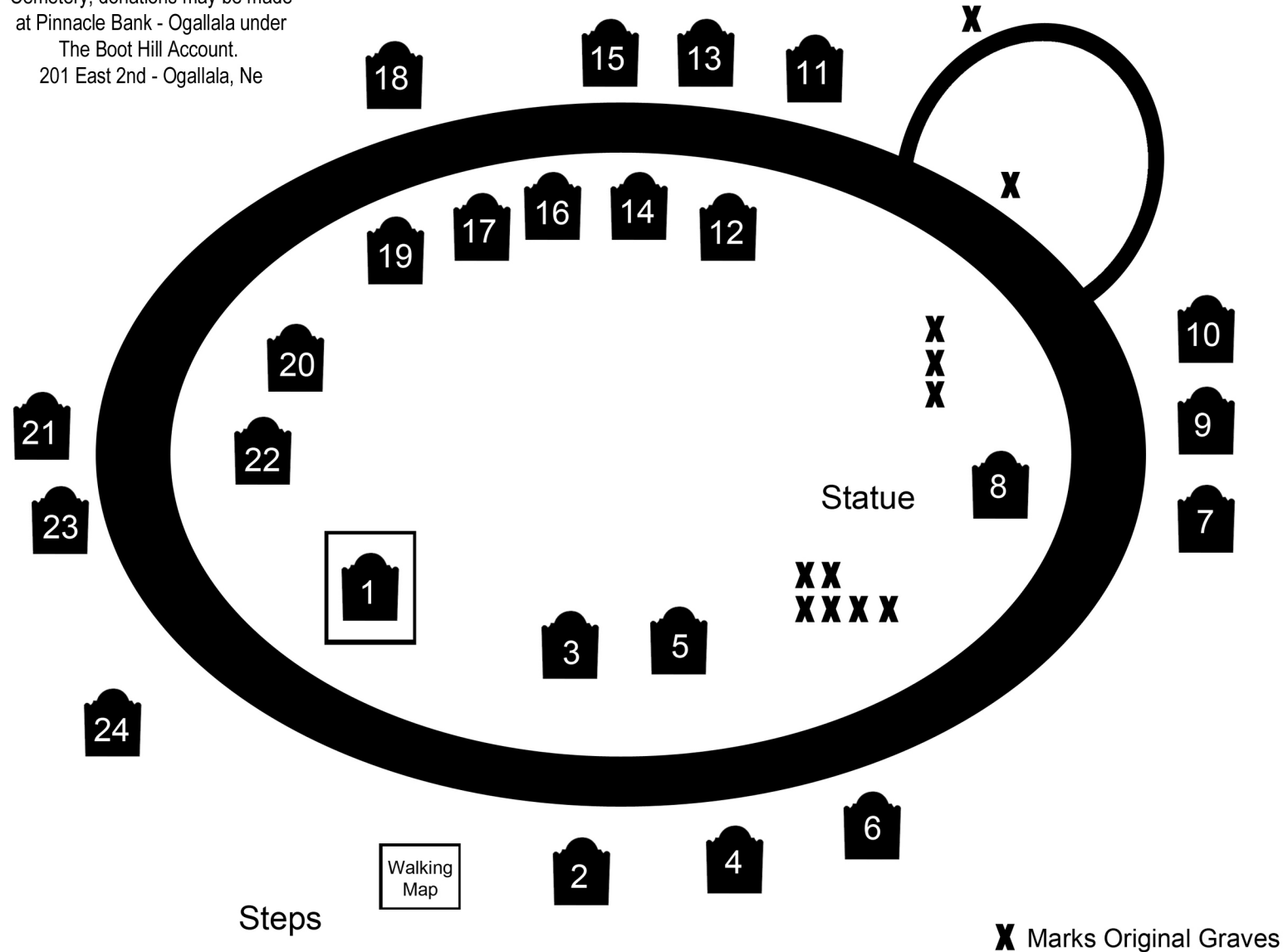


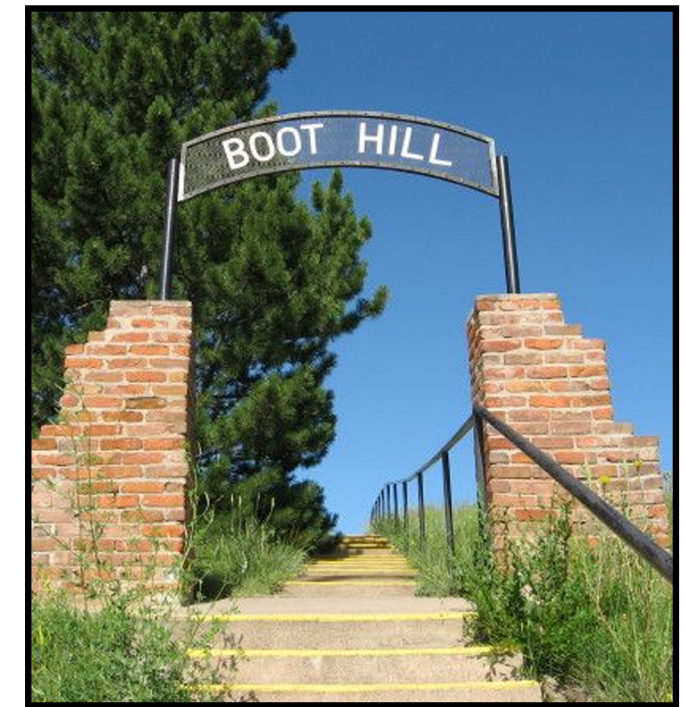
# Boot Hill Walking Map

To help preserve Boot Hill Cemetery, donations may be made at Pinnacle Bank - Ogallala under The Boot Hill Account. 201 East 2nd - Ogallala, Ne



Cont. From Front Page, Ogallalans, for many years were ambivalent about the town's disreputable beginnings. Boot Hill, to some, was a painful reminder of a history that was not "nice." For some years the cemetery was fenced and children of the turn of the century used it as a sledding hill. Steering around the scattered grave markers was part of the fun. By the 1930's wind and wear had all but destroyed the few signs remaining of the old burial ground. The town built up around Boot Hill and would have built over it if the terrain had not been so difficult. However, it wasn't until the 1960's that local Jay Cee's organized an effort to treat Boot Hill with some appropriate honor. They cleaned up the hill, planted trees, recovered what was left of the early gravemarkers and deciphered them and backed research into early records that rediscovered other information. And when five graves were accidentally found in 1978 and confirmed as Texas Trail era burials, the community's interest in the old cemetery was further enhanced. With the help of a grant from Union Pacific Railroad, more thorough research and additional upgrading of Boot Hill was possible. Boot Hill has finally become an appropriate memorial for the dead, known and unknown, of an important era.

# Boot Hill



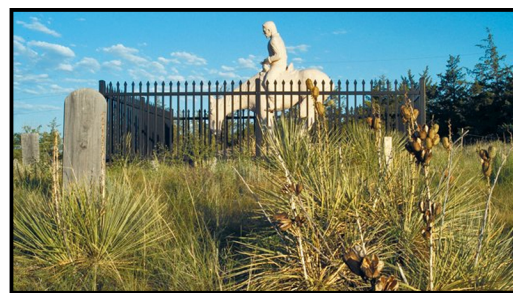
BOOT HILL INTRODUCTION BY: KARYN STANSBERY

When people establish a burial ground, they make an affirmation. They declare their respect for the one who has gone and remind themselves of the dignity of all life and they indicate that they and theirs belong to that place. However, this cemetery that at first had no name and later, half derisively, was called Boot Hill, for most of its brief usefulness was a burial ground for people who were often forgotten even during their lifetimes, who clung to life and sometimes to dignity by the frailest of threads and who belonged to this speck of a place on the vast Western prairie not at all or only in the most tentative way.

