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# The DW

DALLASWEEKLY



www.dallasweekly.com

January 29-February 4, 2015

No. 1 Serving the African-American Community

Volume No. 62 Issue No. 05

/dallasweekly1

/dallasweekly

/dallasweekly

/dallas.weekly

## The Southern Literary Renaissance of Lillian B. Horace

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faith.

Texas's first African American woman novelist was also a biographer, diarist, educator, publisher, and librarian. Lillian B. Horace was born on April 29, 1880 in Jefferson, Texas. Her parents were Thomas Amstead and Macey Matthews. The family moved to Fort Worth, Texas when Lillian was a young toddler. She would go on to receive her early and formal education, graduating from the historically black institution, I. M. Terrell High School. Lillian enrolled in Bishop College in Marshall, Texas, where she took classes from 1898 to 1899. She focused her entire life around writing, entrepreneurship, community activism, philanthropy, and her

Like most women in the south, Lillian B. Horace began her journey in education before she graduated from college. She taught in area schools in Fort Worth, Texas for six years, and then traveled different universities throughout the United States to further her education. Lillian received a Bachelor's Degree in 1924 from Simmons University in Louisville, Kentucky. After graduating from college, Lillian B. Horace was appointed as dean of women at Simmons University for two years. She then returned to Fort Worth, Texas to become the dean of girls at I.M. Terrell High School, established the school's library, journalism and drama departments and the



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school newspaper. Lillian B. Horace was a member of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Alphin Art and Charity Club, Progressive Woman's Club, and the Order of the Eastern Star. Through all of Lillian B. Horace's contributions in the community, little is known or has been publicized about her writing career until now. The writer's papers can be accessed in Fort Worth, Texas at the Genealogy, History & Archives Unit at the Fort Worth Public Library, and at the Tarrant County

Black Genealogical Society.

During the early part of the 20th century few African American women were known to carry the title of writer or entrepreneur in the south. Horace was a publisher and shared an office with James I. Dotson where they established the Dotson-Jones Printing Company. Lillian B. Horace self-published her first book in 1916, *Five Generations Hence* – a utopian novel. Lillian's themes in her first body of work focused on black women's

education, philanthropy, economic self-empowerment, and social etiquette. She used her first novel as a platform for discussion about blacks returning to their origins – the continent of Africa. The writer began working on her second novel, *Angie Brown* in the 1930's; married a preacher, Joseph Gentry Horace of Groveton, Texas, and became a member of the National Association of Colored Women's

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Club. The couple divorced and Lillian B. Horace continued writing and added another genre to her literary prowess: Biography.

Dr. Lacey Kirk Williams presented Lillian B. Horace with the opportunity to write his biography. In 1938, the writer began documenting his life, and produced *Sun-Crowned A Biography of: Dr. Lacey Kirk Williams*, published in 1964, by L. Venchael Booth. In the writer's own words at the beginning pages of the biography she clearly expresses to the reader that this is an accurate portrait of the subject:

"This is not a report on notes gathered from out-of-the-way sources, nor an additional stroke to an already developed portrait. The subject stood before me a living, breathing human being, plodding this work –a- day world shackled by all superstitions, inhibitions, and privations and restrictions of a member of an underprivileged group. I saw that he had the furnace finer than most given the same test, and he rose about the mediocrity that might have been his." – Lillian B. Horace

Lillian B. Horace begins the biography with a stroke of prose about the life of Dr. Lacey Kirk Williams. His parents, Levi and Elizabeth Williams were both slaves; as a result of the Emancipation Proclamation they were granted their freedom. They had seven children; Lacey Kirk Williams was the second son born on July 11, 1811. The writer provides the reader with a wealth of information pertaining to the family migration from the backwoods of Alabama to the southwest region of Texas. In like manner, the author notes at the that she does her best to always have the voice of an interviewer, but being filled with the spirit of her faith, her talent for writing prose seeped into the story to paint a portrait vividly for the reader, ultimately always wanting to provide an honest and thorough visual depiction of the subject's life.

Dr. Lacey Kirk Williams received a major portion of his education with regard to life-skills, religion, society, and culture at Thankful Baptist Church, located in Alabama. He received his formal education under the direction of a white church member that was originally from the east coast. His father was ordained as a deacon in the church and his mother became a prayer leader. They became a religious force in their community, gaining the trust of their peers. Levi Williams received with word from another well-known preacher that resided in their town about the opportunities afforded to newly freed slaves in the southwest region of Texas. He decided to leave his family for a brief time and visit the southwest, to check out the possibilities that were available for black people. In the late 1800's, the Williams family migrated from the state of Alabama to Burleson County, Texas. Once there, young Lacey Kirk Williams attended a school that his father helped found, River Lane Public School. Their lives never were the same after they migrated to Texas.

Levi Williams would go on to run for County Commissioner, was into education, and ordained a reverend. Lacey Kirk Williams followed his father's every move and mimicked a preacher every time a chance presented itself. Lillian B. Horace portrays his character from boyhood to a young man as a life filled with wisdom passed on from generations of slaves and freedmen. The young man's journey as an educator and minister led him through many doors and cities, opportunities opened up for him in more ways than one. He married one of his pupils, Georgia Lewis; their families had migrated to the southwest together. As a family man, Lacey Kirk Williams took full advantage of everything that came his way, including passing the state educator's exam, and receiving his call and license as a minister in December of 1894. In the early 1900's the Baptist minister enrolled in Bishop College in Marshall, Texas, and supported his young wife's quest for knowledge; she enrolled in a women's school and became a student-teacher. Lacey Kirk Williams first sermon was presented at a revival in Cookespoint,

Texas.

Lillian B. Horace documents in the biography that Dr. Lacey Kirk Williams would go on to receive a D.D. degree from Selma University and an LL.D degree from Bishop College. He then began preaching on a full-time basis. During his tenure as a religious leader, he led congregations at Macedonia Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas in 1907 and then took over Mt. Gilead Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas in 1909. He was a leader and supporter of the Lincoln Association, Baptist Missionary, and the Educational Convention. Williams transitioned out of Texas to become pastor of Chicago's Olivet Baptist Church in 1916, at the time it was the largest Black church in the United States with 12,000 members. He went on to receive awards and accolades for his work in the black community on a national scale. Lacey Kirk Williams died in a car crash after accepting an award on October 29, 1940 in Flint, Michigan. He was buried at Lincoln Cemetery in Chicago.

Lillian B. Horace documented the southern migration of an African American male born to parents of slaves, his rise to prominence as a Baptist minister, and national leader. The biography is listed in *The Paper's of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr: Advocate for Social Gospel* –referencing the work of the author.

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