

Gloyne, Lula Owl ^[1]

Gloyne, Lula Leta Owl: First Eastern Band Cherokee Nurse

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Lula Owl Gloyne was the first Eastern Band Cherokee Indian (ECBI) Registered Nurse and possibly the first Native American Registered Nurse in the United States. She was the only ECBI officer in WWI, serving as a 2nd Lt in the US Army Nurse Corps. In the 1920s, she served her tribe and community as a US Indian Health Service nurse providing home health and midwifery services. She was often seen walking, riding a horse or using an ox cart to get to laboring women and ill families living in the most rural sections of the Qualla Boundary. In the 1930s Gloyne was instrumental in the founding of the first hospital for the Cherokee tribe. Nurse Gloyne went to Washington, DC in 1934 and addressed the Commissioner on Indian Affairs on the need for a hospital for the Eastern Band Cherokee. Her advocacy helped secure a hospital which provided the first inpatient care in Cherokee, NC. Nurse Gloyne became the head nurse of the hospital while continuing in her capacity as "field nurse" for the reservation. After her official resignation in 1969 at age 77, Gloyne continued to be active in a variety of community health related activities.

Lula Leta Owl, the first EBCI Registered Nurse, was born in 1891, the first of 10 children born to Daniel Lloyd Owl, a [Cherokee](#) ^[2] blacksmith, and Nettie Harris Owl, a Catawba Indian who was a traditional basket maker and potter. Lloyd did not speak Catawba and Nettie did not speak Cherokee, but both parents shared a basic knowledge of English and it became the primary language in the household. Mrs. Mary Wachacha, Lula Owl Gloyne's granddaughter, surmises that the Owl children's mastery of the English language explains why all seven siblings who survived to adulthood went on to professional careers. Lula Owl attended a mission school on the Qualla Boundary and then went to Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia to complete her education.

Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute (now known as Hampton University) was chartered in 1868 as one of the first colleges for African Americans in the South after the Civil War. Hampton's mission was to train students to become teachers and return to their home communities to uplift their race through education. From 1878 until 1923, the institute conducted a unique experiment in biracial education by admitting and educating American Indian students alongside African American students. Well over 1,000 Indian students from over 20 tribes graduated from Hampton during this period .

After her graduation in 1914, Owl spent a year teaching Catawba children in Rock Hill, South Carolina. During that year, she decided to become a nurse. Mentors from her Hampton days arranged for Owl to enter the Chestnut Hill Hospital School of Nursing in Philadelphia. All nursing students at Chestnut Hill Hospital were required to attend church services weekly. Owl was raised a Southern Baptist, but she had no way of getting to the Baptist church located many miles away. The only church within walking distance of the hospital was St. Paul's Episcopal Church. Owl started attending this church, whose members not only welcomed, but "adopted" her. They collected donations of love offerings (cash contributions) and used clothing for her.

When Owl graduated from Chestnut Hill in 1916, she was awarded the gold medal in obstetrical nursing and became the first EBCI registered nurse. Her Philadelphia church arranged a job for her as the school nurse at St. Elizabeth's Episcopal School on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in Wakapala, South Dakota. During her two years at Standing Rock, she milked cows, learned to ride horseback and worked her way into the Sioux Indians' hearts and homes. According to her granddaughter, her duties extended far beyond the school infirmary. Owl undertook immunization campaigns, delivered many babies, and provided home care to the aging and infirm. Early in her time on the reservation, one of the chiefs experienced a headache so severe he thought he was dying. Owl brought him some kind of medication that brought relief. He became one of her biggest supporters on the reservation.

In 1917, the United States joined its allies in fighting [World War I](#) ^[3]. The Red Cross and the Army Nurse Corps encouraged all non-African American RNs to serve their country during the war. Owl had planned on going to Europe to be a field nurse for the U.S. Army but failed the "seaworthy" exam due to extreme seasickness. Instead, she was assigned to Camp Lewis in Washington State as a second lieutenant in the Army Nurse Corps. Owl was the only member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians to serve as an officer in WWI.

While in South Dakota, she met Jack Gloyne, an Army enlistee passing through the west on his way to Camp Lewis. They rekindled their acquaintance at Camp Lewis, but since she was an officer and he an enlisted man, fraternization was prohibited. Despite the ban, they were secretly wed in 1918. After the war ended the couple spent a short time in

Oklahoma while Nurse Gloyne cared for a sick family member.

