

CAROLYN THOMAS FOREMAN

By J. Stanley Clark*

Martin W. Wiesendanger, in a bibliography of the Foremans published in 1948, wrote, "Carolyn Thomas Foreman's books and articles, together with Grant Foreman's works, present an inseparable whole; one can not be evaluated except in terms of the other. This unity has made possible the unmistakably great contribution to the sum total of knowledge." They worked as a team to collate evidence of Oklahoma's rich heritage and to record their findings.

Dr. Foreman proclaimed this teamwork, their mutual interest in dedicated research. His first book, *Pioneer Days in the Southwest*, published in 1926, is dedicated "To Carolyn." A book published twenty years later, *The Last Trek of the Indian*, bears the dedication "To Carolyn." He spells out her share in their partnership in the preface to *Indians and Pioneers*, published in 1930, when he wrote these gracious words:

"More than all, I am indebted to the patient, unrelenting, and intelligent assistance of my wife, Carolyn Thomas Foreman, who has shared with me the search into all the archives and libraries explored whether fruitful or not, and who has labored long hours in making notes and extracts from the manuscripts used. And it was she who translated into English all the French accounts in books, newspapers, journals and manuscripts that have been drawn upon in writing this book."

Carolyn was born in Metropolis, Illinois, October 18, 1872, the daughter of John R. Thomas, an attorney, and Lottie Culver (Thomas). She was the eldest of three children, one of whom died in early childhood. Her formal education was completed in private schools in Washington, D. C. and at Monticello Seminary, Godfrey, Illinois, supplemented by a year in Europe with tutors. Carolyn's first published article, written under the

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A most perceptive article on the Foremans, written by Mrs. J. O. Mitck, Tulsa, Oklahoma was inserted in the *Congressional Record* issue of July 20, 1961, by the Honorable Carl Albert. The article also appears in the *Congressional Record* of March 1, 1967, with appropriate remarks by Congressman Albert. A moving tribute on Mrs. Foreman's accomplishments was written by Bob Martindale, *The Phoenix News* Editor, as page 1 feature, *The Muskogee Sunday Phoenix and Times-Democrat*, February 10, 1967.



(Oklahoma Historical Society)

CAROLYN THOMAS FOREMAN

pseudonym "Violet," appeared in a Boston church publication *Every Other Sunday* June 8, 1890. This was a short story, titled "Flora's Fairy Mill" and written in the style of the period for teen-age girls.

She cherished a closer than usual daughter-father relationship which continued to her father's untimely death in 1914. The relationship strengthened upon the death of her mother in 1880, was unmarred by her father's second marriage in 1884, and withstood the shock of his divorce some twenty-five years later. Judge Thomas was an exemplary public figure who interpreted to his children his feelings and aspirations for the public good. He represented his Illinois district in the National House of Representatives 1879 to 1889 and rendered distinguished service as a member, and later as chairman, of the House Committee on Naval Affairs. For a generation thereafter he was affectionately referred to by those who knew the Washington scene as the father of the modern navy.

Judge Thomas moved with his family to Muskogee immediately after his appointment on June 7, 1897 as Special Judge, Indian Territory. At that time Muskogee was an unincorporated town, without utilities and with fewer than 3,500 inhabitants. The family lived in a boarding house during the first year, but early in 1898 the newly constructed home of Judge Thomas located on a hill far beyond the town's limit was ready for occupancy. This house was recognized by a later generation as the home of the Foremans at 1419 West Okmulgee Avenue, and it was here that Carolyn died on February 18, 1967.

When her father transferred his interests to the tasks confronting him in Indian Territory, Carolyn likewise became involved with the people and the region. In the spring of 1898 Judge Thomas was designated by the Administration to assist in obtaining volunteers in Indian Territory for a regiment, the Rough Riders. Carolyn witnessed the departure of her brother, John Robert, to San Antonio for training with the group before embarkation for Cuba. She was chosen Sponsor by the recruits and their oath of induction was administered at Muskogee by her father before they entrained. (Fifty years later when a granite marker was placed at the spot in 1948, Mrs. Foreman unveiled the memorial tablet.)

Carolyn was enthralled by the excitement of the times as she experienced history in the making. Muskogee was a seed-bed for this interest: a city to be incorporated and developed, a state to be built, and Indians to be guided to a new and different citizen status as their tribal governments were terminated through the work of the Dawes Commission. At the same time she fell

in love with Nature's wonderland of Indian Territory and grew knowledgeable on its trees, shrubs, flowers and birds. All these interests led her to make a life-long study of the heritage of the region and its people. Practically all her contributions to the *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, beginning with an article in the September, 1927 issue, were about men and women and events of Indian Territory, preponderately on those of the Cherokee and Creek Nations.

