

# The Laurinburg Exchange

SECTION FOUR

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## Laurinburg, Its Past, Present and Future

**An Intimate Picture of the Men and Forces That Have Made the Town and the Promise of a Rich and Golden Future.**

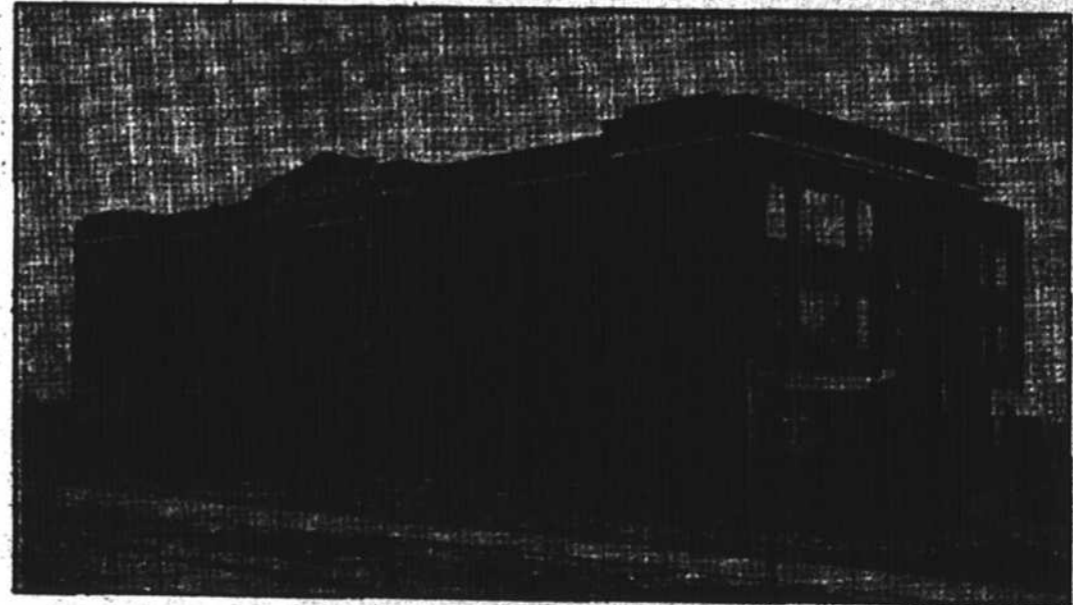
(By T. T. COVINGTON, SR.)

Should we linger at length over incidents of the long ago and dive too far into the dusty archives of a dim and dreamy past, please attribute our weakness, Mr. Editor, to the well-known fact that old folks are prone to be reminiscent—to live over the days gone by and to view everything from a retrospective rather than from a prospective angle. There are yet living only a few of the old citizens, the old landmarks, to tell the tale of former days, some fifty or sixty years ago, when Laurinburg was yet in an embryonic state and had not yet won the distinction of being on the map. This nameless infant was then referred to as "The Gin" and "The Store"—the first name being applicable to a public gin operated at a point near the present residence of Judge W. H. Neal on Church street, and the latter name to a general store located near the old public school building. A little later, it is said, that a postoffice was established, with the name of Laurinburg, in honor of an old and prominent Scotch family, the McLaurins. Thus, by omitting the prefix "Mac" and adding "burg," the hitherto nameless waif became worthy of a name. About this time the old Wilmington, Charlotte and Rutherford railroad, surveyed by Capt. W. L. Everett, reached Laurinburg in good time to transport a company of loyal and brave soldiers known as the "Scotch Boys," composed of the flower and manhood of this community. The old W. C. & R. railroad, with repair shops at Laurinburg, was later on called the Carolina Central. The building of this road was entirely suspended by the Civil War, but not until rails had been laid to Old Hundred, which name was suggested by the fact that this point measured exactly one hundred miles from the Cape Fear river at Wilmington. It was the purpose of the engineers, with Wilmington as a starting point, to run a line due west

and as the crow flies, as far as possible. The one hundred miles, terminating at Old Hundred, was mapped out without bend or curve in the entire distance. At that time, it is said, that this was the longest stretch of absolutely straight road in the world. The original railroad repair shops at Laurinburg were incomplete and primitive, but, before they were removed in 1893 to Raleigh and Portsmouth, locomotives, complete in every detail, were turned out by the hands of skilled workmen. The same sites now occupied by the Seaboard passenger and freight stations were at that time covered by machine shops and car sheds. The first master mechanic of the railroad shops, who located here permanently, was Capt. W. A. Gill, who later resigned for mercantile pursuits and who was succeeded by Capt. James Maglenn, who remained at the head of the shops here until same were moved in 1893. Captain Gill started in life as a locomotive engineer, and it may be interesting at this point to state that, at one time employed as fireman on his engine, was none other than the notorious Henry Berry Lowry, the bandit chief of Scottletown. Lowry was familiar with Laurinburg and its environs at that date, but then he bore a good reputation. The original depot, was a modest affair and occupied practically the same space now covered by the Stewart Filing station, just across the railroad from the Gregg Hardware Co. Col. John C. McLaurin, one of the old settlers, was station master. Business and traffic centered around the old depot, for within a stone's throw two young men from eastern Carolina, Bissell & Murray, established a wholesale and retail farm supply business. They bought cotton and naval stores and sold everything needed on the farm. The building occupied by this firm is still standing, known as Bissell Hall and is perhaps the oldest building now standing in the business section, having been built in the late sixties or early seventies. Just across the railroad from the old depot and on the spot now occupied by Gregg Brothers was located the old Bundy Hotel, a refuge for the weary traveler and conducted by T. C. Bundy, a genial and entertaining host. Old citizens will recall a very sad and shocking accident that befell two young men, native sons, while at this hotel during a severe electrical storm, both

