

## [Mrs. Eloise Seay Mathis - Part 1](#)

This is the first part of a series of interviews with Mrs. Eloise Seay Mathis. Mrs. Mathis is 94 years old and grew up in [Pacolet Mills](#). She has been kind enough to agree to share her memories about her early life in Pacolet with this website. Her granddaughter, Drenda-Michell Brennan, has been essential in allowing us to do this. We have supplied the questions to Drenda via email. She has talked to her grandmother about the questions and recorded her answers. Our plan is to do the interview with five questions per session. In addition to answers to the questions, Mrs. Mathis and Drenda are also furnishing us with photos, newspaper clippings and other items from the past to accompany the interviews. The answers to the first five questions are as given on the following pages.



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*1. Did you go to grammar school at the Pacolet Mills Elementary School at the top of Hotel Hill? Please tell us what you remember about it.*

Yes, she went to school all the way through in Pacolet. She started at the Primary School (1st, 2nd and 3rd grades) at the top of the steps on Hotel Hill and continued through High School. All the mill children on Brewster Street walked to and from school together each day.

Everything in the mill village revolved around the mill's whistle. School started when the mill's whistle blew. When it blew at lunch time everyone walked back home for lunch and then back to school when they were done eating. When the mill whistle blew for everyone to leave work for the day the children were also dismissed from school. Once the whistle blew the mill workers, many of which were their fathers, joined them on their walk. They walked in all weather and they only cancelled school when there was a lot of snow. She doesn't remember anyone being overweight. ;)

Every morning before school all the children sang a song to the Principal, Ms. Dozier, "Good Morning, Ms. Dozier, Good Morning..." They also recited the Pledge of Allegiance before class. They did their 'school work' on the class black board. They often shared books and even desks with other children. My shy grandmother remembers unhappily having to share her books and desk with her sister, LA ...who tended to be more interested in entertaining than learning.

*2. Did you go down to "The Hall" as a young girl? Please tell us what you remember about it.*

The Hall, Granma also calls "The Girls Club". It was a bath house for women where they could go shower and get cleaned up. The Mill provided it for them and anything the mill did for them was free. Mr. Milliken built a new house for Granma's family when she was around four years old so they had indoor plumbing from that point on. (Her father ran the well pumps for the mill.) But she and her sisters did occasionally go to The Hall even though they had a bath tub just for the enjoyment. There were women who ran The Hall (Girls Club) and a dressing area where you could go and get dressed and women would do each other's hair and spending time visiting there.

*3. Did you go on to high school after grammar school? Please tell us about it.*

Granma's father was the son of a school teacher and a strong advocate of education. She went to high school in Pacolet where Hardee's is now....she says that they tore the school down to build Hardee's.

One of her fondest memories is of her 7th grade graduation. That was a big rite of passage! It was a formal occasion and she wore an evening gown and got to wear high heels for the first time. She gave a speech that she had memorized welcoming the incoming 6th grade class. Unfortunately, because of her nervousness she skipped an entire line of her speech...but only her mother (who had also memorized the speech help-

ing her learn it) noticed.

Her high school prom was held on the top floor of the Franklin Hotel in Downtown Spartanburg. She was 17 years old. They hand-made their invitations to invite a guest of their choice. My grandmother took my grandfather. There was a meal served and only the adults were allowed to dance. The prom in those days was a 'program' and everyone did something. My grandmother sang "Poor Butterfly" with three of her friends for her part of the program.

Once a girl married she could no longer go to school. My grandmother remembers being mortified because she was still sharing a desk with my aunt...who liked to walk across the top of them to the cheers of the class! She also tells a story of a science teacher who told the students that they would never be able to have a television in [Pacolet](#) because they would never be able to get a signal to cross over the mountains.

Once a girl married she could no longer go to school....this recollection hits home and is very personal for my grandmother because this became a huge part of the rest of her story and I am thankful she is allowing me to share it here.

