

Nancy Lillian Johnson Harle Remembers:

My first experience of being at Carol Villa was one my mother told me about. After a Sunday gathering of all the family, she, Daddy, and Buck were on their way back home when they realized they had forgotten me. They left me asleep on Grandmother's bed back at Carol Villa!

Grandmother had always insisted that her family join her for Sunday dinner. Everyone brought a dish. The ice cream freezers were on the side porch, if summer or spring. They were hand cranked by the men folk. Grandmother would call out your name and with a big hug greet you as though you were a long lost friend!

My mother's Mammy, Chloe, came from Detroit for a long visit. She came with us to Carol Villa for dinner. I was sitting in her lap in the kitchen by the stove. Some of the cousins however went out near the garden and jumped on Papa's bee hives. The bees swarmed. All of the cousins survived but the dog was not so lucky. God Bless Mammy Chloe - Except for her I would have been there too.

Grandmother introduced me to the piano in the parlor and taught me lessons. She and Daddy found a piano for me when I was in the third grade. I came home from school one day and there it was. I studied music with Mrs. Margaret Ruffin in Wetumpka and I still teach music today.

My great joy was when Papa came into parlor one night when we were playing for Grandmother. He asked me to play "The Old Rugged Cross." I played it and we all sang. He was so pleased. He smiled, thanked me and went back to the desk in his study.

Grandmother would tell us about the early days when they had gaslights in the parlor which could be turned down low. They would entertain with moonlight suppers. Auntie and Uncle Judge would come from Atlanta. Aunteer and Uncle Roy would come from Tampa. They would hire instrumentalists, dance the night away and watch the sunrise at breakfast.

During the Second World War, Aunt Katie had a large Victrola phonograph console, turntable, speakers and storage cabinet. She introduced all the cousins to classical music. Our favorite recording was Jose Iturbi playing Piano Concerts I by Tchaikovsky. We would listen in awe and dream of playing that one day.

Aunt Katie also introduced us to the big bands of the day, all songs from the 40's and some 50's. She taught us to Jitterbug and do the Charleston. And she also taught us how to play four hands Solitaire.

I remember that Grandmother bought a Ouija Board and mesmerized us with its power.

Queenie was a favorite housekeeper for Grandmother and Papa. One memory that sticks in my mind was of her jumping in the clothes bin in the "dark hall" when an electrical storm would come. The clothes bin was the large wooden box, large enough to hold the clothes for 13 children and parents. The box had small holes in the top for air. It was stained a soft walnut color. Queenie would stay there and longer if Grandmother didn't send us to raise the lid and tell Queenie to come out because the storm was over!

I remember visiting Grandmother when I was in Jr. High School. She was checking the parlor to see if everything was ready for her Circle meeting from the Dalraida Baptist Church. She asked me if I could smell that awful smell, I answered "Yes, what is that?" An elderly gentleman to whom she had given shelter had grown impatient and dumped his "potty jar" (slop jar) out of the upstairs window over the parlor window below. We both ran to call for help and closed the windows!

I remember meeting Chinese missionaries who would stay at Carol Villa when they came to share their experiences at Dalraida.

Grandmother conducted a summer Bible School at Canaan Baptist Church. The white women backed out in fear of reprisals so Grandmother enlisted the help of Neva Leota, Kathryn and me. We learned many of their songs and games. Grandmother sat at the piano and led the whole group in "Heavenly Sunshine" and "I'll be a Sunbeam for Him." It was wonderful! When Grandmother was dying the quartets from Canaan Baptist Church came and sang at her bedside for hours.

One afternoon in midsummer I answered the front door. There stood two women in their late 80's dressed in pretty Voile dresses with hats and white gloves. They had a market basket filled with beautiful Elberta peaches. One said, "We brought Mr. Johnson some of our peaches - would you please ask the butler to take them for us?" Grandmother came to the door and responded, "This is the butler's day off; I'll be sure Mr. Johnson gets them!" ☺