

ROCKFORD

By R.S. Folger

In 1753, by act of Assembly sitting at Newbern, the upper or western part of Anson County was cut off and formed into Rowan County, and Rowan County so remained until the 26 of January, 1771, when the General Assembly of North Carolina divided Rowan County and formed of that part cut off into Surry County and the county seat was named Richmond which remained the county seat until Surry County was divided by act of Assembly sitting at Fayetteville in 1789 when Stokes was established. By reference to the Minute Docket of the old court of pleas and quarter sessions at November term ^{1787?} 1788 you will find the entry: William Cupples and Andrew Jackson, Esq. each produced a license from the Honorable Land Ashe and John Williams, Esquire, to the judges of the Superior Court of law and equity authorizing and empowering them to practice as attorneys in the several County Courts of Pleas and Quarter Sessions within this state, with testimonials of their having heretofore taken the necessary oaths and are admitted to practice in this Court". Thus it will be seen that General Jackson never qualified as an attorney in Rockford. The court was held on at Richmond including November term 1789, at which time it adjourned to meet at the house of Richard Horn about two miles east of Rockford, and tradition has always held that the house at Richard Horne's in which the court was held was a barn situated between what is now known as "the Double Creeks" near their confluence in sight of the Yadkin River. This site for long years has belonged to William P. Hobson and his heirs. Court was held at Horne's up to and including November term, 1790. Then it adjourned to meet at February term, 1791, at the house of Elihu Ayears, near the "White Rock Ford". At this place was the court held until the first court house was built, and courts August term, 1791, was regularly held, but at November term, 1791, commenced at Rockford at May term, 1791, "there was no court held on

account of the failure of the Justices to attend", so the clerk, Joe Williams, says on his minutes.

All this ^{ter}tugivization of our court was in consequence of an act of the General Assembly dividing Surry and establishing Stokes County. The deeds to the land on which Rockford is situated (originally) were made by Thomas Ayers and Moses Ayers and contained 58 acres. The name Rockford, as any one can see, is an abbreviation of the name of the ford at the Yadkin River, at that "White Rock Ford". The court was held in this first court house, which was a wooden structure and the nails used were made in a smith shop on the bank of the river at the ford.

Rockford was located with an eye single to the navigation of the Yadkin river. The town was laid off with three principal streets--High Street, Water Street, and Cabin Street. In due course of time, "The Yadkin Navigation Company" was chartered by the General Assembly, stock taken, the company organized, and they went to work, but the "White elephant" with which the company had to deal was the "Bean Shoals" in the river near East Bend, around which the company undertook to dig a canal, and it is said some fine masonry was done in making the banks of the canal, but after spending considerable money, it proved to be "the hair that broke the camel's back, and the "Yadkin Navigation" soon became a dream of the past.

Rockford since I can remember was blessed with three hotels, four stores, a confectionery, a dancing school, and a master of unbounded politeness. Mr. John Gilmer, father of Judge Gilmer, used to say he got as good fare at Rockford as anywhere he attended court, and he was a prominent attorney, and had an extensive practice.

Somewhere in the 30's the county became discontented with the wooden temple of justice she had created in her primitive days, and bought a square acre of land from M. M. Hughes and built thereon a good and xxb

substantial brick court house.

Rockford politically was, in the days of Whigary, largely Whigish. During the year 1840 a prize was offered to the county that would give the largest increased Whig vote, and Surry got the prize, which was a full-rigged ship, hauled by horses from Fayetteville to Rockford. The Whigs planted it on the hillside between the then new court house and public spring, built a house over it, and it remained there for several years. This scribe spent many childish days on the Whig prize.

Among the first hotels built in Rockford was where Esquire J. G. Burrus now lives, and one Grant was the proprietor. Grant had a son and also had with him, in his employ, a boy by the name of Watson Holyfield, about the Grant boy's size (This was told me by said Holyfield in his old age). One evening Grant sent the boys out on Fish River after some whiskey. They did not get back until after dark. Mrs. Grant told the boys to repair to the kitchen (just in rear of hotel) and get their supper. They did so, and on entering the kitchen they captured a large fat o'possum. This boy, in after years, told this scribe that while staying with Grant, Aaron Burr, on his return from a trip South, put up for the night with Grant, and seeing young Holyfield offered to take him and educate him, but he would not go. "And there is where I missed it." Young Holyfield grew to manhood, served in the army against the Seminole Indians. He was an uneducated man, but one of fine natural, common, sound sense, was a good practical surveyor, though he knew not a **** * and surveyed thousands of acres of land for the people of Surry. He was a peculiar man, loved his dram, *****

Rockford was noted for brainy men, men of intelligence. Colonel William P. Dobson owned and lived upon a fine plantation one mile below

Rockford on the Yadkin River. He raised a large family--several boys--and among them was Joseph Dobson, who was, I think, the youngest son. He was an able criminal lawyer and one who loved a joke or an anecdote as well as any one. He once told me of his first case in court which was tried while court was held in Rockford. (Judge Pearson had some time in the 40's moved his law school to Richmond Hill, three miles below Rockford) He and Mr. Richard M. Allison, who boarded in Rockford, both obtained licenses to practice in the County Court after their licenses were obtained, some man came to Mr. Dobson and said to him: "Joe, I've haf a "Ca sa"served on me to this Court and I want you to attend to it fot me". Mr. Dobson replied and said "All right", and began saying "casa, case" what in the world is a "casa, I'll declare I never heard ~~heard~~ a word about a casa in my life. What shall I do?" So to get out of the dilemma I went to Bob McLean, an older attorney and related to him the situation. He explained what a casa was, and Mr. Dobson employed him as a prompter to sit at his elbow when the case came up in court. It so happened that the plaintiff in the case had employed Mr. Allison and when the case was reached Mr. Dobson moved that his client be allowed to file his schedule and take the insolvent oath,

(Stories here of Mr. Dobson's wit and humor) * ***** page lost)

Sometime during the life of Esq. W. P. Dobson, the father of our Joe, there lived, on the south side of the Yadkin, in what is Yadkin County now, but then a part of Surry, an old man, Jenkins by name, who had some meritorious service to the county, and for that Col. Dobson pushed a bill through the Legislature of North Carolina allowing old man Jenkins to retail spirits by small quantity without license, and on

every Sunday evening before each court (six courts a year then) you

could see the old man wading his way up the street in Rockford making
for the court yard which was then familiarly known as the "Devil's half-acre". Early on Monday morning he would shamble off down the

hillside, procure four little forked sticks, drive them in the ground
lay his cross places in the works, lay on a board and set his jugs

and one-half pint cup on the plank, find him a large white flint, roll
it near his establishment, seat himself thereon, and he was then ready
to wait on the public. By that means old Jenkins was enabled to keep

off the county as a pauper. Somewhere during these years, there lived
in Greensboro one London Smith who edited "The Greensboro Patriot".

during one of Surry's numerous courts he paid Rockford a visit in the
interest of his paper and after his return home he wrote under the

heading "Our Trip to Rockford, or "Our Trip to Surry Court". He began
by describing Rockford as a city set on a hill, or a hill successively
terrace. What he saw on the court yard or "Devil's half-acre", and

prominent in the midst may be seen Landlord Jenkins with his cup and jug
ready and anxious to wait upon a thirsty public."

There is so much left out or lost that there is not much of interest
this was written by Mr. Rom Folger in his old age and is not a fair
sample of his ability of former years.