

“Mom” Sanders, World War II Legend

A Clark County woman became a much beloved figure during World War II. Winnie “Mom” Sanders led a group that opened the “67 Club” for men who came to Arkadelphia as a part of the 67th College Training Detachment (CTD). The Club was located in the old Clark home at Eighth and Main. It became a “home away from home” and “Mom” Sanders became a mother figure to each group of young men who came through the training program. And for years afterward, she kept in touch with many of “her” boys.

The 67th CTD at Ouachita Baptist College became a reality in 1943 when Ed Flaig became one of the first of the detachment’s staff to arrive in Arkadelphia. Ouachita and Henderson State College were two of the schools chosen to participate in the CTD program. Colleges provided four months of academic work consisting of math, physics, chemistry, and astronomy, while the detachment provided military training, physical education, and ten hours of flight training during the last month. Arkadelphians welcomed the boys and many life-long friendships resulted from interaction between the newcomers and the townspeople.

One of the most beloved locals was Winnie Sanders. Winnie was born in 1896 in Newark, Arkansas, and married C.M. “Sandy” Sanders in 1919. As a driving force behind the 67 Club, Winnie Sanders served as housemother during 1943 and 1944. At the Club, boys could socialize, away from military and academic surroundings. There, Mrs. Sanders helped the young men adjust to their new life in the military as well as to life in a new environment. The men never forgot her kindness.

Overall, Ouachita’s program served approximately 1,200 men from all forty-eight states. Sanders developed friendships with the cadets as they passed through: rather than just forgetting those who had left town for service elsewhere, when a new group came in, she simply continued the old relationships and increased her realm of friends by adding more! She kept in touch with as many as possible by writing letters, and served as a clearinghouse of information about all who served here.

One of the best-known students to participate in Ouachita’s CTD was George Wallace. Wallace later served as governor of Alabama and was a four-time presidential candidate. Running as an independent in 1968, he won electoral votes from a number of states, including Arkansas. As a young married couple during World War II, Wallace and his wife Lurleen (also a future Alabama governor) developed lifelong friendships with Mom Sanders while here in Arkadelphia. Prophetically, Sanders recognized the Wallaces’ potential for success early on when she described them in her diary this way in 1943: “two grand kids with a glorious future.” The Wallaces tried to make sure that Sanders attended their gubernatorial inaugurations by issuing special invitations and providing transportation. When Sanders died in 1969, George Wallace attended her funeral.

Mom Sanders also left behind a tangible legacy. Instead of memorials or flowers for “her boys” that died, she requested that books be given in their memory to the OBU library. Many donations were made and today, a number of these books remain within the library’s collection, identifiable by their bookplates. Some of those bookplates include biographical information about “her boys.” Sanders also kept diaries and created scrapbooks of the letters, photographs, and memorabilia related to the young men of the 67th CTD. Those materials are preserved in the Archives and Special Collections Department of Ouachita Baptist University’s library.

