

The following PDF is a copy of a manuscript about Jane Macon by Mary McGarvey that sheds much light on Jane Macon as a person and as a teacher.

I have an undated photocopy of the published version, but portions of the article were cut off in the photocopying process. Neither the date of the article nor the publisher is shown on the published version. Reference Librarian Diane Jackson of the Brunswick Library who provided the copy did not know the date of publication, but she said it was published in the ***Coastal Illustrated***. Correspondence during the Spring of 1979 between author McGarvey and one of Jane Macon's nieces appear to refer to the manuscript. Thus, I am guessing that the article was published in the Summer or Fall of 1979. If anyone can confirm the publisher and date and provide me with an intact copy, I would be grateful.

Meanwhile, comparing the accompanying manuscript with what I have of the article indicates only minor differences. I do not know if the attached manuscript was the one that McGarvey submitted for publication or whether it was an earlier draft.

Roger K. Thomas
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A SHAKESPEAREAN HEROINE: MISS JANE A. MACON

"Miss Jane A. Macon, Widely Known Teacher Dies". So read the headlines of the Brunswick News, October 10, 1977. For all of us who had been her pupils, and the youngest would be middle-aged, another barrier between us and Eternity had been swept away. We had thought she was immortal, but for two years now we had missed her on the streets. Once so erect, she had become slightly stooped, but she was still tall. Her large brown eyes peered into the faces of her aging pupils to inquire about them and their friends of yesteryear. Girls were always "sister" and boys were "son".

Miss Macon had walked every day, rain or shine, but this came to an end when a headline of December 4, 1975, Brunswick News read: Miss Jane A. Macon Receives Injury in Vehicle Mishap". She had been crossing Gloucester Street at the Richmond Street intersection when she was hit by the right fender and bumper of a car driven by an elderly man without license or insurance. It was a former student, Alde Murta Taylor, driving the truck of her grocery business, who alighted, cradled Miss Macon in her arms and rode with her to the hospital. (With great presence of mind Miss Macon insisted that she not be moved until the ambulance got there.)

Even though she was ninety-two, people still believed she would lick fate. Stories circulated that she was in a wheel chair, standing up, taking steps. Her mind was clear and she was enjoying the avalanche of cards, letters, flowers, but Miss Macon would never be in charge of herself for she had broken her hip and there were complications. On January 21, 1976, she was transferred to Medical Arts Center. In the spring, her niece, Mrs. Francis Cleets, moved her to Clayton, but not to the beloved cottage but to a nursing home. It was here that she died, October 8, 1977.

She had been part of the Glynn County School System for forty-nine years: forty-one as head of the English Department and twenty-eight years of those years as Dean of Girls.

When I saw her laid out at Miller's Funeral Home (she had taught the four Miller boys and their children), the title of this little memoir sprang to my lips, "A Shakespearean heroine." Age had heightened the purity of her classic features, and her gray hair, still thick, was parted in the middle and braided. There may have been other English teachers in the State of Georgia as through, but only our Miss Macon was a true

Shakespearean. Tall, slender, with large brown eyes and tawny blonde hair, she could have been Rosalind, Portia, Isabella or Beatrice, but never Queen Gertrude, Lady Macbeth, Ophelia or Juliette. We never saw our teacher in modern dress. She came to Brunswick wearing a Gibson Girl blouse and skirt, and her attire was of this basic type with small concessions made to the current mode.

Miss Macon would have approved her funeral which she had planned well ahead of time. It was at St. Marks Episcopal Church and never had it seemed more hallowed than on this blue October afternoon. Light streamed through the fine stained glass windows and reflected on the grey brick walls. Three priests officiated: Rev. Talbert Morgan, who had been her friend since he came to Brunswick in the "Forties; Rev. Cody who had come from Savannah for the service, and the young rector, Rev. Francis Daunt, whose height and golden hair caused my sister to whisper, "Straight out of Miss Macon's 'Idylls of the King'. We looked around at the filled pews and it was hard to believe that these gray-haired men and women had been the glowing boys and girls who moved like dancers through the halls of Glynn Academy.

She was born on January 8, 1883, in Clark County, Georgia. Chester A Arthur was president and Queen Victoria was entering her "late" period. Her niece, Elizabeth, Mrs. Al Amundsen, tells us this of her childhood and youth: "Jane Macon had things going her way underneath the huge oak tree in the side yard. She was the school teacher, and her pupils were, beside her sister, Nona, my mother; two dolls, a large grey cat who wouldn't stay put, and a small pickaninny. Her childhood determination to be a teacher never wavered."

Our heroine was never interested in domestic work and the family cook despaired when she would find her fair-haired apprentice lackadaisically peeling potatoes with a book propped in front of her.

When she was fourteen, her father died, and a year later, her mother. Her deathbed interview with her father strengthened her resolve to teach. He told her that "education is the key". She was not to give up her ambition, but to get an education and then help her sister and brothers. So Jane Macon became the "head of the family" at an early age and this was to influence future decisions.

