

WOMEN-IN-LAW

Mrs. Ena Allen - first woman Master in Chambers

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The following is the first of a new series on Women-in-law by Winsome Lane

MRS. ENA ALLEN, first woman Master in Chambers and first woman to act as Supreme Court judge in Jamaica is small and gentle and smiling, with softly waving gray hair.

Although she has reached the highest position any woman in Jamaica has attained in her profession, her manner is modest, even self-deprecating. She says she comes from a "poor family" and insists that any youngster in Jamaica who has the will to work can be as successful as she has been.

A totally feminine woman, neat and softly-spoken she yet has an unmistakable air of authority. She believes present-day Jamaicans are being wrongly taught they have a right to the good things of life without working for them, and says that the more general practice of birth-control could help to stem crime in her country.

The lady "Master" comes from a large and close-knit family, she lives with her mother and student daughter in a house surrounded by fruit trees, keeps a thriving family of mongrel-Labrador dogs and confesses that her most favourite form of relaxation is fishing from a boat outside Kingston Harbour. She catches snapper, shad and grunt.

Father a jeweller

MRS. ALLEN was born Ena Lue Sang, daughter of first-generation Chinese emigrant Thompson Lue Sang and his Jamaican wife Lucy. Her father was a jeweller "in a very small way" says Mrs. Allen. The couple had ten children but Ena was the only one who took to the profession of law.

A graduate of Excelsior School, Mrs. Allen became a temporary clerk in the Sutton Street Court Office. Here she came under the influence of the late Mr. Frank St. John Hill who was then Deputy Clerk of Courts, father of Mr. Wilton Hill, Q.C. She says Mr. Hill senior encouraged and inspired her to find her vocation in the law and she began to study for the Bar. She remembers that both Mr. Wilton Hill and Mr. Frank Phipps, two gentlemen who

are now eminent Queen's Counsel, worked in the Sutton Street office with her as very young men. She recalls that Mr. Phipps particularly was full of fun and youthful exuberance, often helping the day's work along with his sense of humour.

a "brilliant scholar". He had won a Certificate of Honour at the British Bar and was practising as a barrister in England. The couple were married in 1953 on their return to Jamaica: Mr. H. P. Allen, for many years a barrister and Resident Mag-

stration tour of juvenile courts in the United States and Canada that lasted for four months.

"We were able to tell them, then, of the low rate of crime in Jamaica," she recalls, "And we were able to tell them that there were no gangs here, or crime consequent upon gang warfare."

She commented that this was a sad reflection on how quickly the social face of Jamaica had changed.

Mrs. Allen was appointed chairman of the Juvenile Court, Western Region in 1964, operating out of Montego Bay. At that time she had a small daughter and husband to care for in Kingston and she made the journey to Montego Bay and back every weekend, so as to spend the week-ends at home with her family (her husband was a Resident Magistrate in Kingston, her daughter Karen at school in the city).

This period of her life was
(Continued on Page 22)



MRS. ENA ALLEN

After reading for the Bar in her spare time, Mrs. Allen took her intermediate examinations successfully in Jamaica, then went to Lincoln's Inn in England to read for her finals. She wrote her finals in May 1952 and was called to the British Bar in June 1953. She then spent a further year in England, working for the Crown Agents as a stenographer.

Dreary climate

NOTICEABLY non-committal in her comments on England, all Mrs. Allen would say about this period is that the climate was dreary.

England brought her one good thing, however, when she met her husband there. He was Mr. Herbert Percival Allen whom she describes as

istrate in Jamaica, died in 1974.

During the years 1944 to 46 in Jamaica, Mrs. Allen had joined the Women's Auxiliary Territorial Service, attached to the British Army Pay Corps and served as a pay clerk, hoping, she said to be sent abroad, but her hopes were not realised and she served the whole time in Jamaica.

On her return to Jamaica in 1953 Mrs. Allen became Deputy Clerk of the Courts at Sutton Street, then Clerk of the Courts in 1957. She was later promoted to act as Resident Magistrate. In 1961 with Resident Magistrates Miss Joyce Groves and Mrs. Ena Collymore-Woodstock she went on an obser-

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(Continued from Page 3)

exhausting, she says and she applied for a transfer, eventually being appointed Resident Magistrate for Clarendon in 1967 and for Saint Catherine in 1969.

In 1970 she was appointed the first woman Registrar of the Supreme Court, a post that entailed overall administration of the Supreme Court with its separate divisions. Then in 1972 and '73 she became the first woman to act as Master in Chambers and her permanent confirmation in that post was obtained on July 15, 1974.

She was appointed acting Judge of the High Court from March 26, 1973 to November 13, 1973 and from April 22, 1974 to October 1975. First woman Registrar, first woman Master in Chambers, first woman acting Puisne Judge.

Talking to the charming Master in Chambers it becomes apparent that her domestic life is of great importance to her. The whole family often go out together on weekend expeditions, she says. Her mother now lives with her and her daughter Karen, of whom she is obviously very proud, is now an undergraduate at the University of the West Indies, doing a degree course in Natural Sciences.

Asked how she has managed to attain a distinguished career in law while looking after a husband and child all these years she says with a smile — "I was lucky to have a husband who was a good cook."

Speaking of the problem of crime in Jamaica Mrs. Allen said she felt it was inspired by two things, envy and the realistic depiction of crime in television and movies. The people of Jamaica were being taught these days that no-one had the right to more of the good things than anyone else, she said. They interpreted this, in their own way, to mean they had the right to go and take at gunpoint, what others had worked hard all their lives to earn.

She felt they might not have learned to do this if it had not been for television and movies which showed how criminals and gunmen operated.

She also thought that a population much too large for the resources of the country was a factor that increased crime and said that the present policy on birth control was very wise. The widespread and uncontrolled distribution of condoms and birth control pills was long overdue, she said, but she was pleased to see it as it gave some hope for the future.

Mrs. Allen stressed that in the rise to the top of her profession she has never met with resentment from men and in fact had every help and encouragement from her male colleagues.

"If the fact of being a woman has been a disadvantage, I have never been conscious of it," she said, "everyone has been kind to me." And having met Mrs. Allen, it is easy to understand why.