

# William Thomas Little

William Thomas Little (Will T.) participated in the land rush at the opening of the Oklahoma Territory. He wrote and printed the first newspaper in the newly opened Unassigned Lands. Named *The Guthrie Getup*, it came off the press on April 28, 1889. In his salutatory statement he wrote, "The Guthrie Getup prances into the promised land at the head of the procession, and issues before one week after the glorious 22nd of April, 1889."

Little suffered the same fate as many of the lesser known '89ers; historians largely overlooked them. Where many of the land rush participants rushed in to grab a quick profit, Little and thousands of other participants stayed. They built homes, started businesses and raised families. From the very beginning they built Oklahoma history and wrote about it. During his lifetime he was an editor, reporter, historian, farmer, and arbor culturist. In 1890, he compiled the new laws in the first volume of the *Statutes of Oklahoma*. In 1895, he was the newly elected representative of the territorial legislature. During his tenure, he introduced bills: to regulate oleomargarine; to help develop waterworks and other utilities in towns and villages; to improve the election process; to regulate pharmacists, and to establish a territorial insane asylum.

Little also took a strong interest in the new Oklahoma Historical Society which the Oklahoma Press Association started in 1893. During 1895, after the Oklahoma Press Association learned the University of Oklahoma incorporated the Oklahoma Historical Society, the two entities merged and soon after William Thomas Little became its custodian and curator. He developed the first archives, increased the number of documents and organized local meetings to collect local history.

During the next four years, he divided his time between the Historical Society and his home in Perry. He was the first Oklahoman to raise Tamworth hogs and the first to apply "shelterbelts" to his farm. He was elected VP of the American Forestry Association, representing Oklahoma. In 1889, he worked as a government land appraiser. In 1901, was appointed to the position of Postmaster at Perry where he persuaded the city fathers to plant trees in the local cemetery and convinced local school officials to start a tree nursery on unclaimed land on the edge of town. In 1902, he helped organize the Nobel County Farmers Institute. In 1904, he published *Oklahoma Farmer*, a review for farmers and tree growers. Little was recognized by the leading forestry societies of his time for his unwavering position on planting windbreaks in semi-arid areas such as those that existed in western Oklahoma. To illustrate his point, he purchased several thousand seedlings and planted them as windbreaks -- especially on the grounds of the Perry Courthouse -- and throughout the town before he died.

William Thomas Little died in an insane asylum in Norman, Oklahoma at the age of forty-six years, the victim of an organic brain disorder. At his death, July 5, 1908, *The Daily Oklahoman*, one of the oldest newspapers in existence in Oklahoma today, wrote in part, "..He was altogether one of the brainiest men that ever lived in Oklahoma."

Will T. married Maude Jensen Heileman, daughter of the U. S. Indian Agent for the Ponca and other tribes in 1902. They were the parents of Sarah M. Little, who married Joseph Brandt, later President of the University of Oklahoma; and Edward Thomas Little, who became involved with the oil drilling industry in Oklahoma City. Grandson Joseph T. Brandt, USMC., fought at Heartbreak Hill in the Korean War and received the Purple Heart.

Source: *The Little Family of Monmouth County, New Jersey* Donald C. Little 1951. Donald was a direct descendant of Thomas "Squire" Little.

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