SKETCHES of my ASHEBORO

by
Sidney Swaim Robins

ASHEBORO, NORTH CAROLINA
(1880-1910)

SKETCHES OF MY ASHEBORO

BY

SIDNEY SWAIM ROBINS

ASHEBORO, NORTH CAROLINA

1880 — 1910

Published by:
Randolph Historical Society, 1972

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

These sketches were all but three written between the late summer of 1968 and Washington's Birthday 1969. They were of course done mostly for my own interest and amusement, when not busy at something else. It had often been suggested to me that I might write down some memories of Asheboro as it was in my early memory. But I have no idea whether anybody, outside my own family, will enjoy reading them. It does not matter a great deal. **This** is the sort of thing I could do.

Having reached the mature age of five in 1883, a year before the Southern Railroad built its way into town, my short memory covers a short period of great changes. I cast my first vote in Asheboro in 1904, and have never lived there since, though never entirely losing connections. So these sketches carry memories of sixteen years, with echoes from further back.

It may be necessary to issue some warnings to anyone who does read these little sketches. My memory is clear enough on almost everything reported from it. But there are a few odd points of wavering memory. Streets may be mixed somewhat. There is a difficulty of memory about those two old downtown hotels. The Burns House was easy to name in a way, for Barney Burns was the last man to run it, and I am pretty sure he sold it to my father. The deed books will show. But I have no idea of who ran it when I was very young. The other one, I called the Trogdon House, because I have a strong association of Bill Trogdon with one or the other of them, and at the moment of setting names down "Trogdon" seemed right. But reading over Mr. Blair's History, I see he calls it the Hoover House, and again the Asheboro Hotel. (I remember now that Mr. Blair is correct.)

One other little incident: In the sketch of schooling I referred to a lady principal or teacher under the name of Miss Lily Hubbard. I now think one of the two lady teachers who seem to have had the school that year, was Miss Lily Porter, who married a Presbyterian minister named Shaw (she was daughter of David Porter and aunt of Miss Hope Hubbard, of Farmer); and I believe the other lady may have been named Hubbard. I think so. For an omission in the school story, there was a Virginia lady, whose name feels quite like Clendenning, who had the school headship perhaps. She taught me some good manners, and had some echo of Virginia old family about her. Her memory is as strong as anything, but was somehow in another pocket when I wrote.

I judge that nearly everybody ought to try writing down a little of what they remember, because if they ever want to recall any of the past for others, the setting down something now will, at any future time, help to bring up other details and other events.

Sidney Swaim Robins

The Lot I Grew Up On

I was born in 1883 in an old house which before the Civil War had belonged to the Alfred H. Marsh estate. It was on South Main Street; at the present moment, 1968, the home of Dr. Hugh Fitzpatrick stands over the cellar of it. The older building had been at first a plain, two-story rectangular affair, of common type in Randolph. But when young Jim Marsh married they had built on an ell which merely joined the old house at one corner. That led to the house's having three large stone chimneys. One was at either end, North and South, of the original manse; and the other belonged to the ell, being at the East end, away from the street, just across that corner of juncture and coming within five or six feet of touching the South chimney. That left a nice hide-and-seek hole for kids of just the right age, partly fenced in by two chimneys. The three fireplaces which backed into the yard must have constituted about the most wasteful heating system that was ever devised. They heated a lot of the outer world first. Winds swept under the house, for the foundation stones were laid without cement. We did manage to have a small cellar at one corner, which kept our "Irish" potatoes fairly well. For the fireplace, there was of course plenty of wood in those days. My father bought twenty real cords of eight foot wood, laid down each fall in the yard at one dollar a cord and chopped into fire-logs or stove-wood by a man who received fifty cents per diem as pay. The stove was the kitchen stove and was in an outside building. Both main buildings and ell had porches opening on the street, though the ell porch was at a right angle. There was an old back porch of perhaps ten feet square, where we boys were supposed to lug a pile of wood either from the wood-house, another outside affair; or from the pile alongside the pig-pen in the cow-lot where the axeman chopped it. The yard was not level, and from that back-porch there was a set of five or six steps down to a porch running to the East, first past the kitchen door and then by the door of a room where our colored cook slept. All our food had to be brought up those steps, winter and summer. This seems to be the place to bring in a little poetastery written years back for the family:

When we were boys in the Tar Heel state,
And, naturally, it seemed that supper came late,
We ate the cold biscuits, brother Henry and I,
So we'd sure have 'em hot when the time rolled by.
Back-steps a-perch, we wolfed them down, —
Less fear of tummy-ache than of cook's frown!
"Aunt Christian Sedbury," that was her name;
Black was her face and gaunt was her frame
She hunted those biscuits; too bad! found them gone;
Grumbled a little, maybe didn't catch on;
Jerked out the flour, made buttermilk dough;
Chunked up the fire, got it rarin' to go!

Hurray for hot biscuits, butter, black-strap!
Who wants any lightbread — the hole-y claptrap?
Call it hot, call it home-made, beg us to try it
It may be to blame that the world's on a diet!

Of course that is romance.

But it is no romance to say that I suffered more from cold in that old-time Southern set-up than ever since in my wanderings, North and West, or anywhere. Not that the weather itself really got very cold. My father visited the thermometer on the front porch every morning, and reported. We usually had it ten above zero a couple of times in the winter. I remember just one time in my Asheboro years when it got down to zero. But those stone fire-places sent no heat at all upstairs except what went through the ceilings at the wrong time of day. In our house, the system in cold weather was to throw enough ashes over a few coals so that in the morning you would have easy means of starting a fire. Of a cold January morning, a fellow would race into his clothes when he was called, would jump down stairs and belly-up or back-up to that fire, continually roasting on one side while freezing on the other. That is not at all hard to remember, any more than many details which went with having nothing but kerosene lamps for light when it came night.

The Marsh place, I was told, had originally contained fifty-two acres. Allowing for the John Hill place on the corner, which had come to belong to us too, it extended on South Main Street all the way from the present extension of Worth Street, then nothing but a grassy lane, past my mother's good-sized garden, past our house, past our "woodlot," past our cow-barn, past a field-end and a meadow-end, down into the hollow and up the next slope to where we came to J. E. Walker's line, until the time when my father sold a building-lot on the street to O. L. Sapp. Easterly from the Street it extended on a straight line across the branch and up to the top of a wooded slope which leveled off for the homes of several Colored families: Uncle John Bell's, Jesse Lytle's, John Smallwood's, Uncle Bob Baldwin and Atlas Baldwin. There was a boundary lane to the property up there.

Behind our house were first two fields of five and three acres, usually alternated to wheat and corn. Next there was a seven-acre meadow running in an arc all the way from Worth Street extension to Main. Then came a narrow strip of poor corn-land merging towards the middle or past (it was another arc) into a scrubby woodland which wood-lot continued to Main. In this scrub lived many coveys of "partridges" or quail. The boundary for most of this was a rail fence which ran straight South to Walker's line. Beyond the fence was overgrown pasturage through which trailed that branch which provided our end of town with a swimming hole. Finally came the real woods mentioned before, with a Colored church only a short distance back in it.

Below our place the Robins branch became first the McAlister branch, then the Penn Wood branch, on its way to help make Haskett's creek, which we used to cross on a covered bridge about four miles out on the road to Randleman. Of course we fished that branch all the way from Ed Walker's line way down

past "Eck's" dam to the place where Garland Pritchard grew up. We caught suckers, sun perch, catfish after rains), now and then an eel, a few of them big enough to eat. I knew the small pond on the McAlister place to freeze over thick enough for skating only about three times in my real Asheboro years. I believe the only boys whose families thought it worth while to provide them with skates were the Worth boys, John Wood and his Tom-boy sister (my cousins), the Morrises and the Moffitts. These last ran the hardware store.

I may interject at this point that we usually had about two days sledding in snow per winter. We had a sled but it certainly lived a retired life. We hunted Indian relics and things like that. But outdoor sports in old Asheboro were certainly limited. Of course we played some baseball and cat-ball at school and in the streets.

We usually had three cows on the place, maybe one of them dry. For years they wandered the streets and dales South of town, like all town cows before we got "stocklaw," and showed up come milking-time at the gate of the cow-barn. I am sure I never had to go and help look for those cows. We also had as many as three horses when I was verging on high-school age. These lived in what had been the barn of the John Hill place, down that other lane a hundred yards or so. I might have said that Main Street turned into a lane about where it passed our house, for just in front of us it dodged around quite a grove of big white or post-oak trees, and then narrowed itself into a single rutted track as it went down into the hollow toward Walker's. Those horses we soon began riding to "Lizzie" Henley's swimming hole, about three miles South of town, down Cox Street and off to the left. After you had once learned to swim, as we did on our own property, Henley's hole was the favorite of all the Asheboro boys I ran with. At first we had to ride bareback, but after a while we got some old saddles, and I wouldn't say we didn't learn to split the roads pretty gaily.

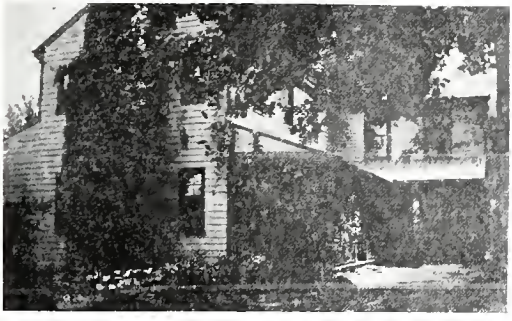
We always had on the place a man who worked by the day, and who incidentally was supposed to teach boys how to hoe corn, to pitch or rake hay, or to store it in what was sometimes a very dusty and choky barn-loft. Frank Robbins would tell me as he pitched hay in: "It'll make a man of you if you can stand it!" Our first worker was Clark Hooker, then came Frank, then Tom Sledge. We built a cabin for Sledge, over in the edge of the woods. These men did the plowing, cut grass for the horses and cattle, made corn-mush for the fattening pigs, took corn and wheat to Cedar Falls to be ground into flour and meal, planted and harvested the crops on the place, helped at hog-killing time, and so on. My father owned two or three farms in the country and got his share of the crops from these. On our woodlot there was a granary for wheat, a slatted crib for corn that the weevils had the best of much of the time, it seemed to me, — as well as a pig-pen and the family "back-house."

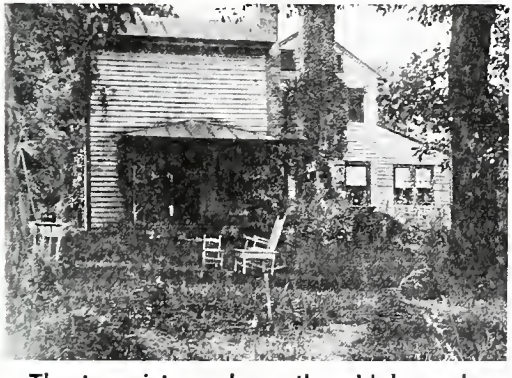
My father remained contemptuous of roller-mill "white flour," even though mother yearned for and occasionally got a little store-flour from the West

to make "a decent-looking cake." Also I will mention that most town people never have a chance to know how good is fresh corn meal. So going to Cedar Falls was a good part of the "Good Old Days." Once we took a cat along and dropped him somewhere on Deep River. But the cat showed up back home next morning.

Of all the out-door fun we had on that place though, I really think the thing I am going to tell about now stands first. In the early winter, up until Christmas time, Henry and I regularly had rabbit-gums (box-traps to some moderns, I suppose, but the idea born of naturally hollow black-gum logs cut into about eighteen inch lengths, closed at one end and with a trap-door at the other.) We set them along the rail fence which bounded the outside of those last fields. We would find places along the fence where the rabbits had discovered a pass, or made one, to our turnip patch. They would gnaw their regular crossing places a bit, I suppose to mark or smooth them. We would look for these "rabbit-gnaws" along the fence and set our yawning-mouthed gums on one side or the other. We caught some dozen or more rabbits every winter. We cared very little for rabbit-meat served at table, but we dearly loved to catch those fellows. When you got your first glimpse of sprung trap or a door down, that was a thrill. Usually he would be inside, perhaps big and sassy. It was a trick to get him out without some painful scratches. But if you stood the trap up on the back-end and opened the door, there he would be with big eyes looking up at you. The trick was to slip your hands around his neck and haul him out by the head at arm's length, and then grab both hind-legs at once. Then you could sling him and tote safely, in spite of the jumping motions and the claws.

Perhaps there are kinder ways of getting your meat than either this method or using a gun. But this rabbit-game was one thing that would get a boy up at daybreak on a frosty morning. Taking off down the meadow road which ran between our two near fields, you might stop at a persimmon tree or two along the meadow ditch. Nobody cut a nice persimmon tree in those days; there were a dozen along that ditch and in the middle of the ploughed fields. Then there was the turnip patch to halt at, and you had had no breakfast yet. For years I could not face the idea of cooked turnips. There was a single chinquapin bush near the rail fence which might merit a glance, and, for return without rabbit, a few scuppernongs and muscadines which hung on in trees quite late in the fall. Even that nice frost which might be on the ground everywhere contributed something.





The top picture shows the old homeplace from the West. The dirt lane in front of the house is Main Street.

The upper left shows the old Marsh-Robins house from the North. The lower left, from the South, shows the other two outside rock chimneys. The ivy is that my mother got from the Talmadge church on a visit to the Thorns family in Brooklyn. The right kodak shows Cynthy, I believe the last of our cooks living on the lot. The kitchen and her room are off the porch you see. In front of her are the higher steps to the house backdoor and dinning-room. Back of the post you see one end of the well-house, and a kiefer pear tree.

A Landmark Goes In The Night

For some years of my earliest life I slept in a well-remembered trundle-bed which in the day-time lived under my mother's big bed. I distinctly recall just two incidents which happened during that period. The first is when I woke up in that trundle-bed in the middle of a dark night and found out that I could not get the least noise out of my throat. Probably I woke up trying to cry and found I couldn't. In any case, the fact is that I had the croup. Managing to get up and around the big bed, I finally got hold of my mother. In a few moments there was a light, renewed fire on the hearth; and a mixture of onions, vinegar, and other spices was a-heating — a familiar remedy in our family and one which did not taste as bad as it sounds. It saved the day, or rather the night, until the morning brought old Doctor Henley.

The other incident, also deep night, fell when I was called up and led to the North and East corner windows, where there was to behold a great light and bustle diagonally across at the corner. The old Jonathan Worth homestead was burning down to the ground. I think there was something like a bucket-brigade at work trying to save, either a piece of the house, or else the John Hill house directly across. Something was said for Henry's benefit and mine about the children being glad to be able to make a report in after years of having witnessed the occurrence. For our elders felt that it was a historic moment and that a landmark was going down.

Naturally enough, there is not too much recollection remaining with me about the looks of that old house when it was standing. I think it stood a bit further back than the Charles McCrary house, and it seems almost as if it stood at a slight angle to the street. But that is as may be. For its brown color and its lawn, with the chairs on it and one time occupation, fortunately we can go to a photograph in the collections of the Historical Society. It certainly had helped to dress up the East end of the town, what you might possibly refer to as the village itself; and the going of that old mansion was undoubtedly an unsuspected harbinger of not too far off loss of dignity, and finally of death, of the center which country people from every direction thought of as "Asheboro" when their thoughts ran in that direction at all.

Our elders were none of them Cassandras that night, but I gave them due credit for recognizing that some day we might like to report of a hushed group and of midnight palpitations once in the long ago. And some sense of the dignities of the past, that have been lost even, seems necessary in order to have real enthusiasm for present and future building and visions.

(Picture courtesy of Historical Society)

Home of Governor Jonathan Worth

The Old Courthouse Center

The old red brick courthouse was the center of life in old Asheboro. It stood in the center of a public "square" which one supposes was the land, or most of it, that was given by Jesse Henley to promote the moving of the countyseat from Johnsonville to Asheboro, where it would be of course more convenient for people who lived in the Southern part of the county. For once an argument about the geographical center of the county must have had its way in a county which itself is about as square as any in the state. Somehow this "square" or rectangle seems to have disappeared, and we know the courthouse itself was burned to a pile of rubble somewhere around the beginning of the century. Salisbury Street, where it now crosses Main, then ran narrowly by the back end of the courthouse.

The building itself was of red brick as to its outer walls, but showed at its top a square wooden cupola in which was hung a bell that we had got used to hearing on all sorts of occasions, including fires and elections. It seems as if I would recognize its tone now, and that would be nice, too! The interior downstairs showed first double-stairs, and then two wide cross-corridors on which opened all the county offices. Upstairs was a simple ante-room with double doors, and then the courtroom. As you entered, you faced the judge's bench which was against the back, or North, wall. The Clerk's desk was on His Honor's left and the witness stand on his right. In front of him was the semi-circular bar, edged by built-in seats for clients and special witnesses for the lawyers to turn around and consult. Around the bar ran a semi-circular aisle, beginning from a jury-room door, first passing that witness-stand on the left and the jury-box on its right, then past the elevated tiers of benches for spectators around to the other retiring-room, which was used by the Clerk and other county officers, also as a judge's retiring-room. Deputies stuck their heads out of the East and West windows to cry their Oyes.

That aisle was carpeted with rough, durable, tow mats; and the mats were covered with a pretty good layer of sawdust. Together, mats and sawdust were to serve not only the purpose of deadening the sound of feet, but also of absorbing tobacco spittle. For this second purpose, lots of sawdust was sprinkled also on the floor between the witness benches. All the sawdust was occasionally swept out and replaced. But that courtroom was probably the least sanitary place in town. In those days the public knew and thought little about sanitation, and I imagine that what sweeping was done came largely to please the eyes of squeamish women-folk who had to attend Court but at that time occupied the critical position on all uses of tobacco. Most of the farmers and lawyers chewed. My father's leading idea for dealing with the toothache, an idea he had followed long years, was to get a chew of tobacco going. He said it quieted the nerves of the teeth.

The courtroom was used for all sorts of purposes, political meetings, organization moves, concerts, public gatherings of any kind. It was used even for amateur theatricals. And the Colored schools held their Commencements there

sometimes, notably when Uncle William Mead was their teacher-principal.

Around the courthouse was that square, which was often a noisy and riotous place, especially on Tuesday of the first week of Court. We long had two Court sessions a year, middle of July and in December. The first week was always given to criminal cases, and the second one was roughly reserved for the Civil Docket. The judge often had to call a halt in the proceedings of a trial and order the sheriff to go down and restore order and quiet around the building. The noises arose from horse-traders, venders of patent-medicines, shillabers for peep-shows and the like, and lastly from quarreilers and battlers likely stimulated by country brands of raw John Barleycorn. Many of these hawkers moved from one Court to another, and, in Asheboro at least, Tuesday was sure to be the big day. They camped oftentimes by open fires alongside their wagon-tongues, and slept in their wagons. This was also the way with many witnesses and principals to appear in Court.

There were a lot of horse-traders around on Tuesday of Court, and somehow they seemed to make more noise than anybody else. Of course the animals themselves helped some. And showing off horses in crowds is noisy business. In July particularly, with windows open, it often sounded like Bedlam out there. I recall Palmer Craven as one local trader, partly because he was an early boy-friend of mine and got into horse-trading when I was still in the middle of High School. At a younger age we used to sneak biscuits for him when he came to those back-steps I have mentioned, and he would ask us to find "just a little piece of meat of any kind" to go with the biscuits. He got little encouragement at home to go on in school if he ever got there at all. One day, when I had got to high school, and Palmer had left "home" and accumulated a nag or two, the town was all laughing about him. A-straddle of a raw-boned nag, he was heard to challenge another trader: "I see it's hog-killing' time at your house? " "How's that?" "Well, I see you're ridin' a cracklin'!" A crackling, if you don't happen to know, is what is left of a fat piece of sowbelly after you have "fried it out" and extracted all the lard. I am not certain but that if Palmer had owned some other father than old Murphy Craven, to make him go to school, he might have become a leader in some form of an early Youth Movement. He made a living swapping horses for a while, and he had a sense of humor. It's one of those things we can't do anything about except to wonder.

Another Tuesday of Court, a kind of advertising man got permission to erect a rude shack in the open square to display his patent fire-extinguisher. He put kerosene on it and set it off during the Court's noon intermission. Then he turned on his hand fire-extinguisher in the presence of an expectant crowd. He himself had swallowed the advertisement (he was not a regular court-follower and had failed to try his machine out adequately), but his extinguisher failed to swallow the flames, which soared on to glory, producing one of the most hilarious scenes you ever saw.

Sometimes the sherriff did not really succeed when he went out to restore a measure of quiet in the square. Occasionally he had to bring back a cul-

prit or two to stand unscheduled before the judge's bench. Then the judge would look very severe, administer a lecture about the dignity of the Court and the crime of interfering with its proceedings, possibly binding them to appear before him later.

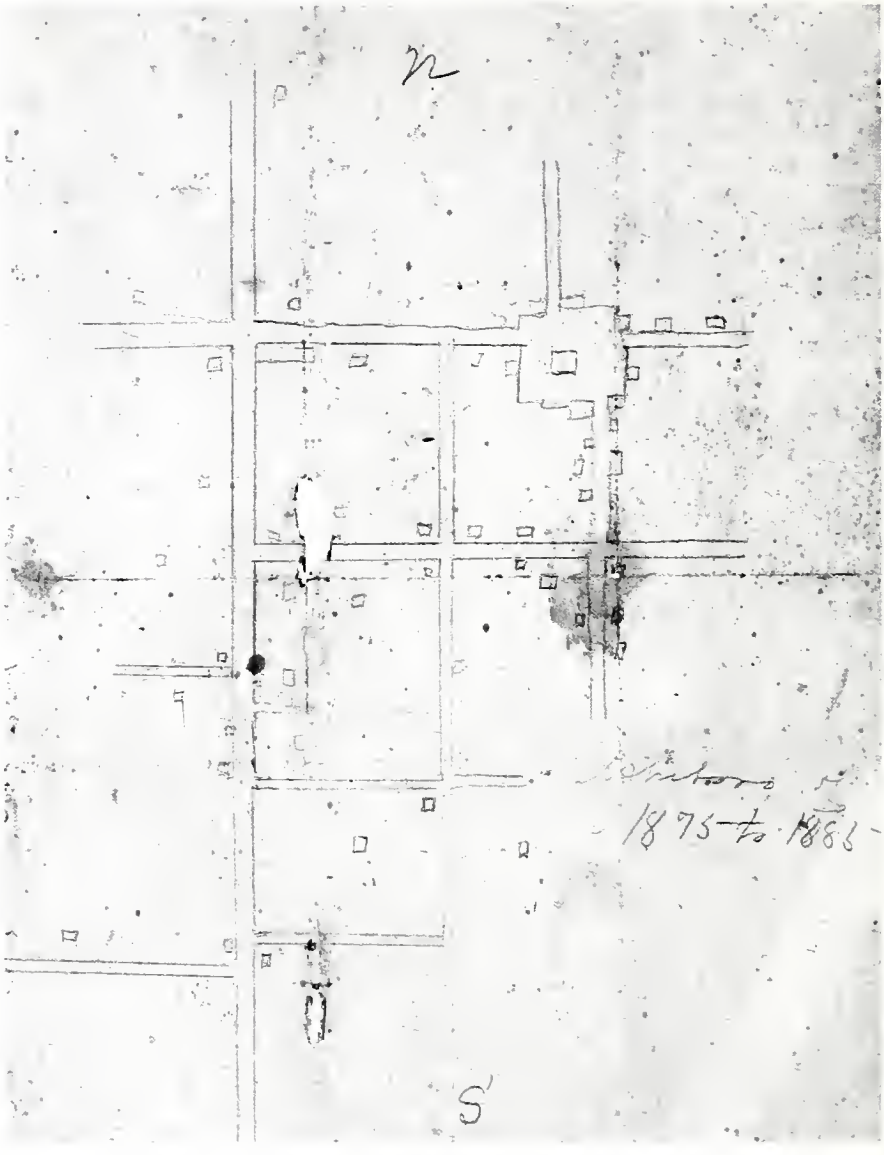
I spoke of the old courthouse as the center of life for the whole town. What there was of Main Street from Worth down to the square was all the shopping center we had. On the Southwest corner of it at the square was one of the town's two old hotels, the Hoover House, or The Asheboro Inn. To the West of it and around the corner a bit was an open space extending back to the jail. It was where a lot of horse and wagon outfits camped during Court week. The only building at the West end of the courthouse square was the Wood and Moring store, which had the open lot on its South side and the Salisbury road coming up along its North side. On the other side of Salisbury and across and down a little was Allen Woodell's house and shoe shop (Salisbury sloped to the West). I have spent many an hour in that shop while Mr. Woodell was mending my only shoes, mostly re-soling them. More nearly on that side of the square and of Salisbury street going by was Frank Rush's house, and alongside him the Ross and Rush livery stable. Next, Cicero Hammer long had a law office, and that brought you pretty well up to the little, muddy, red lane which has since been transmogrified into North Main Street extension. Across that and fronting the square was McAlister and Morris's big general store. Then curving around the Northeast corner of the square some small shops, including a lady's hat-trimming parlor and I believe a home or so. At Salisbury Street and facing on it were two homes, the first somehow associated in my mind with Yancey Cox, who was a leading surveyor in the county, the second occupied by white-headed Enoch Brookshire and his wife, neither of whom often appeared in public unless you mean in their own yard. Across Salisbury and fronting on the square as Wood and Moring did at the other end, was the house, the lot, and the law office of J. A. Blair, our county historian. From Blair's law office West to Main Street again, there was back-entry space for some of the stores and then the red-brick side-walls of the Moffitt hardware store. That bounds the square.

Taking off from the square on the East side of Main back to Worth, there came first that hardware, then, after it got built, the red brick office of the Republican county paper, the **Randolph Argus**, a Stedman grocery, Brittain and Sapp's law office, a drug store, another small shop or two (along here my order may not be letter-perfect), then another old hotel with a kind of arcade in front, more anciently known as the Trogdon House run latterly by Barney Burns. This arcade was favored by visiting lawyers at Court time. The Judge would be there most every time. Colonel Jim Morehead, of Greensboro, occupied the same room every time he came and made it his office. He and the others sat outside their doors in the evening, the Colonel always smoking a pipe with a long stem which would be either the bored root of a bamboo or else a very fragrant fig-bush stem with pith burned out to make it hollow. We had lots of fig bushes growing against our outside chimneys, and the

Colonel counted on renewing his stock of fig stems from us. I kept a stock of those stems on hand myself until I quit smoking only some seven or eight years ago — for occasional use. On beyond the Burns hotel came a small grocery and candy store run for some years at least by Moss Burns. At the corner of Worth after an open field-end came the **Courier** office. About many of these buildings, and not least the **Courier** office, there hangs many a tale.

