

FROM OUR ARCHIVES

The Poet Rita Barr

by Vickie Vogel

This column is based on information available in our archives, supplemented by some online research. If you have corrections or additions to this information, please submit them in writing to the TJHS editor at editor@txjhs.org. We want our archives to be as complete and accurate as possible.

Sara Borschow Bormaster found success in staggeringly diverse arenas—from politics to poetry, from law enforcement to lyrics. She was an award-winning poet, author, law enforcement professional, and political activist from San Antonio.¹ Her goal was to make America more poetry minded, believing that a person who participates in the everyday life of his community has the understanding necessary to reach the hearts of all people. She also was a song writer and penned with Harold Gordon a popular tune called *Let's Make Love Like the Eskimos*. Entered in the Song-Hit Guild Contest, the judges of which included Paul Whiteman, Kay Kyser, Billy Rose, and Guy Lombardo, the song merited favorable comments. Her poetry, under the pen name Rita Barr, was published in various anthologies and magazines, and won prizes in several national contests.

Sara was active in civic, phil-



Sara Borschow Bormaster, a.k.a. Rita Barr.

anthropic, dramatic, and political affairs, serving as alternate national committeewoman of the Young Democrats of Texas in 1938 at its convention in San Antonio. Sara's picture was featured in the *San Antonio Evening News*, as she was one of the leaders in the movement to have the

convention held there.² She served as executive secretary of the Texas State Democratic Executive Committee in the 1940s. She was Vice-President of the First Voters League of Texas, and state secretary of the Women Democrats of Texas. She was the first woman ever elected sergeant-at-arms of a

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State Democratic Convention.

Newspaper clippings in our files reveal that Sara was secretary of the Women's Division of the Texas Democratic Party. Attending a women's meeting in Waco in 1936, Postmaster General James A. Farley was to dedicate the new post office. His secretary consulted Sara as to what color suit, shirt and tie he should wear. He wore a sedate blue ensemble and "beguiled the ladies with his broad Irish smile and blarney."³

Sara was one of the secretaries of the Young Democrat Convention around that time, and was charged with sending questionnaires to delegates for planning purposes. They included a date bureau for eligible bachelors. Asked if they preferred blondes, brunettes or redheads, one delegate answered, "Yes."⁴

The daughter of the first governor of Oklahoma, Frances Haskell Edmonson, was a mentor for Sara in the field of women's rights. Sara met her at a Young Democrats meeting and they conducted letter-writing campaigns to elected officials and Democratic women. Bowen's Bus Lines, which became Bowen Trailways, gave them free transportation to organize women until they had a Democratic Committeewoman in all thirty-one senate districts in Texas. Sara was a leader in the fight to secure equal representation for women on political party councils. She was a member of the National Advisory Committee on Women's Participation in the New York World's Fair in 1939. Sara mingled with the most prominent Texas Democrats, including Lyndon Johnson. Sara was elected

Executive Secretary of a Democratic Convention and was pictured with Senator Tom Connally in the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*.⁵ Sara and Edmonson also crusaded against marijuana and worked to get a "women's bill" passed.⁶

The TJHS sponsored book *Deep in the Heart: The Lives & Legends of Texas Jews* contains two photographs of Sara. In one of them, Sara is talking with St. Louis, Missouri Mayor Bernard S. Dickman during a Young Democrats Convention around 1945.⁷

As a deputy sheriff in Bexar County, Sara served as associate editor of the Sheriff's Magazine, the official publication of the Sheriffs' Association of Texas. Another of her many hats was as deputy district clerk and secretary to the District Clerk of Bexar County.⁸ She was one of only three women in the history of Oklahoma at the time to be appointed Lieutenant Colonel on the staff of the governor.

We have copies of newspaper clippings of her exploits in our archives, but nothing about her family or personal life. TJHS member Dorothy Borschow and I tried to track down her connection to Dorothy's husband's family, and we eliminated some trails, but much of the following is my best guess. If you knew Sara Borschow Bormaster's family, I hope you will write a letter to our editor and fill in some gaps.

Sara Borschow was born in Galveston on August 3, 1910 according to one source. She died September 5, 2003.⁹ According to the 1940 census, however, she was born in 1915 and was living in San Antonio with her

"con orgullo y terquedad," which translates to: "with pride and stubbornness." On May 18, 2001, just days after his speech to the TJHS, Richard presented us with an autographed copy of his book, the inscription reads as follows: "To my dear friends Mel & Marlene Eichelbaum, who were there at the very beginning when this journey began. Hope you enjoy this tidbit of our history."

