

## NECROLOGY

## DR. FELIX W. BIRD

1872-1952

Dr. Felix W. Bird, a prominent citizen of Le Flore County, Oklahoma, was born at Sheridan, Arkansas, November 23, 1872. Left an orphan at the age of seven, he lived on a farm in Central Arkansas until 1889 when at the age of sixteen he came to Cameron, Eastern Indian Territory where he grew up with the country, playing an important part in its development and leading in the political and civic life of the Territory, State and community.

Dr. Bird often said that the only thing of value which he brought with him to his new home was an old blue-back speller which figured prominently in his early-day education and still a treasured possession at the time of his death.

He did varied work in the Cameron area until 1891, when he became associated with Dr. Gray, a famous pre-statehood physician in the area. Dr. Bird was graduated from Barnes Medical College, St. Louis, Missouri, and practiced medicine for a short time with the late Dr. S. B. Ragon, at McCurtain. In 1896, in partnership with the late George B. Noble, these two men bought and operated drug stores in several towns of the State: Cameron in 1896; Waldron in 1900; and Poteau, 1899-1910 and there again in 1932-1946.

Dr. Bird is credited with the formation of the first political organization, of any size, ever formed in what is now Le Flore County, Oklahoma, despite the fact that in Indian Territory white men (except those with Indian wives) did not have a vote. Cleveland and Hendricks were the nominees of the National Democratic Party at that time, and Dr. Bird formed a club of four hundred members who worked for their election.

He served in the Spanish-American War as Corporal, First Regiment Arkansas Volunteer Infantry, Company D, at Camp George H. Thomas, Atlanta, Georgia, and was discharged in 1898. During the two world wars, he was active in home-front activities. In World War I, he served on the draft board, was county chairman of the home-service section of the American Red Cross and was active in Liberty Bond drives. During World War II, he served as chairman of the important county rationing board and prior to that, as County Administrator of the Works Progress Administration.

About 1910, he entered the real estate and farm loan business, opening the Poteau Abstract Company. Later he bought the Guaranty Abstract Company and in 1928, bought the Emerson Burns Abstract business, and combined them into the Le Flore County Abstract Company. He and his brother-in-law, C. R. Gatewood, were operating this company, the Bird Insurance Agency, and the Poteau Realty Company, at the time of his death.

He served two terms as mayor of Poteau, 1919-1921, resigning shortly after election for a third term; was president of the local school board in 1934 and 1935; and helped to organize Poteau's first school which was located on the site of the present high school

building. He served at different times as a representative in the State legislature, city clerk, water commissioner, councilman, and at the time of his death, was a member of the county excise board.

Dr. Bird was a Mason, and one of his proudest possessions was a fifty-year pin awarded him by the Poteau Masonic Lodge. He was also a Shriner, a charter member of Poteau's Rotary Club, and a member of the Methodist Church.

On December 3, 1903, Dr. Bird married the former Kate Gatewood at Vinita, Oklahoma, the Reverend M. L. Butler officiating. His wife survives him

He died on February 17, 1952, at the age of 79 years, in a Poteau hospital, following an operation. His death was unexpected and so a greater shock and sadness to his many friends in this community. Funeral services were conducted at the First Methodist Church in Poteau, by the Reverend W. S. Vanderpool, with interment in Oakland Cemetery. The business and professional firms of Poteau closed for the service, attesting the love and respect of the community in which Dr. Bird had lived for more than sixty-two years.

His character was strongly marked by the courage, honor and moral integrity which characterized the early settlers of the State. A nobler and worthier tribute to his memory cannot be paid than that it receives the sorrow of his surviving family and friends.

—Emma Gatewood Samuel

*Pryor, Oklahoma*

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## ROBERT HARRISON WOOD

1887-1956

Robert Harrison Wood, a pioneer oil man, died April 3, 1956 at Tulsa. Born in Wallaceburg, (now called Blevins) Arkansas March 20, 1887, he was the oldest brother of a pioneer Oklahoma family consisting of nine children. His father, Virgil Andrew Wood, M. D.,<sup>1</sup> participated in several of Oklahoma's land runs, and finally homesteaded at Enid. He was the first county physician of Garfield County, and was also one of Oklahoma's earlier territorial legislators, having been elected a member of the fifth Territorial Legislature. Robert H. Wood was named for his father's brother, Robert E. Wood, another Oklahoma pioneer, who was a member of the Seventh Territorial Legislature, as well as having been a first assistant Attorney General for the State of Oklahoma. Robert's family background was of the old South, for his parents were both born in Georgia, his father, the son of Confederate Soldier James R. Wood, born in South Carolina, and Mary Turner Wood, born in Georgia; his mother, Sarah Catherine Robins the daughter of Samuel H. Robins, born in Georgia, and Sarah Turner Robins, a South Carolinian. His great-grandparents Wood (her name was Anna) were both Virginians by birth.

