

Esther McCrory DAR Chapter 100th Anniversary Address

I want to thank your Regent, Carol Monroe, for inviting me to speak at the 100th Anniversary celebration of your Chapter's founding in Amarillo. Congratulations to all of you on this momentous historic occasion.

My late mother-in-law, Katherine Bynum Cobb Baker, was born and raised in Amarillo and was a niece of Marie Bynum Smith, your Chapter's Founding Regent, and was a member of the Esther McCrory Chapter as is Ann Bynum Whittenberg, Marie's great niece. Katherine passed away in 1999. Over the years I had listened to Katherine's stories about her wonderful Aunt Sissie (as Marie was known in family circles). How Marie bested Sam Houston's son, Temple, in a shooting match and how Katherine had once driven her aunt across Oklahoma in the late 1920s. When a rude driver sped by coating Sissie's car in dust, Sissie rolled down the window, pointed her six-gun, and shouted, 'Speed up, Katherine. I want to shoot out the tires of that Oklahoma road hog.' Fortunately, Katherine's sound head prevailed and there were no shots fired. I must admit that the Aunt Sissie anecdotes Katherine related made great family stories, but I paid little attention beyond that. However, a singular event that occurred eight years ago changed everything for me.

My involvement in researching the life of Marie Bynum Smith (Mrs. James Lowry Smith) began in earnest in March 2003 when I was given permission by my wife and her two sisters to clean out the closets and cabinets in my late mother-in-law's house in Fort Smith, AR. In the deep recesses of a closed ceiling-level cabinet I located several tin breadboxes. They contained rich memorabilia on Marie and her husband whom she called Jimmie. Included was their courtship correspondence and a number of DAR artifacts some of which you can see on display in this room today. The boxes had probably been placed there in the late 1930s when my wife's grandmother (and Marie's younger sister, Sarah) cleaned out the Smiths' 1101 Taylor Street home shortly after Marie's death. This cache of Marie Bynum Smith materials started me on a research trail to museums in Salado and Colorado City and to collections at the University of Texas Center for American History, the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, the Amarillo Public Library, the First Baptist Church of Amarillo, and the Southwest Collection at Texas Tech. I felt the story of the Smiths needed to be told because, as I researched, I quickly learned that Jimmie and Marie were caring and considerate about others and asked nothing in return. For example, both were charter members of the First Baptist Church in Amarillo and were instrumental in funding its buildings and in reaching out to new members. Jimmie was for several years the superintendent of the Sunday School program and Marie went in her carriage to pick up church members for services. On the personal side, Marie quietly set aside tuition money so two of her great nieces could attend college.

I cannot summarize for you today all of my discoveries about Marie and Jimmie. Instead, I will concentrate on three phases of Marie's life leading up to and including her involvement with the DAR. The first phase concerns three successive years early in Marie's life in Amarillo: 1889, 1890, and 1891. These three years—all when Marie was still in her mid-20s—illustrate how Marie put her imprint on the map of early Amarillo as its most forward-looking woman. First, in what Marie later termed a “red-hot town fight, the promising city moved one mile east” to the Sanborn Addition where in the Fall of 1889 she established the Chautauqua Club, probably the first woman's club in Amarillo, but certainly its first literary club. Marie led a group of college-educated women in discussions of such topics as political economy of the nineteenth century, Van Dyke's paintings, the history of Rome, and even some physics and Latin. Next, Marie established the First Baptist Church's Ladies Aid Society to help fund the fledgling church's décor and

activities. She designated the Buckner Orphans Home in Dallas as the primary recipient of the church's future charitable donations, donations which continued for the next 40 years. Third, on July 10, 1891, Mrs. J. L. Smith received a letter from Thomas J. Hurley, President of the Texas World's Fair Exhibit Association that begins: "The County Judge of your County has appointed you as one of the seven Commissioners to represent your county...at the World's Columbian Exposition to be held in Chicago in 1893." Marie and her cohorts were tasked with organizing a patriotic and county activities' overview for what has become commonly known as the Chicago World's Fair. Marie readily agreed and received a sealed Certificate to that effect dated August 10, 1891. So, by the time she was barely 27, Marie had already proven herself as a leader in Amarillo's intellectual, spiritual, and historical activities.

I am now skipping ahead to the first decade of the twentieth century when, as all of you know, Amarillo became, percentage-wise, the fastest growing city in the world because the population surged from 1,000 in 1900 to 10,000 in 1910. Following a lengthy battle to prevent Henry Sanborn from reacquiring the land he had donated for Ellwood Park, Marie helped found the Amarillo Civic League and served as its president for the next five years. The original copy of the 1906 Amarillo Civic League membership notebook has survived and lists the wife of Mayor W. A. Miller as the treasurer. Some 72 names appear on the initial membership roster, including those of the town's leading physician, Dr. D. R. Fly; Jeff Bartlett of the Amarillo Board of Trade; Judge J. N. Donaldson; and even Frank Anderson, a saloon keeper. Prominent Amarillo women included the wives of two church ministers; also Mrs. M. C. Nobles whose husband owned a large retail grocery store; Mrs. A. McKnight, Jr. whose husband was Amarillo's most prominent livery man; and Mrs. O. G. Roquemore, whose husband built the Amarillo Court House. Clearly, Marie knew whom to recruit for one of Amarillo's most compelling civic tasks, the creation of Amarillo's first city park. Although it is known that Marie and her group imported trees from Clarendon, TX, a receipt tucked inside the 1906 Civic League notebook reveals that 196 maples, 213 elms, and 28 ash trees were planted in Ellwood Park by one C. C. Cunningham, a well-known Amarillo nursery-man. The total cost was \$393.30 and all monies were paid by "Ladies of the Civic League."

