

NECROLOGY

ISABELLE REBECCA COLBERT YARBOROUGH
1865-1958

Mrs. Isabelle Rebecca Colbert Yarborough, who died August 2, 1958, was one of the dwindling band of local pioneers of that part of the old Indian Territory, now known as Bryan County. She was born near Colbert, Oklahoma, April 6, 1865, and had lived her ninety-three years in Bryan County and in McAlester. She died in McAlester and was buried in Highland Cemetery, Durant.

Isabelle Rebecca, or Belle as she was called, was the granddaughter of Martin Colbert, who was part Chickasaw Indian and one of the group of Chickasaw men chosen to come to Indian Territory on an exploring party to look over a new home for the tribe. Later, he and his family came west to live about 1838. Belle remembered knowing and talking with many other Indians who made the historic removal to a new land, many of whom had come over the "Trail of Tears."

Her father was Calvin Colbert, son of Martin. He was born in 1838. He carried out the traditional concern of the early Indian people for the education of their youth. After graduating from a Chickasaw academy at Tishomingo, he attended Vanderbilt University in Tennessee, and graduated in law. His death from pneumonia in 1871 at the age of thirty-three years occurred because he was chilled in a cold rain as he returned from a meeting of the Chickasaw Legislature in Tishomingo, of which he was a member and a scribe.

Her mother, Emma Frances Nail, was the daughter of Lucinda, a white woman, and Henry Nail, a Choctaw, who came from Mississippi to Indian Territory when the Choctaws first were removed west. Emma attended Collins Institute, a Chickasaw academy near Stone-wall, and afterwards was sent by her parents to Boston, Massachusetts, to school, where she remained three years, returning home an accomplished pianist. Accompanied by her brother and some Negro servants, she made the trip by horseback to the Mississippi River, then by boat to New Orleans, and thence by sea to Boston. This trip was over much of the same route traveled by her daughters in later years when they went to Mississippi to school.

Because of the educational background of these two young Indians, Calvin Colbert and Emma Nail, their parents thought it most appropriate they should know each other upon their graduation in June. A fish-fry at the mouth of the Washita River was arranged by the families. The two young people met, and in a few months they were married. Today they lie buried on the grounds of their home place, "Carriage Point," four miles west of Durant. The headstone of Calvin Colbert bears the Masonic emblem. Emma Colbert died in 1884 at the age of forty-four years of tuberculosis.

In 1869, Belle's father, Calvin, bought the Fisher stage stand which had become well-known as Carriage Point, after it was no longer used as Fisher's Stand by the Butterfield Overland Mail, 1858-1861, because an old carriage had broken down nearby during the Civil War and was left to the ravages of time. Following the Civil War, after Calvin Colbert bought the property, Carriage Point became an overnight stop for stagecoach travelers. It was also the place where fresh horses for the stagecoach were secured to continue the journey on the old stage and cattle road. The barn was made of

lumber hauled from the forest around Stringtown and was put together with wooden pegs. A granddaughter can remember playing in the old barn and jumping off the eighteen-inch snubbing post in the lot where the wild horses were broken by walking them around this old post, back and forth, without the laying on of whips. By nightfall the wild ones were tired and tamed so that a saddle could be cinched on, and the horses were ready to be ridden.

In 1872, the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railway was built through the Territory, and the stage stand was no longer needed in travel over the Texas Road. However, until the death of Belle's husband in 1911, Carriage Point was considered by the old-timers as an overnight break in their journey. The big house, the ample food stores, and the hospitality found there made the travelers know they were welcome.

At the time the railroad was built, Belle was six years old and was attending school in Atoka. She stood in the yard of her aunt's home and watched the first train go through the town. During the year, she rode the train home as one of the earliest passengers on the railroad which still serves Durant.

Belle continued her schooling in Denison, Texas, and at Bloomfield Academy, a school for Chickasaw girls. She later sent her own daughters to Bloomfield, and her sons attended Harley Institute.

As a girl of thirteen, Belle, with her older sister, Ada, was sent to a school for girls in Oxford, Mississippi, the home of the University of Mississippi which absorbed the academy when the university became co-educational some years later. By special concession, Belle was the youngest student admitted to the school when she attended there. She and her sister distinguished themselves by their achievements in art, for both were talented.

The journey to the school was made from Belle's home to Fort Smith, Arkansas, and thence by coach to Mississippi. Her mother and two Negroes, who had been trusted servants in the family for many years, accompanied the girls to Fort Smith. Their trunks were carried on pack horses, a trunk on each side to balance the load. After her mother and one servant turned homeward, the girls continued their journey, accompanied by the other Negro servant who afterward took the horses home.

While she and her sister were in Oxford, during an epidemic of yellow fever, the president of the school took these Indian girls with him and his family to the country, after closing the school, and there they lived until the epidemic ended.

