

Bennett B. Cardwell was born in Rustburg, VA on May 8, 1893 in the Cardwell home place, which still stands at the end of Wheeler Drive. The great-grandson of Revolutionary War soldier Robert Allen (Robin) Cardwell who settled at the foot of Pilot Mountain in Campbell County in 1780, Bennett was the son of Sallie Katherine Wright and Robert Richardson Cardwell. The youngest of eight children, including four sisters, Nell, Annie, Hilda and Marian and three brothers, Dudley, Thomas and John Robert, he attended Campbell County Schools and Bethany Methodist Church. He began his architectural career in Lynchburg in 1913 as a draftsman in the office of his older brother, John Robert Cardwell. He then attended Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie Mellon University) in Pittsburgh from which he graduated in 1917. At his graduation, he was awarded the prestigious Traveling Scholarship of the Society of Beaux-Arts in New York for a year's study at the American Academy in Rome. Due to severe conditions in Europe fostered by World War I, his use of the fellowship was delayed and his budding career in architecture began to take shape in Lynchburg.

After his brother John Robert's death in 1918, in the Spanish flu epidemic, Bennett became associated for a brief period with Heard and Chesterman prior to forming a partnership with Samuel Preston Craighill in 1919, which spanned fifteen years. On October 19, 1921, on the eve of accepting the delayed fellowship, he married



his sweetheart Olive Leigh Taylor. He immediately departed for New York City with his bride and then on to a memorable honeymoon-year in Europe, graced with the study of Italian and Greek

architecture. Traveling by horse and buggy, Bennett ground and mixed his inks daily from powders, sketching villas, fountains, and other architectural structures.

Upon their return to Virginia, the young architect settled into his work with new and sharpened focus. "During their associative years... the firm of Craighill and Cardwell was responsible for a number of the finest Lynchburg houses of the prosperous pre-depression period." Their major work includes "countless houses" on Peakland Place, nearby Oakwood Place and Lee Circle, Rivermont and Woodland Avenues. Fort Avenue, near its intersection with Memorial Avenue at Fort Early and a number of streets branching off Fort Avenue also abound with homes designed by Craighill and Cardwell. The firm designed the Fort Hill Women's Club, built within the fortifications of Fort Early, in 1922. Schools and churches in town and in neighboring counties also benefitted from their design. These included Grace

Memorial Episcopal Church, in 1928, the crenellated tower of which was built of reused greenstone from the old Epiphany Church. In 1929 their promotional brochure, entitled "Selections from Work of Craighill and Cardwell, Architects," was published, illustrating a number of the Lynchburg homes they designed. The firm became known as masters of Georgian and period house design.

In 1934, when the depression put a general halt to architectural practice, Bennett Cardwell left Lynchburg to become an architectural examiner for the federal government. He returned to Lynchburg in 1936 to open an office, working until the outbreak of World War II, when he returned "to work for the federal government in the same capacity of architectural examiner in Richmond and Washington" until his retirement in the mid-fifties. During the 1950s and 1960s, he designed a number of houses in the Bedford Hills subdivision, which were built by L. G. Flint Construction on Mimosa Drive, Burnt Bridge Road and neighboring streets. This area was being developed by Steptoe-Patteson on the Taylor farm, to the northwest of Peakland, on property that had been in his wife's family. Many of the original drawings for these houses are now in the Lynchburg Architectural Archive at Jones Memorial Library.

Mr. Cardwell was a member of Inglewood Baptist Church where he served as a Trustee and as a Deacon. He and his wife had one daughter, Jean Taylor Cardwell Anton, of

Maine, and three sons Bennett Beckham Cardwell, Jr., deceased since 1993, Samuel Patterson Cardwell and William Richardson Cardwell, all of Lynchburg, who have given them twelve grandchildren, seventeen great-grandchildren and three great-great grandchildren.

Bennett Cardwell died on April 23, 1975. A skillful and wise man, he had the respect of many, but from none more than his children and grandchildren, who believed that Granddaddy or Paw could 'fix anything'. That he could! His own stately eighty-year-old home remains on Mimosa Drive- the home he "built from scraps." The memory of his skill and wisdom, his tools, gadgetry, and his paintings done as a student almost a hundred years ago reside around the world with his grateful family.

Note:

The Cardwell family expresses appreciation for the documentation of Bennett Cardwell's career, used in this biographical sketch, meticulously researched by S. Allen Chambers for his book, Lynchburg: An Architectural History, published in 1981 by The University Press of Virginia.

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Featured Artist**



**Bennett Beckham Cardwell
(1893-1975)**