

XIV #3



The Spanish River Papers

SPRING 1986



OLD CITY HALL, HOME OF BOCA RATON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Jeanne Nixon Baur, Artist

A report to the membership of

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This Spanish River Paper is the product of a senior seminar in women's history directed by Professor Joyce Peterson at Florida International University in Miami. The author, Ella Elizabeth Holst, was assigned to write an original research paper. She asked her aunt, Drollene Brown, if she had any suggestions. Ms. Brown, author of several Spanish River Papers articles, suggested a "biographical look at" Lillian Race Williams. Ms. Holst accepted this suggestion and won approval from her seminar director to treat the subject as a biography rather than as a thesis. As Ms. Holst writes:

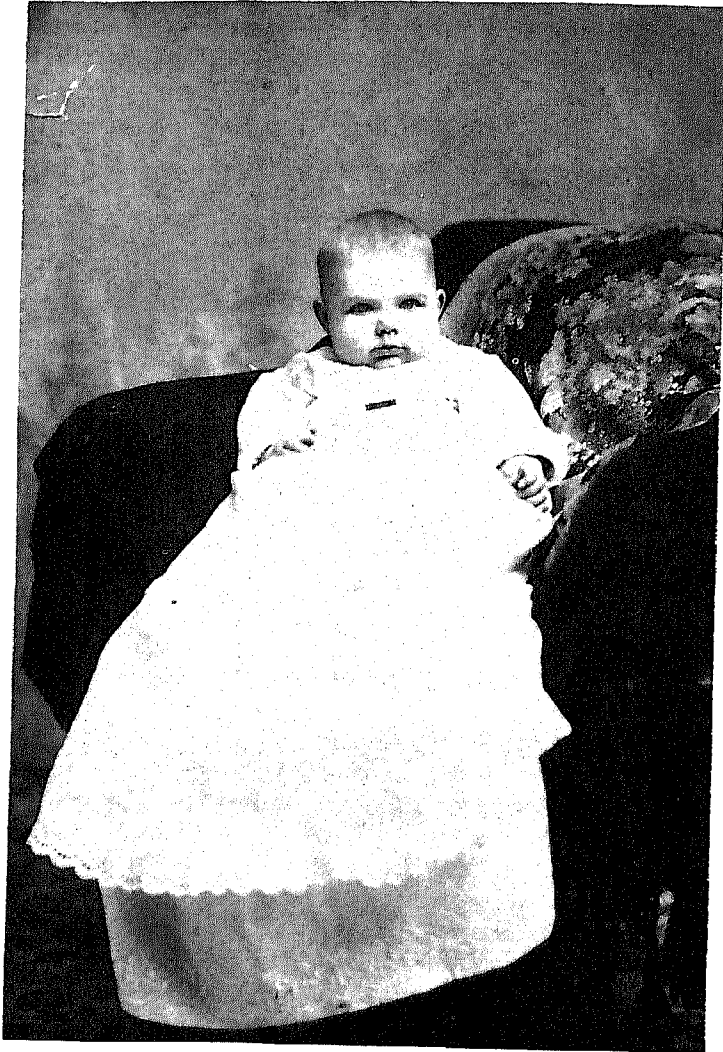
Because the history of women is a social and cultural history, rather than a history of the state, important details are often unrecorded, or are recorded from the point of view of their importance/relevance to the state or male culture; hence women's experience and women's history is often lost. Discovering our past is often like working a jigsaw puzzle--putting together the fragments of experiences that individual women have left to us in the form of diaries, letters, and stories handed down through the generations. For this reason, both my professor and I agreed that an original biographical study had a special relevance to women's history.

For her research, Ms. Holst used the archives of the Boca Raton Historical Society and those of Troy Conference Academy (now Green Mountain College). Her paper presents a very special look at a very special woman. Boca Raton's history is much enriched by Lillian Race William's life.

Donald W. Curl,
Editor

THE LIFE OF A BOCA RATON WOMAN

ELLA ELIZABETH HOLST



Lillian Race at six months.

Boca Raton residents of the early nineteen hundreds were, of necessity, a hardy and adventurous bunch. They faced the hardships of the tropical climate with steadfast resolve, intent on starting their new homes in the growing farming community of Boca, which held out so much promise to them. Some saw in Florida a land of financial opportunity, and sought their riches in the expanding real estate and agricultural markets. Others saw Florida as a paradise, her palms gently swaying in the breezes and her fiery sunsets melting into the cool blue ocean. Still others came to the tropics to improve their health. Whatever their reasons for coming, each soon had their spirit of adventure tested by the environmental and cultural challenges facing them. The tropical heat posed its own problems, especially considering the lengthy and layered dress of the day. Bugs, most notably mosquitoes, were a constant menace, bringing with them diseases such as malaria. Hurricanes, particularly in the 1920s, were nature's biggest threat. The early community of Boca Raton lacked the social and cultural activities which many people had become accustomed to before moving to South Florida. Yet these obstacles did not deter them; instead, they drew the townspeople together. The early community of Boca Raton became very close knit, and everyone knew most everyone else.

