

From: SC News from SCIWAY <sciway-news@sc-news.net>  
To: Kester, Tonykester@aging.sc.gov  
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Subject: The Hamburg Massacre + Hilton Head's 2015 Gullah Celebration

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## { SC's February Calendar + Our Featured SC Event }

February 1-28 | Hilton Head — This year's [February Calendar of SC Events](#) is brought to you by the [Hilton Head Island Gullah Celebration](#), which showcases the rich cultural heritage of the Gullah people on Hilton Head. Recognized as one of the Top 20 Events in the Southeast and one of the Top 100 Events to Attend Around the Globe in February by National Geographic Travel, the celebration provides an opportunity to enjoy traditional Lowcountry food, storytelling, African dance, gospel music, and Gullah spirituals. The event lasts throughout the month, and on Valentine's Weekend, the "Art and Food Expo" will feature cultural demonstrations such as sweetgrass basket sewing and indigo weaving.

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## { "Pitchfork Ben" Tillman and the Hamburg Massacre }

*Back in October, we featured the [lost town of Hamburg](#), which once occupied a portion of North Charleston. Initially home to a thriving inland port – the largest in South Carolina – Hamburg today is mostly abandoned, its ruins slowly returning to earth. Following the [Civil War](#), Hamburg blossomed as a successful freedmen's village. Sadly it is remembered today primarily as the setting for the [Hamburg Massacre](#), one of the bloodiest race riots in our state's history. In this violent battle, at least six people were murdered without cause, purely for the sake of "provok[ing] a row."*

*Interestingly, the ring leader of the massacre, "Pitchfork Ben" Tillman, is now the subject of great controversy, with students at both [Clemson](#) and [Winthrop](#) seeking to remove his name from buildings on their campuses. Their efforts are being met with much resistance by those who honor tradition. The building was originally named for Tillman; both buildings were historically known as Main or Old Main, and only changed decades later – Clemson's at the behest of Tillman's son. As precedent, the University of South Carolina itself was called Calhoun until 1943, having originally been named in honor of our seventh president.*

*president.) In honor of this debate, and in honor of Black History Month, we now present the st  
Hamburg Massacre, starring our future governor and US senator, Benjamin Tillman, infamous  
the Red Shirts ....*

([Library of Congress](#), Prints & Photographs Division LC-B2-2744-3)  
Tillman's eye was damaged by an infection, and he was excused  
from serving the Confederacy during the Civil War.

## **Part I: The Setting**

A manicured park located at the helm of [North Augusta's](#) main thoroughfare – West Forest features a monument commemorating the lone white causality of the [Hamburg Massacre](#). As it this violent 1876 event actually left seven men dead, six of whom were black.

([Larry Gleason](#) © Do Not Use Without Written Consent) This granite memorial was paid for by SC's General Assembly and occupies downtown North Augusta's preeminent vista. It honors the lone white causality of the Hamburg Massacre, a young vigilante who helped attack 38 black soldiers.

The now-extinct community of [Hamburg](#) offered a home for displaced freedmen after the Civil War. There the ex-slaves established a municipality and formed a militia: Company A, Ninth South Carolina Infantry, United States National Guard of the State of South Carolina. The militia had been issued arms by the state [Governor Robert Scott](#). Of course, the presence of an armed black militia in South Carolina, the members of which were Republicans – did not sit well with many local white Democrats.

([Bill Fitzpatrick](#) © Do Not Use Without Written Consent) Another view of the monument erected for William "Doc" Adams, a white vigilante who is hailed as having "exemplified the highest ideal of Anglo-Saxon civilization."

## Part II: The Standoff

On July 4th, 1876, these soldiers gathered to march in celebration of our nation's centennial. As the parade passed, white farmers appeared in a wagon during the parade and ordered the militia to cease its drills so they could pass. Although the captain of the militia, Doc Adams, pointed out that ample room existed on either side of the parade route, the farmers refused to move.

of the formation, the militia eventually parted, allowing the wagon to proceed. Adams was arrested the following day for blocking a public road. He asked the magistrate for protection but was denied. Days later, when Adams attempted to access the courthouse for his trial, he was met by an armed mob. Adams sought cover in the militia's armory, where he was joined by 37 of his men.

