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Murder in the Town of Neverson

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Neverson Williams took strides to establish a town named Neverson on property he owned. It was in the proximity of the Nash and Wilson county lines south of Highway 264 in Old Fields Township between Sims and Bailey. When Norfolk and Southern Railway installed tracks between Wilson and Raleigh, the tracks crossed Neverson's property. A depot was constructed for scheduled train stops at Neverson. However, to make an unscheduled stop, travelers could flag a train with a white handkerchief to travel to destinations east or west of Neverson. In addition to a depot, a U. S. Postmaster, Neverson Williams' daughter, Shug Williams Allen, was appointed to serve Neverson from April 10, 1908 to August 31, 1911. Also, a 1913 road map marked the town's name and location. The twenty-block town was platted; yet, no lots were ever sold. There were residents living in the vicinity of Neverson although the name of the town eventually faded from the maps and only a few people make references to the Neverson community today.

Interesting stories surround Neverson Williams' social, business and political activities as well as the activities near the Town of Neverson during the early part of the twentieth century. One was the murder of Julius "Bug" Williams. On Saturday night, March 20, 1909, a small group of family and friends met at one of their favorite Saturday night gathering

places, Neverson's store. His store was in the vicinity of Neverson's home place and the Town of Neverson. Bug Williams and Ben Boykin were among the patrons that fateful night imbibing and socializing. As the evening wore on, twenty-year-old Williams got into an argument with seventeen-year-old Boykin. The young men had never harbored any hostilities toward one another and had always been friends. In fact, not only had they been friends, they had family ties too. Bug Williams was married to Ben Boykin's sister, Effie. They were brothers-in-law. As well as being brothers-in-law, they were also first cousins once removed. Ben and Effie's father, Richmond Irvin Boykin married Mary Eliza Williams, Henry H. Williams' daughter. Henry Williams and Neverson Williams were brothers. Despite their familial ties and friendship, to worsen the circumstances of this tragic event, Bug and Effie were expecting their first child whom would be left fatherless.

The argument escalated between Williams and Boykin and Boykin shot Williams. The ball entered just above the right eye. While being treated at home, one doctor said he should be up in a few days and another doctor said there were nine out of ten chances that Williams would not survive the injury.¹⁻² When Williams' condition deteriorated, he was taken to Rex hospital in Raleigh for treatment. The doctors at Rex also presented a grim prognosis. Williams was not expected to live. His speech was incoherent; however, when he first arrived at Rex Hospital, Williams did say his brother-in-law shot him accidentally.³⁻⁶

Shortly after the shooting, A. R. Taylor, Justice of the Peace for Old Fields Township, issued a warrant for Ben Boykin's arrest for his assault on Bug Williams and set the court date for the May Term of Superior Court. Wilson County

Sheriff William D. P. Sharpe and Deputy George W. Mumford were looking for Boykin but Boykin evaded arrest by hiding out in the neighborhood.⁷ The sheriff believed Boykin was headed to Kenly or Selma to catch a train to his grandfather's house in Florida. Consequently, the sheriff notified the surrounding towns about the arrest warrant and provided a description of Boykin. On March 23, the sheriff and his deputy staked out the train station in Selma looking for Boykin without success. Afterwards, on their way to Boykin's house, they stopped at Simms Siding and discovered Boykin had been arrested by Constable J. A. Bailey and taken before the Justice of the Peace.⁸ The sheriff transported Boykin to Wilson where he was placed in jail.

Williams succumbed to his injuries on March 26, 1909. Dr. Henry B. Best, Coroner of Wilson County scheduled an inquest on March 29 in Neverson. When the sheriff began selecting a jury for the inquest from five hundred or more people examined for the jury, he was astonished that all but three were related to Williams or Boykin. The sheriff searched the neighborhood for two hours to find enough jury members to complete the Coroner's jury. Finally, the jury selected to serve was: R. B. Evans, J. G. Tank, J. F. Corbett, R. L. Land, James Lucas and Charles Farmer.⁹ A few days after Bug's death, he was buried in the Neverson Family Cemetery. His epitaph, "Not dead but sleeping," was recorded on his grave marker.

