

REMEMBERING A GRANDFATHERLY MAN OF GOD

by Rev. Bob Uzzel

November 14, 2013 marked the 15th anniversary of the passing my wife's grandfather, Rev. W. E. Henry, a retired pastor in the Church of God in Christ and a great man of God who was the son of Elbert and Elenor Wade Henry. His grandfather, Jeff Henry, was born in slavery.

Rev. Willie Elbert Henry was born on November 1, 1904 in the Butler community near Fairfield, Freestone County, Texas. He was educated in the Butler schools. He professed faith in Jesus Christ at an early age and became a member of Pyburn Church of God in Christ under the leadership of Pastor Glover. He served as pastor of churches in Hubbard and Malone and, for several years, as pastor of the Lakeport Church of God in Christ on Highway 84 in eastern Freestone County.



On August 16, 1924, Rev. Henry married Gladys Durham, the daughter of Willie Anderson Durham, the granddaughter of Rance Durham, the great-granddaughter of Allen Durham, and the great-great-granddaughter of the African Gobi. He helped me in my research for *The Durhams of Fairfield: An African American Genealogy* by accompanying me to interviews of various older family members and to graves at Lone Star and Pine Top Cemeteries in the Butler community.

Gladys Durham Henry died on April 9, 1996. She and her husband were preceded in death by sons Clyde, Coleman, and Richmond, and an infant daughter Elenor. They were survived by sons Willie E. Henry, Sr. and Clifton Henry; daughters Catherine Armstead, Laverne Brackens, Aldess Bass, and Vernetta Henry; and a host of grandchildren, great-grandchildren, great-great grandchildren, nieces, nephews, cousins, and friends.

I met Rev. and Mrs. Henry during the fall of 1976, when I began dating their granddaughter Debra Bass. We were married on February 19, 1977. I had never before had a grandfather because both of my grandfathers died before I was born. Rev. Henry and I had a very good relationship. I accepted him as my grandfather and he accepted me as his grandson. He preached for me during my pastorates at Emmanuel AME Church in Dallas and at Macedonia AME Church in Kaufman. To the latter he was accompanied by his cousin Wilson Henry (1932-2012) and his wife's cousin Archie Durham (1906-2001) – two very good friends of mine.

Rev. Henry died on November 14, 1998 at the age of 94. I was honored to be asked to deliver his eulogy at Capps Funeral Home in Fairfield on November 18, 1998. At this service, Rev. Mike Daniels read Scripture, my son-in-law Rev. Kenneth Prox led prayer, and Leslie Freeman provided music. During interment at Pine Top Cemetery, my wife and her sisters began singing his favorite song "I'm Going Home on the Morning Train." After the service, my brother-in-law Lonnie Strickland reminded me that this was the 20th anniversary of his marriage to Celia Bass, Debra's sister. On November 18, 1978, I performed their wedding at Emmanuel and Rev. Henry lead in prayer. This had to be more than coincidental.

Rev. W. E. Henry is gone but will never be forgotten.

