

[Mrs. Eliza Kelly Brady]

25997 [Life? History?] Fernandina

November 23, 1939.

Life History

Mrs. Eliza Kelly Brady,

(Age 72)

41 South 6th-st.,

Fernandina, Florida.

Rose Shepherd, Writer. MRS. ELIZA KELLY BRADY.

More than one resident of fernandina had said: "You go see Mrs. Brady, if anybody knows and remembers things about this town, it's Miss Eliza. And she can tall you all about St. Michael's Catholic Church — she practically lives there."

Mrs. Brady's home is a two-story-and-attic frame residence with double front balconies adorned with spindle posts and the gingerbread lace-work of the early 1880's. The residence evidently originally centered a large plot of ground, but as streets were cut through this section and sidewalks laid, these civic improvements encroached on the premises until now the front steps are flush with the pavement and the row of stately liveoaks that formerly shaded the front yard are on the outer edge of the sidewalk adjacent to the street. The spacious side yard to the north is a veritable tropical garden with its well cared for magnolias, liveoaks, pecan trees, rambling vines, roses and perennials.

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When the doorbell sounded throughout the large house, quick steps were heard on the second floor, and a voice called down from the upper balcony — “Just come in, whoever you are, and I’ll be down in a minute.”

The front door [leading?] into the narrow hall, with its stairway to the second floor was open, and the door opening into the living room an ajar, so that access was easy into 2 this home, whose reputation for hospitality was confirmed by the informal invitation to enter.

A low fire burned in the grate in the living room. An all fashioned grand piano took up the wide space of the north wall, the rose-colored rug and the furniture, although showing a generation of use, were well chosen, and every available space on the piano, the mantel over the fireplace, the two center tables with their reading lamps, was filled with photographs of the Brady family and Catholic clergy.

Mrs. Brady came down the stairs, and entered the room with a cordial greeting, dressed in a long rose-colored coat and wearing a small black felt hat pulled well down over her wirey gray hair. She is a tall spare woman, with pleasant features, gray Irish eyes, fumed In the locality for their friendliness, and does not look within ten years of her age.

“No, I am not going out — I just came in,” said Mrs. Kelly, “I have every week to visit the old Bosquobello Cemetery, this is Wednesday, my day to visit the graves of my family who are gone and my friends of earlier days, whom I have outlived. I have spent most of the afternoon there, and I’ll just keep my hat and coat on, as the fire has gone down and it is rather chilly.

“Yes, I am a native, and been closely identified with the life of Fernandina for my whole seventy-two years. I was the only child of Daniel Kelly and Mary Russell Kelly who settled in Fernandina in 1852. My father came from Sligo, Ireland, and my mother from Dublin. My

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family have been continuous residents since the above date, taking an active part in the 3 upbuilding of Fernandina and Nassau County.

“In 1890 I was married to Patrick R. Brady who came from Columbus, Georgia to Fernandina, opening the only exclusive furniture store in Nassau County, which he continued to operate until the time of his death.

“We had two children, Mrs. Lewis [P.?] Chadwick, residing in Fernandina, and Anthony Rogers Brady.

“I have given you the information about the Spanish-American War” — (See previous interview) ” and I want to say that my son, Anthony Rogers Brady (Rogers was Mr. Brady's mother's name) was born in May, 1898, the year of the Spanish-American War.

“I was considered to have a talent in music, and was given special training, particularly in church music, and was organist for many years at St. Michael's Church. When my baby was so little, and on Sundays the military high mass was so long, the little colored nurse used to wheel him up behind the church, and while the band played and the soldiers sang the Star Spangled Banner, I would slip out and nurse little Anthony.

“By a strange coincidence, this boy, the pride of my life, is a soldier of Uncle Sam. He graduated from Annapolis in 1922. He is now forty-one years of age, and is Lieutenant-Commander of the aerial squadron in Pearl Harbor at Honolulu, Hawaii.

“After his graduation from the U. S. Naval Academy, his first assignment was on the flagship Pittsburg in European waters. He spent four years in Europe. After serving in 4 in this capacity, he was assigned to the Huron, flagship of the Asiatic Fleet, and was made navigator on the Yangste-Kiang River and between Shanghai and Manila. Then he was sent to San Juan, and made an aerial survey in Nicaurauga, when young Theodore Roosevelt was Governor-General of Puerto Rico. Just previous to being transferred

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again to the Orient, my son was instructor for six years at Pensacola Air Station, teaching aviation.

“Here is a clipping from a Honolulu paper he sent me recently giving an account of Algat Segerstrom having been awarded a gold medal for 'rescuing Lt. Comdr. [A.?] R. Brady, U. S. N., from drowning on November 17, 1938, at Field Air base, Pearl Harbor, T. H. Segerstrom is attached to the Commander's Aircraft Scouting force. His gold medal is the first to be awarded an enlisted man of the Navy since 1932.’