After hearing witnesses on the afternoon of March 29, the coroner's jury reached the following verdict. "We the undersigned corner's jury, find that the deceased, Bug Williams, came to his death from a pistol shot wound in the head, said wound having been inflicted by a pistol in the hands of Ben Boykin."¹⁰ Ben was indicted for murder and in early April his

bail was set at \$5,000. Family and neighbors raised the money and Ben was released on bond pending the trial which took place about two months later.¹¹

In May, Solicitor Daniels, assisted by Attorneys James H. Pou and William A. Finch, prosecuted the case in Wilson County Court.¹² John E. Woodard, F. S. Hassel and J. A. Farmer represented Boykin.¹³⁻¹⁴ Judge Oliver H. Allen presided in the Wilson County trial. After hearing the evidence, Boykin was found guilty of manslaughter and Judge Allen sentenced Boykin to six months in the Wilson County Jail.¹⁵⁻¹⁶ Some newspapers reported Ben got away with murder. A reporter from the *New and Observer* wrote, "This is what Ben Boykin gets for slaying his brother-in-law."¹⁷

In early November 1909 Ben Boykin completed his sentence and was released from the Wilson County Jail. A reporter said, "He will take the Norfolk & Southern train for Neverson, where a big home coming awaits him. A barbecue will be given and his friends will help him to celebrate. Quite an unusual proceedings this."¹⁸

The newspapers never published any details about the altercation between Little Bug and Ben Boykin. According to Jim Burgess, Ben Boykin and Little Bug operated Neverson's distillery and had been producing apple brandy earlier in the year. One night Ben Boykin entered the brandy house and rolled a keg out of the building into the woods. Later in the week, the keg was retrieved and some of the brandy was sold to some of the locals. Little Bug was served some of the brandy at a friend's, recognized the flavor and asked about the origin of the brandy. He was told it came from Ben Boykin.¹⁹

The motive for the shooting was undetermined but a March 30, 1909 article described a theft of some of Neverson's

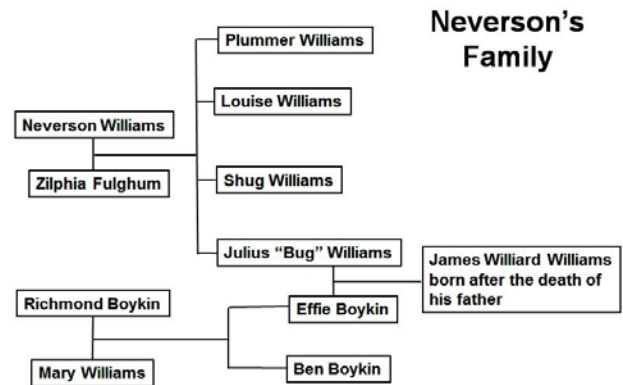
brandy. The reporter provided the following description of the brandy. “He had it in his brandy house, where it had been for...many years – apple brandy, good old Nash brandy of his own manufacture; rich and mellow brandy with a jar of honey standing hard by. Not but those who stood in close with Neverson were even allowed to enter that brandy house and gaze on the oak bound keg and that jar of honey.”²⁰ The theft was never solved.

Neverson Williams died at his home near Neverson about 5:30 pm. on January 8, 1913. During a few months before his death, his health had been declining. He suffered several strokes which resulted in paralysis. Zilphia Fulghum, his wife, and three children, Plumer, Shug and Jimmy survived him. He was buried in the family cemetery near his home and next to his son, Julius “Bug” Williams.²¹ An epitaph, “Although he sleeps his memory doth live,” was inscribed on Neverson’s grave marker. Four months afterward, on April 21, 1913, Zilphia died of heart failure. She was buried beside Neverson.²² The same sentiment as Neverson’s was resonated by her epitaph, “Although she sleeps her memory doth live.”

