



TARRANT COUNTY TXGENWEB

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William Letchworth Hurst

Texas Historical Marker Application Essay
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The fifteen years following the close of the Civil War in 1865 saw large numbers of settlers arriving in Tarrant County. Quite a number of them were ex-soldiers of the Confederate Army, and they came looking for a chance to start over on flat, sparsely-timbered land which had not been worn out by generations of careless farming. One such emigrant was William Letchworth Hurst, who left Tennessee in 1870 and brought his family by wagon to northeast Tarrant County. He was a valuable and productive citizen here for over a half-century, and his descendants continue to be active in the business and government of his adopted home. His memorial today is a thriving Tarrant County city of approximately 35,000 people named Hurst, Texas.

I. Early Life and Marriage.

William Letchworth Hurst (known as Uncle Billy) was born June 1, 1833¹ in southeastern Claiborne County, Tennessee, probably on his grandfather's farm in Caney Valley near Chaleybeate Springs Church,² about six miles southeast of Tazewell. He was one of at least thirteen children born to Wiley Thompson Hurst and his wife, America (Plank) Hurst.³

Billy grew up in an isolated and static society which had changed little in the hundred years since his Hurst ancestors arrived in the New World and moved to the frontier.⁴ Soon after 1800 his relatives began arriving in Claiborne County, where they found a

new home of deep hollows and high ridges that made travel and communication difficult. To a large degree, the topography of their home dictated their lifestyles. Much of the land is thickly timbered and very steep, and farmers there are still forced to adapt as best they can. A writer of a few years ago interviewed two women who lived and worked in the Southern Appalachians near Billy's home:

"A woman told me: 'I've hoed corn many a time on my knees--yes, I have (to keep her footing),' and another: 'Many's the hill o' corn I've propped up with a rock to keep it from fallin' down hill.' "⁵

Travel in and about Billy's home was very difficult and took a great deal of effort and time many mountaineers were not willing to expend. One event remembered by Billy's grandchildren is noteworthy in this respect. Several years after Billy came to Tarrant County, he was visited by a close relative, Mr. Ellison Hurst of Grapevine, Texas. Ellison and Billy Hurst discovered they were both born and reared in southeastern Claiborne County within only three or four miles of each other. Though they talked at length, they were never able to establish how or even if they were related. Later research has shown they were close cousins.⁶ Not only was travel out of the valleys infrequent, travel into the area was mostly confined to other backwoods families coming to settle. Social change and progress crawled in such an environment--as late as 1822 Claiborne County's government still used branding as a form of punishment.⁷

The Claiborne County Hurst family was quite large.⁸ Billy's father, Wiley Thompson Hurst (born ca. 1811), was born, married, lived his entire life, and died in Billy's home community. About 1830 he married America Plank, the daughter of a neighbor, Christian Plank. She was a native of the same community, and was two years younger than her husband.⁹ Billy's paternal grandfather, Hiram Hurst (1792-1867), was a prosperous farmer, minister, and minor county official in Claiborne County.¹⁰ Billy's maternal grandfather, Christian Plank, came to the community from Lee County, Virginia.¹¹ Thomas Hurst (1764-1847), Billy's great-grandfather, came to Claiborne County from Virginia in 1807. He was a Baptist minister, planter, and slaveholder. Thomas Hurst's father, John Hurst (ca. 1735-1817), arrived in Claiborne County about 1803. He was a veteran of the American Revolution, fathered at least seventeen children by two wives, and died under a falling tree in 1817.¹²

Billy was almost certainly influenced by the Primitive Baptist Church--both his grandfather and great-grandfather were ministers of the Big Spring Primitive Baptist

Church, which sat only a short walk from Billy's home.¹³ Several of the Hurst family are members of the congregation to this day.

In March, 1856, Billy was married to Mary Lynch.¹⁴ She was born in North Carolina¹⁵ on October 15, 1835.¹⁶ Although a family tradition prevalent at the time of Billy's death in 1922 stated they were married in Kentucky, their marriage license was issued in Tazewell, Claiborne County.¹⁷ Mary was probably the daughter of another Mary Lynch (born about 1804 in North Carolina) who was living as a widow with six children in 1850 in Claiborne County. She apparently came from North Carolina to Tennessee in the early 1840's. She was illiterate; it is also believed that Billy's wife, Mary, never learned to read and write.¹⁸

It is not positively known where Billy and Mary Hurst spent the first four years of their married life. Family traditions among his grandchildren say that all his older children were born near Lone Mountain, Tennessee.¹⁹ The 1870 Tarrant County, Texas census says the second and third children (Nathan and Mahlon) were born in Kentucky,²⁰ though the 1860 census merely says all the family were Tennesseans except Mary. By 1860 Billy and Mary had four children. Billy was working as a laborer, and had not yet purchased any land. He probably lived and worked on the family farm as his father had done.²¹

II. The Civil War Years and Migration to Texas.

By the start of the Civil War in 1861, the citizens of Claiborne County had aligned themselves according to their feelings and interests. Most of the families in East Tennessee were grain and stock farmers, living on small farms averaging only about fifty acres. On February 9, 1861, an election was held statewide to decide whether or not to even call a secession convention. In Claiborne County, only five persons voted to call the convention; 1,030 people in the same county cast ballots that day to call no convention, since they were afraid it would lead to ultimate secession.¹

The Hursts and their neighbors had little in common with the interests of the deep Southern states. The slavery question probably did not mean a great deal to Billy and his family, though his great-grandfather, Thomas Hurst, lived nearby during Billy's childhood and was the owner of two slaves for many years. Billy doubtless knew them, but they were probably nearly a part of the Hurst family. One of the slaves, Fanny, was with Thomas's household for many years, and was even a member of the Big

Spring Church.² When Thomas made his will in 1846 he directed that his slaves be set free at his wife's death.³ Neither of Billy's grandfathers, nor his father, were slave owners. Quite a large number of the Claiborne County Hursts served in both armies. Though most of Claiborne County did not favor secession, Southern sentiment was pronounced in the southeast part of the county.⁴ Billy's neighborhood gave many soldiers to the Confederate army, and a surprising number left the area after the war to settle in Tarrant County, Texas.

