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ADDRESS

of

STATE HISTORIAN OF GEORGIA

Hon. Lucian Lamar Knight

IN THE STATE CAPITOL

NOVEMBER 25th, 1916

ON THE OCCASION OF THE

PRESENTATION

By

MRS. RICHARD PLEASANTON BROOKS, Regent

Through the

PIEDMONT CONTINENTAL CHAPTER

of the

DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

of Atlanta, Georgia

of an Oil Painting Representing

"Nancy Hart Capturing The Tories"

In Georgia

During the American Revolution

1779

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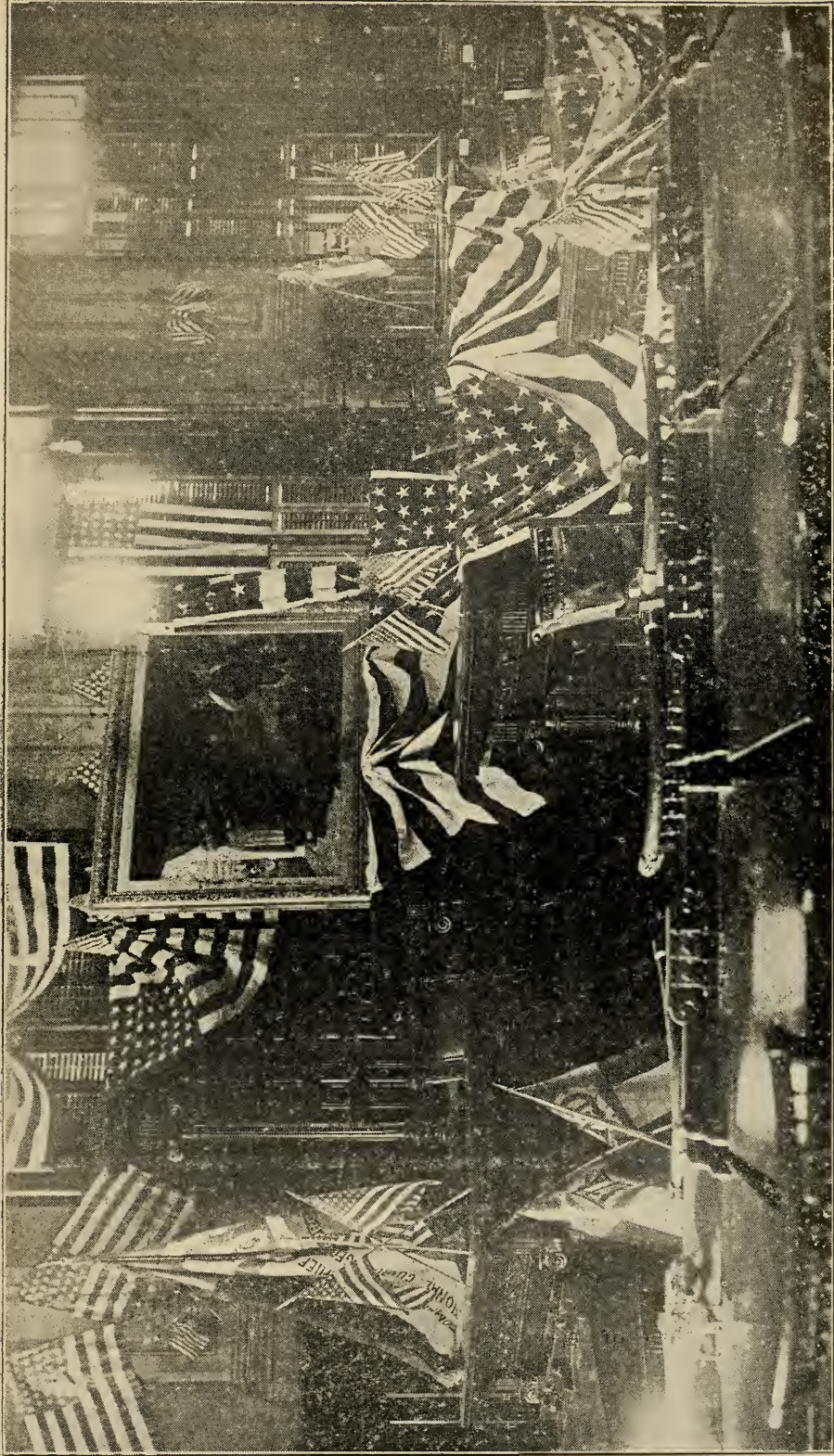
This address is published in appreciation of the work of the Honorary Life Regent, Mrs. Richard P. Brooks, for the Piedmont Continental Chapter, Daughter of the American Revolution, and her untiring efforts for all National and State D. A. R. patriotic work.