As the town grew, many of the original citizens stayed. They formed the backbone of the community, which always retained its small town warmth and flavor. It has been only recently that many of these founding members of the town have passed on. On 14 February 1979 Boca Raton lost one of its most colorful original citizens. She was Lillian Ruby Race Williams--one of the first women to face the challenges of living in Boca Raton on her own. Lillian's strength, her determined and independent will, and her vibrantly colorful character, were preserved in the boxes of documents, diaries, scrapbooks, and poetry which she left behind after her death. Together, they tell the story of a woman devotedly attached to her family and her religion, unwilling to compromise her own independence or pride for the sake of marriage, yet willing to make tremendous personal sacrifices in order to maintain her self-sufficiency. Lillian gave much of herself to the community, but in many ways she remained a loner. She had a strong support network of friends, and throughout her life their love and generosity sustained her through several

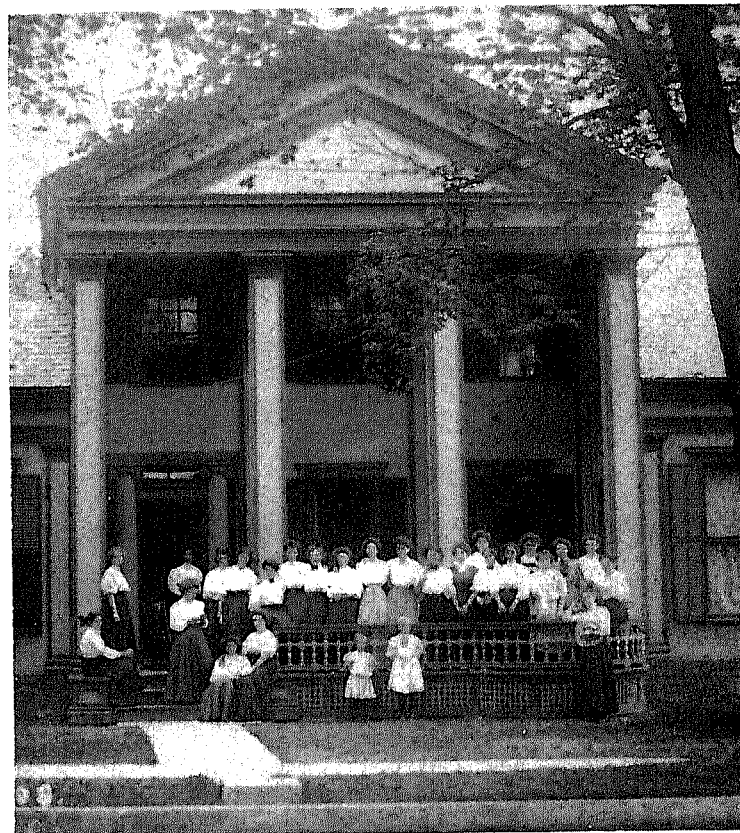
difficult times. Yet, Lillian faced most of the challenges in her life on her own. She overcame her obstacles through her strength, determination, and faith. This article is an attempt to preserve, in the form of a biography, the memory of Lillian Williams--a colorful, stubborn, and sometimes eccentric woman who was one of Boca Raton's most memorable citizens.

LILLIAN RUBY RACE WILLIAMS

On 3 December 1893, Lillian Ruby Race was born into a family of the highest social standing in Middle Granville, New York. Her mother, Nellie Parker Race, was the great granddaughter of Nathaniel Parker, a revolutionary war hero from the Vermont "Green Mountain Boy's" regiment, who fought along with Ethan Allen at the battle of Fort Ticonderoga. Her father, George W. Race, Jr., was the son of the New York pioneer, George W. Race, after whom the town of Raceville, New York is named. Among her more distant maternal ancestors, Lillian could count the Reverend Jon Wing of England, the Quaker Samuel Shattuck (persecuted and almost martyred for his religious beliefs by the Puritans in colonial America), John Rogers (the English Martyr who was burned at the stake in 1554), and Benjamin Franklin (Lillian's great great grand uncle). Lillian was an only child, and she and her parents were a very close knit and (in the tradition of their ancestors), religious family. Her mother taught Sunday school at the local Presbyterian church, and was a gifted artist who loved to paint with oils. Her father managed their farm and other land holdings.

Lillian was a big, strong girl with dark hair and dark blue-green eyes. She was strong willed and stubborn, and a bit of a loner. In her diaries, she never speaks of any close childhood friend, and in all of the pictures of the family gatherings, it appears as if Lillian is the only child present. This might explain Lillian's undying attachment to her parents, and while they were alive she was rarely separated from them. Lillian and both of her parents were musically inclined, and the family was well known throughout their community for the vocal talents which they displayed each week in church. As a child of such a prestigious and well off family, Lillian did not want for much. When in 1909 she desired to pursue her musical talents, she was sent to the Troy Conference Academy (T.C.A.) in Poultney, Vermont. There she enrolled in the academic program, but she spent the majority of her time studying voice, piano, and other musical activities. In June of 1912, Lillian graduated, and

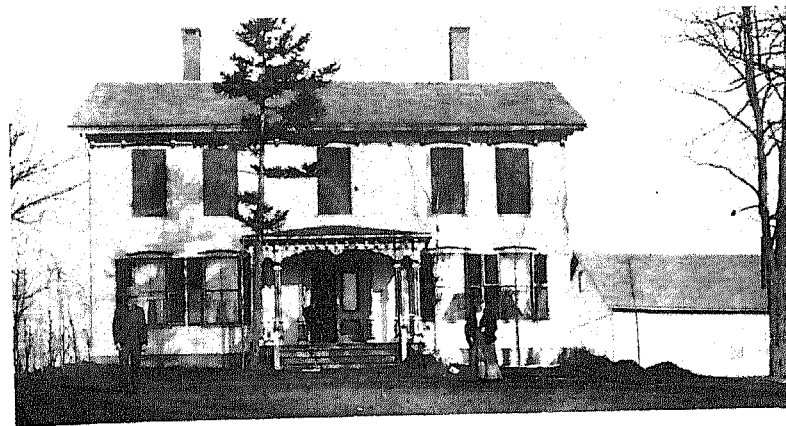
during commencement week she displayed her talents. She sang two selections during the morning services at the local Methodist church, one of which was a solo. In addition, she had a leading role as Yum-Yum, in the post commencement production of The Mikado. The play was produced by the vocal department, and performed at the Poultney Opera House. After graduating, Lillian enrolled as a post graduate voice student in 1912-13. Evidently she was a highly talented soprano. She wrote in her diary that she had wanted to become a concert singer and apprentice with Nellie Hyde Farmer, then head of the vocal department at T.C.A. Mrs. Farmer was a well known concert singer who had travelled extensively around the world and studied voice with several renowned artists. Lillian's parents were quite protective and would have none of the same for her. Although she was never able to share her beautiful soprano voice with the rest of the world, Lillian continued to play piano and sing with church choirs for the greater part of her life.



