FOUR SISTERS FROM BOSTON

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This paper[1] was not written in the spirit of *Roots* but rather in an attempt to put some flesh on the bones of the remarkable "Four Sisters from Boston" who contributed much to the development of Greenville in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Three of these notable ladies were my Great-Aunts and one was my Grandmother.[2] To understand them and the forces that molded their characters, one also needs to know my Great-Grandfather and my Great-Grandmother. The plan of the paper is to give some family background followed by a sketch of each of the four sisters.

Great-Grandfather George Putnam was born in Delhi, New York, on October 28, 1828, and died in Greenville on February 17, 1890, at the age of seventy-two. He married Mary Jane Shepherdson on November 29, 1849, in Providence, Rhode Island. Great-Grandmother was born in Attleborough, Massachusetts, on December 25, 1822, and she died in Greenville eighty-eight years later on January 13, 1918.

My great-grandparents seem to have moved around over the years following their marriage for two daughters were born in Holliston, Massachusetts, a small town near Boston, one was born in Foxboro, Massachusetts, and the fourth was born in Middleborough, Vermont.[3] Their last home before moving to the South was Brookline, a suburb of Boston. In 1933 we made a trip north and visited Brookline. My Grandmother, then seventy years old, directed my Father to the old home saying it could be recognized by the open field just before we got to it. Of course, things had changed and we drove for miles with no

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[1]For the material in this paper I am grateful to my father and my brother, W. T. Adams and W. T. Adams, Jr.; to my uncle, Dr. Herbert Bailey; to my cousins, J. Harvey Cleveland, John Baker Cleveland, Betty Cleveland Livingston, Peggy Baker Walsh, Norma Anderson, and to many others. I have searched newspapers, the family Bible, diaries and autograph books. While some information may not be entirely accurate, it is as honest as everyone's memories will allow.

[2]Only two of these ladies I actually remember. These were "Aunt May," my Great Aunt, Mrs. M. P. Gridley, and "Tigee," my Grandmother, Mrs. Emma P. Baker.

[3]I have been to Middleborough and seen the remains of the mill in which Great Grandfather worked.

break in the houses. We had to start over and eventually found it. Before the rest of us could get out of the automobile, my Grandmother, with my mother trailing, was out of the car and up the steps of this tall house. She opened the door and swept past the open-mouthed owners and right on up the stairs. Mother kept insisting "you can't do this" but "Tigee" just kept on looking and saying that the house was just as they had left it.[4] She never paused upon reaching the second level but swept downstairs again and that was that. We children never got to see the house for she was through with it.

When the War Between the States broke out, Great-Grandfather Putnam had four daughters so he did not serve in the Union Army, paying a substitute to fight for him. We can assume that he really had no quarrel with the South for five years after the war ended he began making trips to the South to ascertain if a spinning mill was needed or feasible there. After traveling around for two years, he decided on Greenville, South Carolina, as the place for his operations. By this time he had a partner, O. H. Sampson. Mr. Sampson stayed in Boston to do the selling and to forward orders to Great-Grandfather Putnam in Greenville.

As is well known, Great-Grandfather built the first post-war spinning mill in the town of Greenville. He built it on the Reedy River near the present site of the Citizens and Southern bank and called it Camperdown.[5] The new mill was equipped with machinery furnished by Fales and Tanks and was water-powered. At first the mill had a wooden race that brought the water from above the falls to the power wheel. However, the power from the Reedy River proved inadequate and after a couple of years Great-Grandfather installed a steam engine to run the mill. When he started inquiring about for men to work in the mill, he found that the independent Southern farmers would not work in a mill, any mill. Consequently, he imported nineteen mill hands from up North as his first labor force. Later he built the Little Sampson Mill, which became American Spinning

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[4]The Putnam family had migrated to Greenville probably in 1874, fifty-nine years before.

[5]This is near the site of Richard Pearis's famous pre-Revolutionary mill and trading post. The name "Camperdown" was reputedly from the Camperdown elms which then grew along the banks of the Reedy River. Ed.

Company, and finally he built a mill for himself at Batesville.

