

Lily Flagg: The Belle of Huntsville

By Doris Benefield Gilbreath

Mrs. Lucile Matthews Stubbins is a gracious Southern lady. When she received me into her home, she was wearing a summer "house dress" and white laced-up "comfort shoes." Her white beads and round white ear-bobs added to the charm of her lovely face and her beautiful white hair.

After greetings, she took a chair in the corner of the room. Beside her chair stood a round marble-top table with a beautiful old lamp. A magazine folded open indicated she usually read there by the lamp.

"Yes, I remember Lily Flagg. Her whole name was Signal's Lily Flagg," she told me as we entered into conversation about the little Jersey cow. "I remember the day she left for the World's Fair. I was just a little girl, but I remember it well."

The Jersey cow, Lily Flagg, has been a subject of folklore and legend to the people of Huntsville since 1891. The owners of Monte Sano Dairy, at which Lily Flagg resided, wanted to create publicity for the Jersey Breed and succeeded in their endeavor: For almost 100 years, people in Huntsville have talked about Lily Flagg, have written pamphlets about her, have presented skits and plays about her, and even had her included in history books.

Almost every pamphlet about Lily Flagg states: "She walked away with all the prizes at the World's Fair. Then, her proud owner Samuel Moore gave a big party in her honor."

Unfortunately, that is not exactly the way it happened.

The truth is: Lily Flagg was part of the herd owned by Mr. Milton Humes, Mr. Samuel Moore, Mr. William E. Matthews (Lucile Matthews Stubbins' father), and possibly others. Mr. Humes was a wealthy land-owner, Mr. Moore a rich bachelor, and Mr. Matthews a well-to-do businessman and a graduate of Virginia Military Academy. Mr. Matthews managed the Monte Sano Dairy, and he and his family lived at the dairy. Their home was Gladstone Place, located just north of downtown Huntsville on the side of today's Chapman Mountain.

Soon after Lily Flagg came to Huntsville from the Isle of Jersey, Mr. Matthews and the dairy workmen realized that she was special: She gave an extraordinary amount of milk that was very rich in butterfat. Lily Flagg's owners were anxious to call attention to the merits of the Jersey breed, as well as to the merits of dairy farming in an area of the country where cotton was king. The men obtained the cooperation of the American Jersey Cattle Club to conduct a test of the amount of butterfat Lily Flagg produced. Two other cows—Little Goldie and Analysis—were tested, too.

The test was conducted from June 1, 1891, to June 1, 1892. During the year Lily Flagg, Analysis, and Little Goldie ate in the pasture with the other cows. They received the same care as the other cows, but their milk was handled separately: Every morning and every afternoon, their milk was weighed and set aside to be churned. Individual

records were kept on each cow. At the end of the year, Lily Flagg had given 11,339 pounds of milk, from which 1,047 pounds and 3/4 of an ounce of butter was churned.

Lily Flagg had produced more milk and butterfat than the great cow Bisson's Bell, the pride of Tennessee. Monte Sano Dairy began to arrange to take Lily Flagg to the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, which was supposed to open in October, 1892. The dairymen wanted to prove that their two little cows—Goldie and Lily Flagg—were as good as any cows in the United States. However, their plans had to be changed. The World's Fair did not open until May, 1893, almost a year later.



In the meantime, because he wanted as much publicity for the dairy as possible, and because he loved to give parties, General Samuel Moore gave a party to compliment Lily Flagg. He sent engraved invitations to more than 1,500 people.

The invitation stated: Mr. Samuel H. Moore requests the pleasure of your company, Thursday evening, July the twenty-first, eighteen hundred and ninety-two, from nine to three o'clock. Huntsville, Alabama, complimentary to Signal's Lily Flagg, the Jersey cow of the world. One year's record, butter 1047 pounds, 3/4 ounces, milk 11339 pounds. Winner of the Derby of the Jerseys against the great Bisson's Belle.

To prepare for the party, General Moore had extensive work done on his home. The house received a new coat of paint. Electric lights were installed inside the house: the first house in Huntsville to have electric lights. Lanterns lighted the lawns and grounds around the mansion. *A special cowstall was built in the backyard for Lily Flagg.*

General Moore's cook, Zenie Pruitt, well known for her famous pastries, was instructed to outdo anything she had done in the past. She, her daughter, and Tom Doregas prepared many kinds of fancy foods.

On the night of July 21, 1892, the more than 500 guests began arriving shortly after dusk. The ladies and gentlemen formed a line around the mansion to the backyard. Everyone wanted to see the Queen of the Jerseys. Lily Flagg stood there, munching fresh hay. Her elegant cowstall was covered with

flowers, and she had a garland of roses around her neck. She stood there regal as a queen and uttered not a single moo as the people passed by and looked at her.

An orchestra from Nashville played music for dancing. The guests were served wine and champagne with the delicious sandwiches, beaten biscuits and ham, salads, cakes, pies and frozen desserts. The dancing and merry-making continued until almost dawn.

Lucile Matthews Stubbins was too young to attend the party, but she has heard stories about it all her life: "General Moore had given some big parties in the past, but I believe everyone agreed that the party for Lily Flagg was the biggest one he had. It was certainly the most famous of all his entertaining. However, I seriously doubt there were more than fifty kinds of cake, as I read about in a pamphlet some years ago."

"Did Lily Flagg go to the fair?" I asked her.

"Yes, she finally went, but she never returned to Huntsville," she said sadly. "I know that statement is contrary to what has been told down through the years, but it is true," she continued. "Both Lily Flagg and Little Goldie went to Chicago, but they never returned. I remember the day they left. My father went, too. My sisters and I ran into the house and brought out our ribbon sashes. Father and the other men helped us tie bows on the cows' horns. Lily Flagg had a blue sash and Little Goldie had a red one. Lina, Narnie, and I hung onto the fence and watched as the wagon went out of sight down the hill in front of the house."

"Why did the cows not win at the World's Fair?" I asked her.

"I don't know what happened to Little Goldie. Lily Flagg was in a contest in May, 1893. Her butter was to be used in cheese making. The person in charge of milking her wanted to save her milk so that she would give more on the last day, so he did not milk her for a day or two. He must have known very little about cows, or he would not have tried that. She developed milk fever and could not be milked at all. It's a pity, but true. After all the publicity that my father and General Moore gave her, she did not win the contest at the World's Fair."

Mrs. Stubbins is correct: *The Book Of The Fair, World's Columbian Exposition, 1893* tells about the more than 30,000 cows of all breeds that were in the various contests at the Fair. Page 396 states: "... the Jersey milch cow, Signal's Lily Flagg, valued at \$15,000, and considered the queen of her race, was not permitted to enter the lists, for though with a record of more than 1,000 pounds of butter a year, at her preliminary trial she failed to meet the expectations of her admirers."

Lily Flagg stayed in Chicago until the Livestock Show August 29, 1893. The *Daily Inter-Ocean*, a Chicago newspaper, lists the winners at that show. Lily Flagg is listed in 11th place. She was sold to the Hood Medicine Company of Lowell, Massachusetts. Her picture was used on the labels of Hood products and on other products.

Although Lily Flagg did not "walk away with all the prizes" at the World's Fair, she remains queen of the Jerseys in Huntsville, Alabama. She went to the World's Fair, and she was "belle of the ball" at Huntsville's most famous party. These two facts are enough to keep her memory alive for all time. □