

JACKSON COUNTY, NC - BIOGRAPHIES - Autobiography of Flora Jane Zachary
Watkins

FLORA JANE ZACHARY WATKINS (born March 30, 1856; died 1945)
[bracketed information added by editor, Connie Ganz, ggg-granddaughter
via
Talmage Watkins]

I was born in Cashiers, Jackson County, North Carolina, in the year 1856. My brother [Charles Franklin Zachary, b. 1869] and I were great chums and worked together at little projects about the barn and garden. We had a little playhouse and a cemetery, where we buried all our little pets. My father [Mordecai Zachary] had a sawmill and grist mills, and brought me little squirrels and other pets. If they died, we buried them in the cemetery in front of my mother's [Elvira Evelina Keener Zachary] window. My father had a nice orchard of apple trees, and I have been in the top of every one of them and gathered some of the most delicious apples anybody ever tasted: Granny Rogers, Morgans, and other varieties. Some of the trees are still there; others gone with time.

Many families of the Southern aristocracy came to this valley [Cashiers Valley, NC] for the summer season, and many of them boarded in our house.

Among these were the Hamptons (Lieutenant General Wade Hampton III, 1818-1902 - Governor of SC 1877-79 and considered by some the wealthiest man in the U.S. prior to the Civil War), the Prestons [Wade's first wife was Margaret Frances Preston, daughter of Gen. Francis Preston 1796-1832], and the Calhouns (John C.) [John Caldwell Calhoun 1782-1850]. We had a handsome croquet yard. I have played croquet with young Wade Hampton [b. 1840], son of the general by his second [sic - Wade was born from the first marriage] marriage. General Hampton had three children, two boys and a girl. I used to ride behind young Wade on his horse. One day he had started hunting on a mule. The mule jumped and he fell and broke his leg. Miss Kate Hampton brought him a cushion to put his foot on. He said, "There's no use for you to pray for God to make you any better, for you are as good as God Almighty will let you be." Miss Kate and her sisters did much service for the people who lived in the community. They distributed literature, taught classes in Sunday school, and did many other things for the people. They were model Christians in every respect. One Sunday, the carriage of the general [Hampton] was driving up to the church. The general alighted, with the baby [George, Mary, Alfred, or Catherine?] in his arms, and assisted his wife [second wife Mary Singleton McDuffie, married Jan. 27, 1858] to the ground. Then he offered her the babe to hold while he helped the Negro nurse. Mrs. Hampton drew herself up with great ____ and refused. General Hampton's sister-in-law was Mrs. Dunwoodie; her son went with [my] sister Mary. Mrs. Dunwoodie was left widowed when her husband was killed in South Carolina. She brought her children to Cashiers Valley. She was also a sister-in-law of Preacher Edwards.

I went to school in Cashiers Valley, to the fall school, which held for a term of about four months each year. The teacher boarded at Uncle Bill Norton's.

Later, I taught two schools at Whittier [NC]. I also taught a subscription school at Bryson City []. From there, I went to the school established by the Friends [Quakers] at Maryville, TN [Maryville College]. I lived here for four years, in the house of Mrs. Newby, paying a part of my expenses by sewing for this lady. At the end of four years, I graduated from this school. During this time, I never once returned to my home for a vacation. I went with Mrs. Newby's children to school.

James Bruff, a professor in the school, was one of my good friends. One Sunday, just as I was resting after dinner, Professor Bruff came by to ask me to go on a walk with him. He had broken two roses from the bush, and he gave one of them to me. As we sat and talked, his rose disappeared, and he asked for mine. Years later, after my marriage, I was ripping up the skirt I had worn on this day and found the dried rose in one of its folds.

I met Mr. [John Christian] Watkins in Webster [NC] at the home of my sister, Mary [Mary Talula Zachary, b. 1855], two weeks after my return from school.

This was in June, and in October of the same year [October 14, 1880], we were married. When I was introduced to him, I was holding Mary's baby [Lettie, Max, or Roland Coggins Jr. from fourth marriage to Roland Coggins May 10, 1874?], and said, "If I get up, someone will have to hold the baby."

