



## SUMMER 2020 Vol. 61 No. 2



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*On the Cover:*

**Gordon Oscar "Griff" Griffiths -Vernon, Texas in 1942.**

*Photo courtesy of Glenda Lassiter*

The Austin Genealogical Society Quarterly is published once per quarter of the year (Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter) by the Austin Genealogical Society (AGS). Deadlines for submissions are the 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of the second month of the quarter. The AGS Editor reserves the right to edit all contributed materials for style, grammar, and length. Contributors are solely responsible for the accuracy and proper citation of consulted sources. In addition, contributors are responsible for adhering to all applicable copyright law in their works. AGS assumes no responsibility for the content of submitted material.

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## FROM THE BOARD

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### *A Salute to the Quarterly*

The Quarterly is as old as the Austin Genealogical Society itself, dating back to the founding of AGS in 1960. In addition to noting that dues were \$3 a year, that first issue contained Travis County Texas Probate records for the years 1835 to 1855; Travis County Marriage Records from the first two in May of 1840 through 1899; Confederate Pensioners of Texas; and Index to the City of Austin Cemeteries.

The listings promised further names and dates in the next issues.

The issue was typewritten, and undoubtedly mimeographed. A great number of members contributed to the collection of data from Travis County sources, and many more to getting it typed. That first issue had 20 pages, most of it historical listings, typewritten and proofread.

AUSTIN GENEALOGY SOCIETY QUARTERLY  
(What Shall We Name It?)

Vol I, No. 1

Nov., 1960

Published by the Education & Publicity Committee of Austin Genealogy Society  
of Austin, Travis County, Texas

Austin Genealogy Society--organized spring, 1960--governed by a Board of Twenty  
Directors--a non-profit organization dedicated to collecting, exchanging and  
publishing genealogical material for the benefit of historians & genealogists.  
Meetings once a month in Austin as announced by bulletins. Visitors welcome.

Much of that data now on the AGS website was collected by members visiting local archives and was first printed in editions of the Quarterly — one of the reasons all the Quarterly issues are preserved on the website (when the new website launches, all issues will be available to the public).

The resources our early members collected are permanent historical and genealogical records because of the Quarterly.

The Quarterly, of course, has changed in 60 years. Now welcome and sought after in academic collections, it most often features the memories and histories of our member's families, with historical data. The stories — and proof — our members submit provides a permanent record of a given family's ancestral history. By itself, it is a source.

Part of the Quarterly's success . . . part of why it is sought-after academically . . . is the quality of editing that goes into it. For the last five years, Angela Doetsch has lived the job with passion and excellence, making history come alive. It's a tough job, making sure proofs and footnotes are accurate, finding members who want to make their stories public, arranging pages and editing paragraphs and lines. She does it with singular devotion and has delivered 18 issues in a row on schedule, a remarkable feat.

This is Angela's last edition. She's retiring from the function she served so ably. Finding good editors is difficult, and she served with distinction. We owe her immensely. We will have trouble replacing her (if you'd like to be considered, let us know).

Through the years, the Quarterly has had its ups and downs, ons and offs. With Angela at the helm, it has been consistent, and consistently excellent.

Until we know how things are going to shake out after COVID-19, we are putting the Quarterly on hiatus until we know how it can be as useful in the future as it has in the past, and especially in the recent past.

Thanks for reading! We look forward to the next Quarterly reincarnation.

**The Board of Directors,**  
Austin Genealogical Society

# AMANDA EILERS BRICE

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## *W.P.A. Slave Narratives*

Compiled by AGS Life Member Peter Flagg Maxson

In 1993, I wrote an article for the *Austin Genealogical Society Quarterly* on the family of my great aunt by marriage, Lucille Eilers Maxson (1894-1951). I never knew Aunt Lucille, but I had heard that her family was of some prominence in Austin, Texas. Her uncles A. T. McKean and August J. Eilers built the McKean-Eilers Building, one of the finest buildings on Congress Avenue, for their hardware/dry goods store. Designed by noted architect J. Reily Gordon of San Antonio, Texas and New York, its fine Romanesque style façade had been covered by a false front until recently. I knew also there was an Eilers Avenue near me in Hyde Park, and that Deep Eddy Pool is located in Eilers Park. The family founder I learned was Netherlands-born Bastrop, Texas merchant Louis Eilers (1828-1895) of Bastrop and Austin, who is buried in Oakwood Cemetery in Austin.<sup>1</sup>

Not until after the article was published, I was told by a colleague that Eilers acquired a young mulatto slave before the Civil War. In 1937, a Federal Writers Project of the Works Progress Administration program documented

two thousand oral histories with persons born into slavery, and one such interview was with Mrs. Amanda Eilers Brice of Austin. The insights into the world of a young enslaved person before the Civil War are extraordinary. But I confess to relief that her situation could have been worse.

