

# **JEMISON AND HER PEOPLE**

**BY  
MELBA PATTON PETERSON  
WITH  
JOHN DAVID GLASSCOCK  
AND  
ROBERT PETERSON**

**April 2002**

Scanned, OCRred, and formatted by Derric Scott, December 15, 2021, with  
minor typographical errors corrected.

**Version 1.2, April 20, 2024**

## **JEMISON AND HER PEOPLE**

The land where the town of Jemison was first located, in Township 23, North Range 13 East, and Section 23, was first entered in a land patented by Weston P. Gale on January 14, 1837, warrant #22300. Gale may have been a land speculator.

The Alabama and Tennessee Railroad patented 280 acres. This must have happened at or about the same time, as railroading came about 1830 and the steam locomotive in 1834. The railroads consisted of wrought iron, laid along thin strips of wood which rested on, crossties of heavy wood (as the rails do today) the rails wore out quickly. When the Louisville and Nashville bought it, the trackage had to be completely rebuilt.

On January 14, 1858, Willis Langston patented 40 acres, warrant #36891 in what was then Shelby County. A year later, in 1859, Reason J. Langston built the first house so we are told.

Willis Langston was born about 1813 or 1816 in South Carolina. He married Louisa Wooley, the daughter of Zaccheus Wooley and Elizabeth Long. Willis and Louisa were married on October 29, 1837, in Bibb County. They were listed in the 1850 Bibb County census, but were also listed in the 1860 Shelby County census. They had at least 13 children, born from 1840 until 1859.

In the 1860s came the Civil War (War Between the States). Many men who later lived in Jemison fought in the war, and three daughters of Captain James Cobb and Elizabeth Campbell married and lived in the town. They were Mary Ann, who married Dr. J. A McNeill; Martha Malone, who married W. E Lowery; and Paralee Melissa, who married J. H. Patton. Willis Langston was murdered in 1865 as was Captain Cobb and some others during the war.

Around 1869, Baker County was created from parts of Shelby, Bibb, Autauga, and Perry Counties. Jemison was located in the Shelby County part.

Sometime in the 1850s and 1860s, the South and North Alabama Railroad rebuilt "that portion of it from Calera to Montgomery which wasn't much to start with, and which the war had made even less" (Kincaid A Herr - Louisville and Nashville Railroad 1850-1963.)

On December 12, 1870, "Langston's Station" was established. That same year, James Gibbons was appointed postmaster. I. N., R. J., and G. W. Langston's names appear on deeds to land sold in early years and the Langstons probably sold wood for crossties and fuel to the railroad. These men were possibly sons of Willis and Louisa.

John Owen Smith was appointed the second postmaster in 1872. Mr. Smith was a lumberman and donated the land for Pine Hill Cemetery. The first burial, that of Arvazena Atkinson, was made that year.

On September 5, 1873, "Langston's Station" was changed to Jamison, and that name stayed until 1888 when it was changed to Jemison. The town was named Jemison for Robert Jemison, who served in the State Senate and Legislature and in the Confederate Senate. The grandnephew of Robert Jemison said that Mrs. Orr, supposed to be the daughter of Sam Tate who was chosen to rebuild that portion of the South and North Alabama Railroad from Calera to Montgomery, named several stations for his friends - for instance, Robert Jemison and General Clanton. According to a story in the Alabama magazine, Senator Robert Jemison was the largest land owner and slave owner in Alabama. He served in the Confederate Senate until the end of the Civil War. He was also a lumberman.

The Shaw brothers, who owned a large piece of land near Jemison and were early settlers, told Julius Simmons that travelers by stage coach from Elyton (Birmingham) to Montgomery used to halt their covered wagons and camp at a big spring east of my home. There is a ditch there. When I was a child, it was nearly always flowing with water and Mrs. Nelia Van Hoose told me that the old post office was located along it. It was called "Jemison's Spring."

The first through operation of trains from Louisville to Montgomery began on September 24, 1872. Possibly due to the upsets during reconstruction, the post office was discontinued for a couple of weeks in January of that year and started again with John E. Moore as postmaster. The next year, of course, it became Jamison which I believe to be Jemison as we have a deed executed in 1874 on which plainly is written, Jemison.

The population of Jemison was 402.

During that first ten years (1870-1879), there was at least one doctor, J. A. McNeill, who had been issued a county license in 1875 as had businessmen Loss Hand and H. C. Lawhon. Some designating lots in the town are signed by William Houston Shelby. Isaac Lawhon, G.W. Deramus and Samuel Arledge as witnesses. William S. Thompson (1873), Henry C. Lawhon (1874), John A. Hornady (1877), and Wilson L. Bandy (1878) were successive postmasters.

My great, great grandfather, William Seymour Patton, moved to town in the LeRoy house sometime in the 1870s. He was a gunsmith. I have a gun which he made for my father, James William Patton. The wood came from the forests north of Jemison. William Seymour Patton also made guns during the Civil War. His son, John Henry Patton had a sort of commissary near Pine Hill in 1873 where he sold supplies that the lumbermen needed. He moved here and built a house with an adjoining store facing the railroad in 1887. My father, James W. Patton, built a variety store later in old downtown Jemison. Finally, Grandfather built a two-story frame building west of the railroad where the parking lot was paved after his and my father's stores were torn down. He ran a general store, even selling tombstones and coffins, but repairing clocks and watches was his specialty. He had a large wooden clock to hang outside his store to aid the illiterate.

