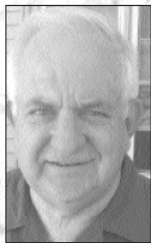


Will Burton's mark endures in Blanch stucco

Editor's Note: The following article by Anne Burton Washburn of Greensboro highlights her grandfather, Will Burton, and the stucco work he did all over Caswell County. The Caswell Messenger would like to thank Charles Walters of Culver Road for allowing photographs to be taken of Burton's work.

—by Anne Burton Washburn

On 17 August 1980, my husband, Bruce, decided that a drive to the



Charles Walters

Welcome Baptist Church in Blanch, would be a nice thing to do. This is where William Arthur "Will" Burton, my grandfather, is buried. We had gotten this information from his death certificate in Yanceyville. Bruce & I had started working on our genealogies that year.

Bruce wanted to go on country roads and soon we were lost. We noticed many houses, cabins and tobacco barns had been stuccoed and we joked about how someone must have come through in the 1930s and "stuck-oed" the buildings by convincing the owners they needed to have this work done. It is an unusual building material in these parts and it really stood out.

Finally, we found the Welcome Baptist Church and walked to the small cemetery behind the church. We looked at every headstone and some places that looked like unmarked graves. There was none for my grandfather. Next door to the church was a little white house with two ladies sitting on their porch, watching us. There was one depression, obviously an unmarked grave, that we decided was my grandfather's.

We were about to leave when one of the ladies called out to us, "Are you looking for a grave?" We said yes. She asked which one. We told her. She said, "Oh, he was buried on Christmas Eve. I know exactly where he's buried!" She tromped across her garden and pointed to the depression we'd already found. She said it used to have a metal marker but it had gotten lost. She said she knew my grandfather and used to ride on the bus to Danville with him. She said she was Reuben Lee's wife.

Mrs. Lee told us that a few days after my grandfather was buried, a man came in a taxi and went to the grave

where "he cried and carried on." She said he was tall. I don't know who this was, unless it was an uncle who has since died himself.

She told us that the cabin my grandfather lived in when he died was just up the road. The minister at the Welcome Baptist Church had gone to the cabin to deliver a Christmas basket to him, even though he was not a member of the church, and he found his body. He arranged for the burial and Mr. Swicegood performed it.

Mrs. Lee told us that she had lived next to the church for 52 years. She knew Will Burton when he and his family lived in a big house at the fork of the road (probably a now-abandoned house at the corner of Highway 62 and Blanch Road), adding "A lot of them lived up at that house. They lived there when they separated." Actually, my grandparents lived in Danville when they separated for good, but they probably separated more than once. Mrs. Lee asked where my grandmother was, if she was dead or alive. I didn't know then but I have since learned that my grandmother died in 1978.

Mrs. Lee gave us explicit directions to the old house. She also gave us the name of the man my grandfather "did business with," Mr. Walters. She said he had told her that "if any of Mr. Burton's people came to the grave asking about him, she should send them to him."

We continued up the road to Mr.

Walters' house. A young son was home and he was too young to have known my grandfather. He said his brother,

who had just come home, might remember something. So we went next door to a beautiful old southern home. Across the street was a stucco cabin. The older son remembered Will Burton and said he'd done odd jobs for his father, including stuccoing the chimney on his great-grandfather's house in front of us. He said my grandfather lived in a cabin across the road, not the one on the road but back behind it. He gave us permission to look at it. "Just let the gap down on the electric fence and put it up when you leave," he said.

It was a neat little cabin with a red tin roof, stuccoed, built on a foundation of large rocks, and it had probably been a slave log cabin once. There was a front room, a back room and an upper room, fireplace, electricity, but no running water. In the back room were a mirror and medicine cabinet. In the front room, red & white gingham curtains hung on the window, and there were a red & white metal table and a couple of day beds. We didn't go in, being afraid of meeting a rat or some hornets. On a tree immediately outside the back door was tacked some wood where my grandfather probably skinned animals and catfish. All around the cabin were woods and fields. My grandfather was a loner.

There was also a multitude of empty

mason jars under the house...sobriety was not my grandfather's style.

As we were driving away, we noticed that a plane had landed in the field across the road from Charles Walters' house. We waited to see if it was him and ended up following him into his driveway. We identified ourselves and he was really surprised to see us! He mentioned how he had told Mrs. Lee to send to him any of Mr. Burton's people who come. We were the first in almost 9 years.

Mr. Walters said he had known Will Burton his whole life, that he had done work for his father and that Mr. Burton had lived on and off in Blanch during all those years. He allowed him to live in the cabin for free.

He told us that Will Burton had stuccoed all the chimneys and structures we'd seen in the area.

Fast forward over 20 years. In 2003, my husband and I visited Caswell County again, doing some genealogical research in the Richmond-Miles museum run by the Caswell County Historical Association. Lib McPherson had been very helpful. After I did my research, I looked around and found some books I wanted to buy. By this time, Mrs. McPherson was on the phone with someone, talking about a professor who had written some books about the area. She was saying that this professor was very interested in all the stuccoed buildings there and how no one knew why they were that way.

I was sitting in a chair, facing her and waiting for her to get off the phone, when she said these things. Good thing I was sitting! I couldn't wait for her to get off the phone! When she did, I gasped, "My grandfather stuccoed all the buildings here!" These buildings are mostly tobacco barns, former slave dwellings, old houses, chimneys, and even after all these years, the stucco remains intact. I told her about our conversation with Mr. Walters more than 20 years prior. We both got goose bumps.

My father has since affirmed that his father had been a craftsman who also did master work in Danville, notably on the Capitol movie theater. He took my dad there to see his work, which included mixing gold in the stucco for this theater. Unfortunately, the theater no longer exists.

After our visit to Blanch in 1980, my dad had a stone made for his father's grave so it is no longer unmarked. William Arthur Burton was born 14 August 1896 and died 23 December 1971. He had a hard life, as many did in those days and as many do today, but he managed to leave behind a legacy.



Walters' home on Culver Road