

**MARY
EVELYN JUMP
OFFIELD
1868-1939**



**OFFIELD
SCHOOL
FOR
GIRLS**

In the early 1910s, the Offield Home School for Girls in Muskogee's Kendall Place, founded by Mary Offield, provided a finishing school where girls "were not only taught the useful things of life, but the moral lessons to help them in the present and future".

Mary Evelyn Jump was born in July 1868 in Virginia, and educated in St. Louis, Baltimore and Philadelphia, receiving her A. B. degree from Lewis College in 1888. In January 1897, she married James Madison Offield in Missouri. They had two children, Alice Evelyn and Lewis Delany, later known as actor Jack Oakie. She was a teacher in Lebanon, Missouri and a teacher and principal in Sedalia, Missouri. She was also president of the Offield School of Expression in Sedalia.

In 1908, the family moved to Muskogee, where James was in the real estate business and part of the group that opened the Kendall College addition. They lived at 205 South 12th Street. In October 1912, Mary opened Offield Home School for Girls for elementary and secondary students.

The Society Page of the Muskogee Times-Democrat from 1912 and 1914 constantly covered the activities of the Offield School of Girls. Music, art, expression, domestic science, French and German were taught at the school at 903 West Okmulgee.

Offield was well known throughout Oklahoma by her work in musical and literacy clubs. She often traveled the South and West on concert tours. Her children lived with their grandmother in Kansas City while Mary traveled. When James died in March 1917, the family returned to Sedalia.

In 1920, Offield took a job teaching psychology at Columbia University in New York. Teenage Lewis got a job as a Wall Street runner but the Broadway lights soon captured his attention. He performed in vaudeville, then broke into Broadway as a chorus boy in George M. Cohan's Little Nellie Kelly (1923). He changed his stage name to Jack Oakie – Jack for his first role and Oakie for Oklahoma. He worked in vaudeville and Broadway musicals to hone his comedy skills.

In 1927, Offield accompanied Oakie to California as he looked for film work. His low, booming voice was perfect for the 'talkies'. Oakie appeared in 87 movies in the 1930s and 40s. The beefy, plump-faced comedian was a top second-banana jokester of Hollywood's Golden Age.

In the 1933 film "Too Much Harmony" with Bing Crosby, Offield played Oakie's mother. On the set, she charmed actors with her anecdotes as they sat around her on canvas chairs emblazoned with their names. Offield died in February 1939 at age 70 in Los Angeles. She did not live to see her son's biggest film success.

In the 1940 Charlie Chaplin classic "The Great Dictator", Oakie portrayed Benzino Napaloni, the boisterous dictator of Bacteria, a broad parody of the Italian fascist dictator. Oakie and Chaplin never spoke after filming, because Chaplin was upset that Oakie stole the picture away from him, receiving an Academy Award nomination for Best Supporting Actor.

Oakie continued to work in films and television until he died suddenly in 1978 from an aortic aneurysm. Offield is buried near her son at Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Glendale, California.