

## NECROLOGY

WILLIAM J. PETERSON  
1880—1955

The official Board, officers, members of the staff and all other co-workers in the Oklahoma Historical Society join the bereaved family and a host of warm friends in mourning the passing of William J. Peterson of Okmulgee.

Mr. Peterson served as a member of the society's board of directors from 1936 until the time of his death on January 19, 1955. He was active in the society's program of service, seldom being absent at any quarterly meeting of the board and, in recent years, always among those making the society's tours to visit the state's historical centers.

The son of John and Sarah Jane Peterson, he was born at the family home near the town of Anice in Franklin county, Arkansas, on November 21, 1880. He was educated in the rural schools of Arkansas and the highschool at Honey Grove, Texas, receiving his higher education at the University of Arkansas, from which he graduated.

On December 25, 1906, he was married to Nelle Sue Davis of Russellville, Arkansas.

He served as superintendent of public schools at Russellville, Springdale and Morrilton, Arkansas, leaving school work to begin the practice of law. He was admitted to the supreme court of Arkansas as a practicing attorney in May, 1917.

Mr. Peterson moved from Morrilton, Arkansas to Okmulgee, Oklahoma in August, 1917 and followed his profession successfully and honorably all of those years. In the last several years he was in law partnership with his son, William L. (Bill) Peterson.

He was active in public and civic affairs. He served in the State Legislature of Oklahoma from Okmulgee county in the 13th, 14th and 16th sessions. He was particularly proud of having jointly sponsored the Oklahoma Homestead Exemption Act, an amendment to the constitution, in 1935.

He served as United States commissioner under appointment by Eugene Rice, federal judge for the Eastern District of Oklahoma, for a term of four years from 1942, with offices at Okmulgee.

Mr. Peterson was a member of the First Baptist church in Okmulgee and a thirty-second degree Mason.

Survivors are his wife, Mrs. Nelle S. Peterson; one son, William L. Peterson; one daughter, Nelle Marie Peterson Skinner, two grandsons and four granddaughters, and one sister, Mrs. Lelah Valentine of Anice, Arkansas.

—R. G. Miller

*Oklahoma City, Oklahoma*

## GEORGE CARL ABERNATHY 1878—1954

George Carl Abernathy, prominent Pottawatomie County attorney died at his home in Shawnee, Oklahoma May 18, 1954 at the age of seventy-five years. Funeral services were held at the First Presbyterian church in Shawnee, with the Reverend L. LaVerne Ross, pastor of the church officiating.

Judge Abernathy came from sturdy stock: The Abernathy family had been prominent in Scotland for many centuries, and came to this country in Colonial days, settling in Virginia, and the Carolinas. One branch of the family moved into Alabama, where Judge Abernathy's father—James Henry Abernathy was born. In 1865 following four years service in the Civil War, James Henry Abernathy returned to Alabama and married Miss Sarah Wood of Tuscaloosa. The young couple migrated Westward, to Arkansas, where in the little town of Summerville, George Carl Abernathy was born, Nov. 24, 1878, the fourth of a family of five children.

That the family might have better educational advantages the next move was to Warren, Arkansas, where George attended grade and high schools. He entered the University of Arkansas, at Fayetteville in the fall of 1896. There he was an outstanding student, and received honors from the faculty, as well as the student body. The reward probably most prized by him, was the sword which he won as the best captain in the Military department of the University, which was presented to him by the Governor of the state.

Upon graduating from the University of Arkansas he was awarded a scholarship in the University of Pennsylvania school of law, at Philadelphia. During the first five minutes in the law school building he memorized from a stairway inscription the following: "In the known certainty of the law is the safety of all. But the law is unknown to him that knoweth not the reason thereof." He chartered his course on the above maxim, and digging out the "reason thereof" was his chief concern during his more than fifty years in the practice of civil law.

On October 1, 1903, he and Miss Carrie Howell were married in Bristol, Virginia. He brought his bride to his native state, and on July 2, 1904, they came to Shawnee to make their home. From the very first day, both Mr. Abernathy and his lovely young wife cast their lot unreservedly with the fast growing little town, and gave all their best energies to building, and fostering its institutions and enterprises. Though a leader in his chosen profession, Judge Abernathy gave much time to civic and religious affairs. He had lived in Shawnee only two years when he began his first official activities as a member of the examining board for Shawnee teachers.

Two years later he was elected alderman. In 1909, Governor Haskell appointed him Judge of the Superior court, the first such appointment made in Pottawatomie County. He served in that capacity five and one-half years. He was a member, and president of the school board. A member of the Rotary club; a member of the American, the State, and the Pottawatomie County Bar associations, as well as the American Association of Insurance Council. He was attorney for the Rock Island, the Sante Fe, and the Frisco railroads.

During World War I, he was chairman of the County Council of Defense, and of the County Exemption Board. He held membership in Masonic Lodge No. 107 A.F. and M. a 32nd degree Mason. He was an active, and consistent member of the First Presbyterian church of the U.S.A. In 1931, he was chosen by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian church as a member of the permanent judicial commission, the supreme judicial body of the church in the United States.

Besides his wife he is survived by three sons: Kenneth, who was his partner in law in Shawnee; George C. jr. who practices law in Boston, Massachusetts; Jack H., who is in the oil business in Oklahoma City; and one daughter, Dr. Ruth Abernathy, Professor in the University of California, Los Angeles.

Possibly the editorial from his home town paper describes in a measure the esteem in which Judge Abernathy was held, here in the town where he had lived for more than fifty years (Editorial in the *Shawnee News-Star*, May 19, 1954):

**HIS LIFE HAD MEANING—RICH, FULL, GOOD.**

"Always cheerful and friendly, courteous in a gracious, old-fashioned manner, Judge George Carl Abernathy was among Shawnee's best-loved men.

"Few lives deserve the adjective 'beautiful' but Judge Abernathy's was truly so. Devoted to home, family, church and a distinguished member of his profession, this grand old-young gentleman, blessed with unflinching humor and understanding, lived a composed and useful life.

"Though he unflinchingly gave his charming wife entire credit for their achievements, sons and daughters shared from their father a rich heritage of character and integrity.

"Few of us reside long on this earth and depart leaving an impeccable record of our stay. But Judge Abernathy was one of these, a wise and unselfish man. His life was rich, full, and had meaning all the way.

"With his passing, Shawnee loses one of its most illustrious citizens."

—Florence Drake.

*Shawnee, Oklahoma*