The Amarillo Civic League credential, together with the three earlier experiences from the early 1890s, meant that Marie was more than well prepared for her next undertaking, the formation of Amarillo's first DAR Chapter on April 11, 1911. By the way, let me share an aside about the personal life of Marie and Jimmie at 1101 Taylor Street from the time they first moved into that house in 1905 until the DAR Chapter founding. The Smith house also provided a home for her elderly parents, her maiden sister, Sarah, and her bachelor brother, Ben. The presence of all those Bynums under the Smith roof has increased my admiration for James Lowry Smith who must have had considerable patience and tolerance. By 1911, however, Marie's father had passed away and Sarah and Ben had fortunately married and moved to their own homes in Amarillo.

In any event, Marie had spent many hours researching her Revolutionary War ancestry as is revealed in the copious handwritten notes preserved in one of the tin boxes I referred to earlier. In fact, she had joined the DAR's Mary Garland Chapter in Brownwood, TX, on March 2, 1910. This move makes complete sense since Marie's first cousin's wife, Bessie Peacock Walker, was a member of that chapter as well as the wife of Marie's husband's business partner John A. Walker of Walker-Smith Wholesale Grocery Company which was headquartered in Brownwood. In a note in Marie's handwriting, she acknowledges being appointed on April 25, 1910 as Founding Regent for a soon-to-be Amarillo DAR chapter. Thus, she was able to move forward as Founding regent for the Esther McCrory Chapter. Marie forwarded a letter/application to the National DAR containing the names of the 21 charter members. As you also undoubtedly know, two of those 21 charter members were Marie's mother, Katherine Walker Bynum, and my wife's

grandmother, Sarah Bynum Cobb.

Because much of the early history of the McCrory Chapter is well documented and known to some of you, I want to concentrate the remainder of my remarks on an event in Marie's life that I believe contributed directly to her decision to run for State Regent in 1915. That event was a last-minute decision on Marie's part to join her first cousin John Walker, and his wife Bessie and their daughter Mary on a European tour in early 1914. Originally, the tour was to last a couple of months at the most, but it stretched to nearly six months based on events that I won't go into right now.

Suffice it to say that Marie took a train to New York and departed in late January 1914 for a Mediterranean and Nile River tour. Unknown until the discovery of the tin boxes was the fact that Marie penned a minutely detailed 140-page diary covering five months of her various tours, using a new state-of-the-art fountain pen given to her as a bon voyage gift by my wife's grandfather, Earl Cobb. Alas, 90 % of the diary entries are meticulous accounts of every art gallery, every classical piece of architecture, the dimensions of pyramids, and the size and shape of every church she visited. However, her aside comments are most revealing, first in regard to the forms of transportation she used to get around Europe and the Middle East and, second, in regard to her pointed observations as the region tottered on the brink of World War I.

Modes of transportation mixed the ancient and the modern: a "peculiar cart drawn by one horse only" on Gibraltar; a camel in the desert near Cairo; a steamer up the Nile; a saddled donkey outside Luxor; "a lifted chair carried by Bedouins" during a side trip through bazaars; and a rowboat then a sailboat near the newly constructed Aswan Dam. She relished a "deluxe train with a small lav between adjoining compartments" en route back to Cairo where she promptly took a "street car" to her hotel. She rode a "donkey-drawn sand cart" near the Suez Canal and had to get on board "longboats" from the steamboat to shore near Jaffa, Palestine because the Ottoman Turks had not built a pier of any type. She traveled on a variety of "three-seated hacks" and horse-drawn carriages for her tour of the Holy Land, but boarded a "train with an observation deck and equipped with strange wicker chairs" en route to Damascus and a cog railway with rack-and pinion steering in Lebanon. In Constantinople she proceeded in "bullock-drawn wagons" from the pier to her hotel.

After a train trip across Italy, she took an "elevator lift" from her Cliffside hotel in Amalfi to the shore and hence by "ferryboat" to Naples where she took an electric tram to Pompeii. She had an automobile tour of Rome and rode a gondola to her hotel in Venice and a bit later took a water taxi to swim at a beach in the Adriatic. In Switzerland she experienced an "electric mountain train," a cog railway, a tour by "steamcar," and caught a "cab" to escape a downpour. At her last stop in England she took a "bus coach trip" to Shakespeare country and delighted in riding the double-decker busses in London. There was no airplane trip; however, she does allude to seeing a "hydro-aeroplane" land in the Mediterranean like a bird skimming across the water. (I am surprised she didn't go down to the shore and ask to go up for a ride). Always keenly aware of her surroundings, she pronounces Rome to be the noblest city, Constantinople the cleanest, and Jerusalem the dirtiest.

