

Obituary of Samuel Shearer Sr.¹

Samuel Shearer Sr. died at his home in Madison County, two miles above Boonesborough, overlooking the Kentucky River, on Sunday night, January 29th, 1893. He was born on the 20th of April 1800, and soon would have been 93 years old. His health had been failing for some months and his death was not unexpected. He was buried at his home on Tuesday.² Funeral by Rev. J. I. Wills of the Baptist Church.

Samuel Shearer was a native of Madison County, born within two miles of where he died, and during his long life never lived more than five miles away, and that during his short residence at Red House within the past few years.

He was a son of Matthew Shearer, who came from Virginia in 1780, settled in the wilderness a little more than two miles east of the deceased's home, and constructed his cabin with a special view to defense against the Indians, and was with Antony Wayne at the Battle of Fallen Timbers³, which terminated the struggle between the whites and Indians for the possession of the country west of the Alleghenies.

Matthew Shearer's wife was a Massie, and if we mistake not, was a sister of Sylvanus Massie, Captain of a Madison County company in the war of 1812. To Massie's company belonged Hiram, a brother to Samuel Shearer, and in another company was Caleb, another brother. In a recent conversation with the writer, the deceased recalled the war of 1812, when he came with his two brothers to Richmond for the purpose of taking home their horses. He brought along some shelled oats, which he sold to Miller's livery stable, where Wager's stable now stands on Main below First, at 16 2/3 cents per bushel, and bought a keg of whiskey from Robert Rodes, where Mrs. Gibson now lives, at 20 cents a gallon.

He also recalled that year of having attended the races in what is now the suburbs of Richmond, the tract extended from a point near where the ice factory now stands, down the valley occupied by a long, straight and beautiful street. On that day, his father's little gray mare won a 3 mile race. There were no brick pavements or macadamized streets -- in fact, there was not much of Richmond any way. Grogget's log tavern was then building, where the Garnett Hotel⁴ now stands, and Robert Miller had a hotel on the corner of First and Main, where the hotel continued until it burned in 1875.

He recollected the open condition of the fences, and abounding in wild turkeys to such extent that no one thought of raising tame ones. A brisk boy was necessary on every farm to drive the wild turkeys away from the growing crops. He was a neighbor and friend, though of course much younger, of Sam South, one of the boys sent out in the wilderness from Fort Estill to find Captain Estill⁵ and party, after the killing of Jennie Cass by the Indians. Sam and his boy friend, Peter Hackett, were a day and night in the woods alone. South was subsequently 13 years in the Legislature from Madison and was State Treasurer. Mr. Shearer was perhaps the last survivor of those who saw the fort at Boonesborough, before it finally decayed and tumbled down.

The Shearers are a people tenacious of life. Samuel Shearer's father and mother lived to a great age, and he leaves four brothers, Absalom and Raymond of Madison County, Burr of Clark, and Sid of Powell, the youngest of whom is in the 70's. Deceased had eight children -- Hiram, Tompson, Samuel, Simon, John, James, Mrs. Butner and Mrs. Eades, all of whom are living except John and Mrs. Eades, and there were one or two who died in infancy.

Samuel Shearer was a remarkable man. When young, his opportunities were better than most boys in his locality, and he advanced in education so far as to study surveying with Major John Cooke, but he dropped into neglect, and when his life was nearly half gone, he found himself with a family, no property and too great a fondness for drink. He suddenly changed, joined the Baptist Church and announced his intention of living a different life.

The people recognized in him more than the average ability, a sound integrity, and entrusted him with their business. He began to drive stock to South Carolina for his neighbors and prospered until he was soon driving his own stock. He was constantly on the road with hogs, horses, mules and even slaves, until the war and the railroads changed the course for markets. From first to last, he bought and sold from six to seven thousand mules and about three hundred slaves.

Like other traders, he sometimes paid too much for stock. Once he bought hogs at \$1.25 per hundred and lost money on them. After the war, he bought, grazed and sold cattle extensively, having accumulated a rich blue grass farm of twenty-two hundred acres. He sometimes grazed his cattle through a snowy winter without feeding, owing to his method of growing grass unmolested on one half of his farm during the entire summer for the winter's use. In one deal in cattle, he made twelve thousand dollars, and on one lot of fillies, which he bought at \$35 and sold at \$70 and made four thousand dollars.

In all his financial transactions, whether he was poor, and after he was rich, he found an unswerving friend in the late Owen Walker⁶, who, he always said, was the best judge of a man and his inclination to pay, the county ever produced. Mr. Shearer's antebellum partner was his stepson, William Arnold⁷, who was equally successful.

Samuel Shearer was a man of Progressive ideas. When the K.C. railroad⁸ wished to extend through Madison County, he said to the engineers, "run your line any where you want through my farm and it shall not cost you a cent", and so it was run from the crossing of Otter Creek a distance of two miles or more, embracing two stations, Boone and Shearer, two gigantic tunnels, a bridge and a water tank. In return for his liberality, the road named a station for him and gave him a life pass over its line.

Perhaps his last public act was the laying of the corner stone of the Baptist church, at Red House, to which building he was the largest donor. He and General C. M. Clay organized the first fair help in Madison County. He was a democrat, and always turned his shekels loose for his friends in a close contest.

He leaves a second wife.⁹

¹ I obtained a typewritten version of this obituary from great, great, great granddaughter of Samuel Shearer, a descendant of his daughter Arzelia Shearer Butner. There was no identification of the original source. This would almost certainly have appeared in a Richmond newspaper, most likely the Richmond Climax. The Climax was co-founded by and edited 1887-1896 by French Tipton, whose family lived at Brookstown and would have been neighbors of Mr. Shearer.

² The Samuel Shearer Cemetery is located on Phelps Road Spur off Stoney Run Road in northern Madison County. Vockery, Bill and Kathy. Cemetery Records of Madison County, Vol. I, Northern Section, Richmond, Ky., 1999.

³ August 20, 1794 near what is now Toledo, Ohio

⁴ The Garnett Hotel was in the middle of the first block of North Second Street, directly across from the Courthouse.

⁵ James Estill built Fort Estill and Estill Station south of Richmond about 1779. This attack took place in 1782.

⁶ Owen W. Walker (1801-1872) was a successful merchant and broker.

⁷ In 1866, William Arnold (1821-1905) paid \$34,000 for a 451-acre farm on the western edge of Richmond. He had a mansion built and called it Arlington. It is now the faculty and alumni club for Eastern Kentucky University. <http://www.arlington.eku.edu/about/history/>

⁸ The Kentucky Central Railway was built from Richmond north in the 1880s. It connected to the Louisville & Nashville line from Stanford to Richmond which was authorized in 1867.

⁹ Shearer married first Mary Watts of Clark County, the 18-year-old widow of John Arnold. After Mary's death in 1877, he married Talitha Ann Watts Griggs.