



School Days
19 46

Mary J. Miller Alford
1908 - 2000

Mary J. Miller Alford
Jan 2 1908-May 8 2000
AAFA #0321

**MARY J. MILLER
ALFORD
1908-2000
AAFA #0321
ZAD787GA/JAM687VA**

THE CULLMAN TIMES, 10 May
2000

Mary J. Miller Alford

Services for Mary J. Miller Alford, 92, of Houston will be held at 11 a.m., Thursday, May 11, 2000 at Houston United Methodist Church, Bobby Alford, Earnest Smotherman and Bill Weems officiating, with burial in the adjoining cemetery.

Kilgore-Green Funeral Home is in charge of arrangements.

Mrs. Alford died Monday, May 8 at her residence.

She is survived by her daughters, Peggy Owens, Evelyn (Billy) Sterling, all of Addison, Betty (Lanier) Godsey, Owene (Carl) Godsey, all of Houston; 11 grandchildren, 26 great-grandchildren.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to the Houston Memorial United Methodist Church Cemetery Fund, c/o Pam Stewart,

P.O. Box 70, Houston, Ala., 35572.

Visitation is at 6 p.m. today at the funeral home.

Mary Jane Miller Alford
By Robin Alford Sterling AAFA
#320 Grandson

Mary Jane Miller was born 2 Jan 1908 near the conjunction of Cullman, Walker, and Blount counties in North Central Alabama. She was the seventh of eight children of Robert Jefferson Miller and Sarah Elizabeth Robins. She spent her childhood in the Harmony and Arkadelphia communities. One of her earliest memories she told of was when she heard what she thought was a bear under the house. Very much frightened, she ran to the garden where her mother was tending the vegetable patch. Eventually the family determined they had experienced a very rare North Alabama earthquake. The year was 1916.

Her earliest schooling was at Harmony School. Later, she lived with her older sister and attended elementary school in Jasper. Mary graduated high school at Corner, in Jefferson County. She received some college education at Howard College (now Samford University)

in Birmingham. While in Jasper in the 1920s, she told about the football players she knew who would drive from nearby Tuscaloosa in their fancy cars to date the girls who lived there. These were not just any football players. They were members of the 1925 University of Alabama Rosebowl Championship team. Also in Jasper, she became acquainted with movie actress, Tallulah Bankhead and was good friends with one of Tallulah's younger sisters. Mary received a couple more years of education at Florence State Teacher's College in Northwest Alabama.

The man who caught Mary's eye was Owen Warren Alford. Mary Jane Miller became Mrs. Alford on 21 Jul 1927 in Walker County, Alabama. Owen lived just North of Jasper near Houston in Winston County and that is where Mary would call home for the next 73 years.

Mary loved her father and mourned when he died in 1931. She remembers her mother Sarah Elizabeth as a kind, gentle, and soft-spoken woman. Sarah died in 1945. Both her parents are buried in the Oak Hill Cemetery in Jasper. Owen Alford's grandfather, Civil War veteran Alexander Marshall Alford

had a long white beard. Mary was the one he allowed to keep it trimmed. Alexander Alford died in 1934.

Mary Alford spent 20 years teaching schools in various places in Winston County, such as Pleasant Hill Church, Houston, and Addison. At the same time, she and Owen raised four daughters: Peggy Jean (1928), Elizabeth Joyce (1930), Eula Owene (1932), and Johnnie Evelyn (1933).

The Great Depression was difficult all over the nation, but particularly in the South. Mary was once asked if the Alford family lost any money during the Depression. She quickly replied, "No, we didn't have any money to lose." Even though her family was poor, her nature was to think of the less fortunate. During that difficult time, she would take food to a family living down behind their house in the woods under a bluff. She would also go to different homes in the community and teach women how to read and how to sew and how to take care of their fledgling households.

Mary was very active in the United Methodist Church. She enjoyed attending the annual conferences in Birmingham. She taught Sunday School, organized youth activities, played the organ and piano, tended the cemetery, and often arrived early on Sunday morning so that the church altar had a nice arrangement of flowers, gathered from her own yard with petals still glistening from the morning dew. She learned the keyboard at an early age. She told of playing an old pump organ when she was too young to reach the pedals. To make it work, she

reached the keys with her fingers and pumped the organ with her feet while standing on the pedals. When she got a little older, she recalled playing a pump organ at All Day Singings until her legs ached.

