



*Bethel Cemetery (left);
Walter M. Hagood, Jr.'s
gravestone (top right)
photos by Chris Frutchie*

*The Higginbotham family
of 1905 (bottom right)
photo from The History of Frisco*



Keeping a Hundred Year Promise

By Bob Warren

MANY PROMISES are made, but I venture to say few are kept for as long as one hundred years. This is a story about a promise made in 1908, which, for ninety-eight years, was faithfully kept by members of a pioneer Frisco family and is now being perpetuated by Frisco's Masonic Lodge.

I first learned about "the promise" from the late Donald Fisher eleven years ago as he led a Heritage Association team through old Bethel Cemetery, narrating the cemetery's history. A complete account of our tour through Bethel can be found in my book, *Frisco - Now and Then*. But for now, let's concentrate on Mr. Fisher's story about the promise and the "angels" who have carried it out.

Mr. Fisher's maternal grandparents, Jasper H. and Nancy Elizabeth Higginbotham came to Frisco from Alabama in 1896. Mr. Fisher told how his grandmother, Mrs. Higginbotham, befriended a transient family and made them a promise that is still alive today.

For her demonstration of love and compassion, I'm going to call her our "first angel."

Mr. Fisher first told us some of the history of the Bethel area and its cemetery that dates from 1850. He recalled that Bethel, located about two miles north of old downtown Frisco, came into being in 1847 when the Rogers family came here from Tennessee in a covered wagon. They liked what they saw, built a house and named their place "Bethel" for their former home in Tennessee.

The next year, Joab Biggs, a pioneer Methodist preacher, came to Bethel and organized a church. After worshipping in homes for four years, the group built their first building, a small wooden

structure with a dirt floor and split-log benches. The little church grew, and each year after harvest, held a two-



week revival. Families came in their wagons from far and near to camp while they attended the revival meetings. The church built a brush arbor and cleared a ten-acre campground to accommodate the crowds.

In 1902, Bethel Methodist Church



Minnie & Mack Fisher's final resting place (left)
photo by Chris Fritchie

Wilma Fisher (right)
photo from Frisco: The First 100 Years

moved two miles south to a new village called Emerson (later Frisco) to become the First United Methodist Church of Frisco. However, the nice campground at Bethel had become a popular place for wagon trains to stop and “refuel” as they made their way from points east to California and other lands of opportunity. The travelers’ cattle and horses needed fresh supplies of grain and farmers were glad to find a market for their crops.

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As our tour of Bethel wound down, we stopped at the grave of an infant, Walter M. Hagood, Jr., where Mr. Fisher related a heart-rending story which had been passed down through his family. He told us how, in 1908, the Walter Hagood family was on its way to California in their covered wagon when they decided to stop at Bethel to await the birth of their baby. The little one was born on October 21, but lived only four days. Mr.

Fisher’s grandmother graciously offered the grief stricken family a burial site in the Higginbotham family plot.

The baby was buried, but when it came time for the Hagoods to resume their westward journey, the mother, sobbing said, “My baby’s grave will never have flowers on decoration day.”

Then came the promise – Nancy Elizabeth Higginbotham, our “first angel,” consoled the distraught mother, saying, “Don’t you worry. We will see that the grave is decorated every year!” True to her word, Mr. Fisher’s grandmother placed flowers on the baby’s grave each year for 22 years until she died in 1930.

Without hesitation, Mrs. Higginbotham’s daughter, Minnie Fisher then assumed the duties of decorating the infant’s grave. Minnie, Donald Fisher’s mother, is our “second angel.” Mr. Fisher said he watched his mother lovingly place flowers on the Hagood baby’s grave each year just as she decorated her family members’ graves. She maintained “the promise” for 34 years until her death in 1964.

The late Wilma Fisher, Donald Fisher’s wife, then willingly volunteered to carry on the decorating duties. Thus, Wilma became our “third angel.” Those who knew “Miss Wilma,” a beloved Frisco teacher for whom the Wilma Fisher Elementary School is named, know that whatever task or duty she accepted was unflinchingly carried out.

Donald Fisher died in 2001, and Wilma

continued to decorate all the graves in the Higginbotham/Fisher tract until her health began to fail about two years ago. That’s when members of Frisco’s Masonic Lodge, stepped forward and told Miss Wilma, “You and Donald have faithfully served in Masonic organizations for many years, Donald as a Mason and you in the Order of the Eastern Star, so we would like to honor your service by assuming the duties of decorating the Hagood baby’s grave.”

Miss Wilma died in April of this year knowing that she now has “a bunch of angels,” the Masons, committed to carrying out the promise.

The infant, Walter M. Hagood, Jr. died on October 25, 1908, one hundred years ago this month. The local Masonic Lodge plan to mark the one hundredth anniversary of baby Hagood’s death later this year with a ceremonial decoration of the little grave. That celebration will also mark the beginning of the second hundred years of our “promise.”

We can rest assured that the promise remains in good hands – the hands of our “Masonic angels.”

Frisco native Bob Warren is an award-winning humorist, historian and former Frisco mayor.

