



NEVILLE'S MOTHER

MARGARET ALICE PURIFOY

b. 4/15/1908 *Jonesboro, Craighead Co., AR*

d. 8/16/1973 *Jonesboro, Craighead Co., AR*



VI.

MARGARET ALICE PURIFOY'S LIFE

Neville's mother, **Margaret Alice Purifoy (1908–1973)**, was as gentle, loving, and caring as any person I have ever known. She had a pleasant temperament and a kindly disposition. She lived her entire sixty-five-year life in Jonesboro, Arkansas. Neville called her Mama; I called her Mrs. Frierson.

Margaret Alice Purifoy was the only child of Mississippi-born **Ola Frank Gillespie (1881–1934)** and **Stanley Neville Purifoy (1879–1942)**. She arrived in the world on Wednesday, April 15, 1908.

Margaret Alice Purifoy's devoted and doting parents gave her much attention in her early years, as evidenced by the plethora of professional photographs that they had made of her as a young child.¹ Some of Margaret's professional photographs were made into postcards. We have three of them, taken at ages two, four, and ten.²



Margaret Alice Purifoy in her christening dress, 1908.



A postcard photograph of Margaret Alice Purifoy at about age four, c. 1912.



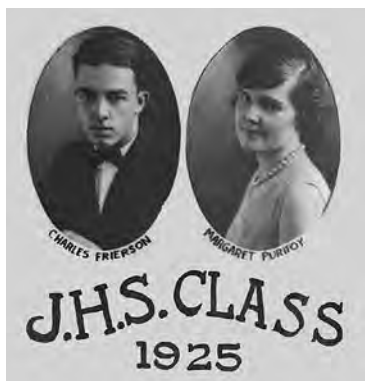
Margaret Alice Purifoy (age twelve), a student at Annie Camp Junior High School, 1920.

Margaret Alice Purifoy's early education took place in the Jonesboro Public Schools, beginning at West Elementary School, which was about two blocks from her home at 821 West Washington Avenue. She next attended Annie Camp Junior High School, where she first met **Charles Davis Frierson Jr. (1907–1970)**, who became her boyfriend.



Margaret Alice Purifoy (age fourteen), a student at Jonesboro High School, 1922.

Margaret Purifoy went to Jonesboro High School, where she graduated a month or so after her seventeenth birthday, in June 1925. At some point along the way, she must have skipped a grade. Her high-school boyfriend, Charles Davis Frierson Jr., was in her 1925 graduating class, although he was more than a year older than she was.

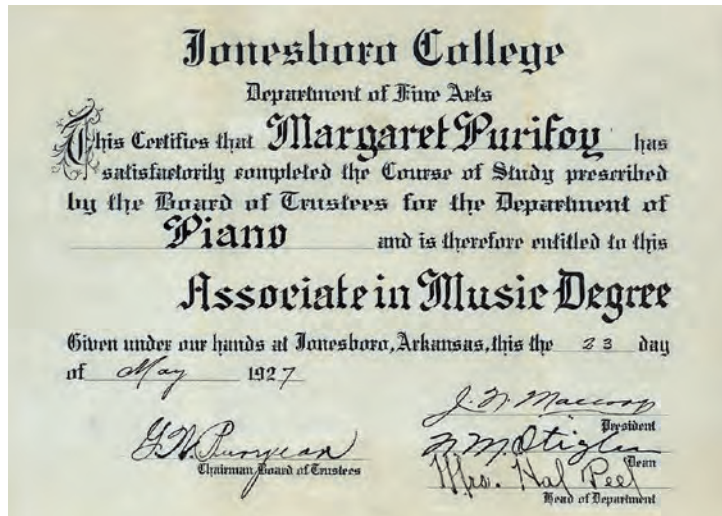


Charles Davis Frierson Jr. and Margaret Alice Purifoy pictured in the 1925 Jonesboro High School yearbook.



Jonesboro High School, from which Margaret Alice Purifoy and Charles Davis Frierson Jr. graduated in 1925. The building (now razed), which was the local high school from 1917 to 1939, was at the corner of Church Street and East Strawn Avenue, about three blocks from where Charles Davis Frierson Jr. lived on East Cherry Avenue.

After her high-school graduation in 1925, Margaret Purifoy entered Jonesboro College. In May 1927, she earned an associate's degree in music from the Department of Piano in the Department of Fine Arts.



Margaret Alice Purifoy's degree from Jonesboro College, which she received at age nineteen, on May 23, 1927.

Margaret Alice Purifoy (age nineteen) at her graduation from Jonesboro College.

