



Mrs. Leon C. Phillips, the former Myrtle Ellenberger, '12. (Photograph by courtesy of Clarence Ireland Studio.)

## First Lady

by

Hazel Fowler, '27

**T**HE University of Oklahoma's first co-ed to preside in the governor's mansion is Mrs. Leon C. Phillips, member of the class of 1912.

It's been hardly three months since the former student became Oklahoma's first lady, but she has fitted into her new role with the same ease with which she tackled new tasks on the campus.

Her primary concern is to "make it a home for the governor and our family." Then, at intervals, she wants to open the mansion to various organizations. "I do want to co-operate with their activities in every way reasonably possible," she explains.

"But the governor and any man in public life, deserves a share of privacy which I hope to make possible for him. Our children need privacy too. I am eager that their lives continue to be as normal as those of others, nor do I wish any particular attention paid to them."

As she talked about details of the mansion management, strains of "The Glow Worm" drifted from the music room. Lois Ann, 13-year-old daughter, was getting in her regular afternoon practice.

"Keep right on," smiled Mrs. Phillips as her young daughter appeared in the doorway. "Close the door if you need to."

Lois Ann is enrolled in Webster Junior High School, and the son, Bob, will join the family this spring after graduating from Okemah High School.

There will be parties in the mansion, but mostly small ones. The first lady most enjoys entertaining that way.

She was active in parent-teacher association work in Okemah and taught a Sunday school class for some time, but there won't be much speech making for the governor's wife if she has her choice.

She feels like "one from the family is enough in the public gaze," and besides there won't be time for much of that when Mrs. Phillips attends to the many duties that fall to the lot of a governor's wife.

Turning to undergraduate days in Norman, Mrs. Phillips recalled that accommodations were "very inadequate and we attended classes in frame annexes that really were shacks.

"But we had fun in those days.... even though we had just three brick buildings and only a thousand students enrolled. I think our good times were largely due to the fact that we became better acquainted."

While attending the University, where she majored in German and minored in Latin, Mrs. Phillips won recognition for outstanding ability.

As the young daughter of Mrs. Annie Ellenberger, (she was only 20 when she graduated) Mrs. Phillips was active in Y. W. C. A. work and served as a member of the council and later as president.

She also found time to take part in literary society activities and was a member of Owl and Triangle, honorary society for women which later became Mortar Board.

There was no chapter of Phi Beta Kappa in her school days, but when a chapter was installed Mrs. Phillips was selected as one of eight from the 1912 class for initiation into the scholastic order.

She had her favorite teachers, too, just like the co-ed of 1939.

"Dr. House (Dr. Roy Temple House, head of the department of modern languages) was a favorite of mine. There aren't many others left now. Just Dean Monnet (Dean Julian C. Monnet, head of the Law School) and Dr. Hadsell (professor of English).

After graduating from the University, Mrs. Phillips was principal of Snyder High School one year and then returned to Norman to be with her mother who was a widow.

It was shortly after her return that she met Mr. Phillips, a law student at the University who had taken undergraduate work at Epworth University and worked a while before returning to complete his legal studies.

He was graduated from the Law School in 1916, and shortly afterwards they were married and moved to Okemah.

But Mrs. Phillips' residence in Oklahoma dates beyond her student days at the University. She was born November 22, 1891, on a farm in Iowa, where her father, a minister, had retired because of a throat ailment. Later the family moved to Ames, where the older boys attended Iowa State College.

When she was nine years old, Mrs. Phillips came to Oklahoma with her parents, and for several years lived on a farm two miles from Norman. She attended New Hope rural school and graduated from Norman High School in 1908.

She counts her two children as her "principal hobby."

"It has been necessary for Mr. Phillips to spend a great deal of time away from home, and for that reason my time has largely centered on the home," she said.

The first lady doesn't collect anything, although she is interested in friends' collections. She likes to grow flowers for cutting to use in the house, and is fond of practically every phase of home-making except sewing. "I can't say I like to do that," she said with a smile.

Despite her home duties, however, she has found time to take part in several activities. She is a member of the P. E. O. Sisterhood and was president of the Junior High School Parent-Teacher Association at Okemah last year. She is a member of the Methodist Church, active in missionary society work, and taught a class of adult young people until recently.