

## A Lexington Boy's Story, 1870-82

John Richard Senseney was born on April 15, 1861, in Lexington. His family could not afford to send him to college, and he became an apprentice, commonly called a printer's devil, at the Lexington Gazette, earning \$1 a week. With printer's ink in his blood, he subsequently worked on newspapers in Lynchburg, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Louisville and Harrisburg, Pa., before finally settling in 1906 in Louisiana, where he managed the Alexandria Daily Town Talk for almost four decades.

A 1938 article in that newspaper told of a visit he paid to Lexington, where his aunt, Elizabeth Kirkpatrick, age 101, and cousin, Ella Kirkpatrick, 82, were his hosts, and in that year he also wrote this reminiscence for the Lexington Gazette. He died in Alexandria at the age of 83 and was buried there.

### REMINISCENCE OF LEXINGTON DURING 1870-1882

*Life As Seen In Lexington By  
A Boy of 68 Years Ago*

*Customs and Incidents Of Early Days  
In Lexington Vividly Described*

By J. R. Senseney



THE FOLLOWING articles were written exclusively for the Lexington Gazette, none of which have heretofore appeared in print. In selecting my subjects for the Special Edition I had in mind short stories that would stand least chance of duplication by other parties writing for this big publication.

All of these stories are absolutely true in every detail, and happened between the years 1870 and 1882 – the latter year I reach my 21st birthday, at which time I left Lexington, to face what I had been told was “a Cold World.” I had plenty of energy and was very optimistic, but lacked even an high school education. I met the “cold world” with a smile, which it returned to me “tenfold.” I believe sincerely in the old adage: “Laugh and the world will laugh with you, cry and the world will laugh at you.” I have never cried at any of my misfortunes, but in every instance have thanked Heaven they were no worse. This is a recipe of “How to grow old and be happy.” With this spirit I have followed in the footsteps of my dear old aunt, Mrs. Elizabeth Ann Kirkpatrick, who celebrated her 101st birthday, July 23, 1938, in Lexington, Virginia. She accomplished, in moderate circumstances, that which John D. Rockefeller wanted to, but could not, with all his wealth and physicians – live to be one hundred years of age. She has always been cheerful and bore her burdens with Christian fortitude.



AT THE CORNER building, near Court House Square, where the First National bank now stands, was a grocery store conducted by Mr. Joe Tompkins, an uncle of Dr. E. P. Tompkins, Coroner of Rockbridge county. At odd times I would help Mr. Joe around his store. He was a large man, genial, kindly and jovial. I thought a great deal of Mr. Joe.

### **The judiciary**

I knew such great lawyers and judges, as Judge [William] McLaughlin, judge of the circuit court; Judge J. K. Edmondson, judge of the county


BOTH: MOUNTAIN CITY MASONIC LODGE



William McLaughlin James K. Edmondson

court; Capt. [John C.] Boude, clerk of the circuit court; Capt. Preston Moore, clerk of the county court; Mr. David Moore, Sr., Commonwealth attorney, who was succeeded by his son, David Moore, Jr., and the following legal lights: Messrs. John J. Moore, J. J. Davidson, Ex-Governor John Letcher, James Dorman, Hon. John Randolph Tucker, Judge [John White] Brockenbrough, and later, followed by the younger set of attorneys: Wm. A. Anderson, Samuel Graham, John Moore, the younger, and William McCorkle [usually spelled MacCorkle].

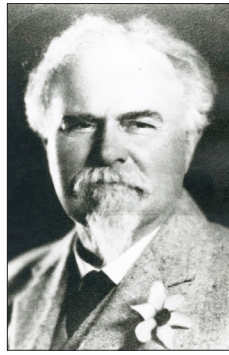
**William McCorkle, later West Virginia governor**

 HE LAST NAMED attorney did not practice long in Lexington, but moved to Charleston, W. Va., with his mother and brother, Pat. In this connection I want to state that my earliest recollections were linked with William McCorkle. It so happened that when I was a boy about seven years of age my family lived on Whistle Creek, and just below us a short distance was the farm of the McCorkle family. William would often come up to our place to play. I remember distinctly that the subject was

brought up as to what we intended to make of ourselves when we reached manhood. I stated that I intended to be a Presbyterian preacher, (why I do not to this day know). William said that he intended to be Governor of Virginia. So time went on, as it usually does, following for William a grind through the free schools, then a preparatory course to fit him for the Washington and Lee University. He graduated in law. But before all this happened, his mother (she was a widow then), moved on Main street in Lexington, opposite to the building now occupied by the Lexington Fire Department. My Father's cabinet shop was the next building to that now occupied by the fire fighters. So I again saw a great deal of young McCorkle, for he was in the shop nearly every day. Time still went on. McCorkle and his family moved to Charleston, W. Va., and I went into the newspaper business, and not as a Presbyterian preacher. The next I heard of McCorkle he had been elected City Attorney, in his adopted city. Several years later he was nominated for Governor and was elected. Here the long cherished dream of the Hon. William McCorkle, of Whistle Creek, Rockbridge county, Virginia, was partially realized. He set his mark high when a small boy, and hewed to that mark. He was not governor of the "Old Dominion" but was Governor of a great state hewn from the "Old Dominion." With modesty I mention the fact that at the time he ran for Governor I was run-

ning a newspaper for a lawyer, Mr. F. T. Shumate, of Wayne Court House, W. Va., and after I recited the history


to him of the Hon. William McCorkle, Mr. Shumate consented at once to throw the influence of his newspaper, (the only one in the county) to McCorkle's



William MacCorkle

support. In after years I received a couple of letters from Governor McCorkle filled with kindly words for me. Peace to his ashes.

