

A HISTORY OF THE STATE OF OKLAHOMA

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JUDGE BRUCE L. KEENAN was formerly United States Commissioner for the Sixth Commissioner's District of the Northern Judicial District of the Indian Territory, and since statehood has practiced law with signal success at Tahlequah. He was born on a farm near Morgantown, Virginia, October 16, 1856. His father, John Payne Keenan, was born on a farm in Greene County, Pennsylvania, in 1824, and died near Morgantown, West Virginia, on a farm he had cultivated for fifty years.

His grandfather, Hugh Keenan, emigrated from Ireland, Fermanagh County, to New York early in the nineteenth century, and soon moved to southwest Pennsylvania, where he married an English lady by the name of Payne, who died early, leaving three children, Richard Keenan, John P. Keenan and Mary A. Courtney, of Marion, Iowa. Hugh Keenan, the grandfather, was a Catholic in belief but the children were brought up in an atmosphere that militated against the Romish creed and they all adhered to the then new creed of Methodism. In 1845, Hugh Keenan having remarried, the family, except Richard, drifted with the throng of western homeseekers to Iowa and located in Linn County of that state, about ten miles east from Cedar Rapids. At that time there were no railroads to the west, and travel was by water and overland. The company embarked at Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, and floated down the Ohio to the Mississippi, and thence by the Mississippi to Davenport, Iowa. John P. Keenan earned his passage by stoking the boat on its journey.

The country was new in Iowa then; and there was some danger of fever and chills along the water ways and low places. The party located a claim, built a cabin, broke the prairie and raised a crop of corn. John Payne Keenan, being one of the victims to the chills and fever, made up his mind to return to Pennsylvania. So, he offered his crop of corn for sale in the field. The price he got seems now remarkably low, five cents a bushel. Not having sufficient means to pay his passage back to civilization he gathered wild hops and sacked them and had them hauled to the Mississippi and forever turned his back on what seemed to him fever-stricken Iowa. With the sale of hops to supplement the fund received from his corn, he found his way safely to Pennsylvania, where his health was soon restored, but he had lost zeal for western adventure. Hugh Keenan and family, including the second set of children by the second wife, remained in Iowa, where he died in 1873. The location in Linn County was a good one, and some of the best farming land in the state is found in the vicinity of Springville and west to the Cedar River.

In 1853 John Payne Keenan married Nancy Scott, daughter of Thomas and Elizabeth Lazzell (born Bowlby) and settled on a farm in Virginia, near Morgantown, now West Virginia, where he died. He had but one term of school in all his life. He was self educated to the extent of the three rules — reading, writing and arithmetic. He kept himself well informed on what went on in the world according to what the newspapers said. He was a Democrat in politics, but he believed in America against the world and the Union above the rights of the states. When the rebellion was begun at Fort Sumter by firing on the flag, he was actuated by one sentiment—the preservation of the Union. He gave his adherence to the administration of Abraham Lincoln, offered his services to the Union army, which was declined on account of his health, and he never again voted the Democratic ticket. Thomas Lazzell, grandfather of the subject of this sketch, was one of the largest land owners in his section and a firm believer in the evil of slavery, and his was one of the two votes east for Lincoln in his township in 1860. And, it was he and men like John P. Keenan who put that county (Monongalia) in the Republican list in West Virginia, where it has ever since remained. Nancy Scott Keenan still survives, and her children are Leonidas H., a lawyer at Elkins, West Virginia, Bruce Lazzell, hereafter further mentioned; Mrs. Mary Elizabeth Davis, of Morgantown, West Virginia; and Thomas Grant and John Franklin, who reside on the home farm near the same place.

Bruce L. Keenan was an average country boy and attended such schools as were established after the war. He had no literary environments. He says there were but five books about the place—the Bible, Frost's Annals of American History, the Life of John Wesley, a "calculator" (arithmetic) and a speller. He learned to read from two terms of private school, and by chance there fell into his hands Ray's Practical Arithmetic (3rd part), and this he practically mastered by his own work, incited by curiosity more than anything else. He knew the speller by "heart"; competed for a prize by reciting more verses from the Methodist hymnal than any person in his neighborhood; and at nineteen was teaching a country school. He entered the West Virginia University and graduated with the Class of 1880, Congressman George A. Pearre of Cumberland, Maryland, being a member of the class. The greatest revelation in his college life was the world of books and the vast ramification of knowledge that lay before him. When he entered college from the country, he had no conception of the meaning of a library of books. It dawned on him that instead of learning all there is to know in a few years in college, life is too short a time to master even a few things in this world of thought.

