

**GERTRUDE
SELMA SOBER
FIELD
1869-1949**



**QUEEN
OF
THE
ARBUCKLES**

School teacher, stenographer and miner describe Gertrude Sober. While working the first two jobs, she was able to be a prospector in summer. Giving up a comfortable home for the zest of living a rough miner's life in the Oklahoma hills, Gertrude is credited with discovering zinc in the Arbuckle Mountains.

Gertrude Sober was born in December 1869 near Farragut, Iowa. Her father Morris was a master carpenter by trade and was also an inventor, with several innovations to his credit, including a horse-drawn cotton chopper. Gertrude is said to have shown an interest in geology at an early age. The family came to Oklahoma during the 1889 Land Run to start a new life after Morris lost a fortune in unwise investments.

She became secretary to Tecumseh Judge James L. Brown in 1890, who was the legislator responsible for introducing the bill to transfer the State Capital from Guthrie to Oklahoma City. She started working for council member C. J. Wrightsman in 1893. From 1895 to 1901, Gertrude lived on the family homestead east of Sweetwater. She also worked as a teacher, but experimented with raising crops, and enjoyed searching for minerals in her free time. Afterwards, she moved back to Oklahoma City.

Charles Gould, early founder of Oklahoma Geological Society, began conducting field trips to the Arbuckle Mountains twice yearly. The week-long trip by horse and wagon was popular, including living in tents and eating out-of-doors. Sometimes as many as twenty women took the trip. Located south of Davis, the mountains are the oldest known formations between the Appalachian and Rocky Mountains. The granite rocks date back to the Precambrian Period 1.4 billion years ago. The elevation is approximately 1,400 feet.

Sober soon heard stories about Gould's adventures. An itinerant peddler also talked about fabulous riches, including gold, silver, lead and zinc, in the mountains. She decided this was worth investigating so she strapped a pickax to her horse's saddle and headed south from Oklahoma City. Undaunted by ridicule from family and friends, she began raising money for a mining company in 1906, and one Oklahoma newspaper called her a "noted mineralogist and geologist" as early as 1907.

Sober and local Davis doctor R. C. Hope visited the area many times prospecting for minerals. In August 1909, while pounding idly upon a rock, Gertrude noticed that the chipped-off fragment looked like zinc. This was the discovery of what turned out to be the Southwest Davis Zinc Field. A Department of Interior official suggested a monument to Sober should be inscribed with "Queen of the Arbuckles".

With \$1,000,000 capital, Dr. Hope and Gertrude formed the short-lived Indian Mining and Development Company with Gertrude as President and General Manager. From 1909 to 1912, business flourished but contradicting claims and court injunctions ended development by 1913. That same year, she acquired the Bellah zinc mine in Sevier County, Arkansas, and served as the superintendent.

In January 1918, Gertrude married Chester Field, who had come to work the mines near Davis in 1909. Their marriage was short-lived when he died in September 1918 due to the Spanish influenza epidemic while stationed at Fort Dix, New Jersey. Gertrude never remarried. She moved to Norman in 1924 and ran a boarding house for boys. With her newfound wealth, she graduated from the University of Oklahoma in 1933 – at age 64 – with a bachelor's degree in geology, the first woman to do so.

Gertrude Sober Field died in November 1949 at age 79 in Oklahoma City. For paving the way for other women in the field of geology, she was posthumously inducted into the National Mining Hall of Fame at Leadville, Colorado in 1988. She exhibited personal and professional courage and laid the foundation for women in mining. For this reason, her legacy lives on.