

IF IT WERE EASY

Bill Rice, His Ranch, and a Revival Ministry



Bill Rice Ranch Publications

Murfreesboro, TN 37128-4555

On the cover

Ground-breaking Service—July 4, 1951

From left (back cover)

Standing by driver's side rear: Mr. Vaughter

On the truck: Grady Rutledge (tail gate)

Woodrow Medlock (Pastor, Westvue Baptist Church)

Harry Clark (standing; former song leader for Billy Sunday)

Standing by passenger side rear:

Jesse Rutledge (facilitated the meeting of Bill Rice and Marvin Scales for the purchase of the property)

Oscar John

Far right (front cover)

Mary Catherine Rice (standing behind little boy with blonde hair)

Photo taken by Bill Rice, founder



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Scripture quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible*, King James Version

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EDITOR'S NOTE

This book is essentially a conflation of two previously printed books: *The Story of the Bill Rice Ranch* by Pete Rice and *My Heart for the Deaf* by Dr. Cathy Rice. The first person narrative of Cathy Rice's book has been retained. The material from Pete Rice's book, however, has been edited to be read in third person (rather than first person, to avoid confusion), and has been supplemented with more information than was found in his original work. The reader will note that the sections of first person and third person are clearly divided.

The significance of this current work is two-fold. First, the bulk of the story has been collected from several different publications and united into one. Now, the majority of printed information about Bill and

Cathy Rice's early lives and the founding of the Bill Rice Ranch has been compiled into one resource. The editor has attempted to arrange all of this information as chronologically as possible. Secondly, this combined material is couched between two newly written chapters: an introduction and an epilogue. These two chapters inform the reader of the property's Revolutionary heritage and the ministry's revival heartbeat. Historically, therefore, this book gives the reader the broadest perspective on the Bill Rice Ranch's founding, development, and growth. Philosophically, it connects the Ranch's history with the present in a way that no other book has to date.

Nathan McConnell

—*Editor*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	7
Humble Beginnings	13
A Bitter Pill	23
Back to the Ranch Life	39
History is Made	55
A Trail of Tears	69
Fruit That Remains	85
Influence, Expansion, and Growth	101
And Here is Why	117
Epilogue	125

BACK TO THE RANCH LIFE

It was a shocking thing for Bill and Cathy to learn that there was no major work of any kind to help deaf people learn about Jesus anywhere in the world. When they first realized the need of reaching deaf people, they began the search to see if anyone was helping the Deaf. As it turned out, little was being done. One denomination did put out a quarterly for deaf adults, but it was so wordy and hard to understand that the average deaf person simply would not be able to comprehend it. As Bill Rice traveled the country in revival campaigns, he would ask if churches had anything for the Deaf such as a deaf class or someone in the church who knew sign language. No one did.

Then one day the Rices read in a national magazine that there were, at that time, fifteen million deaf people

in the United States alone. Millions upon millions of Deaf—and no one was doing anything to reach them for Christ! Something had to be done. Bill talked to different groups, denominations, and conventions, trying to get them interested in doing something about the Deaf. Sadly, he could not seem to stir up any interest. It seemed that no one cared.

One day, while driving to a revival meeting, he said, “Cathy, who is going to win the Deaf to Christ? Somebody needs to work with the Deaf.”

Cathy looked at him and said, “Don’t you know who’s going to work with the Deaf?”

“No,” Bill stated plainly.

“Well, I do,” Cathy said.

“Then, I wish you’d tell me!”

“You are: and I’m going to help you.”

Bill was floored. “Goodnight, Princess! I can’t work with the Deaf; I am a nobody and an independent. There is no one who would support me. How can I start a work for the Deaf?”

Then Cathy said, “When you preach on the widow’s oil, you always say, ‘What you have is enough’ and ‘God will multiply what you have.’” Bill Rice used to always say that there was nothing worse for a preacher

than to have his wife preach his own sermon back to him! So, they prayed about it, and it seemed to them that God was in it. They began to seek the Lord about establishing a camp for deaf children.

In the midst of their praying about a camp for deaf children, Bill Rice had been invited to a large revival campaign in a small Middle Tennessee town called Murfreesboro. The special meetings were to be held in the spring of 1950. The Westvue Baptist Church, which had invited Bill to Murfreesboro, built the largest auditorium in town in order to hold the crowds for the meeting. Their tabernacle was built to seat one thousand people! (Incidentally, the large tabernacle built for that meeting still stands today! It is one of the buildings used to carry on the tremendous ministry of the *Sword of the Lord*.) Though it had never happened before, the pastor, Woodrow Medlock, personally invited Cathy to attend the meetings with her husband.



