

Transcription of the Memoirs of Mildred (Minnie) Thomas Brightwell (1895-1983) *Handwritten manuscript in the possession of Minnie's granddaughter Michelle Miller Chalmers, Louisville Transcribed in 2013 by Margaret Thomas Will, granddaughter of Minnie's uncle John B. Thomas, with input from Robert J. Kenney, Jr., grandson of Minnie's sister Clyda Thomas Walsh:*

So here is the story of the 16 years as we lived it from 1918 to 1934.

We were back in our home. The war was over, the flu epidemic a thing of the past. We had our health and we could manage to get along. My sister Kathryn was in Washington working for the Government and Clyda had gone to Washington and gotten her a job too. They invited me to make them a visit and I decided I would, but I waited another year to go because the Southern Baptist Convention was to meet in Washington in 1920 and I wanted to attend that while I was there...

Although it was the first week in May the weather was terrible. Cold and rainy the whole time. After about two weeks I sort of got homesick and I had a feeling that all was not well back home. Call it ESP or what you will. I was right. It was bad enough that Dallas had rented one side of a duplex on Capital Avenue and moved while I was gone but mother had fallen down the stairs at her home and although no bones were broken she was so badly bruised that she was bedfast for days. When I arrived home and found out about Mother I immediately started taking care of her and doing the housework there. It was several weeks before I was able to get home and start living in

[the] duplex. To say I was angry about this move is putting it mildly. I had wanted to determine where we were to move. I wanted to be home and pack my things so I could find what I wanted but above all I hated a duplex and still do to this day...

In the meantime [1921] my family had moved to West Frankfort [Kentucky] in a very large old house with a big yard and a garden. Mother decided that it would be better for all of us if we moved in with her. She had to cook for her family anyway and since there were so many rooms there would be room enough for our furniture and we would not have to store it. Dallas and [I] decided to do it. I was so glad to get out of that duplex. We stayed over there about a year and a half. It was a wonderful year. Dallas bought a pony and cart and what fun we all had with it. We bought a croquet set and fixed a place in the side yard to play croquet. In July of that year Clyda had married. They had a small apartment in Washington and before long she became pregnant and was so deathly sick all the time that we had her come home. Michael, her husband [Michael J. Walsh], would not be mustered out of the Navy until the next May, so the fall and winter of 1921 was a time of family togetherness and family fun. Dallas had nick named our baby [Louise] "Sugar baby" and before long every one was calling her Sug. That nick name has stuck with all the family ever since. I had no problem with getting a baby sitter. The whole family were ready and eager to care for Sug. Before she was ten months old she was saying words and when she was

eleven months of age she was walking. Her first steps [were] made on Easter Sunday. Clyda practically adopted her and one of her first sentences was when she wanted Clyda to take her up she said "Takie my [me?] Ti," and that gave Clyda a nick name [Ti] that has stuck through the years. John and Paul had fun teaching her words and they taught her to say "hen" and then "chicken" and then when they would say "rooster" they taught her to say "cock-a-doodle-do." Imagine our surprise when they sprung that on the family.

Clyda was expecting her baby the last of June. Michael was mustered out in May and came home to meet his new family. He got a job in Cincinnati to be close until the baby came. He was here on week-ends and my grandfather came to spend the summer. Everybody liked to play croquet and there was a game going day and sometimes at night. Kathryn came home from Washington for vacation. Clyda's baby was born on July 27th (her father's birthday), a little girl whom she named Jean. We went back to housekeeping in October in a rented apartment on the South side. Michael went back to Boston (his home town) got a job and sent for Clyda and the baby. The big house was sold and mother moved further down the street to a house near the Kentucky River Dam...

Sug started to school in the fall after she was five years of age. She was very precocious and was a brilliant student all the way through school. I knew from the very beginning of her school years that she should have a College

education. I wondered and worried as to how she would get to College. There were no loans or aids for students then. If I had had the faith I should have had I would have taken my troubles to the Lord and left them there. I know now that I should have believed that a way would open up for her. She had more faith than I did because she never doubted that a way would open up and she would go to College. This is a story of my life not hers, but from the time she was born until this day my life has centered around her. She gave me no trouble as a little girl or as a teen ager. Even though she was a good student she took part in all phases of school life and church life. I tried to supplement our income by sewing for friends and neighbors.

When Louise was nine years of age I took her and we went on a trip first to Niagra Falls and then to Boston. We went by bus and we had a marvelous time. We visited Clyda and Michael who now had two children, Jean and George (whom we nicknamed Buddy). Clyda had become familiar with Boston by this time and we took the children and went sightseeing nearly every day. We went to Harvard to see the Glass Flower exhibit, we took in Bunker Hill and all the other historical spots. Getting to ride on the subway which was our means of transportation was really thrilling to us. I still love it. I loved shopping in the big stores and what a thrill to take the children to Boston Common and let them ride on the swan boats and feed the pidgeons and sparrows who were so gentle that we could pick them up if we wanted to. We spent nearly a

month there and I have gone back on vacation almost every year since then. I never tire of New England. Michael's uncle [probably Owen Quilty, a younger brother of Michael's mother] took us to Plymouth while we were there. He took us to the beaches – Marblehead, Revere and Hampton Beach in New Hampshire. We even took a boat trip to Nantucket.

As I have said before Dallas and I had the underlying fear with us always that the Hoge Montgomery Co would fail and we would be left stranded with no income at an age when it would be hard to start over. It was particularly hard on me because I had gone through this as a child and I felt I couldn't stand such an experience again. (We never know what we can stand until we are faced with it). We did not let this worry surface very often. Sug was such a joy to us that she was about all I could think about. This was a marvelous trip and the memory of it will always linger with us. During the next few years Clyda, Virginia and I got together with our children and had a wonderful time. There were three mothers with four children and we were all so close that we hardly knew the difference between our own and the others. The children felt about each other almost as if they were sisters and brother.

According to research by Minnie's first cousin John B. Thomas, Jr. (1914-2000), the farm where she was born had been part of a land grant of 1000 acres to Christopher Columbus Graham (surveyed 1791, granted 1793). In 1795 Graham sold part of this land to Samuel Duncan. In 1818 Duncan sold a tract of about 180-200 acres to Cornelius and Gillie (Robertson) Bodine. When Cornelius Bodine died

in 1823 the land was divided (although apparently not officially) into 60 acres – the farm as Minnie knew it and as it still is today – and the c. 120 acres that wrap around it. The widowed Gillie Bodine and her children moved to the 60 acres and the present farmhouse was built at that time. Gillie Bodine's oldest daughter Mary Parker Bodine married Washington Thomas in 1831 and moved to his farm in northeastern Nelson County. When Mary Parker Bodine Thomas died in 1840 her three children went to live with their grandmother Gillie Bodine on her farm. One of these grandchildren, Cornelius Bodine Thomas (1834-1892), remained there most of his life; by c. 1869 he had legal possession of the 60-acre farm (though he may still have been buying out other heirs for some time). He married Josephine Breckenridge in 1864. They had four children, one of whom was Minnie's father George W. Thomas.

*Thus Minnie's great-great grandfather Cornelius Bodine was the first ancestor to own the farm; her great grandfather Washington Thomas never owned or lived at the farm; her grandfather Cornelius Bodine Thomas lived there much of his life and eventually owned the place.
(MTW)*