

# WILSON'S HERITAGE

The Newsletter of the Wilson County Historical Association

Volume 10, Number 3

May 2021

## **A Message from the Association President**

**B. Perry Morrison, Jr.**

Well, the pandemic has struck again! Our speaker for the annual meeting is prohibited from traveling from Raleigh under state employee guidelines, and we can't yet have an indoor meeting with the number of members we have. So . . . shall we just call it a year?



Nevertheless, our work continues. We've produced our regular newsletters and our historical marker committee will be meeting during the first week of June to pick up our work where we left off. Please be on the lookout for an announcement of four historical marker dedications over the summer, and we will hope to gather again for a meeting at Barton College in the fall, hopefully in the newly renovated Ragan Center.

About membership. It is that time again. All of the work for the content of your newsletter is volunteered time. However, did you know that the formatting and mailing of each of these WCHA newsletters costs \$450? Over a year that's a \$1350 expense. We appreciate your continued support, and your renewal is only \$25.

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## **Wilson's Iron Works Industry: Antebellum to Twenty-First Century**

James A. Bailey and Margaret B. Bailey

During the 18th and 19th centuries, the industrial revolution created a demand for iron products which included parts and gears for agricultural and industrial machinery. Consequently, as cities expanded in size, companies formed to provide the markets with iron products and supplies. Some examples included: steam engines, cotton gins, grist mills, planting machines, boilers, castings, machine parts, shafts, gears, cylinders, stoves, plows, as well as other manufacturing, farming and household items. Additionally, in times of conflict during this period, iron products were also produced for military purposes.

It was reported as early as 1812 and perhaps before the Revolutionary War, there was a bloomery operation which utilized a crude type of iron-producing furnace in Old Fields Township. The bloomery produced iron from iron ore mined in that area of Wilson County. The iron ore was referred to as bog ore. This type of ore was a form of impure iron that occurred in bogs and swamps. The depth of the ore bed occurred approximately two to four feet from the surface.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, the ore could be mined using shovels. When the iron ore was heated in a furnace, it produced a mass of porous iron slag referred to as a bloom, hence the term bloomery.

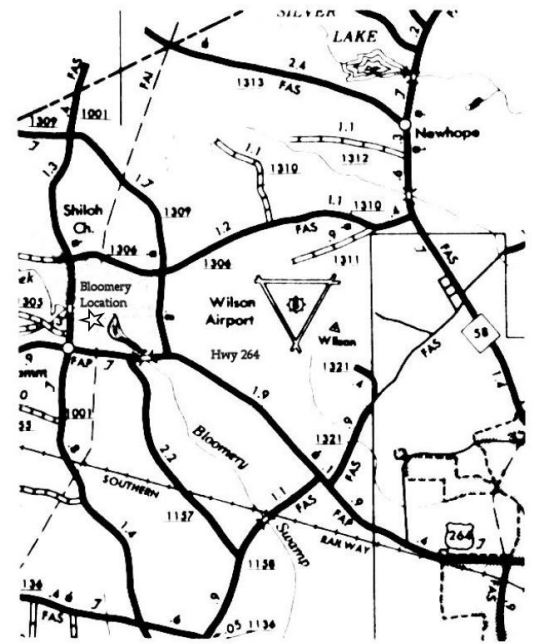
Bloomery technology was used to make wrought iron as early as the second millennium B.C. until the mid-20th century. The Old Fields bloomery

*Continued on page 2*

likely designed similar to other bloomeries dating to the 18th century was used for smelting iron ore. Eighteenth century bloomeries were constructed with a simple chimney design made of fire-resistant materials such as clay or stones. Clay pipes were made and positioned at the bottom of the chimney to provide needed oxygen during the smelting process. Before the iron ore was placed inside the bloomery, it was broken into small pieces and heated by fire to remove moisture from the ore.<sup>2</sup>

In preparation of the smelting process, the furnace was heated by filling it with coal and ignited. Once the chimney was hot, a mixture of about 50% coal and 50% iron ore were continuously added into the top of the chimney. Emissions of carbon monoxide occurred as the coal and iron ore burned in the furnace at a relatively low temperature of approximately 800° C (1472° F). This process reduced the iron oxide in the ore to metallic iron forming the iron bloom at the bottom of the furnace.<sup>3</sup>

During the Civil War, Tappy and Lumsden of Petersburg, Virginia, set up a bloomery in the same vicinity as the Old Fields bloomery and produced iron for the Confederate government. Some items produced from iron for military purposes included: firearms, cannons, sabers, knives, railroad locomotives and ironclad warships. The iron ore mined for the Tappy and Lumsden bloomery was located in an area approximately eight miles from the town of Wilson in the northwestern section of Wilson County, formerly known as the Great Swamp. As a result of the iron ore mining and bloomery industry in the Great Swamp, that area of Wilson County became identified as Bloomery Swamp. Wilson native Lenox Rawlings who was a journalism major at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill and intern with *The Wilson Daily Times* in 1969, published an article which included a section of a Wilson County map describing the bloomery. The bloomery's location was just northwest of Finch's mill pond.<sup>4-7</sup> Although the Old Fields bloomery closed about 1865, manufacturing companies in Wilson obtained iron from other sources and local iron works industries continued.



