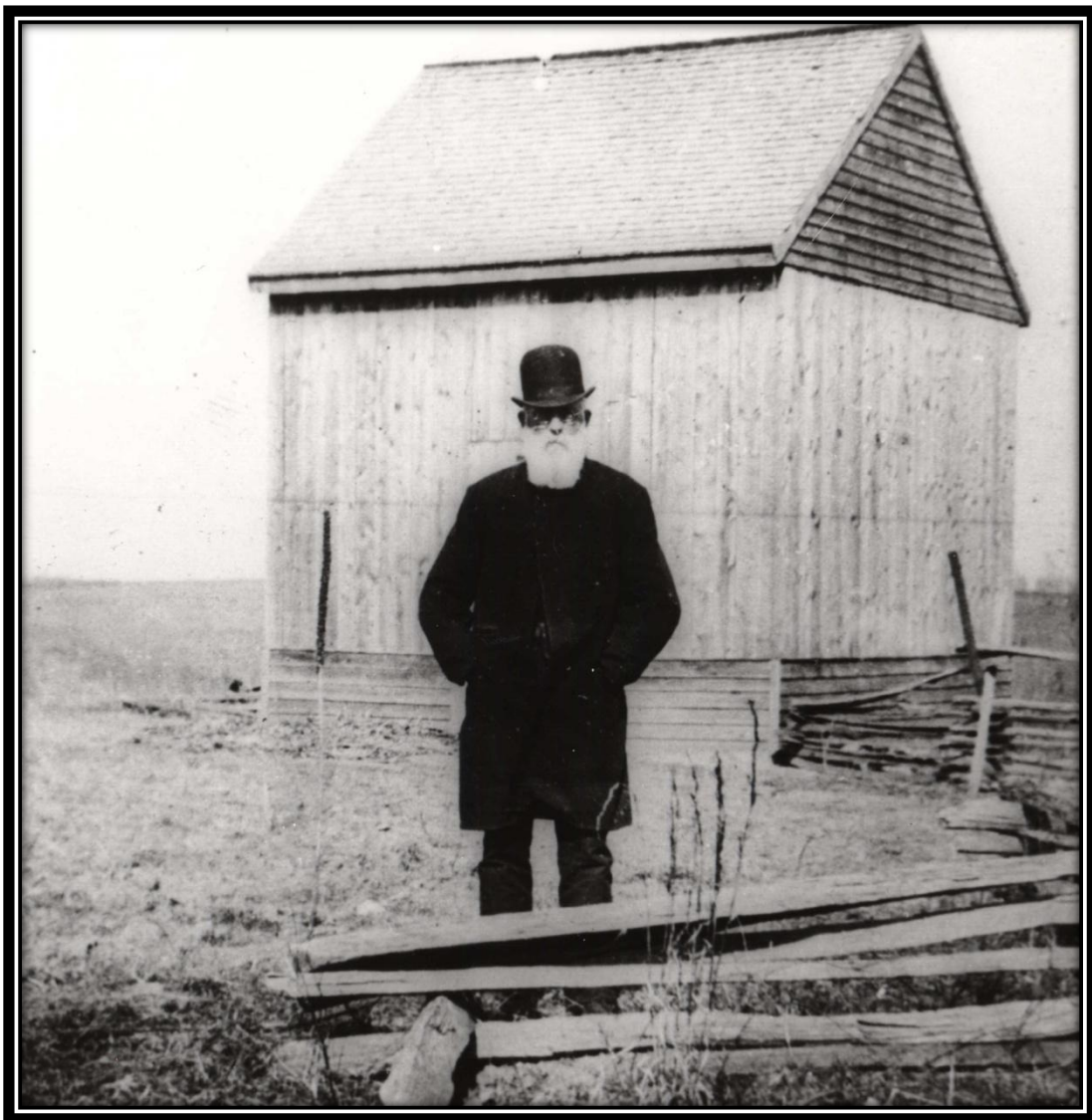


**Some Recollections and Reminiscences
of Appomattox County and its People
in its Early Days From its Formation**

by George T. Peers

Now one of its oldest inhabitants

**(Mr. Peers, who was Clerk of the County for many years,
was asked to write his recollections after the county records
burned in a Courthouse fire in February 1892.)**



Some Recollections and Reminiscences

Of Appomattox County and its People in its Early Days from its Formation, by Geo. T. Peers, now one of its Oldest Inhabitants.

Some over-partial friends having suggested to me that I might write something of my recollection of the early history of Appomattox County, its formation, organization, people, interests, etc., that would be of interest to the younger people of the county, and urgently requested me to do so, I have, with great distrust of my capacity to write anything connectedly that will be instructive, entertaining or amusing reading, for my life work has been such that I have devoted very little of it to literary attainments, or to productions for public reading, consented to jot down a few things as they may occur to me, disconnectedly and without strict regard to chronological order. Whether what I shall write will be submitted to the public to be read after it is written remains to be decided.

I am one of a comparatively few persons, other than very young children, who were living in the county at the time of its formation, who are yet alive. I was then living in that part of the county which was taken from Campbell county, and although a boy of tender years I was old enough to remember, and do remember, that there was a great deal of talk of the formation of the new county with considerable opposition to it on the part of a number of people, mainly, as I recall it, on account of the increased rate of taxation it would entail upon them.