A loyal little group of four went to live with their grandparents. Writes her niece: "Throughout her years with her grandparents, she never wavered in her determination to go to college She had to borrow money to finance college, and with her very first paycheck, she began paying back the loan." When her sister Nona went to the Normal School, Miss Macon helped her out of her small earnings. In 1928, Nona died, leaving two daughters, Mrs. Frances Clements and Mrs. Elizabeth Amundsen, both of Greenville, Alabama. These nieces and Mrs. Clements' children were to be her only surviving family. She lent Elizabeth a substantial sum for her college education which her niece repaid in full to Miss Macon's surprise and pleasure. She had always encouraged the girls with gifts of books, the right ones for the right age. For bookish Elizabeth this was the best part of Christmas. She writes: "In latter years, she helped many others with loans and outright gifts. She was intolerant of ignorance, not of itself, but of anyone who would not try to learn and would not make the most of themselves."

"Making the most of yourself", coupled with a kind and generous heart, made Miss Macon her own attendance officer. She never owned a car but one would meet her of an afternoon on sandy streets visiting homes of pupils who were not attending or who had dropt out. Why were they absent? The problem must be worked out whether at home or at school. The timid and sensitive must be charged with courage to attempt school graduation again. They MUST have that high school diploma.

When she became Dean of Girls, many tales, some probably fabricated to make a good story, were told of her firmness in enforcing the dress code. Boys must wear ties; Girls must wear hose. She made ties out of crepe paper, and if a boy forgot to wear one, he wore the crepe paper tie. The boy never forgot again. One little minx who flaunted the rules, now a matron, said, "I was a horrid child. I hate to remember myself. She was right." Another reminisced with a tender smile, "She wanted so much for us to be nice."

What we remember is that she taught us well, English Literature and English Grammar, but chiefly literature. She made us paraphrase, parse, write compositions, stand up and read aloud. She stocked our minds with quotations from the works we studied, especially Shakespeare. During study hall, she would summon us to her side and we would then recite:

"Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow, creeps in its petty pace . . . "; "All th world's a stage and all the men and women merely players"; "Friends, Romans, Countrymen, lend me your ears!"; "The quality of mercy is not strained . . . "; and the rousing HenryV's St. Crispin's Day speech which ends "God for Harry, England and St. George! " When Miss Macon's last pupil breathes his last, the Age of Quotations will end.

She did not slight grammar. Most of her pupils have ~~gullit-pangsw~~ when they say, "It's me." instead of "It is I". or the "best of the two" instead of the "better of the two". Once at Coastal Chevrolet, Mr. Tuten addressed Mr. Spair in the argot of the car lot, a clump of words which I begin to straighten out by substracting negatives. Then I stopped with "Please forgive me, but hw did you get out of Miss Macon's class talking like that." With a straight face h replied, "'Twant easy."

It was the custom in those days for teachers to have a room in hmes of the utmost probity, taking their meals at one of several nice boarding houses. Miss Macon resided with the McKinnons on Gloucester Street, the Lotts on Union until th out reak of the WW 1 and thn with the Natt Russells. The Ways had a cottage on St. Simons Island and when Miss Macon was not at smmer school or visiting, sh spent th summers with them. In 1946, she took an apartment with Captain and Mrs. Clark at 809 Monck Street. She bought the house when the Clarks moved to St. Simons in 1949. She had a hassle with the City Commission to change the spelling of the street from Monk to the original Monck, the name of a friend of Oglethorpe's.

The neighborhood is a pocket in downtown Brunswick, a charming medley of church spires, stained glass windows, proud Glynn Academy where she spent most of her life, and only a block from the post office and the bank. 809 itself is a handsome two story house with double verandas, West Indies style. The house converted easily into four large apartments and there was a servant's house which was also rentable. For one who was said to hve no interest in money, Miss Macon had made a shrewd bargain.

Wan she arrived in Brunswick in 1903 to teach the 3rd grade, her salary was sixty dollars a month for nine months. In 1904 she was raised to \$65.00. In 1911, she was made head of the English Department at a salary of \$70.00 a month for nine months. Three others exceeded her: Mr. Ralph Newton at \$1,539.72 (paid in twelve months intervals); Mr. J.P. Mott, principal, at \$900.00 a year, and Miss Frances Hopkins at \$734.35 a year.

The minutes of the Board of Education of June 2, 1915, has this information: "The Board fixed the salary of Miss Jane Macon and Miss Betty Rucker at \$100.00 a month for the coming year." Ah, those two queens of Glynn Academy, Jane Macon and Betty Rucker. There could not be but rivalry and perhaps two camps. Was Miss Macon softer, was Miss Rucker more fair? Who could not be awed by Betty Rucker's, "Leave the room" if you had not done the assignment, the paper or the outside reading? Those dazzling outlines that were on the board when we entered, those lectures! She was criticized and for what? Too good for the job, should be teaching in a college. I never found anyone in college as good as Jane Macon and Betty Rucker, but they were both just normal school graduates who got their degrees in bits at summer school. In my senior years there were days when Miss Rucker was absent and we had some nincompoop as a substitute. Then she resigned at the end of the year. We learned that she had terminal cancer. The alumni collected \$2,000 for her which her family wrote was received before her death.

