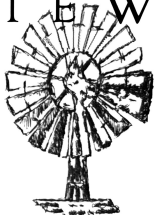
A JOURNAL OF WESTERN OKLAHOMA
WESTVIEW



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WESTVIEW

VOLUME 8 NUMBER 1 FALL 1988 $3.00

A JOURNAL OF WESTERN OKLAHOMA

WESTERN OKLAHOMA POLITICIANS

Foreword

When a valued worker prepares to leave, our polite response is, "We'll never be able to replace you." In the case of our most recent leave-taker, Assistant Editor Rick Plant, we didn't choke on those words. We were speaking the truth as we saw it.

Rick has gone to Staunton (pn. *Stanton*), Virginia, as Assistant Professor of Creative Writing at Mary Baldwin College. He leaves a void on the WESTVIEW Editorial Board, but we wish him continued success in his new setting.

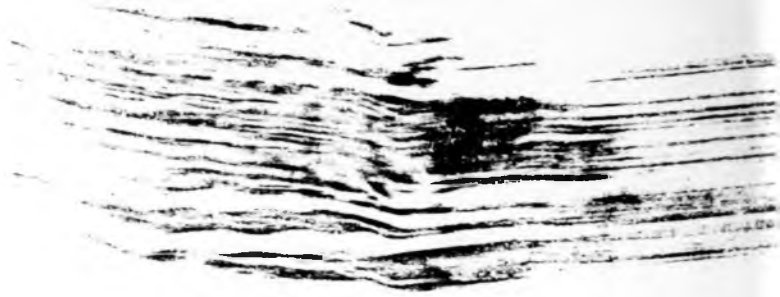
As usual, when we prepare copy for a new issue, we are disappointed by the deletions in coverage that our readers are sure to observe. We have some good copy here, in our first issue of our eighth year of publication, but we can't help thinking about how we needed to receive articles on additional Western Oklahoma politicians. We won't mention names. To do so would make matters worse. We'll learn to be content.

Once again, we thank the lifeline of our journal — our readers, writers, artists, advertisers, and patrons.

TRUTHFULLY,

Leroy Thomas

Leroy Thomas
Editor



WESTERN OKLAHOMA POLITICIANS

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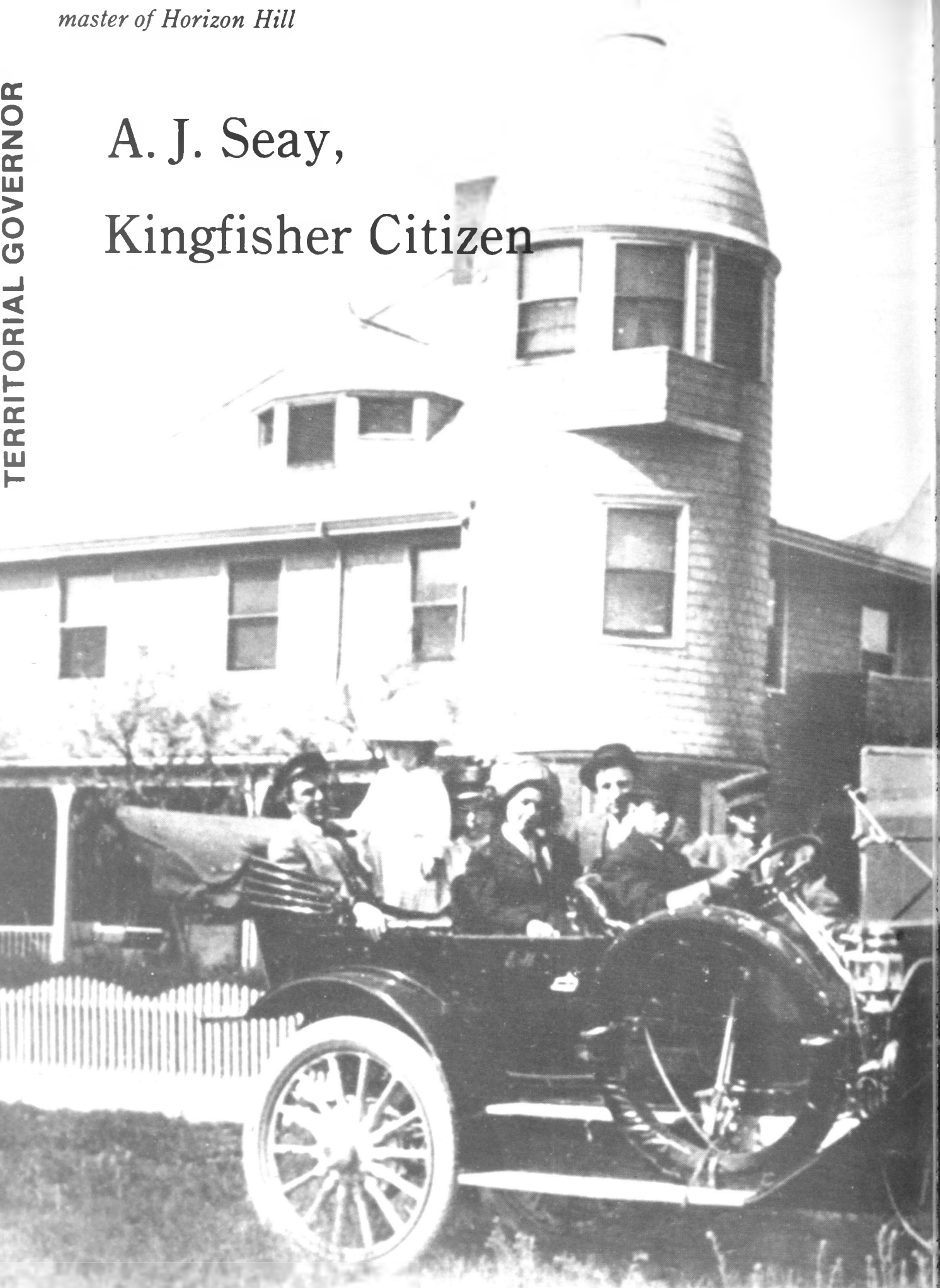
master of Horizon Hill

TERRITORIAL GOVERNOR

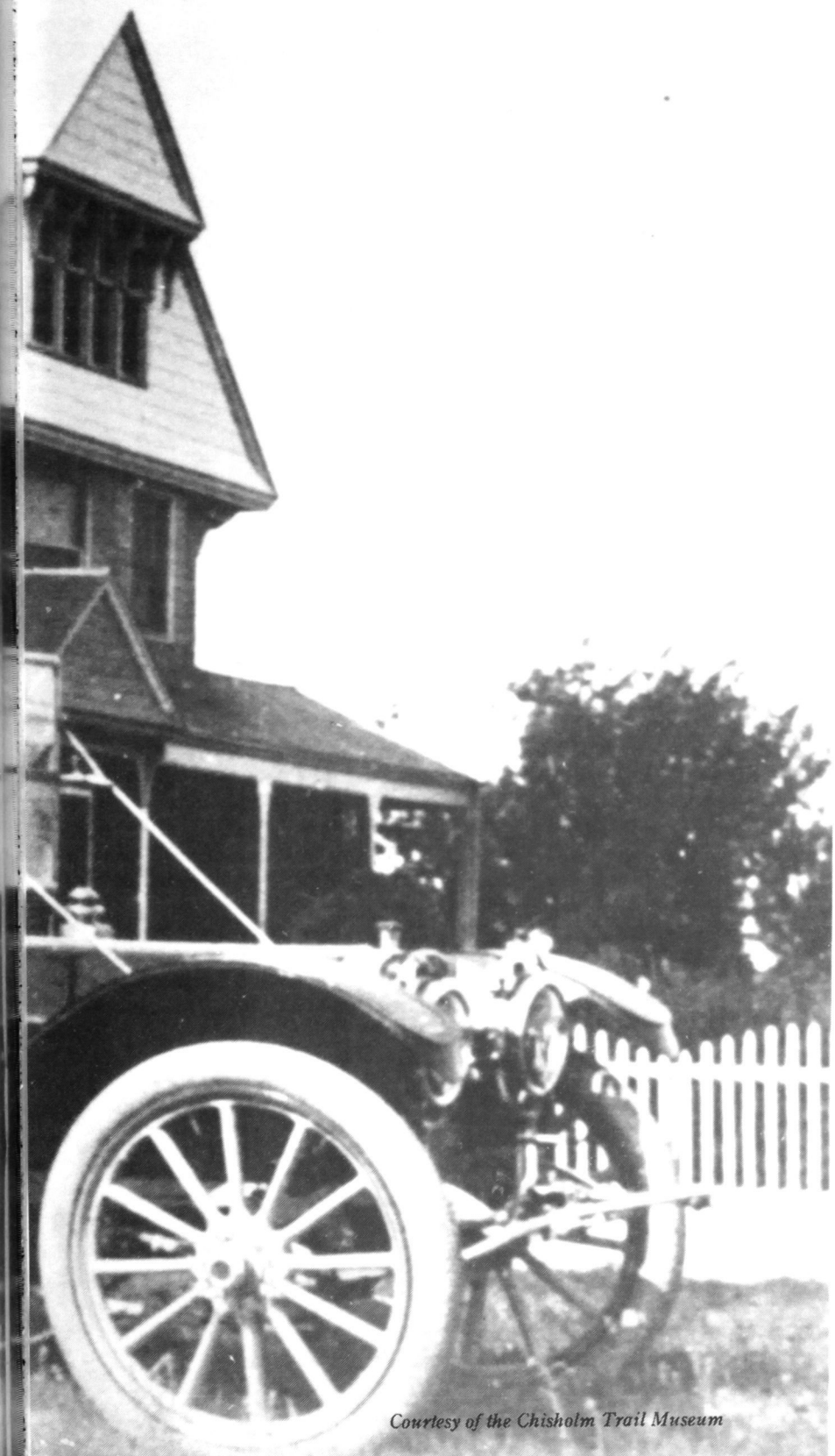
A. J. Seay, Kingfisher Citizen



Governor A. J. Seay's Mansion, Horizon Hill, about 1910.

By

Glen V. McIntyre



Courtesy of the Chisholm Trail Museum

News reached Kingfisher on Tuesday afternoon, February 2, 1892, that newly installed Territorial Governor A. J. Seay, who made his home in Kingfisher, would drive from Guthrie on Wednesday to come through Kingfisher on the beginning of a tour of the Territory. Early Wednesday morning, the merchants began decorating their businesses, and soon the entire town was decked with bunting and flags.

At 3:00 p.m., a large delegation of citizens left the town in carriages and other vehicles to greet the Governor. Part of those eager to escort Seay into Kingfisher were members of the Kingfisher Post of the Grand Army of the Republic, of which Seay was a member. People in over two hundred carriages were in line to honor the Governor.

School was dismissed, and the children were trooped out to the bridge of Uncle John's Creek east of town to welcome Seay.

He arrived proudly in a cab with the top parted in the middle and dropped back. He bowed and tipped his high silk hat first to one side and then to the other. Later, he sent apples to treat each school child.

At the end of the line of carriages, Seay got out and shook hands all around. He was an imposing person, standing about six feet tall and weighing over two hundred pounds. He had fair hair and blue eyes but had a high-pitched falsetto voice which gave him the reputation as a poor public speaker.