The matter had been before the General Assembly of Virginia for one or two sessions before, without final action on it, but at the session of 1844-45, the new county of Appomattox (named for the Appomattox River which rises within its bounds) was formed from parts of the counties of Buckingham, Campbell, Charlotte and Prince Edward, lying remote from the court house of said counties, making it inconvenient as well as expensive and tiresome for jurors, witnesses and others to attend the courts of their respective counties.

On the Thursday after the first Monday in May, 1845, the county court composed of the Justices who were in commission in their respective counties, and embraced in the boundary of the new county, and by law made the Justices thereof, met at Clover Hill, the county seat to organize the new county - among the number I can recall the names of such men as Joel Watkins, William Mathews, Major Thomas Rudd, John W. Marshall, Dr. Rueben D. Palmer, Col. Benjamin P. Walker, Col. Thomas H. Flood, Nathan H. Hancock, Bryant Nowlin, Col. Z. E. Cheatham, Washington Hunter, Sterling C. Anderson, John H. Plunkett and James McDearmon. Possibly there were one or two others whom I do not now remember, all men of prominence, intelligence; among the best men of the county. Joel Watkins, Esq., who was the senior Justice of the county, was commissioned the first Sheriff of the county, and Samuel D. McDearmon, William James McDearmon and William J. Watkins were appointed deputies, they having full charge of the office. The organization was completed by the appointment of the following county officers (all county officers being then appointed by the county courts).

viz;

John T. Bocock, first Clerk; Thomas S. Bocock, Commonwealth's Attorney; Thomas W. Johns, Commissioner of Revenue; Andrew B. Baker, Coroner; and some two or three constables, John H. Davidson one of them, but who the others were I have forgotten.

Before the next term of the court, John T. Bocock, Esq., who had been appointed Clerk died, and Henry F. Bocock, his son, was appointed Clerk in his place, which office he continued to hold until July 1st, 1860, when he resigned and removed to Lynchburg to engage in the mercantile business.

Colonel Z. E. Cheatham, who had been in the legislature before, from Campbell county, was the first representative of the county elected to the House of Delegates of Virginia, and was re-elected for one or two other terms. He had also been appointed county Surveyor, which office he held for many years.

The post offices in the county when it was formed, were Clover Hill, the county seat - soon after the name was changed to Appomattox Courthouse - Bent Creek, Oakville, Walkers Church, Pamplin, then called Merryman's shop, Spout Spring, Reedy Spring and Concord, then kept at Chilton's tavern, near what is now Concord Depot. And just here I want to digress enough to state a fact characteristic of the man, and that so impressed me that I have never forgotten it. Mr. Raleigh Chilton, who was the proprietor of the Concord Tavern and the postmaster there and who was very much opposed to the new county, at least to being taken into it, would always, when opening the mail and seeing a package addressed to Appomattox Courthouse, read it "Scrap Courthouse," and thus he always spoke of it.

The voting precincts of the county were at the courthouse, Walker's Church, Oakville and Spout Spring. I do not think there was any other at first, and a qualified voter could then vote at any precinct in the county he might chance to be at on election day.

The county court, composed of the Justices of the county, was then a self-perpetuating body, selecting and appointing men to fill and keep up their ranks from time to time, and they usually selected the best and most intelligent men they could get to serve. Not very long after the organization of the county it was deemed to have a larger number of Justices, and such Wm. D. Christian, C. Jones, Dr. Joel W. Flood, Silas P. Vawter, James G. Patterson, E. O. Robertson, D. H. Marshall, Major Saml. J. Walker, Wm. M. Hannah and others were from time to time added to the number.

Five of their number constituted a court for all ordinary purposes, the senior member present usually presiding, and they had jurisdiction of all police and road matters, and of probate and fiduciary matters; the trial of slaves for all offenses, the trial of misdemeanors and the examination of white persons indicted for felony, who were either discharged or sent on to the Circuit Court for trial.

The whole body of the Justices would be summoned once a year, usually at the June term, to examine and pass upon claims against the county, make the allowances to the officers and lay the

county levy. This was done by levying a per capita tax on males over twenty-one years old and not exempt, and not by levying a tax on property as now.

The several Justices also held courts (then called warrant tryings) in their vicinities for the trial of warrants on small claims in the hands of constables, then not exceeding twenty dollars in amount. Some of these warrant tryings were big and interesting court days, with more intense litigation than in the courts.

The Justices all served without compensation, other than once in two years the senior one in service was appointed and commissioned by the Governor the Sheriff of his county, from a list of three recommended to him by the court, the senior Justice heading the list. This office was always farmed to a man, or men, for a specified sum to be paid to him, and who, upon his qualification, were appointed his deputy or deputies, and who assumed all the obligations and responsibilities (securing him with ample bond) and performed all the duties of the office during his term.

It was during the administration of the first officers of the new county that the first tragedy in the county occurred, the killing of Wm. J. McDearmon, one of the deputy Sheriffs, by Coleman May, a young attorney who had located at the new courthouse for the practice of his profession, and who, I think, was boarding at the Hotel kept by Col. S. D. McDearmon: the old Patterson Brick Tavern, which is still standing there.

A personal difficulty and a quarrel in the street, a little west of the front of the Hotel, between Col. McDearmon and May was, as it appeared, about to terminate in a fight between them when Wm. J. McDearmon a younger brother of Col. McDearmon, approached and in defense of his brother, struck May over the head with a stick.

