Painting was just one of the many interests of Ivie McGuire. In the background of this picture are a few of the many pieces of china she repaired for others. (Photo by Johnnie Greer.)

The World’s 10-Inch Genius

By Carla Coy and Shari Hatter

In doing our research on Ivie McGuire MacCarthey we interviewed Mrs. Edgar Myers, Mrs. Jane Rohweder, Mrs. Mildred Gross, and Mrs. Robert Link. They gave us many helpful stories in the following article.

Kirksville has had many colorful people in its past. One of the most intriguing was Mrs. Ivie McGuire MacCarthey. She was well known in Kirksville for her controversial ideas on life and death and her psychic abilities. She believed in reincarnation.

In other parts of the world she was well known for her miniature bronze sculptures of famous people. Somerset Maugham nicknamed Ivie the “World’s 10-Inch Genius” because of these sculptures. Ivie sculpted the Prince of Wales, H. G. Wells, Caruso, Sara Bernhardt, Douglas and Mary Fairbanks, Lady Astor and many other famous person-alities of the 1920’s and 1930’s. Mrs. Myers commented, “She lived in the homes of the great and near great when she did these.”

Before Ivie was born, her family bought the Kellogg House. They bought it in 1878 and three years later the McGuires moved out. The first year they lived there, they lost 300 hogs to cholera. The second year 600 chickens died of the same disease. The third year their only child at the time, Hubert, died from a heart condition following diphtheria. In 1881, after these tragedies, the McGuires moved to a house located at the corner of Marion and Missouri streets, where Ivie was born. Mrs. Myers said the reason they left the Kellogg House was, “...because they were all superstitious, I guess.” (See Charlton Collector, December 1980 issue.)

Ivie was born on June 28, 1881. During her childhood, her father was very wealthy and he saw that Ivie spent much time abroad. A handicap that Ivie had to deal with until she was 17 years old was walking on crutches. She had private
teachers and did not enter school until she was 12, and in 1897, when she was 14 years old, she graduated from Kirkville Senior High School. Ivie then entered the University of Missouri, where she studied designing, theory of painting, art and English. She spent three years there. Later she entered the School of Fine Arts in St. Louis where she studied to be a painter.

Ivie loved to travel and when she left Kirkville, she embarked on a life full of adventure and excitement. She was one of the first women to fly across the English Channel. She took a trip on the Amazon River in the early 1900's and it was during this trip that she met a Brooklyn physician, Dr. MacCarty, whom she married, in 1906. During her nine years of marriage she started writing because they had no room for her to paint.

When her mother became ill, however, Ivie had to give up writing to sit with her, so she started modeling little figures from clay. Because of her mother's illness, Ivie found her nerves going, so she hired nurses to take care of her mother and became a newspaper woman for the New York Globe. Ivie lived in New York for 33 years.

Many people believe that Ivie invested most of her money in a musical comedy show on Broadway that she had co-authored while in New York. The musical was called "Taza" and when it failed, she lost a fortune.

When Ivie returned to Kirkville in 1944 she didn't have much money. So in order to make a living, Ivie had to do odd jobs around town. She repaired old china and restored antique dolls. Ivie also did paintings of many of the homes in Kirkville.

She also found time to get her B.A. in Art from the Northeast Missouri State Teachers College.

Ivie took up her writing again. Just before she died she was writing a book about the Kellogg House. The book was called "Wigged House." Mrs. Myers tells the reason for the name of the book: "Because they once had a negro working for them and she always called wicked, 'wigged!'" Ivie never finished the book and all the manuscripts were found after she had died, strewn all over the floor of her apartment. Ivie also wrote "Virginia," an operetta; "Drums," a play, and "The Strangest Experience of My Life."

Her belief in reincarnation was probably the most controversial thing about Ivie. Her ideas irritated some, but others just accepted her as she was. She believed that she had been a snake in Egypt in an earlier life. She also believed she had been born a Roman soldier and that explained her lame leg that plagued her during her childhood.

She seemed to have an uncanny talent for locating lost items. Mrs. Meyers told the following story, an incident which happened to Kirkville bookstore owner, Edna Campbell:

"Edna started to town one morning and she always carried this little satchel thing, a briefcase, sort of a basket. She had all of her things in it to take to the store and on this one occasion she had some very important papers in there. She stopped along the way two or three times and when she got to town she had been in conversation with these various people. She had been in one lady's house; the lady had called her up on the porch and she had gone in. When she got to town, she didn't have her briefcase and she had no idea where it was.

"Well, she started calling these people and nobody had seen it nor could they find it. Well, she was beside herself because some of this had to go to the bank and it had to be taken care of that day. So in desperation she calls Ivie and tells Ivie she has lost these papers and could she help her find them. Well, Ivie called back in a little bit and she said, 'Did you stop at a certain place?' Yes, she had but she had called this place and she had not left them there. 'Well, They're there behind the door.' And they were behind the door." Ivie also found a diamond that a lady had lost.

Her other talents for predicting the future were less popular. Mrs. Rohwedder said while Ivie was doing a painting of her house she would say, 'If you'll tell me when your birthday is, I can tell you when you'll die!' Not really wanting to know this information, Mrs. Rohwedder was very careful never to disclose her birthdate to Ivie.

Mrs. Myers remembers that Ivie was in Russia during Stalin's funeral. After seeing him in the casket, Ivie said he hadn't died the way everyone had said. Ivie believed he had been stabbed in the back.

On November 6, 1955, Ivie presented her statuettes to the Sojourners Club and they can be seen now at the Sojourners Library. The statuettes are superb and seem to capture the spirits of her subjects.

Ivie died on March 8, 1962, after a fall at home. She was 80 years old. Following Ivie's wishes, there was no viewing of the body and no funeral service. Her body was cremated and the ashes buried in the Forest Cemetery in Kirkville.

Mrs. Meyers sums everything up when she says, "She was, to say the least, one of the most interesting people I've ever known."

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Painting by Ivie McGuire, courtesy of Mrs. Elizabeth Link

These bronze statuettes and the painting of a collie (below left) are samples of Ivie's artistic talents.