

LANCELOT MINOR: VETERAN, BUSINESSMAN & PROMOTER

By Robert D. Craig

One of Jackson County's original free-spirited and industrious gentlemen was Virginia-born Col. Lancelot Minor. He was a lawyer and businessman who dabbled in numerous Jackson County businesses and enterprises during that portion of his life spent in the county.

He was born on June 15, 1846, at his parents' home at Charlottesville, Virginia. His father was Dr. Charles Minor, and one biography of Lancelot's life stated his was a family of "honored ancestry." Dr. and Mrs. Minor had 13 children, 12 of whom lived to adulthood. Lancelot was child number four.

Lancelot was at just the right age at the outbreak of the Civil War. In spite of preparing himself to enter the University of Virginia, young Minor joined many of his excited contemporaries and attempted to enlist in the Confederate Army. Not allowed because of his age, he did however serve by working for a while in the army commissary. He was allowed to join later, and he enlisted in the Rockbridge Artillery, and "under the command of 'Stonewall' Jackson took part in the Shenandoah Valley campaigns, and participated in the engagements [mostly behind the lines work in commissary]



Lancelot Minor

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THE POOP DECK

Tuckerman High School has the distinction of having one of the few high school associations in Arkansas. Organized in the depths of the Great Depression it has met every year since with the exception of two or three years during World War II when the rationing of gasoline and tires made travel very difficult. For the last 20 years or so, it has had its annual banquet meeting on the Saturday after Thanksgiving when many of the THS graduates were back home for the holiday. This past Thanksgiving the graduating class of 1943, including your Editor, held its celebration of the 50th anniversary of their graduation. It was a great evening. We hadn't seen some of the '43 grads since that May evening half a century ago. Jeanne Boggs Tiffie, Hazel Ray Smith Warren, and some others did a great job. We all wished we had had more time to visit with each other, even though some of us couldn't recognize each other on sight. One of the women opined that she thought all the girls ought to be permitted to wear head to toe veils. We thought everyone looked amazingly lively. It gives one a different perspective on history to realize that everything that happened to you before graduation is now officially **history** by the definition of the Jackson County Historical Society.

The Newport Depot lives! Perhaps you remember Robert Craig's piece in the Summer 1993 issue of *The Stream of History* about the danger of having the old depot razed. In this issue, Mr. Craig reports on the action of the interested citizens, the Chamber of Commerce, and, ultimately, the City Council. Story on page 11.

Among the most historical events of the Christmas season was the publication of Dan McKee's history of St. Paul's Episcopal Church. Brought out just in time to take full advantage of the gift giving season, Dr. McKee's book, *Laborers in the Vineyard*, is chock full of Jackson County history. Look for details on page 8.

Robert Craig has mined his amazing supply of old pictures and letters and has written a fascinating piece about Col. Lancelot Minor, including a letter Mr. Minor wrote about his youthful exploits in the Civil War. See page 2 for more about this early Newport leader.

This is the last part of the "Penix Family" which has been running serially now for a good many issues. Henry H. Penix probably rode into Jackson County over 150 years ago. Many of his descendants still live in these parts. At least two boys, Rob Penix's son, Robert Anderson Penix, and Sam Penix's son, Thomas Penix, are sixth generation of the pioneer Henry H. Thanks to Lyman Priest, another distinguished descendant, for a marvelous piece of family history.

— The Editor

at Chantilly, Port Republic, Sharpsburg, Gettysburg, the Seven Days fight around Richmond, the two battles at Cold Harbor, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, and was in the trenches around Richmond until the evacuation of the city." The young soldier survived these campaigns as helper and soldier, and he was only 19 years old.