Copyright applied for by Mrs. Minnie E. Hogan, Regent
of the Piedmont Continental Chapter D. A. R., February
13th, 1917.

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NANCY HART'S HEROIC EXPLOIT.

Full text of an address delivered in the Georgia House of Representatives, November 25, 1916, when a memorial picture of Nancy Hart, was unveiled by the Piedmont Continental Chapter, D. A. R., Mrs. R. P. Brooks, regent and donor.

Madame Regent, Daughters of the American Revolution,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

On the dome of this capitol, emblematic of Georgia's governing genius, stands the statue of a woman. Lifted above the hurrying crowds which throng our streets, that symbolic figure maintains its serene poise in the chastened silence of a heavenly ether. To the wise and to the simple, to the erudite scholar and to the unlettered rustic, it speaks a message which all interpret alike—namely this: that the hand which trains the childhood of our state lifts its torch of liberty aloft and that she who rocks the cradle rules the commonwealth.

These commemorative exercises, held in Georgia's Hall of Representatives, lay striking emphasis upon two distinct but kindred lines of thought: first, the devotion of our noble women to the state; and, second, the debt of gratitude which Georgia owes to her patriotic women. Each of these propositions is rich in its suggestiveness. Beginning with the times of Nancy Hart, and coming on down through the iron days of the sixties, even to this god hour, Georgia's crowning glory has been her Spartan womanhood. In every crisis of her history, the patriotism of her daughters has been as lofty, as resplendant and as steadfast as a star; and to all the assembled states I issue this challenge: "Discount them if you will but match them if you can."

More even than to her gallant sons who, in this chamber of debate, have shaped her laws, is Georgia indebted to her daughters. Nor is this the language of absequious compliment; for, deeper than statutory enactments, more binding than legal restraints, the principles which our women have inculcated at the home fireside lie at the very roots of our civic life, and upon these basic principles the whole fabric of our government rests. The quickening interest

which this generation has come to feel in the matchless story of our State is due to the unwearied zeal with which these splendid women have toiled and sacrificed to rescue Georgia's fading memories. With the chisel of Old Mortality, they have been carving monuments and deepening epitaphs all over our State. Nor does this labor of love any longer provoke, as it once did, an irreverent sneer; for we have come to realize that the greatest thing in this universe is sentiment.

These women have not forgotten the hallowed forms which lie sleeping in our silent hills. They have taught us to remember those who are gone—in whose spectral wake we, too, must follow soon. They have sown the State with tablets, from Rabun Gap to Tybee Light. They have marked the heroic fields and the high places of our state. Love's labor has not been lost. Thanks to them a forgotten Georgia is once more remembered. Thanks to them a dead Georgia has come back again to life; and, knowing the old State better, we have learned to love her more, not only for her grand old hills but for her grander history. This is what you have done for Georgia. We are richer, prouder, happier, as a people, for what you have shown us of ourselves.

Nor is this hall an inappropriate place to recount what Georgia has done for her women. The oldest female college in existence was chartered by the Legislature of this State in 1836, when Wesleyan Female College at Macon came to its birth. It pioneered the way for Vassar, for Wellesley, and for Smith, proclaimed woman's intellectual emancipation, struck the shackles from her brain, and registered a new era in the history of freedom. When all other states were silent, Georgia said to her women: "you, too, have a mind. You are a man's help-meet; you were made from a rib in his side; and, if not his equal, you are at least his equivalent." In 1906, a woman became Georgia's State librarian. It was only last year that women were admitted to practice law in the courts of Georgia. Equal suffrage is still delayed. It may or it may not come. I am neither its propagandist nor its prophet. But when I cast my eyes abroad and see the forces which are gathering on the nation's horizon; when I read that for the first time in American history a woman has been elected to Congress; when

I see what equal suffrage has done for temperance, for child labor, for social betterment, and for Democratic victory, I think I can see it coming, and coming fast.

