

Alston-Pleasants Scholars Fund  
May 25, 2008  
50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemoration Program  
Background Information

Missouri Alston Pleasants

Missouri Alston Pleasants was born June 11, 1867, at Saxham Hall, which was later known as Belmont Plantation, in Warren County. She died February 12, 1959.

A long-time resident of Louisburg, Miss Missouri, as she was known, was the wife of William Henry Pleasants, who died in 1917.

Miss Missouri was the youngest of the eleven children of Archibald David Alston, who married a distant cousin, Missouri F. Alston, the daughter of Willis "Congress" Alston and Sallie Madeline Potts, of Washington, NC. She attended the John Graham School in Faulk Township in Warren County.

In a June 6, 1958, News and Observer interview, Miss Missouri explained the origin of her name. "I didn't have a name until I was 11 years old," she told the press. "My mother died when I was two and my brothers and sister called me Baby. I didn't like to be called Baby and I wouldn't answer. Then they tried calling me Missouri, after my mother, and I came a-running. My mother had said she didn't like the name Missouri, but I like it."

She was a member of St. Paul's Episcopal Church and was active in the Colonial Dames and in the Daughters of the American Revolution.

On May 9, 1958, Miss Missouri established the Alston-Pleasants Scholars Fund to provide scholarships to selected UNC students as a perpetual memorial to her grandfather, Willis "Congress" Alston.

## Willis "Congress" Alston

Alston, a grandfather of Missouri Alston Pleasants, was born in 1769, the son of Captain John Alston and Ann Hunt Macon.

As a seven year old, he had an opportunity to sense the political atmosphere of both the April 1776 Provincial Congress in Halifax that authorized the NC delegation in Philadelphia to vote for independence, which was the first official colonial call for separation from England, and the November 1776 Provincial Congress that adopted the first NC state constitution, which continued in effect until revised in 1836.

In 1790, at age 21, he was elected to the NC House of Commons in which he served three terms followed by three terms in the State Senate. Alston was elected to the Fifth Congress, then meeting in Philadelphia, in 1798, and, thereafter, defended his Congressional seat in a nationally important election of 1803 against William R. Davie.

Alston was a strong supporter of the Jefferson and Madison administrations, even when that went against the policies advocated by his Uncle, Nathaniel Macon.

Alston and his first wife, Pattie Moore, had no children and after her death, in 1816 or early 1817, he, in 1817, married Sallie Madline Potts. Alston had retired from the Congress in 1816 but, in 1820, returned to the NC House of Commons where he was instrumental in investigating the official conduct of the State Treasurer.

He returned to the Congress from 1825 to 1831, when he was a supporter of the Jackson Administration during the President's first term. In 1831, Alston retired again to his family plantation, Butterwood, where he died on April 10, 1837.

## The Alston-Pleasants Scholars Fund

On May 9, 1958, Missouri Alston Pleasants, upon entry into a Trust Agreement with Wachovia Bank & Trust Company, as Trustee, contributed \$100,000 to establish the Alston-Pleasants Scholars Fund to provide scholarships to UNC students who are selected by the UNC Scholarship Committee from Franklin, Halifax and Warren Counties or, in exceptional circumstances, from other NC counties.

The Trust Agreement provides that the scholarships shall be known as the "Alston-Pleasants Scholarships" and further requires a public announcement of the Scholarship Committee's selection of recipients at the commencement exercises of each school from which any recipient graduates.

The Trust Agreement initially provided for an annual distribution of 95% of annual net income to be paid as scholarships to students from Franklin, Halifax and Warren Counties.

When the Trust Agreement was revised, in a 1973 proceeding before Superior Court Judge Hamilton H. Hobgood, the mandatory distribution requirement was changed to require the Trustee annually to distribute all of the annual net income of the Fund for scholarships. Among other changes, provisions were added to require distributions of principal if needed for compliance with annual minimum distribution tax requirements.

The Trustee reports annually on the trust investments and distributions to the Clerks of Court of Franklin, Halifax and Warren Counties.

The first Alston-Pleasants Scholarship was awarded in 1959 and, to date, Alston-Pleasants Scholarships, which are administered by the UNC Student Aid Office, have been awarded to 79 beneficiaries.

## Elizabeth Michaels

Elizabeth Michaels, of The American Historical Theatre, has, for more than six years, portrayed historically significant women, including vibrant interpretations of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Rosie the Riveter as well as Dolley Payne Todd Madison, a native of North Carolina and the wife of our fourth President, James Madison.

Elizabeth says that she "... has been drawn to these strong women from America's past, especially to women with strong ethical standards and well-developed social skills who showed courage in the face of adversity."

