

"I REMEMBER"

(Recollections by Mr. W.H. Cowan told to Mrs. John Walker and Mrs. Echols.)

If there is any significance in names, Mr. W.H. Cowan is especially fortunate for his long name came to him in an unusual way. His father and mother often entertained the preachers as they stopped overnight to hold services in the community. On one occasion there were two ministers in the home for the week end. These were Rev. William Hall, the Presbyterian preacher at Hopewell and Rev. L. McDonald the preacher at Neely's Creek. Mr. Cowan's parents decided that it was an appropriate time to have their son baptized so choosing parts of each minister's name they had the visiting preachers baptize their baby, giving him the long name of William Hall McDonald Cowan a name now shortened to Mr. W.H. Cowan or just Mr. Will.

When Mr Will was born in June of 1860 there were many large plantations, many faithful slaves, plenty of wholesome food and it was during the days of homespun clothing. His father owned about 1000 acres of land, about 35 slaves, 10 mules and several riding horses. A thousand acres was not thought of as a particularly large plantation for many other people owned much larger tracts. Col. Richard Springs owned 1000 acres and Mr. Bill Neely and Mr John Steele owned still larger acreage.

The Cowan home was a large two storied white house set in a grove of tall oaks and poplars. Although the old home burned many years ago two of the chimneys are still standing across the road from where Mr. Otis Workman now lives. Between the plantation and Rock Hill lay a big swamp of tangled vines, dense underbrush and trees. There were few roads and the existing roads were almost impassable in the winter months.

Going to town was an event long to be remembered and the hitching posts in Rock Hill were all in use on a Saturday. Mr. Will remembers Mr. Arnold Friedheim taking him by the hand and leading him into the store where he gave him a small bag of sugar - a very precious and scarce article at that time. He recalls that Capt. A.E. Hutchison was a great friend of his father's. ... But let Mr. Cowan tell the story in his own words:

* "My father was married twice and had seven children by each wife, so I had six full brothers and sisters and seven half brothers and sisters. It was difficult to keep names straight, for I had full brothers names John and George and also half brothers with the same name. All of them are gone now and I will be 87 next June.

My mother was Miss Ruth Brady from the Union Church community so I have relatives scattered all over York County.

