

'A woman of wisdom' dies at the age of 100

By CHARLOTTE FULTON

News-Courier Reporter

Sammie Dawson Mason — a retired teacher and the daughter of a former slave — died Friday, just a few weeks short of her 101st birthday.

Mason, born in Elkmont on March 15, 1901, was the daughter of James Jackson Dawson, a slave who left his Elkmont plantation in December of 1863 and walked to Huntsville to sign up with the 110th U.S. Colored Infantry. He later was captured by Nathan Bedford Forrest's men at Fort Henderson, the earthenworks fort located on Coleman Hill in Limestone County.

As a young girl, Mason would attend Trinity High School, built on the Fort Henderson site by the American Missionary Association and designated for the education of former slaves and their progeny. Even later, Mason would return to Trinity High School and teach until retirement, living out the balance of her life within a mile of the site where her wounded father and his fellow soldiers were captured and marched to Cherokee, loaded onto a cattle car and sent to Mobile.

On her 100th birthday, Mason said that if she had lived



Sammie Mason dead at 100.

a life characterized by high expectations and noble standards, it was due to the legacy of her father, who proved he was a man by leaving slavery and fighting for the Union, then proved his manhood again by returning home to care for his wife and daughters.

Though Mason never had children of her own, there are many who looked upon her as a mother figure. One of those is Mack David, who was in the 10th grade at Trinity when Mason came there as a teacher.

"I remember her as a good, clean, decent Christian woman," David said. "She was an excel-

"She touched the lives of hundreds of American citizens — not African-American citizens, and not European-American citizens — but American citizens. She was a warm, witty, wonderful lady who's really going to be missed."

Lt. Col. James L. Walker

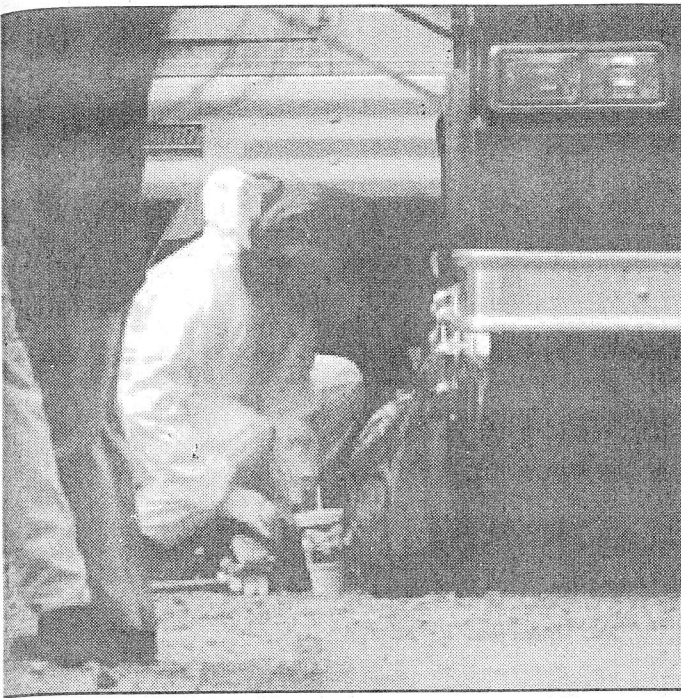
lent teacher and a mother figure not only to students, but to co-workers as well. If you were upset, you could go to her and you'd leave feeling better.

"We were still her children. When I saw her, even though I was a grown man, she might say, 'Mack David, get up and get me that fan.' If I hadn't done it, I guess I'd have gotten a whipping.

"You could discuss any kind of problem with Mrs. Mason, and you'd never hear it talked about again. We don't have those kinds of people any more."

Emma Harris called Mason "an upright woman, a Christian woman, a woman of wisdom,

See Wisdom, Page 3A



AP Photo

orker dressed in a protective suit prepares to work Tuesday at Tri-State Crematory on the property of Ray Brent Marsh outside Macon, Ga., as officials continue to recover bodies at the site. Marsh, allegedly took in the bodies of deceased people for cremation then stored them on the property. Authorities have sealed off the area while they work to recover and identify the bodies.

