

# Ninnie Baird



**B**ack in 1908 a young woman needed to provide for her family because her husband was sick. She began selling the baked foods she made in her wood-fired stove. Thanks to a dependable delivery horse, a commitment to quality, numerous expansions over the years and the ability to adapt during two

world wars, her bread remains known to this day.

Ninnie Baird and William Baird moved from Tennessee to Fort Worth, Texas, more than 100 years ago. While William Baird found success in the restaurant business, Ninnie Baird baked items for those restaurants. William Baird, however, was diagnosed with diabetes. By 1908, he could no longer work.

Ninnie Baird began to sell the bread, pies and cakes she baked in her kitchen to neighbors. Her husband died about three years later, but the rest of the family continued to work in the baking and selling of Mrs Baird's bread. Her four boys — Dewey, Hoyt, Roland and C.B. — worked to bake and deliver the bread. One daughter, Bess, worked as a secretary outside the home to bring in extra money while the bread business was getting started.

The family business in 1915 bought a commercial oven from the Old Metropolitan Hotel in Fort Worth for \$75. Mrs. Baird put down \$25 and paid off the remaining \$50 in bread and rolls. The oven could bake 40 loaves at a time, whereas the old wood-fired stove could handle four loaves at a time.

A family buggy was converted into a sales wagon. Another member of the family — a horse named Ned

— was at the helm. Ned came to know when to stop at every house on the route. Mrs. Baird soon took on three commercial accounts, including Sandegard's Grocery, a business that grew to 15 stores, each one displaying Mrs. Baird's bread in a glass case.

In 1917, the family bought an automobile to serve customers and printed "Eat More Mrs. Baird's Bread" on each side. However,

Mrs. Baird's began to open new plants in Texas cities such as Houston and Dallas.

When World War II broke out, it caused a shortage of ingredients such as sugar. Mrs. Baird cut back on the number of her products but not on their quality.

"Quality, freshness, service — those things were inbred in us," Allen Baird, one of Ninnie's grandsons, once said. "You just

her 80s. That year the company opened a bread baking plant in Dallas that was the largest in the country at the time, according to the Sept. 8, 1957, issue of *The Southwestern Miller*. The plant housed two separate bakeries in its 140,000 square feet of floor space. It had a capacity of 2 million lbs of bread a week.

Mrs. Baird died at the age of 92 on June 3, 1961. She had eight surviving children. The Texas State Senate passed Senate Resolution No. 13 in her memory. It declared she had been "a living example for mothers, wives, business executives, Christians and good people the world over."

Her commitment to community causes and nonprofit organizations continued when the "Ninnie Baird Foundation" was created to improve the lives of children and families through family preservation, education and nutrition.

Mrs. Baird's bread also remained on retail shelves. Mrs. Baird's Bakeries was the largest U.S. family-owned baking company in 1998 when Grupo Bimbo S.A. de C.V., based in Mexico City, bought it. Annual sales volume was about \$300 million then.

Ninnie Baird's legacy in the baking industry continues as Mrs. Baird's market reach expands. Mrs. Baird's bread entered several Missouri markets, including Kansas City, in 2005. The bread in 2005 also could be found in Texas, Oklahoma, portions of Louisiana, northwestern Arkansas and northeastern Kansas.



*Ned, a delivery horse, knew when to stop at the house of every customer on the Mrs. Baird's bread route.*

in 1918, or about a year after the United States entered World War I, the family business lost its No. 1 driver. Hoyt Baird enlisted in the army. In response, Mrs. Baird decided to discontinue the retail route and go wholesale only.

The same year the company moved into new headquarters, a facility that was 30 feet by 72 feet. The bakery was enlarged nine times from 1918 to 1928 to keep up with

didn't do it — you just didn't take the short cut and reduce the quality of the product."

During the war the company limited itself to using the ingredients needed to produce what became its core business: white bread, wheat bread, hamburger buns and hot dog buns.

As the business neared its 50th anniversary, Mrs. Baird's sons began to take more control in day-to-day affairs. She kept a controlling interest as chairman of the board.

By 1957, Mrs. Baird was in