He went to work with a will, and whenever he had time from his college work he acquainted himself with standard works of literature. He quit college in 1880, well acquainted with what is best in English literature, and had a wide knowledge of the Darwinian theory of evolution. He wrote a thesis during his college course on the "Biblical Objection to Evolution." He took the rather unpopular ground then that the theologians did not understand the Bible in its teaching as to creation. He contended that the Bible does not teach fiat creation, but that the sea brought forth and the earth brought forth the living things of sea and land. Man was brought forth out of the dust of the earth and made a living mortal by the "breath of life"; and it is just as easy to understand this to be through long ages of evolution to the point where the man is differentiated from the unthinking ancestor as it is to determine where the embryo child ceases to be a protoplasm and becomes an immortal being. Thirty years have gone by and the church has

come to this conclusion generally. His graduating subject was the "Religious Spirit of Science." Here he took advanced ground for the time. The Bible is not inerrant. It could not be transmitted and copied and recopied and preserved from error except by miracle. It could not be introduced in court by the rules of evidence because not identified as being preserved from the originals. But the truth in it, subjected to the spirit of true scientific investigation, will save it. Science calls for soberness, self-control, physical self-denial, purposeful industry, obedience to higher law, honest thinking, just living and for a religious spirit. This was then regarded as "Blasting at the Rock of Ages." Thirty years have revolutionized thought on this subject. From the time of his entrance in college, he paid his own expenses with the exception of three hundred and forty-five dollars of borrowed money; and he was in school five years counting one year in the law school. The cost of such a course must have exceeded one thousand dollars.

In 1879 he was elected to the county school superintendency of the schools of Monongalia County, West Virginia, a position he held for two years; and in 1881 he went to Piedmont, West Virginia, as principal of the public schools where he remained for two years, when he received his degree of Master of Science from his alma mater. He spent one year teaching in the High School of Crete, Nebraska, and studied law at odd times. He returned to the West Virginia University and graduated from the law department in 1885; passed the examination before the Supreme Court of that state and located in Wichita, Kansas, in the same year. After four years of practice he was elected a justice of the peace for the city of Wichita, Kansas, and served four years. He resumed his profession and was employed by the city council of Wichita to revise and remodel their city ordinances; a work which was done with gratifying success to all interested.

In politics he has always acted with the Republican Party. He believes the doctrine of the protective tariff is a world-wide policy; it is the sword of commerce by which nations fight their battles for commercial conquest. This nation needed it in the stage of infant industries to build up manufacturing and to protect the higher scale of wages to labor. This nation still needs it for our industries, for our higher paid labor and as the weapon and shield for our home market, the greatest on earth. Whatever may be its errors and abuses, under it we have built a great country; and the South has increased its manufactured products six fold in value in less than thirty years, and has in the same time advanced her cotton manufactures from fourteen per cent to fifty-two per cent of our nation's output.

Judge Keenan fought the battles for his party in Kansas when the silver craze carried some of the best men out of the Republican Party. Money does not make business, but business calls for money; the value of money depends on the standard out of which it is coined; value is not created by coinage, for coinage is not consumption of the standard; the relative value of gold and silver is not the relative amounts mined, nor the relative amounts coined, but the relative amounts undemanded by the arts and manufactures. The demand for unlimited coinage of silver at the ratio of 16 to 1 is the strangest and most unexplained error the west ever committed itself to. He was special agent for the Interior Department from 1900 to 1904, spending much of his time in Washington, and making his field investigations in Kansas and Missouri. On the 21st of April, 1904, he was appointed by Judge Joseph A. Gill, United States Commissioner to

succeed Frank N. Hamilton, at Tahlequah. As commissioner he had jurisdiction over what is now Adair and Cherokee counties, Oklahoma, and his administration was marked by rare discipline and splendid public order was preserved throughout the district for that day. His official association and his relations with the bar of the district were most harmonious.

When the preliminaries for statehood were being arranged he aided in planning for constitutional delegates and was the first candidate for county attorney for Cherokee county, Oklahoma, being defeated with his ticket. He was nominated for presidential elector in 1908, and during the campaign made the astonishing statement and proposition to the local Democrats that he would support Mr. Bryan if he would advocate the elimination of the 15th amendment from the constitution. He told the local Democrats that there was no such a thing as a political question on account of the negro in national politics: that the question was the South's question: and that he would support Mr. Bryan if he would indicate that there was a political race question and say what it is. Mr. Bryan refused to answer.

