

NELL A. SNIDER
1873-1955

Nellie Achsah (Smith) Snider was born January 30, 1873, in a dug-out on a farm near Lamar, Ottawa County, Kansas, the fifth child of Myron D. Smith and Sarah Adelaide Caryl Smith. She died March 17, 1955, in a Norman, Oklahoma, hospital. Interment was in the I.O.O.F. cemetery, Norman, March 21, 1955. Survivors included a daughter, Lucile Snider Parks, Reno, Nevada, and two sons, Dr. Ivan Snider, New York City, and L. B. Snider, San Antonio, Texas.

Nell Snider was teaching school in Lamar when she married a fellow teacher, Lafayette Benjamin Snider, son of Alfred G. and Mary Elizabeth Nail Snider, Fort Wayne, Indiana, on December 15, 1891. In the fall of 1892, the couple moved to Oak Hill, Clay County, Kansas, where their first child, Ivan, was born on October 12, 1892. Benjamin was born November 25, 1893, and Lucile on January 24, 1895, both at Tescott, Kansas.

Giving up her teaching career to meet the needs of her family, Nell Snider aided the career of her husband. After holding teaching positions in Tescott, Kansas, the couple moved to Hennessey, Oklahoma Territory, home of Mrs. Snider's maternal grandparents. In the summer of 1897, Mr. Snider conducted the Teachers Institute in Kingfisher, Oklahoma. He served as City Superintendent of Schools in Pawnee (Oklahoma), 1897-1903, also serving as President of the Territorial Teachers Association, 1899-1900.

When Lucile was old enough to enter school, Nell Snider resumed teaching. It was also about this time that she began to write, and to gain renown as a guest speaker on club and educational programs, for which she wrote her own material. On February 12, 1903, her anonymous lines, "Wanted, a Husband," appeared in the *Pawnee County Courier*, and was reprinted in *Sturms Magazine*, issue of June, 1909. The latter publication also printed her "Man and The Rooster," December, 1908; "Our Kate" (honoring Kate Barnard), June, 1909; "The Roasting Ear," August, 1909. On July 3, 1903, her lines, "Tomorrow" a patriotic expression, had been printed in the *Oklahoma Times Democrat*, (Pawnee, Oklahoma). She was also published in the *Wichita Eagle*, (Kansas), and other publications.

In the fall of 1903, the Sniders moved to Clinton, Oklahoma, where both taught in the first school held there, 1903-04. In 1906-07, they taught all grades in the Consolidated School at Port, Washita County. In 1908, Mr. Snider was elected to the office of County Superintendent of Schools, Custer County, Oklahoma, a position he held until his death of a heart ailment on June 6, 1910.

Nell Snider was appointed to fill the unexpired term of her late husband. During that time she served as a Member of the County Excise Board, also as Chairman of the Executive Committee of Southwestern Teachers Association (fifteen counties), and later as secretary of that same organization. At the close of her appointive term, Mrs. Snider became a candidate for election to the office of County Superintendent, and served two successive terms, 1911-14.

In the fall of 1910, Nell Snider wrote what was probably her best known lines, "The Sculptor from Tennessee." These lines, raw as was the young state in its cultural development, commemorated a happening in the Art Department of the Institution then known as the Southwestern State Normal School, Weatherford, Oklahoma. According to Lucile Snider Parks, the lines were first printed in the *Clinton Chronicle* (Clinton, Oklahoma). Their sarcastic humor attracted national attention, and the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, (St. Louis, Missouri), in its issue of August 20, 1911, printed the first three stanzas of the work, and followed them by much comment on the incident. Stanley Vestal (Walter S. Campbell), refers to the lines on page 294 of his book *Short Grass Country*, and comments, "The union of Oklahoma Territory with Indian Territory to form the new State of Oklahoma brought politics into the state schools, and somewhat blurred that bright enthusiasm, though producing an amusing—if unprintable—classic entitled, "The Sculptor from Tennessee."

In the years that followed, Nell Snider was to see her three children distinguish themselves in their chosen fields: Lucile in the arts of voice and music, as well as in the business world, graduate of the University of Oklahoma (1915); Ivan in the field of medicine, a graduate of Harvard; and Benjamin in the science of geology, graduate of the University of Oklahoma (1914).

Nell Snider will be long remembered as a regular attendant at meetings of the Oklahoma Writers, Inc., the Poetry Society of Oklahoma, and other organizations in which she had a deep interest. Yet because of her independent spirit, and strong, somewhat unconventional opinions, she set herself somewhat apart, and may not have been fully understood by many people; but the few who knew the great heart and brilliant mind, were privileged.¹ Certainly, all who came in contact with her sensed something of the "earthiness" of one who had been a true prairie child; a quality that lent her strength and the ability to look straight through the "outward drappings," to the real form underneath.

Lawton, Oklahoma

—Lillian Delly

¹ A more intimate study of her mother has been made by Lucile Snider Parks, under the titles, "*Prairie Prelude*," and "*Biography of Nell A. Snider*," manuscripts both of which are on file in the Oklahoma City Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.