

## TENNESSEE TECH A FAMILY TRADITION

By Bailey Darrow, Herald-Citizen Staff

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**PUTNAM COUNTY** – When looking through old family photo albums, it's easy for the Robert Little's children to relate to the photos taken sometime in the late 1940s of their great-grandmother Clara Belle Maddox Little seated on the campus of Tennessee Technological University.

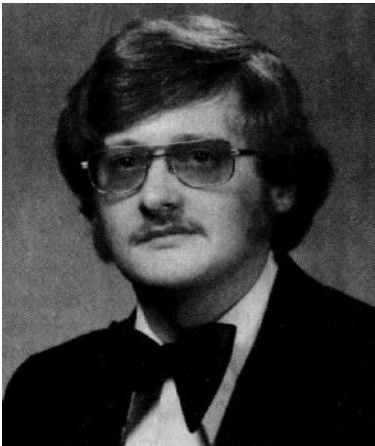


Well, at that time, the school was called Tennessee Polytechnic Institute and Clara Belle didn't know it, but she was starting a family tradition that would last generations.

(Pictured: Clara Belle (Maddox) Little).

Some 60 years later, there are now four generations of tech graduates in the Little family who have walked those same steps, something they are very proud of.

Clara Belle earned a bachelor's degree in social sciences from the school in 1950. She later went on to earn a master's degree in special education from the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. Her son, Charles Owen Little received his bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from tech in 1959. Then came Robert, Charles' son and Clara Belle's grandson. He earned a bachelor's degree in philosophy/sociology from Tech in 1980. All three of Robert's children, Justin Scott Little, Travis Chase Little and Katherine Angela Elizabeth Little Hyde, have earned degrees from the university.



More than 10 Tech graduates have come from the family, and while tradition has played a big role in the family's commitment to the university, the school's high reputation is also important to them.

(Pictured: Robert Bruce Little graduated from Tennessee Tech in 1980).

For Clara Belle, deciding what school to attend was easy. Her oldest brother, Arthur Maddox attended and graduated from Tennessee Polytechnic and it was close to her home in Overton County. Clara Belle's husband also studied at the school and played football for awhile before leaving to go to work.

“The school, even back then, had a very high reputation,” Robert said. “O decided to attend TTU due to a family history on both my father and mother’s side of the families having attended there.”

Since Robert’s father Charles, an uncle, Billy Jim Little, and an uncle on his mother’s side of the family all graduated from Tech, it seemed like an obvious choice for him.



“All academic programs at the school are held in high regard all over the United States whether engineering, agriculture, or those curriculum that are considered arts and education,” Robert said. “In my generation, there are seven of us cousins that have graduated from TTU.

(Pictured: Katherine Angela Elizabeth Little Hyde, center, earned a degree in early childhood education from Tennessee Tech in 2008. She is pictured with her father, a 1980 Tech graduate, Robert Little and grandmother Melva (Ramsey) Little).

“TTU was rated very high by my father. He stated to me and my brother Gilbert V. Little, who also graduated from TTU, often as well as to some of my cousins, how valuable a degree from TTU was. He honestly felt that a degree from there was thought more of than many of the ‘big colleges,’ mainly because there you had to earn your degree with hard work and diligence,” Robert said.

That was one of the reasons that Robert encouraged his children to attend Tech.

“I don’t remember ever considering not completing my undergraduate degree at TTU,” Robert’s son Travis, the family’s most recent Tech graduate, said. “I had grown up listening to the stories of my dad and grandfather and they both had a good experience at Tech. So, it just seemed natural to go there as well.

“Another factor which influenced me to attend Tech was the wide range of classes which were offered. I really didn’t know what I wanted to major in when I arrived at Tech and enrolled in the political science department. Knowing I wasn’t locked into few choices really was a load off my mind,” Travis said.

Travis Little received his first B. S. degree in 2007 in political science. He later received a B. S. degree in business administration and most recently graduated with a masters in education in 2011.

“For me it was a combination of tradition and commitment,” said Robert’s daughter Katherine. “I am very family oriented and I knew choosing TTU would give me the opportunity to continue to be surrounded by my immediate family as well as my extended family.”

Katherine received her bachelor’s degree in early childhood special education from tech in 2008.



“In terms of tradition it was an honor for me to be able to continue the traditions of my father’s family by attending the university,” Katherine said. “Once I began classes and realized my calling was in early childhood special education, the tradition deepened in that my great-grandmother Clara Belle Maddox Little studied and worked in special education was well.”

(Pictured: Travis Little, center, is the most recent Tennessee Tech graduate in the Little family. He is pictured with his mother, Kathy Little, and father, Robert Little).

