

# Education And Mica Vital Factors Here 80 Years Ago

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By SILAS McDOWELL

I have just reached home from a tour of observation in relation to the condition of Macon County and her prospects in the future, and will confine this article to two items, to wit: her promise of intellectual and money prospects.

At the head of the first of these stands Prof. George Jones, who is actively conducting a high school at Franklin, with near 70 students, mostly young ladies and gentlemen, one half of whom are from a distance — and still they are coming! — a fast growing institution. Beside this, there are said to be popular and well conducted schools at Cowee and Holly Springs, but these I did not visit.

My further observation was confined to the county's grand Money lift by means of her Mica mines, and on this subject I have material that would make a book — Don't be alarmed, I won't write it! Suffice it to say, mica is on Macon's brain and an insane asylum would be, to many of her citizens, a money saving institution. — men, now dissipating their substantial means into smoke and sound, driving tunnels into the bowels of rock-ribbed mountains in search after mica mines.

A few of these men have been lucky, found valuable mica mines, and are now polluting the county

with greenback, and one of these fortunate men has directed his attention to a new enterprise, and is now trying to tunnel the state of South Carolina!

The mines that pay well are conducted by the following gentlemen — Albert Bryson, mine located in Nantahala mountain; N. G. Allman, mine one and one-half miles west of Franklin; Thad P. Siler, 1 1/2 miles north of Franklin. These mines are worked by large forces, and as their yield is abundant, and pay for mica immediate and prompt, the thing begins to show.

Mining for mica in North Carolina has sprung a couple of problems for the archeologist and historian to solve, to wit — All the mica veins that make a visible outcrop at the surface of the earth have, in some remote period of past Time, been worked and the mica taken there from as deep down as intervening rocks that would have required iron tools and gunpowder for their removal. These ancient works are all in the form of open cuts into the vein from the surface downward.

Beside these, there are works found in a different form that evince the operator to have been a more recent and civilized people. These consist of well cut shafts reaching perpendicularly to great depths into the earth but now all filled up to the mouths. These evidently were not sunk for mica. Two of these have been re-opened, one of which was opened recently,

and within seven miles of Franklin on Totla Creek, and by Lyle and Bryson.

Since being re-opened, this shaft presents a clean square cut seven feet wide and 60 deep; but they have not yet reached the bottom. In cleaning it out, they found the hind-part of a human skull at the depth of 16 feet. At the depth of 40 feet were found two cranks for each end of a windlass 14 inches long. (Editor's Note: These cranks are now in possession of Mrs. T. W. Porter.)

At the depth of 50 feet were found a pick-axe with a heavy pole for driving, and also a gad, for splitting rocks. All these tools are of excellent workmanship and the pick-axe has the manufacturer's trade mark stamped upon it. This is the whole story.

The problem that antiquarians must solve is this — what people, and at what time, mined these mica veins? Were it the mound builders? Furthermore, who were the civilized people who sunk the more recent shafts? Was it De Soto and his band?

History, I think, settles that question, as it records the fact that Desoto and his men in quest of the precious metals landed at Tamy-bay and marched N. West through the flat country and at length reached the mountains at the head of the large river, and there spent the summer of 1540. To my mind, that question is disposed of; but the Moundbuilder is still a mystery.

# Incidents Of Long Ago Re-Told

By CAPTAIN O. SANDERS

An old woman, who said she was 107 years old, told me years ago about an incident when she was first married.

She and her husband, she said, built a log house high off the ground, with a dirt floor.

When her husband was gone one night, she had to sit up all night and carry fire on a board shovel from the fireplace to throw on the noses of the bears outside to keep them away.

My grandmother told me, when I was just a little boy, about a trip from Clay County, where she was reared, to Macon to visit her kinfolks. The only way to get there was by a trail over Chunky Gal Mountain.

On the way, she said, she passed an old house full of panthers, playing. When she came along, they started jumping at the horse she was riding. How she managed to stay in the saddle, the way he jumped, she said she did not know.

An old Negro once told me about one of the first buildings put up in Franklin.