My grandmother was not allowed to graduate with her class. At 17 years old, two weeks before her graduation ceremony in 1941, my grandfather (Wallace Mathis-four years her senior) talked her into doing something that she has told me a thousand times she has regretted ever since. They "slipped off to Gaffney and got married at the courthouse." She was a teenager in love and ready to get married and start their life together ....and my very charming grandfather convinced her that they could get married and then keep their marriage a secret from everyone for two more weeks until after her graduation. But within hours after the ceremony, my overly enthusiastic scoundrel grandfather "bragged to my Aunt LA" (the desk dancing sister) ....and, of course, big news travels fast in any town, but ESPECIALLY in a small mill village! The news was out before the week was up and my grandmother's dreams of graduating from high school were gone. Her parent's hearts and trust were broken...I believe disappointing her parents and the embarrassment the scandal caused in the community was even worse for her than the shame and loss of having to leave school. It is still a difficult memory for her today when she talks of the disappointment of her parents...despite her many years of marriage to my grandfather until his death in 1970 and two wonderful sons ...."just two more weeks" ...she will still tell me...she already had her class ring.

From my perspective as a granddaughter, I will tell you the positive things that I have gleaned as a result of what she considers a "disgraceful & painful" period that changed the course of her life.

First and foremost, I think this event strengthened in my grandmother a heart for people when we mess up. She has branded into my soul since birth that in all things in life, "People are more important", and she has lived her life modeling it for me. She has set an example of always putting other people first. I think the heartache and disgrace of this event taught her compassion in a very 'real' way and I have never heard or seen her 'caste a stone' and she has always been a champion for an underdog or a person feeling 'outcast'. I think this adversity in her life taught her to love more unconditionally and

extend grace more freely than anyone else I have ever known.

Secondly, she has taught me not to give up on my dreams and to work hard for them by example! Granma worked at Converse Mill once she married first as a spooler and then a warper until it closed. She then decided (by this time in her 40s, widowed, and with her children marrying) that she was going to go to college...which she did at night while working day jobs. She started by FINALLY getting her GED! She then continued on with school in the evenings after work until she earned a degree in Accounting at what was then Spartanburg County Technical Educational Center. After graduating she used her degree to get a job in the office at Mayfair Mills where she single-handedly did the payroll and insurance for every employee (before computers) for all three Mayfair Mills plants until she retired. This is still an accomplishment that gives her great joy and makes me desire to follow in her footsteps of determination and perseverance!

#### *4. What were your favorite pastimes when you were a young girl?*

**SKATING!** They wore the skates with metal wheels and leather straps that you strapped to your shoes. She and her siblings skated everywhere...even down [Hotel Hill](#) and through the house! Any time she was allowed free time you could find her with skates on.! Every Saturday at 2:00, after the entire house was scrubbed top-to-bottom and “clean as a new penny”, Granma and her sisters were allowed to skate to the [Mill Office Store](#) “where the mill workers were paid” to skate under the concrete pergola.

“We lived in a [ball field!](#)” ....there was no shortage of people and activities at the ball field. Even before there were official team games, people came and started pick-up games in the evenings and on the weekends...her Aunt Opi began 'pretend' umpiring so young that by the time she was a young girl she actually did work as an umpire in actual games until she married and moved away!

Granma fondly remembers that she and her sisters “...used to run with Childs when he was ‘doing exercise laps’ at the ballpark.” They would chase him while he ran laps and then when he finished his ‘exercise laps’ he would build a see-saw for them from an old saw horse and a piece of lumber and push them...well, he pushed Granma and Aunt LA...he told Aunt Opi she was “too big”. Granma remembers her father telling her once that he thought Childs could be President of the United States one day. She always remembered that because later Childs went into the military and “did real well”. I decided to look up Childs after hearing Granma’s story...sure enough...Childs full name was William ‘Childs’ Westmoreland....more commonly known as ”General Westmoreland” ....Chief of Staff of the United States Army ...he ran ‘exercise laps’ at the Pacolet Ball Field ....and my grandmother chased him around a field first.

