

**KATIE
DeWITT
JAMES
1874-1905**



**DEAD
WOMAN'S
CROSSING,
OKLAHOMA**

On a map of western Oklahoma, you will find Dead Woman's Crossing near Weatherford. The mystery of what happened to Katie James here in 1905 has become local legend.

On July 7th, 29-year-old schoolteacher Katie DeWitt James left her abusive husband Martin Luther James and boarded a train with her 13-month-old baby Lulu in Custer City bound for Weatherford and then Ripley to stay with relatives. As the train departed, Katie waved to her father Henry DeWitt, unaware she would never see him again.

At a stop in Clinton, local prostitute Fanny Norton befriended Katie, telling her about a strange man asking questions at the station. Katie was nervous so Fanny convinced her to get off the train at Weatherford and stay the night with Fanny's brother-in-law, then catch tomorrow's train.

On July 28th, Henry had not heard from his daughter so he hired detective Sam Bartell, who went to Weatherford to piece together Katie's final movements. Witnesses saw Katie leave the train with Fanny and spend the night at William Moore's house. They left the next morning for a leisurely three-hour buggy ride toward Hydro.

Less than an hour later, Fanny's buggy was seen fleeing full speed from Deer Creek. She stopped at the Birscheid's farmhouse to leave Lulu, her clothes and blanket stained with blood. Fanny tossed other bloody clothes in nearby bushes. Bartell found Lulu still at the Birscheid's – and bloodstains on the buggy in town.

Fanny had rushed back to Clinton, took her four children to Guthrie, and disappeared. On July 29th, she was arrested in Shawnee. The authorities knew her from a previous Weatherford shooting, where a sympathetic jury acquitted her. During questioning, Fanny was visibly nervous. During a break, Fanny went to the bathroom, swallowed poison, and died less than an hour later.

A month later, while crossing a bridge at Deer Creek, George Cornell and his sons discovered Katie's severed skull with a bullet hole behind her right ear. Her badly decomposed body was hidden in a clump of bushes nearby. Fanny's .38 caliber revolver was found nearby, the same one used in the Weatherford shooting. DeWitt identified his daughter's body through her tattered but recognizable clothing, hat, a comb in her hair, shoes, and her gold wedding band.

The coroner declared robbery as the motive – but why leave a valuable ring? There was also plenty of speculation about Martin. Strangely, he hadn't seemed concerned that his baby daughter was missing but he had an airtight alibi, provided by his friend, a local deputy sheriff.

After Katie's death, Martin moved to Dewey County with Lulu. Henry never saw her again but he received updates from his sister, who lived nearby. When Henry sent Lulu new clothes through his sister. Martin told Lulu that Katie was still alive and the clothes were from her. In January 1913, eight-year-old Lulu died of spinal meningitis.

Today, the mystery of Katie James' fate continues. Legend claims her spirit haunts the bridge near the site of her murder, known as Dead Woman's Crossing. Reportedly, at midnight you can hear the sound of a woman crying for her child, as well as the sound of wagon wheels.