

In Loving Memory

The desire to teach is as old as I am. In childhood play—I was—or wanted to be the teacher and often told a playmate “how I would teach her children”. Math was the dream, but in those days you could begin teaching with 2 years of college training and earn a degree in the summer as you taught during regular term. So, after 2 years at Bethune Cookman in Daytona Beach, the school bell rang for me in Chester.

In fact, I rang the bell because it was a one teacher school and well do I remember how I stood in the door with the hand bell in my hands and rang it—heralding in my first group of children—grades K through 8. After 2 years there I went to Yulee for 2 years and then to Peck. Returning to Peck was returning to my High School Alma mater and for 20 years my work with girls and boys continued, helping them to become whatever they desired to become. Through workshops and summer school, I earned a BS and Master’s degree. In the process of becoming a teacher I learned that you are always growing and learning. After 24 years of teaching, later I went back to school, again, by this time I was teaching the children, of children; whom I had taught during my early years as a teacher. Although second grade **was my favorite grade**, the thrills of seeing little children learn and the sharing of their day-to-day experiences and expressions was “my joy”.

I feel that my work has been as a nurse, doctor, and surgeon, binding a hurt, healing a broken world or suturing a friendship; scientist, answering whys; entertainer, refreshing with laughter; fisherman, baiting children to learn; and a pilot, guiding little ones away from ignorance as they learned. It was more than “just a teacher” because my work varied—as varied as the children I taught. Yet a common thread was there—The simple uniqueness of children being “as they are”.

My Philosophy:

I am only one, but I am one,
I cannot do everything,
but I can do something.
What I can do, I ought to do.
What I ought to do,
By the grace of God I will do.

Pall Bearers

Deacons and Officials of First Missionary Baptist Church

Flower Bearers

Ushers and Friends

In Appreciation

Our family is deeply indebted to all the many persons who visited, called, prayed and provided other acts of kindness to our beloved Aunt Willie Mae over these last years. We ask that God continue to put his protective and loving arms around you and your families.

Our appreciation to: **Funerals by T.S. Warden** for their services.



Willie Mae Hardy Ashley

May 24, 1922 - October 31, 2014

Service

11:00 AM, Saturday, November 8, 2014

First Baptist Church

1600 South 8th Street

Fernandina Beach, Florida 32034

Reverend Jeff Overton, Senior Pastor

Rev. Dr. Darien K. Bolden, Sr., Officiating

Interment

Bosque Bello Cemetery

2500 Atlantic Avenue

Fernandina Beach, Florida

Willie Mae Hardy Ashley
May 24, 1922-October 31, 2014

Willie Mae Hardy Ashley was born to the late Annie Mae Mercer Hardy and Deacon Oscar Hardy on May 24, 1922. She joined First Missionary Baptist Church as a young child and was an active member throughout her life. The fourth of five children, she grew up in Fernandina and graduated as Valedictorian of the Peck High School, Class of 1940. Her siblings, Elizabeth Harris, Allein Williams, Blanche Williams and Robert Hardy, all preceded her in death.

She married the late Columbus Ashley, a native of Augusta, Georgia, who was among the early pioneer employees of Rayonier in the late 1930's. She earned a BS degree from Bethune Cookman College, completed graduate school at the University of Michigan and received a M. Ed. degree from Florida A&M University. In 1942, in a one-room school in Chester, Florida, she began a teaching career that would span into 35 years. This career path included an elementary teacher, school coordinator and guidance counselor in Chester, O'Neal and Fernandina Beach, FL. The recipient of numerous awards and honors, Mrs. Ashley was Teacher of the Year, 1964-65 and honored guest at the National Baptist Convention in 1990. She served as President of the Nassau County Teachers Association; she was an active life member of the National Council of Negro Women and the National Education Association and served as delegate to the NEA convention for many years. Always a committed community worker, Mrs. Ashley would undertake any worthwhile task and would not stop until she had found just the right person(s) to help her complete or carry the task forward. For a number of years she worked with the "Read In Chain" program and gave more than moral support to the annual Grandparents Day.

At First Missionary Baptist Church she served in as many roles as required, substitute Sunday school teacher, pianist for the church; Sunday school, and the initial Vacation Bible School sessions, and a delegate to the National Baptist Convention. She had a special interest in the Missions Ministry. She was active and involved in the life of the city and county and was a member of the Nassau County Community Development Corporation and the Peck Alumni Association.

