

Historical Highlights Of Williamston Before The War

Town Limits Extended Only To Elm Street

Two Schools Were Maintained in the Town Back in 1860

Religious Activities Eighty Years Ago Were Centered In Two Churches

WILLIAMSTON IN 1860

In the year 1860 the corporate limits of the town were stretched no further from the river hill than the street crossing Main above J. K. Carstarphen's residence. This street was then a county road. The Episcopal Rectory stood in a field the only house above the home of Elder C. B. Hassell on Main Street.

The Station residence, combining architectural design with beauty of finish, was situated on the lot now occupied by the Slade home, and marked the limits of the town in the Northwest. This whole section was a grove of magnificent oaks, presenting a very different appearance from now. That part of the town known as "New Town" occupied the same space as at present. The most noticeable residence in this part being that of the Duggan's, built in 1849 by Mr. Friely Moore. The business houses were of small dimensions, that of Elder C. B. Hassell, a large three-story building was the largest and stood on the corner now occupied by the store of J. H. Ellison and Co. The only brick building was on the lot now occupied by N. S. Peel and Co. In this was kept a general merchandise store by John C. Lamb, who raised the first company of volunteers in the county. He was promoted to the office of Colonel of the 17th Regiment, and gave up his life for the Confederate cause.

Mr. Amelick Williams in the building now occupied by T. C. Cook, and Mr. William Bagley in a store situated on his residence lot, were two of the most prominent merchants. Capt. John Lanier occupied a store in the corner of his yard which was removed just a few years ago. W. H. Carstarphen occupied a building (since burned) situated on the present site.

These merchants went to New York to purchase goods—frequently driving to Plymouth and taking a steamer to Franklin, thence by rail to the North. This was considered quite a journey. Goods were brought by sailing vessels. The vessels went North laden with shingles and naval stores. Three of the most prominent of these were the "Alice Gibson," owned by Henry P. Gibson; the "Martha Moore" and "Coenine" owned by Messrs. F. and G. Moore. These vessels were built at the shipyard about a mile above the wharf on the Bertie shore. A trade with the West Indies was carried on by these vessels, cargoes of salt and molasses being given in exchange for naval stores. Two steamers came up the river daily—the "John G. Styles," Capt. Moore, and the "Alice of Windsor," Capt. Lafayette Thrower.

The goods displayed by the merchants were—cocoas, 10 cents the yard; French Calicoes, 15 cents the yard; ginghams, organdies, silk tissues, serges, etc. The materials were not so different from those of the present day only in quality. The colors were more durable than those of the present generation—a generation of gaudy hues and designs. But the styles! The best idea of these can be had from a copy of Godey's Lady's Book—the fashion exponent of the day. In this one would see most enormous hoops, angel sleeves, and rigid stays—Nothing at all like the straight form of the present. Low neck and short sleeves were worn even in the winter. The costume was not complete without a round, flat collar of French work or handsome lace. All clothes were made by hand, machines being extremely rare. The lingerie of our mothers was ornamented with a great deal of hand embroidery—one of the favorite fancy works of the day. Tatting, netting and knitting were also feminine occupations of the times. The ladies of the town at this period had one Sunday bonnet a year—dark ribbons for trimmings making a change for winter. Sun bonnets were usually worn except to church or on most ceremonious visits.

The gentlemen were brave in home-made attire, linen, etc., for summer fine boots with very tiny heels, home-made shirts, the bosom ornamented with tucks sewn by hand—sometimes drawn work, while some of the most foppish had hand embroidered bosoms. High standing collars were not worn; turn down collars were used entirely and as a general thing black or white string ties. No ready-made clothes were to be had—tailors made up broad-cloth suits for formal occasions.

Mails were carried through the country—the route through here extended from Halifax to Plymouth. People received mail once or twice a week. The political situation was discussed as portrayed in the Raleigh Sentinel and Richmond Examiner—the latter being the strongest Southern paper of the time. Elections were held in August every two years and the Whigs and Democrats opposed each other strenuously.

The Bar was represented by Jesse Stubbs, William Eborn, Judge Asa Biggs, and Col. Carraway. Hon. Patrick Winston, of Windsor, and Judge Henry Gilliam, of Edenton, were the

BURNED

Recalling her early life in Hamilton, Miss Bell Whitaker, of Enfield, recently stated that the Yankee raids on the town made a lasting impression in her memory.

"I remember very well the burning of the Ben Cloman, the Arthur Cotten, Robert Weathersbee, and Bennett Baker homes in the town during the war," Miss Whitaker said. "My father's slaves put it out," Miss Whitaker added.

Miss Whitaker stated that no one was killed in Hamilton by the Yankee raiders.

Miss Whitaker is the daughter of the late John Byrum and Emma Yarrell Whitaker.

most prominent lawyers attending court at that time.

The courthouse and jail which stood at the brink of the river hill made the center of the town at a still earlier period. The medical fraternity was represented by Drs. Halsey and Yates.

The Episcopal and Methodist Churches were the only ones in town. A large number of the citizens were Primitive Baptists and worshipped at Skewarkee as now. Rev. Alfred Watson, who is now Bishop of East Carolina, was Rector of the Episcopal Church. He lived in Plymouth and frequently walked the entire distance, being a man of wonderful endurance. The Methodist pastor was Rev. Mr. Chaffin. Elder C. B. Hassell was pastor at Skewarkee.

