

# Laura Mae Andress: 'Memories of My Mother'

Williamsport  
**Women**



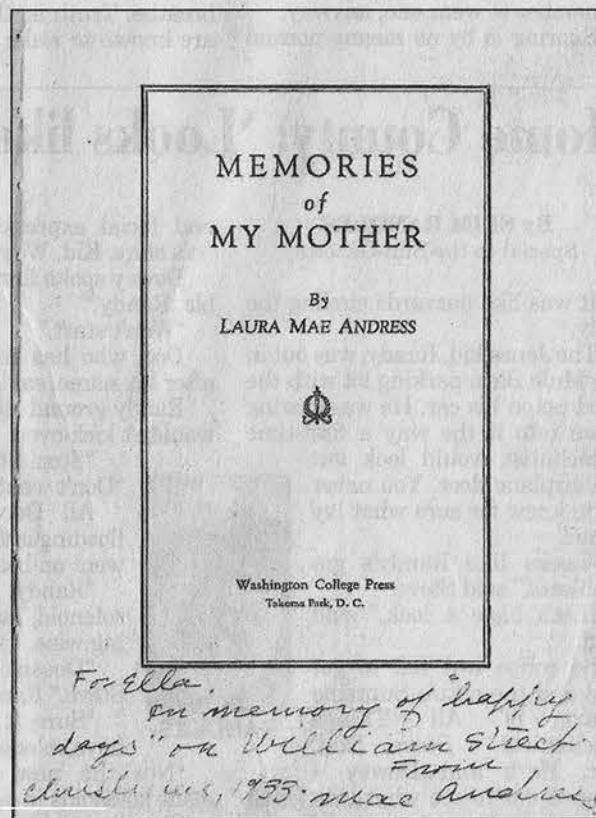
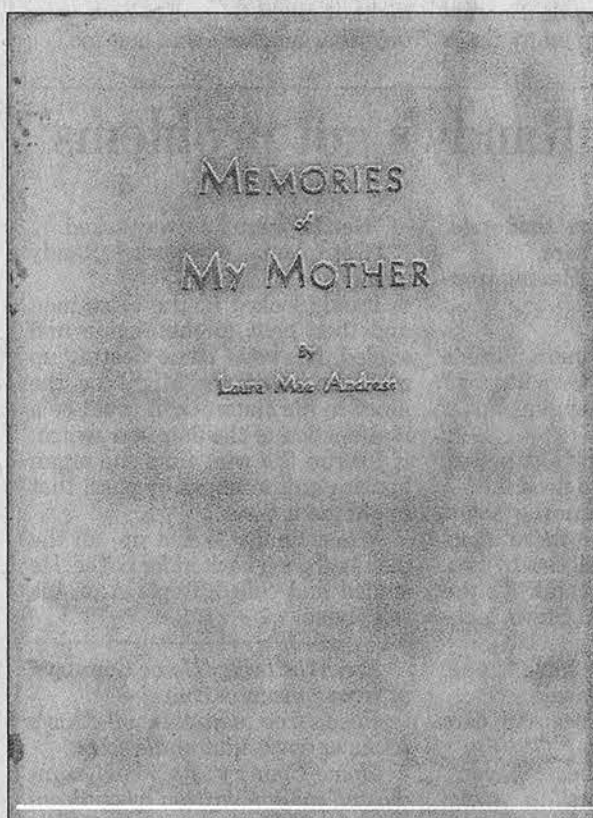
By **JANET McNEIL HURLBERT**  
Sun-Gazette Correspondent

Laura Mae Andress (1884–1968) wrote a book called “Memories of My Mother,” published by Washington College Press. The only copy known to exist was bought on eBay by David Maples, a California resident and Williamsport native. On the title page is a handwritten inscription to Andress’ mother: “For Ella, In memory of happy days on William Street, Christmas, 1933. From Mae Andress.” Today, the book offers insight into everyday life in our community.

