

S P R I N G E D I T I O N

# RUCKER FAMILY SOCIETY

VOL. 21, NO. 1, MARCH 2010

## MORE FANTASTIC OLD PHOTOS

see page 10



William Ambrose Rucker

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## In Memoriam



**Hylton Ellis Wilkerson**, age 89, of Delaplane, Virginia passed away on November 18, 2009. Hylton was born on January 17, 1920 to Royall Ellis Wilkerson, a railroad fireman in the town of Monroe, Virginia, and his wife Bessie R. Roberts. Hylton grew up in Falls Church, Virginia. When he was young, he volunteered as a firefighter in Falls Church and later in Vienna, Fairfax County's first and oldest fire department, later becoming their Assistant Chief. During

Continued on page 3

## Belle Grove Plantation by Bill Smith

This article and the previous obituary are closely linked in that Hylton Ellis Wilkerson and his wife purchased Belle Grove in the 1960s and began the restoration visitors can see today. Belle Grove Plantation is located in the northern Shenandoah Valley near Middletown, Virginia. It is an authentic 1797 Manor House, that was built by Major Isaac Hite and his wife Nelly Madison Hite, who was the sister of President James Madison. Major Hite, grandson of Shenandoah Valley Pioneer Jost Hite, who expanded his original 483 acres to a prosperous 7,500 acre plantation, growing wheat, raising cattle and Merino sheep, and operating a large distillery and several mills.



Belle Grove, Virginia

***The Rucker Family  
Society Newsletter***

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After the death of Nelly in 1802, Major Hite married Ann Tunstall Maury. Three children were born to the first marriage and ten to the second. Twelve of these children lived to adulthood. In 1815, as the family grew, an addition was made at the west end of the original house to finish-out the one-hundred-foot facade as it stands today. The grain and livestock plantation continued to grow until Major Hite controlled 7,500 acres of land with 103 slave workers. Hite also owned a general store, a grist-mill, a saw-mill and a distillery. He died in 1836, and after Ann's death in 1851, Belle Grove was sold out of the family. By the start of the Civil War in 1861, Belle Grove no longer existed as it had during the Hite era. There was a succession of owners before the Brumback family in 1907, and then Francis Welles Hunnewell in 1929. Much is owed to the thoughtful preservation efforts of these 20th century owners. There is an interesting Rucker-Hite connection in that a great-grandson of Isaac Hite, Hugh G. Skinker married Annie<sup>7</sup> Lee Rucker in 1894 (William A.<sup>6</sup>, William<sup>5</sup> B., George<sup>4</sup>, John<sup>3</sup>, John<sup>2</sup>, Peter<sup>1</sup>).

Belle Grove was used as a headquarters by Union General Phillip Sheridan during the Civil War Valley Campaign of 1864 and was at the very center of the pivotal Battle of Cedar Creek. After a surprise attack by Confederate General Jubal Early

in the early hours of October 19, 1864, General Sheridan quickly regained the territory, securing the Valley for the Union and boosting President Abraham Lincoln's chances for re-election.

Based on design principles of Thomas Jefferson, the elegant Federal era Manor House features intricate, hand carved woodwork and a restored interior. The house was constructed of native limestone quarried on the property. Today, Belle Grove is a National Trust for Historic Preservation site and the centerpiece of the new Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park. Situated on 283 acres of the original 483 acres, Belle Grove showcases the Shenandoah Valley's famous mountain views. Visitors to Belle Grove's plantation grounds can explore the Manor House, 1815 icehouse and smokehouse, demonstration garden designed by the Garden Club of Virginia, slave cemetery, and a heritage apple orchard.

