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Nellie Mae Duckworth Adams

July 31, 1930 - Jan. 26, 2021

Nellie Mae Duckworth Adams, 90, of Morganton, died January 26, 2021 at Autumn Care of Drexel after several years of declining health.

Mrs. Adams was a retired local school teacher, a pastor's wife and pianist at area churches, a former library volunteer and community correspondent for the local newspaper, and the author of two books about a large Morganton area family.

Born in 1930, Nellie Mae was a daughter of Jesse B. and Zula Queen Duckworth of the Hopewell community. She was a 1948 graduate of Morganton High School as co-salutatorian and a 1951 graduate of Bob Jones University in Greenville, S.C. In addition to her parents, Nellie was predeceased by a sister, Clara D. Clontz, and two brothers, Charles Duckworth and J.B. Duckworth, all of Morganton. Her husband, the Rev. John O. Adams, died in 2001, and her youngest child, Ken Adams, died in 1977.

Mrs. Adams retired February 1, 1995 from Freedom High School, where she had taught English, Public Speaking, and Bible Treasures and advised the school newspaper, Liberty Press. She was an original faculty member since consolidation in 1973. From the early 1950s, she also taught at Bethware School in Cleveland County, her first teaching position, and at Jonas Ridge School, Pilot Mountain Elementary, Salem High and Oak Hill High, all in Burke County.

In 1952, the Adamses were married at Hopewell Baptist Church. Over the next 26 years they served in Baptist churches including Mountain View #2, Asheville Street, and Brookwood, all in Burke County, and Piney Grove in Caldwell County. During the 1960s they also served at Towanda Community Church and Zion Bible Church, both in Illinois. When their ministry ended in 1978, they returned to Hopewell, where Nellie faithfully attended services until her health declined 6 years ago.

In retirement, Nellie volunteered in the North Carolina Room at the Morganton-Burke County Public Library and, like her mother and grandmother before her, regularly contributed a Hopewell community column to The News Herald. Over three decades she compiled genealogical information and newspaper clippings about the Sidney Poteat family of the Salem community and published two related books: “These My People” and “Poteat Kindred.”

Nellie was an avid reader all her life. She and her mother took the bus to town each Saturday in the late 1930s/early 1940s so she could exchange her books at the library. She established libraries from her personal collection at many of the churches. In her later years, she exchanged books regularly with her sister-in-law in Illinois.

Another passion was playing piano. In her youth, she attended the Stamps-Baxter School of Music in Dallas, Texas, and accompanied gospel quartets at Morganton area singing conventions as pianist. She was a gospel songwriter, with a number of hymns published by Stamps-Baxter Music Company. She taught her own children and children in the community, both in N.C. and Illinois, to play the piano. In addition to the piano, she also played organ, accordion and bells. One of her proudest accomplishments was buying her organ entirely with money earned from giving piano lessons.

Nellie was always active. Her house was surrounded by dozens of azaleas that she tended. Her blueberry bushes supplied blueberries for family and friends, and she even sold pints to a local grocery store in the 1990s.

When not working outside, she busied herself with crafts such as knitting, crocheting, embroidery, quilting, copper tooling, and jewelry making. She was an expert on

embroidery, quilting, copper tooling, and jewelry making. She was an expert on knitting identical patterned sweaters for all her children, including the family dog on one occasion. Her former Freedom students should remember her for knitting “toboggan pins” in school colors and selling them to support the Liberty Press.

The family would like to express appreciation to the personal home caregivers and the staff at Autumn Care of Drexel who participated in her care. Her special caregiver, Stephanie Long, was a loving and devoted friend who allowed her to live at home for several years.

Nellie is survived by her daughter, Steffi Adams of Morganton; two sons, Tim Adams (Wanda) of Irmo, S.C., and Rahn Adams (Timberley) of Boone; one granddaughter, Cary Ann Adams Vincent (Stephen) of Hangzhou, China, and formerly of Irmo; two great-grandchildren, Brooke Vincent and Thor Vincent, both of Hangzhou; and a number of nieces and nephews.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, a private graveside service will be held at Hopewell Baptist Church, Morganton. Sossoman Funeral Home and Crematory Center is in charge of arrangements.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Hopewell Baptist Church, 1112 Hopewell Road, Morganton or to the Morganton Public Library, 204 S. King Street, Morganton.

Sossoman Funeral Home and Crematory Center is assisting the family with the arrangements.

Tribute Wall

No tributes added yet.