

ROBINSON, ELLA

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OSCAR W. STEWART (Biography)

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Biography of Oscar W. Stewart

Investigator - Ella Robinson
January 21, 1938

Oscar W. Stewart, son of George W. Stewart and his wife Margaret Nabers Stewart, was born at Pleasant Ridge, Mississippi May 9, 1883.

At the age of two and one-half years he suffered from acute inflammatory rheumatism that gradually grew worse until he was unable to stand on his feet. He recovered from this, but it left him with an ankylosed right elbow. At the age of twelve years his vision began to grow dim. When his teachers and parents noticed this he was sent to the Texas School for the Blind. By conserving his vision in using the fingers to read the Braille, his loss of vision was arrested. He could see to read large print and even to drive a car. He never attempted to read small print. He graduated from the Texas School for the Blind with a scholarship to the Texas University. Instead of going there, however, he came with his parents to Hobart, where he bought a newspaper and with his father's

youngest brother, L. F. Stewart, assumed its publication.

Later he decided to go to Vanderbilt University and study for the ministry. While there he had a nervous breakdown and came home to regain his health. After months of rest he accepted a pastorate, and from then until 1910 was an active member of the Oklahoma Conference. He was married in 1906 to Miss Janie West Robertson of Virginia.

In 1910 he was appointed to Clinton Methodist Church (South) to which place he moved from Eldorado, with his wife and two children, Virginia Elizabeth and Oscar Wilhelm II. He had been in Clinton only six months when he accepted the position of Superintendent of the Oklahoma School for the Blind, being automatically relieved of the pastorate and placed in the field of education.

Oscar W. Stewart was appointed Superintendent of the Oklahoma School for the Blind July 1, 1911, when the school was in the old barracks buildings at Fort Gibson. He at once realized the inadequacy of buildings

and equipment, together with the fact that Fort Gibson, while generous and appreciative in regard to the school, was inaccessible and lacking in opportunities for the blind. After untiring effort he succeeded in permanently locating the school on its present site just east of the city of Muskogee, which site was donated by the late Ex-Governor Charles N. Haskell. Mr. Stewart succeeded in getting the Legislature to appropriate sufficient funds for the erection of the first four buildings. He then spent a month visiting the largest and most modern Schools for the Blind in this country; and a general plan of the future complete Institution was made before the first building was erected in 1913-14. While these first buildings were being erected, the school was quartered in the old Spaulding College building in Muskogee (now the Muskogee General Hospital). The school moved into its new home on the present campus the Summer of 1914.

As his vision had been impaired at the age of twelve years, Oscar Stewart knew the tremendous handicap of the blind and threw himself into this work

with all his unusual energy and insight. The enrollment of the school in 1911 was thirty students, and they were using a very limited number of New York Point embossed books; while now the enrollment is one hundred and fifty students, with a Braille library numbering 10,000 volumes and a print library of approximately 3,000 volumes.

Building after building was erected as the school's enrollment increased and new courses and departments have been added year by year. His efficiency kept Mr. Stewart in the place of Superintendent through administration after administration in the State, and now this group of twenty and more buildings with its complete organization stands today as his permanent monument. The Oklahoma School for the

Blind is second to none in the United States in

efficiency and products in young manhood and young womanhood. Only a small per cent of the one hundred graduates has failed to make a living. The graduates of the Oklahoma School for the Blind look upon their handicap as a challenge and face life with energy and ambition.

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Mr. Charles W. Dawson F. A. I. A. is architect of this complete unit of buildings of Old English Countryside type.

Mr. Stewart was Superintendent of the school from 1911 until the Fall of 1925. After his death the State Board of Education appointed his wife, Mrs. Janie Robertson Stewart, as Superintendent. She is carrying on and completing his plans in every detail.

Mr. Stewart took an active part in National, State, and Civic affairs. He loved and was loved by the citizenship of Muskogee.

In the American Association of Instructors for the Blind he was a young, vigorous, safe, and accepted leader. Dr. Edward E. Allen, Dean of Workers for the Blind in the United States and builder of the Pennsylvania School for the Blind at Overbrook, Philadelphia, and of the Massachusetts School for the Blind, Riverside, Boston, watched Mr. Stewart with confidence and affection as he stepped into his place by the side of men older and more experienced in the work.

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After his death the Governor, the State Board of Education, and the State Board of Public Affairs named the large administration building of the school "Stewart Hall." A beautiful bronze tablet placed in the corridor of this building was given by the pupils, teachers, officers, and employes of the school as a token of their love for him.