We do not know for sure when Great-Grandfather brought his family South but it was about 1874 for that is the year he built his home the then fashionable, West Washington Street (704 West Washington Street, next door to the present main Post Office.)[6]

The partnership between Sampson and Great-Grandfather was beginning to show strains and Great-Grandfather Putnam began to think of building a mill for himself. He had heard rumors that the projected railroad between Atlanta and Charlotte was to go through Pelham[7] so he bought some property nearby at Batesville[8] on Rocky Creek. Great-Grandfather built "his" mill on Rocky Creek. The building is still there and used by the Old Mill Stream restaurant.[9]

It was during this time that Great-Grandfather split with his partner, Sampson. The final break was precipitated by Sampson when he sent down an order for a certain kind of thread. Great-Grandfather wrote back to his partner that he could not make that specific thread. Sampson answered that Great-Grandfather should send any kind of thread since the customer would not know the difference. George Putnam did know the difference, would not be party to such shady practice, and dissolved the partnership with Sampson.

Meanwhile the family had moved to Greenville and events had occurred to produce two things I had long wondered about: why did the family own a burial lot in Christ Church graveyard but none of us were members and why we were not formal members of any church. Now I know the answers to both

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[6]According to my Grandmother's autograph book, she was still in Boston in November, 1873, having graduated from high school the previous June. Other dates running to 1877 show entries from Greenville.

[7]Ironically, my other Great-Grandfather was urging the railroad to follow another route. He won and the present-day Southern Railway went by Taylors rather than Pickens.

[8]New Englander William Bates built the original Rock Creek Factory in 1837. In 1863 the Trenholm family of Charleston acquired the property. There had been a fire at the mill and the factory had ceased operation. This is the property acquired by George Putnam. Ed. See Marion M. Hewell "The Beginnings of Industry in Greenville," this journal, 4(1968 - 1971): 41

[9]Great-Grandfather did not build a house at Batesville. He used a log cabin on the property when he was at the mill.

questions and it all goes back to Great-Grandfather. Soon after settling in Greenville, Great-Grandfather, who was a Unitarian, joined Christ Church and attended for - it seems - three years.[10] Then one Sunday the minister arrived so drunk he fell out of the pulpit. Great-Grandfather, who was a strict teetotaler, quit Christ Church. Later he took his family to the Buncombe Street Methodist Church where Aunt Daisy sang in the choir which family legend maintains she organized. This relationship went well for a year or so. Then one Sunday morning when the Putnams arrived at the church, they found a crowd milling around the churchyard. On inquiry, the family found that a Mr. Gilreath and a Mr. Sullivan were fighting a duel in front of the church.[11] This display ended the Putnams involvement in organized religion as Great-Grandfather announced that religion was different in the South from what it was in the North. He was a fair man but stuck to his principles. By the strict standards of Greenville of the day the family was very liberal. Not only were they Yankees but they played cards and danced.

Great-Grandmother Jane remains a rather shadowy figure. It is remembered that she always went out and watched "Uncle Jerry," the Negro handyman, milk the cow as she was sure he would steal milk if given a chance. She also put the sugar bowl in the pantry after meals thinking he might take a handful. No one could convince her that he was honest and loyal, which he was. Great-Grandmother Jane made a tour of the West with her daughters when she was eighty years old as there are family pictures to prove it. One of the places visited was the Grand Canyon. When her daughters decided to ride into the Canyon, they suggested that she had better wait at the top. Instead she is remembered as having said, "I am eighty years old and I may never get back here. I am going also." The daughters gave in, expecting that she would give up and wait at the halfway house. No such thing! She rode all the way down to the river and back. Ironically, she was the only one who could walk normally the next morning.

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[10]There is a family story that the youngest daughter, Daisy, played the organ. This story is apocryphal as I figure she was five years old at the time.

[11]The duel arose over the change that Mr. Sullivan had thrown a whiskey bottle onto the church grounds. He was challenged by Mr. Gilreath who was killed in the duel.

Great-Grandmother Jane loved all types of games and someone had to play a game with her after supper every night. Late in life she lived at Batesville where she was bed-ridden. One Sunday afternoon the children gathered around her bed and began to play cards. When someone came in to announce that the Baptist minister had come to call, she quickly stuffed the cards down between the mattress and the side of the bed. After the minister had left, they found that the cards had fallen through and were scattered all over the floor under the bed.