Lancelot Minor, in the later years of his life, wrote the following of his entrance into the Civil War:

After my father's death, my uncle, who was his executor, said I would either have to go to work with the negroes on the farm at 12½ cents a day or he would - - - -

I concluded he would do neither so one night early in 1862 I stole my sister Mary's horse, "Champ," and by moonlight started to the Valley of Virginia by way of Brown's Gap where Jackson's army was. The next night I stayed with old cousin Billy Gilmer at Ivy-Depot and he dissuaded me from joining the army on account of my age and promised if I would not go on he would get me a position in the commissary department under Uncle Dick Noland where I could see the workings of the army. To make things short, I got a place and my first trip was to Hardy County, West Virginia, to help bring our cattle to Jackson's army. Through this means I got to following up the army as a volunteer (special service) not being allowed to join on account of my age. I was sometimes with Mosby's men and Rockbridge artillery and sometimes with the army of Jackson and saw most of the fights of the valley where Jackson went. I was only allowed to enter regularly when in 1864 they needed recruits and they gave brother Charles a furlough by taking me as a recruit. He went to the Engineer Department as Lieutenant.

Luck was to run out for Lancelot. On April 8, 1865, the day before the South surrendered to the North at Appomattox, he was injured. He continues:

I joined the Rockbridge Artillery and was with that Battery up to April 8th, 1865, when I was shot through my left side an inch below the heart and it came out through the end of my shoulder blade, at Cumberland Church on the south side of the river near Farmville, Prince Edward County, Virginia. I was taken to an old blacksmith shop in rear of line of battle and I

remember no more except our boys coming in saying, "good bye." After 10 days when I came to myself I was at a Mr. Hobson's house and a yankee was dead beside me. I had my same clothes on that I had when I was shot and a good woman, Miss Hobson, was poking something down my mouth with a spoon. When they did change my clothes there was found on me a note pinned to my jacket directing whoever found me to please notify my mother in Albermarle County, where I was buried, enclosing five dollars in gold. I was, when able, moved to the yankee hospital at Farmville and Ben Minor and Colonel Venerable were both very kind to me. I heard since the war from Billy Bumpass who I met at Louisville in 1902 that he and Nick Ruffin carried me off the field and he wrote the note and placed in it fifty cents — all he had, that at the blacksmith's shop there was on the same floor a yankee wounded and he asked him to see that the request be carried out. I was told by someone that the yankee put in the five dollars before he died and took out the fifty cents. I brought that five dollars home with me July 1865 and it served a good many times to keep me in coin by being pawned.

Other notes also indicate that Lancelot Minor always believed that the Federal soldier had placed the note and gold piece in his pocket. It appears in later years, as he attended Masonic and other types of meetings, he always looked for that yankee, whom he believed survived his injuries also. He told his story many times hoping to find the man.

After the war, Lancelot totally recuperated at his mother's home. He then got the urge to move west, and that he did. He wound up farming near Paola, Kansas, and also lived for a time in Nebraska.

Charles Minor, Lancelot's brother, was a lawyer of some note in Jacksonport, Arkansas. He urged Lancelot to move to Jacksonport, a bustling community in Northeast Arkansas. Lancelot was persuaded and in December 1871 he did move to Jackson County.

Upon his arrival in Jacksonport, he ran a dairy. During this time he was studying law with his brother, and in 1875, he was admitted to the Arkansas bar. The two brothers practiced law together until Charles' death in 1879. For four years, Lancelot practiced law by himself. He then entered into a law partnership with Franklin Doswell, a former partner of Charles Minor, and a leading citizen of his day. The partnership of Doswell and Minor, which had

moved to Newport, lasted until the end of January 1891 when Doswell died. Lancelot practiced law another 10 years until 1901.

While Lancelot Minor was a promoter of Jacksonport, he also recognized the importance of the town's bustling neighbor, Newport. Although Newport had been around for a number of years, it had a recent resurgence because of the railroad. Recognizing the reality that Jacksonport was losing importance and many businesses were moving to Newport, Minor followed. The big test of these "settlers" was the removal of the county seat from Jacksonport to Newport. On November 11, 1882, an election was held to decide the issue. On one side of the heated fight was attorney Lancelot Minor. On the Jacksonport side was attorney Joseph M. Bell. There is a locally-famous drawing of that battle of strong wills between these two men. C.R. Hite illustrated the determination of both men to win the battle of the location of the county seat. Newport won, and Joseph Bell himself moved to the new county seat in 1887.

