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# HISTORY

OF

# PICKENS COUNTY, ALA.,

FROM ITS FIRST SETTLEMENT

IN

**Eighteen Hundred and Seventeen, to Eighteen  
Hundred and Fifty-Six.**

BY NELSON F. SMITH

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## PICKENS COUNTY, ALA.,

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BY NELSON F. SMITH.

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and intelligence, possessed of much force as a speaker and debator, so much so that his friends might justly blame him, with such talents, for not becoming more eminent. Such advantages, added to his respectable port and bearing and his excellent qualities, ought to be brought into requisition as the means of rising in the world. He is, however, at the present time, again a candidate for the office of Sheriff of Pickens at the election in 1857.

Mr. Jesse W. Bryan, the late landlord of the "Exchange" was the next Sheriff, elected in August 1849, over two whig competitors, Mr. B. F. Roper and B. G. McAllister. Mr. Bryan is a native of Kentucky, was born in Christian county, August 17, 1819. His father migrated to Alabama in 1820 and settled in Sumter county where he was engaged in business with General Gaines at the Choctaw Agency, and died there when Jesse was only four years old. His mother's maiden name was Hawkins, she being own cousin of the renowned David Crocket.—She settled at this place after the death of her husband and here she died. In 1840, Mr. Bryan married his present estimable lady, who is a sister of Mr. John Alexander of Carrollton. It is stated that the first Carrollton wedding was the marriage of one of Mrs. Bryan's daughters,

sister of our present subject. The history of Mr. Bryan is well known, since the last named date, to most of our readers. He engaged in business at Yorkville as a merchant, afterwards went to Mobile, returned to Pickens in 1840, and acted as deputy of W. H. Davis, whom he succeeded in the office, as above stated.

Jesse W. Bryan, Esq., enjoys a more extensive reputation than any of his predecessors, or successors, as we feel bound to set it down, with all deference to other rather celebrated gentlemen—His celebrity is of that enviable character which the Press alone can confer, and without which a great man is nowhere! It would be sheer affectation to *ignore* the clever story of "Cash and the Bear," or "Jess Bryan's Bear Fight"—a tale of three heroes, at least! which has been told, published, nay, stereotyped, from Oregon to Texas, which had its origin on the Gulf of Mexico, was about a "Bar," taken, for aught now known to the contrary, among the Rocky Mountains! The tale originally appeared in the West Alabamian from the pen of Judge A. B. Clitherall, showing how a native came it over a bear man. There is a rich vein of humor in this inimitably told story, which is a much better illustration of Judge Clitherall's ability to write, than anything said in eulogy of his powers. It runs thus:

Every man, woman and child in Pickens county, knows Jess Bryan. And to those whose circumstances unfortunately compel them to live elsewhere, we would say that Jesse is the present Sheriff of the county aforesaid. And furthermore, we have the authority of the present Secretary of State, for saying that he was the finest looking Sheriff who carried the returns of the last Presidential election to Montgomery.

On reaching Montgomery, Jess went to the Capitol and was introduced to the Secretary; "I am happy to know you, Mr. Bryan," said the affable Col. Garrett.

"I am happy to find you do," replied the Sheriff, "for since I put on these blacks I hardly know myself."

Jesse is our crack tale-teller, and many side-aches have the boys had from laughing at his nubbin ridge and Sourwood stories. One of his we will now give, premising that the gist of the tale consists in his rich mode of telling it, and that it must lose much by being read.

"Some years ago, before I got to be sheriff of this county, I was in Mobile, and on one day I saw a crowd moving out toward the Orange Grove; I joined it, and learned that a match fight was to come off between Jim Burguss's bull

dog and a tame bear, for five hundred dollars a side, one hundred forfeit.

"As soon as the ring was formed, the dog was turned loose at the bear, and after one round he stayed loose—no sort of talk could make him clinch again, and Burguss paid the forfeit and drew off the dog.

"Just as the crowd was about to disperse, a tall, raw boned native from Chickasaha, who was rejoicing in the ownership of a big bony, stump-tailed cur dog, sung out: 'I'll be darned if Cash can't take that bar.'

"What will you bet of that?" said the owner of the bear.

"I'll go my pile," said raw-bones, and drawing out the foot of an old stocking, he shelled out twenty dollars. The bear man covered the twenty and the ring was again formed.

"Now gentlemen," said Chickasaha, "I wish it to be understood as how nobody goes enter this ring but me an' Cash an' the bar, and nobody ain't got to speak or tetch but me."

