

## MY MOTHER

### CATHERINE CAMERON WILKERSON

b. 2/22/1909 Greenville, MS

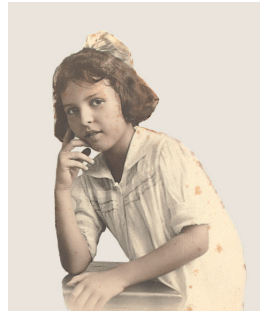
d. 7/20/2002 West Point, MS



**MY MOTHER, Catherine Cameron Wilkerson (1909–2002)**, had a long and highly productive life. She lived in two centuries and 11 decades. Her 93-year life span is the longest of any of my ancestors. She was born in Greenville, Mississippi, on George Washington's (1732–1799) birthday, February 22, 1909, in the heart of the Mississippi Delta region. For over 100 years, since the beginning of the 19th century, her antecedents had been Delta planters, people whose culture was deeply influenced by their agrarian pursuit, raising cotton, and one great event, the Civil War.

Mother was the eldest of five children (four girls and one boy). While born in Greenville, she spent her childhood at Clifton Plantation, seven miles north of Greenville, near Winterville, Mississippi. She often talked with me about her early years living on the plantation, with 60 black sharecropping families who grew an annual cotton crop. She was the last generation to experience that cultural upbringing.

My mother's early education was in a one-room schoolhouse in Winterville. According to her, she went to school on horseback or in a buggy. Later she attended school in Greenville and graduated in 1927.



*Mother at about age seven.*



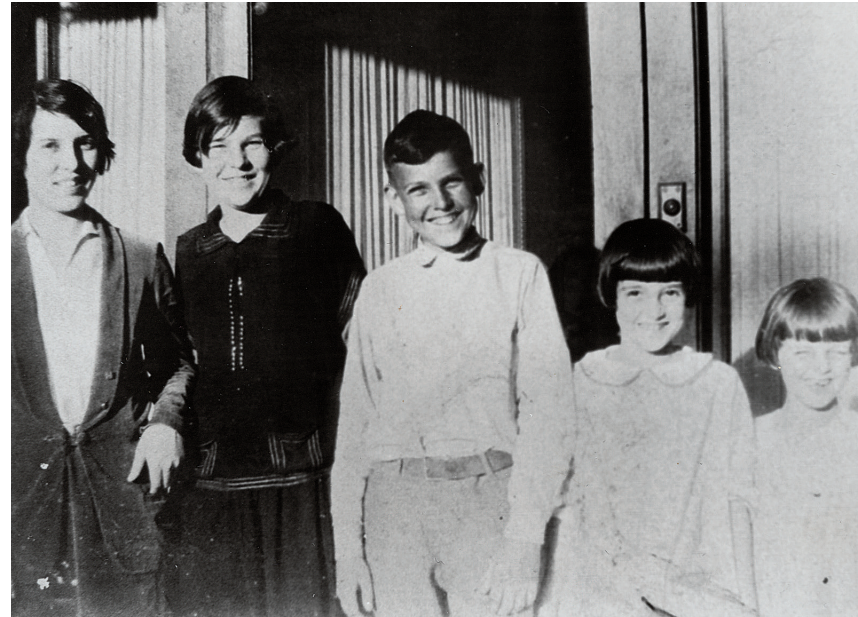
*Mother at age 15.*

That year was a momentous one for the city of Greenville and for my mother. On April 15, 1927, the Mississippi River burst its bank at Mound Landing, about eight miles north of her house. For the next four months, she was a refugee with her four siblings and her mother in Memphis at Southwestern College (now Rhodes College).

Their house at Clifton was under water until August. Mother's graduation from high school was delayed until September 1927.



My mother (left) with her four siblings at Southwestern College in Memphis in 1927. They were refugees of the 1927 flood. Left to right: my mother (18), Josephine (15), Jeff Jr. (12), Caroline (nine), Frances (seven).



In 1927 Mother enrolled at Mississippi State College for Women (now Mississippi University for Women) in Columbus, Mississippi, which is 150 miles directly east of Greenville. She graduated in 1931 with a major in Spanish and a minor in Latin.

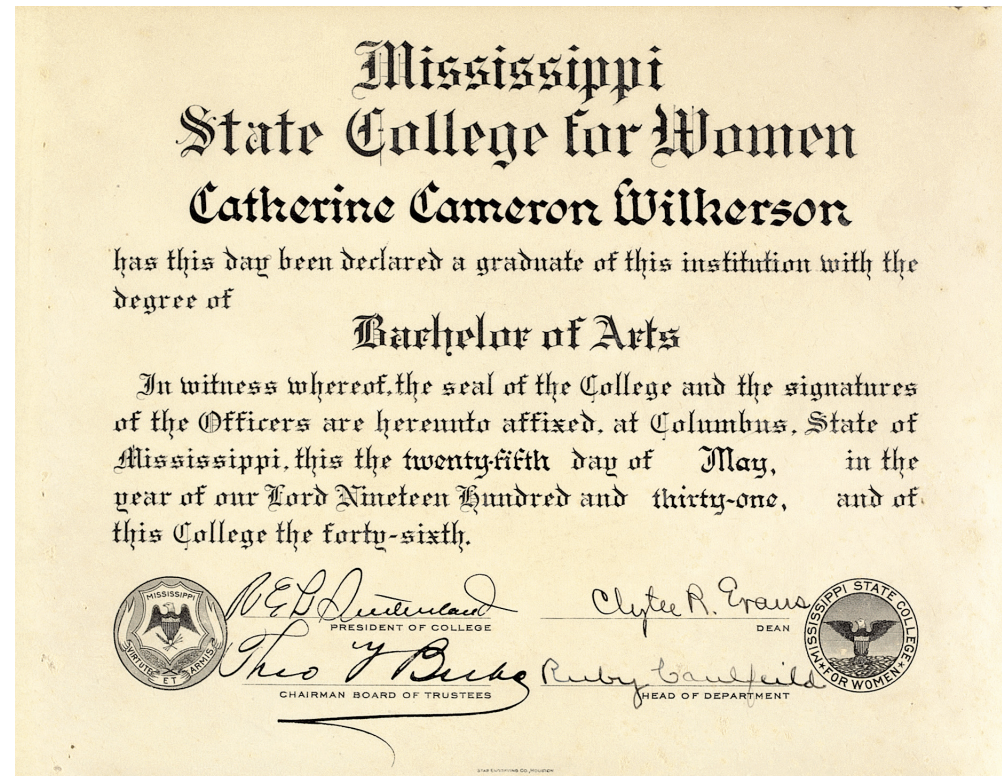
On several occasions, Mother proudly recalled an event that occurred at her college graduation in 1931. Apparently, she and a few of her classmates decided to protest the appearance of Theodore Bilbo (1877–1947), the notoriously racist governor of Mississippi, who was handing out diplomas. To protest they refused to go onto the stage to accept their diplomas from him. Mother gave me that diploma shortly before she died.

In November, on Thanksgiving Day of 1930, my mother’s family faced a disaster when their home at Clifton Plantation burned down along with several outbuildings. They moved in with her aunt’s family, the B. B. Paynes, at nearby Loughborough Plantation until the house was rebuilt.

After college, unable to get a teaching job, Mother became a government social worker. During that time, the government sent her to New Orleans to attend Tulane University, where she earned an advanced degree in social work.



Catherine Cameron Wilkerson as a student at Mississippi State College for Women.







*My parents on their honeymoon in Chattanooga, Tennessee, July 1935. They are pictured in a stage set.*



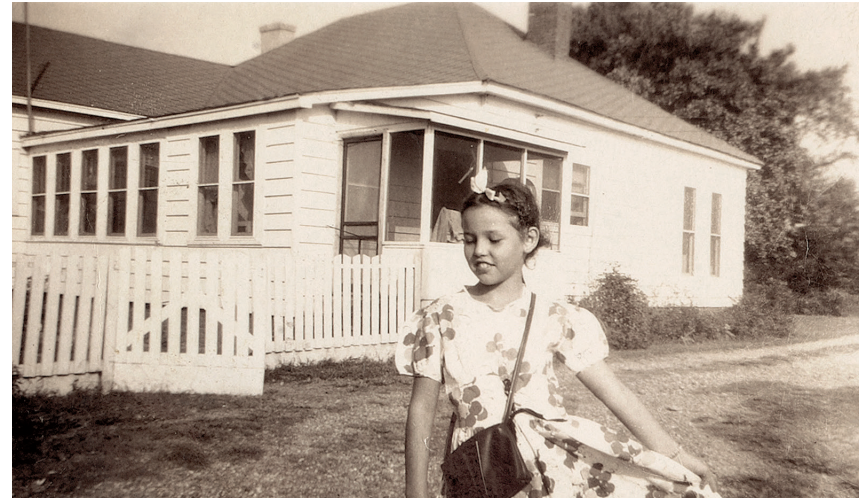
*This photo probably dates to the late 1930s, a few years after their marriage.*

In 1935, while living in Oktibbeha County and managing social services for three Mississippi counties, she met my father. The story of that meeting has been often told. Mother needed to trade some government-owned oxen for mules, a more useful animal for a needy family. Through a friend, she made contact with **John H. Bryan (1908–1989)**, who came to visit her. He bought the oxen and sold her some mules.

