

**ELIZABETH  
JANE FULTON  
HESTER  
1839-1929**



**INDIAN  
TERRITORY  
MISSIONARY  
WORKER**

The Oklahoma Hall of Fame recognizes residents whose work has brought honor or distinction to the heritage of the state. The first Hall of Fame Banquet and Induction Ceremony was held in November 1928, and has been an annual event ever since. The first female inductee was Elizabeth Fulton Hester of Muskogee. Hester's resume was impressive – a nurse during the Civil War, speaker for women's suffrage, and founder of the Muskogee Day Nursery.

Elizabeth Jane Fulton was born in January 1839 in Georgia. Elizabeth graduated from Southern Masonic Female Seminary in Covington in 1855. Soon after, she traveled with her uncle's family to Indian Territory to work as a teacher and missionary in the Chickasaw Nation. She arrived in Tishomingo in 1858, accepting a position teaching at Robinson's Academy. On Sundays, she taught Sunday school classes.

Shortly after arriving, Elizabeth was reacquainted with George Hester, a North Carolina merchant whom she had first met in Georgia. They married in June 1859. George moved his mercantile in 1861 to Boggy Depot, which was a government supply station. Elizabeth taught at the Choctaw National School until it closed. During the Civil War, Captain Hester worked as a quartermaster under the commander of all Southern troops in Indian Territory.

Boggy Depot became a center for Confederate activity. The Hester Mercantile became a hospital for Confederate troops and Elizabeth served as a nurse. Many top Confederate officers ate at the Hester home, including Stand Waite. After the war, George Hester reopened his business on the road served by the Fort Smith stage line. Elizabeth taught at the local National school, which was organized by the Chickasaw Nation.

Elizabeth returned to Tishomingo in 1878 and formed the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. She encouraged women's suffrage and was chaplain of the United Daughters of the Confederacy of Oklahoma. George died in March 1897. Elizabeth moved to Muskogee in 1901 to live near her daughter Daisy, who had married Cherokee attorney Robert Owen in December 1889. Elizabeth became involved with the Methodist Church and taught Sunday school. She also began visiting jails on Sundays across eastern Oklahoma.

Elizabeth founded the Day Nursery in 1904 as a "baby clinic" for unwed mothers. By 1906, it had evolved into a child care facility. She continued to live in Muskogee after Robert Owen was appointed Oklahoma's first United States Senator and the Owens moved to Washington in 1907. In February 1917, Hester spoke about women's issues, becoming the first woman to speak in the new state capitol building.

She was one of the best-known Oklahoma women in her day, loved by all because of her kindly spirit and practical helpfulness. At her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday in January 1929, she was honored for being Muskogee's "first citizen of benevolence." Upon her death in August, the "Muskogee Times Democrat" wrote that "she was a pioneer Indian missionary worker in Oklahoma and one of the best-known persons in Eastern Oklahoma ...loved by thousands."