Though edited, the pictures and most of the text from this article originally appeared on the Belle Grove website, <http://www.bellegrove.org>

Belle Grove in Winter



## In Memoriam

Continued from page 1

World War II, he served in the Air Force Reserve as an aircraft mechanic at National Airport in Washington, D.C. where one of his duties was readying the plane that carried FDR to Yalta. In August of 1940 he married Marjorie Lou Waggoner of Vienna, Virginia where they raised their four children, and began their commercial painting business of 28 years, Wilmar Contractors, Inc. In the 1960's, they moved their residence to Fauquier County, Virginia where they restored "Belle Grove," a circa 1780 manor and plantation near Paris, Virginia (described in some detail in the article found on page 1). Mr. Wilkerson is survived by his loving wife of 69 years, Marjorie; their four daughters, Janet L. and William R. Smith, Susan C. and Charles M. Walker, Sandra E. and Douglas M. Manuel, and Mary E. and William F. Torrey; 14 grandchildren and 13 great-grandchildren. Funeral services were held on November 21, 2009 at Manassas Assembly of God, Bristow, Virginia, and interment followed at Marshall Cemetery, Marshall, Virginia.

The lineage of Hylton<sup>10</sup> E. Wilkerson is: Royall<sup>9</sup> E., Lucy<sup>8</sup> M. Rucker, Washington<sup>7</sup> I., Edwin<sup>6</sup> S., Ambrose<sup>5</sup>, Reuben<sup>4</sup>, Ambrose<sup>3</sup>, John<sup>2</sup>, Peter<sup>1</sup>.

## Virginia Burial Records Online

by Christopher Rucker

Those who attended the 2008 Rucker Family Society reunion in Charlottesville, Virginia will remember the keynote address given by Mr. Ted Delaney, the curator at Lynchburg's City Cemetery. As he promised, the burial records of the Diuguid funeral home have been posted online, and are now available to researchers. Diuguid's has been burying the citizens of Lynchburg city and Amherst and Campbell Counties, Virginia since the mid-nineteenth century. As Rucker researchers know, Peter Rucker's descendants figured prominently in this region, and the burial records are a valuable and fascinating resource for genealogists. The archive are 151 individuals with the Rucker surname, another twelve women with Rucker as their middle name, and three men who have Rucker

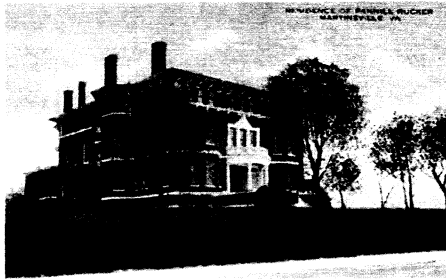
as one of their given names: you can enter the surname in the search box and browse them all, or enter search parameters by name and date. Most of the burials have an image of the Diuguid account book, which will list the services and costs, who paid the bill, the height of the deceased and size of the coffin, and where the burial was performed. Some of the older burials have no image: I was disappointed that my ancestors, William<sup>5</sup> Ballenger Rucker and Ambrose<sup>5</sup> Rucker had no account book entry to view. My favorite entry was for James Monroe Rucker (1813-1878), who paid for his burial in installments with barrels of apples, until the harvest season ended and the last payment was in cash. Enjoy the fruits of the labor of the volunteers who transcribed these data and put them online for our use! Go to: <http://www.gravegarden.org/diuguid/index.php>.

Entry for James Monroe Rucker

3	Out of Jas Monroe Rucker 2nd		
	for coffin & box for self	\$20 00	\$11.50
	Out of " " by Daniel G. Apple		2.00
	" " " " " " " " " "		2.00
	" " " " " " " " " "		2.00
	" " " " " " " " " "		2.00
4	for coffin & box for wife	\$10 00	\$10 00
	5 " " by cash of J. H. Hunkler		
6	Michael Rucker		
	for coffin & box for wife	\$40 00	\$40 00
	12 " " by cash in full		
8	Out of James M. Rucker 2nd		
	for coffin & box for daughter	\$20 00	\$11.50
	April 2nd 1878 by cash of J. H. Hunkler		2.00
	Paid Paper 214 - 18.50		22.50

## More about Pannill Rucker by Michael P. "Mike" Rucker

The last *RFS Newsletter* (December 2009) contained an article about Pannill Rucker. Here is a bit more about this very interesting individual and the enterprise he co-founded, the Rucker-Witten Plug Tobacco Company.



