

Miss Mary Ethel Lane (1902-1982) / Leonora Ferguson Mintz (1909-2009)

Mary Ethel Lane never married. Which in her case did not translate into a boring, quiet life of spinsterhood sitting on the porch of her family's College Street home, holding a lap kitty and gossiping about her neighbors. No, indeed! She enriched countless lives with a lengthy career in education and she entertained and informed as a writer for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution Magazine. Unexpected opportunity and adventure made for a fascinating life.

Mary Lane was born in 1902 in Rockmart at a time the community had a population of around 600 people. Her parents were Frank and Ida Lewis Lane. Her father came to Rockmart in 1898 to work for Southern Railroad as a telegraph operator. The family would grow to six children, but there were far more Lane family members in the community, since Mary's uncle, Montgomery Preston Lane, also came to town to work for the railroad and he lived a block away with his large family. The tracks of the Southern Railroad, for which both brothers worked, ran directly behind their homes.

Mary's forty-three-year teaching career was spent mostly at Waycross High School in Waycross, Georgia teaching English. That alone would be reason enough to bestow accolades of praise and to honor her legacy today. However, she did so much more. She was a Fulbright Exchange English teacher to England for the school year 1955-1956 when she worried profusely about "not being able to speech the language correctly" or at least well enough as an American southern woman to be teaching the proper speaking British. During her year in England a tea was given at Buckingham Palace for the exchange teachers teaching across the United Kingdom. Mary, along with the others, met Queen Elizabeth II.

She also taught one year in the 1960's at Georgia Tech as a visiting English professor. Mary wrote later about the experience and said, "her students at Waycross High School came to class better prepared than the students at Georgia Tech". Perhaps there was a sigh of relief among the engineering students at Tech, when the "taskmaster Mary" returned to her students in Waycross.

In addition to teaching, Mary wrote for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution Magazine as a part time employee. So popular were her articles that the editor offered her fulltime employment which she declined because her passion was teaching. An article that she wrote of interest to locals was published in 1972 the week of Rockmart's 100th anniversary titled "Memories of Early Rockmart". Knowing the town intimately as she did and possessing her excellent storytelling and writing skills made her the best person to tell the story of the town's first 100 years to a larger audience.

A master storyteller, Mary wrote lovingly of things she knew well. Her direct, simple prose spiced with a vibrant sense of humor proved that the simplest things in life could make for a very good story. Her stories of everyday adventures and misadventures were musings that others could easily identify with. For example, these are some titles of articles that appeared in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution Magazine. "Buttermilk, Biscuits and Thickened Gravy", "I remember Washday", "How We Got Papa to the Hospital", "The Horrors of Public Speaking", "Baptizing the Old-time Way", and "Looking a Gift Horse in the Mouth".

After retirement from teaching in 1968 Mary returned home to Rockmart to care for her beloved "Papa", who lived to be 98 years old. After his death in 1977, she continued to live in the family home until her death in 1982. A few months after her death, a collection of her Atlanta Journal-Constitution Magazine articles was published in book form. The title, "Soaring on a Grasshopper's Back" came from her account of flying in a glider. In a broader sense, Mary Lane's eighty years of life could just as easily be summed up as "soaring on a grasshopper's back". For soar she did, packing adventure, achievement and fun into her eighty years of life.

Buried alongside Mary are other members of her family.

Leonora Ferguson Mintz is another English teacher and published author buried in Rose Hill Cemetery. She grew up on a local farm, became a teacher and spent her teaching career in the local area. In addition to teaching, her poetry, devotionals and historical prose were published in various publications during her lifetime. Known in an unofficial capacity as the "local historian", Mrs. Mintz could be counted on to provide details of late townspeople and events long forgotten by others. As a thirty-year teacher, a seventy-five-year member of the First Baptist Church, a member of the Rockmart Women's Club and as a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution, Mrs. Mintz enriched the lives of those around her.

Incidentally, Mrs. Mintz is one of several centenarians buried in Rose Hill Cemetery.

We celebrate the lives of Mary Ethel Lane and Leonora Ferguson Mintz, both English teachers and published authors, and remember their contributions as Rockmart celebrates 150 years of history.

Sources: "Soaring on a Grasshopper's Back", Mary Lane, 1983

Findagrave.com

Leonora Ferguson Mintz, obituary, Freeman Harris Funeral Home website

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