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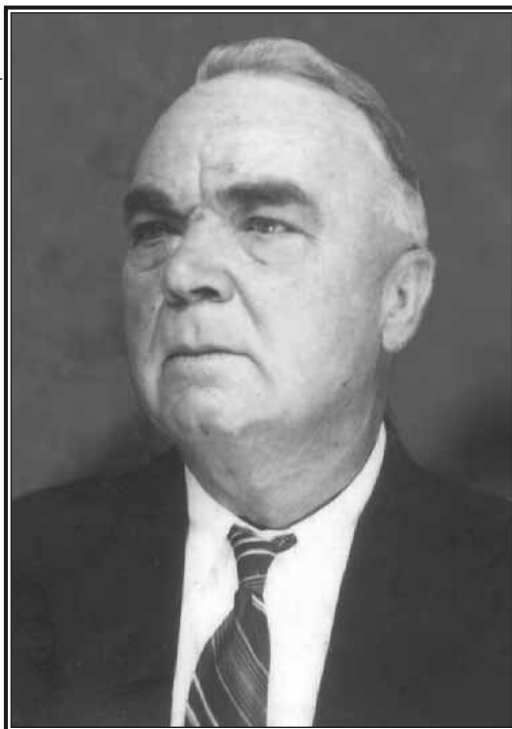
THE FAMILY OF FRANCIS MARION SHAW



T H E G R A N D C H I L D R E N

THOMAS LELAND KNIGHT

Out of the Shadows



It is not unusual that when faced with life's great challenges, a person finds the need to separate himself from his past and start anew. And by so doing, he becomes a different man than he was before, and thus his life, and the lives of all of those who follow, are changed forever.

Some separations come through religious conversion, accidents and trauma, or marital changes. While other transformations are a result of financial calamities or family differences.

Thomas Leland Knight arrived at such a crossroad in 1923 at the age of 35. What trials may have brought this grandson of Francis Marion Shaw and Rachel Moore

Allen, to leave his ancestral home and find a new life in Osprey, Florida? The answers may lie in a search of the shadows of his past.

Leland, as he was commonly known, was born July 17, 1887, in Berrien County, Georgia, near Ray's Mill, now Ray City. He was the third child and second born son of Sovin J.

Knight and Ann Eliza Allen.

He received a rural education, probably at the Pleasant Vale School near the family farm. He was raised in the Primitive Baptist faith, and in all likelihood, met Lillie Sirmons, daughter of Ben and Mary Sirmons, at church and they were married September 23, 1909 in Berrien County.

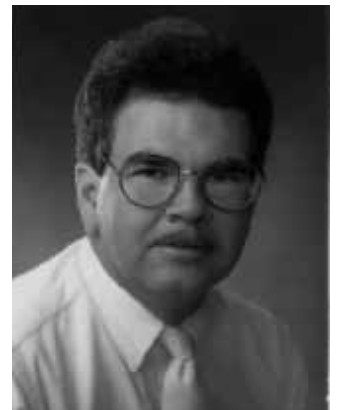
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The Family of Francis Marion Shaw is a non-profit newsletter published semi-annually, or more frequently, for the benefit of the descendants of Francis Marion Shaw and his wife, Rachel Moore Allen Shaw.

Historical contributions are requested. Your family histories including character traits, religious affiliations, professional pursuits and vital information such as birth dates and places, marriage dates and places, and death dates and places, are all welcome. Photographs help make the newsletter come alive. If you have some special photos of your ancestors which you would like to share with all of the family, please make a copy print of it and send it on to the address below. If original photos are sent, they will be carefully handled and returned, but editor cannot be responsible for loss or damage. Send your manuscripts and photo submissions to:

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P.O. Box 417
Nashville, GA 31639
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Bryan Lee Shaw, Editor





Georgia Newly Weds

Firm determination and confidence were etched in the faces of Leland Knight and Lillie Sirmons in this photo taken about the time of their marriage. The wooded setting of the southern Georgia landscape would eventually be but a memory as the shadow of financial hardship would force their family to the Gulf coast of Florida.

By 1910, Leland and Lillie were working a small farm near Ray City, near the home of Lillie's parents. Their first child, Donna Lee, was born 8 September, that same year.

In March, the following year, Leland's parents sold their property in Allenville and moved to a Brooks County farm, near Barney, and Leland and Lillie joined them. But shortly after purchasing the farm, Sovin was struck with a severe heart attack and died on April 16, 1911.

