

The Watauga Democrat.

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BOONE, WATAUGA COUNTY, THURSDAY, OCT. 2, 1913

NO. 6.

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VARNER AND THE SNEAKS.

A Member of the Senate in 1907 Has Something to Say About the Passage of Sneak Bill—The Elkin & Alleghany.

Capt. E. F. Lovill in Charlotte Observer.

Some weeks ago, I saw an article in the Raleigh News and Observer taken from the Lexington Dispatch, in which the editor, Col. H. B. Varner, makes some very serious charges against many of the best men of the State. He alleges that the acts of the Legislature granting aid to the railroads in the labor of the convicts, were sneaked into the Legislature without more than a dozen men in either house knowing what was done. Having myself been a member of the Senate in 1907, when the act was passed chartering and granting aid to the Elkin & Alleghany Railroad, I desire to say that the charge is without any foundation in fact. I was also present in the Legislature of 1909, when the act was passed granting from 50 to 150 convicts to aid in the building of the Watauga & Yadkin River Railroad; in each case these bills were discussed before a full committee, and were fully understood by all of them, and they were reported favorably by a unanimous vote. In the case of the Watauga & Yadkin River road, the bill was introduced by Mr. Smith Haganman, member of the House of Representatives from Watauga county. Mr. Paul Kitchin was chairman of the committee, and an entire evening was given to the discussion before a full committee. There were at least 100 persons in the building and it was discussed by Haganman, Doughton, B. B. Dougherty and the writer, and besides other members of both houses of the General Assembly and newspaper reporters were present. There was not a dissenting vote against the favorable report, and the proceedings before the committee were published in the News and Observer. Mr. Morton, from New Hanover, made a motion to report favorably, saying that he had been in this country and knew that it was a matter of absolute justice to the country. This is the way these bills were "sneaked" through.

Now, Colonel Varner, we would like to have you tell who these sneaks were; who those bold, bad men, from Murphy to Manteo that did conspire against the State of North Carolina to rush these bills through and despoil the State. Was it Doughton, who has spent the best part of his life in the service of the State of North Carolina? Was it J. C. Buxton, who was chairman of the committee? Was it Dowd, of Mecklenburg? Was it Daniels, of Halifax? Was it Webb of Buncombe? Was it Pharr of Mecklenburg? Was it Aycock of Wayne? Was it Bellamy of Brunswick? Was it Drewry of Wake? Was it Hicks of Granville? Was it Holt of Guilford? Was it Long of Iredell, or Klutz of Rowan? These are men whose services in the interest of the State of North Carolina are known to all men, and there were many others not mentioned, who have always been ready to fly to the rescue of our State in every crisis, either in war or peace.

Colonel, come out, have the courage to tell us your convictions and who these men are. The Colonel seems to be fond of that word "sneak," having used it three or four times in his article. Again, the Colonel is in error when he says that these roads are only being built in the inter-

est of individuals and corporations, who will be the only ones to reap advantages in the building of these roads. I think it is a truth that cannot be disputed that the policy of the State has been to aid in the construction of railroads to develop the resources of North Carolina, ever since the first railroad was constructed within her borders; it aided in the construction of the Wilmington and Weldon, the N. Carolina, the Western North Carolina, the Atlantic and North Carolina and the Cape Fear and Yadkin Valley Railroads.

These great improvements have made the State rich and powerful. This aid was granted by public taxation of the people of all the State, and the State would have been richly paid for its outlay if it had never got one penny for its stock. I make the father association, having been a close observer of the business of the State for the last 40 years, that the State has never lost one penny by reason of taking stock in the various railroads which have been completed, except by the scale of her stock in the said roads.

