

JOHN M. ALLEN



JOHN M. ALLEN, LL.B., American congressman, was born in Tishomingo County, Miss., July 8, 1847. He received a common-school education up to the time of his enlistment as a private in the Confederate army, in which he served throughout the war. At the close of the war he attended the law school at Cumberland University, Lebanon, Tenn.; graduated in law in 1870 at the University of Mississippi, and began the practice of his profession at Tupelo Miss. In 1870, he was elected district attorney for the first judicial district of that State, from which office he retired after a service of four years. Since 1885, Mr. Allen has represented his State in Congress, having been elected to the forty-ninth Congress and to the five subsequent Congresses. He was also unanimously reelected to the fifty-sixth Congress. Mr. Allen is a Democrat, and is known in Congress and throughout the South for the humor of his speeches.

TUPELO SPEECH

DELIVERED IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, FEBRUARY 20, 1901

MR. CHAIRMAN, I do not deem it necessary to take up twenty minutes time of this committee to pass this amendment, but as this fish hatchery is to be established at Tupelo, and I find among some people in the country—even some newspaper men, who are supposed to impart information to others, and some gentlemen who have been elected to Congress, and who tell me that they have not only been to school but gone through college—so much ignorance about Tupelo that I think I ought—in justice to them, not to Tupelo—to enlighten them some on this subject.

If I were willing to avail myself of all the traditions and many well authenticated but not absolutely accurate histor-

(126)

ical suspicions, I might invest this subject with much more historical and romantic interest. But I propose to confine my remarks to well-authenticated facts, ignoring such traditions, believed by many of our people to be true, as that when Christopher Columbus had his interview with Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, that in his efforts to persuade them to back him in his expedition that led to the discovery of America, he assured them that an all-wise Creator, creating a world like this, was bound to have made somewhere near its center such a place as Tupelo.

The first authentic account we have of the section of country that will one day be included in the corporate limits of Tupelo is that the great Indian chief, Chicksa, from whom that great and warlike tribe, the Chickasaw Indians, took its name, was west of the great Mississippi River and that he, with his followers, followed a pole guided and supported by invisible hands across the Mississippi River to the vicinity of Tupelo. There, we are informed, the pole stopped, stood upright, planted in the ground, and there the Chickasaw Indians made their home. No people, Mr. Chairman, were ever directed by a wise Providence to a fairer land. 'Twas in the rolling woodland just north of one of the most beautiful prairies on which the eye of man or beast ever rested. The country abounded with all sorts of game; the streams were full of fishes, and on this continent there was no more enticing place for this poetic race of the forest. Here the Chickasaws grew to be, as they are to this time, one of the greatest and most powerful of the Indian tribes.

In 1513 the knightly Ponce de Leon landed upon the coast of Florida, and perverted history has it that he started out to look for the fountain of youth and limitless gold fields, when in truth and in fact he really started to look for Tu-

pelo. You are all familiar with the disaster that overtook his expedition. Later, in 1540, the great and adventurous discoverer, Hernando de Soto, landed his expedition on the coast of Florida, and finally succeeded in reaching and discovering, for the first time by a white man, Tupelo.

Here he stopped in the midst of the Chickasaws until attacked by them and driven west to what is now the city of Memphis, where he discovered the great Mississippi River.

The Chickasaws were then left in peaceable possession, so far as the white man was concerned, of this beautiful section for nearly two hundred years, when, in 1736, Bienville, with his expedition, came up from Florida, and D'Artaguiett from the Illinois attempted to meet and take from the Chickasaws what is now Tupelo. D'Artaguiette got there before Bienville, and was defeated by the Chickasaws. He and almost all of his expedition perished at their hands. Bienville arrived later, was also defeated and driven back with great loss to his expedition; and now, in laying out and grading avenues and boulevards for Tupelo, the bones, spurs, weapons, epaulets, etc., of the slain of these ill-fated expeditions are plowed up.

This is something of the early history of the place about which we find so much ignorance. My colleague, General Catchings, told me not many days ago that some newspaper man had asked him if there really was such a place as Tupelo.

I do not assert that all of these historical events to which I have referred took place immediately in the town of Tupelo, but they were in that vicinity and were on territory that we expect to have incorporated into the city some day. To come down to a later period, those of you who know anything of the history of your country will remember the contentions and contest that lasted for many years between the

French, English, and Spanish governments for the ownership of the Mississippi territory. I am informed by those familiar with the real designs of those great nations at that time that the real motive of all of them was the ownership of Tupelo.

Finally, the United States, appreciating the importance of the position, took advantage of their dissensions and acquired Tupelo.

About the year 1848 it became a matter of great concern to the Great Northwest to secure a market for their products, so they gave aid and encouragement to the building of the northern end of what is now the Mobile and Ohio Railroad. The city of Mobile, on the Gulf, recognizing also the great advantages of direct connection with Tupelo, helped along this enterprise, and the road was built from Mobile to Tupelo.

Everything went on very well until about 1861, when the South concluded to secede from the Union. I am reliably informed that when Horace Greeley and others sought Mr. Lincoln and asked him to "let the wayward sisters depart in peace," he shook his head and said, "No; this secession takes from the United States Tupelo, and we will not submit to it." And it was to rescue to the Union this town that brought on the war.

The armies of the Union were first directed against the capital of the Confederacy at Richmond, Va., but some obstructions were thrown in the way of that army at Bull Run, and they were persuaded to return to Washington. Another great army was then marshaled under the command of General Grant, who landed at Pittsburg Landing, on the Tennessee River, and began his operations against Tupelo.

