"When the facts are known, there will be no need for historians." That is an axiom likely coming from collegiate history departments. Pulitzer Prize Winner Dr. James McPherson, whose book, <u>BATTLE CRY FREEDOM</u>, was awarded that prize, repeated the axiom at a Civil War Roundtable dinner to which I had been invited some years ago in Burlington. That axiom has come to my mind many times as I have tried to piece together a history of the Camel-24 Fellowship, Inc. Which is celebrating its 17th year in September of 2002.

There is no written record of the Fellowship's beginnings, so what I have done is to talk with those whom I know to have been active in those early days and years of the Club, as it has come to be known, "The Camel Club", to be exact. Note that I do not claim to have spoken with each and every individual who may have been a part of the facility's birthing period. I couldn't; many are not available, and I as do most folks, have limited time and energy. It is my hope that my efforts here will be matched by those who can add details, specificity, names, places, events, results. What is offered here is only a sketch, at best. In other words, the facts are certainly not all here and there continues to be a great need for historians.

Some years ago I understand there was an attempt to open and operate a Club somewhere in downtown Raleigh. I was not able to pin point its exact location beyond "downtown". Neither could I get information on how long it stayed in operation. The source of funds to begin that operation is also unknown to me. What is fairly well agreed upon is that the effort was made, but that the enterprise, failed. The story is that the space was quickly filled with active drunks who wanted nothing more than to get out of the weather and to be comfortable. Sobriety was not an agenda item. Attempted meetings became disruptive and ultimately the whole operation was abandoned. Various speculations abound as to whether there were residual funds from the closing of that facility; and, if so, who became custodian of such funds. (The failure of that enterprise soured many of Raleigh's AA Seniors to any future effort in the direction of planning to open a Club. Many of the AA "Old Timers" were dead set against any new attempt and wanted no part of any such talk of one. "We don't need no damn Club in Raleigh; we tried it once and it didn't work." That was the oft repeated lament from the elders. To their credit it must be added that many of them have come full circle and are now some of the Fellowship's most dependable supporters in morale, financially and other forms of generosity. Indeed, as will later be shown, without the "Old Guard" the future might look bleak.)

By the time AA was in its fourth decade in Raleigh, in the 1970s, several significant events had taken place which related to AA; namely, the number of AA Groups had multiplied, Wake County had established an Alcohol Information Center which dispensed printed materials and provided speakers to civic, social and religious groups addressing the disease of alcoholism. Without question, however, the most important development of that time was the opening of the Wake County Alcohol Treatment Center (ATC), as it has come to be known, as an adjunct to Wake Medical Center.

Back in the early years of the 1980s a typical Saturday morning for many of those active in Raleigh/Wake County AA was a much anticipated trip over to the ATC on Falstaff Road to attend an AA meeting and to mix and mingle with others whom they never encountered except at

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that gathering. The Saturday morning ATC meetings were very popular and heavily attended, sought after for the recovery as well as the social benefits. (The meetings were discontinued in the late 1980s when it was discovered that drugs were being brought into the Center at those meetings.)

It became the habit for a small group of men who went to those ATC Saturday morning meetings to rejoin each other for breakfast and/or lunch at a Howard Johnson's restaurant which was then located on then "Downtown Blvd.", now "Capital Blvd." across from the Westinghouse Plant. There they discussed the need for a place for those in recovery. This group had asked for and had gotten permission to use a room at ATC as a sort of "lounge", for lack of a better word, a place where gathering could take place before and following the meetings, where sponsors could meet with their charges or just visit. They, however, sensed and desired something permanent, a place! A place where the Twelve Steps of AA could be followed, and as their planning formed, that goal was a constant: that whatever they formed that it operate according to AA's Principles. Week after week the subject was addressed and dreamed of. The questions were always there, waiting for answers. How? Who? Where? When?

The small group continued to meet in the room provided to them at the ATC and their numbers were growing. To convince themselves of their sincerity and commitment to their cause, the decision was made to dun them \$10.00 per week to get a start-up fund. Beyond that, attorney Knox Jenkins drew up Articles of Incorporation for the Fellowship to apply for a Charter from the Secretary of State's Office. That was done and the Charter granted on April 5th, 1985. The Articles were signed by Denver Hardman, Knox Jenkins and Vic Kirkman. The address of the organization was Denver's home address. Here are the purposes of the organization as stated there:

(A) To provide a facility and fellowship organization to recovering alcoholics in the Wake County area and visiting alcoholics from other areas.