As a small boy, Bob Wood made the trip to Oklahoma in a horse and wagon caravan with his family shortly after his doctor father made the run into Oklahoma Territory in 1889. The family lived at Norman, Enid, and subsequently Blackwell.

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Robert H. Wood, "Virgil Andrew Wood, M. D.," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 3 (Autumn, 1956), pp. 302-14.

At the University of Oklahoma, Bob Wood was well known for his famous gridiron feat of running 110 yards for a touchdown. The following year football fields were standardized to the familiar 100 yards, making it difficult for this record to be duplicated. He was a charter member of Sigma Nu fraternity. Upon graduation in 1911, he was awarded a fellowship to Yale University. However, he entered the United States Geological Survey in Washington, D. C., where he met Lela Howard, whom he married March 14, 1917. She was the daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Walter E. Howard, of Washington, D. C., and was a member of Pi Beta Phi at George Washington University, as well as a graduate of the Washington College of Music.

In 1919 he moved to Tulsa, leaving the Geological Survey to become an independent consulting geologist. He was soon joined by his brother, the late Virgil O. Wood, and the two acted as consulting geologists before forming the larger partnership of Wood Brothers and the Broswood Oil Company. At this juncture, brothers Homa Wood, and later, Dudley A. Wood, were brought into the firm, and manage the business today. Robert H. Wood was president of Broswood Oil Company until his death.

Robert H. Wood left a widow, Lela Howard Wood, and two sons. The older son, H. Robert Wood, is a graduate of Stanford University, where he was president of Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity; the second son, Harold S. Wood, is a Cornell University graduate, where he was a member of Phi Delta Theta fraternity. Both are Tulsa business men. Other survivors include two grandchildren, Barbara and Paula Wood, the daughters of H. Robert Wood. The Robert H. Woods' youngest child, daughter Ailene, a graduate of Randolph-Macon College, Lynchburg, Virginia, where she was vice-president of Pi Beta Phi sorority, and later the wife of Jack Hudson McMinn, who died in San Francisco in 1953.

Other survivors are two brothers, Homa Wood of Colorado Springs, and Dudley A. Wood, of Tulsa; three sisters, Mrs. Fred Smith (Edna Earl Wood), of Norman, Mrs. Leonard Hawn (Okla Wood, the twin of Homa), of Long Beach, California, and Mrs. Garrett Bolyard (Verda Wood) of Oklahoma City. His late brother and sisters, all pioneers of Oklahoma, and who all attended the University of Oklahoma, were Mrs. A. G. Wood (Beulah Wood), who incidently, was the first co-ed to matriculate at the University of Oklahoma; Mrs. Don A. Rose (Minnie Wood); and Virgil O. Wood.

In Tulsa, Robert H. Wood was well-known and loved as a civic and church leader. He was a deacon and later an elder of the First Presbyterian Church; President of the Tulsa Geological Society, and later an officer in the Regional Society; President of the Knife and Fork Club; and a member of the Tulsa School Board for many years. He was a member of the Board of Directors of the Tulsa Boys' Home; the Rotary Club; the American Association of Petroleum Geologists; the Independent Petroleum Association of America; and the Mid-Continent Oil and Gas Association. He was one of the originators and the first treasurer of the Tulsa Petroleum Club; a member of the Union Board of the University of Oklahoma, and of the O. U. Alumni Association; a 32nd degree Mason; and a Life Member of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

Bob Wood had a genial and amiable disposition which made him hosts of friends. As the oldest brother of his family, it might be said that he led the way to another of the Wood family's ties to the state of Oklahoma, namely the record of being the family with the greatest

number of members having attended the University of Oklahoma, thirty-two having been matriculated. Through his large family and many friends, his spirit and influence will long be felt. Robert H. Wood was a leader and pioneer both in the oil industry and in the state of Oklahoma.

Mrs. H. Robert Wood.

Tulsa, Oklahoma

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WALTER THOMAS McCracken

1884-1957

Walter Thomas McCracken, prominent pioneer, civic leader and Churchman of Oklahoma City, died at Polyclinic hospital, Oklahoma City, August 24, 1957, at the age of seventy-three years. Funeral services were conducted at the Capitol Hill Methodist church with the Reverend Grady Ross and J. Frank Graham, former pastors, officiating.

