

### FAMOUS RANDOLPH OF 1835 AND 1921

#### ONCE PROUD LITTLE CAPITAL PASSES INTO HISTORY

#### Surrenders Charter After An Existence of Ninety Years—Spacious Harbor Once Crowded With Craft—Destroyed by Federal Troops During Civil War—Once a Rival or Memphis For Supremacy.

(By J. H. Curtis, in Memphis Commercial Appeal, Sunday April 17.)

Randolph, once the proud and haughty little capital which dominated the early West Tennessee country from its commanding setting on the first or upper Chickasaw bluffs, 50 miles above Memphis, in Tipton county, and which 90 years ago was known far and wide as the rival of Memphis, has at last capitulated. Since the Civil war the history of Randolph has been the history of a decaying village, but it was not until the recent legislature abolished the charter of Randolph that the capitulation became official.

Singularly enough, the bill abolishing the charter was introduced by a senator, Walter Chandler, a citizen of Randolph's ancient rival. But this came about merely because Mr. Chandler happened to represent Shelby and Tipton counties, and not because of any desire to wipe the name off the official records of the state.

The town square moved away, and streets that once carried the burden of industry are better adapted to cotton. A result was a petition of 25 citizens of the town, most of the adult male population, asking that the charter be abolished.

And thus Randolph passes on to take its place with the dreams that once came to the prosperous towns of Purdy, LaGrange and Macon and even Raleigh. When Andrew Jackson was president, Randolph boasted of a harbor that attracted steamers of commerce and pleasure. Its wholesale houses supplied the lower plantations with food and clothing and helped to outfit more than one expedition of adventure on their way to Texas to take part in the Texan battles for independence.

True, the failure of Randolph to get the Memphis & Charleston railroad, which Memphis did get, started its downfall. It was completed during the war, when the town was burned by federal troops. From this calamity Randolph never recovered.

There is always a lot of sentiment, and very properly so, connected with the passing of an old civilization. It was so a few days ago, when the writer strolled over the ruins of old Randolph and talked with the few citizens who remain to attest to the grandeur of her former glories. Nothing is left of Randolph—old Randolph—but the name, and part of that is gone, because it used to be known as Randolph under the hills.

Some of these good men and women raise their heads with a boastful spirit when they start telling about old Randolph. It is a pleasure for them to point out the remains of the city in which their antecedents lived their lives and accumulated wealth. If they failed to get wealth they seem proud of the fact that they were born in Randolph.

The few people left in the village today are whole-souled folk. They do not meet strangers. They take every person by the hand with a cordiality that sticks, and they tell you "goodby, come back and see us some

time when you can stay several days." Scattered about the high bluffs overlooking the broad Mississippi river are a few markers left of Randolph in its palmy days. Occasionally an old citizen will show a ravine or partly caved road way, now grown up in weeds and underbrush, saying: "There are the remains of the main street in Randolph."

This thoroughfare extended from the steamboat landing through the residence section, winding about the foot of the highest bluff, then striking out to the top, where once stood Confederate batteries, placed there during the Civil war to defend the town.

Nothing is left of old Randolph. It was destroyed by federal troops following some man's experience of taking a shot at a gunboat that had taken its stand in front of the town flying the Union flag. The bullet missed the gunboat, but it passed through the flag. A report was made to the commander, and men were afterward landed with orders to burn the town and every house within six miles around it.

The soldiers sent ashore to carry out this order did their work thoroughly. Not a residence was left, excepting that of J. H. Barton. Tradition has it that Mr. Barton, being a member of the same lodge as the federal officer in command managed to save his dwelling.

Mrs. C. W. Templeton, who has lived in Randolph for more than 80 years, said the federal soldiers did not commit any robberies. They gave every dweller of a house so many minutes to get their belongings out, then the torch was applied and guards stationed to see that none of the fires were extinguished.

In an hour's time all that was left of the once famous town of West Tennessee, an early business rival of Memphis, lay in ash heaps.

On top of the bluffs, it is said by old inhabitants, were located the best residences. All that is left are chimney foundations, cisterns and a few sunken roadways, dead markers of streets, where the beaux and belles of the earliest times strolled and talked of their future.

