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Descendant of Gone with the Wind author to be featured on Tour of Homes

By Michelle Bates-Nov 25, 2015

The book *Gone with the Wind* became a major motion picture that instantly became a classic when it premiered in Atlanta in 1939.

During a tour of the Holiday Trail of Lights, the West Tabernacle Community Senior Citizens group will experience a private tour of the home of Frances



Irving, a descendant of Margaret Munnerlyn Mitchell, author of the book. *Pictured to left: Frances Irving, a descendant of Gone with the Wind author Margaret Mitchell, is dressed in Civil War era clothing. She stands inside the foyer at her home, located at 508 Fort Avenue. The historic home is one of the oldest homes in north Louisiana and is on the Tour of Homes set for Saturday, Dec. 4.*

Irving's great-grandmother, Mary Charlotte Munnerlyn and Mitchell's grandmother, Helen Ann Munnerlyn, were first cousins.

"Margaret Mitchell wasn't very tall," Irving said. "She was probably about 5'

1" tall. She was a small woman. All my life, my mother talked about Margaret. I

never had the pleasure of meeting her because she died so young, but Mother told me some things about her.”

Born Nov. 8, 1900, in Atlanta, Mitchell was reared in a family considered high society, a time when women roles were much more narrowly defined. Irving grew up hearing tales of Mitchell, who she says was a free spirit in a time when women were fighting for equality and the right to vote.

“She wanted Margaret to go through becoming a debutante, but all Margaret wanted to do was write,” she said. “Her mother was very strict on her, and Margaret felt like her mother didn’t love her. Margaret was kind of like a free spirit.”

Irving says Mitchell began writing at the young age of three. “She could barely hold a pencil, and she wrote and she loved to tell stories,” Irving said. “She would get her brother and the neighbor’s children and they would sit under this arbor at her home, and she would tell all these stories.”

Irving tells the story of how *Gone with the Wind* came to be, saying it wasn’t a story Mitchell wanted published. She began writing the book in 1929.

“She didn’t think her material would be good enough,” she said. “She had gone to work as a reporter for one of the newspapers there in Atlanta, and they had some of the authors and reporters come to a dinner. This man from New York, Mr. Harold Latham, was looking for scripts.”

He asked each one if they had any manuscripts that might make a good play or book.

“She never said anything,” Irving said. “She didn’t want anybody to know about her book. All of a sudden, one of her so called friends asked Margaret ‘Have you written anything?’ One of her friends said, ‘That’s hard to believe,’ and it made Margaret so mad, she went home and got that script together and it weighed a ton. She took it to him, and he picked it up and read it all the way back to New York.”

When Latham returned to New York, he contacted Mitchell and asked for the remainder of the script. At the time, she hadn't written the first chapter. Latham reportedly asked her to write the first chapter, and after she gave it to him, she thought about it for a couple of days, called him and told him to send it all back.

"Somehow he talked her out of it, and he was just in love with the book," she said. "Had her friend not made that disparaging remark, we might not have ever had the pleasure of *Gone with the Wind*."

Irving says it is believed *Gone with the Wind* is a story about her life experiences, finding love, experiencing loss, suffering and triumph. She says Mitchell reportedly modeled the men in the book after her own life experiences. For instance, she met a lieutenant in the military, Clifford West Henry, whom she fell in love with but was killed during World War I before they could marry. Scarlett O'Hara's love interest, Ashley Wilkes, is believed to be modeled after Henry. Rhett Butler was reportedly modeled after her second husband, Barrien "Red" Upshaw, who was abusive to Mitchell.

Although Butler's character was not abusive in the story, much of Upshaw's characteristics were written into Butler's character.

Mitchell later married John Marsh, who was a writer himself. He encouraged her to write, and during her research for the book, she obtained a massive amount of information from many of the old Civil War veterans. The book was set in the Civil War era.

Mitchell went on to win the Pulitzer Prize for her work, and Irving says this book is now printed in 40 languages and the only other book that has sold more copies is the Holy Bible. Overall, it has sold 30 million copies.

She passed away at the age of 48, in August 1949, after she was hit by a reported drunk driver. She is buried in Oakland Cemetery.



The tour group will get a chance to see the Irving home, built in 1845 by Col. William Bates, who came to Minden in 1842. Bates bought the property from Minden's founder Charles Veeder.