

Florida Prepaid College Foundation

Hispanic Heritage Month 2017

High School Winner

Title- Maria Mestre Delores de los Andrué -A Beacon of Possibilities

Word count- 480

Student's name- Lina Neraas

Home Town – Panama City Beach, Florida

Grade level- 12th

Imagine being caught in a perilous storm while sailing the ocean. If you do not find land soon, the entire ship could sink and you and your crew would be dead. Then, you see something twinkling in the near distance: a lighthouse! Think of the relief you would feel, having the hope of survival. A hundred years ago, this life saving light was the result of a lighthouse keeper's constant attention, dedication, and selflessness. "The best keepers" during this time were experienced sailors, and it was not a position granted to women, let alone Hispanic- American women. At least, that was the case until 1860, when St. Augustine named its first female Hispanic American lighthouse keeper.

What was significant about a woman obtaining such employment? Put simply, a lighthouse keeper had an important, full-time job. And by "full-time," that means all hours of the day and night. Their efforts were especially needed after dark and during hurricanes. Each night the keepers had the task of keeping the tower's lamp lit until sunrise. In addition, they were responsible for the maintenance of the entire tower and the grounds on which it stood, calling for skills in several areas. Since keepers never came home from work, the tower was their home. This job required discipline, sacrifice, and perseverance - qualities Maria Mestre Delores de los Andrué demonstrated.

In 1854, Maria's husband Joseph became the lighthouse keeper of St. Augustine. She moved into the tower with him, and she often performed or helped him to perform his responsibilities. Then tragedy occurred. While Joseph was whitewashing the tower,

"the scaffolding gave way and he fell 60 feet" to his death. (Shinn) Because of her experience, the next keeper was a clear choice for St. Augustine. With support from the townspeople, Maria Mestre Delores de los Andrue was appointed as the Lighthouse Keeper on January 7, 1860, putting her in command of the U.S. Lighthouse Service in Florida. This made her the first Hispanic-American woman to serve in the U.S. Coast Guard, as well as the first to oversee a federal shore installation.

Maria served as the port's lighthouse keeper until 1862, which was the beginning of the Civil War. To avoid aiding the Union Navy, as Florida was at that time a confederate state, removed the light's Fresnel lens and hid it. Maria and her family moved out of the lighthouse but "remained in the region." (Shinn)

Though three years may have seemed like a short time, Maria left a legacy for Hispanic Americans and women in Florida. With her efforts, she has inspired women who have served and now serve in the Coast Guard, functioning as a role model for them. Andue's accomplishments have stood as a beacon for the empowerment and opportunity of women and Hispanic-Americans in Florida, showing that physical and social limitations can be overcome by hard work and willingness to learn.

Works Cited

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