

Context for the Biography of Elizabeth Romigh Brandley

In 1926, during the month following the untimely death of her youngest sister, Flora, Clara Brandley Hildebrand penned a tribute to her mother, Elizabeth, who had died thirteen years earlier. Perhaps Clara was already in a reminiscent mood due to the family's recent loss, but there was also another impetus for writing. A woman from Topeka, editor of *The Kansas Woman's Journal*, had issued a call for stories by or about the strong and courageous women who settled in Kansas in the 1800s. Clara thought her mother a worthy subject.

The story Clara submitted resides in an archive at the Kansas State Historical Society in the Lilla Day Monroe Collection of Pioneer Women's Stories. The following is excerpted from the introduction to Mrs. Monroe and the Collection (by Pat Michaelis, for *Hers Kansas*):

Based on her pioneer experiences in western Kansas in the 1880s and 1890s, Lilla Day Monroe requested some reminiscences of women's experiences during the settlement of Kansas for an article to be published in the *Kansas Woman's Journal*. Her request in the 1920s struck a chord among Kansas women and she began to receive unsolicited accounts of the adventure and perils of travel to Kansas settlers. Women who were children at the time their parents made the decision to move to Kansas described the settlement experience from a child's point of view.

As this project gained momentum, Lilla Day Monroe decided to make it a statewide campaign. She publicized the effort through her *Kansas Woman's Journal* and made this project the focus of her term as president of the Woman's Kansas Day Club. Some of the reminiscences were published in that magazine but the response was so overwhelming, that Mrs. Monroe ultimately decided to devote all of her efforts to editing and publishing a collection of the pioneer sketches. Ultimately over 800 reminiscences were received.

While Mrs. Monroe died in 1929 before she could complete this project, her daughter Lenore Monroe Stratton continued the project by typing and indexing the reminiscences. Lilla Day Monroe's great granddaughter, Joanna Stratton, finally completed the project with the publication of *Pioneer Women* in 1981. At that time, the reminiscences were donated to the Kansas State Historical Society, where they now are available to researchers.

Answering Mrs. Monroe's call for stories may well have been a pivotal juncture in Clara's life at the age of 55. Six years later the Chase County Historical Society elected her to the position of township director for Matfield. In 1939, she became chief historian of the organization and was a major contributor and editor for the first two volumes of *Chase County Historical Sketches*, published in 1940 and 1949. In 1944, she applied to become a member of the Kansas Authors Club, listing her literary interests as historical sketches, biographies and poetry. Clara had evidently found her passion and her forte, as witnessed by the sheer volume of histories and biographies that appear under her authorship in the first two Chase County volumes.

Clara Brandley Hildebrand submitted her original manuscript, dated June 1, 1926, to Lilla Day Monroe in handwritten form. Lenore Monroe Stratton later transcribed it into typewritten form. Marva L. Weigelt copied, transcribed and annotated the microfilmed version of the manuscript in 2006. Spelling and punctuation from the original document are retained in this transcription. A copy of Clara's original cover letter is appended. Endnotes provide additional information and clarification.

ELIZABETH ROMIGH BRANDLEY

By her Daughter, Clara B. Hildebrand

Elizabeth Romigh was born at Summerfield, Ohio, March 28, 1843 and died at Matfield Green, Kansas, December 18, 1913.¹ She was the daughter of Daniel Romigh and his wife Eliza Slaughter Romigh.² Daniel Romigh was a native of Pennsylvania before making Ohio his home. Eliza Slaughter was a daughter of Judge Robert F. Slaughter and his wife _____ Bond Slaughter of Lancaster, Ohio.³

Robt. F. Slaughter was born in Culpepper Co., Virginia.⁴ At the age of 17 he was a volunteer to defend the settlers of Kentucky against the Indians. From Kentucky, in 1796, he went to Chillicothe, Ohio, and from there in 1800 to Lancaster, Ohio. He was one of the first, if not the very first, lawyer to open an office in Lancaster. In 1805 he was elected Common Pleas Judge for the Lancaster District.

