

Barbara and Jack Cay Fund

John Eugene “Jack” Cay, Jr. was born in Savannah on October 10, 1914, the son of John Eugene Sr. and Caroline “Caro” Palmer. In the year following John’s birth his father, along with his maternal grandfather Armin B. Palmer, formed Palmer & Cay Insurance.

When Jack was two months old, Thomas and Elizabeth Ficklen Hilton, also of Savannah, welcomed Barbara Alexander Hilton and by the time they were ten the Cays and Hiltons were neighbors and friends across Atlantic Avenue’s beautiful promenade in Ardsley Park -- setting the stage for a lifelong love affair between Jack and Barbara.

Both Jack and Barbara would leave Savannah for boarding schools in the Northeast – Jack at Episcopal High School, an elite boarding school in Alexandria, Virginia and college at the University of Chapel Hill in North Carolina, where he was a member of Sigma Alpha Epsilon Fraternity and The Order of Sheiks. Barbara went to Choate Rosemary Hall in Wallingford, Connecticut, and then to Vassar, but in her junior year she transferred to Chapel Hill to be with Jack. In addition to playing intramural tennis and basketball, Barbara indulged her creative side appearing in numerous stage productions, including being cast as Dora Carter in the world premiere of “The Enchanted Maze,” by Pulitzer Prize winning playwright Paul Green. In 1935, “Blonde Tragedy,” an original work written by Barbara about two girls and a poet in New York City, was selected as one of only six scripts to be produced by UNC’s Playmakers Repertory Theatre Company.

In 1938, with college behind them, Jack and Barbara were married at Christ Church in Savannah surrounded by family and friends. Jack was in business at Palmer & Cay with his father and Barbara immersed herself in community life through volunteerism through the Bethesda Home for Boys and the Red Cross. In 1940, they welcomed their first child Caroline Hilton Cay, followed closely by Barbara Lachlison Cay in 1941. In 1945, their only son, John Eugene Cay III joined the family, followed in 1949 by Elizabeth Mason Cay.

Through more than fifty years of marriage they were devoted to each other, their family, and their community. Jack assumed the helm of Palmer & Cay in 1947 and in 1953 received the Dunlop Award as the outstanding insurance underwriter in Georgia. He was instrumental in bringing Memorial Hospital to Savannah and served one term as board chairman. In 1954, he was awarded the Lucas Trophy, the oldest and most honored award given by the city of Savannah.

In 1958, Jack wrote and published fifty copies of *Ward Allen, Savannah River Market Hunter* and presented it to the members of the Madeira Club in March of that year. In 1959, an additional 200 copies were printed and in 2013 it was made into a feature film starring Jim Caviezel and filmed on location in Savannah.

John Eugene “Jack” Cay died on October 3, 1989, at age 74 on Hilton Head Island where he and Barbara lived in their later years. Barbara died on November 6, 1995. They are both buried at Bonaventure Cemetery in Savannah. In 2005, The Cay Foundation (John Cay and his sons Christopher and Jack) created the Barbara and Jack Cay Fund at the Georgia Historical Society to continue the legacy of Jack and Barbara in Savannah and the State of Georgia.