Richard eventually divorced Sylvia, had a number of subsequent marriages also ending in divorce, and he finally married Sally Santos, who was Jewish and to whom he remained married until his death. According to Sally, he converted to Judaism before his death. He died on February 22, 2013, and was buried as a Jew in Pearsall, Texas. Rudi Rodriguez who was a prominent San Antonio businessman and the founder of the Hispanic Heritage Center of Texas, referred to Richard stating, "At the end of the day, he said some things that needed to be said." Rest in peace my friend.



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parents Emanuel and Rebecca, her brother Sidney (23) and sister Pearl (19).¹⁰ This is where the details get murky. Sidney (1916-2006) and Pearl (1920-2007)¹¹ are listed as children of Emanuel and Rebecca on findagrave.com, with other siblings Rachel Leah Borschow Nathan, Miriam Borschow Chodorow,¹² and Lucy Elizabeth Borschow Hoffman. Sara is missing.¹³ Another mystery is that when Sara wrote historian Ruthe Winegarten in 1988, she mentioned her sister Pearl and her sister Ella. Ella is not listed among the family siblings.¹⁴ In this letter, Sara wrote she was recuperating from “necessary surgery” and her sisters, Pearl Schaffer and Ella Spiegel, were caring for her in Dallas, along with her brother-in-law Joe Spiegel. She planned to return to Joplin (where she and her husband lived) when she recovered, since her husband was ill. The letter mentions her sister Miriam and Miriam’s daughter Ima Joy came to visit her and they examined family archives that historian Ruthe Winegarten was interested in.

Sara tells a little about her father, Emanuel, writing that her family roots were in Russia, her father having come to the United States during the reign of the last Czar. He lost an eye from being kicked in the face by a Cossack’s horse during a pogrom. He never discussed it, but spoke lovingly of Russia and its people. However, he used to wake up screaming during Sara’s childhood. His stated memories were all beautiful: Russia’s air was pure, the strawberries were sweeter, the waters of the River Dwina in which he swam as a boy were “clear and invigorating.” Russians had taken the family into their home to protect them from persecution.

Rebecca, Sara wrote, came from

England but was of Russian extraction.

In April, 1938, someone, presumably Sara, wrote a post card from Oklahoma to Ima Joy Chodorow. Signing it “Love, Bubu,” she announces she has been made a policeman in Tulsa. Sara took extension courses from the University of Mexico in San Antonio, and traveled in Mexico, learning fluent Spanish. She wrote of her many mentors, including Sophie Bodenheimer, President of the National Council of Jewish Women in San Antonio when Sara was President of the Junior Council. Bodenheimer was principal of the Beth-El Sunday School, which Sara attended and taught kindergarten just after her confirmation.

I believe Sara married Ted Bormaster of Dallas, but I couldn’t confirm how or when they met or wed. Ted’s parents were Sara Kowal Bormaster (1896-1972) and Morris Bormaster (1889-1985) of Joplin, Missouri. Morris was born in Lublin, Poland in 1889 and had been in Joplin since 1910 or 1911. He operated many businesses in the area and owned historical buildings including hotels and bank buildings. Morris and Sara had two sons, Ted of Dallas and Leon of Houston.¹⁵ I connected Ted to Sara through online records of a lawsuit of Ted and Sara Bormaster who had moved from Joplin to Dallas.¹⁶ Since Ted’s parents lived in Joplin and Sara’s sisters lived in Dallas, it seems a likely assumption. The pleadings in the lawsuit state Ted was a victim of manic depressive psychosis and became an anti-social recluse, refusing to communicate with family and friends. He was bedfast and unable to attend to business. His depression lasted eight years. He refused

medication for fear of becoming a drug addict. His depression ended suddenly in September, 1983 which he attributed to prayer intervention. Sara managed the family business during his illness. This history was detailed in excuse for failing to file timely pleadings in the lawsuit.

Ted was born in Missouri in 1916 or 1917 and was single and living at home, as was his younger brother Leon, in the 1940 census.¹⁷ He died in 2002 in Joplin.¹⁸ Perhaps he owned Ted Bormaster Sales Co. in Dallas, which closed in 1963.

