

Aunt Chick's husband didn't bank on column

ONLY IN OKLAHOMA

By GENE CURTIS

When one of the Tulsa World's most popular columns began in 1935, the author didn't tell her husband about it — until after he read her first column in the newspaper.

"That crazy woman will start a run on the bank if people think she has to work!" Sam McBirney shouted as he jumped up from the breakfast table and headed upstairs to confront his wife.

The "World's Kitchen Log" column hadn't used her full name — just Aunt Chick — but most knew Aunt Chick was Nettie McBirney, the banker's wife. It was 1935 and the nation was in the midst of the Depression. McBirney was vice president of the National Bank of Commerce that his family founded about 1908.

Aunt Chick's column taught a lot of people a lot about cooking: how to make good pie crusts, how to keep pie dough from sticking to rolling pins, how to keep the bottom crusts of fruit pies from being soggy and how to keep meringue from weeping.

But McBirney's fears were unfounded — it didn't start a run on the McBirney bank.

Aunt Chick had graduated from Stout Institute in Menomonee, Wis., a school that taught only home economics, and she came to Claremore in 1909 to teach that subject.

Two years later, she became supervisor of home economics at Muskogee schools. She came to Tulsa in 1916 as the wife of McBirney, who was coach of the University of Tulsa football team.

While writing her Kitchen Log column for the next 20 years, Aunt Chick also found time to write several cook books, most of which dealt with pies and other desserts. She also invented a pastry canvas and a cookie cutter that is still in demand.

She began demonstrating cooking methods, first at Vandever's Department Store, and later at other stores in Tulsa and in many other parts of the country. And learned a lot about cooking in the process.

The women themselves developed the demonstrations with their questions, and she listened to everyone wherever she went but didn't take anyone's word for their recipes. In a 1973 interview, Aunt Chick recalled meeting a woman at who claimed her recipe for lemon pie was the best there was.

"I took the recipe and tried it and agreed," she said.

At one of the demonstrations, she mentioned that everyone had trouble with weeping meringues — but a young woman in the audience told her she didn't have any trouble.



Aunt Chick had suggested that the pies should be baked in an oven with a temperature no higher than 325 degrees. But the young woman said she didn't have a thermometer and never knew the temperature of her oven. She added that she couldn't even shut the door on her oven.

That was the answer to the meringue problem.

"I'd stumbled onto the secret — no more weepy meringues — just leave the door open about an inch and it'll work like magic," she said.

Aunt Chick's first inventions were the pastry canvas, treated with a chemical, and a rolling-pin cover that prevented noodles, cookies and pie crusts from sticking. She later developed a heavy steel pie pan and the "Crispy Crust" pie pan that promised perfect bottom crusts on pies.

Although she also developed several other kitchen gadgets, the item for which she was most famous was the device now known as Gramma's Cutter, designed to help the cookie dough slide out of the forms. They are still available.

Aunt Chick included a reci-



Tulsa World file

When Nettie McBirney, also known as Aunt Chick, began writing one of the Tulsa World's most popular columns in 1935, she didn't let her husband know about her new job until after he read the newspaper. Here, she demonstrates her cookie-cutting techniques at Southern Hills Nursing Center in 1977.

pe and some sage advice in every cookie-cutter box: such as "If you don't follow directions, Heaven help you." or "Don't have a neighbor show you how to do these, because you must follow these instructions."

When Aunt Chick moved into a retirement home in 1973, she donated her collection of about 1,000 cookbooks to the Tulsa City-County Library. She had been collecting the books since 1913.

Moving into a retirement home didn't stop her cooking demonstrations; it just changed the venue. She presented her demonstrations to other residents of the center, where she died in 1982.

Aunt Chick once told a World reporter that when she decided she wanted to begin writing a cooking column, she approached World Editor N.G. Henthorne who offered to pay her \$15 a week for the column that appeared Tues-

day through Friday on the newspaper's society page and on Saturday in a food shopping guide. She accepted.

But, she added, "I would have written about good cooking for free."

Photographic research by Rachele Vaughan

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LOCAL, STATE

Police: Teen playing with gun kills self

A 15-year-old boy died Friday afternoon after apparently shooting himself in the head while playing with a gun, police said.

Investigators believe that the teenager and two or three other youths were in the house and that the victim was handling the gun when it went off about 5 p.m., striking him in the head, Sgt. Brian Hill said.

When officers arrived at the house, near 50th Street North and Hartford Avenue, they discovered the teenager dead in the living room, Hill said.

The small-caliber handgun had been moved to a shed behind the house, he said.

Crash witnesses: Police car ran light

A police officer and at least one other person were treated at a hospital after a crash involving a police car early Friday.

The investigation is ongoing, but some witnesses at the scene said the officer ran a red light, Officer Jason Willingham said.

The officer did not have his squad car's lights and sirens activated, Willingham said initial reports indicate.

The police car crashed into a car that was occupied by two men at 91st Street and Yale Avenue about 2 a.m., police said.

EMS spokeswoman Tina Wells said two people were taken by ambulance to a hospital in fair condition.

Willingham said the officer, Christopher Beyerl, was treated at a hospital and released but had to return to the hospital later Friday.

None of the injuries was believed to be life-threatening.

Two men rescued from river sandbar

Two men were rescued from a sandbar in the Arkansas River early Friday after falling into the water during the night.

The men reportedly told firefighters that one of them had fallen off the 11th Street Bridge during the night and that the other man jumped in and tried to help him.

Fire Capt. Larry Bowles said the men reportedly had been drinking.

