

LUTHER N. BYRD

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Luther N. Byrd, who spent his boyhood years in Mount Airy and graduated from Mount Airy High School, later graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; but he returned to his Surry County home in 1929 and accepted the post as teacher and athletic coach at Westfield High School. He remained at Westfield High for nineteen years, also serving as principal of the school there the last three of those years.

While working with children from the many historic and pioneer families of the Westfield area, Luther Byrd quickly became interested in the history of the community, which had been started through work of Quakers from Guilford County. In fact the Westfield name evolved from reference to "the west mission field of the New Garden Monthly Meeting of Friends."

Becoming greatly interested in the history of the pioneer families who settled Westfield, Mr. Byrd started his high school students working on family trees, and many of the students developed interest in family origins. In order to help his students with family background he himself started genealogical research.

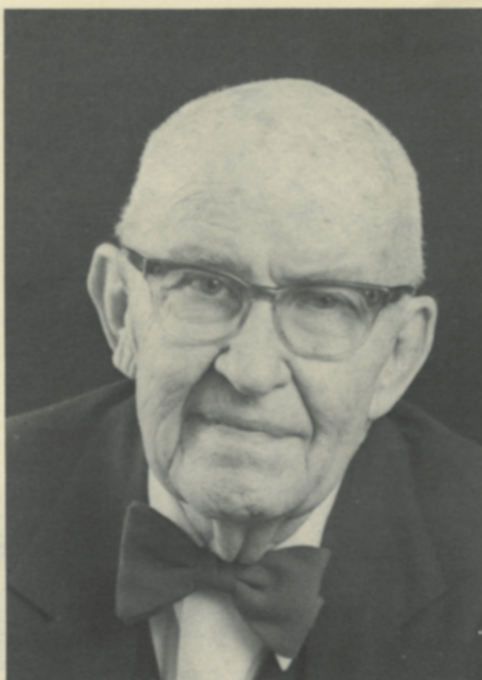
During the 1930s and 1940s Luther Byrd spent many weeks in the National Archives and the Congressional Library in Washington and many weeks in the state archives and state libraries of North Carolina and Virginia. He also worked in the courthouse records of more than 50 counties in North Carolina and more than 50 counties in Virginia, checking deeds, wills and marriage records for many families.

In addition to researching old families of the Westfield area, Mr. Byrd also started tracing his own kindred families from which he had descended through both father and mother. Since the pay of teachers was so low at that time, he branched out into professional genealogy; and he performed numerous family history quests for the Genealogical Society of Utah, a group which operates in connection with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

Luther Byrd left Westfield in 1948 and returned to graduate school at Chapel Hill, accompanied by his wife, who also entered college at Carolina. One year later in 1949 Mr. Byrd accepted a position as professor at Elon College, teaching Journalism and History and also serving as publicity director for all Elon programs such as athletics, faculty activities and college expansion.

The publicity work was not new to Mr. Byrd, for he had worked athletic publicity for the University of North Carolina for five years during his student days in the 1920s. In fact he was in the press box for the dedication of Kenan Stadium on Thanksgiving Day in 1927, with Carolina playing Virginia the opening game.

The new duties at Elon College forced a virtual halt in the professional genealogy, but Mr. Byrd continued work on family lineages for both himself and wife. He has traced his own Byrd lines from North Carolina back through Virginia and England to an original ancestor named Hugo le Byrd (sometimes spelled Bird),



Luther N. Byrd.

who was in England in the time of King William the Conqueror prior to the year 1100.

He has been far more successful, however, in tracing the family lineages for his wife. He married June Estelle Stone during his years of teaching at Westfield. She was the youngest daughter of Elder Preston Stone and Cassie Chilton Stone, and through both her father and mother Mrs. Byrd is descended from such historic families of Westfield and Surry County as the Stone, Chilton, McKinneys, Jessups, Pells and Gordons, families that all date back hundreds of years.

It is a matter of intense pride for Mr. Byrd to know that he has researched and proven his wife's ancestral lines through her Stone father and her Chilton mother for forty generation without a break of any kind to the Emperor Charlemagne, who was crowned Holy Roman Emperor by the Pope at Rome on Christmas Day of 800 A.D. He has also proven her descent from the Baron of Runnymede, who forced King John of England to sign the Magna Charta at Runnymede on June 15, 1215.

All of this work in family history has of necessity been secondary to his real career as a high school teacher, college professor and newspaper man. As stated before, he served nineteen years as athletic coach and teacher of history and math at Westfield, and during sixteen years of that time from 1929 until 1945 he worked as a news writer for the *Mount Airy Times*, working with friends like Judson Ashby, Punch Ashby, W.J. Seigler and Ed Lewis in publishing the weekly paper in the Granite City. He gave up newspaper work in the final three years when he became principal at Westfield.

Luther Byrd retired at Elon College in 1975 after 26 years service, and since that time alumni of Elon have established the Luther Byrd Athletic Scholarship in his honor. The Fighting Christian Club, composed of former Elon athletes, has also given to him a special award for distinguished service to the Elon sports program.

Search back into Mr. Byrd's ancestry reveals that his first Byrd forebear to come to Virginia was a certain Robert Byrd, who arrived in Virginia by 1630, and that early arrival settled in King and Queen County, Va. His arrival was forty years before the arrival of the first one of the famous Byrds of Westover hit the American shores.

The first of Mr. Byrd's lineage to arrive in North Carolina was a certain John Byrd, who settled in Caswell County and married Mary Brooks there in 1785. He later migrated into Wilkes County, which had one time been a part of Surry County. John and Mary Byrd had a son named James Byrd, who married Sept. 15, 1816 to Sarah Brooks, probably one of his cousins, and they have numerous descendants in modern times living in the area of Elkin in Surry.

Luther Byrd himself was born Aug. 29, 1905, the son of Watson Byrd and his wife named Belle Nicholson Byrd. Both of his parents and Luther's younger brother named MacRae Byrd have been dead for some years, but he has a sister, Mrs. Thomas Houch, now living in Mount Airy.

— Mary Frances Mabe

WILLIAM WALKER AND NANNIE HARE BYRD

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William Walker Byrd and Nannie Hare were married February 14, 1906, in Jonesville, and a few days after their marriage they began residing in a home on Elk Spur St. which Walker (as he was best known) had purchased prior to their marriage. They spent their entire married life at this place of abode and raised their family there.

Walker, born March 4, 1879, was the son of Thaddeus Clingman and Sallie Sale Byrd. Nannie was born December 25, 1883 to S.A. Hair (Hare) and Rachel Jane Norman Hair near Jonesville. Walker spent his early life on the farm in Wilkes County with his parents, his three brothers and one sister. Nannie's mother died when she was very young. Her father married again, and shortly thereafter he and his new wife and his youngest son left North Carolina and went to Texas to reside. Nannie and one brother, Will, stayed with their grandparents. Later she resided with Mr. and Mrs. Tom Minish for several years. At the time of her marriage she was residing in Jonesville and was an employee of Chatham Manufacturing Company.

In his young manhood Walker worked as a carpenter for a time, but later became a merchant, operating a general mercantile business on Elk Spur Street near the city limits until November 16, 1945, when he suffered a stroke. He built the building for his business about 1910, and it still stands as a landmark. After his death on December 4, 1945, Monroe Freeman ran a grocery business there for about three years, selling out to Hosea Arnold, who operated a business there until his death in 1971.

Walker and Nannie Byrd had two daughters, Blendon Reece Byrd, who was born August 9,