

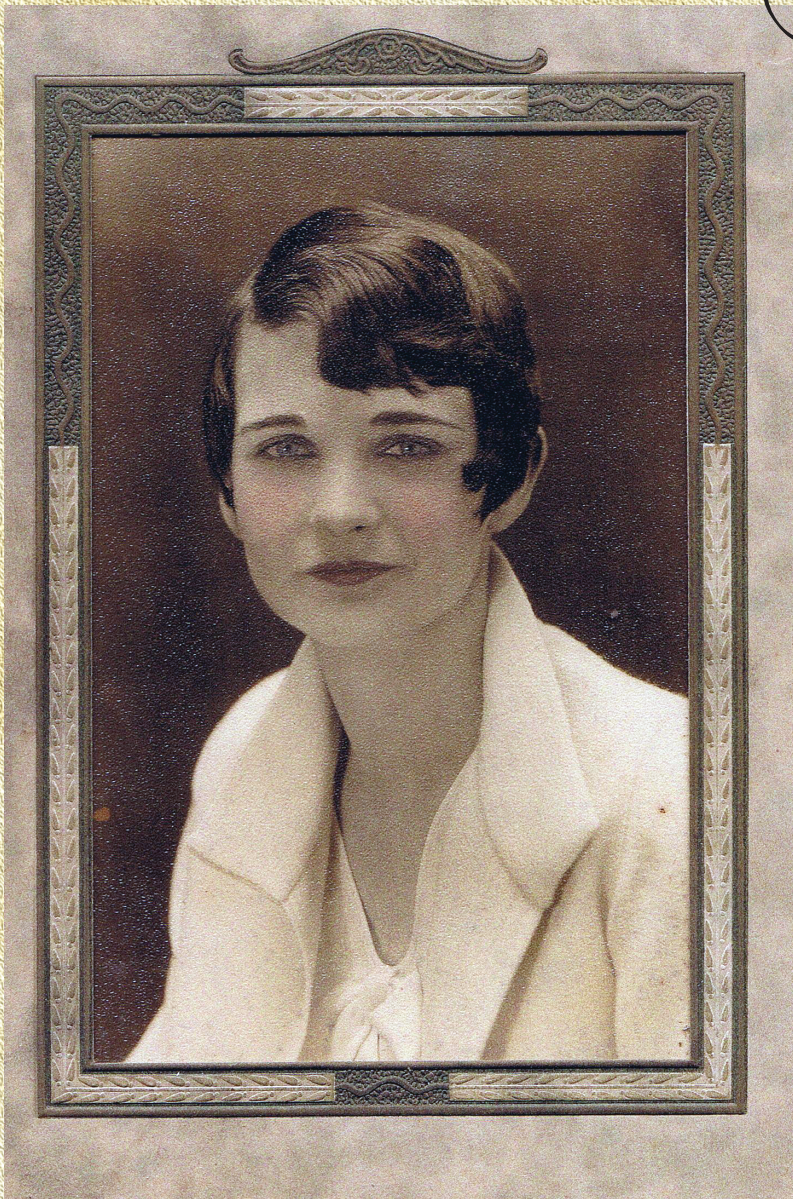
# Leaving A Legacy

by: Faye Sinclair

A beautiful doll from 1910 and a unique collection of letters from World War II are just a few of the things left behind by a Coffee County lady who was affectionately called Miss Willie Pearl. We all know that in the living of life, it is not the material things that matter, instead, it is the lives we touch and the differences that we make as we pass through our years spent here on earth. It is possible that this lovely lady touched more lives in Coffee County than anyone before her or since. She lived an extraordinary life as a devoted Christian, schoolteacher, community volunteer, athletic coach, avid sports fan, and world traveler. It is good to remember...

Miss Willie Pearl Davis was born June 12, 1905 to William Ashby Hoke and Pearl Trice Davis. She was born at the family home on the corner of Ward Street and Coffee Avenue in Douglas, Georgia, where she lived until her death on May 2, 2000. Both her church and her school were only one block away from her home, a convenience, as she never learned how to drive.