The narrative is written in an African American patois that will make many readers uncomfortable. Yet on reflection, Oxford English would not have been right either, and there is a certain beauty in the words and the cadence of Mrs. Brice's narrative. Some of Mrs. Brice's word choices would be unacceptable today. But I took more offence at the interviewer's decision to call her Amanda, as if a child.

In 2005, the Austin History Center did a documentary/reading of several of the Austin Slave Narratives called, "The Blue Bellies are in Austin." Though it did not include Mrs. Brice, it is well worth viewing:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_Nd1TQFPcaM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Nd1TQFPcaM).

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<sup>1</sup> Austin Genealogical Society Quarterly, v. XXXIV, no.2 (June 1993).

## THE INTERVIEW

1937 W.P.A. interview by Alfred E. Menn, published in *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography* (Westport: Greenwood Press, ca. 1970, Volume 2 Texas Narratives, Part 1.)

**A**manda Eilers Brice was born a slave about 87 years ago in Bastrop, Bastrop County.

Amanda belonged to the Louis Eilers family at Bastrop, who was the owner of a store on Main Street. She says her master was very kind to her, and once refused to take a thousand dollars for her, after having bought her for five hundred dollars. Her mother was Sallie Herron, who was brought from Georgia and bought from the Ware family by John [Harvey] Herron (1814-1892) of McDade, Bastrop County. Her father was a white man. When Amanda was about sixteen years of age, she married Paul Brice, who was working in a sawmill, near Bastrop. They had thirteen children, of whom only five still are living. Her husband died more than thirty years ago. Amanda says that her living conditions were better during her slavery days than now, although, she lives in a comfortable bungalow with her daughter and son-in-law, Oscar Woods', 1513 East 20<sup>th</sup> Street, Austin. Amanda's son, Hugh Brice, died during the World War, and she receives a small monthly pension from the Federal Government.

"De folks always call me Mandy, but my real name is Amanda Eilers Brice. Now, I kain't tell yo' nothin' about de days dat I was bawn, but here's how de white folks told me about my age: I was seben years old when de white folks had a baby ob three weeks, and when dat child was eighty years old and died, I still remembahed dat I was seben years older, and dat makes me eighty-seben. Anyhow, dat's whut de white folks tell me. I don't know.

"Ma's name was Sallie Herron, and she come f'om Georgia somewhere. Mawster Ware was her owner den, and he sold her to mawster John Herron ob McDade, Bastrop County. He had a laghe cotton plantation and den he had a lot of stock too. Mawster Herron was good to ma, and he was whut people called a good neighbor. Nobody had to suffer on his place. I'm tellin' yo' dis 'cause it's de truth. He was a good man. If yo' didn't git whut yo' wanted on dat place, den it was yo' own fault. Ma was small and plump, lak me. She was a brown-skinned woman. Mawster Herron's wife died when his two young girls was still young, dere names was Lizzie and Mattie. Lizzie married rich and Mattie

married poor. Lizzie' husband, John Tinnen, had a big ranch at Hogeye, and dey call it Elgin now, over in Bastrop County. Me stayed right on at de Herron place, until dem two girls got married. De old man never did marry again. Ma died about thutty years ago, I think it was. Us niggers ob dem days never did know how to keep dates ob things dat happened. Ma had six chillun, five boys and one girl.

"I never did see my fathaw. I don't know nothin' about him, 'ceptin' jes' whut I heard. All dat I know is dat he was a white man.

"De mawster dat owned me was Louis Eilers ob Bastrop, Bastrop County. He was a merchant down dere. He kept groceries and everything---candy, whiskey and de like. One day his big store got burned down, and de clerk, a Mister Berger, got burned to a crisp. I remembah dat 'cause I was about thutteen years old at de time.

"Dere is one thing dat I sho' do remembah. Dere was one tame Injun dat was dressed lak any white man, and he always come to Mawster Eilers' store to play on a laghe harp. It was one ob dem harps dat yo' could set on de floor and play wid yo' hands. De Injun was a tall man, but dat harp was almost as laghe as he was. I don't remembah nothin' about

him, jes' dat I remembah he played dat laghe harp.