There is no certain record of when people first used this promontory overlooking the broad South Platte River valley as a final resting place. Surviving records do not indicate that any of the procession of Native Americans, mountain men, Oregon Trail migrants, freighters, Indian-fighting soldiers, Pony Express riders and telegraph builders that one group after another used the valley as a highway.

Before Boot Hill was abandoned in early 1885 when the Ogallala Cemetery west of town came into general use, at least 48 bodies were laid to rest here. It is probable that the death count was much higher. Ogallala, which during that time averaged a population of about 200 souls, was reputed to be the most violent town on the trail with an equivalently high death rate. At least fourteen murders occurred during the Texas Trail era and some pioneer memories counted as many as seventeen. The names of the other three victims are lost forever. Record-keeping in those days was haphazard. Certainly not all those buried on Boot Hill were noted at the time. Others who died in or near Ogallala were buried about where they fell, not even granted the dubious grace of interment in a rough canvas shroud on unkempt Boot Hill. Some of those who were buried here were remembered with a grave marker, usually a painted or carved piece of plank or a rough cross. Cont. Back Page

Ogallala was about 10 years old when the Union Pacific Railroad company constructed loading pens just west of the main street of town. The Civil War had ended and there were abundant longhorn cattle roaming the open ranges in Texas. The market for cattle was in the north and soon herds of cattle were being driven up the Texas (Western) trail to Ogallala where they were sold and loaded on rail cars and shipped to markets in the east, sold to local cattlemen and fattened on the open range, or trailed on north to the Indian reservations. This trail started in various locations in Texas and for the most part, ended in Ogallala. It is estimated that over a million cattle came up the Texas (Western) trail between 1870 and 1885. A few of the trail drovers who visited Ogallala never made it back to the herds but ended being buried on Boot Hill.



