

The WPA Life Histories Collection

[Chester County]

Project 3613

W. W. Dixon

Winnsboro, S. C. CHESTER COUNTY SAMUEL D MOBLEY.

(white) 74 YEARS OLD

Samuel D. Mobley is a retired business man. He lives with his sister-in-law and his nephew, John D. Mobley, in the town of Blackstock, South Carolina. He has been a close observer of the panorama of life unfolded to his vision in the last half century and is a reasoner and philosopher of no mean ability.

"I am of English descent. My father was Edward D. Mobley; my mother, Roxana Dixon Mobley. There was a large family of children, five girls and eight boys. I was the second son.

"I began school in 1870, in a log house about three miles from home. At that time, I was living about six miles east of Blackstock, South Carolina. I commenced on my sixth birthday, March 22nd, 1870, to Miss Janie Mills. It is needless to say that the beginner's book was Noah Webster's blue-backed speller. It was a very small pay school, supported by a few families in the neighborhood. The pupils could not arrange any large games and had to be content with mumbly peg, knucks, and Holey Rolly. We all loved our teacher, and I don't remember of her ever having to use the birch on any pupil. She was a good disciplinarian and had the gift of imparting lessons to children.

"My next teacher was Mr. John Bingham. Professor Banks Thompson of Blackstock, South Carolina, came next. The last school I went to was at Fort Mill, South Carolina. It was in charge of Professors A. R. Banks and L. W. Deck. Both were able educators, and I got all the general principles of a business education from them.

"I began clerking in the firm of L. S. Douglas Company, a general merchandise country business, in the fall of 1886. On the retirement of the senior member of the firm, Doctor L. S. Douglas, I became a member of the firm of George L. Kennedy and Company. Mr. Kennedy was my brother-in-law, having married my sister, Lyda.

"We made money rapidly under the operation of the lien law, a statutory enactment of the Legislature of South Carolina . The main provisions were, a tenant of a farm, or person engaged in farming, who had little money and no credit could go to a merchant and mortgage his growing crop to him for as much as he estimated he would need for food, clothing, and plantation supplies to cultivate and produce the crop. The phraseology was about as follows. "I hereby mortgage all cotton, corn, oats, peas, and provender growing or to be grown on a certain plantation, the property of - John Jones, in the county of Fairfield or Chester, as the case might be - and I do hereby further mortgage to secure said debt one black mule, named Ben, one spotted cow, named Bloss, six shoats and all household goods, over all which described property I do herein represent there is no prior existing lien or encumbrance whatsoever and which property above described I possess an absolute title to.

"Articles in our store had a cash and a lien price. The lien price was 20 percent higher than the cash price.

"We bought and sold cotton as a firm, and this was a source of profit. My partner handled the cotton. He classified, graded, and set a price on it. I handled the checking and pay end of the line, taking out the store account on payment for the cotton.

"I married Louise Allen of Spartanburg, South Carolina , in 1890. She died in 1901, without having given birth to any children.

"I established the Bank of Blackstock in 1916, but went into liquidation and wound up its affairs on my retirement from business in 1933. No one lost a penny by the operation of the bank.

"What are some of the most significant trends of the times I have observed in my seventy-four years? 1. The Red Shirt movement and the entire elimination of the Negro as a factor in South Carolina politics. The final