"Ob course durin' dem early days, we always heard a lot about de wild wild Injuns but dey never did bother us. Why de first real wild Injun I ever saw was in a wild west show at Bastrop, after de slaves' freedom.

"Mawster Eilers would credit people in his store. Dey could come in at any time and buy on credit. He had a plank store on Main Street, and his house was near the courthouse.

"Mawster Eilers was a good man, too. All dat I had to do was nuss de baby. De folks used to tell me dat I was a valuable little nigger.

"I used to belong to a man by de name ob Frank Smith when I was real young. I don't remembah much about him. De folks used to tell me dat people talked about me lak dis:

""Whut yo' goin' to de wid dat little nigger?"

""Sell her."

""Sell her? Why yo' won't git nothin for her, she's too little and skinny."



"But after a while a Mister Trigg come around and said, "Eilers, I'll give yo' a thousand dollars fo' her."<sup>2</sup>

"No, I want her fo' my own need, she's a valuable little nigger," Master Eilers told him.

"Mawster Eilers had paid only five hundred dollars fo' me, still he wouldn't sell me.

"De Eilers had good meals. Whut dey had to eat, I had it. I was so spoiled dat de other folks called me "Eilers' free nigger" cause my mawster let me go anywhere widout a pass. I was jes' spoiled.

"When I was still a slave de Eilers would go down to La Grange, Fayette County, to visit kinfolks. Dey would go in a buggy, and dere wasn't room fo' me so I was sent ahead in de stagecoach. From Bastrop to LaGrange was de airline road. Cunninghams' Stage Stand was between Bastrop and La Grange, and dat's where de hosses was changed. De white folks paid my fare so I don't know how much dat I had to pay fo' de trip. I know dat once I went on dat trip and had to sit on a "middle seat". Goin' on de way down two fine lookin' gentlemen was settin' in the coach. Folks told me dat dey was Sam

Houston and a Colonel Boston. Ob 'couse I was too little to know who dey was.

"I have never been to school one hour in my life. I could of learned, I reckon, but I thought dat I was too smart. I jes' never took no interest in schoolin'. De folks in de earlier days never did learn us our A B C's. So, to dis day I kain't read or write.

"When I was about fifteen years old I was set free. Mistress Carolin, de mawster's wife, come to me and jes' said, "Mandy, yo' is free, yo' don't belong to us no mo'."

"About a week or two later my ma come down f'om McDade and took me wid her. I had to help around de place. After freedom I had to go out and pick cotton. I never was much ob a picker. De most dat I could pick was about two hunnert pounds, and I couldn't look around at de birds. Ma used to say dat where she come f'om in Georgia dere was so little cotton dat yo' could pick it in a apron. Ma never was a cotton picker dat could pick much. She never could pick more'n a hunnert pounds ob cotton a day.

"After a year ob freedom, when I was sixteen, I was married to Paul Brice. Paul was a right young man, about twenty or something. When I got married I sho' had to git busy. I never did have time fo' a rockin' chair. We had thirteen chillun,

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<sup>2</sup> Roughly \$25,000 in today's currency.



nine boys and four girls. Dere is only five ob de chillun livin' today.

"Paul was workin' fo' de Brice and Lyman sawmill, near Bastrop, fo' five dollahs a month, and we got our cabin and board. We lived in a one-room log cabin and it had only one door, and nary a window. Paul helped saw down trees and made shingles and slabs. Dem was pine trees down in de lost pine forest section.

"I reckon dat I liked dat country 'cause I never knowed no other place fo' a long time. Our little cabin was about five miles f'om de sawmill and Paul had to walk to work and back. Sometimes he caught a ride.

"Paul was workin' at dat sawmill when I met him. Yo' know how young folks is. After we married Paul worked dere fo' a number ob years. Den it was about three chillun befo' I moved to Austin. De oldest was a girl, Emma, and she was about four years old. I worked out here in Austin, and Paul fahmed down in Bastrop County. I'd go down dere every once in awhile and visit folks. Paul died more'n thutty years ago, and he is buried at Oak Hill, Bastrop County.

"Now I live here wid my son-in-law, Oscar Woods, and he's been a mighty good man to me. When he has wood to burn, I kin burn it; when dere is bread in de house, I kin eat dat. Oscar has been a mighty good son-in-law to me.

*Austin American-Statesman*, 19 June 2003; Peter Flagg Maxson, Eilers Family of Austin and Bastrop," *Austin Genealogical Society Quarterly*, vol. XXXIV, no. 2 (June 1993).