(B) To have a facility available 24 hours a day for purposes of alcoholics offering mutual support in their recovery process.

(C) Facilities will be available for use for Alcoholics Anonymous groups and related 12 step recovery programs.

The By-Laws for the organization were written and approved by the Board of Directors on July 21st 1985. The address of the organization by this time had changed from Denver's home to 622 Creekside Drive, Raleigh, the original location.

It was an idea whose time had finally come in that winter and spring of 1985. The late Jim Pierson, a Wake County native who had spent a good many years of his working life in Atlanta and was familiar with the elevated level of AA Club activity there, pointed out from experience that whatever site was selected must have adequate parking spaces to be successful.

My notes tell me that it was Vic Kirkman who was driving on Creekside Drive one day and spotted a "For Rent" Sign on the rear of the building which housed the Long Branch Saloon.

And, there was plenty of paved parking space around the facility. He immediately contacted a realtor and negotiations were begun-to-rent the space for the start-up of a Club.

Kirkman did all the paperwork negotiating the terms for rental and got some rather generous terms. The saloon owners required no money down, and the "Club" signed for a one year lease on the space. However, the room needed some improvements to make it suitable for meetings; namely, the ceiling had to be lowered; and Hardman living up to his name, made that a contingency for the first rental installment. The wrangling went on for three months and-the rent was not paid. The Owners even begged for at least payment on the electric bill. Denver didn't budge. Finally, the ceiling was lowered and the rent was paid, three months of it. (Too, Denver had been stalling for time to collect enough money to pay the three months rent.)

Meetings were held in the building as soon as it was turned over to Vic and his group. There was no name and there was no structure. Just commitment! Big time commitment and a great need.

As is most everything having to do with recovery, the Camel-24 name is eclectic. Denver had noted that the mega treatment center Hazelden was shilling a pendant with a camel on a chain and the story about the camel going twice to its knees daily and going a long time without drinking. "It works for them; it'll work for us", was his logic, and thus was-the effort and the place given a name.

J. D. Sears started the first meeting, aptly named "The Happy Hour Group" in defiance of a recent action by the Raleigh City Council outlawing happy hours in the city's bars and taverns, a period of time when prices were lowered, for those who might not be familiar with the term. There would continue to be a "Happy Hour", albeit one in which the participants seek sobriety rather than inebriety.

It was not until Jack Livingston's term as President in 1987 that the application for a Federal Identification Number and tax-exempt status (501-c-3) under the U.S. tax code was made and received. The Camel 24 Fellowship was now a reality; it had come to pass. The Club now entered a period of individual willingness to give and participation on the part of members and attendees.

Here I call on my own memory and experience. The single individual I see in my mind is Vernon Marsburn. The man was always there. In his hand was a board, a piece of sheetrock, a hammer, a saw, some construction tool. He tore down walls; he built walls, he built steps, ramps for wheel chair bound individuals. He loaded furniture, hauled off trash. Whatever was required, Vernon was there to get it done or to lend a helping hand. There is just so much that Vernon wants said about his involvement - and I know for a fact that it is far greater than I have begun to detail here. He says that it all kept him sober. Great! For that all are grateful. In my own mind, I have the opinion that the Club as it exist today would not exist at the high level of excellence which it does were it not for Vernon Marshburn. That's my opinion. "God Will Provide". Vernon showed up - and he still does.

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The Club grew and became more and more, a part; of the life of those in recovery in Raleigh and Wake County, and even surrounding counties as people from Durham, Henderson, Smithfield even Goldsboro, Wilmington, Kinston and New Bern, and sometimes even the South Carolina coast showed up in the meetings. Meetings were added on the weekends and evenings. Likely the most remembered meeting from the early days was the 5:30 "Happy Hour" which frequently had to compete with a band warming up for an evening's performance on the other side of a thin wall. It could and would get very loud, but it never stopped a meeting. Another memory is that of the smoke-filled room, sometimes so thick that one couldn't see the opposite side of the room, even with all the ceiling fans working full blast, it didn't alleviate it. Individuals donated items to the Club. Chairs, carpets, kitchen appliances, even a piano - which was later auctioned off in a yard sale, along with Denver's infamous green van.