After its destruction by federal troops most of the largest mercantile houses were moved to Memphis and from them sprang some of the leading firms of that city.

Randolph was not settled by the riffraff, as records show. There were the Chappmans, Templetons, Freemans, Ghents, Bartons, Sullivans and many other families, who trace the history of their forefathers back to the twenties, when the town was first thought of.

M. H. Sullivan, a son of Isaac S. Sullivan, still lives on his father's old home place. The residence was used as a schoolhouse after the Civil war. The elder Sullivan's home met the fate of others at the hands of the federal troops.

In the rear of the Sullivan home are the remains of a Confederate powder magazine. Young Sullivan uses it now for a potato house.

The magazine is about 15 feet deep, with arched ceiling, lined top, sides and bottom with brick and cemented over.

From the Sullivan home down the side of the high bluff is located the first cemetery at Randolph. A few tombstones remain to mark the graves of those who died more than 60 years ago.

There is an imposing shaft at the grave of Josiah Lee Wilson and Rachael Wilson, his wife. Josiah Wilson died July 26, 1870. He was born September 14, 1805. His wife died at the age of 40 years. Josiah Lee Wilson is said to have been one of the earliest settlers there. He was a merchant and planter and in his active career made a great amount of money. He was the father of R. E. Lee Wilson, of Memphis.

Aman A. Harris, aged 20 years, died in 1834, according to the engraving on a tombstone. His family were early settlers and considered the most prominent in West Tennessee.

Amanda S., wife of John Adams, died July 5, 1866. The Adams family were also early settlers, engaging in planting and merchandising. James and Harretta Densford died in 1856. Their graves are forgotten and none of the old folks at Randolph could remember any of them.

Randolph was founded in 1827. It came about when some hunters camped on the bluffs, and it is said that Davy Crockett was a frequent visitor to the town. He was a friend of Marion Chapman, who was a camper near Randolph in 1833, "the night the stars fell." Mr. Chapman became a constable for the Randolph district after reaching manhood, and those who knew him claim he never showed the white feather in making arrests of bad characters who murdered and plundered through that section of Tipton county many years prior to the Civil war.

When Randolph made a strong bid for business over Memphis she was an incorporated town. At the time the place began to decay and after the federal soldiers burned it the charter was surrendered. It was incorporated again a few years ago. The last meeting of the legislature ended it all.

"We are all law-abiding citizens in Randolph now," said an old inhabitant. "We do not need a town marshal like we did in the old days, and we do not want to be incorporated. We just want to stay here happy among ourselves until we are called away to our final resting place."

Randolph had a population of nearly 1,000 persons in 1835. It has dwindled to about 75, children and all. In 1835 the business part of the town was under the bluffs. It was known as Randolph "Under the Hills." On this street, extending half a mile from the main thoroughfare at the steamboat landing to the mouth of Hatchie river, were 50 or more general stores, dozens of saloons and wholesale whiskey houses. The town had a distillery.

There are two stores left in this row. One is operated by W. H. Barton, who has lived in Randolph more than half a century and is a descendant of the family of J. H. Barton. The Mississippi river used to throw its current against the foot of Randolph bluffs. In the eighties it started building up a bar in front of the town, and now, after more than

a quarter of a century, it is eating its way back to its former course.

Mr. Barton says his store stands near the spot where the great steamboats of former years landed to take on and discharge freight. The last big packet to land there during an ordinary stage of water was the Anchor Line steamer City of Vicksburg. She struck on the newly formed bar and had to stop her lighter up so she could get off. Horace Bixby was in command of the City of Baton Rouge that day. After the formation of this bar boats had to drop down under its foot and come up to the landing. Then they were shut off all together and now come only on high water.

The mouth of Hatchie river was at Randolph in 1835 and for many years afterwards. It is now six or eight miles up the Mississippi. The bar that formed in front of the town shut it out and forced it to find its way into the Mississippi farther toward the foot of Island 34.

Back of the Barton store stands a partially tumbled down, rickety frame house. In the earlier days this was a hotel, operated by J. H. Ghent and he boasted that his hotel was at the boat landing, where guests could see steamers passing up and down the river for many miles.

