

A Sketch
of the History of the
Old Ben Lippen Property

now,

Merrimon Christian School .
& The Crest Conference Center

10 Ben Lippen School Road
Asheville, N. C. 28806

Thanksgiving Season

2001

W.L.L.

--preamble--

Its a challenge, to try to bring things into focus, when you approach an ongoing story that's already over 80 years long. It began before it begins, and will never end---its principals all stand on others' shoulders.

The place called Ben Lippen was, many of us sense and believe, born out of God's heart and borne along by God's eternal purposes. It came to be, as Columbia Bible College's founders sought for a place to have a conference center.

And out of the old conference center there soon arose camps, a missionary training center and a high school. It all waxed and waned; and now, has arisen again. This is something of how it happened.

For me, trying to weave some of these multitudinous threads together, is very personal; it forms some of the richest background in the tapestry He has woven into my life. It began for me, before I did; and for me, and thousands of others, in Him, it will never end--its all, of a piece.....

My Mother (and Dad) and her sister, were married here, at the old camp, in a double wedding ceremony, performed at Sell's Lodge, (still standing) by Dr. Pierre Wilds DuBose (son of an old China missionary--Hampden Coit DuBose, who pioneered missionary work to that fifth of the world's population, for 40 years). That lovely wedding took place in 1940.

My Mother and her sister, had been campers and counselors, at old Camp Tappuah for about ten years, in the 1930's. My Grandmother, "...took some classes at the (Columbia) Bible School, and was converted under the ministry of Mr. McQuilkin" (Dr. Robert C.), according to This Is The Victory, by the Hehls.

My Grandmother also sold some of her jewelry, during the Depression, to pay for the swimming pool at the camp, behind the lodge, now long filled in and covered. Gone but not forgotten, part of a ministry to hundreds and probably thousands of people, from the 1930's to the 1980's.

My sister and I, both worked here at the summer conference, in the 1960's. And, way before that, as a little boy, on the lawn of Sell's Lodge, I played during the summers of World War II. And, by God's grace, I am one of dozens and perhaps hundreds, who added our prayers in the 1990's, to have the place kept in His will.....

Like thousands of other brethren, I love the place; its part of me and I am part of it--perhaps, a little like the body of Christ, eternal and-a-present, 'heavenly place'--set, according to His grace, mercy and blessing, in this mountain and mounting outpost, in His Kingdom.....

...a wee fraction of the testimony of Jesus Christ, across these past two and now, three centuries.....

rejoicing with you in our hope of glory....

W.L. Lumpkin
Old Ben Lippen
November, 2001

Thanksgiving Season
November, 2001
The Mountain of Trust
Asheville, North Carolina

The Old Ben Lippen Property,
now
Merrimon Christian School
& The Crest Conference Center

The story of Ben Lippen Conference Center and School, now Merrimon Christian School & The Crest Conference Center, began in the hearts of some praying women in Columbia, South Carolina, at least as far back as the summer of 1918. We can really trace its origins to the home of Mr. and Mrs T. Hal Dick and their daughters, Miss Emily and Miss Gwyn Dick.

Miss Emily Dick had begun working with the girls and young women of the mill villages, then all over the south. And, in her effort to be spiritually prepared herself and to find other Christian ladies to help her, she had gone to Moody Bible Institute in Chicago for several summer sessions.

Then, it came to her, by the leadership of the Holy Spirit, in the fall of 1918, that she and her sister Gwyn, their Mother and a few of their Christian friends should begin to pray for a Bible training school, right there in Columbia.

The answer to those prayers was the Southern Bible Institute, starting with the fall term of 1921. They rented a home on College Street, for \$85.00 per month and began with three students.

Then, by the fall of 1922, Dr. Robert C. McQuilkin, had come from the "Sunday School Times", in Philadelphia. He was the first president of the newly named, Columbia Bible School (over the years, changed to, Columbia Bible College-C.B.C.-and now, Columbia International University).