**Big Foot Wallace**

 KNEW William (Big Foot) Wallace and his brother Alexander, who lived a short distance from the Old Fair Grounds. "Big Foot" was a relative of the Pettigrews and Champes, and helped to a large degree to make the state of Texas a safe place to live in, by conquering the Indians. He was a great Indian fighter and scout, but only fought in self-defence or after being a prey to the savages. He was a large powerful man. He got his name "Big Foot" after killing an Indian Chief by that name. As the story goes, Wallace was out late one evening hunting game for food, and as he climbed a hill, which was very steep, causing him to bend over considerably, and in this position he topped the hill, and to his amazement butted his head against that of the Chief. They clinched, Wallace dropped his gun.

WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY



Big Foot Wallace

They fell to the ground, Wallace on top; he tried to use his hunting knife on the chief, but could not as the chief had Wallace's arm pinned to his side.

Finally, with one supreme effort the Chief turned Wallace over, and was upon him. As the Chief did this he drew his knife, raised his right arm to plunge the weapon into Wallace's breast, but as his arm was uplifted for the death-blow, the Chief fell dead upon Wallace's body. After an examination of the Indian, Wallace found that what he thought were ineffective thrusts at the Chief, proved to be death-dealing blows.

I wonder if my old friend, Joe Pettigrew remembers "Big Foot" Wallace's recital of the above. For many months after the recital by Wallace, all the boys who heard it or heard about it, were determined, in a few years to join "Big Foot" in Texas, and show the Indians that there were other boys in Rockbridge county besides a Sam Houston and "Big Foot" Wallace, who could show them how to make a state safe for "Democracy."

In the meantime while waiting for development of body, us boys were content to continue our home fights, among ourselves, on the corner of Jefferson and Nelson streets, at the old Franklin Hall.

### School in the Old Methodist Church

IN MENTIONING above the old Franklin hall it recalls to my mind many pleasant memories of which I will relate further on after making mention of the Old Methodist church on Jefferson street. My first school days were in the basement of this church. This was before we had public schools. The Rev. Richard Barton, a Methodist preacher, conducted this school for boys only. It was in this room that Robert Barton, a son of our teacher, came from the Washington College, where he was a student and reported the death of Gen. Robert E. Lee to his father, whereupon learning the sad tidings, the Rev. Barton dismissed the pupils, after one of his longest and most earnest prayer I ever heard him make. So eloquent and pathetic was the delivery that every scholar's cheeks were moistened with tears of genuine grief. This was in October 1870.

### John Fuller, Librarian and Glass Mender

IN THIS SCHOOL the Rev. Barton taught reading, writing, arithmetic and spelling. David Moore, the younger, who was afterwards a very distinguished lawyer and later Commonwealth Attorney. He was a brother of Prof. Alex. Nelson's wife, and also a brother of Mrs. Ted Barkley, whose husband was once owner

John W. Fuller,  
c. 1868

and editor of the Lexington Gazette. David Moore taught the higher grades in this school — a kind of preparatory step to entering college. At that time our family lived in the first story of the Franklin Hall, or in fact in half of the lower floor, for at that time Mr. John A. R. Varner was living in part of this building. At that time he assisted Mr. John Fuller as librarian of the Franklin Hall, Mr. Fuller had a two room building — one room on the ground floor and one room above — which he used as a work shop. This was on the corner of the Hopkins lot. Many times I have watched Mr. Fuller mend glassware of all kinds, dishes, and earthenware. He was an expert at the business, and had perfected different cements and glues for mending the different wares, so that the coloring would blend with the particular piece he was mending and not show where the break was after repaired. I want to explain to my readers that in those days glassware, crockery and china-ware, was expensive, and the mending inexpensive. A glass pitcher that you can buy today, for two-bits would cost then one dollar or one dollar and fifty cents, hence the great saving in having someone to mend them. This cement was stronger than the materials cemented. His friendship to me in later years was also cemented in that small work shop. When he got too old to work he gave me the recipe for making the cement, and I put it in bottles, with a label on it printed by my old friend

and benefactor, Scott Moore. I sold many bottles of this "John Fuller Cement" to the people of Rockbridge county before I started in the printing business.

Mr. Scott Moore ran a printing office upstairs across from where the First National bank is now located, and whenever he would get a job of posters to print he would give me a tip and I would go to the party and contract to distribute them. In this way he aided me in making considerable money, for those days. I think now that this close connection with printers' ink was the prime cause of my deciding to embark in the "most fascinating business in the world." I use the language above in quotations, as it is the same language used by Governor [Richard W.] Leche of Louisiana, in a letter last March congratulating me upon my sixty years in the newspaper business. He termed it the "Most fascinating in the world."

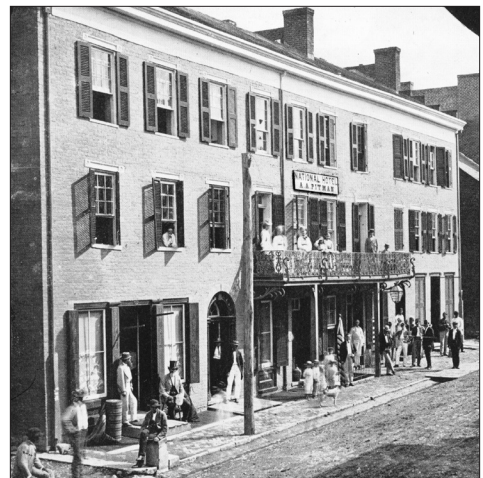
**Presbyterian Church Steeple**

IN THE EARLY '70's Lexington had a volunteer Fire Department and a new hand-pumped apparatus, which was also drawn by man-power, with Mr. "Dick" Bayliss as chief. The greatest ambition of the chief was to put water over the steeple of the Presbyterian' church. This was accomplished after several

trials. On the day this great feat was accomplished nearly the entire population of Lexington was on the grounds to see it. When the stream went over the steeple a thousand shouts went up to the heavens, and were repeated a number of times. This feat was the talk of the town and county for months. Chief "Dick" Bayliss was carried on the shoulders of men through the street. At that time I thought nothing could be built by man any higher than the Presbyterian church steeple, but as I looked at it last June when I paid Lexington a visit, that steeple looked dwarfish, compared to when I was a boy nine years old. Probably it was because I was wearing shoes last June and had grown up.