The author’s father, William Wallace Andress (1821–1895), described himself as a lumberman. At the age of 16, he decided to go into business with Peter Herdic, and together they eventually purchased a sawmill in Cogan House Township. Andress remembers that her father wore a Knox beaver high hat and carried a gold-headed cane as he walked about town. Her mother, Ella Michael Andress, was William’s second, and much younger, wife.

## William Street

In 1880, William Andress built a two-story brick  
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PHOTOS PROVIDED

Pictured, above left, is the cover of “Memories of My Mother” by Laura Mae Andress, and above right, is the “Memories of My Mother” inscription.



PHOTOS PROVIDED

Pictured, above left, is a photo of Ella Michael Andress, and above right, is a photo of Laura Mae Andress.

## Laura Mae Andress: 'Memories of My Mother'

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dwelling at 248 William St. In her book, Andress shares many memories about her growing-up years. Sitting beside the grape arbor that ran along the side of the house, her family would eat a supper of rice and cream. After the meal, her mother would read out loud as her daughter sat on her father’s lap, plaiting his long silver beard.

There were quick errands to Nardi’s Fruit Store, Neyhart’s Hardware Company and Stearns Department Store, as well as excursions such as a four-mile trip to Montoursville by train to visit relatives. When violets came up in the spring, the family would tramp over Market Street Bridge for a picnic. The three spent summers at a shore cottage in Ocean Grove, New Jersey.

## The Flood of 1889

When Andress was five years old, her father came rushing back from Market Street saying that it was under water. He began piling furniture on top of the grand piano, and Ella started pinning her lace curtains up, never dreaming that more than eight feet of water would soon enter the house. The refrigerator on the back veranda, full of ham, eggs, butter and vegetables, floated off. From the roof, the family watched a flourmill slip off its foundation and sail down the river, soon crashing into the bridge. Horses headed toward the Park Hotel, scrambling to safety on its verandas. Eventually, their back yard was a foot deep in dead river fish, killed by the paints and oils from the hardware store. The wallpaper in the house washed away; the chandelier shattered when the piano collided with it; and the Haviland dishes broke when the sideboard upset.

## College

After graduating from Williamsport High School in 1904, Andress was one of the fortunate young women of that era able to attend college. Goucher College records show her enrolled at the Baltimore institution as a non-matriculated student, with a home address of 442 E. Third St. Andress set off wearing her first tailored suit, with buffalo bone buttons; she also sported a velvet hat and silk petticoat. By this time her father had died, but her mother once paid her a surprise visit to attend a presidential inauguration (probably that of Theodore Roosevelt), and they had fine seats for the parade in Lafayette Park, opposite the White House.

Later, Andress and her mother would move permanently to Washington, D.C., but Ella had Bartlett pears and gooseberries shipped on a regular basis by parcel post from Williamsport so that she could can them.

## The Perfect Mother

Ella seems to have been the perfect mother for her era. “No baby was ever more welcome than you were,” commented a neighbor to Andress. Ella thought up amusements for rainy days: making molasses taffy, creating a new dress for a doll, telling stories of when she was a little girl. She delighted in gathering fresh eggs and in watching the approach of a storm; she preserved pears with ginger root and made gooseberry jam. The cookie jar always contained soft ginger cookies. “Mother was a delicious cook. Whenever she had a special dinner or baked a big cake, she always wanted to share it with someone who was lonely or sad.” Andress’ college friends “fell in love with Ella at sight,” as did everyone they met when they traveled together.

Andress remembers that her mother was “here, there and everywhere” as she would bustle around the house. Or she might sit rocking while the kettle sang on the stove. Every night before bed, she could be seen kneeling beside her bed in prayer.

## A Poet

Andress published two poetry books after her mother’s death. “Mary’s Verse Book” focused on nature and daily life. “Shreds and Patches” was dedicated to her mother, “who never wrote a rhyme, but whose love for children, birds, flowers, moonlight and stars have made these verses possible.”

Andress never married and is buried in Wildwood Cemetery alongside her parents. As always, research has left a few unanswered questions: Andress’ mother died in 1932, yet the book is inscribed to her in 1933. Why was the inscription written after her death, and where has the book been all these years?

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