9

Notes furnished A. J. Pickett by the Hon John Sandridge Bibb in relation to Gov Bibb & the times in 1817. 1818

Swan Lake. Carroll Co. Miss. 1st dec 1847

Albert J. Pickett Esq

Dear Sir

Agreeably to your request some two or three months past I have committed to paper a bundle of crude sketches of Alabama in its infancy. I have done so entirely from memory, having no document at hand to assist me In thus attempting to record facts, many of them occurring thirty years ago, it is reasonable there are some mistakes. What I have said is to the best of my recollection.

I send you the first draft, noted down from time to time as I found leisure In reading them over, I discover many grammatical blunders, bad spelling, with many inaccuracies which I might have corrected by transcribing; but believing you will fully understand what I mean, I deemed it unnecessary labour. Whether perfect or otherwise they are yours, either to burn or use as you may think best If they shall be of any service in aiding you in your praiseworthy undertaking, I shall be gratified and my end accomplished. If otherwise, the labour has been but trifling.

Since my return home I have seen and conversed with Colo Greenwood Leflore a native chacktaw who has promised to furnish me with traditionary sketches of his own tribe and also of the Chickasaw nation. When I obtain them, I will forward them to you

You are at liberty to permit my brother Williams widow and my brother Benajah to peruse my scrawl as they may correct errors. With consideration of high respect and regard, I am yours sincerely. John D Bibb

Albert J. Pickett Esquire

Montgomery City

Alabama

First. In relation to the late Governor Bibb.

William Wyatt Bibb was born in Amelia County State of Virginia October 2nd A.D. 1781. He was the elast son of Captain William Bibb a native of that State who was a man of plain practical sense with what men termed a good education for the times that he grew up. He held the commission of a Captain in the revolutionary war and was subsequently a member of the Legislature of his native state. William Wyatt's mother's maiden name was Sally S. Wyatt, born in New Kent County same state. She was a woman of superior intellect which had been cultivated by a fine education. She possessed great energy of character, all the traits of a most devoted mother and a heart teeming with the milk of human kindness. Captain Bibb emigrated to the state of Georgia when it was a wild frontier Country and settled with his family on the Savannah River in Elbert County. He died in 1796 leaving his widow with eight children and the ninth born a few months after his death (Benajah) Wm W. then being in his 14th year. The pecuniary condition of the estate was incumbered with debts, but by the judicious management of the widow, who was left sole executrix a scant sufficiency was saved from the wreck of an once comfortable fortune to give the children an academic education. The subject of these notes previous to the death of his father had but little opportunity to advance in learning, owing to the unsettled and frontier condition of the country. His mother soon afterwards sent him to an Academy at Washington Wilkes County under the superintendance of the then celebrated Hope Hull, whose fame as a Methodist preacher and "a son of thunder" was extensively known. Here he continued until he acquired such a knowledge of the branches taught at such

institutions as to qualify him to enter college. He was sent to William & Mary in his native state where he remained about two years and then returned home. At the ~~commencement~~ beginning of his 18th year, he commenced the study of medicine in the City of Augusta under Doctor Murray a gentleman of high character in his profession. He attended two courses of Lectures in Philadelphia and in due time graduated as M.D. At the age of 21 he commenced the practice of his profession in the then flourishing Town of Petersburg Ga. His devotion to study had much impaired a naturally feeble constitution, so that after a few years of laborious practice he gave up his profession and turned his attention to politics. About the time he commenced practice, he married Miss Mary Freeman only daughter of Colo. Coleman Freeman of revolutionary memory, of Wilkes County. She was one of the most beautiful and accomplished ladies in her native state and made him a most affectionate and devoted wife. She bore him four children. Two, only survived him, a son and daughter. The other two (twins) died in their infancy.

He was elected a member of the House of Representatives from Elbert County a day or two after he was constitutionally illigible. He served as a member four years with that devotion to his duties, for which he was, through life, peculiarly remarkable. During this period he acquired a share of popularity that is rarely gained by men at his early age. There was nothing

during his sojourn in the Legislature of Ga. calculated to call forth any extraordinary efforts. He however made several speeches that did him some credit.