Billy Hurst decided to join the Confederates, and on October 3, 1862, he enlisted in the Southern service at Sycamore, Claiborne County, probably within one or two miles of his home. He became a private in Captain S. E. Mitchell's Company of Pitt's Regiment of Tennessee Infantry. His company, along with several other infantry companies from East Tennessee, met at Henderson's Depot (present-day Afton) in Greene County, Tennessee on October 10. Billy became sick and was not able to meet in Greene County with the rest of his company on that day, but soon joined them. Pitt's Regiment became the Sixty-first Tennessee Infantry, and Billy's company became Company H.⁵

As soon as the Sixty-first Infantry organized and elected its officers, it was placed under the command of Brig. Gen. John C. Vaughn. The combination of the Sixtieth, Sixty-first, and Sixty-second Tennessee Infantry Regiments formed Vaughn's Brigade which stayed together throughout the war. They immediately left for Mississippi, and arrived there in late November, 1862.

Billy Hurst's regiment was first in combat during the battles of Chickasaw Bluffs and Chickasaw Bayou outside Vicksburg, Mississippi, from December 26 until December 29, 1862. The entire Sixty-first Infantry suffered only four casualties, and the regiment was personally and individually commended by Confederate General John C. Pemberton for their tenacity under fire.⁶ The regiment stayed in Mississippi for several more months, and for a while during March or April, 1863, Billy became ill and went to a military hospital at Jackson, Mississippi.⁷

The morning of May 17, 1863, found the Tennesseans again fighting the Federals in what became known as the Battle of Big Black River, Mississippi. Vaughn's Brigade was placed to guard a bridge over the river but were overcome by the Northern soldiers, and even lost their flag to the Twenty-sixth Iowa Infantry. Of four hundred men in the Sixty-first Tennessee who responded for duty in the morning, only one hundred twelve marched back to Vicksburg that evening.

Hurst's regiment spent the next forty-eight days after their humiliation at Big Black River literally eating, sleeping, and fighting in trenches around Vicksburg. There was little shelter, and poor quality rations which, even if wholesome, would not have been nearly enough. Many of the Sixty-first's infantrymen became casualties because of exposure and insufficient food.

The Sixty-first Infantry was among those surrendered at Vicksburg to General Grant on July 4, 1863. While many of the Tennesseans who were taken prisoner there by the Union army were immediately paroled, they were not declared exchanged until nearly a year later.⁸ The records of W. L. Hurst's individual capture at Vicksburg have not survived, though he often spoke of it to his children and grandchildren.

As soon as Billy and his comrades were out of Federal hands, they reformed their regiment. On September 26, 1863, he received a new issue of clothing from the Confederate authorities.⁹ In December, 1863, the Sixty-first Infantry was issued horses by the Confederate government, and until the end of the war they served as the Sixty-first Tennessee Mounted Infantry.¹⁰

Active service ended for Billy Hurst on December 12, 1863, when the Federals captured him near Tazewell, Tennessee,¹¹ probably within five miles of his home. When he was offered his freedom in exchange for signing an oath of allegiance to the United States government, he refused to sign the oath, knowing it meant confinement until the end of the war.

With many other captured Confederates, he arrived on January 2, 1864, at the Military Prison in Louisville, Kentucky. He was kept there until January 17, when he was sent to Rock Island Barracks, in Illinois. On January 20, 1864, Billy Hurst stepped ashore at Rock Island Prison.¹² The stockade sat on an island in the Mississippi River between Rock Island, Illinois and Davenport, Iowa, and was enclosed by a high fence. The island was about three miles long and one and one-half miles wide. Drinking water on the island was always scarce and occasionally non-existent. From December, 1863, until the end of the war, the camp usually contained from 5,000 to 8,000 captive Confederates.¹³

Billy's grandchildren remember him saying he spent sixteen months in "a Rock Island Prison." On March 6, 1865, he was paroled and sent from Rock Island for exchange in Virginia. He had been a prisoner for fourteen months and three weeks, and had spent all but about five weeks of that time in the stockade at Rock Island. Between

March 10 and 12, 1865, Billy was one of 3,499 Confederate soldiers brought to the James River in Virginia at Boulware's and Cox's Wharves for exchange.¹⁴ Only a month later, Lee surrendered the first of the large Confederate armies in the field.

After Billy Hurst's capture, his regiment continued to operate in East Tennessee until late 1864, when they moved into North Carolina. When they heard of Lee's surrender, some merely went home; but others joined Joseph E. Johnston's army in North Carolina. They eventually formed a part of President Jefferson Davis's escort to Washington, Georgia, where they were captured. At that time, the regiment disbanded permanently.¹⁵

Mary, Billy's wife, saw the war much as her husband had seen it, though she remained at home and cared for the children. At least four skirmishes were fought between Northern and Southern troops at the county seat, Tazewell, a few miles from their home. On January 19, 1864, the two sides fought at "Big Springs," literally within hearing and possibly within sight of the Hurst home.¹⁶ A legend prevalent in other families who came to northeast Tarrant County from the community says that Northern soldiers used the Big Spring Church for a hospital and administrative post for a time.¹⁷

Mrs. Hurst told her grandchildren that while both armies were so near, she made uniforms for her small children--a blue uniform and a gray uniform for each. Whenever soldiers passed, she dressed them in the appropriate color and sent them out to ask for food.¹⁸ In 1964, Billy's last surviving child, Em Hurst, recalled hearing that Northern soldiers had burned their home during the war, destroying most of their belongings and all their family records.¹⁹

After Mary learned Billy had been captured, she and her children traveled in a wagon train to Missouri to stay until he was released. After he returned to Tennessee, he rode on horseback to Missouri to get his family and take them back home. Mary told her grandchildren they were bothered by bushwhackers on their way to Tennessee.²⁰

