

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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ELEANOR WEEKS WILDER

For you made me glad by your deeds..."

Psalm 92

It's been just a little over a month since former Albion Town Historian Eleanor Weeks Wilder (1978 photo) passed away at the age of eighty-nine. I can think of no one who ever endorsed local history with more enthusiasm than Eleanor. She not only encouraged people to take pride in our heritage, but she encouraged others to delve into and research our past. From the time I was a small child I can remember her being the champion of historical causes and events. Through her innumerable number of volunteer hours at Swan Library during the 1970's and early 1980's, she produced innumerable history folders including information on local people of historical note.

At the First United Methodist Church in Albion she organized the church archives and wrote up historical information on Methodism and its people. She was an inspiration to Elizabeth Vick who now carries on as church historian. Elizabeth states: "Eleanor was a true historian because she had it all in her head."

Eleanor took great pride in Mt. Albion Cemetery and did extensive research into the origins of Mt. Albion. This information has now become the reliable source material we use. I recall working with her on "Save the Tower" in the mid '70's and that she wrote up information about the cemetery for a promotional pamphlet. It was her research that helped get Mt. Albion placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

I also recall her work with the Cobblestone Society in its founding years and her desire to interpret our unique historical beginnings with accuracy. She also enjoyed working with students through the Albion Middle School History Fairs.

The Rev. Gregory VanDeussen of the Albion First Methodist Church noted in Eleanor's eulogy the following: "She loved poetry, and wrote poems of her own...She had a "mastery of words"; she delighted in words and used all of them she could. She enjoyed sending people scurrying to the dictionary and even used some of her longer and more unusual words in the nursing home. She was an artist who developed her painting skills working alongside her father. She loved music, especially church music, and enjoyed playing her own baby grand piano. She was a "doll doctor"; she would outfit her dolls in authentic period costume from genuine material she had found. She had so many gifts and interests that she could do just about anything and do it well.

"Eleanor loved nature and country living - it was part of her experience in Kent but also an indelible part of her entire life. She loved wildflowers and



gardens and animals and everything that was part of the rich tapestry of creation around her. Her children remember May baskets and the mouse she found one day in her oven. She cared enough about that mouse that she abandoned her oven until he could be released and found other ways to prepare the meal.

"Eleanor was always fascinated by people. She wrote human interest articles for the Democrat and Chronicle and the Medina Journal, excellent articles that portrayed people and situations that were part of this area and her experience. She just loved people."

Indeed, older residents will remember her writing skills through her column in the local paper entitled Talking Things Over. She had a reservoir of historical facts and a treasury of stories that embellished the lives of all who knew her. I will always remember how supportive she was when I was appointed County Historian in 1979.

I'd like to leave you with a poem written by Eleanor, one which she lived up to.

"You cannot buy Happiness
It springs from service to others
And it brings sacrifice unmeasured
And a million things uncounted
That you can do. For you never find happiness
Unless you share it, too.