

# COLONEL MILFORD HOWARD & HOWARD'S CHAPEL



**Milford Wriarson Howard was an uncommon man. A self-described dreamer, he pursued his dreams with such a stubborn, unshakable determination and courage that no force on earth could dissuade his total mental and physical involvement until he either attained success or suffered defeat.**

**A huge man, six feet four inches tall, whose weight ranged from 200 to 250 pounds, Howard was usually robust and healthy, a towering giant with seemingly inexhaustible strength and energy. He possessed a brilliant,**

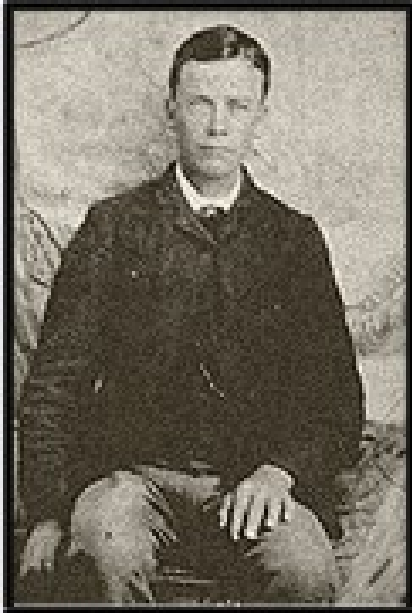
**searching mind and an amazing memory. A great speaker, with a natural dramatic flair, he could instantly recall some suitable quotation from the world's greatest writers and thinkers or recite whole chapters of the Bible.**

**But this gifted man was never content with his life or accomplishments. Always an insatiable adventurer, searching for another dream's fulfillment, he was, at some time in his life, a lawyer, farmer, congressman, educator, lecturer, author, actor, newspaper writer, real estate dealer, newspaper editor, cattle breeder,**



**mine speculator, oil speculator, gold prospector, and the owner of a salmon-canning factory in Alaska.**

**Born on December 18, 1862, on a farm near Rome, Georgia, Milford was the first of six children born to a crippled, stern and overbearing father, Stephen Oliver Howard, and a kind but completely dominated mother, Martha Maddry Howard. When he was five years old his family traveled to Randolph County, Arkansas by wagon, where Stephen worked out a bare living shoeing horses and mules for the occasional wagon trains, which moved through on their way to western Arkansas and Texas.**



**Living in abject poverty, sharing farm chores at an early age, and with little in life which was either pleasurable or entertaining, Milford found his own answer to the drabness of rural Arkansas. He began to build air castles, to create a very different world in his imagination.**

**There was little opportunity for attending school and by the time Milford was 14 years old he had only two terms of school, each lasting three months. But he longed for an education. He memorized the blue back speller and read McGuffey's Reader and the Bible, memorizing the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.**

**At eleven, Milford and his nine year old brother, Andrew, made a two-horse crop and the following year he worked in a cotton gin for \$.30 a day, which his father collected and spent for the family.**

**When he was fourteen, the family moved to Georgia, where Milford, large for his age, did a man's work on the crop. In his little spare time he continued to read. The school he so yearned to attend had to be passed up so that he could help his father run a rented threshing machine. When he was 17, he did get to go to school for another three-month term by walking three miles barefoot to attend class taught by a kind-hearted schoolmaster named Lawson.**

**At age 18, with little more than 11 month's formal schooling to his credit, Milford presented himself to Major Joseph A. Blanche, a lawyer of Cedartown. He astonished the barrister by asking permission to study law under him. Blanche very tactfully questioned Howard about his education and advised him to abandon the idea. Howard persisted,**

however, did study law under Blanche, and did fulfill his "impossible" dream, being admitted to the bar one year later. His father, who had recently traveled to Sand Mountain in Alabama, recommended a county seat he passed through as the place for Milford to begin his practice.

