

## THOMAS PRYOR GORE

1870-1949

*By Charles Evans*

Goldsmith said: "Such is the patriot's boast where ere he roam, his first best country ever is at home."

It is the observation of history that however far fame and power may take a man, death returns him to the land of the people he loved best. On Friday morning, March 18, 1949 the body of Thomas Pryor Gore, the renowned and beloved son whom Oklahoma had honored through long years, was received by those who love him well for final rest in Oklahoma soil.

Ex-Senator Gore was born in Webster County, Mississippi, on December 10, 1870. He was the son of Thomas Madison and Caroline Elizabeth Wingo Gore. It is interesting to note that while his father spent many of his years as a farmer yet he became a successful lawyer late in life.

Senior United States Senator from Oklahoma, Elmer Thomas, announced the death of Ex-Senator Gore before the United States Senate and pointed to his former colleague, "Ex-Senator Gore as one of the marvels of modern times." This was all together true, because he was the first blind Senator to enter the United States Senate and entering there, became one of the foremost leaders in the greatest deliberative body upon the earth.

Nature had bestowed upon him genius for though becoming blind at eleven years of age he revealed signal brilliancy in his high school and state normal school life. He looked in upon political life early as a page boy in the Mississippi Legislature. He set his mark toward the law and after three years of teaching to secure money he entered law school and finishing began his remarkable career. Senator Gore like many other splendid Oklahomans moved to Oklahoma through Texas. He ran for Congress as a young man in one of the Congressional Districts of Texas but was defeated as he espoused the Populist movement.

In 1901, Mr. Gore moved to Lawton, Oklahoma, which was ever afterward his permanent residence. His Lawton neighbors sent him to the Territorial Council and soon, throughout the territories, young Gore became known as one of the most eloquent and able thinkers in the two territories on matters of government. On November 16, 1907, Oklahoma entered the Union and four men came forward and offered their services to the young commonwealth for nomination in the Democratic primary for the United

States Senate: Robert L. Owen, Henry M. Furman, Roy Hoffman, and Thomas Pryor Gore. Owen and Furman received the highest number of votes, but due to an agreement whereby the eastern part of the state should have one Senator and the western part another, Mr. Furman withdrew though he had received a larger vote than Mr. Gore, and Mr. Gore and Robert L. Owen were elected by the First State Legislature as the United States Senators from Oklahoma.<sup>1</sup>

There is no need to dwell upon the career of this man. The archives at Washington and all the records of Oklahoma from 1907 to 1937 reveal no more matchless figure. United States Senator Saltonstall of Massachusetts pictured him in the Senate Chamber as one of the most remarkable statesman of any time. Eloquent beyond the measure of explanation, features of noble cast, his figure of most graceful mold, voice resonant and persuasive, he stood in the chief forum of the United States as a Webster of his day and fearlessly defended the rights of the common man.

Senator Gore was re-elected by the Second Legislature for the term 1909-1915, as United States Senator from Oklahoma. In the elections of 1914, the people of Oklahoma voted directly for United States Senator for the first time. Senator Gore was the Democratic nominee and was elected by the people in this year for his third term as United States Senator from Oklahoma (1915-1921). He fearlessly opposed the entrance of America in 1917 to the first World War. He knew when he did that, the people of Oklahoma would defeat him, which they did in the general elections in 1920. But the people called him back to their service in 1930, and he was sent again to the United States Senate, (1931-1937). In 1936, again he knew that he was throwing himself across the path of what is termed the "New Deal" but he told his friends that he would rather follow his conscience than follow any man. So again he was defeated and was ever afterward inactive in politics except on the lecture platform and on occasions when he was called throughout America to defend a great cause.

The reader of a sketch like this would insist upon an answer to the question, "How without sight could a man arrive to such heights of learning and commanding debate?" The answer is a glorious one. In 1900, Mr. Gore married Miss Nina Kay and she

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<sup>1</sup>The First State Legislature convened in November, 1907, and under the Law, with the Democratic members in the majority, elected the Democratic nominees as the first United States senators from Oklahoma. Since Oklahoma had been admitted to statehood in an odd numbered year, the first terms for the two senators were of unequal length: The "long term" would expire on March 3, 1913; the "short term," on March 3, 1909. To decide which of the two senators should hold these terms, lots were drawn. Senator Gore drew the short term, and thus entered the campaign for re-election in the first regular state elections in 1908.—Ed.

through all the years after was literally the Senator's eyes. If Thomas Pryor Gore became a marvel of modern times, none the less was Nina Kay Gore, his wife, who supplied him not only with the inspiration that only a wife can give but his reading, his notes, and that meticulous service with only a faithful, competent secretary can offer. Here it may be said that the Oklahoma Memorial Association has elected Nina Kay Gore to enter the Hall of Fame in this State November 16, 1949.

His death took place May 16, 1949, in his Washington home. On Friday afternoon, March 18, Honorable Luther Harrison with eloquence paid tribute to this distinguished Oklahoman before a large audience including the Governor of the State and other dignitaries in the Street and Draper Funeral Home, at Oklahoma City. The body rests in a special crypt in Rose Hill Cemetery, Oklahoma City, there to await a final decision on the part of the family as to where shall be his final resting place. He had expressed at one time the hope that his final abode would be on the top of Mount Scott, overlooking his Lawton home and the long sweep of the hills and valleys of Oklahoma he loved so well.