She also remembered that once during the war she had only three dollars left, and was afraid it would be stolen. Beside her house she had laid a small brick walk; she lifted one of the bricks, dug a hole under it, and put in her money. When she had replaced the brick she was satisfied that her money was safe enough. When the Yankee soldiers came to her house again, one of the men walked straight to the brick, lifted it, and took the money.²¹ For a while during the time the armies were camped

nearby, Mary was reduced to feeding her children only milk and corn meal. One day the Yankees stole her only cow; that night she followed them to their camp, went to an officer and told him her story. The officer led her to his holding pens to find her animal, and that night she walked home, leading her cow.²²

Mary said she usually fared better at the hands of Yankee soldiers than she did when Southern soldiers came to the house. She usually hid her children under the bed at mealtime and let them eat there since the Southerners would literally take food off the table if they saw it.²³

Billy's recollections of the war were as vivid as Mary's. He remembered the day he and a taller companion were walking toward the enemy when the other man said, "Bill, you're shorter than me. Let me in front." Billy got behind him. In a few moments a bullet ricocheted off the taller man's belt buckle and then knocked the heel off Billy's boot. Billy always said it was one of the luckiest days of his life.²⁴

Remembering his months in prison, Billy said some of the men at Rock Island finally got so hungry they began eating rats. He never ate any, he said, because he was never able to catch any.²⁵

Kenith Hurst, Billy's grandson, remembered his grandfather's reply when asked if he shot anyone during the war. Billy said he couldn't be sure whether he did or not. He recalled that one day he and a companion saw a Yankee soldier sitting in a tree using a pair of field glasses. Both he and his friend shot at the Yankee at the same time, and the man immediately fell or jumped from the tree. They never knew if they'd hit him.²⁶

One of his granddaughters remembered a story he told of an adventure which may have happened during the war. One cold night, when both he and his horse were tired and nearly frozen, he got off the horse and lay down on the ground to sleep, covering himself with his saddle blanket. Rousing later, soaked with his own perspiration, he threw off the blanket and was startled awake by a face full of snow which had fallen while he slept.²⁷

When the war finally ended and Billy had his family safely back in Tennessee, he continued to work as a laborer and farmer in Claiborne County. Many of his neighbors gradually began to leave and travel west, and by the late 1860's reports of better

farms and opportunities were coming by letter back to his neighborhood. Lots of the letters originated in Missouri and northeast Texas.

Billy probably heard the good reports from his old neighbors, and in 1870 he and his family began the trip to join them. He was part of a fairly large-scale migration which took place in the post-Civil War years from Claiborne County, Tennessee to Tarrant and Dallas Counties, Texas. The Hursts made the six-week trip in a two-horse covered wagon. They said their old home in Tennessee was named Horse Shoe Bend.²⁸ This probably referred to a bend in the Clinch River near their home. During most of the trip, Mary drove the wagon while Billy walked and hunted.²⁹ Mahlon Hurst remembered he was old enough to help with the driving.³⁰ Mary had a large conch shell which she blew occasionally to let Billy know where they were.³¹ When he was an old man, Billy still had a little single-shot rifle he had carried all the way from Tennessee to Texas.³² The family was so large that not all the children could ride in the wagon at once, so they took turns walking.³³ They brought a little dog with them, and were told at one of the river crossings that the dog could not ride the ferry. Reluctantly leaving him behind, they crossed the river and camped on the opposite bank that night. The little dog swam the river during the night, found their camp, and continued the trip with them.³⁴

III. Children.

Billy and Mary Hurst were the parents of at least fourteen children. The first nine were probably born in Claiborne County, Tennessee, and the last five were born in Tarrant County, Texas. One source dated 1870 says that the second and third children, Nathan and Mahlon, were born in Kentucky. The few family records of birth which survive are incomplete and quite contradictory (in each case, all the different dates of birth located will be placed in parentheses). Many dates are obviously wrong.¹

The eldest child, Missouri Ann Hurst (b. 1853, 1854, 1856), was married to George Washington Hoffman. She died at her home near Farmer, Young County, Texas between 1922 and 1931, and was buried there.²

Nathan Booneville Hurst (b. 1856, 1857, 1858, 1859), probably the second child, spent much of his life living in Missouri under the assumed name of William Hammond. Around 1872, he was falsely accused, convicted, and sentenced to the Texas

Penitentiary for his part in an alleged horse stealing episode. He lived more than thirty years as Mr. Hammond, but returned to Texas after his father obtained a pardon for him. He was married twice, first to a Miss French, second to Bettie Roberts, and fathered several children. His second wife returned to Texas with him. He died May 18, 1921, at his home in North Fort Worth and was buried in Mt. Olivet Cemetery.³

Mahlon Stableton Hurst (b. 1856, 1857, March 22, 1858), the third child, was first married to Josephine Huffman in Tarrant County on March 18, 1878. He was married second to Porta Harris (1869-1962) on August 19, 1887. He died at Hurst on January 5, 1932 and was buried in the Arwine Cemetery at Hurst.⁴

Melissa Frances "Frank" Hurst (b. 1858, 1859, May 2, 1860, 1861, 1862), the fourth child, was married to Benjamin M. Brown (1856-1916). She died September 4, 1913 and was buried in Bedford Cemetery.⁵

Jeff Hurst (b. 1861, 1862) died unmarried between 1870 and 1880, and was buried in Bedford Cemetery.⁶

Sophia Jane "Soph" Hurst (b. 1862, 1863, 1864) married Alfred Conner and left Texas. She died in Missouri between 1900 and 1918.⁷

Emerson Ethridge "Em" Hurst (b. 1866, January 1, 1867; January 7, 1869; March, 1872) was the last surviving child of Billy Hurst. He married Clara Hackney (1872-1949) on July 9, 1892. He died October 20, 1964 in Tarrant County and was buried in the Arwine Cemetery.⁸

James Houston "Hous" Hurst (b. 1864, 1865, 1866, March 15, 1867; March 1870) married a widow, Mrs. Nola (French) Souder. He died January 4, 1931 and was buried in Arwine Cemetery.⁹

Evie Bell Hurst (b. February, 1869; 1870) was the last child born before the family left for Texas. She lived with her parents all her life, and died unmarried between 1918 and 1921. She was buried in Bedford Cemetery.¹⁰