It is not the least of your services to us nor the smallest of our obligations to you that, while teaching us to reverence the sacred symbolism of our country's flag, you have taught us first of all to venerate and to cherish, to safeguard and to preserve the history of our own state. The germ of patriotism is the love of home. I have no faith in the Americanism which detaches itself from locality—which professes to know no North, no South, no East, no West. I abhor a sectionalism which is sinister but I cherish a sectionalism which is patriotic—which savors of the soil—which enriches the Union with its local color, with its individual flavor of achievement—whose spirit is to the manner born. When the soldier of the legion lay dying in Algiers, it was not the country spread out upon the map to which his feverish fancy wandered, but the vine-clad hills of Biggen on the Rhine. Home is what Georgia spells to me. This is the picture which she holds before my eyes—this the perfume which she throws around my heart, sweeter than all the spices of Arabia. The man who does not love his state, is not the proper guardian of his country's honor; he is no friend to its flag; and, when danger threatens, he will never heed its bugle call to battle. Secession is dead. This nation has naught to fear from local patriotism. Show me the man who loves Georgia, whose heart is anchored to these red old hills, and I will show you one to whom this republic can pin its faith, and in whose loyalty our ship of state will find an anchor in the storm.

I have no patience with the cant which in an age of progress deems it a heresy and a sin to look backward. Whatever we are or have this day we owe to those who have gone before us. The folly or the wisdom of looking backward depends entirely upon its spirit. God help us, if the time ever comes when we are too wise in our own conceit, or too drunk with the lust of power, or too haughty with the pride of gold, to sit at the feet of our fathers. History is the most ennobling of sciences. It is the story of man. We cannot reverently scan its pages without receiving an access of patriotism, a baptism of fire, a new incentive to exertion.

Besides telling us what we need to know, it better fits us to act in the Living Present—to put our visions into deeds. History is not a fool's paradise. It is a wise man's chart and compass. There is safety in its beacon lights—sure anchorage in its fixed stars. Woe to that state or nation which disregards its divine thunders. In an age of material pomp, let us not forget Thebes and Nineveh and Babylon; and let each morning sun remind us that we are unworthy of a future if we are recreant to a past.

Georgia's history from first to last—from the gentle and humane Oglethorpe down to the last Confederate governor who today fills her executive chair—blessings upon his gray hairs! Georgia's whole history, I say, has been a record of glory, which her children need to study and which the world ought to know. On the map of our state there are one hundred and fifty-two counties only one of which was named for a woman. But her fame is an evergreen of immortality, plucked from the tree of life,—a gift of the gods which the world will not willingly let die—ungainly, unlettered, homely but heroic Nancy Hart. Madame regent, to you all honor. We divide with you this day the homage which our proud hearts pay to her. What a splendid gift to our state, this memorial which calls our war-queen back from the dead and makes her live again in the glowing colors of the artist. Already I can see the youth of our state drinking in its lessons; already I can feel an electrical influence emanating from this picture to all the four corners of our state. It will make for a nobler and a better Georgia. There will not be a hamlet of the mountains to which it will not reach. For the inspiration of so beautiful a thought—born of your own loyal and loving heart—for the liberality of purse, for the expenditure of time, for the patient care required in the execution of its details, Georgia thanks you, and will hold you in her heart's core. Henceforth, upon the walls of her capitol your service and your name will be linked with Nancy Hart's; and for every proud recollection of her there will be a tender thought of you.

Nancy Hart's place in history is fixed. Two centuries have sufficed to establish this fact. The story of her thrilling exploit is neither myth nor fable; and she bids an eternal defiance to the higher critics. But for much of her prestige

in the war department she was indebted to an unheroic blemish which would have kept Helen of Troy safe in Sparta, prevented the Trojan war, and robbed the classic world of Homer's Iliad. It would likewise have destroyed the Biblical legend of Queen Esther and spoiled the pathetic romance of Mary Queen of Scots. She was afflicted with what the doctors call "Astigmatism;" but, in the plain vernacular, she was cross-eyed. Some one has said that if Cleopatra's nose had been slightly tilted it would have changed the whole countenance of mediaeval times. It sounds suspiciously like Douglas Jerrold. We cannot doubt that if "the star-eyed sorceress of the Nile" had been cross-eyed, Mark Antony would never have lost the Roman world; and equally is it true that unless our Georgia heroine had been cross-eyed she could never have held six men at bay with an old blunderbus which might have hung fire when she dared to shoot.

