

**ELLA DELL
LAMB
CLASSEN
1869-1955**



**CONTINUING
HER
FATHER'S
DREAM**

As a young girl in Champaign, Illinois, Ella Lamb remembered hearing her father many times read and talk about the prospective opening of Oklahoma Territory, and was determined to make his home in this land of opportunity when that time should come. Ella would make this dream a reality.

Ella Dell Lamb was born in Danville, Illinois in 1869. With his ultimate plan in mind, Ella's father moved the family to Wichita. Unfortunately, he died there in 1887, and the family plans were changed somewhat but Ella was able to establish her residence in Oklahoma Territory on the day before Thanksgiving 1890, thus carrying out the long-cherished plans of her father. She went to work for her uncle at the Oklahoma City Land Office.

Anton Classen, born in Pekin, Illinois in 1861, graduated from the University of Michigan Law School in 1887. On April 22, 1889, he made the Land Run, briefly living in Guthrie. The town had too many lawyers so he sought opportunity in nearby Edmond, where he founded the Edmond Sun newspaper and donated forty acres of land for the first territorial college, now University of Central Oklahoma.

In 1897, he was appointed by President McKinley as receiver of the U. S. Land Office, in the nation's fastest growing city. As he had done in Edmond, Classen invested his time and resources in a number of ventures, organizing numerous housing additions, including Highland Parked Addition (now Heritage Hills). He beautified the city by planting many trees not only on his own property but on public property at his own expense.

He was instrumental in getting city streets paved and promoted the city as the location for Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders annual reunion in 1900. Classen and John Shartel organized a mass-transit system that connected their housing additions to downtown Oklahoma City. His many real estate interests were transferred to the Classen Company in 1902. Classen promoted the establishment of a meat-packing firm in the stockyards with Henry Overholser and enticed the Nelson Morris Company of Chicago to move.

Ella met Anton while working at the Land Office, and they were married in January 1903 in a quiet family ceremony. The couple "expressed their faith in Oklahoma City's future" by investing in land and developing new living areas for the growing populace. They bought the architect's plans for Epworth University (later Oklahoma City University) and donated \$50,000 toward the school's development. Ella was instrumental in the establishment of the Rosehill Cemetery in 1917.

Classen Junior High opened in 1919, with land being developed by the Classen Company. It became a high school in 1925 after multiple renovations to the two-story building. Anton Classen, the visionary developer of what the city could become, died in December 1922 at age 61. Upon his death, Ella became the president of their real estate business. In 1926, she gave an endowment to Classen High School to finance annual scholarships for the boy and girl graduating with the highest honors. She also donated some of Oklahoma City's most valuable property to create a city park.

Ella Classen was inducted in the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1941. She sponsored the 1942 building of the USS Oklahoma City at Cramp Shipbuilding Company in Philadelphia, that was launched in February 1944. Northwest Classen High School was built in 1955 – and named after Anton – to accommodate the growing population of northwest Oklahoma City. Ella Lamb Classen died in November 1955 at age 86 in Denver. She always said that she had thoroughbred pioneer blood in her veins, and was an Oklahoman in spirit long before she came here to reside – keeping the promise to her father.