



Photo by Payton McCormick

Electra

Waggoner Biggs



Photo by Payton McCormick

Electra Waggoner Biggs made a name for herself as a world famous artist before her death at the age of 88. A room at the Red River Valley Museum is dedicated as a reproduction to her work studio, which was located at her residence on the Waggoner Ranch.

Electra also inspired the naming of an automobile, the Buick Electra, and of an aircraft, the Lockheed Electra. Harlow H. Curtice, president of General Motors' Buick Motor Division when the Buick model was named in 1959, was the brother-in-law of Biggs husband, John Biggs, who died in 1975.

Biggs also figured in a pivotal event in the history of her family's oil and ranching interests.

In 1991, the controlling shareholders in the Waggoner estate, son-in-law Gene Willingham and cousin A.B. "Bucky" Wharton III, disagreed on how to protect the fortune from dropping energy prices and land values.

So Biggs asked a Wilbarger County state district judge in Vernon to sell the ranch and distribute the proceeds to its shareholders. Twenty-five years later, the ranch prepared to finally leave the Waggoner family at the end of 2015.

Born in 1912 in Fort Worth to E. Paul and Helen Waggoner, Biggs began sculpting while

studying in New York. She went to Greenwich Village and found she had a knack for sculpting.

In her artistic career, Biggs was commissioned to do busts of Bob Hope, Knute Rockne, Dwight D. Eisenhower and Harry Truman. But her most famous work may be "Into the Sunset," the bronze statue in Fort Worth of the late humorist Will Rogers astride his horse, Soapsuds.

Texas Monthly, in Sept. 1992, described how she came into sculpting. Following a divorce from her first husband she returned to New York, and took up sculpture. "To Electra's surprise, she discovered that she had a talent for sculpting. At her first exhibition in 1938, she sold every piece, including a bust of her maid that California millionaire Huntington Hartford bought for \$3,000. In a 1938 newspaper article, Electra said she had always wanted to be a sculptress ever since she was a kid. Even when she was going to finishing school in New York, she was studying art on the side.

Once she found the knack, she jumped in full throttle. She took a special course at Columbia, lived in the Village and worked with sculptors. Then she spent a year studying in Paris, at the Sorbonne.

A FAMILY NAME

Electra was named for her aunt -- Electra Waggoner, born in 1882 on the ranch and

named after her maternal grandfather, Electus. She and younger brothers E. Paul and Guy were the three surviving children of W. T. and his wife Ella.

Ranch hands called Electra the "Princess of the Panhandle," before she attended a finishing school in Nashville in 1897. Three years later, she went on a trip around the world. She returned in November 1901 with a butterfly tattoo and a new fiancé, Albert B. Wharton, of Philadelphia, that she had met in the Himalayas. During this time, the residents of Beaver tried to change the name of their Wichita County town to "Waggoner." W.T. instead changed that to "Electra" as a birthday present for his daughter.

Electra was known for her lavish ways. She was the first customer to run up a \$20,000 tab in a single day at Neiman Marcus. Fresh flowers were delivered to her home daily. Reportedly, she insisted on being the first to try any garment and never wore anything twice. Electra Biggs only shared one memory of her aunt, Electra, that she had hundreds of shoes and she remembered playing with them in her closet.

Electra Waggoner Wharton Gilmore died from cirrhosis of the liver on Thanksgiving Day at age 43.



Photo by Joyce Ashley

Love story for the ages

Vernon woman searched for over 60 years to find truth behind husband's death

By Joyce Ashley

Editor's note: The story of Peggy Seale Harris and Billie Dowe Harris is a tribute to an undying love as a young widow searched for the truth about her husband's death and burial in World War II. The following is an account of that story as it was published in the Vernon Daily Record in 2007.

When Billie Dowe Harris and Peggy Seale married on Sept. 22, 1943, they were like most young couples of that time -- young, in love and full of hope. Despite the fact that the United States was fully involved in World War II, and lives were being changed daily, the 2nd Lt. and his bride were full of confidence in the future as they said their vows. Little did they realize how very

different that future would be.

"We actually met through the mail," Peggy Harris recalled.

She was working as an electronic instrument mechanic at Altus Air Force Base at the time. A daughter of Mr. and Mrs. W.P. Seale of Vernon, Harris commuted each day to her job in Altus where she spent her time climbing in and out of airplanes, checking and replacing instruments.

"Billie's father and I both worked at the base, and he kept telling me about his son, who was stationed in San Antonio. He wanted us to meet," Harris said.

A son of Virgil and Nell Harris, Billie D. Harris was an Army Air Corp flying cadet at Brooks Air Field in San Antonio where he was undergoing flight training. He and Peggy Seale corresponded for several months, and shortly after meeting, the handsome lieutenant proposed to the pretty Texas girl. He was 21 and she was 18.

The couple was married in Florida where Lt. Harris had been sent to undergo advanced train-

ing prior to being shipped overseas.

"I didn't even have money to buy him a wedding ring," Harris said. "I used my Vernon High School class ring instead, and he wore it as his wedding ring."

Although the couple was expecting to have two weeks leave for their honeymoon, their time was cut short when a troop ship of pilots was torpedoed in the Atlantic. Lt. Harris' group was tapped to take their place.

"His group was all taken to Tallahassee, and the wives were taken there to a huge hotel. When the men were called up, the wives were told to go home and not tell anyone that their husbands had been sent overseas until they had arrived there safely."

It was October 1943, and unbeknownst to Harris, it would be the last time she would see her husband.

Lt. Harris was assigned to the 355th Fighter Squadron/354th Fighter Group, stationed in southeast England. During the next few months,