

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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RECEIVED JUL 30 1976  
DATE ENTERED NOV 21 1977

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

**\*\*** SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC  
Polson Cemetery  
AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER W E of Jay  
SE 1/4, T 24, R R 25 E — NOT FOR PUBLICATION  
CITY, TOWN CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT  
Jay  VICINITY OF No. 2  
STATE CODE COUNTY CODE  
Oklahoma 40 Delaware 047

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER: Cemetery

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME  
Polson Cemetery Board  
STREET & NUMBER  
Trustees: Lee Washbourne, Lawrence L. Polson, Ruth Stevenson  
CITY, TOWN STATE  
Southwest City VICINITY OF Missouri 64863

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Office of the County Clerk  
STREET & NUMBER  
Delaware County Courthouse  
CITY, TOWN STATE  
Jay Oklahoma

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE  
Special Polson Cemetery Survey  
DATE  
1976 — FEDERAL  STATE — COUNTY — LOCAL  
DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS Oklahoma Historical Society  
CITY, TOWN STATE  
Oklahoma City Oklahoma

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Polson is the typical rural cemetery, a relatively level field of native grass with a few random trees. It is fenced and quite well cared for. Visitors can walk in at will, but a locked gate ordinarily bars automobiles. At the south entrance stands the large granite memorial bearing the likeness of Stand Watie and some details on his life and career.

An ~~orange~~ granite marker stands at the head of Watie's grave. Erected by the United Daughters of the Confederacy, it bears this legend: "Gen. Stand Watie, only full-blood [actually three-quarter] Indian brigadier general in the Confederate army. This brave Cherokee rendered heroic service in the Confederate cause in Indian Territory." Near by are stones to mark the graves of Major Ridge, his son John Ridge, and Elias Boudinot, all three killed in the June 22, 1839, assassination that was to have included Watie (see No. 8). The Major Ridge memorial marker came from the War Department in recognition of his service in the War of 1812. (Ironically, he served under Andrew Jackson against the Creeks ... that is, against fellow Indians under the man who, as president, was more responsible than perhaps anyone else for the forced removal of Cherokees and Creeks to the west.) Near Watie, too, are the graves of eight Watie relatives, removed to Polson in 1971 from an abandoned cemetery in the area.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1871 to present

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Nomination of this site is submitted with full knowledge of (and, with reservations, full acceptance of) the National Park Service conviction that a cemetery is not generally to be considered as eligible for the National Register. It is nevertheless presented because one of the "reservations" is thought to be over-riding. Were Polson Cemetery not to be considered, another NPS conviction - that the National Register program is one of preservation, rather than of memorialization, thereby calling for something physical or tangible to preserve - would almost surely guarantee that a great leader of a great Indian tribe would never be recognized by the National Register. An appeal for "special consideration" has been granted Oklahoma previously in the case of two other important Indian figures: Black Beaver and Jesse Chisholm. It is sought here for Stand Watie. For nothing of a physical nature pertaining to this great Cherokee, who died in 1871, exists today but the stone markers in Polson Cemetery.

\* \* \*

Stand Watie was born in Georgia in 1806. His father was full blood Cherokee, his mother half blood Welsh-Cherokee. (His Cherokee name was Degataga, meaning "standing together," thus the "Stand.") He grew up in that tragic era when pressure was building for the removal of the Cherokees from their ancestral home in the Southeast and tribal leaders were sharply divided on the course they should follow. Most of the some 17,000 Cherokees tended to follow their chief, John Ross, in opposing removal. But about 2,000 of them, led by John Ridge, felt that further resistance was useless and that moving west was the best way out of an increasingly desperate situation. A removal treaty was therefore signed with the U. S. government on Dec. 29, 1835, at New Echota, Georgia, and this group started west in the spring of 1838. Their leaders were John Ridge, Major Ridge (his father), and his two nephews, Elias Boudinot and Stand Watie.

The bitter cleavage between the two factions, born in Georgia, was merely deepened by subsequent developments that tended to vindicate the voluntary removal course of the treaty signers. For when the majority of the Cherokees refused to leave Georgia, troops under General Winfield Scott rounded them up forcibly. By the fall of 1838, the tragic "Trail of Tears" westward had begun. By early 1839 most of the Cherokees were in their new home, in what is now northeastern Oklahoma, and tensions had reached the flash point. A convention called to adopt a new national constitution had failed to agree and broken up. Three days later, on June 22, 1839, Major Ridge, John Ridge, and Elias Boudinot were assassinated at almost the same hour in different parts of the country. Stand Watie was also marked for death, but escaped, thanks to an advance warning. The consequences of this tragic event were to plague the Nation for the rest of its existence.