Some boys had bicycles...that was a common pastime...but she and her sisters did not have a bike.

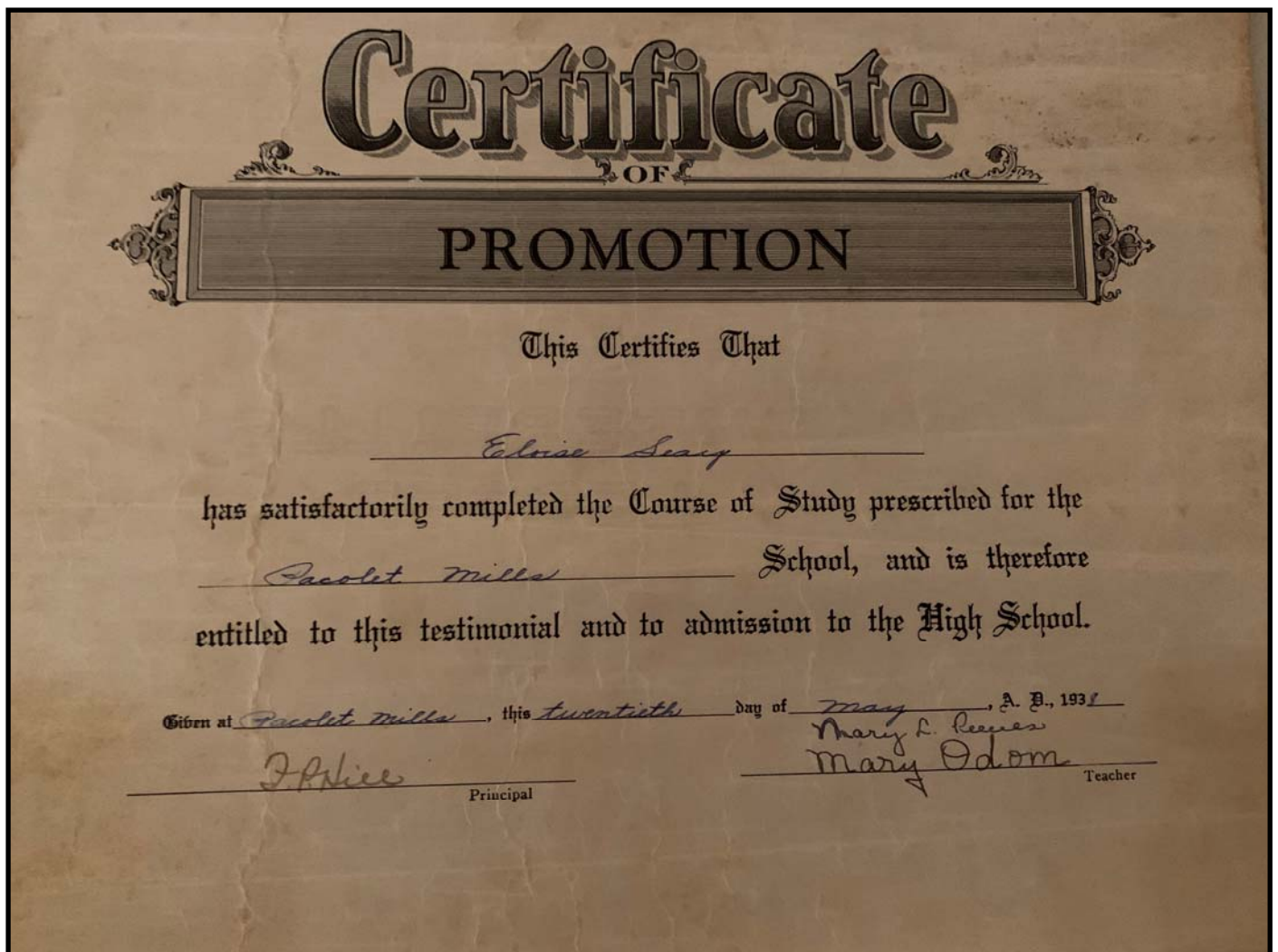
Swimming was a fun thing to do in the summer...but my grandmother's 14 year old brother, Buddy, drowned in the [Pacolet River](#) swimming with other boys so they never swam again after that day.

