

God's Glory
in
Great Bridge Baptist Church



A Biography of
"Uncle Willie"
William Arley Richardson, Sr.

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GREAT BRIDGE BAPTIST CHURCH**

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By Artwell Lee Pierce

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Foreword

In the summer of 1955, Great Bridge Baptist Church was just an idea in the minds of a few Baptist people. Dr. John Brown, Executive Secretary of the Norfolk Baptist Association, with the aid of Reverend Willis E. Joiner and some dedicated members of the Temple Baptist Church of Norfolk, Virginia, visited in Baptist homes of Great Bridge to see if they were interested in a Baptist Church in their community.

After those visits, prayer meetings were begun. The first prayer meeting was held in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Casey on Whitehurst Rd. Much can be said at this time about the faith of the workers sent out from the Temple Baptist Church. Among them was Mr. Robert Bradshaw. He was in charge of the work and conducted many of the prayer meetings. These prayer meetings were held in several homes in Great Bridge until Mr. and Mrs. L. D. Hewitt of 2563 Marion Drive opened their home for a Sunday school on the last Sunday in March of 1956. There were seven present that first Sunday. This Sunday school continued at this resident, until the Temple Baptist Church purchased property located on the corner of Highway 168 and Hurdle Drive.

On November 4, 1956, the Sunday school, with 37 present, moved into a little house on the property and was dedicated as the Great Bridge Baptist Chapel. Dr. Brown was the temporary pastor. Mr. Bradshaw was Sunday school Superintendent from November 4, 1956 until May 15, 1957. There were fifty-two (52) members who united with the Chapel. May 9, 1957 was indeed a turning point in the history of Great Bridge Baptist Church. On that day God sent a full time Pastor, William Arliey Richardson, Sr., who was fondly known as Uncle Willie. God greatly blessed the work of this wonderful Pastor.

This story is about the life of this man, William A. Richardson, whom Great Bridge Baptist called as its first pastor. I have had a lot of help researching and writing about Uncle Willie. I'd like to thank the following people: Mrs. Leone McKinney for her help in writing about the early history of Great Bridge Baptist Church. Julian Creef and Harvey and Edna Sullivan were there at the beginning of Uncle Willie's ministry at this Church. They were able to give me a first hand account of what took place. Thanks also go out to Georgia Edwards, one of William A. Richardson's sisters, who helped me reconstruct Uncle Willie's early days. Thanks go out to Barbara Wright who did the editing.

I hope you enjoy reading about Uncle Willie's life as much as I did researching and writing about this man.

Art Pierce 2/10/04



"Uncle Willie"
William Arley Richardson, Sr.
1906 - 1993

THE EARLY YEARS

William Arliey Richardson Sr. was born on October 30, 1906 and was the first child born to Frank Winston Richardson, Sr. and Emma Cora Jones Richardson. There were six other children, Frank, Virginia, Georgia, Joseph, and twins, Robert and Nettie. The children had a half brother, Henry Nickel.

Willie was born in a home in the Chesterfield Heights section of Norfolk County. His father was working for the Norfolk and Western Railroad as a member of the track maintenance crew. Willie's Dad was sent to Norfolk from Christiansburg for track maintenance work. The family soon moved back to Cambria just outside of Christiansburg where Georgia was born. In 1914, the family moved back to Norfolk and settled in Coleman Place. When the family moved back to Norfolk from Christiansburg, Willie's Dad was no longer employed at the railroad. He worked as carpenter for a time, and then he moved the family to Chesterfield Heights where he started operating his own dairy. Willie attended school and helped his Dad with the dairy. Frank and Willie also delivered newspapers. This kept the boys busy in their younger years.

The family attended the Chesterfield Heights Methodist Church. Willie's Mother would take the children to church, and his Dad, who had a hearing problem, would stay home and do the cooking. His hearing problem may have come from the type of work he had done with the railroad.

Willie dropped out of school in 1924 and went to work for Norfolk and Western Railroad as a messenger boy and later moved up to dispatcher. The dispatcher would call out the local train crew using a messenger boy to find the men. There were very few phones in homes in that day. Willie would use his bicycle and go to the men's homes to tell them the time the train was to be dispatched. When the train left Norfolk the dispatcher would then send a message by telegraph to Crew, Virginia telling the relief men what time to expect the train. Willie loved working for the railroad and soon learned how to send message by the telegraph key using the Morse code. Willie soon works his way up to be a dispatcher working most of the time on the night shift.