Justin Little, Robert’s oldest son earned an MIS degree from tech in 2004.

“My granddaddy (Charles) used to tell us of the types of mathematical problems they would solve in the engineering department,” Travis said. “One of his favorites was right after the Soviets had launched the Sputnik in the fall of 1957. He said Dr. Kinslow came into his engineering class and asked the class to figure how fast Sputnik made a complete rotation around the earth.

“I think those types of stories were mentioned so much because it was the space race that influenced him to specialize in the field of engineering. It was a life long love he always had.”

Robert remembers hearing stories of the university as a child as well.

“He had been in the Navy and when he got out, he realized that he needed a formal education,” Robert said of his father Charles. “He used to laugh about one instance in particular, where the class was discussing, I believe circuits, and my father made the mistake of correcting the professor about a statement he had made to the class. My father learned that day that it is not a wise action to correct a professor in front of the rest of the class and especially if you are right. It was the only class that he barely passed during the years of his attendance there.”

All of the Littles say they are pleased with the education they received at Tech.

“I would definitely encourage any children I have to attend TTU,” Travis said. “My experience at Tech was great for a number of reasons. First, I received an excellent education and was able to do so in a small class ratio.

“A second factor is the friendly staff. I still keep in touch with my advisor, Dr. James Akenson, who has served as a source of academic and professional knowledge which I have begun my professional career.”

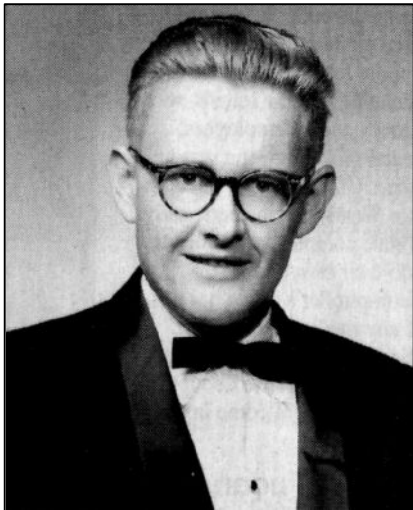
All the Little say they hope to see Tech remain a family tradition.

“I was very happy that (my children) all chose to go to TTU, I knew they would get a quality education there,” Robert said. “I hope that one day all my grandchildren will attend TTU. I will encourage them to attend there and help them to attend there as much as I possibly can. I know that a degree from TTU will mean a better life and job for them when they graduate.

“I am proud of the legacy that my grandmother began and is now continuing through my children. Tennessee Tech University is a valued part of our lives,” Robert said.

**Charles Owen Little Ob.**

b. 25 November 1932, Livingston, Overton Co., TN – d. 9 May 2002, Nashville, TN, md **Melva (Ramsey) Little**. Charles Owen Little, s/o **William Hershel Little** (1904-1972) & **Clara Belle Maddox** (1907-1987).



Funeral services for Mr. Charles Little, 69, of Manchester, were conducted at 1 p.m. Sunday, May 12, 2002, from the chapel of Coffee County Funeral Home with Bro. Kenneth Hubbard and Dr. Benton Cox officiating. Burial was in Good Hope Cemetery in Livingston with Coffee County Funeral Home in charge of the arrangements.

Mr. Little died Thursday, May 9 at St. Thomas Hospital in Nashville. He was a retired electrical engineer with AEDC and a Veteran of the US Navy.

(Pictured: Charles Owen Little graduated from Tennessee Tech in 1959).

Born November 25, 1932, in Livingston, he was the son of the late William Hershel and Clara Belle (Maddox) Little.

Survivors include his wife, Melva (Ramsey) Little, Manchester; two sons, Gilbert Little,

Athens, AL, and Robert Bruce Little, Silver Point; a brother, Billy Jim Little, Livingston; and four grandchildren, Justin Little, Travis Little, Angela Little, and Lauren Little.

**William Herschel Little**

b. 24 September 1904, TN

d. 28 March 1972, Livingston, Overton Co., TN

Wife: Clara Belle Maddox md 19 July 1929, Overton Co., TN

Father: John Porter Little (1878-1938)

Mother: Eula F. Owens (1886-1971)

Buried: Good Hope Cemetery, Livingston, Overton Co., TN

**Clara Belle (Maddox) Little**

b. 26 June 1907, Overton Co., TN

d. 26 October 1987, Livingston, Overton Co., TN

Husband: William Herschel Little md 19 July 1929, Overton Co., TN

Father: Charles Hamilton Maddox (1876 - 1946)

Mother: Angelina Ledbetter Maddox (1878 - 1958)

Buried: Good Hope Cemetery, Livingston, Overton Co., TN

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