Oak Hall, Martinsville, Virginia

The economy of the southern Virginia Piedmont in the late 18th and early 19th century was based almost exclusively on tobacco as the main cash crop. And, the arrival of two railroads in Martinsville, Virginia just before the turn of the century created the opportunity for several large tobacco factories to open there. Tobacco farmers no longer had to travel to markets in Danville and Lynchburg as tobacco could be sold, manufactured and shipped directly from Martinsville. The largest of these Martinsville firms was the Rucker-Witten Plug Tobacco Company.

In an effort to have the railroad come right to the door of their new building Rucker-Witten contrived with the Danville & Western Railway Co. have a portion of private land owned by a

Miss Hairston taken by eminent domain. Miss Hairston brought suit that this taking of her land was not legal as the intended use was not a "public use," the only constitutional and lawful basis for such an action.

Miss Hairston lost her case in the circuit court of Henry County and appealed to the Virginia Supreme Court, where she also lost. The case finally reached the United States Supreme Court under the title *Ann Hairston v. Danville & Western Railway. Co.*, 208 U.S. 598 (1908). Miss Hairston lost this final appeal and a board of commissioners was appointed to determine the price to be paid to her for the taking of her land.

The boom of the tobacco industry in Martinsville was ending about the time of this lawsuit when the "Tobacco Trust" of larger companies began buying and consolidating the smaller, independent factories. Rucker-Witten was sold to R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company shortly thereafter.

Pannill Rucker married Frankie Stevens the daughter of tobacco magnate Col. Benjamin F. Stevens of Martinsville and St. Louis, Missouri. Stevens was the former president of Liggett and Myers Tobacco Co., the world's leading producer of plug (chewing) tobacco, which explains how Rucker got into the plug tobacco business. During 1905 and 1906, Col. Stevens built a three-story mansion on about 10.5 acres of

land situated on Church Street in Martinsville. The original house, named, Oak Hall, was destroyed by fire in February 1917. The mansion was rebuilt using the foundation and some walls of Oak Hall, and later became known as Scuffle Hill House. It was also known as "Martinsville's Most Ornate Home." Col. and Mrs. Stevens lived there along with the Ruckers and their two sons, Benjamin and Pannill, Jr. In April 1920, the Ruckers relocated to Richmond, and would eventually return to Martinsville, where, in 1930, Mr. Rucker died in an automobile accident and was buried the Oakwood Cemetery (from an article by Virginia Windle, published in the *Martinsville Bulletin* and notes from the Virginia Department of Historic Resources). Currently, Scuffle Hill House is the parish house for Martinsville's Christ Episcopal Church, 311 East Church Street, Martinsville, Virginia 24112-2981, and was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1997 and is designated a Virginia Historic Landmark.



Parish House (Scuffle Hill House)

**Errata****in Sudie Rucker Wood's Book  
Continued from Vol. 20, No. 20  
December 2009****by Jean W. Brydon**

Page 83 — Ambrose<sup>7</sup> C. Rucker's middle name was Clark. The Emily J. Clark that Wood said was his first wife was actually his father's 2<sup>nd</sup> wife. Ambrose C. married 1<sup>st</sup> 25 Sep 1858, Philadelphia Catharine ("Kate") Clark [she and Emily J. Clark were sisters] (tombstone at Rucker Cemetery, Amherst Co., VA). Ambrose m. 2<sup>nd</sup> 9 Dec 1962, Rosalie M. Acree; and m. 3<sup>rd</sup> 28 Apr 1868, Sally M. Mason (Amherst Co., VA Marriage Book 2, p.149). Ambrose lived at the "Wigwam," later the home of Queena Stoval and visited by the Rucker Family Reunion in 2004. (Birth dates of children from Charles Hylton Rucker's Family Bible [in possession of Anne L. Denton].)

