

ANNETTE BLACKBURN EHLER AND THE PAT HENNESSEY MEMORIAL GARDEN

By *Athie Sale Davis**

Annette Blackburn Ehler, one of Oklahoma's outstanding pioneer women, was interested in literature, art and music. She was also interested and active in the social, fraternal and political life of the state. She was a Life Member of the Oklahoma Historical Society and, in 1936, was inducted into the Hall of Fame by the Oklahoma Memorial Association.

Annette Blackburn, who according to the family Bible and an announcement of her first marriage was born Annette Belle,¹ in Lawrenceville, Illinois, August 10, 1864 the daughter of William and Amanda Ellen (Rawlings) Blackburn.

She completed the elementary and high school of her native Lawrenceville, and attended Ohio State Normal School in Ada, Ohio. She taught in a country school in Lawrence County, Illinois when she was sixteen years old. Then every summer for a few years she attended school herself, and taught the winter terms at different times in Lawrenceville and in Palestine, Illinois, also in Danville. She later taught in Missoula, Montana.

In 1892 she married Marion Allen Haskett, of Danville, Illinois. Their daughter Helen was born February 18, 1899. Mr. Haskett died January 3, 1900 and little Helen died in 1901. After Mr. Haskett's death, she came to Hennessey, Oklahoma Territory, where her two brothers, William and Marshall Blackburn and her sister, Mrs. Ella Courter, and their families were residing.² She taught in the Hennessey schools, and served one year as Deputy Register of Deeds of Kingfisher County. She resigned this position to buy the *Hennessey Press-Democrat* newspaper which she owned and operated for three years. Annette Haskett married Frederick Ehler, pioneer merchant and banker in 1907, and from that time devoted herself to her home and the social, fraternal and cultural

* Athie Sale Davis is one of Oklahoma's most gifted poets, her poems appearing in outstanding, national publications. She is well known in the poetry field for having assisted her husband, the late Frank P. Davis, M.D., in the annual publication of *Davis' Anthology of Newspaper Verse*, a work she continued after his death until 1942. Mrs. Davis' father, Charles T. Sale of Missouri, made the run at the Opening of the Cherokee Outlet, September 16, 1890, and the following spring brought his family to Enid where Athie was reared and attended school and college. She taught in the public schools of Enid and Okmulgee before her marriage to Dr. Davis in 1919. She makes her home in Oklahoma City where she is a member of the National League of American Pen Women, State Poetry Society and State Writers.—Ed.

¹ Letter dated August 5, 1953, from Ida Blackburn Vandivier (Indianapolis), a niece of Mrs. Ehler, to Mrs. Frank P. Davis.

² *Ibid.*



ANNETTE BLACKBURN EILER

organizations she loved.³ As a girl in Lawrenceville she joined the Christian Church, and was always an active worker in the church, after coming to Oklahoma teaching in the Sunday school and giving of her talent as a pianist and musician.

Mrs. Ehler's chief interest in organizations was in the work of the Order of the Eastern Star and that of the Rainbow Girls. Her work in the Eastern Star organization was outstanding. She had been a charter member when the Lawrenceville Chapter was organized in 1890, and she was a member of the Hennessey Chapter for forty-seven years. She served in various appointive and elective positions of the Grand Chapter Order of the Eastern Star of Oklahoma, and in 1915 was elected Worthy Grand Matron. In 1917, she first published the Eastern Star "Blue Book" revising this as necessary through the 19th and last edition published in 1945. Mrs. Ehler was Eastern Star editor of *The Oklahoma Mason* for eight years. Intensely interested in the Rainbow Girls, she held the position of "Supreme Hope" in this organization.

Mrs. Ehler regarded civic and political participation as a patriotic responsibility, and was a tireless worker. She was delegate to the first Democratic convention in which women participated, was the first County Vice-Chairman of Kingfisher County, delegate-at-large to National Democratic Convention held in New York City in 1924. She served as President of the Hennessey school board, was the first woman Mayor of Hennessey, serving two terms in this office in which she promoted paving of Hennessey streets and many other projects that contributed to the city's improvement.