"This was agreed to, and the bear being unmuzzled, the word was given.

"Look out, Cash; mind your eyes! Watch him, Cash!" cried raw-bones, as Cash, with a prudent regard for his own interests, kept at a respectful distance; his bristles standing up like

the teeth of a harrow. As soon as Cash had taken a position a little in the rear of his foe, and out of the range of his paws, his master shouted, 'take him, Cash!'

"With one bound Cash seized the poor brute by the root of the ear, keeping his body side by side with his enemy, so that the latter could not possibly strike him.

"'Keep outen this ring, gentlemen,' cried the owner of Cash. 'Bring him *here*, Cash!' Cash, by main force, dragged the bear half around the ring, without once exposing himself to the furious blows of the animal.

"'Shake him, Cash!' Again the brave dog shook his foe until the bear's teeth fairly chattered with pain and rage. Still Cash, by keeping yard-arm and yard-arm with the bear, was as safe as if he had been in his master's cabin.

"The owner of the bear seeing that the bear could not bring his arms to bear, could not bear to see Cash bear the bear in such a bear-faced manner, and gave up the day.

"'You give it up,' said our man. 'Well, then, gentlemen, clar the ring—Cash leaves when he do leave 'em. Hold him, Cash! You say it's my money, no discounts, no nothing? Watch your time, Cash. Let go, Cash?'

"With a single spring, Cash was ten feet beyond the reach of the bear's paw.

"'That's a right pert bear,' said raw-bones, 'but he ain't nigh such a good one as me and Cash has tuk. We got one this fall as measured nine feet from snout to tail tip.'

"'That's a lie,' said the discomfitted owner of the bear, 'you never *saw* a bear that large in your life.'

"'I haint? Well, I'll go you these two twenty dollars on that branch of the subject.'

"'It's a bet,' said the bear man.

"'Well, come down to George Davis', and we'll try the case.'

"The crowd all accompanied the parties, and we soon reached George Davis' Store.

"'George let me see that biggest bar skin I let you have a spell back,' said our man.

"Davis handed out the skin, and it measured nine feet *one inch and a half!*

"'Twenty to start on, and twenty are forty, and forty are eighty! Sweet J——s! Whoop! Come *here*, Cash. Good evening gentlemen,' sang the overjoyed native; and the last I saw of him he and Cash were eating ginger cakes at the market-house."

Mr. Barnabas G. McAllister, succeeded Mr. Bryan in 1850, the vote in the previous contest

ed the regular nomination of the Know Nothing, or American party, of Pickens, as their candidate for State Senator, which he declined to accept. In the fall of the same year he removed to the State of Mississippi, and located himself in business at Aberdeen in connection with a large mercantile house.

The General is a bachelor of an age ranging between thirty-five and forty, but is yet considered a marrying man.

Tandy P. Duncan was the next, the last, and is the present Sheriff of Pickens county, having been elected in August, 1853. He was born in Fairfield District, South Carolina, on the fourteenth day of August, 1816, removed to Pickens in January, 1833, but the next year went to the county of Bibb, where he remained until 1838, when he returned to Pickens. He has held almost all the minor offices from Constable up to Sheriff, which are the gift of the people in our Republican country—was elected Justice of the Peace at Henry's precinct, in 1849, and tax-collector, in 1850. In 1849 he was beaten for the latter office by Peter McGee. Mr. Duncan's chief opponent was Jesse Bryan, the hero in the Bear Fight.

Mr. Duncan's term will expire in 1856, and therefore the proper time to speak in his praise,

or censure, has not arrived. His health has been for some time past, in such declining condition that he has been unable to transact the duties of his laborious office, save by deputy. Mr. Duncan has ever fulfilled the duties of the various trusts which have been imposed on him with entire fidelity. He is social in his nature and his manners, and popular with the people.

## RECAPITULATION.

### SHERIFFS OF PICKENS.

Adino Griffin, B. F. Roper, W. H. Davis,  
David Taggart, G. G. Childs, J. W. Bryan,  
Thomas Davis, J. F. Nabers, B. G. McAllister,  
Henry White, B. F. Roper, T. P. Duncan.

Of the above eleven, every man filled out his full term, (Mr. Roper two,) except of course, the present incumbent. The two Davises are not related, five are democrats and six are whigs—six, and until lately, seven reside still in Pickens county and four at Carrollton. Two reside in Mobile, and one out of this State—the other two are dead; the widow of one resides at Carrollton. Six, or more than half are South Carolinians, and four from the famous home of John C. Calhoun, the District of Abbeville. Of the other five, but one was born in this State. The Sheriffs of Pickens have been men of the people.

removed." In August of the same year, David Archer was elected by the Court "To fill the vacancy of Henry Sossaman, removed."

