

EMSLEY THOMAS WALLACE (1837-1918)

Emsley Thomas Wallace, son of Isham Wallace and Nancy Furr, married [Priscilla Melton](#) (1834-1909), daughter of James Melton and Temperance Horner. The Wallaces and the Meltons were close neighbors and there were four marriages between the families; Emsley and three of his brothers went on to marry four of James Melton's daughters. Emsley and Priscilla lived just southeast of the town of Robbins at the end of the present day Rushwood Road. Like many of his time, Emsley spent the majority of his life farming the 230 acres of land he owned near Buffalo Creek.

Emsley and Priscilla had seven daughters and one son during their life together: [Elizabeth Jane](#) (1861-1934), [Sindy Ann](#) (1863-1930), [Louisa Elipher](#) (1865-1944), [Sarah Catherine](#) (1868-1941), [Callie Lee](#) (1870-1916), [Addie Florence](#) (1872-1943), [Lucian Thomas](#) (1876-1935), and [Martha](#) (1878-1955). Most of their children married and raised large families in upper Moore County, NC as well.

Elizabeth Jane married Baxter Williams and produced 9 children. Sindy Ann married Lineberry B. Maness and had 8 children. Louisa married James P. Garner and they had six children and lived in the vicinity of the present day Yates Thagard Baptist Church near Vass, NC. Sarah Catherine married George Williams (brother to Baxter Williams) and produced a family of eleven children. Callie Lee married James Britt and died at 46 years old without children. Addie Florence lived with Emsley throughout her life and never married. Lucian Thomas was the only son of the union. He married Nancy Jane Williams and they produced seven children including my grandfather Mallie Wallace. Martha was the youngest child of Emsley and Priscilla and she married Daniel Bethune Britt, Jr. (brother to James Britt). They lived on Cedar Lane in Eagle Springs and had two children. Emsley and Priscilla both lived long lives – Emsley dying at 81 and Priscilla at 74.

In addition and arguably more important than Emsley's biography, he was the inspiration and focus of admiration of a young boy. My grandfather, [Mallie Wallace](#), was enamored with his grandfather from the very beginning. Looking back it is easy to see why; Emsley was a colorful character, standing over six feet tall, possessing a long white beard and a deep, booming voice. His wife, Priscilla, had died in 1909 a year before my grandfather was born and from an early age, Mallie would spend as many waking hours and nights with Emsley as his parents would let him. He was his constant companion and side kick. Emsley truly had a soft spot for his young grandson and Mallie worshipped the ground Ems walked on.

Emsley told him the stories of the old Wallaces like Everet, Isham, Enoch, Josiah, Aaron, and so many others who had passed long ago. He lectured as to how the Wallaces were related to every family in upper Moore County except the Morgans and the Moores. Not surprising, it turns out that we are actually related to both families, but apparently Ems and his brothers had a few run-ins with them and had declared them off-limits.

Emsley told of how he and several of his brothers (Wes, Sam, Quim, and Lockey) had laid in the creek beds during the Civil War to avoid the conscription officers. Only Emsley's brother Sampson Delaney "Lane" Wallace fought in the War. It was often speculated that he didn't volunteer, but just had been "found."

While Emsley Wallace was admired and loved by his grandson Mallie, he was not generally thought of as a kind man and was more often described by others as ill-tempered and "meaner than the devil." One of the more telling stories of Emsley's character and personal notoriety was his story about the time that he claimed to have met the devil himself. One night walking home late from a gathering, Emsley claimed to have met

the devil on a narrow path. He knew it to be the devil, he said because he could see his pitchfork tail, horns and glowing red eyes in the light of the moon. The devil growled and told Emsley to step aside so he could pass. Emsley kept on walking and finally it was the devil himself who stepped aside and let ol' Ems pass to which began the "legend" that he actually was meaner than the devil.

It seems Emsley and his only son, Lucian, never particularly got along well and as a direct result, Lucian unfortunately did not fare as well in my grandfather Mallie's memory. He always said all he remembered growing up was working hard and Lucian insisting there was always more work to be done. His brothers and sisters remembered their father in a much more favorable light, especially when compared to ol' Ems; it seems most were leery of Emsley and probably much like the devil, got out of his way and allowed him to pass.

Lucian was a hardworking family man and a highly regarded member of the community; with handwriting lessons he had excellent penmanship in a day when few did. He also had a great singing voice, took music lessons and was often asked to sing at neighbor's funerals and sang in the choir at Tabernacle. A favorite family memory was gathering in the front room around the old organ on Sunday evenings singing together songs led by their father. Emsley's only son was evidently not cut from the same rough and tumble cloth as his father.