The West side of old Main Street was less thickly settled at that. The Hoover hotel had a little field behind it on Main. Then came M. S. Robins' law office, perched rather high, a couple of yards maybe, above the street. It was of two rooms. There was a woodshed behind and two Murillo cherry trees in the backyard. I once fell out of one of those cherry trees and took a chunk out of the inside of my left calf, and I can still show the scar to prove to any Doubting Thomas that all the tales I tell about Old Asheboro are faithful and true. My father's law office is still on the lot, living a demoted life as a garage in Mrs. Sheriff Hayworth's backyard (1968.)

After that law office, came what is now called the oldest house in town. Built I believe by Alfred Diffee, it was in my time the home of Sheriff Bije Moffitt. More lately it has been the property of two Eugene Morrises, father and son. Then came the post-office, long run by Mrs. McCain with the help of her son Jim and his family. It was approached by double steps up and a platform. From there the street was open to the corner.



(Map courtesy of Miss Hope Hubbard)

Map of Asheboro as it was in 1875-1885 drawn by Mrs. C. C. Hubbard, the former Miss Frances Porter. The North and South streets running from left to right are Fayetteville, Cox and Main; the East and West streets running from North to South are Salisbury, Worth and Academy. The old courthouse square is easily recognized. Key to this map is in the Asheboro Public Library.

Randolph Court In Session Around 1895

I have a good many recollections of that old courthouse. In the days when I was growing up, lawyers seemed to be our big men because they included most of the big politicians and made the biggest and best speeches. It seems as if it was the ideal of nearly every ambitious boy in those days to make a good extempore speaker or orator of himself. It was the heyday of Southern oratory, when that was a good deal more the style than it is anywhere today. I know that I myself was caught up in adulation of orators, in spite of, or perhaps because of, the applicability to me of a comment my father once made on good, honored, Mr. Blair, that he could not "get his tongue to fire." I was the last Secretary of the Walter H. Page Literary Society at the High School, but was slow in discovering that I was not built for a good extempore speaker.

In my judgment, the best native-born spell-binder we had in Asheboro in my day was Wiley Rush, son of Zebedee F. Rush. Cicero Hammer was good at hammering juries in a big blustering way, seldom grammatical, showing always a dominant personality. He was equally well known as Editor of the **Courier** and Democratic County Chairman; and later was to become known as Solicitor and Congressman. As Solicitor he originated for the Supreme Court of the United States one of the most famous cases in the legal textbooks: the case of **Hammer against Dagenhart.** Both John T. Brittain and O. L. Sapp were good before juries, good in picking juries, good in knowing how to appeal to a jury's ways of thinking. But it is unfair to start really calling any roll of our local bar. It seems more to the point to recall just here one of the picturesque figures at the Randolph bar, or I guess really at any bar anywhere around, Col. James T. Morehead, of Greensboro. With his fine physical figure, his white hair and goatee, his alpaca coat hanging loose, he was my first and abiding picture of an old Southern Colonel. Always ready and warm to the point, booming and bustling in manner, suave before the judge, naturally loud of voice, no one had so much Court presence and style as he carried. Dignified and with an echo of older days, he naturally helped to form my idea of what a public speaker in the **tout ensemble** should be. But I doubt if he had the native gift of speech that Wiley Rush had.

We had other able lawyers in Asheboro and from away who simply made no particular impression upon me as orators or debaters. I once said to Colonel William Penn Wood that my father was no public speaker. He turned to me chidingly, as if I had been an irreverent son, and said: "Your father is a **strong** speaker." I suppose some of the others were that too. G. Sam Bradshaw kept his light under a bushel by being Clerk of the Court for a long time. I understand that he made a reputation after leaving Asheboro. There were other fading and coming lawyers of Randolph's own.

There is one likeable figure of a man, a genial figure, without whom Randolph Court would not have been what it was for a long time. That is Benjamin F. Long, of Statesville, long Solicitor of the District, afterwards Judge, and a familiar face in Asheboro. His brother Jake, reported to have been state head

of the Ku Klux in Reconstruction Days, appeared once in Randolph Court and was an object of special interest on that account. Of him I got no significant impression.

Several other prominent Greensboro lawyers put in a day or two pretty regularly with us; Barringer, Major Scott, James E. Boyd, Caldwell. Captain Frank Robbins, of Lexington I believe, was frequently to be seen. From Concord, came Col. Paul B. Means, whose son Gaston became a sort of famous national figure when the Lindberghs were hoping to get back their stolen baby. From Carthage came the first Spence we ever knew. These are simply those of a particular generation, the one before the last I suppose, whom I well remember.

I have mentioned that the courthouse served many other public purposes besides being a place to hold Court. I remember Governor Aycock and James T. Pou speaking from its front steps. Those Teachers Institutes of the turn of the century brought such men as Alderman, James Y. Joyner, Charles D. McIver, to hold sessions within its interior. I attended some of those Institutes.

One of the most famous lawyers of the state, Cyrus B. Watson, of Charlotte, appeared in Asheboro just once, in connection with a case which you will easily see had special interest for me. Governor Jonathan Worth was probably the most famous man who ever lived in Asheboro. But his brother, Dr. John Milton Worth, had considerable position as well. He was one of the contractors for the Plank Road, having built the section of it which ran through Asheboro. My father drew up his Last Will and Testament for him, and as an old friend and associate in politics, had to consent to the Doctor's determined demand that he sign it as a witness. In doing that, M. S. Robins made an exception to one of his firmest rules as a practitioner of the Law. After Dr. Worth's death, young Robert Bingham, then of Asheville, later editor of the Louisville Courier Journal and Ambassador to Great Brittain, who was a grandson of Dr. Worth, contested the Will. Allegations were made of undue influence on the part of Mrs. McAlister, daughter in the home, and wife of Col. A. C. McAlister. Robert Bingham came to Asheboro in the gray uniform of the Bingham School of Asheville, which School was owned by his father Robert Bingham, Sr., and in which he himself was a teacher. He was then a handsome figure of a young man and focused my eyes as he walked up and down the street.

The competence of the old Doctor to make an unprejudiced Will under his circumstances was brought in question. The old man had been quite out of circulation for a considerable time. I myself recall seeing him only on my way to school, when he would sometimes be sitting in a wheel chair on the porch at his own end of the McAlister house. The chief or head Bingham lawyer was Cyrus B. Watson of Charlotte. In cross-examining M. S. Robins as a witness to the Will, Watson was under the necessity of making as little as possible of the Robins testimony, which had given Dr. Worth a clean bill of mental health. In one way or another he insinuated that M.S.R. was growing old himself and probably losing some of the keenness of his own mind. In very truth my father was up against one of those situations which cause most lawyers probably to have an iron-clad rule against signing a Will they have drawn

themselves, as a witness. Perhaps Watson might have used that very fact as proof of a brother lawyer's having lost some of his grip. In any case, some of Cy Watson's cross-examination was pretty hard for a fellow lawyer and old acquaintance to take. I am not telling this in defense of my father, who may indeed have been something of a prejudiced witness for his old associate and friend. As we grow older we probably conclude that there are not as many perfect unprejudiced witnesses to anything as we once supposed. Happily, the case was all at once settled out of court, the parties to it falling metaphorically upon one another's necks and agreeing to let the Will stand. I do not know that there was no material concession or compromise made to bring settlement about.

Somehow, from early years, and in spite of the winter session of Court being usually in school-time, I managed to spend a whole lot of time in that old Courtroom. Much of the time, I sat alongside my father, who I know rather hoped to make a lawyer of me as well as of my brother Henry, but never said anything about that. Most of his business in later years was Civil Cases, and it was the Criminal ones that interested me far the most. He did not attend Criminal court half the time, being busy with other matters at his office. But somehow the other lawyers got used to seeing me inside the bar-rail, where I could hear many of the side-whispers, could note every detail of facial expression from lawyer, client or witness — even the nervousness of hands. My legal education was well advanced before it caught cold, or possibly caught a virus of philosophy, and died.

I well remember the case of Jule Cranford, a deputy sheriff on trial for murder. He had shot and killed a Negro man he was trying to arrest in the Negro's own home. The widow alleged it was a killing with no excuse of even a gesture on her husband's part. Cranford went on the stand for himself and swore that the man was reaching for his gun, which hung against the wall. The all-white jury found the defendant not guilty. I could read the expression on the face of the Negro woman. It seemed to be saying: "What a fool I was to bring this case into Court! I should have known better." When the jury was dismissed, I remember as if of yesterday how Jule Cranford stood behind his lawyers at the aisle-end of the defendant's box and, with tears running down his face, shook hands with and thanked every juror as he passed by. At that moment he did not look to me like any malicious culprit. Of course it is possible, that like many of us under faintly similar circumstances, the thought did weigh on his mind that he just might have been a little bit hasty in his reaction with his pistol, under the excitement of the moment. But when shall we learn that passing events can be seen differently and interpreted differently by different parties, not all at the same angle of vision anyhow? Our prejudices come into both what we see and what we remember. So psychology teaches now. There was something Jule Cranford did not quite like living with in Randolph, so he sold out and went West somewhere.

I heard a good many divorce cases such as boys of my age were not supposed to hear. If M. S. Robins had been in the bar, I think he would likely have sent me home sometimes. There were other cases too which brought you

into touch with unfavored reaches of lower parts of the vocabulary. One boy in a Randolph village had hit another with a baseball bat. The defendant pleaded Guilty, with a request to be heard before penalty was assessed. His defense or plea to the judge was that the chief accusing witness, the smitten boy, had called him a certain name. Judge Wm. S. O'Brien Robinson, of Goldsboro, was on the Bench. He wheeled around in his chair until he faced the state's witness: "Did you call him that?" "Yes, Sir," responded the boy, rather sheepishly. "Judgment suspended on payment of the cost," thundered the judge. "Human nature can't stand that. If he had killed you, I could have said the same thing if the Law allowed me." Colonel Morehead, defendant's attorney, jumped to his feet with a beaming smile, and said, "I knew your Honor would say that." The State Solicitor, looked as if the name-calling was a new point to him, and the boy's parents surely looked taken aback.

(Picture courtesy of Historical Society)

The old Courthouse which stood at the intersection of Main and Salisbury

Echoes Of Randolph Court

Murder cases were very scarce in Randolph Court in the days I recall. But there came along one from the lower part of the county which I attended the trying of for long hours at least. The victim was one Romulus Owens. His widow, Elizabeth, an uncle of hers, and I believe a younger woman and a younger man, were indicted for conspirational murder. The alleged conspirators, along with the victim, constituted a single household. The case rested entirely on circumstantial evidence, a good deal of it medical. One of the doctors who bore testimony was Dr. Sam Henley, Asheboro's only medicine man over many years. I forget now whether he testified for the prosecution or the defense. One line of testimony said that there were marks around the defendant's neck, appearing to be the marks left by a rope biting into the flesh, and consistent with marks which would have been made by the family well-rope. The other line of medical testimony was much more dubious and vague about the reading of those marks on the neck. The case had occasioned great stirrings in the community, and in fact had extended them as far as Asheboro. The parties were unpopular where they lived and there was rather heavy prejudice against them which had extended widely. Col. Jim Morehead and my father defended and I believe J. T. Brittain assisted the Solicitor. I am sure Brittain was involved in the case and likely Sapp with him. In seeking a jury, the defense issued one peremptory challenge after another, having plenty of them, since there were at least four defendants being tried at once, each one having around twenty peremptories at his or her disposal. The defense lawyers seemed for one thing to prefer jurors who lived in parts of the county remote from parties charged with the crime. The Owens group were finally found Not Guilty, which of course meant that the jurors felt the case had not been proved beyond a reasonable doubt. I have nothing more to say about that of course.

But it was certainly a case to teach a boy something. I had long wondered how it was possible for lawyers on opposite sides of this case or that to be, or to appear, so firmly convinced that they had the right of it on their side. How could they get so warm without being dead sure they were right. The Owens case brought that great psychological question to a head for one boy. I asked my father out of Court how he could possibly be so sure his clients were not guilty when everybody down where they came from, and nearly everyone in Asheboro, was so sure that they were guilty. The question may have bothered him a little, especially when I quoted to him what this or that man of his acquaintance was saying; but after a minute he gave me a talk on how waves of prejudice could get started about people who were disliked for any reason, and how these waves could spread until they engulfed a whole case with most unfair pressures.

It must have been about that time that he told me he had never taken but one client in a criminal case where he was not convinced of having the correct side. That was the case of an old Negro, on trial for arson, in the burning of

a tobacco barn. The old Negro had confessed guilt to him, had pleaded deep provocation, and professed contrition. As the law then stood, he could, if found guilty, have been hanged. My father said that, because of feeling that the penalty was too severe, he had taken the case and won the old man his freedom.

There was a famous killing down in the upper edge of Montgomery County, about which no legal question was ever raised in Court, but which yet in later years had a most interesting echo in Randolph Court. And I was on the scenes both when all Asheboro was galvanized and gripped in sorrow over the killing, and again in Asheboro Court when the echo came up. When "Bije" Moffitt left off being sheriff of Randolph, he presently turned into a revenue officer. Trying to arrest a blockade distiller down in Montgomery, he was shot and killed by the man, who was unquestionably resisting arrest. Before the smoke cleared the distiller went down too, Moffitt having got off a shot, or one of his two deputies. His deputies were Tom Hoover and Lee Freeman. Up from Montgomery a-straddle of a bare-back horse, came Lee Freeman; Tom Hoover having been left on the spot to guard the two bodies until help should arrive. It was a blockading community down there, with great hostility to the revenue laws; and nobody knew what might happen. I did not see Freeman arrive, but by reports he came in something of a lather. And soon all Asheboro was agog, and more than that. For Sheriff Moffitt was one of the most liked men in the county. I did see the rescue party take off down the road. They had been in too much of a hurry to get a wagon with a bed in it. In nothing but the running-works of a two-horse wagon they started from the corner where stood the Wood and Moring store on Fayetteville, where now stands the First National Bank. I don't recall who the driver was, but I do recall that Webb Freeman, Lee's brother, and my uncle, Will Moring, were of the party. Undoubtedly Lee went along to help them find the place. There was so much excitement, so much talk of a war-like atmosphere down at the scene of the killing, that I was not sure how many of them would get back. But in due time we heard that they were back with the Sheriff's body.

Some years after in the old county courthouse, Tom Hoover was a character witness for somebody. The opposite side was trying to discredit him as a witness. Counsel began cross-questioning Tom Hoover about his part in that Montgomery killing of the distiller. Counsel may have been going on to ask which dropped first, Moffitt or the other man; also about the split-timing of the second shot, and about who fired it. There had been a lot of speculation on those questions, wondering about those questions in cold blood instead of under the excitement of the occasion. Further questioning on the case in Randolph Court did not appeal to the Solicitor, who at this time was Wiley Rush. As Attorney for the State, he rose from his seat, addressed the judge, and said: "Your Honour, the present line of cross-questioning of this witness seems to threaten the opening up of a matter of history upon which by universal consent the mantle of silence has been allowed to fall, and I suggest

that it is not in the public interest that it proceed further." There followed a brief conference of bench and bar, at the bench; and Tom Hoover was dismissed from the stand. In later life he freely told personal friends that he had fired the shot. (Dr. Ollie Presnell told me that.)

J. Addison Blair, and Son Colbert

Mr. Blair was known to the other lawyers and some contemporaries as "Ad" Blair. His home-place occupied the whole east end of courthouse square South of the Salisbury-Franklinville road, although after his death the family removed to a house built by O. L. Sapp, on Worth Street between where Frank McCrary now lives and the P. H. Morris house on the corner of Cox St. His law office was in a corner of the yard, a two-room rectangle looking North.

Of course he was a conspicious figure around the square. He was a smallish man rather than big. He was slow-moving, deliberate and sedate in manner, quiet-spoken and somewhat hesitant in speech. He wore a smile, at least for young people; and he welcomed boys into his office almost any time and liked to talk to them. He was "apt to teach," appeared glad to stop what he was doing and to explain things to you. He seemed to me an old man when first I knew him, but that must have been an illusion unless he married late in life, like my father. He had six children, two of them younger than I. He wore whiskers but no mustache, which reminds me of the fact that, at the time, nearly all the older men of town did wear whiskers. How fashions do change! Now it is the very young men that wear the whiskers, while older men are pretty unanimously clean-shaven. It might be that the old people once used whiskers to suggest their wisdom, whereas the young now use them to prove their virility and maturity.

Mr. Blair had cultivated certain wider interests that no one else in Asheboro shared or manifested so plainly. He was interested in natural history, and on the wall of his law office hung the first saw-fish saw I ever beheld. There were other tokens of far reaches of sea and land. He had a few Indian relics in a glass case. The fact that he became our first county historian and published his pamphlet on county history at his own expense and risk, proves that he pored over the town records with lively interest and also treasured the tales of Martha Bell, Andrew Hunter at Faith Rock, Naomi Wise, and others.

In many ways he exemplified the faith, the spirit, and the inheritances of the Quaker or Friends movement, to which he belonged. Looking back from here, it surprises me to have no impression of his ever having attended, or sent his family, to either of the two churches in town, Presbyterian or Methodist Episcopal. They all must have attended public worship from time to time, for some of the family were musical; and, besides, most of the public entertainment we ever got was at the churches — with a little at the courthouse. I imagine that the Blairs had Quaker Meeting often or regularly in their own home, maybe with one or two other people I never spotted as Quakers, and frequently with guests.

He was the only man in Asheboro who seemed to feel any responsibility for visiting the school. He did that about once a year, and, unless he brought somebody else along with him, always responded to an invitation to address the student body. I remember one traveling Quaker elder who became a familiar face at school, and who had been introduced at first by Mr. Blair. His

themes were like Mr. Blair's, but he introduced a sort of vividness, and one of his talks that I remember well will do as a sample for him and Mr. Blair also; and will also suggest to you that even people who loudly object to religion's being brought into the schools might not find fault with such talks as this. They might not recognize the talk as a kind of religious preaching. This Quaker had a way of holding up some object in his hand, to attract the wondering gaze of restless boys like myself: a lead pencil, a piece of chalk, a rubber band. Once it was a postage stamp, which he said was like a boy, because "you had to lick it before it would stick." This particular time, he held a handful of pumpkin seeds, which he dribbled from one hand into the other a time or two. The talk was about a boy who was sent out with a hoe to put some pumpkin seed into the corn-hills which had been planted, that is dropped and "covered," the day before. The boy did all right for a while, but as the sun began to get hotter and hotter, he began to feel lazier and lazier. After a while he sat down in the shade of a tree near the end of a row and began to dream of going fishing and things like that. Presently he laid his head down on his elbow, and next thing you know he was fast asleep. When he woke up the day was far gone. He realized with a start that he was in to "catch it" from his father. He had fallen before temptation. There was only one thing to do. He planted a few more hills and then hid the remaining seeds under a rock he had turned over, and started for the house. But, woe to him! there was a big blue jay who followed him along the path, jumping from one tree-top to another. And the bird kept screaming into the boy's ears: "You hid those pumpkin seeds under the rock! You did! You know you did!" The speaker of course gave a very lively and musical rendering of the blue jay's call. Of course it was the boy's own conscience talking. Well, all of this elder's school talks, and of Mr. Blair's too, were sort of like that; and, as I said, it might be that you could get away with that kind of preaching in school today without anybody recognizing it for what it is. In fact it was a Quaker sermon, and contained the most characteristic of Quaker doctrines, that of the Inner Light.

Mr. Blair was a Republican, somehow or other the only Republican lawyer in Asheboro although Randolph County went Republican as often as the other way. The county-seat itself was strongly Democratic, I know not why. It is funny now to recall the way our whole communication with and regard for the Blair family would approach, or descend to, a kind of nadir or lowest point, as election time came along. Then to most of us children, and to most adults too I think, the Blairs would suddenly become "Black Republicans." The "black" was a hold-over from Reconstruction days, when many respected white people had lost their votes by remaining unreconstructed, and the Negroes were running the legislature with the help of a handful of carpetbaggers from Ohio and such places. In the late 1890s, the Negro question had as much to do with making the Democratic party as Thomas Jefferson ever did, and it continued to dominate our politics until a Constitutional Amendment with a certain famous Grandfather Clause, settled "the Negro Question" for the time being. Of course that was all a long time before the Negroes began to show

their interest in Civil Rights by voting Democratic, and before many whites began talking and voting Republican without ever guessing that things may have gone topsy-turvy, so that they actually were Republicans without having found it out. Well, back in the late 1890s we began at election-time to look down our noses at the Blairs and a few others in our midst until the fight was all over. Then we liked the Blairs and appreciated their fine qualities as much as ever.

Mr. Blair was one of the founders of the first and only Republican paper in the county that I ever heard of, **The Randolph Argus,** whose red-brick home was built near the beginning of a new century on the lot where it still stands now. He was the first editor. His son Colbert ran the printing office connected with it; and as time went on and Mr. Blair became somewhat disabled, Colbert took over the news-gathering, much of the typesetting, the writing and the editing, the printing and mailing, of the paper. He had some help from his younger brother, Garland, who went through Guilford College however while Colbert kept his nose to the grindstone, except, I believe, for one year at Guilford. The newspaper institution has itself finished the education of a good many printers. It became Colbert's life, whereas his younger brother went traveling and presently lost his life in a road accident somewhere out west.

I learned to set type in the **Argus** office, alongside Colbert; although on the whole I came to have more associations with the **Courier.** He must have been somewhere from three to five years older than I, but in retrospect he was the best just plain friend I had among all the boys of Asheboro. The word "plain" means I am excluding relatives. I had two brothers after a while, and a lot of cousins among the Morings, the Coffins and others. But Colbert and I must have had some similarity of tastes and interests. Away back in very early years he and I each had a drawer full of personal belongings, properties and curios, some of them a bit too heavy to go around even in a boy's bulging pants-pockets. I remember more than once taking my drawer down to the Blairs, where Colbert and I got up into their hay-loft, and proceeded to swap and trade, giving boot very likely, until a very large share of our two property-holdings changed hands. Like some other people, both of us had collections of tags from plug tobacco. You hunted industriously on streets and in front of the stores for those things. We roamed the branch and fields together occasionally. We even talked about subjects more and more. You could not possibly quarrel with Colbert about anything. His personality, even in those days, reminded me of a big St. Bernard dog. Perhaps that comparison will help the reader to understand how he could associate as much as he long did with a boy so much younger as I. Up to college age, when I lost sight of him and he left town, he was as close a friend as I had in Asheboro, and I learned a lot from and got a lot out of him. We even got so we could talk politics a little, and he shook some of my easy assumptions or prejudices. Colbert went West by stages, a traveling printer. Eventually he ran a printing office, and very likely a small newspaper alongside, somewhere in Oregon. Around forty years ago I got his address from one of the family and exchanged a few letters with

him. He was then a widower with one daughter. Retired, he was seemingly spending a good deal of his time on the front porch. I suspect his newspaper life had been too sedentary. In the last letter I had from him there was a certain nostalgic aroma I shall never forget. There were not avenues enough open in the days of our starting out. Neither Colbert nor I was ever just a square peg in a round hole. Both of us were odd pegs in odd-shaped holes. I judge I was the luckier of the two. But the age of electricity has brought so much choice and widened opportunity for everybody, and only a little less perhaps for the children of these "ghettoes" we hear about. For a long time after the Civil War, a lot of Southern boys grew up in a kind of ghetto. There were too few opportunities to get inspired by near examples of things to do. There were too few amusements even, too few contacts that challenged minds. I myself have seen brilliantly what just a little industrial development and a few more beckoning or suggestions of things society needed done, could do for the backwoods people of my native Randolph and all the South. All that many of us needed was a chance at life. I say, let Black Power contemplate this very wide fact besides seeing its own certainly harsh difficulties! In Colbert Blair's last letter he wrote me two very suggestive lines about how he found it and didn't find it. He wrote, "I tell you Sidney, it is better to wear out than it is to rust out."

William E. Mead

It was either in 1882 or 1883, as he himself told me, that a young man of twenty or thereabouts came to Asheboro from Brooklyn, N. Y., who made a considerable impression or mark on the town, and of whom I have thought as one candidate for the post of "the most unforgettable character" of the place. That is of course, if the town wants to claim him. His name was William Ernest Mead.

It was not too long after the Civil War that he came, and the first blank point to make about him is that he came as a sort of Quaker missionary. I do not know how he got the appointment as principal or superintendent of the Colored schools of the town, but that was his job when I first remember him. One suspects that the leading Quaker of the town, none other than our county historian, J. Addison Blair, Attorney, had a leading part in it. He boarded with the Blairs for a while, and I am sure it was through the Blair family that he made some of his first contacts with the white people of the village.

But there was another Brooklyn family already in our midst which helped him a lot in getting gradually accepted by the town as a whole. That was the family of Frederick D Thorns. Mr. Thorns himself came from England with a Scotch wife and settled first in Brooklyn or Manhattan. After a while he left the big metropolis to come to Asheboro, where he was interested in some Randolph gold mines or gold prospects. Almost needless to say, he made no money out of those interests although they were long continued. Probably the Hoovers of Hoover Hill are the only people who ever made any money in Randolph gold mines to speak of, and their mine petered out. But after a while, two of the Thorns daughters married into well-known old Asheboro families. Agnes Thorns married John W. Bulla, son of Bolivar Bulla, long time County Clerk; and Mary Thorns married William H. Moring, Jr. That was the Republican and the Democratic sides of it; and not being caught on the horns of that political dilemma in his connections must have been a great help to young William Mead, who was soon at home in or with both of those families and their connections. All the children of those two connections at least, and I suppose a good many others, came to call him "Uncle" Mead. It may be remarked that there were some prominent families in the town who never did quite accept him or approve of what had brought him there.

