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I REMEMBER AUNT KATE

By Lula Joughin Dovi



AUNT KATE JACKSON IN REFLECTIVE MOODS

I never knew Aunt Kate very well. She was my great aunt, never married, and she seemed quite elderly to me when, as a junior high student at Wilson, I sometimes stopped off to visit her on my walk home. I was just getting to know her better, and also beginning to tower over her diminutive frame, when my school changed to Plant and took me in other directions, and the busyness of senior high school intervened. Just after I entered college in 1940 Aunt Kate died at the age of 83.

Now I am getting to know Aunt Kate again as I sort through her steamer trunk to examine the letters and papers she kept. She must have kept nearly everything that was ever involved in her life. Some of her papers-drafts of letters and speeches, newspaper clippings and notes-reveal very clearly the keen, generous, religious and civic-minded person she was. I can't help wondering how it would have been if she had been a man.

To return to the walks to her house, set on a beautifully landscaped block of grassy and flowering serenity on Rome Avenue not far from the Bayshore, I recall with awe the well-ordered and formal interior, obviously not meant for young children. There were tall, overwhelming marble statues, furniture with mother-of-pearl inlay, carpeting, many

religious artifacts, and an overall feeling of repose and somberness emanating from the rich, dark colors that were prevalent.

Eating supper with Aunt Kate was a somewhat uncomfortable experience as I had the feeling she was closely watching my table manners. There were some things on her formal table set for two with which I was not familiar. I was fascinated by the individual salt cellars with their own miniature spoons. The Catholic blessing before the meal also impressed me since I had been raised a Protestant. Adding to the formality of the occasion was the attentive service of her maid, Christine, who lived in the garage apartment. Later I was driven home by Felix, her gardener and chauffeur. His devotion to the gardens, paths and fish pools was lushly evident.

Good Business Woman

Aunt Kate must have managed her share of the family fortunes with providence and enterprise. My father always admiringly said she was a good business woman-considered the ultimate in praise. She was a woman of means and was generous with her religious donations which included personal effort as well as money. An address which she gave to the first graduating class of the Academy of

Holy Names in 1929 revealed her support in the establishment of the institution in 1881.

Her interest in the Sisters of the Holy Names went back to 1869, as she told the story of her bout with malaria and an invitation from Father Allard, pastor of St. Mary Star of the Sea at Key West, to visit the convent and recuperate. She did spend two months with the French-speaking Mother Superior and the sisters of Mary Immaculate Convent. The Mother Superior was being honored on her birthday when the young girl arrived in time to help celebrate the occasion with a picnic.

"I'll tell the world a picnic is a fine occasion for a new pupil to be introduced," she recalled, "and to prove to you that I am an apt pupil-I'll confide in you that I quickly mastered the art of making chewing gum out of the wild sappodillas. I conceived the idea of bringing some home with me but my plot was discovered and my treasure was confiscated."

After her return home Aunt Kate pleaded with her family to return to the convent for schooling. "I continued for four years and graduated on the 15th of May 1873, having received my Diploma from the hands of the saintly Bishop Verot. I was 16 years, four months and two days-up to that date the youngest graduate."

The Young Graduate

And what was expected of a young graduate at that time? Here is a clipping apparently from a newspaper in Key West:

"Mr. Editor: The obliging readiness with which you publish all that can enhance the beautiful and noble cause of education, induces me to hope that you will insert in your interesting columns a few lines more on the subject; a tribute of admiration paid to the



Kate V. Jackson

KATE JACKSON IN 1928

young Ladies, who last week, 15th inst., kept our hearts thrilling under an irresistible charm.

"Already, friends have given a just appreciation of their undisputed merit; they have told of their grace, skill in fine arts, easy and gentle deportment, flower of womanliness, and I would wish to add something to what has been said about the bright Pupil, who received, on the evening of the entertainment at the Convent of Mary Immaculate, the medal and diploma of Graduate.

"On the 13th of May, Miss Kate Jackson, after having undergone the test of three hours' rigid examination, on all the branches studied in the complete course, followed in the Institution, was pronounced worthy of the most flattering



AUNT KATE IN LATER YEARS



THE ACADEMY OF HOLY NAMES

certificates-this judgment coming from such competent judges as Rt. Rev. Bishop Verot, Rev. Father Allard, Rev. Father LaRocque, Rev. Father Beauchamp, Mr. Bethel, Mayor of our city, and Mr. Maloney.

