

William Smith Wilkerson: A History

By
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Wednesday, 24 November 1925 was no day to be standing outside in the bitter cold and blustery wind, yet many braved the harsh weather to pay their final respects to one known as “The grand old man of York County.” Knowing this would be a well-attended funeral many came early to get a seat out of the weather in the sanctuary of the Hickory Grove Mount Vernon Methodist Church. Long after standing room in the sanctuary had evaporated, mourners and those wishing to pay their last respects continued to come, willing to stand in the raw wind.

Eighty years earlier the weather had been more forgiving when William Smith Wilkerson was born on 14 October 1845, the second child of cabinetmaker Thomas Jefferson Wilkerson (1812 - 1852)¹ and his wife, Lucinda Howell Wilkerson. Family tradition has it that the handsome, six-foot plus Thomas met Lucinda while working as a finish carpenter for her father, Williamson Howell. It is also interesting to note that carpenter Joel E. Wilkerson (b. 1810) was living in the Hopewell community near the Howell family. It may have been that Joel had recommended his kinsman to Howell. Since graining doors, woodwork and mantels took some time; it was customary for the worker to board with the owner. For this reason Thomas Wilkerson left his Cotton Belt home just east of York and boarded with the Howell family. It was during this time, about six months, in which he and Lucinda met and fell in love.

They were married in 1843. Age wise, Thomas 35 and Lucinda 31, were late in marrying according to the times. Seven years after they were married, and two years before Thomas’ death, the Wilkerson family was enumerated on the 1850 federal census. The following children were listed: Sarah Jane (1844), William Smith (1845), John Thomas (1847) and Mary E. (1849). On that census Thomas Wilkerson reported having real estate value at \$100, an equivalent of \$2,400 today. Yet, a search of the York County land records shows no transaction to Wilkerson prior to 1850 or after his death in 1852. The 1860 census, widow Lucinda Wilkerson reported owning 50 acres, but her father gave this parcel to her in 1858 -

¹ Thomas Jefferson Wilkerson, had a brother, Charles E. Wilkerson. This is confirmed in the fact that Charles is listed in the 1842-1843 logbook of Samuel Wright, where he is identified as the brother of T. J. Wilkerson. Charles Wilkerson borrowed \$11.85 + interest = \$12.35 from Wright on 7 July 1842. He paid two payments: \$5.00 November 1842 and \$7.35 on 27 March 1843. The 1850 census reports that Charles was born in York County and having \$1,200 in Real Estate in 1850. He was married to Sarah M.____ from Virginia, and having 4 children: John S. (1842), Edward P. (1844), Nancy J. (1846) and George A. (1848).

- six years after her husband's death.

In time, the Wilkerson family of Western York County would become synonymous with the Methodist Church; but it seems that Thomas and Lucinda were originally Presbyterian. Lucinda and her parents are buried in the Salem Presbyterian cemetery, and according to family lore this was the intended burial site for Thomas. However, when he died the Broad River was flooding and prevented the family from crossing the river by Howell's Ferry, and he was buried in the Unity (Baptist) cemetery near Hickory Grove.

Normally a widow with small children in those days, denied the labor and craft of a man, could expect dire straits. While it would be too presumptuous to minimize Lucinda's situation, it appears she may have fared better than traditional believed. Most family traditions have centered on her eking out a living by sewing, and overlooking other skills such as carding, spinning and weaving, skills most women during that period would have learned from childhood. Told to reflect a condition of poverty, one family tradition relates how she required the children to pick enough seed from cotton to fill a high top shoe. However, this is not a sign of poverty as this chore was common for southern nineteenth century children. Typically this tedious task precluded the next day's work of carding and spinning cotton into yarn. The most we should conclude from this is that it was in preparation for a day of spinning by Lucinda or one of the girls.

