

WPA Alabama Writers Project
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Interesting Happenings, Past and Present,
A bout City of Jasper.

As a ten year old child living in the beautiful, cultured, town of Marietta, Georgia, I first became a regular reader of the Mountain Eagle. The editor had seen my name on the desk in his office and had mailed a copy to me. This paper has been a welcome visitor each week during all the intervening years.

When my father's family moved to Jasper we came somewhat on the installment plan, Curtis, my brother, coming early in February, mamma and the other children a month later and Papa following in another month.

Coming by the best route then available, we left Marietta at mid night going northwest to Chattanooga, changed cars and turned southwest to Birmingham, thence north on the caboose of a train to Warrior Station where we spent the night.

Very early the next morning, my uncle's trusty negro man-of-all work, Uncle Plant, driving two powerful mules, Pete and Tobe, to a covered wagon, called for us and we started on our thirty-three mile overland trip to Jasper. Because of my mother's frail health my uncle had a trundle bed with feather mattress and quilts in the wagon and mamma lay down during most of the journey, while I sat in state with the baby on the driver's seat and the in-between children were tucked in vacant spaces around wraps, baggage and bedding. To all of us Uncle Plant and his mules were a source of great amusement. We had never heard a noisy coachman before and we softly giggled at the many "Whoa Pete's, Get Up Tobe's!"

Mamma was impatient to reach our destination but no amount of urging could induce Uncle Plant to overdrive his precious mules. We had to spend the night at a house on the way. My little sister's had never seen an open log room such as the kitchen was and much to our mother's discomfort one of them called out in her childish voice, "O, they have a light in the hen-house". The big house consisted of two rooms with a roaring fire in that occupied by the family, but none in ours. We children were tired after our travels that we slept all unconscious of the sweet potatoes that had been put in our mattress, evidently to prevent their freezing.

How glad we were to reach Jasper, and to greet my Mother's brothers and their wives whom she had not seen for so many years.

It is almost impossible for us of this progressive, modern "biggest little city of the south" to visualize the Jasper of those days. The town was more compactly built than today. The only house east of the creek were Mr. Gravlee's cottage, occupying practically the same site as the two story home of to-day, Captain Long's colonial mansion, Colonel Appling's residence and Mr. Musgrove's home.

A frame court house stood in the place of our present palace of justice, there were small stores with spaces between on three sides of the square, most of the stores having front porches which were popular sitting rooms for the proprietors and unfasting friends. The post office was in the rear of one of these stores.

Our home like the other homes in Jasper was ceiled but had neither been painted or papered. There were three outside doors and the only bay window in the county at that time.

Between us and the public square stretched the "bone yard", a very beautiful grove. During court week, this grove was a hitching place for the country people where a thriving business in horse swapping was carried on and much drinking and carousing.

Among the first visitors in our house were Mrs. Sheriff Lacy and sons. I recall my admiration of their stylish appearance, tho the only details I remember now were the long white stockings and strap slippers worn by the boys. Other early callers not so modish in dress were just as kindly in their welcome to us. There ~~were~~ two sisters whose costumes were unusual as to head, hands and feet. They wore sun bonnets, "half-handed" home-knit white yarn gloves and rubber over shoes instead of shoes and stockings.

Very soon after our arrival in Jasper, I found myself, as I thought, a young lady, for there was a "sociable" at Mrs. Stovall's and I recieved the following note,

"Complements of E. P. Rosemond to Miss Bessie Haley and would be pleased to escort you to the sociable at Mrs. Stovall's to-night".

With my parents' permission I accepted. It was Saturday, March 31. I donned my white pique skirt and wine-colored wool Noffolk jacket, and outwardly calm but with a fluttering heart "went with a boy" for the first time. It was the custom then for a gentleman at night, to place his left arm upon his breast and extend his elbow far outward and for the lady he was escorting to place her right hand gently within the loop thus formed. We went through the ceremony with dignity and studied unconcern.

