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1959

THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
GRADUATE COLLEGE

THE LIFE OF ALICE MARY ROBERTSON

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY
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Searcy, Arkansas

1959

THE LIFE OF ALICE MARY ROBERTSON

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PREFACE

A writer of a dissertation presumably knows why he has chosen the subject for his writing, but the reader probably does not know. In this instance it was a very simple decision. A biographical study, with Oklahoma as the background, had an appeal for me; and the chairman of my committee suggested Alice Robertson as a subject. I have not regretted the choice. The research led me to know many interesting people and a larger number of places within the state. The experience has been enjoyable and profitable. My understanding of the territory and state of Oklahoma has been greatly broadened, particularly in the period in which Alice Robertson lived.

The purpose of this study is to present an appreciation of Alice Mary Robertson and to point out her many contributions as Indian missionary, educator, business woman, benefactor, and congresswoman. These contributions were all the more notable for having been made at a time when women in public life were considered out of place.

The method of approach is chronological. After a chapter of background information which deals with her ancestry, the study moves on from the circumstances of her birth at Tullahassee, Indian Territory, in 1854, to her death at Muskogee, Oklahoma, in 1931. Although the presentation is strictly chronological, each chapter points out the distinct achievements of its particular period.

The materials examined in the pursuance of this investigation were for the most part primary sources. They consisted of her own articles in newspapers and magazines; government documents; and biographical material including press clippings, magazine articles, photos, and interviews. Most of these sources were found in the archives of the Oklahoma Historical Society and the University of Tulsa library. Of particular importance was the complete chronological file of her letters in the University of Tulsa library. The secondary sources examined were limited to background material on the times in Oklahoma and in the nation.

The study reveals her as a patriotic citizen of varied interests and deep sympathy for unfortunates, especially Indians who had not enjoyed the advantages of civilization. It portrays her as an extreme conservative in politics, religion, economics and personal habits. It concludes that the memory of a life dedicated to the welfare of others is worth preserving.

I hope I have been able to depict the times in which Miss Robertson lived in justice and fairness to the facts and especially to her life and work. It is not my intention to discredit or uphold but to let the record speak for itself.

This dissertation could not have been written without the assistance of many people. I want to give credit to members of my committee-- Drs. Edwin C. McReynolds, Alfred B. Sears, Gilbert C. Fite, Rufus G. Hall, and C. C. Bush--who were so helpful and patient in directing my work; to Mrs. Rella Looney, director of the archives of the Oklahoma Historical Society; Miss Eugenia Mattox, librarian of the University of Tulsa; Mrs. O. R. Hisel and Mrs. Grant Foreman of Muskogee for their help

in locating materials; to Drs. Orlan Sawey and Robert Meyers, of the English department of Harding College; Anne Mae Alson, librarian of Harding College; Mrs. Bess C. Chitwood, Bartlesville High School, for their assistance in reading and correcting the manuscript. Last, but by no means least of all, special credit should go to my wife Donna for doing the typing and making many helpful suggestions.

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THE LIFE OF ALICE MARY ROBERTSON

CHAPTER I

WORCESTER versus GEORGIA

On May 16, 1831, Governor Gilmer of Georgia wrote a letter to Samuel Austin Worcester, Alice Robertson's grandfather, with something less than southern hospitality:¹

Sir, it is . . . my official duty to cause all white persons residing within the territory of the state occupied by the Cherokees to be removed therefrom, who refuse to take the oath to support the constitution and laws of the state. Information has been received of your continued residence within that territory, without complying with the requisites of the law, [passed by the state December, 1830]² and of your claim to be exempted from its operation, on account of your holding the office of postmaster of New Echota. You have no doubt been informed of your dismissal from that office. . . . You are also informed that the government of the United States does not recognize as its agents the missionaries acting under the direction of the American Board of Foreign Missions. . . . I am still desirous of giving you and all others similarly situated, an opportunity of avoiding the punishment which will certainly follow your further residence within the state contrary to its laws. You are, therefore, advised to remove from the territory of Georgia occupied by the Cherokees. Col. Sanford, the Commander of the Guard, will be requested to have this letter delivered to you, and to delay your arrest until you have had an opportunity of leaving the state.

The preacher sent a lengthy reply to the governor, explaining the nature of his work among the Indians. He pointed out that he was not

¹Althea Bass, Cherokee Messenger (Norman, 1936), 130-31. Hereafter cited as Bass, Messenger. Niles Weekly Register, XL, 297. Hereafter cited as Niles Register.

²William MacDonald, Jacksonian Democracy (New York, 1906), 176.

working against the state of Georgia and that his primary purpose was to educate and Christianize the Cherokee Indians. He concluded by saying that he could not take the oath required because he was not a citizen of the state of Georgia, that Georgia had no jurisdiction over the Indian Nation, that he would remain until forcibly expelled. While some of the missionaries moved out of the state, the Worcesters remained at New Echota.³

This conflict, involving Georgia, Cherokees, and the United States, began in 1802 when the state relinquished claim to its western territory. In return, the Federal Government was to pay one million two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, accept the responsibility of settling the Yazoo claims, and extinguish Indian title to the land in the state as soon as it could be done peaceably and on reasonable terms.⁴ In view of this agreement, Georgia resented the presence of the Cherokees within her borders and charged that the Federal Government was not keeping faith, since little effort had been made to carry out Indian removals. The state declared that if the United States did not remove the Indians, she would feel at liberty to do so by force, if necessary.⁵

The Federal Government had made a treaty with the Cherokees in 1817 whereby they could trade their land for equal acreage west of the Mississippi along the Arkansas and White rivers.⁶ Accordingly, about

³Bass, Messenger, 136.

⁴American State Papers (38 vols., Washington, 1832-61), 125.

⁵Thomas V. Parker, The Cherokee Indians with Special Reference to Their Relations with the United States Government (New York, 1907), 18. Hereafter cited as Parker, Cherokee Indians.

⁶Charles J. Kappler, ed., Indian Affairs, Laws and Treaties (Washington, 1904), II, 140-44.

one-third of the Cherokee land east of the Mississippi was ceded to the United States, and Indian families began to move to the new location. By 1830 there were approximately two thousand Cherokees living in the West.⁷ These were known as the Cherokee West and those who remained were known as the Cherokee East. But the majority of the tribe still lived within the state of Georgia.

Two events took place in the late 1820's which goaded the Georgians into action. The first was the adoption of the Cherokee constitution in 1826, which stated in the preamble: "We, the Cherokee people, constituting one of the sovereign and independent nations of the earth, and having complete jurisdiction over its territory to the exclusion of the authority of every other state, do ordain this constitution."⁸ These were defiant words. The second event was the discovery of gold in 1828 near Dohlonega in the southeastern part of the Cherokee Nation. By 1830 about four thousand whites had crowded into the gold field. Those who were baffled in their search for riches staked out land for themselves and began farming.⁹

At this point, Georgia began to take charge of the situation by passing laws directed against the Indians. One annexed the Indian Territory to the state and provided that all laws and customs made and enforced by the Indians would be null and void after June 1, 1830. Another

⁷Grant Foreman, The Five Civilized Tribes (Norman, 1928), 281.

⁸Ralph Henry Gabriel, Elias Boudinot, Cherokee and His America (Norman, 1941), 122. Hereafter cited as Gabriel, Boudinot.

⁹Marion L. Starkey, The Cherokee Nation (New York, 1946), 110-14. Hereafter cited as Starkey, Cherokee Nation. Edwin C. McReynolds, Oklahoma, A History of the Sooner State (Norman, 1954), 15. Hereafter cited as McReynolds, Oklahoma.

read: "No Indian or descendant of an Indian shall be a competent witness or party to a suit to which a white man is a party."¹⁰

By 1830, events had occurred among the Cherokees which made them the best known of any tribe. The reputation of Sequoyah¹¹ and the publication of their own newspaper, The Phoenix, which began February 21, 1828,¹² had brought much consideration. Later happenings focused even greater attention on them: a gold rush; the unusual procedure of a tribe of Indians challenging the power of a state before the Supreme Court; and debates in Congress. The latter resulted in the passage of the Indian Removal Act in 1830.¹³ President Jackson upheld the state's contention of jurisdiction over the Indians and supported the bill for Indian removal.¹⁴

Convinced that they could get no sympathy from the state of Georgia or the President, the Cherokees appealed to the United States Supreme Court. William Wirt, former Attorney General of the United States, was obtained as counsel. A criminal case took place in Georgia which brought the issue into the open. Corn Tassel, an Indian, had killed

¹⁰Niles Register, XXXVIII, 54-55, 329; Parker, Cherokee Indians, 19.

¹¹The English name of Sequoyah, inventor of the Cherokee alphabet, was George Guess. Grant Foreman, Sequoyah (Norman, 1938), 1.

¹²Gabriel, Boudinot, 110.

¹³U.S., Statutes at Large, IV, 411; Dictionary of American History (James Truslow Adams, ed., 6 vols., New York, 1940), IV 448.

¹⁴James D. Richardson (comp.), A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1902 (10 vols., Washington, 1905), II, 457-59, 520-21, 555. President Jackson set forth his policy toward the Indians in each of his annual messages. MacDonald, Jacksonian Democracy, 171-72; Grant Foreman, The Last Trek of the Indians (Chicago, 1946), 59-60.

another Indian and was promptly arrested and tried by the state in the Superior Court of Hall County. He was given the death penalty. On a writ of error, the United States Supreme Court summoned the state to appear in court on the second Monday in January 1831. The Georgia legislature passed a resolution declaring this summons an abridgment of the rights of the state and ordered the governor to disregard it. The governor complied and the execution of Corn Tassel was carried out. Nothing more was done about it.¹⁵

As a result of Georgia extending jurisdiction over the Indian Territory, the Cherokees sought relief in the United States Supreme Court to prohibit the enforcement of the laws of the state against them. On March 5, 1831, the court dismissed the suit for want of jurisdiction because the Cherokee Nation was not a foreign state within the meaning of the constitution, and therefore could not bring action against Georgia. John Marshall wrote the majority opinion and said that the relation of the Cherokee Nation and other Indian tribes to the United States "resembles that of a ward to his guardians." The tribal organizations were "domestic, dependent nations."¹⁶

Discouragement and distraction prevailed throughout the Cherokee Nation. On March 12, 1831, Isaac Proctor, the Rev. Samuel A. Worcester, and the Rev. John Thompson, teachers and missionaries at Carmel, New Echota, and Hightower were seized by twenty-five members of the Georgia guard, but were discharged on the ground that they were agents of the

¹⁵Niles Register, XXXIX, 338; McReynolds, Oklahoma, 151-52.

¹⁶Cherokee Nation v. Georgia, 5 Peters, 1.

Federal Government. Soon afterward the missionaries were told that if they did not leave the Indian Territory within ten days they would be taken into custody.¹⁷

Colonel Sanford, who was carrying out the directions of the state to apprehend illegal residents in the Indian Territory, delayed the arrest of the missionary because of the illness of his wife. Their third child, Jerusha, had been born February 27. A difficult confinement and an attack of a fever had kept Mrs. Worcester in bed for many weeks. Though she slowly recovered, she could not be removed without immediate danger to her life.¹⁸

On July 7, her husband was seized and taken to Camp Gilmer, where the other white prisoners were held. Learning that his trial would not be held until September, and knowing that if he remained in Georgia he would be imprisoned, he obtained a release and went to Brainerd, Tennessee. He depended upon friends and neighbors to care for his sick wife and baby. It was during his stay at Brainerd that Jerusha died, August 14, 1831. The little girls, Ann Eliza (who was to become the mother of Alice M. Robertson) and Sarah watched in bewilderment the tragic events in their family.¹⁹

The trial of the eleven missionaries was held in the Superior Court of Gwinnett County, Georgia, on September 15. They were convicted of residing unlawfully in the Indian Territory and were sentenced to four years in

¹⁷Niles Register, XL, 297.

¹⁸Ibid.; Bass, Messenger, 131.

¹⁹Ibid., 137.

the Georgia penitentiary. After the conviction, Mr. Worcester spoke:²⁰

May it please the court--if I am guilty of the charges which have been made against me in the argument of this case, but not alleged in the indictment, then I have nothing to say why the sentence of the law should not be pronounced against me--But I aver before God and my country, that I am not guilty of those charges. I therefore say what I have heretofore said, that the state of Georgia has no right of jurisdiction over the territory in which I reside, and therefore this court has no right to pass sentence upon me.

Of the eleven convicted, only two entered the prison, since Governor Gilmer offered to pardon those who would take the oath of allegiance to the laws of the state or cease their missionary work. For hours the two men, Worcester and Elizur Butler, were urged to accept the governor's offer, but they steadfastly refused.²¹

Meanwhile, Mrs. Worcester was carrying on the work of the mission at New Echota, but she was anxious for her husband. She worried about his health, the effects of the hard labor, and his need of blankets for the winter. An Indian friend and co-worker, Elias Boudinot, with sympathetic understanding, set about to make a visit to her husband possible. He raised enough money for the trip and two blankets. This support came from members of the tribe and he assured her that he could get more if she needed it.²²

The visit took place in November 1831. Mrs. Worcester was accompanied by Mrs. Butler, and they were kindly received by the prison officials and the Governor. They remained from Saturday until Wednesday and were allowed to be with their husbands each day except Sunday. They were permitted to visit the workshops where the men were learning carpentry and

²⁰Niles Register, XLI, 174.

²¹Bass, Messenger, 143.

²²Ibid., 145-47.

cabinet making. It was an opportunity for them to learn skills which they would need later in missionary life.²³

Meanwhile, everything was being done to liberate the prisoners through the United States Supreme Court. Their case was brought before the tribunal on a writ of error and argued by William Wirt and John Sargeant on February 20, 21, and 22. Georgia refused to appear. Chief Justice Marshall gave the opinion of the Court on March 3. He declared the laws of Georgia extending jurisdiction of the state over the Cherokee Nation to be unconstitutional, contrary to the laws and treaties of the United States, and therefore, null and void. He summarized his arguments by saying:²⁴

The Cherokee Nation, then, is a distinct community, occupying its own territory, with boundaries accurately described, in which the laws of Georgia can have no force, and which the citizens of Georgia have no right to enter, but with the assent of the Cherokees themselves, or in conformity with treaties, and with the acts of Congress. The whole intercourse between the United States and this nation, is, by our constitution and laws, vested in the government of the United States.

Immediately the clerk of the court issued a mandate saying, "All proceedings of the said indictment do forever surcease, and that the said Samuel A. Worcester be, and hereby is, henceforth, dismissed therefrom, and that he go thereof, quit without delay."²⁵ This is one of the great cases in United States constitutional history and one which helped to

²³Ibid. One of the cabinets made by Worcester while in prison is in the Tulsa University Library.

²⁴Worcester v. Georgia, 6 Peters, 515.

²⁵Gabriel, Boudinot, 131.

give Samuel Austin Worcester a prominent place in American history.²⁶

Now all eyes turned on President Jackson. What would he do? It was not an easy decision. He had been unyielding in putting down the exercise of state sovereignty in South Carolina and now he was confronted with the same problem in Georgia. The President did not quake at the dilemma. Refusing to enforce the decision of the Supreme Court, he is credited with saying: "John Marshall has made his decision, now let him enforce it."²⁷

The President and the state were anxious to get rid of the annoying problem. The Georgians gave every inducement to the men to seek pardon. Their presence in the state penitentiary remained a reproach to the reputation of the state and a constant and powerful threat to its sovereignty. Governor Wilson Lumpkin thought that he might get at the problem through Mrs. Worcester. While Ann and Mrs. Butler were visiting their husbands, soon after the decision of the Supreme Court, the Governor and his wife invited them to a dinner. He made it plain to the women that he held no ill feeling toward their husbands, but that he had to uphold the principle in the case and the laws of the state. Mrs. Worcester was unmoved because she believed they were right and any other action would be a denial of principle.²⁸

However, Worcester was becoming convinced that he had gained all

²⁶Unidentified clipping in the Alice M. Robertson Collection, Oklahoma Historical Archives. Hereafter referred to as Robertson Col., Okla. Hist. Soc.

²⁷Parker, Cherokee Indians, 30.

²⁸Starkey, Cherokee Nation, 204.

he could as a prisoner, and to carry his contention further would bring ruinous consequences to both the Indians and the country. On December 7, 1832, he wrote the American Board of Foreign Missions for specific instructions about a pardon. The Board met December 25, 1832, and decided that Worcester and Butler had honorably served the case they represented and could ask for pardon.²⁹

Prison officials informed the men on January 14, 1833, that they were to be released from their confinement. Governor Lumpkin had issued a proclamation that they had appealed to the magnanimity of the state and had been set at liberty.³⁰ The long legal battle was over, but the victory for the Indians and the missionaries was not complete. Worcester and Butler had promised to leave the state as it was apparent that removal of the Indians was certain. The most important thing to Ann and the little girls was that the husband and father had come home to them. It was important to him that he could again take up the work which was so near his heart and which he and Ann had begun only a few weeks after their marriage on July 19, 1825.³¹

The story of the early life of Samuel Austin Worcester shows how he prepared to meet the problems which confronted him as a missionary. He was born January 19, 1798, at Worcester, Massachusetts. Soon afterward

²⁹Ibid., 206.

³⁰Joseph Tracy, A History of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (Worcester, 1840), 158-59.

³¹Nevada Couch, Pages From Cherokee Indian History as Identified with Samuel Austin Worcester (St. Louis, 1884), 6. Hereafter cited as Couch, Pages From Cherokee History.

his father, Leonard Worcester, became pastor of the Congregational Church at Peacham, Vermont. He had been a printer but had left that occupation to enter the ministry.³² Samuel's early training in his father's print shop made it possible for him to translate and print material in the Indian language which was his greatest contribution to their program.

Samuel attended the Peacham Academy where he had the famous Jeremiah Evarts as his teacher. Evarts was later Secretary of the American Board of Foreign Missions and Worcester was under his direction. The conviction and courage demonstrated in his imprisonment came from the influence of his beloved teacher.³³ In the fall of 1815 the young man walked to Burlington, a distance of seventy-one miles, to enter college where his uncle Dr. Samuel Austin Worcester, after whom he was named, was president. He remained in college through the entire course and graduated with honors. After a year of teaching, he entered the Andover Theological Seminary where he graduated in 1823.³⁴ Until his marriage and journey south to the Cherokee Nation, he traveled in New England for the American Board of Foreign Missions.³⁵

He was ordained at Park Street Church, Boston, August 25, 1825,

³²Ibid., 5.

³³Bass, Messenger, 18.

³⁴Couch, Pages from Cherokee History, 6; Corinne Blair, "Tulahassee Mission" (unpublished Master's thesis, Department of History, University of Tulsa, 1948), 38. Hereafter cited as Blair, "Tulahassee."

³⁵Letter from A. E. W. Robertson, mother of Alice Robertson, to Mrs. Williams, February 6, 1884. This letter is found in the Robertson Collection in the University of Tulsa. Hereafter cited as Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

with his father delivering the sermon.³⁶ His decision to be a preacher was determined by the fact that he had been preceded by seven generations of ministers and the immediate influence of his father, his uncle, and a great uncle Dr. Samuel Worcester of Salem, Massachusetts, a Trinitarian theologian.³⁷

The Worcesters were descendants of Lucy Winthrop, a sister of Governor John Winthrop, and Esther Edwards, sister of Jonathan Edwards, the well-known New England theologian and writer.³⁸ Samuel was a near kinsman of the famous lexicographer, geographer and historian, Joseph Emerson Worcester, who was the chief competitor of Noah Webster as authority on the usages and definitions of words in the English language.³⁹ Mrs. Ann Orr Worcester was the daughter of the Honorable John Orr of Bedford, New Hampshire, whose ancestors had settled on the Merrimac River, near Manchester, New Hampshire, in 1751. The Worcester family was largely a family of ministers, while the Orrs were more active in political interests. One of John Orr's daughters, Margaret, married Samuel Chandler. Their son, Zachariah went to Michigan and was elected to the United States Senate in 1857. His daughter married Eugene Hale, who was in the Senate representing the state of Maine when Alice M. Robertson was elected to the House.

³⁶Anniversary Exercise of the Congregational Church, Peacham, Vermont, 39-40, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.; Couch, Pages from Cherokee History, 6.

³⁷Ibid., 5; A. E. W. Robertson's Notebook, 1, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.; Bass, Messenger, 19.

³⁸Bessie Allen Miller, "The Political Life of Alice M. Robertson" (unpublished Master's thesis, Department of History, University of Tulsa, 1946), 4. Hereafter cited as Miller, "Alice M. Robertson."

³⁹Dictionary of American Biography, XX, 526-27, 530.

She was the great granddaughter of John Orr and he the great great grandson.⁴⁰ Ann was a woman of good common sense and a high degree of vivacity and wit. She studied under one of the best educators of women, Mr. Joseph Emerson of Byfield, and was a schoolmate of Mary Lyon, famous educator of this period.⁴¹

A few weeks before the Worcesters arrived at Brainerd mission to begin their work among the Cherokees, Mr. J. C. Ellsworth, the Superintendent, read a letter from the Secretary of the Board and said, "We are soon to have a minister and an old acquaintance, Samuel A. Worcester, a scholar who can learn the Cherokee language." Reading the next page, he spoke to Miss Sawyer, teacher of the girls' school, "He is just married to Miss Ann Orr, a former school companion of yours." Miss Sawyer immediately responded, "A Worcester and an Orr united in marriage! They are strong characters. We shall have to mind our P's and Q's when they get here."⁴²

After being assigned to work among the Cherokees in Georgia, the Worcesters left their home in New England in August, 1825, and reached Brainerd Mission on October 21. Here they were to remain for about two years while learning the Cherokee language.⁴³ It was Samuel's unusual linguistic ability which caused the Board of Missions to send him to the Cherokee field. He had studied Hebrew, Greek and Latin and it was felt that he could master the Cherokee tongue, which was said to be as difficult

⁴⁰Alice M. Robertson, "Writings," Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁴¹Couch, Pages from Cherokee History, 6.

⁴²Ibid., 8.

⁴³Bass, Messenger, 19, 28-9.

as Chinese.⁴⁴

When the people at Brainerd station gathered to hear the new minister preach his first sermon, the Cherokees, as was their custom, gave him a new name. An old Indian woman suggested one which meant "green" because he was so white and young. Charles Reese, an Indian warrior exclaimed, "No, no, he knows a great deal, he must have a better name." After some discussion they agreed to call him A-tse-nu-sti, "A messenger."⁴⁵

On November 7, 1826, Mrs. Worcester gave birth to their first child, a girl who was named Ann Eliza. Though childbearing was a dangerous ordeal to those on the mission fields, away from doctor and medical care, Ann made a slow but satisfactory recovery.⁴⁶

After his apprenticeship in learning the habits and language of the Cherokees, Worcester was ready to begin the work especially assigned to him by the Board, the translating and printing of Cherokee literature. The press was to be established at New Echota, the capital of the Nation, and in 1827 the family moved to the new location. According to the letters of Elias Boudinot, the national council had voted in 1826 to provide a printing press. This entire project was the responsibility of the young printer and it was no easy task to get the types cast according to the

⁴⁴Gabriel, Boudinot, 98.

⁴⁵Couch, Pages from Cherokee History, 8.

⁴⁶Bass, Messenger, 67; Muskogee Evening Times, November 21, 1905, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

Sequoyah Syllabary.⁴⁷ After a long delay in obtaining the press, types, furniture and paper, the first issue of the Cherokee Phoenix appeared, February 21, 1828.

When Samuel Worcester was released from the Georgia prison, he knew he could no longer remain in that region and accomplish the work he set out to do. In 1834, when the mission station at New Echota was taken over by the state, the family moved to Brainerd outside the chartered limits of Georgia and remained there until April 8, 1835, at which time they left for the West. On May 29 they reached Dwight Mission which had been moved from western Arkansas to a place near the junction of the Illinois and Arkansas rivers.⁴⁸ It was named for Timothy Dwight, President of Yale University.⁴⁹

⁴⁷Bass, Messenger, 78, 87.

Two days after the Worcesters moved to New Echota, Boudinot arrived with his wife to take up his work as editor of the Phoenix. The friendship of these two families deepened with the passing months. Boudinot had received his education at Cornwall Mission School in Connecticut. He had met and married Harriett Gold, daughter of Judge Gold, against the opposition of the family and the community. Harriett was of the best Cornwall society and marriage to an Indian was regarded as a blow to her family's social position. Elias' Indian name was Galagina (the Buck), but he had taken the name of his patron, Dr. Elias Boudinot, one of New Jersey's noted philanthropists and president of the American Bible Society. In September 1832, Boudinot resigned his position. He had opposed the state laws against his people but had advocated Indian removal. The latter made him very unpopular with a majority of his people. Elijah Hicks, brother-in-law of Principal Chief John Ross, became the new editor. (A. E. W. Robertson, "Biographical Sketch," Robertson Col., Tulsa U.; Gabriel, Boudinot, 133-34; Bass, Messenger, 39-88, 175.)

⁴⁸Grant Foreman, "Honorable Alice Robertson," Chronicles of Oklahoma, X, No. 1 (March, 1932), 13. Hereafter cited as Foreman, "Honorable Alice Robertson." Bass, Messenger, 176; Couch, Pages from Cherokee History, 21.

⁴⁹A. E. W. Robertson's Notebook, 2, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

While waiting for their household goods and printing press, the Worcesters remained at Dwight Mission and Samuel searched for a permanent location in which to live and carry on his work. The boat, carrying personal possessions and the press, sank in the Arkansas River. In reporting this loss to the Mission Board he wrote:⁵⁰

. . . Damage was not all--many things were stolen--such as one good feather bed, the best there was--much table linen, as many as eight blankets--1 ream of letter paper, etc. A large part of the things stolen were Mrs. Worcester's private property. But the heaviest loss was in paper and books. How much of the paper can be made to answer for printing I have not yet ascertained. I fear not much. There were 60 reams or more.

He decided on the abandoned Union Mission as the temporary location. It had been established in 1820 by the United Foreign Missionary Society to serve the needs of the Osage Indians and was located about twenty miles north of Fort Gibson and one mile west of the Grand River. By 1829 the Osages had become disinterested in the mission. After they had abandoned it, the Creeks used it for a while.⁵¹

The Cherokee Council passed a resolution on October 29, 1835, which granted permission to their missionary to erect a printing establishment at the forks of the Illinois River. He was limited to five acres of ground, and livestock could never exceed twenty-five cows and sixty hogs. All white persons connected with the station were expected to live in strict compliance with the laws of the tribe and to have no political interests.⁵²

⁵⁰Bass, Messenger, 185.

⁵¹Muriel Wright and Joseph B. Thoburn, The Story of Oklahoma (Oklahoma City, 1930), 59-60; Blair, "Tulahassee," 11.

⁵²Carolyn Foreman, Park Hill (Muskogee, 1948), 10.

During the summer and fall of 1836, the minister was busy completing his dwelling at the new location, which he called Park Hill. By December 2, the house was so near completion that the family moved into it.⁵³ His next concern was renewing the services of the brilliant editor of the Cherokee Phoenix, Elias Boudinot, but there were serious complications. Boudinot had joined the minority treaty party and had been one of the signers of a treaty for removal. In a letter to Samuel Chandler, June 14, 1838, Worcester wrote:⁵⁴

The greatest trial we have at present is in relation to my translator, Mr. Boudinot. . . . He arrived late last fall, and resumed his labors with me here. But in the meantime his extreme anxiety to save his people from threatening ruin had led him to unite with a small minority of the nation in forming a treaty with the United States; an act, in my view, entirely unjustified, yet, in his case, dictated by good motives. This has rendered him so unpopular in the nation, that they will hardly suffer me to continue him in my employment.

The National Council had sent an unofficial request that Boudinot should not be employed. He took the matter up with Chief John Ross who suggested that no change be made until the Council met the next autumn. Worcester was very much pleased because he recognized that no other would be able to do the work Elias could do.⁵⁵

The spring of 1839 found the two men working at Park Hill at the task they had begun years before. Harriet, the translator's first wife, had died in the summer of 1836; and he had brought with him his second wife, Delight Sargent, who was to mother the Boudinot children. Worcester

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid., 12.

⁵⁵Ibid., 13.

thought the Indians would forget the honest blunder Boudinot and the treaty party made, but he did not understand the depths of the Cherokee resentment. Three hundred full bloods banded together to take vengeance on the signers of the treaty. On June 22, 1839, they made their attack, taking the lives of John Ridge, Major Ridge, and Elias Boudinot. In a letter to his Boston friends, the missionary described the attack:⁵⁶

Mr. Boudinot was yet living at my house. On Saturday morning he went to his house, which he was building a quarter of a mile distant. There some Cherokee men came up, inquiring for medicine, and Mr. Boudinot set out with two of them to get it. He had walked but a few rods when his shriek was heard by his hired men, who ran to his help; but before they could come the deed was done. A stab in the back with a knife, and seven gashes in the head with a hatchet, did the bloody work. . . . The murderers ran a short distance into the woods, joined a company of armed men on horseback, and made their escape. . . . He had fallen a victim . . . to his honest . . . zeal for the preservation of his people. In his own view he risked his life to save his people from ruin, and he realized his fears.

This black deed brought deep affliction to Samuel A. Worcester. He knew too that his work would be hindered. "They have cut off my right hand," he said.⁵⁷ Park Hill continued, however, to be the busiest mission among the Cherokees. From its press many millions of pages were issued for the Cherokee, Creek, and Choctaw Indians.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Grant Foreman, The Five Civilized Tribes (Norman, 1934), 292-93; Gabriel, Boudinot, 177-78; Niles Register, XXXVII, 235. The Cherokees had passed a law making it a death penalty for anyone selling Indian land without the authority of the nation.

⁵⁷ Bass, Messenger, 256.

⁵⁸ Foreman, Five Civilized Tribes, 47; A. E. W. Robertson's Notebook, 11; Foreman, Park Hill, 179-80. A marker was placed on Highway 62, three miles south of Tahlequah in 1940 by the National Society of Colonial Dames. Grant Foreman wrote the inscription which contains the following words: "PARK HILL, center of Cherokee culture was one mile east of Park Hill Creek, home of John Ross, Samuel Austin Worcester, Elias Boudinot and other Pioneers and THE MISSION PRESS which printed millions of pages for the benefit of Cherokee people a century ago. A mile north of Park Hill

For the first time in the life of the minister and his family, there was a feeling of permanence and hopefulness. The girls, Ann Eliza, Sarah, and Hannah were able to help with the duties of the house and to relieve their mother of many tasks. The boys, Leonard and John Orr, were younger than the girls but were growing strong and active.

Mrs. Worcester had suffered long at the birth of John Orr, and in May, 1840, when another child was expected, there was some fear for her life. This anxiety was well founded for within a few hours after the birth of the baby girl, Mary Eleanor, she died. Samuel wrote the Board about his great loss and bereavement.⁵⁹

About one o'clock on Saturday morning, Mrs. Worcester gave birth to an infant daughter, in circumstances apparently favorable; but in a little time was seized with fainting, accompanied soon after, with violent spasms, both which symptoms resisted every effort at relief, and a little after sunrise she fell asleep . . .

It was impossible to tell in words the emptiness of his soul or to say that the great love of his heart was gone. She had been his constant and faithful companion during the most eventful and trying years of his life. In 1841 he took as his second wife Miss Erminia Nash. Though lacking in some of the finer qualities of Ann, Erminia proved to be a loyal and devoted companion and a suitable mother to the Worcester children.⁶⁰

Ann Eliza, not yet fourteen when her mother died, took over the supervision of the house with the help of Sarah who was twelve. In

was the CHEROKEE FEMALE SEMINARY and about three miles northwest CHEROKEE MALE SEMINARY. They left their impress on Cherokee history."

⁵⁹Bass, Messenger, 260-61.

⁶⁰Ibid., 262.

addition to this responsibility, she often helped in the school room when one of the regular teachers was ill or extra assistance was necessary. In early 1843, at the age of sixteen she went to Johnsbury, Vermont, to study under the supervision of her uncle, the Reverend John Worcester, where she prepared herself for the responsibility of teaching among the Indians. In school she gave special attention to the study of Greek and Latin which was to help her translate the Greek New Testament into the Creek language.⁶¹

There was never a question in the mind of Ann as to what she would do after she had completed her courses; she would return to assist her father in teaching, translating, and ministering to the needs of the Indians. She began that journey homeward December, 1846, and arrived the next February 6. Before she left she purchased a seraphine for \$50.00 which was shipped to Park Hill. Her daughters were to hear her sing to the accompaniment of this instrument until she was too frail and weak to walk to it.⁶²

Ann began her teaching career at Park Hill March 1, 1847, and continued her work there until she was married three years later. She had a natural bent for teaching; knew her subject matter and knew how to present it to her pupils in such a way as to make them want to know more. She was patient and kind and had few discipline problems.

A romance soon developed between Ann and William Schenk Robertson. The Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions had sent him to become principal

⁶¹Letter from Augusta Moore, older sister of Alice Robertson, to Rev. Ralph Lamb, January 3, 1922, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.; Blair, "Tulahassee," 40-41; Alice Robertson, "Writings"; Bass, Messenger, 268-69.

⁶²Ibid., 273.

of the Tullahassee Manual Labor Boarding School and he had been there since July 1, 1849. This school was located on a seventy acre tract between the Arkansas and Verdigris rivers, one and one-half miles from the former and two miles from the latter. It was two and one-fourth miles from the Creek Agency, three miles from the steamboat landing, and was one of the most beautiful and best located places in the Indian Territory.⁶³

William Robertson was the grandson of George Robertson of Sterling, Scotland, who came to America in 1759 at the age of 17, and the son of Samuel Robertson who was for fifty-three years a minister of the Dutch Reformed and Presbyterian churches. William was born in Huntington, Long Island, January 11, 1820, but he spent most of his young life in Dryden, New York. He attended Canajoharie Academy and later graduated from Union College, Schenectady, New York, in 1843. He had gone part way through a medical course, but his interest turned to teaching. After graduation, he taught in a select high school in Northport, Long Island, in 1848, and it was here that he united with the Presbyterian church. He then asked the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions for the position of principal of Spencer Academy in the Choctaw Nation. Instead, the Board assigned him the position of principal teacher of the new Manual Labor Boarding School among the Creeks at Tullahassee.

He left for his new station in May, 1849, and reached his destination in July. The buildings for the new school were not complete, so

⁶³William Riley Gilmore, "The Life and Work of the Reverend Robert McGill Loughridge, Missionary to Creek Indians" (unpublished Master's Thesis, Department of History, University of Tulsa, 1952), 80. Hereafter cited as Gilmore, "Loughridge."

he helped with the carpentry work and also directed the activities of the boys in the field. In order to find out as much as he could about how to run a mission school, he visited the Dwight Boarding School among the Cherokees in the fall of 1849. There he met his future wife.⁶⁴

After a rather short courtship, Ann Worcester and William S. Robertson were married, April 16, 1850, with her father, Samuel Austin Worcester, performing the ceremony at Park Hill. Five days after the wedding the young missionary wrote his parents of the occasion.⁶⁵

You of course have received before this my letter informing you of how little attention I had paid to your warning about Cherokees . . . Monday I rode over to Park Hill found them well and preparing for the morrow--The next morning it rained as rain hardly ever fell before so hard that very few came out at ten A.M. We were married by Mr. Worcester and then the clouds dispersed and the rain ceased--the "Gentry" came just in time to be late for the wedding--At eleven we mounted our horses for Tullahassee--and right glad I was to get away from the evil eyes that surrounded me--Brothers, sisters & pupils all seemed to regard me as a thief and robber--Brother John would not even see the ceremony . . . Mary cried her eyes out--the Cherokees threatened my ears--

Samuel Worcester found in William S. Robertson a man after his own heart. Both were men of wide and varied experiences. Their interests in the education and civilization of the Indians were so much alike that it would seem that they must have planned their work together.

The Creeks were behind the Cherokees in education, because of their attitude toward missionaries. In 1836, the Creeks had issued an

⁶⁴Letters from Walter Lowrie to W. S. Robertson, May 2, 1849; May 24, 1849; Letter from A. E. W. Robertson to Mrs. Williams, February 6, 1884, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.; Blair, "Tullahassee," 34.

⁶⁵Letter from W. S. and A. E. W. Robertson to Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Robertson, April 20, 1850, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.; Foreman, Park Hill, 70.

order expelling all missionaries from their land, and those Indians who continued to carry on religious services were punished with fifty lashes on the bare back and one hundred for the second offense.⁶⁶

Robert McGill Loughridge, a native of Alabama, the old home of the Creeks, was interested in the welfare of these people. He obtained permission from the Presbyterian Board of Missions to visit them to see if they would agree to let him establish a school as well as teach them the Bible. He left Eutaw, Alabama, on November 2, 1841, for the six hundred mile journey on horseback. Upon his arrival he met with the Chiefs of the tribe and laid the proposition before them. The Council then met to discuss the proposal, and during this session of three weeks Mr. Loughridge traveled over the territory to observe the conditions of the people.

The missionary was informed that the Creeks did not want any preaching as it would interfere with their customs, such as busks, ball games and dances, but they did want him to establish a school. In reply he said that if preaching were not allowed he would not come. After considerable deliberation the Council agreed that if the school were established, he could preach in the school house but nowhere else. After going back to Alabama to make preparations for his new work, he returned with his wife to the Verdigris landing February 5, 1843, and began looking for a location. It was suggested that the school be established at Coweta, one and one-half miles east of the Arkansas River and twenty-five miles northwest of Fort Gibson. A cabin was built and the people were notified to send their children to school and to attend church. Fifteen or twenty

⁶⁶Blair, "Tallahassee," 14-18; Gilmore, "Loughridge," 18; Alice M. Robertson, "Writings."

pupils enrolled. Mrs. Loughridge taught these, but only a few members of the tribe attended worship. It was a discouraging beginning.

In April, 1847, Walter Lourie, Secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions, visited the mission at Coweta and agreed with the Chiefs for its enlargement and the beginning of the Tullahassee Manual Labor School to take care of eighty pupils, forty boys and forty girls. A large brick building three stories high, seventy-six by thirty-four feet, with a large cellar was constructed. By March, 1850, the school was ready for opening. It started with thirty pupils, and the full number of eighty was not received until fall. The main building, outbuildings, stables, corn cribs, fences, etc., had been built. Cattle, horses, and wagons had been purchased; furniture, books, and paper had been furnished.⁶⁷

Mrs. Robertson joined her husband in the work and responsibilities of the school at Tullahassee. She had the task of learning a new language, but it was not too much for her, as she had a background for linguistic accomplishments. She became a devoted teacher and a splendid disciplinarian for the Creek children. In speaking of her coming to Tullahassee to help with the work, Superintendent Loughridge wrote, "She is a very worthy and competent young lady, and is, I feel, a great acquisition to our forces."⁶⁸

William S. Robertson was lovingly called "the teacher" by the Indians. He was about six feet tall, and so thin that he was almost gaunt.