Samuel David "Lep" Sanders

This statue sculpted by Dr. Burdette Gainsforth in 1965 depicts Lep Sanders. Sanders was an early cowboy who made the trip up the Texas Trail several times before settling in Ogallala. This statue was dedicated to Boot Hill on August 7, 1965, and was funded by The Lions Club of Ogallala. It was moved to the Ogallala Livestock Auction Market on West Highway 30 in Ogallala in 2007.



The Trail Boss

This horse and rider statue known as The Trail Boss replaced the earlier concrete statue of Lep Sanders. Sculpted by Robert Summers, this sculpture represents the Texas cattle drover from the early years of the cattle drives. He appears to be looking out over the graves and town of Ogallala and back over the trail to Texas. It is a replica of an identical statue located in Dallas, Texas.



# Bodies of Boot Hill

**1. Sarah Miller:** The wife of a rancher named Bernard Miller, Sarah was only 24 when she died in childbirth, the tragic fate of many pioneer women. She and her baby were laid to rest on Boot Hill on August 2, 1878. Early records indicate their bodies were exhumed in 1891 and moved to the new cemetery west of town. A strange story became part of local folklore around this time, namely that the young woman's body had become petrified, and was unchanged in appearance from the day of her death. It was even said that a derrick was needed to exhume the body. The story was never reliably confirmed, and it's likely that Ogallala's "petrified woman" legend was an echo of similar stories that circulated around the country in the late 1800s, such as the Cardiff Giant hoax.



**2. Charles James:** Little is known about Charles James, who committed suicide at the Keith County Jail in April of 1884. The method of choice was a .32 caliber pistol. He was buried on Boot Hill, and there are no records indicating his body was transferred. Records show that the county commissioners paid a total of \$74.25 for James' burial expenses.

**3. Craig Waxman:** Craig Waxman remains one of the most mysterious burials on Boot Hill. Waxman's grave was discovered in August of 1978 as dirt was being removed from the northeast side of Boot Hill. A grove of cedar trees covers the area in the present day. A contractor noticed what appeared to be fragments of wood, cloth and bone in the dirt. He notified local officials, who then uncovered other items, including the remains of a coffin lid inscribed with the letter "W," boot heels and a handkerchief embroidered with the name Craig Waxman. The bottom of the coffin was found next to two additional graves, followed by a fourth grave a few days later. Anthropologists from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln came out to aid in the excavation. Local historians believed the bodies may have been from a gunfight documented in Ogallala in 1879. Newspapers at the time noted three men were killed in the fight, and a fourth was wounded but escaped. It is possible Waxman was the fourth man who died from his injuries and was buried with his companions on Boot Hill.

**4. Pedro (real name unknown):** Pedro met his demise on September 13, 1876. He had been employed in Sidney, Nebraska as a hired hand with a local cattle outfit. Newspapers of the day reported that Pedro had been recently fired for drunkenness, and that he had disappeared from the area between September 1 and 6, 1876. Coincidentally, two horses had also disappeared from a local livery stable about the same time. Lawmen from Sidney tracked Pedro to Roscoe, Nebraska where he had joined a band of Mexican cowboys. When confronted, Pedro began firing his gun at his apprehenders. The lawmen fired six shots at Pedro and he fell dead into the river.

**5. Mary (McMurdo) Bleasdale:** A Scottish immigrant, Mary arrived in Ogallala in 1880 with her family. She met Howard Bleasdale, a local bookkeeper and real estate agent. The couple married in Ogallala and by the fall of 1883, they were expecting their first child. Sadly, Mary died in childbirth and was buried on Boot Hill.



