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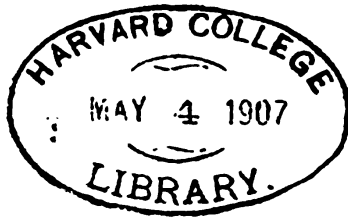
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## A TRIP FROM HOUSTON TO JACKSON, MISS., IN 1845.

BY J. A. ORR.<sup>1</sup>

There was a calm in the financial world following the crash brought about by what is known as the "flush times of Alabama and Mississippi." When one views the ocean after a terrible storm one sees here and there bits of wreckage and flotsam, marking the unseen graves of those who have perished there. So it was in Mississippi after the financial panic of 1837. There existed in various localities wrecks of what were magnificent structures before this awful financial storm.

The political year was full of excitement and interest. The Democratic convention met at Jackson on the 5th day of July, 1845, to nominate candidates for the State offices and for four Congressmen. As the State had not then been laid off into Congressional districts, our members of Congress were elected from the State at large. The Senatorial pot was also boiling, and the canvass had already opened, with Governor McNutt, General Foote, General Quitman, Roger Barton, and Gov. Joseph W. Matthews as aspirants for that honor.

For the office of attorney-general there was an array of talented young men, who afterward became distinguished, competing for the nomination. The incumbent was Gen. John D. Freeman. Opposing him were Wiley P. Harris, then of Monticello; Gen. D. C. Glenn, of Holly Springs; Frank Smith, of Canton, and Gen. W. S. Featherston, of Houston. Harris, Glenn and Featherston were each about twenty-five years of age, and three candidates for this office rarely ever presented a more youthful appearance. It was important for each candidate to have a numerous delegation from his own county. This will account, perhaps, for the fact that the writer, then only seventeen years of age, was one of the delegates from Chickasaw County. He is now (1906) the only surviving member of that convention.

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<sup>1</sup>A biographical sketch of the author of this contribution will be found in the *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society*, Vol. VIII, p. 187.  
—EDITOR.

It was before the days of railroads, and buggies and horseback were the only modes of conveyance to the seat of government. General Featherston and the writer left Houston in a buggy the latter part of June, General Featherston taking a circuitous route to see as many delegates to the convention as possible before their arrival at Jackson.

The first objective point was Grenada, where the Baptist State Convention was in session. One of the three persons making the deepest impression upon the writer's mind at that time was the Rev. Dr. Parr, whose eloquence thrilled his audience, and whose ability and captivating oratory, according to the youthful conception of the writer, has never in all the after years been surpassed. The other two were General Featherston and Miss Whitfield, of Aberdeen, as handsome a couple as ever walked up the aisle of the densely crowded church where Doctor Parr preached. The General was tall and looked every inch a man, and she was a lady of remarkable beauty and was greatly admired. Thereafter their paths in life separated; each married, left families, and have perhaps met in the spirit land.

From Grenada our journey led us to Lexington, Yazoo City and Canton, and then to the capital. To properly appreciate a narrative of this trip and the strange scenes witnessed along the road we must understand what had been the financial condition of the country previous to that time. There were banks with capital stocks which ran into the millions, and in which the people placed infinite trust. They were headed by men whose financial integrity was unquestioned; and yet, with all their money and strength, they were wrecked in the financial storm. Here is a list of these banks, and the careful observer will notice that their financial rating is not now surpassed in this great State, with its more than two hundred banks, having millions of capital, and with its increase of population and its unprecedented growth.

| <i>Names of Banks.</i>                           | <i>Capital Stock.</i> |
|--|-----------------------|
| Agricultural Bank.....                           | \$4, 212, 000 00      |
| Planters Bank .....                              | 2, 000, 000 00        |
| Commercial and Railroad Bank of Vicksburg.....   | 4, 000, 000 00        |
| Grand Gulf Railroad and Banking Company.....     | 2, 000, 000 00        |
| West Feliciana Railroad and Banking Company..... | 1, 000, 000 00        |
| Commercial Bank of Natchez.....                  | 3, 100, 000 00        |
| Commercial Bank of Manchester.....               | 2, 000, 000 00        |
| Commercial Bank of Columbus.....                 | 1, 000, 000 00        |

