

'Priceless' items to be placed on display

\$250,000 received from Cooper Fund

When David Henry Cooper began his service as Chowan College professor of science in 1922, little did he realize the position would not only help advance his career but provide him with his wife as well.

At Chowan, he met Jo Piland Cooper of Winton, a senior art student at the then four-year women's college. In 1923 they were married.

The story of their devotion to each other, service to mankind, and her great courage have been provided by relatives and friends following the announcement that Chowan College has received \$250,000 from the David Henry Cooper and Jo Piland Cooper Memorial Charitable Trust Fund. The gift was provided from the sale of the late couple's West Virginia Farm and other holdings.

Native of Winton

Jo was one of eight children born to James J. and Olivia Copeland Piland of Winton. Three of her older sisters also graduated from Chowan: Georgia P. Cohoon, 92, who resides in the Guardian Care Nursing Home in Ahsokie; Jessie P. Midgett of Coinjock; and Elsie P. Stephenson of St. Augustine, Fla.

She had three other sisters: Mrs. Jimmie P. Lassiter of Windsor, mother of Mrs. Robert C. White of Aulander whose husband is a Chowan trustee; Mrs. Thelma P. Kimbal of Charlotte; and the late Mrs. Mildred P. Midgett of Norfolk. Her brother, the late Herman Piland, lived in Wakefield, Va.

In 1924, the couple moved to his hometown of Jefferson City, Tenn. He taught science at Morristown

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High School while Jo continued her interest in art class at Carson-Newman College.

Then, when she was 25, tragedy struck. She was stricken with rheumatoid arthritis. The odds were against her continuing her interest in art. Her hands were drawn up and her fingers bent and stiff. She was confined to a wheelchair for life.

Flowers Favorite Subject

But she didn't give up. Although it required great effort and concentration, she continued to paint. Her favorite subject was flowers, especially wild flowers. She also painted flowers on wooden trays

and on tin, an art form call tole.

Her neice, Mrs. Robert White of Windsor, was very close to Mrs. Cooper. She has provided the college with considerable information concerning her aunt. "Painting was her chief joy in life," commented Mrs. White. Mrs. White remembers that "she was always cheerful despite her affliction. She had a great spirit."

A Jefferson City neighbor, Lelia Murphy, noted, "Even though she suffered intense pain and crippling results of rheumatoid arthritis, that eventually left her body immobile, she never became embittered."

She said the Mrs. Cooper was "endowed with rare artistic talent. She propped her brushes between rigid fingers and perserved,

against all odds, to the creation of exquisitely lovely flower pictures, perfect in even the most minute detail."

She remembers Jo Piland Cooper as a "gentle, kind and considerate self. There was no pettiness in Jo Cooper's great soul."

She also paid tribute to David Henry Cooper. "In his loving care of her he was completely selfless. His high quality of mind and character translated into adoration of her kept her alive years beyond her expected life span. His en-

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couragement of her in her every endeavor helped her to really live beyond excruciating pain and to be able to brighten the lives of others with her lovely creations and her lovely self."

In 1942, the Coopers moved to Washington, D. C., where he had accepted a government job teaching at Emory School of Electronics. They made their permanent home in Washington until their deaths. Both are buried in Ahsokie Cemetery. Jo died on Jan. 16, 1969. David Cooper died on Aug. 13, 1980. In his will, David Cooper left his estate to Chowan in memory of his wife, Jo Piland Cooper.

Continued to Paint

In Washington, Jo continued to paint flower pictures, but also branched out into another art form, heraldry, the painting of coats of arms.

Mrs. White said David Henry Cooper would lift his wife into their car, put in her folding chair, and take her to the Library of Congress, where she did exhaustive research. Mrs. White explained that Jo Cooper became a familiar personality at the Library of Congress, meeting people from all over the country. In recognition of the quality of her work, she was requested to submit her name to be placed on the list of Heraldic Artists approved by the Library of Congress.

The Coopers bought a farm near Romney, W. Va. as a weekend retreat. Here, Jo painted many of her flower pictures, receiving inspiration from the apple orchards, mountains and colorful foilage.

While Jo Cooper was a talented artist, she was also a warm human

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\$250,000 check is presented

President Bruce E. Whitaker accepts the gift from Mrs. Robert White of Windsor, as Mr. White looks on.