While family tradition recognizes that her family aided her, it may have been more than recalled. We do not know what passed during those first few years after her husband's death, but it is entirely possible she and the children went to the home of the senior Howells. Lucinda's family during the antebellum period was living comfortable lives. Her father's real estate in 1850 had a value of \$1,000 or approximately \$10,000 today, and her unmarried 31-year-old brother, Samuel, had his own property estimated at \$300.

In July 1858, six years after T. J. Wilkerson's death, Williamson Howell, "for consideration of love and respect," gave his daughter 50 acres near the present town of Hickory Grove. The timing of this gift may have been determined by the ages of William S., who was 13, and J. Thomas who was 11; both capable of working a small farm. William's descendents tell that the boy's uncle, Sam Howell, took him to his Hopewell farm and taught him the science of plowing. Another reports that Thomas began plowing at age 9. Among yeoman farmers it was typical for boys to begin plowing as soon as they were tall enough to handle a mule and plow.

When South Carolina seceded from the Union in 1860, Lucinda's real estate was worth \$300 and had \$200 in personal property. William was just over 15 at the time and not eligible for military duty, but shortly after his 18th birthday he enlisted 1 January 1864 as a member of Company G of the South Carolina Sharpshooters, under the command of Captain William Beattie Smith of Clover. John Thomas entered the military when he became 17 and continued to the end of the war.

Exposed to the hardships of war and camp life at such a young age, William's health began to fail. Seven months after he enlisted he was admitted to the Episcopal Church Hospital in Williamsburg, Virginia in July 1864 with Rubella. After his recovery he returned to duty, but admitted on 3 October to the Pettigrew Hospital in Richmond for debility resulting from his battle with Rubella. He returned to duty on 9 November and continued until he was admitted to the Jackson Hospital on 23 December for pneumonia. Five days later he was dismissed and remained on duty until 3 March 1865. On 11 March, Surgeon General Rufus Bratton of York declared him unfit for field duty and recommended he be assigned to a hospital guard detail some other light duty. Following Bratton's recommendation Wilkerson's superior resigned him to nursing duties at the Jackson Hospital on 1 April 1865. Eleven days later, Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox Courthouse, at which time the southern forces broke up and headed for home. William made the long trek home. Sixty years later, upon Wilkerson's death in 1925 only two survivors of that unit remained: J. D. Gwinn of McConnellsville and G. H. O'Leary of York.

Following the war many Southern families suffered terrible hardships. Those who had connections and means to recover from financial bankruptcy were the most fortunate. Others, like William and Thomas Wilkerson, who had little before the war, had to rely on labor and skill. Besides farming William and Thomas saw an opportunity to make money tanning leather. This was a natural step for them, since other members of the Wilkerson family who were tanning and making shoes prior to the war had exposed them to the process. In 1868 William and his brother formed a partnership in a tannery and within a year or so their venture was turning a profit and they were seeking a way to expand the business. Turning to a Western York County family that had experience in shoemaking, they contracted with 27-year-old James A. Cobb to come to their farm and ply his trade of shoemaking. Cobb appears on the 1870 census boarding with the Wilkersons. Although Lucinda was the actual owner of the farm, that year's census William was listed as "farmer" while his 22-year-old brother, Thomas, listed himself as a "farm laborer."

All went well in the tanning operation until 1871 when William and Thomas were arrested on suspicion of being involved in Ku Klux Klan activities. That year hundreds of York County men were arrested by federal authorities for being members of the terrorist group. William, like so many of his neighbors, remained a short time in the county jail, but was released for lack of evidence. Upon their release the brothers resumed their tanning business, but later in the year the partnership was dissolved when Thomas married Mary Ann Leech Watson. His energies were then directed to running the large farm that belonged to his wife, given to her by her father.

Though nothing exists that documents the education of William S. Wilkerson, it is safe to assume that William S. Wilkerson received the best education the area could provide. The late Jean Wilkerson, a descendent of William S. alluded to this in her history of the family, mentioning that his handwriting appeared to be one of an educated man. Too, it is hard to believe he could have risen to the heights of business and community service without a decent education.

