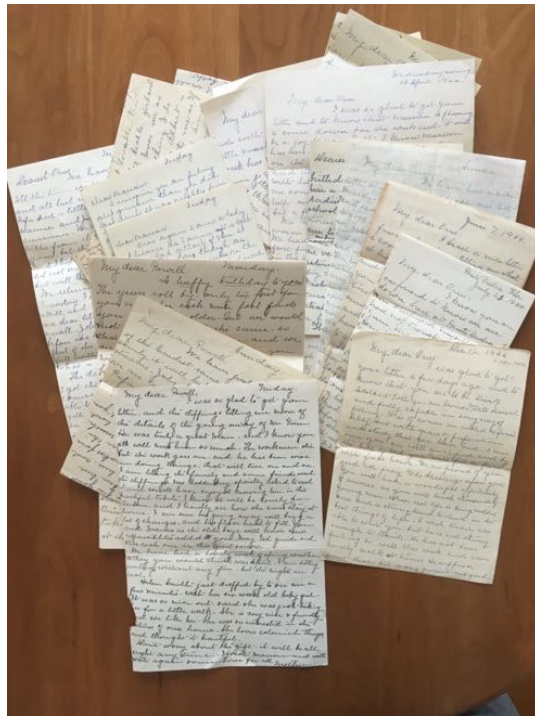


Letters from Grandmother

edited by Nicholas Jones

A history of my grandparents Walter Colquitt Jones (1855–1948) and Martha Melvina Powell Jones (1869–1951), based on letters written to my parents in the 1930s and 40s, and on my father's autobiography, with help from cousins.



Berkeley, California

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Me at age 3 with my mother and grandmother, in Cairo. Dated on back, April 19, 1950.

Introduction

This is the story of my paternal grandparents, Walter C. Jones and Martha Melvina Powell Jones. It is necessarily only a fragment of a full history, so much time having passed, and such scattered and partial records having passed down to me. Most of the people who really knew my grandparents have died. Distance and time intervene.

I was born in Ohio in 1946; they were far away, in Cairo, in southwest Georgia, and both were dead by the time I was six. Although we made a trip there when I was three, I have only a slight memory of a lovely woman in a print dress, and that memory may be only a reflection of the few pictures I have seen of Grandmother Jones.

My maternal grandparents, Frank Hadley and Cornelia Root Ginn, left a historian's legacy, including Grandmother Ginn's diaries and garden notes, boxes of photographs both professional and snapshots, legends about my grandfather. Though I never knew them (they died in the late 1930s, she first and he a year later), they always seemed real to me, partly because my mother would talk about them often, with lots of anecdotes. These stories were the more telling because they were often linked to things I actually saw and touched, for we lived where they had lived, in the house my mother had grown up in, amid orchards and art collections that they had created. We went to church where they had worshipped, and listened to the Cleveland Orchestra in the hall Grandfather Ginn had helped to build. Last year, my nephew Nathan Jones and I compiled much of that history.¹

After writing that history of the Ginns, I found these 38 letters from my grandmother Jones, saved from the breaking up of my parents' home. These letters are the only writings I have seen from my Jones grandparents. By reading them, I have begun to feel I know both Grandmother, who wrote them, and Grandfather, who was not well enough to write, but about whom she speaks in every letter.

The letters date from the mid 1930s up until just after the end of World War II—about a decade. I wonder what happened to the letters that my father must have gotten before his marriage. And were there letters after 1946? perhaps not: Grandfather died in 1948 and Grandmother in 1951, and illness and sadness may have intervened. Perhaps there were such letters, but they just weren't saved.

¹ Nicholas Jones and Nathan Jones, *The Ginns of Moxahela: Frank Hadley and Cornelia Root Ginn, Their Ancestors and Descendants*. PDF. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1uL1Snz5aCbVtGb69Uo1xQsul-3Bud7ni/view?usp=sharing>

I am grateful to have the glimpse these letters give me of Grandmother, of the warmth and devotion in her character, and of her commitment to hard work and efficient management of the household. In the years of these letters, much of her time was focused on long-term needs, caring for her much older husband, and staying in communication with her five scattered adult children with news and love. There were also immediate challenges, such as managing the nut trees that supplied the family income and finding a home after their house burned down. Often the immediacy of reading these letters felt so powerful that as I worked on the first draft of this history, I found myself writing in the present tense . . . "she writes," "she plans for a visit."

May 30. 1935-

Dearest Ones:-
 We have had a very cool May. All the time we were in Mount Vernon and all last week. we had light cover, and Papa had a little fire at eight. This week is warmer and June I guess will bring us real summer. We are enjoying the fresh vegetables from the garden. The strawberries are gone, but the black berries are coming in and I hope next week to get my jelly made. We did not buy plums this year, and no May haws, but will have a fine crop of figs later!

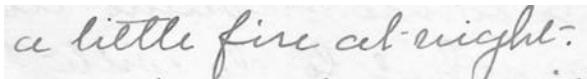
We returned from Mount Vernon last Thursday. I enjoyed being with Margaret & Mill, and hope that I helped a bit. The babies are dear little things, but so delicate and small. John returned from Atlanta the day before we left and was better and able to walk part of the day. Dear Margaret has her hands full with two babies & Mary Lou. We do not know what a day will bring forth.

The day after I got to Mount Vernon I got the notice about Lucretia. and of course hear every few days. She has been able to write herself, and seems to have gotten along beautifully. A letter yesterday said she was giving enough milk for Harry Jr. and he had gained 6 lb. I guess she goes home today. and has

A typical letter from Grandmother.

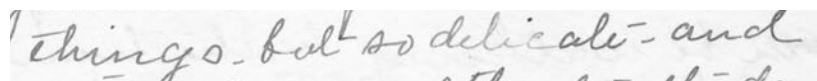
The letters are written in blue fountain pen (with one exception—a letter begun in pencil while waiting in the car), on nice paper, a little smaller than a standard page (about 7 ¼" x 10 ½"), usually folded in thirds to fit an envelope of about 7 ½" x 4". None of the envelopes were saved. A few of the letters are dated, others merely headed with a day of the week, which I think indicates the regularity of the correspondence between Ohio and Georgia. They almost all begin with the same warm phrase, "My dear Ones," or "Dearest Ones."

Grandmother's cursive handwriting is flowing, full of nice long loops and rounded corners. The crosses of her t's are consistently displaced to the right by up to a quarter inch, and the dots of her i's are often the right of the letter itself, as in this detail, with "at" and "night."



Detail: "a little fire at night."

Her commas are so horizontal as to be easily mistaken for dashes, but sitting lower than a dash would be: here, with "things, but. . ." and "delicate, and. . ."



Detail: "things, but so delicate, and"

In her handwriting, I get a sense of speed, of a pen moving quickly from left to right. On the other hand, the letters never seem hurried or impatient: they are consistently warm and relaxed, evoking the sense of someone enjoying the act of connecting with her dear ones.

They are all signed, "love, Mama."

My father's autobiography has been helpful for me in understanding his parents' lives. Dad began writing about his Georgia childhood in 1945 just after returning from wartime work in Washington DC, and then later, in the 1970s, filled out the story of his life in other chapters.²

I've been helped also by my older brother Hal, who remembers many car trips from Cleveland to Cairo (always stopping at the Boone Tavern in Kentucky); by my cousin Harry Hoover, who supplied many of the pictures here; and by my Cairo cousin Rebecca Roddenbery Cline. I've also turned to online sources for genealogies, obituaries, and other background. I am grateful to Ernestine Daniels of Cairo's Roddenbery Memorial Library, who sent me my grandparents' obituaries from *The Cairo Messenger*.

² William Powell Jones, *From Georgia to Cleveland: An Autobiography*. Gates Mills, Ohio, 1979 [hereafter, WPJ]. Used copies can be found on [Amazon](#) and [AbeBooks](#), and I have a few copies that I would be glad to pass on to anyone interested.

The letters that occasioned my writing this history were my grandmother's principal means of communication with my father, William Powell Jones, who was living and teaching in Ohio.³



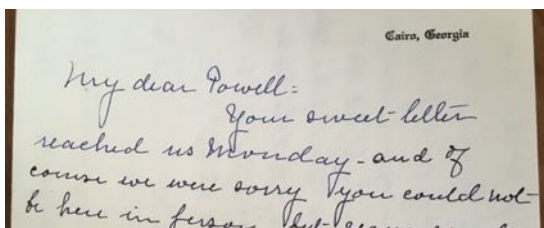
My father, William Powell Jones, in Cairo with his sister Margaret Jones Roddenbery.

Born in 1901, he had graduated from Emory in Atlanta in 1919, and after two years teaching in Japan had gone north for graduate work first at the University of Chicago and then at Harvard, followed by a move to Cleveland to teach English at Western Reserve University. There he met my mother, Marian Ginn, and they married in 1933; their first son, Hal, was born the next year, followed by Chris in 1938, Stephen in 1941, and me in 1946. After the deaths of my mother's parents, my father and mother had moved into the Ginns' spacious house in Gates Mills, 14 miles east of Cleveland, with its 40 acres of orchards, pastures, barns, and gardens.

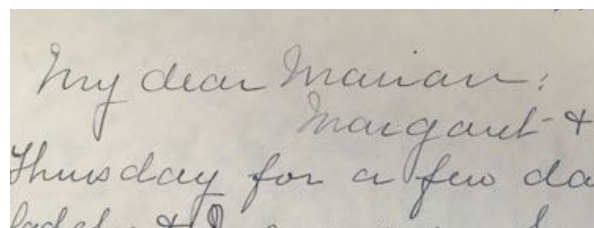
During the war, my father entered the Army Intelligence service and worked in the Pentagon.

Most of that time my mother stayed home, raising

the boys and managing the farm with the help of farmers and household servants, most of whom had previously worked for her parents. The letters from my Georgia grandmother evidence her direct and open connection with her northern daughter-in-law, "My dear Marian."



Detail: Salutation, "My dear Powell." This is the only letter on letterhead, which reads, "Cairo, Georgia."



