

TRAVIS FRANKLIN HENSLEY

1851-1944

By Gladys Hensley Engle

The story of a man whose life span of ninety-three years covered the early history of the State of Oklahoma cannot be told in a brief obituary. The career of this pioneer editor whose writings left their imprint on thousands of individuals and whose efforts in civic and political affairs furthered the interest of his town, county and state, can only be briefly reviewed when his book of life is finished.

Travis Franklin Hensley was born September 21, 1851, near Normandy, Tipton County, Indiana, the eldest child of Eliza Ann Greenwood and Charles Clarke Hensley.¹ In 1867, he moved with his parents from Indiana to Davies County, Missouri. There he received his early education and after graduation from the local schools he received a teacher's certificate and taught school for three years. This teaching experience showed him his own need for further education, so he entered Grandriver College at Edinburg, Missouri, completed the four years' course in three years, and graduated there in 1878.

On December 25, 1873, he was married to Mary Emily Mullen. Three children were born to them, Claude E. Hensley, now residing

¹ The following genealogical notes are from the manuscripts "Collins-Hensley History" and "Hensley Genealogy" by Claude E. Hensley, on file in the Library of the Oklahoma Historical Society.—Ed.

The first of the Hensley family to reach America were three brothers, James, George and Richardson Hensley who came over from England about 1650. Travis Franklin Hensley was the lineal descendant of Richardson Hensley.

Ancestors of Travis Franklin Hensley:

- (1) Parents: (Father) *Charles Clark Hensley*, born November 22, 1822, in Henry County, Kentucky, and died in Idaho August, 1911. (Mother) *Eliza Ann Greenwood*, born April 24, 1824, in Alleghany County, Virginia, married Charles Clark Hensley in Morgan County, Indiana, 1850.
- (2) Paternal grandparents: (Grandfather) *Dr. Berryman Hensley*, born in 1758, was a well known practicing physician in Kentucky and Indiana, and died in Indiana November 10, 1863, at the age of 99 years. (Grandmother) *Elizabeth Clark*, who was the second wife of Berryman Hensley, was born in Henry County, Kentucky, and was the niece of Gen. George Rogers Clark (the frontiersman) and the daughter of Captain William Clark, Military Commander of the Lewis and Clark Expedition in 1804-06 and the first governor of Missouri Territory.
- (3) Maternal grandparents: (Grandfather) *Henry B. Greenwood* was born 1790 and died 1845, his grandfather being Dr. Samuel Greenwood of Virginia, who made the famous "walrus tusk" false teeth for General George Washington. (Grandmother) *Elizabeth Pruitt* was born in 1801 and died 1845 in Morgan County, Indiana.

in Oklahoma City;² Frank Hensley, who died on February 12, 1939, at El Reno;³ and Gladys Hensley Engle (Mrs. Frank M.) who resides in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Mrs. Hensley's death occurred at El Reno on November 24, 1938, just one month before they were to have celebrated their sixty-fifth wedding anniversary.⁴

Travis F. Hensley first entered the newspaper business in 1880, when he purchased the *Peoples Press* at Princeton, Missouri. In addition to his newspaper work he read law and was admitted to the bar in Missouri in 1884. In 1885, he received an appointment from President Grover Cleveland to the office of Special Legal Examiner in the Pension Department. He accepted this appointment and moved to Washington, D. C. He left the government service in 1889 and established a law office in Washington, serving as a pension and patent attorney. It was during his residence that he matriculated at the National Law School of Georgetown University receiving his law degree there in 1889.

He first came to Oklahoma in June, 1889, when he visited Guthrie and Oklahoma City. From the latter place he traveled via stage coach to Old Frisco (near Yukon), Reno City, and Kingfisher. At that time, the townsite of what is now El Reno had just been platted. Attracted by the opportunities offered in the new country, he returned in 1892 to make the run in the Cheyenne and Arapaho opening of that year. At this time, he purchased the *Oklahoma Democrat*, changed the name to *El Reno Democrat*, and plunged into the newspaper field in a vigorous way which soon earned him the reputation of being one of the territory's most courageous editors.⁵

His other newspaper activities in Oklahoma included the publishing of the first newspaper which appeared in the Cherokee Strip after it opened to settlement. This, called the *West Side Democrat*, was published at Enid from September 16, 1893, the day of the opening. He also published *Hensley's Magazine* at El Reno during 1903 and 1904. Later, with his two sons, he owned and published the *Peoples Press* at El Reno. Thus, the first and the last newspapers which he owned were published under the same name, *The Peoples Press*, a name which symbolized his ideal of what a news-

² Claude E. Hensley, *How El Reno Acquired Its Name*, in *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, XI (December, 1933), No. IV, pp. 1116-17.

³ Gladys Hensley Engle, *Frank Hensley, 1877-1939*, in *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, XVII (March, 1939), No. 1, p. 128.