Local historian James L. Strain who was familiar with W. S. Wilkerson told the story that John Smith, a wealthy planter on Broad River, took notice of Wilkerson's business abilities and supposedly offered the young man any financial backing he might need. Though we do not know the particulars of this offer, Wilkerson, in 1878, purchased 339 acres known as the old "Patsy Leech Place" for \$1,017 from sisters Martha Moss Smarr and Rugie C. Moss, who had inherited the land from their father, Jeremiah Moss. The following year he purchased and adjoining 118 acres from Anne Wright, the widow of Dr. Samuel Wright.

From the time W. S. Wilkerson began purchasing farmlands he was flowing against current the agricultural trends in South Carolina. In 1880 the average farm consisted of 143 acres; Wilkerson's first two purchases made his farm three times the state's average. By 1890 the average had dropped to 115 acres and in 1900 it was 90. During the years between 1880 to 1900 the percentage of farmer landowners declined about one-third and six of every 10 farmers in South Carolina were either tenants or sharecroppers (41% white and 78% black). Wilkerson was not part of the downward trend and because of this he rode the crest of economic security while many around him were in decline. He was in ascension while the trend was one of decline; in short, he was in the right place at the right time.

Now having a 457-acre farm and a strong financial foundation, he decided it was time to marry. W. S. Wilkerson married Nancy Scoggins (1854-1910) on 1 April 1878. James L. Strain in a 1902 article in the *Gaffney Ledger* credited Mrs. Wilkerson of having a business sense unequalled by any woman in York County.

Of this business sense, said Strain, her husband owed much to his success. Their first child, John Smith, was born in 1880, followed by brothers, James Mason in 1882, and Thomas Ward, in 1884, . [rest of children](#)

About 1887, Wilkerson hired a contractor to build a stylish twelve room home with a full basement for his growing family. The two-storied house had an upper and lower front porches, and like the gables, were trimmed with delicate gingerbread work. One outstanding feature of the house was a bell tower on the roof. This was used for summoning workers from the fields for dinner and in case of fire should it occur. It was obvious to most of the people associated with W. S. Wilkerson that he loved his home and sprawling farm. In the summer of 1915, after returning from a trip through the West and touring the Panama - Pacific Exposition in San Francisco, he compared his home to those he had seen on his journey. Though he agreed that he had seen “better land, finer crops of corn, wheat, oats, clover, alfalfa,” still, he said, he would not exchange the Leech Place for any part of that country and could think of no better place to live.

Seemingly from the beginning Wilkerson took a strong interest in promoting the science of agriculture and followed the advice that farmer's should be diversified in their crops and businesses. The first documentation of his promoting better farming practices was in 1886 when a Farmer's Convention was held in York. At this time he was still unmarried and had not begun to acquire large acreages, yet he seems to have been well known and respected for his knowledge of agriculture. He was chosen locally as one of ten delegates from the Hickory Grove area and, though not elected, was nominated to represent York County farmers at the state convention.

With the arrival of the Chicago, Cincinnati and Charleston Railroad, a tremendous boom was experienced in Western York County, creating three small towns along the line: Smyrna, Hickory Grove and Sharon. Hickory Grove received its charter from the General Assembly in 1888 and burst into activity and growth. Ever taking advantage of an opportunity to better the lives of his family Wilkerson ventured into the mercantile world when he built a twenty-five by seventy foot frame structure to house a dry goods business in the new town. When the rail line extended eastward and created the depot town of Sharon in 1889, Wilkerson, again, expanded his activities. In partnership with Albertus Hope they became the town's first cotton buyer, purchasing for J. W. P. Hope in York. In lieu of a bank, they operated from a small house near the present location of Brownie's Sales.

