

Remarks by Will Watt III at GRSP Peace Plaza & Will Watt Memorial Fountain Dedication

January 22, 2022 | Thomasville, Georgia

Good morning. What a great occasion it is for us to gather at this location for this purpose. It's been said, **"The world will never be the dwelling place of peace until peace has found a home in the heart of each and every man."** Will Watt, Sr., sought peace in the world in which he lived.

Granddaddy Watt was a giant, not in height, although he was 6'2"...but in stature and character. He cared so much about other people and about doing what is right. I'm sure he wouldn't want us making a big fuss about him as he was a humble man.

He was very familiar with the area where we are now standing. He was born just two blocks behind us at 446 South Hansell Street...a street that happened to be named after his grandfather, Judge Hansell. For many years he lived just one-half mile up Dawson Street from this spot. He loved his church and was a life-long member of the First Presbyterian Church one block away, and was a longtime member of the YMCA just a hundred yards away, serving as its president at one point. Additionally, he used to walk to work most days to Watt Building Material Company just three blocks from here. Grandmama would go pick him up at the store and bring him back home for lunch, after which he would stretch out for a 20 minute nap before heading back to the store.

He passed away at age 87 in 1967, but he certainly left his mark here. He taught Sunday School at First Presbyterian Church and later on Sunday afternoons, would drive out to Dillon Road Presbyterian Church to lead services there.

He was a patriot and loved his country. He served stateside in World War I. He pursued peace here in Thomasville and wanted our city to be a peaceful one. He loved growing vegetables in his hydroponic garden out back of his house and most of my cousins have fond memories of feeding the goldfish from the glass jar hanging from the tree beside the pond in the backyard as well.

In the early 1920s, he was commander of our local National Guard Company and a prisoner was in immediate danger of being lynched by an angry mob. He quickly gathered his troops, went to the jail and put the prisoner in a box formation and marched him safely away from the mob.



Another example of peace is a story I am about to tell that most of you have never heard before. As recently told by Thomasville native, former Atlanta mayor and Ambassador to the UN, Andrew Young..."In 1956, my wife and I came to Thomasville for a voter registration drive. We got into town, turned a corner and the Ku Klux Klan was in the street trying to intimidate us. They knew where we were staying and what we were there for. They came to the house where we were staying two separate times at night to intimidate us. I told my wife, "I'm going to the sheriff," and someone told me, "No, you need to go see Mr. Watt." Mr. Young said, "No, I'm going to the sheriff," and I was again told, "Go see Mr. Watt." I did and he said, "I'll take care of this." And he did. Granddaddy loved ALL people and all lives mattered to him.

His house at 714 North Dawson Street had an open door policy for the Georgia Rotary Student Plan students and there are some wonderful pictures from the Thomasville newspaper of him enjoying the company of the kids. He even served as a stand-in 'Father-of-the-Bride' for one student who couldn't return to her country to get married due to civil unrest that had just broken out. So he walked her down the aisle and she was married here in Thomasville.

My Grandmama Watt wrote a book from a journal she kept called, Honeymoon Odyssey, about their weeks-long honeymoon to Europe that was delayed until 1956 due to two world wars and the Great Depression. An idea hit me earlier this week to go through the book to see if there were any additional details I could share with you about him.

I only had to turn to the fourth page of the book, the dedication page, to read what Grandmama wrote there, "To the memory of William Augustin Watt - Christian gentleman who trusted God and served his fellow man."

While in England, she wrote, "On June 4th, we drove to Ilford, where Will was to attend the Rotary Club. This was the club to which he had been able to get the Rotary Clubs of Southwest Georgia during World War II to contribute a mobile kitchen for relief work."

It was also on this trip that he was conferred the title of **Citizen of Honor** of Luneburg, Germany, at a special ceremony in his honor for arranging material goods to be sent from the citizens of Thomasville to the citizens of war-ravaged Luneburg immediately following World War II. Granddaddy was one of only three in 1,000 years to receive this honor. Quoting Grandmama from her book and I think this will give you a glimpse into the person he was, "Will said he felt two emotions deeply, humility and gratitude. He explained it was the Christian-hearted citizens of Thomas County, Georgia that had sent the relief. He quoted several passages of scripture, giving reasons for sending relief, and closed with the benediction of Moses. The orchestra played another number and we filed out. As we passed along, I saw many there with tears rolling down their cheeks."

At one point in his life he was called 'Mr. Rotary' because he lived out the ideals that Rotary instills in each of its members. All of his relatives here this morning are certainly proud to be a Watt and will fondly remember our legacy each time we pass by the marker (point to it) with his picture and background on it.

Finally, I will close with this last story from Honeymoon Odyssey. King Haakon VII of Norway conferred the St. Olav medal to Granddaddy for the work done on behalf of the Norwegian students as they had been recipients of scholarships under GRSP to promote international understanding, goodwill and to promote peace among nations. About the ceremony Grandmama Watt states, "It was a thrilling moment. I was so proud of Will and of the recognition of his idea and hard work for the success of the plan. Will made a very fine acceptance speech, stressing that he was accepting the medal for the exceptional Thomasville, Georgia, club, whose members had cooperated and worked hard to put the idea into action. He closed with the quotation from the poem of Maltie Babcock, **"We are not here to play, to dream, to drift..." "It matters not how deep entrenched the wrong, how hard the battle goes, the day how long, Fight on, faint not, tomorrow comes the song."** A real standing ovation followed. I could hardly stand it; I was so thrilled and my eyes filled with happy tears. I hope all the loved ones who had gone to their heavenly reward were bending near to watch and hear, and add their cheer, and that God, too, was smiling that His child had been obedient to His command, "Love one another."

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Will Watt III



"Be kind to one another."