Detail: Salutation, "My dear Marian"

There were striking differences between the lives of my parents in Ohio and my grandparents in Georgia, and these differences must have been in the mind of both parties as they wrote and read the letters that went back and forth almost weekly between North and South. In industrialized "Yankee-land," my mother's family had a life of great privilege. My mother's mother had grown up in a wealthy Cleveland merchant's family, and her father, though coming

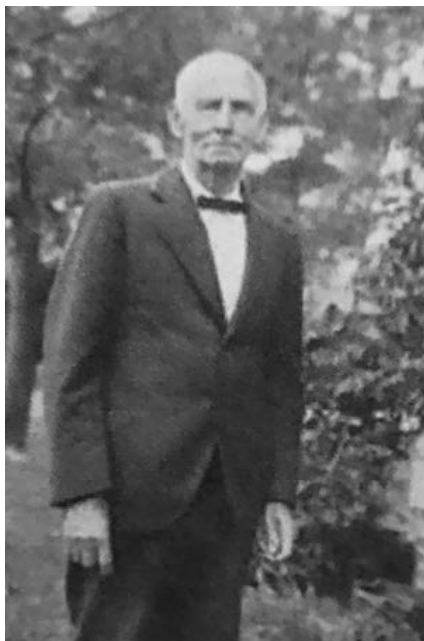
³ His Georgia family called him "Powell," although in the North he had taken the nickname of "Pete."

from a schoolmaster's home in rural Ohio, had founded a successful Cleveland law firm. Despite the Depression, which decimated my father's university salary, my parents lived well through the 1930s.

In the agrarian south, still struggling with the effects of the Civil War and Reconstruction, my Jones grandparents had far less financial security, their income subject to the whims of weather and crop prices. My parents were Episcopalian, with its class and lifestyle implications; my father's parents were revivalist Methodists, pious, sabbatarian, and non-drinking. Mom and Dad lived on a country estate with thoroughbred horses for foxhunting, and with close connection to urban culture of Cleveland – university, art museum, symphony, opera. Grandmother and Grandfather Jones ran a farm and small business outside of a small southwest Georgia market town.

But many things united them, and the central bond was family. Caring for their children, educating them and helping them become responsible human beings—these were central to both families. Care and love echo through these letters. It is clear in every letter that Grandmother loved my father and had great pride in his achievements and his choice of a life in the north, even while she sorrowed at the distance between them. The letters do not merely *speak* of love and family connection, they *enact* it: their regularity, the sense of familiarity, the steady stream of news about Grandmother's other children, and her unaffected delight in what she hears of their lives—these qualities in the letters must have served to nurture the family bond across distance and difference.

Grandfather Jones



Grandfather in his signature bowtie.

My grandfather, Walter Colquitt Jones, was born in 1855—before the Civil War; as a boy, he was old enough to remember the final years of the war and Sherman's march through Georgia.

Family lore says that the Joneses (Welsh, judging from the name—as were the Powells, Grandmother Jones's family) came to the new world in the person of Peter Jones, who founded Petersburg, Virginia, and surveyed the boundary between Virginia and North Carolina. My father was uncertain about the Peter Jones link, but did trace descent from an Adam Jones, born in Virginia in 1759, who moved to Warren County, Georgia in 1782 accompanied by his wife Nancy Harrison and twelve enslaved workers. Adam and Nancy Jones had eleven children. His son Thomas, my great-grandfather, married Patsy Denmark in 1799 and moved to Bulloch County, Georgia. Thomas's son Malachi (one of 10 children) married Sarah Reisser Groover, of a

family who had come to Savannah from Salzburg, Austria.

My father wrote a poem about his ancestors, which began:

We are the restless ones, wandering
In search of new lands, unwilling to name
What it is we wanted.

The restlessness, he wrote, came from planting roots and then wanting something new, in a cycle of constantly moving, "ready to wander in search of new homes." Pulling the genealogy into the present, my father thought about his own wanderings, and those of his siblings:

Soon the new lands would give out, no place to go,
But still we had to go
And from my father's house three of us went north,
Searching the new job, seeking a market for brains and skill.⁴

In 1854, Malachi Jones, my great grandfather, settled at a plantation at Hickory Head, five miles southwest of the town of Quitman, in Brooks County, Georgia; this brought the family to

⁴ WPJ, 3.

southwest Georgia. The next year, my grandfather was born, the tenth of eleven children. He was named for Walter Colquitt, a circuit-riding Methodist preacher, judge, and US Senator who had been active protecting states' rights to remove Native Americans, to continue slavery, and to secede from the Union (this senator had died just a month before my grandfather was born).⁵ The choice of name says a good deal about the political and social ideologies of Malachi Jones and his family.⁶

My father wrote another poem about what his father may have taken from his heritage. "You are a bridge from America's youth," he wrote about—and to—his father. The poem evoked his restless ancestors again—"hungry for land"—and contrasted them to his father's world; it was "the stuff of change / From farm to factory, from wilderness to city." He imagines his father living with "the heartbreak of war that tears up the past / And leaves the infinitely slow rebuilding to you."

After the war ended, my grandfather, not yet in his teens, worked on the family farm. Most of the eleven children had died in the war or had left the farm, and he was needed. Their emancipated workers, now free, also stayed on: my father recorded their names—Jerry and his wife Fanny, and "Sarah, separate from the father of her three children, the best plow hand on the place who rode sideways on a mule no one else could ride."⁷

There would be no formal education for Grandfather until he was 22, when he went to school for a year to learn what the war and work had delayed. He was a fast learner, absorbing in a short time Latin, algebra, and rhetoric (an essential for a preacher). His first work after school



My grandparents on their wedding day, Jan. 20, 1892.

was as a clerk in a store in Quitman. In a few years he joined the Methodist Church and in 1887, he became an active minister, as what was then called a circuit rider, tending to multiple churches. He took a four-year course in ministry from the Methodist church, while working as preacher and pastor on circuits among various small churches, and then in Brunswick, Georgia, as junior pastor. On one of these circuits, he met Mellie Powell, and they married in 1892. After marriage, Grandfather worked in Camilla and nearby towns as a revivalist preacher, first at Waverly Hall near Columbus, Georgia, where he built a new church and parsonage (probably by hand), then at Mt. Vernon, and finally at Cochran, where my father was born in 1901.

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_T._Colquitt

⁶ My father wrote that the Malachi Jones family attended the Primitive Baptist Church.

⁷ WPJ, 5

Grandfather's career as an active preacher and minister came to an end when his health failed dramatically in what must have been a neurological collapse. As my uncle Joe described it later, Grandfather awoke in the middle of the night, "paralysed and speechless." This near-death experience was "sacred to him and his wife"; that is, my grandparents interpreted it as an encounter with the divine. I do not know how long the paralysis lasted, but in time and with rest, Grandfather recovered, to take up a new life. Uncle Joe wrote:

He had little in him save an innate and unbroken ambition and determination to amount to something in the world. Though 48 years of age, broken in health, with a wife and three small children, he held up his head and determined to go out into some outdoor work and build back his health sufficiently to care for his family.⁸

After the rest and rehabilitation, Grandfather sold an old farm he had acquired at Quitman, and with that and an inheritance of Grandmother's, the family settled in Cairo, where Grandmother had grown up. They lived at first in town, tearing down the old Powell house and building two new homes on the land, and gradually piecing together from various parcels a substantial amount of land a mile outside of town. In 1905, Grandfather entered on his new career on that land, raising seedling pecan trees that were sold throughout the South to farmers planting new orchards.



Magnolia, my grandparents' home for about 25 years. One of the big magnolia trees is on the left; the photo is taken from under the big red oak near the road.

With their five children, my grandparents moved to their newly purchased land about 1907, living at first in a small house, setting out the young trees that would later become their own pecan grove, and starting the nursery business. In a few years, Grandfather built a much larger new house, with some outside help, and with a lot of his own labor—a spacious two-story home with five bedrooms and wide porches, and four big columns in the ante-bellum style. They called it "Magnolia" for the two big magnolia trees that shaded it.

⁸ WPJ, 8.

The pecan nursery business was Grandfather's main work in these years, from about 1905 to perhaps 1930.⁹ My father and his brothers worked at the business, learning to graft the young trees; this gave him a lifelong love of orchard-work.¹⁰ My uncle Walter must have inherited a love of plants as well, for he later became an avid and well-known orchid grower.

My father writes about Grandfather's nursery work:

This was quite a business for a broken-down Methodist preacher to build up from nothing. He managed it all, including the clerical work such as advertising, business correspondence, and bookkeeping, every piece of it in longhand and without any help. (No wonder Papa has not written even a personal letter for the past ten years!).¹¹

Despite the success of his nursery work and the deceptively grand "plantation" home of Magnolia, money was tight in the family. In my father's words:

The nursery business is fairly easy, once you have learned it, and in those days, it was far more lucrative than ordinary farming. With our family it came at a time when we needed it most. Not only did the profits take care of the growing needs of a large family; what was more important, it enabled Papa to send all five children to college and three boys to expensive postgraduate professional schools as well. It took all we could possibly squeeze out of the business and out of the developing of the large pecan grove across the creek, which Papa sold to Mr. Gipson for a good profit. When I got my Ph.D. degree at Harvard in 1927 to end the drain on the family resources, our farm had what looked like a hopeless debt on it, but Papa was determined to see us through with all the education we would take.¹²

The grove that my father mentions above was the one way Grandfather could plan his retirement from the hard work of the nursery (there was no Social Security in those days). This is my father's recollection in 1946:

He set out all the [pecan] trees that now furnish the only income for his and Mama's old age. Those trees on our place are now huge, some of them a good

⁹ The business was called Magnolia Nursery, Orchard, and Farms. Grandfather became the first president of the [Georgia-Florida Pecan Growers Association](#).

¹⁰ I remember my father spending hours on many a rainy Saturday in March, pruning the apple and pear trees on our farm; I was glad when homework "forced" me to spend at least some of that time indoors rather than helping him,

¹¹ WPJ, 36.

