

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE LIFE OF [12676] GEN. J. C. N. ROBERTSON

(Late Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of the Free and Accepted Masons of Tennessee; written by himself at the age of seventy-seven.)

I was born on the 20th of February, A.D. 1792, in Washington County, in the State of Tennessee; though it was then North Carolina, as the State of Tennessee was not admitted to the Union until 1796. My father, George Robertson, was the youngest son of Col. Charles Robertson, of whom favorable mention is made in the history of the Revolution. He commanded as a major in Col. John Sevier's regiment, at the memorable battle of King's Mountain, in which both of my grandfathers and four of my uncles were engaged. One of my uncles, Capt. Robert Sevier, fell in that engagement; and another uncle, Julius Robertson, was wounded. My father was too young to participate much in the service, though he went into it near the close of the war. I was raised in West Tennessee, but about the time I arrived at manhood my father moved to Overton County, where in 1812, I volunteered in the Service of my country, and was one of the soldiers known as Gen'l Jackson's Old Tennessee Volunteers. I was with that renowned General all through the Creek War, and though quite a young man, was promoted to the rank of orderly sergeant. After the close of the war, I was elected captain in the 58th regiment Tennessee Militia, since which time I have filled various offices in the Militia up to and including that of Brigadier-General, This was in times when military offices were respectable, and were sought after by men of character and qualification.

In the Spring of 1823, I removed with my family to the Western District of Tennessee, and in the Fall of that year was elected first Sheriff of Hardeman County. I served in that respectable position for fifteen years. In 1834, I was elected a member of the Constitutional Convention, which framed the Constitution of Tennessee in that year. In 1835, I was elected Senator for the Counties of Hardeman, Fayette, and Shelby, and served in the arduous session of the legislature of 1835-36, and also in the called session of 1836.

In the year 1825 I was made a Mason in Clinton Lodge No. 64, in the town of Bolivar, Tennessee; and after presiding over that Lodge several terms as Master. I was, in October 1835, appointed Deputy Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Tennessee -- Gen'l Benjamin Tappan was Grand Master that year. In the Fall of 1836 I was elected Grand Master. My elevation to the distinguished position of Grand Master of Tennessee was more owing to my military and political character and standing and the partiality of my brethren than to any superior attainment of my own in the art of Masonry, though I was considered a bright and zealous Mason. I regret that I am unable to illustrate, or rather to detail , the early history of Masonry in Tennessee. Gen'l Andrew Jackson was one of the early Grand Masters of the Grand Lodge. In 1843 I removed to the State of Mississippi, since which time I have not been familiar with the proceedings of the Grand Lodge, nor the progress of the Order in Tennessee.

I will here take occasion to relate a circumstance which occurred during the late war, in which myself and a neighbor by the name of Williams were greatly benefited by being Masons. I live in a section of the country (De Soto County, Miss.) which, after the occupation of Memphis by the Federal troops, was alternately in the possession of

one Side and then the other -- and subject to predatory excursions from both. Mr. Williams was engaged in transporting bacon and other supplies to the Confederate forces some distance South of us, and for this purpose had hired my wagon, team and driver. While engaged in constructing a bridge or raft, in order to cross a little stream in our vicinity -- the bridges and ferries having been destroyed by the Contending armies -- he was overtaken by a troop of Federal raiders, under command, I think, of Major Heath. Mr. Williams was taken prisoner, and some of the wagons, with their drawable loading, were burned. But the wagons belonging to Mr. Williams and myself were ordered to the right-about face, and were driven towards Memphis. After some ten or twelve miles they halted for rest and refreshments. While resting and discussing a little good old rye, which the Major had with him, he and his prisoner, Mr. Williams, got into conversation, in which they found out that they were both Master Masons, and the Major was informed that I too was a Master Mason. The consequence was that Mr. Williams and both our wagons and teams, were generously released from custody by their captor. Mr. Williams then turned about and proceeded to his original destination, greatly rejoicing at his good fortune in having fallen into the hands of a brother Mason, so generous and magnanimous as Major Heath, and one who so strictly adheres to the tenets of the Order. The Major will ever have our highest esteem and gratitude for his kindness to us.

For reasons unnecessary to mention here, I have never attached myself to any Lodge since my removal to Mississippi, though I have frequently been with the Lodge of my neighborhood on public occasions. My last Masonic act was a participation in the ceremony of laying the corner stone of the New Masonic Lodge in Hernando -- the old one having been burned down by the Federal troops during the war. The address on laying this corner stone, was delivered by that great and good man and Mason, Gen'l Albert Pike.

