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*April 1950*

# In Cleveland County's Early Days

By MAMIE JONES

## ROBERT C. MILLER'S RECOLLECTIONS

"I thought the readers of The Star would like to read interesting incidents about old Shelby, which happened approximately 60 years ago when I was a boy. So, I am sending you a list of memories of the old days," writes Robert Miller of Charlotte. Mr. Miller, the son of Andrew C. Miller, was born and grew up in Shelby. For many years he was a teacher at the School for the Deaf in Morganton. I quote his letter:

When I was a little boy, Shelby was a village having several hundred inhabitants. Streets and sidewalks were not paved. The thoroughfares were either muddy or rusty, according to the weather. The streets in all four directions from the courthouse were of dirt with many holes in them, and they were very muddy when it rained.

Nearly every corner was decorated with hitching posts and water wells. There were no laws of sanitation, and garbage was dumped out into the streets, or left in the

yards. There were no water works, and small tin tubs were used for bathing purposes.

## SMOKY STREET LAMPS

The streets were lighted by oil lamps set on posts. Each evening Jack Beam, an old Negro, carried a five-gallon can of kerosene oil about the streets and filled the smoky lamps. When Shelby men went uptown at night they carried lanterns to light the way, and keep them from stepping into the holes in the sidewalks. Homes were heated by wood-burning stoves and open fires.

Any person in those days who owned a horse and buggy was regarded as a substantial citizen. Quite a number of people were excited when the first automobile— or gasoline buggy—came to Shelby.

Nowadays, every Sunday we see a great many cars speeding along the highways; but many years ago it was considered a sin to drive a horse and buggy for pleasure on Sunday. When I was a little boy it was a rare thing to see a buggy or

other vehicle on the streets on Sunday.

I remember very clearly the big crowd and the great excitement one day in the Fall of 1889, when the first locomotive came into the Shelby station over what is now the Southern railway line from Rock Hill, S. C., to Marion, N. C. It was then called the Charleston, Cincinnati, and Chicago railroad.

## PRIMITIVE COOKING

Practically all the cooking was done on wood-burning stoves and open fires instead of on electric and oil stoves, such as we use today. I recall the large fire-places with iron rods running across and large hooks attached thereto upon which to swing pots for cooking vegetables and meats. Ovens (Dutch type iron ovens) were used to make salt-rising bread, and skillets were used for frying. Large coals were pulled from the fireplace to the hearth, and the coffee pot placed thereon. Oak and hickory woods

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were used and the coals were excellent for such cooking. It was hard to excel the lye hominy—sometimes called big hominy—the cornbread, the salt-rising bread, and the big thick biscuits of those days. The cooking fireplaces were much larger than those in the other rooms of the houses.

In connection with the old-time fireplaces, I recall, when I was a boy, a family living on the road beyond Fallston, who did not let the fire go out for 15 years. They did not use matches, but covered up the embers every night.

### "MINDING THE FLIES"

Flies gave much trouble in those days and to recall the cooking of

that time brings to mind the fly-brushes used. Paper cut in strips was attached to a slender strip of wood, and some child of the household, or a colored servant, always stood by the table to keep the flies away.

People who had peafowls used their feathers to "mind the flies." There were many peafowls in those days, and feather brushes were also used to keep flies away from the sick bed. Later came the fly nets, fly traps, fly screens and fly paper.

That was the way too, of lye soap made from ashes, and of oil lamps. And people seemed to be better satisfied and happier than they are today with all the modern comforts and conveniences.

I remember when we did not have a newspaper but once a week.

When there was to be a funeral, a notice was written on a sheet of paper, this was mounted on a piece of cardboard, this was tied with black ribbon streamers from the back, very much like the white satin ribbon of the essay of the old-time graduate. This funeral notice was carried by a messenger to almost every door in town, so that the people might know the time and place of the funeral.

### SOCIAL LIFE AND AMUSEMENTS

I remember the social life of older generations here. The society people had many interesting amusements.

Among the chief amusements were tennis, baseball, cycling, horse and buggy riding, checkers, church picnics, sociables, political meetings, home talent plays, bowling, and old-fashioned dancing.

When ball games, tournaments, revival meetings, and political gatherings were being staged all the stores in town closed, and everybody attended. That generation knew very little of our modern fast life. There were many rifle shots—many skilled marksmen who could shoot off a turkey's head at 75 yards. Horse racing was in vogue too.

The young people of those days did not have as much freedom as they do nowadays. Mothers were very strict, and few young people went out for pleasure on Sunday. When the young people went on trips and picnics, or were out at night, they were chaperoned.

Wooden-wheeled bicycles and high bicycles were used. The businessmen rode their wheels to their stores and offices. Young men and young women formed cycling parties and had the time of their lives.

Cleveland Springs was a popular summer resort and excursion spot then, and a great many people came to Shelby from other towns on excursions, and Shelby people went on excursions to the mountains and the seashore.

Those were the days!

(Note: I am sure my readers join with me in thanking Mr. Miller for these interesting reminiscences.—M. J.)

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