Judge Keenan is a successful lawyer and does not waste much time in his practice in motions and dilatory pleas. Demurrers and motions to make more definite and certain he thinks too often help the other fellow to construct his pleading correctly. He is not paid to help the other side. His advice to the young lawyer is to go direct to the heart of his own case and seek results by clearness of statement. Opportunity for orations may be found on Independence Day and in political campaigns— they are too often dangerous in the trial of a lawsuit.

In his mental qualities he has a decided literary bent, and his reading since he left college has taken him into science, philosophy, history, the new theology and the deeper significance of politics. Science deals with the orderly meaning of all things in nature, their existence and the laws of continuation; history considers the romance of man in his efforts to maintain what he calls civilization— the marvelous story of error and truth mingled in government and subsistence and in the production and distribution of life's necessities; the new theology points the way to a harmonious relation of right living here as the only real preparation to the hereafter —to a creedless but not divineless Christian unity; the real significance of politics is the practical science of self-government— the test as to whether we will or will not succeed in our experiment in Republicanism or Democracy.

We are living in an age of unrest and yet we are conservative. We are progressive but not revolutionary. We froth and foam over politics. We want things to come to pass but do not know exactly what. Mr. Bryan, who is conceded to be one of the greatest leaders of men in history, while in private life, has inculcated more error than any living man. A man who stands deservedly high as a man of integrity, yet by becoming the voice of the undigested appeal for reformation in politics he has fallen into errors and inconsistencies which greatly damage his reputation.

And now we have the west alive with "Insurgentism" and anti-"Cannonism." Anti-"Cannonism" is simply a question of Congress rules and a mere question of parliamentary law and not an issue in politics—both the old parties stand for "Cannonism" for this is but standing for organization. Anti-"Cannonism," however,

is a revolt against party organization— the Insurgent leaders will not admit it, but it is the truth just the same. It signifies whether party solidarity will remain, or will make way for a course of political independence. The fact that both sides appeal to the name "Republican" does not change this significant fact.

Judge Keenan believes in education, but it must be practical. The colleges of the past have spoiled quite as many men as they have helped— educated them away from what they were fit for. Education is but the awakening of the individual to know his own capacity and limitations and to fit himself accordingly. A farmer may spend a thousand dollars to spoil his son for farming, only to find he is a dismal failure at anything else. The schools do not create capacity, but they fit capacity for opportunity. You do not enter physical cripples to win in the Marathon races; but too many mental cripples are entered in our colleges without being helped to find their limitations. You cannot put a quart of water in a pint cup without running it over.

Judge Keenan's library indicates the variety of his reading; but he insists that men read too much for the thinking they do— live too much in the shadow of other men's ideas. He enjoys the conversation of well informed people and talks interestingly. He is rather abrupt with the uninformed fogey. He has ideas on all subjects of the day. Woman suffrage for instance; that he says is the woman's question. When women unite and ask for the ballot, if they ever do, that will end it— there will be no room for debate then.

He is a stockholder in the Oklahoma State Bank at Tahlequah, and President of the Commercial Club, and takes a prominent part in the social and public life at the old Cherokee capital and enjoys a large circle of personal and political friends. If the Republicans succeed in carrying the next election in the First Judicial District of Oklahoma, he will probably be made District Judge.

On October 16, 1890, he and Alice M. Overstreet were married at Emporia, Kansas; her father, Robert M. Overstreet, was a pioneer of that place and still resides there. He was a Presbyterian preacher and helped to found the Georgetown College in Texas, but left during the war on account of his adherence to the cause of the Union. Alice M. Overstreet was educated in the Kansas State Normal at Emporia, where she received a diploma and a teacher's life certificate. She is a woman of domestic tastes, but with rare intellectual attainments and very popular. Rev. Robert. M. Overstreet and Margaret Baugh were married, and the children living of this marriage are: Miss Mayme, a teacher in the public schools at El Reno, Oklahoma; Dr. Joseph Addison Overstreet, of Kingfisher, Oklahoma; Mrs. Alice M. Keenan; Mrs. Madge M. Wright, wife to Lee R. Wright, of Kansas City, Missouri; Frances, wife of Dr. John M. Parrington, of Emporia, Kansas; Jesse D. Overstreet, a farmer at Chillicothe, Texas.

Mr. and Mrs. Keenan met while she was teaching in Lewis Academy at Wichita, Kansas. They have five children, namely: Robert Bruce, born July 26, 1891, who finished the course in the Tahlequah high school in 1909; Marguerite, born October 3, 1892; Hypatia, born November 1, 1894; Claude Overstreet, born July 14, 1898; and John Kenneth, born September 22, 1900; they are all students in the North Eastern Normal School at Tahlequah.