Later that evening there was a reception at the courthouse and then a dance which topped off the festivities.

Kingfisher had a right to be proud. One of her adopted sons had just become Governor of the new Territory of Oklahoma; and with any luck, his Governorship might result in Kingfisher's becoming the capital of the Territory.

Governor Seay — after he had broken his hip.

Courtesy of

the Oklahoma Historical Society

Back of Seay Mansion when Governor lived there, circa 1895.

Courtesy of the Chishom Trail Museum

Abraham Jefferson Seay had traveled a long road to become the second Territorial Governor of Oklahoma. He was born in Virginia on November 28, 1832, but was reared in South Central Missouri. He qualified as a lawyer just before the outbreak of the Civil War. Instead of practicing law, he chose to go into the Union army, rising from Private to Lieutenant Colonel in the course of the war. A diary which he kept during the war has been preserved.

After the war, he returned to his law practice and later ran twice as a Republican for the United States Congress but was defeated because Missouri was a predominantly Democrat state. He continued to practice law and then later was elected as district court judge in Missouri for a term of six years to which position he was later re-elected. He also purchased a bank in Union, Missouri, of which he remained president until his death.

In April of 1890, he received a telegram from his Civil War friend, John Noble, then Secretary of the Interior under Republican President Benjamin Harrison. Noble offered him the position of Associate Judge of Oklahoma Territory. Though preferring to be made Chief Justice of the Territory, Seay accepted and in late May of 1890 took up his duties as Associate Justice of the Territory of Oklahoma serving the third district.

The district consisted of the settled lands of the territory — Kingfisher, Canadian County, and the entire Panhandle of Oklahoma — then known as Beaver County. The Panhandle had been attached to the fledgling territory of Oklahoma by the Organic Act of 1890. Even though there were as yet no settlers in the Indian lands — the Cheyenne and Arapahoe Reservation; the Cherokee Outlet; the Wichita, Kiowa, and Apache lands — Seay's court held jurisdiction over these areas as well.

Holding court in Beaver, the county seat of Beaver County, could be quite a chore. Seay either had to go by rail via Wichita, Kansas, to Englewood, Kansas, and then take a stage from there for the fifty remaining miles to Beaver (a total of 300 miles) or go by buckboard or wagon up the old road along the North Canadian to Camp Supply then up Beaver Creek to Beaver — a total of 200 miles. One pioneer remembers that Seay once took a party of twenty-seven people with him to Beaver to hold court — Seay, his court clerk, a stenographer, and twenty-four other people deemed necessary for business.

Seay was proud of his court's reputation as a "shotgun" court. He was also reputed to be more interested in what was right than in what was in the law books. A reputation of sternness and bluntness tempered with fairness was prized by judges in those days.

However, because Seay was concerned more with judicial business from 1880 to 1892 than in politics, he was not fully in touch with the political leaders of the territory, which could haunt him later.

The first Territorial Governor, George Washington Steele, was an old friend of President Harrison's from Indiana. Steele came to Oklahoma in May of 1890 very reluctantly and soon became involved with the major controversy of the day — the location of the Territorial capital.

The Organic Act specified that the

Governor A. J. Seay

Courtesy of the Chishom Trail Museum

capital would be at Guthrie, but other cities were vying for the valuable prize.

These forces got the House of Representatives and the Council (the territorial version of the Senate) to pass a bill making Oklahoma City the territorial capital. To get the votes of the people from Kingfisher, who naturally wanted that city to become the capital, the people from Oklahoma City promised to vote for Kingfisher as their next choice if the drive to get it for Oklahoma City failed.

Steele vetoed the bill making Oklahoma City the capital, in the process making everyone but people from Guthrie angry. As a result of their prior agreement, the legislators then pushed through a bill making Kingfisher the Territorial capital, which Steele also vetoed.

Then, disgusted with Oklahoma Territorial politics, Steele resigned as Governor to return home to Indiana, leaving Robert Martin, Secretary of the Territory, as acting Governor until a replacement could be appointed.

Three men were considered for the post — Acting Governor Martin, Angelo Scott of Oklahoma City, called the boy orator because of his youth, and Seay. Acting for Seay, U.S. Marshal William G. Grimes got both Scott and Martin to write President Harrison to support an Oklahoma nominee and recommended Seay. Seay's continuing support from Noble clenched the deal.

With Seay as Governor, Kingfisher had high hopes of finally becoming the Territorial capital. Here, however, Seay met one of his major defeats as Governor.

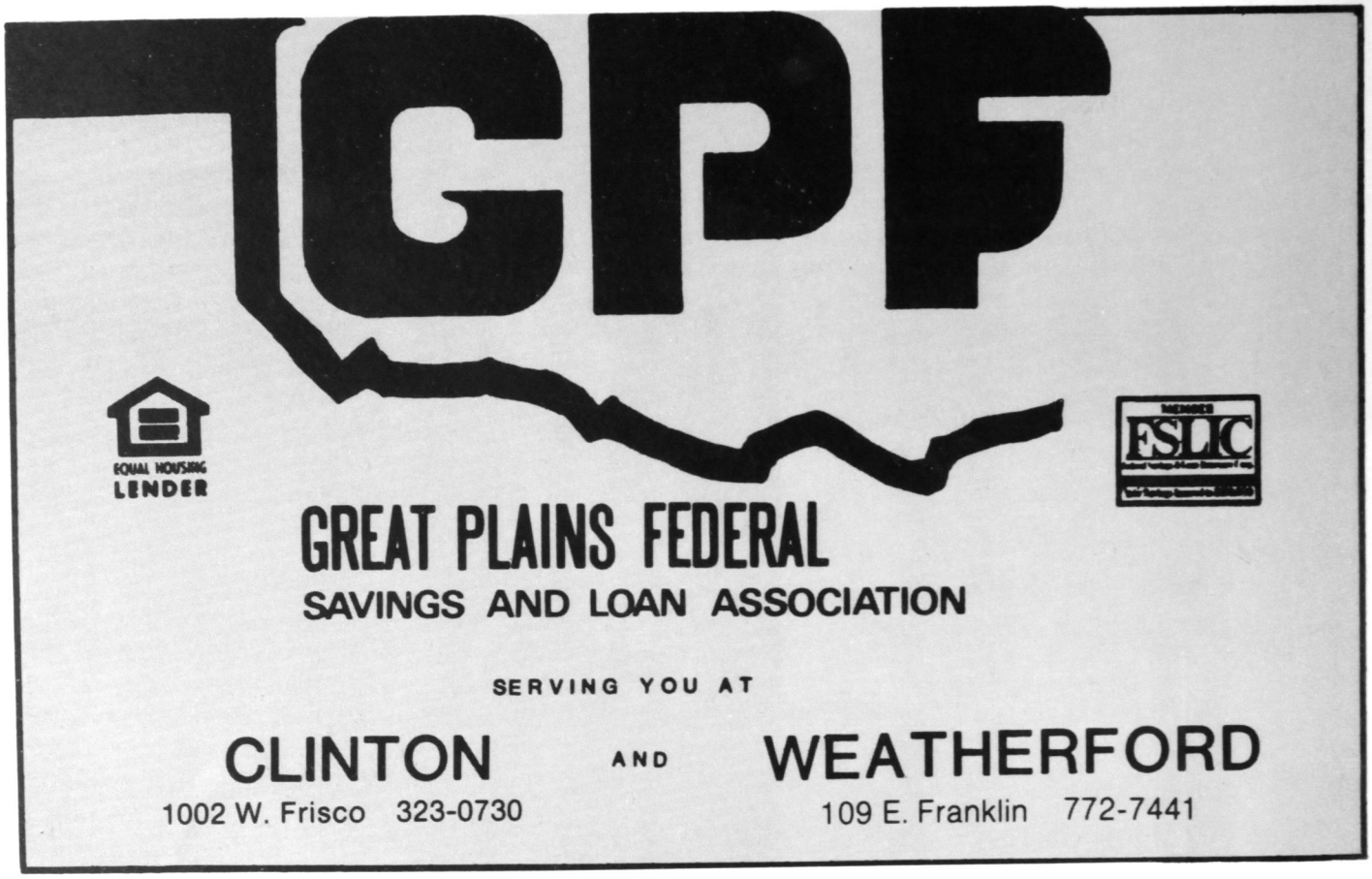
The Organic Act had made no provision for re-election of a legislature, so Seay lobbied the U.S. Congress to allow a new election for the legislature. The bill which Congress passed stipulated that the capital should remain at Guthrie. Thus, Seay got his legislature to run the territory but lost his push to make Kingfisher capital.

One of the first big occasions after Seay became Governor was the opening of the Cheyenne and Arapahoe reservation by land run on April 19, 1892. In one day, the Territory of Oklahoma more than doubled in size.

The date of the land run also coincided with the completion of Governor Seay's magnificent new home, "Horizon Hill," on the south side of Kingfisher. Tradition in Kingfisher has it that Seay intended to give the mansion to Oklahoma as the Governor's Manse if Kingfisher became the territorial capital.

The opening of the Cheyenne and Arapahoe lands gave Seay one of his greatest challenges. He had to appoint ten positions for each of the six new counties to be made from the new lands. Because he had not been active in Republican Territorial politics, he was not very knowledgeable concerning the personalities and qualities of the many men who hounded him for office. There was some criticism of his appointments but little evidence that he picked too many unsuitable men for the job.

By the time the Territorial legislature met in the spring of 1893, Seay knew that he was a lame-duck Governor. Benjamin Harrison had lost to the Democrat Grover Cleveland in the fall Presidential election, and Cleveland naturally would want to appoint a Democrat as Governor.



Still, Seay managed to accomplish a great deal during his short term. He oversaw a reapportionment of the territory beginning in August of 1892, and the University of Oklahoma was officially opened during his term. The seal of the Territory of Oklahoma, which survives as the center of the Great Seal of the State of Oklahoma, was adopted. He convinced the legislature to fund an exhibit from Oklahoma Territory at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. He himself went to the exposition's formal opening at the beginning of May, 1893. There he met President Cleveland and had a brief talk with the new Secretary of the Interior — probably an unsuccessful lobbying attempt to keep his job.

As Ex-Governor, he remained active in politics and the life of the territory. He attended the original organizational meeting of the Oklahoma Historical Society at the Kingfisher Courthouse on May 27, 1893, and served on the original board of directors of the society. He was active in the Free Home's League and attended a meeting of the Trans Mississippi Congress of July 1897, which was held in Salt Lake City, and pushed for a stand supporting the Free Homes concept.

He prospered financially, owning two hotels in Kingfisher, serving as president of three banks, and holding considerable stock in four others. In 1908, he donated the money for Seay Hall at Kingfisher College. Seay Hall was to serve as a dormitory for boys who were working their way through Kingfisher College.

Seay sold the Mansion in 1901 and in 1903 suffered an accident which ruined his health. In 1903, he was standing in the doorway of the Kingfisher Hotel when a gust of wind blew a door open and caused him to fall to the pavement and break his hip. His condition eventually deteriorated to the extent that he was confined to a wheelchair.

On his doctor's advice, Seay went to California to try to recover his health. He was in San Francisco in April of 1906 when the widely publicized earthquake struck. He had to be carried from his hotel by his Black attendant.