The McQuilken Family name, is written large, through all the life of Columbia Bible College (C.B.C.) and Ben Lippen, from 1919, right up through the present, in this new century. His son, Dr. J. Robertson McQuilkin, was Headmaster of Ben Lippen School (1952-55) and just before his Dad's death, July 15, 1952, at Ben Lippen--translated from one of God's 'heavenly places', more totally, into 'heaven's table land'!

J. Robertson McQuilken, was also later, President of Columbia International University, until the early 1990's, when he resigned to care for his wife, smitten with the dread alzheimer's disease--a sacrifice he is respected for all across this country and beyond.

But, back to the early days and his Dad, Robert C. McQuilkin. Dr. McQuilkin's life had been transformed by the reality of the Victorious Life Messages and conferences, let by such spiritual giants as L.L. Legters of S. C. and Charles G. Trumbull, editor of the 'Sunday School Times'.

Dr. McQuilkin, had also been involved in the American Keswick, (New Jersey) movement and conferences, in what generally has been known as the 'deeper life movement', all across the last century, rooted in the English Keswick movement (going back to the 1870's).

These are rich, golden threads which run through most of the 20th century and now into our new century, in the work of God up on this property, 'The Mountain of Trust' (which is what Ben Lippen means in Scottish).

So, when Dr. McQuilkin agreed to come to Columbia, to be the President of the new Bible College, he came also looking for a complementary Bible conference center, somewhere in the cool mountain country, where summer meetings could take place.

This is where Miss Emily Dick, again plays an important part in the origins of the Columbia Bible College ministry and place, known as Ben Lippen. She had visited the Eliada Home Orphanage and Campgrounds outside of Asheville, N.C., as she traveled with her mill worker's ministry.

So, with her suggestion, Dr. McQuilkin wrote to the orphanage founder, Lucius B. Compton (another giant from the old days) and in the words of the Columbia Bible College history, Towers Pointing Upward, by R. Arthur Mathews: "His reply could not have been more gracious: 'I belong to the Lord; you belong to the Lord; the grounds belong to the Lord; come and use them'."

And, come they did (every summer from 1923-1931) to the old Eliada Campground Tabernacle, where many blessed saints of the last century, encouraged the brethren (the pillars and amphitheatre setting, still stand, barely a mile from the old Ben Lippen/Merrimon School grounds).

But, the place known as Ben Lippen, to thousands across the country and around the world, really began to come into existence in the summer of 1928. Miss Emily Dick and 'Aunt Frizzie' (Mrs. Frizzelle) Hill, share the honor of spotting the site, as they returned to Eliada after grocery shopping.

One of them cried: "Look at that mountain just across from Compton's. It must have a beautiful view!" They were right; and, tens of thousands have been blessed by it ever since.

They found the owners name, contacted him and there followed the well known 'Blackberry Patch Prayer Meeting', where faithful C.B.C. pioneers claimed the property for God's conference ministry. And, by 1929, the 75 acres of 'heaven's table land', was purchased by C.B.C.

Over the years, parcels were added as the school was able to acquire them, now totalling 138 acres.. The property's elevation varies from about 2200' to over 2500'. The current buildings on the property comprise about 125,000 sq. ft. of floor space and there is currently approximately 110,000 sq. ft of asphalt and concrete paving in the various roads and parking lots.

The old Ben Lippen/Merrimon School property is just under five miles from the center of Asheville, a driving time of 8 to 10 minutes.. The southernmost 55 acres support the school campus, related residential structures and includes about eight (8) acres of athletic fields. So the property is essentially in four sections: the campus, athletic fields, Camp Ridge and Missionary Ridge.

The unique name of the old conference center, came about during one of those early, Eliada conferences. The name that struck them all, as they discussed it one night at the supper table, was 'Mountain of Trust'. There were several people of Scottish background present and someone had the bright idea of asking what the Scottish rendering of these words would be.

The conference song leader, Jimmy Patterson, one of the Scotsmen, promptly answered: 'Ben Lippen'. Later that evening, the conference speaker, Dr. J. Alexander Clark, another Scotsman and missionary to Africa, told stories about this Scottish word, 'lippen', meaning to trust or have faith.. So, the word was confirmed and has stood and been echoed in the hearts of countless thousands around the world, for over 70 years.