Bug’s wife, Effie Boykin Williams, died on July 27, 1957, at the age of 66, of a heart attack. She was buried at Nobles Chapel in Wilson County.²³ Bug and Effie’s son, James Willard Williams, was born on April 2, 1909, just one week after Bug’s death. He died of a heart attack on July 27, 1973. His obituary was published that same date in the *Wilson Daily Times*. “SIMS – James Willard Williams, 64, died this morning in Wilson Memorial Hospital. Funeral services will be Sunday at 3 p.m. in Joyner’s Funeral Chapel by the Rev. Jerry Turner. Burial will follow in Evergreen Memorial Gardens. Surviving are his wife, Mrs. Melva Holliday Williams; two daughters, Mrs. Miriam W. Thompson of

Anderson, S.C. and Mrs. Reta Campbell of Asheville; one [half] brother, Randolph Williams of Wilson.”²⁴

Ben and Bug were related to the authors. Bug Williams was the great grand uncle of James A. Bailey on his maternal side and Ben Boykin was Margaret Boykin Bailey’s 1st cousin twice removed on her paternal side.



Endnotes

- ¹ “Shooting Affair Near Wilson,” *The Raleigh Times* (Raleigh, NC) March 16, 1909, p. 2.
- ² Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, Old Fields Township, Wilson County, N.C., May 11, 1910, Julius Williams.
- ³ “In a Dying Condition,” *The Raleigh Times* (Raleigh, NC) March 22, 1909, p. 2.
- ⁴ “His Life Despaired Of,” *The Farmer and Mechanic* (Raleigh, NC) March 23, 1909, p. 16.
- ⁵ “Warrant for Boykin,” *The Farmer and Mechanic* (Raleigh, NC) March 23, 1909, p. 16.
- ⁶ “Still Conscious But Unable to Talk,” *News and Observer* (Raleigh, NC) March 25, 1909, p. 4.
- ⁷ *Wilson, N.C. Directory 1908-1909*, (Richmond Va.: Hill Directory Company, 1908) Vol. 1, pp. 11 and 91.
- ⁸ “Vote for Township Constable,” *The Daily Times*, Wilson, N.C., November 15, 1910, p. 8.

- ⁹ “All Eyes Were Dimmed,” *News and Observer* (Raleigh, NC) March 30, 1909, p. 8.
- ¹⁰ “Inquest in Williams Case,” *The Raleigh Times* (Raleigh, NC) March 29, 1909, p. 8.
- ¹¹ “News from Wilson,” *The Raleigh Times* (Raleigh, NC) April 12, 1909, p. 2.
- ¹² *Wilson, N.C. Directory, op. cit.*, p. 99.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 109 and 128.
- ¹⁴ “Murder Trial Thursday,” *News and Observer* (Raleigh, NC) May 13, 1909, p. 5.
- ¹⁵ “Six Months in Jail,” *News and Observer* (Raleigh, NC) May 16, 1909, p. 10.
- ¹⁶ “At Liberty Again,” *The Raleigh Times* (Raleigh, NC) November 10, 1909, p. 7.
- ¹⁷ “Six Months in Jail,” *op. cit.*
- ¹⁸ “Finished His Jail Sentence,” *News and Observer* (Raleigh, NC) November 11, 1909, p. 2.
- ¹⁹ Authors Note: Jim Burgess was Neverson’s great grandson. Born August 4, 1917 and died August 13, 2002, he was the son of Troy Burgess and Nora “Tincy” Williams.
- ²⁰ “Took Even the Bung Hole,” *News and Observer* (Raleigh, NC) March 30, 1909, p. 8.
- ²¹ Deaths and Funerals, *News and Observer*, January 9, 1913, p. 2.
- ²² Deaths, *News and Observer*, April 25, 1913, p. 2.
- ²³ North Carolina State Board of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics, Certificate of Death, Effie Boykin, Filed July 29, 1957.
- ²⁴ “Obituaries,” *Wilson Daily Times*, July 27, 1973, p. 2.