After our marriage, we lived in Webster. There had never been a Sunday school in Webster with literature. I took up a collection to order literature. After we married, he would not go to the Methodist Sunday school. I went on. Finally, they organized the Baptist Sunday school and asked me if I could go with him. He was well-pleased. After Rosa was born [1888 or 1889?], I joined the Baptist Church. We entertained Dr. M.N. Curry and Preacher Conley from Thursday until Monday. Dr. Curry explained the Baptist faith from the Bible.

(Mr. Watkins was about 40 [sic - he was born in 1837, so was actually 33] and I was 22 [sic - she was born in 1856, so was actually 24] when we were married.

We moved to Dillsboro [NC] when [fourth child John Dixon, who followed Richard, Charles, and William Leber in birth order - all born in Webster] Dixon was a baby [He was born around 1886]. The other children [Benjamin Talmage, Rosa, Fred, Paul, and Tom] were born here [in Dillsboro]. We started the church here. The Earleys, Watkins, Masons, and Dills were the first families to move here. Then came the Enloes. (We were in Dillsboro when the first train came through. There was a great celebration. A dinner was spread down at the tunnel, and all the convicts were fed. [William] Leber was a baby. This was about 1886 [1885?]. Judge Davis said, "Call him Judge." Mr. Watkins was a magistrate for 16 years and never had a case turned down.

Leber took "hip-joint disease" when he was nine. He was sent to Atlanta and kept there for two months. Dr. Hipkiss [how funny is that?], from Baltimore, was in Dillsboro and waited on Leber. Advised sending him to Atlanta. Mr. Harris said, "I want an interest in this cure," and handed Mr. Watkins a bill.

We bought this home [on Haywood Road, now the Squire Watkins B&B in Dillsboro, NC] soon after we came to Dillsboro. Mr. Watkins built a little shack to live in and moved over here. Started this house when Pa [Mordecai Zachary?] came home from Tennessee. He had a kiln. Had started the house then. Got the lumber from mills throughout the country. The house was patterned after the old [childhood] home [Mordecai Zachary House, listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1998]. Lindsey Bumgardner built it. It had no windows for a year or two. Boards served for windows. The house was not finished when Mr. Watkins died. I finished it. The house was damaged by men blasting nearby. Walter Moore entered suit for damages. From this, I received enough money to finish up the house and paint it. Many of the supplies were ordered from Hickory. Charles Rich painted it white.

Mr. Watkins died in 1899. Left his property covered with mortgages ... He had gone on the sheriff's bond and everything was covered. Mr. Hooker advertised it for sale. I said, "It is not I you are turning out in the street. It is a house full of little helpless children. You cannot stand on the fence and fall on both sides. You are their lawyer." He replied, "Before God and man, I am doing the best for you." Mr. Moore said, "You and Leber write 160 letters tonight. Mail them out to every lodge (Masonic) in the state. State the circumstances." We did this, and the money poured in. I went to Judge Davis and tried to borrow money. He had just loaned every dollar to the Cullowhee school. He sent me to the Wike girls. They had loaned all theirs. We met Jim Buchanan. "Did you get the money?" "No." He wrote me a check for \$600.

[Son] Charlie went to work for Mr. Harris. We put every available dollar on the house, and got it paid off. Charlie decided he could be of more help if he went west [California] with Charlie Zachary [Flora's brother]. We kept on digging and _____. They wanted me to give away my children. Hooker said, "Let it go on sale and then you can borrow money." Miss Hattie Moore, a teacher, wanted [son] Fred, seven. She would give him a horse and \$100 when he was 21. I, thinking it over, saw a picture of my boy looking through iron bars if I did not let them take him. I said, "I will stand it if I can." He stayed one month. I sent them money and said to send him home. I thought I would die before I got him back home. I said, "If we starve, we will starve together." Mrs. Morrison gave me many quotations from the Scripture where the Lord would take care of widows and orphans. (It was after this I sent for him.)