Lancelot Minor was constantly involved in the growth and activities of the city and state. He helped found the Newport Fire Department from which he received a gold cane at his retirement as chief. He helped organize



This famous cartoon from the early 1880s illustrates the determination of both Lancelot Minor and Joseph M. Bell to win the battle of the location of the Jackson County seat.

the Newport Water Works System in 1888. He established a telephone system with the switchboard being in his office. He assisted in the organization of the First National Bank, the Arkansas Bank and Trust Company in Newport, and the Bank of Newport. He was a member of the Newport City Council. He was the first president of the White River Breeders Association in 1885. He compiled the first abstract book for Jackson County. In 1888 he helped organize the Arkansas State Breeders Association. In 1896 he was a founder of the Phillips-Ferguson Insurance Agency. This business continues today as the John Minor Company with Lancelot's grandson as owner.

He was very active, first, in Grace Episcopal Church at Jacksonport, and later, in St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Newport. He contributed very generously to the church and was active in its history. He attained the highest degree in the Masonic Order and was Worshipful Master of Lodge 191 in Jacksonport and Newport in 1878, 1882 and 1896. He was a member of the Knights of Pythias and the Royal Arcanum.

He was a member of the Tom Hindman Camp of the United Confederate Veterans. In 1900 he was appointed Brigadier General of the Arkansas State Guard. As a Civil War veteran, he served as colonel of the regiment of the old Confederate Reunions at Elizabeth. He also helped raise funds for the Confederate Monument placed at the Newport Courthouse. The monument has since been moved to Jacksonport.

He was very active in the Democratic Party and frequently served as a delegate to state convention. He attended the 1884 Democratic National Convention and was an alternate to the St. Louis National Convention.

Lancelot Minor came from a big family and he himself had quite a large family. His first wife was Emma Walker. They married on November 24, 1869, in Charlottesville, Virginia. She was born October 12, 1849, and she died in Newport on August 7, 1886. They had at least two children, Charles Minor and Louisa Nolan Minor (never married). His second wife was Betty Theodosia Ferguson of Augusta. She was born there on September 17, 1863. Their children were: Thomas Senter Minor (died at age 11 years); Minnie Ferguson Minor; Mildred Minor (drowned in White River around age 18); Willie Overton Minor; Alcorn LaVesque [Ferguson]; and Lancelot Cabel Minor.

Lancelot Minor's second wife, Theo Ferguson Minor, was nicknamed "Miss Sweet" by a nurse and was called that by all who knew her. She was one of Newport's leading society ladies of the day. She was devoted to her church and was very active in managing her real estate affairs. Theo Minor died in 1947.

Colonel Lancelot Minor died in June 1916 and is buried at Walnut Grove Cemetery beside his wife and two daughters. The colonel took to his grave many stories of his varied activities and incredible life. He must have had a few doubts about some past activities, but, at the end of his remembrances of the Civil War quoted above, he ended with this intriguing statement:

My experience with the K.K. and Reconstruction I leave out for it was varied indeed — in Virginia, Kansas and Arkansas — but I am that I am — and can safely in my years of experience say that now I am in peace — thank the Lord.



**Col. Lancelot Minor
in later years.**

References

References consist of a number of undated and uncredited newspaper clippings and historical publication page photocopies. These were collected over the years by the late Mildred Minor Gregory of Newport, a granddaughter of Col. Minor. There are also many typewritten note pages and family history sheets compiled by Mrs. Gregory. These notes are now in the possession of the Jackson County Historical Society. Some photographs are from her collection while others are from John Minor of Newport.

LOCAL CLERGYMAN WRITES HISTORY OF EPISCOPAL CHURCH

— *A Book Review* —

The title of Dan McKee's new book, *Laborers in the Vineyard, A History of St. Paul's Episcopal Church*, is only slightly misleading. It is certainly a history of St. Paul's, but it is a great deal more. In this exceptionally well-researched history of the Episcopal church in Jackson County, Dr. McKee begins, not with the founding of St. Paul's in Newport around the turn of the century, but with the very earliest days of Episcopal worship in Jacksonport before the War of Northern Aggression. It is this scope and depth of the book that make it interesting reading for anyone interested in history, and especially history of Jackson County.



Grace Church, Jacksonport

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