About a week or so later, they had a chance meeting at the Henry Clay hotel in West Point (my father bought the hotel 19 years later).

Their courtship and marriage began with their first date on April 11, 1935.<sup>1</sup> After about 30 more dates, noted in Mother's diary, they married on July 20, 1935. It was exactly 100 days after their first date. He was 27 and she was 26.

Their wedding was at a time of deep economic depression. It was a simple ceremony in the manse of the Presbyterian Church of Columbus, Mississippi. Afterward, they had a brief honeymoon at the Signal Mountain Hotel in Chattanooga, Tennessee.



*An early 1940s photo of my parents' first home. Caroline, my sister, is in the foreground.*

After living with my father's widowed mother for four months, my father bought a white frame house in a grove of magnolia trees on a hill south of West Point. It sat on 80 acres of land. My parents would live there for 14 years.

Bryan Brothers Meat Packing plant was built next door to their house in 1936, and Mother occasionally worked at the meat market downtown. Mostly, however, she managed the household (she often proudly told me about living on \$20.00 per week) and raised a family. I was born on October 5, 1936, and my sister Caroline 11 months to the day later. We are often called Irish twins. Kitty and George were born during the war, in 1942 and 1944, respectively.



*Caroline, Mother and me, c. 1940.*



*My mother and father shown with their four children in mid-to-late 1944. Caroline and I are standing at my father's right. Kitty is in front, and George is in Mother's arms.*



During my youth, in the 1940s and 1950s, it was traditional in the South for children to be raised by their mother. Such was certainly the case in our family. My father deferred to her on family matters. Mother told us what to do; she disciplined us and set the values for the family.

Mother's life centered largely on family and children. She was also a deeply religious person. A strong Presbyterian, she persuaded my father, a lifelong Baptist, to join the Presbyterian church after his mother died in the mid-1940s.

Mother taught Sunday school for 50 years. She attended church regularly and dutifully. She had very strong beliefs but was not in the least pious about her religion.



*A recent photo of my parents' West Point house, built in 1949.*

In 1949 my mother and father moved the family to a newly built house on Calhoun Street, just one block from West Point High School. The house cost \$36,000. I was 12 years old and very pleased to move near the school because I could hear the school bell ring and then walk to school.

It was a Georgian-style house. My father had gotten the plans for the house from a Carolina meatpacking friend who had built the same house. Mother and Daddy had recently stayed with them on a trip to the Carolinas.

Next door to our new home was a large Victorian house owned by the Gates Calvert family. My father bought the house, razed it, and Mother sponsored the construction of a building (in the style of her house) to house a school for retarded children. The school, which opened in 1989, continues to operate today and is called The Catherine Bryan School for Special Children.



When Mother died, the family home was sold to her grandson Bryan Harrell (b. 1973) and his family. The proceeds from the sale went to support the school.

*The Clay County Association for Retarded Children operates The Catherine Bryan School for Special Children next door to my parents' house.*



Family portrait taken in our new house, c. 1954.



In the 1950s, our family was “growing up,” and it was an increasingly prosperous time for my father. One of the highlights of Mother’s life in the 1950s and 1960s was an annual trip with my father to the American Meat Packers Convention in Chicago in September of each year. They took the overnight train (Panama Limited) and stayed at the Palmer House. She shopped at Marshall Field’s, and they were entertained by suppliers at Chicago restaurants.



My family in the summer of 1954 on board the Queen Elizabeth II, sailing to Europe.

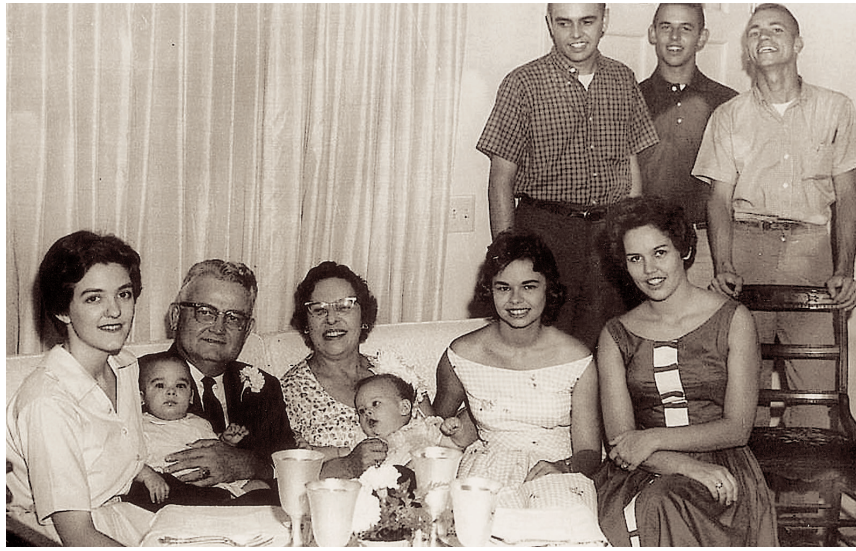
The trip of a lifetime was in 1954, when all six of us spent almost two months on a grand tour of Europe. Mother loved it! She remembered every detail for the rest of her life.<sup>2</sup>



Catherine and John Bryan enjoying a meal in 1960 at the Blue Room of the Roosevelt Hotel in New Orleans.

They also often went to New Orleans for medical checkups at The Oschner Clinic. Many people from the mid-South went there. Incidentally, sometime in the late 1970s, I spent an afternoon at the Bohemian Grove Encampment in California with Dr. Allen Oschner (1896–1981), one of the founders of the clinic.





My sister Caroline and I both got married in the summer of 1958. My sister Kitty married in January 1964 and

My mother and father's 25th anniversary at my home, in July 1960. Seated from left to right: Neville, my father holding John Henry Bryan III, my mother holding Catherine Harrell, my sister Kitty, and my sister Caroline. Standing: me, my brother George, and Robert Harrell, Caroline's husband.

my brother, George, at Christmas 1964. All four of us were relatively young when we married. Kitty and I were 21, and Caroline and George were 20.

It was Mother's destiny to have 19 grandchildren. The two firstborn arrived in 1960, just before my parents' 25th wedding anniversary. By 1970 Catherine and John III were 10 years old, and Mother had a total of 12 grandchildren. By 1976 she had 19.

Mother had a tradition of hanging one-year-old portraits of her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren in the entrance hall of our home.<sup>3</sup> All the photos were in gilded oval frames. When mother died in 2002, there were 56 portraits (four children, 19 grandchildren, 33 great-grandchildren) on the wall and five empty frames waiting in the closet.



Mother in 1970 standing near her swimming pool with her oldest grandchildren, Catherine Harrell on the left and John III on the right. Mother is 62 and the kids are 10 years old.



Mother made a very deliberate choice of the name she wished her grandchildren to use for her. The name was Mur. The name was taken from her mother's sister **Frances Cameron Montgomery Payne (1878–1950)**, my great-aunt, who was always called Aunt Mur by us.

My mother and father in 1981 with their 19 grandchildren at Caroline and Robert Harrell's playhouse.

Mother attended the wedding ceremonies of 14 of her 19 grandchildren and lived to see three more of them married. Two grandchildren, Sarah Catherine Dill (b. 1974) and Nancy Bryan (b. 1972), married after her death.

In 1988, at age 79, Mother had her first great-grandchild. By 2011, she had 68, including four step great-grandchildren acquired in 2010.



Mother with her eldest great-grandchild, Samuel Louis French (b. 1988) in Lech, Austria, just before Christmas 1991. Mother is 82 and Samuel is three.