Around 1921 the couple returned to Cherokee, North Carolina to set up housekeeping. The Gloynes had four children. Unfortunately, Jack Gloyne died before the youngest was two years old. After her husband's death, Gloyne returned to Miami, Oklahoma to work as a school nurse at the Wyandotte Indian School and clinic. The job had better pay and more standard hours than her work in Cherokee, things she needed as a single mother of four young children. In the 1930s, while on an ambulance run, the ambulance was in a serious accident and Nurse Gloyne sustained life threatening injuries. Doctors feared she might never walk again. She returned to Cherokee to recuperate near her family.

At that time, the [Qualla Boundary](#) [4] did not have a full-time physician. Lula Owl Gloyne was the first full time western trained health care provider available to help the people on the Qualla Boundary. In a 1983 interview with *The Sylva Herald*, a local newspaper, Gloyne recalled her early years as a nurse in Cherokee, when there was no hospital, only a part-time clinic at the Quaker grade school. She recalled making calls to homes by crossing difficult terrain on foot, lacking transportation. She recalled sewing up wounds in the field and delivering babies at home. She recalled giving medical care that would be illegal for registered nurses to give by the time of her the interview in 1983. She dreamed of a community hospital.

From June 5-17, 1933, a general health survey was conducted among the Cherokee living on the Qualla Boundary. The U.S. Public Health Service, U.S. Department of Interior Bureau of Indian Affairs, North Carolina Tuberculosis Sanatorium, and the North Carolina State Board of Health collaborated on this project to determine ECBI health needs and to define Federal and state responsibilities in this area. Nine hundred sixty seven Cherokee of all ages received a complete physical examination, dental examination, and free immunizations for smallpox, diphtheria, and typhoid fever. Data from the survey showed nine percent of those tested had active tuberculosis and 4.6% had syphilis. Higher than state rates of trachoma, an infectious eye disease, were found, and care was given to those suffering from these diseases.

Gloyne's desire for the Cherokee people to have a hospital on the Qualla Boundary compelled her to go to Washington, D.C. in the mid-1930s where she met with Dr. Stephens and Mrs. Gregg, the head physician and head nurse who oversaw all public health work for the Indian Health Service. In 1937, the efforts of Gloyne and her allies paid off. The BIA built a new hospital in Cherokee. Services offered in this facility included surgery, outpatient, dental, and inpatient care. There was a nine-room inpatient ward and sunroom for women and a six-bed ward for men. The BIA spent \$80,000 for the new facility (Twelve new, 1934). It was staffed by one physician, two Registered Nurses, and one Public Health Nurse. For the first time, people who lived on the Qualla Boundary had access to modern hospital care. Gloyne was appointed head nurse. In addition to overseeing the hospital, Gloyne continued to see patients in the community, providing home health, hospice and midwifery services. With her Indian Health Service salary, she bought a horse to make her travels in the community quicker and easier. Later, as paved roads became more common, the government bought her a car.

Pain from her 1930s ambulance accident stayed with Gloyne the rest of her life, however, and she worked as she was able and as needs arose. Over the years, she served as a private duty nurse, in hospital staff, and supervisory positions in nearby Sylva and Bryson City, North Carolina, and as the company nurse for the outdoor drama *Unto These Hills*, a summer theater production that tells the story of the Trail of Tears. In 1969, at age 77, she retired from her last paid position as the supervisory home visiting nurse for the Community Action program in Cherokee.

From her retirement until her death on April 17, 1985 at age 93, Gloyne remained an asset to her community. She was honored by District 23 of the North Carolina Nurses Association on May 1, 1978, when she was 87 years old. After her death the Lula Gloyne Memorial Scholarship was established in her honor.

Additional information provided by the North Carolina Government & Heritage Library Staff:

Lula Owl Gloyne was named Beloved Woman of the Tribe. She is one of only three women bestowed historically with the title. One of her children, Mollie Blankenship, was the first woman elected to the Cherokee Tribal Council, and another, Mary Byler, is an accomplished teacher and writer. And a grandson, Lloyd Arneach, is a master storyteller, author, and recipient in 2011 of the Mountain Heritage Award from Western Carolina University. In 2015, Lula Gloyne was inducted in the North Carolina Nurse's Hall of Fame.

References and Additional Resources:

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Subjects:

[Biographies](#) [7]

[Cherokee Indians](#) [8]

Medicine ^[9]

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World War I (1914-1918) ^[12]

Origin - location:

Jackson County ^[13]

Qualla Boundary ^[14]

Swain County ^[15]

Cherokee ^[16]

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Years:

1891 - 1985

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