Wiley Thomas "Tom" Hurst (b. 1871, October, 1872) was married twice, first to Sallie Zachary and second to Mrs. Mary Lutes. While at a horse race he was kicked by a

horse, and eventually died of his injuries. He died in a Fort Worth hospital on December 4, 1912, and was buried in Bedford Cemetery.¹¹

Hiram Sol Hurst (b. 1872, 1873) died unmarried while still a young man. When he died he was living and working with his brother, Mahlon. One day while sowing wheat, Sol discovered he had run out of chewing tobacco and while he worked, chewed wheat instead. He died that night with severe stomach cramps, and was buried in Bedford Cemetery.¹²

America Belle Hurst (b. 1873, 1874, August 8, 1875) married James Milton Souder (1870-1952). She died November 12, 1953, and was buried in Arwine Cemetery.¹³

William Ceal D. Hurst (b. 1876; August, 1877; 1879) married Hattie Lutes. He was buried February 22, 1951 in Arwine Cemetery.¹⁴

The fourteenth child of Billy and Mary Hurst was stillborn in August, 1879. Family sources remember the child was a girl; though a record made in June, 1880 says it was a boy. Mary Hurst told her grandchildren the baby weighed fifteen pounds at birth. It was buried in Bedford Cemetery.¹⁵

IV. Life in Tarrant County, Texas

When Billy and Mary first arrived in Tarrant County with their family, they were not strangers. Many of their old neighbors and relatives were already living around Grapevine, and they probably stopped there first to stay while searching for a new home.¹ Their first permanent home was on the "Widder Daniels" place, northeast of present-day Euless, Texas.

They next lived on the farm of Dr. W. C. Dobkins (1841-1928),² on or near the Abraham Barnard survey in eastern Tarrant County, also in present-day Euless. The Dobkins family had left Claiborne County, Tennessee in 1852, and may also have been old friends of the Hursts. "Em" Hurst, Billy's son, recalled during a 1964 interview, that his first remembrances were of a log house with a dirt floor. This house may have been their home on Dobkins land, before they later moved into a "box house."³

On January 24, 1872, Daniel Arwine sold Billy a tract of forty acres of land in the William O. Yantis survey in present-day Bedford.⁴ Four years later, on December 2,

1876, Billy bought another tract of 15 acres from W. W. Bobo which joined his other land.⁵ These were only the first of many parcels of land he bought and sold in Tarrant County. The family had at least two separate homes in Bedford.⁶ Probably soon after 1876 they left their first Bedford home and moved into a new, larger, two-story frame house which sat on the east side of present-day Bedford Road, north of its intersection with the Airport Freeway (see Appendices).

In the early 1880's, after their move into the new Bedford house, the family had a joyous reunion. Nathan Hurst, one of the elder sons, secretly returned for a visit after an absence of ten years. Many years later, Nathan recalled the night he came home:

"So leaving my children at home with my wife I went away on business. And that business was to see father and mother again. I had changed in the ten years. I left a boy. I went back to Fort Worth, where I was tried, a man. No one knew me. I walked past the very courthouse in which I had been sentenced--a stranger to everybody. At night I got a negro boy to drive me out north.

"All the old remembrances came back to me as I passed one familiar object after another. I remember distinctly to this day my keen disappointment in going to the old homestead and finding others living there. My parents had built a new and larger home some distance away."

"I left the negro boy in the road and went up to the house. 'Does W. L. Hurst live here?' I asked. The very name seemed queer in my lips. I had not spoken it for so long. Finally a man came to the door with a lamp and said he was Mr. Hurst. 'I want to speak with you,' I said. He invited me in. There in the hallway I could restrain myself no longer. 'This is Nathan, father,' I said."

MOTHER DOUBTED HIM AT FIRST

'Wait a moment,' he said. 'Let me get you in the light first:' He put the lamp in my face and looked at me fixedly. Slowly his eyes began to brighten and he said, 'Son.'

"Mother heard the talking and came downstairs. I rushed to her and threw my arms around her neck and started to kiss her. 'It's Nathan,' I said. 'I don't know whether you're my son or not,' she answered. I was dumfounded. Never had I thought it possible they might forget me."

"We went into the sitting room and sat down and then I began to tell her incidents of my boyhood. All the time her eyes never left my face a moment. She would ask me over and over again about some stories I told, but somehow I couldn't quite convince her. Father added to my perplexity by suggesting new doubts all the time. He evidently was enjoying my mother's predicament, although it was apparent he was satisfied I was really his son."

"After this had continued for some time I got up and said I must go back to town. I couldn't keep the negro boy waiting longer. 'We'll take care of the boy,' father said. 'There's a bed upstairs for you, son.' How good it felt all over to hear that word 'son' again. I was worn out and I slept well."

"I was awakened near morning by light in my face. I opened my eyes to peep. It was my mother and by her side was my favorite sister. I pretended to be asleep. Mother brushed my hair back and peered into my eyes so steadily I feared I would move and disturb it all. 'Can it be my son?' she said over and over again."

"Sister said it was Nathan and mother went out of the room crying. After that, there was no doubt in her . . ."

(Remainder of clipping is not complete.)⁷

Between December, 1895 and mid-1900, the family moved again to a one-story house a few yards south of the present-day Bellaire Shopping Center in Hurst (see Appendices). The family lived in this house when Billy's wife, Mary, died in 1908. Billy and his daughter, Evie, lived there until around 1920 when she died. During a part of the time between Mary's and Evie's deaths, several of Billy's grandchildren took turns staying with their grandfather and helping with the chores.⁸

After Evie died, Billy left his home and began living in the homes of his children. Although most of his time was spent at his son, "Hous's" house, he spent time with all his children who lived nearby. Hous's home sat on the southeast corner lot at the intersection of present-day Norwood Drive and Highway 183. Some of the old post oaks which surrounded the house remain to this day.⁹

