

Gone but not forgotten: The Colerane House

BY HARRY ENOCH
Contributing Writer

Rev. Horace D. Colerane built a house that was unique in Winchester. It had a front porch with his name, in cut-out letters, under the eave: "COLERANE 1883." He purchased a lot at a Master Commissioner sale for \$100 and built the house in 1883. The photographs show the shotgun house at 113 Second Street in 1976. It was razed in the 1980s.

Horace Donia Colerane (1857–1922) was born enslaved on a farm in Jessamine County, Kentucky. We know little of his early life. His death certificate listed parents Morgan Colerane and Celia Brown. Horace came to Winchester in 1875 and followed the occupation of plasterer. (This was an important profession in the building trades, as drywall had not yet been invented.) He married Betty Combs, who worked part-time as a laundress. Of their five children, all died young except one son, Chester.

Horace had a fascinating life story. As a young man, he headed down a path of dissipation and self-destruction but was able to get himself turned around. He became a beloved minister and one of the most respected citizens in Winchester. In 1908, Horace told his story in a Winchester News article, "Christmas in Dear Old Winchester." An abbreviated version of the article follows:

"It was Christmas eve in 1892, a cold drizzling rain was falling, night was coming on, and there was a hustle and bustle in Winchester. The rich in vehicles and the poor on foot were hunting Santa Claus. 'Broke, not a cent, yet [I] have a spirit in me to go home to wife and children. My little girl [Jessie] met me at the door with letters to Old Santa. She wanted him to bring her a doll that would close its eyes. My boy [Chester] wanted a story book, some candy and fire crackers.

"My wife noticed the tears in my eyes [and] though I had thrown to the winds my earnings for the week, she sympathized with me. I said I would try to borrow some money, but she said she would rather I not. I donned my overcoat and left the house."

He hurried back downtown, and "the first man I had a conversation with said, 'Come by as you go home. I have a quart of good old Taylor whiskey that I am going to give you for Christmas.' Thank God I had the courage to say no."

As Horace walked by



Colerane's shotgun house at 113 Second Street. (Photo submitted)

West's ten-cent store on North Main Street, a gentleman stepped out and greeted him saying, "You have come down to see Old Santa for the children, I suppose." To which Horace replied, "I haven't a cent."

"Oh, the milk of human kindness. He ran his hand in his pocket and said, 'The children must have something. Take this, and let old Kris Kringle come to see them tonight.' So saying he pressed a bill into the palm of my hand. I turned to go home after thanking him [and] he admonished me against the wine cup that spoils men's lives and men's souls.

"A fawn never moved with fleeter steps than did I, from George Brothers [saloon] corner to my humble cottage, not having as yet looked at my bill. At home I passed on through to the kitchen. My wife followed me and we looked at my bill. It was a Five."

(Five dollars in 1892 would be worth about \$150 today.)

"She put on a wrap, and we told the children to be good, and we would soon find Old Santa. The little ones were remembered beyond their wildest anticipations by Old Santa Claus that night, and would you believe it, the same kind gentleman who had given me the money, sent us a nice Christmas turkey the next morning."

In closing his story, Horace encouraged everyone to make all children glad on Christmas 1908.

He advised against spending \$100 on a present for one who perhaps would not appreciate it. Instead, take that money and make 100 children glad who would have had nothing.

Horace enclosed a personal note to the editor stating, "Mr. Perry, 'twas you who gave me the money and the turkey. I can't forget it. It was the sweetest Christmas I ever experienced."

The editor, R. R. Perry, attached his own note to the story: "H. D. Colerane is a colored man. He worked for me many years. He is a fine mechanic and received good wages, but as he says, spent it for drink. A change came. He quit drinking. He is now and has been for a number of years like a ministering angel to his people, honored and respected by all classes."

Three years after that article, H. D. Colerane became a Baptist minister and preached regularly at First Baptist and Broadway Baptist churches. Colerane was frequently called to serve on local committees and speak at public gatherings.

His 1913 election to the city council from the fourth ward created a furor in Winchester. Whites across the city protested that a black man should not be allowed to serve in that office. Seven of the nine councilmen signed a petition calling for his removal. His lone supporter, Dr. M. S. Browne, said Colerane was one of

the best and straightest men in Winchester, an honest, upright, God-fearing Christian man."

At the first meeting of the new council in December, Dr. Browne read Colerane's resignation letter which stated, "To best

promote the good, peace and prosperity of the city, I hereby tender my resignation to take effect at once."

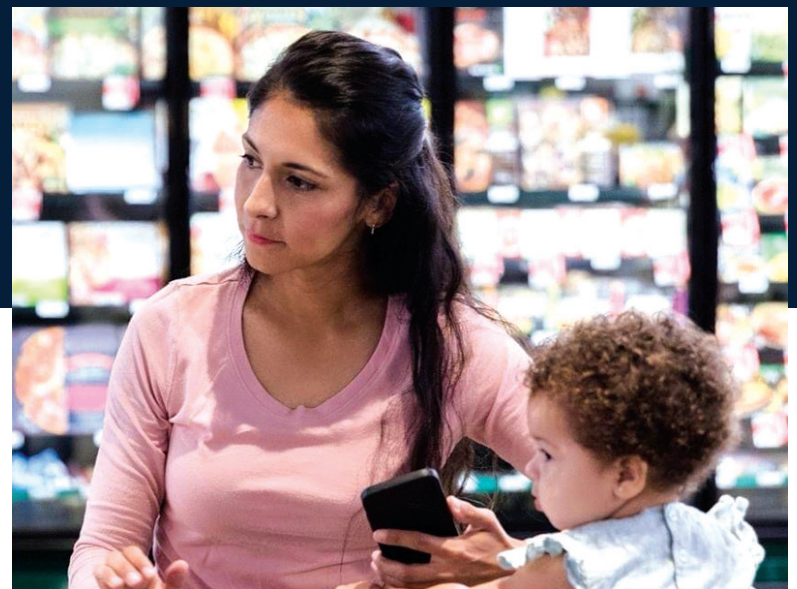
Colerane sold his house on Second Street to his son Chester in 1910 and spent his remaining years living at 2 North Burns Avenue,

next door to Dr. John Tyler. Colerane had been blind for seven years, when he passed away in 1922. Glowing tributes appeared in the newspapers. He is buried beside his wife and children in Daniel Grove Cemetery.

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