Minnie Gay Memorial Junior High School, Harlingen

by Norman Rozeff

12/21/48 A site is given by R.E. Smith of Houston in memory of his mother Minnie B. Gay of Brownsville. Smith is an oil operator in Conroe. The deed is given to J. Lewis Boggus, president of the school board. Smith is cited as trustee for his daughter, Bobbie Sue Smith, 1 year old, for whom the tract had been given. Mrs. Gay came to Brownsville from Jefferson, TX in 1908. Her husband, Portes Gay, was chief of the Border Patrol at Brownsville. The 40 acre tract was acquired by Mrs. Gay in 1918 and remained in tact until the railroad cut through leaving 37 acres. Of this, 6.8 acres has been given for the school site next to Cardinal Field. Brownsville attorney Robin Pate, a family friend, is credited with generating the gift. On hand are board members Arthur Purdy, F. Earl Davis, T.D. King, J.R. Fitzgerald, Guy Leggett, and W.W. Ballard business manager.

1949 The Minnie B. Gay Memorial Middle School comes into existence on 13th at Madison. Its architects are Cocke, Bowman & York and its construction is by E.J. Waitman. In the 1990s its name is changed to Memorial Middle School as a bone to "political correctness" since the word "gay" has become synonymous with homosexual. During this year the open canal paralleling 13th Street is put underground. The second story of the Alamo School is removed.

1940s: In this era E.J. Waitman, general contractor, is a prominent builder of important structures. He builds the Minnie Gay Junior High School, Temple Beth Israel, The First National Bank, Holsum Bakery, the new Nehi Bottling Co.on Business 77, and Luby's Cafeteria in Coronado Village buildings among others.

The auditorium of Gay Memorial was used for a time in the 1980s by the Country Playhouse to put on productions. One of its more successful presentations was Irving Berlin's "Annie Get Your Gun."

Gay's remembrance blog

"Minnie" is MeMe's sister--right? She was born in St. Louis. Aunt Minnie lived and died in Brownsville [incorrrect]--married Clarise (sp?) Gay. Right? [incorrect] Mother lived with them in Brownsville--she was teaching there, I think--and that is where she met Daddy. And that is where I got my name, 'Gay'.

Sorry to see that Minnie suffered dementia for 3-4 years before she died--after her husband had died. She died the year before MeMe--and I did not know about MeMe's hypertension. I doubt that having mother move in with 2 very young children could have been beneficial to her health! I am wondering why Minnie was buried in Brownwood [correct] instead of Jefferson or Brownsville--maybe it was a slip of the pen and she was buried in Brownsville--she had lived there MANY years. She was a wild one apparently. Mr. Gay was her second or third husband. They did not have any children. Her first husband was Bob Smith who was or became a BIG oilman in Houston. They may have had a son which he raised--not sure about that though. There is a burial site in the Zachry plot in Jefferson that only says "Infant" don't think there is a name. But somehow I have the idea that that might have been a child of Minnie's.

I have a copy of a poem she wrote to Sara Sample (Hess) on stationary for Texas Federation of Women's Clubs. She is Chairman of committee on poetry: Mrs D. P. Gay, Jr. She signed the note MB
Minnie B. Gay was born to Thomas J. and Kathrine Lawler Shanaman in St. Louis, Missouri on 4 August 1868. She died in Austin, Texas on 17 July 1944. She had suffered senile dementia for 3 to 4 years and died of pneumonia after a 5-6 day bout. She is buried in Brownwood, Texas. Her first (?) husband who she married in 1891 was Robert Davis Smith. It was their son Robert Everett Smith that made the donation of land to the Harlingen ISD.

In 2012 a new Memorial Intermediate School is constructed on Rio Hondo Road. It is dedicated November 6, 2012. The old structure will be transformed into administrative and support staff offices of the HCISD.