

# Life in Christiansburg, c. 1850

By H. H. Farmer

Published in the *Montgomery Messenger* in 1880

[unedited}

In 1851, I went to this place to live, I learned the harness trade with A. S. Woolwine in a house that stood where the Bank Building now stands across the street from the Court House. About 1853, we had to move out of this house for the bank to be built. In 1857, I left that place and when I left I was well acquainted with every person in that town. Up to the time I went to Christiansburg there had been but two old churches there. The Methodist Church, an old log house, stood in the east end of town on a hill at the old cemetery. The Presbyterians used a brick building for their church that stood on the Floyd Road; a year or so later they built their present church and the old one, the Masonic Temple, was used as a female school until the Female College was erected on the northside of town. The Methodist church that stands down on the right-hand side of the street leading to the Depot was nearly completed when I went to the town, and it was dedicated a few weeks later. There were two papers there then, the *Montgomery Messenger* (or *The Herald*,) this was a Whig paper edited by Robert C. Trigg, later Colonel Trigg of the Confederate Army. The other paper, *The Star*, was a Democratic paper edited by attorney James C. Taylor, afterwards Attorney General of Virginia. Politics used to get pretty high sometimes. Trigg was a brave man out of the Army as well as in it. At one time a Democratic Editor at Union, Monroe County, now West Virginia, wrote an editorial in his paper that grossly insulted Trigg.

He took the paper in his pocket, got in his buggy and started for Union. When he got there he found the Editor in his office, drew the paper on him and asked if he was the author of that

article.

He told him he was, Trigg demanded the retraction of it. He told Trigg he had no retraction to make. Trigg drew a cowhide from under his clothes and let in on him. It came so sudden and the licks so fast that the Editor was over-powered and Trigg gave it to him to his heart's content.

I think there must have been less whiskey drinking in Christiansburg when I was there than in any town I have ever been acquainted with. I can think of but one man that ever drank at all. I suppose some of the young men took a dram sometimes. but the heads of the families never drank. At that time all hotels had their bar-rooms. Liquor was cheap; people from the *country* would come to town and drink and quarrel and fight. Doctors Edie, Brown, Wade and Sheltman were the doctors then. Sheltman came while I was there. I think Dr. Figgatt came soon after I left. Of the prominent old citizens at that time were William Wade and James and John C., his sons; Rev. William Barnitz; Rev. Elijah Williams; Rev. F. R. Anderson; Rev. Chas. Miller; Rice D. Montague, clerk of the court; David Douthat; Henry Douthat; old Mr. Snider and his family. Hamilton and James Shields; Geo. W. Anderson, hotel keeper; Edward Williams, hotel keeper; Jeremiah Kyle and son, William; William Wade and Thomas Montague, Christopher Snidow, old Mr. Baylor and his sons, old Mr. Ragan and his sons and daughter; George Clair and family; Frank Kessler, Mr. Walthall, Capt. Bragg; the two Hickocks came while I was there; Wm. C. Hagan, principal in the academy; Joseph MacMarran came and took his place, he studied law; Charles Lane was there and his newpew. D. S. Pollock, now of Pulaski, was a school boy; Alex Gardner and his son, the late Col. Gardner who died in Dublin a few years ago. He had recently returned as a soldier from the Mexican War. George Price, several of the Garders, the Woolwines, the Barnetts and a good many others too tedious to mention. Uncle Billy Wade, a noble man, died while I was there. He was stricken with apoplexy and died within an hour or two. Rev. Michael Haymaker, who died before I went to Christiansburg, was looked upon as the best man

that had ever lived in the town.

At the time I write about Christiansburg, Montgomery County had more able lawyers and smart men than any county in the State, and I doubt if any county at any time has had such an array of great men. For instance, William Ballard Preston and his brother, James; Daniel Hoge and his brother, James; Henry A. Edmundson and his brother, James; Waller R. Staples; ; Charles A. Reynolds; James C. Taylor, (Attorney General); and Eli Phlegar. H.A. Edmundson was in Congress all the time I was there. James Edmundson, I believe, was not a lawyer, but he represented the county in the Legislature. All the others were strong men at the Bar. B.F. Wysor from Pulaski and Rush Floyd used to practice law in Christiansburg, and they all together made one of the ablest bars that we had in our country. For a great speaker, I suppose Ballard Preston has never been surpassed in our State. He immortalized himself in the great campaign of 1844 between Clay and Polk. Preston canvassed the State for Clay. They generally had joint discussions in those days and Preston could hold a crowd better than any of them.