May immediately turned upon him with a dagger, or some sharp pointed instrument (as I recall it now, it was said to have been an old soldering iron, with the end ground to a sharp point) struck him a violent blow on the left shoulder or upper breast, just over the breast bond, driving it down to the heart, inflicting a wound scarcely an inch wide from which but little blood flowed, but from which he died almost instantly, exclaiming as he fell "he has killed me." Col. McDearmon, it is said immediately opened fire on May with an old-fashioned six barrel pepper-box revolver, striking him with one ball on the side of the abdomen inflicting a single, glancing skin wound, as was afterwards discovered; but May, exclaiming, "I am killed," turned and walked off, and in the confusion, made his escape. Later he was pursued by some of Col. McDearmon's friends and an officer and was overtaken, captured and taken to the courthouse that night. He was examined by a Justice, and afterwards by the county court, and sent on to the Circuit Court, (then termed the "Circuit Superior Court of Law and Chancery") to be tried for murder. This, as I now remember it, without any record to find the date, was in March, 1846.

The time of his trial was at the succeeding May term of the Circuit Court.

That time was the occasion of my first visit to Appomattox Court House, and of my first attendance at any court. My boy curiosity (for I was then a small boy, but large enough to ride a

horse alone) prompted me to be very anxious to go, and my father, after much begging and teasing, permitted me to accompany him to court. The, to me, new scenes and surroundings made impressions on me that I am sure will not be forgotten while my reason lasts. There was an immense crowd of people there, possibly more than I had ever seen together before.

The court was held in Alex Patterson's "old stage house," a large old frame and planked up structure, covered with boards and stood in the middle of the road, or rather on a plot of ground with the road on each side of it, just about where the county courthouse was afterwards built. Judge Daniel A. Wilson presided, and Henry F. Bocoock, as Clerk and other court officials were there. The accused was brought into court and arraigned and then, on his motion, made and fully argued by his counsel, the venue was changed to Amherst County, on the ground that on account of the popularity of Col. McDearmon, he being the managing Sheriff of the county, and of the feeling here, he could not secure an impartial trial in this county. He was afterwards tried in Amherst and acquitted on his plea of self-defense.

I cannot now recall many of the lawyers who were present at that court, but the improvised bar, near the center of the "old stage house" was crowded with them. I do remember, however, that D. A. Wilson, Jr., the Commonwealth's Attorney or the Circuit Court, and Thos. S. Bocoock assisting him were there, also C. S. Mosby, Jno. M. Speed, Danl. Marr and others.

It was on the late afternoon of this, or the next succeeding day, I am not certain which, I think the former, that the most terrific hail storm that ever visited this section occurred at, and in the immediate vicinity of the courthouse. The stones and irregular pieces of ice were of large size. It beat down and almost ruined the wheat crop, vegetables and beat off the leaves, bark and small branches of the trees, and it was said, it was washed up in fence corners about the courthouse to the depth of two or three feet. For years after trees in the woods nearby were pointed out with dead tops, and all the smaller limbs knocked off as a result of the storm.

The erection of the public buildings was commenced in that year and the courthouse and jail were completed in 1847, and were in use before I again visited the place. I do not recall any special event of note that occurred afterward during 1846-7. Everything seemed to work along smoothly, with some complaints of the high taxes for county buildings.

In the spring of 1848, the time of Joel Watkins, as Sheriff expired and Major Thomas Rudd, the then senior justice of the county was appointed and commissioned Sheriff of the county and qualified as such at the March term of the court, 1848, with Capt. A. B. Baker and Capt. Robert J. Boaz as deputies. I cannot remember now, whether Col. S. D. McDearmon was interested in the sheriffalty for that term or not. He was elected to the House of Delegates either in that or the succeeding year. The term of Capt. Thos. W. Johns, Commissioner of Revenue having expired, and he not desiring a reappointment, Mr. Jonathan Christian was appointed and qualified as Commissioner. He performed the duties of the office faithfully and acceptably.

I do not remember any events occurring during the two years calling for special note or comment, the affairs of the county working along smoothly and orderly, in the ordinary course of county affairs.

I do remember, however, one incident that occurred during Major Rudd's term as Sheriff, and early in his administration of it, as it was related to me by witnesses to and actors in it, which rather baffled the actors in it, and was a source of amusing comment.

The old case law of Virginia, under which a judgment debtor could be arrested and confined in jail until the debt was paid, or until he took an oath of insolvency, or made a schedule of, and surrendered all his personal property liable to execution, was then in force. Under that law some judgment creditor of Major Rudd (from Campbell county, I think) had issued a case against him and put it in the hands of Capt. A. B. Baker, Coroner, to be executed. Upon being confronted with the process, and not being ready to arrange it, and declining to take the oath or make the schedule required, the Major was informed that then he would have to go to jail, whereupon the Major in his peculiar way, said, "See here, honey, I am the Sheriff of this county, and, as such, its jailor. I therefore peremptorily demand of you the keys of that jail, and if I am to be confined I propose to be my own keeper." The dilemma was not so easily solved. The Major was not put in jail. I think he soon after arranged and settled the debt. Major Rudd was a unique character in the county, a man of high order of common sense; of strict honesty and integrity and a kind heart, but with many peculiarities. Not long after his term as Sheriff expired, I don't remember the date, he died quite suddenly in a room he occupied in the house in front of the "Raines Hotel."