He sometimes played the organ or piano in the Presbyterian Church, one of the two White churches in town (the Colored people had more varieties.) But something which must have helped him most of all after awhile was that he became a sort of medical missionary among the White people. He sat up with the sick all over town, and assisted and showed sympathy where there were deaths in the family. Particularly was this the case where there were young people sick and dying. It seems to me as if we had an awful lot of those situations in those days, though it may have been because I was young and meeting some of those facts for the first time and in a small town where

everybody knew everybody else. Particularly was Mr. Mead likely to become interested and involved if there was a boy of the right age in the family. He idealized boys after the fashion of mothers. We certainly had a lot of typhoid fever epidemics in town in those days. Knowledge that the chief germ-culprit was likely to be either milk-or water-supply was slow getting around. I remember one boy slightly older than I who was down for a long time with typhoid, with Uncle Mead reported sitting up at that house, and who finally died of it. And I well remember how I shocked Uncle Mead one day long after he had left Asheboro by casual mention of this particular boy's having had the bad habit of throwing rocks (we never called them stones) at smaller boys passing by on their way to Sunday School. He gasped, and couldn't believe it.

But that was not the extent of his interest in boys. He organized a glee club among them. In the latter days of his life when I was visiting him in Brooklyn, he gave me some photographs to take back to Asheboro, one of them being a picture he had taken (he was a camera fiend and an early one) of that glee club. I think I turned that particular photo over to Eugene Morris, who appeared in the group with a banjo. Before my childhood was far advanced enough to register such matters, he had adopted two white children, brother and sister, the first a little older than I. Then at the mother's importunity he adopted the daughter also, because she wanted to marry and the husband-to-be did not want the girl around. Both of those children were away a good deal of the time, perhaps with him during school-vacations at first. But they were back at his home in Asheboro some of the time for several years, and I played now and then with the boy at Uncle Mead's home or on the street. At that time they lived in the old Benjamin Elliott house, behind the Presbyterian Church and fronting on Fayetteville. Also I saw the girl with my cousins in the Moring home. It may have been about the time of the adoptive father leaving Asheboro for good that these two children finally disappeared, first to school in the distance, and then after a while the boy into business and the girl into a distant marriage. But it seems as if it should have been before leaving Asheboro that Father Mead informally adopted two or three other Asheboro boys, who went to Brooklyn with him to go to school for a while and then returned to their families. I remember being momentarily a bit jealous of Herbert Slack and Ernest Redding, thinking how nice it would be to have a whet of big city life. You see New York was then further from us backwoods people than Timbucktoo is now. You also see that Uncle Mead loved boys — loved to help them along and to have their company meanwhile.

The first scene in which I have clear recollection of him belongs to the time after he had come to live in the Elliott house. It was at a Christmas party he threw for children of around my age. There was a good-sized Christmas tree in a North window of a big front room, and of course there were the usual mysteries and songs. No doubt he himself acted Santa, for he always loved opportunities to do that; but of course my not advanced age did not detect him at it. He was ever a grand master of ceremonies. When he put his

head under that black hood which shrouded his camera (no modern Kodak for him or in the times I am talking about) he could order people around like a photographer you know; and could bustle and enjoy himself at it.

I think it must have been during his earlier years in Asheboro that he married. He told me all about it one day in later life, but I have forgotten the details, except that he married a woman when she was literally, not figuratively, on her death bed, with himself standing at the foot of that bed and only a handful of people present. I find I am not absolutely sure it was in Asheboro, though equally surely I have always assumed that it was. Everything fits in, that way, except that I do not happen to remember anybody else in Asheboro referring to her or to that marriage in any particular way. I think it was generally known about in a way. I do not know what the wife's family name was. He always spoke of her by her given name or short name. And there is one other thing I remember about his being a sort of benedict. People often teased him about not taking some girl or other off the waiting line. I have heard him say, it seems as if more than once: "One perfect woman is enough." He said it with enough unction too, as if he meant it.

It must have been several years after that Christmas party that I recall him as master of ceremonies at a Colored schools Commencement in the Court room of the old courthouse of an evening. I recall that the white people of the town had been invited, even urged or asked, to be present. Again he was quite in evidence as master of ceremonies at large, with capable Negro teachers managing their classes or prompting their pupils. It was a gala occasion, nothing left out except these gowns for graduates of lower schools that we see nowdays.

It is time to mention that the Colored schools, or the Negro people of Asheboro, outgrew Uncle Mead or his kind of leadership. That seems to have happened about the same time that the white people began to pretty fully accept him. But the thing is natural enough anyhow. I suppose that as our Negro people began to rise, they began to want to do their own flying. They began to want to have teachers and officers of their own race. Whether Uncle Mead's wonderfully suave bossiness or his type of ceremonial managership began to feel like a restraining and repressing dictatorship, I do not know. But it very well might have done so, with the highest of motives on both sides. They probably wanted more freedom to be themselves. He probably wanted to teach manners for them as he did for everyone else. In fact, he was a **nice** man, in some respects at least somewhat feminine in his ideas of table-manners or any other kind of protocol. He eventually resented a little their graduation in sentiment from his leadership, and that was natural too. They came to seem to him not appreciative enough of that sort of missionary work to which he had given his life. I wonder if all missionaries do not come to share this feeling of his in proportion as they have been successful. If we succeed at all, we make self-starters and democrats out of our pupils.

At any rate William E. Mead left Asheboro, having I suspect, more warm friends in the town, white and black, than anybody else in the town. For one thing, there were no class restrictions at all in his friendships and affections,

no color boundaries, no politics, no religious sectarianism. To everyone he shone as a **human** being.

He lived again in Brooklyn for a while. When I was fourteen years old they took me out of school and let me go alone by train to Clinton, Massachusetts, where there was an uncle by marriage (Blanche McGlohon's father) who was overseer in the Lancaster cotton mills. I say I went alone by rail. The fact is that it had been carefully arranged for Uncle Mead to meet me in Jersey City and break the joint of the trip. He did that for me as he did for ever so many Asheboro greenhorns in those days. He showed me the city by trolley. He kept me in his home overnight. He put me next afternoon late on the Fall River boat. I managed to get lost later at Framingham junction in Massachusetts, and arrived by a later train than expected; but that was none of his fault. Later in the winter, when I was working in the Lancaster Mills, he came to Clinton himself and flaxed around a lot with that busy camera of his, from which I have faded photos. More than that, he took me on a trip to Boston, where we spent a couple of nights alongside a big brewery in Roxbury, with the owner's family, of which two boys had been in his schoolroom somewhere. Under his wing, I roamed the Harvard Yard, little thinking that six years later I would be there for a spot under my own steam power. The following summer, on the way home to Asheboro, I stopped overnight again with him in Brooklyn. All Asheboro counted on him in such ways.

Not too long after that, he was teaching in an F.F.V. school somewhere in Virginia. I suspect that it was in Richmond and that I was attending a Virginia-Carolina football game there, with the Chapel Hill rooters, I saw him again on his school campus, slept with him in the same big bed, as people more often did in those days. As said above, he had reacted a bit against aspects of his early Asheboro efforts; and he cautioned me not to let out that he had once been a teacher in Negro schools, saying that it would be his finish in the place where he was. One can think of that as a purely defensive measure. He did not so much need boys in his home in that period of his life, having all the school contacts.

The next time I saw him, for present memory, was after my Harvard days and when I was a poor clergyman in Kingston, Massachusetts. My mother and cousin Agnes Moring, later Porter, had been visiting me. On their return home, I came with them as far as New York, where all three of us spent a night at the Mead Brooklyn home. He then had no boys but had a beloved aunt in his home and was supporting a step-mother who had never been appreciative of him but for whom he felt a responsibility. He was giving music lessons right and left to support the three of them. He told me once that he had inherited $20,000, quite a sum for the 1880s, but had spent it all in his missionary days and on his proteges.

Still longer years elasped before I saw him again and had the closest encounters with him ever, and came to know him more and better. The other day only there turned up a letter of his to my Aunt, Mrs. W. H. Moring, Jr. telling of his visit to this old farm in Conway, New Hampshire, where I am now sit-

ting down to write about him. He had formed the habit of bringing his "Auntie" to the little town of Swanzey, N. H., the home of Denman Thompson, famous actor in the play, **Way Down East.** I drove down to Swanzey and brought him and three boys he had in tow acress the state and up to this place, where they spent a few days, the boys camping out in a tent over against our near woods. One of the boys was a Jewish boy who was on a visit to him from Ohio for the summer. The other two, younger, were Polish boys whom he had adopted on the plea of a distracted mother who knew that she was definitely headed for an insane institution. They were well-mannered, appreciative, boys. They all fitted in happily with all my family. After they had left my boys began and long continued to intone a certain adage or saying after those Brooklynites: "The oily boid gets the woim."

After that, came removal of my family to Ann Arbor, Mich., for ten years, and some more years at Canton, N. Y. (I was a teacher now) before I saw Uncle Mead on at least two trips to New York and Brooklyn.

The first of those occasions he was living in a fairly good house on a fairly nice street, supporting himself and his two sons by music lessons. Also he was teaching them their Roman Catholic catechism, preparatory to the rite of Confirmation. I suppose he had been forced to promise to do that in order to get permission to adopt them. But he did it with perfect grace and willingness. No sectarian he! He himself had by this time formally changed his allegiance from Quakerism to the Episcopal Church, partly, as he freely said, in order to make himself eligible for a nearby Episcopal Home when he could no longer work — for his boys.

The last time I ever saw him he was living with his two boys in cramped quarters in the back end of a small laundry. He was doing the cooking, patching, ironing, and much of the washing for those three boys and himself, in spite of the fact that he lived in the back-end of a laundry. He continued to be a very religious man, in all the practical essentials of that. He would be found "laboring in the vineyard" until the Lord took over. I believe he always continued to think of Asheboro and Brooklyn as his two homes, and if he had inherited more money and had not spent it immediately he might have liked to return to Asheboro to end his days. There are more things to tell about his Asheboro life which can't be told as yet if ever. So says loyalty to his memory and to him But maybe I have told enough to make him a candidate for being a most remarkable man.

Along in 1936 or 1937, I wrote him a letter addressed to that Brooklyn laundry. It came back from the dead letter office evidently, with a statement that he was not known by people now at that address.

Three English Captains

Somewhere in the midst of the 1880s three British "Captains" arrived in Asheboro to make it their home. They were clearly associated, and I assume rather than know that they came together and were old friends. They were "Captains" Winn, Wainman, and Fisher. It was generally supposed that they had retired from the British army and had been in some foreign place like India. Whether the title of "Captain," so evenly handed out to all three of them, was justice or a kind of courtesy, one does not know.

The most prominent memorial left upon the town by one of them is, I suppose, the name of Wainman Avenue. Whether Winn is commemorated anywhere at all is more than I know. B. J. Fisher certainly made the biggest splash of the three at the time. Apparently he had more money to throw around. He not only built the biggest house, but he laid out a sort of park around it, with white board fences much in evidence, something of gardens near the house, extensive stables and kennels. As for the kennels, he and his friends used bird dogs to follow after the plentiful coveys of quail or "partridges" that we had around Asheboro. They made extensive use of the services of John Betts, eldest son of Uncle Joe Betts, who was a sort of professional guide in that field. As for the stables, the main thing I remember is that Captain Fisher had a famous stallion named "Champ" that he drove to a two-wheel gig, often appearing down the street. He was reported to have driven Champ to Greensboro in two hours time. In those days we called Greensboro twenty-eight miles over the road, which was rough in places and full of mud-holes. But Captain Fisher wore a jockey's cap and loved to split the road. I think it was the Fishers, and possibly after the other two Captains had died, who lost a little daughter who is buried in the old Methodist cemetery. That is at least their most poignant memorial or marker of the present day. I believe Sunset Avenue was first called Fisher Avenue; in fact I am sure it was informally called that, just as longer before the lane that was there had been called the Gluyas pond road.

Of course the three arrivals caused a considerable centering of interest and gossip, for many of their ways were strange and new to the town. I hold in mind one clear picture of Captain Winn, although I am sure I must have seen him a good many times. He was coming up Main Street from the direction of the old postoffice and was just turning the corner on to Worth Street. He walked with a free and wide, limber-legged, stride. He wore knee-boots over his pants, with a plain, flaming-red shirt, and there was a pistol tucked into his belt. That picture printed itself on the memory of a five or six year old boy playing in the throat of the lane which later became an extension of Main Street past our house. I recall hearing gossip to the effect that it had seemed necessary to hint to the newcomers that it was not felt good form for a man to wear pistols on the streets of the village. No doubt British boys of those days, even those who did not join the army or get to India, were brought up on Buffalo Bill and to read Bret Harte. And having no realistic vista of the vastness of the country, no doubt when foreigners landed in New York they

felt themselves on the edge of the frontier if not of the Wild West. Still I rather think it was the quail, the rabbits, and the wild-turkeys that were left, which chiefly brought this trio to Asheboro.

It was not long before there was a moment of great excitement for the town. It couldn't have been more than a year or two from the time I got that clear picture of Captain Winn before, one morning, the whole town was electrified by the news that he had died in a loud fit of **delirium tremens.** Make no mistake, the name of what he had died by was central in the first resounding rumor. I have no idea now whether Captain Winn had been a married man or not.

Captain Wainman I recall as a slightly built man, dressed for the streets in a light checked suit or tweed (maybe a Harris tweed), such as I was unfamiliar with. I don't think I ever heard his voice. But within a year or two more after Winn's death, came again that same resounding report of a man dying in the night in a shouting fit of d. t. And that was Wainman. He left a wife and at least one little girl. I have no doubt in the world that if older people than I, who knew these men better, were writing this page instead of I, they would have things more homely and perhaps appealing to say of the two Captains. But I didn't know them very well, and you have some idea how a boy is built to register and remember some things.

Mrs. Wainman soon left Asheboro. Her lawyer in the settling of her husband's estate was Col. Jim Morehead, of Greensboro. She consulted him by letter and by visits to his office. In that room of the University Library at Chapel Hill, where they kept original documents and letters for future historians to know us better by, there is a file of Col. Morehead's papers. There are some letters and communications about the Wainman inheritance in the Colonel's file, and in particular there is a black-bordered envelope (he did not usually keep the envelopes), with a letter inside written on the same paper of mourning, which letter he must have kept for personal interest rather than as any record of a legal transaction. It shows some more of the mother's natural concern about her little daughter, and there is one extraneous reference which caught my eye in going over the Morehead file some years ago, for another purpose. I am sure Colonel would not have kept anything that would conceal personal secrets, or anything else that Mrs. Wainman would object to seeing brought out to attention of others. What I was caught by was a mere remark to the effect that the name of the person she was talking to him about, at his office, "the other day" was Simon, Lord Lovat.

Now the first Simon Fraser, Lord Lovat (1667 - 1747), of the time when Scottish pretenders were trying for the Scottish or British thrones, was apparently one of the most famous, or infamous, men that ever lived in the Highlands of Scotland. Graduate of Aberdeen University, able to quote Horace and Vergil in the original, as well as Shakespeare and others, the Encyclopedia Brittanica at least gives a very hectic report of the man, with no punches pulled. He raped a great lady in her castle, and then, to get her estates, to be sure forced a marriage upon her. It is said that he won some portion of the lady's

consent after a while, to some of this. But from this point in his early life on, he was candidate for the place of history's worst turncoat. He betrayed and double-timed every man or party that ever trusted him until, a weak and ill old man, he was caught up with finally, and was hanged way down in London.

The presence of that note, in that mourning letter, in Col. Morehead's papers, may suggest to some that the Wainman family had roots in far North Inverness-shire and the Fraser country where one Simon, Lord Lovat continued to follow another, as head of the tribe. If there had been any close family connection, the letter would doubtless have been burned. But it suggests to me that Wainman, who, like Winn, had been what is called a "remittance man," very likely came from some "gentle," possibly some "noble" family of the old isles. We have no idea whether they were wanted, cared for, back home. But it is sort of harsh to reflect that they exiled themselves so completely to come to a strange world and beat out their hearts maybe in a nostalgic life that ended in a wild night, neither one yet thirty years of age.

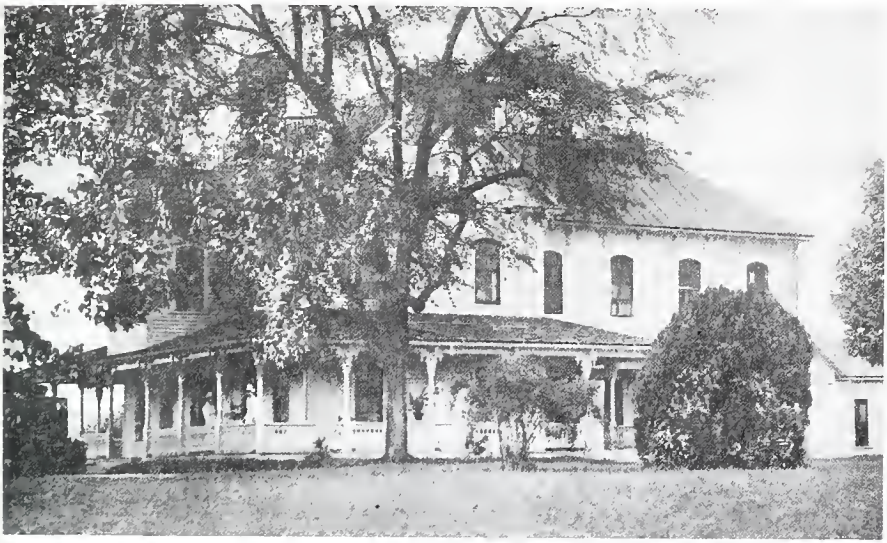
After the death of his two friends, B. J. Fisher took a renewed grip on life. I think it must have been before the death of that little Fisher daughter, that I recall being allowed to tag along to a Christmas party at the Fisher home, to which party my younger brother, Duke, had been the one originally invited. There was a tree, and the Captain played Santa. When he was not Santa, I heard his wife call him "Jack."

It is more than likely that three such deaths should have made Asheboro look dreary to the Fishers. Anyhow the Captain moved to Greensboro, where he went into the real estate business rather extensively for the times. He was certainly one of the early workers in that field. There is a great park, Fisher Park, named in his honor. The first noise of his operations came when he bought one, or was it two, of the town's ancient hotels. More than that, he had his old guide-friend, John Betts, come to Greensboro to run a hotel for him. That set Asheboro agog. We had not thought of John Betts as a candidate for running such an anciently appointed and citified business. I remember one day when our whole town was laughing over a report that John Betts was serving watermelon for breakfast! Indeed it may be that the joke was on Asheboro itself, that time. Most of us had then never heard of orange juice for breakfast either. Undoubtedly W. P. Wood, J. E. Walker, and others who went for a week every summer to Saratoga or White Sulphur Springs had met that Yankee or foreign innovation; but not most of us. Our idea of beginning the day was mostly hominy grits, with gravy or molasses and butter, and occasionally dishes of eggs with ham or bacon. That watermelon for breakfast may have reflected a Yankee motion and wave of the future which was to bring in some wider ideas of breakfast menu, containing, in particular, fruits. Oh, we may have used cantelopes in season. But Asheboro breakfasts, and those other meals with too much grease in them, so as to make many of us red-pimpled in the face, began to suffer a sea-turn about the time I left Chapel Hill to go North. That was in the fall of 1904. When I came back I began to get cereals of all

kinds, instead of the only occasional oatmeal; and with orange juice, — also later in the day more vegetables not soaked in pork fat.

Meantime, Captain Fisher's tale goes to Greensboro.

Captain B. J. Fisher's Home as seen from Sunset Avenue



(Courtesy of Mrs. C. A. Hayworth)

The Fisher Home after it became the Memorial Hospital

Uncles, Aunts, and Baldwins

Most of the established Colored families of Asheboro, or families that had been there from before the Civil War at least, excepting the Coxes, had members old enough to be addressed by everybody as "Uncle" or "Aunt." We never called them anything else.

For example, there were the Lytles. Now a Captain Lytle had commanded a company in the Revolutionary War, in the 10th regiment of N. C. Continentals, under Colonel Abraham Shepherd. My own great-great-great grandfather (twice over) Marmaduke Victory, was in Lytle's company, and I presume it was largely a Randolph company. But if the Lytle name was not killed out, then it died out so far as white people are concerned. But it had prominent Colored people to represent it in Asheboro. They were what was known as Free Negroes. That means they had possessed the right to vote before the adoption of our 1835 Constitution, which took away that right, and which new Constitution was fought, tooth and nail, on that account and because of the denial of citizenship to Roman Catholics, by the author of our State hymn, **The Old North State.** I am referring of course to Judge William Gaston.

The Lytle name was represented in Asheboro by Uncle Jesse and Aunt Maria, by Uncle Bill and Aunt Mary, and by Joe, who was of the next generation younger and ran a barbershop for whites, when he came back to Asheboro, as he did from ventures elsewhere. Uncle Jesse was the Worth McAlister outdoor man or steward as long as he lived. He had little to say on the street, but walked with a certain dignity and met boys with a sort of quizzical smile. With a pretty long beard for a Colored man, he reminded me somehow of some Old Testament character or other. Aunt Maria dressed as neat as a pin and was strictly high-cut from every standpoint except color. Like most of the Colored women who lived on the hill to the East of ours and the McAlister meadows, she did washing for a short list of established customers.

Uncle Bill Lytle was married to her sister, Aunt Mary. Their house is still standing on the corner of Cox and Wainman or Kivett Streets. Uncle Bill had a barbershop in his home but frequently came around to people's houses, bringing his hair-cutting and shaving tools. He sharpened razors too. He long cut my hair for fifteen cents, whether on our West-wing porch or in his shop. He had some old hand-clippers which pulled like the dickens.

I think he was skilled at some trade like brick-laying, but he had achieved or assumed a certain amount of free-play. He had a garden with fruit trees in it. And he was decidedly one of the town's guides and Nimrods. Among people I knew, either he or John or Rufus Betts, had the best ideas about where to find the last of the wild turkeys there were around. In fact, he was an enthusiastic hunter. He was highly respected and liked by everybody. His wife, Aunt Mary, was seamstress for a lot of people. In that capacity as well as others, she was often in and around our house, and seemed to be a sort of member of the family. She belonged to the class of superior people, black or white; and everybody really knew it.

Leaving the Lytles, there was Uncle John Bell and his wife Aunt Lu. They lived on the top of that hill behind us to the East. He was a carpenter by trade, if I remember. They had one son whose name I have forgotten, but I recall that my mother encouraged me to go over and play with him. She regarded the Bells as top-cut from the humanistic point of view.

There were no Aunts and Uncles among the Coxes, but they ranked high in the Colored community. I think Harry, John and Anne were sibs. I believe Harry and John were both bricklayers, and I knew they were both leading artizans. Besides that, over long years, John was the entrepreneur who, come Springtime, brought us our treat of a roe-shad from the Cape Fear river. Until we got our branch railway in 1889, that shad must have come over the road from High Point, and at some risk of loss of freshness and flavor. But I do not remember ever feeling anything to complain about in it. John Cox would have a box of shad, packed in ice, over at our corner, and we would go and choose. Asheboro still lived on a post-War Spartan diet, and a good roe-shad practically made a day of celebration. Anne Cox came and did our family washing, at the wash-house out in the yard. She got her own water at the well-house fifty feet away, heated it in the big iron pot seated in a white clay arch, and boiled some of the clothes. Over long years she even made her own soap, and for help on that there was an ash-vat against the back-wall of the wash-house which provided the lye. We made our own hulled-corn (hominy) with some of that lye.

Uncle Bob Baldwin and wife Aunt Maria lived on that same ridge to the East. They were pretty old. In fact Uncle Bob told us one evening, when offering baskets for sale at our front door, that he was a hundred and thirty-eight years old. It seems doubtful that he could have kept a careful record, or known actually just how old he really was. He did look more like Uncle Remus than anybody I ever saw. But I feel sure he could not read or write. His speech was a bit thick, and on that account and in the light of his claim to longevity, it may be that he was an original unwilling immigrant to this country, perhaps from the West Indies or some place where they did not speak English too clearly. But there is no question about his claim to be 138, for we quizzed him a while on that.

I have more than once seen Uncle Bob and Aunt Maria trudging up the lane (East Worth Street to you), carrying on head and shoulders, both of them, a load of baskets that made them look like human mushrooms. I suppose that is West Indies style. In their case, the material for baskets was in part our plentiful branch-willows.

I do not know exactly what relation another local celebrity, Atlas Baldwin, was to Uncle Bob and Aunt Maria. He was regarded as the strongest man in Asheboro. Tall and wide, deep-chested, he had arms and shoulders like a gorilla, full grown and big as I suppose they come. His legs were certainly not large in proportion, and when they were displayed you could look upon him as a bit top-heavy; but the total impression of might and muscle was there.

We almost always had three hogs to kill, "dress," salt, and bestow in our outdoor smokehouse around Christmas time or before January was out. When hog-killing time came along, we always sent for Atlas Baldwin to act as master of ceremonies. I remember one year in particular, when we had three Poland-Chinas weighing each from 300 to 325 pounds. When it came to scalding those great unopened carcases to get rid of the hair, Atlas offered to bet anybody that he could, by himself, souse one of them (it may have been the biggest — I do not remember that) into the hogshed of scalding water that had been heated at an open fire. Well, the bet was taken, maybe by someone who wanted to see Atlas perform. Of course there was danger of his getting scalded. Well, I saw that heave. He took the whole slippery hog in a body hold, carried him the step or so, got the hog's nose posed on the rim, and then leaned backward and pushed out until the burden slid in nose first, as it should. Thinking of that, I have often wondered how it happened that Atlas's parents picked such a good name for him.

At those hog-killings Atlas Baldwin always asked for and got some of his favorite pieces of pork, which were the lights. And when we boys were roasting some bits of tongue at the open fire, I have seen him stick his great hand into the middle of the blaze and, holding it there, very slowly turn it over and back a time or two; and then without any hurry take it out and ask if you could see anything the fire had done to it. The answer was No, of course. He himself claimed the performance was painless and wanted us to accept it as a piece of magic. My mother, being told about it, merely opined that by this time Atlas Baldwin probably wore a skin as tough and hard as a rhinoceros hide.

