

The Reverend Ralph E. McCaskill, Sr. - esteemed Presbyterian minister

By Eleanor Winn Foxworth
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"That McCaskill is a regular vacuum cleaner, sucking everybody into the (Williamsburg) Presbyterian Church." These words from a prominent Baptist layman who lost two sons through marriage to Williamsburg Presbyterian. William J. Cooper, Sr., who edited the church's 1736-1981 history, included this information in that history.

McCaskill's ministry was the first full-time ministry since the Rev. John W. ("Preacher") Davis left the church after 20 years of service—the longest service for any minister in this church. He returned to his home state of Louisiana to preach in the Minden Presbyterian Church. After "Preacher's" departure Williamsburg Presbyterian had two temporary supply pastors. Then came the Rev. Ralph Emerson McCaskill, Sr.

His ministry began in 1944 and officially ended with the full year of service in 1947. However, he continued until his resignation on July 11, 1948. This resignation was regretfully concurred by the congregation and the session, Cooper noted.

So many current and former members of Williamsburg Presbyterian remember Mr. McCaskill and his ministry.

Virginia Irene ("Mickey") McIntosh Atkinson remembers him: "He was a very caring minister. All the young people liked him. His wife, Mary Chandler

McCaskill, and my sister, Addie, were very good friends. I was a good friend of his sons, Ralph and Chandler. I remember Mr. McCaskill was a retired army chaplain. That impressed me."

Virginia ("Ginger") Hinson Joye recalls: "When he became pastor at Williamsburg Presbyterian, Mama and Daddy joined Williamsburg. Mama was an Episcopalian; Daddy was a Baptist. They both liked the Rev. McCaskill so much. He was such a likeable person—more like a friend than a pastor."

Ginger's husband, Wilbur Joye, says: "I liked Mr. McCaskill. I had all my plans made to go to Clemson. But he encouraged me to go to Presbyterian College. He even got me a work scholarship there. I liked him a lot. He was a fine preacher."

Emma Lois Inman Williamson was reared across the street from the Williamsburg manse. She recalls: "I was six years old when the McCaskills came here. I remember he did magic tricks using balls; he would have a ball between each finger. His eyes twinkled. The first time I needed to go to the dentist, he took me. Dr. Thomas McCabe had his office up town on Academy Street. Then I remember visiting the McCaskills when they lived in St. Charles. (A Presbyterian church was once in St. Charles.)"

Richard H. ("Dick") Kellahan remembers: "Mr. McCaskill had one of the best personalities of anybody I have ever known. He was

famous for wearing his hat on the side of his head. He was real cocky-like. Coming out to our farm one day he met a colored man and stopped to talk. Mr. McCaskill told the man he was a preacher. The man answered: "I am a preacher too." So they continued to talk. Later on the man who worked on our farm said to me: "I met your preacher." I asked: "What did you think of him?" The man answered: "He is a fine man but he wears his hat too far on the side." Kellahan concluded: "I liked that man, Mr. McCaskill. I have fond memories of him."

Johnny Evans remembers Mr. McCaskill in so many ways. "He and the Rev. Cellis Woodard performed the wedding ceremony when Ellen (Swails) and I got married. She was a Methodist. Mr. McCaskill was a chaplain during the war. I found him interested in so many things. He was a pilot. He took me over to Sumter where a friend kept a plane. We got on board and took off. He was quite a personality.

"I was not surprised that he had etched the front of our church's building which continues to be on the cover of our church bulletins.

"He was a man of many talents," Evans concluded

Another comment from Virginia ("Ginger") Hinson Joye is revealing. "One day his sons Ralph and Chandler were playing in the park. Chandler had a gun. He took a shot at the light in the park. Immediately his father got that gun from

Chandler, put the gun on his knee, and cracked that gun into two pieces." Mr. McCaskill was a loving father, and he believed discipline was essential in a child's growing-up years."

