

Fly-Wilburn

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The information was compiled from the following sources:

- *The Directory of Williamson County Tennessee Burials, Vol. 1*, Williamson County Historical Society, ©1973, page 96.
- Research and recollections of Vance Little, 2008
- Recollections of Mrs. Joe Ann Wilburn Griggs, owner of the home, February 10, 2008
- *Looking for Magical Country (A Gathering of Savory Southern Characters)*, Maria von Matthiessen, ©2001, pages 83-90

The main structure that stands today was built in 1860. It incorporated an existing log cabin and the age of that cabin is unknown. At least one other subsequent addition occurred. A collapsed smoke house is present but the magnificent dairy barn on the property was lost to fire in the 1970s. The house at one time contained six fireplaces, a cistern, and sulfur well. A Fly family cemetery is on a hill overlooking the house and has many old graves. A summary of those buried in the cemetery is included.

The home sits on 120 acres and represents one of the largest undeveloped land sites in the city limits of Brentwood. The home was acquired by Joe Brice Wilburn in 1955 and was occupied by his family until 1997. The property is still in the family and used for farming.

The Wilburn family and the house were featured in Matthiessen's book and the appropriate pages are included here. All the photos were taken at the house by the author.

The Fly family has been prominent in the East Brentwood area since its settlement in the late 1700s. They came from Northampton, North Carolina. The Fly-Wilburn house is located on land that was deeded to John Fly in 1799. It was deeded to him by his father, Elisha Fly. The elder Fly is said to have married a Cherokee maiden who was the niece of Sequoia, who invented the Cherokee alphabet.

John Fly was said to have been a Methodist preacher. He was one of the original trustees of the Methodist Church when land was deeded to them to build the first church on a different location in 1837. The Fly family owned a great deal of land in the East Brentwood area. They also ran a grist mill and a lumber mill.

In 1807, John Fly bought 640 acres of land in Maury County. Several of his children moved there and found the Goshen Methodist Church. The area came to be called Fly Station. Many descendants of those founders still live in the area.

In 1900, William Fly and his wife Cynthia Sledge Fly, deeded land for the building of the Liberty School across the road from the Liberty Methodist Church. This school was open for the education of children in the East Brentwood area until 1942.



Above: rear of the house showing the original log cabin with a wood plank siding.
Below: A portion of the gravesites at the Fly family cemetery
(both photos by Randy Lee, February 23, 2008)



STANFIELD, Edd; B. Feb. 19, 1883; D. March 15, 1920.

FLOYD CEMETERY

Location: 18th District; State Hwy. 96, about one mile west of Rutherford County line and about 50 yards north of road. There is only one marked stone in the locality. There are number of stones set on edge, apparently as headstones. Some bear faintly discernible initials, such as J. H., L. P. H., etc. The graves of children seem to be predominant. Information by: Col. Campbell H. Brown.

IRWIN, Mary; B. April 22, 1863; D. May 4, 1928.

FLY CEMETERY

Location: 16th District; Brice Wilburn Farm, Waller-Ragsdale Road. Information by: Mr. Vance Little.

FLY, Annie E.; Wife of J. M. Fly; B. Mar. 1, 1854; D. Jan. 6 1891.
" , Benjamin; B. March 18, 1832; D. Nov. 18, 1896.
" , Catherine; B. Nov. 14, 1792; D. Dec. 1, 1855.
" , Catherine E.; Wife of B. F. Fly; B. Jan. 5, 1837; D. Aug. 21, 1861; Married to B. F. Fly Feb. 1860.
" , Emily; Wife of S. B. Fly; B. --; D. Mar. 3, 1898; Age 87 yrs.
" , John; B. 1772; D. Dec. 1, 1855.
" , Lawrence; B. Nov. 11, 1791; D. June 30, 1874.
" , Matilda; B. Oct. 19, 1818; D. Oct. 14, 1874.
" , S. B.; B. May 5, 1823; D. Nov. 20, 1884.
HILL, Jeremiah; B. Sept. 28, 1799; D. Sept. 29, 1892.
LAYNE, Andrew J.; Son of W. H. and E. Layne; B. Feb. 28, 1857; D. April 19, 1877.
" , Thomas; Son of W. H. and Elizabeth Layne; B. July 6, 1866; D. June 2, 1894.

