

May 11, 2007

The Belknap Twins: A Faded Louisville Legacy

By Steve Wiser

Two small crosses sit silently in the Belknap family plot within Louisville's Cave Hill Cemetery. The engraved dates are the same: "1925 - 1944." Charles H. Moorman, Jr., and Morris B. Moorman were twin brothers. Both served in the U. S. Army during World War II, and on the back of both of their crosses are inscribed: "Killed in Action - World War II - Normandy, France".



*Above: Front of the Moorman Twins
Cross Markers*

Below: The rear of their cross markers

Charles, Jr., and Morris were the sons of Charles, Sr., and Lilly Moorman. Lily was the granddaughter of William Burke Belknap, who founded the once-prominent Belknap Hardware Company.

How Charles, Jr., and Morris died on the Normandy battlefield is a story of a dedication to their country and fulfilling their family's American heritage.



Origins of a Grand Company



William Burke Belknap was born in Brimfield, Massachusetts, in 1811. His early life was spent helping his father in the iron furnace industry. The Belknap family relocated several times, first to Pittsburgh, then to eastern Tennessee. William decided to strike out on his own with various ventures in Texas, St. Louis, and Cincinnati. By 1840, he had started an iron nail business at Third and Main Streets in downtown Louisville.

This was a golden moment in the city's progress. Louisville was growing rapidly, soon to become one of the nation's largest cities. And, W. B. Belknap and Company grew right along with it, providing the building materials for this expansion. William Belknap became a distinguished resident, hosting the likes of

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Ulysses S. Grant and William T. Sherman in his home during the Civil War. With Reconstruction after the war and westward migration accelerating, Belknap Hardware took advantage of its central location with excellent water transportation routes along the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, as well as overland on the L & N Railroad. It was indeed a prosperous period to be in the building material business.

When William died in 1889, his son, William Richardson Belknap, took command. The Belknap formula was focused on rural customers, being a one-stop shop for all of their home and work-related needs at a very reasonable price. Years later, a small town Arkansas entrepreneur named Sam Walton would follow a similar strategy for his company, Wal-Mart.

By the turn of the century, the renamed Belknap Hardware and Manufacturing Company occupied 42 acres and 14 buildings near the Ohio River waterfront and on the perimeter of Louisville's urban core district.



William R. Belknap

Business and Society Connections



Morris B. Belknap, Sr.

While William R. Belknap led the family's hardware empire, his brother Morris strengthened the family's political and societal standing by marrying Lily Buckner. Lily was the only daughter of Simon Bolivar Buckner.

Simon Bolivar Buckner was born in 1823 at Glen Lily, the family estate near Munfordville, in south central Kentucky. He attended the U. S. Military Academy at West Point and served with General Winfield Scott during the Mexican War. Once out of the army, he married Mary Jane Kingsbury and joined her father's business. But, with the onset of the Civil War, Buckner spurned the Union's offer of a commission, and became a General with the Confederate army. He was involved in numerous conflicts, and was once captured by General Grant, only to be released later in a prisoner exchange.



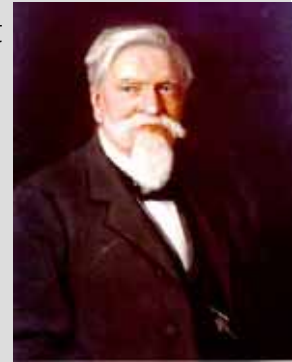
Simon Bolivar Buckner, Sr.

Following the war, Buckner resurrected his business holdings, becoming a well-known figure in Kentucky. He translated this popularity into being elected Gov-

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error in 1887. In 1896, he unsuccessfully ran for Vice-President of the United States on the "Gold Democrat" ticket with John Palmer as the Presidential candidate.

Buckner's son-in-law, Morris, also had a notable background besides being a member of the Belknap family. He graduated from Yale in 1877, in the same class as future President William Howard Taft. He then worked for the Belknap Company as well as several other independent ventures. Morris served as a Lt. Colonel in the Spanish-American War and was also a member of his father-in-law's gubernatorial staff. He even ran unsuccessfully for Kentucky governor in 1903.



Governor Simon Bolivar Buckner, Sr.

