

## MEMORIAL ADDRESS: OKLAHOMA'S HERITAGE

*By Judge Orel Busby\**

We are met here today on an occasion which calls for both solemnity and joy. We sadly pay homage to the memory of three great Oklahomans who have passed on to Eternal Rest. But we rejoice to commemorate the birthdate of what was fifty-three years ago the infant State of Oklahoma.

Biography of the three Oklahomans whose memory we honour today reveals: Edgar S. Vaught, Christian gentleman, outstanding lawyer, teacher, eminent jurist, philosopher, civic leader, and city and State builder; Anabel Gum, daughter of Democracy, patriotic humanitarian, a gentle, lovely lady, who was active in worthwhile club activities; and Roy M. Johnson, independent thinker, fearless editor and moulder of public opinion, pioneer business man and pioneer in the oil industry, a philanthropist, church and civic and state leader.

While we have a feeling of sadness because of the passing of these friends, we also have a feeling of joy for the unparalleled record of achievement of our State as one of the greatest states in the Union. Furthermore, we can point with pride and satisfaction to the fact that our departed friends were outstanding characters who helped to make our State what it is and who left their indelible imprint on its fifty-three years of history.

No state in our nation can rise in greatness above the level of its leaders.

The heritage of a state—even only fifty-three years old—is largely embodied in the ancestry of its leading citizens who helped mould it in its infancy and early growth. For that reason Oklahoma has its literally thousands of famous ancestors who are or were in reality active and sturdy pioneers, or sons and daughters of pioneers, who wrought better than they knew in its creation. In every rural area, town and city and county, we have had, and still have, a quota of these citizens, dead or living,

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\* This address in memory of Judge Edgar S. Vaught, Mrs. Anabel Gum and Mr. Roy M. Johnson was delivered by Judge Orel Busby at the memorial services of the Oklahoma Memorial Association on November 16, 1960. The occasion also commemorated the Fifty-third Birthday of the State of Oklahoma. Judge Busby is a former Justice of the State Supreme Court, and is serving as a member of the Board of Directors of the Oklahoma Historical Society. He is a well known attorney in Ada, Oklahoma, and has lived in this part of the state since he was brought here in the arms of his parents traveling by covered wagon to the Indian Territory, in 1890.—Ed.

who have done their share building Oklahoma from Statehood Day, November 16, 1907, until this day in 1960.

Oklahoma did not start its career in 1907 as a State of contentment, but as a State of opportunity and progress. And this was because of the stature and ability of those who came to a new country filled with eager ambition, dynamic action, and the desire and ability to do things. They were willing to work, and willing to dare. They recognized that with energy, habits of thrift, trained minds and courageous hearts, they could build a future State second to none. We now enjoy and rejoice in the benefits of their accomplishments.

Hence our romantic background stems from the fact that its sturdy pioneers swarmed into the two territories which to them represented a promised new land of soil, grass and water. It meant an area to build, and to turn around in—to breathe and be free. It offered new space calling for new activities and new institutions. Every man wanted something for himself and relied on himself. He was ready to tame the wild prairies of the western territory and to clear the wilderness of the eastern territory. These twin territories were literally then the last frontiers and the pioneers swept into this alluring land. Among them came the wanderers, the restless, the lawless, the land-hungry, the cast-offs, the individualists, the indomitable squatters, sooners, boomers—as well as the trustworthy and the God-fearing.

The trustworthy and God-fearing were in the great majority and were the salt that leavened the loaf. They replaced the men who hated the plow: that is, the cowboys and cow men with their cow pens and barbed wire.

These pioneers had many striking characteristics: a practical turn of mind, restless nervous energy, dominant individualism, and the buoyancy and exuberance that comes from confidence in the fate of the future. Part of their dream was to build something new in homes, schools and churches, cities, and above all, a State second to none. They came with a spirit of individual enterprise, with imagination and a democratic good nature that gave strength to the communities and helped them survive the first hard years.

There is much romance and romanticism in the fascinating history of those first settlers who lived in sod houses in the western territory and log houses in the eastern. They were soil breakers who followed the cattlemen. But the cow men left their tracks that even the farmers could not plow under.

From the influence of these pioneers handed down to second and third generations there came the town builders who have

built the great cities; business men who have played a great part in our growth; daring pathfinders who have had courage to drill wildcat wells and eventually made us one of the greatest oil producing states in the union; industrialists and manufacturers; doctors who have looked after our health, and lawyers who have provided us with laws and with courts which always follow civilized man; members of the teaching fraternity who were so dedicated that we have a system of schools second to no state in the union—also leaders in the religious field who have so faithfully guided us in our spiritual and moral welfare.

Properly we commemorate today the lives of three outstanding Oklahomans above referred to. But, in my mind's eye, the curtain of time is rolled back and I see fifty-three years of activities of literally thousands of Oklahomans—living and dead—who by their deeds and acts in their own small corner in this state, and in their own humble way, have done their bit, in making our prideful history. But they have not had time to write about it.

