

McKoy, Millie-Christine ^[1]

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Millie-Christine McKoy

by LeRae Umfleet, 2010

Research Branch, NC Office of Archives and History

<https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program> ^[2]

See also: [Millie-Christine McCoy](#) ^[3], *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*



Photo of Millie-Christine by Louis Bertin, Brighton, Great Britain

Two sets of [conjoined twins](#) ^[4] called North Carolina home in the 19th century. One set is [Eng and Chang Bunker](#) ^[5], who settled in [Surry County](#) ^[6]. Native-born conjoined twins, Millie-Christine McKoy, were born into slavery in 1851 on the plantation of Jabez McKoy near [Whiteville](#) ^[7]. The young twins were sold several times before their first successful promoter purchased them in Boston when they were four. Their last legal owner was [Joseph Smith](#) ^[8] even though they were abducted twice by men who sought to exploit them. Smith toured with the girls throughout the United States, Canada, and Europe before the start of the Civil War. During the war, Smith hid the twins near Spartanburg, South Carolina, to prevent their capture. Freed after the war, Millie-Christine again traveled and performed in practically every state, and were seen by European royalty. Queen Victoria of England enjoyed their performances and presented them with jewelry. Many of their appearances were with P.T. Barnum's circus troupe.

Physicians took great interest in their physiology and, after much study, it was determined that they shared portions of their pelvis and spinal cord, making separation impossible. The twins were intelligent and although they were two separate personalities, they referred to themselves in the singular. Exceptionally talented singers, Millie-Christine was often billed as the "[Carolina Nightingale](#)" ^[9]." As result of their star status, the twins were prosperous and were able to purchase the original property on which they were born and built a ten-room house where they lived between tours. Their hectic tours stopped around 1900 and they retired to their home which burned in 1909.

Millie suffered with tuberculosis and in 1912 she died on October 8th. Christine could not safely be separated from her sister and died the next day after being heavily sedated by doctors. Fearful of being dissected post-mortem, Millie-Christine wanted to be cremated but arrangements were made for them to be buried in a specially made coffin near their home. The burial was guarded for almost a year after their death to prevent grave-robbing. Their grave marker was made of two lead sheets shaped into two arches joined by a bridge inscribed "A soul with two thoughts. Two hearts that beat as one." Over the years the cemetery became overgrown and the Columbus County Historical Society removed their remains to [Welches Creek Community Cemetery](#) ^[10].

References

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Powell, William Stevens. 1991. *Dictionary of North Carolina biography. Vol. 4, L-Q* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. <http://www.netlibrary.com/urlapi.asp?action=summary&v=1&bookid=50691> ^[13].

Documenting the American South website: <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/millie-christine/millie-christine.html> ^[14]

Image Credit

Bertin, Louis. "Millie Christine [carte-de-visite portrait]." Image of the twins from a Columbus County Historical Society pamphlet on their lives via the [North Carolina State Archives](#) ^[15], Raleigh, NC.

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[4] <https://www.nlm.nih.gov/hmd/conjoined/gallery.html>

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[8] https://cardinalalumni.stanford.edu/magazine/magdir/news/magazine/2000/mayjun/shelf_life/review.html

[9] <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/carolinatwin/milli23.jpg>

[10] <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/11427328/christine-mckoy>

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