

**EDITH  
CHERRY  
JOHNSON**  
1879-1961



**DAILY  
OKLAHOMAN  
SOCIETY  
EDITOR**

In a fifty-year newspaper career, “Miss Edith” became an influential conservative voice advocating for the traditional roles for men and women. Edith Johnson feared suffrage would permanently draw women outside of the home. In her view, the most important work for women was to preserve and protect her home and family.

Edith Cherry Johnson was born in November 1879 in Lexington, Ohio, the first of five daughters. At age eleven, she wrote and distributed copies of “The Young Ladies’ Journal”. At fourteen, she yearned to marry and have at least six children but was horrified when her dear cousin said her life “will be cast in a different direction”.

She attended Miss Phelps’s English and Classical School for Young Ladies and later Ohio State University until her mother’s death compelled her to return home to care for her younger sisters. Her father moved his daughters to Oklahoma City in 1903, which had a population of about 10,000, and as many saloons as churches. When her father suffered financial losses, Edith supplemented their income while nursing him in his final days.

While Edith sought employment, she heard of the impending marriage of Mrs. Hertha Hess Jobson, society editor of The Daily Oklahoman. She was urged by friends, who had created a new paper The Oklahoma News, to apply for the job. “I could cook, clean, wash, iron, sew, mend, nurse a sick child, and run a household,” she said, but she hadn’t written since she left school in Ohio. Editor Roy E. Stafford agreed to try her out.

Her writing career was launched when Stafford assigned her to write a humorous feature story about a YWCA biscuit-baking contest on December 15, 1908. As time went on, Miss Edith was pressed into service as art, music, literary, and drama critic, and she was assigned to interview all visiting celebrities. Theodore Roosevelt was touring the country in his 1912 Bull Moose campaign, but he had refused to grant interviews. Miss Edith persuaded Skirvin Hotel manager Fred Scheruble to lock her in the presidential suite. When Teddy entered the suite and saw her, he stalked into the bedroom and slammed the door. Unruffled, she sat quietly, even though his secretary repeated that he never gave interviews. Eventually, Roosevelt relented and Edith got her interview.

In 1915, Edith was asked to create a women’s page for the Sunday paper. By this time readers had begun to seek her advice. In 1918 she was asked to write a daily column for the editorial page. Her column with her name and picture remained on the Daily Oklahoman’s editorial page for fifty years until her retirement in 1958.

Although Edith advocated for traditional gender roles, she understood that some women needed to work to survive – as she did. Unmarried and childless, Edith devoted her life to her career. Her Sunday column was published by Republic Syndicate across the country. She also found time to write two romantic novels and publish two advice books: “Illusions and Disillusions: Touching Upon Topics in Every Day Life” (1920) and “To Women of the Business World” (1923), in which she predicted “Woman is in business and she is here to stay”.

There would likely be no Goodwill Industries of Central Oklahoma without Miss Edith. She was commissioned by publisher E. K. Gaylord to report on Goodwill’s mission in neighboring states. She returned with stories about Goodwill’s impact. In 1936, this led her to become Goodwill’s official founder.

Her awards and recognition were numerous. She was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1935. She was awarded an honorary Doctor of Literature from Oklahoma City University. She was honored as Oklahoma City’s Woman of the Year in 1948. She was awarded a certificate of achievement by the Women’s National Press Club in Washington DC presented by President Truman in 1950. That same year, she received the first honorary life membership ever given to a woman by Oklahoma City’s Junior Chamber of Commerce.

In the summer of 1958, Miss Edith’s column failed to appear because she had fallen ill. Four hundred fans and friends from forty organizations gathered at the Skirvin Hotel on a freezing February night in 1959 to pay tribute to Miss Edith. She died in March 1961 at age 81, but her uplifting spirit lives on in the words she wrote. She was inducted into the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame posthumously in 1997.