At the August election of 1836, John W. Middleton, David Archer, Robert Henry, and Burwell Ball, were chosen Commissioners, Samuel B. Moore being Judge at the time. These persons served out their full terms.

August 1839, Robert Henry, Burwell Ball, John Story and Thomas H. Wilson, composed the newly elected Court, and served until their three years term expired.

The successors of the last named Court, in 1842, were Robert Henry, Burwell Ball, Thomas H. Wilson and David E. Woods, the latter being the only new member. All served their full terms.

At the general election in 1845, Maj. Robert Henry, Col. David Bradford, Capt. James Gibson and David E. Woods, Esq., were elected Commissioners. All these gentlemen served out the full term.

The next Commissioners' Court, elected at the regular August election in 1848, was composed of David Bradford, James T. Burdine, James Henry and John H. Hargrove, who all served out their entire terms of office.

In 1851, at the August election, the new Court

consisted of Maj. Robert Henry, James T. Burdine, Thomas C. Lanier, and John Shockley.

In 1852, by virtue of one of those changes which our unstable legislation is constantly producing, another election for County Commissioners resulted in the choice of the same persons, last above named. At the October term, 1853, Whitaker W. Guyton was elected by the Court to fill a vacancy occasioned by the resignation of Maj. Robert Henry. Mr. Henry had been a member of this body since 1836, with the exception of the term of three years, when his son, James Henry was Commissioner. The cause of his retiring was his declining health, infirmity and old age. He made one of the most efficient public officers the county ever had.

In 1854, a new Court was elected, composed of James T. Burdine, Esq., Capt. William Gibson, Col. William McCracken and Col. Fergus McDowell. The next year (1855) the same gentlemen were all re-elected and constitute the present Court, with the exception of Thomas C. Lanier, chosen to fill a vacancy occasioned by the decease of Col. William McCracken. Col. McCracken died soon after his re-election, in the autumn of 1855, respected and lamented by all who knew him, both as a public officer and private citizen. T. C. Lanier, Esq., his successor,

died at Fairfield, in 1841, aged thirty-five years. He was a bachelor.

Dr. Jephtha Spruill, James Peterson and Wm. McGill, were members of the House in 1840, being all of the whig party. Their opponents were Col. Nat. Smith, Dr. Beckett and William D. Lyles, all of opposite politics.

Mr. James Peterson left Pickens county some five or six years since, and now resides in Chickasaw county, Mississippi, near Palo Alto. He came from Lawrence District, South Carolina, and settled in Pickens county, at a very early period, and was for many years a respectable and influential citizen; holding several minor offices and discharging the duties thereof with satisfaction to the public. He is about fifty-five years of age, is a plain, industrious planter, and a clever man.

Mr. William McGill came from Kershaw District, South Carolina. After residing several years in Pickens, he removed to Mississippi about 1842, where he died some three years ago.

At the session of 1841-'42, J. M. K. D. Wallis, Reuben Gardner and Dr. Spruill, all of the whig party, represented Pickens.

The unsuccessful candidates were James B. Owens, B. G. Sims and James B. Gladney, all democrats.

J. M. K. D. Wallis was born in far-famed Mecklenburg, North Carolina, in the year 1814. He was the eldest son of Elijah C. Wallis, late of Pickens county, was grand-son of the Rev. Jas. Wallis, of Providence, North Carolina, and great-grand-son of John McKnight Alexander, whose name appears conspicuous in the celebrated Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. Mr. Wallis came with his father to Morgan county, Alabama, in 1820, at the age of six years. He was educated in this State, and in 1836, at the age of twenty-two, he graduated at our State University; two years afterwards he settled in Pickens county, in the town of Memphis, where he engaged in agriculture; that most independent and honorable of all the pursuits of life. He, too, like his predecessor, Ellis, was one of the pioneers upon the rich soil west of the Bigbee, and joint proprietor of those lands where now stands the flourishing village of Memphis. He died at that place, in 1843, two years after the expiration of his term of service in the Legislature, aged only 29 years, in the midst of his career and usefulness, respected and lamented. He left, besides his aged parents, a widow, son and twin infant daughters, to mourn their early bereavement.—His mother, the accomplished Mrs. Elijah Wallis, still lives and resides with her son, James M.