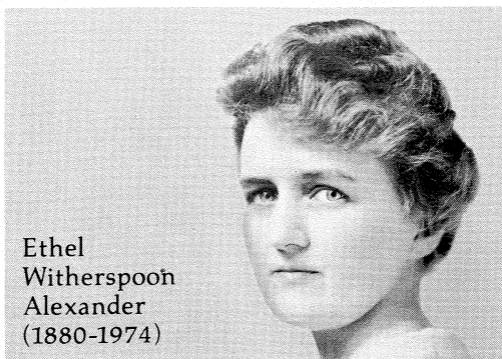


Oakey Logan
Alexander
(1878-1950)



Ethel
Witherspoon
Alexander
(1880-1974)

*Oakey Logan
and Ethel Witherspoon
Alexander*

Memorialized by the
Oakey Logan and Ethel Witherspoon
Alexander Fund in

The New York Community Trust
909 Third Avenue
New York, NY 10022

In her Will, Mrs. Alexander established the Oakey L. & Ethel Witherspoon Alexander Foundation which later became a Fund in The New York Community Trust.



Glenartney

She was a blueblood with aristocratic lineage that included a signer of the Declaration of Independence. He was a bread salesman for a wholesale grocery company. When Ethel Witherspoon married Oakey Alexander in 1909, they formed a team that in time amassed a fortune in the bituminous coal industry and later gave generous amounts of it away.

Ethel Witherspoon was born on April 28, 1880, at "Glenartney," the 350-acre Witherspoon estate and farm in Versailles, Kentucky. Her great-uncle, John Witherspoon, a Presbyterian clergyman and president of the College of New Jersey (renamed Princeton University a century later), did not believe in mixing religion and politics. Nevertheless he served as a delegate from New Jersey to the Continental Congress and signed the Declaration of Independence. Ethel's father was a famous preacher, but the other men in the Witherspoon family leaned toward finance. At one time five of her uncles were presidents of five different local banks.

On her mother's side Ethel was a Viley whose roots originated in France and whose ancestor had emigrated from Maryland to Kentucky in the late 1700s. The family had been prominent in politics and in breeding thoroughbred race horses in Kentucky, particularly Woodford County, for a century. Ethel graduated from Hollins College, then still known as Hollins Institute, in Roanoke, Virginia.

In 1909 she married Oakey Logan Alexander. He was thirty-one; she was twenty-nine.

Oakey Alexander was born in Parkersburg, West Virginia, in 1878, the son of William and Isabella Mann Alexander, whose family stock came from Greenbrier County to the east. He was educated at Concord College in Athens, West Virginia. Although he did sell bread for a time, Oakey decided to change that when he met beautiful Ethel Witherspoon. He thought she was too beautiful to marry a man who sold bread for a living, and after his marriage he went to work for the Pocahontas Fuel Company, a large producer of high-quality bituminous coal in the southern part of West Virginia bordering on the Virginia line.

An early conglomerate, the company owned not only the coal fields but also the transportation services that moved the coal from the mines to the point of consumption. Alexander's customers were primarily the textile and pulp paper industries of New England. In 1910, he became district manager of plants in New Bedford, Salem and Boston, Massachusetts, and in Portland, Maine. The young couple moved to Boston.

In the next eight years, Oakey Alexander rose rapidly through his company's ranks. By 1918 the Pocahontas Steamship Company had been developed, and the barges and sailboats that had hauled coal from Hampton Roads, Virginia,

to New England were replaced by oceangoing colliers that also hauled coal to Europe and South America. And in that same year Alexander was promoted to vice president and transferred to New York.

Unlike most women of her time, the genteely-bred Ethel Witherspoon Alexander was not content to be the woman behind the man; she was the woman *beside* the man, collaborating with him in the design of coal terminals and colliers and taking a keen interest in the operation and maintenance of the coal properties, terminals, and ships. The Pocahontas Steamship Company was of special concern to her. Besides her sharp business head, Ethel had another advantage. The former Miss Witherspoon was an aristocrat, with the papers to prove it, and her membership in the D.A.R. and other such organizations proved advantageous in those early New England years in dealing with socially prominent people and with social and business organizations.