The transplanted Yankees had problems in earning a place in ex-Confederate Greenville, but earn it they did. About five years after they had moved to Greenville, Great-Grandfather came home one day and said, "Jane, we have finally made it. On my way home someone called out 'Hello George' instead of 'Hello Damn Yankee.' "

One of the ways he "made the grade" of acceptance by the "natives" was his insistence that there would be no discussion of "the War," politics, or religion at his table. A family myth that they took to good works because they were ostracized by Greenville people was dispelled by the discovery of two short diaries by the third daughter, Flora, which proves that they were accepted. In fact, they were very popular and both entertained and were entertained a great deal.

Life in the house at 704 West Washington Street in Great-Grandfather's day was a combination of strictness and fun-loving ways. In this atmosphere the "four sisters from Boston," daughters of George and Mary Jane Putnam, grew into womanhood. In order of their appearance they were Mary Sophia ("Aunt Mag"), Emma Carrie ("Tigee,"my Grandmother), Flora Gressette ("Aunt Flo"), and Daisy Gerogietta ("Aunt Daisy" to her descendants but "Gerogie" to her sisters).

The youngest, Aunt Daisy, was born in Middleborough, Vermont, on April 10,1867, and died in Greenville in 1905. She was the only sister not educated in the North but graduated from the Greenville Female Academy. She loved horses and was a superb rider. At the end of her life she had a fine Palomino horse and a red saddle trimmed with silver. She was also a good shot and owned an ivory-handled pistol. One day she wanted to ride out

to Batesville to see her sister but Great-Grandfather objected until she asked him to test her. He threw up a tin can which she drilled while it was in the air. He did not object to her riding alone again. Aunt Daisy was very musical and played both the piano and the organ. However, she was never very well. She was so frail that they had a cot in the vestibule at Christ Church for her to lie down on during the sermon. She married a physician, Dr. Thomas Bailey on April 10, 1890, and they had two children: Herbert and Gladys. Unfortunately, she died when her son, Dr. Herbert Bailey, was only seven and he has little memory of her.

A second marriage in the Putnam family in 1890 came on Christmas Day when the third daughter, Flora, married Charles F. Dill of Dayton, Ohio. "Aunt Flo"[12] was born in Foxboro, Massachusetts, on June 23, 1857, and died in Augusta, Georgia, in 1920. Aunt Flo was very elegant. Her pictures show her looking like a hot-house flower. But her life belies the picture. Her husband, who was a lawyer, was a restless person and they traveled a great deal. Once she spent three years living in a tent near Boise, Idaho, while he tried gold mining. He had bought the gold mine only to find that he needed sizeable amounts of water to operate it. To provide the water he spent $40,000 building a dam. As the dam neared completion, ranchers below the dam successfully objected to the national government that the dam would cut off their water supply and Mr. Dill was forbidden to impound the water. Without water, the mine could not operate so Dill abandoned the mine and Aunt Flo and her husband came home to Great-Grandfather's house on West Washington Street.

In Greenville, Aunt Flo soon became part of the effort to secure a hospital for the community. In 1899 she was elected president of the newly organized Ladies Auxiliary of the Hospital Association (later called the Woman's Hospital Board), a position she held until her death in 1920. She donated $5,000 and her husband donated another $5,000 toward the

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[12] I never knew Aunt Flo but she left two short diaries which helped a great deal in writing this paper. The first covers the period from November 26, 1883, to December 25, 1884, and is concerned largely with a description of a trip "up North." The second diary covers the period from December 23, 1893, to February 13, 1884, but is rich with details of life in Greenville and the family business.

buying of the old Corbett home which became the first unit of what has developed into the Greenville Hospital System.

Aunt Flo's two extant diaries give considerable enriching details of the family in the late nineteenth century. In one passage, she describes herself as ". . . 27 years old, single and likely to stay so. Medium height, 5 ft. 2 inches, more slender than stout, wight about 115 lbs., light hair, fair complection [sic.], when not billious, but an almost entire lack of coloring." She was not really fair to herself. She did marry seven years later. She was a very lovely and accomplished lady.

