

# **Jemison and Her People**

by

John D. Glasscock

with Melba and Rob Peterson

April 5, 2001

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The land where the Town of Jemison is located, in Township 23 North, Range 13 East, Section 23, was first entered in a land patent by Weston P. Gales on Jan 14, 1837, warrant #22300. The Alabama and Tennessee Railroad patented 280 acres at the same time.

On Jan 14, 1858, Willis Langston, patented 40 acres, warrant #36891, when this property was still located in Shelby County.<sup>1</sup>

I have no idea who Weston P. Gales was. He may have been a land speculator. As much of the land grants were issued to speculators. *(Editor: Weston P. Gales was a well connected, significant newspaper man in Raleigh, North Carolina, just as his father was. He died a few years after he bought this land. All the property he bought was along the future railroad right of way, from south of Pine Hill to north of Jemison, so he probably did buy this land as an investment.)*

Not a lot is known about the early days of the area before 1870. At this time it was in Baker County. It is said to have been a stagecoach stop when the driver and tradesmen would stop to refresh themselves and their animals, using the cool springs.

The Shaw brothers, C. N., and S. P., whose family moved here long ago, told Julius Simmons that travelers from Elyton (now Birmingham) to Montgomery used to halt their covered wagons and camp overnight at the big springs located at that buggy spot, covered with cattails and inhabited by frogs and other little creatures, that lies east of the railroad and north of highway 191. It was called "Jemison's Spring."<sup>2</sup>

It is said that Reason J. Langston built the first house in 1859.<sup>3</sup> He is the son of Willis and Louisa Langston.

With the coming of the South and North Railroad in 1870, every little burg needed a station. "LANGSTON'S STATION," was established on December 12, 1870, probably named for the landowner, Mrs. Louisa Wooley Langston. She was the widow of Willis Langston, who was murdered in 1865 by the so-called "Blackwell Gang."

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<sup>1</sup> Shelby County Ala. Track Book

<sup>2</sup> Melba Peterson, "Jemison's Early History"

<sup>3</sup> Langston Family History

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The Langston family has played a major role in Jemison for years since, with sons owning business for years.

Willis Langston was born about 1813/1816 in South Carolina. He married Louisa Wooley, the daughter of Zacchaeus Wooley and Elizabeth Long.<sup>4</sup> Willis and Louisa were married 29 Oct 1837 in Bibb County Alabama.<sup>5</sup> The Langston family lived and was listed in the 1850 **Bibb** County Census but was later listed in the 1860 **Shelby** County census. Mrs. Louisa W. Langston Allen died September 6, 1882. Her husband Rev James P. Allen died May 27, 1885.

Willis and Louisa had at least 13 children born from 1840 until 1859. More about the Langston family later.<sup>6</sup>

In 1870, a post office was established and James Gibbons was appointed Postmaster. The post office was named Langston's Station.

The name of Langston's Station was changed to JAMISON, on September 5, 1873, which was probably a misspelling. It was changed again on February 13, 1888, to Jemison. And it was again changed on March 13, 1890, this time to Bristol, and back to Jemison in the late 1890s. Jemison was incorporated into a town in 1898.<sup>7</sup>

With the coming of the railroad, John Owens Smith, was probably operating his sawmill south of Langston's Station and he was appointed the second postmaster in 1872.

Mr. Smith donated the land for Pine Hill Cemetery and the first burial, that of Arvazena Atkinson, was made that year. The marker can be found yet. Tradition says the community was once called Smithville for the Smith Family.

For some unknown reason, the post office was discontinued for a couple of weeks in January, but it was started again with John E. Moore, as postmaster<sup>8</sup> (remember this was during the reconstruction period of our county's history.)

