

1950-12-06

1950, December 6

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#### Recommended Citation

Jones, M. (1950, December 6). Cleveland County Early Days, The Daily Star. Fay Webb Gardner Collection, Gardner-Webb University Archives, John R. Dover Memorial Library, Boiling Springs, NC.

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Mar 6-1950

# In Cleveland County's Early Days

By MAMIE JONES

**"THE MIRACLE OF TODAY IS THE COMMONPLACE OF TOMORROW."**

In the beginning, God said "Let there be light", and there was light. And for eons of years the light of the sun by day and the light of the moon, and stars by night was all the light man had.

One day when the forked lightning flashed in the sky, it did not stay in the sky, but came down to earth and burned a tree. Primitive man took a chunk of this burning wood to his cave, fed the flame, and it lighted and warmed his cave, and he kept the fire throughout the years.

Somewhere along the way, man found that fire could be started by friction of certain substances, and that sparks could be produced which, when coming in contact with inflammable material, would ignite and produce fire. But this was a slow and very difficult process.

For many years efforts had been made to invent what we now call matches. But until approximately 125 years ago the only way to have fire was to keep it burning year to year, to start it with flint, or to borrow from a neighbor.

It is quite probable that among our oldest citizens there are those who remember taking a certain kind of iron pot—kept especially for the purpose—and going to a neighbor's maybe miles away, and toting home a pot of live fire coals. There used to be an expression among the older people when a neighbor came visiting

and stayed only a short time—perhaps an hour—the hostess would exclaim, "why, you're not going yet! What did you come for? To borrow a chunk of fire"?

## THE ETERNAL FIRE

It is said that in the home of Sanders Wright and his sisters who lived near Fallston, fire was kept burning from the 1860's until death broke the family circle a few years ago.

In a recent newspaper article, Rev. W. H. Anthony tells of a fire in Saluda, N. C., that was lighted 160 years ago by a man named Morris, and was kept burning continuously until recently, when the last of the Morrises went away. The neighbors called it "the eternal fire."

The latter part of the 17th century matches were invented, but were not perfected until about 1833. Even then, it was necessary to draw the match through two folds of sandpaper to ignite it. The perfection of matches was indeed a progressive step, for where man can carry fire he can carry civilization. Paradoxically, where man can carry fire he can bring ruin and destruction, and destroy civilization.

Throughout the years tallow candles were used for light, though for more than two thousand years lamps of a kind have been in use. These lamps had some sort of stationary wick which rested in bowl containing animal fat or fish oil.

The first matches seen in this section were brought by Noah Hoyle, of the Knob Creek

section. Mr. Hoyle made a trip to Charleston in 1835, and brought back with him a miniature barrel three and one-half inches high, containing 20 matches for which he paid \$1.00. There were persons who walked 15 miles to see Mr. Hoyle "strike fire."

## KEROSENE OIL

The first oil well in America was sunk in 1859. Just after the close of the Civil War kerosene reached Shelby, but people were afraid of it. I quote briefly from the reminiscences of Harry Fulenwider:

"1868: The first hotel I can remember was kept by the late eccentric and jovial Jim Alexander on the South Court side, when old tallow candles lighted your supper and the way to bed. Then kerosene oil was tried by a few for the first time, which proved sorrowful to the family of a Mr. Hawkins who, with one of his little children, was burned by a lamp turning over and spreading the burning flames which caused their death. The morning after this accident there could be seen all the kerosene lamps from the Alexander tavern scattered and broken on the streets and sidewalks of the place."

## FIRST ARC LIGHT SEEN HERE

Thomas Edison perfected the incandescent light (after 3,000 trials) in October, 1879. During the early 1880's Robinson's circus showed here and gave demonstrations of Edison's incandescent light. An eye



## LIFE

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witness described this demonstration as follows:

"A steam engine was brought in to generate power. A hole was opened in the top of the canvas tent to let out smoke from the engine. The steam engine generated the electricity. Two large carbons were drawn in close contact by ropes, and the electric current turned on. Some of the spectators complained that the light was so bright it blinded them so they not see the remainder of the performance."

