

☆ NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

ETHEL MAE BRINDLEY, BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

By Esther E. Brindley

Ethel Mae Brindley was eight years old when she traveled by covered wagon with her parents, Marion and Frances Hubbard, as they moved their family from Little Compton in Carroll County, Missouri, where she was born on December 24, 1889, to their new home on a 160-acre farm near Mustang, Oklahoma, in 1898.

At the age of ninety, she still recalled the journey: the campfire and the catching of her long, dark brown, braided hair on fire; "Old Rover" the shaggy shepherd dog running beside the wagon with her younger brother Chester (she and Chester were the two youngest of nine brothers and sisters); and her fear of horse thieves as well as the thrill and excitement of the adventurous journey.

Most prevalent among Mrs. Brindley's memories of happy childhood at her new home (in what was then known as Oklahoma Territory) was the creek. It ran through the barn lot and pasture in the south eighty. Its clear, sparkling water came from an abundance of natural springs at the point where Mustang Creek heads up. She loved to fish, wade, and play up and down that beautiful stream, and to ice skate when it froze over in the winter time.

There was one place on the creek where the bank sloped out from shallow to deeper water, where the Baptist Church congregation held its baptismal services. The people would gather about eleven o'clock on a Sunday morning, have a sermon, and sing a few songs; then, those who were to be baptized were immersed in the creek. Afterward, they would spread a basket dinner in the nearby grove of catalpa, cottonwood, and hackberry trees. One of the cottonwood trees that is still standing was measured in 1975. Its trunk, at four feet from the ground, measured sixteen feet ten inches in circumference.

When she married Edward Warren Brindley on April 25, 1909, they established their home in the town of Mustang, where Mr. Brindley became principal owner and president of the Mustang State Bank. Four daughters were born to them and Mrs. Brindley was pregnant with the fifth daughter when tragedy struck—Mr. Brindley was murdered. A bank customer and former resident of Mustang came to the Brindley residence at about ten

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o'clock on the night of December 29, 1921, and asked Mr. Brindley to step out in the yard to talk business with him privately, which Mr. Brindley did. Within a very few minutes, he shot and killed Mr. Brindley. The man, who had experienced recent difficulty in paying off a bank loan, seemed to have been drinking and to be in a half-crazed state of mind. After the murder, he escaped and was never caught. Mr. Brindley was thirty-five years old. Mrs. Brindley was only thirty-two.

Prior to this time, Mrs. Brindley's life as mother and wife was filled with happiness and diversified activities, such as working in the Methodist church (which she had joined after marrying a staunch Methodist), playing leading roles in home-town plays, and participating in the family and social life of the area-wide, agricultural community.

Although Mr. Brindley left his wife and children financially secure, adverse circumstances developed. In order to obtain what was thought to be honest, reliable, experienced men to operate the bank, Mrs. Brindley sold forty-nine percent of the bank stock to two men. One man sold out to the other, who turned out to be a crook. He shorted the bank of funds, burned individual ledgers, and ran away before being apprehended and convicted. As the controlling stockholder, Mrs. Brindley stood double liability under the state banking laws, in protection of the losses of bank customers. This required a considerable amount of her money. In addition, individuals to whom Mr. Brindley had made personal loans took out bankruptcy or otherwise defaulted on payment, thus further diminishing her financial security.

In April, 1925, due to her worsened financial conditions and the need to find a means of support for her little girls, Mrs. Brindley moved her children to Edmond, Oklahoma, where she established a rooming house for students of Central State Teachers College (now Central State University). During these and subsequent years, Mrs. Brindley plied her natural aptness with the sewing needle as a milliner and seamstress. With five growing daughters, her thimble was never idle. She made all of their clothes, and, if time permitted, made a new dress for the music teacher, or someone else, to help pay for piano lessons for one of the younger children.

In the fall of 1925, she moved the family to El Reno, Oklahoma, and, in 1928, moved to Oklahoma City where, after overcoming a long siege of serious illness and worsening financial circumstances, she pioneered the role as one of Oklahoma's first women oil brokers and became a successful businesswoman. She was most active in brokering leases in the Oklahoma City and West Edmond Oil Fields and in Canadian County.

