

WOMEN OF THE SHOOTING IRON

By Art T. Burton

Today on television there is a very popular program titled "Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman." This show highlights the unlikely premise of a medically trained female doctor on the western frontier of the 19th century. As a woman, Doctor Quinn faces many hardships and biases, but she is determined and overcome most of them. As strange as it may seem, there were women on the Oklahoma frontier in another profession, thought today to have been an exclusive men's club, the peace officer. This has never been portrayed in movies or television. Research shows that there was at least one female deputy U.S. Marshal in the Indian Territory and two females in the Oklahoma Territory.

An article from the Muskogee Weekly Phoenix, November 19, 1891, discusses a female Deputy United States Marshall named F. M. Miller. The newspaper reported that Ms. Miller was commissioned out of the federal court at Paris, Texas. She was known to be the only female deputy that worked the Indian Territory. Ms. Miller had the reputation of being a fearless and efficient officer and had locked up more than a few offenders. It was stated in the article that she was a "young woman of prepossessing appearance, wears a cowboy hat and is always adorned with a pistol belt full of cartridges and a dangerous looking Colt pistol which she knows how to use." Ms. Miller had been in Muskogee for a few days. She had assisted Deputy U. S. Marshal Cantrel in transporting some prisoners from Talahina to the Muskogee federal jail.

The following article was found in the verticle file on U. S. Marshals in the Oklahoma Historical Society Library. It was written in a newspaper in 1898:

FEMALE OFFICERS OF LAW

Two Oklahoma Girls Are United States Deputy Marshals

It is not infrequent these days for an officer of the law to name a woman as a deputy. But she is nearly always what is known as an office deputy. She performs mere clerical duties and never takes to the field. But Oklahoma has set the pace. United States Marshal C. H. Thompson, of Guthrie, has appointed two women as deputies for field work.

That a woman should choose the vocation of professional thief taker in the most civilized portion of the land would be strange enough. It is infinitely more so when she chooses field duty on the worst territory in the Union. Criminals in Oklahoma and in Indian Territory, the district where these two girls – for they are maidens – must operate, are of the most desperate and dangerous class. More lives are lost among Federal officers in a year than in all the rest of the nation together. So it would seem that these girls possess metal of exceptional kind to willingly undertake such duties.

The young women are Miss S. M. Burche and Miss Mamie Fossett. They are of that adventurous class of females who invaded the newly opened territory in search of homesteads. They are young, fairly good-looking, well-educated, fearless and independent. Their duties are by no means confined to keeping Marshal Thompson's books. When they took the oath of office and assumed their duties it was with distinct understanding that they would serve the Government just as would any other deputy

marshal. They were to take the field, serve writs and warrants and make arrests just as any rude man might be called on to do. And they have been doing this with exceptional success.

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