*The family in late 1969. The setting is the same as the photo on page 116 taken 15 years earlier in Mother's living room; same chair, same bureau bookcase, new curtains and carpet.*

*Back row (left to right): George holding Suzanne, Marcia, Robert holding Bob, Caroline, me, Neville, Kenny, and Kitty.*

*Middle row: Margaret, Catherine, my father holding Mary Margaret, my mother holding Wilkes, John III, and Frances.*

*At the time, Caroline was pregnant with Helen and Neville was probably pregnant with Charles.*

*Front row: Beverly, Caroline, and Elizabeth.*

As the family expanded through the 1960s and 1970s, we maintained an extraordinary closeness. Until 1974, when Neville and I moved to Chicago, we gathered and ate together at Mother's house every Sunday after church services. We called it "Sunday dinner" though we always ate at noontime. My family (Neville and I and the children) even spent most Christmas Eve nights at Mother's house along with my sister Caroline's family, though we all lived only a few minutes away from my parents.



*Christmas 1980 at Caroline's house.*



*Christmas 1985 at Caroline's house. My father was ill at this time.*

From 1974 to 1985, Neville and I and our family went to West Point from Chicago almost every year for Christmas. That tradition was broken when Neville and I were 50 years old, and we took our family to England for Christmas 1986. We had no grandchildren at the time, but Lee French (b. 1962), my daughter Margaret's husband, was with us.



*My mother in 1979 at age 70.  
She was destined to live  
23 more years.*



My mother played the role of the family matriarch for several decades in the latter part of the 20th century. She had a profound influence on all of us, and it would be hard to overstate the influence that she had on the success of my father.

Mother was a bright and curious person. She was strong willed but had a very calm and almost stoic demeanor. I do not recall ever hearing her raise her voice at any one, nor did I ever see her cry. I saw my father cry several times.



*The first portrait of my mother painted in the 1980s, by John Howard Sanden (b. 1935). It hangs in the lobby of The Catherine Bryan School for Special Children.*

Mother was an avid reader, liked to do word games, and loved to work both jigsaw and crossword puzzles. For many years, I gave her custom-made, wooden jigsaw puzzles of family photographs that I had taken.

Throughout her life, mother had a keen interest in genealogy. She searched through archives, hunted in cemeteries, and corresponded with distant relatives to learn about her ancestors. She accumulated and left copious genealogical records for all of us.

To politically identify Mother, I have often called her “an unreconstructed Roosevelt Democrat.” It never occurred to her to vote Republican, although my father once voted for Eisenhower.

Mother’s attachment to the Democrats came about, in part, because of her early career as a social worker during the Great Depression. It also emanated from her strong identity with the politics of her 19th-century agrarian Southern forebearers. Neither of these points, however, really explains her liberal and tolerant social views. I suppose they were simply an inherent trait.



In 1979, at age 70, Mother was named Mississippi’s Mother of the Year. She wrote a short piece about herself at the time.<sup>4</sup>

*In 1979 Mother was very pleased to be named Mississippi’s Mother of the Year. She and my sisters went to New York City for the national contest and stayed at the Waldorf Hotel. The national winner was a former Mormon missionary mother from Utah.*

Mother was a very good cook, though she always had Ophelia Melton (1912–2007), who worked for the family as a cook for about 45 years. For Mother’s 80th birthday, Ophelia contributed an especially interesting remembrance about Mother.<sup>5</sup>



Mother remained very close to her four siblings and their families throughout her life. She arranged family reunions on a number of occasions.

Her sister **Josephine Spiars (1912–1986)**, who married Marshall Spiars (1907–1970), was especially close to Mother. Some years after becoming a widow in 1970, at age 57, Aunt Jo lived with Mother and traveled with her. She died in West Point in 1986. She was 73.

Mother's brother, **Jeff Wilkerson Jr. (1914–1995)**, the middle child, owned and farmed the family plantation at Clifton from 1945 until his death in 1995, at age 81. During World War II, while serving in England, he corresponded frequently with my mother.<sup>6</sup>

Mother's sister **Caroline Hamilton (1917–1982)** died in 1982, at age 65. Her husband, Bradley Hamilton (1912–1981), was a successful salesman for Bryan Foods for a number of years.

The youngest of the five children, **Frances Ellis (1919–2001)**, was married to Benjamin T. Ellis (1913–1987), who was a Lt. Colonel in the U.S. Army. They had seven children and lived many years in West Point. Aunt Frances died in 2001, at age 81.

My mother, although the oldest child, outlived all of her four younger siblings.



*Mother's sister Josephine Spiars and Mother in 1985 touring a garden in Great Britain. Aunt Josephine was living with Mother at that time and traveled with us to England and Scotland.*



*Mother with her younger brother, Jeff, and his wife, Ida (Iday) Judson Harrold (b. 1918), in 1985 at my daughter Margaret's wedding.*



*Mother with Aunt Caroline, who lost her sight late in life.*



*Mother and Aunt Frances in May 1988 at the wedding of John Ellis (b. 1965), her son and my first cousin.*



*Mother and me at Inverlochy Castle near Fort William, Scotland, in 1985. Mother was 76 and I was 49. Aunt Josephine Spiars, who was traveling with us, took this photo.*



*Mother in 1986 at Achnacarry, the seat of the chief of the Cameron clan, where she returned to visit with my sisters and sister-in-law, Marcia, after being there the year before with me. She is pictured with the clan chieftain, Sir Donald Cameron (1910–2004), and Lady Margaret Cameron (1913–2006).*

Mother liked to travel, and she talked forever about the family's 1954 summer trip to Europe. She and my father traveled very little during the late 1960s and 1970s, but after my father became ill in the 1980s, Mother frequently traveled with Neville and me, and sometimes with other family members. She saw a lot of the world between 1985 and 1998, during which time she was between age 76 and 89. Mother traveled with Neville and me on seven overseas trips to Europe and the Middle East, and she attended a number of events with us and other family members around the country.<sup>7</sup> Mother also came to Chicago almost every October for the Sara Lee Annual Shareholders Meeting.





*My mother and my sister Kitty standing in front of The Connaught Hotel in London in the summer of 1989. Mother once said that The Connaught was her favorite hotel and restaurant in the world. Kitty had flown the Concorde to London for a few days before going to Israel. In both London and in Israel, life-support equipment was available for her each day.*

In 1984 my mother's 42-year-old daughter, my sister Kitty, was diagnosed with breast cancer. Two years later her cancer metastasized and she underwent radical surgery that removed her digestive system. This required Kitty to spend 12 hours each day being fed life-sustaining liquids through tubes.

Despite this disability, for the next four years, Kitty courageously continued her duties as the first lady of West Point. Her husband, Kenny Dill (b. 1940), was the mayor of West Point from 1973 to 2005. She also tended to her family and managed a kindergarten she had founded. On October 11, 1990, Kitty died at age 48, leaving four children who were ages 12 to 21.<sup>8</sup>



*My mother and my two sisters at the Western Wall in Jerusalem in 1989.*



*At Brown University in 1993, at the dedication of the Catherine Bryan Dill Center for the Performing Arts. After the death of my sister Catherine "Kitty" Bryan Dill (1942–1990), our longtime family friends Martin (Marty) J. Granoff (b. 1936) and his wife, Perry Granoff (b. 1943), made a sponsoring gift to build a performing arts center at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. Back row (left to right): George Bryan, Martin Granoff, Caroline Bryan Harrell, me, Kenny Dill. Front row: Perry Granoff, Mother, Mrs. Dean Dill (b. 1916), Kenny's mother.*





*My mother and my daughter Elizabeth swimming in the Dead Sea in 1989. Mother was 80 and Elizabeth was 24.*



*My mother in Jerusalem in 1989 with Teddy Kollek (1911–2007), the mayor of Jerusalem. Teddy Kollek had a luncheon for my family (32 of us, including the Granoffs) at the Israel Museum during our visit in 1989.*



*My mother on skis in Lech, Austria, at Christmas in 1991. She was 82. In the background is her three-year-old great-grandson Samuel French (b. 1988).*

*My mother with me in Moscow in 1990. We traveled there for the opening of an art exhibition at the Pushkin Museum. Traveling with us were my daughter Elizabeth, my wife, Neville, and James Wood (1940–2010), who was the director of the Art Institute of Chicago.*







*On an evening in 1991, I introduced Margaret Thatcher (b. 1925), Great Britain's former prime minister (1979–90), at two Chicago Council on Foreign Relations events. My mother attended the second event, a dinner, accompanied by her granddaughter Sarah Catherine Dill (b. 1974), who is pictured in the photograph. After dinner that evening the four of us—Mother, Sarah Catherine, Neville, and I—flew to Aberdeen, Scotland.*



*Mother with Liza Minnelli (b. 1946), who entertained at a Sara Lee event that we held for the Food Marketing Institute Directors at Chicago's Navy Pier, 1996.*



*My mother with Eppie Lederer, a.k.a. Ann Landers (1918–2001). In the 1990s, Mother often visited Eppie's home in Chicago for tea when she came to the Sara Lee Annual Shareholders meeting in October of each year. Eppie was a good friend and traveled with our family often. Eppie attended my son John III's wedding in New Orleans in 1996, the dedication of the Dill Center (named for my sister Kitty Dill) at Brown University in 1993, the dedication of The Bryan Campus Life Center (named for my mother) at Rhodes College in 1997, Elizabeth's wedding in Kenilworth in 1991, as well as many other events. I often introduced her as Aunt Eppie.*





Above, left:  
The First Presbyterian Church  
(EPC) on East Street in  
West Point, Mississippi.



