

History Of The Early Life In The Town Of Ahoskie, North Carolina

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years immediately after the town's birth as a municipality extended one block west of the railroad crossing and included what is today the first block of North Railroad Street and block No. 1 of West Main Street.

Among the first couples to be married and settle in the new town, after the postoffice was established and before the period of which this chapter will tell, were Miss Nettie Hayes and A. E. Garrett, the former a daughter of Tom Hayes and the latter one of the early merchants and a native of Tennessee. They were married April 17, 1889. He later was elected sheriff of Hertford County. The Garretts added a "first" by purchase of the first residential lot offered for sale in the year from which this Golden Anniversary is dated, the bargain being made and the lot bought April 1, 1889; and then, on September 23, the first child was born in official Ahoskie, son of Mr. and Mrs. Garrett. The Garrett residential is now owned and occupied by W. H. Basnight & Company and the old home still stands on a corner of the lot.

Twenty-three years after the first real estate subdivision was made by the Mitchells, C. C. Hoggard, purchaser of the very first lot sold and builder of the first store on the west side of the railroad, was describing and reciting the things that happened in 1893, in the legal language to follow in the next paragraph. The language is that of his lawyers in the famous "No Man's Land" suit and is quoted as given under oath in the superior court of Hertford County. The following are excerpts from the complaint filed in the suit, in which Mr. Hoggard was seeking to declare the open land between North Railroad Street and A. C. L. Railroad property as public property, because of its use as a street over a number of years:

At the time said town (Ahoskie) was incorporated there were but a few people and a small number of buildings there and a railroad was in contemplation by capitalists who were eager to purchase the valuable timber in that section; and the owners of the land in which the town had been laid out were anxious to sell all the lots in the said town and near and around the depot site of the said railroad, and in order to develop their property and induce persons to purchase the same and, thereby, to induce other persons to become buyers of the rest of their valuable holdings in the said town, the defendant (Dr. Mitchell) and his father (Geo. H. Mitchell) and his brother (J. A. Mitchell) had a large portion of their said farm cut up into lots and streets and a depot site had been laid out and sold . . . and they had a plat made of same, showing the same divided into streets and avenues and certain vacant spaces . . . and the said survey and map thereof was exhibited to prospective customers and by which and according to the boundaries set out in same they sold a large number of lots.

C. C. and R. J. Hoggard bought the lot on the corner of North Railroad and Main streets, on which The Bank of Ahoskie now stands. They paid \$75.00 for the property which is described in Book S page 33 of the Hertford County Register of Deeds office. The Hoggards built their store on the corner in 1894 and C. C. Hoggard came to town from the Bethlehem section to operate the business. He later became sole owner



"THE BIG MILL" COMMISSARY

It served as storehouse and office for the Branning Company when it first began operations in Ahoskie, 1899. Among those seated in front of the place is E. J. Gerock, who came to Ahoskie with the company and was their mercantile sales manager. (More in book, *The Ahoskie Era of Hertford County*.)

of this and other property belonging to the brother partnership; and today C. C. Hoggard is still a partner in a mercantile firm with his brother-in-law, Henry W. Stokes, a native of Pasquotank County who was soon to migrate to the developing Ahoskie.

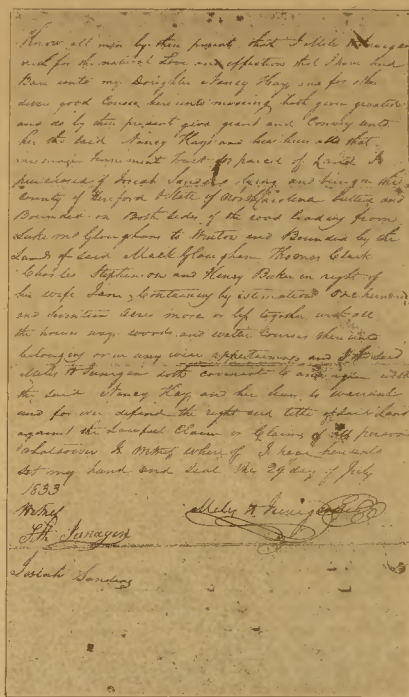
Other circumstances surrounding the sale of the Mitchell property and the layout of the Ahoskie of that day are given in the following excerpts quoted from the testimony of a number of the town's early residents, who were called in court as witnesses in the "No Man's Land" suit:

When the first building was constructed on the left side of the railroad, it had recently been plowed up and leveled down . . . Parker (A. J.) built the second store, Tillery the third. These were frame buildings . . . Dr. Sears (of Union) built south of the Parker building, then Fletcher Powell built a store, which he used for a residence and a store, and it was later burned . . . Later Mr. New-some built another store . . . and still later C. C. Hoggard built a warehouse in 1902 and Mr. Godwin (J. W.) later on built a stable there . . . Two successive fires, in 1901 and 1902, destroyed most of the block of buildings . . . Sales of lots on North Railroad Street, opposite the new depot, were made as follows: (1) C. W. Vinson, April 14, 1898; (2) Lucy Copeland, June 3, 1898; (3) W. P. New-some, December 18, 1898; and (4) W. E. Powell, March 25, 1899.

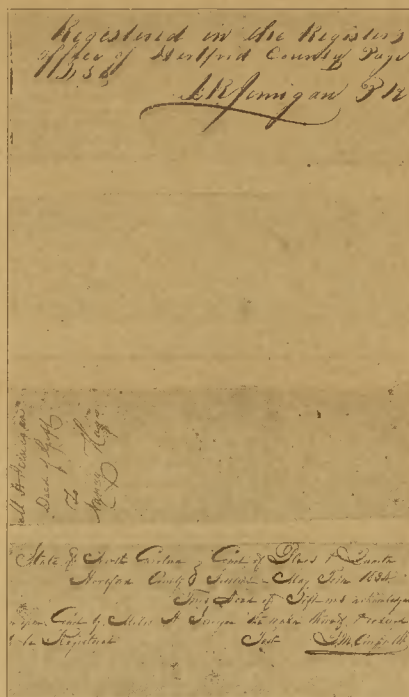
This first map of the Mitchell property was made by A. J. Parker, who came to Ahoskie from Speed, N. C., to become agent for the Norfolk & Carolina Railroad, later the A. C. L. He arrived in the town in June, 1890, and remained here until November, 1897. He was a busy man during his sojourn in town: being station agent, merchant, promoter of land sales, real estate agent, and, according to his associates of those days, an all-around good citizen, zealous for the young town's growth and eager to share in whatever progress was made, both for himself and for his employing railroad company. Not only did he act as agent for the Mitchells in the sale of their choice business blocks, but he also purchased the Clark tract of land in the northern section of town and began a residential development in the vicinity of the Negro Baptist Church.

Incomplete descriptions of lots sold off and the failure to properly register an official plat of the Mitchell property involved in this first real estate boom lay at the bottom of the future quarrel over whether the unused portion of the old Winton road was the property of the original owners or was

JERNIGAN-TO-HAYES TRANSFER OF ORIGINAL AHOSKIE DIRT



Reproduction of a deed of gift made by Miles H. Jernigan to his daughter, Nancy J. Hayes, wife of Rev. Thos. Wright Hayes. Property conveyed herein includes all of the original Hayes tract, which was later divided between Thomas and Richard Hayes, the acreages being about 100 acres, and including all of that part of the 1939 Ahoskie north of North Street and west of the A. C. L. Railroad, except the lots facing south on North Street. Tracts of this land are now owned by Ernest Hayes, J. Hayes Brett, direct descendants of Thos. Wright Hayes and Nancy J. Hayes, the grantee in this paper.



public property by dedication and use. Aside from the question of ownership of the triangle cut off by the straightening of the street, the little piece of land has helped to make Ahoskie history and even today occupies a pre-eminent place in all plans for civic improvement and development. It perhaps has been the cause of more quarrels, discussions, demonstrations, gatherings, town planning, and what not, than any and all other plots of land in Ahoskie.

J. Leonard Bell, who succeeded Parker as railroad agent in late 1894, still recalls how his attempts to make a flower garden and beauty spot out of the triangle was frustrated by unknown objectors. Writing from his home in Norfolk, Virginia, Mr. Bell says: "As the freight and passenger station was combined in a small building, I decided to beautify the grounds in front of the building by laying out a flower garden, planting some trees and set a row of posts to keep vehicles from cutting diagonally across the small area in front of the station; but some others did not agree with my plans and the first night after I had finished some one got a pair of logging cart wheels, pulled up the posts and trees. That was the last of my beautification project. I guess that Rob Roy (Copeland) remembered it; if not, Bingham will."