**National Hotel Errand Boy**

THE OLD National Hotel (where now stands the beautiful Robert E. Lee Hotel) was another place of interest to me in a financial way, for I often ran errands for the guests, and had a warm friend in the person of Mr. A. A.



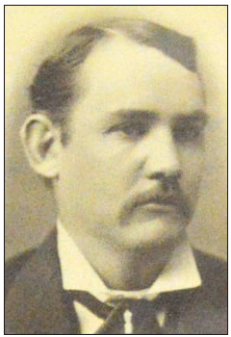
National Hotel, c. 1890

Pittman, who managed the hotel. If my memory serves me correct he was an uncle of Miss Ida Rapp, who in later years married Mr. J. McD. Adair, whose son is now connected with the Rockbridge National bank in Lexington, and a fine young man he is. Many a store errand I have made for his mother. In those days we had no phones and no delivery service. If you wanted anything in a store you went after it, sent for it or did without.

**County courthouse orators**

“THE BATTLE GROUNDS” – the Court House Square. Here, I will venture to say, more oratorical words have been spoken than anywhere else in the state of Virginia, outside of State Capitol at Richmond. I heard, in my boyhood days, such orators as John W. Daniels, the silver-tongued orator and ex-confederate soldier of Lynchburg, who seconded the nomination of Thomas Hendricks, for Vice-President [in 1884]; the man who wanted to stop after delivering a short speech; but the Convention would not let him – he was too eloquent, and kept him speaking for one hour and thirty minutes. Daniels could take you into another world and hold you in a sublime suspension until he uttered his last word, which let you back to earth against your desire. I heard such men as Harry Riddlebarger, of the Shenandoah Valley; Hons. Wade Hampton, Zebe Vance, Gov. John Letcher, Hon.

MOUNTAIN CITY MASONIC LODGE



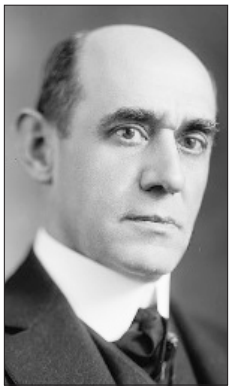
Scott Moore

MILEY PHOTO

John Randolph Tucker, Hon. Wm. A. Anderson, and many other fluent speakers. In later years I heard Samuel Graham, son of Dr. Ned Graham, another prince, who was a splendid young lawyer, and a good speaker.

### ***Samuel Graham's Impertinence***

**I**N THIS connection I would like to mention the name of Samuel Graham in a conversation I overheard at my father's cabinet shop. Col. John Preston often stopped at the shop, and while talking to my father, he brought up the subject about his son Herbert coming home



*William McCorkle*

one evening very much wrought up over the conduct of young lawyer Samuel Graham, in court over which Judge J. K. Edmondson presided. Herbert told his father that Samuel Graham [who practiced in Lexington, 1880–91] contradicted the judge on a point of law; and even turned to the law and read it to the judge, which Herbert thought was a piece of gross impertinence on the part of Graham. Col. Preston told his son that Samuel was within his bounds, and possessed the backbone that would some day, in the near future, take him to a court where he would be presiding officer. Col. Preston's predictions came true, for Judge Samuel Graham is a very

noted jurist [on the U.S. Court of Claims, 1919–51].

### ***Matches and fire***


**D**ID YOU KNOW that ten of your heaviest cigaret smokers in Lexington today strike more matches in one day than all of the population in Lexington seventy years ago struck? It is a fact. Seventy years ago this necessary article was very expensive. The first matches were in a block of wood about three-quarters of an inch square, was then sawed a number of times two ways, so that the block at one end was still intact. This end was then dipped into a solution by the factory and allowed to dry, put in a wooden box and placed on the market. When you had occasion to use a match, you pulled one off of the bunch, and if you was lucky you got a fire. You had to wait until it blazed up and then what an odor. In many cases you would have to raise a window to let out the disagreeable odor. The match I remember, was the single match. This match was placed on the market in a round wooden box, with a lid that fit it securely. The box contained about fifteen matches and retailed for ten cents. One box was supposed to last a well regulated family for one month. You say absurd. No, it was a matter of economy. The housekeeper would light a fire and maybe it would be a week before another fire was lit. To make that first fire last so long is easy to explain. When the fire was first started

it burned up to bed time and then a good sized chunk of hickory wood was placed in a nest of coals, and allowed to burn awhile, then it was covered well over with ashes. This held the fire until next morning when all you had to do was to rake the ashes off, add a little kindling wood, get down on your hands and knees and blow — sometimes a few curse words would help. This procedure saved the precious match. I have known country folks to go a half mile to a neighbor and borrow fire. The borrower would come to his neighbor with two sticks, go to the fireplace or stove, secure a good live chunk of fire, and depart for home with the words: "Thanks, come over some time and see us." All lamps and candles were lighted with a lamp lighter, made by twisting a piece of old newspaper in such a way as to form a taper. A number of these tapers were made by the children, put in a retainer of some kind to be used as the occasion demanded. One of the tapers would be inserted in the fire until it blazed up, and then applied to the wick of the lamp or candle. In those days we used candles and also what was known as a kitchen lamp. This was a small brass or copper lamp with a round wick, about the size of a medium lead pencil, made of twisted yarn. This lamp did not have a chimney. The fuel used was lard oil. The large glass lamps used coal oil, or what we now call kero-



sene. The oil used then, I think, contained some gasolene, as very often a lamp bowl would explode. Many people believed, at that time, that if you put a good sized piece of red flannel in the globe it would prevent explosion. This I will not vouch for.