The declaration the Colonel makes regarding the stock of these "alleged" railroads has no force, because the stock of no railroad has ever been salable until the railroad was put into operation; but it is a fact known of all men that the development of the country through which any road passes, and the result of improvement and institution which springs up along its line will eventually pay the State in taxation many times for all it has given them. But the president of the Good Roads Association has stored in his great mind, as set forth in his keynote speech before his association on the seashore, a speech he has lately had republished, to emphasize the meeting of the Good Roads Association at Raleigh, on the very day of the meeting of the extra session of the Legislature. What is this great and vaunted policy that he is going to launch forth to overwhelm the Legislature if we are to take his speech for his policy, it is to abandon the work on the railroad, abandon the State farm, and put the convicts to work on the public roads. This scheme means that the whole expense of the State's prison is to be borne by taxation, so that the convicts shall be a benefit to all the people alike. Now, to be just to all the people, according to his own allegation, he must distribute them throughout all the counties. I understand from the authorities of the penitentiary that there are about 600 able bodied convicts able to perform hard labor; now there being 100 counties in the State, it would give each county six convicts, and it would take about two men to direct and guard these convicts, and if there were no repairing to be done to the roads, they would probably get our roads done about the year A. D. 5000.

Now it is easy to see that this policy is a pipe dream of the most absurd and iridescent variety. As to the Colonel's "alleged" railroads," he rode on one of them, the Watauga & Yadkin River for 21 miles. The road has first-class new engines, new engines, new freight and passenger cars, with heavy rails, is now running on regular schedule, and as I understand, is making money over and above regular expenses. We were afraid he would not see further than the end of the rails, so some of us sent him, together with the entire force of the penitentiary Board, an invitation to visit this country and agreed to meet them at the end of this "alleged" road with vehicles, and bring them along over the line, and show them some of our resources and beau-

tiful valleys, but the gentleman went back over the "alleged" road and we never had the pleasure of showing him our country.

Now, Colonel, what is an alleged railroad? Please define, Col. J. S. Mann, our able manager of the penitentiary, does not bear you out in his description of the Watauga & Yadkin River Railroad. None of us has ever harmed Col. Varner in the least, and we appeal to the sober thought of the just men of North Carolina. This territory lying west and north of the Blue Ridge and the State line, about 100 miles long and from 35 to 50 miles wide, containing from 65,000 to 75,000 souls, including three entire counties and about half of another, and perhaps the largest territory east of the Mississippi River that has no railroad or water transportation. It has the finest soil, finest climate, grows almost spontaneously all the rich, nutritious grasses, is capable of producing almost all kinds of vegetables and fruits in almost unlimited quantities, together with all the cereals and, in fact, everything except cotton and tobacco that is generally raised in the State. The market for our produce lies to the South and East, our haul is an average of 35 miles to North Carolina railroad points, our produce reaches the railroad burdened with a freight charge of about \$10.00 a ton, after which we encounter the same exorbitant freight rates that are so justly complained of in the State. These conditions put us out of the market and we cannot compete with New York, Vermont or Maine, and they even ship cabbage and potatoes from Denmark and Holland to the eastern part of North Carolina at much less rate of freight than we can from the mountains. So it is with incoming freight. If one of our merchants buys a carload of fertilizer, cotton seed meal hardware or any other commodity, he pays the railroad freight rates to our nearest station, and then he has to pay \$200 to have that carload of merchandise brought in to this territory.

These conditions are intolerable and although our country is rich, our people are not prosperous and cannot prosper, and when we consider the fact that these two railroads, the Elkin & Alleghany, and the Watauga & Yadkin River, 50 miles apart, trying now to climb this great barrier, the slopes of the mountains, the completion of which would consummate the effort of our people for 30 years, and when the further fact appears that these railroads will soon make valuable connections—the Alleghany with the Norfolk & Western, and the Watauga & Yadkin River with the Virginia & South-Western—two great coal hauling railroads, opening up two great gateways into our State, having a tendency to equalize the unjust freight rates complained of, we are surprised that these great schemes have not been made, before now, a great State policy, at the same time doing justice to this territory, and enriching the state also by the improvements that would spring up all over this country.

This country has been aptly termed the great "Hygienic Highway," to which multiplied thousands annually resort for health and temporary residence. A prominent man from the City of Charlotte informed me a short time ago that he believed if we had comfortable transportation facilities to this country there would be over 100,000 people annually resorting to it. They love to see these green hills, to

Among the Pioneer Settlers of Watauga County.

[By L. D. Lowe.]

