

## Conversation with a Friend: Emmeline Cooper's Slice of Life

Emmeline King Cooper seems to know everyone in Savannah. She was an acquaintance or a good friend of most of the key players in the founding of Historic Savannah Foundation. As we near the end of HSF's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, we thought it would be informative to get a slice of life of the 1940s and 1950s, as well as her perspective on what *"the ladies might think now."*

Emmeline has lived in Savannah for most of her life. Her father was Dr. Ruskin King, who practiced pediatrics in Savannah for more than fifty years. Her mother was Mary Justice King, an accomplished singer who met her husband when they were both studying in New York City. (Emmeline and her sister, Judy, were born there.) The King family moved to Savannah in 1934 to live first on the corner of Hall and Abercorn Streets.

The Morel family was next door at 205 East Hall Street. Emma Morel (Mrs. Leopold Adler II) and Emmeline often rose at dawn to drink Kool-Aid and orchestrate elaborate bird funerals, having filched a 3x5 file card box from Dr. King's office. Sometimes they abandoned their brick sidewalk and crossed Hall street to skate on Mrs. Wilder's smooth, concrete sidewalk. Mrs. Wilder was always gracious and generous with pink and white peppermints.

In the 1940s the King family moved to 10 West Taylor Street, on Monterey Square. In those

days Taylor and Jones Streets were lined with doctors' offices with St. Joseph's Hospital where the Rose of Sharon is today. Emmeline tells that there were more playmates on Hall Street than on Taylor, but Nina Norvell (Mastman) and Courtney Knight (Gaines) were not too far away.

The 1950s were eventful for Emmeline. She finished college, traveled in Europe and South America, worked at the Savannah Public Library, Savannah Morning News and WTOC, met and married Robert Cooper, moved to Buffalo, NY, and back, bore two of her three sons, and served as secretary to Historic Savannah in its early days.

Here are assorted, non-chronological snippets from Emmeline:

I remember when streetcars gave way to buses on Abercorn Street. A friend and I often took a bus downtown to see a movie at the Lucas, Avon, Bijou, or Odeon theaters. Fifty cents would buy a ticket with enough left over for orange juice at Tanner's or root beer at Walgreen's or Livingston's. Or we might hop on the open air trolley on Habersham at Leopold's and ride out to Isle of Hope to see a friend or the ter-rapins at Barbee's. Sometimes we rode our bikes as far as Isle of Hope or Gordonston. No television, no computers, no air conditioning, but lots of fun and lots of freedom.

Our mother always wore hat and

gloves when we went shopping on Broughton Street. Favorite targets were Adler's, Levy's, the Accessory Shop, Fine's, Globe Shoe Company, Chaskin's, and Levy Jewelers. For everything from hair ribbons to hosiery to housewares, we always headed for Adler's. For a dress, we'd often cross Broughton Street to Fine's, which handled only women's wear. Jake Fine was the quintessential retailer. When we stepped off the elevator onto the second floor, there he stood in coat and tie, warmly welcoming and summoning a saleswoman who was always standing, always in black. My favorite was Mrs. Johnson, who helped us choose, brought our selections to a fitting room, brought the next size up or down when necessary, and ar-



anged for alterations. It was never a problem to take things home "on approval." Working at Fine's was

Mrs. Johnson's career, not just a job.

Two other favorite shops were the Lady Jane and Town and Country, both farther south on Bull Street. When Adler's burned in the late 1950s, Penney's took over that corner of Bull and Broughton for a time. At some point, Levy's became Maas Brothers. The closing of these two stores marked the end of department stores downtown. Then malls were built and shopping moved south; Broughton Street withered for a time. Hooray for

Levy Jeweler's and the Globe Shoe Company for keeping their doors open and waiting for Broughton Street to bounce back. It's wonderful to see it bustling again.

Favorite high school "hangouts" were the Triple-X and Our House, drive-ins with curb service, both begun by Herb Traub. A favorite treat at the "X" was a Juicy Pig, which was barbecue on a bun. Yum! One memorable afternoon, Anne McCaskill (Leonard) and I bought a package of cigarettes and headed to the Triple-X to sit in the parking lot and learn how to inhale. Much later that afternoon, dizzy and miserable, I sat on the mounting block in front of our house on Taylor Street (we called it "the stumbling block") until I could climb that long flight of stairs. We also had fun at the Knight's house on Whitaker Street where Courtney Knight (Gaines) had a Rumpus Room in the basement. I remember a ping-pong table and record player with Tommy Dorsey's "Opus No. 1" for jitterbugging.

In the 1950s, Mr. Day was manager of the old DeSoto Hotel and Dick Dickerson was his Man Friday. We spent lots of time planning costumes for the fabulous parties that Dick orchestrated at Halloween. One year Ermine Claghorn (Blumenfeld), Henry Clemens, Bill Titus and I covered a mound of chicken wire with a sheet, sprayed it gray, and painted on two huge eyes. The four of us climbed inside this creation, armed with eight plumber's friends, and joined

the grand march at the Sapphire Room, winning a prize as an octopus.

In the 1940s, my mother loved to shop at the Grocerteria, on Barnard near City Market. Dugger was there, always ready to help. The City Market was nearby, busy with women shelling butter beans, sugar cane stalks in season, and shrimp-women with bucket in each hand and basket balanced on head, preparing to stroll the streets of Savannah, hawking their wares. Then the city fathers decided that Savannah needed more parking spaces and the market must go. The year was 1953 and Anna Colquitt Hunter, a remarkable dynamo of a woman decided to plan a farewell party for City Market. We were to come as something sold



in the market. At the Market Ball, Emory Jarrott won a prize as a bunch of radishes, wearing a red bathing cap and red balloons. My date and I painted our skin green, stapled magnolia leaves to bathing suits, made hats of green shag carpet, corralled Bylee Hunnicutt to walk with us, and came as Green Giants, as in peas. Mr. and Mrs. Robert W. Groves rode in a horse-drawn wagon. It was a bittersweet gala because we knew the market was doomed.