Willie met Helen LaCresa "Creasy" Woodland (born August 14 1908), and they dated for a while. He asked her to marry him. She told him, "Your sister, Virginia, is dating

Frank De Seamus and if they get married, I will marry you.” “That way we can rent a house together.” Virginia was 16 at the time and could not get married in Virginia without her parents’ consent. Willie and LeCresa made plans to get married on Wednesday night, December 1, 1926 in the Chesterfield Heights Methodist Church. On Tuesday, the night before their wedding, Willie and LaCresa took Virginia and Frank to South Mills, North Carolina to get married. In those days a lot of people did this because they did not have to wait for a three-day blood test or anything. A Hotel was just across the Virginia State line and was very popular in that day to accommodate people who wish to get married. A couple could walk in and see the justice of the peace, pay their money, and were soon legally married.

On the night of Willie and LaCresa’s wedding, Willie told his mother that Virginia got married the night before. Georgia said, her mother was broken-hearted from this experience, but you know, it turned out ok. They had two wonderful children and were happily married until Frank’s death.

Willie’s Dad sold his dairy and moved his family to the Ocean View section of Norfolk around 1929. His Dad began to work as a carpenter again. Willy and Creasy followed them and rented a home in Ocean View also.

At first the family attended the Ocean View Methodist Church but not too long after moving, Willie and LeCresa started attending Ocean View Baptist Church. On October 2, 1927, the couple was blessed with the birth of a son, William (Bill) Arliey Richardson, Jr. A few years later on July 22, 1931, their daughter, Nancy Wirtley Richardson was born. Nancy told me, “I was about 9 months old when I was taken ill. About the only thing I know is that I developed fluid on the brain. I have heard it said that I had Scarlet Fever and ran an extremely high fever, which could have caused the fluid and the paralysis that followed. The doctors advised the family to take me to the Medical College of Virginia in Richmond. It was there they found fluid around my brain. They were able to relieve the pressure, and I grew up with no trouble from my early start in life. I was in the hospital for a few months. Ocean View Baptist Church had a 24-hour prayer chain for me. Finally one night Dad got on his knees and prayed. In his prayer he

said, "Lord, whatever you want me to do, I will do it. Just let my baby girl become well." Miracles do happen, because within 48 hours, I started to improve."

Using Uncle Willie's own words, he said, "On June 19, 1932, I was converted." — an act which, according to him was both good and bad. It was good because he became a minister. It was bad because he lost 75% of his railroad vocabulary.

After Willie's conversion, he became a very close friend with his Ocean View Baptist Church Sunday school Teacher, Peter Wright. Peter was an excellent Bible teacher. Willie shared with Peter that he felt God calling him to the ministry. Peter encouraged Willie to take study courses on the Bible at the church. He also told him about taking correspondence courses from Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. Willie completed a number of these courses. He read and studied everything he could lay his hands on that would help him in his future ministry. All during the years of his ministry he continued studying, so that he might become a better pastor.

This is as Willie told it to me, "In 1940 there happened to be a split in Indian Creek Church in Norfolk County over the cemetery, which was located in front of the church. Half of the members wanted to discontinue burials there in order to save the space for parking. The others objected, and there was a split. A new pastor was needed and "Uncle Willie" was available. Willie approached Dan Kessler, Pastor of Kempsville Baptist about licensing him to preach. The church voted to grant it to him January 1941. Willie became pastor of this church, and forty people attended on his first Sunday there. The agreement was that he was to receive the church offering. That Sunday it was \$1.02. On December 7, 1941, World War II came along and Willie had to leave this church because the Ration Board would not give him sufficient gas coupons to allow him to travel the 25 miles each way to this church from Ocean View. When WW II came along we had gasoline rationing and at first, the Ration Board was very tight with the gas ration coupons. It was very difficulty to obtain the coupons to purchase the gas to travel to this church.

In early 1943, Willie became Chaplain of the Merrimack Park Navy housing project, which was closer to his home. Georgia his sister told me, "My husband was in the Navy, and we lived there too." She told me the Navy Chaplain in charge wanted Willie to move his family to Merrimack Park housing to be closer to the Navy families. They lived there

for a number of years. Willie's brother, Robert (Bob), played the organ for a number of years at this Church. The Navy also wanted Willie to be ordained. He asked his home church Pastor, Reverend Coltharp if the church would ordain him and they did. Ocean View Baptist ordained Willie in July 1946. At the same time he was still working the midnight shift at the railroad. I guess you could say Willie was like Paul, working as a tent maker to support his family at night, while doing the Lord's work in the daytime.

