

Marguerite Shearer Fairchild

Angelina County woman pioneered change as Univ. of Texas Regent

By ELLEN TEMPLE

The history of Angelina County is, of course, one dominated by men's faces. There were no women city "fathers," lawyers, doctors, politicians, mayors or business people. And little is known of women's contributions to the course of that history because books rarely record their contributions as wives and mothers.

Marguerite Shearer Fairchild deserves special recognition in Angelina County's history because of her service as a University of Texas Regent from 1935 to 1945. Her tenure was distinguished for a number of reasons, but first some background.

Mrs. Fairchild was born in 1885 and died in 1974, shortly before her 89th birthday. She was the daughter of R. B. Shearer and Mary Palmer Shearer who moved to Lufkin from Polk County in 1887. Mr. Shearer was a Lufkin pioneer, and one-time mayor, who helped found the Episcopal church. As a brick maker and contractor, he built many of Lufkin's first buildings.

Mrs. Fairchild was a student at Hollins College, Virginia before her marriage. She was the wife of I. D. Fairchild, who served for 14 years as Angelina County's State Representative and Senator; mother to her niece Dana Glass Hendon of Oklahoma; sister of Mabel and Persis Shearer, distinguished teachers and cultural leaders, who both now live in Lufkin.

RED CROSS WORKER

Always active in Lufkin affairs, Mrs. Fairchild served as co-chairman of the American Red Cross in World War I, gathering bandages and items for soldiers serving in Europe. She served on the County Board of Child Welfare, was a member of the Angelina County Chamber of Commerce, and helped found the first Lufkin library, donating many of the first books.

Yet she always joined her husband in Austin when the Legislature was in session. Mr. Fairchild was a U.T. ex-student; it was probably in Austin that she, too, developed an interest in the University.

In 1928 Mrs. Fairchild was widowed. Her beloved husband died in a car wreck on his way home from Dallas. She was devastated; her activities virtually halted and for many years she mourned her loss.

Then "out of the blue" came Gov. Miriam A. Ferguson's (Texas' only woman governor) appointment of Mrs. Fairchild to the University of Texas nine member governing body, the Board of Regents.

Although Mrs. Fairchild did not actively campaign for the appointment, John S. Redditt, her husband's young law partner who served in the Texas Senate from 1932-1940, must have worked in her behalf. Also the Fairchilds had been staunch Ferguson supporters.

TIMID AT FIRST

Mrs. Fairchild began her term as a Regent in 1935 with great timidity. But as she served, her political awareness and intense interest in the University quickly grew. And she kept in touch with housemothers, staff, department heads and students, at one time speaking at the girls' annual Swing Out, one of the most colorful events of the school year where senior girls received academic awards.

These were exciting times for the University. A great building program was under way. And while Mrs. Fairchild served on the building committee, the Music Building, MacDonald Observatory, the Main Library Tower, and the Anderson Cancer Research Hospital were dedicated.

It was a politically tumultuous period. America embarked on the New Deal and then went to war; the great Red Scare had begun with national and state un-American activities committees searching for communists on university campuses. Academic freedom became the big issue.

Mrs. Fairchild served with some men who were inclined to label those with whom they disagreed as "pinks and perverts." And a struggle developed at the University between the Board of Regents and University President Homer P. Rainey. That exciting power struggle is known as the Great U.T. Controversy which lasted from 1939 to 1945.

Because of her courageous role in that controversy, her contribution as promoter of a Fine Arts Department, and her unique position as the second woman to serve as a U.T. Regent, Mrs. Fairchild deserves a special place in our history.

As one of only seven women who have served on the U.T. Board of Regents, she belongs to a distinguished company which includes Lady Bird Johnson. At the time of her appointment in 1935, women had had the vote for only 15 years and would not be allowed by law to serve on juries in Texas until 1954.

FINE ARTS SUPPORTER

Her proudest accomplishment as a Regent and member of the building committee was her role in creating a College of Fine Arts. The following is her written account of the establishment of that College:

"There had been a College of Fine Arts on the campus years before but it was later dropped. Since then great effort by the music clubs of Austin and other people over the state tried to establish one again, but with no results.

"I asked Dr. Benedict (the U.T. President) how he felt about establishing a School of Fine Arts. He replied by saying that he had once had a group of long-haired professors on the staff of the University and they had not fit in very well! Now, he said that he would not object to a new School of Fine Arts provided it did not take from the regular funds at the University."

And she goes on to discuss her efforts to research other fine arts schools, only to discover to her surprise that most of the colleges had abolished their Fine Arts Departments. "But they had found through the years that the cultural influence was needed and most were reestablishing their schools."

Then she went to Senator John S. Redditt, who was chairman of the powerful Senate Finance Committee, for help. She lobbied the right man because she writes: "Later when the appropriations were made for Texas University, funds were included for a modest School of Fine Arts." E. William Doty of the University of Michigan was hired as Dean; he selected his faculty; and the College went on to become one of the finest in the country.

In November, 1951, the University recognized Mrs. Fairchild's efforts in establishing the College by dedicating its



MARGUERITE SHEARER FAIRCHILD, the second woman to serve on the University of Texas Board of Regents, 1935-1945. She was appointed by Gov. M. A. Ferguson and reappointed by Gov. James V. Allred.

Angelina County -- Some History

Tenth Annual Fine Arts Festival to her. She was honored with a dinner at the Chancellor's home and with a faculty reception.