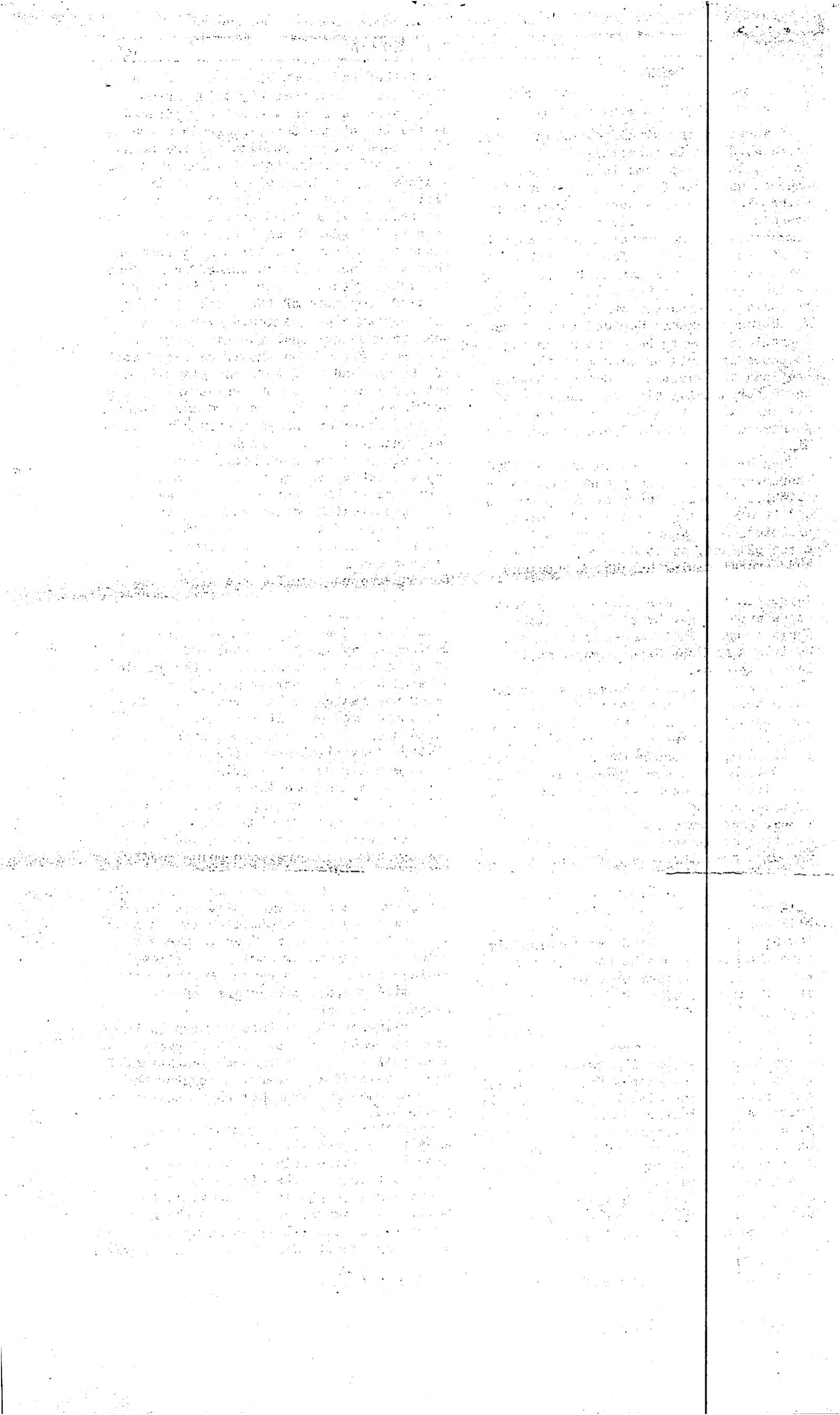
My father had about 35 slaves and the first time I remember any thing about these negroes I was a small boy perched on the top of the barnyard fence watching them clean out the stables and the barn. After a bit I heard them talking about me and several of them said I was their little boss and would some day be their big boss. That sounded good to me for they were my friends. Often I would smuggle biscuits to them from the big kitchen and they would do nearly anything for me even to fighting for me. Shortly afterwards I heard some more of the slaves talking and they said no one would ever be their boss because now that the war was over they were free. When they were freed most of the men and boys left the plantation but the women stayed on for several years working as before in the yard and kitchen.

I well remember the good things we had to eat, things that were cooked on the huge fire-place in the cook room. Every Saturday was baking day when rows of crusty brown loaves of bread came from the oven. Corn pone tasted better than any of the fancy foods of today. Usually it was cut and fried in butter for breakfast. In the gardens and fields we raised vegetables for our own use and for the slaves and the smoke house was always filled with meat. I remember watching the negroes kill hogs and prepare the meat. Old Martin Massey was the butcher and often 20 or 25 hogs were hanging on the gamble pole on a cold frosty morning. The water was heated in big iron pots with hot stones and when it was scalding I would hear one of the negroes call out, 'Waters 'jes right now, boss.' The sausage mills were kept going, side meat salted down and soon the smoke house was filled with hams hanging from the rafters. Usually the smoke from the hickory chips made my eyes smart so I could not tell exactly how many hams were being cured. After the smoking of the meat big hogs-head were rolled in and each filled with shoulders, hams and side meat with ashes over each layer of meat. Also stored away for winter's use were 10 to 12 barrels of molasses. I remember seeing Frank Fewell, a slave get his hand caught in the sugar cane mill one day and several of his fingers were crushed.

I remember the clothes we wore in those days for each piece of cloth of every description was made on the plantation. I have a beautiful hand-woven counterpane of wool made by my mother when she was 17 years old.

My Father's sisters Aunt Mattie and Aunt Betty Cowan lived with us and they operated a large spinning and weaving room just back of the big house. Seven negro women helped in the weaving. Aunt Betty was slightly crippled so she most often sat by the little spinning wheel while Aunt Mattie did the more active work.

* William Cowan, born c. 1792.
r Born c. 1835.



