

dedicated to a better Jamaica

AMY BAILEY grew up in an era of colour prejudice when to be black was deemed to be inferior and yet she emerged as one of the island's reputable and leading educators.

On the night of Friday, January 29, at the Hotel Oceana in Kingston, an elderly, serene, God-fearing and dignified lady stood tall, and through her small piercing eyes saw her life's work and achievements over the years, as she received the first prestigious Marcus Garvey Award for Excellence.

Miss Bailey, O.D., O.B.E., M.B.E., J.P. received her award amidst thunderous applause by relatives, friends and well wishers, who have since that night showered her with numerous floral arrangements.

She has dedicated her life and work to the development of the social structure of her beloved nation.

Reputable educators

Her family has made a monumental contribution to education. Her three sisters, brother and herself are reputable educators and they all went to Shortwood Teachers' College and Mico College respectively.

Making her contribution to the development of this nation, she has fought relentlessly and championed the cause of young working black men and women in the 1930's: fought against discrimination against women and was a champion for equality without given thought to race, colour, religion or sexual differences.

The peaceful nonagenarian, Amy Beckford Bailey was born on November 27, 1895. She is the daughter of William Fredrick Bailey and Anne (nee) Lawson. Both were outstanding teachers who taught Amy about the greatness of teaching.

Paying tribute to her parents, Miss Bailey said that they made a great contribution to Jamaica's educational system by giving their five children to the teaching profession.

Her father was trained at the Government College in Spanish Town which was established before Mico Practising and her mother was trained at Bethabla College, now Bethlehem College.

"My mother had as her principal, Mrs. Hicks, a German-Swiss who taught her students how to be ladies and my mother was able to pass on what she learnt at college to her students."

"My father realised that there were not many places for us to go in those days and so, he sent us to teachers' colleges."

Miss Bailey completed her studies at Shortwood Teachers' College in 1917. After a brief period of illness during which time she taught herself shorthand, she entered the teaching profession.

Recalling her first job at Kingston Technical High School in 1919, she said

By Winsome Smith

that her sister was going on leave for three months and suggested to the principal that her sister, Amy would relieve her during her leave.

Interestingly, Amy started her first job at KTHS, as a shorthand teacher and there she stayed until 1958, when she retired.

Bold plea

One of the achievements she is best remembered for is the pioneering of the entry of Technical School students into the civil service.

In 1938, the year which saw massive labour uprisings in the nation, Miss Bailey made a bold selfless plea to then Governor Sir Edward Denham, for assistance to get these students into the civil service.

Responding to the Governor's question about the students' attitude, she told him that the students performed well, but lacked motivation and there was no jobs available for them after they left school.

After learning that they were not allowed in the Civil Service, Governor Denham promised to assist the students with this problem. Two weeks after his visit to the school, word came that the students would be allowed to sit the Civil Service examination and for years, her students produced some of the best results.

Looking at apartheid during her

childhood, Miss Bailey said between 1904-6, her two eldest sisters, Winnie and Ivy attended Wolmer's High School. At this time, they were among the few blacks attending this school.

Her eldest sister, Winnie, was among the first set of teachers who received specialised kindergarden training, Ivy who never returned to the Kingston Technical High School, became a commercial teacher.

Victor, her brother became a teacher and later a politician. Her sister, Elsie entered the political field and was a pharmacist at Christiana.

Between the 1920's to late 1940's, apartheid was rampant and the blacks could not get prominent jobs. Even in the church, apartheid was practised as one prominent Baptist Church in Kingston did not want a black man to be the Minister, she said.

"You had very few black professionals, most of them were teachers. The general feeling then was that the black person was at the end of the ladder", she adds. In today's Jamaica, apartheid is not as prominent as it was then, blacks are achieving everywhere.

In the Jamaican society of the 1930's, Miss Bailey observed rampant racism. She began her fight and championed the cause of Jamaicans of every race to be employed in stores and offices.

