



Clara, Amanda, Mable, Alma, William Earl and Dulcey

Mable With Sisters And Brother

EDITOR'S NOTE: A recent interview with Mrs. Earl Burton and her son, Jack, both of Tampa, reveals some interesting sidelights on the personality of Mable Ringling, wife of the famous circus king.

By **LEE McCALL**
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"I remember when John (Ringling) hugged Mable so hard, he cracked one of her ribs," said Mrs. Earl Burton, sister-in-law of the late Mable Burton Ringling.

"Mable had just returned from seeing a doctor in Germany and had given John an

encouraging report. Contrary to rumor, I would say they had a very good marriage. I thought John was just a wonderful person."

Mrs. Burton was married to William Earl Burton, Mable's only brother. He died several years ago. Mrs. Burton was not a blood relative, merely an in-law, but she came to know Mable and is able to shed a new light on her famous relative's personality.

Mrs. Burton's son, Jack Burton of Tampa, also remembers some interesting anecdotes involving his aunt "Mim" (the family nickname).

Although much has been written about the life and personality of John Ringling, there are many myths about Mable, some conflicting.

One author described Mable as being small and dainty while another wrote that she was tall and willowy with delicate features.

"Actually," said Mrs. Burton, "Mable was quite tall. It is obvious in the family photograph. She had dark brown hair and large brown eyes. She was very pretty and made an impression that commanded attention. All of the sisters were nice looking."

Mable had four sisters, Clara, Amanda, Alma and Dulcey.

One author stated that Mable met John while she was a performer in the circus. "That is definitely incorrect," said Jack Burton. "She never performed in the circus."

Another writer said Mrs. Ringling first saw John while she was working in a Chicago restaurant.

"But both are incorrect," Mrs. Burton said adamantly. "I am positive that he met her on the boardwalk in Atlantic City. She had previously worked in a shoe factory but was working in a small jewelry stand at the time she first saw him. John courted her on the boardwalk and lavished money on her."

Mable, the daughter of Mary Elizabeth Wilson and George Wesley Burton, grew up on a farm in McCon, Ohio, a suburb of Washington Court.

After her marriage to John, she was privately tutored in many subjects including art and music.

Mable and John never had children of their own, but unknown to most people, Mable raised three of her sisters' children.

"Two of Mable's sisters, Clara Smith and Amanda Workman, were deaf mutes," explained Mrs. Burton. "So when their children, Bill and Evelyn Workman and George Smith, became of school age,

they went to live with their Aunt Mable.

She sent them to the best private schools and dressed them beautifully, but she was very strict with them.

However, all three of the children seemed to resent rather than appreciate their aunt's attention.

Evelyn married the Ringling chauffeur while Mable and John were on one of their European trips. Mable was furious. She disowned her niece and never had a thing to do with her again.

Both boys ran away and joined the navy when they reached 18. Mable again was extremely displeased. "But Mable was right there when they were commissioned," said Mrs. Burton, "as proud as any mother could be."

Mable also offered to send Jack Burton to an exclusive school, "But my father said, 'absolutely no,'" said Burton. "He was very proud and never accepted any money from his wealthy sister-in-law."

"My husband lived with his sister Mable for a while when he was a young man," added Mrs. Burton, "But he didn't stay because he got very lonely. The gardeners were the only people around to talk to. Mable and John were away much of the time."

"Mable, however, obviously loved her brother very much. When he was critically injured in an accident, Mable rushed to Ohio immediately, arranged for an ambulance to take Earl to the hospital (against his wishes) and demanded the best care possible.

"She was wonderful to her parents, too," added Mrs. Burton. "She supported them for years and paid for them to travel. On her parents' 44th anniversary, she gave her mother a pair of diamond earrings. John (Ringling) had both Mable's parents buried in very expensive caskets," she added.

This seems ironic when, for

years, no rental was paid on the Mable Ringling vault.

"My father wanted to move Mable's body to our family plot," Burton said, "but when he inquired about the transfer, we discovered that not one cent had ever been paid on rental of the vault. Mable's family would like to have the body buried at the museum. This is what John and Mable had planned to do, so that's what we feel should be done."

Both Burton and his mother feel that the following quote from the editorial page of the Sarasota Sunday Times published shortly after Mable's death on June 9, 1929, best describes their late relative:

"Of a retiring disposition. Mrs. Ringling never sought the limelight, though much of her work and her philanthropy, all of which were unknown to the average person, would have brought her much prominence if given publicity. But she was averse to it and consequently much that she did will remain a closed book.

"One of the greatest memorials not alone in Sarasota and Florida, but nationally, is the John and Mable Ringling Art Museum.

"The beautiful home here considered one of the finest in the United States, is a offspring of her constructive genius, for it was she, at Mr. Ringling's request, who advised the architect as to the type of residence she desired and today it is reputed to architects to be numbered among the most handsome of the nation.

"But Sarasota needs a material shrine as a reminder of the life and the many good qualities of Mrs. Ringling. The greatest shrine which she has left in Sarasota is the one which she built with her marvellous and lovable qualities, and for which she though passed beyond, will live forever in the memory of her numerous friends who valued her friendship."



Mable's, Niece And Nephews

Pictured above are Evelyn Workman, George Smith and Bill Workman, the children Mable helped raise.