Wilson L. Bandy, postmaster in 1878 was also a merchant who had moved from Columbiana in Shelby County. He and James P. Allen formed a company

called "Allen and Bandy" with many legal transactions in the county courthouse. Mr. Bandy died on August 31, 1882, of consumption. He had been sick two weeks and had gone to Florida in hope of recovering his health. He left a widow, three sons, one brother, and one sister. He was in the process of building a new house at the time of his death.

Mrs. Allen died on September 21, 1882, and Mr. J. P. Allen died on May 27, 1885, at the age of eighty-one. He had been a member of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church for fifty-eight years, fifty-six of which he was ruling elder. He was known as Reverend Allen and is buried at Mount Hope Cemetery.

Another J. P. Allen, I suppose to be a son of the Allen named above, was born on March 14, 1881, died on February 18, 1898, and is buried at Pine Hill Cemetery.

In 1884, J. T. Mullins had removed his stock of goods to Jemison from Verbena, had a "first class store," and was "a first class businessman" according to the Chilton View of January 17 of that year.

J. H. Gibbons had moved to Jemison from Benson (Isabella) where he was engaged in the hotel business called "Gibbons House." On July 3, 1884, the Chilton View stated that Jemison had a hotel named "Chilton House."

In the 1880's, land for three churches was acquired in the town proper. On December 18, 1884, land occupied by the Cumberland Presbyterian Church was sold by Mr. and Mrs. J. P. Allen "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 trustees J. A. McNeill. J. C. Morris and J. C. Allen (buried at Pine Hill Cemetery).

I have been told that the Baptist Church was organized in the Mulberry Association in 1856, but I do not know if this is true. There was, according to tradition, an old Baptist Church standing across the railroad from Pine Hill Cemetery in the past century. It was later sold to an African-American congregation. It must have been the place from which the Baptist congregation moved to its location in the town on what is now Highway 191 in 1886. That must have been the old Masonic Hall, a two story building, which stood in front of what is now the Church of Christ. At any rate, I have been told that the Dave Crosby family donated "one square acre of ground" for a Missionary Baptist Church in 1886. The first pastor was Asa Burns who later became principal of the school. His son Percy was dean of Howard College for many years. Further research shows that a deed to the Jemison Baptist Church was made by M. E. Ward on May 7, 1886. In 1908, another building was constructed in back of it. At that time, deacons J. A. Skaggs, William Ensley Lowery, and David Lafayette Langston sold it to the Jemison Masonic Lodge which is now located just east of the Church of Christ.

The lot where the once Methodist Church, now the True Life Church, was purchased on January 18, 1887, from Pendleton C. Bean by trustees G. W. Deramus, J. H. Hughs, and G. L. McCary. In 1887, the building at Pine Hill was in great need of repair so the congregation agreed to start a church in the town.

St James' African Methodist Episcopal Church was organized in 1890 by a group of African-Americans. The name of the first pastor was unavailable at the time I wrote this but John Robinson, Need Bailey, and John Johnson were deacons. This church is located west in Jemison.

The Holly Grove Baptist congregation was formed in 1900 when there was a division of St. Paul's membership. This group of African-Americans met under a brush arbor until a church was built. The Reverend Robert Mixson was the first pastor and Brothers Ed Singleterry, Dan Hicks, Jim Poundell, Sr., Joe Martin, and Jake Kinnebrew were deacons. Members now meet in a brick church located southeast in Jemison.

The old St. Paul's Church stands north of the town, and there is a new church built there. Nearly all of the people in the town and surrounding it were members of these six churches.

Sawmilling and lumber was an important first industry of Jemison. By 1884, Hand and Callen had a tram road in operation. A tram was a train that was built to haul logs out of the woods to the sawmills. They were even connected to the railroads. A Reverend J. C. Hand, father of Daisy Hand who married J. M. Langston, was pastor at Mulberry Church in 1855. The Hands were in Jemison by 1888. A large lumbering company early in the century was the Clear Creek Lumber Company at old Wessington. Another lumbering company that has been mentioned is that of Taft and Marbury, who used a pond where the park is now to float logs. This pond froze over in the late nineties and my father said that they skated on it.

In 1885, the Cumberland Presbyterians organized a school at the church with an enrollment of about forty. The next year there was a study about building a new school. I have report cards for the Jemison High School 1888-1891 when J. D. Ruffin and B. F. Crump were principals, assisted by Miss Mattie Ruffin. Wyatt, in his history of the county, states that Jemison and Verbena schools were outstanding. Miss Emily Love, who owned property in the north of Jemison, was a prominent teacher, as was Mr. Ruffin. Early teachers were Asa Burns, C. C. Walter, Lillie and Carrie Slaton, Judson Strock, Harvey Hicks, Lindsay Smith, and J. M. Collier. Tuition ranged from \$.70 to \$2.00 monthly. The old school house oak still stands today.