Mansfield, the oldest child, convinced his mother and Leland that they could not possibly operate the 280 acre farm alone. So in January 1912, Mansfield sold his farm in Allenville, and along with his wife and two children, joined his mother, his brother Leland, plus his three youngest siblings, Lena, Rachel, and Ora Kathleen, in the Brooks County farm home.

The property was not probated until January, 1914, when the estate was settled and two-thirds interest of the farm was sold to Mansfield by his mother for \$5,000.

Mansfield, in turn, sold one-third interest to Leland for \$2,500. From that moment, for the next ten years, Mansfield's life was Leland's life, for better or worse. Mansfield was 7 years Leland's senior. Leland deferred the business decisions to Mansfield, trusting in his maturity and wisdom. Yet every land purchase and promissory note was in the name of Mansfield M. Knight and Thomas Leland Knight, equally.

About this time their mother, Eliza, and the younger girls moved to Ray City, where they lived with Eliza's parents, Rachel and Marion Shaw. This left the two brothers to occupy the Sovin Knight farm home.

But perhaps due to the strain of multiple families living in the same home, in October 1914, the brothers purchased a second farm of 122 1/2 acres just 5 miles south of Sovin's farm. Leland, Lillie, and Donna Lee probably occupied this farm for the next few years.

The main cash crop of the region at that time was the sea island or long staple cotton. However, between 1914 and 1916 the boll weevil infestation made it impossible to produce that cotton. This forced Mansfield, Leland, and other farmers like them to rely on the less profitable short staple cotton.

Mansfield and Leland were frequently borrowing against their farms to purchase seed and keep their mortgages paid up, but they were going deeper in debt.

In October, 1917, perhaps in an attempt to farm more acreage to make up for lost yields from the short staple cotton, the brothers purchased 400 acres adjacent to Little River from their uncle, William B. Allen, then immediately borrowed against it. In December, 1918, they purchased an adjacent 277 acres, and again, immediately borrowed against it.

On January 6, 1919, there seemed to be a bright spot in Leland and Lillie's life, with the birth of their second daughter, Aline. But the shadow from financial storm clouds hung over the Knight brothers' farms, and in September, 1919 it poured out its misery.

The brothers mortgaged all of their property on the New River, and sold the 122 1/2 acre farm, south of Barney. Leland and Lillie and their two daughters moved back into the Sovin Knight farm home that Mansfield and his family had been occupying. Suddenly, Aline fell desperately ill and died. Lillie was consumed with grief and reflected upon her the rest of her life.

The loans came due without payment and by 1922, the partners had defaulted on the 677 acres on New River. Taxes were falling in arrears, and the original Sovin Knight farm was mortgaged to the limit.



For ten years, Mansfield and Leland had put one crop up against the next, one piece of land up against the next, one hope, one dream up against the next. Leland and Lillie had lost more than their land. They had lost their lives, and their daughter. They had no more to give. The only way out was to get out from the shadows.

In 1923, Leland, Lillie, and their daughter, Donna Lee, packed their meager belongings, made a somber visit to the grave of their dear little Aline, and left the shadows of their Georgia past.

Their destination was Sarasota, Florida, where the boomtown atmosphere was attracting many rural Georgians who had been beat down by the hard years of the boll weevil infestation.

Upon arriving in Sarasota County, the Knight family immediately felt a new life was beginning. After a brief stay in the small community of Bee Ridge, Leland was hired by the affluent Palmer family as a caretaker at *The Oaks* estate in

Osprey, Florida.

There were 8 caretakers, and each caretaker was provided a tenant home for his family to live in. The children of the caretakers attended the school in Osprey.

Donna Lee shared this whimsical observation from one of her class assignments in 1925:

Two years ago I decided to move to Florida and brought my parents with me. I entered Osprey School where I have been annoying my teachers through two entire grades. Consuming much chewing gum and candy and occasionally evoking severe reprimands from the principal.

Living at *The Oaks* must have seemed like living in a garden. The Knights enjoyed their close friendships with the other caretaker families, without having to live under the same roof with them.

In 1930, Donna Lee married Millard Guess, an acquaintance of the family, and they moved into one of the caretaker homes adjacent to Leland and Lillie. Millard was a landscaper, but also had skills as a carpenter and had found employment at *The Oaks*.

However, the depression had hit the

The Knight Brothers

Pictured above on one of the rare occasions that brought the sons of Sovin Knight and Eliza Allen Knight together are, left to right, Rossie, Mansfield, and Leland. Mansfield, though small in stature, cast a large shadow in the family. Leland made several trips back to Georgia to settle debts incurred over a decade of partnership with his brother, Mansfield.