Early iron works companies in Wilson either specialized in manufacturing and selling a few products or had machinists skilled in working with iron to fabricate or repair any type of machinery used in manufacturing or farming industries. For example, Hackney and Sons, later Hackney Brothers, specialized in the manufacture of carriages and buggies while some companies only sold equipment made with iron manufactured by other companies. Many of the diverse companies also sold iron stock for anyone wanting to repair their own machinery. Iron stock included round bar, square stock, flat iron, pipe, pipe fittings and valves in a variety of sizes.

Numerous suppliers, manufacturers and distributors of iron supplies and products have operated in the city since the establishment of Wilson in 1849. Following are summaries for some of Wilson's iron works companies which illustrate the importance of iron products and machinery in this area preceding the Civil War and subsequent to the war.

One of the early companies in Wilson was Farmer and Wainwright. Circa 1860, Albert Farmer started the first iron foundry in Wilson. Albert Farmer, a Wilson County native, was born November 23, 1821. By 1855, he was married and owned property in Wilson. He served as a town commissioner in 1860 and continued to operate the foundry throughout the Civil War.<sup>8-9</sup>

In 1861, Farmer partnered with Theophilus A. Wainwright and founded Farmer and Wainwright iron works. T. A. Wainwright was originally from Virginia; however, he relocated with his family to Warrenton, North Carolina. He eventually made Wilson his home. The Farmer and Wainwright partnership was successful. "They shipped plows not only to every county in eastern North Carolina but to other states as well."<sup>10</sup>

In 1867, their foundry was located on east Goldsboro Street near the old bridge crossing the railroad.<sup>11</sup> Their iron works business manufactured plows, cotton planters, and parts from iron castings.<sup>12</sup>

T. A. Wainwright died on October 25, 1881, and Farmer and Wainwright Iron Company closed on November 30, 1881. At the time, Farmer and Wainwright consisted of a ten-horse power boiler and engine, two metal lathes, one wood lathe, an emery wheel, blacksmith forge, miscellaneous machinery, two horses and a wagon.<sup>13</sup>

George H. Wainwright, who lived in Raleigh, succeeded his brother, T. A. Wainwright, in the Farmer and Wainwright iron works business. The business continued under the Farmer and Wainwright name with George H. Wainwright as proprietor.<sup>14-15</sup> Later, George H. Wainwright partnered with P. J. Royall who was born in Petersburg, Virginia, and moved to Wilson in 1871.<sup>16</sup> The iron works company continued under the Farmer and Wainwright name.<sup>17</sup>

In 1882, A. A. Murray and H. E. Benton, proprietors of a Wilson machine shop, leased the machinery that had belonged to T. A. Wainwright.<sup>18</sup> Two years later, Murray and Benton purchased the equipment. Murray and Benton, were skilled machinists and provided similar services to those provided by Farmer and Wainwright. They also manufactured and repaired iron products which included pipe-valves, inspirators, pipe-fittings and other iron works. Corn and flour mills as well as cotton presses and steam engines were among the products they manufactured and they contracted to build corn and flour mills.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, Murray and Benton were progressive businessmen who took advantage of opportunities to procure devices to improve their business. They attended a government salvage sale in Richmond, Virginia, and purchased an enormous vice at the sale. The vice was originally from the Merrimack's machine shop which had been equipped to make repairs at sea.<sup>20</sup> Murray and Benton installed the salvaged vice in their iron works shop in Wilson. Interestingly, in 1888, the *Fayetteville Weekly Observer's* special newspaper correspondent from Wilson observed the enormous vice in Murray and Benton's machine shop that had been used on the Merrimack.<sup>21</sup>

March 1888, almost exactly a month after the reported sighting of the massive Merrimack vice at Murray and Benton Iron Works, Albert Farmer, founder of Wilson's first iron works factory died. After Mr. Farmer's death, Farmer and Wainwright, one of the largest machine shops and agriculture implement establishments in Wilson, continued to operate successfully.<sup>22-23</sup>

Six months following Farmer's death, Albertus Robert "A. R." Paschall who lived in Wayne County and one of his three brothers, Benjamin Green, Joseph Branch or Joshua Walter Paschall, purchased Murray and Benton's Machine Shop in January 1889. At the time, all three brothers resided in Wilson.<sup>24-25</sup> On January 17, 1889, Paschall and Brother, proprietors of Wilson Iron Works advertised it was ready to work on mills, engines and conduct iron work services for the Wilson area.<sup>26-27</sup>

<b>A. Murray</b>	<b>H.E. Benton</b>
<b>Machine Shops</b>	
Having leased all of the Machinery belonging to the late T. A. Wainwright, we are now prepared to build new and repair all kinds of	
<b>MACHINERY.</b>	
We keep constantly on hand pipe and fittings. Also values of all kinds. Cotton gins fitted up in first class order. Special attention given to fitting up mill work. Estimates for finish on all types of work. Orders solicited, and promptly executed	
Murray & Benton Wilson, N.C.	