Walter McCracken was born March 23, 1884, on the Smith Paul farm near Pauls Valley, Oklahoma. The only son of J. T. McCracken and Malinda Wilson McCracken.<sup>2</sup> His parents with six little daughters made the trip by covered-wagon from Eureka Springs, Arkansas, and settled on the farm in February, 1884, one month before Walter's birth. His father made the run in 1889 and staked a claim southeast of Oklahoma City known as Clear Springs; he returned to his home on the Smith Paul farm for his family, leaving one of the little girls buried in the old Cemetery in Pauls Valley.

Mr. McCracken was born and reared by Christian parents. His father donated an acre of ground for a church but the permanent building was never built. The acre remained virgin soil and while waiting for the church building a brush arbor was erected where church services were held by the Methodist circuit riders. His father helped build the first school at Clear Springs, Oklahoma, (later called Mishak) where his son and two daughters attended school, Walter finishing the seventh grade.

Ambitious and wanting to go on with his education, he enrolled in the public schools in Oklahoma. Walter was a charter member of the Jeffersonian Debating Society at Irving High School, and had the distinction of being a member of the first graduating class of old "Irving High," having completed his studies under the direct leadership of Judge Edgar S. Vaught, then Superintendent of Oklahoma City schools and now (1958) retired United States District Judge of Western Oklahoma. Later, after continuing his education, Mr. McCracken was principal of public schools at Jones, Choctaw, Harrah and Moore.

On September 1, 1909, Mr. McCracken was united in marriage to Dollie May Brown, daughter of Reverend E. J. Brown, one of the Methodist circuit riders who had served Clear Spring, Sunny Lane and other little Methodist churches in the Methodist Conference of Oklahoma Territory. To this union was born four children: Mildred McCracken Crossley, Oklahoma City; Wilson Walter McCracken, Guthrie; and the twins, Lawrence McCracken, Oklahoma City and Laurene McCracken Needham, Tulsa. On November 30, 1914, Mrs. Mc-

<sup>2</sup> See Notes and Documents this number of *The Chronicles* for note on McCracken Homestead, p. 99.—Ed.

Cracken died at the birth of the twins. Mr. McCracken soon gave up his teaching in the public schools and entered into a new career.

On December 24, 1916, he was united in marriage to Miss Maude Hill, who was also a public school teacher. Three children blessed this union. Edmond Clarence, Thomas Creal and Donald Ray. Edmond and Thomas died in infancy. Donald lives in Oklahoma City.

Mr. McCracken was Superintendent of Sunny Lane Cemetery for more than a quarter of a century. In his capacity as superintendent and presiding over burials, he really lived the philosophy of Sam Foss: "Let me live by the side of the road and be a friend to man." His church, Capitol Hill Methodist, took priority. He ably served in every capacity in the Church open to a layman, twice elected delegate from the Oklahoma Methodist Conference to represent the State at the Methodist Jurisdictional Conference.

For many years, he was an active member of the Capitol Hill Chamber of Commerce, serving in 1933 as president. His advice and counsel were especially valuable to the group when it staged the big 89'er parade every year. He was in charge of the 89'er section of the parade, and rounded up the old timers and the old-time pieces such as surreys, chuck-wagons, buggies and the hearse. He was also the Master of Ceremony at the Chamber's annual dinner for 89'ers whose ranks diminished every year.

On April 23, 1958, at the 89'er Day observance by the Chamber of Commerce, Mr. McCracken was honored for the work he had done in this community. His pastor, Dr. Alva R. Hutchinson, was chosen to pay tribute to Walter McCracken, the mutual friend of all present. He received many words of praise and gifts at this meeting. He was also an honorary member of the Capitol Hill Junior Chamber of Commerce.

The McCrackens lived in the house at the Sunny Lane Cemetery, of which he was in charge until just a few months before his passing. During his last illness, the family moved back to their home in Capitol Hill. He was laid to rest in Sunny Lane Cemetery in the McCracken family plot. Walter Thomas McCracken has left his host of friends with memories of a good life well spent for us and the future generations to observe and follow. Besides his widow, children and grandchildren, he leaves three sisters, Mrs. Jessie Hogan, Mrs. Mary Jane Shirley and Mrs. Frank Trosper all of Oklahoma City.

—E. M. Sellers

*Capitol Hill Beacon*  
*Oklahoma City*