

# History of Blackstock

Ed. note: The following article appeared in the Chester's News and Reporter's Progress Edition in April.)

By Catherine Irwin  
as told by the late  
Dr. S. B. Latham

Many years ago Ned Blackstock, an Irishman, set sail from his native land and after a voyage of three months - then considered very rapid - landed at the United States and found his way to the present site of Blackstock. Blackstock established a post office at his home, and he became postmaster. At that time the mail was carried by stage coaches. As the stagecoach paused in front of his home, the master of the house dumped out all the mail, took out those letters addressed to him and put the rest back into the bag, together with letters he wished to be delivered. The postage for one letter was fifty cents.

In a few years Ned Blackstock died. The postoffice was then moved to a red house approximately one-half mile north of the present site of Blackstock. A man named John Strong became postmaster. The postoffice remained there until his death and was then moved to the home of a Mrs. Bell. At that time Frank De Bardeladen ran a store and a house of entertainment. After his death the place was bought by Mrs. Bell and still continues in the family.

In 1851 the railroad was built and a depot established. The postoffice was moved to the present site of Blackstock and T. M. Boulware became postmaster. The mail was now transferred from buses to the railroad. Up to this time all the land near Blackstock had been owned by Jerry Walker, who sold a large portion of it to David Hemphill. It was he who donated the land to the railroad for a depot to be built.

In the immediate

neighborhood of Blackstock there lived one Alexander Skelly, a school teacher, surveyor, Captain of the Militia Company - one of the outstanding citizens in many ways. One of Captain Skelly's past times was writing poetry - of all types and on all subjects.

Among one of his queerest notions he conceived the idea of inventing a machine with perpetual motion. For two long years Skelly worked on it unceasingly. Then at last his dream seemed about to be realized. He felt that he was on the verge of completing the only machine with perpetual motion. One day he invited all of his friends and acquaintances in to witness his machine in operation. When everyone had collected, Skelly pulled the lever - the machine ran - a few minutes - the band broke - and that was the end of "Skelly's Folly".

Skelly's next exploit occurred in 1883. At this time there was great talk of Negro uprisings and nullification. Skelly with his militia stood guard every night to be ready for trouble. One night the company was on duty, stationed near the present Baptist Church of Blackstock. For a long time they stood there, not hearing a word. Suddenly they heard a great commotion in the near-by woods, shouting and crying. The company moved forward stealthily, prepared to fire, and upon arriving in an open space saw the cause of the excitement - a 'possum in the top of a tree, a dog, and two or three men. Naturally the company was very embarrassed and felt that they should do something to save themselves from being the laughing stock of the countryside. Again the company was called to order. Each man promised that as long as two members of the company were living in Chester County he would never disclose the

happenings of that night. And these promises were kept. Many years afterward only one member of the militia company was living in the county, an old Irishman. It was he who finally disclosed the secret.

A few years after this incident, Skelly moved to Indiana and was soon lost track of completely.

After the railroad was built, Blackstock began to be built up. T.M. Boulware built the first house which was later burned by Sherman. The first store was operated by Dr. DeVega, who ran it for two years. His clerks were David Fant and Henry Pratt, who later bought the store. Until the War Between the States they ran a dry goods and grocery store and had a flourishing business. Several other stores soon sprang up. A large academy was located near Blackstock and received pupils from all over the state. It lasted until the war. One April thirty-four young men departed to enlist in the Army. The school degenerated and was never revived. Thus was the end of what has been known as "first Blackstock," for Sherman soon invaded the neighborhood, leaving only destruction in his pathway.

After the war "Second Blackstock" was begun. Alec and William Rosborough opened a store. Other buildings sprang up. Churches — Methodist, Presbyterian, and Baptist — were built. Since that time the town has grown some and is now almost equally divided between Chester and Fairfield counties; the magistrates have jurisdiction in both Counties.

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**(Editor's Note: The following article on life in a small South Carolina town some 50-60 years ago appeared first in the Columbia Record. It was written by John A. Montgomery.)**

Electricity and technology have worked so many wonders that it is hard for the present generation to imagine a world without them. So let's go back just 50 years and see what life was like then in a small South

Carolina town.

