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Wyatt Earp to return to downtown Dodge *Oklahoma artist creating bronze statue of Dodge's famous lawman*

By Charlene Scott
Dodge City Daily Globe

An 8-foot bronze statue of Wyatt Earp that will be placed in downtown Dodge City has been commissioned from Oklahoma artist Mary Spurgeon by the Trail of Fame Committee.

Spurgeon, whose daughter Linda Spurgeon owns the Trails West store in Dodge City, also is creating several 14-inch-tall statues that will be sold by the committee to help finance the larger rendition of the famed Dodge City lawman.

"They called me from the committee in December to tell me they would consider me to design the statue," Spurgeon said. "I made a clay model called a 'marquette' and presented it to the committee.

"Committee members told me mine was the first statue they had ever seen that looked like Wyatt Earp," Spurgeon added. "I do a lot of research before I begin my work. I looked in Western books and in books about gunfighters to find Wyatt's photos and pictures of his gun. I use the Dodge City library for much of my research."

Her statue shows a mustached Wyatt Earp in full stride, with his coat blowing behind him in the breeze. Hat in one hand, his other hand grasps his long-barreled gun.

"From the pictures of Earp, he had a gambler's hands -- those slim fingers, slender fingers that looked flexible," Spurgeon said. "He probably could shuffle the cards pretty well.

"I thought he had a fascinating face. His face is interesting. There's quite a bit of character there. He had a big, long mustache. I thought he was a handsome man, but he looked rather fierce."

 photo: local

Charlene Scott/Daily Globe
Oklahoma artist Mary Spurgeon shows the books she used to research the history and appearance of famed lawman Wyatt Earp for a statue that will be placed in downtown Dodge City.

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USA Weekly

She laughed at her own observation and proceeded to describe the gun that is connected with the legend of Wyatt Earp.

"This gun -- the 'Buntline Special' -- always is associated with him in Dodge City, but actually it was given to him later after he left Dodge for Tombstone," she said. "It had a 12-inch barrel, and the entire gun was 18 inches long.

"They said they doubted he would have used this gun if he wanted a quick draw," she explained. "Wyatt Earp was a cautious man who probably had his gun drawn by the time he confronted somebody."

In order to portray the Buntline Special accurately, Spurgeon borrowed a gun from former Boot Hill Museum historian Marc Ferguson. She also borrowed a couple of frocked coats from Charlie Meade of Dodge City.

"The gun I borrowed had the same mechanism as Wyatt's long-barreled gun," she explained. "The coats were long, one with a tail. Wyatt may not have worn a coat like those, but the coat is dramatic and it made for good composition."

A photograph never shows an artist the details needed to make a sculpture come to life, Spurgeon said.

"Unlike a photo, a sculpture has to be pleasing from every angle," she said. "In this statue, Wyatt has a pistol in his hand against his leg. The gun is drawn, but the holster is on the opposite side. I didn't want a statue with that long barrel sticking out the side.

"Kids climb on large sculptures, and this one is going to be outdoors," she noted. "Moisture gets into statues that are outside -- freezing and thawing -- which isn't good for a part that's protruding."

Spurgeon uses the lost wax process to create her pieces, and she already has sent a model of the Wyatt Earp statue to Art Castings of Colorado in Loveland.

"They are working on casting the new sculpture for the top of the dome of the capitol in Topeka," she explained. "At the foundry they told me my sculpture is a really artistic piece, and that makes a person feel good."

The two small statues -- in bronze with different patinas -- will be completed in May. The large statue will take a year to complete.

"The larger sculpture will have a western, or what they call a French patina back East, a darker golden brown," Spurgeon said. "But you can buy the statues in all shades."

Approximately 40 small statues will be created to sell to help finance the cost of the larger sculpture, which will be placed on the Trail of Fame, a walking tour of downtown Dodge City that will include in-ground medallions dedicated to famous cowboys, lawmen and pioneers.

"Eventually, we hope to have several statues along the Trail of Fame," said Don Steele, director of the Boot Hill Repertory Company and a member of the Trail of Fame Committee that was formed a year ago.

"Fund raising for the large sculpture of Wyatt Earp is in process," he added. "Our goal is to have the statue in place for the Cowboy Symposium of 2004."

Spurgeon's work is well known in the Southwest. Her sculpture depicting team ropers, "Lookin' Forward, Lookin' Back," has been presented to the winning teams at the rodeo in Dodge City each year for five years.

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