¹² WPJ, 34.

two feet in diameter. Though he can't walk through them, Papa still loves to sit in the car and look at them. He tells the story that, when he was setting out the first orchard across the road from our house along the main road, he overheard one man say to his companion as they rode along in a buggy, "I wonder if that old man ever expects to get a nut off those trees." Papa loves to tell the story because he has always taken a pride in planting for others and building things he did not expect to use himself. One of the last things he did before he was invalidated by his last operation a few years ago was to plant some young pines down by the sand field near the creek. Already those pines are big enough for pulpwood, and he continually asks about them though he knows he cannot walk down the lane to see them growing.¹³

Although Grandfather had stepped down from regular ministry, he still did church work on the side. Known as "Preacher Jones," or "Brother Jones," he would preach at country churches and revival meetings, and conduct weddings and funerals, sometimes paid in food, sometimes in cash (for the weddings), which, my father writes, "went straight to Mama by long standing agreement. It was the only 'extra money' our household ever got, and it was not much."

My father remembers what it was like when Grandfather conducted a rural burial:

Papa would preach his heart out to these simple country folks. He gave his best and they loved him for it. Many times they came from many miles around to get him to come bury their dead. Now that I look back upon it, I can understand why: they could feel his genuine sympathy. Not content with reading the ritual of the church, Papa talked to the people at the open grave as if they were his brothers and sisters, as if he were burying his own mother or father. No wonder he had worn himself out at the age of forty-six! To spend such nervous energy constantly, day in and day out, without physical recuperation, would wear down the strongest heart.¹⁴

¹³ WPJ, 36-37.

¹⁴ WPJ, 29.

That heart had worn out by the early 1930s, when these letters begin; Grandfather was in his 80s and in bad health. He had an operation of some kind, and was unable to walk far. Grandmother makes it clear, though, that he was good-humored and patient.

The Reverend Walter C. Jones died August 1, 1948, and was buried in Cairo.



My grandparents' graves in Cairo.

This obituary appeared in *The Cairo Messenger*:¹⁵



Southwest Georgia lost one of her most esteemed citizens when the Rev. Walter C. Jones, a retired minister of the South Georgia Methodist Conference, and a major factor in the development of the tung oil industry in this area, slipped peacefully to eternal rest at his home here at 6 a.m. Sunday.

Mr Jones had been ill much of the time for several years but it was not until Sunday of last week that a rather pronounced change for the worse became evident. He began sinking Friday and little hope was held for him after that time. His son, Dr. Walter C. Jones Jr., a prominent Miami (Fla.) surgeon, was at his bedside for some hours before the end came.

Mr. Jones was born near Quitman in Brooks County, on June 26, 1855, one of 14 children of the late Malachi and Sarah Reiser Jones. As a farmer in his early

¹⁵ This and Grandmother's obituary were kindly supplied by the Roddenbery Memorial Library, Cairo. This had no date, but was probably published on the Tuesday following his death.

thirties, he answered the call to the ministry and served Methodist pastorates in this county and at Camilla, Waverly Hall, Mount Vernon and Cochran before he retired because of his health and located here. He married Miss Mellie Powell, of Cairo, in 1892. A brother, the late W. M. (Billy) Jones, was Ordinary of Thomas County for some years.¹⁶

He located on a farm just outside the southeastern city limits of Cairo and established a large pecan nursery which he operated in connection with his farm for many years. When the tung oil nut industry was started here, he also operated a tung nursery for some years and made a major contribution to the development of these and other crops for this area. The large and beautiful colonial home of the family there burned some years ago and Mr. and Mrs. Jones moved to North Broad street.

Although he was forced to retire from active ministry, he continued to serve countless people over a wide area for many years. He was recognized as a tower of spiritual strength and inspiration for others and he was long a favorite among the so-called poor people. He founded and taught the William Powell Bible class, the men's class of the Methodist Church School here, for many years. The radiance of his staunch Christian character helpfully touched countless lives over a period of 60 years.

A final tribute was set in a simple, dignified funeral service at the First Methodist Church here at 4 p.m. Monday and burial followed in Cair[o] cemetery, with his pastor, the Rev. Granville N. Rainey in charge, assisted by the Rev. W. E. McTier, of Thomasville, district superintendent, and Rev. J. W. Hildy, Valdosta. The family requested "no flowers" and it is understood a number of relatives and friends plan contributions, instead, for Vashti School at Thomasville, and other such institutions.¹⁷ The body lay in state at the church from 10 a.m. Monday until the funeral hour.

Immediate survivors include his widow; two daughters, Mrs. Julien B. (Margaret) Roddenbery, Cairo, and Mrs. H. B. (Lucretia) Hoover, Cambridge, Mass.; three sons, Dr. Jones, Miami, Dr. W. Powell Jones, Cleveland, Ohio, and Joseph M. Jones, Washington, D. C.; and fourteen grandchildren.

¹⁶ Uncle Billy, older than grandfather, lost his leg at the Peach Orchard at the Battle of Gettysburg. He became a respected judge in Grady County.

¹⁷ The Vashti Center in Thomasville was founded in 1903 by the United Methodist Women, and serves challenged youth.

Grandmother Jones



An undated photo of Grandmother Jones.



Mellie Powell about the time of her marriage.

My grandmother Martha Melvina (Mellie) Powell was born in 1869. Her father, William Aden [or Aiden] Powell, was a minister and a merchant in Cairo, and eventually station agent for the town. The Powells had settled originally in Virginia in the early 18th century, then moved to North Carolina, and to Georgia after the Revolutionary War. William Powell (1783-1836) and his wife Sarah established a plantation near Bainbridge in southwest Georgia. It was either their son Kedar Powell, or Kedar's son William Aden Powell who moved to Cairo, about 25 miles to the east of Bainbridge.¹⁸ William Aden Powell married Lucretia Brockett, who had grown up in Leon County (Tallahassee) in the Florida panhandle, about 45 miles south of Bainbridge and Cairo.

The family of William and Lucretia Powell included 11 children, born between 1857 and 1877. The family lived in a big house on Broad Street in Cairo, which Grandfather tore down around the turn of the century to build two homes. My father writes: "Cairo was then a small market town of about 1500 inhabitants. The town was dominated by the Powells, the Wights, and the Roddenberys [Julien Roddenbery later married my aunt Margaret]."¹⁹

Grandmother had three years of college education,²⁰ possibly at Wesleyan College (then known as Wesleyan College for Women) in Macon. Wesleyan was founded in 1836: my aunts Margaret and Lucretia both graduated from there.

Mellie Powell was 23 when she married Grandfather, who was then still working as a Methodist minister. It may have been the Powell family presence in Cairo that brought Grandfather and Grandmother to settle there just after the turn of the century. In a few years, the family moved out of town to what my father called "the farm." There they built Magnolia, described above, and created the pecan groves and entered on the nursery business.

¹⁸ Much of the genealogy is from *From Georgia to Cleveland*, 10-12, and from my nephew Nathan Jones's work on Family Search. Mellie Powell's ancestry can be seen at <https://www.familysearch.org/tree/pedigree/fanchart/LH6N-D8K>.

¹⁹ WPJ, 12.

²⁰ 1940 Census.



A family photo, perhaps from the later 1920s. Back from left: Grandfather, Walter Jr., Powell, Joseph; Front: Lucretia, Grandmother, Margaret.

In the Jones family at Magnolia, there were five siblings: Walter Jr., later a surgeon in Miami; Margaret, who married Julien Roddenbery and stayed in Cairo); my father, "Powell"; Joseph, who became a railroad lawyer in Washington, DC; and Lucretia, who raised her family in in Massachusetts. Grandmother knew how to manage a big family—she had, after all, grown up with four older and four younger siblings. My father remembered that his mama had a "handy hairbrush" to administer order among the wrestling matches of her boys, and added that "most of the whippings I got from Mama—I never

remember getting one from Papa—were for teasing Cretia" (Lucretia, his younger sister).²¹



On the porch at Magnolia.

My father remembered his childhood warmly: "We were, I believe, a happy family, certainly a united family held together by Papa and Mama's devotion to God and to the belief that the home is the first place where religious ideas should be shown." The family went to church every Sunday (and probably other days of the week as well), with Grandfather sometimes preaching or assisting and Grandmother teaching Sunday School to the young men's class. "Mama's best service was in seeing that we got ready for church and behaved ourselves, and in looking after the needs of the church pastor and his family. . . ; there were not many Sundays when Mama didn't bring them some eggs or butter or fresh vegetables or smoked meat."²²

My father remembered, also, the hard work his mother put in as Corresponding Secretary for the Women's Missionary Society and the Women's Christian Temperance Union.

The household adhered to traditional Methodist ethics: no drink, no swearing, no loose talk. It was also Sabbatarian: Sunday entailed no work. My mother told me that she took out her

²¹ WPJ, 18.

²² WPJ, 31.

knitting on a visit to Cairo, sitting on the porch. "Marian, dear," said Grandmother quietly, "we don't knit on Sundays."

There were no official vacations, in the modern sense of the word, no break from the hard work of running the family and serving the church. The family did get away every summer, however, traveling by train to a two-week summer "camp meeting"—that is, a revival—at Indian Springs near Atlanta where Grandmother and other church women spent their "vacation" cooking at the old hotel for "table after table of hungry people [who] ate fried chicken with the same zest that they listened to the preaching and praying."²³

Food was a big part of home life. My father described vividly the long communal work days of cutting and cooking sugar cane for syrup, and of hog-killing and butchering, and the well-stocked pantry full of canned goods, especially Grandmother's wild blackberry jelly, brought out with a homemade loaf of bread on a summer evening "after we had eaten all the prepared supper and were still hungry from working in the fields."²⁴ Even as late as 1935, Grandmother was making the jelly: she wrote on May 30 of that year that "the blackberries are coming in, and I hope next week to get my jelly made."

Grandmother canned tomatoes, vegetables, and preserves, and made most of the clothes for the family ("she was a magnificent seamstress"). Hard work was something she and Grandfather both expected of life, and of their children as well. With little spendable cash, and a difficult and weather-dependent business to run, they ensured that the family would prosper: my father wrote, "We held our own with our wealthier relatives, and when the time came we all went to college."