There is abundant proof of the fact that Mrs. Hart was not a belle of the ball. In an old newspaper published at Milledgeville in 1825, I have found this somewhat grandiloquent description of her personal attributes: "Nancy Hart, with her husband, settled before the Revolutionary struggle a few miles above the ford on Broad River, known by the name of Fishdam Ford, in Elbert County, at the bend of the river, near a very extensive-canebrake. An apple orchard still remains to point out the spot. In altitude, Mrs. Hart was almost Patagonian, remarkably well-limbed and muscular, and marked by nature with prominent features. She possessed none of those graces of motion which a poetical eye might see in the heave of the ocean wave or in the change of the summer cloud; nor did her cheeks—I will not speak of her nose—exhibit the rosy tints which dwell on the brow of the evening or play on the gilded bow. No one claims for her throat that it was lined with fiddle-strings. That dreadful scourge of beauty, the small-pox, had set its seal upon her face. She was called a hard swearer, was cross-eyed and cross-grained, but was nevertheless a sharp-shooter. Nothing was more common than to see her in full pursuit of the stag. The huge antlers which hung around her cabin, or upheld her trusty gun, gave proof of her skill in gunnery; and the white comb, drained

of its honey and hung up for ornament, testified to her powers in bee finding. Many bear witness to her magical art in the mazes of cookery, for she was able to prepare a pumpkin in as many ways as there are days in the week. She was extensively known and employed for her knowledge in the treatment of various kinds of ailments. But her skill took an even wider range, for the fact is well known that she held a tract of land by the safe tenure of a first survey, which she made on the Sabbath, hatchet in hand." It is quite evident from this account that, if Nancy Hart did not do the voting for her family, she was the militant prototype, in an eighteenth century time and in a Carrie Nation manner, of ballot reform. She may have lacked beauty; but she possessed "captivating charms," and she knew how to bring even a Tory to his knees.

It was during the troublous days of Toryism in upper Georgia that Nancy Hart performed the courageous feat which has since carried her name to the ends of Christendom. There is perhaps no exploit in our annals richer in the thrilling elements of the drama. It was staged in a little cabin of the backwoods. Both Savannah and Augusta had become the strongholds of the British; and all the frontier had commenced to swam with Tories. Preparatory to waging warfare against these scalawags of the Revolution, General Elijah Clarke had transported most of the women and children of the Broad River settlement to a secure asylum beyond the Blue Ridge mountains. But Nancy Hart had not traveled in the wake of the noted rifleman. There was work for her at home.

Given to bloody deeds of violence as the Tories were, it seemed like the irony of fate for these desperadoes to be held up by a petticoat. Stupefied with astonishment, they were like helpless babes in the wood as they stood before the flashing eyes of this war-shod Diana of the forest. Never before had they looked into the barrel of an old shot-gun behind which glared such an infernal pair of optics. If red-hot coals had risen up from the ground underneath and taken the place of eye-balls, they could not have flashed more defiantly the brimstone message of a lower world. Tradition says that when she seized her gun she cocked it with "a blazing oath." It was undeniably an embarrassing

moment. Each member of the squad thought in his bewilderment that she was aiming her buckshot at him, and, since discretion was the better part of valor, he decided to stand pat. At last, however, one of them did move. But he never moved again. Recovering from his paralytic spell, he ventured forward to wrest the weapon from her hand. But, quick as lightning, she pulled the trigger. "Old Bess" went off with a bang. He received the leaden charge into his bosom and fell lifeless upon the floor. Before another member of the party could advance, she had snatched another musket from her daughter's hand, and squared herself for action. It was evident at this stage of the game that the lady of the house knew how to shoot, straight to the mark.

