

Sallie Middleton

Side 1:

Sallie was born in Washington in 1926 where her mother's parents were living. Her parents were moving with her uncle to Asheville. There was a building boom in the city and her father and uncle were a team in building the First Baptist Church, City Hall, the S&W Cafeteria and the High School. (see enclosure) [her shoes are squeaking - I move mikes] [Mother: Margaret Carr Roberts Ellington, Grandmother: Mrs. Arthur Carr Roberts, Father: Kenneth Ellington, Uncle: Douglas Ellington]

[17] Her house (pictures enclosed) was built of "scraps and samples." It is the result of "two men having fun" and never wasting material. The pink granite came from the High School, the mosaics around the living room were architectural samples, the ceiling beams were from an old school house in Reem's Creek that Vance attended. Douglas attended water color classes in France and, while the openings on the second level were aesthetically pleasing, her mother backed them with fabric so the family could move around without being observed from below. She was about 2.5 when the family moved in. There was no electricity in the kitchen then. [Zeb Vance]

[52] Few people lived in the cove, just a few "pioneering mountain folk" and, farther up Smith who had eloped with an Irish maid. [Richard Sharp Smith]

[61] A girl's camp was close by with a lake with a diving board, docks and canoes, surrounded by willow trees. There were tennis courts and a bowling green. The little pond (passed on the left before arriving at her house) was, at that time, a riding field belonging to the camp.

[76] She didn't go to school until she was 9 and only for a short time. Her sister was born when she was 8 and soon after her brother. He became a neurosurgeon who died young. Her sister was a wife and mother. [Martha Ellington Pettigrew, Eric Ellington]

[90] When she was small she "ruined all the fly-leaves of books" and her father got her colors and paper. She did not do birds and bugs at that time but princesses.

[102] This house went for some time with no attention. She has been here three years and works in a studio on the top floor where she gets strong natural light (enclosure).

[113] Her brother had started his practice in Maine but was not well. She had a premonition and, when she called him he said, "Sallie, I want to come home." He, his wife and 4 children moved in and, after 2 years he died. Her mother gave them the house to use. After 16 years his widow remarried. The house was "shot to hell." Caretakers restored the house in lieu of rent. [Eric Ellington, Ann Ellington]

[140] After her mother died, her sister had MS so she (Sallie) moved in.

[148] Her grandson was staying with her when she went to Charleston to do a show last November and forgot her admonition not to lock the three tremendous dogs in the house. He forgot, the dogs were frantic to get out and damaged the windows and doors.

[166] The doors and windows are built of cypress. She phoned the Preservation Society and Hardwood Construction Company was recommended.

[178] She, for a short while, was tutored at the Asheville School for Boys by a baron - the only girls attending at the time. [Baron Von Kauff]

[186] The building boom did not last very long. Architects were wiped out. Ellington kept Lindsey on until he had nothing to pay him. He was then hired by the WPA to help build a "green belt" in Maryland. Her parents just stayed on in Asheville. [Douglas Ellington, Lindsey Gudger]

[200] "Come the revolution you go to these true mountain folks if you want to know how to survive." Her mother asked her neighbors what to feed the children. The man who was the gardener stayed on. The family had a pig pen for a while. [Mrs. Armstrong, Mrs. Stewart, Otto Bruen (changed to Brown)]

[222] The Depression was "fine" for her. She remembers that her mother's mandolin and her father's guitar were missing and no explanation suited her, some of the silver didn't match, but she was well fed. Mr. Bruen moved on and a 19-year-old colored boy from eastern North Carolina was given a room, food and 30 cents a week for movies in exchange for yard work. ["Doc" Eric Durham]

[250] There were few people in Chunn's Cove at the time. A few black families around St. Luke's Church had cornfields where the underpass and overpass are now.

