

The Campaign Trail

William S. Battle, part owner of the cotton mill in Rocky Mount, NC, was prominent in Nash and Edgecombe counties, particularly after the Civil War. He was running for the legislature in Edgecombe Co. and Hardy Flowers, an uneducated local man, was his opponent. The local farmers had gathered around a crude platform to listen to the candidates campaign for their votes.

The crowd cheered when Mr. Battle arrived, and again when he finished his speech. Then it was Mr. Flowers's turn. He stood up, spit a stream of tobacco juice to the side, and said, "Well, boys, we have just hearn the finest speech ever made in this here county, for Mr. Battle is a fine man—the finest man in this county. But Mr. Battle don't live like we'uns does. He lives in a fine house and lives fine, and he don't know how we'uns live or what we'uns need.

"Now look at that carriage Mr. Battle rides in with them fine horses and one colored man to drive him and another to help him in and out. I come here on that mule tied to that sapling over there, just like we'uns all come.

"Look at that hat Mr. Battle wears. That is a beaver hat. It come from Europe, cause there ain't no hat fitten for Mr. Battle's head in this county. My hat is a old coonskin cap. I treed the coon, skinned him, and my wife made the cap.

"That coat Mr. Battle got on is a broadcloth coat that come from Paris. My coat—my wife spun the yarn, made the cloth and the coat, just like we'uns all wear.

"Them boots Mr. Battle has on come from Europe, too. My boots—my old brindle cow broke her leg I skinned her,

tanned the hide, and old man Brown by Otter's Creek made the boots.

"I tell you, Mr. Battle is a good man, a fine man, but he don't live like we'uns and he is just too danged fine to represent us.

"Now I have saved this about Mr. Battle for the last. When Mr. Battle gets ready to go to bed at night, he don't go out under the firmament, look up at the stars and wets on the ground. He uses a china mug."

Mr. Flowers defeated Mr. Battle in the election.

In an obituary, William S. Battle, who died in 1915 at the age of 92, was called The Grand Old Man of Edgecombe." He was a member of the State Convention in 1861 that adopted the ordinance of secession.

"Four minutes before he died the nurse finished giving him some nourishment. As she desisted, with a smile on his face he said 'Thank you.'

"He once owned the cotton mills at Rocky Mount. In 1869 these mills were destroyed by fire. His first thought was of the employees. He went to the store and gave instructions to let each family have so much meat and bread according to the size of the family and charge it all to him. ...

"... It is gratifying to the heart to chronicle that the citizens of Tarboro as a mark of respect and esteem closed all places of business this afternoon while the funeral service took place at Calvary church, a spacious sanctuary filled with esteeming, aye even venerating friends.

"A cedar of Lebanon has fallen, but bore not a scar or blemish and it was very near the king of the grove."

[Kemp Battle, once president of the University of NC at Chapel Hill, told the story in one of his classes in the early 1900s. "In Olde Edgecombe", *Daily Southerner* (Tarboro), October 3, 1968.]

Obituary: Unknown paper, Nov. 11, 1913]

[Barring, Cont. From P. 17]



were a-wonderin' where he would begin, he got up and spoke a little speech, asking us to excuse him for havin' let his temper git the better of him, saying that it should never happen agin."

"Then you didn't bar him out after all," said Bob.

"Bar him out! Why, Tom and Josh never throwed spit-balls after

that. They were so skeered of lettin' the master's temper git the better of him."

[Taken from *The Southern Bivouac*: Basil W. Duke and R. W. Knott, eds. *The Southern Bivouac*, a monthly literary and historical magazine, was a project of the Southern Historical Association. In its earlier years, it was devoted to the publication of papers on the Civil War, but in 1885, with new editors, it became much more general. It was not published after 1887.]

Guano.

20 tons Mexican Guano,
For sale by W.H. Willard.
Washington, N.C.,
November 17, 1856

Salt.

1000 Sacks Liverpool Ground Salt.
For sale by W.H. Willard.
Washington, N.C.,
November 17, 1856

Cantwell's Justice,

JUST RECEIVED.

And for sale by Geo. Howard, Tarboro'.
[Tarboro Southerner, Jan. 1857]