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THE ERICK CEMETERY

By Margie Snowden North

Through her weekly column concerning Erick's 100th Meridian Museum, Julia Ann Holmberg keeps Erickites informed of many aspects of history. In her September 18, 1980 column, the emphasis was on the beginning of the Erick Cemetery. It is reprinted with her permission:

We'll share a bit of Erick history which is of importance to the museum, but also to tell all those whose loved ones are buried in the Erick Cemetery. Sometime ago, at our request, Rosettie Gephart wrote the following about her early memories of how the cemetery began:

Well, here I go again trying to tell how and when the Erick Cemetery was started. The first person buried there died in my parents' dugout on April 8, 1901. My parents were Charles W. and Rebecca A. Abla, and they were always ready to help their neighbors.

At that time, this country wasn't thickly settled. We had no doctors or hospitals, no churches, and no cemeteries. So when Mattie Hughes died on a Sunday morning, the men of the community got in a wagon and started out to find a place for a cemetery. Each man had agreed to deed two acres off his land to the public for a cemetery, no matter whose place they decided to put it on. It was on Mr. J.E. Permenter's place they decided to bury Mattie Hughes.

The second person that was buried out there was a young man. He died in a covered wagon over close to Uncle Pete Gilchrist's home, and they laid him out at my uncle's place. The folks were traveling with this young man for his health. Then there were two elderly men buried there. I don't know which one was put there first. The name of one was Turcott; the other's name was Campbell (written by the Ablas' daughter, Rosettie Abla Gephart, Erick, Oklahoma—March 29, 1980).

In January of 1985, I talked with Rosettie by phone, and she gave me these additional facts: Mattie Hughes, a fifteen-year-old girl, lived with her family near the Ablas.



Photo courtesy of author

The inscription on the tombstone of Erick Cemetery's first grave reads: "Beautiful, lovely, she was but given a fair bud to earth, to blossom in Heaven."

She had caught a cold that apparently turned into pneumonia. Some of the Ablas were taking turns sitting up with her to help care for her. This was during the rainy season, and the Hugheses' dugout was leaking badly, so the Ablas opened their home to the ailing girl.

In order to keep Mattie from getting wet and chilled, they threw a wagon-sheet over the bows of their wagon; and they drove up right next to the door. Mattie was strong enough to walk from the wagon to the Ablas' half-dugout where a bed had been prepared for her. Before going to bed, however, she went directly to the water bucket and drank a big gourd dipper full of water. They had no idea that the doctor had told her that she must positively not drink any water. The move occurred on Thursday and she died the next Sunday morning.

In 1978, citizens of Erick began to see the need to establish a trust fund so that the cemetery could be properly maintained. Mortician Lacey Albert was especially instrumental in bringing the need to the attention of the town.

Mayor S.T. Meadow passed a proclamation to create a public trust that year; and by August 3, 1979, the fund was established. The first board of directors included Juanita Dollar, Leon Gillum, William L. Luman, and Ricky Wayne Greene.

A letter was drafted and sent out to those who had relatives interred in the cemetery. Because of the generous interest of the townsfolk, the needed \$100,000 was soon raised. The money was used to establish an Irrevocable Fund, and the interest has been sufficient to meet maintenance needs and pay the salary of keeper Doyle Nichols, who works from April through October of each year.

Present trustees are Juanita Dollar, Leon Billum, Carl Jefferson, and Carol Griffen (secretary-treasurer).

MARGIE SNOWDEN NORTH of Erick is a woman of many interests, including farming, writing, and church work. Wife of a minister-farmer, she has published much in both religious and secular periodicals. An issue of WESTVIEW without an offering by Margie is unusual.