At the age of 25 years when barely eligible he was called out by the people of Georgia to represent them in the Congress of the U.S. He obeyed the call and was honorably elected. The system of voting in Georgia was by general ticket and not by districts. He took his seat in Congress the first time at the Session of 1806 (I think). During his service in the representative department of the Nation he was an active and efficient member (I was too young at that period to attempt to record from memory the measures and subjects in which he took a conspicuous part. For correct information ~~information~~ I refer you to the history of the times and to such private documents as you may be able to procure from his widow).

His Cotemporaries at his first election were Bolling Hall, George M. Troup and Howell Cobb. I do not distinctly recollect in what year he entered the Senate of the U.S. His career in Congress terminated in the year 1816 when he received the appointment of Governor of Alabama Territory from President Monroe. At the commencement, and increase throughout his congressional career he was identified with the Republican party. In the state of Georgia, there was scarcely any political distinction known. The state was republican throughout with a few individual exceptions. William H. Crawford at the commencement of Doctor Bibb's political life, had already taken a conspicuous stand as a public man and there gradually grew up in the state a division known as the

the Clark and ~~Cra~~ Crawford parties. These parties grew out of a spirit of rivalship between those two men which at first was more of a personal than general character. In the course of time however other took sides until the whole state became more and more affected either on the one side or the other. There were however many exceptions of men who kept aloof from the contention. This sort of party spirit at last grew to such a height that a Clark man could scarcely be induced to vote for a Crawford man and also the reverse. Doctor Bibb took rank with the Crawford party. Still in all this strife, Georgia was Republican which ever party prevailed.

His appointment as Governor ensued on the division of Mississippi into two Territories, Missi- and Alabama. Both Territories were organized under the provisions of the Ordinance for the Government of the North Western Territory (which you will find in the old Mississippi ~~Territory~~ Digest. The Governor of Alabama was vested with the whole power of organizing the Territory by the appointment of all Officers, civil and military. This responsible trust was performed by Governor Bibb with fidelity and judiciousness. When he rec'd the appointment of Governor, he was a citizen of Georgia. In the summer of 1817 he visited Alabama for the first time and purchased a home ~~for himself and family~~ on the Coosa & Alabama Rivers

Here he removed his family in the winter of 1817 where they resided in comfortable log cabins until his death. It was not required that the Governor should reside at the seat of Government, tho being invested with the power of appointing a Secretary of the Territory who resided there in the absence of the Governor and on such occasions his powers & duties were commensurate with his. Henry Hitchcock, a gentleman of a high order of talents of sterling integrity and industry was appointed by the Governor to fill this important office, the duties of which, he discharged with fidelity and credit. The seat of the Territorial Government was located at the Town of St Stephens (the history of which you would do well to examine) on the Tombecbee River. At the first session of the Legislature the duty of appointing one Delegate to Congress devolved on them. John Crowell was elected. The privileges of a Territorial delegate in Congress were ~~only~~ limited by withholding the right to vote. In every other respect his privileges were those of state Representatives. He had the right to present petitions to discuss all questions before Congress, to receive equal pay &c. John Crowell was not talented, but the Territory at that time had no one else to spare that would have done any better.

The Governor usually made two or three trips to the seat of Government during the recess of the Legislature in order to consult with his Secretary and to make the necessary arrangements to meet emergencies.

During this time a second Indian War had commenced and was raging with great annoyance and sometimes loss of life to the frontier settlers. This war was carried on by such parties of the Creeks as were dissatisfied with

General Jacksons Treaty and were making their way South to join the Seminoles in Florida. On one occasion as the Governor was returning from the seat of Government to his residence with no attendant but his servant Peter, he having a brace of small pocket pistols and Peter armed with a little double barrel gun, he stopped at Old Fort Dale to eat his snack and graze his horses. Two or three families only resided in the neighborhood of the Fort and one family immediately at the place. The Governor departed on his travel at about one O'clock and in two hours afterwards, the family residing at the Fort were attacked by a party of wandering hostile Creeks and cruelly murdered and scalped. The wife had, a short time previously gone to a neighbors house and on returning instead of being greeted by her husband and five children whom she had left a short time before she beheld their bones smouldering in the ashes of her dwelling. The Governor narrowly escaped their melancholy fate.