On January 1, 1880, Belle eloped with John Calhoun Yarborough who was of a pioneer white family in Blue County, Choctaw Nation, now a part of Bryan County. She became owner of Carriage Point by exchanging her original inheritance of Red River bottom land with her only brother who inherited the homeplace. The exchange was made by oral agreement only, and, as was usual in pioneer days, this agreement was never contested by anyone. At Carriage Point, Mrs. Yarborough reared three daughters and two sons: Mrs. Meta B. Hatchett and Mrs. Eunice Franklin, Durant; Mrs. Elizabeth Bentley, Ardmore; Clarence Yarborough, now deceased; and John C. Yarborough, McAlester.

The Yarboroughs lived the life of Indian Territory pioneers, with rich farm lands in Red River bottom and lush grasslands for their cattle herds at Carriage Point. Texas herds driven north sometimes

passed by on the road, the hundreds of head of lowing cattle coming out of a great cloud dust that had been first seen swirling up on the horizon to the south.

Mrs. Yarborough retained a feeling of kinship, loyalty, and responsibility even to her own distant cousins throughout her lifetime, like members of many another Indian family. She had her husband reared as their own son, Steve Yarborough, now deceased, whom they took as an infant of six months. He was the son of her sister and her husband's brother. Upon the death of the baby's mother, the infant was taken into the hearts of the members of the family and regarded as a son and brother. His education and upbringing was as great a concern of these pioneers as was their concern for their own children.

Mrs. Yarborough possessed the inner strength necessary for pioneer women. She was a member of the Presbyterian church which sent early missionaries, many of whom had several preaching appointments. One of the highlights of the church year was the camp meeting at Presbytery which she and her husband with all the members of the family attended.

This little old lady lived the kind of life we read about, and she regarded it as commonplace. She lived a long life marked by rugged faith, staunch loyalties, great courage, and amazing endurance. She left her loved ones a heritage which they will always cherish and will pass on in memory to their children's children as a real life legend.

—M. Ruth Hatchett*

Durant, Oklahoma

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HOUSTON BENGE TEHEE

1874-1953

There was born on October 14, 1874, in what is now Sequoyah County, a Cherokee Indian, destined to bring honor and recognition to his country. This man who represented two old prominent Cherokee families was Houston Benge Tehee.

His father, Stephen Tehee was a prominent farmer and Baptist minister who spoke only the Cherokee language. He was universally loved and honored by both the white people and the Indians. Houston Teehee's mother, whose maiden name was Rhoda Benge, died when he was only twelve years old. Houston's boyhood days were spent on the farm, and his ambition was to become a good and upright man like his father. Houston attended the Cherokee common schools and later the Cherokee Male Seminary at Tahlequah. After graduation from the Seminary, he was a student for a term in Fort Worth University.

He returned to Tahlequah, and after working as a clerk for a period of ten years, he became Cashier of the Cherokee National Bank of Tahlequah in 1906. During this time, he studied law under the guidance of Judge John H. Pitchford. He resigned his position as Cashier of the Bank in 1908, and began the practice of law in Tahlequah, devoting attention to probate oil and gas matters.

Houston B. Tehee was highly regarded in public life, serving as alderman and later, as mayor of his home city to 1910. He was elected Representative from Cherokee County to the Third State Legislature in 1910, and reelected two years later to the Fourth Legislature. He was appointed Register of the United States Treasury and went to Washington, D. C., in 1914, his name appearing on all Federal notes and bonds from 1915 to 1919. He returned to Oklahoma and served ably for a number of years, as Vice President, Treasurer and General Manager in the Continental Asphalt and Petroleum Company with headquarters at Oklahoma City. He served as Assistant Attorney General of Oklahoma in 1926-27, and was a member of the Supreme Commission of Oklahoma, representing the First Judicial District of the Supreme Court in 1927-31. He returned to make his home in Tahlequah and gave his time to his law practice. He rendered great service to many leaders in affairs of the Cherokee Nation, acting as counselor and advisor in matters affecting individuals as well as families and communities.

Mr. Tehee married Miss Haglund, a native of Alabama, on December 11, 1898. When he died at Tahlequah on November 19, 1953, he was survived by his wife who passed away in 1958. Both Mr. and Mrs. Tehee were buried in the Tahlequah Cemetery. They had no children, and he had no living brothers nor sisters at the time of his death.

A lover of nature and all that is true and beautiful, Houston B. Tehee loved his home and enjoyed the out-of-doors. He found pleasure in music and literature, and his constant reading kept him in touch with the trend of modern thought and progress. He was a member of Cherokee Lodge A.F. and A.M., the oldest Masonic Lodge in Oklahoma. He was a deeply spiritual man and an ardent member and worker of the Presbyterian Church. He was an inspiration to the Cherokee people and to all who had business and social relations with him during the years of his active life.

—Marie L. Wadley

Muskogee, Oklahoma