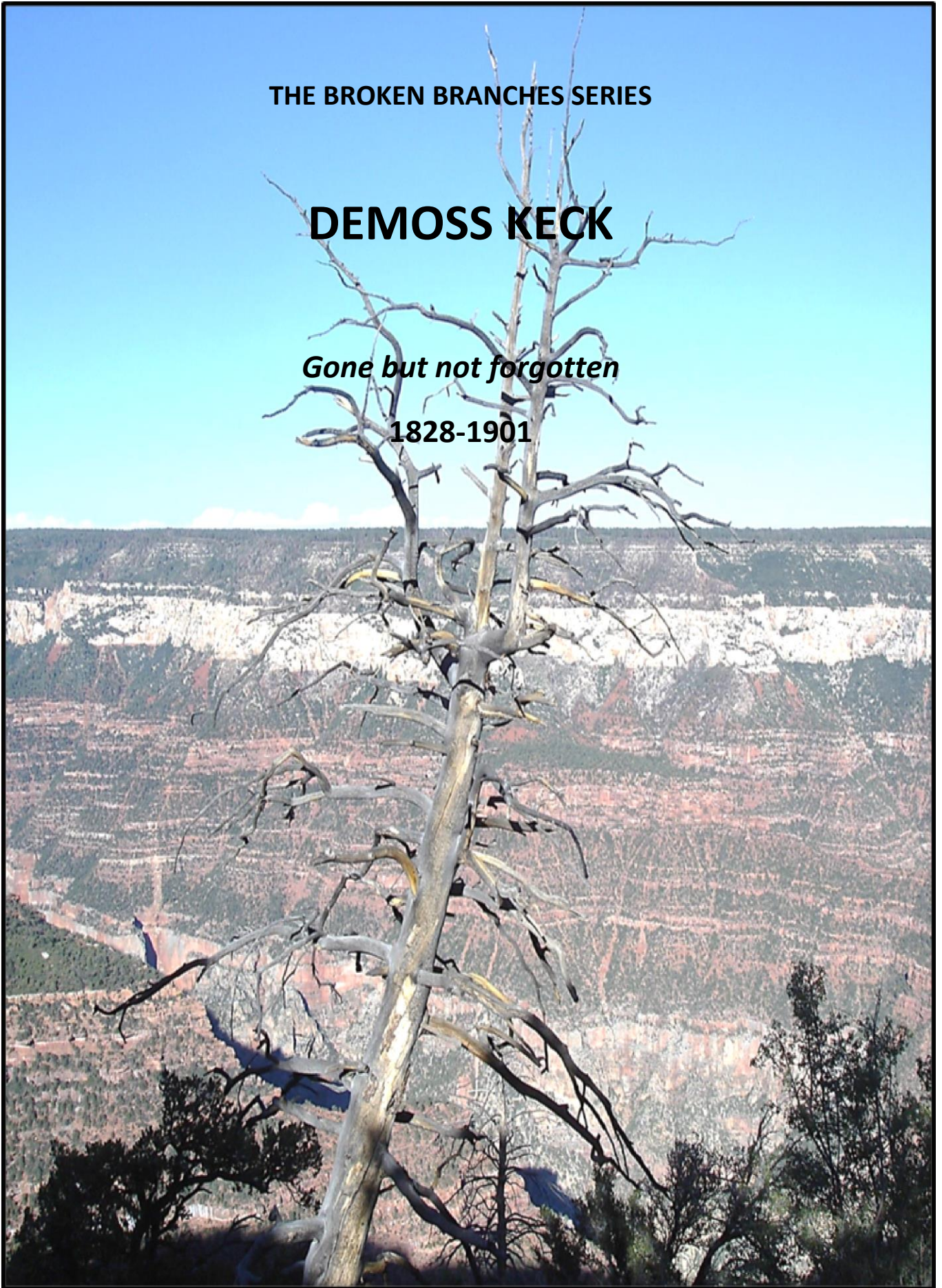


THE BROKEN BRANCHES SERIES

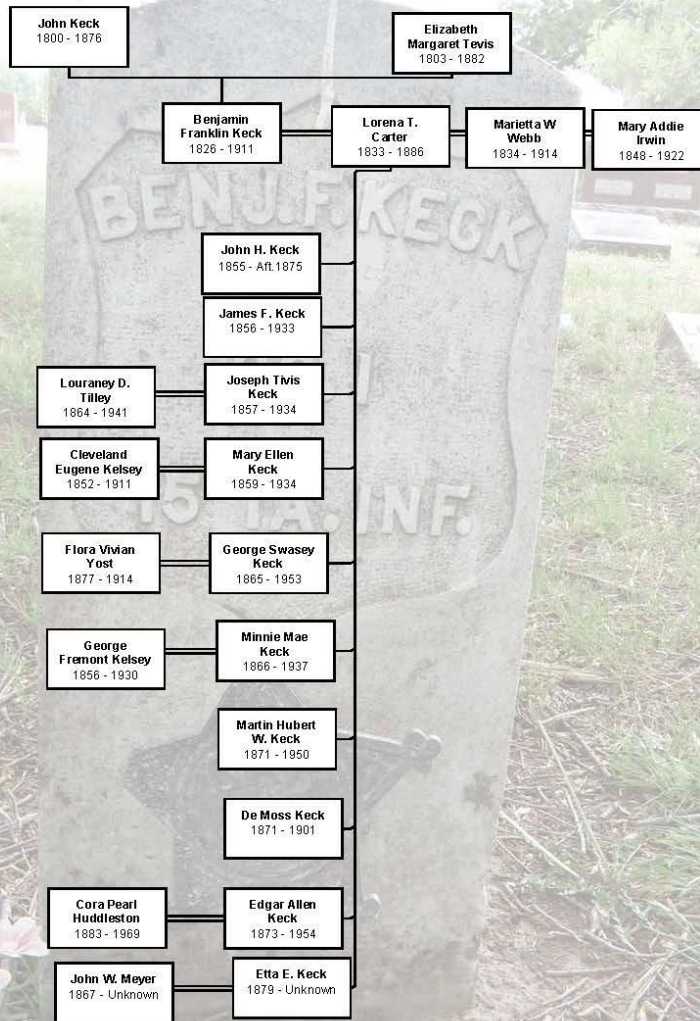
DEMOSSE KECK

Gone but not forgotten

1828-1901



Benjamin Franklin Keck Parents, Wives and Children



Demoss Keck was the eighth child of Benjamin Franklin Keck (1828- 1901) and Lorena Carter (1833-1886), born on December 30, 1871ⁱ and died on November 12, 1901. Benjamin Franklin Keck was the brother of William Henry Keck (1842-1901), father of Walter Cheston Keck (1869-1950). On the 1880 US Federal Census, Demoss is listed with this parents and siblings living in Hickory, Butler, Kansas. The 1885 Kansas census shows Demoss still living with his mother and other siblings in Hickory. When Demoss was 15 years old in 1886, his mother died in Hickory, Butler, Kansas. The newspaper called her a “widow” when in fact Benjamin was still alive but not dwelling with the family.ⁱⁱ Benjamin had commenced travels through Kansas, Missouri and, according to his statements, Florida around the time of her death.ⁱⁱⁱ In August 1892, a letter remained unclaimed by Demoss Keck in El Dorado, Butler, Kansas.^{iv}

Demoss was deemed insane and committed to an insane asylum on November 21, 1895^v. This was local news for Enid, Oklahoma where Demoss’ two older brothers, Joseph Tevis and George Swasey had staked claims to land in the Cherokee Outlet in September 1893. It was further reported that “His troubles seem to be religious of some kind. He is a single man.” Demoss was transported to the Oak Grove Retreat, a private facility for the insane, in Jacksonville, Illinois, shortly after his commitment. He was still confined at Oak Grove Retreat on July 23, 1897. The Oklahoma Territory government had an agreement with the owner of the facility, Dr. Andrew McFarland^{vi}, to house the insane from the Indian Territory for \$300 a year.

