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W E S T V I E W

A JOURNAL OF WESTERN OKLAHOMA



WESTERN OKLAHOMA LANDMARKS

VOLUME 8

NUMBER 2

WINTER 1988

\$3.00

Foreword

The notation for this issue reads *Volume 8, No. 2*. We are still afloat, and we are grateful to our many supporters.

One Assistant Editor, Mr. Rick Plant, as noted in the Fall Issue, has left. A new one, Dr. Jeanne Ellinger, has helped to take up the slack. Dr. Ellinger has taught in the SOSU Language Arts Department since 1965. Her B.A. is from SOSU, her M.A. from OU, and her Ph.D from OSU. She's mother of four and grandmother of six. Her special expertise is English as a Second Language. Many of us who teach English often feel as if we are teaching a foreign language, but Dr. Ellinger actually teaches English to international students, a group to whom English *is* a foreign language. A writer herself, she brings abilities that are needed and can be used to good effect on our Board. She has already proved to be a significant addition.

We request that all our readers and potential writers notice our two new projected issues — one for Fall, 1990 (Western Oklahoma Friendships) and one for Winter, 1990 (Western Oklahoma Reunions). We continue to depend on our free-lancers.

Dependent,

Leroy Thomas

Leroy Thomas
Editor

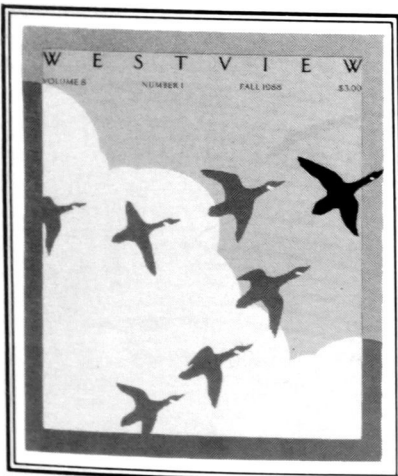
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APOLOGIES:

Because of oversights, we have two apologies to extend for our Fall, 1988 issue:

1. to JAY HOLLOPETER, senior Commercial Art major at Southwestern, who was not recognized for doing the Fall '88 cover design. Thanks, Jay — we appreciate your talent and effort.
2. to John Lovett of the Western History Library of Norman, who provided the pictures for Gwen Jackson's article titled "The Engaging Life of Al Jennings" (pp. 24-26). We appreciate the availability of the Collection and Mr. Lovett's spirit of cooperation.

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The Wilds: Past, Present, And Future



By Delenna Williams

If you are looking for:

A delicious meal for the entire family,

A lovely, shaded area for fishing,

A quaint farmyard with petting zoo,

A moving experience in history,

Or a fun-filled holiday activity,

I suggest THE WILDS.....Fish Farm, Restaurant, and Recreation Area.

What I expected from my first trip to THE WILDS was a good, reasonably priced fish dinner in a crowded restaurant. What I found in addition to the ranch-grown fish was a large selection of beef and pork dinners in an 1800's setting with musical entertainment and computerized seating.

What I expected from THE WILDS was a tedious search for an obscure road out of El Reno leading to a restaurant located in "the wilds," an undeveloped area with little landscaping. but what I found after a pleasant country drive was a family-oriented recreation area in a beautifully planned "natural" farm setting owned and operated by an El Reno family, the Wilds.

I expected on my first trip to THE WILDS to take a brief walk after dinner to see the lake and to feed the ducks. What I discovered was 240 acres: a 10-acre lake with fishing and paddle boats; a "petting" area with ducks, goats, rabbits, a bobcat, a coyote, a miniature burro, a herd of buffalo, and horses; and a grist mill with water wheel.

What I found at THE WILDS was a good family restaurant, a beautiful, quaint setting, and a historical recreation area for individuals and groups. According to Steve Wilds, his land is an ideal location for attracting tourists.



There are a million people within an hour's drive. Visitors from at least five states are at the restaurant each evening, and many countries have been represented at least once for an individual dinner or group activity. From the I-40 El Reno Exit, the drive is 10 miles to THE WILDS, and if one drives from Oklahoma City, Britton Road is a quick route from the N. W. Expressway.

The land has been in the Wilds' family since 1938, and the first step toward a recreational facility was the construction of the dam in 1946. In 1970 the lake was stocked with fish from the Wilds' hatcheries, and in 1983 the restaurant opened. The most recent acquisition is an authentic, antique steam-powered 2-6-2 narrow gauge train. Plans include the construction of a depot, 2¾ miles of track, shuttle buggies and hand cars. From the train, the rider will be able to see the buffalo herd as well as antelope, bobcat, and perhaps a bear. I'm sure once the train project is completed, there will be new ideas on the drawing board. Although Steve Wilds and family always have plans for development and improvements, some features will remain unchanged — the consistency in architecture, the music selection (Country-Western and Gospel), and the absence of alcoholic beverages. No alcohol in any form is allowed on the grounds or served in the restaurant. The family atmosphere will be maintained.

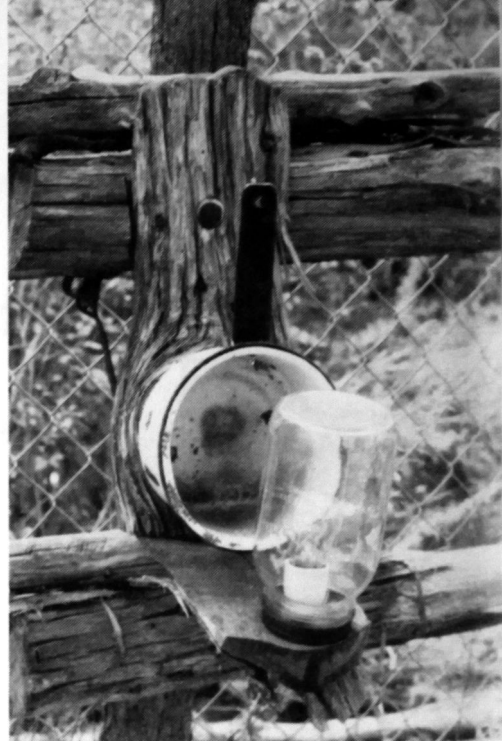
In its sixth year, the restaurant at THE WILDS is unique with its rustic look of the 1800's which was created from barns in the area; the oversized doors were brought in from an Oklahoma barn and cut to provide a grand entrance into the waiting area.

Handmade items and antiques that decorate the hand-polished aromatic cedar walls suggest the Oklahoma Frontier, as well as do the costumes of the staff. The atmosphere for the 1800's setting

is best created by Arlie Clayton at the player piano. Waiting in line until the computer prints their names, customers can make requests and sing along with Arlie as he plays the piano or uses the player piano rolls he created for the entertainment of his listeners with songs of the past.

The 4,000 square-foot dining area seats over 250 people, so the wait for a table is not a long one. On Fridays and Saturdays, one can eat from a buffet or order from the menu. The buffet offers three meat choices and many vegetables. The diner selects two meats and as many vegetables as he wishes and gets rolls, a soup or salad, and a dessert. One of the choices is the house specialty, fresh farm-raised channel catfish fillets, hand-breaded and deep-fried; barbecued ribs and smoked brisket are the other two choices. In the vegetable area are the traditional potato varieties, green beans, squash, peas, broccoli, cauliflower, and something new with deep-fried corn. The menu offers individual dinners of the channel catfish and smoked beef, as well as a variety of Western steaks, soups, salads, and desserts. Prices range from \$4.00 - \$13.00. The restaurant is open from 5:00 - 9:00 p.m., Tuesday through Thursday, and Friday and Saturday from 5:00 - 10:00 p.m., and is open for selected holidays.

For my first meal at THE WILDS RESTAURANT, I was lucky to be seated by the window for the beautiful view of the lake and farm area, so I was anxious to start the walk after dinner. I did feel as though I was walking back in time as I crossed the lake on a rustic, covered bridge. The electric light bulbs along the path were a reminder of the late Twentieth Century, but the rusted metal pan used as reflector and the Mason jar kept the 1800's atmosphere in tact. Rabbits ran on the path, and goats and sheep awaited my arrival,



knowing that I would place a coin in their food machine and feed them. A coyote paced frantically in his pen, a variety of birds slept in their smaller pens, and for a small fee, horseback riding was available. I preferred to walk so I could take all the time I wanted to feed the animals and the ducks and to take the winding path through the trees, past the picnic area and to the mill. I was amazed at the number of trees; I found later that they had been transplanted from various areas of Oklahoma.

With several lakes on the property, there is no problem in finding a quiet fishing area. Steve Wilds calls the 10-acre lake a place for "put and take" fishing; the Wilds "put" in the fish, and the fishermen "take" them out by paying \$1.80 a pound. In the bait house, both tackle and bait are available, as well as facilities for dressing and filleting the fish. The lake is stocked with channel catfish, bass, and various species of pan fish.

Past the fishing areas, hidden among the trees, is a water-powered grist mill which stone-grinds corn and other grains under the power of an 18-foot water wheel that was used during the Civil War. The Wilds rebuilt the wheel and the

building. The stone is all that is left from the original structure; it was shipped from either France or Italy for the mill's completion in 1854. The mill provides a beautiful setting for art shows and for romantic moonlight walks.

THE WILDS provides a lovely, peaceful atmosphere for family entertainment and is an Oklahoma show-place for out-of-state visitors. A variety of "old-time" activities are available as group packages for company picnics, clubs, school and church functions, or class reunions. Groups may choose from activities in tug-o-war, greased-pole climb, water games, horse shoes, volleyball, rolling pin toss, milk can toss, and sack races. There is an outdoor stage complete with electricity, and THE WILDS will arrange and book Country and Western, Bluegrass, Gospel or Folk music for entertainment. Also available are horseback riding, paddle boats, fee fishing, and bonfires with hot-dog poles.

Food for the group packages range from hot-dog suppers to catered meals of ribs, brisket, and/or chicken, served with potato salad, baked beans, rolls, choice of two drinks, and homemade fruit cobbler. Groups may select the outdoor picnic or dine indoors; anniversaries and birthdays seem typical celebrations at the restaurant. The evening I was there, THE WILDS fed one thousand people; there was a group of five hundred outdoors and another five hundred patrons in the restaurant with one birthday and two anniversaries.

On selected holidays, THE WILDS offers additional activities in the spirit of the Oklahoma Frontier. The most elaborate holiday activity is over the Labor Day weekend...I attended one day of the three-day "Hootenanny." All ages enjoy the festivities, particularly the children. There is an admission fee, but there are many animals to pet and feed, hay wagons, games

and crafts, and historical demonstrations and displays to educate and entertain any age. There are three choices for eating: one can take a picnic and enjoy the facilities near the lake; eat buffalo burgers or hot dogs at the concession booths on the grounds; or have an indoor meal at the restaurant.

A church service is provided Sunday morning and each evening there are music concerts; an Arts and Crafts show, antique cars, steam-powered threshing, gun-fights, Civil War campsites, and many other activities are included. I enjoyed particularly the demonstrations of sorghum making, spinning and the rope making; there was a corn sheller in which I placed an ear of corn, cranked a non-electric grinder, and in a few seconds had enough kernels to feed the animals.



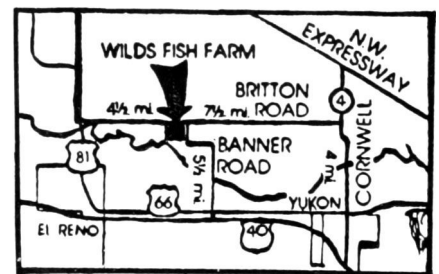
The small art show in the mill and the crafts for sale on the grounds are in keeping with the 1800's theme, with woodcarving, handmade clothing and country crafts. Demonstrations included woodcarvers and a sculptor who was carving Indian figures from alabaster.

In the late afternoon before the

music concerts began, I hopped the tractor-drawn hay wagon that toured the grounds and saw the buffalo herd. Two high-school students from El Reno, Larry Chadwick and David Litler, were assisting parents in the weekend activities and served as unofficial guides for the tour. They enthusiastically explained THE WILDS' history and future plans. We tried counting the buffalo, but we were distracted by the buffalo babies that were new to the herd. By the end of the hayride, the sun was down and the music proved to be a pleasant ending to a very active, warm day.

After talking with Steve Wilds about his involvement in the dam project to the future train plans, I felt he had fulfilled a childhood dream. He was quick to say that he was not a "dreamer," but a "realist, one who has a plan and gets busy." At present, he is busy making the railroad a reality and laying the groundwork for more entertainment facilities in the Nineteenth Century motif.

Watching the Wilds family working in the restaurant on a Saturday evening to accommodate one thousand patrons, I knew there was no time for dreaming. And one wonders how they have found the time and energy for the planning and construction of the authentic and beautiful WILDS' FISH FARM, RESTAURANT and RECREATION AREA. ■



DELENNA WILLIAMS, SOSU Assistant Professor of Speech-Theater, has, through her productions, entertained local audiences for twenty years. She now adds writing to her accomplishments.

Abandoned Farmhouse

By Glen V. McIntyre

Proud and gaunt against
dark skies,
your eaves and gutters etched with time;
windows and chimneys
strain to hold together;
container of memories,
holder of times gone by,
reminder of lost glories,
hold fast.
You have, til now,
been victorious over time,
but it is a costly victory, one that must be won again,
every day.

GLEN V. MCINTYRE, a regular WESTVIEW contributor, is curator of the Western Trails Museum in Kingfisher.

remembrance

My Uncle's Blue Jeans

By Joel Everett

They were a symbol — something bigger than life. I stood at knee level and pondered the patches of worn spots and washed-out axle-grease stains. I don't remember ever seeing past those jeans because the worn cloth was to me the epitome of the man who filled them. Tough as nails but better and wiser with the age displayed so awesomely. There was dirt on the knees where he had crouched down to pull my ears teasingly or catapult me to the heavens or to scratch the soil to see if his work was coming to life.

I loved the man in those jeans with his hands as big as anvils and his grin that filled all doubts. The random snags were all that served to tell me that he was truly real.

Bigger than life, they filled the vacuum of childhood fears when I saw them. He died before I knew him as an adult, but the jeans will always stay with me to remind me what he was, the man who filled those jeans. They tell me now that he was a war hero and could chin himself with one arm. I have no doubt about that, never will. ■

JOEL EVERETT with his harmonica, electric typewriter, and his position as a banker in Altus, has always believed that the eclectic can exist in the parched bluffs of Southwest Oklahoma.



courage and faith

Blessed Mama

By Wenona L. Dunn

Edna Pearl Rigney Latimer with her daughters, Wenona and Laurel.

I remember Mama for her kindness and for her toughness; I remember her for her generosity and for her thrifty ways; I remember her for her courage and her stick-to-it-iveness, and for her impatience with the "I can't do it" attitude.

Mama was Edna Pearl Rigney Latimer, born on a farm east of Cordell in Washita County in 1898. She was the second child and eldest daughter of Jim and Mattie Rigney, lately come from north Texas to Oklahoma. In 1900 another girl was born to the family and that winter the older son and the baby died, leaving Mama as an only child. But only for a time, for in 1902 another boy was born and in 1904 another girl.

The family moved into Cordell then, and Grandpa got a job in a dry goods store and Grandma cooked and served meals to people who worked in town. While they lived in Cordell, another son was born. About 1910 the family moved to Dill City and a year or two later to a

farm southwest of the present town of Burns Flat. It was there that Mama met my father, Kirk Latimer, youngest son of J. K. and Sarah Latimer, who came to Oklahoma from Kansas in 1896.

In 1915 the Rigney family moved to Florida, but the next year Daddy went down and married Mama and brought her back to Oklahoma. For several years they lived near Lexington, in Cleveland County, where I was born. In 1921 we moved to a farm four miles south of Foss, which my grandfather had bought the year before. We moved in with Paw and Maw until a small, two-room house could be built for us in the back yard. Daddy farmed the place and Mama helped Grandma in the garden and in canning fruits and vegetables. She also worked in the fields when her help was needed.

In 1923 Mama's second child, Laurel (now Mrs. J. R. McNatt) was born. That year Mama didn't do any field work. In 1926 Mama took Laurel and me to Florida for a visit

with my Rigney grandparents. We went by train and Mama packed a big box of food for us to eat on the way. We stayed about two months and while we were gone Daddy moved our little house to the north eighty, which he had bought from Grandpa, and added two rooms—a bedroom for Mama and Daddy and one for my sister and me. He did this without letting Mama know what he was doing, and was she ever pleased and surprised! She felt she at last had a real home of her own.

Mama always loved flowers, so she promptly began setting out trees, roses, lilacs, spyria and anything else she could get her hands on. She planted dozens of iris bulbs and flowers of all kinds, and every spring our yard was a blaze of color. Mama took many a bouquet to the small church which we attended at Burns Flat.

In 1931 our brother, R. C., was born and Mama's family was complete. During the dust bowl and

depression days Mama worked in the fields with Daddy and us kids — chopping cotton in summer and picking it in the fall. When we finished our own, we worked for neighbors. Night and morning, Mama helped Daddy milk cows and they sold milk. Mama also raised chickens and sold eggs, butter and cream to the produce in Foss. Those were hard times, but we made it through.

Mama found time to sew our clothing — hers and those for us children. She was an expert at crocheting and every new baby in the community had one of Mama's baby sets — a saque, cap and booties. She sold some of her work from time to time, and used that money for something special which she couldn't have afforded otherwise. We kids even yet have some of the lovely quilts which she made from scraps left from her sewing projects.

All three of us kids graduated from Foss High School, and Mama wanted us to have more education so we wouldn't have to work as hard as she had. She used money from her sales of produce to pay tuition for my sister and me at a business college, and when R. C.

was old enough she saw to it that he went to SOSU, where he graduated and received his teaching certificate, and later his master's degree.

