

## J. HOWARD LANGLEY, OKLAHOMA ICON

Most residents of Langley, Oklahoma and those that are familiar with the history of the Grand River Dam Authority are aware that the town was named for J. Howard Langley, a Pryor attorney. However, fewer could relate that the town was named for him because he was instrumental in promoting the GRDA dams and was its first chairman of the Board. And, very probably, none of the citizens would know that Langley's DNA included traces of two famous ancestors, George Washington, our first president and George Gist, otherwise known as Sequoyah, noted Cherokee linguist.

James Howard Langley was born near Southwest City in McDonald County, Missouri on July 8, 1867, the son of William Grant Langley and Jane Gist, whose ancestry can be traced to Nathaniel Gist, father of Sequoyah. In turn, Nathaniel Gist's roots can be traced to the Reverend Lawrence Washington, George's grandfather. But, of course, ancestry or blood lines in and of themselves, don't begin to guarantee success in life and J. Howard was no exception to that rule. Growing into young manhood, he attended school, receiving advanced education and, for the next three years, taught school. In 1891, at the age of 24, J. Howard moved to Adair, Indian Territory and became involved in the mercantile business. In 1896 he began taking correspondence courses from a law school in Michigan and upon completing coursework and being admitted to the bar, he opened an office in Pryor.

His new career in Pryor was an instant success. In 1901, the Pryor Creek Clipper summarized his achievements by noting, "Langley is honest, able and conscientious of all those who know him. He has developed considerable talent as a lawyer, and that, coupled with his unswerving honest and strict business integrity, insures him the esteem and patronage of the good people of this section." Evidently the Clipper wasn't alone in their evaluation of Langley, when Oklahoma became a state he was chosen as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention at Guthrie, the designated capital at that time. Years later, in 1930, he was appointed as a member of the State Supreme Court, however he resigned in 1931, citing health issues that soon enough proved fatal.

Returning to Pryor and full time to his law practice, Langley became aware of both a growing concern regarding devastating flooding along the Grand River as well as a renewed effort to harness it to produce electricity. There had been talk of building a dam or series of dams on the river for forty years and there were several attempts made to seek funding. However, more recently a federally funded project on the Tennessee River, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), had succeeded in doing what had also been projected for years regarding the Grand River in Oklahoma.

Langley became caught up in this dream and with the TVA as a model, he went to work along with a number of powerful politicians and businessmen in northeastern Oklahoma. Early on, writing to his fellow activists about the impact of electrical power in the region, Langley noted "all I want is to be able to buy my cotton socks manufactured in Oklahoma instead of Massachusetts."

As this new venture gained traction J. Howard Langley's natural ability at leadership emerged. W.R. Holway, Consulting Engineer for GRDA, wrote in his *History of the Grand*

***River Dam Authority*, published in 1968 that, “Langley was probably the only man on the Board who realized the ‘bigness’ of the project. He also reflected far-sightedness and was a leader in planning and policy of a group, close knit in their pursuit of a goal, which they believed necessary for the welfare of their part of the state.” And as if fulfilling Holway’s assessment of him, J. Howard Langley, one of three appointments to the GRDA Board made by the State Attorney General, was elected Chairman of the nine member board on May 5, 1935. Unfortunately, shortly after his selection, that health ailment that had plagued him earlier and caused the resignation from the State Supreme Court, proved fatal. He died the following October.**

**But J. Howard Langley was not forgotten. Before Langley became a bon – a – fide town, there had been an engineer’s camp on the bluff overlooking the dam. As the dam was being constructed, Cliff Bogle, who owned most of the 1.2 square miles that presently defines the town, divided the land into lots and developed the town site. Remembering J. Howard as a driving force that promoted construction of the dam, Bogle honored him by naming the town Langley.**

**The life of J. Howard Langley certainly is a model of success and achievement for others. Missouri farm boy, Indian Territory businessman and lawyer, Constitutional delegate, a leader in the development of northeastern Oklahoma’s premier economic engine .....undoubtedly the presence of DNA didn’t have an affect on his motivation and success, but perhaps reminders of the accomplishments of such illustrious ancestors did.**

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