Further revealing information about the property that was being developed at that time is given in paragraphs from a letter written by Mr. Bell:

When I went to Ahoskie, it was then a small town laid off in a marsh and it can almost be said that it had its beginning in a mud hole. The whole area in front of the station was a marshy thicket, with all the refuse from the clearing of the right-of-way and space for the small station, freight and passenger combined, in huge piles on the edge of the woods in front of the station . . . Practically the entire site of the town at that time was in this low space. Later, when the road (The Wellington & Powellsville Railroad) was built to Windsor, all that marshy woods was cleared up . . . After the building of the railroad the town soon outstripped Aulander, took on another spurt when the road to Windsor was opened up . . . but I understand that the real growth took place after I left there, in about 1901 . . . When I was in Ahoskie, there was only one church in the place and that was the Baptist, near where J. R. Garrett lived and, as there was nothing else to do nor anywhere to go but to church on Sundays and prayer meetings Wednesdays, all turned out and the biggest task was to stay on the improvised sidewalk and not get in the ditch, as there were no lights, but some one in the crowd would have a lantern to show the way.

Early in its official life, in fact, during the four years intervening between establishment of a postoffice and its incorporation, Ahoskie began the perennial argument over the sale of legal whiskey within its limits. The voting dries have prevailed until this day, despite the periodic efforts to shatter tradition. It was during the pastorate of the late Rev. Braxton Craig, and with him as sponsor and leader, that a local vote determined that there should be no liquors sold within a mile of the Baptist Church. With the coming of the railroad and the settlement around it and the new postoffice, the church people forecast the coming of the larger town and they were fearful lest the complexion of the population be so changed by the incoming of new residents that there might be an overturn in the predominant sentiment of the natives. Therefore, they requested a vote under the prevailing local option laws, which provided machinery for voting dry or wet areas. An election was held, at which the church people and native landowners cast majority ballots for outlawing liquor sales within one mile of the Baptist Church.

That law has never been changed by any action of the voters within the area affected and today is the law insofar as it is not in conflict with repeated changes of statewide laws enacted since then. Fear that the law would be repealed if a town was incorporated generated a campaign of opposition against the 1893 act of incorporation, and Mr. Craig, still pastor of the church, led the fight against the plan to incorporate the town of Ahoskie. Though it developed that he and his supporters were wrong in their interpretation of the effects of incorporation, they were taking no chances of having their new law overturned. It had been less than three years since the territory had voted against legal liquor sales. If anything, according to older residents, this campaign over incorporation aroused the countryside and the little settlement of Ahoskie more than the prior election. There were the same arguments and the identical alleged line-ups in that fight that every subsequent campaign over sale of liquor has produced. Among the issues, of course, was the charge that the "preacher and the bootlegger had lined up together," and the charge was made, whether founded on truth or not, that some of the local storekeepers were joining up against sale of liquors because they wanted to continue to sell and make folks drunk and giddy off their potent spirits, a concoction manufactured, packaged and advertised as a patent medicine—Scheidam-Schnapps. The suggestion was made and the argument employed that, if a town were incorporated and if by the act of incorporation the local option law were repealed, then and in that event it would be legal to sell liquors in Ahoskie and, that being so, the sale of Scheidam-Schnapps would immediately slump, because folks would prefer to buy and drink the more potent legal whiskeys, gins, brandies, and other liquors. It was the same then as it has been ever since: that is, the arguments were the same.

The fight to prevent Ahoskie's incorporation was lost, but it turned out that the local option law continued in force despite it, and so it was that both sides won the argument. Lined up with Pastor Craig against the incorporation was J. D. (Doss) Downs, a storekeeper who did business on the corner of Main and Maple streets. It is said of him by those who knew him as a young man that he was an expert marksman and spent hours each day in the practice of his skill, as he lolled around the back lot of his place waiting for the trade

AN EARLY AHOSKIE AUTOMOBILE



This fact-finding and recording newspaper edition does not attempt to settle upon the first automobile to have been owned in Ahoskie. This is one of the first, and it was owned by J. H. Robertson of the wheel. The background for the picture was some of the dry kilns of the Branning Manufacturing Company. (More about the first automobiles in book, *The Ahoskie Era of Hertford County*.)