During World War II Mama made room in her little house for my sister and me and our babies during the time our husbands were serving in Uncle Sam's armed forces. During that time, Mama had to have a very serious operation and had to stay in bed for a month. Now it was time for us to take care of her. She endured the inactivity with just a little impatience at being a burden to others.

In 1959 Daddy decided to retire from farming, so he and Mama sold the place and bought a nice modern house (the one on the farm wasn't!) with a few acres near Tishomingo, Oklahoma. Daddy was going to enjoy fishing and loafing. But it didn't work out that way! Daddy had been a farmer too long. They sold that place in a very few months and moved back to Foss, where they moved into Grandpa's old house, now empty for several years and in a sad state of disrepair. Mama helped Daddy clean up the house, re-wire it and add a bathroom and a sun porch for her flowers.

When he became discouraged, she was right in there pushing him along. Daddy farmed until he was eighty years old and finally had to retire indeed. His health worsened and Mama was there to take care of him for two years, until she died of an apparent heart attack. She had been out in her flower garden pulling out grass and weeds. She did this in spite of her own poor health, using a small stool to sit on as she worked. That day she came in from her work, prepared lunch for Daddy and sat down to eat. Suddenly she experienced a terrible pain and went to lie down. Before she reached the couch she fell in the floor, and died immediately. In spite of her courage and faith, Death was one enemy she couldn't overcome. She was laid to rest in Page Cemetery, less than a mile from the farm where she had spent fifty-four years of her life.

Yes, I remember Mama! She was quite a lady, "and her children rise up and call her blessed." ■

WENONA L. DUNN of Burns Flat, niece of late Arapaho Laureate Dick Chapman, serves another slice of history to WESTVIEW readers.

Foreclosure

By Fran Merrill

He stands there by the sagging fence
looking over barren fields
where died his dreams.
The heaviness on his heart
restricts breathing momentarily.
He stoops to pick up a handful of soil;
lets it fall to the ground.

Then with head high
he turns and walks toward
an unknown future
where he will again build dreams
from the tiny spark of hope
that will not die.

FRAN MERRILL is a prize-winning writer from Shawnee.

Nostalgia

By Inez Schneider Whitney

An antique telephone of polished oak occupies a prominent place on a wall in our family room. There it reigns with its crank on the right and the receiver hanging on the left. If I happen to gaze upon this relic of the past my thoughts are carried back to my childhood when this telephone occupied a prominent place on the living room wall of our farm home near Custer.

This pioneer Oklahoma town came into existence in 1902 when the Frisco railroad came through. A few years later Joe Storm brought the community the convenience of telephone service when he supervised the stringing of the lines introducing the hand-cranked magneto instruments.

The settlers were amazed. The telephone was a new invention. It was only twenty-six years earlier, March 10, 1876, on the rented top floor of a Boston boarding house when Alexander Graham Bell, working with his assistant, Thomas A. Watson, first succeeded in speaking words over a telephone. He was getting ready to test a new transmitter. Watson waited for the message in another room. Suddenly Bell spilled some acid from a battery on his clothes. He cried out, "Mr. Watson, come here! I want you!" Watson rushed into the room shouting, "Mr. Bell, I heard every word you said! Distinctly!" Bell had invented the first successful telephone.

Joe Storm soon had the switchboard working and his wife, Emma, was the "Hello-Central!" girl. This service first operated from a wooden building on the east side of Main, then in rooms over the First National Bank.

There were several lines with eight to ten families on a line. Each family had its own signal in shorts and longs. One turn of the crank sounding a quick "Ding" was called a short. Several continuous turns sounding a "Ding-g-g-g-g-g!" was called a long. Each family was assigned a ring. Ours was two shorts. If we heard "Ding! Ding!" someone in our family rushed to take down the receiver and say "Hello!"

In retrospect I remember climbing on a chair so I could reach the crank, and calling my friend, Jessie Agan. Her ring was a short and a long, "Ding!



Ding-g-g-g-g!"

When wishing to call someone on another line you rang one long. Then you'd hear Emma say "Hello-Central." You'd tell her the party you wanted and she'd connect you.

Occasionally there would be a series of shorts, a dozen or more. This was a signal for all to listen. Everybody would rush to take down their receivers. It could be good news or it might not be. Perhaps a load of seed corn had been shipped in and was for sale at the depot in Custer. There might be a birth, a death, or maybe a carnival was coming to town.

Often people ran to listen when they heard a neighbor's ring. What could the neighbor be up to now? No one ever told news on the party line that he didn't want broadcast throughout the community.

After Papa died, Mama rented the farm and moved to Custer. Since they had bought the phone she took it with her. Once when visiting her I saw it in a closet.

"Mama, if you don't want this phone we had on the farm I'd like to have it," I said.

"Take it," she replied. "It's just in the way."

After I reached home I took it to an antique dealer who refinished it. How I value this memento of my childhood. I only hope someone in my family will treasure it as I do. ■

INEZ SCHNEIDER WHITNEY is a native Western Oklahoman who has retired from teaching in Virginia and now lives and writes in Arlington.

Sandyland Sanctuary

The Zielkes were a good Western Oklahoma farm family. From my earliest remembrance, we had always lived within a quarter of a mile from their farm. Being practicing Christians, they observed the policy of caring for their neighbors, and my parents also ministered to them. I can remember all the neighbors gathering at the Zielkes' during what everyone thought were Uncle Jacky's dying hours, but he lived on many years after that. I can also remember crying because sometime during those dark hours Mama didn't come home all night because she was sitting up taking care of Uncle Jacky so his family could rest. Although I was too young to understand, everyone in the community loved the Zielkes because a favor done for them was never left unreturned.

Looking back, I don't know how we could have existed without the Zielkes. Of course my parents filled in these details after I had reached adolescence. Although the Zielkes were sharecroppers just as we were, they always seemed to be more prosperous, and they even had a car. They made weekly shopping trips to the county seat and brought back supplies for us. I have heard in later years that maybe the money my parents sent along to pay for our purchases stretched a bit further in the Zielkes' hands than it might have otherwise. They also brought back longed-for treats for all four of the children in our family. We were much poorer than the Waltons and not nearly so talented.

As far back as I can remember, I always knew that Uncle Jacky and Aunt (we called her **Aint**) Ethel had six children already away from home, and the only

ones still in the nest were Bub, Dora, and Pearl. Throughout the community, the "girls" were called Dora-n-Pearl.

Bub, a deaf mute, was a good old guy, and he didn't seem to let his inability to hear and talk bother him at all. He could grunt, point, and make gurgling sounds. He loved all children; he and I were constant playmates. Bub was older than my dad, but it was no issue with me or with my playmate.

Our favorite games were marbles and horseshoes. And although he was a grown man, he thought nothing of rolling in the dirt with me as we dug our castles on our sandyland farms. He even got to the point — finally — that he could gesture at me and form the words "My Boy."

Dora-n-Pearl were also involved in loving and caring for the children in that small country community. Dora was a friendly, easy-going person most of the time, but she had a physical appearance that frightened little people. She had a large unsightly goiter that grew outside her neck, and she wore high-necked collars to try to conceal it. Everyone always wondered if there was a surgical procedure that would have corrected it, but as far as I ever knew, no one asked. She also wore more make-up than was necessary, and she dyed her hair red; but it always looked orange. The overly red lips appeared garish when the snuff spittle oozed from her mouth.

Pearl was a quiet, genteel Southern lady who was always tender, compassionate, and loving toward everyone — and especially her aging parents. She wasn't an outwardly attractive woman, but she never tried to put on airs, and what we saw was the real Pearl

— no make-up, no dye, no show. She was never a very healthy person; as a result, her entire family protected her from strenuous activities.

The highlight of my young life came on the day that the Zielkes asked if I could go into town with their family for the weekly shopping trip. Not only was that the first time I had ever been to town; it was also the first time I had ever ridden in a car. I soon learned that I was to experience two more firsts that I hadn't even anticipated. After the shopping was finished, we ate at a restaurant that specialized in family-type food service. Although the foods I ate were things I had eaten before — barbecued beef, fried okra, and corn on the cob — the novelty was the surroundings. What else nice could happen to me in one day? They also took me to a cowboy movie starring Gene Autry. For days after that, I wasn't still for a minute.

One of the saddest times of my young life involved another example of the way the Zielkes gave of themselves beyond anyone's expectations. Early one spring, my dad was trying to get one of our horses adjusted to the thought of working in the field after being lazy all winter. The horse bolted, balked, reared up, and broke Daddy's collar bone. Not only was Uncle Jacky soon there to drive Daddy to the doctor's office; he and Bub also did most of the farming for Daddy that spring.

Our neighbors weren't without their foibles, however. One of their eccentricities that made all of us laugh was the way all of them refused to tell their ages. One day Dad and Mom decided that the weather was too cold for

By Leroy Thomas

my sister and me to be in the field with the rest of the family. Since they were pulling cotton for Uncle Jacky, they left us at the house with Aint Ethel. My sister Betty, five years older than I am, was always the inquisitive type; and she liked to allay her boredom by asking nosey questions. Sometime during the day, she drawled, "Aint Ethel, how old is Dora-n-Pearl?" Aint Ethel evidently had been asked that question many times, and she had a ready — but evasive — answer: "Oh, I don't know, Honey. I guess they ain't so powerfully old." The ages of all the family members were carefully guarded secrets never revealed until the obituaries were written.

Uncle Jacky and Aint Ethel had worked hard all their lives, and hardship had never kept them from trying to eke out a living from the soil. They had actually reared two families — the six who were away from home with families of their own at the time we were neighbors and the other three who never married and would continue to live at home with their parents. Those three weren't even considered oddities of their time, but they would be today.

I can still remember how those dear people looked, although it has been close to fifty years now. Uncle Jacky, as I recall, was a short, slightly stocky man who always walked with a springy step. I never saw him that he wasn't wearing a blue work shirt and bib overalls.

And I never saw Aint Ethel that she wasn't wearing an apron. She never worked in the fields during the years I knew her, so she was always daintily attired in feminine-looking dresses. She also stayed busy

taking care of her house and family. More than once, I ate at her table and enjoyed her delicious meals. And between meals, she often treated me to her hot homemade bread, cobbblers, and pies.

With the exodus of farmers into Western Oklahoma towns, we lost contact with the Zielkes because they managed to buy a small house in the little town about five miles away. For many years as I grew out of childhood, we saw our good friends only during infrequent visits in the little town.

Although I was only an adolescent, I soon came to the realization that the change from the farm to town life had a bad effect on the Zielke girls. Before long, they were alone. Uncle Jacky, Aint Ethel, and Bub died within a few months of one another, so the family circle had disappeared.

World War II had spread into our private zone; it even took my only brother. We were near an air-force base; Dora-n-Pearl — in loneliness, despair, and boredom — began going out with "fly boys" much younger than they were. At the time, the girls were likely approaching their fifties.



Illustration by Paul Rabalais

Always searching for acceptance, Dora — according to the town grapevine — became rather wild. Pearl seemingly remained pure and untouched by all those outward influences.

Somehow they survived; but Dora, that remnant of good Puritan stock, soon had to go to work at a laundry to help support herself and her younger sister. The family had always shielded Pearl, so Dora carried on the tradition.

So they lived on for the next thirty years together in the little white frame house Uncle Jacky had bought for his family upon leaving the farm.

It was there about two years ago that Dora departed this life. And it's there that Pearl lives alone today while going through the motions of living without family and with only a few friends remaining in that Western Oklahoma setting. ■

LEROY THOMAS, the first person to earn a Ph.D. in English at Oklahoma State University (Class of 1970), is Editor of WESTVIEW and is the only remaining member of the original Editorial Board.

Babbs Switch: A Commission From The Spirits

By Karen Allen Chapman

A pickup truck of vintage years and questionable color lumbered along highway 183 a few miles out of Hobart. It veered onto a side road, bounced, lurched, then stopped. Interrupted but momentarily, stillness returned to the sizzling quiet of an Oklahoma summer afternoon.

Suddenly, the passenger door burst open. Shrieks and squeals split the sky as two children irreverently broke the spell. Grasshoppers scattered in alarm before them as they ran. "Can't catch me, silly sissy girl! Can't catch me!"

Slowly, hesitantly, the driver's door squeaked open. Cautiously, an old man lowered himself from the seat of the pickup and stood. His eyes pinched into the calculated squint of the farmer long accustomed to scanning the horizon into the sun, evaluating the skies for promise of rain. He spat into the weeds. No sign.

And then his eyes sought that for which he had come to this place — the rose granite marker. He walked toward it, reluctantly. His heart was heavy, but he was piqued by curiosity, propelled by courage. With scarred fingers he felt the smooth surface of the stone and traced the story thereon, as if a reader of braille. Nineteen twenty-four. Such a tumult on that chill winter night sixty-four years ago. So unlike this brilliant windless day. How could this be the same place? Why had he dreaded to come back? But he had finally returned, drawn here like the tongue is drawn to irritate a festering tooth. Why not leave the memories alone? How could this journey expiate his guilt, the senseless guilt that the living feel in the presence of the spirits of the hapless dead?

The grandchildren stumbled toward him, breathless from their sprint, sweaty, and out of sorts.

"See, that's what happens when you take off like racehorses in this heat. Sit down on this patch of grass here and be still. You'll feel better soon."

He sat on the running board of the pickup, facing the children.

"Your hands are ugly, Grandpa," the lad observed innocently.

"Yes, yes they are, Son." The old man looked at his hands perched atop his knees. The skin was angry looking, stretched so taut that he could not make a fist, could not even clasp his knees tightly. "And if you'll rest a bit, I'll tell you why. It's a story. By then maybe you'll be ready for a Dairy Queen ice cream."

He leaned back against the truck door, wiped sweat and imaginary cobwebs from his brow, and began.

"It was right here, December 24, years ago. I was just about your age, and just as full of energy as you two. And kids back then — well, we got just as excited around Christmas time as kids do today.

Babbs Switch school set right over there. It was just a one-room frame building, about the size of your mother's living room, and all thirty-three of us pupils were taught by one lady, Mrs. Florence Terry Hill. She was a wonderful woman, made us each know we were special. 'We each had a gift to offer to the world,' she'd say. . . a gift.'

Well, our school was dressed up extra nice to get ready for our Christmas program that year. It was going to be the biggest Yuletide doin's ever, and so the inside was fresh painted, and the students all helped

put up the evergreen. In those days we used cotton and strung cranberries and popcorn to drape around the limbs. And of course we didn't have electricity, so folks attached little wax candles to the branches for light.

The tree wasn't very steady. While we were trimming it, I reached for a branch that I could just barely fetch. When I pulled, the whole thing came over on top of me. Everyone hooted at how clumsy I was, and we had to start over on most of the trimming.

Come Christmas eve, I was getting pretty skittery. I was nervous about saying my Bible quote from the Christmas story for the school program that night. I had those lines memorized frontwards and backwards, but when I thought about standing up in front of all the grown ups, the words just started doing leap frog in my head.

Lots of things weren't going just right. The weather turned off terrible. That afternoon, black clouds gathered up, and soon a norther was blasting us with knifey sleet. On top of that, my baby sis, your great Aunt Lila, came down with the croup. That meant Mama couldn't go to Babbs Switch. I'd sure miss watching her mouth my lines to herself while I did my part. I'd wanted her to see me and be proud of me. . . more than anything.

Course, before Papa and I could go, we had chores to do. Animals have to be fed no matter what, and the weather slowed us up so's I thought we'd be too late and miss it all.

Fact was, we were a little late. But we got there just as Mrs. Hill was announcing the little kids' part; that was the first thing on the program. When Papa opened the door, it kinda dragged on the floor. And when he had to force it inside to open it wider, it made a scraping sound. Everyone turned clear around to shush us. My face flamed red. Well, that was just the first time that contrary ole door was to make trouble for us that night.

There were fifty desks, all in neat rows. (They were nailed to the floor in those days.) All of them were taken. There were even extra chairs in the aisles, and people in all of them too. So Papa and I stood at the back, just inside the door. I couldn't see much, so I stood on top of a stack of books. I knew that I'd get it for sure if Papa or Mrs. Hill saw me, but no one

noticed. And I could see fine.

The little room was transformed. The candles on the tree at the front were so merry. They fluttered and flickered in the branches. The light and shadows of them, and the glow of the kerosene lamps and lanterns made it seem like Santa's elves were dancin' about. Outside, the wind howled, and the ground was covered with an icy crust. But inside, the stove sent out its heat, and everybody radiated their own Christmas glow.

People clapped and cheered after my group performed. And I only stumbled over my lines once. When I got back to where my dad was, he slapped me on the back, proud-like, the way men do to each other, and I swelled up about to pop with pleasure.

Then when all our parts were done, Santa Claus appeared. He was decked out in his regulation uniform, but I could tell by the way Mrs. Bolding helped him when he handed out the bags of candy that he was her son, Dow. He was seventeen, and I had in mind to be just like him someday. He never teased the little kids like some older guys will do. And when he handed me a bag of candy that night, he shook my hand, as if to say we were special friends. He clasped my hand tight, and I gripped his hand hard too, not knowing it was the last time I was ever going to be able to give a man a good hand shake. I'm proud it was with Dow.

After he handed me the last bag he was carrying, he went to the front of the room for more. I saw his hand reaching up into the top of the tree for a present that someone had placed there. (That was a natural place for packages in those days.) Somehow, in that maneuver to get that present some candles ignited the tree. Nobody thought much of it at first; we'd seen the like happen before. I even heard some of my friends laugh and yell out to Santa to back up or he'd catch afire.