They floated to a sandbar near 17th Street, where they managed to get out of the water. They stayed there undetected until daybreak, when someone saw them and called 911 about 6:45 a.m.

Firefighters launched a rescue boat from 23rd Street and Jackson Avenue. Bowles said the men were examined by EMSA medics and were OK.

Pregnant woman robbed in apartment

A woman who is 35 weeks' pregnant reportedly was robbed at gunpoint early Friday at an apartment complex.

The 20-year-old woman was watching television alone at a friend's apartment at 11247 E. 45th St. when she heard a knock at the door, Sgt. Dave Walker said.

A man at the door identified himself as "Rob," Walker said. The woman told police that she knows a man by that name.

She said that when she opened the door and saw that two men were wearing black ski masks, she initially thought someone was playing a joke on her.

The men entered the apartment, and she saw that one of them was carrying a shotgun, police reported.

They forced her into the bathroom and then ransacked the apartment, the woman told police. After at least 10 minutes, she said, she came out of the bathroom and called 911.

The robbers apparently stole electronics, police records show.

The woman described the man with the shotgun as black, 20 to 25 years old, 6 feet tall and about 175 pounds. She said he appeared to have long, braided hair.

The second man was black, about 5 feet 9 inches tall and 150 pounds. He was wearing a black shirt and black pants.

Anyone with information about the robbers is asked to call Crime Stoppers at 596-COPS. Callers can be anonymous, and the Crime Commission pays rewards for information that leads to arrests.

Lightning cited in 1 of 2 house fires

Two houses were significantly damaged by fire Friday morning, including one that investigators said was started by a lightning strike.

The first fire was reported about 9 a.m. at a house in the 6600 block of East 88th Place, Fire Capt. Larry Bowles said.

A couple were home at the time and heard the lightning strike, he said. They went outside and saw that the roof was on fire. The blaze caused about \$50,000 worth of damage, Bowles said.

A few minutes later, firefighters on the other side of town were called to a fire at a house in the 2200 block of East 33rd Street North, Bowles said.

A woman and children were home at the time, and they escaped without any reported injuries.

The cause of that fire was not available Friday. Damage to the home was estimated at \$30,000 to \$40,000.

Man allegedly solicited minor for sex

A 50-year-old man made an initial appearance Friday in federal court in Tulsa after being charged with using a computer to attempt to entice a minor to have sex with him.

Richard Dale Montgomery of Choctaw was arrested Friday afternoon in Broken Arrow. A federal affidavit alleges that he had traveled there to meet someone he evidently thought was a 13-year-old girl.

Undercover agents had been communicating with Montgomery since late January, the document says.

The affidavit contains a printout of computer and telephone dialogue between a law enforcement officer who was posing as the girl and a person who authorities allege was Montgomery.

Montgomery agreed Friday morning to travel to a Broken Arrow coffee shop, the affidavit alleges. The document alleges that it was clear that Montgomery was traveling to northeastern Oklahoma to have sex with the minor.

He was followed from Choctaw by agents and was arrested when he approached a police officer who was posing as the underage girl.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Edward Snow said Montgomery would face a minimum of 10 years in prison if convicted.

B'ville man wins \$200,000 in lottery

OKLAHOMA CITY — A Bartlesville man has redeemed a Powerball ticket worth \$200,000 by mailing it in, the Oklahoma Lottery Commission said Friday.

Danny Stewart, who purchased his ticket at Murphy USA, 3880 S.E. Green Country Road, surprised lottery officials by mailing the winning ticket to Lottery Commission headquarters to claim his prize.

"It's surprising for the actual ticket to come to us in the mail because it's such a large prize," said Jim Scroggins, the commission's executive director.

From staff and correspondent reports



BRENDA LUTHY / Tulsa World

Miami Laundry and Dry Cleaning, 217 S. Main St. in Miami, Okla., was gutted by fire early Friday. Damage is estimated at \$600,000.

Fire destroys longtime dry cleaners in Miami

► Losses include about 100 Grove High School band uniforms.

By BRENDA LUTHY
World Correspondent

MIAMI, Okla. — The state Fire Marshal's Office is investigating a fire early Friday that destroyed a downtown dry-cleaning business that had been in operation for decades.

Firefighters were called about 1:45 a.m. to Miami Laundry and Dry Cleaning after a passer-by reported the fire. They battled the blaze for hours and knocked down walls to keep it from spreading.

Damage was estimated at \$600,000.

"Fortunately, no one was injured," Fire Chief Kevin Trease said.

"The building was fully engulfed in flames when the 19 Miami firefighters, three engine trucks and a ladder truck came on the scene."

A neighboring business, B&B Auto, shares the same roof, which was fully engulfed, Trease said. That business sustained \$5,000 to \$6,000 in damage not including contents, he said.

The cause of the fire wasn't

immediately known.

"We are so devastated; we don't know what will happen at this point," said Sheryl Turnbow of Joplin, Mo., who owns the building and the dry-cleaning business with her husband, Russell Turnbow.

"I'm so sad to see this has happened and very thankful nobody was working at the time of the fire."

The building did not have a sprinkler system, Trease said, but it was insured.

In addition to modern and antique dry-cleaning equipment, the fire destroyed the clothes of an unknown number of customers, including a

jacket owned by the fire chief and about 100 Grove High School band uniforms.

Trease said he had "loaned a jacket to a co-worker a few weeks ago, who ... took it to the dry cleaners, and (I) learned this morning that my jacket had never been picked up."

All of the company's records also were destroyed in the fire, Sheryl Turnbow said.

Miami Laundry and Dry Cleaning has operated at the site since the 1950s, officials said. The site has been a laundry business under other names since 1929, Trease said.

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