

Robert Harold O'Kane and Mildred Blanche Bridger



Robert Harold O'Kane was born in Wood River May 10, 1910. His parents were David D. O'Kane and Agnes Whalen O'Kane. The Whalens were among the first residents of Wood River and Harold's grandfather, Thomas Whalen laid many of the first side-walks. The Whalen family operated a hotel and boarding house for a time at the corner of 9th and West St. David Ollkane was instrumental in bringing telephone service to Wood River, and Agnes's sister, Elizabeth Whalen Hoyer was one of the first telephone operators. Harold's sisters and brothers are: Leo D. O'Kane, Mary O'Kane Leu, Gretchen O'Kane Williams, Charlotte O'Kane Carl and Monica O'Kane, who died in infancy. He is survived by his sister, Mary, son, Fr. Jim O'Kane of Ord, daughter, Kay (Mrs. Robert) Stearns of Neligh, eleven grandsons and eight granddaughters. Also surviving are nephews Gary, Leo and Philip

Carl and Leo O'Kane's daughters, Mary Carroll and Monica (Nickie) Schumann. Leo O'Kane's son, Thomas Whalen O'Kane is deceased. Harold's wife, Mildred died Jan. 18, 1987.

Harold received his education in the Wood River schools and at Creighton University. He was a long-time postmaster in Wood River, retiring in 1972. He served in the Navy during World War II as a postmaster aboard the U.S.S. Crenshaw in the Pacific. He was an active member of St. Mary's church, and was an enthusiastic coin collector.

Reprinted in the January 5, 1989 Wood River Sunbeam under "Items of Former Years" 75 years ago was this item: Tuesday of this week, Masters Leo and Harold O'Kane and King Hawks, small boys of 5 or 6 years or less, hooked their sleds on behind a farmer's wagon and "hung on" until they got several miles southwest of town, down on the Brown section where jack-rabbits and coyotes do abound. The little fellows were espied by Mrs. Perry Williams and taken to her home just as it was getting dark and she telephoned town informing Mr. O'Kane that she had the boys in charge. It is needless to say that Dave got a livery rig and went to the Williams home and soon had them all back in town.

Harold vividly recalled this event, stating treat their mission was to hunt bears.

Mildred Blanche Bridger was born in Wood River December 4, 1903. Her parents were J. E. Bridger and Mary Elizabeth (Brunner) Bridger. The Brunners were early Wood River residents. J. E. "Jack" Bridger was a native of Mayfield, Sussex, England whose family settled first in Fremont, Nebraska. Jack Bridger managed the T.B. Hord grain elevator in Wood River for many years, and after his retirement, actively farmed for a few years.

Mildred had four sisters - Marjorie (Mrs. Arthur M.) Hauke; Leah, (Mrs. Frank) Rugg; Alice Bridger who passed away at age 16, and Thelma Bridger who died in infancy. Mildred was the last survivor of her immediate family. She had one niece, Joan Rugg (Mrs. Edgar) Wagner, of Cawker City, Kansas and one nephew, Steven Rugg of Beloit, Kansas.

Mildred was a graduate of the Wood River School in 1921 and taught in rural schools for a time after high school. She was a pianist for the Presbyterian Church in Wood River and also played piano for silent movies. She later worked in a Breda, Iowa bank and at a Savings and Loan in Omaha.

She was married to Harold O'Kane February 13, 1934, and they lived all their married life in Wood River, the last 40 years at the same residence. Her children are James D. (Father Jim) O'Kane, pastor of St. James church in Kearney and Kay E. (Mrs. Robert) Stearns of Neligh, Nebr. Her grandchildren are Michael Stearns of Lafayette, La., Sharon Stearns Anson of Alamogordo, New Mexico; Rosemary Stearns Bolling of Norfolk, Nebraska; Daniel T. Stearns of Eagle River, Alaska; David R. Stearns of Columbus, Nebraska, Mark C. Stearns of Lawrence, Kansas; and Matthew C. Stearns of Eglin Air Force Base, Florida.

There are seven great-grandsons and six great-granddaughters.

Mildred enjoyed bridge games and was a crossword puzzle expert. She could laugh at herself and had a sense of humor. She will be remembered by her friends and family for her courage and positive outlook.