⁶⁷R. M. Loughridge, "R. M. Loughridge"; A. E. W. Robertson, "Writings"; Letter from Augusta Robertson to Rev. Ralph Lamb, January 3, 1922, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁶⁸Foreman, "Honorable Alice Robertson," 14; Gilmore, "Loughridge," 80.

His hair was long and brown and his face was of ruddy complexion. He wore extra thick-lensed glasses. His appearance was not at all prepossessing, but he was so sincere and genuine that he was greatly admired by all his pupils.⁶⁹

The exercises of the school were conducted on the manual labor plan. The time for daily study was six hours, for manual work, usually two hours. The boys worked on the farm, in the garden, and supplied wood for heating and cooking; the girls took care of the household duties--cleaning, sewing, and cooking. The boarding students were provided with nourishing meals, furnished mainly by the farm. Devotional services in the morning and evening consisted of hymn singing, prayer, and Bible reading.

By the summer of 1853, six persons were employed by the mission in addition to the minister and the superintendent. They were Mr. and Mrs. W. S. Robertson, Miss C. W. Eddy, Miss Nancy Thompson, Mrs. E. Reid, and Alexander McCune. By 1855 there were twelve teachers.⁷⁰ During the nine months term of 1857-58, ninety-six Creeks, four Cherokees and two white pupils were enrolled in the school. The daily average attendance was eighty-two and one half. The school term of 1858-59 had one hundred enrolled and the following year one hundred thirteen attended.⁷¹ The church established at Tullahassee had a membership of eighteen by 1851, consisting

⁶⁹Miller, "Alice M. Robertson," 8-9; "Augusta Moore," unclassified article in Mrs. O. R. Hisel's private collection, Muskogee, Oklahoma. Hereafter cited as Hisel Col.

⁷⁰Blair, "Tullahassee," 48.

⁷¹Ibid., 58, 60.

of six Indians, ten whites, and two Negroes. By the autumn of 1858 the membership had increased to forty-five. Both Robertson and Loughridge were concerned over the lack of religious interest among the Creeks.⁷²

The other children of Samuel Worcester continued to serve as teachers and workers among the Indians. Sarah, born in 1828 at New Echota, became assistant principal of the Cherokee Female Seminary in 1850.⁷³ This school and its counterpart, the Male Seminary, were founded in that year. The former was located about one-half mile north of Tahlequah and the latter about a mile west.⁷⁴ Sarah had been a student at Mt. Holyoke. After teaching in the Seminary two years, she married Dr. Daniel Dwight Hitchcock, a graduate of Amherst College and Bowdoin Medical College, February 15, 1853. She died June 30, 1857, three years after the birth of her niece, Alice Robertson.⁷⁵

Hannah, born at New Echota, January 29, 1834, was denied the privilege, because of hard times, of going back East for her education. She studied in the mission schools and helped in the printing office, in setting type, proof reading and book binding. She married Abijah Hicks, January 30, 1852.⁷⁶ He was killed by an unknown assassin July 4, 1862, while returning alone in a wagon from Van Buren, Arkansas. Mrs.

⁷²Ibid., 49, 60.

⁷³Foreman, Park Hill, 80.

⁷⁴Catalogue of the Cherokee Male Seminary (Archives of the Cherokee Nation in Manuscript Collections of the University of Oklahoma), quoted in Dale and Rader, Readings in Oklahoma History (New York, 1930), 824.

⁷⁵Foreman, Park Hill, 84-85.

⁷⁶Ibid., 91.

Hicks was the only one of the Worcesters, besides her step-mother who did not leave her home in the Indian Territory during the Civil War. She suffered untold privations, including loss by theft of almost all her belongings. Her house was burned by marauders.⁷⁷ On December 22, 1864, she was married to her brother-in-law, Dr. Dwight Hitchcock, who died of cholera in July, 1867. Hannah died at Fort Gibson, January 12, 1917.⁷⁸

Alice Robertson's Uncle Leonard, the eldest son of Samuel A. Worcester, was born in March, 1836, at Union Mission. He was sent East to school in 1852. At the beginning of the Civil War he joined the Union Army. He was married in August, 1860, to Mary R. Spooner, a talented teacher who was encouraged to come to the Indian Territory by Samuel A. Worcester.⁷⁹ Leonard died at Denver, Colorado, November 3, 1907. John Orr, named after his mother's father, was born in March, 1838. After entering school in 1855 at Johnsbury, Vermont, he and Leonard were never at home except for occasional visits. His greatest interest was in the study of music. John was married to Julia Snow in October, 1860; and on February 15, 1861, he died of inflammation of the bowels.⁸⁰

⁷⁷Ibid., 122-23; letter from D. D. Hitchcock to W. S. Robertson, November 25, 1863; letter from Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Worcester to A. E. W. Robertson, August 21, 1862, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁷⁸Foreman, Park Hill, 144; letter from Alice Robertson to Augusta Robertson, July 29, 1866, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁷⁹Foreman, Park Hill, 89; letter from Mary R. Spooner to A. E. W. Robertson, August 7, 1860, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁸⁰Bass, Messenger, 287; letter from J. K. Colby to A. E. W. Robertson, February 18, 1861; letter from John Orr Worcester to A. E. W. Robertson, October 8, 1860, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

The youngest child of Samuel Austin Worcester was Mary Eleanor, born at Park Hill, May 23, 1840. When she was sixteen her father took her East to enter school. She attended Thelford Academy for three years before returning to Park Hill to teach in the public schools of the Cherokee nation.⁸¹ During the Civil War, she sympathized with the South. This undoubtedly was a great shock and a source of grief to her family. Early in life she married a soldier by the name of Mason who deserted her, but later she met and married Dr. Mason Fitch Williams.⁸²

Meanwhile, Samuel A. Worcester continued his great work of translating and printing Indian literature, and on his small press, with the assistance from translators and printers, he issued 13,980,000 pages in various types of books, almanacs, and pamphlets.⁸³ In addition to giving the Cherokees an almost complete translation of the Bible, and a hymn book, he published the Cherokee Almanac for twenty years.⁸⁴ In recognition of his great work among the Indians, the University of Vermont conferred upon him the honorary Doctor of Divinity degree in 1857.⁸⁵

He carried on his work up to the last hours of his life. Speaking of the probability of his death he said,⁸⁶

⁸¹Foreman, Park Hill, 101-2.

⁸²Ibid., 130.

⁸³Ibid., 112.

⁸⁴A. E. W. Robertson's Notebook, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁸⁵Bass, Messenger, 325.

⁸⁶Letter from A. E. W. Robertson to John Orr Worcester, April 22, 1859; letter from Mary C. Holman to Alice Robertson, June 8, 1898, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

If I could only finish the testament in Cherokee, and prepare another edition of the hymn-book, and feel assured that my children were all converted, I could say with Simeon, 'Lord now lettest thou.'

He was not able to finish all that he had planned because, after a fall from a ladder into a sixty-five foot well, he was taken ill. He died April 20, 1859, and was buried in the missionary cemetery near Park Hill beside the grave of his first wife Ann Orr. On the tombstone are the words:⁸⁷

Reverend Samuel A. Worcester, for thirty-four years a missionary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions among the Cherokees, died April, 1859. To his work they owe their Bible and hymn book.

The careers of her maternal grandfather, Samuel Austin Worcester, and her father, William Schenk Robertson, had a marked influence upon Alice Robertson. From them and her mother, she received a keen, but strict and narrow religious heritage and a stern devotion to what she considered her duty. She developed an intense pride in her ancestral line and an overweening sense of family superiority. In later years she often spoke of her ancestry with awed respect and reverence.

⁸⁷Letter from A. E. W. Robertson to Mrs. Day, October 18, 1879, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

CHAPTER II

ALICE MARY--THE COOK

Alice Robertson was born January 2, 1854, at Tullahassee. Flowers bordered the walks and cedar, oak, and hickory trees shaded the ground of her home place. Nearby orchards and gardens provided food for teachers and Indian pupils.¹

Describing Alice when she was about two years old, her father wrote his parents: "Mary Alice is one of the fat ones--almost a spectacle--she begins to talk a great deal."² These early characteristics were prophetic of the woman whose kindly face and bulky figure were to become so familiar in Oklahoma and in Washington, on public platforms and in the halls of Congress.

As a child, Alice possessed a spirit of adventure that is reflected throughout her life. When she was three years old, she slipped off to the milk barn with some Indian girls. One of the cows, on seeing her white hair in contrast to the Indian girls' black hair, threw Alice over the fence.³ When she was about four she became lost while picking plums on Park Hill Mountain, not far from the house. She wandered in

¹Miller, "Alice M. Robertson," 10.

²Ibid. Apparently she was named Mary Alice but later changed it to Alice M.

³The Arrowhead (August, 1931), 4.

the woods for hours while all the neighbors, with guns and horns, searched for her. She was discovered a little after midnight, crying bitterly. One shoe was missing, but she held fast the plums she had picked.⁴

She did not lack for determination. When she was about five, a playmate named Mary came to visit her. The young friend had a new toy, a china nest egg, which Alice was permitted to hold in her hand and exhibit to her mother. Mrs. Robertson told her little daughter to return it to her playmate because she might break it. Mary's mother said, "No, let her play with it; she couldn't break it if she tried." Alice pondered the remark and finally went out to the blacksmith shop, put the egg on the anvil, and struck it with a blacksmith's hammer. Gathering up the broken pieces, she took them to her mother. She demonstrated then, and on many later occasions, that when her ability was doubted, it must be proved.⁵

Alice knew little else than poverty all her life. The Robertsons were poor, not because they were unable to find for themselves a comfortable place in society, but because they had to forget the material things in order to devote their lives to the Indians. Resourceful, intelligent, and well educated, they did not lack the cultural and spiritual advantages which helped them to be a proud, uncomplaining, and happy family. Recalling some trying times of her early life, Alice wrote: "When I was a child on the Indian Mission farm where my father taught simple lessons in farming and stock-raising to men as well as to the boys

⁴Ibid., 5-6.

⁵Muskogee Times-Democrat, n.d., clipping, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

in school, I had no dolls--we were too poor."⁶ Later she said: "My life has been a disappointment. I could have done so much more, I often think, with a little more favorable circumstances at the beginning, gone so much further, 'put over' so much bigger things."⁷ Her first recollection of the capital of the Cherokee Nation came when her parents, deeply interested in the temperance movement, took her to Tahlequah to march in the Cold Water Army, a Cherokee Children's Temperance Organization.⁸

The Civil War brought a temporary cessation of the school at Tullahassee. Teachers were scattered to various places of safety in the North, and the Robertsons were ordered by the Union Government to abandon the school property and leave for the Northern lines. They first went to the Cherokee nation, which was neutral at the beginning of the war but soon had to leave because the defeat of General Lyon's army at Wilson's Creek left the Indians at the mercy of the South.⁹

Storing their goods at the home of Alice's Aunt Hannah Hicks, who remained in the Indian Territory during the war, the Robertson family left on September 4, 1861, for Rolla, Missouri, the western terminus of the railroad. It was a long and dangerous three weeks' journey. The father narrowly escaped death at an overnight stop in the Missouri Ozarks. The host thought he was a spy, but safe conduct was provided by General Sterling Price, whose camp was only one mile away.¹⁰

⁶Muskogee Daily Phoenix, October 27, 1920.

⁷Oakland Tribune, June 7, 1921.

⁸The Arrowhead (August, 1931), 5-6.

⁹A. E. W. Robertson, "Writings," Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

¹⁰"Ann Augusta Moore," 3, Hisel Col.; Blair, "Tullahassee," 66.

At Rolla, the family boarded the train for St. Louis. This was a new experience for the family, as the Robertson children had never seen a train. From St. Louis they went to Winneconne, Wisconsin, to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Robertson, the parents of W. S. Robertson. Here they remained until the autumn of 1862, and Alice and her older sister, Augusta, attended school. The family then moved to Mattoon, Illinois, and the following year to Centralia. Mr. Robertson taught school for a year in each place, and in 1864 the Presbyterian Board placed him in charge of the Indian Orphan Institute in northeastern Kansas, near Highland in Doniphan County. Most of the forty orphan children were from the Sioux tribes. The school lacked sufficient teachers and funds, but the missionaries labored there for two years in an effort to better the conditions of the children in their charge.¹¹

Since the family included five children--Augusta, Alice, Grace, Samuel and Dora--the meager salary provided a bare sustenance. The Board allowed \$200.00 a year for husband and wife, and \$25.00 for each child. This small remuneration was augmented by help from Robertson's parents and by contributions from friends. While they were living at Highland, Dora died, and when the family made the trip back to Tullahassee after the war, they took her body with them and buried it beside Mrs. Robertson's parents at the mission cemetery near Park Hill.¹²

¹¹Letters from Walter Lourie to W. S. Robertson, August 2, 1864; September 5, 1866; "Augusta Moore," 3, Hisel Col.; Blair, "Tullahassee," 70.

¹²Ibid., 57; Letter from A. E. W. Robertson to Miss Nancy Thompson, August 23, 1864; Letter from Walter Lourie to W. S. Robertson, July 22, 1866; Letter from Lizzie S. Clark to A. E. W. Robertson, January 20, 1863; Letter from Mrs. Samuel Robertson to W. S. Robertson,

On November 15, 1866, The Robertson and J. R. Ramsey families left Kansas in two covered wagons for the three hundred mile trek to their former home among the Indians. The Robertsons went to Tullahassee and Mr. Ramsey became a missionary to the Seminoles.¹³ Alice was twelve years old when they made the trip and served as the camp cook. She would arise at 4:30 in the morning, put the iron tea kettle on the fire, get the dutch oven ready to cook the biscuits, and obtain a long handled frying pan to prepare the bacon. Food was scarce, but the young cook would carefully portion out to each one the maximum quantity. The mother's time was completely filled with the care of five months old twin boys, Johnny and Willie. Alice and the little girls slept in the wagon, and her parents slept in the tent with the babies.¹⁴

Ann Augusta, the oldest child, was not with the family on the journey from Kansas because she had enrolled as a student at Cooper Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. She was the recipient of a scholarship of board, room, and tuition, offered by Mrs. B. G. Galloway.¹⁵

Upon arrival at Tallahassee, the missionaries found the brick building they had used for the boarding school almost in ruins; not a door nor a window remained; holes had been made in the walls by the

February 7, 1863; Letter from A. E. W. Robertson to Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Robertson, January 2, 1867, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

¹³Letter from J. R. Ramsey, missionary to the Seminole Indians, to W. S. Robertson, April 19, 1871; A. E. W. Robertson, "Writings," Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

¹⁴Alice M. Robertson, "Old Timers Scare Even," September 15, 1929; "Alice M. Robertson," A pamphlet, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

¹⁵Blair, "Tallahassee," 47; Letter from Mrs. B. G. Galloway to W. S. Robertson, July 30, 1866, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

Federal soldiers who had taken the bricks to Fort Gibson to make ovens. The father went to work with saw and hammer to make the doors and board up the windows, while the family lived in a tent in the yard.¹⁶

Since very little furniture and food were available, the Robertsons made use of items they found abandoned near the place. An old rusty, beaten-up heating stove was used for cooking. Hay, left by the cavalrymen, was put into ticking for the beds. Tables, chairs, and bedsteads were made from boards and sassafras saplings.¹⁷

Their first Christmas was observed with the best the family could afford. Recalling the occasion, Alice wrote:¹⁸

Grace and I awakened early that morning to hear the howling pack of wolves at the door, which though accustomed as we were to the sound, never lost its horror to us children and made us cling close together in shivering silence.

Gaily we waited the lifting of the cover from the table and how bravely we rejoiced over the simple love token! Only the babies had new gifts from the store, but they flourished their bright tin rattlers with a gleefulness that made up to all the rest of them.

Because her mother was not strong, Alice assumed the responsibility of the housekeeping. For breakfast that morning she prepared venison, corn cakes to go with molasses, and coffee. Dinner consisted of eggs, milk, butter, chicken, wild game, and mincemeat pie. Her father bought a turkey for twenty-five cents from an Indian who had killed it with a bow and arrow. Mr. Robertson did not hunt because he was too near

¹⁶ Alice M. Robertson, "Christmas Time," Muskogee Phoenix, n.d., Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

¹⁷ Muskogee Phoenix, n.d., Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

¹⁸ Alice Robertson, "Christmas Time," Hisel Col.

sighted.¹⁹

Not only was physical reconstruction necessary, but religious improvement had to be made before the work at Tullahassee could start again. The church had been dissolved and many of the members were dead, but it was reorganized with the few that remained.²⁰ The missionary rode throughout the area on horseback, carrying corn on one side of his saddle, his Bible, hymn books, and a little case of medicine on the other. A roll of blankets served as his bed.²¹

During the year 1867, the Indians began to drift back to their pre-war homes. Few of them had livestock, and most of them were penniless. Their buildings had been burned, their fences torn down, and their fields had grown up in weeds.²² Alice recalled this year as the most sorrowful of her life. It was the wettest season ever known in that country. The stagnant water bred mosquitoes causing epidemics of malaria. As a result of the years of poverty and sacrifice, the people had low resistance and many died. There was little seed to plant and little opportunity to plant it, thus causing a shortage of food for the winter. The Robertsons secured two cows in April of that year, and shared milk with their sick neighbors.

In the summer, an epidemic of cholera broke out and whole families died of it. Dr. D. D. Hitchcock, Hannah's husband, was one of its victims.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰R. M. Loughridge, "History of Presbyterian Mission Work Among the Creek Indians," Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

²¹Muskogee Phoenix, 5, n.d., Robertson Col., Okla. Hist. Soc.

²²Alice M. Robertson, "Miss Alice Reports Indian Situation After Civil War," Muskogee Phoenix, June 26, 1929, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

Mrs. Hitchcock told of a Creek woman who fell in the middle of the road on her way home from the store and died. The disease was so widespread that it was impossible to get help in taking care of the sick.²³

A fever, which was also prevalent in the whole region, struck the Robertson home and before long every member of the family had suffered its weakening effect. It caused the death of the young twin boys, Johnnie and Willie.²⁴ Alice later recalled these trying times and wrote:²⁵

The next Christmas, 1867, was different. The battered little tin rattlers and time worn shoes had been carefully hidden away among mother's most precious treasures. In the autumn had come the days of fever to all the family. One of the twins had succumbed to it. Then father and mother both lay sorely stricken, first one then the other. Brave little sister and I had been the last to yield to it, and the other of the twins slept in the waxen loveliness of purity that death brings.

Old uncle John made boxes from the rough boards of the attic floor which I covered and lined with one of mother's sheets. I remember helping uncle John to close the lid for the last time shutting out the baby face, and then the fever seized me too, and for days, many days, the fever dreams left no memories.

So when Christmas (1867) came again, though we had much more of material comforts than the year before, father's voice faltered as he read the story of the Christ child . . . and mother's fingers trembled on the melodian keys and while we thought of the tin rattlers stored away, we could not sing the verses of "While the Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by Night."

The year 1868 was one of varied activities for the family. The famed evangelist spent much of his time among the people. He was also

²³Alice M. Robertson, "The Spring and Summer of 1867," n.d., Robertson Col., Tulsa U.; Letter from Hannah Worcester to A. E. W. Robertson, July 22, 1867, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

²⁴Letter from A. E. W. Robertson to Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Robertson, October 30, 1867, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

²⁵Alice M. Robertson, "Christmas Time," Muskogee Phoenix, n.d., Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

busy in the fields, planting crops of corn, potatoes, pumpkins, squash, and other vegetables for the family's needs. In addition he worked in the woods, sawing lumber to repair Tullahassee Mission buildings.²⁶ By March, 1869, the buildings were repaired and the large bell, still hanging in the cupola, was sounded for the reopening of the boarding school. Fifteen girls and fifteen boys were in attendance. In October of the same year the school was increased to eighty pupils, with six teachers and several helpers. Leonard Worcester, a younger brother of Mrs. Robertson, was superintendent, and W. S. Robertson was principal.²⁷

Teaching school meant more than instruction in the three R's. They wanted the boys and girls to learn how to work, make a living, keep a clean house, cook nourishing meals, have happy homes, and learn the principles of Christianity according to the strict rules of New England Calvinism. They were always interested in the welfare of their students and corresponded with many after they left school, urging them to continue in the ways of life they had been taught.

One of the pupils with whom the Robertsons corresponded after he left the school was Pleasant Porter, afterward a delegate to Congress and Principal Chief of the Creeks. They had a great influence in converting Porter to Christianity and were anxious that he remain firm to his vows and be an inspiration to his people.²⁸ On one occasion Mrs.

²⁶Blair, "Tullahassee," 56.

²⁷Alice M. Robertson, "Opening of School After the War," n.p., n.d.; R. M. Loughridge, "History of Presbyterian Mission Work Among the Creek Indians," Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

²⁸Letter from E. L. Ramsey to A. E. W. Robertson, April 18, 1871, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

Robertson wrote him about the evil of going to the theater, and he replied: "I know you truly hold my welfare dear, as you do all that have been your scholars."²⁹

Mrs. Robertson, a devoutly religious person, taught her children what she considered acceptable and becoming piety. When Augusta returned home after a year's absence at Cooper Seminary, her mother did not appear glad to see her and would hardly speak because her daughter had come home on Sunday. This habit of strict observance of the fourth commandment remained with Alice all her life. In the midst of her political campaign in 1920, she would not travel on Sunday.³⁰

In addition to translating the New Testament into the Creek language, Mrs. Robertson furnished material for the Indians in a paper called Our Monthly. The paper was printed on the school hand press by her son, Samuel, with the help of Indian boys.³¹

Ann Augusta graduated from Cooper Seminary June 23, 1870, and supported by her church at Elmira, returned to Tullahassee to help with teaching in the school.³² After a short courtship she was married to J. W. Craig, who assisted her father in the operation of the farm.³³

²⁹Letter from Pleasant Porter to Mrs. A. E. W. Robertson, March 8, 1872, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

³⁰Miller, "Alice Robertson," 8.

³¹A. E. W. Robertson, "Notebook," 3, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

³²Letter from A. E. W. Robertson to Mrs. Day, October 18, 1879; Letter from Hannah Worcester to A. E. W. Robertson, June 23, 1870; Letter from Ann Augusta Robertson to A. E. W. Robertson, November 6, 1866; Letter from A. E. W. Robertson to Mrs. Williams, February 6, 1884, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

³³Blair, "Tullahassee," 79.

From the age of twelve to seventeen, Alice received no formal education except that which she received at the mission. She helped her parents with the operation of the school but realized she had no one to teach her. Since Ann Augusta had completed her college course in the East and returned to take up her work with the school, it was now Alice's turn to go away to college.

CHAPTER III

SCHOOL GIRL AND CLERK

In 1871, Alice Robertson realized the dream of furthering her education by entering Elmira College in New York. She wrote: "I did not realize at the time what an adventure was before me when at the age of seventeen, I went to the first college for women in America at Elmira, New York." Her parents had done well in preparing her for college work, for when she took her entrance examinations, she passed without difficulty.¹ Shortly after her enrollment she wrote her sister, "I do try so hard to win and if determination will accomplish anything I shall do something."²

There is always a way for those who "try so hard." Dr. Frederick Lent, President of Elmira and a former classmate of Alice's father at Union College, gave her employment so she might earn part of her expenses. The rest of her needs was supplied by friends of the Congregational and Presbyterian churches of Elmira. In addition, Ann Augusta sent what she could spare from her meager salary as teacher at Tullahassee.³

Alice Robertson was well known and loved by her fellow students

¹Alice M. Robertson, "Miss Alice Reports Indian Situation After Civil War," Muskogee Phoenix, June 16, 1929.

²Letter from Alice Robertson to Ann Augusta, March 13, 1873, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

³Letter from Mrs. A. E. W. Robertson to Mrs. Williams, February 6, 1884, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

as well as the citizens of Elmira. In later years, she visited the college on many occasions and was always received with honor and courtesy. In 1921 she was a special guest at the Commencement exercises and featured speaker at the luncheon. Dr. Lent asked Mrs. Molly Ann Haley to read the poem she had written for the occasion and dedicated to Miss Robertson. It was called "The Beloved Bell-Ringer," because Alice had helped defray her expenses by ringing the bell. The poem depicted her character as well as the respect and honor she received from those who knew her.

THE BELOVED BELL-RINGER⁴

Dawn in the college corridor and there
Beside the Octagon, a slender girl,
Greeting the hour's responsibility,
High-hearted as she rings the rising bell!

"Wake for the day is come, the campus gleams
Dew-drenched and glad, beneath the morning sun,
Night is for sleep but now have done with dreams
Since every hour must be a precious one,
For is Our College not a pioneer,
Set on a hill, to prove if it be true
That women may be trained to higher things?"

This is a picture that our hearts hold dear,
We smile with tenderness to see her there,
As, faithful to her task, the long day through,
Beside the Octagon, her bells she rings!

Dawn,--and beside the Octagon of Life,
Ringing the rising bell for womanhood,
The summons to a fairer, fuller day,
She who was faithful in the lesser things,
Performs the greater with a reverent heart.
And looking out across the thronging ways,
Still to her conscience true, with tireless hands,
"Keeping the faith," as in her college days,
Within the Nation's Capitol she stands,

⁴Molly Anderson Haley, "The Beloved Bell-Ringer," Elmira College Bulletin, Alumnae News Number, Summer, 1931, pp. 17-18; Letter from Alice Robertson to Ann Augusta, October 1, 1871, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

Trained for her task by crowded years wherethru
 She rang the bells of opportunity,
 That "they who sat in darkness" might behold
 That Light which is the very Life of men!

So meet it is, that we with kindling hearts,
 Do homage to the service she has wrought,
 And closer drawn through this, our common bond,
 Ask of ourselves, have we too "Kept the faith?"
 Or have we fretted that the routine days
 Withheld us from achieving as we would?
 She turned the humdrum to her Master's praise,
 And of the simple things evolved the good!
 Dawn,--and the rising bell rings round the world,
 "Wake woman souls, for there is much to do,
 Young nation's reaching up imploring hands,
 Old nations yearning to be built anew."
 And oh, we would not miss this shining day,
 Nor while its challenge peals, sleep idly on,
 But, springing to new service, proudly say,
 "Is not this one who rings the bell, our own?"

The young student was interested in writing, and in her preparation she took courses in history, English, and civics. In a letter to Ann Augusta she said, "I am each day looking forward to the time when I shall have brain power enough to be able to write. That seems the only way open to me. Teaching is slow and killing."⁵ An essay written November 8, 1871, was one of her first efforts. Though revealing immaturity and mediocrity for a student of her age, it showed an unselfish and humanitarian spirit which was so characteristic of her.

WHEN MY SHIP COMES IN⁶

Somewhere in the vast ocean of the unknown, my ship is now sailing.
 Only in imagination have I seen it--yet fancy has painted in glowing
 colors many bright dreams to be realized--when my ship comes in!

⁵Foreman, "Honorable Alice Robertson," 14.

⁶"Essays Written by Alice Robertson While A Student At Elmira,"
Elmira College Bulletin, Alumnae News Number, Autumn, 1931, p. 5.

In youth we are ever dreaming of the future, and there are times when forgetting the present with its cares and duties I wander in the tangled mazes of dream life. Already I am deciding what use I shall make of my untold wealth when my treasure-laden vessel is safely anchored and I have so gladly received its burden.

I think of the many privileges and advantages enjoyed by the students of this College and decide that a part of my riches shall endow a similar institution in the far southwest that the black eyed daughters of the forest may have opportunities to cultivate the equal talent Providence has given them--While it has denied the means of culture bestowed upon their fairer sisters.

Then, too, my people should no longer hunger for the books in their native tongue I might supply them with--were such golden treasures indeed mine.

When my ship comes in, I will visit the old world. Through the storied cities of ancient time I shall wander. I will visit the many places we consider sacred because once the homes of those whose names have been rendered immortal by their genius. Everywhere gaining fresh knowledge, new thoughts, and valuable experiences, the realization of this dream would indeed be pleasant.

When my ship comes in the Elmira College shall have a museum and Professor Ford will no longer have to wish vainly for specimens to illustrate his lectures. A gymnasium shall rescue the Chapel from one of its present uses and dumb waiters shall prevent weary feet from climbing so many stairs.

Farther than this I dare not now express my ideas as to the disposition of my imaginary fortune. A fortune which will, however, probably never be mine in reality. I know though that my future depends upon my present action, so I will not wait idly for my ship to come in but will try to work.

While at Elmira, Alice Robertson made her first trip to Washington, D. C., along with some others from the college, and they had the opportunity of seeing President and Mrs. Grant. She wrote her sister of meeting Pleasant Porter and Senator Chandler on this occasion.⁷

When I was at the Capital with Pleasant [Porter], I told him of my note to Senator Chandler, so he brought him out and I presented

⁷Letter from Alice Robertson to Augusta, May 11, 1872, Robertson Col., Tulsa U. Senator Chandler was a cousin of Alice's mother, and Pleasant Porter was a delegate to Congress from the Creek Nation.

it. . . . The worthy Senator did not seem unimpressed by me, for he began immediately tracing resemblances between myself and the Orr family. . . . I think the trip paid if anything ever did.

Her college career came to a close in July, 1873, when she was offered a job as copyist in the Indian office in Washington, thereby becoming the first woman to do any work in this department. This post she retained for six years.⁸ She felt that her family needed her financial assistance, and she also wanted to help her younger sister, Grace, go to college. Alice never went back to school, but was granted an honorary Master's Degree by Elmira College in 1886.⁹

While in Washington, she availed herself of the opportunity of learning shorthand and typewriting, and afterwards was the only stenographer in the Indian Territory for many years. She also studied domestic science from Miss Corson and social-welfare work from Miss Huntington. These courses were to prepare her for a life of greater usefulness when she returned to her people to teach the Indians.¹⁰

Miss Robertson's work in the Indian Office had given her opportunity to meet people of high honor and political influence. Dr. Merrill E. Gates became one of her warm supporters. She had the privilege of attending several receptions given by Mrs. Ulysses S. Grant. At one of them she met Mrs. Rutherford B. Hayes, and the future President of the

⁸Robertson, "Miss Alice Reports Indian Situation"; Letter from Mrs. A. E. W. Robertson to Mrs. Williams, February 6, 1884, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁹"One of Elmira's Most Distinguished Alumnae Passes Away," Elmira College Bulletin, Alumnae News Number, Summer, 1931, p. 16.

¹⁰"A Woman Who Got Into Congress Through the Want-Ad Columns," The Literary Digest, December 4, 1920, p. 56; Muskogee Times-Democrat, July 1, 1931.

United States, James A. Garfield, and his wife.¹¹ She had not been happy in her employment, however, and wrote her mother:¹²

Please Mama, do not be vexed with me, do not give me up, but I do not know what is to become of me. This worthless department life is stifling out of existence the very little of good and unselfishness there is left in my nature. This is the reason I have not written home. I knew the blueness would show. Two weeks and I will be 22. I cannot realize it.

In 1879 she terminated her position in the Indian Office and went home to help with the work at Tullahassee. She became the domestic science teacher for the school and was able to relieve her mother of many household tasks.¹³ The office of Indian Affairs regretted to lose the services of so valuable an employee and in accepting the resignation her supervisor, E. J. Brooks, wrote:¹⁴

I desire to express regret that you feel compelled to resign the position of clerk in this Bureau which for nearly six years you have filled with entire acceptability, and to assure you of my high appreciation of the efficiency, promptness and fidelity with which you have discharged your official duties. Your unusual clerical ability both in respect to quickness and excellence of penmanship will make it difficult for the office to fill the place you have vacated.

I shall be interested to know of your success in the other phase of Indian work which you have chosen, and if at any time you should desire to return to this office, I shall be glad, in the interest of the service, to recommend your reappointment.

After a year at Tullahassee Miss Robertson received an appointment

¹¹Alice M. Robertson, "Women of the White House," Muskogee Daily Phoenix, October 6, 1929; Letter from Merrill E. Gates to Alice Robertson, April 12, 1900, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

¹²Letter from Alice Robertson to Mrs. A. E. W. Robertson, December 13, 1876, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

¹³Miller, "Robertson," 15.

¹⁴Letter from E. J. Brooks to Alice Robertson, March 14, 1879, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

as clerk at the Indian School at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, September, 1880. She was made secretary to Captain R. H. Pratt, Superintendent of the school.¹⁵

On December 19, 1880, the school building at Tullahassee caught fire from a defective flue and burned to the ground. Ninety-seven pupils and their teachers were suddenly without a place to stay. Most of the things on the first two floors were saved. These included some of the bedding in the girls' quarters, but everything on the third floor where the boys stayed was lost. After the distribution of Christmas gifts, a large number of students was taken into the homes of friends, while the few girls that remained slept in the ironing room on pallets. The boys who stayed with the school slept on hay in the barn.¹⁶

Immediately Alice Robertson was notified of the tragedy, and with the cooperation of Captain Pratt, she went to Washington to the Indian Office where she had previously worked, to lay before it the request that the most promising students of Tullahassee be sent to Carlisle at the expense of the government. The Department agreed to pay the expenses of twenty-five students if transportation could be furnished. Having realized her first objective, she set out to accomplish the second--free transportation from the Creek Nation to Carlisle. With characteristic energy and decision, she began to interest some wealthy people in her cause, and was successful in obtaining the money from a well-to-do cousin, E. D. Worcester, and Russell Sage, the well-known philanthropist. All

¹⁵Blair, "Tullahassee," 81.

¹⁶A. E. W. Robertson, "Writings," Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

this was quite a service for a young woman to perform.¹⁷

The burning of Tullahassee was a great shock to Alice's father, but he would not let it keep him from carrying on the endeavor which was so close to his heart. Immediately he set to work, using all available facilities, to continue the school with as many students as could be accommodated. The workshop was converted into a classroom, and the wagon shed became a dormitory for boys. Within a few weeks the school reopened with twenty boys. Fifty former students had to wait until more buildings were provided.¹⁸

He carried on the campaign to rebuild Tullahassee by writing letters to those he thought were interested and could help, but his pleas brought little encouragement. In a reply to request for help, John C. Lowrie, Secretary of the Presbyterian Board of Missions, said that the Board would not allocate money for rebuilding the school because the Indians needed to feel their own responsibilities in such cases.¹⁹ Hoping to receive a more encouraging response, Robertson wrote Carl Schurz, Secretary of the Interior:²⁰

Perhaps you will remember your kind invitation given me at the Indian Fair to write to you personally, with reference to the education of Creek girls, if there should be any special reason for it. One hundred and thirty boys are provided for in boarding schools,

¹⁷Ibid.; "Alice M. Robertson," unsigned pamphlet, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.; Alice M. Robertson, "Burning of Tullahassee," clipping, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

¹⁸Letter from W. S. Robertson to John C. Lowrie, January 1, 1881, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

¹⁹Letter from John C. Lowrie to W. S. Robertson, February 28, 1881, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

²⁰Letter from W. S. Robertson to Carl Schurz, January 29, 1881, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

and only twenty-two girls, including the fifteen recently sent to Carlisle through your kindness.

Can you not aid us in rebuilding those broken walls and again gathering fifty boys and fifty girls in accordance with our Chief's request?

The added burden of reconstructing Tullahassee and labors to obtain new buildings were too much for the frail body of W. S. Robertson. He was soon admitted to the hospital at Muskogee and remained several months until his death on June 26, 1881.²¹ Alice was summoned home when it became evident that her father would not live, but arrived too late to see him alive. She sat beside his body during the night of June 27, and at three o'clock in the morning wrote the following letter to Pleasant Porter, Chief of the Creeks, accusing the Creeks and the Home Mission Board of killing her father:²²

Coming home too late for even a last fond look from the father you know I loved so well, I have been here beside him through these still hours.

Can you not imagine the agony it is to be beside what was my father, and know that he left us because his heart was broken by those he loved and trusted so? I tell you frankly, that this morning when I came and found my father dead, I hated you, but I do not now. I am sure you loved him, because he was so proud of you, he gloried so in your successful manhood, he rejoiced so in the future of your people because of your ever growing influence. He is dead now. You have helped to kill him, and all your life you will know the bitter sorrow of remorse. If my life would have bought my father's, you know how gladly I would have given it, that he might go on in the work he loved so well. I will not reproach you, I know you did not understand but you cannot give me back my father.

²¹Letter from W. S. Robertson to A. E. W. Robertson, June 10, 1881, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.; Letter from W. S. Robertson to Alice Robertson, June 14, 1881, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.; Blair, "Tullahassee," 85

²²Letter from Alice Robertson to Pleasant Porter, June 28, 1881, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

But I write to you now because I should like to see you before I go back to Carlisle. My father's last gift to us is the message to go on with the work. For months past I have been so discouraged, so bitter that I have not felt that I could ever even try to do anything more for the Creeks, but sitting here in the awful stillness, looking back over my father's life, remembering all the hopes, the prayers, the anxieties he gave for your people, I can only say I will try to be more like my father.

The good work of W. S. Robertson had not gone without genuine appreciation from the people he loved and served. They knew he had given up everything to be able to bring the Creeks the joys of enlightenment and Christianity. The Board of Trustees of Tullahassee met at Wealaka on July 6, 1881, and adopted the following resolution which shows the profound respect and deep gratification for his services to the Indians:²³

It is with profound sorrow that we have heard of the death of Rev. Wm. S. Robertson, former superintendent of the Tullahassee Mission Boarding School, who has for so many years been engaged in the successful education of our youth.

We wish to acknowledge our heartfelt gratitude, and the gratitude of our people for the very faithful, zealous, self-denying and successful labors of Mr. Robertson as a missionary and educator of our people. The excellent results of these labors are to be seen in every department of business throughout the nation, and long will be remembered with grateful emotions by the hundreds of pupils who have been under his training.

To his afflicted family we tender our deepest sympathy, and trust that the assurance of his Christian preparation to meet the solemn change will comfort them in this dark hour.

Resolved that a copy of these resolutions be forwarded to the family of the deceased and also a copy to the Indian Journal for publication.