Delighted with her family's successes and being well into her 70s in 1888, Lucinda

Wilkerson decided to sell the land she had received from her father. She, Sarah J., William S., Thomas J., Mary R Smith and Nancy J. Buice agreed with their mother to sell her 58-acre tract to George C. Leech for \$888. Family memory informs us that Sarah Jane went to live with her brother William and his family. Remaining unmarried, she gave much appreciated help to the growing family. It seems feasible that Lucinda may have also joined the family at the new home, or with one of her other children. Lucinda died two years later, 26 April 1890.

At this point it will serve to reflect on the 10-year stellar rise of W. S. Wilkerson from 1878 to 1888. At the close of the war Wilkerson was working his mother's tiny farm along with his brother, owning nothing of his own. In 1868 they established a fledgling tanning business and expanded it one year later with a resident shoemaker. Suddenly, in 1878 he began acquiring farmland beginning with the purchase of the Patsy Leech place and subsequently other purchases. He was married that year and was fast becoming a well-known, successful farmer. We know little of his income for that period of time, but no doubt it was diversified through crops, corn and wheat-milling, molasses-making and other means associated with an agricultural life. After a few years of success, he built a beautiful, outstanding home in 1887, a mercantile business in 1888 and became a partner in a cotton buying company in Sharon. All this in 10 years, with the greatest growth occurring during a two or three year period.

Willaim Beatty was born in 1893.

Indeed W. S. Wilkerson was a star entrepreneur, who brilliantly displayed himself across the Western York County sky. Yet, not all his ventures were successful. Some time around 1894, Wilkerson, Samuel Hunt, S. B. Lumpkin, A. Tripp and J. B. Martin formed a company with \$10,000 in capital. The objective of the company was to clear a channel in the Broad River and develop a line of steam-driven hacks along the Broad and Pacolet rivers for travel and shipping. No doubt the construction of the Lockhart Cotton Mill some 10 miles down river prompted the idea, believing it would be more economical to off-load supplies and equipment at the Hickory Grove rail depot, haul them to Howell's Ferry on the Broad River, then ship them down river to the mill site. This, in lieu of off-loading in Sharon and transferring by wagon over 10 or twelve miles of poor roads with steep hills and low ravens.

In the summer of 1895 the company made a charter application to the Secretary of State to incorporate the Hickory Grove & Lockhart Shoals Transportation Company. The York County records have no entry showing the charter was

awarded, but nevertheless, a local newspaper reported the newly formed company had signed a contract with Lockhart Mill to deliver materials to the mill and transfer its goods to the rail station in Hickory Grove. As soon as a channel in the Broad was cleared (Wilkerson was credited with the work) the entrepreneurs began shipping lumber down the river during the summer of 1895. During February of the following year witnessed a landmark event by those associated with the river when the Fowler Brothers shipped the first load of cotton (19 bales) to the Lockhart Mill.

Other members of the Wilkerson family were also making news in 1896. In March Mrs. Wilkerson gave birth to a “fine bouncing baby boy”--Samuel Hunt; named for his father's partner. That fall, while John and Mason were rabbit hunting in September, John accidentally fired his gun, grazed Mason's head and removed part of his scalp.

Enthused about their progress clearing the river, Wilkerson went to Cincinnati to study the small boats used there on the Sandy River. In April he and Lumpkin went to Wilmington, North Carolina to purchase a boat, returning in May reporting they had indeed purchased a boat. However, more clearing of the river channel was needed and soon after their return from North Carolina Wilkerson immediately set a task force in motion. Progress must not have gone as well as was hoped and Wilkerson reorganized his crew.

From the lack of documentation, it is undetermined what became of the project. It may have been that road improvements made hauling overland easier. Too, it is known that a number of shipments for the Lockhart Mill construction were off-loaded in Sharon and delivered to the mill by dray carriers along what is now Highway 49. Perhaps the river, being so prone to freshets and flooding may have proved the river travel to be unreliable.