⁴ Joseph B. Thoburn, *Mary Emily Hensley, 1859-1938*, *ibid.*, pp. 124-5. See *Appendix* for story of Daniel Boone's Compass and genealogy of Mary Emily (Mullen) Hensley.—Ed.

⁵ Daniel William Peery, Secretary of the Oklahoma Historical Society (1930-36) was associated with Mr. Hensley in the publication of the *Oklahoma Democrat*. —Paul Nesbit, *Daniel William Peery*, in *The Chronicles*, XX (March, 1942), No. 1, pp. 3-8.

paper should be, truly a publication of and for the people of his community.

During his publishing activities, Mr. Hensley was always greatly assisted by his wife, who was an accomplished writer and business woman. No story of his life and work could be complete without mention of her in this connection, for Mary Emily Hensley was indeed both wife and business partner.

Mr. Hensley was also owner and manager of "Hensley's Book Store" which for many years was a land mark in El Reno. Two generations of school children purchased their text books across its counters and the reading habits of many townspeople were formed and encouraged by its offerings.

Mr. Hensley was one of the founders of the Oklahoma Press Association and served as its sixth president. He was later honored by being made a life member of the Association. It was the Oklahoma Press Association in its annual meeting held at Kingfisher, on May 27, 1893, that organized the Oklahoma Historical Society.⁶ Mr. Hensley was one of the first of the pioneer editors to be elected to the Hall of Fame by the Oklahoma Memorial Society. This occurred in 1934.

Always an active figure in civic and political life, Mr. Hensley was twice elected mayor of El Reno. During this period he installed El Reno's first sewer system and secured from the United States Government the land on which the El Reno Cemetery is located. During his second term occurred the famous land lottery drawing for the Kiowa-Comanche Indian lands in 1901. At that time El Reno, a city of about 5,000 population, grew over-night to 120,000 as people from all over the nation thronged there to participate in the drawing for land.

Mr. Hensley served in both houses of the Oklahoma State Legislature, being elected to the House of Representatives in 1912 and 1914 and to the State Senate for 1916 and 1918. During World War I, he served as a special income tax investigator for the United States government. He later served six terms in the Income Tax Division of the State Auditor's office.

Mr. Hensley was a member of the Christian Church, a life member of Keystone Chapter number 9, Royal Arch Masons, at El Reno,

⁶ Some of the members of the Oklahoma Press Association en route to this meeting stopped by El Reno expecting that Mr. Hensley would join them and go on the rest of the way to Kingfisher. He had been called away from home on business and afterward always regretted that he was not present at the organization of the Oklahoma Historical Society. However he was actively interested in the plans and the work of the Historical Society from its beginning.—Information from Claude E. Hensley. See, also, Thomas H. Doyle, *History of the Oklahoma Historical Society*, published in pamphlet form by the Historical Society in 1935 pp. 45.—Ed.

and a member of Knights Templar. He remained active and vitally interested in all that concerned the welfare of his city and state until ill health forced his retirement in 1940. He passed away in Oklahoma City on December 2, 1944, and was placed to rest beside his wife in Rosehill Mausoleum, Oklahoma City.

An editorial which appeared in the *El Reno American* characterized him as follows:

"A Pioneer Townbuilder Passes. In the death of Travis Franklin Hensley El Reno has lost one of the men who was much responsible for the early day development of this city. A forceful, fighting editor, Hensley came here in the early nineties and immediately embarked in the newspaper business. During the years he wielded a powerful influence in the fourth estate of Oklahoma, starting a number of papers, exercising a trenchant pen and maintaining an active part in early day press association activities. He was voted a life membership in the association several years ago.

"Mr. Hensley took an active interest in El Reno civic affairs and served as mayor of El Reno during the trying days incident to the famed land drawing of 1901. A courageous and far-seeing citizen, he aided much in advancing many needed improvements for the young city. His greatest monument will not be a tombstone, but the imprint he left upon this city."

APPENDIX

DANIEL BOONE'S COMPASS AND SUN GLASS

By Claude E. Hensley

About the year 1795 Daniel Boone gave to a 12-year-old boy, Abraham Kirkendal Miller his compass and sun glass. The Miller homestead at that time was located on the Kentucky-Indiana frontier and was the last white settlement. Boone in his travels in that section often stopped at the Miller home, staying a week or two at a time. The boy Abraham became quite a favorite of Boone's, and he was allowed to accompany him on hunting trips in the vicinity of the home. Young Miller spent many a happy hour in Boone's company on these hunting trips and was taught woodcraft, alertness, the proper way to load a rifle without the wasting of powder, the use of the compass and sun glass, etc. Boone cautioned the boy time and again about getting excited in time of danger and never to pull a trigger until he had a "dead bead" on his object.