However, it was not until the summer of 1932, that enough development took place on the property to have the first Ben Lippen Summer Conference. The first two major buildings have been beloved by legions of believers. First came the Conference Inn, which had been the old Asheville Post Office.

Through a series of miraculous circumstances (this was right in the heart of the Depression and many losses and setbacks had to be overcome by faith and prayer), C.B.C., secured the building, tore it down and removed the material for about \$3,000.00 in 1931. It was rebuilt at Ben Lippen, as the Conference Inn in 1932 (and, the stately 8-column front porch and 33 room wing was added by 1940).

The second major structure was Huston Hall Auditorium, built of native quartz stone, quarried from all over the mountain ridges and hollows of the property. The Chapel, was later built of this lovely material which God provided for His people--as well as beautiful walls and fireplaces all across the grounds. Houston Hall featured open-air seating for 1,200, with unobstructed interior views, facilitated by steel trusses, secured from a burned out factory, for \$300.00! (And, paid for by a 'homeside missionary with a nest egg of a very modest savings account').

Construction began in 1935 and was dedicated by Dr. McQuilkin, in 1937. And, from this hallowed place, have been called out boys and girls, men and women, for the cause of Christ, to go out from its portals, by the hundreds and thousands, all across the Globe, for over half a century. This is holy ground.

These two grand old structures have been the heart and soul of Ben Lippen since it's early days. Unfortunately, the old Conference Inn and wing, were destroyed by fire on December 12, 1980. Interestingly, it was Song Leader, Cliff Barrow's son Billy, a student, who mistakenly was granted permission to build a fire in the old Inn's

fireplace, with its faulty chimney. That tragic event, ended the Inn's prominence as Ben Lippen's premier building.

But, out of the ashes of that great loss, the Lord had a way to work out the needs and ministries of Ben Lippen. Under the leadership of Headmaster Jack Layman, a 17,000 sq. ft. Chalet, soon arose, at a different location, to replace the Inn's dining hall, kitchen facilities and gathering spaces, as well as music and maintenance facilities. This, also-wonderful building, was amazingly designed and built, for the opening of the fall term, in August, 1981.

And, this beautiful Chalet, still serves (very well), twenty years later, as one of the nerve centers of Merrimon School and the heart of the Crest Conference ministry.

Still, the loss of the beloved Inn and its dormitory wing, in 1980, was possibly a significant thing that began to precipitate the removal of Ben Lippen School to the Columbia International University campus in S.C., in 1988.

An interesting transitional chapter in Ben Lippen's life took place from about 1985-1988. In the course of events surrounding the fire and the building of the Chalet, Billy Graham eventually came to offer Ben Lippen the 1,500 acre property that later became, The Cove.

This would allow Ben Lippen more space for anticipated growth. So, Ben Lippen, under the auspices of C.B.C., began to move toward a new location and to invest in the development of an infrastructure, at what later became, The Cove. They put in roads, the initial structure of the Chapel and the camp ministry, investing approximately, \$3,000,000.00, in about three years.

Somehow, the transition did not move quickly enough, to suit everyone involved and in the end, the B.G.A., repaid Ben Lippen its investment and the venture was amicably concluded. This in turn, apparently sealed the decision of Ben Lippen and C.B.C., to sell their Asheville property and remove Ben Lippen School to Columbia, S.C., in the summer of 1988.

Perhaps, this is a good place to note another very interesting connection, with the two, original, major buildings, by two of our best loved, evangelical leaders already mentioned. When, as a young man, Billy Graham was leading a series of meetings at Ben Lippen, in Houston Hall (-the summer of 1945), he came up short of a music director one night.

Looking around for some help, someone mentioned that there was a young musician in attendance, from California, on his honeymoon. And, he just happened to have his guitar in his car. The young man agreed to fill in. He met Billy Graham that night in Houston Hall. His name: Cliff Barrows.

