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LIFE

In Cleveland County's Early Days

By MAMIE JONES

THE COMING OF THE PIONEERS

"Renew their breed, Almighty God- those pioneers of yesterday, who through wilderness and wastes undaunted pushed their westward way.

"Renew their breed, those giant men, those women of the rugged path, who smiled at fears and daily gave impossibilities the laugh.

"With fortitude they faced their fight, to tame the unknown and the wild. They climbed the mountains, plowed

the plains to any hardship reconciled."

The verses above, written by Bishop Cushman, might well refer to the sturdy pioneers who, in 1765 (when this section was still a part of Mecklenburg county), made the first permanent settlement within the area that is now Cleveland county, in the vicinity of Boiling Springs, Sandy Run Creek, and Broad river.

In his book, "Hamrick Gene-

rations," S. C. Jones (no kin to me) tells of the coming of these pioneers, namely the Blantons, the Hamricks, and others, mostly kin-folks and in-laws.

I quote briefly from the above mentioned book:

"The Hamrick generations include and contemplate the Greens, the Hamricks, the Blantons, the Bridges, the Harrells, the McSwains, the Champions, the Washburns, the Wrays, the Suttles, the Bostics, the Led-

bettors, the Doggetts, the Hughes, the Magnesses,, the Webbs, the McBrayers, the Williamsons, the Lovelaces, the Bowens, the Connors, the Robinsons, and the Matheneys.

OF DIFFERENT NATIONALITIES

"The Blantons are of English descent. George Blanton was the first Blanton to cross the ocean. He, with Henry Green and Housand Harrell came from England. David McSwain came from Scotland. Gabriel Washburn came from Germany. He first entered land in Burke county but in 1820 he removed to Rutherford county. William Champion came from France.

"George Blanton, H. Green, James Bridges, Wm. Champion, G. Washburn, Minor Bowen, and D. McSwain made the seven-month ocean voyage from the "old country" in 1731 with George Hamrick (the German spelling was Homrick), grandfather of the Cleveland county pioneers."

How did these immigrants reach this particular section and why did they stop here?

I do not know. All I know is that some of them—maybe all of them—had been living in Virginia.

It is possible they had set out to join the German settlement in what later became Lincoln county. Or maybe they were trying to find the Scotch-Irish Presbyterian settlement in what later became Rutherford county. Each of these settlements was fairly well established by 1765. But the present Cleveland county area was a wilderness, populated only by deer, elk, buffaloes, bears, and other animals.

Perhaps when they did get into this immediate section it

reminded some of them of their homelands across the sea. More so than any other place they had seen; and they wanted to stay for that reason.

George Stitt, who is connected with Patterson's Flowers, is a native of Ireland, and lived for many years in England. Mr. Stitt says that this section, including the people, the shrubbery and the general appearance of the landscape, reminds him more of England and Ireland than any place he has seen in the U.S.A.

IDEAL FARMING CLIMATE

I do not know at what point these newcomers entered the present Cleveland county. They knew by the appearance of the vegetation that the red clay soil would produce fine crops. However, they did not know that some day this section would be described as "having the most ideal farming climate in the South, with an average mean temperature of 61 degrees, an average 55-inch rainfall, and a 200 day growing season."

WHAT ROUTE DID THEY FOLLOW?

Let us imagine this band of pioneers leaving Virginia one morning in early spring. There were no roads in Western North Carolina, and probably none in the section of Virginia they set out from. However, originating in the vicinity of what is now Petersburg, Virginia, there was a "Trader's Path" leading in a southwesterly direction from the present locality of Petersburg through North Carolina by way of Hillsboro, Salisbury and Charlotte. It is probable the pioneers followed this trail a part of the way.

INCONCEIVABLE HARDSHIPS

Picture these stout-hearted travelers journeying confidently over buffalo trails and Indian paths into the unknown wilderness to establish homes. History says the summer of 1765 was the hottest ever known in North Carolina in memory of the inhabitant. We, today, cannot conceive of the hardships they endured.

On the trek each man carried a rifle. At his belt was a powder horn, a tomahawk and a pouch of bullets. Usually some of the more experienced men led the procession, constantly watching the trail for vicious animals or for Indians. It was often necessary for them to cut down trees and clear away underbrush to make a path for the caravan. The women and children trudged along after the men.

They had no wagons. The book above referred to says they packed their possessions into a slide or sled. I quote: "Almost everybody knows something about a slide, or sled. They were made from eight to 10 feet long with two runners. The front ends of the runners were curved so as to run over rough places and stumps. Most of these slides had standards. When the slides were boxed up a whole family could get in one and ride from one place to another."

Into these vehicles they put their bedding, maybe a loom, a few cooking utensils, including a three-legged iron pot in which to cook buffalo stew, their maddock, and that symbol of the American pioneer: an axe. Sometimes this sled was drawn by an oxen, and sometimes by the family milk cow.

When they came to a river the men made a raft, or maybe cut down a big tree, hollowed out the inside and made a canoe. The pioneers loaded their possessions into this canoe and rowed across the river.

DIDN'T HAVE BREAD

It is probable the party reached this Cleveland county area in the early fall, too late to plant a crop. They found plenty of wild game, chestnuts, fish and wild honey. But the supply of corn they brought

with them was exhausted before the crop they planted in the spring matured, and for two months they had no bread, nor any satisfactory substitute for bread.

Very soon after they arrived here they began turning trees into cabins and forests into farms. They kept fires burning all night around these cabins to keep the wild animals away, but they could not always keep the snakes out.

A FLOORLESS CABIN

This is the story of what happened to one pioneer couple. They may have lived in early Cleveland county, or maybe in a county west of this one.

This newly married couple built for themselves a one-room cabin of logs, and daubed the space between the logs with tough clay, or maybe with red mud. The early settlers had no nails, so they used wooden pins, or maybe ox-hide thongs to hold the timbers together. The chimney was built of mud and hickory sticks. There were no sawmills to prepare boards for a floor; but the happy couple did not mind the good earth under their feet, and they had a deer skin rug near the fireplace.

When they were building the cabin they noticed that in one corner there was a hole in the ground. But they laughingly said that would make a nice place to put the ashes, and that they would soon fill it up.

The first night after they moved into the cabin, they took up the hot ashes from out the wide fireplace and poured them into the hole they wanted filled up. Then they went to bed. Before they got

to sleep the room was swarming with angry rattlesnakes. The hot ashes poured into the hole had brought them up to get air. Both the young man and the woman died from the rattlesnake stings.

There must have been a few people in this section before the coming of the Hamrick settlers. Bricks from the chimney of an old log house near Mooresboro are said to bear the date 1723. This house is known as the Hamilton homestead and is on the lands of Roy and Yates McBrayer.

It is said that William Green, of whom I shall write later, was born in the vicinity of King's Creek in 1753. Didn't some of those Hamrick pioneers stop in the vicinity of King's Creek before going over into what is now Number One township?

FROM WILDERNESS TO CIVILIZATION

Comparatively speaking, we are such a young country! It has been only 184 years since these intrepid immigrants came here. The only tools they brought with them were an axe, a maddock, and a spinning wheel, coupled with indomitable courage and faith. With these they conquered a wilderness.

Today, on the foundation they laid we have a lovely city — two cities, in fact—many prosperous small villages, and a county that is among the leading counties of the nation.

"Renew their breed. We owe them more than we can pay in whines and tears. Almighty God, renew in us the spirit of the pioneers."