**6. William Campbell:** A seasoned drover, Campbell died in one of the most notorious local gunfights. Like many disputes of the day, it was rooted in opinions still smoldering from the Civil War. In Ogallala's infancy, the Gast Hotel served home cooked meals to cowboys off the trail. Two men known as the Moy brothers were ordering a meal as William Campbell entered the restaurant. When he heard the Moys order baked beans from the waitress, Campbell reportedly shouted, "Just what I thought! A bunch of damned Yankee bean eaters!" The Moys wasted no time in reminding Campbell that a lady was present. Campbell continued shouting obscenities at the two brothers as they ate. After dinner the brothers left the restaurant and entered the Cowboy's Saloon. Campbell followed close behind, hurling insults. Reportedly, Campbell grabbed his gun first, prompting the Moy brothers to grab their guns, and the saloon erupted into a frenzy of bullets. When the smoke cleared, several bystanders were injured and Campbell lay dead on the floor. Commissioner records showed that Campbell owned property that paid for his burial expenses. Unfortunately for the Moys, Campbell was a well-known and well-liked cowboy across Texas and the West. Over the years, other witnesses shared conflicting versions of events. Whatever the real story, Campbell was buried on Boot Hill, undoubtedly sharing space with other cowboys from both North and South.



**7. William Brewton:** It is believed that 19 year old William Brewton was the third man killed in the July 1879 gunfight in Ogallala along with Henry Parker and William Shook. Reports indicated that Sheriff Joe Hughes paid for the boarding of a prisoner. Newspapers carried several conflicting reports of the gunfight. It is possible that the boarded prisoner was actually Henry Parker rather than William Brewton. However, the mortality schedule reported that William Brewton died several days later on July 13, 1879. He is believed to be buried on Boot Hill.

**8. E. A. Maler:** On May 8, 1883, E. A. Maler died from causes unknown. It was confirmed that he was buried on Boot Hill.

**9. William Shook:** William Shook was 20 years of age when he was shot on July 9, 1879. Shook worked for the Hunter and Evans crew pushing cattle to Ogallala. Upon arrival, Shook and a gang of men including William Brewton, Henry Parker, and another unknown cowboy took it upon themselves to terrorize and shoot up the town. Newspapers indicate the men were arrested by Sheriff Hughes and were placed in the stone jail at Ogallala before they managed an escape. Shook and the group declared that nobody in town could re-arrest them. After several nights of drunken shooting, Hughes and his deputy Jasper Southard ordered the men to surrender in the local saloon. Shook drew his revolver at the sheriff. The sheriff drew his gun and a bullet entered Shook's neck. Shook continued lunging at the sheriff, and another shot hit Shook in the side and killed him. It is believed he was taken to Boot Hill for burial.

**10. Henry Parker:** Henry Parker was involved in the same shoot-out as William Shook and William Brewton in July of 1879. After Shook was killed in the saloon, another shot was fired at Parker. The shot killed Parker's horse instantly and fatally wounded him in the abdomen. Newspapers reported that Parker's wound was fatal, and he died later that day or the next. It is believed that he was buried on Boot Hill with Shook and Brewton.

**11. George Orhman:** Little is recorded about George Orhman, except that he was killed in late August of 1885 by gambler Jack Keyes in a gambling dispute. Jack Keyes was the brother of Lank Keyes, the man responsible for the murder of Rattlesnake Ed Worley. Orhman would have been one of the very last burials on Boot Hill, as the cemetery was officially abandoned by December of 1885.

**12. Michael Kearney:** Michael Kearney may have been one of the oldest people to be buried on Boot Hill. Employed as a section hand, Kearney was a widower who arrived in Ogallala in 1875. On January 5 or 6 of 1880, he was found dead of an apparent stroke near the edge of the railroad tracks. Records did not show that Kearney had family; only that he died at the ripe age of 80 years old and was buried on Boot Hill.

**13. Jasper Southard:** Jasper Southard was the brother of Sheriff Joe Hughes' wife, Elizabeth. They all arrived in Ogallala in the early 1870s. Southard was appointed a deputy to help Sheriff Hughes clean up the wild town of Ogallala. Unruly Indians were reported in the area north of Ogallala when Southard disappeared from a cow camp in that area in 1880. One version of the story said his body had been hidden by the Indians and was not discovered until 1883. Other locals stated that his sister Elizabeth Southard Hughes told them that Joe Hughes and his sons traveled north when Southard disappeared, found his body, and brought it back to Ogallala for burial. Regardless of the timeline, it was verified that Southard was buried on Boot Hill.

**14. Amos (Enos) Black:** Amos Black was believed to be a cowboy from Texas. He died on December 16, 1875, and it was confirmed that he was buried on Boot Hill. The cause of his death was not recorded.



