

NECROLOGIES

WILLIAM FINLEY SEMPLE

1883 - 1969

The name of William Finley Semple has been associated with Choctaw affairs since the turn of the century. Born at Caddo, Indian Territory in the present Bryan County on March 16, 1883, the son of Charles Alexander Semple and Minnie Pitchlynn Semple, he attended Jones Academy near McAlester and graduated from Washington and Lee University at Lexington, Virginia in 1907. He set up his law practice in Durant specializing in land titles. He was elected to the House of Representatives in the 2nd Oklahoma State Legislature, from Caddo, Oklahoma. He was appointed Attorney for the Choctaw Tribe and later served as counsel for the Bureau of Indian Affairs during the administration of President William Howard Taft.

President Woodrow Wilson appointed Mr. Semple, Principal Chief of the Choctaws in which capacity he served from 1918 to 1922. He came to Tulsa in 1932 as general counsel for Deep Rock Oil Corporation and served as its Chief Counsel for seventeen years until his retirement in 1949. With his retirement from Deep Rock he again opened his law office fighting many legal battles as tribal attorney for the Choctaws and the Creeks.

The Choctaws retained more of their tribal lands than any of the Five Civilized Tribes at the close of their tribal governments in 1907. On August 25, 1959, Congress authorized the Choctaw tribal council to dispose of the remaining property that included 16,500 acres of land on which the tribe retained 1/2 of the minerals. It was with the disposition of this property that Mr. Semple was concerned during his third tenure as Choctaw Attorney.

His book, *Oklahoma Indian Land Titles*, published in 1952 by the Thomas Law Book Company of St. Louis is used in the universities as a text. He was an admirer of Judge Isaac C. Parker of Fort Smith and presented some of the Judge's law books to the University of Tulsa in 1960. Mr. Semple was awarded the Golden Legion of Phi Delta Theta in 1955.

The wife of William Finley Semple, Clara Petty Semple, died on June 11, 1966, after fifty-six years of marriage. Mr. Semple's maternal great, great grandfather was Major John Pitchlynn, a former officer in the colonial army who came to live with the Choctaws in Mississippi in 1774. He is described in contemporary journals as "the man who knew Pushmataha best."

Major Pitchlynn was appointed official Choctaw interpreter during President George Washington's administration and served for many years in this capacity. He was present during the negotiations at the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek in 1830, whereby the Choctaws gave up their lands in Mississippi and immigrated to the Indian Territory. He



WILLIAM FINLEY SEMPLE

was married to Sophia Polson. She came west to Indian Territory (now Oklahoma) with her son, Peter Perkins Pitchlynn, the Major being too old to travel. She lived to the age of one-hundred years and is buried in the old Garland Cemetery in McCurtain County.

Peter Perkins Pitchlynn, Mr. Semple's great grandfather attended Choctaw Academy in Kentucky set up by Vice President Richard M. Johnson for outstanding Indian Boys, and later attended what is now Vanderbilt University. He practiced law in Arkansas and the Choctaw Nation. He was tribal attorney and delegate when the debate over questions relating to the Indian Removal from Mississippi was before Congress and on February 3, 1849, delivered a devastating attack on a bill in Washington which had the effect of delaying the question.

After the Civil War, as Principal Chief of the Choctaw Nation, Peter P. Pitchlynn negotiated for the surrender of the Confederate Choctaws on June 19, 1865. The U. S. Government commissioners charged the Indian nations with treasonable conduct for having joined the Confederate States. The Choctaws maintained that the Federal government had abandoned them in the Indian Territory at the outbreak of the War; they had fought for their land in the great conflict, and still remained a nation at its close. As a result, a new treaty was drafted and signed at Washington, D. C., on April 28, 1866, providing that the Choctaw Leased District lands west of the 98th Meridian in Indian Territory be given over for settlement by the Plains tribes; all tribal land east of the 98th Meridian, south of the Arkansas and Canadian rivers, remained in the title of the Choctaw Nation, in which the Chickasaws shared in part.

The Choctaws were forward looking in matters of education as evidenced by the establishment of Spencer, Fort Coffee, Armstrong and Jones academies for boys in their new nation west, as well as Wheelock, Goodwater, New Hope and Tuskahoma academies for girls. From 1834 to 1907, the Choctaws had their own constitution and laws. The Nation was divided into judicial districts, and its citizens elected their county and national officers, — council (legislative) members, lighthorsemen, clerks and judges. Well versed in the Choctaw government and its laws and treaties, William Finley Semple served his people faithfully for many years. He was an outstanding member of a noted Choctaw family and a descendant of Presbyterian missionaries whose lives were devoted to Christian culture in the history of Oklahoma.

—John E. Ingram

Tulsa, Oklahoma

WILLIAM PENN COUCH
1910 — 1971

William Penn Couch, retired United States Air Force Lieutenant Colonel, devoted his life to service of his country: as a boy who studied to show himself approved and win honors of his state, his school and himself; as a man who devoted himself to business, and then to the

business of his state, serving in both houses of the State Legislature; and as an enlisted member in the armed forces of his country. He was carrying on in the tradition of his pioneer family that has been identified with the old Indian Territory and Oklahoma for over 125 years.