He said his wife cooked for the men working on the building, for 50 cents a week — and she took her pay in old clothes!

All the trucks are not with automobiles.

In 1900, Raleigh Lowe drove a team across Wallace Mountain, on the first road built across that mountain, headed for Franklin. When he drove into the gap, the team ran away. The wagon failed to make the first curve and ran into a tree, killing one of the horses.

Macon County has 21 peaks 5,000 or more feet above sea level. In the spring of 1904, Franklin was rejoicing that the Tallulah Falls Railway was expected to be built as far north as Clayton, Ga., by July 1.

# Letter Of 1862 Tells Of War In Eastern N. C.

By MRS. LESLIE YOUNG

Below is a letter written July 29, 1862.

This letter was found by my father-in-law, the late Jacob I. Young, in the family Bible of his parents, William and Ruth Moore Young.

The Bible had been in the hands of several of the young children and misplaced for several years. When it was given to Mr. Young, a few years prior to his death in 1951, by a neighbor who had come into possession of it, it contained the letter.

Mr. Young had no knowledge of the writer, but as there were several Parkers in this county about the turn of the century, perhaps someone seeing the letter printed will recognize the name.

The letter was written on a small, frayed sheet of paper, evi-

dently torn from a small pocket notebook.

To me, the letter is a tender gesture of a husband to ease the worry and heartache of the wife of a soldier, who was like wives through the ages standing behind the soldiers of all wars with troubled hearts and prayerful lips.

The letter follows, with the spelling reproduced as it appears in the old manuscript:

"July 29, 1862

"Dear Wife

"This is to certify that I am well this morning. I stated in my letter on yesterday that it was expected that we would have to fight fourth with but I can say to you that our Colonel had returned from down towards Newburn and he says that the Yankees are going back towards Newburn and he says that he don't think we will have any fighting

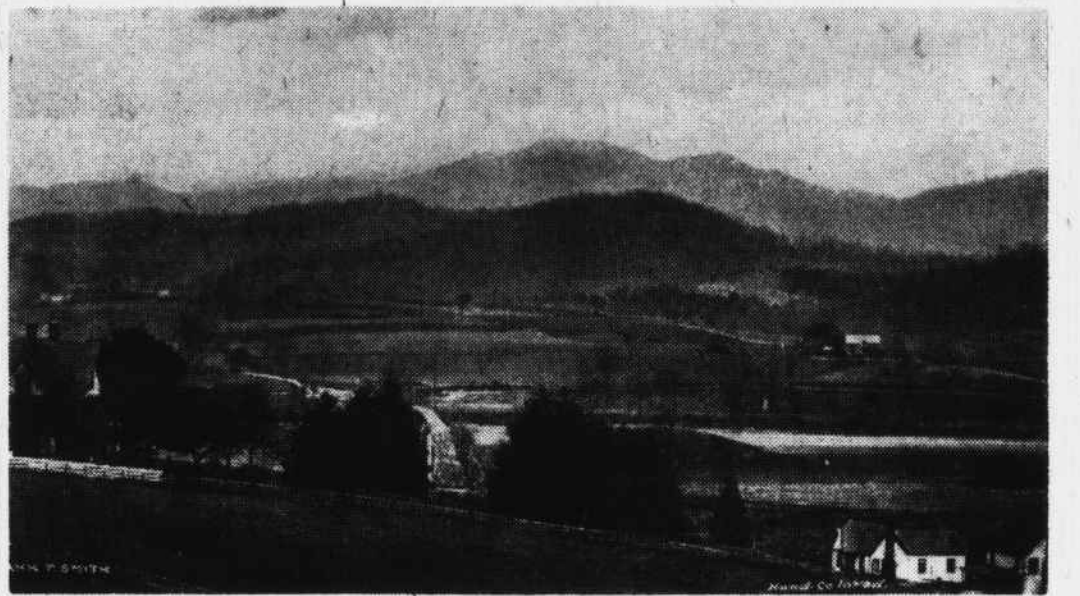
now. The Yankees have only taken one Company of our Cavalry. I wrote this morning and have my letter to brake open to put it in. So no more.  
"David Parker".