By using the outbuildings, Alice's mother and sister Ann Augusta, continued to hold as many classes as they could at Tullahassee. Mrs. Robertson could not give up the dream of continuing the school her husband

²³Board of Trustees of Tullahassee Manual Labor Boarding School, "Resolution," Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

worked so hard to make possible, and Alice, determined to do all she could, resigned her position at Carlisle in 1882 and returned to the Indian Territory. The Creeks showed great interest in rebuilding a school for their children, but the matter of location had to be worked out. A delegation of Creeks--Pleasant Porter, Ward Coachman, and D. M. Hodge--expressed regret over the burning of Tullahassee and said it must be replaced, even better than before, with perhaps a more suitable location.²⁴

Tullahassee had ceased to be the center of Creek population and the most convenient place for a school. Before the Civil War the area surrounding it was made up of a number of large plantations which had belonged to Creek Indians with fairly large slave holdings. During the latter part of the war, many of these land owners were forced to leave their property and move southward because of the invasion of that area by the Union armies. By the treaties of 1866, the former slaves received equal property rights with their former masters. The Negroes moved in and took possession of most of the land around Tullahassee. The Creeks who had homes in this vicinity moved farther west and settled around the Broken Arrow and Wealaka communities. For this reason they wanted the new school building moved to a location which would be more accessible to them.²⁵

In 1881 Congress appropriated \$5,000.00 for the rebuilding of Tullahassee, and John Tufts, United States Indian Agent, wrote Samuel Checote, Principal Chief of the Creeks, that the money could be used only

²⁴Letter from Creek Delegation to W. S. Robertson, December 24, 1880, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

²⁵Letter from Mrs. A. E. Robertson to Mrs. Williams, February 6, 1884, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.; Gilmore, "Loughridge," 124-25.

for the construction of a school building on the old site.²⁶ In reply Chief Checote gave reasons for erecting the new building at Wealaka. Tullahassee was on the north side of the Arkansas River, and most of the Creeks lived on the south side. During rainy seasons the river would make it very difficult for the children to get to school.²⁷

The Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions appointed R. M. Loughridge as Superintendent of the Wealaka school.²⁸ All movable property was to be taken from Tullahassee to the new location, except the pony and hack which were to be left for Mrs. Robertson to use.²⁹

Meanwhile the Indian Council placed Mrs. Robertson in charge of the school and farm at Tullahassee until the Negro trustees assumed responsibility for its operation. She was granted permission by the Creeks to conduct a school for one year while the new buildings at Wealaka were being built.³⁰ When the Negro school opened in the autumn of 1883, under the supervision of the Baptist Home Mission, Mrs. Robertson went to live with

²⁶Letter from John Tufts, U.S. Indian Agent, to Samuel Checote, November 21, 1881; a Report of Creek Schools, Robertson Col., Okla. Hist. Soc.

²⁷Letter from Samuel Checote to John Tufts, November 28, 1881; a Report of Creek Schools, Robertson Col., Okla. Hist. Soc.

²⁸Letter from R. M. Loughridge to Samuel Checote, January 9, 1882; a Report of Creek Schools, Robertson Col., Okla. Hist. Soc.

²⁹Letter from William Robinson, Chairman of Committee on Education, to Houses of Kings and Warriors, December 3, 1883; a Report of Creek Schools, Robertson Col., Okla. Hist. Soc.

³⁰Letter from John C. Lowrie to Mrs. A. E. W. Robertson and Ann Augusta Robertson, October 11, 1881; Letter from Pleasant Porter to Samuel Checote, October 26, 1882; a Report of Creek Schools, Robertson Col., Okla. Hist. Soc.

her daughter, Ann Augusta.³¹ Tullahassee continued to serve as a school for the Negroes until 1914, when it was closed.³²

With the perseverance so characteristic of her, Alice Robertson set to work to obtain support for the building of a new school for the Creeks. She went back East to solicit funds from friends she had made while working in the interest of the Indians. The Board of Home Missions gave its blessings to the building of such a school.³³ The fund raiser was successful beyond her fondest hope. Her concern for the Indians and passionate appeal for their welfare drew unexpected support from many quarters. Mrs. Kate P. Bryan wrote Mrs. Robertson of the way in which Alice had won the hearts of her listeners.³⁴

I believe you would have felt a holy pride if you had seen Alice sway her audience to the amount of \$500.00 in a very few minutes. Captain Pratt told us we might as well give it to her for she would never let go, until she had got it all.

Writing her mother of her experience in the campaign to raise money for the school, Alice said, "Do you know that my success everywhere frightens me? People compliment till I have to pray constantly for humility. I am simply overwhelmed with requests to deliver addresses."³⁵ The Women's Executive Committee of the Home Missions Board voted to give

³¹Blair, "Tullahassee," 86.

³²Gilmore, "Loughridge," 127.

³³Letter from E. H. Haines to Alice Robertson, December 12, 1882, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

³⁴Letter from Kate P. Bryan to Mrs. A. E. W. Robertson, June 21, 1882, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

³⁵Letter from Alice Robertson to Mrs. A. E. W. Robertson, October 13, 1883, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

\$10,000.00 and the Creek National Council provided \$2,500.³⁶ Commissioner of Indian Affairs, H. Price, sent a letter to the Department of the Interior recommending appropriation of \$20,000.00 for the building of the school which Alice Robertson had requested.³⁷

Alice's older sister, Mrs. Augusta Moore, was to be the superintendent of the new school, which was located at a place called Nuyaka. Ann Augusta's husband, J. W. Craig, died shortly after their marriage and in 1882 she married N. B. Moore, a prominent Creek from Alabama. He had come West with the Creeks in the early days of their removal. At the close of the war he had been elected a member of the Creek Council, and a few years later was elected judge of the Supreme Court of the Creek Nation. After his retirement from the Court, he was chosen treasurer. In the winter of 1889-90, he was a delegate to Washington. In that capacity he was able to secure an appropriation of \$400,000.00 for his people. He was of great assistance in the educational work of the tribe, serving as trustee of Tullahassee and Nuyaka Missions. When Mrs. Moore became superintendent of Nuyaka, they closed their home at the Moore ranch and moved to the new location. They remained with the school for seven years.³⁸

Nuyaka was built on the cottage plan, with four frame buildings serving the needs of the school. This made it possible to accommodate

³⁶Foreman, "Honorable Alice Robertson," 14.

³⁷Letter from H. Price, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, to Department of Interior, February 7, 1883, Robertson Col., Okla. Hist. Soc.

³⁸John D. Benedict, Muskogee and Northeastern Oklahoma, Including the Counties of Muskogee, McIntosh, Wagoner, Cherokee, Sequoyah, Adair, Delaware, Mayes, Rogers, Washington, Nowata, Craig, and Ottawa (Chicago, 1922), I, 181-82; Letter from T. J. Morgan to N. B. Moore, January 27, 1892, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

seventy Creek Indian students.³⁹ It remained under the supervision of the Presbyterian Board from the time it was built until 1912 when the Federal Government assumed control.⁴⁰

During the school year 1882-83, while Nuyaka was being built, Alice Robertson taught a day school for Creeks at Okmulgee, the capital of the Creek Nation. Lelah Brown, a promoter of Indian education, told of substituting for the teacher while she was attending a conference in New York. When Miss Robertson returned, she asked the substitute, who had done the job so well, to continue teaching so that she might pursue another phase of Indian education work.⁴¹

While teaching at Okmulgee, Miss Robertson made the acquaintance of a young lawyer, Robert L. Owen, with whom she had a life-long friendship. Although they were aligned with different political parties and would be on different sides of political contests and issues, they were both interested in the improvement of Indian conditions. Each had a wholesome respect and sincere liking for the other. They served together as officers of the first Educational Convention held in the Indian Territory, September 29, 1884.⁴²

³⁹Letter from Mrs. A. E. W. Robertson to Mrs. Perkins, September 21, 1892, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.; the name Nuyaka was from a clan of Indians about sixty miles west of Muskogee. They were known as New Yorkers and they spelled and pronounced their name as "Nuyaka."

⁴⁰Nuyaka News, May 13, 1921, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁴¹Grant Foreman (Director), Indian-Pioneer History (112 Vols.; Oklahoma City, 1937), CIX, 258 (mimeographed); Miller, "Robertson," 17; Foreman, "Honorable Alice Robertson," 14.

⁴²Miller, "Robertson," 17-18.

CHAPTER IV

EDUCATOR, SCHOOL SUPERVISOR, POSTMASTER

In the field of education Alice Robertson made her greatest and most lasting contribution. Though being an educator was more strenuous and less rewarding than other activities of her life, she preferred this role to any other. At a speaking engagement in Oklahoma City, J. M. Gordon introduced her as the former Congresswoman from Oklahoma. In reply she said she had rather be referred to as an educator than as anything else.¹

In 1885 Miss Robertson took charge of the Presbyterian Mission Boarding School at Muskogee, a school for Indian girls known as "Minerva Home" and established primarily for teaching domestic arts, for which she was so well qualified.² Susan H. Tiger, one of the students, described her teacher as one who³

. . . tried to be a mother to all of us. She had prayer every night and after prayer she would kiss each of us goodnight before we went up to bed. Not one was left out. She said that the Indians weren't civilized until they learned to kiss and be loving.

The girls in the school were taught all phases of home economics. Miss Robertson emphasized the importance of knowing how to be good wives

¹Tulsa World, January 2, 1923.

²The Boston Evening Transcript, January 22, 1921; "Alice Mary Robertson," pamphlet, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

³Foreman, Indian-Pioneer History, XL, 120.

and mothers. She said, "I had rather be the mother of a big family than be president."⁴ On another occasion she wrote, "Give me a nation of great mothers and I care not who the husbands be."⁵

Unhappy with scant facilities of Minerva school, she set out to raise money for expansions. She appealed to the Presbyterian Women's Council for help and while traveling in the East met Mrs. Mary C. Thaw, who made a sizeable contribution to the project. She received considerable assistance from Mrs. Thaw the rest of her life. Commenting upon Mrs. Thaw's generosity, Miss Robertson said:⁶

It is impossible for anyone to know what a help and inspiration Mrs. Thaw was to me during the long period from the time when I first met her with her husband in Dr. Henry Kendall's office in New York. She not only gave liberally to the little school, but helped then as always by advice and suggestion.

The money needed to expand the school was procured, and the Board of Missions decided to admit boys and elevate the school to the rank of a college. This was done in 1894, at which time the name was changed to Henry Kendall College, in honor of the well-known Home Mission Secretary. William A. Caldwell was chosen President, and Alice Robertson continued with the school as teacher of English, history, and civics until 1899. Henry Kendall College remained in Muskogee until 1906. Then it was moved to Tulsa and later became Tulsa University.⁷

⁴Alice Robertson, "Is Mother to Blame?" The Christian Herald, May 13, 1922, Robertson Col., Okla. Hist. Soc.

⁵Oakland (California) News, June 7, 1921, Robertson Col., Okla. Hist. Soc.

⁶Letter from Alice Robertson to P. S. Space and Howard Irish, August, 1929, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁷"Notes," May 29, 1903, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.; Boston Herald,

In 1889 Miss Robertson was employed by the Indian Commission which was sent out by the Federal Government to negotiate with the Cherokee Nation for the purpose of obtaining the Cherokee Outlet.⁸ When the Commission failed to reach an agreement with the Cherokees, it returned to Washington to secure further legislation to carry on its work. Miss Robertson was asked to go along with the Commission and was present when it was granted an interview with President Harrison. She took little part in the discussion, but, because of her long association with the country and its problems, she was called upon to relate what she knew of the conditions of the Indian Territory. Speaking with calmness, plainness, and confidence, she convinced the President of the need for assistance, and the Commission was able to get the necessary legislation.⁹

In October, 1891, at an Indian Conference at Lake Mohonk, she delivered a speech on the problems and needs of the Indians. In the audience was Theodore Roosevelt, then the United States Commissioner of Civil Service. He listened so attentively that the speaker forgot the rest of the listeners and spoke directly to that one understanding face. After the speech, Mr. Roosevelt went directly to her and said, "I could

n.d., Robertson Col., Okla. Hist. Soc.; Muskogee Times, November 25, 1897, Hisel Col.; Letter from William Roberts to Alice Robertson, June 22, 1894, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁸"Miss Alice Robertson," Muskogee Daily Phoenix, n.d., Hisel Col. This Commission was authorized by the Indian Appropriation Act of March 2, 1889, whereby the President had the authority to appoint a commission of three persons to deal with all Indians west of the Five Civilized Tribes for the cession of their surplus lands. (Congressional Record, 67th Congress, 2nd Session, 1922, LXII, Part 13, pp. 13747-750.)

⁹Alice Robertson, "Presidents I Have Known," Muskogee Daily Phoenix, June 2, 1929.

not wait for a formal introduction, I just had to tell you how fine I thought your talk was. Your views on Indian education are mine also."¹⁰ Concerning her Roosevelt said, "Wherever she is, whatever her surroundings, she is one of the great women of America."¹¹

A cordial friendship developed from their first meeting. They had much in common, for both knew and understood the West as well as the East.¹² Each respected the other's point of view, even when they differed over political policies. While Roosevelt was considered a radical reformer, his new admirer was a regular, ultra-conservative Republican. She did not appreciate his views on "big business," trusts and social legislation, but there was one current issue upon which they heartily agreed--civil service reform. They had seen so much corruption and dishonesty in public affairs that they were willing to lay aside other differences to accomplish something for better government.

At the outbreak of the Spanish-American War, Roosevelt organized a regiment of "Rough Riders" for a campaign in Cuba. Every adventurous young man was eager to join, and two of Miss Robertson's students at Kendall College, Milo Hendricks and Eugene Gilmore, asked her to assist them in enlisting by writing a letter of introduction to Colonel Roosevelt.¹³ This she did, and they were accepted. She took an intense

¹⁰"A Woman Who Got Into Congress Through Want Ads," The Literary Digest, December 4, 1920, LXVII, 56.

¹¹"Alice Robertson," Muskogee Daily Phoenix, n.d., Hisel Col.

¹²"A Woman Who Got Into Congress Through Want Ads," 58.

¹³Grant Foreman, "The Lady From Oklahoma," The Independent, March 26, 1921, CV, 326, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.; Letters from Eugene Gilmore to Alice Robertson, May 24, 1898; July 6, 1898, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

interest in speeding the recruits on their way to service. For each of the men who went to the war from Muskogee, she prepared a kit containing a New Testament and eating utensils.¹⁴ Roosevelt recognized her contribution in raising troops for the "Rough Riders" and gave the story in his own words:¹⁵

Two of the young Cherokee recruits came to me with a most kindly letter from one of the ladies who had been teaching in the academy from which they were about to graduate. She and I had known one another in connection with governmental and philanthropic work on the reservations, and she wrote to commend the two boys to my attention. One was on the academy football team and the other in the glee club. Both were fine young fellows. The football player now lies buried with the other dead who fell in the fight at San Juan. The singer was brought to death's door by fever, but recovered and came back to his home.

. . .

In the first chapter, I spoke of a lady, a teacher in an academy in the Indian Territory, three or four of whose pupils had come into my regiment, and who had sent with them a letter of introduction to me. When the regiment disbanded, I wrote to her to ask if she could not use a little money among the rough riders, white, Indian and half-breed, that she might personally know. I did not hear from her for some time, and then she wrote as follows:

Muskogee, Ind. Ter.,
December 19, 1898.

My Dear Colonel Roosevelt: I did not at once reply to your letter of September 23d, because I waited for a time to see if there should be need among any of our Rough Riders of the money you so kindly offered. Some of the boys are poor, and in one or two cases they seemed to me really needy, but they all say no. More than once I saw the tears come to their eyes, at thought of your care for them, as I told them of your letter. Did you hear any echoes of our Indian warwhoops over your election? They were pretty loud. I was

¹⁴"A Woman Who Got Into Congress Through Want Ads," 58.

¹⁵Theodore Roosevelt, The Rough-Riders (New York, 1899), 26, 227-29. Milo Hendricks was killed in the battle of San Juan and the Muskogee Post of the Spanish-American War veterans was named in his honor. Eugene Gilmore was the one who came home.

particularly exultant, because my father was a New Yorker, even if I was born here . . .

I am planning to entertain all the Rough Riders in this vicinity some evening during my holiday vacation. I mean to have no other guests, but only give them an opportunity for reminiscences. I regret that Bert's death makes one less. I had hoped to have them sooner, but our struggling young college salaries are necessarily small and duties arduous. I make a home for my widowed mother and an adopted Indian daughter, who is in school; and as I do the cooking for a family of five, I have found it impossible to do many things I would like to.

Pardon me for burdening you with these details, but I suppose I am like your boys, who say, "The Colonel was always as ready to listen to a private as to a major-general."

Indian control of their education came to an end in 1897, with the passing of the Curtis Act.¹⁶ This phase of Indian life became the responsibility of the Federal Government. Immediately Alice Robertson became interested in the post of Federal Supervisor of Creek Schools, and made application for the appointment. In a letter to President McKinley asking for the job, she pointed out that she was qualified for the position because of her experience as teacher among the tribes and her understanding of their problems. She added that she had campaigned for him in the last election, while almost everyone else was supporting William Jennings Bryan.¹⁷

Desiring to obtain all the backing possible to get the appointment, she wrote Senators and other acquaintances asking for their support.¹⁸

¹⁶Seth Gordon and W. B. Richards (compilers), Oklahoma Red Book (Oklahoma City, 1912), I, 521-31.

¹⁷Letter from Alice Robertson to President McKinley, December 24, 1898, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

¹⁸Letters from Alice Robertson to Senator Hawley (Conn.), January 11, 1899; Senator John Ross (Vt.) to Alice Robertson, March 11, 1899; Senator T. C. Platt (New York) to Alice Robertson, February 1, 1899, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

Mr. James K. Imes wrote her that he thought she stood as good a chance as any woman, but candor required him to state that he doubted whether any woman could do the job.¹⁹ Pleasant Porter, Principal Chief of the Creeks, very strongly recommended her appointment.²⁰ In order to be in a better position to achieve her ambition, she resigned her place as teacher in Henry Kendall College and took assignment in the Census Bureau in Washington in 1899.²¹ Finally, through the influence of many of her friends, including Dr. Merrill Gates, Secretary of Indian Affairs, she received assurance in June, 1900, that she would get the appointment. After receiving official confirmation she returned to the Indian Territory to take up her new duties.

Her responsibilities were heavy and varied. She looked after the appointment of teachers, visited schools, audited accounts, prepared statistics, made quarterly and annual reports, and each summer handled normal schools at Eufaula and Muskogee. Her work required her to travel by horse and buggy in all kinds of weather throughout the Creek country, but at no time was she ever molested. There were few hotels, and she stayed with Indians, who always welcomed her.²² When Roosevelt heard of the fine work she was doing under these trying circumstances, he wrote

¹⁹Letter from James K. Imes to Miss Alice Robertson, January 12, 1899, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

²⁰Letter from Pleasant Porter, Principal Chief of Creek Nation, to Secretary of Interior, April 3, 1900, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

²¹Letter from A. E. W. Robertson to A. L. Gould, March 10, 1900, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.; Muskogee Daily Phoenix, January, 1900.

²²Foreman, "Honorable Alice Robertson," 15.

her that he was glad to hear she was doing so well, and planned to visit the Indian Territory as soon as he could.²³

The 1902 report of Creek schools by Miss Robertson gave a view of the deplorable conditions of education as well as the enormous task of the School Supervisor:²⁴

Like the preceding year, the past has been marked by conditions unfavorable to the schools. While smallpox has been less prevalent, few neighborhoods have entirely escaped it . . .

The greatest suffering of the people has been, however, from the terrible drought of last summer, with the consequent failure of all crops but cotton. Many Indians, instead of being able to hire help to pick their cotton, were compelled to keep their children out of school for this work. In the spring the same need led to keeping the children out to help in planting. In many cases parents, because of scant food supply and consequent lack of means to purchase both food and clothing, were unable to send their children to school . . .

The greatest obstacle to successful work in our neighborhood schools is the presence of a preponderant population of illiterate whites. While the Indian day schools have been open to this class of people upon the payment of \$1.00 a month tuition, their enrollment for the past year has been only 404, with an average attendance of 142. A majority of this small number would not pay the tuition, and when told, after repeated failures, that they must pay, left school and tried to injure the teacher in the community . . .

Even greater obstacles confronted the school supervisor during the ensuing year. Storms and flood made the school work more difficult than in any year during the history of the schools. Continuous rains swelled the streams past fording, and made great bogs of all low-lying land, for many weeks at a time all travel being practically suspended and pupils being unable to reach the schoolhouse. The decreased attendance this year reported, instead of the anticipated increase, is not therefore an indication of retrogression, but the

²³Letter from Theodore Roosevelt to Alice Robertson, November 14, 1900, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

²⁴Grant Foreman, Muskogee, The Biography of an Oklahoma Town (St. Louis), 198-204. This book is dedicated to the memory of Alice M. Robertson, Pioneer Muskogean. Hereafter cited as Foreman, Muskogee; Letter from Alice Robertson to John D. Benedict, August 1, 1903, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

fact that this decrease is not greater shows marked progress. The greatest obstacle to successful school work I believe to be the lack of a general school system which shall care for the white population of this Territory. So long as the great mass of children in the country are practically without schools, our efforts in Indian-school work will be largely nullified. The Indian child who loves the forest freedom so well can see no reason why he should be shut up in the schoolroom while the white renter is not . . .

The past year a new system of paying the teachers of Indian neighborhood schools was inaugurated. Teachers were appointed at a uniform salary of \$25.00 a month, with the requirement of an average of 10 pupils, and were allowed an additional \$2.00 a month for each additional pupil added to the average. The plan worked quite satisfactorily.

Miss Robertson revealed her political beliefs in her statements on public schools. She said:²⁵

A public school system might even yet make this a Republican state when it comes in. Only cotton-raising Democrats are willing to raise their children in ignorance.

Under present conditions the Indian Territory would come in an overwhelmingly Democratic state. Of course the question of politics does not count when we are considering what is best for the Indians, except that republicanism seems to me to stand for the higher and better things of life.

In this same letter, she showed her feeling toward the Negro race. The Federal Government had made investigation of removing restrictions on the sale of Indian lands. Miss Robertson used all her influence to prevent such policy because she thought it would be bad for the Indians. However, she said that it would not matter if the Negroes did lose their land as it would teach them to get out and go to work for themselves. She had intense solicitude for the protection of the Creeks, but seemed to have little feeling for the welfare of the freedmen.²⁶

²⁵Letters from Alice Robertson to Senator O. H. Platt, January 23, 1904; March 7, 1904, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

²⁶Ibid.

Because her work as School Supervisor created so many problems, she realized that she would have to secure some other means of livelihood. One of these problems was the care of her mother, who was advanced in age and in poor health. She needed to be near her mother, especially at night, and in the present position it was impossible for her to do it. With an old acquaintance and friend, Theodore Roosevelt, as President, she felt that she had a good chance to be appointed postmaster of Muskogee.

To make her appeal as strong as possible, Miss Robertson secured the endorsement of many citizens. None denied her qualifications, though some preferred another for the job. A letter from Theodore F. Brewer, President of Spaulding Institute in Muskogee, is a sample of the endorsement she received:²⁷

The undersigned has known Miss Alice Robertson for twenty years and would respectfully recommend her for the appointment for postmistress of Muskogee Indian Territory. She is eminently qualified to fill the position she is asking for.

When Dr. Merrill Gates obtained a personal interview with the President in her behalf, the President told him that he was sending the appointment of Alice Robertson to the Post Office Department, and he did not care what the local politicians thought about it. Her name was sent to the Senate on December 12, 1904, and her appointment was confirmed immediately and without difficulty.²⁸ Thus she resigned as Supervisor of

²⁷Letter from Theodore F. Brewer, President of Spaulding Institute, Muskogee Indian Territory, 1904. All the letters of endorsement are found in the files of the Robertson letters at Tulsa University for years 1904-1905.

²⁸Letter from Merrill E. Gates to Alice Robertson, November 7, 1904, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

Creek Schools and began her new duties as postmistress in January, 1905, recommending George A. Trotter, Superintendent of the Euchee Boarding School, as her successor.²⁹

The leaders of the Republican Party of the Territory were very unhappy because the President had completely disregarded their patronage rights. They felt that at least he should have appointed a man, but there was nothing they could do about it. Miss Robertson wrote the President to express her happiness and gratitude for his kindness and consideration. She said it seemed like "a childhood fairy dream of a new world" and she realized it would require much "earnest, toilsome effort to be worthy of the trust" placed in her.³⁰ In a letter to Dr. Gates she revealed her feeling that the appointment was a gift from God because of her mother's long and devoted service to the Indians and that this "recognition from the man most honored in all the world, comes like knighthood conferred upon a humble, battle-scarred veteran." She earnestly desired that she might "come up to the Roosevelt Standard."³¹

During her tenure as postmaster, she maintained a regular correspondence with the President and his Secretary, William Loeb, in order to keep them informed of the conditions of the Territory and perhaps to get the President to accept her viewpoints on Indian problems.³² In one of

²⁹Letter from Alice Robertson to John D. Benedict, December 17, 1904, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

³⁰Letter from Alice Robertson to President Roosevelt, December 13, 1904, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

³¹Letter from Alice Robertson to Dr. Merrill Gates, December 13, 1904, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

³²Letters from Alice Robertson to President Roosevelt, June 5, 1905; November 10, 1905; May 16, 1906, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

her letters she appealed to him to appoint Dana H. Kelsey to the position of Indian Agent. Thinking that moral fitness would some how compensate for other deficiencies, her recommendation was based on the fact that Kelsey did not smoke, drink, or keep questionable company, and above all he did not break the Sabbath.³³

Miss Robertson's first year as postmistress brought her in conflict with a Muskogee newspaper when she barred one of its issues from the mails because it carried an item concerning a benefit bridge party which offered prizes. The postal regulations forbade the use of the mails for gambling purposes, and adhering to the letter of the law, she interpreted this act as a violation. Being personally opposed to any kind of gambling she, therefore, felt fully justified in her action. This event created some controversy and editorial comment but soon passed without further conflict.³⁴

In November, 1905, Mrs. A. E. W. Robertson passed away at the age of 80. The devoted daughter wrote Dr. Gates expressing her thanks for having been at home with her mother the last year of her life. She said, "It is the first time for 32 years that I have had no financial care for someone else."³⁵ At her funeral the choir sang, "Just As I Am," the first hymn Mrs. Robertson had translated into the Indian tongue. Rev. A. Grant Evans, President of Henry Kendall College and an old friend

³³Letter from Alice Robertson to the President, May 16, 1905, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

³⁴South McAlester News, November 12, 1905.

³⁵Boston Evening Herald, January 22, 1921; Letter from Alice Robertson to Merrill E. Gates, January 1, 1906, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

of Mrs. Robertson, conducted the ceremonies, assisted by Rev. J. K. Thompson, her pastor.³⁶

One of the things which caused Alice Robertson much anxiety was the proposal to make Oklahoma and the Indian Territory a single state. President Roosevelt was strongly in favor of this measure and recommended it to Congress.³⁷ She appealed to the President to delay this action because she felt that the Indian Territory was not ready for statehood, and when it was, it should come in as a separate state. She supported the "Sequoyah Movement," and though she did not attend the sessions of the convention, she talked with many who did, including "Alfalfa Bill" Murray. Speaking of the proposed state of Sequoyah, Miss Robertson said there would be forty-seven counties named after great men of the Indians and American Presidents, such as Washington and Jefferson, but none after Jackson because he was responsible for the removal of the Indians.³⁸

In a letter to the Secretary to the President, she wrote:³⁹

I believe the best future for the Indian people and for the new state that is to be, would be that Republicanism should control here. To this end, while I would not for an instant compromise the right, I honestly believe that no wrong could be done by a further stay.

³⁶"Mrs. A. E. W. Robertson Has Passed Away; A Noble Woman, A Missionary and A Christian in Word and Deed--Her Work Among the Indians Will Never Be Equaled," Muskogee Evening Times, November 21, 1905. For all her work and as a recognition of her unusual scholarly attainments, Wooster University, in 1885, conferred upon her the title of Doctor of Philosophy degree, the highest honor ever conferred upon a woman up to that time.

³⁷Richardson, Messages and Papers of the Presidents, II, 1178.

³⁸Alice M. Robertson, "Step Into My Parlor," Muskogee Phoenix, September 22, 1929.

³⁹Letter from Alice Robertson to William Loeb, June 5, 1905, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

In opposing the single state measure, she portrayed her prejudice toward Democrats, cotton raisers, Southerners, and Oklahoma Territory. She despised the name of Oklahoma and wrote to the President that the single state plan would be easier to take if some name other than Oklahoma would be used.⁴⁰ Roosevelt was not swayed by such trivial arguments, for it was obvious she did not fathom the basic issues concerning statehood for Oklahoma or she was allowing prejudice rather than reason to influence her thinking. The grounds she had for concluding the state would eventually be controlled by the Republicans are revealed in a letter she wrote to William Curtis:⁴¹

The inauguration of a public school system now in its second year of practical work is bringing a different class of people to the rural districts. There is great reason to suppose that a large percentage of those new people are Republicans. Two out of three of the last two years have been far better for corn than for cotton. The population that raises cotton is a shifting one. . . . While I am sorry for the people who sell goods in the towns and who buy cotton, I can never help a little feeling away down in my heart of satisfaction at any discouragement of the raising of cotton.

Secretary Hitchcock's determined and splendid protection of the Indians by placing so many obstacles in the way of their selling their lands has been the best possible thing for Republicanism. . . . The land is being sold more slowly . . . to practical farmers from the North.

I know it would be questioned very generally, but I believe that Indian Territory people as a rule, would show more of intelligence than the Oklahoma people. The majority of grafters come to us from Oklahoma. The meanest money sharks in our town are Oklahomans.

⁴⁰Letter from Alice Robertson to President Roosevelt, November 10, 1905, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁴¹Letter from Alice Robertson to William Curtis, November 11, 1905, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

Shortly before her mother's death, Alice Robertson had expressed opposition to the combining of the two territories into one state in strongest terms in a letter to Dr. Gates. She had said it would be too great a shock to her aged mother to know of the plan to unite the Territory with Oklahoma because it would mean union with the liquor interests since Oklahoma was "wet." She added that she had listed her property for sale and was going to leave as soon as it was sold. She would have nothing to do with the saloon which would be introduced into the state.⁴²

She did not carry out her threat but kept the property and held on to her job as postmistress. In fact, in 1909, when her first term expired and her name came before the Senate for reappointment, she made a determined fight to retain the position. Considerable difficulty was experienced in obtaining confirmation of her second appointment because of charges of inefficiency and misconduct in office by some who were seeking her place.

James Cromwell, former assistant to the postmistress, was her leading opponent. He thought that if he could get a number of complaints from citizens of Muskogee, he could get her removed from office. Her appointment had been confirmed by the Senate, but when the reports of the alleged violations came in, Senator Robert L. Owen had it held up until a full and satisfactory examination could be made.⁴³

⁴²Letter from Alice Robertson to Merrill Gates, n.d., Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁴³Letter from Senator Robert Owen to Alice Robertson, January 16, 1909, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

Acting on the advice of Senator Eugene Hale of Maine, a distant relative of hers, Miss Robertson presented the case to Senator Boies Penrose, Chairman of the Post Office Committee. Senator Hale took a personal interest in the contest and kept the incumbent advised as to what she should do to clear her record. He informed her that official protests to her confirmation had been filed by Representative Bird McGuire and Republican State Committeeman Norris.⁴⁴

In writing to Senator Penrose, the postmistress stated that she was willing to stand on her record and pointed out that Representative McGuire was from the first Congressional District, while Muskogee was in the second. In the case of Chairman Norris, she felt sure his opposition resulted from her sending only \$25.00 to the campaign fund, instead of the \$50.00 which he had requested. Anyway, she was relying on her work as reasons for reappointment, and not on political power.⁴⁵

Postal Inspector, Carter Keene, made an extensive investigation for the Post Office Department of the complaints and accusations against Miss Robertson and found no evidence to support the charges. He questioned those who were reported to have made requests for her removal, and they all gave her their endorsement. Keene's report showed the tremendous growth of the work of the Muskogee Post Office, in spite of there having been no increase in clerical help. This fact might account for any inefficiency in its administration. It had grown from a second class to a

⁴⁴Letter from Senator Hale to Alice Robertson, January 16, 1909, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁴⁵Letter from Alice Robertson to Senator Boies Penrose, January 2, 1909, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

first class post office during the preceding four years. The investigation closed with the recommendation that she be retained in office.⁴⁶

The President of the University of Oklahoma, A. Grant Evans, wrote her congratulations on the re-appointment, in which he said:⁴⁷

I was delighted to see a few days ago the notice of your reappointment as postmaster at Muskogee. I most heartily congratulate you, and rejoice in your beating the gang that has been trying to get you out.

Alice Robertson was an active member of national and regional organizations of postmasters and postal employees. Although she was the only woman member of the United States Postmaster's Association, the men were very friendly and courteous to her. She was chosen to membership on important committees and was always prominent in convention affairs. In a letter to Senator Penrose, she explained that her acceptance was not the result of her attractiveness, but of the fact that she was a capable member and a good postmaster. To prove her point she sent the Senator a photograph of herself.⁴⁸

A meeting of the Southwest Postal Association, consisting of postal employees of the states of Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Kansas, was held in Kansas City in 1910. Miss Robertson was chosen Vice-President of the Association.⁴⁹ She was five times a

⁴⁶Letter from C. B. Keene to F. E. McMillis, January 26, 1909, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁴⁷Letter from A. Grant Evans to Miss Alice Robertson, December 10, 1908, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁴⁸Letter from Alice Robertson to Boies Penrose, January 2, 1909, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁴⁹Kansas City Post, October 10, 1910.

member of the committee on resolutions of the National Association of First Class Postmasters.⁵⁰

The political campaigns of 1912 brought to a close the control of the government by the Republicans. The split in the Republican Party and Roosevelt's running as a Progressive Party candidate brought about the election of Wilson. The Democratic Party also controlled both houses of Congress. Roosevelt realized his mistake and said to a friend:⁵¹

The fight is over, and we are beaten. There is only one thing to do and that is to go back to the Republican Party. You can't hold a party like the Progressive Party together . . . there are no loaves and fishes.

There were no "loaves and fishes" for Alice Robertson either. Although she applied for re-appointment for postmaster of Muskogee, November 16, 1912, it was no more than a matter of form, as she must have had no real hope of success.⁵² At the expiration of her term, she retired to private life and to her other interests in Muskogee.

On historic Agency Hill northwest of Muskogee, the former postmistress had built a spacious residence in 1910.⁵³ The house was

⁵⁰Letter from Alice Robertson to Mrs. Nettie Whinery, August 23, 1916, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁵¹John D. Hicks, The American Nation, A History of the United States From 1865 to the Present (3rd ed.; Dallas, 1955), 380-82.

⁵²Letter from Alice Robertson to the President, November 16, 1912, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁵³Agency Hill had been the location of Union Agency. For many years, the agents of the Five Civilized Tribes had been located in their own territory, The Choctaw and Chickasaw agents at Boggy Depot, the Seminoles at Wewoka, and the Cherokee at Tahlequah. The Creek agency had been located about three miles northwest of present day Muskogee. The Federal Government had decided to consolidate these agencies into one, and this was done on July 1, 1874. From that date, this one agency had control of the administration of all the Five Civilized Tribes (Foreman, Muskogee, 24).

constructed of wood and stone acquired in the neighborhood. She called the place "Sawokla," and gave her reasons:⁵⁴

Sawokla was the name of a little band of Indians who spoke different language and who lived in the valleys around Conchartey. The last known members of this band were buried on the farm of my brother-in-law. He was interested in a store and post office about three miles from the present town of Haskell and this post office and trading post was called Sawokla. When the post office was discontinued because of the railroad giving mail service, it was changed to Haskell in honor of the first governor. I called my place Sawokla from this. I do not know the meaning except that I have heard it meant a gathering place for people.

The determining factor for building Sawokla on Agency Hill was that a leading denomination decided to establish a college there, and to help finance the project, lots were sold with a guarantee of city improvements, including streetcar service. The foundations for the buildings were laid, but through dishonest management, the operation ceased, never to be resumed.⁵⁵

Miss Robertson hired Benjamin Cunliff to draw up plans for Sawokla and to supervise the construction. Feeling she too was a victim of dishonesty in the building of her home, she accused the contractor of using inferior material and charging for a better grade. She claimed she had paid for labor and supplies which had been used elsewhere and that the contractor had also placed fraudulent liens upon Sawokla. Handicapped by these misfortunes and the burden of her own debts, she was never able

⁵⁴Letter from Alice Robertson to Ellsworth Collings, January 8, 1930, Robertson Col., Tulsa U. It has also been mentioned that Miss Robertson chose the name "Sawokla" because the first three letters were the initials of her famous grandfather, Samuel Austin Worcester, and the rest of the word is the abbreviation for Oklahoma.

⁵⁵Muskogee Daily News, October 27, 1925.

fully to carry out her hopes and desires for the building of the proposed show place.⁵⁶

The structure had huge fireplaces and broad porches overlooking the wooded slopes below. These lent themselves to the purpose for which Sawokla was built. It did indeed become a gathering place upon many and varied occasions; from the meeting of veterans of two wars to the meeting of the Oklahoma Press Association at the end of her term as postmistress in 1913.⁵⁷

Perhaps the most important gathering was that of about fifty Spanish War veterans of the Milo E. Hendrix Camp number four of Muskogee and the members of the Ladies Auxiliary of the camp, which was also named for Milo E. Hendrix. These and their friends were the guests of the proprietor at her beautiful home at Sawokla. They were served a bountiful meal. The group played games and sang songs of special significance, such as "Tenting on the Old Camp Ground," "Dixie," "Yankee Doodle," and the "Star Spangled Banner." Mrs. Grant Foreman, who was a descendant of soldiers of every war that has been fought by the American Government, was selected to light the first fires in the fireplaces.⁵⁸

Extensive entertainment at Sawokla and the upkeep of the house and fifty-five acres were probably the most important reasons Miss Robertson found it so difficult to live within her income. However, it

⁵⁶Letter from Alice Robertson to Benjamin Cunliff, August 17, 1910, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁵⁷Foreman, "Honorable Alice Robertson," 16.

⁵⁸"Spanish War Vets Are Entertained," newspaper clipping without reference or date, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

proved a suitable home for her and her adopted daughter, Susan Barnett. She finally had a place to display the many Indian relics and curios she and her family had accumulated through the years.

CHAPTER V

FARMER, RESTAURANTEUR, WAR CITIZEN

After her active and strenuous career as Supervisor of Indian Schools and postmistress, Miss Robertson retired to her home at Sawokla. It might seem that she would spend the time in quiet release from public activity and take life easy for a while, but she was ambitious. Her life from 1913 to the time she became a candidate for Congress in 1920 showed her resourcefulness and devotion to the needy.

Sawokla, with its fertile farm land, was ideally situated for livestock, dairy, and vegetable production. Its proprietor was accustomed to outdoor life, and having learned ways and means of farm problems from her father and by actual experience during the early days of mission work at Tullahassee, she plunged into the management and direction of the farm's activities. She specialized in raising good Jersey and Guernsey milk cows, Duroc Jersey hogs, and egg producing chickens. She grew all kinds of vegetables for the residents in town and for the cafeteria she established.¹

She always had a special place in her heart for young girls and spent much time and money in providing the social and spiritual guidance she felt they needed. Perceiving the need for an association to take

¹Muskogee Daily Phoenix, October 19, 1920.

the place of the languishing Y.W.C.A., she undertook the work of organizing and financing a business women's club.² One was opened in the McKibben building under her supervision with Misses Bertha and Jessie Pense, sisters, as assistants. Provisions were made for a reception room, rest rooms, dining room, dressing rooms, and baths. Luncheon was served at the club in cafeteria style, and the privilege of using the facilities was extended to any woman who held a membership card, which was obtained by paying a small fee. Men were admitted only when accompanied by a lady friend.³

The lunch room had such a large and appreciative patronage that she turned her attention to the development of a cafeteria where food prepared with all the care of home cooking could be furnished at moderate prices.⁴ After a few months, her fame as a cook was well known throughout the city, and the businessmen persuaded her to allow them to eat at her cafeteria. Her business grew until it was a full-time job, and she had to hire extra help to take care of the customers. Her Sawokla cafeteria became the most popular eating place in Muskogee.⁵

Alice Robertson's maternal instinct was so strong that she became a mother in the practical way to many girls and boys during her life. Speaking of her concern for young people she said: "I am not a

²Grant Foreman, "The Lady from Oklahoma," The Independent, March 26, 1921, CV, 326; "Busy-Bee Idealist," Hollands Magazine, n.d., n.p., clipping, Robertson Col., Okla. Hist. Soc.