Whatever the case, W. S. Wilkerson was not done with the river. A few years later, about 1902, Wilkerson predicted that a steel bridge one day would span the river near Howell's Ferry, connecting York and Cherokee counties. It was said that some thought he was merely dreaming and secretly scoffed at his prediction. The old man, however, was neither an idle dreamer nor a prophet, but may have been privy to plans, or perhaps he inspired his son, W. Beattie Wilkerson. Seven years after his prophecy, in February 1909, his son, now a South Carolina House Representative, introduced a bill to authorize the Commissioners of York and Cherokee County to raise funds for a steel and concrete bridge just north of Howell's Ferry. Later that year we find W. S. selling a right of way to the York

County Commissioners for rerouting roads and the construction of a bridge. Wilkerson also agreed to provide a bridge across the Devil's branch when the Howell's Ferry Road was rerouted to the new river bridge. It's not certain how the local folk felt about crossing Devil's branch since for more than 100 years it was believed to be the haunt of ghosts and goblins. In April the commissioners from both counties, as well as a large crowd of spectators, met at the "Darwin Place" near the bridge site and let out a contract to the Roanoke Bridge Company for construction to be completed by 1 October 1909. In spite of flooding and late arrivals of supplies, the bridge was completed on time.

In 1905 the Yorkville Enquirer reported that son, John S. Wilkerson, the 25-year-old son of W. S was stepping into his father's entrepreneurial shoes by opening a mercantile business in Hickory Grove with a stock of \$5,000. This is probably the same mercantile business W. S. began in 1888, and having received a nod from his father John was being named manager. Fourteen years later, John's younger brother Thomas, now age 25 joined the business when he and John petitioned the Secretary of State for a charter for the Wilkerson Mercantile Company. John was president of the company with Thomas registering as secretary and treasurer of the company. It seems likely that their father had given them full ownership.

A railroad survey crew was working on both sides of the Broad during January 1907, seeking a route from Blacksburg to Lockhart Mill. They first established a base camp at Pine Grove near Wilkinsville in Cherokee County. From there they came down to Howell's Ferry to the mouth of Thicketty Creek, probably following the unused bed laid by the Chicago Cincinnati and Charleston Railroad Company. From the Beaver Dam Camp in York County, the crew searched a route on the east bank. This rail line was never realized.

By the early part of May 1907 residents on both sides of the Broad River were discussing the building of a power dam being built at Hamilton's Shoals. It may have been that word had gotten out that three men; W. S. Wilkerson, Emile Warth² (name sake of Worth Mountain) and D. J. Smith had formed a partnership and were buying water rights to use the Broad River and its tributaries for building dams to harness the waterpower. Rights were successfully purchased from G. C. Leech, W. P. Whisonant, J. W. Brown and J. J. J. Robinson. William Reid Walker, however, balked at the idea. He owned 3,600 acres that fronted on the Broad River for about four miles and equally as much on the Pacolet. He publicly declared he

² Emile Warth migrated from Germany as a piano tuner. Many Western York County people who knew Mr. Warth understood his surname was "Worth," hence the naming of the high prominence on his property and later the recreation area.

would not sell land or rights for any amount of money claiming a dam below the forks of the Broad and Pacolet would easily cover four or five hundred acres of his choice bottomlands. He was also of the opinion that it would not be beneficial for the area and it would “ruin the health of the country and make all this section uninhabitable.” The partners contract with the landowners who had sold the rights stated that unless all agreements were met within a given period of time the contract would be null and void. Perhaps the refusal to sell by Walker and others doomed the project, as no dam was very constructed at the shoals.

Early in December 1907, an arson struck the farm of J. Thomas Wilkerson levying a heavy toll on the farmer. The *Gaffney Ledger* reporter was straight forward in giving his opinion: “We deplore the idea of lynching, bua a scoundrel who would put fire to his neighbor’s property out to meet summary and severe punishment. If Mr. Wilkerson has an enemy...we don’t know it.”