While still a young man, Billy worked as a small farmer and laborer. For a few years after he came to Texas he continued to farm, raising cotton, corn, and other crops.¹⁰ During most of their married life, Mary worked hard to help support the family by selling butter and eggs.¹¹ But as Billy grew older, he turned more to trading and speculation to earn his living. One of his great-grandsons recalled that he "was one of the best horse traders there was -- he always had a pocketful of money."¹² Billy and his son, Mahlon, were large-scale speculators in land in the present-day Hurst-Eules-Bedford area.¹³

The single act for which Billy Hurst is most remembered came just after the turn of the century, around 1903. At that time, he and his son, Mahlon, owned a long strip of land along present-day Highway 183 in Hurst. The Rock Island Railroad was laying a line between Fort Worth and Dallas in that year,¹⁴ and approached Uncle Billy about laying the tracks across his land. He and the railroad company eventually came to an agreement by which he gave the railroad the right-of-way across his farm. In return, the railroad agreed to establish a stop there, build a depot, and name it Hurst. With the establishment of the railroad stop, the city of Hurst was born.¹⁵

Billy grew up in the doctrines of the Primitive Baptist Church. He remained a Baptist all his life, though he did not join the Baptist Church in Hurst until after 1908.¹⁶ He and his family had helped support the Hurst Baptist Church (now First Baptist Church of Hurst) in its early years, however. The congregation began in 1889 in Bransford, a small Tarrant County community on the Cotton Belt Railroad a few miles northwest of Bedford. A few months after it began, the small congregation joined with others and moved to Bedford where it remained until 1908. The Hursts attended this church while it was in Bedford. In 1908, the building was dismantled, moved to present day Highway 183, and rebuilt two blocks west of the present site of the First Baptist Church of Hurst.¹⁷ Billy's son "Em," when interviewed in 1964, vividly recalled that he and his father helped to move the church building. After the move, the church members began calling themselves the Hurst Baptist Church.¹⁸

V. Personal Glimpses.

All of Billy's children and grandchildren were quite fond of him. He enjoyed his grandchildren and spent much of his time entertaining them. He had fine white hair which his granddaughters liked to comb; he always offered them a dime if they could get it so tangled he couldn't run a comb through it.¹

Nearly all his grandchildren remember an old pocketbook he carried. It had three sliding buttons on each side, and could only be opened by pushing all the buttons in a certain sequence. He would open it and show the children the coins inside, then close it again and tell them they could have a dime if they could open it. After they had tried a little while, he would take it back, say some "magic words", and open it -- then he would close it again and hand it back to them. None of them ever got his dime.²

He loved to play marbles with his grandchildren and adults as well. With a file, he fashioned a taw marble from a piece of flint; he carried that favorite marble with him in his pocket.³

Billy enjoyed squirrel hunting and had a 16 gauge double-barrel shotgun he always carried on his hunts. He also enjoyed mumblety-peg, horse-shoes, dollar pitching and croquet (he made his own croquet set), but by far his favorite grime was dominoes. As long as some of his grandchildren can remember, there were domino games at his house every night. For the last few years of his life he lived with his son, "Hous," who was married to "Aunt Nola," a domino player as skilled as he was. He wanted to play so much that she sometimes let him win so he would be satisfied and let her tend to her other chores.⁴

Billy liked to sit and eat apples; he cut them in half, scraped out and ate the insides, and then gave the rinds to his eagerly waiting grandchildren.⁵

Until the end of his life, Billy was a well-known fiddle player. He played by ear, left-handed, and rocked back and forth as he played.⁶ He played the popular old tunes of the day, like "Turkey in the Straw." His granddaughter, Pearl, remembers him playing and singing, "Blue-eyed girl in the nigger kitchen, If I want her I can get her."⁷ His great-grandson Homer's first remembrance of Billy is seeing him sitting in Mahlon Hurst's house, playing his fiddle with an old Mr. McDowell. Other old-timers in the community who played five-string banjos, guitars, and fiddles often came to play with

him, or he went to visit them.⁸ After he died, his grandson, Joe Hurst, was given his fiddle.⁹

Uncle Billy became a familiar sight along the lanes and roads in the Hurst and Bedford communities. He walked everywhere he went, never accepting buggy rides. He sometimes covered several miles a day, always wearing his old black hat and folding his hands behind him as he walked. He never needed a cane.¹⁰ Although he had a favorite brood mare named Patsy, he seldom rode her.¹¹ He enjoyed visiting but hated goodbyes, and would simply slip out of the house and be gone on his way without a word.¹²

Billy enjoyed good health all his life. He never used tobacco. He kept a healthy appetite, though he lost all his teeth several years before he died. He bought a set of false teeth which he seldom wore except at meal time.¹³ One day while he stood beside his well, one-half of his set of teeth tumbled in, never to be recovered (or replaced either).¹⁴ He usually carried something soft in his coat pockets for a snack; one of his granddaughters remembered that after meals he always gathered the extra crackers from the table and put them in his pockets for later.¹⁵

Billy subscribed to a daily newspaper which he received in the mail. He never needed glasses to read for his eyesight remained good until the end of his life.¹⁶ He was always interested in current events, and each day during World War I he was especially interested in the developments in Europe. He was eager for the war to end, he said, so that his grandsons in the service could come home.

Around 1900, celebrations of Billy's birthdays began to involve people outside the family. Eventually they became annual affairs eagerly awaited by his family, friends, and neighbors. His family would sponsor large picnics at which several young heifers would be barbecued. The people of the Mosier Valley community, a settlement of blacks on the river southeast of Billy's home, were always invited. They usually did the cooking. As the years passed, the celebrations grew quite large; political candidates came and made speeches, and newspaper photographers came to take pictures. Contests were held to see who had the prettiest baby in the crowd, and two big square dance platforms were always built (one for the whites and one for the blacks). Uncle Billy always liked square dancing and enjoyed playing while others danced. A wagon holding a barrel of ice water was always on hand.¹⁷

The birthday party of 1918 was the most memorable. The World War was still going on, and Billy decided to use the picnic to raise money for the Red Cross. Around 350 people attended and helped to raise \$100.00. There were several speeches given by county leaders and candidates.¹⁸

VI. The Last Years.

As Billy and Mary grew older, they were able to enjoy a comfortable life, good health, and a large family of children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. When Mary died, she left at least eleven of her children as survivors (Billy was survived by only six), and with few exceptions the children married, settled near their parents, and raised their families there.