1919 found Miss Macon and Miss Rucker each receiving \$1,580 a year, the same as the principal. 1923 they had been raised to \$1,600 and the following year \$1,700. On June 6, 1928, appeared this notice: "In recognition of 25 years of service of Miss Jane Macon in the schools, the board voted her the title of "Dean of Girls" in the High School and increased her salary to \$2,000 a year to be confirmed in the budget of 1928. Signed R.D. Eady, Supt." Salary increases continued until her retirement in 1952 when she was earning \$329.16 for nine months. Teacher's Retirement and Hospitalization were in effect. Miss Macon had taught fifty-one years, forty-nine in Brunswick.

The Alumni collected \$2,500 as a purse to take her on that long delayed trip to England and Europe where she would see castles, cathedrals and even prisons, remember "The Prisoner of Chillon". Mary Miller, a former pupil, now with a travel agency, chartered the trip, arranging economical accommodations to make the trip extend as far and as long as possible. On her return there was a reception at the school auditorium and Miss Macon gave a talk about her travels. With tears of appreciation, she said that the trip had made the dreaded progression from working life to retirement easier. She still filled in as librarian and found it exhilarating to work with the children without the barrier of grades etc.

Another honor was paid her: the new Junior high school which would serve the newcomers of Brunswick, situated on that new highway, Altama, was named Jane Macon. Today it is called "the Middle School."

Elizabeth wrote: "She was interested in 'roots' all her life and early on became interested in everything concerned with her kinfolks. Bible records, letters, newspaper items, and the conversations of her elders about her progenitors fascinated her. She began making notes of her findings." She had never thought of publishing, but after retirement, she got together her notes and compiled "Gideon Macon of Virginia and Some of His Descendants" which came out in 1956. Then having so much material on allied branches of the family, she published "John and Edward Tuck of Halifax County, Va." and then a third, "Four O'Kelly Sons and Some of Their Descendants." All of these books are still available and selling. They have been brought up to date and are in second editions.

More and more she was becoming family-centered, and was now spending as much time at Clayton, Georgia, as in Brunswick. In the 'Twenties, she acquired land around Clayton and began building a mountain cottage. Elizabeth: "I do not know how she accomplished the building of her mountain home for at that time there were practically no roads up there, especially to the site she had chosen. Somehow she managed to get the lumber, plumbing etc up with the aid of local helpers. This went on for several seasons for she would do as much as she was able, both timewise and moneywise.

Elizabeth writes that in the early Twenties, a class gave her \$50.00 for a Christmas gift to be used as she wished. She had tucked it away for future use.

Then, in 1932, she was leaving for the winter and had not yet filled in the space for the fireplace and chimney. She was having boards nailed across the open space when one of the men asked if he could build the chimney. She said she was unable and would have to wait for more money. He persuaded her to let him make an estimate - a price of \$50.00. The moment he said that she remembered the hidden away fifty and told him to go ahead.

With a mule and a wagon, hauled up stones from the creek, load at a time. She was overwhelmed when she saw it. In her two story living room with balcony, he built "The beautiful thing. The fireplace is of native stone, grayish and goes up to where the ceiling would be, but the room is open with beams. The mantel piece is one huge piece of stone,

several inches wide and several feet long. How he got it up there, or even found, it is a mystery. And on the outside the stone rises up from the ground to tower above the top of the house.

"She was overwhelmed when she returned and saw it, and knew, even at that time, The Great Depression, it was dirt cheap. She tried to make him take another \$10.00 which he refused. Told her he always kept his word. ~~After~~ ^{After} some argument, he turned away and she tucked the bill into his ~~shirt~~ ^{shirt} pocket. Next day here he comes with a huge iron crane on which to hang pots and things. Later she added large andirons." Of the house itself, her niece writes: "It is on the side of Screamer Ridge and can be seen for miles around. Stained a woodsy green, trimmed in white, with the huge stone chimney, it makes a striking sight."

Elizabeth tells of Miss Macon's last years blossoming not only with enjoyment of family ties and of Clayton, but in self-expression, too. There were ~~the~~ ^{not} only the genealogical books, but also water colours and poems ~~which~~ ^{which she} was too modest to confess were hers. Her niece writes: "I spent many a late summer evening on her large porch in Clayton, looking across the town below Black Mountain looming up in front of us. I wanted to know everything about my family, since I had been away so long I hardly knew some of them. And ~~how~~ ^{how} she would talk . . . with lightening bugs all around the porch and the stars coming out. There is a large lighted cross on Black Rock and at certain hours the Methodist Chrch plays chimes . . . I miss her!"

And was there no love interest? Yes, but since she was such a reticent person, she should not be betrayed by second-hand accounts. Miss Macon watchers of her early days in Brunswick, perched in the fifth grade and high school, report that a handsome young man made two trips to Brunswick to press his suit. He left with a "very sad face". His family responsibilities and her promise to her father to look after the younger children forced her to send him away. There was a principal who endured campfire hikes and marshmallow roasts to be near her. He took a place somewhere else. There was a lawyer who would have come at her beck. And someone else who may have been the real thing . . . but then she always said she was married to Glynn Academy.

If people wonder why I wrote this, like the stone mason who built the chimney, I just wanted to do it.