ELISHA FLY CEMETERY

Location: 17th District; located on the Stanley Fly farm off Rocky Fork Road. It is just behind his house. Information by: Mr. Vance Little.

ELDER, Billy King (Infant); B. --; D. Nov. 27, 1935.
" , Rose Marie (Infant); B. --; D. Feb. 3, 1932.
" , Sarah E. (Infant); B. --; D. Nov. 27, 1933.
FLY, Agnes L.; B. March 4, 1905; D. July 31, 1905.
" , Elisha; B. Mar. 25, 1837; D. Sept. 26, 1899.
" , Jessie M.; B. 1882; D. 1966.
" , Sarah E.; B. April 12, 1839; D. (no date-about 1923 according to Stanley Fly).
" , T. Mack; B. 1880; D. 1948.
" , W. W.; (no marker, but according to Stanley Fly); B. about 1876; D. about 1933.

Keepsake Memories

JOANN GRIGGS

There is a top-notch experience awaiting an outsider when he comes to talk to a Southerner. For once he has entered his yard and stands before him, the slow spill of words begins to build to a mighty Mississippi flow. By the second hour or so, the outsider is sneaking glances at his car wondering if he will ever get back over the gushing.

My Yankee conscience was gnawing ravenously at me with all of the things I thought I needed to do before the sun hit the ground, when I left Joann Griggs's father's yard. She stood next to me for an astonishing three hours straight ... paying magnificent verbal tribute to him, to this farmer, her father, Joe Brice Wilburn. I left her side awed and amazed, for I was immovably then, convinced, that once ignited she could talk twenty snorting bulls with nostrils flaring and horns lowered ... and forty rush-

ing Dobermans with fangs barred ... right into the ground.

She was an exceptionally good talker, seemingly never pausing for breath. Her choice of words was select indeed. I had never heard the English language gussied up in quite such a fashion. "Twicet" and "whupped" were two words I remember. Her stories were like sipping some incomparable mountain soup with all sorts of rare mountain herbs, never to be served again, and only to be tasted once.

I arrived there by driving up a slim muddy road which ended up on her father's front lawn; heaving the car over good-sized rocks and dipping suddenly into pits hidden by pools of water from a recent summer shower. Landing safely on some grass, I was convinced that at least one tire had been wrenched off and was lying back in the mud, useless. But they were all still there.



Mrs. Griggs began by telling me about the dogs she had had as a child, "six, seven, eight (her voice lowered as if she were telling me a secret), as many as I could git." I nodded at her with encouragement to go on. But it was not really necessary, so caught up was she in the stirring of those memories, each sentence lighting her up ... soon she was glowing like the crimson azalea bush springing up between the front wheels of an abandoned tractor.

As her mind ran off to gather up other recollections, I was left behind with a creeping crawling of ticks; who with determined concentration, were hiking up each leg of my blue jeans. I tried to politely divert them back onto the ground with a twig.

Curiously, not a single crawling biting creeping critter ventured onto our Miz Griggs. Perhaps they were already too familiar with her taste, lucky for her as her fingers were happily guiding her head into nods and rotations left and right as she made comments to herself. My fingers smacked with hopefully-not-too-visibly-agitated motions at the mosquitoes, also seeming to want to participate in my new taste sensation along with the ants, who were hurriedly climbing down from a nearby blackberry bush and

moving toward me in a single-line procession.

By the time I was able to take a flying leap from the lawn, high up over her river of memories back into my car, I was left mightily impressed by said performance, and could only conclude that once upon a time, from far away across the sea, some Scotch-Irish immigrants must have brought along with them ... this glorious gift of gab.

