

Nancy Ogilvie

17 August 1994 saw the passing of a gracious lady. ‘Gracious lady’ may be considered a hackneyed phrase, but in describing Nancy Ogilvie it bears its original meaning.

Anne Rose St George was born on 18 July 1898 in the home of her maternal grandmother Mrs Emma Vanderplank on the corner of Longmarket and Fleming Streets (the house, much altered, is still there). This was exactly six days after Pietermaritzburg’s first City Hall was burnt down and Mrs Ogilvie would recount that her mother, who had come in from the country for the birth, had gone to watch the spectacle, much to Mrs Vanderplank’s disapproval, considering, as she did, that *enceinte* ladies should not appear in public.

Nancy was the fifth of the ten children of Theophilus (later Sir Theophilus) St George and Florence Vanderplank, and grew up in a large, double-storeyed house in Burger Street (still standing) opposite the old gaol. Her education commenced at a small school at Government House run for the benefit of the daughter of Sir Henry McCallum, but that episode came to a swift end after she and the Governor’s daughter came to fisticuffs when the latter saw her father carrying Nancy into the schoolroom one morning and attacked her. Nancy who had arrived late, could not open the door, and he had come to her rescue. Thereafter she was educated at the Convent in Pietermaritzburg and at Natal Training College. She taught until her marriage, and afterwards lived in Pietermaritzburg and Port Shepstone before finally returning to the capital.

Nancy is known in the wider community for her work in the Interdenominational Church Women’s Association, an organization established in the 1950s, concerned with the needs of Pietermaritzburg’s aged, predating today’s Pietermaritzburg and District Council for the Care of the Aged (PADCA). Representing the Catholic Women’s League, she was one of the association’s founder members, and was to serve on its committee for 34 years.

With two of Natal’s prominent men for grandfathers — Sir Theophilus St George, Bt., Pietermaritzburg’s first Resident Magistrate, and John Vanderplank, landowner and farmer, it is little wonder that Nancy had an abiding interest in Natal’s history, and was a mine of information on Pietermaritzburg society in bygone days. At least some of her extensive knowledge was committed to paper — her informative and amusing item on the hotels and pubs in and around Maritzburg appeared in *Natalia*’s Notes and Queries in 1979 and was reprinted in *Pietermaritzburg 1838–1988; a new portrait of an African city*. Her interest in matters historical was shared by her husband,

Mr W.F. Ogilvie, a land surveyor, to whom Natal is indebted for his work in cataloguing and adding to the Natal Museum's extensive photographic collection, and for his excellent photographs in Professor A.F. Hattersley's *A Camera on old Natal*.

Nancy was interested in everything going on around her, and her delightful sense of humour and turn of phrase made time spent in her company a special experience. She maintained that as one grows older one should remember the two As — accept and adapt, and she was a true model of this precept. On the other hand, she did not let age interfere with her lifestyle: on giving up her house and moving into Jacaranda Lodge a couple of years ago, she remarked that this facilitated bridge parties as most of her bridge partners were already resident there!

Her passing is our loss, not only because of her unique personality, but also as we can no longer draw on her knowledge of early Natal, and Pietermaritzburg.

SHELAGH O'BYRNE SPENCER