

White House Mistress Fifty Years Ago

Living quietly in the big brick building known as the Louisa Home, in Washington, D. C., is a white-haired woman who was the mistress of the White House more than half a century ago. By the world at large her very existence has been forgotten nor would the mention of her name—Mrs. Letitia Semple—recall any memory whatever to the ordinary reader. It was as Letitia Tyler that the white-haired old lady first became known to Washington society, in the days when the capital city was scarcely more than a country village, containing a few fine public buildings separated by long stretches of nearly bottomless mud. She was the second daughter of President John Tyler and she was a Virginia belle in the days when that was the clearest title to beauty that could be bestowed in this country.

Tyler's administration seems a long way back to most of us. It seems strange to think that this serene-faced woman, who is still active and vigorous, knew and talked with Webster and Clay and Calhoun and the other leaders of that period which was so prolific of great men. Webster she saw often and she describes him as a man of imposing presence which made its power felt in any assemblage.

"At the time of our coming to Washington," said Mrs. Semple, in recalling her White House experiences of fifty years ago, "my mother's health was too poor to admit of her taking active charge of the duties naturally devolving upon the wife of the president. My elder sister and myself had our newly made homes in Virginia to supervise and my youngest sister was only a child. Therefore, by common consent, the wife of our brother Robert became the mistress of the White House so far as the public side of the life there was concerned. However, my other sister and myself were there a good part of the time.

"This arrangement continued until after my mother's death, which occurred in the White House. Then my brother established himself in law practice in Philadelphia and his wife wished to make her home there. Meanwhile my husband had been appointed a paymaster in the navy and as that led to his being away from home a great part of the time I came here to take charge of my father's household and remained until 1844.

"There were no great social entertainments in the White House during my father's term. My mother's ill-health and later her death forbade that. For the most part we lived openly, hospitably and unpretentiously; in fact, just as we had been accustomed to do at home in Virginia.

"I remember that it was customary during the sessions of congress to entertain guests at dinner in the White House twice a week. The former of these was usually attended by about twenty prominent public men, the personal and political friends of my father. The second was on a somewhat larger scale. It usually included members of the diplomatic corps and the number of guests was generally about forty. But these dinners were always very simple affairs and they ended at what would be considered now a ridiculously early hour.

"Then on other evenings it was customary for the president's family to be informally

at home, that is, to receive calls from friends and acquaintances. But even on these occasions the visitors always departed before 10 o'clock. At that hour the White House was closed and the family retired."

Although Mrs. Semple is nearly 80 years old she takes an active interest in all current affairs. She receives many invitations from people in public life in Washington, and although she is of course unable to accept any of these, she is much pleased to have them as a proof that she is not forgotten by those who are in and of the world in which she was once a leader.

Christmas Money is Not Wasted

The business side of the holiday season is, perhaps, for the majority in these days the most important. Good cheer seems to be inseparable from the spending of money. It may be that many people do not consider



CHILDREN ADMIRING TOYS IN OMAHA SHOP WINDOWS.—Photo by Louis R. Bostwick.

the enormous transactions of the Christmas time, both in its domestic and foreign relation. Three ships left New York last week with money orders representing \$758,000. Probably all or nearly all of this money was earned in the United States, and most of it will be spent by relatives and friends of the earners in Europe. Europe, therefore, owes a special debt of gratitude to this country. Most of this money went to Great Britain, Germany and Sweden, but nearly every important country over there has received some benefit from the United States. At this season of the year many Swedes who live in our northwest, where farming is not active in the winter, go home, spend the winter with friends and return in the spring in time to put in their crops. One ship, a few days ago, carried from New York 600. These people, of course, take back money earned here, and Sweden becomes so much richer.



CARTING CHRISTMAS TREES IN OMAHA'S WHOLESALE DISTRICT.—Photo by Louis R. Bostwick.

The international side of the holiday season is becoming more important every year, but it is also, so far as we are concerned, becoming more and more one-sided. The domestic side is that which concerns nearly everybody. It is a poor home that does not in some way feel the influence of Christmas. Presents in these days are in such great variety and are so cheap that gladness by reason of gifts can shed a ray in nearly every hole and corner of this wide land. In the cities there is an exchange of money for nearly every sort of thing. The country cousins come in and buy to the limit of their means, and the rural population pour into the crowded centers of people all manner of good things to eat, and so the balance is kept up. The aggregate of money thus put into circulation in a country of nearly 75,000,000 people where Christmas is observed, is beyond computation. Very little of the money spent at this

season is really wasted. A toy used and broken may be discarded, but the use of it even for a brief season has added something to the general contribution of happiness. Even an elaborate dinner may be worth what is spent upon it if it makes the diners better friends than before. And the best feature of the season is that the poor and the unfortunate are never forgotten. Though unable to spend little or nothing at Christmas there are those who always see to it that the poor are remembered. Though the joyous side of Christmas may sometimes be over-emphasized, the most carping critic must admit that the good done at this season far outweighs any harm that may follow in the train of its observance. And so the dominant thought this week will be that each giver, be he never so humble, will feel that he is able to contribute something to the happiness of somebody.