She notes the latest in electronic communication technology by writing about a new Maconi wireless radio station in Italy and she acknowledges receiving several e-mails from Jimmie in the form of cablegrams which cost her husband 10 to 20 cents a word depending where it was sent and how swiftly it was delivered. The low point on her extensive tour was probably a nighttime visit to the casino at Monte Carlo where she was shocked to see a woman wearing a "split skirt above the knee" and was dismayed by the "terrible blight" of gambling she observed, adding that she was pleased that the U.S. government doesn't permit such gaming on

American soil. The highpoint evidently occurred late in her trip where in one day she had breakfast in Italy, lunch in France, and dinner in Switzerland, then walked across a glacier the following morning.

As far as the winds of war were concerned, Marie's diary is peppered with a series of astute observations. In northern Palestine, she wrote about passing by an "extensive Turkish barracks" and on the island of Samos off the coast of Greece she saw "a company of young Greeks drilling." She states that a "dark cloud came up from the mist" just after she talked with a young Greek army lieutenant on the street. Up near the Bosphorus she spotted "dozens of new barracks where they were drilling." Anchored off of the Greek island of Corfu, she observed "two German men of war, the Goeben and the Breslau." And while in Germany she made note of German army crews constructing a new pontoon bridge.

Just before she sailed from England on her way home, she received a letter from her sister Sarah who was pleased that Marie was taking a modern ocean liner because 'you'll likely never have a chance to ride it again.' That transatlantic ship was the Lusitania which, indeed, was torpedoed off the coast of Ireland 10 months later and precipitated the U.S. entry into the War. In fact, Marie's final letter to Jimmie is dated July 9, 1914 and is penned on Lusitania letterhead the night before the vessel docked in New York harbor.

Marie returned at once to Amarillo where she attended an Esther McCrory Chapter welcome-home party in her honor on July 21st. If her diary is any indication, she undoubtedly had more firsthand knowledge of the emerging situation in Europe than any person in West Texas. Perhaps such awareness prompted her to take the next major step in her DAR career—a run at Texas Regent in 1915. Not one to leave such an important step to chance, Marie garnered support for her campaign long before the actual election. Three letters survive today, all written by supportive DAR Regents from Paris, Brownwood, and Austin, as well as a crucial letter from her sister-in-law, Roxalee Smith Andrews, who had rounded up DAR women in Houston to endorse Marie's candidacy. In a letter written to Jimmie who was away on business, Marie happily informed him that she had received added support from the DAR chapters in Waco, Fort Worth, and Galveston.

Her election as State Regent became a *fait accompli* in early November 1915 at the Sixteenth State Conference in Texarkana. When she officially assumed office in 1916, a special song, written in her honor by Miss Julia F. Lockett of Amarillo, was sung (and a copy of that original song is on display in a shadowbox at the rear of the room today). Marie's accomplishments as both State Regent and a Vice President General are well documented and known to many of you. What she was probably proudest of was her task of heading up the contributions of nine western states to the War Relief Committee which, among other things, provided a variety of care packages to American troops serving in Europe during World War I. The successor Americanization Committee saw Marie again coordinate America's western region to accomplish two very important tasks: the promotion of the study of U.S. government in elementary and secondary schools across the United States and the creation of a guidebook for immigrant women which outlined survival and prosperity skills—the latter eventually translated into more than 15 languages.

Perhaps Marie's proudest DAR moment occurred in 1922 when Amarillo hosted the Texas State DAR Conference, an event about which Marie had this to say: "I have awaited eleven years for this eventful day when Amarillo could gather to its hearthstone this distinguished gathering." Indeed, that 1922 event was the largest gathering of women to date in Amarillo history. During the final 12 years of her life, Marie attended nearly every State DAR Conference and every Continental Congress.

I want to thank her for teaching me so many things about Amarillo in general and about the DAR in particular. Because of her, I now know that Esther McCrory Chapter members do not simply eat cucumber sandwiches and brag about ancestry. Instead, the Chapter members have contributed and will continue to contribute to the vast number of undertakings that preserve and advance the moral, intellectual, and cultural heritage of Amarillo, the Texas Panhandle, and the United States of America.


Although it is true that Marie has not been with us now for over 75 years, her voice literally rings out daily over Amarillo thanks to the bells in her husband's honor that she had placed in the tower of the First Baptist Church.

Thank you for listening to me today as you celebrate your first 100 years and now embark on your next 100 years of DAR work.

Bill McCarron is a retired Air Force officer and a retired university professor. His wife, Adele, proudly claims Marie Bynum Smith as her great aunt.

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 **DESCRIPTION:** Bill McCarron's address to the Amarillo DAR chapter about Marie Bynum Smith