**Issue of Ambrose<sup>7</sup> Clark Rucker**  
and 3<sup>rd</sup> wife, Sally M. Mason:

1. Edwin<sup>8</sup> Samuel Rucker, b. 1 Nov 1859; m. Lillie Sue Clark.

**Issue of Ambrose<sup>7</sup> Clark Rucker**  
and 3<sup>rd</sup> wife, Sally M. Mason:

2. Sallie<sup>8</sup> "Birdy" N. Ruckere, b.9 Feb 1869

3. Margaret<sup>8</sup> "Maggie" M. Rucker, b. 17 Jan 1871.

4. Charles<sup>8</sup> "Charlie" Hylton Rucker, b. 22 Jan 1874.

5. Mary<sup>8</sup> "Massie" Rucker, b. 12 Sep 1876.

6. Helen<sup>8</sup> B. Rucker, b. 16 Sep 1878.

7. Marcia<sup>8</sup> Rucker, b. 1880, d. 1882.

Page 83 — Charles<sup>8</sup> "Charlie" Hylton Rucker (Ambrose<sup>7</sup> C. Edwin<sup>6</sup> S., Ambrose<sup>5</sup>, Reuben<sup>4</sup>, Ambrose<sup>3</sup>, John<sup>2</sup>, Peter<sup>1</sup>), b. 22 Jan 1874, d. 1956, m. Mary Drean, b. 6 Jun 1877, d. 10 Apr 1966. Lived Botetourt Co., VA. **Note:** He was not a doctor as stated in Wood on p.83. She was confusing him with his uncle, Dr. Hylton James (not G.) Rucker (Edwin<sup>6</sup> S., Ambrose<sup>5</sup>, Reuben<sup>4</sup>, Ambrose<sup>3</sup>, John<sup>2</sup>, Peter<sup>1</sup>), listed next on the same page.

Page 83-84 — Washington<sup>7</sup> Irving Rucker (Edwin<sup>6</sup> Sorrell, Ambrose<sup>5</sup>, Reuben<sup>4</sup>, Ambrose<sup>3</sup>, John<sup>2</sup>, Peter<sup>1</sup>) had eleven children (Wood lists only five) by two different wives. His first wife was Margaret Miller (m. 6 Oct 1862, Rappahannock Co., VA marriage records) not Sarah Knight Jones. His second wife was Betty Shelton, m. 9 Nov 1864, and they lived in Forest, Bedford Co., VA, and were listed in the 1910 Bedford county directory.

**Issue of Washington I. and 1<sup>st</sup> wife, Margaret Miller:**

1. James<sup>8</sup> Irving Rucker, b. Jul 1863 (Note: his mother died shortly after his birth and he was raised by his maternal grandparents, the Millers, at their farm in Rappahannock Co., VA, see RFSN, Vol. 18, No. 2, p.20).

