

HUGH BLAIR BUIST WINTHROP HORTICULTURIST

Mr. H. B. Buist of Greenville came to Rock Hill in February 1896 to help develop the new Winthrop College farm. He also helped to develop and landscape the main campus. The Buist family was in Rock Hill for about eleven years. This paper is an effort to trace the family and assess their impact on Rock Hill and the Winthrop community.

The Buist family was founded in South Carolina with the arrival in 1793 of Rev. George Buist, D. D. to assume the pastorate of the First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston. He was born in the County of Fife, Scotland in 1770, the son of Arthur and Catherine Inglis Buist. His grandfather was Henry Buist (c. 1690-c. 1787), a farmer of Orkie, Parish of Kettles, in Fifeshire.¹ Young George entered the College of Edinburgh in 1787 and was soon recognized as a precocious student. His main field of study was theology, but he also mastered classical studies, science, the arts, and several languages. The faculty recognized “early indications of his superior genius.”² He was honored by the College of Edinburgh in 1794 with a Doctor of Divinity degree at the age of 24. During his time in Edinburgh as a very young man, he was made an honorary member of the Edinburgh Philological Society, published an abridgement of Hume’s *History of England*, and contributed articles to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.³

In 1793, the Presbyterian Church in Charles Town was seeking a new pastor and sought assistance from the authorities in Edinburgh. The young minister George Buist was recommended to them, and he accepted their call. From the earliest period of the colony at Charles Town, Presbyterians had worshipped with other Calvinists in a union congregation at the site of the present Circular Congregational Church. By 1731, their numbers had grown to the point that they established a separate congregation. Because it was made up largely of immigrants of Scottish heritage, they called it First (Scots) Presbyterian Church. The church had grown with the colony, and was seeking an outstanding minister in 1793. They were worshipping in a frame building which had been enlarged in 1763 and was located at what is now the corner of the graveyard.⁴

¹ Genealogical information from *South Carolina: A Guide to Churches, Vol. 1*, Theresa M. Hicks, Columbia, S. C.: Peppercorn Publishers, 2003, pages 22-23.

² *History of the Presbyterian Church in South Carolina*, George D. Howe, D. D., Columbia, 1870, pages 574-575.

³ Presbyterian Historical Center, “Biographical Index of Ministers,” Rev. George Buist, D. D.

⁴ *Historic Churches of Charleston*, Clifford L. Legerton, 1966, page 61.

Rev. Buist's ministry was a period of growth and expansion for the church. He was described as "A man of eminent talent, impressive eloquence, and sterling character, who enjoyed the confidence of the entire community."⁵ The congregation flourished, and during his ministry, two additions were made to the church building to accommodate crowds. In 1805, in addition to his duties as minister, Rev. Buist was named President of the College of Charleston. His untimely death in 1808 cut short a remarkable ministry for both the church and the City of Charles Town. Before his death, the congregation was beginning to collect funds for a new and much larger sanctuary. It was completed in 1814 and still serves the congregation.⁶

Rev. George Buist married Mary Somers. They had six children:⁷

- 1) Arthur Buist became a minister and served as pastor of the First (Scots) church in the late 1820s.
- 2) Mary Buist married James Lamb, member of a prominent family in First (Scots) church. There is a memorial window in the sanctuary in memory of the couple.
- 3) Martha Buist was unmarried.
- 4) George Buist (1809-1877) became a prominent attorney in Charleston and married Mary Edwards Jones.
- 5) Henry Buist, MD, was a physician in Charleston. He was unmarried.
- 6) Edward Tongue Buist became a minister and served the First Presbyterian Church of Greenville, S. C.

The youngest son of this family, Edward T. Buist, was born March 1, 1809, about six months after the sudden death of his father. He studied at the College of Charleston and South Carolina College in Columbia (now the University of South Carolina.). He then went to Princeton University in 1828 to prepare for the ministry. He was ordained and installed following graduation in one of the Presbyterian churches in Charleston County. However, he later moved to Greenville County to live at a higher altitude. He purchased a plantation in southern Greenville County, and began preaching at Fairview Presbyterian Church. He was later called to Antioch church and helped to organize Mt. Tabor church.⁸

Edward Buist was married three times. The first wife was Margaret Robinson from Charleston. The couple married in 1832. There are no children known from this marriage. After her death, he married Mrs. Emma H. Lowndes of Greenville. We know of three children from this marriage:

⁵ *First Presbyterian Church of Charleston, Centennial Exercises*, Charleston, 1915, page 13.

⁶ *Ibid.*, page 125.