Several days later, sitting in my hotel room in Nashville, gazing at the pile of typing the typist had transcribed from the recording tapes I did of Mrs. Griggs, one story stood up from the pile, and beckoned me to look at it again. Here is that story recounted to me by Mrs. Griggs at the end of our visit, as the evening rose up around us along with her river of words.

"I could never do anything to displease my father, never told a lie or nuthin'. He's a tiny man, but all he had to do is look at me like he was goin' to cry, and I'd know he could not stand what I'da done. He'd say, 'Sister ... did you do that?' I just knew the way he was made, he loved everybody, and he loved me so much that I could not betray him. I thought he might just have a heart attack and die. He made me want to have

(facing page) Joann Griggs

him respect me, the way I respected him, so he ruled me that way, and there was never any conflict, he never had to whup me. We was just like that, we jelled.”

“I was always behind him, I was the first child, the only child for four n’ a half years. I remember there was this winter, the winter of ’50-’51. I was eleven years old. One day it was real calm and warm, then all of a sudden it hit, just like that, a big horrible winter storm. It jus’ froze up everything. The truck was frozen down n’ the creek. We had no way of gettin’ it out. Electricity was out for weeks and weeks and weeks. We had the brightest moon that ever was durin’ that cold, it was so bright.”

“I would go out every day with my dad with the criss-cross saw n’ cut wood so we could have a fire; and I would roll down the bucket into the deep well on the back porch to draw water, as the ponds was frozen. Ma’ dad would have to hitchhike to the fair-grounds to feed some of the horses that we had out there, and he wouldn’t git back ‘til the middle of the night. So I would git the water for all the cattle and the other horses and the chickens to help out.”

“We didn’t wash for a while ‘cause there was no point; there was no way to hang the clothes out ta dry, so we just kept dirty clothes. And then we ran out of money, and

my daddy said, ‘We have no money and no food.’ I said, ‘Daddy, I’ve got some money.’ I always hoarded my ice cream money or any money I could git. I had ‘bout \$3.50 hidden. So I said, ‘Daddy, I’ve got money.’ So we put burlap bags ‘round our feet and made snowshoes out of ‘em, ‘cause we didn’t have no galoshes, and we traipsed ‘cross the fields. We didn’t go by the roads, we went the way of the crow, to the closest little store, and we bought enough food to survive on ‘til dad could get paid back some money owed him for training someone’s horses. I remember lookin’ at his white face goin’ along them fields in that cold bright moonlight, and them cedar trees bowed under caps of snow lookin’ like prayin’ priests, guidin’ us along the top of that slippery ice, seemin’ like it was goin’ on forever.”

“All his life God’s seen to ma’ dad. There’s an expression he got from the Bible ... ‘cast yer bread upon the water, and it always come back.’ And that’s the way he’s always lived. He’d give his last dime, he will help anybody, he’d take the shirt off his back. And it always come back.”

I wonder if parents realize that ... children never forget. They will remember forever so many things their parents have done, and said. ■

Farmer Joe Brice Williams Remembers

"He was in the hospital more n' seven times 'n 93'," said Joann Griggs. "Had him a stroke, had him some real bad falls, but he won't give up, just keeps fightin' it, hangin' in there."

She was bringing her father the farmer, Joe Brice Wilburn, tenderly from the farmhouse. He was buoyed up by an aluminum walker he slid along the lawn as he went to look at a young tulip tree.

"He wanted some young trees planted so my husband set this tree out here for him. Here's the little tree Dad."

Farmer Wilburn was indeed a tiny man, frail.

"Here's yer cane Dad, it'll help so's you don't git tired," she said switching the aluminum walker for the cane.

Joann was helping me to put her father in a place where I could take his photograph.

"Well I gotta have my hat," he said, his voice creaking like a rusty chain trying to draw a bucket of water from a well. Joann went running back to the house to get his hat.

"Most people now don't wear a hat," he said. "When I was farmin', I didn't wear a hat with too wide a brim. It got in the way."