A "Hall," Troy Conference Academy in Poultney, Vermont.



Nellie Hyde Farmer, Lillian Race's mentor at Troy Conference Academy in Poultney, Vermont.



The Race homestead in Middle Granville, New York.

LILLIAN'S MARRIAGE

Shortly after leaving the Troy Conference Academy, Lillian became the bride of her childhood friend Arthur Williams, son of William T. Williams. Friends describe Arthur as someone of a much lower social rank than Lillian. If Arthur was not Lillian's social equal, she either didn't know it or was too much in love to care. Arthur and Lillian were married on 9 September 1914 at the Presbyterian church of Middle Granville. The evening wedding was quite formal. It is described in the T.C.A Chronicle's alumni news section as follows:

The bride's gown was a beautiful ivory satin, trimmed with cream lace and pearls. Her tulle veil was caught up with lillies of the valley and she carried a bouquet of pink roses. . . . A reception at the home of the bride's parents followed the ceremony, and nearly a hundred relatives and intimate friends of the bride attended. . . . The couple left in the evening for the Bermudas, and will visit New York and Boston, and upon their return will reside in Granville. A typed list of the wedding gifts shows that the couple received an extensive amount of silver, linens, cut glass and crystal, money and gold from more than 200 people.

Their plans to reside in Granville were thrown a curve w' shortly after her marriage to Arthur, Lillian's parents bc some land in Boca Raton and moved to the Lake Worth area Florida. Lillian could not bear to live so far from them and

she and Arthur moved with them. For the next three years, Arthur and Lillian lived with her family in Lake Worth during the winter and returned to New York in the summer. In September 1917 Arthur left for Camp Devans in Massachusetts, and in July of 1918 he went overseas. Arthur became a Sargeant Major in the Army, and during his tour of France he kept in touch with Lillian and both their parents. But it was soon clear that Arthur and Lillian were drifting apart. After the war they spent some time together in Florida, but ultimately each went their own way. The cause of their breakup is not clear. In her writings Lillian hints that they were both too young and foolish, and during their separation both had become interested in other people:

. . . A pink cheeked boy and I proud, too proud a wife
to you when trouble came, we could not see it through
together; but sought other comforters who at the time,
seemed almost perfect--until too late, alas! they proved
untrue. . . .

In another diary, Lillian mentions that she had become very used to being babied by her parents. Perhaps the responsibilities and realities of married life were a shock for her. She may have expected to be pampered in marriage as she was in childhood. Based on their actions, neither Lillian nor Arthur were prepared to make the commitments and sacrifices that marriage required. Perhaps, like other young couples caught between the vision of the Victorian era and the Modern era, they were unable to see their way past their own romantic expectations to find their own definition of a successful marriage. During this time the divorce rate in the country had risen 2,000 percent, and reflected the mixed expectations that people had about marriage.

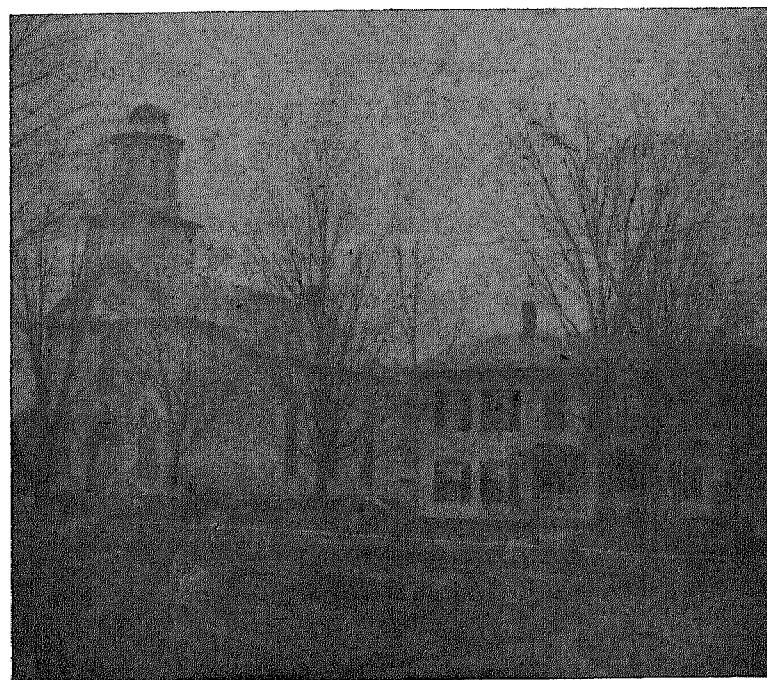
For several years Arthur and Lillian continued to see each other on an occasional basis, although they no longer shared a home together. But they did not get a divorce or an annulment for quite some time. There are several possible reasons for this--Lillian preferred the status of being married, even if she did not want the responsibilities. In retrospect, Arthur's reasons for not divorcing Lillian at that time seem dubious. In a poem, Lillian speculates:

. . . when the money ran low,
and there was no more dough,
he bid a last adieu. . . .

Only in 1934, after the family had lost it's money through illness, poor financial dealings, and the depression, did Arthur Williams file to have his marriage to Lillian annulled. Lillian, being too proud to answer, allowed the annulment to be granted on

the basis of her default. Arthur remarried in 1935 and lived the rest of his life in West Palm Beach. Although he promised Lillian some financial support, there is no indication that she ever received any from him. Lillian never forgot her only husband. Her poetry and prose are filled with reminiscences about Arthur and their marriage. Shortly after Arthur's death in 1952, Lillian wrote:

I was not there, when you darling went to heaven
But tho a stranger died, I knew your angel spirit
Oh! Had I but known!
Oh, God forgive me all the wrongs I've done--
Until life's close, you are my dearest one.
It is not good any more to weep and moan--
I cannot bring back the past, and tho the days
have flown,
I'll try to keep fresh flowers on your grave up there
And always when I bring them I will say a prayer.



