



Nan L. Mitchell

# Lemelle inspires through her work

It has been said "A mother is the heart of the family." I do not question this; not when I am in the home of Shirley Lemelle. The obvious love and worth of this family circle is inspiring. Upon arrival I was greeted by five or six smiling little children who ran out to greet me. This welcome would touch anyone in a special way.

The back door was open. I used this entrance because I consider Shirley a special friend. This friendship has spanned the years. Through the many functions which she has catered, I developed a fondness for her "way of doing" the hot tamales (which her family use to sell on the corner of Main and Landry) that were a favorite, the bountiful table she prepared for class reunions at Mitchell Cove, the elaborate dinners served at the Michel Prudhomme Home when Les Dames d'Etude met, the popular plate lunches sold at the annual Woman's Club BRASS.

Shirley's daughter Aaron was also visiting. We chatted about many things: About gone times when the Lemelle family was the owner of extensive property holdings, reaching from the present home site north to Washington. These land holdings also included stretches of land to the east and the west. The family farmed and industriously engaged in the production of



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Shirley Lemelle does not regret a life of busy work. "One learns to work by working," she said.

syrup. Another distinctive feature was that they were "free men of color." The account is interesting. Dr. Claude Oubre included this account in his book "Forty acres and a Mule."

In a reserved way Shirley discussed with me some of her life story. She went to work at the early age of 12 in The Opelousas Steam Laundry. She does not work on this with regret. Explaining this she continued, "One learns to work by working." And work she did: Boatman Cleaners, 23 years as a cook at Opelousas High School. One of her rewarding memories is being asked to cater an OHS reunion (The Class of 1981). The students did remember her.

After retiring Shirley went "full scale" into the catering business. Well-known and well-liked she is well-known and respected. Her expertise extends to many areas of the state. Shirley especially relishes being asked to cater the

menu aspects of oil company workshops and staff meetings. The following is a letter of appreciation she received.

The heart of the family may be the mother. However, this mother is also the heart of the family. Her two daughters appreciate the efforts and determination Shirley has adhered to in relationships. She and her daughters have "taken off down the road" just to do a bit of traveling and sightseeing. Aaron is now her mother's right hand in the catering business. She has even developed some special dishes of her own. The two daughters are Aaron Adette and Andre Michel.

A wonderful Bible verse comes to mind. It is from the book of Proverbs. (Chapter 31:31).

Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own work praise her in the gates.

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