

NECROLOGIES

WILLIAM BALSER SKIRVIN 1860-1944

William Balsar Skirvin, generally known as William B. or W. B. Skirvin, died March 25, 1944. He had been a resident of the Territory of Oklahoma and the State of Oklahoma since 1906. He was born in the State of Michigan near the town of Sturgis. His childhood was spent there on a farm.

His father was James Balsar Skirvin and his mother was Mary Osborn (Skirvin). He was born on November 10, 1860. His mother died when he was eight years old, leaving him and his sister, Mary, as her only children. After his mother's death, his father engaged in business away from the home town of Sturgis, and he was left in the custody of his father's mother. His father became associated with one of his brothers in business in the State of Ohio. His father was married a second time to one Sarah Stillman of Bur Oak, Michigan. Of this marriage, two children were born—Clifford J. Skirvin and Floyd Skirvin. Clifford J. Skirvin died in Ada, Oklahoma, in April, 1928, and Floyd Skirvin is now residing in Battlecreek, Michigan.

William B. Skirvin, as he was generally known, was raised by his grandmother until he was about fifteen years of age when he went west of the Mississippi River and to the town of Shenandoah, Iowa, where he apprenticed himself to one Dr. Chase and worked on the farm for Dr. Chase except while he was in school. After working for Dr. Chase for four years, he then returned to the State of Michigan and associated himself with one C. A. Crosby of Kalamazoo, Michigan, who was engaged in selling farm machinery, and William B. Skirvin engaged in this line of work operating out of Kansas City. His work took him through Kansas and Nebraska.

While so employed, he lived with one H. F. Reid in Wyandotte County, Kansas, and married one of the daughters of the said H. F. Reid, namely, Harriet Elizabeth Reid, who was generally referred to by him as Hattie. He and she established a home in Butler County, Kansas, and acquired a farm in said County. Later he traveled for S. A. Himo and Company of Lawrence, Kansas, which work carried him for the first time into Oklahoma Territory. He removed from Butler County, Kansas to Kansas City. He became associated with O. W. Shephard who had also married one of the daughters of the said H. F. Reid and he and O. W. Shephard engaged in the real estate business in Kansas City. They became very close personal and lifelong friends.

In 1889, when Oklahoma Territory was opened to settlement, he and O. W. Shephard made the run into the new country. They started from Arkansas City, Kansas, and because of the crowded condition of the train, they rode into Guthrie on top of the train. They each acquired property in the new town of Guthrie which they sold shortly thereafter and he and O. W. Shephard removed to Galveston, Texas, and engaged in the real estate business in the growing City of Galveston. O. W. Shephard remained there in business with William B. Skirvin three years when he returned to Kansas City and engaged in the banking business where he died in 1942.

After engaging in the real estate business in Galveston for several years, he platted a town across the Bay on the mainland of Texas and on the main line of the Santa Fe Railroad between Houston and Galveston. He named this town Alta Loma. In his enterprising way he set about to

discover fresh water for the use not only of his town, Alta Loma, but for that general area. He drilled several deep water wells, the first in the area, which furnished an adequate supply of fresh water, and water from these wells is still being used by the City of Galveston on Galveston Island.

It was while so engaged that to him and his wife, Hattie, three children were born—Pearl Reid Skirvin, Marguerite Adelaide Skirvin and Orren William Skirvin, all of whom are still living. His home was in Galveston in the year 1900. In August, 1900, occurred the destructive Galveston storm. His family was away at the time but he was there and assisted in the rescue work of people who, but for his efforts, might have been victims of that flood. On several occasions in this effort he all but lost his life. The home in which he lived was washed off of its foundation and thousands of persons were drowned in this terrific catastrophe. He often stated that he believed had the storm lasted half an hour longer, there would not have been any persons left on the Island living.