In a picture of my grandparents, probably from the early 1930s, Grandfather stands nearer to the camera, in focus; Grandmother behind him, a little blurred. She looks directly at the camera, faintly smiling. He stands more forcefully with head tilted and a set to the jaw that I recognize in others in my family. The bowtie and white shirt seem to have been a signature outfit. Perhaps Grandmother made his shirts; I believe she made most of her own dresses.



Grandmother and Grandfather.

My father used to tell me often, and proudly, of his parents' financial support for higher education for all their children, with money raised by mortgaging

²³ WPJ, 33. [Indian Springs Holiness Camp Meeting](#) still operates, and apparently the old hotel is still there.

²⁴ WPJ, 42.

the house and land at Magnolia, for college and even for professional school for the boys (medical school for Walter, law school for Joe, and a doctorate for my father).



Grandmother (on the right) with two friends, perhaps her sisters.

Several of Grandmother's brothers and sisters stayed in the Cairo area, and the letters mention her Powell family a number of times.



At Magnolia, with Roddenbery grandchildren Rebecca and Julien Jr.



August 7, 1944, with niece Julia Powell (daughter of Grandmother's brother William) and granddaughter Martha Roddenbery.



My grandparents at the Massachusetts home of my aunt Lucretia, probably 1938. The twin babies are my cousins Lucretia and Elizabeth; the boy in front is Harry Hoover.

Grandfather and Grandmother traveled north several times. Here they are with their Hoover grandchildren in Massachusetts. The house is the modernist home that Uncle Herb designed and built on Trapelo Road in Lincoln. This being New England, it must be summertime, probably 1938. Grandmother would have been just short of 70, grandfather about 83.

My family drove down from Ohio to visit Grandmother in the spring of 1950.



April, 1950: My mother holding Rebecca Roddenbery, with me and my brothers Hal, Stephen, and Chris.



From left: Julien Roddenbery, Martha Roddenbery, Grandmother, Julien Roddenbery Jr.

Grandmother died three years after Grandfather, in September 1951. My father writes that he visited her in the Cairo hospital in that summer.

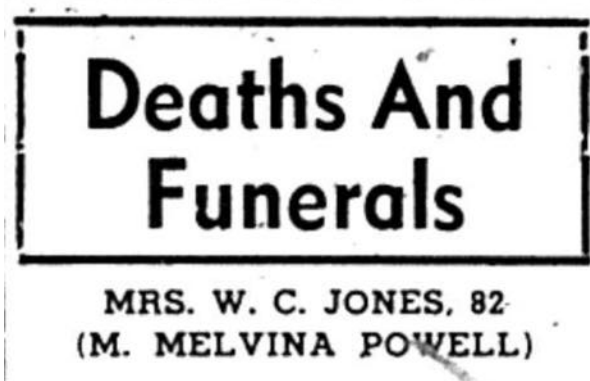
Grandmother was buried beside Grandfather in the cemetery in Cairo.²⁵



My cousin Rebecca Roddenbery with her great grandmother and her grandmother (Margaret) in the spring of 1951.

²⁵ Later, after her death, the town built a new hospital on land given to the town by my father and his siblings in memory of their mama and papa.

From *The Cairo Messenger*, Grandmother's obituary:²⁶



A shadow of gloom hovered over the entire community Friday, September 7, when news of the death of Mrs. Walter Crisp [actually, Colquitt] (Martha Melvina Powell) Jones was received; her soul departed this life as the sun was beginning to shed its rays over the eastern horizon. Although she had been seriously ill for about four weeks her passing was not expected.

A beautiful and loving tribute was paid to the deceased at the funeral service Saturday morning by the Rev. Albert S. Trulock, of Valdosta. Her pastor, the Rev. G. N. Rainey, was in charge of the service at the First Methodist Church. Interment followed in the Cairo cemetery.

Pallbearers were: Albert Walker, J. A. Powell II, Robert E. Jones, W. J. Powell, of Thomasville, Obie Jones, of Moultrie, and Wayne Walker, of Tampa, Fla.

Mrs. Jones was born in Thomas, now Grady, county on January 20, 1869, the daughter of the late William and Lucretia Brockett Powell. Being reared in a [C]hristian home she identified herself with the church in chil[d]hood and continued to be faithful to its services and activities, through precept and example, until she was taken ill recently. As the end was approaching she looked upward and said "Heavenly Father, take me home."

In 1892 the deceased became the bride of the Rev. Walter C. Jones, an itinerant Methodist preacher of South Georgia. After being a most gracious and lovable parsonage dame for fifteen years the Rev. Jones['] health failed, he became super-numerated, and they located in Cairo. Rev. Jones died here on August 1, 1948. To this union five children were born, all of whom survive, they are Dr. W. C. Jones, Miami, Fla., W. Powell Jones, Gates Mills, Ohio, Joseph M. Jones, Chevy Chase, Md., Mrs. J. B. Roddenbery, Cairo, and Mrs. H. B. Hoover, South Lincoln,

²⁶ Undated, but probably Monday, Sept. 10, 1951. Courtesy of Roddenbery Memorial Library, Cairo.

Mass.: surviving also are fourteen grandchildren, two great grandchildren, one sister, Mrs. W. A. Peterson, Mount Vernon, and one brother, Dr. W. A. Powell, San Francisco, Calif.

In 1907 upon returning to Cairo, where she continued to make her home until her death, she and her esteemed husband immediately became active in the church and civic life of the community. Their home was always open to preachers, many have partaken of their hospitality. By her sincere interest in people she endeared herself to countless friends and relatives who will miss her cheerful smile. She was honored for her untiring services in church and civic organizations a number of times.

Arrangements were handled by Forsyth-Bearden Funeral Home.

Letters from Mama

At the time that Grandmother was writing these letters, Grandfather was in failing health. Grandmother was 14 years younger, and still in good health. All but one of the five children had left home—Walter for Miami, my father for Cleveland, Joe for Washington, D.C., and Lucretia for Massachusetts. Margaret, the second child, was the only one close to home, married and living in Cairo. I imagine that Grandmother must have been writing similarly regular letters to the other far-away children, and that those letters would have been as personal, news-filled, and loving as these to my parents.

Let's start with Christmas. There are several letters around Christmas and New Year's Day, occasioned partly by the boxes of presents that my mother had sent to Cairo.

This one was undated:

And now Christmas is over, and you know what a let-down feeling you have after eating turkey and all the good things that go with it, but for me I never tire of turkey, it is good to the last bone.

Another letter of January 1935 replied to a letter from my mother about her first Christmas with her first baby. Grandmother wrote: "*Dear little Hal was too little to enjoy it all, but I know he meant everything to you all.*"

In the packet with Grandmother's letters was a letter from my Aunt Margaret (Roddenbery), the only sibling still living in Cairo. It too was dated January 1935, and shows how the families kept family ties strong with letters and presents. Aunt Margaret was pregnant, "waiting" as she says "for 'baby sister' (maybe)." The child was my cousin Martha. My mother had boxed and sent presents for her other four children—a yellow suit for Albert, a dress for Rebecca, and books for the older boys Ralph and Julien Jr.—as well as books for Margaret and her husband Julien.²⁷

For Grandmother's birthday that year (January 1935), my mother had sent a linen tablecloth. My mother loved linen, washing, ironing, and using it. And Grandmother thanked her warmly:

²⁷ Julien Roddenbery was born to a longtime Cairo family and now ran a successful food business in peanut butter, cane syrup, pickled watermelon rind, dill pickles, and wonderful hot pickled okra; Cairo called itself "the okra capitol of the world"). I remember fondly the boxes we would get from Cairo at Christmas when I was growing up—except for the cans of soggy boiled peanuts, which I never could stomach. In later years, the company switched their peanut butter from the excellent sugar-less, non-homogenized peanut butter to something indistinguishable from Skippy, to our dismay.

I certainly do thank you. It is something that I needed as most of my cloths had worn thin. I prize it very highly for I know the value of good linen. I hope you can see it on the table and help me enjoy it soon.

A few years later, in 1939, around New Year's Day, Grandmother sent another post-Christmas letter.²⁸ It began with the same phrase as her earlier letter ("*and now Christmas is over*") and briefly touched on the sadness of time and change, then made a lovely segue, evoking her abundant sense of patience and gratitude.

And now Christmas is over, and we begin a new year. Of course the Christmas's are not like they use[d] to be, to us, when we had the big house and all the children came home, but it is well enough it is not [that is, that Christmas is not the same as it used to be], for each little bird has flown, and have their own little nest, and little ones, to make Christmas for. I always enjoy the many cards and of course each package as they arrive, so I am still a child, in that respect. I did not open my packages until Saturday night, for as Christmas was on Sunday, I could not get through with everything and go to church & Sunday school. Your packages were waiting, with lovely trimmings, and my how beautiful my robe, Oh, I feel so dressed up and I thank you all and I promise to wear it, and Daddy's sweater is beautiful also, and fits nicely, and he really needed a new one, so it will come in nicely, and the boys['] pictures are precious, such a good picture of both of them, and Christopher [my brother, born in 1937] has grown so much, and gets more like his Dad every day. We had so many nice things, such as a new radio from the Roddenberys, a lovely silver mounted comb and brush, with my name, and a beautiful traveling bag, for Daddy from Miami, Lucretia sent a bushel basket of Virginia apples, to Daddy and two sweaters for me, and Joseph & Francis was [sic] so busy getting ready for their trip, they sent a check, and then the stocking, and socks, and handkerchiefs and bath mats, & etc.

I love the rush of excitement in her prose, writing about the gifts from all the family—from my parents, from Margaret [Roddenbery], living next door, from Lucretia in Massachusetts and Joseph and his wife Fran in Washington.

"*When we had the big house. . .*," Grandmother wrote. This was Magnolia, the house Grandfather had built, and which burned down early in 1934. This letter described the fire first-hand. Most of the letters began with "My dear Ones," but this began with "My Precious Ones."

²⁸ The letter is undated, but refers to my brother Chris, born in November 1937, and to Christmas falling on Sunday, which happened in 1938.

