

Twenty-one Years a Judge



Photo by Ben Matthews

JUDGE JAMES L. WEBB

Judge Webb, Reaching 72, Tells Reminiscences of His Interesting Career

Jurist's Twinkling Eye and Firm Step Belie the Bible Record

Judge for 21 Years

He Has Seen Men at Worst and Best

By J. W. CANNON

Judge James L. Webb has to go to his old family Bible quite frequently to keep his spirit and body from telling him a lie. The Bible says that the beloved jurist from Shelby is 72 years old but his twinkling eye, quick step and keen mind take the props out from that Biblical assertion and if Judge Webb didn't admit it himself one would say that when the late Rev. G. N. Webb, Baptist minister went to mark his son Jim's name down as being born, he just added about 10 or 15 years by mistake.

But be that as it may, at least Judge Webb arrived and ever since that time he has been busy. He was busy when a Journal reporter asked for a story about the life which included 21 years on the Superior court bench with a record of 12 years as solicitor in his district before that.

But if one of the things that marks Judge Webb's life is attention to duty, there is certainly a more predominant one of kindness. One doesn't meet a stony stare or a gruff word from the "kindly judge" even if one mayhap be from a newspaper. It wouldn't be Judge "Jim" Webb to run a yellow dog away unnecessarily.

He could tell many things about those pupils who had done well

over his fellowbeings. He has seen North Carolina life at its lowest and its best. He has seen men tell pitiful lies and tragic truth. He has seen heroes and cowards in his day and is still seeing them.

But it is not these things that make Judge Jim outstanding and it was not about those things that the reporter asked him. Other jurists have seen those things too but what we wanted to know about as we want to know about every successful man is "How come?"

James L. Webb was born on a Rutherford County farm in 1853. When he first came into this world there were no judicial lines appearing on his brow and in fact he was not very different from many other babies of the time, tradition says. If there was ever any hint of him becoming one of the most beloved judges in North Carolina, it was not recorded.

Rev. G. N. Webb, his father, besides being a pastor owned a North

Carolina farm, which was not any great asset in the days before the real estate boom. Subdivision was a thing yet unborn and in time of the boyhood of "Jim" Webb, farms had to be worked.

"I look back with thankfulness on those days that I had to work," he said. "I don't believe in children being overworked but if they don't work at all they are liable to get into the low places of life. Its dangerous not to have something to do."

"Jim" Webb attended the school of his day to-wit a log cabin with slab benches and Webster's "Blueback." "I used a goose quill pen" he recollected. "I remember one institution in that old log school which I don't think would be such a bad idea today. It was called the 'Lazy Bench.' In front of the room there was a little short slab with posts in it for legs on which those pupils who had done well

"Jim" had to work two days and go to school one. He did everything that anybody would let him do to get a little money on which to go to school. He hauled wood. He walked behind a plough and he dug with a mattock.

After finishing the school at Shelby he went to Wake Forest College and it was here that he began to turn his mind around something for the future. "I wanted to be a lawyer but I wasn't sure I could make a success at it and above all things I wanted to do something which I could do well."

But any way "Jim" finally decided he believed he could make a lawyer out of himself and he began studying under Plato Durham later going to the old Richmond Hill school in Yadkin County where he studied under Judge Pearson, then on the Supreme court bench. He was fellow student of Governor Bob Glenn and Stephen A. Douglas, brother of the late Judge Douglas, of Greensboro. After finishing his course at Richmond Hill, he went to Raleigh, was given his license by Judge Pearson and then went back to his Shelby home to practice his profession.

"My first fee was the greatest one I ever received in my life," he said. "It was two spring chickens and a pound of butter and a woman walked four miles in the hot sun to bring them to me."

And then Judge Webb told about his first case.

"I was sitting in my law office with its two or three books and table and chair when this 70-year old woman walked in. She told me the story of how some creditors of her husband were suing her for \$20 on old debts against which the United States Supreme Court had recently ruled that homestead rights were not valid. If this old woman had had to pay that \$20 it would have ruined her. I took the case and appeared before the magistrate who by some chance or other ruled in her favor. She was very grateful and asked me how much I charged and I told her that she didn't owe me a cent. She said:

"Oh yes, I haven't got anything now but I am going to pay you something some time. I assured her that I wouldn't take a copper. And with as much fervor she assured me that I would be paid. She trudged off to her little home four miles in the country, walking all the way. It was next week that just before dinner that this woman walked up to our home with the two chickens and pound of butter. I refused to take them but it looked as if it were going to break her heart if I didn't take them and so we finally struck a bargain that if she would come in and eat dinner with me I would accept the fee. I appreciated the one from that old woman more than I have any that I have received since."

Judge Webb goes to the Bible for other things than get the record on his age.