Mrs. McCaskill, the former Mary Chandler, was a consecrated minister's wife. She was very active in the work of the women of the church. In 1947 Mrs. McCaskill gave her friend, Mrs. Elizabeth Winn Foxworth, a copy of a very special book. It was entitled "Presbyterian Women of South Carolina," written by Margaret Adams Gist. That year, 1947, was extra-special for the Harmony Presbytery's Auxiliary since Mary McCaskill was auxiliary president.

W.M. Cooper, Sr. wrote in the 1736-1981 church history: "When the call came to become the minister of Williamsburg Presbyterian, McCaskill was ready, able and willing. His sermons were short, to the point, and well-received." Then Cooper underscored: "But it was as an ambassador from the church, not only to the indifferent members, but to the town at large he made his presence known.

McCaskill became a valued member of this community. For example, looking through the "Williamsburg County, South Carolina, a Pictorial History," there are pictures of McCaskill and the Boy Scout Awards during 1946.

What are some of his influences as a minister at Williamsburg Presbyterian? History records that when he resigned in 1948 to accept

the call of a much smaller church, Mt. Zion Presbyterian, the members totaled 523. The budget for 1946 had been \$18,310.00. A Director of Christian Education was employed. Choir robes were used. A choir director was employed. An Outpost Sunday School was established over Broad Swamp. So very important, the church needed an educational building, agreed on by the session and the congregation, so a building committee was established. To borrow the needed funds for this building, the session authorized borrowing for the new structure.

On July 11, 1948 when the congregation and the session sadly agreed to accept Mr. McCaskill's resignation because his weakened physical condition made it a strain to pastor all the members of the church, he left Williamsburg. And there were so many new members received during his term of service at Williamsburg.

Now let's review Mr. McCaskill's background. He was born in Georgia. He received an appointment to the U.S. Naval Academy while he was a student at Center College. He resigned from the Academy after only a year so he could enter Southwestern. Following his graduation from Southwestern, he graduated from Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia. Afterwards he did graduate work at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia.

After his ordination, McCaskill

served several churches for the five years prior to entering the Chaplain's Corps of the Army in 1935. In 1943 he retired as a Lt. Colonel. The reason? A physical disability.

After he had married Mary Chandler, a South Carolina young lady, the couple returned to South Carolina to live in Summerton, then the story of how he became Williamsburg Presbyterian's much-loved minister.

Years later his son Ralph, Jr., a member of the Williamsburg Presbyterian Church during his father's ministry, became a minister. He always considered he belonged to Williamsburg Presbyterian, and Williamsburg claims him as a son of the ministry. Ralph, Jr. served 40 years as a minister of the Presbyterian Church, USA, including his well-received ministry at Indiantown Presbyterian, Williamsburg's first daughter church.

Prior to his retirement, Williamsburg Presbyterian's Session presented him with a framed resolution to show its gratitude to God for Ralph's service as a minister. The elder Ralph Emerson McCaskill died August 6, 1981. At that time he was living in Camden.

The memory of the Rev. Ralph E. McCaskill, Sr. lives on in the Williamsburg Presbyterian Church through memories of members and in our church's history. Only a short period of time was his ministry here. But oh, how much he did in service to His Lord, Jesus Christ!



Etching by Rev. Ralph E. McCaskill
Minister at Williamsburg 1944-47

ABOVE IS AN etching done by the Rev. Ralph E. McCaskill, Sr. of the Williamsburg Presbyterian Church located on Academy Street. This etching is used on the front of the weekly church bulletin.

All Photos Provided



Reverend Ralph Emerson McCaskill, Sr.



Reverend McCaskill's son



BOY SCOUT AWARDS 1946, first row left to right: E.L. Shull, First Silver Beaver Awarded in Williamsburg County, Mark Hauenstein, James A. Benton, Jr., First Eagle Scout from Williamsburg County. Second row left to right: Edward C. Welch, E.A. Wilkes, the Reverend Ralph McCaskill, Sr., E.E. Bryant.