At this debut party of mine I met the society contingent of Jasper, ranging in age from twelve to thirty. Among those present were Dr. Stovall and Nancy Dodson who afterwards became his wife, Mollie Little, Carlos Owen, Leila Gamble, J. Harvey Cranford, (our future mayor for many years), Ella Stanley (Mrs R. W. Gordon) and also Jasper's first "tooth dentist", Dr. F. H. McAnnally.

A few nights later, there was a party. I was invited but young people in those days didn't have "dates". Every girl looked forward to a "note" and the note was seldom sent more than a few hours before the function.

As time passed and the town grew the note carrying business became a profitable industry for the small boys of the community that they made themselves a pest by soliciting orders and the young men in self defence required their messengers to warrant the notes, that is, guarantee an affirmative answer, the customary nickle being paid only upon this proviso. The youngsters soon developed an almost uncanny working psychology as to whose answers they could safely warrant.

I recieved my note that aforesaid night from Mr. A. B. Stovall and I accepted. Now, it was a life-long custom of my father's to keep th e

clock from fifteen to thirty minutes fast, and that unlucky night the clock had already struck eight when my escort, a Beau Brummel, in neatness and style put in his appearance. My Father said "It's going on eight o'clock, too late to go to a party," and from his decision there was no appeal. Another time when I had a note I was advised to reply, "My parents think I am too young to go with the gentlemen, and you know I must obey the fifth commandment! With these parental handicaps to say nothing of my red hair and freckles, is it any wonder I was never a society belle? But youth is a defect too rapidly overcome and there were many good times for me after all.

In addition to Sunday School singings, sociables, and parties, other diversions of the young people were walks to the old cemetery, Robins' spring, Academy Hill and Childers spring; buggy riding, a little later more elegantly designated as "driving" and occasional hayride and most fascinating of all, serenading. Uncle Sam and Aunt Lucy were always ready to chaperon us, and Uncle Sam was a genius with the banjo, guitar and violin while all of us joined in singing "Juanita," "When you and I were young, Maggie" "In the gloaming" "Good-bye, my lover, good bye".

Many delightful functions have graced Jasper's calendar during our residence here. The most elaborate among those in earlier days was a party given by Mrs. L. Stanley, famous as housewife, cook and hostess. It rained hard that night and there were no carriages nor cars but my parents yielded to my entreaties to let me go any way.

Barbecues and her own seventy-eighth birthday anniversary on the lawn gay parties inside, long tables placed in the hall and lavishly furnished with all good things to eat for serenaders who could seldom take her by surprise- these were some of the hospitalities of Mrs. Musgrove.

A mystifying invitation sent to a dozen couples back yonder was this, "Dr. and Mrs. Haley cordially invite you to attack with us the CUBAN QUEEN and her fleet of IRONSIDES. The battle will be fought under the black flag for no quarter will be given." Great was the hilarity and hearty the onslaught when the dining room doors were opened and the guests beheld a black flag proudly floating over a great fort of watermelons of the varieties named in the invitation.

An elaborate affair was the banquet at the residence of Mr. and Mrs. John B. Long in honor of the locating committee for Alabama College. To grace the occasion, the first state flag outside of Montgomery was made and displayed. There were speech making and feasting, everybody there helping Jasper to put her best foot forward in the effort to secure the new state school.

Mrs. Zue Long, a frequent and cordial hostess, always saw the funny side and convulsed her friends with laughter. She pretended to be highly indignant because some of her appreciative, tho tactless guests in bidding her good night had said, "We've had such a pleasant time for you have such a nice large house for a party".

I could go on and on of the lovely parties we had in those days. Just to mention a few more was the first Halloween party in Jasper given by Mrs. D. L. Stovall, the elegant one in compliment to Miss Dollie Kirk (now one of the University chaperons) given by the mysterious W.

W.E.X.L.A.O.J. club whose membership consisted of the young "blades" of the town.

