

THE JESSE C. WAILS FAMILY

*Information from Minnie Wails Myers and Ruth Reed Scott*

Thomas L. Wails, a minister of the United Brethern Church, with his wife and small children, lived in Council Bluff, Iowa, when Jesse C. Wails was born, February 25, 1863. At this time a minister and his family were often forced to move; the T. L. Wails had made several moves and they would make several more before they settled in a permanent home. From Iowa they went to Missouri, and by 1889, they were living in Besumont, Kansas. Although the Wails children were grown up and married, they moved each time Thomas L. Wails did and settled near their father.

When the proclamation for the opening of the unassigned lands in the Indian Territory was issued by the President, the Thomas L. Wails family decided they would make "the run" and get a claim. They made very careful plans on the best way to do this. The Wails boys had made trips across the western part of what is now Oklahoma, going from Kansas to Texas on business. They had a fair idea of the area where they wished to get a claim. They also wanted to be sure of being able to provide for their families the first winter.

Early in March, 1889, the first group of the Wails started south to the Chickasaw Nation in Indian Territory. There they rented a few acres from the Indians or from a squaw man. On this land they planted corn to provide food for the winter.

The first four families that moved consisted of Thomas Wails, the oldest son in the family, his wife, Katharina, and daughter, Anne; George Wails and his wife, Nanney; Aunt Jane Wails and her husband, Len Slattery; Aunt Lizzie Wails and her husband, Joe Williams. Each of these men made "the run," April 22, 1889. They left their homes in the Chickasaw Nations, forded the South

Canadian River and staked claims in the Ten Mile Flat west of Norman.

It was not until August, 1889, that the younger brother, Jesse C. Wails, and his family moved to the territory. Jesse C. had gotten his education in Iowa, where he had taken a two year course in college. He had worked on farms, been a salesman in a store, and held other jobs. In 1885, Jesse C. was in the fruit tree and flower business near Eldorado, Kansas. In slack times of business and in debt he hired out to help on farms. He was hired as a farm helper by Doctor VanZant. Here he met Mariah Anne, the young daughter of Dr. VanZant and soon a romance flourished.

Mariah Anne VanZant was born July 14, 1864, at Mt. Vernon, Indiana, in Posey County. Her father's home was near the Wabash River. She often recalled that in her childhood, she could hear the ice breakers as they came down the river during the rugged winters. When the area of Kansas was being settled by white people, Dr. VanZant had moved his family to Kansas.

On April 1, 1885, Jesse C. Wails and Mariah Anne, accompanied by Jesse's sister, Mrs. Joe Williams, and Dr. VanZant, went to Eldorado, Kansas, and were married by a Judge Sharp. The wedding was not without an almost tragic incident -- especially to the bridegroom. The day before the wedding he had approached his partner of the fruit tree business for his half-share of the \$4,000 they had in the business. The partner pleaded illness, promising to pay the following day. But next day he had disappeared and left the bridegroom without his share of the money. It was August before the culprit was found. Although he did not recover his money, there was a silver lining. Wails learned from the records that he did not owe some bills that had been claimed against him.

Although the other Wails brothers filed claims in the April 22, 1889,

Run, the Jesse Wails family didn't arrive until August, 1889. Annie was expecting a baby in July so Jesse thought it best to stay in Leon, Kansas, where they had lived for some time, until after the baby's arrival. There were already two children, Tom and Jay, and the new baby was named Otto.

Arriving in August, 1889, Jesse bought a farm in the Ten Mile Flat from A.M. Cummings for \$700. Mr. Cummings was a Sooner who had already put in a garden. The Wails first home was a tent set up under a large elm tree. In the fall, work was started on a dugout house. This consisted of digging down about three feet, then making a frame work of poles and a roof covered with brush, willows and sod. A well was dug close to the house, a fairly easy job since the water was near the surface, since the South Canadian River was so close.

The next year they built a cottonwood lumber house of two rooms and used the dugout for an extra room. The green cottonwood lumber warped from the rains and the house leaked.

In 1891, Annie's dream came true when a four room house with a porch across the front was constructed near the old house. This is where Minnie Florence Wails was born in October, the first girl in the Wails family, and the first Wails child born in Oklahoma Territory.

Entering into the community life, Mr. and Mrs. Jesse C. Wails helped establish Liberty Church and Liberty School, and assisted the minister, Dr. Kelley. He preached on Sunday and practiced his profession as a physician during the week doctoring chills and fever.

In the course of time, the Wails children became ill. Minnie Florence had chills and fever, so Jesse notified Dr. Kelley. When he arrived he produced a large blue bottle of quinine, took out a certain quantity on a

piece of paper, then separated this into small portions with his pocket knife. Then he wrapped each portion in a piece of tissue with instructions it was to be taken at certain intervals. He promised Minnie that if she would take her medicine like a good girl, he would give her the blue bottle when it was empty. Minnie felt sure she had taken a bushel of it, but somehow the bottle never did become empty.

Along with Minnie, Charles and Theodore were born on the homestead.

Then in the fall of 1896, the Wails family moved into Norman where Jesse built a 14 room house on the site of the present Baptist Church parking lot. Jesse entered the real estate and insurance business in Norman and the family again helped in organizing a New Church of Christ.

In 1898, Jesse was elected County Representative to the Oklahoma Territory Legislature at Guthrie and he helped in getting the University of Oklahoma located in Norman.

After her husband's death, November 25, 1913, Mrs. Wails kept roomers and boarders in her large home, and it became known as the "Wails House."

In 1930, Mrs. Wails went to Washington State to make her home with her daughter, Mrs. Minnie Myers. Mrs. Myers had taught school in Burley, Idaho. Here she was married and also became a writer. She reared her husband's three children.

After his death, September 17, 1952, Minnie and her mother returned to Norman, the latter completely blind now from the effects of glaucoma. They were active in church work and D. A. R. They also belonged to the Washington Family Descendants Association. Mrs. Wails died May 29, 1960 or 61.

A list of the children born to Jesse and Mariah Wails:

1. Thomas, born 1887 - died 1901
2. Jesse W., born in 1888 - died 1959

3. James Otto, born July 16, 1889 - died in 1969.  
Practicing physician in Okmulgee for years, later in Oklahoma  
State Health Department.

4. Minnie, born October 25, 1891.

5. Charles Edgar, born September 2, 1893 - died in 1969.  
Charles married Blanche Smith, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs.  
Frank Smith, Cleveland County pioneers.

6. Theodore, born November 25, 1895 - died February 14, 1965.  
For many years an eye, ear, nose specialist in Oklahoma City.

7. Baby girl born November 18, 1898, died in infancy.

8. Elmer, born July 19, 1900 - died December 15, 1956.  
Coached football in early years and later worked as geologist in  
Louisiana.

9. Winnie Ruth, born August 21, 1902 - died September 1915.

Of the seven children who grew to maturity, five of them graduated  
from the University of Oklahoma. Otto, Charles, Theodore and Elmer played  
football for Norman High School and for the University of Oklahoma.