“It seems my son in command of a squad, represented by three planes. Behind him was another officer, and a man who handled the torpedoes in the maneuvering flight. My son was first to see that the torpedo carrier was not connected right, and as the plane started to fall, he swiftly put on a special suit — a kind of life preserver outfit — but the other two officers failed to observe this precaution and when the plane hit the water of the bay they were instantly killed. This young Segerstrom fished my son out, more dead than alive. He had a bad head injury and was unconscious for some time, but they kept him at the post hospital for a month, and upon examination pronounced him all right. The accident 5 “The accident was announced over the radio, and I received letters of inquiry and sympathy from all over the country.

“Now, about the St. Michael's Church: When my father came here in 1852, he brought his mother. Both of them were Catholics. There was no priest, but there was a church in Old Town (old Fernandina). The priests who occasionally officiated were mostly from Italy and France. They were called missionaries. There was no way of reaching here only on mules through swamps, ditches, and dense shrubbery. There were no roads. St. Augustine had always been the head of this diocese.

“The first Catholic Bishop in this part of Florida was Augustine Berot, a Frenchman, who was considered a wonderful scholar. With him were Father o'Brea, Father Clavereil, Father Hugon, and Father DuFau, who was pastor of the church in Jacksonville for many years.

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“Father Clavereil came to Fernandina on a mule, and with a long rope tied the animal to a big liveoak tree right across the street here on Sixth and Ashe. Yes, the tree is still there.

“Then came Father John Batazza, Father Spandari, and Father Sartouri — all Italians — who spent months of their lives in Florida right after the War between the States. The first two named priests are buried in the yard of St. Michael's.

“When the terrible epidemic of yellow fever came in 1877 and again in 1888, a young priest, Rev. Father Anthony Kilcoyne came to Fernandina to serve as pastor at St. Michael's.

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“When he first came here he was about 31 years of age. He went about ministering to the stricken, without regard to creed or color, and did a lot of good, but at last he was also taken with the malignant fever and died from its effects. Then a French priest, Father Hugon, came to relieve the sufferers.

“The Episcopalian minister who stayed here during the yellow fever epidemic was Rev. John Thackera. He was a native of Fernandina, and stayed right at his post of duty.

“I remember Father Kilcoyne came to my mother's home right from a sickroom, with the black vomit on his hands, in itself a sure sign of death from the plague. Terrible times!

“So Fernandina's history is interwoven with that of the Churches.

“After Father Hugon, came Rev. Maurice P. Foley, D. D., who was pastor of St. Michael's. After spending several years in Fernandina, he was made bishop of Tugugaros, in the Philippine Islands, near Manila. He was a Boston man, and died in the Philippines, where he is buried.

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“Another of the Italian priests who was much loved in this section in the early years was Father [Botalacio?]. The early missionaries were of the Jesuit order, and following them were the Franciscans.

“During the War between the States I have often heard my parents and an old lady living in St. Augustine speak of a Jesuit priest by the name of Hamilton. Father Hamilton was Irish and was a famous scholar who was much revered and much loved. He was located in Jacksonville, and today there are 7 many men in Duval, Nassau, and St. Johns County, who bear the name of ‘Hamilton’ in honor of this much loved priest.

“The Right Reverend Bishop John Moore was the Bishop of the Diocese of St. Augustine during the Spanish-American War. Then we had Bishop Curley, now Archbishop Curley, and our present Bishop, the Right Reverend Patrick Barry, who has done valiant work in Florida for the past forty years. He did a great work during the Spanish-American War.

“I must not forget to tell you that State Senator Dan [?] Kelly is my nephew. He was born in Fernandina on July 4, 1908, the son of Daniel A. Kelly and Dora Kelly. His grandfather, the Hon. Patrick Kelly, tendered valuable service during the War between the States. He was the first Democratic Senator from Nassau County and held many responsible positions during his long career. His grandmother, Christine Bessant, of St. Mary's, Georgia, was from an old Southern family. When the bell of freedom rung in Fernandina, his grandmother, Christine Bessant Kelly, freed by her own right, twelve colored men, the youngest, Paul Robinson, aged 16. The descendants of these slaves live here in Fernandina, and are good-living people,

“Yes, I still play the organ at St. Michael's, especially at funerals and weddings. It is not unusual for the youngsters to come around and say, 'miss 'Liza, I want you to play for my wedding,' and I always go, wherever I can serve or do good.”

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We went to the door, and as she said good-bye, she pointed to a residence across the street, where Martha Reid, a famous Southern nurse and wife of ex-governor Robert Raymond Reid, kept house for her nephew for seventeen years, preceding her death.