

OKLAHOMA'S FIRST SENATOR DIES

Early Saturday, July 19, 1947, death closed the brilliant career of one of the first United States Senators from Oklahoma, and one of her most distinguished United States senators, Robert Latham Owen.

A native of Lynchburg, Virginia, Senator Owen was born February 2, 1856, the son of Robert L. Owen, president of the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad, and of Narcissa Clarke Chisholm.

While a member of a distinguished family of Cherokee descent, Senator Owen was not a child of wealth, and upon the death of his father when the boy was but sixteen years old, it was due to his own initiative, and to his mother's determination that he was able to complete his education. In appreciation of the efforts of his mother, and of the scholarships which were awarded him, Senator Owen applied himself diligently to his studies, graduating from Washington and Lee University as valedictorian of his class.

Because Robert L. Owen found it difficult to speak in public, he enrolled as a member of the debater's team at Washington and Lee. Upon his first appearance in that role, after a smooth, eloquent delivery by his opponent, he stood up and began, "Mr. President and gentlemen—" and then to his consternation, not another word could he utter; presently there came from one corner of the hall, and then another, the derisive calls of the students, finally culminating in loud applause. Robert L. Owen stood his ground; stood until it was so quiet in the room he could have heard a pin drop, and then, his brainstorm having subsided, he began his speech—a speech that ran far over the time allotted, but no one thinking to call time on him. He won the medal that day; perhaps because the judges respected a boy who would not let a momentary weakness subjugate him.

The spirit that was shown on the platform that day, was to stay with Senator Owen throughout his long, distinguished career; it came with him to the Indian Territory, shortly after his graduation from Washington and Lee, and where he rendered great service to the Cherokee Nation and the Territory, and later to the State.

In 1880, Senator Owen reorganized the Cherokee Nation School system, supervising it until 1885; in that year he became United States Indian Agent for the Five Civilized Tribes, and settled thousands of civil cases in Indian Territory by a system of compulsory arbitration, which he established in the absence of a court system, between 1885 and 1889. In 1889 he primarily aided in the establishment of the first United States Court in Indian Territory, and

was secretary of the first bar association of that territory. In 1889, as fiscal agent of the Choctaw Nation, he disbursed the net proceeds fund, under a bond of a million dollars.

In February, 1900, the eastern Cherokees of Indian Territory employed Senator Owen to represent the Tribe in their famous case against the United States. Eminent attorney's had failed to obtain judgment for the Cherokees, but Senator Owen presented their claims in such a way that he won for them a complete victory in May, 1906, whereby the United States Government was compelled to pay to the eastern Cherokees, the amount of nearly five million dollars. Later he was one of the attorneys for the western Cherokees in a recovery for them of over \$800,000.00; in 1893 he secured, as an attorney in control of the leased district case for the Choctaws and Chickasaws, about three million dollars in payment for the leased district lands.

It was only natural that a man who had rendered such services to the Territory, should be elected to represent the people in that area as one of the first Senator's to represent the new state in Washington after the State of Oklahoma was erected in 1907.

In Washington, the erect handsome Senator from Oklahoma played an important part in National politics. He had a leading part in guiding the enactment of the Federal Reserve Bank Act; the farm loan and the child labor laws. He served three terms in the Senate.

In late years, although broken in health, and handicapped by failing vision, and the loss of his wife, he maintained his interest in World affairs. His latest dream was to perfect a global alphabet, based on phoenetics, which would enable the people all around the world to speak together. It was stated that Senator Owen had spent more than \$25,000 of his own money in working on that project.

The nearest surviving relatives of Senator Owen, are his daughter, Mrs. Dorothea Whittemore, and a grandson, Robert L. Owen III, Washington, D. C.

Private funeral services were held in Washington, July 21, 1947, and interment at Lynchburg, Virginia.