The next sister was my Grandmother,[13] Emma Putnam Baker ("Tigee"), who was born on November 29, 1853, in Holliston, Massachusetts, and died in Greenville on July 12, 1934. She graduated from the Boston Normal School on the eve of the family's moving South. Soon after they arrived in Greenville the three older sisters (Aunt May, Tigee, and Aunt Flo) went down o the Fairview Fair. One of the entertainments was a "tourna- ıent" where the young men on horseback tried to snare a ring ıanging from a pole with a lance while riding full tilt. Each of the young ladies would choose a knight. The three sisters knew no one but chose their knights any way. Grandmother chose John W. Baker who became my Grandfather. They were married at Great Grandfather's house at 704 West Washington Street, the scene of all family weddings including those of my mother and her two sisters.

Like all the Putnam women. Tigee had the firm jaw and thin lips which meant firm opinions and no deviation from one's own scruples. She concurred with the old-fashioned notion that hot bread was "heavy on the stomach." She believed in sulphur and molasses in the spring and a wet flannel around the throat for a sore throat.[14] She conserved whatever property she had and tried to pass on the idea that one should never spend principal but only income. (To this day I feel guilty when I spend a little principal.) She was not politically minded. She once told

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[13]She too left diaries but they were quite personal.

[14]All these must have worked for we were very healthy.

my Father that she would not have voted for Herbert Hoover because he parted his hair in the middle!

She maintained her undeviating adherence to principle to the end of her life. In her will she stipulated that her estate should remain intact until the youngest heir was twenty-five years old because no one knew how to handle money until at least that age. It was hard on some of the family to wait eight years until Aunt Gertrude's daughter, Peggy, grew up but the estate did prosper under the management of Father and Aunt Hazel.

Grandmother Tigee was both the designer and overseer of construction of her home at Batesville. The house is so well-built that it still stands today nearly a hundred years after it was built. My Grandfather died of a heart attack while on business in Atlanta and fire destroyed his general store on the same night. Grandmother had to sell the house at Batesville to pay their debts. She had to adapt to reduced circumstances and limited income for the rest of her life but she always made a place for herself -- and took the adventurous course when she could.

Before my Mother's marriage, Tigee and my Mother lived in New York and Chicago. When Mother was on the Chautauqua Circuit, Grandmother traveled with her. When Mother married and Aunt Flo died, Grandmother lived with Aunt May at 704 West Washington Street until my brother was born. Mother was not very strong after that and Grandmother came to live with us. To give my parents privacy and the opportunity to entertain their friends, she always retired after dinner with my brother and me to read to us before we went to sleep.

She could cook but there were always many more things of greater interest to do. A cousin from the West remembers visiting at Batesville and said that what started as soup on Monday became a thick stew by Wednesday or Thursday. Once when Mr. Harvey Cleveland was courting my Aunt Hazel, he had an occasion to stay over night at Batesville. The next morning he arose expecting his ham and grits and was a little taken a back to be served Boston baked beans and brown bread. My cousin, Dr. Herbert Bailey, tells of stopping overnight with Tigee and my Mother in Chicago when he was on leave from the Army during World War I. They were delighted but served him

only an apple and a cup of tea for his supper. He left early the next morning in search of something to eat. He still remembers the tantalizing smell of fresh bread from a bakery where he was not allowed to purchase any as there was war-time ordinance at that time in Chicago prohibiting the sale of bread until it was three days old.

When she was seventy-nine, Grandmother Tigee went to Europe. She especially wanted to see Rome. Since Rome was not on the guided tour, she left the group and visited the Eternal City by herself. It was a tense time in Italy,[11] but Tigee said that if you didn't say Benito Mussolini's name out loud in public places, no one bothered you. Later that summer, she went to Denver to visit her daughter's family taking her sister-in-law, Ella Baker Dick, with her. Ella was also in her late seventies. They traveled by coach because it was cheaper that way. When airplane flights became available in Greenville, she took one of those brief around-the-city flights but she took my mother, my brother and myself with her because she did not want to be lonely if the plane crashed. She believed her grandchildren should have varied experiences so she took two of my boy cousins, who were in their teens, out West. At this time, she was eighty. They traveled in an open Dodge touring car. She took as her companion Miss Mitta Bell Shelton but there was no doubt that Tigee was in charge.

