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In Cleveland County's Early Days

By MAMIE JONES

There is a legend, which I have not been able to verify, that when the early settlers came to what is now Cleveland county they found turpentine trees growing here. I think this county is rather far west for the type of pine tree from which turpentine is obtained. However, in the early census reports we find residents of the county listing their occupations as "tarman." And unless there was tar and turpentine there would be no work for tar-men.

VIRGIN FORESTS

When Shelby was chartered more than a century ago, there were hundreds of magnificent trees in this area. Some of them have since died; but many of those that were left to beautify the streets by the men who laid off the town, and many of those that were planted later, have been ruthlessly destroyed under the direction of men in charge of town affairs who did not appreciate the beauty of trees.

I recall that one town official told me more than 25 years ago, "If you want trees go to the country."

Recently I noticed two ancient oak trees growing on our streets under which, I suspect, bears growled, deer played, and buffalo rested.

One of these trees stands in the

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COMMISSION REPORTS

2,000 Took Part Recreation Program

A city parks and recreation commission report of summer activities promoted by that department revealed today that about 2,000 individuals participated in one or more of the several programs of the season just ended.

The program officially came to a close with end of activities at the five supervised playgrounds and championship play-off tournaments in all leagues.

An aggregate of 24,242 participants was recorded during the nine-week period at the five centers with an average daily attendance of 541. Cleveland Training School led the pack with an average daily attendance of 141 followed by Dover with 139, Jefferson 106, South Shelby 82, and Graham 73.

The Teen Center at the high school operated five weeks with 736 'teen-agers participating in ping-pong, dancing and table games while the colored 'teen center over a nine-week period

averaged 79 nightly with a total of 3,004 for the entire period.

The Cleveland Cotton ball league, directed by Superintendent Clayton K. Bault, played 140 games with an aggregate participation of 2,800 men and 14,000 spectators attending. Three ball leagues composed of men's teams and seven women's teams played twice weekly for a total of more than 200 games, giving an aggregate participation total of 4,000 men and women playing before spectators. Attendance totalling 10,000 men and women played more than 30 games.

Teams organized at the centers and playing a regular schedule for city championships included 12 softball, four table tennis, four ping-pong, four croquet and four softball. Other center programs in

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third block, on the east side of North LaFayette street, just below the residence of Mrs. Nelson Lattimore. Jack Palmer, Jr., and I measured this tree trunk four feet above the ground, and it is approximately 15 feet in circumference.

The other tree stands on West Marion street, in the yard of George Blanton. I measured this tree trunk four feet above ground, and it is 12 feet in circumference.

SHOT AT DEER

Mr. Blanton tells me that when he bought the place more than 50 years ago, Mr. Elick Wray, who was then quite elderly, told him that when he (Mr. Wray) was a young man, he used to stand under that tree and take a shot at deer as they sauntered by going toward Broad river, probably for water.

There were a great many deer in this section in the earlier days. Pat McBrayer tells me that an aged Negro told him that long after Shelby became a town he used to see a herd of deer grazing near what is now the Southern railway station.

MOORE'S DEER PARK

Before the War of the Revolution, when this section was part of Tryon county, the King gave to Moses Moore a grant for a large tract of land which included the Cleveland Springs area, then known as the Moore's Deer park. This grant is recorded in Lincoln county. (Moses Moore was one of the 48 signers of the Tryon Resolves which defied King George in 1775).

WONDERFUL CLEVELAND COUNTY

In this lovely Piedmont county of Cleveland, nature has given us so much that we take it for granted and do not realize how much we have. The average North Carolinian (including me) knows mighty little about what our state can produce.

We have in this state a greater variety of trees than any other state, except Florida and Texas. There are 166 different native trees. However, this includes varieties of the same tree, such as 24 different kinds of oak, eight different kinds of pine, etc. In addition to these varieties, many other different kinds of trees have been brought into the state elsewhere.

