

Dabney-Dixon, Minneola Lanora (1929–2014)

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Minneola Lanora Dabney-Dixon served Oakwood University for approximately 40 years in various capacities, including secretary/administrative assistant, director of student employment, director of alumni affairs, and director of the museum and archives.

Minneola was born on July 19, 1929, in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, to Sebastian Cabot Dabney (1885–1940) and Alberta Sanders (1889–1971). “Minneola,” a name meaning many waters, is somewhat foretelling since she would become a fountain of selfless service for her family, her community, and Oakwood University!¹ Her mother studied the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, espoused them, and was baptized. In time Minneola and her siblings (Bettie, Ruth, Alpha, and Frank) became baptized members of the Beulah Seventh-day Adventist Church in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.² After graduating from Frederick Douglas High School, Minneola chose to attend Oakwood College, declining scholarship offers from public colleges that recognized her academic, musical, and oratorical skills. In 1947 she commenced her studies at Oakwood.³

A talented vocalist, Minneola was a featured soloist with the Aeolians. She worked as a reader or teaching assistant for the legendary Eva B. Dykes and sold magazines with the colporteur club. Moreover, she was the president of the business club, served on the dormitory council, worked as an institutional recruiter, and



Minneola Lanora Dabney-Dixon

Photo courtesy of Oakwood University Archives.

eventually became an officer for the graduating class of 1951.⁴ After receiving a Bachelor of Science degree in business with a minor in English, Minneola married an Oakwood classmate, James Philip Williams (1930–2012), of Key West, Florida. Shortly thereafter, the Army called Mr. Williams to report for duty at Camp Pickett, Virginia. She followed her husband and found employment at the camp as a public relations officer. Consequently Mrs. Williams became an office employee at the military installation.⁵ Following the Korean conflict, in 1953, the couple settled in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and started adding to their family. During these years they had four children: Philip, Dwayne, Denise, and Mark.

During the next 15 years Mrs. Williams worked in the Employee Personnel Department of the Air Force and later the Department of Housing and Urban Development.⁶ At the same time, she was very active in the local church. She directed an award-winning youth choir and worked as the church communication secretary— which meant writing articles for the local black newspaper, informing the community of the good things happening at the Tenth Street Seventh-day Adventist Church in Oklahoma City.⁷

Eventually the Williams' marriage ended in divorce. Later Frank Hale, the president of Oakwood College, offered her a job as the secretary/administrative assistant to Adell Warren, the college's business manager. So in 1970, with her four children, Minneola returned to Oakwood. She reorganized the various categories of college business, supervised a strong on-campus student work program, and managed both the campus mailroom and switchboard. After hours she moonlighted as night supervisor in the student tutoring center and on weekends as a receptionist at Royal Funeral Home.⁸

In the early 1970s student enrollment at Oakwood College reached more than one thousand. This growth created an even greater challenge for the campus as it related to student employment. So the college asked Minneola to leave the business manager's office to become the first director of student employment.⁹ With on-campus jobs in short supply because of the closing of Oakwood's industries from 1986 to 1987, she created the first-ever program that connected community businesses with students.¹⁰ She also set up and designed a system of employment applications, contracts, and evaluations for the program.¹¹

In 1979 Minneola married Dreadsie James Dixon (1905–2004), a retired and widowed pastor, on the campus of Oakwood College.¹² In 1986 Mrs. Dixon became the director of the Office for Alumni Affairs and served in this capacity until 1988.¹³ During her term as Homecoming Weekend coordinator (starting in 1974) and because of her promotional skills, attendance at the annual event grew to such large numbers that the main services were moved from the campus to the Von Braun Civic Center Arena. As the full-time Alumni Affairs director, she poured her efforts into designing a program that would reach alumni and bring their needed support back to Oakwood. During her tenure she created the Gift of Love offering plan, conducted the first fund-raising phonathon, started the President's Reception, and published the first alumni directory.¹⁴ In 1991 at the request of Benjamin Reaves, president of Oakwood College, Mrs. Dixon became the director of the college's Archives and Museum, a position she held until 2009.¹⁵ In preparation for this task, Mrs. Dixon went back to school and, in

1990, earned a Master of Library and Information Studies degree from the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa.¹⁶