In September, 1898 the Golden Wedding of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Sanders was celebrated. Another brilliant function of later years was the Golden Wedding in November 1916 of the late Senator John Hollis Bankhead and Mrs. Bankhead. Preparations were being made for months before hand, hundreds of invitations were issued, an elegant feast was served, guests came outside the state, gifts poured in from everywhere, but the remembrance which attracted the most attention was a great bunch of magnificent red roses with cards simply engraved "The President and Mrs. Woodrow Wilson".

The culmination and crowning event in Jasper was our Walker County Centennial only last year. (1924).

Perhaps the greatest indoor sport in Jasper during many years preceding the days of the railroad was the arrival, opening and distribution of the mail. A star route driver, as he was the then, left Warrior Station at one o'clock one day, spent the night at Democrat, (now Sumiton) and reached Jasper at eleven the next morning. Leaving Jasper at one o'clock the same schedule was made back to Warrior. The news of his arrival spread like wildfire, everybody rushed to the postoffice and when the postmaster opened the pouch, he called each piece of mail as he came to it, and there was no delay in the delivery.

There were two church buildings, the Baptist being part of the present Screws hotel on fourth avenue and the Methodist, now the two story building on the southeast corner of fifth avenue and seventeenth street. The upper floor was used as the Masonic Lodge and the lower floor by the church. The Baptist church had a large front porch and both churches had two doors, the men's on the left and the women's on the right, and each had corresponding "Amen" corners for the brethren and sisters. It would have been rank heresy for a woman to sit on the men's side and almost as bad for a man to venture on the women's side, The young people, especially when they were keeping company discreetly occupied middle ground, that is the central tier of pews. Neither church had services every Sunday and the Baptists were several times without a pastor.

The most cordial relations existed between the two demoninations, every body going to the Methodist Sunday school in the morning and to the Baptist in the afternoon. We had the same lessons in the two schools, but the questions were asked from the different quarterlys. Mr. Sheriff Lay was my teacher for years, as often in one Sunday School as the other.

Unusual were the relations of denominational co-operation existing between two neighbors pastors of recent years. Both were busy about "Our Father's" business, yet both were famous for working with there hands as well. Brother Hagood kept several cows, running a small dairy and was his own milkmaid but when he went to the State and Southern Conventions, Dr. Ponder of the Presbyterian church, kindly acted for him in that capacity. How about that as a modern instance of the traditional "milk of human kindness?"

In the early days Amens were frequent and fervent and so earnest in their own devotions were those who made them that some of their responses occasionally sounded inappropriate. Judge Gamble, of the heroic and benign countenance, merely smiled blandly when the joke was told

on him that as the other minister in the closing service of a protracted meeting, prayed, "O, Lord it may be the last time we shall meet together," the preacher-Judge fervidly ejaculated, "Amen, Lord grant it".

Baptist and Methodist church members in those days were not in good standing if they engaged in even the square and contra dance, but most of our young folks were inveigled all unawares into that last named wordly amusement. "Twistification" was soon unmasked as the Virginia reel, so certain devotees introduced an innocent singing game which became extremely popular, until it too was unmasked. The classic words to this game were;

"Dogs in the wood, treeing up a squirrel,
My true love's, the beauty of the world".

As they were merrily, earnestly sung ever and over, faster flew the light fantastictoes and all went merry as a marriage bell.

Charades was the next society fad and what fun they were. Sometimes there was the excitement of choosing sides and again the merry challenge, "Boys against the girl's" or vice versa.

One of the greatest characters in Jasper and especially in the churches was "Hanny Lee Anner Jane Cath Ryne May Rier Eason. She attended every service and made herself conspicuous in all. Whatever the proposition, she was the first to accept it and was a great trial to the ministers. The "door to the Baptist church was opened" one morning and she went forward as a candidate for membership. Dear old Dr. Samuel Henderson, a saintly man of God, was the preacher and he looked troubled as he said, "My sister, aren't you a member of the Methodist church?" Cherry was her ready response: "O, yes, but I want to put myself under the watch care of all the churches. The Methodist church is a very good church to live by, but it won't do to die by. I want to git on the good ship of Zion and go sailin' home to glory".