Around the beginning of 1908, Mary became ill. She grew steadily worse, and died on the morning of February 21, 1908.¹ She was conscious of the people near her and of things going on in other parts of the house until a few moments before her death. Her granddaughter, Bertha, was there when she died. Her funeral was held in the Baptist Church at Bedford, just northeast of their old Bedford home. She was buried in Bedford Cemetery near her children; Sol, Jeff, and the stillborn infant.²

As 1922 began, Billy looked forward to his eighty-eighth spring. His birthday party, the annual Bedford Old Settlers Reunion, and the Bedford School picnic would all take place before the summer ended.

The Bedford School trustees had asked Uncle Billy to play his fiddle at a picnic to raise money for the Bedford school basketball teams. It was to be held at the arbor at the Bedford (at that time New Hope) Church of Christ, beside Bedford Cemetery. Billy said he would be there, even if they had to bring him in a coffin.³ The picnic, they told him, was to begin on June 27.

As June passed, Billy continued taking his daily walks and visiting his family. On the morning of June 26, he got up, ate breakfast, and was sitting on the porch of Hous's house when his daughter-in-law; Hattie, came by driving one of her cows home. She told him good morning, and asked how he felt. He stood up and danced a jig, saying "I never felt better in my life!"⁴ Later that day, he walked to the Trinity bottoms south of the house to look over a tract of land he owned there. He came back to the house looking a little tired,⁵ but he ate his dinner, went to the mailbox for his paper, and sat

on the porch reading for a while.⁶ He asked Nola to play him a few games of dominoes; she agreed, and they began playing. He began to win and got quite excited, but soon Nola had to stop to do some of her housework. He stood up and walked inside to take his afternoon nap.⁷ About 5:00 one of the neighbors, Mrs. Smedley, came by to see him, and one of his granddaughters went in with her to wake him. Mrs. Smedley looked at him and said, "Your grandpa is dying." He never awoke.⁸

His death was completely unexpected--only two or three days before he died he had been able to jump into the air and click his heels together while entertaining his grandchildren on Hous's porch.⁹

The news of his death spread quickly, and that evening the Bedford School trustees came to call asking if the family wished the school picnic to be postponed until after the funeral. His children remembered what he had said when they invited him to play, and said to go ahead with the picnic.¹⁰

The undertaker came to Hous's house and prepared the body in the dining room. Until the funeral at the church on June 28, the casket sat in the front room of the house. After the funeral at the Hurst Baptist Church, they carried his body to Bedford Cemetery. The picnic stopped while they buried him beside Mary. Among the many people who came to pay their respects was a large number of blacks from the Mosier Valley community. They remembered his many kindnesses to them: the yearly invitations to his birthday parties and square dances, and the plot of land he gave them for one of their cemeteries.¹¹

A few years after the death of Uncle Billy, his family erected a single monument to mark his and Mary's graves. At the same time, they placed a small, rectangular block of granite with only the inscription "H" on each of the other four Hurst graves beside those of their parents; those of Sol, Jeff, Evie, and the infant who died in 1879. Uncle Billy's descendants continue to live throughout Tarrant County, and have spread to many other parts of the United States as well. When he celebrated his eighty-fifth birthday in 1918, he was already the grandfather of one hundred grandchildren. Though most of those grandchildren still living today are themselves grandparents and great-grandparents, Uncle Billy's memory is still vivid in their minds. As long as there are Hursts, and as long as there is a Hurst, Texas, Uncle Billy will be remembered.

FOOTNOTES

NOTES I

I. Early Life and Marriage

1. Bedford Cemetery, Tombstone Inscriptions. "Hurst Funeral is To Be Held Wednesday," Fort Worth Star Telegram (hereafter FWST), Tuesday, June 27, 1922, p. 18; United States, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census; Federal Population Schedules; 1860 Census, Claiborne Co., Tenn. (8th District, page 135); 1870 Census, Tarrant Co., Texas (Precinct 2, page 53); 1880 Census, Tarrant Co., Texas (Precinct 3, page 30); 1900 Census, Tarrant Co., Texas (Precinct 3, family no. 107); "Pioneer Observes 85th Birthday by Aiding Red Cross," FWST, Sunday, June 2, 1918, p. 7.

The birth date engraved on W. L. Hurst's grave marker in Bedford Cemetery, "June 1, 1834," is probably incorrect. In the 1860 census he was 26; in 1870 he was 37; in 1880 he was 47; and the 1900 census lists his birth date as June, 1833. In June, 1918, he celebrated his 85th birthday (1918-85 = 1833). His obituary gives his birth date as 1833.

2. Ethan Allen Hurst (1855-1937), "History of the Hurst Family," The Claiborne Progress, (Tazewell, Tennessee) July 20, 1932.

E. A. Hurst placed Hiram Hurst's residence in Caney Valley near Chaleybeate Springs Church. Thompson lived adjacent to his father in 1833.

Claiborne County, Tennessee, "Free Male Inhabitants, Twenty-One and Upwards, 1833," (Tazewell, Tennessee: James Mason, Commissioner, 1833; transcribed by Sherill Williams, Tennessee State Archives).

3. J. C. Hurst, Hursts of Shenandoah, (Lexington, Kentucky: private printing, no date), p. 15.
4. *Ibid.*, page 1.
5. Horace Kephart, Our Southern Highlanders, (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1976), pp. 23, 35.