⁷ Genealogical information from Hicks, pages 22-23.

⁸ Sketch of his life provided by his daughter Lula Buist Clyde and printed in *History of the First Presbyterian Church of Greenville*, Henry Bacon McKoy, 1962.

- 1) Tallulah (Lula) (1849-1919) married Mr. S. C. Clyde, a merchant in Greenville. They had two daughters, Mrs. Emma Hollis and Mary Clyde.
- 2) Emma married John C. Anderson of Spartanburg County. They had a son, David Buist Anderson, and daughters Mrs. Emma Dunovant and Mrs. Eloise Mines.
- 3) Hugh Blair Buist (November 8, 1851 – June 6, 1913) married Eliza Williams of Abbeville District. There are no known children of this marriage.

After the death of Emma, Rev. Edward T. Buist married a Miss Flora McNeal of Greenville. They had one son, George A. Buist, who was for many years a professor at Furman University.⁹

While Rev. Buist was preaching in various churches in southern Greenville County, he also taught a small school in a building on the grounds of his house. Students included his sons, nephews, and sons of neighbors and parishioners. Sometime before 1858, he was elected as President and Professor at the Laurensville Female Academy in Laurensville (now Laurens). The family moved there. The academy had been established in 1829 and in 1856, the Presbytery of South Carolina took control. Rev. Buist is listed as President, Treasurer, and Professor of Mental and Moral Philosophy and Ancient Languages.¹⁰ The college had primary, academic and collegiate departments, and by 1860 had an enrollment of 128. With the advent of the Civil War the college closed, and Rev. Buist moved his family to the City of Greenville. He was soon called to the pastorate of the First Presbyterian Church of Greenville, where was installed on May 4, 1862.

Rev. Buist had a strong and successful pastorate in Greenville, where he was described as “eminent in learning, with marked ability as a preacher and during his administration, he kept the church out of debt...” even during the difficult times of the Civil War and Reconstruction.¹¹ It was related that, during the war, he would go to the Greenville rail depot, secure a copy of a Columbia newspaper, and read the war news to people assembled there, most of whom could not afford a paper or could not read.¹² His successful ministry was cut short by his sudden death in 1877 at the age of 68. He is buried in Springwood Cemetery in Greenville.

Hugh Blair Buist (usually called H. B.) was born in 1851 in Greenville and grew up there under the ministry of his father. In the 1870 Census, H. B. Buist, age 18, is living in the household of Samuel Clyde in Greenville. Clyde is listed as a retail merchant, and Buist is a clerk, probably in Clyde’s store. This was the household of his sister, Lula.

⁹ Genealogical information on the family was gathered from various sources, especially the *Rock Hill Record*, June 9 and June 12, 1913.

¹⁰ Information from a catalogue of the Laurensville Female College for 1858 on the South Carolina Genealogy Trails web site.

¹¹ *The Greenville News*, 1929.

¹² *One Hundred Fifty Years of First Presbyterian Church of Greenville*, James Walker Murray and Dorcas Barnett Lindsay, 1998, page 16.

In January 1872, he married Eliza Williams, the daughter of William Augustus Williams and Kittie F. Marshall Williams of Abbeville District. When she was a child, Mrs. Buist's mother moved the family to Greenville to give her children the benefit of the educational opportunities available there. She attended Greenville Female College. She is described as knowing H. B. Buist from childhood.¹³

We have very little information on the couple during their early years of their marriage while they were living in Greenville. Several sources state that H. B. Buist served for several terms in the State Legislature. In 1895, he served as one of ten representatives from Greenville County at the state convention which created the new state constitution. He served on two committees, and he is recorded as introducing two resolutions, one requiring the maintenance and support of Winthrop Normal and Industrial College and one calling on the General Assembly to provide for support for the education of deaf, dumb and blind citizens.¹⁴

In 1893, H. B. Buist was serving as a member of the initial Board of Trustees of Winthrop (then known as Winthrop Normal and Industrial College). The decision had been made to move the college from Columbia to Rock Hill, and the board met in 1893 in Rock Hill to select an architect and decide on the site of the first building (Tillman Hall).¹⁵ The board met again in May, 1894 and laid the cornerstone for the building. At that time, brick work had reached the third floor on the main building and construction had also been started on a dormitory. H. B. Buist of Greenville was listed as a member of the board at both meetings.¹⁶ Buist's name is included on the cornerstone of Tillman Hall as a member of the Board.