—most of it made up of persons working in logging camps and on the new railroad—to come by for their bottles of Scheidam-Schnapps. Between rounds of shot from his rifle, merchantman Downs campaigned vigorously against the proposal to incorporate, and days upon days harangued his audiences around the store on the evils of legal whiskey, predicting disaster for the new town's development should the forces of evil prevail and put over the act of incorporation.

Jack (A. J.) Parker, who initiated the movement to incorporate because of his interest in real estate generated by his recent purchase of the Clark property in the colored section of the present-day town, was as strongly in favor of the incorporation as his friend Downs was opposed to it. He became mildly alarmed at the Downs opposition and, conspiring with others who were with him on the proposition, a board of strategy was set up to plan ways and means of stifling the Downs opposition. They decided on a publicity campaign, with Parker in charge. The same age-old strategy of attacking the leader was employed: Parker wrote a poem, impugning Downs' motives for opposing the incorporation, and it was published by word of mouth through the village and even into the hinterlands. Whether the verses to follow pulled the trick or not, the record was that the act of incorporation went through as scheduled. Here is the poem:

A great discovery has been made,
A monster man been found
Who is all the time shooting
And shoots to hear the sound.

He bought a pistol with which
He hopes to reach the goal,
So he sets and shoots for hours
At a little piece of coal.

He, too, will dance a jig
While some poor fellow class,
Then hie himself away to the store
And fill himself on snaps.

The boys they made a plot
To have a corporation,
The monster stopped now on the spot
And made a short oration.

He said, "Boys, to do this thing
I think would be a sin;
Why can't you come around my way
And fill yourselves on gin?"

But when you come, don't call for gin,
But call for Scheidam-Schnapps;
I'll bet my gin will make you grin,
And dance while some one claps.

My gin is not the very best,
But tastes a little bad,
But it will cure you for I've made the test
When my kidneys hurt like mad."

The truth of the matter, say those who remember the incidents and the poem, was that Mr. Downs was courting Miss Nannie Wilson, a school teacher who boarded in the home of Pastor Craig, and that his sustained show of opposition to the incorporation and for strict prohibition was just one part of his love stratagem. He was courting teacher and preacher, and to make sure Mr. Craig learned of his fervent attachment for

AMONG AHOSKIE'S FIRST FAMILIES



ROBERT AND MARTHA VANN HOLLOMAN, both members of leading Hertford County families, moved to Ahoskie in the early 1890s and helped to make the town by spreading its fame at home and abroad through the first commercial hotel and boarding house. The Holloman children still own and reside in the old home, East Church Street. Mr. Holloman came to Ahoskie as a representative of the Farmers Alliance, from his home near Union. He was prominent in the early life of the town, in municipal affairs and as churchman. Mrs. Holloman was the sister of Dr. Richard T. Vann, Raleigh, N. C.

prohibition, Downs was daily preaching the cause of temperance and against the evils of whiskey. It must have worked—a perfect campaign and faultless strategy! Miss Wilson became the bride of Downs and they built a home in the block next to preacher Craig's. It is the home now occupied by Mr. and Mrs. J. L. Mitchell, next door to the Holloman residence.

Even after the incorporation, continued efforts were made to provide for legal sale of liquor in the town, and during the period between 1893 and 1899 there were repeated movements to upset the local option law but, according to a citizen of that day who no longer lives in the town, "whenever there was a movement on foot to allow it, there would be lengthy petitions from the church people and a longer one from the colored church." Even after Pastor Craig had left, the liquor fight continued and Rev. J. K. Fant, the next pastor, also had to lead his church folks in campaigns against rising sentiment for legal sale.

Of illegal sales of whiskey in Ahoskie during the early days, the following testimony is given by a former resident:

Ahoskie was a dry town, with saloons in Winton, Union, Aulander, Powellsville, Colerain, Windsor and Harrellsville. This law (forbidding sales within 1 mile of the Baptist Church) was found to be analogous with the National Prohibition law, for old Eli Williamson, with his market basket, would always furnish pints of Old Henry Whiskey for 30 cents when the saloons in Union were charging 25 cents, and would always oblige the 'teen age boys with any quantity they wanted, but there never was an open saloon in Ahoskie.

Another Ahoskie native who moved away to a distant state several years ago adds another name to that of Williamson. He says Bud Bynum was the town's leading bootlegger and that he went about making sales unmolested by the law and was winked at by many of the leading citizens, who were

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