- 6 Grace Corbin (b. 1906), interview with Patterson at Denton, Texas, March 23, 1979.
- 7 "Tazewell Becomes Town in 1801; Area Settled in 1783;" (Morristown, Tennessee) Citizen-Tribune, Historical Series No.6, Sunday, April 14, 1968, p. 2.
- 8 1830 Census, Claiborne County, Tennessee.
The 1830 Claiborne County Census lists at least 96 persons in Hurst households. There was probably an equal number in the families of married Hurst women. Moreover, by 1830, many Hursts had already left Claiborne County.
- 9 Hursts of Shenandoah, p. 115.
- 10 Ibid., Big Springs Primitive Baptist Cemetery; Springdale, Tennessee, Tombstone and Monument Inscriptions; Hansard, Mary A. (1825-1899), Old-Time Tazewell, (published by Mary Lorena Hansard Wilson, Sweetwater, Tennessee: Kingsport Press, Inc., Kingsport, Tennessee, 1979), p. 176.
- 11 Hattie Byrd Muncy Bales, comp., Early Settlers of Lee County, Virginia and Adjacent Counties, (Greensboro, North Carolina: Media, Inc. Printers and Publishers, 1977), Vol. II, pp. 48, 1103.
- 12 Hursts of Shenandoah, pp. 11-16.
- 13 Big Spring Cemetery Tombstones.
- 14 Claiborne County, Tennessee, Marriage Records.
- 15 1860 Census, Claiborne County, Tennessee (8th District, p. 135).
- 16 Bedford Cemetery Tombstones.
- 17 Claiborne County, Tennessee Marriages.
- 18 1850 Census, Claiborne County, Tennessee (7th subdivision, family no. 229); 1900 Census, Tarrant County, Texas (Precinct 3, family no. 107).

- 19 Lula (Hurst) Doyle (1890-1972), interview with Patterson at Colleyville, Texas, 1970.
- 20 1870 Census, Tarrant County, Texas (Precinct 2, p. 53).
- 21 1860 Census, Claiborne County, Tennessee (8th District, p. 135).

NOTES II

II. The Civil War Years and Migration to Texas

- 1 Mary Emily Robertson Campbell, The Attitude of Tennesseans Toward the Union, 1847-1861, (New York: Vantage Press, Inc., 1961), pp. 262,288.
- 2 Big Spring Primitive Baptist Church; Minutes, 1800-1830, (Claiborne County, Tennessee: transcribed by Pollyana Creekmore from copy at Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, Tennessee).
- 3 Claiborne County, Tennessee, Probate Records.
- 4 William Guy Harrell, telephone interview with Patterson at Tazewell, Tennessee, March 17, 1979.
- 5 United States, National Archives, "Compiled Military Service Records of Soldiers of the Confederate States of America," (Washington, D.C.: U.S. War Department; 1903-1927), Service records of W. L. Hurst, Co. H, 61st Tennessee Infantry.
- 6 Tennessee Civil War Centennial Commission, Tennesseans in the Civil War: A Military History of Confederate and Union Units with Available Rosters of Personnel, (Nashville, Tennessee: 1964), pp. 303.
- 7 W. L. Hurst service records.
- 8 Tennesseans in the Civil War..., p. 303.
- 9 W. L. Hurst service records.

- 10 Tennesseans in the Civil War..., p. 303.
- 11 W. L. Hurst service records.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Mark Mayo Boatner III, The Civil War Dictionary, (New York: David McKay Co., Inc., 1959), p. 705.
- 14 W. L. Hurst service records.
- 15 Tennesseans in the Civil War..., p. 304.
- 16 E. B. Long, The Civil War Day by Day: An Almanac, 1861-1865, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1971), pp. 244, 247, 405, 456-457.
- 17 Georgia (Hurst) Breeding (1905-1976), interview with Patterson at Grapevine, Texas, January 18, 1975.
- 18 Lula (Hurst) Doyle interview.
- 19 "Uncle Em Recalls When Hurst Was a Cornfield," FWST, Wednesday Evening, March 25, 1964.
- 20 Maude (Hurst) Walker (b. 1892, daughter of Mahlon S. Hurst); interview with Patterson at Hurst, Texas, November 25, 1980.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Bertha (Souder) Headrick (b. 1894, daughter of America Belle Hurst); interview with Patterson at Colleyville, Texas, November 29, 1980.
- 24 Sophie (Hurst) Carter (b. 1902, daughter of Will Hurst), telephone interviews with Patterson at Fort Worth, Texas, November 29 and December 3, 1980.
- 25 Ibid.

- 26 Kenith Hurst (b. 1913, son of "Hous" Hurst), interviews with Patterson at Hurst, Texas, November 23 and 28, 1980.
- 27 Sophie (Hurst) Carter interviews.
- 28 "Land Values Up Like Helicopters As Hurst Flexes Its New Muscles," FWST, December 13, 1953; Thomas Baldwin and J. Thomas, M.D., A New and Complete Gazetteer of the United States, Giving a Full and Comprehensive Review of the Present Conditions, Industry, and Resources of the American Confederacy, (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo and Co., 1854); A. von Steinwehr, The Centennial Gazetteer of the United States..., (Philadelphia: Ziegler and McCurdy, 1873); Floyd Evans (b. 1901), interview with Patterson at Springdale, Tennessee, March 16, 1979.
- Horse Shoe Bend probably refers to a bend or oxbow in the Clinch River near Springdale, Tennessee. Two contemporary gazetteers fail to show the place name in Claiborne County. Floyd Evans, a native and lifelong resident of southeast Claiborne County, had never heard the name. In 1873, there was a post office named "Horse Shoe Bend" in Scott County, Tennessee.
- 29 James Edward "Ed" Hurst (b. 1902, son of "Em" Hurst), interview with Patterson at Smithfield, Texas, November 22, 1980.
- 30 "Land Values Up...," FWST, 1953.
- 31 James Edward "Ed" Hurst interview.
- 32 W. M. "Dub" Hurst (b. 1907, son of "Em" Hurst), "Hurst, Texas As I Knew it and My Grandfather and My Father and Families," (unpublished manuscript, 1975, at Tarrant County Junior College, Northeast Campus, Local History Center, Hurst, Texas hereafter TCJC-LHC).
- 33 Kenith Hurst interviews.
- 34 Wilma (Hurst) Dobbs (b. 1908, daughter of "Hous" Hurst), interview with Patterson at Irving, Texas, November 29, 1980.