By 1896, the college had been fully established in Rock Hill and was becoming a success with families from various parts of South Carolina wishing to provide higher education for their daughters. In February 1896, H. B. Buist was appointed to manage the farm to be connected with Winthrop College. "He will supervise the garden and orchard and will have charge of the grounds around the college."¹⁷ His title was generally Superintendent of Farm and Grounds. From very early on, his position also included serving as an instructor, offering classes on dairying and horticulture.¹⁸ When he first came to Rock Hill, he lived with President Johnson. When his wife came and joined him later in the year, the couple moved into the home recently vacated by John Barron (the location of this home is unknown at this time).¹⁹ Buist was assisted in his initial work at Winthrop by a team of 19 convicts provided by a legislative act. "The

¹³ *Rock Hill Record*, February 8, 1912.

¹⁴ *Journal of the Constitutional Convention of South Carolina*, 1895, pages 20, 24, 44, and 57.

¹⁵ *Rock Hill Herald*, August 9, 1893.

¹⁶ *Rock Hill Herald*, May 9, 1894.

¹⁷ *Rock Hill Herald*, February 8, 1896.

¹⁸ Report of President D. B. Johnson to the Board of Directors, June 7, 1898, page 3 (located at the Pettus Archives).

¹⁹ *Rock Hill Herald*, November 21, 1896.

convicts are to be used in building a barn on the college farm and improving the grounds around the college buildings.”²⁰ When the convicts were sent to Camden in November, they had completed the barn and “they have done a great deal of improvement work on the college farm as well as having put the 32-acre campus, which was broken and rugged, in good condition.”²¹ In coming years, Buist would often request additional convict crews to assist in farm work and grounds maintenance. For example, in 1899, fifteen convicts graded and paved the road to the college farm, dug ditches on the farm, painted roofs on the campus, and unloaded coal and wood for the buildings.²² The crews represented a major savings in labor costs.

Within a few months of arriving at Winthrop, H. B. Buist was seeking advice on landscaping the grounds from one of the foremost authorities on horticulture in the southeast. “Prof. Berckman [Berckmans], the noted landscape man of Augusta, spent Thursday at the Winthrop College looking over the grounds...he will submit to President Johnson a report advising him on how best to proceed toward laying off the flower beds, grass plots, etc.”²³ The Professor named in the article was likely Prosper Jules Alphonse Berckmans (1830-1910). The Berckmans family, from Belgium, came to Augusta in 1858 and established Fruitlands Nursery, the first large-scale horticultural nursery in the southeast. It operated until 1918, and later the grounds became the site for the Augusta National Golf Club, site of the Masters Tournament.

The Buist family lived in Rock Hill for around eleven years while H. B. Buist served as horticulturist for Winthrop and taught classes. There was a strong family history of military service in Mrs. Buist’s family, and she was a member of the Colonial Dames, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the United Daughters of the Confederacy. She was described as the organizer of the Catawba Chapter of the DAR while living in Rock Hill, and served as regent while she lived here.²⁴ She also was active in the Ann White Chapter of the UDC, representing the group at the state convention in 1901. The Buist family continued to have strong political connections. In April 1907, Mrs. Buist and her mother visited for several days with Governor and Mrs. Ansel in Columbia, staying in the Governor’s Mansion.²⁵ There is no record of the couple having children, but “during her residence in Rock Hill when Mr. Buist filled with ability the position of horticulturist for Winthrop College, her home was a ‘city of refuge’ for hundreds of homesick students of Winthrop and the Catawba Military Academy.”²⁶

H. B. Buist’s work expanded as the college enrollment grew rapidly in the early years. He oversaw the expansion of the college herd of dairy cattle, created new areas for vegetable

²⁰ *Rock Hill Herald*, March 7, 1896.

²¹ *Rock Hill Herald*, November 28, 1896.

²² Report of President D. B. Johnson to the Board of Trustees, December 20, 1899, page 15.

²³ *Rock Hill Herald*, April 25, 1896.

²⁴ *Rock Hill Record*, February 8, 1912.

²⁵ *Rock Hill Record*, April 18, 1907.