About this time, oil was discovered at Beaumont, Texas, and he engaged in the oil business in that area and his efforts were rewarded with an accumulation of considerable money. In 1906 he, with his family, removed to Oklahoma City, then a rapidly growing town, and engaged in the real estate business. Thereafter and in 1910 and 1911, he built the Skirvin Hotel now standing at the Northeast corner of First Street and Broadway in Oklahoma City. He later engaged in the oil business in the Healdton field in Carter County, Oklahoma; the Ada field in Pontotoc County, Oklahoma; the oil field near the town of El Dorado, Kansas, in 1917 and 1918, and in the Oklahoma City field in 1931.

William B. Skirvin was of Scotch descent. His people migrated from Scotland to the Colonies about the time of the Revolution. His father's two brothers, Captain C. J. Skirvin of the Seventh Indiana, and Charles Skirvin lost their lives during the War between the States.

His wife, Harriet Reid Skirvin, died in Oklahoma City in 1908, leaving surviving, her husband, William B. Skirvin and her three children, Pearl, Marguerite and O. W. Skirvin. William B. Skirvin was never married after her death. His children were reared in Oklahoma City. Pearl R. Skirvin was married in 1917 to George Mesta of Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. Marguerite Skirvin was married in 1920 to one Robert Adams of New York City and of this union three children were born, Robert Skirvin Adams, Harriet Elizabeth Adams and William Skirvin Adams who were adopted by George Tyson after his marriage to Marguerite Adams, their mother, and now bear his name. O. W. Skirvin of Oklahoma City, the third and youngest child of William B. Skirvin is now living in Oklahoma City. Robert Adams died and Marguerite is now Mrs. George Tyson, having married one George Tyson of Boston in 1937.

William B. Skirvin was a man who made friends easily and kept them. While he never engaged in public affairs in the sense of seeking public office, he gave much of his time and money to civic enterprises and was always vitally interested in anything that had a tendency to upbuild Oklahoma, Oklahoma City and its people. He was a continuous member of the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce and a liberal contributor to the enterprises promoted by it.

In 1929 he and his children began the erection of the Skirvin Tower Hotel and completed the same in 1934. This hotel now stands at the Northwest corner of First Street and Broadway in Oklahoma City and it and the Skirvin Hotel across the street are two of the outstanding hotels in the Southwest.

He built the original hotel largely out of funds he acquired while residing in the State of Texas, and the accumulations therefrom. These monies were community property which he and his wife brought from Texas to Oklahoma City and upon her death, her children inherited her part of the said community estate. During his long life in Oklahoma, he never failed to recognize this interest of his children acquired from their said mother and many years before his death, in the interest of their welfare, had conveyed his interest in the properties to his said children.

William B. Skirvin was a man of strong physique, vigorous mind, genial disposition and a progressive attitude in all matters of business and governmental concern. Perhaps there are few, if any, other men in business who are personally acquainted with more people throughout the State of Oklahoma than was he. His courteous and generous manner and attitude drew people to him. His children are of the same type. He was in good health and looked forward to a life of many more years of usefulness when, on the 12th day of March, 1944, he sustained serious injuries in an automobile wreck from which injuries he died on March 25, 1944. His children, above mentioned, and his grandchildren survive him and are carrying on in a manner he would have them carry on. William B. Skirvin was a far-sighted business man—always looking for the upbuilding of his community and the welfare of the people as a whole and exceptionally devoted to his family. Those who had worked for him and for the hotels which he built, evidenced their love and affection for him by the tremendous attendance at his funeral service, March 27, 1944. It can justly be said that he was one of the outstanding stalwart citizens of Oklahoma, his adopted State, and his efforts produced marks of progress, which are now, and will continue to be for a long number of years, not only useful institutions, but monuments to his efforts and name.

By Fred P. Branson.

Muskogee, Oklahoma

ENLOE VASSALLO VERNOR
1879-1944

Judge Enloe Vassallo Vernor was born on November 24, 1879, in Elkhorn, Washington County, Illinois, and died on March 25, 1944, in Muskogee, Oklahoma, with his widow and two daughters surviving him. Interment was in Memorial Cemetery near Muskogee, Oklahoma. His father, Richard Enloe Vernor, died April 22, 1922, and his mother, Mrs. Mary Culley Vernor, survives him.