Morris Belknap married Lily Buckner on June 14, 1883. They had four children: Gertrude (1884), Walter Kingsbury (1886), Lily (1889), and Morris B. Jr (1893). His wife died on December 29, 1893 and Morris Sr. passed away of a blood disorder on April 13, 1910 at the age of 54.

Continuing the Tradition to the Next Generation

Four years after the death of her father, Lily Belknap married Charles Harwood Moorman on November 28, 1914.



Judge Charles Harwood Moorman, Sr.

Charles H. Moorman grew up in Meade County, Kentucky, and studied law in Elizabethtown. He was admitted to the Kentucky bar in 1899. In 1906, Charles joined the L & N Railroad as an attorney. During World War I, he served as a major in the U. S. Army. Upon being discharged in May, 1919, he formed the law firm of Moorman and Woodward. Moorman then was appointed judge of the Kentucky Court of Appeals, the state's highest court. President Calvin Coolidge, on January 8, 1924, named Moorman to the U. S. District Court for the Western District of Kentucky.

Triumph and Tragedy

The next year, Lily and Charles celebrated the birth of their twin boys, Morris Belknap Moorman and Charles Harwood Moorman, Jr., on February 25, 1925. It is said that Lily's pregnancy was difficult, and that she was bed-ridden for several months prior to delivery. These were the Moormans' only children.

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Both boys were a delight for their parents and were destined for future success with a strong academic upbringing. While twins, they were given separate educational paths to pursue, perhaps better to prepare them for individual leadership later. They were sent to private preparatory schools in Chattanooga, Tennessee: Morris to Anchorage School and Charles to McCallie School.

Their father, in the meantime, was becoming a widely respected judge, ruling on several legal cases that involved national issues. In 1937, Charles Sr. took part in a decision that helped create the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA).

In late January, 1938, Morris and Charles Jr. received frightening news while away at school. Their father had been stricken with a cerebral hemorrhage while working at his office on a Saturday. Four days later, on January 26, Charles Sr. died at the age of 61.

This was a devastating loss for the two boys, who were 12 years old, and their mother. Lily had lost both her mother and father at a very early age. Now, she had lost her beloved husband. All the fame and fortune of the Belknap holdings could never replace this void in their lives. Yet, life continues and the children returned to Chattanooga to complete their education.

Responding to a Call to Duty

For high school, their paths took a wider departure. Charles remained in Chattanooga, now attending Baylor School. Morris, though, chose The Hill School in Pottstown, Penn., where his uncle Walter K. Belknap had attended. Both schools were exceptional institutions of learning that would provide the Moorman's the discipline and skills they would need in a challenging and changing world.

Across the Atlantic, far away from the tranquil society of middle America, a ruthless Adolph Hitler was rampaging across Europe. England was being terrorized by aerial 'robot' bombs. And, on December 7, 1941, the United States was thrust into this global conflict. World War II was an epic struggle between good and evil. Thousands of American men answered their country's call to arms. It was not a question of if, but when the Moorman twins



Morris B. Belknap, Jr.

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would enlist. Their father was an Army major in WWI. Their grandfather was a Lt. Colonel in the Spanish American War. And, their great-grandfather was a General in the Civil War.



*Freshman Class of The Baylor School in Chattanooga, Tennessee.
Charles Moorman, Jr., is believed to be pictured in the fourth row, second from the left.*

By March 1943, Morris could wait no longer. He volunteered in the U. S. Army and became a Private First Class. A month later in May, his brother Charles was inducted and received the rank of Corporal. Charles trained in Ft. McClellan, Al., and Camp Blanding, Fl. Morris headed further north to a camp in the state of New York.

Destiny and Sacrifice

On June 6, 1944, the Allied invasion of Normandy took place. 3,300 Americans were killed in the initial phase of D-Day. It was a horrifying experience, with the chaos and intensity that occurred in such a short period.

Charles and Morris, though, were not in the first wave of action. They were still

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stationed in England. Charles had asked to join Morris's unit, but his request was yet to be acted upon.

Morris was sent to France first. The U. S. army was making advances against the vaunted German war machine. By mid July, the area around the invasion site had been secured. And, on August 1st, the allies were within striking distance of Paris.