We know more about Sara’s professional life than her personal life. She started writing poetry at the age of ten, and composed hundreds. In 1946, the *San Antonio Evening News* called her one of the city’s rising young poets and lyricists. She used the pen name Rita Barr. She formed the name from Sarita, a diminutive of her own name plus the first syllable of her surname. At this time, she was a deputy district clerk at the county courthouse. Ted Florita, the bandman, wanted to write music for some of her song poems. She was published in nationally-rated poetry magazines in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

One of her greatest accolades was winning first place in a national poetry contest sponsored by *Embers* magazine of New York. The collection which won was called “Beyond Remembering.”¹⁹ Many of her poems were published in national magazines. She was an associate editor of *The Raven*, a magazine and the official organ of the Avalon Poetry Shrine of Corpus Christi. She also won first prize in a Shakespearean sonnet contest conducted by *NOW* poetry journal.²⁰ She won the John Milton Smithers Book

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Award and published poems in other magazines. In 1988, she was a recipient of the Golden Poet Award for her poem “That Joyful Tomorrow,” which was dedicated to Secretary General Mikhail Gorbachev and President Ronald Reagan in gratitude for their efforts to bring about peace and understanding. A special show in all the awardees’ honor was held at the Anaheim Hilton in California.

Another news clipping shows Rita Barr with Warren Hull, host of the popular TV show, *Strike It Rich*, which she visited while on vacation in New York City, helping a polio-stricken youngster who wanted to win money for a television set.

Sara Borschow Bormaster, aka Rita Barr, would probably like this article to end with some of her actual poetry.

That Joyful Tomorrow by Rita Barr

**Let the taproots of justice and truth sink far deeper
than stones that are dropped in a bottomless pool;
and let each son of man be his brother’s keeper
in a world whose law is the Golden Rule.**

**Let the children grow old without knowledge of hating,
for hate is the offspring of envy and fear;
then the sweet wine of peace which the world is awaiting
will flow from those hopes that our hearts have held dear.**

**There will be no more boundaries, notations, no races...
but all men, as brothers, will walk in the light
with uplifted hearts and glad, radiant faces
extolling the ultimate triumph of right.**

**And never again will there be want or sorrow,
and never again will a child be afraid—
then, come, let us welcome that joyful tomorrow—
the day we have longed for...and hoped for...and prayed!**

Endnotes

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all information is from Box 3A169, Folder: Poets, Texas Jewish Historical Society Collection, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.
² *San Antonio Evening News*, May 20, 1938 “Pay-as-You-Go Government Offered as Platform Plank to Young Demo-

crats.” Box 3A169 op cit.
³ Undated and unnamed news article, San Antonio, Texas, p. 13A. Farley was appointed by FDR and served from 1933-1940. <https://about.usps.com/who-we-are/postal-history/pmg-farley.pdf>. https://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/WM-W36Z_76701_Former_Post_Office_Waco_TX.
⁴ Unidentified, undated news clippings.
⁵ George Godoy, “A Little Bit of Everything,” undated, in TODO.
⁶ Letter Sara Bormaster to Ruthe Winegarten, March 5, 1989. Box 3A169 op cit. Connally was a Senator from 1928 to 1953, so the photo is from that time period.
⁷ Ruthe Winegarten and Cathy Schechter, *Deep in the Heart: The Lives & Legends of Texas Jews*. Eakin Press: Austin, Texas, 1990, pp. 213 and 141.
⁸ “Miss Sara Borschow,” *Avalon Annual*, San Antonio, Texas; October, 1941.
⁹ <http://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/ea.cgi?111136>.
¹⁰ <https://www.archives.com/1940-census/sara-borschow-tx-110870152>
¹¹ Pearl’s first husband was killed in the war in 1945. Her second husband died of ALS in 1964. Her last husband, Morris, died in 1985.
¹² Miriam was the mother of long-time TJHS archivist, Ima Joy Chodorow Gandler who died in 2010. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/95793819/miriam-chodorow>.
¹³ <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/68154693/sidney-borschow>. Sidney’s daughter Nancy died in 1991 at the age of 36, three years after receiving a double lung transplant. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/68154695/nancy-foerderer>.
¹⁴ There is an Ella Siegel born in San Antonio and died in Dallas in the right timeframe but no other family is listed. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/11225392/ella-spiegel2>.
¹⁵ <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/58466835/morris-bormaster>; <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/58466795/max-bormaster>.
¹⁶ <https://www.casemine.com/judgement/us/59148d04add7b0493453c171>.
¹⁷ <https://www.archives.com/1940-census/ted-bormaster-mo-48537341>.
¹⁸ <https://www.archives.com/1940-census/ted-bormaster-mo-48537341>.
¹⁹ Godoy, *ibid*.
²⁰ *ibid*.
²¹ See <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1989-09-02-vw-1343-story.html> for an alternate view of the significance of this award. 