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Polson Cemetery

Friends of the victims understandably charged Chief John Ross with having arranged the killings, although he steadfastly denied any knowledge of the conspiracy. "His assertions were undoubtedly true," says Indian historian Muriel H. Wright, "yet there were reasons to believe that those who committed the murders were among his followers. The old tradition of blood revenge and the law exacting the death penalty for the sale of any tribal lands [officially adopted by the Cherokee Council in the late 1820s] were of special significance in the tragedy." A two-year reign of terror followed, with ruthless murders and attempted murders on both sides. The bitter political cleavage carried on into the Civil War.

John Ross (principal chief until his death in 1866) hoped at first to keep the Cherokee Nation neutral. He recognized that this was not an Indian conflict and that his people had enough problems of their own without borrowing yet another from the whites. But initial Confederate successes in this area and the organization of a Cherokee regiment by Stand Watie to fight with the South caused Ross finally to sign a treaty aligning the Cherokee Nation with the Confederacy. If anything, the move merely widened the split between the two leaders and the factions they led, and deepened the Nation's suffering. Union advances in 1862 caused John Ross to be taken prisoner. Paroled, he went east where he remained for the remainder of the war. In the meantime, his supporters -- the so-called Northern Cherokees -- repudiated the treaty of alignment with the Confederacy. And Stand Watie became elected chief of the Southern Cherokees. The two rival governments remained until the end of the war, their troops often lining up on opposite sides in bloody Union-Confederacy skirmishes in neighboring Arkansas as well as Indian Territory.

Stand Watie through it all was a distinguished leader and soldier, the only Indian officer to attain the rank of brigadier general in the Confederate Army. Curiously enough, when he surrendered his Southern Cherokee forces at Doaksville in the Choctaw Nation, he was the last Confederate general to do so ... this on June 23, 1865, 46 days after Appomatox.

Victory for the North represented the final defeat for Stand Watie. When John Ross <sup>died</sup>, Princeton-trained nephew, William P. Ross, succeeded him. Watie died Sept. 9, 1871. Other members of his family <sup>were</sup> buried in Mockingbird Hill Cemetery near Bernice, some 30 miles northwest of Polson. But legend has it he was away from home when he became ill. The Grand River was in flood and he died before he could get back. He was therefore buried - not unfittingly - beside his cousin, John Ridge, killed in the assassination plot from which he had escaped 32 years before. Near by was the site of old Fort Wayne where he had established a Confederate post and organized his Cherokee Rifles regiment in July 1861. Also but a few miles to the south is the site of the Battle of Maysville in which his troops fought.

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Eight of Watie's relatives have since been moved to Polson. And here in 1972 the Oklahoma Historical Society installed a seven-foot-tall monument engraved with a likeness of Watie and details of his life. Like the South itself, to whom he gave his loyalty, Stand Watie was defeated. But he fought valiantly, and not without touches of brilliance, for what he believed in. To a certain extent the tragedy of his personal life was merely a part of the greater tragedy the Civil War proved to be for the Cherokee Nation itself.

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DELAWARE COUNTY: Polson Cemetery - 11/8/76

Because of its long and significant involvement with Cherokee Indian history, Polson Cemetery in its entirety - approximately two acres - is included in this nomination.

Dr. W. D. Polson (1839-1893), who donated the land for the burying ground, was himself a prominent Cherokee. His wife Flora, buried there in 1876, was a daughter of John Ridge. And over the years as many as 50 members of the Ridge, Watie, and Washbourne families have been interred at Polson.

One of the most recent burials was that of Major General Lee B. Washbourne (World War II service). Near by is the grave of his uncle, Jay Washbourne, for whom the Delaware County seat of Jay was named. Recently, too, Stand Watie's wife, Sarah Bell Watie, was reinterred in Polson from Monkey Island in Grand Lake, where the Watie farm home has now completely disappeared.

Also gone completely is any physical evidence of two other sites associated with Watie: nearby Fort Wayne, a rather temporary cantonment, and the site of the Battle of Maysville in Arkansas. For these reasons the cemetery containing the graves of Watie and his wife - with so many of his relatives and other prominent Cherokees - is being nominated. This involves some 150 graves. The cemetery is still being used.