In 1817 he was elected to the Ohio Legislature and was a member for the years 1819, 1821, 1823 and 1824. During the years 1827, 1828, 1829, 1830 and 1831, he was a member of the Ohio Senate. He died Oct., 1846. His wife was a Miss Bond and the children born of this union who lived to maturity were William Slaughter, Thomas S. Slaughter, Mrs. Maria Dennison, Mrs. Ann B.B. Hamilton, Mrs. T. Butler, Mrs. Frances Clark and Mrs. Eliza Romigh.

After her marriage to Daniel Romigh, Eliza went with him to Summerfield, Ohio, where they resided until 1856 or 57. Of this union were born William S. Romigh, John Romigh, Daniel Romigh, Mrs. Rose Waite, Mrs. Sarah Anderson and Mrs. Elizabeth Brandley, besides two others who died in childhood.

In 1857 the family of Daniel Romigh moved to Kansas making the trip by steamboat and prairie schooner. Elizabeth the subject of this sketch being at that time 14 years of age, she often told, in later years, of their long trip across the State of Missouri where they were hampered by mud, hub deep, and often were unable to progress more than a few miles a day.⁵ She said that when they reached their destination at Tecumseh, Kansas, it was early in May, the grass was green and spring flowers blooming and they felt like they had reached Paradise.⁶ They stayed at Tecumseh one year, then moved to a claim near Cottonwood Falls, Kansas.

Cottonwood Falls was just a village then and L. D. Hinckley was Post Master. Among their neighbors were the Prathers, Shafts, A.S. Howard, Isaac Alexander, John Scribner, Sam Wood, J.B. and William Smith, A.B. Watsons, Shipmans and others.⁷

As they reached young womanhood, Rose, Elizabeth and Sarah Romigh all taught school in Chase Co. — Sarah, the youngest, being one of the early graduates from the Kansas State Normal at Emporia.⁸ Elizabeth taught on Mill Creek in Waubaunsee [*sic*] Co, near Sycamore Springs in Butler County, at Bazaar and the Dist. south of there in Chase Co. Her last school was in Dist. No. 12 in 1869.⁹ In April, 1870, she was married to Capt. Henry Brandley, of the District, and resided with him on the Brandley homestead, three miles south of Matfield Green, until his death June 1, 1910, and continued to reside there until she passed on in 1913. Both are buried near the old home site in a grove of pines they planted 40 years ago.

Her husband, Henry Brandley, was born at Samaden [*sic*], Switzerland, Oct. 12, 1839. At the age of 12 he came to America with his parents and located at Cincinnatti [*sic*] in 1852.¹⁰ In 1859 he came to Chase Co., Kansas and took up a claim. At the outbreak of the Civil War he enlisted at Emporia with the Lyon Co. troops under Col. L.T. Heritage. He was mustered in a private Sept. 1, 1861 and served until mustered out Aug. 17, 1866 as Capt. of Co. B. Ninth Kansas Cavalry.

In 1863 he was shot in the arm and side by a Ute Indian near Fort Halleck and as a result was crippled in the left hand for the rest of his life.¹¹ After the war he returned to his farm which he improved and enlarged. He was active politically for a number of years. He served in the Kansas Legislature as Representative from Chase Co. and later as Senator, representing Chase, Marion and Morris Counties.

He married Elizabeth Romigh in 1870. The children of this union were 8 in number. Mrs. Clara B. Hildebrand, Mrs. Maude Crocker, Harry Brandley, Mrs. Ruby Wagoner, Mrs. Daisy Crocker, Mrs. Pearle [*sic*] Harsh, Robt. C. Brandley and Mrs. Flora B. Lampe.¹²

Like the great majority of Pioneer women, Elizabeth Romigh was industrious, courageous and resourceful. Many times she was obliged to ride horseback and alone from Cottonwood Falls to Council Grove and on to Topeka.¹³ She has told of traveling thus and meeting a wagon train of Mexican freighters. Had she needed protection or help, there was no one within miles to come to her aid. The men shouted to each other, pointing their whips at her

and she knew they were talking about her. She pursued her way with apparent outward calm but much inner trepidation, thankful at last when she had passed by them in safety. At one time finding it necessary to cross the Kaw River, horseback, she arrived at its banks to find it much swollen by flood. Hesitating about plunging in and riding along the banks in hunt of a possibly better crossing she saw a band of Indians in the usual single file riding into the river. She saw how they went above the landing place to enter and drifted somewhat with the current as they swam across. Unhesitatingly she attached herself to the rear of the file; her horse plunged in and swam safely to the opposite bank. She took at least one trip many miles westward with her brothers on a buffalo hunt. She took no active part in the killing of course but helped to jerk and dry the meat for their winter's food.