In a letter to Mrs. Melba Patton Peterson from Robert Jemison's grandnephew (see Appendix I), also named Robert Jemison, Jr., who was 94 years old in 1972, he wrote:

"I am pleased to enclose miscellaneous data concerning the life of Robert Jemison, Jr. of Tuscaloosa who served for many years in the State Senate and Legislature... also in the Confederate Senate. Robert Jemison was opposed to Session in the Session Convention,

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<sup>4</sup> Langston Family History

<sup>5</sup> Bibb Co Ala Marriages

<sup>6</sup> Langston Family History

<sup>7</sup> Mary Ellison, City Clerk of Jemison

<sup>8</sup> Peterson's Early History

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William L. Yancy, was a member and leader in the Session...those in favor of secession won. William L. Yancy was sent to a Confederate Convention in Richmond where he served one year before he died. The Alabama State Senate directed Robert Jemison to succeed Yancy in the Confederate Senate.

.... In regard to the name of Jemison, I made many unsuccessful efforts to find why the name of Jemison was given to the town, until I happened to sit next to Mrs. Orr, a daughter of Colonel John T. Milner, who had charge of building the L & N Railroad from Decatur to Montgomery. I asked Mrs. Orr if she could tell me how the name Jemison was given to the town, as I happened to know the Jemison family was native of Tuscaloosa and Jefferson Countries. Mrs. Orr replied. "I can tell you how the name originated. My father, who had charge of the building of the L & N Railroad from Decatur to Montgomery named several of stations for friends. He and your great Uncle Robert Jemison of Tuscaloosa were associated and friends for many years in the Alabama Legislature. He named the town of Jemison, and he also named the town of Clanton for another friend, General Clanton." "I finally got the answer from Mrs. Orr, who was then perhaps the only living person who could give me this information."

..... Sen Robert Jemison of Tuscaloosa was the largest landowner and the largest slave owner in Alabama. He served in the Confederate Senate for about four years until the end of the Civil War."

Robert Jemison died in 1871 a year after the town was named in his honor.<sup>9</sup> (This date may be in error. The Chilton View on March 23, 1882, states: "Col Robert Jemison of Tuscaloosa bought land (500 Acres) in Shelby County for the purpose of Mining Gold.")<sup>10</sup>

The Railroad started things to rolling in the Jemison area. William S. Thompson was Postmaster in 1873, Henry C. Lawhorn, 1877, John R. Horndy 1877 and Wilson L. Bandy 1873.<sup>11</sup>

During the first ten years (1870-1880), there was a least two doctors in the town, J. A. McNeil, who had been issued a county license in 1875.<sup>12</sup> Dr. James J. Dawson, born about 1826,<sup>13</sup> was also a doctor in the town.

Quite a bit of land exchanged hands, evidenced by the deeds designating lots in the Town of Jemison. W. H. Shirby, Isaac Lawhon, G. Deramus and Samuel L. Arledge are among the Justice of Peace who witnessed deeds.

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<sup>9</sup> Madge Wilbanks, Advertiser 10/12/90

<sup>10</sup> Chilton View, March 23, 1882

<sup>11</sup> Peterson's "Early History"

<sup>12</sup> Peterson's "Early History"

<sup>13</sup> 1880 Chilton Co Census

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Not a lot happened until a James P. Allen moved to Jemison in July 1877, when he moved his mercantile business from Montevallo to Jemison.<sup>14</sup> James Allen had married Mrs. Louise Langston, on Sept 21, 1871, in Baker County Alabama.<sup>15</sup> Bondsman was James M. Scott. He was also listed as "Reverend."

In 1887, J. P. Allen was practicing Law at Jemison.<sup>16</sup> Note there were two James P. Allens in Jemison, the older was born in 1803 in Georgia. The younger, born Mar 14, 1851 in South Carolina, married Hartrine E. Motley Cutt Oct 5, 1876. They are buried at Pine Hill Cemetery.