Nancy, Willie's daughter, told me about a incident that took place one Sunday morning when they lived in Merrimack Park, Dad's railroad job took him out of town. "He was stranded in Edenton, NC due to a snowstorm." "He called my mother and told her he could not make it home for church service, so she got out one of his sermons and preached in his place."

Willie once asked me, "Have you ever wondered how the title, "Uncle Willie" got started?" Naturally I was curious. Willie proceeded to tell me, "I was at the Navy housing church, and the children started to call me "Uncle Willie" and subsequently, other children hearing this, naturally proceeded to call me "Uncle Willie," and I have continued to be "Uncle Willie" to everybody ever since."

In 1948 Willie was invited to speak at Oak Grove Baptist Church, with the prospect of a call. After the sermon, on the way home, Creasy told him it was the worst sermon she had ever heard. "I thought you would drown Simon Peter before you could get him back in the boat," she said. Did they pay you?" "Yea," Willie answered, " \$10.00." Creasy told him, "Take all but \$2.50 back to the church and if you get the call, it's the Lord's calling. It's nothing you did."

The following week Willie got the call and was invited to become their pastor. The salary was \$2100; half of what he was making at the railroad. Willie was a yardmaster when he stops working for the Railroad and became full time Pastor of this church. He stayed for 9 year, during which time the church was remodeled. For two years, before leaving the church, he attended the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, in Wake Forest, N. C. He traveled 200 miles each way every week. Willie graduated and was awarded a Theology diploma. While at the Seminary, he said he had to take an equivalency test and did not have any problem passing this test.

WORKING IN A NEW CHURCH

On May 9, 1957, Uncle Willie accepted a call to a Mission Church in Great Bridge. The Church was meeting in a 5-room house. The first Sunday the congregation consisted of 35 people. Willie had a talent that only God can give you, the ability to reach out to people with love, and get them to work for the Lord. This church grew right away with 27 families moving over from another church and all joining at one time. Harvey Sullivan told me the first thing they did was knocking out walls in the house. Julian Creef, the men's teacher, told me his class met for a time in an old school bus that someone had given the church and parked it behind the house. Mr. Creef also spoke highly of Uncle Willie. There were times when the church had trouble paying the oil bill or other bills. Uncle Willie would say, "Pay the bills first, and don't worry about paying me." He also used a paintbrush when we were painting a classroom or hallway, etc.

Uncle Willie got busy with the work of this congregation right away. In the July 30, business meeting, the nominating committee recommends to the Chapel that a board of Deacons consisting of seven men be established immediately. The first Deacons elected by the Chapel were L. D. Hewitt, B.L. Lancaster, Cecil Morris, Dan T. Spence, J. H. Norton, J. S. Snow, and L.D. Lane.

Cynthia Fields, one of the first staff member conveyed this story to me, of how she meet Uncle Willie and came to this church.

After Melvin and I were married we became active members in Pleasant Grove Baptist Church; I played the piano in the Sunday school. In October 1957 I went to the Norfolk Baptist Association annual meeting and that is when I meet Uncle Willie for the first time. He introduce him self to me and said "I need you to play the piano in our worship service at Great Baptist." I said to him "no way not at this time I am pregnant." He said to me, "come on over and help us and we will give you a choir rob to hide the pregnancy;" Uncle Willie was such influence on us that we moved to GBBC right away; that is how we became a members of this church. I played the piano for a number of years and sang in the choir too. I can truly say it was a wonderful experience knowing Uncle Willie and for him being our Pastor.

My sister Joyce Thompson soon followed me and played the Organ and she was also employed as the first part time church secretary. I asked Dorothy Anderson who followed Joyce as church secretary, to give me an idea of how this church office work in the early days before the Computer and reproduction machine came along. She said, we only had an old Royal typewriter (manual); old used Ditto or Mimeograph machine that you had to hand crank it too. To run off anything that needed to be reproduced such as the bulletins for the worship service, and newsletters to be mailed out, and Etc. I had to type on a stencil and then fit it on the Mimeograph machine and they were broken down most of the time. We had an old, old, adding machine; it came out of the Ark, I do believe, to help with keeping the finance records. I also posted all the contributions from the congregation and on Monday morning I would go to the Bank to get the recites from the Sunday collection. The treasurer usually balanced his checkbook at home.

