

**CHARLOTTE  
SUSAN RYAN  
SWAIM PETERS**  
**1873-1965**



**DISCOVERED  
ARTISTRY  
OF KIOWA  
FIVE**

In 1928 the International Art Congress in Prague, Czechoslovakia featured drawings done by Native American artists from Oklahoma known as the “Kiowa Five”. Their talent had been discovered by a woman working in Anadarko named Susie Peters.

Charlotte Susan Ryan was born in November 1873 in Huntsville, Tennessee. The schoolteacher was married three times: Deputy Marshal John Swaim (1891), James Peters (1901), and Oscar Shaffer (1911), but each met untimely violent deaths. After being widowed three times, Peters went to live among the Kiowa in Caddo County.

Susie Peters was hired by the Department of the Interior as field matron for the Kiowa Indian Agency in Anadarko in 1917. She often asked to tutor Indian children, being very sympathetic to Indian culture. She recognized the artistic talent of several in drawing and organized them into an art club. She encouraged them to memorialize the Kiowa culture and rituals they saw as young children.

In 1918 she paid college teacher Willie Baze Lane to teach them art techniques for a few months and purchased supplies with her own money. Then she convinced Sister Olivia Taylor, a Choctaw at the nearby mission school operated by St. Patrick’s Catholic Church, to teach them art. Peters also attempted to market their works in both Oklahoma and New Mexico, and brought them to the attention of Oscar Jacobson, director of the University of Oklahoma art department.

In 1927 Stephen Mopope, Monroe Tsatoke, Spencer Asah, and Jack Hokeah came to Norman under the guidance of Edith Mahier. Later, they were joined by Lois Smokey and James Auchiah. Smokey left the group later that year but her work was included in most of their early exhibits. Jacobson provided the students with art supplies and studio space, and a monthly stipend for their living expenses. He ignored suggestions that the Kiowa artists be taught to draw in a more European manner. They inspired a style of painting known as the “Oklahoma School”.

Jacobson, unlike Susie Peters, had the contacts to successfully market their works. Six months after their arrival, he organized a traveling sales exhibition. Within a year the works had been sold, and an even larger exhibition was mounted. A mere eighteen months after their arrival, Jacobson arranged for the Prague exhibition. In 1929 a prestigious French publisher issued a beautiful folio of some of their more-important works.

In the 1930s the Kiowa Five painted murals and other projects on the walls of the Anadarko Post Office and many other historical Oklahoma buildings as part of WPA projects. Today the works of the Kiowa Five are highly collectable. Due to the limited supply, Smokey’s works are the most valued.

Peters continued to encourage Kiowa youth to preserve their heritage, accompanying dancers to programs like the Gallup Inter-Tribal Ceremonial from the 1930s into the 1960s. She was made a “blood sister” during a Kiowa ceremony in November 1954, given the name Kom-tah-gya. That same year, she was honored by the National Hall of Fame for Famous American Indians. She served as matron of the tribe until her death in October 1965 at age 91 in Anadarko. She was posthumously inducted into the Oklahoma Women’s Hall of Fame in its inaugural year 1982.