

Samson Disaster Brings Progress to Growing City

On April 6, 1907, disaster struck Samson. Fire destroyed nearly all of the buildings in the block where T.S. Faulk store now stands. But the debris was soon cleared and brick buildings sprang up on the old sites. Faulk rebuilt his store of brick, made it a two story structure, and had the second story designed as an Opera House.

And so, the old timers say, the fire in 1907 was really the beginning of Samson as it is today — the brick buildings replaced the wooden structures and made the town more permanent.

According to Dr. A.L. Faulk, when the town began to rebuild after the fire, each property owner in the business district was careful to plant at least one tree in front of his place of business.

Town Surveyed

On March 21, 1903, the town of Samson was laid out and plotted. Until then, except for a few farmers and some woodmen, the town wasn't even marked on a map.

But in 1903, the L&N railroad had already laid out its Georgiana–Graceville line. The Central of Georgia Railroad ended at Sellersville, northeast of Samson. But in 1903, the Georgia line officials decided to extend their line to Florala.

By the fall of 1903, the Central had reached the spot where Samson is now and then the town began to boom. At that time, there was no post office at Samson. The nearest one was at Flat, a mile and a half east on the L&N line.

Turpentine

The leading industry in the area prior to the crossing of the railroads was the turpentine done by D.P. McDuffie, Sr., D.P. McDuffie, Jr., J.H. McDuffie, and W.S. McDuffie, who owned a big turpentine still just south of where Samson is now.

It was in 1900 that the activity around the railroad began, the L&N started grading in the Samson area and then in 1901 opened the line to Geneva. Railroad officials thought that Pera, a town northwest of Samson would be the biggest town in the area, so they built a depot there.

First Store

The first store in Samson, according to a history written by Mrs. A.L. Orme Sims in 1957, was McDuffie's Commissary. The McDuffies had moved their turpentine still and saw mill to Samson in 1903. Their commissary stood where the town hall is now.

Next door to the McDuffie's was Danley - King Mercantile. At about the same time, Lewis Drug store was built on the corner where Home Furniture is now.

Railroads

Meanwhile, the L&N objected to the Central of Ga. coming into Samson. In 1903, the Central got ready to cross the L&N tracks, but the L&N refused to move a box car parked at the crossing.

But one night, according to Mrs. Sim's history, the Central railroad men managed to build their tracks across the L&N. As soon as the line was completed, they built a depot.

It was that same year, 1903, that the post office was moved from Flat to Samson. The first postmaster was Mrs. Delia F. Jones, daughter of D.J. Williams who lived at Flat and had been in charge of the mail there.

The town of Samson was first named McKinleyville, then Morristown, and finally Samson.

Some say that the town was named by the Governor of the State and others give credit to Miss Doshia English, Samson citizen, who submitted the name to the Railroad and they accepted it.

But it was named, according to records, first Sampson, and later shortened to Samson.

Then Jerkins Clemens, a surveyor, divided the town into lots, using as its center, the alley which runs by People Drug now.

The 160 acres of the town was divided into lots which belonged to E. P. Morris, 80 acres; E.P. Johnson, 40 acres; and M.D.Wise, 40acres. The first lots sold for \$12.50 each but within less than a year were selling for \$25 each. Town lots brought \$40 and residential lots, \$100.

Morris, Johnson, and Wise were given no money but could keep one lot out of every five that were sold.

At that time, there was a big open well in the center of town where people and stock were watered.

In 1906, the town of Samson incorporated, extending one mile in each direction from the center of town. At that time there were 300 white citizens and two Negroes.

The first mayor of the town was Dr. B.J. Lewis. His councilmen were M.D. Wise, Hose McDuffie, W.D. Alford, H.M. Farmer and D.J. Williams.

The mayor served one year — to organize the town. The main thing accomplished during his administration, according to Tatum Bedsole's history of the town, was the pull-

ing of stumps in Main Street. A stump puller and two mules were bought from John Crews and the records show that 124 stumps were pulled between Johnson and Broad Street.

The next Mayor of the town was Carl Say. Councilmen were W.D. Alford, H.M. Farmer, Hose McDuffie, T.S. Faulk, and H.C. Orme.

Bedsole's history speaks of Say as an "enthusiastic mayor" under whose leadership the town began to grow. It was at this time that Samson, as did many other towns in the area, licensed liquor "dispensaries" which sold liquor and brought in revenue from the license fees. Bedsole's comment on the "dispensaries" was that they "brought funds into the town's treasury and fear into the hearts of the people."

The first policeman in the town was T.M. Alford.

In 1906, the First Baptist Church was built and in 1909, the First Methodist Church was constructed.

Then on April 6, 1907, the disaster struck in the form of a fire. And it was after that fire that the town began to grow.

Lights and water systems came in 1910 and were installed by D.B. McCreary.

Samson in 1968

Samson is governed by the Mayor-Councilman government and the present Mayor is Houston Donaldson, having been elected to the position in August.

Councilmen are: Place 1, Verne Brewer; Place 2, James B. Linton; Place 3, James L. Crowell; Place 4, Douglas Haney; and Place 5, Harrin E. Wise.

A factory, Wex-Tex Manufacturing Co. opened in Samson in 1959 and in 1960 moved into a new building located south of town. They now employ approximately 200 people and are manufacturing pajamas.

In November the Samson Municipal John B. Logan Airport was dedicated. The airport facility is located southwest of town.

A new Samson Public Library is ready with the exception of the equipment on north Johnson St. The library is what is formally known as the old vocational school building. It has a library space, meeting room, formal room, and kitchen which is for the civic clubs of Samson.

There are five churches located within the City Limits of Samson. First United Methodist, First Baptist, Church of Christ, Church of God, and the Assembly of God.

Caption for Samson photo:

SAMSON IN THE GOOD OLD DAYS — This was a typical scene on the streets of Samson in 1905, a year before the business area burned. Standing the wagon are the late Alcus Jones and Willie Mitchell. The young boy in the street is Dr. A. L. Faulk. Looking from the window in the second story of the building in the foreground is John Ogburn. Leaning against the post is the late Dr. B. J. Lewis and against the corner of the building is Eldridge Sims. Others in the picture include the late Dr. W. T. Edge, dentist; Jim Weeks, Jim Lewis, father of Dr. Lewis; W. C. Holley, Sr., Rass Faulk, Cy Smith, who later became town marshall. The building in the foreground was located where Home Furniture is now.

By the winter of 1916, "boll weevil prosperity" was being felt in Geneva County. The Reaper commented on it by taking note of the number of automobile agents flocking to town. "At one time there were at least six new automobiles in town: It's a sorry farmer, indeed, these days who doesn't have a roll of bills about his hip", Reaper Editor William L. Wilkin-son commented in the Feb. 2, 1916 Reaper.