

# NARRATIVE TEXTS

## Clara Driscoll, Philanthropist and Author, 1881-1945

Daughter of a prominent Texas ranching family, Clara Driscoll managed her own bank account from an early age. She resolved to leave a legacy by funding the causes in which she believed.

In 1900, fresh out of finishing school in New York and Paris, Clara learned that the Alamo faced grave danger. Outside investors intended to purchase the grounds and build a hotel next to the chapel. Clara mobilized the DRT, wrote editorials, lobbied legislators, and solicited support from schoolchildren. When these efforts failed to raise enough money, Clara signed a personal check and promissory notes for the property, then promptly turned over her purchase to the State of Texas.<sup>1</sup> She became known as “Savior of the Alamo.”

For the next few years, Clara pursued a writing career. She published a romantic novel and short stories set in the South Texas ranchlands of her childhood. Relocating in New York, she wrote a play that enjoyed a three-month run on Broadway. Clara married Hal Sevier, financial editor of the New York *Sun* and a former Texas state legislator whom she had met during her campaign to save the Alamo.

Upon the death of Clara’s father, the couple moved back to Texas. Hal founded the Austin *American* newspaper, while Clara dedicated herself to designing and entertaining at their Italianate mansion, Laguna Gloria. When her older brother died, Clara moved to Corpus Christi to assume her family’s financial interests. She capably managed ranch and oil properties and presided over the Corpus Christi Bank. Keenly involved in Democratic Party politics, Clara gained a reputation for rowdy language and decisive action.<sup>2</sup>

After a two-year ambassadorship in Chile, the couple dissolved their 31-year marriage, with Clara reclaiming her maiden name. She continued to underwrite conservation at the Alamo as well as other civic causes. Clara donated Laguna Gloria to become an art museum, paid off the building debt of the Texas Federation of Women’s Clubs, and financed a luxury hotel in Corpus Christi, boosting the town’s economy. When she died, Clara left her entire estate to establish a children’s hospital in Corpus Christi.<sup>3</sup>



### Quotations

*The Alamo, weather-beaten by time, is what will endure in the memory of all who have seen or heard of the old city of San Antonio.*—Clara Driscoll<sup>4</sup>

*Politicians learned to respect her. She could drink, cuss, and connive with the best of them and outspend practically all of them.*—*Time* magazine commemorating Clara Driscoll<sup>5</sup>

### Photo

Driscoll Foundation, Corpus Christi; image from Texas Woman’s University.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Major sources for biographical information in this essay are Ann Fears Crawford and Crystal Sasse Ragsdale, *Women in Texas: Their Lives, Their Experiences, Their Accomplishments* (Austin: State House Press, 1992), pp. 168-81; and Mary Beth Rogers, Sherry A. Smith, and Janelle D. Scott, *We Can Fly: Stories of Katherine Stinson and Other Gutsy Texas Women* (Austin: Texas Foundation for Women’s Resources, 1983), pp. 63-73.

<sup>2</sup> Crawford and Ragsdale, *Women in Texas*, pp. 176-77; Rogers et al., *We Can Fly*, p. 69.

<sup>3</sup> Crawford and Ragsdale, *Women in Texas*, p. 179; Rogers et al., *We Can Fly*, pp. 70-73; Dorothy D. DeMoss, “Driscoll, Clara,” *Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/DD/fdr4.html> (April 4, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Crawford and Ragsdale, *Women in Texas*, pp. 169-70.

<sup>5</sup> This quote appears in Ruthe Winegarten, *Texas Women: A Pictorial History from Indians to Astronauts*, (Austin: Eakin Press, 1986) p. 103; and in Mary Beth Rogers, Ruthe Winegarten, and Sherry Smith, *Texas Women: A Celebration of History* (Austin: Texas Foundation for Women’s Resources), p. 22.