

ARTHUR NEAL LEECRAFT

1866-1943

By A. H. Ferguson

Arthur Neal Leecraft was born at Union, South Carolina, November 22, 1866. He was the son of Captain Benjamin Leecraft and Susan Elizabeth (Stowe) Leecraft. His mother was a daughter of Colonel Samuel Neal Stowe, M. D., who had served on the staff of General Robert E. Lee, during the Civil War. The Confederate swords carried by Captain Leecraft and Colonel Samuel Neal Stowe are now in the treasured possession of their descendant, Brigadier General Walter Alexander Dumas, U. S. A. The sword of Captain Leecraft, an emblem of rank, was used to denote authority, but useless as a means of warfare, for it was originally the property of a Masonic lodge and put into military service in the dark days of the Confederacy when such equipment was greatly needed. The sword of Colonel Stowe is of finer steel. The scabbard still shows the damage done to it when it was in the air while he was giving command and his horse was shot from beneath him. The sword escaped injury but the scabbard was badly dented.

Colonel Arthur Neal Leecraft was proud of his ancestors, the story of the clan having been traced authentically back for one thousand years. The name Leecraft—modernized—was originally a “place name” and has gone through many changes in spelling, but as proven by church records in the old cathedrals of England, it was originally spelled Leaycroft and meant simply “the house (croft) on the Leay (Lea-hill)” in feudal England to distinguish it from surrounding homes. In 1304, there was a village named Leaycroft in County Suffolk England which was the family home. The family name was Arundell or Arendall, a score of different spellings, the original one being De Hironnelle, the name having come from Normandy with William the Conqueror.

The surname Leaycroft (Leacraft, LeCraft or Leecraft) was adopted by younger sons of the family at a very early date, the coat of arms and crest being illustrated and described in various books of heraldry as used in 1666, although the French branch of the family used the same with several quartering at a much earlier date.

Some of the members of this family fought with the Crusaders, some for Queen Mary of Scotland and some against her. During the reign of Queen Elizabeth, they were active in her defense when Philip of Aragon with his mighty Armada threatened to invade England. However, most of the Leecrafts belonged to the landed gentry. The church records prove that as a family they had deep religious convictions. When James I of England (James 5th of Scotland), son of Mary and Lord Darnley, ordered the Westminster Assembly

to translate the Bible, and when the Church of England (Episcopal) was organized, Leecrafts were among the first to enter its list of avowed adherents.

Leecrafts are listed as members of the Virginia Company which did so much in colonizing not only Virginia and Bermuda but also contributed permanent settlements farther up the Atlantic coast.

A Leecraft was Governor of Bermuda when George III of England, in his Teutonic stubbornness destroyed the last semblance of independence in Bermuda. The Leecrafts who had long owned a fleet of boats used in commercial shipping, moved lock, stock, and barrel to islands to the south, living at various times in Barbados, Antigua and Martinique and sending their cargoes to ports along the American mainland. The family finally came to the mainland of the colonies to live ever after. Two brothers settled in New York City, one in Beaufort, South Carolina, and one, Captain Benjamin Leecraft, in Beaufort, North Carolina. The last named became the ancestor of Colonel Arthur Neal Leecraft. He arrived there on his own boat, and speedily became one of the largest land-owners in the province.

He married Susan Elizabeth, daughter of Colonel Malachi Bell, and his wife, Elizabeth, daughter of Colonel Coale. When the Revolution came Colonel Bell and Colonel Coale promptly entered the army on the side of the Colonies. Colonel Benjamin Leecraft joined with Biddle in Philadelphia as Captain and Leecraft as Mate in shipping. Benjamin Leecraft I was killed in a sea battle off the coast of Bermuda and was buried at sea.

His widow and children remained in Beaufort, North Carolina, and there his sole surviving son, Benjamin Leecraft II, married Mary Fuller, descendant of the Mayflower Fullers and also a descendant of the Belcher family of Massachusetts, whose grandfather, Edward Fuller, came to North Carolina from Connecticut. Benjamin Leecraft II had several descendants, among whom was Dr. Lafayette Leecraft and from whom came Benjamin Leecraft the third, who married first his cousin, Mary Elizabeth Arendell, and upon her death, married Susan Elizabeth Stowe, of which marriage were born six children:

1. Arthur Neal Leecraft, the subject of this sketch.
2. Albert Stowe Leecraft who married Mary Ann Chew.
3. Charles Fuller Leecraft, who died in early childhood.
4. Bessie Holland Leecraft, who married DeBerry Glenn Dumas, who became the parents of Brigadier General Walter Alexander Dumas.
5. Daisy Leecraft, who was twice married, first to Rev. Edwin Eugene Moody and second, to Frank Sims Moody.
6. Walter Benjamin Leecraft, who married Mildred Rudolph Pratt.

The first Marshal of the Southern District of the Indian Territory was Charles L. Stowe who was a member of the Leecraft family. Colonel Leecraft's father came to Sherman, Texas, in October 1870, from North Carolina. He died when Colonel Leecraft was about thirteen years old. While a mere lad Colonel Leecraft went to work in a drygoods store (the Star Store) in Denison, Texas, and supported his widowed mother and two brothers and two sisters.