Jonesboro College was a Baptist college founded in 1924. The college closed in 1934, and some years later, in 1939, the Baptist Church sold the building to the city of Jonesboro for \$50,000. It then became the Jonesboro High School that Neville attended from 1950 to 1954. The building was completely destroyed on May 27, 1973, by a tornado, and a new high school was built on the site.

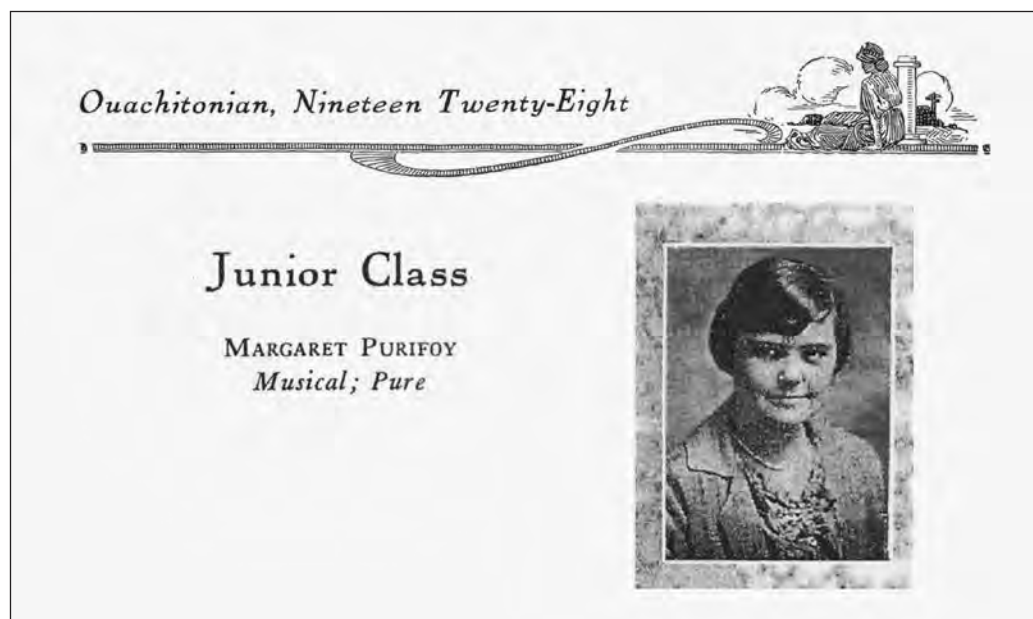


A 1965 photograph of the Jonesboro High School, which Neville attended from 1950 to 1954. The building was a part of Jonesboro College when Margaret Alice Purifoy attended there in 1925-27.



Jonesboro High School after the 1973 tornado, which hit less than three months before Margaret Alice Purifoy Frierson died.

In the fall of 1927, Margaret Purifoy enrolled at Ouachita Baptist College, located sixty-five miles southwest of Little Rock, in Arkadelphia, Arkansas. Since 1965 the college has been known as Ouachita Baptist University. Today the school has about 1,600 students and is affiliated with the Arkansas State Baptist Convention. Margaret attended Ouachita Baptist College for one year. Her mother, Ola Frank Gillespie Purifoy, lived with her in Arkadelphia during that time. At Ouachita, Margaret studied piano, and she became an accomplished pianist. An April 1928 piano recital by Margaret Purifoy at Ouachita was reviewed by a local newspaper. At the graduating exercises of Ouachita Baptist College on June 4, 1928, Margaret Purifoy was listed as a Conservatory Senior.³ While at Ouachita, Margaret met and dated John Homer Summers (1906–1998), a piano student from Hot Springs, Arkansas.⁴



In the 1928 annual yearbook, called the Ouachitonian, Margaret Purifoy is depicted with the junior class. She is also listed as a graduate with the senior class. Thus, Margaret Purifoy earned her degree after only one year at Ouachita.

For the next three years, Margaret Purifoy lived with her parents in Jonesboro. She may have taught music during that time. We know that she continued her relationship with Charles Davis Frierson Jr.



A recent photograph of Margaret Alice Purifoy's childhood home at 821 West Washington Avenue in Jonesboro. It is located about ten blocks from the Frierson House at 1112 South Main Street.

Margaret Purifoy's childhood home was at 821 West Washington Avenue, and she was only a few blocks away from her closest cousins, who were the six children of her mother's sister, **Emma Edith Gillespie (1888–1976)**. During the late 1920s, Margaret Purifoy often saw three of her first cousins who lived in Memphis, Tennessee:

Robert Snowden Gillespie (1907–2000), Francis Bearden Gillespie (1908–1964), and John Stanley Gillespie (1912–1996).