The Creekside Drive location was a good beginning but after several years there, the saloon owners decided they needed to expand and need that space, so the search was on again for a space with parking availability. That space was located off Yonkers Road, just off the Beltline. It spelled convenience to many since it was so quickly accessible from that main artery. It was a commercial building with a glass front and a small room in the rear which was out fitted with sofas and other chairs for smaller meetings and for-privacy when a sponsor-sponsee want to meet. There was an area for a small bookstore in the front. It was in this location that the daily noon meetings were added to the schedule. The Friday TGIF meeting was already set at 11 AM, and it was decided to leave it at that hour. That continues to be the schedule today. Noon meetings had already begun in Cary in what is now the Gateway Group.

My personal involvement with the Club at this time was scant, and it is here where others need to come forth with details and memories. I do recall the late Buie Costen's smoker's bridge nights, and the fact that there was always someone who kept the Club open. I remember pushing to get decaffeinated coffee available at the meetings for those of us who couldn't drink the regular. Dances became a regular fund raiser on Yonkers. Book store volunteers became more visible and the bookstore began to enlarge. The worst part of Yonkers was that the rent kept climbing. It was a constant plea for money. Daily there was a chart on the wall wailing that unless "X" dollars were raised by "Y" date, the Club would be forced to shut its doors. "God Will Provide" became the mantra, and indeed, God did provide, for the funds always showed up and the decision was made to move and to look for a property which could be purchased.

I am sure the exact dates could be determined from a careful review of available documents, if time were available to carefully review such. I don't, therefore I'll guess. I think the time the Club lived on Creekside Drive was about from the spring of 1985 until it moved to Yonkers Road sometime in the late 1980s. The Club remained there until 1995 when it moved out to 4015 Spring Forest Road, its present location.

Again there are details, significant historical details which rightly should be here. I just do not have the time to dig it out. Suffice here to say that the decision was made to purchase the Spring Forest property. "God Will Provide" again proved true in that the father of a young man

who attended meetings at the Club was in banking and was able to; get the Club some very reasonable terms in gaining the capital to make the down payment on the property. Since that time, the Club has been blessed and has been able to make several payments on the principal of the loan to the point that in the not too distant future the mortgage will be paid off. That is the kind of support the community has given the Club and its mission.

The property was a small gymnasium, constructed for rhe Royal School of Baton Twirling, a place where little girls, aspiring to be cheerleaders, came and learned to twirl and throw the baton. (When Camel-24 took possession of the property, the walls were lined with trophies for twirling. The back part of the building was-stacked with the same. There must have been a thousand or more statues of various forms there.) Being a gym it was very open, an extremely high ceiling where the insulation was torn and shredded as a result of having batons twirled against it. There were industrial style gas heaters in two of the corners, heaters which were so loud that during a meeting they had to be turned off to hear. The same was true of the air conditioners. The Club acquired fans to stand at strategic places to attempt to cool folks during the summer months.

The Board of Directors, motivated by the largesse of a member, voted to make the facility smoke-free, an action which resulted in great consternation among some of the most loyal of the members. In fact many of them just stopped attending meetings at the Club for awhile and held the Board in low esteem. In actuality, it was a very realistic action totally consistent with similar actions at the respective churches in the city, state and nation. To attract the smokers back to the fold, Vern and his colleagues constructed a shack adjacent to the rear of the building. Dwight and others installed sheetrock and painted it. It is complete with a window air conditioner ceiling fan, and a space heater for the winter months. That seemed to work for the smokers have returned and the area around the smokers' shack is the general pre and post meeting gathering place for all.

At this writing, the Club hosts 26 recovery meetings weekly. Those include AA Discussion meetings, three 12 Step meetings, one Speaker meeting, one Men's meeting, one Women's meeting, two CA meetings, one NA meeting, one CODA meeting, and one AlAnon meeting. On one night per week the Club is rented by a Baptist Church for their Youth Program. The Club has, over the time it has been on Spring Forest Road, hosted numerous feeds in conjunction with holidays and anniversaries. It has served as the venue for the Unity Day celebration, a Tri-County Intergroup and District 31 venture, marking AA's birthday .It has been the site of a wedding or two and the hall of choice for wedding receptions. With relative ease, it converts itself into a very attractive party room, complete with dance floor and refreshments. The Camel Club is reaching out and is touching the lives of many in recovery in very effective ways.