Presbyterian Church and Parsonage, Middle Granville, New York.

WEDDED AT MIDDLE GRANVILLE.

A pretty wedding was that at the Presbyterian church at Middle Granville on Wednesday evening, September 16, when Miss Lillian R. Race, only daughter of Mr. and Mrs. George W. Race of that village, became the wife of Arthur J. Williams of Granville, son of William T. Williams.

The ceremony was performed by the Rev. B. Gwynedd Newton of Granville, and the church was handsomely decorated for the occasion with flowers of the autumnal season. The bride's gown was a beautiful ivory satin, trimmed with cream lace and pearls. Her tulle veil was caught up with lilies of the valley and she carried a bouquet of pink roses.

Miss Emily Thomas presided at the organ, her programme including Nevins's Love Song, O, Promise Me, and the Angel's Serenade. She played Mendellsohn's Wedding March as the wedding party entered the church.

A reception at the home of the bride's parents followed the ceremony, and nearly a hundred relatives and intimate friends of the bride attended. Mrs. Race, the bride's mother, was gowned in blue brocaded silk, with lace trimming. An exquisite luncheon was served. The couple left in the evening for the Bermudas, and will visit New York and Boston, and upon their return will reside in Granville.

The bride is a graduate of Troy Conference Academy of the class of 1912.

"2nd senior year."

An article from the November Number of the I. C. A. Chronicle, 1914, detailing Lillian Race's wedding to Arthur J. Williams.



Lillian Race, front row far right, and members of her family in July 1908.

TRANSITION

Between the years of 1918 and 1938, Lillian underwent a tremendous transition in her life. In 1918 the Race's bought a house in Boca Raton. The house was surrounded by tall pines which caught the breeze and played a melody upon it. Lillian nicknamed her new home Singing Pines. She and her parents still spent the summers in New York, and in the early years were fairly well off. During her summers in New York, Lillian kept busy working on her family's farm. When she was in Boca Raton, Lillian contented herself with her passions; she loved cars and used to enjoy going for long drives in the country. She and her mother were early members of the philanthropic Boca Raton Women's club, and attended their monthly meetings. The object of the Women's Club was to "promote general philanthropic work, along practical and educational lines," and it served to fill a large social and cultural void in the lives of many women of the time. Once a month, the club would meet and sponsor some type of cultural activity such as a play, a dance, or an art lecture. The first order of business at each meeting was an audible repetition of the Lord's Prayer. Lillian and her mother probably found the Women's Club a needed outlet for their social, creative, and perhaps even religious interests. Lillian also appears to have been somewhat concerned about civic matters in the developing community. In 1929 she wrote a letter to the town suggesting that they install shuffleboard courts for the amusement of the town's citizens; she even suggested that they be

placed at the "lower west" of City Hall. But at the same time, she was not hesitant to do battle with City Hall. When the city threatened to sell two of her family's lots unless the assessments were paid, Lillian wrote: "I shall acquire a first-class lawyer and sue the town or the mayor or commissioner or clerk . . . or whoever it is that's trying to put this over on me" Whatever the cause that stirred her to action, Lillian was not shy about expressing her opinions.

Unfortunately, Lillian was not as free with her opinions when it came to recording the details which brought about her family's financial downfall. However, it is not unreasonable to speculate that the Races were just one of many casualties of the bursting of the "Florida Bubble." What had been a real estate buying frenzy in South Florida during the early to mid-1920s began to collapse as paper profits far exceeded actual cash profits and thousands of people defaulted on loans which they had taken out in hopes of making some fast money. As the real estate bubble burst, real estate developments went bankrupt and many sincere investors along with real estate tycoons lost their savings. Those who were not investors were caught in the economic chain reaction; many lost their money as local businesses and banks collapsed along with the economy. By the time of the national depression, the dream of South Florida had disappeared (and the reality had been made even less attractive by the twin hurricanes of 1926 and 1928.) Several residents of Boca Raton lost their life's savings during these economically unstable times, and George W. Race was most likely one of them. But, like many other residents, George and his family elected to stay in Boca Raton and work to recover from their financial setbacks. Unfortunately, it was not to be. During the next few years Mr. and Mrs. Race's health began to fail. In 1931 they were forced to sell the farm up north. A large part of the money that they made from the sale went to pay the medical bills of Mrs. Race, who had been in the hospital for seven weeks with diabetes. In 1938 Lillian's father died, and the next year she and her mother were forced to begin selling things to make ends meet. On the wedding list, which had been so carefully typed twenty-four years before and had been a symbol of so much promise, began to appear check marks near the items that were sold. Most of these were bought by close friends such as Floy Mitchell, who were sympathetic to their situation. By 1939 it was clear that they needed an added source of income, and so they began taking in roomers. Regardless of just how it happened, Lillian's world had turned upside down in just a few short years. She now had the burden of caring and providing for herself and

her sick mother on her shoulders, and this required Lillian, so used to being babied, to make a big adjustment. Summoning up all of her strength and all of her faith, and purging herself of all self pity, Lillian began to look for a way to make ends meet.

BOARDING HOUSE YEARS

Up to this point in her life Lillian had faced few challenges, but she had, in many ways, demonstrated her strength of character. Lillian faced the harsh southern climate without flinching. She wrote of the threatening hurricanes: "devils sent by satan to trample on our souls," of catching malaria in 1920, of snakes and mosquitoes, and of the oppressive summer heat:

Ninety degrees and extra five
every day all thru summer.