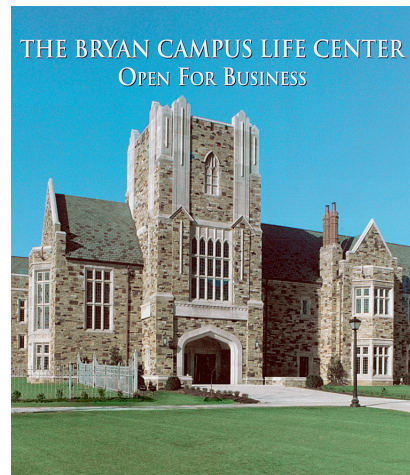
Above, right:  
The Presbyterian Church  
(USA) on Main Street in  
West Point, Mississippi.

When Mother was 80, the First Presbyterian Church of West Point, where she was a longtime member, decided to secede from the national Presbyterian Church (USA). The local church was objecting to the liberal social positions of the national church. In response to that secession, Mother resigned and purchased a small frame house on Main Street, where she and about 20 other members of her congregation retained their affiliation with the Presbyterian Church (USA). At the new church, they employed a female minister and invited black members. Today the church membership remains small and retains its affiliation with the national church.

After this incident, Mother told me that we must not have her funeral at the local First Presbyterian church. Over 13 years later, when she died, we had the visitation at “her” Presbyterian church on Main Street, and the funeral service was held at the

much larger Methodist church, where her daughters were members because they married Methodists. My brother-in-law Kenny Dill and I delivered eulogies at the service.<sup>9</sup>

In 1997 we dedicated The Bryan Campus Life Center at Rhodes College. We decided to name the building after Mother, who had urged me to attend college there some 40 years earlier.



The Bryan Campus Life Center  
opened in 1997.



George and I with Mother  
and her portrait by John  
Howard Sanden (b. 1935)  
that hangs in The Bryan  
Campus Life Center at  
Rhodes College. The  
dedication was in 1997.  
Mother was 88 at the time.

Mother’s health was very good until her early 90s. During that time, she had excellent caretakers at home. On a warm July day in 2002, as was her usual custom, she was driven around for a few hours by Betty Ervin (b. 1936), her great friend and principal caretaker. They bought some fresh tomatoes from a farmer’s market called the Ellis Tomato Farm. Mother went to sleep that evening and did not wake up the next morning. She was 93 years old. It was July 20, the 67th anniversary of her marriage to my father.<sup>10</sup>



## CATHERINE CAMERON WILKERSON

PAGES 108–135

### 1. ACCOUNTS OF MOTHER'S COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE

In 1989, in a booklet given to her grandchild James Bryan Harrell (b. 1973), Mother recorded the following memories about her courtship and marriage to my father in 1935:

*We first met in Starkville, Mississippi when I was working there as head of the County Welfare office. We traded some mules for oxen for people who farmed and plowed the fields. I was 26 years old.*

*Our first date was on a Sunday afternoon. He came to Starkville and picked me up. We rode to Artesia, Mississippi, and gave out of gas in the middle of town. He was 26 years old, and was helping his brothers run a meat market and grocery store in West Point.*

*I liked him because he was good looking and had such nice manners. He was a good businessman. We enjoyed doing the same things. He told me that the day he met me, he knew he was going to marry me.*

*It was about four months before we discussed marriage. We were riding down the middle of Main Street in West Point and along about the intersection of Main and Commence, he stopped and said, 'Let's get married.'*

*I received a diamond engagement ring that I still wear (54 years later). I did not give him a present or ring.*

*We were married in Columbus, Mississippi at the Presbyterian Minister's Home. It was on a Saturday night, July 20, 1935. I wore a navy blue linen suit and a silk navy hat and white gloves.*

*At the wedding were my mother-in-law, Mrs. James Charles Bryan, Aunt Vena Bryan, Uncle Frank Bryan, Bory Mosely, Elizabeth Robins, John Clark and Helen Lane from Kosciusko, Mississippi. The minister's name was Thomas Douglas Bateman, who was born in Scotland. The ceremony was short and the minister's wife had made a cake and punch for us.*

*My parents were surprised for my mother said my father did not think I would ever get married. But they liked him and were pleased to have him for a son-in-law. We spent the first night of our marriage at the Thomas Jefferson Hotel in Birmingham, Alabama. We then went to Chattanooga, Tennessee and stayed five nights at the Signal Mountain Hotel. It has since burned.*

*For our first home, we stayed in a furnished apartment at my mother-in-law's house for four months.*

On July 19, 1935 (one day before my parents married), my grandmother **Caroline Mosby Montgomery Wilkerson (1884–1957)** wrote a letter to my mother's first cousin, Monty Payne (1906–1970), who had just entered a TB sanitarium in El Paso, Texas. An excerpt from that letter gives my grandmother's perspective on my mother's wedding:

*Well! I had a letter from old Kitty [she was 26] today, saying she was going to be married Saturday or Sunday. That John didn't want a big wedding & she didn't either, so they were going to drive over to Columbus, get married & go away in his car for a while. They might come by here on the way back. He seems a fine boy & very much in love with Kitty.*

*The day after they left here last weekend, Jackson office called Kitty. She wrote me, the call was from Ethel Payne for her to come to Jackson right away. So she drove over there & Ethel had her appointment already approved by Washington & Allison for a job as Field Worker out of Jackson office & she would have supervision over 19 counties, with headquarters in Jackson. She told John about it & he went up in the air, wanted to get married right away instead of fall. So she turned the job down & is going to marry instead. I wish she had taken it for the honor of the promotion & waited until fall to get married. But you know how hard headed a person can be about things like that. John told her he would build her a new house & get her a new car. Ethel said she could have the job anyway & have headquarters in West Point, but John said 'no' so no it is. I guess she will write you soon, but she has been so stirred up over trying to decide what to do. She hasn't thought of much else. Ethel said the F.E.R.A. would close in about a month & this has the new set up of the W.P.A.*



### CATHERINE CAMERON WILKERSON

PAGES 108-135

My mother kept a diary in 1935 during the time period in which she met and married my father. The first diary entry related to my father was on Thursday, April 11, 1935. It says:

*Date with John Bryan from West Point. Just road [sic] around.*

Over the next three months, mother records about 30 dates that they had, leading up to Wednesday, July 10, 1935, when my father proposed marriage while “riding down Main Street in West Point.” On Saturday, July 13, they “looked at rings”; on Monday, July 15, she “called Mamma—told Caroline” (her sister); and on Wednesday, July 17, she says, “John bought a ring. We planned everything.”

Mother’s diary entry on Saturday, July 20, 1935, after her 100-day courtship with my father, says:

*John Bryan and I married today in Columbus at the Presbyterian preacher’s home about 8:00 p.m. We drove to Birmingham and spent the night*

Other than listing a few wedding gifts, there are no further entries in Mother’s 1935 diary.

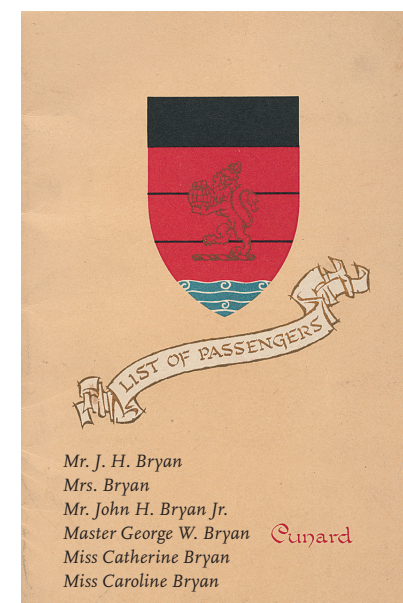
## 2. OUR GRAND TOUR OF EUROPE

In the summer of 1954, my father took his family on a grand tour of Europe.