A new experience has come to us today, one that I had hoped would not come in my lifetime. Papa & I were sitting in the room by the fire, looking over the mail when a negro boy called said the house was on fire. I ran to the back, and saw smoke and flames coming out of the little lattice on top. I turned in the fire alarm and by that time some [people] were coming in, I told them to take everything out of the house, for I knew we could not put out the fire. When the fire truck got there, if they could have got the hose or the pump, they could have saved the lower story, but [can't read this] they could not get to it. There was a strong east wind, and it did not take long to burn. We saved everything downstairs, even the stove, refrigerator, bathtub, but nothing upstairs. Of course it is a great loss, so many things that money could not buy, but we are thankful to save as much as we did. We have 5000 on building and 500 on furniture [in insurance]. As we saved part of the furniture we may not be able to get all that. I am sure it caught from a short circuit in the attic, for there is where it was when I first saw it. We had not had a big fire [that is, in the sitting room], and there was no chance of a spark. Everybody was very kind, and Julien and Margaret are marvelous. Julien had every[thing] moved in at once, and we will store things for the present. We are at Margaret's, and Papa has held up remarkably well. I hate it on your all account, for it was a lovely place, & I did hope it would not burn. But it only teaches us that the things of this world are perishable, but we both have a mansion in heaven and some day we will go where moth and rust don't not [sic] corrupt nor fires destroy the streets of gold. I shall write you again in a few as soon as we can think. Don't worry about us, for there will be some way, and we are both spared to each other, and have you dear children to think about.

Remarkably, Grandmother sat down to write this on the very day that the fire occurred; and I would guess that the same night, or the next morning, three others were written to tell the other siblings of their loss. She was direct, even almost blunt: *"it did not take long to burn."* She was also pragmatic: cause, sequence, consequences—particularly financial consequences like insurance. She turned naturally to the salvationist language of revival preaching, *"where moth and rust do not corrupt, nor fires destroy the streets of gold."* She was sensitive to what my parents must have been feeling on reading the letter: *"I hate it on your all account."* She ended with a moving consolation: *"Don't worry about us, for there will be some way."* She had a practical faith, and a sense of what mattered: *"we are both spared to each other."* And at the very end of the letter, she reached out in love: *"we . . . have you dear children to think about."*

As she made clear at the beginning of the letter, it was not a tragedy, but "an experience," unwelcome to be sure, but one that very quickly – the same day— became part of her life, to be seen in the perspective of larger events—her children's lives—and of eternity.

My father wrote this later, about the fire:

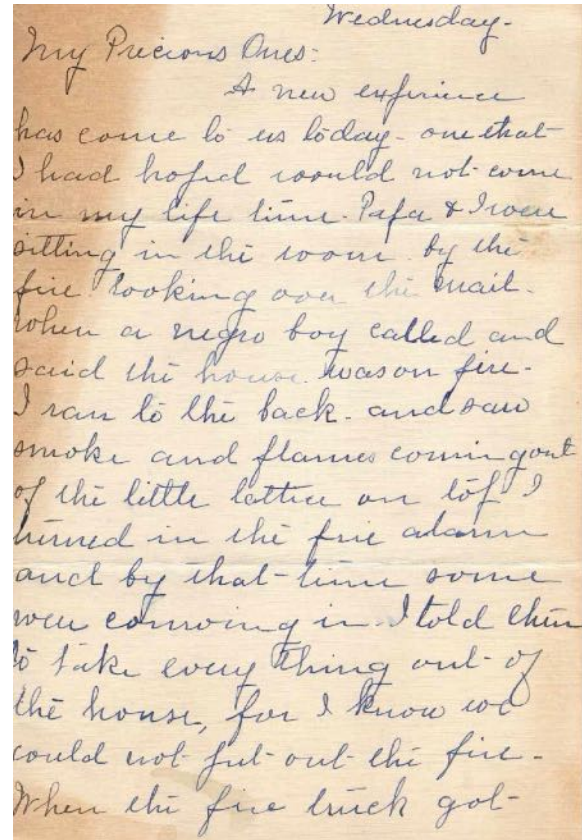
Ironically, it was the insurance paid us when our big dream home burned in 1934 that made it possible for us to meet the debt and save the place. But after all that was Papa's work, too— it was his dream and his hard work that gave us the training and the advantages that few others in our circumstances would have dreamed of getting.²⁹

They "saved the place"—the land and the pecan grove and some outbuildings, but the house was uninhabitable. After the fire, my grandparents moved into town, apparently to an apartment. A letter dated June 1934 indicated that they were going back for the summer to what was left of Magnolia:

we are fixing up an out-house [that is, an out-building] out at the farm, and we are going out and camp for the summer. It has a good roof and we will be comfortable, and I think Papa will be better satisfied. Then maybe by the time summer is over, we can decide what will be best. I have had the house white-washed and screened, and when we get out there, I will write you more about it.

When the weather turned cold, in what I guess is the fall of 1934, they had to leave what she called "Magnolia Camp" in order to move back to town. They took a small apartment in the Cairo house of a Powell relative, Rosa Crawford:³⁰

We have decided for several reasons, we could not go to Miami this winter. We could not stay here [at Magnolia, I think] when it got cold, and Margaret



The opening page of the letter about the fire.

²⁹ WPJ 35.

³⁰ Rosa Crawford was my father's cousin, the daughter of Sarah Jane Powell Crawford ("Aunt Sally"), who had died recently.

& I talked about it and decided the apartment was the best thing for us for the winter, and so I have rented the apartment and will use my things, and hope it will seem like home. It is a good neighborhood and I am just hoping Papa will be better satisfied than anywhere else we could get. We will have a spare bed so if any of the children come, we will have plenty [of] room. Rosa needs us for she feels very much the loss of her mother, and I am sure she loves me next to her mother. There is not another place in town we could get now.

I have promised Papa, if he is not satisfied, to come back out here [that is, at "Magnolia camp"] next spring, and fix up the camp so it would be comfortable, and we would not have to move. That is one of the worst things about the fire, it broke up the home, and at our age, and condition, it is hard to get adjusted. We expect to move about the middle of the month. We have had the two magnolias cut down, and the oak on north side of the house. One side of the oak was burned, and we have it cut into house wood for the winter. We have sold some of the brick, but will have enough to build a chimney if we decide we want one next spring. Building a chimney would not solve the problem now for it would all have to be ceiled [?] and divided into rooms, but we could really make it comfortable with the roof we have, for 300 or 400 hundred [sic] dollars. The nuts [from the pecan grove] are quite discouraging, and we cannot tell what will be the result. We are very dry, and the nuts have scabbed, and we cannot tell how many saleable nuts we will have. The MoneyMakers and Moores [types of pecans] are opening, and we will go over them next week [that is, inspect them?]. Slater [Wight, another grower] has just returned from Texas where he attended the national nut growers meeting, but I do not know whether he has any idea about the price or not. He will not have anything to do with our nuts, unless we care to sell to him. We have a good many oil nuts [that is, not pecans but tung nuts] and they say we are going to get something out of them this year. The plan is to have them shelled here and sent to Gainesville FLA to have them crushed – here is hoping. Papa & I are both well. I think our camp life this summer has been good for both of us, and I feel sure we will be well fitted for the winter.

Tung oil trees, introduced from China by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 1905, were an additional income crop that had been planted at Magnolia.³¹

My grandparents seemed to have considered living with my Uncle Walter, a surgeon in Miami. They did make a visit to Miami at some point, a visit that included a trip to the Florida Keys as well: "*We went down on the Keys last year when we were in Miami, and I said then 'there was too much water there for me.'*" They did not move to Miami.

Their income still depended on the crops at the farm, so even with Magnolia gone, things needed to be looked after. At New Years 1935, Grandmother wrote about the work of managing the place:

Christmas week I had to go out the place, to install a new pump jack to the tune of [\$]16.20, so about the time I think I am through, there is something else to be done. The man Taylor that lived on the place last year got a government farm and has moved, so I have just rented the house and will have the fields plowed in the spring. There is [are] some fence post[s] must be put in. I do not believe we are going to get anything out the oil nuts. I have sold most of the old brick. Like conditions are, it is very hard to collect rents from the little houses. I am trying to sell the cows, as we have no one there now to feed or look after them.

Always "*something else to be done.*" Grandmother worked hard to manage the property in this sudden transition after the fire. The well needed to be in working order, the fields plowed, the house of a tenant farmer rented out, fence posts repaired, nuts harvested, bricks sold (recovered from the burned house), cows fed and sold, decisions to be made—and all this in the depths of the Depression.

By the summer of 1935, they had decided to settle in town, buying a house on North Broad Street next door to Margaret. The letter Grandmother wrote about this in June showed both her involvement in the details and her anxiety about the wisdom of the decision. They had paid \$1500 for the house, and she worried that it might have been too much:

Well, I guess we have bought the place next to Margaret, the Mack Johnson house. It is a five roomed house, and is livable. Of course you have to live in a house to know all the defects, but we can change it, when we are able. June [Julien Roddenbery, Margaret's husband] thought 1500.00 too much for the place, as the lot was small, 51 x 250 ft, and we tried to get it for 1400.00 but they would not consider it at all, so I deposited a check and the papers have

³¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vernicia_fordii

been sent off, and Tom Wight said it might be two or three weeks before the papers come back, but he thinks we will get it, and the family in the house will vacate Oct 1st. The place would have been sold long ago, but June owns the driveway, and he would not sell any of it, hence they would not buy. For us of course it [the driveway] won't matter. In talking to John Croffs he said he considered it very cheap and others of our friends feel the same way, so I hope we haven't made a mistake. It really seems like the only thing possible. With a small crop like we have this year, I think I will be able to meet the [down] payment, 400.00, and the rest in the next three years, at 6 percent. Papa just had to have a home, and I think he will be satisfied, while he [would] rather go out home [that is, live at the farm], he realizes this is best.