**Issue of Washington I. and 2<sup>nd</sup> wife, Elizabeth "Betty" Epps Shelton:**

2. Florence<sup>8</sup> Royall Rucker, b. 1 Oct 1867

3. Mary<sup>8</sup> Maude Rucker, b. 6 Apr 1869

4. Edwin<sup>8</sup> Shelton Rucker, b. 1 Apr 1871 (birth cert).

5. Herbert<sup>8</sup> Leslie Rucker, b. 21 Jan 1874.

6. Gertrude<sup>8</sup> Rucker, b. 3 Feb 1877 (birth cert).

7. Lucy<sup>8</sup> Mable/Mabel Rucker, b. 8 Mar 1878 (birth cert).

8. Rosa<sup>8</sup> Valentine Rucker, b. ca 1880.

9. Margaret<sup>8</sup> "Pearl" Ellis Rucker, b. ca 1884.

10. Lillian<sup>9</sup> Rucker, died in infancy.

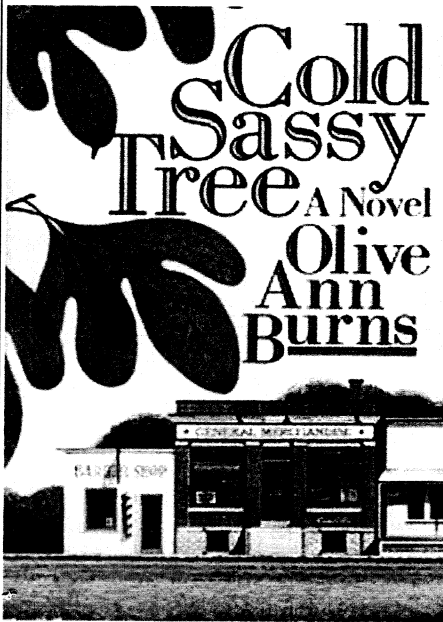
11. Ethel<sup>8</sup> Roberta Rucker, b. 21 Mar 1890 (tombstone).

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Ruckers in Fiction** **by Mike Rucker**

Occasionally, fictional characters named Rucker can be found in novels. This new series is to explore such fictional Ruckers. This first is a character named Rucker Blakeslee in the popular novel, *Cold Sassy Tree*, written in 1984 by Olive Ann Burns. Set in a fictional town in Georgia named Cold Sassy (and based on the actual city Harmony Grove, since 1904 named Commerce) during 1905-1906. Since a branch of the Rucker family migrated to Georgia perhaps the author found the Rucker name among those folks. [Indeed Beulah Rucker Oliver, the daughter of Willis and Caroline (Wiley) Rucker, who

was born in Harmony Grove/Commerce, Georgia, became better known in Gainesville, Georgia for establishing a school for African American children in 1914.]



**Plot summary:** On July 5, 1906, Enoch Rucker Blakeslee announces that he intends to marry Miss Love Simpson, a milliner at his store who is years younger than he. This news shocks his family, since his wife Mattie Lou died only three weeks earlier. Rucker's daughters, Mary Willis and Loma, worry about what the gossips of Cold Sassy, Georgia, will think of their father's impropriety.

Will Tweedy, Rucker's 14-year-old grandson (son of Mary Willis) and the narrator of the novel, supports his grandfather's marriage. Will thinks Miss Love is nice and pretty, even though she comes from Baltimore and therefore is practically a Yankee. Will thinks that Rucker needs

someone to look after him now that Mattie Lou is gone. On the afternoon Rucker announces his engagement, Will sneaks off to go fishing in the country despite the fact that he is supposed to be in mourning for his grandmother. He walks across a high, narrow train trestle and nearly dies when a train speeds toward him. He survives by lying flat between the tracks so the train passes just overhead without touching him. Will becomes a sensation after his near-death experience, and the whole town comes to his house to ask him about the incident. Rucker shocks everyone by arriving with his new bride, Miss Love.

The people of Cold Sassy disapprove of Rucker's hasty marriage, and rumors spread quickly in the small town. Will, however, spends a great deal of time at the Blakeslee house and becomes friends with Miss Love. Will likes her because of her candid opinions and open personality. He also has a little crush on her, often spying on her and thinking about her large breasts, which he says looked like puppies peeking over a fence. Will soon learns that the marriage is one of convenience and that Rucker and Miss Love sleep in separate rooms. That means no sex. Miss Love tells Will that she married Rucker only because he promised to deed her the house and furniture. For his part, Rucker married Miss Love to save on the cost of a housekeeper.

Rucker and Miss Love eventually become flirtatious and affectionate with each other, and Will wonders whether their marriage is becoming more legitimate. Will overhears Rucker tell Miss Love that he loves her and wants their marriage to be real. Miss Love declares that she cannot and that no man would want her if he knew her terrible secret. Finally, Miss Love and Rucker fall deeply in love and have a child.

I will not disclose the dramatic ending for those who wish to read this excellent novel.

Carlisle Floyd wrote an opera based on the book and the novel was adapted into a TV movie in 1989, starring Faye Dunaway and Neil Patrick Harris.