"If people would just obey the divine commands, 'Do unto others as you would have them do you' and 'Love thy neighbor as thyself,' we would have no need of the courts."

And possibly it is that, together with hard work, a little ancestry and some of Webster's "Blueback" all mixed together that answers the question "How Come?" about Judge "Jim" Webb.

POSTMASTER CAUGH FIRST THIEF HE

The first reported theft of Shelby post office was in September 1911 when a negro, Cha Miller was caught redhanded Postmaster B. A. Baber in the of taking registered letters fi the box. A decoy letter had been planted after several articles I been missed.

Policeman Bob Kendrick a Wilbur Baber assisted in the capture of the negro. Keys were fou on him belonging to Judge J. Webb, Capt. J. F. Jenkins, Laurence Lackey and Roy Sisk. T culprit drew a considerable ter in the federal penitentiary.

NEEDS OF STATE JUDICIAL SYSTEM AS WEBB SEES IT

Oct. 27-1927
Judge J. L. Webb Says Method Is Needed To Speed Up Trials Superior Court.

Gastonia, Oct. 27.—The judicial system of the state of North Carolina, its great work and its present needs, was the subject of an address of Judge James L. Webb, of Shelby, at the Wednesday luncheon of the Lions club.

Judge Webb told of his trips to Gaston county as a young man, when he was a candidate and in the midst of a speaking program. Gastonia was then a wide place in the road with a dozen houses. But there were then in this county God-fearing men who stood for the right, and whose descendants today stand for their same principles. The same spirit of progressiveness found in the county then, according to Judge Webb, accounts for the steady growth that has not yet seen its end.

"So many people know little or nothing of the judicial system of the state," said the speaker, in beginning his talk on the courts of the state. "It behooves all to know about it and to respect it," he continued. "Men ought to respect the position of a judge, not for the man occupying the position but for the position itself and what it means."

"We must have the law, for without, there would be no assurance that we should wake up in the morning after going to sleep at night."

Judge Webb said the biggest need of today in respect to the judicial system is some means of facilitating and speeding up the trials in court. He said present growth and progress, with automobiles and prohibition have accounted for the clustering up of courts with small and in some instances very unimportant cases.

"The judicial system is all right," he said. "There is nothing wrong with it, but we must have some way of disposing of the thousands of cases that appear in court. Much criticism has been made because of the seeming inefficiency when as a matter of fact, the courts are hampered. In the present court, there are around 400 cases on the docket, some of them for speeding, on the public highway, which, according to an act of the last legislature, is now a matter for the superior court rather than for the magistrate."

He said that the state ought to be re-districted because of the ever-increasing number of cases to be heard. There are at present ten districts in the western part of the state and ten in the eastern. The last session of the state legislature did not re-district the state but did give the governor the power to appoint emergency judges of which there are now five in the state.

Judge Webb said this state and South Carolina were the only ones in the union which have the "rotating" system for judges, which permit them to handle court outside their own bailiwick.

He wound up his speech with a plea for honest and conscientious jury service. He declared that the honest and law-abiding man with no formal education is as good as any other, provided he has the common sense and the discernment necessary.

HERE ON MONDAY

Judge J. L. Webb Will Preside Over Term. No Sensational Cases On Docket.

The fall term of Superior court for Cleveland county will convene Monday morning with Judge James L. Webb presiding. Judge Michael Schenck was scheduled to hold the coming term but through an exchange the Shelby jurist will preside over the court.

Similar to recent courts nothing of a sensational nature is booked for trial at this term, and with the county in the midst of its busiest cotton picking season the court crowds are not expected to be so large.

Among the few cases that will attract a crowd will be that of the State against C. F. Silvers, Morganton merchant, and Miss Lena Williams, up-county school teacher, in connection with the death of Mrs. Easter Buff at Beam's Mill about the middle of August. Mrs. Buff was fatally injured when struck by an auto driven by Miss Williams, it being claimed that the Silvers car and another car featured in jamming the road. The preliminary hearing before the recorder drew a crowd that packed the court house and a similar crowd will likely hear the case aired fully.

Several interesting suits are on the civil calendar which will be taken up after the criminal docket.

BACK IN THE NINETIES a little girl went into a barber shop in Shelby and admired the many shaving mugs that were lined up there. She admired the mugs so much that she began saving them and today she has a collection of over 200 shaving mugs and cups of all kinds.

The owner of the rare collection is Mrs. Roscoe E. Lutz, of West Sumter Street. Her collection last week won her second place in the Hobby Fair, sponsored by the American Legion.

"I have always liked cups," says Mrs. Lutz, "but it was not until four or five years ago that I decided to assemble all my cups into a collection. I had a broken arm at the time and was lounging around the house one day when I happened to think of my cups and decided to put them all together and see just what sort of collection I had. That was actually the beginning of my collection."