The iron works company manufactured cotton presses, cotton seed crushers, husk hackling machines, saw mill machinery and gumming.<sup>28</sup> The company also provided repair work on boilers, feeders, inspirators and had machine supplies available for engines and boilers. In addition, they made and sold bridge bolts.<sup>29</sup> Also, the iron works company built and repaired cotton gins and other types of machinery. In 1889, the company employed seven to ten workers and had an income of approximately ten thousand dollars annually, which, today, would be approximately \$300,000.<sup>30-31</sup>

**Wilson Iron Works,**  
**PASCHALL & BRO., Proprietors.**

Having purchased of Murray & Benton the Wilson Iron Works we take pleasure in informing the public that we are now prepared to do work as well and as cheap as any Machine Shop in the State. We are now ready to do all kinds of work on Cotton Presses, Cotton Seed Crushers, Husk Hackling Machines, Saw Mills and Mill Machinery, Gumming All kinds of Bear Work, Boilers, Feeders and Inspirators a specialty. A full line of Machinists' supplies always on hand. Engines and Boilers and all kinds of Bridge Bolts for sale. We believe that

**MACHINE SHOPS**  
 that can do first-class work at LIVING PRICES, will be appreciated by the people of this community and we propose to do as

**GOOD WORK**  
 As anybody and at as low prices. Give us a trial.

**Paschall & Bro.**

By October 1894, A. R. Paschall partnered with twenty-eight-year-old George R. Winstead, who was born in Edgecombe County and later lived in Elm City. Winstead was a farmer and an experienced machinist.<sup>32</sup> The iron works company operated under the name Paschall, Winstead and Company.<sup>33</sup> In 1897, Paschall and Winstead's iron works was considered one of the leading iron works in eastern North Carolina. Paschall and Winstead operated a modern facility with iron working machines and heavy lifting cranes. The company manufactured cotton presses, cotton seed crushers and saw mills. They were equipped to repair any type of machinery and operated a foundry which manufactured castings.<sup>34</sup>

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and continuing into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, intense competition and demand for the iron works industry to develop and improve farm plows, planters, and other types of farm equipment in rural America were in demand. Consequently, fifteen different types of plows with three of the most popular plows being the No. 7 turn plow, the star and the Tar Heel Cotton plow, were manufactured utilizing steam engine technology in Wilson while the demand for iron works continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>35</sup>

However, early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the science of metallurgy had advanced and various types of steel which is an alloy of iron, was being produced, used and sold by iron works companies. Also, machinery powered by steam engines would soon be antiquated technology and the use of electric motors to power machinery was the forthcoming wave of the future.

In 1920, Mack Gilbert Bass and Roland Darvell Edwards, both experienced in iron working, opened Wilson Iron Works, a modern facility using electric powered machinery.<sup>36-40</sup> Originally, Bass and Edwards' business, Wilson Iron Works, was located on Barnes Street; however, the business soon relocated around the corner to 208 South Lodge Street.<sup>41-44</sup>

Wilson Iron Works sold machinery, engines and boilers of all types and carried an inventory of iron supplies. Advertisements indicated Wilson Iron Works hired the best qualified machinists to repair all types of machinery, engines and boilers.<sup>45-47</sup> With three new employees, Wilson Iron Works began advertising for business in the summer of 1920. The company's advertising slogan, "Figure with Us – Save a Figure or Two," encouraged Wilson's newspaper readership to bring their iron works needs to Wilson Iron Works.<sup>48</sup>

In 1928, Wilson Iron Works continued to operate a successful and prosperous business in Wilson. They expanded and purchased Harper's Machine Shop the same year. Wilson Iron Works reported it owned a lathe capable of handling material five feet in diameter and twenty feet long. They could also thread pipe six inches in diameter and had machinery for gear cutting.<sup>49-50</sup>

**ANNOUNCEMENT**  
 OF THE PURCHASING OF HARPER'S MACHINE SHOP  
 EQUIPMENT BY

**The WILSON IRON WORKS**

With this extra equipment we are in a better condition to serve you and we will appreciate your patronage.

<b>OUR SPECIALTIES</b> Smoke Stack Building Crusher Rolls Grinding Gin Saw Filing Acetylene Cutting and Welding Repairing of Traction Buggy Machinery of All Kinds	<b>MACHINERY OF ALL KINDS</b> Sold and Repaired GOOD STOCK OF SUPPLIES ALL WORK GUARANTEED TELEPHONE 981	<b>SUPPLIES CARRIED</b> Flat and Round Steel Shafting Pipe Bolting Bolts Lubricators Valves Injectors, Oil Pumps and Pipe Fittings Carried At All Times
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## Announcing the Opening

# UTILITY IRON WORKS

208 N. RAILROAD STREET

MACHINIST

BLACKSMITH  
BOILER MAKER

ALL KINDS OF MACHINERY  
REPAIRS

PHONE 806

R. D. EDWARDS, Manager

Roland D. Edwards, Mack Bass' partner since 1920, left Wilson Iron Works in 1930 to start his own company, Utility Iron Works, located at 208 N. Railroad Street. Edward's company made boilers and also repaired all types of machinery.<sup>51-52</sup>

In 1933, Wilson Iron Works was incorporated as a company for manufacturing and selling electrical machinery and appliances. The company had an authorized capital stock of \$40,000 and \$20,000 in subscribed stock by M. G. Bass, Carl C. Aycock, and Claudine Aycock, all from Wilson.<sup>53</sup>

