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PROGRESSIVE WILLIAMSTON

Williamston -- A Sketch

Williamston, the capital of Martin County, North Carolina, is situated on the right bank of the Roanoke river, sixty miles from the Atlantic coast, and was laid out in 1774. Prior to that date, the place was known as "Tar Landing" on the "Moratock" River, as the Roanoke was then called. The name "Tar Landing" was gained from the fact that a large number of barrels of tar was taken at the wharf by vessels to the West Indies and other points, and these brought in return sugar, molasses, salt and other commodities. At this time and for many years later, small stores were built at the wharf and business conducted therein. Gradually the town progressed and moved up higher to the hill, where not many years ago ruins of some of those old buildings were torn away. For years there was not a business house beyond the spot where the City Hall now stands, and the "Yellowly Inn", the chief hostelry of that day, is now known as the "old hotel". Just above the hill and on the right, stood the first Court House and jail, these being situated on the Hunter farm of which the Wilson farm is now a part. Later another building was erected, which was burned in 1885 and nearly all the old records except land records, were destroyed. The present Court House was erected at a cost of \$20,000, and is a large, commodious brick structure with the jail in the rear on the same lot.

The early history of the town has much to do with the families of the Smithwicks, Yellowlys, Hunters and Williams, who were of splendid English stock and laid the foundation upon which future generations built. These were noted for conservatism—a quality which has been inherent in the blood of every builder for good in the town and community.

Prior to the Civil War and after, men like Doctrine Bagley, Cushing B. Hassell, Judge Asa Biggs (who was elected United States Senator but was not allowed to serve his term), Jesse Stubbs, Jos. D. Biggs and others made for the material and moral uplift of the town and county, so that today their influence still lives, though all have been many long years in the land beyond. The days during the war were dark ones, and Foster's Army with ruthless hands, left their vile impress on the homes of the town, destroying and making waste what the brave women had gathered, while husband and brother were fighting for the Southland. Residences were used as slaughter pens and stables to shelter the Northern steeds.

After reconstruction days which tried the hearts of men and women, the inhabitants gathered renewed energy and soon thereafter the town became actively commercial. The large mercantile establishments of C. B. Hassell, W. H. Carstarphen, William Slade and Biggs & Simmons with, others, combined with the large shingle industries of

Dennis Simmons and Rhodes Brothers caused a revival in business and money began to circulate more freely. Farming, too, had been revived and labor was plentiful. The building of the railroad from Tarboro to a point on the river, where trains connected with a daily mail boat, marked an important period in the history of the town. Several years later, the A. C. L. R. R., extended its line to Plymouth and the daily boat was discontinued, though freight steamers have regular schedules and carry large cargoes of farm products to the Norfolk market. Thus Williamston and the adjoining country have the advantage of both rail and water transportation, which saves thousands of dollars in freights yearly. The Norfolk Southern Railroad has two boats which make regular trips, and this competition between rail and water enables a Williamston merchant to offer goods at a lower rate than those at points removed from the river. This fact is very appreciable in the large shipments of fertilizers in the spring season.

Though Williamston is situated on the Roanoke River in what some suppose the malarial district, it has fewer mosquitoes than Greensboro, Raleigh or Asheville. Hence its inhabitants rarely have chills. Natural slopes and deep ravines combined with a sandy soil, make almost a perfect drainage, rendering it one of the healthiest towns in the State.

Perhaps no town in North Carolina has suffered more from fire. In the year 1883, the entire business section reaching to Smithwick Street was totally destroyed. The erection of brick building began as early as practicable, but since that period there have been several fires which destroyed large business houses. But these were soon replaced and the courage of this people remained undaunted. For several years, however, the town has owned two excellent fire engines, one a small chemical engine which has never failed to do effective work when properly charged and operated. For a number of years no fire has occurred in the business portion of the town.

