

**THERESA
HUNT-
TYLER**
1878-1972



**WATONGA'S
FIRST
FEMALE
DENTIST**

When Dr. Hunt, newly graduated from dental school, stepped off the train in Watonga at the turn of the century, she had stopped in a place that was remote and unsettled. Her first office was sandwiched between two saloons and her patients frequently showed up inebriated.

Theresa Hunt was born in August 1878 in Iowa. When she told her family at age eight, she wanted to be a dentist, they laughed at her goal. Dentistry was a male-dominated profession at the time. Besides, the Hunt family were farmers in Mountain Grove, MO, and they didn't have the money to send her to dental school.

After graduating from eighth grade, Theresa obtained a teaching certificate and taught school for a few years. She lived with families and saved her salary of twenty dollars a month for future tuition at dental school. She also received valuable experience working part-time for a local dentist. When Theresa had saved enough money, she entered the Western Dental College in Kansas City, as one of three females in a class of sixty students. Only a few of the male students accepted the women. The men soon realized that the women were determined to succeed.

Upon graduation in 1901, Dr. Hunt was invited to work for a dentist in El Reno. With very little money, she boarded a train for Oklahoma Territory. While there, she heard about the great need for a dentist in Watonga. Packing her new Oklahoma Dental License #134 on a dreary winter day, she boarded the northbound Rock Island train to the small frontier town.

With courage and determination, she picked up her valise and started down the muddy road to the hotel. Patients were waiting to see her even before she had checked into the hotel. The people of Watonga had been nine years without a dentist and they welcomed her. She treated patients in an unused hotel room, then moved to the back room of Hooper's Drug Store before her office in the business district's Rose Building was ready.

While living in the territorial governor Thomas Benton Ferguson's home while the family was in Guthrie (1901-06), the Hoopers offered Theresa a place to live. She rented the top floor for her living quarters. Soon she found true love when Homer Tyler moved to town as a partner in a local mercantile store. They found out they had much in common – and both were born in Iowa.

In July 1903, they married in Dallas and set up living quarters behind the store. In 1904, the store was burned down in a fire that started in a nearby saloon so the couple bought a farmhouse south of town. She set up a dental office in the front room, while raising three children. In the wintertime, the family would live in an apartment over the drug store.

Her office was always busy, with people wanting to just sit around and visit. In 1941, fillings were still a dollar for adults and fifty cents for children. Extractions were one dollar and gold crowns were five dollars. Usually, people paid in cash. Although there were three saloons in the block where her office was located, Dr. Tyler kept a supply of whiskey on hand, especially for the women who were not permitted in the saloons.

In 1941, Dr. Tyler's family convinced her it was time to give up her forty-year dental practice. Even so, many patients still came to her for consultation. She died in June 1972 at age 94.