In 1912, Seay settled in Long Beach, California, where he died on December 22, 1915. He left an estate in the neighborhood of $500,000 to numerous nieces and nephews. He had never married. He was buried in the Kingfisher Cemetery beside his favorite sister, Isabel Seay Collins, who had been his hostess for official functions when he had been Governor.

Seay's time in office had lasted only from February 1, 1892, to May 7, 1893; but he still served as one of the founders of Oklahoma Territory. His mansion, Horizon Hill, still stands in Kingfisher, is open to the public, and stands as a memorial of what might have been if Seay had been successful in making Kingfisher the Territorial capital. ■

GLEN V. MCINTYRE, when he isn't busy as curator of the Chisholm Trail Museum in Kingfisher, enjoys writing poetry and prose articles.

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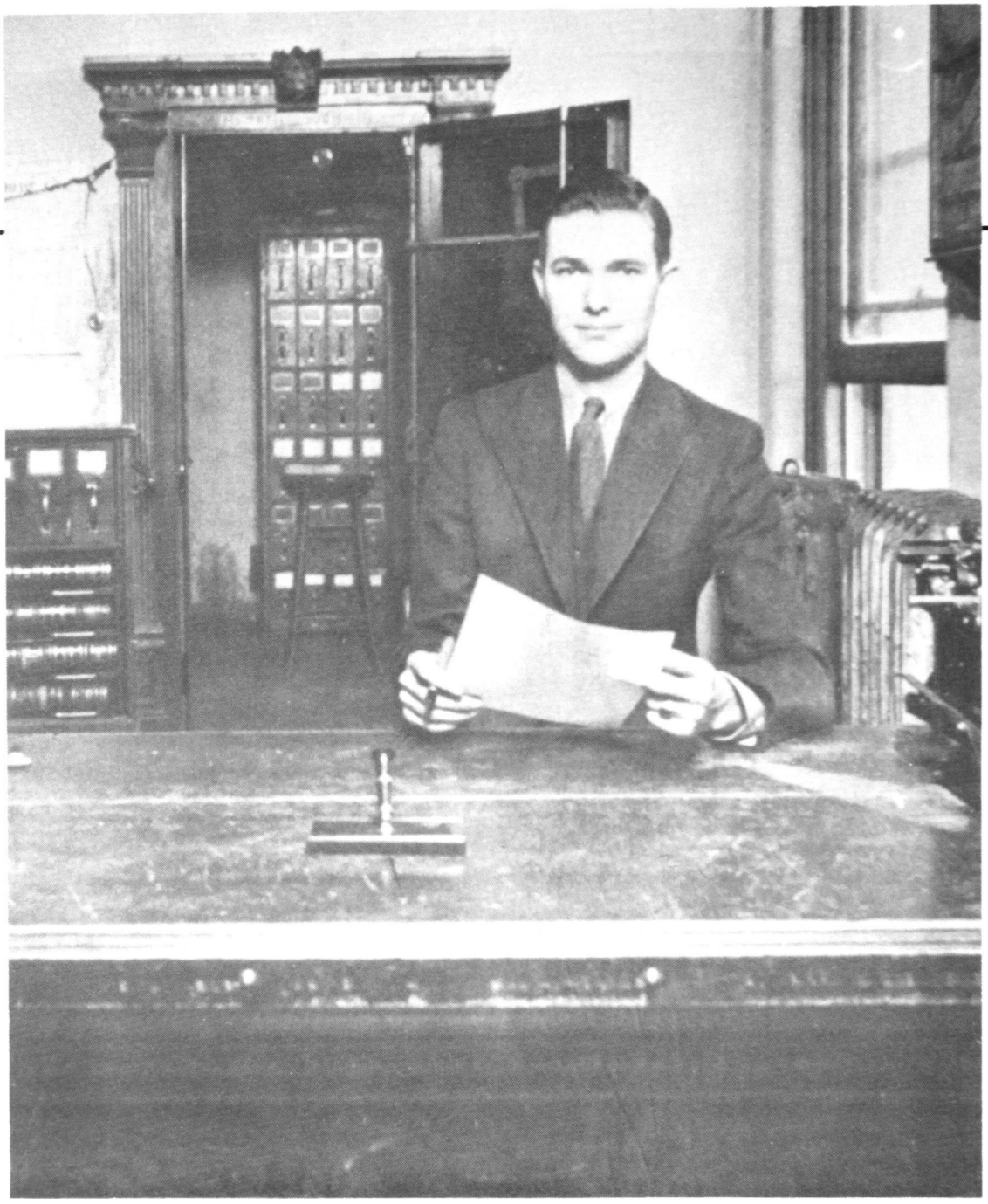


Victor E. Wickersham as the Greer County Clerk in 1929.

A FAVORITE SON OF MANGUM

By Dee Ann Ray

U.S. REPRESENTATIVE, OKLAHOMA LEGISLATOR

On Tuesday, March 15, 1988, Victor Wickersham, oldest member of the Oklahoma Legislature at the time, died. He was sworn into office on February 9, 1988, after winning a special election for Seat #60 in the Oklahoma House of Representatives. Wickersham won his last political campaign race by 211 votes. In the Democratic primary election, he faced several opponents but won easily by a big majority garnered mostly in his home county, Greer. His Republican opponent in the special general election for the seat was R. B. Cline. Wickersham got 2,167 votes to Cline's 1,956.

Wickersham's political career spanned six decades. He served nine terms of office in the United States House of Representatives, beginning in 1941; and four terms in the Oklahoma Legislature from 1971 - 1979, prior to his last election to office in 1988.

When asked about his health during the final election campaign, Wickersham replied, "I had a doctor examine me a few months ago, and he told me I could do anything a 60-year-old man or a 10-year-old mule could do." Wickersham's death was caused by a massive stroke and the following complications.

In September of 1984, this writer traveled to Mangum to interview Victor Wickerham. Many people thought Wickersham had already died by that time because little had been heard from him since his last term in the Oklahoma House. His wife of more than fifty years, Jessie, was ill and Wickersham had been taking care of her. She died July 14, 1984.

The interview was delightful. Wickersham was a gentleman and a marvelous host. He loved being interviewed again, and it was obvious that he still wanted to be involved in politics. As he relived his years in public service, his eyes were full of longing for the old days.

As a result of that visit, Wickersham included my sister and me on his mailing list. We received a copy of the newsletter he wrote after each trip to visit his relatives around the United States. He sent copies to everyone he thought would be interested. He always did like to travel, and he accepted every invitation that came his way.

On November 8, 1986, Victor Wickersham married Lorene Meason-Dennis of Bedford, Texas. She had been a widow for five years. She had three children, and Wickersham had four. His son, Galen Wickersham, served as best man. Following an extended tour, about which Wickersham wrote a newsletter, the couple was at home in Mangum. They did continue to travel. It was with his second wife's blessing that Wickersham decided to make the race for Oklahoma House Seat #60.

The following story was written in September of 1984 as a result of the personal interview with Victor Wickersham.

"I've always tried everything three times, at least, before I gave up," said Victor Eugene Wickersham, former Congressman from Oklahoma's sixth and seventh districts. "I believe that is why I was able to accomplish so many things for my district when I served in Congress. If I called a federal office regarding some matter and I was told no, I tried again and again, even if I had to wait a year until another appropriation. I usually was able to get the contract, industry, or job for my district."

Victor is most often remembered by citizens in his district because he knew so many people by face, name, and voice. His hobby is remembering names, a practice he began when he worked as deputy clerk in the Greer County Courthouse. His facility with faces and names won him many helpers in his campaigns for Congress and the Oklahoma Legislature. Of his 106 opponents for political office, he defeated

Rep. Wickersham behind a portrait he commissioned as a gift for Harry S. Truman. Larry Pendleton of Cordell was the artist.

". . .he told me I could dc

ninety-nine and won re-election to the U.S. House of Representatives for nine terms or eighteen years. He spent eight years in the Oklahoma House of Representatives.

His theory that trying something three times usually wins success is validated by the fact that his third race for the U.S. Congress from the old seventh district of Oklahoma put him in the office he sought. Victor ran unsuccessfully for Congress in 1938, losing to incumbent Sam Massingale from Cordell. Since he had no automobile, Victor made that race on foot. He hitchhiked all over the southwestern part of Oklahoma and made a good showing in the field of candidates. He ran again in 1940 and by that time had a "Reo Flying Cloud" auto, which he drove relentlessly over the district. Again he lost to Congressman Massingale, who was a very popular member of the U.S. Congress. But Sam Massingale died unexpectedly on January 17, 1941 of complications following a short bout with the flu. Massingale's vacant seat was sought by a field of eleven candidates. Victor won the primary and the run-off and left for Washington, D.C. on April 1, 1941. Before he made that trip, he gave his old "Reo Flying Cloud" car, which was worn out from the campaign, to the American Red Cross to use in the World War II effort. He purchased a new car for his trip to Washington, where he was sworn into office on April 14, 1941.

Victor E. Wickersham was the son of Frank M. and Lillie Sword Wickersham. He was born at Lone Rock, Arkansas on the family homestead February 9, 1906. He was the second of eight children (six of the eight were still living at the time of this story). Morrell died at six months of age, and an older sister, Velma Husell, died in 1977. William Jefferson Wickersham, the third child, was Chief Clerk at the Oklahoma State Reformatory at Granite. Nina Elise is married to Herman S. Knight of Cordell. Helen married Paul Butterfield. (Nellie Jane and Ashley were the two other living Wickershams in 1984.)

The Wickersham family immigrated to the United States in the early 1700's. There is still a town in East Germany named Weckerheim, "Home of the Basket Weavers." Serving people through political office runs in the Wickersham family. Ambrose Wickersham, Victor's grandfather, was a County Clerk in Arkansas; and other Wickershams served in federal offices, including one U.S. Attorney General. Victor's father even envisioned political office for his second son, but Victor had no such aspirations until he began to help others campaign. The bug bit and Victor threw his hat into the ring.

Victor had a great sense of family history and recalled learly his early growing years. He even related the ways his father paid the delivering doctor for each of the eight children. The first was paid for with five hundred fence rails. The second cost a dressed hog. The third earned the doctor a whole hind quarter of beef. For the fourth, the doctor received five hundred bales of fodder. The fifth cost one hundred pounds of Mayapple roots and twenty-five pounds of Ginsing roots dug from the ground. The elder Mr. Wickersham worked four days on the county roads to pay the doctor's poll tax for the sixth child. Victor's mother made uniforms for the doctor and nurses for the seventh child. Victor was selling Watkins goods and contributed some of them, to which his father added fresh Irish potatoes and sweet potatoes plus dried blackeyed peas, to pay for the eighth child.

Always enterprising, Victor went to work as a boy. In addition to doing chores at home, he began selling GRIT and CAPPER'S WEEKLY when he was six years old. He had to walk to town to pick them up, and he made only two cents a delivery; but, added to the family money, it helped. Later he began selling Watkins products door to door. "I always put the popular and easy products back in the box next to

Victor purchasing the latest model car in the 40's for his trips to Washington, D.C.

anything a 60-year-old man or a ten-year-old mule could do."

my body and the more difficult sales up at the front," Victor related.

