

The Family of John Allison

The fabric of historical significance and its documentation is not only a reflection of individual accomplishments and historic events, but is also an expression of what those individuals and their families stood for in the community, their ideals, and their integrity. The compilation and recording of historical data sometimes neglects or fails to recognize those individual traits and characteristics that were quite likely as vital to that era, or perhaps even more important, than the individual's accomplishments.

In that respect, an example of this to consider is John Allison, a well known and prominent figure in Fairmont in the mid to late 1890's and the early part of the 20th century, and his family. Most local history enthusiasts will associate his name with the well known "Allison Horse Parlors" of that era, which was located on North Main Street just east of where the old Armory once stood in Fairmont. However, upon closer examination, there was more to Mr. Allison and his immediate family than the well known horse parlors which bore his name.

John Allison, an Englishman, came to Fairmont in the mid 1890's. His initial business venture involved the livery business and the importing of English horses. This, of course, evolved into the well known "Allison Horse Parlors," referred to in the November 19, 1926, *Martin County Sentinel* as "the institution that put Fairmont in the front row." The building itself was a large structure that could accommodate up to 250 teams of horses with facilities for feeding, watering, and bedding them for the night. Consequently, his business helped Fairmont prosper as a result of the increased trade it brought to the area. In addition to his horse parlor, however, he also was involved in the real estate business and served for many years as deputy sheriff as well. Due to poor health, he retired at the age of sixty-three. According to the December 16, 1937, edition of the *Fairmont Sentinel*, "Mr. Allison could be classed among Fairmont's favorite citizens. Genial, kindly and the soul of courtesy and consideration, he made a friend of everyone." Those statements clearly reflect the character of the individual in addition to any of his business accomplishments.

That same article referred to the fact that, after going west to spend the winter months, Allison told friends that he was living on borrowed time thanks to his new raw food diet that he had discovered while in California. When he initially left for the west coast, he stated that he had a number of health concerns, including being overweight. Upon his arrival in California, he had to be taken off the train on a stretcher, and his doctors from Fairmont didn't think he would even be able to stand the trip. However, since being on the raw food diet, he told friends that he had lost fifty pounds, lowered his blood pressure, and had not felt this good in years. Nevertheless, he also admitted to his

friends back home that he would probably be even better off if he adhered more stringently to his new diet.

John Allison passed away in California at the age of 73 in December of 1937. He was survived by a son, Jess, who was at that time the head of a large Minneapolis financial institution, a brother, Charles, in Los Angeles, and two sisters in England whom he had not seen in forty years. Mr. Allison was preceded in death by his wife, Fredrica, who was born in Wurtemberg, Germany, and a son, Ben.

Regarding Allison's family, his surviving son, Jess, was at one time also employed by the *Sentinel* and described as a "mainstay." A *Sentinel* article from that time period stated the following upon his leaving in August of 1916: "We are going to hold a job open for him and pray that he will tire of the wicked city and come back to his first love where a lot of 'em love him." Although eventually becoming quite successful in the financial world of Minneapolis, Jess Allison was also obviously very highly respected by the *Sentinel* and local community of that era as well.

Their other son, Ben, attended Fairmont public schools and was a star athlete. After graduating from high school in 1921, he went on to attend Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois. He then entered law school at the University of Minnesota where he was also a starting guard on the Minnesota Gopher football team. It appeared at that time that he had a very bright and promising future.

After graduating from law school, he moved to Raymondsville, Texas, where he opened a law practice. While there, he developed an impacted wisdom tooth which caused him problems, and consequently, had to be removed. An infection as a result of the tooth extraction developed which, unfortunately, resulted in his premature and untimely death. Ben's obituary memorialized him as one who will be remembered by all who were privileged to have made his acquaintance.

It appears from written accounts in the Pioneer Museum that John Allison and the Allison family were not only well respected, but also contributed to the community in many ways. They were Martin County pioneers who helped form and shape the early history of this area. Although they will most likely be remembered primarily for the "Allison Horse Parlors," which was certainly a significant aspect of Fairmont's history, it's also important to keep in mind that there was much more to pioneering individuals such as John Allison than strictly their business endeavors and accomplishments. Allison's presence, how he conducted himself in the community, his family, his integrity, his character, and the respect of local citizenry further serves to reveal his overall

contribution to the history and development of our area, which in essence might well have actually transcended his entrepreneurial endeavors and accomplishments.

For more information on this topic, visit the Pioneer Museum in Fairmont.