

# THE COLORFUL EIGHTIES IN NASHVILLE

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NUMBER VIII

*Kings of Commerce—Strong Array of Lawyers—Outstanding Physicians—Spectacular Fires.*

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Mention has already been made of the fact that during the eighties Nashville was the business and financial center of the South. It was a remarkable coterie of men engaged in business here then. One of them, who belonged to the old regime, but who continued active in all progressive movements, was sturdy Michael Burns. Born in old Ireland in 1813, he first came to Nashville in 1836, and established a saddlery business, and though afterwards he engaged in many big enterprises, he always maintained his original business. He had been actively engaged in the construction of the Nashville & Northwestern Railroad, now a part of the N. C. & St. L. Railway system, and was successively president of this road and the N., C. & St. L., resigning the presidency of the latter in 1868, when he was succeeded by Col. E. W. Cole. He had been a director of the Bank of Tennessee, and was always after that connected prominently with financial institutions. He and Andrew Johnson were personal friends, and he rendered the Governor much assistance during and prior to the days of reconstruction. He was a staunch Democrat, and always was interested in politics. In the late eighties he served a term as State Senator.

Gov. James D. Porter was a resident of Nashville during the early eighties, and was for a time president of the N. C. & St. L. Railway. He was an outstanding figure in Tennessee for many years.

Gen. G. P. Thruston was prominent as a lawyer and business man. He came to Nashville as a Federal officer, married a daughter of J. M. Hamilton, a prominent merchant, and became thoroughly identified with the best interests of Nashville.

Capt. John W. Morton, who had been Forrest's chief of artillery; Gov. Neil [Neill] S. and John C. Brown, were prominent figures, the latter being actively engaged in promoting the Texas & Pacific Railroad.

In 1881 H. W. Buttorff, W. P. Phillips and B. J. McCarthy established

the Phillips & Buttorff stove foundry. At first they made 5,000 stoves and ranges annually. They soon put Nashville on the map as the leading stove and range manufacturing city of the South. Their present capacity is 200,000 annually.

This list of sketches might be continued indefinitely, but time and space forbid. Following is a partial list of the business men who wrought wonderfully for Nashville during this time.

William Literer, Dan Bailey, M. J. Smith, Samuel Murphy, Nathaniel Baxter, Jr., Dr. William Morrow, Chas. H. Eastman, P. T. Throop, Godfrey M. Fogg, John Kirkman, Herman Justi, Henry C. Hensley, Henry Hart, George R. Knox, W. L. Danley, Judge James T. Bell, J. H. Thomas, Robert Hollins, Bolivar H. Cooke, Byrd Douglas, W. R. Cornelius, W. T. Henderson, Jo B. Morgan, Garnett Morgan, A. J. Harris, Samuel Seay, Mose Stratton, John Williams, Samuel and Robert Orr. Samuel Scoggins, Col. John T. McGuire, George Jackson, William Hume, J. B. O'Bryan, E. R. Richardson, Ben and William Herman, Ben and Joe Lindauer, J. S. Reeves, James E. Richardson, Jake Fishel, W. C. Dibrell, Shade and Byrd Murray, Hooper Phillips, W. C. Collier, Joseph L. Weakley.

General Weakley was the head of the Weakley & Warren Furniture Manufacturing Company, with its factory in South Nashville, and sales rooms at the corner of Third Avenue and Bank Alley, where Foster & Parkes are now located. They had the first commercial telephone line in Nashville, connecting their sales room and factory.

Jake Fishel is the only surviving member of the great old dry goods firm of Herman Bros. & Lindauer. He is now connected with J. S. Reeves & Co.

Samuel Seay was a unique figure, a man of education, intelligence and of a very active mind. He was for many years secretary of the Nashville & Decatur Railroad, and was a member of the wholesale grocery firm of Stratton & Seay, besides having other business interests. Business could not keep his scintillating intellect employed. He knew more about the tariff than any man in Nashville, and was unalterably opposed to a high protective tariff, and would talk on the subject by the hour when he could gain an audience. Anyone desiring information on this complicated subject knew where to go for enlightenment. When kodaks arrived he became a kodak enthusiast, and was once severely injured climbing over the tops of buildings to make pictures. When he boarded a street car he always had a nickel between his thumb and forefinger. No conductor ever had to make change for him. He was of genial disposition, and his friends were countless.