In 1934, after fourteen years of operation, it was reported Wilson Iron Works was, "a very substantial industry of Wilson, and one necessary to keep the other industries operating..."<sup>54</sup> Mack G. Bass died in 1944. Cornelius Sarvis "Neal" Bass, Sr. succeeded his father as president and principal owner of Wilson Iron Works. Mack Bass' grandson, C. Sarvis Bass, Jr., joined the company as vice president and general manager upon graduating from North Carolina State University with a degree in mechanical engineering in 1972. Sarvis Bass retired from Wilson Iron Works in 2021. In the meantime, in 1988 Ray Pittman became owner of Wilson Iron Works. Then, in 2014, Doug Beamon purchased the business and it was at that time all shares held by the Bass family were also sold.<sup>55-56</sup> While ownership and management has transitioned from 1920 until today, Wilson Iron Works prospered



Mack G. Bass

and expanded to other locations in eastern North Carolina and has provided continuous iron works services.

## We Have Built Our Shop Upon the Patronage Of The Public

And by giving to them the very best material and workmanship. We guarantee all our work to be satisfactory. Our youngest man has over 10 years experience. We purchased the best machinery that Harper & Co., had to make our shop the best equipped maching shop in Eastern Carolina for repair work. We take care of lathe capacity up to 5 feet in diameter, 20 feet long. We also do pipe threading up to 6 inches and gear cutting. All kinds of drillings with hydraulic press and acetylene cutting and welding. We carry a complete line of machinery supplies, pipes, shafting, etc. We work nothing except skilled workmen.

## Wilson Iron Works

M. G. BASS, Manager

LODGE ST.

PHONE 981

Also, in order to meet developing demands, the iron works industry in Wilson has adapted to changing industrial demands for iron works products. Currently, Wilson Iron Works, Inc., the oldest iron works company in Wilson, employs approximately one hundred employees and provides full machine and fabrication shop services, a drafting department, field service, stock and delivery services. While Albert Farmer established the first iron works foundry in Wilson in the 1860s, Mack Gilbert Bass and Roland D. Edwards, Wilson Iron Works founders, established an iron works business in 1920 that has evolved over ten centuries to meet 21<sup>st</sup> century demands.<sup>57</sup>

## References

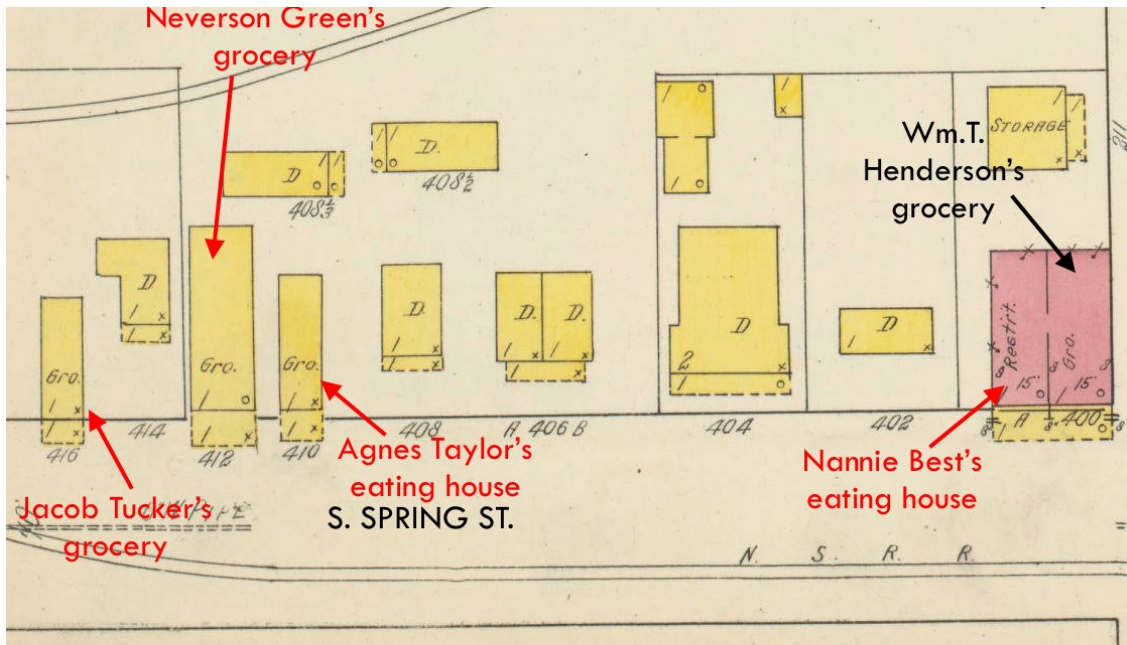
1. J. A. Holmes, *North Carolina Geological Survey: Iron Ores of North Carolina* (Raleigh: Josephus Daniels, State Printer and Binder, 1893), Bulletin No. 1, 35-36.
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3. *Ibid.*
4. Keith Barnes. "So That's How Bloomery Swamp Was Named," *The Wilson Daily Times* (Wilson, NC), February 18, 2009, 13.
5. Lenox Rawlings, "Bloomery Located Near Lamms School: Iron Once Mined in Wilson; Products Used in Civil War," *The Wilson Daily Times* (Wilson, NC), September 6, 1969, Sec. 2, 1.
6. "The Old Bloomery," *The Wilson Advance* (Wilson, NC), August 29, 1884, 3.) and
7. ("A Big Sale," *The Wilson Advance* (Wilson, NC), May 21, 1891, 3.
8. "I'm Thinking by an Old Reporter," *Rocky Mount Telegram* (Rocky Mount, NC), December 21, 1958, 10.
9. "I'm Thinking by an Old Reporter," March 5, 1960, 4.