## **POSTSCRIPT: MY FAMILY AND SLAVERY**

**A**frican American connections are rarely mentioned in Caucasian family histories. First and foremost, the enslavement of Africans was not one of the proudest moments in American history. Also, we may incorrectly assume that because our ancestors lived in Northern states that

slavery was not an issue. Primary source materials are scarce, beyond, say, the 1860 Slave Census or probate records. And there may be racism, classism, etc. issues.

Likely there were few slave owners among my Maxson ancestors. However,

there are a dozen references in family histories to mainly 17<sup>th</sup> century Massachusetts slaveowners. Not all know that New Englanders were both owners and traders of enslaved persons in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The 1750 Will of my ancestor George Babcock of Kingston Rhode Island left his wife, Elizabeth Hall, "my negro gall Peg' to his son David the homestead farm, a negro man named 'Bristo,' a negro woman named 'Geney'"<sup>3</sup>

A secondary source notes the home of Hazard ancestors in Rhode Island is remembered for, "its capacious chimney. Inside the chimney were two stone seats, where, tradition says, little slave children were wont to sit; the heat from the big logs being no bad substitute for the hot sands of Africa." A choice?

My grandmother Marion Flagg Maxson's ancestor Ebenezer Flagg (1710-1762) of Newport, Rhode Island inherited a slave called Pompeii, from his father in Boston. Though the White Flaggs left Newport during the Revolution, the Black Flaggs have remained and prospered there.

Ebenezer's son, Surgeon Henry Collins Flagg, went to South Carolina during the Revolution with General Nathaniel Greene, and settled there after marrying the wealthy Widow Allston, a member of Moore and Vanderhorst<sup>4</sup> families and to the best of my knowledge these five times great-grandparents were my only large-scale slave-owning direct ancestors. My forbear Henry Jr. moved to Connecticut, but his nephews, Arthur and Allard Flagg, married daughters of rice magnate John Joshua Ward of Georgetown County, South Carolina, according to Wikipedia the largest slaveholder in the United States in 1850 with 1092 enslaved persons. I repeat that with shame, not pride, though the connection is very indirect. It is interesting that Ward's grandchildren Allard and Penelope Flagg are remembered in the 1880s as "good people, very poor."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Babcock, Stephen, *Babcock Genealogy* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1903), p. 21; Caroline E. Robinson, Caroline E., *The Hazard Family of Rhode Island 1635-1894*. (Boston, 1895), p.4.

<sup>4</sup> Pronounced "vanDROSS."

<sup>5</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joshua\\_John\\_Ward](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joshua_John_Ward).

## WALKING TO SCHOOL, BACK IN THE DAYS

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By AGS Member Kay Dunlap Boyd

**D**oing research, I have always looked at other family members and friends to learn more about my own branch of the family. Maybe they were on the same ship, in the same wagon, lived in the same town, attended the same church or like my great grandfather had a brother with had a pet bear.

My Dad was born in 1908 at a dot on the map called Adalia. *The Handbook of Texas* states “Adalia was twelve miles northeast of Lockhart in northeast Caldwell County. The Adalia school was consolidated with the Lytton Springs school in the 1930s. Adalia had ceased to exist by the 1970s.” The Dunlap family home was north of Lytton Springs and straddled the Caldwell and Bastrop county lines, on what is now Caldwell Road south of Hwy 21.

Carl Wright was born in this area in 1910. I visited with him several times about “the old days” because he knew my father and grandfather. He was a fascinating storyteller and writer with a great memory. I have always been drawn to writings and stories that parallel my family who left few written words.

I recently uncovered this article Carl wrote:

“By the 1930s children were bused to school on our prairie in central Texas.

“Consolidation of small rural schools with city schools ended their walks, some of them very long.

“Recalling my three-mile tramp to our two-teacher school in the 1920s, I am now aware that the walk then meant more than a means to attain knowledge of the three Rs.

“My conception must have been similar to Thoreau’s in his essay on walking. “Man needs the tonics of wilderness.”

“This I received by keeping an eye on the flora and fauna during every step of the way to school.

“I preferred making the trip without my peers, for they generally overlooked the enchantment of nature.

“With them I was bound to hear such talk as which car was better on muddy roads, the Model T or a Maxwell.

“Sometimes children carried devices or gadgets for diversion on the road. A student might walk on stilts or push a wagon tire by holding against it a cupped tobacco tin.

“Alone I was part and parcel of nature.

“For a limited time I could forget about fractions and adverbs. My home was a small farm and mesquite pasture like many others making a patchwork quilt over gently rolling hills.

“When the clock on our mantel struck seven-thirty, I pulled on a stout booksatchel.