But then it all started happening fast. Dow picked up a toy chair and threw it at the tree, I guess to put out the burning branch, but the tree fell and knocked over a glass bowl lamp. That lamp exploded into flames. Fire licked across the newly painted ceiling zippity fast. The curtain we'd made of sheeting to go across the stage came ablaze.



After that, I couldn't see much, just people screaming and crying. I remember Mr. Tom Goforth standing up on a desk yelling for folks to calm down. 'We're all going to get out all right,' he said.

But all of us didn't. Not Mrs. Hill or Dow. Not Mr. Goforth either.

Mrs. Hill had told us, in case of a fire, to drop down to the floor and crawl because we could breathe better if we layed low. I saw some of the children doing just that, but the stampede for the door was leaving them tromped under, and their crawling bodies tripped other people. There was such a cluster of arms and heads and legs that it might have been laughable if it was an act in a slap-stick comedy. but it was real, all right.

I was lucky to be close to the door. Right quick, folks were clamoring for it to get out, and the more they pressed into the door, the harder it was to pull it open. Their bodies just pushed it shut.

Papa and some other men managed to open the door a space, and he grabbed me by the shoulder and hurled me outside, rough as if I was a bale of hay he was buckin' onto a

rack. That's how he saved my life.

Some people who made it outside turned right around and went back in to rescue others, and most times, they died too. Several of us tried to get people out through the windows. There were lots of windows, but they all had sturdy galvanized mesh wire over them, and we couldn't budge the wire. It was fastened with seven-inch bolts and wire staples. Oh, whoever had put that on'd done a good job of it, I'll tell you.

Outside it was freezing sleety cold, but we were so close to the fire and working so hard to break loose the window wire that sweat was rollin' off us. The window glass was broken, and the flames were burning out at us and heating up the metal wire so that it was like grabbin' holt of an oven rack in your cook stove when you've set it on broil.

We could hear the screams and prayers from folks inside, and close to the window I saw my papa. He'd stayed to help others 'til there was no helping hisself. His mouth was open in a cry. I'd never seen him cry, ever. I just kept pulling at that mesh wire until big arms from behind me dragged me away.

Pretty soon the voices inside stopped. All we could hear was the hiss of fire. All we could see was flames and black, black smoke. Thirty-six fine people perished that night."

"Did you burn your hands when you tried to pull down the wire, Grandpa?"

"Yes."

"If you'd died back then, Buddy and I wouldn't even BE, would we, Grandpa?"

He looked at the beautiful pair, so healthy and full of life. He felt the spirits about him, felt their approval, and sensed their message. Those who live out their lives have an obligation — to make the best of their gift, to prepare a good way for the generations after. He had done well. He smiled slightly, nodded.

"That's right, Child," he said. ■

KAREN ALLEN CHAPMAN, a 1963 Weatherford High School graduate, is a free-lance writer living in Park City, Utah. Her specialty is young adult historical fiction.

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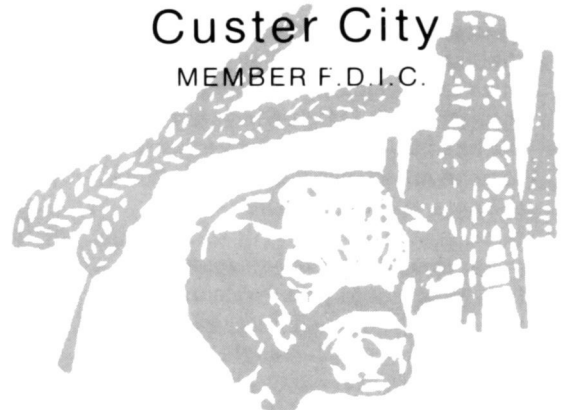


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FAMILY

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The Old Country Store

By Eunice Wattenbarger

On a farm lived my brother near this store
In a little old white house rose-grown at the door;
And down this road he walked to sell his cream,
Stopping sometimes along the road to dream;
Of what, I don't know; he never did say,
But he did pause and rest along the way.

People didn't stop to give him a ride,
But this didn't even damage his pride,
For he knew it would not always be that way;
It would be better "over there" someday.
He would walk on and buy a loaf of bread,
Or perhaps tobacco, and a spool of thread.

He eyed the oil derricks along the way
And the big red service trucks there that day,
And he'd say, "They'll hit oil there sometime,
And I'll have money, a lot more'n a dime."

Years have gone since my brother passed away,
And now there are oil and gas wells that pay.
Why did they wait so long to bring from the ground
This abundance my brother never found?
But, "If you love the Lord, all things work for good."
My brother wouldn't change it if he could.

"In my Father's house are many mansions,"
Said Jesus to His disciples one day:
And I believe my brother lives in one
With roses growing all along the way.

EUNICE WATTENBARGER is a 77-year-old Sentinel poet. The "old country store," which was torn down in 1986, was owned and operated by Dan Evans. The store was located in Washita County on the old 41 highway.

honored son

By Coeta Sue Lindsey

COETA SUE LINDSEY, mother of four, is a columnist and typesetter for the CARNEGIE HERALD. The subject of this piece is her brother, Eldon Lee Reynolds.



Remembrance Day November 11

He wasn't afraid when his
country said go;
His smile was still bright,
tho his step a bit slow.

They were so close and he hated to leave
For while he was gone he knew they would grieve.

But he didn't say no, and he didn't run.
Anyone would have been proud to call him their son.
With a wave of his hand to his dad and mom,
He was off to war in Vietnam.

His family prayed both day and night,
That their fine young man would come home all right.
They didn't know that one month to the day,
Just what a great price they all would pay.
He with his life, they with their son;
Their months of heartache had just begun.

For all that came back from that man-made hell
Were a big silver casket, a flag and one shell.
No, we haven't forgot him and we never will;
The boy is gone, but his spirit is here still,
In the hearts of friends, family, his dad and mom,
And it can't be erased. . . not by Vietnam.

Eldon fought for his country, for freedom
of generations to be,
So they could grow up knowing
what it is to be free.

This Old House

By Imogene Barger



This old house sits crumbling down and alone in a pasture without even a driveway leading to its door. Its doors, windows and front porch are long gone. But — it remembers — better days — when curtains were hanging at the windows and bouncing bettys, pink roses and lilacs bloomed around its door. When its walls were carefully papered and painted and its floors were kept white by scrubbing with the wash water or perhaps covered with a linoleum that was used until all the bright colors were gone in spite of careful waxing each week with a mixture of coal oil and paraffin.

It remembers — pictures on the walls, flowers on the table and the smell of fresh baked bread covered with home churned butter.

This old house has been home to many, both saint and sinner and it remembers many things. The good and the bad, the happy and the sad. Its walls still hear the echoes of the laughter and tears of the children that ran through its now empty rooms.

It remembers — the joy at the birth of a healthy baby with only a midwife or a country doctor or perhaps just a neighbor woman in attendance. It remembers — the pain of death, whether it be a child or someone that had lived their allotted three score and ten years and it remembers the voices of family and friends that came to congratulate or console.

It remembers — the prayers of the good and the not so good and can still hear the voices of the neighborhood women as they caught up on the local news when they met to quilt or can.

It remembers — when the furniture was pushed back, the rugs were rolled up and its wall rang to the music of guitar and fiddle. It can still hear the waltz and two-step tempos and the square dance callers voice sing-singing "Ladies bow, gents pow-wow, if that ain't hugging, show me how." It can still see the men slip quietly out its side door during these dances for a refreshing sip of homebrew or home made wine.

This old house sits lonely and alone, soon to be just a pile of rubble. AND — there is no one to care. Its memories will soon be dead and gone like the people that made it live through the years. It's sad — it wants to tell its stories. But — no one has time to listen. ■

Author's Note: The house that was the inspiration for "This Old House" is still standing ¼ west and ¼ mile south of the Highway 281 intersection west of Lookeba.

IMOGENE BARGER's works have appeared often in WESTVIEW. A history buff, she enjoys researching subjects about Lookeba, her home territory.

chief landmark and cornerstone

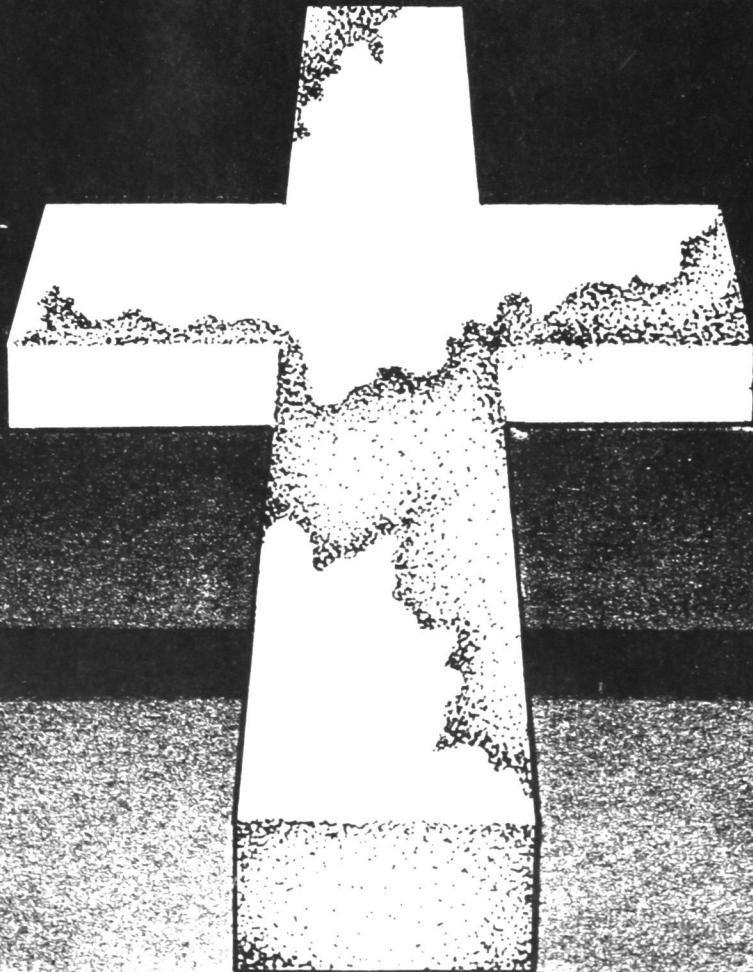
Illustration by Maria Sheets

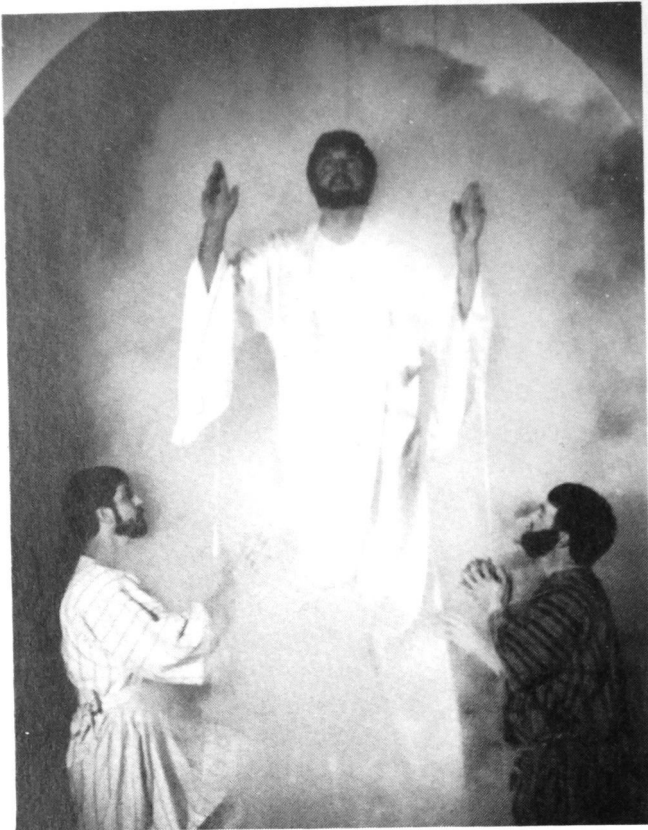
Little Lord Jesus

By Ernestine Gravley

Make ready, said the prophet long ago
Make ready, prepare your heart
Make him a cradle, make him an altar
Make him a psalm.
Let all the desert bloom.
Find him a shelter, lend him a stable
Let all the cattle kneel
Before the Author of the Universe,
The Shepherd of the Milky Way,
Creator of the poinsettia and the mistletoe.
Pity the poor unready world...
They know not what they do.

*ERNESTINE GRAVLEY is a prize-winning writer from Shawnee and
our only contributor whose works also appear in COSMOPOLITAN.*





RELIGION

joint, unified effort

Our God Reigns: FBC Easter Pageant

By Bob Klaasen

A Western Oklahoma landmark? Not in the exact sense of the word, but the annual Easter Pageant of First Baptist Church (FBC) in Weatherford will soon become a Western Oklahoma Landmark. This pageant originated in the mind of Tony Cannon approximately six years ago. During that time, he was directing pageants in another community. In 1986, when Cannon became Minister of Music at FBC, Weatherford, this particular pageant began. "Since I was a small child," says Cannon, "I've heard that a picture is

especially true of Christian dramatizations. Cannon continues, "For years we have read of the agony that Jesus went through to die on the cross. We have also read and learned of the love that Jesus had and still has for us today. But...have we really felt that agony, that love, His mercy?" As Cannon reflects upon the first pageant he viewed, he says, "For the first time in my life, I felt the love God really had for me. He loved me so much, He died. Yet, He lives today! The sufferings I face are not even a drop in a bucket compared to what Jesus had to suffer for my sins." Because of the tremendous impact this first pageant presentation had on his life, Cannon reflects, "I have committed myself to Him to be used by Him in each of our presentations. My ultimate desire is that Christ is seen, not man! John 3:30 says it best: 'He must increase, but I must decrease.'"

The Easter dramatization at FBC in Weatherford started with one performance in 1986, and will have four performances in 1989. The first two performances will be March 23 and 24, and the last two on Easter Sunday, March 26. The adult choir of the church, composed of approximately sixty voices, is the most visible portion of the presentation. However, there is a large cast of non-singing participants and much work also occurs behind the scenes! First of all, the script must be written before the cast is selected. Cannon never uses the very same presentation from year to year — there is an annual revision. Musical numbers must be chosen and ordered, publicity must be planned, costumes designed, personnel enlisted, and sets built. The latter of these requires a large cadre of volunteers who spend about three weeks each season building an elaborate set across the entire front of the church building. Merle Bonner, Supervisor of House-keeping at Southwestern Oklahoma State University, and Set Construction Coordinator in 1988 and again in 1989, says, "I don't mind giving my time for this project because it's enjoyable. Everybody has a different talent; however, I cannot sing or read music, but I have a talent in building and working. A Bible verse in Romans 12:6 reminds us that our gifts differ."

Other areas which require considerable planning and preparation are sound and lighting. Because FBC does not own enough lighting and special sound equipment, it's rented from a commercial establishment in Oklahoma City and delivered here several days before the first presentation. Volunteers in the church fill additional vital positions such as coordinators of drama, make-up, props, publicity, prayer, video, special effects, photography, and ushering. Approximately 130 different people were involved in the 1988 presentation. The cost of this annual ministry is budgeted by the Music Budget of FBC with special gifts accepted.

Mrs. Midge Gerber, church organist and Instructor of Office Administration/Business Education at SOSU, has been the Technical Producer since the

first pageant in 1986. She has a crew of six to ten people who enjoy working behind the scenes. They work as a family and enjoy it so much that no one wants to quit. The only people not presently involved, who were part of the original crew, have moved away. "If it were not for the technical crew, the choir would sing very quietly and in the dark!" says Mrs. Gerber. She is also quick to point out that "the pageant is an opportunity for spiritual growth." "A spectator," she continues, "might perceive the production as just a performance, but as a participant you see that the pageant is done for God's glory, not man's."

How does the community of Weatherford fit into the production? First of all, the community is invited to attend. Additionally, invitations are sent to churches within a fifty-mile radius, encouraging them to make reservations and attend as a group. This pageant has become an important part of Easter-time worship for people of many denominations. FBC feels that this production is a service of ministry to the community as well as to its own church.

This Easter dramatization is the portrayal of the life, death, and resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Important aspects of the pageant include fellowship and evangelism — fellowship that occurs among its cast members and evangelism that reaches out into the community. These aspects, combined with attitudes of giving and ministry, will cause the pageant to continue being successful.



A Western Oklahoma landmark? Maybe not in the true sense of the word, but it is hoped that this pageant will become the type of landmark which will encourage people to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. ■

BOB KLAASSEN, SOSU Director of Admissions, has appeared in the cast of OUR GOD REIGNS, subject of his article.



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Christian training ground

By Carol Bates

Jabbok's Faith

In 1899, Mr. and Mrs. A. L. Eisenhower, uncle and aunt of President Dwight Eisenhower, claimed a homestead on a site one half mile south of Thomas. In 1901, the Eisenhowers received a patent from the territory of Oklahoma for the purpose of preaching the gospel in every land, for maintaining a missionary home and Bible School for the training of home and foreign missionaries, for setting up a holiness school, and for publishing Christian literature. An orphanage was thus established and maintained by the Eisenhower family until 1909, at which time a petition of transfer was made to the General Conference of the Brethren in Christ Church. After this transfer, many changes took place for the Eisenhower orphanage.

On April 24, 1909, the first change occurred when a will was written. It conveyed the farm and buildings to the church on condition that an annual sum of \$500 be paid to the donors for life. This payment was terminated in 1953 upon the death of Mrs. Eisenhower. The orphanage was maintained by volunteer workers and teachers. When the number of orphans dropped from a high of fifty-five to a low of seventeen, the orphanage was closed in 1924.

