

The Saga of the Missouri River Reveille

Biggins: James Matthew Biggins was born January 7, 1867 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to Matthew Biggins (1835) from Cavin County, Ireland and to Deborah McGrath who was born May 14, 1845 in Limerick, Ireland. Deborah was five years old when she landed with her parents on United States Soil and settled in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Matthew Biggins was two years old when he sailed in 1837 with his widowed father Thomas. They too settled in Philadelphia. Matthew learned the shoemaker, or cobbler trade, which he followed until his enlistment in Company C. 71st Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry. He was engaged in all the major battles of the Civil War – he started out as a private but at Fredericksburg was made a corporal.

In 1864 on April 12th, Matthew Biggins was wed to Deborah McGrath in Philadelphia. She had nursed Matthew as he lay in the hospital at Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania recovering from wounds he had sustained at the Battle of Gettysburg. At this time, Deborah was living in Doylestown, Pennsylvania and was a volunteer aide caring for the wounded soldiers after the battles. A son Thomas was born to them in 1865. Matthew was in Washington, D.C. when President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated; in 1866 he was discharged from the Union Army. In 1867 a son, James Matthew was born in Philadelphia where they had settled after Matthew's honorable discharge from the army and where he again resumed his cobblers trade.

In 1868 Matthew Biggins enlisted in the regular army under the Veterans Reserve Corp. He was sent West where he served as a private for thirteen years. During this time Annie (1869), Matthew (1872), and John (1873) were born to Matthew and Deborah. Matthew was transferred to Dakota Territory in 1874 and was stationed at Fort Sully where three sons were born to them – David (1875), Edward (1876), and Daniel (1879). He was transferred to Fort Thompson; in 1880 in the regular army he was stationed in the Crow Creek Indian Agency. He mustered out of the army at Fort Randall and was a sutler (*Webster's: a person who follows an army and sells provisions to the soldiers*) at the post. On 1882 the Biggins family settled in Charles Mix County, Dakota Territory where Matthew had squatted upon 160 acres in the Fort Randall Reserve. Two daughters Deborah (1882) and Mary Ellen (1884) were born in a log cabin on the homestead. Their town was Wheeler, the County Seat of Charles Mix County. Their family numbered seven sons and four daughters; an infant daughter, Catherine, was buried in New York. Deborah was a true military man's wife and moved with her husband Matthew from army post to army post. Matthew Biggins died January 1907 and Deborah McGrath Biggins passed away January 3, 1927. They are both interred in the family plot in the St. Mary's Cemetery of Bonesteel, SD. Thomas married Mayme and they had eight boys and one daughter. Annie did not marry. Matthew was born in New York. He was married to Mary Meade in 1900 at Geddes, SD. They lived in Bonesteel and in 1949 moved to Blair, Nebraska. They had one daughter Lucile. Matthew was killed November 21, 1950 when struck by an oil transport truck while he was crossing highway No. 73 on North 3rd Street in Blair. John did not marry. **David**, born February 3, 1875 at Fort Sully, Dakota Territory; he filed for a homestead in 1904 north of Gregory, SD. He was manager of the Gregory Elevator and retired to Detroit, Michigan 6 years before his death. He was married in June 1906 at Bonesteel to Jennie May Fox and they had 4 children; Myrle, Clarence (Les), Elwin and Harold. Edward married Stella Griffith and they had three sons; Furnass, Chester and Walter. Daniel married Tillie Hauf and they had no children. Deborah was born June 21, 1882 at Fort Thompson. She was reared on her parents homestead in the Fort Randall Reserve. She was married to Walter Quinn who practiced medicine in Bonesteel and Winner, SD. Walter Quinn died in Winner, SD in 1927. Walter and Deborah

Quinn were the parents of three children; Walter Jr., married Dorothy Hersesian; Mary Margaret married Harold R. Bruns and they have two children; Kathleen married Paul Goodwin and they have three children. Mary Ellen married Ralph Riley and they had one son and two daughters one of whom was Monica. It was recalled that the Biggins boys spent their leisure hours educating calves for their driving team, and later in life it was broncos and baseball.

