

THE ROBERT LEE WILLIAMS MEMORIAL DEDICATION

By Charles Evans

Early in September 1953, Hon. Harry Gibson, Jr., Trustee of the Estate of Robert L. Williams, deceased, invited the Oklahoma Historical Society in a letter to its President, Gen. Wm. S. Key, to hold under the auspices of the Society, a proper ceremony for the dedication of the Robert Lee Williams memorial monument then in place in the City Cemetery of Durant, Oklahoma.

The history of the State of course, records the remarkable career of Robert Lee Williams ;a member of the Constitutional Convention, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Oklahoma, U. S. Federal Judge and a member of the U. S. Court of Appeals, all included in a career of some fifty years for the State and Nation. He had been one of the greatest benefactors the Oklahoma Historical Society had known, therefore, General Key and the Board of Directors accepted the invitation put forth by Mr. Gibson and at 2:30 p. m. in the Durant Cemetery the following program was set forth with the President of the Oklahoma Historical Society, its Board of Directors, together with the Staff Members, all meeting with the citizens of Durant and other distinguished citizens of the State, gathered about the impressive monument.

After the invocation was given by Rev. John Mueller of the First Presbyterian Church of Durant, the song "America" was sung by the assembled throng, led by the A Cappella choir of the Southeastern State College. Hon. Harry W. Gibson, Jr., Trustee of the Estate of Robert L. Williams, deceased, set forth in brief the history of the monument and the careful selection of its site in the city of Durant, chosen because this eminent jurist and statesman, Robert Lee Williams, had spent his life among the people of Durant and Bryan County and always had called this city his home and these people his friends and neighbors.

He then introduced Gen. Wm S. Key, President of the Oklahoma Historical Society, as Master of Ceremonies and asked that he take charge of further exercises. The President of the Society spoke briefly of the high esteem and great reverence which the State institution known as the Oklahoma Historical Society, held for the life and memory of this distinguished man. He sketched in close terms, how Judge Williams, a profound student and lover of history and devoted to his State, had guarded, builded and directed this Society through.

After these remarks the A Cappella choir together with the assembly, sang "America, the Beautiful." President Key set forth

that the Society had exercised great care as to the choice of a man who had the highest requisites for delivering on this occasion, a proper appraisal of the life of Robert Lee Williams. It was wholly essential that the one chosen should know as intimately as possible, the life and service of this eminent citizen of the State and Nation; a man who was rated by all Oklahoma as a citizen of great ability and character and could offer an oration upon this occasion worthy of the man and of the hour.

The Board of Directors had found that man in the distinguished attorney and citizen of Oklahoma for more than fifty years, the Hon. Baxter Taylor of Oklahoma City. He therefore took great pleasure in introducing Judge Taylor who delivered the oration of the day.

Standing near the monument and grave of his long time friend, Mr. Taylor spoke beneath the clear sky, to the assembled throng. With clear voice, deliberate, yet with an eloquence issuing from a devotion and friendship of almost half a century, Mr. Taylor held his audience in rapt attention. Believing that this eulogy should be given to as many readers as *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* may find throughout the State and Nation, this journal, as exponent of the Society, sets forth on its pages the oration delivered by Judge Taylor.

At the conclusion of this address, the A Cappella choir of the Southeastern State College gave a musical arrangement of the "Pledge of Allegiance." In closing, President Key introduced Dr. Charles Evans, Secretary of the Oklahoma Historical Society, an educator and historian in Oklahoma for almost fifty years, who would close the program with prayer.

It should be said that the Governor of Oklahoma, Hon. Johnston Murray, had ordered the State flag over the Capitol of the State to fly at half-mast and called upon all the citizens of the State to recognize November 12, 1953, as a period set aside for contemplation of the life of this great man. Officers of the State, members of the Supreme Court of the State of Oklahoma, eminent citizens in all the professions and pursuits of life, together with the host of neighbors and friends of the region about Durant, gathered about the monument upon a hillside in Durant and made the ceremony a memorable occasion.

In the morning of November 12, 1953, Miss Priscilla Utterback daughter of Hon. W. E. Utterback, deceased, perhaps one of the closest friends Robert Lee Williams ever knew, held "open house" in the historic old Utterback home and graciously received friends of Judge Williams and her father.

In closing, it would be well to say that the monument¹ erected consists of an impressive Monolith of beautiful gray granite, carved in such a way as to permit an alcove which seemingly embraces a few feet from it, the grave which is protected by a heavy slab of granite. The lettering on this granite slab has at the top, the Masonic emblem, and below that:

Robert Lee Williams
December 20, 1868
April 10, 1948.

At the top of the monument proper, the name "Robert Lee Williams" extends across the entire front in large letters. The state seal is in the center of the rear of the interior. On either side of the interior are emblems of the scales of Justice with mistletoe ornamentation.

Within the alcove portion of the monument, are carved these words:

**"Robert Lee Williams, born Brunridge Alabama, December 20, 1868;
Son of Johnathan and Sara Julia (Paul) Williams.
Admitted Alabama Bar 1894, came to Oklahoma, 1896.
Oklahoma Constitutional Convention 1906-07;
Chief Justice Supreme Court of Oklahoma 1907-1915;
Governor of Oklahoma, 1915-1919;
United States Judge Eastern District of Oklahoma 1919-1937;
United States Circuit Judge, Tenth District, 1937-1939;
Member, director, president Oklahoma Historical Society;
American Bar Association, Alpha Tau Omega (Alabama Chapter);
A Methodist, 32nd Degree Mason, Shriner.**

"Robert Lee Williams was a builder of buildings, of institutions and of men. These endure, and are his memorial. The tradition which he left, foresight, integrity and fearless devotion to the state of Oklahoma and the nation, are a guide to all who would serve mankind."

¹The monument is of abelter design. It is 11 feet wide and 11 feet, 2 inches tall. The architect was Harold J. Schaller of New York, and the monument was bought from the Muskogee Marble and Granite Company of Muskogee.