

# Mrs. Mary Parkman Peabody

## 2013 Recipient of the 'Dr. Robert B. Hayling Award of Valor'

Civil rights demonstrations in St. Augustine, 1964



*In honor and recognition of her courageous acts displayed during the 1964 Civil Rights Movement, ACCORD presents the "Dr. Robert B. Hayling Award of Valor" Posthumously to the Late Mrs. Mary Parkman Peabody.*

*In a June, 2013 letter written by her son Malcolm E. Peabody, to Ms. Dalonja Duncan, President of ACCORD, Inc., he states, "I will be unable to attend the event, but...honored to receive the award in absentia...if mother were alive today, she would be very proud to receive the...award...she would insist that the courage of all those who participated in the demonstrations, particularly the children and Dr. Hayling...far exceeded what she was required to display...In representing my family let me say how touched we are to have this honor placed on our mother"*

*The Annual "Dr. Robert B. Hayling Award of Valor" was initiated and sponsored, July 2, 2009 by former Florida State Senator Dr. Anthony 'Tony' Hill. Past Recipients are Mr. James Jackson, Mr. Clyde Jenkins, Rev. Goldie Eubanks+, and Mrs. Loucille Plummer+ who had as a guest in her home, Mrs. Peabody in 1964.*

It was 49 years ago: March 31, 1964: a time of excitement in the Nation's Oldest City. It was spring break, and many college students had come to town -- not to go to the beach, but to take part in civil rights demonstrations. The Elk's Rest on Washington Street was the headquarters. The historic two-story building had meeting facilities, and also a kitchen where food could be prepared (civil rights veterans can still remember the peanut butter sandwiches). Integrated groups would be organized and sent out to the restaurants, lunch counters, motels and churches to see if they would be served, barred or arrested.

Not all of the visitors were students. One was Mary Parkman Peabody, 72-year-old wife of an Episcopal bishop, cousin of Eleanor Roosevelt, and mother of the governor of Massachusetts. Her presence in St. Augustine was very big news. FBI reports show that J. Edgar Hoover himself began taking an interest in the Nation's Oldest City when he learned the governor's mother would be coming here.

Mrs. Peabody agreed to "test" (in the parlance of the day) the Ponce de Leon Motor Lodge on U.S. 1 north of town. Two of her white friends, a Harvard professor and the wife of the president of the Episcopal Theological Seminary, agreed to go with her. They looked around for black people to accompany them -- and came upon the women working in the kitchen of the Elk's Rest: Georgie Mae Reed, Rosa Phelps, Cuter Eubanks, Nellie Mitchell and Lillian Twine Roberson. They were driven home to dress appropriately for the occasion, then went out to the Ponce Lodge -- and were arrested. The next day it was front-page news all over the country. From that time until the signing of the landmark Civil Rights Act on July 2, 1964, St. Augustine got more media coverage that it had in the previous 399 years of its existence.

The sacrifices they made led Martin Luther King to hail them among the *Heroes of St. Augustine*". Of these five black women, only Lillian Twine Roberson is alive today. A sister of the late city Commissioner and Vice-Mayor, Henry Twine. Lillian now lives in Jacksonville, FL. Her home on Gault Street in North City was burned down in 1964 (only the brick steps remain) after she sent her children to integrate the previously all-while Fullerwood School and her husband was fired from his job at a local car dealership because of his civil rights activities.

One of the provisions of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that grew out of the demonstrations in St. Augustine outlawed job discrimination -- not just against blacks, but also against women. Every woman who now has a job that in previous generations reserved for men only, owes a vote of thanks to Mrs. Mary Parkman Peabody and the other *"Heroes of St. Augustine"*.

David Nolan, Historian & Author  
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