

["The Poppy Lady"]

February 8-9, 1939

Miss Moina Belle Michael

"The Poppy Lady

Georgian Hotel Fifty Fifth -floor Room 523

Athens, Georgia

Hornsby

Miss Michael

I entered the Georgian Hotel walked through its spacious lobby to the clerks desk and asked him if he would call Miss Michael's room, and find out if it was convenient for me to come up. She told him she was expecting me, as I had made an engagement the day before to visit her.

When I got on the elevator, to go to the fifth floor, I must admit I was a little nervous, I got off at the fifth floor walked down one long empty empty hall-way except for the carpet on the floor, and turned into a nother , a few doors down I found the number, knocked upon the door, a voice within said: "come in." I opened the door there stood Miss Moina Michael, she extended her hand to me saying, "welcome into my living room, library, office, dining room, kitchen and bed room. This is the only place I have to invite visitors. Do you know as much as I have done for the world they don't even so much as to five give me paper and stamps to do my letter writing in answer to the thousands of answers , and stamps to mail them with. Right now I am preparing a speech to give over the [?] radio in New York, in the spring. That means new clothes, an evening dress to wear while I am giving my talk. The

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thoughts of all that makes me sick. You know I haven't been well for some time. One thing I simply don't like to do is pack for a trip. [???

“Now what is it you want? A story of my life, why that is very kind of you to think my life history is worth mentioning, but I am always doing things like that I have thousands of questions 2 asked me every day. Why , I am just like a little wren just as simple as simple can be. My sister once said to my, ‘why, Beckey you are just too simple for words.’ That's why I remind myself of the little wren, just a simple little common place person. People will write the best things about me when I am gone.

Her room is neatly furnished, a walnut chest of drawers, which serves as a dresser on this sits a toilet set of blue glass. A large mirror hangs over the chest of drawers. A single bed with low square posts serves as a divan, a tapestry cover is placed spread over the bed and several large pillows are covered with the same material , are arranged upright across one end and around the back of the bed. A screen draped with harmonizing material is placed to obscure from view the desk , typewriter, hot plate and other articles used for house keeping aid. Miss Michael was wearing a blue crepe dress trimmed at the neck with a crochet collar of a delicate pattern caught with a gold pin of full blown and buds of poppies bordered with pearls, perhaps a gift for some noble work she has done in regard to the work to immortalize “Poppy Day.”

“Where do you want me to begin, way back to my childhood days[.??]? Well I was born in Walton County, just a short distance from Good-Hope, between Monroe and High Shoals, August 15, 1869. I was the oldest daughter, my mother was Alice Sherwood Wise and married John Marion Michael. I am of French Huguenot lineage, and borned in a cherry log cabin with a log floor, on the spot where the first cabin was built on which was the first clearing in that county. When my father built a better house the log floor was taken up and the building used for a smoke house. Often I was called from my playhouse to put oak chips on the fire when my parents were curing their meat; mother would say; 3 ‘Beckey run

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and put just three chips on the fire.' It didn't mean anything to me than, oh, the mistakes I have made if I could call those times back, I could be of more service to the world.

"During the war the ashes were raked off the top of the ground in that smoke house the earth was run through an ash hopper and the salt from the meat that had dripped on the ground was extracted from it and used to season food. Oh, what a time people had in those days, I think it was [?] remarkable how my grandmother carried on after her father died she was the youngest of nine she herself was only eighteen, how she took the plantation over and managed it successfully. He was a large land owner and had many slaves. But 'Shermon's Sherman's March through Georgia' changed all that. I think that the things in Margaret Mitchell's book 'Gone With The Wind' were true, I am sure it was that way around Atlanta or she would never have written it. To my mind Meloney was the true type of Southern Character. When I was a child and saw those stately men and women so noble and fine it never occurred to me a bad person ever lived.

"Everyone in that community turned out on meeting day, we had two meetings each month one Sunday we went to the Baptist church and the next we went over to the Primitive Baptist. I can see them now, those good women and those grand old men with long white beard, praying and singing in church.

