

Three Rivers Historian

Spring 2015

A Journal of Three Rivers Museum

Vol. 17, No. 2

Women Led the Way in Pioneering Success

The latest census showed a large number of management-level positions in agriculture are held by women. This comes as no surprise in rural areas such as Oklahoma. Women have long been involved in making farms and ranches a success. They were leaders in all pioneer efforts.

In many Native American cultures, women were the farmers while the men were the hunters. The Indian women planted and harvested the crops and prepared and preserved the food for the family. Many a rural household in days gone by ran on the milk, butter and egg money that women earned from their work on the farm.

A huge vegetable garden was common to every farm and usually the women of the household were responsible for it. Canning and drying fruits and vegetables were chores undertaken by women to ensure that the family had a healthy diet through the winter months.

When Muskogee began to host the International Indian Fair in 1874, the goal of the event was to encourage agricultural development and excellence in Indian Territory. The fair gave farm women of all the represented races an opportunity to demonstrate their skills in agricultural enterprises. And the women were often the most talked about aspect of the fair.

In the early fairs, equestrian events were a favorite among the many Indian tribes that were in attendance. Much attention was garnered by the ladies who participated in the riding events. In those days, women generally rode sidesaddle and one horse breeder from near Briartown in her velvet

riding habit was all the talk of fair goers. Her name was Belle Starr. It is said that Belle enjoyed entering the riding competitions each year at the fair – except for the year she spent in prison for horse stealing.

However, at the 1875 fair, the woman taking first prize in the competition was not Belle, but rather a young Cheyenne woman named Minnehaha. At age 16, she was married to a Cheyenne leader and was described as a “prairie queen” by the *Indian Journal*.

Minnehaha’s prize for winning the competition was a sidesaddle. Unfortunately, she didn’t know how to ride upon it. The women of the Plains Tribes all rode astride. She was allowed to trade the sidesaddle for one she could use.

Each year the International Indian Fair included a “Women’s Department” that judged baked goods, canned vegetables, jellies, jams and needlework just as fairs continue to do today. But in the 1881 fair, it was a woman who took the blue ribbon in a competition outside the women’s department.

A Cherokee widow named Mrs. Rogers won first place for having the best bale of cotton at the fair. Women have never been strangers to farming and the hard work that goes with it. Their success at the fair is proof of that.

— *Jonita Mullins*

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Spring 2015 V. 17, No. 2
220 Elgin ♦ Muskogee, OK 74401
918.686.6624 ♦ 3riversmuseum.com

Published quarterly by Three Rivers Museum
With assistance from the City of Muskogee
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Where the Gem Sparkles Yet: The History of Belle Starr's Grave

There are few gravesites in American Western history that have provided as much fascination and exploration over the years as the grave of Belle Starr. Historians, adventurers, treasure hunters, and curiosity seekers have been drawn to the isolated grave near present day Porum, Oklahoma since the untimely death of the infamous "Bandit Queen."



Until recently the passage of time was taking its toll on the grave and surrounding property. Decay and damage was alarming and access was extremely difficult due to the heavy growth of underbrush and the destruction of many trails to the site. Belle Starr's grave was becoming endangered.

In the last two years however, the gravesite and the Younger's Bend property have been restored by a new owner. Today, the gravesite of one of Oklahoma's most famous women is the most accessible it has been in nearly a century. This restoration has shed new light on the grave and provides an opportunity to look at the unique history of Belle Starr's final resting place.

BURIAL AT YOUNGER'S BEND

Shortly after the mysterious murder of Belle Starr on February 3, 1889, her body was covered with quilts and taken to her home in a wagon by two brothers from the area named Jim and Wiley Cates. The Cates, originally from Tennessee, had moved to the area south of the Canadian River during the 1880s when their father Richard Cates had settled there to engage in farming and stock raising.

Belle's body was prepared for burial by several women from the area and was anointed with turpentine and oil of cinnamon. The body was dressed in Belle's "finest black riding habit" and then placed in a pine coffin made by the Cate's other brother John. Belle's arms were crossed for burial and her revolver was placed in her hands.

Belle's burial took place on February 6, 1889. Stories over the years say that Belle told her family she wanted to be buried on the Younger's Bend property, but no documentation explains why she chose to be buried by her cabin and not in a neighboring cemetery.

