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CIVIL WAR TO CIVIL RIGHTS: MARY BRECKINRIDGE (HEALTH CARE PROVIDER)



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LESLIE COUNTY — Mary Breckinridge was born on Feb. 17, 1881 in Memphis, Tenn. The daughter of an aristocratic family with ties to Presidents Thomas Jefferson and James Buchanan, Breckinridge chartered an unusual path for women in the early 20th century.

Twice married, Breckinridge filed for divorce and restored her maiden name in 1920 after the death of her two children.

In 1925, she founded in Leslie County what now is known as the Frontier Nursing University to train midwives to provide

health services to rural and underserved populations throughout the country.

Breckinridge sought to improve the health of children and create a health care system that could serve as a model for health access in the most remote locations in the world. By 1959, Frontier Nursing midwives had attended more than 10,000 births.

Breckinridge died in 1965, but the school she founded and the services it provides continue to be leaders in rural women's health care. Her log cabin, The Big House, in Hyden, Ky., remains the heart of the Frontier program and a hospital named after her was built in 1972. It continues to provide Leslie County residents with quality health care.

The Kentucky Historical Society (KHS) links Kentuckians with their past via archival collections that document people from every walk of life, reaching back to 1509. Letters, diaries, oral histories and photographs, as well as the first and second Kentucky Constitutions, are included. Find these and other KHS collections online at khscatalog.kyvl.org

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