

Margaret Jane Swank



Margaret Jane Swank died peacefully at home on her ranch April 14, 2014 at the age of 93. A graveside service will be held at 2:30 pm Saturday at Sunset Memorial Gardens. Margaret often told her family members that she did not want anything listed in the newspaper about her accomplishments in life. She was like that. She lived her life on the run, doing good for all of her family and friends, not expecting anything from them in return. Several of her nieces and nephews and young family friends lived on her farm with her while they went to school. She was always there for her family and friends when needed.

Margaret was a true leader in the many positions she held throughout her life from her service as an officer in the United States Army to her ownership of the Oklahoma Abstract and Title Company and to her life as a rancher. Margaret was born Nov. 16, 1920, in Guthrie. She was the fourth child of Judge A.R. Swank and Margaret Jane Chilton Swank. Her paternal grandfather, David Swank, was an 89er. He homesteaded in Logan County in the Land Run of 1891. The 89er Day activities were an important part of Margaret's early life and she often rode her palomino stallion in the 89er parade.

After her early life in Guthrie, she grew up in Stillwater with her brothers and sisters. When World War II started, Margaret was quick to join the armed forces. She was one of the first women to volunteer for the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps which soon became an official part of the United States Army as the Women's Army Corps. She served in a number of capacities ending her service as a captain in Washington, D.C. as a member of the National Security Agency. After her military service, she returned to Stillwater where she became the owner of the Oklahoma Abstract and Title Company and worked as an abstractor for over 40 years.

Margaret was also a rancher. With the help of her sister, Olive, she ran a cow/calf operation, raising registered Polled Herefords and Angus. She stayed active in the cattle business and managed her farm until her 90th year. Throughout her many decades in the cattle business, Margaret mentored countless young people who helped with the farm work and became cherished friends and members of her extended family.

During her days at college at what was then Oklahoma A&M College, Margaret was an active member of Kappa Alpha Theta sorority and served as chapter president. After her return to Stillwater, she served on the Theta Advisory Board for many years. Margaret was also an athlete. She participated in a bowling league in Stillwater for many years and played golf regularly at the Stillwater Municipal Golf Course. One of her best friends was Doyne Iba, the wife of Henry Iba. For many years, the two of them attended every OSU football and basketball game together.

Margaret served for 31 years as a district director of the Payne County Conservation District and was chairperson for 12 of those years. She played an important and valuable role in developing local conservation policy during her tenure with the Central Oklahoma Development District and the Payne County Flood Plain Management Board. She worked with the youth in the FFA and 4-H and hired many high school and university students, teaching them the values of farming and ranching. In 2007 she received the Centennial Award for Lifetime Achievement in Agriculture. Margaret was passionate steward of the prairie land she loved.

Margaret was preceded in death by her siblings, Olive L. Swank, Mary Ann Swank Kobos (husband Fred Kobos), Arthur Roberts Swank Jr. (wife Maxine Finch), Elmer Chilton Swank (wife Dorothy Nell Penner); and by her niece Mary Jane Swank. Margaret is survived by her brother, David Swank, and his wife Ann Heffner Swank of Norman, as well as her nieces and nephews: Sandra Elizabeth Swank and Nan Swank of Stillwater, Charles Arthur Swank of Ellinwood, Kan., Suzanne Labarthe of Houston, Texas, Richard Chilton Labarthe of Oklahoma City, David Swank II of Stillwater, Ami Swank of Norman, and Sarah Kobos and Steven Kobos of Tulsa. Margaret is also survived by her many grand- and great-grand nieces and nephews as well as one of her best friends, Shane Summers.

Margaret's desire was to live on her ranch until her death and she was able to do that through the help of a number of wonderful caregivers and her family members. Her caregivers became her friends and took wonderful care of her to the end. Margaret gave specific instructions as to her funeral, and her funeral will be as she wished. It will be a simple graveside service with military honors to be held at Sunset Memorial Gardens south of Stillwater at 2:30 p.m. Saturday. Rev. Jim McCool of Stillwater will be officiating. Margaret said to keep her funeral simple and short. After she retired from abstracting, Margaret said that she did not want to go any place that she could not wear her ranch clothes. So for her family and friends who wish to attend Margaret's services, do as she would want you to do, dress as you would have when you were with her. She would have appreciated that.

In lieu of flowers, a contribution to the local FFA or 4-H chapters or to the Judith Karmen Hospice in Stillwater would be appreciated. The Judith Karmen Hospice provided care and kindness to Margaret during her final illness. Margaret was an inspiration to those who knew her, especially to generations of women who saw her as a role model. Margaret was a feminist before there was even a word for it. There is no way to adequately honor Margaret in the space of this page. She was smart, funny, independent, adventurous, warm and generous. Her farm was a "home away from home" for generations of family, friends and young people. She was a friend to all who met her. Margaret will live on in the memories of so many that she touched throughout her long and vibrant life. She leaves a tremendous void in our lives, and we will miss her wisdom, wit and charm.

Margaret Jane Swank belonged to the Hanner-Sharp American Legion Post 129 Stillwater, Oklahoma.