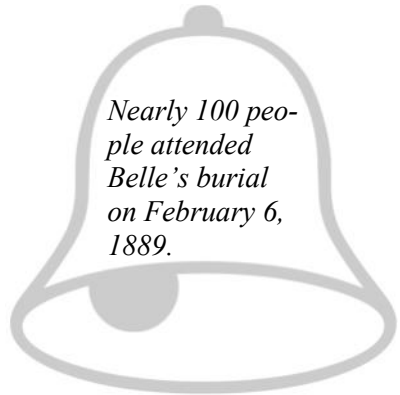
Men from the area dug the grave within a few feet of her cabin on a location looking out across the Canadian River Valley. Some stories even suggest that Edgar Watson, who was later put on trial for her death was among the men who dug her grave.

Nearly 100 people attended the burial. The attendees were a diverse group including the Starr family, Choctaws and Cherokees, sharecroppers and other friends of Belle and her family. Among the group were several suspects for her murder.

The coffin was opened and the group paid their final respects by passing it. No official religious ceremony was held at the time of burial, but the Cherokee citizens dropped cornbread into the coffin which was an established burial custom. Eventually the casket was lowered into the grave and the dirt was shoveled over the casket to cover it.

There are some conflicting stories of what happened soon after the burial had taken place. Some indicate that within moments young Jim July Starr (Belle's common-law husband) pointed a Winchester at Edgar Watson and shouted, "You murdered my wife!" July, in his testimony at the trial in Fort Smith, stated that he arrested Watson shortly after her murder.

John Cates, who was attending the funeral, was pulled between Watson and July and used as a shield to protect Watson from a shot by July. Watson was taken into custody and then to Fort Smith for trial. This event likely would have taken place only a few feet from where the grave is located.



A MONUMENT FOR BELLE

Just over a year after her burial a story appeared in the *Dallas News* on March 20, 1890 stating that the grave had been looted and robbed to obtain “her jewelry...and a very fine pistol buried with her.” Afterwards Belle’s daughter Pearl had the grave “walled up with two feet of stone” with the wall being filled with “broken rock, and two large well fitted slabs of limestone tilted over the vault in a V shape, like the roof of a house.”

At some point a stonecutter was hired to carve a stone to be placed on Belle’s grave. In his book *Outlaws and Peace Officers of Indian Territory* author C.W. “Dub” West recounted an oral history interview with Jess Shinn whose family had lived in the area for a century.

Shinn told West that in the 1890s a man who made grave markers stayed at the home of his grandmother, Mrs. Rowland. Pearl was said to have contacted the man at the Rowland home and soon after made arrangements for him to procure, engrave and erect a marker for her mother’s grave.

Shinn stated that the man borrowed a team and wagon from his grandmother and obtained a stone, which he took back to the Rowland home. The man then engraved the stone per the instructions of Pearl and then hauled the marker to the grave site and erected it. According to the story, the man was paid \$25 for his work.

The stonecutter also carved “J. Daly” at the bottom of the marker. Several newspaper stories and books attributed the initials to Joseph Dailey, sometimes spelled Daley. This likely first occurred in a story written by newspaperman Frederick Barde near the ten year anniversary of Belle’s murder, but this identification does not coincide with the markings of the stone showing a name of Daly.

Research shows that F. Daly & Company, a monument business out of Fort Smith, Arkansas was advertising in the Indian Territory during this time period stating that they had “served the Indian Territory since 1872.” A brief story also appeared in the June 30, 1889 issue of the *Muskogee Phoenix* concerning the death of a John Daly in Muskogee at age 38. The story mentioned Daly as a member of the Daly family of Fort Smith and said he had a “good reputation.”

A member of this Daly family would be a good candidate as the stonecutter of Belle’s grave marker. Further research may be able to determine this and accurately identify the person responsible for the creation of the monument.

The monument included a short and colorful poem at the bottom that has become synonymous with Belle's history.

*"Shed not for her the bitter tear.
Nor give the heart to vain regret.
Tis but the casket that lies here,
The gem that filled it sparkles yet."*

This poem over the years has been attributed to Pearl by Belle's biographers, but the stonecutter may have prepared it himself. Research reveals that the same poem was used on a tombstone in Massachusetts in the 1850s. Similar monuments can be found in nearby cemeteries including the Hoyt Cemetery, Whitefield Cemetery, Coleman Cemetery and in the Starr Cemetery near Briartown where Belle's husband Sam Starr is buried. Many of these tombstones have some type of poem at the bottom.

