

Typed as the Original

Billy Strong Recalls Early

Days in Leaksville History

by

Daisy King Barker

Inseperately linked with the social life of Leaksville of the gay 80's was the names of three gallants, each of whom chose a bachelor degree, instead of aspiring to the holy state of Benedict. Two of them, George Dyer and Tom Reynolds, several years ago, departed for that bourne where here is no marrying was giving in marriage.

The Third, William Ward Strong, known as Billy Strong, still remains in single blessedness in his house by the side of the road. No vision of unpaid dress maker bills disturb his sleep. No dread of college tuition notes due harnesses his mind; he takes no thought for the morrow, when he lies down to sleep. His own hand supply his simple needs, when numerous nephews and nieces do not invite him to dinner.

The three cronies, reared in days when gentlemen had not yet learned to do manual labor, have gone through life in a happy-go-lucky way, yet they never lacked for the somforts of life. Though it was said that Zeus has two urns of sorrow for one of joy, this proved false in their case, for trouble seemed to pass them by.

They were possessed of a keen sense of humor, a friend of information and historical lore, and a remarkable memory for dates and names of people. To listen to then talk was a treat indeed, for they could recount much interesting local history. Only one is left to tell the story and he does it well.

One of Billy's early recollections was the whipping he received when as a boy he attended the little frame school house, that stood in Hamilton street, where Mrs. Ben Harrisburg's resedence is now located. He recalled distinctly when the old red brick school house on West Henry Street was the chief seat of learning of the city, as he attended school there. A few of his old school mates are still living: John Reynolds, of Wentworth; T. Lee Millner, of

Leaksville; Charlie Hamlin, of California: Miss Armie Smith of Stoneville.

Patrick Henry's son, Nat Henry, was once teacher at the brick school house and taught Mr. Strong's father, William Randolph Strong, about 115 years ago. Governor Bob Glenn, Rev. Sam Burton, Hon. Charles Reynolds and other notables attended this Academy, Mr. Strong said.

Patrick Henry's grandson, Bob Ward, whose parents lived at the old Sharp place down the river, edited the news paper here, called the "Leaksville Herald". He boarded with Mr. Strong's father who kept the tavern, which stood where the colored Methodis church and parsonage now stand on South Henry Street and this 13 room rambling house later became Guerrant's tobacco warehouse, and remained standing until within recent years, Mr. Strong pointed out.

Mr. Strong's grandfather, Terrill Hopper, lived in what was considered the finest house in these parts. It was a four story brick house located where Pace-Stone Furniture Company now stands. On this building was nailed the first Confederated flag which was raised in Leaksville. This flag was handed by William Randolph Strong to Jim Stevens Sr., who nailed it up, according to Mr. Strong's recollections.

Across the street from the old tavern lived Mrs. John Meadow, grandmother of Mr. Fletcher Kemp and Mrs. Jones Norman of this city. Mr. Strong recalls that this was a very nice residence on Henry street, which was the principal residential street in Leaksville in those days and that the residents and some stores extented from the site now occupied by the Bedspread Mill to the Episcopal church.

Jim Leak lived at the end of this street overlooking the river, and had several children contemporary with Mr. Billy Strong and his brother. Another Leak family lived in earlier times in the site where R. P. Ray's residence now stands. Located on Henry Street also was the residence of Dr. Tom Reynolds in the site where his daughter Mrs. T. G. Taylor now resides, and his brother, Captain Pryon Reynolds lived at the old Reynold's place, which is now Seymour Court, it was recalled. On the site where the hospital now stands was the

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residence of Dr. T. D. F. Guerrant grandfather of Judy Lane. Dr. Reynolds' and Dr. Guerrants' homes were built in the same place, about 1812 by a Mr. Barnett where Leaksville was in a boom. The old Lawson house was built about the same time. It stood on the corner where Miss McGenniso' store is now located.

Burton's Store stood where the post office is now located, and Burton's residence stood before it was burned, on the hill where Burton Grove is now located, hence came the name Burton.

The old store of Henry Moir and Col. Dillard was on the corner where Carolina Drug is now located and here it was that the soldiers were served a wholesome meal by the ladies as they passed through the town after the surrender.

Mr. Strong stated that probably the oldest residence now standing in Leaksville is that formally owned by the elder Dr. Syd Martin on Henry Street, near the Episcopal Church.

Another house of about the same age is the log cabin located on the Leaksville Stoneville road just below the E. B. King's residence. Here Patsy Murphy was born and reared and became Mrs. John Vernon.

Dr. George Washington Jones, son of Dr. Benjamin Jones of the Iron Works of Revolutionary fame, owned a residence on Patrick Street over 100 years ago, next to the Jim Ivie place. This house was torn down about 20 years ago. Dr. Jones died in 1839 and was buried on his place. This house was occupied at the first of this century by "Aunt Bunk."

Dr. Robert Robertson, who afterwards moved to Danville, first owned Dr. S. L. Martin's place about 100 years ago.

"Bleak House", the home of Dr. A. B. Johns Sr., and Jr. is another interesting place, not only on account of its age but the owners. Mr. Strong recalls that Dr. A. B. Johns Jr. and Bob Ward were great friends and that Miss Annie Johns and her sister Mrs. Martin were his Sunday School teachers.

Mr. John Bullard, of Massachusetts, moved to Leaksville about 80 years ago, and owned the original home on the site where his grandson Dr. John Bullard Ray now lives on Washinton Street. Several other homes in town date to ante-bellum

days or shortly after by boats on the Dan river before the D. & M. railway was constructed about fifty years ago. The old boat landing was where the concrete bridge now spans the river. Mr. Strong recalls when the arrival of a boat was an event.

Mr. Strong has lived in this community all his life. He was born in 1855, at the home of his grandparents, Terrill and Rhoda Virginia. Hopper, who lived then about three miles out on the King's Mill Road at what is now known as the strong place, and which belongs to Mrs. A. D. Ivie. His mother was Caroling Hopper. An ancestor, John Field fought in the Revolution under Gen. Alexander Martin. Billy was too young and his father too old to fight in the War Between the States, but he had numbers of relatives in that conflict. His cousin, Jim Downers John fought in the War Between the States under Col. Winston and was the last Confederate soldier of Leaksville to join the invincible army. He died last Thanksgiving at age of 92, in Oklahoma. Billy's brother, Alexander Hamilton (Ham) Strong and four sisters, Agnes, Caroline, Eugenia and Lula Strong have passed over the river. Billy has seen one by one the friends and loved ones around him fall "like leaves in wintry weather" leaving him as one who treads alone some deserted lanquet hall; yet the years do not seem to steal fire from his mind or signs from his limb. He can say with Thomas Moore:

"Oft in the still night
Ere slumber's chain has bound me,
Fond memories brings the light
Of other days around me".