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Personal Writings - Undated - Beginning of Shelby

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BEGINNING AND EARLY DAYS OF SHELBY

By MADGE WEBB RILEY

The present generation of Shelby is fortunate in that there are many residents of this community who are direct descendants of the first settlers and who have heard from their parents and grandparents many homely events of the beginning of the new town of Shelby.

I presume I was asked by Mr. Weathers to write about the early days for the reason I am one of the many great-grandchildren of James and Susan Love, who gave the land, 147 acres, upon which the present uptown section of Shelby is today located. We must remember that our ancestors did not make the mistake of locating the county seat of Shelby until after they had won the fight to create the new county of Cleveland. The first meeting to organize the new county of Cleveland was held in the upper part of Lincoln County in the dwelling house of Teator Beam on Thursday, September 22, 1836. At this meeting George Cabiness was elected chairman and William Roberts, secretary, and plans were laid to make the fight for the new county.

I have been told that our forefathers believed it would help them with the Legislature and meet with less opposition from Rutherford and Lincoln Counties, if the promoters of Cleveland County exercised patriotic wisdom by proposing to name the town and county after two distinguished heroes of the Battle of Kings Mountain.

It will be observed that our ancestors, in their plans for the new county, were from the beginning good politicians. I have always heard that Dr. W. J. T. Miller, the father of the late A. C. Miller, Robert Miller and William Miller, who was Senator from Rutherford County at this time, and who introduced the bill on January 11, 1841 to create Cleveland, made a great speech in behalf of the new county, in which he emphasized its isolation and also paid eloquent tribute to the patriotism and public interests of

our people and to the grandeur of Col. Isaac Shelby and Col. Benjamin Cleveland, His argument and eloquence was irresistible and the bill passed without serious difficulty. Senator Miller must have made a profound impression throughout the county for today there are perhaps a dozen cities and counties in the United States named after either Colonel Shelby or Colonel Cleveland.

It must be borne in mind that in 1841 what is now Shelby was nothing but sparsely settled and largely virgin farm lands. The nearest approach to actually locating the town of Shelby was the provision in the Act that the county seat was to be located "not more than 4 miles from Wilson's mineral springs", now Cleveland Springs. The committee authorized to make the selection of the county seat were the leading citizens of this section. They were Durham Bryant, D.Gray, D.McDaniel, Samuel Andrews, my great-grandfather, R.H.Burton, Eli Hoyle, and H. Cansler. This committee, under the law, could locate the town of Shelby in any direction it chose, provided they did not select a site more than 4 miles from Cleveland Springs. This was the only limitation in the bill. Of course, every section - North, South, East and West set out to secure the county seat. It should be remembered that Wilson Springs was not only regarded as the center of the county, but was the best known point in this section. Its mineral waters had been famous long before the new county was heard of.

The committee to make this selection had a most difficult time. They were urged by every known pressure, personal, political, and otherwise. The Lincoln county group, that was coming into the new county of Cleveland, was led by S. Oates, John Roberts, Robert Falls, Joshua Beam and William Graham. They wanted the county seat located in the Lincoln County territory of Cleveland. They first proposed to locate Shelby at what is now known as the "Rock Cut" near the station of Stubbs on the Seaboard Air Line railroad. To this the Rutherford County group offered violent objection. The Lincoln County group then proposed

to locate the town of Shelby on the county line road with part of the town being in old Lincoln and part in old Rutherford. This proposed compromise suggested the area of the present county home, embracing the Elizabeth Church section. The Rutherford County group, composed of Samuel Bailey, Yancel Reisendene, Thomas Roberts, George Cabiness, and William Covington, were determined to locate the new town in the territory taken from Rutherford. Hot and bitter debates ensued. It had all the elements of log rolling that always arises in such controversies.

At this point, James Love made his strategical move. He owned all the land on both sides of what is now Route #18 from Zoar Church through the present town of Shelby. He lived in a big house on the vacant lands near the Shelby Cotton Mill just off South Lafayette Street where the Duke Power Sub-station is now located. James Love appeared before the contending groups and said, "I have the solution to the whole situation that ought to please everybody". He contended that he had a site within 2 miles of Cleveland Springs and in the center of the county. He proposed to make a deed to the commission for 147 or 150 acres of his land in what is now the heart of Shelby for a county seat. He submitted his proposition in the form of a deed and was accepted. Recitals in this deed show that James Love was a far-sighted man. He was planning for the future and he had a vision beyond his time. The deed recited that it was made with "perfect understanding that 6 one-acre lots were to be dedicated and set apart by the commissioners for the purpose of religion and education, 2 acres of which were to be appropriated for a male academy and a female academy, (he evidently did not believe in co-education), and 4 acres were set aside for the use of such churches as may be permitted thereon". There were evidently such churches at that time in America that my ancestor did not think would be allowed to locate in the new town. The Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian and Episcopal churches in due time became the

beneficiaries under this deed. The deed also held out to the commissioners an appealing offer. The new county must have a courthouse, a jail, and county home, and it had no money. Love provided that the commissioners were empowered to sell the remainder of the 147 acres, blocked out in lots at public auction, and to use the proceeds for public purposes. Thus, James Love created the background for the first real estate auction and boom in Shelby. We may well imagine the alluring picture that was laid out before the land speculators of that period. It is well to remember that at that time there was not a railroad in the county, nor a store within miles. The present courthouse square was a corn patch and the block of the First National Bank, a cow pasture, the most of the acreage being in woodland. The commissioners sent all the way to Lincolnton to get John Harry, a native of far-away Maryland, as auctioneer. In 1842 the grand public sale was held. The story goes that John Harry was blessed with a fertile and vivid imagination. He put on the heat and painted a glowing picture of the future of Shelby that would some day possess a population of 500. Everybody thought he was exaggerating, but we had speculators then, as we have them now, and the lots sold freely and the written report is that they bought "fabulous prices". They actually sold the 141 acres for less than \$15,000 and immediately the commissioners proceeded to build a log courthouse, a tight jail, and a rude poor house.

I have been told by my grandfather, Dr. William Andrews, that James Love who had recently visited our national capital had been greatly impressed with the wide streets of Washington, D. C. He insisted that in laying off the streets for the town of Shelby that they be made wide and commodious. He urged that the same mistake not be made in Shelby that was made in laying off the towns of Lincolnton and Rutherfordton where the streets were very narrow.

John R. Logan, the progenitor of the late sheriff Hugh Logan was

selected as surveyor of the new town. It is said that James Love and surveyor Logan were roundly criticised for their plans and wasting so much good land for what was termed "useless purposes". Of course, they did not contemplate automobiles, parking spaces and traffic jams, but they did have an eye for the beautiful.

We owe no little to James Love and John R. Logan and the wise commissioners who really approached their responsibility in the making of a new town with a degree of high intelligence, wisdom and foresight for the future.

One other word - I am pleased to say that my sister, Mrs. O. Max Gardner, is planning to present to the county commissioners during the centennial, a portrait of our great-grandfather, James Love, to be hung on the courthouse walls. At that time an appropriate speaker will further develop the history of the life, character and public service of the father of the town of Shelby.

James Love and his wife, Susan, are buried at Zoar Baptist Church, and the following inscription is on his marker:

"Peace to a good man's ashes
James Love
born
Jan. 6, 1796
died
Nov. 15, 1878
Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord,
and their works do follow them".