

**ELLEN
HOWARD BLYTHE
MILLER
1862-1944**



**BIRD
WOMAN
OF
OKLAHOMA**

Ellen Miller was a woman dedicated to civic activities from her interest in developing Bartlesville's Johnstone Park to her work in the conservation and study of bird life. Her title of "Bird Woman of Oklahoma" was well earned.

Ellen Howard Blythe was born in January 1862 in Enterprise, Missouri. She was educated at the Cherokee Female Seminary and taught school for two years before marrying William Wallace Miller in Vinita, where he was in the hardware business. Ellen helped survey, fence and landscape the local cemetery. She was Indian Territory's representative to the 1893 World Women's Christian Temperance Union convention in Chicago. After selling the business, they moved to a ranch on the Caney River in Washington County. Although they later moved to town, William operated the ranch until his death in March 1909.

In 1895 George Keeler and William Johnston operated a trading post of the south bank of Caney River, where they noticed oil seeping from the ground. With Frank Overlees, they obtained a lease from the Cherokee Nation to drill a well and hired the Cudahy Oil Company of Chicago. Drilling began in January 1897, the same month Bartlesville was incorporated with 200 people.

On April 15, 1897, Nellie Johnstone No. 1 struck oil. It was capped until 1899 when a railway was built to provide the means to ship the oil to outside markets. Its success brought Frank Phillips, J. Paul Getty, Bill Skelly, E. W. Marland and Harry Sinclair to the area. Nellie, a descendant of Delaware Chief Charles Journeycake, was allotted the land in 1903 and sold it to the city in 1917 for a park named for her father. A unique feature is the bridge on the north side of the park embellished with swastikas, a sacred Native American symbol before negatively abused by Germany in the 1930s. After producing more than 100,000 barrels, the well was plugged in 1948 and abandoned in 1963. The rig was reconstructed on its original site and listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1972.

In 1920, Miller suggested the bridge being built across Caney River be designated Memorial Bridge and include a memorial to World War I servicemen. The county commissioners supported it but had no money for the pylons and bronze tablets where the names would be inscribed. Miller got Frank Phillips to donate the money if she secured the names of the servicemen. There are 1,550 names on the bronze tablets with a Victory Row of trees along the highway on the approach to Memorial Bridge.

Miller served seven years in the State Federation of Women's Clubs, as chairman of the Committee on Birds, Flowers and Wildlife. For two years she studied ornithology at the University of Oklahoma. Her 1926 study in the conservation of bird, flower and wildlife in Oklahoma on her 200-acre farm resulted in the state fish and game commission making it the nucleus of the Ellen Howard Miller Game Preserve No. 18, and extended the preserve to include 2,000 acres.

She lectured all across America and advised the owner of the Chateau de Saint Hillaire near Paris how to build a bird sanctuary. Miller stressed was that no lawn was too small, or grounds too large, for a bird sanctuary. Her farm had a natural rock beach, an ideal spot for a bird sanctuary, where about 48 different species of birds were feeding at one time. She maintained that most species should be protected – a dove could destroy weeds and one quail might eat approximately 1,000 harmful insects in a single day.

Ellen Howard Miller died in November 1944 at age 82. Johnstone Park is still a remembrance of her community service and her title of Bird Woman of Oklahoma honors her dedication to wildlife and feathered folk.