Shortly after Victor was born, the Wickersham family moved to Oklahoma, settling in various towns of Greer County, and finally Mangum. Victor continued working on the farm, as a janitor for three churches in Mangum, picking turkeys for seven cents each and hens for four cents each for a produce house, salting down cow hides for the same produce house, and doing anything else that contributed to the family income.

"One reason we came to Oklahoma was that my Grandfather Wickersham taught Ashley Wilson, age 19, to read and write. He used the old MCGUFFEY'S READER and BLUE BACK SPELLER. Later Wilson moved to Mangum and operated a general store and implement business. He encouraged us to move there," said Wickersham.

Victor's memories of growing up are rich with family gatherings, literary meetings, and church going. His family was close knit. He learned about hunting, trapping, and living from his uncles and grandfather as well as his father. Grandfather Wickersham taught the children how to spell and also to write in Spencerian penmanship. Although times were difficult financially, there was no feeling of poverty, for the entire family basked in the warmth of sharing what they had.

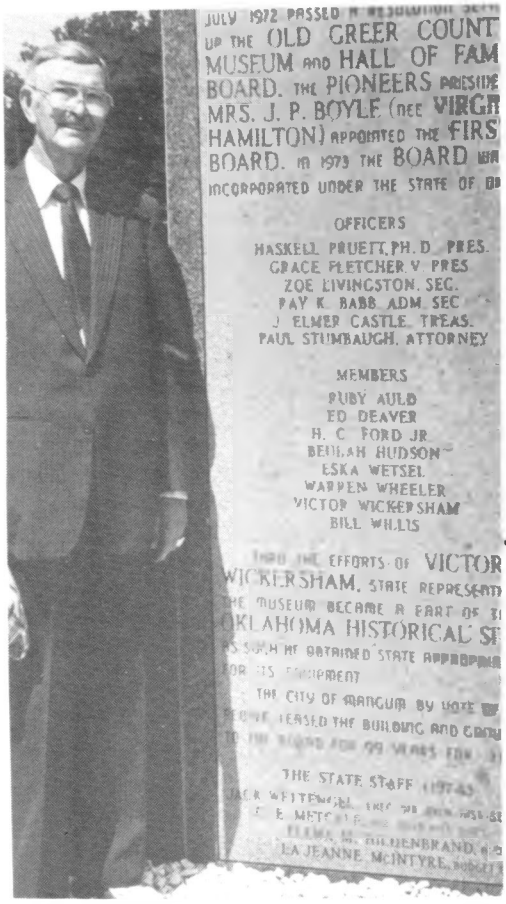
In Mangum, Victor and his older sister, Zelma, were placed in the same grade. When they graduated in 1923, Zelma was Valedictorian and Victor was Salutatorian out of the sixty-three graduates. "Zelma always studied harder and made the better grades. I came in second but studied less," said Victor, laughing.

Victor continued his selling career until he was appointed Deputy County Clerk and later Court Clerk of Greer County. He served in those offices from 1926 - 1935.

On June 30, 1929, Victor married Jessie B. Stiles. He sold himself the marriage license and put off paying for it until the next Monday when he got his paycheck.

Victor and Jessie had met when Victor was purchasing a suit. He was trying to make an impression on the Mangum folks who believed he was brokenhearted because a young lady whom he had dated for some time had become engaged to another young man. Victor took a different girl each night to the church revival that was in progress. Jessie was the girl for the eighth night. After he went through all sixteen girls and nights, he returned to Jessie. They dated every other night for 1½ years, became engaged, and married.

Jessie and Victor had four children. The oldest, Galen, designs Fisher Body interiors. LaMelba Sue is married to



Victor Wickersham in 1984 beside the stone honoring his help in establishing the Greer County Museum.

He answered his telephone,

Everett Lloyd Renberger, who owns a jewelry store in LaCrosse, Kansas. Nelda is married to Samuel L. Holston, Jr., of Richmond, Virginia. Mr. Holston represents Johnson Wax for four states in his area. The youngest son is Victor Wickersham, Jr., who is Assistant Director of the Aging Program in Phoenix, Arizona. Among the children, there are "twelve fine grandchildren and ten outstanding, cute great-grandchildren of whom we are proud."

Of Jessie, Victor said, "I never met a better Christian. We shared so many wonderful years. Jessie made a marvelous home for us. I miss her greatly."

While serving as Court Clerk of Greer County, Victor helped Congressman E. W. Marland campaign for Governor of Oklahoma. Marland then appointed Victor as Chief Clerk of the State Board of Affairs on February 1, 1935. Two years later, politics changed and Victor lost his job (governors were elected for only two years at that time).

Ready to work, Victor began moving houses where the oil companies were drilling near the State Capitol. He bought some of those houses from a man named Roy J. Turner and some from another man named Robert S. Kerr, both of whom later became governors of Oklahoma. Kerr also became U.S. Senator from Oklahoma. At the same time Victor was moving houses, he was also selling insurance. He became the top salesman for his company in Oklahoma.

When Victor made his first race for Congress, he was not completely unknown. He had been making friends for years. He often acted as volunteer auctioneer at pie suppers and box suppers at schools throughout the area. He was always active in his Christian Church work, starting with Christian Youth Endeavor. He served faithfully in all types of civic activities. He was an active Rotarian, a Mason, a Modern Woodman of the World, a member of the Shriners, of the PTA, and a long list of other organizations. He often served as president of those groups.

Early on, Victor adopted a slogan that was to remain his during every political campaign: "Anytime I may be of service, phone, wire, or write," to which he later added "or see me." He always termed himself as his constituents' "best friend."

After hitchhiking in his first congressional race, Victor used Dr. G. Fowler Border's old ambulance for the second race. The siren made a great entrance note for each town.

During that race, the Mangum Drum and Bugle Corps accompanied Victor often, marching up and down the streets performing while volunteers aided Victor in handing out cards.

During World War II, Victor went

Wickersham at his desk in the replicated Washington, D.C. office located in the Greer County Museum.

"Hello, this is Victor Wickersham, your best friend."

overseas frequently, always taking with him letters, photos, and messages from home for the boys of his district. From the earliest days of campaigning, Victor's constant companion was his camera. He took pictures of his constituents in uniform to bring home. He had his picture taken with dignitaries wherever he went. His files were full of historical photos taken around the world.

When Victor first went to Congress, the government paid for only one trip home each year per congressman. Now, congressmen are allowed eighteen trips home a year and can take staff or spouses with them. The salary of a congressman in 1941 was $7,500. The congressmen were allowed only one long-distance phone call and two wires a day. They had to pay their own air-mail charges. Pushing for more phone and mail privileges earned Victor a photo and story in a LOOK magazine article one year with the mistaken headline that he wanted a bigger salary. "I only wanted more money to use for office expenses," said Victor. "I paid for the offices I kept in Oklahoma out of my own pocket, as well as the salaries to staff those offices. I also took my campaign expenses out of my own pocket, so I wasn't obligated to anyone or any group.

"People could always get hold of me in 2½ minutes. I kept three phones at home, eight in the office, and was accessible to twenty-eight phones in the cloakroom off the House floor," related Victor.

One of Victor's House committee chairmanships was the Military Appropriations Committee. Through his activities on that committee, military installations were brought to Altus, Frederick, and Burns Flat. Ft. Sill was expanded greatly through his efforts. "If I couldn't get them for my district, then I worked on the next priority, which was for Oklahoma," he stated.

Victor served in Congress during the administrations of Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon B. Johnson. In addition, he was acquainted with Presidents Nixon and Ford. He knew some of the Presidents when they were fellow congressmen.

Many people who live in Western Oklahoma remember their trips to Washington because Victor made them memorable. School children visiting in our nation's Capitol — if they were from Victor's district — were treated to lunch at his expense. He took them to the Congressional dining room and brought the Speaker of the House and other dignitaries to meet the touring Oklahomans. On days when Congress was not in session, Victor toured the groups in his car and his staff members' cars throughout Washington — even to Mount Vernon. When he took the young people and their teachers to the U.S. Mint, he always made a point of taking at least $100 in freshly printed bills — which he got from his personal bank account the day before. While tour members were watching the money being printed, Victor handed out "free samples" — $1.00 to each child. Other tour groups felt slighted and often questioned their guides, requesting some "free samples," too.

When Victor told that story, he laughed a great deal, and it was evident that he had enjoyed those tours. A large number of young Oklahomans carried home from Washington a vivid image of the importance of Washington in our nation's government. They remembered the smiling congressman from their district who told them to call him "Victor."

When Victor wasn't in Congress, he sold real estate very successfully in Washington and Oklahoma. He was always a good salesman for whatever product he promoted. He returned to insurance selling when he retired from Congress in 1965.

In 1971, politics again beckoned to Victor, and he served the next eight years in the Oklahoma House of Representatives from Greer County and part of Beckham County. He retired from that office only because he developed a severe allergy to smoke. So

many of the House members smoked in session and in committee that Victor's tendency to contract pneumonia was a threat to his good health.

When questioned whether he missed politics, his eyes seemed to look far back on the many excitement-filled years of public service, and he said quietly with a tremor in his voice, "I miss it terribly!"

But then he quickly became the vibrant man he still was and said, "You know, people just don't know how to get things done. I get lots of calls and letters from people asking me to help them make contact with their legislators, congressmen, or senators. I have a typewriter there in the office that I use everyday. I write letters and make phone calls at no cost to the people. I have always liked the feeling I get from helping people. It makes me feel good and useful."

Victor remained true to the Democratic Party. He voted the party down the line, although he was not always in agreement with the party platform planks, he said.

"Our Congressman Glenn Lee English is doing a great job," remarked Victor. "I keep in touch with him, and he is really serving this district well."

Of politics in 1984, Victor said, "We need more horse traders in office. We need to shorten the sessions. The congressmen should make fewer trips home during the sessions and stay there to get the job done. I think they should finish up in ninety days. We need to streamline the government. I think that congressmen should spend three months each year overseas seeing how our foreign aid is spent. They should spend three months in their own districts seeing the people and talking with them. They should have three months with their families — there's never enough time for the family. The final three months of the year should be spent in Washington in session."

Victor also believed that there was too much foreign aid, which he said resulted in the United States being drawn into the politics and wars of too many foreign countries. He worried about the lack of competitive bidding, the long coffee breaks, and the high costs of materials bought by government, etc.

Enthusiasm was Victor's secret ingredient. He never lost it through the years of public service. He attacked each problem presented with enthusiasm and the willingness to work until the goal was achieved.

"THE DAILY OKLAHOMAN used to make fun of my handshaking and remembering names, but I think that is the best way to campaign. You have to reach out to people. You have to be of service whenever you can and you have to be accessible to the people," said Victor.

The tall, thin, then-retired congressman and state representative was well known wherever he went. He did remember people. His life was too full for one article. He is worthy of a book. His photo album overflowed, and his filing cabinets were full of materials concerning his public-service careers.

Victor was willing to try three times, at least, on any request he received for help. He served the City of Mangum on the Planning Board; he served his First Christian Church as an Elder. He stayed active, and he was always happy for you to write, wire, phone, or see him. He answered his telephone, "Hello, this is Victor Wickersham, your best friend." ■

DEE ANN RAY well fits the designation "Renaissance woman" because she has a vaiety of interests. In addition to her work as director of the Western Plains Library Systems, she writes book reviews, stories, and researched articles.

