

Beale and Peggy Fletcher

Side 1:

[1] Beale tells about the Arden House, known in the area for big Christmas parties. The house was built to accommodate a 3-story tree and every year three parties were given - complete with presents - one for friends, one for blacks and another for the poor - there was an orchestra and food. It burned in 1922, was rebuilt, his aunt lived there after the grandparents died. It later deteriorated and was torn down. [Katharine told me to ask about this house] [Katharine Shepard]

[40] The Blake houses were famous in the area. Royal Pines is one of them. There is a swimming pool and recreation area around it. It is now a restaurant. He gave a talk to the DAR there about family history (see enclosure). [Robert Blake]

[79] The houses in the Arden area were big and open to friends who dropped in on Sunday. Tea was always ready. Several of these houses still stand. [George Vanderbilt, Robert Blake, Charles Shuford, Fred Rutledge, Col. Malcolm Ross, George Westfelt]

[88] He tells about his grandfather who settled in the Fletcher area before the train came through which picked up livestock for Charleston, from whence they would go to New York and Boston by boat (enclosure). [Dr. George Washington Fletcher]

[99] His great grandfather settled in Essex, VA (see enclosure).

[108] The Fletcher Inn was torn down around 1930 to accommodate drivers over what is now Highway 25. They could cover 10 miles a day. "Fletcher Stop" for the train gave the name to the area.

[123] The old airport (now Steel Case Trucking Company) was on property owned by Katharine's grandfather. It is 3 1/2 air miles from the new airport (he is a pilot). [Katharine Bynum Shepard]

[154] He went to Fletcher School and then Christ School in Arden, NC (only had 11 grades - see enclosure).

[161] His father had a small dairy and he started dancing in the cow barn to the rhythm of the blacks milking. They played a rhythm and he beat it out with his feet [poor cows!]. He became a parlor entertainer and when he was attending a WWI soldier parade he stole the show by beating out the drum rhythm.

[192] His aunt taught social dancing. Whenever there was a show he would get in it. [Elsie Hempville]

[206] His mother had a boarding house and he watched the boxers and took a few lessons in college. [Jack Dempsey, Gene Tunney]

[223] He was singled out as having talent and he told his mother that he wanted to study dancing in NY. She invested \$100 and he worked his way through school dancing. [Keith Vaudeville Circuit, Jimmy Roe]

[24] Peggy, from Montreal, came to the US. for 6 months every year dancing. He was told he needed a partner and they became a team. [Peggy Gatley]

[257] They stopped traveling long enough to have babies and since, because of hotel restrictions during the war, they weren't allowed to have children in the room they smuggled them in in foot lockers (a delightful story). They became known as "Beale and Peggy Fletcher, America's most versatile dance team."

[290] When the children got older they bought a house trailer and later Peggy's mother came to live and they traveled all over the US.

[332] When Maria had to go to school (later Miss America), they opened a dance school. First on 70 N. Market, while living in a trailer, and later two more schools. They also taught in schools. There was a petition signed by 600 against this "sin" - so they went to St. Genevieve's where it was ok. [Maria Fletcher, Dr. Pinkney Herbert]

[379] When Asheville got TV (it was WFBC, now channel 4) he offered to have a little child on to sing a song on the government sponsored program out of Greenville. Biltmore Dairies agreed that, if this was a success, he would be signed on for 13 weeks. This reached 300,000 at one time. It worked and Fletcher got his advertising. He started with 200 students and after a few months on TV there were 1,900. Branch outlets were all around - American Legion halls, church halls. Maria went around training teachers.

[440] There were other studios of several hundred students each. Weaver had the only straight ballet studio. Fletcher students opened their own studios. [Alice Weaver, Marguerite Hyatt, Angie Norris]

[469] The Fletchers settled with two studios - one in Fletcher, one in Asheville, incorporated in 1969. Their son and his wife managed one. [Walter Fletcher, Linda Fletcher]

[482] Maria won contests when she was 7 with folk songs taught by her mother. She won talent contests in school to raise money. At 12 she was MC on a TV show. Above all she wanted to be a Rockette and was to be auditioned in fall. The Jr. Chamber of Commerce asked her to be in Miss Asheville contest - the Fletchers said no because she wouldn't be available for parades etc. [if she simultaneously became Miss Asheville and a Rockette]. She did run and won. When she went to N.Y. she was told the JC's would want her time and the Rockettes wouldn't audition her. Her manager in Asheville made her feel duty bound to return. [Maria Fletcher, Monte Silvers]

Side 2:

[2/12] Before leaving NY the Rockettes gave her a mock ceremony and crowned her as Miss America before she ran for Miss NC contest.

[2/23] Everyone wanted to tell her what to do - Land of Sky group said to use ballet, Business Manager said tap dance. Since Joan Crawford was president of Pepsi Cola (her sponsor), some said she should do a dramatic reading of Stella Dallas. Fletcher had the idea of her recording 3 part harmony (voice over) in Charlotte and tap dance to her own singing (on tape). She won, singing Somebody Loves Me. [Joan Crawford, Bert Parks]

[2/71] The show was in Atlantic City and the Fletchers needed \$ for the trip. They were able to get Biltmore Dairies to have her endorse milk in the paper which made Pepsi mad - as both were drinks.

[2/110] He explains how the Miss America pageant works. This is non profit and used as a technique to hold tourists over in Atlantic City the week after Labor Day. Sales people in Atlantic City pay the bills - TV etc. - thousands of dollars. Miss America is paid a fee (\$250) for performances and gives exclusive rights to sponsors and agrees to go where needed for a year.

[2/157] When asked as Miss America what the most exciting time in her life was she said when she became a Rockette - no one happy to hear!

[2/186] He graduated from Vanderbilt on a scholarship.

[2/205] Peggy was always singing Scottish ballads and Maria took part in Mountain Youth Jamborees which began in 1927. People came from 12 surrounding states. [Hubert Hays, Leona Hays]

[2/347] It is now illegal to sell dance studio names (see Robert Bunn interview). [Arthur Murray]

[2/365] He describes floors used by dancers. Baryshnikov brought his own "Marley" floor (unrolls and prevents slipping) but tap dancers need a wood floor especially built for them. "Slip No More" is a product used. [Mikhail Baryshnikov]

[2/401] The Civic Ballet was started in 1946. The Fletchers started the Land of the Sky Civic Ballet in 1948 which is open to anyone through audition. Most students come from Fletcher school but the Civic Ballet is separate from the school. [Alice Weaver, Sanders, Jessie Creech]

[2/502] The 18th Nutcracker suite will open in December (enclosure).

[2/538] Beale plays a tape made by Peggy singing Try to Remember.

Thanks.

Walter, a dancer, married Linda. He was killed in an air crash and Linda is running the Asheville studio and will buy out her in-laws. She is working with Peggy on The Nutcracker Suite (enclosure). [Children: Maria, Walter, Bonnie, Margaret]