She attended Georgia Normal College in Douglas before moving to the Bessie Tift College, now named Tift College in Forsyth in 1922. She received an AB (Bachelor of Arts) in English in 1926. She earned seven letters in Athletics during her four-year tenure at Bessie

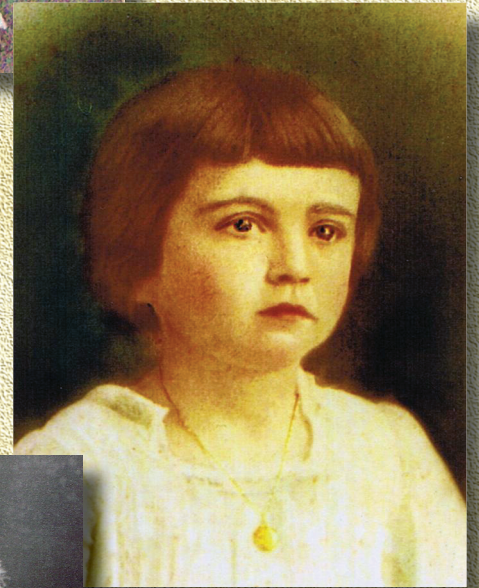


*Miss Willie Pearl Davis. Photo taken during her time at the Bessie Tift College*

Tift: four each in basketball, baseball, tennis, and golf, plus one letter in track. She received her master's degree in education from the University of Georgia in 1953.

She taught at the Lyons Consolidated School in 1927, and at Manchester School in 1928 before she returned to continue her teaching career in Douglas. She began teaching in the Coffee County School System in 1929, and she remained a permanent fixture there until she retired in 1966. Miss Davis taught all four high school grades and coached until the war effort halted organized athletics at the old Douglas High School. She once said, "I didn't get any pay for coaching, and if they didn't let me coach, I'd pay them to let me." She belonged to NEA, GEA, and CEA. She was voted as Star Teacher on two occasions, and she was a charter member of the Delta Kappa Gamma Society, and honorary organization for outstanding women educators. She was also a member of the recreational board, the library board, and was a Pink Lady at Coffee Regional Medical Center. She was a charter member of the Robert E. Lee chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy.

In 1989, Miss Davis was honored with a dinner and a program featuring former student speakers. At that time, a South Georgia College Foundation Scholarship was established in her name. In 1991, the Coffee County Teacher's Association presented the Community Service Award to Miss Davis. That same year, Shady Acres honored her as the 1991 volunteer of the Year. Being chosen as Grand Marshall of the Annual Christmas Parade also honored her.



### *Through the years...*

- (top) Miss Willie Pearl at age 2*
- (second) The young Miss Davis at 5 years*
- (third) Miss Willie Pearl during her time as a teacher. Circa 1960.*
- (bottom) Her last church yearbook picture. Miss Willie Pearl at age 92.*

Miss Willie Pearl was an active member of the First Baptist Church where she taught a Sunday School class from 1929 until her death. About the year 1990, the church recognized her for over 60 years of devoted service to the church and to the community. She taught an adult training union class, was a member of the "Singing Seniors," attended state and national Baptist Conventions and several Baptist World Alliances.

Over the years, when Miss Davis attended many high school class reunions, she had roll call, as she had done in her classroom. At her memorial service, Pastor Shep Johnson called the "roll" while many groups with whom she was closely associated stood individually to answer the call: Joy Groups of the First Baptist Church, Singing Seniors, Sunday School Class, SunPointe Baptist Bible Class, Deacons of the First Baptist Church, Personnel of Recreation department, Retired Teachers Association, Delta Kappa Gamma, Pink Ladies Auxiliary, fellow teachers, and former students.