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U.S. CONGRESSMAN

Glenn English, Cordell Democrat

By Lynn Burns

conservative from Cordell

Congressman Glenn English of Oklahoma's Sixth District is working hard to make Oklahoma a better, more productive place to live. His work is aimed at making Oklahoma a healthier, happier, drug-free place to rear children and live a quality life. But it hasn't happened overnight. Many years of hard work and education have gone into making his dream a possibility, and many years of equally hard work are yet to come.

Congressman English is a family man who realizes the significance of the family unit in society. Included in his family are Jan, his wife, John, their fifteen-year-old son, and T. J., their eleven-year-old daughter.

Glenn English is a small-town boy. He was born and reared in Cordell. After graduating from Cordell High School in 1958, he went on to receive a double degree in Economics and Business at SOSU in Weatherford in 1964. He then served six years in the Army Reserves (1965-1971) and also worked as the Executive State Director for the Oklahoma Democratic Party. In 1974, English ran for election to Congress in the sixth district of Oklahoma. He won easily in this Republican-dominated district and has repeatedly won re-election just as easily.

According to Alan Ehrenhalt, "English has turned out to be one of the most conservative of Southern members of Congress. . .a man who pays much closer attention to the wishes of his prairie district than to the wishes of the Democrat leadership."

Making Oklahoma a healthier, happier, drug-free place is his goal.

On cultural issues, English's view is mixed; however, on economic and foreign issues, his stand is strictly conservative. As a result of his knowledge and skill, he has been named to numerous committees:

1. Agriculture: Subcommittees —Cotton, Rice, and Sugar; Livestock, Dairy, and Poultry; Tobacco and Peanuts; Wheat, Soybeans, and Feed Grains.

2. Government Operations: Subcommittees — Government Information, Justice, and Agriculture, of which he is chairman, where he took on the job of overseeing the government's entire drug-enforcement effort.

Congressman Glenn English is briefed in the cockpit of a Lockheed P-3 aircraft used to track drug smugglers.

3. White House Conference for a Drug-Free America.

4. Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control — where he directed a task force on drug abuse and the military.

English has made drug enforcement a top priority of his subcommittee. He has spent many years researching this country's drug problems and has worked just as hard developing proposals to fight the war on drugs. His hard work has finally paid off — in part as a result of the needs he has seen and the solutions he has developed to overcome the inadequacies. A recently developed and approved anti-drug plan is now in effect. It isn't a plan that English developed on his own, but it is one he has greatly influenced and one in which many of his proposals are included. He has declared the overall plan a "major victory" for Congress against drug smugglers.

The Anti-drug plan is a major boost for law enforcement. It is making what seems an impossible job of drug enforcement a truly obtainable plan to defeat the selling of drugs in this country.

Such a plan will give law-enforcement agencies all of the resources they need to declare war on drugs. These resources include manpower, money, planes, helicopters, detection equipment, and the authority to stop any drug deal on U.S. soil and in the Bahamas. Arrests can now be made.

On economic and foreign issues, his stand is strictly conservative.

This Anti-drug program will have a major effect on Oklahoma because the National Command and Control Center will be located at the Will Rogers Airport in Oklahoma City. Staffing of the $20 million Command Center, which will surely affect our economy, has already begun. The center, which promises to make Oklahoma the heart or center of all drug enforcement, is now in temporary quarters. A ground-breaking ceremony for the new building will be held sometime this year. This center will handle the duties of intelligence, planning, coordinating, and command for all drug-enforcement agencies. One of the major plans is to stop the illegal flow of drugs into the United States and also to stop the cultivation of drugs.

In one of his reports from Washington, English insists that his is not just another plan to throw money at drugs. The plan has been well thought out, and the multiple hearings he has held support it. It is a well-developed, well-studied plan. Given time, it will work.

To assure the effectiveness of his plan, English wrote a reorganization bill which has been included in the drug plan. The bill requires the President to submit his recommendations concerning how the nation's drug forces should be reorganized to provide for more effective drug enforcement. These recommendations must be made within six months of the bill becoming law. The date was set for the first White House Conference on the Drug Act —between February 28 and March 3, 1988. Officials from all over the country were present for the conference, and Mr. English spoke to the group on March 1.

The beginning of use of the plan will be slow because much time and work are required to make any new program a success. Congress realizes that the beginning will be laborious, but many congressmen believe that the program will ultimately succeed.

Such success from a small-town Western Oklahoman is noteworthy. Oklahoma is once again the center of attention, and all of us can be duly proud of the conservative congressman from Cordell. ■

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LYNN BURNS, formerly a fulltime SOSU student, is now a general assistant at the Ramada Inn of Clinton.

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COUNTY COMMISSIONER

Clarence Redden, Roger Mills Pacemaker

By Ola Redden

Clarence Redden

Clarence Redden was born in Roger Mills County, near the South Canadian River, north of Cheyenne on his Grandfather Redden's homestead, and resided in the county his entire life except for the time he spent in the armed service.

He got his first real taste of politics when in 1938 he became the Sixth District campaign manager for Leon C. (Red) Phillips when he ran for and was elected Governor of Oklahoma.

In 1939, Clarence was named by Governor Phillips as county commissioner of the Third Commissioners District of Roger Mills County after the death of the present commissioner. At that point, he was the youngest person ever to have served in the office. He served District Three until 1943 when he was inducted into the Navy. In 1946, after his time in the Navy, he was elected to the office of county commissioner in the first district of Roger Mills County and served until January, 1967.

Clarence was elected state president of the Oklahoma County Commissioners Association in December 1962 and served that organization for four years. No one had ever served as president more than two years prior to that time. Over the years, Clarence was honored to have been involved in numerous statewide endeavors as well as having been elected as a delegate to the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles in 1960.

In the gubernatorial campaign of 1950, Clarence traveled the state organizing and raising funds for the campaign of William O. (Bill) Coe, who was defeated in the democratic run-off by Johnston Murray by fewer than one thousand votes. Clarence was to serve in Bill Coe's state campaign in two unsuccessful attempts for the governor's office — in 1954 and then again in 1958, when J. Howard Edmondson's "Prairie Fire" swept the state in a landslide.

It was while Clarence was commissioner of District One that the Board was petitioned to call a county-wide election for the purpose of voting a hospital bond. When the $150,000 bond was voted on, it passed by 67%. A $144,000 federal grant was obtained, earmarked for construction of Roger Mills Memorial Hospital. The hospital was completed and the dedication was set for March 2, 1966.

Clarence maintained his interest in politics throughout his lifetime with more than a passing interest in the destiny of Roger Mills County and the great state Oklahoma. ■

LOLA REDDEN of Cheyenne is employed in the office of Roger Mills Memorial Hospital. Like her husband, the subject of her article, she attended the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles and was present at the Pearl Mesta party at which Mesta said, "Come for brunch" — and they did, all five thousand.

M. C. Liest — Agrarian, Educator, And Lawmaker

By Imogene Barger

M. C. Leist with his mother, Myra.

M. C. Liest became a politician in Eastern Oklahoma, but he grew up and was educated in Western Oklahoma; therefore, we claim him as our own. He comes from a family that has an active and pioneering history. He had three great-uncles who fought in the Civil War, and one of them became a state legislator in St. Louis, Missouri. His great grandfather and one uncle were buffalo hunters from Dodge City, Kansas in 1873 who hunted buffalo down almost as far as Ft. Supply, Oklahoma. These men were friends, neighbors, and fellow buffalo hunters with Bat Masterson.

Liest's grandmother came to Oklahoma in 1912 after the death of her mother. She made her home with her brother, who had bought a relinquishment in Beaver County. She married a native panhandler and then reared and educated her children there

World War II interrupted college — education plans for Liest's parents, M. C. Sr. and Myra. His father spent four years in the U. S. Navy and participated in the Normandy Invasion. After the war, he worked for a time for Phillips Petroleum, but he and Myra decided to finish college and become teachers. So they moved back to Alva, to Kollege Kamp, a prisoner-of-war camp during the war years, which became their home until graduation. There followed thirty years of teaching and administration jobs, and the young M. C. was much impressed by his dad's ability to handle problems and his interest in both students and adults.

M. C. was born October 17, 1942 while his dad was in the Navy and started to school at the college training center while his parents worked on their degrees. He graduated from the Lookeba-Sickles High School in Caddo County in 1961 as Valedictorian of his class. He married a classmate, Glenda Tucker. They moved to Stillwater where he attended OSU for a year before transferring to Panhandle State, where he received his degree in 1965.

He taught, coached, and served as principal at the Liberty-Morris School from 1966 - 1968 and then on to the Mounds, Oklahoma school for a year. He then took a job at Tulsa with the Office of Economic Opportunity for four years before being transferred to Muskogee for several years. He then decided to become a teacher and coach once again and took a job with the Boynton School System for four years. By 1986, Liest was getting interested in politics; he entered the District 16 Representative race as a Democrat against four opponents and won.

Some of M. C.'s accomplishments through the years have been the planning and arranging of funding for Senior Citizen Centers, nutrition projects, transportation programs, and also grant applications for funding of parks, playgrounds, water, sewer, and rural developments. He directed the Tulsa Headstart program for a time. In addition to all those activities, he has a farm where he raises cattle and horses as well as crops such as soybeans.

He has been author or co-author of several bills while a representative. Some of them are House Bill 1223, which amends an act relating to crimes and punishment and relates to penalties for offenses relating to prostitution — requiring certain tests after conviction, providing penalties and an effective date; House bill 1212, which provides for a standard screening test for antibodies to the human T-Lymphotropic Virus Type III besides the regular screening test before acquiring a marriage license —providing rules and controls for screening; House Bill 1819, which relates to public health and safety restricting the transportation of solid waste except with certain approval; and House Bill 430, which concerns certain motor vehicle titles and registrations, their fees, and penalties.

M. C. and Glenda are very proud of their three children — Benita, a medical technologist; Donna, a teacher; and Brion, who works for Ocean Petroleum. They also have three grandchildren — Tiffany Liest and Jessica Renee and James Matthew Casselman. ■

M. C. Leist's swearing-in ceremony at the Capital, 1986.

IMOGENE BARGER lives on the family farm near Lookeba. She is mother of four children, eight grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. In addition to her writing for WESTVIEW, she writes an occasional human-interest story for the HINTON RECORD. She spends most of her spare time researching local and family history.

Varied Life

Lawyer — Outlaw — Politician — Author — Actor — Chicken farmer

THE ENGAGING LIFE OF AL JENNINGS

By Gwen Jackson

He boasted that train robbers were more honest than the Democratic establishment.

In the late 1800's, families surged into Oklahoma Territory from all walks of life looking for free land and new beginnings. J. D. F. Jennings, a physician, Methodist minister, and attorney, infiltrated his family into this unsettled area and served as probate judge in Pottawatomie County. He taught his sons —Ed, Al, and John — enough about law to pass bar examinations.

