



Bethinking of Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin
6-27-85 County
Historian



REMEMBERING--Mayor Donna Rodden is pictured here (at right) during the re-dedication of the Tower in Mt. Albion Cemetery on July 4, 1976. Others in the photo (L-R) include this

columnist, the late Bernard Lynch, Stephen Hawley, Assemblyman and Harold Breuilly, President of the Historical Monument Corp. and the late Mayor Rodden.

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THE EULOGY FOR DONNA

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Immediate family, other relatives and devoted friends. This is indeed an awesome task to try to eulogize the life of such a great and magnificent woman as Donna. However, I have accepted the responsibility to give this tribute and hope that in some small way I can make this an adequate testimony. To eulogize a person is to point out and extol all their finest qualities and admirable traits. We only do this when a person is of exceptional merit. And we do it because that person has set extraordinary examples for others to follow. So it is today. Since I was asked on Tuesday to make these remarks, I have thought back over the number of years I have known Donna, as I know many of you have. As I thought back, I saw her in many different roles. In fact, how could anyone not see her in many roles? Her accomplishments even in one short life span covered a half page in Tuesday's Journal-Register. Yes, I saw her as Albion's Mayor giving her best to the village she was so proud of. As a one time colleague I saw her as school librarian dispensing her duties with care and utmost respect for the students in her charge. I saw her as writer, producer and director of innumerable and successful dramatic productions. I saw her toting Experimenters in International Living about our county, pointing out various sites. And of course, we know she believed this was one of the best means for accomplishing world peace. I saw her just plumb exhausted after working a long hard day in the Cobblestone Museum during the Farmers Parade in 1980. I saw her as a champion of the arts and one-time president of the Orleans County Council on the Arts. It was through her initiative that an arts store was opened in downtown Albion which served a dual purpose of also giving senior citizens a place to sell home crafted items. In 1978 I saw her as the leading force in celebrating Albion's Sesquicentennial. The community clock of which is a reminder in downtown Albion. I also saw her on three occasions when her pride of accomplishment was most joyous. The first was on the occasion of the re-dedication of Soldiers and Sailors Monument at Mt. Albion Cemetery in 1976. The "Save the Tower" committee was formulated because of her initiative. The second occasion was on the dedication of Mt. Albion Cemetery into the National Register of Historic Places in 1978. Again, this was her incentive and doing. The third and probably most important was on Flag Day 1981 when thirty-four buildings making up the Historic Court House District including this church, were dedicated into the National Register. She was very pleased about this. I saw her in 1983 at the dedication of the Lily Pond in Mt. Albion. How relieved she was to think that that restoration project was finally finished! In fact, it was around that time she mentioned to me that she felt her best accomplishments were promoting and supporting these last four historical projects.

Yes, I have seen Donna in many places working for various causes, doing her thing. I have seen her deliver and give produce from her garden to friends and the elderly. I have seen her empathize with the unpopular, poor, women's causes and senior citizens. I have seen her eyes literally dancing with pride over her grandchildren. I have seen her picture in the papers probably more than anyone else: BPW, Rebeccas, Eastern Star, Mental Health, ribbon-cutting ceremonies, United Fund, plus many special awards

and honors bestowed on her. I have seen this community give her a testimonial dinner in support of her unflagging efforts in our behalf. Oh, so many things, too numerous to mention. It goes without saying, we will all miss her.

How does one sum up a life so complex, voluminous and multifaceted? She was indeed an individualist, a brilliant thinker, creative writer, renowned speaker, diligent public servant and humanitarian, the last term being the greatest compliment that can be bestowed upon anyone. Think about this. Around 95% of the people are average. It's only a few who become totally outstanding, who do what they say they can. Yes, Donna has left her mark on our community and one which will always be with us. Everything she did was aimed at improving the quality of life here. But yet, how does one put into words all her accomplishments, the very essence of her being? Well, let me try these four words as a description.

"TO ALBION WITH LOVE"

As I saw Donna through my recollections, this to me is what the main thrust of her life was all about. "TO ALBION WITH LOVE" These are the title words for a community production she helped write, produce and direct just a few years ago at the Albion Middle School. Speaking of love, here is what the great 19th Century agnostic and orator Robert Ingersoll had to say on the subject:

"Love is the only bow on life's dark cloud. It is the Morning and the Evening Star. It shines upon the cradle of the babe, and sheds its radiance upon the quiet tomb. It is the mother of art, inspirer of poet, patriot and philosopher. It is the air and light of every heart, builder of every home, kindler of every fire on every hearth. It was the first to dream of immortality. It fills the world with melody, for Music is the voice of Love. Love is the magician, the enchanter, that changes worthless things to joy, and makes right royal kings and queens of common clay. It is the perfume of the wondrous flower - the heart - and without that sacred passion, that divine swoon, we are less than beasts; but with it, earth is heaven and we are gods."

How appropriately this description of Love fits Donna. As we know, she was a highly educated and complex person. Yet she saw herself as a simple country woman. And when all is said and done, in spite of her many facets and involvements with various causes, her main motivating force, the reason for all her concerns, aspirations and accomplishments was really for one simple cause. Without a doubt her's was a life devoted "TO ALBION WITH LOVE."

And now, let me leave with you this brief quotation from Richard Wagner's opera Parsifal:

"The home of desire I leave behind
Illusions forever avoid.
The open door of return and being
I close forever.
Yearning for regions of peace,
The holy land of choice,
Released from the path of return
So wanders the Wise one forth.

(Delivered at the First Baptist Church of Albion on June 27, 1985.)