

**KATE  
VERNON  
MAY  
1856-unk**



**WOMEN  
WHO MADE  
LAND  
RUNS**

Women participated in the Oklahoma Land Runs for a variety of reasons. Like men, they were enticed by the glowing reports, built-up excitement, novelty of a Land Run, and availability of land. Married women followed their husbands, sometimes unhappily, after the decision was made that the family would move to what was considered the uncivilized frontier. Kate May was one of those women.

Single women over the age of 21 and head of a household could also claim a 160-acre homestead. Young and old, they came with their most cherished possessions by wagon and horseback. The more fortunate homesteader made the run by train, and the less fortunate entered the race on foot.

Frontier women included newspaper reporter Nannita Daisey, who jumped from a train to stake a claim near Edmond, Elva Shartel Ferguson, who witnessed three land openings before settling in Watonga, and Laura Crews, who made the Cheyenne and Arapaho Run but didn't stake a claim until the 1893 opening. Lucy Davis, who registered for the 1893 land opening against the wishes of her husband, who believed there wouldn't be enough land for everyone, settled in Newkirk.

Kate May followed her husband to Oklahoma City after he made the 1889 Land Run and participated in the 1893 Cherokee Outlet Opening.

Kate Vernon was born in 1856 in Antebellum, Mississippi. In 1875 at age nineteen, she quit teaching school and married Samuel D. May, a storekeeper from Charleston, Mississippi. Due to financial setbacks, Sam first moved his family to Texas, and later he staked a claim in Oklahoma City during the Land Run of 1889. Sam would die the next day, leaving Kate as a widow with nine children.

She decided to make Oklahoma City their home. There she operated a restaurant until the 1893 financial panic caused the foreclosure of her loan. As head of the household, Kate knew that she would have to find opportunity elsewhere. As luck would have it, there was going to be another Land Run. On September 16, 1893, Kate made the Cherokee Strip Outlet Land Run on horseback and claimed a quarter section three miles south of Perry.

Like many pioneer women, Kate endured the adversities of everyday life. Her bad luck included drought that led to crop failures, a failed restaurant in Perry, and a daughter who developed tuberculosis. Doctors advised her to find drier climate so Kate moved her family two more times. They lived in Old Greer County in southwest Oklahoma for about ten years before settling in New Mexico Territory in 1906. She faded away into obscurity and the date of her death is not recorded.

Oklahoma historian Arrell Gibson categorized the Oklahoma pioneer woman as "resourceful, inventive, creative and versatile". With those talents, women made their mark on the state's history, whether as mothers and homemakers or as teachers, lawyers, and politicians. They managed households and reared children from dugouts and sod houses. Their personal stories provide insight into the state's early history and captured the essence of life on the prairie and in the small towns that grew in a day.

To commemorate their spirit, Governor E. W. Marland commissioned models for the Pioneer Woman statue from twelve well-known sculptors and financed a nationwide tour to get feedback from art critics and the general public in order to decide which model to use for the final statue. It was dedicated on April 22, 1930 in Ponca City on the 41<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the Land Run of 1889.