taken to Captain A. E. Hutchinson's home on Nations Ford and lay on the porch until he died. His bloodstains remained on the porch until the house was torn down some years ago.

Before the Yankees withdrew they took the muskets of the garrison and broke them into pieces on the railroad tracks. The cannon was damaged as much as possible and thrown into the river.

It was the last battle of the Civil War. After the Yankees left, a train came down from Charlotte and an officer bearing a white flag told the men Lee had surrendered on April 9th.

Some years later a Yankee soldier wrote to a Capt. White of Fort Mill and told him about the cannon. A large group of veterans and young men tried to find it but failed.

The Fort Mill Chamber of Commerce plans to send skin divers in search of it as soon as the weather is warm enough. Keys will show them the spot.

Rock Hill, S.C. - Stoneman's Raid