"As a girl I used to go in my father's shop on North LaFayette Street and sit in the barber chair and admire the rows of shaving mugs in a cabinet on the wall. I had it over the other girls of that day, in that I could go into a barber shop and they couldn't. Women were not supposed to know much about the interior of barber shops in those days. When they would pass one they would always hold their heads stiffly erect and their eyes strictly to the front. As memory recalls, many of the shops had curtains over part of the windows so that it was difficult to see inside without deliberately staring."

"Because my father owned a barber shop, the place was my second home. So you see my interest and love for cups and shaving mugs date back to childhood days. The mugs greatly interested me for they bore the names of the fathers of my school mates. I remember well the cups of Governor Clyde R. Hoey, which I have now in my possession, Judge Jim Webb, L. A. Gettys, R. L. Ryburn, J. E. McMurtry, A. C. Miller, A. B. Sullivan, Dr. W. F. Mitchell, John Lineberry

Judge Webb was born in Rutherford county in 1853 being the son of that saintly servant of God, Rev. G. M. Webb. Mr. Webb is the oldest of the famous Webb family which includes Congressman Webb and several other prominent characters. Mr. Webb attended the common schools of the county and at the age of fourteen, entered Shelby Academy. After graduating here, he entered Wake Forest College where he stayed for two and a half years when he was called home to become editor of The Shelby Banner, then managed and edited by Hon. Plato Durham. Mr. Webb and Mr. Durham edited the Banner for some two years when Mr. Webb sold his interest and entered the law office of Mr. Durham. Later he entered the law school of Chief-Justice Pearson and in June, 1877, was admitted to the practice.

Early in his legal career he formed a partnership with Capt. J. W. Gidney. This was one of the most influential firms in the county and they served as county Attorney for a period of ten years and had a large and lucrative practice in this and the surrounding counties. Mr. Webb was elected Mayor of Shelby in 1880 and has been Alderman for several terms. Mr. Webb was nominated and elected to the Senate from this District in 1883 and re-elected in 1887 and was one of the most conspicuous figures in the presidential campaign of 1880. He was made postoffice inspector under Cleveland but was forced to resign on account of illness in his family. He was appointed Solicitor of the old twelfth Judicial District by Governor Holt to fill out the unexpired term of Frank I. Osborne who was elected Attorney General. After serving in this capacity for twelve years he was appointed Judge by the lamented Governor Aycock to fill out the unexpired term of Judge Hoke who was appointed to the Supreme Court. Judge Webb has been elected for two consecutive terms of eight years and if he lives to the end of his term which expires six years from next January he will have served for thirty years as Solicitor and Judge. His popularity is evidenced by the fact that he has never had opposition for office in his own party.

Judge Webb married Miss K. L. Andrews of Shelby in 1878 and children have been born to this union, two of whom survive. They are O. Max Gardner and Miss Madge Webb. They have a beautiful and art home on South Washington street.

BURTON WAS FIRST MASTER OF LODGE

Masonic Honors

In seeking details of the old cornerstone, Mr. Lineberger did, however run upon some interesting information of bygone days. Among other things he found that the first master of Cleveland lodge 202 A. F. and A. M. was Augustus A. Burton. Other officers were Thomas Williams, senior warden; A. S. Hardin, junior warden; Martin C. Roberts, treasurer; John F. Stephens, secretary; Henry F. Schenck, senior deacon; Jeff Black, junior deacon; Philo P. Hoke, tyler.

That was in 1858. Members at that time were: J. F. Aydolett, M. Elliott, W. F. Gold, N. A. G. Goode, P. V. Green, J. C. Gidney, W. L. Borders, J. S. Borders, Rev. W. S. Black, C. H. Dickson, Aud Deale, E. C. Bopson, L. M. McAlfee, W. McSwain, Dr. J. L. Neagle, Dr. J. W. Tracey, A. G. Walters, Jas. G. Williams, John Webb.

A recent issue of the Masonic bulletin asks: "We wonder if there are any of our present members who are descendants (the bulletin said 'ancestors') of these men?"

Among other things it was also learned that a called communication of the lodge was held during the Civil war. What it met for, why and what took place is not known. The meeting was held at 1:30 in the morning, due, presumably, to the presence hereabouts of Yankee troops.

Masters of the lodge up to 1905, when Capt. J. F. Roberts, present master took office for the first of four regimes, were: Augustus A. Burton, H. F. Schenck, R. B. Price, John W. Gidney, James L. Webb, W. L. Damron, T. K. Barrett, Albert B. Suttle, Samuel E. Gidney and Columbus C. Roberts. Mr. Gidney is the only one living.

Next to Capt. Roberts, who is serving his fourth term, Mr. Chas. S. Young master in 1928, has been master more times than any other—three in all.

