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News Clipping - 1954 Hamrick Family

Lee B. Weathers

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STAR LINES.....

By LEE B. WEATHERS

Jan. 28 - 1954
This column carried a review yesterday of Robert Lee Durham, a distinguished son of Cleveland County, and at another time made reference to an outstanding layman, J. B. Ivey, Charlotte merchant who began his mercantile career at Belwood, so today I take up a third man, a successful industrialist and civic leader, Dr. Wiley C. Hamrick, born in the Beaver Dam section.

I am reading the three books by these native sons to get background material for a history of Cleveland County, which I hope some day to find time to write and publish, because the county has 112 years of interesting history and has produced many distinguished personalities, some of whom lived their lives here while others cast their lots elsewhere.

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There are perhaps more Hamricks in Cleveland than any other family and they all bear a characteristic trait of thrift and industry. Dr. W. C. Hamrick (1860-1935) did not have the educational advantages that all Cleveland County children are blessed with today, yet he was a man of varied talents, represented Cleveland County for two terms in the lower house of the N. C. General Assembly, two terms as a State Senator in South Carolina and was the top executive of five textile plants in our adjoining county of Cherokee, in South Carolina. So fluently does he write, he could have been a top author. So active was he in civic affairs and as a lay church leader, he could have become equally successful as a minister or a politician.

Every child today takes his or her opportunities for granted. In order to fully appreciate the advantages they enjoy and to be fully aware of the sacrifices our forebears made to bring about the high standards of living that prevail today, they should read Dr. Hamrick's books of recollections, "Life Values in the New South."

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All local Hamricks are the descendants of Hans George Hamerick, a native of Lower Palatinate, which at the time he came to America comprised an area of 2,000 square miles on the Rhine River. Originally this was a feudal district, whose ruler Count Palatinate, was virtually vested with the authority of King. Macaulay, English historian, describes the Palatinates as "honest, laborious men who had once been thriving burghers at Mannheim or Heidelberg, or who had cultivated the vines on the banks of the Necker and the Rhine rivers. Their ingenuity and their diligence could not fail to enrich any land which should afford them an asylum."

Hans George Hamerick was one of a shipload of immigrants that landed in Philadelphia in 1731 from Rotterdam, driven from his homeland by the scourge of war. French armies had laid waste the region with fire and sword and the inhabitants, especially the Protestant element, suffered frightful horrors and deprivations, which caused them to flee. That's why the Hamricks in Cleveland cling to the soil and appreciate the freedom that America provides.

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Several years prior to the War for Independence, three brothers, Charles, Benjamin and George, sons of Hans, migrated to North Carolina from Virginia and settled in what is now Cleveland County. It was then Tryon County. The "e" was dropped for the sake of brevity and economy. Charles begat Price who begat Moses who begat Cameron Street Hamrick, the father of Dr. Wiley, the industrialist author of Gaffney. Each had large families and some local Hamricks descended from other branches of the original Charles.

Well do I remember when I first became editor of The Star, the five local brothers of Dr. Wiley who chose to remain here: M. N. who served as country sheriff for many years; Sidney; John C.; Leander and Alonzo, all large landowners and good farmers.

Dr. Wiley says he was "sickly" as a child and never had the strong bodies of his brothers, so he diligently applied his mind to books. He was six years old before he ever ventured six miles away from home.

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It is difficult for the young people of today to understand how the youth of that period was content to live in such a restricted world. However, Dr. Wiley Hamrick, in his book tells of the subscription schools, the three courses in reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic, the spelling bees once a week, and the period given over to teaching "manners."

As he grew older, he remembers the dark days of reconstruction, the Ku Klux Klan, which Tom Dixon calls "The Invisible Empire" in his books, to protect white women and preserve law and decency.

The Hamricks, as well as other families, had the Ten Commandments drilled into them at mother's knee; they were admonished to keep all of them, so the scriptural lessons guided the lives of all of the six Hamirck sons throughout their lives.

In that period, the only social contacts people had with their neighbors was at church and Sunday school. Ministers preached long

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Starts on 2nd Front

and loud, stressing the fear of hell and damnation if sinners didn't repent.

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There was a spirit of neighborliness then as now. At harvest time there were corn shuckings. When a farmer needed to clear more wooded land so a growing family could expand their crops, the neighbors gathered to help with the "log rolling."

After Dr. Hamrick finished his course of medicine in Baltimore, he was invited to locate at Grover. Already Grover had two practicing physicians, but the young Dr. Hamrick set up for practice, using the proceeds of a loan from his father to buy a horse, saddlebags and other accessories incident to practice. Today Grover does not have a single doctor. He couldn't stand the miles of riding, day and night, but met and wooed Miss Paola Turner of Grover who later became his wife.

Then he moved to Shelby where he set up a drug store and had a successful fling at politics, later entering business at Clifton, S. C. It was here he was thrown in daily contact with textile laboring people, found them to be trustworthy and imbued with the same human impulses, desires and honesty that he had.

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Cotton mill building started in this area about the turn of the century. Every town wanted and needed a mill to give employment. No local people had any executive experience in textile manufacturing, but those who had proven themselves to have good business judgment, integrity and with a moderate amount of experience, were called to head these new enterprises.

Dr. Hamrick had proven his ability and worth at Gaffney so he was chosen to head a big plant and his success with it was so marked that as the years rolled by, there were five large textile plants under his direction.

Although a busy business executive, Dr. Hamrick always had time for civic and religious duties. He never felt aloof from his employes and associates and was perfectly at ease on every social and economic level with his fellow man.

Dr. Hamrick's life should be an inspiration to the youth of today. Although physically weak, he was mentally and morally strong and learned early in life to overcome handicaps and reverses which shows the stuff that is in one.