Sweat and wash while your skin does simmer,

Thats the season from May to November

Yet the most prevalent theme in Lillian's poetry is not nature's hostility, but it's beauty. In Florida, Lillian believed she had found paradise. The obstacles and difficulties posed by tropical living apparently left Lillian's optimistic outlook undaunted:

Ocean rolls green, trees sing to me;

Tall Pines surround, I feel so free--

Their arms outstretched to shelter me

Her father's death was also a great test of character for Lillian. When he died, it was up to her to make the arrangements and handle the crisis. Because Mr. Race died in Florida, Lillian was faced with making arrangements not only for the funeral but also for transporting her father up north. She and her ill, grief-stricken mother escorted the coffin carrying Mr. Race to New York by train. When the funeral was over Lillian must have first realized her situation; it was now up to her to look out for and provide for herself and her sick mother. No longer was there anyone to take care of her, to shelter or pamper her. Yet even coming to terms with this painful realization could not help to prepare Lillian for the difficult years that lay ahead for her.

In 1939 Lillian began to take in roomers, and continued to sell her fine possessions in order to raise money. On Christmas 1941, several kind and loving neighbors brought Lillian and her mother bags of groceries. Lillian kept an itemized list of everything that she received from each person, clearly intending to pay them back. It was the outbreak of World War II, and the overflow of soldiers to the Boca Raton Air Base, that gave Lillian an economic break--she soon had more business than she

could handle. In order to make extra rooms, Lillian put up cardboard partitions throughout her home. Mrs. Race was still quite ill, and Lillian saw to it that her mother had a room of her own until her death in October of 1942. Judging from the letters and notes that she left behind, the death of her mother was the lowest point in Lillian's life. She had lost her closest friend, and the last surviving member of her family. Her mother's death left her alone and inconsolable; she wrote:

My mother died, My mother died. She is gone - I can't believe it. I can feel her everywhere, I know she is here with me. One who loved me so, would even give up Heaven for me and I know she hasn't left me, but I miss her so. . . . I miss her so. . . . There's nothing left to work for now. . . .

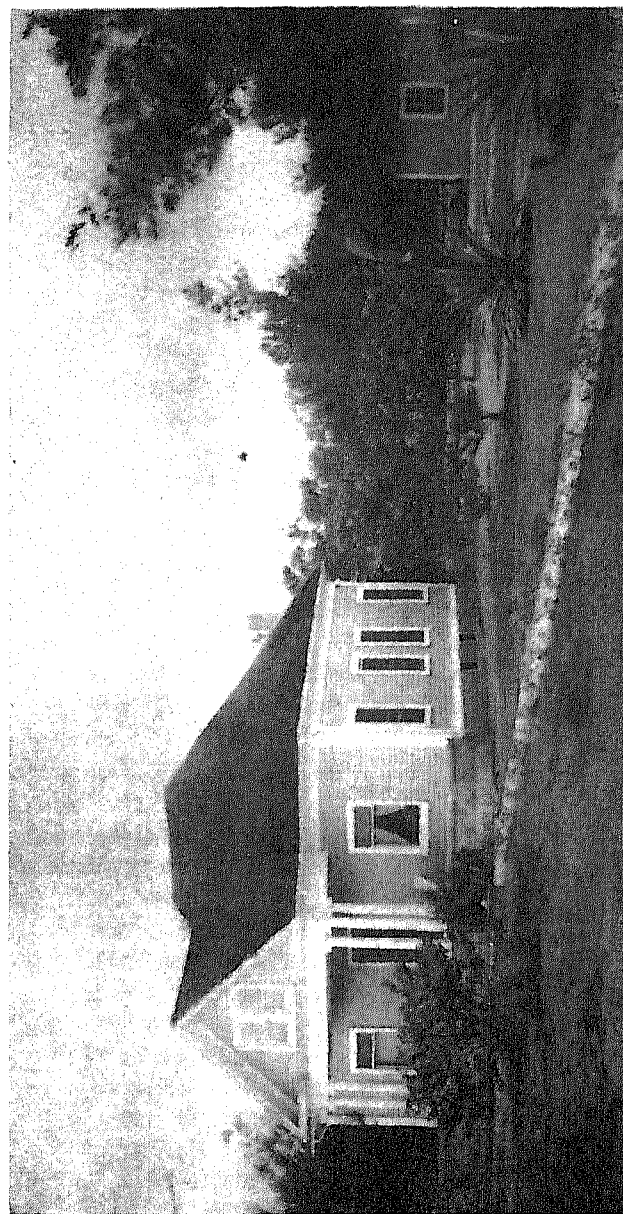
Almost a year later, Lillian wrote in her diary:

Am getting along fine in every way except my sorrow. It will never heal. I am all alone, am left here for some reason and will try to do [the] best I can, but I am all alone among all those loving couples.

In spite of her grief, Lillian continued to run her busy rooming house. The demand for rooms was overwhelming. One soldier, Louis M. Schultze, contracted with Lillian in 1942 to build an eight by twelve foot cabin on her property. The conditions of the contract specify that Schultze and his wife were to occupy the cabin for five dollars per month until such time as he was transferred out of the area. At that time, the cabin was to become Lillian's. Yet things were still cramped. In a letter to a hometown newspaper dated March 1943 Lillian wrote:

I rent rooms: Also two parts of the garage where there are two mexican [sic] families and each have a young baby. Also have a small cottage with a family in it who rent by the week, since December. The Mexicans have been here since October. There are 25 in all who stay here, 17 in the house. I sleep in a corner of the piazza, and another couple in the opposite side.