"The city of Shelby was started in 1841, and the first home was built in 1840. It stood where the Central Methodist church is now and was erected by Dr. Williams. The late Judge J. L. Webb had his law office there for years and the building was not torn down until the church was erected.

"The first jail was built where the Chevrolet garage now stands.

"Tom Dixon, father of the famous sons, built a house just across the street from the jail.

"In 1875 the residential section of West Marion street was nothing but woods with only a few houses here and there.

"Three barrooms were operated in Shelby in 1890. One stood where the Doggett filling station is now, the second where the First National bank is, and the third where Rose's store stands.

"The old club house at Cleveland Springs was erected about 1841 by the Wilson family.

"Jesse Jenkins, banker, built the C. C. Blanton residence on North LaFayette street in 1870.

"John D. Lineberger owned the first blacksmith shop here in 1860.

"In 1870 the Baptist Female college was started at the present Victor hotel location."

Around Our Town

Shelby SIDELIGHTS

By RENN DRUM.

FAMOUS OLD STREET LOSING ITS LEADERS

Death and the changes wrought by the steady procession of years have laid a heavy hand upon Shelby's stately old South Washington street.

For one decade after another the tree-lined avenue, running south from the court square, was Shelby's most exclusive residential section, spoken of in tones of awe as were the Back Bay region in Boston and the old Riverside and Fifth Avenue areas in New York. There lived, and still live today, some of the town's oldest and most prominent families. Sumter street, as old data informs, was the city's first up-and-coming residential section. But as the years passed and the town got on its feet more pretentious dwellings were erected down South Washington; and South Washington has reigned, removed from the business whirl and invading gas stations, as a restricted boulevard of fine homes to be seen through the trees across long, wide lawns and protecting rows of shrubbery that were set out many years ago.

A decade ago, however, a city troubled with growing pains began to erect other exclusive residential suburbs. After all, there was just so much space on South Washington and that space was filled. There are handsome homes and beautiful settings in these other suburbs, but there is something about age that nothing will equal. South Washington has rivals but is still South Washington. It's somewhat like contrasting Duke university to Harvard and Yale. Duke has its mammoth and handsome buildings, its beautiful quadrangle and about everything necessary to make a college campus beautiful, but Duke, as yet, hasn't the history. If you get what we mean.

But South Washington is changing. Gaudy gas stations haven't interrupted its quietude and passing years add more beauty to its dignity. The changes, in other words, are not external, but on the inside of those homes it is another story. A street may remain, but the men who made it may not. Year by year men who built there, set out young shrubs and trees and watched them grow, are yielding to the inevitable inroads of time upon man and are being carried over to Sunset where a new cemetery was being started about the time South Washington began filling up with homes. Few there are living along South Washington today who remember when it was only a straggling street with the broomsage and undergrowth broken here and there by new residences. In another decade or so the few will not be there.

Of more recent weeks slow-moving funeral corteges seem to have been making regular drives along that street beneath the boughs of the overlapping trees. Check over, for emphasis, a portion of the death list—J. A. Anthony, W. H. Jennings, John R. Dover, Joe Smith, Walter ten—J. A. Anthony, W. H. Jennings, John R. Smith, Joe Smith, Walter Fanning, Judge James L. Webb, Sam A. Andrews, A. C. Miller and Dr. W. F. Mitchell.

A new generation, of course, is carrying on. It is always that way. Juniors are playing along the old street and grandsons, too. But the old timers are drifting out . . . the men who made the street, or were early residents there. The majority of the homes remain in the family. It is still the So-and-So residence, and likely will be through one generation and then another yet to come, but there are new faces inside—faces of younger men and women who cannot remember when the old trees were merely saplings and there were many vacant lots, upon several of which the boys of a bygone day played baseball.

In a few more years, retrace to the list above, and the last of the men who helped build South Washington will be no more. But their homes will, we suspect, remain for many years and descendants of their name will carry on. Even now an old-timer, leaning on his cane and taking a slow, shuffling afternoon walk along the shady sidewalks, could point out more homes where his friends are no more than could homes where they still remain.

And through it all, the never-ending alterations of hour hands that never, never stop, South Washington grows more historic and reaches the point where its story becomes a legend.

JUDGE WEBB GAVE ROOMS

FREE TO THE RED CROSS

For two years, Judge James L. Webb gave free of rent, three of his choicest rooms in the Webb building to the use of the Shelby Red Cross chapter as a work room and headquarters. While the Red Cross organization is still intact, the front rooms in the Webb building have been surrendered and quarters have been taken in one of the back rooms with Judge Webb still giving free of rent to the chapter. The Red Cross members numbering into the thousands throughout the county, should appreciate Judge Webb's generosity in giving his most desirable rooms free to this worthy organization.