

After completing his public and some private schooling, probably around 1905 at age 17, Willie, following in the steps of his grandfather before him, became a schoolteacher. We do know that Willie (or William) was an avid reader and excelled in his studies. In 1911, at the age of 23, William enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps at Nashville, Tennessee on October 7. He participated in the Nicaraguan campaign of 1912-13, from where he frequently sent home gifts to his younger brothers and sisters. On May 23, 1912, while serving in Nicaragua, he was promoted to the rank of Corporal. While in Nicaragua he contracted malaria and received a medical discharge, which took place on October 25, 1913.

We know little of his activities immediately after his discharge from the Marines; however, in 1918, at the age of 30, he enrolled at Howard College (now Samford University), a Baptist institution in Birmingham, Alabama, to study for the ministry. It was while delivering a sermon as an intern minister in 1920 at the Hunter Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, as part of his study program, that he met his wife-to-be, Henry Hunter Wildsmith ("Hunter"), whose mother had donated the land for this Church. It

should be noted here that the church was named after Hunter the youngest child of the seven Wildsmith children.

On March 25, 1921, in Birmingham, Jefferson county, Alabama at the age of 32, William Vardaman married Henry Hunter Wildsmith, age 21, who was born on Friday, October 25, 1899, in Birmingham, the daughter of Thomas Wildsmith and Margaret Curry of Birmingham. Presumably due to his contemplation of marriage and the necessity of providing for a wife, Willie abandoned his ministerial studies sometime late in 1920.

In October 1927, then 39 years old, he embarked upon a Federal Civil Service career as a postal clerk with the U.S. Post Office - a career that he pursued for the next 30 years until his retirement from the Birmingham Post Office, August 22, 1958, at the age of 70. For the greater part of his career with the Post Office he served as manager or supervisor of the special delivery mail section. Much of this time he worked on the evening shift that he enjoyed so much.

On Saturday, October 15, 1927 Willie and Hunter became the parents of twin sons: William ("Bill") Kilpatric, Jr. and Hunter Wildsmith ("Hunter") Vardaman II. William was 39 years old and Hunter just 10 days short of her 28th birthday when the twins were born.

Willie Vardaman was a very proper gentleman who preferred to dress formally when he left the house. He always wore white starched shirts and, usually dark well pressed suits and a short brimmed Stetson Homburg or Temple in the fall and winter. In the spring and summer, he chose light summer suits and the typical hard-blocked Boater or Panama straw hats (common in the 20s and 30s). He usually wore a bow tie which he always tied himself with perfection. In the fall and winter, he chose long ties, which he tied in a very tight "bankers" knot. As many people know, these knots are very difficult to tie - but Willie was a master at it. He was an avid reader usually concentrating on historical items or works of nature or politics. He was never without something to read and always took several newspapers with him to read during his trolley and bus rides to and from work. He was also an ardent crossword puzzle fan.

Unfortunately, in 1935 Willie and Hunter separated and soon divorced. Willie was then 47 years old, Hunter 36 and the twins 8.



Twins with their Father "Willie" A trip to Town (Birmingham)

Late in 1938 Willie moved to a small hotel in Birmingham, across the street from the Post Office where he worked. It was often told to me that his sons, William Jr. and Hunter II, and Jesse, their cousin frequently visited him there on many occasions they had lunch or dinner in the hotel dining room which was always prepared in a formal or semiformal manor which was cloths, linen napkins, China, crystal, and heavy silverware. In later years the twins developed a deep and lasting appreciation for these times with their father. It was also about this time that Willie found time to take the twins and also young Jesse to see their first country music concert at the old Birmingham City Auditorium to see fiddler Curly Fox and Texas Ruby (Ruby Owens), two of the country music recording stars of the late 1930s.

Sometime during this period while living at the hotel, he met Miss Minnie Belle Chapman, a Birmingham school teacher and, on Wednesday, July 26, 1939 Willie and Belle were married in Birmingham. Belle, who was 44 years old at the time of the marriage, was born in Wilcox County and raised at Atmore in Escambia County. Willie and Belle remained together until Willie's death in Birmingham on Wednesday, November 22, 1967, at the age of 79. Belle died on September 23, 1977 at 82. Both are buried at Forest Hills Cemetery in the Woodlawn section of Birmingham, Alabama.

Hunter, Willie's first wife, who never remarried and had continued to live in Birmingham, was around 78 years old when she purchased a home in Huntsville, Alabama to be near her sons. Hunter died on November 6, 1992 at the age of 93 and is buried in the Wildsmith family plot at the historical Hurricane Creek Cemetery in Brookwood near Tuscaloosa, Alabama where her Mother, grandparents, great grandparents, and many other family members are buried.

At this writing, Willie's only children, the twins, live in Alabama with their wives: William Jr. in Huntsville and Hunter II in Alexander City. Willie leaves us with a rich and growing legacy - the twins, grandchildren, and great grandchildren now living throughout the country. Submitted by: Debra A. Vardaman Browning (daughter of William K. Vardaman, Jr., Willie's son) of Browning Drive, Tony, AL 35810.

Sources: Family Bible, courthouse records, school records, family documents, and Cemetery records.

George Varner

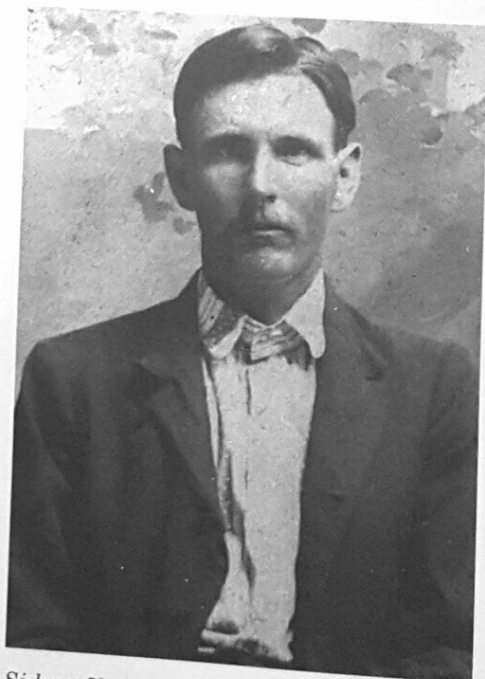
George Varner was born in 1817 in Pendleton District, SC, to David Varner and Judith Priddy. He lived in Franklin county, GA, and Talladega county, AL, before settling in Coosa county during the 1850's. He was a teacher and farmer.

George Varner married Mary Ann Elizabeth Smith, Sept. 1, 1851, in Tallapoosa county. Four children were born to this family: (1) William David Varner (born 1853) married Sophia Bailey. William and Sophia were parents of ten children. (2) Mary Elizabeth Ann Varner (born 1854) married Elias Kelly. Mary and Elias

were parents of nine children. (3) Cleopatra Penelope Varner (born 1857) married Maxwell Whiddon Gandy. They were parents of nine children. (4) Laura Eugenia Varner (born 1859).

Mary A.E. Smith Varner died in about 1871 of unknown causes.

George Varner married, July 24, 1872, Sarah Jane Findley. George and Sarah Jane had six children: (1) Judith Varner (born 1873), died young. (2) Sidney Oliver Varner (born 1875) married Dec. 29, 1901, Lula Emaline Vincent. Sidney and Lula had nine children. (3)



Sidney Varner, son of George Varner and Sarah Jane Findley