A musician and pianist, she was the composer of several songs, among them *Sweet Face Beneath the Roses* which was written after the death of her little daughter, and later *Welcoming Ode* which was used in Eastern Star.

She was author of *Study Outline of Greek Mythology, Rhetorical and Literature Outline* and *A Text on Grammar*. She wrote and published these booklets when she served as State Chairman of Literature of the Oklahoma Federated Women's Club. She wrote and published in serial form a novel titled *Back to the Old Ambrose*.⁴ She also had published a book of her own poems, *The Fire Fly*, and a small booklet, *Echoes of the Cherokee Trail*, as well as the "Blue Book" of the Eastern Star (19 editions).

In addition to her membership in the Oklahoma Historical Society, the Oklahoma Memorial Association, the Order of the Eastern Star, and Rainbow Girls, Mrs. Ehler was also a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution, The National League

³ Joseph B. Thoburn and Muriel H. Wright, *Oklahoma: A History of the State and Its People* (New York, 1929), Vol. III, pp. 215-16.

⁴ Letter from Ida Blackburn Vandiver, *op. cit.*

of American Pen Women, Pi Gamma Mu, and the Delphian Chapter. She contributed to Oklahoma's culture by sponsoring struggling young artists and by arranging art exhibits, and acquiring a sizable collection of paintings by Oklahoma artists.

It was her intense interest in history and in marking the historical spots in Oklahoma as well as her desire that the facts of history should be kept straight, that caused Mrs. Ehler to spend \$4,000 on a memorial for the murdered tramster for whom the City of Hennessey was named, and then present the memorial as a gift to the city. This presentation took place May 30, 1941.

THE PAT HENNESSEY MEMORIAL GARDEN

This outstanding memorial is a corner lot (75x150 feet) located at the north edge of Hennessey, just one block west of Highway #81.

On July 4, 1874 Government employees found and buried the body of Patrick Hennessey beside the Chisholm Trail. In her book *Echoes of the Chisholm Trail*, Mrs. Ehler writes:²

"Sometime after the Town of Hennessey was established, the women of the town placed an iron fence around his grave with an arch upon which was inscribed his name. As the town grew larger and it became necessary to open a street along the old Chisholm Trail, it was necessary to remove this grave, as it was directly in the center of the new street, and the grave with its fence was moved about one hundred and thirty feet west of its original place. About thirteen years ago the City sold the plot of ground to which they had moved the Hennessey grave when the street was opened, and they again moved the grave about one-half mile away from its original place. The State Historical Society objected to the removal of this historical marker and I asked permission of the City Council to take it back at my expense as nearly to the original spot as it was possible. In 1939 when Hennessey celebrated its fiftieth anniversary and put on a 'Pat Hennessey Pageant,' I purchased the plot of ground around this grave and proceeded to build a Memorial to the Memory of the man for whom our town was named."

The first iron fence around the grave is incorporated in the fence around the Garden. Mrs. Ehler had the grave covered with native stones, set in cement and a small head stone and foot stone erected. Just east and south of the grave is a rock lighthouse twenty-four feet high, in the top of which is installed a large light and musical chimes which operate by automatic control. From the many small windows shine electric light through bulbs of all colors. Directly to the south of the grave is a five ton granite boulder bearing a bronze marker which gives a statement showing that Hennessey was not killed by Indians, but by white out-laws.

In the winter of 1940, the writer visited Mrs. Ehler. After return from a visit to the Garden, there was comment on the fact that many historians tell that Indians murdered Pat Hennessey.

² Annette B. Ehler, *Echoes of the Chisholm Trail* (Hennessey, n.d.).