## **OUTSTANDING DOCTORS**

There were many outstanding physicians and surgeons in Nashville during this time. Among them were Drs. Duncan and Paul F. Eve, the former still living; Drs. William Briggs, J. H. Callendar, Dixie Douglas, J. D. Plunkett, T. O. Summers, T. A. Atchison. J. Berrien Lindsley, first secretary of the State Board of Health, and William H. Morgan.

Dr. Morgan was a dentist and known as the father of scientific dentistry. He was an explorer and discoverer of his profession, and his reputation was world-wide. He came to Nashville a country boy from Logan County, Kentucky. He came from a robust and numerous family, nearly all of whom were men of mark. Many of them were Confederate soldiers.

### **ABLE LAWYERS**

Nashville had an exceptionally strong bar in the eighties. There were men among them who were great thinkers and great speakers, and some of the younger set have since attained distinction. Following are some of the familiar names that come to mind: Judge E. H. East, Judge Wm. A. Quarles, Judge Wm. G. Brien, Judge Matt Allen, M. T. Bryan, Sparrel Hill, Capt. John W. Childress, J. C. Bradford, Judge Howell E. Jackson, afterwards United States Supreme Court Justice; Judge Frank T. Reed, Judge John Vertrees, Maj. Wm. O. Vertrees, J. M. Dickinson, afterwards Secretary of War and one of the distinguished lawyers of America; Baxter Smith, J. M. Head, George B. Guild, Judge J. M. Anderson, Tully Brown, Raymond Sloan.

Every man mentioned above deserves a separate story. Judges East, Quarles and Brien were lawyers of the old school, eloquent, classical and remarkably successful before a jury. An interesting volume could be written about Judge East. Judge Frank T. Reed was eloquent and full of sentiment. He had been a Confederate soldier, and became a Republican after the war. In middle age he went to Seattle, where he died a few years ago.

Capt. John W. Childress was an active figure in Nashville and Tennessee. He had been a boy soldier in the Confederate army; he was a lawyer and a politician of a high order, and later in life became Circuit Court Judge, which position he filled acceptably for many years. The late White Hall used to tell of a dramatic incident in his career in which Captain Childress figured. They were companions in arms at the battle of Franklin when Hall was shot in the forehead. All who remember him will also remember the scar this bullet made, which Mr. Hall carried throughout life. He said when he was shot he fell on the battlefield, and while he was completely paralyzed, he could hear and see what was going on. He said the surgeons examined him and said he was as good as dead; that they did not want to waste time on him, as there were so many other wounded men who needed attention. Meanwhile young Childress stood over him weeping. It proved the ball did not enter the skull, and Mr. Hall speedily recovered, and led an active life for many years afterwards.

Building and loan associations came into being and were very popular. At first there were only small, local associations. The locals were generally well managed, with little overhead expense, and prospered greatly.

### **MARRIAGE ASSOCIATIONS**

Another form of associations in the early eighties swept Nashville and surrounding territory like a tornado. They were marriage associations. The friends of every young couple who were showing love symptoms would insure them in a marriage association. If they married the insurer won; if

they did not, he lost. At first nearly everybody won, and the associations paid them out of money coming in from new contracts. Finally the associations went broke, and the late comers lost their insurance premiums. Millions of dollars were taken in before the final debacle. The officers always got their pay first. Then came litigation which reached the State Supreme Court, and Judge Peter Turney, afterwards Governor, delivered a humorous opinion on the subject of marriage associations. It created so much amusement that the financial losers had at least some consolation.