Clearly, Grandmother thought principally of Grandfather's contentment (the word she uses several times is "satisfied"). Staying connected to "the place"—Magnolia—must have figured strongly in Grandfather's sense of satisfaction. By October 1935, they were about to move into their own home in town. The letter showed her exhaustion at organizing all this—making the move, and making some money off the "place":

We are still at Margaret's. The folks moved out of the house on the 10th and we are doing a little painting inside, and it looks like we never will get things together again. We are so discouraged with the nuts. I am almost sorry I ever bought the place, but it did look like we had to do something, and I still think it was the [only?] thing we could do. You could not rent a desirable place and after anyone has had a home it is hard to be satisfied in two rooms. The nuts get worse and worse [this may refer to the tung nuts, or perhaps the pecans]. We are not going to have half as many as we had last year, and the price is much less. I have never seen the trees shed their leave[s] so early and the nuts are really not there. Last year we had just begun gathering nuts, and went on till just before Thanksgiving. It is very dry here and whether that has anything to do with it or not, I do not know. We have finished gathering the MoneyMakers [a pecan cultivar, as are Stuarts, Monroes, and Frotschers, mentioned later], had a little over 3000 lbs. You have a little over 300 lbs. [my father had invested in the grove] I have sold 2500 and only got 8 ¼ [cents per pound?] which was the top of the market. They are small and some light ones, and while around here there are not many nuts, the crop generally is very large, and Texas has a bumper crop. Slater [Wight]'s were so light, he sold his whole crop of M. Makers for 5 cts, but last year we got 12 cts, so you see the difference. I am not going to sell any more until I finish gathering. They are only giving 11 cts for Stuarts. I

don't think now we will have much over 1000 lbs of Stuart, then some Monroes, and a few Frotschers that I am afraid will be light, so you see how short the crop is. It will take about all we get to pay interest and taxes. It looks like the nuts has gone to the bad. So I do not know what to do, that is our only income, so we may have to call on you boys for a little help after Christmas, but we will wait, and see how we come out. . . . I don't suppose it would pay to try and sell the Mmakers up there – I mean your Money Makers [that is, to send his part of the crop north for him to sell there].

The finances sound pretty dire, and they must well have needed some help from "you boys." Grandmother later gratefully acknowledged a check that my father had sent her to help out. Even with the worries, she loved writing about babies, telling my father that his sister Lucretia had written: *"Henry weighed 18 lbs, so he is some boy, eh! They [Lucretia's family] have commenced building, but will not try to go out [to Lincoln, west of Cambridge where they were living] before spring, which is a wise decision."*

Grandmother also stayed busy taking care of her Cairo grandchildren. She wrote to my mother from Margaret's house, where she was taking care of the four Roddenbery children (Martha, the last, was to be born the next spring).

. . . the days go by without a quiet moment in which to write a letter, especially here where there are four children in and out, and Albert at the age when he is in everything. While we are here, Margaret can go [away for a break] on short notice and she enjoys getting off with Julien without any of the children. Four children is quite a responsibility. They are out of school, now and hardly know what to do with themselves. . . .

. . . I wish I could slip in and see all the frilly little things you have for Peter or Barbara, as the case may be.³² I know you have enjoyed making them. You are fortunate to have so many hand-me-downs. Don't set your heart on a boy even if the Dr. does think so, for I think that is a thing no one knows, until the child is born. As the time draws nearer, I shall be thinking of you. Joseph was born in Aug. and it was so hot, and especially the two weeks in bed, but you will have electric fans, and cool the atmosphere of the room, and I hope you get along all right. You will soon be celebrating your first anniversary, June 26th [actually June 21], but I guess you won't feel like having your bridal party. Anyway you and Powell can celebrate and know

³² "Peter" would be my brother Hal, whose formal name is Peter Hadley; the name "Barbara" for a girl baby would have been in honor of my mother's younger sister, my Aunt Bobby.

what a year of joy & bliss married life is, although there are trials and difficulties, which freighted with love, only makes the heart grow fonder. I hope you will have many happy anniversaries, and be spared each to the other for many many years.

My brother Hal was born August 14, 1934:

How I wish I could see you and dear little Hal this afternoon, and in my imagination I can hear his little voice as he cries for the touch of mother's hand. I hope you have both kept well, while Powell has been away [in Boston], and that you have continued to gain your strength, and will soon be yourself again. I hope you will be able to train Hal to be good and lie on the bed most of the time, which will be much better for him, as well as yourself. You will enjoy watching him grow from day to day, and every day you can see the smart little things he does, as no one else can. After all, what is any sweeter than an innocent little baby, and a mother love is next to divine love. God bless you, and help you to train the dear little one for his glory. Kiss him for his far away grandmother . . . blessings for our little Yankee grandbaby, I know he is a real wonder.

Another letter was written from Margaret's while Grandmother again cared for the grandchildren. It was clearly a lot of work, particularly as Albert was a special needs child, but Grandmother nevertheless found time to write to my mother:

Rebecca & Albert have a very good nurse, and we have a very good cook, but there is always plenty to do, and I keep busy. Albert has a bad foot (creeping eruptions) and he is restless at night, and requires a good deal of attention in the day. We are getting very good sugar cane now and the nurse has just taken them out in the swing and is feeding them some cane. You don't know anything about sugar cane, but Powell does and it is a great appetizer for children in early fall.

My mother seems to have confided in her mother-in-law, and Grandmother responded:

Too bad for you to have a backset [that is, setback] and faint, when you were getting along so nicely. It usually takes several weeks to gain your strength back, and I hope you will soon be strong and able to get out some before the cold weather begins. I am glad Hal is gaining and I know he grows sweeter every day. Nothing as sweet and innocent as a little baby. Sorry you had to wean him, for I think there is no picture quite as sweet as a babe at its mother's breast. Take care of yourself, for health is wealth.

As if taking care of four grandchildren at Margaret's wasn't enough, she reported that she also took on sewing them new clothes, using Margaret's new electric sewing machine.

The next spring, Grandmother wrote excitedly about my parents' plans to bring baby Hal to Cairo for a visit. In February or early March, she wrote, "*I think if you get to come the last of March you will see the azaleas and dogwood in full bloom . . . a kiss for my dear boy.*"

Another letter eagerly anticipated the visit: "*It is warm today and I hope you will get some real spring weather. I can hardly wait to see you all. . . . There is measles and whooping cough in town, but Hal is small and we can just keep him away from other children.*"

My Ohio grandmother, Cornelia Root Ginn, kept a written annal of her adult life, and it confirmed that "*Marian and Peter*³³ *took little Hal to Cairo to visit his grandparents.*"

In Cairo, soon after that visit, Margaret had her baby. On a Monday night in early April 1935, Grandmother wrote:

I am happy to be able to tell you, at 9:45 little Martha Roddenbery arrived in Cairo. She weighs eight lbs, and is a perfect baby. . . . Will write more later. We miss you all so much today, was so sweet for you all to come to see us.

My father had seen his parents often after moving north for graduate school. His brother Joe brought their parents north in June 1927 for my father's Harvard PhD graduation.³⁴ The next summer my father, who was then teaching at Harvard, drove to Cairo; at the end of that visit his younger sister Lucretia came back to Cambridge with him to live in his apartment and take classes at Radcliffe. She had graduated from Wesleyan Women's College and had a year of teaching school in Quitman but was ready for a change. She soon met my father's friend Herb Hoover, a young architect, and stayed north, first in Cambridge and eventually in Lincoln, Massachusetts.

Much later, my father wrote of that 1928 visit:

Papa and Mama were getting no younger, for that year he was 73 and she was thirteen years younger. That difference of thirteen years in their ages made a lot of difference from here on, for she was always ready to look after him. But at this time, it made little difference as they tried to keep the place together. There was now a heavy mortgage on the place, caused by my father's desire to see us though our higher education. Now that we were on our own, we were still not able to help out. But the place was still ours, as long as we could meet the payments, and they would not let the shadow disturb our homecoming. We ate

³³ "Peter" is my father, known by that nickname in the North.

³⁴ WPJ, 109.

our fried chicken and grits and gravy, rode through the countryside, welcomed our many relatives, and in general enjoyed ourselves.³⁵

The next year, 1929, my father and Lucretia drove to Cairo again:

Mama and Papa were still living in the old home place near the town of Cairo and in a way carrying on the nursery business that I had grown up in. They welcomed Cretia back to her old room, glad that she was so happy in her new engagement but sad when they thought of her living up in Massachusetts. By this time, they were reconciled to this and enjoyed her being with them at home.³⁶

Just after my mother and father had gotten engaged in February 1933, my mother went south to Thomasville, not far from Cairo, to visit her friend Helen Greene, whose family, like many wealthy Clevelanders, spent part of the winter in the south. The visit to Thomasville became the opportunity for her to meet her future in-laws for the first time. My father recalled:

I reminded her that my mother was in Cairo only fifteen miles away. So she [that is, my mother] called Mama [Grandmother] and made arrangements to go over, but Mama got confused about the day and was not expecting her. Nevertheless Mama made her feel welcome and told her what a good boy I was and how glad she was about it all.³⁷

After their marriage, in June 1933, my parents took a long honeymoon road trip, ending up in Cairo. It was my mother's first extended visit there. In my father's words:

We rested in Cairo in the old house where all trails met, where we absorbed the restfulness and easy living of Magnolia for the last time before it burned. Marian loved it with me, the long porch with the four columns where we sat and looked over the place, or enjoyed the great trees around it, the magnolias and the huge red oak tree by the road. We got acquainted with kinfolks all over town, Aunt Fannie, Aunt Jessie and Uncle Willie who looked after the ailments of the family, Aunt Eula and Uncle Lem, and Aunt Sally where we were to stay after the house was burned. It was a revelation to Marian, but not as much as the way we learned [sic] the black people, especially Viny who lived down below our house, Viny with at least six children but no husband, Viny who did our washing and ironing and part of the cooking.³⁸

³⁵ WPJ, 120.

³⁶ WPJ, 124.

³⁷ WPJ, 135.

³⁸ WPJ, 139

Shortly after baby Hal in Ohio and Martha in Cairo, came news from Massachusetts of Lucretia's first child, Harry (formally, Henry B. Hoover, Jr.). Grandmother wrote on May 30, 1935:

Dear Margaret has her hands full with two babies & Mary Lou [I'm not sure who this was]. We do not know what a day will bring forth. . . . [Lucretia] has been able to write herself and seems to have gotten along beautifully. A letter yesterday said she was giving enough milk for Henry Jr, and he had gained 6 oz. I guess she goes home today, and has a white girl that will stay all day. She was with her the week before she went to the Hospital, and she said she thought she would like her very well. Lucretia has never been used to white servants, and said she didn't know what to do with them, but I guess she will learn. Yes, I think they hope to build this summer [their home in Lincoln]. Herb has his plans about ready, and I think they hope to be ready by Sept, when their lease is out.