By the end of the nineteenth century the Wilkerson farm was a model for modern agriculture and diversification. The farm’s income did not rely only on crops of cotton and grain as most farms of the area did, but was diversified through a sawmill, cotton gin, thresher and sorghum mill. Wilkerson’s sorghum mill was one of the finest and most efficient in the area. In October 1899, James L. Strain, correspondent for the *Gaffney Ledger*, paid a visit to the farm when the mill was in full operation. He wrote that the mill was “the most improved and thoroughly equipped outfit” he had seen. Using a steam power engine, laborers operated the mill, sawmill and cotton gin by a belt. When Strain made his visit the mill was producing 125 gallons of sorghum molasses a day. In May of 1902, Wilkerson sold 149 acres to Scott Cobb an expert in molasses making and hired him as foreman of the mill. That fall, under Cobb’s supervision, the Wilkerson mill produced 1,000 gallons of a fine grade of molasses.

Born and reared during one of the nation’s most volatile political times, it is only natural that W. S. Wilkerson would have taken more than a casual interest in politics. He served 45 years as a member of the York County Confederate Pension Board and a number of years as chairman of that board. He was a school trustee for nearly fifty years. In 1902, after serving a number of years on the York County Board of Commissioners, Wilkerson decided not to run for reelection, he was approached by a number of county leaders to run for reelection. When he declined, his supporters urged him to run for County Supervisor or State Legislature; but he remained firm, saying he preferred to stay at home and tend to his own businesses.

Early in his life Wilkerson aligned himself with the educational system of the area.

In 1899 he was one of the trustees of the Hickory Grove Academy, serving with J. N. McDill, R. M. Allison, W. J. Moorehead and J. B. Martin. Wilkerson continued to support education with the rise of the public school system.

Like the majority of the state and entire South, Wilkerson was a member of the South Carolina Democratic Party. In 1914 that party was divided into two lines of thinking--the Reformers and the Conservatives. For years the Conservatives had waited for the Reformers to revolutionize the government and rid it of corruption, all to no avail. Governor Tillman had done little to support the movement and he chose weak men to succeed him who let the Reform Movement drift.

Wilkerson numbered himself among the Conservatives, meaning he was not content with the performance of the present administration and wanted a complete overhaul of the government. In May of 1914 the York County Democrat leaders met in convention in the dining room of York's Rose Hotel. This room was being used as a courtroom while a new courthouse was under construction. (Wilkerson was one of the commission members selected to build the \$100,000 courthouse.) At this meeting he was one of ten nominees to represent the county at the state convention, though he was not elected.

Earlier, in 1892 most people in York County, especially the Conservatives had lobbied hard for an out and out prohibition on alcoholic sales. Governor Tilman was a great disappointment to the church-going prohibitionists when he backed them into a corner with his plan for a distillery system. This was a typical Tilman tactic. It did not matter that most of the people in the state and the majority of the legislature wanted, he pushed his plan and ordered bewildered statesmen and Prohibitions to vote for this plan. The Distillery Plan was far from a prohibition bill, it merely placed all sales under state jurisdiction and creating a larger tax base. Consequently all bootlegging was declared illegal.

Wilkerson, a Conservative and Prohibitionist simply was not content with the performance of the present administration and York County Senator J. S. Brice supported the Dispensary Bill, Wilkerson and the Mount Vernon Methodist pastor took public issue with Brice during the campaign. Tilman's system was passed in 1892, but after thirty years, bootlegging and alcoholic abuse was rampant in York County.

In 1919, in hopes of eradicating bootleg whiskey, a grassroots movement took root late one Sunday afternoon at a meeting at Mount Vernon Methodist Church in Hickory Grove. At that time the Broad River Township Community Improvement

Association was formed with W. S. Wilkerson and his son, W. Beattie as main activists. R. L. A. Smith was elected President and Beattie, Secretary.

