

MARY'S COLUMN

Mamie Starks Had A Remarkable Life

By MARY STEIN, *Tribune Society Editor*

Mrs. Mamie Starks died last week at the age of 86 but her kindness and goodness of character along with her ability as a teacher will leave their mark on the many left whose life she influenced. She held the respect of the white members of our community and of the Negroes in our town most of whom she taught during the 37 years she worked in the local schools. She began her career in 1910 and retired in 1947.

I am grateful to another retired teacher, Miss Lil Emery, for bringing 'Miss Mamie' to my attention, and telling me much of the wonderful work she had done. I had heard about Miss Mamie all my life and was aware of the civic work she had done and the many boards on which she served, but I knew her only through the eyes of others and the complimentary remarks they made of her.

Miss Lil told me that the late Professor Buerk always referred to Miss Mamie as a heroine because of an interesting and tragic event. Mamie Starks began teaching in the little school known as the Olden Street school at the corner of Union and Pearl streets which is now the ball park. In April of 1917 when the cyclone hit New Albany that part of town was badly affected and the school house nearly demolished. Mamie freed herself from the rubble and frantically sought help, but the neighboring homes were wrecked, too, and every person unharmed was busily engaged with saving his own family.

So Mamie thought of her friend, Professor Buerk, and ran all the way into town to 7th and Spring to the old People's College for help and Prof. Buerk said he could scarcely keep up with Mamie who ran the distance back to the school, knowing that every minute could mean a life.

She worked with flash light into the night until every child had been freed. Many she saved, but some she found dead.

For years she served as principal of the Jackson Street School and taught at Griffin Street School, at Division Street School and at Scribner High School at West First and Spring. She also had charge of the choir at the Second Baptist Church and taught her school children to sing Negro Spirituals.

On one occasion her students presented a program for the Piankeshaw chapter of D.A.R. and when the D.A.R. committee offered money to Mamie to treat the children she refused saying "If the children can bring pleasure to anyone and entertain them, I don't want them to think that they should be paid for it but rather think of it as a gift they are blessed with to give."

Miss Lil Emery also recalls that back when the teachers had the County Institute days and books were required to be studied and reviewed all awaited Miss Mamie's programs as they were of great interest since she was a fluent speaker and had a sharp sense of humor. She had a wonderful relationship with other teachers and Miss Lil added that on visiting days at schools Miss Mamie's classes were always found to be the best behaved.

When Mamie was called on to serve on any committee of a community agency, or on any project or drive, she always cooperated fully.

She is survived by a son, Stanley Starks, and nine grandchildren. Stanley is known to the present generation of school children as he is the driver of the school bus that transports the athletic teams and the elementary students when they are taken on visiting tours.

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