

Abby House

by John T. Marck



Abby House

Of all the cantankerous, cussing, belligerent women in North Carolina, easily one of the best known was Abby House, known (actually affectionately) as "Aunt Abby."

Born in Franklin County about 1797, she gained prominence during the War of 1812 when she learned that her beau was sick in Norfolk, Virginia. To care for him, she walked all the way from North Carolina to Norfolk, but arrived the day after he had died, so she walked home again. When the Civil War was imminent, she collected clothes, shoes, and food for the Confederate soldiers and delivered them personally. Having eight nephews, she encouraged all of them to serve in the Confederate army. She told them that should any of them become sick or wounded, "*you can depend on your Aunt Abby to nuss and tend you.*" Throughout the war, she nursed back to health five of her nephews, and buried another. She also had a special affection for any soldier from Franklin County.

Never intimidated, and always bold, she would confront commanding officers and ask to care for any soldier from Franklin County who was sick or wounded. So determined was she, that following the Battle of Fredericksburg, she searched the battlefield for twelve days, trying to find one of her relatives. After the war, during Reconstruction, Abby lost her house and property, but was taken in by some Confederate veterans who gave her a cottage near Raleigh. At Raleigh she would frequently attend political meetings where she would give the Democrats advice, whether they wanted it or not, and no one had the nerve to ask her to leave. In 1876 she attended the Democratic State Convention, uninvited, and nominated Zebulon B. Vance for governor. There was one delegate absent, and when the presiding officer made a motion that Abby take the absent

delegates place, the motion was passed unanimously. Occupying this seat, she then cast her vote for Vance, and became the first woman to cast an official vote for a political office.

Abby House died in 1881 and on her gravestone was written, "Angel of Mercy to Confederate Soldiers."

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