10. "The Wilson Iron Works," *Weekly State Chronicle* (Raleigh, NC), May 31, 1889, 1.
11. "At the Foundry," *The North Carolinian* (Wilson, NC), March 23, 1867, 3.
12. "Farmer and Wainwright," *The Raleigh News* (Raleigh, NC), July 12, 1878, 3.
13. "Sale of Valuable Property," *The Wilson Advance* (Wilson, NC), November 25, 1881, 2.
14. "An Old Landmark Removed," *The Wilson Mirror* (Wilson, NC), March 28, 1888, 5.
15. "The Wilson Iron Works," *Weekly State Chronicle*.
16. "Died," *The Wilson Advance* (Wilson, NC), November 21, 1889, 3.
17. "George H. Wainwright, P. J. Royall, Wainwright & Royall," *The State Chronicle*, (Raleigh, NC), May 10, 1884, 4.
18. "A. A. Murray and H. E. Benton Machine Shops," *The Wilson Advance* (Wilson, NC), March 3, 1882, 3.
19. "For Sale," *The Wilson Advance* (Wilson, NC), September 5, 1884, 2.
20. Authors' Note: The Merrimack burned and sank near Norfolk, Virginia, but Confederate forces raised the Merrimack and constructed the CSS Virginia utilizing the Merrimack's hull. The reconstruction included installing the large vice which had been on board the Merrimack in the CSS Virginia's machine shop. The CSS Virginia was the first steam-powered ironclad warship constructed by the Confederacy and was in the first naval engagement with the Union Ironclad Monitor. The CSS Virginia sank following the war but was raised by the government. All materials on board were sold at the government salvage sale at Richmond, Virginia.
21. "Wilson Items," *Fayetteville Weekly Observer* (Fayetteville, NC), February 16, 1888, 2.
22. "An Old Landmark Removed."
23. "The Wilson Iron Works," *Weekly State Chronicle*.
24. Authors' Note: The Paschall brothers were the children of Robert Lee Paschall, a physician and farmer, and the former Mary Frances Cook who settled in Black Creek after living in Nahunta, Wayne County.
25. 1870 United States Federal Census, Snow Hill, Greene County, North Carolina, Roll: M593-1140, page 480B.
26. "Machine Shops," *The Wilson Advance* (Wilson, NC), January 3, 1889, 3.
27. "Wilson Iron Works," *The Wilson Advance* (Wilson, NC), January 17, 1889, 2.
28. Authors' Note: Gumming was an important operation performed by machinists to deepen saw blade gullets, the space between the saw blade teeth. Deepening the gullets allowed sawdust to be carried out of the kerf while the saw was cutting which prevented clogging.
29. "Wilson Iron Works," *The Wilson Advance*, April 4, 1889, 4.
30. "The Wilson Iron Works," *Weekly State Chronicle*.
31. "Dissolution," *The Wilson Advance* (Wilson, NC), October 18, 1894, 2.
32. 1900 United States Census, Wilson, Wilson County, North Carolina, Enumeration District 0124, microfilm 1241225, page 16.
33. "Dissolution."
34. "Paschall & Winstead: Proprietors of The Wilson Iron Works," *The Wilson Advance* (Wilson, NC), November 11, 1897, 5.
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36. "Wilson Iron Works," *Wilson Times* (Wilson, NC), July 29, 1921, 28.
37. "Wanted: A Good Machinist," *The News and Observer* (Raleigh, NC), June 27, 1920, 30.
38. "Wanted: A First-Class Machinist," *The News and Observer* (Raleigh, NC), May 2, 1920, 33.
39. "Obituary," *The Wilson Daily Times* (Wilson, NC), March 25, 1944, 7.
40. "Obituary," *The News and Observer* (Raleigh, NC), July 26, 1960, 5.
41. C. Sarvis Bass, Jr., Mack Gilbert Bass's grandson, Personal Interview, April 29, 2021.
42. Authors' Note: Mack Gilbert Bass, the son of Calvin Bass and the former Virginia Savage, was born March 4, 1884, in Halifax County, North Carolina. Bass' parents were born in Scotland County. Spellings for Bass' middle name varies, sometimes Gilbert, Gilbry, Gilbrey or Gilbery. Bass began operating a machine shop when he was about twenty years old. At twenty-nine, he worked in iron works in Wilson and at thirty-six, he established Wilson Iron Works according to the article about him, "Wilson Iron Works Keep You Going," in *The Wilson Daily Times*, August 20, 1934.
43. "Wilson Iron Works Keep You Going," *The Wilson Daily Times* (Wilson, NC), August 20, 1934, 11.
44. Authors' Note: Roland Darvell Edwards was born May 23, 1885. He was the son of Caswell Edwards, a locomotive engineer, and the former Sarah Jane Tichenor, who lived in Charlotte, North Carolina, in 1880.
45. "Wilson Iron Works," *The Wilson Times*.
46. "Wanted: A Good Machinist."
47. "Wanted: A First-Class Machinist."
48. "Wilson Iron Works," *The Wilson Daily Times*.
49. "Announcement," *The Wilson Daily* (Wilson, NC), April 27, 1928, 4.
50. "We Have Built Our Shop Upon the Patronage of the Public," *The Wilson Daily Times* (Wilson, NC), September 1, 1928, 2.
51. "Announcing the Opening: Utility Iron Works," *The Wilson Daily Times* (Wilson, NC), March 4, 1930, 2.
52. *Hill's Wilson City Directory, Wilson, North Carolina* (Richmond: Hill's Directory Publishers, 1930), 109.
53. "New Corporations," *The News and Observer* (Raleigh, NC), 25 July 1933, 10.
54. "Wilson Iron Works Keep You Going."
55. C. Sarvis Bass, Jr.
56. "Bass Named Executive of Iron Works," *The Wilson Daily Times* (Wilson, NC), August 1, 1972, 2.
57. Mary Beth Pudup, "From Farm to Factory: Structuring and Location of the U.S. Farm Machinery Industry," *Economic Geography*, vol. 63, no. 3, (July 19)