W. S. and Beattie Wilkerson were outspoken on the subject of bootlegging and left no doubt as to where they stood on the issue. The Evening Herald in a 1969 article on W. Beattie Wilkerson described him as “humorous, quick minded” and when necessary, “forceful.” Both father and son demonstrated the latter quality at one of the meetings of the Improvement Association when Beattie publicly stated that certain “white men of prominence” were connected with the illegal operation and would do everything they could to hinder the eradication movement. W. S. rose and declared, “This whole country around here...is organized against us...Magistrate Smith cannot move in any direction without their knowing. They watch him like a hawk. They’ve even got their dogs trained to bark at posses as they go by, and on the bark of some of these guard dogs you hear a shot or two, followed by answering shots and spreading out until all the distillers in that particular section are aroused. Yes, they are organized and we’ve got to organize and up hold the law or the country won’t be worth living in. There is a right and wrong to everything. The only thing I am afraid of is to do wrong. But we are right in this. I am not afraid to do right and I have no respect for any man who is unwilling to do right. We might have a few right in here who are subject to suspicion; but the majority of us are on the square and we are not going to be very badly fooled I guess.”

W. S. Wilkerson was an avid fan of Western York County and would do everything possible to improve the lives of the people who lived there. Today’s common complaint of bad roads in Western York County definitely has some history behind it. In 1922 appropriations were being made to build what was termed as the “West Road” from York to Sharon, Hickory Grove, Smyrna, ending at the Cherokee County line. Dr. Joseph Saye of Sharon fervently lobbied the state for additional funds to build the road. Wilkerson endorsed Saye’s request as well as use of the county chain gang. He argued that in all the 30 years of the chain gang’s existence, the Broad River and Bullocks Creek townships had received only 18 months of service from these free laborers. Through Saye’s and Wilkerson’s labors, as well as others, enough funds were appropriated and the concrete road was completed.

Not only dedicated to serving his community, township and county, he was a dedicated churchman and spent much of his energies and money to support and improve Mount Vernon Methodist Church. As the Civil War raged on, a spiritual revival began in response to men and their families came face to face with near certain death. W. S. Wilkerson was no exception and shortly after his return from

the Virginia battlefields, he united with the Mount Vernon Methodist Church. Uniting with this congregation was the first step in creating a union of church and family that has continued for more than 150 years.

Today, Mount Vernon Methodist and the Wilkerson family are nearly synonymous. For more than sixty years W. S. Wilkerson was a member of the church and set an example for his family. He served the congregation in various offices and though dedicated to his own, he contributed to the causes of other denominations. In 1890 Bullock's Creek Presbyterian Church was raising funds to erect a monument in the church cemetery to commemorate their first pastor, Rev. Joseph Alexander, who came in 1774. Wilkerson made a small contribution.

When the Mount Vernon congregation decided to replace the 1860 meetinghouse, a Building Committee was appointed; they were: D. John Smith, John Thomas Wilkerson, Robert Latham, Abernathy Smith, Joseph Morgan Leech, William Smith Wilkerson, Jonathan I. Buice, Robert A. Foster, William T. Slaughter, J. Preston Ramsey and Rev. S. D. Bailey. The meetinghouse was completed and dedicated in 1909. One of the first, if not the first funeral conducted in the new sanctuary of that of Nancy Wilkerson, the wife of W. S. Wilkerson, who died in 1910 of kidney inflammation.

For more than a year before his death in 1925, "Uncle Billy" Wilkerson's health began to take a remarkable decline. He was finally confined to his home and cared for by a loving family. Aware of approaching death, Wilkerson deeded some of his land holdings to two of his sons. For "one dollar, love and affection" he gave 92 acres to Sam and 341.88 acres to Beattie.

