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Pannick: A Tragedy of the Civil War: Lieut. Henry Stokes Figures 4th Alaba

A TRAGEDY OF THE CIVIL WAR:
LIEUT. HENRY STOKES FIGURES
4TH ALABAMA ADJUTANT 48TH ALABAMA

Edited by John Pannick

The War Between the States (1861-1865) called many of Huntsville's own to an early demise. Among them was the son of one of Huntsville's most prominent families, Henry Stokes Figures. Born to William and Harriet Stokes Figures on January 9, 1844, Henry was raised in the Figures Home which still stands on Randolph Street. His father had come to Huntsville to live with his uncle when he was twelve years old. He first served as an apprentice on his uncle's newspaper, the Southern Advocate. Later he purchased the paper (known as the Huntsville Advocate after the war), remaining as editor until his death. He also served as the mayor of this city both before and after the war and was a state senator during the period of the Confederacy.

Herewith is an original account of the brief life of Henry S. Figures as written by his younger sister, Mattie Figures, who was seven years old at the time of Henry's death. This brief biography was written by her in the 1870's and was included in the Figures papers, which were acquired by Mr. Pannick in July of 1980. The biography is presented verbatim.

LIEUT. HENRY S. FIGURES
ADJUTANT OF 48TH ALA.

Early in January, when Xmastide joys were still warm in the heart, on the ninth 1844, this dear little boy came to gladden the home of his parents, and became at once, the center of their existence. He was baptized Henry Stokes, and was a healthy happy little boy, devoted to his parents.

My earliest glimpse of him, is from an old-fashioned miniature, we have, taken in his first round

jacket and trousers, it represents a dimpled chubby-faced little fellow, with earnest wondering eyes, looking out from a mass of flaxen hair.

The child of christian parents, he was brought up in the Presbyterian Church, and early trained in those religious principles, that speak so eloquently from his letters home, written during the war. He was educated in the schools here, and grew up a dutiful affectionate son, the idol of his parents, especially his Mother, by his little brothers and sisters, Brother Henry was looked up to as something of a demi-God, in their childish eyes, nothing was impossible to him. In appearance, at this time, he was like a slim sapling, with a pair of handsome dark-blue eyes, under straight brows, regular clear-cut features, a face full of that fire, which never wholly leaves the human countenance.

With the first thunder of that war-cloud that was to devastate, and lay in ruin, our fair Southern land, Henry's boyish heart thrilled with indignation, and none were more eager, to serve their country than he was. The consent of his parents being won, he joined the 4th Ala Infantry, with a high heart full of pride and devotion to the Cause. A careful perusal of his letters show this, more than once he says, "If necessary, am willing to die for it." In 1861, yielding to his Mothers persuasion, we find him in Montgomery, working in the War Department. General Walker, at my Fathers request gave him one of the clerkships. Here for a while he was continually giving graphic account of life at the Capital, at that momentous time.

The longing to take active part in service, showed strongly, especially when his own company came down. Later he accompanied the War Department to Richmond VA, and we find Henry delighted with the city, writing with fluent pen, descriptions of how things were. He never failed to attend Church, or say his prayers, he writes my Father, and seems greatly shocked, at seeing some of the soldiers drunk. To quote correctly, "How can they serve their country well with their brains stupified

with intoxicating drink." His duties were well performed and merited the approval of his superiors, but through all was that pleading to join the troops. It became so strong that at last, that he resolved to go, and wrote home for permission, saying he could no longer stand, to sit at his desk, while others were fighting for their lives, it was too cowardly. General Walker, also wrote my Father, advising him to give his consent. Henry decided for himself, and after a plea for forgiveness, for what he termed undutiful, he enlisted at Winchester VA July 1861. At this time he was only eighteen (18) years and six months old. In a letter to his Mother, he speaks of it, also saying to comfort her, I can and will be just as good a boy in the army as out, I never have or will, take any intoxicating liquor the Bible, my Sister sent, I carry in my jacket, and read a little in it every day, I know I may meet death at any moment, and will try and be careful, so dont worry." Henry was a good soldier, popular with his comrades, he was orderly Sergeant in the 4th Alabama Infantry, Laws Brigade, Longstreets Corpe, Hoods Division, afterwards he was Adjutant of the 48th Ala. All too brief that bright young life. He fought in the battles of Yorktown, Frederickburg, Gettysburg, Manasas, Ringold Ga, Chickamauga, was mentioned for bravery at Gettysburg, It was on the gory battle-field of the Wilderness, that my brave young brother lost his life May 5, 1864. I have no remembrance of him at all, but my Father's grief and my Mothers anguish, are as fresh in my mind as though yesterday. Kind hands carried him from the battle-field, and laid him to rest, in an orchard under an apple-tree, in full bloom, which cast its rosy petals over his head, as if in sorrow for the early dead. My Mother went to Virginia to see him, but failed, his regiment being off in the mountains, she never saw him again in this life. Every letter of his breathed a deep longing to see them all at home, to come back once more. When the long looked for furlough was granted, Federals were in possession of Huntsville and he could only come as far as the river, but not cross it. I have often tried to realize, what must have been his feelings, so

close to all that were dearest and nearest, and yet he might not see them, what an irony of fate. An incident of this tiny little child that I was, is stamped indelibly upon my brain. Gen. John Logan was stationed in Huntsville at this time, occupying Mr Sam Moore's handsome residence on Adam's Avenue. My Mother in her despair, at my Brothers not being allowed to come within the Federal lines, resolved to make a personal appeal, herself, to General Logan, my Father, with influence to aid him, having failed, gave his consent, it was a last resort. After much thought it was decided, that my Mother should go alone, taking with her, one of the smaller children. I was the one selected, a little girl being deemed best. I was carefully cautioned as to my behavior, for the spirit against the Yankees, was strong in my little breast, to my childish eyes, they (sentence incomplete). As we walked up the broad graveled walk, I remember that my Mother held my hand very tightly. We were shown immediately into the large parlor. The General was seated in an easy chair at a table facing the window, from whence he could overlook the street, he saw us come in and doubtless drew his own conclusions. I see it all so plainly, the heavy brutal-looking man, with thick black hair, worn rather long, small dark sinister eyes, a repellent face at best, in my young eyes, the embodiment of cruelty, which proved correct. He received us politely, asked me my name and shook hands with him with great reluctance. My Mother made known her errand in an agitated voice, he refused pointblank, and as she persisted, the fiend in him, leaped to the surface, and he threatened her if she attempted to go he would send his soldiers and arrest her and my brother, and jail them both. At this I lost my fear and blazed out what big Brother Henry would do, my Mother quickly put her hand over my mouth, or there is no telling what I would have said. Years after at a reception I heard of his death, and I was not sorry. The brilliant scene around me faded away and for the moment I saw and heard my Mother pleading to see her boy. I felt that act of fiendish cruelty had met its reward.

In April 1867 the remains of
Lieut. Henry S. Figures were taken
to Huntsville and interred.

"Soldier sleep, thy warfare oer,
Dream of battled fields no more."

M. F. A.

He was Sergeant in the 4 Ala
Infantry, Laws Brigade, Longstreet
Corps, Hoods Division. Afterward he
was Adjutant of 48th Ala., Sheffield
was his Colonel.