### **Cost of Living**

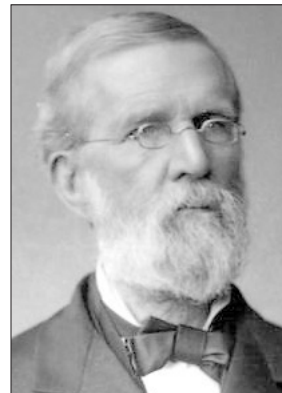
 DO REMEMBER that kerosene cost fifty cents a gallon, or fifteen cents per quart. Dark brown sugar retailed for 12 cts per pound; calico 12 to 15 cts per yard; a spool of Clark's O.N.T. thread ["Our New Thread"] = 10 cts per spool. This is the dark side of the situation.



Now, for the bright side: Corn, Irish potatoes and cornmeal each sold for 30 cts per bushel. You could step out on the streets of Lexington any cold morning and buy a dressed shoat [piglet] weighing 100 pounds for \$2.50; eggs 5cts per dozen; big fryers 8 $\frac{1}{3}$  cts for the whole chicken; a large fat hen for 15 cts; a pound of good country butter for 10 cts and 12 cts; a 196 pound barrel of the best flour for \$2.50. This flour was a little dark, because the kernel of the wheat was ground with it. Your flour today is nice and white – but it lacks the vitamin, the substance so essential to the diet of man. That is why we have so many stronger calves and colts nowadays then we have boys and girls.

The wages paid then was 50 cts to \$1.00 per day, of 12 to 15 hours

each day; where you now receive \$5 to \$6 for eight hours. How would some of you Lexington youngsters like to join me in a journey back 70 years. I hear an echo saying: "No, thanks, ever so much, we do not want to take that long journey backwards. We neither have the time nor the inclination for so long a journey. Thanks again, we'll be seeing you later." No, nor would I like to take the trip; but I am going back, or rather let my memory stray back about seventy years to record an incident that happened about that time in regard to a man, whom many people, including myself, thought was a very stern man and very hard to get along with. This man was General Francis Smith, superintendent of the Virginia Military Institute, who became a friend of mine, and whom I was very much attached to after the incident I am about to relate. It so happened that most of the baseball bats used by the students of Washington College, and the cadets of the Virginia Military Institute, were made in my father's shop. I was the salesman who



*Francis H. Smith*

was supposed to dispose of the bats on the ball grounds, of the two above mentioned Institutions of learning. One day, after a ball game, I was returning home, with other boys, and with only one bat. I will state here that I had a ball, given to me by Jud Effinger, a grand ball player at that time – he was my Babe Ruth – so in

passing General Smith's residence near the campus, I asked one of the boys to pitch me the ball – I had the bat ready, and dealt the blow – the ball going through General Smith's library window, breaking a good sized window glass. Horrors! Did I have to face that stern old General. My father had told me that if I broke a window glass to go up to the house and tell the people that he would replace the glass – this was part of the work of a cabinetmaker then – so I mustered up all the courage I had, and started down the walk. As I got half-way to the house, out comes the general with my precious ball in his hand – at this point my heart stopped beating, but my thoughts sent up a plea to heaven – I do not know what the plea was, but something saved me. I continued my walk toward the

General and he toward me. When we met he spoke first, of course, because I couldn't have spoken a word if it had saved my life. He said in the mildest voice I thought I ever heard spoken: "Whose son are you?" I said Mr. Amos Senseney,

and before he could say another word I rattled off what my father had told me. The General put his hand upon my head – I thought he was going to pull my hair – and said in that same mild tone. "You know, I like to see a boy act like you have in this matter. You can tell your father that I will have the glass replaced by our

repair man." He then handed me the ball, and told me to be more careful hereafter.

Several years after this — to be exact about two years later, I had a contract delivering ice from General Pendleton's house to that of Commodore Maury's residence, and in so doing passed by twice every day the residence of General Smith's going and coming back. On several occasions on my return to town the General would call to me and I would go down that path which I dreaded so at one time — as happy as a chirping cricket. I would spend a few minutes with him, while I ate the cookies he brought out to me. General Smith had a stern face — like that of General Pershing, but in his breast beat a heart as tender and sympathetic as that of a most lovable woman. You must take into consideration that at the time this all happened, was only a few years after the Civil War, a time that "tried men's souls," and the fact that he had hundreds of cadets from all over the South to contend with; so he wore on his face a sternness that was essential to the calling of his position. I learned to love him, because I knew his inward nature, and still reverence his memory.



HE HON. E. A. Gibbs, of Rockbridge county, of whom I was personally acquainted, invented a sewing machine — the one I now remember was a small affair and was made to screw on to the edge of a table with

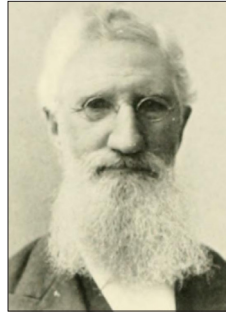
a thumb screw, easily detached. This machine did not have a foot treadle, but had a little wheel with a projection on the side that enabled the assistant — generally a child — to turn while the one doing the sewing would have both hands to



*Wilcox & Gibbs hand-cranked sewing machine, 1880*

guide the article being sewed. I thought it was fun at first to help my mother with this work, after awhile I would readily consent to let the other children take over the job, for I soon got tired of anything that developed into the semblance of work.

For a good many years I thought that my father was fibbing to me, for every time I was about to get my jacket "tanned" — and this occurred often — my father would say "John, I would rather take ten licks on my bare back than to give you one." But in after years, when I had a boy of my own I knew exactly how my dear father felt. One day I was turning the grind-stone for him to sharpen an ax. When all of a sudden I stopped. He asked what was the matter. I told him I was tired. He said, "John, now, you were born tired and it is going to take you a life time to get rested." In all the years that have gone by, I have looked upon my father as a prophet, for as I am now seventy eight years



*James E. A. Gibbs*

of age, I can say truthfully, that, in all my life I have never entirely felt rested. Now I never get tired nor hungry, for just before I feel that I am getting tired I sit down and rest, and before I get hungry I eat something.

I am admitting all of the facts before my dear cousin, Ella (Kirkpatrick) Gillock will have a chance to tell you how lazy I was when a boy.