The wealthy classes rode in carriages with their slave drivers. Horseback was a popular mode of travel.

Two good schools flourished in the town. The Male Academy at the present building (since repaired) and the Female Academy in what is now Mrs. Alex Smith's residence. Prof. Chase, of Vermont, was principal of the Male Academy. Northern women were employed to teach as it was considered degrading for a Southern woman to do any work outside of home. Boys studied Greek and Latin and were prepared for Chapel Hill and other colleges. The girls had Latin, music and painting and were usually sent to Salem, Greensboro, St. Mary's and Murfreesboro. The girls were more given to games and play than at the present time.

The youthful light heart and yes, very often light head, being the same thing in a different setting in all times and countries. Slaves spun and wove cloth for clothing and had their daily tasks but never a care for the future; for Master and Mistress would see that they were warm in the winter and had sufficient food and careful attention in sickness. Christmas came in 1860 and with it Christmas cheer, but a theme fraught with most potent meaning was beginning to engage the village gossip. The school boys began to lose interest in their studies—games no longer possessed the same charms for them—they dreamed of muskets, the roaring of cannon and fleeing Yankees. The fife and drum no longer meant a general muster—but a company forming to go to the front to battle for the honor of the South.

'Twas a long good-bye to the dear old regime, for in 1861 the Civil War began and the old town gave her bravest and best.

(Written by the late Miss Hattie Thrower, the sketch of Williamston in 1860 appeared in The Enterprise in November, 1902. Quite a few changes have followed since the sketch was prepared. The J. K. Carstarphen home referred to is the house located on the corner of Main and Elm Street. The Station home referred to was that of McGillicudah Station, grandfather of Mr. Jim Station, which occupied the entire block now surrounded by Academy, Smithwick and Hassell Streets and Simmons Avenue, but there was no Simmons Avenue at the time. The home was either burned by the Yankees during the war or fired when a lamp turned over, some claiming the first and others claiming the lamp caused the fire. The Duggan home is now occupied by the Joe Godards. Elder C. B. Hassell did business in a three-story wooden building on the corner of Main and Smithwick Streets where the Alpha Cleaners are now located. Smithwick Street was then known as Sixth Street. The only brick building of that day was located on the site now occupied by the Virginia Electric and Power Company. Amelick Williams did business about where the Courtney Furniture store is now located, and William Bagley had a store just below the new post office building. John Lanier had a store in the yard where Attorney and Mrs. Hugh G. Horton now live, corner Main and Watts Streets. W. H. Carstarphen, buying the business from John S. Pinner Co., operated a store where the Sinclair Station now stands, corner Main and Smithwick Streets. The store was rebuilt following a fire and was operated by Mr. Carstarphen's son, the late C. D. Carstarphen, the combined operation lasted almost a century. The store was razed just a few years ago and part of the lumber was used in building the high school gymnasium. —Editor's Note.)

NEW CAROLINA WAREHOUSE OPERATORS



JOHNNY GURKIN



SYLVESTER LILLEY



W. D. ODOM



JOHN A. MANNING

One of the strongest organizations in this section of the State was perfected several months ago for the operation of the New Carolina Tobacco Warehouse, one of the largest houses in the area. Messrs. Johnny Gurkin, Sylvester Lilley, W. D. Odom and John A. Manning will operate the large house this season, offering to the farmers of eastern North Caro-

lina the services of an experienced and able personnel. Messrs. Odom and Manning are joining the organization this year for the first time, but they have gained a wide experience in the tobacco business from the farm to the factory. Mr. Odom has been actively engaged in the operation of a warehouse for a long number of years, and is widely and

favorably known to hundreds of farmers throughout northeastern North Carolina. Mr. Manning, a farmer himself, is widely known as the head of the peanut company bearing his name, but he is also remembered for his work in the warehouse business here a few years ago. Messrs. Gurkin and Lilley need no introduction to the farmers of this section.

They have gained an enviable record in the business by their courteous, sympathetic association with tobacco growers from fifteen or more counties. They have, through hard work, fair and honest dealings, gained the confidence of farmers, and they are certain to make a strong bid for an increased patronage at the Carolina house here this season.

Ships Were Built On Roanoke River

The details have been lost through the years, but it is an established fact that shipbuilding was a leading business on the Roanoke River a short distance above the Norfolk, Baltimore and Carolina Boat Line here. It was owned by the Slades who were pioneers in this section of the country and who later migrated to other sections of the country to play a prominent part in the early history of the Nation.

There are records showing that the shipyard, located on the Bertie side of the stream, was in operation as early as 1820, and it is believed that the business was maintained as late as 1850 and possibly later.

Established as a port of entry during the Revolutionary period, Skewarkee, later to be known as Williamston, was a lively shipping center and center of shipbuilding. At least three vessels, the "Alice Gibson," which was named after Mrs. Latham Thrower's sister, the "Martha Moore" and the "Coenine" were built in the river shipyard.

As far as it can be learned, the shipyard here was one of only two ever located on the Roanoke. The old ram, "Albamarle", was built along the shores of the Roanoke in Halifax County and placed in service during the Civil War. The yard here is believed to have been abandoned prior to that time.



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