Judge Vernor's paternal grandfather was Zenas Vernor who was a patentee of a section of land in what was afterwards Washington County, Illinois, for services rendered in the United States Army in helping to subdue the Black Hawk Indians who were committing numerous and serious depredations against the settlers, on which in 1898 a substantial dwelling house was built by him and which still stands on the original site. On account of the inability to obtain nails the entire structure was put together with wooden pegs. The house has ever remained in the Vernor family since it was patented to Judge Vernor's grandfather, Zenas Vernor, and is now owned by Vilas V. Vernor, also a grandson of Zenas Vernor, and a brother of Judge Vernor, now a resident and practicing attorney of Muskogee for many years.

Richard Enloe Vernor, his father, was a judge in the county and state of his residence. He was a staunch democrat; and notwithstanding the fact that that part of Illinois was largely Republican in politics, he was re-elected to judicial office successively for many years.

Judge Enloe V. Vernor grew to manhood in the county of his birth and his father's family for many years made their home in the town of Nashville, Washington County, Illinois, in which town and county Judge Vernor received his primary education. Early in life he served as city clerk in the town of Nashville, and later had a brief experience as editor of the *Nashville Democrat*. In 1904 he graduated from the law department of Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri. After considering several localities he cast his lot in Muskogee, then Indian Territory, as his permanent location.

The Resolutions adopted by the Muskogee Bar Association at its meeting after the death of Judge Vernor recite:—

"For approximately forty years Judge Vernor was our friend and neighbor, first as a practicing attorney and then as a Judge. He was first elected County Judge of Muskogee County in 1916, and successively re-elected in 1918 and 1920. In 1922 he was elected to the District Bench, and was re-elected successively until 1942 when he voluntarily retired from the bench over the urgent requests of many of his friends who wished him to continue in office."

A number of the members of the bar addressed the meeting on the Resolutions, speaking in terms not only of admiration but of love and affection for their departed friend.

By Benj. Martin

Muskogee, Oklahoma

NAPOLEON D. BLACKSTONE 1881-1944

Napoleon D. (Nip) Blackstone was born in Webbers Falls, Indian Territory, now Muskogee County, Oklahoma, on October 28, 1881, and died at San Angelo, Texas on March 24, 1944. He was the son of Robert E. and Sallie (Jennings) Blackstone, of pioneer families, members of the Cherokee Tribe of Indians, who appreciating the advantages of an education, availed themselves of the opportunity for their children to attend the schools which their tribal government afforded. At Tahlequah, which was the capital of the Cherokee Nation, the Cherokees had erected two handsome and commodious brick buildings, one as a male seminary and the other as a female seminary. Nip Blackstone attended the male seminary.

At an early age, he engaged quite extensively in the cattle business in Indian Territory, and desiring a greater outlet for his operations, he moved to San Angelo, where he and his brother-in-law, Lon Slaughter, became among the largest ranchers in that part of the State of Texas.

In addition to his large ranch and cattle holdings in Texas, Nip Blackstone had other extensive interests, not only in Texas but in Muskogee County, whence he had removed.

He was a man of outstanding character and integrity. The San Angelo Standard Times of March 26, 1944 stated:—

"Named for a warrior, Napoleon Blackstone was a man of peace. Raised in a wild section of Oklahoma, coming to Texas when many people considered sidearms good things to have handy, he came as near bearing out the admonition given the shepherds of Galilee 'peace on earth, good will toward men', as any one who ever lived in this section, his friends agreed yesterday, as they discussed his untimely passing."

Even the best of men have a pet peeve, but if there was an unprotected opening in his armor of good will he never exposed it. He thought

no evil and spoke no evil. In his cynical age of debunking he clung to the bright side, and never saw a cloud he did not know had a silver lining.

W. D. Holcombe, a former mayor of San Angelo, Texas, said:— "He was the best man I ever saw. He helped a lot of people that will never know anything about it. He'll be missed by many West Texans."

He was united in marriage with Miss Gillian Mabson of San Angelo, Texas, who survives him. They have one daughter, Mary. He was interred at San Angelo.

