

Georgetown County Historical Society

During the occupation of Union forces during the War Between the States, the Winyah Indigo Society Hall was used as a hospital and recuperation center for Union soldiers. Many valuable books and other items were stolen and over time a few of them have been found and made their way back home. One such relic is a letter from President George Washington to the Winyah Indigo Society thanking them for their hospitality during his recent visit in the Spring of 1791. A news story in the Georgetown American of June 13, 1883 traces the route taken by this letter and how it was returned.

The letter was taken by a private soldier, a German, who subsequently sold it to Captain Leonard of the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Volunteers who began occupation on March 1, 1865. The letter came into the possession of Lieutenant W.C. Manning, who was at the time a Major of Volunteers in the Union army stationed at Savannah, Georgia. He was in command of Fort Pulaski when a contingent of Georgetown citizens were confined there as prisoners, including Judge A.G. McGrath, Judge Campbell, Mr. Selden, Mr. Hunter and Mr. Trenholm (possibly George Trenholm who had been Treasurer of the Confederate States of America) and others.

The June, 1883 article states of Lt. Manning, "His conduct and treatment of these gentlemen was so uniformly courteous and considerate that the most friendly relations were established between the gallant soldier and his prisoners which have ever since been maintained. It was prompted by these feelings that Lt. Manning, now in the regular service, wrote to Judge Magrath with a view of enlisting his offices in effecting a restoration of the valuable letter to its rightful owners." In compliance with Lt. Manning's request, Judge Magrath communicated with the Honorable Richard Dozier, now President of the Winyah Indigo Society. A previous attempt by Lt. Manning to restore the letter had been made to the "officials of the Radical regime" and was informed by them that the society was defunct and that few of its members were of respectable social standing.

The following is a copy of the correspondence from Lt. Manning:

Headquarters Dept of the Missouri  
Office of the General General Instructor of Musketry  
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas  
May 19, 1883  
Hon. Richard Dozier, Georgetown, SC

Sir, In pursuance of my correspondence with Hon. A.G. Magrath of Charleston, who has kindly aided me in so doing, I take a great pleasure in restoring to the Winyah Indigo Society the autographed letter of General Washington addressed "to the Inhabitants of Georgetown and of its vicinity." Which was taken from its library, as I was informed, by a private soldier – a German – sometime in 1864. I obtained it from an officer of the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Vols. In 1865 with the intention of restoring it to the Society as soon as political and social order should be resumed, and have previously made two efforts to do so, without success, in letters to the Mayor of Georgetown written Feby. 24. 1870 and Feby. 21, 1871.

I am  
Very Respectfully,  
Your Obedient Servant,  
W.C. Manning,  
1<sup>st</sup>. Lt. 23d Infantry U.S.A.

The Washington Letter was received by Mr. Dozier on June 8, 1883. Today, the original letter is in safekeeping and a copy of the letter is on display in the Winyah Indigo Society Hall.