Another change that took place was the addition of more buildings. The first building for the Jabbok Orphanage was a two-room wooden structure built in

1907. Then a thirty-by-thirty brick building was constructed in 1929. That building was converted from a grade school, which had operated as such until 1929, to a dormitory for boys. In 1910, work was begun on a building later to be known as "Old Main." The cost of the two-story, forty-by-sixty-foot building with a basement was approximately \$8,800. To make use of the existing facilities and to carry out another provision of the original patent, another change took place.

The Board of Trustees under the leadership of Bishop D. R. Eyster and Rev. J. P. Eyster decided to open Jabbok Bible Academy on September 14, 1925. Thirty students enrolled with Rev. P. J. Wiebe, who served as the first president. Approximately three hundred students from fifteen states attended Jabbok. Many of the graduates and students served as missionaries, church administrators, pastors, Sunday School teachers, church board members, and Christian lay workers. The school was closed in 1955.

Although the school was closed, a dairy that was begun during the Eisenhower years continued to operate as a source of income and student employment until 1963. For twenty-seven years, Jess and Ruth Eyster delivered milk to the Thomas community. For most of these years, they made their deliveries in a horse-drawn wagon. They ran the dairy until they retired a few years ago.

Since the closing of Jabbok, the members of the Thomas Brethren in Christ congregation have cultivated the land, the proceeds going to the mission program.

All that are left now are the fertile land and a granite monument donated and erected by the Jabbok Alumni Association. In 1983, the Oklahoma Historical Society recognized Jabbok as a part of the history of Western Oklahoma and erected a historical marker giving directions to the site. The memories of the people who attended Jabbok Bible School, as well as those who lived and worked there, will go on forever. ■

CREDITS: Mrs. Paul Lady, the Jabbok Alumni Association.

CAROL BATES of Thomas, mother of three sons, is a SOSU student who has hopes of becoming a registered nurse.



HISTORY

a timeless room near Hinton

Red Rock Canyon

By Marj Bennett McAlister

In this red rock room
lichens paper thirty-foot walls
red floors sport green carpets
now beginning to fade
trees, half-clad from first frost
decorate floors and walls.
Wrap-around sunshine beams
from sapphire sky-ceiling:
Red Rock Canyon, timeless room.

Peace accented by gently moving leaves
red boulders rest the eye
quietness soothes the ear
clear crisp air attends
autumn at its best —
halcyon days before
winter's white decor.

Balm to urban-tired visitor:
exhilarating, poignant, transient
enveloped by euphoria:
Red Rock Canyon, timeless room.

MARJ BENNETT MCALISTER, an indefatigable worker in the Poetry Society of Oklahoma, is a widely published poet.



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HISTORY

unsolved mystery

The Dover Train Robbery



Illustration by Tony Neely

By Chrystabel Poteet

Steam hissed wildly and brakes screeched violently as engineer Gallagher brought the midnight south-bound Rock Island train to an abrupt halt before the blazing barrier set upon the track ahead of him. Into the cab jumped two undisguised bandits carrying Winchester's to hold both the engineer and fireman at gunpoint. While back at the mail coach three shots rang out simultaneously, shattering each of the three small glasses in the car door.

"Open up!" demanded a raucous voice from outside, "or we'll fill your coach with hot lead."

But not until 20 or more shots were fired around, underneath and into the mail car with one shot wounding express messenger Joe Jones of Kansas City, did the second mail clerk roll back the heavy door on the west side of the car. As the door slid back this lone man found himself facing three unmasked desperadoes on horseback, their guns pointed directly at him.

"Hand over that box of gold that's goin' to the Fort and be quick about it," called out the burly fellow with an oath stiff enough to cut the chilly April breeze.

And because there was no alternative, this helpless clerk meekly handed over the box that was going to the Fort.

While the other two bandits stood guard, the big fellow, much larger than his companions, fastened the box of gold coin securely to his saddle, wheeled his horse around and galloped off to the west into the blackness of the night. Not more than two minutes later he was followed by his buddies who kept hurling jibes at the mail clerk until they rode out of sight. Back at the engine the other two members of this bold undisguised gang released their captives and after firing a shot into the air — the signal for

the engineer to start the train — mounted their horses and rode off in the same direction the others had taken.

The box which was addressed to Fort Sill, a fort in the military reservation of the Kiowa, Comanche and Apache Indian lands in southwestern Oklahoma, contained a large federal payroll for the soldiers stationed there. Ordinarily the quarterly shipment which had to be transported across this Indian land by stage after it was taken from the train, was not nearly so large as this one. But because of a change in government regulations that year — 1895 — there had been a long delay in shipment. It was this delay which caused the box to be so valuable.

The box, heavy enough to attract the attention of any clerk along the line, rode unmolested from Washington, D.C., through all the eastern states and it was not until the shipment had been transferred to a train at Caldwell, Kan., (a railroad division point) that the two frightening words "holdup" and "outlaws" were used in the clerk's conversation.

"Joe," spoke the elder clerk as he sorted the southbound mail, "this is sure a heavy package that's going to the Fort. If you remember it's been a long time since the boys down there had a payday so the package must have great value."

"Yes, I do remember," answered Joe, "and I hope those roving bandits don't hear about this big prize. I've never met up with any but I've heard many stories about them," concluded Joe with a shrug of his shoulders as he looked at the box.

The conversation of these two clerks changed so many times as the train stopped and started at every town along the line, that the thought of train robbers was quite forgotten. It was 11:45 by Joe's watch when the train, made up of the usual mail and baggage cars and five coaches, pulled out of Dover. The coaches filled with passengers consisted of a smoker, daycoach, chair car, sleeper and

tourist car, the latter occupied by a party going to California.

As the train hurried on through the blackness of the night the whistle suddenly sounded out loud and clear. "That's the engineer blowing for the Cimarron River bridge," said the veteran clerk in a reminiscent mood. "Once across that bridge we're deep in bandit country. Fellows have told me many times as I've gone up and down this line that bandits have hideouts in the gyp hills west of here. They also say that these bandits have a secret code which alerts them whenever a big shipment is coming down the line. Anyway," he continued, "with this valuable shipment on board, I'll be glad when we get as far south as El Reno."

No sooner had the clerk finished speaking than both men were thrown forward by the sudden stopping of the train. Not easily frightened by the shattered glass falling around them the two mail-clerks at first refused to comply with the demands of the gunmen outside. But when bullets came whizzing through the car, one of them wounding Joe in the shoulder, the older clerk pulled back the door and handed over the box as the bandits had ordered.

As the place of the holdup was only six miles north of the next town, the engineer, after the bandits released him, soon brought the train into Kingfisher, the county seat. There an alarm was given and a posse started at once in pursuit of the robbers. Joe Jones, who was taken off the train and given medical aid, was found not to be seriously wounded. Both Joe and the older clerk were asked to tell the story of the daring mail robbery over and over again in the short time they remained in the town.

The next day, which was Friday, April 5, The Daily Oklahoman told the story of the robbery on its front page. The account of the affair was given by a passenger on the train — Bion Cole of the Western Newspaper Union — who told how the

two desperadoes from the engine not only held the engineer and fireman but also had the conductor and porter of the train in charge while they relieved the passengers of their cash and valuables. As there was no attempt at disguise, these two gunmen were recognized by ex-United States Marshal William Grimes, who was a passenger in the chair car. Both these men, Gyp Wyatt (known as the bad man of western Kansas) and Charlie Gibson, had been arrested at Kingfisher while Grimes served as U.S. marshal.

Because of the double feature employed by the daring bandits, this affair became known as Oklahoma's boldest train robbery, and because a federal payroll had been stolen, a posse of United States marshals was sent into the Territory to help catch the robbers.

For the next two or three weeks people living around Kingfisher and Dover were kept in a state of terror while the officers searched every barn and cave in their communities. Deputy Marshal Madsen believed the gunmen to be a part of the Doolin gang, with headquarters at Mrs. Dalton's farm, but after careful search this idea had to be abandoned and the officers moved farther away from the scene of the crime in their search for the bandits.

On May 10, the posse of U.S. marshals surrounded part of the gang at the home of the Dunn brothers in Pawnee County. Two of the desperadoes, Dynamite Dick and Bitter Creek — also known as "Slaughter Kid" — were killed.

Although wounded seriously in the first round of the fight these two bandits lived long enough for each to tell the officers the same story. In understandably ill-tempered tones they told that the big fellow who rode away from the train eluded all four of their gang in the darkness of night and made good his escape with the box of gold.

On July 26 Wyatt and Gibson were killed and their bodies were hauled into Guthrie in a wagon. The marshals had already learned that the same Wyatt and Gibson had been seen around saloons in Kingfisher the day before the robbery, talking with suspicious characters. It was believed that the big fellow was selected not only because of his size and rough manners but for his fast running horse as well.

The only clue the officers ever had, came from a young woman living on a ranch south of Bridgeport who told the marshals that a big tall man wearing a large white hat and riding a dark bay horse had stopped and asked her for a drink. This posse of U.S. marshals, chagrined at their failure to capture one lone bandit, was recalled and the Kingfisher officers were left in charge. "Just who was this big man?" the officers asked each other, "And where could he have gone?"

The failure of all the officers to capture the bandit and retrieve the gold caused a legend to develop which has been kept alive for more than a century. The old-timers who told the story many times believed that the big man became

so frightened over the immensity of his crime that he hid the box of gold by burying it in some out-of-the-way place. It is a fact, however, that not a single piece of gold coin bearing that date was ever put back into circulation.

Throughout the years men have hunted in many strange places for this box of gold. During the depression years 1929-1932 they began searching in canyons and creek-beds of Caddo County. Some even carried old maps supposed to show where the gold had been hidden.

As late as 1948 an old man carrying a crumpled map in one hand and a divining rod in the other, was found searching for this gold in a dry creek-bed five or six miles southwest of Hinton. This attempt, like those made by gold-seekers of previous years, failed miserably.

Every few years, someone tries to locate this hidden treasure. Now in this year — 1988 — Oklahomans still ask the same two questions that have been asked so many times before. "What became of the big bold bandit? And, where did he hide the gold?" ■

CHRYSTABEL BERRONG PO-TEET, 95 years old, lived for sixty-seven years three miles west of Hinton and now resides in the Geary Nursing Home. Still an active writer, her works are published in GEARY TIMES and GEARY STAR. Previously, her articles have appeared in ORBIT, OKLAHOMA CHRONICLES, and the HINTON RECORD.

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THE OLD HOUSE

BY WENONA L. DUNN

WE ARE TEARING DOWN THE OLD, OLD HOUSE.
(NO ONE HAS LIVED HERE FOR MANY YEARS.)
HOW MANY MEMORIES DOES IT HOLD?
HOW MANY JOYS? AND HOW MANY TEARS?

THE NAILS ARE RUSTY, THE BOARDS ARE OLD —
THE WINDOWS AND DOORS ARE LONG SINCE GONE;
AS WE WORK I THINK OF TIMES GONE BY —
BACK IN THE DAYS WHEN THE HOUSE WAS YOUNG.

MOTHER HAS WORKED IN THE KITCHEN — THERE;
AND BAKED THE BREAD IN THE OLD WOOD STOVE.
FATHER HAS READ TO THE CHILDREN — HERE;
AS THE FAMILY MET IN A CIRCLE OF LOVE.

HERE THE CHILDREN HAVE PLAYED AND LAUGHED AND CRIED;
GROWN UP AND MARRIED AND GONE AWAY.
FROM TIME TO TIME THEY ALL CAME BACK
AT CHRISTMAS AND OTHER SPECIAL DAYS.

NOW THE PARENTS ARE GONE, AND THE CHILDREN, TOO;
(THE YEARS HAVE SPED SO QUICKLY BY!)
SOON THE OLD HOUSE, TOO, WILL BE NO MORE.
AS WE WORK I THINK I CAN HEAR IT SIGH.



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FOUND IMAGES

Self portrait.



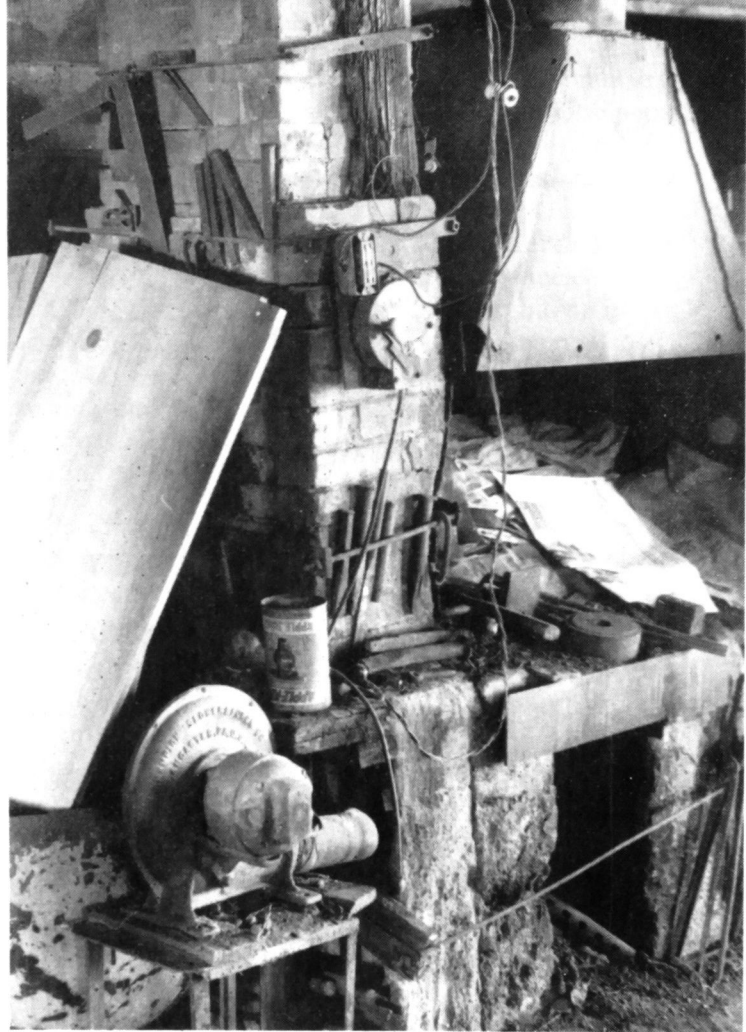
BY TONY NEELY

Interior of a sod house near Homestead, which is registered with the National Historical Society.





Shadow and texture from Red Rock State Park located at Hinton.



Lee Cotter's Blacksmith shop, which was opened in 1913 and is still operational today and is also registered with the National Historical Society.

Tony Neely, senior Commercial Art major at Southwestern Oklahoma State University and photographer for the University Public Relations office, traveled western Oklahoma in search of images which would convey his impressions of this region.

Tony was recently selected for *Who's Who of American Colleges and Universities*. He also received a first place award at the Graphics Communication Society 1988 Annual Student Competition in Oklahoma City.

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THE WICHITA MOUNTAINS: A LEGACY IN GRANITE

By Jim Logan

Author's note: This is dedicated to a person, now in her eighty-ninth year, of truly remarkable love and kindness — my grandmother, Lila-merle Logan.

From a distance, they appear as gray bulges on the horizon. As one draws nearer, the Wichita Mountains, or Sierra Jumanos (Mountains of Mortals), as the early Spanish called them, rise abruptly and loom in stark contrast to the flat plains of Western Oklahoma surrounding them. Named for the Wichita Indians, whose history refers to the region as "from time immemorial" a part of their ancestral hunting grounds, the mountain range thrusts from near Lawton, southwestward through Comanche, Greer, Kiowa, and Jackson counties, ending a few miles northwest of Granite, and dominating an area sixty miles long and twenty miles wide. Composed of huge granite boulders and among the oldest mountains on earth, they are actually the crests of even larger ranges extending beneath the earth's surface and remain as graven testament to a monumental upheaval during the earth's infancy.

Mount Scott, named for General Winfield Scott of Mexican War fame, stands sentinel, from its 2467 summit, over a view of grassy valleys and tree-lined streams below, melting into a checkerboard pattern of farm fields in the hazy distance. According to Indian legend, the Great Spirit appeared at the top of the mountain thousands of years ago, following a devastating flood, calling his people to him and furnishing them with the means by which to survive. In the days before "manifest destiny" and the

ensuing encroachment, the broad expanses of grassy valleys between the mountains fed and sheltered deer, elk, and antelope. The buffalo grazed in countless thousands.

The first exploration of the mountains was by the Spaniards. They were drawn to the region by the same two forces which brought Spain to the new world; the desire for more souls for the Catholic church and more gold for the royal treasury. In 1629, some ninety years after Coronado's first contact with the Wichita Indians, and a century and a half before American Independence, Father Juan de Salas, escorted by an expedition from Santa Fe, journeyed to the mountains to form a mission among the Indians. They were hesitant to accept change and at times hostile. He abandoned the effort twenty years later. In 1650, Diego del Castillo and his soldiers foraged for a greater part of a year among the mountains in search of gold and silver. It is known that these adventurers did find some gold nuggets in the streams of the region. In 1956, researchers working along Cedar Creek near Saddle Mountain verified the existence of a Spanish arrastra, a circular ditch hewn from granite rocks through which large mill stones were pulled by horses to aid in the separation of gold ore from crushed rock. It lies today in silent seclusion beneath a stand of trees south of Meers. Although the date of its use is uncertain, it serves as a reminder

of the far-reaching effect of Spanish culture on the region. Natives have, for years, talked of an old trail which once skirted the base of Mt. Scott, and is said to have connected Spanish possessions east of the Mississippi with their southwest holdings. Rusty knives, pieces of armor, and other relics found there give credence to the tales. Today, legend in the area is rich with stories of "the lost Spanish mines in the Wichita Mountains."