Will Christian the Decatur

Miss Maria Ten Eyck Decatur Mayo, a fair young daughter of the south, has been invited to christen the torpedo boat destroyer Decatur, now building at the shipyards of the William R. Trigg company of Richmond, Va., and which will be launched early next spring. Miss Mayo has accepted the invitation.

It is eminently fitting, says the Philadel-

phia Times, that the beautiful young Virginian—she is only 17 years of age—should officiate at the ceremony which will honor the memory of her illustrious ancestor, the great Stephen Decatur. She is the great-grandniece of the famous sea warrior and his nearest living descendant; and a glance at the heroic lineage of the youthful sponsor of the war ship named in his honor has a timely interest.

Stephen Decatur—he of the revolutionary period, 1776-1801, was in the service of his country during the war of independence, and afterward when the trouble with France threatened serious consequences. He also at one time commanded a squadron operating in the West Indies, his flagship being the Philadelphia, destroyed by his son Stephen in 1801. This first Stephen had three sons, Stephen, James and John. Of these three worthy sons of a noble sire James was killed in the war with Tripoli, while very young, Stephen married Miss Susan Wheeler of Norfolk, Va., the daughter and only child of Luther Wheeler, at one time mayor of Richmond, and president of one of its boards. There were no children born of this union, but the third son, John, married Miss Maria Susanna Ten Eyck, the only child of a Dutch gentleman, and merchant of New York. This John Decatur was Colonel John Decatur, of the United States army, and to him were born several children, among them Stephen Decatur, third, also of the navy; and a daughter, the present Mrs. Wyndham R. Mayo, who is the mother of the maiden chosen to christen the war ship named for her distinguished ancestor.

On the paternal side the charming sponsor of the ship is likewise distinguished. Her father, Captain Wyndham R. Mayo, is a son of Judge Peter Mayo of Norfolk. He is highly connected, his mother having been Miss Upshur, of the old Virginia family of that name. He served in the confederate navy, and after the war commanded one of the Bay Line steamers plying between Baltimore and Norfolk. His wife, the mother of the young woman, is a very beautiful woman. She was Miss Decatur.

Lost and Won

An Outlander in Johannesburg, mounted on a smart-looking horse, was stopped by a Boer official in the market square and ordered to surrender his steed for the service of the republic. He declined and was promptly pulled off. Regaining his feet the Outlander lowered his head and charged straight at the Boer, after the fashion of an angry goat. The Boer, taken by surprise at this novel mode of resistance, was rolled in the dust by the force of the impact and before he could recover his footing the Outlander had remounted and was galloping away at racehorse speed.



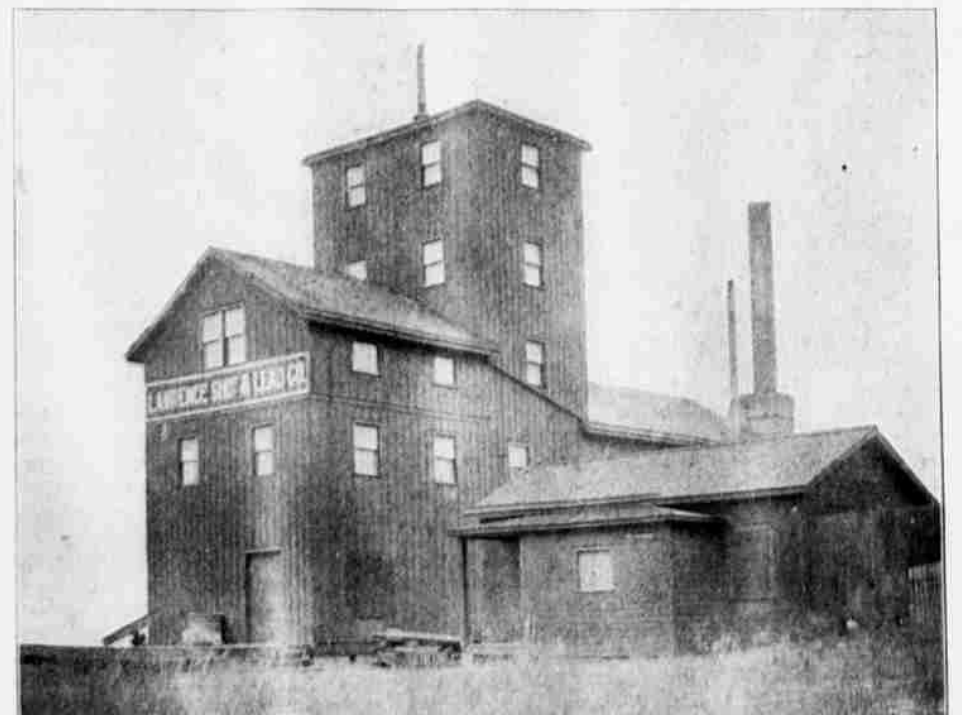
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