It was partly burned and then rebuilt by the late W. C. Davis, chief of the Memphis police department, who made it his home for many years, coming from Randolph to Memphis.

During the early part of the Civil war a dashing officer in uniform went to Randolph. He became acquainted with one of the young women of the town, a daughter of a very fine family.

Suspicious about the young man ran a rifle. One night he was caught growling about the town and was arrested. Old people now in Randolph say he was a federal spy.

On a bluff overlooking the river stood a big mulberry tree. The spy was hung to it one night by soldiers and citizens. The young woman, who contended that he was innocent, left Randolph and a few months afterwards her family moved away. It is said they went to Arkansas.

Jesse Benton is said to have been about the first man to settle on the Chickasaw bluffs, or the site of Randolph. He established a small trading post and it soon became a stopping over for emigrants traveling west. Traders from the interior of West Tennessee floated down Hatchie river on rafts, bringing their furs and hides to Benton. His business grew and he began expanding. Then the town started growing and in a few months its fame spread among the settlers and its population increased from Benton and Indians to a dozen or more white families. All did well.

About 1832 the business men of Randolph got together and started a movement to have a canal dug so that water transportation from the Tennessee river might be diverted to Randolph by a connection with Hatchie river. This fell through after a hard fight in the state legislature. Politicians of those days were unable to interest the government.

Following this, and several years later, there was another movement to make the town the county seat of Tipton county. This was opposed by a committee appointed by the governor. It was lost.

In 1834 Mrs. Chamberling claimed legal ownership of all the property on which the town of Randolph was located. It was thrown into the high courts and in 1835 disposed of by a compromise with her.

Mr. Barton said all present boundary lines of property in the old town were obliterated. No one knows where his property starts or ends. "We are sorter setting down on our claims. That is, some are hoping that no one will come along and wipe out their ownership," he said.

When Randolph was at its best there was society of the finest. It had a college, good schools, none public, but all private. Young people were sent there from near Memphis, Bolivar, Brownsville and other points.

Young women of well-to-do parents were sent to schools in Virginia and Middle Tennessee from Randolph to complete their educations. The young men attended the local college and then, if they wished more education, went to college in the southern states.

John A. Murrell, famous many years ago as an outlaw, had his West Tennessee headquarters a short distance down the river from Randolph. A deep ravine is said to have been a hiding place for his men. He operated extensively around Randolph in 1830 and later.

Finally, however, his depredations became so bad citizens of Randolph organized for the protection of their property. Close watch was kept on the clan under Murrell. It seemed impossible to get any real trace of his movements because he had spies located in Randolph. The committee of citizens attempted to ferret them out, but failed.

Murrell met his men under a mammoth sycamore tree that stood at the entrance of the ravine to give them instructions on their future actions. The committee knew this and one night each man, heavily armed, went to this tree, but found nothing. The spies had tipped Murrell and he and his men moved across the river into Arkansas. The committee gave the job up and disbanded.

A stage coach line operating from Somerville to Randolph was the earliest mode of land transportation. These coaches ran through Covington over a direct route to Randolph. It carried the mail for many points, but had considerable opposition in connection with a steamboat line on the Hatchie river. Boats then ran to Bolivar.

Some of the earliest business firms were: Edmund Booker, commission; McCorkle & Holmes, general store; James N. Smith & Co., store located on Hurricane Hill. This is said to have been the only store of importance on top of the bluffs. A. Moorehead & Co. operated one of the largest general stores. They kept ladies' cloaks, hats, bonnets, men's suits, hats, boots and shoes.

Jordan Brown, Robert Smither and Gabriel Smither were large cotton buyers. Charles Hood was a commission merchant. J. Postelthwait &

Co. were commission merchants, buyers of livestock, cotton, wool and dealers in iron. Forsythe, Goodwin & Ford, commission merchants; Caruthers, Harris & Co. were commission merchants. John H. Haight was a cotton buyer and commission merchant.

J. A. Read & Co. were commission men, so were Lawrence & Brown, Charles Hood and J. T. Vallean. They were dealers in wagons and farm stuff.

