THE BULL STONE HOUSE, A MONUMENT TO FAITH AND FAILURE, and SOME OF ITS RESIDENTS

Good afternoon Bull Family members, cousins, and some of our friends. For those who may not know me, I’m Michael Knight Brown, whose mother was a Bull, not many men can say that, who married a Brown, so I’m a Brown Bull.  [The following not included when speaking. My parents moved into the Stone House in 1937 when I was one year old. Yes, I was privileged to grow up here, along with 3 brothers and a sister until I joined the US Navy at age 19 to sail five of the seven seas on 5 warships as a weatherman.]

The house, now an almost 3 century old stone building, was believed to have been started in 1722, by an English stone mason, William Bull, trained in Ireland and his wife Sarah Wells, progenitors of our prolific family, with descendants scattered around the world, but primarily in America & Canada.

William was born in the Midlands of England at Wolverhampton, baptized in St. Peters Collegiate Church of England. His family moved to Ireland during his youth, where he apprenticed as a stone mason. He, along with a partner, was building a stone arch bridge which collapsed before completion. He lost his investment and his reputation, so came to America, an English colony in 1715, to seek his future and fortune. He was hired off the ship by Daniel Cromlin to help build a house for him 5 miles from here as the crow flies, near Craigville. Our cousins, the Mark Roe Family reside in a 1716 one room with loft above stone house he also built nearby, the oldest known standing Bull House and the 3rd oldest stone house in Orange County.

Bull continued to work as a stone mason building contractor, to gain the reputation of being the foremost or best in the area. From his failure in Ireland, and none of us like to talk about failure, he applied his apparent faith to his future endeavors, of which we have become heirs.

He must have known the parable of Jesus recorded in Matthew’s Gospel, the proper way to build your house is upon the rock. When the storms of life come against it, the house will stand. The Stone House is built on a rock ledge with 2 feet thick double faced fieldstone walls on bedrock, having withstood a well-documented earthquake in 1727 leaving only a crack in the east wall, lightning strikes and hurricanes.

The house was built for a home. It has been home for people with numbers nearing a hundred persons, mostly family, with some friends and as described in William’s will, quote “negro slaves”. It has been host to births, deaths, weddings, funerals, other social events, a Quaker Meeting House, a fort, a school house, political meetings, Christian Bible studies and prayer meetings while housing 10 generations of Bull’s, now standing empty. It was considered a mansion or manor house in its day, in many ways more elegant, formidable and enduring than today’s commonly called McMansions.

William (1-1) and Sarah, along with their 12 children, were obviously the first residents, William in his will of 1755, stated, “In the name of God, Amen”…“being of sound and perfect memory (blessed be God…)” gave the house to Sarah and subsequently his oldest son John (2-1) after Sarah remarried in 1759.

John, then in his will of 1795, reading, “First, humbly assigning my spirit to its Creator and my body to the grave, in hopes of a joyful resurrection…”, gave the farm to his son John, Jr. (3-7). John occupied in 1807 until he had financial problems and the property was sold at public auction to Thomas Powell, a wealthy ship merchant. After about a day, John’s brother Daniel (3-9), also a successful business man near Oxford Depot, bought back the property which he felt should not be out of the Bull family, and gave it to his son Ebenezer  (4-72) @1816. He was a Quaker. When the Township of Hamptonburgh was formed in 1830, he became the first Town Clerk. He gave property for a Presbyterian Church and Manse, along with land for the  District #1 Hamptonburgh School. Around 1857, his son Ebenezer Bull II (5-311) took ownership. Because of the many springs on the farm for cooling milk and milk products, had a creamery. The first telephone lines were needed to do business at that time. He was a Presbyterian Sunday School Superintendent.

After the war to end all wars, WW1 during which over 120 Bull descendants served, he, along with others including Robert McLeod Jackson (7-2233), an international attorney in Manhattan with Hunt, Hill & Betts, whose summer home was Hill-Hold now an Orange County Museum and former 1769 home of Thomas Bull, formed a committee to create a living memorial for those who served during the war. They formed the Bull Family Association and bought the Homestead, giving life rights to Ebenezer & Anna, his wife, who had no children. Upon Eb’s death in 1926, Anna survived him until 1933. Caretakers stayed until 1935 when Charles B Howell & family became Bull resident caretakers. The first inside bathroom replaced the upstairs hall bedroom. They left early for many reasons when in 1937 Louis and Corinna Bull Brown (7-1046) moved in with 2 sons. My brother William Bull Brown born in 1938, was the first child to be born in the house for over 50 years. I’m sorry to report, he died in February of this year and is sorely missed – he was a gentle soul, a great brother and supporter of this house and Association.

After 30 years, my parents, who many knew as Lou and Jo, moved to his home Village of Montgomery, with continuing strong support for this family.

So, in 1967, after 2 requests by the Board of Managers and submission to the will of God, I, along with my wife Betty and 7 children became the resident caretakers.

After Betty’s Home going in 2011, and 2nd marriage to my former classmate Sally in 2013, my youngest daughter Melanie Latimer was chosen to be the caretaker, who had been in residence for most of her life. With the offering of a new caretaker agreement by the Board of Directors, which was beyond her capacity to fulfill, she vacated our home in July 2017.

There are 2 constants in life, change and our Creator God whose name is Jesus.

History is really, His Story, at best an interpretation of the past, changing daily, but our always Good Faithful Father God remains forever the same, revealing His primary attribute of love.

I’m thankful to have had the privilege of serving Him here, and throughout my God blest life, until God calls me Home or Comes Again.

Thank you for your attention and the opportunity to share some real Bull.

(Talk given at the 152nd annual Bull Picnic reunion August 3, 2019, 2nd oldest annual family reunion in the USA)