About once a year, my father sent for Atlas to come and clean out our well, of which father was very proud. For it furnished plenty of good, clear, "free-stone" water, whereas the water yielded by the well at the John Hill house next door, was definitely limestone and unpleasant to the taste by comparison. Our well was housed in a yard building, which contained a buttery at the far end; and towards the kitchen porch consisted of roof and lattice-work sides. Of course there was a windlass attached to the roof. The well was supposed to be some twenty-five feet deep. For its annual cleaning, what water could be got out with buckets and windlass was thrown out on the grass. Then Atlas would let himself down the well, with the help of the rope and toe-holds on the edges of the rocks which were the well's lining. Then he would fill the bucket with mud and slush for a while, sending it up to some assistant at the top. Then the rope would be made fast above, and he could come up in reverse of the pattern of his descent. I suppose this was the usual method of cleaning wells. But to see that enormous man come budding out of a hole in the ground was a wondrous sight the first few times I ever saw it anyhow. I guess he must have looked over and tested the rope each time, but do not remember that part.

The Baldwins, one family and another of them, were the biggest Colored family native to Asheboro to the best of my knowledge and belief. Uncle Bob and Aunt Maria were credited with over thirty children, but somehow these

were the very first Colored people to begin leaving Asheboro and streaming North or West as soon as they began to grow up. It was one of that family that furnished Robert Bingham with a valet when he went to Louisville to live, I believe as a lawyer or something before he got into the newspaper business with the **Courier-Journal.**

Of course if I went much further in speaking of Colored people who belonged to native Asheboro families, I should surely run into mistakes. I shall mention two or three more that I am pretty certain of, and then stop. There was old Don Stith, last caretaker of the tan-yard properties on the West side of Park Street. He lived on that place by himself for quite a while after the tanning business was all over, and to my earliest thoughts he seemed to sort of haunt it. Whether he was always around to catch up with any boys who went hunting bullfrogs, I do not know; but that may have been it. Then there was "Chess" Thrift, who was a mighty cook, often sent for to help in putting on and serving banquets. You often saw him around with white cap and apron, dressing the part of a chef. For a considerable time he served as major domo for Hal M. Worth.

Other Colored people I like to recall are Taylor Waddell and Martha Jane Waddell (no relation to one another so far as I know), William Henry and Catharine McSwain, Jim Hill, Wesley Brower, Dave Kepler, Lindsay Holmes. I will end with a word about Lindsay. He long worked for Cicero Hammer, and at all sorts of jobs. I remember him best as pulling the lever on **Courier** press, and I rise to say that Lindsay needed no Joel Chandler Harris to help him tell stories about Brer Rabbit, Brer Fox, and other animals. He could tell original stories bringing in Brer Rabbit and other such characters by name; and Lindsay is the man who showed me that those stories which Harris collected down in Georgia must have come all the way from Africa in part.

JESSE LYTLE

THOMAS CHESTER THRIFT
(better known as "Chess")

(Pictures courtesy of Historical Society)

What Asheboro Ate

When you consider that in Asheboro eighty years ago nobody, not even doctors, knew much of anything at all about calories, vitamins, carbohydrates, proteins, is it not a wonder that we grew up at all? Some of us were pimple-faced from too much fats, and some grew slender and light bones; but on the whole we made it.

In my home we certainly did not have a real meat dish once every day, although it is true that practically all our vegetables were cooked with scraps of salt pork in the water. But apart from that, many families were vegetarians one day after another. Our list of vegetables was much shorter too than it is today. We lacked carrots, parsnips, winter-squash, eggplant, chard, spinach, sweetcorn (we used field-corn.) Asparagus was not exactly unheard of: our family had the feeblest possible remains of an old bed dating maybe from "back before the war." We had turnip greens and collards before the big world knew them, but only white turnips and not rutabagas. A few garlic roots of ancient heritage still grew alongside our wood-pile in the wood-lot, to serve as a delicacy for a few old-time Negroes who knew about them and regularly asked to visit them. You could not buy any greens at a grocery store, or any vegetables much except white potatoes.

I have many times, at home as well as in farm houses, sat down to the dining table with just a big bowl of one particular vegetable, like cornfield peas (black-eyed peas to some people), or snap beans, which dish was supposed to be the staple of dinner, apart from bread. Of course many people were Bible readers in those days, enough to have read that bread is "the staff of life," and Fundamentalist enough to believe it. We had plenty of bread at my own home, and the wheat-heart was still in the wheat flour, while very likely the corn meal was more whole and fresher than you can get hardly anywhere today. But to finish the tale of that vegetarian dinner aright, it should be added that the better-off part of the population could and did get plenty of butter and milk. Ah, doubtless that was a saving-grace. We could, by sending children to a neighbor's, buy plenty of milk at from ten to twenty cents a gallon. Jersey cows were not scarce either, and furnished much of that milk. Cream meant real cream everywhere. And many people had a cow or two of their own. Whoever owned cows let them roam the hills all day for free food except in mid-winter. For one spring month, those cows would spoil both the milk and the cream by eating wild onions.

Outside of lemons, we had fresh fruits only when native fruits were in season, if you allow for apples ripening in cellars until late fall, coconuts visiting for the deep winter months, and a few oranges and bananas around Christmas time.

Of course we had chickens and eggs at the market price, and very likely a little egg-supply of our own. You could not buy dressed chickens; you had to catch your own and wring his neck, or else buy personal service with your chick. The eggs at the grocery stores needed to be caught shortly after they had come in from the country. "Case-eggs" from a distance were anybody's bet; they often led to sad experiences. As you might guess, we all tended to eat up our chickens

while they were still "frying-size," before they were big and heavy enough to repay growing them for the market, or to get your labor out of them if they were your own rasing. Good Yankees still can't bear to eat their own chickens until the poundage is there, and so they don't know the real meaning of fried chicken. For compensation, they raise them to maturity and get their price, or they eat them and get two or three meals off the same bird.

Right here is the place to celebrate real molasses — not any of the light-colored stuff and not any of the foreign to the subject syrups. I am talking about genuine black-strap, black as the ace of spades, from Cuba or New Orleans. Day after day and week after week, with intervals for Sundays and perhaps a few other special occasions, my breakfast to grow up on consisted of oatmeal or hominy grits with black-strap, or biscuits with black-strap and butter; and of course plenty of milk. We didn't let up on the milk pitcher usually until Mother said No More. I suspect that and the butter were life-savers. We bought that molasses by the jug-ful, and it came out of a big hogshead at the grocery, with a bunghole and an awfully slow flow in the wintertime. I have often bragged of growing up on molasses, and of course that was where a boy's sweet tooth got satisfied to an extent. Those were the years when a whole lot of our candy consisted of "pulled" molasses too.

There is a little more rightful qualifying to be done, letting in some more of wild nature that drifted into the picture and requires mention. The edges of all the fields and certain patches along the branch were haunted with wild blackberries, and everybody canned them as well as enjoyed them in season. Some of the Colored people knew where to find a few huckleberries (blueberries to some people), and brought them around to sell. Wagons brought up some Sampson County Blues from the swamps, as they brought honey and chestnuts from the mountains. We had persimmon pudding pretty nearly off the trees, for nobody ever cut a persimmon tree that was any good, no matter where it showed up. Up against some of our half a dozen stone chimneys that backed out into the yard, fig-bushes flourished a long early and late season. My mother was a champion in the field of making fig preserves, and the magic secret of her recipe seemed to be ginger, and the best kind of root at that. She utterly scorned powdered ginger. I have been sent back to a store and on to another one, if necessary, in order to get the best quality of white ginger root.

In the same way my grandmother Moring was unrivalled family champion, and famed in the neighborhood, for making her most wonderful watermelon-rind sweet pickles. And those pickles began with her watching day after day, and week after week if necessary, to get the right watermelon. The rind must have the right ripeness, thickness, brittleness — I suppose porosity. And then the process was not one day's work. It went by stages and took several days.

Cooks were known and appreciated in Asheboro. It seemed that each one had a special receipt and routine to be famous for. And of course they ran loose in the branch of luxurious desserts. I have spoken of Chester Thrift as a famous cook, (I wondered once if Chess cakes were named for him), and I guess there were as many well-known ones among the colored people as

among the whites. In fact, they had the more professional cooks anyhow. But my cousin Blanche Wood was noted for her chess cakes and again for superb coconut frosted cakes — out of sight from any canned supplies but the coconut right out of the shell, and you might say "in the milk."

That reminds me of some homesick lines a fellow once wrote about my mother's coconut custard pie:

Sing Riley, Sing Field! Help out with this story
Of autumnal facts and things gustatory.
There's frost on the pumpkin, there's all kinds of pie:
Sing boy-time eating and yearning to try!

Come deep in the fall, the old Stedman store
Got a shipment of coconuts, whiskered galore;
Glamorous tokens of South Sea demesne,
Tiding of bays where sunny palms lean.

You wondered if head-hunters started from this;
Like Robinson Crusoe discovered the bliss
Of split-open heads, meat, milk, and ferment.
You brought one home, cracked it; Ma nodded assent.

She never on "custard" pie wasted her gift,
Knowing egg needs a magic it's sad face to lift;
Thank God she'd not heard of "coconut creams" —
One more sweety-tweety to join the bad dreams!

She grated that coconut fine as she could,
Put the milk in the custard, stirred it all good.
It's no use to sprinkle with dry, bony, gristle;
Pies needn't have beards because coconuts bristle!

You stood there seeing a round kind of halo,
Mixing up cakes with the Magi they tell o';
Then plop in the oven; then out that rich brown:
"De Gustibus non . . . . . ," "Nunc dimmitt's," . . . Going down!

At that, I have missed the home brand of sausage not made out of scraps but out of some of the best meat of some of our own hogs, more than any Asheboro dessert. The last I ever heard of that kind was from some friends near Plymouth, Mass., who also raised their own hogs.

Of course I did not know all the good cooks in town, and you had better judge some of those I didn't know by some of those I did, I am ready to admit, by way of getting off the home lot at least, that when it came to making real chocolate cake, with hard, not goo-ey or yaller but black frosting and inlays between the multitude of layers, my mother always seemed to me conservative or afraid of extravagance. They did a better job of that at my Uncle Will Moring's or at some church suppers.

If you ask me who did the best job making persimmon pudding, I have to admit I haven't the faintest idea. And I want to go back and cover the whole ground by saying I do not believe in champion cooks much more than in champ-

ions anywhere else. It seems to me that people should give up this confounded vanity of judgment and conventionality of picking the most beautiful girl in the town, or the state, — or, God save the mark — nominating a "Miss Universe." Maybe the angels take time to laugh at that one! There just "ain't no such animal." About every time they have a beauty-judging contest, I can find one in the group I like better than the one the judges picked, and my judgment in such subjects is far better for me than theirs. I advise you to stick to your own judgment too. Different things are good or beautiful for and to different people, and that goes to the bottom of the question really. There was no Miss or Mrs. Asheboro in the field of cooking. For that matter, I am not saying the best fried chicken I ever got was not out of one of those New Hope township country wagons that choked the near woods when Farmer Commencement was going on under one of those brush arbors they had every year. But we had our many chefs to look Paris or any place in the eye, and tell them their cooking is good for special occasions or for a change and refreshment of taste now and then.

CENTRAL HOTEL

Uncle Willis Hamlin and Household

Uncle Willis Hamlin had more than his share of surprises, contradictions, and puzzlements about him. He and his environs aroused a boy's wonder, while his personality aroused liking and regard. You never caught him at work, or busy with anything much. He was getting along in years to be sure, when I began to know him, but he seemed to have more than his share of leisure. If he took the world or his politics very seriously, he never had very much to say about such things. You first heard of him for going on fishing expeditions with a crony or two more than for anything else. The most likely place to come upon him, after business moved up town, was on the wide apron, or front porch, of Wood and Moring's General Store, at the corner of Fayetteville and Sunset Ave. There he appeared as a jack-knife whittler, in a cane-bottomed chair leaned back against one of the posts.

He dressed roughly, a good deal like a typical clodhopper; and I believe he wore brogans on his feet. He had neither horse nor mule at his place. He walked. He always appeared clean-shaven except for his chin-circling, nearly white, whiskers. He showed all the symptoms of being poor. He lived in the edge of a Colored neighborhood. If he had ever had any educational advantages beyond a little early free-schooling, I never heard of it and I doubt it. He had spectacles which he used for some newspaper-reading, when time-killing there at the store. But there was something rather cultured beyond what you at first expected in both his voice and his speech. In fact that point should be widened a bit. It was worth anybody's while, when some matron of the village passed that corner, to see Uncle Willis bang the front legs of the chair he was leaning back in down on the porch floor, rise to his feet, swing his old hat — I picture that as a wide-brim, soft, summer, straw hat — in a wide and sweeping arc as he made a bow, and smiled wide. They all responded with something like, "Howdy, Uncle Willis." But none of them ever stopped, as I seem to remember it, to really chat or to enter into general conversation with him. Along with Louis Bulla and one or two other non-conformists, he never appeared in Church. He never attended select public gatherings, though you might see him in the court room when Court was in session, or at some political gathering or speech-making. I am certain I never saw him in anybody else's house except his own.

And yet he exuded friendliness and wore a pleasant and smiling face. He was more than approachable; he was inviting to anybody who felt like exchanging a few words. He had a ringing laugh that could be heard as far as anybody's, and it was often to be heard. People delighted to report his jokes or accounts of his fishing-trips, even when some of the jokes or reports may have been stale enough, like this one. "How many fish did you catch, Uncle Willis?" "I got just ninety-nine, Sir." "Why, Uncle Willis, why didn't you make it an even hundred?" "What! do you think I would tell a lie for one little fish?"

He lived on what was known as the Oaky Mountain road, the first house on the left, after you started down the red lane from the old courthouse, crossed

the wet-weather brook on a low plank-bridge, and passed the Colored schoolhouse half way up the first rise to where the lane leveled off. His house was on perhaps a quarter of an acre of ground with palings around most or all of it. It was a two-room house on one level, with a kind of sleeping loft for the left-hand room as you went in from the front. The cooking was done at an open fireplace with wide hearth in the North room. That may not have been so exceptional for those days as you might think. It was the time when we were all beginning to hear of and see "airtight" stoves for heating and often for some of the cooking too. The family, besides himself consisted first of a housekeeper who went by the name of Mrs. East, whom it seems as if I never saw without a sunbonnet on, indoors or out. She had very little to say, when I was around, — practically nothing. Then there were two boys some three to five years older than I, named John and Arthur East. John was the elder by a year or so. John went to school, Arthur never did so far as I ever saw. I have been in that house a number of times, frequently when hunting Indian relics in Uncle Willis's garden (with his permission) or just beyond in the back yard or fields of Jim Hill and Wesley Brower. I once found a complete, 3 or 4 inches wide, Indian spade in Uncle Willis's corn-patch, old enough to be colored yellow white on the outside. That would suggest not too much hard banging with holes in that garden, and not too much interest in Indian relics.

I do not know what other occasions carried me into that house, though John East was a fellow I admired greatly for his gifts and learned something from. Uncle Willis was proud of him, and he had a right to be. I often walked home from school with John part-way, because my home was on one of his convenient routes. He could quote passages from the editorials of Henry Woofden Grady, editor then, or just before, of the **Atlanta Constitution.** When it came Friday afternoon at school, and every boy or girl had to speak a piece he had learned, John's favorite spouting was a famous essay Editor Grady had written about **The New South.** Walking home, John would quote the Texas iconoclast Brann, whom I first heard of in that way. I think I was first really introduced to "Bob" Ingersoll by John East, although my father had a volume or two of Ingersoll on his shelves. "Every birth asks us whence, and every grave asks us whither?" John would swell out and quote that. He could and did quote Shakespeare. He was the only Asheboro teenager who ever did that, to my knowledge. In particular he loved to quote a Shakespeare passage in defense of the poor bastard. My confoundedly abbreviated edition of **Bartlett's Quotations** refuses to help me locate it. But John would stick up his chin and want to know if the bastard did not have two hands, and two feet; two eyes and two ears; the same kind of feeling as anybody else; the same human nature? I don't think I am wrong in referring the passage to Shakespeare. I believe there was a bookcase behind the door that folded back into the rear room of that cabin. Obviously there was a brief supply of good literature somewhere around, for Asheboro had no library in those days.

Why did it never occur to me, or what in the world ever kept me off from

ever asking that boy to come in and have a look at my father's library, which was certainly one of the best in Asheboro. Was there a settled belief that he would shy off? Maybe I did try and have forgotten.

John was a central pillar of the Asheboro Literary Society, or at one time the Page Literary Society, at the schoolhouse, — the second name just after John Hammer, younger brother of Cicero, had written Walter Hines Page and got his permission to borrow the name. John had a gift of eloquence or debate, even if perhaps he was not so much of a born orator as Charlie Ross. Charlie could make his points, and could also appeal to the emotions and "turn on the rousements" better than John East. But I believe John could or did more often surprise you with a new line of thought, or with a rebel idea.

John, as I said, was the pride of Uncle Willis's eye. The sight of John's report card was one of his greatest pleasures. Any compliment to John was food to his heart and soul. I saw him exude this kind of satisfaction more than once. I got away from Asheboro, and coming back and inquiring for John a few years after, the news I got was that he was running a native fruit stand, selling peaches, melons, that sort of thing, down towards Troy. The next time I asked, nobody could tell me anything about him.

One thing I do firmly believe. If in the times of which I write there had been around Asheboro half as many men with means as there are now, John East would have been offered a scholarship at some college. If "freedom of opportunity" is one of our main slogans in this present stage of American democracy, then a good illustration of a fellow who missed or lacked opportunity is John East. I still would not say that he or anybody else in Asheboro ever lived in a "ghetto," for they used to have a gate to those places in Europe, and they turned the key after dark. That has never quite been done in the United States, though you certainly cannot say our Asheboro Negroes ever had anything like "freedom of opportunity." I recall my Asheboro sister-in-law looking out of the breakfast window at a Colored boy who was mowing the lawn, and saying: "I tell you it is a hard, hard thing in Asheboro to be born with a black skin." She was referring mainly to the kinds of jobs that were not open to all bright-enough minds.

One of the things I like to recall about Uncle Willis is how he had time to talk with boys about Indian relics, or anything that interested them. And I do recall his giving me, unasked, one spontaneous piece of advise, — giving it apropos nothing in particular but just bursting out with it, just having a moment of seriousness in which to go preaching: "Keep your hands off a nice girl, Sidney!" He repeated it.

Somehow back a piece Uncle Willis must have offended what are called the respectabilities, or the mores. It left him sort of on the outskirts of local society without killing a kind of inevitable regard for him. I do remember being told that he "was related by blood to the Alstons of South Carolina." All I know about any family of that name is that there is a famous Revolution-

ary-days house in the big bend of Deep River, in Moore County below, known as the Alston house. Whether there was such a well-known family, whether it possessed any tinge of genteelity or of top-status in South Carolina, whether or how Uncle Willis may or may not have been related thereto, I neither know nor much care, except as it may have added an eighth of an inch to the pickle he may have got himself into. But I mention it for that reason.

It was pleasant, even more than that to me, to hear that towards the end of his days they made Uncle Willis a Justice of the Peace. I heard that he was delighted by that. Of course I do not know whether he felt that a certain kind of isolation which had fallen upon him in his earlier days had been due to his own sins or to other people's conventionality. If it was the first, he was sort of taken back into the fold, or forgiven, when he was made a Justice. If it was the second, he never had complained but doubtless he enjoyed a little public recognition.

Grandpa's Last Buggy

Sometime in the 1840s, my maternal grandfather, William Henry Moring, Sr., came from Greensboro to Asheboro. Born in 1815, he had been for some years living under the wing of his uncle, Christopher Moring, who was one of the innkeepers of Greensboro and also ran a stage coach line to carry mails and passengers. Grandpa had learned something about buggy making before moving to Asheboro.

Shortly before him, or possibly at the same time, had come David Porter, from the same place, Greensboro. I do not know how well the two had known one another beforehand; but pretty soon they together were running a buggy-making shop on Fayetteville Street. The shop stood at the South end of the Moring lot as that fronted on Fayetteville. The old white Moring house was just East of the Southern Railway depot, its lot fronting half a block on Fayetteville and running West to Park Street, with pine woods for its West end. David Porter lived on the same side of Fayetteville, just a few rods beyond the buggy shop. All very convenient!

This enterprise, which may have been known as Porter-Moring or Moring-Porter Buggyshop, must have focused some little interest in Asheboro, which up to that time had possessed only two tan-yards and one brick-yard to represent industry, — so far as one knows. And the buggyshop gathered or trained some good artizans, notably some of the Presnells and the Burnses. The business was quite successful for a while as things went in those days, but was damped down very low by the Civil War. During that war Grandpa drove the mails to High Point, for Southern Railway connection. After the War, the buggy shop revived and must have run on until towards 1880. David Porter died, in the early 1880's and not too long after his death the business folded.

Born myself in 1883, the shop was standing idle and a bit forlorn in my earliest recollections. But Grandpa held on to it as a private workshop and a place to putter around; and whenever any piece of wood or iron equipment at our house got out of fix, we would take it up to him there, to be repaired.

It must have been not far from 1890, when Grandpa was 75 years old, that an event happened which I very well remember. Grandpa scraped the rust off himself, and decided that he was going to make one more buggy "if it was the last act." The family encouraged him enough, for they well knew how the old man had been suffering in his lack of real occupation and very likely haunted in his dreams. I dare say he wanted to prove that his skill was still with him. And the family were sure that the effort would give him something real to be busy about and make him feel younger.

I saw a good deal of the building of that buggy, for it went on to what seemed to my childish mind a terribly long time. I observed some of the processes very closely. I remember that when it came to making the wheels (they were good hickory), he had the sense to send for Dan Presnell, who had achieved local fame on that end of the job. Dan shaved and fitted those

spokes. I guess he made the hubs and fellies. I remember clearly his applying the iron rims to the wooden circumference, and then to me, hopeless aspect of the rim not being big enough. Then Dan heated the rim, and on it went. An early lesson in physics!

I could not say positively how much of the buggy Grandpa made all by himself, and it doesn't matter. He may have sent for Arch Presnell, who later ran our biggest blacksmith shop, to make those iron rims. What I do remember is that for the longest time, when I would be going home by the long route, he would be puttering around doing something or other for, or about, or to the buggy. Along towards the end, the buggy would be standing out in the yard, if it was clear weather, and he would be at work on the upholstery or putting coat after coat of black paint on the body, or wheels, or shafts. I thought he never would get done.

At last things got to where, when anybody asked him how he was getting on, he could heave a sigh and say he was coming to the end. And then it was two more days, and then the buggy was finished. The old shop had once more gone through its birth-pangs. What was Grandpa going to do with that new buggy? I guess this must have been before the Southern railway reached Asheboro in 1889, or shortly after, because nobody around Asheboro needed a new buggy or had the money to pay for one like that.

In discussion around the table at home, I learned what he hoped to do with it. Naturally it was through my mother, his eldest daughter, that he had let it leak to my father that he hoped to be allowed to borrow our old roan horse, Frank, and take that buggy on the road. It is one of the occasions on which I remember seeing a certain benign expression on my father's face. He made no difficulty, shared what amounted to a family appreciation of an old man's enterprise.

Well, Grandpa hitched old Frank to his new buggy and set off down the Plank Road, into the regions of Moore County, where many of the people still had Porter and Moring buggies, and who knew quality, finest materials, and a finished product when they saw it. We didn't hear from him for a week or more, and didn't expect to. We knew that, going or coming, he would spend some time at the Coffin place. His second daughter, Ida, had married Alex Coffin (Will Coffin's father), and lived at a post office known as Carter's Mill, unless I forget names. It was in what is now the town of Robbins. We thought he might halt there on his way towards Carthage, and let Alex Coffin, who was postmaster there, send out word, far and wide, that "Old Tip Moreen" was down with a new buggy to sell from the old Asheboro shop. Or Grandpa might drive all the way to Carthage, making a noise among old business friends as he went. In short, we didn't worry much about it. There were friends to stop with all along the way. We rather expected that he would be enjoying himself, as he explored what the market was willing to pay.

In something not far from a week, he was back.. He came a-straddle of old Frank. In lieu of a saddle he had belted a blanket to Frank's back, arran-

ged to carry the harness in some sort of a bag attached, and had taken his time on the road.

I guess we were a little bit relieved to see him, after all, for reason of possible accidents or weather. But this was before, must have been before, that old-fashioned rheumatism got him down so badly. There was evident in him a sense of solid satisfaction over having carried out his idea. I guess the best thing of all, if you can have it, is never to retire at all from some sort of real job, even if you keep at it without any employer, or on your own. But even belated rebellion against rust and dust is better than nothing.

Moring Family gathering on lawn at Moring home on Fayetteville Street where new part of first National Bank is located now. Front row, left to right: Walter Bulla, Annie Moring, Sidney Robins, Marion Moring, Edith Moring, Mrs. Annie Robins, Mrs. Agnes Bulla; at left in two big chairs: Mr. and Mrs. Frederick D. Thorns; Back row: Will Coffin, Beatrice Bulla, W. H. Moring, Jr., Mary Thorns Moring (Mrs. W. H. Moring, Jr.), William Penn Wood, Julia Thorns, Agnes Moring.

The Railroad Comes

Some time in the warm part of the year 1889, I lay on the roof of an outbuilding in the front yard of my Grandfather Moring's old white house, which was a stone's throw East of the new Southern Railway tracks. My cousins Agnes and Edith Moring were beside me, and our chins were more or less propped on the comb of the roof, and our gaze fixed on the scene out in front. There were a lot of people there, gathered to see the first passenger and freight train, passenger car on the end, pull in from High Point. Most of us had some time since been out to see the laborers, with no power tools, but only picks, shovels and wheelbarrows, dig a slot for the tracks through the last low hills that barred passage into town. But today was a genuine acme or climax. The train's whistle blew in the distance, presently nosed around the distant bend, and then with sufficient roars and puffs, came in to the stop. Of course there were some ceremonies, but all I remember of those is the presence of Col. Andrews, a famous railroad man of whom we had heard.

