Mrs. Jane McCallum Still Fights For Old Ideals—Recognition of Women

By CURTIS BISHOP

The days pass gracefully for Mrs. Jane Yelvington McCallum, and she wears them as well as in the years she was launching crusades for women's rights or when she was serving as secretary of state under two governors.

At her home at 613 West 32 Street Mrs. McCallum tends flowers and shrubs with unusual “green fingers,” keeps up personal associations of half a century and spends other hours working at a hobby which she adopted—the history of her native state, and particularly of the women who have served it.

And she spends odd hours putting into physical form some of her memories.

THERE ARE MANY of them, and those recollections are important to the Texas story. They begin, for her, as a child at La Vernia in Wilson County in 1876. Her father set her up on a gate post and told her to watch the winding road very carefully.

A trail herd bound for Kansas was raising dust a mile or so away and her father wanted his men to be able to see it pass.

“It will be the last one on the Chisholm Trail,” he predicted.

It was. Those trails of memories moved on to 1890, when the son of a Carolina planter came to Texas on a visit and on the spur of the moment agreed to become a teacher at La Vernia.

He didn’t realize it at the moment, but it was the decision of a lifetime.

The young Carolinian was to become one of Texas’ best known and best loved school superintendents, a sturdy man who, after his death an impressive Austin high school was to bear his name.

His 18-year-old Yelvington girl who had already become closely interested in Texas history and legend married the same year. After teaching assignments at the nearby college and Seguin he became associated with the Austin public schools in 1893.

And, once a citizen of the Capital City, Mrs. McCallum grew more and more concerned with the affairs of her state. Already she had spoken out on two crusades: for women’s suffrage and prohibition. She persuaded Hal Sevier, then owner of

The Austin American, to publish her views headed “Suffrage Corner.” She threw one editorial barrage after another at the scoffing opposition to granting women the right to cast a ballot.

Later she became a full-fledged staff member of The Statesman. The people who were not then affiliated and stayed with the popular paper throughout World War II, despite the fact that she continued to campaign editorially for prohibition and the Statesman’s editor, Edmund Travis was actively opposed it.

MRS. MCCALLUM was one of the first women to attend the University of Texas, and she was as active on the campus as in her crusade for women’s rights. The cause for which she was directly responsible were signs directing students to various buildings. Some of them, erected posthumously by the UT president, are still there.

Women’s suffrage had come, and there was also prohibition for its era, but Mrs. McCallum had not lost her interest in public affairs. Women, she still insisted, must take a bigger responsibility in government.

And there were still issues. The 1920s had arrived but it was still the Ku Klux Klan had come back to life. A political personality named James E. Ferguson was fighting to hold gubernatorial authority under his wife’s name. And a young central Texas attorney, Dan Moody, won office in the attorney general’s race by the election of 1927.

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It was so present day campaign one of Texas’ best known in which funds are contributed by many thousands and professional public relations men steered a candidate carefully down the victory trail. Dan Moody had a ring of votes and unlimited energy and some friends—one of them was Jane Y. McCallum.

She set up local campaign headquarters at her home, borrowing typewriters and other equipment. She and friends contributed modestly to employ one secretary at $25 a month. Letters, editorials and pamphlets were out and they flooded Texas women to vote for Dan Moody.

Enough did. And during the Christmas holidays the governor-to-be paid a visit to Mrs. McCallum and shortly after she was secretary of state.

She found that the office was easily within the touch of a woman’s touch. She had installed new index filing and modern office machinery. And when going through one cabinet she found a rusty tin box, tied with a rotting ribbon, and inside the long missing copy of the Texas Declaration of Independence signed March 2, 1836.

Mrs. McCallum served as secretary of state for 24 years, longer than any other. But the “private” life to which she then retired was by no means an idle one. The grey haired, soft faced lady can still take time out from her writing and her flowers to join a crusade.

Her children are widely scattered now, only A. N. or Arlo, as he is better known, living in Austin. Kathleen has become Mrs. John L. Morley and lives in Oklahoma City, A. Y. McCallum is now a waiter in Corpus Christi after achieving football fame as coach at Texas A&M. under the nickname of “Bud.” Brown Mc-