

WORLD WAR II VETERAN CELEBRATES NINETIETH BIRTHDAY

BY CAROLYN SMOTHERMAN

September 13, 2009, will be a very special day in the life of one of College Grove's most respected citizens. Jane Miller Covington, born September 13, 1919, in College Grove, will have a birthday party to celebrate ninety years of good living.

The party will be at the Methodist Church in College Grove, from 2 till 4 p.m., with 3:30 reserved as the time to sing "Happy Birthday." All of her friends, relatives and



former students are requested to come and eat birthday cake with her. "Miss Jane" said she wanted no gifts, but when pressed to name something she would like to have, she said "Well, if everybody would bring canned food for those who need it, that would be very nice." Donated food will be used to stock the Methodist Church emergency aid.

Jane Miller, the daughter of Thomas C. Miller and Mary White Miller, was the second of four daughters. Her sisters are Sarah Miller Flannigan of Columbia, Mary Tom Miller Cromer of College Grove and Josephine

Miller Culbertson, now deceased. Jane attended College Grove School, graduating in 1937, and went on to State Teachers College (now Middle Tennessee State University) in Murfreesboro, where she graduated in 1940.

Her first job was teaching Forrest Hill School on Carter's Creek Pike in Williamson County. She was the only teacher for grades one through eight. The next year she had an opportunity to teach at Warrior, Alabama. Her uncle, Wm. Cannon "Cannonball" White, was coaching football at an Alabama college near there and got her the job. She was in her second year in that position when her life took a new turn.

She felt that she wanted to help with the war effort. When a friend joined the WAVES, Jane decided to apply. The Women Accepted Volunteer Emergency Services was a whole new concept for the American military forces. When she submitted her application she was immediately called to Birmingham on a Saturday where she completed tests. At the end of the day, the group was told to hold up their hands and be sworn in. Jane said "I can't do this right now—I haven't even told my principal that I applied." She was assured that she would not be called until summer. At the time her younger sister Mary Tom was visiting her; Williamson County schools were closed to register the population to receive ration coupons.



The following Thursday (March 5, 1943) she received a telegram from the Director of Naval Officer Procurement to report to Hunter College, New York. About a week later, having packed all her belongings and gotten herself and Mary Tom back to College Grove, she began basic training in New York.

The women were told, "You are just one of thousands, but every one will be judged by your behavior." Most people were complimentary of the women in service, but a few were not.

Students and Friends
Of
JANE M. COVINGTON
Please Attend Her
90th BIRTHDAY PARTY
College Grove Methodist Church
Sunday September 13, 2009
2 to 4 p.m.
Sing Happy Birthday at 3:30
No Gifts
Food for Methodist Pantry Aid

She spent six weeks at Hunter College under the supervision of a wounded sergeant who found drilling women to be a most distasteful assignment: "Wipe that smile off your face, you are not advertising Ipana Toothpaste." Drill, drill, drill, shots, shots, shots; march to eat, go everywhere with the platoon, marching in step. Lights out at 11, bugler at 7; be mustered outside ready for breakfast



in 30 minutes, studying military history and proper behavior. She was an apprentice seaman, earning \$50 a month, and had to sign with her fingerprint to receive her pay. With a degree in science and physical education, Jane applied to work in a medical laboratory. She was promoted to Seaman 2nd class (\$54 a month) and sent to the naval base at Norfolk, Virginia where she studied bacteriology, urology, hematology, and other subjects she would need. She learned about sulfa and penicillin, relatively new drugs at the time, and how to maintain the correct level of medicine in the body.

After four weeks she was transferred to Naval Hospital, Key West, Florida, promoted to Pharmacist's Mate 2nd class at \$78 a month. Things were different in the hospital at Key West—almost no drilling, the doctors were more human. She worked in the medical lab and went to school for six months, in the hospital. The women she was with were the first WAVES there. Old salts told them if they blew the bridge up they could draw overseas pay because there was no other way back to the U.S.