In the spring of 1850, William Mathews, of Walker's Church, being the next senior magistrate of the county, became the next Sheriff of the county and qualified as such at the March term of the court, and William Paris, who had farmed the office from him for his term, together with John S. Bass and Geo. T. Peers qualified as his deputies, and took charge of the office. During the two years term it was quite a busy time with the Sheriff. There was a good deal of litigation in the county as well as many indictments by the Grand Jury for misdemeanor, principally for fighting and gambling, for card playing had become very common about the courthouse, and I remember many hunts and runs after witnesses to go before the grand juries to testify as to it, with many failures to find and get them.

It must be remembered that we had no Treasurer then, and the Sheriff had to make off and collect the state and county taxes, and pay off the county allowances. There were no jury or justices allowances to be then paid. The jurors for the trial of cases, civil or criminal, were summoned from the by-standers, as they were needed, and after the cases were announced to be ready for trial. Only the grand jurors for the quarterly and the circuit courts were summoned before, to attend the court, and all the jurors were selected and summoned by the Sheriff at his discretion, and all served without compensation. One of the most difficult things the Sheriff had to collect; one that gave most trouble, were the fines imposed upon the militia for failing to attend the regular musters, for then there two petty of company musters held at different places in the county, twice a year, spring and fall, and a Regimental Muster, of all the companies in the county, was held at the courthouse in the spring, and everyone who failed to attend and answer to the roll call, who could not show a good excuse for his absence, was fined seventy-five cents.

It was in 1850 or 51 that the first hanging of a person in Appomattox occurred. Reuben, a slave, was tried and convicted for the killing of a rival of his somewhere in the neighborhood of Concord Depot and was hanged on the side of the hill across the branch, in the rear of the Hotel.

In 1850 there was an election under an Act of the General Assembly of the winter before of delegates to a convention to revise or amend the Constitution of Virginia. The delegates were elected from districts composed of several counties. This district consisted of Appomattox, Charlotte and Prince Edward, and was entitled to three delegates, all to be voted for in each of the counties. There were quite a number of candidates for the position, some from each county, and the campaign was quite spirited, it was expected that a delegate from each county would be chosen but the election resulted in the choice of Col. Willis P. Boccock and Col. Thomas H. Flood of this county and Branch J. Worsham, of Prince Edward. Col. Flood defeating Wyatt Cardwell, of Charlotte, by one vote, and he always boasted that he was elected by a large majority as William Paris, of this county had voted for him and Col. Boccock too, and not for Mr. Cardwell. The convention met some time that winter and formed a new Constitution which was sometime in the fall of 1851, submitted to the people and ratified to go into effect July 1st. 1852, that is, the officers elected under it, went into office at that time. Isaac Adams, Esq., was appointed Commissioner of the Revenue in 1851, in the place of Jonathan Christian, Esq., who had died. I cannot recall any other changes in the offices of the county or any other events of special note occurring about that time, except Judge William Leigh, of Halifax, had succeeded Judge D. A. Wilson as Judge of the Circuit Court. I do not remember now in what year this was.

In 1851, work on the Southside Railroad was commenced all through the county along its line, and the people were very much interested and excited about soon having the long talked of railroad through the county. Up to this time and for some time afterwards, the mails and passengers between Lynchburg and Richmond were carried through on stage coaches drawn by four horses. The courthouse was one of the stopping places to change horses and drivers, and where passengers going west would get their supper, and one of the customs of the driver was to blow his bugle when coming down the hill east of the courthouse, long enough to give notice of his approach and then give one blast, at intervals of a few seconds, for each passenger aboard who would want supper so that it would be ready and on the table for as many as would want it, when the stage stopped at the gate, and they could go right into the dining room and to the table.

The hotel, for several years about this time, was kept by Mr. George R. Jeffries, who was employed by Col. McDearmon for that purpose. On one occasion in 1851, as I now remember it, when a large load of passengers stopped for supper, among them was a lady, who complained of being quite sick and who did not go into supper, but remained in the sitting room while the other passengers were eating and Miss Jeffries remained there with her to entertain and minister to her. About a week or ten days after that time Miss Jeffries was taken sick, and during the first days of her sickness a number of persons called to see her, among them was Mrs. Pryor Wright and Squire William Trent (as he was always called) who, it was said, was very fond of her. In a very few days Miss Jeffries broke out thickly with an eruption which was very soon pronounced to be smallpox, by some of the physicians, others who were called in differed with them and decided that it was not. The matter was, however, soon settled by learning, upon inquiry, that the lady

who was sick at the hotel, had gone on through to Lexington that night and the next day had broken out with a well developed case of genuine smallpox, and by the further fact that other members of Mr. Jeffries' family and Mrs. Wright and "Squire" Trent had broken out with it. Other cases developed from time to time, and a pest house was established at "Squire" Trent's and he was put in charge of it, and the patients and others who had been exposed to the disease were sent there. In a month or two it was starved out, although there were seventy cases in all, only one patient died, and he was an old Negro man. This was the first smallpox scare in Appomattox.

In March, 1852, the term of Wm. Mathews, Esq., as Sheriff having expired, and no officer under the new Constitution having been yet elected, John W. Marshall, Esq., was commissioned and qualified as Sheriff with the same deputies, Wm. Paris, who had farmed the office from his and John S. Bass and Geo. T. Peers, holding the office until the first of July, when it expired by the provision of the new Constitution.

