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In Cleveland County's Early Days

By MAMIE JONES

Among the very first acts of the Justices of the Peace, after they had organized themselves into a governing body for the newly erected county of Cleveland (March 8-9, 1841), was to call an election for Wardens of the Poor. Those elected were: David Warlick, Lawson Canipe, Henderson Borders, Wm. Covington, Jacob Anthony, Lewis Corbett, John Baily and Prior McEntire.

It was the duty of these Wardens to have supervision and care of the destitute and homeless of the county, and to find homes where they could live. Usually the homes chosen were those that offered the cheapest board, which was \$3.00 to \$3.50 a month. The wardens were concerned only with the care of white persons. The Negro slaves were cared for by their masters.

COUNTY HOME BUILT

In 1847, county leaders felt it would be better to have a house and farm owned by the county where aged and infirm persons could live and be maintained in part by the products of the farm. At the August meeting, 1847, of the court of P. & Q. Sessions, a committee, namely, B. Bridges, John R. Logan and T. P. Grigg, was appointed, and instructed to purchase a tract of land of not less than 200 acres within four

miles of Shelby, suitable for a county farm and poor-house.

The committee reported as follows:

"We have purchased on a credit of one and two years for the sum of \$170.00 a tract of land of 200 acres, situated on the Post road leading from Spartanburg to Lincoln, on the branch of Buffalo creek, being a portion of the lands belonging to the estate of Jacob Fulenwider, deceased, sold by the Clerk and Master of Equity for said county. We have contracted with John M. Tucker . . . for the erection of a frame double cabin with one open entry of ten feet . . . the building to cost \$216." After considerable quibbling the contractor was allowed \$5.00 additional.

On a portion of this 200-acre tract there stands today the County farm and Home with its green grass and outbuildings, the Cleveland County Fair grounds, and the Prison camp.

INDENTURED APPRENTICES

So far as I know, there were no orphanages in North Carolina 100 years ago. Then, a dependent child left without parents or relatives to care for it, was placed in a home as an indentured apprentice. Or, as they said in those days, the child was "bound out." A man tak-

ing such a child into his household was required to give bond, usually in the amount of \$500.00, that he would give such apprentice the rudiments of an education. That is, the boy or girl was to be taught to read, write and spell, and "instructed as far as the Rule of Three" in figures. The child was supposed to get such education in 'two years' schooling." Since the school term each year was between three and four months (sometimes less) that meant such schooling as could be had in seven or eight months, altogether.

The bond provided that the indentured child should be taught a trade such as "the art and mystery of a common farmer;" or, "the art and mystery of a common blacksmith"; or, "the art and mystery of a common cabinet maker"; and other similar occupations. There was usually an agreement that when the boy reached 21, and the girl reached 18 years of age there should be some sort of bonus. A few masters agreed to pay a small amount of money; others agreed to give clothes or tools of trade.

William Forbis took an orphan girl into his home and promised to teach her "the art and mystery of a common spinstress" and to give her sufficient schooling to enable her to "read the New Tes-

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tament fairly well."

The minutes of the Court show that a free Mulatto boy was apprenticed to J. G. Mauney, who agreed to give him \$125.00 when he should become 21 years of age. This free Mulatto was evidently the child of a white woman by a Negro man. Since no white woman's child could ever be a slave, he was "bound out."

The majority of these "bound" children had a pretty hard time. They were usually servants in the home. There is a local story of a wealthy Shelby family that apprenticed an orphan girl about the same age as their own little daughter. According to legend, the orphan girl was not allowed to walk along the streets by the side of the rich little girl, but followed at a respectful distance behind. Some folks say she was not allowed to sit on the same bench with her in church.

TRENDS OF THOUGHT

Since today's generation thinks itself wiser than the generation which founded this county 110 years ago, I was surprised when told recently by one of the leaders in social welfare work in the state of North Carolina that, in a modified way, the trend of thought in social welfare work as relates to the care of the aged and destitute, and to dependent children, is turning back towards customs and practices of the middle of the 19th Century. She told me that today's leaders want to get away from institutional care for the homeless—young and old —

and get them into private homes.

As above stated, the county's poor were boarded in private homes during the first eight years of the county's existence. Then they were put into the institution known as the poor-house. Some of these leading social workers contend that the poor-house is a blot on civilization, and that the destitute should not be kept in county homes, but in licensed boarding houses with a home-like atmosphere . . . Or else that they should be placed in the homes of relatives, and that such relatives should be paid by the county to care for them.

Mrs. Mary Burns Parker tells me she thinks that with such conditions as we have locally, the County home is preferable.

DEPENDENT CHILDREN

After the close of the War Between the States orphanages were built and homeless children were placed in them, cared for, educated, and taught to work to earn their living. According to the ideas of the leading social welfare workers in this and other states, children should be placed in private homes instead of orphanages or institutions, the idea being to give the child the atmosphere of a normal home.

In a report published in a local paper recently, I noted the county of Cleveland is paying approximately \$1,000.00 a month for the maintenance and care in private homes of about thirty orphan children. This amount does not include clothing and medical attention which the county furnishes. Most of these children attend our county schools. I am told, however, that a few of these dependent children may soon be placed in orphanages.

BLACK VELVET COFFINS

Funerals, during the early days of the county, were not nearly so expensive as they are today. Then there were no nearby stores where coffins could be bought.

Mrs. O. B. (Virginia Ann) Elliott tells me that when she was a little girl her father, Frank Stockton, was a carpenter, and that they lived near Polkville. That when there was a death in the community Mr. Stockton made the coffin, frequently working all night to finish it. The most expensive coffin sold for \$5.00. This was made of thoroughly seasoned lumber he kept on hand for such purpose, and was covered on the outside with black velvet supplied by the purchaser. The inside of the coffin and the lid were padded with hand-carded cotton, and lined with white bleaching. The pillow was of hand-carded cotton with a white bleaching slip. Cheaper coffins were painted on the outside with lampblack. There were no facilities for embalming, hence the dead body could not be kept for any length of time.

In those days of black velvet coffins, funerals were quite different from what they are today. The funeral service probably did not begin until an hour after the time set. The procession moved very, very slowly on its way to the cemetery. If the relatives didn't "take it hard" by weeping long and loudly at the graveside, the general idea was that they did not love the deceased. Today, convention demands that notwithstanding a very deep heartache, the bereaved show as little emotion as possible in public.

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO

A century ago the average Cleveland countian ate his peas—and the greater part of his food—with his knife. Probably the reason for this was that he did not have four-tined forks as we have today. I have been told that no forks were manufactured in the USA until after 1814, and folks had to learn to eat with forks. Many poorer families used eating utensils made of wood.

In those very early days of our county, our forebears drank their coffee—if they had coffee—from a saucer. The saucer was made to hold nearly a teacup full. Those folks who did not have much money probably drank a beverage made of parched rye, sweetened with "long sweetening," which was another name for molasses. I am not sure just when the mustache cup, which is a coffee cup made with a band of china across the top of the cup to keep the long handle-bar mustaches out of the drink, were first used.

Those old folks never heard of vitamins. But they had 'em! Their bread was made of wheat or corn ground between heavy millstones operated by water power, and retained all the elements of the grain except the husks, and was brown. We who today must have white bread, have to take pills and buy vitamin tablets. Our forefathers ate the potlicker where the vegetables were cooked. They did not know it contained vitamins and mineral matter, including iron. But they knew it was good for them, and they ate it. Many cooks today pour that valuable potlicker down the drain.

In the early spring they drank sassafras tea and firmly believed it was a panacea for all ills. What do you think?