This was not so very far from the time when we had just seen or were about to see our first motion pictures, which all consisted so far as I remember, of big mogul engines approaching out of the distance, — without as yet any noise being reproduced. Still those silent pictures were impressive enough at the time. This day when the first train came in, there was plenty of noise, and although most of us had seen trains or been on them from High Point or Greensboro a way, there was some little excitement. In fact there was enough to make me, whenever I recall us kids perched on that shed roof with the train puffing in, at least think of a story which Buck Robertson, an older student at Chapel Hill from up in the mountains, used to tell. It was about a couple of old people up there in his native haunts who had walked twenty miles to see their first railroad train. They tramped to where the road-bed ran through a deep cut, and hung their chins over the edge of the cut. First the train blew in the distance, then nearer a time or two; then the engine came into sight; then with a lot of noise and great puffs of white steam both sideways and up, whisshed its way through the cut. "There now, Mary," said John. I told you we would be all right here." "I know, John," said Mary, "but it went through endways that time." I think we all felt there was some big new experience of some sort coming to Asheboro.

But people's forsight is not too rich. The very first change in the town that we noticed, I do believe, was that the new depot was providing an important gathering place in the middle of the afternoon for a considerable part of the town's population. In fact there was a small knot of people who became noted for being there every day; and they kept it up for ten years or more than that. Of course Tom Hoover was there every day with his express wagon. And it seemed that everybody wanted his mail in a hurry. That came down from High Point by rail, and it didn't take long to sort the mail after the bags were unloaded. For a little while the bags went down town to the old post office; but shortly the postoffice had to be moved nearer to the depot. A

second reason for people lining out in that direction as soon as they could get loose! The fact that the train was not expected to be quite on time only made more time to visit.

For years, A. M. Rankin was "Captain" or conductor of that train. The first engineer's name escapes me. But Claude Pierce, of Greensboro, was the first fireman; he was a second cousin out of a large family. Eck Burns was chief brakeman. We saw a lot of these men over the years, because they all spent the night in Asheboro and took the train back to High Point too early every morning. Captain Rankin eventually married Lena Blair, daughter of Atty. J. A. Blair, after having waited a good many years for her to grow up. A quiet and patient man was he.

In no time at all we were hearing of little villages popped up over-night along the tract to High Point. The first or nearest was Spero, six miles out. Then the train, for its own reasons of convenience, backed into and out of the town of Randleman, which was considerably larger than Asheboro and home of two or three cotton-mills. After Randleman came Sophia, Glenola, Trinity. At the last of these there was Trinity College, in which were the beginnings of Duke University; but the village at this time was a college community on one small street.

In Asheboro it was hardly any time at all until stores began moving away from Courthouse Square and Main Street to re-cluster or sprawl around the junctions of Worth Street and Fayetteville, and of the latter with Gluyas Pond Road, or Fisher Avenue, or Sunset Avenue, as that was called in succession. Very shortly W. D. Stedman moved his grocery up to sit on a part of the lot now occupied by the Wachovia Bank. W. J. Armfield with his Bank of Randolph did not get there to occupy more of that lot until 1897 I believe. Next to Stedman's seems to have been a jewelry store, and then Tom Carter's barber shop. Tom cut my hair there for quite a while, still at fifteen cents a whack; and he gave me my first shave. It was at his own suggestion, and his big glass caused me to see the wide grin he was trying to disguise as he administered it.

Across the street from this clump of business, on the corner of the Moring lot, was re-planted Wood and Moring's big general store. This fronted on Fayetteville and snaked back a long way. Near its rear end shortly appeared Poole's Hardware, fronting on what was to become Sunset. Next to that was the Standard Drug Company, which I believe really got placed first. Then came W. J. Scarboro's sort of emporium. When the postoffice moved, it dropped in there somewhere. It was an avenue with only one side for some time.

Down on the North corner of Worth, where my earliest memories somehow recall nothing except Joe Lytle's barber-shop, very soon Doc McCrary and Tom Redding started a hardware, and soon seemed to be selling buggies by the dozen. I am sure they made more money in the buggy yard for quite a while, although they ran a progressive store. Presently they sold buggies with hard-

rubber tires. Eugene Morris, Sam Teague, and Will Coffin began driving around smartly in those, and it gave them an advantage with the girls over all other beaux. (I called on Sam in Tallahassie some five or ten years ago, and he was in the Florida legislature a year or so ago.) On the other corner of Worth, long stood another town center, so far as looks and history go, — the old Presbyterian Church with its grove of oaks crowning a knoll or high bank.

Out of sheer business convenience, and of course with nobody planning anything except his own business, Asheboro swapped its old center for a new shoulder, or an elbow or two; anyhow not for another real center of anything except shopping. Fires contributed quite a lot to making the shift. One fire down on Main took J. M. Boyette's drug store and J. T. Brittain's law office, perhaps another building or two. The hole that fire made on the East side of Main was never filled to do business. The old court house itself did not burn until a bit after 1900; and that, with the county offices all within it, sort of maintained a ghost of the old order for a time. I forget whether one or both of the old downtown hotels burned down before the court house.

My father had always been a conservative investor. He lacked any share of that industrial vision (or else he mistrusted it) which way back before the Civil War had come to men of Randolph like Dr. John Milton Worth, John M. Randleman, Henry B. Elliott, Hugh Parks, Elisha Coffin, W. H. Watkins and others. So he had over the years gone on putting his savings into rather poor Randolph farms, where it did not get lost, but increased precious little in his lifetime. But he had got accustomed to the idea of that old Court House as the center and heart of Asheboro, and when the owner of the old Asheboro Hotel came to him with the offer of a real estate bargain, he bit and he bought. And a little later another hotel owner who was more alert in business than he was, more aware of that exodus of everything up towards the depot, offered him the other hotel at a bargain, and he bought that one too. Of course he was a total lawyer and had no idea of going into the hotel business. He rented both of those hotels, for a time at least, to the people who had been running them.

Well, the Asheboro House burned down first, almost taking his law office with it, and left nothing after a little cleaning up but a squarish corner lot of the cloddiest, hardest, most exhausted land in Randolph County. It seemed not to have a particle of mould or humus left in it. I know, because we manured it and tried to grow corn there, and I hoed on it, and it was the saddest go I ever saw or had to do with. My brother Henry and I tried to have a peanut patch up against the law office. I judge that, after the removal of the town center and all business building interest elsewhere, there was about as little left of that real estate investment as ever was. And my father had never accepted the modern idea of fire insurance. It was a total loss.

The Burns House across the street (Main) from his office served the Court and visiting lawyers a few years longer. I believe it went in the same fire

that took the Boyette drugstore, for I remember my father saying he had lost as much as anybody in another fire than the first hotel fire, and that the fire of which he spoke was one which involved many other owners. My father was a lawyer, and secondly and by early training possibly a bit of a farmer. But he should have stayed clean out of the hotel business, either as owner or operator. I would say if he didn't know the operating side he should let the owning side alone. Why is it we all want to try something else that we know nothing about, like the successful comedian who must try doing Hamlet before he dies?

There is a human incapacity also among people who have been a part of a real historic center, with their whole life wrapped up in it in one way or another and now grown old, to take in such a vast overturn as took place in Asheboro pretty rapidly after the coming of the railroads. The Page road from Aberdeen edged in presently to add its part.

I confess to you that I think it would have been nice if a little townplanning had been to-be-had-in those days when the heart and lungs as well as the stomach of Asheboro was removing. I say nothing about any soul or about any other 'center,' unless you mean a "Shopping Center." We once had a town which had grown around a natural center that gave it some dignity and perspective. For one thing, it was at a square, county, cross-roads. What were the county fathers deciding when they voted to rebuild for a courthouse up town, jammed in amidst what-nots, on a slope instead of a level, with no fairly spacious grounds around it, with no invitation to a modern hotel on a corner? I would say nothing much in the matter of long-run convenience in this present day of the automobile. A little sense of historic atmosphere would in itself have paid some dividends by now for many people. And a center for dignity, beauty and trees, is something to consider as well. I well know I am talking nonsense from the commercial point of view. But when we have made money enough in Asheboro, we may wish we had thought of some of these other things. Is there or not any lesson for future planning in what happened to us once upon a time?

I have told you how my dad nearly lost his shirt in those two old hotels, but I believe I told that for the humor you would find in it. And after all, he did not lose the whole of his shirt; only a large piece of its tail. At this moment I am wishing there were something in Asheboro which would seem natural and familiar to eyes of older men of Asheboro than I, — maybe to somebody like old Governor Worth!

"And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each in natural piety."

Corner of Fayetteville and Sunset. Fred Baldwin is crossing the street.

Sunset Avenue looking West about 1900.

The people of Asheboro and of the County of Randolph will celebrate the completion of the

High Point, Randleman, Asheboro and Southern Railroad

AT ASHEBORO,

On the 4th day of July, 1889.

There will be suitable ceremonies, civic and military, including speeches by the Governor and other distinguished speakers from all parts of the State.

In behalf of the people of Asheboro and of Randolph County, we have the honor to request your presence.

W. P. WOOD,

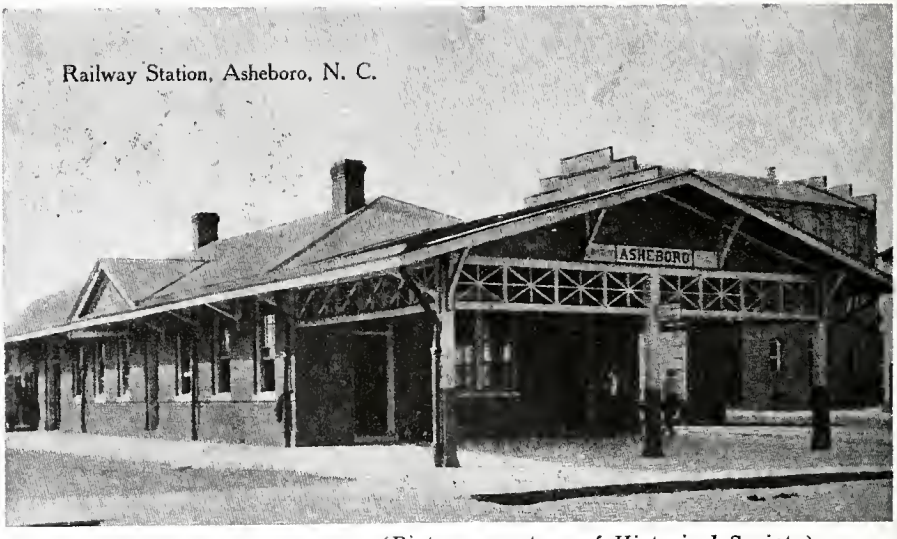
Chm'n Com. of Arrangements.

COMMITTEE OF INVITATION.

J. T. CROCKER SAMUEL A. HENLEY, W. F. CRAVEN

(Invitation courtesy of Historical Socitey)

Invitation to the celebration on the completion of the railroad into Asheboro from High Point July 4, 1889.



(Picture courtesy of Historical Society)

The Southern Railway depot which stood on the South Side of Sunset Avenue at the tracks.
(from an old post card of 1914)

(Picture courtesy of Miss Esther Ross)

ROSS & RUSH LIVERY STABLE

Transportation before 1889 was provided by horse-drawn vehicle. Livery stables were very necessary businesses. The Ross and Rush Stable was located in the old Courthouse Center.

Wid Connor

Winborne Connor, ordinarily referred to as Wid Connor, is the man who had the most funny stories told about him in my Asheboro. The one that everybody knew came out of his Western travels subsequent to the Civil War. He had been a brave soldier in the Confederate Army. When the War was over he took off for the West somewhere and was gone for several years. When he came back of course he was asked to tell of his travels, where he had been, how he had found work, what he had done to feed himself. It was a hungry time, Reconstruction Days, and I guess he was pressed on that. He told some pretty tall yarns. And the one which everybody knew was about "digging coconuts out in Wymaho."

We were provincial people in those days, and I doubt if there were a half dozen people in Asheboro who had ever seen a real coconut tree, and Idaho was about as far off then as the moon is now, this 1969. Also we had a high percentage of illiterates, and it may well be that "Wid" Connor had got one of those early starts in the Army and been out with Bob Lee or Stonewall Jackson when he should have learned to read and write.

There was a veteran over in Chapel Hill, by the name of Lloyd, who could not read or write so long as he lived, but yet managed to build and run a successful cotton mill and incidentally founded the town of Carrboro.

Wid Conner was an able-enough citizen. He was our chief house-mover. In fact he did pretty nearly all the house-moving that was done in Asheboro. Living up in the edge of Central Falls, some seven miles away, he was ready to turn up with his horse and wagon, some wooden rollers made of sawed-off logs, big jacks and heavy planks, whatever else was needed. Of course the horse pulled the house on the level, and there were holes for pike-staffs in the rollers, so that one could help the horses or put on the brakes. He held up more traffic than anybody else around by quite a long shot. One happy time for us kids was when Sam Bradshaw was getting ready to build himself a home on the old Governor Worth property, and offered Mrs. Rachel Ingram, or "Mangum" as she was known in my family, a little house across the street from us if she would have it moved off. Wid Connor blocked the corner of Worth and Main with it in an exciting way, but got it around without any overnight stall of traffic, and eventually down the lane (now Worth Street East) past our horse-barn to a small lot my father had let Mangum have.

When he was at work a little late or wanted an early start next morning, Wid would build a fire and camp out by it under what he once, for my benefit, called "the banner-wings of heaven." He may have had a poetic soul.

I remember one or two personal interviews with him, for he excited my curiosity, and even then I loved to get good stories to tell at suppertable. I suppose the truth is that I just hung around him until the gushing stream of talk he had turned up something worth telling others about.

One time, was, I remember, when he was either camped or getting ready

to camp down on the edge of the courthouse square. He was ridiculing people who taught that the Earth was round. "How can it be round," said he, "when the Bible says that the winds blow from the four corners of it? How can it have four corners if it is round?" Being in high-school then, I did jump in with the supposed fact that ships travel all around the Earth and get back.

"Shucks," said he, "they get up around that air North Pole that you hear about, and git turned around without knowing it and come home."

If you think that can't be a true story of any half-way intelligent practical man of business within a lifetime past, I will tell you another from another interview when the Panama Canal was being talked about or actually dug. He was excited on the subject. I don't know where or how he got his "facts." But he declared that the water in the Pacific Ocean was a mile higher than that in the Atlantic, and that if the canal was cut through nobody could possibly tell what the awful consequences would be to people living in those parts.

There must be many good stories from the rather untutored imagination of Wid Conner left hanging around Asheboro in somebody's mind. For the man was famous as a source of stories and odd sayings.

I am not telling you these stories which I myself picked up just to make fun of Wid Connor, who paid his own way through life as well as anybody. My thought about him is that he probably missed his schooling by fighting for the rest of us. There were no pictures or photographs in the newspapers of his days, to help educate people about foreign places and the peoples of this Earth. There were no richly colored magazines lying around in the barber shop or in any doctor's office. Magazines were sold in those days chiefly for the solid articles or the romantic stories that were in them, not for the pictures and the ads. Newspapers at the turn of the century were usually identified with some editor. We took "Josephus Daniels' paper" more than any **News and Observer.** There was a paper in Charlotte known by an editor named Tompkins. The **Louisville Courier Journal** was Henry Watterson and the **Atlanta Constitution** just had been Henry Woofden Grady, in person. Papers were journals of opinion by the editors, of local news, and of just a little hearsay or articles about the big world, not a part and portion of big business, geared to the purpose of making money like every other business.

The consciousness that we had an illiterate electorate is what fired a group of able N. C. youngsters clustering in a knot around the year 1900: Charles B. Aycock, Charles D. McIver, Edwin A. Alderman, Philo P. Claxton, James Y. Joyner, Walter Hines Page — all of these within the state of North Carolina. I happened to see every one of these men in action except Page, and I saw him on the Page Railroad train on his way north from Aberdeen. They led a kind of youth revolt, except that it was centered on training teachers first, maybe with subterranean feelings for the rights of unborn generations of children.

Wid Connor as a provider of humor is a very good illustration of what could happen to, what could stunt the mind-growth, of a generation: namely

lack of opportunity to learn. If we have blossomed in this century like the green bay tree, and if our state has become great and even conspicuously noted in some respects or for a few of its best men, it is the belated opportunity which in the still pioneer days before the Civil War we only smelled from a considerable distance, and which, after that War, was painfully delayed by the poverty and the other effects of Reconstruction Days.

Rich Brick Yard June 20, 1900

(*Picture courtesy Miss Cleta Rich*)

Bucolic Wit and Humor — Zeb Vance

There was a lot of having fun in old Asheboro, but I am free to confess that, looking back, it seems to have been on rather a bucolic level. We laughed rather easily and didn't need to be really witty or anything like that. We had two or three people around, like Louis Bulla and John T. Brittain, that we thought of as town wits. The only story of Louis Bulla I happen to remember still is about somebody catching him at work on the family wood-pile and calling out: "Hello, Louis, splittin' wood, are you?" "No, you damn fool, can't you see I'm knittin?" Our supply of mild fun came to us rather easily, and maybe that is why we didn't go very far to look for it.

Along towards 4 o'clock on a hot summer day, people sat on their front lawns, not their back lawns if they had any, maybe with a cut watermelon or a pitcher of iced lemonade and some cake or cookies on a table. Pretty soon the law offices would close, and presently a clerk or two, perhaps the proprietor in person, would be going home. Many of them felt free to drop in, whether invited or not, wherever they saw a gay party. Going up Worth street in the middle of the 1890s, I have often heard the laughs on the Moring lawn before I got around the Presbyterian Church. People would be recounting the least bits of funny or odd incidents of the day, and they laughed a-plenty. What I am telling about is most too public to be called gossip. Maybe the fun was because we were just happy enough, perhaps without knowing it.

Every fellow would be teased about his girl, if he had one; and every girl about her beaus. That began in school at grammar age, although B. Frank Page and Bertha Coffin were the only two people who were going steady even in high school years so far as I remember. O Yes, Sam Teague and Etta Blair got there pretty soon, or about the end. But when I was at tow-head level somebody wrote on the fly-page of my grammar book: "I'll bet a hat I get Pat", and I was teased a full share about that. Somewhat later I was led to attempt a Christmas poem myself and spent an evening hour or so squeezing out a dozen lines of which the only ones I remember are:

"See the Church and women filing
With their children up the aisling".

My mother quoted that at me for years. You can't say budding youth got much encouragement to produce literature then. But her original comment was in two lines which I suspect she had been hearing all her life:

"He's heaps more of a poet
Than a sheep is a go-at."

However she did love Tennyson's

"I came from haunts of coot and hern,
I make a sudden sally
And sparkle out among the fern
To bicker down the valley".

My father had a few Shakespeare quotes, humorous ones, at hand; notably what Julius Caesar said about fat and lean men like Brutus and Cassius. There were no book-clubs or public libraries back there, and I don't suppose our minds got stimulation enough to produce noteworthy wit and humor at large. "Light-hearted and bucolic" seems to tell the public story.

It seems even more that way when I think of some of the practical jokes made up to produce a little extra fun. One time, Col. J. Ed Walker's cronies put up a mean game on him. Of a bright morning, he started down town in gay spirits, swinging his cane and likely humming a tune. The first conspirator met him near the postoffice, and hailed: "Hello, Ed. Why, you are not looking so spry this morning. What's the matter?" The Colonel responded that he was feeling fine. The next conspirator, possibly Parsons (Pass) H. Morris, met him a little further down. He halted short, stepped back a pace, and slowly said: "Why, what in the world is the matter with you, Ed?" By the time JEW got to the Penn Wood store and Penn addressed him in a similarly serious manner, they had him down. He said, "I know I ought not to have come out this morning, but the fine day tempted me." He went home and went to bed. Not so very funny, but hilarious in his share of further teasing.

Just about the same gang made some other man sick by getting him to enjoy some 'chicken' soup really made out of turtle, and later telling him he had eaten something which all his life he had detested the very thought of.

This next prank was at least harmless and not worked on the home folks. It was in 1892, time of the famous Chicago Exposition or World's Fair. A number of people went from Asheboro, and not least notably our High Sheriff. W. F. Redding, I, had been elected county sheriff and he was not only (so I believe until better informed) the tallest of all the Redding tribe until this hour, not overlooking his son or Long Tom Redding of Caraway, but the tallest man in the county or within reach. I don't really know whether he was nearer 6ft. 7 inches, or 6ft. 10 inches. Ask the family about that. But he was pleasantly referred to as the High Sheriff. Well, he fell into the humor of a group of his friends who were going to the Chicago Fair. I think Tom Winslow, Register of Deeds, had a hand in it. They got the High Sheriff to go along wearing a pair of shoes with extra high heels and a tall beaver or silk hat. It was reported that the party made quite a splash on the Exhibition grounds. I suppose people thought of our sheriff as somebody out of one of the booths. And I suppose the prank represents a small town, in horse and buggy days, too quiet days, trying to attract a little wide public attention to itself.

Of course funnier things then made-up pranks can happen in real life anywhere, and now and then we got one of those. This incident echoes as if told to me by my brother Henry, but it plainly enough goes back to real horse-and-buggy days at or before the turn of the century. I could not give you the names of the heroes of the story, although one of them was an Asheboro lawyer and might possibly have been John T. Brittain. He would have much enjoyed telling such an adventure.

This lawyer had business in Carthage, a little over thirty miles away which at around 4 miles per hour, meant a fairly long day's drive for horse and men. He and his liveryman driver got to the usual stopping off place, or inn in Carthage some time after supper was over; but the kindly landlady agreed to "wrastle up a bite" if they would wash-up and wait. Presently they were called to the table, sat down, and with their keen appetites were all ready to pitch in. But the landlady halted them by saying: "Grace first, gentlemen. Nobody eats at my table without first saying Grace." "I dont know any", said the lawyer, "and I dont think Jim does." "Then you must each of you say a verse of Scripture", she declared. The lawyer turned his gaze towards his plate and in a moment came up with his verse: "Jesus wept". "He shore did", chimed in the man from the livery stable. So they ate.

Up to just about the turn of the century we certainly did have one man in North Carolina who was widely accepted as a wit and a teller of funny stories. That man was Zebulon Baird Vance, Civil War-time Governor, and after Reconstruction long-time United States Senator in Washington. There were years back there when it seems that all the funny stories there were to be told, if they were in any sense orphans or anonymous, seemed to gravitate towards Vance, or to be fathered upon him. He was an example of that phenomenon of history: Give a man a certain name, and all the loose things that come under that name tend to be referred to him. That makes it all the odder that at the present time I can recall only two stories that certainly went with Vance or his name. They are both very like him, and like the rough mountains in which he grew up.

But anyhow and quite independently of the theme of humor, I want to tell of the one visit of Vance to Asheboro after I was old enough to take an interest in such matters. This happened towards the close of his career, somewhere in the middle of the 1890s, when Cleveland was President and was engaged in an argument with the Free Silver-ites like W. J. Bryan, in his own party. Vance was supporting Cleveland in the matter of maintaining the Gold Standard.

I am not sure whether we built him a brush-arbor to speak at or not. But I am clear that he spoke outdoors from a platform amongst the oak trees on the old School lot, quite near the Bulla fence. There had been a march from the Courthouse Square in which the Confederate Veterans took a leading part. There were still fifteen or twenty of them in it at that late day. I recall many of the familiar faces among them either from this or earlier, or from many, parades. There would likely be Captain C. F. Siler, L. F. McMasters, Winborne Andrews, Winborne Connor, and Asheboro's own Wm Penn Wood and Col. A. C. McAlister. Vance was naturally staying at the Worth-McAlister home, Dr. Worth being brother of his successor in Raleigh, Jonathan Worth. I remember that because my father had tried to get Vance and was a wee bit disappointed. But he should not have been, as my mother told him well, even though he had been for a time Vance's Secretary.

Col. McAlister, like Captain Siler, had got his own title in the honestest and proudest way of any, in the actual armed services. But no doubt he could have become a bit of a martinet at his time of life and after having long since become accustomed to marshalling and drilling parades and like. But of course John T. Brittain had a sort of native-born irreverence for dignities and disciplinarians. I believe it may have been on this occasion that Mr. Brttain remarked: "I tell you, if somebody would just give Colonel McAlister a pair of feather britches, he would make the best hand to raise young chickens that ever was." I tell that story not exactly on Col. McAlister, but on Mr. Brittain's account. For he was as lively a wit as we had, even if a bit caustic or irreverent. In his office in his latter days, I recalled this comment of his to him, which calls for confession that I have sometimes been too ready for iconoclastic humor. "Did I say that?", said Mr. Brittain. He had forgotten it.

The Asheboro band was a feature of that Vance speech-making. We had a pretty good one over long years, always led and trained by Albert Betts. Their usual fee for attending a school occasion was $15, but I do seem to recall the public joining in an effort to get them some uniforms. They certainly made enough cheap contributions to the town. Albert Betts, son of Uncle Joe, was a wood-worker by trade and had lost about half of two important fingers on his fingering hand. But I was fascinated to stand close and see how he could and did make that cornet go just the same, in spite of those stubs of fingers. That cornet rang clear, loud, and true, in the lead. To me at least he seemed a perfect wizard with it, especially when he did a solo. I was for one quite ready to be told that he was great among the cornet-greats. His brother Rufus played the trombone, and I think it was brother John who belabored the big drum. Sister Hannah was leading alto in the Methodist choir. All of this helps to remind us how music tends to run in families where a tradition of it lies. You just don't pick up quality of life, especially with musical or artistic tones in it, in any one isolated generation. I would like to know if there was not some Moravian or German blood somewhere in the Betts family.

But to get back or around to the feature of the day, Vance's speech: that was one of the greatest disappointments of all my boyhood years. You see there was that background. Hardly anybody in North Carolina today is able to imagine what a reputation as orator and story teller Zeb Vance had. Possibly that repute was somewhat greater among Democrats than among political opponents, but it was big enough to bring him big audiences of all sorts and kinds. They flocked to hear him this time. Physically he was still a magnificent man to look at, well over six feet tall, well proportioned, handsome of face, noble orbs for eyes. But on this day of my opportunity to see and hear him, he looked old, worn out, unless it was that he was disgusted with political life. I suppose his speech was weighty and convincing. I might as well confess that is not

what I was ready and listening for. Where was the fire? Where the uplifiting oratory? Where the stories to remember? With me, it was a case of one of those build-ups of a reputation that upon this occasion utterly refused to justify itself.