Al Jennings' political career began in 1892 when he was elected to the office of Canadian County attorney. He ran for re-election in 1894, but he was defeated. He then moved to Woodward to enter legal partnership with his brothers Ed and John. John and Al rode the circuit of Western Oklahoma courts defending ranchers in land disputes and taking various clientele.

On October 8, 1895, Temple Houston, spirited Woodward lawyer and youngest son of General Sam Houston, appeared in court representing Santa Fe Railroad against Jennings brothers' clients accused of stealing a keg of beer. A heated argument erupted in the courtroom and guns were drawn. Officers quickly restrained the men. The attorneys apologized to each other, but tempers boiled beneath the surface. That night, Houston and a close friend, ex-sheriff Jack Love, entered Garvey's Cabinet Saloon. Shortly, John and Ed Jennings appeared and the courtroom quarrel resumed. According to an account in THE DAILY OKLAHOMAN, the lights were shot out. When light was restored, Ed Jennings lay dying from a gunshot wound in the head. John Jennings fled, clutching a seriously wounded arm. Houston and Love were unharmed.

People in Woodward supported Houston and Love. Their defense lawyer suggested in court that John Jennings had accidentally killed his brother, Ed. Houston and Love were acquitted; the jury ruled self-defense. Al Jennings left the courtroom cursing the court decision and swearing revenge.

The topsy-turvy events in Woodward prompted Al to abandon the law practice. Younger brother Frank, who is said to have been a card dealer in a Woodward saloon, joined Al to organize a gang. In a whirlwind of lawlessness, they sought to avenge the injustice bestowed upon the Jennings brothers.

On August 16, 1897, the robbery of a Santa Fe train outside Edmond failed, and the express car messenger recognized the Jennings brothers' voices. A train robbery near Muskogee and train depot robbery at Purcell also failed.

Ben Tilgham, deputy U.S. marshall, heard that the Jennings gang planned to rob the Minco bank. He wired C. B. Campbell, president of the bank. Campbell organized area cattlemen to protect the bank day and night. When gang member Pat O'Malley went into Minco, he saw that the robbery would not be practical.

On october 1, 1897, Morris and Pat O'Malley, Al, Frank, and Dick West, stopped a Rock Island train north of Pocasset. There was supposed to be $100,000 being sent to Ft. Worth, but the express car messenger couldn't open it. The gang tried dynamite but blew the side out of the train without opening the safe. Hungry and desperate, the gang lined up passengers and took about $300, watches, and other valuables.

In December, after considerable trailing by U.S. deputy marshall James Ledbetter and several posses, the Al Jennings gang was captured. Four indictments were filed in U.S. Court in Indian Territory, Southern District, at Chickasha. There were two counts of robbery, shooting into a railroad train, and robbery of U.S. mail.

The gang was held in the old jail that is now located in Shannon Springs Park. According to the CHICKASHA EXPRESS, there was a ten-foot-high stockade around the jail. Federal guards patrolled the area, and prisoners were chained together with leg bands.

A. C. Cruse of Duncan defended Al, free of charge as a gesture of love for Al's father and mother. Al was tried and found guilty of robbing U.S. mail. His sentence was imprisonment in the Ohio Penitentiary for the "rest of his natural life."

In October, 1899, the other three indictments were dismissed against the Jennings gang, and they were never punished.

In 1900, Al Jennings' sentence was reduced to five years, less good behavior; and two years later, President Theodore Roosevelt gave him full pardon.

Al returned to Oklahoma to practice law in Duncan and Lawton. Mary Bailey remembers Al visiting her father, Judge Bailey, in their Chickasha home. Mary says her sister Frances nearly fell off their divan when she learned that the man seated next to her was Al Jennings, the outlaw.

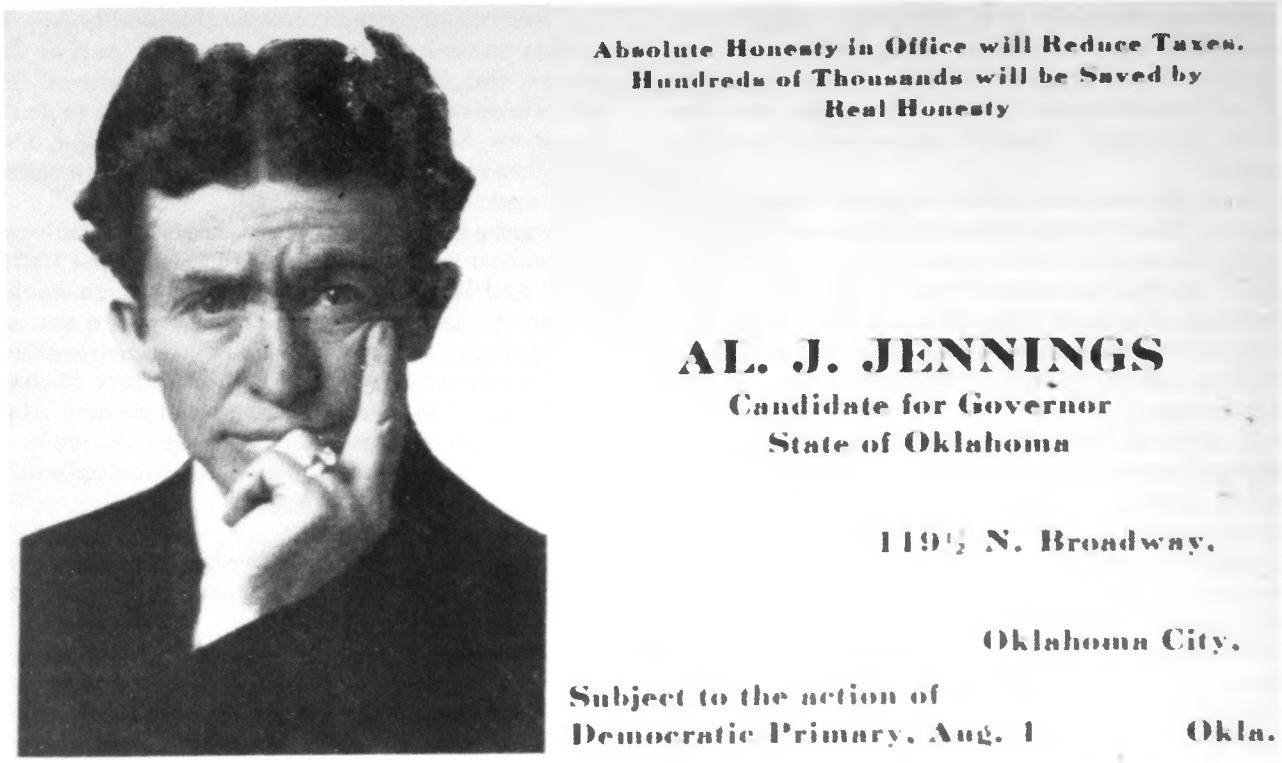
Once Al and his former defense attorney, A. C. Cruse, teamed on a case against a lawyer Al had robbed of ninety cents during the Pocasset robbery.

On January 6, 1904, Al married Maud Elizabeth Deaton, who lived in Lawton. A family newspaper clipping indicated that Maud was from Iowa and "nationally known on Chautauqua circuits."

In 1911, Al moved to Oklahoma City and ran for county attorney. He won the Democratic nomination but lost the general election.

Shortly afterward, Jennings wrote BEATING BACK, his autobiography. It told of his start in outlawry, his life in prison, and his comeback after release. This romantically written account was published in the SATURDAY EVENING POST in seven installments — from September to November of 1913. It contained eight Charles M. Russell illustrations.

In 1914, Al staged an aggressive campaign for Governor of Oklahoma. His campaign card stressed commitment to honesty. In the middle of campaign efforts, Al traveled to New Jersey to star in the movie about his life called BEATING BACK. When he returned to campaigning, he boasted that train robbers were more honest than the Democratic establishment. Voters and political leaders liked Al's rebellious nature. Final balloting was so close that results were in doubt for two days. He carried Oklahoma, Logan, and Stephens counties. His total vote of 21,732 was third in running.



Looking for a chance to begin again, Al and Maud moved to California. He worked as a movie advisor on correct handling of sixshooters. He retired to a peaceful life on a chicken ranch.

In 1951, Dan Duryea starred in the movie AL JENNINGS OF OKLAHOMA. According to the CHICKASHA EXPRESS, Al said that the picture was a disgrace. He also laughed at television Westerns, claiming the villains were ridiculous.

In later years, Frank Decker asked Al how it felt to be a bandit. Al reminiscently replied, "One feels as if he is isolated from the whole world and acts from that standpoint. Man in that business becomes accustomed to the hardships of it and gets to believing in his business as others who are skinning the public, but in a different and more legal manner. All fear and regard for human life leaves him, and he goes as a soldier to battle invulnerable to its danger, disaster, and death."

Several newspaper accounts state that Al Jennings shot his last man when he was ninety years old. A reporter came to the Jennings home for a fast-draw demonstration, and Al accidentally wounded him.

After such a life of varied experiences, Alphonso J. Jennings died in his San Fernando Valley home on December 26, 1961, at the age of 98. His death certificate listed him as a self-employed guest speaker. □

GWEN JACKSON, formerly of Port and now of Amber, has been teaching on the Elementary level for twenty-five years. She is an older sister of Pat Kourt, another WESTVIEW writer.

The Trouble In Shilo Springs

By Lu Spurlock

I was in Lora Anne's laundry room that afternoon last January when some of the trouble in Shilo Springs busted loose. Lora Anne had given me her back door key so's I could sort clothes for the church rummage sale while she was out of town.

When the doorbell rang, I thought I was by myself. I was goin' to see who was at the door when I saw Eugene, that sorry husband of Lora Anne's, in the front hall. 'Stead of goin' to the door, I walked into the kitchen.

"Old Buddy, come in this house. It's good to see you," I heard Eugene say.

I peeped out and saw Eugene shakin' hands with a spindly gray-haird man named Johnson who looked mighty impatient.

"You said it was important," Johnson said.

"It is. Very." Eugene shoved the door shut. "Come on back. We'll talk over a can of beer. Or maybe you'd rather have Scotch?"

"Beer would be fine, but I don't want anything to drink."

I could hear Johnson and Eugene comin' toward the kitchen so I stepped back to the laundry room, but I left the door to the kitchen open.

"Throw that overcoat on a chair and sit down, Old Buddy."

Frowning, Johnson sat on a straight chair by the table. "I'll keep my coat on. I told you on the phone I have another appointment. I don't have much time."

Eugene took two cans of beer from the refrigerator and handed one to Johnson. "This won't take much time. All you have to do is agree."

"Agree to what?"

"I've decided to run for City Council. I want you to be my campaign manager."

Johnson set his can of beer on the table and shoved it away from him. "Can't. Too busy with the new branch office. And you know I hate politics."

"You shouldn't. You're a citizen of Shilo Springs, too."

"I think the present City Council is doing a good job."

"That's because you don't know what's going on."

If I was a bettin' woman, I'd'a bet Eugene was thinkin' about Johnson's blonde wife when he said that, but I stayed quiet watchin' and listenin'.

"They aren't enforcing half the city ordinances and I believe they're misusing the hotel tax fund," Eugene said.

Johnson shifted in his chair, and I could tell he was wantin' to get away. I stood not fifteen feet from him with a washed-out purple blouse in my hand waitin' to see what was goin' to happen next.