They came into frequent contact with the Indians but according to Mrs. Sarah Anderson of Oakland, California, the only one of the children of Daniel and Eliza Romigh now living, they were never hostile. She says, "They were always friendly and Mother often traded them coffee and meat for moccasins and buffalo hides. At one time a report came to town that there was going to be an Indian raid, and every one gathered at the little stone school house on the hill in the western part of town, but it proved a false alarm."

Elizabeth Romigh Brandley often told her children of an incident that happened while she was teaching near Sycamore Springs.¹⁴ She had occasion to make a trip to Cottonwood Falls. There came wild rumors of an Indian raid on the Whitewater. She was implored not to start on the perilous trip. However feeling her journey a necessity she started out on her pony, accompanied by a young man who also wished to go somewhere, by way of Cottonwood Falls.

All went well till they reached Mercer Springs. At that point, in the early dusk, a meteor flashed before there [*sic*] eyes, seeming to cross their path at no great distance before them. The youth, who was inclined to be superstitious was terror stricken. He just knew it was a warning sign that they would be killed by the Indians if they proceeded. He begged her to return, she explained to him that what they had seen was but a natural phenomenon with no especial significance for them, but he would not be convinced. He shivered with fear and continued to implore her to turn back. He refused to go forward. At last she started on telling him to go back if he wished but he would have to go alone. She refused to listen to further pleadings. This was

too much for him. He was afraid to go on, but more afraid to go back alone, so he hurried after her and together they finished the journey in perfect safety.

In a reminiscent mood she would tell of many similar occurrences, interesting but not tragic—tho' they might so easily have been that, too. However pioneer life was not all hardship and danger. The outstanding fact is that the environment was such as to bring out and develop the dominant qualities of individual character. Thus the Romigh girls, in common with all other Kansas women of that day, learned at an early age to depend upon themselves—to do whatever work there was to be done, and to face danger when it must be faced, as calmly as they were able. And there was the compensation of contact with the great new West—a new world—theirs to help develop from wild prairie to comfortable homes. Among the hardships endured was the drouth of 1860. In that year the youngest Romigh girl, Sarah, was sent to live with relatives at La Plata, Missouri as their [*sic*] was a fear that food enough to sustain the family would not be forthcoming. Then the Civil War came and she was not able to return for three years.

Another hardship was the historical grasshopper scourge of 1873.¹⁵

What more is there to write of the life of Elizabeth Brandley? Pages, chapters, volumes even of the dear and intimate things interesting to her descendants only. Hers was the work of the Wife and Mother, the Helpmate of her husband, the Home-maker and Home-keeper. The raising of a family of eight children and the care of a household that always included several and often many farm hands left her little time for life outside the home walls. The first year of her married life, the Brandley home was a station on the stage line to Wichita and there were many hungry passengers to feed. Mrs. Brandley did all the extra work of cooking for these people without help.¹⁶ That year she sold her pony and with the \$90 proceeds bought one of the first Wheeler and Wilson sewing machines owned in the community. The Brandley home was the logical boarding place always for the teacher of Dist. No. 12, and this added one more to the household. This had its compensation however as these boarders were always people of fine character and some of them exceedingly interesting additions to the home life.

During the first years of the Brandley's married life, the nearest doctor lived at Cottonwood Falls, twenty miles away and the mode of locomotion was usually horseback;

therefore there was never a physician present to officiate at the advent into this world of any of the eight Brandley children.¹⁷

It is a fact that no doctor was ever in the Brandley home professionally until the youngest child was over two years old.

