

## NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

TWO LAST LETTERS ON THE  
LIFE OF LIEUTENANT WILLIAM E. BURNET

Two last letters that closed the life story of Lieutenant William E. Burnet have been brought to light just recently by Dr. Raymond Estep, and sent to *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, in which Dr. Estep's series on "Lieutenant William E. Burnet Letters: Removal of the Texas Indians and the Founding of Fort Cobb" has appeared (Vols. XXXVIII, Nos. 3 and 4 and XXXIX, No. 1). This series of Burnet letters appear as a reprint published by the Oklahoma Historical Society, in which these two, last letters added to the original series, close the life story of the young Army officer who met death on the field of battle in the Civil War.\*

## THE LAST LETTERS

W. Richardson, Esq.:<sup>127</sup> I beg you will give a place to the following letter from Major General Dabney Herndon Maury, received a few days since.<sup>128</sup> It is to me a precious memorial of the most costly sacrifice that could be exacted of me in this life, the last member of a once dear family. It is precious, because I know it has the grace of sincerity and of truth.

David G. Burnet  
Richmond (Texas), May 8, 1865.

Mobile, Alabama, April 3rd, 1865

My Dear Sir: With deep regret and grief I announce the death of your son William E. Burnet, my Chief of Artillery and my most Christian friend. He was shot through the head and

\* The footnote numbers in the above text of the two letters follow in consecutive order with those found both in the text published serially in *The Chronicles* and in the reprint.

<sup>127</sup> Willard Richardson, editor, *Gambeson Weekly News*. The two letters that follow appeared on page 4 of that paper in the issue of May 17, 1865. They were located by Mrs. Bonney Wetzel of the University of Alabama Library, Tuscaloosa, and were copied by J. D. Matlock, Austin, from the University of Texas Library collections.

<sup>128</sup> Maj. Gen., CSA, Nov. 1862. Born in Virginia in 1822, Maury earned an A. B. degree at the Univ. of Virginia in 1842. Graduated from USMA in 1846, he saw service in the Mexican War, 1846-47. From 1847 to 1860 he was Assistant Professor of History, Geography, and Ethics at USMA and from 1850 to 1862 was Assistant Instructor of Infantry Tactics at USMA. Resigning his commission as captain in May 1861, he was named captain of Cavalry, CSA, in 1861. In July 1863 Maury was named Commander of the Gulf with headquarters at Mobile.—*Dictionary of American Biography*, Vol. XII, pp. 427-428; Cullum, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 284-285.

instantly killed, while on a reconnoissance in Spanish Fort, in the 31st ultimo. We buried him with honors of war yesterday evening. It will be consolatory to you to know that a very general and profound interest was aroused by this great misfortune, and that the honors paid to his remains and to his memory were unusually marked and appropriate. My wife, who esteemed him very highly, and many other good ladies here, took into their charge the sad duties relating to his funeral.

He was buried in the Protestant Cemetery<sup>119</sup> on Ann Street, in the lot of Mrs. Twelers,<sup>120</sup> in whose house he has been quartered ever since he came here. The Rev. Mr. Murray, of the Episcopal Church, conducted the services.

I had gone with Col. William E. Burnet to the Fort, and said to him on parting: "I will return for you in the steamer—remain here as long as you find necessary". I have never received such a shock as when, an hour afterwards, a despatch announced to me his death.

I relied upon him more than anyone. He was a rare compound of excellent qualities. He was the best educated soldier I have ever seen. His information was varied—he was accurate in his reflections and deductions. His courage was of the highest order. He was kind to all—had no antipathies nor prejudices against persons; and was so modest and unobtrusive that only persons of rare discrimination, or who knew him intimately, appreciated him adequately. His death is a loss to his country and comes at a time when I feel it profoundly. I cannot replace him. His loss is irreparable. When Gen. Beauregard was here, he expressed the highest compliments on him and some important inventions that he had applied to the service of heavy artillery.

Accept my sincere and deep sympathy in the bereavement which has fallen upon you, and command my services in any manner whatever.

My little army has now been besieged for ten days by an over-powering force of the enemy—therefore we have held our own well—but the issue none can tell save Him to whose decree we must all bow.

Sincerely and respectfully your friend,

Dabney Herndon Maury

Hon. Judge Burnet.

<sup>119</sup>Now the Magnolia Cemetery.—Arthur O. Owens, Mobile, to the author, July 3, 1861.

<sup>120</sup>"Twelves".—*Ibid*

### THE MUSEUM OF THE GREAT PLAINS IN OKLAHOMA

The establishment of the Nation's newest museum is here reviewed for *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, by R. Haliburton, Jr., chairman of the Department of Social Science, Cameron State College, at Lawton:

#### *The Nation's Newest Museum*

On April 9, 1961, nearly fifteen hundred people witnessed the official dedication of the new Museum of the Great Plains at Lawton, Oklahoma. Those who toured the spacious three hundred thousand dollar physical plant, situated in Lawton's Elmer Thomas Park, were apprised that the institution is formally dedicated to portray the broad expanse of human history of the Great Plains region, included are the states or parts thereof of Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, and Wyoming. Since no other institution serves in this capacity, the museum has a unique mission:<sup>1</sup>

1. To conduct, preserve, interpret and exhibit items of the cultural history of man in Great Plains of North America.
2. To conduct research into the history of the Great Plains in order to increase man's knowledge of man, and to make such information available to all.
3. To gather information that will better enable present and future inhabitants of the Great Plains to understand the vivid contrast of the land, climate and people of the region.
4. To enrich the future, to promote the appreciation of beauty, and to serve as the voice of history in the Great Plains.