In the process of obtaining her degree, she envisioned what the archives could become. Mrs. Dixon updated the catalogs of the holdings already in the archives and requested more space, which was granted. With the support of the college administration, the archives grew from a small, cramped room on the main floor of the library to a much larger eight-room center on the lower level.¹⁷ Through her persistent efforts, Mrs. Dixon persuaded several regional conference workers and Oakwood alumni to donate various artifacts and documents to the College Archives. Consequently, the archives' holding quadrupled. Through the assistance of Joyce Williams, an army of dedicated student workers, and a bevy of interested volunteers, she conducted hundreds of interviews with Oakwood pioneers; cataloged thousands of periodicals, books, and pictures; planned Black History Month programs; reorganized the museum; conducted numerous historical bus tours; and brought widespread attention to Oakwood through her public relations efforts.¹⁸ Mrs. Dixon helped get the campus listed in the Alabama Register of Historic Places, researched the history of Dred Scott's relationship to Oakwood, lead out in placing historical markers around the campus, and coordinated the effort to mark the slave cemetery discovered on the campus.¹⁹ Her work as an archivist and librarian took her to numerous conferences and meetings both within the United States and overseas. She was a sought-after speaker for women's ministries and Black History programs. Mrs. Dixon's drive to inspire future generations to study the past caused her to conceive the idea of taking to the airwaves. In 1991, shortly after being named Alumna of the Year, she delivered the first Oakwood Heritage Moment segment on the campus radio station, WOCC, now WJOU. This daily five-minute radio program compellingly narrated key events and personalities in Oakwood's history. As if it were not enough to tell the Oakwood story by radio, in the mid-1990s she started a weekly column in Huntsville's *Speaking Out* newspaper that chronicled the history of the institution.²⁰ Mrs. Dixon retired in 2009.²¹

In retirement Mrs. Dixon maintained an active lifestyle. She was a member of the Human Relations Advisory Board of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, directed the Mount Calvary Seventh-day Adventist Church choir, acted as an associate in the disabilities ministry of the South Central Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, and was an active participant in many other professional, church, and civic organizations.²² Mrs. Dixon died on April 1, 2014, at the age of 84, in Huntsville, Alabama.

Mrs. Dixon's legacy is encapsulated in her indefatigable work ethic and a passion for service. Consequently, Mrs. Dixon will be remembered for the herculean efforts she put forth to advance Oakwood University's well-being and ensure that its story is preserved for future generations.

SOURCES

"Elder Dreadsie James Dixon obituary." Oakwood College Church, July 30, 2004. Oakwood University Archives.

"Minneola Dabney Dixon obituary." Oakwood University Church, April 11, 2014. Oakwood University Archives.

Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook. Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1986–1988, 1991–2009.

NOTES

1. "Minneola Dabney Dixon obituary," Oakwood University church, April 11, 2014, Oakwood University Archives.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1972), 330. See also "Minneola Dabney Dixon obituary." According to the obituary, Minneola Dabney-Williams became the first director of student employment at the request of the newly appointed president of Oakwood College, Calvin Rock. Accordingly, this event must have taken place in the year 1972. The position of director of student employment is not listed in the *SDA Yearbook* during the time Minneola reportedly held the office.
10. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1986), 444. See also *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1987), 437. Note that the vocational industries at Oakwood College are reported in the *Yearbook* up to 1986. Thereafter, this section is excluded.
11. "Minneola Dabney Dixon obituary."
12. "Elder Dreadsie James Dixon obituary," Oakwood College church, July 30, 2004, Oakwood University Archives.
13. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1986), 444; *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1987), 437; *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1988), 446. According to the official *Yearbook*, Minneola Dixon became the director of Alumni Affairs in 1986 and held the office up to 1988. Prior to this, Fred Pullins and Gary Wimbish respectively held the position of Alumni Affairs director. Mrs. Dixon's obituary states that "in 1984 Minneola was asked to move to the Alumni Affairs office to become its director." See Minneola Dabney Dixon obituary."

14. "Minneola Dabney Dixon obituary," Oakwood University Church, April 11, 2014, Oakwood University Archives.

15. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1991), 426; *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1992), 421; *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1993), 405; *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1994), 416; *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1995), 422; *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1996), 433; *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1997), 446; *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1998), 457; *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1999), 465; *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (2000), 469; *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (2001), 418; *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (2002), 431; *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (2003), 461; *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (2004), 438; *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (2005), 458; *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (2006), 471; *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (2007), 476; *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (2008), 478; *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (2009), 489. According to the official *Yearbook*, Mrs. Dixon started her tenure as the director of the college archives in 1991. Her obituary states that "in 1988, Minneola accepted the position as the second director of Oakwood College Archives and Museum." This is probable considering that Mrs. Dixon may have accepted the position when offered it in 1988, but did not officially assume the directorship until 1991.

16. "Minneola Dabney Dixon obituary."

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

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