



## Michael Gracey Publishes Ma Thicket's Story

[Tyler County Booster](#), 06-19-14, 8A.<sup>1</sup>

Michael T. Gracey's book, *Ma Thicket – The Story of Ethel Osborn Hill*, just came off the press (2014). Though he has been in and through Tyler County for decades, he retired to Woodville a few years ago on his land that includes where her old log cabin once stood, now gone to ruins through forest overgrowth, with only the chimney, a garage, and one dilapidated addition remaining.

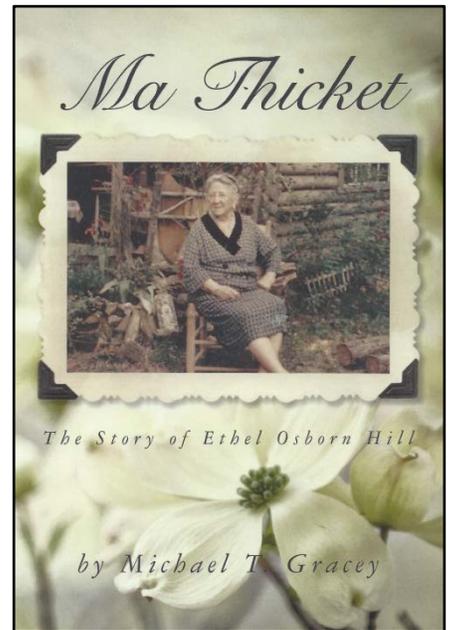
An engineer by trade, Gracey researched the extant books and articles on her life, and he contacted Ma Thicket's granddaughter, Linda Cliett, that added childhood stories.

Ma Thicket named her home the Dogwood Den. A celebrated naturalist of the area, she gave talks on nature in the Big Thicket all over Texas. Her craft class called "Sticks, Stones, Shells, and Bones" was a big hit with children.

Photos revealed her life in the woods and her many passions, including crafts, her dish collection, and her writing studio. Her weekly syndicated column "America Still Is" was published for seven years. In 1967, the Tyler County Historical Survey Committee named her the Poet Laureate of Tyler County and in 1975 she was designated Poet Laureate of Texas at a Writer's Club banquet in Port Arthur.

On her 90th birthday in 1968, the Big Thicket Association presented her with a plaque signed by the governor that officially designated her "Ma Thicket" for her work in education and her 40-year campaign to get the Big Thicket designated a national park.

In the latter half, Gracey reprinted her hard-to-find book of poems, "Trifles and Treasures" (1967), in its entirety. Pastoral descriptions mix with heartfelt revelations of a woman facing the world with a strong faith. A few gems include "My Creed" where toughing it out, she said, "I'll count each jagged rock a goad ..." and so forth. "Fireplace in a Deserted Home" bemoans the empty nest and is followed by "A Miser" that cherishes memories over gold. In "My Heart," oh, perhaps you should read that yourself,



<sup>1</sup> Paragraphs 7-8 were absent in the Booster article.

and if you do, you'll also find its gentle antithesis in "My Gypsy Heart," something many modest women can relate to, I am guessing. But then I read "The Captured Bird" and understood more.

In "Pluck," so self-descriptive, she declared that "Courage shall always light my eyes; Hope falters, but it never dies."

My favorite was "When Azrael Calls" which beautifully describes how she wanted to be buried, an exquisite tribute to her love of Texas nature: "Tho strange and far be the paths I've trod, Lay me to rest in Texas sod.... For a headstone give me a stout mesquite, And

plant a dogwood at my feet.... There in the wind and the sun I'll rest, With Texas bluebonnets on my breast." Loving nature to the end.

Today, one has to trek through the dense thicket for about 100 yards on an unclear zigzagging trail thick with underbrush, pushing through vines, brush, thorns, and climbing over fallen trees to get to the ruins that front a still active spring. What is left might fall anytime. Yet, Gracey has brought Ma Thicket back to life again.

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After she got electricity, she had a few outdoor outlets



Ma Thicket's garage still standing



Original fireplace with Ma Thicket's initials



Original fireplace had conch shells embedded