

JESSE BARTLEY MILAM

By Grant Foreman

All too soon the Board of Directors of the Oklahoma Historical Society again has the melancholy duty of observing the passing of one of our most valuable and loved members. Jesse Bartley Milam, second in a large family of children, was born March 10, 1884, in Ellis County, Texas, the son of William Guinn Milam and Sarah Ellen Couch Milam. When the boy was three years old his father removed the little family to the neighborhood of Chelsea, Indian Territory, where he engaged in stock raising. Here young Milam began his education in the school at Alluwe, which he continued at the Chelsea Public school and later completed at the Cherokee Male Seminary in Tahlequah.

At the age of nineteen, by his mother, a one-sixteenth Cherokee, he was enrolled with eight brothers and sisters as a one-thirty second degree Cherokee. After he finished school, he was launched into a business career by his father in the conduct of his hardware store in Chelsea.

In time as his business experience and competence expanded, Mr. Milam purchased an interest in the Bank of Chelsea, the first state bank in the Indian Territory, in which he became cashier and in 1915 the president. As his experience and acquaintance broadened, Mr. Milam assumed a larger place in the business world and in the confidence of the people with whom he lived; he identified himself with financial interests in Rogers County, and in 1936 he was made president of the principal bank in that county, the Rogers County Bank at Claremore.

He did not limit his activities to banking interests and with shrewd appreciation of the possibilities of the oil field just opening up in the county within the orbit of his banking operations he ventured into that inviting field and in 1904, in association with Woodley G. Phillips he drilled his first oil well on his own allotment near Alluwe and Chelsea. The success of this venture led Mr. Milam to extend his operations in the field in which he continued to be interested, and before his death he and Mr. Phillips owned and operated a large number of oil wells in that part of Oklahoma.

Possessed of tireless energy and capacity for work and planning, Mr. Milam became interested in many business enterprises that contributed to the welfare of the people within the range of his influence.

On April 6, 1904, Mr. Milam was united in marriage with Miss Elizabeth P. McSpadden, a member of a distinguished Cherokee family and from then to his death he lived under the benedic-

tion of this gracious lady. This union was blessed by the following children: Hinman Stuart Milam, born April 16, 1907, now of Chelsea, Oklahoma; Mildred Elizabeth Milam born May 10, 1910, married to Phillip Hubbard Viles, and now living at Claremore, Oklahoma; and Mary Ellan Milam, born May 16, 1916, married to George Joseph Stevenson and now living at Tarkio, Missouri.

Mr. Milam was a member of the Masonic Lodge, a thirty-second degree Mason, and a Shriner; a member of the Memorial Methodist Church of Chelsea; a member of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows; Past president of the Claremore Rotary Club and a member of the Claremore Chamber of Commerce

President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed Mr. Milam principal chief of the Cherokee Nation on April 16, 1941, for a term of one year; he was re-appointed April 17, 1942 for one year, and on May 18, 1943 he received the appointment for four years, and again succeeded himself on May 18, 1947 for four years.

During his later years Mr. Milam was afflicted with a heart ailment that interfered with his normal activities though he continued to maintain his interest in the work of this Society; but death finally overtook him on May 8, 1949 in a Kansas City Hospital and brought him to an end of a useful and distinguished career, lamented by Oklahomans far and wide. He was survived by Mrs. Milam, all three of his children, and eight grandchildren, three sisters, Miss Viola Milam, Mrs. Benjamin F. Mehr, and Mrs. Robert H. Rucker; and two brothers, Noolie T. and Walker W. Milam.

Funeral services were conducted at Memorial Methodist Church in Chelsea, Oklahoma, on Wednesday, May 11, 1949, by the Reverend Forest E. Dudley of Kilgore, Texas followed by interment in the Chelsea Cemetery.

Mr. Milam's interest in his people took the form of an intelligent study of their history, which resulted in his accumulation of one of the most extensive and best selected libraries in the state. His interest in history resulted in his becoming a life member of the Oklahoma Historical Society of which he was elected a director. He was a member of the Sons of the American Revolution, and former president of the Cherokee Seminaries Association.

He was a faithful attendant at board meetings of the Historical Society and his advice and counsel were listened to with the great respect to which they were entitled. He had a sound appreciation of historical values and was in every way competent to guide this Society in the way of greatest usefulness and achievement. Mr. Milam had an engaging and courteous manner that endeared him to his fellow members and made contact with him at board meetings a stimulating and pleasant experience. He will be sorely missed.