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In Cleveland County's Early Days

By MAMIE JONES

RECOLLECTIONS OF EARLIER DAYS

Recently I was asking Will Harris, Carl Webb, and Pat McBrayer about their memories of earlier days. Not too "early days" because each of these gentlemen is comparatively young.

Immediately their minds went back to the days of swimming at Chapel's Bend on Broad river just west of the city. And, since swimming necessities undressing, the talk veered around to underwear, the kind worn by local boys more than 50 years ago when their mamas made their (then) "unmentionables" out of flour sacks. Sometimes the bright colored printing on the outside of the sacks had been only partially washed out.

LILY WHITE IN COLORS

Pat McBrayer recalls an embarrassing occasion when he was wearing brand new flour-sack undergarments made by a seamstress who owed Pat's papa, Dr. I. McBrayer, for doctor's services. She had neglected to wash out all the colored lettering on the sacks. For some time before Pat stripped for the swim he had been sitting on the ground; and when he undressed and started to dive in, his companions behind him burst into shrieks of uncontrollable laughter, for in big colored letters across that bare part of his anatomy on which he had been sitting were the words LILY WHITE in bright colors, the imprint of the lettering on the flour sacks from which his drawers had been made.

"AUNT LIZ" GREEN

Mrs. Veva McFarland Armour has vivid recollections of "Aunt Liz" Green, a big, fat Negro woman with large, protruding eyes, and a most unattractive exterior. All the children in town were mortally afraid of her. Pat McBrayer suggests that in those days when Aunt Liz was around town there was no need for a juvenile officer. The threat that a naughty child would be turned over to Aunt Liz was usually enough to keep the average youngster straight. Pat suggests further that many mothers of children probably gave Aunt Liz food and other things as an inducement to her to make the children afraid of her.

Veva says that one summer's night her mother was getting ready to go to prayer meeting. Veva did not want her mother to leave her and wept loudly. Her mother said: "Veva, if you don't hush crying, I'll call Aunt Liz to come and get you." The door was open

and Aunt Liz happened to be passing at that moment. She came on the porch and said "Little girl, if you don't hush crying I'll take you and put you in a deep hole where I keeps my chillun. I keeps it locked with this key (holding up a huge door key). I won't give you nothing to eat except cornbread and cowpeas. No water, no nothing, but peas and cornbread." Veva stopped crying; and for many a day thereafter fear of Aunt Liz kept her on her best behavior.

For my younger readers, it might be well to explain the use of the word aunt in connection with a Negress. When I was a child we were taught to regard elderly Negroes with affection and respect; and as a mark of respect we used the terms "aunt" and "uncle" for old Negro women and men. Now, today (I am sorry to say) the Association for the Advancement of Colored People resents the use by white people of the terms aunt and uncle for old black-skinned friends; and asks that we do not use these terms.

NAMES OBLITERATED

Oliver Anthony deploras the use of paint in certain places. Oliver says that in earlier days he, and nearly all the other local boys, wrote their names on the wall and ceiling of one of the rooms in the freight depot at the Seaboard Air Line railroad station. Oliver says he loved to go to this room and read again these names and recall old friendships, happy experiences and pleasant memories of by-gone days. A few years ago, to his regret, the room was painted and all these names covered up.

Hugh G. Miller, Sr., who now lives in Raleigh, writes: "I lived in Shelby . . . I remember when I was 12 years old I used to run to the home of my grandparents, Dr. and Mrs. W. J. T. Miller, for good hot cakes and sausage. My grandfather made good locust beer and often treated me to it."

ELECTRIC STREET LIGHTS

Fell Babington recalls being told that the first electric lights in the USA were at Black's Station, S. C. (now Blacksburg).

Mrs. Virginia Anne Stockton Elliott recalls a trip to Black's Station in 1890. Bessie Finch who had been living with her Aunt Mary Cabaniss, was returning to her home in Texas, and Mrs. Elliott who was then Virginia Anne Stockton, and her suitor Oliver Beam Elliott, whom she later married, went down with Bessie to see her off on the train at Black's

Station. (Bessie may come to Shelby this summer). Mrs. Elliott recalls that on that same day Maj. H. F. Schenck and other members of his family were at Black's Station to see Miss Lily Moore off on the train for Texas. Miss Moore had been visiting in the Schenck home and later married John F. Schenck.

The thing that impressed all this on Mrs. Elliott's memory was that after the ladies left on the train, the Schencks drove toward Kings Mountain to see—Mrs. Elliott says—the first electric lights ever in use in this section. Does anybody recall whether Kings Mountain had electric lights as early as 1890?

IN THE 1890's

Nowadays, country homes are as nice as town homes. But I recall when driving along country roads more than 50 years ago that on nearly every front porch there was a shelf across one end on which was a bucket of water and a wash basin. Every morning the men of the family usually came out on this front porch and did their bathing for the day. That is, every day except Saturday. On Saturday they usually had an all-over bath.

In earlier days we did not have the comforts which nearly everybody has now. I recall helping my mother fill hand-woven bed-ticks with newly threshed wheat straw. These straw-filled ticks were placed on the bed next to the slats, and on top of this there was usually a cotton mattress. We had feather beds for some, but not all, of the beds. It was considered bad luck to buy or sell feathers. So the average household got its feathers from its own chickens and geese.

About 1899 or 1900 there were several cases of smallpox in the town. I recall an ill man was left alone in an isolated house and after he got over the fever he was removed from the house and placed with several other smallpox victims in a pest-house which was—I think—back of the cemetery. Later, both houses were set on fire and burned down, as a precautionary measure to prevent the spread of the disease.

Recently I wrote about the quaint little red-brick court house which was replaced in 1907 by the present structure. I said there were six rooms upstairs. Buck Hardin and Fell Babington say I am entirely wrong. That there was only one big upstairs room where court was held. Fell reminds me there were

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12 ladder-back chairs for jurors who sat at the left of the judge's stand, which faced south.

SPELLING MATCHES

Meetings of various kinds were held in this court room. I recall a Teachers' institute that was held there for a week during one summer. Professor J. A. Anthony, county superintendent of education, was in charge assisted by Miss Addie Gardner. At this institute—I think it was in the early 1900's—Dr. McIver of Greensboro Normal college, was one of the instructors.

When the graded school building, where Junior high now stands, was burned in 1905, classes were held in this court room for several months during the winter and spring while the new school building was being erected. I think the schoolhouse was burned in October, 1905.

In the late 1890's public spelling matches were quite popular. I recall a spelling match held in this court room in which the school children of the higher grades took part along with many of the town's older men and women. The admission fee was 10c, the proceeds to be used for charity.

Miss Addie Gardner, teacher of the 7th and 8th grades, a woman of exceptionally fine mentality but with a very high temper, was regarded as one of the best spellers in town. I am not sure, but I think Sam Gidney was giving out the words. He asked Miss Addie to spell "styly." She spelled it s-l-i-l-y. Miss Addie contended that either spelling was correct (which it is). The result was a row which shook the town for days. O, well! It was such a little town, it didn't take much to shake it.

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