

## EMMA CHASE: Lizzie Brandley's Sister-in-Law?

About the Emma Chase Café [from *PrairyErth (a deep map)* by William Least Heat-Moon]



Photo taken by Marva L. Weigelt with permission from the Chase County Historical Society

On the west wall hangs a portrait of a woman from the time of Rutherford B. Hayes, and she, her hair parted centrally, turns a bit to the left as if to answer someone in the street, her high collar crisp, her eyebrow ever so slightly raised, her lips pursed as if she's about to speak...

The portrait is of *the woman history forgot*, Emma Chase, who said, *You can't start a revolution on an empty stomach*. She was not wife, daughter, sister or mother of Salmon P. Chase, the great enemy of slavery and Lincoln's chief justice, whose name the county carries. Emma stands in no man's shadow but in the dark recess that the past mostly is. In this county, she's famous for having been forgotten; after all, who remembers it was on the back of one of Emma's envelopes that Lincoln outlined his Emancipation Proclamation? That's been the story in the Falls, anyway.

Most countians now understand that Emma "A-Cookie-in-Every-Jar" Chase has the reality of an idea and an ideal. When Linda Pretzer Thurston decided to open the café a couple of years ago, she cast about for a name, something local, something feminine, and she searched the volumes of the *Chase County Historical Sketches* for an embodiment of certain values but came away unsatisfied...

So, the café had no name until one night at the family supper table Linda and her identical twin said simultaneously in response to something she's now forgotten, *The Emma Chase!* Soon, newspaper ads for the café printed Emma's chocolate chip cookie recipe, and they asked townspeople to search their attic trunks for information about her. One day Whitt Laughridge came in with a large, framed portrait of an unidentified woman he'd found in the historical society vault. Thurston said, *Yes, at last we've got Emma!*

Imagine my Surprise [from Alice Starks Miller]

*I had given the portraits [of my great grandparents William Slaughter Romigh and Delilah Link Romigh] to the museum after my grandfather passed away in 1976. However, somewhere along the line, they became "unidentified" and when one of the Pretzer girls started the Emma Chase Café and needed a picture of a pioneer woman, the museum gave her the unidentified picture to hang on the café wall.*

*Can you imagine my surprise when reading the Wichita Eagle one Sunday morning there was my great grandmother, Delilah Romigh, staring at me as Emma Chase? She appeared on tee shirts and other items. Eventually she was moved back to the museum. I also found the portrait of her husband in the basement of the museum along with other unidentified pictures.*

## The Rest of the Story

Lizzie Brandley was William S. Romigh's sister, so in an odd juxtaposition of real and fictional relationships, Emma Chase is Lizzie's sister-in-law.

Delilah Romigh, according to her niece Clara Brandley Hildebrand (*Chase County Historical Sketches*, Vol. I), "was born December 18, 1837 in Ohio, and passed to her rest October 18, 1923. She was a good, industrious pioneer wife and mother." I cannot imagine Delilah would have minded serving as a matriarchal mascot for old-fashioned values, homemade food and neighborly fellowship, but she might have been a bit put out at having her real identity obscured. On the other hand, I cannot quite picture a café named the Delilah Romigh.

Delilah's picture is back in the Chase County Historical Society Museum below that of her husband. The note attached to the picture reads:

### EMMA CHASE

Several years ago no one knew who this lady was so she was given the name of Emma Chase and her picture was hung in the restaurant of the same name. Family members later identified this lady as being Delilah Link Romigh, wife of William S. Romigh, a prominent businessman of Cottonwood Falls.

Picture donated by her great granddaughters, Alice Kay Starks Miller and Halicia Starks Motter.

Alice Miller kindly shared this information about her great grandparents with me, accompanied by the photographs showing William and Delilah in later years:



The Romigh and Brandley families were certainly instrumental in the pioneer movement. Education was important to them. In addition to several of Daniel's daughters teaching school, my great grandfather, W.S. Romigh, also taught school and studied law. I have read that he graduated from law school in London, Ohio, but I have not been able to confirm that fact. He was active politically in Chase County serving as County Clerk, County Surveyor and County Attorney and was active in various organizations and civic affairs; was director of the Library Association. He was the editor and proprietor of the *Reveille* which later became the *Chase County Leader*. He was interested in new crops and methods, being one the first men in the county to grow alfalfa

and the first to use a lister on his farm. (I have a handwritten account of his various attempts to grow alfalfa.) I know at least two of his daughters, Alice and Ophelia, attended the Kansas State Normal in Emporia. My grandfather, Fred Romigh, was a 1909 graduate of the Kansas City Veterinary College. The family traveled extensively. I know Alice attended the Chicago Exposition in 1893 and the Buffalo Exposition in 1901. My granddad, being the youngest in the family, received a bicycle which was purchased at the Chicago Exposition. Fred and his brother, Orlando, were in San Francisco during the 1906 Earthquake.



For more information about Lizzie Brandley's brother William and sister-in-law Delilah Romigh, see *Chase County Historical Sketches*, Vol. I, pp. 358-59.