Wilson L. Bandy may have moved to Jemison from Columbiana, Alabama, in Shelby County, to be Postmaster in 1873. He was also a merchant, where I remember reading in one of the old newspapers, that he was moving his business to Jemison.<sup>17</sup>

James P. Allen and Wilson L. Bandy formed a company called "Allen & Bandy" with many legal transactions in the courthouse. They seem to have been the driving force in the building of Jemison.<sup>18</sup> Mr. Wilson L. Bandy died Aug 31, 1882, of Consumption. He had been sick 2 weeks and had gone to Florida in hopes of recuperating his health. He left a widow, 3 sons, 1 brother and 1 sister.<sup>19</sup> He was in the process of building a new house at the time of his death.<sup>20</sup>

The older, Mr. J. P. Allen died at the age of 81 (born March 5, 1803, died May 27, 1885), he had been married twice, had a widow, 4 daughters and 1 son to survive him. He had been a member of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church for 58 years 56 of which he was ruling elder. His funeral took place Jemison and is buried at Mount Hope Cemetery, which is located near the now (2002) Jemison Trade Center.<sup>21</sup>

1884 seems to have been a year of progress in Jemison. Mr. J. T. Mullins had removed his stock of goods to Jemison, from Verbena, had a first-class store, and was also a first-class businessman.<sup>22</sup> The Chilton View called Jemison the "Boss Town of Chilton" and it had eight stores.

J. H. Gibbons, Esq. had removed to Jemison, from Benson (Isabella) where he was engaged in the hotel business called "Gibbon House" where it listed Mrs. Gibbon as an

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<sup>14</sup> Chilton View

<sup>15</sup> Baker/Chilton Co Marriages

<sup>16</sup> Chilton View Feb 3, 1887

<sup>17</sup> John D Glasscock, remember reading this in a Newspaper but do not have dates

<sup>18</sup> Chilton Co Deed Book 1

<sup>19</sup> Chilton View, Sept 11, 1882

<sup>20</sup> Chilton View Sept 21, 1882

<sup>21</sup> Chilton View Feb 17, 1898 (note Cemetery Census list death date as 27 May 1885)

<sup>22</sup> Chilton View Jan 17, 1884

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excellent cook and all who wants good board will find it there.<sup>23</sup> On July 3, 1884, the Chilton View stated that Jemison had a hotel named "Chilton House."

As in other areas of the county, Jemison was no exception to the "whiskey problem." An election was ordered in Beat 2, as Jemison was always called, on March 4<sup>th</sup> (1884) to vote upon the whiskey question. This is the Jemison and Clear Creek beat. The citizens of Jemison are to be congratulated upon the facts that no matter how the election goes, no whiskey can be sold within three miles of Jemison Church, by an act of the legislature incorporating said church.<sup>24</sup>

"Hand & Callen's tram road was in full blast. They are putting over their road 110 logs daily that will average 225 feet or 24,995 feet in the aggregate. The engine is a perfect little giant and will wade the branches with her load of logs, when it is necessary."<sup>25</sup>

A Tram railroad was a train that built to haul logs out of the woods to the sawmills. They extended at several points to connect to the railroads also.

On April 10<sup>th</sup>, 1884, Mr. J. P. Allen is having the grounds prepared for the erection of several newer buildings.<sup>26</sup>

Mrs. M. J. (Mary J.) Bandy and Mrs. G. W. Deramus, of Jemison visited Clanton in the interest of a new church at Jemison, for which they are securing contributions. "We are glad to know that they succeeded well with their praiseworthy undertaking in Clanton and the church is an assured fact."<sup>27</sup>

In the Jemison Jottings, on April 2 1885...money certainly never was scarcer in this part of the country than is now. "It's as scarce as hens' teeth. The tension on our financial resources, at least with some of us is nearly as great as that brought to bear on "Dick's hat band."""<sup>28</sup>

In 1885 Jemison was third in size of towns and villages of Chilton. It was a place highly described as a home of morally and physician, second to none. It has plenty of good water and plenty of fuel. The town has five or six stores, all reportedly with good businesses, several boarding houses, telegraph, and post office, two church houses, several private residences, a good school for several years.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Chilton View Feb 28, 1884