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Kiowa, Comanche, and Wichita Indians and their allies, known collectively as the plains tribes, claimed what is now the western half of Oklahoma as part of their hunting grounds and shared the teeming wildlife areas in and around the Wichita Mountains region. In 1833, a warring band of Osage ranged southward into the area and surprised a Kiowa village located at the headwaters of Otter Creek, southeast of present-day Gotebo. The Kiowa men were away at the time on a hunting trip. In a savage display of inter-tribal warfare, the Osage war party attacked the inhabitants of the village — all of whom were women, old men, and children. The terrified villagers tried to escape to higher ground on a nearby hill but were run down and massacred. The Kiowa men, upon their return, were met by the sight of their loved ones' bodies. The heads had been cut off and placed in copper buckets, neatly lined up in the center of the

village. The area is known today as Cutthroat Gap, and the nearby hill as Decapitation Mountain.

In 1834, a United States Army dragoon expedition journeyed to the Wichita Mountains to explore the area and establish formal relations with the plains tribes. When General Leavenworth became ill and died, Colonel Henry Dodge assumed leadership of the group, described as "two hundred of the most daring, healthy, and select men of the corps, superbly mounted and equipped as an elite frontier force." The group was notable for the famous names in it — Nathan Boone, Daniel's son; Jefferson Davis, who would become president of the Confederacy twenty-six years hence; and George Catlin, the most famous painter of American Indians in history. The expedition learned, from Comanche scouts, of a large Wichita village in the mountains to the southwest. A few days later, the American force, low on food and with approximately half its original number dead from disease, located the village in Devil's Canyon, a few miles southeast of present-day Lone Wolf. Hugh Evans, a member of the group, wrote the following account of the moment:

On the evening of July 21st we reached the goal of our enterprise, the long-sought village. We approached a sweep of perpendicular mountains, whose tops are wholly inaccessible to the human foot from this side, and reached the village through leads to it, a narrow defile which one hundred good men, with a proper armament, would keep against the countless legions that Napoleon led to Moscow. After passing through this, we immediately entered the village situated in a beautiful bottom, on the margin of a river.

The artist, Catlin, gave further description in his diary:

...near the base of a stupendous range of mountains of reddish granite, in many places piled up to an immense height without tree or shrubbery on them; looking as if they had actually dropped from the clouds in such a confused mass, and all lay where they had fallen. We found here a very

numerous village containing some five or six hundred wigwams, all made of long prairie grass, thatched over poles which are fastened in the ground and bent in at the top; giving to them, in distance, the appearance of straw beehives. To our very great surprise, we have found these people cultivating quite extensive fields of corn, pumpkins, melons, beans, and squashes; so with these aids, and an abundant supply of buffalo meat, they may be said to be living very well.

THE HEADS HAD BEEN CUT OFF AND PLACED IN COPPER BUCKETS, NEATLY LINED UP IN THE CENTER OF THE VILLAGE.

The dragoons met with the Wichita tribe for several days. They secured, in an emotional meeting, the release of a Negro man and a nine-year-old white boy, who had been captives for quite some time, in exchange for a Kiowa and two Wichita girls who had earlier been obtained in a trade with their Osage captors. During the council, over two thousand additional Kiowa, Comanche, and Waco Indians came to witness the meeting between the plains Indians and American forces. It paved the way for agreements and treaties essential to the ultimate settlement of a great part of the Southwest and as such ranks as one of the most important military expeditions in the history of the plains.

In 1869, the United States Army, in need of a secure command post in the Southwest to protect White interests and discourage Indian raids, primarily into Northern Texas, assigned General Phillip Sheridan to personally stake out the location of what would become Fort Sill, named for a Union Civil War officer. The first buildings were erected not far from Medicine Bluff Creek, below the sacred sheer bluffs, several hundred feet high, where the Comanches and other tribes had for centuries brought their wounded and sick to heal or

die. Over the next quarter-century, the fort would serve as a focal point of the deterioration of Indian-American relations, imprisoning such feared names as Geronimo and Satanta, the fierce Kiowa chiefs who committed suicide rather than exist behind bars. In its shadows are buried the great chiefs Lone Wolf (Kiowa), Geronimo (Apache), and Quanah Parker (Comanche).

In the latter half of the 1800's, the Wichita range was a part of the notorious Oklahoma badlands. Reports continually circulated of robberies, hide-outs, murders, and hoards of buried money associated with the Daltons, Youngers, and the James gang. Famed outlaw Bill Doolin was killed by a posse near Lawton in 1896. Frank James farmed not far from the mountains, outside present-day Fletcher, for a while.

It had long been known that granite was among the oldest rock formations on earth and that quartz veins were commonly found in the crevices between such formations. Where there was quartz, there was often gold or silver. Consequently, during the 1890's, prospecting got into full swing in the Wichitas, beginning in the Otter Creek area. Small mining towns such as Golden and Silverton sprang up as prospectors swarmed over the northern and western slopes of the mountains. In 1901, Lawton, Oklahoma's third largest city, was born practically overnight as two million acres of Kiowa-Comanche-Apache reservation land was opened to White settlement. Newspapers such as the OTTER CREEK MINER and MOUNT SHERIDAN MINER rang with such headlines as "The Wichita Mountains: Future Mineral District of America and the Coming El Dorado of the World." In 1901, digging was going strong at the Gold Blossom mine near Meers. A large mining camp was at the base of Mt. Sheridan. Practically every gulch had clusters of mining cabins, and the hills bristled with claim notices. In 1902, forty-three mines honeycombed the slopes between Lawton and Lugert. There were the inevitable exaggerated reports

of occasional strikes. Hope and greed ran rampant. In the end, however, no gold or silver was ever found in sustainable quantities. By 1907, it was over. Some moved on to mineral fields in the Rockies and westward. Others stayed to ranch or farm the surrounding land and raise families.

In 1905, President Theodore Roosevelt, alarmed at the near extinction of the American buffalo and other once abundant animal species, set aside 59,000 acres as the Wichita Mountain National Wildlife Refuge. From a small starting herd of fifteen buffalo, the number has grown steadily into several herds. The elk population, hunted to extinction, was successfully re-introduced. Longhorn cattle, descendants of the first animals brought by Spanish conquistadores to the continent in 1521, were re-established from near-extinction, along with turkey and other wildlife. Native bluestem, Indian grass, switch, and buffalo grass grow once again in verdancy. Small blue lakes with names like Treasure, Caddo, Osage, Quanah, and Lost Lake catch the mountain runoff. Today, over a million visitors a year come to the area to catch a glimpse of what the natural scene must have looked like two hundred years ago.

"THE GREAT SPIRIT APPEARED AT THE TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN THOUSANDS OF YEARS AGO."

The beauty of the place is still present, as timeless as it has been through history. Each year, in late April, the redbuds, like early guests, still spring forth in exuberant pink contrast to the damp, dark backdrop of bark and granite. The rains still spangle wild daisies and asters and Indian blankets in hues of yellow and red and white over the hills and valleys. The viewer still marvels at the marked clarity of the streams. Mountain boomers scurry under

rocky overhangs adorned with lichen in shades of burnt orange and chartreuse. The late afternoon whistles of bobwhites still echo off the mountain walls, and the scissortails still dance in the sun. In the autumn, the sumac and cottonwood and Caddo maple leaves explode in gold and scarlet celebration of another season of life. The valleys still offer calm reprieve from the Oklahoma wind, and in them, in the evenings, when the light is right and the surrounding granite walls take on a rosy glow, a person senses that now, as then, for a short while, it is as if he and God have arrived at the same moment.

From the beginning, the mountains have attracted the human spirit. It was in them that Moses received the law. The early Indians came to them to fast, meditate, and absorb their magical healing power. Today, we often make long journeys to them for just a few days' peace and quiet. There seems to be a sense of awe in most people toward anything capable of surviving their own feeble mortality. The Wichitas are Western Oklahoma's unique legacy, seen today essentially as they were in the days of early human history. They have witnessed, in unlocked silence, the unfolding of the fabric of natural and human history, woven of threads of good and evil, joy and suffering, choice and chance. Nowhere in Oklahoma has there been a greater concentration of life and happening. A century and a half ago, an awed onlooker, viewing the Wichitas for the first time, wrote:

Here the gradual swell, the beetling precipice, the castellated battlement, the solitary tower, the glittering, roaring cascade, the shady vale and opening vista, disclosing in turn distant views of new grandeur; all the rich combinations of mountain scenery are here thrown together, forming an unrivaled whole, which, in years to come, will be the goal of all travelers on earth.

The words may be a bit flowery by modern Western Oklahoma standards; but the viewer, in his wide-eyed reverence, possibly saw



Saddle Mountain, in the Wichita Range. Photograph by the author.

"THE DESIRE FOR MORE SOULS FOR THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND MORE GOLD FOR THE ROYAL TREASURY."

something which too many people today take for granted.

My mother's parents farmed for almost half a century — through depression, dustbowl, and two world wars — within view of the mountains near Granite. Earlier, in the late 1800's, on my father's side of the family, my great-grandfather brought his family by covered wagon from Texas through the Wichitas to present-day Leedey, avoiding hostile Indians in the mountains and ultimately finding there water for his thirsty family. In a very real sense, through the genetic miracle that is seed, a small part of me (and of my children) was there. The mountains are today an affirmation, not only of roots and the essential merit and resurgency of life, but of our oneness with nature. They draw us somehow closer to our natural surroundings, to history and those who preceded us, to our Creator, and, ultimately, to ourselves. ■

DR. JIM LOGAN is a 1962 graduate of Weatherford High School and a 1969 graduate of the University of Missouri College of Dentistry. He has been a dentist in Weatherford for five years. This article is his first published work.

Illustrations by Sossee Eskidjian

The Straight, The Narrow, And The Almost Empty: Traveling The Oklahoma Panhandle

BY ALVENA BIERI

The 34-mile-wide, 167-mile-long Panhandle of Oklahoma is not so much a landmark as a geographical and historical oddity.

If a Martian landed in our state to study mapmaking, he would be amazed at the crazy shape of it. The Panhandle almost got left out of everything, and it's still left out of a good deal of "downstate" activity in Oklahoma. Most of its citizens live as close to Denver and Santa Fe as they do to Oklahoma City.

The pink granite historical marker at the east edge of the Panhandle contains more information about its history than many Oklahoma history books. Way back at the time of the Missouri Compromise in the middle of the last century, New Mexico's eastern boundary was set as the one hundred and third meridian. The Texas state line and the southern boundary of Kansas and Colorado were in place, and the edge of Oklahoma's Cherokee Outlet marked the eastern boundary. So what we know today as the Panhandle was left high and dry.

Congress called it the Public Land Strip. Everyone else called it No Man's Land till 1890 when it was taken into Oklahoma Territory. Beaver City became the county seat of the entire Panhandle. Later it was divided into the three counties of today — Beaver on the east, Texas County in the middle, and Cimarron County in the west.

The Panhandle today is a little bit like all the states it touches. It has the feedlot feel and smell of west Texas, some of the flat, desolate grayness of eastern Colorado, the mesas and tiny foothills of the southern Rockies, and the sparse population and conservative politics of western Kansas.

The Panhandle is a place where every tree (and trees are usually single and not bunched up together) is bent permanently northward, where some of the haystacks (or bales, I'm not sure which) look like big loaves of bread, and the sunflowers at the side of the road have turned miniature. The red soil of other parts of Oklahoma has gone to light beige and brown.

There's a desert quality here, till the next farm comes up — it's green and prosperous-looking and probably will stay that way till the underground irrigation water gives out a few years from now.

As the traveler enters the Panhandle from the east there is the wide spot in the road called Slapout. I don't think anything of historical importance ever happened in Slapout. But its name tells a story. During frontier days when the storekeeper had trouble keeping enough provisions in stock, he often had to say, "We're slap out of that!"

But if there is a big town in the Panhandle (and size is relative, of course), it's Guymon. There are not many billboards here, but a big one on the east side of town says, "Jesus is Lord over Guymon." I'm not sure about that, but I do know the famous Hitch Ranch is nearby, and so is Panhandle State University at Goodwell, about 10 miles southwest.

The thing I like about the Panhandle (and most of the rest of Oklahoma, for that matter) is I know for sure when I'm leaving one town and coming into another one. It's not like a big city with spread-out suburbs that all stick together to form one huge, complicated area. Out here, much is clear cut. Much is blank, too. But I was sure when I left Guymon, and I was sure when I arrived in Boise City an hour later.

When I went into Boise City on this hot Saturday afternoon in July, I was looking for the road to Kenton. Yes, Kenton, the very last town in Oklahoma. Kenton — once called Florence and once enjoying the civilized luxury of a post office.

Getting to Kenton was not really hard — just time-consuming. Leaving Boise City, I was pretty much on my own. The road, though good, is unmarked and not a part of the Oklahoma highway system, the map says.

A little north of Boise City I found the old Santa Fe Trail crossing. Settlers came through here by the hundreds from the east on their way to New Mexico or to the gold fields of California.

And during Civil War times, Ft. Nichols, seven miles southwest of the road, was built by Kit Carson to guard the Trail. Now a small thunderstorm was building across the grassy plains, far in the distance.

The vistas of the Black Mesa to the north and west were a study in neat, navy blue space. A park and tiny lake were ten or so miles off the main road, and there was even a "country store." But the whole world seemed very quiet. I had seen only one or two of the 3,000 inhabitants of Cimarron County since I left Boise City.

I looked for the high point in Oklahoma — over 4900 feet — so celebrated in the tourist literature, but never found it.

I did find Kenton, though, what's left of it. Kenton is not a town anymore. It's a settlement of some houses, a church, and a little white building I'm sure was once the post office. It's marked "Kenton, Okla.", and it's flying an Oklahoma flag.

I had driven as far as I could get from Stillwater and still be in Oklahoma. It had taken all day. Two miles west of Kenton, I crossed the New Mexico line, bound for Clayton, a motel, and some Mexican food. ■

ALVENA BIERI, formerly of Hobart, now lives and writes in Stillwater.

Illustration by Neal Acosta

Debo's Footloose And Fancy Free

By Jeanne Ellinger

Unlike many histories, Angie Debo's OKLAHOMA: FOOTLOOSE AND FANCY FREE, an O. U. Press publication, sparkles with vitality, reflecting the author's enthusiasm and love for the young adopted state. In 1899, nine-year-old Angie, settling with her family in Oklahoma Territory, became an observer-participant in the exciting development of the new state. She presented an eye-witness account of a young woman growing up with Oklahoma. She presented statistics in a human context as the book comes alive with anecdotes about the people who formed the fabric of the new state.

While most history books follow a chronological organization, Dr. Debo's has a subjective pattern. For instance, separate chapters are devoted to politics, agriculture, the oil industry, state parks, and recreation. But the two chapters entitled "Sooners or Okies?" and "We Met Some Oklahomans" are especially intriguing. The author had a special talent for writing about the people who shaped the events rather than the events that shaped the history. In the book, numerous stories are told of Oklahomans who made things happen — like the young journalist, Mike Gorman, who exposed the deplorable conditions in state mental hospitals. As a result, improvements were made hastily.

Many passages have a personal touch exuding a warm nostalgia reminiscent of story-telling time at a family reunion. For example, the author wrote a colorful account of a young couple, Billy and Cora Fox, who staked their land claim on the Cherokee Strip.

The book presents factual details palatably, often laced with eloquent imagery. The chapter "Plowman's Folly" is filled with vivid description and word play. Referring to Paul Sears' soil conservation book, DESERTS ON THE MARCH, Debo commented, "It was the sight of the dry wind scooping up the Oklahoma soil that drove his pen." She colorfully concluded, "Much water has flowed under the bridge since 1889 — and too much of it has been colored with Oklahoma soil." ■

DR. JEANNE ELLINGER is the latest addition to WESTVIEW's Editorial Board.



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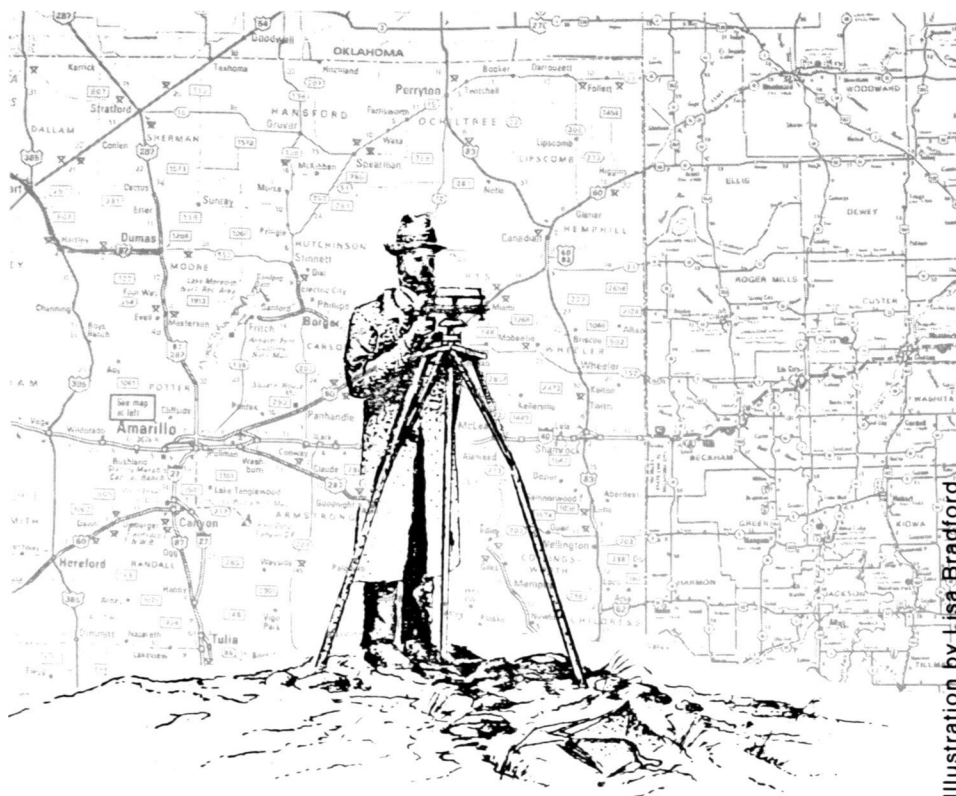
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5 BLKS FROM DOWNTOWN SHOPPING
3 MINUTES FROM SOUTHWESTERN STATE UNIVERSITY



Searching For The True 100th Meridian

By Maxine Wilhelm

The 100th Meridian was surveyed or located at least eight times. But it finally took a decree of the U.S. Supreme Court March 17, 1930 to settle the boundary dispute, by declaring the last survey by Gannett the true 100th Meridian. It is said the Texas-Oklahoma line on the west is the most scientifically accurate boundary line in the United States.