The interesting Candidate terminated her examination by a brilliant execution on the piano, and by the delivery of a touching essay in poetry. Of this piece, full of sentiment and noble thoughts, (which was handed with grace to the examiners) we know not what to praise the most, the talented dictation, or the admirable penmanship. The plain writing leaves nothing to envy the best printer, and the most flourished styles are imitated with an artistic skill.

"She received, after the heartfelt congratulations of the honorable Mayor and the whole assistance, who wished her a bright future, which her accomplishments, completed with her modesty, promises her."

Aunt Kate's destiny was closely interwoven with the growth of Catholicism in Tampa, as her 1929 speech further revealed.

"Naturally," she said, "when the question of establishing a Catholic school in Tampa was discussed, I was strong for the Holy Names and in July 1881, two sisters arrived in Tampa-at midnight. A young Catholic man approached them and asked if he could be of service. They said they wanted to go to Kate Jackson's house. So we were aroused-after they had walked all the way from the dock through the deep sand. There were no taxis in those days and no sidewalks.

"They came empty-handed," she continued. "We did not know when to expect them. The Pastor was absent and no preparations had been made for them. The first money raised was from a collection made among the soldiers in the garrison."

Heroic Sacrifices

By September, according to Aunt Kate's talk, "school was opened in a little building standing on the corner of Twiggs and Marion Streets and the sisters lived in a little cottage on the same block. As years rolled by and means permitted, changes for the better were made-until at last, the Academy of the Holy Names is sheltered by a building which is a credit to the City and the cause of Catholic education and this is due to the heroic sacrifices of the sisters and the patronage of both Catholics and non-Catholics-who, recognizing the salutary influence of the sisters upon their pupils in the formation of their characters have been their staunch friends through the passing years."

Aunt Kate reminded that first graduating class of the "stately Academy of the Holy Names at Miramar on the Bayshore" that her family had three generations of graduates from the school. They included herself, her niece Mazie Jackson Carty, and in 1929, her great niece Catherine Carty Cunningham.

The large civic needs of Tampa also occupied much of Aunt Kate's energy. She was the first president of Tampa Civic Association, a group which met many challenges from its first day of organization in 1911. A whole catalog of "needs of Tampa" posed -a resounding challenge in what must have been the hand-written draft of a speech calling for "co-operation of her citizens (of Tampa)-and particularly of her women." In her exhortation she claimed that, "If the women of the City would only become convinced of how much the City's progress depends upon them-of how much they can do to make the City more sanitary-and more beautiful, I feel sure the City would advance by leaps and bounds."

A primary need, according to Aunt Kate's speech draft, was "the sewerage and the people of Tampa recognized this need when they voted to bond the City. . ." But she worried that paving might be done prematurely and therefore pipes and mains should be laid down before paving. Also, her concern touched on the purchase of public property at the best price, before values would increase with anticipated growth. She stated, "I hope our City Fathers will pardon me, if I make so bold, as to suggest that they deal direct with the owners of such property and not pay in addition to the cost, the commission the Real Estate Agent considers himself entitled to-I do not wish to deprive the Real Estate agents of their just dues-but I think that they might be a little more modest in their demands where the City is concerned -witness -the prices asked for a City Hall site." How familiar these problems of growth sound today.

The Library Fight

In less than two years, according to another speech draft, the TCA "took an active part in the fight for the Public Library lately won in Tampa." Other accomplishments were listed: "We have organized a branch association in Seminole Heights, a suburb of Tampa. We submitted plans for the beautifying of the Court House Square, which have materially changed the appearance of the same. We appealed to our congressman and Tampa's Federal Building is in better shape than ever before. We have protested against loafers on the Square, and have sought strenuously to have the Spitting ordinance enforced. We have been largely instrumental in having the merchants close on Thursday afternoons during the summer months thereby, giving the clerks a needed rest. We have now under way a project for the holding of a Flower and Plant Market during February and have appealed to all club women in Tampa for aid. . . ."