What was the work of a farm woman in those early days? All the work of the home including cooking, laundry work, sewing and the raising of garden and poultry. The cook stove was in use of course, but there was usually a kettle of something boiling in the fire place, at least in the winter. Even the irons were frequently heated there. The milk had to be cared for in the old laborious way of straining in pans, skimming by hand and churning with the old dash churn.

The family supply of meat was killed and cured at home. There was the butchering, the cutting and rendering of lard, grinding sausage, salting and later smoking the meat. After this came the making of the year's supply of soft soap from cracklings. This included the leaching of lye from the wood ashes and the ash hopper was a familiar sight in every pioneer's back yard. True, the pioneer woman did not do all the work of caring for the meat, but she shared in it from the frying of the first "mess of fresh meat" to the storing away of the last gallon of soap.

Neighbor women borrowed patterns from each other when it came to sewing and the latest style in sleeves, overskirts or basques was a matter of much solicitude. No convenient paper patterns or ready made clothes for women and children were to be had in those days.

The pioneer Kansas woman shared her husband's work and interest in the garden, the orchard, the crops and the animals of the farm, she worked in the garden and gathered its products. She knew just how each vine in the new vineyard or tree in the young orchard was coming on. She shared in the hopes for a bountiful crop as the field things sprouted and grew green and tall. Bitter was her disappointment when the grasshopper, drouth, hail or tornado devastated the earth. Did a horse, dog or other farm animal get badly gored, cut or wounded hers was the task to cleanse the wound and take the stitches that drew the torn edges together. Many such a task did Elizabeth Brandley perform for wounded creatures on the farm, and once when her son Harry received a scalp wound several inches in length, she sterilized a needle and some white thread and gave the laceration the only surgical attendance it ever received or required.¹⁸

The first Brandley home was a log house of six rooms.¹⁹ In 1879 this was enlarged, weatherboarded and plastered and remained the home until replaced by a new house in 1900.²⁰ Here in the old house the children grew to maturity. They romped and played in a back yard shaded by box elder trees and one gorgeous Morello cherry tree at the well. Here roamed the chickens, the young turkeys and geese, the dogs with their puppies, the cats with their kittens and even the white rabbits with their young.

There was a front yard filled with cedar and cherry trees. Here purple lilacs and old fashioned roses bloomed, and clove, pinks and annual flowers in their season. Bird boxes on high poles to make them safe from cats were there and filled with chirping colonies of purple martins in early summer. Swift winged chimney swallows built their mud nests under the eaves. A latticed porch was covered with grape and Scarlet Trumpet vines where in the hottest weather humming birds whirred in the air, sucking nectar from the long tubular blossoms.

These scenes live in the memories of the children raised there and now and then some vagrant scent of new blown rose or pink recalls it all, rekindles the past, recreates the old scene anew, with over it and in it and saturating it an all pervading sense of the presence of Mother, Mother, Mother everywhere.

Upon the hillside the pines are tall and their branches sigh in the breeze, while underneath, the Mother rests at the Father's side and over them the chaste winds from the Kansas prairies blow. "Our Mother" an appreciation by those of her children still living:²¹

Clara B. Hildebrand
Maude Crocker
Daisy Crocker
Pearl B. Harsh
Robert C. Brandley

June 1, 1926

Elizabeth Romigh Brandley

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Upon the hillside the pines are tall
and their branches sigh in the
breeze, while underneath, the Mother
rests at the Father's side and over
them the chaste winds from the
Kansas prairies blow. (end)

"Our Mother" - an appreciation
by those of her children still living...

Clara B. Hildebrand

Maude Crocker

Daisy Crocker

Pearl B. Harsh

Robert C. Brandley.

June 1 - 1926.

Hildebrand (4)
Bazaar, Kansas, May 28, 1926.
Mrs. Lilla Day Monroe,
Topeka, Kans.
Dear Madam; I was asked to write an
article about my mother, Mrs. Elizabeth
Romigh Brandley, - and told to make
it "personal and human". I thought
it was for the Kansas Woman's Journal,
and that length would not matter,
(I have been away from Kans. and not
conversant with all that is going on).
Was informed this morning that
what was wanted, was a short article
for a book to be published by the
State Historical Society. - I am
submitting the article as already written.
It would be very glad if you could
use it in the Journal in its entirety.