Few of us realized the history and stories we would uncover when a group of interested people started a small museum in 1977 called the 100th Meridian in Erick, Oklahoma. The museum has grown with the research that has been done.

The history of the 100th Meridian began in 1803 with the purchase from France of the Louisiana Territory and the 1819 Treaty with Spain. These were the most important steps in the development of the United States as a nation, both involved the 100th Meridian. The 1803 lines were indefinite, but apparently went as far west as the Rocky Mountains. But the 1819 treaty with Spain named the 100th Meridian as boundary from the Red River to the Arkansas River.

The Mississippi River and its tributaries constituted

the means of transportation in that day, and prior to these treaties both France and Spain had refused the United States access to the Mississippi through the New Orleans entrance except by special permit.

These treaties with France and Spain specified boundaries of the Louisiana Purchase, beginning at the Gulf of Mexico, running up the Sabine River to the 32nd Parallel, then north to the south bank of Red River, west along the River to the 100th Meridian, and finally north to the Arkansas River. The boundary followed the Arkansas to its source, and then became a wavering line north across what is now Wyoming and western Montana to the 49th parallel present boundaries between Canada and U.S.A. west to the Pacific Ocean. Texas at this time belonged to Spain.

Lieutenant Zebulon Pike was sent in 1806 to explore the headwaters of the Arkansas and Red Rivers with particular attention to the latter. He penetrated the Rocky Mountains where the Arkansas issues, but was prevented from exploring the Red because of the hostility of the Spaniards. A party headed by Captain Sparks proceeded by boat 635

miles up the Red River. They were stopped by a force of Spaniards who gave them the alternative of turning back or being fired upon. Consequently, we were ignorant concerning the Red River when conducting the negotiations that resulted in the treaty of February 22, 1891, establishing the boundaries between the Louisiana Purchase and New Spain. The map made by John Melish in 1818 — placing the 100th Meridian a few miles east of the present location of Ft. Sill — was used in part to identify the boundaries. While ratification was pending (Ratified Feb. 19, 1821), Major Stephen H. Long ascended the Arkansas, and descended a river which he thought to be the Red River. But at its mouth, emerging upon the Arkansas River, he realized that he had descended the Canadian instead.

In 1824, Mexico achieved Independence from Spain, and in 1828 reaffirmed the 1819 boundaries. Still, the United States did not know where the upper Red River was or what it was like.

In 1852, Captain R. B. Marcy and Captain George B. McClellan explored the upper Red River. It developed that there were two principle branches, each nearly two hundred miles in length. The northern one rising near Santa Fe and the other in the Llano Estacado mountains of New Mexico, about 75 miles south. The 100th Meridian, as located by Captain McClellan in 1852, was about six miles east of the forks of the Red Rivers, and was ascertained by the use of a pocket chronometer. This survey was one degree off, about 56 miles off the true 100th Meridian. Later, it was found McClellan's chronometer was not running correctly.

The question arose: Did the treaties intend the South or the North Fork as the boundary extending to the 100th Meridian? When Texas was admitted to the Union in 1845, she claimed the land between the forks east of the Meridian. the United States contended that the South Fork was the main stream, and the area a part of United States territory.

In 1857, Government surveyors headed by John H. Clark located the 100th Meridian about 80 miles west of the forks. This was to be the line between the Texas Panhandle and the Choctaw-Chickasaw country. Texas again claimed the Meridian was much farther east! A contract was made with A. H. Jones and H. M. C. Brown to follow through with this survey of the boundary lines the same year. These surveyors were better equipped than Captain McClellan. Their initial marking of the 100th Meridian was set on the North bank of the South Fork of Red River, then north, placing a marking every mile ending 19 miles north of the Canadian River.

In 1860, Texas named the area of 1,571,575 acres (the size of the State of Delaware) between the forks, bounded on the west by the 100th Meridian, Greer County.

Other surveys or locations of the 100th Meridian were done by O. T. Morrell in 1873, H. C. F. Macbush, C. L. DuBois, and Ehud H. Darlin, 1875.

In February, 1886, a joint Texas Commission and the United States assembled but could not agree. Texans and Greer County settlers assembled at Mobeetie, Wheeler County, Texas later the same year and organized Greer County with Mangum the county seat. County Commissioners immediately started building a county jail at a cost of \$11,000.

President Cleveland issued a proclamation December, 1887, declaring the disputed lands to be Indian Territory and warning against buying, selling or homesteading. That was the situation when Congress in May, 1890, created the territory of Oklahoma. Suit was brought in the United States Supreme Court for a determination of title to Greer County, which again turned on the question of whether the North or the South Fork was contemplated in the 1819 Spanish Treaty.

In 1892, Professor Pritchett left his survey marker on the 100th Meridian. The same year the Cheyenne-Arapaho area was open for white settlement, which added six counties to Oklahoma Territory, including Roger Mills and Day (now Ellis), both bordering the 100th Meridian. At that time, Roger Mills extended South to the North Fork of Red River. The courts on March 16, 1896, held that the South Fork was the main stream, and therefore Greer County was a part of Oklahoma Territory. In 1902, Arthur Kidder surveyed another location on the 100th Meridian. The day Oklahoma became a state, November 16, 1907, Greer County was divided into smaller counties. They were Jackson, Greer, Harmon and Beckham from the North Fork of Red River south. The rest of Beckham was taken from Roger Mills County. The squabble over the oil wells being drilled in the Red River bed east of the forks helped to bring on the suit in the Supreme Court for a final determination of the true 100th Meridian. The court appointed Samuel S. Gannett, Geodetic and Astronomic Engineer, to run, locate, and mark the boundary between the two states. Mr. Gannett located the intersection of the 100th Meridian, with the South Fork of Red River, and placed his first monument on the South bank. He then ran the line north, and found it to pass 340.28 feet east of the Kidder marking, and 4040 feet east of the Jones-Brown monument. The line was then continued to its intersection with 36 degrees 30 minutes parallel, a distance of 133.6 miles from the south bank of Red River to the south line of the Oklahoma panhandle. Gannett worked from 1927 through 1929, mostly at night to avoid the aberration of heat waves. One hundred and sixty concrete markers with brass benchmarks on top were spaced along the new survey.

Two men from Erick helped with the survey; they were Milo and Clifford Simmonds. Mr. Gannett gave

them one of the extra benchmarks that was left from the survey. It is now in the museum along with letters of recommendation from Mr. Gannett.

From the treaty of 1819, the boundary was established, but it took the combined efforts of the U.S., the Republic of Texas, and later the states of Texas and Oklahoma over 100 years to actually locate and mark the 100th Meridian.

Some of the methods used to mark the 100th Meridian line during the different surveys were carving on trees, carving on rocks, mounds of earth with charred stakes in the center, piles of rocks, and concrete markers with the bronze (benchmark) engravings.

It is interesting to know a little about how the last survey by Mr. Gannett was done. He used a method known as "Geodetic Triangulation." He selected sites located on hilltops about five to ten miles apart. The sites were located on either side of the 100th Meridian along the entire length of the Oklahoma-Texas border. A tall wooden tower about ten to thirty feet tall was erected at each site. From each site, at least three towers were visible. The angles between each of the towers were measured using a theodolite. Measurements were taken at night to reduce optical aberrations of heat waves. Communication between towers was done with signal lights using Morse code. The distance between some of the sites had to be measured with special steel tapes, the measured distance between two sites was called a "base line."

Each triangle in the grid must contain a "base line." From this data the geodetic latitude and longitude of any site could be calculated.

A separate observation of several stars was made at some of the sites. The astronomic latitude and longitude was determined for the site. Although the difference between the geodetic position and the astronomic position is the deflection of the vertical, both sets of data are used to improve the accuracy of measured location of the sites.

Having established the position of each of the triangulation sites accurately, the 100th Meridian could be calculated and then measured from the triangulation sites. The Gannett survey located the 100th Meridian to approximately one foot of its true position.

The settlers along the southwestern Meridian sometimes lived in Texas, Indian Territory, Greer County Texas, Oklahoma Territory, and Oklahoma without ever moving. When Texas claimed the land, Oklahoma settlers sometimes had to clear their titles by buying back the strip of land for \$1.25 per acre. Texas kept 1/16 of the mineral rights. Since money was so scarce it was a real hardship for the settlers. Many could not pay the price, and the lapland (overlap into Texas) land that many homesteaded was sold to others. ■

MAXINE WILHELM lives in Erick after many years of working on the family honey farm.

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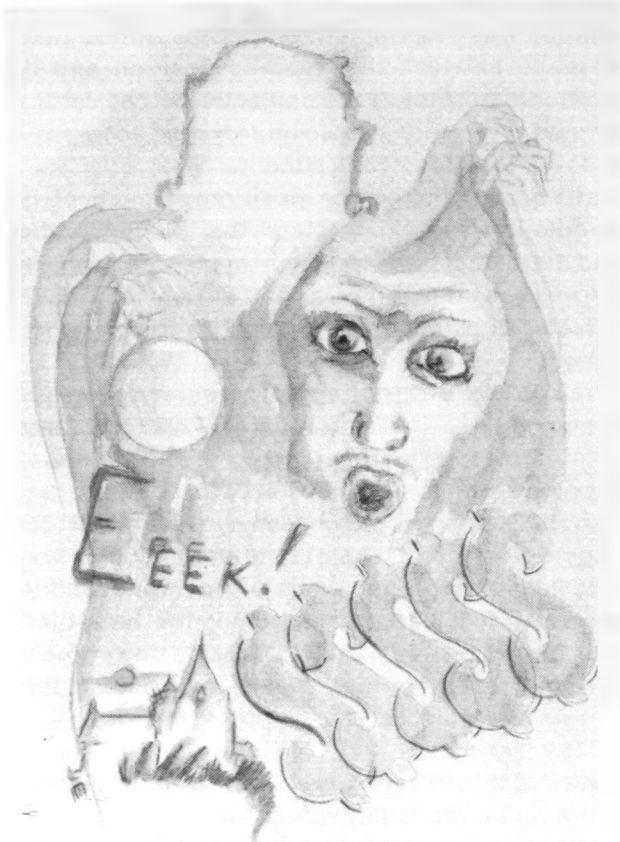


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"Growing by Helping Others Grow"

NOVELTY

surprise. . .sleepwalker



The Haunted House

By Elmer M. Mills

I shall never forget this story Papa used to tell, especially when company came to visit. He told it to be true, and I always believed my daddy.

Many years ago around the turn of the century, about 1898 to be more exact, a man rode into Western Oklahoma, near where Weatherford now stands, and filed on one hundred and sixty acres of land where I was later born. He came in after the "big run" and had to take second choice of land. He held his claim by staying on it so long each year for a certain number of years. The rest of the time he punched cattle over at the Cole Ranch not far away.

Mr. Cole owned lots of land, buying up homes from disheartened settlers. One of these purchases was nearby which included a large deserted home with many rooms. It was a big house, empty and forlorn. Because of the mysticism surrounding the place, Mr. Cole could rent it for but only a short while. People would move out saying it was infested with ghosts and strange happenings.

This moving in and out was getting on George Cole's nerves so much that it got to the point where one morning at the breakfast table he spoke his piece. "Boys," says he, "I have a proposition to make. I'll give any one of you the sum of fifty dollars (which was no small amount in those days) to stay all night alone in the old house and see what's going on." There was a short qualm then my dad, the man to whom I referred you at the beginning, Dave Mills, was there with them at the time, and being desperate in need of money grabbed at the chance. He told Mr. Cole he would go and

bring him his ghost the next morning.

That evening, carrying his bedroll, he hoofed it off to the old relic of the past not quite a mile away. "It was getting toward dusk," he remarked, "and thank goodness it looked to be a clear night with a full moon showing well up in the east. It was a creepy ole' house," he would tell us repeatedly, for we loved to hear him tell it over and over again to us kids and all the others at times, "and it took plenty," he'd say, "of all I had, I must admit, to enter and cautiously air each room and conceivable place. And upon climbing those creaking stairsteps," he'd say, "oh my, how those goose pimples did stand out, like quills on a porcupone's back!"

Finally, an upstairs room was his choice for the waiting room and thereby laid down his pallet and stretched himself out for a sleepless night. He was alert to the utmost as he lay on his back with his head cupped in the palms of his hands, gazing at the dim ceiling above. For hours only the usual sounds of the prairie land prevailed. There he lay motionless, and it was not until the moon had finally crept its way westward to where it was beaming its light across the room and onto his body where he lay that the spell was suddenly broken. There came a slow grinding of the gravel outside the house below. Papa always had the biggest ole' eyes and I suppose, the way he told it, that at this moment they must have almost rolled from their sockets. He said he lay mortified as the goose pimples gathered fast!

"Directly, the porch gave way to those creaking sounds,"

he would say, "and I knew right then that Mr. Ghost was approaching the inside." Papa lay rigid, and sure enough the next sounds came one by one slowly but surely, winding their way through all the rooms downstairs and then the creaking stairsteps gave vent to the abominable. Upon reaching the top, it winded its way down the hallway through all the rooms and back again toward the only one left, "Dear Ole' Dad's." It was the beginning of the crucial moment. Papa knew it had to show and sure enough there it stood, erect and motionless in the open doorway. It was the image of a perfect ghost, clothed in a white robe. "I was paralyzed beyond words," said he, "and though I could not see the features of its face too good, I could truly sense its eyes fixed upon me."

"It then began moving toward me slowly, and behold, it actually laid itself down there beside me! Oh, what a moment of desperation it was! 'What is to happen next?' says I to myself, and it did. Lo and behold, Mr. Ghost laid its hand upon my bosom, bless you me, and this hand had a ring on its finger easily seen from the moon's bright light beaming across our bodies. Of course, I was darsin' to move, but yet I did. For I thought, says I to myself, 'If, and I know for sure it is the ghost, that by capturing the ring I can at least prove to the boys that I, although not producing the whole ghost, can at least show its ring.'"

"So gently I moved my hand across this hand and my fingers found that the ring could be removed without effort, which I did with no conflictions. Time was a big element to me, and after a short time, which couldn't have been too short for me, it arose and in its same stalkerly fashion disappeared through the doorway, down the creaking stairs, onto the porch, and made its final round in the crunching

gravel and then disappeared into where, only God would ever know."

Nothing else happened and at the break of dawn Papa made up his bedroll and struck out to reunite with the living, "mission accomplished." He made it back for breakfast and they were all present at the table intently awaiting his story of the outcome. Then Mr. Cole spoke with a chuckle. "Well, Dave, how did you survive the night and did you bring me back my ghost?" "No, I didn't, Mr. Cole," said Papa, "Not the ghost, but I **did** bring back the ghost's ring," and threw it into the center of the table for all to see. Immediately the whole bunch was startled by the sudden outcry of Mr. Cole's eighteen year old daughter, Mary, as she reached across the table for it. She had missed her ring that morning and assumed that she had thoughtlessly laid it down and consequently had not mentioned it to anyone.

And so there it was! The mystery had been solved. Mary Cole was the sleepwalker, unbeknown to anyone, and had been making occasional jaunts to the old haunted house, her once favorite playground. All of the Cole family and the rest of the threshold were deeply grateful to Dave for solving the mystic happenings. Mary was broken of her bad habit and the Ole' Haunted House once more became the lighted harbor for those seeking lasting happiness and protection from the ravages of the Wild and Woolly West.

ELMER M. MILLS, a 1925 graduate of Weatherford High School, now lives on a farm near Seneca, Missouri. He is happily surrounded by his wife, Betty, their four children, eleven grandchildren, and eight great-grandchildren. One granddaughter, Lori LeBahn, is responsible for submitting Mr. Mills' manuscripts to WESTVIEW. ■

NOVELTY

cooperative spirit

The Highway That Never Was

By Maxine Wilhelm

The 100th Meridian had just been surveyed for the last time. Highway 66, crossing the country east and west, was being constructed. Feeder roads were needed to intersect the new highway, connecting the rural towns together.

The Chamber of Commerce of Erick met with Chamber members and business people in Hollis, May 9, 1929. The object of the conference was to formulate a plan for a State road from Hollis to Erick on north to Shattuck. Everyone was enthusiastic about the road and plans were made to meet with other towns along the route to Shattuck.

A highway sign 12" by 12" reading, "OK Meridian 100 Highway," was designed. This sign was similar to the signs used on state roads at the time. The Erick Chamber of Commerce ordered 50 signs to be made by the State Penitentiary at McAlester.

O. R. Wilhelm made many trips with fence posts, posthole diggers and the signs loaded in his 1927 Chevy. He nailed the signs on posts or set posts at strategic points along section lines generally used for north and south travel. There were lots of square

corners on the route at that time. The signs were displayed from Hollis to Durham.

