

NECROLOGY

GEORGE CLAIR WELLS
1890-1964

George Clair Wells was born on a farm in Indiana County, Pennsylvania, May 10, 1890, the youngest of seven children of James K. and Hannah (Pringle) Wells. Orphaned at the age of twelve, he lived with older brothers and sisters while completing the work of the rural schools.

At sixteen he began teaching. While taking a teacher examination at his county seat, Plumville, he met another applicant, Miss Effie Agnes Matthews. Though only eighteen, she had taught three years in rural schools. They married in August, took the Niagara Falls trip, and returned to their rural schools for the fall session.

Reading of the need of teachers in the new state of Oklahoma, they resigned and took the train to Muskogee, a destination picked at random. November 1, 1908 found him teaching the San Bois school, in Haskell County. The next thirteen years he was student, teacher, principal, and superintendent in the schools of Haskell, Cherokee, and Creek Counties, most of the time at Stigler and Wainwright. By teaching a full school year, a summer session, and the one-month County Normal at Stigler, he was once able to teach 13 months in a 12-month period. In 1921-23, he was superintendent at Luther, in Oklahoma County.

During this time he completed high school work, earned the two-year teacher diploma at Northeastern Normal, Tahlequah, in 1917, and the B. S. in Education at the University of Oklahoma in the summer of 1923. A General Education Board grant enabled him to attend Teachers College, Columbia University, New York City, in 1926-27, receiving the M. A. in Education. In the summers of 1927 and 1928 he taught at the University of Oklahoma.

From 1923 to 1929, he was a member of the staff of High School Inspectors of the State Department of Education, chief the last two years. In 1929-31 he was Secretary of the State Board of Education. In these 23 years he had an unusually wide range of experience in the public schools, and had seen the problems of Indian education.

From 1931 he was in the Indian Education Service: eight years directing the program in Oklahoma; five years, at Pierre, S. D., with the Northern Plains Area; and eight years, at Phoenix, in the Southwestern area. In the summers he taught teachers of Indians at several colleges, including Chillico (Oklahoma), Chewama (Oregon), Fort Wingate and Santa Fe (New Mexico), Haskell Institute, Stewart, (Nevada), and Brigham City (Utah). Thus he supervised and taught among most of the tribes of the West.

During his sixteen years at Oklahoma City, he did much writing and editing. Besides co-authoring *Student Publications*, he prepared workbooks and objective tests for use in the public schools. With Walter Campbell, Roy Hadsell, Grace Jencke, J. L. Rader, and J. B. Thoburn, he edited English classics for use in high schools.

From 1932 his writing was mostly concerning Indian education. The twelve issues of the *Oklahoma Indian Education Magazine*, which he edited and which was printed at Chilocco, contain much of the best material on the government boarding schools for Indians in Oklahoma. Later he wrote for *Indian Education*, a magazine published at Haskell Institute. In 1953 he completed *Orienting New Employees*, published by the Office of Indian Affairs.

In the summer of 1952 Mr. Wells was called to Washington, D. C., where he was Educational Specialist in the Office of Indian Affairs. Because of ill health he retired in August, 1953 and he and Mrs. Wells again journeyed to Eastern Oklahoma, this time by auto instead of by train, as in 1908. Near Poteau, overlooking beautiful Lake Wister, they built the residence, which was occupied on his 64th birthday.

On his retirement, he received from the Secretary of the Interior the Citation for Meritorious Service, containing the following tribute:

During his career, Mr. Wells made many noteworthy and lasting contributions to the Bureau's educational program. Outstanding among his achievements were his efforts in setting up the pattern which made it possible for all Bureau high schools to become accredited. His special orientation course, given at the in-service training schools, assisted hundreds of teachers and others to obtain better understanding of the Bureau's educational policies and objectives, enabling them to become more rapidly adjusted to their assignments. He also played an outstanding role in building good public relationships and developing the policies, standards, and regulations for education of Indian children in the public schools, which paved the way for their acceptance in the local schools and communities.

In the months that followed retirement his health steadily grew worse. The end came on Dec. 12, 1954 in Poteau, where he rests in the Oakland Cemetery. The funeral in the Methodist Church and the Masonic graveside ceremonies attest to the years of service through these two institutions. He was a 32nd degree Mason. He is survived by his wife, Mrs. Effie A Wells; four children, Kenneth Paul, Mrs. Dorothy Nell Gibson, Mrs. Ruth Evelyn Rowe, and David Lloyd; and seven grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

George Wells had erected his own monument in improved Indian education throughout the nation, enriched lives of many thousands of Indian children, improved relations of Indian children in the public schools, and in the affection and esteem of many, many friends.

—F. A. Balyeat

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