The first Couch, John, of South Carolina who moved to Mississippi and Georgia, and later to Texas, came with his family to the old Cherokee nation enroute home to Texas after traveling in a wagon train to Utah and the California gold fields. After the Civil War, his son, James Clark Couch, a freighter and merchant made long cattle drives over the Texas Road from the Italy-Waxahachie Texas area through the Indian Nations to Kansas, finally going on to Kansas City. It was on these trips that the Couch cattle herds were held for grazing in the Verdigris River Valley near the present town of Alluwe, the area which later became the Couch Ranch. It was on one of these trips that Couch, carrying money from his cattle sale, escaped from pursuing robbers with help from a railroad conductor who invited Couch into the private car of the President of the United States for a safe ride back to Texas.

His son, Herbert Franklin Couch, reared in the lush cotton lands of East Texas, came North to the Indian Territory, the land over which his father had driven cattle. He came to the area his father had visited, now Nowata and Rogers counties, arriving in December, 1894. He settled in Chelsea where in 1896 he married Ida May Coker, a native of the Coker Hills Area where her family had settled in 1867. Her mother, Eliza Bullett, was the 125th Delaware to come from Kansas to the Indian Territory. This family has left its imprint in this area with place names in Nowata, Rogers and Tulsa counties. She was a descendant of the Cherokee Chief John Rogers, who had come to the Territory in the early 1800's.

The Couches settled on lands in the Alluwe district where they developed wide farming and livestock interests, and operated a store on Salt Creek, a landmark in the early years of the century. The store became the target of frequent visits of outlaw gangs. After it was burned, Herbert Franklin Couch moved his business to Pumpkin Center and entered the oil and gas business during the boom days of Oklahoma's first oil field.

It was to this family in their ranch home that William Penn Couch was born February 22, 1910. He grew up in that area, and attended Salt Creek School in the community. He later graduated from Nowata High School. He was a member of championship judging teams in six fields. He was twice a member of world championship judging teams and won 208 awards in one year, a world's record. He served as president of the Nowata county and northeastern district 4-H Club organizations, and later as president of Oklahoma 4-H Clubs. After high school, Mr. Couch attended Oklahoma State University. He left college to operate the Couch store at Pumpkin Center and also to engage in farming and ranching.

A life-long Democrat, Mr. Couch had early developed a real interest in politics. He made his first race for office in 1934, and won the election for Nowata County Representative. He served in the State

**WILLIAM PENN COUCH**

Capitol 1934 to 1938. He then was elected to the office of State Senator from the Rogers-Nowata counties district. He served from 1938 to 1942. During the eight years of his legislative service, Couch did not miss a vote, piling up 4750 consecutive votes which became a world's record. Couch is credited with much of the state road system in Nowata and Rogers counties.

He left the State Senate to enter the armed forces at the beginning of World War II. He enlisted in the army, serving in the infantry as a private and later a corporal. He then was sent to officers candidate school, receiving a commission as a second lieutenant in the quartermaster corps. He was detailed to duty with the army air corps, and won promotions to 1st lieutenant, captain and major when he left active duty for service in the reserves. When the army air corps became the United States Air Force, Couch changed his branch of service. He returned to active duty in May 1952 and was a lieutenant colonel when he retired after twenty-four years of service.

Couch served during World War II, the Korean and Vietnamese actions. He spent seventy-two months on duty in Asia, Africa, Europe and South America. He was an accountable property officer with the air transport command, engaged in closing United States bases abroad. While on duty in Africa, in France and Germany, Couch was in charge of Italian and German prisoners of war, assisting in the war crimes trials conducted by the Judge advocate division. During his military career, he was awarded campaign ribbons in World War II and European and Asiatic war zones.

Mr. Couch retired from military service August 1, 1966 and returned to Nowata to make his home again. He interested himself in affairs of the area of Nowata, Rogers and Craig counties. Again he became interested in politics, and was preparing to return to business as operator of a curio shop. The veteran legislator again had interested himself in youth work. He had memberships in the VPW, American Legion, and Farmers Union.

Mr. Couch died at his home in Nowata on March 22, 1971, from a heart attack, at the age of 81 years, 28 days. He left to mourn his death two brothers, V. Clark and Herbert F. Couch living near Alluwe; and four sisters, Leola Reinhardt of Albuquerque, New Mexico; Wanda Strain of Nowata; and Elna and Elaine Couch of near Alluwe. Afternoon funeral services were conducted in the Alluwe Methodist Church where his family had long been attendants. Interment was in the family plot at Nowata Memorial Park Cemetery.

Those who knew him best — the life-long friends — say that Mr. Couch was a gentleman of honor and integrity ... a man.

—Jennie M. Bard

Chelsea, Oklahoma