The first facility in Indian Territory for the insane was established by the Cherokee Nation, called the Cherokee Home for the Insane, Deaf, Dumb and Blind, near Tahlequah, in 1873. It was only for Indians^{vii}. The Oklahoma Territory government officials decided that the maintenance and transportation costs for the officials transporting each patient to Oak Grove Retreat were too high.^{viii} The governor also said that the costs to the families traveling to visit their relatives were prohibitive. Another cost which the government considered was the cost of transporting the committed back to Oklahoma. The government contracted with a privately owned facility near Norman, Oklahoma to house the insane^{ix}. The facility was formerly the High Gate Female College, a Methodist college, which closed in 1893. This facility had been purchased by the Oklahoma Sanitarium Company^x, who renovated and expanded the facilities. It began treating the mentally ill on June 15, 1895^{xi}. The Governor’s Report of June 30, 1896 states that 77 patients were received from Jacksonville, Illinois^{xii} and 108 from various parts of the Territory. Of these patients, 116 were males and 69, females. Of these, 37 were discharged, three escaped and 19 died. The high death rate in the facility was blamed on the countries’ failure to address the care for the afflicted by the Superintendent David W. Threadgill.^{xiii} It was reported on July 27, 1897 in the *Wichita Daily Eagle* that 53 of the 146 patients from various counties in Oklahoma were transported to this facility. 40 more arrived when security measures were completed.^{xiv} The report was that “a carload of insane people” had arrived.^{xv} Demoss was among those listed from Garfield County^{xvi}.

“Early in the new year, the Oklahoma Sanitarium Company that had secured from the Territory a contract for the care of its insane patients, became interested in locating in the vacant building. A committee of Norman citizens worked long and arduously to meet the conditions laid down by the Company. On the 12th of the following April, the committee met with Dr. Threadgill of the Oklahoma Sanitarium Company, and the latter finally accepted Norman's offer of the old college building and grounds, and an additional forty acres which the city had purchased from the Forbes estate.

“Early in May, extensive improvements were begun on the old campus. The Mansard roof was torn away and a third story formed of brick. To the rear of the college building was erected an annex, one hundred feet long and forty wide, and a T-shaped structure was the result. Finally, on the evening of July 27th, 1895, ‘a car load of insane people’ was observed coming into Norman, to make their future home on the campus of a ‘ghost college’” .^{xvii}

In the 1900 US Federal Census, Demoss is listed as a patient and noted as “insane.”



One of Hope Hall's entrances. Wheelchairs rest on the caged balcony.



High Gate Hall. Courtesy Cleveland County Historical Society.

Demoss probably suffered as other patients in that they got very little treatment^{xviii}. If he were “violently insane”, a popular description of individuals so afflicted in the newspapers of the time, he may have been locked in cells at Hope Hall. However, he was among the first patients or wards and thus did not suffer the extensive crowding in subsequent years. On July 1, there were 243 inmates and the year before his death in 1901, 283. The cost of housing each patient was \$200 per year.^{xix} The *Wichita Daily Eagle* reported 254 on October 5 1899 and 350 on November 4, 1900.



Staff of Oklahoma Sanitarium Company

Conditions were not good even by the contemporary standards for such facilities. The *Wichita Daily Eagle* provided a glowing report of the facilities on November 4, 1900, despite the continued reports of others to the contrary. However its report was consistent with the reports of the Governor over the years. A report by the Oklahoma Territory Governor to the Department of the Interior in 1897 also praised the facility describing the newly constructed laundry facilities; two comfortable cottages each being able to house 50 patients separating the epileptic and violent patients from the main population, newly enlarged sewage system and waterworks systems.^{xx} In an earlier report Governor's report stated "Light labor is provided for those who are able to work, and regular hours for meals and sleep are enforced, religious services are held frequently, suitable literature to read is supplied, and amusement intended to divert the mind, but not excite it, are encouraged." Yet there were complaints voiced by former patients, such as Charles Baker, who reported that there were many soldiers and other sane persons incarcerated in the facilities, patients were not properly feed, and the attendants abused the patients to the point of driving one patient insane by blows to the head.^{xxi} These claims were hotly disputed by the Superintendent T.S. Galbraith.^{xxii}

Demoss may have benefited from the initial efforts of Dr. David W. Griffin who took charge of the facility in 1899. Dr. Griffin was horrified by what he saw. He viewed the care of patients to be in a deplorable state.^{xxiii} Dr. Griffin persisted in his efforts during his tenure to improve the conditions. Eventually the hospital sustained itself where patients grew their own crops, ran a dairy with 450 cows, generated their own power, drilled for their own water and had their own butcher shop.