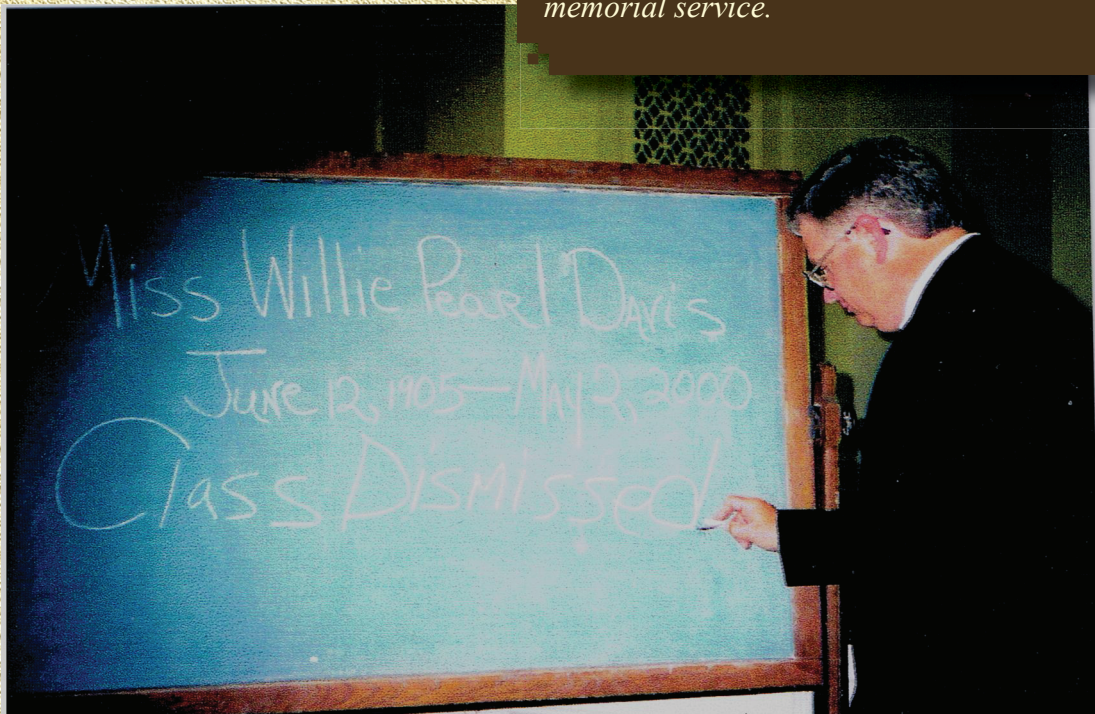
A basket filled with pieces of chalk tied with school colors was available as a memento of the service. Several school desks and a large chalkboard with her name, birth and death date set the stage. Rev. Johnson gave a warm tribute to Miss Davis and closed with a challenge to those present, "to take the chalk they received upon arrival and make their mark on the world as Miss Davis would like them to do." He then closed the service by writing these final words across the chalkboard: "Class Dismissed."

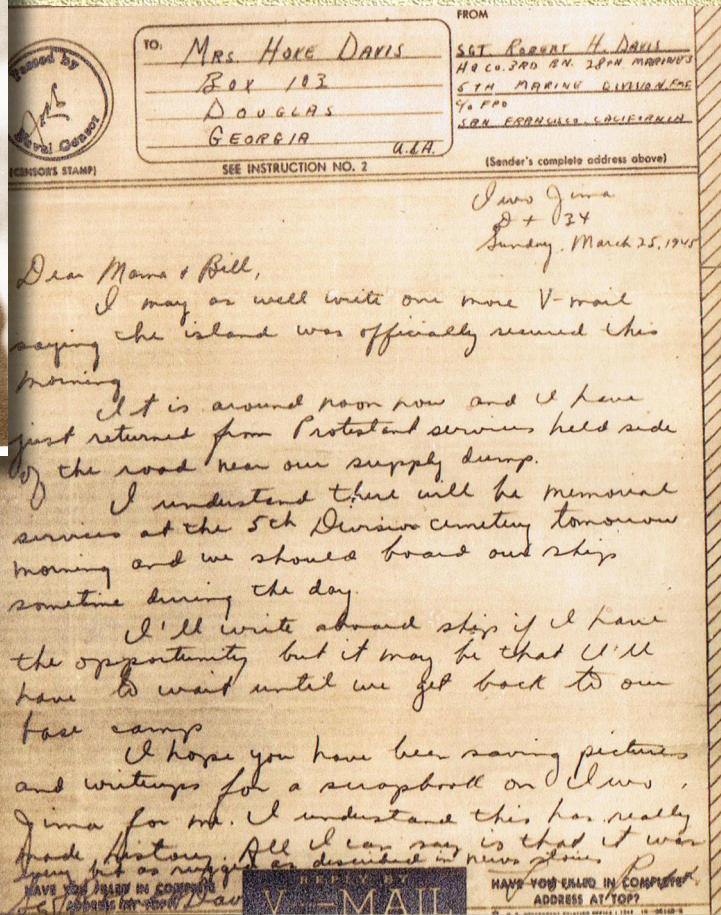
A memorial for Willie Pearl Davis would not be complete without naming three special people: along with her extended church family who helped make her latter years more comfortable Lana Tanner and Catherine Moddie, long time friends, cared for her with tenderness and compassion. Dr. Diskin Morgan, her devoted family physician, cared for her and sang her favorite hymns at her memorial service.