↳ Trombone

So, half-a-century of outstanding Christian history and God-wrought collaboration, started that night, at Ben Lippen. But, that's a bit ahead of the story.

Back to the earlier origins!--this is not an easy story to untangle and separate the layers, with a cast of literally thousands of characters and overlapping situations--anyway, Dr. McQuilkin, early on, encouraged the development of a camp on the property, named Tappuah, which ran from about 1930-1956 (although most of the camp buildings were reportedly built in 1937); and, intermittently the camp ran until the early 1980's (before transferring over to the 'Cove' property, as earlier noted).

Camp Tappuah's main building, Sell's Lodge (now just a shell, used for storage, but hopefully redeemable) is one of the few remaining camp buildings. A girl's bunk house, log building, was added in 1979.

Dr. and Mrs. Pierre Wilds DuBose, of Ben Lippen's sister school, in Zellwood, Florida--Hampden DuBose Academy, were instrumental, in developing and running Camp Tappuah for many years. They would bring up a number of their staff each summer (with the added benefit, of getting away from the Florida heat!). Mrs. DuBose, was Gwyn Dick, one of the 'founding sisters', of C.B.C., Ben Lippen and H.D.A.

Well, back to the convoluted origins of multiple ministries on the 'Mountain of Trust'. By 1940, having seen a need for a Christian boarding school for boys, Dr. McQuilkin led in the development of the Ben Lippen Conference Center, to double as Ben Lippen School, for boys, during the school year. A lot of the needed facilities were already in place, so with the addition of a dorm wing, that year, to the Inn, why not use them he reasoned!

So, the school started with 17 students, growing to about 200. Girls were admitted in 1952. And, about 70% of the students were missionary kids, many of them children of former C.B.C. students. And, many of these Ben Lippen students returned to the mission field. You can still see the remains of the HAM radio tower, at the highest point on Missionary Ridge, where the Ben Lippen kids, kept in touch with their parents, all over the world--often, following those signals back to their home fields, to follow in their parents' footsteps!

The Conference Book Store, by Houston Hall, was also built of the beautiful, native, Ben Lippen, white quartz, in 1947, and later expanded into a chapel to seat 250+ (most recently, converted into a five-classroom bldg., for upper school students). Then, in 1961, the McQuilken classroom building was added. Also, recently a modular building, for Day Care, and a beautiful playground structure were added.

In the course of time, at least twenty (20) homes, cottages or cabins were built on all sections of the property--this is, besides the remaining camp buildings--several chimneys, cisterns and foundations echo a fascinating past. Fifteen homes remain; eleven are now habitable and three or four are begging for repair and restoration.

Also along the way, two major dorms were erected, the upper, Girl's Dorm, in 1955; and later, the lower, Boy's Dorm, in 1967--comprising, together, about 90 rooms

These dorms are currently used for retreats, conferences, camps etc., along with Houston Hall (in season) and the dining/kitchen/and gathering facilities of the Chalet. One of the larger houses, called Mulberry, is also primarily dedicated to use as a retreat house (having 6 bedrooms, 5 baths and two large gathering rooms, as well as a huge kitchen).

Another important facet of Ben Lippen history, was the Missionary Training Center, previously situated on Missionary Ridge (cc. 1935 to the early 1960's). This was a part of the work and ministry of C.B.C., whereby they could send missionary candidates to train to live on and live off the land.

The Missionary Training Center's main building was the old Lippen Lodge (a name later transferred to the 1967 Boy's Dorm).. This Lodge, housed about three staff families, and only the chimney remains--but a memorial stone in the fireplace, still tells an interesting story, inscribed with the date, 1938. There were also, at least four other log buildings--there are remains of three.

So, as noted earlier, the property in general, is pretty well delineated by four area: The main campus, Missionary Ridge, Camp Ridge and the lower, approx. 8 acres of athletic fields. By the way, athletics have played a big part in the life of Ben Lippen, for the past 60 years. There have been State, Regional and Conference Championship teams, for both Ben Lippen School and Merrimon School, in Soccer, in Basketball, Baseball, Track and Field and in Volleyball, as well as excellent showings and enjoyable involvement in several other sports. And, Bobby Richardson of the famed New York Yankees, lived here and coached for a couple of years.

