

Private Rites Will Be Held Thursday For W. W. Bridgers

Private funeral services for W. W. Bridgers, state representative since 1936, and resident of El Paso since 1881, will be held Thursday at 2 p. m. at the Kaster and Maxon Funeral Home.

Rev. B. M. G. Williams will officiate. The family requests that no flowers be sent. Mr. Bridgers had requested that his funeral services be private.

His funeral services be private. Burial will be in Concordia Cemetery.

Mr. Bridgers was 76. He died at 6:15 p. m. yesterday in Southwestern General Hospital.

He was taken to the hospital on Sept. 19 for an abdominal operation. He was released from the hospital Oct. 8, but was returned there Oct. 13 after suffering a relapse.

Surviving are his widow, Mrs. Mary V. Bridgers of El Paso; a daughter, Mrs. Pendleton Howard of Los Angeles; and a brother, L. T. Bridgers of El Paso.

Was Born in 1869

W. W. (Billy) Bridgers was born in Montgomery County, Texas, Nov. 6, 1869. His father had migrated to Texas from Tennessee in 1855.

When he was three years old his family moved to Austin, where he attended school. As a boy of 11 he joined a Texas & Pacific railroad work crew as water carrier and came to El Paso with the crew in 1881, arriving here on his 12th birthday.

At that time the Texas & Pacific and Southern Pacific were racing to get the right of way into El Paso. The S. P. won. Mr. Bridgers recalled that he saw Indians on the way to El Paso, but he was not molested. The biggest danger en route, he used to say, was the lack of water. Young Bridgers rode a pinto pony into El Paso, while the work crews rode in grading wagons.

In Stagecoach Era

When Mr. Bridgers arrived in the dusty little adobe village that was El Paso, the Overland route stagecoach station was still in existence at Overland and El Paso streets. Thus he saw El Paso pass from its stagecoach days, saw the arrival of the railroads and the subsequent rapid growth, and lived to see the town become an aviation center.

When he first arrived in El Paso, however, the village had little to commend it. The only lights visible at night were the lights from kerosene lamps gleaming from saloons.

In the early days, Mr. Bridgers would recall, San Francisco street was the business district; there were no customs officers at the interna-

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W. W. Bridgers

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tional bridges, a livery stable stood where the St. Regis Hotel is now, and San Jacinto Plaza was a manure pile.

Two-thirds of the population carried guns, gambling flourished, and the town often was run by toughs, he said. Mr. Bridgers personally witnessed some of the pioneer brawls which ended in sudden death.

As a youth Mr. Bridgers held many jobs in El Paso. He was a Western Union messenger, learned the printing trade and became foreman for the old Herald, was a grocery boy, railroad shop worker, plumber, reporter, columnist, lawyer, peace justice, county attorney, district attorney, and state representative.

Population Was 1200

In 1881, El Paso's population was only 1200. Mr. Bridgers' mother built the fourth house north of the railroad tracks at 602 North Stanton street in 1882. He saw the first board sidewalks laid, grocery stores established in tents, and the boomtown building that followed the coming of the railroads.

Mr. Bridgers played the cornet in the old McGinty Club band, a locally famous social club of the Gay Nineties.

During the Spanish-American War Mr. Bridgers published the Monday Morning Graphic, an El Paso weekly. For a time he published a paper called the Blade at Bowie, Tex. In 1898 he was financial secretary of the old Knights of Labor.

Elected in 1898

In 1898 Mr. Bridgers was elected to his first office—justice of the peace. He began to study law. He was elected to the Legislature in 1900, 1902 and 1904, when the El Paso district extended to Eagle Pass. In 1906 he was elected county attorney for four years, and in 1912 was elected district attorney. He did not return to the State Legislature until 1936.

As a pioneer who grew up with El Paso, Mr. Bridgers knew the history of the city at first hand. In his spare moments he wrote part of a history of El Paso. He also wrote another book, partly autobiographical, called "I Was a Water Boy on the T. & P."

Published Magazine

Despite his law practice and office holding he never got over his fondness for writing. He wrote fiction and articles, and columns for the Times and the old World-News. In 1914 he and W. S. McGrath published a weekly magazine, the Saturday Spectator.

"I never had much ambition," Mr. Bridgers used to say. "When one publisher turned down something I wrote that ended it for me. I suppose I've been too easy-going. There have been times when I didn't have 15 cents ahead. When our daughter wrote us she wanted us to come to her wedding, I told her we'd go, though I didn't have a dollar at the time. But before it was time to go I won a law suit that I'd almost forgotten, and made \$400."

A Lot of Friends

Mr. Bridgers liked to be a legislator. "I made a lot of friends," he would say. "It was just up my alley."

In his early legislative days he supported such measures as he deemed favorable to his West Texas constituency. One of these was a bill protecting quail, which were considered enemies of the boll weevil.

Mr. Bridgers generally supported progressive social and labor legislation. In 1939 he voted against a proposed sales tax constitutional amendment, sponsored by Governor W. Lee O'Daniel, and defied O'Daniel to carry out a "purge" at the next election.

Was Elk's Ealer

Mr. Bridgers supported old-age pension proposals, favored a state clean politics act similar to the Hatch Act, and favored redistricting proposals.

In Austin during the 1945 session of the 49th Legislature Mr.

Bridgers became seriously ill, but even so missed only one or two days of work. "Toward the end of the session I improved so much that I got to thinking about running for re-election," he said.

Mr. Bridgers served as exalted ruler of the El Paso Elks, and later was president of the Texas Elks Assn.

Today, scores of friends of Mr. Bridgers expressed regret at his passing. The family home is at 215 Wyoming street.

A Friend Passes

S. J. Isaacks, state representative, said:

"Having served with him in the Texas House of Representatives through five terms over a period of 10 years, two of which were more than 40 years ago, I probably knew Billy Bridgers better than any other man. El Paso County or any other County in Texas never had a representative who was more loyal to the people's interest nor more conscientious to the discharge of his duties than he. The State and County have lost one of their most valued public servants.

"Personally, I have lost a friend and a colleague who was never found wanting in any emergency and whose judgment and counsel were invaluable. I shall miss him more than anyone other than his own family."