(Harper's Weekly, 1876) This political cartoon by Thomas Nast shows an imbalanced scale of justice, with one white dead at Hamburg versus at least six blacks.

### **Part III: The Shootout**

The armory soon was surrounded by between 200 and 300 armed men who demanded that it surrender its arms. The militia refused, arguing that its weapons were rightfully issued by the state. The mob retaliated with bullets and cannonballs. McKie Meriwether and at least one African-American, James Cook, died during the exchange of gunfire. The black soldiers attempted to flee but they were captured. Some time later, five captives were hauled out and executed: Allan Attaway, Myniart, Moses Parks, David Rivers, and Hampton Stephens (some accounts say two were killed at the scene and four were later executed).

(Harper's Weekly, 1876) Also by Thomas Nast, this illustration shows a black man kneeling amidst his slain family. It was published in response to the Hamburg Massacre and similar events.

Afterwards, the state Attorney General issued this report:

The facts show the demand on the militia to give up their arms was made by persons without lawful authority to enforce such demand or to receive the arms had they been surrendered; that the attack on the militia to compel a compliance with this demand was without lawful excuse or justification; and that after there had been some twenty or twenty-five prisoners captured and completely in the power of their captors, five of them were deliberately shot to death and three more severely wounded. It further appears that content with thus satisfying their vengeance, many of the crowd added to their guilt crime of robbery of defenceless people, and were only prevented from arson by the efforts of their own leaders.

([Chuck Sutherland](#) © Do Not Use Without Written Consent) This bronze statue stands on the grounds in Columbia. Today, some historians consider Tillman "a racist, terrorist, and murderer."

## Part IV: The Legacy

The Hamburg Massacre, as the tragedy came to be known, galvanized the state's Democrats and ignited the Red Shirts in South Carolina, a paramilitary group dedicated to the election of Democrats and the eradication of Republicans, regardless of whether they were black or white. "Pitchfork Ben" governor from 1890 through 1894 – was instrumental in leading the Red Shirts that summer and as a US senator, he often recounted how he had murdered blacks to keep them from voting.

(SCIWAY © Do Not Use Without Written Consent) Various quotations by Ben Tillman, SC gov and US senator. Two state universities renamed buildings in Tillman's honor, Clemson in 1946 and South Carolina in 1962. Before that, both buildings were called Main or Old Main. Students at each university launched movements to have the name changed.

Regarding the massacre itself, Tillman later said, "The leading white men of Edgefield" had decided to seize the first opportunity that the Negroes might offer them to provoke a riot and teach the Negro a lesson." Tillman further described the events of that day as "having the whites demonstrate their superiority by killing as many of them as was justifiable." He is also well known for saying, after Theodore Roosevelt invited Booker T. Washington to the White House in 1905, "Now we will have a thousand niggers to put them back in their place."



([Larry Gleason](#) © Do Not Use Without Written Consent) This simple marker may not hold the grandeur of Meriwether's, but it does at least mention the six black soldiers who were killed. Note: Some sources say seven blacks actually died.

Although 87 whites were charged in the massacre, they were never tried. Hamburg disappeared, and its borders were incorporated into North Augusta when the city was established in the early twentieth century. In 1916 South Carolina's General Assembly erected an obelisk in Meriwether, the only white man to die in the massacre, in the heart of the new town. The remains remain to this day.

([Larry Gleason](#) © Do Not Use Without Written Consent) The marker, which was made in 2010, has not yet been erected.

For nearly a century, no marker nor monument recognized the six black men who died. In fact, during the 2006 celebration of North Augusta's centennial, McKie was described in literature of historic site as the "only resident of Hamburg to be killed in the Hamburg riot of 1876" – a glaring omission. In recent years, many have noted this injustice, and in 2011 an historical marker was finally unveiled and will be located near the 5th Street bridge to commemorate the deaths of all killed during the Hamburg Massacre. At the time, the marker is on display at [First Providence](#) and Second Providence Baptist churches in North Augusta. Unlike Meriwether's granite obelisk, which was commissioned by our state legislature, this simple marker (seen above) was sponsored by the Heritage Council of North Augusta, a local nonprofit organization.

1. Moredock, Will. (2014, February 5.) [Ben Tillman was a racist, terrorist, and murderer: It's time to take down his statue](#) . Charleston City Paper. (Retrieved 2015, January 28).



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