

**“BIG ANNE”
BAILY
WYNN
1863-1915?**



**MADAM
OF
HELL’S
HALF-ACRE**

At noon on April 22, 1889, a gunshot signaled the exciting and chaotic opening of the unassigned lands. Within hours, downtown Oklahoma City was populated with thousands of settlers. “Big Anne” Wynn pitched a tent on Front Street (later Santa Fe Avenue) and stocked it with women. This “business district”, which also provided alcohol and gambling, was called Hell’s Half-Acre, which ran from Second Street to Reno, and Walker to Front Street. “Big Anne” reigned over this area for twenty years.

Anne Baily was born in 1863 in Illinois. At seventeen, she and a friend took a stagecoach to the lawless boomtown of Leadville, Colorado where she married a saloonkeeper and learned to be a “madam”. After seven years, her husband left but gave her \$75,000. She soon headed to Oklahoma City for the 1889 Land Run.

The activities of Hell’s Half-Acre were no secret to prohibitionists and church-goers who lobbied city officials to close the “sinful” establishments. Politicians patronized voters while not running afoul of the powerful owners of Half-Acre. By 1901, the crime and violence were too hard to ignore, putting more pressure on corrupt officials to do their jobs so the business owners increased their bribes to pay for protection.

When “Big George” Garrison was sentenced to ten years for assaulting a young woman at Big Anne’s Place, Judge Burford blamed “the unbearable moral conditions of the city” on lax law enforcement. Mayor Van Winkle ordered the arrest of prostitutes, madams and anyone leasing property for such use. Saloons were to stop serving at midnight, and anyone engaging in gambling would be arrested. Business owners ignored the efforts to the outrage of city police and nothing really changed.

When Oklahoma became a dry state in 1907, it marked the end for Half-Acre. Police-officer “flying squadrons” raided saloons and brothels that continued to operate. Big Anne was forced to move to a two-story house at 312 East Grand Avenue. On August 27th at 2:00am, the house caught fire, supposedly to cover up the murder of four people.

After pleading not guilty to murder and arson charges, Big Anne was imprisoned for the first significant time in her two-decade above-the-law activity in the city. This time, no community leaders rushed to pay her \$18,500 bond, and none of her connections came to her aid.

On May 19, 1908, over 150 witnesses were subpoenaed to testify against her, but the state failed to make its case and the juror acquitted her. But her legal defense had wiped her out financially so she sold off her furniture and left Oklahoma City for Los Angeles in the spring of 1909 where she died a few years later in her mid-forties.

Hell’s Half-Acre, and its corrupting influence, marked a dark time in Oklahoma City’s history. Big Anne was a shrewd businesswoman who controlled and colluded with the city’s thieves, gamblers, drunkards, prostitutes and shady dealmakers. Audacious and charming, she was also popular with important businessmen and civic leaders, and her fat pocketbook easily earned her favors with politicians.