

**LULU MAY
TITTLE
HEFNER
1874-1954**



**FIRST
FEMALE
OIL
OPERATOR**

Lulu Hefner (also Heffner) was a Cherokee businesswoman from Nowata who became successful in the oil industry. She became the first woman to drill for oil on her own property and the first female oil operator in Oklahoma.

Lulu May Tittle was born August 1874 to James Marion Tittle and Annie Henrietta Prather. She was educated at Vinita and the Cherokee Female Seminary. She married John Emory Hefner (1867-1926) in December 1892 in Lenapah and had four children.

James Tittle's mother before her marriage was Rose Anne Ward, a descendant of the famous Nancy "Nanyehi" Ward. He was also a descendant of Sequoyah, inventor of the Cherokee alphabet.

Vinita was founded in 1870 by Elias Cornelius Boudinot. It was the first city in the state with electricity. The city was first named Downingville and was primarily an Indian community. James Tittle opened a pool hall and cider point, but the city authorities poured out his "product" and he sued for damages.

Boudinot told city authorities that if they changed the name to Vinita, after Boudinot's lover, sculptor Lavinia "Vinnie" Ream, Tittle would not collect damages. Ream was best known for the statue of Abraham Lincoln in the United States Capitol rotunda. Vinita is probably best known today for the "Glass House McDonalds", built in 1957, that spans I-44 south of town. Refurbished in 2013, it is now known as "Will Rogers Archway".

Attractive and resourceful, Lulu Hefner opened the first millinery store at the time Nowata was beginning to be one of the busy Oklahoma oil towns. She was also active in the civic and social affairs of the Nowata community. However, after learning about the excitement of oil drilling, she sold the shop and used her own funds to drill an oil well on her own property.

When she struck oil, Hefner earned the title of "the first female oil operator in Oklahoma". By 1921, she had drilled 28 oil wells, all of which produced oil, and none were dry wells, called dusters. She was asked about her consistent luck in finding oil. "I do not depend on luck. I back geological science with my own judgment and intuition. I always operate on my own money and so I cannot afford to waste time on 'dusters' – I must get producers."

Although Hefner believed that "a woman's judgment beats a man's every time when applied to business," she had a collaborative relationship with the oil fraternity and was "always willing to listen to good counsel and advice from the older heads in the oil fields; but depends upon her own business judgment in the last analysis."

Her other accomplishments included managing a successful motion picture theater -- which was a hobby of hers -- and owning the largest car garage in the state of the Oklahoma. She enjoyed a considerable income from all of these ventures, became known as "largest lady property owner" in Nowata.

After finding success in Oklahoma's oil industry, Heffner moved to Texas in search of more oil. She died in July 1954 at age 79 in Oklahoma City. She was buried in Nowata.