### ***The Day the Circus Came to Town***



NE MORNING, very early, six of us Lexington boys left the court house square, where we had previously agreed to meet, to go out and meet that greatest of all showmen, P. T. Barnum, and his great circus. I will state that all circuses coming to Lexington, traveled by wagons at that time, for we had no railroads entering Lexington. We started from the Court house that morning about daylight, and walked out the old Staunton turnpike for 2 miles before we met P. T. Barnum in a buggy, drawn by two beautiful grey horses. Just before they reached us they stopped for some trouble, so we proceeded, as boys will, to ascertain the delay. When we reached Barnum's buggy,

**P. T. BARNUM'S  
Greatest Show on Earth.**

**SEASON OF 1878.**



Comprising a World's Fair, Immense Museum and School of Marvellous Mechanisms, a Score of Imported Royal Gallions, and a Grand European and Native Circus, all combined in

**ONE VAST UNDIVIDED SHOW.**

Owled by the exclusively and secure my own individual and personal direction, assisted by Messrs. BAILEY, JONES, SATTLES, and several other well known Managers of experience and ability

EXHAUSTIVE, EXTENSIVE, MAGNIFICENT, MARVELLOUS AND COSTLY as many of my previous exhibitions have been, I hereby pledge my Honor, Reputation and Fortune that the present Grand Exhibition of 1878 excels them all.

More than **ONE MILLION OF DOLLARS** are invested in this unparalleled collection of the World's Wonders. It is transported through the country on **100 railway cars** of my own.

This Colossal, Moral, Movable

he said: "Where do you boys live?" One of the boys told him that we lived in Lexington, and that the distance was about seven miles, and that we had come to meet his circus. He told a fellow standing near the buggy to go back and tell the wagon boss to come up front. When the wagon boss arrived, he told him to take us back and put the bunch on a wagon, with the remark that just such boys as we made it possible for a circus to live, and if it wasn't for the boys there would be no circuses. He laughed and said that Lexington was a fine town, and the only one that had sent out a reception committee to receive him and his circus. To show that he appreciated our efforts in welcoming his aggregation to our historical town, the same man who placed us in the wagon, later on, came to our wagon and gave us each a ticket to the show with the compliments of P. T. Barnum. Will you imagine six barefooted boys riding in town, bowing to the people on either side of the street on top of Barnum's Circus wagon. At that time some of our mothers thought we had disgraced the family by coming in so close contact with circus people. However, we boys thought it an honor, and we believe all who are now living think today that it was, with your humble servant. After other boys saw us and learned the facts, they impatiently awaited the coming of the next circus. This time at least thirty boys went out to meet the circus — at a distance of some ten miles — but

with poor success, as they walked back to Lexington with low spirits and sore feet. The original six did not participate in the second venture, as we felt that the large crowd would lessen the honors, if there should be any. In after years, being connected with newspapers, I came in contact with many great show people — both on the stage and the sawdust, and I have found them as a class a good bunch of sports, averaging up favorable with the run of citizens that were considered intelligent and good.

### **The County Fair**



WHEN A BOY of about 13, I had a job driving Prof. Alex. Nelson's mulch cows to and from his home on College Hill to the Fair Grounds. My route was from the Nelson home down back of Lee chapel to Jefferson street, up Jefferson to White and then out Main to Houston; down this street to the Fair Grounds. It so happened that on the evening I have in mind I was very late returning the cows to pasture, and besides there was a big-to-do at the W. & L. College that night. When I reached the fair grounds it was dark, but a pale moon was shining. To save time, I decided that I would cut across the fields from the fair grounds instead of going around the



*Alexander L. Nelson*

way I came. This route across the fields would land me at the back of the Presbyterian cemetery, which I intended to cross; this would lead me to Main street. The front gates of the cemetery were kept locked after dark, but there was a side entrance over a stile, with two steps on either side, and a wide platform on top. This alley led from Main street to the rear of Mr. A. S. Bacon's residence. I reached the rear of the cemetery, got through the fence and was going down a path whistling — not because I was scared, but it was a habit of mine. When I reached the square of "Stonewall" Jackson — the monument was not there at that time — a cat gave an unearthly scream. I knew what it was, but to save my life I couldn't keep from running. I had no control over my legs, they carried me to the stile, and I hit that stile only once — on top. After I got out on Main street my legs quieted down but to such an extent that they were of no use to me for walking purposes — they would only tremble, but I did not miss the big-to-do at the College.

Speaking of the old Fairgrounds it reminds me of the first time I ever exhibited anything for a prize. I bought a pair of very young Black Spanish chickens from William Beeton, of North Main street — a cockerel and a pullet. I took particular care of these chickens and entered them in the Rockbridge County fair. They were well developed birds when I entered them. The morning these birds were to be judged I was on hand early. When



the judge got down to business I watched every move he made. Finally he reached my coop, took the chickens out, examined them, and put them back



*Black Spanish chickens*

and made a mark on the coop. After a long time he returned; took them out again; put them back and walked away. A boy friend of mine, who was at the other end of the alley where the judge was came running up to me and told me that I had won first prize in that class for he heard the judge tell the young man who was assisting him. This friend of mine knew the chickens were mine, but the judge did not know to whom they belonged. So we waited for a long time. Finally the judge came back up the alley, and as he started to my coop a lump got in my throat as big as an hen egg – it wouldn't come up nor would it go down. The judge walked up to the coop and put a blue ribbon on it – just in time to keep me from choking to death. I then swallowed and was myself again. For the past fifty years I have been raising pure-bred chickens and exhibiting them all over the country in the best of shows, but I have never had such an exultant feeling in all of my winnings as I experienced at the Rockbridge County Fair. Pardon me for stating that I was about the first person in the south, this side of Mason and Dixon line, to carry off first at

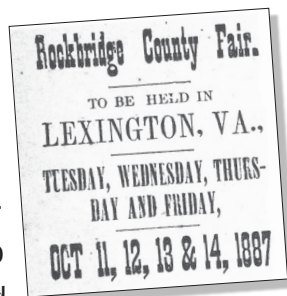
Madison Square Gardens, New York and at the Chicago Coliseum.