Lillie T. Sirmons Knight



Donna Lee Knight Guess



The Leland Knight Family
With their move to Osprey, Florida, Leland and Lillie changed the future of their own lives and the lives of their daughter, Donna Lee.

For 18 years, Leland was caretaker of the beautiful grounds of The Oaks estate of the Palmer family, living in a tenant home on the grounds. Here he strikes a familiar pose in the surroundings of his own handiwork. The Oaks is now a private community of very elegant homes, and is not accessible to the general public.



Florida land developers, and Millard was laid off in 1937. Leland escaped the layoff for a period, but four years later in 1941, he too was without work.

Finding himself unemployed, Leland turned to family once again, this time, Lillie's family. Her brother-in-law was the head custodian at Woodrow Wilson Jr. High in Tampa, but had recently suffered a stroke and could not continue in the job.

So Leland was hired to take over his position at the school, which also provided the head custodian a two bedroom apartment right in the school. He would live out the remainder of his life in that position and at the school apartment.

It was a demanding job, even though he had 3 other custodial assistants. He would retire early in the evening, about 7:00, and be up at 4:00 in the morning.

In 1946, Lillie started having heart problems, and Leland felt that she needed someone to be there with her to help around the apartment. So Donna Lee's



daughter, Doris, moved in with her grandparents and attended school as a 9th grader during the day, and helped in the home in the evenings. On weekends, Donna Lee and Millard would come up from Osprey and visit their daughter, Leland, and Lillie.

And every so often a shadow of Leland's past would make its way down to Tampa, with visits from his siblings, and on other occasions, he would make a trip north to Georgia.

Having a teenager around 24-hours a day was quite a test for the senior couple, but Lillie always met the challenge with sweetness and soft words. Leland, on the other hand, though not harsh, was very firm and strict. Doris always catered to her grandmother.

Doris continued to live with the grandparents during her 10th and 11th grades, though she attended Plant High School during the day. She had full intentions of living with the her grandparents through her senior year.

But in May, 1949, while working in the junior high, Leland suffered a heart attack. He was hospitalized for a short time, then

was released to return to the apartment. While recovering at home, he suffered a massive heart attack and was rushed back to the hospital. But the long shadow that Leland had fled 26 years earlier was not the shadow that fell over him that day. He died on Sunday, May 8, 1949.

The custodial vacancy was filled by Lillie's brother, Mannis Sirmons, and Doris and Lillie moved back down to Osprey with Donna Lee and Millard. Two years later, Millard was diagnosed with cancer and quickly passed away in March, 1951.

Lillie lived out her remaining years with her daughter in the small home that Leland had purchased for Donna Lee and Millard when he had lost his job at *The Oaks*, 14 years earlier. Lillie would often say that she looked forward to the time she could return to her home in Georgia to be reunited with her little baby Aline. On 14 November, 1978, Lillie passed away.

She was indeed, returned to her Georgia home where she was buried beside her baby Aline and her loving companion Leland. And all were finally at rest, united, out of the shadows of the past. —BLS



Doris Guess Lamb

Home at School

Woodrow Wilson, Jr. High School, shown above, where Leland and Lillie occupied a two bedroom apartment. In 1946, their granddaughter, Doris, moved in with them and remained there until Leland's death in 1949.

Extending Appreciation

In my recent visit to Florida and Georgia, I was able to gather several valuable interviews and search through several photo collections of children of Francis Marion and Rachel Allen Shaw's grandchildren. My special thanks go out to Merle Sirmans, Rev. V. L. Daughtrey, Elva Allen Mills, Jimmy Shaw, and Cranford Sutton who gave so much of their time and were so open and forthcoming with the history of their family and friends. I am very hopeful that you will soon be reacquainted with more of the 48 surviving grandchildren of Marion and Rachel. And please let me know if you have gathered your family histories and photos together for all of our cousins to share and learn from.