The move to Oklahoma City had been occasioned largely because of the educational opportunities at Oklahoma City University available to her

daughters, the oldest of whom was college age. Prior to Mr. Brindley's death, the couple had made a pledge to the university (then Oklahoma City College) that carried with it a provision that each of the couple's children would have full-paid four-year college tuition should they choose to attend that school. Mrs. Brindley had completed payment on the pledge soon after her husband's death. Many times she prayerfully applauded her husband's foresight, which made it possible for each one of her daughters to attend this school. Pursuing a dream and working hard, Mrs. Brindley, over a period of years but primarily during the 1930s, purchased from her brothers and sisters, parcel by parcel, their parts of the 160-acre Hubbard homeplace in Sections 20 and 29, Canadian County. This was a dream fully realized. Believing in the security of owning land, she also acquired an additional 160 acres in Section 19, just west across the road from the north eighty of the Hubbard homeplace.

It was not until the early 1950s, when her family was grown and no longer at home, and when she herself had reached the age of retirement, that she moved back to the old home place northwest of Mustang. Then she started a new career in farming and cattle-raising.

A few years earlier, when the Cavalry Post at Fort Reno, Oklahoma, had auctioned off its horses preparatory to closing the fort, Mrs. Brindley attended and purchased two thoroughbred fillies, the progeny of which her grandchildren and great grandchildren have enjoyed riding throughout the ensuing years.

In her late seventies, she retired from her agricultural career by selling her cattle and renting the 320 acres of land to a neighbor. She continued, however, to make her home there in the same house that she had rebuilt, modernized, and enlarged for the third time to accommodate her increasing family of ten grandchildren and eighteen great grandchildren when they came to visit.

Always civic-minded and progressive, Mrs. Brindley, upon a number of occasions, took the necessary action to help bring about important improvements in her community. One such action occurred in 1943, at the time that rural electrification first became a possibility in the southeast portion of Canadian County. She went about the area, north and west of the town of Mustang, and obtained signatures of land owners to subscribe to electrical service, in order that the first electrical wiring could be brought into the homes and barns of the countryside to replace coal-oil lamps and lanterns. In another instance, shortly after a new oil field was discovered just north of Mustang—the South Yukon Field—Mrs. Brindley felt that this name was an affront to the Mustang community and she set about to get it changed. Through contacts with the Oil Editor of the Oklahoma Pub-

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lishing Company and other influential oil-connected people, she was granted a hearing on April 18, 1969, in Tulsa, Oklahoma, before the Oklahoma Nomenclature Committee of the Oklahoma-Kansas Division of the Mid-Continent Oil and Gas Association, for the purpose of pleading her case to get the name of the oil field officially changed from the South Yukon Field to the North Mustang Field. Although she was then seventy-nine years old, she was successful in getting the change accomplished.

One of Mrs. Brindley's most remarkable attributes was her ability to rise above past experience and education in applying the courage of her convictions. At the age of eighty-three, when a concerted effort was underway by a few people to build a forty-acre mobile home park in the center of the city of Mustang, she personally, and alone, drove to surrounding homes in a several square-mile radius and secured more than 100 signatures on a protest petition, which she presented in person to the Mustang City Council, thus enlisting additional support from other interested citizens in the ultimate defeat of the mobile home park project.

The youth of the community have always been of great interest to her and she has given of herself in this regard. Upon a number of occasions, especially during 1976—the bicentennial year—when she was eighty-seven, she was invited and appeared before school groups of different age levels, telling of her early-day experiences around the turn of the century. Once she wrote a four-page letter, in laborious long-hand to a young stranger—a nine-year old boy, who had written asking her for some early history for his bicentennial project at school. For the past several years, she has invited the Camp Fire Firls to hold their annual Father-Daughter Fish-Out and Awards Ceremony at her pasture ponds, and at the 1979 ceremony, she was named an Honorary Life Member of the Mustang Camp Fire Council.

Mrs. Brindley, a member of the Uniter Methodist Church of Mustang, has served on its Administrative Board. Formerly, she was a member of the First Methodist Church of Oklahoma City. She is a Past Worthy Matron of The Eastern Star of Mustang, a member of the Amigo Chapter No. 451, Order of The Eastern Star in Oklahoma City, a member of the Gladiolas Garden Club of Oklahoma City, a member of The Mustang Citizens Improvement Committee, and of The Canadian County Historical Society.

Times have changed considerably during Mrs. Brindley's ninety years, and she is ready for whatever changes occur in the future. However, she is frank to admit that she would prefer not to travel to the moon by space shuttle, and she doubts that she will convert her sewing measurements and her cooking recipes to the metric system.