### **Better than a greased pig**



HE SAME DAY I won this prize, a number of us boys entered the contest of catching the "Greased Pig." This pig was a fine Berkshire male worth \$10 or more. Prof. Alex Nelson, one of the warmest friends I ever had, told me that if I won the pig he would buy it from me and pay the full worth. The pig was turned loose in a ring of fairly good size, and the fun began. The pig, went round and round finally coming close to me. I jumped straddle of him and had him by both ears and was about to conquer him when he ran under a threshing machine where my head struck a rod and knocked me off. The pig prize went to another boy. I walked around for awhile with a terrible headache.

Prof. Nelson took me over to a coffee stand and bought me a strong cup of coffee, and he wanted to take me home, but I decided to stay. An hour or two after this I decided I would



cut across the fields and go home. I went out of the gate and started down the road to reach a path, but had traveled only a short distance before some one on horseback came galloping by me and I noticed that when he got down the road about fifty feet something flew out of his pocket that looked bulky. I yelled at him but he evidently did not hear

me, for he kept at a rapid gait. I ran down the road and picked up the package. It was a billfold crowded with greenbacks. I knew that Mr. H. H. Myers was the treasurer of the Fair Ground Association, so I decided to take this wallet to him. I proceeded across the fields and came into Nelson at Randolph and then to the corner of Nelson and Main, where Mr. Myers conducted a hardware store in the old Tutwiler building. It seems that while I was on my trip, the gentleman who dropped the package, had retraced his route (he being on horseback) and was back at the store when I arrived. Upon arriving in the store I went back to the office and found the occupants in a heat of argument. I gave the package to Mr. Meyers and told him I had found it just outside of the Fair Grounds. They all thanked me, and the gentleman who had lost the pack-

age gave me a quarter. I started out of the store but was overtaken by Mr. Myers who told me to come to the store the next morning at nine o'clock.

Next day I reached the stairsteps leading up to Mr. Mike Miley's photograph gallery, in front of the Presbyterian church, and took my seat at the bottom of the steps to wait for the clock on the steeple to strike nine – I was fifteen minutes ahead of time. When the clock struck I got up and crossed the street and went into the store where I met Mr. Myers. He said: "John, the Board of Directors

Henry H. Myers,  
c. 1867

met last night and instructed me to give you five dollars for the return of that wallet. Do you know how much money was in the wallet?" I told him I did not.

He said "There was more than six hundred dollars." If it had not been for that "Prince among Men" I would have received twenty-five cents. This is only one of many times this noble man did me great favors. I lost the "Greased Pig" contest, but won half as much in an easier way.

In this connection I want to state that it will be impossible for me, for lack of space in these articles to give due credit to all who were kind and generous to me in my boyhood days. Should I attempt to do this I would be compelled to mention nearly the whole population of Lexington at that time. I can not call to memory at this time one person who mistreated me in my boyhood days. Not that I was so very popular with the people, but from the fact that if I should mistreat anyone I would had to account to my father. To a great extent I suppose this was a deterrent and regulated my conduct. I might state here that since that time I have had the good will of my fellow-workers and employers and have held every job until another showed up that would better my condition financially. As an evidence of this assertion I have held my present job for the past thirty odd

years, with satisfaction to my employers and myself.

An Irishman, whom my father was well acquainted with, came into the shop after a long absence. After the usual greeting my father asked him where his brother Jerry was. He said Jerry was dead. My father asked me how long he had been dead. He replied that if Jerry had lived until the 22nd of next month he would be dead two years. "Believe it or not".

### Narrow escapes

**I** WANT TO MENTION some of the narrow escapes I have had: I have been in four train wrecks; two cyclones and was dumped in the Ohio river by the blowing up of a steamboat, receiving no great injuries in any of these.

### Journalism

**I** HAVE OWNED and operated five weekly newspapers – three at one time. The reason I operated three at one time was to "bust" myself quicker and lose all desire for the ownership of papers –

I accomplished this in one year with three weekly papers. With only one paper it would drag along from three to five years, but finally it had the desired effect, and I have lost all desire to own a newspaper. The desire for ownership of a newspaper, when once it gets into your blood, is the most terrible thing to conquer I have ever had experience with. To get this

out of your blood you have to use drastic measures, and get a chain of papers. One paper will give you more worry than a mother would have with triplets cutting teeth and with the rash at the same time. Three newspapers will put a damper on your love for journalism – unless you are working for someone who will relieve you of the mental and financial strain. This is why I prefer to let the other fellow worry, so that I can close down my desk in the evening, locking up all my worries, knowing that Saturday will bring forth a check. This is the most fascinating part of the newspaper business. It would not be so bad for the owner of a newspaper if the general public would take into consideration that the editor with his newspaper is working for the people and the town to make the town a better and healthier place to live and the people more prosperous, and that his only source of revenue is from advertisements and subscriptions. So when he asks you for an advertisement don't treat

him as though you were throwing your money away. If it was not for your home paper, your

town would stand still – would make no progress. It is your newspaper that makes the appeal to the taxpayers for your schools and your civic improvements, and serves you in a thousand other ways without asking pay. Take the newspapers out of your town, with the churches, also, and



your town would be dead as a door nail. Patronize your papers liberally and it is like the "bread I cast upon the waters" it will be returned to you ten fold. I have seen it done, and am speaking from experience – 60 years experience. I am going to record a case I have in mind, and it is not an isolated case, of a merchant who rented a hole in the wall and placed a small stock of merchandise in this place. This was 18 years ago in Alexandria, La., but today this man has the largest department store in Central Louisiana. From the day he opened his store he has never let the general public forget that he was in business. His advertisements were small at the beginning, but as he expanded he increased his "ads" until today he is using five pages each week at a cost of \$350 per week. Ask him who made him. He will tell you "Printer's Ink."