My father was 46 and my mother was 45. I was 17, having just graduated from high school; Caroline was 16; Kitty and George were 12 and 10, respectively.

My father bought a new 1954 Lincoln, and we drove to New York to embark from there on the *Queen Elizabeth II* for the journey to Europe. The drive to New York took about two days, with a stopover in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

We then sailed to Southampton, England, traveled by bus and train to see the capitals and famous sites of Europe, and returned to the United States from Le Harvre, France. The trip was with a group arranged by the Oslen Travel Agency. All accommodations were first class and the trip cost my father \$12,000. It was our family’s first time to experience the rather elegant and luxuriant life style of old-world Europe. It made a big impression on all of us.





### CATHERINE CAMERON WILKERSON

PAGES 108-135

In Mother's records, I came across a small binder in which she had typed a piece called "Travelogue of Europe."

A few pages are missing, but it is unmistakably Mother's writing and her impressions from her first trip to Europe. I think this travelogue was a talk that she made, probably to a church group, after we returned from Europe. Its emphasis is on the churches we saw there.

TRAVELOGUE OF EUROPE ①

It will be impossible in such a short time to tell you all we saw and did in six weeks. First I want to tell you a little about the churches and the people, after this you will see pictures taken along the route of our trip.

Just as in America, the first building you see before you enter a town is the tower of the Church. We saw many places of worship in the seven countries visited. From Southampton to London we traveled by train. The English countryside was beautiful, as we passed the many thatched roof homes we noticed that each one had a garden which contained vegetables and many flowers.

The first landmark you see as you enter London is Big Ben, this famous clock tower is near Westminster Abbey. We visited the Abbey on our first afternoon's tour. The Nation's premier church and memorial stands on ground consecrated since the 7th century. A benedictine abbey was built here in 730 and enlarged in 1050 by Edward the Confessor. The present abbey was built in the 13th

②

century. 8 of the Kings and Queens of England are buried in the Abbey: Henry III, Elizabeth of York, wife of Henry VII, Richard II and Mary Queen of Scots are some. For 900 years the Abbey has been the coronation place of all of the Kings and Queens of England as well as the place of many royal weddings. Poets corner was especially interesting to me. Here lie buried Chaucer, Spenser, Dryden and Tennyson. There are memorials to Shakespeare, Thomas Gray, Milton and others though they lie buried elsewhere.

St. Pauls is a larger Cathedral but not as ornate as the Abbey. The choir and High Altar were damaged by two direct bomb hits during the war, workmen are still repairing the damage. A Chapel is being erected in one corner in which will be placed a book containing the names of the 28,000 American Airforce men killed in World War II. We saw a photostat copy of this book and the guide turned to the page on which was the name of Lt. George Martin Bryan, killed Aug. 17, 1943.

*(a cousin)*

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On another day we visited Windsor Castle, at one time the home of the Royal family, now a museum and used only on state occasions. In 1240 Henry III built a small chapel at Windsor, named for the patron Saint of England, The St. George made famous by the Legend, St. George and the Dragon. It is a lovely chapel but newly built by Edward IV in the 15th century. Here are buried the later Kings and Queens, among them are Henry VIII and Jane Seymour, more recently George V and Mary, grandparent of the present Queen.

21 miles from London is a beautiful churchyard which furnished the scene for Thomas Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard". The poet is buried here. The church is a 15th century structure stands in Stokes Park Estate, purchased in 1780 by Thomas Penn, son of William Penn. The Penn family worshiped in Stokes-Poges Church.

The next Cathedral that stands out in my memory is the one at Cologne, Germany. In spite of 14 bomb hits during the war the twin spires rise to 515 feet. Its foundation was laid

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The first real city we visited in Italy was Milano. This was for a short time before taking the train to Venice. The real purpose of our stop was to see the painting of the "Last Supper" by Leonardo Da Vinci. It is located in the side Chapel of the Church of Santa Maria del Greize built about the 10 or 11th century. Here we saw the result of a modern day miracle. Our guide told us that in 1943 a bomb hit this building, all that was left standing was the two end walls, both of which contained two famous paintings, The Last Supper and the Crucifixion by A. Mortino. The building has been rebuilt. (show picture) As you study the Last Supper you get such a depth of perspective. The canopy overhead and the windows in the back of Christ seem so real. Actually light ~~appears~~ appears to be coming through those windows. These are a few of the things that make the fresco so great.

Florence was my favorite Italian city, its many sidewalk cafes, its bridges across the Arno and its churches right in the middle of everything. The Cathedrals here are

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in 1248 and took 40 years to build. As we rode by bus through Cologne, Frankfurt, Heidelberg and the German country side we thanked God that we had been spared the horrors of bombing. We saw many block in cities still in ruin, Frankfurt was 85% bombed but it is rebuilding rapidly.

After a boat trip down the Rhine and a motor trip through the Black Forest we arrived in Switzerland, a most beautiful country, so clean and neat. Here we rested from the past strenuous days of walking through Cathedral colleges and castles. Here we took time out to enjoy the beauties of God's world. We took boat rides on Lake Lucerne and Lake Lemon. We enjoyed the wonderful views of the snow covered Alps and looked down from 7 and 8,000 feet into the neat little valleys with their winding rivers. Switzerland is indeed a land of majestic beauty and I think my favorite of all the countries visited. Maybe it was because you can always find a Swiss who speaks English. They are required to learn English, German and French in their schools.

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much more simple, even severe. The outside walls of the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore are of marble paneling in beautiful colors. Beside the church is the Baptistery, one of the ancient buildings of Florence, which rose in the 10th century on the site of an old Roman pagan building. The East door is called the Gate of Paradise because of the beautiful carvings done in bronze. These are scenes from the old Testament, showing Adam and Eve, Moses receiving the 10 Commandments and many others. In Florence we visited the Medic Chapel, done in Baroque style and entirely encrusted with costly marble and many semi-precious stones. Most of the art work done in this chapel was by Michaelangelo.

Rome has been called the most interesting city in the world, tradition traces its origin in 754 B.C. As you view the Forum, the Arch of Titus, the Colosseum and the Temple of Castor and Pollux you feel that you are in a different world, and old world. It was in Rome that we saw the oldest Church of any on the trip. The Pantheon is the only



### CATHERINE CAMERON WILKERSON

PAGES 108-135

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structure of ancient times to survive intact to the present day. Built by Hadrian in the 2nd century AD it was used for worship of planetary divinities. In 609 the Pantheon was consecrated for Christian worship, imagine 1300 years as a church. Victor Emmanuel II, 1st King of United Italy; the painter Raphael and Umberto I are buried here.

It will be impossible to tell you about all of the Cathedrals, churches and basilicas we saw in Rome, but I do want to tell you about St. Peter's the largest church in Christendom. Its construction lasted from 1452 until 1626 and it was erected on the site of an earlier basilica built by Constantine over the tomb of the Apostle Peter. For 200 years each Pope added to St. Peter's. As you enter the main part of the building and look up at the center of the dome, which rises to 435 feet, you feel about the size of an ant. To illustrate: One of the paintings on the wall was of St. Andrew, holding a quill pen in his hand, the guide told us the pen was about three feet long, and it actually looks to be about 3 inches long.

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No visit to Rome is complete unless you see the Vatican Museum and the Sistine Chapel. On one of the walls of the Chapel is a painting by Michelangelo, "The Last Judgement" it is a tremendous thing and took the artist 4 years to paint, most of the time lying on his back. We visited the Mamatine Frison and saw the room where the Apostle Peter is supposed to have spent many months in chains. It is a thrill to ride over the Apian Way built in 312 B.C. and to visit the Catacombs on this road. It was in the subterranean tombs that the early Christians hid from the persecutions of the Emperors, many of them are buried here.

As you travel about Europe and see the Churches, Cathedrals, Chapels, basilicas and monasteries, you are amazed at their beauty, magnificence and their grandeur but you feel the lack of sacredness and true worship. The people of the continent have commercialized their places of worship. In addition to the fee you pay to enter, in most places men stood about with little boxes to receive donations. You wonder how

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the members could worship when hundreds are walking through their churches, sometimes on Sunday.