Jasper has been fortunate in its colored population. Among the old-timers were Aunt Betty Cobb, whose daughter, Mandy still lives here, and whose son, Jack early felt the call to preach, went to Paine College, Augusta, Ga. becoming a minister and editor and editor of prominence before his untimely death: Aunt Dinah, whose quaint curtsy and "Yes'm bless you" were always so refreshing; Henrietta Cook a proud, ambitious and reserved who owned her own neat cottage with its large lawn and beautiful trees; Aunt Nellie Pery, most faithful of servants and a true christian, Aunt Julia Gaines, a privileged character, priding herself upon her age which doubtless did eventually reach the centary mark. When asked how old she was she always replied, with a proud toss of her head, "Over a hundred" and once she added, "I guess I'se two hundred".

Jasper first stenographer was Miss Alberta Lee, a young woman of an unusual personality.

A few months after we came to Jasper I began my career as a school mistress and from that time through my Worlr War service as a teacher in the Walker County High School, I have numbered among my pupils two generations of our leading families. For some years I had pupils older than myself. My first school was was a tiny, one-room house which stood about where Cam Smith lives now. Its one window was toward the west, and the house was so hot during July and August that it well deserved the name "Tar Ailn

Institute" bestowed upon it by my sympathizing relatives. There was not a town clock and neither teacher nor pupil owned a timepiece, so when two of my big boys patched a hole in the roof they left a slit in it so we could still tell by the sun mark on the floor when to dismiss at twelve and four. A later High Sheriff of Walker was among my pupils. Later when I was teaching English and Education in the Jacksonville State Normal School, Judge Gamble and Judge Shields offered me a larger salary and other inducements to come home and teach their five children, Frank and Foster, May, Maude and Johnnie Bee. Other pupils who were admitted to the class were; Griffin Lamkin, Earnest Lacy, Mollie McDade, Ella Duffie, Everett McGuire, Mattie Appling, Paul and Francilla Haley

Jasper has been undoubtedly a good training ground for men and women who have later won prominence elsewhere. Sam Earle Greene, the eminent jurist of Birmingham and Jefferson County, began his career here. K. M. Williamson, who taught here, later went to the Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut, as professor of Philosophy. Henry Vance started his newspaper work on the Mountain Eagle and is now with the Birmingham News

Two of our citizens were of national fame; L. B. Musgrove, coal magnate and Prohibition leader and Senator John Hollis Bankhead, father of good roads, whose splendid monument, Bankhead Highway, extends across the continent.

Because she spent part of her childhood in Jasper and because her distinguished father is "Our Billy" we claim Tallulah Bankhead, the clever young actress, who has won laurels on two continents.

Others who grew up in Jasper were, Griffin Lampkin, a successful lawyer in Birmingham; Kenneth Lampkin, a professional musician in New York City; Frank Gamble, a prominent attorney in Pennsylvania; Owen Gamble, a physician and surgeon in Albany, New York; Will and Bert Rosemond, successful physicians in Birmingham and many others too numerous to mention.

May I not properly close my long ramble with "Jasper Town" the music as well as the words of which were my mother's tribute some years ago?

Jasper Town

"There's a town in Alabama in the coal and cotton belt
Where the fox, the deer and 'possum roam around,
And the breezes from the pine trees on our cheeks
' are ever felt;
'Tis our dear, progressive Jasper Town.

Chorus

O, our dear old Jasper town, with its hills and vales so fair
And the balmy breezes floating on the air,
You may search the world around and there'll never yet
be found
Dearer place than our old Jasper Town.

Sweet song-birds sing a carol waking us at early morn
And the mocking-bird a lullaby at night,
And the streams and ferns and flowers as they shimmer
and adorn

Are a joy, a beauty and delight.

There's a brotherhood of love going out from heart
to heart

As we meet and pass the cup of kindness round,
And our traffic and our trade as they pass from
mart to mart

Tell of health and wealth in this good town.