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# In Cleveland County's Early Days

By MAMIE JONES

## MEMORABLE EVENTS IN CLEVELAND COUNTY

Let us recall together a few of the much-talked of events in this county in the earlier days.

In the 1850's four Shelby men each won a small fortune in the Louisiana lottery. These men, namely, Billy Corbett, John F. Stephens, Augustus Burton, and Mark Carroll each held a winning ticket for \$5,000 in the Louisiana lottery. They went to Charleston, S. C., to collect, and were paid in gold pieces.

Comparing the purchasing power of a dollar in 1850 with the purchas-

ing power of a dollar in 1950, these winnings were equal to \$50,000 each.

## AN APPARITION

In "Sherrill's Annals of Lincoln County," there is a story about ex-governor Gordon Hutchins Burton (kinsman of Augustus Burton, above mentioned) which happened when the eastern portion of this county was part of Lincoln.

In April, 1836, ex-governor Burton was returning to his home. He suddenly became very ill, and stopped at a house by the roadside near Statesville, and died within a few hours.

His wife, Mrs. Burton, made this

statement: "That afternoon, April 21st, 1836, I was walking in the yard with the children when I saw—or thought I saw—my husband alight from his horse and walk into the house. I called to the children, 'Hurry, children, your father is going into the house.' They rushed in to see him, but the Governor was not there." Later, Mrs. Burton learned that her husband had died that same day and hour at a house in Iredell county.

Recently, in one of my articles, I mentioned Dr. W. P. Andrews who

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# LIFE

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practiced medicine here for a great many years, and who in the 1880's was the only surgeon in the county. I also wrote a story about a hard working Negro man, John Wilson, who was better known by his nickname, John-the-barber.

Some days ago ex-Sheriff Durbro D. Wilkins told me about a much talked of event which occurred in 1886, or maybe it was 1887, in which these two men, John-the-barber and Dr. Andrews were the chief participants.

At that time Shelby's popula-

tion was about 1,200. There was no hospital, and no suitable place for any sort of surgical operation. And for a doctor to cut a man's abdomen open to adjust his internal economy was more than a nine-days wonder. In fact, it was something the average individual thought could not be done. That is just what did happen. John-the-barber became

severely ill, suffering with the abdominal region. Dr. Andrews, Dr. O. P. Gardner and Dr. Chauncey Gidney were called. These doctors in consultation decided that John had locked bowels.

Although Dr. Andrews had some training in surgery and

Physicians and Surgeons College in Philadelphia, his local surgery practice had been confined to amputations and minor emergency operations. These men knew that if John were operated on he might die. They were sure he would die if something were not done. They took a big chance.

According to Mr. Wilkins, they put the Negro on a large kitchen table in his home. Dr. Andrews made an abdominal incision, took out John's intestines, cleaned them, straightened out the kinks, put them back where they belonged, and sewed him up, Dr. Gidney and Dr. Gardner assisting.

Nowadays, doctors do operations like this quite frequently, and nobody thinks it unusual, but sixty-five years ago, with small opportunity for sterile conditions, and not much anesthetics, it was a remarkable achievement, and many folks refused to believe such a thing could be done.

I wonder what drug they used for deadening the pain. They would not have known how to administer ether if they had had it. It is probable they used morphine and maybe laudanum. But both drugs would have had to be given by mouth. Although the hypodermic syringe for injecting morphine and other drugs under the skin for quicker effect had been invented in 1855, I doubt if our Shelby doctors had it sixty-five years ago. Can anybody tell me what they did have?

Mr. Wilkins says these doctors sewed John up. That he got well and worked for more than forty years thereafter.

### THREE DEATHS

As a rule, these stories of early days do not contemplate events

later than 1900. However, there are 3 deaths which occurred in the first decade of this 20th century that I shall mention; though, I do so with great reluctance.