Margaret Alice Purifoy also had two sets of Purifoy cousins who lived in Crystal Springs, Mississippi, about three hundred miles away: the four McPherson sisters, born between 1901 and 1908, the daughters of Margaret's aunt **Martha Elizabeth "Mattie" Purifoy (1876–1962)** and the thirteen children of her uncle **Linfield "Linn" Purifoy (1878–1949)**, all born between 1908 and 1931. Finally, Margaret Purifoy had fourteen recorded first cousins who were the children of her father's two much-older half sisters, **Mary Lucinda Purifoy (1859–1927)** and **Julia Purifoy (1861–1949)**. Mary Lucinda's family, the Newmans, lived in Jefferson County, Mississippi, and Julia's family, the McDonalds, lived in Jonesboro. These cousins, all born between 1879 and 1901, were much older than Margaret Purifoy.

Margaret Purifoy had no siblings, but she had at least forty-two first cousins.

Margaret Alice Purifoy with three of her first cousins from Memphis, Francis Bearden Gillespie, John Stanley Gillespie, and Robert Snowden Gillespie, c. 1929.



*Margaret Alice Purifoy at her
wedding, October 2, 1931.*



In August 1931, the Jonesboro newspaper announced the engagement of Margaret Alice Purifoy, age twenty-three, to twenty-four-year-old Charles Davis Frierson Jr. Acknowledging their long courtship and using perhaps a bit of society page overstatement, the article said, *“This marriage will unite two of the most prominent families of the South, and will be the culmination of an unusual romance, one which has existed from their childhood.”* After the wedding announcement, the bride-to-be was feted with parties, several of which were also recorded in the newspaper.⁵ The wedding was a formal event, held at 8:30 p.m. on Friday, October 2, 1931. The First Baptist Church was filled to capacity, and the event was hailed as *“Beautiful and Impressive.”* It is well documented by the local newspaper.⁶

At the wedding, the matron of honor was Hope Harrington Cowdery (1905–1996), Margaret Purifoy’s dear friend and the daughter of the couple who had shared the double wedding of her parents in 1904. The maid of honor was Charles Davis Frierson Jr.’s younger sister, **Margaret Frierson (1912–1990)**, and the best man was his first cousin Thomas Whitsett Hughes (1902–1989), who lived in Memphis.

After their wedding, the newlyweds went by car to Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, and New York. It was during their honeymoon that Margaret Purifoy Frierson became pregnant, and on July 5, 1932, exactly nine months and three days after their wedding, Charles Davis Frierson III arrived.

Neville, Margaret Purifoy and Charles Frierson Jr.’s second child, was born four years after her brother Charles Davis Frierson III. She arrived quite early on the morning of June 1, 1936. She was a Monday’s child who fulfilled the nursery rhyme prediction that she would be “fair of face.”⁷

Four years later, on April 9, 1940, Neville’s younger brother, James Gordon Frierson, named for his paternal great-grandfather, was born.



Margaret Alice Purifoy Frierson (age twenty-eight) with Neville Frierson, shortly after her birth on June 1, 1936.

Margaret Alice Purifoy Frierson (age thirty-two) with her one-month-old son, James Gordon Frierson, and her almost four-year-old daughter, Neville Frierson, May 1940.



The Frierson family in front of the Frierson House on March 15, 1942, the day that Charles Davis Frierson Jr. went to war: (left to right) Charles Davis Frierson III (age nine), Charlotte Martin Gallaway Frierson (age sixty-three), Charles Davis Frierson Jr. (age thirty-five), Margaret Alice Purifoy Frierson (age thirty-three), and Neville Frierson (age five).

Margaret Alice Purifoy Frierson (age thirty-four) with her children, in late 1942: Charles Davis Frierson III (age ten), Neville Frierson (age six), and James Gordon Frierson (age two).

Then came World War II (1939–45). In March 1942, just four months after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Charles Davis Frierson Jr. entered military service at age thirty-five. For most of his forty-five months of service in the United States Army, he was stationed in Omaha, Nebraska, about 570 miles northwest of Jonesboro.

For more than three years during the war, Margaret Purifoy Frierson and her three young children lived without their husband and father in Jonesboro. Many years later, Margaret told her daughter Cherry Purifoy Frierson (b. 1947) that this period was the hardest time of her life.

In the autumn of 1942, Margaret Purifoy Frierson wrote many letters to her husband; Charles Frierson Jr. kept these letters.⁸ The major subjects of Margaret's letters were their three children, her management of the family's farmlands, and caring for the property she had inherited from her father, Stanley Neville Purifoy, who had died that summer. She also described wartime scarcities in the letters. On a more personal level, she always closed her letters with expressions of love.