This remarkable clay soil and climate of Cleveland county will grow just about anything—that is, any kind of tree or plant—that can be grown anywhere in the state, with the possible exception of a few plants like rice, and a few trees of coastal growth.

Sometimes we get ideas that things from the outside are better than what we have in North Carolina. Perhaps this is illustrated by a story told in Sherrill's "Annals of Lincoln County," and by an experience I had in California.

In the long-ago-days when the eastern half of what is now Cleveland was part of Lincoln county, Col. J. H. Weaver was appointed the first superintendent of the Mint in Charlotte, in 1838. Col. Wheeler went to Philadelphia to get married, and was beguiled by a florist there into buying shrubbery to beautify the Mint grounds. Among other things he bought 50 Ailanthus trees at \$1.00 each.

ODIFEROUS AILANTHUS

I quote Mr. Sherrill: "I want to say something about the 50 ailanthus trees Col. Wheeler planted on the Mint grounds. Of course people far and near wanted sprouts to plant in their front yards . . . little thinking that this rare South American specimen, like sin, is a marvelous missionary which is to become a nuisance in nearly every town in the Carolinas, for it is no less than what is called the copal tree, which flourishes near the back lots in Lincolnton, near the stables and pig stys—that offensively odiferous tree that we can't get rid of; for when you uproot it here it breaks out yonder, and the wind blows the missionary seed wherever it willeth. When I see copal trees in Lincolnton . . . Charlotte and other towns I think of Col. Wheeler and the curse he planted in North Carolina soil, little dreaming that he was scattering a pest which generations since have been unable to eradicate. Ailanthus—copal! How offensive the odor! How difficult to eradicate!"

I have several of these trees growing on my lot, and I do not share Mr. Sherrill's aversion to them. I think the wax-like, bronze flecked flower, nestling in a cluster of green leaves is lovely, even though the leaves don't smell good. That is the "Tree of Heaven" described in that recent best-selling novel "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn," as "having pointed leaves which grow along green switches which radiate from the bough, and make a tree which looks like a lot of opened green umbrellas."

PASSION FRUIT

Some years ago I was in Los Angeles, where every citizen is a booster for California. (The Chamber of Commerce has sold the citizens on the merits of their city and state). I went one day to hear a lecture about Australia. The speaker was telling of the marvelous vegetables and delicious fruits that grow in Australia, and had much to say about passion fruit.

She added that she was surprised and delighted to find a small amount of passion fruit being grown near Los Angeles. She said this fruit was not only delectable by itself, but most delicious for cake willing, ice cream flavoring . . . She made it sound like food for the gods, and I earnestly wished I had just a little passion fruit, but felt sure I could never procure any.

GROWS WILD HERE

A few days later, in one of the city's largest grocery stores, I saw a box containing fruit which was green in color and about the size and shape of a goose egg. I said to the saleswoman "What is that?" She replied, "That is passion fruit." I was so interested in it and so obviously a hill-billy, that the girl picked up one and gave it to me. I broke it open and ate it, and said to the saleswoman:

"I am reminded of a countryman from North Carolina who had sold his big cotton crop, and went to New York to see the sights and spend his money. He went into a high class eating place, determined to take the most expensive food on the menu. This was quail on toast, which he ordered. When he got home and was telling about his trip he said, 'And quail on toast wasn't nothin' but a little ole partridge on a piece of loaf bread.' Well, passion fruit isn't anything but a maypop that grows wild in the fields of Cleveland county."

Of course I should have known that maypop and passion fruit are the same. Any well informed person knows that it was so named because the purple flower seemed to typify the passion or last sufferings of Christ. The corona of the blossom was imagined to represent the crown of thorns, other parts the nails . . . the petals symbolizes the 10 apostles—the two omitted being Peter who denied and Judas who betrayed Christ.

The cultivated fruit is bigger and has better keeping qualities than the wild variety. I went back to that lecturer, and told her that passion fruit grew wild in vacant lots in Shelby. And that when I was a little girl I loved to step on the green balls to hear 'em pop.

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