

Myrtice Wilson Patterson



Myrtice was born in Oxford, Alabama, on June 26, 1877, one of eight children of Joseph Columbus Wilson and Margaret Helenah Nichols Wilson. Her father was born in Sandtown, Georgia, in 1848 and lived in a plantation house 12 miles west of Atlanta which was confiscated for use as a hospital by General Sherman. Joseph Wilson was a Methodist educator, and he attempted to start a Methodist College in Oxford;



Myrtice and George around the time of their marriage

but he abandoned his plans and worked in the cotton exchange in order to support his large family. He is listed in the 1880 census as a 32 year old teacher with five children.

Her mother Margaret was a niece of Bishop John Emory (1789-1836), the Methodist bishop for whom Emory University was named.

Myrtice graduated from Alabama Conference Female College in Tuskegee, Alabama, in June 1899. This college later became Huntingdon College in Montgomery, which both her daughters would attend. She met George Patterson of Tallassee, Alabama, the following year at a church conference and after four years of what he described as “long and patient wooing” she agreed to marry him. They

had four children: Margaret (b. 1905), George Daniel Jr. (b. 1907), Joseph Wilson (b. 1911) and Myrtice Wilson (b. 1914).

She was clearly a strong woman whose political convictions equaled her religious beliefs. She was an ardent admirer of Woodrow Wilson, but perhaps the best indication of her personality is the idealism and sense of social justice which she instilled in her children. Although in her later years she became rigidly provincial and sentimentally conservative, it seems clear that the very traits which may have caused some of her children to lose patience with her inability to understand civil rights issues were in fact inherited from her.

Her oldest daughter, Margaret, studied

at Union Theological Seminary in New York, and married Julian DeGray, a concert pianist and college professor. Margaret taught philosophy at Bennington College in Vermont. Myrtice's oldest son, George, had a law degree, but spent most of his career as a public servant whose liberal views probably undermined his political ambitions. Wilson went to New York to do social work during the Depression after he graduated from Emory University, but was apparently discouraged by the experience. He returned home to Tallassee to work in the cotton mill, where he eventually became president. He married Olive Ogletree, and they had three children: John Edward, who died at the age of one month, Joseph Wilson Jr. ("Bill") and Anna. The youngest daughter Myrtice graduated from Huntingon College at the age of 19 and returned to Tallassee to teach. She married Ernest Moore, a doctor, with whom she had two children: Ernest Griffin Jr. and Margaret. Both Myrtice and Wilson were highly regarded members of the community and active in the Methodist Church which their grandfather had help establish.

Myrtice was 63 when her husband died in 1941, and she lived most of the rest of her life with her son, Wilson, and his family. She died January 31, 1966, at the age of 88. Neither her daughter Margaret nor her son George attended the funeral, but a letter from Dwight Patterson to his father describing the funeral gives an indication of how she was regarded in Tallassee:

Dear Daddy,

While I expect to be home shortly, I thought that a letter would help convey my impressions of the funeral and its connected events. Grandmother died last Monday, and I drove down Tuesday morning. The undertaker prepared her body and placed the casket in her own room which is adjoining to the living room. Beginning Tuesday morning people came by to pay respects. Olive, Wilson, or a Mrs. Harris would greet people as they came in, encourage



Myrtice and George, Jr.

them to sign the guest register in the hall and then invite them into the living room. Normally the guest would stay about 5 minutes talking and then go into the side room where she lay. Callers came all day Tuesday, Tuesday evening until nine, and Wednesday until one o'clock.

On Wednesday at eleven-thirty the minister of the First Methodist Church in Tallassee held a

July 1907: Myrtice captioned this photo in George's baby book: "You are being introduced into Society for Sister has been 'It' long enough."





George on the steps of the house on King street

Wilson, Margaret and George admire the newest member of the family, Myrtice.



Myrtice and George with Margaret, George, Wilson and one of George's chickens on the porch ca 1912

family prayer. The funeral was held at three in the afternoon.. The events may be similar to many other funerals but this funeral and the preceding activities were filled with hope, faith, and love. These days served as a tribute to Grandmother; the activities generated confidence that God had rewarded her; and the funeral service itself provided an opportunity for



renewal and rededication of life. In short, the funeral would have pleased Grandmother, and Wilson should be commended for the arrangements he made (I did for you).

Wilson and Myrtice set a tone on Tuesday for which I was grateful. Rather than sit around gloomily receiving people, he welcomed the visitor, ushered them in to the living room and started some conversation. Under these circumstances Bill, Anna and I could help carry on conversations and make guests feel at home. After a short period he or Myrtice or one of us would take the visitor into Grandmother's room. The atmosphere was relaxed enough for the conversations to be sincere, which made them even more of a tribute. People remembered Grandmother in many different capacities. One man who helped carry the Mill's payroll from Montgomery remembered the hospitality of her home. Another man fondly recalled the best candy pull he had ever attended. One woman considered her a second mother (as her mother lived in another town). To others she was a substitute teacher, a member of the church, or a neighbor; and of course the local Senator in the Alabama Legislature

Myrtice with all four of her children



George, Margaret, Myrtice and Wilson

recalled her letters. I was impressed that most of the visitors seemed personally and genuinely interested in making an appearance. Of course the temptation existed for aspiring assistants at the mill to come pay Wilson their respects. But time after time the personal involvement of the person with Grandmother became apparent, and these people included not just the minister, the doctor, the son of the former mill director and the relatives. One visitor was a coach; another was a contractor (cement pourer); the Negro help missed her and so did the Mayor....