

Remembrances of Early Days of Biscoe Fred Monroe

Fred Monroe, who lived in Biscoe from 1904-1917, is an amazing man with a wonderful gift for recalling events and people of the past. This is only a part of what he shared in an extended interview earlier this year. He has very fond memories of growing up during Biscoe's early years.

Fred Monroe was born on December 30, 1900, in Candor, North Carolina. John Monroe, his father, came down with typhoid fever while Fred was a baby. Dr. Shamburger from Star, came down on the train to attend those sick with typhoid. Fred's mother had little help in caring for her sick husband because people were fearful of typhoid - afraid to even come into the house. Judson Cox, Fred's uncle, came to help his sister. Typhoid fever left John Monroe too weak for regular work, so he took his family to live in Laurinburg for two years where he found part-time work with a cousin. When Monroe regained his strength, he moved his family to Biscoe on October 3, 1904, to work as a boiler-maker for the Page Railroad.

Fred Monroe remembers his early days in Biscoe.

When we moved to Biscoe in 1904, the Pages had a company house for us on Church Street, not far from the Methodist Church, but we had to stay in the Burt's hotel for a week until our goods came from Laurinburg. Most of the houses built by the Pages for the railroad workers were painted red, the same color as the box cars. Ours happened to be white - I don't know why. We had chickens, two cows, and pigs. We bought a few acres of land for gardening.

My brother Clement became a doctor, the first doctor at Pinehurst and one of the founders of what is now Moore Regional Hospital. I remember when my sister, Alberta, jumped on a yard rake, and Clement pulled the tines of the rake out of her - maybe his first medical procedure. Clement and Dr. Bowman, who lived and practiced in Biscoe, became good friends. Dr. Alex Dowd, my mother's first cousin, also took an interest in Clement and let him ride out on calls with him. Clement worked at the drug store for Mike Nicholson.

We played with the Bowman boys (children of Dr. Bowman), John Smith's children, and Earl Bruton. We lived next door to Edgar Maness and the Dudley Bruton family. We played street baseball (One-Eyed Cat). Our father made an "auto-go-somewhere," a machine car, at the railroad shop for us to play with.

Our family moved to Biscoe for two reasons: there was a job for my father with the railroad and there was a good school. It was very important to my mother that we had a chance at a good education. Robert N. Page, congressman, furnished the land and built a wooden structure for a school and then, in 1907, the brick building that still exists today. The Pages also made sure that there were excellent teachers at the school.

*The first principal had a room upstairs in the school for his living quarters.

*Elizabeth Liles was the first and second grade teacher. She later married Clyde Capel.

*Kate Bryan was the teacher for 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades.

The school was composed of four big rooms where we got a complete education. A student stayed in the first room for grades 1-3, then moved to the second room for grades 4-6. The third room was for grades 7-9, and the fourth room for high school, grades 10-11. There was a middle room for music.

Commencements were the biggest events in Biscoe. Early grades had their commencement a day earlier than the high school. There were wonderful operettas (I remember the Hicks girls dressed up like butterflies), school plays, and baseball games. There was a big picnic on graduation day with tables 150 feet long! People came from everywhere!

The first social occasion I can remember attending was when the cotton mill was completed and there was a big community picnic. Clyde Capel was the first manager of the mill, then called the Francis Cotton Mill. It was a very important part of Biscoe. The water works was there as well as a big siren. Dudley Bruton ran the mill for a long time. W.T. Hurley was the superintendent of the factory.

Prominent people in Biscoe's early days:

Pages - J.R., Frank, Robert N.

Monroe family

Charlie Crocker - Related to Pages - worked in cotton mill with electric generators - went to Raleigh with the Pages.

George Coggins

J.W. Ewing - merchant

A.W. Burt - hotel

Dr. H.E. Bowman

Dr. Alex Dowd

M.E. Shamburger - furniture store

W.B. Hicks
Kissell family - Boarding house
Hugh Lowdermilk - organized bank - killed by a train
Clyde Capel - First manager of the cotton mill
Major Biscoe - Prominent lumber man the Pages did business with.
Dave McLeod - Post master - ran livery stable and rented buggies and surreys
Bob Medlin - ran planer mill.
Mike Nicholson - ran drug store
C.E. Kellam - came from High Point and built a foundry which was supported by the railroad. Lived on Hunsucker street
John Beck - well-drilling business
W.E. Asbill - ran a roller mill at the south end of Biscoe

Fine homes in Biscoe

Hicks house (Garner house now)
On the south side of Hicks house was the Frank Page house which was later bought by the Bruton family.
On the north side of Hicks house was the Robert N. Page house
C.C. Crocker house - just past the school

Chris Page, Frank Page and Bob Page moved to Biscoe to build their railroad business. The Pages created the town from the woods. They did everything for Biscoe. They had the town laid off first thing - Biscoe was an incorporated town. The Pages sold the railroad about 1912 to Norfolk and Southern (called the Charleston and Southern at that time) and moved to Raleigh.