It was hoped that a bridge might be built on the South Canadian River west of the Antelope Hills, then on to Shattuck. The members of the Chambers thought that a main highway along the 100th Meridian would help the State finances through the gasoline tax paid by users of the road.

However, boosters for a highway connecting all the county seat towns, Arnett, Cheyenne, Sayre, Mangum and Altus had more political influence, so highway 283 got the bridge across the South Canadian at Packsaddle crossing. A bridge was never built north of Durham. A team of mules pulled vehicles across the channel.

Two of the original signs posted on the proposed highway that never was, are now in the 100th Meridian Museum in Erick. ■

Other Erick Chamber committee members were J. W. Gillum, J. A. Ivester, L. E. Thomas, Neal Stewart, R. S. Rowland and Dr. R. C. McCreery.

Oklahoma Ostrich Farms Increasing



By Opal Hartsell Brown

Checking up on exotic animal farms in Oklahoma, there are fifty breeders of the world's largest birds — ostriches. Having three toes on each strong foot and two wings, they cannot fly, but are stately creatures, which emit a "mournful" cry. Ostriches are becoming a more common sight and a new source of income in Soonerland.

As a matter of fact, Oklahoma is headquarters for the National Ostrich Breeders Association. Leon Vandiver of Bethany is founder and president of the organization, which has 130 members in 18 states.

Vandiver has nine adult ostriches, four emues and one pair of rheas. The emues, similar and related to the ostriches, are Australian birds. The rheas, too, are similar to the ostrich, but smaller and are native to

South America. This is Vandiver's second year as a breeder. And why did he choose to raise these exotic birds?

A former mechanic, he said he "saw the potential of raising them for a diversified market." Besides that, he found ostriches easy to raise. He feeds each of them about three pounds of grain and alfalfa a day and gives them plenty of water. They add to their own diet stones and other hard compounds to help grind their food.

These birds grow from six to ten feet tall, run faster than a horse and live about seventy-five years. Vandiver understands they lay about thirty of those years. He has an incubator, but when the birds are allowed to sit, the male and female take turns at the nest. Incubation takes forty-two days.

In some countries, ostriches are used as draft animals to pull sulkys in races, but their uses in this country are primarily for show, such as in parks, zoos and circuses, and for their hides. Leather from these hides can be used to make the same things as leather from other creatures.

Records of ostriches reach back to antiquity. Although hunters have said their flesh is "palatable," it has never been popular as food. There is an account in Roman literature, however, where one character feasted on the brains of six hundred ostriches.

Plumes from their tails and wings were used for fans in royal courts of the East and later for decorating hats and robes. An ivory-handled fan of plumes was found in the tomb of Egypt's King Tut, and it is on display in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo. Plumes decorated hats and robes in this country into the 1940's. Maybe later.

According to Harper's Bible Dictionary, "In Christian symbolism, the ostrich egg motif, pendant from lamps for example, suggest that Christ is watchful over His church, like the ostrich over its egg."

Other places in the state, where ostrich breeders operate, are in the vicinities of Ardmore, Lawton, Chattanooga, Gotebo, Ryan, Rush Springs, Chickasha, Roosevelt, Duncan, Comanche, Sentinel, Marlow, Mt. View, Wayne, Mustang, Newalla, Noble, Moore, Tuttle.

Also Blanchard, Edmond, Owasso, Hinton, Jones, Sayre, Cheyenne, Blair, Elk City, Yukon, Wanette, Oklahoma City, Canute, Felt, Shawnee, Canton, Sweetwater, Skiatook, Boise City, Freedom, Rattan, Turpin, Tulsa, Inola, Ada, Checotah and elsewhere.

Besides exotic and unusual animal farms already mentioned, there are the alligator farm of C. C. Killian in Beckham county, the greyhound farm near Harmon and at least one farm of Angora goats. Fish farms, also, have come into prominence. ■

OPAL HARTSELL BROWN, Honorary Life Member and former president of the OWFI (Oklahoma Writers Federation, Inc.), is a free-lance writer living near Davis.

Shootout In Stephens County: The "Wal" Williams Story

By Mary S. Redmond

Three miles south of Marlow, in the middle part of Stephens county, at a spot on Highway 81 which is called the Marlow-Duncan-Lawton "Y," there is a monument. Hundreds of motorists pass it every day, but few, of course, stop to read it.

If they did, however, here is what they would learn about that monument. Its inscription reads as follows:

"Erected in honor of the services of all peace officers and dedicated to the memory of W. A. ("Wal") Williams. . .

1869 - 1930

Who gave his life in the courageous performance of his duty May 13, 1930."

Wal Williams was an Oklahoma lawman, and a good one. His monument sits on the very spot where he received the gunshot wounds which would kill him in a bloody shootout which, 54 years ago, rocked this sleepy rural area. This is the story of that shootout — and the story of Wal Williams.

He was born in Colorado, just four years after the close of the Civil War. But he grew up in Kansas, where he married Minnie L. Powers. Theirs were farming families, and farming is what brought the couple to Comanche

country in Oklahoma in 1901. There, four miles west and one-half mile south of Marlow, Williams established his farm and became known throughout the country for the Duroc pure-bred hogs he raised. Perhaps his most famous sale was to the fabled 101 Ranch: a single boar with a price tag of \$5,000.

This kind of background doesn't sound much like one that could be attributed to a lawman-in-the-making, but Wal Williams was always interested in public service and politics: he was a Republican who frequently served as a state convention delegate. And this, indirectly, is what led him to his career as Stephens County Sheriff. During World War I, Herbert Hoover, at that time serving as Food Administrator under President Woodrow Wilson, appointed Williams as chairman of a committee which would represent the entire swine industry of this country in Washington. It was a great honor, and it made Wal Williams an official public servant.

He took time out to run the Marlow Auto Company in 1924, but that lasted only until 1928. Williams knew that Stephens county Republicans had other plans for him, and in November of the same year those plans were realized. By a margin of 2½ votes to 1,

Wal Williams was elected sheriff.

Now, those who are wont to believe in portents might well have taken some meaning from the bout with illness which struck Sheriff Williams down in early January of 1929. It was pneumonia, and Williams, who was to be sworn in on Monday, January 7, was confined to his home at 505 West Kiowa in Marlow. But his recovery was going well, and he had no doubts that he would be there for his swearing-in ceremony.

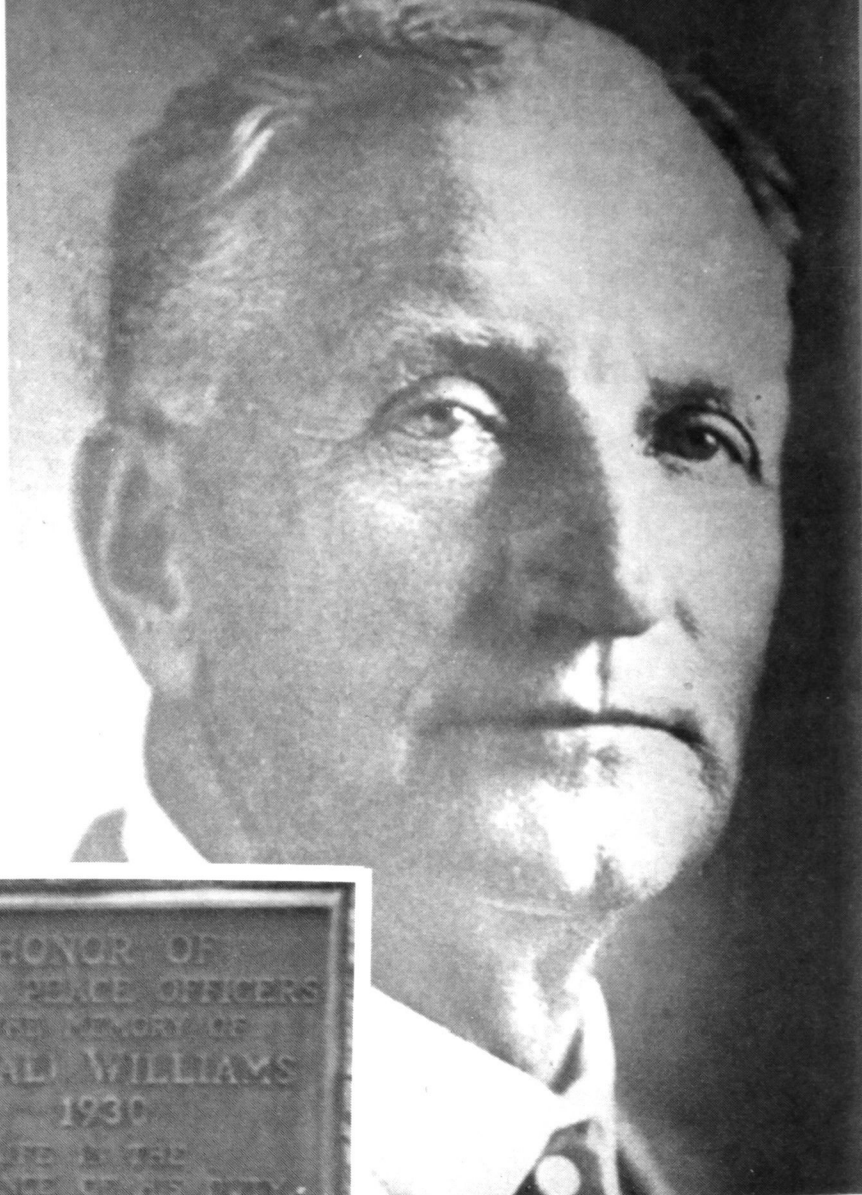
Somebody, however, had other plans.

Hours before he was to be sworn in, just before 1 A.M., as the Williams family lay sleeping in the house, a bomb blast devastated the surroundings. One local rancher would later claim that he heard the explosion on his farm 14 miles east of Marlow. It was a crude bomb — home made — but it did plenty of damage, blowing the family bathtub in two and wrecking the west portion of the house. Even the nearby Cumberland Presbyterian Church was damaged from the blast.

But Wal Williams was unhurt.

His bed, which he was occupying at the time, was lifted off the floor. Mrs. Williams, who was sleeping in the opposite end of the house, was out of danger — but the soon-to-be Sheriff actually could have lost his life. In fact,

Sheriff W. A. Williams
1929 - 1930



Commemorative plaque at the site of the shootout.



according to the Marlow Review story, he would have, save for the ineptness of those who placed the bomb under the bathroom window:

"Placing of the bomb or other explosive used in the attempt to end the life of Sheriff Williams is believed to have been bungled by persons who have visited the scene of the explosion," the newspaper said. "Thick vines cover the window of Mr. Williams' room on the west of the house. Had the blast happened immediately under Mr. Williams' west window, there is little doubt but what it would have proved fatal to him."

And so the life of Sheriff Williams was saved only by a case of mistaken windows. His would-be killers simply put their bomb under the wrong window.

This incident did, apparently, have the effect of hastening Wal Williams'

recovery from pneumonia. By Sunday, January 13, he had this to say to the press:

"So far as anyone's trying to intimidate me for one minute, now or ever, in my duty, they certainly made a mistake."

Clearly, the new Sheriff of Stephens county was a man who meant business.

Who was responsible for the attack on the Williams house? History has not revealed this. The post of Stephens County Sheriff was never an easy one to hold: of the five that held the office between Statehood and the death of Wal Williams, three were killed while serving out their tenure. Only a fearless man would have taken that job in a county which even the Duncan *Eagle* wrote was "infested with rapists, murderers, hi-jackers, thieves and illicit peddlers."

But Wal Williams did take the job, and the year of 1929 was an unusually quiet one for Stephens county. A Williams deputy was felled in the line of duty, but, aside from that and the bouts of illness which continued to plague Williams, it looked like his regime was going to be a successful one.

Until 10:30 P.M. on May 12, 1930. That's the date which Stephens county would remember as the night that all hell broke loose.

The Duncan police had received a call about a filling station robbery in east Lawton. It wasn't a big robbery by any means, but the men, four of them, had certainly looked dangerous. And dangerous they were: The Cunningham brothers, Forrest, John, Emanuel, and Jess were already responsible for a string of state robberies, although at

this time, no one seemed really to suspect it. They were known generally in the area as good farm boys.

But on this May 12, the "good farm boys" had held up a Lawton filling station and claimed the princely amount of 80 cents for their troubles. They had been reported heading east when Undersheriff Ed Sumrill got the report. He went to the courthouse in Duncan and picked up a sub-machine gun. When he returned to his sedan, Wal Williams was there, ready to ride, as were Duncan Police Chief I. B. Gossett and Deputy W. F. McKinzey. They piled into Sumrill's car, heading west to look for the Buick sedan the bandits were supposed to be driving.

Sumrill later told the story to the *Marlow Review* in this way:

"We drove out to the 'Y' and turned west. About a mile we met the bandit car but didn't recognize it as it was driving slowly and went on a half mile and met a new Buick sedan going fast and followed it until we saw it was driven by a Duncan man, in the meantime driving past the bandit car. At the 'Y' we turned around and waited for the bandit car. "It turned toward Duncan and we followed, driving about a half mile south when the bandits saw us, and speeded up. We didn't catch up with them until we were about two miles farther down the road. We drove up and blew the horn. Somebody threw a flashlight on the car and I. B. kept them covered with his shotgun."

At this point, Sumrill reported, the bandit car was crowded off the road and the occupants of both vehicles got out.

"Why didn't you stop?" I. B. Gossett asked the Cunninghams.

"We thought you were hijackers," one Cunningham told him.

"We're not," Gossett came back, "but that's the kind of fellows we're looking for."

At this point, Sumrill, who had been looking into the interior of the Buick, saw, by checking the reflection in the window glass, that one of the Cunninghams was holding a pistol on Deputy McKinzey. He shifted the safety down on his machine gun.

"I started around behind the Buick to where Mr. Williams and I. B. were," Sumrill said. "The

fellow near the right door of the Buick saw me and shot back through the glass at me and I let go at him with my machine gun.

"Then I saw a man around in front of the Buick and I dropped back near the right front door of my car. This fellow shot back a couple of times and I let go at him through the glass. Then another came around the front end to the left of the Buick. He ran across the road and I shot at him several times. He fell out in the field. Then another started up the road and ran about 100 yards. I shot at him several times and think Mac (McKinzey) was shooting at him."

In truth, everybody seemed to be shooting in the brief but lethal fracas which followed. I. B. Gossett got his shotgun up only to have its barrels knocked down by Forrest Cunningham. But even as the shotgun exploded into the dirt at their feet, Gossett brought out his sixshooter and shot Forrest, who at 27 was the oldest of the Cunninghams, dead. Gossett himself was then shot in the stomach.

Sheriff Williams sustained the next wounds, but the posse gave back more than it was getting, and John and Emanuel Cunningham both fell. Only the kid brother, Jess, escaped, hot-footing it across the fields to the east. He stole a car from George Miller, a farmer who lived nearby, at that time confessing to Miller that it was he who had shot Gossett. Jess was 18 years old.

The group which returned to Duncan was a bloody one. Sheriff Williams lived until 2:30 P.M. the following day. Gossett's life was saved because he received a direct blood transfusion from Dr. A. J. Weedn. And John and Emanuel would live to stand trial and be sentenced to life imprisonment. About two weeks later, on May 25, Jess Cunningham was apprehended near Gunnison, Colorado. Back in Oklahoma, however, his own father, B. Cunningham, had led the posse which scoured the area where the crime took place.

Stephens County mourned Sheriff Williams, but was not quite done with his family. On May 15, in a surprising action, the county commissioners of Stephens County appointed Mrs. Williams to serve out her husband's term of office, keeping Wal Williams' complete roster of deputies.

And though surprising, the action was hardly without precedent, as an area newspaper pointed out:

"The appointment of Mrs. Williams has a precedent in the case of the late Bill Cates who died while serving as sheriff of the county and his widow was appointed to serve out his unexpired term. This act of the county commissioners should meet public approval."

It did. The county was grateful to Wal Williams, and treated him in death as he should have been treated: like a slain hero.

Businesses in Marlow and Duncan were closed for the Williams funeral: all of them. Someone counted the sprays of flowers at the funeral and found that there were 167 of them. It was a major event. And well it should have been. Wal Williams was sheriff at a time when there truly were elements of "lawlessness": a time which would usher in the decade of Bonnie and Clyde and Pretty Boy Floyd. Stephens County knew this, too. On May 22, 1930, the *Marlow Review* ran a front page editorial which said in part:

"The price paid to break up one of the worst quartets of bandits in Oklahoma was an enormous one. It cost the life of a beloved man of strength and character, and brought serious wounds to another, a pioneer respected and fearless officer. It has been said that the people elected the administration, then sat back and did not give all the assistance possible in bringing about the desired results.

"Be that as it may, Stephens County now has the opportunity to go further than the already many expressions of grief over the loss of Sheriff Wal Williams. The suggestion of a suitable monument in his memory and in honor of the bravery of I. B. Gossett, Ed Sumrill and W. F. McKinzey, as representative of fearless peace officers, has spread favorably into the far corners of the county where it has been heard."

That monument, cut from native granite stone of the Wichita Mountains, now stands at the Marlow-Duncan-Lawton "Y" on the spot where Wal Williams lost his life. It is a tribute to a man who believed in the law...in times which were indeed lawless. ■

MARY S. REDMOND is a free-lance writer living on the farm of her youth 3½ miles north of Marlow, Grady County. Her book *ADVENTURES IN THE FOUR-MILE STRIP: AN OKLAHOMA CHILDHOOD* was published in 1982.

That Old House

By Dick Chapman

WHAT COULD IT TELL, WHAT COULD IT SAY
ABOUT THE FOLKS THAT HAVE LONG GONE AWAY?
TIMES THERE WAS MUSIC, ONE TIME THERE WAS SONG,
BUT ALL OF THAT NOW IS MISSING AND GONE.

