From the Diary of Ollie Guehring
The Kidnapping of Nila May Thomas

Ollie Guehring would write about the weather, her chores, work, and tidbits of news in the community in her daily dairy. On Thursday, May 26, 1921, she wrote: "Cloudy and rained. I went to work. The varnishers was here have to come up stairs by a ladder. Nila Mae Thomas was kidnapped from the Brown School this morning." Of course, this last line is intriguing and with just a few clicks on newspapers.com, we get the rest of the story.



Top:
Elizabeth Parr-Head
Bottom:
Nila Mae Thomas

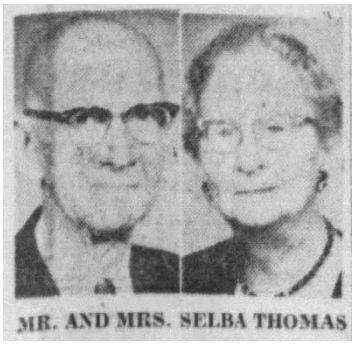
Eight-year-old Nila Mae Thomas was reported to be allegedly kidnapped by a woman who picked up the girl on her way to the E.J. Brown School in the North Riverdale neighborhood. The unknown woman placed Nila Mae in an automobile which contained two men and then it quickly sped away. Police immediately suspected Elizabeth Parr-Head, mother of the girl. Nila Mae had been abandoned by her mother several years before and in March 1920 was legally adopted by Mr. and Mrs. Selba Thomas.

The adoptive parents were dismayed by the alleged kidnapping, and Mrs. Thomas was inconsolable. Mr. Thomas stated that Mrs. Parr-Head was a half-sister to his wife and that she could be on her way to Indianapolis where she once lived. A reward of $100 was offered by the Thomas family.

Seventy-three days later, Nila Mae was still listed as "missing" despite a nation-wide hunt by all police departments "from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean." Police said that Mr. Thomas visited police headquarters almost daily to inquire if any trace had been found of "his little girl."

The *Dayton Daily News* reported on Sunday, August 28, 1921 that the missing girl and her mother were found in Owensboro, KY. The police chief in Owensboro said that Mrs. Head "will put up a drastic fight against requisition." A policewoman from Dayton travelled to Columbus to secure requisition papers from the governor for the return of Elizabeth Parr-Head to Dayton. Meanwhile in Kentucky, Mrs. Parr-Head claimed that the Thomas's adopted Nila Mae without her consent. Mr. Thomas who travelled to the state with a lawyer and a police officer stated that if he were given possession of the child, he would drop all charges. Mrs. Parr-Head stated that she "would not give Nila Mae up."

In a hearing held in an Owensboro courtroom, the judge denied the suit brought by the Thomas's and declared the adoption of Nila Mae void as he stated that the adoption had not been properly conducted. He charged that Mrs. Parr-Head had not been notified of the adoption proceedings and that she had not given her consent for the adoption. On the witness stand, Mrs. Parr-Head said that she was barely sixteen when she gave birth to Nila Mae and after divorcing her husband, found it hard to take care of the little girl. She gave her girl to her half-sister to care for her and would on occasion visit. Mr. Thomas stated that after a year or more had gone by without a visit from the mother, he and his wife made plans to adopt the child. While they did make a futile attempt to contact the mother, stating family differences for lack of further contact, they proceeded with the adoption.



Mr. and Mrs. Thomas celebrating their 50th Wedding Anniversary in 1960.

The judge ruled that Nila Mae Thomas was to remain with her natural mother, Elizabeth Parr-Head.

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