Succor now arrived. Captain Hart, having learned of the visit of the Tories, appeared upon the door-step in good time to see his wife drilling the squad in defensive tactics. But he reached the house none too soon. Another moment might have changed the whole aspect of things. Well, too, it was that he brought substantial re-enforcements. With the aid of stout muscles, the men were soon made prisoners; the entire bunch was captured; and in less than half an hour five Tories were dangling in mid-air to the tune of "Yankee Doodle."

But this bold capture was not effected without cunning strategy on the part of Nancy Hart. It required not only courage but presence of mind, quick-wittedness and a level head. Under the guise of feminine simplicity, she induced the Tories to believe that she was an easy mark. The first demand of the visitors was for something to appease the pangs of hunger. Breakfast had already been served. Captain Hart had rejoined his comrades of the frontier guard, stationed some distance off. But she dropped her work instantly to oblige her guests. She even admonished her children to wait upon the gentlemen. Not by the least token did she exhibit the weakness of fear or betray the stratagem which she expected to employ. Suspicion was completely allayed. On came the repast. Venison, hoe-cake, fresh honey-comb, and pumpkin pie. Cut of a jug of corn-liquor, which one of them brought along, Nancy herself drank, saying: "I'll take a swig with you, if it kills every cow on the island." Finally, when the Tories, arms stacked, were be-

ginning, like Jack Falstaff, "to take their ease in their inn." all bunched together at the table, she snatched an old fowling-piece from the wall and threatened to blow out the brains of the first man who offered to rise or to taste a mouthful of food. The tables were turned. Swifter change was never wrought, even by the magic "Presto" of the Arabian Nights.

Meanwhile, the guard was coming up. Nancy had dispatched one of the youngsters to Captain Hart, urging him to hasten to the house at once with able-bodied help; and she also stationed her eldest daughter, Sukey, in her rear, so that, in the nick of time, she could be re-enforced with fresh weapons. It was not until succor arrived that Nancy Hart lowered her second musket. Thus an unprotected woman, in the danger-infested thickets of upper Georgia, during the darkest hour of the struggle for independence, not only outwitted and outbraved a lawless band of Tories, but added another immortal name to the heroic roster of the Revolution.

What if her eyes were crossed?—they were true enough to sentinel the Georgia forest in an hour of danger, and, like twin stars upon the morning sky, were glorious enough to light the dawn of liberty. Will Georgia forget her? Not while an impulse of gratitude is left in her heart or a fragment of her history remains. The Maid of Orleans may some day be forgotten in her own beautiful France, but among these Georgia hills I can fancy no such fate for Nancy Hart.

To find the grave of our heroine, we must look to the "dark and bloody ground" of old Kentucky; but even there our search will be in vain. Her last resting-place is unknown, save to the friendly dews and to the vagrant flowers. Perhaps the song-bird knows its secret. We cannot tell. But somewhere, in the land of the Blue Grass, sleeps Nancy Hart; and, wherever she lies, may her deep slumbers be forever sweet. She left us when the war ended, to join her husband's kindred, on the forest trails of Daniel Boone; but here the curtain falls. The Hart family into which she married, an aristocratic one, gave a wife to the illustrious Henry Clay; while it flowered again in the great Thomas Hart Benton, of Missouri. Her own maiden name was

Nancy Morgan, a name which honorably connects her with one of the best families of the Old Dominion. She has left us no mound to bedew with our tears—to bedeck with our garlands; but she has left us an immortal memory. It permeates all our life. It lives in the prattle of the nursery and in the lore of the school-room. Our children know her story by heart. Water-fall and cataract, wind and wave, have all set it to music. Reaching down to the very roots of our soil, it extends to every leaf and twig and blade of grass, to every wandering violet, to every climbing honeysuckle, and to every wild-rose of the woodland paths. Her spirit is still abroad in Georgia—guarding our ocean front, patrolling our forest solitudes, and hovering in the golden air above our mountain-tops. She lives again in Georgia's capitol. We meet her face to face once more in these Daughters of the Revolution. We find her in every chapter house; we find her in every patriotic cause; we find her wherever Old Glory's stars are lifted. Re-incarnate, in ten thousand molds of beauty, Nancy Hart is with us still—still fighting for the flag. We need not look for her among the dead, because she lives again.

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