

St. Paul's Junior Club



Anniversary

Oct 13,-1950 - Oct 13,- 2000

SALUTE TO MRS VALERIE OLIMPIA THOMAS FOUNDER OF ST. PAUL'S JUNIOR CLUB

Mrs Valerie Thomas, affectionately known as Ms. Val, was born in the community of Sea Cow's Bay on March 8, 1914 to the late Mr Reginald Forbes and Miss Rosie Smith. She began her education in the Sea Cow's Bay Methodist School which was founded by her Aunt Ms Augusta Forbes, and later progressed to the Road Town Anglican School where she completed her studies.

After leaving school as a young woman, Ms. Val found employment with a family in Hannah's Estate where she taught the children the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic. During this period, she also supplemented her income by selling pastries which she prepared daily, and knitted as a favorite past time.

Later in life, Ms. Val married Mr Charles Thomas from Pleasant Valley and God blessed them with four children: Cleone, Clarence, Clarice and Claudia. In addition to raising her children Ms. Val donated much of her spare time to her community. She was an active member of the St. Paul's Episcopal Church, where she performed a variety of duties such as: Sunday School teacher, Organist, Choir Mistress and later on our very own Lay Reader. She was also the founder of the Mother's Union, known today as the Episcopal Church Women (E.C.W.). Ms. Val was also very instrumental in the restoration process of St Paul's Church when its roof was destroyed by hurricane in the year 1916.

Recognizing the need for a civic organization in the community that would serve as a gathering place for young people, Ms Val along with the Reverend Father

Forsight, Mr. Stanley Nibbs and Mr. Ross Adolphos Rawley, formed a group which they named the Progressive League. The league performed many services and sponsored a number of functions in the community during their tenure.

Years following the Progressive League's existence, Ms. Val formed another organization which she named the St. Paul's Junior Club which is still in existence today. The club serves as a place where young people from the Sea Cow's Bay community gathered to spend time learning skills such as: arts and craft, leadership, public speaking and cake-making. In spite of severe illness, and major surgeries, that Ms Val had to under go, the children were very keen and wanted to persevere with their club life. At one point, Ms. Val was so ill that she told her members she couldn't continue. However, the children insisted that she be present even if they had to conduct the meetings. She willingly agreed and the meeting



were successful up until she was able to resume her duties. Housing for the meetings was a problem therefore they had to revert to open air meetings in the church yard. This did not continue for very long, for they were determined to get shelter erected.

Ms Val said that they raised funds and many friends helped them. Dr. Parker had not long arrived in the colony, and was unpacking his furniture, when Ms. Val approached him and asked him to sell them the crate boxes. He told Ms. Val he would gladly give them to the Club.

The boys and girls built the house with the help of a few friends who directed them in special area of work. It was not a stately building but they were proud of the job accomplished, for now they had their own meeting place.

In 1957 Ms. Val said she felt there was a

need for a library in Sea Cow's Bay. Therefore, she bought a few books hoping to run a children's library. The boys built shelves and the girls stamped the books, and got them ready for the opening day. When the day came for the opening of the children's library, there were about three hundred books on display. Thanks to Rev. Father Raymond Abbitt the then Rector of All Saint Church in St. Thomas, he kept us supplied with children's books. Thanks is also extended to the Parodical Club of America, who through Father and Mrs. C.E. Pipe were responsible for contacting them to send us books, the Church of St. Phillips and St. Stephens of Detroit Michigan, and Mrs Neille Thome of Fort Bragg California. The friends were too numerous to mentioned, from abroad and at home who kept the Library in books for over eleven years. When our Government mobile Library came into being, we discontinued after a short while. It served not only as a children's library but adults also found good books and made use of them.

Thanks to the right Reverend Cedric Mills, who was instrumental in building the St. Paul's Parish Hall from funds given by the United Thanks Offering, we were able to use it for our Club meetings etc. and the Club house which we loved so much once was closed.

In December 1950 we were able to hold our first Community Christmas Tree which we still do, with the help from many friends who supports this worthy cause. Ms. Val always said that the children from the Club as well as the Community enjoyed this Christmas effort.