What was Demoss condition? When committed a newspaper report suggested that his disturbed mental state was related to delusions relating to religion. The early patients of the Oklahoma Sanitarium were offered treatment for alcohol abuse or venereal disease that caused their mental health to decline. Generally, the two most common mental illnesses at the hospital were schizophrenia and manic depression (bipolar disorder).^{xxiv} In the 1909 report by Kate Barnard, Commissioner of charities and corrections, there were 94 patients released and "restored", 86 who died, 48 discharged as "improved"; and 9 discharged as "unimproved," 71 who were paroled and 15 that escaped. The causes of insanity were defined as hereditary insanity, 210; ill health, 117; syphilis, 26; inebriates, 29; old age, 76; over-work, 17; drugs, 23; child birth, 8; mental worry, 30; privation, 13; injury to brain, 6; idiots, 24; imbeciles, 98; unknown and unclassified, 165; epilepsy, 91; criminally insane, 11; sunstroke, 3; pellagra, 3; and self-abuse, 4.^{xxv}

Demoss Keck was buried in the IOOF (Independent Order of Odd Fellow) Cemetery, located at 1913 North Porter Avenue, Norman, Cleveland County Oklahoma USA . The IOOF established this cemetery in 1898. The local chapter was one of three lodges instituted in the Unassigned Lands referred to as Oklahoma Nation in Indian Territory: Norman #10 (11/21/1889), Oklahoma # 11 (12/18/1889), and Guthrie #12, (02/13/1890). In May 1890 Congress declared the unassigned lands as Oklahoma Territory and the three became Norman #1, Oklahoma #2, and Guthrie #3, in the Oklahoma Territory, which set the stage for the Grand Lodge of Indian Territory, and the Grand Lodge of Oklahoma Territory, both to be instituted in 1893.

Noticeably, Demoss has a headstone.^{xxvi} His burial site is in Section 20-R-14-11 in the IOOF Cemetery in Norman. Those persons buried in close proximity to DeMoss appear to have no connection [Josephine L. Swank (1902-1903) on SO2-R-14-10; Hiriam Carl Swift (7/14/1877-10/3/1903 on SO2-R14-12)]. It should be noted that neither of these burial site have as significant of a headstone as DeMoss. Also, having a headstone was not the case for the 40 patients who were the victims of a 1918 fire.^{xxvii} Until recently, they were interred in an unmarked grave at the I.O.O.F. Cemetery.



The question is who provided for the headstone? In response to an inquiry, the proprietors of the cemetery stated that they did not have records of who provided the headstone but only that he had a single plot to himself.^{xxviii} It is possible that his brothers, James Tevis Keck from Enid and another brother identified only as “brother from Paul’s Valley” who traveled to Norman in December 1901 purchased the headstone. Also buried in this cemetery is Jesse C. Wails (1863-1913) who was mentioned in the newspaper as being a former neighbor of the Keck brothers. Knowing the family, Wails could have help ensure that DeMoss had a plot and headstone.^{xxix}

In the early 1940s Dorothea Irene Keck, daughter of Walter Cheston Keck, and grandniece of DeMoss would travel with Irene’s husband, Thad Allen Snyder, and daughter, Janna Margarette Snyder, to Norman for Allen to attend summer classes. It was at the University of Oklahoma,



Janna would celebrate her first birthday. Allen had also attended the University in 1937. It is doubtful that Dorothea was aware that her granduncle had been at the facility or was buried in the IOOF cemetery.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ Demoss Keck appears to be a name sake of “L.D. Demoss” neighbors to the Kecks in Hickory, Butler, Kansas. “L.D.” was Lewis Nixon DeMoss born on December 14, 1845 in Maryland and died on October 24, 1912. His wife was Emma Semisch born in Canada who immigrated to the United States in 1863. However it has not been established where the Kecks and DeMoss’s first met. L.D. DeMoss first came to Hickory, Butler Kansas in 1870 and after two years moved to Leon. Leon is listed as a place of residence for Benjamin Franklin Keck, his father, in 1908. So at some point during that time Benjamin and Lewis lived in the same community.

ⁱⁱ *Walnut Valley Time*, February 19, 1886.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Marion County Herald*, September 2, 1887.

^{iv} *Walnut Valley Times*, August 4, 1892.

^v *Enid Weekly Wave*, Vol. 2, No. 47 of same date.

^{vi} Andrew McFarland hung himself on the Sunday before November 26, 1891 (*Salina Daily Republican*). Upon his death, Oak Grove Retreat was inherited by his son, George McFarland, and daughter, Annie McFarland. When Annie married she moved to Kentucky. George McFarland was later prosecuted for running Oak Grove without a license to do so. See the *Biennial Report of the State Board of Charities and Corrections, Colorado State Board of Charities and Corrections*, 1997, Harvard University, digitized February 25, 2008., pp. 61-62.

