

Obituaries

Eloise Thompson

🕒 03.04.17

Eloise Yancey Bailey Thompson, 88, of St. Marys, Ga., passed away Monday evening, Feb. 27, 2017, at her home on Mush Bluff.

Mrs. Thompson was born on Dec. 31, 1928, in Brunswick, Ga., to the late Clarke Mearny and Elizabeth Dean Yancey.

She grew up in Brunswick and graduated from Glynn Academy in 1946, going on to graduate from Valdosta State College with a B.S. in biology in 1950. Mrs. Thompson moved to St. Marys shortly after her graduation to teach first grade. After she married and raised four children to school age, she returned to teaching until her retirement.

While her children were in school, she worked tenaciously to improve the public school system and served as president of the PTA. After moving to St. Marys, Mrs. Thompson developed an avid interest in local history and genealogy, and has written and lectured much about these topics. She helped to establish the Guale Historical Society in 1975, an organization dedicated to the area's history. She often served as president, and wrote and edited the society's newsletter for 34 years. She was sometimes the featured speaker at meetings and was so knowledgeable of local history that she could fill in for a cancelled meeting's speaker at a moment's notice. She often led walks around St. Marys and Oak Grove Cemetery for the society and arranged and led field trips to sites of local historical interest.

While serving as the chairman of the Camden County Historical Commission, she worked with Marguerite Reddick and Virginia Proctor to produce in 1976 the first full-length history of the county – "Camden's Challenge: A History of Camden County Georgia" – in time for celebration of Camden County's bicentennial.

Mrs. Thompson was instrumental in establishing, with county-wide support, The Bryan-Lang Historical Library in Woodbine which opened in 1987. She worked tirelessly to ensure the library had proper funding and was on the board of its foundation for many years.

She was instrumental in getting Orange Hall in St. Marys placed on the National Register of Historic Places. In addition, her work also led to the placement of the St. Marys Historic District and the McIntosh Sugar Mill Site on the National Register.

She put together many genealogy lines for both her family as well as other families and had a wonderful memory for names and dates and the many family connections in Camden County and beyond.

Recognizing the need for a senior living facility in Camden County, Mrs. Thompson was a major force in getting Magnolia Manor of St. Marys opened in 2003. She served on its board of directors and was on the advisory board up until her death.

She was a generous supporter of many charitable causes. She was a founder of the Communities of Coastal Georgia Foundation and established one of the first donor-advised funds there, which has made many charitable grants.

Mrs. Thompson was strongly concerned about the environment, and placed conservation easements, which protect land from ever being developed, on both the land around her Mush Bluff home and land she owned along the St. Marys River. She strongly supported Cumberland Island's purchase and designation as a National Seashore, writing a short book on the island's history and serving on the Cumberland Island Historic Foundation. She was an enthusiastic supporter of both the Satilla Riverkeeper and the newly formed St. Marys Riverkeeper.

A longtime member of the St. Marys United Methodist Church, Mrs. Thompson held various positions in the church and taught a Sunday school class for many years. Her research led to the designation of the church as an "Historic Site in Methodism." She wrote a book on the history of the church for its bicentennial, St. Marys United Methodist Church 1799-1999.

She wrote her own funeral plans, which, being a stickler for getting it right, she subsequently revised several times. Even though the cemetery was one of her favorite places, she worried about the comfort of others and made sure to note in her funeral plans that any ceremony at the cemetery be brief, so that attendees not suffer the heat, the cold or the sand gnats.

Mrs. Thompson received many awards during her lifetime, although, given her humble nature, any evidence of these tended to be tucked away in filing cabinets in her home. Among the notable awards she received were two from the National Association of Press Women (Georgia Chapter) for both history and column writing in 1984. She received the Georgia Statewide Volunteer Leadership Award in 1986. As well, she was presented with the Governor's Award in the Humanities in 2004 for her contributions to Camden County and coastal Georgia history and culture.

Mrs. Thompson is survived by her daughter, Bettina Bailey (Don) George, of Mountain Rest, S.C.; her sons, Alan (Diann Johnson) Bailey of Savannah, Ga., James Frank Bailey of Woodbine, Ga. and John King (Rhonda Davis) Bailey of Clarkesville, Ga.; and her grandchildren, Clarke Bailey, Ben Bailey, and Thomas Bailey. Mrs. Thompson was predeceased by her husbands, James Wilbur Bailey and Charles Wesley Thompson Jr.

The funeral service will be held at 10 a.m. Saturday, March 4, 2017, at St. Marys United Methodist Church with Dr. Derek McAleer and Pastor Tom Jones presiding. Interment will follow in Oak Grove Cemetery in St. Marys, Ga.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that memorial contributions be made to the Bryan-Lang Foundation, 311 Camden Ave., Woodbine, GA 31569 or Magnolia Manor, 4695 Charlie Smith Sr. Drive, St. Marys, GA 31558.