"Oh," I said.

"Yep," he said, "I've lived a few years." He began to sway behind the little tulip tree as I hurriedly set up my tripod. "I've raised me some race horses, never did have what you call top form. Had me some good form though. Those top form horses, like Kentucky Derby horses, they're hard to come by. But I did have me a horse that raced the Kentucky Derby one time. He didn't do no good. He was a chestnut horse."

"Tell her 'bout one of them stories you've got dad," said Joann hoisting him back up from behind to get the sag out of his knees.

"Yep yep, yes mam, I've got a story for you." He poked gently at a leaf on the new little tulip tree with his cane to see how it was coming along.

"Let me tell you what happened."

"There was four of us boys. We was 'bout sixteen years old, sent from Tennessee to



Farmer Joe Brice Wilburn with the Little Tulip Tree

Arlington Park in Chicago. They was tryin' to make jockeys out of us. Well, we fellas was goin' down the road outsid'a' Arlington Park past this real big fancy house . . . throwin' rocks and hangin' 'bout in the trees . . . climbin' up them then jumpin' down; and this man come down from the house and says, 'How you doin' boys? How'er you all doin'?' "

"Alright," we said, "we're jus' throwin' rocks down here."

"Well," he said, "help yourself. If you want, come on up to the house and I'll show you around."

"We was scared, but we went up there anyways, to this very big house, very fancy. So he showed us all through the house and everything, and they was gamblin' there. Dice tables, card playin' everything like that was goin' on. When we had looked 'round the house and we was ready to leave, he asked us when we wanted to come back. Well, we wanted to but we was scared by it all. We didn't find out 'til much later that it was Al Capone's place, and Al Capone was sittin' out there when we was there, playin' cards, goin' full blast." ■

(right) Picture of Farmer Wilburn in his youth as a jockey





Dot, Mrs. Wilburn's dog

Dot, Mrs. Wilburn's Dog

Dot, Mrs. Wilburn's dog is a Jack Russell terrier. "Say I'm a *loveable* bugger," Mrs. Wilburn cooed at Dot as they posed on the front porch next to the wringer washing machine leaning against the rusted lawn mower lying on top of empty Jack Daniels whiskey boxes. Dot obligingly leaned her head on Mrs. Wilburn's pink and white nylon robed bosom, and looked helpfully into my camera lens with wise eyes.

"She goes affta' everythin," said Mrs. Wilburn hoisting Dot a little higher in her comfortably fleshed arms with pride, "bobcats and foxes ... once she dug up a groundhog out there, bigger n' her,"

"She gits along with cats though. She don't bother with them."

"Say I'm momma's baby," she simpered at Dot jiggling her up and down before she gave her a big smacking kiss.

"Somethin' got 'er a while ago, we don't know what. It just *tore* that skin off her throat. She'd been gone a week and I just assumed someone had stolen 'er, like they did 'er father and brother. But she come *draggin'* in. The skin at her throat was just

hangin' down. So I carried her to the vet. Doc Jones is the one I always take her to. He took a fishhook out of one of her front legs the week before. Had to cut that out. She limps now. Doc said, 'Dot, you just won't stay out of trouble, will ya.'"

"She had puppies one time. My youngest daughter killed one of the pups. A snake bit it. And I gave the others away. So the pups are all gone. But she's still here tough as nails. She'll be eight years old this September. I don't know how old that is in human years. Maybe thirty-six or so, I guess. That's like the horse down there in the barn, he's thirty-six years old."

"Sometimes she gits mad at me. And she pouts, and won't let me speak to her. She'll turn her head away. You've seen children pout? Well, if she gits mad at me 'bout anything, she'll turn her head and I'll say, 'Dot, come to Momma,' and she'll just run to my little granddaughter. And my granddaughter will pick 'er up."

"Then Dot looks back at me and gives me a look as if to say, '*See*, now I've found me a *new* momma.'"

■