

Biog-20

6/2/63

'Aunt Grace' Williamson, 90 Today, Recalls Santa Cruz 'Good Old Days'

By MARGARET KOCH

She likes to say she was born "in the middle of Vine street." (That was 90 years ago today—and before Vine street went through to Church street was where the first DeLamater home stood.)

She made the Santa Cruz casino dance floor "respectable." (That was back in the early 1900's when mothers were stricter with their daughters.)

And she helped bring "culture" to Santa Cruz.

Grace DeLamater Williamson ("Aunt Grace" to many Santa Cruzans) is celebrating her 90th birthday today at 538 Lockhart Gulch road, where she makes her home with her daughter, Mrs. Clifford Kilfoyl.

Grace doesn't look—or act—90. Memories of "old Santa Cruz" shine in her bright eyes like they had happened only yesterday. And for a number of years she was Santa Cruz' one-woman actress-director-producer and choreographer of plays and benefits.

Sometimes a thwarted talent can change the entire course of a person's life. Grace didn't say so—but when father said "no" in those days, it stuck. And Father DeLamater said "no" to an operatic career for his talented daughter. She had attended San Jose Normal before graduating in 1892 from California School of Elocution and Oratory in San Francisco. She also had gained recognition there—and locally—as a contralto.

Her father was G.B.V. DeLamater, popularly known as "Alphabet DeLamater." He served as Santa Cruz mayor from 1872-73, and operated a general mercantile business in what was said to be the first brick building on Pacific avenue (where Santa Cruz Hardware is today). But he said "no."

So Grace came back to the big 14-room DeLamater home at the corner of Ocean View

teach for three years at Santa Cruz high school.

When a benefit to raise money for school flags had been proposed in 1890, she had staged "Cinderella" in four acts at Santa Cruz Opera House (formerly Knight's Opera House).

She helped organize and stage the first of the famed Venetian Water carnivals on San Lorenzo river. And in later years she was to present "Fanchon the Cricket" as a benefit at the Opera House to help raise money to send Zasu Pitts to Hollywood.

One memory — not so pleasant—concerns the 1906 'quake when she and her family were in San Francisco to hear Enrico Caruso sing.

"We never did hear him. Instead we spent two nights in Lafayette Square where we slept on the grass and kept damp handkerchiefs over our faces because of the smoke and cinders," she recalled.

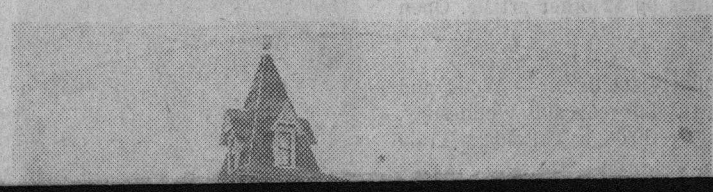
She, her husband and two very small daughters, got back home by walking to the Ferry building, crossing the bay, getting a train as far as Pajaro, walking across a 'quake-damaged trestle, then getting on another train for the last lap into Santa Cruz.

Not all her activities were "just for fun" either. During World War I William Jeter, who later became California's lieutenant governor, asked her to work with him on the war bonds drive. She covered blocks of Santa Cruz on foot during the campaign.



GARDENING has replaced teaching in Grace DeLamater's life today. She enjoys raising flowers at 538 Lockhart Gulch road where she makes her home with her son-in-law and daughter, Mr. and Mrs. Clifford Kilfoyl.

—Photos by Roy Austin



Her father was G.B.V. DeLamater, popularly known as "Alphabet DeLamater." He served as Santa Cruz mayor from 1872-73, and operated a general mercantile business in what was said to be the first brick building on Pacific avenue (where Santa Cruz Hardware is today). But he said "no."

So Grace came back to the big 14-room DeLamater home at the corner of Ocean View avenue and Windsor street. Built in 1880 for her father, it still stands—minus its original "tower."

The home was one of the social gathering places of that day with many Congregational church activities taking place there. Grace, who sang in both the Congregational and Calvary Episcopal church choirs, conducted private dancing lessons in her home for Santa Cruz' small fry. She also was in great demand as a dramatics coach and actress, and took active part in the social and club life of those days.

She helped organize the Saturday Afternoon club in 1907, which became Santa Cruz Woman's club; she was a member of Native Daughters of the Golden West, Santa Cruz chapter of the Order of Eastern Star and Santa Cruz Art league (in which she holds a life membership).

She also was an active member of the Friday Shakespeare club, which refuted the old idea that women weren't smart enough to study the classics, and she took part in many of its dramatic productions.

"Here I am as Shylock," she said, showing an old photo.

Among fellow-member-actresses were Mrs. Fred D. McPherson Sr. and Mrs. Nellie Newlove.

Grace became Mrs. William Williamson when she became the bride of the county court reporter. She and her husband made their home in the DeLamater family residence where she continued teaching even after the birth of their daughters, Mrs. Kilfoyl and Mrs. Deloss Wilder. Mrs. Williamson also found time to

building, crossing the bay, getting a train as far as Pajaro, walking across a 'quake-damaged trestle, then getting on another train for the last lap into Santa Cruz.

Not all her activities were "just for fun" either. During World War I William Jeter, who later became California's lieutenant governor, asked her to work with him on the war bonds drive. She covered blocks of Santa Cruz on foot during the campaign.

But some of her most delightful memories concern the Santa Cruz casino ballroom, where she was employed by the Seaside company as the "chaperone-hostess."

Dancing was undergoing an evolution of its own—to the dismay of many local mothers.

"Grace—look over there!" a mother might hiss.

Grace would look, and if a dancer dipped too low — or clutched too firmly—she would speak. And—at the casino—her word was law.

Today, on her 90th birthday, Grace's word is still law.

"I'm going to just sit quietly and enjoy my party," she said with a smile.

life today. She enjoys raising flowers at 538 Lockhart Gulch road where she makes her home with her son-in-law and daughter, Mr. and Mrs. Clifford Kilfoyl.

—Photos by Roy Austin



BUILT IN 1880, the historic DeLamater home still stands at the corner of Ocean View avenue and Windsor street. It was the scene of many early-day social events as well as Grace DeLamater Williamson's dancing classes for Santa Cruz young people.



SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS were vivid productions in the early days of the Friday Shakespeare club. Above, Mrs. Williamson plays "Shylock," (standing right). Next to her is Mrs. Fred D. McPherson Sr. and seated at their feet is Mrs. Nellie Newlove. Others include Lula Bias, May Williamson, Elsie Cardiff, Susan Forsyth and May Dewey.

final days
spring clearance