While she had a full house, Lillian slept on the porch regardless of the weather. On 4 December 1944 Lillian's cousin, Ethyl Chesebro, wrote home to tell of suprising Lillian with a birthday cake. She found Lillian, who was ill with a cold, on the back porch all bundled up in a long coat with a beret on her head. The roomers, who had given her a box of candy and a box of decorative soaps, were inside playing cards. After sharing her cake with the roomers, Lillian left the inside revelry and retired alone to her cot on the back porch. It's no wonder she



"Singing Pines" in the 1930. Mr and Mrs George Washington Race purchased the house from the original owners, the William Myrick family, in 1917. See the October 1979 issue of the Spanish River Papers for the history of the house.

was sick! Running her rooming house was hard work; Lillian did all of the washing and cooking for her roomers, as well as all of the maintenance on her house and property. Washing was done in the back yard in a tub with washboards. Cooking was done on a kerosene stove. Other chores included chopping wood, trimming the hedges, cutting the grass, boarding windows during hurricane threats, as well as general housecleaning. But to Lillian these chores were the price of self-sufficiency, and although the hard work took its toll, it allowed her to maintain her pride by not relying on the charity of others.

Occasionally, however, she would become frustrated and vent her feelings in her writings. In a poem she wrote during a violent hurricane, Lillian comments:

If these roomers who come winters and beat you
down on your rent, etc, and sell what they own--
Then ride round and have a good time; Then "Goodbye"
--If they were here to go thru what we do, Boy--
What would they think about it: huh?--
How much would they ask?
Double what we do--YEAH.

she also kept meticulous business records, recording the names and hometown addresses of each boarder, the length of their stay, and the amount of payment (which she broke down into income and tax.) As a typical demonstration of Lillian's outspoken personality, she made personal comments next to each roomer's name, such as "good riddance," "good boy, but drank," or "kid with big mouth and head."

After the war ended and the air field closed, Lillian had fewer roomers. The bulk of these were caddies from the Boca Raton Hotel and Club, and "Snowbirds" who spent their winters in Florida and their summers in the North. A letter home, written around 1947, records the details of Lillian's life. She wrote:

The house must have new roof, shingles on front--awful--
cost awful, must be done. I can't worry, but have so
much to do. Grass and hedges to cut, vines growing on
trees, house and out[side] to keep, mop, wash. Pay
about \$7 or more [for] elect and water bills a month.
Food costs me about \$2 a day, and gas for car 5-8 gals
a week. I ride every day--by Lake and ocean, by club.
It has never looked so beautiful; (unreadable) glass,
fountain, loads of folks there. They fill up my place
so I'm glad.

But Lillian's boarding house was nowhere near as busy as it had been during it's peak. Instead of twenty-five roomers, she now had four. Although this meant that Lillian had less work and

more privacy, it also meant the return of her financial struggles. Fortunately, she had managed to accrue some savings, and also still owned some land. The money that she continued to make from her rooming house covered her daily living expenses, but major expenses such as car or home repairs had to come from her savings. Consequently, her lifestyle was "frugal" to say the least. In her diary she recorded the details of her Thanksgiving holiday, 1947:

It is 4 O'clock in the afternoon and I am here in [the] Garage with Billy, my golden Doggy. We have together eaten our Thanksgiving Dinner of Chicken dinner in a jar, Cranberry sauce from a can, peas canned, canned grape fruit juice and coffee, left over from breakfast. As I sit here thinking of past Thanksgivings. . . so long gone and yet at Life's end [they] seem so near, the years but as a moment.

As difficult and lonely as these times were for her, Lillian found many ways of coping. She found companionship with her pets; her dogs were her constant and faithful friends, her "babies." Lillian could often be seen driving through town in her roadster with a dog beside her, her long colorful scarves trailing in the breeze behind her as she sang at the top of her lungs. Lillian had her own interests, and driving cars was her passion--perhaps it filled her with a sense of freedom and independence. She often took long drives along the beach, or to a nearby baseball field. She was a big fan of the "Bombers," a local baseball team, and could often be seen cheering them on from the stands. Lillian was also actively involved with the church, and regardless of her own financial problems, she always found a way to make donations to the church, the children's hospital, or the Red Cross. She drew great comfort and strength from her faith, believing that the love of God and the love of her parents would guide her and provide for her. She also found peace in the glories of nature, sitting on her back porch for hours during the evening, listening to her radio, basking in the moonlight, and breathing in the fragrances of the cassias, hibiscus, and great pine trees that sheltered her.

It was during this time of her life that Lillian met and fell in love with one of her roomers. He was Frank Holland, a businessman from Stewartville, Minnesota, who spent his winters at Lillian's boarding house. Aside from Arthur, Frank was Lillian's greatest love. Their relationship began in 1947, and suddenly Lillian was not alone while walking on the beach, attending church, going to baseball games, or sitting on her porch. Frank took her to restaurants, and gave her presents such



Lillian Race's grandparents, Cynthia J. Rogers Parker and Nathaniel Parker, seated, and parents, Nellie Jane Parker Race and George Washington Race, standing.

as chocolates and handkerchiefs. For Lillian, it meant the end of loneliness, and she was hopeful that Frank would ask her to marry him. But once again, her romantic expectations led only to disillusionment. When she found Frank with another woman, she rushed home and threw him and all of his belongings out of his room. The next year, however, she was forced to take him back as a roomer because she desperately needed the money. It was during this time of her life that Lillian wrote the bulk of her poetry. At first, inspired by her new found joy, all she wrote were love poems. Later, however, her poetry began to reflect her hurt, bitterness, and disappointment. Although Lillian continued to date Frank for the next few years (probably out of her need for companionship), it is clear that she truly lost all hope that she would ever marry again. Eventually she did receive a marriage proposal, but it was from another one of her roomers. Johnny, a caddy at the Boca Raton Hotel and Club, was one of Lillian's "regulars." Over the years they had become good companions, but when John asked her to marry him, Lillian refused. She did not want to leave her "cracker cottage" to go and live in "one of those new houses," nor did she care to spend her life with a drinker. (Lillian's biggest complaint about the caddies that she rented to was their love of drink.) Most importantly, Lillian recognized that her relationship with John was one of friendship. Despite her previous romantic disappointments, and despite her difficult financial situation, Lillian refused to marry for comfort or companionship. If she were ever to marry again, it would have to be for love.