³Muskogee Daily Phoenix, n.d., Hisel Col.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Tom P. Morgan, Ladies Home Journal, March, 1921, p. 21

mother as you know, but God has given me more or less a mother's heart. I have tried to be a comforter in sorrow in many instances."⁶ At one time or another, Miss Robertson and her mother took many Indian orphan children into their home and clothed and fed them.⁷ In relating this experience she wrote:⁸

There are a lot of things that perhaps I might say about girls who have been with me, but I'd rather they would not be said during my lifetime. How many I have given weddings to I do not know, nor do I believe it would be possible for me to count up. I do remember that I have bought twelve trousseaux, some very modest ones, others very elaborate. Although an old maid, I have always held myself up as a warning and not an example to my girls. My greatest ambition has been to do all in my power toward the establishment of happy homes. After all, if my hard working life has seemed to be one of accomplishments, as I know it has been of earnest, sincere effort, it is no credit to me, but simply something I could not help because of the blood in me.

The only child the self-styled "Old Maid" officially adopted was Suzanne Barnett, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Wesley Barnett. Apparently Suzanne's mother was killed by an Indian lover when the little girl was only five years old. She then came to live with Miss Robertson⁹ and later was the first Indian to file for an allotment on the rolls of the Five Civilized Tribes at the Indian Agency at Muskogee.¹⁰ The new mother provided her with the best advantages and saw to it that she received the finest education possible. Suzanne was later married to

⁶Unclassified newspaper clipping in Oklahoma Historical Society Archives.

⁷Foreman, "The Lady From Oklahoma," 311.

⁸"Busy-Bee Idealist," Hollands Magazine, n.d., n.p., clipping, Robertson Col., Okla. Hist. Soc.

⁹Foreman, Indian-Pioneer History, LXXI, 425.

¹⁰Ibid., XXVIII, 151.

Charles E. Strouvelle, of Tulsa, a wealthy oil man.¹¹

Alice Robertson had her own pattern of a girl's behavior, but she was not dogmatic and unreasonable. She understood the problems of young people and appreciated their place in life. The question of smoking, especially women smoking, was a big issue just before the outbreak of World War I. She was urged to join organizations to fight the use of tobacco, but refused. She had no sympathy for its use but explained that as for smoking among women, she believed that every one should be governed by her own conscience. She said she did not smoke and would see to it that her daughter did not.¹²

By 1915 it appeared as if Sawokla would be a source of considerable wealth to its owner. In March of that year drilling for oil was started and people who had been the beneficiaries of her liberalities were hoping and praying that she would become wealthy through the land on which she lived, but such was not the result. Only traces of oil were discovered and the wells were abandoned.¹³

Working on the farm and operating her own cafeteria business gave Miss Robertson the time and place to have gatherings and parties of all kinds. In 1913, for the third consecutive year, the Milo E. Hendrix Camp of Spanish-American War veterans with their wives and children were entertained at Sawokla, on the anniversary of the battle of San Juan. Milo E. Hendrix was one of the favorite pupils of the hostess while she was

¹¹Ibid.

¹²The Washington Times, January 15, 1921, Robertson Col., Okla. Hist. Soc.

¹³Muskogee Daily Phoenix, March 26, 1915.

teaching at Henry Kendall College. Every year on the anniversary of that battle, in which Milo was killed, she opened her home to the veterans of the Spanish-American War and gave them a camp fire supper, choosing to keep the memory of Milo alive in the hearts of his comrades in this fashion rather than with a solemn memorial service.

On this occasion, the members of the camp presented their honored hostess with a beautiful and expensive silver loving cup on which was engraved, "To Miss Robertson, the first department president of the Oklahoma woman's auxiliary to the Spanish War Veterans." She was a charter member of the auxiliary and an honorary member of the camp.¹⁴

On January 16, 1915, a saddening experience came to this outstanding patriot, when the Indian Office issued an announcement that the old buildings and property of Tullahassee would be sold at auction. For about twenty-seven years, the buildings were used as a school for the Negroes, but after the 1913-14 school term, it had never been reopened. On the day of the auction, Miss Robertson was present and was interviewed by a newspaper reporter. Looking about over the school grounds, she noticed a large old walnut tree. She recalled the story of the tree's being planted by her father on the same day she was born and remarked to the reporter that it was not "ready for the ax-men yet." He got the idea that she had in mind many hopes and aspirations before the end of her time.¹⁵

Her love for people made it easy for her to associate with all classes. One fellow missionary said of her that she was equally at

¹⁴Ibid., n.d., Hisel Col.

¹⁵Ibid.

home in the cabins of the poor and in the palaces of the rich.¹⁶ Concern for the welfare of others was a part of her philosophy of success, especially as it pertained to the work of women. She said:¹⁷

The most successful are those who possess poise and control. One thing worthwhile is service to one's fellowman and to the Almighty. The woman who does a man's job should do a substantial work. Men are not particularly attracted to women in business and they must be prepared to sacrifice the wonderful joys of motherhood and the blessings of grandchildren.

Quite naturally, one of the activities which took much of her time and interest was the work of her church, since she came from a line of ten generations of ministers and was the daughter and granddaughter of pioneer Presbyterian missionaries. Speaking of her church affiliation, she wrote: "I hope Elbertine is very happy in the Episcopal Church, you know I have quite a leaning that way, although I am too dyed in the wool a Presbyterian."¹⁸

She served as one of the five Vice-Presidents at large of the Women's Presbyterian Board in Buffalo, New York.¹⁹ She was busy doing what she could for the support of her home church in Muskogee. On one occasion she canned and put up over three hundred quarts of fine preserves of different varieties, along with seventy quarts of jam and pickled fruit, which she put on sale. The proceeds went toward the

¹⁶Letter from Mrs. N. B. Moore to Mrs. Carolyn Foreman, April 16, 1934, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

¹⁷The Morning Oregonian, June 17, 1922.

¹⁸Letter from Alice Robertson to Miss Georgia Robertson, August 25, 1923, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

¹⁹Letter from Ella A. Boole to Alice Robertson, June 9, 1904, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

expense of building the new Presbyterian church. She reported that she met with considerable success in the sale of fruits for the benefit of the Presbyterian fund.²⁰

Always a keen student in Bible teaching, she was a fundamentalist in religious belief. Her great faith in the text of the scriptures led her to believe it was the express inspired work of God. Since she had unswerving confidence in God's providences, prayer played an important part in her life. "Pure and undefiled religion" was one of the great principles of doctrine which she believed so strongly and carried out to the best of her ability. She had decided convictions on many points of Bible doctrine. One of these was the position of the church in relation to the state. The following incident expressed her feeling in this matter:²¹

I told my pastor of the church with which I have so long been connected that if I were read as a candidate from the pulpit of the church, I should feel so hurt that I should be brought into politics in my church that it would be impossible for me to attend another service in it until after the election.

For the same reason, when asked whether it would be agreeable to me for the ladies whom I have loved and known so long and so well, in my church, to give me a home coming reception, I said I could not go to such a reception while I was a candidate pending election and declined the invitation.

I believe in a clean cut division in church and state. I believe that every individual voter should answer to his God and his own conscience for the way he votes.

Usually this Bible student had a sympathetic feeling for denominations other than her own, but she had little respect for the Catholic

²⁰Muskogee Daily Phoenix, September 1, 1898.

²¹Ibid., n.d., 1920, Hisel Col.

Church. On one occasion she told of visiting a cathedral in Baltimore and said:²²

It was a scene eloquent of Catholic heathenism--the rich dress of the priest and the almost fantastic garb of the sisters of charity, but above all the mockery of the Latin words spoken by the priests broken as they were by the sobs of the stricken mourners who listened to the mass for the soul of their dear lost ones. I was almost glad when our leader gave the signal of departure. I could breathe more freely under the dome of heaven which the Creator made of His own glory than under the cathedral dome created by the deluded followers of the Virgin Mary.

In 1916 Alice Robertson took a hopeless and brief fling at politics. When the Republican ticket was completed for the primary, it was found there was no name for candidate for County Superintendent of Public Instruction. Because of her experience as Supervisor of Indian Schools and teacher in the county schools, she was asked to allow the party to place her name on the ballot for this position. At first she hesitated because she thought the incumbent was fully qualified, but after further persuasion she complied with the request and won the party nomination 1,021 votes to 955 for the next highest candidate.²³ Her campaign message for the general election stipulated her qualifications and reasons for election:²⁴

I ask your vote because: - - -

I have had thirty years school experience in the state, in teaching and management, from primary to college work.

²²Letter from Alice Robertson to Ann Augusta, May 11, 1872, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

²³Letter from Alice Robertson to State Superintendent of Public Instruction, August 15, 1916, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

²⁴Unclassified clipping in Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

I have proven executive ability, am thoroughly trained in office and statistical work, so that no time would be lost from field work in learning to manage the County Superintendent's Office.

I have shown my financial ability and honesty by handling hundreds of dollars of school and millions of dollars of postal funds without loss or error.

I have perfect health. I have not lost a week from business in sixteen years. I have traveled the roads of this county all my life and if elected I intend to spend most of my time traveling them in visiting schools.

I am and shall continue to be absolutely free from any promises or agreements beyond this pledge to you to be governed solely by what seems for the best interests of the schools.

The school is next to the home. As a woman who combines a thorough and practical knowledge of domestic affairs with a man's business training and ability I claim especial qualification. I am not a politician nor a suffragette, but I love the homes and the children of my county. My family have lived in the congressional district as missionaries and teachers since 1833, so I stand fearlessly upon my record, among you, the people who know me.

She confessed she made a very mild and perfunctory campaign for the office of County Superintendent of Schools, for knowing the strong majority of Democrats in the county, she entertained no false hopes of being elected. When the returns were in and showed the Democrats had won, she showed few signs of disappointment.²⁵

Miss Robertson took a leading part in the activities of many noted organizations. Especially was she active in the Daughters of the American Revolution,²⁶ becoming regent of the A. H. Yastee Chapter. Some years

²⁵Muskogee Daily Phoenix, n.d., Hisel Col.

²⁶Letter from Frances Ingraham Mann to Alice Robertson, February 19, 1912, Robertson Col., Tulsa U. Daughters of American Revolution was an organization formed in 1890 for the purpose of commemorating historical events of the American Revolution, preserving records and sites of such events, and fostering a spirit of patriotism and love of country.

later the Okmulgee Chapter wrote a letter honoring its famous member:²⁷

To Miss Alice Robertson, first woman of Muskogee and of Oklahoma, first woman member of Congress from Oklahoma, and first woman to preside over the lower house of Congress, personal friend of presidents, descendent of the pilgrim fathers, of revolutionary heroes and of early missionaries to the Indian, true friend to the soldier boys and of those mistaken by misfortune, able educator, faithful missionary, careful historian and loyal patriot, this chair is dedicated with love and admiration by the members of the Okmulgee, Oklahoma, Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

As is true of an active progressive community, there were drives for many organizations and community interests in Muskogee. The well known restauranteer was interested in all of them and did what she could to help put them over--Y.M.C.A., Y.W.C.A., Community Service Drive, Salvation Army, etc. She wrote:²⁸

How about the Salvation Army Drive? Tired of drives? No more than I am. I lothe the very word as I do taxes but as we never will arrive at that point where we will support our government without taxes, so we shall have to meet this moral obligation, I suppose through the obnoxious drive. One thing you can do, as I'm doing to-day, "beat them to it," for I'm writing a check today which I wish could be a thousand times as big.

Alice Robertson made lasting contributions to the welfare of her community. She invested her time and money in starting new businesses as well as in helping to develop the physical, cultural, and social life of the city. Before she established the Sawokla cafeteria, she had operated a photography shop. Mrs. Faith Daltry, a niece, recalled early memories of her aunt's operating such a studio in Muskogee, and that she and her sister were convenient subjects for experimentation.²⁹

²⁷Letter from the Daughters of American Revolution of Okmulgee, Oklahoma, to Alice Robertson, n.d., Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

²⁸Muskogee Times-Democrat, October 13, 1920.

²⁹Letter from Faith Daltry to Joe Spaulding, October 2, 1956; Foreman, "Honorable Alice Robertson," 17.

World War I took most of the attention and energy of the people of the nation. Almost everything was forgotten except the war. The people of Oklahoma gave their loyal support to the war effort, and many military training camps were located in the state, such as the famous Doniphan Camp, situated in southwest Oklahoma, which was well known as an artillery school. The state contributed her quota of men to the armed services, among them men of military prominence such as General Roy Hoffman and Patrick J. Hurley, later Secretary of War.

Miss Robertson was not satisfied with personal devotion to her country, she felt her duty to impress the younger generation with their duties of citizenship. The Alice Robertson Junior High School of Muskogee, Oklahoma, has a room named in her honor which contains many mementos, and one of them is a flag of the United States which was a personal possession. To promote the spirit of patriotism in the hearts of the students, she personally presented the flag in 1911 to the first graduating class from Central High School, and asked that it be passed on from year to year. Her request was followed in Central for thirty years, and in the spring of 1941, the Senior Class and Mr. Jesse Cardwell, principal of the Central High School, presented the flag to the school bearing her name, and the tradition is now carried on in the Alice Robertson Junior High School. In the spring of 1951, forty years after the presentation of the flag, members of the ninth grade class retired the frayed original, and with solemnity and respect dedicated a new one to carry on the tradition.³⁰

³⁰A Handbook of Information Concerning Alice Robertson Junior High School, Muskogee, Oklahoma, 4; Interview with Miss Goldie M. Lemon,

As a war citizen Miss Robertson gave valuable service to the soldiers en route to training camps or points of embarkation.³¹ When troops began to mobilize, they passed through Muskogee, first in small numbers and then by trainloads. The local Red Cross unit was one of the first to be organized in Oklahoma. So urgently did she feel the need of helping the soldiers that she did not wait for Red Cross funds. With little or no facilities at the depot for their accommodations, she would load her "flivver" with good things to eat from her cafeteria, such as sandwiches, candies, chewing gum, doughnuts, cakes and a big pot of coffee for the service men. Her colored chauffeur drove the car, since she could not drive, but she was always present to greet the boys. She was punctual in meeting every regular or special train that might carry a soldier.³²

It was not long until her fame extended to all the Southwestern camps, and troops passing through Muskogee looked forward to stopping there for the good "eats" that awaited them. In addition they knew they would see the motherly woman who would greet them and give them whatever assistance they needed. Meeting the troop trains became a matter of first importance with her. Soldiers soon learned that if they were broke or in any trouble, they could go to her and get help. She gave many parties at Sawokla for those who could stay over night.

teacher of the Alice Robertson Junior High School since its beginning, who was a personal friend of Alice Robertson for many years, September 20, 1956.

³¹"Alice M. Robertson," a pamphlet found in the Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

³²Foreman, "Honorable Alice M. Robertson," 16.

In addition to this phase of her war service, Alice Robertson fed thousands of soldiers and their families in her cafeteria without charge. It was her policy to refuse pay for meals from a man in uniform, and more than five thousand boys accepted her hospitality.³³

Finally the Railroad Company placed an old fashioned passenger coach on a siding for a Red Cross canteen. There Miss Robertson supervised a corps of efficient Red Cross workers.³⁴ She was also made a member of the executive committee of the Muskogee chapter.³⁵ Later a building was secured, and the canteen became a model for other chapters in the state.

Many letters poured in from all parts of the world expressing appreciation for the Muskogeean's work in behalf of the soldiers. The sentiment of many of these letters was expressed by S. W. Garlock when he wrote:³⁶

Among the many pleasant incidents of the long journey we are making, I shall always remember the homelike hospitality of the ladies of the Red Cross at Muskogee. We met Red Cross people again at Buffalo and on the pier just before we embarked, but at neither place did time or circumstances permit any such friendly visit as I had with you and Mrs. Enloe in your car at Muskogee.

Many of our men and officers still speak of your hospitable city with words of warmest admiration and I am certain it did us all good to come your way. We shall all hope that sometime we may be permitted to pass that way again.

³³Foreman, "The Lady from Oklahoma," 326.

³⁴Foreman, "Honorable Alice M. Robertson," 16.

³⁵Letter of American Red Cross, November 20, 1918, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

³⁶Letter from S. W. Garlock to Miss Alice Robertson, February 22, 1918, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

It was this kind of service and devotion to doing good for others, that prompted Grant Foreman to write the following words:³⁷

I am well within the known facts when I say that there is no other person living whose life has been so long and so consistently devoted to public service in this state or has so touched and influenced for betterment directly and indirectly the lives of others. Who can set a limit to the extent to which the present high state of our commonwealth, of its material and spiritual welfare is indebted to the plodding, patient, devotion of the Tullahassee school teacher?

After the war, Miss Robertson led a comparatively quiet life managing her farm and cafeteria, which brought in profitable returns and would have left her in financial security had it not been for the expenses of war services. Now she was in her middle sixties, and since all her life had been crowded with conflict and adversities, it would seem natural that she would prefer seclusion from the demands of public and political activities. Such was not, however, the path she chose, for at this time she entered upon the most difficult and treacherous adventures of her entire life--that of a campaign for the congressional seat from the second district of Oklahoma.

³⁷Grant Foreman, "Our Most Distinguished Citizen," Muskogee Daily Phoenix, November 19, 1922.

CHAPTER VI

CANDIDATE FOR CONGRESS

Alice M. Robertson announced her candidacy for the Republican nomination for Representative in Congress from the Second Congressional District of Oklahoma June 4, 1920.¹ Her principles were "Christianity, Americanism and Standpattism."² Her slogan was "I cannot be bought; I cannot be sold; I cannot be intimidated." Her platform consisted of three statements: "I am a Christian; I am an American; I am a Republican."³

The opponents took the announcement of the lady's candidacy lightly. They laughingly said she had no organization, she knew nothing about politics, and besides she had other things to do, being proprietor of a cafeteria in Muskogee, to say nothing of a farm.⁴ Politics had always been considered a man's responsibility, and it was almost unheard of that a woman would seek such a high place in government.

¹Muskogee Daily Phoenix, June 4, 1920.

²"A Woman Who Got Into Congress Through Want-Ads," The Literary Digest, December 4, 1920, p. 56. Hereafter cited as "A Woman Who Got into Congress."

³An advertisement appearing in many newspapers in the district, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁴"A Woman Who Got Into Congress," 56.

To add to all these handicaps, the aspirant was a strong anti-suffragist. She had been a leading opponent of the nineteenth amendment, which was ratified on August 26, 1920, in time for the women to cast their vote in the presidential election. The candidate said, "I was a Republican in a Democratic state, and besides I was an anti-suffragist. I was Vice-president of the state organization opposing suffrage when the state passed the bill giving the vote to the women."⁵

She attributed her opposition to woman suffrage to the fact that she always did a man's work, carried a man's burden and paid a man's bills.⁶ When her Democratic opponent, W. W. Hastings, attacked her in his campaign speeches on her suffrage stand, the fiery Republican replied in a full column "want-ad," explaining that she had taken her position because it would be but another duty placed upon the already overburdened homemaker and mother. But since the men had insisted upon

⁵The Morning Oregonian, June 17, 1922. In the lightest voting in the state's history, Legislative Referendum number 33 (woman suffrage amendment) was submitted to the people on November 5, 1918. It attracted more attention in the election than the race for any office. It was strongly opposed by the war time governor R. L. Williams, but due to the war work of the women of the state, he agreed not to take the stump against it. The measure carried 106,909 to 81,481 with overwhelming support from the cities and opposition from the rural areas. J. B. A. Robertson was elected governor by defeating Republican candidate Horace G. McKeever 104,132 to 82,865. Pat Nagle, Socialist, received 7,438, less than one-seventh of his vote for the United States Senate in 1914. With the Socialist party relegated to almost obscurity, the returns showed the relative strength of the parties to be almost what it had been in 1907. Robertson lost about the same counties as Haskell. The Republicans gained five seats in the Senate and three in the House. Robert L. Owen, making his last campaign before retiring in 1924, won handily. Oklahoma, The State Election Board, Directory of the State of Oklahoma, 1957, compiled by Leo Winters (Guthrie, 1957), 92, 176. Hereafter cited as Oklahoma, Directory.

⁶"A Woman Who Got Into Congress," 56.

giving women the vote, she was ready to assume her part of the burden of the state. She also wanted to see if the men really meant what they said about granting equality,⁷ and added, "I did not favor the nineteenth amendment, but now I pray that I may live to see it fully carried out in my native state and to this cause I pledge myself with all earnestness and sincerity."⁸ Commenting further, she said, "The only reason for women in politics is to make clean government, to tell the truth and do justice to all, and to refrain from bitterness after the example of the Great Exemplar, who 'when he was reviled, reviled them not.'"⁹

Alice Robertson received encouragement to run for Congress from many prominent men in politics, but A. D. Cochran, an attorney from Okmulgee, had more to do with making up her mind than any other person.¹⁰ In telling how a man came to her and asked her to run for office she said, "If a man had come to me with such perseverance, tact, diplomacy, and patience and asked me to be his wife, I should not now be an old maid."¹¹

It came as no surprise that Miss Robertson should enter the field of politics in such an auspicious manner, despite her advanced age of sixty-six and her opposition to woman suffrage, when one considers her

⁷Muskogee Daily Phoenix, September 28, 1920.

⁸"A Woman Who Got Into Congress," 56; Muskogee Times-Democrat, December 26, 1920.

⁹"A Woman Who Got Into Congress," 58.

¹⁰Letter from A. D. Cochran to Alice Robertson, March 12, 1928, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

¹¹Unclassified newspaper clipping in Oklahoma Historical Archives.

past connections with political problems and her acquaintance with prominent men in government. Pulling political "strings" to obtain assistance in Indian education, securing her appointment as School Supervisor and Postmaster, and serving as reporter and stenographer in dealing with the Cherokees concerning the Outlet were only steps in her political training. She was a woman of great patriotism, as was shown by her part in the Spanish-American War and World War I, and was always interested in the affairs of the state.

To further stimulate her interest in politics, there were many names on both sides of the family tree who had been prominent in governmental affairs. Senator Zachery Chandler of Michigan was a cousin of her mother. Senator Chandler's daughter, Mary, married U. S. Senator Eugene Hale of Maine, who was himself a distant cousin of the Worcesters. The son of Eugene Hale, Fred, was a U. S. Senator from Maine at the same time Alice Robertson was representing Oklahoma in the House. Another relative, Dean C. Worcester was U. S. Commissioner to the Philippines, 1899-1901;¹² and her father's youngest sister, Julia, married Frank Pierpont, first governor of West Virginia when it was designated as a separate state from Virginia during the Civil War.¹³

Miss Robertson carried on a most unusual campaign, very different from the customary manner of "vote-getting." A magazine article explained her election by saying: "How do you suppose Miss Robertson reached the Congress of the United States? She COOKED her way there. Startling but

¹²Who's Who in America, 1920-21, X, 3022.

¹³Dictionary of American Biography, XIV, 584-85.

true."¹⁴ In advertising her Sawokla Cafeteria in the "want-ad" section of the daily papers, she included reasons for her election to Congress, together with her philosophy of life on almost every interesting subject. Her advertisements became the most popular part of the paper, and readers turned to that column first to see what she had to say.

In explaining this method of campaigning, she said,¹⁵

Believe me, there is no advertising medium so effective or which produces such wonderful results as the classified ads. You know I operated a cafe in Muskogee. One day I announced my intention of placing a little ad in the classified section of a daily newspaper. My friends told me I was crazy; no body would see it buried among the want-ads. But I went ahead and advertised. I continued to keep the ad in the same place every day. The results were amazing. Everyone got to know Miss Alice's Cafeteria.

Since neither paper in Muskogee supported her candidacy, she had to use advertising space purchased for the cafeteria.¹⁶ As a result, far more people came to eat her food and sit around and talk politics with the proprietor. She would move about from table to table among the customers and talk to them personally about her campaign.¹⁷ She understood the problems of the Indians, housewives, businessmen, and farmers. Speaking of having interviews with the farmers of the area, who continued to face life with courage, she said she felt better because she was like them, always an optimist.¹⁸

¹⁴"Alice Robertson and American Womanhood," Miss Columbia, May, 1912, I, No. 12, p. 9.

¹⁵The Washington Times, January 15, 1921.

¹⁶Grant Foreman, "The Lady from Oklahoma," The Independent, March 26, 1921, CV, 326.

¹⁷Unclassified newspaper clipping in Oklahoma Historical Archives.

¹⁸Muskogee Times-Democrat, n.d., Robertson Col., Okla. Hist. Soc.

Some of her opponents, feeling the power of the want-ads, spread the rumor that she had hired a press agent to write them. She responded,¹⁹

Some have asked me who wrote these ads. They have even hinted that I had a press-agent in some distant town who got them up. But I leave it to the readers if they sound as if they were dictated or the rubber-stamp variety. I'm not any one but home folks, and I want to go to congress, first, because a lot of men moved that I go, and then because a lot of women seconded them. Some say I won't get there, but I'm well pleased with the outlook. More are crowding my homely old bandwagon every day.

An example of these want-ads is one which appeared on August 2, 1920:²⁰

SAWOKLA CAFETERIA

Fourth Street, Just North of Broadway
Self-service--no tips

Gone to make a speech, but the eats have not been neglected.

The casualness of this appeal to the voters indicated that she did not enter the primary with great enthusiasm and hope. Her business came first, and campaigning was only incidental. Some things said in her want-ads were often far removed from politics, such as this one:²¹

There is no race-suicide in this district. No greater joy has come to me through all the happy days of the campaign than to feel in my time-worn hand the soft hands of little ones who smile at me because their mothers or fathers had gone to school to me.

There was one day during the week when the want-ads were not published and that was Sunday. Miss Robertson said,²²

¹⁹"A Woman Who Got Into Congress," 58.

²⁰Muskogee Daily Phoenix, n.d., Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

²¹"A Woman Who Got Into Congress," 58.

²²Ibid.

The Sabbath was for man for rest, and for time to keep burning in our souls the pure flames of faith and trust, and then we should get better acquainted with our families and attend our chosen place of worship.

The primary was held August 3, 1920, and the results were startling, even to Alice Robertson, who polled almost as many votes as the combined total of her Republican opponents--3,032 to 3,222.²³ She had done so much for the people of her district, especially for the boys in uniform during the war, that they remembered her when they went to vote.

After being nominated with such overwhelming landslide, the newly-chosen candidate plunged into the campaign for election with renewed faith and energy. On September 16, 1920, at her Sawokla home, she gave a barbecue which was attended by several hundred people, some of whom were Democrats. There was food of all kinds, music and entertainment, including an airplane stunt. When a plane kept zooming low over the crowd, some of them thought it was a prankster interfering with the meeting, until they saw a large sign on the side of the plane which read, "Vote for Miss Alice."

The nominee made a speech in behalf of her candidacy, but avoided any reference to the opposition party or to controversial issues, making it plain that she was not bound by any commitments or pledges and that if elected would work for the good of all. The address contained plans for the wounded and disabled veterans which would include a hospital for the state, and in conclusion, she urged everyone to vote according to his best judgment even if it meant casting the ballot for the opponent. Other

²³Oklahoma, Directory (1957), 91; Muskogee Daily Phoenix, August 15, 1920.

Republicans made speeches, but they were not as generous as the first speaker. They attacked the opposition party, its platform, and especially President Wilson and the League.²⁴

After the celebration, Howard Keaton, chairman of the Republican party of Okmulgee County and a strong supporter of his party's choice, took her in his private airplane to Okmulgee to make a speech. This was her first airplane ride and it must have been an exciting experience for a woman of her age.

Following her nomination, the party hopeful made greater use of the want-ads in the daily papers. In one of them she gave a detailed account of her campaign expenses during the primary. The total amount was \$303.74, of which \$249.50 had been spent on newspaper advertising in the district. The remainder was spent for food, soft-drinks, gasoline, and railroad fare. She reminded her supporters that more financial assistance would be necessary to carry on the campaign and called upon friends to continue to patronize her cafeteria.²⁵ Mrs. Carolyn Foreman related that close acquaintances, including herself, went on campaign trips and made speeches for the party's nominee.²⁶

The Democratic opponent of the Republican candidate was the incumbent, W. W. Hastings of Tahlequah in Cherokee County. Hastings was elected to his first term as congressman in 1914 and had served three consecutive terms. He was a prominent Cherokee who had rendered notable

²⁴Ibid., September 16, 1920.

²⁵Ibid., August 7, 1920.

²⁶Interview with Mrs. Carolyn Foreman, September 20, 1956.

service to his people. After attending the Cherokee public schools and the Cherokee National Male Seminary of Tahlequah, he entered Vanderbilt University, where he received his law degree. During the years 1891-1895, he served as Attorney General of the Cherokee Nation, and from 1907-1914, as National Attorney for the tribe. The Democratic Party chose him as its delegate-at-large to the National Convention in 1912. He was made chairman of the fifty-member committee to draft a constitution for the proposed state of Sequoyah in 1905.²⁷

Miss Robertson acknowledged her opposition as the strongest Democratic candidate in the state, but she believed she could defeat him because of 1) the split in the Democratic Party; 2) the party loyalty of the Republicans; 3) the large first voting of women; 4) the vote of soldiers and sailors with their families; 5) the vote of the Indians; 6) the silent vote of the Democrats; 7) the vote of labor and Socialists, though she made no bid for the Socialist vote; and 8) the large farm vote.²⁸

Regardless of the power and prestige of her opponent, she submitted her own claim to fame. Referring to Hastings as "Big Brother," she said,²⁹

Who put Muskogee on the map, not only in Oklahoma and the United States, but wherever in the world the United States forces have gone? The women of the Muskogee Red Cross did it, and a Muskogean up in

²⁷Lyle H. Boren and Dale Boren, Who Is Who In Oklahoma (Guthrie, 1935), 210; McReynolds, Oklahoma, 314; Dale and Wardell, History of Oklahoma, 305.

²⁸Letter from Alice Robertson to Simeon D. Fess, August 3, 1920, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

²⁹Muskogee Times-Democrat, October 23, 1920.

Washington will not fail of recognition. Have I ever failed in any undertaking? The work done in the Muskogee Postoffice is of itself a sufficient answer.

Writing to Simeon D. Fess of Ohio, Chairman of the Congressional Committee of the Republican Party, the party choice asked for financial aid for her campaign, and requested that \$2,000.00 be sent and a campaign manager be named. She said, "I have never ceded my native state to the solid south--at last has come the chance for a change."³⁰ It has never been revealed whether or not she obtained the help.

The Republicans, sensing the opportunity of taking the reins of government from the Democrats, entered the campaigns over the country with hopefulness and enthusiasm. Confident that the congressional elections of 1918³¹ portended victory in 1920, the party convened in Chicago, June 8, and proceeded to nominate a candidate for the Presidency. There was a list of well known candidates from which to choose: General Leonard Wood, Frank O. Lowden, Senator Hiram Johnson, Herbert Hoover, Calvin Coolidge and Warren G. Harding, the last two being the least known among the rank and file voters of the nation. On the tenth ballot Harding was nominated, and Calvin Coolidge was chosen as his running mate.³²

³⁰Letter from Alice Robertson to Simeon D. Fess, August 23, 1920, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

³¹On October 24, 1918, Wilson appealed to the American people for a vote of confidence in which he said: "If you have approved of my leadership and wish me to continue to be your unembarrassed spokesman in affairs at home and abroad, I beg that you will express yourselves unmistakably to that effect by returning a Democratic majority in both the Senate and the House of Representatives." Two weeks later the voters went to the polls and chose a majority of Republicans to both houses of Congress. Harvey Wish, Contemporary America, The National Scene Since 1900 (New York, 1945), 248.

³²Ibid., 267.

There was one major consideration in the platform of the Republican Party--the repudiation of Woodrow Wilson. Henry Cabot Lodge, keynote speaker for the convention, said, "Mr. Wilson and his dynasty, his heirs and assigns, or anyone that is his, anyone who with bent knee has served his purposes, must be driven from control, from all influence upon the government of the United States." The platform called attention to the "unexcusable failure to make timely preparation" for the war. In addition, according to the platform, "The outstanding features of the Democratic Administration have been complete unpreparedness for war and complete unpreparedness for peace."³³

In the matter of candidates and issues the Democrats were considerably less fortunate than the Republicans. President Wilson had not encouraged the rise of strong leaders, and the unpopular record and platform of the administration was too great a hurdle for any candidate to overcome. Though ill, there was reason to think he desired the nomination for himself. He declared: "I do not accept the action of the Senate of the United States as the decision of the nation. I have asserted from the first that the overwhelming majority of the people of this country desire the ratification of the treaty." He then chose to make the coming campaign "a great and solemn referendum" on the issue.³⁴

The Democratic platform praised Wilson and the League and condemned the Republicans for not ratifying the treaty and blamed them for delay in the return of prosperity after the war. They chose the

³³Ralph V. Harlow, The Growth of the United States, The Expansion of the Nation 1865-1950 (New York, 1951), 471.

³⁴Ibid., 472.

practically unknown James M. Cox of Ohio as their party representative. His running mate was the young Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Franklin D. Roosevelt. As for the voters, they could not be expected to rally too strongly behind an unknown candidate and a dead issue.

In the election, Harding received a plurality of almost 7,000,000 popular votes and had 404 electoral votes to 127 for Cox. In addition the Republicans gained a majority of 165 in the House and 24 in the Senate. There are many reasons for such an overwhelming landslide. It is evident that the Republican organization was better managed and was more successful in getting its message over to the people. Furthermore the Republicans spent over \$8,100,000 while the Democrats spent less than one-fourth that amount.³⁵

The most significant feature of the political landslide of 1920 was a profound and active dissatisfaction among the large number of tenant farmers and working population of the state, and it was apparent that the Democratic Party was losing support in Oklahoma as well as in the rest of the nation. This election almost ended in disaster for the Democratic Party nationally and seriously threatened its ascendancy in Oklahoma. In the state, the "great and solemn referendum" for which President Wilson fought, became the occasion to express dissatisfaction with conditions at home. The voter used the ballot to show his annoyance at such concrete problems as unemployment, low wages, high prices, labor violence and the abrupt end of the war boom. The disastrous break in

³⁵Ibid., 473. In Oklahoma, Harding won the electoral vote by 243,831 to 217,753 for Cox. Eugene Debs, Socialist got 25,726 votes. Oklahoma, Directory (1957), 89.

wheat and oil markets had a direct effect upon the election in the state.

A special election in the fifth congressional district in November, 1919, to fill the unexpired term of Joe B. Thompson, who had died, was prophetic of the disaster that would hit the Democratic Party the following year. Republican, J. W. Harreld, was elected in this strongly Democratic district, defeating Claude Weaver 11,782 to 11,074 votes.³⁶

Another serious handicap to the fortunes of the Democratic Party in the election of 1929 was the division of its members into the Wilson and anti-Wilson groups. Senator Gore, who was head of the anti-Wilson faction, was running for re-election. Prominent on the other side of the issue and strongly opposed to Gore were Governor Robertson and senior Senator Owen. It was evident that the Robertson-Owen faction was backed by a majority of the party members. Thus the dominant mood at the state convention was anger at the junior Senator. Gore had opposed entrance into the war, had sharply criticized Wilson's war and peace program, and had helped defeat the League of Nations. In a strongly worded resolution against Gore, the party proclaimed that "with blush of shame and the lament of sorrow it deplores the action of its other senator." Looking for a strong candidate to oppose his re-nomination, the party endorsed Congressman Scott Ferris of the sixth district, who had been Congressman since statehood, representing the state from the fifth district until 1914 and from the sixth from 1914 to 1920.³⁷

³⁶Oklahoma, Directory (1957), 92; James Ralph Scales, "Political History of Oklahoma, 1907-1949" (Unpublished Master's thesis, Department of History, University of Oklahoma, 1949), 220. Hereafter cited as Scales, "Political History."

³⁷Oklahoma, Directory (1957), 93, 97, 101, 107, 109, 114. Between

Ferris was a hardworking, hand-shaking, back-slapping, James Farley type of campaigner. He vehemently lashed out at the weaknesses of his opponent. Gore was an able thinker and brilliant speaker. He gained the sympathy of the audience because of his blindness, melodious voice, and knowledge of public affairs. The major issue between Gore and Ferris was loyalty to Wilson. In few elections have the rank and file voters taken sides so strongly. The tragic senatorial fight left the party torn to shreds and ill-prepared to meet the opposition in the general election. So great was the opposition to the anti-Wilson stand of Gore that he was defeated in his bid for renomination.³⁸

In the general election in November, with strong support from the Socialists, opponents of the war, and anti-Wilson Democrats as well as strong support from his party, J. W. Harreld defeated Ferris by almost 30,000 votes (247,719 to 217,783), and became the first Republican U. S. Senator from Oklahoma.³⁹

One Senator (Harreld) and five of eight members of the U. S. House of Representatives were elected by the Republicans--Thomas A. Chandler, Vinita; Joseph C. Pringey, Chandler; Alice Robertson, Muskegee; L. M. Gensman, Lawton; Manuel Herrick, Perry. Three of the incumbent Democratic Congressmen lost their places by narrow margins.

the elections of 1912 and 1914, the state was redistricted because the increase in population raised the number of members of the House of Representatives from five to eight.

³⁸ Scales, "Political History," 212; Walter M. Harrison, Me and My Big Mouth (Oklahoma City, 1954), 81-82.

³⁹ Oklahoma, Directory (1957), 89.

Hastings lost to Robertson by 228 votes; Tom D. McKeown of the fourth district to J. C. Pringey by 1,626 votes and Elmer Thomas to L. M. Gensman by 772 votes.⁴⁰ In Miss Robertson's successful bid, she lost her home county of Muskogee by 6,523 to 5,102 to Hastings, while she won his home county of Cherokee 2,417 to 2,018. She was able to pile up a sizeable margin in Okmulgee County--5,177 to 4,718--to help put her over.⁴¹

A farcical situation developed in the eighth Congressional district in the election of Manuel Herrick of Perry. The veteran Dick Morgan, who had served as member of the House since 1908, had died shortly before the primary. The Republicans were counting so heavily on him that no member of the party filed as an opponent. Herrick, who had received just fifty-six votes in 1918, when he ran as an Independent, was certified as the unopposed nominee. The outraged Republicans were forced to accept his candidacy. Since no Democrat could win in the eighth district in 1920, Herrick was swept into the nation's capital by the Republican landslide--31,337 to 23,218 for Zack Harris, his Democratic opponent, and 3,248 for H. C. Geist, Socialist. He had been a laughing stock, so poorly regarded by his party that he had run a poor fifth on August 3, 1920, for Morgan's brief unexpired term.⁴²

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Muskogee Daily Phoenix, November 3-4, 1920; Rex F. Harlow and Victor E. Harlow (comp.), Makers of Government in Oklahoma (Oklahoma City, 1930), 81, 415, 600. Because the Socialist Party had disbanded during the war and had been bitter enemies of the party in power, its members, in complete opposition to their platform, very strongly supported the arch conservative Republicans in the elections of 1920.