They would walk to [Bonner’s. Store](#), down in the flat also known as Can Holler...they

carried all kinds of groceries and there was a beauty shop there or sometimes they went to [Thomas' Store](#) which was near their house and they carried everything....they even had ice cream.

They visited people...everyone visited each other...they walked down the street and people sat outside on their porches and talked. Many of them were family members...aunts, uncles and cousins...

[4th of July cook outs at the ballfield](#) ...the smell of the meat roasting, activity, and excitement! ....And Granma's father would buy a Coco Cola for each of them on the 4th of July every year. Granma says that they "...made our own toys and our own fun and we never had any shortage of things to do!"



Certificate given to Eloise when she finished at [Pacolet Mills Elementary School](#) and was admitted to [Pacolet High School](#).

# Pacolet Mills School Offers Pageant Today

Christmas Program Will Be  
Given by Grade 4-A  
at 1:30 P. M.

Pacolet, Dec. 20.—A Christmas pageant will be presented at the Pacolet Mills School this afternoon at 1:30 o'clock. The program will be presented by Grade 4-A and is under the direction of Mrs. J. B. Weeks. The patrons and friends of the school are cordially invited to attend.

The program is built up as a radio broadcast including television. Charles Lowery will act as the listener while Lawrence Tolison will be the announcer. The following pageant in four scenes will be presented:

In the first scene several Christmas carols are to be sung by a chorus composed of Florene White, Louise Sprouse, Sarah Tesner, Bonnie Faye Robinette, Gladys Spake, Sarah White, Evelyn Spake, Virginia Padgett, Margaret Pierce, Elizabeth Scales, Edward Wilkins, James Mathis, Leroy Morgan, Paul Wells and Lelmer Tramel.

After the carols, the nativity scene will be dramatized. Those in this scene are: Mary, Arbie Belle Seay; Joseph, Nellie Jones; Wise Men, Harold Fowler, James Wells and Harry McGaha; reader, Stella Davis; angel, Hazel Ward. The chorus will be hidden until near the end of this scene when it will enter singing "Oh Come All Ye Faithful" and bow in adoration and prayer before the manger.

The third scene will represent a modern night before Christmas. The children taking part here are Hazel Lee, Marie Courtney, Ruby Shehan, Barbara Campbell, Vernie Tate, Harold Fowler and Edward Wilkins.

In the fourth scene Santa will come to decorate the Christmas tree and leave his gifts. The characters are: Santa Claus, Herbert Scales; Star Girl, Hazel Ward; Bubbles of Happiness, Irene Loving, Hazel Worthy, Mary Sue Tate, Frances Lancaster and Eloise Seay; tinsel carriers, Fannie May Jette, Helen Harmon, Virginia Dupre, Mildred Kirby, Ruth Holmes, Zana Hodge, Edward Wilkins, Fay Patrick, Woodrow Reynolds, Samuel Hogan.

Newspaper clipping from 1934 when Eloise's class put on a Christmas Pageant.



**Eloise in her younger years.**



**Eloise and her husband, Wallace Mathis.**





**Another photo of Eloise and Wallace.**



**Eloise with two of her sisters and her Dad, Kimsey Seay.**

## **Tragic Accidents in the Life of Mrs. Eloise Seay Mathis**

Eloise Seay Mathis had two tragic occurrences to happen in her lifetime. The first one happened in 1935 when she was 9 years old. Her older brother, Kimsey, drowned while swimming in the [Pacolet River](#) with some friends. Eloise still remembers when it happened and particularly the anguish of her mother, Dora, when finding out the news. Kimsey's obituary from the *Spartanburg Herald Journal* on July 2, 1935, is shown below.