There are three or four individuals whose names definitely need mention here. One is, again, Vern Marshburn. Vern threw himself into altering the building immediately to make it more usable for the Fellowship. He began to wall in the back to create a lounge for the members' or for meetings. Another is Randy Hutchins who unselfishly brought his considerable talent to the Club and lowered the ceiling very attractively so that new and quiet heating and air conditioning systems could be installed and the room retain its comfort during meetings. A third is John

Peeler who brought similar talent and knowledge of electrical systems and dropped the buildings light down to the level of the new ceiling and made other improvements and the electrical system. There were two Kens, both of whom have last names which begin with the letter J, and one of those doesn't want his name in print, so I'll leave it at that. These two people gave freely enough equipment and appliances to install a complete kitchen which was done with hot and cold running water. Randy Hutchins masterfully designed and constructed a bookstore, one which allowed a much increased stock of books attractively displayed.

There are so many people whose names could be mentioned and should, knowing that I'll omit many, here are some of those of whom I'm aware. "Doc" for cleaning and waxing the floors so beautifully and freely, Ray Byrd for books, helping to pay for the big tent and having the carpet cleaned in the lounge, Bill for looking after the plants and outside plantings, Mike Bailey for cutting the grass, Charles Nowell for painting the interior several times, Boone McGee for painting, Randy for the new storage room, Mark Hula for being there to repair the A/C, Jennifer Post for dependability in helping out whenever needed, Tom Stephenson for power washing and obtaining useful materials, Fred Schmidtke for many things, not the least of which is taking the leadership in so many functions and preparation of delicious meals enjoyed by many, Barbara DiCirio for willingness to volunteer-with regularity-and dependability and is not afraid to get her hands dirty, Doug McCaffrey for his generous financial support for a long period of time.

Over the seventeen years of the Club's life there have been a few folks who make considerable contributions but are not in view of those who come regularly to the meetings. For instance, the Club has had a golf open for the past decade or so at Prestonwood Country Club. These events have been enormously successful due to the willingness of the community to come out and participate but also due to the help and cooperation we receive from Prestonwood's golf pro, Vance Heafner. Vance is a true friend of the Camef-24 and is owed a great vote of thanks for the benefits our Club has received from the Annual Open. Another individual who is due a big word of gratitude is Peyton Moore, A dynamo in getting the golfers lined up and on the course. A third is our own Kathy Powell-Guy, she who keeps us straight with the tax people, who orders the stock for our book store pays the bills, keeps up with our insurance, and many other things. This little lady tackles the annual golf event with super enthusiasm, and much of the success of the event is due to her promotion and willingness to go out and get business professional and industrial sponsors for the event. As a matter of information, it is the success of that event as much as anything else which has allowed us to reduce our loan principal. Another is Philip White a member who has steadfastly monitored the books and kept the various Boards on target as to their true mission and why they're there. Thanks Vance, Peyton and Kathy, Philip and all the golfers over the years and coming years.

For me and for many others, a particularly proud moment in the Fellowship's life came last year when the 16th Anniversary was observed on Saturday, the 15th of September, four days after the horror and shock of that fateful Tuesday, 9-11. Barbara DiCiero donated a large U.S. flag which was hung on the wall The National Anthem was played over the sound system and the large group assembled for the occasion gave the Pledge of Allegiance. Additionally, there was a group conscience that the money contributed that day be given to the NYPD and NY Firefighters. The check was for \$500.00 and charter member and former Raleigh Firefighter

Vern Marshburn presented that check to the Fire Station just down the road from the Club.

A Little Perspective

"Ask not what the Club can do for you; ask what you can do for the Club." You recognize that as a paraphrase of JFK's famous line from his inauguration speech of the early 60s.

Times have changed. They always do. Unfortunately, the times do not shine as brightly on the future of the Club as I, and others, would like. For example, in the Club's beginning there was an enthusiasm about chairing meetings. There was a competitive spirit about sitting in that chair. That enthusiasm is long gone. In its place is a resigned, "I didn't plan to chair", or "What's her name asked me to chair, and I don't know how to do it." The speaker might be one who has been in AA for 5 years to a decade.