In giving a sketch of my political career, I might have mentioned, that after my removal to Mississippi, I was elected to a convention that assembled in 1851, and which was considered of great importance. It will be recollected that Mississippi, as well as South Carolina and other Southern States, became dissatisfied with the compromise measures passed by Congress. The Governor of Mississippi, Gen'l Quitman, and the Legislature, being in favor of secession, it was decided to call the Legislature together to deliberate on the subject. The consequence was that a general convention was called, of which body I was a Union member. When the convention assembled, it was discovered that the Governor and Legislature had "counted without their host". Out of one hundred members but fifteen were secessionists. The secessionists were extremely disappointed at this result, for they were certain that the State was ripe and would join South Carolina to go out of the Union.

The last act of my political life remains to be told. Last summer, in canvass for and against that odious thing-so-called the Constitution of the State of Mississippi, prepared for us by political adventurers and negroes -- old as I was, and nearly blind, my services were in requisition, I was induced to make several speeches against the adoption of that odious and detestable instrument, and I have the vanity to believe with good effect. Although a majority of the registered voters were negroes, yet the County gave a majority of 1,750 votes against the so-called Constitution. I have not the vanity to think

that this result was attributable to my efforts, yet, in conjunction with many of the best and most talented men of the State, a most glorious result was achieved. Although there was a majority of over 17,000 of the registered voters of the State negroes, yet the constitution, so-called, was defeated by 8,000 majority.

It is a difficult matter for a man to write a sketch of his own life without subjecting himself to a charge of egotism; but if ever this sketch shall make its appearance in print, the reader will readily excuse one of seventy-seven years for manifesting a little of this disposition, especially with regard to his military achievements, for it is said of decrepid old men, who have seen service in their youth, that they will shoulder their crutch and fight their battles over again."

Forest Grove (near Hernando), Miss .
Feb. 1869

Editor's Note: The foregoing sketch was written by Bro. Robertson. Had it been written by ourself, we must admit that we should not have been quite so modest as to the "old General's" merit and strength; but our venerable brother still has a mind and a will of his own and appears as strong and vigorous with the exception of sight, as in days of yore -- in argument, thought and *enclire* he is equal to the best -- we are not disposed to "pass" without having a little to say. our Brother will not bear much praise, therefore we will only be permitted to add a few additional facts. Previous to the war between the States, he had accumulated a considerable fortune, a large portion of which he spent in aid of building railroads. He has been a director in the Company of the Mississippi and Tennessee Railroad ever since its organization, and now at the age of eighty-one years, the stockholders of the road will not release him from service as a director. He is still interested in every improvement that he thinks will add to the peace and prosperity of the country. Liberal and tolerant, and at all times the genial and accomplished old gentleman, he excites respect and good feeling wherever he goes. Few will recognize the good likeness we present in this number of the JEWEL who have not seen him for years. He is not now the young man that is represented in the Grand badge room of our State when Grand Master, but his love of Masonry and his affection for the Order remains the same.

Julius Caesar Nichols Robertson, *The Masonic Jewel*, Memphis, Tennessee; Jan 15, 1875; Volume III, Number 1, 4.

FOREST GROVE, Near Hernando, Miss.,
February 27, 1869

R. W. JOHN FRIZZELL
Grand Secretary of Grand lodge of Tennessee.

Dear Sir and Brother:

In your letter now before me, you requested me to furnish you with a short biographical sketch of my life, and knowing my want of sight, you suggested that I should procure some suitable masonic friend to act as my amanuensis for that purpose. It not being convenient to obtain such person, I proceed to perform the task myself. I suppose the object of requesting such memoir is that at some future day it is designed to publish a work containing sketches of the lives and characters of all the Grand Masters of the Grand Lodge, or as many as can be obtained. In the sketch herewith furnished, you will permit me to suggest that you make any alterations or corrections you may deem necessary, to prepare it more appropriately for publication.

Very Truly and Fraternaly Yours,

J. C. N. ROBERTSON

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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P.S. In the foregoing sketch I omitted to state that I was of Scotch descent. My Great Grandfather was a Scotchman and I have heard my Grandfather say he could trace his relationship back to William Robertson that eminent Scotch Historian.

J. C. N. ROBERTSON

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P.S. When I wrote the foregoing sketch it was not intended to give anyone a copy but the Grand Secretary for the use of the Grand Lodge, but having shown it to several of my friends and relatives, they all insisted on having a copy, & in order to furnish them I have had it printed.

J. C. N. Robertson

This file courtesy of Ron Roy. scs_jrray@hotmail.com