By 1929 the company had eight oceangoing colliers with an annual capacity of two and a half million tons of coal. But 1929 was also the year of the beginning of the Great Depression and, like other large companies, Pocahontas had its share of problems. Oakey Alexander was more than equal to the challenge. Made president of Pocahontas Fuel in 1932, the depth of the Depression, Oakey (undoubtedly with Ethel's assistance) pulled the company through that extremely difficult time, a feat that brought him even closer to the West Virginia families who were the major owners of the company. Pocahontas companies included Pocahontas Fuel Company, Pocahontas Steamship Company, Pocahontas Coal Corporation, Pocahontas Light and Water Company, and Pocahontas Corporation. In addition to being president and director of these firms, Oakey Alexander was also a director of the Irving Trust Company in New York and of the First National Bank of Bluefield, West Virginia. He was also president of the Pocahontas Coal Operators Association and a director of the National Coal Association and the Bituminous Coal Institute. At one time his directorships totaled fifteen.





Before the outbreak of World War II, Oakey Alexander had taken an active interest in the development of rayon, a synthetic fiber that had gained in usage in the 1920s and, although still involved with the various Pocahontas enterprises, he became an executive in the American Enka Corporation and later chairman of the board. Most of the owners of the corporation were Dutch, and when Holland was taken over by the Germans, the Dutch holdings were threatened, since it was the policy of the American government to freeze assets of citizens in German-controlled countries. However, so great was the confidence of the Dutch owners in Oakey Alexander's honesty and business acumen that they turned everything over to him. It was even rumored that the gold bullion reserves of the Dutch government were hidden in abandoned Pocahontas mine shafts in Bluefield, West Virginia, during World War II. When the war ended, he handed the greatly increased assets — and the gold — back to the grateful Dutch. The Alexanders counted many Dutch in their wide circle of friends, among them Queen Julianna, who was a frequent guest at their New York apartment before and after the war.

Oakey Alexander had a reputation as a hard worker and a loyal employer who demanded no less of himself than he did of his employees. In the 1940s when many New York firms were cutting back to a five-day work week, Oakey tried to ignore the trend. For a while he was successful, but ultimately the tide was too strong. Eventually he agreed to close the Pocahontas offices on Saturday, but he himself continued to work six days a week.

Although the Alexanders lived in New York City, they frequently visited Ethel's ancestral home of "Glenartney" during the summer, and they especially enjoyed entertaining friends at Kentucky Derby time.

The Alexanders also liked to entertain customers and friends on board the two flagships of their fleet, both named S.S. OAKEY L. ALEXANDER, and fitted out with state rooms for coal cruises from Norfolk to New England ports.

Oakey always had a special attachment to Bluefield, West Virginia, the business center of that part of the mining industry. He founded the Alexander Baptist Church in Bluefield (Ethel founded a Methodist church in one of the other Pocahontas coal towns), and he and Ethel built a lodge near there in the timberlands of the Southern Appalachians. There was a sanitarium in Bluefield run by a close friend of Oakey's, and he usually checked in there when he needed hospital treatment. However, at the time of his final illness in 1950, Oakey Alexander was in New York. He entered the hospital on January 9 and died on January 21 at the age of 72. His widow was just two months short of her seventieth birthday. There were no children. Ethel lived on almost a quarter of a century, dying on July 26, 1974.

During their lifetimes, both Alexanders were unflinchingly generous with their fortune. One of Mr. Alexander's most important and interesting gifts was made for a project far from home. He was a contributor to Commander Richard Byrd's second expedition to the Antarctic in 1933, and Byrd's vessel carried Pocahontas coal as ballast. Ten years after her husband's death, Mrs. Alexander created the Oakey L. and Ethel Wither- spoon Alexander Foundation so that their concern for others might continue undiminished.



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