From the early nineteen-fifties business at Lillian's boarding house dwindled; often she had only a few roomers, and was grateful for the companionship. A poem that she wrote, entitled "Rooming House Soliloquy" reflects her feelings:

The air is cool - a cloudy day - at 6 A.M. they drove away
In shiny car, piled high with plants, and other things -
shells, Jelly Easter chick, atop the night bag, looked so
"chic"

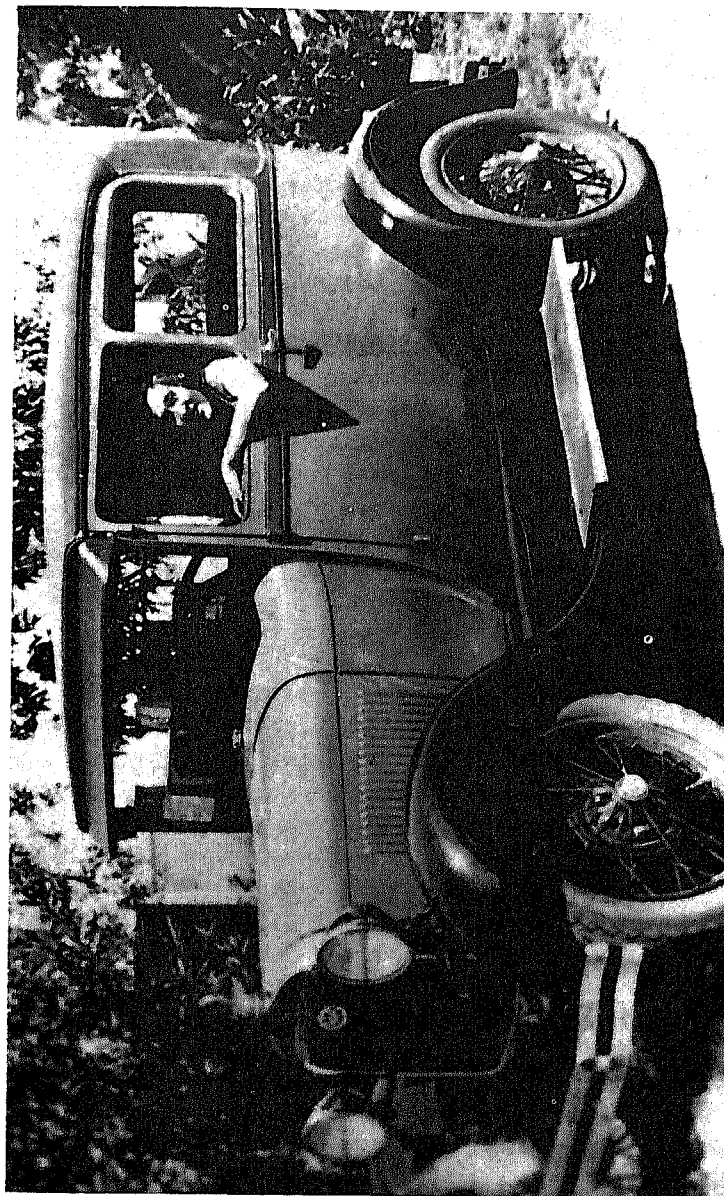
Those weeks of joy and happiness, laughing, singing spent;
Taking long walks thru woods of pine
O'er sand and hillside - There to find
Strange flowers fruit and birds-
Having palm trees, whispered words.
Sun shining, Ocean calling: all the world was gay,
and yet they had to go away.

Please come back -
Please come back; Lord hear me pray
Let them return again to me:
That dear and cheerful Company.

According to Lillian's records she stopped taking in roomers in 1961. Plagued by ill health and financial problems, Lillian was simply unable to keep up with the demands of her business. Furthermore, there simply wasn't enough business to keep her rooming house going. Beginning in the early nineteen-sixties, Lillian lived alone with only her dogs and cats to keep her company. Financially troubled and not wanting to give up her home, she applied for Social Security in 1961. For the rest of her life, Lillian was forced to rely on Social Security and the kindness of her friends and relatives to make ends meet. However, it was her own indomitable spirit and her faith that God would provide for her that truly kept her going.

LATER YEARS

In the fifties, Lillian's health had begun to fail; she was plagued by high blood pressure, diabetes, Brights disease, and various injuries. Now in the sixties, she had the added strain of arthritis. But Lillian did not let these illnesses deter her; she tried to remain as active and as vital as possible. She continued as the organist at the Church of the Open Door (which she began in 1957). In 1961, at age sixty-eight, she was issued a new drivers license. (Lillian lied about her age to the Department of Motor Vehicles; her drivers license lists her birthday as 1897, making her only 64!) She also remained civically active. In 1965 she was replaced on the active Registration list for city elections in Boca Raton, and in 1966 when she had trouble voting because of an address problem, she immediately wrote to the City Clerk's office to have the matter corrected. Despite her able and willing spirit, during the last ten years of Lillian's life, she had to depend on the kindness and generosity of her friends and relatives in order to survive. Because of her illnesses, Lillian's legs and feet had become swollen and sore, and it became quite difficult for her to do work around the house. Still she persisted in cleaning, scrubbing, and taking care of her yard, but her persistence had a price. She took several falls, and in 1969 one of these falls broke her leg. Because she was unable to take care of herself with such an injury, Lillian was forced to spend two months in a nursing home. Two months after her release from the nursing



Lillian Race Williams in one of her favorite early autos.