More about Anna Colquitt Hunter. I knew her first at the Savannah Morning News. I can see her now at her manual typewriter in the newsroom, batting out the Book Page where she wrote about interesting publica-

tions and elicited book reviews from thoughtful readers. I was working for the SMN then and wrote a feature article about Anna and Capt. Frank Spencer, "Modern Cliff-Dwellers" who lived on Bay Street, overlooking the Savannah River. Anna's apartment at Bay and Lincoln was also a studio where she produced paintings treasured by many today.

Savannah lost the fight to save City Market, but when the Isaiah Davenport house on Columbia Square was threatened because a nearby funeral home needed more parking spaces, Anna Hunter said, "No more!" She mobilized six other determined, feminine dynamos, sparked the creation of Historic Savannah Foundation, and served as its first head. Historic Savannah's first move was the purchase of the Davenport house. No more is Davenport House a shabby boarding house with laundry draped on its balcony!

I had the privilege of knowing all seven of these determined dynamos. They were Elinor Grunsfeld Adler, Lucy Barrow McIntire, Nola McEvoy Roos, Katherine Judkins Clark, Jane Adair Wright, Dorothy Ripley Roebing, and Anna Hunter. Next to Anna, I knew Mrs. Adler best because Emma Morel Adler and I had been friends forever, were in each other's weddings, and my mother and Mrs. Adler were friends. I remembered Mrs. McIntire from early years on Hall Street, then later saw her in action on committees where she was able to listen to mountains of verbiage and cut

through to the kernel of what needed to be done.

Back in Savannah in 1958, Robert and I first rented an apartment on West Hull Street from Alida Harper Fowlkes (Mrs. Hunter McGuire Fowlkes), preservation pioneer. Alida helped us find 105 West Perry Street, just across the street from her, which we bought in the 1950s and where we lived for 38 years while rearing our three sons.

We bought 105 from Mrs. Emily Saba, who was thrilled when we came along. She was tired of cooking for retired railroad men and wanted to move to Tybee and fish. The parlor floor was covered with linoleum and beds. The residents loved to sit on the front steps in their undershirts and railroad caps. The house was home to fourteen people.

Around us in our block were apartments and commerce. How lucky that we had boys, because there were no little girls in our neighborhood! Our boys visited back and forth, though, with Walter Hartridge, Jr., Robbie Federlein, Reid and Robert Williamson, and John and Sam Thorsen, all living close by.

Walter's father was Walter Charlton Hartridge, Harvard graduate and preservation scholar, who was mentor to the preservation pioneers of the 1950s. The Hartridges lived nearby on Hull and Barnard Streets. I can see Walter now, striding through Orleans Square on his way home. One of my treasures is a hand-written copy that Walter, Sr., made of an 1872 newspaper article about the

building of our house.

Our boys had older friends, too. Alida Fowlkes's mother, Miss Georgia, (Mrs. William Harper), and our son, Ruskin, often celebrated their birthdays together on September 28. Ruskin and Robert, Jr., knew Mrs. Lewis and her delivery boy, Jimmy, at Lewis's Grocery on Liberty and Whitaker. Buster Gottlieb and Harvey were across the street at Gottlieb's Gas and Oil and often had bags of cookies from Gottlieb's Bakery. Mrs. Coleman had a confectionery on the Barnard Street end of the block. On the darker side were the Horse and Buggy bar/pool hall around the corner and Harry's Place at Liberty and Barnard. Our boys often saw men with the staggers. Once we found one "sleeping it off" under our front steps.

Yes, our two older boys saw "Life" with a capital "L" when they were growing up downtown. When we're together now they love to reminisce about those days. Ruskin is now on the piano faculties of Davidson and Salem Colleges, and Robert, Jr., is photography editor for the Panama City (Florida) News Herald. Graham, born in 1970, saw a gentler side of life in his early years. There were more families with children in the neighborhood. Graham and his family now live in Savannah where he stays busy with home improvements and renovations.

I worked for Historic Savannah when Albert Stoddard, then Lee Adler were president. For a time the office was in the apartment where Robert and I had lived before we bought 105 West Perry.

The loan of this space was a generous gift from Alida Fowlkes. I remember well when Albert and Lee joined forces in 1959 with Karl Roebing and Dr. Harry Duncan to save Marshall Row from demolition. Historic Savannah consulted often with Frances Edmunds, executive director of Historic Charleston. Lee began to tell "*The Savannah Story*," showing slides and stressing the economic value of historic preservation. In 1964, during one of his many years as president of Historic Savannah, the Revolving Fund was established. Downtown Savannah was not very residential then and prices were low. Can you believe that in those days one could purchase a house in Gordon Block for \$2,500.00?

You asked me what "The Seven" would think about Savannah today?

I think they would be happy to see Broughton Street bustling again. They would be thrilled to see the beauty of the squares and would rejoice that Elbert and Ellis Squares may be reclaimed. They would delight in the fact that so many families live down downtown and would be amazed at the price tags on downtown property. They would be proud to see that Davenport House and Historic Savannah are flourishing. I hope they would have a warm feeling of satisfaction that their combined effort helped to turn the tide of decay and demolition in Savannah and had a hand in creating the miracle, the mecca, the model that Savannah is today.