In August 1957 more land was purchased and the Church voted to build the first unit. When the ground breaking for the first building took place, Edna Sullivan's mother, and a native of Hungary. Magdolna Tomczni Olah was asked to turn the first shovel over at ground breaking. She also paid for all the pulpit furniture used in the first Chapel. One Sunday, after the Chapel was finished, Uncle Willie asked my Mother to sing, "Jesus Loves Me" in Hungarian. There was not a dry eye in the Chapel when she finished this song.

As Harvey Sullivan told it to me, we had no drawing to work with. He said I drew a sketch for the first three buildings. The Chapel was 42 X 60 feet long block building with a frame roof. We had no problem with the county-building inspectors. In my contract building business, I had dealings with all kinds of sub-contractors and I asked them to donate their labor and they did. The church paid for the material and I used my contractor license to get the best prices for the church. Temple Baptist Church had title to the property at this time. In order to get a loan of \$3000.00 to pay for the material, from the Bank; fifteen men signed a note guaranteeing the loan. Once the Chapel became a church and had trustees. Temple Baptist turned the title over to the Church and the note was re-negotiated with the Bank using the title to the property. With members from the chapel helping and using the sub-contractors' expertise of their many trades and vocations, they did all of the work when the first block building was started and finished. Some of the women helped with laying the tiles on the floor and painting. A baptism pool was installed. Uncle Willie

baptized a number of families that had not been baptized by emersion. By September, the Church had outgrown the little house, and the church began to meet in Great Bridge Elementary School for Sunday services. Before they moved into the school, Uncle Willie was holding 8: 30 and 11:00 am services. His remarked, "This helped the late sleepers and the golfers."

Great Bridge Masonic Lodge AF & AM NO. 257 laid the cornerstone for the first building on November 9, 1957. On November 27, 1957 the Chapel passed a resolution and it was read at the organization meeting of the Church. On December 29, 1957, the Great Bridge Chapel was organized as the Great Bridge Baptist Church, with 180 charter members. The Chapel was not finish and the church met in Great Bridge Elementary School.

Uncle Willie read the following Resolution,

"Whereas, *it* appears to us that there is a real need for a Baptist Church in this locality. After much prayer and seeking of Divine Guidance, and upon seeking consultation; with our neighboring brethren and churches, and upon receiving the unanimous approval of our mother Church, Temple Baptist Church, Norfolk, Virginia, in a business session on December 11, 1957. It is resolved that we do now enter upon the organization of a church by the adoption of our church covenant."

"And by the adoption of the articles of faith, which were approved in a business meeting held at the Great Bridge Chapel on November 27, 1957, a copy of which you now have in hand."

And by choice of the following name: Great Bridge Baptist Church:

And by the choice of the following officers:

Pastor: William A. Richardson

Deacons: J. Herbert Norton, Cecile Morris, B. L. Lancaster, L.D. Hewett, L. D. Lane, J. S.

Snow, Dan T. Spence, Charles A. Casey, and John J. McKenney.

Trustees: Joseph T. Cornette, Harvey J. Sullivan & Josh E. Davenport

Church Clerk: Virginia Edwards

Treasurer: Mrs. Harvey Sullivan Asst. Josh B. Davenport

Sunday school Superintendent: Lankford D. Hewett

Associate Sunday school Supt.: Leon D. Lane

Training Union Director: Cecil O. Horns

Woman's Missionary Union President: Mrs. Lillian Hewett, Pastor and Trustees to serve for life or until terminated at either their or the Church's discretion. All others to serve as elected. And by the adoption of the following manuals in the current editions as guide for their respective organizations: Building a Standard Sunday School, The Baptist Training Union Manual, Brotherhood Guidebook and the WMU Yearbook of the Woman's Auxiliary of SBC with Virginia Supplement. WMU to be integral part of the Church.

And we further wish to designate that this church desires to fulfill the necessary requirements to become a cooperating member of the Southern Baptist Convention, Baptist General Association of Virginia and the Norfolk Baptist Association.