"I Remember," (Continued)

The cloth was dyed with indigo (I can show you where the indigo patch used to be) and walnut and other barks were used to make different colors. My aunts also had another interesting work, namely helping to care for the triplets, Bob, Nannie and Mary. Other people have told me that my mother was so busy that she cared for one baby and each of the madden aunts cared for another. Evidently these triplets received excellent care for they all lived to maturity.

My aunts were greatly interested in the church and every time the special communion services were held at Neely's Creek they would go and spend the day and night with the Boyds or the Williams in order that they could attend all the services. On Sabbath, father would hitch two horses to the big carriage and with Henry or Tony as the driver, mother and I would go with him to church. After the morning sermon there was pionic dinner on the ground and in the afternoon another sermon or two then we all came home bringing with us Aunt Mattie and Aunt Betty.

My first school house was the Rock Spring school and there I learned my ABCs and also got a whipping nearly every day. Do they whip the children at school now? I don't see how they teach them anything if they don't. Miss Hammond, a cousin of the Fewells was my teacher. If on Saturday night Mr. Mat Jolly had come calling on her we always noticed how kind and nice she was on Monday morning.

My first Sabbath School teacher was Mrs. Dick Springs and she often brought along her daughter Miss Bessie as she walked over from the farm now known as the Springstein Farm. Mrs. Springs kept me close to her trying to teach me to sing bass, also teaching me the catechism and Bible verses. She often raised the tunes and I also remember John Knox and his tuning fork.

The Springs were fine religious people and on muddy days when the horses could not pull the carriage I have seen a yoke of oxen pulling their carriage to the Methodist Church in Rock Hill. I also went to Sabbath School at Ebenezer and to the First Presbyterian Church in Rock Hill. My teachers there were Miss Mary Adams and Mr. Hutch White.

When I began going to Neely's Creek there was a long partition in the church separating the men and the women.

I have been particularly interested in the building of the educational building at Neely's Creek and did what I could to help Miss Elizabeth Lesslie, who was the leader in that movement. Also I have been greatly interested in seeing the church grounds make more beautiful and have tried to help in that by setting out

shrubs and plants.

Somehow, I remember things far back in the past better than the things which have happened more recently. One of the things I'll never forget was the time that Sherman came through the South and Wheeler's Cavalry was assigned the task of meeting and fighting Sherman. Wheeler's force of about 500 men camped in our grove and up the road toward Rock Hill. My father had heard they were coming so he tried to hide the cotton and mules and other provisions to keep them from being requisitioned by the Southern Cavalry. He had a deep pit dug in the swamp below our house and two wagon loads of meat were hidden so well the meat was never found. 60 bales of cotton were also successfully hidden in the woods. The 10 mules and my mother's five gaited riding horse were taken down into the woods of the black jack section and a negro posted to keep watch. However this negro, Henry, became friendly with a Yankee soldier who was hiding in the woods and the Yankee gave Henry a gun. When the negro saw some of Wheeler's men coming he forgot to get the mules into hiding places. Instead he shot at the Confederates. He and another slave, Andy, were captured by Wheeler's men and some of the officers came to my father and told him they were going to give the negroes a good whipping. My mother took me by the hand and with my father we walked down to the camp. My father and mother both begged the soldiers to let the negroes go but they refused. Andy was whipped first and then came Henry's turn. He was a big strong negro and just two licks across his back made him leap through the circle of men, knocking soldiers right and left and he escaped into the thickets. Several days after the cavalry left Henry came creeping in with his face cut and his clothes torn to shreds.

Times soon changed after that. The slaves were freed, large plantations broken up, my father died and when I was 14 years old I had to do my part toward managing the farm and earning a living.

In 1901 I became manager of the Rock Hill Oil Company where I worked until 1926. I've done a little bit of all kinds of work, farming, running a cotton gin, running a corn mill, saw mill and other things. Now, I'm not working any more just sitting and watching the people ride by, reading my newspaper and my Bible.

I can call to mind many of my school friends like, John Knox, Bob Cornwell, Brooks Cornwell, Joan and Tobe Wallace, Bill Boyd, John Boyd, Robert Gettys, Jim Williford, Nasa Williams, David Lesslie and Joe Simpson. If I had time I could think of many others. The old times were good and I hope there are better times ahead for the church and community. ✓