[261] John Baxter was the son of her mother's laundress. He would bring back clean clothes to the family. He asked her to do a drawing of a tree near his house that was going to be removed for the road work. By the time she was able to do this the tree was gone. (see tape by Silveri on Baxter) [John Baxter]

[280] As a child she always had colds. Her sister was a "polished apple." One day a truant officer came up the drive to see why she was not in school (Martha wasn't school age). Her father didn't want her to go to Haw Creek School so her mother said she was delicate. The truant officer said he was sorry and left.

[321] Douglas was sent by Hopkins (Secretary of State) to restore the Dock Street Theatre. He fell in love with Charleston, opened an office and her father was needed there to help with the business. The family moved to Charleston, coming back to Chunn's Cove for most summers. [Douglas Ellington, Harry Hopkins]

[334] Her father thought that if the US was attacked in WWII, Charleston would be bombed, so he moved the family back to the cove.

[359] Douglas was never told about the decision not to build the County building on his design. He read about it in the paper (see enclosure). It was a "bad hurt," it "wounded Douglas for life. He never spoke of it, no one mentioned it." Both models are in the little house on the hill. He never lived to see his city court house used as a logo.

[375] Douglas died in this house and worked up to the end. She came up from Charleston to be with him. They were very good friends.

[385] When she attended the National Cathedral School she learned how important her uncle was. She had completed the Plonk School of Creative Arts (see enclosure). They had spiritual training as well, as a regular curriculum. Her father was not about to let the children go to the "vast public school." [Kahlil Gibran]

[424] The High School has changed little but the paint color is not as it was in the beginning. She Xeroxed an old architectural magazine with suggestions that the original colors be used in the future.

[447] When an extension was added to the First Baptist Church, Martha, who was very alert to color, protested that the church looks as though it has a disease. She would have made a fine architect, had girls been trained in such matters and did volunteer decorating for friends all over the city. Sallie went over to a friend's house with a Wedgewood saucer and said that Martha said this was the color she should paint her house. [Martha Ellington Pettigrew, Mary Margaret Saunders]

[492] Her mother did illustrations for a story her father wrote for her and Martha before Eric was born. She found them tucked in a magazine and her daughter framed them (see enclosed snapshot). Her mother left the Arts Student League saying there were enough bad artists in the world. [Margaret Ellington, Kenneth Ellington]

[520] Douglas was trained in water color in the Ecole de Beaux Art. Kenneth was a lawyer. The brothers formed a unit - Douglas was talented and impractical and Kenneth was called the "office bouncer" and collected bills. "Douglas' last words to my father were, 'Kenneth, what are we going to do now?'" [Douglas Ellington, Kenneth Ellington]

[560] She has two daughters. Sallie has taken up painting and designs sets for parties and conventions at Grove Park. She lives in town. [Mikell, Sallie]

[591] Two of her brother Eric's children live in town. [Dr. Kenneth Ellington, Douglas Ellington]

[604] Her interests are divided between Charleston and the Cove. One is the country - the other the city. Both are good ways of living

Side 2:

She discusses the change in attitude of women: "I am truly shocked at the lack of courtesy on the part of men towards women until I think "why should they be courteous towards women. The

women have leveled themselves and they are in competition with these men! There is no wonder jobs are hard to find. The job market is flooded with females who have dumped their children in public places. There is no home life anymore." In Congress, "The gentle lady may now speak" is a "double positive."

She feels that the "Cold War" is not over. The US should keep defenses up. The Russians are just good chess players. She believes that women needed choices in occupations when supporting their children - beyond teaching, sewing, nursing or running a flower shop - but they have become belligerent, unreasonable, militant and disagreeable. Her sister would have been a good architect but kept a man and a little girl happy and ran a good house. [Martha Ellington Pettigrew]

[50] Her daughter liked to play office and go ice skating, not showing an ounce of creativity, so she was surprised when she came to Chunns Cove and painted. She was afraid her husband would laugh. She is now designing emblems for his sweat shirt studio on River Road. She is also making scent packets. [Sallie Middleton Jr., Peter Kaltreider]

[100] Her father encouraged her in flower painting and took 3 or 4 of her works to gift shops where they sold. Her uncle helped her mix colors but she considers that she is largely self taught and learned through trial and error. [Kenneth Ellington, Douglas Ellington]

[136] She has painted the 4 seasons and 12 months (see enclosure) and believes that everything in nature is in a spiral - a circle within a circle.