## Acknowledgements

We would like to express our appreciation to C. Sarvis Bass, Jr. for talking with us and providing information about his grandfather, Mack G. Bass; his father, Neal Bass; and the history of Wilson Iron Works which his grandfather established. Also, we appreciate Lawrence Bradley, the current Wilson Iron Works Operations Manager, for providing recent important information about Wilson Iron Works and its current operation.

From Lisa Y. Henderson's "Black Wide Awake," she discovers information about the location of African-American owned businesses along Spring Street (now Douglas Street).



age 3, Sanborn fire insurance map of Wilson, N.C., 1913.

Cross-referencing the 1912 Hill's Wilson, N.C., city directory and the 1913 Sanborn fire insurance map of Wilson reveals the specific locations of Black-owned businesses just after the turn of the century.

Above, the west side of the 400 block of South Spring [now Douglas] Street, showing a heavy concentration of small restaurants and groceries. This stretch bordered the American Tobacco (later Liggett & Meyers) tobacco warehouse to the rear and was a block away from Smith's warehouse, Watson warehouse, Export Leaf warehouse, a larger American Tobacco warehouse, and the Norfolk & Southern cotton loading platform, and these businesses no doubt targeted the swarms of warehouse workers.

Meet Virginia native **Jacob Tucker** [here](#); **Neverson Green** [here](#) and [here](#); and **Nannie Best** [here](#).

**Agnes Taylor** does not appear in Wilson census records, but her full entry in the 1912 city directory shows that she lived at 418 South Spring, just a few lots down from her eating house.

**\*Taylor Agnes, eating house 410 S Spring h 418 S Spring**

All these buildings have been demolished.

*A Message from the Association President continued from page 1*

Many people contribute more, and we appreciate your help in continuing our work documenting the history of this fascinating place. As we have been fortunate to obtain funding from the Tourism Authority for our historical markers, the newsletter is our primary expense.

In this issue, you will find a feature article on Wilson's Iron Works Industry by our faithful members, James and Margaret Bailey, as well as the second installment of our series on the eulogy of H.G. Connor. Lisa Y. Henderson has graciously allowed us to reprint a second map featuring black-owned business in the early part of this century. I encourage you to follow her thoroughly researched and fascinating blog, Black Wide Awake, which you can find on both Facebook and WordPress.

I will look forward to seeing you in person in the fall!

## Judge Frank A. Daniel's address 2<sup>nd</sup> installment of edited (newsletter) H.G. Connor Eulogy:



Judge Frank Daniels

(Continued from WCHA Spring Newsletter, Vol. 10, No. 2) . . . There were in the village four churches [Editor's note: there were likely more than four churches]: the Primitive Baptist, leading all others in numbers and influence, and having for many years as its chief pastor my old and valued friend, the able and devout Elder P. D. Gold; the Methodist and the Missionary Baptist of small membership, but actively engaged in religious work, and the Episcopal Church, having the smallest membership, but having a tower of strength in its great layman, that Christian gentleman and devoted churchman, Thomas C. Davis.

David S. Richardson, a great teacher, who enjoyed the affectionate regard of his students and of the community, despite his insistence upon thoroughness and a discipline that spared not the rod, conducted a school in the old Female College over which, before the Civil War, Rev. Charles F. Deems, a great Methodist preacher, had presided on the site of the present residence of James T. Wiggins, Esq. He was succeeded by George W. Arrington, an admirable teacher, highly esteemed by all our people.

The Wilson Collegiate Institute for Young Ladies, under the management of Prof. J. De B. Hooper, a scholar of culture and refinement, before the Civil War professor of Latin and Modern Languages, and afterwards professor of Greek and French, in the University of North Carolina, with his Associate Principal, his father-in-law, Rev. Dr. William Hooper, son of William Hooper, signer of the Declaration of Independence, a Baptist minister of great usefulness, and a scholar of accurate and varied scholarship and literary power, was conducted in the school building on the east side of the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad, which had been used during the War as a hospital for Confederate soldiers.