But after my own build-up to you about Vance as a story-teller, I can't althogether let it go at that, with no illustration at all. I said that I now remember just two sure-enough Vance stories, that is, belonging without much doubt to him. And so I will tell one of them. Both of them are sufficiently off-color not to have been told in mixed audiences and to have shocked a little bit even in a public speech which had to go into the records. Maybe the one I tell will draw from others some more of the good ones, the laughs, that haunted the shadow of the man.

This one comes from the United States Senate, at a time when the Republican majority was about to pass a pork-barrel bill allotting Federal money for dredging a small river or stream in Wisconsin or Michigan. Vance was acting in the role of a "watch-dog of the treasury" and deriding this appropriation. "Why, Mr. President and Fellow Senators, this is ridiculous. How can anybody justify the spending of Federal money for dredging such insignificant streams as this. Why, Mr. President, I could piss across this stream." "Order, Order, Order", came the shouts from the floor. "The Senator is out of order", said the Vice-presiding. "Mr. President", said Vance, "I know I am out of order. If I weren't, I could piss twice across it."

Old "Drake Hotel" owned and opertated by B. B. Burns, later purchased by M. S. Robins. It was located on the East side of Main Street

" Poor White Trash"

"Old Dan Tucker was a fine old man,
Washed his face in the fryin' pan,
Combed his head with the wagon wheel,
And died with the toothache in his heel."

Asheboro once owned an old fellow by the name of Dan Tucker. I remember him as living somewhere in the Westerly environs of the town, and showing himself in public quite infrequently, but always noticeably. He was rough and somewhat uncouth, miserably clad in what looked like somebody's cast-offs, of course illiterate in speech; and I reckon that is why we all learned that old backwoods rhyme as well as we did. He forced us to think of it whenever he put in any sort of an appearance, although he was harmless and well-meaning enough so far as I ever heard, never accused of anything more serious than just his appearance.

I really suppose that most old old towns have had their string of characters of the sort, who really seemed not to belong exactly to the body politic, unless you mean in the sense of being hangers-on or perhaps sometimes public charges. Asheboro certainly had its share of poor whites who lived a miserable hand-to-mouth existence, and slept in hovels or maybe, in the summertime, outdoors. When it is said of them that some may have had a low mentality but that none of them had ever had any opportunities until it was far too late, that is as much as any of us have the right to say. I feel quite sure we lacked the wisdom to deal with them as God would have liked us to deal with them. And I also suspect that we lacked some of the means that are at hand now.

All Randolph and all Western Carolina has had wonderful opportunity since 1900 to learn how much capacity, and how varied, there was in the mass of us at the turn of the century, which capacity had never had a chance. This country had always been poor. In Colonial days, our Western farming and livelihood was poor because we had no roads or navigable rivers; and to market a bushel of wheat or corn over our muddy roads, which did not lead to any place that had money anyhow, cost as much as it did to grow that bushel of corn in the first place. That, and taxes, is what the war of the Regulators was about in the 1760s. After the Revolution, we developed very little industry and grew only a mite richer, for the old reasons. The Civil War gave us additional reasons for being poor. I really suppose it was the plank roads; then, quickly, the coming of the railroads; then better farm roads and through ones; and electricity, that hit us in rather swift succession and began to pry us out of our sort of ghetto.

I had been away from Asheboro after 1900, so far as living there means, but I remember how my ears began to pop at reports. We discovered that we had men among us who possessed enough ability to make a lot of money and

become really rich. First thing you knew, there was even a 'millionaire' next door. People of my Asheboro time never would have been able of course to guess which ones were to be millionaires, or how they would make it.

I remember driving in horse and buggy days through those cotton-mill towns we then had on Deep River, and seeing the girls leaning out of the mill windows, in bags of old dresses, more than likely with sweet-gum toothbrushes for dipping snuff hanging out of their mouths. The difference came gradually but unbelievably fast. Even twenty years ago, if you went to those same towns you would find all the girls dressed as well as anywhere else for what they were engaged in doing. And they all had Sears Roebuck catalogues at home, and had begun even to keep up with Paris fashions to a degree. And while I have been familiar with New England factory or mill-work, I aver that none of it is superior to ours in its aspect of intelligence.

We have discovered how much more education the mass of us could take. Why, many of the old timers, including by hearsay my grandfather Robins, used to think that the three R's were education enough for ordinary people and farmers in particular: reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic! I don't know but we were afraid of education back there: we had been taught so long by religion that questioning, doubting, and practically any novelty of reaching out, was sin or next door to it. Cultivating the mind was dangerous!

Even the people we thought of as poor whites, even some of our disreputable families, have blossomed out since opportunity opened up for white people. Now it has begun to open for blacks — not fast enough in these days of more education. It was Aristotle who said that revolutions are not made by slaves, but by the half-free. I am saying we have had our eyes popped many times though.

Speaking of disreputable: Asheboro had its families whose younger people never looked you in the eyes when you met them. They didn't go to school. The parents were a bit more hardened, but that is the pity of it. There comes a mental picture of one of these white families (I mean a recall) coming up a lane very close to my home, strung out in a line, or Indian file, wearing ragged clothes revealing rusty hand and necks, sunbonnets if anything on the girls' heads, excuses for shoes or barefooted, scarcely looking to right or left — glancing I think, very likely on the way to see a little of civilization while acquiring five cents' worth of salt pork at a grocery. Sitting alongside my friend Sam Walker, while he was running a grocery, I have seen him sell less than five cents' worth at a time, whether to white or black, dipping down one hand into a barrel of salt and pulling out some of the small pieces. These people had no conversation. If you made them talk, they would be evasive, shy off, turn away. In fact they acted more or less like wild animals, though throughly reined in by something — perhaps by an intimidating air or atmosphere of respectability or difference of tribe.

The family of this kind I most often saw lived in a log cabin in an oak grove not more than a mile from our house. But we hardly ever went to the edge

of their clearing. They cleared to get firewood, a little at a time. The boys used to say that if you walked through the edge of the clearing you might see people jumping and running out of the bushes in opposite directions, somebody possibly there you might think you knew, but who was trying hard to keep from being recognized. When that family came into town there was one boy who very plainly had had a negro father. O Yes, gossip, utterly unresponsible and not be trusted gossip, used to hint that there was "good" blood in some members of that family.

It is better to tell something like the truth even about Asheboro. In this day, and tomorrow, we do not want to be dreaming of old Asheboro as a place, or existence, we would love to go back to. It had some beautiful people and things in it. But in some most important respects it was definitely inferior to the Asheboro of this moment. It was definitely inferior in the matter of possibilities open, and of challenge to all that is in a body.

One certainly suspects that the draft of the first Wold War did something for some families. It probably showed some of the members that if they exhibited a little fortitude, a little bit of the ability to endure hardships, a readiness to take things as they come, as well as a little courage under fire, that they were the equals of anybody else whatever in some very practical and unmistakable ways. That is a mighty yeastly revolution! under some of those heads they had had more than their share of preparation for "making good." Presently one heard of a young girl in an underprivileged family of Asheboro taking a job in a Government office in Washington. I hope she didn't change her name. Old man Opportunity had at last got around to her door and knocked. Very likely he had showed up at the very first in a public law which said that all children within the township limits must go to school. That law was a power-tool going to work in the region of the humanities. I really suppose our poverty programs have sometimes opened opportunity where there had been none. So mote it be! When you are a baby you can't fight an even-handed battle for yourself. Nor can you at five or six years. And only a few years after that, the hopeful part of the battle is all over. The rest of it is just the forlorn hopes which may indeed be better than nothing.

But perhaps the real matter worth study would be observations of what the coming of industry, the making of more jobs, have actually done for some of the kind of families I have recalled. Maybe it could not be published yet, that study; but it would be good for some people in churches and town offices to know the results of that study. I have been too far away from Asheboro, so far as living there is concerned, to know anything in that direction. But I do know that when I go there now I no longer see people marching Indian-file, with that look of utter "don't belong" to the human race, or America, on their faces.

You will observe that nothing much has been said here about our problem of civil rights for Colored people. I would prefer to think, to hope, that the

body of them no longer think of themselves as outside the life of the town. I hope that by this time they are coming to feel as some of my "Uncles" and "Aunts" somehow succeeded in feeling to an extent, that the town would in the future at least be theirs as much as anybody's.

Schooling in Asheboro

The teachers you remember are not the ones who taught you books, but those who taught themselves, who gave you their personality to react to, revealed their own inspiration and feeling about life. That is probably the reason we have lasting and important memory of so few teachers. I suppose all good or fair teachers put a portion of themselves into their work, even in these days of too large classes, too much paper work, too much struggle to grade large numbers of pupils and pass them on; but most teachers seem to lack the freedom and free-play they need to do their best. What are we going to do about that?

Of some teachers we remember one or two odd characteristics, habits, or incidents; but the point is what we get out of them as teachers. And to some of them we owe a great debt, more than we can ever pay. It is a great profession, a part of that one profession which has as its objective making or stimulating the growth of human beings and "changing human nature."

Before I was six or eligible for public school, my parents sent me and my older brother Henry as well for a year or more to a private school carried on in her own home by Miss Nannie Bulla. She lived in the Bolivar Bulla house on the Cox Street corner next what was for many years the only school building and lot of the town. She was a tall, handsome, lady, the best soprano voice and church soloist in town. She was kind and thoughtful for kiddies, saw that they had their rubbers and wraps on and off right, taught them to read in Holmes' **First** or **Second readers,** and to use their slates for writing and I suppose for a figure or two. That is all I remember and it seems enough for those tender years.

The big three-room frame public school building had been put up not more than a year or so when I started in there, for I remember the inside as well as the outside of the one-room school which preceded it, and remember being in it once and seeing three older girls in the front rows looking up: my cousin Blanche Wood (Redding), Rowena Moffitt (Morris) and Minnie Hancock (Hammer.) The new schoolhouse had one big room which housed all the pupils except the primary kids, who had one of the two smaller rooms and were provided with a separate entrance. Most of my time at least, that room was presided over by Mrs. Jennie Hancock. I suppose it was when all the windows were open, that she used to stick her head out of the window and say: "Oh, Mr. Gurney, will you please get my mail?" That was addressed to Gurney Henley, son of our Doctor, who was a part time scholar about ready to leave us. The primary children never forgathered with the rest of the school, but the intermediate children, of whom I began as one, all had their desks in the main big room, and went for their class sessions to the other smaller room in turn. The main room was heated by a large stove in the middle of the front-and-back center aisle. It could get awfully cold in that room, and in deep winter we spent a good deal of time snapping our fingers and getting permission to go over and

sit by the stove to study. There were usually empty desks around it, and I suppose a chair or two.

It was a considerable task for the principal, who was also a teacher, to maintain order in that room, although it never held more than seventy-five or eighty of us. He spent a good proportion of his time going around the room with a ruler in his hand, looking over shoulder, occasionally applying the ruler a little.

The school was then ungraded. Some of us would be much more advanced in one or two subjects than in others. I myself, when rather well advanced for age in most subjects, was sluggish and out of line in arithmetic. I still have to add a column of figures three times, and then do not feel quite sure of myself. When one teacher wanted to arrange his penmanship groups, I got an astonishingly high ranking as sheer result of loving to see my John Hancock so much that I had practiced it until it made too good an impression for my own welfare. If all forms of egotism reacted against us as fast as that one did to cause embarrassment, it might be a good thing.

It seems as if the first principal or two I knew were ladies. Certainly I recall a Miss Hubbard there when I was quite small. She was a dignified and impressive woman, and maintained good order within her orbit, which may have been the main room.

But the first principal to make a striking and abiding impression upon me was certainly James B. Game. He was a disciplinarian, a cracker of the whip, a man who intimidated you. Perhaps he was a teacher; I was too young to know anything about that, my classes being in the Intermediate room. My picture of him is without smiles in it. But he was a man who commanded respect and kept things going smoothly. Some ten or fifteen years ago. I saw the name of James B. Game on the faculty roll of the University of Florida, Gainsville, and wondered if that was the man I remembered. Those were days when many University students taught school to earn money or to pay schooling debts.

As presiding over that big room, I next remember two Durham brothers. The elder had Stonewall Jackson for his given name, and the younger one was called Plato. The latter was afterwards long a well-known teacher at Duke University. I am at this moment wondering if he is the teacher who started me too high up in penmanship class, where pride went before a fall. He had a pleasing, large, personality, smiling a good deal. "Stony" was the disciplinarian of the two.

Somewhere along there, after the Durhams, came "Charlie" Tomlinson, from the Archdale community. I was coming along in years when he arrived, for I clearly recall his doing me out of a victory at the Friday afternoon spelling-match for the whole school by giving a handsome girl three or four chances to spell a certain word, with me next in line and eager, but knowing I would get but one chance if it ever got to be my turn. He smiled at the handsome older girls, and from this eminence of the years, who can blame him? A man

needs some fun in teaching school. Anyhow, while I hated him at the moment and used to recall what the word was we were spelling, until fifteen or twenty years ago, I have grown more tolerant and have now forgotten it. (I think it was "stupendous.")

Somewhere on the line came in James M. Bandy, from Trinity, a retired professor who had not followed Trinity College to Durham, on its way to become Duke University. He was better with the older part of the students. His specialty was mathematics and he spent hours at the board in the big room, diagramming arithmetic and beginning algebra — incidentially explaining the logical syllogism to his hearers. From him I learned that three dots in a triangle mean Therefore. But he opened the opportunity for some of the smaller kids to show they were not amused nor helped to concentrate on their lessons. Along about this time, the idea of diagramming grammer was creeping into schools from those Teachers Institues they held in the courthouses; and that was a business my father, an old time teacher, was openly contemptuous of and snorty about. I suspect the reason was that in his day the teaching had been frankly adapted to the smarter boys and girls; and the dumb ones, who could use a lot of diagramming and other helps, were simply neglected. Now we have to teach everybody. In his days only the few were supposed to get beyond the three r's.

Then came, as principal of our school, one George H. Crowell; and I think many of my contemporaries will join me in saying that he made an epoch in our schooling life. I was getting to adolescent age where a spark may find tinder to catch; but I feel sure I can speak for some who were older and some who were younger than I. The man was a lumbering, bulky, loud-voiced, intense sort of a man, — on his way already to becoming a Methodist preacher and orator. All at once, morning prayers became a feature of school. There was not a Roman Catholic or a Jew in town to object, and first arrivals of such sects would have sung small anyhow. We learned many familiar Methodist hymns by heart. His big, booming, voice dominated the singing as it often did the room when he was merely just teaching a class up there in the front benches. I got my first feeling of the beauty of some English poetry while still an urchin, when a Senior class was on the front reciting-benches studying Scott's **Lady of the Lake** and Tennyson's **The Princess.**

> The splendor falls on castle walls
> And sunlit summits old in story;
> The long light shakes along the lakes
> And the wild cataract leaps in glory.

Our Friday afternoon recitation period took on meaning. It scared me badly to stand up in public and deliver a declamation I had learned by heart, but nevertheless there was nothing else I so loved to do and so honed to acquire skill and confidence at doing. I guess we all acquired a piece or two and got them tagged as ours for reciting. Tom Worth spoke **Horatius at the Bridge**

while his brother George had a humorous piece about an old Negro and his mule named Nebuchadnezzar. An older fellow from the country, named Hancock, recited **Hohenlinden.** John East would speak a piece from Atlanta editor Henry Woofden Grady. My specialty was **The Burial of Sir John Moore.** I can pin down only one of the girls: Esther Ross recited:

Miss Flora McFlimsey of Madison Square
Was always complaining of nothing to wear.

At Commencement everybody recited, and the older ones were supposed to write orations for themselves. I tried but wound up with a mosaic into which Mr. Crowell felt obligated to poke a few orotund sentences. We were sent into the woods in pairs to practice declaiming at one another. Joe Ross asked me: "Did you write that part?" I had to admit it was something Mr. Crowell had tacked on. We once built a brush arbor and had Commencement outdoors, something the people down at Farmers did every year, where many of us visited.

Under Crowell the school began having theatricals and pageants. I was too young for much of that. But those things certainly added to the school life. So did the Page Literary Society for boys, which met every Friday evening for debating whether there had been progress in history, or arguing woman suffrage or Free Silver (that would be in 1895 or 1896.) Charlie Ross and John East were easily our two debating leaders, though Milo Hammond, John Hammer and the Blair brothers were noteworthy.

Mr. Crowell was full of enthusiam and eloquence himself, and you surely see that some of it must have been contagious all around. He loved poetry and was devout in his religious piety. He loved boys, and maybe girls in the proper way of that. He was ambitious for his students and felt responsible for their moral education. There he got into trouble and met resistance which led to the necessity of some rather sad expulsions. When Barnum's circus, I think it was, came to town, the big boys wanted to attend the circus in the afternoon instead of school. He felt the circus had an immoral side, and that the boys should go in the evening if at all, and with their parents. He started whipping a row of big boys, met resistance, and it all led to two or three boys leaving school when they should not have done so. If Crowell had not gained a pretty firm grip on the town in other ways, he would probably have been compelled to go. Are you of those who think we ought to have perfect teachers, politicians, lawyers, labor union leaders? Teachers are desiderated for, expected to be, gifted in every aspect of their work rather than men of very special or rare good gifts? Where do you suppose is the supply of all-around perfection? There surely is a demand for it, and from all sides. Every profession or job would like to skim the crop of not only gifted but perfectly rounded and matured material for itself.

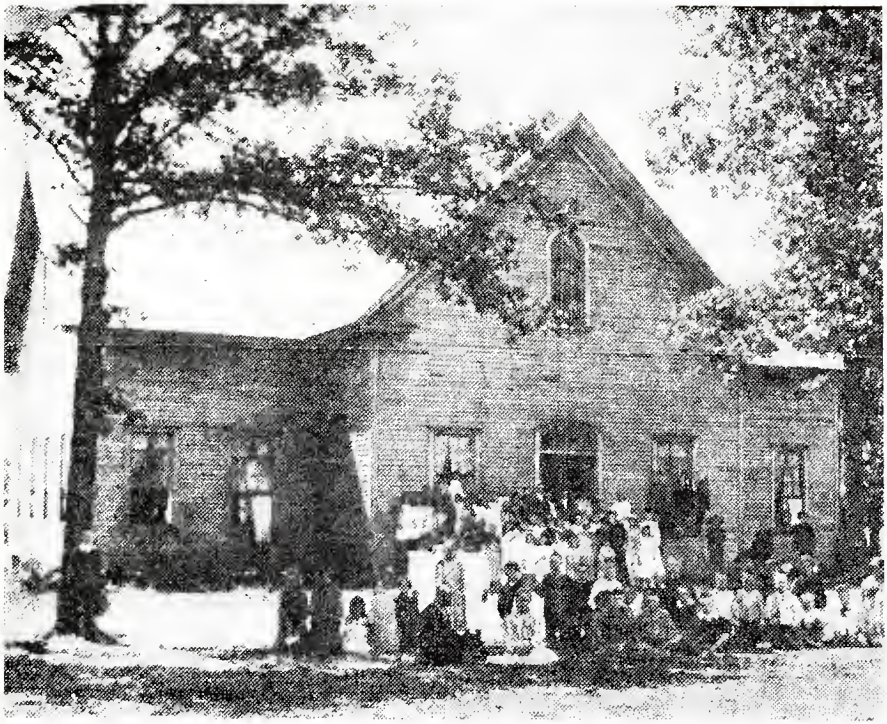
I think George H. Crowell acted more like yeast in the dough than any teacher I ever saw until I met Horace Williams at Chapel Hill, and William James at Harvard. In later life he became preacher, teacher at a Texas college,

President I believe at the college founded in High Point. A big man in spirit, generous if opinionated, hot in his old time religion and its ideas of compulsory morals, I found him "apt to teach," gifted with some divine enthusiam. I am glad Asheboro did not wait for a perfectly well-balanced and truly broad-minded man when they engaged him.

I omit speaking of Newbold, who followed Crowell I believe, for the good reason that I was away in Massachusetts. After him, "Fatty" Holmes gave me an enthusiasm for Greek studies, and encouraged me in writing rather than in speaking — something in which I had more of a chance. Once on a horse and buggy trip with him into the country somewhere, he pointed with his whip to a cornfield bright in the sun and asked me the color of the cornfield. O course I answered green. He said it was **white.** And he made me see it that way or think of it for the first time. Maybe an edge of green where the sun did not fall right, but white from side to side. He was of the artistic temperament and some thought him a bit effeminate or feminine. He taught me to respect artists, and to remember that they can see things that I cannot see at first. In fact he gave me a certain youthful modesty against just **expressing** myself as I stand "in my stocking feet." He reminded me that there is a teacher for everything, as well as a bevy of us half-baked novices impatiently popping our eyes at the big world and telling what we see without waiting for artists of one kind or another. I for one had to do an awful lot of growing up, and some of these men, as well as many of their successors, have helped me on a lot from where I was.

(Picture courtesy of Historical Society)

The Female Academy was built in 1839 and is still standing at the Armfield homeplace on North Fayetteville Street. This building was used for a private school for young women from 1839 until the late 1880's except for the war years (1861-1865) when it was used for barracks. The property was sold and the funds were applied to a public school for Asheboro. This picture was made by Mrs. J. E. Carson around 1900.

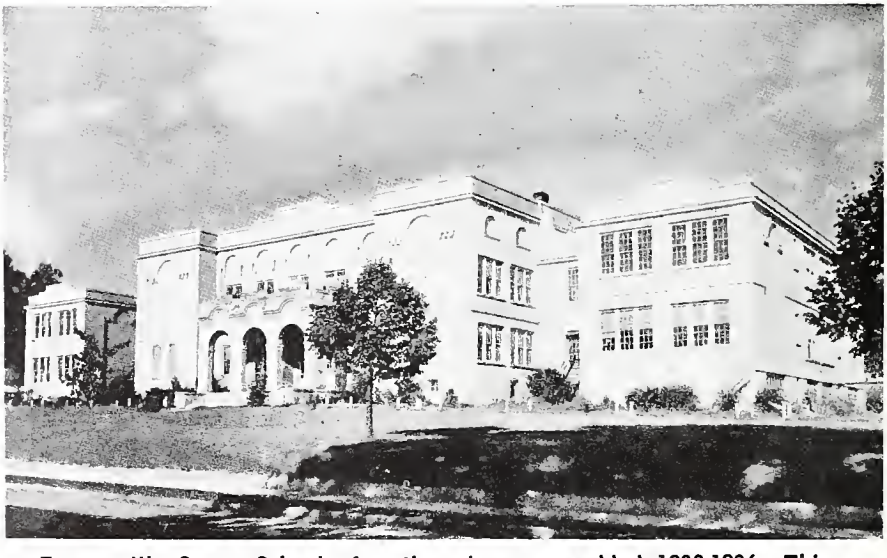


(Picture Courtsey of S. B. Stedman)

The first public school building on the Fayetteville Street property. This picture was taken in 1895

The old Male Academy which was erected in the 1830's was located on this same property. It was used for a barracks during the Civil War. The militia parade ground was near the academy. The academy was either burned or torn down. The wood school building was built in the early 1890's. It too burned later.

The graded School was built in 1909 on the same Fayetteville Street property.



Fayetteville Street School after the wings were added 1923-1926. This property was sold in 1969 and the school was torn down, thus ending more than a hundred years of its use for school purposes.

That Old Time Religion

I begin this March 7, 1969. About two weeks ago I found that over the Fall and Winter last I had written, on the side of some other pursuits, fifteen sketches of boyhood scenes and happenings in Asheboro. And I had done it without having written anything about that institution which for all people of the town, young and old, probably meant more even than the schools. Why had I not found ready and seeming worthwhile tales or tale of anything, or anybody, connected with the churches there? Why was I still unable to get started on any word at all that would show respect and significant memory for the old-time religion back there? The cause was not disrespect, but there was a road-block. And only this morning it has come to me what that difficulty or road-block was.

It was that I had nothing worth saying about that side of Asheboro that would not bring myself in too much. I had set out to tell tales about the setting in which I grew up, and at least had kept that purpose in the center. But religion is a very personal thing — in fact the most personal thing there is — and it simply refuses to be written about in that impersonal way, unless maybe by someone who indeed feels himself to be a rank outsider to what he is writing about.

Having found out the reason, I am going to defy the difficulty and apply the straight forward method of writing about what I knew of religion in Asheboro, leaving the history of the churches to those already in that field and who have records at hand.

Any picture of the Asheboro in which I grew up, or the Randolph, which does not feature the churches and the brush-arbors, the religion-colored or dictated mores, and the strenuous efforts to "convert" the young (especially), is or would be most out of focus.

As I face the subject and the matter, very present to me is that week-end bath, which came either Saturday night or Sunday morning. With us that was in one of those wide-flanged tin tubs. At some times of the year to be sure, a Saturday afternoon trip to the swimming-hole, made that dispensable. Then, I recall getting out one's Sunday clothes on the Sunday morning, and the shining up of shoes. Never that I remember had I but one pair of shoes though, and I never wore shoes in summer. How tough those foot-soles would get within a week or so of barefooting it up and down and hither and yon. About the time the shoes had been shined, the Presbyterian and the Methodist Episcopal Church bells began ringing in companionship, in spite of the fact that the Presbyterians would not hold their Sunday School until late afternoon. Families of children, teachers, some parents, began sedately walking in groups past the corner, but getting into single and careful line when side-walks were all mud, as was often the case. At every corner other homes were debouching their dressed-up progeny and accompaniments on to the converging trail. Before we got to the church, the Methodist bell at least would be ding-donging again, and we usually made

it just about in good time. The Presbyterians held their Sunday School later so that the children could get a second dose if the first one proved not enough. And sometimes we did apply for a second treatment. There was nothing else to do of a sociable or playful kind. No Sunday paper! No shift to old clothes! There would probably be family calling later if nothing else.

The dominant personalities of the town ran those Sunday Schools, even decorated them. Col. J. Ed Walker was for donkey's years the booming superintendent and singing-leader at the Methodist Church. Wm. Penn Wood would be on hand as church treasurer, maybe to keep the School collections, anyhow to be a prominent corner-sitter in the older men's class. G. Sam Bradshaw, clerk of Court, later W. J. Scarborough, had the older girls class. Rufus Fraizer taught the teen-age boys group. Good man, everybody remarked on how he worked up his lesson for presentation! At times he certainly strove hard to get Saint Paul's travels straight, as well as at other times the Gospel scenes. I remember being awfully sorry for him one Sunday, when he turned his questions to one or two of us who were supposed to be decently bright in the public schools, and we showed all too plainly that we had not done our homework. That Sunday it seemed to me that I saw him almost throw up his hands in despair.