Her last trip was to Washington, D. C., with three grandchildren, one of whom was 1. She was very ill at the time but since she did not believe in complaining, we did not realize how sick she was. When we reached home, she took to her bed and died a few weeks later. A soft-voiced, quiet woman whom I remember as dressed in modest widow's weeds, she was the most loved, or rather the most loveable, of the four sisters.

Aunt May, Mrs. M. P. Gridley, was perhaps the most remarkable of the four sisters. She was born September 7, 1850, and died in Greenville on December 19, 1939. She was a graduate of Boston Normal School and taught three years at Peabody, Massachusetts, before the family came South. She

[11]This was in 1932 when Benito Mussolini was transforming Italy into the fascist corporative state.

married Captain Isaac Gridley on October 26, 1876, and had a child who only lived a few weeks. Her husband died on August 23, 1878, and her widowed life for the next sixty-one years was devoted to individual achievement, edification of others, and civic improvement.

She lived all those years in Great-Grandfather's house at 704 West Washington Street, a place of elegance at first which gradually slipped into decline with the rest of Washington Street. She saw the neighboring fine homes become rooming houses or be cut into tacky apartments. Shoddy storefronts appeared here and there, and many gardens became patches of littered dirt. But, decay and decline did not affect the dignity of her life. In her later life she lived in only part of the big house and overlooked the fading fabrics and the smell of accumulated dust in the unused rooms. For years meals were formal with white tablecloths and good silver.[16] Her yard always blossomed with flowers and the sunken solarium just off the large living room, called the "billiard room," was always full of ferns and palm trees.[17] Just off the billiard room was one of Greenville's early bathrooms, far from the bedrooms but complete with flush closet, marble washstand, and zinc tub enclosed in walnut. A second bathroom was added to the large bedroom downstairs that was Aunt May's domain in later life and a third bath with a "step-up" from the hall floor to accommodate the necessary pipes was partitioned from the large upstairs hallway. These replaced the traditional pitchers and bowls.

Aunt May once told a cousin of mine that she accepted widowhood because many men were killed in the War and others were left crushed by the Southern defeat. She said it was a time for women to be strong and courageous. She felt fortunate to have been married to a fine man even for less than two years. After her husband died, she helped Great-Grandfather with the Batesville Mill bookkeeping. When he died, she became the first woman to become a president of a cotton mill in the South, a post she held from 1890 to 1912 when the mill was sold.

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[16] I do not know if she was aware that the Greenville cab drivers called her home "the infidel's house" because no cab was ever called to take someone to church.

[17] I still possess an offshoot of one of her Boston ferns.

She signed her name M. P. Gridley, because she knew that in those days women were not considered capable of conducting a business and she thought it was no one's business that she was a woman. Her early pictures show her as tiny and as beautiful as a Dresden doll but she was never on the shelf. Only four feet, ten inches tall, she could manage on all-male board of directors without ever raising her voice.

In her early adult life she was free to devote her time to business, civic interests and reading because the household was managed by her sister, Flora. Uncle Jerry, the faithful colored man, who lived under the firm scrutiny of Great Grand-Mother Jane, became the driver of Aunt May's carriage. After his death, she bought a Ford car but never learned to drive. Help lived in cottages behind the house and Julia, another devoted servant, was with Aunt May at the time of her death. Julia's husband did chores in a desultory way. Most of the family called him "no count."

The house at 704 West Washington Street was the pivot point for the whole family. Family members came for a few hours, a few weeks, or even months at a time for three generations. Country schools were considered inadequate in the twenties and early thirties so my cousins, J. Harvey, John Baker, and Betty Cleveland all lived with Aunt May during the week and went home to Cleveland on weekends.