The Club's Charter and-By-Laws state that "The corporation will have the following class or classes of members: Non-profit volunteer individuals." I have listed above those who fully fit that description, members who freely give of their time, talents and energies; however, it has become increasingly the case that members want to be paid for work. There has developed a "What's in it for me?" attitude, rather-than "What can I do to help?" That attitude needs to change. There is a need to get back to those days when people took pride in the Club, who wanted to see it cared for and well maintained, who were not willing to abandon it to the general public with crossed fingers that nothing would happen. We need to get back to caring for the Club and not just expecting the Club to care about us. It's a building, folks, a building. It needs us to take care of it, keep it clean and safe.

Absence of youth in leadership roles. We need more younger people to step up to the plate and demonstrate a willingness and a eagerness to involve themselves in the Club's governance. We need men and Women in their 30s, 40s, and 50s to get involved. No more needs be said on that. It speaks for its self.

There is a need for more women to become members of the Club. Attendance at many meetings is sometimes as high as 70% female. That percentage does not show up on the membership rolls. Try to imagine a Club with an active female membership which was eager to plan family activities, holiday activities, special fund raising activities, those things which women, hands down, do better than men. Think of an active kitchen committee in which there are weekly/monthly/semi-annual functions held so that the kitchen really gets the use of which it is capable.

There is a need to learn to respond intelligently to those who choose, to criticize the Club. Since the snarls of the old timers in the very beginning of the effort to open a Club back in 1985, we have had more than our share of critics and complainers. The loudest and most predictable whine is about the Club's handling of funds which come to it through the AA and other meetings. It is a legitimate complaint when he/she complaining is an active member; it is a nuisance complaint when he/she is not. It was an early intention of mine to include a copy of the "AA Guidelines Clubs" as a part of this. I decided not to. You do your own research. I will, however, make reference to those Guidelines to make a point about the Club's decision to operate the way it does. (1) In the opening paragraph of those GSO Guidelines, the last sentence reads: "The purpose of these Guidelines is to assist in reaching an informed group conscience." Question: Who is "the group" here? Answer:

The elected Board of Directors of the Fellowship. Interpretation - that Board is free to decide on its own the best direction for the Club, sticking with its original stated purpose of following AA's Principles. Is there any conflict there? No. Are there assumptions made in the AA Guidelines which do not recognize the type of Club the Camel-24 is? Yes. What is that assumption? It is that "a club" has a separate base of support separate and apart from the meetings it hosts and houses. The assumption is that "a club" is the same as a church which has a congregation's donations to support it and is, therefore capable of the generosity of meeting space for AA for a small fee. That model would be accurate for the Camel Club were the membership at such a level so that revenue from membership dues were high enough to pay the mortgage, the heating/cooling,/water/sewer/electrical/gas/ bills, buy the coffee, the cups, other condiments, clean the building, pay the garbage pickup, the insurance on the building, repair costs, other maintenance costs, sustain losses from theft and other costs, including those of stocking the bookstore and buying furniture and equipment for what little security and office work we have and need. Yes, the AA Guideline for Clubs would match, were that true. It is not. Therefore, the Club, to continue to serve the "recovery community" - and it grows larger every day - with what resources that are available to us has to depend on the revenues of the meetings to pay those aforementioned expenses and maintain the facility at a safe and comfortable level. (\$3000.00 was just expended to treat for termites which were eating away at the front part of the building and discovered to have tunneled under the concrete slab. Additionally, \$370.00 was needed to replace a bookstore window broken out by a burglar, to that is added the approximately \$70.00 taken from the bookstore cash drawer.) Question: Were there individual groups, each with its own treasurer and exercising its principled autonomy, would any of those groups be expected to contribute to those expenses? There are many more examples which could be given.

There are many ways that Clubs which host and house AA and other recovery meetings operate and sustain themselves. Some clubs are endowed handsomely by a wealthy and grateful member. We have had a representative of another club in southeastern NC at a meeting at Camel-24 who told me that, "We have money coming out of our ears. We have to look for projects to spend money on. The club is the recipient of tax money from the county's ABC stores. The Camel-24 wants no part of public money, for while it may not be true where the mentioned club exists, it would certainly be true in Raleigh and Wake County that with public money comes public control.