Being one of the best known and respected men of the county there was a near constant flow of visitors who inquired into his well being. In the evening before his death "the grand old man" was in good spirits talking with his family and some visitors. The night went as usual and "Uncle Billy," rose early, as he was accustomed. He seemed to be well until 7 O'clock; sitting up in bed he was suddenly stricken with a heart attack and died instantly. Word rapidly spread over the county and within hours friends and family gathered at the Wilkerson home to give what comfort they could to the bereaved that included Wilkerson's five sons and one daughter: John Smith, James Mason, Thomas Ward, Mrs. Ola Edwards, William Beattie and Samuel Hunt Wilkerson.

On that cold November morning chosen for the eulogy, mourners gathered about Mount Vernon Methodist Church, where the old man had worshipped for more

than 60 years. Among those standing outside were a number of “colored people” who worked and lived on the Wilkerson farm.

The lineup of officiating ministers was impressive: Pastor W. Glenn Smith, Rev. W. Lewis, a former pastor then living in Woodruff. The family had particularly desired his presence since he was last minister Wilkerson had heard before his hearing deteriorated so badly and his condition became so frail he could no longer attend preaching services. Others were Rev. E. B. Hunter pastor of the Sharon Associate Reformed Presbyterian church, Rev. R. M. Bell of the Hickory Grove Associate Reformed Presbyterian church, Rev. H. Rabb of Indiana and W. Munnerlyn, the presiding elder of Rock Hill District.

During the service, Rev. Smith recalled former times and the role the deceased had played in their lives. He reminded the people of the great interest Wilkerson had shown in the growth and progress of his church and community, as well as his interest in educational affairs. Some had their own personal stories: “He loaned me \$50 to pay a part of my first year’s expenses when I told him I wanted to go to college.” Another reminisced, “He bought me a car and gave me long years to pay for it, and he helped me in more ways than one to get on my feet and to start in the world.” Still another recalled, “He has helped me in more ways than one, and I know lots of others in this and other communities for whom he did a whole lot. He was a man who lived his religion and practiced Christianity by his good works.”

Rev. Lewis paid tribute to the many good qualities exhibited by Wilkerson, and spoke of his simple, childlike faith and how he had proved to be an inspiration to him. “Every man and woman who has had the pleasure of knowing Mr. Wilkerson is a better person by having contact and acquaintance with him.” Lewis went on to say that there was no question of the fact that Hickory Grove and the county owed Wilkerson a debt of gratitude for his many achievements in working for a better community. The funeral service included several of Mr. Wilkerson’s favorite hymns sung by a ladies quartet. Robert Moss, a friend of many years and singing master of the Smyrna community, sang a solo.

In spite of the cold, windy weather, as pallbearers, Leon M. Allison Jr., ___ Plexico, John Cobb, ___ Gill, A. L. Brooks and Jett Smith removed the body from the church to the nearby Hickory Grove Cemetery, a large number of relatives, friends, men, women and children braved the raw wind and followed the hearse to the burial site. Following the graveside service, the crowd slowly evaporated sharing memories of the “Grand Old Man of York County.”

Check to see when Thomas married Watson woman to see if it corresponds with his release from jail. Did he marry in 1871--maybe he did not serve time.

Did WS enter army 1 Jan 1864?

Sarah Jane died in 1917. Took over household duties when Nancy Died.

HG Cemetery trustees: C. S. Moorehead, J. W. Castles, R.L.A Smith, Mrs. W. N. Whisonant and Mrs J. N. Wylie. J. N. McDill sold 44,100 square feet for \$50

Children:

**John Smith 1880
Silent partner of Wilkerson Supply Co**

**James Mason 1882
Musician. Operated store in Hickory Grove with bro John.**

**Thomas Ward 1884
Merchant until premature death in 1932**

William Beattie 1893

Samuel Hunt 1896

WS built store in HG for sons.

With Bro Tom, brother in law Jonathan Buice, the built the Wilkerson School

Total acreage totaled about 1,250 acres.