At a subsequent period the Governor arrived at the eastern Bank of the Tombeckbee opposite St Stephens on his way to the seat of Government, several travellers were in company. The River was very full and the ferry boat leaky, and frail; he was travelling in a one horse Dearborn the body of which was water proof. They entered the Boat and when about half the distance across it was found to be in a sinking condition. Her could not swim and his situation was perilous; his faithful servant Peter true to his Master speedily loosened the horse from the vehicle and turned him into the River and requesting his Master to seat himself in the carriage, by his skill in swimming carried him safely to land. The Governor did not forget Peter in

his dying hour. Nearly his last words were, addressing himself to one of his brothers, "On account of his fidelity to me, it is my wills and earnest desire that my servant Peter, shall have his freedom after the death of his first owner."

At the expiration of the Territorial Government a constitution was formed and Alabama became one of the ~~sta~~ sister states of the Union. Governor Bibb was elected first Governor of the new State and about the expiration of half his term he died on the 10 of July 1820. His death was occasioned by the falling of his horse which so injured him, that after suffering excruciating pain for several months he expired at his residence in Dallas County, calm, collected and peaceful, surrounded by his family and many of his relatives and friends he departed in the 40th year of his age. Few men ever lived of more habitual industry and devotion to all the duties, public and private, he was called on to perform. As a husband and father he was most affectionate and kind, as a relative and friend faithful and sincere and as a public servant, he was true and honest. By his conciliating disposition and suavity of manner, he had endeared himself to a large circle of friends. He was sedulous to a fault and many who knew this trait in his character availed themselves of it to act with deception and insincerity towards him. In stature he was 5 feet 10 inches high with a delicate and weakly frame. His weight, when in health not exceeding 125 pounds. His face was strongly marked with signs of deep thought and intelligence, his eyes dark, his annunciation clear and distinct and his language chaste and pure. If he excelled in any contract, it was in the selection of words and ~~sentences~~ sentences. He was

never known in conversation to utter a word that he would have been ashamed to pronounce in the circle of the most refined females. Vulgarity of every character and description exciting in him the most palpable disgust. During his administration of the Territorial government his duties were laborious and severe. Many important trusts were confided to him, most of which had necessarily to be performed by men of his selection and appointment for whose faithfulness he ever held himself responsible. Amid the multiplicity of Territorial offices to be filled and the many of his relations resided in the Territory, he never but in one instance appointed one of them to office. The exception was made in favour of a brother whom he appointed Territorial judge in Montgomery County. This course was not prompted from the absence of regard for his family connexions, for he loved them most ardently, but from the sensitiveness of his character. He has been heard to remark that a public officer should be like Caesars wife. He carried out this course during his long services in Congress. He never would recommend or apply for office for a relation.

In addition to other important duties, an act of congress was passed donating to Alabama a certain quantity of Land for the purpose of a seat of Government. He was called on to select the land and the site. He chose Cahawba and surrounding lands, believing it more central and eligable than any other place where the public land was unsold, — (you know its fate). See page 17

The Congress of the United States also donated to the state seventy two sections of Land for a seminary of learning which he was required to select out of the unappropriated lands in Alabama. He appointed commissioners for this purpose, and the selection was made of the best and most valuable land in the state. A great portion of this land was located in the rich valley of Tennessee River in the Counties of Franklin and Lauderdale (By adverting to the history sale to of those Lands, you will find that the state institution was more richly endowed than any College in the United States

At the death of Governor Bibb, the consitution of the state devolved the office on the President of the Senate for the time being. Thomas Bibb being President of the Senate became acting Governor for the unexpired term.

X

In the early settlement of Alabama, the immigrant had many difficulties and privations to endure. Those that now occupy splendid mansions erected on spots of ground, where within the memory of living man, and even within the compass of the last thirty years, the ~~wild~~ forest grass grew in its native luxuriance and the wild deer basked in uninterrupted repose, can have any correct knowledge of the suffering of those who first planted their stakes and stretched over them their cloth covering to shield their wives and little ones from the "pelt-ings of the pitiless storm" and whose only dependance for sustenance was on the uncertain success of capturing the game they had frightened