By Benj. Martin

Muskogee, Oklahoma

ISER H. NAKDIMEN
1869-1943

The life story of Iser H. Nakdimen has a real place in the history of Oklahoma and is like that of many an outstanding citizen in America who through his own character and enterprise rose from obscurity to preeminence. It is the story of one who came to America from a foreign land as a lad, unknown and in want; who courageously overcoming every obstacle settled in this region of the Southwest and finally attained the pinnacle of success in the financial world.

Iser H. Nakdimen was born in Grodno, Russia, on September 15, 1869. His parents were Abraham and Goldie Nakdimen, a prominent and wealthy family living near Grodno that had long counted among its members business men, tanners, farmers, cattlemen, merchants, doctors, and lawyers. Up to the age of fourteen years, the son, Iser, was instructed through private tutors in Vienna, Austria, Hamburg, Germany, and Amsterdam, Holland. He could speak five languages. When he was fourteen and a half years old, he arrived in New York City with fourteen cents in his pocket. From that time, he was given no funds by anyone and made his own way in the world.

On his arrival in New York, he did odd jobs including cutting ice on the Hudson River as a day laborer. He worked in a brick yard, peddled tinware, and served as a huskster. He later moved to Chicago where he clerked in a store and, through saving money, became a member of the Chicago Board of Trade at the age of twenty-two.

In 1894, he came south, living at different times at Muldrow, Indian Territory, and at Fort Smith, Arkansas, where he made his home during his last years though he continued to own wide business interests in Oklahoma. He first clerked in a store at Fort Smith, then in a mercantile store at Muldrow. Returning to Fort Smith, he set up an overall manufacture. Later he went back to Muldrow, in present Sequoyah County, Oklahoma, and opened the first bank there.¹

On January 1, 1899, Mr. Nakdimen was united in marriage with Celia Spiro,² born September 11, 1873, and died February 2, 1942. Mr. Nakdimen died at Fort Smith, Arkansas, on April 19, 1943. Interment was in the Jewish cemetery of that City. The surviving members of his family are

¹ Questionnaire on Biography of Members of the Oklahoma Historical Society and letter from H. S. Nakdimen, Fort Smith, Arkansas.

² The maiden name of Celia Spiro Nakdimen is that of the town of Spiro, Le Flore County, which was named for her. The ancient Indian mound in the vicinity of the town, in which wonderful artifacts and ornaments of a prehistoric people were discovered through excavations made under the direction of the University of Oklahoma, is known throughout the archeological field as the "Spiro Mound."

a daughter, Pauline Nakdimen Mendel, born October 21, 1899, now living at Marott Apartment Hotel, Indianapolis, Indiana; a son, Hiram Spiro Nakdimen, born November 12, 1901, who is now President of The City National Bank, Fort Smith, Arkansas; and a granddaughter, Joann Cecile Mendel Altman, born April 11, 1921, now living at 4020 Red Bud Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio.

The subject of this sketch was a Mason (32nd degree) and a member of a number of organizations including Woodmen of the World, Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias, Eagles, and B'nai B'rith. He was President of The City National Bank of Fort Smith and, also, President and owner of the Oklahoma-Arkansas Telephone Company, Poteau, Oklahoma, at the time of his death.

After founding the first Bank at Muldrow, Mr. Nakdimen through the years founded many banks in Eastern Oklahoma and Western Arkansas, sixteen of which were in Oklahoma. At one time, he headed and owned the following banks in this state: Sallisaw State Bank, Sallisaw; First National Bank, Muldrow; Bank of Sequoyah, Muldrow; Sallisaw Bank and Trust Company, Sallisaw; Bank of Vian, Vian; Farmers Bank, Gore; Farmers Bank, Fort Gibson; Farmers National Bank, Fort Gibson; Bank of Braggs, Braggs; First National Bank, Eufaula. In addition to heading The City National Bank at Fort Smith, he owned three other banks in Arkansas; Citizens National Bank, Greenwood; First National Bank, Mansfield; and First National Bank, Hartford.