In the same letter, Grandmother comments about a picture of Hal at about 8 months old:

I am not surprised to see him standing, for he was so strong [that is, when he visited Cairo], and I told Marian I knew he would soon be pulling up. He will be walking by the time he is a year old. Tell Marian to save his little rompers as he outgrows them for Henry Jr.

In that same letter, Grandmother reminded my father of Grandfather's upcoming 80th birthday, June 26, 1935:

I want each of the children to write him a personal letter, no presents expected, but merely a note of love. He has fought bravely, under many difficulties, without any early advantages, and yet with a zeal and ambition for his children that but few have. And when we think of the three fine boys, who stand so well, and the noble daughters, then the in-laws and grandchildren, surely life has not been a failure. Of course we would love to have all the children and grandchildren here, but that is impossible, and I want you all to come when it suits you. All have been [here] this year except Lucretia and I guess it will be Christmas before she can get here. Don't refer to this in my letter [that is, my parents' regular letter to grandmother], but just make a note of it, and a few days before send the letter. I don't want him to know I wrote you.

About this time, my father sent his parents a short story he had written, perhaps containing some sexually explicit passages. The writing had not pleased his parents, and they told him so (that letter is missing). But Grandmother gave the matter a second thought:

Powell, I feel like we are due you an apology for our criticism on your story. I am reading "Lamb in his bosom," the new 1000 prize story³⁹ and it is full of expressions of things about girls like he [a character in my father's story] used which I objected to, but I find I am behind the times and you are up to date as it were, for I did not know they wrote in such strains, but judging from the popularity of this book, and I have never in my life heard such expressions as she uses, it must be what the people like to read. I haven't had time to read much of late years, and so I did not know the change in literature.

Later that year, Grandmother wrote my father for his 34th birthday:

The years roll by, only too fast for you now, for each mile post finds you one year older. But we would not like to be just the same, so that is a fault of nature, and we are all growing older. I hope you will have many many more happy birthdays. You have always been such a joy and blessing, and now in your own little family, you can watch them grow, and each year brings added joy, and before you know it Hal will be old enough to go to school. . . . I wish I could see Hal walking. He is a darling boy.

Grandmother often wrote with warmth about my parents' activities in the north. She never seemed envious or critical of my mother's wealth and lifestyle:

It was fine Marian that your horse should win a prize, and it must be fascinating to be able to ride well enough to go on a fox hunt.

The same letter went on to speak of their own contrasting activities in Cairo—church. . .

We are having an all day meeting at our church tomorrow, and expect Bishop Ainsworth to preach at 11 o'clock. We expect three or four hundred visitors, so we will have a busy day to feed the crowd.

. . .and farming. . .

We expect to begin gathering MoneyMakers Monday. They are opening earlier than they did last year. They do not look very good. Frotcher[s] are scabbed and we do not expect any good ones, and Papa says we won't have as many as we did last year. We just got the beans harrowed in this week.

³⁹ Caroline Miller, *Lamb in His Bosom*. Harper & Brothers, 1933. Grandmother explains that she did not buy the book: "We are reading Mrs. Roddenbery's book"; that is, it was loaned to them by her daughter Margaret's mother-in-law. It was a Pulitzer Prize winning novel about the antebellum South.

Writing in March of 1935, she congratulated my father on his second book of scholarship, focusing on the hard work that would still be entailed: *"So glad you have your book in the press, and I am anxious to see it. I guess you still have a lot of hard work connected with it, reading proof & etc."* The book, when published by Harvard in 1937, had this dedication:

TO
MY FATHER AND MOTHER
WHO DEPRIVED THEMSELVES OF COMFORTS TO
EDUCATE THEIR CHILDREN
THIS BOOK IS LOVINGLY DEDICATED⁴⁰

In the same letter, Grandmother commented on another aspect of her northern son's life, so different from hers: *"I believe Mrs. Ginn is to sail the 9th and I hope she will have a good trip. I would like to travel although I never had the opportunity, but maybe some day I shall yet."* It was to be my Ohio grandmother's last trip overseas, a cruise through the Mediterranean Sea and then by train to Paris and London. Later that summer, Grandmother Jones wrote my father, again mentioning travel: *"I know you will be glad when summer school is over, and you and Marian can go up to Canada as you plan. I have always wanted to go to Canada but I guess not now."*

The pecans were always on Grandmother Jones's mind:

I am certainly disgusted with the nuts we sent you all, that is if they are like some Papa was cracking out for me today. I thought they were good, and the ones I sampled were, but the ones we were shelling today had black spots on them and were hard to shell. I certainly am sorry about it, but I did not know it, and the Frotchers were so poor, I thought these others would be better. Well, I wonder that we got as much out of the nuts, when I see how sorry they are. I plan to have the groves plowed up and sowed in beans.

One consequence of the loss of the big house at the farm was that Grandmother could not host all her family again. She wrote to my father sometime in 1935 about changes like that:

It is indeed sad, the breaking up of the family, but that is in accord with nature and God's will, so we must not murmur. I [would] much rather see my loved ones go on, when they are helpless, and no hopes for them to recover. I hope you will always feel about the family as you do now, but are so scattered and when Daddy and I am gone, it will be much harder to keep up

⁴⁰ William Powell Jones, *Thomas Gray, Scholar*. Harvard University Press, 1937.

the connections. Margaret living here will have to be the meeting place. They all write to me but you know how hard it is to keep up a correspondence with them all, but promise me you will always try and keep in touch with them when we are gone.

This letter was probably written early in 1937:

We had a nice ride this afternoon in the country with Bro. Blitch & wife and the woods and fields looked so pretty, we even saw some red maple blooming. Papa loves to ride, and we go out the country roads, and he enjoys talking about the farms, and tells many interesting things, that happen[ed] along some of the roads when he was a young preacher.

So glad Mother [that is, my Ohio grandmother] could be with you all for Christmas, but sorry she had to go back to the hospital, for another operation. I am sure it has been very trying on her to have to undergo so much, but she is still young, and it may mean yet many years of usefulness in her home & church. I know it has been hard on you, having to divide your time between your father & mother and then your home. Do write me how she stood the operation, and how she is feeling. We never forget to pray for her, and we talk to God about her every day, and we know she is in His hands.

Grandmother Ginn died January 14, 1937, just days before turning 60, and just about the time that I think this letter was written. The next year, my grandfather Ginn died as well. About the "going away of Mr. Ginn," Grandmother Jones wrote: "The workmen die but the work goes on, and he has been wise in doing things, that will live on and on."

The next New Year (1939), Grandmother reflected on change:

A "happy New Year" to you all, and may blessings abound, as God sees fit, and may we all have a more abundant life for service. We feel very thankful that we have been spared thus far, and at our age with remarkable health. May we be able to live a more abundant life in these declining years.

Three years later, in January of 1942, Grandmother and Grandfather celebrated their fiftieth anniversary. My father was in the middle of a teaching year made more than usually stressful by the onset of war and could not get to Cairo for the occasion. Grandmother wrote a letter of thanks to "My dear Powell" for his "sweet letter":

. . . of course we were sorry you could not be here in person, but your words of confidence cheered our hearts and we know you were here in thought. . . . It was an unusual event. When you consider that your father was thirty-six

years old before he married, to raise a family of five children, and educate them, with very little means, & then celebrate his fiftieth anniversary, I think it quite unusual.

They had not held a party, since none of the scattered children could be there. Instead, Margaret took them with a couple of friends to the fishing town of St. Marks on the Gulf coast in Florida, "*and we had a nice fish & oyster dinner.*"

[Grandfather] enjoyed telling them many things that had happened on his trips to the coast. One of the things he told them was about our trip to the coast in the covered wagon, and old George & the double buggy, and about [how] you and Joseph fell in the hole of water when you went to water old George [a horse]. You will have to tell Hal about your experience, I guess you were about Hal's size. Well, we may get back to the horse & buggy days, if the war lasts many years, & they can't get rubber. The war is making many changes, and we do not know what a day will bring forth. . . . I shall save your letter and put it in my treasured papers.

The letter may have reminded my father about this anecdote, for he too recalled it four years later when he wrote the first chapter of his memoirs, about the family's two-week horse-and-buggy fishing trip to Spring Creek near St. Marks:

There was a sink hole near our camp where we used to water the mule and old George. One Sunday morning Joe and I, in our clean clothes put on to honor Sunday, rode old George to this sink hole to water. He drank as usual at the shallow end but instead of turning round and going out the same way he decided to go up the steep banks. Joe and I slid off his rump into the dark water, clean clothes and all. They tell me that Joe laughed and I cried, but all I remember is being boiling mad at old Macmillan, our farmer who took care of the mules because he stood on the bank laughing at us instead of pulling us out.⁴¹

In 1944, Grandmother looked forward to a visit from my mother and father. Grandmother efficiently spelled out the train connections in Savannah, laying out contingency plans for if connections were missed. If they had to take the night train, she wrote, "*one of the policemen will give you the key, and you will see a light on at Margaret's where you will find a nice room and bed waiting for you.*" After the visit, my father had flown back north from the airport at

⁴¹ WPJ, 22.

Tallahassee: *"Daddy [Grandfather] stood the trip to Tallahassee very well and still talks about seeing you get on the plane."*⁴²

Harry Hoover, Lucretia's oldest child, born in 1935, wrote me after reading a draft of this history:

These letters begin four days after I was born; their writer dies when I was a junior in high school. During that time, even as a young child, I knew of Grandma's love, both from personal experience in Cairo and through my mother, sitting at her writing desk in our kitchen in Lincoln, or turning to her own "chillun" to share yet another anecdote of Cairo childhood. If these were not reminders enough, there were the Bibles, each inscribed with our names in gold letters on the covers, given (as I was told) to every umpteenth grandchild. I wonder if some of the energy of and inspiration for this love came from the large families both grandparents were born into and grew up within, 14 and 11 children respectively, not to mention Malachi's one of 10 himself.

