

MISS IMA HOGG

Comments to the Ima Hogg Ceramics Circle April 1988

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Since I was born in Illinois, people ask me how I became acquainted with Miss Ima. When I first came to Houston I was interested in the Symphony and, of course, Miss Ima was very active with the Symphony. I was asked to join the staff at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, to train docents to give tours. It was at this point, with my involvement in the Symphony and the Museum, that I came to know her so well. We used to have lunch every Saturday as long as she lived, and it was on these occasions that she told me so many things.

Miss Ima's parents, Sarah Stinson Hogg and Governor James Stephen Hogg, were married in 1874 in Quitman, Texas. It rained so hard that night that the carriages could not get there. They finally had the ceremony at 11:00 PM. Miss Ima was their second child born July 10th, 1882. The question is always asked, "Why was she named Ima Hogg?". Her father had an older brother, Thomas Eliah Hogg, of whom he was very fond. Before Miss Ima was born Thomas had written a love story about the Civil War called "The Fate of Marvin" and the heroine's name was Ima. ON the second page it reads, "Ah, she was fair, the southern skies were typed in Ima's heavenly eyes". Thomas died before Miss Ima was born, but in a letter to a younger brother, John, from the Governor, he said "Our cup of joy runneth over. This morning Sarah gave birth to a beautiful little girl whose name shall be Ima". Miss Ima had many problems with her name. Many people said she had a sister, Ura. I was standing with her one day during the Azalea Trail and a couple came up and were so glad to meet her. They said, "Tell me about your sister, Ura". Miss Ima was so tired of that type of question but she was gracious and said, "I'm sorry I was never blessed with a sister. Three brothers but no sister". And as they walked away the woman turned to her husband and said, "She did too!" If they are not going to believe Miss Ima, they sure are not going to believe me. I asked her how that got started. She said, "When my father was campaigning to be Governor, I was 7 ½ years old and the only girl in the family, I accompanied him to the little

towns. I was allowed to take a play-mate with me and we both sat on the stage with him. During a speech he told the people that they liked to own possessions but you have to work for them. And then as an afterthought and a play on his last name he said, "After all, I'm a hogg and you're a hogg". The opposition picked it up and said, "Uh-huh, the other one is Ura". There has also been the assumption that he named her that because he was mean and did not want a girl. Nothing is further from the truth. He often took her with him as evidenced in many photographs.

Miss Ima's mother died when Miss Ima was 13 years old. It was very soon after he left the Governor's Mansion. She actually was serving as the hostess in her mother's absence. Her mother had been taken to Colorado in hopes that the climate would help the TB. So much responsibility was put on her shoulders at a very early age.

Another story she related had to do with the family tradition of premonitions. When she was 16 her father suggested a trip to Hawaii. They had a grand time and upon returning to San Francisco her father suggested a trip up to Seattle. They got on the boat and Miss Ima suddenly burst into tears and could not stop crying. Her father asked her what was the matter and she told him that she did not like the boat. She could not give a reason. Many a father of a teenage would not have paid attention, but he knew that premonitions ran in the family so they got off that boat and took another one. The first boat hit a storm off the coast of Oregon and not one person survived.

She was a gifted pianist. She studied piano at private schools, then attended the University of Texas where she continued her studies. She studied piano in New York and was in Germany at the outbreak of WWI. Although she never felt that she was of concert caliber, many of her friends felt that she was. She taught piano and was instrumental in founding the Houston Symphony.

Miss Ima had three brothers, Will, Mike, and Tom. Will and Miss Ima never married and I am often asked, "Why?" As I said earlier, I used to have lunch with her almost every Saturday but I always waited for her to call me. She called. She was leaving for London the following Tuesday. That Saturday she talked to me about things she had never told me before and she brought up the subject. Her father's older sister Frances, known as Aunt Frank, had joined the family upon her mother's death. Aunt Frank had said, "Never get married. None of you children should ever marry because you know your mother died of TB and it is a very

contagious disease.” In those days there were trainloads of people going to sanitoriums in San Antonio and it was believed to be easily caught. Mike and Tom did marry but there were no children so there are no direct descendants of the Hogg family.

When Miss Ima was 38 years of age, she was in New York City having her portrait done by the artist, Wyman Adams. While posing for the painting in his studio, she saw a lovely transitional Queen Anne armchair. It was American. She fell in love with it. She had no idea that American furniture was so beautifully handcrafted. He would not sell it to her, but that started her interest in American furniture. When you tour Bayou Bend you will see the chair that she was finally able to purchase after he died. You will also see the first chair that she purchased and it is felt that it is superior to the chair in the artist’s studio.

