

**KATHERINE
ANN
CROSS
1899-1917**



**MURDERED
BY
HUMAN
WOLVES**

Oklahoma's most enigmatic gravestone lies in Konawa Cemetery. The inscription reads: "KATHERINE Dau. of J.T. & M.K. CROSS Mar. 13, 1899 Oct. 10, 1917". Below is a brief epitaph, in a left-leaning script: "Murdered by human wolves". What could this inscription mean? The death of Katherine Cross would shock her rural town forever.

John Taylor and Mary Katherine Cross moved from Vilonia, Arkansas to Konawa in search of farmland and a better life for their family of four girls and four boys. Katherine was their first-born in March 1899. At eighteen, she told her parents that she was pregnant.

Local doctor Dr. Abraham Yates convinced her parents that she was suicidal. They consented to an "illegal operation" that was performed on October 10, 1917, but complications led to her untimely death later that day. Katherine was not the first young woman to die at the hands of Dr. Yates and his assistant, schoolteacher Fredrick O'Neal.

On August 15th, the same procedure had been performed on schoolteacher Elise Stone, who was quite far along in her pregnancy. The rumored father was none other than the very-married Mr. O'Neal. Complications arose and Elise languished for four days in Dr. Yates' office before she was returned to her home where she subsequently died. The men were arrested on August 31st but it would take Katherine's death to shed light on the true case of Elise's untimely passing.

The good people of Konawa wanted answers as to why these beautiful young women died in Dr. Yates' care so a complaint was filed with County Attorney A. G. Nichols. He ordered Elise exhumed and an autopsy performed right at her graveside. It was quickly determined she died of an abortion gone terribly wrong.

Katherine's parents then came forward and gave authorities information about Dr. Yates' procedure on their daughter. On October 24th, Dr. Yates was arrested, ironically, while singing at a church revival. Legal technicalities dropped the original charge to manslaughter.

At the Stone trial, friends of Elise testified about her relationship with O'Neal while both worked at Vamoosa School. Surprisingly on February 22, 1918, the jury acquitted Dr. Yates and were hopelessly deadlocked 11-1 for conviction for O'Neal. The pending charges in the Cross death were never addressed in a court of law.

Overcome with grief and tired of the publicity, the Cross family moved to Waurika, about 100 miles south. Before they left, they wanted the town of Konawa to never forget what happened to their daughter that horrible October day. On her headstone they had inscribed "Murdered by human wolves".

Cross and Stone probably believed they could have the "operation" and perhaps no one would know. These procedures were done in secrecy, often with unsanitary instruments leading to infection, or worse yet, hemorrhaging, often resulting in death. The doctors who performed these surgeries were often referred to as "human wolves".

Katherine Cross' headstone has been repeatedly stolen over the years. After the 2016 theft, it has never been recovered. Ironically, Dr. Yates is buried a mere fifty feet from his victims.