# Schools In Franklin Valued At \$727,000

School buildings within the corporate limits of Franklin are valued at nearly three-quarters of a million dollars. The Franklin school structures are listed as worth \$547,000, and the East Franklin Elementary school as \$180,000, a total of \$727,000. The Negro school here, a new structure, is outside the town limits.

# 55 Schools Operating In This County In 1885

Semi-public schools were first established here in 1875, and by 1885 there were 50 white and five Negro schools in operation in Macon County.



This is the way East Franklin looked some 40 years ago. The exact date of the picture is not known, but the above cut is a reproduction of a post card (addressed to Mrs. John M. Norton, who loaned the picture) that was postmarked in 1916. At the extreme left is the old Bryson place, now the home of Mr. and Mrs. T. W. Porter. The house at extreme lower right (with red roof) is the home of Mrs. T. W. Angel, Sr.

# In 60's, Town Missed Being Burned To Ground By Margin Of One Day

By JAMES ROBINSON DANIELS

If General Lee had surrendered one day later, Federal troops would have burned Franklin to the ground in 1865. A town in ashes might never have recovered. Or it might have been rebuilt on a different site. Certainly our community would be the poorer without the time-mellowed homes that date from "Before the War."

All this is speculation. The grim fact is that Col. George W. Kirk marched his Union regiment from Asheville to Macon County in the twilight of the Confederacy. He was intent on arson because: "I have heard that Franklin is the hottest hole in Rebeldom." Kirk planned to make it even hotter.

The day before his mounted infantry reached here, however, a courier brought him word of the surrender at Appomattox. Kirk kept on. Those Secesh needed a lesson, anyway.

## Enter Franklin

Detouring widely, Kirk's troops entered Franklin by every possible road. They converged on the Courthouse, and sought to overawe the citizens. On their bridle reins jingled silver spoons, looted from homes all the way to Tennessee. Ropes for torture and for hangings were part of their equipment.

Stomping into Dixie Hall, on Main Street next to the Courthouse, Kirk declared it was now his headquarters. He met an icy reception from Mrs. Julius T. Siler, its mistress.

Her only son, William P. Siler, had enlisted at 15 and was with the Army of Northern Virginia. Her husband, a Captain, C. S. A., was on sick leave. Her son-in-law, Capt. James L. Robinson, was likewise an ill man. The Army doctors in Richmond had sent him home "to die." (He didn't, for I am his grandson.) Both the captains, to avoid capture as prisoners of war, had taken to the woods an hour before. Kirk's "lamb" were ruthless with Rebel officers.

## Same Over County

Throughout Macon County the situation was the same: Only old men, boys, and the physically unfit remained. The rest were in the Confederate Army, though some were now being paroled and starting the long journey back.

At the door of Dixie Hall Mrs. Siler had a warning for Col. Kirk. "If your men pull up all the vegetables and ransack the smokehouse, you will have nothing to eat." He gave an order, and the senseless destruction stopped instantly. George Washington Kirk liked his vittles and plenty of them.

His order, of course, did not extend to nonedible booty. Some of Kirk's men were honest Unionists. Others were de-

serters from both the Blue and the Gray, with a liberal mixture of just plain criminals. They had joined his outfit in the expectation of little fighting and a lot of stealing. And they were not disappointed.

## "We'll Burn Your House"

Riding up to a Macon homestead, they would ask: "Got any gold or silver? No? Well, we'll burn your house." After piling straw around the outside, the scoundrels would strike a match. "Your last chance to save the place. Sure you ain't got no hard money?" They would light the straw. Generally the owner would break under this pressure and reveal his little treasure. If an owner held out stoutheartedly — or if he actually had no money — Kirk's ruffians might put out the fire and go on to the next farm. Or they might apply greater cruelty.

At the home of Barak and Mary Nicholson Norton, in Whiteside Cove, the so-called soldiers strung up Mary by her thumbs. Her husband was in hiding to escape a worse fate. She refused to give up her gold. A razor slashed her throat, not deeply but enough to make the blood drip fast. She would not tell; and they grudgingly cut her ropes. That same night Kirk's ruffians murdered her son, a former Confederate soldier, at his nearby home.