About two years after the end of World War II, Margaret Purifoy and Charles Frierson Jr. had their fourth child, Cherry Purifoy Frierson, who was born on May 26, 1947. Neville recalls that her mother, who was thirty-nine years old when Cherry was born, developed a serious postpartum infection and was hospitalized in Memphis for about a month. During her recovery, Neville and her two brothers stayed with their grandmother **Charlotte Gallaway Frierson (1878–1968)** at the Frierson House. A few months later, Margaret was diagnosed with adult-onset type 1 diabetes. For the rest of her life, she took insulin injections and closely monitored her diet and blood sugar levels. The disease eventually took her life.

As the second half of the twentieth century began, the Frierson family—with four children, ages twenty to five—sat for an informal family portrait using color photography.



The Frierson family in their house at 823 Park Avenue, Christmas 1952: Charles Davis Frierson III (age twenty), James Gordon Frierson (age twelve), Charles Davis Frierson Jr. (age forty-five), Neville Frierson (age sixteen), Margaret Alice Purifoy Frierson (age forty-four), and Cherry Purifoy Frierson (age five).



The Frierson family, 1968: (standing, left to right) Cherry Purifoy Frierson Hester, William Allen Hester, Charles Davis Frierson III, Carolyn Rhea Frierson; (seated on the sofa, left to right) James Gordon Frierson, Kay Lynn Coleman Frierson, Sandra Rhea Frierson, Margaret Alice Purifoy Frierson, Charles Davis Frierson Jr., Margaret Purifoy Bryan, Neville Frierson Bryan, Elizabeth Montgomery Bryan, John Henry Bryan Jr.; (seated on the floor, left to right) Terry Lynn Frierson and John Henry Bryan III.

In the year 1968, Margaret Purifoy Frierson turned sixty years old. A photograph of her family that year includes her four children, their spouses, and her five grandchildren.

The first of Margaret Purifoy Frierson's eleven grandchildren, Sandra Rhea Frierson (1957–2005), was born in 1957. She had an abbreviated life on account of a congenital heart defect.⁹ Her brother, Terry Lynn Frierson, was born in 1962. By the mid-1960s, Neville and I had contributed three grandchildren: John Henry Bryan III, born in 1960; Margaret Purifoy Bryan, born in 1963; and Elizabeth Montgomery Bryan, born in 1965.

In June 1970, Neville's parents came to our home in West Point, Mississippi, for the birth of their sixth grandchild, Charles Frierson Bryan (b. 1970). Two more grandchildren, John Graham Frierson and Mary-Margaret Hester, arrived in 1971 and 1972. The last three grandchildren, Catherine Neville Hester, Sarah Frierson, and William Allen Hester Jr., were born in 1974, 1976, and 1978, after Margaret Purifoy Frierson died in 1973.

Today, Margaret Purifoy Frierson, Neville's mother, has twenty-one great-grandchildren, born between 1986 and 2002.



In the latter part of 1970, Margaret Purifoy Frierson had a heart attack. Margaret Purifoy Bryan, our daughter, who was seven years old, was visiting with her in Jonesboro at the time.

After her mother's heart attack, Cherry Frierson Hester recalled her father crying and being very distressed; it is quite likely that he was aware at that time of his own vulnerability to a heart attack.

Margaret Purifoy Frierson recovered from her heart attack and seemed reasonably well at the Frierson family gathering at Thanksgiving in 1970. She was, however, having trouble with her eyes, likely caused by her diabetes. She had an eye operation between Thanksgiving and Christmas that year. Thus, she was recovering and bedridden when her husband died suddenly on the day after Christmas in 1970.

After Charles Frierson Jr. died, his twenty-three-year-old daughter, Cherry Frierson Hester, and her husband moved in to live with Margaret Purifoy Frierson. According to Cherry, her father had asked her to do that. Almost one year later, just before Christmas 1971, Margaret Purifoy Frierson had a severe stroke and essentially lost her eyesight. She died about twenty months later, on August 16, 1973, at age sixty-five. In a remembrance entitled "Recollections of My Mother," Cherry wrote, "*She was my very best friend.*"¹⁰

Margaret Alice Purifoy and Charles Davis Frierson Jr. at Neville Frierson and John H. Bryan Jr.'s home in West Point, Mississippi, in the mid-1960s. Margaret Purifoy Bryan is seated on the lap of her grandmother, and John H. Bryan III is seated next to his grandfather.