



NATHANIEL POLK DESHONG



The Southern Diaspora



Nathaniel Polk DeShong descended from Huguenot immigrants who settled near the Haw River about a mile and a half north of here. He enlisted on June 21, 1861, at 17 years of age under Capt. James W. Lea “for the War” in the 6th North Carolina State Troops at Camp Alamance (5 miles west). A slight man who handled animals well, DeShong was detailed as a teamster and ambulance driver on February 6, 1862. In that capacity, he removed the wounded from the battlefields of Antietam, Maryland, and Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, and never forgot their screams and moans.



Nathaniel Polk DeShong, 1861

DeShong returned to the Haw River after being paroled at Appomattox Court House in April 1865. Although his father owned six slaves before the war, they lived in the house with his family instead of in separate quarters, as was sometimes the case on small farms. When DeShong remarried in 1865, the former slaves made a rolling pin from a single piece of wood and smoothed with elm bark as a wedding gift.

Like many Southerners during the postwar depression, DeShong and his second wife, Catherine McRae, headed west to Texas, where he put his experience with horses to good use in Paris, in Lamar County. He never forgot, however, the “crystal-clear streams, towering oaks or corn higher than your head” of Alamance County as he reminisced to his children. Perhaps inspired by his stories of treating the wounded, some of his descendants entered the field of medicine. His youngest daughter returned “home” here in 1994, almost 130 years after her father left.



Reunion badge, United Confederate Veterans

*All images courtesy
Haw River Historical Museum*



Former DeShong family slaves, ca. 1890