The Coleman Cemetery near Porum, Oklahoma, contains the stone of Becky Wilkerson with one of the Daly marks. Wilkerson, who had moved to the area with her second husband, died in October of 1888 a few months prior to Belle's death. The initials of J. Daly are found on her stone and also the same poem word for word. It can be assumed that the poem was commonly used by the stonecutter on monuments.

The true uniqueness of the original stone however were the symbols carved at the top which included a center image of Belle's favorite mare Venus with BS initials on the shoulder. Also included on the stone to the left was a hand bell and to the right a star symbolizing the name of Belle Starr. To the bottom was a clasped hand holding flowers. These unique markings on the stone when combined with the roof shaped sandstone vault made the grave a unique and attractive monument.

THE VISITS BEGIN

The fully completed grave was in place when one of the earliest newspaper mentions of it appeared in the *McAlester Capital* newspaper on May 23, 1895. The article detailed a trip made to the gravesite by newspaperman W.W. Wallis, the *McAlester Capital* editor, and Mr. and Mrs. Cates of Hoyt.

The trip to the grave was described as follows:

The grave has been well taken care of and is in the front yard of her residence, not more than 25 feet from the door, which is now

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AEW Robertson Received Honorary Degree

On June 18, 1892, the University of Wooster in Ohio honored Ann Eliza Worchester Robertson with an Honorary Doctor of Philosophy degree. This award is believed to be a first for an Oklahoman.

Ann Eliza Worchester was born in Brainerd, Tennessee, on November 7, 1826. She was the



daughter of Rev. Samuel Austin Worchester and Ermina Nash. At the time of her birth, her parents were missionaries to the Cherokees in Tennessee. Her father was a seventh generation minister. Later, her parents were missionaries in Georgia before immigrating to Indian Territory with the Cherokees on the "Trail of Tears."

In the new Cherokee Nation, her father's talents produced numerous publications in the Cherokee, Creek and Choctaw languages. Especially notable was his bringing the first printing press to the Cherokee Nation. He worked his adult life on translating a Bible and hymnal in Cherokee.

Ann Eliza was Samuel's first-born child. Her gift of hearing and intellectual curiosity predestined her to follow in her parents' steps. She married in 1850 Rev. William Schenk Robertson of the Tullahassee Mission in the Creek Nation. To this union were born four daughters and three sons. Their second child was Mary Alice, the second woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.

Ann Eliza's days were full at the mission. Caring for the children, hers and the students, included teaching and nurturing. During this period, she came to see the need for a Bible written in the Creek language for both uses.

She began, despite her heavy responsibilities, to spend a few spare moments with the translation of the Bible into Creek. As the years passed, Creeks who were once students under her care began contributing words and phrases. Classically trained fellow missionaries also helped in translating the Greek words into the Creek language.

Ann Eliza's knowledge of the almost exclusively oral Creek language became widely recognized. When the US Bureau of Ethnology sent representatives into the Creek Nation to preserve the Creek heritage and culture, they sought out Ann Eliza.

By the 1880s her memory was exactly the source needed in their work. After the chroniclers' return to Washington, DC, their long letters filled with questions came to the mission.

The passing years and growing infirmaries slowed Ann Eliza down, but dampened her enthusiasm none at all. At last, she completed the translation of the New Testament.

Following the closing of the Tullahassee Mission, Ann Eliza moved into Muskogee and lived with her daughter now called "Miss Alice" Robertson. During her last years, Ann Eliza was "Professor Emeritus" at the Henry Kendall College.

Ann Eliza passed away in the early morning hours of November 19, 1905, in her daughter's home. She was 79 years old. The woman who "gave literature to the Creeks" joined her husband and three children in death. Her funeral in the First Presbyterian Church attracted a packed crowd of sympathizers, many who grew to adulthood under her care and attention.

Her obituary in the *Muskogee Democrat* newspaper summed up Ann Eliza this way. "Mrs. Robertson's life was devoted to her fellow man; rich and poor, black, white or red have known her as friend...." Her gift of literature to the Creek Nation earned her love and respect.

— Wally Waits

Become a Museum Member

Your membership helps us provide a safe environment to care for, preserve and protect the artifacts that represent our area history. It also helps us provide support for the museum operations, exhibits and special events. In addition, your membership provides support for the Thomas-Foreman Historic Home, owned by the museum since 2004.

