

**CHRISTINE
ARENA WALKER
HITCH
1890-1984**



**PRESERVING
NO MAN'S
LAND
HERITAGE**

The Oklahoma Panhandle is a long narrow (34.5 x 167-mile) strip in the northwestern corner of Oklahoma, comprising three counties: Cimarron, Texas and Beaver. Prior to statehood, all of it was a single entity known as the Public Land Strip, or No Man's Land because until 1890 it was effectively under no formal government control. It had been declared Native American hunting territory in the Medicine Lodge Treaty of 1867. Visitors viewed the Panhandle as marginal land, good for hunting buffalo and nothing else. The Hitch Family of Guymon would turn the area into a major agribusiness.

Christine Arena Walker was born in June 1890 in Sun City, Kansas, where her father had come from Kentucky after the Civil War. He had grown up on a tobacco plantation which could no longer be operated successfully when the slaves were freed. The romance of the west drew him to this part of the country, where he became a cowboy following the herd up the old Chisholm Trail. Then he began hunting buffalo for the hides. With the returns, he established a horse herd, and later raised cattle.

She attended school at Medicine Lodge through the eighth grade when her family moved to Colorado where she attended high school. At seventeen, she started teaching school in the Pleasant Valley District near Liberal, Kansas. The district was so large, it was necessary to have two schools and lacking funds for this purpose, a chicken house was converted into a school room for 18-20 students. She eventually attended Kansas State Normal School (now Emporia State University).

Christine was living on her mother's farm north of Liberal and teaching at the country school when she met Henry Hitch, who was managing his father's Kansas ranch along with his own claim. The Hitch family had immigrated from England to eastern Tennessee. In 1884, James Kerrick Hitch left home for the High Plains and fortune. After ten years working as a cowboy, he rode into the Coldwater Creek region of No Man's Land. In 1890, when the Strip was open for settlement, Hitch claimed land. By 1900, they were running ten thousand head of cattle on thousands of acres.

Christine Walker married Henry Hitch in June 1910 and moved to the Hitch Ranch south of Guymon. After his father's death in 1921, Henry assumed direction of the family interests in addition to running his own ten-thousand-acre ranch. Henry's genius and hard work would eventually pay off. In time, the family owned 30,000 acres of land in three states. Eventually they would move into farming, become Oklahoma's largest wheat producer, and create a feedlot empire.

Meanwhile, Christine was constantly engaged in the affairs of the community, including churches and schools. She helped found Goodwell's No-Mans Land Historical Society in 1934 to preserve the Oklahoma Panhandle's heritage. She wanted to sustain the historical documents and pioneer relics that marked the settling of No Man's Land for future generations. An archive of newspaper articles details the plight of local residents during the Dust Bowl and their sometimes-bitter feelings toward the term Okie.

She also helped establish the No Man's Land Museum at Panhandle State College. In 1962 she was among the top ten "Mothers of the Year" selected in Oklahoma. In 1965 she was selected "Queen of Pioneer Days", an annual Guymon event to observe the traditions and backgrounds of the Oklahoma Panhandle from the date of its settlement as No Man's Land. Her granddaughter Jane Hitch was named Miss Oklahoma in 1964.

Christine Hitch was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1972. She died on January 3, 1984 at age 93 in Guymon. Her legacy continues today in the activities at the No Man's Land Historical Society.