Prior to the year 1843 there were only three families living in the valley of Elk Creek, and these were the families of Levi Moody, Joel Eggers and Delilah Baird, the illustrious daughter of Belant. The first mill that was ever constructed in this valley was a small corn-cracker put in operation by Joel Eggers. About the time this little mill was completed John Houston Baird, a young man of poetical turn of mind who was staying with his aunt Delilah, thought he would do a little advertising for the new enterprise of Eggers, so placed a number of sign posts along the mountain trails bearing the following inscription: "One mile and a half to the foot of the hill, And to Joel Eggers' Merchant Mill."

And then the young man would go to another point and post another: "Two miles and a half to the foot of the hill, And to Joel Eggers' Merchant Mill."

Eggers considered that he was a great benefactor and thought he had contributed too much to the public welfare to have his industrial plant advertised in this manner. John Houston afterwards went to Texas, but the old man could never forgive the youngster for his sallies of wit.

About the year 1818 Martin L. Banner came from Forsyth county and settled in this valley. He built a cabin and cleared a small field, but he soon grew tired of his surroundings and sold his lands to George W. Dugger, and took up his abode in Carter county, Tenn., where he remained only a short time and then returned to North Carolina and settled on the headwaters of Toe River, where he resided until his death only a few years ago. Martin Banner was the father of seven sons and three daughters.

A few years later Martin was followed by his brother, Louis P. Banner, with his family of five sons and three daughters: Anthony E. Banner, another brother, with his family of four sons and two daughters; John W. Banner, another brother, with his family of four sons and three daughters, and later by Dr. Matt. R. Banner, the youngest brother, with his family of two sons and two daughters, and still later by Edwin H. Banner, another brother, with his family of two sons, three daughters and two sons-in-law.

All the six brothers lived to be of the age of from 75 to 90 years. While the older Banners were living and before the younger set began to remove to other states more than half of the population of this valley consisted of Banners, but they have died and removed until there are not more than about twenty-five of the Banner family left in this valley. Anthony Banner had a great fondness for jokes but more particular of that kind he originated himself, and he was especially delighted to make and circulate ridiculous jokes on his youngest brother Dr. Mat. Banner for the reason that they would worry intensely.

During the fall of 1876 Dr. Banner shipped two hundred and fifty Texas ponies to Johnson City, Tennessee and drove them from that point into Watauga County, but owing to the great number there was considerable delay from the time it was reported that the ponies had been shipped until their arrival; doubt was being expressed by the curiously inclined and prospective purchasers about their coming, and this feature of the situation created a fertile field for the ingenious mind of Anthony to get in some effective work, and among others he circulated the following report: "Dr. Mat. has heard from his ponies; they started from Texas and when they reached the Mississippi River there was no way for them to cross except to swim the river, so they drove the ponies into the river and as they were coming across there was an old woman washing on the bank, and not knowing what they were and thinking they were squirrels or some other little wild animals, she flew into them with a stick and killed nearly all of them before she found out what they were." In the lot there was one something like thirty years of age and Anthony bought this, and he would often make this remark, "This pony was the first that was ever driven into Texas, Dr. Mat. brought this along to show people that these ponies never die." These ponies were vicious and difficult to handle. As they had been shipped from a hot climate and arrived at the beginning of a severe winter, the sudden change caused many of them to take cold, and having to stand out and shiver in the cold a great many of them died; and this gave Anthony an opportunity to circulate this report: "Dr. Mat. will make more out of the dead ponies than he will out of the live ones; he extracts the teeth and uses them in his dental work; just a few days ago he put in a set of teeth for a woman; she acted like a Texas pony, broke up nearly all of her dishes before she found where the trouble was and she had to lay her set of teeth aside." One of the Doctor's friends told him of Anthony's jokes and this brought forth the following sarcastic remark: "I do say that brother Anthony has accumulated more ignorance than any man I ever knew of his age."

As late as about the year 1872 there was no postoffice in this valley, the nearest being Valle Crucis on the one side and Cranberry on the other, and about this time a mail road was established between Boone and Cranberry, and at the same time a postoffice was established. As the population consisted largely of Banners the office was named Banner Elk, and the office still bears this name though the town is incorporated under the name. (Continued next week.)

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