



The Ghost of Kisner Heights

by Gary L. Brown

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One of Enid's most notorious stories of *local lore* is the legend of badman Dick Yeager, alias Zip Wyatt. Dick killed a couple of people and stirred up the local population for about four months beginning in the spring of 1895. In July of 1895, he was eventually shot and captured near Enid. The wounded outlaw was brought to the jail in Enid where he lingered for about a month before dying. Yeager's death bed caused quite a commotion in early day Enid as locals paraded through the jail to see the desperado lingering in his jail cell.

Bottom line, Dale Tagge's great-grandfather, Dr. McKenzie, tried to patch up Dick, but it didn't work and Dick died on September 7, 1895. Bob Berry's great-grandfather, D.C. Bass, got the contract to build him a coffin and Dick McConkey's father took a photograph of Dick in his coffin for posterity. Yeager was then buried in the local "potters field."

Yeager's place in Enid's *folklore* was insured when Marquis James recounted the story in his Cherokee Strip memoirs published in 1944.

You ask, "what is Dick Yeager's connection to Kisner Heights?" Enid's first cemetery was on the "school quarter" southwest of town and that is where Dick was buried. You guessed it, the old burial grounds are located on Minnie Kisner's farm which became the Kisner Heights Addition. A great story of the legend and the "Ghost of Kisner Heights" is told in the following article published in the Enid Morning News in 1947.

"If you should meet a ghost some dark night just as you enter Kisner Addition on West Wabash at Highway 81, don't get upset about it. Just think what a grand opportunity it is to increase your circle of acquaintances."

Why, you might be face to face with the late Dick Yeager in the...uh, protoplasm. Yeager, the most notorious man of Enid's early days, was laid away near that corner when it was the city's first burial ground.

So instead of scaring the poor ghost half to life, quietly try to get his attention. Then, in a friendly, normal voice, ask: "How are you, Dick?"

If it should be the ex-Mr. Yeager, he'll probably be as glad to see you as you are to see him. He might even give you a message to Marquis James, who wrote him up so well in "Cherokee Strip."

There also were two Chinese buried there. Their remains later were removed to China, but you know how people feel about Enid. Once they've lived here, they always want to come back. If the ghost should be one of them, you might have trouble conversing. That would give you an acceptable excuse for withdrawing politely to another section of the city.

Some pioneers place the location of the first cemetery about where Martin Garber resides at 1002 S. Wabash. Contrary to a long-lived rumor, no bones were discovered there when the house was built, according to T.F. Mefford, the contractor.

One or two old-timers say that the cemetery was over near the Kisner Mansion, now the home of R. L. Sanford. The highway corner seems to be favored by the majority, however.

Relatives of most of these early citizens moved their remains to Enid Cemetery when it opened in 1897. Yeager and a number of others were left.

A.P. Wilcox, 1217 W. Broadway, who came to Enid as assistant postmaster nine days before the Cherokee Strip opened, says the Kisner Addition burying ground was originally school land. Four sections in each township were set aside for school land and occasionally were leased for other purposes.

Wilcox remembers the burial of the two Chinese in the abandoned cemetery, but says their bones were later disinterred and taken to China.

Forrest Robertson of the Enid Cemetery Association lists among bodies moved into the cemetery Frank Pay, who died in 1894, husband of Enid's last case worker known as Auntie Pay; E.M. Sloan, who died in 1896; Benjamin Bird, who died in 1894; Ralph Woodard, who died in 1896. Mrs. J. B. Woodard, 216 W. Oak, his mother, says that her child's was the second grave in Enid Cemetery.

H.B. Bass, whose father, D.C. Bass, built bandit Yeager's casket, says he had a cousin buried in the Kisner Addition plot but that grave was moved. There are other transfers among the 10,000 on record at Enid Cemetery not so easily accessible.

Another early burying place mentioned by Wilcox is that of the young man named Ernest Lindtner. He worked for Jack Nelson at his place on the southeast corner of Sixteenth and Market. Wilcox and his first wife, then Leva Billings, were with the young man when he died and Miss Billings' father built a casket which they lined with black cloth.

"The young man was buried a little bit south of the corner of sixteenth and Market," says Wilcox. "I asked Garth Nelson (1315 Indian Drive) the other day if he remembered hearing about the grave, and he said his parents had pointed it out to him when he was a child. I doubt that anyone but Garth and myself knows where it is."

But Dick Yeager, a tall, blue-eyed cowboy, is easily the most interesting occupant of an unmarked grave in this vicinity. A drawling young man, whom Wilcox says looked like the popular conception of a Texan, Yeager had a talent for getting into brawls; twice he broke jail at Guthrie and was in a fight at Mulhall. He and some friends killed a Kansas sheriff and a settler who got in their way en route to a hideout.

A huge posse caught Yeager after a 125-day manhunt. Stopped by two bullets as he lay hiding in a cornfield, he was brought to Enid.

James tells in "Cherokee Strip" of seeing Yeager in jail. James, then a small boy—a "Fauntleroy boy with long curls,: according to Wilcox—says the bandit was blue-eyed and had a reddish beard. He also said his father had Yeager's gun, a single action long barreled Colt .45, until the desperado's sister wanted it for a memento of her brother.

Mrs. Jim Brennan, 123 W. State, whose husband guarded Yeager from his capture on August 4, 1895, to his death on September 7, says, "I can see Yeager lying there in the jail. He didn't look like a bad man. I don't think he was nearly as bad as more recent bandits. Nobody was much afraid of the desperadoes in those days."

Yeager's real name was Nelson Ellsworth Wyatt and he was also known as Zip Wyatt. Wilcox says, "Everybody went to jail to see Zip Wyatt, like he was a hog in a pen. He was a tall fellow who rolled his own Bull Durham in brown paper, and like a lot of those highly-touted desperadoes, he was ignorant."



Dick Yeager alias Zip Wyatt on his death bed in Enid jail, 1895

Charles V. Porter, 220 W. Maple, one-time county sheriff, say Wyatt, or Yeager, had been shot several times. "There was a bullet in his chest previous to the wounds that caused his death," says Porter. "I persuaded him to have it removed. Afterward, I wished I had kept it."

Porter has in his office the belt that Yeager took off and gave to Jim Brennan, his guard, before he died. Mrs. Brennan gave the belt to Porter after her husband's death. It is a wide leather belt made in Cheyenne. Judging by the greenish marks in all the loops, it carried many cartridges. The stitching at the top is ripped—whether it just wore out or somebody hid money in it, no one knows.

You might remember to ask Dick's ghost about it, if you should meet. Oh yes, and ask him what he thinks of the high-way patrol headquarters being just a block away. One would imagine it must give him that old haunted feeling."

Editor Note: If you want to learn more about the notorious legend of Dick Yeager a/k/a Zip Wyatt, log on to [Marquis James' story of Zip](#) reproduced on this site. It's a great read in classic Marquis James story telling style.