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Lacy Lowry

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# A STORY OF HARDSHIP AND TRIUMPH

By Lacy Lowry

*EDITOR'S NOTE: As part of "Oklahoma Heritage Week" in 1986, students in the Gifted and Talented Program at Clinton Middle School wrote essays on local early-day men and women to enter in a statewide competition sponsored by the Oklahoma Heritage Center in Oklahoma City.*

*This first essay, by Lacy Lowry, was placed in the top twenty across the state among seventh through ninth graders.*

A new community, city, county, or state can be built only if many positive elements are present. Many natural resources make up its environment which nourishes new growth. A new community can grow without the purest water, the richest soil, or the most temperate climate.

There is one natural resource, however, that must be present to build any new community--the common strength of the community's men and women. Among the pioneers whose strength built Custer County and the city of Clinton was G. C. Wheeler. G. C. was born on January 1, 1885, in Hyde County, Missouri. He and his family homesteaded in a wagon to Washita County. His family consisted of his father, B. B. Wheeler, his mother Miriam, three daughters, and seven sons.

G. C. grew up in Washita County. He went to Southwestern College in Weatherford and went to work at Fay State Bank in Fay in 1908. He then bought and became president of the Oklahoma National Bank in Clinton in 1919. That year, the bank's capital surplus and undivided profits totaled approximately \$32,000. In 1958, they totaled \$400,000.

G. C. Wheeler made successful loans to people such as W. Erle White, new president of the multimillion dollar business, White's, Inc. He encouraged businessmen and farmers to keep trying during the depression of the 1930's. Many of those men would have given up but instead turned out to be very successful.

In addition to his devotion to banking, he was deeply involved with community affairs. He was president of the Clinton Chamber of Commerce and of the Rotary Club. He was county chairman of the Democratic Central Committee and a member of the board of deacons and the board of elders at the Presbyterian Church. He was also Southwestern District Chairman for the U. S. War Bond organization for 15 years. He was not only an organizer of the Oklahoma Public Expenditure Council but also served on the executive committee of that organization.

During his 56 years of banking, he survived many hardships as well as good times. Of the three banks in Clinton that closed on March 6, 1933, during the "bank holiday," only one reopened under the original ownership. That was Wheeler's Oklahoma National Bank. One of the banks reopened under new management and new charter, and the other one never reopened at all. G. C. Wheeler's strong management and keen judgment had seen his bank through the darkest days of banking.

Wheeler had other adversities in his life as well. Although he had four healthy children, one boy and three girls, he was preceded in death by his only son, a victim of a car accident. He also lost his first wife to illness, leaving him with three small children to rear, the youngest of whom was two years old. He lost his second wife to illness, too, leaving him alone with a fourth child to rear. In 1959, he sustained a massive stroke, which left him com-

pletely paralyzed on the left side. Nevertheless, through rehabilitation and stubborn determination, he continued to take an active part in banking and his community until his death in August of 1964.

Grover Cleveland Wheeler was a giant-sized man, six feet four inches tall, with a giant-sized love of banking, his family, his land, his church, and his community. His giant-sized drive and determination helped him develop banking and his county.

With men like G. C. Wheeler, a town may overcome many problems. Using this natural resource, cities can be built on the plains where the weather is hot, the mountains where it's cold, or the deserts where it's dry. Strong pioneering men and women can conquer all. ■

*LACY LOWRY, thirteen-year-old daughter of Cheryl and G. W. Lowry, Jr., plays piano and basketball; was a football cheerleader and a Science Fair participant.*



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