

**ANNA IONE  
MURPHY  
OVERHOLSER  
1870-1940**



**BROUGHT  
'SOCIETY'  
TO OKLAHOMA  
TERRITORY**

Anna Murphy was a teenager when she came to Oklahoma City in 1889. Within a few months, she was married to wealthy businessman Henry Overholser, who had also just arrived in the city. As the wife of a wealthy business leader, the young Anna soon became one of the leading socialites of the city.

Anna Ione Murphy was born in October 1870 in Holden, Missouri. Her father, the first Oklahoma territorial treasurer, arrived in Oklahoma City on April 22, 1889. After completing high school in Harrison, Arkansas, Anna arrived on June 3<sup>rd</sup>. The 17-year-old Anna married 43-year-old financier Henry Overholser on October 25<sup>th</sup>. Henry would become “father of Oklahoma City” and Anna the city’s foremost socialite.

Born in 1846 in Ohio, Henry amassed a sizable fortune in Indiana, Colorado and Wisconsin before coming to Oklahoma City, with six railroad cars full of building supplies and lumber, and some pre-fab buildings, arriving just days after the 1889 Land Run. Almost immediately, he leased six business buildings on Grand Avenue.

He built the Grand Avenue Hotel in 1889 and the magnificent Overholser Opera House in 1890, followed by the Overholser Theater. In 1906, he helped the Chamber of Commerce purchase grounds at 19<sup>th</sup> and Eastern for a permanent home for the State Fair of Oklahoma. He also organized a railroad and promoted a streetcar line.

In 1902, when Henry purchased three lots in Classen’s Highland Park Addition (now known as Heritage Hills), many questioned why he would build a home so far “out in the country”. Seeing potential in the land, the couple constructed a three-story brick-and-stone 20-room mansion. The Queen Anne and Chateausque architectural style were regarded as out of style and stood in stark contrast to the Mission, Craftsman, and Prairie styles of architecture that had become prominent at the time.

The home had the latest in luxuries: radiator heat, indoor plumbing, electricity, hand-stenciled and painted canvas covered walls, imported wood and an early intercom system. It featured English carpets, French stained glass, Italian light fixtures, Belgian fine oak paneling and a turret. Henry spent \$38,000 on the 11,700-square-foot mansion located at 405 NW 15<sup>th</sup> Street. The Overholser mansion became a focal point of Oklahoma City society. The opening of the mansion in April 1904 became the highlight of the social season. Anna hosted balls, concerts, luncheons, and dinners. Newspapers described her Paris gowns and lavish home furnishings.

Anna also founded the social organizations Philomatheia, Modern Classics Club, Ladies Music Club, Women's Orchestra League, Patriots Club, and the First Families Club, raising funds for a home for needy elderly women. She was also known to lend out her fine linens to prominent newcomers to entertain in style as well. Anna co-founded the Chafing Dish Club in 1899 and the Five O’Clock Club in 1906, opening the first nursery.

After their son died at eight months old in 1890, their daughter Henry Ione was born in 1905. While on a European tour in 1911, businessman Henry suffered a stroke, leaving him an invalid until his death in 1915. Henry Ione married aviator David Perry in 1926. They lived in the mansion with Anna until her death in April 1940 at age 69. Because the Perrys had no children, the property was transferred to David after Henry Ione’s death in 1959. Realizing the historic value of the mansion, he sought to preserve it. In June 1970, it was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In 1972, Perry sold the mansion and all of its belongings to the Oklahoma Historical Society. In 2003, Preservation Oklahoma took possession and still manages it today.

From Louis XV furniture to Belgian lace curtains and antique art objects, the formal rooms are preserved exactly as they were on the night of the 1904 opening reception, providing a unique look into the economic, architectural and social history of both the Overholser family and early Oklahoma City. Some people claim the ghost of Anna still glides through her old home. Ghost stories have been told for decades of seeing curtains open and close in the third-floor turret window. Some say they have seen a petite woman in a pearl-decked lacy white gown, her dark hair piled gracefully around her face. This is the exact gown that Anna Overholser wore to a 1900 reception for President and Mrs. William McKinley.