IXTY-FIVE years ago when I first had the pleasure of visiting that wonderful sight, Natural Bridge, it was the most wonderful sight I had ever seen. When I visited it in June of last year, it is still the most wonderful sight I have ever seen, and it thrilled me in a way that I have never been thrilled before. I looked first upon it and was awed by the works of our Creator. In the olden days people were allowed to visit this wonderful sight of nature free of charge, provided they closed the gate at the entrance so that the cows would not get out and stray away.

About the only thing at the Bridge at my first visit was a dwelling – a kind of boarding house for the accommodation of travellers, who stopped over at night, and a country store. At one time a son of Mr. Samuel Campbell, who lived on Main Street, at the West end of Houston street ran the store. In June man had added materially to the works of God – in the way of cleaning up and wonderful improvements in the way of gorgeous buildings and surroundings. I paid a price of \$1.25 each for myself and two sisters and the scene was well worth the price. I sat on a seat near the arch of one of God's masterpieces, and listened to music produced by man, and it made me feel nearer to heaven than I ever felt before. It



left an inspiration that is still lingering with me, and I hope will for some time to come. The price paid for the enjoyment was insignificant.

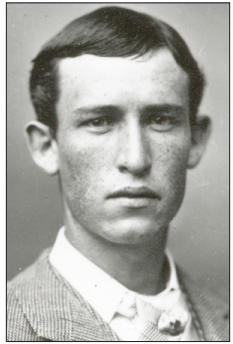
### **Boys vs. His Goatship**



IN THE east side of Randolph street, about 150 feet north of Nelson street, there was a large livery stable, run by a Mr. Kraft. Us boys were in the habit of getting in the way of the help. So Mr. Kraft decided, after using other means of extermination, to buy a Billy Goat from Mr. Hogshead, who lived out the road towards

Natural Bridge. This goat was on splendid terms with man and beast, but he abhorred boys. It seems that the boys near his former home had aggravated him beyond toleration, and had made of this otherwise docile animal, a deadly enemy for boys. Mr. Kraft in due course of time, brought his goat-ship to the stable, to the disgust of our crowd. At first we contented ourselves by going on a long porch of a two-story building, belonging to Mr. Waddell, which was only a short distance from the side of the livery stable. One of the boys discovered that if he bleated at the goat he would come up under the porch, shake his head and paw the ground. Finally we got bold enough to go below and taunt him, and when he made for a boy the boy would dodge behind one of several pillows. Sam Alexander, the blacksmith, told Mr. Kraft that he bet a dollar that some of us boys would be riding that goat inside of a month. Mr. Kraft did not take the bet. One day "Little" Charlie Deaver was making for a pillar under the porch but slipped and fell. Taking advantage of our hero's condition, the goat butted Deaver twice before we could render assistance in the way of beating the goat off with sticks and rocks. The act on the part of the goat showed us what kind of low down creature we had to deal with, for our motto was: "Never strike a man when he is down." This goat had violated our most cherished motto. We all put our heads together and fell upon a scheme. Charley Deaver

had a little brindle bull dog, weighing not over 10 or 12 pounds, but he could whip five times his weight in wild cats. His procedure when attacking a big dog was to catch the big one by the jaw, and when he got a secure hold he would shut his eyes and pretend he was asleep. So we



*Charles Deaver, 1881*

took this dog in as a comrade. The day for the test, the boys congregated at the blacksmith shop on the corner of Randolph and Nelson streets. Charlie

had the dog under his right arm, and all of us marched boldly down toward the stable – something we had never done before. The goat saw us and proceeded to meet us on half-way grounds. Before the goat got too close to us Charlie turned the bull dog loose, and told him to go to it. As was the usual habit of the dog, he grabbed his goatship by the jaw and went to sleep. The goat turned round and went around and around – a bleat at every jump. This was kept up until the goat ran to the corner of the stable yard and fell exhausted. We then went down with a bucket of water and soused it on the dog, who opened his eyes and let go. During all of this time Mr. Kraft was enjoying the performance hugely. After that the goat saw as many as two boys coming down the street, he would retire to his stall in the stable. About a year after this Mr. Kraft was in his

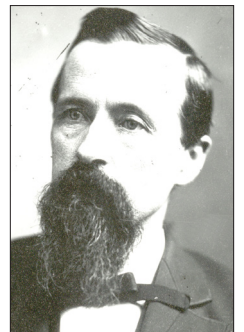
garden, opposite the stable hoeing small vegetables and was stooped over with his back toward the gate, which he had left open – when the goat spied him he made a dive for his owner and struck him squarely in his seat. This was the last of the goat – our enemy. Mr. Kraft was so enraged that he killed the goat with the hoe. Mr. Kraft was confined to his bed for about a week, and while in bed an old confederate soldier, who was in the war with Mr. Kraft, came to see him. He asked Mr. Kraft how he was getting along. Mr. Kraft replied that he was mending, but the worse part of it was that he thought he was going to die, and this caused him a lot of humiliation. That he had fought in the Mexican war and also in the Confederate army, and then to come out of all this, and be killed by a d--m goat was too humiliating. The Charlie Deaver I speak of in this article was an uncle of your townsman, Mr. J. Ed. Deaver.

### ***A kind man rescues the boys***



STORY about a Mexican Dollar. Our crowd, of about eight boys, were going from Main street to Jefferson, by the way of Pettigrew alley, when half way down the alley one of the boys picked up a Mexican dollar that looked as though it had been there for some time. The rule was whatever belonged to one boy he was to share with the rest. So, without any parleying, we continued to what we then called back street where we

knew that there would be several watermelon wagons. We purchased melons and candy with this Mexican dollar, which was worth only seventy cents in the United States, and that is the amount of trade we received. After a few days we discovered that the dollar was lost by a sister of one of our crowd. To make an amicable settlement of the matter, we got together and agreed to reimburse the loser if we were given two or three days to get the amount up. In those days it was quite a task to raise a dollar. The time limit for raising the money had expired, and we still had fifty cents to raise. The crowd was sitting on the rock wall in front of the court house discussing the matter when Mr. Preston Moore, Clerk of the County Court, passed us going to his office in the Courthouse. We did not want our families to know anything about this – for the sake of keeping down an argument, that might terminate in something more serious. So, I went into the court house and laid the whole matter before Mr. Preston, who produced the fifty cents as a loan. We were then happy, but in the excitement we




*Preston Moore*

paid over the full one dollar in good United States money for the Mexican dollar which was only worth seventy cents. We tried to get a refund on several occasions, but to no avail.

