

By the Kansas State Historical Society

Famous Kansan



Charles Curtis

1860-1936

Charles Curtis learned to speak three languages when he was growing up. He also learned to ride a pony bareback by the time he was 3 years old. His mother died when he was young. His father had gone to fight in the Civil War so Curtis lived with his grandmother. She was part French and part Kansa. Curtis also learned about the Kansa way of life from his grandmother.

Charles Curtis did many things in his life. For a time he was a jockey riding in horse races. He became a lawyer when he was 21. Then he decided to become a politician. He was elected first as county attorney. Later he served in the U.S. House of Representatives and in the U.S. Senate.

Charles Curtis was popular with the people of Kansas. They called him "Our Charley." Some thought he would become president. But, when Herbert Hoover decided to run for president he selected Charles Curtis as his running mate. They won the election and Curtis became the first Native American vice president. He was also the first vice president to have his own official automobile!



Charles Curtis helped American Indians get fair treatment from the government. Curtis supported a law that made it possible for Oklahoma to become a state. That law also helped American Indians to own land in Oklahoma and to hold rights to the oil, gas, and coal that were on their land. He helped Indian artists be recognized for their work. Curtis decorated his office with paintings by these artists.

Charles Curtis was especially concerned with the rights of women and of orphaned Indian children. He spoke on behalf of many people. His strength was in helping people to better understand each other. That made Charles Curtis a powerful leader.