Randolph boasted of four fine hotels in 1834. One of the best, say old inhabitants who remember of having heard about it, was Washington Hall. It was located on the bluffs near the best residential district and in its large dining room were given many fashionable dances by the young people.

Among the doctors who lived at Randolph then were B. H. Ligon and Isaac N. Jones. Both men became wealthy and lived their lives there. John T. Conley was a tailor. He made suits for the best families and the town boasted of a weekly newspaper in 1835, edited by Frank S. Latham.

That year Gen. Jacob Tipton was a candidate for circuit court clerk of Tipton county. Marquis Galmes, Nat Hunt, William Cowan and William F. Ramsey were candidates for sheriff. Josiah Horne was a candidate for county trustee.

In 1835 Daniel Vaught was appointed postmaster at Randolph, succeeding Col. William P. Miller, who resigned to command troops under Gen. Houston. Col. Miller went to Texas by the Mississippi river from Randolph, carrying several of the best young men of the town with him. He was captured by Santa Anna and placed in prison. Samuel Wilson, one of the young men who went with Col. Miller, was killed at the Fannin massacre. David Murfree, another prominent young man escaped.

On June 26, 1836, the steamer Tuskinia, with 300 Kentucky volunteers on board, landed at Randolph for supplies. There was a big wood yard near her landing and she remained in port two hours loading fuel. A five and drum corps furnished the citizens with music and the elite of the town went on board, distributing flowers among the soldiers. This steamer went her way to New Orleans, from which place the troops were sent by water to Gen. Sam Houston.

Randolph was the great river shipping point for West Tennessee from its earliest days to the forties, when Memphis began to show better facilities, but she could not get all the trade.

The fight for business continued until the Memphis & Charleston railroad began operations in 1857, then citizens of Randolph saw it was not much use to continue. A few sold out. Some went to St. Louis, others to Nashville and a few to Memphis, but others went to the town to take their places. Business continued along pretty well until the town was destroyed by federal troops.

In the forties there were 40,000 bales of cotton shipped annually at Randolph. It boasted of the finest steamboat harbor on the lower Mississippi, and the big packets of those days never passed up or down the river without landing.

Mr. Barton said if the old business men had put their heads together in the early fifties they could have got a railroad and Randolph might have been as large a city as Memphis.

"No set of men would build a city on top of these bluffs," said the town wit.

"What are you talking about?" remarked Mr. Barton. "I remember when a very little boy I went to Memphis. The bluffs there were as rough as they are here. I saw Indians camping where the postoffice building is now."

Of the number of doctors at Randolph during its life, none remain. The village is without a physician.

"We don't have much illness here. However, we notice more since the bar built in front of the town," remarked Mr. Barton.

Of the larger number of general stores in former times, only three are left. One is conducted by Templeton & Graves and one by Mr. Barton. E. M. and J. A. Templeton are descendants of the first families of Randolph. They are interested in the firm of Templeton & Graves.

"There is not much left to our town. It is the memory of those days when our fathers and grandfathers fought for business supremacy over Memphis, I suppose, that is keeping us here at home, where we know all our neighbors for miles around, and where we still try to give the hand of welcome to strangers coming our way," the way Mr. Templeton put the only reason for the existence of Randolph as it appears today.

#### INSOLVENT NOTICE

Executor's Notice of Insolvency of the Estate of Frank Taylor, deceased.

To the Creditors of the Estate of Frank Taylor, Deceased:

The insolvency of the estate of Frank Taylor having been duly suggested to the Clerk of the County Court of Tipton County, Tennessee, notice is hereby given as required by the order of said Clerk to all persons having claims against said estate to present and file the same, duly authenticated, according to law, with the Clerk of said County Court at his office in Covington, Tennessee, on or before the 15th day of July, 1921, or be forever barred.

This March 29, 1921.

JAMES R. FALLIN, Extr.

#### ADMINISTRATOR'S NOTICE

Having duly qualified as administrator of the estate of Mrs. Alice Edwards, deceased, all parties holding claims against said estate are hereby notified to file same with me within the time prescribed by law, and all parties indebted to said estate are hereby notified to settle same with me.

E. W. HOLLOWAY, Administrator.

(14Apr2w)

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