Within the past twenty years new streets have been opened, Main Street extended and many residences in every portion of the town have been erected. Haughton Street extending from Main towards the cemetery, is one of the most beautiful sections of the town, containing handsome residences, attractive shade trees and a sand-clay driveway, which delights the autoists and others who drive over it. Fifteen years ago this section of the town was known as the "Hassell Field" and corn was cultivated thereon. That part of Williamston familiarly called "New Town" was laid out many years after the incorporation of the town. It is the highest elevation in the town, contains some handsome residences, lovely shade trees, the best drinking water, and is joined on the Southeast by the farms of J. W. Watts and Marshal D. Wilson, on which are situated two of the handsomest homes in this section. It may be interesting to state

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Our Tobacco Market

The culture of tobacco in Martin County has not reached its majority, yet the quality of the weed has a world-wide reputation. The adaptability of the soil and the quickness of the farmers to acquaint themselves with the most advanced ideas as to cultivation and curing, have made some of the finest crops seen in any of the tobacco-growing States. Here it is seen in its perfection, the broad green leaves turning later into a bright golden sheet, for which the tobacco world is clamoring. In 1902, was seen the incorporation of the Martin County Warehouse Tobacco Co., in Williamston.

And two large warehouses with three prize houses were erected for the sale of the weed. The market has continued with unabated interest every year since, and has handled large quantities of the County's crop and much from other points. The year of 1914, has found the market with a strength equal to any in the tobacco belt, and far greater than many on which growers sell their leaf. The market opened on September 2nd., with a tremendous break and prices best in East Carolina. Every day since, the farmers have been given the very highest marks for the grades offered, and several days the banks have remained open to cash the checks for the convenience of the farmers.

At no time in the history of the market, has there been a stronger corps of buyers here and the competitive purchasing has made the sales interesting from every point. Representatives of the Export Leaf, American, Liggett & Myers, R. J. Reynolds, Imperial, Taylor & Co., Boyd & Co., and several independent buyers bid against the active warehousemen, who are giving every pile on the floor its full value.

These buyers are all trained men—they know tobacco and have had years of experience with the companies which they represent.

Dixie Warehouse

J. G. Staton and J. W. Hight have been proprietors of the Dixie Warehouse for two years, the former having recently purchased the entire property of the Warehouse Company. Both are trained in the growth and sale of the weed, and the largest sales of this season have been on their floor. Mr. Hight is auctioneer and with Mr. Staton gives personal attention to every pile brought there for sale or for grading. The office force is active and capable and careful attention is given every detail of the business, which is helping to build a splendid reputation for the Williamston market.

Roanoke Warehouse

The Roanoke Warehouse this year is under the management of Messrs. Joe Taylor, M. D. Mobley and Hugh M. Burras, a trio difficult to duplicate on the markets of the State. For each is well fitted to judge tobacco and is giving the farmer a fair deal. Messrs. Taylor and Mobley are from the bright belt of Martin County, and have had much experience both in raising and selling the leaf. They are ably assisted by C. C. Lucas, who has had years of experience in auctioneering. Williamston's trio of warehouses sit at the head of the table of highest prices.

Farmers Warehouse

Several years after the beginning of the market, the Farmers Warehouse was built by Eli Gurganus, who with W. A. James has opened it this year for the sale of tobacco. Both of these men have spent years in the business, and are competent to handle every pound of tobacco which may be carried to their floors. They have a full corps of assistants and B. E. McClure, who is well known here, is auctioneer. Their sales this season have been large and prices with the general market.

Farmers & Merchants Bank

The business increase of the town and county, made it possible for the organization of the Farmers & Merchants Bank in the year 1905, with a capital of \$25,000. Dennis S. Biggs was organizer and first President. One significant fact is that it began business in the same building as did the other bank. As soon as practicable, a handsome brick building was erected on Main Street with splendid counting rooms, director's room and offices on the upper floor. The capital and profits amount to \$40,000. Dr. John D. Biggs is President, C. D. Carstarphen, Vice-President, R. G. Harrison, Cashier and J. L. Rodgerson, Asst. Cashier. Resources \$322,274.66.