The new Constitution, adopted in 1851, changed entirely the manner of selecting county officers. The Justices, who selected and perpetuated their own body, no longer appointed all the county officers, except the Sheriff, who was appointed and commissioned by the Governor, but only from a list recommended and furnished him by the court, and always the first one on the list, but the Justices themselves, and all the county and district officers were to be elected by the qualified voters of the county, and the time fixed by the Constitution, or the schedule to it, for the first election under it, was in May 1852.

The campaign opened early in the spring and the "woods were full of candidates" for the various offices, "every man of his own hook" - to use familiar old phrases. It was earnest and exciting, but as I remember, it was fair and friendly and free from bitter personalities.

When the election was over it was found that the following county officers were elected: William Paris, Sheriff; Henry F. Boccock, Clerk; Lewis D. Isbell, Attorney for the Commonwealth and Isaac Adams, Commissioner of the Revenue.

Four Justices, a Constable and an Overseer of the Poor were also elected in each of the magisterial districts. I cannot remember now who all the Justices elected were. I do remember a number of them, John H. Davidson and Thomas R. Peers, who had held the office for years before were elected Constables in their respective districts. I cannot recall who were elected in the others.

The newly elected officers qualified and entered upon their offices the first of July, 1852. The same deputies, John S. Bass and Geo. T. Peers, continuing as such for the new Sheriff.

The court was reorganized at the July term by the election of Col. Benjamin P. Walker as presiding Justice, who was to preside at each term of the court, and the classification of the other Justices to serve in turns at the succeeding terms, these Justices constituting the court for ordinary occasions, and five for the special terms for the trial or examination of felony cases, or in other words, the court consisted of not less than three nor more than five Justices, except that

for special county purposes as provided by law, a larger number or the whole body of Justices were assembled to consider the matter, such as examining and allowing county claims, laying the county levy, etc.

Everything under the new order of things worked on smoothly and well and general satisfaction seemed to prevail. No special events occurred that are now remembered that are worth special notice.

But in 1851 or 1852, I cannot remember with absolute certainty which year, and there are no records here to refer to, a very spirited and animated contest occurred between Col. S. D. McDearmon and Col. Benj. P. Walker for a seat in the State Senate from the district composed of this and Campbell counties. The fight was exceedingly hot and closely contested between the candidates and their friends. It resulted in the election of Col. McDearmon.

On the night of the election the biggest rough and tumble fight I ever saw occurred. It commenced in the barroom in the hotel which had been thrown open to the public and was crowded with men - between two men. Others joined in and in less than two minutes there must have been at least twenty-five or thirty persons engaged in it. Out on the porch and in the yard. The officers present, who did all they could to stop it, were utterly powerless to do much towards it, and just had to stand off and let them fight it out. After a while it was over, and no one was seriously hurt and no one seemed to know whom he had fought, or why he had been fighting. One man came out of the barroom early in the fight laughing, and said he had hit one man a h____ of a lick and left, he did not know who it was, he just hit the first man that got in his way.

The term of the Clerk then being for six years and that of Commonwealth's Attorney and of Justices being four years, the election of 1854 was only for Sheriff, Commissioner of Revenue, Constable, etc., and all of the incumbents were re-elected, so that the corps of officers remained the same for the next two years and the affairs of the county proceeded in about the usual way.

In the spring of 1856, William Paris having held the office of Sheriff for two terms, was ineligible for the next ensuing term and John S. Bass and Isaac Adams (the then Commissioner of the Revenue), became candidates for that office, and there were several candidates for Commissioner of the Revenue. The canvases for these two offices was spirited and animated - Mr. Isbell, for Commonwealth's Attorney, having no opposition.

The election resulted in the choice of John S. Bass, Sheriff; L. D. Isbell, Attorney for the Commonwealth, and Anthony A. North, as Commissioner of the Revenue, the only county offices to be filled at this election.

The terms of the Justices expiring that year, the election of a full board of Justices in all the districts occurred, and resulted in the re-election of nearly all, if not every, one of the old ones in office.

The first of July the newly elected officers went into office, and at the July term the county court was organized.

It was about this time that Col. Benjamin P. Walker removed to Lynchburg, and Capt. James G. Patterson was chosen as presiding Justice of the court. I cannot remember, with certainty, whether it was at this time, at the reorganization of the court, or sometime afterwards, when Col. Walker resigned, that Capt. Patterson was elected. But he succeeded Col. Walker and retained that position up to and during the war.

Under the new Constitution, the Judges of the Court of Appeals and of the Circuit Courts were elected by the people and upon the retirement of Judge William Leigh, on account of his age, Hon. Hunter H. Marshall, of Charlotte county, was elected Judge of the Circuit Courts of this county until after the war when he was removed by the military.

In 1858, the six year term of Henry F. Bocock, as Clerk, expiring on the first of July of that year, he was re-elected to that office without opposition, and John S. Bass, Sheriff and A. A. North, Commissioner of the Revenue, were re-elected to the respective offices.

In 1859, Jno. S. Bass, the Sheriff, having gone into business in Lynchburg that required his absence from the county a great deal of the time, turned the office over to me, as his deputy, and I managed it as such for that year and until the term expired in 1860.

In the spring of 1860, a new Sheriff was to be elected and I had announced myself a candidate for the office and done much talking to the voters in regard thereto, but before the election Mr. Bocock informed me that he was going to resign the office of Clerk to engage in the mercantile business in Lynchburg and asked me if I would not prefer that place to the Sheriffalty, adding very graciously and kindly, that he thought I was better prepared to take charge of the office at once and discharge its duties, than anyone else in the county who would be likely to want it; and this for the reason that, during my long service as deputy Sheriff, I had assisted him so much in his office work both in and out of court, that I had thereby become familiar with many of the duties of the office. I had no hesitation in deciding that I would very much prefer that office, for I felt then, as I have always since felt, that I would rather hold it than any other office in the county.