"Why doesn't the Club send money to the GSO and to the Intergroup office?" It does. Indeed, the amount of literature the Club purchases from GSO annually is in the thousands of dollars, Big Books, 12x12s, Living Sober, As Bill Sees It, hard backs, paper backs, small editions, small hard back editions, small paperback editions, AA Comes of Age, Pass It On, Dr. Bob, and the Good Old Boys pamphlets by the boxes. We purchase the Tri-County AA meeting schedules from the Intergroup Office and freely distribute them in the same way meetings in other venues do. Those schedules are sold to the Club at .25 cents per. We also purchase the 30 and 60 days chips from the Intergroup, paying .35 cents per for those.

My point is this. Attitude. Rather than complaining about what Camel-24 doesn't do, in your opinion, let me suggest a good look at all the good it does, in my opinion and that of the hundreds of men and women who have availed themselves of the opportunity to come and receive a message of hope in the 17 years of the Fellowship' s existence. May it continue to serve and serve proudly. HAPPY 17TH BIRTHDAY, CAMEL-24 FELLOWSHIP, INC

In the body of this meandering sketch some names are mentioned. I have placed another listing of names here for the, to me, simple and obvious reason that each and every name which should be mentioned will not be. There are the names of those who have gone on, but whose memories remain dear and bright. George Anderson roaring forth when a speaker, particularly a newcomer, went afoul of his AA learning. Quiet and dependable William Lamb sitting alone in the room perfectly contented and eager and willing to help in anyway. He could repair anything broken and frequently did. He told me once when I was suspicious of the way something was being handled, "Chuck, we just have to trust folks." A dear man, indeed. Quirky Jimmy Lloyd, always on the job and with a positive attitude. Rebecca rising to hug any woman who picked up a chip and proudly reciting the Third Step Prayer by heart in that fast disappearing liquid Southern accent from years gone by. Jim Pierson invoking the memory of his sponsor and his granddaddy sponsor, as he put it, to make a point in that measured and articulate voice of his. Buie Costen, always a "reasonably happy" individual and that Lawyer's turn of the head to address someone. Harold Du Bose, always dapper and eager to get well. Tiny Betty Batten an original and big part of the Club's early days. There are others whom I don't know about. You fill them in.

There are those who are happily still with us but not necessarily at the Club: Lee C. sitting guard and greeting over at the original Creekside location, Jane Devine with her dramatic pauses and then, BOOM,"IT'S A KILLER DISEASE!" "I'm going to Belk's and charge something. There are more. You add them.

I close with this. If you feel that your name should be here somewhere, then add it, please, and I apologize for the oversight. Ultimately, to me at least, it is not about the names, it is about the anonymity, the willingness, the gratitude that you can contribute, that you do contribute, and that you will continue to contribute to the mission of the Camel-24 Fellowship, Inc.

That original group was comprised of Denver Hardman, Jimmy Lloyd, Vern Marshburn, Vic Kirkman, and Earl Knox. There was an enthusiastic response, with many individuals indicating a desire and willingness to be a part of the new venture. Sadly, many of those folks have passed on, many have since moved away, some are still with us and as active as they were back in 1985 when it all began. It's an illustrious roll of present and past Raleigh AAers. Bill Johnson, Knox Jenkins, William Lamb, Jim Pierson, George Anderson, Earl Knox, Betty Batten, Kenneth

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Jackson, Susan Schneider, Jack Livingston, Jim Pike, Gladys ?, Ralph Freeman . These were later joined by Howard Rocket, Gene Chalk, Allen Perry, Pat Hughes, Philip White, Pete Manuel, Robert Hobson, Fran Smithson, Kathy Beetham, Candace Martindale, Battle Robertson, Lee Johnson, Bebe Blades, Buie Costen, Peggy Costen, Mark Pfeifer, Ray Byrd, Larry Midgette, Jim Britt, Harold DuBose, Nancy Southerland, Tom Stephenson, Barbara DiCiero, Mike Bailey, Fred Schmidtke, Chris Dieterich, Randy Hutchins, Boone McGee, John Peeler, Charles Nowell, Kenneth J. (2), Jennifer Post, Mary (Mississippi) Ingram, Kathy Powell-Guy, and Chuck Barrett. There are many more, but the admission has been made that all the facts are not here. The reader, hopefully, will add names.