Frank Page was the first state Highway Commissioner (1918).

Post office was located across the railroad going toward the cotton mill. Dave McLeod was post master. He also rented out buggies and surreys - had a livery stable.

There was a Burton-Hicks Furniture factory which burned.

Sidewalks were made from cinders from the railroad shops.

Clement Monroe worked at the foundry for 50 cents a day. Fred worked at railroad shops in 1910 for \$1.00 a day.

Students came to school on the train from Eagle Springs, Candor, and Samarcand. The train arrived with students at 10:00 a.m. and left at 5:00 to take them home again.

Baseball was the main recreational activity. Biscoe had a men's baseball team. Dick Page was the coach. The Page men played ball!

Bloomer Girls - a professional women's baseball team that came to Biscoe and played the men's team. The women's team had a male pitcher and catcher.

One-eyed Cat - Street baseball

The "Maness Tribe" (nickname given to family) walked to school several miles a day, rain or shine. Three men who married three sisters.

The mayor's office was at the back end of the drug store.

Mr. Hicks (1913) offered Fred Monroe (age 13) the job of tax collector - got 5% of whatever he collected. Fred went to collect at the cotton mill first! Turned in the money he collected to Mr. Ewing, town treasurer. Worked for Mr. Ewing for 4 years.

Graduation Day at the high school was the greatest celebration of the year.

Uncle Harry was the garbage collector. He had a 2-wheeled ox-cart. Parents would threaten children with, "Uncle Harry will get you if you don't behave!"

Marshall Holland - A black man with a one-horse wagon delivered cargo from the depot to all the stores in town.

Rev. Bostic was an elderly Baptist preacher. He had a relative who drank a bit named Ollie Bostic.

Asa Owens was an old man who lived in a shack near the cotton mill. The people in the community supported and took care of him. When he died there was no family to "lay him out," so Mike Nicholson, a neighbor, came by and got my brother, Clement, who was just a grammar grade boy, to help with the "laying out."

They laid Asa out on a table, face down, to bathe him. When they turned him over, his eyes opened up! Clement never forgot that experience!

When people died there was no undertaker so friends and family had to take care of the "laying out." The men took care of the men and the women took care of the women.

"Fire Department" - The Cotton Mill whistle was the fire alarm. The only hydrants were around the cotton mill, so there were very long hoses available that could reach to areas around town in case of fire.

Ike Thomas worked in the railroad shop. He liked to make rhymes. People would say, "Ike, make me a rhyme." He'd say,

*Ain't got time,
Got to be a gwine
On down the line
And catch old Number Nine.*

Will Ewing's store sold molasses in a 50 gallon drum. Ike Thomas would come and say, "Want a few molasses in a paper sack." Molasses was poured into a doubled paper sack.

The church building, which is now Page Memorial Methodist, was called Union Church - all three denominations - Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians - worshipped in the same building - had a schedule.

The Pages would sponsor excursions on the train from Union Church to Jackson Springs, which was like a beach area.

Colon Hurley, an engineer on the railroad, had a bull dog named Tag. The Shamburgers had a collie dog. The most excitement in Biscoe was when those dogs would fight. Everyone would come! The fights usually happened at Arthur Burt's shoe store.

"Rescue Squad" - The nearest hospitals were in Fayetteville, High Point, Greensboro, or Charlotte. If a person got really sick, six men would walk to the

house from the railroad shop, lift the sick person on a metal cot and carry him or her to the depot. The sick person would be carried on a baggage car to a hospital - the ambulance of the day.

Striders' Cafe - where Miller's Hardware is now.

Bob Page was U.S. Congressman from the 8th District. Herbert O. Sink, his secretary, visited the Pages in Biscoe.

Miss Lizzy Connely, Mr. Page's secretary, lived upstairs in the depot.

Steam powered merry-go-rounds came to town via the railroad. The cost was five cents a ride. I remember when Mr. Frank Page gave us a quarter so we could ride some more. The merry-go-round set up right across from the depot and stayed maybe two weeks at a time.

Sometimes we rented a surrey from Mr. Dave McLeod to go to Ben Salem .

Charlie Auman - A very artistic man. Had a battery-building business between Biscoe and Star. (car batteries)

When we heard the sound of a bugle in the distance, people would gather around the depot because they knew who was coming! A man came walking through the woods into town with a trained bear and a monkey that would do tricks. He would come around about once a year.