⁴² Oklahoma, Directory (1957), 91, 94; Scales, "Political History," 215.

Senator Gore could hardly conceal his satisfaction at the Republican victories. He said,⁴³

I heard a Democrat yesterday give his reasons why the ticket suffered such an overwhelming defeat in Oklahoma. He said that Harding, Harreld, Hayes, Harris, Herrick and H--- formed a combination that simply could not be beaten. . . . The country did not go Republican. It simply stayed American. . . . Senator Harding and I are warm personal friends.

Surveying the worst defeat of the Democrats since the Civil War, the Oklahoman expressed the conviction that the party was not finished. It recalled the 1840 prophecy of the Whig partisan, Sargeant Prentice, in which he said, "Thank God, the Democratic Party is dead at last," and took comfort from history.⁴⁴

Writing in his Ada News after the returns were in, State Senator Luther Harrison blamed Governor Robertson, whose frequent use of the militia had irritated many voters. Because of industrial conflict, Robertson found it necessary to use his military power more than all his predecessors combined, and before the first year of his term had passed, he had spent more than \$100,000.00 in excess of appropriations for the Adjutant General's office. His suppression of the strike at the telephone company in Drumright gained him a reputation as an anti-labor governor. Harrison noted that every county subjected to martial law by the governor went Republican.⁴⁵

The Republicans, gaining the greatest victory in Oklahoma history, elected four of nine justices of the Supreme Court, one justice of the

⁴³Tulsa Daily World, November 5, 1920.

⁴⁴Daily Oklahoman, November 4, 1920.

⁴⁵Scales, "Political History," 206; Ada News, November 5, 1920.

Criminal Court of Appeals, and one member of the Corporation Commission. The Oklahoma House of Representatives was organized by the Republicans for the first and only time, due to their 55 to 57 majority. However, the Democrats retained the advantage in the Senate 27 to 17. The party's control of this body has never been upset. One of the newcomers to the House was Republican Bessie McColgin of Rankin from Roger Mills County. The only woman ever to sit in the State Senate was also chosen in that first year of woman suffrage, with the selection of Mrs. Lamar Looney, Democrat of Hollis who served eight years from district four. Fewer than one-fourth of the members of the House had served in the preceding session, so great was the turnover.⁴⁶

The Republicans had put on a strong campaign in the state. Party members of national prominence visited Oklahoma to speak in behalf of the ticket. Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., visited the second district and spoke at Okmulgee, September 8, 1920, in support of Alice Robertson and the rest of the nominees.⁴⁷ Then on the ninth of October, the Republican presidential candidate, Warren G. Harding, attended a large gathering at Oklahoma City and spoke in the interest of the party. The second Congressional district nominee was present and attended the reception after the rally. This acquaintance with the Hardings was the beginning of a deep friendship which grew into strong admiration between them.⁴⁸

⁴⁶Oklahoma, Directory (1957), 89, 90, 140-41, 155-57.

⁴⁷Tulsa Daily World, September 8, 1920; Letter from Harwood Keaton to Alice Robertson, September 4, 1920, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁴⁸Alice Robertson, "Women in the White House," Muskogee Daily Phoenix, October 20, 1929, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

Miss Robertson followed the party line on most issues of the campaign, including the ill-defined stand on the League of Nations. Though making no public commitment relative to the League, she expressed in her private interviews her opposition to it. She said she was for an association of nations such as Harding advocated⁴⁹ but concluded that it was a dead issue and that she would never be in favor of a League which included "idol worshippers among its members."⁵⁰

Her idea of President Wilson was harmonious with the attack which the Republican Party made against him:⁵¹

In my judgment present conditions all over the country are direct result of secret compact between Woodrow Wilson and the labor unions. He aspires to place brawn above brain and muscle above mind. If the country is not under his treachery plunged into civil war within the next six months, I shall feel God is indeed merciful. He is so drunken with the arrogance and conceit of self-given power that step by step he is going on to the day of reckoning that must come.

Perhaps with Miss Jeannette Rankin⁵² in mind, the new Congresswoman expressed her feeling about America's entry into World War I when she said, "I would vote for war without a quiver. We should have entered

⁴⁹"A Woman Who Got Into Congress," 58. Such statement probably meant that Miss Robertson was not aware of the problems of foreign affairs and knew very little about the League. Endorsing Harding's stand meant nothing. The Republican policy was couched in an impenetrable obscurity unrelieved by the floundering explanations of Harding. In the course of the campaign, Harding approved of the Leagues with reservations, suggested the substitution of a new one for the existing one, and denounced any League. His masterly obfuscation of the issue was perhaps the most confusing and contradictory statement possible for any candidate.

⁵⁰Tulsa Daily World, November 7, 1920.

⁵¹Letter from Alice Robertson to Grace Merriman, August 8, no year, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁵²Jeannette Rankin of Montana was the first woman elected to Congress.

the World War sooner than we did."⁵³

She had a decided opinion of Eugene Debs⁵⁴ and his activities. In a letter from her sister Ann Augusta it said: "You are perfectly right in your stand about Debs . . . how can any loyal American see it any other way? If he could be deported to stay out and save the country expense!"⁵⁵

In a want-ad on October 2, 1920, Miss Robertson gave her reasons for being a Republican. She printed a letter which her grandfather had written during the time he was in the Georgia penitentiary. It described the arrest and trials in the state of Georgia and the case being taken to the United States Supreme Court as *Worcester v. Georgia*. It told of the court's ruling in favor of her grandfather and President Andrew Jackson's refusing to enforce the decision. This caused indignation against the President, and since Jackson was the founder of the Democratic Party, it made the Worcester family staunch Republicans. She argued that the League could not work if the Democrats were in power because they could not be trusted to enforce its decisions.⁵⁶

The election of 1920 was almost a clean sweep for the Republicans over the nation, and Alice Robertson was swept in with the landslide.

⁵³The Daily Oklahoman, November 6, 1920.

⁵⁴Eugene V. Debs, Socialist Candidate in 1920, because of violation of Seditions Act of May 1918, was sent to prison from which he made his presidential campaign. His campaign pictures showed him behind bars with prison clothing. He received 920,000 votes. (Wish, Contemporary America, 288.)

⁵⁵Letter from Ann Augusta Moore to Alice Robertson, n.d., Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁵⁶Muskogee Daily Phoenix, October 2, 1920.

The victory came as a surprise to everyone who was aware of her campaign, even to the Congresswoman herself. She said,⁵⁷

In my own case, I was induced to enter as a "pinch hitter." I was everything that would seem to make even nomination, much less an election, impossible. . . . I won in the primary out of a field of five, but really had no expectation of winning the election. I knew I could not carry my own city or county--and I didn't. In fact it was not considered necessary to make any active fight against me but the incredible happened and I was counted in . . .

Newspapers and magazines over the country began to make the most of such an interesting story. Like her friend "Teddy" Roosevelt she made good copy for publication. Her election was of public interest and even curiosity for several reasons. She was sixty-six years old and a spinster; she had a colorful pioneer background; she was an anti-suffragist elected to public office; she was a Republican elected from a strong Democratic district; and she was the only woman Congressman.⁵⁸

Oklahoma for the first time was in the Republican column. Warren G. Harding's 27,000 vote majority over his Democratic opponent James Cox was due more to local issues than national.⁵⁹ The Gore-Ferris campaign

⁵⁷Alice Robertson, "Miss Alice Recalls Women in United States Congress," Muskogee Daily Phoenix, May 19, 1929. The election of 1920 was not an indication of the power of the parties or candidates. The results did not mean the permanent shifting of political affiliation, as all the following elections show. It was one of those unusual occurrences when the voter becomes so irritated by the political, economic and diplomatic conditions that he is willing to "kick the rascals out," regardless of party label. Thus Miss Robertson, as well as many successful Republicans were political accidents, tasting the sweetness of victory for the first and only time of their career.

⁵⁸Many clippings of articles from newspapers and magazines telling of Alice Robertson's election can be found in the Robertson collection of the Tulsa University and Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City.

⁵⁹Muskogee Daily Phoenix, November 14, 1920.

left sore spots in the party. The farmers of the state had a bumper cotton crop in 1918; then the Federal Reserve Board shut down credit to the farmers, so that they had to rush the cotton to the market for needed cash. This glut on the market caused the price to spiral downward and brought hard times to the agricultural areas, for which they blamed the Democrats. Many of them voted Republican for the first time. Most of the strength of the Socialist Party as well as a large number of labor votes went over to the Republicans.⁶⁰

All of these reasons had their impact on the election, but that was not the only cause of victory for Alice Robertson. According to her friend and fellow-townsmen, Grant Foreman, "Her reputation for patriotic and public service accounted for her majority over W. W. Hastings."⁶¹

The official returns in the election were 24,188 for Robertson and 23,979 for Hastings. John Cooper, Socialist, received 1,401 votes. This gave Miss Robertson a plurality of only 209 votes, but she had overcome a Democratic majority in her district of about 5,000 votes. This small margin of victory should have impressed her with the fact that if she were re-elected two years later, she would have to refrain from alienating any of her supporters and gain as many friends as possible.⁶²

Congratulations came to her desk from every section of the United States and from people in all walks of life. They included former pupils; Indians from over the nation; Democrats who had voted against her but were

⁶⁰Oklahoma, Directory (1957), 89; The Morning Oregonian, June 17, 1922.

⁶¹Foreman, "Honorable Alice M. Robertson," 16-17.

⁶²Oklahoma, Directory (1957), 89.

glad she had won; Presbyterians with whom and for whom she had worked; many state and national officials; relatives, some of whom she had never heard; ex-soldiers who had not forgotten her kindness during the war and who had eaten at her cafeteria without cost; and of course, loyal Republicans over the country.⁶³

Hastings sent the following message which Miss Robertson put in one of her want-ads: "The returns received indicate your election to congress from this district and I congratulate you upon your opportunity to be of service to the district and nation."⁶⁴ J. W. Harreld, Congressman from the fifth district and Senator-elect, wrote his congratulations and expressed hope for cooperation in Congress for the benefit of the state they represented.⁶⁵

Commenting on the Congressional election, the Tulsa Tribune had this to say:⁶⁶

"Crap shooters" and bridge players alike will feel the iron hand of the law, if Miss Alice Robertson of Muskogee, congresswoman elect from the Second District, has her way when she enters the halls of congress. And we will have fewer laws and more enforcement of the ones we do have, too, the lady politician who never wears silk stockings declared.

The new member of Congress was described as silver-haired, almost white, bright eyed, gentle-voiced, taller than the average and somewhat

⁶³Many letters of congratulations and comments can be found in the file of letters of Alice M. Robertson for the year 1920, Tulsa University.

⁶⁴Muskogee Times-Democrat, n.d., clipping in Robertson Col., Okla. Hist. Soc.

⁶⁵Letter from J. W. Harreld to Alice Robertson, November 12, 1920, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁶⁶Tulsa Tribune, February 8, 1921.

stout, shoulders sagged a little. In appearance the congresswoman was by no means fussy, being almost indifferent to fashion's trifles. In fact, some were unkind enough to say that she was a bit careless about her dress. But the rouge-stick, powderpuff, silk stockings, and high heels never fitted in with her program of activity.⁶⁷

Though she was an "old maid," there was no sign Miss Robertson was a man-hater. On the contrary, she said she always got along with men better than with women and was going to have a man for her secretary in Washington.⁶⁸

Grant Foreman, Oklahoma historian, wrote of his friend and neighbor soon after her election:⁶⁹

Miss Robertson goes to Congress at a mature age ripened with fifty years of useful life, in which she has been a pioneer, teacher, executive, philanthropist, business woman, an exemplar of good citizenship and sincere piety.

She believed her election was in answer to her prayers and the prayers of many others interested in her welfare. When asked to run for Congress, she said that six weeks were needed to think and pray about it.⁷⁰ After the election, friends asked how she accounted for the victory and her reply was:⁷¹

⁶⁷"A Woman Who Got Into Congress," 58; Tom P. Morgan, "Miss Alice of Muskogee," Ladies Home Journal, March, 1921, p. 21.

⁶⁸"A Woman Who Got Into Congress," 56. Young Benjamin Cook was selected to be her secretary.

⁶⁹"Lady From Oklahoma," Independent and Weekly Review, March 26, 1921, CV, 311.

⁷⁰The Morning Oregonian, June 17, 1922.

⁷¹Current Opinion, January, 1921, LXX, 41-44.

I regarded my election as a direct answer to prayer. God helping and giving me strength, I am going to try and make good, and I am sure I will do so with so many good women praying for me.

At the same time she was asked what things she would work for when her term in Congress began, and she answered:⁷²

I'll work for the interests of the women and children, the soldiers, and the Indians. I really haven't given much thought to what I will do when I go to Washington, because everyone told me I didn't have a chance to get there. Above everything else, however, I will work for the soldiers. It makes my blood boil to think that there is not one bed for a sick or injured soldier in Oklahoma. The last congress appropriated \$46,000,000 for hospital care. Thousands of soldiers in the state need attention and treatment. If they get so much as an examination they have to go to Houston, Texas. It's the rottenest thing I know of. It is a disgrace to the state of Oklahoma.

The new legislator's interests and activities had not prepared her for an understanding of international affairs, and when she was questioned on such problems as recognition of Russia or the Irish Republic, she confessed her lack of knowledge of these matters.⁷³ It did not take her long to make up her mind on them, because when they came up for discussion and vote in Congress, she took a decided stand on both issues.

Criticism was sometimes leveled at the Congresswoman because of the lack of understanding concerning public policies, and some may have thought she was deceived by prejudice, but no one ever accused her of being dishonest or failing to stand firm for the principles she advocated. She was forthright for what she believed and opposed vigorously those things she thought were wrong. Her firm opposition to the Jake Hamon political ring at the risk of her own future in public office, gives an

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Ibid.

indication of her stand on the question of morality.

Jake Hamon, multimillionaire oil and railroad businessman of Ardmore, Oklahoma, and also Republican National Committeeman from the state, was shot on November 21, 1920, while he was in his hotel room. His manager affirmed that it was accidental and caused while Hamon was cleaning his gun. At first it was thought that the wound was not serious. He did not recover as well as the doctors expected, and on the twenty-seventh of November he died.⁷⁴

Many people believed that Mrs. Clara Smith Hamon, Hamon's secretary and wife of his nephew, Frank Hamon, was the one who shot and killed him. During the time he was being treated for the wound, a warrant was issued for Mrs. Hamon's arrest, but she could not be found. After the passing of the elder Hamon, the truth came to light that Mrs. Clara Hamon was responsible for his death.⁷⁵

On the day of the funeral, November 30, 1920, a group of about fifty Republicans came together in an informal meeting and endorsed his wife, from whom he was separated, as his successor as National Republican Committeeman.⁷⁶ The general feeling was that leaders of the party wanted

⁷⁴The Morning Examiner. (Bartlesville, Oklahoma), November 27, 1920.

⁷⁵Tulsa Daily World, November 22, 1920; November 30, 1920; December 4, 1920. After Harding's election, Hamon was in the running for Secretary of Interior because of the large amount he contributed to the Republican Campaign. Hamon decided to break with his secretary when he felt National recognition was coming his way. He informed her that she could not go to Washington with him as he had to play it straight. She would not listen and when he offered to buy her off, she shot him. (Harrison, Me and My Big Mouth, 92-93.)

⁷⁶The Morning Examiner, November 30, 1920.

the distribution of patronage planned by Jake Hamon carried out and that his wife would serve as the figurehead to accomplish their purposes.

Miss Robertson spoke boldly and fearlessly against the appointment. She said that his death was a just penalty for his moral transgressions and that she was opposed to keeping his influence in the party.⁷⁷ She abhorred such scandals and was ready to risk her future in opposing an entrenched and powerful political machine as the one Jake Hamon had organized. Her opposition was so strong and convincing that many influential party members agreed with her, and the appointment of Mrs. Hamon was not made.⁷⁸

After her election, the victor was besieged by newspapermen, magazine writers, photographers, and moving picture corporations, until it was almost impossible for her to get the rest she needed so badly after such a strenuous campaign. As she expressed it, she was driven from her home by a case of nerves superimposed by an endless chain of people wanting interviews with her. She went away to Kansas City to visit friends and to get some freedom from the demands upon her time and strength.⁷⁹

As a result of her victory, Alice Robertson became a favorite choice as a speaker at clubs, banquets, and various gatherings. She was swamped with invitations to address groups of all kinds from far and near. She plunged into the whirl of public appearances with great enthusiasm and accepted as many of the invitations as she could.

⁷⁷Muskogee Daily Phoenix, December 9, 1920.

⁷⁸Letter from T. A. Latta to Alice Robertson, December 8, 1920, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁷⁹The Morning Examiner, November 24, 1920.

Many comparisons were made between Alice Robertson and Jeannette Rankin. It was generally agreed that the former might not possess the culture nor the natural fitness for the seat in Congress which the latter had, but it was conceded that she would make her influence felt to a more satisfying degree to those who were eager that women should hold public office.⁸⁰

The Muskogean entered Congress as a conservative and even a reactionary on many issues, but this was one of the dominant traits of the political activities of the times which was true of both parties. Evidences can be seen in the fact that the Republican Party, known for its conservatism and reaction, polled huge majorities in three successive elections during the 1920's; both parties nominated men who were respected and supported by the world of business; there was little difference in the issue of protective tariff; and men of wealth seemed to be favored for high political offices.⁸¹

⁸⁰Preston W. Slosson, The Great Crusade and After, 1914-1928, Vol. XII of A History of American Life, edited by Arthur M. Schlesinger and Dixon Ryan Fox (New York, 1930), 91.

⁸¹Unclassified clipping from a newspaper found in Oklahoma Historical Archives, Oklahoma City.

CHAPTER VII

ALICE ROBERTSON IN CONGRESS

Conservatism in politics and social philosophy was dominant in the decade after World War I, as it was in the years succeeding the Civil War. The Republican Party, in almost undisputed control of national affairs both times, regarded itself as the means of advancing business along the lines of the laissez faire doctrine. Both eras were necessarily filled with the problems of readjustment: restoration of finance, agriculture, industry, and transportation to peace time basis; reduction of taxes; adjustment of veterans benefits; and payment of the public debt. Each age witnessed a complete and rapid change in production and business techniques, a badly distributed industrial prosperity, and an agricultural distress which was succeeded by acute and prolonged depression. Both periods were characterized by political and business corruption, ardent nationalism, indifference to reform, and decline in liberalism.

The leaders of the party in power expressed the principal point of view of the 1920's. President Harding strove for "return to normalcy," Calvin Coolidge announced that "the business of the United States is business," and Herbert Hoover argued that "rugged individualism" was the basic American way of life.

The controlling party quite naturally assumed that its concept of conservatism and retrenchment had been fully endorsed by the voters.

Issues of foreign affairs may not have been clear in their minds, but there was no ambiguity about the economic philosophy espoused by the contending candidates. James Cox, the Democratic standard bearer, represented what progressive policies remained in his party. Harding was the choice of the "Old Guard" Republicans, Boies Penrose, Reed Smoot, Joseph R. Grundy, and members of the "Ohio Gang." The electorate, very definitely aware of the position of each candidate on domestic affairs, gave Harding an overwhelming majority.¹

When men yearn for normalcy and think in terms of a return to "the good old days," they are overwhelmed by the complexities of society and seek an escape by idealizing the past. This does not require vision, planning or program. Normalcy by its very nature is but an afterthought, but it provides a brake against progressive proposals. Its virtues tend to conservatism and become a cloak for those who shirk new responsibilities or fear their cost.

The very extent of the Harding majority in 1920 brought embarrassment to the President and his party. The Republicans had increased their control from forty to one hundred sixty in the House and nearly half were newcomers. To add to the complexity, there was a wide difference in the views of the new and old members. Progressives Hiram Johnson of California, LaFollette of Wisconsin, George Norris of Nebraska, Burton K. Wheeler of Montana, William E. Borah of Idaho, and Albert J. Beveridge of Indiana clashed with conservatives Reed Smoot, H. C. Lodge, Boies

¹Mark Sullivan, Our Times, 1900-1925, The Twenties (New York, 1946), VI, 129-30. Hereafter cited as Sullivan, Our Times.

Penrose, Albert Fall of New Mexico, and Harding. In addition, Democratic Senators John B. Kendrick of Wyoming and Thomas J. Walsh of Montana felt no obligation to cover up the embarrassment of the opposition's blunders. Both played a vital role in revealing the oil scandals which involved Secretary of Interior Albert B. Fall and Secretary of Navy Edwin N. Denby.²

President Harding was unable to bring peace and harmony to his party during the first year of his administration. The majority leader of the Senate, Henry Cabot Lodge, had lost much of his prestige. The stubborn isolationist Philander C. Knox and the master strategist Penrose, the two Pennsylvanians whom Harry Daugherty deemed the titans of the Senate, died in 1921. Will Hays, the skillful chairman of the Republican National Committee, and flexible conciliator of his party, was soon to surrender his position as Postmaster General to accept an appointment with the movie industry.³

Fortunately or unfortunately, the President had a weak Congress with which to work. Leadership in the Senate was lacking, and to fill the void, fighting Bob LaFollette of Wisconsin and twenty-seven senatorial recalcitrants formed a coalition which held the balance of power. Between this group and the titular head of the party there was little community of interest or understanding. The insurgents' power was largely obstructive and did not achieve much in positive legislation, but it did

²Ibid., 275, 277-285.

³Frederic L. Paxson, Post War Years, Normalcy, 1918-1923 (Berkeley, 1948), 269-70. Hereafter cited as Paxson, Post War Years.

hamper the Old Guard program.⁴

The House was also divided and without strong command. Frederick H. Gillett of Massachusetts, Speaker of the House, had passed the peak of his power, as had Joseph W. Fordney of Michigan, chairman of the powerful House Ways and Means Committee.⁵ While the House was more conservative than the Senate, there was enough opposition and insurgency to create legislation uncertainty and impotence in this body. Not only was there sharp battles between Congress and the President, but there were cross currents within the legislative branch. The House battled the Senate on tariff duties; East was hostile to West; and on almost every issue bloc was against bloc.

The new member from Oklahoma's second Congressional district was given a very warm and hearty reception when she took her seat in the House of Representatives. Newspaper reporters were present to get a first-hand view of the happenings and the Tulsa World gave the following account:⁶

She had one continuous day of triumph today. From the time the modest congresswoman from Oklahoma entered the house chamber amid the cheers of her peers who rose to their feet and cheered, until the house adjourned, she was in the center of the stage.

⁴Samuel Hopkins Adams, Incredible Era, The Life and Times of Warren Gamaliel Harding (Boston, 1939), 225-26. Hereafter cited as Adams, Incredible Era.

⁵Karl Schriftgiesser, This Was Normalcy, An Account of Party Politics During Twelve Republican Years, 1920-1932 (Boston, 1948), 91. Hereafter cited as Schriftgiesser, This Was Normalcy.

⁶Tulsa World, April 11, 1923. President Harding had called a special session of Congress in April, 1921, primarily to make peace with the Central Powers.

Miss Robertson attempted to make a quiet entry, but as she stepped into the hall of the house from a door to the left of the speaker's desk, she was seen by Republican members who started the cheering. House veterans vied with new members to make her feel welcomed.

When Miss Robertson's name was called for the first time her voice was scarcely audible. Clerk Page recorded her present. She raised her voice later when she cast her vote for Frederick H. Gillett for speaker.

In describing the excitement of her early experiences as the only woman representative in the House, she wrote her sister Ann Augusta about meeting with the Republican caucus. She said:⁷

I made my first appearance at the Republican Caucus last night. Can you imagine me stepping right in when the whole house was closed to everybody but Republican members--over three hundred were present, and I for the first time in their midst? When my name was called there was handclapping from everybody, and they all stood up and applauded until I had to stand up and repeatedly bow my acknowledgments. The men are simply beautiful to me and everyone seems sure that I'm going to "make good" because I do not push myself.

Miss Robertson had associated with men in high positions while she had lived in Washington and during the time she was court reporter and stenographer in the Indian Territory. This gave her the experience necessary to know how to conduct herself in their presence and be respected, and she often remarked that she knew how to get along better with men than with women. She said that she kept her seat for many weeks in Congress without doing anything but keep her eyes and ears open and her mouth shut.⁸

At the inauguration, she was escorted to the Senate chamber by Speaker Gillett to witness the swearing in of the Vice-President, and

⁷Letter from Alice Robertson to Ann Augusta Moore, March 1, 1921, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁸The Morning Oregonian, June 17, 1922.

later to the outside of the capital building to see the President take the oath of office. In the Senate, she sat between Gillett and Representative Schall of Minnesota, the blind Congressman. The Speaker's attention was regarded by Oklahomans as a special honor to the new member in the House.⁹

The Senate gave the only Congresswoman a place of distinction by permitting her free access to its chamber. Writing to her sister Ann Augusta she said:¹⁰

I can walk right in any where, it seems, but I'm not doing it till I'm really "in." Think of my having a right to the senate floor!! That impresses me most. Jeannette Rankin, as an ex-member can go on the floor of the House, but only an actual member can go on the senate floor.

It keeps me praying, praying that I may not forget God and that it is not I but my ancestry recognized through me.

Not only was the excited Representative cordially received by the members of Congress, but President Harding showed his delight in her presence in the legislature. She gave the account of her first meeting with the President as Oklahoma's Representative in the following words:¹¹

The first time I went with the Oklahoma delegation to call up-on President Harding, he took a Columbia rose from a vase on his desk to give me, withdrawing it quickly when he saw there were thorns on the stem, that he might remove every thorn before giving it to me. To which I said, "When a woman goes into politics, Mr. President, she must take the thorns with the roses." To which he said, "You will never have any thorns from my hands." He kept his promise.

Besieged with invitations from all parts of the country, she did her best to refrain from accepting many of them in order to devote all

⁹Unclassified newspaper clipping in Robertson Col., Tulsa U., n.d.

¹⁰Letter from Alice Robertson to Ann Augusta Moore, March 1, 1921, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

¹¹Muskogee Daily News, December 8, 1921.

her time attending the needs of the Second District of Oklahoma. The pressure brought upon her to speak in various cities and on all sorts of occasions was almost more than she could bear. When she declined, the promoters of her appearance would get in touch with the Senators from her state who would add their influence to the invitation. She found no escape from many of these engagements, which continued for the entire time she was in Congress, a period which she referred to herself as "Alice in Wonderland."¹²

At each succeeding speech the busy legislator found herself making a greater impression on her audiences. Because she was always "good copy" the newspapers gave her plenty of space and editorials contributed their share of comments, most of which were favorable. When arrangements had been made to take care of the needs of her district through an increase in office force, she no longer dodged invitations to speak in distant cities. She did not feel that her presence was missed in the House when she wanted to make a trip to Maine, Pennsylvania, or Virginia to make an address.¹³

An example of the busy schedule of speaking engagements showed her appearing at Lowell, Massachusetts, before the Republican Women's Club on Saturday, May 21, 1921. She then went to Boston to speak at a public meeting that night; on Sunday afternoon she spoke at Wellesley College; on Tuesday she appeared at Winona, Indiana, to speak before the

¹²Muskogee Daily Phoenix, August 6, 1922; Letter from Frederick Lent to Alice Robertson, January 4, 1921; Letter from Lorraine Wooster, State Superintendent of Schools, Topeka, Kansas, n.d., Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

¹³Daily Oklahoman, June 11, 1922.

Presbyterian General Assembly; then she went back to Washington.¹⁴

With few exceptions Miss Robertson followed the party line as voiced by Harding. At the outset she became aligned with the conservative branch of the Republicans. As soon as she was elected this group began to make strong overtures for her influence. One of those to bid for her services was the President's wife. After one of her speeches Mrs. Harding wrote:¹⁵

Mr. Wakeman has been good enough to send me a copy of your speech on the tariff and I cannot refrain from writing you a line to congratulate you, not only upon your speech but upon being a woman who has come out of the West to point the way to the women of the East in matters of politics and statesmanship, and I do not know of anyone who can do it with better understanding than yourself. With kindest personal regards and best wishes for your continued success as a leader of women in the field of politics, I am

Sincerely yours,

Florence Kling Harding

Mrs. Harding included her as a guest on many private parties.

One invitation, dated June 12, 1922, read:¹⁶

Mrs. Harding requests the pleasure of your company on the Mayflower Thursday, June 15th, for an afternoon on the river, starting from the Navy yard wharf at two o'clock, and returning about five-thirty.

Another who was anxious to exercise the conservative influence over Miss Robertson was Louis A. Coolidge of Massachusetts, former secretary to Senator Henry Cabot Lodge. Coolidge harbored the traditional

¹⁴Letter from Alice Robertson to Mrs. William Wheeler, May 16, 1921, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

¹⁵Muskogee Daily Phoenix, July 30, 1922.

¹⁶Letter from Laura Harlan to Alice Robertson, June 12, 1922, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

feeling of big business toward extension of the power of the Federal Government into the field of Social legislation. On one occasion he sent her a telegram asking her to speak to the "Middlesex Club of 1000 Republicans" at their Roosevelt Night Dinner on October 27. He assured her that "any Massachusetts representative can tell you all about the club. Also Senator Lodge, Secretary Weeks, or President Harding."¹⁷

Louis Coolidge was later head of the "Sentinels of the Republic," an organization which devoted its time and influence to opposing social legislation. Especially at this time the organization was actively fighting against the Maternity Bill and the Child Labor amendment, and it was for this reason, no doubt, that the honored speaker was given the invitation to address the club.¹⁸ As the guest of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Stearns, wealthy members of the Middlesex Club, she was entertained at the exclusive Hotel Touraine. She received many recognitions and was reminded of her "colonial antecedents" to make her feel as one of them.¹⁹

One of Alice Robertson's first and most influential supporters and benefactors was Mrs. Mary C. Thaw, whom she had met earlier while raising money for Henry Kendall College. Mrs. Thaw made a sizeable gift to the school. When her friend was elected to Congress, Mrs. Thaw renewed the acquaintance, informing the Oklahoma delegate that she took the same

¹⁷Telegram from Louis A. Coolidge to Alice Robertson, August 18, 1921, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

¹⁸"To Arms! To Arms!" A bulletin published by the Sentinels of the Republic, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

¹⁹Letter from Louis Coolidge to Alice Robertson, October 21, 1921, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

stand on woman suffrage, and wrote:²⁰

I shall also watch with keenest interest the workings out of your practical commonsense notion. They have already commended themselves to persons who read and ponder the questions of the day.

Soon afterwards Mrs. Thaw sent a check for one hundred dollars,²¹ and a few months later wrote her the following message:²²

I am delighted that you are going to speak at the Press Club Anniversary Banquet. Have telegraphed and now write to say I expect you here as my guest. Come a few days beforehand so as to meet some of my friends. Am sending a beautiful and suitable suit for you to wear on that and other similar occasions.

Hoping that you will exercise a wholesome influence both when speaking here and on the degenerate house.

Writing a word of gratitude Miss Robertson said, "I thank you very much for the check to help me keep neat and well groomed."²³ Later she wrote Mrs. Thaw, "You have been indeed a fairy godmother to me, always anticipating my needs."²⁴

Was the acceptance of these invitations, honors, and gifts a sign that the Republican Congresswoman was under the influence of the forces of reaction? Was she a tool being used by these groups to achieve their

²⁰Letter from Mary C. Thaw to Alice Robertson, November 26, 1920, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

²¹Letter from Alice Robertson to P. S. Space, Executor, Mary C. Thaw Estate, August 6, 1929, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

²²Letter from Mrs. Mary C. Thaw to Alice Robertson, January 28, 1921, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

²³Letter from Alice Robertson to Mrs. Mary C. Thaw, March 8, 1921, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

²⁴Letter from Alice Robertson to Mrs. Mary C. Thaw, December 2, 1922, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

ulterior motives? It is not easy to understand how she could accept the benefactions of Mrs. Thaw and others under whose influence she came without suspecting unethical practices. It may be that her missionary background of receiving charitable gifts from wealthy people anxious to do "good works" accounts for her attitude. At any rate, she seemed to have suffered no qualms of conscience nor prickings of pride at taking that which many people would regard either as a bribe or alms. She always felt she was courageously following an independent course and acting according to her best judgment. Speaking to her opponents who had criticized her stand on political issues she said:²⁵

I am no coward. Through centuries my ancestors suffered exile, imprisonment and ostracism in the cause of religious freedom.

If these ideas do not commend themselves to you, and you think someone else can better represent the Second District in Congress, I can only say that, "I am a Christian, an American," and shall act as my oath of office seems to demand of me regardless of consequences.

Appointment to powerful and influential Congressional Committees is important to Congressmen, especially to freshmen members. Miss Robertson was particularly interested in gaining membership to the Committee on Indian Affairs, and her background and interests would make her a logical choice. She contacted her cousin, Senator Fred Hale, and requested him to arrange the committee assignment; through his help she was able to achieve her desire. She was also made a member of the Committee on Expenditures in the Department of the Interior and, to her chagrin, was placed on the Woman Suffrage Committee.²⁶

²⁵Letter from Alice Robertson to Frank Craig, 1922, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

²⁶Letter from Mary Chandler Hale to Alice Robertson, December 26,

She followed the party leadership, supporting Republican-sponsored bills such as the Army and Navy Appropriation Acts,²⁷ Resolution to end war with Germany and Austria,²⁸ Emergency Tariff of 1921,²⁹ Fordney-McCumber Tariff Bill,³⁰ repeal of the Excess Profits Tax,³¹ and the Veteran's Bureau Act.³² She supported the President in opposing the Adjusted Compensation Act, or "Bonus Bill."³³ An exception was her opposition to the majority of her party in voting against the Sheppard-Towner Act or "Maternity Bill."³⁴ She took an unexpected stand on the Anti-Lynching Bill, voting with the Southerners against it.³⁵

The Sheppard-Towner Act was introduced by Senator Morris Sheppard of Texas and Representative H. M. Towner of Iowa. It created cooperative

1920, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.; Congressional Directory (Washington, D.C., 1921), 67th Congress, 1st Session, 223.

²⁷U.S., Cong. Rec., 67th Cong., 1 sess., 1921, LXI, Part 2, p. 1280; ibid., Part 5, p. 5724.

²⁸Ibid., Part 4, p. 3261.

²⁹Ibid., Part 2, p. 1637.

³⁰Ibid., 2 sess., 1922, LXII, Part 12, p. 12719; ibid., Part 13, pp. 13747-750. Miss Robertson stated in this speech that she learned the idea of protection from the Chairman of the Cherokee Commission which came to Oklahoma to negotiate with the Cherokees about the Cherokee Outlet. She was teacher in the Minerva School at the time and served the Commission as stenographer.

³¹Ibid., 1 sess., 1921, LXI, Part 5, p. 5355.

³²Ibid., Part 3, p. 2330.

³³Ibid., Part 5, p. 4448.

³⁴Ibid., Part 8, p. 8037.

³⁵Miller, "Alice M. Robertson," 51-52.

state and federal bureaus of child hygiene and also prenatal centers that offered free instructions to mothers. It was administered by the Federal Children's Bureau. It provided for the United States Government to contribute \$10,000 the first year to each state and \$5,000 each year thereafter and an additional \$5,000 to each state which contributed the same amount.³⁶

The Congresswoman's antipathy to the Sheppard-Towner Bill created a storm of controversy and aroused great opposition. By the very nature of the bill, its backers logically expected her to be its foremost proponent. They were sadly disappointed.³⁷ She fought it with all the powers at her command whenever she had the opportunity and spoke against it several times on the floor of the House.³⁸

A letter was sent by some women's organizations to the leading Republican women of the Second District urging them to write those Senators who voted for the Maternity Bill and express their gratitude. They were to write those who voted against the bill and express their sorrow and disappointment. It concluded: "We Republican women are awfully disappointed to have Miss Robertson against the bill. It seems like woman against woman, and then Miss Rankin was for it."³⁹

In a speech before the House, Miss Robertson gave her reasons for opposing the bill. She said it was an encroachment of the federal power

³⁶Cong. Rec., 67 Cong., 1 sess., 1921, LXI, Part 8, pp. 8034-35.

³⁷Woman's Home Companion, November, 1922, p. 3.

³⁸Cong. Rec., 67 Cong., 1921, LXI, Part 8, pp. 7970-83; Baltimore Evening Sun, December 7, 1921.

³⁹Cong. Rec., 67 Cong., 1 sess., 1921, LXI, Part 8, p. 7983.

upon the state's rights; its provisions were paternalistic and would lead citizens to depend too much on the Federal Government for things they should do for themselves; it would extend bureaucracy in government at a time when the country should economize; "old maids" would be given too much interference in family life; it might lead to dissemination of information concerning birth control.⁴⁰ She said in one of her speeches to the House:⁴¹

Mr. Chairman, . . . Is birth control yet in the bill as it was? I am not certain whether it be eliminated as it is, I believe and hope it is. The originators of the bill certainly favored it, judging by the membership they hold in various societies.

Miss Robertson evidently had in mind Jeannette Rankin when she referred to the originators of the bill and those with membership in various societies, for in another speech she said:⁴²

The name of "Hon. Jeannette Rankin" appears as a member of the National Council of Voluntary Parenthood League. The same publications which have been openly urging the passage of the Sheppard-Towner Bill, so far as they could without violating the laws of the United States, have been suggesting birth control.

It is not unjust or harsh to judge bills like people, by the company they keep, and the inference of unwholesome propaganda seems to me undeniable.

Realizing the power of the opposition to her stand on the Maternity Bill, the Congresswoman concluded one of her speeches by saying:⁴³

I think this is a harmful bill and I stand here and tell you so, and if I am digging my political grave in doing so, let me say that it will be a mighty comfortable grave.

⁴⁰Ibid., Part 9, pp. 8640-43; ibid., Part 8, pp. 7980-83.

⁴¹Ibid., 7981.

⁴²Ibid., Part 9, p. 8642.

⁴³Ibid., Part 8, p. 7983.

The Sheppard-Towner Bill was supported by the National League of Women Voters, the American Association of University Women, the Congress of Parent-Teachers and similar organizations.⁴⁴ Miss Robertson and many of these women's organizations had clashed earlier on the issue of woman suffrage, and undoubtedly it was because of this antagonism that she decided to oppose the Maternity Bill.

