

A Tribute to Mary Bess Coleman,  
our Family Association's oldest member,  
born November 1, 1897

Mary Bess Coleman was born almost 100 years ago in the house built by her maternal grandfather, Robert Williams Coleman, around 1858. He had seen a house which he wanted to build on family land in Fairfield County, South Carolina, while traveling to Medical School at New York University. According to Mary Bess, "The logs were cut on the plantation and hauled to Charleston by ox cart to be planed. A lumber house was built behind the house site to store the planed boards while the house was being constructed."

Mary Bess, daughter of Lizzie and Yongue Coleman, grew up in this house less than a half mile north of the Feasterville Academy. Along with her sisters Isabel, Kathleen and Nancy and brother Robert Yongue, she enjoyed a happy childhood centered around family, school and church. (The oldest sister, Fanny, died at age 10).

At home she played with her china doll named Dorothy and with paper dolls. "We always let our dolls talk," she said. The family played cards, Set-Back, croquet and romped on the juggling board. Mary Bess broke her arm when she "cut the butter" on the juggling board. Dr. Robert Coleman, a cousin living just up the road, set and splinted her arm.

Lizzie Coleman attended Columbia College. She was a talented seamstress. "Mother taught me to crochet, quilt and tat, but we didn't do those things on Sunday." The W. Y. Coleman family belonged to Salem Presbyterian Church--Mary Bess is still a member there. Because Salem did not hold weekly services, the family attended Cool Branch and Beaver Creek Baptist Churches, Liberty Universalist and Antioch Methodist. In her youth Sunday afternoons were for quiet times, such as reading,

reflecting or visiting with family and friends. No games were allowed on Sunday. However, they could play with their pets. Mary Bess especially remembers a cat named "Old Vick" and a pig named "Easter Lily."

Once, a first cousin from New York City came to visit. She claimed to have a diamond ring. All of the girls wrote their names on the panes at the front door. These are still visible today as testimony to the ring's authenticity.

"Papa taught me to ride and I loved it." Yongue Coleman owned a race horse named Prince, winner of blue ribbons at the Chester County Fair. He also taught her to drive the wagon and buggy. She often accompanied him to take the grain to be ground at Hill's Mill on the Shelton Road. Yongue Coleman also played the fiddle, for pleasure at home, and for dances at the Feasterville Boarding House. Mary Bess enjoyed square and round dancing.

Mary Bess, her brother, sisters and many cousins attended the two-room school at Feasterville. She especially enjoyed speeches which they made once a week. Recesses were as popular long ago as today. Games played ranged from baseball to "ante over." The object of the latter game was to see who could throw the ball over the schoolhouse.

Mary Bess attended Winthrop College as did her three sisters. She taught at various schools in South Carolina, among them Feasterville, Thornwell Orphanage and Montmorenci. In the early 1930's she returned home to care for her mother, who died in 1941, then remained with her father. During this time she participated in community activities, ranging from Home Demonstration Club to serving as precinct registrar at Feasterville. Upon the death of her father in 1947 she inherited his position as a trustee for the John Feaster properties. She later served as secretary for the Coleman-Feaster-Mobley Family Association.

Fifty years ago Mary Bess moved to North Carolina to live with her sister, Nancy, brother-in-law, Guy Ross, and their family in Pleasant Garden. For a number of summers she and Kathleen returned to the home place, but Pleasant Garden remained her permanent residence.

Eventually, the home place and a few adjoining acres were sold since it was not feasible for her to maintain the property. The house has been updated and is currently owned and lived in by Mark Rigsby.

Upon arrival in Pleasant Garden, Mary Bess resumed her teaching career. She had received only an associate degree from Winthrop College, so it was necessary for her to return to college to obtain a teacher's certificate. Over a period of four years, while teaching second grade full time, she earned her BA degree from High Point College in 1952.

Learning continued after college. She studied art, wild flowers and the Bible. Her interests include attending sporting events, fishing, quilting, crocheting, tatting, puzzles, Chinese checkers and croquet. Church and social activities continue to interest her. She is, or has been, a member of garden, book and bridge clubs. Currently, on weekdays, she attends a luncheon and program for Senior Citizens.

Her dedication to family led her (along with sister Kathleen) to assist nieces and nephews financially with their college education. Her indomitable spirit as well as her strong and loving character continues to be an inspiration to her family, her students and to all whose lives she touches.

NOTE: Not only is Mary Bess a Coleman, but through both her parents she is also descended from Feasters and Mobleys.