The Miller family had several head of cows and it was young Abraham's duty to drive them up at milking time in the evening. The year Boone gave his compass and sun glass to Abraham there was a plague of flies in that section. They were so numerous it was impossible to milk during daylight and as a result they were left in what was called the "lower pasture" where the thick brush protected them from the flies where they could feed without being worried by this insect pest. The cows in their travels from the pasture to the milking place had made a path near which a large tree stood, one of the limbs extending out over it. One evening about dusk as the boy was on his way down this path after the cows, on nearing the tree, he saw something laying on the limb over the path. He was unable to tell whether the object was Indian or animal. However, without hesitating he raised his rifle, took careful aim and fired. Not waiting to see the result of the shot, dropped the rifle and left on a run for the house. His father on hearing the sound of the gun hurried to meet his son and was told what had happened. On investigation it was learned the boy had killed a very large panther, the largest any of them

had ever seen, measuring eleven feet from tip to tip. The animal was skinned and the hide was stretched on the side of the log house in the process of tanning, a few days after which Boone stopped at the Miller home, and on being told of the foregoing, gave young Miller his compass and sun glass, as a reward for his conduct in time of danger.⁷

Abraham Kirkendal Miller on reaching manhood had developed into one of the greatest rifle shots in Kentucky. He had great endurance and was very fleet of foot and was very alert, nothing missing his keen eyes. In shooting matches he often came home driving six or seven head of cattle he had won with his rifle. In 1811 a little over a year after his marriage he was one of a company of 135 or more Kentuckians who went to Indiana to offer their assistance to William Henry Harrison and forces in their fight against the Indians. This company of mounted Kentuckians on reaching Harrison's camp learned his force consisted of regular army troops and militiamen and that he wanted to fight the Indians according to army rules and regulations. This so disgusted the Kentuckians, every man of whom was an experienced Indian fighter, they went into camp a little over a mile from Harrison's and immediately sent out scouts to try and locate the Indians. One of the scouts, Abraham K. Miller, succeeded in running down an Indian and bringing him in from whom they learned their location. Early the next morning the Indians attacked Harrison and were getting the best of him until the mounted Kentuckians got into the fight, the Battle of Tippecanoe, November 5, 1811.

On reaching manhood Abraham Kirkendal Miller and William Mullen, (my great grand father), married sisters, daughters of Moses Endicott.

My grand father, James Mullen, was Abraham Kirkendal Miller's favorite nephew and on the latter's death in 1866 the compass and sun glass were given to him.

Upon my grand father James Mullen's death in 1888 the compass was given to my mother, Mrs. T. F. Hensley, the sun glass going to an aunt of mine. In 1928 the compass was given to me by my mother.

GENEALOGY

Abraham Miller Sr., moved to Kentucky about the close of the Revolutionary war and settled in Bourbon county. He married Elizabeth Kirkendal. Their children were: Annie, Rachel, Abraham, John, Charity, Aaron, Jane, Rebecca, Jacob, and Martha. Annie married Jacob Carbough; Rachel, Henry Buckner, Abraham, Elizabeth Endicott; John, Margaret Courtmill; Aaron, Polly Ravencroft; Jane, James Endicott; Jacob, Polly Goble; Martha, John Cummings.

Moses Endicott was born at Burlington, N. J., 1759, was a soldier in the Revolutionary war. His wife was Martha Hill. He moved from Surry county, North Carolina to Bourbon county, Kentucky in 1786. Their children were: Joseph, Sarah, Jesse, Elizabeth, Martha, John, James, Moses, Samuel, Margaret, William and Nancy.

Joseph was married to Rebecca Caza; Sarah to William Mullen; Jesse to Sallie Lowe; Elizabeth to Abraham Kirkendal Miller; Martha to William Ross; John to Nancy Adair; James to Jane Miller; Moses to Sarah Mafit; Margaret to James Smith; William to Ellen Drummonds; Nancy to William King.

Captain Thomas Mullen was born in Loudon county, Virginia and was stationed at Fort Pitt at the close of the Revolution and was mustered

⁷ Reference to Daniel Boone's compass and sunglass may be found in the article, "The Endicotts of Indiana" by Mabel Nisbet McLaughlin in *Indiana Magazine of History*, XXIX (March, 1933), No. 1, pp. 26-37.

out at Philadelphia. He went from Loudoun county to Bourbon county, Kentucky in 1783. His family consisted of James, Richard, Nancy, Betsy, Asa, Sallie and William.

William Mullen was born June 15, 1781 and was married to Sarah Endicott in 1806. He died June 5, 1855; she died April 27, 1827. Their children were as follows: Brazilla, born January 7, 1807; Seldon, June 28, 1809; James, June 30, 1811; Thomas, September 13, 1813; Moses, December 17, 1815; Martha, January 18, 1818; William J., August 12, 1824.

James Mullen married Permella Ann Lofty (Mikels) in Indiana in 1855. Their children were: Joseph Riley, born 1856; Mary Emily, born 1859; Lydia Jane, born 1861; Amanda Ellen, born 1864; Minnie, born 1869.

Mary Emily Mullen married Travis F. Hensley in 1873. Their children: Claude Eugene, born April 8, 1876; Frank born October 3, 1877; Gladys, born 1898.