

ELLEN HOWARD MILLER

By Lillian Delly*

Ellen Howard Miller, "Bird Woman of Oklahoma," was born January 2, 1862, at Enterprise, McDonald County, Missouri, the daughter of James Chastene Blythe and Sarah Jemima Rogers Blythe. She died November 13, 1944, at her home, 1201 Keeler Avenue, Bartlesville, Oklahoma.

Ellen Howard Blythe was educated in the public schools of Indian Territory and at The Cherokee Female Seminary, Tahlequah, Indian Territory. She taught school two years before her marriage to William Wallace Miller on July 21, 1880, at Vinita, Indian Territory, where Mr. Miller was engaged in the hardware business. They had three children: William Roy Miller, 1216 Hurley Avenue, Ft. Worth, Texas; Howard Kenneth Miller, 214 North Harding Street, Ft. Worth; and a daughter, Mrs. Ray M. Buck, 1201 Keeler, Bartlesville, all of whom survive.¹ Mrs. Miller was preceded in death by her husband, who died March 31, 1909.

In addition to rearing a family, Ellen Howard Miller had throughout her life, an absorbing interest in the civic and cultural development, as well as in the conservation of the natural resources, of her State. At the age of sixteen, while a student at the Cherokee Female Seminary, she organized and served as the first president of a study club for girls. After moving to Vinita she was the leader of a woman's organization which undertook as one of its projects, the surveying, fencing, and landscaping of the cemetery; also, this group aided in the development of the schools of the community. Mrs. Miller was a delegate from Indian Territory to the World's Columbian Exposition, held in Chicago in 1893.

A member of long standing of the Tuesday Club of Bartlesville, Mrs. Miller held various offices in that organization. She was one of the first to see the possibilities in the development of what is now known as Johnstone Park, and the project was sponsored by that club. For her years of service, the Tuesday Club awarded Mrs. Miller an honorary life membership, and at the golden jubilee celebration tea held by the members on April 3, 1940, she was chosen the outstanding pioneer member.

*Member of Oklahoma State Writers, Inc., and the Oklahoma Poetry Society, Lillian Delly is one of the State's most promising writers, having won first place for her poetry and other writings in a number of statewide contests. Her articles and poetry have appeared in state and national publications, including *Red Earth Poetry Magazine* and the *Christian Science Monitor*.—Ed.

¹This tribute to Ellen Howard Miller is based on original notes, press notices, and other material submitted to the Archives of the Oklahoma Historical Society by her daughter, Mrs. Ray M. Buck, of Bartlesville, Oklahoma.—Ed.

During World War I, Mrs. Miller was Chairman of Women's Social Service Work, in Bartlesville, and her work in that capacity brought a personal letter from Secretary McAdoo, commending her for outstanding service to her Country.

At the close of World War I, when the citizens of Washington County were considering a memorial to their men who had served in the armed forces, it was Mrs. Miller who suggested that the bridge to be built across the Caney River, on the Tulsa-Bartlesville highway then under construction, be designated Memorial Bridge. This idea was heartily approved by the citizens of Washington County, and by the county commissioners, but there was no money that could be allotted by the County, for the pylons, and for the bronze tablets where the names of the men would be inscribed. Mrs. Miller was undaunted; she took the proposition to Frank Phillips, wealthy oil man of Bartlesville, who agreed to donate the money for the pylons and for the bronze tablets, if Mrs. Miller would undertake the task of securing the names of Washington County Service Men. Fifteen hundred and fifty names appear on the bronze tablets, and along the highway on the approach to Memorial Bridge, a Victory Row of trees was planted at the instigation of Mrs. Miller.

She served several years as a member of the Park Board of Bartlesville. Because of her outstanding work in civic enterprises, she was invited to become a member of the American Civic Association, a national organization.

Mrs. Miller was a life member of the Oklahoma Historical Society; a member of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and of the Daughters of the American Revolution. She led in the organization of the Washington County Indian Association, The Indian Women's Club of Bartlesville, and the Au-wa-nar-sa and Wah-ha-oak Clubs of Washington County. She was ever alert to promote the welfare of the Indian.