Mrs. Ehler smiled, "Yes, I know. I once spoke to one writer about that and he replied, 'But it makes such a colorful story.' However there is one thing upon which all agree and that is the fact that William E. Malsley found and buried the body, and I personally interviewed Mr. Malsley."

Then she told me the details of the Pat Hennessey story that she had gathered through the years.

THE STORY OF PAT HENNESSEY

Pat Hennessey had a government contract in 1874, to haul freight from Wichita, Kansas to Fort Sill and Anadarko, two government posts in the southern part of Indian Territory. As there were no railroads through this part of the Territory all freight was handled by such as Hennessey.

Mrs. Ehler said she was first intrigued by hearing one man say to another "Have a Pat Hennessey cigar." Then finding that the grave was a shrine to which all new comers were directed and to which she, too, wended her footsteps, she asked:

"Who was Pat Hennessey?"

"Ask Mr. Malsley, he found and buried Pat Hennessey's body," was the reply.

Upon further inquiry Mrs. Ehler found that William E. Malsley had been a Deputy Marshal and that he was a man well trained for his work.² He spoke the Indian language fluently, and knew Indian habits. He was always most cordial in his relations with the various tribes with which he came in contact. She learned also that Mr. Malsley was then living in Hennessey and was operating a livery stable. She went to see him and asked him to tell her the story of Pat Hennessey.

From Mr. Malsley, Mrs. Ehler learned that on the night of July 3, 1874, Patrick Hennessey and three other teamsters spent the night at one of the small relay stations located at a point called Buffalo Springs, now known as Bison, six miles north of the present site of Hennessey. The other teamsters were: George Fund, Thomas Calloway and Ed Cook. Each man was driving a six mule team hauling a wagon well loaded with supplies. Next morning the freighters made preparation to start on their way, but the keeper of the inn, Mr. Mosier, urged them to wait a while longer because he had received word that the Indians were reported to be on an uprising. To this the genial Irishman, who was always friendly with the Indians is reported to have said "No Indian will harm me." So the men and teams headed south.

²For a biography of "William E. Malsley," see *The Chisholm Trail* by Sam P. Ridgely (Cachle, 1936), pp. 100-115.—Ed.

This same morning another party was headed northward across the plains. This party left the Indian Agency at Darlington to go to Wichita, Kansas. The Agency employees, composed of John D. Miles, the Indian Agent in charge of the Darlington agency, Mr. and Mrs. J. A. Covington and their daughter, Katie were riding in a light spring wagon and were accompanied by three horsemen, William Malaley, J. S. Brink and an Army Lieutenant from Fort Sill.¹

They had spent the night of July 4th at a ranch house near Kingfisher, and started out very early the next morning. When they reached Red Fork, now known as Dover, they found an excited group barricaded in Charlie Russell's store because of an attack and bombardment supposedly by the Indians which had occurred early that morning.

The Government party left the women at the store while the men went out into the timber and sand hills to reconnoiter. They found no signs of Indians, but found a place where a large number of horses had been tied for a considerable length of time. Malaley and others noted that they had been tied by white men. An Indian would have tied the horses close to the trees so they would have had very little room to move about and the stamping of their hooves would have made a small trampled place where each one stood. Instead these horses had been given a long, loose rope as was plainly evident from their tracks.

Another important and startling bit of evidence was the prints of high heeled boots all about. Indians all wore moccasins in those days, no Indian ever wore boots! But boots were worn by white men who were much in the saddle.

From all these signs the men decided that the attacks on the store had been by white outlaws, who had disguised themselves as Indians. It was a known fact that there were roving bands of outlaws in the territory who were doing much mischief that was being charged to the Indians.² So the investigators were satisfied in their own minds that the attack on the store had been by white outlaws.

¹"The party consisted of Agent John D. Miles, J. A. Covington, Sarah (Darlington) Covington, his wife, Katy Covington, their daughter, a babe in arms, Marshal William E. Malaley, a lieutenant, two or three soldiers, and a few other persons."—*Ibid.*, p. 104.—Ed.

