

## **MR. BRASHER'S DEATH-BED PREDICTIONS**

by Monette Young

In, probably, late spring or early summer of 1859, a Mr. Brasher was dying in Calhoun County, Mississippi. This was a rural county made up of pioneer settlers from the great migration from the Carolinas, Virginia, Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia.

He lived in the Skuna River bottom area, probably in the hills just north of the river and its fertile little valley, and most likely in an area just opposite the Rocky Mount community which was on the south side of the river just up in the hills.

In the final hours of his illness, he told his sorrowing family that his coffin would come near to being lost in the river on the way to Rocky Mount church for his funeral service and that a tree would be struck by lightning near the head of his grave as they started to lower his body into it and that he would "have plenty of toothpicks for his teeth".

A short time later, he died. It was a Saturday. Smooth lumber was kept stored in a barn or shed of certain people in the community who were proficient at carpentry and could make coffins. Black cotton flannel was used to cover the outside and white sheeting material was used to line them.

Two little Morgan boys who lived some miles away in what would later be called the Reid or Poplar Springs community went to visit their married sister in the Rocky Mount community on the day that Mr. Brasher died. The boys were Reuben Reese Morgan, twelve years old (he would become my grandfather), and William H. (Billy) Morgan, his ten-year-old brother. They lived with their parents John and Adaline Todd Morgan further up the valley on the same side of the river and about six miles away, so the little boys had walked a long way.

Their sister was Catharine Morgan Haire, the wife of John Haire. The Haire's lived slightly northwest of Rocky Mount church in the last outcrop of hills overlooking Skuna Valley. Reuben and Billy spent Saturday night with their sister, her husband, and their one or two small children, and they learned of the burial service to be held the next day. They wanted to stay for it. Community gatherings were rare. There was no Sunday School. Preaching services were held only occasionally. So even a funeral became a chance for the residents to come together and mingle, even if in sorrow. To the children of that time, death was a part of life and they were not frightened or puzzled by it. A burial held no terror for them. They would see friends whom they would not otherwise see often. So the boys planned to go to the "burying" and then to make the long walk home afterward.

On Sunday morning, Catharine watched the darkening, glowering sky for some time and saw in its color and movement that a "bad cloud" would come later. So she advised her brothers to start for home in a hurry and to try to get there before the cloud "made".

They started home, but only got about two and a half miles before the storm hit in its fury. They reached a place where, over fifty years later, Mr. Jim Hannaford would have his home. But someone had a house there in 1859 and Billy and Reuben were given shelter.

Meanwhile, the funeral cortege was making its way toward Rocky Mount. The funeral party was traveling by ox wagon.

Remembering Mr. Brasher's prediction of how his coffin would almost be lost in the river, his neighbors had selected the most placid and gentle pair of oxen that they could find to draw the funeral wagon. They were called a yoke of oxen. Wagons of friends and family followed, also drawn by oxen.

Bridges across the creeks or rivers of the area were frightening things in those days, narrow with no side rails. I have ridden across them when I was a child, terribly afraid, knowing that a sudden whim of the animal or animals pulling the vehicle would plunge us into the water. This day while the funeral wagon was crossing the river, one of the "gentle" oxen "spooked" at something and in its fright almost threw the wagon, the driver, and the team into the river. However, they quieted the animal without that mishap and continued on to the church.

The threatening clouds that had been overhead all the journey were getting worse. At the church, the people saw more darkness and massing of black "thunderheads". The preacher cut short a usually long funeral oration and everyone hurried to the graveyard to try to get the coffin lowered and covered with dirt before the storm broke.

This had only been partially done when the rain began falling very hard and thunder and lightning were crashing all around. The congregation ran back to the church to wait out the storm's fury. Just as they got inside the safety of the church, the lightning struck a tree near the head of the grave and shattered it into splintery fragments.

After the "bad cloud" had passed, the men returned to the cemetery and finished filling the grave. Then mourning relatives and friends returned to their homes, remembering and discussing Mr. Brasher's predictions and how they had come to pass as he had foretold.

After the rain ended, Billy and Reuben Morgan left the house where they had taken shelter and went on home.

Billy and Reuben were not to have too many more trips together or times of shared work or play, for on December 23, 1859, Billy died. His death was fairly sudden. He had been feeling "poorly" all week, then on the following Saturday night while his eldest brother Stephen Bennett Morgan was being married to Gilly Hardin at her parents' home, Billy died.

When the newlywed couple returned to his parents' home for their little honeymoon, as was the custom then, they found that death had marred any festivities.

**Monette Morgan Young**  
This story was told to me by Clarence Morgan,  
grandson of Stephen Bennett Morgan and Gilly Ann Hardin Morgan