



LINTHICUM
Vignettes



TALES OF A LINTHICUM HISTORIAN

By Oscar 'Skip' Booth

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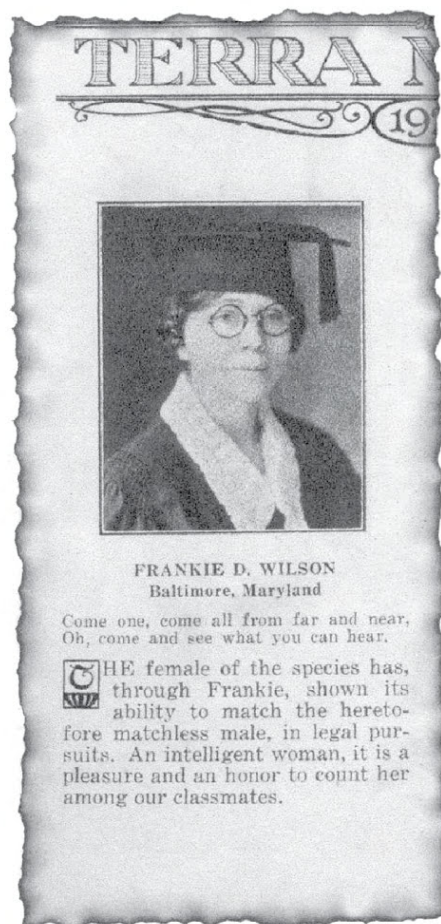
Frankie Wilson: Not Your Typical Southern Belle

Each March we recognize Women's History Month. It is a time to celebrate and appreciate the accomplishments of women and their contributions throughout history. There have been many pioneers in women's rights, women who have established themselves in roles traditionally dominated by the male of the species. Linthicum was home to one who through hard work and determination succeeded in being the first woman to graduate from the University Of Maryland School Of Law.

I remember when Hammond's Ferry Road crossed Camp Meade Road in front of Tauber's and ran to Broadview Boulevard. That stretch of road is now known as Cabin Branch Lane and it ends in a circle before intersecting Broadview. When I was a kid, my dad and I belonged to the YMCA Indian Guides. I remember meeting in a beautiful, modern house there. In a Frank Lloyd Wright inspired fashion, the house's glass front looked out over a little yard that seemed like a pine bordered meadow. It was an impressive home. Bill and Irene Wilson lived there with their two sons.

The house is gone now, as is the older home by the railroad tracks where Bill's parents, Robert and Frankie Wilson, lived. Frankie Dismukes Wilson was born in Birmingham, Alabama in 1890. Frankie was indeed her name. It was not short for Francis. She was named for an uncle. She married a young man from north of the Mason-Dixon Line, Robert A. Wilson in 1910. Frankie's family affectionately referred to him as "that damn Yankee."

The Wilsons moved north. Robert was an engineer for General Electric and was involved in the development of the first electric refrigerators. He was designer, developer and production manager. Bill Wilson recalls that his family had a refrigerator with the big round condenser on top and a



From the 1923 University of Maryland Yearbook.

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serial number of 70. It kept his family provided with cool food and ice for more than 30 years. The Wilsons lived in Linthicum for most of their lives except for a few years when Mr. Wilson's work took him to Pennsylvania.

Frankie's formal education ended at 6th grade but she was a determined young

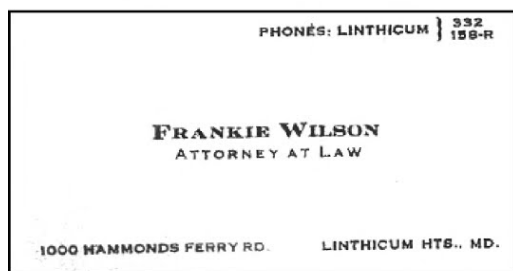


woman. As a teenager she made up her mind to accomplish something significant with her life. In 1920 the University of Maryland School of Law was, like most law schools of the time, an all male institution. That was about to change. Armed with her sixth grade education, a few night courses and a lot of determination, Frankie applied to and was accepted to the School of Law.

In 1922, Frankie took the grueling three day bar exam. She was pregnant with her third son, Bill, at the time. To be on the safe side, the school had a nursing student sit with her through the three days. Bill, who later would go to law school himself, remarked that he went through law school twice. Frankie's quest was successful. She became the first woman to graduate from the school.

After law school, Frankie practiced law in Baltimore, taking the B & A train home in the middle of the day to take care of her infant son. During the mid to late 1920s, her husband's job took the family to the Philadelphia area for a couple of years. The family was back in Linthicum in 1930 when General Electric laid off everyone over 50 years old, including Frankie's husband. For a family of five going into the Great Depression this was not a very bright picture. These were lean years for the law profession and for Frankie as a female lawyer, the times were especially harsh.

The Depression was hard on many people. Savings and Loan companies found themselves in possession of



TOP: Frankie was 70 years old in this 1960 photograph and left a strong legacy. She was a lawyer and businesswoman in an era when there were few. She concentrated on real estate in her later years, founding Frankie Wilson & Son with her son Jonathan.

BOTTOM: Frankie's business card from the 1950s. Note the three-digit phone number.

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many properties because of defaulted loans and foreclosures. Frankie found a calling in real estate. She purchased many of these properties. Her husband and sons fixed the properties up and she resold them. Her law and real estate office was located at 20 East Lexington Street. Through the 1930s, Frankie's business thrived. By the 1940s she lost her office downtown and her husband passed away. Frankie moved the business, which by this time was almost all real estate, to her home in Linthicum. She thought that her business would suffer but this was not the case.

Real estate was a booming business as America came out of the Depression and soldiers returning home were looking for houses. When her son, Bill, was discharged from the Navy in 1946, the two formed a partnership. Frankie Wilson and Son was incorporated in 1949.

Over the years hundreds, if not thousands, of properties in the Linthicum, Ferndale and Glen Burnie area were developed and sold by this entrepreneur. Some may have found fault in the way Frankie acquired property through default and at auction, but as a landlord and business person she was known as a fair and caring person. In tough times she often would take barter and partial payments on properties she was handling.

Away from business, Frankie compiled a detailed genealogy of the Dismukes family. To accomplish this, Frankie followed the trek taken by her family from Virginia, Alabama and Georgia. She visited the many libraries, courthouses and churchyards in towns and villages along the way. Frankie remarked that it was a wonderful experience to see where her family had settled, lived and worked. Frankie also loved to travel, especially on the steamships that carried passengers from Baltimore to Boston and south to Newport News.

When Frankie died in May of 1962, she left quite a legacy. Frankie Wilson and Son continues under the leadership of Bill Wilson and his son Jonathan. Jonathan is the father of a 12 year old daughter named Frankie Wilson. Many women have graduated from the Law School since 1923. But the first one, a determined woman defying the odds, was a member of our Linthicum community.