“This bag with a shoulder strap sewn by my mother held books, a Big Chief tablet, pencil box and a lunch wrapped in yesterday’s newspaper.

“The initial leg of the journey covered a little road and separating field from pasture.

“A fencerow in all seasons was the habitat of various plants, small animals and birds.

“Here in early winter, fern-like prairie lace with tiny white flowers scented the frosty air, and purple wild oxalis made its first showing.

“In spring the mockingbird poured out a rich symphony above the shy meadow lark’s secluded notes.

“A disturbed cottontail might hop away for safer protection.

“Leaving our farm, I came upon the big dirt road which I soon left to enter a pasture, a shortcut to school.

“Moreover it contained a greater selection of plants than other pastures in the neighborhood.

“Tall willows around the tank bore catkins, small flowers in clusters and seeds on long silky down.

“Cattails in shallow water grew spikes capped with brownish clubs.

“Their leaves shaped like swords obscured the wild green duck with a purple ring around its neck.

“This lovely creature was often a transient in fall from the far away north.

“Two exotic shrubs could easily give me a tardy mark in deportment: the agarita reminding me of Christmas holly and chili-pitin with orange-red pepper pads.

“All of these blessings of nature were only a part of the interesting region.

“On the road near our schoolhouse, I would try to beat the nine-o’clock bell sending its chimes over the countryside.

“The first class was always arithmetic.

“Although my mind would be fresh, I had to struggle again wilderness if the teacher sent me to the blackboard, saying ‘Show how to divide one-eighth by two-sevenths’ or Diagram the following sentence...”

(Carl C. Wright was a retired Lockhart educator when he wrote this article.)





BOYS IN ADALIA SCHOOL, 1917-1918

First Row, left to right

Thomas Dunlap, Robert Vanlandingham, Walton Robinson, Carl Wright

Middle Row, left to right

Leroy Bentham, Morris Perry, Horace Perry

Back Row, left to right

Virgil Speck, Harold Jamar, Elmo Wright, Alley Perry, Walter Wright

**Adalia School 1917-1918**

*My dad, Thomas Dunlap, is the lad on the left end of the front row. He has shoes on in this photo, but is barefoot in another I have. Carl Wright is on the right end of the first row and two of his brothers are on the back row.*

*Photo courtesy of Carl Wright*

### *Chapter XVII: A Good Life*

**By AGS Member Glenda Lassiter**

*Griff (Gordon Oscar Griffiths) was born in 1908, near Jermyn, Texas in Jack County. In 1990, at the age of 82, Griff recorded the story of his life on audio tapes. When he died the following year, he left the tapes to his daughter, Glenda Lassiter, asking her to write his memoir from them.*

*Chapters 1-16 are serialized in the Austin Genealogical Society Quarterly beginning in the December edition of 2015.*

Chapter 1 – “Sand” (December 2015 Vol. 56 No. 4)

Chapter 2 – “A Child in Texas” (June 2016 Vol. 57 No. 2)

Chapter 3 – “Graduation” (September 2016 Vol. 57 No. 3)

Chapter 4 – “Leaving Home” (December 2016 Vol. 57 No. 4)

Chapter 5 – “Denton” (March 2017 Vol. 58 No. 1)

Chapter 6 – “College” (June 2017 Vol. 58 No. 2)

Chapter 7 – “The Deal” (September 2017 Vol. 58 No. 3)

Chapter 8 – “Last Year of College” (December 2017 Vol. 58 No. 4)

Chapter 9 – “Exams” (Spring 2018 Vol. 59 No. 1)

Photographs from Griff’s Life – (Summer 2018 Vol. 59 No. 2)

Chapter 10 – “The Monitor Top” (Fall 2018 Vol. 59 No. 3)

Chapter 11 – “A Christmas Robbery” (Winter 2018 Vol. 59 No. 4)

Chapter 12 – “Wed” (Spring 2019 Vol. 60 No. 1)

Chapter 13 – “In Business” (Summer 2019 Vol. 60 No. 2)

Chapter 14 – “Loss” (Fall 2019 Vol. 60 No. 3)

Chapter 15 – “Recovery” (Winter 2019 Vol. 60 No. 4)

Chapter 16 – “We Can't Even Guess What Will Be the Outcome”

(Spring 2020 Vol. 61 No. 1)

When Griff got home after the meeting with Mr. Davis, he was so excited that his face was flushed, and he was short of breath. Desda was just putting a dinner of chicken fried steak, mashed potatoes, and cream gravy on the table for the girls. She was expecting him to come home later, because he usually stayed after hours at the office working on loan applications or else he was out in the evening showing or appraising houses. But here he was.