from their resting places. The County of Madison North of the Tennessee River as its boundaries are now defined but with little variation was insulated having no civilized neighbors except on the North, being surrounded in every other direction by Indian Territory, was settled in the year 1808. The land Office at which those lands were sold was located at Nashville Tennessee until the County became sufficiently populated to protect the public funds from ~~mountain~~ rogues and robbers that infested the neighboring mountains. In 1812 the Office was moved to Huntsville a large portion of the rich lands of ~~that~~ County having been purchased for settlement by wealthy planters from Georgia, Tennessee, Virginia N & S Carolina and they were speedily settled by the purchasers. In a few years, the thick foliage was made to give place to fine plantations and "the wilderness to blossom as the rose;" At the time Alabama became a state this County had attained a high state of improvement: Even at that period Huntsville had become a Town of considerable extent and was a place of gaiety, fashion and refinement. Many intelligent citizens had located there. (I refer you to the history of the creek war)

Alabama ~~continued~~ to be a Territory about two years when at the end of ~~that~~ time the population was found to have increased to the requisite number to authorize the organization of a state Government. An act of Congress was accordingly passed ~~authorizing~~ ordering ~~the~~ elections ~~to~~ be held

for members of a convention to form a constitution. At this period the counties of South Alabama were thinly populated owing to the more recent extinguishment of the Indian Title to the land covering those counties. That population was like Josephs coat, composed of many colours. In and about the rubric Towns that had started into existance were found Black Legs of every description, Rowdies, Sharpers, Land pirates, the honest Farmer or planter, the sober and astute merchant, with now and then a Parson whose time was too much occupied in providing for the wants of his household, to be able, however willing, to do justice to his sacred calling.

The county of Montgomery seemed to possess attractions more enticing to foreigners than those of the surrounding counties. The cause of this was, that the lands were first sold, they were considered to be of a better quality and immigration had been more rapid, to its bordering on the noble Alabama River and the increment was offend of future wealth and grandeur. The Town of Montgomery had taken an earlier start than other neighboring villages. At first two Towns had been laid out on the River and on different fractions of land. A company of gentlemen formed their Town on the lower Bluff and called it Alabama. Andrew Dexter a gentleman of great enterprise, laid out his Town beginning at a line where the court house now stands, running ~~the~~ East imbracing the spring where the state capital is built and called it Philadelphia. The company owning the lower Town in order to prevent competition, had, purchased the Fraction of Land imbracing the present Steam Boat Landing and extending to the court house, thereby cutting Philadelphia off from the River. This was done at the price of $70 per acre.

After paying to the Government the first installment, under the former system of selling the public lands, forfeited it to the government. This policy was intended to prevent the land from being entered by any other person or persons, as it could not be done without paying the full amount for which it originally sold. Finding however that the dexterous Dexter had outstriped them in Town making, the company repurchased the fraction and entered into an arrangement with the owners of Philadelphia by which the two Towns were amalgamated and assumed the new name of Montgomery in honor to the memory of Major Montgomery who was killed in the Creek war at the battle of the Horse shoe. It may not be uninteresting to state, that thirty years ago, Andrew Dexter, pointed to the square on which the new state house now stands and emphatically remarked to the writer. "Here Sir is Capitol square, and tho, it may not be used as such, during my life, yet the time will come, when the Indian Title now within the Chartered limits of Alabama shall have been extinguished, that a noble edifice will arise here to be known as the Capital of the State of Alabama." Prophetic words.

The Territorial Legislature at their last session, designated Huntsville as the place for holding the Convention; as there was a good prospect of the members and such strangers as might attend, finding better accommodation than at any other place in the ~~state~~ Territory

The Convention was composed of a body of men highly respectable ~~for their~~ character and intelligence. Indeed many of them would have graced any deliberative assembly. When they met on the important subject of creating a sovereign ~~or~~ State, and forming for its Government a Constitution intended to exist through all future ages, each one seemed to feel the heavy and responsible duty incumbent upon them. In the outset, there were many formidable difficulties to overcome. The members were for the most part, strangers to each other. Their respective capacities for the various and complicated business of legislation, was not known. Some of the members manifested an itching to lead off and sought occasion to become conspicuous and establish a name for themselves. When it is recollected that the various offices of state, from Senators in Congress down to the lowest grade, Judges of the different circuits &c. were to be filled at the session of the Legislature succeeding the Convention, no surprise should be excited for the manifestation of this spirit. (I regret the want of the Journals) John W. Walker of Madison County was elected President. He was in every respect qualified for and worthy of the important station to which he was elevated. In their incipient deliberations, it was soon manifest that it would not be an easy matter to agree on the principles and details of a Constitution, composed, as it was, of members from different states, and each one bringing with him all the partialities and prejudices of state preferences, together with various and contrary views relative to the policy of the new state, seemed to render an agreement, almost hopeless.