I told him [the pastor] that I would be unable to come because my children were in school. The revival meeting was to be in April. He insisted I should come and told me to get schoolwork from their teachers

and bring it along. He explained to me that they had a missionary apartment right near the church, and we could stay in it. This was thrilling to me! I did as the pastor suggested—went to the school and got the lessons for the next three weeks. When the time came I packed, piled my kids into the car, and drove to Middle Tennessee. My husband had been in a revival meeting in Kansas. He drove from Kansas and met us in Murfreesboro.



The revival campaign lasted four weeks. It was a tremendous meeting, with an unusual amount of people being saved (over 100) and large crowds. A young man named Jim Averitt was saved in this meeting and would go on to pastor in the Murfreesboro area. Another young man was saved through this revival meeting that would later pastor in California! The Lord did many amazing works during that revival campaign, but how He led Bill Rice during his time in Murfreesboro would stand out as providential for the rest of Bill and Cathy's lives.

One day a fine man in the church, Mr. Jesse Rutledge, spoke with my husband. "I am an auctioneer. "Tomorrow we are going to auction off a farm property. Everything must go. You ought to bring your children to see it."

My husband was delighted. So, the next day we went to the auction and watched with interest as everything went. The last items to be auctioned from the farm were several beautiful horses. Memories of his childhood days, bronc-riding and cattle-chasing in Texas, flooded into his mind as Bill saw those magnificent animals going for fifteen, twenty, or thirty dollars.

"I sure wish I could buy one of those horses," he said.

"What in the world would we do with a horse in Wheaton, Illinois?" I hurriedly asked him.

Added to his memories of the past was Bill's burden in the present. All of a sudden, it hit him! "Why don't we buy some property and have a *ranch* motif for our deaf camp?" As we had been praying about buying some property to establish a camp for deaf children, our minds had always been centered on a lake property.

(Most camps seem to have a water motif.) But Bill knew nothing about boats or water. He knew a great deal about ranch life, however, because he had been born and reared in the ranch country of West Texas. He had always loved ranch life. Ranch life would be right down his alley!

Later that day, my husband saw Jesse Rutledge and asked him if he knew of a property in the area suitable for a camp. He told him that he would like to make it into a ranch for deaf children. Mr. Rutledge took us nine miles out the Franklin Road to an old ranch that had lain dormant for forty years. It was run down, dilapidated, filled with brush; and yet, in a rustic way, we thought it was one of the most beautiful places we had ever seen. We found we were able to secure this old run-down ranch. It was badly grown over with brush but was a beautiful setting in the foothills of the Cumberland. We thought this would be ideal for our camp.

So, in the spring of 1950, the old King ranch (what had originally been Abraham Haynes' property), nine miles west of Murfreesboro on Highway 96, was transformed from what once was a Hereford cattle ranch

to a ranch geared to round up deaf teenagers for Jesus Christ.

The latter part of June found us moving to Murfreesboro, Tennessee. How excited we were! Not only were we thrilled at the prospect of building a camp, but we also had a good church to attend.



Mr. Rutledge had successfully facilitated the meeting between Bill Rice and land owner Marvin Scales. As a result of his discussions with Mr. Scales, Bill purchased nine hundred acres for twenty bucks per acre!

Early in 1951, Bill Rice went to Africa with the Africa Inland Mission to conduct a series of revival meetings there on that continent. The book *Cowboy Boots in Darkest Africa* tells about Bill Rice's adventures there. While Bill was away, Cathy and the children stayed in a small apartment in Murfreesboro. After spending more than three months in the Congo, Uganda, and Sudan, Bill Rice returned to Tennessee in May 1951.

On Wednesday, July 4, 1951, Bill and Cathy invited people from the church in Murfreesboro to come to the property and have a ground-breaking ceremony for their ranch. It was an unseasonably cool and overcast

day in Murfreesboro. Members of the Westvue Baptist Church, including Pastor Medlock and Jesse Rutledge and other friends, trickled onto the property around mid-morning. Dr. Harry Clark, Billy Sunday's former song leader, led the small group in familiar hymns. A word was spoken about the intent of the new ministry, and the Word was shared. Then, before a prayer of dedication, Bill Rice and Dr. Clark sang acapella "Follow, I Will Follow Thee."

Follow, I will follow Thee, my Lord

Follow ev'ry passing day.

My tomorrows are all known to Thee:

Thou wilt lead me all the way.

Over the next two years, the features of the campground began to emerge. Many people from Murfreesboro and around the country came to help clear brush, move rocks, and prepare the campsite for its newly dedicated purpose. And, of course, Bill could count on his family to help him as well.