Be it further resolved that this record hereto The spread in full upon the minute book of the Church and that all brothers and sisters whose names shall appear on the Church roll at the close of worship services today December 2nd, 1957 shall be afterward known as the charter members of Great Bridge Baptist Church. Having received a letter of dismissal as members in good standing with the Temple Baptist Church, Norfolk, Va. given in business session December 11, 1957, be it hereby known that we adopt the above and enter into covenant relationship one with another in Christ at the Great Bridge Baptist Church.

Rev. Kenneth E. Burke, Treasure, Virginia Baptist General Association gave the charge to the new church. It also pledges that Virginia Baptist General Association would supplement the Pastor salary for a number of years until the Church was well establish.

At the same business meeting the congregation voted to borrow \$3000.00 to help with paying for labor and material for the first building. It authorized the Trustees, Deacons and three other members a told of fifteen, to negotiate with Campostella Branch of the National Bank of Commerce, for a ninety- (90) day's note. These men sign on behave of the church to guarantee the note, in order to get the money to continue with the building of the Chapel.

Although the new building wasn't finished, the first meeting, a watch night service, was held on December 31, 1957. A total of 59 members were at this first service. Harvey Sullivan told me the heat was not working for this service. He took one of the glass panes

out of a window, and used a potbellied stove, vented it through the opening he made in the window; to heat the room until the work was finished. From May 1957 to December 31, 1957 there were 127 new members. The first unit of the church was completed and dedicated on February 2, 1958. Only five months were spent in the Great Bridge Elementary School.

On January 8, 1958, business meeting, the Church called it's first Associate Pastor. Rev. Douglas Braum who also director the choir at a salary of \$70.00 plus retirement compensation per month. The Church made application for membership to the Norfolk Baptist Association and it also voted to enlarge to twelve the number of Deacon.

On February 12, 1958, Temple Baptist Church transferred the Deed and Title to the property to the church. The church directed the Trustees to seek a lone from National Bank of Commerce for \$10,000.00 to pay for labor and material for the second building. The Church voted to start the second unit using the planes approved at the August business meeting.

On February 27, 1958, the Great Bridge Baptist Church was accepted into the Norfolk Baptist Association. The Association gave GBBC a \$1000.00 to help with the work. God continued to bless this church and on April 13, 1958 work began on the second unit. In September 1958, the finance committee suggested a budget of \$27,000.00 for the year 58/59 and the church approved it.

The second unit was ready for use on October 1, 1958. The church now had 423 members and 504 enrolled in Sunday school. March 1959 the church voted to start a Junior Board of Deacons, Four men were to be selected and would work a long side of the Deacons. After one year they could become eligible to be Ordained as a Deacons. Groundbreaking services for the third unit was held on June 14, 1959. This building was to be used for the Nursery, Beginners, Primaries and office space.

A new organ was given to the Church and was dedicated to the Glory of God in memory of Billy Dunbar on December 6, 1959. The constitution of the church was adopted, on March 1960, it also negotiate a lone for \$30,000 on May 1960 to pay for labor and material for the third unit. The third unit was completed in August of 1960. December 1960, the church voted to sell the house on its property to the highest seal bidder for \$950. It also voted to build a parsonage at a cost not to exceed \$18,000,

including the lot. As Harvey Sullivan told it to me, using my contract building business, I built this parsonage for a whole lot less than the \$18,000. The church authorize the Trustees to negotiate a lone for \$17,000, with Providen Mutual Insurance Company for a period of 20 years, using the deed of trust for the parsonage as collateral.

The first Sunday in May 1961 an anniversary and dedication service was held in the afternoon with Rev. J.E. Sandridge preaching. "Four Years for Christ" was the focus of this service with the celebrating of Uncle Willie fourth year as Pastor and dedicating of the finish building. The May business meeting the church voted to start a kindergarten and also to license Leon Lane to preach. Air Condition was installed April 1962 and the Church excepted the resignation of Rev. Douglas Braun Associate Pastor on May 1962.

After a discussing, the lack of space for classrooms and the enlargement of the Sanctuary at the December 1962 business meeting, a planning and study committee was appointed to bring back a recommendation to the next business meeting. On January 1963 they recommended adding 70 Ft. to the present Sanctuary building and adding 3 more classrooms. After more study was made it was recommend at the March business meeting that the church proceeds to build a new sanctuary using the planes previous approved. Julian Creef told me; some people left the church because of congregation decision, but the church keep right on growing.