"I went to school at [Braswell?] Academy in Morgan County, and also attend / ed Martain Martin Institute from 1883 until 1886 however, I did not graduate. My parents were not able to send me to school the 4 next term. The first week in June of 1885 I left school and went home. The next day I met the children of school-age of the neighborhood / a one-room, vacant negro cabin, on the hill, and launched my crude canoe on the educational sea. My immaturity, ignorance, guldness [guidness?] and my mother's faith in me, together with her anxiety concerning the children younger than myself and the neighbors' children, was a cargo of this frail bark. I habe have taught in county schools / in rural one-room house, in town schools in larger buildings, in church schools, Bessie Tift College, state schools with big enrollments and large and ancient buildings , fifty-four years.

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“South of my home on the old family plantation, some two miles distant across the fields, hills, woods and Indian Creek, was the little community, with the country post office, where we [?] got our mail every Friday afternoon. There was a vacant chestnut log structure which had been the Robert Hale store. It had shuttered windows and front and back doors, an open fire-place, I taught school five months at this building in Good-Hope. I received eight cents per day for the sixteen children in school for the five months. It was paid to me January 1886. I used \$30.00 \$20.00 of it for dental work. The other I gave to my father.

“The same year I taught at Liberty, in Greene County in a one-room school building it also was used for a church and Sunday School, one Sunday in a month. I boarded with Mr. and Mrs. Watt Wray. Their young son, Willis, went to school with me each day. This “Old Wray” place is a dream place with me; the original forest which- made had tremendous groves bordered bordered flower garden and the strutting pea-cocks beyond the paled in yard and 5 beyond this grove. Big vegetables gardens with real paper shell pecan trees which was immense. It is said of this old place that the owner used to fertilize his cotton rows with hog lard. But this generation of Wray's was living through “the relics of former grandeur,” as the rest of us southerners were after, “The Surrender.”

“I taught four 4 years in the Baptist Orphan*1'[s*1] Home; two 2 years in *2 Atlanta , on [its?] Courtland Street [School in *2] and two 2 years after it was moved to [Hapevella?] Haperville [??] sick Sickness overtook me and and had to go home when I was strong enough [????] I went back to the school room , I taught this time at Apalachee it was at this place that I conducted a funeral[,?] That was in 1897. A little girl in that community had been died from the result of burns. burned to death . I told my school children to bring flower to the funeral the next day to put on the grave. When the [cortage?] arrived we were waiting on the outside of the building waiting. In those days there were no hearses, so that casket was placed across the foot of a buggy, accompa*3i[n*3]ed by two men, back of them was the family in a spring wagon. [everyone *4] in those days *4 turned-out to a funeral. A runner was sent for the pastor, only to find learn that he was conducting another

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funeral at that time times. *5 Joe [?] was attending court at High Shoals. who was [the only other [?] preacher living nearby that they could think of was *5] Turning to me crying, her mother she said: 'miss Moina I simply can't bury my child without a funeralsl, can't you do it for me?' I couldn't denigh deny her so I said a few words, had my children sing; 'When He Cometh To Make Up His Jewels,' and I closed with a prayer. There wasn't a man there, that didn't feel condemned, they couldn't even pray in public, and had to get a little country school 6 teacher to preach the funeral, that was forty years ago.

She laughed [?] as she confessed : "I have had to pinched-hit at a funeral and wedding too . When I was at Columbia University, a friend of mine was marrying my cousin, Congressman Walter Wise, of Fayetteville, Georgia. At the last minute , Walter wired the girl he was to marry. 'Best man is sick, get Cousin Moina to act as best man.' She asked me and I accepted agreed to the plans . Walter arrived on the day of the wedding, which was also my friend's graduation day, my friend was dressing wore her wedding dress under the [graduation?] [dress?] [??] and after graduation after that exercises were over rode over Central Park. At six [7?] o'clock we drove up to the Baptist Church. It was all very homey , no fuss about it, after the wedding, the witnesses had to sign ever so many papers, there were ten of us in all. The pastor, his wife, secretary, clerk and etc. When it came my time, to sign , I signed it wrote Moina Michael, best man, everyone laughed. Walter has taught his children to cut out every picture of me and paste it in a scrapbook and write underneath it 'best man at his Daddy's wedding.'