Howard arrived in Fort Payne on November 7 1881, not knowing a person there. He owned only the set of clothes he wore, a little bundle of shirts and underwear, a comb and a brush, a Bible and thirty dollars. Col. L.A. Dobbs permitted Howard to use his office and books in return for keeping a fire in the fireplace and cleaning the office. It was there he studied the statutory law of Alabama before becoming one of the youngest men to ever apply for admission to the Alabama bar.



He soon met pretty, petite, golden-haired, brown-eyed, Sallie Lankford, and they were married two years later on December 2, 1883. He was 21 years old and she was only 17. They were to have three sons, Clyde, Clarence, and Claude, but their middle son died at the age of 11 months.

Soon he took his first step into politics, accepting appointment to the chairmanship of the county Democratic executive committee, and organizing the first Democratic primary ever held in Dekalb County. He was later appointed by Governor Thomas Seay as the first county solicitor of Dekalb County.

With an established law practice and a growing reputation as an outstanding lawyer and speaker, Howard could still not be satisfied with any achievement. He kept looking for a better goal in life, a brighter dream. At the height of his law career, Howard became interested in lecturing and studied oration and drama at a school in Washington DC. After making, and losing a fortune during the Fort Payne boom period, he turned to lecturing where he found, for a time, a satisfying intoxication in holding great audiences in rapt attention as he spoke.

After his lecture tour, he decided to write his first book, based upon stories he had heard of corruption and scandal among Washington leaders and entitled it, *If Christ Came To Congress*. It was published in 1894. The book became an immediate sensation in the press and was widely quoted.



**Following a split in the Democratic Party in Alabama, Howard expected the Populist nomination for Congressman from the seventh district. He was elected to in 1894 after a bitter campaign.**

**Turning down a lucrative offer to join a New York law firm, Howard returned to Fort Payne and again prospered at law, achieving particular success in criminal practice. He also bought one of the local county papers and became editor and feature and short story writer.**



**When his family became tired of farm life and yearned for the city, Howard moved to Birmingham and practiced law there for two years. After an illness he again stopped practicing law and speculated in a Mexican mine, losing his investment during the Revolution there. Next he invested in a Louisiana oil field. From there he went to Alaska, and became interested in gold prospecting and built a cannery for salmon. Everywhere he went, he lost money. Once again he returned to Fort Payne.**

**After a strenuous year's work on the farm, Howard consented to move to California. He soon became restless and decided to return to Alabama in 1923 to start a school for underprivileged children. A site was chosen on Lookout Mountain and 1000 acres of virtual wilderness was purchased, mostly on credit. On July 23, 1923, they cut the first underbrush and marked the four corners of the little schoolhouse, to be built of native stone.**

**Two dormitories and a dining hall were built of slabs donated by a sawmill, and were covered with shingles. Optimistically, they started school in the fall, with about 40 boys and girls, and hoped to receive enough funds in contributions until the school became self-sustaining. But contributions were small and few.**



**Unable to raise sufficient funds for the Master School, an effort was made to sell lots in a development called Little River Park. The whole thousand acres purchased for the school would not be needed if it couldn't be kept in operation.**

**An auction failed to bring any buyers or money, so Howard accepted a ten-dollar donation and started construction of the dam to improve River Park's value.**



**This sturdy concrete dam was soon built under the supervision of Joe Biddle, a former British sailor, who, with other mountain friends, had helped build the school. Howard then had the idea of a clubhouse built on the picturesque bluff overlooking the dam and Alpine Lodge was soon underway, with his mountain friends working for months without pay. Debts were added to debts and little financial aid came, except frequent checks from Sallie Howard in California.**



**Sallie came with their grandson, Milford, to spend the summer of 1925. Already seriously ill with cancer, she died in the fall, soon after returning to Los Angeles. As soon as Howard began to recover from the loss of his beloved Sallie, he envisioned a scenic highway from Chattanooga to Gadsden along the west brow of the mountain. Surely his inaccessible, but potentially valuable property would sell then. And soon the southern half of the highway was**