One particular example of Lucian and Emsley's chilly relationship is the location of Emsley's grave. When his wife and Lucian's mother, Priscilla, died Emsley insisted she be buried at the end of the field beside a small grove of trees, instead of a church cemetery, but as time passed, he decided that he should and would be buried at the new cemetery at Tabernacle Methodist Church when he died. When Emsley died, Lucian did not do his bidding, instead he declared "if the old field was good enough for Mam it is good enough for him" and the old field is where Emsley remains. My grandfather Mallie always believed that Emsley haunted Lucian for that act of defiance.

My grandfather would tell us many stories about Emsley and his brothers. Two of the most memorable involved his younger brothers, Byrd and John. Virgil Spinks "Byrd" Wallace's wife Regina Hunsucker died leaving Byrd with a small, young family of children. Byrd moved his young family into Emsley's house for a few days after her death. During the next couple of days, Byrd and Emsley got into an argument that became so heated that Byrd packed up the family and left. As they were walking away from Emsley's house, Byrd and Emsley were yelling back and forth at each other. Emsley got so mad that he picked up a rock and threw it at Byrd and his family narrowly missing them. According to my grandfather Mallie, Ems threw the rock so hard that it knocked a plank off a nearby corn crib. All this towards his closest brother who had just lost his wife. Maybe the devil was smarter than we thought.

Another was the time Emsley's brother John M. Wallace came in on the train from Arkansas to stay with Emsley for a few weeks. My grandfather and Emsley had waited at the station until midnight for the train to arrive. John was the youngest of Emsley's siblings and had been one of his favorites. John had gotten married to Candace Melton (Priscilla's younger sister) when he was young and she was pregnant. Not long after, John slipped off and headed west. In Arkansas, John got along well, married another woman and raised a family. He had also recently been elected as a Judge. After his arrival by train, John and Emsley spent the entire day catching up and planning his stay. Then they got the word that John's former family, currently living in Rockingham, had heard about his arrival and were headed their way. John slipped away that night on the midnight train much the same way he had arrived. It is interesting to note that John gave a quite embellished biographical sketch of his family in *Goodspeed's Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Central Arkansas*

in which he listed his brother Emsley, a successful member of the state legislature. Maybe my grandfather Mallie wasn't the only one with a high opinion of ol' Ems after all.

One final story that has always been one of my favorites and helps demonstrate that while Emsley had a soft spot for his young grandson Mallie in his final years – the Devil still would have been wise to step aside and let him pass. Duncan Garner was the son of John Garner and Sarah Ann Wallace and a nephew to Emsley. Duncan owned land that adjoined Emsley's property down by Buffalo Creek. One day Duncan was cutting down a tree and it happened to fall down over on Emsley's property and tear up Emsley's fence. When Duncan came to tell Emsley that it had happened and that he intended to rebuild the fence, Ems flew into a rage right in front of my grandfather. Mallie told of how an eighty year old man picked up his walking cane and went to beating Duncan with it. Duncan, a mere forty-five years old and quite a strapping fellow himself, took off running down the road with Emsley close behind in hot pursuit swinging the walking cane. Mallie said he had never seen anything like it. Duncan went on to press charges but later dropped them due to the embarrassment that he was assaulted by an eighty year old man.

These stories are just a few of many that Emsley told Mallie. One of the most amazing facts was that when Emsley died, Mallie was only eight years old. What an effect Emsley had on his grandson Mallie as over the next eighty four years Mallie himself became a great spinner of yarns and had many, many stories for his children and grandchildren but you could always count on him coming back to his favorite topic, Emsley Wallace.

Just like my grandfather Mallie before me, my love of the Wallaces began with Emsley. I saw him through the same eyes as my grandfather did many, many years before. So much so, that my daughter now bears Emsley's name as a testament to my own grandfather and his love for his grandfather.

I have always believed that Emsley's relationship with Mallie was the foundation for my grandfather's relationship with his children and grandchildren. My grandfather was so beloved and so special to all of us that even now, seven years after his death, he is missed as painfully as he was the day he died. And just like my grandfather Mallie did with us, we talk frequently about our grandfather to our children and to others who will always know him in the way that we have.

Later on in life, my grandfather built his house on the very same spot as Emsley's house and proudly kept the large rocks used as foundation for Emsley's house in his yard. It was in that same yard and under those same trees that he passed down the stories of long ago and sparked an interest in several more generations of Wallaces. While we may now all be called by other names like Jackson, Chriscoe, Parker, Moore, Dodson, and Purvis – we will always be Wallaces.

Written by Morgan Jackson, grandson of Mallie Wallace and great-great grandson of Emsley Wallace