Three Rivers Museum of Muskogee, Oklahoma, Inc. is a 501c3 non-profit corporation. Your financial contributions are gratefully accepted.

Basic benefits for all memberships include:

- Membership Card
- Free regular admission to the museum and the Thomas-Foreman Home
- Special discounts to museum events
- Ten percent discount in the museum gift shop
- One-year subscription to The Historian
- Invitation to special exhibit previews

Membership Levels

- Individual \$25
- Family \$35
- Builder \$100
- Sponsor \$250
- Sustainer \$500



To complete a membership form and make payment visit the museum website at 3riversmuseum.com/membership

occupied by W. H. Potter and his father. It (the grave) is walled up with stone and the wall filled with broken stone.

The roof of the vault is of two stones set like the roof of a house. A marble slab adorns the front of the tomb that has a horse chiseled on it said to be modeled from a favorite horse that she had buried when he died; on a level with the feet and at the head is a hand bell, at back above is a star, the design supposed to be the name.

Below are the words: Belle Starr, Born, Carthage, M., Feb. 5, 1848, Died Feb. 3, 1889. "Mr. and Mrs. Cates were present at her funeral. Mr. Cates made the coffin. The members of our party were here during the days of the gang and knew them.

The grave soon became a popular destination to visit and this was fueled by the fictional dime novels on Belle's life that were produced during the 1890s. The *Muskogee Times Democrat* included a small mention of the grave during this time in a story and called the site "one of the show places of Porum."

In September of 1910, Sturm's *Oklahoma Magazine* included an article entitled "The Story of Belle Starr" from newspaperman and early Oklahoma writer Frederick Barde. The seven page article included several photos of the cabin and spring at Younger's Bend and included photos of the grave. The magazine story included a description of the grave as being "chipped by relic hunters, until its edges are rounded." A hollyhock with blood red flowers was at one corner.

Barde died in 1916 and in 1917 the Oklahoma State Legislature authorized \$5,000 to purchase his writings and photographs which included those images. The Younger's Bend photographs are now in possession of the Oklahoma Historical Society and have been used as illustrations in several books on Belle Starr.

These photographs may have been taken earlier than the 1910 story, possibly as early as 1899 at the 10 year anniversary of Belle's death.

A very detailed article appeared in the *Washington Post* (and likely several other national papers) on May 16, 1915 which stated the gravesite was in a dense timber along the South Canadian River. It made mention of the cabin of cedar logs which was still standing nearby.

The story further mentioned Mabel Jones of Tamaha, Oklahoma who while being interviewed for the story was shown a photograph of Belle's grave. Tears "filled her eyes" as she pointed to a sumac near the grave and said "I planted that sumac. Belle told me once that

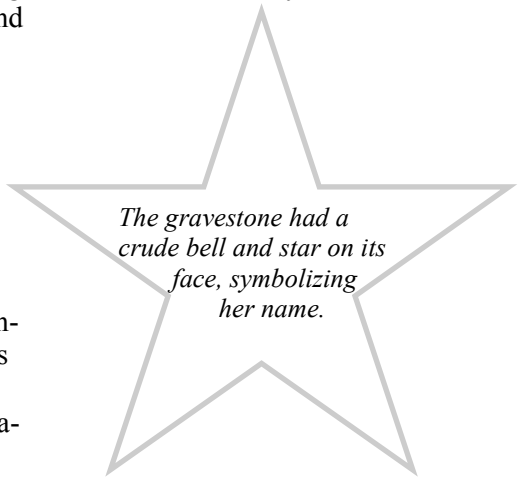
she wanted me to plant a sumac at her grave when she was put underground. She was twining red sumac leaves when she asked me to make a promise saying: ‘Joe’ – she always called me Joe – ‘I always loved the red leaves of the sumac.’” Today there are several tall and thin sumac bushes around the gravesite.

The *McIntosh County Democrat* mentioned the gravesite and Younger’s Bend property in a March 16, 1922 story. At the time, the site was only accessible by trail with “plentiful rough shrubbery surrounding it.” The gravestone had a “crude bell and star cut on its face” to identify the resting place of “the woman bandit.” The article further stated that the site was “protecting the biggest moonshine still operation in Eastern Oklahoma.”

A few years later, the *Miami News Record* on October 21, 1928 reported on a trip to the grave. It mentioned hiring a guide in Porum to take parties to the gravesite. It stated that the roads to the grave location at that time were “very rough but traversable by automobile with a stout heart, good tires and a tank filled with gasoline.”