Miss Hope Hubbard of Farmer tells me that her grandfather David Porter was long superintendent of the Presbyterian Church Sunday School. She says also that he often acted as sexton and sometimes would roll a wheelbarrow full of wood from his own home to church of a Sunday morning, to fill the maw of the good-sized stove up front, which was the only means of heating. I think I remember his son Sam performing that wheelbarrow act. I remember the Presbyterian church as for one reason or another hard to heat, and it may be their heating-system was devised only to heat up by afternoon.

There was an interval between Sunday School and Church, and usually this was spent either in front-steps gossip or in walking all over the cemetery, and inspecting many of the grave-stones. Believe it or not, there was a Sunday when I was fourteen years old, or else fifteen, that I spent that interval following grave-yard paths alone, and muttering or moaning to myself: "God is dead, God is dead!" Not so uncommon an adolescent disease even then, as one might think!

The adult population began streaming along, and the choir began refreshing on the anthem a little, as soon as Sunday School was out. Presently you missed hardly anybody from the central part of the town except the Presbyterians, a few sick people or ancients, Louis Bulla the town non-conformist, skeptic and wit, and J. A. Blair and family, Quakers. At that, I do believe Florence Blair sang in the choir. For Methodist preachers, my memory goes back as far as Mr. Futrell. Asheboro being the county-seat, I suspect it had quite as able and good preaching as it deserved from the supply. I remember as preachers who could talk well, A. E. Carter, A. W. Plyler, as well as Presiding Elder Frank Wood. These men were all orators, and they didn't bore me except when they spoke too long. I recall Parker Holmes as definitely a kindly and good man.

The Presbyterians for a long time had Dr. Egbert Smith, from High Point, who preached there in the morning, and then behind old Dobbin got down to Asheboro for the late afternoon assignment. Or did he come from Greensboro? Anyhow he belonged to that Smith family which adorned the state in more than one profession. Later at Chapel Hill I contacted his brother, C. Alphonso Smith, biographer of O. Henry.

Within my quite early years we lost two well-known members of the local bar to the ministry: Mike Bradshaw, and J. T. Crocker. Bradshaw became a Presiding Elder down East. I think this helps to show how close the churches were to the town and to the top and brains of it. However something G. Sam Bradshaw said to me might have had a little to do with his brother and Crocker leaving the bar to be clergymen. He told me that my father, who had by long service become the dean of the bar, "set fees so low that it was exceedingly difficult for other lawyers to make a good living" — especially no doubt the younger men who were just trying to get into the field. I simply mean that when a man has to spend too much time staring at the blank wall of his office, the Holy Ghost has a good chance to come in and speak to him. And in those days there was not a great deal of legal business anyhow. Two two-week terms of Superior Court was all that custom or law called for, one week criminal and one civil; and usually Court adjourned before its two weeks were out. Office business corresponded in measure, one supposes.

Not only did the churches dispense what religion got dispensed by preaching such as the age afforded. They were also the prime source of culture, in the narrower sense of that word, for most of the town and country. There was no public library in the county, unless you mean the typical children's shelf at the church rear. Town and countryside were pretty much alike. Every first-rate farmer had a short shelf with half a dozen books on it. I read P.T. Barnum's autobiography off such a shelf while spending a week on the Alexander Murdoch farm at Lassiter's mills. We must remember that as late as this there were many people in Randolph, both white and black, who could not read or write.

There were and still are other regions not too different from us in their reading habits. When I retired from teaching and got my books hauled to Conway, New Hampshire, the truck driver, who had delivered another part-load on his way, found a heavy old quarto book of some kind in the bottom of his truck. He tried to leave it on me so as to be rid of it. "Better take it," said he, "it's got lots of readin' in it." A friend of mine from Hanover, same state, told me the story of two men on the street talking about what to give a common friend of theirs for Christmas. One of them said: "O, give him a book." The other said, "He's got a book."

Pope Leo back in the Dark Ages told people who objected to statues in churches, and pictures in the glass window, that these were the books of people who could not read.

Sermons in my early experience sometimes sent you home to look up a Bible story and find out how the story really came out. The Old Testament was read a lot. Sermons helped me to find some of the juicy parts and passages of

the Old Testament, parts no elderly and loving friends would have encouraged you to read.

The newspapers of the day I do believe did more for people than they do now in the way of editorials, but they certainly now give you vastly more of world affairs than we got from our old newspapers. Our weeklies hardly got beyond local gossip, births and deaths. Preaching, even if from texts, mentioned many famous names you might be tempted to look up. Occasionally they dealt a bit with significant moments of history.

I am making the simple point that sermons in our kind of desert had some educational value of a broad kind. Perhaps their most common theme was that people should not let themselves be caught by this terrible monster whose name is Doubt. I guess we were taught that to use the human mind where it might lead to any different conclusions than those involved or implied in the church's system of mores and Sabbath observances, was Sin of the worst kind. But even so, the harangue which was intended to prove that, and such reasoning as came from the pulpit, could be and often were used by some minds to reach the opposite conclusion. Even the Bible has to be interpreted, and varieties of interpretations of the very same texts have produced most of the different kinds of sects and denominations that we already have. Because the Roman Church knew that the Bible in the hands of the people would lead to variant interpretations and to splitting up into sects, it tried to head off the whole notion of letting people have the Bible in their own hands and in their own language.

Every Wednesday evening over long years my mother claimed me for escort to her Wednesday evening Prayer-meeting. I suppose that was when I was about the right age to be available and unoccupied. But also you saw some of the girls there, and a few boys. And I liked to sing, most anything I could learn by rote. The prayers of the stand-bys of the church got to be stock affairs. John Wesley had told them it would be that way if they kept confining their preaching to the same walls and the same people! I suppose I picked up a fairly good old-time Methodist vocabulary for praying. But one positive thing anybody could learn at such places is that for Methodists religion is an inner experience, not just something to argue about or to reduce to words.

The church had parties and picnics, and some effort was made to get hold of and to feed for once some of the children of the poorer and more distant families that did not get to Sunday School. Around Christmas time, there was not only Santa Claus, the candy bag and the orange, at the Christmas tree in the church, with much of the town present; but there was also joyous singing of Christmas carols. New and juicy things to sing were found by the organist, my Aunt, Mrs. Mary (Thorns) Moring. Nowhere else have I ever heard this one:

"Jingle, jingle, jing, jing, jing;
Jingle, jingle, jing;
Jingle, jingle, come Kris Kringle,
Come to the Christmas tree."

Somewhere she had dug up sleigh-bells for us kids on this one.

A very major part of the religious story is those revivals which the Metho-

dist Church saw to our having at least once a year, with some supposedly gifted orator from a distance to do the preaching. These men had not only religious fervor but gifts of speech and of language, in the first place calculated to attract the crowds. I remember stepping inside a revival tent near the depot in High Point one time and hearing the orator, who was preaching against cigarette smoking, tell his audience that if the Almighty had intended men to use their noses for smoke-stacks he would have turned them the other end up. Such turns of speech and other platform gifts drew unbelievers, and made the fame of the great Southern revivalist of that time, the Rev. Sam Jones. Jones once asked a Durham congregation how many of them had read the book of Samson. The most pious woman in the church, knowing she had read the whole Bible through more than once, raised her hand, and got a terrible lashing for not knowing there was no such book.

But of course the honest effort and felt responsibility of the devoted pastors of small towns like Asheboro looked towards converting their young people and bringing them into the church. And these revivals usually did add some of these, a few, every time they were held. It is also true that there were certain ones in town who seemingly "got religion" all over again at each revival. They could be pretty well depended upon to start the march on the sawdust who preached there in the morning, and then behind old Dobbin got down to trail. I wondered about that routine of being converted and backsliding and converted over again although I do not mean that it was typical. The Presbyterian Church had a different tradition and, as a rule, did not go in for revivals. However they fell in line a time or two, and had their own, hardly distinguishable in kind.

I myself cannot report that I ever went through anything like a typical religious conversion. And as a matter of fact I never joined any church whatever until after I had earned what they call a doctorate in philosophy. Then, having, I suppose, had an overdose of the intellectual life, instead of going into teaching that subject, I accepted a proffered ministry in a village New England church where I "preached" for some seven years, still without ever having joined any church. Then I helped to sort of reorganize the platform of that church and joined it, not upon any "profession of faith" but upon a covenant which had to do with common purpose and aims. That would not have been possible under some kinds of denominational rule of course.

But I was strongly affected, like others of my age, by some of these Methodist revivals. Once the evangelist called for "penitents" — or whatever it was, three or four times, and was successful in getting his handful of my contemporaries. Then, in a sort of last act, not uncommon at revivals, he asked any who proposed henceforth to live a Christian life to come up and give him their hands. I arose, got up to the front, and shook hands with him. In the act of shaking hands, I felt a definite physiological sensation descend upon me which I once described in writing but have never told anybody about until now. (In other words, that former writing did not see the light.) It felt as if a ring of

lightness (not color but weight I am talking about, that is non-weight) had fallen upon and around my shoulders. You might think I had been reading about poor old Christian in Pilgrim's Progress, losing his burden. And that is quite possible to think of as back of the experience, for along in those years somewhere I did pore over Bunyan's book. But I did not think of any such analogy then, indeed I did not think of any analogy at all. No doubt at all there was some kind of relief from emotional pressure which took that form. But an interesting point about it to a psychologist might possibly be that after less than so many seconds I was disturbed about it rather than elated or lifted up. I was definitely afraid I had got myself into something I did not and could not understand. I walked home feeling queer, with the ring of lightness persisting. I wanted to ask someone about it but was too shy. During dinner I am sure I was unusually quiet. After dinner, I asked permission to visit a cousin whom I had picked out as about the most sensible and knowing person of near my own years, if a bit older. That was Mabel Wood, later Underwood. I found her in the Penn Wood front yard, snipping roses at the beds between front door and gate. I walked around and around with her among those rose beds, watching the buds fall in to her basket, discussing the revival. She gave me her parents' opinion that the emotionality of these revivals could be overdone, and often was. Somehow that view **comforted** me. There is no other word for it! But, believe me or not, it took all of a week for that distinct feeling of a ring of lightness around my shoulders to pass away. I am definitely sure that I was somewhat relieved as well let down, perhaps a trifle demoted and restored to nature, when the thing was clean gone.

Out of that experience I got at least the point that religion is, or can be, an experience, sometimes physiological in part but mental and all-over as well. I got the Methodist point that religion is not something you maybe **believe** in but something that gets you. I have never lost that point of contact with Methodism. Religion and God can either of them be something to take you by the scruff of the neck, call you 'a mean thing,' and tell you to seek to get right. As St. Augustine said, not to know God, is not **not-believing** in him; it is not to **see** him. Hippo's saint might as well have added, "or not to feel him."

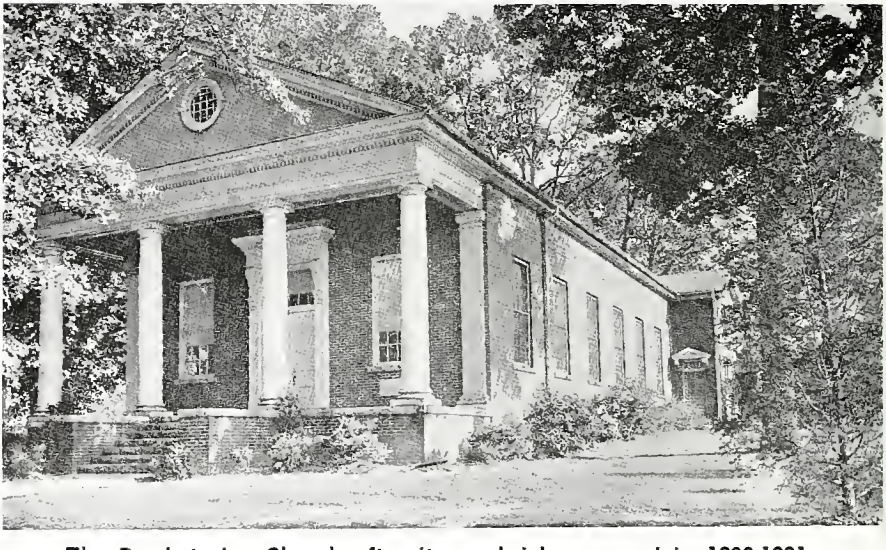
As to my eventually joining a church on the basis of a Covenant of Purpose instead of a Confession of Faith, that is the way some of the old New England covenanters did it, including that company which came on the Mayflower. They signed a remarkable and most readable covenant in the cabin room of the Mayflower before they landed, a covenant which was to serve in both religious and political realms if I remember aright. It is worth looking up.

Somebody may think I have forgotten my geography lesson, got clean away from old Asheboro, and picked up in imagination the wrong congregation. But let us see about that. Many of those New England Congregations had formed under George Whitfield and John Wesley while those two great revivalists were working together, while they were developing their common more or less Puritanical religion. To be sure Wesley had kept company with the Moravians too, and now his disciples and theirs were side by side in North Carolina. How is it

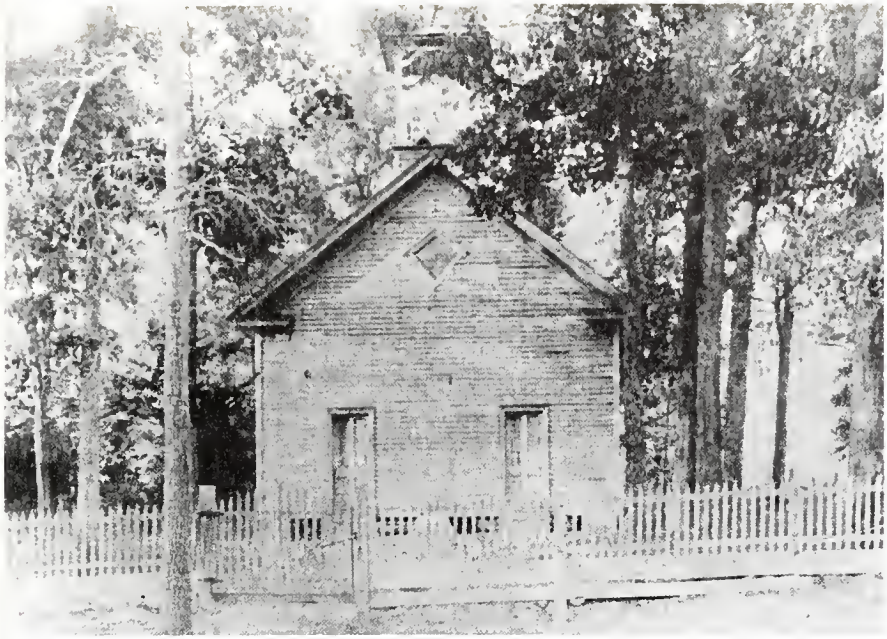
for religious and other family connections with some of the New England Yankees?

Certainly the Worths of Randolph, the Coffins of Randolph and Guilford, and others, were nothing in the world but transplanted Nantucketers. And what about the rest of us? Up until two years ago, I knew my own Robins ancestry only as far back as a great-great-grandfather of that name who is found standing on Randolph lands in the 1750s, and had probably been around for some time. In some other connection I may some day want to report on these interesting adventures in family genealogical research.

Asheboro Presbyterian Church on Worth Street. Organized 1850; building erected in 1851-1852.



The Presbyterian Church after it was brick veneered in 1920-1921



(Picture courtesy of Historical Society)

First Methodist Church on Salisbury Street at City Cemetery. Picture made in 1886.

The Gatekeeper's House for the Fisher Estate as it looked after it was moved from Sunset Avenue to Lanier Street. It is now the property of three Women's Clubs, but for many years it was owned by members of the Caviness family.

Churchly Footnotes

Reading over the sketch I have written called **The Old Time Religion,** I am reminded of the need of a certain footnote which might be added to it, and which might as well be extended to some of the other sketches. No doubt at all, I have right along tended towards describing things the way I first saw them, or got familiar with them; and have paid less than proper attention to changes that came about within my time. Conversely, I have sometimes placed houses on lots to which they came later but nevertheless became very familiar there.

In the case of the churches, I spoke of Asheboro as long having had just two churches for the White people, and of the Presbyterian and Methodist bells both ringing of a Sunday morning for Sunday School at the Methodist Church. I think that continued to be the situation until not far from the time the railroad came in from High Point, after which event the town began growing rapidly. But it seems sort of disrespectful to leave it at that, since three other churches were firmly rooted in the village by the time I was in the middle of school years.

The Methodist Protestants must have had a pretty strong base in the county before they built at the county seat. Cicero Hammer's father was a Methodist Protestant minister. So was Henry Lewallen, well-known and at first living just a bit Southwest of town. The building of their church on Fayetteville Street is associated in my mind with the coming of the large family of Romulus R. Ross, which I am confident filled its fullest pew. Ross came to town to be County Sheriff. After my time the group became known as the Central Methodist.

The "Christian" denomination had three churches in the county as early as 1872. I was coming along in school when they built on the next corner of Cox, South from Worth, diagonally across from the old Bolivar Bulla homeplace and the schoolgrounds. Our near neighbors, the A. E. ("Bije") Moffitt family, had a great deal to do with that church, and I am sure took a lively hand in building it. I think they came to town when Bije Moffitt was elected sheriff, and that may have been as early as 1888, or even before that. I do not know that there is a "Christian" church in town now, and that makes me want to tell a little about certain associations of Asheboro people with the denomination. The denomination is the one which built Elon College, and I think most, if not all, of the Moffitt family coming of age went there.

Sheriff Moffitt's second son, Emmett, deserves special mention, I think. For he was an able man and a builder. He not only went to Elon College, but went on from there for a graduate year at Harvard. Then he went back to Elon in some teaching capacity but eventually became president of the college for a good many years. And after retiring from there, he had an aggressive or enterprising career in Asheboro.

I think Emmett Moffitt may have been the first Asheboro boy to go to Harvard. I remember he came home from Cambridge one summer wearing pants with extremely wide legs. I took them for the Harvard mode. As we know, width

and tightness of pant legs, for men and women too, now, is a thing that goes around in a cycle. It must have been a later turn of the wheel which gave Will Rogers the opportunity to quip that the style in pant legs for men was so wide that you had to take three steps before your pant-leg moved. That joke made me recall Emmett Moffitt going up Worth Street to church somewhere, himself about in front of where Charles McCrary now lives.

After a goodly term of being president at Elon, as we said or noted, Emmett came back to Asheboro and turned **entrepreneur.** He launched some sort of a wood-working industry, possibly a wheelbarrow factory, in which is brother Herbert joined him after a while. But he remained a man of wide interests, including a strong interest in religion. He long pushed a sort of missionary movement out at West Bend. It was as late as 1914, when I was back in Asheboro for a visit, that he got me out there with him and got me into trouble of which I shall say no more than that I was not built to be a missionary, and he got me up into his pulpit where I felt like the devil. He had a way of making you see something as a duty which I think must have been hard for any young and groping youth to resist. A college president needs that sort of gift probably.

With the "Christian" movement as a whole, there was one other Asheboro family which had at least an historic connection of which I want to speak. There are, or were, at least three movements or denominations in the United States which have at times and places used for themselves the simple name of "Christian," with no further qualification or specification. Perhaps the largest of these movements centered in the Middle West, especially Ohio, I think. Its properest name or distinctive name has always been **The Church of the Disciples.** But at times they were called "Christians," and at other times "Campbellites." That last was given for a distinguished founder of course. This denomination established and published **The Christian Century,** a paper of national note. The second of the three denominations of Christians I spoke of is the one to which belonged the family of my life-long friend, Ralph Harper, of Kinston, N. C., who always insisted that his inherited denomination was neither Campbellite nor that of the Elon College founders, but yet "Christian." That is all I know about it. The third one, which Asheboro knew, besides being "Christian" and associated with Elon, long wore the nickname of "O'Kellyites." My mother referred to it by that name, except in public when being polite. You know, not many denominations have enjoyed the privilege of naming themselves while avoiding popular nicknames. The Quakers named themselves "Friends," and I believe like that name best to this day. But, "O'kellyite" was never a weak name or a bad name. People's memories of their founder just failed them.

Before the American Revolution, James O'Kelly, from the North of Ireland, was Superintendent or Presiding Elder of the Southern or Virginia District of the Methodist Church under Francis Asbury and John Wesley. He was a famous circuit-rider in the wilderness, and withal a church-builder. At the same time, he had a mind of his own which sometimes he used inconveniently for his superiors. He was a leader among those in Kentucky, Virginia, and the Caro-

linas who waved off or disregarded some of Wesley's rules, in particular one about the rite of Communion, or The Lord's Supper. The congregations he gathered and led, and a good many which gradually came to know of him, wanted to enjoy the Communion Service; but Asbury, and Wesley in the background, ruled that they could not be allowed to do that unless some properly ordained minister in good standing was present with them for the occasion. Some of them broke over and upon occasion observed the rite anyhow, and Francis Asbury had to visit place after place especially to straighten them out on that.

At the beginning of the Revolution there were only a handful of ordained Methodist ministers in the whole United States, all of these having been ordained in England before they came over, and nobody this side of the water having authority to so ordain anyone. When Wesley summoned all of these back to England after outbreak of the War, almost all of them returned to the old country. A few went into retirement. Asbury was the only one who went on as before. He knew Wesley well enough to write letters of protest and to "appeal from Philip," well not exactly from "Philip drunk to Philip sober," but "from Wesley uninformed about the breadth and depth of the need to Wesley better advised by a devoted lieutenant." Asbury continued to be tolerated, by Wesley perhaps as a sort of stake around which to begin rebuilding the movement in America after the rebellious colonies should be bought back to their allegiance to the British Crown. Meantime there simply was no legal way for American followers of Methodism to have the Communion Service; but the law kept on getting broken here and there. Like Prohibition, this one could hardly be enforced. Only at the end of the Revolution, did Wesley ordain or appoint Asbury, Dr. Coke, and I believe one other, to act as his delegates in the business of ordaining others. In doing so Wesley had to act as a bishop, and to tell his reluctant brother Charles that he verily believed himself as true a bishop as any man in England. Charles thought that was a separation from the Church of England and the end of everything.

This measure took hold and helped to heal one open wound in the Methodist movement. But there were other points of difficulty that kept coming to the top. At a general convention held in Virginia not long after the War, there was a rebellion led by James O'Kelly, on the question of whether the appointments, or the stationings, of the Methodist pastors should be entirely centralized in the hands of Bishops Asbury and Coke, or whether those who were dissatisfied with their appointment should have a right of appeal to the General Convention itself. We see that this was a question of democracy in the movement. You might even say that some of the Methodist preachers were rebelling against Wesley on the same lines on which the country as a whole had rebelled against George III. Asbury sought in vain to heal this split without making any concession. The group of Southern churches which followed James O'Kelly's lead went off and formed a convention of their own, calling themselves at first **Republican Methodists.** Why they ever changed that name seems an interesting question. The other

party settled down to the name of **Methodist Episcopal.** Somewhere in the middle of this controversy, the O'Kelly group also began clinging very closely to a point which John Wesley himself had stood for at one time, namely that all the teachings and doctrines of all Protestants ought to be stated in Biblical language. He thought that all Christians really should be ready to agree if that was done. This point of teaching I recall hearing emphasized time after time in that "Christian" church which stood for a spell on the Cox Street corner.

Three miles out of Chapel Hill on Route 54, towards Raleigh, there stands a roadside tablet memorializing James O'Kelly by pointing South on a narrow road which brings you within two or three miles to a chapel and an old cemetery. Nearby and only a stone's throw from corners of Orange, Chatham and Durham counties, stands an O'Kelly homesite, with a house on it still. Across the road from that Chapel which holds the O'Kelly grave, and down the road a few hundred yards South, stands a garage or store, which, ten years ago, I was told was in the middle of the plantation of "Uncle" Alfred Moring. Maps of around 1850, will show on the main road to Raleigh from the West a village named Moringsville. Alfred Moring married an O'Kelly, exactly of what relationship to James I know not but very probably his granddaughter.

For Alfred Moring's father, "Sergeant" John Moring, had moved together with James O'Kelly from Virginia to Carolina, and they had settled alongside. John Moring was treasurer of the O'Kellyite convention of churches from near the beginning. John was father of Christopher Moring, first Master of the Masonic Lodge in Greensboro, and a hotel or inn-keeper there, as well as master of a line of coaches such as the times had in our rugged country. William Henry Moring, Sr., who came to Asheboro in the 1840s was son of a second John Moring, and grandson of the first. His sister Eliza, for whom my mother was partly named, married Matthew Yates, a well-known Baptist missionary to China. That provides the Moring family with a fair trace of a connection with both the "Christian" and the Baptist movements.

There is a biography of James O'Kelly to be found in some of the older state libraries.

The third church I was mentioning as having come to Asheboro before I left there is the Holiness one. I guess that came a little later than the other two. It was a product of the Holiness revivals which came not far from the turn of the century, and I think that, years ago at least, you could have got pretty clear agreement that Frank Birkhead was the inspired leader and founder of it. Frank was always a good work-man, but until middle life he did nurse the bottle. However conversion during that Holiness rising provided him with a new hold on life. In fact he was long regarded as the very best example at hand of what that old time revival religion could do for a man by way of lifting him out of a bad habit and giving him a new hold upon life.

There had been a Quaker group owning a building and functioning as a public group in years before mine. It was on the W. J. Armfield lot and is now in the act of becoming changed into a permanent home for the Randolph Historical Society.

It seems odd that Asheboro had to do so much growing before the Baptists, largest denomination over the state as a whole, came to be represented in the village. In fact all the Baptists I met in earlier years were Primitive or Hardshell Baptists, and they were getting scarcer then. It may be that Randolph was sort of Hardshell Baptist territory, and that may help to explain some things. For the Hardshell Baptists were not missionaries, and perhaps they did not even stress building churches so much as others. They got along without **settled** ministers too. My father was brought up among them and in a family of that connection, though he never joined any church.