chapter was written in that history when the last democratic convention of 1938 debarred the Negro from the rolls of the party. I feel like and believe that this provision will be in force for the next 100 years. 2. The change and migration of white people from the rural districts of the State to the towns and cities. This is bad. The [United?] States Government has made some attempts to check it. Looks like rural free delivery of mail and the telephones would have been helps to keep white people in the country, but good roads, consolidated schools, and the movies have proven stronger attractions. The rural part of the State has been nearly depopulated of white people. What few land owners who farm find it easy, because of good roads, to jump into their automobiles and ride out to their farms in ten or fifteen minutes. "I don't look for rural electrification to induce the white people to stay in the country. The march will grow on. In fact, I look for our small towns to die out in favor of courthouse cities. See how such towns as Ridgeway and Blackstock and trading places like Woodward, White Oak, and Simpson, in Fairfield County, have gone down from importance to insignificant points of interest? It's expensive to maintain a U. S. Post office or a railroad station agent at such points nowadays. "Cast your eyes around. Reflect. There is not a physician, a preacher of the Gospel, nor a school teacher living in the country outside of an incorporated town in Fairfield County. 3. The frantic assertions and demonstrative [ebulations?] in regard to State's rights are less proclaimed than they were forty years ago. There has been full acquiescence in the National Government taking part in building our highways, looking after our health, conserving our forests, preventing the erosion of our soils, building our schoolhouses, and administering our criminal laws. Andrew Jackson has become a fixed star of the first magnitude in luminosity, and John C. Calhoun an asteroid fading and disappearing into the realm of innocuous desuetude." "In the last twenty years, from 1918 to 1938, the National Government has changed its position from a servant of big business to something like a guardian ad litem in a court proceeding, wherein the people are the words who are helpless and unable to understand what is best to be done to promote their health and happiness. 4. In my young boyhood there was a phrase, 'cynosure of all eyes and the observed of all observers'. The planter occupied that position before the War of [Sessession?]. Perhaps the preacher occupied the place a short while after the war. Next came the lawyer, then the doctor, next the merchant, than the banker, capitalist and captain of industry. Just where this 'seat of the mighty' is since the depression, 1929, I can't figure out. People don't bow down as much to money now as they formerly did. It begins to look as if it might have a political cast

of countenance the next time. There are so many new offices and bureaus created since my boyhood, and they are so correlated with tentacles stretching out from Columbia into every county that, perhaps, the county dispenser of patronage is to be the next 'cynosure of all eyes and the observed of all observers.'

"I have noticed that every attempt to legislate morals into the people has resulted in disaster. I will call your attention to the fact that you and I remember when we had the old barroom system, the State dispensary system prohibition, and the present retail liquor shops. No system is perfect, but the worst of all was the prohibition law. Whiskey caused some trouble in Papa Noah's family and resulted in some confusion in Uncle Lot's household. But religion and morals should be taught and inculcated in the church and home, and self-control and temperance should be read and studied from the Bible rather than the Statutory Code.

"When the Mobleys came over from Sheffield, England, to America, they came in the Dove, an immigrant ship of Lord Baltimore. They were Catholics. Shortly after they arrived, they joined the Episcopal Church. After coming to South Carolina and settling in the Up Country, where there were none of that profession of faith, they built a meeting house in which all denominations might worship. This was called the Mobley Meeting House.

"Well, you know I suffered a paralytic stroke four years ago and must not over exert my mind, but I want to tell you an incident that occurred at court in Chester, where I was in attendance in 1894. R.C. Watts was the presiding judge, and Hough, an old gentleman, was solicitor. Harry McCaw was the court stenographer, a well-liked and mischievous young fellow. Solicitor Hough was fond of wine and fine liquors and brandies. He went into a drug store and, while there, lost all his papers and indictments. Court had to take a recess for the day, in order for old Mr. Hough to look for them. Irritated and worried, the solicitor attempted to drown his unenviable plight in more drink, and he had to be put to bed in his room in the hotel.

"Harry McCaw was his roommate, and, hearing an Italian down in the street with an organ and a monkey, he went down and effected a loan of the monkey for a time. He took it into Solicitor Hough's room and fastened the chain to the bedpost. It sat upon the post and set up a chattering

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after a time, the noise of which awoke the old solicitor. He sat up, looked at the monkey, rubbed his eyes, reached under his pillow and brought forth his revolver and said, 'Mr. Monkey, if you are not a monkey, I am in a h---ll of a fix, and if you are a monkey, then you are in a h---ll of a fix.' He fired and killed the monkey.

"The question is always asked, 'Who paid for the monkey and what become of the Italian.' Harry McCaw and his friends paid for the dead monkey and buried it. The bereaved Italian left town. The sobered solicitor found his papers and the court resumed its monotonous grinding of prohibition cases the next day."