

**JESSIE IRENE
DEARING
KINLEY
1914-1997**



**OIL & GAS
DRILLING
COMPANY
EXECUTIVE**

While the majority of the women working in oil companies held secretarial positions and a few worked as geologists, there are rare examples of women who were executives. One such woman was Jessie Kinley, who took over management of Little Nick Oil Company in Chickasha, upon the death of her boss.

Jessie Irene Dearing was born in April 1914 in Blair. She enrolled at Oklahoma College for Women in 1931 to study teacher education. In 1934 she took a housekeeping job with John and Marjorie Nichlos to earn extra funds to get her through her senior year of college. She so impressed the couple that they encouraged her to change her major to business, so she earned a mathematics degree in 1935. She became clerk-stenographer for Nichlos at \$35 per month.

John Nichlos organized Little Nick Oil Company in July 1922. After drilling two dry holes and finding himself in debt, he used his last \$92 to drill one last well south of Chickasha. With this well, Nichlos hit a significant gas field, soon named the Chickasha Gas Field. Eventually, one of his companies, Oklahoma Gas Utilities Company, merged with Oklahoma Natural Gas.

In 1942, Nichlos added his wife Marjorie and Jessie as partners. This demonstrated his trust in Jessie's ability to contribute to the company's success. It also came none too soon. In late August, Nichlos died in a gasoline explosion at his home near Ninnekah. Since Jessie was intimately acquainted with office management, she became manager. She kept the company going, not only operating existing wells, but drilling new ones. She soon learned about the working of oil and gas rigs, and oilfield technical work. The company's development in the Chickasha and Cement Fields grossed \$5 million by 1953.

In 1954, the New York Journal-American newspaper praised Jessie for her humble beginnings and business acumen. She had been given the space to learn how to manage an oil and gas company, apply that knowledge, and make mistakes along with way without punishment. Jessie worked collaboratively with her male colleagues, but the final decisions about the direction of the company were hers and hers alone. Nichlos left behind a successful company, but Jessie worked beyond expectations to expand its influence, make it more profitable, and garner a reputation for sound business practices and successful drilling.

One reason for Jessie's success may have been she was single until age 46 when she married legendary firefighter Myron Kinley in November 1958. Myron began working in the oilfields with his father as a teenager. By 1928, Myron and his brother Floyd were the best oil-well fire extinguishing firm in the Mid-Continent region. His international reputation was solidified in 1931 when he extinguished a nearly-impossible fire in Romania.

Jessie's career was often overshadowed by Myron's exploits. By her own reckoning, her work was not necessarily groundbreaking. "As for me, I'm just a gal in love with a job and damned grateful I was chosen to do it!" Myron died in May 1978, almost totally deaf and partially paralyzed from a lifetime of dangerous work. His inventions were immortalized by "Red" Adair, "Coots" Matthews and "Boots" Hansen, whom he trained.

Jessie retired from drilling activities in 1972. In her retirement, she wrote poetry and prose about her experiences in the oil and gas business, earned a bachelor's degree in English, and published a book about Myron's work entitled "Call Kinley" in 1995. Jessie died in May 1997 at age 83.

She found success in an industry that she loved, in spite of the obstacles related to her gender. Her story shows how, given the opportunity, a woman can succeed in a male-dominated field. When John Nichlos died – and Marjorie Nichols provided Jessie with the freedom to flourish or fail based on her own merits – Jessie did not solely rely on her own knowledge, but surrounded herself with experienced geologists and oil field workers ready to give her not only wise counsel, but also the space to make her own decisions. She gave the world an example of what female leadership looked like in the petroleum industry.