

REMINISCENCES OF PENDER COUNTY, NO. 4

Telling not only of the lives of More Elderly Pender County Citizens But Giving Glimpses of Youths Since Become Prominent in the State. See D. M. Stringfield Expecting to Go To Congress Directly—Rev. John Larkins Aping the Superb Orator Dr. Hall—Von Bullard in Action Against a Crew of Hazers Led By Robt. C. Lawrence.

By CHAS. H. UTLEY

On becoming superintendent of the schools of Pender county, for perhaps a year I had served the Baptist church at Atkinson as pastor. Hence the center of the memories that inspire this article cluster around that church and village. And I well remember that before getting acquainted with the people as a whole those I met told me that the open-heartedness and hospitality of the community were known and noted and that it would be a pleasure to me to know, associate with, and work with the folks of that community; and I can truthfully testify that every promise was amply justified by experience. No incident of an unpleasant nature, either in the local school there, or the church, ever occurred while I knew and mingled with the Atkinson people.

Wm. H. Lewis

In every community some person stands out, because of character and usefulness, more prominently than the general run of people. This is abundantly true of the community under consideration in the person of Mr. W. H. Lewis. I am sure his neighbors, then and now, would bear me out in this statement. For he has stood out as a leading citizen for many years. He is a Christian gentleman of the finest character, ever on the alert for the betterment, uplift and welfare of his neighbors and the people of his county. He is, and has always been trustworthy, and trusted, never abusing any confidence reposed in him as a Christian, a neighbor, and a citizen. He has served his community in perhaps every local office assigned the locality; and come years ago served his district in the State senate, in which he is said to have honorably redeemed every pledge made his constituents. For many years Mr. Lewis has been a leading farmer, illustrating to his less progressive neighbors the advantages of scientific agriculture. In the days when I saw him frequently he had a fine farm, used the most modern methods; and produced abundant crops.

In his home Mr. Lewis, together with his splendid wife, formerly a Miss Peterson from Sampson county, lived up to the finest traditions of the Old South, in generous and freehearted hospitality. He had a good home whose doors have, through the years, opened to unnumbered guests, always welcome, royally entertained, and always cordially invited to come again. An ardent friend of education, Mr. Lewis was one of the prime movers for the establishment of a local high school, one among the first established in the State when provision was made for them by the legislature. He educated his own children, not only in the local school, but in the colleges, his son becoming a prominent dentist, a specialist and expert in a certain line of dentistry, the oldest daughter, May, a superior young lady, dying in the very prime of young womanhood, soon after completing her education. A second daughter became the wife of a Presbyterian minister. For thirty-five years Pender county has had few citizens the equals of Mr. Will Lewis, and one superior. (Make it 45 years—Editor.) A man of more than average commonsense, cool in temperament, not easily provoked, possessing a mind clear and eager for the true and the best in life's relationships, unselfish and altruistic, the friend of the poor, and the generous helper of the needy, the name of Will Lewis is the synonym of good citizenship in Pender county and honored by his neighbors, friends from childhood.

Has Bachelor Brother Joe

Yes Joe was, and I am told, still is. And here may be the reason for it. When I knew him for many years he had courted a certain lady whose name I refrain from calling; however, one mid-summer, she visited in the home of relatives, in the home of Mr. Wash Henry, and the time having come to return home, several miles away, one evening she meekly informed her long admirer that the time had come for her return home; and it was not only plowing time but in the middle of the week, the grass growing and the ground moist and mellow, so, to her great surprise, Joe said, "I can't stop my plow now to take you home." On my next visit to the community the head of the host family, Mr. Henry, told me about it and the lack of chivalry on the part of an unmarried

man toward a fine young lady, and added "Such a man doesn't deserve a wife." Mr. Dave Lewis had a son who became a Pullman conductor on the Southern railroad, whom I met several years later several times.

Mr. Jeff Lewis

Jeff Lewis, in early manhood, married a Miss Stringfield, sister to Attorney D. M. Stringfield of Fayetteville. After her untimely death he was more than fortunate in marrying the sister of his former wife, Miss Callie Stringfield. This second Mrs. Lewis was a woman of superior ability, and a superb character. She was known and admired by her many friends for her sterling qualities and uniform usefulness in more than one relationship of life. She, too, has passed to her reward and she certainly deserved a rich one for the service she had rendered and her fine example to her neighbors and Christian associates.

Edwin A. Hawes

Here was a typical representative of the Old South, in some, if not in other ways. Mr. Hawes had much of the world's goods, especially in lands. Later he sold his timber for almost a half million dollars. He believed in education for his own children, sent two of his sons through the University, one of whom became a physician, but died early. The other, Edwin, more than once represented his county in the legislature, built a fine home in Atkinson, married, served the community efficiently on the local school board for years, was a progressive citizen and, when I knew him, a successful business man, very courteous and accommodating. But the father seemed to lack vision in the potentialities and possibilities of education for the masses. He never really seemed to see the public as did the founder of the great party to which he gave unstinted allegiance, Thomas Jefferson, who said "The common schools are the colleges of the common people."

The Colvin Family

Of the Colvins there were two Jims, both gone, years ago; both splendid citizens. Young Jim Colvin was a member of the Board of Education that elected me county superintendent of schools. I knew him best in that relationship. He was the friend of education, a surveyor by profession, and a genial gentleman.