Boy, 14, Drowned in the Pacolet River - Kimsey D. Seay, 14, of Pacolet, SC, was drowned yesterday afternoon, Monday, July 1, 1935 around 3 o'clock as he and several companions were swimming in the Pacolet River about a quarter of a mile above Pacolet Mills. Efforts to save the lad were made by Junior Kirby, on of his companions, but unfortunately he was overpowered and and was unable to bring the Seay boy to shore. Young Seay had swum across the river and went down about the middle of the river on his way back. Young Seay was in the eighth grade at Pacolet High School and was prominent in many School and Community activities. He was a star member of the Junior Baseball team, sponsored by the Pacolet American Legion. Defoix Lanham recovered the body from the river shortly after 4 p.m. and efforts were made to resuscitate the boy by people of the community and member of the staff of the John F. Floyd Mortuary, butt they were to no avail. He is survived by his parents, Mr. William Kinsey and Dora Lillian Pugh Seay; six sisters, Mrs. Wilson Sherbert, Ophelia, Lillian, Abel Eloise, Mildred and Nelleen Seay; and one brother, Donnie Seay. Funeral services were held on Tuesday, July 2, 1935 at the Pacolet Mills Baptist Church, by the Rev. B. H. Tucker with interment in the White Rose Cemetery.

Obituary from [Find A Grave.com](#)

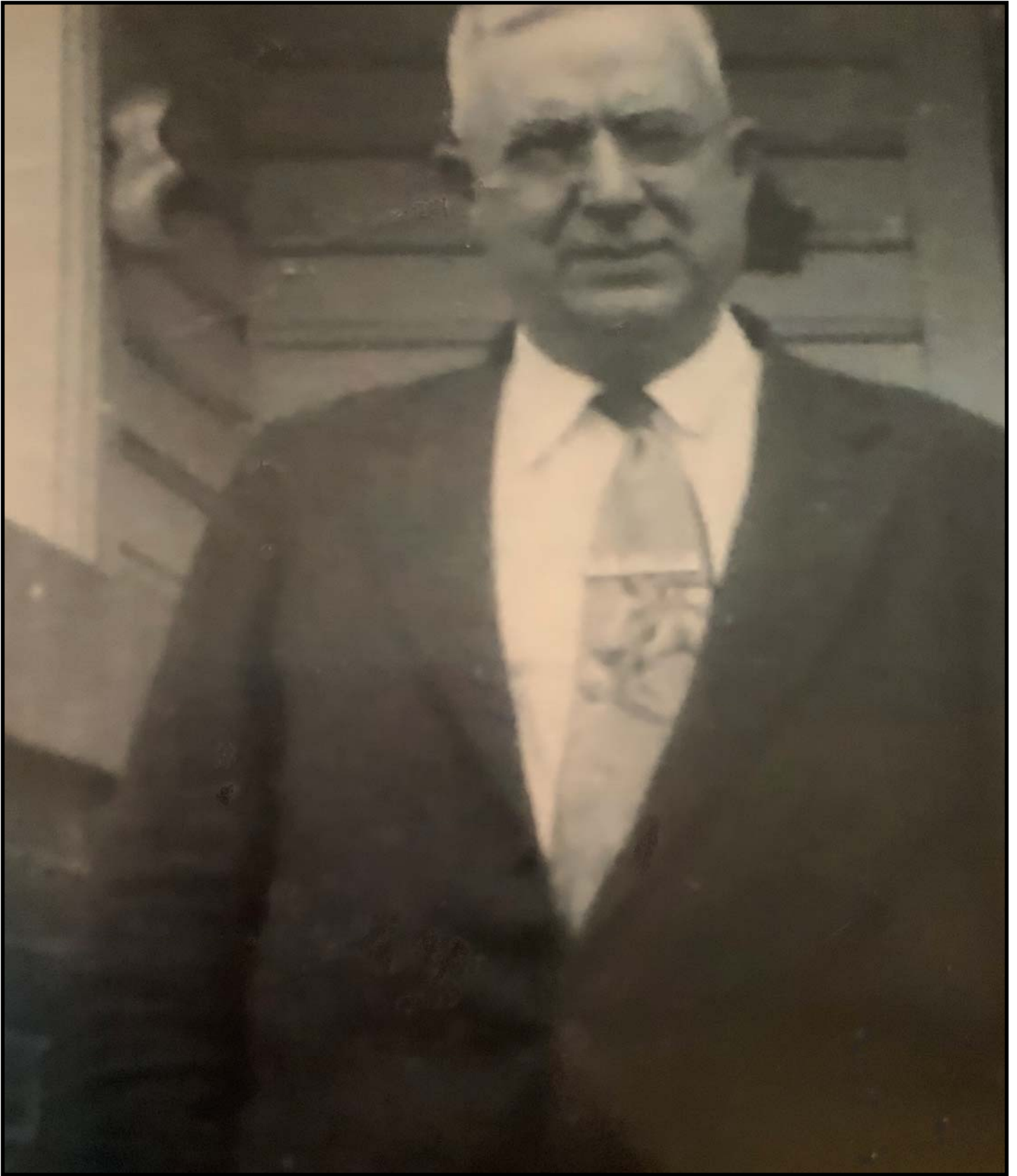
The second happened in 1953 after she was an adult. Her father, William Kimsey Seay was a carpenter and shop employee working for [Pacolet Mills](#). He died in an accident at the mill. A bale of cotton was dropped on him by a forklift operator while he worked on repairing a window frame on the floor below. He did not die instantly but lived on for several days. Mr. Seay's obituary from the *Spartanburg Herald Journal* from November 6, 1953 is shown below.