Harry recalled his wartime visit to Georgia:

Mother took us south to Cairo to get out of our father's hair as he struggled to reinvent himself during WW2. Since Walter Jones [Grandfather] died in 1948, my recollections of both of my maternal grandparents would relate to our second visit to Cairo, which I believe was in 1944. (Father drove our whole family down to Cairo in our 1940 Plymouth just before the war, when I was 5 or 6, I guess.) I recall Granddad taking me to a "fishing hole" or creek by driving his 1936 (ca.) black Chevrolet north up Broad Street and turning off somewhere beyond the last houses out of town, not built up very much in those days. I don't remember what fish were caught or who did the cleaning.

I remember Granddad slowly shuffling out to his corner armchair in the living room in the morning dressed in his dark three-piece suit with bow tie. Grandma would make a charcoal fire in a stove in a back room as well as in the living room. I remember the thud-thud-thud of her making butter in the churn on her back porch.

I wish I could remember if it was still wartime when mother squired us three children to Cairo via the all-night Atlantic Coast Line, switching to the

⁴² I think that only my father took the plane, probably to D.C., for my mother was reluctant to fly until she had to do so two decades later to attend back-to-back graduations of my brother Stephen in Connecticut and me in Ohio. Later in life she flew many times on her travels with my father.

Montgomery train after a grueling six-hour wait in Savannah. Grandma would be waiting on the late-afternoon platform in Cairo.

I also wish I had a recollection of Granddad preaching at his brick Methodist Church in the south of town. Or tending to his pecan grove.

Mother warned us not to sing "Marching Through Georgia" in Granddad's presence—not that there was much chance of that. I don't think we knew the song that she thought would remind him of Sherman, but it was just in case. (Granddad was nine years old when the Civil War ended). Grandma did not permit smoking in her house; mother had to smoke out on the lawn.

I think my mother took after her own mother as the disciplinarian in our family. She meted out the spankings, (ominously scheduling them for before or after dinner, whichever we preferred), leveled a sentence of incarceration in one's room, dealt out the admonishments (all so instinctively effective) following a slip in proper behavior. She it was who accused me (raised eyebrows, a faint smile) of "teasing his sisters" or looked over the table with a level gaze, "You don't know you need salt until you've tasted it." But my mother was, for us three children, also the raconteur and introducer of Cairo life, remembering the groans of Baptist worship across the street, eschewing play on Sundays, leaving to go outside to smoke, warning against mentioning "Sherman" in Granddad's presence as we prepared to leave for Cairo, telling of Uncle Billy's loss-of-leg at the Peach Orchard (never "at Gettysburg"), and the black servants serving fish roe and grits. All of this helped to make Cairo a bit less foreign to us when we alighted from that Savannah-to-Montgomery train, squinting in dusty noon.

Grandma did join our family during a visit to Ponte Vedra, Florida,⁴³ the last time I saw her. I remember she encouraged me to eat ice cream, when for some reason I was reluctant to try. I remember missing her very much when we were last at Ponte Vedra in 1959.

There was love in this family: the only time I saw my mother cry was in our kitchen in Lincoln when she'd just learned Grandma had died.

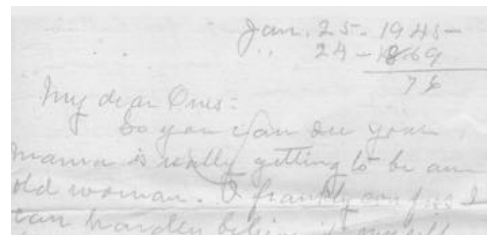
Winters were hard on Grandfather in his old age, even the relatively mild winters of southern Georgia. Grandmother wrote this on Jan. 16, 1944:

Today is so bright and so nice after dinner. Margaret said Daddy just must get out, so while the sun was shining, and before someone came in, was the

⁴³ Where Margaret and Julien Roddenbery had a beach house.

time to go. He just dreads the cold wet weather, and when he can't get out for a ride, it makes it very hard for him. He is not as well as when Walter was here and when Wayne saw him, he went to church the Sunday they were here, on the 12th and they all thought he looked so well, but we had had beautiful fall weather, and he was out every day. He has been suffering with his aches and pains, and some days looks like he can hardly stay up. Rainy cold weather makes quite a difference in his feelings.

Grandmother's 76th birthday was Jan. 25, 1944. She had a phone call that day from one or both of my parents, and the next day, she wrote them. At the top, she put the date of the letter, and underneath it, the date of her birth, and subtracted the two to get her age, 76. *"So you can see your Mama is really getting to be an old woman. I frankly confess I can hardly believe it my self. Of course I realize I am not as strong as I use to be, but I still love to work, but find I forget, and get tired, two signs of old age."*



The opening of Grandmother's birthday letter, written (unusually) in pencil.

Grandmother began the letter in pencil, not pen, because she and Grandfather were sitting in a car outside Finney General Hospital, an Army hospital, near Thomasville.⁴⁴ My uncle Joe and his wife Fran were visiting; Joe had been at work all day *"replanting his oil trees"*—that is, his tung nut trees. Fran, who did Red Cross work in Washington, D.C., wanted to visit the hospital. *"It is an immense hospital, and it would take a day I am sure to walk through each ward. We saw several walking or sitting out in the sunshine. I did not go because I can hardly stand to see the crippled boys."* The war weighed on Grandmother's mind, in part because her eldest grandsons, Margaret's boys Julien Jr. and Ralph, were both in the Navy, Julien on active duty "in the Pacific somewhere," and Ralph about to be sent to sea after training at Chapel Hill.

[Ralph] will possibly be able to come home for a few days, and then we do not know. They are dear boys, so full of promise, but thousands of dear young boys just as dear are giving their lives, and we can but say, what for. War is an awful thing, and how any sane person could ever think of such a thing, is more than I can understand. Greed and hate must be the cause.



Julien, Jr. and Ralph Roddenbery.

On Valentine's Day, 1944, Grandmother amusedly reported on her granddaughter Martha and her Valentines:

⁴⁴ https://georgiahistory.com/ghmi_marker_updated/finney-general-hospital/

I know you will remember when you were school children, what Valentine's day meant and especially when you were old enough to send Valentines to the ones you really liked best, and didn't want everyone to know it. Well, all those things just go on today, just the same.

My father occasionally came home to Ohio from his war work in Washington. This letter from Grandmother to my mother is dated Sunday, June 4 [1944], just two days before D-Day:

I know those few days that Powell spent with you and the boys, went by all too fast, for I know how many things you tried to accomplish. . . how nice for the children to have Daddy at home, and, oh what it meant to him. . . . [Grandfather] is about the same. He can't walk much, and some days his appetite just fails, but he is still able to read the papers, and rests fairly well. I am thankful to say that I am still able to keep things going and feel real well.

Three days later, on June 7, she wrote to my father, back in Washington.

I guess you got a little sunshine, that you enjoyed, and I fear the work was a little hard, as you had not been able to get out [that is, come home to Ohio] in so long. Anyway you got acquainted with your family, and the boys realized for a few days, how nice to have Daddy at home, and dear little Stephen, I know, would look in amazement, hardly realizing who it was.

Stephen (born 1941) was just turning three, and his father had been away at least a year of that time. Grandmother reported the reaction to D-Day in Cairo:

. . . while there was no demonstrating downtown, everyone had a very serious look and we felt that each was offering a prayer. In the afternoon the Mayor sent a notice for all business to cease, and all the churches opened and prayers, both white and colored, and the churches were full, and a [sic] very earnest prayers were made and will continue to ascend to the throne of grace from which cometh our help. Daddy & I walked over to the Baptist church, and while he was a little tired when we got home he would not go to bed until he heard Pres. Roosefeld's [sic] prayer at 9 o'clock, and he said amen & thank God for such a leader in times like these.

Three years earlier, my grandparents had traveled north to Ohio for my brother Stephen's baptism, performed by Grandfather. I love how Grandmother looks so endearingly towards her infant grandson Steve.



In Gates Mills, Ohio, at Stephen's baptism, with my mother and father. May or June, 1941.

In July 1944, remembering this visit and the baptism, Grandmother wrote:

It is always a joy to hear about the fine boys, and how full of life they are. Hal and Chris I am sure are a lot of help, and do many errands for you. Dear little Stephen still holds his place for he was such a dear little fellow, and if I mention Stephen, Daddy always remembers he baptized him, and how sweet he was.

On Oct. 16, 1944, Grandmother wrote:

We rode over to Thomasville Saturday afternoon with Margaret, for the first time we have been over there for a long time. Daddy sat in the car on Broad St, and watched the crowd go by and even though there was no one he knew, it was interesting to him, he can still see the funny side. He sleeps fairly well, but is not able to walk much. He will have to stay in most of the winter.

The last letter in the packet is to my father, written Dec. 12, 1946, two days before I was born.

I was glad to get your letter a few days ago, and to know that you are to be Dean of Adelbert College, an honor you well deserved and [are] fully capable in every way of filling. It is of course an added responsibility, but with years of preparation and study that you have had, I am sure you are well qualified, and by the help of God, you will fill the place with great honor. We are proud of you and we pray God's blessing upon you. You will have a wonderful

opportunity of service, as you will touch thousands of young men, whose real life is being molded and need a strong hand to direct in the best things of life. I wish Daddy was able to write you, but he is not strong enough to think. He has not been feeling so well this week, and can hardly walk at times. He suffers a great deal but is very patient and good. . . . Lots of love for Marian, I know she is tired waiting, but it is hard to count, for sometimes it is earlier and sometimes later. Give my boys a big hug and tell them I think they are mighty fine.

On that note, this packet of letters ends—with warm congratulations for her son's accomplishments, not only proud but also convinced of the importance of his work; with a quiet sense of the importance of patience for my very pregnant mother; and finally with "a big hug" for her "mighty fine" grandchildren.

Among those mighty fine grandchildren, I'm sure Grandmother meant to include me, even though I'd not yet come into this world. I'm happy I got to meet her, just a year before her death, and happy now to know her again through reading these letters.

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