D. M. Stringfield

Meeks Stringfield's two sisters became the wives of Mr. Jeff Lewis, as related above. During my last year at Wake Forest college Meeks Stringfield roomed with me. He had a rather brilliant mind, had an unusual memory, and is one of the very few men I have known who can or could write a speech, lay the manuscript away, and get up and repeat the speech verbatim, and do it so eloquently. I well remember the last night of commencement when I was tired out and had crawled into bed, Meeks came in, apparently aflame with the ambition of a typical college boy and kept me awake telling me just how many years before he would be in Congress. Later he changed his mind as many of his fellow students did. Yet the boy of that day has landed the important position of assistant U. S. district attorney. Von Bullard is his partner in the legal firm of Stringfield and Bullard. Not a few Fayetteville people have told me that Stringfield and Bullard are the leading lawyers of Fayetteville. I may be permitted to add a story of Von Bullard in the days at the old college when not only mild hazing but *blacking* was the order, not of the day but of the night. I had spent the summer there in the law classes of Dr. Gulley, a great man and a great teacher. In this summer class Von Bullard had been a student. He was a fine specimen of young manhood, weighing, perhaps, more than two hundred pounds. As the blacking nights drew near with the opening of the fall term Bullard said to me: "Utley, I am uneasy; I don't want to be blacked."—Parenthetically, he roomed in one of Dr. Poteat's houses, near the railroad, famous rooming places in the history of Wake Forest.—In reply to him I asked, "Who pays your room rent?" "I do," he replied. "Then," said I, "that room is your home. You have a perfect right to bar anyone you choose from entering that door, and if he enters over your protest he does it at his own risk." He

Self-Opinionated But—

Oh yes; if the people of North Carolina, and particularly the press, like a self-opinionated man and consider that quality a mark of superior fitness for a public trust, they have him in Fred L. Seely. But hard-headedness may be mere pig-headedness. It happens that I once tested the good sense of Mr. Seely and found it wanting. But he was hard-headed enough. I tried to stop him from inciting to a massacre, but couldn't. Many hundreds of innocent negroes died like dogs because of his failure to heed my warning. He declined to publish in his paper the protest against his apparently deliberate attempt to infuriate the whites of Georgia, and particularly of Atlanta, and I received his signed refusal to publish it because my view was contrary to his. A week or ten days, as I recall, brought the godless massacre.

No; Mr. Seely's opinion is not infallible, and there is little reason for North Carolina to fear that his place could not have been as well filled if his resignation had been allowed to stand. Let's have no "slobbering" over Mr. Seely.

Carl Goerch got out very neatly by tendering us a fine compliment for scholarship. But the fun of the thing was that I beat Carl on his own ground. Candidly, Friend Carl, I do not feel it much to brag about to beat you in the matter of scholarship, but to beat you at your own game is another matter.

seemed to get an idea. The blacking season arrived and was on in full vigor. Unwisely a bunch of fellows who did not know the prospective victim as some of us did, came to his room late at night bent on fun. They were led by Bob Lawrence, later a prominent lawyer in Lumberton. On entering the door Bullard told them to "turn back," when they seemed to hesitate Bullard grabbed something like a Smith and Wesson and bored a hole through the ceiling as a starter, and added to his admonition, "be quick about it." The rumor was that there had seldom been such a foot race as followed. From that night Von Bullard was not even threatened with a shining up. As Mr. Alf Paddison of Burgaw once casually remarked, "They woke up the wrong passenger."

John Larkins

John Larkins from Atkinson entered Wake Forest when this writer did. I knew him intimately during his stay of four years at the college. John was a good student, punctual, studied hard, made the grade always, delighted in debate, could make a good speech, was always heard with interest by the fellows. However, about John's second year in college the institution was visited by Dr. Hall, one of the finest speakers that ever graced the platform, a fine, strong personality, commanding in appearance, scholarly and eloquent. He was to lecture in the evening and to advertise invited the boys in the afternoon chapel to hear a free lecture. He had a full house; his theme was "God, yesterday, today and forever." It was certainly a masterly address; choice language, such phraseology and descriptive adjectives as one hears only a few times in a lifetime, came, eloquently delivered. His gestures were as nearly perfect as possible. His audience listened with rapt attention. With his prepared lectures Dr. Hall could have graced a platform with Daniel Webster. He captured all of us, but hypnotized John Larkins, and the hypnotic spell was never broken. Unconsciously John assumed the posture of Dr. Hall, and something of the pathos and eloquence of the lecturer. Naturally the boys afterwards called John "Dr. Hall." However, be it said, in compliment, no finer example could have been found to exemplify.

At Atkinson I found the father of John, Mr. Eli Larkins, postmaster. But my article is already too long. However, the family of Mr. George Smith certainly deserves mention. Mrs. Smith was the sister of Franklin and Billie Keith. Mr. Smith was a quiet, unassuming man, a typical gentleman, loyal to family and friends, a merchant, fair and square in his dealings, and stood high with his customers and friends. The wife and mother, a fine home maker and keeper, reared her children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. The oldest daughter, Katie, married Ramond Corbett, lives at Atkinson, and is a teacher under the ERA set up for adult education. There were others at the village whose memories are richly cherished but space forbids all the reminiscences that crowd into the focus of memory. It has been my good fortune to have known many, very many, most excellent people, and been many times entertained in their homes, and to have enjoyed their royal hospitality, and to have claimed them then, and to think of them now, as my friends.