Arthur Neal Leecraft married Lelah Maupin on January 9, 1893. Lelah Maupin was the daughter of John Maupin and Helen Eastman Maupin, who had a strain of Chickasaw Indian blood. John Maupin was a member of Quantrell's band in Missouri.¹ In 1895, Colonel Leecraft moved to Colbert and opened a store there which has been operated ever since, now known as the Leecraft Mercantile Company. He was married under two ceremonies, the first in the Indian Territory according to the Chickasaw law, and later in the First Presbyterian Church at Denison, Texas, according to the laws of the State of Texas. To this marriage, four children were born, namely: A son, Bertram M. Leecraft, now living in Colbert; Mrs. H. L. Williams (Mildred Leecraft) of Durant, Oklahoma; Mrs. Floyd E. Maytubby (Frances Leecraft) of Oklahoma City and Corporal Donald S. Leecraft, now stationed at Camp Hood, Texas. Mrs. Maytubby is now the wife of the present Governor of the Chickasaws, Floyd E. Maytubby.

Colonel Leecraft was head Consul of the Woodmen of the World of Oklahoma from 1919-1921 and afterward a member of the National Legislative Committee of the Woodmen of the World. He was active in the affairs of the Chickasaw Nation, serving on committees relating to its schools and representing the Nation by appointment of the Chickasaw Legislature in matters before the Indian Department at Washington. He was a member of six Legislatures of the State of Oklahoma, as follows:

11th Legislature from Jan. 4th to Mar. 24, 1927;
 Extraordinary Session from Dec. 2nd to Dec. 29, 1927;
 12th Legislature from Jan. 8th to March 30, 1929;
 Extraordinary Session from May 16th to July 6, 1929;
 13th Legislature from Jan. 13th to Apr. 11, 1931;
 14th Legislature from Jan. 3rd to Apr. 22, 1933;
 Extraordinary Session from May 24th to July 15, 1933;
 16th Legislature from Jan. 5th to May 11, 1937; and
 17th Legislature from Jan. 3rd to April 29, 1939.

He was private secretary to Governor Robert L. Williams, beginning with January 11, 1915 and serving until he became a member of the Board of Affairs on July 1, 1916, of which board he was made Secretary. When he became a candidate for State Treasurer in 1918 he resigned as a member of the Board of Affairs. He was nominated at the primary election and elected in the general election in November, 1918 and qualified as State Treasurer in Jan-

¹ *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, XVI (September, 1938), p. 308.

uary, 1919 and served throughout the term of four years. While he was Secretary to the Governor in 1915, during an ad interim, for a few days, he was appointed and served as Highway Commissioner. On March 27, 1919, he was appointed as a member of the Fraternal Insurance Board and served during the period he served as Treasurer. He was also appointed and served as trustee of the Oklahoma State Teachers Retirement and Disability Fund in May, 1919. On Feb. 1, 1923, he was appointed on the Governor's Staff as a Colonel. For a short period, while private secretary to the Governor, he was secretary of the Capitol Commission.²

He was a member of the Board of the Oklahoma State Historical Society for over three decades. On March 6, 1920, he was appointed and served on a committee which arranged for the publication of a quarterly magazine known as the Oklahoma Chronicles.³

He was active in Fraternal matters in Oklahoma for many years. He was a 32nd degree Mason, a member of the Odd Fellows, serving as Grand Master from April, 1911, to October, 1912, and was also a member of the Knights of Pythias. He was a member of the Sons of the American Revolution and had held various offices and honors at the hands of that organization.

Colonel Arthur Neal Leecraft loved his fellow man. He made it a rule in public office, to be as kind and considerate of his political enemies as his friends. He had no real enemies, so far as he was concerned. He was a member of the Presbyterian Church and was for eighteen years an Elder in the First Presbyterian Church in Durant; prior to that he had been an Elder in the Oklahoma City and Colbert Churches. Many times he represented the local Presbyterians in the Presbytery, Synod and General Assembly of the Southern Presbyterian Church. It was through his influence and upon his invitation that the General Assembly of the Church came to Durant in 1918. He was devoted to his Church and gave it his support in every way possible. He attended its courts, served on committees, taught in the Sunday school, and discharged every obligation and duty committed to him by his church with fidelity and ability. He served for more than a quarter of a century as a member of the Board of Trustees of the Oklahoma Presbyterian College in Durant. During a large part of that time he was Secretary of the Board and he carefully, accurately, and painstakingly kept the minutes of the proceedings of the Board.

The outstanding characteristics of Colonel Leecraft were his gentleness toward all men, his manly courtesy, his unfailing cheerfulness, and his unwillingness to engage in strife, or harbor hatred or ill-will toward anyone. He patterned his life after Him who came not to be ministered unto but to minister.

² *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, XXI (March, 1943), p. 35.

³ *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, I (January, 1921), p. 3.

For a large part of his life he was in public office, as Secretary to the Governor, on the Board of Affairs, State Treasurer, and a member of the State Legislature. The last few years of his life, because of failing health, were spent quietly at his home in Durant, Oklahoma. However, his fine courtesy, his sunny disposition and his love for his fellow man never failed him. He lived to the ripe age of seventy-six. His was a good, a fruitful life. After a prolonged illness, on the night of August 10, 1943, paraphrasing the words of another, the faithful heart that had beaten high in the service of his fellow men, grew faint and failed, and the white stars watched until morning. Interment was by the side of his wife in the cemetery at Sherman, Texas.