

**SARAH
RECTOR
1902-1967**



**OIL
MILLIONAIRE
AT
ELEVEN**

A hundred years ago, the Dawes Allotment Act divided Creek lands, giving four-year-old Sarah 160 acres of infertile land, not suitable for farming. At the time, the land appraised at \$556.50. The \$30 annual property tax was such a burden that her father Joseph tried to sell the land, but the state forbade the sale of lands belonging to minors. This proved to be the family's greatest blessing.

Rector was born in 1902 near Twine, Indian Territory. In March 1906, Sarah was assigned land near Glenpool, sixty miles away. In February 1911, her father Joseph leased the land to Standard Oil Company. The law at the time required black citizens with significant money or property be assigned white guardians. In 1913, Thomas Jefferson Porter, a family benefactor for many years, was appointed Sarah's guardian. Soon after, wildcatter B. B. Jones produced a "gusher" that yielded 2,500 barrels daily, providing Sarah with \$300 per day!

In January 1914, the Kansas City Star published the headline "Millions to Negro Girl". A scathing editorial in the Chicago Defender claimed the Rector family was living in poverty and Porter was getting rich. As news of Sarah's wealth spread worldwide, national leader W. E. B. DuBois became concerned about her money, oil revenues, and living conditions.

Muskogee County Judge Leahy addressed DuBois' concerns. T. J. Porter was indeed the white guardian. Porter's guardian fees totaled \$900 to date, much less than the two percent allowed by law. Over the past eight months, Sarah had received \$54,490 in oil revenues. The Rector family lived in a new five-room cottage, with the judge approving every construction expense. Sarah and her sister were set to attend a prestigious school in Tuskegee in the fall.

When Sarah turned eighteen, she relocated to Kansas City and bought a luxurious home. But her troubles from Oklahoma soon followed. John Collins, a white man from Muskogee, petitioned for guardianship, but Judge Guinotte denied the request. The 20-year-old "has handled the more than \$750,000 worth of property she owns with such astuteness," he determined. The judge ruled that she was competent and therefore required no guardian.

In 1922, she married Kenneth Campbell. They became "local royalty", driving fancy cars and hosting Joe Louis, Duke Ellington, and Count Basie in their mansion. The Depression had diminished her wealth so when the marriage dissolved in 1930, she moved to a more modest residence, eventually selling the mansion to the Kerford Funeral Home. In 1934, she married William Crawford and settled into a quieter life.

Sarah Rector died at age 65 in 1967. Her wake was held at the Kerford Funeral Home, her former home. She was buried with her parents in Taft's Black Jack Cemetery. The story of Sarah Rector is more than a simple tale of rags to riches. It is a story that illustrates the complex issues of race, citizenship, identity, the role of wealth and how one girl defied all odds and lived life her way.