

SHADOWS OF THE PAST—Part 1 **The Kernersville of Sixteen Years Ago**

Prof. M. H. Holt, Oak Ridge Institute
News and Farm, Kernersville, NC, Feb 17, 1888

Transcribed by Michael L. Marshall

Sixteen years have left marks upon your beautiful little town, quite as unmistakable as upon those who walked its quiet streets and lived in its hospitable mansions when I first knew it as a school boy. In the latter part of Jan., 1872, in company with three other rustic youths, on a cold, rainy day, I made my first acquaintance with Kernersville. We went to the Academy late in the afternoon and registered, and then sallied forth like Don Quixote, in search of adventures. I have a shadowy memory that smoke curled from four cheroots (four or five cents) as four hats set on the backs of four heads as the four self important personages referred to “split the town wide open.” This performance was well nigh literal as the mud then was very much the same “warp and woof” it is now. We could not then “go up the new cut road and come down the lane,” for there was only one street, and it extended from Uncle Joseph Armfield’s to the Moravian church, possibly a few scattering houses beyond that. We found a few goods in a small house occupied by N. W. Sapp, a few more at I. Kerner’s, and a very nice stock kept by Beard & Roberts at the old stand next door to Mr. Joe Kerner’s in the flat. Beyond this there were no stores. Perhaps, too, Mr. A. H. S. Beard kept a few groceries where Mr. Tarpley now has a store. There was then not a factory, not a warehouse in the place. [William] Pendleton Henley, Esq., was “mine host” where now the Sapp Hotel sign swings to the breezes. Cherry street was then unknown or just opened; I do not remember it. The residences of L. E. Griffith, J. W. Beard, N. W. Sapp, J. C. Roberts, G. W. Stuart, M. Crews, Dr. Dicks, Prof. Ray, Wm. Leak and many others—I see the list would be too long—did not exist. So, too, the stores now occupied by Beard & Roberts, Davis & Son, J. S. King, and all those near the depot have since gone up, as well as the depot itself; for Kernersville was then only a straggling country village, which had awkwardly struggled into existence at the crossing of the Salisbury and Danville road and the Greensboro and Salem road. There was then no *News and Farm*. Nothing has aided the material growth and prosperity of Kernersville more than the excellent newspaper, which, without the stimulus of love or money, has gone right on in its unselfish, unpaid, unthanked way (in many instances) building up every enterprise of the citizens.

Kernersville when I knew it intimately had such an exuberance of social life, and such an unbounded, unstinted hospitality as is to be found only in towns remote from the great thoroughfares and commercial centers. Sixteen years have not effaced the memory of the hearty welcome which, from my entrance into the town and the school, made me feel I had friends indeed. I shall never forget the Valentine drawing which took place at the Academy, and the merry games, participated in by young and old alike. I shall never forget kindly faces that first I met that night, nor voices whose music sounded for the first time in my ear and heart. Many of those faces have for years been beneath the sod, and the music of their voices has been hushed forever. But tonight that night just sixteen years ago comes back again from the hallowed past, and the music, and the smiles, and the games, and the drawing, and the merry party are back again from east and west and north

and south, with the dew of youth upon their brows and the fire of youth within their hearts; aye, some have aid down their harps on the golden streets of the City Immortal, to meet again as once we did. Again as of yore Flora, and Annie, and Cora, and Lizzie, and Charlie and others play exquisite harmonies upon our heartstrings. Another I remember, too, whose heart was true and trusting—aye, too trusting—for a demon with the face of an angel has since despoiled her and abandoned her to the questionable mercies of an uncharitable world. But tonight, dear ones, you are all the same, pure, true, noble, hopeful and buoyant party I met sixteen years ago. Now, the lights go out one by one, and reluctantly we go to our rooms.

Again, on Easter Sunday we have another evidence of the social life and hospitality of the Kernersville of sixteen years ago. The school picnics at Harmon's mill. All the wagons and buggies and oxcarts are called into use, and, preceded by the band, we make our way to the place of meeting. Three hundred people of all ages and sizes were on hand, all intent on forgetting the perplexities of life for one day, and having a hearty, enjoyable time. To me the Moravian custom of observing the anniversary of the resurrection of our Savior has always been very beautiful and impressive. If there is ever a time when people ought to feel thrills of brotherly love, it seems to me it should be when contemplating that Great Love whereby we were all made brother partakers of the blessings of Redemption. The day was spent in fishing, croquet, talking, walking, rowing and eating what a feast we had that day, thanks ever to the noble womanhood of Kernersville! That night at the Academy—fit setting for such a jewel of a day—we had the loveliest party, and humorous speeches from several of the whole-hearted men of the place. Again memory backward turns the wheel of time, and again do forms and faces and voices that long association taught me to love, in life's green spring, amid the perfume and fragrance of the early flowers, come back to the treasured chambers of my heart. This occasion, sweet as it was, was earthly and must end; but the memory of it will live as long as I live, as sweet incense wafted from the long ago to the praise of the large-hearted sociality and hospitality which characterized the town.

As my article is growing longer than I intended it to, I shall defer some pictures of school life, which I intend to sketch from memory, till next issue.