James Matthew Biggins, the second son of Matthew and Deborah Biggins grew to manhood on the Fort Randall Reserve in Gregory County, which was then Dakota Territory until 1889. He was seven years old when he came with his parents and family to Wheeler, Charles Mix County and thence into Gregory County on his father's homestead. He attended rural schools in the area but his education was limited. James Matthew Biggins Jr. was wed to Harriett Ducharme. Harriett was born April 7, 1871 near "old" Wheeler to Cuthbert "Papineau" and Theresa Le Compte Ducharme, who were the proprietors of the famous "Papineau Trading Post & Tavern", which was located southwest of Wheeler, and below Fort Whetstone, on the East side of the Missouri River in Charles Mix County. Cuthbert Ducharme was born 1827 at Sault St. Marie, Canada to Mr. and Mrs. Jean Ducharme, a family prominent in the Canada and Great Lakes fur trade. Cuthbert, a fur trader set up a Trading Post in 1857 and eventually added a roadhouse to the log cabin post. Here he dealt in furs, guns, ammunition, wine, gambling, supplied fuel to the steamboats, and contracted the pony express. The Fort Randall military road bypassed his establishment. He finally governed the valley he farmed until Wheeler became the county seat and Papineau's strip became public domain. "Papineau" was the Indian name for Ducharme. Theresa Latina LaCompte was the daughter of Frenchman Joseph LeCompte and Pazaakuwin, the granddaughter of Yanktonian Chief One Feather. Theresa had been wed to Murdock McKenzie from Canada and they had two sons, Patrick Baptiste (1855) and ??? Baptiste. Murdock McKenzie was a Texas ramrod bringing up cattle to the Sioux Country for the Scottish Cattle Co. and he did not return from one cattle drive. Theresa was later wed to Cuthbert P. Ducharme in 1862. They became the parents of Louise (1863), John, Frank (1870), Charles, Harriet, and Margaret (1872). Cuthbert Ducharme was admitted to Yankton Mental Hospital where he died at 90 years of age in 1917. Theresa married Antoine "Chet" Dubray and they had one son, Joseph; she was 57 years old when she died.

James Matthew and Harriett Biggins occupied their log cabin on Whetstone Island in the Missouri River. The island is now covered by water of the Fort Randall Dam. Later they squatted land in the first Gregory County, which he had claimed by "squatter's rights" and upon which he built his house, barns and improved the land.

After the government survey was completed in 1896 and the 99th meridian line established, the general land office issued an order fixing December 4, 1896 as the date to receive filings for the land claimed by squatters. J. M. Biggins was deputized to serve in the land office at Bonesteel. Consequently, he made the first final proof upon land in Gregory County. The records disclose that the first final receiver's receipt was for Mr. Biggins homestead described as lots 6, 7, and 12 of section 22, and lots 1,2, and 6 of section 27, Whetstone Township. His application was made to the Clerk of Courts of Charles Mix County since Gregory County was unorganized and attached to Charles Mix County for judicial purposes. He gave his address as Starcher, Gregory County, South Dakota. The improvements listed on his homestead included a 16' x 36' log house, 14' x 16' log stable, a 8' x 10' chicken house, a 8' x 10' cellar logged up inside, 30 acres fenced land, and 15 acres under cultivation.

In 1896, Harriett Ducharme Biggins died. She was only 26 years old and the mother of four children – Arthur L., James M. Jr., Birdie, and Katherine. Later James M. Biggins Sr. married Millie Irish and their offspring were Frank, Helen, Eben W., and Freddie.

The west three-fourths of Gregory County was opened to homesteading in July of 1904. James Biggins and his family moved to Bonesteel where he was engaged in the real estate business and was prominent in politics. In 1907 he was appointed judge of Bonesteel. He had just recently been inducted as mayor of Bonesteel when he expired May 22, 1913. The Gregory Pilot, the Bonesteel paper reported that James M. Biggins Sr. had been about town as usual that day and was talking city matters with Mr. McCarville in the McCarville Clothing Store. Mr. Conlon entered the store and for a moment conversation seemed to cease. Mr. Biggins, with his head on his arm, slipped to the floor. He rallied and was assisted by Mr. Conlon and walked to his home. Dr. Kenaston was summoned since Dr. W. M. Quinn, Mr. Biggins brother-in-law, was out of town. Three or four minutes later, James Matthew Biggins drew his last breath. “Mayor Biggins was stricken down in the prime of his life without warning” were the headlines of the Gregory County Pilot and the people were stunned by the suddenness of his death. He was only 46 years of age. James Matthew Biggins, Sr. was buried beside his wife and parents in the Bonesteel Cemetery.