being instantly killed by electricity. One was a Mr. McKinnon and the other a McLaurin, companions who had reached young manhood. Just why Main street is narrow and runs practically north and south instead of some other direction, has never been explained, unless it was the will of the original owners, these being Capt. W. H. McLaurin, Col. J. T. Roper, Michael Cronly and others. A stranger passing along Main street would not discover that the sidewalk on the east side is built up some five or six feet in order to level it with the west side. Thus it appears that the original map of Laurinburg was planned without regard to precision of measurements, location of streets or beauty of design. However, builders of towns and cities cannot always choose the direction in which developments shall spread. Other influences may determine this. The first building erected on Main street was located on the lot now occupied by Eddie Daw. This was of wooden construction and never painted. It was at one time occupied by Capt. S. M. Thomas, who dealt largely in farm implements and was a strong advocate of Starke's Disc Plow, which had a phenomenal sale throughout this territory. This building was also occupied at one time by Everett Bros. & Gill, who later erected a store on the site now covered by the store of Mr. Jno. F. McNaif. Old observers will recall the large pine tree, of short leaf variety, that stood at the rear entrance of Everett & Gill's place of business. When some of the older citizens, including such men as L. W. McLaurin, James Lytch, J. T. John and others of like type, came to town in those days it was their want to tether their horses under the shade of this tree, which stood the storms of many years until the ruthless hand of progress no longer appreciated its services. From the late sixties to the early seventies all that space extending from Main street and on a line with the Baptist church was nothing more than an old discarded field covered with scrubby pines, without buildings of any kind and with no evidences of development. Annual tournaments, under the auspices of young men, were pulled off here to the delight of a throng of visitors from far and near. These were indeed gala occasions! A race course, beginning at a point near Main street and extending out

Laurinburg High School



The Laurinburg High School for a number of years has been an accredited high school. Its graduates have made enviable records in nearly all the higher institutions of the State.

by and beyond the Baptist church, was laid off with a grandstand about the center. The contest was between knights at full speed on horseback to determine who could get the greatest number of "rings" and "heads." A big ball at Bissell Hall at night was the climax of the occasion, at which time the successful knight crowned his best girl as "Queen of Love and Beauty." Some of the contestants were such young men as W. H. McLaurin, Hugh Stewart, Angus McCall, Milton McIntyre, Stacy Sunday and others. Commercially Laurinburg made rapid strides, beginning about 1876 and for a decade thereafter. A large volume of trade poured in from adjoining counties, including the border county in South Carolina. This was prior to the completion of the old Cape Fear & Yadkin Valley railroad, running from Mount Airy via Fayetteville to Bennettsville. Bennettsville and Clio merchants, having no

railroad connections with the outside world, shipped most, if not all, of their cotton from Laurinburg. They also received here heavy shipments of fertilizers, groceries and other goods for transportation by wagon to their stores in Marlboro county. In addition to approximately twelve or fifteen grocery and general stores on Main street at this period, there were thirteen open saloons for the sale of whiskey. It would be uncharitable to say that these barrooms obtained their support entirely from local patronage; probably the larger patronage came from adjoining territory in which prohibition obtained. During this period the safety and peace of citizens and of property owners especially was seriously menaced by oft repeated fires—conflagrations that would sweep almost the entire Main street. The frequency of these fires were not made of the noble achievements of Prof. W. G. Casperson, who established a high school here in night, led to the belief that they were of incendiary origin. It also made the insurance companies suspicious and their rates became almost prohibitive on property in the business district. Each fire was followed rapidly by the creation of larger and better buildings, usually with insurance money. The only actual loss to the property owner was the interruption of business in the interval between the fires. This frequency of fires continued until the town authorities made it prohibitive to erect other than brick buildings in the business center. Hence then the supposition has been dispelled that firebugs and incendiaries dwelt among us. Educationally Laurinburg has always maintained her position at the forefront. Any historical references to the past of Laurinburg would be negligently incomplete if mention were not made of the noble achievements of Prof. W. G. Casperson, who established a high school here in night, led to the belief that they were

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