The nearby cabin still remained at this time and the reporter was able to “Draw up a chair to the old hearth stone,” drink from the nearby spring and later visit the nearby Belle Starr Cave.

In 1936 a detailed story entitled “Lonely Memorial Marks Grave of Belle Starr” authored by Joe Synar and Richard Venator appeared in the *Muskogee Phoenix* on January 5. This story was later republished in the *Frontier Times* magazine of the same year. The article relayed little information on the condition of the grave at that time, but a photograph appeared of the grave in the *Phoenix* article that had been taken by the authors showing the grave to be in fair condition at the time.



A BARBER COMES TO YOUNGER’S BEND

In 1938 a man by the name of Claude Hamilton was sweeping his

barbershop in Sterling, Colorado when a map fell from beneath a couch in his small shop. This map apparently led to the discovery of a buried treasure in Colorado by Hamilton.

With a portion of his findings, he purchased a new ice blue 1938 Oldsmobile. He became fascinated with treasure hunting and in 1939 he moved his barbershop to Porum, Oklahoma and purchased the land in and around Younger's Bend at sheriff's sale. His purchase included the grave of Belle Starr.

A lifelong obsession with Belle Starr and the hunt for nearby treasure followed. For many years, Hamilton searched the hills around Hi Early Mountain as well as the nearby Belle Starr canyon for any sign of outlaw treasure.

Hamilton was known to even use dynamite on hills and cliffs in the area in search of potential treasure sites. Hamilton though never indicated that he had any inclination to search the actual gravesite and he seemed to develop a great respect and caring for the preservation of Belle's grave.

The continuing saga of a lonely mission
on the untamed prairie

Tribal feuds . . .
A mysterious fever . . .
Awakening love . . .

JOURNEY
into
UNTAMED LAND
JONITA MULLINS

LOOK UNTO
the
FIELDS
JONITA MULLINS

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Don't miss the beginning of the series
"The Missions of Indian Territory"

On July 1, 1956, a detailed story appeared in the *Daily Oklahoma* newspaper entitled ‘Belle Starr Lies in Lonely Grave.’ Hamilton is quoted heavily in the story and he indicated that at the time of his purchase of the property, the grave was in fair condition with most of it intact.

“They just won’t leave it alone,” he stated in the article. Hamilton had planted wild brambles in an effort to keep souvenir hunters away from the grave. No trespassing signs had been erected on the property as well as fencing around the grave.

The *McIntosh County Democrat* had a story which included information on the grave on September 17, 1964. It described the grave at the time by the following:

Belle’s grave is an above the ground tomb constructed of sandstone slabs. It is located in the front yard of her old homeplace on ground now owned by a Porum barber. The grave is covered by brush and is completely hidden from view. The grave stone has

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Upcoming Events at Three Rivers Museum

Bass Reeves Legacy Day

Saturday, June 27

Enjoy lectures, a trolley tour and afternoon meal. Learn the fascinating story of one of the greatest lawmen to serve in the Indian Territory.

History Explorers

Tuesday, June 30, and July 28 7:00 p.m.

Program to be announced. Check the museum website for details. Join with fellow history buffs in learning more about the fascinating history of the Three Rivers region.



Historic Homes & Buildings Tour

Saturday, September 12, 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Tour some of Muskogee's historic districts and take guided tours of recently restored structures and others in need of preservation. We hope you will come along.

Haunted History Trolley Tours

October 16, 17, 23, 24

5:30 p.m. each night

Have a hauntingly good time visiting area sites to hear the ghostly tales, unusual experiences and eerie events. Tickets go on sale September and they go fast!

Watch the website for more upcoming events: 3riversmuseum.com

been chipped to pieces during the years by curiosity seekers prompting the landowner to bar the place from public view.

The article stated that there were plans in progress at the time to potentially create a park and museum at the site of the grave. An alternate plan was also mentioned about possibly relocating the grave to the newly established Belle Starr point on Lake Eufaula where a shrine would be erected.

During the 1960s there were efforts within state government to create historical sites and places for tourism in Oklahoma. A master plan of tourism was found while doing research for this story and indicated that the Belle Starr site was one under possible consideration for development and tourism. Likely due to funding issues, these plans never got past the initial stage.