"I was house / mother at Winnie Davis Memorial Hall when [?] our country was deckared declared the World War . I gave all each of the boys I had taught a some little remembrance to take with them him . Back at Apalachee, I had [?] the brightest boy in school he beat at spelling in his lessons and in every game the boys played had that rarely found ability that enabled him to excel in studies and athletics too he played. He would run to me, and say: 'miss Michael I won that game.' I would say to him reply , 'yes, Louie you have won your spurs.' He was among the last to come by to say [? War?] good-bye. I told him, " Louie , I want to give you something as a little remembrance to take with you. " He

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had joined the Calvary Cavalry so , I told him , ' I am going to give you a pair of spurs, ' he said, 'Oh, Miss Michael I was hoping you would say that, I have everything but [?] spurs .' We tried to get them in Athens however, we but couldn't find them. 7 So I gave him a five dollar \$5 bill. I don't think I ever saw anyone as happy, he got then bought the spurs in Atlanta on his way to Fort McPherson. He told me[;?] he was going to write a note saying: 'I am wearing the spurs given me by Miss Moina Michael. in war, no matter what happens to me in this war, whether I die of a natural cause or am shot down on the battle field, I want them sent back to her.' Louie was in the first victorious battle fought in France, he was one of the men who kept the wires from being cut. It was a heavy-fight, but when that battle was over he sent a message to his commanding officer saying, ' we won the battle everything is O. K. signed Louie. ' That message was flashed over the world. When the war was over, he brought those spurs to me. I took them patted him on the shoulder , saying to him , Louie you won your spurs. " She showed them to me, also with the spurs was a whistle: "This" [?] " was the [?] whistle blown in France that ended that to announce ending of the war.

"I was in Europe when Archduke Ferdinand Ferdinand was killed, and [I?] hurried home with the other Americans American tourists to keep out of the war, but I soon discovered that our country would have to join in the hostilities. I will never forget that afternoon in April when I learned that [?] the United States had entered in that great war. I waited impatiently on the steps at Winnie Davis Hall , where I was housemother, for the paper boy, after getting it the paper I went to my room to read every word. # I took a leave of absence from the Normal school, now the Co-ordinate College, and went to the Y. M. C. A. training Conference of at Columbia University in New York. [# ?] It was there the final step in the generation of the poppy idea came, for it was there I read a challenging poem.

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"I met with a [considerable] difficulty, a French woman, Madame E. Guerin, took up the poppy cause for France, and brought poppies to this country. The result [?] was competition for the disabled American veterans , who were fashioning the poppies in

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government hospitals for one cent each. I proved that I was the first to originate had originated the idea. She gave up her the work here and later took her poppies, [make?] made by the French war widows , to Earl Haig and in England. The memorial poppy has gain gained wide circulation, and created our annual poppy day[,?] in May, 30.

"I promised a mother whose only son went down at sea on a transport, that those who went down at sea soldiers whose bodies had found a watery grave should have their definate definite floral tributes as well as those whose graves were on the land. So a poppy [?] anchor is placed on the waves at Savannah of the Atlantic Ocean on each Memorial Day.

"I saw no reason why the beautiful new bridges built in Georgia since 1918 shouldn't be dedicated to our World War men who died to keep civilization on the highways alive . Through me , the Teachers Teachers' College, established its own chartered Red Cross Chapter, the/ first early school in the United States to have such a chapter.

"My foreign services were done service was in Rome, Italy, where I assisted the Embassy and the Consulate in handling the difficulties created for American tourists tourists by the war. The headquarters of this commitee were in the Hotel Royal. I was presented one of the two distinguished Service Medal's which have been awarded in the United States. Haig's Legion of London, England has adopted the Memorial poppy idea, which brought a total of over \$20,000,000.00 profits on Poppy Day since 1921.

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"I was a war worker assistant secretary to Dr. Irwin, President of the Y. M. C. A. in New York, and it was in our quarters Hamilton Hall in the basement of Hamilton Hall that my idea of the [memorial?] poppy was worked out. I think the greatest thrill I ever had was when Columbia University celebrated its one-hundred and seventy-fifth anniversary. I was the only woman mentioned in their report of that great and gigantic institution with thousands of students scattered all over the world. I was too sick to get a thrill when the

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state unveiled a bust of me in the State Capitol however, I don't think it was so much in honor of me as it was just a record of the state's achievements.

