

Martha Lou Hughes | 1921-2015

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Martha Lou Hughes

Martha Lou Hughes, 93, of Decatur died at her home Thursday, July 23, 2015.

Memorial service is 2:30 p.m. Sunday, July 26, at First United Methodist Church in Decatur with the Rev. Dr. Brian Bosworth officiating. Coker-Hawkins Funeral Home in Decatur will be open for viewing from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday.

Honorary pallbearers include Dr. Tom Steffan, Brock Smith, J. E. Carson, David Dodson, Gary Cocanougher, Chuck Heaberlin, Jim Richards and Eric Vincent.

Martha was born Nov. 18, 1921, in Sulphur Springs to Alma Caldwell and Emmett Thornton, a former county attorney in Hopkins County. She was the second child of four, having an older brother Dozier and younger sisters Mary and Carolyn, all of whom preceded her in death.

Following her primary and secondary education in Sulphur Springs, Martha attended North Texas State Teachers College (now the University of North Texas) and obtained her degree in library science in 1943. While in school, she met William Augustus "W.A." Hughes Jr. and following his service in the U. S. Navy in the South Pacific during World War II, they married in 1945.

The couple moved to Waco, where W. A. completed his law degree at Baylor University and Martha worked at the Waco Public Library. Although that marked the end of her "paid" career as a librarian, she continued as a professional librarian for 48 years as a volunteer.

She was a driving force behind the creation of the Decatur Public Library in 1967 and served as a member of the library board for 48 years. Until shortly before her death she volunteered at the Decatur library each Monday.

Martha and Althea Forbis, both attorneys wives, convinced the Decatur City Council to form a library board in 1967. Several years later Hughes and Forbis joined forces with the Rev. Albert Tyl of the Assumption Catholic Church to begin planning a local library.

Part of their fund-raising efforts included the filming of a coffee commercial that starred Hughes among others. That effort involved 400 Wise County residents following a fictional pied piper across the courthouse square. The weeklong filming earned \$5,000 for the fledgling library.

The city donated an abandoned building at the corner of Church and Pecan Streets and by 1970 the first Decatur Public Library was in business with Hughes, Forbis and other volunteers manning the check-out desk. Martha served as a full-time volunteer librarian from 1968 to 1976.

By the mid-1980s, the library needed expansion and this time the library board decided to build a new building on Farm Road 51 South at Thompson Street. The library has had four full-time directors since it opened. In 2012, the Decatur Library was named one of the best small libraries in the nation.

Martha's first library in Decatur was at her church, First United Methodist, which she started in 1959. It was recently dedicated in her honor.

In addition to her volunteer work, Martha was an avid gardener and a "ready-to-go" traveler, enjoying many trips throughout North America, Eastern and Western Europe, Central and South America, Russia, Africa and Australia.

She was preceded in death by her husband of 44 years, District and Appellate Court Judge W. A. Hughes Jr. on Jan. 6, 1989; a son, Carter C. Hughes, on Sept. 11, 1996; a brother Dozier Thornton; and two sisters, Mary Pearce and Carolyn Murray.

She is survived by her son, Dan T. Hughes of Fort Worth; daughter-in-law Becky Hughes of Denton; two grandchildren, Gus Hughes of Denton and Nelan Hughes of Taylors, South Carolina.