A Trip from Houston to Jackson, Miss., in 1845.—Orr. 175

| <i>Names of Banks.</i>   | <i>Capital Stock.</i> |
|--|-----------------------|
| Commercial Bank of Rodney.....   | \$ 800,000 00         |
| Tombigbee Railroad Company.....  | 2,000,000 00          |
| Mississippi and Alabama Railroad and Banking Com-<br>pany.....               | 4,000,000 00          |
| Bank of Vicksburg.....   | 2,000,000 00          |
| Bank of Grenada.....   | 1,000,000 00          |
| Bank of Lexington.....   | 800,000 00            |
| Bank of Port Gibson.....   | 1,000,000 00          |
| Vicksburg Waterworks and Banking Company.....                                | 500,000 00            |
| Northern Bank of Mississippi.....  | 2,000,000 00          |
| Hernando Railroad and Banking Company.....                                   | 1,000,000 00          |
| Mississippi Railroad Company.....  | 8,000,000 00          |
| Citizens Bank of Madison County.....   | 1,000,000 00          |
| Bank of Mississippi.....   | 600,000 00            |
| Mississippi Union Bank.....  | 15,500,000 00         |
| Aberdeen and Pontotoc Banking Company.....                                   | 1,000,000 00          |
| Benton and Manchester Banking Company.....                                   | 1,000,000 00          |
| Branches of Agricultural and Planters Banks at Frank-<br>lin and Tchula..... | 1,000,000 00          |
| Total amount of capital.....   | \$62,512,000 00       |

It is a beautiful and fertile country through Holmes, Yazoo and Madison Counties, over which we traveled. Many plantations had been recently opened, and on some of them elegant residences had been erected. The owners had freely indorsed for each other in the banks, and hundreds of thousands of dollars had been invested in negroes, brought from Virginia and the Carolinas. When the storm broke over the banks the suits were so numerous in the courts that some of the lawyers had their declarations in *assumpsit* printed by the quire, leaving blanks only for the names of the debtor, creditor and the amounts. In each of these counties an immense number of judgments had been obtained and the aggregate indebtedness had run into millions. A great number of these plantations in 1845 were uncultivated. The fences had fallen down, the homes and outhouses were tenantless and bespoke widespread desolation. We learned the history of the times from the lawyers at Lexington, Yazoo City and Canton. With these General Featherston talked as to his candidacy before the coming convention. We were told that as a general thing on the evening before abandonment those large plantations would present no unusual appearance. The stock would be in the stables, properly attended to; the cows would be in the cowpen; the hogs would be called and fed; the sheep would be herded; the plantation negroes would be in their proper places, and over all the hush of evening and the stillness of night

would fall. On the morning following the smoke would curl from the chimneys, from residence and quarters, the cows would be lowing in the pen, the sheep bleating in the fold, the hogs in their place; not a wagon gone, not a vehicle missing; the meat left in the smokehouse, the poultry raising their usual disturbance—and not a human being, nor horse, nor mule, nor saddle, nor bridle on the whole place. Every negro, every horse, every mule spirited away in the darkness of the night—the negro women and children on horses and mules, the men on foot, all, all in a double-quick march for Texas, then a foreign government. The first object was to get across the county line, the next to cross the Mississippi River, and the next to cross the line of the Republic of Texas. All this had to be done before the executions could issue and be placed in the hands of the sheriffs of the different counties. Family carriages were left motionless to avoid creating any suspicion, the white families having taken their trips to neighboring towns, where the stage lines would convey them to points of safety—generally steamboat landings on the Mississippi—on their way to Texas. Even in the city of Columbus there remain on file in the circuit clerk's office printed declarations, containing not only the names of the plaintiff's banks, but in some cases the names of the defendants. This will convey an idea of the immense indebtedness to the banks of the country and of the universality of endorsements and personal securities. The immovable property was all that the executions could reach. After this came hundreds of suits by holders of bank notes.