**completed, running from Alpine to Gadsden.**

**On November 9, 1926 Howard and Stella Vivian Harper were married in Chattanooga and thereafter he referred to her as "Lady Vivian". She too, was also a dreamer and she and Howard traveled throughout Europe together.**

**In spite of many different attempts to raise money, his River Park development met with failure and Howard finally realized that his greatest dream, the Master School was doomed. Broken in body and spirit, he meditated and wrote in his lonely mountaintop cabin while Lady Vivian spent much of her time visiting friends and relatives.**

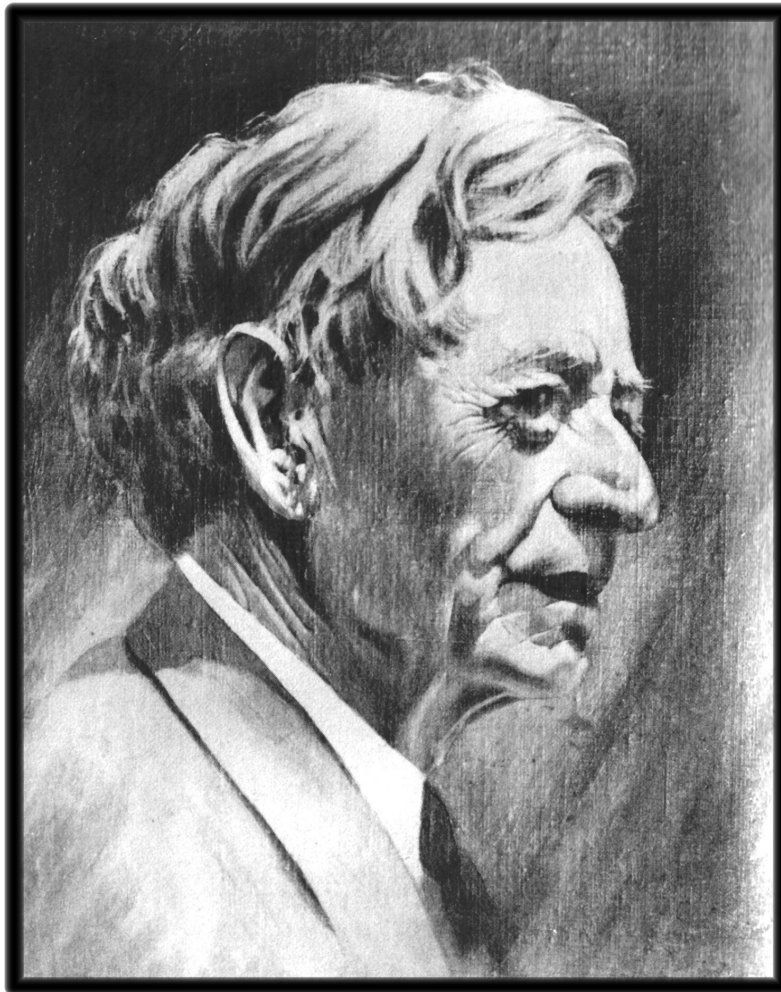


Howard had yet another dream. When he buried Sallie Howard at Forrest Lawn Cemetery at Glendale, California, he had greatly admired the Kirk O' the Heather, a reproduction of the Annie Laurel Church in Scotland. From that time on he had secretly hoped to reproduce the Glendale Church as a memorial to his first wife. Friends urged him to return to California in hope the climate would improve his health. More adamant than ever he supervised the construction of the chapel sometimes standing on frozen ground for weeks.