Into Judge Thomas' home came leaders of an epoch: tribal stalwarts, chiefs and governors, legislators, school superintendents, and agents of the federal government. Congressmen, too, who visited the Territory for first-hand knowledge from committee hearings, called at the home of Judge Thomas whom they respected for his knowledge and judgment. Other callers were members and representatives of the Dawes Commission. Here Carolyn met the serious-minded young Illinois lawyer, Grant Foreman, an employee of the Commission, who was already developing an interest in the heritage of the Indians. After Judge Thomas entered into private practice, he took this young man into his law firm as a junior partner in 1903. Foreman's visits to the home became more than occasional: Carolyn had become the center of his attention. They were married July 28, 1905 with the Reverend A. Grant Evans, President of Henry Kendall College, officiating, and they became an inseparable husband-wife team until Dr. Foreman's death April 21, 1953.

The young lawyer and his bride made an extended trip to Western Europe. Reflecting his interest in his adopted community, he gathered data on the economic importance of European waterways, and upon their return presented an analytical report on his findings to civic leaders. Thus he became Muskogee's strongest proponent of the period for Arkansas River navigation.

Mrs. Foreman, likewise, was active in community affairs. When the Muskogee General Hospital became operative in 1909, she served as a member of its Board of Women Managers for a number of years. Her interest in the hospital led to greater activity during World War I. After the country entered the war in April of 1917, the Foremans paid their expenses to Washington in order to learn about local Red Cross activities in support of the war effort. Upon her return, as Director of Women's Work of the Muskogee County Chapter of the American Red Cross, she organized units and instructed surgical dressing classes in Muskogee and nearby communities. Quotas were exceeded. Muskogee was a center through which troop trains passed to and from training camps. It became known as the place where Red Cross women greeted all trains with hot soup, coffee and dough-

nata. Mrs. Foreman drove herself tirelessly; this was the busiest time of her life in community work.

When Grant Foreman retired from the active practice of law after World War I, the Foremans devoted their time to serious research and writing. They liked to travel; they visited Europe several times and made two trips around the world. Quite often extended absences from home were in the interest of research. Once she remarked that they had transcribed notes in one hundred thirteen libraries of this and other countries. How fortunate for us that these two pooled their talents and resources to examine government documents, missionary reports, diaries, unpublished manuscripts, and old newspapers, assembled data on Indian Territory, and prepared articles pertaining to the region and its people!

Wherever they travelled they observed the life and conditions of people away from the usual tourist haunts. They shared their observations with Muskogee-area residents through letters by Dr. Foreman published in the *Muskogee Phoenix*. On their last trip to India they talked at length with Mahatma Gandhi who knew of their research on the Indians of this country.

It is easy to make the assertion that Dr. and Mrs. Foreman were a team in mining source data on the region and fusing it into readable accounts for public use. This is common knowledge, easily corroborated by an examination of their published works, recognized for all Oklahomans by the faculty of the University of Oklahoma in 1943 when it proclaimed "deep appreciation of Grant Foreman and his wife and co-worker, Carolyn Thomas Foreman, for their research and writing in Oklahoma and Southwestern history over a period of more than 35 years."

It is more difficult to be so positive about her influence on him in promoting projects which redounded to the credit of the Historical Society. Their threads of interest on matters historical were so interwoven, so tightly knit, that it is impossible to separate one from the other.

In the article on Grant Foreman which appeared in the Autumn, 1953 issue of the *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, mention was made of his many contributions to the Society as a member of the Board of Directors. He would insist that she share this credit. Indeed, the Board of Directors of the Society, recognizing her many contributions, made her an honorary member at its annual meeting on April 23, 1959.

Mrs. Foreman's idea was followed in setting up the WPA project to index by subject matter all newspapers on file in the Society from the earliest issues of territorial days through 1936.

She had recently completed seven years of research for her first book, *Oklahoma Imprints, 1835-1907*, a history of printing in Oklahoma before statehood. She did time-consuming research in the Library of Congress and other out-of-state libraries, but a considerable portion of her work took place in the collection of the Historical Society. Her suggestion for the index project, presented to the Board of Directors by Dr. Foreman, was adopted. The more than one million three-by-five subject-matter index cards on file in the Newspaper Room of the Society have been responsible for time-saving research.

She also conceived the idea for the Indian-Pioneer History project, undertaken with WPA assistance in 1937. One Sunday afternoon in May of 1936 while picnicking in a pasture near the old military road from Ft. Smith to Ft. Gibson, Carolyn Foreman talked of the need to preserve reminiscences of pioneers, to uncover old diaries, letters and manuscripts, to locate family cemeteries as well as to mark distant trails and landmarks of yesteryear. Her suggestion reached fruition through the interest of Dr. M. L. Wardell of the University of Oklahoma, and Dr. E. E. Dale and other members of the Board of Directors of the Historical Society. When the project was completed, some ninety bound volumes, each with more than three hundred typewritten pages, were placed with the University of Oklahoma and the Historical Society. The late Kenneth Kaufman, long-time editor of the literary page of *The Sunday Oklahoman*, described the collection as an outstanding contribution of folkway, the social and economic history of pioneer Oklahoma.

