

B/N LADY BUSTAMANTE
Lady Bustamante -

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Saluting an outstanding matriarch of Jamaica

The public side of Lady the Hon. Gladys Bustamante, O.J. is recorded in all the editions of "Who's Who in Jamaica" and "The Jamaica Directory of Personalities" over the past forty years.

For those who have never seen these publications, the highlights of her life are that she was born in Ashton in Westmoreland, the daughter of James Longbridge, a farmer, and Rebecca Blackwood-Longbridge, and named Gladys Maude.

The brief notes in these publications state she is the Honorary Treasurer of the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union and a Trustee of this Union since 1938, a member of the Executive Committee of the Jamaica Labour Party and a Trustee of this Party's Old Age Pension Committee.

The list of awards and honours she has received is long. Apart from the Order of Jamaica, she is the recipient of the Golden Orchid Award from the Government of Venezuela. In addition, she was presented with Certificates of Appreciation from the Lions Club of Kingston in 1968, the Committee for Christian Education of New York and Jamaica for service of dedication to the people of the world in memory of National Hero Sir Alexander Bustamante, and by the New York Freedom League for her work as Patron of the Bustamante Hospital for Children, 1984.

She has also been presented with a plaque for Outstanding Public Service to Jamaica to mark the end of the United Nations Decade of Women (1976-1986); she has been honoured by the Staff and Friends of the Bustamante Hospital for Children for 21 years of service; has been presented with the Harmony in the Homes Movement Model Family Trophy in recognition of "Widow Exemplary Family Life", 1985, and has received a Citation from Young Jamaica in honour of her supporting role to National Hero, the Rt. Excellent Sir Alexander Bustamante.



Lady the Hon. Bustamante, O.J.

Today, she worships at Sts. Peter and Paul on Old Hope Road in St. Andrew. although in her early years, Gladys Longbridge was a Moravian.

She attended the Elementary School in Ashton, her birthplace, until she was 15; then taught there for a short while as a pupil teacher.

It was her aunt, twin sister to her mother, who brought her to Kingston and enrolled her at the Tutorial College which was founded by Mr. and Mrs. R. J. Blake.

After Tutorial, she was invited by Sir Alexander to be his secretary, and a long and close association began on Duke Street where he operated his Securities and Loans Company.

During the years of his early trade union activity with A. G. S. Coombs and St. William Grant, and later when he started to build his own union, she travelled with him all over Jamaica. There were times when employers dared to try to refuse to see him; and when he stormed his way into their offices she was there with him as they swept past startled secretaries. Toe to toe.

Those who were present say there was none as proud as "Miss G" when she sat on the platform at the official opening and dedication of the offices of the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union at 98-100 Duke Street in Kingston on May 24, 1943. And when the Rev. J. Cowell-Lloyd offered prayers and asked God to bless the building and those who would work in it for

the benefit of the workers of Jamaica, her eyes were closed tightly as she whispered, "Amen, Amen", twice!

Her interests are listed in the reference books as swimming, motoring and gardening. These listings are not peripheral.

She is a competent swimmer, and even now enjoys being tossed on the crest of the waves of the sea.

She still loves to drive herself to the country on weekends, and the friends who travel with her do not have to press imaginary brakes.

She is also a gardener and a farmer. Many of the tall trees which cast cool shadows on the grounds of Jamaica House were planted or supervised by her. So too, at Belencita at the hill top

of the gentle, sloping lands in Irish Town where she lives. There you will find the delicate sweet lychee, and the strawberry red bougainvillea which was hybridised by the late Vernon James and named the "Lady Bustamante" in her honour.

There she also has a vegetable farm with lettuce, parsley, carrot, beet, cucumber and string beans which are bought by housewives in the supermarkets of Kingston and enjoyed by guests staying in some Kingston City hotels. More recently too, she has established a coffee farm.

Gladys Longbridge was called "Miss G" by friends for years. After she married Sir Alexander on Sept-ember 7, 1962, her friends named her "Lady G".

She has grown with modern Jamaica. She has been part of

Jamaica. She entered elective politics once, but did not succeed. And had she given the hint of a wish, she could have been a member of the Legislative Council and a Minister without Portfolio before Independence.

Instead, she remained "Miss G", until Sir Alexander could ask her to be his "Lady G".

On the night of the JLP's electoral victory in April 1962, Sir Alexander was asked in a live broadcast to name his Cabinet. One by one he listed some, gently reminded of other potentials by the

celebrants at his Tucker Avenue home.

Then he added sadly: "my one regret is I won't have "Miss G" in my Cabinet — the woman who made me."

Many, many, more Happy Birthyears, Lady G! You have also helped to make Jamaica.

This article was prepared by Hartley Neita.



Lady Bustamante and Sir Alexander on their wedding day, September 7, 1962.