When I go on to remark that the Episcopalians, the Lutherans, the Roman Catholics, the Evangelicals, none of them, were realistically represented in my time, that may lead somebody, in this day of churches getting together and uniting denominations in an ecumenical movement to ask: "How many churches do you think a town which, beginning about where you took up the story had only three hundred and fifty people in it, really needed?"

I only bring that question forward to give me a chance to ask a question for my own ignorance, and then to stop. I do not exactly remember Asheboro as having only 350 people in it. But I do remember telling it that way many times, and may have had more to go by when I first so told it than now. Was it ever actually that small as a county-seat, with Randleman having around twice as many? Does it mean there were 350 voters or 350 taxpayers, 350 when you count or don't count children? I may have found the figure in the 1890 census. I recall transcribing the taxpayers list into a big county book, for pay, one summer around 1897-9: could I have got the figures from that? Somebody can look the matter up if they are interested. I would like to know whether I have been telling things right in that particular. And behind that, **remembering** other things just right? But the main point in this sketch was simply to get back to where Asheboro was a very small place, considerably out of the world; and to report a little about the kind of churches we had.

Skipper Coffin

Oscar Jackson Coffin, famous head of the School of Journalism at Chapel Hill, was only three or four years younger than I, so that we grew up in substantially the same Asheboro. My five years younger brother, Marmaduke or Duke, knew him much better in early days than I did. But first and last I came to know him quite intimately, and may be able to sound a brief note of my own about a man whom many living people actually saw more of than I ever did and that the town cannot fail to recognize as having been one of the best gifts it ever made to the state and who reflects honor upon itself.

My first recollections of "O. J.", or "Skipper" Coffin came from the time when he was a babe in arms down in the first home his family ever had, at Carter's Mills, in Moore County. His father, Alec Coffin, owned a tiny farm and ran a store and postoffice near Bear Creek, and in or very near to what is now known as the town of Robbins (named I believe for a man who started life under the moniker of Rabinovitch). When I first saw this baby boy of the Coffin family, he was just balancing off a family which had started off with a son, Will Coffin, then had acquired two girls of its own and perhaps already had adopted two nieces. I will admit it seemed to my tender years that the family was inordinarily proud of him. That was when I was making them a visit of a week or so. Those girls kept thrusting him upon me so they would have more room to contemplate and admire him in new scenery; or I felt that was it. I found him the meanest, scratchiest baby I had ever seen. He wanted to claw a fellow's eyes out. He was a fighting wildcat. He had no respect for his elders at least, though some of them may have got him tamed to their approaches by this time. From my point of view he was pulling no punches, while I wanted to fight back and of course could not. The first part of that stayed with him spiritually all through life. He was not inclined to observe proprieties. He wanted to scratch under the smooth surfaces of life. He was not intimidated by dignities or willing to leave mere reputations owing the field.

They moved to Asheboro and settled in the old John Hill house on the corner of Main and Worth streets, with the responsibility of looking after the common grandparents already installed there, William Henry Moring, Sr. and Jane Jackson Moring. After Grandpa Moring died, Grandma occupied just the ell of the house which projected itself into my mother's garden, and the Coffins soon built a house of their own, still standing, on the corner of Park Street and Sunset Avenue. During the years they were next door, I recall a good deal less of Oscar than of any others of the family, adult or young. The time-gap between our ages was at its very widest just then, I am sure.

Oscar began to register on me about the time Alec Coffin told my mother that Marmaduke Robins was ruining his boys by letting them read all the time instead of putting them at work at something or other, like his boys. He was refusing to consider at all the very irregular chores we were needed and used

for on the home place, like hoeing the corn and helping get in the hay. Those things were not paid for and didn't constitute a job. His own Will was clerking in a store and Oscar was employed in a wheel-barrow factory. Uncle Alex was pretty nearly right about me anyhow, and first off in the simple matter of eyes. I almost ruined my eyes those years. We were spending the long days around the house, I at least in the library most of the morning, Henry doing I hardly know what, the two of us riding the horses to Henley's swimming hole in the afternoon, often with the hired man along when we had three horses. That was to give the horses "exercise," and my father approved of that. Except for one winter in a cotton mill in Clinton, Massachusetts, where an uncle was boss in the carding-room of the Lancaster Cotton Mills (1897-8 that was), I had never earned a dollar in my life when I graduated from college in 1904. But, as said, my cousins Will and Oscar were at work earning, and I was sometimes very conscious of that and wondering how one got into a job of that kind. Somehow am sure I would have been afraid to go around asking anybody if he could use me.

The time came along when I was being "prepared for college." That was an enterprise by no means so common as it is in this day. It had originated in my case with our father, who had long since got Henry and me assuming we were destined for Chapel Hill, where he himself had graduated in 1856. Meantime Will Coffin made his final choice, of business; and I do not believe there were any family thoughts about O. J. going to college. He was at work in a factory, and learning many things which even then I heartily wished that I knew. He was getting to know his town in ways I never knew it, though both of us loved it and never ceased to do so. He got to know Tom, Dick and Harry from the inside as well as the outside. That is to say he "communicated" with them, to borrow a very modern word. He liked people as people and as curiosities, and I imagine at least that some of the riff-raff (I do hate though to classify people even by using a term of that sort) got to like him pretty well. One came to hear that he was causing a certain anxiety in the family by showing a bit of wildness. His father and mother died quite closely together, and his brother Will, now head of the family, was quite disturbed at times. In particular I heard that Oscar was learning the taste of corn liquor.

I guess that O. J.'s notion of going to the University was due to his somehow developing an ambition and initiative of his own. He got there after I had graduated in the Spring of 1904, and I believe a year later than my younger brother Duke, who went there in the Fall of 1904. He got there when there were more temptations to get started in some growing business than there were in going to college. Asheboro and High Point were growing industrially, and young men were seeing non-illusory ways of getting rich. The modern idea that the quickest road to a fat job is by way of college, and the more degree from college the better, had not got around when O. J. went to Chapel Hill. I think he was following an inner urgency to find what he would be good, and happy, at doing. He may not have been fully conscious of having the

making of a newspaper man within him, but they must have been there.

I was out of the state all the time he was going through at Chapel Hill. First distinctly new hearing of and about him came when he was cub reporter on a Charlotte newspaper. I was trying myself out as a country clergyman in Massachusetts about that time, and during a sort of retreat made for the purpose of deciding what I really wanted to do with my life, I made Oscar a short visit in Charlotte, probably over a couple of nights. I slept in the same room with him and the same bed. He took me around to call on all the Chapel Hill friends that had settled in Charlotte (several of them were budding lawyers), and we had a lot of talk about this and that.

There was a sequel to that Charlotte visit which involves me personally more than I like, but which is so honorable to Skipper Coffin, and so revealing of him, that I cannot possibly omit it. I went back to New England, to what I had been doing on a sort of temporary basis (I was a New England clergyman for seven years without ever having joined any kind of a church whatsoever.) Presently I worked out and wrote out a long and maybe thoughtful sermon, and sent it to O. J. for comment. Back it soon came with a comment from "the horse's mouth." He wrote me: "There is not a spark of life in it from beginning to end." That to an older cousin to whom he had looked up with some respect, partly because of age, partly perhaps because it was Horace Williams at Chapel Hill who had got me a scholarship to do graduate work at Harvard, and had helped me to get into the troubled state of mind I was in. Horace held the belief that Southern boys needed to be waked up and their minds started growing, even it it was painful at first.

I will not say I had the grace and the sense of humor to gratefully appreciate that response when it first came. But I knew he was telling the absolute truth. I knew he was right about my current "self-expression," just as not far from the same time, Josiah Royce, who had advised me to write a philosophy paper or two, had been right in losing or burning the efforts I sent him. But I will say that over many long years now I have been chuckling over what O. J. wrote me about my 'sermon.' The fellow did not pull his punches. He gave it to me without gloves. It shows you part of what made Skipper Coffin beloved by his boys in that School of Journalism. He taught his students to engage in reporting of the kind that had life in it. It was the only kind that would feed the flame of life within them.

It seems unnecessary to bother about sequence on the calendar from this point of my story. O. J. may or may not have been with a Greensboro paper for some years. I know he long had a column in the Greensboro paper which often figured or featured Randolph and Asheboro news. Lastly, I believe, before the call to Chapel Hill, he was on a Raleigh paper and doing a great deal of commentation on legislative affairs and personalities like Henry Page of Aberdeen and Cicero Hammer of Asheboro. He handled these people with bare hands, tobacco spitting and all. Those were years of much agitation over political questions of the time. Questions of freedom of speech for teachers,

freedom for college teachers to consider with their classes all sides of political and ethical issues, questions of religious freedom involving efforts on the part of trustees and churchmen to protect young minds from disruptive or new ideas, were stirring the age's big cauldron with a mighty spoon. O, that also was a challenging time in which to live! And many, many people were already scared to death. O. J. had a share in all that, and he was ever on the side of freedom.

It may have been after he got to Chapel Hill that he stood out on one particular kind of freedom that was indeed rare anywhere in the South: freedom from party. Perhaps it was the so-called Negro question that started things that way, but voting the solid ticket down the line surely was a tradition in North Carolina. Except perhaps in town and city elections, splitting a ticket was hardly thought of as allowable, and least of all among politicians. But it was when O. J. or Skipper Coffin was Chairman of some Democratic Committee, I believe it was chairman of the Orange County Democratic Committee, that he publicly announced he was going to vote for the Republican candidate for Congress. That was Idyl Ferree, of Asheboro. He knew Idyl from of old, and from top to bottom. But even in these latter years, I have seen many of my acquaintances change all their political convictions to Republican ones, without knowing, or confessing to themselves, that they were Republicans in all the essential of the matter. The prejudice in favor of mere names, or against independents in politics, still has a good deal of life left in it.

During some of these years O. J. began writing that column in the Greensboro paper (that is where I saw it at least.) It was the same genre as James Russell Lowell's **Bigelow Papers** of Civil War times, although at times rougher and more uncouth than those. The humor, bent, and sympathies of the writer were more obvious, I think, than the rhyme or the poetry. Some of his political references were too far off for me to get. But clipped passages from it sent me from various sources evinced and fed a live interest in affairs in Carolina and in Randolph County. He had me fishing again on the Penn Wood branch, in imagination. He was referring to antics in and around Asheboro and recalling familiar names in a way that made me homesick. Once I remember he talked about Phil and Filmore Presnell in the same piece. I remember Filmore coming downtown the day after a big storm, and telling people about the lightning striking the home chimney. Said he: "If I hadn't 'a dodged just when I did, it would have got me for sure."

But real close associations, closer and more habitual, I think than ever before, came about in the early 1950s when, after what is called "retirement," my wife and I began spending a part of our winters in Chapel Hill. Skipper Coffin had then been for some years Dean of that School of Journalism. When I showed up in his office one day after a long period of mutual not-seeing, he stood up with a smile which was really worth seeing and getting. It came from the inside of him as well as the outside. It was the smile of a teacher who makes real contacts with his students, and who is in the habit of looking

for real contacts. Certain old roots began growing again from both sides, until we were in closer understanding than we had ever been before. Frances and I began going down, most every Friday night when the Coffins were not engaged, and sometimes for dinner or supper with a game of bridge to follow with him and Gertrude. He led me at other hours to a sort of famous local institution called The Shack, which he described as the only place in Chapel Hill where you could get a beer with a sandwich and a place to sit down and push your feet under. To be sure we were joined there a time or two by the ablest legislator the state had in those years, John Umstead. So the place could hardly have been as disreputable as some inclined to think it. You did not exactly have to get elected to membership there, but the proprietor was careful, when I went there alone, to tell the group present that I was a friend of Skipper Coffin. That wiped off all looks of suspicion and brought a question or two of friendly sort. I had drives with Skipper to Asheboro at least once, and to Durham and other places as well. We talked of cabbages and kings, of political moves he saw with Xray eyes.

He retired in the middle fifties, and not far from the time we Robins felt ourselves led to move on to Florida in search of a warmer winter climate for my air-passages, or sinuses, if you want to be dignified or learned about it. When he retired, he soon moved to Raleigh. The only explanation I heard for that move was that it was so he could stop driving in traffic but could get downtown by bus and attend to or make new contacts around the Capital. He suffered terribly from asthma those last years, and it was without much doubt a release when death took him. That happened when I was far away somewhere. But I am glad that I was able to see some of the wonderful flow of letters from his former students. He had taught them to think of their part in the newspaper game as a fine art, a life-giving art; and not merely as a fifth wheel to another wide packet of big business operations beginning and ending in a countinghouse.

I conclude with a newspaper letter from one of his old students, Robert Ruark, the novelist. I came upon it in my copy of the morning's Tampa, Florida, Sunday Tribune December 30, 1956:

Robert Ruark

O. J. Was Fine Journalism Prof Even If He Did Create Ruark

One of the lights in my life went out the other day when a magnificently cantankerous gentleman named Oscar Coffin died in Raleigh, N. C., possibly from boredom. He retired last June as the head of the journalism school at the University of North Carolina, the thought-factory which unleashed me on an unsupecting world.

It is impossible to estimate how many

newspapermen O. J. Coffin created in his own image. He left an editorship of a Carolina daily newspaper to head up the journalism school at the university and turned out working pressmen at a furious rate for 30 years. He may have created a few monsters, such as me, but mainly his fledglings got jobs and held them, progressed in them and achieved recognition in them.

* * *

ONE THING is certain: Coffin turned out a small percentage of amateurs, and practically none of his boys and girls wound up in the advertising business. Very few became book-authors, a shameful profession, the Skipper always said.

O. J. was a humorously irascible gentleman whose hooked nose and craggy chin gave him the appearance of a truculent turtle. He had a pair of piercing blue eyes behind frosty glasses and a laugh that could be reminiscent of the croaking of ravens. Some of this was asthma, but a lot of it arrived from the sardonic view that there was very little room in his racket for ineptness.

He had an idea that a man writing a piece ought to know what he was writing about, so that it at least might be intelligible to the author before he palmed it off on the public.

The Skipper had been a school-teacher, a reporter, a columnist, several kinds of newspaper executive, an editorial writer and finally an editor-in-chief before he started pounding knowledge into the knotty heads of young squirts who wanted to write the Great American Novel that very minute. While discouraging this, Coffin taught them the rudiments of a coherent, short sentence.

HE TAUGHT THEM the value of the "ain't," for emphasis, and suggested that the world was far from perfect and that the people in the world shared its imperfections.

To that end, he dispatched his hopefuls to such unlyrical places as police courts, insane asylums and state prisons. He issued assignments at the first of the week and reviewed the efforts on Friday, which was laden with peril. He read the works aloud, with appropriate comment. His sarcasm blistered the paintwork, and his very occasional praise sent you soaring over the weekend.

* * *

THE MAN'S SOLIDITY made him a clearing house for newspapers as far north as Baltimore. Even in the midist of the depression, Coffin's boys and girls went to work straight out of school. Editors held most vacancies for O. J.'s cubs, largely because they didn't have to teach the cubs very much about covering and writing a story.

I fell under the man's spell in an unusual fashion. I was not a journalism student, but I came down with an attack of love for a doll who was. The old professor asked me, in an interview, why I wanted to take up journalism in the Winter quarter of my senior year. I replied that I was in love with Miss So-and-so, and this was the easiest way I could contrive to keep her under my eye.

"I like a practical man," O. J. said. "And she is the prettiest girl in the class. You're hired. She'll get married before she ever makes a newspaper hand, but I got some ideas about you."

I CAN SAY with a whole lot of pride that he gave me the first job that developed in the Summer of 1935 — "because," said he, giggling evilly over a slug of bourbon, "the job is so damned awful that you're the only man I got who's ornery enough to take it. I give you a month outside." As a matter of fact, I lasted three, before country-weekly claustrophobia in Hamlet, N. C., drove me out into the Northern snow.

The Skipper and his tiny razor-tongued wife, Miss Gertrude, took us all to raise, and we spent more time in his house than his son, Wilson.

The salty old boy had an unholy pact with Phillips Russell, the noted biographer who taught creative writing. Dr. Russell would inject us with quiet culture and O. J. would adapt it to harsh practicality. They worked together as cynically as a thief and his fence, with Phil Russell hitting us over the head with Japanese hokku and Coffin adapting the ancient art form to the vulgar present.

Well, he's gone now, as all the good ones go, although some several thousand of us thought he was imperishable. If he's someplace where he can read his obits, he probably has already produced a blue pencil and is busy hacking them to bits.

(Picture courtesy of Asheboro Public Library)

OSCAR JACKSON COFFIN

Marmaduke Circle

(This piece of local history is a slight re-editing from the **Asheboro Courier-Tribune** of September 5, 1960.)

Even since observing that the town of Asheboro has given a dead-ender off South Main the name of "Marmaduke Circle", I have thought I might offer the **Courier-Tribune** and its readers a little account of the travels of that name before it got on to that sign-post they have put there. It is a uncommon name but one well-rooted in Randolph County.

It goes back to one Marmaduke Vickory, or Vickery, who, at least according to an old aunt of mine, came from the old world with his wife. The **Moravian Records,** Volumn II, in an early-page footnote, mention him as witness or something to a land-survey in what is now Randolph County in the year 1753. He was one of the farmers who rose in arms against the Colonial government and its place-men five years before the battle of Lexington and Concord.

Armed with anything from squirrel-guns to pitchforks, they were 'defeated' or dispersed at the battle of Alamance by Governor William Tryon, whose palace has been recently restored in New Bern, and who had cannon and a number of trained soldiers or trained militia. After the battle, Vickory was among the captives that, instead of being hung, were exhibited, chained together, in the streets of Moravian Salem. Authority for that statement, with Vickory mentioned by name, is his great-grandson Lyndon Swaim, long editor of the **Greensborough Patriot,** in a footnote to Eli Caruthers's **Life of David Caldwell.** Tryon was trying hard to discourage rebellion and the rough handling of county officers who charged poor people unreasonable fees, sometimes double the legal fees. But let tyrants beware! Randolph Circle commemorates Marmaduke Vickory and his neighbors.

Born in 1715, Marmaduke Vickory was later a soldier in the Continental line during the Revolution, and a son of his spent a certain winter with George Washington at Valley Forge.

His Will, as we find it recorded in one of those old record-books discovered by Mrs. Laura Worth in a damp corner in the old courthouse basement, was probated in Asheboro in 1788, with Christopher Vickory and Marmaduke Vickory (Junior) as witness, Sampson Vickory being executor of the Will. Old Marmaduke had three boys with him at Alamance battlefield and several of his boys were Revolutionary soldiers. I have been told that all the Vickories of Randolph are decended from him.

Among his other children, Marmaduke the first had two daughters named respectively Elizabeth (Betty) Swaim and Charity Swaim. You see both of those daughters married Swaims. Betty married John Swaim who lived a long life in Randolph County and raised eleven children. Charity married William Swaim, the grandfather of writer O. Henry. According to the speaker at a Swaim Family reunion at Level Cross in 1892 (I was there and saw and heard

him, but am relying upon a copy of his address also, for the sort of questioning but nodded-at statement) all the Swaims then living in Randolph were descended from John. I suppose the others were over the line in Guilford.

Betty gave the name of Marmaduke to a son, and Charity did the same to one of hers. There had been at least four Marmaduke Swaims in Randolph before the name was handed on to my father, Marmaduke Swaim Robins. Incidentally he was descended from both Betty and Charity. He was a lawyer, and his portrait hangs on the wall in the courtroom in Asheboro, alongside my brother Henry's more recent one.

Those two daughters back there were proud of the first Marmduke for something. Perhaps it was not just being at Alamance, or the service as Continental soldier. Perhaps it was the patriotism and public spirit that was in him and remained as a tradition, among the family. He was an honorable and leading citizen in his day.

And now Asheboro and the County have, perhaps without fully intending it or knowing very much about old Marmaduke Vickory, done something to help bring his name back into county traditions, done something even to slightly help commemorate the battle of Alamance and what it means, still means. Certainly in first line, all the Vickories and all the Swaims of Randolph, and all their connections, have a right to be mildly pleased. The name was theirs. Now is has gone out of style. But at one notable point Asheboro is calling attention to it.

Marmaduke Circle is situated on a lot on which Marmaduke Robins lived his active years out with just a little preface. Before he bought the lot or farm it had belonged to Alfred Marsh. I for one would be glad to see the names of Marsh, Elliott, Penn Wood, names that mean a little in local circles, given to things as prominent and sticky as streets and driveways. And that can be said with special emphasis for names that in any degree at all help to recall important traditions or events, events that have some chance of echoing on and on. It is not only the bad and crippling traditions and mores that hold us in bonds; there are also good traditions some of which bind us to things ahead and to the public exertion of our freedom for the forward adventure.

How We Began

The first kind of local history that ever really interested me was Indian history. About five years ago I turned over to Mr. Coe at Chapel Hill, Indian relics man, something between a peck and a half-bushel of Indian arrows, spears, knives, needles, scrapers, bits of pottery, one or two tomahawks, one or two sinkers, all picked up amid chips lying around enough to suggest some of the things were made right there on the spot.

Mr. Coe said some of the things were pretty new and some pretty ancient in form and pattern, but I think I may be one of the few people who have first-hand knowledge of how Asheboro really began.

It began as an Indian village, that is, as an established camp-site, because nearly all of that stuff was found in Asheboro and within a little space not much bigger than the lot the court-house now stands on.

Asheboro and Randolph County are surely indebted to J. Addison Blair for getting out a pamphlet on Randolph back in 1890. He did some things well enough so that others so far have mainly copied him for the old days and I don't see how anybody can make a better book on the same subject for a while yet, though it is coming. There are some inaccuracies in it, and a whole lot of prose poetry. Here is one poetic sentiment from the book, and you want to remember that it was written seventy-one years ago:

"It might be refreshing, in this age of fashion and progress, while the effacing hand of time and change is fast obliterating every relic of the past, and every cherished emblem of domestic life has well-nigh lost its meaning and significance, to revert briefly to the simple and rustic manners of the long ago."

Maybe we have never felt that things were changing too fast and old ways fading too fast; but I doubt it until corrected.

Mr. Blair had been over the old county records which were probably better stored in the old Main Street courthouse than in this one, up to the time when Mrs. Hal M. Worth began hauling them out of the damp. I will refer to a few things he does mention and then go on with some others he does not. He tells of the founding of the two county-seats, the first one at Johnsonville where Andrew Jackson appeared to practice law in 1788. He is the source of common knowledge of the story of Faith Rock in Franklinville; and he recounts other of the harsher exploits of the Tory, David Fanning. By the way, David Fanning wrote a book afterwards telling about his Revolutionary exploits, and it might be interesting to have it reviewed.

Mr. Blair tells about Randolph being involved in the Regulator war against Governor Tryon, and praises Herman Husbands who owned more than eight thousand acres of land on Sandy Creek and Deep River before he saw the handwriting on the wall and sold all of it he could, preparatory to skipping out.

Mr. Blair calls him the leader of the Regulators at Alamance and praises

his bravery as if that were in battle. But in fact, Husbands never joined the Regulators at all, although he wielded a doughty pen in their interest and once at least signed a general circular or petition they sent around. But he was a Quaker and no man of war. He was no relation to Benjamin Franklin, as Mr. Blair seems to think he was. He also wrote a book or two about his experiences in North Carolina after he had founded a town up in Pennsylvania. One of these books was called An Impartial Relation and another A Fan for Fanning (Edward Fanning of Hillsboro, Tyron Pal). They reveal a man very clever with his pen, no doubt given to reading B. Franklin; and he was a much higher type of man, I think, than he has been represented. Like Thomas Jefferson, for a very long time his life got written up mostly by his enemies.

Mr. Blair tells about many of the early founders of the county like Martha and William Bell, and puts in a good many amusing notes. He doesn't tell about Sandy Creek Baptist Church being reduced, as others do tell, in the first summer after the battle of Alamance, from over six hundred members to twenty.

They decided they could not live under the momentarily victorious tyranny of Tryon, the man whose "palace" at New Bern we have just helped to rebuild. That was a time when we and South Carolina shared in the same kind of rebellion but they got off more lightly because of having had a more sensible or humane royal governor.

Mr. Blair doesn't tell about the county commissioners voting to build a road to cross Uwharrie at the Widow Lassiter's fish-trap, wherever that was; or at the Painted Rocks. He doesn't tell about six Hoovers from Hoover Hill and around all giving their power-of attorney to somebody in the same year and pulling out for the West.

That was when Herbert Hoover's tribe got out. Perhaps it is when originated the definition of a North Carolina gold-mine as "a hole in the ground owned by a damn fool."

He doesn't tell what the court did with the rather many "base-born" children brought before it; apprenticing them to learn "the mystery of tanning or weaving"; or "the mystery and art of black-smithing"; or the plain "art" of "spinstering." He doesn't tell how in 1792 the woods got so full of cattle, sheep and pigs, that they started the practice of marking them with a shallow-fork, an underbit, an overbit, or something in the ear. Some of us remember how that was, before stocklaw came in.

Mr. Blair doesn't mention the Manumission and Colonization Society organized to encourage people to free slaves in their wills, or churches to buy them up, or the state to do something, maybe some colonizing. This society had its center for N. C. in Guilford and Randolph. Charles Tomlinson says it once had 38 branches and 1600 members in the state. Its last president was an Asheboro lawyer.

The father of Governor Worth and Dr. John Milton Worth was a charter member, and Dr. Milton himself attended some of its last meetings. The biggest

slave-owner in Randolph, General Alexander Gray, was a member. General Gray got his start by being storekeeper in Johnsonville when that was the county seat, and he got to be a general as leader of the N. C. militia taken into national service at Wadesboro for the War of 1812. You tell me whether he went on into that war and maybe got to New Orleans to see a man he had seen practice law in Johnsonville fight the British.

Changes in our laws started many of this Manumission Society's people moving West. By no means all of them were Quakers. The Quakers had all freed their own slaves before 1800. But the Congressional district which included Guilford and Randolph was long called the Quaker District.

And Governor Worth was to the end of his days often referred to by his enemies as "that old Nantucket Quaker." That is where his people came from not too far back.

(Reprinted from an article in the Courier-Tribune, April 6, 1961, page 4B. This paper was prepared for a program for the Randolph Book Club shortly before it was published in the Courier-Tribune.)

Should be at end of sketch. T/o p. 99