Mr. Preston Moore, in due time, received his fifty cents, and for interest he received the friendship of seven or eight boys – a friendship to last for his entire life – and a memory which I still cherish. In after years he secured for me my first permanent job in the printing business. Mr. Moore was the father of your townsman, the Hon. Frank Moore, whom I had the pleasure of meeting in Lexington last June while on a visit to my “Old Home Town.”

When God made J. T. McCrum and his good wife, He could not help from feeling proud of his creation, for here were two of the kindest and gentle people I have ever known. Mrs. McCrum was a sister of Cap. James White, whom God cast in the same mold as that of his sister, only changing the sex. Mr. J. T. McCrum had the most gorgeous beard of any man in Lexington. It was at least 20 inches long; coming down to a medium sharp point. Seventy years ago, eight men out of every ten wore some kind of beard – it was the fashion, or rather the custom. On windy days Mr. McCrum was compelled to put his beard under his coat and vest to keep this huge beard from blowing in his face. The McCrum Drug Store has existed ever since I could first remember – more than 70 years. When I can first remember it was in the old Barkley building, where it is today. The name McCrum meant purity both in person and the drugs he compounded. The above three, I am certain, are with their Creator.

### **Political favors**

N LOOKING OVER the Lexington Gazette of the first part of August last, I ran across an item in the column of “Fifty Years Ago” which read as follows:

“John Senseney, son of Amos Senseney, located at Tazewell, Tenn., where he conducts a republican paper, has received a political plumb in the shape of Deputy U. S. Marshal, so they say.”


In this matter I am going to use the language of “Mark Twain” by saying “I deny the allegation, and defy the alligator.” I have never at



any time conducted a republican newspaper. Every paper that I have owned has been independent of any political party – reserving the right at all times to support the man whom I believed would serve the people best. The records will bear me out in the statement I am going to make. In the latter part of [Republican President Benjamin] Harrison’s administration I was appointed to the office of Deputy U. S. Marshall for the Eastern District of Tennessee at the request of Hon. H. M. Carr, a staunch democrat who was U. S. Commissioner, and by U. S. Judge D. M. Key, an appointee of [Democrat] Grover Cleveland, in his first administration. I held the office for a little better than a year – or just before Cleveland was nominated for his second term. I admit that I advocated the election of Cleveland.

When I did this I was notified to send in my resignation, which did not surprise me. The request from the department mentioned that the department was sorry, that my work was entirely satisfactory in every way, and that my reports to the department were of the best, but that the republican congressman from my district had requested my dismissal. Grover Cleveland was again elected president. A short time after his inauguration I was appointed Deputy U. S. Marshal again and continued through his term. In after years I was in Chattanooga, Tenn., and called on my old Democratic U. S. District Attorney, Gen. [James H.] Bible, in his office, and while talking to him, a splendid looking young gentleman came in. Gen. Bible arose and said: “Mr. Nelson let me make you acquainted with Mr. Senseney.” We shook hands and demonstrated to the General that we had known of each other before. This young man was a son of that good man – Prof. Alex. Nelson, whom I made mention of in another place in this write-up.

### **Advice to the next generation**

ITH THIS last item I am going to close my little history of my boyhood days in Lexington and leave the recording of deeper problems and facts to those who have a better knowledge of the English language.

I was born on the 15th day of April, 1861, in a brick house just back of the old Waddell home on the

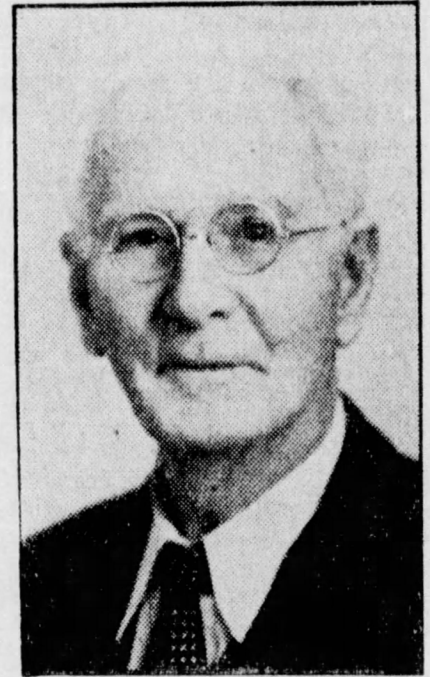
corner of Washington and Randolph streets, in Lexington, Va.. at the break of Dawn, and now I am in the Twilight of a life reasonably well spent, and I believe, from my behavior toward my fellowman, that even my undertaker will be sorry when I pass away. So, I am winding up the series of articles for this "Special Edition" for that old time friend of mine in my youth The Lexington Gazette, and I hope that some of these articles will bring back bright memories to the older readers, and to the younger generation a realization that they are living in an era that is full of opportunities for advancement in their chosen field; in all of which I rejoice with them.

### OLD MEMORIES

I hear the melodies ring out once more.  
Old songs are sung again, and I return  
In dreams to find an open vine-clad door,  
And friends of long ago, for whom I yearn.  
A strain of music brings back flying feet  
And a dear voice that I remember yet,  
And all the peace and quiet of Main Street  
In that dear old town I cannot forget.

## John R. Senseney, Dean of Printers, Aged 83, Dies

Native of Virginia with  
Town Talk for 38  
Years



JOHN R. SENSENEY

*Alexandria (La.) Town Talk,  
September 23, 1944*