## Tricks Kirk

Perhaps they would have killed Jesse Siler Robinson at Dixie Hall if they had realized what he did on May 11, 1865. Jesse, younger brother of James L. Robinson, returned from service in the 6th N. C. Cavalry on that day. He was compelled to take the oath of allegiance before Col. Kirk. In swearing, Jesse held up his left hand "out of disrespect for Kirk, and not for the U. S. Government."

Jesse's parole, signed by the Colonel at "Headquarters, Franklin, N. C.," is still in the possession of his children. Years later he married the granddaughter of the unvanquished Mary N. Norton.

Maybe Kirk didn't know a left hand from a right. He wasn't too stupid, though, to miss the act of Alice Siler Robinson, daughter of his unwilling hostess — if he had seen it. Alice, aged 17, was bursting with contempt for the rascals who were disgracing the Federal Army. She expressed it in the only way she could:

## Spits On Flag

Quietly, her hoopskirts rustling, she crept up to the second story porch of Dixie Hall. From the railing hung the sign of Federal headquarters: the Stars and Stripes. With great deliberation, Alice spat upon the flag.

Then she went downstairs and told her mother. Great-grandmother Siler instructed Alice to say nothing to anyone about this insult to the invaders. Great-grandmother had her house overrun by a band of power-drunken gorillas in blue uniforms. She must feed the beasts, and hope that they would stay reasonably peaceful, choking back her fears and loathing.

Beside the outrages which Kirk's gangsters were committing in Macon, Mary Coleman Siler knew how they had treated her father's home in Buncombe County. Opening the spigots of the molasses barrels, the despoilers had flooded the cellar with stickiness. The contents of feather beds were then stirred into the mess. Finally, bucketsful of molasses-and-feathers were flung onto walls, ceilings, and furniture.

## Ultimate in Deviltry

This, it seems to me, is the ultimate in ingenious deviltry. Would Kirk leave a similar reminder when he left Dixie Hall? Nightly Great-grandmother prayed against the possibility. The prayers of the righteous are answered. As Kirk prepared to depart he told her, politely enough:

"I regret, Madam, that I am unable to pay for the hospitality you have extended to me and my staff. Unfortunately, in fording one of your swift mountain streams, my purse was swept away." He bowed graciously.

Anxious to get him out at any cost, she said not a word as an orderly clanked past with the swords of Capt. Robinson and Capt. Siler. The garret hiding place had been discovered. The silver, in a secret hold under the house, was safe.

## Ride Away

So George Kirk and his ruffians rode away to even greater infamy in Eastern North Carolina during the troubles of Reconstruction.

The Macon County people whose ancestors he robbed and murdered are completely Reconstructed nowadays. If you don't believe it, look at the front of the Courthouse. Julius T. Siler donated half the land on which the Courthouse stands, and all of the open square on the west side of it. This was his contribution to the public welfare.

On that Courthouse wall appear in bronze the names of descendants of Rebels who have fought — and died — in the two World Wars for our United States.

Figures compiled half a century ago showed that Franklin had an average summer temperature of 72 degrees, and a winter average of 45.



Here's how West Franklin looked about the turn of the century. The photo (loaned by Miss Lassie Kelly) appears to have been taken from a point southwest of the intersection of West Main Street and the Georgia Road (Maple Street). Center foreground is the Leach house at that intersection. Note there was no Bidwell Street then. Just beyond the

intersection is the Jones home, and to the right the home of Mr. and Mrs. Frank I. Murray. In the background, at the extreme left, is the Isaac Ashe home, to its right the Academy (now the Franklin Terrace), then the Methodist Church, and at the right, just back of the Blaine house (recently was razed to make way for the new town hall), an old granery.



This photo was made in the Bank of Franklin some 30 years ago. The building burned in 1940. Left to right are the late Dr. S. H. Lyle, chairman of the board; Henry W. Cabe, cashier; the late Lee Crawford, president; and George Dean, assistant cashier. (Photo loaned by Mrs. W. B. McGuire).