

History of Bessie Sims Austin

Bessie May Sims was born on February 24, 1896 to William Robert Sims and Matilda Sims, who both died in 1907. She was one of five children. The two brothers and three sisters were then taken to be raised by foster parents, Charles and Madrina Premont from Premont, Texas. The Premont family was prominent in the cattle and oil industries in Texas. Bessie was educated in a Catholic Convent. She became engaged to Darwin Stramm of San Antonio and remained engaged to him until his death. Bessie eventually graduated from the St. John's Hospital School of Nursing in San Angelo.

After completing nurse training, and qualifying as a registered nurse, she became employed at Santa Rose Hospital, San Antonio. She served in that healing institution until she met Mr. Charles O. Austin, a Cleveland banker, civic and political leader who was admitted to the Santa Rose Hospital on April 21, 1939, with a critical case of pneumonia contracted while on a business trip to San Antonio with John Manthey, local publisher who at that time was president of the Texas Gulf Coast Press Association. The two were attending a press-banker convention there. Miss Sims treated the critically-ill Austin with the new sulfa drug which had just that month been released for hospital use. The local banker recovered within five weeks but returned to San Antonio for several "check-ups" and then on December 2, Miss Sims and Mr. Austin were married in the rectory of St. Peter, Prince of the Apostle Church in San Antonio.

After a 10 day wedding trip through South Texas the couple came to Cleveland where they lived until Jan 1, 1943, when they moved to Liberty. There, Mr. Austin assumed the office of Liberty County Judge, a position which he held until Oct, 18, 1944, when he died of a heart attack. Mrs. Austin returned to Cleveland, where she became active in civic and church affairs. She gave generously to church and civic organizations in the tradition her late husband had

established. She was instrumental in the establishment of the Charles O. Austin Memorial Library in Cleveland, as well as donating the six-lot site and part of a building to St. Mary's Catholic Church. She was an active member of the Cleveland Pilot Club and was one of only a very few Texas women at the time to serve as a bank board chairman (Farmers State Bank in Cleveland). She was co-owner, along with Farmers State Bank President Jack McKellar, of the Cleveland Insurance Co. Her health declined in 1965, and she passed away in 1966, but her contributions to the cultural life of Cleveland, Texas, have never been forgotten.