

Claire Isabelle McGill Luce (1923-1971)

By Karen Nitz

Claire Isabel McGill Luce was an accomplished businesswoman and philanthropist from Harney County who embodied the adventurous spirit of the West and spent her life traveling the world. Best known as the wife of *Time Magazine* publisher Henry Luce III (son of Time Inc. founder Henry Luce, Jr.), she worked for Time Inc. and was the director of the China Institute of America.

Born on October 19, 1923, to Frederick T. and Catherine Rogers McGill in Andrews, Oregon, a small town in Harney County, Claire McGill's early life was spent in Idaho following her parents' divorce. By 1930, at the age of six, she lived with her mother and her stepfather Fred Williams in Omaha, Nebraska. By the age of twelve, she had returned to Harney County to live with her grandfather, Alexander Rogers. The time spent living and working on her grandfather's ranch instilled in her a love of local history.

McGill was an eager student and earned the highest scores in the state during her eighth-grade year. She spent her senior year of high school in Queens, New York, where she attended operas, ballets, concerts, and other cultural events.

After high school, McGill embarked on a series of jobs that took her around the country and the world. In 1943, she joined Time Inc., where she managed the company's stock portfolio and various holdings. She left the company four years later to join a special U.S. aid mission to China. Two marriages, the first to Daniel J. O'Sullivan Jr. in the early 1940s and the second to Alfred M. Hurt from 1949 to 1957, produced three sons—Kenneth D. O'Sullivan, James H. Hurt, and William M. Hurt, an Academy Award-winning actor who retains ties to Harney County.

In 1957, Claire returned to New York as business manager for the New Building Department for Time. It was there that she met Henry Luce III. They were married in 1960. In 1964, she became a director of the China Institute of America, a bicultural organization based in New York City.

In 1969, Luce heard that a new library was being planned for Burns and determined to preserve the history of the county she loved. The next year, she wrote George Hibbard, a friend, that she had "found faith and courage in a place of ghosts, Harney City, from my Grandfather who never experienced comfort and security, but whose door was never locked, and whose meager table was freely shared by every stranger. I am forever grateful to Harney County."

Her vision culminated in the addition of the Claire McGill Luce Western History Room to the Harney County Library in 2006. The research room was funded in part from a \$30,000 endowment Luce established at the library shortly before her death on June 22, 1971. The collection holds hundreds of local oral histories, photographs, microfilm, and three special collections of books on western and local history.

Sources

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