At an early age Ms. Val demonstrated a love for music and was encouraged by family and friends who delighted in her precocious abilities. She staged her first concert when she was fourteen. The concert was held on property belonging to her godfather's wife, Rosita Rawleigh, under a tent. The sides were made from dried coconut palms and the ceiling was made from canvas. Like the concerts that were to follow, the first one featured songs, plays and recitations. Weeks of rehearsals paid off. The children and adults whom Ms Val had coached, performed their

roles well and the audience received mistakes with good humor. The first concert was a huge success and many more concerts followed with people coming on horseback and by foot from neighboring communities. Before each concert, flyers would be made up and circulated to people who were going to Pleasant Valley, Belle Vue, Carrot Bay etc. These flyers would be then posted in areas where they would be seen in those various communities. Word of mouth was also a reliable means of ensuring that people knew of an upcoming concert. Ms. Val was thrilled when the audience some

times reached one hundred. The concerts were held around special events such as Christmas, Mothers' Day, Easter or any time there was a demand for a fund raiser. For Sea Cow's Bay residents, the concerts were a claim to fame, time to kick back, take time off from working on their farms, cooking, planting and either show off their talents or enjoy their neighbours. In the absence of theatre and television people were glad for something to do. "My Mother Callaloo, "How Me Boss Can Lie," and Jumbie Ghut," were particular favourites.

It was in 1953 we choose our uniform of red hats, white blouses, and blue skirts and pants. At that time there were male participants. The first time we turned out in our uniform was on the day of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the 2nd Coronation. We were invited by the Government to take part in the celebration held in Road Town Tortola.

As a woman whose "can-do" attitude infused everything she did, Ms. Val began a correspondence course in professional custom millinery offered by New Jersey's Academy of Millinery Design. Quite frequently the Academy would send her millinery materials which would be returned weeks later in the form of finished hats. After she received her diploma she began to sell her hats or give them away to friends and family who would wear them to church and other special occasions.

Ms. Val also found the time to make local preserves and would give them as gift to people. Such dainties included guava

jelly, guava cheese, stewed guava shells, pickled pawpaw and mango chutney. Ms. Val's wedding cakes were famous in the community and, in addition to baking bread once or twice a week in her brick oven she would make elaborate, time-consuming multi-layered creations. Hand work was a special interest and she made baby booties, doilies and lot of embroidery. Through all this she found time to be an involved mother who delighted in playing snakes and ladders with her children and took them to the beach and on picnics.

In 1963 when the territory's Anglican churches were transferred from the Diocese of Antigua to the Diocese of the Virgin Islands, the Mothers' Union changed its name to the Women of the Church, becoming more democratic and inclusive by accepting members who were single and/or childless. The community showed its appreciation for Ms. Val's efforts and that year she became the new organization's first president.

In 1973 she became the ninth woman in the territory to be awarded the British Empire Medal by Queen Elizabeth II.

In 1982 she received what, to her must have been sweetest reward, when the past and present members of the St. Paul's Junior Club, after 20 years held a testimonial dinner for her and gave her an award of appreciation for long and untiring service to church and community. In 1983, Ms. Val was honored by the Lions and Lioness Club of Tortola at their Installation Dinner as Citizen of the Year on June 4, 1983.

In 1990, Bishop E. Don Taylor at a ceremony at St. Paul's Church attended by many, presented Ms Val with the Bishop's Award for long and faithful service in the

church. It was the first time that a BVIlander was given this prestigious award.

Mrs Valerie O. Thomas was honored by the State of Alabama, USA and received Certificate of Commendation by the Secretary of State, Don Siegelman. In addition she was recognized by the American citizen of Alabama for her contributions of love, peace and hope, on 27th January, 1983.

In 1998, Sea Cow's Bay Community Center was named after Valerie O. Thomas on Sunday May 3, 1998. The committee referred to her as a matriarch, loyal family woman and leader in her church as choir director, youth organizer, Sunday school teacher and Superintendent, lay reader, President of the Mother's Union and organist.

In May, 1995 Ms Val was profiled as Senior Citizen for the month.

In her golden years Mrs. Valerie Thomas has become incapacitated but continues to be a mentor for all those whose lives she has touched. Ms. Val you are and will always be a marvelous, wonderful and extraordinary role model.



At The Queen's Birthday Parade 1998