Finally with the help of the Civilian Conservation Corps boys and local patrons his chapel was completed. His last accomplishment was somehow managing to get enough money and materials to build this

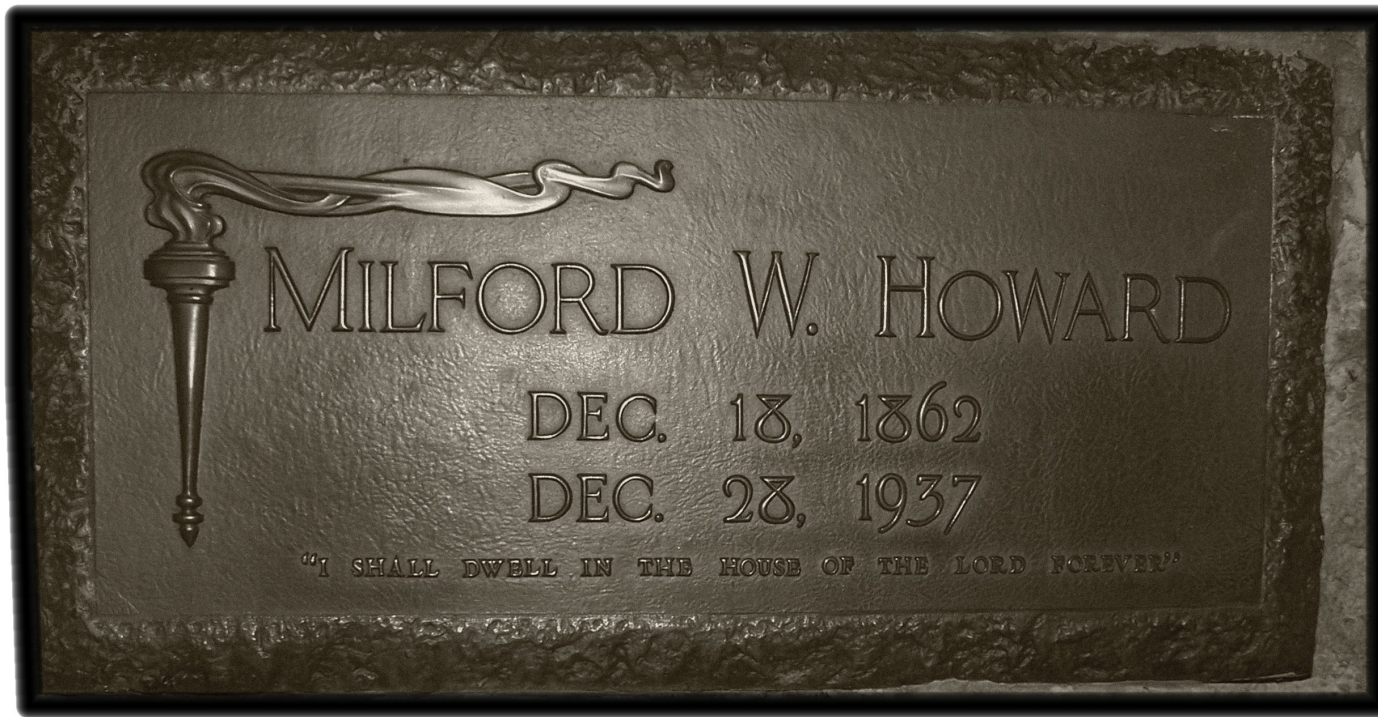
memorial, though the organ and beautiful stained glass windows he envisioned were never added. A line from Sallie's last letter was written above the stone altar: 'God has always been as good to me as I would let him be.' The Chapel was dedicated on June 23, 1937.





**During the summer Howard delivered a few sermons at the chapel, all on immortality. That fall the aging, broken man became ill and took a train to California, where he died of pneumonia on December 29, 1937, at the age of 75. His body was cremated and Lady Vivian made plans to inter the ashes at the Sallie Howard Memorial Chapel at a later date.**





A private ceremony was held in the fall of 1938, Howard's remains were placed inside the huge boulder and a bronze plaque placed over it, inscribed, Milford W. Howard, born December 18, 1867. Died December 28, 1937. I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever".