Squire George Campbell was a live wire in the eighties. He was active in politics and in the affairs of the county. He had an unusual maxim: "Never do today, what can be put off until tomorrow." When asked why he had adopted such a dilatory rule of conduct he said that just before the Civil War he was going to a country school with his brother. One Saturday afternoon the teacher asked him and his brother to remain after school had been dismissed. He then explained that he knew of some of their misdoings that deserved a whipping, and they were going to get what was coming to them.

"But," said he, "it is Saturday, and if you prefer it I will put it off until Monday."

The brother said he would take his punishment at once, and not have it on his mind all day Sunday. So he got it. The young Squire-to-be said he preferred to defer the evil day, and would take his licking Monday. Sunday came the news of the fall of Fort Donelson, and there were no more schools in Nashville for three years. And the Squire's licking will have to be administered in the New Jerusalem, where hickory switches do not grow.

## **FIRE DEPARTMENT AND FIRES**

The late Andy Meadows, sportsman, wing shot, business man and all-round good citizen, was fire chief in the eighties. He was succeeded by E. M. (Mun) Carell, who ten years later was killed in an accident when his buggy ran into a steel post on the Square. There were several big fires during this decade. The Baxter Court burned, when Judge Matt Allen came near losing his life. He hung outside a window on one of the upper stories until a ladder could reach him. His hands were badly burned.

The famous old wholesale dry goods store of Anderson & Greene on the corner of the Square and Third Avenue was destroyed. The immense crowd cheered wildly when Fire Chief Carell appeared standing on the roof of the blazing building, silhouetted against the Northern sky.

A \$400,000 fire destroyed thirty-four buildings at Church Street and Second Avenue, on both sides of Church Street.

One of the most spectacular fires that ever occurred Nashville was when May's Opera House, opposite the present police headquarters,<sup>33</sup> was burned.

The fire broke out about midnight. The third floor was occupied by

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<sup>33</sup> The police station stood on what is now Second Ave. N., on the site occupied (as of 2005) by the jail at the rear of Metro's Criminal Justice Center. So the opera house must have stood roughly on the location of Parkway Towers, across Second from today's jail.

theatrical people and theater employes, who were not aroused until the lower floors were in a light blaze. The smoke and heat wakened them and forced them to climb out the windows in their night clothes and stand precariously on a narrow stone coping. Late as it was, an immense crowd gathered in the street, and was wild with excitement, as the firemen began to shoot up the ladders and rescue men and women. The latter in their night clothes looked like splotches of snow against the black wall. One man with a baby in his arms was brought down. Finally all were rescued except one woman. When the ladder for her was put up it lacked a few feet of reaching her. A fireman climbed the ladder, and, standing on the top rung, reached up, caught the woman, threw her across his shoulder, and began to descend, as the cheering of the crowd split the heavens. The woman, who was young and good looking, said in a clear voice: "Put me on the ladder. I can go down by myself." Before she reached the ground the crowd grabbed her and carried her in triumph over their heads. A large number of women from the red light district was present, and these women, always full of sentiment, strange as it may seem, clothed those who had lost all in the fire from their own wardrobes.

A remarkable incident of the fire was that a Negro boy who was sleeping in the attic of the theater jumped from his window into the alley some fifty feet below. He alighted on the head of an upturned barrel, which broke his fall. He crumpled into the barrel, and, when pulled out, it was found he was not seriously hurt.

*To be continued next Sunday.*

has been arrested. There is great indignation.

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**DIED.**

FULCHER—At the residence of his parents, corner of South Carroll and Berian streets, LITTLE JOE, son of Joseph P. and Mattie Fulcher, aged 1 year and 7 months.  
Prayer at the residence, as above, at 10 a. m. to-day. Burial at Mt. Olivet.

PLUMMER—At 10 p. m., Aug. 29, 1886, CORA LEE PLUMMER, daughter, of K. R. and Katie Plummer, aged 4 years and 5 days.  
Services at the residence, 185 Cedar street, at 3 p. m. Monday.  
Little sufferer, thou art at rest at last.

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**CITY ITEMS.**

Advice to Mothers.—Mrs. Winslow's