THE GREAT CONTROVERSY

Greater honors and fame came, though, with her role in the Great U.T. Controversy. The issue was power — would a few Regents have total control of the University or would they have to rightly share administration with then President Homer P. Rainey?

Three of the Regents wanted to assume total control; they refused to rehire three economics professors despite the objections of the President, the Deans and Department Heads. They set out to fire someone who had permitted John dos Passos' book USA to be used in the English curriculum even though it had already been removed because of objections despite the fact it was considered an American classic and used in universities across the nation. One Regent tried to remove faculty tenure rules so as to be able to easily fire professors but failed, under Dr. Rainey's protests, to do so.

Mrs. Fairchild admired Dr. Rainey's honesty and his support for his faculty when under fire. And when the Regents attempted to undercut his authority, to deprive him of his effectiveness as an administrator, to fire him, she voted "No", alone.

When the Regents voted to remove Dr. Rainey's right-hand man, A. L. Brandon who was director of public relations for U.T., Mrs. Fairchild asked for reasons, received none and said "No".

When President Rainey's request to move the Medical School to Austin was thrown out and the Regents asked him not to defend his recommendation but to accept theirs, Mrs. Fairchild voted "No", alone.

When in November 1944, the Regents voted to fire Dr. Rainey, Mrs. Fairchild voted "No", alone. Her official announcement at the time concluded with the statement: "It is my opinion that Dr. Rainey is well qualified to conduct the affairs of the University if he were given reasonable cooperation and freedom to do so."

And one of her final votes as a Regent in January, 1945, was the lone "No" vote on a motion to deny numerous petitions to reinstate Dr. Rainey as President.

THE DEAR LADY

Regarding her "No" vote on firing Rainey, I quote from a Daily Texan editorial entitled "The Lady Said 'No'" which was clipped and sent to her by an admiring student:

"The lady from Lufkin tonight is receiving flowers, messages in tribute. Her tribute is not in the messages or flowers, it is in her devoted record, on the line all the way for the University."

"President Rainey calls Mrs. Fairchild the 'Dear Lady'. 'She is the dear lady that dared say the 'No' that was the 'Yes' for the University.'"

She was besieged by telephone calls supporting her vote! The Faculty and Ex-Students Association passed resolutions praising her courage! Mac Wallace, president of the Student Body, sent a telegram acknowledging student support for her vote. Letters and telegrams urged her to consider reappointment!

Mrs. Fairchild's term expired in January, 1945, and she felt that she could not accept another appointment. Ten years as a Regent in the University's most tumultuous period was enough! And her aged, ailing mother needed her care. On hearing the rumor that Martin Dies might be appointed, she thought he would be a good member, but hoped another woman would be appointed.

But Mrs. Fairchild did not retire from the arena, because as her sister Miss Persis Shearer states, "She was a staunch Democrat and loved politics to the end of time." And when Dr. Rainey ran for governor in 1946, she campaigned for him on Dallas' Texas Quality Radio Network, defending his U.T. record and urging voters to support him. If he had won, he could have then as governor appointed some of the U.T. Regents, but he barely lost to Beauford Jester in the Democratic primary runoff.

AN HONORED PLACE

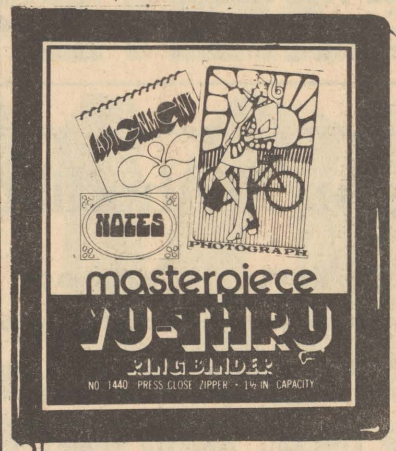
Back home in Lufkin, Mrs. Fairchild continued her community involvement with support for the Black Citizens Chamber of Commerce's efforts to establish Lufkin's first day care center. And she offered support to young politicians like Charles Wilson in his first race. She counted such distinguished men as Lyndon Johnson, Ralph Yarborough, Mac Wallace and J. R. Parton among her friends.

I wish I had known of her courage and political savvy. I wish that I'd been able to meet her before she died.

Marguerite Shearer Fairchild deserves an honored place in Angelina County's history.



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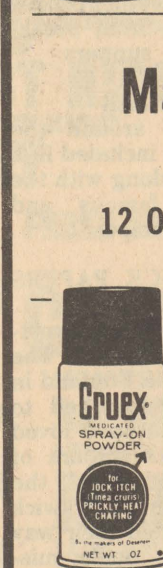
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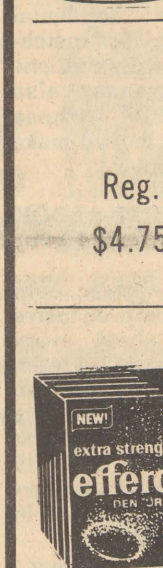
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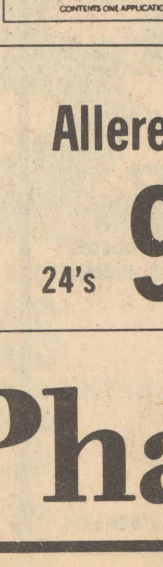
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