She was the first woman to serve on the Houston School Board. At that time the schools were segregated. She introduced art and music into the black schools. She was the only woman on the Houston Symphony Board. She was ahead of her time in many ways. Andre Previn said of her, “She stays on the bus. If I present a concert that is totally contemporary, I know at least one person will clap”. She bought Picassos in 1920 before they were popular. She bought Klee, Timayo and Rivera, really ahead of herself. She did not like everything that was contemporary, for example, she did not like pants suits for women, so out of respect for her we docents always wear dresses.

Katherine Prentis Murphy was a very close friend of Miss Ima’s. They called each other every Sunday morning asking how the other was, and what each had seen and purchased the previous week. The Murphy Room, which houses the collection of seventeenth century furniture, was named for Mrs. Murphy. Since this is a ceramic croup, I would like to share a story with you about the ceramics at Bayou Bend. One day we were in the Murphy Room and she told me how much she loved the white Lambeth candlesticks, and then proceeded to tell me the story of their purchase. She had entered a little antique shop and saw one of them and was just delighted. She said, “I’ll take a pair of those”. The owner said, “You’re not in a dime store where you buy ribbons by the dozen. I have never seen another one like it”. Miss Ima said she felt rather foolish for saying that, but thought there must be another one. She purchased the one but made the lady promise to contact her if she ever found one similar to it. About six years later the lady called her

with the news that she had found one. So, they are not a pair but are displayed as such.

It was at this time that I asked her to put these stories on tape so that all of the docents might share in the knowledge. She said she would feel foolish doing that, but after a while it was agreed that I would go through the house with her and she would record the stories. I will never forgive Richard Nixon as long as I live. Between the time of her decision to tape and the actual taping, Watergate occurred, and Miss Ima called me and said, "I'll never say anything on one of those things, I might make a mistake".

The Hoggs were always interested in mental health. When their wills were probated, the bulk of the estate went to the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health at the University of Texas. Governor Hogg had become interested in it very early. A book "Responsibilities in Mental Disease" by Henry Maudsley was published in 1878. The Governor became so fascinated that he filled in the margins with so much writing that Wayne Holtzman who is now President of the Hogg Foundation said "You can almost say that the book was written by Governor Hogg". It was just filled with his comments.

Miss Ima told me that her father was so poor that he had to borrow money in order to move out of the Governor's Mansion after serving two terms. He was able to buy 3,000 acres of land at \$7.00 an acre in West Columbia, Texas. It was very poor land but he said in his will that he did not want his children to sell the land for 15 years after his death because he felt that there was oil on it. About 11 or 12 years after his death they did find oil and Miss Ima felt that her father was responsible for making the Bayou Bend Collection possible. She also felt that it was a gift from God and it should go back to the people. She restored an old German inn referred to as Stagecoach Inn and gave it to the University of Texas. She restored the Varner-Hogg Plantation and gave that over to the State of Texas. Bayou Bend now belongs to the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and the twelve hundred acres that are now known as Memorial Park are from the Hoggs.

When Bayou Bend was dedicated, she said, "Now I will be collecting sunsets from my high-rise apartment". I knew perfectly well that she would keep on collecting which she did. I asked her how she could leave Bayou Bend and move to a condominium. She said, "I've never felt that the collection belongs to me, it belongs to the people and I'm going to live long enough to see the people enjoy it".

Governor Hogg had told her that at his death he wanted no monument. He wanted his children to plant at the foot of his grave a pecan and at the head of his grave an old-fashioned walnut tree. When the trees bore, the fruit was to be given to the people of Texas and they in turn would plant them and Texas would become a land of trees. The Governor died that night, again showing the premonitions in the family.

When I last visited Miss Ima and we finally said goodbye, I saw a look in her eyes, and I knew that she knew that it really was goodbye, and that she knew that she would never see me again. She was determined to go to London as feeble as she was. None of us were surprised when the call came that she had fallen. This needs to be clarified. It was a lovely afternoon and they were getting into a taxi cab. The running boards are high on English taxis, and as she stepped up her hip cracked and she fell. The driver of the bac was concerned that he might be blamed for the accident and so he visited her in the hospital, and in front of her nurse-companion she said this man is to be completely exonerated. He had nothing to do with the accident.

When Miss Ima was 89 years old, we asked her to have another portrait done. The one that we had was just not her. She finally agreed to have Robert Joy do the painting but she wanted the same dress, jewelry, and her favorite chair. When he delivered, she looked at it for a long while and said, "You may hang it". She told me later, "He took 30 or 40 years off my life". This is the first thing you see as you enter Bayou Bend, Miss Ima welcoming you to her home.