Mr. Olsen in his book "Abroad and Abroad" makes this statement: "As you travel abroad try to remember that you are in fact an ambassador of good will. Try to leave behind you in your travels many people who will remember with pleasure that a kind and gentle American has visited their homeland." I would add to this to practice the Golden Rule. People may not understand your language but they do understand your actions. I hope many of the Europeans will remember the Bryans with pleasure, however I am sure there are many of them that we will not forget.

We still remember our stewards, stewardesses and waiters on the ship. They do everything to make you comfortable and go out of their way to make your crossing a happy time. In London we took a cab from the theater to a famous restaurant, later that night, as we left the restaurant the same cab driver took us back to the Hotel and

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he remembered us from the first trip.

Mr. Mims, a gentleman of 85, was one of our local English guides. He is a graduate of Cambridge and made the Literature and writers of England come alive for us. The high light of the time spent in England to me was when we stood by the tomb of Thomas Gray and heard Mr. Mims give the "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" To refresh your memory, I will give only the first few lines:

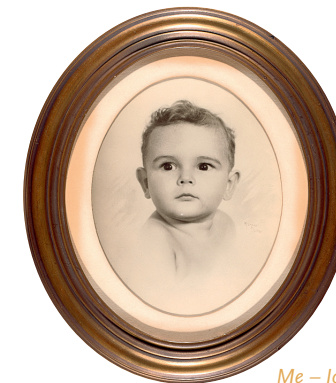
"The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,  
The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea,  
The plowman homeward plods his weary way,  
And leaves the world to darkness and to me."

We will remember the kindness of the Dutch Doctor in Scheveningen, Holland. Johnny was sick and of course I was worried. He quickly reassured us that it was only a sore throat, caused from the bad rainy weather and that he could travel the next day. He left us both feeling better.

### 3. THE PORTRAITS IN THE HALL

As her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren became one year old, Mother would hang a picture of each in a gilded frame in the stairway hall at her house. That tradition ended when she died in 2002. At that time, she had one-year-old pictures of her four children, 19 grandchildren, and 45 great-grandchildren on the wall. There were five gold frames left in her closet waiting for great-grandchildren when she died. That was not enough. By 2009, 100 years after she was born, she would have needed 19 more. By that time, she had 64 great-grandchildren.

Mother's photographs of her four children at age one.



Me - Johnny



Caroline



Kitty



George



### CATHERINE CAMERON WILKERSON

PAGES 108-135

#### 4. MOTHER'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY AT AGE 70

*from home & community*

My name is Catherine Wilkerson Bryan, known to my friends as Kitty, to my husband and children as "amma or Mom and to our 19 grandchildren as Mur. I was born in Washington County, Miss. and have lived all of my 70 years in that State. Obtained my education in Miss. from 1st grade through college with the exception of 6 months graduate work in the School of Social Work at Tulane University. I did social work in several rural counties in the state.

After marriage in 1935 I moved to West Point, Miss., a town of under 10,000 population. In a small town one finds opportunities for leadership in many different aspects of community life. The church is usually the focal point for family and community life and I have always been active in its work. A Sunday School teacher for 37 years, leader in vacation church school, circle Bible teacher and leader in the "omen's organization of the church". *Let me say here that I believe any talents I have are God given and I have tried to use them for His glory.*

I have made several contributions to the strengthening of family life in our home and community. Among them being the organization of the Junior Auxiliary, a service organization to improve the social, economic and educational conditions prevailing among the children of West Point. A major step was made when we convinced the Clay county Board of Supervisors and the West Point City Board of the great need for public health services. As a result, a full time health Dept. was started and today serves the 19,000 people of the county. We also established a Teen Town for our young people, which was a gathering place for them after school and at nights on weekends. This facility kept the young people off the streets and was a place for them to congregate, play cards, listen to music and enjoy fellowship under good supervision.

My work with the Clay County Association for Retarded Citizens has been most rewarding *to me*. I first taught arts and crafts to ~~some retarded~~ retarded young adults. After becoming a member of the Board of Directors I served as chairman of a bldg committee which raised funds for a permanent building. We now have a program for young adults, about 30 pre-school children and 27 children with speech problems. *Before these programs were started parents were taking their children with speech problems to Miss. University for Women about 25 miles away. Severally retarded young people and children were placed in special schools, the nearest being over 150 miles away. There was no way for families to keep their children at home or to learn that they could be taught certain skills. One of our severely retarded boys has been to a National Swim meet for handicapped.*

I have also served on the Board of the Mogan Nursing Home, a well run home where families who are unable to care for their elderly relatives in their home can take them and know that they are getting the best of attention.

My husband, children and I worked hard to help ease the integration of the public schools. We believe in public school education and all of our grandchildren attend public schools today.

*to see this gives me a great sense of pride that our children and grand children are making their own contribution to the streng & family life in*

*This program has really been a boon to the parents of devolped children & young adults*

#### 5. OPHELIA MELTON

On the occasion of my mother's 80th birthday, her longtime maid and cook, Ophelia Melton (1912-2007), wrote the following for a book of recollections:

*I remember when I first started working for you Jonnie was four years old, Caroline was three years old, Kitty was six weeks old and George wasn't thought about. I had some good times with the children. I member when Caroline wanted to push the stroller with Kitty in it and she ran all the way down that high hill and I was running behind her. I remember again back in 1953 in March you carried me to Memphis to the hospital. Mrs. Vena and Mrs. Marie went with you and you sent me the Daily Times Leader every day and when you did not have time to write you would write al around the paper. Love Ophelia.*



Mother and Ophelia.



## CATHERINE CAMERON WILKERSON

PAGES 108-135

### 6. LETTERS FROM UNCLE JEFF

For about two years in 1943-45, my mother's only brother, **S/Sgt. Jefferson Pinckney Wilkerson Jr. (1914-1995)**, was stationed in England. During that time, my Uncle Jeff and my mother corresponded.

What follows are excerpts from three letters that Jeff wrote to his older sister, Kitty (my mother), around the time of the birth of my brother, George Wilkerson Bryan (b. April 5, 1944).

**To: Mrs. John Bryan**

West Point, Mississippi

**From: Sgt. J. P. Wilkerson, Sept. 17/43**

Dear Kitty:

*There is very little I can tell you except we had a very uneventful trip across. I am somewhere in England. I expect to visit all of the historic places and take in everything I possibly can while I am here. I hope this will be my only and last trip across.*

*If you think it will keep, you can send me half of a ham. You would have to pack it very good and put it in a box because they handle everything rough now.*

*How is Johnnie [me, age six], Sister [my sister Caroline, age six], Kitty [my sister Kitty, age one], & most of all you. Iday [his wife] told me about the blessed event. I have not told anyone it is still a secret. I hope it is another boy. Did Iday tell you what I told her about catching up with you? Tell big John hello for me and not to work to [sic] hard.*

Love to all of you

Jeff

**To: Mrs. John H. Bryan**

West Point, Mississippi

**From: S/Sgt. J. P. Wilkerson, Feb-14-44**

Dear Kitty:

*I am expecting any day to hear that I am an uncle again. I think the name you picked is a very good one if it is a boy. If it is a girl you should name her Princella. If I ever have a girl I am going to name her that, although Iday does not approve of the name.*

*I saw Ben [Ben Ellis, his brother-in-law] in London and we really did have a big time. He had a bottle of scotch so we painted the town red. I was with him for a couple of days. I may go to see him again in March if I can get a furlough....*

*Do you get to see Iday and Helen [his 2-year-old daughter] much? I think she likes it at M.S.C.W. If everything comes out alright I may get home in Sept. at last. I am hoping so. Write me again real soon.*

Love to all of you

Jeff

**To: Mrs. John Bryan**

West Point, Mississippi

**From: S/Sgt. J. P. Wilkerson, April-28/44**

Dear Kitty:

*I got Iday's cable today. I was very glad to hear that it was a boy. I think you gave it a good name. I know John is very proud of him. Who does he look like? Does he look like the rest of the children or like you? Iday said he was the prettiest one of them all. The mail situation has been very bad for the last month. Iday said she had sent me some candy from you; I certainly appreciate it[.] It is very hard to get any over here....*

*Tell all of the in-laws and John hello [?] for me[.] I am glad he does not have to go to the army.*

Love to all of you

Jeff



**CATHERINE CAMERON WILKERSON****PAGES 108–135****7. MOTHER'S TRAVELS WITH NEVILLE AND ME: 1985–97****MOTHER'S TRAVELS OVERSEAS****1985 June/July** Scotland/LondonWith Mother and her sister [Josephine Spiars \(1912–1986\)](#).**1989 July** London/Israel

My mother and my sister Kitty were with 32 of us, all family including the Granoffs. This was a preliminary trip before 32 of my family members went to South Africa and Botswana on a three-week safari.