I was impressed by Aunt Kate's thoroughness when among her papers I found an envelope containing pamphlets from all over the country on organizing, supervising and equipping playgrounds. She must have collected that information to fortify herself and the ladies of the Tampa Civic Association for their persistent battle with the City Fathers for playgrounds and parks.

McKay's Recollections

Writing in a column in the Tampa Sunday Tribune, 1957, D. B. McKay reminisced: "I recall distinctly my first day in office as mayor in 1910. Among the early visitors was Miss Kate.

"She stated that among Tampa's great needs were playgrounds under trained directors. I tried to argue that the City had more material needs, but she would not be denied.

"As a result Tampa's first playground was purchased and equipped. Therefore Miss Jackson is entitled to credit for the acquisition of Tampa's first public playground. She contributed a considerable sum of money to its equipment."

The battle for playgrounds was subtly but forcefully fought by the ladies, according to an old clipping in Aunt Kate's trunk. The Tampa Civic Association was formed in March 1911, her notes show. The ladies' battle strategy was to attend City Council meetings regularly. The headlines of the old clipping read: "LADIES TO ATTEND COUNCIL MEETING-Civic Association Will Have Committee Wait On City Dads Again Tonight-Becoming Regular."

The article stated: "A committee of ladies from the Tampa Civic Association will attend tonight's Council meeting to present a resolution asking that body to purchase

playground sites selected by them. A meeting of the association was held yesterday and the resolution was drawn up and adopted.

"For the last several weeks the Council has been called to order at each meeting with a large attendance of Tampa's feminine citizens present and the presence of the committee from the Civic Association or some kindred organization, to push the playground plan has become a looked for event. The ladies state that they are going to continue to be present until some definite action is taken by the Council, if they have to put off their summer vacations."

Civic Club Success

Turning to Aunt Kate's notes on Civic Association history, one may discover that the City did purchase three playground sites in 1913. Then a playground opened and was equipped by TCA by 1914, the same year that story telling was initiated on the playground sites.

Her notes reveal success with the following: "The Civic Association, having prevailed upon the City to buy several sites for Playgrounds, now desires to see those Playgrounds equipped and made ready for the use of the children. Feeling that it is best to make haste slowly, we will attempt, at the present time, the equipment of only one place, the one situated between 10th and 11th Avenues in the Denis' subdivision... Knowing that unsupervised play is harmful to the children, we will make earnest endeavors to get the City Council to appropriate sufficient money to pay someone to be in charge... We hope, in this way, to demonstrate to our City Fathers and the people of Tampa, the great value of Playgrounds, well directed. . . ." Fittingly, the site of her house is now the site of the city-owned Kate Jackson Recreation Center.

A cleaner and more beautiful Tampa was also on the list of needs that the ladies, led by Aunt Kate, as president, promoted. TCA initiated a clean up week; promoted Arbor Day and a flower show in 1914; furnished refuse containers to the City in 1913; agitated for clean up of vacant lots; furnished equipment, including May poles, to the schools; advocated City planning by bringing in a lecturer on the subject, and instituted lawn contests.

World War I Days

As if that list were not long enough, the ladies tackled other projects, some of which reflect World War I days. Members worked with the Red Cross and the Liberty Loan Drive, gave money to the Near East Relief and \$1,100 to the "poor children at Evian, France, during the war."

Other officers listed on the letterhead of TCA during its second year of existence included Mrs. William S. Oppenheimer, vice president, Miss Elizabeth Askew, secretary, and Mrs. H. R. Gaines, treasurer.

For all of the accomplishments recounted above and many not mentioned, there is ample prophecy in Aunt Kate's grammar school penmanship booklet. She wrote with varying handwriting skill and complexity of ideas on different subjects. In the exercises she developed her own ideas about such topics as Rivers; Stoves; A place in the country; Try, Try Again; Bees; Books; I Can if I will; The Golden Rule; School; True Politeness; Kindness; Cleanliness and others.

"How to be good and useful," is one subject she must have taken to heart. "I think," she wrote, "it is a great thing to be good and useful. To be good and useful we must try and do everything that we can do for our parents, friends, and playmates. . ." And in writing on

"Youth," she said it "is called the 'spring time of life.' It is so called for we always sow the seed in spring. So we ought to sow the seeds of knowledge, purity, and goodness in youth, so when we reach the summer of life we can reap the harvest of goodness and purity." I think she did so abundantly.