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Mamie Jones

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In Cleveland County's Early Days

BY MAMIE JONES

(Editor's Note: Following is the fourth and last of a series of interviews with Benjamin Baxter "Bass" Suttle, dealing with local events and conditions in the '80's.)

"Were the winters colder in the 80's? I'll say they were! I recall, as a boy, watching the beaux and belles ice skating on Sam Wilson's millpond, just below the present city garage in Shelby. The ice was so heavy that sometimes there was skating for two months in the wintertime. Among the skaters whom I recall are Robt. L. Ryburn, who was an especially good skater; Ed Fulenwider, Betty Winslow, Gus Stephens, Beck Quinn, and his brother, Florence Green, Harry Worthing, Bill Worthing, Minnie Stephens, Will and Ed Jennings, Will Dameron, Chivus Froneberger, Los and Ab Harrill, Oliver Summers, Maggie Babington, and Jake Rudisill. Sometimes the boys built fires on the ice.

"The Charlotte Weather Bureau records show that on May 22nd, 1883, the temperature was 40.5 degrees. One day in June, 1889, the temperature was 45 degrees. Of course it was colder in Shelby than in Charlotte.

Ice-Houses

"There was no commercial ice. It is my impression we did not have that until the '90's. A few people built ice-houses and gathered ice from ponds and rivers. This ice was packed in sawdust and sometimes kept until well into the spring. A few doctors

permitted the use of ice in the treatment of typhoid fever, but many would not allow it to be used. Crawford Durham had an ice-house on East Marion street where the Rogers building now stands. Ice was gathered from a pond back of the building. Dr. L. N. Durham, dentist, who lived where Lowery Suttle now lives, had an ice-house; I think Will McArthur had one; and Mrs. Suttle's uncle, Davy Cline, who lived at Lawndale, had one.

First Harvester

"The first wheat harvester was brought to Shelby by Thomas S. Elliott in 1886. It required four horses abreast to pull the machine. Mr. Elliott rode the outside horse. I had one of the greatest thrills of my life when he let me ride on the seat, and throw the machine in and out of gear. That year the rains came, heavily, and all the wheat sprouted.

Arabian Ponies

"That pair of handsome white ponies your father (Shelton Jones) used to drive, and which he later sold to Dr. Victor McBrayer, were of Arabian stock. They were brought here from the upper part of South Carolina. I do not know just where they came from originally. So far as I know, they were never in any way connected with a circus. Another pair of these Arabian ponies were sold to some one in Waynesville.

"Other recollections include: Standing on the corner where the First National Building now is, and watching a cow eat a

hunk of cotton out of a bale lying on a wagon. She left a hole in that bale you could put a good sized barrel in. The upholstery factory, operated by Seventh Day Adventists, located where Lutz Bros. Furniture company now is. The corn mill on Buffalo Creek, built nearly a hundred years ago by Josh Beam (they called it Baum then) which, I think, is still in operation.

"I recall also being told the story that when Charles Blanton, first Sheriff of Cleveland County, completed his first year's tax collections, he mounted his trusty horse and rode all the way to Raleigh to turn this money over to the proper tax authorities. It is not likely it amounted to more than \$500.00.

"Back of where the Shelby hospital now stands, my grandfather, Sheriff D. D. Suttle, had a fish-dam which covered two acres. We caught great big fish there.

"There were two Negroes who were familiar figures on the streets in my boyhood days. One was "Uncle" Jack Beam and his cart. The boys made him furious by yelling "buginmyear" which, translated, means bug-in-my-ear. This was some kind of insult and of course gave us boys a great deal of pleasure. Another Negro was "John the Barber." There were no white barbers in my boyhood days. In addition to cutting hair and shaving his white patrons, John peddled ice cream on the streets, shouting

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Early Days

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"Ice cream. Ice cream. It must be sold. It must be sold."

This closes the interview with Mr. Suttle.

My uncle, Will Jones, used to tell a story about the Negro, Jack Beam, above referred to: "A group of boys induced Jack to go bear hunting. Jack was rather reluctant to go but was finally persuaded. When they were some distance from town one of the group suggested that in order to easier round up the bear that the men scatter. Said Jack: 'Youens kin scatter if you want to, but d—m if I'm a-goin to scatter'."

A pathetic character of the nineties was Sam Ross, a half-witted white man who lived at the County Home. I have been told that Sam's father was quite well off. That he went to fight for State's Rights in the War Between the States, and left his wife and half-wit child and his property in care of a friend at home. The elder Ross was killed in battle. The "friend" kept the property. The woman and child were left for the County to take care of.

Fake Gem Expert

In the nineties my father was chief of police. And although the whipping post had been abolished by law, the mayor of the town could order a whipping if he deemed it necessary.

In those days we got products in the most beautifully colored thick glass bottles, green, red, blue, amethyst, white. Sometimes I would take these bottles, and put them into a very hot fire. The glass would swell greatly. Then I would take them out of the fire, drop into a pot of cold water, and the glass would break into thousands of pieces and they looked just like uncut gems. I had a small sized cigar box full of these bits of broken glass.

A man was arrested as a vagrant. He said he was unable to work, and wanted the town to

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help him. He said he was a trained minerologist and knew about precious stones. My father took this cigar box of colored glass to this so-called expert. Immediately he identified the "uncut gems" as emeralds, amethysts, rubies, sapphires, topaz, crystals.

I think the mayor ordered the man whipped, and that he either go to work or leave town.