This magnificent air conditioned structure of "rustic modern" architecture contains an exhibit area of sixteen thousand square feet, and is situated on a five-acre tract in Lawton's new "Cultural Center." In retrospect, the genesis of the museum of the Great Plains was the epitome of austerity and entwined with the formation of the Comanche County Historical Society which was founded in 1952,<sup>2</sup> formally organized in 1954, and incorporated in 1955. During January of 1955, the society appointed a "museum and archives committee" charged with responsibility to formulate plans for the erection of a suitable building to house their numerous acquisitions.<sup>3</sup> Later, when the society accepted the invitation of Maj. Gen. Thomas E. de Shazo, the commanding officer of Fort Sill, to maintain a museum within the Fort's "old stone

<sup>1</sup> Official statement of the mission of the Museum of the Great Plains by the Board of Directors.

<sup>2</sup> "Prologue," *Chronicles of Comanche County*, Vol. I, No. I, (Spring, 1955), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> "Minutes of the First Meeting Under Articles of Incorporation," *Chronicles of Comanche County*, Vol. I, No. I, (Spring, 1955), p. 48.

corral,"<sup>4</sup> it marked the fruition of a diligent search for an appropriate "home" for the institution.

Nearly two years later during January of 1958, representatives of the McMahon Foundation met with the Comanche County Historical Society's Board of Directors and announced that Mrs. Louise D. McMahon, a widely-known Lawton philanthropist, desired to grant two hundred thousand dollars for the construction of an archives and museum building. This generous offer was accepted immediately.<sup>5</sup> During February of 1959 a contract was awarded to the W. C. Shelton Construction Company of Lawton, Oklahoma for construction of the facility, ground was officially broken in March of the same year, and the building was completed in May of 1960. The McMahon Foundation has subsequently provided an additional one hundred and thirty thousand dollars for construction, furnishings, and operation expenses during the first year.<sup>6</sup>

The Museum of the Great Plains, with a full-time professional staff of six, headed by director Marvin E. Tong, Jr., has already begun its responsibilities. The institution has been designated as a depository for the United States Geological Survey for the Great Plains region, and it has been the site of several major regional conferences.<sup>7</sup> Sixteen modular exhibits are on display depicting the diverse characteristics of the Great Plains region. The exhibits include: "The Great Plains in Transition, A Climate to Reckon With, Prehistoric Indians of the Plains, Indian Horse, Warpath, The Fur Trade, Advancing the Frontier, The Great Buffalo Hunt, Wheels Across the Plains The Rampaging Herd, Territorial Openings, Lawton Opening, Lawmen of the Plains, The Frontier Doctor, The Civil War Centennial," and a series of free standing exhibits depicting various aspects of the lives of past plainsmen.

—R. Haliburton, Jr.

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<sup>4</sup> John Clabes, *Daily Oklahoman*, April 9, 1961.

<sup>5</sup> "Minutes of the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Comanche County Historical Society *Chronicles of Comanche County*, Vol. IV, No. 2, (August, 1958), p. 125.

<sup>6</sup> John Clabes, *Daily Oklahoman*, April 9, 1961.

<sup>7</sup> Marvin E. Tong, Jr., Director, Museum of the Great Plains, interview with author on April 28, 1961.

## HONORING CAROLYN THOMAS FOREMAN

A tribute to the great writing team of the Southwest, the late Grant Foreman and his wife, Carolyn Thomas Foreman appeared in the *Tulsa World*, July 16, 1961, as a feature story, "Books were their tools in trade," by Mrs. J. O. Misch, and has been reprinted in the Congressional Record. The following letter from Congressman Carl Albert calls attention to this reprint, and pays further warm tribute to Mrs. Foreman who richly deserves this signal honor:

Carl Albert, Okla.,  
Democratic Whip

Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Office of the Democratic Whip  
Washington, D. C.  
July 21, 1961

Mrs. Grant Foreman  
1419 W. Okmulgee  
Muskogee, Oklahoma

Dear Mrs. Foreman:

I was very pleased to read in Sunday's *Tulsa World*, Mrs. J. O. Misch's article on your life and work. I have taken the liberty of having this article inserted in the Congressional Record. It is a matter of sufficient interest to have nationwide distribution through this mean.

I not only read the article but after reading it read a short biography of your father and found it also very interesting.

The long life which you and Mr. Foreman spent together has always seemed to me about as nearly ideal as any couple could hope to experience in this world. You both certainly lived the full and devoted life. Everybody who knew you got a vicarious happiness from your wonderful experience.

I have told you many times and I scarcely need to repeat that as one who loves Oklahoma, I feel a devotion beyond my power to express to you and your late husband. I am most grateful that you have drawn for us a picture of our background that never would have been or could have been drawn had it not been for your life and work. I am very happy that it was my pleasure in my lifetime to know you both and to count you among my friends.

Sincerely,  
Carl Albert, M.C.