Next issue: a Rucker character by Mark Twain.

Note to readers: Please provide input to Mike Rucker of any Ruckers (real or fictional) who you feel deserve an article in the RFS Newsletter. E-mail is mikruc@aol.com; postal address: 1003 W. Centennial Dr., Peoria, IL 61614-2828; phone 309-692-0621.

\* \* \* \* \*

### In Memoriam

**Randy Gail Clay**, 49, of Broken Bow, Nebraska died December 27, 2009, at Custer Heights in Broken Bow after a lengthy battle with diabetes. He was born January 17, 1960, to Gail Jr. and



Janet (Hohfeld) Clay in Broken Bow.

He was diagnosed with diabetes at age 13 but never let the disease slow him down as he traveled overseas and to several states. He worked in Los Angeles and Denver before returning to Broken Bow where he worked until his health no longer allowed him to do so. While in Denver he married Maria Parks, from whom he was later divorced.

Randy was a staunch Cardinal fan but loved all sports, especially fantasy football. He loved life and will be remembered for his teasing ways.

He is survived by his parents, Gail Jr. and Janet Clay; his brother, Corey and Kim Clay of Broken Bow; and nieces and nephews. Funeral services were December 31, 2009, at Govier Brothers Mortuary in Broken Bow. Burial was in Broken Bow Cemetery.

Randy<sup>10</sup> G. Clay's lineage: Gail<sup>9</sup> Jr., Gail<sup>8</sup> B., James<sup>7</sup> W., Mary<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Rucker, Lemuel<sup>5</sup>, Ambrose<sup>4</sup>, Lemuel<sup>3</sup>, James<sup>2</sup>, Peter<sup>1</sup>.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Researchers Beware

### - Part II -

by Judy Hendren

McKinney and Bill Smith

This is a follow-up story about genealogical research at its best. This represents just the kind of assistance members of

organizations such as the Rucker Family Society can perform for other members, or non-members alike. Many thanks to Judy for being such a fine exemplar.

In the Rucker Family Society Newsletter Vol. 20, No. 4, December 2009 I read Bill Smith's article on "Researcher Beware." He found a reference to Nell Jones' 1985 *William Oliver Womack and Wirt Adams Love: Their Ancestors and Descendants*. Bill located several copies of the book on the Internet, but the closest one was 1,100 miles away from his home located in Stephenville, Texas. I emailed Bill that I would be willing to drive to Stephenville, about 70 miles from Goldthwaite and make copies of the pages on Peter and Ambrose Rucker.

On February 13, a Saturday morning, the sun was shining and the sky was clear. This was just the perfect time to visit the Stephenville Public Library and to "research" the flea markets. Since the library opened at 8:00 AM on Saturday, we left Goldthwaite about 7:00 AM and made it just as the library was opening.

The library has a small genealogy section with computer access, books and microfilm. The librarian brought me the book from the vault and I anxiously looked for Ambrose Rucker. I looked all through the book and did not see any information on Peter Rucker or Ambrose Rucker. I thought that the trip to

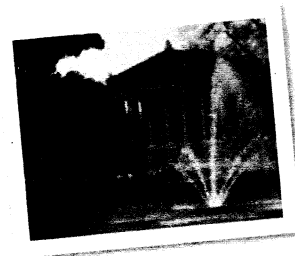
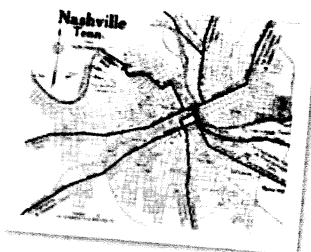
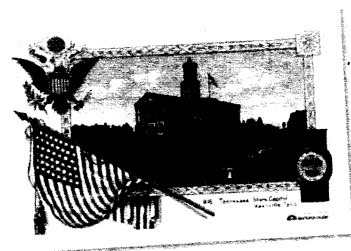
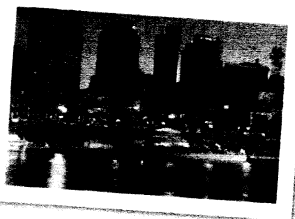
the library was made in vain but realized that *this* was the same author but the wrong title. The librarian went back into the vault found the second book by Nell Jones. I felt like I had struck gold.

