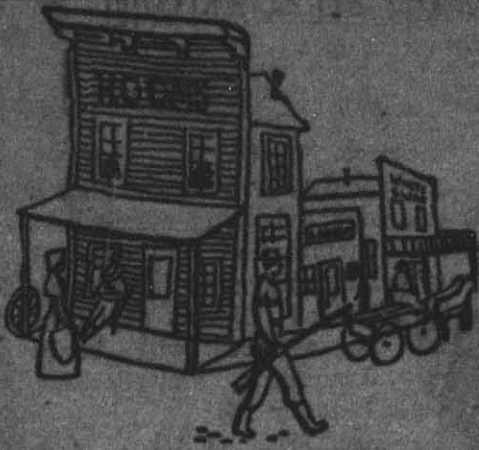


# They Say . .

Bits taken from our old files—  
History, Politics, Humor! Ori-  
gin Unknown; Contents Good.

"No greater calamity can befall a people than to break utterly with its past; and if we forget our ancestors we ourselves are unworthy to be remembered."



## The Story of 'Miss Jessie' TWIN-CITY C OF C LEADER IS WINNER OF LAURELS IN FAMILY, CIVIC LIFE By GUS J. CHIGGES

Batesburg—Mrs. Jessie Cullum Wylie, the springtily, red-haired executive secretary of the Batesburg-Leesville Chamber of Commerce, is the only woman in the nation to head a state group of the Commercial Executive Association.

But for Mrs. Wylie, whose business career began after she passed 50, top laurels have not been uncommon. This includes, also the realm of family life for she has been the mother of 12, four of which are her own and eight of which she loves as her own.

"Miss Jessie," as she is known to all her friends, spark-plugs the activities of the twin cities of Batesburg and Leesville from her key post with the Chamber of Commerce. Along with this activity, however, she has maintained an active role as homemaker, church leader and Sunday School teacher.

The fact that she embarked upon a business career so late in life has not been a handicap to "Miss Jessie."

The youngest of 11 children, Mrs. Wylie was born in the Sandhills of Lexington County, a daughter of Dr. B. S. and Mary Ann Rucker Mack. The family moved to Leesville when little Jessie was of fifth-grade age. She finished school there and attended the old Leesville College—an outstanding institution of higher learning in South Carolina's older days.

Upon completing school, she taught for a year before taking a business course and moving to Batesburg.

In 1915, she married L. D. Cullum, pioneer merchant, banker, cotton buyer and lumberman of the twin-city community. A man many years her senior, he was the father of eight children by a previous marriage.

"Miss Jessie" added four more to the household during the 12 years that Mr. Cullum lived. At his death, "Miss Jessie" was left with a sizeable family and a thriving business.

The depression came along soon, however, and the lumber company was lost. Miss Jessie was left with her four small children (three girls and one boy) and nothing much more than her indomitable will to face the future with optimism. All of Mr. Cullum's children were by now on their own.

It was then in the dark year of 1933 that "Miss Jessie" re-entered the business world—and not by her own choosing, but to hold things together.

"I sold everything from silk stockings to insurance," she recalled. "Anything that would sell."

During those trying days, she managed to keep up her duties as home service secretary of the Batesburg-Leesville chapter of American Red Cross. She marshalled community forces to convert an entire carload of cloth into wearable clothes for distribution to the needy.

In 1936 "Miss Jessie" married Joe B. Wylie, a Chester bachelor. He was a semi-invalid for nine years and died a little more than a year ago. Miss Jessie cared for him with the same devotion and tenderness that characterizes her to this day.

Soon World War II began. Typically, Miss Jessie was raring to do her part.

"You didn't tell us you were 50 years old," the Red Cross said politely in rejecting her bid to work in that organization, so Miss Jessie took a job as director of the servicemen's center of the First Presbyterian Church in Columbia. With the passing of the war, "Miss Jessie" returned home "to retire."

"Little did I know," she mused, "that an exciting new part of my life was to begin."

Her four children had grown up, three had gone to college and all were married. It was then that the local Chamber of Commerce issued a cry for aid. It was in February, 1948, while negotiating with a man for the job, that the directors asked her to "keep the door open."

It was one more chance to help her community, and Miss Jessie responded. "I went down to open the mail and answer the mail for 30 days," she reminisced.

When negotiations with the

man offered the job fell through, the directors again turned to "Miss Jessie" to "help us out for another 30 days."

She has been there since and it has been a boon to the twin cities. Things began to hum and wheels have been turning ever since "Miss Jessie" took over.

She is one of only 171 women Chamber of Commerce execu-

tives in the United States and possessions. In April of this year she took office as president of the South Carolina Association of the Commercial Executives Association and is the only woman in the nation to hold such a position.

In recognition of her work, the Anderson Daily Mail saluted her in 1950 as the Woman of the Year in South Carolina.

She became the first president of the Batesburg-Leesville Business and Professional Women's Club when it was organized in 1949 and received a scroll of honor as the outstanding "business or professional" woman of the twin cities, presented in 1952 by Miss Anne Thomas, editor of the South Carolina Magazine.

Through the whirlwind business career which developed so unexpectedly, Mrs. Wylie has continued her active membership in the Batesburg-Leesville Presbyterian Church. She lives alone now in the four-bedroom bungalow on Highway 1 between Leesville and Batesburg.

"People don't understand why I keep up such a large place," she said, "but it gives me a comfortable feeling to know that I have plenty of room for my children and grandchildren whenever they want to visit me."

Mrs. Wylie's eyes twinkle when she talks of her children and grandchildren. She said she spared no trouble whenever it came to visiting them or having them come "home."

Her children are Mrs. A. Lee Parson (Elizabeth Dow Cullum) of Washington, D. C., Mrs. Theo B. Kohn (Margaret Cullum) of Columbia, Mrs. Herbert E. Topping (Harriet Cullum) of Atlanta, Ga., and her only son, William E. Cullum, of Augusta, Ga.

In her eight years with the Batesburg-Leesville Chamber of Commerce, Mrs. Wylie has always ridden with guests in the annual Christmas parade. In this year's

parade recently, however, she wanted to stand on a corner and "watch with all the other folks." And she did just that.

There is a distinguishing hint of grey now in the hair of this dynamic businesswoman of South Carolina. "I don't dye my hair" she announced as she hurried off to keep a social engagement.

"How do I stay young? Well, I know one thing—I've never let my troubles get the best of me yet."