

**NORMA  
DES CYGNE  
SMALLWOOD  
1909-1966**



**OKLAHOMA'S  
FIRST  
MISS  
AMERICA**

When Norma Smallwood became Miss America in 1926, she was the first contestant to win both the bathing suit and evening gown divisions. The Tulsa World reported, “Miss Smallwood is so quiet, poised and graceful that the judges were mystified by her beauty and charmed by her wonderful smile!”

Norma Des Cygne Smallwood was born in May 1909 in Bristow. As a student at Oklahoma College for Women, she loved to ride and swim, play tennis and hockey. The contest’s first Native American pageant winner received a \$5,000 gold cup, vaudeville contract, \$1,000 watch, \$1,000 wardrobe, and mermaid statue. Smallwood’s life after the pageant would forever change the image of Oklahoma’s first Miss America.

After winning the crown, she was highly criticized for earning over \$100,000 in appearance fees. She requested \$600 to appear to pass on her crown the next year but pageant organizers refused her demand so she left the pageant early. After her reign, Smallwood abandoned school when Orpheum vaudeville theaters offered her \$1,500 a week.

While visiting Tulsa, Smallwood met millionaire Thomas Gilcrease. He fell madly in love with Norma, presenting her with a \$7,000 engagement ring – and prenuptial contract – which provided \$1,000 cash at their wedding and, in case of divorce, \$5,000 a year for their years together. The 4.5-carat diamond ring was hers – only while they were married.

Thomas, 38, soft-spoken, cultured, widely-traveled, well-read and multilingual, quietly married Norma, 20, in September 1928. Their daughter Des Cygne L’Amour was born in 1929. The couple spent part of the year in a large, luxurious Paris apartment where Gilcrease studied French history and Smallwood took French, Spanish and art lessons.

Bored in Europe, Norma returned to Tulsa. Thomas wrote her lovelorn letters, but Norma’s response was complete indifference. She lived in their large stone house with her mother Mahala, who encouraged her to spend lavishly and throw parties. The couple fought continuously about the frequent parties – and her mother’s presence. Soon Thomas wanted a divorce and custody of their daughter, but didn’t want to pay much to get them.

In October 1933, Gilcrease filed for divorce due to “extreme cruelty and gross neglect of duty”. When the fiery trial ended in May 1934, Thomas won his divorce and custody of his daughter. Norma was awarded \$72,000 – if she did not remarry. She settled instead for \$15,000. They both appealed the settlement for years, leaving Gilcrease a very bitter man.

In 1936, Norma married wealthy Wichita oilman George Bruce, and had a son Robert in 1939. Over the years, Smallwood watched the pageant on television, but never spoke much about her reign. She died in Wichita in May 1966 at age 56. In July 2015, an online auction website advertised her Miss America silver cup, having bought it from a legendary pageant memorabilia collector’s estate. Since it was not engraved, her surviving relatives assumed it never came back to Tulsa. It was sold to an anonymous collector for \$5,975.