

Historical Perspectives

The Duplin Story and Other Legacies, Part II

By Dr. Lynn Veach Sadler

Besides the play and a thick scrapbook, this treasure trove of Margaret Fussell contained assorted separate items. One, the play's "theme song," is the professionally published "Carolina Jubilee," words by Robert Grady and music by Tommie Haas and Rommie O'Daniel (Flatiron Building, Fort Worth, Texas: Lyric & Melody Publishers, 1949). The featured singer was Alice Gaylor of Kenansville. It was for sale (\$.50) at the Amphitheatre; Kenansville Drug Store; C. E. Quinn Store; and drug stores in Warsaw, Rose Hill, Wallace, and Mount Olive, as well as by mail from *The Duplin Times*. The hand-lettered/-noted "North Carolina Song for School Children," words and music by Marian W. Erdman, copyrighted in 1960, was probably not connected with *The Duplin Story*.

Copies of three individual scenes from Act I—vii, viii, and ix (annotated in pencil)—are in the scrapbook itself, and a duplicate of ix is also among the box's contents. Scene viii, in which Margaret Fussell played Mrs. Owen Kenan, has (presumably) her extensive notations and questions in pencil, sketches of the heads of "James" [Capt. James Kenan] and Tom [not among the characters in the scene but likely Tom Kenan], the note "Harmonica for Wade," and a typed "Property List" for it (e.g., "Jug of Buttermilk" and "Pieces of Chicken"). Taped to that last page are two tin pin-on circular badges, red lettering on white, slightly under 1.5 inches in diameter, with "*The Duplin Story*," "1749-1949," and "Official." Also pasted to it is a small piece of yellow ribbon with what appears to be a name handwritten in red ink; a safety pin remains attached to one end. Margaret included the regular program/playbill distributed to playgoers and the souvenir program

booklet, with “Autographed copy” in her handwriting at the top of the front cover. In addition to the one cut up for the scrapbook and the “autographed” copy are another intact copy and the 1950 program book. The 1949 program cover, drawn by Corwin Rife, has been pasted onto the front of the scrapbook. Its colors are wine, with grey shades for the Revolutionary soldiers and what was possibly white or off-white lettering (now time-changed). The same drawing appears on the 1950 program cover, but the wine and grey have been exchanged for brown and blue. Sam Byrd wrote her a note on the page with his picture. Largely illegible, it contains a reference to “the steaks at the Cottage Grill.” Betty and Corwin Rife have signed on the page with his picture. A few others have added comments by their names on the list of “Characters In The Play.”

Mrs. Fussell cut out and pasted in the scrapbook everything from the original program book except what I called (in a later issue of *Footnotes*) “Greetings Upon the Occasion and Advertisements in the Souvenir Program.” I listed them, along with selected highlights, for they provide wonderful history in their own right (e.g., my “discovering” that Warsaw’s Quinn-McGowen sold furniture *and* was a funeral home!). When she turned in the scrapbook to materials associated with the 1950 performance, Mrs. Fussell did cut out and paste in ads that appear to be from local newspapers (not the souvenir program). One of them is for the Cottage Grill in Magnolia (“L. H. Fussell, proprietor[;] Mrs. Eva Powell and Mrs. Pearl Croom, waitresses”), mentioned by Sam Byrd.

The scrapbook collects what must be every local newspaper account of the “Miracle In A Corn Field” celebration of 1949 and 1950 and the accompanying history articles. In the back, as if Mrs. Fussell had not found time to harvest them, are eight folded newspapers. She also provided copies of two issues of *The State* (26 August and 2 September, 1950) that deal with the Bicentennial, the latter featuring on its cover a scene from the play.

When the Duplin Outdoor Drama Society, Inc., sponsored *The Liberty Cart: A Duplin Story*, by Randolph Umberger and Composer-Arranger Benjamin Keaton, July 29-August 15, 1976, at the William R. Kenan, Jr., Memorial Amphitheatre in Kenansville, it was dedicated to “the many people who made the first *Duplin Story* possible, especially Sam Byrd.” Mrs. Fussell included its “Official Souvenir Program” and the program/playbill distributed to ticket-holders. Perhaps we should refer to her wonderful collection as “The Liberty Box.”

As I have indicated, preservation by play participant Margaret Gurley Fussell (and by Maude Pickett Smith) enabled me to compile, edit, and publish the Program Book, Fussell memoirs/mementos, and the play in *Footnotes* (Issues 109-115, January 2010-July 2011) and as a book, *The Duplin Story: An Historical Play With Music By Sam Byrd* (Sanford: Press of The Duplin County Historical Society, 2011). The book contains 92+ pp. of text. Contents in addition to the edited play are (from the 1949 Souvenir Program) “Acknowledgments” (I); a gathering of “Greetings Upon the Occasion and Advertisements in the Souvenir Program” (II); listings of the officers of the Duplin County Historical Association, 1949-1950 (III); others associated with the 1949 production (IV); lists of the characters and actors (V); and a “Program Note” (VI). The pictures are principally from souvenir postcards sold for the 1950 production.

I wrote a “Historical Perspectives” column on Annie Maude Pickett (Smith), born 30 March 1928, on a farm outside Magnolia. She worked (1950-1951) for *The Duplin Times* soliciting and setting ads, proofreading, folding papers, writing stories about Duplin County, traveling to renew subscriptions, and composing the monthly “Rambling in Duplin” about those travels. When Editor Grady had her interview and write about Hester Pearsall, the oldest-known living ex-slave in Duplin, he was unaware that “Aunt Hester” midwived when Maude was born and that the families were close. He had Hester recognized during the second/final

production (1950) of *The Duplin Story*. She did not want to stand up because she thought people would laugh at her for being so old. Maude was 23 when she interviewed Hester, 107. Hester died of pneumonia 23 September 1953. In 2012, came *Hester: Historical Fiction about the Life of a Slave*. I was privileged to edit the book and find the publisher.

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