

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MACON COUNTY

A Reprint of Old Book

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the third installment of Dr. Smith's history. Another will appear in an early issue.)

PART III.

The Courts of Pleas and Quarter Sessions of that day as they were called, were regular jury courts, and I give the names of the first venire summoned to serve as jurors, for the June term following:

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| 1. Wymer Siler | 15. Wm. Welch, Sr. |
| 2. Jonathan Whiteside | 16. Samuel Smith |
| 3. Jacob Hice | 17. Geo. T. Ledford |
| 4. Wm. Cochran | 18. Ebenezer Newton |
| 5. Benj. Johns'n | 19. Joseph Welch |
| 6. Wm. McLure | 20. Luke Barnard |
| 7. Peter Ledford | 21. George Dickey |
| 8. Martin Norton | 22. Zachariah Cabe |
| 9. John Lamm | 23. Mark Coleman |
| 10. John Addington | 24. Lewis Vandyke |
| 11. Matthew Davis | 25. Thos. Love, Sr. |
| 12. James Whitaker | 26. March Addington |
| 13. Henry Addington | 27. Jacob Trammel |
| 14. Michael Wikle | 28. John Dobson |

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| 29. Andrew Patton |
| 30. George Black |
| 31. Isaac Mauney |
| 32. John M. Angel |
| 33. John Gillespie |
| 34. Joseph Chambers |
| 35. John Howard |
| 36. Jacob Siler. |

This venire was composed of typical and representative men of the early population of Macon County. It would be hard to find an abler body of jurors, even now, in any county in the State. It is true they were a style of men different from the present edition. They were men of sound minds, of the strictest integrity, profoundly impressed with the obligations of law and justice and for old fashioned courtly deportment one towards another, and for manly bearing in the discharge of their duties as conservators of public peace and justice they have no superiors at the present day. Many of them came to the years of manhood in and about the close of the Revolutionary war which achieved American independence—at a time and under conditions that "tried men's souls" and when

"the survival of the fittest" gave us a race of men brave, true and thoroughly impregnated with a love for those rights and that justice which cost so great a price of blood. That love was quickened and intensified by the war of 1812 when the mother country, for the second time, attempted to enslave free men and levy unjust tribute upon this grand and productive country of ours. Is it any wonder that men raised in such times and familiar with the heroes who staked their all on the struggle against oppression and injustice should be eminently qualified to try all legal disputes between their compeers and mete out justice to the violators of the code?

I have a distinct recollection of many of the members of that jury. They would compare favorably with any similar body of men, then or now. In stature they were above the ordinary jurymen and were decidedly manly in appearance with a bearing expressive of firmness and a will to do the right. They were very affable gentlemen and well read for men of their times. In fact, they constituted a brotherhood of patriots who loved and labored for their country's honor and their country's good. This constitutes the highest type of citizenship for a commonwealth. Such obedience to law and order—such devotion to the public good—such fidelity to public trust and such unity of action and purpose in behalf of the well-being of the whole as characterized those men furnish a guarantee of a prosperous and happy people.

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vation of public peace and morality, and they patriotically undertook to perform the public service without compensation. I can well remember the good cheer which prevailed when the people gathered at the quarterly courts to transact the county business and such other business as came within the jurisdiction of a quarterly court jury. It seemed to be a sort of ovation when they could meet and conserve the public interest. But the last third of a century has developed new ideas and methods for the public service. Indeed it may be said of this generation as Robert Burns said of the Scotch youth in his day:

"That beardless laddies should think they better were Inform'd than their auld daddies."

Losing that patriotic spirit which prompted their noble fathers to the performance of a public service without a pecuniary reward, they commenced to murmur about the hardships of the public service without a per diem compensation. Nor did they cease this howl for a paltry sum until they secured the coveted prize. Then of course came taxation in order to raise the funds to meet the demand. It presents, in fact, the odd spectacle of a people taxing themselves that they might get it back in a draft upon the county treasury. It is the necessity of this self-imposed new order of things that makes the difference between the taxes of the present and sixty-two years ago. It has created and fostered a mercenary spirit in the conduct of all public affairs, than which there is no greater bane to all civil and political purity. This mercenary spirit is a poison that works imperceptible but none the less surely. It has cost kings their crowns and republics their liberty and perpetuity. It is especially insidious in public affairs, and there can be little doubt that it has been a potent agent in weakening public virtue. It has, indeed, been a fruitful source of the perjury and bribery that now disgraces our civilization—that corrupts our public officials—that defeats the administration of justice and threatens the permanency of our noble principles of government. It had its beginning in little matters but has grown to dangerous proportions, and the end is not yet. Perhaps the reader will consider this an unardonable digression. While I admit that it is not narrative, I claim that it is nevertheless history and so such commends itself to the sober consideration of all.

Little as mankind may think about it, one generation impresses itself upon another. And singularly enough, the further removed, as a general rule, each generation is from the original stock the feebler becomes the impression of the original type. This is the history of nations and commonwealths. I mean this to apply not to mere conditions of luxury and style under which lie a vast amount of moral obliquity, but to those nobler traits of heart and brain which constitute real worth of character and qualify men to bear up the pillars of good government and a sound public morality. Let the candid reader compare the prevalent disinclination of the populace of today to perform any public service only from mercenary considerations—the general spirit of insubordination to law and authority whenever it conflicts with their private prejudices and personal whims with the ready and cheerful compliance with the public demands for the public good, rendered by our fathers of sixty years ago, and he must be convinced of the truth of this axiom. This chapter is written not in a spirit of vindictiveness or the mere love of complaint, but with a view to awakening the public mind to a sense of a prevalent evil, and with a hope thereby to induce a return to healthier methods and a more loyal and patriotic course in the conduct of public affairs. Should this result in stirring up a spirit of emulation of the noble men who subdued the wilds of Macon County to the arts of Christian civilization, I will have gained the coveted reward.

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