In 1964 the nearby Eufaula Dam was completed which created Lake Eufaula directly to the west of the Younger's Bend site on the Canadian River. The creation of the lake swallowed up several nearby historic locations including the famous Standing Rock and North Fork Town, however the Belle Starr grave and Younger's Bend property remained untouched.

Vandalism of the gravesite was the focus of a story which appeared in the *Daily Oklahoma* on January 15, 1967. The story detailed how Clyde Hamilton had previously created a duplicate grave marker at a cost of \$325 and had placed a 6 foot high cyclone fence around Belle's grave with the new marker being erected within the past year.

Hamilton posted the site against all trespassers and was only allowing visitors to the site while he was present. The "two sizable chunks" that were remaining of the original grave marker were stored in Hamilton's barber shop in Porum for preservation. The remains of the original marker are now in the possession of the present owners of the property.

After many years of hunting for treasure and protecting the property, Claude Hamilton passed away in 1970. Mr. Hamilton spent nearly 30 years preserving and maintaining the Belle Starr gravesite and likely without his efforts the site today would be destroyed.

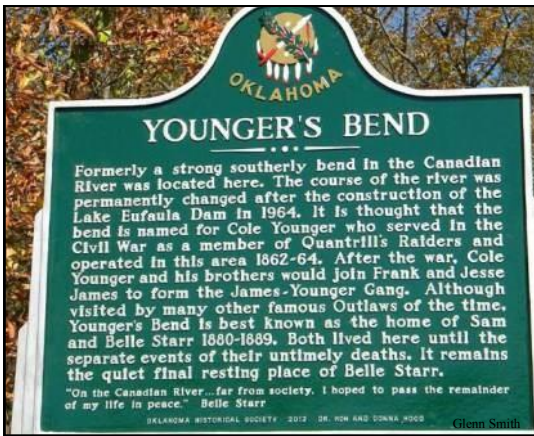
Mr. Hamilton's widow Ada continued to live near the property for many years in a small frame house along the highway. A sign was in front of her home for many years offering to guide persons to

the grave for the fee of \$1. She gave these tours to many persons over the years though she always stated before her tour, that “she knew very little about Belle Starr.”

In 1986 an Associated Press story made nationwide distribution entitled “Bandit Belle Starr a mystery 100 years after dying.” The author of the article tells the story of his trip to Porum, Oklahoma to see the grave. He made contact with Ada Hamilton and she led him on a tour to the gravesite for the usual fee of \$1. The reporter mentioned in the article “walking up a muddy slope from a roadside gate through a glade awash in wildflowers.” Belle’s grave was in a “battered enclosure topped with barbed-wire.”

On January 29, 1989 near the 100th anniversary of Belle’s death, an article appeared in the *Daily Oklahoman* which noted the lack of markings for many historical sites in the state. Author Glenn Shirley was quoted in the story along with Bob Blackburn of the Oklahoma Historical Society about the possibility of placing a historic marker near

Younger’s Bend and the gravesite. There was even mention of the possibility of installing a radio transmitter with audio information broadcast on the history of the grave and Belle Starr.



A RESTORATION

After Ada Hamilton’s death the property passed into the hands of other family members. Visitors

continued to come to the grave, but the trails which led to the site were damaged by the ice storms that hit eastern Oklahoma in 2007 and 2009. The gate entrance that Claude Hamilton had once built for the trailhead was also badly damaged.

The adventurous who went to the grave found the site in poor condition with the roof slabs fallen flat on the grave. Cuts in the chain link fence had exposed the site to vandals with trash and beer cans inside. The concrete replica marker had fallen flat on the ground.

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Call for Articles

The Three Rivers Historian welcomes articles about the history of the Three Forks region of Oklahoma covering Cherokee, Mayes, McIntosh, Muskogee, Okmulgee, Sequoyah, and Wagoner Counties.

Upcoming issues will feature the following themes:

Summer 2015 Entertainers

Fall 2015 Sports

Please submit articles of 750 to 3,000 words in length to The Historian, 220 Elgin Ave., Muskogee, OK 74401 or by e-mail to 3riversmuseum@sbcglobal.net or to the editor: Jonita.mullins@gmail.com

Test Your Knowledge

What other famous Oklahoman has a poignant bit of poetry inscribed on his/her tombstone?



*Answer: Alex Posey
His grave is located in Greenhill Cemetery.
The poem is his own composition.*

We Need Your Support

Three Rivers Museum received a grant from the City of Muskogee Foundation for renovations of the Oak Grove School. Staff and volunteers will restore it and develop a teaching curriculum for students.



