
A Peek At The Past

The legacy of Colonel Jarrett and the bulldog

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Like most of us, Charlie Rosamilia had never heard of Phaon Jarrett before he purchased the rambling old house in downtown Lock Haven. Then a stripped-down aluminum-sided residence located on the corner of West Main and First streets, the 1854 structure became home for the attorney, his wife Bonnie and three sons in 1979. Slowly, in the ensuing 30 years, Charlie attained an ever-growing interest in Jarrett, his life and career. Today Charlie is an amateur Jarrett historian and collector, and with good reason: In his day, Phaon Jarrett was one of Lock Haven's most distinguished citizens, and his exploits during the Civil War gave him an important place in American history.

Born Feb. 9, 1809 in Allentown and raised in Macungie, Lehigh County, Jarrett was a prominent local civil engineer who was instrumental in the construction of the Philadelphia and Erie Railroad. In fact, according to an obituary published in the Clinton Democrat newspaper, "The public hereabouts is more indebted to his scientific skill for the construction of the Philadelphia and Erie railroad than to any other man, living or dead, and many of the structures on its line command the admiration of all the engineers and master mechanics who see them."

But it was through his skills as a military leader that Col. Phaon Jarrett attained genuine immortality. His period of wartime service was brief — three or four months — but so memorable that a search of his name on the Internet today generates nearly 20 citations.

Joining the conflict during its earliest days, in April of 1861, Colonel Jarrett was placed in charge of the heroic 11th Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry, consisting largely of men from Westmoreland, Clinton, Lycoming, Carbon, Allegheny and Cumberland counties. According to a unit history written by Jonathan A. Noyalas, the 11th was mustered into service at Camp Curtin in Harrisburg, and moved to Camp Wayne near West Chester soon thereafter, beginning an intense bout of training under Jarrett, who was well-known among family and friends for his remarkable discipline and organizational skills. Under Jarrett's leadership, Noyalas wrote, "men from all walks of life transformed into a fighting unit."

During this same period, the regiment received a unique gift: a brindle bull terrier pup who quickly became their beloved mascot. The soldiers named her Sallie Ann Jarrett, giving her the first name of a well-known West Chester beauty and the the last name of Col. Jarrett himself. The bulldog followed the regiment faithfully in many of its most famous campaigns.

On the morning of July 2, 1861, the regiment went to battle against the famous Col. Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson at the Battle of Falling Waters. Jarrett, history tells us, was the first person to ever come up against Jackson in battle, forcing the notorious Confederate military genius into retreat.

Just a few weeks later, at the end of July, 1861, the regiment mustered out of its 90-day service, and Jarrett returned home to Lock Haven, but only after making sure his men were compensated properly for their duty by an unscrupulous paymaster who had cheated many other servicemen out of their salaries. Afterward, many of Jarrett's men re-upped and continued to fight through the end of the war under new leadership.

Sallie Ann Jarrett, the unit's four-legged companion, continued on with those men to bravely carry on the Jarrett name on America's battle-scarred warfields for years to come. Alas, like over 400 other members of the 11th Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry, Sallie didn't live to see the war's end. A casualty in the final Virginia campaign, Sallie was felled by a Confederate bullet during the fighting at Hatcher's Run on February 6, 1865. "Poor Sallie fell in the front line in the fight," wrote a member of the regiment five days after that battle. "She was buried where she fell, by some of the boys, even whilst under a

murderous fire." Twenty five years later, in 1890, Sallie Ann Jarrett was still so fondly remembered by her surviving comrades-in-arms that the men included a bronze likeness of her on their regimental monument, which today stands like a silent sentinel on Gettysburg's Oak Ridge. By that time, her partial namesake, Col. Phaon Jarrett, had also gone to his final rest. At age 67 he became ill and was confined to his bed in his lovely gothic cottage at 104 West Main Street in Lock Haven, 11 years after the war's end. He died Sept. 21, 1876.

"He was one of the kindest and most affectionate of husbands and fathers, a most pleasant and companionable friend and associate," wrote the editors of the Clinton County Democrat newspaper, who also described him as "earnest, sincere, truthful, upright and frank; a public-spirited citizen who would have been a loss to any community, a man of the highest and most patriotic aspirations, a lover of his country and of his kind; active, generous and always brave, singularly without malice, readily overlooking wrongs or injury to himself; unselfish, a lover of justice, a true friend."

Further, the paper continued, "In his death the city of Lock Haven loses one of its very best and most respected and honorable citizens, and few there are amongst us who have not shed an affectionate tear in his memory."

One hundred and three years after Jarrett's demise, Charlie Rosamilia walked excitedly through Jarrett's old home with his father for the first time, marveling over the gothic windows and wall dormers. The house was then for sale, and Charlie made an offer. That's when Phaon Jarrett's old house became Charlie Rosamilia's new one.

At that time, the home's signature board-and-batten exterior had been covered with white aluminum siding and the unique gingerbread that once followed the roof line was a distant memory. But by the mid-1990s, the Rosamilias had begun a careful restoration based on an illustration of the house that had been executed over a century earlier.

Pieces of the old gingerbread were found in the property's carriage house and carefully duplicated. The board-and-batten siding was recreated with modern materials and now adorns the exterior of the home, which has been repainted in what is believed to be its original grey-and-burgundy color scheme.

While renovations to the home were taking place, Rosamilia became increasingly interested in the life of the man who had built it in 1854. He scoured Ross Library for information Jarrett and his family, searched for books and other items that had belonged to the colonel. It became, Rosamilia said, "a labor of love."

Through that labor, Rosamilia discovered that several of Col. Jarrett's civil engineering projects remain in use today.

"The best example of his work is the railroad bridge on the way to Farrandsville, which comes across the river," Rosamilia said. "That was his engineering project. Other than Farrandsville, there are supposedly seven bridges still standing that he engineered."

According to Charlie, the colonel bought the property upon which the Phaon Jarrett house now stands from the Fallon brothers, the agents for Maria Christina, Queen of Spain, who were also responsible for the construction of the Fallon Hotel, built the same year as the Jarrett abode.

Rosamilia also found out that the Clinton County Historical Society's Heisey Museum had in their possession Jarrett's Civil War-era pistol and sword. Through a special arrangement with the museum, Rosamilia is going to be loaned those items for display in the house.

"Every time I find something new out, that's when I get the most charge out of it," he said. "I can't really say that I'm guided by the man, though I'd like to be able to say that. He was the kind of man we'd all like to be. I absolutely admire him."

In fact, Rosamilia said of the late — and now largely-forgotten — civil engineer/war hero: "He's the kind of person we need more of in Clinton County."

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