

Wilfred Ivanhoe Hodsden, Jr.

“The cousin who showed us the way.”

I would be remiss if I did not take a little space to mention the tremendous contribution made by a cousin of mine to the archaeological dig at Whitemarsh. This cousin was Wilfred Ivanhoe Hodsden Jr. Without Wilfred's contribution we might never have known where to look for the Bridger family cemetery. Wilfred and my wife, Barbara, had corresponded a fair amount over the years regarding our family. Wilfred was quite knowledgeable about his side of our family and was always eager to talk about genealogy. My 2<sup>nd</sup> great grandfather, John Goodrich Hodsden, and Wilfred's 1<sup>st</sup> great grandfather were brothers. Wilfred's great grandfather, grandfather and father had all lived in Isle of Wight County just across Brewers Creek from Whitemarsh for most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Wilfred was now 86 years old, losing his eyesight, wheelchair bound and living in an assisted living facility in Cape May, NJ.

By August of 2010 the Bridger Family's many attempts to locate the Bridger cemetery and hopefully Joseph Bridger's grave had ground to a halt. Every clue we had as to the graves location had been examined and pursued only to yield no positive results. In a conversation Barbara had with Wilfred in August 2010, Barbara brought up the disappointment about not being able to find the Bridger family cemetery much less Bridger's actual gravesite. Wilfred immediately reminded Barbara that he had described Bridger's gravesite in a letter to her over three years earlier. Barbara did not specifically remember the description in a letter, but after looking through her file for Wilfred, she found the very letter dated April 13, 2007.

In it Wilfred states that his father was born in 1885 and as a boy of about ten, “saw Mr. Blackwell moving the Bridger gravestone to the old brick church, St. Luke's, when he was outside (of school) for recess.” Wilfred goes on to write that in the late fifties he and his father and Charlie Davis, long time Commissioner of the Revenue, and Charlie's wife, Eliza, were at Benn's Church when Elizabeth Jordan joined all of them and “asked Charlie and my father if they knew where the original (Bridger) gravesite had been? Both said yes and she asked if we could go down and show her the original grave site.” When they arrived at the farm “there were hogs bunched up and grazing. My father said see where those hogs is (is) where the original the gravesite was.” Wilfred had seen exactly where his father was pointing. The description was helpful, but without more frames of reference, we would still have a difficult time finding the exact location. So, after a quick call to Alain Outlaw, an archaeologist who is married to Merry Outlaw a Bridger cousin to explain what we had come across, Alain said, “Why are you on the phone with me, you need to be heading to New Jersey.” One more call to Wilfred to see if he would mind a short visit and Barbara and I grabbed an overnight bag and were Jersey bound.

When we arrived, we found Wilfred to be in very poor health, but happy to see us and willing to help if he could. I brought several terrestrial pictures and satellite images of the farm with me. I showed him the pictures, which were taken from different vantage points on the farm as well as

the satellite images. Without fail, Wilfred squinted and pointed to the exact same spot repeatedly. Wilfred even commented that he knew that I was trying to throw him off, but that he couldn't be fooled. We enjoyed spending some good time with Wilfred, hugged him goodbye and headed back to Virginia the next day with our new found information.

Within weeks, Alain Outlaw brought equipment to the site and with the current owner's permission began scaping away topsoil where Wilfred had said Bridger was buried. Within just a few passes two grave shafts were discovered. Those two grave shafts contained the remains of two late 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century males, a timeline when the Bridger family was still in possession of Whitemarsh.

After three years of trying to find the Bridger family cemetery and perhaps the exact location of where Bridger had been buried, we were now in the cemetery. This eventually led to the discovery of 25 graves with two of them being Bridger's and Anne Randall's empty grave shafts. This probably would not have happened had Wilfred not shown us the way. Sadly, Wilfred passed away on October 28, 2010. Wilfred is remembered on the crypt that now houses the remains of the 23 souls removed from Whitemarsh all because of Wilfred's recollections. Thank you, Wilfred!