

Marianna Rosalind Fischer Black

By Stanley Warren Black, III

My grandmother Marianna Rosalind Fischer was born on 28 October 1874 in O'Fallon, Illinois, the daughter of Louis Friedrich Fischer and his second wife Josephine Engelmann, whom he married following the death of his first wife, Laura Owens. She and her brother Louis Engelmann Fischer grew up in a household with their half-siblings Charles Owen Fischer and Louise Mary Fischer. Their father Louis had come from Germany in 1859 at the age of 20 and arrived in Belleville, Illinois, where he soon joined the Union Army and had a distinguished record in the Civil War. Later he worked for the Tiedemann Milling Company in O'Fallon as bookkeeper, secretary, and eventually manager. Marianna's mother was from the Engelmann family prominent among the German community in the Belleville area since the 1830's. Marianna was named for her paternal grandmother in Germany. She and her siblings attended the public school in O'Fallon and the German Church School to improve their command of German, which was spoken in the home by the German community. A program from the Dedication of the new Town Hall of O'Fallon in 1890 shows that Marianna (age 16) played the role of Susan in the play "Turn Him Out" along with George Lienesch, her future brother-in-law. Following public school, Marianna was sent for a year to Shurtleff College in Upper Alton, Illinois, where she was a classmate of her future sister-in-law, Amy Black. Her brothers attended the Manual Training School in St. Louis. Louis graduated from the University of Illinois at Champaign with a degree in Engineering and became a prominent industrialist.

In 1896, Stanley Warren Black had moved from Bridgeport, Illinois to Bryson City, North Carolina to study law with his sister Amy's new husband Thad D. Bryson. When Marianna came to North Carolina in 1898 to visit her classmate, she and Stanley met, then became engaged, and were married in O'Fallon on March 6, 1901, after Stanley had passed the bar and begun practice in the new firm of Bryson and Black. A bust of Goethe, which I still have, was a wedding present from her father. They first rented and then purchased a small house on a hill overlooking the town. Later twice enlarged, this became the home for their four children and summer vacation spot for eight grandchildren. Marianna enjoyed playing the piano, talking on the telephone with her

circle of women friends, and carrying on an extensive correspondence with her children, grandchildren and many friends. She wrote at a little desk given her on her 16th birthday by her grandfather Engelmann. Stanley tells of how an old friend of his, Col. Bason, fascinated by Marianna's beauty and intelligence, remarked "Young man, you always do what she says and you will never go wrong." My grandfather later said "And how true it has always been."

Their first child was stillborn in O'Fallon and was buried in the Engelmann family cemetery as L. F. Black. Of their other four children, Ellen Engelmann Black earned her Ph. D. in Sociology from the University of Chicago with a dissertation on the problems of the mountain people of North Carolina and became Commissioner of Welfare for North Carolina from 1944 to 1962 and then for the United States from 1962 to 1967. Stanley Warren Black, Jr. became Executive Vice President and Secretary of North Carolina National Bank, the predecessor of today's Bank of America in Charlotte, NC. Louise Black Cox moved to New York, became a buyer for a large department store, and then married Oscar S. Cox, who became an attorney for the US Treasury Department and had a hand in drafting the Lend-Lease Act and the military commissions for trying enemy combatants in World War II. They became socially prominent in Washington, DC. Fischer Sheffey Black was educated as an electrical engineer and worked for several electrical companies, became editor of *Electrical World* and then moved to Florida, where he joined Tampa Electric Co, retiring as Vice Chairman of the Board.

In Bryson City, Stanley and Marianna joined the Presbyterian Church as a compromise between her Lutheran and his Baptist background. Over the years, she served many times as president of the women of the church and as Sunday School teacher. Her Scrapbook dated 1957 contains many devotional clippings and not a few poems in her own hand. She expressed her philosophy as

"I will follow the upward road today.

"I will keep my face to the light.

"I will think high thoughts as I go my way.

"I will do what I know is right.

"I will look for the flowers by the side of the road.

“I will laugh and love and be strong.

“I will try to lighten another’s load

“This day as I go along.”

About 1920, she organized the first Parent-Teacher Association and became its president, while her husband was serving as president of the School Board. Through their efforts and those of others the Swain County schools were extended from ungraded four month schools to twelve grades for nine months. Marianna also organized the Women’s Club of Bryson City and served as its president.

Her most important contribution to the community was through her establishment in 1929 of the town library in the grand jury room of the courthouse, which was unused most of the week. She would bring a collection of books two afternoons a week in a suitcase and lend them out to mothers and children who came to borrow. Eventually shelves were built and I remember going there often as a child to read the books. In 1944 the Marianna Black Library became part of the Fontana Regional Library System. A new building was dedicated in 1969 and has now served the area for some 37 years.

Marianna died on 27 November 1960 in Bryson City, NC following a trying airplane trip to Raleigh, NC for a family Thanksgiving at Ellen’s home, which I attended. I well remember her commenting upon arrival “This is the damndest day I’ve ever spent.”

Stanley spent much of the next few years overseeing the building of the Marianna Black Educational Building for the Bryson City Presbyterian Church. I believe he watched the Cherokee Indian stonemasons lay every stone.

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