When [son] Fred was 15 or 16, he got a job as a news butch. Worked for over a year. Came home and went to school here. Professor Dawson was teaching here. Later, he joined the Navy. Once, he told me the preacher said to him, "My son, will you never wake up?" Fred said to me, "Mama, I felt the hand on my shoulder." He served in the Navy until his four years were up, in 1918. He was discharged. He worked in New York as a steward in a café. _____ told me Fred didn't look well. Next day, I went to New York and brought him back to Asheville. He died in October 1918 [flu epidemic?]. Next year Talmage died [in Byrd, GA, where he was stationed as a railroad employee], with influenza.

I made four trips to California to see [son] Charlie, [half-sister by father's second marriage] Rose [Zachary Fisher], [half-sister by father's second marriage] Hattie [Zachary Boyd], Joe [?], [half-brother by father's second marriage] Sam [Zachary], and brother Charlie

[Zachary]. One time, I stayed a year. My [son] Charlie was in Mexico in 1916, when the U.S. and Mexico had the trouble. He wrote me to come to Camino [CA], sixty miles from Sacramento, in the Sierra Nevadas [mountains]. This was the time I stayed a year. Charlie had an English cook, who cooked for about forty of the men. I helped with the management. From there, we went up to Rose's, at Chico [CA], to spend Christmas. We went to Hattie's, in Red Bluff [CA], and I waited on her. Charlie wrote me to come to Westwood [CA - Lassen Co. or Los Angeles Co.]. We received a message of Virginia (Cannon's) birth [born to Rosa Watkins and husband James Cannon in Dillsboro, NC]. Charlie said, "Mamma, she (Rosa) has gone through two of the most trying ordeals of her life without you." I went on to Westwood. There, I had some dental work done. Charlie told the dentist: "Find everything you can to do; I want to keep her here this fall."

[Flashback] While I was going to school in Franklin [NC], to Preacher Bowman, I met Frank Ray. (I was living with Mary.) Professor Bowman made a rule that boys and girls could not speak to each other without written permission from him. Frank wrote me a note to know if he could go with me to church Sunday. I told him I could not go without permission from Professor Bowman. Frank said he had written permission in his pocket. At church, he took my arm; when I protested, he said he had written permission in his pocket. It was all a lie. When I came home, he got the school at Shoal Creek and came to see me every weekend. At a Sunday school picnic at Webster, our Sunday school was invited to parade. (I tried to avoid Frank all the time because he drank.) In the party at Webster, I saw Frank. He asked me to stay and go back with him on horseback. Pa [Mordecai Zachary] said I might. Sallie Barly and I were together. Next morning, Frank came after me. I told Sallie to go with us. When Frank drove by, I said, "Come on, Sallie. Frank, can Sallie go with us?" Frank said, "I reckon there's room." We stayed all night at Sam Cooper's. Next morning, he turned his pony out so he could not catch it for me to ride home. I told him I was going to walk. I rode home. He went on to school. That night he came after the pony.

His wife died and my husband died. One morning, I walked out to make a fire to wash wearing an old kimono. Around the bend in the road came Frank. I had seen him at Webster once before that, at court. He had said, "Well, Flo, I reckon we just as well begin where we left off." I replied, "Frank, I think we're too old and have too much sense for such foolishness." The night he died, the last word he said was to ask if I were coming. I loved him better than any other man on earth; I could not help it to save my life. But I had resolution enough not to marry a man that drank. He ruined his life with liquor. He married a right nice woman and raised some nine children. The night he died (I was in California), I saw him come in at the door just as plain. He came in and looked everywhere until he saw me. Then he looked straight at me and turned and walked out. In a day or two, I received a letter from Nell [Watkins, wife of Talmage?] saying he was dead. He quit drinking after he had a fall across a stove while he was drunk.

Once, [daughter] Rosa was over at Cousin Wiley's, sewing. She wanted me to go over and help her. Frank was going, so I went with him. We drove across the mountain. He had a very bad cold. He said, "Flo, if I had thought about it, we would have gone down through Brindle Cove [], where a still is, and got a little for my cold." I said, "You have used

it all your life. Why not use it for some benefit now?" We went back.
He got the liquor and gave me a little dish of kraut. Wiley said,
"Where have you and Frank been?" I told Frank, and he said, "Flo, die
with it [the secret of the still] in you." END

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