Afterwards, in the 70's, Elder Sylvester Hassell, calling to his assistance an able faculty composed of Edward M. Nadal, J. B. Brewer, J. B. Williams, David G. Gillespie and Joseph H. Foy, upon the site last mentioned, founded the Wilson Collegiate Institute, a co-educational school, which for years ministered to the moral and intellectual life of the youth of this community and much of Eastern North Carolina. The wisdom, learning, gentle breeding and high character of these great teachers seemed to me, even in my immature boyhood, a benediction to our people, and especially to the aspiring youth who was so fortunate as to live in close association with them. What rare quality was in this atmosphere that touched, inspired and, in a large measure, transfigured the lives of Dunham, Shepherd, Kenan, Murray, Woodard, Aycock, and Connor, to name only some outstanding figures that are gone!

Here, at the age of thirteen, Henry G. Connor saw the close of a disastrous War, which had wrecked the estates of many of the large land owners, overwhelmed with debts they could not pay . . . . Here, as elsewhere in the State, the majority of the people were never slave owners; these were less affected by the results of war and more easily returned to normal conditions. Many of the young men of the county had died in the service of the Confederacy and some returned to their homes maimed and, in some instances, incapacitated for the duties of life. Others returned suffering from what we now call "shell shock," found it difficult to resume the quiet ways of peace, and some of them sought relief in dissipation. The poverty that follows in the wake of war was evident everywhere. Sorrow over the loss of a cause dear to their hearts, grief for those who did not return, and the reaction from the extremes of hope and fear, long indulged, depressed, many of the older people to the point of despair. But soon the steadiness and courage which had carried soldier and civilian through the four years of war reasserted themselves, and, with the necessity came the will and the strength to restore their broken fortunes, and they faced the future with hope and cheer . . . .

The subject of this address knew and felt the evils of that time and the deliverance that came not long afterward when great citizenship arose in its might and took the government out of the hands too weak and some of them too vitious to wield its powers, and a long year of peace and order was ushered in. [Editor's Note: This view of the unrest during 1898 runs contrary to modern interpretation.]



Upon him, as upon all that generation, the experiences of this period left an indelible impress that colored all of their after lives. The community in which he grew up was a segment of the old South, with many of its ideals, its prejudices, its virtues, and some of its darker aspects. Its men were, in the main, sincere, genuine and strong and their wives and daughters the modest, pure and refined women who constituted the chief glory of our southern civilization. The man who knew and loved such a woman might truly have declared with Tennyson's since:

Faith in womankind  
Beats with his blood, and trust in all things high  
Comes easy to him, and though he trip and fall,  
He shall not bind his soul with clay.

While they were not a demonstrative people, they were reasonably hospitable and kindly but slow to give their confidence and affection until they had learned the character and ways of new-comers. When this had taken place, no people anywhere had been more just, more considerate and more generous and, when they knew the Connor family, no visitor seeing the relations between the older residents and the newer, could distinguish between the recent arrivals and the natives.

With such ancestry, under such influences, it was among such a people and such environment that this boy had come to receive the training that should fit him for life. For a short while he attended the school of Mr. Richardson, but the death of his father and the necessities of his family, put an end to his schooling. He began to work to aid in their support, and his further education was a result of his own efforts. While a mere lad, he entered the law office of Howard & Whitfield as a law clerk or amenuensis and remained with them until the dissolution of their partnership.

I have a distinct recollection of him as he grew up, a slender, delicate young man of quiet dignity, thoughtful and serious. There was apparent in him then, as in later years, a reserve, a reticence, a distinction that gave to those about him an impression of superiority of mind and elevation of thought, which seemed, in some degree, to isolate him; but without unbending, his kindness of heart and sympathetic understanding bridged this gulf that often separates one from his associates. His intellectual features and his luminous and expressive eyes, mirroring every phase of thought and feeling, were unchanged until within a few months of his death, when his eyesight became seriously impaired. He never appeared robust but enjoyed good health throughout his long and busy life, which his correct and moderate habits preserved; and his form was as erect and his step as elastic at three score years and ten as in his youth. From his boyhood he cherished high ideals and led a stainless life. In a village, where everybody knew everybody else and where lapses in conduct were inevitably the subject of criticism, there was never a suggestion of deviation from the high standards which he early set for himself. I observed during this period that he was quite severe in his judgment of wrongdoers. In his moral strength and serious outlook on life he could not understand the weakness of those who went astray, and this, to me and others of his early friends, seemed to mar an otherwise wholly admirable disposition. Engrossed in his work, his reading and his studies, he had neither time nor inclination for the sports and dissipations of the young people of the community. His contact with the choice spirits of the town, highly prized by him, gave him a certain culture and contribute to form a character and social nature which were ever the delight of his friend, while he did not lose the human touch with all sorts and conditions of men, the merchant, the farmer, the shoemaker and the village blacksmith, who became his person friends and gave him a wider horizon. He began the study of the law in the office of Howard & Whitfield, for both of whom he entertained the deepest respect and affection. Fifty years afterward, in presenting Judge Howard's portrait to the Supreme Court, he said:

I hold his memory in sacred keeping as a dear and loyal friend. Although many years my senior, I enjoyed and returned for more than 25 years, his manly affection and perfect confidence. His friendship and wise counsel were to me, at all times, never failed sources of strength and unalloyed pleasure. He was no summer friend, but one whose grip strengthened with the stress of the storm.