Mrs. Foreman's greatest recognized literary achievement came with publication by the University of Oklahoma Press in 1943 of her second book, *Indians Abroad*. Research for the book was done in libraries of this country, and the archives and libraries in Mexico City, Madrid, Paris, Brussels, and London. She possessed a command of the French language, and became equally facile in the use of Spanish, partially as a result of the many summers she and Dr. Foreman spent in Mexico City. *Indians Abroad*, published during World War II, was selected by the Office of War Information as one of the volumes to be placed in overseas libraries accessible to our military forces. A second printing of eighty thousand copies was made for this purpose.

Books and articles by Mrs. Foreman were remarkably factual in content and explored a subject in depth. Sometimes prolix and uneven in presentation of the subject matter — even repetitious at times — she nevertheless presented an exhaustive study, making thereby a valuable contribution on the history of

men and events. A recent random sampling of master's theses pertaining to Oklahoma history on file at our state's two senior universities revealed few that did not list the Foremans in bibliographies. Several, obviously, were the elaboration of foot-notes appearing in their published works.

As recognition came to the Foremans, their home attracted out-of-state scholars, nationally-known writers, as well as student candidates for degrees in the field of Southwestern history. They were unfailingly gracious in sharing their knowledge with those who shared their interests in researching facts on Oklahoma. After the death of her husband, Mrs. Foreman sustained herself with interest in research. She contributed more than twenty articles to the *Chronicles* during this period, was author of one book and co-author of another, and arranged for the republication of two of Dr. Foreman's books.

She received the annual award in 1959 from the American Association for State and Local History as the individual "contributing most significantly to the understanding and development of local history in the south central region of the United States." She held membership in the National Society of Magna Charta Dames, and recognition for her writings brought membership in the nationally-recognized Pen and Brush Club and the Eugene Field Club. She was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame November 16, 1938.

Mrs. Foreman was an honorary member of the Muskogee Women's Forum, an Oklahoma Federated Woman's Club; Delta Kappa Gamma, Epsilon Chapter; and the Pilot Club of Muskogee. In 1960 a local honor she considered distinctive was bestowed upon her and a long-time friend, Mrs. Frances Rosser Brown, active in the establishment of the Five Tribes Museum, Muskogee. They were made members of the Da-Co-Tah Indian Club, Muskogee, the only members of non-Indian lineage.

The Foremans loved books and periodicals. Bookshelves lined the walls, overflowing into the hallway, and in the study were cabinets filled with the notes transcribed from archival and library sources. To these, they could give their undivided attention. Thomas J. Pressley, member of the household during the last thirty-six years of Mrs. Foreman's life, efficiently relieved her of the daily tedium associated with home management.

Grant and Carolyn Foreman had no children of their own, but young children never entered the home without being captivated by the pull and cuddly toys Mrs. Foreman kept for their amusement. And, through the years, rarely a week passed that

young ladies of the community did not call upon her to chat about school and college plans. They felt impelled to share their fascinating world with her. She was a source of encouragement to young men and women of Indian descent, a heritage from an association formed in territorial days with the Indian Rights Association and nurtured by intimate contact with Indians and their problems.

It was only natural that the Foreman home reflected her interest in travel and the culture of other nations. Statuary and wood carvings, old brass, paintings and prints, weaving, batik, chinaware, and a fine bell collection contributed to making theirs a home of distinction. Mrs. Foreman appreciated art in many forms. Nettie Wheeler, her friend through the Muskogee years, recently commented on this: "Carolyn had seen and studied the great art of the world and her opinion was important. And when the first small paintings by American Indians appeared, she highly approved of this new form of expression. She understood Oriental art; she saw the relationship. When Acee Blue Eagle was still a young student at Bacone, she purchased one of his first paintings and proudly hung it in the study. Too, she helped Willard Stone, the famous wood carver. Willard, whom Dr. Foreman discovered, was a protege of hers. It was Carolyn who persuaded Tom Gilcrease of Tulsa to grant a scholarship to Willard when he first began his carving. This scholarship lasted two years and the magnificent Willard Stone collection of wood carvings in the Gilcrease Museum is a result. Her interest in Indian art continued, and even in her nineties she was one of the first to recognize the great talent of the young fullblood Indian, Jerome Tiger. She purchased the painting, "Seminole," one of his first, and presented it to the Grant Foreman Public School, Muskogee."

Anyone who attempts to measure the stature of this generous-spirited and public-minded woman can do no better than recall John Donne's undated words, "No man is an island entire of itself." Our mighty nation was still a vast wilderness more than three hundred years ago when that prescient Englishman wrote "Any man's death diminishes me because I am a part of mankind." Carolyn Thomas Foreman, chief contributor to the *Chronicles*, author of six books, co-author of another, all relating to the region and the people she loved, community worker, scholar, and always young in spirit, has added stature to all Oklahomans.