

DAVID HUTCHISON REMEMBERS EARLY ROCK HILL

One of the principal businesses in Rock Hill in its early days was the grog shops or barrooms. Mr. Hutchison (David) remembers when there were seven on Trade Street, the street leading from the Southern depot. They were all very close together and they did a rushing business in spite of the fact that the village population was small. Almost everybody drank liquor in those days and people of the country surrounding used to furnish plenty of customers.

From 1875 to 1880 there was an average of about one killing a week in Rock Hill and the bar rooms were responsible for practically all of them. In fact it was dangerous for citizens to walk on the street between the depot and the National Union Bank in those days and ladies were never seen on the street on Saturday.

It was in January 1881 that an election was held on the question of prohibition. The dries carried the day by a majority of one vote after the hardest kind of fight.

The ministers of the town stayed by the polls all that day to assure a fair count. The whiskey men worked hard during the campaign prior to the election and they busied themselves with hauling their friends to the polls. There were a lot of hard words spoken and rough talk that day, but strangely enough there were no scraps.

Up until a short time before the election some of the best business men and leading citizens were opposed to prohibition. Their argument was that if the bar rooms were driven out the people would not trade in Rock Hill, and the prediction was made that grass would soon be growing in the streets.

But an incident that occurred about two weeks before the election turned the tide. An inoffensive negro was killed by a well known white man while in a drunken frenzy. The negro was innocent and it was clear to everybody that a cold blooded murder had been committed, although alcohol was the cause. Some of those who had opposed prohibition the strongest ceased their fight and town went dry, though by only one vote.

In talking of the days when Rock Hill was a wet town, Mr. Hutchison recalled the incident of the death of J. M. Howe, a barkeeper who died from a rattlesnake bite.

Howe was a soldier of the Northern army who settled in the village of Rock Hill after the war. When he first settled here he established a tailoring business, but that didn't make money fast enough and he opened a bar. He soon became his best customer. It happened that after he had been in the bar room business some time, D. A. Barnett, who lived on the Catawba river, caught a huge rattlesnake and sent it to Howe, who put the snake in a glass cage where it remained several months an object of curiosity and interest to frequenter of the place.

One day Howe, who was very much intoxicated, boasted to a number of friends that he could handle the snake without harm to himself and he proposed to take it out of his cage. This he attempted to do, when the snake suddenly bit him on the finger. Howe then threw the snake from him and reached for a bottle of liquor. But his system was so filled with liquor already that it would not serve to counteract the poison and he died within an hour. The snake was killed by some of those who had witnessed the tragedy.

..... Hardly an incident worthwhile that has transpired in Rock Hill in the past sixty-four have passed since David Hutchison knew the village of less than 100 people practically all of whom he could by name and since he saw the clerks that roamed Main street at the main corner where hundreds an hundreds of people now pass daily. But to his bright mind and keen intellect it is all so fresh as if it had occurred.

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