And while today we name three of these outstanding Oklahomans and recount their accomplishments, we also owe much to the unsung thousands who in the past fifty-three years have laboured and have passed on to their just rewards.

It is a matter of regret that Oklahoma has so much colourful and romantic history to be proud of yet much of our history seems to be written around the activities of the Daltons, the Youngers, the Jennings, the Belle Starrs, and their ilk. In fact, a new T-V series has just begun on a nationwide hook-up entitled "Oklahoma Outlaws." Actually, in the settlement of the west, Oklahoma has had no more than its share of outlaws but they were only brief actors on the stage of our history. A few fearless, straight-shooting marshals and their deputies limited their careers in each instance to a brief space of time. But the recent T-V programs proclaim these characters as an important part of the warp and woof of our State history. Nothing could be farther from the truth. I do not believe that "sin writes history, goodness is silent." It would be to the everlasting credit of Oklahoma if some alert scriptwriter with ambition, imagination, and ability would portray the activities of the real worthwhile pioneers of this State who actually dominated our early history, and in which early history the outlaws played only a minimum part if any.

You have often heard the phrase that all men are created equal. This is not a literal truth. They are created equal in their relationship to our Creator and in the eyes of our laws. Yet men are not created equal as to character and talents. Some are born with three, five, or ten talents—if made use of; but

talent, inheritance, environment, and our own individual desires, efforts and opportunity make us rich or poor, wise or foolish, holy or unholy, honorable or dishonorable.

Today in commemorating the lives and activities of the three Oklahoma pioneers, we praise them for the part they played in the building of our State. In this commemoration we recognize that among civilized people there is a great and silent compact between the living and the dead. The honored dead toiled for the benefit of those who were to follow in succeeding generations. Such toil embodies the noblest ambition of humanity. They sow that others may reap. They projected their influence into the future for the guidance of other Oklahomans. They desired to survive their funerals. Many persons do not want to pay the price of this survival.

But still it is those who have passed on that largely govern and often control the destinies of the world and mankind more than the living.

This is not strange when we think on these things. We owe our properties, yea our very liberties, to those who preceded us; not to the living. Think of the debt we owe to the Oklahomans who wrote our progressive state constitution and bill of rights some fifty-three years ago.

We inherited from our revolutionary forefathers a government based on the consent of the governed. The electric light in our homes and the modern conveniences that flow from electricity, we owe to Edison—one long gone—who during most of his lifetime lived in hardship and poverty. Think of what we owe to Pasteur and to other outstanding scientists.

We cannot give too much credit to the influence and good impulses of those who have gone on before us. There are the Ten Commandments delivered into the hands of Moses on Mt. Sinai because of the kindly act of Pharoah's daughter. What Moses forbids we obey today. Lawyers boast of the Bill of Rights we now live under. We have this Bill of Rights because the Knights of England wrested them from King John at Runnymede in 1265. We settle estates in Oklahoma today according to many of the rules of inheritance written in England hundreds of years ago. Statesmen whose ashes have been cold for thousands of years still speak to the world today. It is the dead who have added greatly to the welfare of mankind. Truly the dead influence the living. If by their works, individuals have added nothing to the betterment of humanity, their names are lost in oblivion; they are remembered for a day and their deaths barely survive their funerals. President Garfield spoke a few short words on this subject just before his untimely death;

he said, "The living obey the dead, and the dead govern the living." And this is the tribute we pay our heritage.

Remember that the conventional things we say or do, do not last beyond our lives. Such is of little or no consequence. The only thing worth doing beyond the routine of our lives, or beyond the conventional, is that which shall continue into and influence the lives to come and for the betterment of humanity, "that frail and delicate fabric which we call the human race."

We honour the lives and memory of three distinguished Oklahomans because by their works, deeds, and achievements in their lifetime they left the world a better place in which to live and to rear our families. They toiled and sacrificed as an inspiration and example to the living and that their good works would extend into the future to benefit those left behind and the generations to come after.

I have dealt here mostly in generalities. I want to add a personal note:

In 1890, Oklahoma and Indian territories were largely wilderness. There were only a few settlements and very few towns of importance. To paraphrase Henry Clay's statement, I grew up in Indian Territory listening to the tread of coming thousands. A million and a half came in the first fifteen years after the run of 1889 into the Oklahoma country. I have watched the transformation of wilderness to a state of homes, schools, churches, cities, super highways, industries and factories. I have lived through an age of miracles. I have seen the change from "arrows to atoms"; I have seen the dreams of the pioneers of yesteryear literally come true in the embodiment of the full grown, lusty and progressive State of Oklahoma.

Oklahomans living today owe an everlasting debt of gratitude to those hardy pioneers who lived through many turbulent and lean years of toil and hardship and who sacrificed for the betterment of mankind.