Back in Louisville, the Courier-Journal newspaper was full of war coverage. Banner headlines trumpeted victories. But, it was the second section that military families feared to read. Names of those killed in action were listed, along with those wounded. Most days contained four to six local men who would not return home, as well as dozens who were severely hurt in the fighting. Unlike today's instant communication systems, news traveled very slowly. Casualty reports were at least three weeks delayed. The anguish of loved ones who had to deal with the uncertain fate of their husbands, brothers, fathers, and sons overseas had to have been an excruciating experience.



Normandy Invasion Military Positions as per July 19, 1944.



Normandy Invasion Military Positions as of August 1, 1944

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On August 10, 1944, Army chaplains knocked on Lily Moorman's door. Seeing who was waiting on the porch must have caused Lily great concern. There never will be a compassionate way to deliver this dire message. Morris had been killed in action in France. He died on July 18th, in Normandy, France. It must have seemed like the world had ended for Lily. How does one endure this dreadful reality? Certainly, her only remaining son would soon return home safely.



Charles H. Moorman, Jr.

Twenty-four days later, on September 3rd, the unthinkable happened. Army chaplains again walked up the steps to Lily Moorman's home. Charles was killed in action, 20 days after his brother, on August 7th. Two youthful, inspiring lives lost in a world gone mad. Lily Moorman was left alone to grieve.

Coming Home

It was a bright sunny Friday near 3 pm. The temperature would reach an unseasonable balmy 85 degrees on this spring day that felt more like summer. Flowers were in bloom. Dogwoods and azaleas were at their colorful peak. Slowly the funeral procession departed St. Mark's Episcopal Church on Frankfort Avenue in Crescent Hill. West along Grinstead Drive, past Cherokee Park, through the Cherokee Triangle neighborhood, and into the Broadway gates of Cave Hill Cemetery, the two black hearses traveled to lot 225 of section N.



*Belknap Family Plot
in Louisville's Cave Hill Cemetery*



*Charles, Sr., and Lily Belknap
Moorman's Monuments*

Here among the scenic landscape lay the gravesites of William Burke Belknap, William R. Belknap, Mary Jane Kingsbury, Morris B. Belknap Sr., Lily Belknap, and Charles H. Moorman, Sr. Lily Moorman quietly mourned as her sons were laid to rest together on April 23, 1948.

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What would have been Charles Jr. and Morris' future? Would they have gone to Yale University like their grandfather and uncles? Would they have followed in the legal steps of their father? Or, would they have joined the Belknap Hardware business? Certainly, with their wealth and leadership skills, their options appeared unlimited. The city of Louisville no doubt would have benefited regardless of what career path they chose. Who knows how the dynamic synergy of Morris and Charles could have shaped civic affairs in the 1950's, 60's, and 70's. Perhaps one or both would have entered the political arena.



Reminders of a Proud Past and Fading Legacy



The Belknap name no longer resonates with today's generation of Louisvillians. Most now only associate it with two areas of the community: the Belknap campus at the University of Louisville; and the Belknap neighborhood, which surrounds a former school. Both of which were named in recognition for William R. Belknap.



Above: Former Belknap School named in memory of William R. Belknap

Below: Administration Building on Belknap Campus, which was purchased with money donated by the Belknap family in memory of William R. Belknap



No longer does the global hardware enterprise that carried the Belknap brand exist. Its massive complex of brick warehouses on East Main Street have since been transformed into contemporary offices for Humana insurance and the Presbyterian Church USA, among others. The iconic "Belknap Bluegrass Hardware" sign, which was a prominent symbol on the Louisville skyline for decades, is but a distant memory.

Belknap was a signature name for 150 years in Louisville. Thousands were employed, millions of dollars were generated, and a city prospered. Lily Moorman passed away on September 17, 1972 at the age of 83. The



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Belknap Hardware Co. went out of business on February 4th, 1986.



On the World War II Memorial at the corner of Jefferson and Fifth Streets, there are 1,450 names of Louisville area residents who made the ultimate sacrifice for the freedom we enjoy today.

And two names on this memorial will be an ever-lasting reminder of the Belknap family's proud heritage and fading legacy.

