

Martha Dixon Chapman Sharpe

April 4, 1904 – August 2, 1979

Compiled by her son, Dwight Albert Sharpe

My mother, Martha Dixon Chapman, was born April 5, 1904, the year that [Theodore Roosevelt](#) had his first election to the Presidency of the United States, after having succeeding William McKinley who was assassinated while President. This was the year that author [Jack London](#) published *The Sea-Wolf*. Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* opera opened in Milan, Italy. Work began on the [Panama Canal](#). The Rolls-Royce Company was founded in England. [Helen Keller](#) graduated from [Radcliffe College](#) and the Broadway subway opened in New York City.

(Source: "The Timetables of History" 3rd Revised Edition, Bernard Grun, Simon & Schuster, New York 1991, pages 456-457)

Martha was born in her Lufkin home at [419 Abney Avenue](#). Living on a street with your family name is a hint as to the place the family held in the eye of the community. Her mother's maiden name was [Margaret Lavina Abney](#). Her church life was in the First Methodist Church. Martha was age five when her mother died, and age 21 when her father died, which was a hardship. She and her younger brother, [Herschell Albert Chapman](#), were raised after their Mother's 1909 death by their grandmother and grandfather, Martha Jane Dixon Abney and James William Abney. [Dr. James Herschell Chapman](#), their father, resided with them in the Abney home for a while.

Martha Chapman Sharpe
Late 1930s



Martha Jane Dixon Abney, Martha's grandmother, was widowed in 1913, and Dr. Chapman soon moved out from the house. He had been much older than his wife, Maggie, being only one year younger than his mother-in-law, Martha Jane Dixon Abney. Family oral tradition reported that he felt it was more appropriate to move out, as it did not reflect the proper appearances for an unmarried man and woman so close in age to be domiciled together.

Maggie continued to raise his children, Herschell and Martha, in her home. After Dr. Chapman married the third and last time, to a woman named Josephine, his contacts with the Abney family apparently became somewhat detached, or at least the recording of continuing relationship has not been identified by me.

Martha had a high school teacher of science about 1919 or so, named Mr. Blevins. It is of interest to know that he also taught me in Dallas, Dallas County, Texas during my ninth grade in 1954, at Alex W. Spence Junior High School, about 35 years later! There is also a Miss Bess Wood of Lufkin who taught at that same Dallas school at the time I was there, and who remembers my being there. She is Lillian's Aunt, Tempy Wood Abney's sister. Bess was born March 17, 1897. In 1987, Bess resided at the [Angelina Nursing Home](#), where Suzanne and I visited her once.

Martha attended [the University of Texas at Austin](#), graduating in June of 1925. On the certified copy I have of the information she completed with her application to college, on the blank requesting her home address, said *No Street Address*. When you live on the street bearing your family name (Abney) and you are the only "mansion" on it, there is no need for an address number back then. You could just address a letter to them in Lufkin! Such were the days!





She was elected a member of the honor society, [Phi Beta Kappa](#), according to the certified college transcript copy, the first scholastic fraternity in America. Phi Beta Kappa was organized at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia on December 5, 1776. She had a double major in Latin and Greek. She was then engaged for marriage to fellow University of Texas student and [Austin Theological Presbyterian Seminary](#) student, [Dwight Alfred Sharpe](#). She taught in the [Lufkin Public Schools](#) the ensuing year after her graduation.

Martha's education was in the classics, which was the usual major for the very few women of that day who were privileged to attend college. Martha and her husband-to-be would be the first generation of our family to graduate from the University of Texas. Now, three generations have graduated from there and a fourth maybe is on his way!

Growing out of that refined education was her skill in writing. I cherish the one "love letter" that came into my possession only in recent years that my Mother sent to my Father during the year that she taught school in Lufkin and he completed his Seminary studies in Austin before they married. Here is how the letter of October 20, 1925 went:

"Dearest Sweetheart

"Please forgive me for writing on this paper. I'm in a powerful big hurry and can't hunt for any more. Last night I had so many papers to grade that I got sleepy and went to bed without ever writing to the sweetest person on earth. I thought about you, dearest, between papers and the last thing before I went to sleep, and the first thing this morning. Honey, you're in my heart all the time. I'm going to scribble this off just so it can be mailed this morning, and it won't be late. Tell me if you get it tomorrow morning.

"I'm the happiest thing, because I had a sweet letter waiting for me from your mother yesterday when I came in from school. Dwight, already I just love her to death. Don't tell your father, but she said when he read my first letter, he said "Well, I'm kinda left out on this deal." She said he was a little jealous, but said she was to send his love anyway. Now I just believe I will write him a little note or letter all to himself. I may enclose it with your next letter and you can give it to him when you pass through Georgetown Saturday. Is that all right? You know how easy it is for women to talk to each other, but because I'd never met him, I just felt a timidity in writing.

"The funny thing about it is that I was writing to your mother the same time she was writing to me. Guess she received mine yesterday too.

"Sweetheart, love me lots and don't blame me for writing like this. I just had so much work. I'll promise never to let it happen again. I'll write again tomorrow night.

"Must hurry up and eat breakfast now. Want to eat with me? I built the fire this morning.

Lovingly, Your own Martha"

Well, how's that for good romantic narrative?! Wonderful!

Martha graduated in 1925 and taught in the Lufkin Public Schools the following year, while my father completed his final year at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary in May of 1926.

Serving as wife of the Pastor suited Martha well. She loved living the role and the people loved her doing it. After marriage, her only gainful employment was as a teacher in the [Houston Public Schools](#), Harris

County, Texas during the 1940's World War II years when there were such shortages of people to teach.

During her daughters' high school years, she served as adult sponsor for the High School Youth Fellowship at the Central Park Presbyterian Church, located at [6914 Sherman Street](#), a couple of blocks east of 75th Street, near Wayside Boulevard. Fondly remembered by me are the summer trips on the weekends when the whole Sharpe family and the Youth Fellowship spent all day Saturdays at Stuart's Beach in [Galveston](#) on the Gulf of Mexico. One of my favorite memories were the many times when we went riding on the old-fashioned wooden roller coaster near the beach!

Reading was also an avocation for Martha. She "screened" much material for Dwight, marking articles and books she thought it would be good for him to read. She truly was a helpmate for her husband in all the best senses of that concept. She was a lady of the South in all its good senses of culture and heritage. And she was a wonderful mother to me, always holding up the bar for me to climb higher for better things, and to know God and our role with Him.

Martha was such a lady of positive influence on me. She was a woman of learning and culture, and instilled a respect and interest those things in me.

Though there were occasions for her to correct or discipline for my actions, there never was a moment

when I thought she did not love me with the upmost of motherly love.

Though my father was the Pastor and spiritual head of the family, it was my mother who instructed me from the very beginning of receiving income (a weekly allowance at first) to set aside 10% of it for the offering at church that Sunday.



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me

I didn't understand why, but the practice of tithing instilled in me a pattern that has endured all of my life. The only change in it is that my giving, and that of me and my wife, has only increased in % to where we now give around 20% or more. We have since developed in the spiritual understandings about how and why that is the proper and [prosperous](#) thing to follow. Our blessings have been abundant!

Martha's funeral service was at Alamo Heights Presbyterian Church in San Antonio in the morning, followed by the 100+ mile drive to Georgetown, Texas where she was interred that afternoon in the I.O.O.F. Cemetery on Smith Creek Road, immediately to the northeast from [Southwestern University](#). She graduated to Heaven on August 2, 1979 at age 75.

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