Johnson squirmed a little. "I don't like to see tax money wasted, but I don't want to get involved. I have a big investment in the new branch and a sales organizaiton to run."

"That's why I want you." Eugene flashed that toothy smile he seems to think's so winnin'. "Running a political campaign is selling. You just sell a person instead of merchandise."

I was goin' to see who was at the door when I saw Eugene, that sorry husband of Lora Anne's, in the front hall.

Johnson shook his head so's his hair kinda bushed out. "No, you'll have to get someone else." He stood up.

Eugene got all red in the face. "Think about the business I've thrown you. I gave it. I can take it away." Eugene stood at least a head higher'n Johnson, and his voice sounded smart-alecky. "I don't want to, Buddy. But you do owe me a favor."

"I know." Johnson slumped in a chair and hunkered his shoulders. Then he looked at Eugene real straight. "I hear city politics are dirty. Are you afraid of dirt?"

"No way. I have a good record on the Zoning and Planning Commission."

There's nothing in your personal life they can use against you?"

I didn't sort no more clothes because I was afeared they'd hear me, but I come close to snortin' when Eugene said, "No, not a thing." Everybody in town must'a heard about Eugene and Johnson's wife

meetin' at the Mayflower Motel.

With one of those resigned expressions that made his face look gray as his hair, Johnson stood up. "All right," he said, "I'll be your campaign manager."

"Thanks." Eugene pumped Johnson's hand. "You won't be sorry."

"I doubt it." He turned away, took a couple of steps, then stopped and stared at Eugene. "You do have at least one qualification of a politician. You lie well."

Eugene's face got beet red. "I resent that. What do you mean?"

Johnson didn't say anything, just backed up a little and his right hand moved down near his overcoat pocket. For the first time I noticed the bulge. Slowly, he pulled out a blue pistol and pointed it toward Eugene.

face. He wasn't the only one scared. I gripped that purple blouse like it was all in the world I had to hold on to.

"You're crazy," Eugene said.

"No." Johnson's voice was so quiet I had to strain to hear. "I'm not crazy." He cocked the gun. "Not crazy at all. I do hate politics, but I do appreciate your inviting me to your house. I've waited for this opportunity for a long time."

"I don't understand."

"By now you should."

I could see Eugene cowerin'. "Don't do anything foolish, man. Please."

"I'm not." A twisted smile touched Johnson's lips. "I planned this well."

Eugene was lookin' at that pistol like it was a

"I'm not crazy." He cocked the gun. "Not crazy at all."

Suckin' in my breath, I wished I was any place else. Eugene yelled one of those words I don't mind readin' but I don't say out loud.

I knew I couldn't get out the back door without Johnson hearin' me, so I ducked behind the ironin' board. Come close to knockin' it over. They didn't seem to notice. I eased the laundry room door shut most of the way, but I left a crack to peep through. Johnson's finger was curled around the trigger, and he pointed that gun right at Eugene's chest.

Eugene gulped a whole heap of air. "What're you doing with that?"

"You called in an IOU. Now, I'm calling one in."

"I don't know what you mean. I don't owe you anything."

Johnson seemed to grow tall. "You're sure about that?"

"You bet!" Eugene made a flyin' leap at Johnson, but he stepped sideways and Eugene fell flat.

"Get up." Johnson's voice sounded mean.

Eugene stumbled to his feet, sweat rainin' down his rattlesnake coiled ready to strike.

Johnson took a slow, careful aim. When he squeezed the trigger, that gun popped big as a giant firecracker.

Eugene grabbed his foot and whirled around like a turkey buzzard with its head chopped off 'til he fell backward onto a chair.

Johnson aimed higher and I craned my neck to see what else he was goin' to do. When I saw where he was pointin' the gun, if I hadn't been scared I'da laughed out loud.

"No!" Eugene's squeak coulda' passed for one of those wild hyenas. "You wouldn't!"

"You're right, I wouldn't. Not this time."

"What — what're you going to do?"

"Nothing, but you are. You're going to call the hospital. Tell them to send an ambulance. You had an accident while cleaning your pistol."

I could see Eugene wasn't payin' no attention to the blood drippin' on Lora's good kichen carpet.

Johnson tossed a card on the table. "That's the hospital's number."

Eugene clutched the card and looked like he was tryin' to focus his eyes on it.

Johnson walked toward the door. "That scratch won't keep you from running for office. But, Old Buddy, it better keep you from running after my wife."

Eugene didn't say nothin' at all.

When I heard the front door close behind Johnson, I walked out into the kitchen. Eugene's face was whiter'n fireplace ashes.

"What're you doing here?"

"Just helpin' out," I said. You want me to get the ambulance?"

"No!" Eugene looked worse'n he did when Johnson pointed the pistol at him. "Get out of here! Now!"

"I'm not in no rush."

He glared at me like he wanted to wring my neck, but I went ahead and called for the ambulance. Then I told him if he'd stop tomcattin' around I wouldn't say nothin' to nobody.

He didn't make no promises, and he didn't thank me for stayin' and openin' the front door when the ambulance got there, but ever since that January it appears Eugene has been a good husband to my sister and a fine, upstandin' politician. 'Course, from time to time, he limps a little. ■

LU SPURLOCK of Bedford, Texas enjoys writing both poetry and prose. She's an award-winning writer in the Texas Bunch and the OWFI.

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Pacts And Schemes

By June A. Hale

I can tell you about Oklahoma county commissioners from way back — from way, way back to the early thirties. At least I can tell you about one of them; and I guess enough time has passed now that it won't hurt to tell. Since the recent scandals, some folks now clal the county commissioners "devils." Back then, one county commissioner admitted that he was a devil; and although I was only eight years old at the time, I was responsible for some of his devilment. The commissioner has long since taken his part of the shame to the grave, and it's time I confessed my part.

My family got hooked up with the county commissioner because Mama knew everybody in town, not only by name, but by history too. She and Daddy had moved to Prairieville when it was mostly a tent city, not long after Oklahoma became a state. Daddy built our house, helped to build the town, and then he died. But Mama knew all the folks in town and half the people in the county. She was the first choice of the rich folks when they needed housecleaning help or other day work. Not only was she a hard worker, but she was also conversant on any subject. . .with the rich and the poor. She walked miles every day getting day work or selling Avon. Yes, women sold Avon even back in those deep depression days; and all those wonderful folks bought from Mama whenever they could afford such luxuries. Mama loved to talk to folks, and there was something about her that made people want to follow her advice.

So it's little wonder that Mama got into politics — no, not running for office, but helping people who did run for office. They hired her during elections to campaign for them. The first politician Mama campaigned for was the county commissioner named E. M. Dickman. She walked from door-to-door all over town from Silk Stocking Showcase to Happy Hollow, convincing nearly EVERYONE — to vote for "Old E. M." she was such a convincing campaigner that Old E. M. got her help to put "his" men in the other offices. Each year there were more men that E. M. supported so they would support him; and Mama helped him deliver the goods — or at least to deliver the votes.

But mama knew all the folks in town and half the people in the county.

The money Mama earned during election time surely beat her income from day work and Avon sales. In a good year, there might be even enough left at Christmastime for a toy or two for us youngest children. But every cent came out of the candidates' pockets. Nothing came from the county office funds. The closest we came to getting anything from the county was from Jim Hale — no relation to us. Jim ran the commissioner's county garage, and he welded the cocking lever on a broken BB gun I had been given. . .and which I kept breaking. In fact, he welded my wagon and whatever other used and broken toys I was able to scrounge.

But please bear with me while I tell the whole story. Our house, which Daddy had built, had not only patched screens and needed paint, but the roof was leaking badly that year when I was eight. During a rain one day, as Mama and I placed pans under the leaks, I complained that we were getting more and more leaks. Mama acknowledged my complaints, saying, "If there are enough men running for office next election, maybe I can earn enough money to get a new roof. Maybe we could even get the house painted."

Not only was I irked at chasing leaks with pans, but I was also beginning to feel ashamed of our rundown house. I asked how much a roof would cost. Mama always had an answer for my questions; and she said without a thought, "Oh — a hundred dollars." Probably a hundred dollars would have bought a new roof in those days, but it may as well have been a million dollars. We did well to buy food. We got by on Mama's electioneering, day work, Avon sales, and by utilizing a big garden and chickens. We often had meager meals — but we never went without a meal. Many of our friends, especially those in Happy Hollow, weren't so fortunate in those days before Welfare or the Work Projects Administration.

Mama had taught me that God always answers prayers; though I never told her, I prayed that God would somehow let me find a hundred dollars someplace for a new roof and that He would let Mama get enough money next election to paint our house. You see, I had prayed before (also then unknown to Mama) for a pair of "engineer's boots." Engineer's boots were a fad then with the rich kids whose folks could afford them. After I prayed for boots, one day —out of the blue — Mrs. Brasier had given me a pair of engineer's boots that one of her boys, Frank or Gene, had outgrown. God had answered my prayer. The boots were used, badly worn; but God had answered my prayer. So I just knew He would help me some way to get a new roof on our house. I prayed that since the boots He had given me were used, surely He would give us a brand new roof.

As I walked to and from school each day, I looked in every ditch, every culvert, to see if there weren't an old suitcase, an old wallet, box, or can with a hundred dollars inside to buy a new roof.

Mama had taught me that God always answers prayers.

Well, the next spring we had gone to bed one night when a storm came up. We got up and set pans under the drips throughout the house. Then the wind began to blow, and it started lightning and thundering. Suddenly, it began hailing ... hard! The pans filled before we could empty them.

The hail found a window screen weak from age and rust and broke the window, spewing the glass across the room. Mama grabbed a quilt, and I helped her hang it over the open window to help keep out some of the hail and rain. During the lightning flashes, we could see shingles from the roof flying through the air. The pots and pans ran over as new leaks spewed water all over the rooms of our house. As the hail beat the shingles and the wind blew the shingles away, the rain poured in everywhere. Mama made a makeshift tent to cover one bed. Everything else in our house was completely soaked but the one bed, a few clothes, and some of the food we had managed to cover.

Finally the rain and hail stopped, and we went back to bed and to sleep. At least I slept; I don't know whether or not Mama slept. I doubt it. When we got up in the morning, she made biscuits with the flour she had managed to keep dry; and after breakfast, she sent me off to school as usual. As I walked to school, I looked back at our house and saw large, gaping holes all over the roof, more shingles on the ground than left on the roof. Hail was piled in drifts like snow. All the houses in town except those with the newest roofs were damaged. I was too stunned to look for old boxes or wallets stuffed with a hundred dollars as I walked to school that day.

When I came home after school, Mama was sitting in front of the heating stove crying. She hadn't moved from the front of the stove all day. When she turned to me as I came in, she discovered that her shins were badly burned from sitting near the stove all day. She had just sat there crying, not realizing that her legs were gradually burning, deeper than a severe sunburn.

I got some salve from the pantry and helped Mama put it on her shins. She tossled my hair and said, "Son, I have failed you children and failed God." When I asked how that could be, she explained, "After your daddy died, I made a pact with God. I told Him I wouldn't complain about my lot in life if He would just allow me to always have food for you children and soap to keep you and your clothes clean. I took too much for granted and must have thought this house your daddy built would last forever. God allowed the roof to be blown off to show me how presumptuous I was."