^{vii} Later the Norman Insane Asylum would house Indians as well as “coloreds.” See *Guthrie Daily Leader*, April 28, 1898.

^{viii} The transportation costs of the insane were paid by Oak Grove Retreat. See *Guthrie Daily Reader*, October 25, 1894.

^{ix} The US Congress subsequent referred to this contract as “extravagant.” See the *Congressional Report*, Volume 5060, 1907, US Government Printing Office, page 7.

^x In 1915, the assets of this company were transferred to the state and then called Central State Hospital or Oklahoma State Hospital. Subsequently it was named Griffin Memorial Hospital. Another story associated with this facility is that Governor William Miller Jenkins (1856-1941) was removed for official misconduct arising from his ownership of stock in the sanatorium. He was later exonerated.

^{xi} The first patient was from Wood County followed by the 77 patients from Jacksonville, Illinois. See *Wichita Daily Eagle*, June 4, 1900 providing a history of the facility.

^{xii} Jacksonville was where the brother of Benjamin Franklin Keck’s third wife, Mary Irwin Meek, was institutionalized.

^{xiii} “The death list seems to be abnormally large, but is explained by the superintendent of the asylum, Dr. John Threadgill, in his report to myself [Governor], as follows: ‘Our death list would not be nearly so large if the boards of insanity of the different counties were more careful in not waiting so long to send some of the unfortunates here, as many of those who have died were in a moribund condition when received here. We have not yet had a death in the asylum from fever, pneumonia, dysentery, or any of the prevalent diseases of the country. At all times the asylum has been free of sickness, and no death has ever occurred in the asylum from

sickness originating in it. At present time all the patients in the asylum are in healthy condition.” At page 15 of *Governors Report*.

^{xiv} Jeff Provine, *Haunted Norman*, [Arcadia Publishing, 2014], ISBN 1625850972, 9781625850973

^{xv} The University of Oklahoma: A History: Volume 1, 1890–1917, by David W. Levy, University of Oklahoma Press, 2015, ISBN 0806152796, 9780806152790.

^{xvi} On July 1, 1898, the number of patients from Garfield County increased by three and five were released for a total of 11. See *Reports of the Secretary of the Interior*, Oklahoma Governor, 1898, pp. 19-20, original Harvard University, digitized January 31, 2008.

^{xvii} Oscar A. Kinchen, “Oklahoma’s First College, Old High Gate, at Norman” cited in *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Volume 14, No. 3, September, 1936, pp. 322-323.

^{xviii} For a review of the facility, review articles of Mike Gorman in the *Daily Oklahoma* (1946) commencing with “Misery Rules in State Shadowland.” Gorman continue with his exposes on mental health facilities in following years.

^{xix} Frank Moore Colby, Editors Frank Moore Colby, Harry Thurston Peck, Edward Lathrop Engle, *International Year Book: A Compendium of the World’s Progress During the Year 1898 [1902]*, [Dood, Mead & Company, 1901], p. 682. Digitized on October 13, 2010. A more recent newspaper report put the number at 362 in 1899. See *Oklahoman*, January 25, 2016, “Report: Okla. ignores its mental health 'epidemic'” by Jaclyn Cosgrove. Also see Provine, *Haunted Norman*.

^{xx} *Reports of the Secretary of the Interior*, pps. 19-20

^{xxi} *Arkansas City Daily Traveler*, January 24, 1896.

^{xxii} *Arkansas City Daily Traveler*, January 30, 1896.

^{xxiii} Provine, *Haunted Norman*.

^{xxiv} *The Oklahoman*, Cosgrove, “Report: Okla. ignores its mental health 'epidemic'”

^{xxv} *The Daily Oklahoman*, January 10, 1910, article by Kate Barnard, commissioner of charities and corrections, giving an account of the 1909 annual report about “the Norman insane asylum.”

^{xxvi} Photo by Helen Maloy on Findagrave.com

^{xxvii} Between 35 to 37 boys between the ages of ten to 15 years of age died in the fire. It completely destroyed wards 10, 14 and 15 and started in the engine room of the hospital. See *Ada Weekly News Oklahoma*, April 4, 2018.

^{xxviii} Letter dated March 28, 2017 from Jessica Kraus of IOOF Cemetery.

^{xxix} *The Peoples Voice* (Norman, Okla.), Vol. 10, No. 21, Ed. 1 Friday, December 13, 1901