

## Early Jonesborough Residents As Recalled by Col. Robert I. Chester (1793-1891)

by Paula Gammell

We often speak of how valuable reminiscences can be; here's part of an 1883 interview with Col. Robert Chester about his memories of early Jonesborough.

By the way, if the Chester name sounds familiar to you, no doubt you are thinking of the Chester Inn, which still stands in Jonesborough, just down the street from the courthouse.

Col. Robert I. Chester settled at Jonesborough in 1796, his father moving there from Philadelphia when he was three years old, and, though now ninety years old, he is not only well-preserved in body and intellect, but his mind is as sprightly and quick and his memory as fresh as when he in 1814 was made Quartermaster of Col. Bayless' regiment and moved under the old chief against the Creek Indians.

*"Colonel...David Deaderick is a familiar name; was he the father of our present Chief Justice?"*

"Yes, he was among the first merchants that settled in Jonesborough, coming from Winchester, Va. He had two brothers, who came to Nashville, George M. Deaderick and Thomas..."

*"Colonel, what can you tell me about a...lawyer at Jonesborough...by the name of Kennedy?"*

"Why, he was my uncle, Judge John Kennedy. He came from Maryland and settled there about the time my father did. He was a great lawyer, and was often sent to the legislature when it sat at Knoxville. At one time the boys got excited over his election, and, carrying him about on their shoulders and fighting about who should carry him, they tore all his clothes off and carried him into the house naked.

He had a beautiful daughter, Sarah, educated at Philadelphia, who afterwards married Joseph Howard..."

*"Colonel, tell me what you remember about a fight between Judge Kennedy and John A. McKinney, the great Irish lawyer of East Tennessee."*

"Why, nobody knows to this day what the result was. They called each other hard names in a lawsuit, and both left the courthouse. Went off and rented a room. Kennedy wore his hair long, but asked time to have it cut off....then they both went into the rented room, locked the door and fought it out. But when they came out they were friends, and never told anybody who was whipped..."

*"Did not the McAlisters come from Jonesborough?"*

"Yes, John McAlister was an old merchant at Jonesborough. A most estimable man, a little high-tempered, but so much of a gentleman that in all matters he made it a rule to consult his wife, a lady of uncommon mind and great prudence. His success in life was in great measure attributed to his wife.

Mr. McAlister, after selling goods for a great many years at Jonesborough, moved to Franklin, Middle Tennessee, and here...Harry Hill, married his daughter Margaretta. His two sons live in Nashville."

*"Did not the Allens come from Jonesborough?"*

"Yes, Robert Allen, an Irish merchant, settled in Jonesborough at an early day. He married my aunt, Rebecca Greer. About 1802 he moved from Jonesborough and settled at Dixon's Spring, in Middle Tennessee..."

*"Didn't Aleck Porter's ancestors come from Jonesborough?"*

"Yes, Alexander Porter, William Porter, and James Porter were three Irish brothers. They all settled at Massingill's stand, between the Holston and Watauga. Alexander married Miss Massingill, and he is the grandfather of Capt. Aleck Porter, whose father was James Porter..."

*"Colonel, are any of your comrades in arms under Jackson in the Creek war left?"*

"No, not one...When at Jonesborough a year ago, I inquired diligently, and found that I was solitary and alone."

*"When did you leave Jonesborough?"*

"In 1816 I went to Carthage, went into a store; afterwards went into business with my uncle, and made trips to New Orleans on a flat boat in 1817, 1818, 1819, 1820, and in 1821 I went on a steam-boat."

As always, remember to confirm Col. Chester's statements before regarding them as fact. The entire interview will be found in Volume 6 Number 4 of "East Tennessee Roots."