Shelby had electric lights in some of the homes and business houses as early—or perhaps earlier—than 1900. I know we had electric light in the house I now

live in 1901. R. B. Miller installed the first generator at Laura Glenn Mills south of Shelby in the late 1890's and furnished current for local homes and businesses.

## ELECTRIC STREET LIGHTS IN 1902.

I went to the City Hall to get information about the city's early contracts regarding electric lights. But the earliest Minute Book of the proceedings of the Town Council is dated May, 1911.

In the early 1900's Hugh Miller and A. W. McMurry bought from R. B. Miller the generator he had used at Laura Glenn Mills, and installed this and some additional new equipment at the Shelby Cotton Mills and furnished power from there, for business places and for the homes.

A. W. McMurry says he is not sure when he and Miller started this business, but that soon thereafter the City of Shelby installed electric street lights and bought current from them. It is my understanding that electric street lights were first used here in 1902. He says further, that to induce householders to put in lights the houses were wired free. And that Mr. Barron was brought here from Rock Hill to manage the electric light plant.

Later, the Shelby Electric Light & Power Company, Inc., was organized and stock was sold.

Among the stockholders were S. A. McMurry, J. J. McMurry, A. W. McMurry, D. D. Wilkins, C. C. Blanton, and others. J. C. Smith was president, and S. A. McMurry was secretary of the company. This Company bought power from the Duke Power Company, which in turn it sold to the Town.

## CITY REFUSES TO RENEW FRANCHISE

In the Fall of 1911, J. T. Gardner was mayor and the aldermen were: L. E. Ligon, A. P. Weathers, Z. J. Thompson, and J. L. Suttle. This City Council notified the Shelby Electric Light & Power Company that under a clause in the franchise granted them, the city had a right to buy the plant, and asked the S. E. L. & P., Co. to name two appraisers, to confer with two appraisers whom the City would name, to determine what would be a reasonable price for the electric light plant and good will.

The Shelby Electric Light and Power Company denied that the city had any such right or option, and refused, emphatically, to sell. The City Council put the "squeeze" on them by telling them that if they did not sell, their franchise would not be renewed. They finally agreed to sell and to continue furnishing (thru Duke Power) electricity to the City for a reasonable price. Deed for the property was made in May 1912.

## BOND ISSUE OF \$15,000

In December, 1911, an election was held to determine the will of Shelby citizens as to whether to vote a \$15,000 bond issue to purchase this electric light plant. At that time Shelby had a population of approximately 2,200. In the election, 158 votes were cast "for city ownership of electric lights," and 39 voted against it.

Shelby owes a debt of gratitude to June Gardner and that board of Aldermen for their foresight in buying this plant. Were it not for the income from the city electric lights, Shelby taxes would be a great deal higher than they are.

## FIRST BICYCLE

Another interesting act at the circus above referred to, was a man riding a bicycle. Never before had the spectators seen a man riding on two wheels, one before the other. They predicted quite loudly that he would break his fool neck. Several years later there were a number of bicycles in Shelby. I do not know who had the first one, A. C. Miller or Lawson Quinn. In 1899, John Shannonhouse had the first bicycle with hub-breaks on it.

The first sidewalk paving was put down in front of what is now the First National Bank on La-Fayette street. At that time there was a drug store on the corner operated by (I think) Clyde Webb. And next to that was the Central Hotel, operated by Mrs. C. R. Dogget. There was then a front porch where hotel guests and family sat on nice days.

L. U. Arrowood tells me that when he came here in 1906, this part of the sidewalk was being paved by J. S. Branton. Mr. Arrowood says further, that in 1908, a man named Beale (from South Carolina) put down sidewalk paving around the business section and in front of the Presbyterian church. That in 1909 he (Arrowood) put down paving on the sidewalks of the business section of South Lafayette street. And in 1909 and 1910 he put down paving on East Warren and East Marion streets. In 1910 he put down paving on West Marion from Trade Alley, about three blocks West. The paving around the Court Square was laid by the contractors who built the Court House in 1907. The general paving program for the streets was begun about 1921.

In April, 1907, the city voted bonds to pay for installing water works.

Note: These stories which have been appearing in this section (nearly) every Thursday for almost two years, will appear only very occasionally hereafter. The Daily Star feels it can use the space more profitably otherwise.

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