In discussing her portrayal of Dolley Madison, Elizabeth has said that "What really drew me to Dolley was, in addition to her obvious courage and determination, her extraordinary personality. She combined charisma, genuine kindness, great intelligence and an attractive creativity. Dolley Madison, who began married life in a Quaker community, became, through events and circumstances, the indispensable companion of James Madison and, in her later years, an unforgettable member of Washington social scene. And she did it magnificently."

In addition to her work with AHT, Elizabeth teaches at the Actor's Center in Philadelphia and has extensive radio and television voice-over experience.

As the AHT interpreter of Dolley Madison, Elizabeth will participate in the Society's May 25 Alston-Pleasants Commemoration Program with recollections of Willis "Congress" Alston throughout his time in Washington during which he was a valued supporter of the Jefferson and Madison Administrations.

Her presentation will take place in the context of her own exciting and memorable life as First Lady and Washington hostess during those years.

## The American Historical Theatre

For two decades, AHT, which is based in Philadelphia, has presented a variety of interactive theatrical programs in which professional actor/historians interpret people and situations from American history to contemporary audiences.

Each program is carefully researched and powerfully portrayed and each provides important insights into the drama and humor that reflect the American experience.

Among other significant undertakings, AHT recently accepted a White House commission to produce *On Fire For Liberty*, written and directed by AHT artistic Director William A. Sommerfield and performed by seasoned AHT interpreters.

AHT interpreters appear at the White House Visitors Center, the National Archives, the Smithsonian Institution, the National Portrait Gallery, Mount Vernon, Independence National Park and many other venues in the United States, Europe and Asia.

## The Center for the Study of the American South

The Center, under the direction of Harry L. Watson, is a research arm of the University that has its main focus on the regional history of the American South.

Among other activities, the Center sponsors The Program on Public Life, which helps to inform the public agenda and nurture leadership; administers The Southern Oral History Program, which uses new technologies to create, preserve and extend the use of oral history interviews; and publishes *Southern Cultures*, a quarterly that provides discussions of aspects of southern life as well as promoting a broad array of significant regional studies.

### Timothy J. Williams

Tim, a native of Blacksburg, VA, and an alumnus of Wake Forest University, is a PhD candidate in the Department of History at UNC-Chapel Hill, where he works as a teaching assistant. He specializes in antebellum southern cultural and intellectual history. His dissertation, which focuses on UNC students, examines relationships involving education and gender in a region in which gender and intellectual history have only recently begun to receive critical attention.

Among other recognitions, Tim was a 2006 recipient of the prestigious UNC Student Undergraduate Teaching Award.

Tim has prepared an article, *Republican Ideology in the Life and Politics of Willis "Congress" Alston, 1769-1837* that presents an overview of the political life and times of Willis "Congress" Alston with particular emphasis on his involvement in national political life in the Jefferson, Madison and Jackson Administrations. This article is now pending peer-review for academic journal publication.

Tim will present a historian's perspective on the life of Alston at the Society's the May 25, 2008, Alston-Pleasants Commemoration Program.

## The Person Place Preservation Society, Inc.

The Person Place Preservation Society, Inc., has restored and now occupies the Person Place House, an historic Franklin County landmark located on the campus of Louisburg College at 605 N. Main Street, Louisburg, N. C.

The purposes of Person Place include preserving, interpreting and promoting an appreciation of the history, culture and architecture of Franklin County and making the Person Place House available as a cultural center for the community and the region.

John Young is the President of Person Place and a member of its Board of Directors. The Honorable Lucy T. Allen, North Carolina House of Representatives, is a member of the Person Place Board of Directors and heads the Alston-Pleasants Commemoration Program Committee.

The Person Place House is located on its original site, alongside the Old Stage Road, which is now North Main Street. When viewed from the road, its southern wing, which dates from 1789, is a small Georgian structure and its larger Federal section is said to have been constructed about 1830.

Among its early occupants was Mathew Dickenson, a Yale scholar, who, on January 1, 1805, became the first headmaster of Franklin Academy, now Louisburg College, which, dating from 1787, is the nation's oldest chartered two-year, church-related, co-educational college.

There were at least nine owners of the Person Place House before it passed, in the early 1800s, into the hands of the Person family which continued to own the property until 1970 when it was conveyed to Louisburg College.

Throughout the year, Person Place sponsors programs of a cultural or historic nature, including a Franklin County oral history project, and has carried forward efforts to establish a Town of Louisburg local history preservation commission.

Person Place also, by special arrangements, makes the Person Place House available for parties, receptions, reunions, business meetings, and similar functions.