THERESA SCHMIDT
BRUNGARDE
Through the Lens of Photography
THERESA ELIZABETH
SCHMIDT BRUNGARDT

TESS or MRS. B

- Born February 26, 1893
- In Chimney Rock, New Jersey

1900: Schmidt children born to date; Tess in dark dress
THERESA ELIZABETH SCHMIDT BRUNGARDET

{TESS OR MRS. B}

- First daughter, second child in family
- Parents: George Andrew Schmidt & Theresa Bender Schick Schmidt
- 8 Siblings
  - 5 Brothers, 3 Sisters
  - 1 brother died in infancy
THERESA ELIZABETH SCHMIDT BRUNGARDT

{TESS OR MRS. B

- Grew up in Watchung, New Jersey
- 1906: Graduated from Watchung Grammar School
THERESA ELIZABETH SCHMIDT BRUNGARDT

TESS OR MRS. B

- 1911: Graduated from North Plainfield High School
- Did not go to college, however…
- 1919 – 1921: Attended National Recreation Institutes
Parents were active in the community

Mother
- Helped run post office from their home

Father
- Farmed
- Operated small quarry on land
- Town Postmaster
- Volunteer Fireman
1911: Indian Princess Wetumpka in pageant, *The Indian Legend of Watchung*

Participated in annual pageant while growing up
1917: Started professional recreation career during WWI
  - With the National Recreation Association (NRA), when it was called Playground & Recreation Association of America (PRAA)

24 years old

Served on headquarters staff in New York City
THERESA ELIZABETH SCHMIDT BRUNGARDT

TESS OR MRS. B

❖ What motivated her to recreation work? We don’t know! We can only speculate…
  ❖ Family believed in community service
  ❖ Cared for younger siblings
  ❖ NRA was a young organization with mission that appealed to her
  ❖ Wartime patriotism
  ❖ Women were being asked to participate in war effort

Tess, second from left, with sisters
1906: National Recreation Association (NRA) had grown out of the playground movement. NRA quickly realized that all ages wanted recreation opportunities & changed name to reflect this trend.
What had been an emphasis on youth play and playgrounds, became an emphasis on social work, civic affairs and recreation.

WWI: NRA teamed up with Council of National Defense to form War Camp Community Service (WCCS)

- Worked with communities that had military bases & war industries to organize social & athletic programs
- By the end of WWI, WCCS had spread recreation & playground movement to over 600 communities
Military personnel wanted same recreational opportunities when they returned home

WCCS continued after war as Community Services, Inc. under NRA to help communities start recreation programs

1919: Mrs. B went to Greenville, SC with Community Services to establish recreation programs
  - One program was Keowee Trail pageant that included 2500 participants
  - Stayed in Greenville through 1922
Next stop…

- 1923 – 1930: Boston, MA where she served as the New England Field Representative for the NRA
- Platform shifted from assisting 1 community in 1 state to many communities in 6 states
In Boston, Mrs. B met Alphonse Oswald Brungardt from Hays, KS. He was an accountant & works manager for the Walworth Company in Boston, MA.
Mrs. B called him Brun

July 5, 1930: Married in the Wilson Chapel in Watchung, New Jersey

Mrs. B was 37 years old
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- Following her marriage, Mrs. B stopped working professionally.
- 1931: She & Brun had a daughter, Elizabeth, who died in infancy.
- 1933: She & Brun moved to Brattleboro, VT when he became treasurer & general manager of the Estey Organ Company.
During the 1930’s, Mrs. B…

- Raised money to purchase the West River Swimming Beach in Brattleboro, & to fund a city recreation department
- 1938: Was named by Governor George Aiken to chair the first state recreation committee, which was voluntary service
- She would serve 10 governors over the next 25 years

1940: Brattleboro Recreation Department was established

- Mrs. B was named to the first recreation commission
- Served for 33 years
- 1971: named an honorary lifetime member by Brattleboro Selectboard
Aunt Tess & Uncle Brunie hosted “Camp Brungardt” for nieces & nephews at their Brattleboro home during summers 1939 - 1943
Christmas Eve, 1942: Tragedy struck with Brun’s death
- He was shoveling snow
- 48 years old
1943: Mrs. B organized first Governor’s Conference on Recreation in Vermont at the request of Governor William H. Wills
After conference, Gov. Wills named Mrs. B Vermont's first state Recreation Director

- January 1, 1944: Appointment started
- 1964: Retired after serving for 20 years

Mrs. B at work later in her career
After 6 months in office, Mrs. B reported:

- Driving 6,320 miles through VT
- 4 new tires & 1 retread
- 136 visits to 47 communities
- 172 communities requested help
- 69 talks
- 201 recreation conferences with 3 or more people
- Sometimes worked 18 hour days, often Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays
  - “the work is challenging and most worthwhile.”
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❖ Pace only picked up over the next 20 years as she added national and international activities to her schedule
During WWII, the state recreation service was under the auspices of the VT Council of Safety.

1947: Recreation service was made a formal state service when legislature established the State Recreation Board.