There was information on Peter Rucker that I copied and when I returned home I compared the information to the Rucker book by Sudie Rucker Woods, and I discovered it was the same information. I had also, found 14 pages on Ambrose Rucker and I did not find this information in the Sudie Rucker Woods book but Jones had made reference to *History of the Rucker Family*, by Edythe Whitley. I do not have a copy of this book so I don't know if this is a repeat for Whitley's book. [Bill Smith – I do have a copy of the book, and much of the material on Ambrose Rucker is copied word-for-word from *History of the Rucker Family*.]

My husband, Henry, patiently read books on amateur radios while I was busy making copies from this book.

Research was followed by searching the flea markets in the area, shopping and then back home. This day was a treat just to get out of town to help a fellow researcher on the Rucker line.

Judy<sup>9</sup> Hendren's Rucker lineages are: Vencil<sup>8</sup> Hendren, Laura<sup>7</sup> F. Rucker, James<sup>6</sup> B., LeGrand<sup>5</sup> F., Ephraim<sup>4</sup>, Augustine<sup>3</sup>, James<sup>2</sup>, Peter<sup>1</sup> – and Tomagen<sup>3</sup>, Ephraim<sup>2</sup>, Peter<sup>1</sup>.



# **Make Your Plans Now - Don't Get Left Behind!**

## **Rucker Family Society Reunion**

### **Nashville, Tennessee**

### **October 14-17, 2010**

**Reunion Committee - Larry Black and Robyn B. Caldwell**

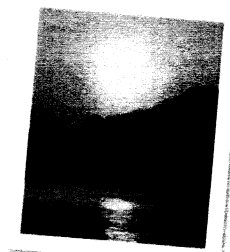
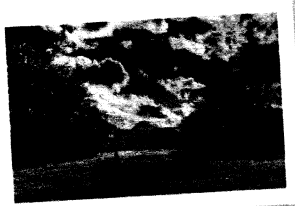


**There are two ways to make your reservations for the reunion:**

**1 - Go to the Rucker Family Society website, and then to the Society reunions and meetings and click on the link at the bottom of the page**

**2 - Type the following URL into your browser**

**<http://www.ichotelsgroup.com/h/d/HI/1/en/cwshome/DPRD-822RTN/BNAOP>**





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	To be continued in the next issue.



## MORE FANTASTIC OLD PHOTOS

This is a likeness of William Ambrose Rucker (1840-1922), the son of William B. Rucker and Mary Ann Dawson Rucker, who were featured in last month's Fantastic Old Photos. There is a "Sketch of my war experiences" that Mr. Rucker wrote for his granddaughter when he was 81 years old. The remembrance can be found at [www.theruckersociety.org/warsketch.html](http://www.theruckersociety.org/warsketch.html). An interesting genealogical note is that William Ambrose Rucker was the father of Sudie Rucker Wood and the great-grandfather of Jeannie Brydon, Chris Rucker and Mike Rucker.

William<sup>5-6</sup> Ambrose Rucker's lineage is: William<sup>5</sup> B. Rucker, George<sup>4</sup>, John<sup>3</sup>, John<sup>2</sup>, Peter<sup>1</sup>; and Mary<sup>6</sup> Ann Dawson Rucker, Ambrose<sup>5</sup>, Reuben<sup>4</sup>, Ambrose<sup>3</sup>, John<sup>2</sup>, Peter<sup>1</sup>.

If you have old Rucker photos and would be willing to share them with other Rucker Family Society members, they can be published in the newsletter and online at <http://www.theruckerfamilysociety.org>.

*Check them out, they're amazing!*

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