**1990 June** Moscow/Berlin/Amsterdam/London

My mother, daughter Elizabeth, and Jim Wood (1940–2010), director of the Art Institute of Chicago, accompanied Neville and me.

**1991 June** Aberdeen Scotland/London/Paris

My mother and Sarah Catherine Dill (b. 1974), her granddaughter, travelled with Neville and me.

**1991 December** London/Lech and Salzburg, Austria

Margaret and Lee French (b. 1962), Elizabeth and John Seebeck (b. 1964), John III, and Charles were with Mother, as well as our two grandchildren, Samuel and William.

**1992 June** Portugal/Copenhagen/Amsterdam/London

My sister Caroline accompanied Mother with Neville and me.

**1993 August** Amsterdam/London

Mother's youngest grandchild, Caroline Dill (b. 1976), was with Neville and me.

**MOTHER'S TRAVELS IN THE UNITED STATES WITH MY FAMILY****1985** Chicago for Margaret's marriage to Lee French at Crab Tree Farm.**1986** Augusta, GA, for Thanksgiving weekend at the Augusta National Golf Club.**1988** Chicago for family reunion at Crab Tree Farm.**1991** Chicago for Elizabeth's marriage to John Seebeck in Kenilworth.**1991** Chicago to attend the Council on Foreign Relations dinner with Margaret Thatcher (b. 1925) before our trip to Scotland, London, and Paris.**1992** New York for the Sara Lee Frontrunner's event. On the previous evening, we had dinner with poet Maya Angelou (b. 1928), and about 10 family women, including Perry Granoff (b. 1943).**1993** Providence, RI, with the Granoffs, Eppie Lederer (1918–2001), and my family. We went to Brown University for the dedication of the Catherine Bryan Dill Center, named by Marty Granoff (b. 1936) in honor of Kitty.**1993** Chicago to attend the Order of Lincoln Award ceremony in my honor.**1994** Atlanta for a Martin Luther King Center Event in honor of me.**1995** Lake Bluff for reunion at Crab Tree Farm.**1996** New Orleans for John III's marriage to Louise Comiskey (b. 1965). Mother was not able to attend Charles's marriage to Annica Larsson (b. 1970) in 2000.**1996** Chicago for a Sara Lee dinner at Navy Pier for the directors of the Food Marketing Institute with Liza Minnelli (b. 1946).**1997** Memphis for the dedication of the Bryan Center at Rhodes College in Mother's honor.

*Mother in 1995 at a family reunion. There was an abundance of babies at that time, as many great-grandchildren had been born.*



CATHERINE CAMERON WILKERSON

PAGES 108-135

8. QUOTES FROM MY SISTER IN AN EDITORIAL AFTER SHE DIED

In October 1990, Mother's 48-year-old daughter Catherine Parker Bryan Dill (1942-1990) died of cancer. After her death, the editors of the West Point Daily News ran a story about her and opened with some quotes from an earlier interview.



9. TWO EULOGIES AT MOTHER'S FUNERAL

THE EULOGY THAT I GAVE AT MOTHER'S SERVICE

Catherine Wilkerson Bryan Eulogy

Tuesday, July 23, 2002

West Point, Mississippi

By John H. Bryan

*While I have occasionally delivered eulogies and tributes in the past, I have never spoken as a family member at such an event as this. From my upbringing, I presumed that praising one's family was not appropriate or, perhaps, just not a very Presbyterian thing to do.*

*But, today, I really do have a few thoughts, which I want to be remembered about Mother. These thoughts are particularly addressed to the many descendants in this family for which Mother was so long the matriarch.*

*I shall relate no anecdotes or lists of her accomplishments; rather, I would like to talk about a few character traits, which, I think, best define her.*

*Mother was a woman of extraordinary and rare conviction. She knew exactly what she believed in, and she never vacillated, for she always had total confidence in her beliefs. Her church, the Presbyterian Church, was at the very heart of her convictions and her life-long devotion to that church was manifest every day in her life.*

*Perhaps, she best showed the courage to follow her convictions when, at the age of 80, she took up the task to preserve her Presbyterian Church in that little converted house over on Main Street—a place she loved very much.*

*Mother was a religious person; but, even in the family, she was never judgmental or pious. She lived her religious life the way she wanted to, and, thus, set an example for all of us.*

*Mother's social convictions were equally strong-willed and, in fact, they were inherent in her character, and only modestly augmented by her education and short professional career as a social worker.*

*You see, Mother always cared intensely about people less fortunate and disadvantaged in our society. In fact, she first met my Father when, as a social worker, she bought from him a pair of mules for a destitute family in Oktibbeha County. I suppose that transaction is why our family is here today!*



**CATHERINE CAMERON WILKERSON****PAGES 108–135**

*And, Mother always hated the intolerance in our world and the abuses people have so often inflicted on one another because of differences such as race, religion or whatever.*

*Just last year, she gave me her 1931 college diploma from M.S.C.W. It was signed by Theodore Bilbo, Mississippi's governor at that time. As a 22-year-old girl, she had refused to personally receive that diploma from Governor Bilbo because of his strong racist views.*

*And, Mother always had an absolutely natural instinct that caused her to be attracted to people who were handicapped. That is why she devoted herself and her resources to building organizations and facilities for these very special people of our society. And, that is why she has made an especially nice provision for the benefit of the Clay County Association for Retarded Children, the organization for which she provided facilities next to her home for the past 54 years over on Calhoun Street.*

*Her sense of social responsibility, her values about how we should all relate to one another, and the character of her convictions have made a deep impression on all of us in the family. And, we are so very thankful for those gifts to us.*

*Our Mother, Grandmother and Great-Grandmother was also a gifted person with some rather special skills. She was very bright and curious; she read voraciously; she worked all kinds of game puzzles, which we gave to her as gifts—especially in recent years.*

*She loved her research and genealogical work. All of us in the family have several books, which she compiled over the years about different branches of our family. And, us older ones have memories of roaming through graveyards and dusty old archives looking for clues about ancestors.*

*Mother had a steel-trap memory that amazed everyone in the family. She could remember every place she had ever been and when she was there.*

*She was energetic and highly organized; she kept diaries and always made lists of things to do. But, along with all these skills—and more importantly—Mother had a wonderfully positive attitude. She was always upbeat, optimistic, eager to move ahead and do new things. In recent years, we took a lot of trips around the world together. She was always ready to go!*

*As I think about it, what amazes me most is that I never heard her waste time complaining or fretting about anything or fussing with people, and I never saw her*

*lose her cool or raise her voice. She just always moved ahead with quiet determination—a determination, which, by the way, she particularly drew upon to keep going in very recent years.*

*Mother's skills and her attitude, I think, made her a born leader. She certainly managed our family in most important ways—as she also led all kinds of civic and social organizations.*

*But, as a woman of her time and place, Mother was not a business person, and, certainly not a feminist. She was first and foremost simply a wife and mother. And so, I suppose that nothing should, and does, define her more to all of us than her devotion to her family. Now, we all believe our mothers are devoted to their family, but, somehow, this mother seemed so very special in that respect.*

*She really worked hard at preserving a sense of family. In her house, there are pictures of seven or eight generations of family all over the walls, every single table-top and two refrigerators. And, we all grew accustomed to planning and attending all sorts of grand family reunions, and she relished those reunions.*

*In the later years of her life, Mother continued to keep up with each grandchild and each great-grandchild, and all 58 of them became accustomed to receiving a letter which enclosed a modest check on their birthday—\$25.00 for a grandchild and \$15.00 for the great-grandchild. Just the other night, I learned that one of my younger grandchildren, upon first hearing about Mur's death on Saturday, had exclaimed, "Oh man, it was almost time for my birthday check." His next birthday is August 10th.*

*All of Mother's great interest in the family surely relates somewhat to her genealogical pursuits and her sense of history. But, family is really what she cared about. It is what she thought was important, and somehow, when it is all over, there can be no better legacy than a life devoted to family.*

*And so, we have a lot to celebrate today—a very long life. She outlived four younger siblings. She lived exactly 67 years to the day from the day she married in 1935. And, I suspect, she lived longer than anyone in the history of our family. And, such a productive life—61 living descendants and, at last count, two more on the way. And, such a meaningful life—that made such a powerful difference to her community and her family—and left to us so many lessons for the future.*