Number of corpses at crematory grows

MACON, Ga. (AP) — As the search continued around Tri-State Crematory, where more corpses were found, residents in the area faced the horror of planning funerals for loved ones they long believed were resting in peace. Forensic teams on Tuesday had recovered 149 bodies left to rot outside the northwest Georgia crematory, finding skeletons sealed in urns and bodies that had been dumped into a shed.

"I feel like I'm in a horror movie," said Leatha Shropshire, a mother of three, whose own mother died Jan. 30 and was found dumped in a 16-acre area behind the crematory. Clutching a framed photograph of her mother, Shropshire said she is more fortunate than hundreds of others who are still waiting to see if their loved ones can be identified from the intermingled skeletons. "We just lost our mother two years ago and we are having to do all over again," Shropshire said. "I'm waiting to describe what that kind of pain is like."

Marsh was arrested for a second time and authorities filed 11 new theft-by-deception charges against him, bringing the total to 16.

"By the hour, this is getting bigger and bigger and bigger," said Kris Sperry, the state's chief medical examiner. "I don't have a theory because none of this makes sense. I don't think it ever will."

Officials examined the contents of 51 urns that had been sent to relatives — some contained powdered cement or potting soil rather than human remains, officials said. Other urns appeared to contain human remains, but it was not clear whose.

Sperry said there was no way to make a positive identity using cremated remains, but officials said at least one family received remains that did not belong to their relative. The relative's remains were identified among those recovered from the grounds.

Investigators have said Marsh told them the bodies were not cremated because the incinerator was broken. Authorities said they were unsure how long the incinerator was

Consultant

Continued from Page 1A

"We're in the building process with the jail and the other building and that's quite a load for Pam," Menefee said. "I feel an obligation to Pam and I feel an obligation to the people of Limestone County. With all these building projects going on we need good records kept."

Menefee also said Ball will need to attend certain training sessions required in her new position. Ball took over the office of county administrator when Bates retired in late January after serving as administrator for eight years.

The county then agreed to use Bates as a consultant until such time as Ball feels comfortable with

the administrator's duties.

While commissioners took no official action regarding Seibert's concerns they decided to leave the issue in Ball's hands.

"So Ms. Ball is going to make the call when she's comfortable and doesn't need help anymore?" Seibert asked, to which other commissioners nodded agreement.

Later Tuesday Seibert said he didn't feel like his concerns had been properly considered.

"The reason I was questioning that is that's \$29 an hour we are paying for a consultant," Seibert said. "That's what I was talking about. I'm not sure long how long we need to do that."

Wisdom

Continued from Page 1A

my mentor and my friend."

Harris has known Mason since the 1940s when Mason was earning her secondary education degree at Alabama A&M University, where she also was a house mother.

"I always wanted to be like her," Harris said. "I'll be 89 Monday, but she claimed me as one of her daughters. She was a beautiful, warm, caring person and a good leader. She touched my life. Anyone who knew her loved her."

Lt. Col. James L. Walker called Mason "an educational giant."

"She taught me in seventh grade

around 1957," Walker said, "and she opened up the world of science to me. On the shelves in her classroom, she had jars of formaldehyde with examples of all kinds of animals, there to arouse the curiosity of the students. I was fascinated. She gave me a basic foundation in science which I have used for the rest of my life."

The funeral will be 2 p.m. Sunday at Antioch Cumberland Presbyterian Church with burial in Thatch-Mann Cemetery. Visitation will be 7 p.m. Saturday at Peoples Funeral Home.

You're Invited

Fred & Nora (Bauer) Ferguson will celebrate their 65th Wedding Anniversary on February 20th. In celebration of this event, friends and neighbors are invited to visit with them on Sunday, February 24th at their home on Brownsferry Road between the hours of 1:30 PM and 4:30 PM.



Fred and Nora are the parents of three children. Bruce