Bank of Martin County

In 1902, Joseph G. Godard organized the Bank of Martin County. A few months thereafter, it was reorganized with a capital of \$15,000, and Dennis S. Biggs was made President. This was the first bank in Martin County, and its first banking room was in the brick building now occupied by the U. S. Post-office. Later the Godard building was erected on the corner of Main and Smithwick Streets, containing handsome bank rooms and director's room. For some time this bank has been on the Honor Roll of banks in the United States, and has a capital and surplus of \$35,000. The officers are: J. G. Godard, President; J. G. Staton, Vice-President and C. H. Godwin, Cashier. Resources \$320,000.00.

Biggs Iron and Motor Company

Among the newer industries established within the past year, the Biggs Iron and Motor Co., stands prominent. It was incorporated with a paid capital of \$12,000, owned and operated by W. H. S. R., and J. W. Biggs. They purchased the plant of J. L. Woolard & Co., and all rights, patents, etc., of that company, which made itself famous by the manufacture of the Woolard Harrow. One large feature of the business is the making of tobacco flues for which the demand has been great the past season. The factory is splendidly equipped with modern machinery for all kinds of repair work. The motor department is one of the best in Eastern North Carolina, being fitted with everything necessary to repair and build up automobiles. S. R. Biggs, manager, is an expert machinist and his assistants are experienced men. The company has recently purchased a lot on Main Street, where they will erect a large brick structure for their business. They are also agents for the Buick automobile and have placed many of these machines in Martin County and elsewhere.

"Studebaker Home" and Garage

On Brogden Street during 1914, has been erected the "Studebaker

Dennis Simmons Lumber Company

Williamston cannot be classed as a manufacturing town, yet it is the home of the Dennis Simmons Lumber Company, which ranks as one of the largest lumber companies in the State. Its timber holdings are large, and three modernly equipped mills located respectively at Astoria near Jamesville, Kenly and Middlesex manufacture an immense amount of lumber which is sold in Northern markets. A large amount of the shares of the stock is owned by Williamston people, and the profits are large. Capt. T. W. Tilghman, of Wilson, is President, Dr. John D. Biggs, of Williamston, Treasurer and Asa T. Crawford, Secretary. The office is located on Main Street and the business is one of the town's most important assets.

Electric Light Company

The vote to issue bonds for lighting the town by electricity three years ago, met with very little opposition and a franchise was given the Virginia-Carolina Peanut Co., which had a large factory here at that time. Later the plant was sold to W. C. Manning and the Williamston Electric Company was incorporated. It is said by those who have seen many other towns, that Williamston is better lighted than many larger places. Every part of the town, however remote, is well lighted and the system is carefully looked after by Electrician Maurice S. Moore. The power house was moved last year to the Cooperage Mill, which furnishes steam. The higher power lamps recently put on Main Street have increased the beauty of and added to the brightness on the street.

Telephone Company

The invention of the telephone has put all the world in touch. So it is that Williamston with its large system, is on speaking terms with the outside world. There are three hundred miles of lines with three hundred and twenty-five telephones. Copper lines have recently been built to Tarboro and Plymouth, and with the lines to Washington and Hamilton, the service is equal to that of any town in the East. W. C. Manning is owner and manager, and the Central office is located on the second floor of the Godard Building. There are two daily operators, a night operator and one for Sunday hours. The system is now being extended to Windsor, crossing the river at Hyman's Ferry near Plymouth,

Home' and garage, where these cars are demonstrated and sold by J. Paul Simpson. The garage is conveniently arranged for repair work, which is in charge of an experienced auto machinist. Here is sold, too, the Benthall Peanut Picket and Stover engines the pioneer machines in the peanut picking industry, and known throughout the world as The Originals. A convenient gasoline tank can supply cars quickly with gasoline, and in every service, the best can be found there.