Since she never married and had no heirs, Miss Willie Pearl left her estate in trust to her church. The contents of her home were carefully gone through and an auction was held on October 7, 2000. Inside this home were letters dating from the 1800s, antique furniture, precious family photos, antique dolls, beautiful handmade linens and quilts, World War II memorabilia, and a lifetime of family heirlooms.

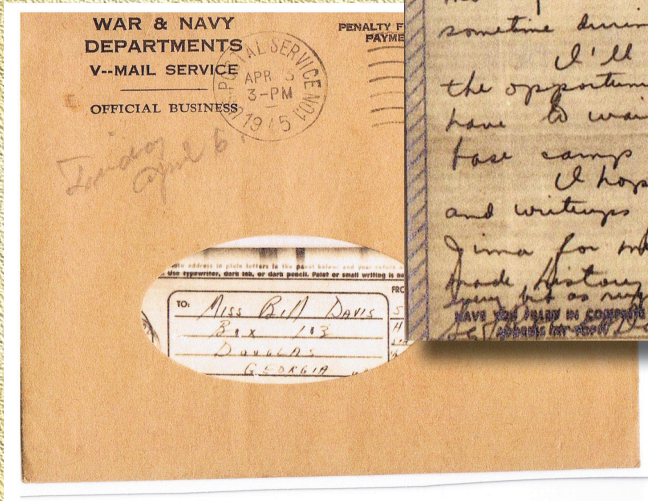
One thing of great importance that was found was a collection of letters to Miss Davis and her mother from her brother, Bob while he was serving on the island of Iwo Jima during World War II. He served

*Final Roll Call: "take the chalk you received upon arrival and make your mark on the world as Miss Davis would like you to do." Pastor Shep Johnson says as he writes "Class Dismissed" on a board at Miss Davis' memorial service.*





Letters home: found at Miss Willie Pearl's estate was an extensive collection of letters from her brother, Bob (left) who fought at Iwo Jima during World War II



during active combat in one of the bloodiest battles in American history. He made the statement in one of the letters, "I understand we have really made history. All I can say is that it was every bit as rugged as described in the news stories." These letters are on file at the Heritage Station Museum. A masterpiece with almost every day accounted for during his service to his country. He was born Robert Hoke Davis, February 5, 1912, and he died July 18, 1996. It is good to remember...

Among the many treasures found in the home was a beautiful 24" antique doll. It was found in 16 pieces at the bottom of a blanket chest. She was made by the J.D. Kestner Doll Company in Waltershausen, Germany around 1910, and she has been completely restored to her

original beauty with articles of clothing and jewelry from the Davis Estate. She has painted brown eyes, and pouty lips... she even resembles Miss Willie Pearl a bit. She has her original mohair wig styled in coiled braids over each ear as was popular with little German girls of the year. She is wearing her own original chemise. Her beautiful dress and slip were worn by Miss Willie Pearl at about age two. Miss Willie Pearl's baby shoes have been altered to fit the doll's feet, and her stockings were made from an old pair of gloves. The pearl necklace and bracelet were restrung to fit her. On her right arm, she carries a silver purse engraved "Willie Pearl Davis, Douglas, Georgia, 1920." Inside the coin purse are coins dated her birth year of 1905.

This Kestner 308 character doll is a very rare find and is worth quite a bit more than the original price tag of \$3.50.

The present owner of the doll was just as excited to receive her in 2000 as 5-year-old Willie Pearl was on Christmas morning almost 100 years ago. The doll has been in attendance at high school class reunions and, on special occasions, she visits the museum to take her place and stand proudly in the permanent exhibit that has been placed there in tribute to Miss Willie Pearl.

Miss Davis left behind a wonderful legacy to be admired for many years to come. She would be proud to know that her only heir, the doll lovingly named Willie Pearl, would be living permanently in the town she loved so dearly. The doll was purchased from the Estate and restored by a local doll collector; it is such an honor to have known Miss Willie Pearl Davis and to have her legacy live in my home. I am that doll collector, and I have been given the privilege of writing this story about the extraordinary life of Miss Willie Pearl Davis and the legacy she left behind. It is good to Remember... † CCM

*Miss Willie Pearl and her doll. (left) Somewhere in the age range of 5-7 years old. Below is the German doll restored and clothed in Miss Davis' estate items. Behind the doll is a blanket crocheted by Willie Pearl's Mother. The blue ribbon from the blanket's first place win at the 1929 fair is still attached.*