During one year in high school, I was required to have lunch at 704 West Washington Street because the house was within walking distance of the school.[1] After a lunch in the kitchen supervised by Julia, I was required to go to Aunt May's room and read a newspaper article to her. At that time she had stopped eating in public because when she was a young girl someone had encouraged her to swallow some spirits of ammonia after a fainting spell and her badly burned throat caused increasing swallowing difficulty in later life. In her seventies and eighties she occasionally would have tea at the home of family members but preferred the pureed food that Julia prepared

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[1] This would be the now-torn-down "old high school" which was located on the hilltop at the end of West McBee Street. The "new high school" mentioned later in this paragraph would be the present Greenville Senior High School building on Vardry Street. Ed.

and served on a tray. Her eyesight also dimmed in later life so any visitor was apt to be opportuned to read aloud to her as her interest in current issues was lifelong. Reading to her was quite demanding. Woe to the reader if a word were mispronounced or a sentence were given the wrong emphasis. She was known to say, "Walter Lippman didn't say it that way. Read that again." I was also required to discuss what I read with her because Aunt May believed conversation was for issues and not for gossip. I was rather relieved when the new high school put me out of luncheon distance. In her later years, Aunt May preferred one caller at a time because two callers were apt to talk to each other and she did not like to be out of things.

The only frivilous thing I remember about Aunt May was her love of murder-mystery books. I guess I remember because I am addicted to them too. She liked games too and played checkers, backgammon, bridge and pinochle. She was not demonstrative but she did not lack humor. One cousin recalls her trying on a colorful dress that had been given to her and finding it a little too flamboyant for a tiny-statured woman of advanced years. She stood before the mirror for a moment and said, "Dress, where do you think you are going with that gal?" She broke her hip when she was nearly eighty and was told she would never walk again. She did walk and was told she would have to use a cane. She did and used it to emphasize her remarks and to scold her nieces and nephews when they lovingly teased her.

Aunt May helped start the Thursday Club and was its first secretary with Mrs. W. E. Beattie its first president. At that time few women had access to spending money and there was some discussion as to whether or not there should be dues and, if so, should someone's husband serve as treasurer. Aunt May set the club members straight on this matter and the Thursday Club managed its own affairs including its funds. She was president of the Thursday Club for thirty-seven years and established the goals of self improvement and espousal of charitable and civic endeavors that are still followed today. She was also instrumental in the formation of the Federation of Women's Clubs in South Carolina. She started a Lyceum course in Greenville which booked and paid for the appearance of such men as Jerome K. Jerome, whom she characterized as not nearly as funny a lecturer as his books would lead one to think. She was

active in the development of public playgrounds in Greenville and was an advocate of supervision of the playgrounds by trained personnel. She served as president of the Woman's Branch of the Chamber of Commerce and aided in the formation of the Greenville Garden Club.

Her most outstanding work was with the Hopewell Tuberculosis Association. She founded the first special care center, the Hopewell Tuberculosis Camp on the Spartanburg Road opposite where the County Home is now. It was the County Farm then and from it came food to feed the tuberculosis patients. Some weeks she did not know how the employees would be paid and she would go to outstanding men of Greenville such as Mr. George Sirrine or Mr. Alex Myers for donations. She said they did not want their good works to be publicized but they never refused her. She also contributed her own money.[19] Through her subtle insistence she got the county to appropriate $5,000 annually to maintain the tuberculosis camp until a bond issue was passed to build the new tuberculosis hospital which opened on August 4, 1930. As she never learned to drive, she employed patients who were considered arrested cases to drive her Model T Ford. She also arranged for a radio system at the hospital so each patient could listen to his or her favorite program. She did not cease her efforts after the hospital was opened, but immediately began working for a nurses' home nearby. It took six years of effort for a woman in her eighties but when the nurses' home was completed in 1936 despite the Depression it was named the Mary Gridley Nurses' Home.

She put her sharp mind and her firm purpose to everything and did whether it was playing dominos with a great niece, arranging flowers, or presiding over a board meeting. She must have come to Greenville a scared and naive young woman but she left it one of the most-honored citizens.

The "Four Sisters from Boston," despite their Yankee origin, certainly made their mark. It is doubtful if the distaff side of any other family has contributed so much in the emergence of the Greenville of the New South.

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[19]Some of this came from low-cost housing which she rented to colored people. She went out on Mondays with regularity to collect the small rents.