



Joseph Alexander Fearington

Joseph A. Fearington (“Mister Joe”) was born 96 years ago and grew up on the farm of his parents, Rufus and Ola Fearington, on Damascus Church Road. He was the oldest of six children. His father was a builder; his mother sold milk and butter. Joseph learned farming at an early age, growing fields of corn, beans and cotton. He recalls walking the three and a half miles to town to attend Sunday school at St. Joseph C.M.E. Church on Rosemary Street.

Joseph joined the military in January 1942, during World War II; he served in the South Pacific as a sergeant and communications coordinator on the “hot line”, sometimes having to string communications wire on the front line under combat conditions. Upon his return to the U.S. and civilian life in 1946, he married Lucy Watson on May 21, who had been his girlfriend before military service; they wrote to each other nearly every day during his service. They had two children, Clementine Self, and Joseph D., (who passed away in 2011), and also two grandsons and three great-grand daughters. Joseph and Lucy had been married for over 70 years when she passed away in May 2017.

He began working as a carpenter and builder after the war, helped construct many of the houses in the Potter’s Field and Sunset communities, including his current home on North Graham Street. The area is

now known as the Northside neighborhood. Putting his farming skills to good use, he planted crops in the vacant lots in the neighborhood. “He didn’t plant gardens,” his daughter Clementine remembers, “but fields of corn,” as well as turnips and sweet potatoes. They served as community gardens for the neighborhood; when Joseph would bring in crops from the field, Lucy would announce to the neighborhood that “Joseph’s here—come and get it.”

He also put his carpentry skills to work in renovating his first church, Hamlet Chapel C.M.E., in northern Chatham County. He later became a member of his wife’s church, Hickory Grove Baptist, northwest of Carrboro. He performed many volunteer services for the community, taking people to doctor’s appointments and community meetings, and plowing the roads when it snowed. Before the roads were paved, he and R.D. Smith helped to keep the dust down by spreading oil on the roadway.

When the Northside neighborhood began to change, with older residents moving out and many homes becoming rental property, Joseph and Lucy began to work to help preserve the character of the neighborhood. They began to attend town meetings on the subject, and provided transportation to others in the community who wished to speak out in favor of preserving the community, and providing affordable housing.

The contribution to the community that Joseph found most rewarding was helping other people, whether by plowing gardens, maintaining the roads, or providing transportation. The biggest change he has seen in his life in Chapel Hill is the loss of a sense of community, as older neighbors left the Northside neighborhood and small homes were replaced by high-rise apartments. He fondly recalls some of the small businesses that used to exist in the neighborhood, including the B&F Grocery, and Preston Weaver’s shoe shop. In the future, he would like to see more affordable housing being made available so that long-time residents could remain in their homes; he believes that the community should stay in the hands of the people who made it.