(to be continued)

*Editor's Note: Like many prominent North Carolina leaders of his day, H.G. Connor was a "White Supremacist." He was elected to the N.C. House from Wilson County during the tumultuous year 1898 and became its Speaker that same year. An official state report on the Wilmington Insurrection of 1898 states that Connor's correspondence and speeches indicated that he desired to remove the negro from the politics of North Carolina, yet also that it was his belief that those in control of political power "should earnestly improve the lives and education of blacks." (Carolana.com, a blog of J.D. Lewis)*

A number of you have asked about the fire hydrant grave marker for Ben Mincey located during the Lane Street project. As published by Lisa Y. Henderson on her Black Wide Awake blog, following is an article from the Wilson Times on March 7, 1965 which reveals a little more about Ben Mincey:

# Loss Of Homes Spurred Efforts For Fire Dept.

By JACK ADAMS

It was a cold December night five years ago when Clarence Hoskins, father of 12, lost his home.

All possessions were ravaged by the fire.

Three homes on Queen St. East, owned by Mamie Rountree, previously had been turned into piles of smouldering ashes.

These were among the people living in a densely populated area east of U. S. 301. There was no fire protection.

Even before Hoskins' home burned to the ground, a small group of Negro citizens anxious to remedy the problem had begun meeting in the backroom of Frank W. Barnes' Sanitary Barber Shop.

Their own resources limited except for a throbbing desire to render a community service, they began mapping plans for a volunteer fire organization.

## Idea Introduced

The idea of such an organization was introduced at the original meeting, attended by Barnes, Hoskins, David Suggs, J. E. Williams, Henry Hagans and L. H. Coley.

Pursuit of this goal continued with later meetings, and citizens in the area were invited to attend.

There were periodic lulls in the drive, but Barnes recalls that after citizens were introduced to the idea people began attending the meetings.

Soon it became impossible to hold these gatherings in the barber shop, and the group moved to Brown's Chapel Church.

Later the sessions were held at Rountree's Church, a more centralized location.

Leaders in the movement began the slow and difficult task of soliciting donations.

Countless barbecue and chicken suppers, singing events and other special programs were held to raise funds.

After beginning to solicit donations and contributions in 1960, the group set an assess-



## Fire Hydrant Over Mincey Grave

ment of \$25 per home in 1962 to build and equip the proposed fire station.

### Some Paid

Some paid the entire assessment, other citizens paid in part while many have paid nothing.

It took a long time to raise the money with nothing concrete to show to citizens in the area. Meanwhile, other homes were being gutted by fires and the need for fire protection never diminished.

Nor did the determination of a handful of citizens.

Finally, after about four years of meetings, benefit suppers and solicitations, some tangible progress was made.

In 1964, the group was chartered by the state to form a volunteer fire department.

Listed as the board of directors on the state charter were L. H. Coley, Barnes, Suggs, Hoskins, John Mincey, Eugene Hoskins and Paul Pender.

The three incorporators were Mincey, Barnes and Suggs.

In February of 1964, the organization began combing the county for equipment.

Two trucks were purchased—one a flat-bed truck and the other an oil truck. Both were in adequate shape, and the \$975 total investment was considered a good one.

But, transforming a couple of second-hand trucks into fire engines is a task equal to changing a pumpkin into Cinderella's coach—particularly in expense.

The two trucks were sent to

O. W. Williams in Rocky Mount, a firm which specializes in such transformations.

### Only Small Part

Siren-red paint jobs were only a small part of the transformation.

Pumps had to be added, along with other equipment, sirens installed, hooks for ladders, hose hook-ups, safety installations, and many other changes.

The bill ran to \$4,992.45. This meant the East Nash Volunteer Fire Department had a total investment of \$5,967.45 in the two trucks.

But, more important, the department was now equipped to fight fires.

The next step was building a facility to house the shiny red vehicles.

With several citizen-firemen working together, the building was put up a brick at a time.

### Labor Donated

Measuring 30 to 54 feet, the facility cost only \$2,276, all in construction materials, since all of the labor was donated.

Now, the East Nash Volunteer Fire Department has its building, its pumpers, and the citizens in the area have a much-needed fire protection.

Since organization of the group, a total of \$5,339.46 has been raised and paid out for equipment and facilities.

The department owes approximately \$7,000, but its equipment and facilities are valued at more than \$15,000.

Some financial relief, \$100 per month, came when the county commissioners approved the department Monday and added it to the County's rural fire system.

Nevertheless, the East Nash firemen are continuing to raise money to pay off their debts.

They're going to keep on dishing out the barbecue and chicken each weekend.

Here they've met with apparent success: an average serving is around 200 plates.

John Mincey, one of the leaders in the organization, gets his firemanship naturally.

### Son Of Ben Mincey

A teacher at Speight High

# WILSON COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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Thank you for renewing your membership with the Wilson County Historical Association. Your support and involvement is very important as we work together to collect, preserve and present the history of Wilson County.

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