*Those lessons from her life are what we must remember.*



## CATHERINE CAMERON WILKERSON

PAGES 108–135

### EULOGY BY KENNETH D. DILL

By Kenneth D. Dill, mayor of West Point and Mother's son-in-law

*Speaking on behalf of the Bryan family, I want to thank each one of you for being here to share in the family's tremendous loss and this special funeral service celebrating a life well lived by Catherine Cameron Wilkerson Bryan, known also as Mrs. Catherine or Miss Kitty, but to her family she was affectionately and simply known as Mur.*

*The family wishes to especially thank all those who helped provide care for her over the recent years, which allowed Mur to completely run the wheels off of this life until she used every ounce of her strength to get the final breath out on Saturday morning, July 20th. On Friday, she went riding and had attended her church service the prior Sunday. A special thanks is given to long time friend, Jeanette Taylor, who worked for Mr. John, John, Jr., and George at Bryan Foods, who has helped attend to Mrs. Bryan's business and personal needs and treated Mrs. Bryan as her own mother. Also, a special thanks to Betty Ervin who has rendered special love and care for Mrs. Bryan for the past 11 years, and also treated Mur as her own mother. Thanks to all of you who cared for her needs.*

*Mur loved the adventure of traveling to a Sara Lee board meeting or to Scotland and around the World, but in recent months, her travels were limited to those special daily drives to surrounding communities, cemeteries, the tomato farm, and to get her special treat of chocolate yogurt. You may remember the movie Driving Miss Daisy—I began teasing Betty and Jeanette about these daily rides as "Driving Miss Kitty." These daily drives would sometimes include a full carload of ladies having a fun riding adventure.*

*As Mayor, I am notified of severe weather warnings and on many occasions, I would go by Mur's house or call to warn them to bring Mrs. Bryan downstairs to a safe place in the house. Well, I don't recall one time when I ever caught them at home! They were always out driving in those storms. I compared them to the storm chasers that are always chasing tornado formations.*

*Before the recent storm that damaged the Columbus area with over 100 mile winds, I tried to warn Mrs. Bryan, but again I couldn't find them. Later, I asked Betty Ervin if they were out in the storm and Betty shyly looked at me and said, "Yes, we sure were." Betty told me that they were driving right into the storm towards Columbus, and she told Mrs. Bryan that she thought they should turn around and go back home, but Mrs. Bryan kept telling her to "Keep on going—keep on going" but, thankfully, Betty did overrule her and returned safely home.*

*I also recall one of the few snow and ice storms to hit West Point, and I was out checking the streets on a day when the public was asked not to get out because of the dangerous driving conditions. As I drove down Calhoun Street, I saw Mur's car coming down her driveway barely getting under a huge pine limb weighted down with snow and ice and, who was in the car but Betty and Mrs. Bryan. I asked them, "What are you girls doing out in this weather?"*

*Betty shyly said, "Mrs. Bryan wanted to drive around and look at the snow." And, here they went, lickety split, and I just shook my head. Mur was generally a very sweet person, but she never liked to hear you tell her "no" or "can't." She was a yes personality!*

*Mur would also name drop on occasion, such as shopping for t-shirts and asking the store clerk if they were Hanes t-shirts. If they weren't, she would say, "I am not buying anything but Hanes t-shirts because I have two sons that work for Sara Lee." Mur was always proud of the accomplishments of her sons and daughters and would brag on them on occasions.*

*Caroline and I were laughing about the time she and her mother were on a drive and Mur's Buick developed trouble and stranded them in Columbus. They had called the Buick dealer to come rescue them and the salesman had refused the request. Mrs. Bryan told Caroline, "You tell that young man that my son sits on the General Motors Board, and that I am going to report him to General Motors for poor service!"*

*Mur was always intensely interested in making things better for children in her community. Caroline shared an excerpt from a diary that Mur had written about a speech that she made to a large Jr. Auxiliary State meeting. And, I quote Mrs. Bryan who was a charter member of the West Point Jr. Auxiliary that, "When a group of young women get together and they are civic minded, something usually happens, and, in March 1941, the Thursday bridge club decided to convert their social club into a service club to be known as the West Point Jr. Auxiliary Club. The goal of our club was to improve conditions in West Point for children."*

*Some of the worthwhile projects for children that were targeted were to see that lunchrooms were established in our schools. Clay County had no full-time Health Department, no playground or public tennis courts existed, no Girl Scout Area Council or PTA in the schools. The West Point Jr. Auxiliary worked hard to get these projects started and working for the children of our community.*



CATHERINE CAMERON WILKERSON

PAGES 108-135

Mur's life was an example of living a full life of service to others. She had her priorities right. She loved her Lord, she loved her family, and she loved others. She has given us and leaves us with an excellent pattern for living this life!

I believe Mur was also ready for the adventure of dying. I attended a funeral recently of a friend where Chancellor Khyat of Ole Miss read a letter that Ben Franklin wrote in 1756 to his brother's step-daughter who was apparently having a difficult time dealing with the death of John Franklin, and it is one of the best statements dealing with death that I can recall, and I want to close with the reading of his letter:

Dear Miss E. Hubbard,

I condole with you. We have lost a most dear and valuable relation. But it is the will of God and nature, that these mortal bodies be laid aside, when the soul is to enter into real life. This is rather an embryo state, a preparation for living. A man is not completely born until he be dead. Why then should we grieve, that a new child is born among the immortals, a new member added to their happy society?

We are spirits. That bodies should be lent us, while they can afford us pleasure, assist us in acquiring knowledge, or in doing good to our fellow creatures, is a kind and benevolent act of God. When they become unfit for these purposes, and afford us pain instead of pleasure, instead of an aid become an incumbrance, and answer none of the intentions for which they were given, it is equally kind and benevolent, that a way is provided by which we may get rid of them. Death is that way. We ourselves, in some cases, prudently choose a partial death. A mangled painful limb, which cannot be restored, we willingly cut off. He, who plucks out a tooth, parts with it freely, since the pain goes with it; and he, who quits the whole body, parts at once with all pains, and possibilities of pains and diseases, which it was liable to, or capable of making him suffer.

Our friend and we were invited abroad on a party of pleasure, which is to last for ever. His chair was ready first, and he is gone before us. We could not all conveniently start together; and why should you and I be grieved at this, since we are soon to follow, and know where to find him? Adieu.

B. Franklin

Thank you for allowing me to be a part of this special celebration of Mur's life.

10. MOTHER'S OBITUARY



Prominent member of community, Catherine Bryan dies

From staff reports

Funeral services will be held at 11 a.m. today at First United Methodist Church in West Point for Catherine Cameron "Kitty" Wilkerson Bryan. A community leader in West Point for over 60 years, Bryan died Saturday morning at her home.

She was the eldest of five children born to the late Jefferson Pinckney and Caroline Mosby Wilkerson on Feb. 22, 1909 in Winterville, Mississippi.

She graduated from Greenville High School in 1927, the year of the great Mississippi River Flood, which broke through the levy three miles from the



Bryan

Wilkerson family home. She was eventually rescued from the rooftop of a building and taken to Greenville, where they took a riverboat to Vicksburg. From there they took a train to Memphis,

meeting other family where they stayed for two months before the river fell back below flood stage.

She went on to Mississippi State College for Women where she graduated in 1931 and also received a graduate degree in social work from Tulane University in 1935. Bryan Hall at Rhodes College in Memphis is named in her honor.

While a social worker in North Mississippi, she married John Henry Bryan of West Point, July 20, 1935 in Columbus. She worked briefly at Bryan Brothers Packing Company, a firm established in 1936 by her husband and his brother W.

B. Bryan. Bryan Brothers grew into one of the South's largest meat packing companies and merged with Sara Lee Corporation in 1968.

She was a devoted member of First Presbyterian Church and the First Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) where she was a founder and elder. She also had an active interest in genealogy research and was a noted expert in the field.

She was an avid supporter of the Public Schools of West Point and was a member of the Jr. Auxiliary and Daughters of the American Revolution. She was an advocate for children with special needs and helped

found the Clay County Association for Special Children. The Catherine W. Bryan School for Special Children was established in her honor with funds provided by family, friends and the Hardin Foundation.

She was a dedicated wife and mother to their four children, John H. Bryan Jr., Caroline Bryan Harrell, Catherine Bryan Dill and George W. Bryan.

She was selected as Mississippi Mother of the year in 1979 and loved to enrich her children's minds through travel, education and community service.

For full obituary, see page 3.