"Daddy!" the girls squealed in unison.

"You girls go ahead and eat. I need to talk to your mother," he said, giving Desda a little shoulder hug and guiding her gently toward the door into the living room.

When they were out of the girls' hearing, he looked into her eyes. A feeling of calm came over him.

He began slowly, "The Old Man called Melba Ruth and me into his office this afternoon. He had heard about that offer I got to sell real estate for that fellow around the corner."

Desda looked apprehensive. "No, it's all right. He just wanted to make sure I don't leave." Griff chuckled and looked at the

floor. "I guess he figured if I owned part of the business, I couldn't leave."

Now Desda's eyes widened. "What do you mean?"

"He made us an offer. He wants Melba Ruth and me to buy into the business. She and I would be partners and own half the business together."

"You and Melba Ruth would own half the business?" Desda repeated.

"But it won't come cheap. We're going to have to make pretty big payments into the Davis estate every month. Money is going to be real tight for us. I mean even tighter than it is now. And I'll have a lot more responsibility."

Desda knew how much being a business owner would mean to Griff. She knew how losing the appliance store in Electra had broken his heart. She didn't hesitate for a moment.

"If this is what you want for us, we can make it work," Desda smiled. The agreement between them was made.

The same scene was playing out in Melba Ruth's house when she told her husband Bob about the offer, the financial obligation they would assume, and the time demands the new arrangement would put on her. Bob Tabor worked at the *Vernon Daily Record*, the local



newspaper. Smiling, easy-going Bob was happy to let Melba Ruth follow her dreams.

So, the decisions were made and in January of 1945 the partnership papers were signed. The office manager and the real estate man at T. E. Davis Agency became co-owners with T.E, for no money down but with an enormous financial obligation to the Davis estate.

Five months after the ownership papers were signed, World War II ended, and there was a huge demand for houses all over the country as the soldiers returned from the war. On June 22, 1944, President Franklin D. Roosevelt had signed into law The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 – commonly known as the GI Bill of Rights.

Among other benefits, it provided for loans guaranteed by the Federal Government for the purchase or construction of homes for veterans, known as VA loans. In order to make VA loans, a realtor had to be willing to study the intricacies of the law to ensure that the applicant and the property qualified for the conditions of the loan. Griff soon realized that there wasn't a lending program on the market that could match the buying power and flexibility of a VA loan. Griff turned himself into a VA-savvy real estate agent. He became the

only agent in the county who was completely qualified to make VA loans.

Griff saw the advantage of building houses to sell in addition to selling pre-existing properties. This, of course, included insuring the new property for the buyer which was an additional advantage to the agency.

When the agency started building houses, they started making good money. At first this practice was not without its risks. One house they built was in a flood plain. By the time that house sold, they had spent so much money repairing it while it sat vacant, that all they made on the house was \$7.50.

In 1952, "Old Man T.E.", who was almost retired, died. Griff and Melba Ruth had paid for their half of the business. They decided that they needed to buy the other half of the business. That meant they would continue to make even larger payments into the Davis estate. But they were willing to make the commitment. Making VA loans was costing Griff hours filling out complicated loan applications and trying to get them approved. Both he and Melba Ruth worked until 10pm every night and put in time on the weekends as well. They were working extra hours because they couldn't afford to hire more people.

Griff always seemed to be working. It was a family joke that whenever anyone wondered where he was, he was out "on a deal." He forever had a "big deal" that demanded his time and attention. The family lived very frugally, but, growing up, the girls never suspected that all of the hours he was putting in and all the scrimping and saving their mother was doing were focused, devoted to making that business a success. The two of them were maintaining the agreement they had made when they first decided for him to take the partnership with all the extra time, work, and money it would cost them.

Griff and Melba Ruth got the estate paid off in 1966 and were co-owners of T. E. Davis Agency. They never did change the name of the Agency. Griff did not want to put his name on another business after losing the businesses in Electra which bore his name. Besides, the agency was already widely known by the name T. E. Davis Agency.

Closely associated with his determination to make a success of the business, Griff also became involved in civic activities which enhanced his reputation as a businessman in that growing post-war rural community. He became active in an impressive variety of civic organizations, serving as an officer and on the board of directors for many of

them. Griff was gratified to feel that he was making a contribution to the development of the town. To him, community building was part of being a successful businessman.

