

## NECROLOGY

### FREDERICK PAGE BRANSON 1881—1960

Frederick Page Branson, better known as Fred P. Branson, was a lawyer, judge, business man, civic leader and resident of Muskogee, Oklahoma. He departed this life in a hospital at Tulsa, Oklahoma, October 5, 1960, at the ripe age of seventy-nine years. The funeral was conducted by Dr. Wilford Jones, minister of Saint Paul Methodist Church of Muskogee, Oklahoma, and interment was in the Branson mausoleum at Myrtle Hill Cemetery, Rome, Georgia.

Judge Branson, as he was called, in deference to his years on the bench, had been ill more than a year before he died.

He came of sturdy revolutionary stock. He said his ancestors owned the land at Gullford Court House in North Carolina where the battle of the Revolutionary War was fought March 15, 1781 between General Green's Continental troops and the British forces under Lord Cornwallis. Branson often visited this place, was proud of his ancestry and the fact that his forebears had taken part in the American Revolution.

Branson's mother was Rhoda Page. She was reared at a small place called Pine Log, Georgia, a few miles north of Cartersville, Georgia. She first married Harrison Mull and moved west, settling at Dardanelle, Arkansas. By this union she had one child, Joseph Mull, afterwards a physician of Rome, Georgia, who died in 1906, leaving a large family of nine children. Upon the death of her husband, Rhoda Page Mull and her son, Joseph Mull, returned to Georgia from Arkansas, settling at Cass Station, Georgia. There she met and married Levi Branson, a widower. Of this marriage, there were born three sons and one daughter: Thomas Branson, Frederick Page Branson, Jessie Branson Adams, Homer Branson and Rhoda Page Branson. All of these preceded Judge Branson in death. Levi Branson is buried at Costanala Methodist Church Cemetery about nine miles north of Rome, Georgia. Homer Branson died many years ago, and is buried at the same place. Upon the death of Levi Branson, Rhoda Page Branson moved to Rockmart, Georgia, to live in order to have a school for her children. She died at Rockmart, Georgia, a small town about thirty-five miles south of Rome, Georgia many years ago, and is buried in the cemetery at Rockmart. Judge Branson erected a handsome monument to her grave in memory of his mother. Judge Branson has a long list of nephews and nieces living.

Frederick Page Branson was born at Rockmart, Georgia, March 1, 1881, on a farm. Living was not easy. The War Between the States had destroyed the resources of the country and Fred frequently walked the streets of Rockmart and Rome selling eggs and vegetables produced from the farm, that he might help his mother provide for the family.

His education was limited to the school at Rockmart, and afterwards he attended Emory University at Atlanta. He dreamed of the day when the newspapers would carry the story of him sitting on the bench as judge, deciding important matters of law. With this in mind he left Georgia soon after the turn of the century and landed at McAlester, Indian Territory, where for a short time he was Deputy

Clerk of the United States Court of Appeals for Indian Territory. He left McAlester, and was employed by the Commissioner of the Five Civilized Tribes at Muskogee, Indian Territory. He soon left this office and opened an office to practice law in Muskogee.

He loved politics and was elected to the House of Representatives of the First Legislature of the State of Oklahoma in 1907. Later, he was elected County Attorney of Muskogee County two terms. Then he was appointed District Judge for the Judicial District comprising Muskogee and Wagoner Counties, Oklahoma. Next he was elected Justice of the Supreme Court of Oklahoma, and during the six year term he served on this court he was for two years Chief Justice of Oklahoma, and the presiding officer of said court. He was proud of the fact that of nine opinions he rendered as Justice of the Supreme Court of Oklahoma, that were appealed to the Supreme Court of the United States, all were approved and affirmed. While he was Chief Justice controversial questions stirred the Court, but with the boldness born of conviction he stood firm with the Constitution and what he believed was right. The legislature tried to call itself into session to hear impeachment charged against the Governor, but Branson wrote an opinion for the court, that under the Constitution of Oklahoma the Legislature could be called in special session only by call of the Governor. There was no call by the Governor and Branson refused to preside over the Senate to hear the impeachment charge. After he left the Court he went to Texas, bought several oil leases and drilled a wildcat well. Some of his leases proved very productive and placed him on easy street the rest of his life.

Governor Roy J. Turner appointed him President of the Grand River Dam Authority, which position he held for several years, resigning in 1959. While President of the Grand River Dam Authority, the Authority made a contract for interchange of public power with the Public Service Company of Tulsa that ended a controversy that had continued for several years. This contract had the full approval of Governor Gary. He made two unsuccessful efforts for the Democratic nomination for congressman, one from his home district and one from the state at large. He announced his candidacy for Governor of Oklahoma, but withdrew in favor of Roy J. Turner, who was elected.

He was a member of Saint Paul Methodist Church of Muskogee; Masonic Lodge No. 28 of Muskogee; Chapter Three of Royal Arch Masons, of Muskogee Commandery No. 2 of the Knights Templar and of Bedouin Temple of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine; and a life member of Lodge 517 of BPOE. He was a member of the Muskogee County and Oklahoma Bar Associations and a member of the Democratic party of Oklahoma. He was the first State Chairman of the Democratic party of Oklahoma.

He married Eula Jeans in 1903, who preceded him in death. No children were born to this union. Mrs. Branson died January 27, 1950, and was buried in the Branson mausoleum in Myrtle Hill Cemetery, Rome, Georgia. Judge Branson married a second time.

Judge Branson and the writer were close friends for over fifty years, and he was always held in sincere affection. It is fitting to say these few words in commendation of him and his life, for he was a wise statesman, a good lawyer, a good judge, a Christian gentleman and a good man. He gave to his country the best in him. He was noble by birth, yet nobler by great deeds.

—William B. Moore

*Muskogee, Oklahoma*