During the discussion of this bill in Congress, the legislator came in contact with Mrs. William Lowell Putnam, a woman of wealth and prominence, who exercised extraordinary influence over her thinking. Mrs. Putnam was of the famous Lowell family of Massachusetts; her brother James was president of Harvard University, and her sister Amy was the gifted poet and literary critic. Her husband, William Lowell Putnam, was also of the Lowell family through his mother's side and the marriage consolidated their holdings in many cotton and textile mills.⁴⁵

There was no doubt about the stand Mrs. Putnam took on the Maternity Bill. Hearing of the Congresswoman's position, she made a special effort to contact her and to influence her vote. Shortly before the measure came up for vote in the House, Mrs. Putnam wrote her friend encouraging her in the fight on the measure and closed with the intimate words, "It was such a pleasure to see you, yesterday."⁴⁶ When the

⁴⁴Pamphlet issued by these organizations asking support for the Bill, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁴⁵Who's Who in America, 1922-23, XII, 2541.

⁴⁶Letter from Mrs. A. R. Moore to Mrs. Grant Foreman, April 16, 1934; Letter from Elizabeth Lowell Putnam to Alice Robertson, October 28, 1921, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

measure came before the House, the Representative from Oklahoma cast her vote against it, but it passed two hundred seventy-nine to thirty-nine.⁴⁷

As a result of their fight against the bill, the two women became close friends. The Oklahoman was a guest on several occasions in the Putnam home in Boston, and near the close of her life wrote Mrs. Putnam saying, "Without your many financial gifts I do not know what I could have possibly done."⁴⁸

In a letter to Mrs. Thaw, Miss Robertson gave reasons for her support of the Ship Subsidy Bill.⁴⁹ She said she could not attend the wedding of her secretary, Ben Cook, because the vote on the Ship Subsidy Bill was to be taken at the same time. Another statement read: "I hope you approve my having voted for it, for the opposition to it was of the sort that made me believe in it."⁵⁰ Revealing the kind of opposition referred to in the letter, she announced to the newspapers that she had been given "orders" by the American Association of University Women and the League of Women Voters to oppose the Ship Subsidy Bill, but that she was tired of being "bossed" by these organizations and had made up her

⁴⁷Cong. Rec., 67 Cong., 1 sess., 1921, LXI, Part 8, p. 8037; Letter from Alice Robertson to Ann Augusta Moore, June 7, 1922; Letter from Alice Robertson to Elizabeth Putnam, February 5, 1930, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁴⁸Letter from Alice Robertson to Mrs. William Lowell Putnam, January 7, 1930, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁴⁹The Ship Subsidy Bill was an effort on the part of the Republican Administration to assist the shipping industries, which had many difficulties after the war, by granting generous subsidies to keep them operating.

⁵⁰Letter from Alice Robertson to Mary C. Thaw, April 17, 1922, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

mind to vote for it.⁵¹

While she created considerable criticism as a result of her stand on these measures, she drew a storm of protest because of her fight against the soldier's Adjusted Compensation or "Bonus" Bill. The newly organized American Legion, which had approximately 850,000 members by 1922, exercised powerful pressure for legislation which would provide pensions for all veterans who had worn a uniform during the war, regardless of actual combat service. They argued that they had volunteered or had been drafted at a time when they could have demanded much more than soldier's pay for civilian work. Many of them had not been demobilized until several months after the war was over, and when they returned to civilian life they found their jobs had been taken.⁵² After a long and heated contest in Congress, a law was passed providing for the bonus, but it was vetoed by the President, and the Senate sustained the veto.⁵³ It was not until 1924 that Congress passed a law over the President's veto which awarded certificates of insurance proportionate to the length of service.⁵⁴

In a speech before the Republican Women's League, Miss Robertson said that she was proud of having voted against the bill. The President opposed it, and she was following his lead. She argued that the country could not stand the cost. For the same reason she opposed help to Russia

⁵¹St. Paul Pioneer Press, January 10, 1922. Clipping, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁵²Slosson, The Great Crusade and After, 76-77.

⁵³Wish, Contemporary America, 361.

⁵⁴U.S., Statutes at Large, XLIII, Part 1, pp. 121-31.

and was against every appropriation the country could do without.⁵⁵ In addition, she said the bonus would be bad for the ex-soldiers because they would be in effect giving the government a quit claim, and if any other disabilities arose the veterans would have no further demands.⁵⁶ She assured "her boys" that until the last gun was fired she would stand by those who were unable to care for themselves and those needing rehabilitation work.⁵⁷

The speech which drew the most criticism from the veterans was the one delivered by Miss Robertson before the Republican Women's Club of New York, in which she declared that when the boys asked for a bonus they were putting a "dollar mark on their patriotism." She stated that her ancestors had fought for their country without demanding a price for it.⁵⁸ A flood of protests poured in to her office. A letter from Luther Armstrong, who was commander of the American Legion of Major County, Oklahoma, is a sample of the criticism. He said:⁵⁹

⁵⁵Harding argued that it was not sufficient to warrant unbalancing the budget or committing the country to the payment of large sums for whose raising no arrangement had been made. (Paxson, Post War Years, 307.) Estimates showed that the payment of the bonus would cost about four times what the corporations saved the first year the excess profits tax was repealed. (Schriftgiesser, This Was Normalcy, 109.)

⁵⁶Muskogee Phoenix, March 3, 1922; Steubenville (Ohio) Gazette, n.d. Clipping in Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁵⁷The Morning Oregonian, June 17, 1922.

⁵⁸New York Times, February 13, 1922. Clipping in Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁵⁹Letter from Luther Armstrong to Alice Robertson, February 21, 1921, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

Now Miss Robertson, get me. I am speaking as a Republican, not as an ex-soldier. The American Legion is not in politics. The favorite indoor sport of the Republican party before the election was introducing bonus bills.

What for? You don't mean to tell me that was for effect and did not mean any effort to carry out their promises?

Now let me turn prophet. Fail to pass that bill, and next election will see a solid democratic delegation from Oklahoma in the next Congress. . . . The landslide that slid you in will be nothing compared to the slide out, should you break your solemn promise to us. I am not given to threats and this is not so intended but take warning. Get your ear to the ground.

Another ex-soldier wrote:⁶⁰

I was on the side fighting, in answer to the Clarion Call, My Country, Right or Wrong, and the affairs at Washington where petty party differences were bobbing up drove me into a frenzy of hatred against all partisans.

Before God, I lost the ideals I was fighting for, and now I demand a price for services rendered to a body of men who were not fit to kiss the boots of George Washington!

If I want that money, I want it to the betterment of my immaculate wife, and the hope of our lives, our little Irene Frances! I want it because it is due me for a \$2,000 economic loss that the combinations of foreigners and Republicans have received in hire.

As you can see from my early volunteering my patriotism asks for no reward; but the Clarion call has been ill-used, and now I demand an accounting from the men you feel are above me in principle.

Regardless of the threats, Miss Robertson stood firm. The opposition seemed to spur her on to work even harder for its defeat. She wrote Congressmen and Senators to array their vote against it. In a reply to her letter Senator J. W. Harreld said:⁶¹

⁶⁰Letter from Joseph Traynor to Alice Robertson, February 14, 1922, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁶¹Letter from J. W. Harreld to Alice Robertson, May 24, 1924, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

Replying to your letter of recent date urging me to vote to sustain the President's veto of the so-called Bonus Bill, I am sorry I could not grant your request, because I was elected to congress on the platform pledged to this measure and could not disregard this pledge except at the expense of my reputation for consistency and fair dealing.

Realizing the severe struggle over the bill and the threats to her political future she wrote Mrs. Thaw.⁶²

In my judgment, at least five out of every six members of the house believe it (the Bonus) is a dangerous thing, one that will bring disproportionate burdens upon the poorer classes by the effect upon the industries of the country. But there is just one answer to make. I find more soreness toward myself on this question than on anything else that has come up since I have been in congress. They finally say with some heat, "Well, I am not going to commit political suicide by voting against it whether we can afford it or not." I thank God that at any rate, whether I am right or wrong, I believe I am right and I care more for that than for another term. I realize fully that the stand I have taken will be used by the Democrats of Oklahoma to the limit against me but none of these things move me. I must be right with my conscience.

Whether Miss Robertson was right or wrong, the veterans were unhappy and bitter toward her. Various American Legion posts and auxiliaries passed resolutions condemning her stand on the bill. There is no doubt that when she voted "nay" on the Bonus Bill she lost much of the ex-soldiers' support, which had been so strong during her campaign for Congress.⁶³

In opposing the Towner-Sterling Bill, which provided for a Federal Department of Education and aid to education in the various states, she emphasized what seemed to her a dangerous encroachment on "individual rights" and the sanctity of the home. The President of the Oklahoma

⁶²Letter from Alice Robertson to Mrs. Thaw, February 16, 1922, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁶³Cong. Rec., 67 Cong., 1 sess., 1921, LXI, Part 5, p. 4448.

Americanization Society, who worked for the passage of the bill, circulated to all the members of the organization a form letter which pointed out the House member's opposition to it and said if she did not change her views, "someone else can better represent us in Congress."⁶⁴

In reply to the Americanization Society, Miss Robertson wrote the President of the organization setting forth the reasons for her opposition to the proposal. She said the school was a continuation of the home and therefore must be adjusted to local needs; this problem belonged to the state and not the federal government. She concluded her remarks by saying:⁶⁵

I may say that my blood goes directly back through ten generations of Presbyterian ministers, to Pilgrim, Puritan, and Scotch Covenanter, an American of the sort that has no drop of blood which does not flow through the veins of a soldier of the Revolution. Since coming to Congress I have aligned myself with those who are stubbornly, persistently fighting to prevent further immigration. . . . Atheism, bigotry, fanaticism, defiance of American ideals--all are evils attendant upon the stream of immigration.

I am no coward. Through centuries my ancestors suffered exile, imprisonment, and ostracism in the cause of religious freedom. When a strong centralized power is to be allowed to control educational affairs it will not be long until we have a State Church. Changes of dynasty come to republics as they used to come to monarchies.

She took a decided stand against broadening of immigration laws, believing that all who lived in America should be Americans. She said that we take in foreign people so rapidly that we cannot Americanize them and reasoned that too many were here already who did not appreciate our

⁶⁴Letter from Frank Craig to Fellow Worker, April 14, 1922, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁶⁵Letter from Alice Robertson to Frank Craig, April, 1922, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.; The Morning Oregonian, June 17, 1922.

liberties and were doing their best to tear down the nation.⁶⁶

Long before she was elected to Congress, she was converted to the principle of tariff protection by Horace Speed, Chairman of the Cherokee Commission in 1889. Because of her support of the Fordney-McCumber Tariff, she received many expressions of gratitude from business interests. She was the guest of the Wilbur Wakeman family of Eltingville Beach, New York, just a few days before she delivered her speech to the House. Mr. Wakeman was secretary of the American Protective Tariff League and became a contributor to the campaign the Representative made for re-election.⁶⁷

In summary she said:⁶⁸

I am so glad I am an American. I am so glad I am a Protectionist. . . . I shall ever be proud and grateful that I had the privilege of voting for a Tariff Law--a Protective Tariff Law--to supersede the Free Trade Act now in operation.

Let us conclude with other expressions of my love for the word Protection. It means so much; it does so much; it insures so much protection for our institutions, and best of all protection for our homes.

When a measure was introduced in the House to give political pardon to Eugene V. Debs, Miss Robertson opposed it. She said that she saw no reason for pardoning a man who had been an enemy of the United States during the war as he was, and felt certain that Debs had experienced

⁶⁶Ibid.; Letter from Alice Robertson to Frank Craig, April, 1922, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁶⁷Letter from E. H. Gary, President of U.S. Steel Company to Miss Alice Robertson, September 5, 1922; Letter from Wilbur Wakeman to Miss Alice Robertson, December 7, 1922; Letter from Alice Robertson to Augusta Moore, June 7, 1922; Typewritten list of campaign contributions, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁶⁸Cong. Rec., 67 Cong., 2 sess., 1922, LXII, Part 13, pp. 13747-50.

"no change of heart" and that he should be kept in prison.⁶⁹ She fought against radicalism in every form and warned of letting Bolshevism trickle in through Ellis Island. "Be conservative, avoid all fads and fancies," she advised.⁷⁰

When the bill came up before the House to lend Russia \$50,000,000 for rehabilitation purposes as a result of the war and revolution, the lady legislator voted against it and said she thought the United States should keep its money at home. In a speech she said:⁷¹

I thought of all those little children back on the farm in Oklahoma who already cannot wear shoes because of the cruel burden of war's taxation, and I thought when those children are clothed and fed and their fathers out of debt, it will be time to send our millions to Russia.

Let Russia learn. It will be a lesson to those who have allowed themselves to become embroiled in the terrors of Bolshevism and Sovietism.

In one instance, Miss Robertson relinquished her opposition to paternalism in government and voted for federal aid to cotton farmers. The Resolution for the Eradication of the Pink Cotton Boll Worm proposed that the Federal Government pay the farmers whose crops had been infested by the worm the rental value of the land if they would let it lie idle or plant it with some crop other than cotton. She declared her support for the bill because it would be a serious risk to run short of the supply of cotton when it was so important in the case of war. She added that the state of Oklahoma was plagued by cotton raising Democrats; if the

⁶⁹Ibid., 1 sess., 1921, LXI, Part 8, p. 8153.

⁷⁰Portland (Oregon) Telegram, June 21, 1922.

⁷¹Okmulgee Times, July 12, 1922.

government kept them from planting cotton they might leave the state.⁷²

In the spring of 1922, Lady Astor, member of the British Parliament, made a visit to the United States. Being the only woman in the United States Congress, Alice Robertson was given the honor of appearing on various programs with her. Thrilled, she wrote her sister Augusta, "Imagine me escorted to dinner by Lord Astor!"⁷³

An invitation from the League for Political Education read:⁷⁴

My Dear Miss Robertson:

Mr. Henry W. Taft, and all of our officers are much pleased at your acceptance of the invitation of the League for Political Education to be a special guest at the Farewell dinner to Lord and Lady Astor, to be given Monday evening, May 22, at eight o'clock at Hotel Astor.

Miss Spence, founder and head of the Spence School, is to preside and the principal addresses will be made by Lady Astor and her husband. We would be very happy, however, if you would speak for not to exceed fifteen minutes. There will be one other speaker, a man, for the same length of time, both these addresses preceding that by Lady Astor.

A very interesting account of the meeting of these two at the National Press Club read:⁷⁵

Miss Alice Robertson and Lady Astor sat side by side this afternoon in the National Press Club, chatted pleasantly, sat for photographs and acted very much like ordinary women, rather than world celebrities.

⁷²Cong. Rec., 67 Cong., 1 sess., 1921, LXI, Part 5, p. 4352.

⁷³Letter from Alice Robertson to Augusta Moore, May, 1922, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁷⁴Letter from Robert Erskine Ely, Director of the League for Political Education, to Alice Robertson, May 15, 1922, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁷⁵Muskogee Daily Phoenix, n.d., Hisei Col.; Letter from Walker S. Buel to Alice Robertson, April 26, 1922, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

Lady Astor, young and beautiful, handsomely gowned, presented a contrast to the sweet faced gray haired woman from Muskogee.

One, the wife of a wealthy titled Englishman, the other a humble worker among the Indians, making her living from a cafeteria, they commanded equal respect from the hundreds of newspaper men at the National Capital who assembled to greet them on the occasion of their first meeting.

"I am not surprised that this broad minded, sensible woman, with her kindly regard for every one, her firm adherence to principles and her courage should have been selected by her constituents to represent them in congress. Miss Robertson is a charming woman, and I am glad to have met her," Lady Astor commented.

"Lady Astor is a live wire," said Miss Alice, "She is as versatile as Theodore Roosevelt was. President Roosevelt was equally at home in the palaces of a king or in a hunter's cabin, and Lady Astor reminds me very much of him. I am greatly pleased to have met her and most favorably impressed with the woman member of the British Parliament."

A high honor came to the celebrated legislator while she was in Congress when she was given the gavel by the House Speaker. It was the first time in history a woman presided over the House. The Ambassador from Peru, F. A. Pezet, made the following comment:⁷⁶

For the first time in the annals of history, a lady Representative in the parliament of a great nation became Speaker Pro-tempore: the motion under debate being the passage of a joint resolution of Senate and the House of Representatives of the U.S.A., authorizing the President to appoint a special mission to represent the government and people of the United States at the celebration of the one hundredth anniversary of the Proclamation of the Independence of the Sister Republic of Peru. Flowers were presented to her bound by the colours of Peru as a token of respect and admiration.

An even greater recognition was bestowed on Oklahoma's representative by the President of the United States when he selected her to represent him at the annual Rose Festival in Portland, Oregon. She wrote

⁷⁶Letter from F. A. Pezet to Alice Robertson, July 28, 1921, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.; The Daily News (Santa Barbara, Calif.), July 5, 1921.

Mrs. Thaw the news saying:⁷⁷

I have a wonderful experience ahead of me, as I have received an invitation to go to Portland, Oregon. The invitation wire says "as the personal representative of the President at the Rose Festival on June 21st, 22nd, and 23rd."

Honors were accorded her that would have been given to the President, including the Presidential salute.⁷⁸

During her campaign, Miss Robertson had promised to do something for the disabled soldiers, and one of the things she set out to do was to locate a hospital in Oklahoma. Without hospital facilities, the veterans had to go to Texas to get treatment. The Oklahoma Legislature passed a law in March, 1921, providing forty acres of state-owned land for the purpose of erecting such a hospital, but in the event none of the public land was acceptable, \$100,000 was appropriated for the purpose of securing the suitable site.⁷⁹

In a letter to the Congressional Committee on Hospitalization, Miss Robertson urged the locating of the hospital in the state of Oklahoma. She also enlisted the aid of Mrs. Thaw to influence the committee and Secretary of the Treasury, Andrew W. Mellon. Mellon complied with the request but did not get immediate results.⁸⁰

⁷⁷Letter from Alice Robertson to Mrs. Thaw, May 30, 1922; Letter from Florence C. McCrillis to Alice Robertson, June 5, 1922, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁷⁸The Morning Oregonian, June 17, 1922; Foreman, "Honorable Alice Robertson," 17.

⁷⁹Frank O. Eagin and C. W. Eaton (comp.), Oklahoma Statutes (Oklahoma City, 1932), II, 12015-16.

⁸⁰Letter from William C. White, Secretary to Congressional Committee on Hospitalization, to Alice Robertson, March 28, 1921, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

Another scheme was devised whereby the state of Oklahoma would appropriate the money and direct the building of the hospital and then it would be leased to the Federal Government. The building was located at Muskogee, and the advocater of the project immediately set out to obtain the lease. With the help of the Oklahoma delegation in Washington, especially Senator Harreld, the lease was completed in 1923, and the hospital was opened for operation. Colonel Hugh Scott, active in the American Legion in Oklahoma, and an official in the Veterans Bureau, aided in the consumation of the plans, and when the hospital was opened was placed in charge.⁸¹

Oklahoma City, Tulsa, and several cities of the state offered a location for the hospital, but it was built in Muskogee on land adjacent to Sawokla. The American Legion had decided on this location in a State Convention held in January 1922, at Enid.⁸²

While in Congress, Miss Robertson introduced a total of sixteen bills. Two of them were for the purpose of extending time needed for building of bridges across the Arkansas River at Fort Gibson and Webber Falls in Oklahoma. These measures were reported favorably by the Committee on Roads and Bridges and passed. Another was for the construction of a military road to the national cemetery at Fort Gibson, but it died in committee. She introduced a bill for the construction of a public

⁸¹ Muskogee Phoenix, March 30, no year. Clipping in Robertson Col., Tulsa U.; Frank O. Eagin (ed.), Session Laws, 1921 (Oklahoma City, 1921), 250; Daily Oklahoman, November 12, 1922; Letter from Hugh B. Davis, Adjutant, American Legion, to Alice Robertson, February 12, 1922, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁸² Daily Oklahoman, November 12, 1922; Alice Robertson's unpublished folder, n.d., Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

building at Wagoner, Oklahoma, but it was not reported out of committee. Another proposal would have provided pensions for old deputy marshals of the Federal Court who had served during territorial days but it too failed of passage. She was author of a measure which would allow free mailing of publications for the blind; this bill also was defeated. Others introduced were for the relief of "Certain Eastern Cherokees"--J. L. Holmes, relief; Daniel Stocton, relief; Rebecca Wilson, relief; Dick, Jane, to pension; American Allied Insurance Company, relief; Edith Bonter, to pension; Narcissus Butler, to pension; Tenny A. Littlejohn, to pension; Meranda N. Swall, to pension. All of these died in committee.⁸³

Alice Robertson's contribution to legislation during two years in Congress was negligible. History would not be altered in any perceptible way if she had never tried her hand at law making. She knew little of government and the place of the voter in politics. She misjudged the past, and her appraisal of her contemporaries was poor. Of the sixteen bills she introduced only two were passed, and they were local measures. One bill was of national scope but of minor significance, and it failed of passage. Her brief Congressional venture added little to the stature of the new state of Oklahoma.

The responsibilities of her office and the added strain of public appearances were almost too much for her to bear. In April 1922, she spoke at the Republican State Convention in Maine.⁸⁴ In May of the same

⁸³ Cong. Rec., 67 Cong., 1 sess., 1921, LXI, Part 9, p. 271; Ibid., 2 sess., 1922, LXII, Part 13, p. 244.

⁸⁴ Letter from Marion E. Brown to Alice Robertson, January 5, 1922, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

year she was appointed by Governor J. B. A. Robertson of Oklahoma as a delegate to the Twenty-Sixth Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Political and Social Science which was held in Philadelphia.⁸⁵

Writing to her sister Augusta about the heavy duties of her office she said,⁸⁶

I have to allow myself ten minutes from my office to the house when I could easily do it in four, because I have to shake hands with people along the road.

In a letter to her other sister, Grace Merriman, she wrote:⁸⁷

I have really had a tremendous physical strain, and the fact that everybody working in my office is going to school, makes it rather difficult to get my correspondence attended to. I have turned a new leaf this morning and I am not going to neglect those nearest and dearest to me, whether I come back to Congress or not.

I do without shopping for myself. I wear holes in my stockings. Sometimes I am two or three weeks with a broken shoe string, and I am getting tired of putting myself to the last.

In spite of the strain of duties and her complaint of being tired, Alice Robertson decided to run for re-election to Congress. Immediately after returning from the Rose Festival in Oregon, she went to her home district in Oklahoma and began her second campaign.⁸⁸

⁸⁵Letter from Alice Robertson to Governor J. B. A. Robertson, May 4, 1922, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁸⁶Letter from Alice Robertson to Ann Augusta Moore, May 6, 1921, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁸⁷Letter from Alice Robertson to Grace Merriman, April 24, 1922, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁸⁸Portland Oregonian, June 21, 1922.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DEFEATED CANDIDATE

The first few years of the 1920's were memorable ones for the state of Oklahoma. Women were made eligible to hold office and vote; the U. S. Supreme Court made its decision concerning the southern boundary between Oklahoma and Texas in favor of the former;¹ and a race riot in Tulsa which began May 31, 1921, gained national attention.² Before the mad decade was over, Oklahoma was to see its state government thoroughly discredited by impeachments, scandals, and the poison of hatred and bigotry.

Thus when the second district Congresswoman made her bid for re-election in 1922, conditions were not the same as they were two years before. The people had realized that they had not cured all their ills by changing parties. Besides, she had alienated many of her loyal supporters because of the stand she took on some of the issues before the country.

In beginning her campaign for re-election to Congress, Alice Robertson chose Coweta as the starting place. She wrote Mrs. Thaw:³

¹Oklahoma v. Texas, 162 U. S., 252, 372 (1921).

²Scales, "Political History," 222.

³Letter from Alice Robertson to Mrs. Thaw, June 9, 1922, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

I have selected Coweta as the place to open my campaign because that is the site of the first Presbyterian Mission among the Creeks, where my father met my mother more than seventy years ago. I do not know what shape I will find things in, except that all the letters I get seem very favorable.

Walking onto the platform with Bible in hand and bowed head, she began her speech by reading a few passages from the scriptures and then announced her candidacy for second term to Congress. The platform she used in the first campaign was repeated, "I am a Christian; I am an American; I am a Republican."⁴

The well-liked and respected legislator had the loyal support of her colleagues in the House and Senate. She made the statement:⁵

If it depended upon the House of Representatives whether or not I would return, I would be elected unanimously. I have but one enemy in Congress. His name is Blanton, and he is the biggest liar in the country.

A newspaper columnist wrote of her:⁶

Partisanship is keen in the House of Representatives, but if the members of that body had the final say, Miss Alice Mary Robertson of Oklahoma would be reelected hands-down next November. Miss Alice . . . has the respect and esteem of all the members regardless of their political affiliations. They would like nothing better than to aid her, if it were possible, and insure her a second term.

. . . Miss Robertson says more in two minutes than most members say in an hour. She squelched Representative Tom Blanton of Texas, when he opposed the House Resolution to improve the quality of food in the House Restaurant, which for all the world reminded me of an old-fashioned school marm dressing down an unruly pupil.

Another comment added:⁷

⁴Portland Oregonian, June 21, 1922.

⁵Okmulgee Times, July 12, 1922.

⁶Boston Transcript, June 1, 1922.

⁷Unclassified newspaper clipping by George W. Summers in Robertson Col., Okla. Hist. Soc.

If the press is a criterion, the people at large feel the same way. Some may oppose her stand on individual measures, but from one end of the country to the other she has been commended for her absolute honesty, her adherence to her conviction of duty and her stand on the matters before her, regardless of political consequences.

Miss Robertson's adventure in politics was not considered as a temporary and brief career by certain interested persons. In the words of James A. Harris, Chairman of the Republican State Committee and Oklahoma's representative on the National Republican Committee, "She will make the race for Congress in 1922 and after her second term as congressman will go after the crown of Senator Owens."⁸

Endorsement of her candidacy came from all parts of the country and from people in high official positions. One of them was from Colonel Hugh Scott who said of her, "She is the best friend that any soldier of any war now living has ever had."⁹ The Republican candidate selected State Senator E. M. Frye as her manager, who at once set out to raise the necessary support for the political contest. He had some difficulty in creating financial interest in her campaign in the state and wrote to one of his contributors and said, "It is surprising how difficult it seems to be to raise even the small amount a candidate for Congress is allowed to spend."¹⁰

One of the greatest difficulties the incumbent had to overcome in her bid for re-election was the fierce opposition of the veterans. They

⁸Unclassified newspaper clipping in Robertson Col., Okla. Hist. Soc.

⁹Letter from Hugh Scott to the People of the Second Oklahoma Congressional District, October 10, 1922, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

¹⁰Letter from E. M. Frye to J. J. McGraw, President of the Exchange Bank, Tulsa, Oklahoma, September 4, 1922, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

felt she had betrayed them in her stand against the bonus bill. The Muskogee American Legion invited her to make a speech at its meeting and explain her reasons for opposing the measure. With courage and frankness, she made her appearance before her "boys" and stated that the country could not afford such a large expenditure at this time and that if the request was granted the burden of it would unjustly fall on the shoulders of the farmers and producers. Besides, it would be unfair to the soldiers themselves, because it would mean a surrender of any help by the government in the future. As she fearlessly closed her speech and was leaving the assembly she said, "Now, do what you want to, boys." They all stood and gave her a resounding ovation because they knew she was their friend and had done so much for them in the past. When the time came for condemning the speaker as a candidate, it was voted down by a small majority; however, they did favor a resolution providing for the bonus.¹¹

The Veterans of Foreign Wars also invited her to speak to them, but they were not so kind in the treatment of their guest. During her speech, they heckled her with questions. One of the men asked if she would remain in opposition to the bonus if the majority of the voters proved favorable to it. She answered that the question was a political trick and refused to reply. In spite of her plea, they voted a resolution condemning her stand.¹²

The former soldiers felt they had not been rewarded sufficiently while they were fighting the country's battles at very low pay whereas

¹¹Muskogee Daily Phoenix, March 31, 1922.

¹²Ibid., March 3, 1922; Tulsa Daily World, March 4, 1922.

munition firms made millions for their owners and workers. In answering their complaints, she gave what they felt was a weak and naive reply. Obviously she did not understand the deep feelings of the ex-soldiers in regard to the bonus question. She said:¹³

The soldiers feel that it is wrong for them to have fought and bled for almost nothing in material reward while the big war lords have amassed great fortunes by their war time graft. It is true that the profiteers have taken great toll but the Lord will deal with them in his time and in his way. I understand almost all of those who speculated in sugar are now bankrupt. . . . Let the soldiers remember they have gained great things too, knowledge, experience and wisdom.

The Executive Committee of the American Legion Auxiliary, Department of Oklahoma, officially condemned the Congresswoman for her opposition to the bonus in the following resolution:¹⁴

Be it resolved: That whereas Miss Alice Robertson, Congresswoman from Muskogee, has on more than one occasion declared she opposed the five fold Adjusted Compensation Bill, and Whereas, she is the only member of the House of Representatives from Oklahoma, regardless of political affiliation, who voted against the five fold compensation plan.

Therefore, be it resolved that the Executive Committee of the American Legion Auxiliary, Department of Oklahoma, in business session assembled this tenth day of April, 1922, go on record as condemning such action on her part as unworthy of American womanhood.

The courageous candidate was not afraid of these attacks. When she had told Frank Craig that she was no coward, it was no idle boast. She added:¹⁵

. . . I came of brave stock. My grandfather was not afraid to spend four years in prison for the Cherokee Nation and when he

¹³Okmulgee Times, July 12, 1922.

¹⁴Resolution of Executive Committee of the American Legion Auxiliary, Department of Oklahoma, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

¹⁵Henryetta Free Lance, July 3, 1922.

returned they would have cast him out. He was not afraid, why should I be?

Ever since the stormy battle over the Sheppard-Towner Bill, the embattled representative had incurred the bitter opposition of the various women's organizations over the country and each gave out verbal blasts against the other. Prominent women of the state of Oklahoma and in other parts of the nation openly attacked their opponent even before she began her race for re-election; the attacks increased in intensity until the campaign ended.

In one of her interviews, Miss Robertson issued a statement which brought violent reaction from the women's groups. When asked if she thought that in one hundred years a large part of the membership in Congress would be women, she replied:¹⁶

I hope not. Women in politics are so likely to be radical. Such unthinkable theories as those of birth control are likely to be found running rampant among those women who are active in politics.

As they tend to take turns with their husbands in Congress they will probably insist that their husbands take turns with them in the bearing of children. I deplore woman's tendency to drift away from the home.

The League of Women Voters invited Lady Astor to address the Pan-American Women's Congress which met in Baltimore in May 1922. It would have been expected that they would invite her American counterpart to attend the affair but such was not the case. She felt the rebuke very keenly, and with obvious resentment issued a statement to the press that from then on it was open war between her and the Women's League of Voters

¹⁶Knickerbocker Press (New York), April 9, 1922, clipping in Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

and all other similar organizations.¹⁷

Jane Addams, prominent reformer and head of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, opposed the Congresswoman's re-election. An official statement from the organization of which Jane Addams was the head stated that it considered Miss Robertson as advocating measures of "special favors to special classes."¹⁸

The Oklahoma League of Women Voters invited Mrs. Richard Edwards of Peru, Indiana, Vice-President of the national organization, to speak at its first annual convention in 1922. She said:¹⁹

As a Republican woman I regret the newspaper prominence given a woman of Miss Robertson's type. Herself a political accident, in her contempt of women and their ability, her total ignorance of women and women's affairs, she fortunately in no way represents women, though she sits as the only woman in Congress. Actually what Miss Robertson says or thinks is negligible. The women in my part of the country know that she never represented the demands of women, nor concerned herself with the things women's organizations were developing throughout the country.

Mrs. Chester H. Peoples, Oklahoma delegate to the Pan-American Women's Congress, had something to say about her fellow townsman in a speech before the assembly. She said of Miss Robertson:²⁰

Please do not judge Oklahoma by Miss Robertson. . . . She is entirely out of tune with Oklahoma's ideas and progressiveness. . . . She is a standpatter, pure and simple. . . . She was against suffrage

¹⁷Worcester Telegram (Massachusetts), May 12, 1922, clipping in Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

¹⁸Detroit Free Press, July 29, 1922, clipping in Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

¹⁹Unclassified newspaper clipping, n.d., Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

²⁰Wagoner Record-Democrat (Oklahoma), May 4, 1922, clipping in Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

to start with and now after we have won the fight she steps in and walks away with the office.

In the primary, the congressional incumbent was opposed by Gus Tinch of Sallisaw, who had supported her in the first campaign. Tinch was nominated by his party in 1918 and opposed W. W. Hastings in the November election, but was defeated 11,601 to 7,670. The lady candidate made an active campaign, covering seven counties in seven days. When the primary returns were in, she had defeated her opponent by a majority of almost three to one. In the Democratic Primary Hastings defeated his opponent, Oscar Stewart, for the nomination by a majority of two to one.²¹

During the last of July, Miss Robertson had to take time out from her campaign and made a trip to Washington on a matter of patronage in her district.²² It concerned the Superintendency of the Five Civilized Tribes. Victor M. Locke held the post, but she wanted L. G. Disney appointed. Locke was supported by Albert B. Fall, Secretary of the Interior, and Senator Harreld of Oklahoma, and he was appointed. Sensing the reflection it might have on her campaign, the Congresswoman flew to Washington to see what could be done about it. Being unable to change the appointment, she decided to return to Oklahoma and patch up her differences with Locke. She sent him an invitation to dine with her in her cafeteria so that the constituents would see them in conference, hoping this evidence would stop any report that there was trouble between her and members of her party.²³

²¹Oklahoma, Directory (1957), 86, 88, 93, 96; Muskogee Daily Phoenix, August 2, 1922.

²²Ibid., July 30, 1922.

²³Daily Oklahoman, July 20, 1922; ibid., August 5, 1922.

Realizing the power of patronage to any candidate seeking office, she exploited its possibilities with all her might, at times proving to be as ruthless as any other politician. In September of 1922, she tried again to see what could be done in turning the patronage in the Indian Service to her favor. She wrote a letter to the Honorable H. P. Snyder, Chairman of the House Committee on Indian Affairs, telling him of the troubles in her district, and explaining that she was losing the Indian vote by not being able to reward those who had been her loyal supporters in Cherokee County. Mr. Hastings, her Democratic opponent, was making the most of the predicament. It seems that the men he had appointed in the Indian Service had remained in office with the help of Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Merritt. She showed her displeasure in the Commissioner's action in the letter written to Snyder:²⁴

Mr. Merritt is a very useful consulting clerk upon whom the Commissioner depends, and whom I have found very pleasant, in all my dealings with him, but this is an occasion not for a soft velvet glove, but for the iron hand, because the state of Oklahoma is in the most critical period of its history. Unless broken now, at a time when a divided Democratic Party is in our favor, the State will in my opinion be irrevocably lost.

. . . If I did not know you so well I wouldn't dare write such a strong letter, but this is no time to mince words. If I should be beaten by the cowardice of the Indian Office, I would have a few months to stir things up in the House. I am in to win even though my bitterest opponent seems to be in the Indian Service.

Even with all this opposition and difficulties the Republican candidate apparently was confident of victory. In summing up the prospects in her contest with Hastings she said:²⁵

²⁴Letter from Alice Robertson to H. P. Snyder, September 5, 1922, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

²⁵Muskogee Daily Phoenix, n.d., clipping in Hisel Col.

I'll break even with Mr. Hastings in the five counties outside of Muskogee and Okmulgee. The Democrats are only claiming Muskogee County by 1200--and they won't get that--while Okmulgee is sure to give me a majority of 2500.

I never felt so sure of success. I have kept the faith. Though I was against woman suffrage, I have done everything that the proponents of equal suffrage said women would do if the ballot was granted. I have voted solely as my conscience dictated to me, without thinking of the effects on my political future.

The fact that Miss Robertson went about her work without thinking of her political future cost her support when it could have and should have been avoided. Local sentiment went against her. All three of the local newspapers opposed her. An incident occurred in September of 1922 which gives an indication of the kind of opposition she aroused among her people. When the local school board planned the offering of night classes for adults, and a group of women requested a class in "Prenatal Care of Mothers and Babies," she offered her protest by saying that the "mysteries of motherhood" should not be taught in open classes to everyone in a public school. A member of the school board replied through the columns of the local paper. He said:²⁶

Miss Alice Robertson, our Miss-representative in the last Congress, Miss-understands the Mission of the night school, as shown by her recent Miss-statement about teaching the Miss-teries of Motherhood. It is such Miss-information as this that makes Miss Alice such a Miserable Miss-fit.

The editorial in the same paper softened its remarks against her personally, but declared her unfitness was due to her party affiliation. It read:

We do not attack Miss Alice personally, because it is our honest opinion that there is no better woman. Miss Alice Robertson, the

²⁶ Muskogee Daily American, September 7, 1922, clipping in Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

politician, and she is as shrewd as the shrewdest, is subject to honest criticism anytime by anyone of her constituents.

We further admit that Miss Alice has behaved better in Congress than we had expected and no one will dispute that handicapped by her party affiliation as she is, she has done as much as any other Republican would have done.

Miss Robertson apparently sensed the mounting criticism and realized that her election was in some danger. Her sister wrote a letter of encouragement a short while before the election in which she said:²⁷

If your Eastern friends could vote you would have no trouble. The best women are for you.

I hope and pray for your success, not simply for your own sake but because you stand for Christian principles as no one else in Congress and because of the sneer that religion cuts no ice in politics . . . your election would be a triumph for religion. If God is for you, Hastings can't defeat you.

Even though her election was at stake, the candidate would not give in to the opposition. She said fearlessly:²⁸

I am against sex in politics. I did not want to run at the beginning, but the men insisted and I did what I considered my duty. If they want me again they will elect me. It is true that I was the head of an anti-suffragist movement and I was unpopular with the suffragists. But why did I vote against certain measures?

I was elected to Congress as a representative of the people. When they call the roll in the House of Representatives they do not use the prefix "Mister," but merely call the last name. Why should I claim as a woman any preference and cause confusion by being specially distinguished as such, even in having my name called?

Just before the election in November, 1922, the Woman's Home Companion came out in the editorial attacking the Congresswoman for opposing

²⁷Letter from Augusta Moore to Alice Robertson, September 14, 1922, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

²⁸"Elmira College Woman Hailed as 'Historic Figure,'" Elmira College Bulletin, Alumnae News Number, Spring, 1930, p. 8.

all the legislation sponsored by the American Association of University Women, General Federation of Women's Clubs, League of Women Voters, National Congress of Mothers, the Parent-Teachers Association, and the Young Women Christian Association. The membership of these women's organizations was reported to be about 4,000,000. The article said:²⁹

Women who pleaded for suffrage declared that their first service as voters would be the passage of laws in the interest of women and children. They redeemed this promise by faithful untiring work through their organizations for the Sheppard-Towner Act, and when this measure came up for a vote, Alice Robertson, the only woman in Congress, voted against it.

Whether this editorial was mainly responsible for her defeat, as she thought,³⁰ is largely debatable, because Hastings won by a margin of 8,445 votes.³¹ It is not likely that the statement made in this editorial, which was voiced by so many people and at various times, would have changed very many votes.