As Griff became more prosperous he bought Desda a new Buick every year. He drove older cars around town when out showing houses or making collections. By the time Glenda went to college in 1957, he gave her a little yellow 1956 Studebaker out of his fleet to take with her.

Griff and Desda were members of the First Baptist Church for 50 years. Both of them were active teaching Sunday School and as leaders of the young people's group. Both girls sang in the church choir and were involved in church activities. The family sat in a certain place every Sunday morning on the front row of the church balcony. This was the safe, nurturing, and stable environment that Griff wanted for his family.

In spite of his work schedule, Griff and Desda found time to play bridge regularly and belonged to a square-dancing club. Desda played bridge with women's groups during the week.

Griff always loved to fish and became an avid trout fisherman. The family took

annual vacations to Colorado on fishing trips. As a child Glenda felt honored when Griff appointed her the navigator on these trips and said it was her job to read the map and be sure he was driving on the right highway. They would stay in log cabin camps, some rather rustic, high up in the mountains around Durango, Colorado. Sometimes they varied the plans a little. One year they visited Yellowstone. Another year Griff drove them up into to Winnipeg, Canada, taking two of Glenda's teenage girlfriends with them.

Family was all-important to both Desda and Griff. Griff often assisted family members who had fallen on hard times. He took in Desda's youngest brother Howell and gave him a job at the agency. He also employed one of Desda's nephews who later became a president of Republic Bank in Dallas and his financial advisor. After "Papa" Stubblefield died in 1956, Griff moved Desda's mother in with the family, building her an apartment on the back of their house with her own kitchen and bathroom. She lived there until she died in 1964.

The family lived in the house Griff had bought after the war across the street from the junior high and high school. Desda was very popular with all the kids and the house was a teenage hangout. She taught everyone how to dance and



**Desda's mother Flora Stubblefield on right with  
Desda's older sister Keron**

*Photo courtesy of Glenda Lassiter*

how to play bridge. These were very happy years for Desda being surrounded by her daughters and their friends. The house was always filled with teenagers and music and laughter and she loved it.

Jeannine graduated from high school in 1949, and went to The University of Texas, and, after she graduated, she married and had two daughters. Her family lived in Houston, Texas. Glenda graduated from high school in 1957, and graduated from The University of Texas

in 1961, and completed a master's degree at SMU in 1975. She married and had a son and a daughter. They lived together in Dallas, Texas. When the grandchildren were small, both families would return to Vernon every year to visit Desda and Griff for Christmas and for Thanksgiving. Griff bought Desda a larger house after the girls went to college. Desda loved to decorate the house for the holidays, and Griff would cook huge traditional holiday dinners for his family.

Both Griff and Desda began having health problems in the 1970s when they were in their 60s. Griff began to have trouble walking because of osteoarthritis. Desda had a bad fall in 1972 and had to have brain surgery for a subdural hematoma. Then Griff's stomach burst during surgery in the late 1970s, when they were trying to resolve some of his vascular pain. This caused a cascade of physical problems. By 1980, his failing health convinced him that he needed to sell his half of the agency. He sold it to two local businessmen and "socked" all of his profits into savings and investments.

When they were 76 years old, they decided to move to Dallas where they could be closer to Glenda, the grandchildren, and the many doctors they both needed to consult regularly.

Glenda, Amy, and Stuart were able to see them regularly. They had a standing date to take Desda and Griff to Luby's Cafeteria every Sunday for lunch.

Griff had developed lung cancer when he was 70 years old. Smoking cigarettes since the age of 12 had finally caught up with him. He quit smoking and put himself on a health regimen. The cancer went away for 13 years.

In 1991, the cancer came back. Glenda was in the hospital room with him in Presbyterian Hospital in Dallas when he died and was able to tell him she loved him. He looked at her with those clear blue eyes and said, "I love you too, Baby."

\* \* \* \* \*

They gave me all of the effects that he had brought with him into the hospital. Among them was his billfold, and in that billfold was a worn black and white snapshot of his daddy's gravestone that he had carried all these years.

I had to tell Mother that he was gone. She had not been very lucid since the brain surgery years before, and I didn't think she would understand. But when I told her, she stopped her reverie in that far away land where she lived now, gave me a startled look, and said, "Griff's gone? He was so precious to me."



Griff was 83 years old when he died, and he and Desda had been married for 63 years.

I wonder how, starting with so little, Griff was able to achieve so much financial and social success. Perhaps the misery of his young life created in him a need to feel safe, and to keep everyone he loved safe.

Or perhaps in his heart, he was always that desperate and determined six-year-old child, crying in the sandstorm because he had just lost his daddy.