²In her booklet *Echoes of the Chisholm Trail*, p. 9, Mrs. Ehler quotes an excerpt from a letter dated July 10, 1874, from Agent J. D. Miles to the Office of Indian Affairs in Washington: "I do not hesitate to say that had we been furnished with a detachment of troops sufficient to have protected their own (Indians) reservation from buffalo hunters and the continuous incursions from white horse thieves, all of which was promised them (and my records show that these troops have been earnestly appealed for), I do not hesitate to give it as my firm conviction that all our present troubles would have been avoided. But now it will not do to stop to ask 'whose cow it was that kicked over the lamp that burned up Chicago,' the hostile movement must be controlled and at the proper time when order is restored, deal out justice to the original cause. I claim to know almost every whiskey-horse-thief in this country and hope to be able at some future day to bring them to justice, as they are the parties who have set the match on fire."—Ed.

Then the Government party, with its mounted escort proceeded on its way north, Mr. Malaley was riding in front of the spring wagon.

Between one and two o'clock in the afternoon they came upon signs of trouble along the trail. Sugar, coffee, empty boxes and barrels were scattered about. The horsemen rode rapidly forward and soon came upon the body of a man. He was lying on the east side of the Chinholm Trail, covered by smoldering grain. Ashes of the wagon were about him, its iron tires alone were left. Attached to these tires were chain traces. The position of the burning body gave evidence that the man, while still alive, had been tied to the two back wheels of the wagon with his head to the southwest and his feet to the northeast, by the chain traces of his own wagon. He had then been covered with sacks of grain and the whole outfit set on fire.

Mr. Malaley, in his official capacity as Deputy Marshal, carefully checked everything for clues. Again he noted the numerous prints of high heels all about! He also noted that the man had not been scalped.

Despite fear of a return of the outlaws, or a possible attack by an Indian war party it was decided to bury the body before proceeding on the way. The only implement the men had for digging was an axe. With this they chopped the prairie grass and loosened the dirt, then set to work with their hands and threw out the dirt. It was a difficult job, and the hot July sun made it even more unpleasant. At last they had a rude hole which was about eighteen inches deep and in this shallow grave they laid the body, then threw the loose dirt back over it.

When the party reached the inn at Buffalo Springs they told of the incident and learned the identity of the victim—Patrick Hennessey. It was also learned that the massacre of the freighters was known. Mr. Malaley especially noted the loquacity of one individual. The man's name was reported to be Brooks, and he had been a guest at the inn for some time. He claimed that he had been down on Turkey Creek hunting, and said that he heard shooting so hurried to a spot where he could see.

This man, Brooks, said: "I saw that a fight was going on between the Indians and the freighters. After the freighters used up their ammunition the Indians closed in on them and killed them. I returned to the inn and later got another man to go with me to get the bodies. We brought the three teamsters in and buried them."

Mr. Malaley asked why they did not bring Hennessey too, and the man paused, stammered and then replied that the wagon would not hold them all. As Mr. Malaley continued his questions the man became more and more reluctant to talk, and finally got away and left

the inn. Others said that Hennessey's body was in such shape that the men were reluctant to touch it, to this Mr. Malaley responded: "Well, we did. We buried it."

However the government employees all noted the shifting glances, evasive replies and restless manner of the men who at first had been so quick to furnish information.

