

**ESTHER ESTELL
LeBARRE
JORDEN
1904-1984**



**RECOVERED
ALL-INDIAN
SILENT
FILM**

In 1919, Texas Film Company owner Richard Banks approached Hollywood writer-director Norbert Myles about writing a script based on an old Comanche legend and directing the film. The location would be the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge near Lawton. The movie “The Daughter of Dawn” would premiere in 1920 with its all-Indian cast. The story of this film – and its resurrection – would unfold over the next ninety years.

The lead was played by Esther Estell LeBarre, who was born in 1904 in Kiowa County. Her father was born in Alsace-Lorraine, France and emigrated to America in 1875. Her mother was born in Indian Territory and adopted into the Comanche Tribe. Supposedly she got the part due to her family’s relationship with Comanche Chief Quanah Parker.

She portrays the daughter of the Chief of the Kiowas, played by Hunting Horse who was General George Custer’s Indian scout. Her love interests were White Eagle, played by White Parker, and Black Wolf, played by Jack Sankadota. Wolf had many ponies so her father wanted to consider both as potential husbands for her. Red Wing, played by Wanada Parker, was also in love with Wolf. The Parkers were Comanche Chief Quanah Parker’s children.

Only one copy of the movie, filmed on highly flammable and easily decomposable silver nitrate film, was made. In 1920, it survived a fire that destroyed the Dallas warehouse where the small Texas Film Company stored its work. Somehow it ended in a North Carolina garage.

In 2003, a private investigator, trying to collect a client’s fee, was given five cans of nitrate celluloid reels. Believing it to be “The Daughter of Dawn”, he contacted Brian Hearn, film curator at the Oklahoma City Museum of Art who contacted Bob Blackburn at the Oklahoma Historical Society.

OHS already had 36 still photographs at the Museum of the Western Prairie at Altus and the original script, but thought the film was lost. The investigator offered OHS the movie for \$35,000. In 2006, OHS purchased the film for \$5,000. Using a National Film Preservation Foundation grant, they digitized the film, added intertitles, and hired Comanche symphonic composer David Yeagley to compose a new score in 2012.

In the film, historians noticed a prominent tepee with unusual markings – yellow and black horizontal stripes. Known as the Tipi with Battle Pictures, it was given to the Kiowa by the Cheyenne as a symbol of peace. Paintings from one tepee were copied on to the next tepee and passed through generations as a history of the Kiowa. In 2013, the Library of Congress added the movie to its National Film Registry.

It is remarkable thing is that this film still exists. It had just one cameraman, no costumes, no lighting, no props and buffalo borrowed from the Bronx Zoo. Myles would write and direct until 1933, when he switched to makeup, working with Ray Bolger in “The Wizard of Oz” (1939) and “The Jack Benny Show” (1954-1962).

This was the only film Esther LeBarre ever made. She lived in Lawton and Yukon before relocating to Memphis with her husband Albert Jordan and their two children. She died in March 1984 at age 79 and is buried in Loudon, Tennessee, where her son lived.