**15. Rattlesnake Ed Worley:** One of the last burials on Boot Hill was believed to be that of Edward Worley, also known as "Rattlesnake Ed Worley." Worley was shot by fellow gambler Lank Keyes in a saloon on August 17 or 18, 1884 over a \$9 bet. Reports differ, but one version indicates that Worley had lost his money playing monte and asked Keyes to loan him more to continue playing. When Keyes refused, Worley pulled a knife and rushed at him. Keyes stepped back and pulled out his revolver, shooting Worley in the corner of his eye. Worley died instantly, and it is believed he was buried on Boot Hill. Keyes eluded justice in Keith County, but was later hanged for a different crime in the Dakota Territory.

**16. Patrick Carroll:** In contrast to the drovers and travelers who were buried on Boot Hill, Patrick Carroll was a settler and community man of the Ogallala area. Carroll moved to Ogallala in the 1870s with his mother, sister and three brothers. He had developed a form of tuberculosis called scrofula and doctors recommended the dry climate of western Nebraska. He ran for county treasurer in the fall of 1879 but died on December 14, 1879 before taking office. Carroll was buried on Boot Hill.

**17. Gertrude Fisher:** Gertrude Fisher was only eighteen years old when she died on November 4, 1884, a victim of a typhoid fever epidemic that hit the Ogallala area. Her parents were area homesteaders Aaron and Rebecca Fisher. Gertrude's body was eventually moved to the new cemetery.



**18. Cheyenne Warrior:** As white settlers encroached on native lands, many natives were moved to reservations. The Northern Cheyenne tribes did not adapt well to the new southern reservations. Many became sick due to climate and new diseases. Led by Dull Knife and Little Wolf, the remaining Cheyenne left for their native homeland in September of 1878, raiding cattle and horses from ranches along the way. On October 4, 1878 the Indians crossed the South Platte River a mile east of present day Spruce Street. One Indian died there during the night and was found the next day. The cause of death was unknown, but the county paid \$5 to bury the warrior on Boot Hill.

**19. Alice West:** For many years it was believed that Alice West was the notorious local dance hall madam known as "Big Alice." After years of research, local historian Karyn Stansbery discovered that Alice West was only a baby when she died on December 6, 1882. It cannot be confirmed that she was originally buried on Boot Hill, but given her death year, it is possible. She is now buried in the Ogallala cemetery west of town.

**20. Unknown:** In August of 1978, a fifth grave was uncovered near the four graves believed to be from the 1879 gunfight. Anthropologists from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln were unable to determine identity or cause of death.

**21. Robert Webster:** Robert Webster is one of the earliest confirmed burials on Boot Hill. A newspaper of the day stated that Webster was killed on August 5, 1875 while bathing in the North Platte River north of Ogallala. Webster had been working for a cattle outfit that also employed a black cook. A cowboy named Woolsey reportedly played a prank on the cook, dressing up as an Indian and sneaking up on him as he was out hunting for the evening meal. To make the prank appear more realistic, another cowboy began firing shots above Woolsey's head. Afterwards, Woolsey learned the shots had barely missed the top of his head, and was told by the other cowboys that Robert Webster had fired them, aiming to kill Woolsey. Enraged, Woolsey confronted Webster as he bathed in the river, and shot the unarmed man five times, killing him. Webster was buried at the foot of Boot Hill, but did not remain long. He was originally from Michigan, and his sister arranged for his body to be moved back there.

**22. Unknown:** On February 23, 1880, a herder by the name of Jas Carry came upon a grizzly sight while watering cattle near the South Platte River. Carry discovered a group of wild hogs covered in blood and the mutilated body of a man with a large mustache and goatee. The man had several cuts on his head and a fractured skull, and it appeared that he'd been murdered and left on the river. There was no way to identify him, but a reward was posted for any information about his murder. The crime went unsolved, and the county paid \$55 for the man to be buried on Boot Hill.

**23. Eva Hughes:** The only daughter of Ogallala Sheriff Joe Hughes, four year old Eva Hughes was killed in a tragic accident on August 8, 1884. The child's head was crushed by a loose timber at a local livery stable. Eva was one of the last burials on Boot Hill.

**24. 3 Union Pacific Workers:** By 1867, the first transcontinental railroad had reached the future site of Ogallala. Around noon on May 27, 1867, a crew of tracklayers were eating their midday meal, their weapons stacked nearby in a pile. A party of Lakota warriors rushed in from a ravine and attacked the unsuspecting men. Three workers were killed. The warriors took every available horse and mule and quickly departed. It is believed that the men were buried on the hill to the north that would later be known as Boot Hill.

**Original Grave Markers:** Although few of the original grave markers survived the rigors of time, there are a few that still stand today. Near the statue, there are several wooden posts dotting the grass. The large concrete marker is also an original grave. The final original lies in the far northwest corner with the words "Unknown Cowboy" carved into it. Original graves are shown on the map with an "X."