And, who could forget the grand old Gym, completed by 1950? Tens of thousands of people have passed through its doors, enjoying thousands of games and events held there, in the ensuing half century.

Well, a few comments are in order, for the years, 1988 through 1999, at old Ben Lippen. They were years of repose, turmoil and renewing ministry for the grand old mountain top. After Ben Lippen School, removed and relocated to the Columbia International University campus, in the summer of 1988, there have been three groups here.

First came Blanton's Business College, with a truck driving school branch, located at the dear old campus, about 1990 to early 1992. Perhaps we'll tell that story another time--those were not the happiest days for the place or for faithful Ben Lippeners.

But, people were still seeing the Lord here and being saved--in spite of some of the negative things of that period. And, some of us, in the area and around the country were praying (for months and years) for the Lord's best at old Ben Lippen. So, by early 1992, the trucking school faded away and Ben Lippen was quiet again.

Then, the property was bought by the Church of God, of Western North Carolina, in about 1993 and they operated the Crest Conference Center here, until 1999--the place was spruced-up and back in the Lord's service, after that strange interlude.

And finally, Merrimon Christian School, after 22 years with Merrimon Avenue Baptist Church, independently, as a school/conference ministry, acquired the property in the summer of 1999 (now, under the auspices of, The Crest Christian School Partnership, Inc.) Miracles and massive labor, got the old school reopened for the fall term of 1999.

So now, in its 25th year, and our third year, on our own, at the former Ben Lippen property, Merrimon Christian School has 240 students, 2 years to 12th grade, and a burgeoning conference ministry.

With this rich heritage, as may be apparent, the history of this old Ben Lippen/Merrimon Christian School property, is enormous, even globe-girdling. It features a vast heritage, stretching across almost the whole last century, with an interconnecting network of relationships and involvement with the Kingdom of God, which touches the whole world.

Those may seem to be high sounding words but they are altogether true, and when you get a glimpse of the panorama, of what God has done here and is still doing, it is really amazing and staggering.

Many of the leading saints of God, came through this place and ministered here: The McQuilkins, Lucius B. Compton, the DuBoses, Steven Olford, Alan Redpath, J. Vernon McGee, Billy Graham and Team members, Vance Havener, Tom Neely and countless others.

And, when you begin to see the larger picture of what has happened here and is still happening here, on this Mountain of Trust, for over 75 years, from the perspective of the Kingdom of God and Eternity, you know you are on holy ground, in a sacred, God-wrought and God-ordained place.

Part of the fruit of that, with the Conference Center, the Schools, the Camps and Missionary Training Center, we can have no doubt, has issued in hundreds and thousands over the decades coming to Christ and going out across this country and all over the earth, as missionaries, preachers, teachers, church workers and just plain, good, solid Christian citizens.

It is hard to imagine, that the ministries, of many other places on earth, have resulted in more impact for the Kingdom of God, worldwide, than what He has done here and is still doing here. It is certain that ten's of thousands and even millions, may have been touched by the ministries emanating from this Mountain of Trust, now serving into its second century. May Eternity proclaim His work here, and may it ever be so.....

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***Apologetic!!!!

This is a rough sketch of the history of the old Ben Lippen property; so, I must add a Chaucerian disclaimer. I am sure some of my dates may be mistaken and there are probably other errors. I would be most grateful if you could respond to this initial effort with any corrective dates, clarifications or other information.

Among other things, this may be viewed as a 'working paper' and I hope to improve on its accuracy and correctness. This is a subject that has a rich and massive history. So, any corrective comments you may be able to share, would be very helpful.

I would like to expand on this effort (perhaps attempting to cover the whole period of the history of this old Ben Lippen property from the 1920's, right up into the 21st Century) as the Lord leads and allows. Would you please consider taking the time, to help me in these ways, toward a more accurate and possibly expansive continuation..?...

--with appreciation for our blessed heritage,

will