

Granny Deanes — still "playing" after all these years

The 1909 - 1910 women's basketball team must have been tough in those days. One of the players Mary Peele Deanes - - is tough enough to have lived for 99 years and shows no sign of quitting yet.

"Granny" Deanes, as she is known by just about everyone in Murfreesboro, including her 19 grandchildren, and 5 great-great grandchildren (all of whom she can call by name), has been around long enough to recall the "good ole days" of Chowan.

Mary Peele Deanes was educated in a one-room schoolhouse before coming to Chowan. She remembers coming to the Female Baptist Institute the same year as President Bruner and that her room was on the third floor on the end. Back then there was a section of the building connecting the main building to the old library and the girls referred to this as the "street car". Mrs. Homer was the "mother of us all" at the time.

Granny's husband-to-be at the time, Willie Evans Deanes, had some connection to Chowan too. His mother, Norma Spiers, was a student at Chowan and later taught here. Some of her work is displayed at the home of Granny's son, Gene Deanes, where Granny also lives today.

Young Mary grew up near Powellsville in Hertford County and attended the Bethlehem Church there. Today she remains a member of Murfreesboro Baptist Church although she doesn't get out much anymore.

The home of Willie and Mary Deanes, built in 1836, was moved years ago from Main Street to Jay Trail and is listed in the register of historic homes. It now is the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Ed Wooten, both Chowan faculty/staff members. Mary and Willie had four children at that homeplace and two sons, Sidney, who lives in Virginia, and Ted, of Murfreesboro, are still living.

Five generations of the Deanes family (on two sides) have attended Chowan, according to Granny. Mr. Deanes' mother was the first, and Granny herself was the second generation to attend. Granny's son, Ted Deanes, (a businessman in Murfreesboro) was the third; Joyce Deanes Langston, class of '61 and her daughter Deborah Ann Langston, class of '84, round out the picture through the generations.

"I have fond memories of Chowan the way it was," recalls the 99-year-old. "I enjoyed playing basketball. We played against each other in the old gym which was where Turner Auditorium is today."

"My team was one of the best," she confides.



(L to R) Mary Parker, Murfreesboro, Ruth Boyette, Murfreesboro, Mary Josephine Peele, "Granny" (age 16), Powellsville, Linnie Mizelle, and Bernice Howell, Northampton Co., Zenova Ethridge, Manteo.

Granny remembers the oldest living alumna of Chowan, Mrs. Mary Wiggins Turner, class of '12.

"Yes, I remember seeing her at school. She married a man from Gates County, Mr. O.C. Turner."

That's correct.

"I remember Miss - - oh, yes, Olive, she taught English. Teachers sat with each table in the dining room, you know. We girls weren't allowed to go past the turngate at the entrance of the school. Rules were very strict."

Right again.

"I remember we were not to associate with President Bruner's sons because we were to have no contact with boys, but one of them, Willis, had a secret romance with Claudine. They used to talk to each other through the pipes from rooms on different floors."

Well, there are no records to verify that, but we believe her.

It's been 82 years since Mary "Granny" Deanes walked the halls of the Columns Building at Chowan, but students of today could, no doubt, still learn a few lessons from her.



Granny Deanes today

Chowan Olympian bobsledder in games

Think Chowan wasn't represented in the Winter Olympics? Well, think again. A Chowan alumnus was there, and not where you would expect to find a hefty former Chowan football star and ex-pro football player.

Greg Harrell, class of '82, played football for two seasons at Chowan, but at the Winter Olympic Games he competed in bobsledding - - on the No. 2 U.S. team, that along with Herschel Walker and company, in the No. 1 sled, attempted to break a 36-year medal drought for American

bobsledders. They didn't quite do it, but it was exciting to watch.

Harrell left Chowan for the University of Maryland where he lettered three times as a tight end and wide receiver. He then played for the San Diego Chargers in 1985 and the Washington Commandos of the Athena Football League in 1989 and 1990. He was on the Los Angeles Raiders practice squad prior to joining the Olympic bobsledding competition.

Harrell said at the time, "All I

knew about bobsledding is that it was fast and on ice and a lot of people turned over in the sled."

Coach Jim Garrison remembers Greg Harrell, who often comes home to Chowan for football games when he is in the area. "It didn't surprise me a bit that he made one of the bobsledding teams. He came to Chowan from Hertford County High School and grew in size, strength, and maturity. He became a starter for us before his freshman year was over. He is a quality athlete with great

speed and size."

It's a long way from Harrellsville, N.C. where Greg is from to La Plagne, France, site of the games. His mother, Mildred Harrell was worried about his safety at that high speed, but was behind him 100% and planned an olympics party for friends and neighbors.

"This is by far the best feeling I've had since I can remember being an athlete," said Greg. I can't put anything into words what it's like to be an Olympian."