When the Church voted to build a new sanctuary in March 1963, it also voted to raise the money by selling Church Bonds not to exceed \$130,000. They decided to use Providence Church Plan Inc., to sell the Bonds. Buddy Oneal told this to me. He served on the Church Bonds committee and it was a wonderful experience. The people of this congregation bough most of the bonds with out any sail pitch. We sold \$79,400 dollars in Bonds, when ground braking took place.

Work began on the new Sanctuary on July 15, 1963 with the first service being held March 15, 1964. This building was dedicated to the Glory of God on May 10, 1964. The Church authorizes the Trustees to negotiate a temporary loan of \$10,000 from the Norfolk Baptist Council, the finance arm of the Norfolk Baptist Association. In order to pay off the remaining debt to the contractor.

Joyce Thompson resigned as church secretary. Gordon and Dorothy Anderson had moved to Chesapeake in December 1963. Uncle Willie went to visit Gordon and Dot the

first Saturday in January 1964, to invite them to church. After finding out about Dorothy's experience, he asks her if she would go to work for him as the church secretary and she said yes. She had graduated from Averett Collage with a clerical and business degree. He told her he would check with the Deacons on Sunday to see if she could start working for him on Monday. They all agreed and she went to work the next day. Gordon and Dot became members that Sunday also. As Dot told it to me my husband who had a degree in Accounting. Helped me set up a set of books so everyone could see exactly where every penny went to, I ordered larger envelopes for offering, prepared news letters monthly, prepared year books of all members with address and telephone numbers and every thing else had to be done. I would even take the offering envelopes home and post them at night that I felt as if I lived there all the time. I work at the church alone for approximately six months after Mr. Richardson retired. I started the GA and Acetone program, the church didn't have one when I came and we ended up with 39 in the last Carnation we held. It was so nice for the girls learned so much of the bible and what all missionaries do, and to pray for them.

Dot said, "Uncle Willie was one of the closest friends my family had from the day he entered the house in December 1963 until he died." He loved everyone and wanted to make you happy in any way he could. While working for him, he would talk to me about life and sometimes he would be upset and he would tell me he had to go to the Anchor and be with the Lord for a while to get himself together. He was very much involved in the Norfolk Baptist Association in buying the Anchor. He loved to put his bible overalls on and go out and work some place on the building that wasn't finished or needed repair. I always kidded him I worried about his sermon for he did so much for everyone and worked so much he didn't stay in his study that much. He said not for me to worry for the Lord will put words in his mouth and things would be fine. Everyone knew him as Uncle Willie. He loved to kid me when dictating a letter or Etc. for he knew I wouldn't write what he spoke. If he were living today, he would get a big laugh about me stopping him and telling him I wasn't going to type what he said. Regardless where he was or whom he was with, he made everyone there feel at ease and he showed him or her his love. Truly he was a man of God and maybe not the most educated, but the most caring and loving person I have known."

In March 1965, the Church voted to send Uncle Willie to the Baptist World Alliance meeting in Miami, Florida in July in lure of going to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in June. This body meets every five years to promote Baptist work, worldwide. The church continues grew and it added 3 more active Deacons at the September 1965 making 15 member.

Colon Smith related to me this story of how he met Uncle Willie. We had bought a lot in Chesapeake Colony, with hopes of building a new home there. One day I was cleaning up the lot when I first met Uncle Willie, GBBC was having a parsonage built up the street from my location. After introducing him self to me, he join me in cleaning up the lot. I like him right away. I do believe he never met some one that he did make them feel at ease talking to them. A lot of people join this church because of meeting him on similarly occasion like mine. June 1961 we moved to our new home and soon became member of the church.

With amusement Uncle Willie told me about an incident at the church one Sunday. The auditorium had just been built and he announced he was going to sing a solo. He sang "Higher Ground," and to him it sounded just beautiful, — he was thrilled. He turned to the choir and asked them what they thought of it and noticed Creasy, who was in the choir sitting down. "What are you doing sitting down?" he asked? "I couldn't take it standing up," she answered.