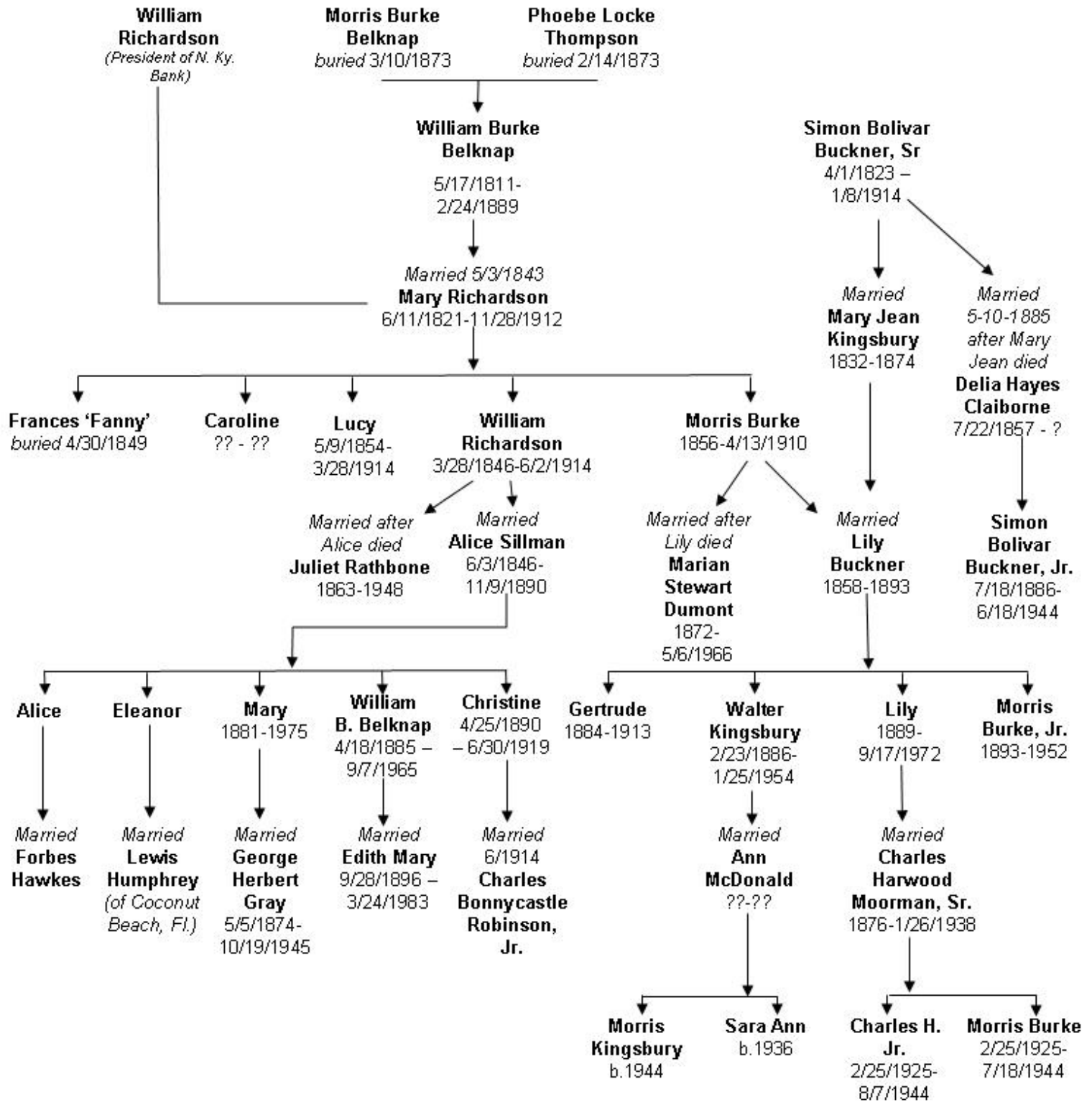


(Steve Wiser is the historical tour guide of Cave Hill Cemetery. He is also a local architect and board member of the Louisville Historical League. Steve can be contacted by emailing WiserAIA@Hotmail.com or via his website at www.WiserDesigns.com)

Provided below is a list of resources which I gratefully acknowledge for assisting me on this article:

Sam Thomas
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Cave Hill Cemetery
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Louisville encyclopedia
The Courier-Journal
Pearson's Funeral Home

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Belknap Family Tree

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