Jemison was incorporated in 1898. It was reincorporated about 1916 or 1919.

Around 1895, W. A. Reynolds was asked by a group of farmers at Collins Chapel to start a store in Jemison. I believe it to be located at the junction of Main and Church Streets as Mr. Will and Miss Sudie lived across from the Pattons.

In the 1890s baseball was a favorite sport. J. W. Patton and J. M. Langston played on the town team. The baseball fever came to town as to the rest of the country. In a small notebook of my father's scores of games played for the years 1893, 1894, and 1895 are given. Clanton won two of the games: 13-10 and 20-18. Jemison won the other two that are recorded: 39-10 and 21-8. Under "Batteries" for these games are the names

Middleton, Stanfield, McMorris, and Pinckard for Clanton and the following list of Jemison players is in the notebook as follows:

R. B. McNeill, Pitcher  
Jim Langston, Catcher  
Dave Allen, First base  
Jim Patton. Catcher and Second base  
R. D. Durham, Third base  
G. C. Shaw, Shortstop  
R. E. Barnes, Pitcher and Left field  
S. O. Bristow, Center Field  
H. A. Bandy, Right Field  
Jene Bean, First base  
Less Williamson, Shortstop  
C. N. Shaw, Third Base  
S. P. Shaw, Center Field  
E. B. Langston, Pitcher  
A. A. Langston  
Bob Sessions, Pitcher  
Wills, Pitcher  
Ed McBride, Pitcher  
W. L. Hand, Pitcher

In December 1898, the County Commission met in Jemison to make arrangements for taking care of the county paupers in 1899. It was agreed that 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 into 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. I do not know where the land was located but Dr. Lane is buried at Pine Hill Cemetery. However, in 1901, Judge Adams bought 80 acres of land five miles from Clanton on Yellowleaf Creek with a good house for \$460.00 to build a "Poor House."

A Professor J. M. Cordrey taught an arithmetic school in the early years. The Jemison Academy opened by October 20, 1887, with forty pupils and increased to about seventy or seventy-five with Professor C. L. Speer as principal and Miss Kate Sherrill as assistant.

On October 15, 1888, the school was to open with J. L. Ruffin in charge. In the advertisement, he says that maps, globes, charts, etc. are of the latest style and board and tuition will be \$10.00 per month.

Isaac Newton Langston and J. H. Patton had stores on what is now Main Street in early days. Dr. J. A. McNeill and his stepson, James R. Johnson owned and operated a grist mill and gin. He and Robert Burns McNeill (son of J. A. McNeill) formed a partnership and operated a general store for some 35 years. The names Allen Atkinson, Charles Reynolds, Claud Mooney, Thomas Harrison, John Brantley, and the Coopers have also been mentioned as businessmen of the town. Doctors besides the McNeills were Johnson, Givhan, and Hall.

There were the blacksmiths, Charlie H. Durham and Charlie Ray; the barbers, Allison Sims and George Shaw; and the railroad agents and telegraph operators, Freeman Garner, Elijah Garner, and Hubert Garner. Elijah Garner's father-in-law, David Washington Barnes, was a railroad detective who played a part in the capture of the outlaw Rube Burrows in 1888.

Around 1895, L. H. Reynolds established a store known as the Jemison Corporation Company which was later sold to his brother, William A. Reynolds. Mr. L. H. Reynolds was State Representative from Chilton County from 1896-1902. He subsequently became Judge of Probate for the county and held that office for four terms.

In the Gay Nineties, Jemison had its amusements and diversions. Travelling shows passed through, medicine vendors came and promoted their cure-alls, the young ladies played parlor organs (harmoniums) and pianos, and the young had a string band led by Henry Grady Jefferies who played the violin. Gypsies occasionally wandered through exciting interest and alarm. There were parties and picnics, too. When the girls were not busy baking cakes or frying chickens to eat at such gatherings, they were sighing and weeping with the heroines of such novelists as Augusta Evans Wilson. They embroidered, tatted, quilted, crocheted, and whipped yards of lace and insertion on their clothes which were stiffly starched, then ironed, with a heavy little iron, heated on the stove or fireplace and rubbed over a cedar branch to make it slick. The boys read James Fenimore Cooper and Mark Twain. A son of J. H. Patton was named Samuel Clemens Patton for Mark Twain.

In 1888 the post office name had been changed (or corrected) to Jemison. For a while it became Bristol (I read somewhere that Shelby county was first called Bristol) and back to Jemison which it has since remained. Postmasters during the nineties were: Frank I. Cockeron (1889), Mrs. Frances E. Scott (1891), Thomas Harrison (1894), and William A. Reynolds (1898).

Today more than a hundred years after the railroad was completed, the town has expanded miles beyond its original "half mile square." Lumber is not a major industry and the "Old Reliable" Louisville and Nashville Railroad has merged with the CSX. There are no passenger trains to be met where the depot once stood.

Most of the people who created this town sleep quietly at Pine Hill Cemetery with the Atkinsons and Smiths who gave the land for it.