- 2nd in the nation, 10 days behind North Carolina.
Annual & biennial reports of the State Recreation Board detail work accomplished by Mrs. B:

- 65 talks given to community groups
- 278 visits to towns
- 8 radio broadcasts were made in VT, 1 in MA
- 6 leadership training sessions were held that
  - 675 people attended from 26 towns
- 3 day summer playground leaders institute
  - 77 people attended from 26 towns
- 1 camp clinic for private and agency camps
  - 64 attended from 16 VT towns and 6 out of state towns
- 1 Governor’s Conference on Recreation
- 4 United Nations Secretariat Recreation weekends
- 2 Youth commissions from Germany hosted
- Annual NH-VT Recreation Workers Weekend
- 1 Country Dance Festival – over 2,000 attended
  - Dance festival grew to 6,000 – 7,000 people

Over the years she added:
- VT Teen Congress
- Lifeguard training workshops
- Nellie Gill One Act Play Festivals
- Senior Citizens Camps
- Statewide Senior Citizens Governor’s Day & Picnic
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- As State Recreation Director, Mrs. B founded/helped found:
  - Vermont Recreation Society
    - Now Vermont Recreation & Park Association
  - NH-VT Recreation Workers Weekend
    - Now Northern New England Recreation Conference
  - Vermont Camping Association

25TH anniversary Northern New England Recreation Conference, 1973
Mrs. B was active in national organizations & events

- 1952: 1st woman elected President of the American Recreation Society
Mrs. B was active in national organizations & events
  ❖ White House Conference on Aging
  ❖ White House Conference on Children & Youth
Mrs. B was active in national organizations & events

- National Recreation Association Advisory Committees on State Services & on Defense Related Services
- National Congress of Parents & Teachers, Board of Managers, and National Recreation Chairman
Mrs. B was active in national organizations & events
  • Planning Committee member, Thor Resources for Better Farm Living, rural recreation seminars
Mrs. B was active in national organizations & events
- 1 of 30 selected leaders to participate in 1st National Recreation Workshop for Community Living at Jackson Mills, WV
- Vice-President & Director, New England Gerontological Society
- Consultant to the Veterans Administration
- Consultant to the U.S. Department of the Army
Mrs. B was active in international organizations & events

- 1952: U.S. State Department and U.S. German High Command sent Mrs. B to Germany as a Recreation Specialist
  - Visited 73 communities in Bavaria to help establish recreation programs
- Hosted representatives interested in community recreation from 28 countries to VT
- Hosted recreation weekends in VT for United Nations Secretariat
- International Committee member, American Recreation Society
Brattleboro always remained a focus

In addition to raising funds to purchase West River Swimming Beach & establish a city recreation department, Mrs. B…

- Was the driving force behind establishing Living Memorial Park
- Credited with marshaling 73 civic groups & individuals to establish the park for which Brattleboro received the All America City award in 1956
- Received the Brattleboro Chamber of Commerce ‘Man of The Year’ award in 1971
1964: Mrs. B retired from state service, reaching the state mandatory retirement age of 70.

She was actually 71.
Mrs. B received many honors during her lifetime:

- 1948: Fellow, American Institute of Park Executives
Mrs. B received many honors during her lifetime:

- 1951: Fellow, American Recreation Society
Mrs. B received many honors during her lifetime:

- 1953: Presidential Citation, American Recreation Society
Mrs. B received many honors during her lifetime:

- 1955: Citation from New England Advisory Committee of the National Recreation Society in recognition of her outstanding leadership in advancing the cause of recreation in the State of Vermont, and throughout the nation and the world.
Mrs. B received many honors during her lifetime:

- 1973: Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from Windham College
Mrs. B received many honors during her lifetime:

- 1968: Distinguished Fellow & made Life Member of the National Recreation & Park Association
- 1975: VRPA establishes Theresa S. Brungardt awards
Mrs. B received many honors during her lifetime:

- 1976: Dedication of senior area named for her, Living Memorial Park
When Mrs. B retired, she said she had been to every Vermont community & hamlet, & felt she knew every road in the state. No one has ever doubted that statement.

At her retirement dinner Mrs. B was presented a bound book of letters from about 200 people.

Letters came from all over the country, including from the governors she served, colleagues from professional organizations & agencies, & many from Vermont individuals & groups she had helped.
Mrs. B never “retired” from recreation.

She announced in the *Recreation* magazine that “she was going to be a planning consultant, continuing with a number of national assignments.”

A few examples of what she did are revealing...

- **1964:** She asked Governor Hoff, at the request of the U.S. State Department, to meet with a visiting dignitary from Yugoslavia.
  - She noted in the letter that she was currently attending the New England Recreation Conference in Connecticut, and then was going to Chicago for the Congress of Parents and Teachers national board and convention meetings, followed by several days in Michigan and then back to Chicago to plan the third national seminar on rural family recreation.

- **1968:** She was invited to be a citizen ambassador in the People to People program, visiting Australia, New Zealand, and Bali.

- **1970:** She was elected to the National Recreation and Park Association Board of Trustees.

- She loved the Vermont Conference on Recreation & attended regularly until she wasn’t able.
  - **1983:** At the 40th anniversary conference Mrs. B, at the age of 90, spoke on “Pioneering Recreation in Vermont.”
1990: Mrs. B died at the age of 97

Buried in Brattleboro, VT with her husband & daughter

1997: posthumously, she was inducted into the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) Hall of Fame

2013: recognized as a “legend” in parks & recreation by the American Academy of Parks and Recreation Administration
Photographs of Theresa Elizabeth Schmidt Brungardt, dated when possible
PHOTO CREDITS

Theresa Schmidt Brungardt's family:
  Dave (nephew) and Joann Schmidt
  Nancy Walden (niece)
  Wendy Flickinger (grand niece)

Brattleboro Historical Society
Brattleboro Reformer
Library of Congress
National Recreation & Park Association
Playground and Recreation Association of America
Pyramid America
University of Minnesota, Social Welfare History Archives
Vermont Recreation and Park Association
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