

## History of Old Benjamin House Tells About Romance, Spying, 'Strange' Death

Through the courtesy of Noel Mark Holt of Tipton, son-in-law of Mr. and Mrs. Pettis Powell of Shelton, the Democrat is publishing a story about the "Benjamin house," located at Third and Col- lege.

J. F. Holt, pastor at the Tipton Methodist Church and a student at Central College at Fayette, wrote the story as part of his class work a "history of the South," taught by Dr. M. T. Gaddis, who has been in the family since 1825.

The story, which Mr. Holt dedi- cates "to the memory of a man J. F. Benjamin) who had the au- thority to dis-enthrasise the Dem- ocrats of Shelby county," repre- sents much research and work by W. Holt.

Below is the first installment of Mr. Holt's story.

### THE BENJAMIN HOUSE

#### History of the House

J. F. Benjamin was born in the State of New York in 1817. He came, with his wife, in 1847 to Shelbyville to practice law. He was an exceptionally talented attorney and by the time of the Civil War was a moderately wealthy man, supposed to be worth about 75,000 dollars. When the Civil War broke out he joined the Missouri Militia and was commissioned a Captain.

He was assigned to Shelbyville as the Union Procurement Officer for this territory. In this capacity it was his job to secure recruits for the Union Army. Due to the fact that this section of the state is in what is known today as "Little Dixie," Captain Benjamin's business was not of the land office variety. But J. F. Benjamin was a resourceful man. In addition to the few volunteers and reluctant drif- tees who went into the Union Army, Capt. Benjamin had as sys- tem or obtaining other not-so-will- ing young men.

Through a network of spies, Capt. Benjamin received periodic reports concerning young men who were about draft age. After re- ceiving the information Capt. Ben- jamin would approach the father of the particular young man in question and advise him that his son would soon have to be drafted into the Union Army. When the father protested, as most of them did, because of their decidedly southern sentiment, Capt. Ben- jamin had a substitute to offer. For \$1,000 a substitute could be hired to serve in the son's place. So the father begged, borrowed and stole as much money as he could, and if he only raised \$600 or \$700, Capt. Benjamin was a generous man and let him off for that amount. Cap- tain Benjamin's \$75,000 fortune grew by leaps and bounds, but his per- sonal popularity didn't. He was so successful, in fact, that he gained regular promotions and by the war's end, Capt. Benjamin was Brig. Gen. Benjamin, although he was known after the war as Col. Benjamin.

In 1864, then Col. Benjamin dis- enfranchised the Democrats in the district, and was elected to the National Congress. He was re- elected in 1866, 1868, and 1870, but was defeated by the Democrats, who had gotten back their right to vote, in 1872. He then went into the banking business in Wash- ington, D.C.

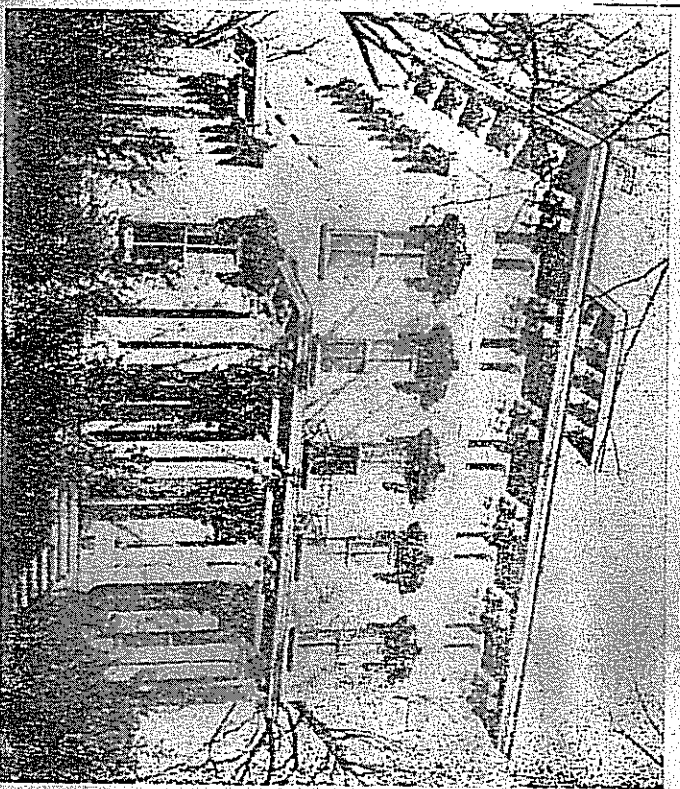
After the war Col. Benjamin, who had received unkind treatment from his fellow citizens at Shel- byville, moved to Shelbyna, where

he built a home, modeled after one he had seen and liked in Wash- ington, D.C. The house cost him ap- proximately \$15,000. After the house was completed, about 1869, Col. and Mrs. Benjamin held open house, which, understandably, few people attended. Col. Benjamin, having duties in Washington, soon returned there, leaving Mrs. Ben- jamin to occupy the house.

Col. Benjamin died March 3, 1877. Local legend claims that he died under mysterious circum- stances. While in Washington, Col. Benjamin had hired a secretary, named Minnie Welsh, whom he soon took a liking to, and prompt- ly set up in his own apartment. When she was married, Col. Ben- jamin hired her sister, Guy H. Al- lison, who had been previously mar- ried. She too was set up in the Colonel's apartment. Col. Benja- min lived a rather riotous life in Washington, being seen often in public with Mrs. Allen, whom he presented as an adopted daughter. On one occasion he brought her back to Shelbyna with him. Many stories have grown up surrounding Col. Benjamin's death, one story says he was poisoned by Mrs. Al- lison, another has it that she was deathly ill in the next room when he died, no one knows, I guess, for certain.

Col. Benjamin's will provided that the house and some money go to his wife and a few personal things to his brothers and friends, but by far the largest portion of his wealth was to go to Mrs. Allen and her sister. In what has been called "one of the most celebrated cases in Northeast Missouri juris- prudence" Mrs. Benjamin and the Colonel's brothers tried to break the will. As far as the book, the "History of Monroe and Shelby Counties" relates, the affair there were two hung juries in the trial. Later investigations seems to show that in a third trial Mrs. Benja- min broke the will and got most of her husband's wealth.

(Editor's Note: The next in- stallment will tell about Col. Ben- jamin first being buried in the yard of the home, Mrs. Benjamin's will and the material used in con-



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