

**MRS. ROBERT M. “VIOLA SIMRELL” GREENWOOD...  
COOKEVILLE’S FIRST STENOGRAPHER, WOMAN BOOKKEEPER (#712)**

**Source:** Heritage of Putnam County Tennessee – 2008 by Putnam County Heritage Book Committee and County Heritage Inc.

Pg. 264 – Mary Viola Simrell was born October 27, 1884 in White County. Her father was a Sparta lawyer named Stanton Farris Simrell (1860-1886) and her mother was a schoolteacher named Mary Viola Baker (1885-1953). Her father was shot and killed when she was just barely 2 years old. She was very close and lovingly devoted to her widowed mother, Mrs. Simrell, who taught school in Sparta.



In those days a woman was limited to the home and the school room. Viola was contemplating entering the business world, and influenced by B. O. Duggan, then a Sparta teacher, later Commissioner of Education, who said “there is a new and far reaching field in the making for women, that of a stenographer and bookkeeper and strongly advocated that Mrs. Simrell send her daughter to Nashville.

So to Draughon’s Business College Viola went. She received her diplomas in shorthand, typing and bookkeeping and became expertly adapted in these extremely difficult phases for young women.

She recalled her first position was in the office of Jere Baxter, for whom the neighboring town of Baxter is named. She applied for a position here in the office of Alfred Algood, a leading attorney. In later years, the two families were closely associated.

His reply to her application was “a law office is no place for a young woman to work”, consequently she said I didn’t get the job.”

In 1908 she was working in the mammoth new Stahlman Building in Nashville, when J. N. Cox, General Manager of Gainesboro Telephone Co., offered her a secretarial position here.

Viola Greenwood was noted as Cookeville’s first secretary, woman bookkeeper and stenographer.

Later she was with the Bank of Cookeville. R. L. Farley was cashier. She also was with First National Bank and other business concerns.

In September 1911, Viola Simrell and Cookeville’s native Robert M. Greenwood were married, residing on Broad Street until 1919, when together with Mrs. Simrell, their son, Bob, moved to their Spring Street home. Viola Greenwood’s grandson, Bobby Greenwood, now resides at this home with his family...wife Elma and daughter Viola.

Mrs. Greenwood has been Cookeville’s outstanding “Career Woman” through the years, a title justly earned as she has conducted a School of Business in her home, during which time she converted her shorthand system from Pitman’s to Gregg’s by self instruction.

Mary Viola Simrell-Greenwood taught shorthand writing and typing to 650 students, one at a time, in her own home at 105 East Spring Street, Cookeville, Tennessee for 1925 until late 1950s. Jennie Lee Williams, now Mrs. DeFord VanHoosier of Lexington, KY, was the first student and John Frey the last. Her school was called Viola Simrell Greenwood Business School. She was also President of Woman’s Society, Cookeville, TN, 1928-1931; Correspondent Secretary and later President of Business and Professional Women’s Club, 1934-1935; President of Cookeville Music Club; Treasurer and Charter Member of Daughters of the American Revolution (D.A.R.), L.A.F., Order of the Eastern Star (O.E.S.); Member of Methodist Church and was a Southern Democrat.

Mrs. Greenwood was a charter member of the Cookeville Music Club, Old Walton Road DAR Chapter, Business and Professional Woman Club, Algood Home Demonstration Club and "she loved entertaining", frequently hosting large club meetings in her home.

She had been a devout member of the Methodist church since childhood and had taught classes for various ages and was active in the different organizations. In the last years of her life she would work up her Sunday school lessons one word at a time with an aid of a magnifying glass because of her near blindness. In 1952 Viola Simrell Greenwood was chosen Queen Mother by the men of the Methodist Brotherhood. She died January 22, 1974 at 91 years of age.

Mrs. Viola Greenwood is the grandmother of the golf pro Bobby Greenwood, who played 7 years on the PGA Tour, a Three-Time NCAA All American at North Texas State University, and later, a Three-Time Golf hall of Fame Inductee.

*Story submitted by Bobby & Elma Greenwood, P. O. Box 674, Cookeville, TN 38503.*

*Sources: The Compendium of American Genealogy 1600s-1800s, Volume VI, Lineage Records, Page 259, Titled: First Families of America. The Sparta Bar, by Frank Trigg Fancher, printed by The Cabinet Press, Milford N. H., 1950, p. 47 The Citizen (Social Events, page 4), Cookeville, TN, Tuesday, February 27, 1962, by Alice Keith Ford, Editor.*

\*See Biographies of Cookeville City Cemetery at:

<http://www.ajlambert.com>

#### **Robert Monroe Greenwood Obt.**

**COOKEVILLE** - Funeral services for Robert Monroe Greenwood, 97, were conducted at the First United Methodist Church Wednesday, October 15, 1980, at 1:30 p.m. with Rev. Robert H. Case and Rev. Maurice Moore officiating.

Mr. Greenwood died October 14 (1980) at his home at 105 East Spring Street. Survivors include a son, Robert S. (Bob) Greenwood, two grandchildren, Robert S. (Bobby) Greenwood, Jr., Eden, North Carolina, Mrs. Ann Gholson, Nashville, and four great-great-grandchildren.

Burial will be in the Cookeville City Cemetery.

Hooper & Huddleston Funeral Home is in charge of arrangements."

Herald-Citizen Newspaper, Cookeville, TN: 15 October 1980

#### **Mary Viola (Simrell) Greenwood Obt.**

b. 27 October 1884 – d. 22 January 1974

**COOKEVILLE** – Funeral services for Mrs. Mary Viola Greenwood, 89, were to have been conducted from the First United Methodist Church today at 2 p.m. with Rev. Ben Alexander, pastor of the church officiating.

Mrs. Greenwood died Tuesday in a local nursing home following an extended illness. She was a native of Tennessee and the daughter of the late Stanton and Mary Baker Simrell.

Mrs. Greenwood taught business subjects to over 900 girls in her home for many years. She was the first Stenographer employed by the First National Bank and was a member of the United Methodist Church, the

Woman's Society of Christina Services, The Eastern Star, Business of Professional Women's Club and the DAR. She stayed active until her health forced her to retire from her many activist.

She is survived by her husband, Robert M. Greenwood, a son, Robert Staton "Bob" Greenwood, two grandchildren, Bobby Greenwood, Cookeville, and Mrs. Ann Gholson, Nashville; and great grandchildren.

Burial was to be in Cookeville City Cemetery. Hooper and Huddleston in charge of arrangements.

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: Thursday, 24 January 1974.