On the night of August 3rd, 1901, Chief of Police Robert Shelton Jones was shot and killed by a Negro, Jim Lowery, whom he was arresting. The night-watchman, Solon Ford, was with Chief Jones at the time.

The killer got away and was never apprehended, although a large reward was posted for his capture. There were wild rumors that he was lynched. But this is not likely.

Rev. T. M. Lowery, at one time pastor of the Presbyterian church here, told me some years later when he held a pastorate at Memphis, Tenn., that he had seen a Negro whom he believed to be Jim Lowery laboring with a construction gang near Memphis. He approached the Negro and spoke to him, but the man was sullen and would not talk. Mr. Lowery told me that he went again to where this gang was working, determined to make another effort to talk with the Negro. However, he was told that the Negro had left the job; had gone to Kentucky; and had been killed there.

Since Jim Lowery grew up on the farm of Rev. Lowery's father, near York, S. C., and since Mr. Lowery had known Jim since he was a boy,

it is probable he would have recognized him.

### LAST PUBLIC HANGING

On the 28th of Aug., 1904, Chief of Police B. Edgar Hamrick was shot and killed by a drunken Negro, Ben Clark, whom he had arrested and had put into the jail cell. In searching the drunk, the chief had failed to find the pistol in the man's overalls pocket. The Negro also shot Sheriff A. B. Suttle, but the bullet merely grazed the Sheriff's abdomen, leaving a red welt. At the same time the Negro shot nightwatchman Joe Kendrick, in the neck. But Mr. Kendrick's heavy coat collar deflected the bullet somewhat, and it was extracted by Dr. Ben Palmer, with Durbro D. Wilkins assisting him.

Nightwatchman Kendrick shot the Negro twice in the chest, in the same area Chief Hamrick was hit. After Dr. Palmer examined the Negro's injuries, he came down stairs and told the angry crowd in front of the jail that there was no use doing anything to the killer, that he would be dead in five minutes. But the Negro did not die, although he lay on the concrete floor for two days with nothing under him and nothing over him, and very little attention of any kind. Later, he recovered, and on a lovely day in November, he was hanged on a gallows, just below the jail. To my amazement and horror many of the best men

and women in Shelby attended this execution. This was the last public hanging in the county.

### ROADSIDE HOLD-UP

The third death was that of a man named Walker, on May 9, 1909. On the Fallston road a few miles above Shelby, there is a marker at the spot where this man died.

There were not many automobiles in this section in 1909. It is said that Dr. T. F. McBrayer (Doctor Iv.) was the first doctor between Lincolnton and Asheville to use an automobile for making professional calls.

One afternoon soon after he had bought the car, Dr. McBrayer was on his way to Fallston to see a patient. Dr. McBrayer's wife and their two little daughters, Frances and Miriam, were with him. Rush Thompson was driving the car.

A few miles above Shelby they came up with a man and his family riding in a horse-drawn buggy. Horses were very much afraid of automobiles in the earlier days, and before passing Rush Thompson stopped and asked the man in the buggy if it would be all right to pass. The man said it would be. The woman in the buggy was very much frightened, and taking her little girl with her she got out of the buggy and ran across the field.

The party in the automobile went on to Fallston, stayed for several hours, and on the way back to Shelby were held up by a man with a loaded gun at the same spot where the car had passed the horse-drawn buggy some three hours earlier.

This man, his name was Walker, a young man probably 30 years old, of excellent reputation, had heard of the woman's fright and flight. He did not quite understand the situation. He resented the fact that people were driving around the country in automobiles frightening women and horses.

Walker's anger seemed particularly directed at the driver of the car, Rush Thompson. He told him he was going to kill him. Just as he raised his gun, cocked and ready to shoot, his knees buckled under him and he sank to the ground, dropping the gun. Mr. Thompson picked him up out of the road and carried him into a nearby house, and Dr. McBrayer pronounced him dead.

Was it fright that caused Walker's heart failure? Or was it the answer to Dr. McBrayer's agonizing prayer to God to protect his family from harm?

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