Mrs. Lilla S. Monroe.

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And if you can cull the historical data needed for the book article please include it. You will find the historical part in the first 13 pages and I do not think it would require changing, just a suitable ending added.

I enclose postage for the return of the article if not used, for I have no time to make a copy. If you do use it I will want to know when as I shall want to order extra copies.

Sincerely,
Clara B. Hildebrand
Bazaar, Kansas.

ENDNOTES

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¹ There is some confusion about the year of Elizabeth's birth. Clara reports the year as 1843, but Lizzie's obituary notes that she died at age 69, which would be consistent with a birth year of 1844, and her gravestone reads Mar. 28, 1844 - Dec. 18, 1913. Elizabeth died unexpectedly at age 69. Cause of death was given as apoplexy, the common term at that time for a stroke.

² According to Clara in *Chase County Historical Sketches*, Vol. I, p. 355-6 (1940), "Daniel Romigh was a Pennsylvania Dutchman, born April 28, 1788" who "lived but a few years in Chase County. He died February 28, 1862. His wife, Eliza, died at her home on the Cottonwood River April 12, 1870, aged sixty-four years." According to genealogical records found elsewhere, Eliza was born in 1809 in Ohio and would only have been 61 at the time of her death.

³ The missing first name is Sarah. Sarah Bond Slaughter was born Mar. 12, 1789 in Bedford, Connecticut.

⁴ Robert Field Slaughter was born Feb. 25, 1769.

⁵ Elizabeth was known to friends and family as Lizzie. Her gravestone in the family cemetery in Chase County, Kansas reads, "Lizzie Brandley."

⁶ In *Chase County Historical Sketches*, Vol. I, p. 356 (1940), Clara quotes Elizabeth as saying, "We made the trip in a covered wagon. When we reached La Plata, Missouri, where lived our uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Clark, the mud was hub deep and it was impossible to travel further. We rested there several weeks. It was about the first of May when we reached Tecumseh. The mud was gone, there was a rank growth of grass, the prairie flowers were blooming everywhere and the weather was ideal. We felt that we had reached a paradise. The men hurriedly turned the sod and planted corn, melons, pumpkins, etc., and that fall we reaped a bountiful harvest. Two or three years later, while we were in Chase County the great drouth was upon us."

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⁸ Chase County was established in 1859 and Cottonwood Falls named the temporary county seat that same year, which is when the Romighs arrived. Cottonwood Falls became the permanent county seat in 1862. Kansas became a state 2 years later, on January 29, 1861.

⁸ Now Emporia State University.

⁹ Later in this document, Clara mentions that it was traditional for teachers at Dist. No. 12 school, also known as the Brandley School, to board at the Brandley cabin. In 1869, Elizabeth may have boarded with Henry Brandley and his first wife, Kittie, who died April 11, 1869. Henry and Elizabeth were married a year later. It is of note that the marriage took place on April 24, 1870, just 12 days after the death of Elizabeth's mother.

¹⁰ Henry was born in Samedan, a picturesque village in the Alps northeast of St. Moritz in southeastern Switzerland.

¹¹ Fort Halleck, Wyoming, was established in 1862 to protect the Overland Trail Stage Line from continuing Indian problems.

¹² The offspring of Henry and Lizzie Brandley, as was common in that day, were "stair step" children: eight children born in 14 years. Their birth years were 1871, 1872, 1874, 1876, 1878, 1880, 1882 and 1885. Unlike many other women of that period, Lizzie apparently suffered no miscarriages and lost no children in infancy or childhood. She must have been quite robust. At a time when the majority of women were married in their teens, Lizzie's marriage at the relatively ripe old age of 26 was somewhat unusual. Looking back on the situation from the present, we might think it wonderful that Lizzie had her own career in teaching before settling down to marriage and family. At the time, however, it is more likely that Lizzie and her friends and family feared her possible fate as an "old maid."

