



Virginia Lopez Begg

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Ms. Farrel Brandin
306 Bratton
Winnsboro, SC 29180

Dear Ms. Brandin:

Several weeks ago I called you at the Fairfield County Museum to ask about Hanna Rion (1875-1924), a writer and artist born in Winnsboro. You gave me the name of William Beals here in Massachusetts, and he and I have been in touch, although he had very little information. We have been sharing what we have.

You also suggested that I write to you with the facts that I have gathered so far, and said that your genealogy committee could do some checking for me. I am, as you may recall, doing an exhibit at the Schlesinger Library of American Women at Radcliffe next April. I would very much like to include Hanna Rion and, it turns out, her mother, Mary Catherine Rion.

On a separate page, I have written the bare bones of what I know so far. Then I have added a list of my most pressing questions, although any information you can provide will be gratefully received.

The exhibit is to be called Women, Design and the Land and my section focuses on my area of specialization, American women garden writers. Hanna Rion wrote two garden books and to my amazement, her mother wrote one in 1860, the Ladies' Southern Florist. They are the only mother-daughter garden writers I know of, and the date of the mother's book makes it extraordinary. There are very few garden books by women in the nineteenth century. I have found no information about MCR though--not even her dates.

I will look forward to hearing from you when you have the chance.

With thanks,

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HANNA RION:

Born--July 11, 1875 in Winnsboro, SC

Father--Col. James Henry Rion, wealthy attorney, businessman and Civil War officer. Born 1828 in Montreal and died 1886 in Winnsboro. Moved to Winnsboro around 1850 to teach at Mount Zion College. Became a lawyer in 1854.

Mother--Mary Catherine (maiden name Weir) Rion

Education--South Carolina College for Women; also studied in Berlin and was fluent in German

Husband #1--She married Le Roy Atwood Williams, date unknown. He disappears from the record. Died? Divorced?

Husband #2--Early in this century, date unknown, she married artist Frank Ver Beck, under whom she had studied. He was a well-known illustrator of children's books.

Husband #3--She must have divorced Ver Beck some time during or after WW1 because, on June 1, 1921, she married the Rev. Alpheus Baker Hervey, Ph.D. of Bath, Maine.

Died--May 4 or 5, 1924 (sources disagree) at her winter home in Warwick East, Bermuda. She was young--only 49.

Hanna Rion was a very talented woman. She was an excellent watercolorist and exhibited in London, NY, etc. She also wrote--

1906--Ver Beck's Book of Bears (verses only)

1909--The Garden in the Wilderness (under the pen name "A Hermit")

1910--The Smiling Road

1912--Let's Make a Flower Garden

1915--The Truth about Twilight Sleep

1915--Painless Childbirth in Twilight Sleep

1916--Golden Motherhood

1916--Ver Beck's Bears in Mother Goose Land (verses only)

1917--The Real Michael Strange

1923--Fate and a Marionette

The Garden in the Wilderness and Let's Make a Flower Garden are both garden books; the "twilight sleep" books concern painless childbirth--Rion was a matron at a maternity hospital in London during WW1 and believed strongly in that method. The "bear" books are for children. I have no information about the other books.

PLEASE SEE NEXT PAGE FOR QUESTIONS



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QUESTIONS ABOUT HANNA RION

1. Any information about the Rion family in Winnsboro?
2. Any information about the Weir family (her mother's family)?
3. Did the Rions have a family place, estate, home of which there might be pictures or a description? I think her parents were quite wealthy.
4. Does the South Carolina College for Women in Columbia still exist, either independently or as part of a university, or with a different name? Do you have their address?
5. Can you give me any information on Mary Catherine Rion, Hanna's mother?
6. Is there a Rion family member with an interest in family history to whom I might write? Name and address?
7. Do you have any information on her first husband, LeRoy Atwood Williams? He might well be a local person.
8. Did Hanna have any brothers or sisters?
9. None of the published material indicates that Hanna had any children, but in one of her books, she says she is a mother. Do you have any record of any children?
10. Do you have a photo of either Hanna or Mary Catherine Rion? Do you know of the existence of a portrait which might be photographed?
11. Do you have any information about her girlhood in Winnsboro? Activities? Clubs? Schooling before college? Church?
12. Was there a local newspaper which might have a report of her marriage (especially the first one) or anything about any of her family? Perhaps an obituary of her parents?