This effort will require funds above this generous grant and donations are still needed.

Visit 3riversmuseum.com to learn more about making a donation to the Oak Grove School Restoration. For a minimum gift of \$50, you will receive a commemorative brick to be placed in a walkway to the school. Your gift is tax deductible.

Belle Starr's Grave

In 2010, the property was purchased by Dr. Ron Hood, an orthopedic surgeon, and his wife Donna. Ron learned of the property from a conversation in his Tulsa office. His passion for history fueled his decision to purchase it from the Hamilton family. Soon after purchase, the couple began making plans to restore the property and gravesite.

A new trail gives access to the grave, starting at the base of the property along the highway. The chain link fences were removed and the grave repaired and accurately restored. The Hoods also purchased a historic cabin from Belle's home county in Missouri. The cabin was meticulously taken apart and then rebuilt at the foot of the Younger's Bend property and includes modern conveniences and revisions.

Today, a trip to the gravesite is the easiest it has been in a century. The Canadian River can now be seen from the site. Hood continues to make discoveries on the property and continues to update these on his Younger's Bend Facebook page. The passionate restoration and renewal of the property has saved the site and allowed for future generations to discover this unique and fascinating part of American Western history.

— Roger Bell

Female Seminary a First for Women

Seminary Hall at Northeastern State University in Tahlequah is a unique building. The Cherokees established the first "free, compulsory co-educational public school system" in 1841. In 1846, Principal Chief John Ross proposed to the Cherokee Council the establishment of a male and female seminary. A seminary was a "finishing" school where advanced students could complete their education.

Rev. Samuel Worcester, a missionary to the Cherokees, drafted the proposal for the schools and it was put into effect in 1847. This makes the seminaries the second oldest public institution of higher learning west of the Mississippi. It was the first in the region to provide a liberal arts education for women. The Cherokee National Female Seminary was built at Park Hill, four miles southeast of Tahlequah. It was completed in 1851 and a grand opening was held on May 7 of that year.

The school was patterned after the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary in Massachusetts and a graduate of this school, Ellen Whitmore, became the first principal of the Cherokee Female Seminary. Because of financial difficulties the Female Seminary closed in 1856 and remained closed until after the Civil War. It was opened again in 1871 and operated until a fire destroyed the building on April 10, 1887.

The Cherokee Council, under Principal Chief Dennis Bushyhead, decided to rebuild the Female Seminary. But because the water supply had proved inadequate at Park Hill, the school was rebuilt in Tahlequah on forty acres of wooded land. The cost of the building was \$60,000 and money from the Cherokee Strip Live Stock Association was used to finance the construction. It was completed in April 1889.

The building was the largest ever erected by an Indian tribe but even so, students had to be turned away for a lack of room. The young women who attended the Female Seminary studied a wide range of subjects including botany, Latin, chemistry, Bible, vocal music and zoology. Miss Florence Wilson was the principal beginning in 1875 and continued in this position for 26 years.

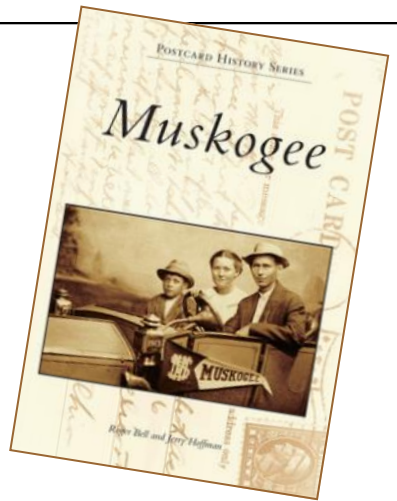
After Oklahoma statehood, it purchased the Cherokee Female Seminary in 1909 and created the Northeastern State Normal School with an enrollment of 511 students its first semester in September 1909. In 1919, it became a four-year college named Northeastern State Teachers College. It continues as Northeastern State University today where the Cherokee Female Seminary, now called Seminary Hall, still stands.

— *Jonita Mullins*

Shop the Whistlestop!

The **Whistlestop Gift Shop** at Three Rivers Museum offers the book *Postcards of Muskogee* by Roger Bell and Jerry Hoffman. You'll also find a great selection of books, artwork and mementos unique to Muskogee at the Whistlestop.

Open Wed~Sat, 10~5 or online at 3riversmuseum.com.



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