

Williard Pendergrass 102 Tomorrow, Has Century Full of Memories
By Debie Rami
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Willard Pendergrass has many memories from the past century – the most endearing are the births of his children and his baptism at age 100.

And on Saturday, family and friends will make yet another memory for the man they adore.

To celebrate the January 24, 1885, birth of Pendergrass, a festive celebration will be held at the Double Springs home of his daughter, Joan Loftis, where he now resides.

Friends, along with many of his three step-children, seven grandchildren, five step-grandchildren, seven great-great-grandchildren and 11 step-great-great-grandchildren will attend an open house from 2-4 p.m. in his honor. Also hoping to attend the affair will be his 96 year old brother, Arthur, of Nashville.

Born to the late Willie and Rachael Pendergrass, he set out to California at the age of 30, an idealistic young man ready to conquer the world. “He still marvels at the speed of travel today,” remarked Mrs. Loftis. “It took him 20 days in an open-air sedan to get from Tennessee to the west coast. The roads were just narrow ruts then and when a car got stuck, all the other drivers would have to get out and help or else no one could get through.

“There were practically no motels, so my Dad would stop along the road when he got tired and hungry and sleep under the open sky.”

While in California, Pendergrass worked in the oil fields, but his chief talent seemed to lie in carpentry. He was employed by the US Civil Defense Department for many years, helping build air bases. He also assisted in constructing the Japanese internment camps during WWII.

At the age of 20, he married Pert Hutchison of the Double Springs community. Three years after her death, he wed Minnie Brown Shipley, a widow, and took on the responsibility of raising her four children.

The couple then added a son, Bill Pendergrass, and daughter, Joan, to the growing family. His wife died in 1981 and their son in 1982.

Many local residents remember him as a business man, the owner and operator of a grocery in Double Springs, TN which he opened upon his return from California in 1949.

He also worked for many years at Jere Whitson Hardware once located on the Courthouse Square in Cookeville. Others remember him fondly as a talented carpenter who built several homes in the Double Springs area.

A birthday money tree has been started in his honor, the proceeds from which Pendergrass plans to donate to the Double Springs Community Center for scheduled improvements. The \$130 which he received last year for his birthday was given to the Double Springs Homecoming '86 project to help build a shelter for the Double Springs Cemetery.

According to his daughter, Pendergrass can no longer help with the physical renovations needed in his community so he donates monetarily instead.

Even though he suffers from bad eyesight and hearing, he's in excellent health, “ his daughter said. “He's alert and really keeps abreast of what's going on around him. He listens to the news every night and is amazed how rapidly things have changed.

“He loves talking to people. In fact,” she chuckled, “he’s still got an eye for the ladies. His grandsons tease him that they’re afraid to bring a special lady home for fear that he’ll steal her away.”

Pendergrass is a member of the Double Springs Church of Christ where he was baptised two years ago at the age of 100.

The family encourages anyone who cannot attend the open house to visit Pendergrass at his home on Blackman’s Fork Road. Cards may be sent to Rt. 2, Box 222, Cookeville, TN 38501.

He cherishes the birthday cards and letters he has received in the past, including the ones signed by President and Mrs. Regan.

Pendergrass has lived through two world wars, the Depression, recessions, and the death of his parents, two wives and son. Travel has progressed from buggies to rockets during his lifetime. He watched with awe as men walked on the moon and cried at the Challenger shuttle disaster.

“Through all the changes, he kept shaking his head and muttering, “What next?” his daughter said. “But they always came up with something.”

Willard Pendergrass died at the age of 103 - 23 April 1988. He is buried in the Double Springs Cemetery, Double Springs, Putnam Co., TN

***See Family Sheet for Willard Pendergrass.**