She was known throughout the community as the historian of African American life in the area. Her research, a collection of writings on the history of African Americans in Fernandina Beach, is compiled in the unpublished, but studied work, "The Ebony Connection". Having known Mary McCloud Bethune, she remained dedicated to her college and the ideals of Mrs. Bethune. In 1974 she attended the Convention of the National Council of Negro Women and was a part of the historic unveiling of the statue of Mrs. Bethune in Lincoln Park, in Washington, D.C. In 1983, Mrs. Ashley was a special guest at a White House reception, honoring the work of NCNW.

Her dedication to Peck High and all of its students was a life-long commitment; she served on the committee and undertook research and letter writing across the state in the efforts to gain historical status for the building and for its restoration. In a celebration on March 6, 2004, the Peck Center Auditorium was renamed, the Willie Mae Hardy Ashley Auditorium.

She is the author of "Far From Home", a biography of Emma B. Delaney, a member of FMBC, who was one of the early African American female Missionaries to Africa. Ms. Delaney served in Liberia and Malawi from 1902 to 1919. The U.S. Center has reprinted "Far From Home" for World Mission's African-American Experience in World Mission, Volume 2. Mrs. Ashley did further study on the life and work of Daniel Malekebu who was a student of Ms. Delaney's and also visited Fernandina. Of her many skills, talents and attributes, her ability to be present, to talk with you and to hear what you could not say and find words of encouragement, support or wisdom needed at that moment, was a god-given gift and a blessing that she shared freely.

Willie Mae Hardy Ashley was always ready for a new adventure and she traveled throughout the United States, Europe and West and Southern Africa. She loved to read and was a great collector of books and African Art. Her maternal African ancestry indicates that she comes from the Hausa and Fulani peoples of Nigeria, West Africa. Her interest in all people found her involved in the most unlikely of historical events, including helping to make the top secret arrangements for the wedding of John Kennedy, Jr., on Cumberland Island in 1996. She was blessed with any number of unique experiences, from meeting Alex Haley before the writing of Roots, being interviewed on CBS national evening news as she participated in the March on Washington to protest apartheid in South Africa; visiting South Africa before the end of apartheid; visiting the New York World's Fair both years with young people; serving as chaperone for a group from Fernandina to the inaugural National Urban League Youth Conference in New York, being singled out in an audience by any number of celebrities, because they thought "she looked interesting".

She leaves to mourn her life and celebrate her legacy, a large extended family including her devoted nieces and nephews: Evelyn Wynn, Miami, FL; Doris Haynes and Delores Brown, Jacksonville, FL.; Ruth Terrell (William), Sanford, NC.; Donald Williams, Carolyn McDonald, Diane Williams and Toni Patton (Billy), Philadelphia, PA.; Sandra Palmer (Hosea), Barbara Aikens, and Clarice Williams, Fernandina Beach, FL.; Bruce Williams (Drena), Capitol Heights, MD.; Regina Gilbert (Gerry), Miami, FL.; Charles Hardy (Cynthia), Robert Hardy and Merritt Hardy, Fernandina Beach, FL.; Rivious Hardy, Jacksonville, FL.; and Valinda Drummer (Jackie), Lake Mary, FL. She leave many grandnieces and grandnephews: Dwayne Wynn, Miami, FL.; Stacey Brown (Angelica) Ashburn, VA.; Padrika Gray (Anthony), Rene Brown, Desiree Haynes, Bonnie Lowe, Yolanda Hardy and Raven Hardy, Jacksonville, FL.; Heather Harris, Rochester, NY.; Hope Manuel (William), Lakeland, FL.; Hannah Austin, Las Vegas, NV.; Johnny Aikens, II (Alice), Colorado Springs, CO.; Andrea Gowen (James), Charlotte, NC.; Brenda Walker (Clarence), Timothy Taylor (Renee), Hope White (Teddy), Natasha Aikens, and Delano Hardy (Lynette), Fernandina Beach, FL.; Robyn Williams, Rodney Williams (Renee), Terry Lamar (Eddie), and Perry Williams, III (Keisha), Daytona Beach, FL.; Lanae Martin (Justin), San Diego, CA.; Jaclynn Drummer and Jackie Drummer, Jr., Lake Mary, FL. She also leave her neighbor, confidante and sister-friend Vivian Hardy; her godson, Rev. Charles E. Wilson, a large extended family and a group of special friends, students, parents and a community grateful for her many contributions.

We are all in a better world because she was here.