I asked, "Mama, what is 'presumshus'?"

"Presumptuous," Mama said, "is being overly confident. I was too sure of myself."

Then I began to cry, "No, Mama, no! It's not your fault. It's MY fault. It's my fault."

I explained about my prayers for the engineer's boots and for a new roof. Then I said, "I wasn't happy with the boots that were used boots, so I wanted a brand new roof. God allowed us to lose the roof because I was presumshus."

Mama hugged me harder than I ever remember being hugged. "No, it's not your fault," she said. "It's not the fault of either of us! It will be all right some way."

"How can we keep dry?" I asked.

"There will be a way somehow," Mama answered. "We have come too far now for there not to be a way."

And there was a way. We set about cleaning and drying things out the next few days, even though we had no idea how we would keep them dry. Mama said we were acting in faith. When I asked what faith was, she said it was "putting feet to prayer."

"Putting feet to prayer!" Just then I realized that I would never find a hundred dollars for the roof. I began to think about how I could put my feet to prayer besides just cleanig and druing things out. My thoughts turned to plans, and my plans turned to schemes: devious schemes. Oh, Mama would never approve of schemes, and my best scheme was the worst.

"I took too much for granted and must have thought this house your daddy built would last forever."

That very day, I broke my BB gun again — purposefully broke it, to tell you the truth — and I took it to Jim Hale at the commissioner's garage to weld. As I figured, Jim asked how our house fared in the storm. And I told him, told him all about it — how bad it really was.

Then I acted like an eight-year-old philosopher and said, "Isn't it funny how things are? Jim, you are probably the smartest man in town. No one else is smart enough to weld toys like you can. But you aren't the richest man in town. You're the smartest but not the richest. Now, just think about my mother: she's the best 'lection campaigner there is. If it wasn't for her campaigning, Mr. Dickman wouldn't be your boss. In fact, she could probably campaign just about anyone she wanted to into the commissioner's job. But here she can't even buy a new roof."

Jim responded, "If I'm so smart, why can't I weld this cocking lever on your gun without it breaking?" My heart sank. Jim finished welding the lever, cooled it off, and put it back on the gun. As he handed it back to me, he said, "Maybe I AM smart enough to weld this lever so you won't have to break it again."

Hot dog! "Won't have to break it," Jim had said. He knew I had broken it on purpose. But I knew we'd have a new roof as well if Jim had signed a contract for the commissioner. "Won't HAVE to break it," he'd said. There's something conniving people recognize in each other without saying it outright. How gleeful I felt to share an unspoken plot with such an honest con-man as Jim, knowing full well he would persuade the commissioner.

As I walked home, I popped old cans in ditches with my BB gun and just couldn't miss. Never looked at one to see whether it had a hundred dollars in it.

I had traded faith for scheming, and I was proud — so proud (can you imagine?) to share the surname of such a crafty, artful, wiley person as Jim Hale.

The next day a truck with the County Commissioner's insignia on its doors backed up into our yard. The driver unloaded some roll roofing, some nails, and some tar for sealing the seams. The whole thing was a surprise to Mama. She never did find out that I had talked to Jim. The driver said nothing to Mama but "It's your'n. Hope you can fin' some way to put it on." And then he drove off.

Mama did find some way to put it on; or rather, the way found her. A dozen or so men from all parts of town gathered at our house on Saturday morning. Had the roofing job nearly half done by noon. they seemed to have a great time, kidding and joking while they worked. Mama killed a couple or so chickens and opened some jars of blackberries she had canned and made a big cobbler. What a sumptuous dinner we had for all the men. The roof was finished before evening.

A few days later, Commissioner E. M. Dickman drove up in his car and came to the door. Mama started to invite him in, and then she said, "No, let's first look at the new roof God put on our house — and then we'll go in."

Old E. M. responded, "Why, it does look fine! Not as pretty as shingles, maybe; but looks like it won't leak. But Mrs. Hale, someone told me that it wasn't God that put that roof on. I was told that a number of men around town did it."

"Yes, Mr. Dickman," Mama said. "Some good men did come and put it on, but God gave it to me so they could put it on."

"God gave it to you? Why, the truck that brought the roofing rolls out here had my insignia on the doors. Or hadn't you noticed?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Dickman," Mama said. "I noticed. and thank you. But I still say that God gave me the roof. I always say that every good and perfect gift comes from God — even if He does have the Devil deliver it."

Old E. M.'s mouth gaped open, and he cocked his head. When he caught his breath, he pulled his ear lobe, smiling — and said, "Well, this old Devil really came by to see if you would help me campaign in the election that's coming up."

Mama returned Mr. Dickman's smile and said, "I don't work for the Devil, Sir. But if the money is as good as it was last election, you'll be an angel. And I'll be glad to campaign for you."

Now of course, if I had that time to live over again, I'd...why I'd still lead old E. M. astray. ■

JUNE HALE, who has written about his native state Oklahoma for a number of years, makes his second appearance in WESTVIEW in this issue. A resident of Bethany, he is Programs Assistant in the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, Visual Services. In his spare time, he's a long-distance bicyclist.

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BALLAD OF A COUNTY SEAT

By Pat Kourt

Politics causes decline, or it increases fame.
It can build towns' budgets. . .or mar a good name.

In east Washita County, folks think of an early day
When those on the west side wanted politics THEIR way.

The county seat was a prize that many sought to win;
A series of court battles didn't bring it to an end.

Appeal to block the vote was the county attorney's goal.
But his son delayed the papers (the way the story's told).

The injunction filed in federal court was just a bit too late,
So citizens of Cloud Chief decided the young man's fate.

He was tarred, feathered, and "rode" out on a rail,
With his embarrassed father close upon his trail.

After some delay, a vote proved Cordell had won.
Some claimed, though, an illegal act had been done!

Resists of seat removal occurred now and then;
Finally, with more struggle, the move was settled again.

Or so everyone thought.

In nineteen hundred and four, Congress had its first say —
"We think supporting Cloud Chief is the only right way."

As the case was reopened, townspeople felt just great;
The courthouse was theirs as the law seemed to relate!

But a long trip to Washington by three concerned men
Got a special bill passed to give Cordell the win!

The precious bill was copied and displayed to be shared
As proof of a victory to those who had cared.

In nineteen hundred and nine, the frame courthouse burned;
The bill signed by Roosevelt was gone — it was learned.

Thus ended the skirmishings for one county seat.
One site is now a ghost town; the other is complete.

Politics causes decline, or it increases fame.
It can build towns' budgets. . .or mar a good name. ■

PAT KOURT supervises the library and teaches Creative Writing at Thomas High School. She has been a loyal WESTVIEW supporter since 1981, the first year of publication.

A NAME IS A NAME

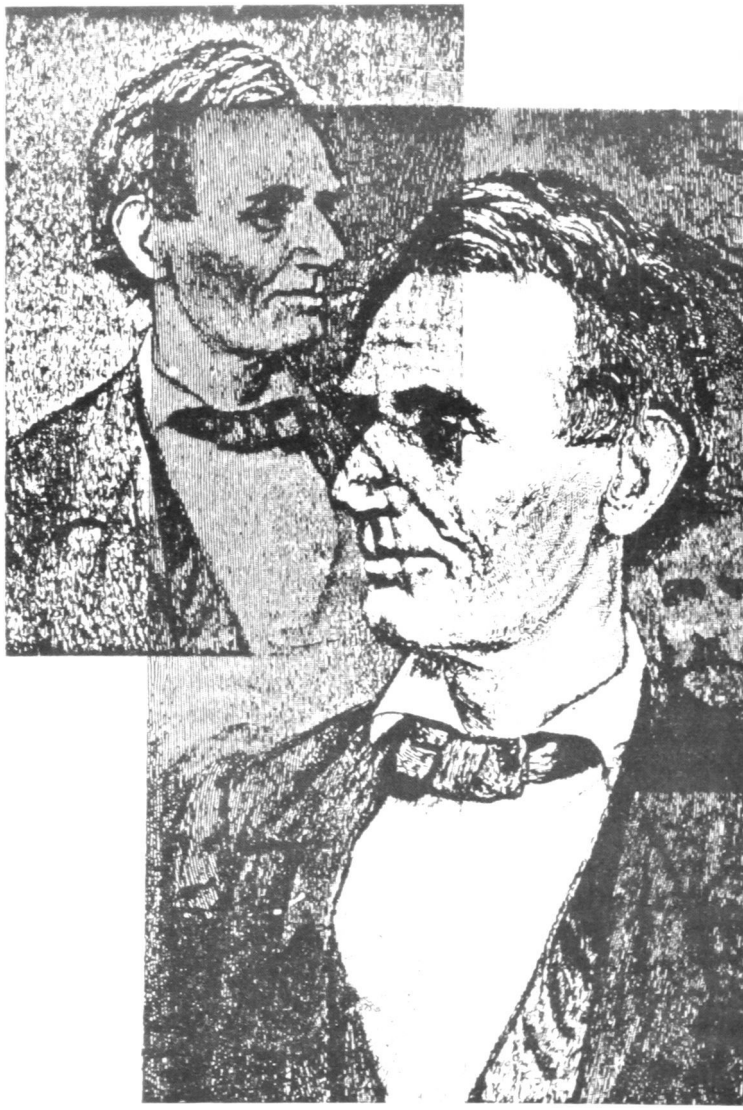
By Aaron A. Baker

In some ways Al Lincoln really looked
a little like the "A. Lincoln"
of the history books. He was tall, lanky,
with an angular face —
and wore black, though he didn't have
a top hat, and his boots — which
I shined at Pop's Barber Shop — were black
cowboy with high heels. You see,
Al was running for district attorney as
"A. Lincoln," though everybody
knew he wasn't our sixteenth president who had
been dead all these years, but
the identification caught on because there
was a "Jefferson Davis," another
shirt-tail lawyer running for the same office
down in Jackson County.

This political race drew some attention before
it was over, and even made outside
newspapers like CAPPER'S WEEKLY and the DAILY
OKLAHOMAN. Old Jeff Davis — as his
friends called him — could out-talk Lincoln,
my father said, though he didn't have
the droll sense of humor. Anyway, Davis beat
out Lincoln at the polls because, as my
father said again, there were a lot
of Texans who settled around Blair and Altus
who probably descended from
Confederates.

In later years, as everyone knows, other
politicians ran for office in Oklahoma
with names like U. S. Grant or Jack Dempsey or
Will Rogers, but usually
didn't last but a term or two — until the
novelty wore off or something,
which led my father, a school teacher, to remark
in Pop's Barber Shop that the practice
of running for office under somebody's famous
name was not something that should
be complacently contemplated, to which Al Lincoln —
looking up from my boot-shining — made
the comment, "The whole business calls for a
continuation with forceful anticipation."

I remember someone laughed, then others joined in,
for not wishing to be thought ignorant
of big words quoted in such a public place. ■



AARON BAKER, now living at Burns Flat, is a retired teacher and former newspaper editor and columnist. He is a "buff" of local human-interest historical stories and is presently working on a book of poetry titled SOMETHING WILL COME TO YOU, to be published this fall.

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Western Oklahoma Politicians

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

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