On November 9, 1968 Willie announced his retirement with a letter to the congregation:

Dear Friends in Christ:

Having reached the age of retirement on October 30th, 1968, I hereby submit my resignation as Pastor of Great Bridge Baptist Church effective December 31, 1968. It has been a joy to be your pastor for these past 11 years and 7 months and I pray God blessings on each of you and especially the Pulpit Committee as they seek God's man for Great Bridge Baptist Church.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

W. A. Richardson

Harvey Sullivan was elected as interim supply committee chairman for the pulpit. The following was elected to the pulpit committee, Colon Smith, Cordell Forbes, Stanley Vaughan, Edith Castelloe, Gladys Harris and Stanley Vaughan was elected chairman.

When Willie retired in 1968, he told me, “1,064 people have joined Great Bridge Baptist Church. Could it possibly have been from the fine sermons or the good jokes?” he said to me. The year after Uncle Willie retired, the church voted him Pastor Emeritus.

Julian Creef, a charter member of Great Bridge Baptist Church, composed and read this proclamation for the first time and presented it to Willie Richardson when the Church named Willie the first Pastor Emeritus.

The Pastor Emeritus

His name was Willie Richardson, a preacher in every way.

He worked for Norfolk Southern and rode the right of way.

He found in his heart Christ was the way, and he had to be with him everyday.

He started preaching a little late and much strife he could relate.

Oak Grove Baptist was his home; he was well liked and did not serve alone.

He was tall and lanky and losing hair. This did not hinder his smiling flair.

He preached and prayed and visited those who were sick and those without plenty. He looked for fields white with harvest and found in Great Bridge there would be no largest.

He started with just a few; there was not a great number.

As we worked and grew we were amazed with wonder.

He helped paint the walls and walked the halls and with Christ he was enthralled.

Of charter members there were quite a few.

Some are with Christ in a home that is new.

Dr. John Brown was our mentor in our works.

The Baptists from Temple were our mother church.

Uncle Willie was his title that's all the children knew
and those who flocked around him were more than just a few.

He preached and prayed, had compassion for all
and with tears stood at many palls.

May God bless you Willie Richardson and
keep you with care until the time comes to climb
the golden stair.

To your lovely wife Creasy we pay honor and love,
as we all look forward to those mansions above. Amen

LATER YEARS

The year Willie retired he became Outreach Minister for the South Norfolk Baptist church. This necessitated traveling. This church was a great help in his ministry. They purchased a sound system and helped Uncle Willie when he had needs. Uncle Willie took his Outreach Ministry to 37 different churches in 47 of the 48 continental states. This was done with a travel trailer and pickup truck. When visiting Kentucky in 1982, Governor Brown commissioned Uncle Willie a "Kentucky Colonel."

In 1975, Uncle Willie suffered a heart attack and had to give up traveling the circuit. At a rally in the huge Ocean Holiday Trailer Park in Melbourne, Florida, Howard George, the owner, invited Uncle Willie to become chaplain for the trailer park. He remained there 11 years. He and Creasy sold their trailer in 1977. They bought a mobile home and lived at Ocean Holiday Trailer Park.

Uncle Willie continued to preach at Ocean Holiday Trailer Park until 1986 when he reached his 80th year. He said; "It's hard to explain the joy that Creasy and I have had working with the people in this park." "This neighborhood comes as close as any I've ever seen to fulfilling the Bible quotation, Love thy neighbor as thyself."

In April 1990, Willy celebrated the 50th Anniversary of his Ministry, and in January 1991, he moved back to Chesapeake to be closer to his family. After a short illness he died, June 6, 1993, at the age of 86. Rev. Charles Moseley conducted a memorial service in Great Bridge Baptist Church and the burial was in Oak Grove Baptist Church Cemetery Creeds, Virginia Beach, VA.

In 1984, Stella and I went to Orlando Florida on Business. I told my Pastor at SNBC, Frank Hughes that we were going and he said to us; please go by to see Uncle Willie. We had a time off on Saturday and we went over to Melbourne to visit with them. On the way over Stella said to me, let us not stay to long, I give you a sign and we will leave. Well, it took us some time to find where they were living and it was about 1 PM when we reach there home. After 4 PM, I told them that we had a meeting to attend and we departed. On the way out of the Park I had to stop for some traffic to pass and I look over at Stella and she said to me "my jowl ache from

laughter.” She said, “I am glade we came, they are a wonderful couple and I know God has bless their ministry for all of these many years.”

Truly a man that heard the call from God, he did his best for His kingdom.