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SHADOWS OF THE PAST—Part 2 **The Kernersville of Sixteen Years Ago**

Prof. M. H. Holt, Oak Ridge Institute
News and Farm, Kernersville, NC, Feb 24, 1888

Transcribed by Michael L. Marshall

In my last, the printer made me locate the picnic on Sunday instead of Easter Monday as I intended, and as it was. The school at Kernersville at that time was under the charge of Prof. Jno. S. Ray, the present mayor of the town. To say that Prof. Ray was a born teacher would be using a hackneyed phrase, and yet one that very fitly represents the truth in the case. The longer I live, and the more experience I have in the school room, the more convinced I am that Prof. Ray was more nearly a Dr. Arnold than any other man

whose school I ever attended. There is not a day that I do not introduce some plans whose outlines I discerned there. It is true that sixteen years have wrought changes in school management. We are more methodical now than then. We are more mechanical—more nearly like clock-work, if you please. But there was an individuality in Prof. Ray's school, an effort on his part to develop individuality, which modern schools, particularly Graded schools do not, cannot have. Prof. Ray was not one of those eloquent teachers who spouted forth rhetorical flowers by the hour from the rostrum—a walking encyclopedia—while the poor ignorant urchins looked up from their carved desks, with open mouthed and open-eyed astonishment and wonder. He had the faculty that usually comes to the teacher when enthusiasm gives way before wisdom, that of being able to draw the student out and make him do the talking. This is the secret of teaching—the golden key that unlocks the Mystery Chamber of the profession, bestows upon its owner all its hidden powers. And Prof. Ray had not lost the enthusiasm without which all teaching is dull and lifeless. Add wisdom, knowledge, tact, knowledge of human nature, love of children and youth, and then to these qualities a spirit of enthusiasm, and you have a teacher who will have a *school*, and whose influence will go on increasing through the ages. No matter what the advantages or disadvantages, pupils will flock to him and around him. Such a one was Prof. Ray. In grammar, especially Latin, Greek, and English—he was the finest teacher I ever knew. His *English Grammar*, I always keep at my elbow for reference, and I have used modifications of his plan for teaching it for ten years, and I am daily more and more convinced there is no better plan.

But occasionally Prof. would get “sold” as all of us teachers do. He had lectured us one morning on the use of tobacco, especially smoking (as the Prof. chewed he said nothing about that use of the weed.) He referred to two boys whom he caught in the Academy smoking pipes. Friday evening, coming, was essay evening; so one of the youths, John Goley, an ill-fated but brilliant boy in some respects, wrote up an essay on “Consistency,” in which he dwelt for some time upon people who preached one thing and practiced another, scoring mankind in general, and finished up on those, in particular, who used tobacco themselves, and yet denied the enlilation [sic] of fragrant Havana to others. He closed with the quotation “Consistency: thou art verily a jewel &c.” I never heard the Prof. mention the use of tobacco again.

Sometimes when we had a difficult Latin lesson we could draw him out upon the customs of the Romans, their modes of warfare, their ideal of physical excellence, their oratory and statesmanship compared with ours &c. &c. and get him to fill up the time himself in that way, but it was not often that we trapped him that way.

I would not, I could not pass this point without paying a tribute of respect and praise to the memory of his excellent wife—my teacher in mathematics. Born and raised in Mass., she brought with her New England culture and scholarly attainments, that matter-of-fact honesty and sincerity so characteristic of the Puritan. There was no *ponying* over the oremes of Euclid There could be no cut and dried skimming the surface and talking learnedly about what the student knew precious little except that he wanted to “darken counsel by words,” with her. She would keep those piercing eyes upon him till he got through, and then say with a smile, “Very well, Mr. A., but why is it so?” Knowing we could not get around her, we prepared the lesson we affected to recite to her. But the disease was preying upon her system which was destined all too soon to remove her from her loved work to scenes beyond the ken of mortals.

Neither could I forget, if I wished, Miss Lollie Kittle's pleasant smile, as she went from room to room, carrying sunshine to all of her classes in music and botany. If she had an enemy in school, I did not know of it. Since then she has become Mrs. Dr. Kerner, and lives at Henderson, N. C.

Escapades? Well, I remember a few. I remember one night a party of us, six or eight, overflowing with animal spirit and brandy peaches, went out on the Salisbury road and laid hold of a shackling one horse wagon. We conceived the brilliant idea of waking up the town. The ground was slightly frozen, and the night clear, and at ordinary gate, the rattling of that wagon could have been heard a mile. Judge then how it must have sounded at one o'clock a. m., as we tore through town twice at full speed. Doors open, windows raised, and some of the boys said Uncle Isreal [sic] Kerner ran out thinly clad, thinking the train had come (the railroad had been graded but not built.) We carried it back and pulled and pushed it into a pond near the owner, thinking it needed tightening up.

Speaking of brandy peaches reminds me of more strides Kernersville has made in sixteen years. I am not sure that J. W. Beard kept them, although it is likely he did—I am sure the other merchants did. Now surely they do not. That is quite a stride in sixteen years in public opinion.

But to go back to the halcyon days—to their hopes [illegible] their dreams, their inspirations—how like a Blessed summer morning with its perfumed breezes and joyous song of birds, the happy hours, and days and weeks flew by. After all, life is but a Summer's day. The sun rises clear out of a bed of amber and gold, the landscape glistens resplendent, each spear of grass being hung with jewels which would grace a King's Crown. Then comes noontide with its heat and worry, and the glory of the morning is scorched out of sight. Then come the clouds, the wind and the rain. In the midst of this comes darkness sometimes, but sometimes the "clouds roll by," the rainbow, blessed harbinger, spans the retreating storm. The gateway of the evening, hung with purple tapestry from bars of silver and crimson and gold, is slowly opened and the king of day departs leaving upon the firmament foot-prints of stars. May God bring our lives to such a close as this last, and may we all who dream together amid the hopes and perfumes and freshness of the morning, outside the storm of earth, and in the evening be lighted into heavy by the Sun [sic] of Righteousness crowned with many starts. More next time.

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