“Just think what I have caused the world to realize has realized from the sale of poppies each year ! just seventy million dollars. yet the world don't donate one penny toward my support and and I have barely enough to buy actual necessities. I have a letter asking for a donation toward the World World's Fair. I think they ought to be ashamed of themselves as much as I have done all ready themselves to ask me for cash . However, I am going to New York to give a talk sometime during the Fair. I told them I wanted to make it to give my speech as near Poppy Day as I possibly can. My, expenses will be paid for that trip. Requests come to me daily from people are always asking who ask for donations , I get them every day. I donated gave \$750.00 to help put over the Georgia Bi-Centennial. I do appreciate all the nice things said about me. Someone said of me: ‘Betsy Ross is Uncle Sam's most famous seamstress and Miss Moina is his most celebrated gardner gardener , for she planted the Memorial Poppy in the heart of the English speaking world.’ I also have a medal from Serbia [Syria?] , brought to me by Dr. Rosalie Mortan in 1930.

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“One day last week I had a letter from a mother in New Jersey, asking me; ‘what in the world is wrong ...’ with the University of Georgia I wrote my son in [?] and asked him if he had met you he wrote, reflected that he had not. I told him to go to see you right away.’ I wrote her that the University of Georgia didn't owe me anything and they knew I live very quietly here at the hotel, that everyone here knows where to find me. if they wanted their out-of-town students to know who I am. Why, [?] I don't feel important and why should anyone want to know who I am ? What I did, and am doing was is no more than any other person would have done. I only thought of it first. Everyone has some good in them, all they need is a little get up and get about them to put over what they want accomplished [‘I have earned every dollar I have had *7] since I began working, back in my young days *7. I began work to educate my younger sisters. I helped supported support my parents , and

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paying paid all my subsequent expenses for my own educational advantages the years of misfortune had left my family penniless . I moved [?] them into town and when I taught in the school at Monroe. One of my brothers married and [died? ? only [?] then died [after?] a short time my other brother died a very young man. Father's health was bad. I , being the oldest, had to support my our family. When my sister , Nell Colquitt, now (Mrs. J. W. Chambley [Chamber?] graduated at the University she was the first woman who had ever spoken [?] from that stage [?] [graduation?] [platform?] [?] that institution.

“[[now?] I am too old to do much work *8] now, I was housemother at Winnie Davis Memorial Hall twenty-five years, *8. I am not [?] well enough to do my own work, such as sewing and darning. A woman came to me with a pitiful tale. she didn't have work, owed a large doctors bill and the drug stores were pushing her for their money. I let 11 have the money and asked her to come to my room and fix mend my clothes for me she promised [?] anything until she got the money , now she won't come near me.

“Did you read in Lucian Lamar Knight's book what he had to say about me? It is very good, but when he wrote it he sent the manuscript to me to read for my approval. In a note to [?] me he [told?] said , ' I have only given Rebecca Felton ten 10 pages and have given allowed twelve 12 for you.' I wrote him a letter and quoted what a very distinguished person said about me when he introduced me to an ordinance [?] before I gave an address. He said, 'rebecca Felton belongs to Georgia, Martha Berry , belongs to the mountains, Milly Rutherford belongs to Lucy Cobb, but Moina Michael belongs to the world.' Now I told Mr. Knight, 'decide for your self if I am worth twelver twelve whole pages [???) in your book.' When I received a copy of [????] the book [??] it contained a 12-twelve whole pages designated to me page sketch of my lifetime work . I thought it was very nice to be in 'Who's Who' in America from 1932-1933.

“I have a busy day ahead of me. I am expecting an out-of-town guest, and have just bought some lovely roses for her room. I wish I had the money to maintain a little home so I could have my friends, but this is the only home I can afford. I am not afraid here, the

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manager is awfully good to me they do my laundry and I don't even have to buy soap. I down go with you for my mail. Every time you ask one of the helpers to do something for you they expect a tip You feel like you must tip the help for errands like that . So I try every way I can to save my nickels. I am glad you came, and don't consider yourself under no my obligation, it is just like I going to your office and you coming to mine. I am always glad to 12 help when ever do what I can. Some day I hope to be well again so I can have [afford?] a place large enough to display some of the many lovely gifts have [been?] presented to me.” We rode down on the elevator together, and I left her in the lobby of the hotel.