General Albert Sidney Johnston and myself met General

Grant's army at Shiloh, and for most of the first day we had a real good time with them, and but for General Johnston being killed and me being scattered on the evening of that day, there is no knowing what might have happened or how the history of this country might have been changed.

Suffice it to say, I retired on Corinth, and when we were there, sorely pressed, President Davis ordered General Beauregard to fall back to Tupelo, and there make a great and desperate stand for the life of the Confederacy. And it seems that Generals Grant and Halleck were so much impressed with the dogged determination of the Confederate Army to defend Tupelo to the death of the last man that they turned away in other directions. Later, General Sturgis started from Memphis with a well-equipped army, with a view of capturing Tupelo, and breaking the backbone of the Confederacy. But on the road down there, when he had gotten within a few miles of Tupelo, General Forrest, that great cavalry commander, appreciating what the loss of Tupelo would mean to the Confederacy, met Sturgis at Brices Crossroads, took from him all of his artillery and wagons, sent him back to Memphis without an organized company and with the remnant of his army, in about one-fourth of the time that had been consumed by forced marches in going down.

But Mr. Lincoln seemed never to have lost sight of the importance of Tupelo to the Union, and he marshaled another army under that able commander, General A. J. Smith, and started them to capture Tupelo. General Stephen D. Lee and General Forrest, with their commands, were sent to intercept him, but in maneuvering for positions General Smith got between Forrest and Lee and Tupelo and succeeded in capturing the town; and in an effort to dislodge

him from there the desperate and bloody battle of Harrisburg, which is in the suburbs of Tupelo, was fought, in which nobody had any decided advantage, but General Smith evacuated the town and went back to Memphis. But the very fact that Tupelo had fallen seems to have broken the spirit of the Confederacy, and we never did much good after that.

You will find, Mr. Chairman, in the Congressional Library a book the title of which is "Tupelo." It was written by a Northern Presbyterian preacher and school-teacher who happened to be down in that section when the war began. I remember him very well. This book treats of his trials and tribulations about Tupelo, where he was arrested, imprisoned, and would have been shot but for his timely escape from prison; and, as I remember the substance, as he puts it, of his offense was a suspicion that he entertained secret doubts as to the divine origin and right of African slavery.

After the close of the war, when we had returned to our peaceful avocations, one of our brightest and most farsighted young men, having in mind the great future as well as the great past of this town, settled in Tupelo, and afterwards became a member of this body and is not about terminating a great career of sixteen years here. What this nation and this House owes to Tupelo for this contribution I leave for others to say. My modesty forbids my speaking of it. Some fifteen years ago Kansas City and Memphis, appreciating the fact that if they ever hoped to do any good as cities they must have direct connection with Tupelo, built a railroad from Kansas City, through Memphis, to Tupelo. Birmingham, realizing that with all of its marvelous resources they could never be developed and properly distributed without direct railroad connection with Tupelo, saw to it that the road was built from Birmingham to Tupelo.

Mr. Chairman, during the discussion on the river and harbor bill in this House recently, I heard so many statistics as to the tonnage of the various cities that were seeking appropriations in that bill that it stimulated me to inquire into the tonnage at Tupelo, and I find that during last year there were about 4,000,000 tons of freight passed through Tupelo. It was only the other day that you saw in great headlines in all of our newspapers that the Southern Railroad had purchased the Mobile and Ohio Railroad, running from St. Louis to Mobile, through Tupelo.

The president of the Southern road was in Washington a few days later, and I met him for the first time, and in a conversation I had with him I gathered the reason for this purchase. It was that the Southern system had already about 7,000 miles of railroad, which had cost them hundreds of millions of dollars; they found this great system, after all this expenditure, practically useless to them, because they had no direct connection or terminal facilities at Tupelo. They therefore spent many millions more for 900 miles of railroad that would take them into Tupelo and give them good terminal facilities there.

Many of you gentlemen have never been to Tupelo. I hope none of you entertain any idea of dying without going there. I should hate to have it said of any member of this Congress—for all of whom I have such a kindly feeling—that they did not aspire to visit Tupelo before they died. I extend you all an invitation to come, and promise you a royal welcome. Come and go with me on College Hill some evening and see one of our Tupelo sunsets.

Come and see one of our Southern, silvery, Tupelo moons! I think it is the only place in the South where we have the same beautiful moons we had before the war. I

have often been asked about the size of Tupelo. I confess I have not been able to get the exact figures from the last census. The tabulating machines do not seem to have been able to work it out yet; but I can say, Mr. Chairman, that by sufficiently extending the corporate limits of our town we can accommodate a population larger than the city of London. The truth is that our lands about Tupelo have been so valuable for agricultural purposes that we have not yielded them up for building a city as rapidly as we should have done.

I can say, Mr. Chairman, that while there are larger places than Tupelo, I do not think there is any other place just exactly like it. Tupelo is very near, if not exactly, in the center of the world. The horizon seems about the same distance in every direction. The sun, when doing business on regular schedule, comes right over the town, and sometimes gives us a hot time in the old town. It is a great place for the investment of capital, where it will be welcomed and protected. Come early, gentlemen, and avoid the rush!

This, Mr. Chairman, is a proposition to establish there a fish hatchery. We have the ideal place for a fish hatchery. Why, sir, fish will travel over land for miles to get into the water we have at Tupelo. Thousands and millions of unborn fish are clamoring to this Congress to-day for an opportunity to be hatched at the Tupelo hatchery.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I only wish to say in conclusion that if there is a member here who wishes to have his name connected by future generations with that of Judas Iscariot and Benedict Arnold, if he wishes to have himself and his posterity pointed at with scorn, if he desires to be despised by men and shunned by women, let him vote against this amendment and he will secure all this infamous notoriety.