No doubt Alice Robertson's independence in following her own way hurt her chances for re-election, but there were other things beyond her control which contributed. General unrest and poor economic conditions in Oklahoma brought the Democrats back into control, and the incumbent was swept out of office along with the other Republican Congressmen. The only member of the defeated party to hold his seat in the House was

²⁹Woman's Home Companion, November, 1921, clipping in Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

³⁰Letter from Alice Robertson to Elizabeth Lowell Putnam, January 5, 1924, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

³¹Oklahoma, Directory (1957), 84; Muskogee Daily Phoenix, November 9, 1922; Congressional Directory, 68 Cong., 2 sess., December, 1929 p. 156.

M. C. Garber of Enid.³²

Considerable influence had been brought to bear on the voters of the second congressional district to get her elected, especially from the press, both in and out of the state. Republican and Democratic newspapers gave her a "pat on the back." In a scrapbook of newspaper clippings, found in the Robertson Collection at the University of Tulsa, one can read many comments which endorsed her candidacy. The Daily Oklahoman said:

Miss Alice has not been right in every decision she has made, but she has shown a lot of men what a real woman is. It is good for the soul to see one member of Congress standing up and speaking for what she thinks is right.

The Tulsa World commented, "Here at least is one conscientious candidate." The Tulsa Tribune referred to her platform as "magnificent." Many out-of-state newspapers carried articles which were highly complimentary. Among them were the Birmingham Age Herald, Washington Evening Star, New York Telegram, San Francisco Chronicle, and the Philadelphia Inquirer.

An interesting comment came from Marion, Ohio, Daily Star, a newspaper with which President Harding had been affiliated. The editorial said that she "had her hat on straight," and that she was sensible and knew how to conduct herself. The editor wished success for her in the bid for re-election.³³

Alice Robertson tried to take her defeat philosophically. After the election she said:³⁴

³² Oklahoma, Directory (1957), 84, 85.

³³ Newspaper clipping, n.d., Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

³⁴ Muskogee Daily Phoenix, April 11, 1922.

I would not feel that I was accomplishing very much if I did not encounter some criticism. I should hate to be in Congress and accomplish so little that it would not even draw fire. One who escapes criticism doesn't often amount to much.

The thing which distressed her particularly was the large majority of fellow Muskogeeans who voted against her.³⁵ She felt they had not treated her fairly and was resentful and bitter about it. She commented:³⁶

It was purely a business proposition of sending me back to Congress. I didn't want to run two years ago and it was only after much urging that I consented, but now I'm through.

For thirty-seven years I've lived in Muskogee and was born within ten miles of the city and I have always fought for the good of Muskogee, just as I did while I was in Congress. If I had to do it over again, I'd do the same things I've done in Congress and vote just exactly as I did before. . . . It wasn't that I wanted to go back for two years, but it was the principle of it. I felt it was due me after what I had done for Muskogee.

I should have been allowed to stay up there two more years, but I haven't shed a tear yet about being defeated and furthermore I won't. I must take defeat like a man, since I have been filling the place of a man, and not like the wives of a lot of men I know.

I'll come back to Muskogee next Spring and straighten out my affairs and then I don't know what I'll do. I don't like to cross the bridge till I get to it. I told a real estate dealer the other day that I guessed Sawokla was on the market and he told me I ought to keep it a while yet. I don't think I'll have any trouble selling it, however, after Jack Walton has been governor for a while.

She said there was nothing to come back to in Muskogee as she would not have a penny income and "there are a lot of good homes open to me." Though she felt hurt over her overwhelming defeat, she was thankful for the experience for it proved to her that Congress was no place for a woman.³⁷

³⁵Harlow and Harlow, Makers of Government in Oklahoma, 415. The vote in Muskogee County was 8,121 for Hastings and 4,633 for Robertson.

³⁶Muskogee Daily Phoenix, n.d., Hisel Col.

³⁷Ibid.

Soon after the election Mrs. Putnam wrote expressing surprise and regret over its outcome, and said she felt as if the "bottom had dropped out of everything, and that she could not properly rejoice over the Republican victory in Massachusetts." To her question, "What caused your defeat, was it the League of Women Voters?"³⁸ Miss Robertson replied:³⁹

My defeat in the rottenest election ever held in this rotten state was not enough. While the women undoubtedly helped very materially it was "the invisible Empire" that did it. I was the only candidate on the ticket of either party who refused to vote for the Sterling-Towner Bill, so all the Ku-Klux and most of the Masons worked and voted against me on the plea that I favored Catholics and therefore could not be a loyal American.

It was generally believed that the defeated candidate could get almost any work she wanted in the Republican administration, that the leaders of the party would see she got what she needed. When it was reported that a place was waiting for her in the Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor, she was asked if she would take it if it were offered. She answered, "I've got to do something, haven't I, and I haven't a cent of income after I leave Congress." Then she continued:⁴⁰

I'm not through fighting yet, either, and when I get through up there they'll know I've been there. They say I haven't done anything up there--well, I've done a few things and I'll show them that I still can do something.

The report of her campaign expenses showed that she received a little more than \$4,000.00, mostly from out of state. One thousand three hundred twenty dollars was donated by the Women's National Republican Club;

³⁸Letter from Elizabeth Putnam to Alice Robertson, November 10, 1922, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

³⁹Letter from Alice Robertson to Mrs. William Lowell Putnam, January 5, 1924, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁴⁰Muskogee Daily Phoenix, n.d., Hisel Col.

\$600 was contributed by Mrs. Putnam; \$200 was given by the American Protective Tariff Association; and the rest from individuals in various parts of the country. These included Mrs. Nicholas Murray Butler of New York and Louis A. Coolidge of Massachusetts. Others who gave were W. B. Pine, \$1,000; Pat Hurley, \$100; Eugene Lorton, \$100; and J. J. McGraw, \$50.⁴¹

Miss Robertson was conscientious in keeping within the amount she could legally spend for the campaign. Mrs. Thaw had offered to pay a male quartet to travel with her for public appearances, and in reply her secretary wrote:⁴²

After dropping a note to you for Miss Robertson this morning, I remembered that she asked me to tell you that she could not avail herself of your generous offer to furnish a male quartet for her campaign, as the amount permitted for campaign purposes would be exceeded if the quartet should accompany her over the district singing at all meetings.

In speaking of campaign finances, she said:⁴³

They laughed at me all over the nation because I turned in an honest expense account. I have tried to keep a check on every penny spent and have not received a donation to my campaign fund that I am afraid to tell the people about.

I admit that I spent almost \$4,000 in my campaign, my opponent claims only \$100. If all the people who believe I came nearer telling the truth over my sworn statement than he did will vote for me, I will win easily.

After the strenuous campaign, she decided to take a vacation. Using her liberties as a congressman, she left for Panama on December 15,

⁴¹Typewritten statement of receipts and expenditures, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁴²Letter from Miss Alice Robertson to Mrs. Thaw, July 25, 1922, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁴³Muskogee Daily Phoenix, n.d., Hisel Col.

1922, in the company of eight friends and relatives aboard the S. S. Gorgas. After two weeks abroad, she returned to her duties in the House.⁴⁴

After all the excitement of the election was over and she had settled down to routine work, Alice Robertson seemed glad to get away from the heavy demands of political life. She wrote Mrs. Thaw:⁴⁵

While I still feel that it was my duty to make the fight for re-election, each day I am less and less sorry to be out of it. God has better work for me I am sure, and so I am trying just to wait patiently for plans to develop.

She also wrote a friend:⁴⁶

I am going out on the crest of the wave. Was the only outside guest at the only cabinet dinner given this season and lunched with President and Mrs. Harding last week. I am not sorry to go for the burden of Congress is a heavy one. It will be hard to have no income till I find a way to support myself, but I am not discouraged.

⁴⁴Letter from A. J. Flint to Alice Robertson, November 28, 1922, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁴⁵Letter from Alice Robertson to Mrs. Thaw, March 5, 1923, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁴⁶Letter from Alice Robertson to Harold Westerburg, February 17, 1923, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

CHAPTER IX

SOCIAL WELFARE DIRECTOR

While Alice Robertson could have had a good job in the Republican Administration in Washington after her term in Congress, she decided to return to Muskogee and live on her farm at Sawokla. The homecoming reception which her fellow-townsmen accorded her was a great surprise. She wrote her sister Grace Merriman:¹

I am received here in a way that would do your heart good to see. It has been a strange experience to have many people say, "We needed you here, more than in Washington!" I was not conscious of filling any special place in the community but it is comforting to be told I am needed here.

It took quite some time for the bitterness of defeat to subside and for her to feel as kindly toward the neighbors as she should. She wrote:²

Last Sunday in church I could not say all the prayer. I could not voice "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," for I knew I had not recovered from a deep sense of undeserved injury and down in my heart I have not forgiven as the divine exemplar forgave.

Many letters came from loyal friends expressing sympathy and disappointment because of her defeat. One of them was from William Tyler

¹Letter from Alice Robertson to Grace Robertson Merriman, March 19, 1923, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

²Muskogee Daily Phoenix, September 13, 1925.

Page, Clerk of the House of Representatives. He said:³

Since your exit have often thought about you and have been glad that I knew you and witnessed your courageous stand for the right and for your conscientious scruples at the cost of your temporal welfare, and have wished that more would emulate your fine example. . . . Yours has been a thorny path indeed, but it's only by the thorny road that the real goal is reached. John Quincy Adams in politics traveled this road but he stuck to his convictions. He said that he had the "approbation of his own conscience." Like him you can say this, but mighty few can.

Verily I wish you were here in the next Congress, not to vote for me as I know you would, and I thank you, but for your splendid statesmanship.

In another letter he praised her for the distinction she received while in Congress:⁴

You were the first woman ever to preside over the House. My recollection is that that distinction was not accorded Miss Rankin, the House during her term having been Democratic, nor have I ever heard any other woman being honored by a Presidential salute. In the Army and Navy this honor is reserved for the President himself.

One would think that with the salary of a congressman, together with connections made which might be of help financially, Miss Robertson should have had enough money to provide a comfortable living. But such was not the case. In fact, she was in real need immediately after her term in the House was over. In a letter she explained:⁵

My sister and I are living together here. She has come to my aid in every way with personal work and with financial aid in what has been, during the past few months, the most trying period, probably of my life. She has gone on my note to borrow money to meet pressing personal obligations, including my lawyer's fee in Washington. We

³Letter from William Tyler Page to Miss Alice Robertson, September 25, 1923, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁴Ibid., June 24, 1927, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁵Letter from Alice Robertson to H. P. Westenburg, August 25, 1923, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

are living together, therefore, in the simplest manner possible. The maid we have does not stay and we have no dinner at night, my sister and I picking up a little luncheon.

During this period of financial distress, Mrs. Thaw wrote her beloved friend, who was now in her seventieth year:⁶

Let me know if there is anything you wish me to do by way of helping make life easier, now that your friends the Hardings are so far away, and having such jolts--physical, political and otherwise--that may tend toward forgetfulness of their responsibilities in securing for you so responsible a position . . .

Some time later Miss Robertson received a letter from P. S. Space, executor of Mrs. Thaw's estate which read:⁷

As instructed by Mrs. Thaw, we enclosed by registered mail certificate D-21828 of the Standard Oil Company of Indiana, in the name of Miss Alice M. Robertson, which with the enclosed check for \$29.25 is to be considered a \$500.00 gift from Mrs. Thaw. The stock is selling today for 67 $\frac{1}{4}$, making the value of the shares \$470.75.

In reply to Mrs. Thaw's question about her welfare, she wrote:⁸

I had a raise of fifty dollars a month in my pay on the first. Of course that helps very much. If I were out of debt I could manage very nicely I think.

In addition to these monetary contributions, Mrs. Thaw used her influence in helping Miss Robertson secure a job so that she could take care of her own obligations. In a letter to Secretary of the Treasury Andrew Mellon, she asked if he could help get an appointment for her devoted friend "in connection with invalid soldiers in Oklahoma."⁹

⁶Letter from Mrs. Thaw to Alice Robertson, July 21, 1923, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁷Letter from P. S. Space to Alice Robertson, February 6, 1924, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁸Letter from Alice Robertson to Mrs. Mary C. Thaw, July 31, 1923, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁹Letter from Mrs. Thaw to Andrew W. Mellon, Secretary of the Treasury, March 5, 1923, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

The aspirant made direct application for the job with the Veterans Hospital in a letter to General Frank Hines in which she said: "I have the honor to apply for appointment in the welfare work at the hospital soon to be opened in Muskogee."¹⁰

President Harding issued an executive order waiving civil service requirements in her case and made the appointment as Welfare Director of the Muskogee Veterans Hospital in the following letter to Colonel Hugh Scott, head of the hospital:¹¹

My dear Colonel Scott:

I have just issued an executive order, a copy of which is enclosed herewith, which makes Miss Alice Robertson eligible to appointment as welfare worker in the hospital at Muskogee. I shall be glad to see Miss Robertson appointed to a becoming place and compensated in a measure of just recognition of her very great merits. I am advising the director of the Bureau of these facts so that he may authorize the appointment directly.

With very best wishes, I am

Very truly yours,
(Signed)
Warren G. Harding.

The message added: "Miss Alice Robertson may be appointed to the position of Welfare Worker in the United States Veterans Bureau without reference to the requirements of the Civil Service rules."¹²

General Hugh Scott, who had been a great admirer of the appointee and who had supported her in political campaigns, made the request for

¹⁰Letter from Alice Robertson to General Hines, April 21, 1923, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

¹¹Letter from President Warren G. Harding to Colonel Scott, April 14, 1923, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

¹²Executive Order Number 3824 (Harding), April 14, 1923, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

the appointment because he recognized her special fitness for the job and also because many of the patients would be Indians.¹³

In all the negotiation and correspondence, the new Welfare Director got the impression that the position would pay over \$3,000, possibly \$3,600, a year, but to her great surprise it was only \$1,800. She made strong protests to the Secretary of the Interior Hubert Work, Veterans Bureau Director Frank Hines, and to many of her friends in Washington who would have some influence in obtaining the larger salary. After considerable effort, she was able to get it raised to \$2,400. A letter of July 2, 1923, was sent to her to confirm the raise which read:¹⁴

You are hereby promoted from Welfare Worker, at a salary of \$1,800 per annum, to Welfare Worker, at a salary at the rate of \$2,400 per annum, in the U. S. Veteran's Bureau, effective July 1, 1923.

Still she was very unhappy and dissatisfied with her work.¹⁵ At the beginning of her employment with the hospital, relations between the welfare worker and Superintendent Hugh Scott were very cordial; however, it was not long until difficulties arose which made their work less amicable. It might have been because Miss Robertson was appointed to the position without having to take the Civil Service examinations, or more likely to her inability to work harmoniously with the Red Cross Director, the American Legion, and Legion Auxiliary. At any rate, she revealed to Mrs. Thaw some of the difficulties and disappointments. Mrs. Thaw wrote

¹³Muskogee Daily Phoenix, n.d., clipping in Robertson Col., Okla. Hist. Soc.

¹⁴Letter from W. M. Cobb to Alice Robertson, July 2, 1923, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

¹⁵Miller, "Alice M. Robertson," 85.

to her:¹⁶

Please have your sister write a list of crying needs from which I might select a few to be sent. How about periodicals? . . . How many religious papers come, and what are they? How about your own personal needs--be not slow to mention these.

In reply she stated that she was having insurmountable problems in trying to carry on her work. She charged that the Red Cross official at the hospital refused to cooperate with her and that from many quarters she had met with opposition and resentment. The work of looking after the needs of 200 patients,¹⁷ together with the disturbance she met, caused her to lose twenty-five pounds.

In another letter her theory of the misunderstanding of the salary dispute was explained. It stated that she was double-crossed by those who prepared the executive order which the President issued in appointing her. She conjectured that they had purposely avoided mentioning the larger salary, and that the President had signed the order without detecting it.¹⁸

Miss Robertson had suffered a most humiliating and exasperating experience at the close of her term in Congress, when her secretary, Ben Cook, sued her for slander. She had bought a Ford car and because she could not drive, she allowed him to keep it for his personal use if he would take care of it and drive her to appointments. While she was on a

¹⁶Letter from Mrs. M. C. Thaw to Alice Robertson, October 30, 1923, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

¹⁷Letter from Alice Robertson to Beulah H. Cureton, September 7, 1923, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

¹⁸Letter from Alice Robertson to Mrs. M. C. Thaw, July 31, 1923, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

trip out West, Cook sold the car for \$382.50, and kept the money, which he claimed was due him for back salary. He said she had promised to pay him \$250.00 a month, but for expediency and with her consent, he signed his name to the government payroll for \$203.33 a month. She replied that out of her generosity, he had been allowed time off from work to attend law school, and she had told him very plainly that because of so many debts she could not pay more from her salary.¹⁹ When Ben sold the car, he charged that Miss Robertson had said publicly, and to the injury of his reputation, "He sold my automobile without my authority, and pocketed the proceeds."²⁰ She denied making such statement, but instead said, "He had the authority to sell the car but not to keep the money."²¹ Cook claimed that she had made the statement in the presence of her niece, Faith Merriman, but Faith wrote her aunt, "You told me that Ben sold the automobile while you were gone and had not turned over the money."²²

The slander suit of \$1,500.00 came up in Washington, D. C., and Miss Robertson hired Carter B. Keene to be her attorney. The case brought forth bitter charges and counter charges from the participants. One of her letters said:²³

¹⁹Letter from Alice Robertson to Carter B. Keene, March 14, 1923, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.; Muskogee Times-Democrat, April 7, 1923.

²⁰Letter from Carter B. Keene to Alice Robertson, March 12, 1923, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

²¹Letter from Alice Robertson to Carter B. Keene, March 16, 1923, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

²²Letter from Faith Merriman to Alice Robertson, March 28, 1923, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

²³Letter from Alice Robertson to Grace Robertson Merriman, March 19, 1923; Letters from Alice Robertson to Carter B. Keene, March 14, 1923, and March 16, 1923, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

It was Ben Cook's habit to go through my private desk and remove any papers which he feared might be helpful to me when he made his final demands for arrears of an alleged salary. I never promised him and always refused to pay. I was not willing to discharge him for the sake of his family but hoped he would resign. I endured absolute persecution from him so that his final vicious attack which frees me absolutely from any possible further demands from him, comes to me in the nature of a positive relief.

When the trial was over and Cook had failed to prove his charge, the defendent wrote her lawyer, Carter B. Keene, and said:²⁴

I cannot express to you in words, nor indeed in any way except by unvoiced appreciation my gratitude to you for the wonderfully successful handling of the case for me.

The suit was the culmination of many months of almost unendurable treatment that looking back it seems to me was caused by a disordered brain. Ben Cook's adviser, I have recently learned, is undoubtedly a victim of war service which will probably place him under psychiatric surveillance very soon--but now happily, that horrible stream has passed under the bridge and my every effort will be to forget it.

A letter from Cook reveals something of his appraisal of her:²⁵

Elizabeth is still working in the office with me. Miss Robertson, after seeing that I was determined to have my way, gave in to my wishes and the last four months we have been getting along like turtle doves. The "old lady" really has a wonderful mind, but a bad disposition and no tact. If I can continue to hold her down and keep her in the harness, I believe she will be reelected.

After the long drawn-out legal battle, she wrote Miss Georgia Robertson:²⁶

Ben Cook's law suit against me has been finally disposed of, so that he cannot bring another one. It was a terrible experience for me and really affected me mentally.

²⁴Ibid., June 19, 1923, Robertson Col. Tulsa U.

²⁵Letter from Ben Cook to Cousin Liz, April 25, 1922, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

²⁶Letter from Alice Robertson to Georgia Robertson, August 25, 1923, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

Another shock came to Miss Robertson on August 2, 1923, when she heard of the death of President Harding. The warm personal friendship between them had continued from the first time they met in 1920. She mourned the death of the President, and in a letter to Brigadier General Charles E. Shaw she said, "Never since Lincoln has there been a man in the White House so of the people and for the people as Warren G. Harding." She mentioned that she was sure "the burdens he bore through the summer of 1922" had saved the nation from a civil war, but it cost him his life.²⁷

Alice Robertson made the principal speech at the Memorial service at Muskogee for the President in which she said, "I studied Warren Harding carefully. I found there was not a trace of sham in his make-up. He was a kind man."²⁸

The President's death made the Welfare Director fear that her position at the hospital would be made more difficult. She felt the Democrats might try to oust her. She wrote Congressman Charles Curry of California:²⁹

The death of President Harding made them feel that now I had no friends they could get rid of me, and through me also discredit Colonel Scott who is, like myself, an arch criminal in being a Republican who lives in Oklahoma.

Some time afterward, she wrote to her friend William Tyler Page, Clerk of the House of Representatives:³⁰

²⁷Letter from Alice Robertson to Brigadier General Charles E. Shaw, August 28, 1923, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

²⁸Muskogee Daily Phoenix, n.d., clipping, Robertson Col., Okla. Hist. Soc.

²⁹Letter from Alice Robertson to Congressman Charles Curry, August 25, 1923, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

³⁰Letter from Alice Robertson to William Tyler Page, September 6, 1923, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

I am still having to meet more than I ever thought it possible should be thrust upon me, for my crime of being a Southern White Republican just as you are; sometimes I think it would be easier to be a Democrat in Pennsylvania. . . .

In order to make sure of her position in the Muskogee hospital, she wrote a letter to the new President, Calvin Coolidge, which explained her difficulties and presented her side of the conflict. She wanted him to write a letter of confirmation to the Veterans Bureau. Instead of presenting the letter to the President, Bascomb Slemp, Presidential Secretary, sent it directly to the Director of the Bureau, Frank Hines, who referred it at once to Colonel Hugh Scott. Hines wrote a letter to the Welfare Worker rebuking her for not taking the matter up through the regular channels.³¹

This incident only aggravated the difficulties between Miss Robertson and the Veterans Bureau, and it was the beginning of the discussion which led to her dismissal. At first she asked for an indefinite leave of absence, apparently to look for another job, but was informed that such grants were made only to employees who were ill. She then requested that her services be terminated without prejudice. This decision was largely due to a request from Mrs. Elizabeth Lowell Putnam, who was National President of the Women's Coolidge for President Club, for Alice Robertson to become Oklahoma State President and the National Vice-president of the Club.³²

³¹Letter from Alice Robertson to President Coolidge, November 22, 1923, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

³²Letter from Frank Hines to Alice Robertson, January 20, 1923; Letter from Alice Robertson to Bascomb Slemp, January 19, 1924; Letter from Alice Robertson to Director, United States Veterans Bureau, December 21, 1923, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

This break with the Veterans Bureau did not mean that she was not acceptable to the administration in Washington. A few months later she was asked to serve on the Indian Advisory Council. She received a letter from Dick Lay which said:³³

I am glad to know you have consented to serve on the Indian Advisory Council. . . . The Pima Indians have never shed white man's blood, and have always been friendly to us. Frank Russell, in his book on Pima Indians said, "The American people owe the Pimas a lasting debt of gratitude. The California pioneers who traversed the southern route before the days of the railroads, owed their lives to the friendly brown-skinned Pima fathers they met along the Gila. This tribe rendered notable assistance as scouts in the long contest with the Apaches."

With no definite income, Miss Robertson borrowed as much on her home as she could. Her friends and relatives came to her aid with financial gifts to tide her over until she was able to earn enough to support herself. Mrs. Thaw sent her five hundred dollars to help her through her financial difficulties.³⁴

About this time, Mrs. Thaw honored her friend by establishing an Alice Robertson Scholarship at Elmira College. In a letter to her attorney, she said:³⁵

I wish to establish a scholarship in the name of Alice M. Robertson at Elmira College, Elmira, New York, and would like at your earliest convenience, the four thousand (\$4,000) dollars necessary, and which I promised some time ago.

³³Letter from Dick Lay to Alice Robertson, November 21, 1923, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

³⁴Letter from P. S. Space to Alice Robertson, February 6, 1924, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

³⁵Letter from Mrs. Mary C. Thaw to P. S. Space, June 8, 1923, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

After she had severed relations with the Muskogee hospital, the former welfare worker was free to enter the political activities of 1924. She became active in the support of W. B. Pine for the Republican nomination for United States Senate. J. E. Dyche was Pine's campaign manager, and he had written a letter to Miss Robertson asking her support for the nomination.³⁶ Her acceptance of the invitation placed her in a position of working against her long time friend, Colonel Hugh Scott, who was also a candidate for the Senate. This meant, of course, that the breach between the two was complete. Pine defeated Scott in the primary. The vote stood 60,129 for Pine; 24,374 for Eugene Lorton; and only 14,345 for Scott.³⁷ Veteran Senator Robert L. Owen had announced that he would retire at the end of his term on March 4, 1925, and this left the Democratic nomination open to many aspirants. Among them was the recently impeached Governor, John C. Walton, who wanted to get vindication at the hands of the people. He was nominated by a plurality of votes, but was soundly defeated in the general election by Republican candidate, W. B. Pine. This was because of the widespread revolt of many loyal Democrats who formed anti-Walton clubs and fought aggressively against him. However, the state gave John Davis, Democratic nominee for President, a 30,000 majority over Republican candidate, Calvin Coolidge.³⁸

³⁶Letter from J. E. Dyche to Alice Robertson, March 19, 1924, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

³⁷Oklahoma, Directory (1957), 82.

³⁸Ibid., 80, 81. The vote in the primary was 91,510 for Walton; 83,922 for E. B. Howard; 56,249 for T. P. Gore; 51,291 for C. J. Wrightsman; 15,384 for S. P. Freeling. The vote in the general election was W. B. Pine, Republican, 339,646; J. C. Walton, Democrat, 196,417; George Wilson, Farmer-Labor, 15,025. Dale and Wardell, History of Oklahoma, 344.

Miss Robertson was delighted that she could help elect a Republican as Senator from Oklahoma, but was bitterly disappointed in being unable to secure the state's vote for Coolidge.³⁹ Failing to receive any reward for her efforts in the campaign, she blamed her political enemies for using their influence against her. She was quite sure they had persuaded the President that in her support of Senator Pine she had traded votes against the President.⁴⁰

The scandals of the Harding administration came to light soon after the President's death, August 2, 1923. The exposés rocked the nation with rapid astonishment. Cabinet members--Secretary of Interior Albert B. Fall, Attorney General Harry M. Daugherty and Secretary of the Navy Edwin Denby--were either convicted for bribery or implicated in the crimes. Others involved were: Harry F. Sinclair, Edward L. Doheny, both wealthy oil men; Thomas W. Miller, Alien Property Custodian; John T. King; and Jesse Smith, a close friend and business associate of Daugherty.⁴¹

When Alice Robertson heard of the scandals, she immediately sprang to the defense of the dead President and his cabinet members. Likely this attitude was due to her simple honesty and naive trust in everyone who appeared to be honest. Without the facts at hand, she may have thought this was a ruse to discredit the administration. Certainly she would not be found intentionally upholding scandals and corruption in government or

³⁹Letter from Elizabeth Putnam to Alice Robertson, November 6, 1924, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁴⁰Letter from Alice Robertson to Elizabeth Putnam, February 5, 1929, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁴¹Wish, Contemporary America, 364-65.

anywhere else. At any rate, she wrote Harry Daugherty:⁴²

I have most bitterly resented the ingratitude and cowardice of many people I know who were under deepest obligation to the President and yet trailed after the pack of hyenas who attacked the dead that they feared living. In my own case I paid dear for my outspoken devotion. Hines of the Veterans' Bureau, the moment of his death, set in motion, revenge for what I do not know, except that I was absolutely honest and they knew I could not be handled.

It is easy to picture such a wily politician as Daugherty smiling at the naivete of the loyal Republican. Naturally he was glad to hear of her allegiance. A letter to a Muskogee friend revealed his feeling toward her. It characterized her as a "level headed woman, too smart to be fooled by a lot of gossip, and too honest to be a hypocrite." He expressed confidence that he could depend on her and professed to be unworried by the growling and howling of "false and irresponsible people."⁴³

To add to all of Miss Robertson's confusion and hardships, the beautiful home Sawokla burned to the ground in August, 1923. Mrs. C. E. Strouvelle, adopted daughter, and her negro maid, Fannie McIntosh, were the only occupants when the fire occurred. A party of four girls who had been entertained at Sawokla had departed only a few minutes before the fire broke out. The two women fought the flames as best they could and soon were joined by C. E. Hurd, a general workman at Sawokla. He and his family helped carry out the furniture. Most of the prized heirlooms and a large number of her books and manuscripts were saved. A great part of the valuable papers and books had been removed from the house only a few

⁴²Letter from Alice Robertson to Harry Daugherty, May 28, 1929, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁴³Letter from H. M. Daugherty to A. H. Murcheson, April 23, 1929, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

days before. The firemen were able to save treasured silver and china sets which had been handed down from generation to generation. A picture of Mrs. A. E. W. Robertson, which her daughter prized so highly, was also rescued. However, many valuables were lost, such as important documents, manuscripts and souvenirs which were stored in a cherry wood desk upstairs. This desk had been a gift of a group of girls in 1883 of Wells College, one of whom was Frances Folsom, later Mrs. Grover Cleveland.⁴⁴

Surprised and shocked by the sudden tragedy, and jumping to conclusions, which seemed to be one of her failings, the Sawokla proprietor declared that it was the work of one of her enemies. She said, "I am positive it was set on fire. Yes, I have enemies, political and otherwise who would resort to such a thing. Yes, again I say I believe it was set on fire."⁴⁵ In spite of her accusations, no evidence of arson was found.

Though the days were dark because she was unable to obtain employment to secure her support and pay her obligations, there was some consolation in the fact that Miss Robertson was still recognized as one of the leading women of the nation. As proof that her contributions were highly appreciated, honors of various kinds were made. A rather unusual one came when she was notified that the Steamship Sawokla had been launched on April 17, 1920, and delivered to the Emergency Fleet Corporation on October 13, 1920.⁴⁶

⁴⁴Letter from Mary E. Day Ayer to Alice Robertson, August 27, 1925, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.; Muskogee Daily Phoenix, n.d., Hisel Col.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Letter from E. C. Plummer to Alice Robertson, November 28, 1922, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

Another came from her beloved state when she was informed:⁴⁷

You have been selected by our committee as a citizen worthy of the honor of having a tree named for you and which we will observe and commemorate Sunday, November 25, at the State Capital, at 2:30 P.M. In this observation we will plant one hundred trees which we will dedicate to the memory and honor of one hundred Oklahoma citizens.

A very important recognition came when she received a letter stating that she had been chosen as Elector of the Hall of Fame.⁴⁸ It said, "I have the honor to invite you to serve as an Elector of the Hall of Fame in the sixth quinquennial election which is to take place next year."⁴⁹

After her term as Welfare Director of the hospital ended, she found employment in writing articles for various newspapers, especially those of Muskogee. The Daily Oklahoman of Oklahoma City wrote her requesting a series of articles on "My Experiences in Congress." The offer read:⁵⁰

I do not know what length your manuscript on your experience in Congress is going to be, but I am sure it will be interesting newspaper material, and I take this means of making you an offer of \$500.00 for newspaper publication rights, to a story of at least 10,000 words in length entitled, "My Experience in Congress."

⁴⁷Letter from J. S. Whitehurst to Alice Robertson, November 21, 1923, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁴⁸The Hall of Fame for Great Americans is a semi-circular granite colonade on the campus of New York University at New York City. It was established in 1900 from a gift of \$100,000 and later \$250,000, by Mrs. Finley J. Shepard, and was dedicated in 1901, when the first twenty-nine inscriptions of outstanding Americans were unveiled. Selections are made each five years by a committee of one hundred electors representing each state in the union and appointed by the New York University Senate.

⁴⁹Letter from R. U. Johnson to Alice Robertson, October 16, 1924, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁵⁰Letter from W. M. Harrison to Alice Robertson, March 12, 1923, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

I would be very happy to see that the articles are prepared in good form, and to see that your manuscript is not garbled in production.

In October, 1925, at the age of seventy-one, she became a correspondent for her home town paper, the Muskogee Daily News. The newspaper comment said, ". . . After her home burned, despite the heart-breaking disappointments and losses and despite her years, she has not lost her smile nor her proud independence. She regards the future without bitterness."⁵¹

Her duties as newspaper columnist required her to go to Washington, D. C., where she was a member of the press gallery to report on the political happenings. After serving in this capacity for about a year, she resigned. The letter of resignation said:⁵²

It is with deep regret that I terminate, what has been one of the pleasantest associations of my life, by resigning from the press gallery. I am not able to meet the requirements of membership.

A few weeks later she wrote Senator Pine:⁵³

It will be just seven weeks tomorrow since I left Washington after quietly announcing that I had quit politics permanently, so far as any active participation was concerned. In making this decisive announcement, it was after carefully deliberating the situation here and deciding that the one course which would make me feel safe in person and property was to wipe my slate clean, stop fighting and make friends. I did this with seemingly good results.

Miss Robertson was seventy-two when she resigned from the press gallery and returned to her home in Muskogee. What awaited her she did

⁵¹Muskogee Daily News, October 8, 1925; Santa Barbara News (California), March 1, 1926.

⁵²Letter from Alice Robertson to M. Grafton S. Wilson, March 8, 1926, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁵³Letter from Alice Robertson to W. B. Pine, May 1, 1926, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

not know, but she faced the remaining few years of her life with the customary courage and fortitude.

CHAPTER X

THE CLOSING YEARS

Alice Robertson lived in poverty from the time she lost her place in the Muskogee hospital. She was always hopeful of getting a job which would support her, selling her land adjoining the hospital grounds to the Veterans Bureau, or striking oil on her property. But until one or more of these came true, she had to depend on the generosity of her friends and relatives, for there were no provisions for elderly people such as federal pensions, Social Security, or subsidies to relieve the burdens of old age. Perhaps if these benefits had been presented, she would have been one of the leading opponents of such paternalistic and socialistic tendencies.

One of those to send generously to her needs was a cousin, Georgia Robertson. In a letter to Mrs. Grant Foreman, Mrs. A. R. Moore said, "Our cousin Georgia Robertson is the one who helped sister Alice financially so much."¹ In one of her letters to her beloved kinsman, Georgia wrote: "Your letter came just a little while ago and I am hastening to get the check off to you. Will send it air mail. I am sending \$500.00 of it as a gift and \$500.00 as a loan."²

¹Letter from Mrs. A. R. Moore to Mrs. Grant Foreman, June 3, 1933, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

²Letter from Georgia Robertson to Alice Robertson, May 16, 1929, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

Mrs. William Lowell Putnam did not forget her dear friend during the days of distress. She wrote:³

I was glad to get your letter but so sorry to see by the clippings that you are having a hard time to make both ends meet. I am enclosing you a cheque which I hope you will accept, but if you will not accept it send me something which you are ready to part with as its equivalent. I should much prefer to have you accept it, however.

Mrs. Thaw, until her death, was of great help to Miss Robertson, providing her with clothing and other gifts as needed. After Mrs. Thaw's death, she wrote the family:⁴

Mrs. Thaw always used to take a great interest in my personal appearance. Once she saw a newspaper picture of me and at once I received a brief letter telling me that my hat as shown in the picture was quite unbecoming and that she was sending one of hers by parcel post. After that she would never let me buy another hat.

In June, 1927, the beloved Oklahoman received the break she was hoping would come. The good news was an offer from the Oklahoma Historical Society for her to write some articles for publication. The letter read:⁵

It is a pleasure to report that the board of directors of the Historical Society of Oklahoma City on June twenty-third, unanimously passed a resolution employing you at least until the next annual meeting of the Historical Society, and I am satisfied it will continue on indefinitely for the full two years, but they did not want to make this employment so as to anticipate the annual meetings' action. You are to prepare and compile the data as to the Cherokees, Creeks and Seminoles at \$125.00 per month, that being the full appropriation per year to begin on July first, when the appropriation will

³Letter from Mrs. William Lowell Putnam to Alice Robertson, January 22, 1927, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁴Letter from Alice Robertson to Mrs. Thaw's daughters, August 3, 1929, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁵Letter from R. S. Williams to Alice Robertson, June 8, 1927, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

be available. The committee which will have supervision will be Grant Foreman, W. P. Thompson, General W. S. Key and myself.

The Society felt it had made a wise choice. Not only would the employment benefit the appointee, but her experience in governmental and Indian affairs and private collections would make it possible for her to produce interesting and valuable material for publication. However, because of failing health, expense in gathering the data and the cost of stenographic assistance necessary for compilation, she was unable to assemble a great amount of information.

Other interests and demands on her time interfered with her work with the Historical Society. She was busily engaged in writing her autobiography, which she never finished, and a history of the state of Oklahoma, with emphasis on the early years.⁶ Requests for information and documents on historical subjects came from many parts of the country. This was a constant drain upon her attention and time. In response to one of the requests she wrote:⁷

I am very sorry to seem ungracious, but it is simply impossible for me to take time or strength to answer the questions you ask.

From all over the country such requests come to me, and much as I regret to seem not interested, and I really am, I am forced to refuse.

She also made the suggestion to Richard Loyd Jones that she write a supplement to his history of Tulsa. Her remarks were:⁸

⁶Letter from Alice Robertson to Mr. L. H. Roberts, October 4, 1929, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁷Letter from Alice Robertson to Margaret E. Watts, February 12, 1930, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁸Letter from Alice Robertson to Richard Loyd Jones, September 23, 1927, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

The suggestion was made to me that I supplement your History of Tulsa, recently published, which I have kept, and I am sending you the enclosed, which goes back farther than anything I have seen in print.

I am frank to say I would like to do some space work for you. I am under an appointment by the State Historical Society, at a salary of \$1,500.00 a year to do historical research work for the Cherokees, Creeks and Seminoles. This does not allow me a living wage and in addition provide the services of a very necessary stenographer. I shall soon be 74. I have a vast fund of material on early Oklahoma no one else has.

In writing to those she knew, and to relatives who might help her, she made no secret of the need for their assistance or the necessity of more income. In one of these letters she said:⁹

I never in my life received more honors from the people of Oklahoma than in the past few months and never in my life have I had to pray for money to live on. The last legislature made no appropriation to continue the \$125.00 a month that they gave me for my research work. They say I am the best loved woman in the state, but that does not feed me; so I just have to pray every day, and I have not starved yet and I don't expect to.

There was one avenue of escape from her financial embarrassment which was exploited to the utmost--the selling of her land adjoining the hospital to the Veterans Bureau. At the outset of this scheme, she wrote directly to the Director of the Bureau and later to many others in responsible positions to enlist their aid in the project. Miss Robertson had been convinced that the head of the Bureau, Frank Hines, as well as Colonel Hugh Scott, were prejudiced against her and because of personal spite, were standing in the way of the sale. As early as May, 1926, she wrote Oklahoma Senator W. B. Pine:¹⁰

⁹Letter from Alice Robertson to Thomas A. Latta, July 31, 1929, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

¹⁰Letter from Alice Robertson to W. B. Pine, May 1, 1926, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

I have real estate that I think at moderate valuation is worth thirty-five to forty thousand dollars, a valuable library, no less valuable Indian collections against which my total indebtedness does not exceed six thousand dollars, \$2,000.00 of this is 5% state land loan. If "Washington" agrees to purchase just a part of my farm I could, I am sure, make a loan that would put me on my feet till the sale is consummated.