One Sunday four of them rented a car and drove around—picked oranges from the trees, picked up coconuts and mailed them to friends back home. If a palm tree blew over, they would just pick it up and stick it back in the ground. There were sand fleas in September and August that almost drove them crazy. Captain's inspection was on Saturday morning. One Friday, eaten up by mosquitoes, the WAVES spilled a solution in the lab while cleaning up for inspection and had to work half the night eliminating all signs of the accident.

Jane drew blood, learned blood counts, urinalysis, and Conn's test. She saw new patients every day. As the only female in the lab, they thought she would get sick drawing blood and doing autopsies—but she did not. They had to sterilize everything. There was no such thing as disposable



Made in Florida during WWII: Jane is on the right end of the front row, others are unidentified.



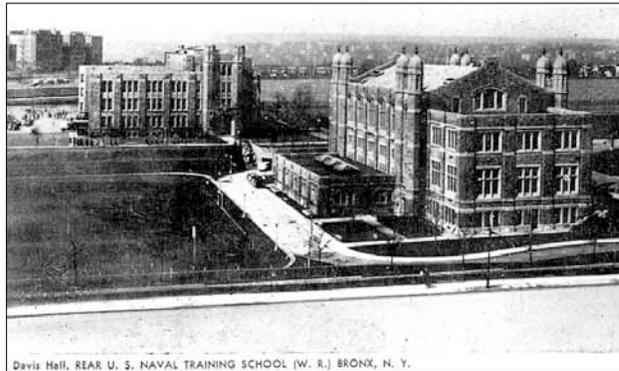
needles and other medical items at that time. The barracks were not ready when they arrived and they had to sleep in a hospital ward until construction was completed. Jane had to be in the barracks by 12 pm every night, but there weren't very many places to go anyway.

Her next assignment was at the Miami Beach dispensary; she lived at Robert Clay Hotel, taken over for "the duration and six months." The dispensary was mostly for dependents of naval personnel. Curfew was midnight except 1 am on Saturday night. There was a boat in Miami with a dance band that she and other WAVES went on. Jane was there on VJ-Day. People went wild, climbing light posts, waving flags.

She then was sent back to Hunter College, New York, where she taught chemistry to new recruits. All were going to the hospital corps to take care of the many servicemen injured in the war. Jane was there until she was discharged

in November 1945. At the time they did not expect the military services to retain the womens groups.

After the war, Jane worked in Chattanooga with the Public Health Dept until she received



Davis Hall, REAR U. S. NAVAL TRAINING SCHOOL (W. R.) BRONX, N. Y.

a letter from R. L. Windrow telling her he needed a math and science teacher at College Grove. Since her mother was not feeling well and Mary Tom was a senior in high school, Jane felt her place was at home. She

began teaching at College Grove High School in the fall of 1946: biology, chemistry, algebra and geometry. She became the annual sponsor that year, even though there was no typewriter in the school, and continued for 25 years. She was also usually the sponsor for the senior play.

Jane Miller married Bruce Covington, widower with a son, Eric, in August 1949. Jane was chaperone for girls ball teams. Bruce went to all the games, rode the team bus with Jane, and worked the concession stand at home games.

When Page High School opened in 1974, Miss Jane was on the original faculty. She was teaching seventh and eighth grade science and when Page Middle School was built, she moved across the road where she completed her teaching career in 1984.

Bruce and Jane lived with Mr. and Mrs. John Cotton in an apartment when they first married and later moved to the Covington family farm. Bruce worked for Coca-Cola and for Tru-Li-Pure Milk Co. They enjoyed living in the country. They had big gardens and kept horses to ride. Jane was always a Methodist and Bruce was a Presbyterian until the church closed. They helped their neighbors. They built a new house in 1968 and sold the farm. Their house had a room with a long row of windows facing the road where they could relax and keep up with what was going on. Bruce passed away in 2000 at age 92. Jane still lives in their home, even though she recently spent time in Claiborn - Hughes, receiving therapy for a dislocated shoulder.



Jane with her two surviving sisters: Mary Tom Cromer, College Grove; Sarah Flannigan, Columbia; and Jane Covington