

**JANE
IMPSON
ROBINSON
1863-1940**



**THE LADY
ON
RUSSIAN
HILL**

Nestled in a small town near McAlester is a Russian Orthodox Church. It has three domes that represent the holy trinity, distinct crosses with three bars, and stained glass. Many immigrants from Russia and Eastern European nations came to the area in the late 1880s for a better life. A century later the church stands as a symbol of the combined integrity of both Russian and Native American people.

Jane Impson was born in 1863 in Jumbo, Indian Territory near Antlers. She married James Wesley Robinson in January 1883. He had moved to Indian Territory to teach at the Choctaw Indian Seminary. Short after their first-born child died in December 1885, they moved to Hartshorne to claim their allotted land. The original Dawes Act of 1887 allowed the federal government to take land from tribal communities and disperse it out to individual tribal citizens. The Robinson family built three new homes on the western edge of Hartshorne. In 1897, the Robinsons donated six acres of their land to immigrants on which to build a church.

Saints Cyril and Methodius Russian Orthodox Church was founded by Russian immigrants who were recruited in East Coast cities by the railroad to move to Hartshorne to work in the coal mines. The neighborhood in which they settled was named Russian Hill. The church was dedicated as the only Orthodox Temple between Saint Louis and San Francisco and may have been the last Orthodox Church to receive the blessing and financial support of Tsar Nicholas II.

In 1917, they constructed the current red brick building, reminiscent of St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow. With the onset of the Great Depression and the decline of coal mining, many members of the church left the area to find other employment. The edifice remains an important reminder of the impact of coal mining on the state's diverse religious and ethnic heritage.

James Robinson died in October 1916. In December, Jane applied for a Civil War Widows Pension since he had served in the 11th Kansas Cavalry. She was rejected when it was discovered that James was still married to his first wife Mary Sabra Rogers, whom he married in 1868 in Indiana. He had deserted and never divorced her before he moved to the Choctaw Nation.

Jane Robinson was known as a matriarch, surviving in difficult times. She raised her own food, slaughtered her own animals and sewed all the family clothing. She also battled prejudice toward Choctaw people. A great-grandson of Jane remembers as a child walking to Hartshorne with her and hearing people calling her prejudicial Indian names. Once a white man ordered her off a narrow sidewalk so that he could pass. She responded by singing in Choctaw as she proceeded to claim her rights to the sidewalk with her great-grandson in tow!

Jane Impson Robinson died in July 1940. Today, she is remembered as "the Indian Lady on Russian Hill, a symbol of strength and spiritual leadership.