home, she still used a walker, but was glad to be home. "I hope I never see a nursing home again!" she wrote to an old friend. Medicare and her cousin, Ethyl Chesebro paid all but \$50.00 of her bills. Lillian often said "thank-God for Social Security," for this little bit of income helped her to live in her own house. But Social Security was hardly enough to live on. Floy Mitchell, one of Lillian's dearest friends (Lillian called Floy her "Guardian Angel") would frequently send bags of groceries to her, as would other dear friends. Ethyl (who Lillian lovingly referred to as "her bank") looked after Lillian financially, often sending her \$5.00 in a card, and taking care of her major medical bills such as the nursing home. Other friends such as Marie Pierce offered Lillian their companionship, stopping in for visits or writing letters to her. Lillian did have one special companion, though, whom she speaks of in her diary:

Oh the thoughts in the night, with you lying close beside me
in the chilly night and the North Wind screaming.
Rain pattering on the roof above us
and we are safe together, but for how long?
Terror grips my soul, I have loved you so long and [am] so
afraid of the time of parting.
Soft blankets make us warm - but for how long?
The devil himself comes to worry and torment me
For I love you more than anything in this wide world.
If you were gone, there would be nothing left -
Nothing left to love, to hold...to stroke your beautiful
black velvet coat.
Others do for me, give me elegant gifts
You are my only joy - you are my life
If we should part, there would be nothing left for me.
I fight the feeling in the dark gloom and turn and kiss
Your lovely little ears, trained to watch and keep burglars
out.
I feel the large swelling in your beautiful little coat,
and I groan and pray, Oh God, don't take her from me or I
shall die.

Until Lillian mentions a beautiful black velvet coat, this poem sounds like one of her love poems to Frank Holland! Certainly, this poem shows the extent of her devotion and attachment to her dogs (in this case, the poem was to her dog Fuzz) who had been Lillian's only constant companions.

Lillian kept extensive diaries during this time of her life. Perhaps recording her experiences, thoughts, and feelings was a therapeutic outlet for her. Sometimes Lillian's writings are reminiscent of days gone by, such as her poem, "I Sit and Wait":

I sit and wait while the days pass by
weeks and months and years, they fly-
sunshine and rain, heartache and pain
What does it matter to one such as I?
I've had my fun in former years,
as a concert singer, I bowed to cheers of those adoring
there.
At just my approach, they'd rise from their chairs.

I had my man, in summertime beside the sea.
We wooed, danced, and loved, how can it be
That he is gone with no farewell to me?

Hair changing color, cheeks fading now,
Glance in the mirror; I wonder how
One gets like that, ere time seems short-
Only a moment since in the North.

and yet

"Don't give Up" - hang on - try again
press on and struggle, although in pain.
God is with you, my dear, give him praise!
I'll keep my head, while to him I raise
a prayer in the morning and afternoon,
in sunny day or night of gloom.

Alone, with memories, and friends, so true:
Whatever life offers, or brings by fate,
I'll try to keep cheerful,
as I sit and wait.

Lillian also had the curious habit of writing notes and sometimes full letters to God. They are like written prayers, most of the time written when Lillian desperately needed some kind of help either with her finances or her health. One note simply says:

Dear God - Please take this awful disease off me - Please -
I'm spending my money for no good Doctor, must go again
Thurs. Noon. Please take it away, right off - Please. Lil

In another letter to God, after she explained her situation and asked God to please provide her with a new roof and the needed repairs to the house, Lillian says:

[it's] a great big order - you know I can't do anything, no money hardly and no place to go if [I] sell, except to pay it all out for another [place] not half as good. What shall I do? Help me God, you can fix it all up for me, won't you please? I feel so bad, my dear baby [Fuzz] is gone. I'm trying to keep my head above water and not get sick worrying again. There is no one to help but you God. I'll be waiting for your answer. Thanks for keeping me well.

In 1976 Lillian got her answer about her house, but it was undoubtedly not the answer she had hoped to hear. Due to her crippling arthritis, Lillian was forced to sell the land which her home was built on, and move into a nursing home. In spite of having to return to a nursing home, when she was interviewed in 1974 and again in 1975, Lillian claimed to be happy. But often she missed, and she never forgot, her "Singing Pines." She donated the house itself to the Boca Raton Historical Society. The house was moved to a site on Second Avenue, donated by the city, and restored as the Singing Pines Museum. It is one of the only original Boca Raton houses still standing.

CONCLUSION

When I die, let it be under a Palm Tree
After the suns gone down
And Gold moon among the stars in the Eastward
Oershadows the lights of the town.

While the Mocking Bird croons me a requiem
I have loved her so well for years,
And friends wave their graceful leaves lightly,
Oh for me, do not shed tears.

I've had my fill of Living, in this Southern Paradise
Birds, grasses, smiling blue ocean, often my heart has
yearned

When in a far Northland, where things were cold and dark
Till lying here neath your warm starlight
I vowed we never would part.

So peaceful, so lovely, so fragrant.
I've lived along with the breeze;
Let it waft me to the heaven above,
When this Heaven below, I must leave.

On Valentine's Day, 1979, at the age of eighty-two, Lillian passed away. But she left behind her diaries and scrapbooks, poetry and musings, by which she is remembered. And Lillian did hope to be remembered! One of her writings says "I try and stop, and sit, and write a thing like this for strangers to see, and peek, and wonder when I'm gone. . . ." That is what this author has done. I've tried to tell Lillian's history without losing her essence amid the facts. But I do not think that any second hand "Lillian Williams" could possibly live up to the real thing. In reading Lillian's writings, I was struck by her strength, her outspokenness, her sensitivity, and her willfulness, which I have tried to convey in this paper. This paper was written as an original research thesis for a Seminar in Women's History, yet it contains no thesis. I cannot make any sweeping conclusions based on the life of one woman. But that does not mean that we cannot learn from Lillian's life. From Lillian we can learn the importance of self reliance and optimistic outlook when facing the challenges in our lives. From Lillian, we can learn to have pride in our own strength.



Arthur J. Williams, husband of Lillian Race Williams in 1919 shortly after his return from WWI.

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