

William Bradley Hale

A Celebration of his Life

November 22, 2011

“In my Father’s house are many mansions” is, of course, what Jesus said in declaring the spacious, inviting, expansive, abundant nature of real life, open to all, but certainly found in following the way of self-giving love made manifest in God incarnate. The world is a poorer place without William Bradley Hale, whose life we celebrate today, even as we mourn. Bradley both knew and reflected that spacious, inviting, expansive generous life, not only in his own many mansions, but in his person and in his many, many friendships.

In addition to hearing the gospel, we have just sung William Blake’s poem to music written during the First World War by Sir Hubert Parry, the sorts of details that fascinated Bradley as he tracked down a Scottish Hymnal and made, and kept a wrinkled copy of the hymn. It tells of the image of Jesus coming again, doing away with the dark satanic mills of the industrial revolution and building the New Jerusalem in its place. It would not be helpful to draw too close an analogy between those mills and any modern Atlanta institutions, but it is not too much to say that Bradley set about building his slice of heaven in the black belt of Alabama. As with every project to which Bradley turned his mind, Paulling Place was built with exquisite attention to detail, and with a clear vision guiding the project. That vision was certainly heaven on earth, but defined by the family he loved and in which he took so much pride. It was a place where Anne could tell those stories that he appreciated so much and a place with which this, his beloved and wonderful Georgian eventually made her peace and was laid to rest as Bradley will be later this week. It is a place with many inviting spaces, but guest spaces that were really built and furnished with Sheffield and Elizabeth, Ellen and Ray in mind. He was beyond proud of his children who filled his thoughts and much of his conversation, --even when they were not present. And he adored his grandchildren, creating sleeping lofts for all of them up high around and in the walls of the big family room. He knew, of course, that they would soon grow out of them but wanted to be surrounded, as it were, by a beloved cloud of witnesses, angels and archangels. Not really an ethereal man, the earthly and earthy were celebrated as well. Some of you will have seen the pleasure he took in remembering young John’s early hunting accomplishments, Bradley’s eye for detail being particularly drawn toward humor wherever he saw it. Musing with Ellen and Sheffield over what his last words might be, he thought about saying “look children...copper gutters.”

I don’t think Bradley was so much an Anglophile as someone who had an eye and ear for absurdity and he found as much material in England as he did in the American South.

Bradley Hale always had a project going of some sort. Even knowing of the dreadful pulmonary fibrosis that would bring about his death, he poured himself into completing a magnificent library for his descendents to enjoy. He and Anne did countless unspoken

and unheralded and fundamentally kind things for many people, me included. But he also left signs that he was here. He along with others of you selected the Rambusch Red as we call it for this church. But if you look up you will see red panels surrounding the nave. These were not red following the major renovation that gave us the red and stenciled apse. They have been there for less than ten years. Bradley somehow contrived to circumvent all committees and processes, had the panels made and installed almost in the dead of night, and most of us would swear they had been that color all along. The formula for this red is a tricky one, but Bradley tracked it down for a room in honor of his father Ernest Everett Hale Sr. at the Archives Building of the State of Alabama in Montgomery as well as for his own library. His highly developed sense of taste permeated much of what he did and to some extent drove his interest in historic preservation and his support of the Atlanta Historical Society, the Georgia Trust and the national Trust.

You know his resume and you probably also know that under his carefully cultivated eccentricities was a leader who could be a tough negotiator. He ended up leading most groups with which he was involved. He was President of Lanier High School in Montgomery, of his fraternity of which grandson Thomas is now also a member and with whom he was able to visit in his last days. He played many roles in this parish. He was managing partner of King and Spalding in the old days when being a partner in the firm meant that of course you would have special seating for what was almost a second family at your funeral and would so specify in your handwritten funeral preferences dated 1972 ! He did not study leadership and would have thought the very notion absurd, but he had the kind of capacity to listen and engage and the kind of judgment that engendered real trust that meant he was invited to take on key roles at key times. Now it is true that following his taking both undergraduate and law degrees from Alabama he then pursued and was awarded an MBA from Harvard Business School in 1958, something of an oddity for a Southerner in those days. His own father blamed Bradley's well articulated progressive views on civil rights and on the treatment of the poor (as well as his propensity to enjoy scotch) on that excursion to the North. It was certainly yet another rich source for some of his best stories. But his MBA did not teach him how to make leadership fun. He simply knew. Many of us volunteered to be involved in things ourselves because, he was as Elizabeth recalls, a 'fun-maker'. Another of you said that his progressive stance "made it safe and fun not to be a predictable conservative".

Who does not remember his dancing eyebrows and the way his whole body shook when he laughed? He really listened. He craved good company and he was good company. In recent months he told many people the saying credited to Voltaire that "life is a shipwreck but we must not forget to sing in the lifeboats." He did that to the end. He made sure the hounds were blessed in Marengo County, presumably another blow for building Jerusalem by transferring England's green and pleasant land to Alabama. He visited with friends and spent good time with family. He was able to come to the All Saints' Day Concert in honor of Anne where he enjoyed watching the people around him as much as he did the music. The music was really her 'thing' but they supported each others desires and commitments to the end. And when the end came for him, he was in

the company of his physician brother Everett, on whom he relied in many ways and of whom he was immensely proud.

Blake wrote, recalling Elijah's being taken into glory, "Bring me my bow of burning gold...bring me my chariot of fire". There is yet work to be done in bringing to being the New Jerusalem, a project for the ages, and one to which this man whose life was spacious, inviting, and generous is well suited. We pray he may go from strength to strength under the sovereignty of God and we commend him to the Love that made him for Love, giving thanks for a life well lived.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN