

Part 2 of the story of Willtown, the earliest community in Georgetown-Williamsburg County. ©

Continuing from last week's article of Marjorie Rhem, "Cleland Belin, of Willtown at Black Mingo, was born in 1792, and died in 1868. He married Sarah Margaret McFaddin. They had thirteen children eleven of whom died before the age of five. Sarah died in 1851. Their first child, Margaret Jane Belin, died on the twenty-seventh of October, 1837. Their third child, died on the twelfth of October, 1847. Their only son, James M. Belin, died October, 1847. He was five years old.

Two of the most common diseases that many of the people of this section died of were diphtheria and malaria. A few times there was a typhus epidemic that took a tremendous toll of human lives. In 1815, the first occurred and hardly a home in Willtown was left untouched by the angel of death. The tombstones at Old Belin's Church can tell many a pathetic tale. In one family of six children only one lived to be of any age.

The correct name of Old Belin's Church is Black Mingo Baptist Church as may be determined by stone gate posts in the front and the side of the church. The stately proportion of this old building brings forth respect of those who appreciate good architecture. Apparently, only the best materials went into the building of the church. As was the custom of that day, mortices and wood pegs were used to hold the framework together. The timber was hand ripped and dressed with the utmost care.

When one steps inside this beautifully constructed church, the first thing he is apt to notice is the small narrow stairway leading up to a gallery along the side of the wall where the slaves sat. In those days white people assumed the responsibility for the spiritual welfare of their slaves. The slaves were taught early to be in the Lord's House on the Sabbath. Sawdust was spread over the floor of the gallery to silence the footsteps of the slaves as they came and went, for services weren't as short then as they are now.

The inside of the Old Church is painted a dull gray. The pulpit is maple colored with an inscription on the front. Above the pulpit hangs a rosewood sounding board with the inscription: "God knows thy thoughts. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water, and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God". The pews were protected against the wear and use of time by pieces of molten lead fitted over the ends. At the back of the Church, written above the slave gallery is: "Let your light so shine before man, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven". Written on the left side of the Church is: "Be not deceived; for neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor thieves, nor covetors, nor drunkards, nor wilers, nor extortioners shall inherit the Kingdom of God." On the right hand side of the church is written: "When ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any, that your Father also which is in heaven forgive your trespasses". At the back of the church just below the slave gallery is: "The angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth".

The outside of the Church is painted white with inscriptions in the front and on the side. The inscription in the front is: "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved." The inscription written on the side reads: "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give your rest."

Not far from Old Belin's there is a small graveyard which must have been located just behind Willtown. On August 9, 1948, some of the graves were robbed by persons seeking jewelry. Several headstones were broken and holes have been dug by treasure hunters. One grave that was obviously robbed was that of James Zuill, late merchant of Willtown who died Sunday, the thirtieth of March, 1810. Age fifty-one years old and a native of Scotland. He had two infant children when he died. His son, John Zuill, who died ninth of October, 1819 age eleven years, lies beside him.

Senator Thomas McConnell, who died on the twenty-second of November, 1827, in the thirty-seventh year of his age, is also buried there. He was a husband, pastor, and master.

In 1819, a rivalry existing between Thomas McConnell and John Dozier over a bridge, became so intense, that the legislature had the bridge moved some miles below Willtown to Shepard's Ferry, where it is located today. All public roads to Willtown were discontinued and from that time on, Willtown deteriorated."

A sad ending to this story is that the Belin's Church at Black Mingo was burned to the ground in 1992 by vandals. The cemetery is still there.