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# In Cleveland County's Early Days

By MAMIE JONES

## INTERESTING WOMEN OF CLEVELAND COUNTY

The most important women of the early days in the county I shall not mention by name.

These are the women to whom we owe such civilization as we now have. These are the women who came with their husbands into what is now Cleveland county between 1760 and 1775, conquered a virgin wilderness, established homes, and made possible the lovely towns and county we now have. Without the women the men would not have stayed.

In a previous story, I have written how they came riding—when they did not walk—on sleds made with plank runners which dragged the ground. When the travelers came to a river the men cut down trees, made a raft, and floated over.

They lived devoid of everything which we—in what we think is a higher state of civilization—regard as essential for the meagerest of comfort. They built cabins of unhewn logs and daubed the chinks with mud. These cabins were covered with roofing boards split out of tree trunks and held in place with weight poles or, in many cases, anchored with stones.

The good earth was their floor, with a buffalo skin spread underfoot. For food, they killed game which they roasted on a forked stick before the open fire. They cooked in the ashes a johnny-cake (journey cake) made of corn pounded into meal in a mortar. They had no leavening for the bread, no soda, no baking powder. They ate the food probably out of wooden plates with wooden forks.

The brilliant flame of the pitchpine knot lighted their one-room cabins at night. Perhaps they stuck a rag in a bowl of grease and lighted that. Sometimes they shivered as the stillness of the night was broken by the cry of a brown bear or the howl of a wild cat just outside their cabins.

## PRIMITIVE WHEAT THRESHING

When they threshed their

wheat, less than 175 years ago, they used the same primitive methods that Boaz used when he was courting Ruth more than two thousand years ago. The wheat was put into a pit and the oxen trod it out! They heeded the Biblical admonition that the ox be not muzzled.

### BEDSTEADS WITH ONE POST

Few of these early settlers had any bedsteads. They gathered oak leaves and hay and straw, made a pile in the corner, and slept on that, being careful at night to see that no snakes had crawled in during the day.

Their first bedsteads had only one post, which stood well out in the room. A hole was bored in each two walls, and two holes bored in the bed post, and rails were fitted into the holes in the wall and into the single post. On to these rails they affixed rope cords, and this made a fairly comfortable foundation for their bed-ticks filled with either feathers or straw. They then put curtains around the beds which hung to the floor. These rope cords and curtains were made of thread spun from flax. The pioneers grew and spun flax long before they planted any cotton. They began raising cotton about 1815.

These pioneer women labored with their husbands, and they prospered. They frequently sickened and died young. Such medicine as they had was brewed from herbs growing around them.

There was child bearing and child loss. One of the numerous McSwain families had a five-year-old boy which was stolen by the Indians. Twelve years later, following a battle with the Indians, the boy was restored to his parents.

## SUSAN TWITTY

Probably the only famous woman Cleveland county has produced is Susan Twitty, the 17-year-old heroine of Graham's Fort.

Susan lived with her mother and stepfather, Col. William Graham, in a log house situated on Broad river about seven miles south of Shelby. Col. Graham built

this home as a fort. And it was used as a place of refuge for old people and children, since the Tories were ruthlessly murdering and pillaging throughout the section during the war of the Revolution.

Susan had a brother, William, two years older than herself. He had taught her to ride and shoot and she was fearless.

## TORIES ATTACK FORT

One day in September, 1780, this fort was attacked by a band of 23 Tories. They came riding up and shouting demands for surrender.

There were at the time a number of helpless people in the house and the only defenders were Col. Wm. Graham, William Twitty, his friend, David Dickey, and Susan Twitty. One bold Tory came right up to the house, got his gun in a crack and fired. Susan jerked her brother, William, out of the way just in time to save his being hit by a bullet. As the attacking Tory stopped to reload his musket, William shot him. Then before anybody knew what Susan was about, she rushed out of the door into the yard, amid a shower of Tory bullets, grabbed the dead man's gun and ammunition and, with the protection of a kind Providence, got safely back into the house where the gun and ammunition were desperately needed. With three of their number wounded and one dead, the Tories left but returned later and did considerable damage to the house.

The historian, Draper, in his book "Kings Mountain and Its Heroes" devotes nearly two pages to Susan's exploit.

## OUTSTANDING MEN

Susan married John Miller, a Revolutionary war hero. One of their sons, Dr. John F. Miller, was superintendent of the Eastern North Carolina Insane hospital at Goldsboro for eighteen years. Three of their sons, namely, William H. Miller who for many years edited the Shelby Aurora, Robert B. Miller a pioneer cotton manufacturer, and Andrew C. Miller a pioneer cotton manufacturer and local business man, were all quite prominent locally as civic and church leaders.

Later, I shall write of other interesting and outstanding women of the county.

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