**THE ONLY THING** electrical in the house was a telephone on the wall in the hall. It was hand-cranked to call "central." A few affluent homes had Delco systems for electric lights, but they were not bright enough for reading unless the gasoline engine generator was running. There were, of course, no radios, televisions or electrical appliances. Houses were cleaned with brooms and mops, and the best-kept yards were swept clean and free of grass.

Some houses had gas lights, and changing the carbide was the messiest job in the neighborhood. Oil lamps were standard. The glass chimneys had to be cleaned every day. If you got close enough to one to read, you suffered from its heat. Some families had gasoline lights, which were brighter, but the delicate mantles were vulnerable to a strong breeze or the slightest shock, and keeping windows and doors open was the only way to cool the house. In winter, all heat came from open fireplaces.

**ONLY TWO** homes in town had running water. One pumped water from an artesian well into a tank with a gasoline engine. The other had a windmill. Substitutes for bathrooms were bedroom chamber pots, an outhouse at the back of the garden, a tin tub for Saturday night kitchen baths, a foot tub for nightly use during the barefoot season, and a hand pump over a sink on the back porch. Water from the pump was only for washing; drinking water had to be hauled in buckets from the artesian well.

No roads or streets were paved. Cars often became stuck in the mud or sand, but the sand came in handy for frequent automobile fires. All automobiles were touring cars or roadsters. Curtains with isinglass windows were attached when it rained. It was wise to hire a mechanic as a driver for a long trip of 15 miles or more. Average driving speed was 15 miles an hour. Twenty miles an hour was fast, and only the young daredevils drove 30. Cars had to be hand-cranked, causing many broken arms when they

kicked. In cold weather the carburetors had to be thawed with kettles of hot water. Instead of filling stations there were 50-gallon tanks of gasoline and oil at the general stores.

**THE STANDARD** pay for work was ten cents an hour, but regulars in the mill received a dollar a day which was paid in pasteboard checks that were redeemable at the company store. Starting pay for youngsters in the few jobs available to them was 75 cents a workday that ran from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., with a free hour for lunch.

Football was a game for colleges and large high schools. The small - town equivalent was played in back yards with tin cans for balls. Baseball was the year-around sport except for the brief marble season in the spring. Every crossroad had a team, so there was no problem scheduling games. Basketball was a sport for girls on clay courts on school grounds. The players wore black bloomers and white middies.

An airplane was something you saw at the county fair, where two could buy a ride for \$5. When the first daring couple took a flight in the open cockpit of the biplane, the young swain quipped that he was not afraid of being hurt; he had his nurse with him. Tanks, the military marvels of World War I, also were paraded at the fair, and a Confederate veteran exclaimed, "If we'd had just one of those machines, we would have beaten those Yankees!"

**ALL FARMING** was done with horses, mules, plows, hoes and human hands. The only insecticide was paris green. "Irrigation" meant open ditches to drain off surplus water. During the curing season tobacco barns were social centers where the all-night temperature watchers invited their friends to chicken bogs, peanut boilings and watermelon cuttings.

Men bought their shaves in barber shops, which stayed open until 11 o'clock on Saturday nights. The only lotion for hair and face was

bay run. Women did not go uptown on Saturday because that was the day the drunks came to town and there were frequent fights and shootings.

**"STREETCARS"** were shoe boxes that were cut out and decorated with colored crepe paper, and lighted with candles. Young people dragged them by strings and paraded in groups around the town, singing songs. The boxes with crepe paper windows were also used in wedding decorations, and every nuptial ceremony was interrupted by at least one fire that brought ushers and groomsmen on the run.

Trains played an important part in entertainment. The whole town turned out for the morning and afternoon arrivals. Children built elaborate make-believe track systems out of wooden blocks culled from construction projects. Every boy dreamed of being a locomotive engineer. Youngsters swung onto cars on sidings and made believe they were hopping the freight. The height of pleasure was to actually ride on the train, smell the smoke coming in the open windows, and get cinders in your hair, eyes, and down your back.

**IN THOSE** happy days of no inside plumbing, no labor-saving devices, no electric current, when every youngster had ground itch and leg sores and worms, and high living was spending a nickel a week for candy or a Coca-Cola, the new generation had no thought that only five decades later such conditions would be condemned as unbearable poverty.