After teaching in the Winston County school system, Mary retired from that occupation and about 1950, she became the full time and only office secretary for the Alford Lumber Company, her husband Owen's business. She became so proficient with that job, she could calculate the approximate cost and amount of board feet of lumber a project would take given the most sketchy of details. Plus, she did it in her head.

Mary and Owen traveled extensively on vacations during the Summers which took them to the nearby Great Smokey Mountains, the Blue Ridge Parkway, and the Central Plains and West Coast. She was particularly fond of the Redwood Forests of California. It was always a special treat to get to visit the "big trees." In her 80s, she visited the Holy Land and took an Alaskan cruise. For decades, Owen Alford always insisted Mary drive a new car as one of the few luxuries they afforded themselves and most of the time it was a Cadillac.

Mary didn't start fishing until she was in her 60s after the Alabama Power Company built a dam in Walker County and the water backed up on the Alford property in Winston County. Soon, she was one of the area's best anglers and had the mounted trophy bass hanging on her living room wall to prove it. Her husband Owen had been a lifelong hobbyist fisherman,

but after Mary's success, he quietly turned to other pursuits such as squirrel and coon hunting.

Mary's ability with plants and flowers was legendary. Her yard was always well manicured and decorated with a variety of artfully-placed and colorful flowers. She had a greenhouse in the backyard and her closed-in patio contained many potted plants. She took special pride in her roses and kept a Jackson-Perkins catalog near her chair in the living room. She mowed her own yard until she was in her 90s. During the growing season, Mary and Owen would have up to three separate gardens in as many locations, each timed to bear so that there was always a fresh supply of vegetables through most of the year. Any excess was given to relatives or neighbors or canned and preserved for use during the Winter. She said the fig tree growing just outside the living room window had been there almost as long as she had. Mary was known for being able to work harder and with more stamina than most people years younger than she.

Even after her family had grown very large, up to and including her last Christmas, she always insisted on giving each descendant an individual Christmas gift at the annual family gatherings. Often, the gifts were hand made dresses, sweaters, vests, afgans, needlepoint, or soft toy animals for the youngest. She started these Christmas projects way back in the middle part of the year to make sure she had enough time to finish before December 25th. During the year, she always remembered her children, grand-

children, and great-grandchildren with gifts at their birthdays. She had 38 direct descendants.

In the last weeks of her life, Mary developed cancer. But even two weeks before she died, she enjoyed Easter with her family. She sat in her usual place in the living room and was alert and joked with those who came near to speak with her, but she tired quickly. The next day, she was told she had cancer and she greeted the news by saying she had known it all along. She had decided long ago she did not want any breathing apparatus, or feeding tubes prolonging the inevitable when her time was accomplished. She was attended by family members around the clock and regular visits from hospice until the end came. When it was time, a little before seven o'clock Monday evening the eighth of May 2000, she was surrounded by her daughters, and other close family members, in her own room, in her own house. She began life not long after the turn of the last century, and lived long enough to see the next millennium.

At her services, final respects were paid by former students, relatives from as far away as Oklahoma and Texas, direct descendants, and a large number of friends and neighbors from several Alabama counties. Her mortal remains were placed next to Owen in the Houston Memorial United Methodist Church cemetery.

Mary was a strong-willed, independent lady with a large measure of personal pride, dignity, and grace. But, she was also gentle, kind, and caring. She could convey her

disapproval by a subtle change in the tone of her voice or sometimes just a look. Conversely, she greatly enjoyed a funny anecdote and would laugh mightily. She loved her family with all her heart. She outlived her last surviving sibling by 15 years; she outlived Owen by nine years. But, she delighted in her grandchildren and great-grandchildren and lived long enough to know she had one great-great-grandchild on the way. She lived a long, wonderful, and eventful life and she will be missed. The family has a favorite picture of Mary Jane Miller Alford sitting behind one of her grandsons riding a Skidoo on the backwaters of Smith Lake near the Alford homestead. At the time, it was Labor Day 1998 and she was 90. Mary was a remarkable individual, and these few words here cannot pay adequate tribute to a grand lady who's life influenced so many lives, so positively.

[Since Mary was the wife of an Alford we have not included the usual Alford Ancestors data.]