

Sweetheart Lyric Actually Was Tennessee Woman's

Rambonnet Yarn Denied With Proof By Sister of Late Beth Slater Whitson

By Jack Bryan, Press-Scimitar Staff Writer

E. A. Rambonnet's account in the Press-Scimitar of how he wrote, "Let Me Call You Sweetheart" on the back of a café menu to a passing lady of the evening and sold it for a paltry \$50 was a romantic one.

It was too romantic for certain readers who protested the Mr. Rambonnet was laying claim to an honor that rightly belongs to the late Beth Slater Whitson, a Tennessean.

They have produced the sheet music to show Miss Whitson's name plainly inscribed thereon, and Mrs. George Norton of Nashville, a sister and a writer, has provided detailed information concerning the authoress' work. Both Mrs. Norton and Mrs. For work. Both Mrs. Norton and Mrs. Forrest King of Memphis have testified to having been present when the work was written.

Got Goodly Sum

Miss Whitson's advocates claim for her only the authorship of the words, the music having been written by Leo Friedman of Chicago. Unlike Mr. Rambonnet, she did not dispose of her interest for a mere \$50. On the contrary, she realized several thousand dollars out of it.

Neither did she regard it as a piece of hack writing that happened to catch the public fancy. To her it was a simple lyric that sprang from the heart and one that she prized highly, so highly that she resented to the day of her death, her sister says, the fact that the publisher did not see fit to share with her the proceeds it garnered in the years after its initial success.

That success was not wholly a surprise to Miss Whitson. She had already written one lyric that had swept the country and that today is still sung and remembered, tho not so much as "Let Me Call You Sweetheart."

Wrote "Dreamland"

That first song was "Meet Me Tonight in Dreamland," to which Mr. Friedman also wrote the music. According to Mrs. Norton, Mr. Friedman sold the number for \$7500, but failed to share any of it with the authoress. But the publisher, Will Rossiter, "the squarest man this side of heaven," the sister calls him, voluntarily paid Miss Whitson royalties on the piece so that she was well rewarded for her work.

When Friedman sold "Let Me Call You Sweetheart," Miss Whitson received a percentage of the \$7000 he got for it, and also retained ownership in the song, realizing several thousand dollars in the next few years before she sold the piece outright.

She sold it then to Harold Rossiter, brother of Will, thinking the song had had its day and little realizing what a revival of popularity it would enjoy. But Harold appears not to have been so philanthropic as his brother.

Dug Out of Files

When 10 years later he dug the piece out of his files in response to the need of a Chicago orchestra leader for a waltz tune, he resurrected it for a world that has not since forgotten it. The song realized large sums for the publisher, but this time Miss Whitson, to her sorrow, did not share them.

Miss Whitson's writing was not limited to songs. She was a constant contributor of verse and stories to leading magazines, her short story, "At the Foot of the Hills," appeared in Collier's, having been selected for the O'Brien collection of the 10 best stories of the year. During the years preceding her death about four years ago, she had been writing movie scenarios, three of them, "Human Driftwood" "Sweeping Against the Wind" and "White Flame," having been produced on the silent screen.

Lived In Village

Perhaps the oddest thing about Miss Whitson and her sister, Alice, now Mrs. Norton, is the fact that they lived in an out-of-the-way Tennessee village. Theirs is the story of the two Tennessee Brontes, for their similarity to the Bronte sisters, who lived in the unvisited village of Haworth and wrote sentimental stories that became world famous, is striking.

The Haworth of the Whitson sisters was Goodrich, Tennessee, in Hickman County, and like the Brontes, they inherited their writing flair from their father, who was editor of a country newspaper. Out of this Middle Tennessee hamlet came Beth Slater's simple, romantic lyrics to be sung in a dozen different tongues the world over.

Later the sisters moved to Lookaway on McFerrin Road, Nashville, where Mrs. Norton now lives. Tho she wrote a little and helped her sister in her literary work, it was not until the sister whom she revered died that Alice Whitson undertook writing seriously to become a professional authoress who today scarcely sees a day pass that she does not market some of her work.

Had Romantic Life

Of the piece with the song she wrote was also Beth Slater Whitson's real romance. She was both Miss and Mrs. Whitson. Interested by the fame of her work, Capt. M. V. Whitson, unrelated, of McMinnville, had written Miss Whitson, asking her to lunch with him at the Maxwell House in Nashville.

She accepted, and there met and fell in love with George Whitson, the song of her host. They married, and their life together was a realization of the idyllic devotion that the bride had expressed in her song.