²⁶ *The Greenville News*, February 5, 1912.

gardens, and planted fruit trees. He also oversaw the landscaping of the areas around new building as they were built, filled in low areas on the campus, installed sidewalks and landscaped areas, and ensured good drainage. The work done by landscape architect Berckmans was becoming outdated, and the college secured the talents of G. A. Parker of Hartford, Connecticut. In the spring of 1907, he had developed a map of the campus showing all the buildings, drive, sidewalks, fences, flowerbeds, and trees.²⁷

Mrs. Buist was a victim of a tragic accident in 1903. On September 3 of that year, a Southern Railway train crashed on the trestle over Fishing Creek about three miles east of Yorkville. Five were killed and at least sixteen injured. In an interview given by Walter Jenkins many years after the accident, he remembered that “Mrs. H. B. Buist, who was on her way to Piedmont Springs and had given us candy...” was sitting near him on the train.²⁸ Mrs. Buist was seriously injured. She was taken by local residents to the hospital in York, where she was soon joined by her husband and mother, Mrs. Kittie Williams. Mrs. Buist was in the hospital for at least a month, and slowly recovered from her injuries. In December, the family received a settlement of \$8,000 plus expenses from the Southern Railway.^{29 30}

In the spring of 1907, Mr. Buist retired from his service at Winthrop after ten years. President Johnson reported that the Superintendent of Farm and Grounds had given notice of his resignation, to be effective at the end of the school year. “He informs me that he has accepted a position in Greenville, where he can look after the development of his property. He leaves Winthrop with the good will and wishes of us all.” The Board of Trustees passed a resolution thanking him for his services as a member of the Legislature in helping to secure incorporation of Winthrop as a state institution, then as a member of the first Board of Trustees, and afterwards as an officer and instructor of the college. The nature of Buist’s work as an instructor can be inferred from his successor, Mr. H. J. Painter of Canada, who was described as planning and planting the school gardens for the Practice Department and teaching nature study and elementary agriculture.³¹

Upon Mr. Buist’s retirement, the couple moved back to Greenville. They placed an advertisement for the sale of their home, described as a new seven room cottage at the corner of York and Oakland Avenue.³² Since this home is described as new, it is likely the couple lived at another address nearby during most of their time in Rock Hill. There are no City Directories for this period, and they do not appear in the Census reports. The house did not sell immediately,

²⁷ Report from President D. B. Johnson to Board of Trustees, June 5, 1907, page 18.

²⁸ *Rock Hill Herald*, May 3, 1952.

²⁹ *Rock Hill Herald*, September 5, September 9, September 12, September 26, October 21, and December 12, 1903.

³⁰ Report from President D. B. Johnson to the Board of Trustees, June 5, 1907, page 16.

³¹ *Rock Hill Record*, June 10, 1907 gives a description of the resolution and a sketch of Buist’s replacement.

³² *Rock Hill Record*, July 25, 1907.

and it was placed with Realtor Edgar Poag by September.³³ It was soon sold to Mr. J. M. Cherry for \$3,510, and an announcement appeared in the paper, “The friends of Mr. and Mrs. H. B. Buist will regret to learn that his estimable couple will leave Rock Hill next week for Greenville to make that place their future home.”³⁴

In Greenville, the Buists lived at 701 Buncombe Street at the corner with Butler Avenue. H. B. Buist became Chairman of the Park and Tree Commission for the city, and was active in efforts to beautify the community. It is likely that he was involved in real estate development, as there are two streets in Greenville with the Buist name, including Buist Circle. In February 1912, Eliza Buist died after a short illness. She was 58. H. B. Buist died in June 1913 at the age of 62. It was reported that he took his own life by poisoning and left a note on his desk.³⁵ His death was covered in detail in several newspapers. He was generally described as one of the most prominent men in Greenville and the owner of extensive real estate. “He was the possessor of some of the valuable property in the city and was just completing a magnificent mansion, to which he had planned to bring his bride, a young lady of 22 years of age of Toccoa, Georgia, this month. He was 62 years of age, being a widower for the past year or so.”³⁶ The Buists are both buried in the cemetery of Christ Episcopal Church in Greenville.

The will of H. B. Buist was revealed shortly after his death. The estimate of his net worth was \$40,000.³⁷ He left money for his sister Lula, his nieces and nephews, and funds were designated for Chicora College and Greenville Female College.³⁸

While Hugh and Eliza Buist were in Rock Hill only eleven years, they were important members of the community. Hugh had a major role in the physical development of the Winthrop University campus in its earliest years, and Eliza led a leading role in civic clubs. In Greenville, Hugh was an important factor in the political life of the city.

This article was prepared by Paul Gettys. We welcome additions and corrections.

³³ *Rock Hill Record*, September 5, 1907.

³⁴ *Rock Hill Record*, September 19, 1907.

³⁵ *The Greenville News*, June 7, 1913.

³⁶ *The Lancaster News*, June 10, 1913.

³⁷ The CPI Inflation Index translates \$40,000 in 1913 dollars to \$969,725 in 2016.

³⁸ *The Greenville News*, June 10, 1913.