

# Ivy Julia Cromartie

# STRANAHAN

## PHILANTHROPIST AND INSPIRATION

by MARY MCGREEVY

"Women will love her, that she is a woman,  
"More worth than any man:  
"Men that she is the rarest of all women."  
— Shakespeare, *A Winter's Tale*<sup>1</sup>

Ivy Julia Cromartie Stranahan was an early Broward County pioneer and an unusual person deeply involved in and dedicated to improving the lives and living conditions of other humans. Her biographer, August Burghard, describes her as "Thoughtful, positive, argumentative." She felt deeply for those who were underprivileged or downtrodden, and she worked to improve their lives, convincing others to assist. Her concern brought a significant change for the better in the lives of many citizens of her adopted hometown, Fort Lauderdale. Not only in her lifetime, but in years afterwards, people in Fort Lauderdale—Seminole Indians, disenfranchised women, the needy, blacks, older persons, children, and many others—benefited and will continue to benefit from institutions she founded and ways of thinking she inspired.

Mrs. Stranahan's interests did not

stop at people. Probably the area's first ecologist, she grew many varieties of flowers and vegetables and was an important member of the Garden Club. At one state garden show, she had a rose named in her honor. Deeply appreciative of the natural environment, she opposed the building of waterways and other construction that threatened to destroy the marvelous fishing in New River, on which her home was built. She was an early member of the Broward Audubon Society, and opposed the killing of birds to market their feathers, even though her husband had traded manufactured goods for pelts, bird plumes, and alligator hides with the Seminole Indians during his early years in Fort Lauderdale. She also helped the Federation of Woman's Clubs in their efforts to preserve the ecology of Florida by setting aside some of the land that eventually became part of the Everglades National Park—Royal Palm Island—as a state park. She was an inspector of that area for the woman's clubs for many years.

Anyone who knows about Ivy Stranahan's life and activities can find inspiration and courage in her battle to

preserve native plants and animals in their natural habitat, a habitat which, in Broward County, has seen enormous destruction since the early years of this

*Ivy Stranahan's enduring fame as a leading Fort Lauderdale pioneer is due as much to her long life of community and public service as to her early arrival or her position as the settlement's first schoolteacher.*

*This article, outlining Mrs. Stranahan's many achievements, contributions, awards, and honors, was prepared for the Broward County Women's History Coalition in their nomination of Mrs. Stranahan to the National Women's Hall of Fame.*

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Ivy Stranahan.

century, when the State of Florida began dredging the North New River Canal:

The rock ledges of the north and south branches [of New River] were dynamited as the dredges worked their way through rock to muck westward. The first humus-laden dark water began to creep unnoticed down the clear current of the lovely river, staining the bright white bottom sands.<sup>2</sup>

Mrs. Stranahan also worried about the effects on the New River when the Federal Highway tunnel was constructed beneath it between 1958 and 1960. "I resent such modern improvement as the Federal Highway Tunnel," she said, "But I think I have adapted well to the new civilization."<sup>3</sup>

Although she conceded that the City of Fort Lauderdale lost much of its natural beauty to development, she also hoped that the new residents would "take up an interest in their gardens that makes up for some of lost nature."<sup>4</sup> One of the bougainvilleas at her home is now about eighty years old, and is still growing very strong, much like a tree, reaching up to the second story of the house, where its bright, purple blossoms, brilliant in the

sun, are reminders that she was a strong-willed person who overcame many difficulties and bloomed in the community.

While recognizing the destructive forces of civilization, Mrs. Stranahan also believed that communities contain structures to implement cures and improvements for the social ills that occur in their formation. Some of the organizations that work toward these ends are often women's service clubs and associations that demand not only dues and contributions from their members, but also volunteer work, planning, education, and communication. In many of these organizations, Ivy Stranahan stood as a founder, a pioneer, a dauntless lobbyist, a courageous speaker, a very hard worker, and an enthusiastic promoter. Few have or ever will equal her efforts. Throughout her long life, she continued to be an active member of many of the organizations she helped found, often serving as an officer or trustee in them. It is impossible in an article of this scope to catalog her numerous memberships and activities; it would be harder still to record all the honors she received over her lifetime.

Among the most prominent and most

important service clubs that Mrs. Stranahan helped found was the Fort Lauderdale Woman's Club, that town's first women's organization. The Woman's Club was organized in 1911, at the same time that the men were establishing a board of trade in order to plan the incorporation of the town. Thus, the women worked side by side with the men, at one in their goal to form a unique and clean community with high aspirations. The first task undertaken by the Fort Lauderdale Woman's Club, which was originally called the Ladies' Civic Improvement Society, was the development of means of collecting and removing trash. To this day, Fort Lauderdale has a reputation of being a clean city where residents are concerned with the upkeep and appearance of their property. It was during Mrs. Stranahan's administration as president of the society, in 1913, that its name was changed to the Fort Lauderdale Woman's Club. The following year, she and her husband donated to the club a piece of property on the corner of Andrews Avenue and Park Street, which is now known as Stranahan Park. The Woman's Club began collecting money for a permanent building on the site. The building was completed in 1917.

On its fifty-second anniversary in 1963, the Woman's Club honored its past presidents, including Mrs. Stranahan, noting that she had been a founder and charter member as well as a president of the club. During those years, she had also worked actively on most of the club's projects, including the founding of the library in 1914, canning, cemetery improvement, World War I activities, education, fund-raising, emergency shelter, tree planting, the naming of Port Everglades, staging weekly concerts in Stranahan Park, hospital work, selling bonds during World War II, projects to help the mentally handicapped, civil defense, Easter Seals, and many more.

Another organization in which Mrs. Stranahan was extremely active was the Fort Lauderdale Historical Society, Inc., which now maintains her papers, photographs, and other effects in their archives. She helped found the historical society in 1962, served many years as a trustee, and inaugurated a trust fund for its benefit from her personal money.

Although her husband, who came to the New River in 1893, is usually acclaimed as the first resident of modern Fort Lauderdale, both the Stranahans were instrumental in establishing the community. In 1899, the handful of residents in the area, several of whom had come to