Mr. Malaley continued his investigation. From others who saw the bodies of the three men who were brought in for burial, he learned that none of them had been scalped. Since the Indians regarded a scalp as a prized possession it seemed strange that they had passed up these four trophies of war.⁹

The Government party continued their trip. Upon arrival in Wichita, the Indian Agent, Mr. Miles, sent his report to Washington and in it he attributed the deaths of the four men to Indians. Just why he did so in the face of the evidence is not clearly known.¹⁰

⁹According to B. K. Wetherell writing on July 4, 1874 near Red Fork, a "Texas Outfit" reported that four men had been killed and scalped and their wagons burned this day on the Chisholm Trail. Existing communications and reports from the military posts, ranches, Indian agencies and stations on the Chisholm Trail, written in 1874, reveal that there was virtually a reign of terror throughout western Indian Territory in this year. Wetherell wrote: "The Arapahoes killed and scalped a young man named Wm. Watkins, just across Red Fork, and chased a man in this Rancho. They shot his horse; they also tried to run off stock from here. This was on the 2nd inst. I was at Baker's at the time, and remained there until this morning when a Texas Outfit came down and reported four men killed and scalped, with their wagons burning, laying about four miles above Baker's on the trail. The names of two of the men are Pat Hennessey & Geo. Fard, the other two unknown. They were freighting to Sil. They were cautioned at Moberly not to come down, as two men who left Baker's yesterday evening were chased into the Rancho. Baker had left here some days ago. Capt. Leach & Stage driver were at Baker's. Upon receipt of news of murders, we abandoned the place and came here. I think it possible a party will go up, and bury the men tonight. We are closely watched here. I will go up the trail when I can but I look for the Ranches to be all cleaned up except this. . . ." Copy of letter signed by B. K. Wetherell, dated "Lee & Reynolds Rancho near Red Fork, I. T. 7th 4th 1874," to Enoch Hoag, Supt. Ind. Affairs, in *Kiowa Depredations*, Indian Archives, Oklahoma Historical Society.—Ed.

¹⁰Agent Joe. B. Miles in his report dated September 30, 1874, states that it "was Cheyennes that killed William Watkins near King Fisher rancho on Seven month 26; was Cheyennes that attacked Lee & Reynolds's rancho on same day near Red Fork, killing some valuable horses; was Cheyennes that attacked Hennessey's train, loaded with sugar and coffee for Agent Hayworth, killing Pat Hennessey, George Fard, Thomas Calloway, and Ed. Cook; Osages arriving at the scene of the massacre while the Cheyennes were yet present, and securing the largest portion of the plunder, and afterward firing the wagons, to one of which the body of Pat Hennessey was evidently affixed."—*Report of the Commissioner Indian Affairs*, 1874, p. 284.

Agent Miles further states in this same report of September 30, 1874 (*ibid.*): "During last fall and winter I became aware of the presence of a number of notorious horse-thieves, who had their headquarters established in the Black Jack Woods, bordering on Turkey Creek, a small tributary of Cimarron River (Red Fork), and made several ineffectual attempts to capture or drive them from the country,

Pat Hennessey's shallow grave was kept tended by freighters, who put a few stones or bits of earth upon it as they passed by on the Trail so that the winds would not blow away the sands which covered the body. The freighters and stage-coach drivers called the nearby bluffs "Hennessey Bluffs."

When the Rock Island railway was built through the Territory the company gave their station the name "Hennessey." In the early days of the town there was a cigar factory there which named their product the "Pat Hennessey Cigar."

When Mrs. Ehler concluded her story, the writer asked, "When your story was published what was the reaction to it?"

She smiled and said that following the printing of the story several of the readers told her that she was mistaken, insisting that Patrick Hennessey had been killed by Indians. So she again sought Mr. Malaley. He verified every point in her story! He stressed the fact that at the Red Fork attack the manner of tying the horses had convinced all witnesses that the attack had been by white men in Indian garb. The most significant fact however was that none of the victims had been scalped.