Mr. Bocock did resign the office to take effect the 1st day of July, 1860, but not in time for the court to hold an election to fill the vacancy at the general election in May (vacancies in office were then filled by election and not by appointments) and so a special election was ordered to be held for the purpose on the 20th day of June, 1860. I had withdrawn my name as a candidate for Sheriff and announced myself a candidate for the Clerkship before the May election.

There were several other candidates and a hard fight for the position, but at the election I led my foremost competitor by the small majority of thirty-nine votes, and secured the election, which I attribute more to the fact that many of the voters considered, and supported me for the reason given by Mr. Bocock than to any other cause that suggests itself to me. I qualified and took charge of the office the first day of July, 1860.

At the general election in May, 1860, Wilson Hix was elected Sheriff, Samuel J. Walker, Commissioner of the Revenue and L. D. Isbell re-elected Commonwealth's Attorney.

It was during the summer and fall of this year (1860) that the great political upheaval and intensely interesting campaign for the election of President of the United States occurred, which resulted in the election of Abraham Lincoln as President. Of this campaign, its results and consequences, and matters of recent history, this writer does not propose to write, but only of things in Appomattox county resulting from it, as may be remembered by, or occur to him, that he thinks may be of some interest to his readers.

After the election of Lincoln and the call for a convention in Virginia to consider the affairs of the State and decide whether Virginia should remain in the Union, or withdraw from it and unite with her sister States of the South that had or might secede therefrom, an election was held in the county, and Lewis D. Isbell, an avowed secessionist, was elected the delegate to represent this county in the convention.

I cannot remember now (and that is immaterial) just the date when that election was early in 1861, nor is it necessary to say here that the convention met in Richmond and passed an ordinance of secession, nor that after Lincoln's inauguration, there was a call for Northern troops to invade the South, only as they lead up to events in this county resulting therefrom.

The enlistment was rapid and soon the tramp of soldier boys drilling and preparing for the fray, and the hep, hep, hep of the cadet drillmaster, were familiar sights and sounds on the streets and old fields at and about the courthouse.

A fine company of cavalry was soon formed under the command of Capt. Joel. W. Flood, which became Company H, in the Second Virginia Cavalry, and was afterwards commanded by Charles E. Webb and at the close of the war, by Captain J. Watt Carson - also a company of heavy artillery commanded by Captain James Robertson and afterwards by Captain S. H. Overton, a company of infantry commanded by Captain Thos. P. Mathews, afterwards by Captain W. T. Johnson - a company of infantry under command of Captain William H. Abbitt, and afterwards Captain George W. Abbitt - companies were also raised a little later under the command of Captain Crawford H. Jones and Captain Robert P. Kyle. These companies were sent to the front and mustered into service as they were respectively filled up and ready to go. The latter two companies, were, I think, afterwards disbanded and the members assigned to other commands.

The other companies, as they were decimated by casualties, deaths and otherwise, were kept pieced up during the war by volunteers and conscripts from the county, until during the last years of the war there was a great scarcity of middle aged and young men in the county.

The regular terms of the courts were held during the war, but litigation was almost suspended and there were not many transactions in real estate, so there was but little to do in courts or in the Clerk's office except occasionally to try a case of misdemeanor, grant letters of administration, etc., and look after and provide for the necessities of the families of indigent soldiers, and for the assessment of the taxes necessary for the county expenditures.

One of the most perplexing questions confronting the court and the people, after the supply of salt had been cut off from the South by the blockade of her ports, was to provide a supply of salt, not only for the families of soldiers but for the whole people of the county. But this was done by making a contract with the salt works of Southwest Virginia to ship it here in car-load lots at the expense of the county, to be distributed to the people by a committee appointed by the court for that purpose. The supply being scant, this was done, by distributing to each family so many pounds for each member of it, proportioned according to the weight shipment. A "salt day" as they were then called, was a great and exciting day at the railroad station. A representative from almost every family in the county, with his or her (a large number of hers amongst them) little white bag was present (and this whether rain or sunshine) and had his or her proportion as they appeared and were listed, weighed out and delivered. Each one who could pay and was not furnished by the county paying cash to the committee, so much per pound for his allowance. It was very precious and had to be kept with great care and it was not uncommon for one neighbor to have to borrow a cup full of another neighbor before another "salt day."

Everybody was, of course, deeply interested in the war and their friends in it, and it was the foremost topic of conversation in all assemblies of the people, and a large part of the working men were in the army, and yet, the farming interest of the county was well looked after, and fairly good crops were raised, so that it was rare to hear of anyone wanting for bread, the women in many instances looking after their farms and making good crops and I have always thought the Negroes deserved great credit for their work and for their faithfulness and manly conduct in looking after the interest of homes of soldiers in the army.

And thus the war wore on through four long, wasting years, all hoping for success, until towards the close of 1864 and early in 1865 when the supplies of men, horses and provisions for the army, which had been constantly diminishing, and hard to obtain, seemed almost exhausted and the armies being pressed on all sides by the superior forces of the North, men of thought and observation began to fear that the Confederacy could not hold out much longer - many to despair of it. It was not until we heard of the fall of Richmond, the retreat of the army and the flight of the government that we thought the end would come so quickly, and I am sure no one, even then expected it would terminate at Appomattox Court House.