NOTES III

III. Children

- 1 In all cases where possible, the following sources were consulted to determine approximate birth and death dates of W. L. Hurst's children. Some death dates were computed based upon lists of survivors shown in obituaries. Wherever an additional source was used to obtain a date, it will also be noted. 1860 Census, Claiborne County, Tennessee; 1870 Census, Tarrant County, Texas; 1880 Census, Tarrant County, Texas; 1900 Census, Tarrant County, Texas; "Chill After Game Leads to Death of James Hurst," FWST, Evening, January 5, 1931, p. 13; "Hurst Funeral... Wednesday," FWST, 1922; Obituary of E. E. Hurst FWST, Oct 22, 1964, Sect. 3, p. 6; "Hurst Funeral Will Be Today," FWST, Wednesday Evening, January 6, 1932, p. 5; "N. B. Hurst Dies at "Residence Here," FWST, Wednesday, May 18, 1921, p. 2; "Pioneer Observes Birthday..." FWST, 1918.
- 2 Lula (Hurst) Doyle interview.
- 3 "Alias William Hammond: The Mysterious Life of Nathan Hurst," (compiled by Duane Gage, 1975, TCJC-LHC).
- 4 Arwine Cemetery (Hurst, Texas), Tombstone Inscriptions.
- 5 Lula (Hurst) Doyle interview. Bedford Cemetery Tombstones.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 James Edward "Ed" Hurst interview; Maude (Hurst) Walker interview.
- 8 Ibid.; Arwine Cemetery Tombstones; "Uncle Em Recalls..." FWST, 1964.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Maude (Hurst) Walker interview.
- 11 Ibid.; Tommy Ray, comp., Notes and Clippings on the Hurst Family, (copy at TCJC-LHC); Pearl (Hurst) Cade (b. 1897, daughter of "Em" Hurst), interviews

with Patterson at Hurst, Texas, November 28 and 30, 1980; W. T. Hurst Obituaries, FWST, Wednesday, December 4, 1912, page 12, and Thursday, December 5, 1912, p.2.

Pearl Cade has a transcription of an older Bible record listing Tom Hurst's death in 1912. Tom is shown as a child in the 1918 newspaper announcement of his father's birthday.

- 12 Maude (Hurst) Walker interview.
- 13 Arwine Cemetery Tombstones.
- 14 Ibid.; Sophie (Hurst) Carter interviews.
- 15 1880 Federal Mortality Schedules, Tarrant County, Texas, (Enumeration District 95, Supervisors District 3, p.1); Maude (Hurst) Walker interviews.

NOTES IV

IV. Life in Tarrant County, Texas.

- 1 "Land Values Up...," FWST, 1953.
- 2 "Uncle Em Recalls...," FWST, 1964.
- 3 "Land Values Up...," FWST, 1953.
- 4 Tarrant County, Texas, Deed Records, Vol. 43, p. 82.
- 5 Ibid., Vol. 43, p. 83.
- 6 Kansas City Missouri Star; remnants of unreferenced newspaper article (circa 1900) of interview with Nathan Hurst, alias William Hammond; in Duane Gage, comp., "Alias William Hammond...," TCJC-LHC.
- 7 Ibid.

- 8 Pearl (Hurst) Cade interview; "Sam Street's Map of Tarrant County, Texas, December, 1895," (Fort Worth, Texas: Texas Map Publishing Co.); copy at TCJC-LHC; 1900 Census, Tarrant County, Texas.
- 9 Kenith Hurst interviews.
- 10 James Edward "Ed" Hurst interview.
- 11 Maude (Hurst) Walker interview.
- 12 Homer Hurst (b. 1910, grandson of Mahlon S. Hurst); telephone interview with Patterson at Hurst, Texas, November 29, 1980.
- 13 Maude (Hurst) Walker interview.
- 14 J. L. Allhands, Boll Weevil: Recollections of the Trinity & Brazos Valley Railway, (Houston, Texas: The Anson Jones Press, 1946), p. 33.
- 15 Bertha (Souder) Headrick interview; Maude (Hurst) Walker interview.
- 16 Bertha (Souder) Headrick interview.
- 17 Lori Adams, First Baptist Church, Hurst, Texas: (Student paper, 1976, in TCJC-LHC).
- 18 "Uncle Em Recalls...", FWST, 1964.

NOTES V

V. Personal Glimpses

- 1 Kenith Hurst interviews.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 James Edward "Ed" Hurst interview.

- 4 Ibid.; Wilma (Hurst) Dobbs interview.; Homer Hurst interview.
- 5 Kenith Hurst interviews.
- 6 Homer Hurst interview.
- 7 Pearl (Hurst) Cade interviews.
- 8 Homer Hurst interview.
- 9 Maude (Hurst) Walker interview.
- 10 James Edward "Ed" Hurst interview.
- 11 Homer Hurst interview.
- 12 Sophie (Hurst) Carter interviews.
- 13 Wilma (Hurst) Dobbs interview.
- 14 Pearl (Hurst) Cade interviews.
- 15 Macie (Hurst) Longley (b. 1915, daughter of "Hous" Hurst), telephone interview with Patterson at Hurst, Texas, November 29, 1980.
- 16 James Edward "Ed" Hurst interview.
- 17 Horner Hurst interview; Wilma (Hurst) Dobbs interview.
- 18 "Pioneer Observes...Birthday...," FWST, 1918.

NOTES VI

VI. The Last Years

- 1 Bedford Cemetery Tombstones.

- 2 Bertha (Souder) Headrick interview.
- 3 Thomas M. Acton (b. 1908), telephone interview with Patterson at Bedford, Texas, November 29, 1980.
- 4 Macie (Hurst) Longley interview.
- 5 Wilma (Hurst) Dobbs interview.
- 6 James Edward "Ed" Hurst interview.
- 7 Maude (Hurst) Walker interview.
- 8 Macie (Hurst) Longley interview.
- 9 Kenith Hurst interview.
- 10 Thomas M. Acton interview.
- 11 Wilma (Hurst) Dobbs, Kenith Hurst, Maude (Hurst) Walker, Homer Hurst interviews; "Hurst Funeral... Wednesday," FWST, 1922.
The black cemetery is now partially covered over by one of the buildings of the Bell Helicopter plant on the south side of Highway 183 in Hurst.

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