¹³ The distance between Cottonwood Falls and Topeka is 76 miles. An average day's trip on horseback is about 45 miles. In *Chase County Historical Sketches*, Vol. I, p. 355, Clara writes, "The Romigh girls, like most pioneer young

women, were great horseback riders, and thought little of trips in that manner from Cottonwood Falls to Topeka." A possible clue to the reason for such trips to Topeka is found elsewhere in the above-referenced sketch; Clara notes that Rose and Elizabeth Romigh "attended school at Bethany College or Bethany Female Seminary, as it was called." Known variously as The Episcopal Seminary of Topeka, College of the Sisters of Bethany and Bethany College, this was the first institution for higher education of women west of the Mississippi. The school was absorbed into Washburn College in the 1930s.

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¹⁴ Sycamore Springs is the original name of a town now known as Cassoday, just off I-35 between Emporia and El Dorado. The distance between Cassoday and Cottonwood Falls is about 26 miles.

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¹⁵ Grasshoppers were bad in 1873, but they were even worse the following year (which became known as "Grasshopper Year"), according to *Climate of Kansas, A Report of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture*, 1948. "Early settlers who saw these flights stated the swarms of grasshoppers were so dense they darkened the sky like clouds and when they alighted all growing vegetation was killed within a few days, and in some instances within a few hours." [p. 125]

¹⁶ "The first year of her married life" commenced on April 24, 1870, followed closely by her pregnancy with her first child, Clara, the author of this article. According to other historical notes by Clara, at the end of 1870, the Brandleys decided not to renew their contract to serve as a dining stop on the stage line. Clara was born shortly after that decision, on January 27, 1871.

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¹⁷ Clara notes in *Chase County Historical Sketches*, Vol. I, p. 358 (1940) that "Credit here must also be given to 'Aunt' Mary Nowlan, a worthy pioneer matron who ushered most of the Little Cedar, Thurman Creek and Upper South Fork babies into this life during the 1870s."

¹⁸ Harry was evidently an adventurous boy. The *Chase County Leader* of August 17, 1876 notes, "Mrs. Alice Turner goes down a well at Captain Brandley's and rescues Harry, who is two years old. He had fallen in while playing."

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¹⁹ The cabin was built about 1867. According to Clara Brandley Hildebrand, "After the close of the war, and in preparation for his marriage, Mr. Brandley built a six-room log house, hauling the walnut logs from the Verdigris River. There being no hotel nearer than Cottonwood Falls, Mr. Brandley's home was the stopping place for all transients, and many interesting people were entertained at his hospitable hearth." *Chase County Historical Sketches*, Vol. I, p. 149, 1940. "Six rooms" should not be confused with six bedrooms. At least two of the rooms were probably kitchen/dining and living areas.

²⁰ The expansion and remodeling project of 1879 followed the birth of Daisy, the fifth of eight Brandley children. The home was later destroyed by fire, as reported in the *Chase County Leader*, Dec. 20, 1900: "Just about a week before Christmas, 1900, when the family was about half moved into the new house, and its members were eating their first meal in the new place the old log house which had been a landmark since 1867 was discovered to be ablaze. There was no fire in the old building, no insurance was carried on it and how the fire started remains a mystery to the day."

The new home, begun in 1898 and completed in 1900, was palatial by comparison to the old cabin and, indeed, to virtually any house in Chase County at the time. The grand two-and-a-half story home was graced with gingerbread trim, numerous porches and balconies, several fireplaces, a library for the Captain's book collection, and a "crow's nest" with a commanding view (where according to local legend he liked to go with his dog and a bottle of whiskey to survey the Brandley domain). We can only speculate upon what Henry was thinking when he planned such a grand home at that particular juncture in his life. He was 61 years old at the time of its completion, and his youngest child was 15, not much below the marriageable age of the day. Ten years later, the Captain would be dead, with his wife following three years later. Ironically, this home burned down, too, in another mysterious fire in 1924.

²¹ None of Elizabeth's children preceded her in death, however, three had died by the time this document was written in 1926: Harry in 1916 (age 42), Ruby in 1919 (age 43), and Flora (age 41) just over a month before Clara submitted this tribute.