When we arrived at Jackson the saloons in the city and the hotels were crowded with anxious politicians and statesmen and their friends. Governor A. G. Brown had no opposition for a re-nomination for a second term as governor. The most active canvass for any of the State offices was made by the friends of the candidates for attorney-general. Wiley P. Harris, Featherston and Frank Smith were defeated by a coalition between the friends of Freeman and Glenn, by which Freeman was re-nominated for a second term and Glenn came in as the nominee four years thereafter and served for eight years in that office with distinguished ability. He was a beautiful speaker, elegant, graceful and eloquent.

The most intense feeling was developed in the convention between the friends of Jefferson Davis and of Doctor Gwinn. It was the policy of the party to preserve harmony by nominating candidates with reference to geographical position. The State was entitled to four members of Congress, and they were taken from the four different sections of the State. In the northwest Jacob Thompson had no opposition for re-nomination. Judge Stephen Adams, of Monroe, and Col. Geo. H. Young, of Lowndes, were the candidates from the northeastern district. They were men of different types of character. Young was a man of courtly and princely manners, refined, cultivated, hightoned, an aristocrat by birth. He was a type—of whom we had hundreds throughout the South—misunderstood and not appreciated by the Northern people either before or since the great war of secession. A grander, nobler type of citizenship never lived in any government or country. They knew that they belonged to the master race. Their selfishness and their keen sense of honor united to make them brave, discreet and conscientious, and they were never surpassed in the qualities by the bravest Roman or the noblest Briton. The value of the negro appealed to the selfishness of the owner for his protection. Healthful food, good clothing, prompt medical attention, moderate work were essential factors in maintaining his money value to the owner. A knowledge of superiority, the right to dominate the will of the slave, the power to enforce absolute obedience carried in the minds of such men as Geo. H. Young a high sense of moral responsibility. It was a very rare thing that a church was erected without a gallery for the accommodation of the negroes, and in many localities the Sabbath was far better observed than it is at the present time by either our white or our black population.

Judge Adams was a "self-made" man. He was of humble origin and of moderate literary attainments. He was a man of integrity, full of energy, had won his way to a circuit judgeship, and was emphatically "one of the boys." He was nominated, elected, and afterwards sent to the United States Senate.

Robert W. Roberts, known as the "War Horse of the Piney Woods," had no opposition from his section of the State.

The contest became bitter in the southwestern section. Davis and Gwinn were from Warren County, and the fight was between two rival factions. Gwinn was a man of fine ability, and had previously been much more intimately connected with the politicians of the State than Davis. But this had also caused Gwinn to make many antagonists. The nomination was not made until the second day of the convention. On the night before the city of Jackson was placarded with a violent assault on Doctor Gwinn, in which, among other things, he was charged with having been instrumental in the killing of Doctor Hagan, the influential editor of the *Vicksburg Sentinel*. Vicksburg had been a bloody city, and Hagan had many friends throughout the State. The contest was close, but Davis was nominated.

The people of Mississippi, after the adjournment of that convention, were entertained with political discussions between the ablest representatives of the Democratic and Whig parties in the State. At the election just preceding the one in 1845 the presidential contest between Polk and Clay was earnest and close and at the election preceding that the State went for General Harrison, the Whig candidate. Davis canvassed the entire State, and established a reputation as an orator inferior to none except Prentiss, and that reputation he sustained in the United States Senate.

The people became greatly interested in the memorable contest between McNutt and Foote for the United States Senate. They were attendants on the convention in Jackson in July, their canvass having already opened. Dense crowds gathered wherever they had an appointment to speak. The candidates were personal enemies. McNutt would never notice Foote, would not divide time with him, and silently treated him with profound contempt. He would open his speech at 11 o'clock and speak until 3, gather up his papers and leave without alluding to Foote in any way or paying the slightest attention to him. The rest of the time would be occupied by Foote. The country audiences would go home in the dark.