

ANNA LEWIS: A GREAT WOMAN OF OKLAHOMA

By Winnie Lewis Gravitt*

*"I would rather work in stubborn rock
 All the years of my life
 And make one strong thing
 And set in a high clean place
 To recall the granite strength of my desires."
 —Untermeyer*

Anna Lewis was born October 25, 1885 near the town of Cameron, Choctaw Nation, Indian Territory. She was the daughter of William Ainsworth Lewis and Betty Ann (nee Moore) Lewis of Choctaw descent.

Anna was the fourth child born into a family of ten children, three of whom did not survive childhood. Of the surviving, she was preceded in death by her oldest brother, Frank, 1923; by a sister, Belle, 1930, and by her youngest brother, Grady, 1952.

Anna passed away August 1, 1961, at her home near Clayton. Her home had been built on the site of the old Tushkahoma Female Institute, four miles from Tuskahoma and six miles from Clayton. She named the home "Nunih Wayah" from the sacred mountain of the Choctaws, where legend says the tribe was created. Her survivors were a brother, Curtis, of Clayton (who died on July 14, 1962); a sister Alice, Mrs. Mark Pierce, Fort Worth, Texas; and Winnie, Mrs. Andy Gravitt, of McAlester; a half-sister Ruth, Mrs. Ruth Miller of Midwest City; and a half-brother, William, Denver, Colorado.

Her early education was obtained from "Subscription Schools" of the era, and private teachers in the home. She entered the Tushkahoma Female Institute in 1900, and was graduated in 1903, later attending Mary Connor Junior College in Paris, Texas. After attending a summer "normal school" at Jones Academy, Choctaw Nation, she was granted a teacher's certificate in 1904 and that fall, began a teaching career which lasted until she retired in 1956. Four years of this period were spent as a

* *The Chronicles* appreciates this contribution and memorial on the life and work of Dr. Anna Lewis, teacher and writer in the field of Oklahoma history, written by her sister, Winnie Lewis Gravitt. Mrs. Gravitt is talented in her own right having had poems and other writings appear in different publications. Dr. Lewis made special acknowledgements in her book *Along the Arkansas* (Southwest Press, Dallas, 1932), to her sister, Mrs. Gravitt for her aid in translating many of the documents from the French in preparation for this book on early French expeditions to the region along the Arkansas River. Mrs. Gravitt makes her home in McAlester, and is retired after serving as Librarian in the Public Library of this City.—Ed.

student and a graduate student at the University of California at Berkeley. From California University, Anna Lewis received the degrees of A. B. in 1915, and M. A. in 1918. She continued to work toward her doctorate and after completing a year's residence at the University of Oklahoma, she was granted the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in 1930. She was the first woman to attain this honor from the University of Oklahoma.

Dr. Lewis' first two schools were Choctaw national schools in the Choctaw Nation. After Oklahoma statehood, she taught in Bokchito and later in the Durant City schools.

Returning from the University of California in 1916, she became a teacher in Oklahoma Presbyterian College at Durant. In the fall of 1917, she went to Chickasha to teach in the Oklahoma College for Women. Along with her duties as history teacher, she assumed the duties of Registrar. With the growth of the College, she was later able to devote her full time to the building of the Department of History, being relieved of the duty of Registrar. She became Head of the Department of History and held that position until her retirement in 1956.

As teacher, Dr. Lewis achieved her greatest satisfaction. She was a true teacher, teaching with authority, knowledge and inspiration. She challenged her students to think, to evaluate and to interpret the facts with unbiased mind. She was well known as an after-dinner speaker and lecturer. She held her audience with clear thinking and straightforward delivery. She spoke with charm and wit.

Dr. Lewis' special fields of study were American History and History of the Southwest, with emphasis on Oklahoma. In this field, she had done much research and writing. She is the author of *Along the Arkansas* (published by the Southwest Press in 1932, 250 pages); a Syllabus of lectures on the *American History and Government*; *Outlines of Oklahoma History*; and numerous articles published in *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*; the *University of California Press*; *Mississippi Valley Review*; *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*. She was a contributor to the *Dictionary of American Biography* and the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

Pushmataha—the American Patriot was published early in 1960, by the Exposition Press, New York. This was the first definitive biography of the Choctaw Chief, Pushmataha. It represented a work of research and writing of more than twenty years. The book was well received and reviews were complimentary. Research was done in the University of California's Bancroft Library; The University of Oklahoma; The State Library of Mississippi, Jackson, Mississippi, and the Library of Congress.

As a teacher, lecturer and writer, Dr. Lewis was well known, and in 1930 was named as one of the twenty-four prominent

women of Oklahoma. In 1932, she was included in that edition of *Who's Who*; later in *Women in Who's Who*; and *Who's Who in Oklahoma*. She was elected in the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1940. In 1949, she received a scholarship to the Petersborough Artist Colony in New Hampshire, the gift of the McDowell Club of Oklahoma City.

Dr. Lewis was a member, or honorary member of many organizations. She was a member of the Baptist Church; the Eastern Star; the D. A. R.; Delta Kappa Gamma;¹ American Pen Women; Mississippi Valley Historical Society; Oklahoma Historical Society; American Association of University Women; Business and Professional Women; Phi Gamma Mu; Ohoyohoma Club of McAlester; and Alphi Phi.

Upon retiring in 1956 from Oklahoma College for Women at Chickasha, Dr. Lewis was named professor emeritus of History. Early in 1940, Dr. Lewis had built a home from the stone of the old Tushkahoma Female Institute on her farm near Clayton. It was to this spacious, picturesque home she retired, reluctantly leaving it and each time returning with renewed pleasure.

Dr. Anna Lewis left the loved home for the last time on the night of August 1st, 1961. Burial was in McAlester, Oklahoma August 3rd, 1961.

In "A Tribute to Dr. Anna Lewis," Jeffie Young of Mu Chapter of Delta Kappa Gamma, writes: "We who mourn her passing realize that 'Death is but a horizon and a horizon is the limit of our eyes.' Though she has passed from our sight, her influence lives on. Transcending time itself in immortal love. Though her yesterdays are pages turned forever, on them the Master Teacher has inscribed her deeds. And today, in its book of remembrance, Delta Kappa Gamma places her name with this loving tribute among the members of the chapter eternal."

Dr. Anna Lewis' life was one of great loyalties and service to others, a living Memorial more lasting than Bronze.

¹ Dr. Anna Lewis was one of the founders of the State organization of Delta Kappa Gamma, national honorary teachers' society.—Editorial tribute to Dr. Anna Lewis in the *Chickasha Daily Express* for Wednesday, May 23, 1956, at her retirement from the Department of History at Oklahoma College for Women.—Ed.