—Bryan Lee Shaw, editor

FAMILY GROUP SHEET

THOMAS LELAND KNIGHT Farmer, Landscaper, Custodian

Born: 17 July, 1887 Berrien County, Ga

Died: 8 May, 1949 Tampa, Hillsborough, Fl

Buried: Pleasant Cemetery, New Lois, Berrien, Ga

SPOUSE

LILLIE TEXAS SIRMONS

Born: 6 July, 1888, Ray City, Berrien, Ga

Died: 14 November, 1978, Osprey, Sarasota, Fl

Married: 23 September, 1909, Berrien County, Ga

Buried: Pleasant Cemetery, New Lois, Berrien, Ga

CHILDREN

Donna Lee Knight

Born: 8 September, 1910, Berrien County, Ga

Died: 27 October, 1989, Osprey, Sarasota, Fl

Buried: Osprey Baptist Cemetery, Osprey, Fl

SPOUSE

Millard Alfred Guess Married: 5 April, 1930

Born: 27 October, 1904, Wauchula, Hardee, Fl

Died: 3 March, 1951, Osprey, Sarasota, Fl

Buried: Osprey Baptist Cemetery, Osprey, Fl

Aline Knight

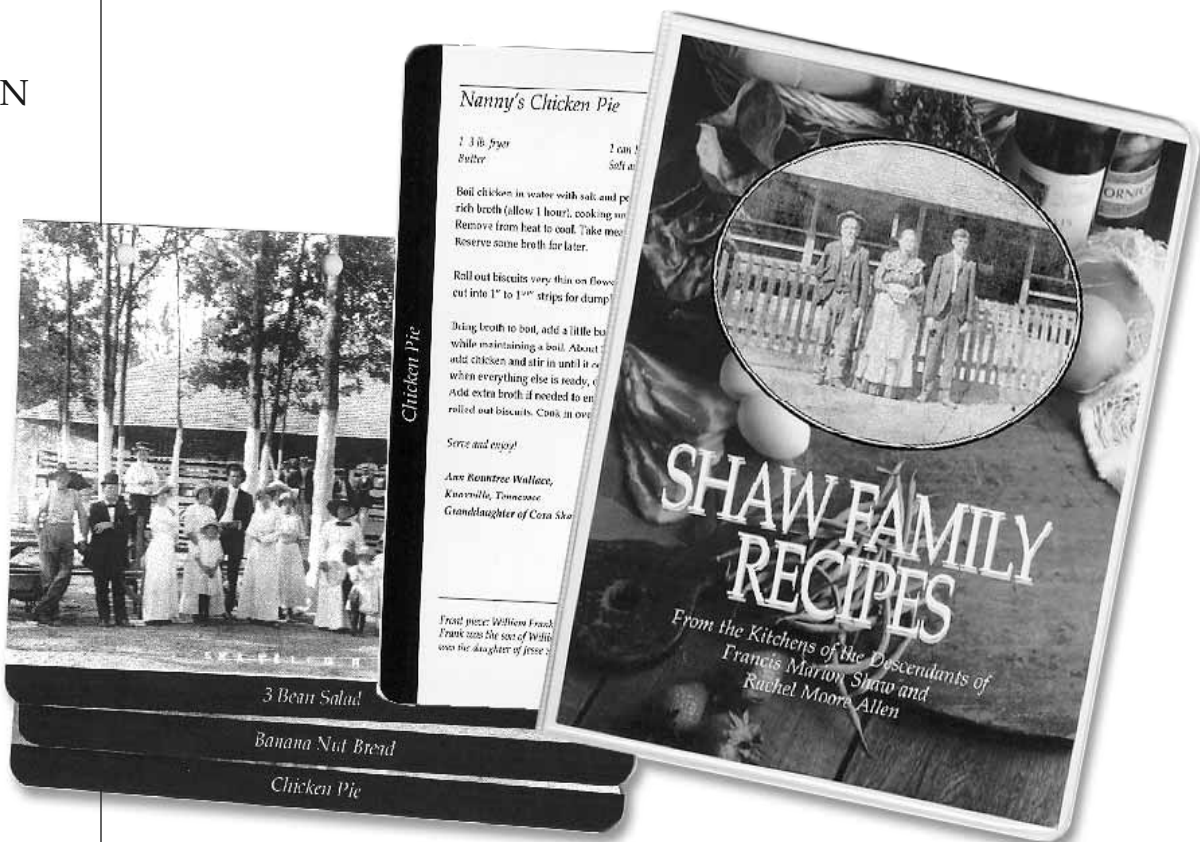
Born: 6 January, 1919, Brooks County, Ga

Died: September, 1919, Brooks County, Ga

Buried: Pleasant Cemetery, New Lois, Berrien, Ga

8TH ANNUAL
SHAW-ALLEN
REUNION—
SUNDAY,
AUGUST 12, 2001,
10:00 A.M.
RAY CITY, GA.
SENIOR CITIZEN
CENTER

The new Shaw Family Cookbook Binder with the first installment of recipes from the kitchens of our own family members. This cookbook and recipes will only be made available to families in attendance at the reunion. And future additions to the cookbook will also only be offered at future Shaw-Allen Reunions. So make your plans now to be in attendance so you won't miss out on the first issuing of this family treasure.



3 Bean Salad

Banana Nut Bread

Chicken Pie