THE SURRENDER

After the fall of Richmond we got no newspapers and the meager reports of the movements of the army - as retreating towards Burkeville - as early as Wednesday evening April 5th however, stragglers from Lee's army began passing by the courthouse, who reported that they were coming in this direction.

On Thursday, April 6th (which was our county court day, with a large crowd attending court) many refugees from Richmond were passing through, amongst them Governor William Smith, who addressed the crowd in a short speech from the hotel porch. Among them also were Major Doswell's race horses.

The procession of refugees and struggling soldiers was kept up through Friday, the 7th and Saturday morning.

On the afternoon of that day (Saturday the 8th) several batteries of artillery (I do not know how many, it seemed quite a cavalcade of cannon and caissons to me), passed through the village going towards Lynchburg. Not very long afterwards we saw the smoke and flames of the burning of the depot and government store-houses at Appomattox depot. Soon after we heard the roar of cannon and rattle of musketry, and knew that some of Grant's army had, coming up the railroad, gotten in front of Lee and the fight was on. It was Sheridan's cavalry attacking the artillery in Cyrus' old field. Some of the artillery was captured and some of it escaped from them. About dark the advance of Lee's cavalry came up to the courthouse and halted in and near my yard.

Learning of the force in front of them and hearing of the fight out near the depot, a picket was sent out and stationed on the hill west of the courthouse, while another picket line, dismounted, was formed below my house, facing the road from Walker's Church and Evergreen.

About 8 o'clock when General Ransom, who was in command there, was in my kitchen eating something he had prepared, rapid firing, the clatter of hoofs and the rattle of sabers was heard coming down the hill from the west. It was the 15th New York cavalry, or a part of it, under command of Lieutenant Colonel Root, driving in the squad of pickets from the hill. The picket line below my house and other cavalymen near, dismounted, were quickly formed across the road just below my house, who fired into the advancing Federals, checking and drove them back.

Two men were killed just west of the courthouse, one, Captain Macon, of Richmond, the other a Federal soldier, and two below my house where they were fired into, one a sergeant in Company I, 15th New York cavalry, who gave me his name before he died, but I have forgotten it.

Col. Root was also killed by a single soldier, who hid himself behind the large white oak tree near Wm. Roper's shop, and fired at him as he rode by in advance of his column, the ball passing through his neck and cutting the carotid arteries.

On Sunday morning, April 9th, about light, the cavalry commenced coming through the village going west, and soon the infantry was brought up and formed in line from the top of the hill near the Tibbs house, down the hill and across the road just west of the village, to a point in the field would of it near Plain Run.

Sheridan's corps of cavalry had been marshaled early and were advancing on the courthouse, when they were met by this column, and the artillery opened on them and they were being driven back, when they were met by one division of infantry coming to their support, and our officers learned that they were being flanked on their right by another division. These divisions having arrived that morning - Mead's army was in Lee's rear and another force was coming up the road from Walker's Church, thus having Lee's army almost surrounded. As soon as it was discovered

that a large force of infantry was in front, our forces began to fall back on the village and a courier was sent to General Lee with that information. It is said that a council of general officers the night before, it had been decided, that in the event of finding infantry in force in front next morning, it would be impossible to cut through it and there would be nothing left to do but surrender the army. Notes had previously passed between Generals Grant and Lee, and so a flag of truce was sent to the front by General Lee for a cessation of firing and a note dispatched to General Grant requesting a meeting between them. They met at the house of Major Wilmer McLean, in the village and agreed upon the terms of surrender, and the papers were signed by them, and the surrender was thus accomplished.

On Monday morning, Sheridan's corps of cavalry and a corps of colored troops were marched through the village and sent away.

Grant's army came in and encamped in the village and on the hills around it. Lee fell back and encamped on the hills to the north-east of and facing the village. Monday and Tuesday was spent in paroling the army and arranging details, and on Wednesday the 12th, General Chamberlayne's division was formed at the lower or east end of the village, right through my yard and lot, and the Confederate soldiers, by brigades and regiments were marched up and stacked their arms and colors in front of it, and returned to their camps for their blankets and such other things as they had, and soon after, during that and the next day, were leaving in companies and squads for their homes, and thus the surrender was a matter of history.

The last of the Federal soldiers, Chamberlayne's division did not leave until Monday and Tuesday morning of the next week, and then one company under command of Captain Geiser was kept stationed at the courthouse until November of that year. Many incidents of the surrender might be related, but this account of it has already grown too long, and I forbear.

In 1864 an election was held for county officers, and all of the old officers were re-elected without opposition, so far as I can recall, except the office of Sheriff. Wilson Hix, who had held it two successive terms, could not be again elected and William D. Hix was elected in his place. These officers all continued and discharged the duties of their respective offices until the spring of 1866, when Virginia was placed under military rule, and all the county officers were removed and their places supplied with military appointees. These appointments, for this county were all made upon the recommendations of the incumbents, of such men as could take the iron-clad oath prescribed, with the full knowledge and understanding on the part of the appointees and the authority appointing, that the old officers were to furnish the security required on their bonds, and as their deputies and assistants to perform all the duties of the office, as they did.