Farm Women's organization were not forgotten in the wide range of Ellen Howard Miller's interests: In 1914, she was a delegate from Washington County to the World's International Dry Farming Congress, which was held in Tulsa. At this meeting, her farm took the first prize for the best lawn and farm surroundings. She was First Vice-President of the International Congress for Farm Women, and a delegate to the first Oklahoma Conservation Congress, held in the State Capitol Building, Oklahoma City, December 10, 1924.

The young people of the State were not forgotten: Various groups had the use of her farm for their meetings; the Washington County 4-H Club girls held their training school on the farm, with Mrs. Miller assisting in the nature study. In conjunction with her nature and bird work with the Boy Scouts of America, she was made a life member of the National Advisory Board of Boy Scouts.

It would seem that to limit Ellen Howard Miller to the title, "Bird Woman of Oklahoma," was lacking because of her many interests, however, it was the work that seemed closest to her heart.

She began her nature study, and her work in the conservation of the bird, flower and wildlife of Oklahoma, on the two hundred acre farm, lying along the Caney River, about twenty miles south of Bartlesville, which Mr. Miller acquired when he disposed of his business interests in Vinita. This farm soon became known as the Ellen Howard Miller Farm, and in January, 1926, the state fish and game commission made it the nucleus of the Ellen Howard Miller Game Preserve No. 18, and extended the preserve to include approximately 2000 acres.

Ellen Howard Miller served seven years in the State Federation of Women's Clubs, as Chairman of the Committee on Birds, Flowers and Wildlife. It was during this period that she spent two years at the University of Oklahoma, studying the subject of ornithology. She gave up the duties as State Chairman, to assume the duties of National Chairman of the same committee in the General Federation.

As a result of the splendid work done by Ellen Howard Miller in performing the duties of National Chairman, she won wide fame. She was invited to lecture throughout the country; from the owner of the Chateau de Saint Hillaire, two hours drive from Paris, France, came a request to her for advice in the building of a bird sanctuary. Her many published articles about her work, brought an invitation to membership in the National League of American Penwomen. She was a life member of the Izaak Walton League, and a member of the Audubon Society, and was instrumental in having a course in nature study established in the public schools.

One point that Ellen Howard Miller stressed is that no lawn is too small, or grounds too large, for a bird sanctuary. The Ellen Howard Miller farm had a natural rock beach, about a mile long and fifty feet wide, extending along the Caney River, which formed an ideal spot for a bird sanctuary. Within the acreage surrounding the beach, bird houses designed to meet the need of different species, were hung in the trees; bags of suet, pieces of cheese, corn, kaffir corn, and other foods for birds, were hung from tree limbs; feeding platforms and troughs were placed throughout the area. As many as forty-eight different species of birds have been seen feeding in the sanctuary at one time. Yet, Mrs. Miller's back yard at 1201 Keeler Avenue, Bartlesville, was a haven for birds, too, and if the yard was covered with snow and ice, her back porch became their refuge.

Mrs. Miller's desire to protect the bird life of Oklahoma was not founded on sentimentality; she maintained that most species should be protected, if only for their usefulness to farmers. A dove,

she said, could do as much work as a farm hand in destroying weed seeds, and one quail might eat as many as 1000 harmful insects in a single day (facts borne out by government research). She recognized the English sparrow as a nuisance, and led in a campaign to help rid the city of Bartlesville of the pests.

