

**ANNETTE BELLE  
BLACKBURN  
EHLER  
1864-1947**



**JOURNALIST,  
POLITICIAN,  
AND  
HISTORIAN**

Annette Ehler was interested in literature, art and music as well as social and political life. A longtime resident of Hennessey, she dedicated the Pat Hennessey Memorial Garden to the town's pioneer founder. Over the years, Mr. Hennessey's death had been misrepresented and Ehler was determined to tell the true story.

Annette Belle Blackburn was born in August 1864 in Lawrenceville, Illinois. She attended Ohio State Normal School in Ada, Chicago University in 1890-91, where she earned degrees in journalism and advertising, and Kingfisher College in Oklahoma Territory. At sixteen, she taught at a country school in Lawrence County, Illinois and also in Missoula, Montana before she returned to teach near Palestine and Danville, Illinois.

In 1892 she married Marion Allen Haskett of Danville. Marion died in 1900 and daughter Helen, born in 1899, died in 1901. Soon after, Annette came to Hennessey, Oklahoma Territory, where her three siblings lived. She taught in Hennessey schools, and served one year as Kingfisher County Deputy Registrar of Deeds until she resigned and bought the Hennessey Press-Democrat newspaper, which she owned and operated for three years.

In 1907, Annette married pioneer merchant and banker Frederick Ehler. She became actively involved in the Order of the Eastern Star and the Rainbow Girls, having been a Lawrenceville charter member when it organized in 1890, and a member of the Hennessey Chapter for 47 years. She was elected Worthy Grand Matron in 1915 and published the Eastern Star "Blue Book" from 1917 to 1945.

Ehler was a delegate to the 1924 New York City Democratic National Convention, the first time women could participate. She served as President of the Hennessey school board, and was the first woman mayor from 1924 to 1928. Ehler had other interests as well. As an accomplished musician, she published several songs, wrote "Study Outline of Greek Mythology, Rhetorical and Literature Outline" and "A Text on Grammar" while chairman of literature for the Federated Women's Clubs, and published a poetry book "The Fire Fly" in 1911.

Her interest in history led her to research the murder of town founder Pat Hennessey. On the night of July 3, 1874, Hennessey and three other freighters, each driving a six-mule team and hauling wagons loaded with supplies, stayed at the Buffalo Springs relay station, north of Hennessey. The next morning the gentle Irishman Hennessey was told of an Indian uprising nearby but since he had a good relationship with the tribes, the group continued their journey south.

At the same time, some government officials, traveling north from Darlington to Wichita, encountered a party barricaded in a store supposedly attacked by Indians. They found no Indians, but saw evidence a large number of horses had been tied for quite some time. They knew this was not how Indians tied their horses. They also found the prints of high heeled boots, strange since Indians all wore moccasins in those days. They decided the attack was by white outlaws, disguising themselves as Indians.

That afternoon they came across the charred body of a man on the Chisholm Trail, tied to the two back wheels of his wagon. When they reached Buffalo Springs, they learned the victim was Pat Hennessey. The other three massacred freighters were brought back for burial, but mysteriously Hennessey was left on the trail. They also learned that Indians weren't involved since the men hadn't been scalped. Hennessey's grave would soon mark the future town of Hennessey.

For years, historians believed Indians killed Hennessey but Ehler doubted the story. Through her historical research, Deputy Marshal William Malaley verified the true story and Wellington, Kansas businessman Jack Hastie reported the arrest of several men in southern Kansas, with mules and harnesses belonging to Hennessey. The truth was finally proved. An iron fence was placed around Hennessey's grave with an arch inscribed with his name. As the town grew, it was moved back near its original location. Ehler was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1936. She built the Pat Hennessey Memorial Garden, with a tower, beacon light, and botanical garden in 1939 and dedicated it to the city in May 1941. Ehler died in May 1947 in Hennessey.