She wrote many "NOT WANTED" letters to the **Public Opinion**, she interviewed many store managers and business owners to get them to employ coloured Jamaicans. She was successful as coloured Jamaicans began to be employed by these business leaders and store managers.

Fighting for the liberation of women,



FIRST MARCUS GARVEY AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE being presented to Miss Amy Bailey (right) by Lady Bustamante. Said Miss Bailey: "The award will be given to God, the Giver of all good gifts, for His love for Jamaica and Jamaicans.

the renowned and dignified educator became co-founder and the first Chairman of the Women's Liberal Club. The organisation fought to give women an acceptable place in the world — both inside and outside of the home.

Resulting from the establishment of the club, Mrs. Mary Morris-Knibb became the first female Councillor of the

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Kingston and St. Andrew Corporation.

Miss Bailey prides herself in being the first Jamaican to testify before the Royal Commission. She was in England at the time on a mission for the Save-the-Children Fund.

At this time the Jamaican nation was facing serious times. A time which saw massive labour uprisings and the emergence of the nation's trade unions and two major political parties.

Miss Bailey recalls vividly her testimony about the situation in Jamaica. Giving evidence before this prestigious Commission which was chaired by Lord Moyne, the gracious, dynamic and eloquent lady said she missed a trip to Geneva. She was invited to Geneva by a lady who told her that Swiss people would be anxious to learn about Jamaica.

Real problem

Also, her visit to England brought her success in another area. After giving a lecture on the work of the Save-the-Children Fund, a gentleman approached her and congratulated her on the talk about Jamaica.

He told her then that the nation had to attack the real problem very soon which was Jamaica had too many children.

Urging her to introduce the birth control method in the island, he told her he would send an expert to help with the introduction of the method.

The official campaign started in 1939 at a meeting held at the Ward Theatre and chaired by the Rt. Excellent Norman Manley. This function heard Mr.

Manley's first public speech as he was just entering the political arena.

Looking back at the start of what became the turning point in the control of the nation's population, Miss Bailey smiles and said she encountered many problems. The first clinic was at 24 Esseys Court.

She was always an admirer of the great orator, Rt. Excellent Marcus Garvey and his work. "Garvey did not hate the white man, he only hated some of their actions. The masses was able to understand him as he was trying to instil in them personal cleanliness and dignity due to the realisation of their inner consciousnesses that they were human beings and men like the others (whites). He always told them to emulate the best attributes of the white man."

Black dignity

Garvey, she recalls, always told the masses that Jesus preached love and that they must love themselves and then their neighbours. "Try to build up your neighbours — just as you would build up yourself".

"I feel in today's world, it is more important to have black dignity and black consciousness."

"Everybody must have knowledge, reverence and self control and these three lead one's life to sovereign power. Young people lack self control, love and dignity and all the other things that go to make a great individual."

In 1944, Professor Simey advisor to the Comptroller for Colonial Development and Welfare in the West Indies criticised Jamaican women about

their behaviour, and that they did nothing to develop their country.

Miss Bailey, being the assertive person she is, insisted on doing something about this. With £100 from her bank account of £105, Miss Amy made the down payment for the property at 4 Rosedale Avenue in Kingston.

At this site, she became one of the founders of the Homecraft Training Centre, which opened its doors in January 1946, with six students, one matron and one cook. The aims of the centre was to train girls to bring out the best in themselves and to teach them to respect themselves and their jobs. For this job, she received no salary, but when the Government took over the centre in 1974 she received \$190 per month.

Today, Miss Bailey stands tall as she looks back at her life, work and achievements throughout the years. She has served on many boards and is a member of the Shortwood Teachers' Association. This lady has written a vast amount of letters and articles in **The Daily Gleaner** and is never afraid to comment on any thing, be it favourable or not.

She has challenged the media to ferret information about the past history of those who developed Jamaica economically and culturally and write about it. This, she said, would enable the youths of today to learn more about the history of this beloved nation.

This lady has not only left her footprints on the sands of time, but she has blazed the trail in the social development of this country. Jamaica's history is so much richer because of her life and work.