<sup>24</sup> Chilton View Jan 31, 1884

<sup>25</sup> Chilton View Apr 10, 1884 /Pine Hill Points

<sup>26</sup> Chilton View Apr 10 1884

<sup>27</sup> Chilton View Aug 21, 1884

<sup>28</sup> Chilton View Apr 2, 1885

<sup>29</sup> Chilton View Oct 1, 1885

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Mr. and Mrs. J. P. Allen sold land for the Cumberland Presbyterian Church "In consideration of the love and affection they have for Christ and his cause and with a view to promote his kingdom in the World, to trustee, J. A. McNeil, J. C. Morris, and J. C. Allen."<sup>30</sup>

The Cumberland Presbyterians organized a school at their church the 28<sup>th</sup> ult. with an enrollment of about forty.<sup>31</sup> On June 24, 1886, there was a study about building a new school in Jemison. I don't know if this is the same school or not. By this time both schools and Churches were being built all over the county.

The lot where the present United Methodist Church now stands was purchased, Jan 18, 1887, from the Pendleton C. Beans by Trustees, G. W. Deramus, J. H. Hughes and G. L. McCary. John O. Smith donated lumber for the Methodist Church. It has not been learned whether it was the present building in Jemison or the old church that was at Pine Hill. The building at Pine Hill needed repair in 1887 and Jemison had outstripped that settlement in population, so the congregation agreed to start a church in the town.<sup>32</sup> The Chilton View reported the lumber was on the ground for building a new Methodist Church in Jemison.<sup>33</sup>

The Baptist Church was organized in the Mulberry Association in 1856. There was an "Old" Baptist Church standing south of the Hand-Guy house early in this century. It must have been the place from which the Baptist congregation moved to its present location. That early building was sold to a Black Church. It burned some years ago.<sup>34</sup>

In 1886, the Dave Crosby family donated "One square acre of ground for a Missionary Baptist Church in the Town of Jemison. The structure is known to present townspeople as the "Old" Masonic Hall, which was torn down several years ago. It was used by the Baptists until another building was constructed just back of it in 1908. At that time deacons, J. A. Skaggs, W. E. Lowery, and D. L. Langston sold it to the Jemison Masonic Lodge.<sup>35</sup>

St. James African Methodist Episcopal Church was organized in 1890 by a group of Black People. The name of the first pastor is unavailable currently. John Robinson, Need Bailey, and John Johnson were deacons. The present church stands on the hill west of Jemison.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Peterson's Early Jemison

<sup>31</sup> Chilton View Jan 8, 1885

<sup>32</sup> Peterson's Early Jemison

<sup>33</sup> Chilton View Feb 10, 1887

<sup>34</sup> Peterson's Early History

<sup>35</sup> Peterson's Early History

<sup>36</sup> Peterson's Early History

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There was an early Baptist Church organized by blacks. It is beginning probably came about after the Civil War. Mrs. Peterson has been told that the Holly Grove Baptist Congregation was formed in 1900 when there was a division of St Paul's membership. This group met under a brush arbor until a church was built. The Reverend Robert Mixson was the first Pastor and Brother Ed Singleterry, Dan Hicks, Jim Poundell, Sr., Joe Martin, and Jake Kenebrew were deacons. Members now meet in a brick church south of Jemison. Old St Paul's Church stands north of the town.<sup>37</sup>

The County Commission met at Jemison on in Dec 1898 to make arrangement for taking care of the county paupers in 1899. It was agreed the present location of the pauper farm was somewhat out of the way and it was decided to sell the land and secure another site nearer the center of the county and closer to the courthouse. The land was sold to Mr. I. N. Langston for \$800.00 and a contract entered with him to take care of the paupers in 1899. Dr. Lane was appointed physician to attend the paupers at a salary of \$70.00 per year.<sup>38</sup>

Judge Adams bought 80 acres of land, five miles from Clanton on Yellow leaf Creek, with a good house for \$460.00 to build a "Poor House."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Peterson's Early History

<sup>38</sup> Chilton View Dec 23, 1898

<sup>39</sup> The Banner July 25, 1901



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## Appendix I Robert Jemison, Jr. Letter