*The End*

Following are photos from Griff's life from his marriage to Desda in 1928, to his death in 1991.



**This photograph of Griff's and Desda's graves in Vernon, Texas was taken in 2018. They had been married for 63 years when he died in 1991.**

*Photo courtesy of Glenda Lassiter*



**Griff and Desda sitting on their front steps in Electra, Texas in their first year of marriage in 1928.**

*Photo courtesy of Glenda Lassiter*



**Griff and Desda photographed with their first daughter in 1932.**

*Photo courtesy of Glenda Lassiter*



**Here is Griff with second daughter Glenda in 1938 who is 3 months old.**

*Photo courtesy of Glenda Lassiter*

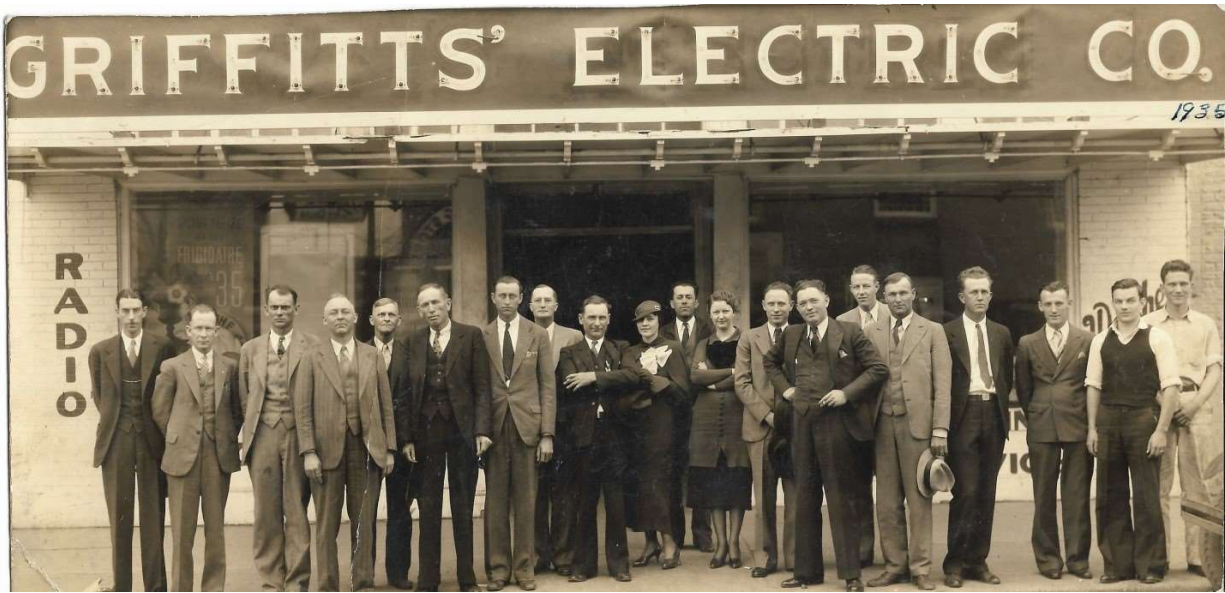




**Griff clowning with two brothers-in-law, Howell and Ross, and Jeannine and Stein – 1933**

*Photo courtesy of Glenda Lassiter*





Sixteen in picture were Griff's employees in his appliance store in Electra, Texas just before his store in the background burned on the night of July 10, 1935. Eight employees in the picture worked at the other store, 21 miles away in Vernon, Texas. Griff and Desda are 8th and 9th from the right in the picture. In 1936, they moved to Vernon to work in that store.

*Photo courtesy of Glenda Lassiter*



After entering real estate sales in 1940, Griff became a partner and part owner of Davis Real Estate and Insurance in Vernon, Texas in 1942.

*Photo courtesy of Glenda Lassiter*



**Griff at Glenda's wedding, February, 1965**

*Photo courtesy of Glenda Lassiter*



Griff's immediate family at his funeral, November 1991

*Photo courtesy of Glenda Lassiter*

***From the Editor:***

I would like to thank Glenda Lassiter for sharing the life of her father, Gordon Oscar Griffitts, with us over the past five years. It has truly been an honor to follow along on Griff's journey.

I would also like to extend my gratitude for all of those who have submitted their family histories and memoirs over the past five years since I have been the editor for the AGS Quarterly. It is truly my belief that it is the stories that make our ancestors' lives tangible and can bring us closer to knowing not only who they were but also who we are.

Angela Doetsch



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