

How Town Of North Wilkesboro Began

Historical Account Of Origin Of Town Of North Wilkesboro Given

J. R. Finley Gives Account Of His Recollection Of Town's Beginning

By J. R. FINLEY

The Richmond and Danville Railroad Company was building the Yadkin Valley division of the Cape Fear and Yadkin Valley Railroad Company from Rural Hall to Wilkesboro under condition that the county of Wilkes issue the Railroad Company one hundred thousand dollars in county bonds when the railroad was completed to within one mile of the court house. The advanced engineers had made the survey to within one mile of the court house and stopped the survey on the north side of the river. To save the expense of building a bridge across the Yadkin River, the depot would be located on the north side.

As the railroad came very close to Captain Blair's residence, he moved his family to Winston-Salem for educational purposes as well as to get away from the unpleasantness while the railroad was being built, and leased his home and farm to the Railroad Company. His residence was occupied by the engineering corps for the railroad company and on part of the farm shanties were built for the grade force, consisting of something like three hundred negroes. As these negroes would at pay day go through the farm that was being cultivated by J. T. and J. R. Finley, they conceived the idea that it would be a good plan to build a store near this camp and went to see Mr. A. W. Finley about a location for the store.

Mr. A. W. Finley stated that as soon as the Railroad company had definitely settled the location of the depot but as nothing definite had been done about that, he agreed to sell a small lot at the cross roads. This cross road was one running east and west up the river and the other coming north and south from Traphill to Wilkesboro, and when he went to locate the lot on the corner of the cross roads, Mr. Finley said we must not get too close to his straw stacks as he was afraid they would be burned, and we could not go back beyond the gate coming into the cattle barn.

so the lot we bought at that time was thirty-three by seventy-five and in December of 1889, my brother and I with the assistance of one of the neighbor boys began to build our store house and we had it completed and goods in it so we opened up the sixteenth of January, 1890. This was the first store building ever opened in what is now North Wilkesboro and it was located on what is now part of the site of the Forest Furniture company. We bought the groceries from L. C. Younger Grocery Company in Richmond, Virginia and they were shipped to Taylorsville and hauled over by us from there here.

While we were building, Mr. W. M. Absher, who was a county merchant at Dockery, bought a lot just across the road from us and was having a store building put up on this lot and he opened up his store in about one month or six weeks after our opening.

A number of the county people became interested in the situation and Mr. A. W. Finley promised to contract several locations for business buildings to be sold and located as soon as the depot had been finally located and necessary survey made. Mr. John Wilson, young engineer, was employed to make a survey, which he had partially completed when a promoter, Mr. W. F. Trogdon, from Greensboro, N. C. came to North Wilkesboro and took options on the farm of Mr. A. W. Finley and Captain E. S. Blair and some of the heirs of William Finley. After getting this option, Mr. Trogdon sold stock in the development company, most of it to Winston and also some Greensboro parties and a few local people. In the meantime, Mr. A. W. Finley died on Dec. 30, 1889, and the survey that was being made by young engineer Wilson was stopped and until the option was either taken up or expired, Mr. Trogdon succeeded in selling stock enough to take up the option in the name of the Winston Land and Improvement Company.

The directors in the Winston Land and Improvement Company consisted principally of Winston people. In fact it consisted of Colonel Winstead of Greensboro, Captain Holden, Chief Engineer for the Richmond-Danville Rail-

Writes Article



J. R. Finley, North Wilkesboro's first postmaster and now one of the city's most prominent industrialists, has written a historical account of the founding of this city.

road Company, W. M. Hinshaw, Dr. W. L. Brown and Mr. P. H. Hanes of Winston-Salem, and Mr. A. A. Finley, of North Wilkesboro.

Previous to this option cleared out the town was known as "Gordon" due to the fact that it was originally the homestead of the Gordons. In fact the father of General John B. Gordon of the Confederate Army, who was later sent from Georgia to the United States Senate was born in what was then known as the "Red House" on top of the hill in the center of North Wilkesboro, which is now known as Kensington. Mr. A. W. Finley had bought this land a number of years ago and the home place was known as "Fairmount."

When the railroad was finally built, so the train could be run within one mile of the Court House, the depot was located at the present site of the depot and the people who had contracts for lots from Mr. A. W. Finley began to build stores. Mr. J. F. Dimmette started a brick store building on main street, the same building which is now occupied by Princess Cafe. About the same time Mr. L. A. Jarvis started the brick store building on Ninth and B Street, which is now occu-

pled by Brame Drug Company. Mr. J. S. Forester built a frame building on the corner now occupied by the Call Hotel. Mr. W. A. McLean built a frame building on the location of the present bus station. These were all used for store buildings and built by county men. The Hotel Gordon was located on the lot which was promised by Mr. A. W. Finley to J. T. and J. R. Finley, which was north of the depot. These lots were all reserved from the option to the Winston Land and Improvement Company and together with some residence lots farther back up in town. The Hotel Gordon lot extended from B Street back to C Street and is now occupied by the Bank of North Wilkesboro and Hotel Wilkes on B Street and various other buildings running back to C Street.

As stated above the town was called "Gordon" and the writer was appointed postmaster for the town of Gordon. The post office was put up in our store building. After the Winston Land and Improvement Co. got possession of their property, they decided that the name should be changed so as to have Wilkesboro in it and they finally decided to call it North Wilkesboro, the present name of the town. So the post office Gordon was discontinued and the post office was named North Wilkesboro and I was re-appointed postmaster for North Wilkesboro and held this office for several years.

The grade force and track line force completed the track to where the depot now stands on August 30th with special car of Colonel A. B. Andrews, Vice President of Richmond-Danville Railroad Company came to what is now North Wilkesboro and brought the one hundred thousand dollar bond that was voted by Wilkes County to this railroad company to have them sign up by Mr. Rufus Colvard, who was (Continued on page two)

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