[152] She has specialized in flowers but started adding small animals - everything but elephants.

[163] She is painting an emblem for Trinity [Episcopal] Church. This has no relation to the work she has been doing for the last 30 years. She was asked to do this by the rector (see snapshot of work in progress) and it will be used in many ways. She describes the symbols. [Rev. Michael Owens]

[200] She refers to two gold medallions which came from Italy. When she was engaged to Ab, he said they looked like stove pipe covers. [Abbott Middleton]

[212] People who come to the house either love or despise it. She thinks it must have been built on an Indian mound. Springs are surfacing due to the rain. She and Barbara feel that the Cove is filling up with people. The house is too close to the back line. The building of the cut was a stupid thing as tourists love to go through tunnels. Taylor "had to have his pockets lined." She didn't go to the meetings as she is shy by nature. Her sister never met a stranger. She was called Porkey in Charleston - she was like a polished apple. [Barbara Fritchie, Baxter Taylor, Martha Ellington Pettigrew]

[265] She painted as a hobby, taking up to two years to finish a piece. When she had to earn a living she knew she wouldn't make a good waitress or teller at a bank. There was only one thing - she was pretty good with a paintbrush. She had a little child to support but felt everything would be fine. A man from the Chamber of Commerce came out to see her paintings and the

next thing she knew a man from Lexington, KY phoned and said, "Honey, put your paintings in a portfolio and I'll meet you at the airport." Three men became her first publishers - one from the Lafayette Gallery, a business man and a commercial printer. This was the beginning of her career as a painter.

[309] Because of the pressure of time she had to go simple. "The minute you use that desire to create for the gain of money, it loses a lot of its spirit. Some of the heart goes out of it." Regarding the pressure put on her she said, "Would you rather have a good painting or would you rather have it on time?" But "you can't push too far."

[331] The "Flutter Creatures" (see enclosure) started when a friend's son was killed in an airplane accident and her first grandchild was born with deformed feet and hands. The family had "a thing about bears" so she made the Flutter Bear and presented it to the baby.

[356] Butch, of the Village Galleries framed the Flutter Bear and was one of the dealers carrying her work. He is not promoting and people are beginning to forget. Her other dealers had people so stirred up that they were following her down the street (see photos enclosed - she did the dancing dragon at his request) ["Butch" Ochenreiter (Eugene III)]

[385] Of late she has done work for charity (see enclosed). Her hands are not as sure as they were and her eyes aren't as keen. After 25-30 years of sitting still producing paintings she would rather haul brush. She took off for 2 years and then went back to it. She may take up a looser approach.

[415] Butch asked for the dancing dragon which he has in his shop. She likes fantasy and in state of rebellion started hiding fairies in her flowers. The NC Wildlife Magazine carried her paintings every month and one day they ran into a fairy - they didn't want that and she had to delete it. A woman in Florida who had been collecting her work over the years found a fairy and phoned her. Sallie explained that it was just a little wood sprite and nothing evil about it. Some people don't like imagination.

[458] Her father trained Martha and her to look for the Red Leaf Fairy and, when she discovered the ground covered with dew drops, she thought they were fairies. On the Swannanoa River Rd. she drove through a rainbow - no pot of gold.

[537] In painting she worked from "can't see to can't see." Being confined by publishers and sitting still for hours and hours for years with no chance to break loose, "can use up your creativity."

She doesn't know what form her creativity will take now. She is not on call but there is always a pressure on her time and mind.