Mrs. Ehler said, "Mr. Malaley was most emphatic in his final statement when he said, 'NO INDIAN EVER KILLED PAT HENNESSEY.'"¹¹

Then she took from her files a book of clippings. Among them were published letters that had been received after her story had appeared in print. Most significant was one from Mr. J. W. House of Texas City, Texas. With Mrs. Ehler's permission, these notes were made from it. Mr. House said in part: "I recently read in the Hennessey Clipper the article on 'Who Killed Pat Hennessey'

feeling assured that their frequent depredations on the herds of Indian ponies would sooner or later bring on trouble with the Indians of this reservation. But my efforts in that direction were unsuccessful, owing to the lack of necessary force to warrant their successful arrest. A few thieves only have been arrested, and one killed in his attempt to resist the marshal who had demanded his surrender."

¹¹ "He [Malaley] loved to talk of the old days on the range, and he often stated that he wanted the writer [Ridings] to record his statement of the death of Hennessey. These matters were not considered as important at that time, and it was not attended to until it was too late."—Sam P. Ridings, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

William R. Malaley died at Kansas City, Missouri, on January 14, 1919 (*ibid.*, p. 115).

In his chapter on "The Death of Pat Hennessey," (*ibid.*, pp. 432-44), Mr. Ridings states definitely that Hennessey and his companions were killed by a roving band of young Cheyenne warriors from Stone Calf's contingent. However, Ridings further states that he found the subject of Hennessey's death very difficult to present, and closes his chapter on Hennessey with the statement (*ibid.*, p. 444): "Regardless of the uncertain items entering into the details of this important and historical happening, the fact remains uncontradicted that Hennessey died—was killed—and buried at the time and place heretofore stated."—Ed.

This called to my mind the early eighties I spent in southern Kansas, when that question would have been answered by 'The Horse Thieves' who had given so much trouble to early settlers and caused them to organize vigilance committees."

The letter went on to say: "I talked to Jack Hastie, a very prominent and reliable business man in Wellington, Kansas, just after Pat Hennessey's death and he said they caught in southern Kansas a number of men who had in their possession the mules and harness reported to have belonged to Pat Hennessey, the freighter, at the time of his murder. The men were brought to Wellington and lodged in jail. They were taken from jail one night and hanged on one tree on the north bank of Slate Creek, about a mile north of Wellington."

The letter closed by saying: "I never heard anyone in southern Kansas even intimate that the Indians killed Pat Hennessey, and I talked to many who knew the circumstances. I think you are right in your contention that the Indians did not kill Pat Hennessey."

In her generous giving of the beautiful Pat Hennessey Memorial Garden to the city she certainly fulfilled her desire to keep the facts of history straight.¹²

Her interest in the Oklahoma Memorial Association was also demonstrated by her gift of a large legacy to that Association. In appreciation of her interest in this organization, Mrs. Ehler's name is inscribed on a bronze tablet on the south wall of the entrance to the Oklahoma Historical Building which reads as follows:

MRS. ANNETTE BLACKBURN EHLER

1864

1947

THIS TRIBUTE IS PLACED IN THE OKLAHOMA HISTORICAL BUILDING, TO THE LIFE AND SERVICE OF MRS. ANNETTE BLACKBURN EHLER, BY THE OKLAHOMA MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION TO WHICH SHE GAVE A RICH LEGACY AND GREAT DEVOTION, A PHILANTHROPIST, A DISTINGUISHED CITIZEN, AND A NOBLE WOMAN. IN HONORING HER WE HONOR THE STATE OF OKLAHOMA.

OKLAHOMA MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION.

¹²The question "Who killed Pat Hennessey?" still receives heated replies in the Oklahoma Trail region north of the Cimarron (formerly the Red Fork) in Western Oklahoma. Many people will not even countenance discussion of the probability that Hennessey was killed by white outlaws.—Ed.

Iron fence with arch bearing his name placed around the grave of Pat Hennessy, by the women of Hennessy after the town was established. For many years this was the only marker.

The right foot granite headstone with a bronze plate, in the 1st Hennessy Memorial Garden marks the grave of Mrs. Pat Hennessy, a Government freighter, was inaugurated on July 4, 1874. Memorial presented to the town of Hennessy by Anthony W. Kiefer in 1911.