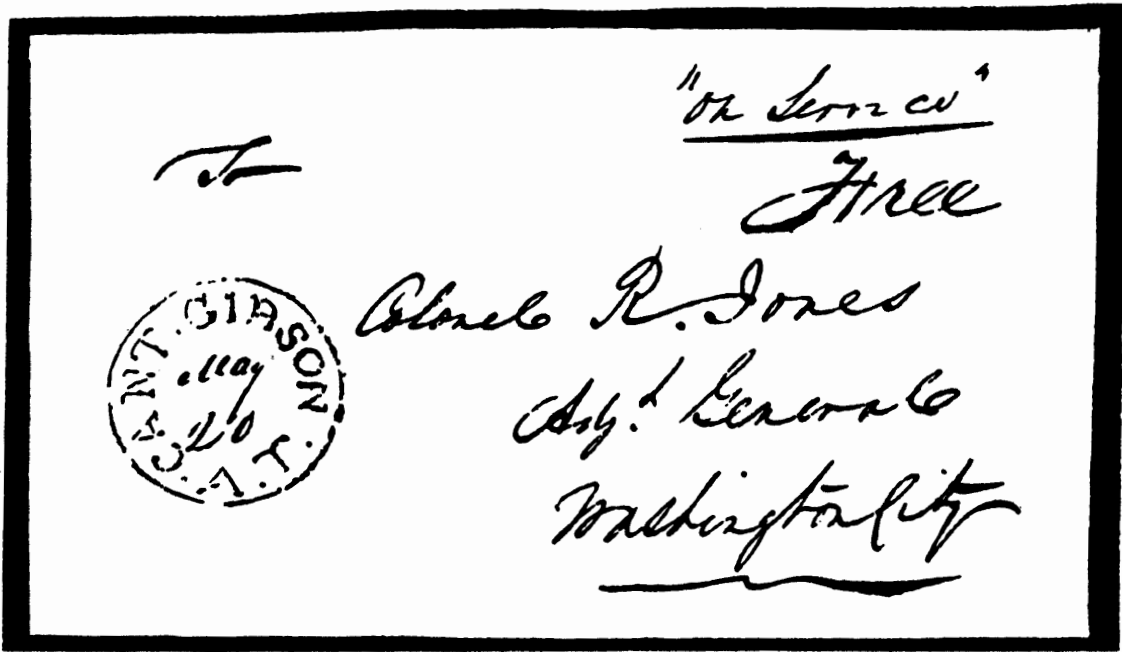
Ellen Howard Miller was a descendant of the famous John Rogers, member of the staff of General Andrew Jackson in the War of 1812, and instrumental in building one of the first churches in Georgia. Her paternal grandfather was William Blythe, substantial land and slave owner in Tennessee, and the location of his old home, is now the thriving town called Blythe's Ferry. William Blythe married Nancy Fields, one-fourth Cherokee, daughter of Chief Richard Fields, who held land grants from the government, to valuable Texas lands.

Her maternal grandfather was Joseph Rogers, of Milton, formerly Forsythe County, Georgia, who came west in 1837, and settled near Baxter Springs, Kansas, where he built a handsome farm home, and aided in the early development of that part of Kansas. The maternal grandmother was Hannah Foster, daughter of Elijah Foster, also a member of a distinguished Georgia family.

In addition to her children, Mrs. Miller is survived by one granddaughter, Mrs. Ross Cunningham (nee Ellen Frances Buck), 312 South Carmelina Avenue, Brentwood Heights, Los Angeles 24, California; by a grand-son, William Blythe Buck, 1207 McLish, Ardmore, Oklahoma; and by three great-grand-children: Ann Marie Buck, 1207 McLish, Ardmore; Lee Ross and John Blythe Cunningham, also of 312 South Carmelina, Los Angeles.

In commenting on the passing of Ellen Howard Miller, the *Bartlesville Daily Enterprise* of November 14, 1944, read:

To the youngsters and to the newcomers to Bartlesville, the name Ellen Howard Miller may not have meant much. But to old timers and to folks who have lived in this section for any reasonable number of years, that name was synonymous with character and service to mankind and to the wildlife and feathered folk. We lost a grand character and a citizen when that Indian Territory pioneer died here Monday. The world was a little better because she passed this way and her going leaves a niche of emptiness in many places.



(From the collection of Dr. Carroll Chase)

Postmarked 20 May 1828. The oldest known letter bearing a postmark from what is now Oklahoma.