

Why Remember?

By Helen Vogt Greene

For some, it is hard to believe that there are those who simply do not care about (there are stronger words) the people, places or the events of the past. The attitude is "Let's get rid of the past."

There are very few, if any, that want to live in the past, but they do care and honor those who have brought us to this point. There are those that believe in 'passing the torch of the past knowledge'

Those individuals, who explore the past, have what is called a roll call of names, places, and dates. They, each person has their own, are always adding to the roll call. Today, we are ever so thankful for the computer that makes our journey to the past much more factual and accurate.

The computer allows us to fast forward into the past and find books, information and 'foot prints of the past' ready to be enjoyed over and over again.

Lake Worth Beach is still basking in the memories of being the "Wonder City." Its location, with the breezes of the Atlantic Ocean, truly make our city a paradise.

On December 12, 1912 there were 115 men, 97 women, 55 boys (under 21), 41 girls (under 21) with a total of 308 founders with stories to tell in our community.

In 1912, the "Lake Worth Herald" was published. Did you know, if

you have a computer, that you can read the very first editions of this 110 year old treasure of early Lake Worth history free of charge? A special thank you to the Boynton Beach Library, the Lake Worth Library and *The Lake Worth Herald* for making this possible. Just log on to either Library and look for archives, or call the library and they will be happy to help.

The love of any history and its people is passed, like a torch, from one generation to the next. During the early 1960's, the four women who took me under the protective wings of early history were Miss ('Katie My Lady') Katherine Slack, Mrs. Edward J. (Jean) Addison, Dr. Audrey (McGill) Ploudre and Mrs. Bert (Sylvia) Merrow.

Sylvia Merrow married Bert Merrow, Pioneer. He owned one of the first fish markets and in his own words, "I spent more time in principal offices (now the Museum office) explaining that the Blue fish were running and I just had to go fishing."

It was my honor to be the singing MC and to play 'straight man' to the amazing stories of these amazing women. Sylvia and I knew that we were on the learning curve of the early programs for whoever asked us. For well over 200 programs, we quickly learned to do 'our program' before the business meeting, called counting cookies.

Because of the personalities of the special ladies, their stories were always unique. Katie Slack, who was in business on Lake Avenue for over 39 years, always got teased about never being married. When asked who she would like? Who? Gosh, Helen, any man will do.

Katie's fondest memory was the arrival of the Slack family from Toronto, Canda. They had come by steamer and train. The porter on the train tried very hard to have the Slack family get off in West Palm Beach. In fact, he tried three times. Mr. Slack, finally said very loudly, "Sir, I don't know what the hell is wrong with Lake Worth, but we are going to find out."

After the laughter, Katie would tell... "It was night and I thought it had snowed because of the white sand. A man holding a tomato can with a candle met us at the train. We went to the Poinciana Hotel. Mrs. Hershey, wife of the Fire Chief, met us at the desk.

My Mother said, "We would like two rooms." Mrs. Hershey said "Two rooms? You may have one and cots for the children. After all, it is the season, you know."

Dr. Audrey (McGill) Ploudre was always the lady. She told the story so well of how the McGill family, the Childs' family and the Love family first came to Lake Worth from Hibbing, Minnesota. "The coldest spot in the nation."



Katherine Slack in her Dry Goods Store in 1983. The store was located at 512 Lake Avenue.

All three worked for the same company and were given promotional information on Lake Worth from the train porter. According to Audrey, it was an especially cold winter. Childs' had their first time off. It was decided that Childs would come down and check 'out this Lake Worth.' He would send a coded message.

The message came and a train car was rented to move the three families. The men built the first of the three houses on South "M" Street. "There was one big room, divided by two 9 by 12 rugs. The men built an out-house and a shed, which was used as a communal kitchen. We learned very early how to help each other."

Audrey and her sister, Fern McGill (Stephenson) could always entertain a group of people with the singing. They always had matching costumes made by their mother.

Jean Childs was the daughter of G. Sherman and Ethel Childs. She was the first girl born in Lake Worth.

Her father, who was a contractor and architect, and his wife, also had the first set of twins, Irvin Rae and Irvane Mae. As the first City engineer, he has left a legacy of building still being enjoyed.

Jean made her stories even more interesting by opening with "Technically, I am not a member of the Pioneers because I was not here physically on May 18. My birthday was June 17, 1914, so I was only 8/9th here. (During the 50th Anniversary of the Pioneers of the City Of Lake Worth, the organization corrected this 'slight' and a Jean was found to be a full, card-carrying member legally.)

Jean Childs Addison always recalled the visit of one of the most famous architects that would visit their home for dinner

on Sunday evening. At the time her father was a draftsman for Addison Mizner. He shared his vast talents with the Palm Beaches.

Whoever was the last to speak would remind those attending that life at times was extremely difficult. In the late 1912, there was a tremendous rainstorm, the drainage canals were in the future. For days, boats were the only way people had to move from one place to another. Following the rains, the mosquitoes were huge. Smudge fires were used to keep them away, as much as possible. Because much of our heavy moving was done by mules, we also had lots of horseflies.

The people of Lake Worth, in spite of the problems, built lasting relationships. The ocean breezes and screens made living here possible, especially during the winter months. Today, Lake Worth Beach, a paradise, is worth remembering.



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