

THOMAS (DR. TOM) WILLIAM WILLIS

COOKEVILLE -- Graveside services for Thomas William Willis (Dr. Tom), 66, of Cookeville, will be held at 11 a.m. on Thursday, July 23, at Smyrna Cemetery.

The family will receive friends from 5-9 p.m. on Wednesday, July 22, at his home in White Plains on Old Walton Road.



(Pictured: Thomas W. Willis at the William Jared Cemetery Dedication on the 20th of Oct. 2007, Putnam Co., TN)

Mr. Willis passed from this life on Sunday, July 19, 2009.

Tom was born Sept. 20, 1942, to Thomas Houston and Jessie Isabelle Zeigler Willis of Selma, Ala.

He attended a small country school in Burnsville, Ala., and graduated from Parris High School in Selma. His B.A. in history came from Livingston College (now Northwest Alabama University). He taught American history at Southside High School in Selma for five years. During that time he was elected president of the Dallas County Teacher's Association. The next five years he served as Supervisor of Diagnostic and Educational Services and Supervisor of Educational Day Program for Central Alabama Youth Services in Selma. During this time, he earned his master's in school administration from the University of Alabama.

After "hearing the calling," he earned his doctorate

in special education in 1979 from the University of Alabama. That same year, Tennessee Technological University advertised for his specialty in learning disabilities and gifted education, so Tom moved to Cookeville to pursue his career in teaching and his passion for the Tennessee Walking Horse. He was employed at TTU for more than 30 years.

His career, as well as the life's work, was in the field of inspiring future and present teachers of special education to love the field of teaching children with disabilities. He was tenured and held the rank of full professor. For more than 10 years, he was the director of the "Summer Program for Educational Development," where children with learning disabilities and children who were gifted came together during two weeks in the summer to learn together and foster their common bonds. He was also the program director of Tennessee Tech's "Science Enrichment for Females" to increase participation of females in the fields of math and science. For 22 years, he directed the Special Education Teacher's Institute, funded by the Tennessee State Department of Education, where teachers teaching on waivers could become certified in special ed.

He served as president of the Alabama Association of Children with Learning Disabilities, 1975-1978, where he was the recipient of the Outstanding Past President Award. He served as president of the Upper Cumberland Council for Exceptional Children, 1980-1981. He also served as faculty advisor to the Student Council for Exceptional Children for many years. He was nominated for TTU's Outstanding Teaching Faculty Award on four different occasions. He served as president for the Tennessee Association for Gifted (TAG) in the early 90s. He also served as director of "Base 10" (Be a Special Educator in Tennessee), a state funded program to help persons become special education teachers.

Outside of his career and family, his love of genealogy, history, antiques and Tennessee Walking Horses

were his driving forces. He raised, trained and showed several outstanding show horses and colts. Among his winners were "Winston's Big Secret," Reserved World Champion Owned and Trained Walking Horse, "The Hickory Stick," World Champion Yearling Colt and Reserved World's Champion Yearling, "Mitchie's KV," 1987 3-year-old Plantation World Champion, and, most recently, "Fashion's Sunnie Attraction," 2008 FOSH North American Champion and 2008 NWA High Point Versatility Champion.

He was very proud of his membership in the Sons of the American Revolution, where he served as a charter member and vice president of the Lt. William P. Quarles Chapter of Cookeville and the Sons of Confederate Veterans. He was also a member of several other history-related and heredity societies. His love of history, genealogy, antiques, horses and family, along with teaching and his many students, will be his lasting legacy.

Truly a Southern Gentleman!

He will be truly missed and fondly remembered!

His family includes his wife, Martha Elizabeth Summers Shanks Willis; a stepdaughter, Chrissa Elizabeth Shanks Goin and husband Gary Lee; a stepgrandson, Jacob Alan Goin; two brothers and a sister-in-law, Bobby Hughes and Leigh Willis and Bennie Zeigler Willis of Selma; two nieces, Melanie Willis Blair and husband Walter of Falls Church, Va., and Jessica Willis of Selma; a brother-in-law, Harvey Louis Summers and wife Cathy of Cookeville and his children, Robert Harvey Summers and his wife Elizabeth, Sarah Allison Summers Baisley and her husband Andrew and Matthew Howell Summers and his wife Nichole; and three stepnephews.

Memorial donations may be made to Tennessee Technological University Education Foundation, in memory of Dr. Tom Willis, TTU, Box 1915, Cookeville, TN 38505, or the Kate Duncan Smith DAR School Special Education Department, Grant, AL (make checks payable to TSDAR and on the "for" line, write "KDS-DAR, Tom Willis" and send to Charlotte Reynolds, TSDAR State Treasurer, 244 Ridgeway, Crossville, TN 38555-8457.

Dr. Jann Culp will officiate at the services.

Please visit his Web site at www.mem.com and send a message to his family.

Crest Lawn Funeral Home-Cremation Center is in charge of arrangements.

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: Tuesday, Jul 21, 2009

<http://www.ajlambert.com>