As a leader in civic enterprises of his community, he was active in promoting in many private business enterprises, and lent his counsel and support to retail stores and manufactures. A friend once wrote this about Mr. Nakdimen:³ "There is none of that chilling pride air about him which unfortunately characterizes many men of wealth and large affairs. He is frank and outspoken and the poorest working man looks good to him. He has helped many and many a struggling farmer and business man out of a tight place, and his deeds of kindness are scattered like threads of gold in the woof and warp of his life."

During the panic of 1907, when the banks throughout the country were practically out of business for lack of cash, Mr. Nakdimen was the only banker in this region and in almost the whole south who advertised in the newspapers that he would lend money on cotton to farmers and would pay out cash in making the loans. Up into thousands of bales were stored in warehouses as a result of this, held for the farmers, Mr. Nakdimen inducing them not to sell at six or seven cents a pound. After a few months, the cotton was sold at fifteen cents a pound to the advantage of those who had obtained their loans from him.

In 1911, he advocated and worked for a National Guaranty Law for Banks, the forerunner of the present Deposit Insurance. He spoke on this subject at the Oklahoma State Bankers convention in Oklahoma City in the same year.

It was in this year, also, that Mr. Nakdimen came to the rescue of the State of Oklahoma and purchased its \$1,750,000 building bonds issued for completion of public buildings and the Eastern Oklahoma Hospital at Vinita. For a year and a half prior to this, the State had been unable to find a buyer for these bonds. Within forty-eight hours after Mr. Nakdimen's purchase, it was in a position to complete its public works. This

³ *Fort Smith Tribune*, Special Edition, Twenty-fifth Anniversary of The City was a momentous occasion for the new State, Governor Lee Cruce, public National Bank of Fort Smith, Arkansas, October 13, 1939.

officials, and newspaper men throughout Oklahoma commending Mr. Nakdimen for his public spirit.

Known for his interest in all matters pertaining to the good of his community, state and nation, his writings and talks found space unsolicited in banking and telephone journals and in newspapers generally throughout the country. He himself was owner of the following newspapers in Oklahoma: *Vinita Daily Journal* and *Vinita Leader*, Vinita; *Democrat American* and *Sequoyah County Democrat*, Sallisaw; *LeFlore County Sun*, Poteau; *Stigler News Sentinel*, Stigler; *Adair County Democrat*, Stilwell; *Cherokee County Democrat*, Tahlequah.

When a branch of the League to Enforce Peace was organized and a call for a convention was issued to be held in Oklahoma City, on March 29, 1917, Governor Robert L. Williams honored Mr. Nakdimen with appointment as a member to represent the State in this world-wide, non-political, and non-sectarian movement.⁴ He was held in honor and respect by Governor William H. Murray who appointed him honorary colonel on the Governor's staff. At this time, when visiting the State Capitol, Mr. Nakdimen was introduced from the floor of the House by Representative Benjamin Martin, from Muskogee County, and Speaker Carlton Weaver interrupted the session to extend a public welcome, saying in part: "Mr. Nakdimen is the one man who is known for the helping hand he has given in an unselfish way to many a legislator as well as the counties and towns of Eastern Oklahoma."

A glimpse of Mr. Nakdimen's deeply religious spirit and philosophy of life are found in an extract from his speech to a convention of teachers of Sequoyah and Adair counties some years ago:

"In order to be a good man or woman, always remember there is a God above us and a Sabbath to be observed. If you want to be satisfied always look upon the man who is below you instead of above you and who has less than you have, and when you do, you will always be satisfied."

In Oklahoma history, Iser H. Nakdimen has been recorded a public spirited citizen and a broad humanitarian. Among his friends, he is remembered for his geniality, diligence, and rectitude, and among the members of his family, as a loving husband and father.

By Muriel H. Wright

Oklahoma City

⁴ Original certificate of Honorary Appointment by the Governor of the State of Oklahoma, signed at Oklahoma City on March 13, 1917, by R. L. Williams, Governor, and J. L. Lyon, Secretary of State.