William Kimsey (Kim) Seay, 63, carpenter for the Pacolet Manufacturing Co. for many years, died Wednesday night at the General Hospital following a brief illness. Funeral arrangements will be announced later by J. F. Floyd Mortuary.

Mr. Seay was born in Haywood County, N. C., a son of the late Mr. and Mrs. Thomas B. Seay. He was a member of the Pacolet Baptist Church.

Surviving are his wife, Mrs. Dora Pugh Seay, Pacolet Mills; five daughters, Mrs. Ophelia Manning of Jacksonville, Mrs. Eloise Mathis of Converse, Mrs. Mildred Gilbert of Spartanburg, Mrs. Lillian Millwood of Pacolet Mills and Miss Nellene Seay of Pacolet Mills; a son, Cpl. Donnie E. Seay of the U. S. Air Force, France; four sisters, Mrs. T. H. Cathey of Campobello, Mrs. Emma Berry of Spartanburg, Mrs. R. W. Watson of Spartanburg and Mrs. Howard Harmon of Spartanburg; three brothers, Felix and Walter of Pacolet and James of Spartanburg; 10 grandchildren.

Obituary from Find A Grave.com



**Eloise's Dad, William Kimsey Seay.**



**This is the house at the end of Brewster Street where Eloise was born and grew up. It was located right next to the baseball park. The [ballpark](#) was a big part of their lives. Eloise's youngest sister, Nelleen Seay, was also born and raised in this house and she still lives in it today.**



**Eloise and Nelleen on the porch of the house on Brewster Street.**



Eloise and Nelleen, with bats, remembering the [Ballpark](#).







Above, photo taken at Nelleen’s birthday celebration. She is in the center, Eloise is to her left and her brother, Donnie “Moon” Seay is to her right. Donnie played baseball with the [Pacolet High School](#) team and also with the [Pacolet Mills Trojans](#). Below, picture of Eloise, Nelleen, Donnie and their extended family.





**Eloise and her granddaughter, Drenda, traveled throughout Pacolet Mills to take photographs to use in this article and other articles on the Pacolet Memories website. Shown above are some “selfies” of the two of them taken during these travels. The pictures not used in this article will soon be available on this website at [Pacolet Photo Albums](#).**