*DICK CHAPMAN, now deceased,
formerly of Arapaho, shared this poem
with his niece Wenona L. Dunn, who has
passed it on to WESTVIEW.*

TWO TWIN GIRLS ONCE DANCED ON ITS FLOOR.
THEIR FATHER (A BLACKSMITH) WORKED NOT FAR FROM THE DOOR.
THE MOTHER, ALAS, WAS WITH THEM NO MORE.

THE HOUSE THAT ONCE STOOD WITH A RIVER CLOSE BY
NO DOUBT COULD TELL STORIES OF TIMES LONG GONE BY.
TIMES THAT WERE HAPPY. TOGETHER WERE THEY.
TIMES WHEN FIERCE STORMS NEAR WASHED THEM AWAY.

WHAT COULD IT TELL, WHAT COULD IT SAY?
MANY THINGS THAT WOULD SOUND STRANGE TO PEOPLE TODAY.
TIMES THAT WERE HAPPY, SOME TIMES THAT WERE SAD,
TIMES THERE WAS LAUGHTER AND THE FAMILY WAS GLAD.

BUT AS ALL THINGS MUST PASS, COME THIS WAY NO MORE,
WE ONLY CAN PONDER, WE ONLY CAN GUESS,
AND HOPE THAT WHEREVER THEY ARE
THEY HAVE FOUND PERFECT REST.

memories of the good and bad

Last Rights

By Lu Spurlock

"BROTHER MICHA WAS A GOOD MAN"
THE PREACHER SAID.

"MINDED HIS OWN BUSINESS
NEVER CAUSED NO TROUBLE
PAID HIS BILLS ON TIME
AND CAME TO CHURCH EVER SUNDAY.
HE NEVER HURT NOBODY."

GRIEF CONTORTED THE PREACHER'S FACE.
"MERCY! LORD, HAVE MERCY.
BROTHER MICHA SHOT HISSELF."

I TOLD THAT PREACHER
WORDS MIGHT HELP US,
BUT GETTIN' RILED UP
WOULDN'T HELP MICHA.

MICHA STOOD IN THE PATH OF WINTER
BECAUSE NOT HURTIN' NOBODY
WASN'T ENOUGH.

LU SPURLOCK is a prize winning writer and writers' workshop director from Bedford, Texas.

Up And Away

By Aaron A. Baker

IN THE PHOTOGRAPH, YOU AND I STAND TOGETHER WITH PUZZLED SMILES, PROUD-LIKE, EACH HOLDING SOMETHING — YOU AN OLD BEAT-UP SADDLE, AND I A COIL OF ROPE; THE BACKDROP, A SUBSTITUTE TREE, FOR THEY HAD CUT DOWN THE LANDMARK TO MAKE WAY FOR THE INTERSTATE.

THEY SAID IT HAD TO GIVE WAY TO THE HIGHWAY IN SPITE OF ANY HISTORIC INTEREST SUCH AS A TREATY BEING SIGNED WITH THE INDIANS OR HOW TREES DON'T USUALLY GET SO LARGE IN CHEYENNE-ARAPAHO COUNTRY.

THE PHOTOGRAPH OF US AND THE FAKE BACKDROP WAS PROBABLY TAKEN BY ONE OF THOSE CITY NEWSPAPER REPORTERS SOMETIME LATER, AFTER YOU HAD SAT IN THE TOP OF THE OAK FOR NEARLY THREE DAYS; SAT IN THAT OLD SADDLE RIGGED UP ON ONE OF THE TOP BRANCHES LIKE THOSE FLAGPOLE SITTERS SO NUMEROUS IN THE 1920'S.

AND I HOISTED WATER AND OTHER LIQUIDS TO YOU BY ROPE AND PULLEY SO THAT YOU COULD STAY UP THERE AS LONG AS POSSIBLE OR UNTIL THEY BUILT THE HIGHWAY AROUND THE GREAT OLD TREE. NEWSPAPERS THAT RAN THE STORY ABOUT YOU CALLED YOUR PERCH A "SKY SADDLE," TRYING TO MAKE A LITTLE HUMOR.

I FOUND THE OLD PHOTOGRAPH IN A BATTERED HISTORY BOOK ABOUT OKLAHOMA WHILE RUMMAGING AROUND IN THE ATTIC TODAY. YOUR PROUD SMILE IN DEFEAT MADE ME FEEL STRANGE AND MAYBE A LITTLE ANGRY. BUT WHAT CAN WE BELIEVE IF NOT ON OUR OWN FACES IN PHOTOGRAPHS? YOU GAINED SOME KIND OF VICTORY ALMOST WITHOUT THINKING. AND PEOPLE ON THE INTERSTATE DRIVE OVER THE SPOT WITHOUT EVER KNOWING ABOUT YOUR LONG NIGHTS UP AND AWAY IN SOME OLD RUGGED, DAG-BLASTED HISTORIC TREE. ■

AARON A. BAKER, A RETIRED TEACHER, LIVES IN BURNS FLAT.

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old to new

Letter

By Wenona L. Dunn

Dear Dr. Thomas:

Thank you for the two copies of WESTVIEW I recently received and for the nice treatment of my story which you entitled FROM THERE TO HERE. I think it is very fitting. There is one small error in the story, due I am quite sure to my own carelessness when I proof-read my manuscript. My eyesight isn't what it used to be, as I suffer from glaucoma. In the article as printed, on page forty two and about 2/3rds down in colum three, it states that "On October 16, 1867, Anna Bateman was married to George C. Fittell," etc. In reality, it should have read, "On October 16, 1867, Anna Bateman was married to James Abner Dunn, of Hamlet, Illinois, and on January 3, 1869 Edna Bateman was married to George C. Fittell, who had served during the war in the same unit with Robert Bateman and with James M. Dunn, father of Abner Dunn."

Enclosed you will find material for your consideration for the fall issue, OKLAHOMA MEMORIES. I wrote the one poem several years ago, in 1975 in fact, as my husband and I were tearing down an old house belonging to my brother-in-law. We had just recently returned to western Oklahoma from several years of living and working in Texas, and Walter was between jobs (he did carpenter and painting work). So we took on the job of tearing down the old house, which was located on the banks of the Washita River near Stafford in Custer County.

As was my custom, I enclosed a copy of the poem in a letter to Walter's Uncle Dick. (He liked to read my feeble attempts at poetry.) In just a very few days, we received a letter back from him, in which he had enclosed a copy of **his** poem. You see, back in his younger days, he had visited in that home and knew the family quite well! We have quite a few of Uncle Dick's poems, in his own hand-writing, which he sent along with his letters to us from time to time. I doubt if any of them have ever been published. They are poems which we will always treasure.

It was interesting that Uncle Dick Chapman had an article about my husband's Chapman grandparents in the same issue of WESTVIEW as was the article about his Dunn grandparents. We had not heard that story. Incidentally, Walter's parents later lived in a dugout on that same Bennett place west of Clinton.

In 1982, Uncle Dick had a poem in the Poetry Society of Oklahoma's DIAMOND JUBILEE ANTHOLOGY, and one of mine was in it, too.

Although our address has changed, we haven't moved. We live in the old home of my Latimer grandparents, four miles south of Foss, which we bought in 1973. We came back from Texas in 1975 in order to help my mother care for my father. Just two weeks after we arrived, Mama died of an apparent heart attack. My father died in 1976. We now are retired and enjoy traveling with our pickup and travel trailer. We have three sons and nine grandchildren, all of whom are presently living in Texas and California.

Very Sincerely,

Wenona L. Dunn,
(Mrs. Walter Dunn),
Box 210
Burns Flat, OK 73624

By Margie Snowden North

The Caddos have walked here
on the banks of the river,
the Northfork of the Red River,
and sought food —
turkey and deer and fish,
wild grapes, sandhill plums —
and sought peace.
Officials have disputed her position,
the Northfork of the Red River,
and she has been a boundary
for Old Greer County, Texas (1860-1896)
and since then an integral part of Oklahoma.

Summers found her lazy,
slowed to a trickle (or less)
shimmering in the hot sun,
while only the spring before
the headrises had come
and foolhardy boys had ridden
on six-foot walls of water.
Bottom lands flooded,
bridges swept away like crumbling toothpicks
and an empty coffin floated down from
places unknown.

Bridge-building, year after year.
Headrises, spring after spring.
Men and mules and horses
pulling Model T Fords across swift currents
(sometimes for months on end)
until new bridges take the place of old,
spanning the wide river,
the Northfork of Red River.
And still years later the headrises come
and suck at pilings (new, strong,

unmovable, the "unsinkable Tittle Bridge,
six years in existence)
and the bridge went once more,
and two young lives went with it.
And until time healed that memory,
the river, the Northfork of Red River,
was not a fun place to be.

These waters have cooled the feet
of generations of young from here and from there.
These banks, always changing
with the tides and the winds,
have known camp fires and weiner roasts,
angel wings in the sand,
castles that dissolve in the dampness
and are worn away by the wind,
just as life is lived and
disappears bit by bit, day by day.

Ah, the memories of a river,
the Northfork of Red River,
memories sad and haunting,
memories lazy and satisfying,
fleeting, like sunbeams
caught for a moment on the water's surface.
This place has made history
and is history recorded in sand-choked beds
and meandering trickles
or insidious currents and
recorded in the hearts and minds
of all who have ever known the river,
the Northfork of Red River. ■

*MARGIE SNOWDEN NORTH lives in the Erick
area. A regular contributor, she is WESTVIEW's
"nature poet."*

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Needed Information

A review of Kent Ruth's OKLAHOMA TRAVEL HANDBOOK

By Margie Cooke Porteus

If a person is an Oklahoma history buff, a trivia buff, or just interested in the world around him, there's something for him in Kent Ruth's OKLAHOMA TRAVEL HANDBOOK.

I've used it to settle an argument: There is too a town called Sand Springs. Uncle Jess used to work there." The book tells of oil-rich Charles Page, who built the town around a home he had established for widows and parentless children.

I used it when a map wasn't available and I wanted to know how large Roman Nose State Park is. It's a 540-acre park with a 55-acre lake and a 15-acre one plus a swimming pool, golf course, lodge, etc. All of this plus a thumb-nail sketch of Henry Roman Nose, for whom the park is named, is in the book.

I've used this book to answer an annoying question: "Johnny Bench is from Oklahoma, but where?" Binger, of course.

I've used it to thumb through during a leisure moment and discovered such interesting information as that found under **Seiling**: Carry

Nation, the hatchet-wielding prohibitionist, lived there in the early 1900's.

Listed alphabetically in the book are all proper place names found on Oklahoma maps. Under each name are the location, date of establishment, history, and information the author considered important or interesting. Information on Oklahoma City, for instance, uses parts of six pages, including several pictures; Ninnekah, population of thirty, is limited to six lines.

The handbook — which is really not what I think of as a handbook — is a book that travelers in Oklahoma should take along as they go through the state. As an instance, if they are traveling OK 37 and see the sign NILES, how else would they know that the area around Niles "has some of Western Oklahoma's finest off-trail sight-seeing?" If they didn't read the book, how else would travelers know that the country store at Orion is worth visiting or that workers in a plant in Pauls Valley can turn out two thousand frozen pecan pies an hour?

A quick look at the index will show that the book not only lists places, but can also be used as a quick reference for well-known Oklahoma people. Will Rogers has ten references; Chief Bacon Rind, only one.

The index also lists general subjects such as **railroads**, which has fifty-three entries plus a cross reference; **Amish Settlements** has three entries; **Archeology**, eight.

Kent Ruth, well known throughout Oklahoma as a writer of travel books and articles, was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1976.

OKLAHOMA TRAVEL HANDBOOK was published in 1977 by the University of Oklahoma Press.

MARGIE COOKE PORTEUS, a graduate of Thomas High and SOSU, is a retired teacher living with her husband in Paonia, Colorado. Besides writing, she enjoys grandchildren, gardening, and genealogy.

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Conservation Tactics

By DeeAnn Dowd

The first few generations of Oklahoma farmers were threatened by drought and floods. The 1923 flood of the North Canadian River destroyed Western Oklahoma's transportation systems. All bridges, for wagons and railroads, between Oklahoma City and Woodward, were washed away. George Sheppard, a civil engineer surveying Oklahoma several years later, under the direction of the U.S. War Department, estimated the damage in excess of three million dollars to state and county road and rail bridges and other public utilities. This estimate did not include the loss and damage to the land itself.

Following this disaster, many Oklahomans became interested in finding a solution to the water problem — especially the rail companies, whose repeated loss of bridges was proving expensive! As a result, the Rock Island Railroad had its civil engineer, Ernest E. Blake, survey the river and make recommendations on how to control the recurring floods.

Blake's report resulted in the formation of the Blaine County Flood Control Association on May 31, 1931. Officers elected at that first meeting were: Frank Raab, Canton, president; Smith Cunningham, Watonga, vice-president; C. V. (Salty) Waters, Hitchcock, secretary/treasurer. Directors were appointed from each community in the county: B. H. Burnham, Canton; Andy Marks, Okeene; Elmer Kennison, Watonga; Bryan Long, Eagle City; U. H. Warner, Geary; and Bill Allsman, Longdale.

The association worked diligently to gain public interest. They wrote letters, sent telegrams and held numerous meetings outlining a plan that would divert flood water, by canal, into Salt Creek Canyon, south of Southard.

They were faced, however, with little support downstream. Oklahoma City filed a law suit against the association, naming each member and their communities in the suit, 147 defendants in all, represented by 11 attorneys. The suit claimed that the diversion of waters would jeopardize Oklahoma City's water rights and contaminate the water with salt deposits. They, also, claimed virtually all the water flowing down the river as theirs. After approximately two years of lengthy debate, and study of water laws (or the lack of such laws), the two sides reached a compromise the morning they went into court.

The Blaine County Flood Control Association recognized Oklahoma City's two objections as valid. This decision led them to reorganize the association and expand it to include the entire watershed from Oklahoma City west to the head waters of the stream. Additional members joining the association and lending their help in promoting the project were: Julius Cox, Boise City; J. Hiner Dale, Guymon; Bill Cooksey, Beaver City; Vern Miller, Laverne; Dr. James Day, Ft. Supply; Mayor Burdick, Woodward;

Stanley Shepherd, Seiling; Fred Gwaltney, Greenfield; Henry Breeze and A. H. Thompson, Calumet; Ray Dyer and Merle Woods, El Reno; and Editor Endment, Yukon.

The larger association gave the group the benefit of three congressional districts, allowing them a stronger voice in Congress. The help of these Congressmen proved very valuable through the years.

The new organization took the name of North Canadian River Flood Control and Improvement Association. They adopted a three reservoir plan which include the present sites of the Optima Reservoir, Ft. Supply Reservoir, and Canton Reservoir. The Association stipulated in their recommendations that the control of the river and development of each project be a multiple purpose project, including flood control, water supply, irrigation, recreation, fish and wildlife benefits.

The Association still faced many obstacles, delays and disappointments. Frank Raab and Salty Waters made several trips to Washington D. C. at their own expense, lobbying Congress for legislation necessary for the funding of the project. They, also, tried to gain the backing of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and persuade them to survey the project locations. The Corps, however, were only authorized to construct harbor inland waterway levy systems on the lower reaches of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers.

Finally, in 1935, Congress enacted legislation giving the Corps the authority for some tributary stream system improvements. The Corps procrastinated on the North Canadian project, until the Association feared the time limit on the funds would run out. Frank Raab contacted his Congressman, a member of the Appropriation Committee, and the survey started within a few weeks.

Construction began on the flood control project at Ft. Supply in 1937, Canton in 1940 and Optima in 1978. The last, Optima Reservoir (Hardesty site) being dedicated in 1980, nearly 50 years from the first Association meeting.

In 1983 an estimate on the benefits from the projects claimed over \$9,542,000 of flood damage had been saved. The dedicated efforts of those men in the North Canadian River Flood Control and Improvement Association resulted in these savings, plus, conservation of the land, and the benefit of the recreational facilities we enjoy today. It should be noted that none of the members of the Association received any pay for their tireless efforts. They were true pacesetters of Oklahoma and the Country. Only two members are living today, Frank Raab of Canton and Julius Cox of Boise City. ■

DEEANN DOWD of Canton is a commuting student in Elementary Education at SOSU. "Conservation Tactics" is her first published work.

BEACON OF THE PRAIRIE

BY AARON A. BAKER

This, as with haiku.

*Would show an old hawk soaring
Then dive-bombing near*

Old grain elevator

*Standing tall and white — basking
In the village sun*

On the interstate —

*Like some sort of old castle.
The building serving*

As an aged landmark

*For old settlers to reminisce
About years later*

When the lone railway

*Ran where now tumbleweeds grow
At June harvest time*

And old dreams appear

*To soar like the old hawk over
The white elevator...*

FUTURE ISSUES

WINTER 1988

Western Oklahoma Landmarks

SPRING, 1989 (Western Oklahoma Festivals; deadline:
12-15-88)

SUMMER, 1989 (Western Oklahoma Celebrations; deadline:
2-15-89)

FALL, 1989 (Western Oklahoma Cemeteries; deadline:
7-1-89)

WINTER, 1989 (Western Oklahoma Artisans; deadline:
9-15-89)

SPRING, 1990 (Western Oklahoma's Children; (deadline:
12-15-89)

SUMMER, 1990 (Western Oklahoma's Diverse Voices;
deadline: 2-15-90)

FALL, 1990 (Western Oklahoma Friendships; deadline:
7-1-90)

WINTER, 1990 (Western Oklahoma Reunions; deadline:
9-15-90)

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Please notice changes in submissions deadlines.

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