PAS SING OF FAMED 'BLACK PATTI' DEEP LOSS TO THOSE WHO KNEW HER AS A CHILD IN PORTSMOUTH

Internationally Known; Singer Was Born Here
Showed Talent Early, Old Residents Recall As
They Tell of Mme. Jones' Vivacious Childhood

The death of the famous, talented and popular singer Miss Matilda Jones, well known as "Black Patti" for her rich voice and her ability to captivate audiences, has caused deep sorrow among those who knew her as a child in this city.

For the golden-voiced artist who passed away in New York City on Sunday, May 24, 1933, was born and spent her early life right here in Norfolk. Born on a plantation that was once owned by a people whose good fortune it was to have known "Black Patti" in her youth as well as during the height of her fame and later in her waning years.

"Black Patti's" birthplace was a small two-roomed house on Barnard Street, between Church and Fingal Street. This dusty place in the old North Norfolk neighborhood is remembered by a Journal and Guide reporter through conversations with some of the older children days old of the vivacious singer.

Parents Lived Here

In those early years she was known to her neighbors by her real name, Matilda Colten. Her father was the late Mr. and Mrs. Jerry Jones, who farmed in the vicinity. The mother died when Miss Jones was ten years old.

Perhaps the nearest relatives who survive Miss Jones are Mrs. Melvina Colten, 207 High Street, a niece, and Mrs. Melvina O'Brien, of the same address. William Colten, 180 Wool Ave., one of Mr. Jones' brothers, is a first cousin to the famous singer.

Young Matilda was literally born to strains of music for her mother was a member of the Church of Ebenzer, having sung in the choir of the Ebenezer Baptist Church until her death.

Early Life Not Easy

Mr. Colten and Mrs. Jones are now residing with the children of the family, for both are single men of maturity. The former is now a member of the Methodist Church.

According to a story related by Mrs. Colten, the early life of Miss Jones was not easy. There were two children, Matilda and her late sister, Miss Joanna, a devotee of Mr. Jones. The mother was forced to drive herself to school for her children, but young Matilda sang through those days with her mother.

She would mount chairs, bureaus, or tables about the house and sing until her mother chased her out.

Went To School Here

"I never heard her sing any one song as much as 'My Baby's in the Sea.' She would complain.

Several residents of this city remember the active young Matilda as a student of the old Webster School, where she was in the first grade. Even then she showed possibilities as a singer and would fill the air with sweet and lovely music. She was a much loved and popular member of the class.

Her sometime in the early 80's she was sent to the North to further her education.

Married In Late 80's

According to people who knew Miss Jones, she was married to a man named Richard Jones, of Portsmouth, and in the early 1900's, she began a career in her life that remains a mystery to all.

About 1890 Matilda Jones, known on the operatic stage as Miss Jones, began to become famous as "Black Pati."

She sang with great success for many years, and in all the principal cities of Europe.

She later headed her own company, an aggregation of talented performers of that day, known as the "Black Pearl Troubadours," which played in every important city of America, the West Indies, and Central America, with sensational success.

Favorite Song

Local citizens remember her in sentimental memories of the songs of the 90's such as, "If You Like Me Like I Like You," and "You Are My Sunshine," which was sung at the old Academy of Music for the last time in the 300 block of High Street.

Mme. Jones was equally effective with classics. Her favorite song, however, is still "Sweet Adeline." When Mme. Jones came down upon the Swan River, it was an epoch-making event.

During last several years, Mme. Jones has been a devoted lover of the church and gave liberally to that institution. She is remembered by Miss Melissa Jones as a devoted church worker.

"Dear Sisters:"

The name of Miss Jones is still kept in mind. I know your mother, yourself and all the folks are well and getting along these hard times. With it all God has been mighty good to us. He has trees us to live to see another Christmas. It is a new day and I have every thing to be thankful for.

Strongly Religious

I am feeling fine, thanks to the Lord, and I shall continue to thank Him and pray and trust Him until the end. I am going to take to my mother and do write and tell her she is and Arthur also. Love to all, as well as to you and your mother.

Even when her fortune in diamond ornaments was one, more life and existence became a problem she was generous to oth- ers. She would help a sister and a friend in distress she invari- ably did sometimes to the extent of self denial.

Was Very Sick

In another letter to Mrs. New- ton, Miss Jones wrote: "I have been very sick, went out for the first time in a week or two, and to the Lord to give me strength to do so and answered my petitions. So you see how good my Savior is. I shall continue to pray and trust in the Lord for I have no use for mere man's help."

On Sunday, Miss Jones died. She was 87 years old.

As an indication of how deeply religiously Miss Jones was, the following part of the letter is quoted: "Give Aunt Melvina my love and ten times in God. She alone is the only one to cure all ills."