

**BESSIE
MAREE
HUFF**
1892-1983



**THEY REALLY
CALLED IT
HUFF
UNIVERSITY**

Gifted with exceptional public speaking ability at an early age, Bessie Huff became one of the outstanding journalism educators of her time. In the first half of the twentieth century, she helped guide one of the first higher education institutions in Muskogee to serve students of all interests.

Bessie Maree Huff was born in Hancock, Iowa in 1892. The family settled in Muskogee in 1904 where Bessie's parents enrolled her in the Spaulding Institute. In March 1905, she was chosen to participate in the school's recitals. Her performance of a reading is the first record of her public speaking. Her performances included a reading of "Orphan Annie", before it became a comic strip. Bessie entered Central High School in the fall of 1907. The next year, Bessie and her classmates moved to the new building on Dayton Street. In December 1909, the new high school began publishing a school newspaper "The Scout", with Bessie Huff as the first Literary Editor.

Bessie's parents were socially active. Her father served on the town council with Grant Foreman and her mother was active in the History Club, a social club that educated its members about historical and current events through book reviews. This would motivate Bessie to enter a Muskogee newspaper contest to showcase her communication skills. She proved she was well spoken when meeting people, by placing fourth.

In the fall, Bessie returned to Central High School for her senior year. At the end of the year, the local newspaper listed what the graduates wrote for their senior thesis, with Bessie the only senior listed as having written two theses. Her 1911 class of 35 students were the third graduating class of Central High School.

Bessie Huff graduated from the University of Kansas in 1916, and then returned to Muskogee to teach at Central High School. During the summer of 1922, she worked as an instructor in the Department of Journalism at Columbia University in New York. Her appointment came largely due to her 1921 textbook entitled "A Manual for Journalism in the High School", which was widely used in the United States.

In 1923, Bessie joined the staff of Muskogee Junior College, created by Muskogee's Board of Education in 1920 and supported by progressive-minded citizens. MJC offered liberal arts and science courses to local students, who saved money by living at home while completing two years of course work. In 1928, she was promoted to dean of the college.

MJC added commercial and industrial courses in 1940 and manual training courses such as carpentry, machine shop, and pattern making in 1952. Student enrollment increased from nine students in 1920 to 292 students in 1953.

Although the official name was Muskogee Junior College, it was affectionately known as Bessie Huff University. Unfortunately, financial problems caused it to close in October 1962 – thus ending Bessie Huff's 34-year career at MJC. Bessie died in 1983 at age 90. She is buried with her parents at Greenhill Cemetery.