I am sure that the man who was appointed Clerk, was never in court or in the office after his qualification. Those appointed were James Geyser, of Pennsylvania, Sheriff; H. H. Willard, of Pennsylvania, Attorney for the Commonwealth; Samuel Worley, a youth who had just grown up in this county, Clerk. I cannot now remember who was appointed Commissioner of Revenue, Wm. J. Collins acted in 1866-7. Only three Justices were appointed in the county, just enough to compose a court.

In the fall of 1866 an election was permitted to be held under the restored Virginia or Underwood Government, and Capt. Wm. T. Johnson was elected Sheriff and W. J. Collins, Commissioner of Revenue, with most of the other old officers, who held the offices during 1867-68 and 69.

I was elected Clerk, but because my disabilities had not been removed in time by Congress, I was not permitted to qualify as such at first and Dr. Robt. P. Patterson was appointed and qualified as Clerk, I was appointed as his deputy and did all the duties of the office, until my disability to hold office was removed by Congress, when I qualified as Clerk, but just how or exactly when this was done, I cannot now remember. I know I was in all the time, did all the work of the office and got all the pay.

In March 1867 Congress passed the act for the reconstruction of the Southern States and under that act a convention was called to form a constitution for Virginia, and an election of delegates to it was held that fall. The convention met in Richmond on the 3rd of December, 1867 and adopted what has been known as the "Underwood Constitution." That constitution had to be reported to Congress for its approval before being submitted to the voters of the State for ratification. It was not until the fall of 1869 that it was submitted to the people to be voted on, and two clauses of it, by which a large number of the white men of the State were disfranchised, were by some authority from General Grant, submitted to be voted on separately. These two clauses were rejected by a large majority of the voters and the remainder of the constitution was ratified and same put into effect. Under it many changes occurred.

The counties were laid off into townships. The old county court of Magistrates was abolished and county court was to be held by a Judge learned in the law, and new officers were created, the principal new officer being that of Treasurer. The office of Commissioner of the Revenue was left out and an Assessor in each township was substituted in his place.

A Board of Supervisors, consisting of one Supervisor in each township was elected. This board had charge and the management of the financial affairs of the county in the place of the old court Magistrates. There were other new officers for the townships created, and two elections a year were provided for, one for township and one for county officers.

The first election under this new constitution was in May 1870, for township officers, which then consisted of Supervisors, Township Clerk, Road Commissioner, Assessors, a Constable, Overseer of the Poor, and three Justices of the peace for each township. I cannot remember now who many of these officers were, but Dr. Wm. A. White, Dr. Jno. F. White, and Dr. D. P. Robertson were elected members of the Board of Supervisors in their respective townships.

In November of that year the election of county officers was held to go into office the 1st of the next January and the following officers were elected: Wm. H. Gills, Sheriff; Charles T. Plunkett, Treasurer; Geo. T. Peers, Clerk and L. D. Isbell, Commonwealth Attorney. Mr. Isbell was afterwards elected the first county Judge of the county by the General Assembly and upon his qualification he appointed Chas. H. A. Sackett, Commonwealth Attorney to fill the place until his successor was elected.

This brings us down to the reorganization of the county under the reconstruction law as the Underwood Constitution, as far as I proposed to write of my recollections, because there are so many now living who can remember subsequent events as well, perhaps better, than I can.

In writing these papers I have had to rely almost entirely on my memory, without county records to refer to, all of which were destroyed by fire, and it is for this reason that I have been asked to write them.

I have written as I remembered, and it may be that my memory has sometimes been at fault, especially as to dates. I cannot hope to have made no mistakes. If that be so, I can only say it is my recollection. If others remember differently, I have no controversy with them. They may be right and may show that I am mistaken.

I cannot close these articles without reference to some of the men I remember in the early days of the county, who were of my age and older, and of my pleasant memories of them - men of prominence, high intelligence and influence in the county, taking active part in its affairs. Amongst them, our most prominent citizen, Hon. Thomas S. Boccock, who represented the several districts of which this county was a part, in Congress from about the time the county was formed, (1846 I think) to the beginning of the war, and was then Speaker of the Confederate Congress during its existence; Col. Willis P. Boccock, Col. Thos. H. Flood, Dr. Joel W. Flood, Henry D. Flood, Dr. Wm. D. Christian, Dr. D. C. Jones, John Williams West, the Walkers, the Davidsons, the LeGrands, the Sears, the Hunters, the Robinsons, the Marshalls, J. H. Plunkett, Dr. R. D. Palmer, and many, many others I cannot take the time to name. In looking back over the county, it is sad to think how few of those then grown up, now remain. Among the few, I can recall such as Luke A. Bagby, Joel Coleman, Dr. C. S. Morton, Col. Geo. W. Abbitt, Dr. W. H. Abbitt, Wm H. Gills and a few others.

In recalling the prominent men of our county, I am reminded that at one and the same time it furnished the Attorney-General of the State (Col. W. P. Boccock), the representative in Congress from this district (Hon. T. S. Boccock) and the State Senator from this senatorial district (Col. Thos. H. Flood).

Of the many gallant soldiers who went from this county to aid in the defense of their beloved Southland, and returned to the county, many of them never did, quite a number are still living, but their ranks are being yearly thinned out by death.

Of the many prominent men who have risen up since the war, to take and fill the place of those who are gone, and who, with their acts and history, are fresh in the minds of so many now living, I will not undertake to write, but will leave it for some abler pen to do later.

If what of my recollections I have so crudely and hurriedly written out, shall prove of interest to any who may read it, I shall be satisfied.

Geo. T. Peers

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