

[Mrs. Irene Lake, Pianist]

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Mrs. Irene Lake,

Pianist

1847 Pearl-st.,

Jacksonville, Florida.

Rose Shepherd, Writer.

MRS. IRENE LAKE, PIANIST.

Mrs. Lake had been recording on the piano some old plantation songs - rowing songs, negro spirituals, lullabys, work songs. The [ease?] with which she caught the melody from the rendition by an eighty-five year-old lady, swinging from a childhood memory of the glamorous Florida in the days just preceding the War between the States - the latter [1850's?], to be exact: The quick ear which caught the [?] as the cracked voice strived to reach the high notes and flattened on the lower ones; the nimble fingers racing up and down in deft runs to enliven the original negro interpolations; the right hand marking the notes on the ruled score paper, as the left softly struck the keys to confirm the tune — all brought an exclamation of “Marvelous!” from those in the room, who had been attracted by the unusual proceeding.

Mrs. Lake is a woman of small stature, probably five feet tall, fifty-two years of age. Her blond hair, now mostly gray, was parted in the middle and waved softly over the ears

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to a small knot low on the neck in the back. Her blue eyes, set wide apart, below [[?]?] wide level forehead, lighted with interest and enthusiasm as she work worked swiftly, completing the four songs in the rough in the short space of two hours.

She was dressed comfortably - the day was quite hot - in an inexpensive voile dress, with blue, her favorite color predominating. A pale blue oil skin parasol leaned against 2 the piano. Rain or shine she carries a parasol - even her most intimate friends in Jacksonville have never seen her wearing a hat.

“How do you do it?” she was asked.

“Well, I suppose it is a talent I inherited from my morthher mother, who was a very fine musician. She was born in Athens, Georgia, in [1854?].

“Her father was [?] Heinrich von der Lieth, a German, whose father was tailor to the Emperor of Germany, not Kaiser Wilholm, but his father. One of his duties was to embroider the royal crest and coat-of-arms on the Emperor's clothing, as well as all household linen. He was a native of Hanover, Germany.

“My grandmother, his wife, came from [Reipic Diepmult?], Germany - where she was born in 1804.

“Grandfather fled Germany because he did not approve of the compulsory military training instituted by /the first Kaiser Wilholm. He landed in Charleston, South Carolina, after a thirty days' trip in crossing the ocean. There he met my grandmother, they were married, and came direct to the Athens, Georgia section.

“My mother was born there in 1854 - she was just a small girl during the War between the States

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"My father was James Alfred Grant, whose ancestors came to America on the famous Mayflower.

"One of his most famous relatives was Josiah Bartlett, a signer of the Declaration of Independence. I have a very old book with a reproduction of the Declaration of Independence and Josiah Bartlett's name is very prominently written thereon.

3

"Leonard Grant, my father's paternal uncle, gave Grant's Park to Atlanta, now a beautiful landmark of the Georgia city.

"I went to the public schools in Athens, and then attended the same private school for girls in Athens that my mother had attended in her young girlhood.

"The school was in charge of Miss Callie [osnowski?], a Russian lady of education, culture and refinement.

"By the way, Miss [Sosnowski's?] niece married Charles [Herty?], famous for his experiments in the pine and turpentine industry, and his discovery of the process of converting scrub slash pine into paper used commercially in paper bag manufacture and also paper containers, and other byproducts of the pulp paper industry.

"I took the regular grades through Miss [Sosnowski's?], also studied music there. There was an especially fine music department in connection with the school.

"When I graduated, she thought I possessed unusual talent as a pianist and secured for me a year's scholarship in the Chicago Musical College.

"I had wonderful training there, and after I graduated went back to Athens, then a year or so later, I went to Boston and enrolled in the [? Pianoforte?] School, from which I also graduated.

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“My studies in the two northern cities brought me into contact with many famous musicians. I know Josef Hoffmann personally, and was influenced a great deal by his kindly interest and advice.

“Strange to say, in Chicago, I was thrown more with the theatrical element, rather than musicians. However, all the large theaters had famous orchestras, and their classical renditions and musical adaptations to the tempo of the play, were like high class concerts themselves.

“I met Joseph Jefferson, famous interpreter of Rip Van Winkle. Then there was Richard Mansfield, Rose Coghlan and her brother, Charles, Louis Morrison, renowned for his portrayal of [Mephistopheles?] in [Faust?].

“In Boston I met Maxine Elliott, a most beautiful woman, and an actress of no mean talent. There I heard Ellen [Bauch Yaw?] in concert. She possessed a marvelous voice of great flexibility and wide range - from below middle ‘C’ to almost an octave above high ‘C’.

“It was a great advantage culturally, I suppose, to meet those famous people, but when you are a girl you do not think of those things so much.

“In Boston we were required to attend noted recitals to note especially the manner and technique of experts. Then we would give concerts at the schools, for which invitations were sent to a selected few, and thus we acquired polish, poise, and the [ease?] of contact of professional musicians.

“I remember one thing very distinctly in those recitals. The participants were not allowed in the concert hall before 5 our proper appearance on the program. We were required to remain in an upper, somewhat remote room, so that we would not be ‘jittery’ or unnerved by the possible errors or misinterpretations of the scores by one preceding us. Thus when

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it came time for each one to perform, the pupil was calm, collected, and as fresh as if just opening the program. I practiced six hours a day at Faelton School.

"I came to Jacksonville in September, 1906. It seems a long time ago, and it seems much longer when I look back upon my musical career, which started when I was so small I had to be lifted upon the piano stool.

"My mother was very musical, and also possessed a beautiful contralto voice. My father also possessed some ability as a musician, my two sisters were educated in music, so we lived in rather a musical atmosphere always. My sisters, however, did not keep up their music, but took business courses and later married, one living in Atlanta and the other, on the old home place near Athens.

"Shortly after coming to Jacksonville, I met my husband, who is a brother of Forrest Lake, one of the most famous [citizens?] of the city of Sanford, Florida, of which he was Mayor for fourteen consecutive terms. He is dead now, after a rather stormy career in his latter days. My husband and I are divorced, and I divide my time between my two children, a son in Jacksonville and a daughter, who has - dancing school in West Palm Beach, Florida.

6

"I have taught music at different times, played in concerts, both amateur and professional, and earned quite a reputation as an [accopanist?].

"I never played in orchestras, however, until after I came to Jacksonville.

"When radio assumed its early proportions as a system of distributing music to the public, I was thrilled by its possibilities, and eagerly assisted in broadcasts when the first little station was established in an old shed down behind the Florida Times-Union Building on West Adams Street.

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“When WJAX, the municipal broadcasting station, was opened in Jacksonville with a program which lasted until three o'clock the [?] morning after Thanksgiving Day in 1926, I was accompanist on several of the numbers, and continued for many years, playing the score for Henry Cornely and his associates, Prof. [LePaige?], and many others.

“I was glad to see the Federal Music Project established in 1935. I have been associated with the program in Florida from the beginning, always working in some capacity, and as accompanist in concerts for both public and private entertainments, the Federal Theatre, and others. It has been the [salavation?] for old musicians, and an oasis in the land of promise for the younger element who needed its coordinated training, and I am in hopes that some way may be opened for its continuation.

“I think President Roosevelt's administration will go down in history as the greatest endeavor in the humanitarianism ever promulgated, and I am heartily in favor of it. If he is able, or can be prevailed upon to accept a third term, I am all for it!”