Another letter to Senator Pine early in July, 1928, stated that Dr. Edwin T. Rose, who had succeeded Colonel Hugh Scott as head of the Veterans Hospital in 1927, was anxious to buy the forty acres which she thought the government should purchase at a price of \$20,000.00.¹¹ She argued that with the passage of the \$15,000,000 Appropriation Bill introduced by Representative Edith Rogers of Massachusetts, this step should be taken. She concluded:¹²

So far as I know, there is absolutely no reason why this property should not have been taken over long ago by the government, except for Hugh Scott's hatred of me and his, to me incomprehensible influence over Director Hines, who has also shown great unkindness to me.

In spite of the urgency of her request and the efforts of those interested in the case, Director Hines remained opposed to the purchase. He said the Bureau had no need for the land and had no plans for its purchase in the near future.¹³ Shortly before this statement, she wrote to Representative Rogers to enlist her assistance in obtaining the sale of the land, saying:¹⁴

¹¹Letter from B. W. Black to W. B. Pine, February 11, 1928, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

¹²Letter from Alice Robertson to W. B. Pine, July 9, 1928, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.; The appropriation of this bill was for Veterans Hospitals.

¹³Letter from Frank T. Hines to Mrs. E. N. Rogers, August 11, 1928, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

¹⁴Letter from Alice Robertson to Representative Edith Rogers, July 18, 1928, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

The medical officer in charge of the Muskogee Hospital has reported to the Veterans' Bureau the need of this piece of ground by the Hospital and requested its purchase. I think a little encouragement from you would be of greatest possible help to me, so if you will do this you may be the means of giving me a new lease on life, for my financial condition is at its lowest ebb.

Then again in the early part of 1929, she wrote:¹⁵

I sent all my papers in the Veterans' Bureau matter to Pat Hurley who has Hines same old evasive answer, that no enlargement of the hospital is contemplated at present. Anybody that knew anything about the facts would understand that needed land is not additional building.

Failing to realize favorable action from her efforts thus far, she turned to the aid of Mrs. Putnam and requested her to see if she could get the President to order Hines to buy her property. Again she asserted that it was clear Hines objected to the purchase because of personal spite, and also charged that Colonel Scott hated her because she had succeeded in forcing the dismissal of a paroled convict from the hospital while working as Welfare Director. A letter to her friend, Mrs. Putnam, revealed: "I have a large box filled with documentary evidence of the crookedness which I at first reported to Dr. Scott not knowing it was with his connivance." The letter concluded with the pathetic note, "The President could turn the clock back five years if he would tell Hines what he must do."¹⁶

One more remote possibility remained which would put Miss Robertson on "easy street"--the discovery of oil on her farm or enough gas for commercial production. In the summer of 1927, oil was found, and it was thought this might be the answer to her prayer. When the news reached

¹⁵Letter from Alice Robertson to W. B. Pine, 1929, month and day not given, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

¹⁶Letter from Alice Robertson to Mrs. William Lowell Putnam, February 5, 1929, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

Georgia Robertson, she wrote her cousin:¹⁷

I expect because of the publicity given to your well that you will be besieged by any number of people with a hard luck story. Everyone knows, as Mr. Tumbull said to me that you "are easy and they will work you for all they can get out of you."

Having known something of how you have given away all your substance in the past, I feel justified in speaking very plainly.

The riches which the wells promised soon faded, but again in 1930 there was an oil boom north of the city, near Sawokla. She leased her land to a drilling company and received \$160.50 as the first royalty check. Succeeding ones were for about \$100.00 each. This was not much but it gave her some comforting relief from worry.¹⁸

In 1929, Miss Robertson's work with the Oklahoma Historical Society came to a close, because the special appropriation made by the state legislature was not extended.¹⁹ This was quite a blow to her, for meager as the salary was, it had been something upon which she could rely. Now she was forced to resume the selling of her precious Indian curios and relics, which she had done to some extent since the end of her campaign in 1922. Some of them she literally "kissed goodbye," since it was so difficult for her to part with them.²⁰

An advertisement with a tone of sadness appeared in the local

¹⁷Letter from Georgia Robertson to Alice Robertson, February 6, 1927, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

¹⁸Letter from Alice Robertson to Jack and Jane, December 23, 1930, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

¹⁹Letter from Judge R. L. Williams to Alice Robertson, November 27, 1929, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

²⁰Letter from Alice Robertson to Mrs. Elizabeth Putnam, March 1, 1928, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

paper. It read:²¹

Miss Alice Robertson calls your attention that her sale will continue a few days longer. New things are being added to her display daily. You are invited to inspect her chinaware, glassware, linens, Indian curios and a large assortment of preserves, jams, pickles, jellies and relishes.

Because of her rich experience and ability as an entertaining speaker, Alice Robertson was busy making appearances at local meetings around the vicinity of Muskogee. She enjoyed the opportunity of participating in school programs and giving the children sketches of Indian life in Oklahoma, as well as bits of advice for which she was famous. On one occasion she told the students not to abbreviate, because more mistakes and losses were made by this practice than by any other. She recalled that during her service as postmaster, many letters were lost because of abbreviation.²²

She took an active part in the Presidential nomination and campaign of 1928, despite her age and financial difficulties, and attended both the state and national Republican Conventions just as she had done in 1924.²³ As a delegate she gave her support to Senator Charles Curtis for the Republican nomination. After the state convention, the delegate wrote Pat Hurley:²⁴

²¹Muskogee Daily Phoenix, n.d., Hisel Col.

²²Interview with Miss Goldie M. Lemon, teacher in Alice M. Robertson Junior High School, Muskogee, Oklahoma, September 20, 1956.

²³Letter from J. E. McKirdy, June 21, 1924, Robertson Col., Tulsa U. The person to whom the letter was sent is not mentioned.

²⁴Letter from Alice Robertson to Pat Hurley, April 27, 1928, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

While I am still hopeful for Curtis, I simply gloried in the way you handled your man Hoover's candidacy. The last few days would seem to indicate that you are going to win hands down, but whether you do win or not for Hoover, you have won for Pat Hurley as usual.

Pat Hurley did win the nomination for his man Hoover and was rewarded with the appointment to the position of Secretary of War. This was the beginning of national and international prominence which Mr. Hurley achieved during his service in the government.

The election of 1928 was one of great excitement over the country. The issues and personalities created a campaign of fear, rumor and prejudices. Miss Robertson was much concerned when the Democrats began backing the candidacy of Alfred E. Smith of New York on a "wet" ticket. Because of his being a "wet" and a Catholic, she felt it would be a national calamity if he were nominated and elected. She wrote her sister Grace Merriman of a conversation with Senator Robert L. Owen as they returned from Washington. He admitted that the Democrats would have little or no chance of winning the presidential election if Smith were nominated. Owen had attempted to prevent the Democratic delegation from Oklahoma from going for Smith but was unsuccessful. She closed her letter by saying, "In these troublous political times one must pray and trust, knowing that God can make the wrath of man to praise Him, and the remainder He will restrain."²⁵

In the same correspondence with her sister, she told of a visit to the Putnam home while she was in the East. Mrs. Putnam had paid for the trip her friend made to the National Daughters of the American

²⁵ Letter from Alice Robertson to Grace Merriman, May 2, 1928, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

Revolution Convention, and she went on to Boston to spend some time with Mrs. Putnam. In addition to discussions about the political situation in the country, the guest from Oklahoma talked with those who had a vital connection with the famous Sacco-Vanzetti case. She related this most unusual experience by saying:²⁶

I could not stay for a dinner party Mrs. Putnam was giving that night in honor of Judge Thayer who handled the Sacco-Vanzetti trial. They came in late in the afternoon for tea before resting until the dinner hour, so that I had a thrilling visit with them. I consider this couple, wife as well as husband to have been among America's heroes. Six years and a half of facing death to spring upon them at any moment and yet to stay true to the trust.

She gave her impression of the political situation in Oklahoma and predicted defeat for the Democrats in the state if they insisted on Al Smith as their candidate. Writing to Mrs. Mary Chandler Hale she said:²⁷

I had to go because it is a very critical time in this state where the invisible empire has control politically and that it should have gone into the Al Smith column seems incredible. If they really do, as now seems probable, go that way it will mean Oklahoma going Republican as it did in 1920. Because Oklahoma is a dry state and a Protestant state, and while they may manage to cast the Smith vote in the Convention they can never carry him through any election in this state, because there are not enough wet Republicans to help them out.

The Republican Party held its national convention in Kansas City in June, 1928, and on the first ballot nominated Herbert C. Hoover for President and Charles Curtis for Vice-President. Miss Robertson was writing for a Muskogee newspaper at this time under the caption, "Miss Alice Says," and she devoted much of her space to political issues and opinions. She sent out a circular letter to all the members of the Presbyterian church, asking them to consider their vote for the President very

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Letter from Alice Robertson to Mary Chandler Hale, May 10, 1928, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

seriously and not let their Democratic affiliation lead them to vote for Catholicism. She mentioned the danger to the church if Smith were elected, and said that we must keep Catholicism from triumphing in this nation where her forefathers had fought and died for religious liberty.²⁸

Herbert Hoover was elected by a landslide and in the voting carried Oklahoma by a majority of about 175,000 votes. The Democrats were hopelessly divided in the state. Governor Henry S. Johnston, himself a dry, gave half-hearted endorsement to Smith and in so doing alienated the dries who had supported him in previous campaigns. With this political situation, many Democrats voted Republican in the Presidential contest, and the party barely held a majority in the state legislature. The Republicans also picked up two congressional seats, the first and fifth districts.²⁹

Miss Robertson may have intended to retire from active politics when she resigned from the Press Gallery and returned to Muskogee, but she was unable to keep her promise. Not only was she busy in the elections of 1928, but in 1929 she went to Washington to lobby against the new Maternity Bill. She wrote a friend about her experience and said:³⁰

On the 13th day of January--Sunday--I got a wire from my friend Mrs. Putnam asking me to wire immediately if I would go to Washington to speak on Thursday, the 17th before the House Committee before whom the ubiquitous Maternity Bill was to have a hearing in the worst form in which it had ever been presented. I wired acceptance and made

²⁸No date to this circular letter, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

²⁹Oklahoma, Directory (1957), 72, 73, 154-57; Dale and Wardell, History of Oklahoma, 349.

³⁰Letter from Miss Robertson to Carol, March 10, 1929, last name not given, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

hasty preparations and left Monday night, reporting to Mrs. Putnam at the Mayflower Hotel on Wednesday night where I was her guest until after the dinner Friday night. She added an extra fifty dollars to have a good time for a few days, so I changed from the Mayflower where fifty dollars looks like fifty cents out here to the comparatively moderate priced George Washington Inn, where I am quite at home . . .

A few days later she wrote Judge Williams about the same matter saying:³¹

In mid-January I went very unexpectedly to Washington. My friend, Mrs. William Lowell Putnam of Boston wiring me asking me to appear before the Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee of the House, to speak against the Sheppard-Towner Bill, which by the action of a rampant minority of women job-holders and their friends seemed in danger of being reported favorably from the Committee in a far more unconstitutional and objectionable form than ever before. My expenses were all generously paid.

The University of Tulsa gave its principal founder a well deserved recognition when it conferred upon her the honorary LL.D. degree for the work she had done for the school and the state of Oklahoma.³² It was the first degree of learned literature ever conferred by the University.³³ Upon the presentation of the diploma to her on May 30, 1928, she said:³⁴

There was a day, never mind how many years ago, when I sat way back in the college chapel and ate my heart out because I could not obtain a degree. I hesitated at first to accept this degree, because I felt I did not deserve it, but someone has said, "Maude Adams has been awarded the degree for interpreting Shakespeare and you have been interpreting human souls throughout all these years." I have tried to do my little bit to help others, not for myself, but for the sake of my missionary ancestors.

³¹Letter from Alice Robertson to Judge R. L. Williams, March 19, 1929, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

³²Muskogee Daily Phoenix, n.d., Hisel Col.

³³Tulsa World, March 9, 1928.

³⁴Unclassified material in Hisel Col.

In commenting upon the occasion of the conferring of the degree, the Tulsa World headed its editorial, "Oklahoma's Most Useful Citizen," and in its closing paragraph said:³⁵

The qualities of her signal success and growing renown; homely philosophy, inherent natural honesty--a womanly woman. "The sanest, most attractive and most influential political figure that has come to Washington in a decade," said another Metropolitan journal. She is that, and all Oklahoma is proud of her. Her patriotism is so unobtrusive that one never thinks of it at all.

Another honor was bestowed upon Miss Robertson when the Tulsa Board of Education named one of its schools in her memory. She received the following letter from the school board:³⁶

The Board of Education, at its meeting held July 16, officially named one of the new schools now in progress of construction the Alice M. Robertson School.

The Board of Education, in naming the school recognized the distinct contribution you have made toward the social, religious and cultural life of the Indian Territory and the State of Oklahoma.

The Alice M. Robertson school is destined to be one of the largest grade schools in the city.

In 1929, she was chosen by the Board of Directors of the State Business and Professional Women's Clubs of Oklahoma, as the state's outstanding professional woman to represent the state in a contest held at Mackinac Island, Michigan, in July. Similar selections were made by every other state in the union and from these forty-eight candidates the one was elected who, in the opinion of the judges, stood out over all other American women. The Oklahoma delegation presented a sketch depicting the life of their representative, and at which time she received many

³⁵"Alice Mary Robertson," a pamphlet in Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

³⁶Letter from W. F. Graham to Alice Robertson, July 18, 1929, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

distinguished honors.³⁷ In notifying her of the selection, Miss Winnifred McMichael wrote:³⁸

. . . We have given your name as that of the most famous woman of Oklahoma. Your work as a missionary, an educator and as congresswoman has been so colorful and so worthwhile and your life has been so full of real service to your fellowmen, your state and your country, that we should have the most outstanding episode in the whole pageant.

In presenting their choice for the national contest, the State Federation wrote the following entry:³⁹

The Oklahoma Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs has the very great honor to present for your consideration as the foremost business and professional woman in the United States today:

Miss Alice Robertson LL.D., a member of the Muskogee Camp Spanish American War Veterans, of the Daughters of the American Revolution, of the Presbyterian Church, of the Republican Party, and of the Muskogee Business and Professional Women's Club.

The University of Tulsa had presented a historical pageant depicting the eventful life of Alice M. Robertson just prior to the one to be presented at the National Contest in Michigan. In answer to the letter from Miss McMichael, she replied, "I am sending you a copy of the Historical Pageant given last June by the University of Tulsa which was dedicated to me."⁴⁰

It was impossible for her to get by on the gifts of friends and relatives and since she made no secret of her financial condition, the

³⁷Muskogee Daily Phoenix, July 7, 1929; Foreman, "Honorable Alice Robertson," 17.

³⁸Letter from Winnifred McMichael to Alice Robertson, March 26, 1929, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

³⁹"Alice M. Robertson," a pamphlet in Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁴⁰Letter from Alice Robertson to Winnifred McMichael, n.d., Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

information came to the attention of Mrs. Frank Korn, President of the Oklahoma Historical Society. Realizing that the state of Oklahoma owed a debt of gratitude to this noted person for the work she had done for the state and nation, Mrs. Korn conceived the idea of a memorial fund of \$50,000.00 which was to be invested to yield a return of \$200.00 a month. In exchange for the \$200.00 a month income for the rest of her life, Miss Robertson was to deed her property, including her land next to the Veterans Hospital, to the Oklahoma Memorial Association, and the association was to assume all her debts. At her death the principal was to be used to construct a home for the aged needy on the property as a memorial.⁴¹ Members of the association were Judge J. R. Keaton, Senator Elmer Thomas, E. E. Dale, Walter Ferguson, James S. Buchanan, and William B. Bizzell.⁴²

After interesting a few of her friends in the project, Mrs. Korn began the campaign to raise the amount needed for the fund. Despite the all out effort by the promoter, the project never attracted the attention and support which backers of the association thought it would. It certainly was not due to the lack of appreciation for the work Miss Robertson had done or to the absence of popularity, but to the general financial conditions of the times. The drive to raise money came just after the stock market crash in October, 1929. People who could and would help such

⁴¹Letter from Mrs. Korn to Alice Robertson, December 11, 1929, Robertson Col., Tulsa U. A copy of the contract between Miss Robertson and the Oklahoma Memorial Association is in the Robertson Col., Tulsa U.; Letter from Alice Robertson to the Oklahoma Memorial Association, December 13, 1929, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁴²Letter from Mrs. Frank Korn to Alice Robertson, n.d., Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

a worthy project were having to make adjustments of their own; however, some of the honoree's friends sent their congratulations and checks to begin the drive. Mrs. Putnam sent another \$500.00.⁴³ Her old friend Will Rogers wrote her a letter in his characteristic style:⁴⁴

Bless your old heart, I am glad we will be able to do something for you in a public way. You have helped many a poor old boy in your day.

I hope your Association prospers, for it should, enclosing check.

A few years before, Will Rogers had written an article about his Oklahoma neighbor entitled, "Ain't Old People Lovely," in which he said, "Miss Alice is a very lovely old lady. She has devoted a long and useful life to do nothing but help somebody else."⁴⁵

When the program for the laying of the corner stone of the Oklahoma Historical Building was being formulated Alice Robertson wrote Mrs. Korn:⁴⁶

If I knew that Will Rogers was likely to be in this part of the country, I should certainly ask him. I feel sure he will join it, because we are the very best of friends and two years ago, I had the pleasure of being entertained at his wonderful Berkley Hills home.

She received a letter from H. C. Pearson which quoted Pat Hurley

⁴³Letter from Mrs. William Lowell Putnam to Alice Robertson, February 10, 1930, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁴⁴Letter from Will Rogers to Alice Robertson, March 19, 1930, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁴⁵Will Rogers, "Ain't Old People Lovely," August, 1927, unclassified magazine clipping in Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁴⁶Letter from Alice Robertson to Mrs. Frank Korn, November 4, 1929, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

as saying:⁴⁷

I am glad to hear that our mutual friend Miss Alice Robertson is again being honored. She has certainly left her impression on the history of Oklahoma. She will be remembered when most of us have been forgotten.

Assistance came from Georgia Robertson, and in a letter she said:⁴⁸

. . . I just had a letter from Mrs. Korn, President of the Oklahoma Memorial Association, relative to the settlement of the loan of \$500.00 I let you have. As they were settling up your debts and establishing as you had written me a monthly payment of \$200.00 a month to you, I wrote her thanking them for offering to pay me \$350.00 possibly if I would accept the amount in payment of the loan. I assured her I would cancel the \$500.00 owing me.

Although these contributions were encouraging and a significant tribute to the beloved Oklahoman, they fell far short of the amount necessary to establish the memorial. Mrs. Korn felt that its failure was due to the "politics" Lew Wentz and his supporters injected into it. An article by Sigrid Arne appeared in the Oklahoma City Times relating the condition of Miss Robertson's finances about the same time the association got underway with its drive.⁴⁹ The leaders felt this was a good beginning and would interest the public in the project. However, to their surprise, an article came out in the Oklahoma News the next day saying that millionaire oilman Lew Wentz had heard of his fellow Oklahoman's needs and was making plans to take care of her financially.⁵⁰ When Mrs. Korn read the

⁴⁷Letter from H. C. Pearson to Alice Robertson, December 11, 1929, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁴⁸Letter from Georgia Robertson to Alice Robertson, January 8, 1929, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁴⁹Oklahoma City Times, December 9, 1929, clipping in Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁵⁰Oklahoma News, December 10, 1929, clipping in Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

report, she knew it would seriously damage the drive for people would say, "Let Lew do it," and they would not contribute to the fund.⁵¹

Mrs. Korn explained the situation to her friend in a letter which read:⁵²

Mr. Herman Dittmar of El Reno is a member of our committee to organize and procure our fund. He is a close friend of Mr. Wentz and is boosting him for Governor. Mr. Dittmar phoned Mr. Wentz to see if the story appearing in the News was true. Mr. Dittmar told him what the Association was going to do, etc. Mr. Wentz said, "I did not know of the movement of the Association--but it is good." He said, "I made no attempt to provide for the future of Miss Alice. When I read the story by Sigrid Arne in the Oklahoma City Times . . . I was surprised for I did not know Miss Alice to be so needy, so I told a man to look into the case and if interest or taxes were due on her property to see same was squared--and to ascertain her direct need. Nothing more."

Again we feel better. We did not believe that if he knew of our organized effort in your behalf he would butt in. He won't either. He leaves for Washington, D. C. tomorrow.

A few weeks later, Mr. Wentz wrote to Mrs. Korn to show his interest in the project. He said:⁵³

I understand your Association, through a committee functioning as the Alice Robertson Memorial Fund Committee, contemplates raising a fund to be used in the support of Miss Robertson during her life time and the establishment of a memorial for her.

Sometime ago, I made arrangements which would care for her needs, but would not have that arrangement to any way interfere with or prevent the carrying out of your worthy project. If you so desire I will send you each month a remittance of \$100.00 instead of sending it direct to her and will continue this payment until such time as your fund will reach the necessary proportion to carry out your plan.

⁵¹Letter from Mrs. Frank Korn to Alice Robertson, December 24, 1929, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁵²Letter from Mrs. Frank Korn to Alice Robertson, December 12, 1929, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁵³Letter from L. H. Wentz to Mrs. Frank Korn, January 3, 1930, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

Contrary to the statement that he did not know of Miss Robertson's needs, Mr. Wentz had chosen to do nothing about it. In 1926, she had written him giving a complete account of her assets and liabilities and asking for assistance. About a year later, she wrote him and asked for her letter to be returned as she considered the contents confidential. She apologized for bothering him with her "pressing need" and regretted requesting help which he ignored. He returned the letter she had written and stated that his failure to answer was due to its being hidden beneath the pile of correspondence on his desk.⁵⁴

Mrs. Korn charged that Wentz and his colleagues were trying to get publicity for his candidacy for Governor of Oklahoma by publishing his generosity in contributing to the memorial. She also alleged that Dittmar was a deceiver and even suggested that in all his pretense to be working for the association he was doing all he could to defeat it. In a letter to Alice Robertson, Mrs. Korn said: "You were used as a football to further the candidacy of Wentz for Governor. I doubt there would have been the manifestation of generosity had he not been running for Governor."⁵⁵

She did not agree with Mrs. Korn as to the interpretation of Wentz's actions and the friendship between them began to wane. She objected to the sending of the money Wentz provided for her to the Memorial

⁵⁴Letter from Alice Robertson to Lew Wentz, September 28, 1927; Letter from Lew Wentz to Alice Robertson, September 30, 1927, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁵⁵Letters from Mrs. Frank Korn to Alice Robertson, January 15, 1930; February 3, 1930, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

Association as Mrs. Korn desired, because she was afraid some of it would be used for other purposes. He complied with the wishes of Miss Robertson and sent her \$100.00 a month for the rest of her life.⁵⁶

Mrs. Korn soon realized that there was no need to continue with the campaign, and discouraged with the results of having received only about \$925.00, she wrote Miss Robertson and asked what she thought should be done with the money. She indicated that poor health had made her give up the project.⁵⁷ Some disagreement arose as to the disposition of the funds. Mrs. Korn felt that it should be used for the purpose for which it was raised or the association might be liable to legal action. A bust of the honoree had been suggested by Mrs. Korn and others, but when the idea came to Miss Robertson's attention she indignantly responded, "Make a bust of me after I am dead . . . starved to death, I suppose." She felt the money should be given to her to use for living expenses or to pay her debts.⁵⁸ In a letter of gratitude to Wentz she said, "It seemed unbelievable that you could have done so much for me. I cannot express what I wish I could."⁵⁹

During the last few years of her life, Miss Robertson suffered

⁵⁶Letter from Lew Wentz to Mrs. Frank Korn, January 3, 1930; Letter from Alice Robertson to Lew Wentz, January 14, 1930, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁵⁷Letter from Mrs. Frank Korn to Alice Robertson, March 12, 1930, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁵⁸Letter from Alice Robertson to John Dill, December 8, 1930, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.; Letter from Mrs. A. R. Moore to the Foremans, February 28, 1934, Robertson Col., Okla. Hist. Soc.

⁵⁹Letter from Alice Robertson to Lew H. Wentz, January 14, 1930, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

almost constant pain caused by rheumatism and a dislocated cartilage in one of her knees. This condition forced her to use a cane. In the summer of 1930, she went to Claremore, Oklahoma, to take steam baths in order to get relief. She took a room in the Will Rogers Hotel, and most of the time was confined to it unable to walk. However, being interested in political matters, she always went back to Muskogee to cast her vote in the elections.⁶⁰

After one of the trips to Muskogee from Claremore, she wrote her sister Mrs. Moore:⁶¹

I walked so much the four days that I was in Muskogee at election time, that I finished up my knee. When I got back to the Will Rogers that night I had to have two men practically carry me in.

Despite her suffering and the inconvenience of getting to the place she wanted to go, the beloved citizen made several trips and appearances in the state. One of these was to the unveiling of the Pioneer Woman Statue at Ponca City. The account related:⁶²

Dressed in a costume such as the honest-to-goodness pioneer women of Oklahoma wore, she attended the unveiling of the Pioneer Woman Statue at Ponca City. The event is heralded as one of the greatest in the history of the state and Muskogee's "grand old woman" will be one of the leading figures.

What proved to be her last public appearance was the trip to Oklahoma City to be the principal speaker at the dedication of the newly constructed Oklahoma Historical Building. By sheer willpower and determination

⁶⁰Letter from Alice Robertson to Mrs. Frank Korn, June 6, 1930, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁶¹Letter from Alice Robertson to Ann Augusta Moore, December 6, 1930, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁶²Muskogee Daily Phoenix, April 22, 1930.

she endured the pain and inconvenience to be present, as revealed in her letter to a friend about the experiences at the dedication:⁶³

My stay in Oklahoma City of two days was of intense pain from the dislocated cartilage in my right knee. I had to be almost carried by two men up the side steps of the library auditorium. . . . I have been shut in ever since my return, some days not even leaving my room.

In the same letter she referred to her speech which showed her active and keen interest in political matters. She wrote:

My talk was entirely different from what I had intended it to be. After I heard an hour and a quarter of a tirade from governor-elect Murray, I made mine quite brief, taking occasion to say that because of the generosity of Lew Wentz, I was prevented from financial suffering, as everybody else who had proffered help had fallen by the wayside. His name came in for ringing applause. Murray is so deaf I am sure he did not know what it was all about.

Miss Robertson's health grew steadily worse and early in 1931 she was granted admittance to the Veterans Hospital at Muskogee and underwent an operation for cancer of the jaw, caused by friction of a dental plate. After an illness of four and one-half months she died at 1:15 P.M., July 1, 1931.⁶⁴ Mrs. William Lowell Putnam, her generous benefactor for many years, paid her medical, hospital, nurse and funeral expenses.⁶⁵

The people of her community and state hastened to show proper respect for their departed loved one. Business came to a standstill in Muskogee in her honor. City and Federal offices closed for the funeral

⁶³Letter from Alice Robertson to H. W. Gibson, November 28, 1930; Letter from Dan W. Peery to Alice Robertson, November 1, 1930; Robertson Col., Tulsa U. William H. Murray and Lew Wentz were bitter political enemies.

⁶⁴Muskogee Times-Democrat, July 1, 1931.

⁶⁵Muskogee Daily Phoenix, n.d., Hisel Col.; Letter from Alice Robertson to _____, March 9, 1931, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

services.⁶⁶ Dr. Walter G. Letham, her minister of the Presbyterian Church at Muskogee, and Chancellor John D. Finlayson of the Tulsa University were in charge of the services. Members of the Veterans Organizations attended in a body. At the grave, in Green Hill Cemetery, the Milo E. Hendrix Camp of the Spanish War Veterans was in charge.⁶⁷ Many of the state's pioneers were present to pay tribute to the most noted of them all. Governor Murray appointed Robert P. Chandler to be the special and official representative of the state.⁶⁸

Many lists of the most outstanding women of Oklahoma have been made, both official and unofficial, and they vary in the names of the persons included, but there is one name which appears on all of them-- Alice M. Robertson.

In an effort to get a list of twenty-five of the most useful citizens of Oklahoma, a committee was appointed to the task, and they placed Miss Robertson's name among the number.⁶⁹ Omer K. Benedict, Vice-President of the First National Bank and Trust Company of Tulsa, Oklahoma, was asked by the Daily Oklahoman to name the seven most prominent women of the state, and he designated Alice Robertson as one of them.⁷⁰ Mrs.

⁶⁶Muskogee Times-Democrat, July 2, 1931.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Letter from R. G. Miller to Alice Robertson, January 26, 1931, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁷⁰Letter from Omer K. Benedict to Alice Robertson, September 17, 1930, Robertson Col., Tulsa U. Benedict was a prominent newspaper man in the early days of Oklahoma. He was one of the writers for the Daily State Capital, the most influential newspaper in Oklahoma Territory. In 1893,

H. H. Heisler wrote Augusta A. Moore for information about her famous sister to put in her book, Women of the South Who Have Made History.⁷¹ When the University of Oklahoma had completed two dormitories for women in 1936, Dr. E. E. Dale was asked to suggest two of the leading women of the state for whom the buildings should be named and he suggested Alice Robertson and Elizabeth Fulton Hester.⁷²

Very few people knew and appreciated the noted Oklahoman better than Grant Foreman, and in a newspaper article entitled "Our Most Distinguished Citizen," he said:⁷³

Miss Alice is known and honored in this country outside of Oklahoma and has brought lustre to the state of great material value to us. She is better known over the country than any other citizen of Oklahoma. On my trip around the world, on steamship, in hotels, wherever English speaking people got together, they knew Miss Robertson of Oklahoma and wanted to know more about her.

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The mention of the name Alice M. Robertson brings an inquisitive, "Who is she?" from the lips of most people of her native state and even from people of the community where she lived and worked for 77 years. This consignment to obscurity is strange when only 35 years ago she was one of the most publicized women in America. The expressions "Miss Alice of

he and Charles Hunter established the Enid Eagle. In 1936, he was the Republican candidate for Governor who was defeated by Democratic candidate Henry S. Johnston.

⁷¹Letter from Mrs. H. H. Heisler to Augusta A. Moore, March 12, 1934, Robertson Col., Tulsa U.

⁷²Interview with Dr. E. E. Dale, February 27, 1957.

⁷³Grant Foreman, "Our Most Distinguished Citizen," Muskogee Daily Phoenix, November 19, 1922.

Muskogee," "Oklahoma's Congresswoman," "The Lady From Oklahoma," and "The Grand Old Lady," regularly appeared in newspapers and magazines across the nation in the early 1920's. This lack of knowledge of one who was described as the "best loved woman in Oklahoma" is undeserved. Alice Robertson merits a greater place in the state's history and the memory of its people for her outstanding and unselfish service. Her achievements, gained in spite of circumstances and difficulties which would mean insuperable barriers to most people, form an impressive list.

She was a remarkable woman, and in some respects even a great one. A list of accomplishments would include such things as the first woman appointed to a federal position in the Indian Territory; first woman postmaster of a first class post office in the United States; second woman to be elected to Congress; only woman to receive the presidential salute, and the only woman to preside over the national legislature.

Born into the "grinding poverty of a missionary home," at Tullahassee, Indian Territory, in 1854, she learned the meaning of personal sacrifice and self reliance. Her parents, of New England stock and stern puritan faith, taught her strict personal behavior and a conservatism which she applied to all political and public policies. Her mother, Ann Eliza, daughter of Samuel Austin Worcester, came West from Georgia with her parents as they moved with the Indians with whom they had been doing missionary work. Her father, W. S. Robertson, journeyed to the Indian Territory in the 1830's to serve as a missionary among the Creeks. After their marriage they continued in that work for the rest of their lives.

The interruption of the Civil War forced the Robertsons to leave Tullahassee and remain for some time with his parents in Wisconsin.

Before the end of the war and their return to work among the Indians in Oklahoma, the family moved to Highland, Kansas, to serve as teachers and missionaries with the Indians of that area. It was during these years that young Alice had to assume most of the responsibility of the home since her mother was not physically able to care for the large family. There were seven children: Ann Augusta born in 1851; Alice, 1854; Grace, 1857; Samuel, 1860; Dora, 1863 (died in 1864); and twins born in 1866 but died in the same year.

After their return to Tullahassee in 1866, Alice was busy with many duties connected with the mission. She attended the school taught by her parents and other instructors and on occasions substituted for some teacher who was unable to attend classes. At the age of 17, a dream of her life was realized, when she was able to go to College at Elmira, New York. She left school at the end of two years and took a position in the office of Indian Affairs in Washington, in order to help her sister Grace go to college.

Tragedy struck in 1880 when the mission building at Tullahassee burned and left the students homeless. With her customary courage Alice Robertson set about to obtain permission to get twenty-five of the most promising students admitted to Carlisle College. Over-taxed by the responsibilities of the mission work and discouraged by a lack of public interest in rebuilding of the school, William S. Robertson died in June, 1881. This was a severe blow to the young daughter. She hastened home to take up her father's duties. After it was determined by proper authorities that Tullahassee should not be rebuilt at the old location, she went back East to raise money for a new Creek school. Her sister Ann

Augusta helped in the enterprise, and the new school, Nuyaka, was begun in 1885.

In the same year she took charge of an Indian school for girls in Muskogee, called Minerva Home, and again she went East to raise money. It was during this time that she met the woman who was to be her benefactress the rest of her life--Mrs. Mary Copley Thaw. The money was raised and in 1894 the name of the school was changed to Henry Kendall College. In 1906, it was moved to Tulsa and later became known as the University of Tulsa.

Alice Robertson continued as teacher of English, history, and civics in Henry Kendall College until 1900, at which time she secured the position of Supervisor of Creek Schools. In 1904 President Theodore Roosevelt, whom she had met at the Lake Mohonk Indian Conference when he was chairman of the United States Civil Service Commission, appointed her postmaster of Muskogee.

With the Democratic victory in the presidential election of 1912, Miss Robertson lost her position as postmaster and subsequently moved to her Sawokla home outside of Muskogee where she raised dairy cattle and vegetables. In order to utilize the products from the farm, she opened a cafeteria in Muskogee.

With the entry of the United States into World War I, many military camps were established in Oklahoma and Texas. As troop trains passed through Muskogee, she met every one to provide the soldier boys with good things to eat, or if they could stay for a few hours, she took them to the cafeteria. This was the beginning of the work of the Red Cross in Muskogee which became a model for other centers of troop concentrations.

At the age of 66, Miss Robertson undertook the greatest venture of her life, election to Congress. To be elected she had to overcome a large Democratic majority and defeat one of the best known and most capable politicians of the state, incumbent W. W. Hastings. Aided by the nationwide swing to the Republican party and yet handicapped by her own anti-suffragist views, she won the election by a vote of 24,188 to 23,979. Afterward she was besieged with urgent invitations to speak at various gatherings over the country. With great zest she accepted as many as possible during the two years she was in Congress, a period she spoke of as being "Alice in Wonderland."

From the outset of her term in office she was associated with the most reactionary elements of the Republican party who impressed her with their wealth and manners. As a member of Congress she followed the party line as laid down by President Harding. Her opposition to the Bonus Bill brought a storm of protest from the ex-soldiers and her fight against the Sheppard-Towner, or "Maternity Bill" as it was commonly called, aroused strong condemnation from many women's groups. In the election of 1922 she was beaten decisively by W. W. Hastings.

How does one account for the reversal of her political fortunes? She was an amateur in politics, but she was not lacking in character and intelligence. She was no stranger to the people of her district, having spent a lifetime among them. Still she was out of sympathy with the ones who had elected her. The reasons can be determined, to a great extent, by an examination of her life and the forces which cast her into a mold that she could not change even when her best interests demanded it.

Soon after her return to Muskogee, she was appointed to the post of Welfare Director of the Veteran's Hospital. President Harding made it a personal appointment without the necessity of a civil service examination. Early in 1924, she was released as an employee of the hospital and had to rely on the generosity of many friends for subsistence. Among them were her cousin Georgia Robertson, her sister Ann Augusta Moore, and Mrs. Elizabeth Lowell Putnam of Boston, Massachusetts. Her income, which was never sufficient, was gained by short employment with the Oklahoma Historical Society, writing for newspapers, and the selling of some precious heirlooms. During the last year of her life, Lew Wentz of Ponca City, Oklahoma, sent her a check each month for \$100.00.

Miss Robertson lived in almost constant pain the last two years of her life because of rheumatism in her knees. Her health grew steadily worse and in early 1931 she was admitted to the Veterans Hospital at Muskogee where it was discovered that she had a cancerous growth of the jaw. She died July 1, 1931, and was buried in Green Hill Cemetery just outside of Muskogee.

She was a person of particular interest because of her sympathy for unfortunate fellow beings, especially Indians who had so few advantages of civilization. She was greatly moved by all forms of patriotism and had a warm feeling for all men in the armed services. Her religious training of simple faith and trust made her susceptible to the designs of those who were less scrupulous and their manners and means impressed her.

Notoriety and recognition came to Alice Robertson because of her political activities, but when they are compared with the more lasting

contributions of her life, they seemed trivial and empty. Her life, dedicated to the welfare of others, as Indian educator, missionary, benefactor, and business woman, make her memory worth preserving. So great was her contribution to the field of education in early Oklahoma that buildings on the campuses of Oklahoma and Tulsa Universities were named after her. In addition, public school buildings at Tulsa and Muskogee were given her name. In recognition of her work as an educator, the University of Tulsa and Elmira College bestowed on her honorary LL.D. and M. A. Degrees.

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The Alice M. Robertson Collection, University of Tulsa Library, Tulsa, Oklahoma. This collection contains over 2,500 personal and business letters of the Robertson and Worcester families from 1815 to 1932, which are arranged chronologically. There are Indian curios, records, and official papers. A great many photographs of the Robertson and Worcester families are found among the articles. Unpublished manuscripts, diaries, telegrams, and bulletins form a part of the material. A large number of clippings of nationally known magazines, newspapers, and bulletins written about Miss Robertson are found in the collection. Most of the newspaper extracts are from Muskogee, Tulsa, and Oklahoma City papers.

The Oklahoma Historical Collection, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. This collection is found in the archive division of the Oklahoma Historical Society, under the supervision of Mrs. Rella Looney. It contains many personal and business letters of the Robertson and Worcester families, as well as photographs, diaries, and personal records. A large collection of newspaper and magazine clippings are also found among the papers. Some official government documents, such as parts of the Congressional Record which refer to the work of Alice Robertson, are a part of this collection.

The O. R. Hisel Collection, Muskogee, Oklahoma. This material is the private collection of Mrs. O. R. Hisel, 408 South Fifteenth Street, Muskogee, Oklahoma. It includes a large number of newspaper clippings from Muskogee newspapers which give accounts of early Indian history. Many personal letters and photographs of the Robertson and Worcester families are found in this collection. These sources center around the history of the Presbyterian Church of Muskogee; therefore, they deal particularly with the religious life of the Robertson and Worcester families.

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