weakened by consumption, yet on several occasions he displayed great wisdom and talent in the speeches he made. He was of ordinary height, refined manners considerable powers of elocution, a profound statesman gravity of manners and commanded the entire attention of the members of the convention whenever he attempted to address the body of them. He presided with dignity and impartiality and gave entire satisfaction to all parties. His death was a calamity to the state which was in need of his wisdom and intelligence.

Judge Foulman, another member was a man of much learning and was a considerable speaker, but being a Foreigner he failed to obtain that influence among the members which many a man of less talent would have acquired under more favorable circumstances.

Israel Richards, was modest and unassuming. His speeches were plain and unostentatious, short and to the point. He was an amiable man and much respected by his colleagues.

Wm R. King is known to you personally.

Doctor Henry Chambers possessed strong native powers with a highly cultivated mind, much dignity of deportment. He seldom spoke, but when he did so commanded general respect and attention. In after years he was elected to the Senate of the U.S. but died before he took his seat. Henry Hitchcock, A. G. Hopkins, Johnell Taylor with a number of others were men of considerable intellectual powers.

Legislature

An appropriation was made of $20,000 either by the Territorial, or by the convention (I have forgotten which) for building a state House at Cahawba which was affected by an after additional appropriation at which the first session of the Legislature of the state of Alabama convened in the winter of 1819. I recollect no particular circumstances of this or any succeeding legislature more than you will find in the journals. At some one of the after sessions a string of resolutions were introduced into the house, by Col. Wm R. Pickett for the alteration of the constitution, which passed and was lost in the Senate by the casting vote of the President (Nicholas Davis) a majority of 2/3rds being required to pass them. Among other amendments embraced, was one to alter the tenure of Judicial terms of service from that of "good behavior" to a term of years. This amendment was subsequently made.

The members of the representative department for the first few sessions presented a heterogeneous set of materials, as to appearance capacity and views. A sufficient number of men however were always there to perform, correctly the duties of legislation. Among others was your, honoured Father, to whom the state of Alabama owes much.

As regards the passage of the state Bank Charter, you will find in the charter itself, and the journals all the details. I particularly refer you to the protest of the minority in the Senate against final passage.

P.S. The Lots in the new City of Cahawba were sold at high prices, from the belief on the part of purchasers, that the seat of government was permanently located. Many fine and expensive buildings were speedily erected and a number of wealthy and highly respectable citizens and families settled there, and lived and moved in a style to seldom excelled even in cities whose destiny was more fortunate. When afterwards, the Seat of Government was removed property fell and became of no value; and many who had invested their all were ruined. Some houses decayed and rotted, others were floated off to some more fortunate location and again built up for various uses.

So soon as Cahawba was laid out, the Land office was moved from Milledgeville Georgia, where the lands about Montgomery had been offered for sale, and located at Cahawba. A great deal of the public domain and particularly River Lands were sold at enormous prices. Large amounts of Yazoo scrip had been issued by the General Government receivable in the purchase of public land; this scrip was held by capitalists who had obtained it at $40, in the hundred which enabled them to compete, with money holders at tremendous odds. The consequence was, that when a collision ensued between those who held Scrip and those who had not the lands were bid up to a high price.

The Land sales were usually attended by large crowds. Often 3 or 4000 persons might be seen scattered over the plain in Booths and tents. Some busking in

the sun shine or shade as the season might render most comfortable, waiting the progress of things and discussing the ways and means of obtaining land at at the lowest possible price

At one time a company was formed to defraud the government by preventing opposition, so as to buy the land at Government price and resell it ~~during~~ public sale among themselves at whatever it might bring After paying the Government its due the overplus was divided among the stock holders. Thus enormous sums of money were gained by the cunning and sagacious while the more ignorant were often fleced.

Sketch of Gov Bibb