James Matthew and Harriett Biggins were the parents of four children: Arthur Biggins married Anna Struck, an early telephone operator in Bonesteel; they have one son, Arthur Jr. Arthur Biggins, Sr., is a traveling Internal Revenue Income Tax Consultant and lives in Virginia. James Matthew Biggins, Jr., was born April 7, 1892 on Whetstone Island. He was 21 years old when his father J. M. Biggins, Sr. died and only five years old when his mother, Harriett Ducharme Biggins passed away. He attended school at the Haskell Institute for Indian students at Haskell, Kansas. Here he began studying cornet under the school’s band director. He ran away from the institute and joined a circus train passing through and was hidden beneath the canvas of the wagon by one of the men. He played in circus bands for a period of his younger life. He entered the Great Lakes Naval Training Center at the onset of World War I. He was selected from a try-out of many contestants to play in the John Phillip Sousa Band – a great naval band that promoted bond drives and made personal appearances during the war. After the war, James seriously studied piano and saxophone. He played cornet in lucrative bands at Chicago and Minneapolis. He began playing theaters, vaudeville, silent pictures, stage performances, and such until talking pictures were introduced July 6, 1928. Since orchestras were no longer needed James became an insurance and real estate salesman. James M. Biggins, Jr. was married to Nettie (Pete) Davis in 1964 at San Marino, California. James Matthew Biggins, Jr. died August 2, 1976. Nettie (Pete) David Biggins passed away June 14, 1979 at Arcadia, California. They had two daughters, Louise David Carroll (dec. 1970) and Catherine David Olson.

Bertha (Berdie) Biggins Penne was born near Wheeler, Charles Mix County, Dakota Territory on July 17, 1889. Her parents were James Matthew and Harriett Ducharme Biggins. Her mother died in 1896 and her father later moved to Bonesteel where Birdie lived along with her brother’s Arthur and James Jr., and sister Katherine (Katie). She worked as a switchboard operator for the telephone company, which was then located on Main Street in the Krotter Lumber Company. Also employed, as a switchboard operator, was her good friend Marie Romig (Mrs. Charles Miller). The telephone office had a living room and bedroom in the rear of the building where both operators slept at night and rotated the duty.

Birdie later attended Mosier Lampman Business School in Omaha for 18 months and then was employed by the Bonesteel Bank as a bookkeeper until her marriage to John C. Penne. John C. and Birdie Penne are the parents of James, Harold, Virginia, Eileen and Ruth (dec. 1917).

Katherine and Birdie are the living children of the family of James M. and Harriett (Ducharme) Biggins. Birdie Biggins is the only living survivor of the original Cuthbert "Papineau" Ducharme family.

Katherine Debra Biggins Magill was born January 6, 1892 in a log cabin on the Whetstone Island in the Missouri River. Her parents were James Matthew and Harriett Ducharme Biggins. Her mother died four years later at the age of 26. Her father moved to Bonesteel where he engaged in the real estate business and was mayor of the city at the time of his death on May 22, 1913.

Katherine graduated from Bonesteel High School on May 23, 1909. She was the first graduate of the high school and the only member of her class. Among friends and family, she was called Kate. She then attended All Saints School in Sioux Falls, South Dakota and graduated from its two year course on June 14, 1911. In 1915, she received a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Chicago Law School. On September 7, 1918 she married her law school classmate, Roswell F. Magill, in Washington, D.C., while he was on duty as a first lieutenant in the Army Infantry. She remained in Washington and worked for the Italian Embassy for a year. She returned to the University of Chicago Law School and joined her husband after his discharge on March 22, 1919. In 1920, she obtained her J. D. degree with honors, having been elected to the Order of the Coif, and was admitted to the Illinois bar, all of which was an unusual accomplishment for a woman at that time.

In 1924, she and her husband moved to New York City where her husband joined the faculty of Columbia University Law School as a full-time professor until 1943. From January 1937 to September 1938 they lived in Washington, D. C. while her husband served as Undersecretary of the Treasury, during a leave of absence from Columbia University. In 1943, her husband became a partner in the Wall Street law firm of Cravath, Swaine & Moore and took charge of its tax department. At this time he gave up teaching at Columbia University except for a course in taxation. He was a widely recognized authority on taxation and published many books and articles on the subject.

Katherine and Roswell continued to reside in New York City, with a summer home in Weston, Connecticut, until Roswell died in December 1963. In 1975 Katherine gave up her residence in New York City and now lives in Westhaven, Connecticut near her daughter, Katherine Prelinger. A son, Hugh, died in 1975.