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## Mary Bailey: Chickasha Historian

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*sharing of memories*

# Mary Bailey Chickasha Historian

By Gwen Jackson

A van of Boy Scouts, a living room full of girls with tape recorders, Grady County Genealogical Society members, and countless others are excited to hear Mary Bailey share her memories. Mary, who retired from Chickasha Schools after forty years, is a living library of local history. She has a one-hundred-year-old map of Oklahoma and Indian territories, a 1907 handkerchief that bears the words "Chickasha for single statehood--10,000 strong," pictures by Indian artists, and numerous souvenirs to bring her memories to life.

Mary Bailey's grandfather came to Fort Sill after the Civil War. When Mary was doing some family genealogy, she learned that he was the first civilian buried in Arlington Cemetery.

Mary speaks of her mother as being a packrat. She loved to collect items, especially Indian pictures. Quanah Parker personally gave her mother his picture. Her picture of the Comanche Indian named Tabitie is Mrs. Fred Harris' grandfather. Mary loans a friend Indian pictures such as Tabitie to copy dolls for the Smithsonian. Last summer, Mary and her sister took most of their mother's picture collection to the Fort Sill Museum.

Mrs. Bailey was a little girl at Fort Sill when Geronimo was captured. Someone came to school and told everyone that Geronimo was in a cell. After school, the kids went to look at him through the cell window. Later, he lived across from the stockade. Before Geronimo died, he requested a visit to



*Quanah Parker*

*This is a copy of the picture Quanah Parker gave to Mary Bailey's mother.*

the 101 Ranch. Mary's mother got a picture of him dressed in a suit and a silk top hat.

Mr. Bailey was elected district judge at statehood, and he served on the Supreme Court. He traveled the Rock Island line from the Canadian River to the Red River to try cases. He tried the Al Jennings case and the Sherman Billingsly case. He was judge for J. D. Suggs, who was probably the richest man in Chickasha. After gall-bladder surgery, Suggs received his bill for \$10,000. Judge Bailey told Mr. Suggs to look again since the amount was exorbitant for the times. Suggs paid a doctor to come from Mayo Clinic and one from Johns Hopkins to testify how they charged for similar operations. Mr. Suggs won his case, and his hospital bill was reduced.

Before Oklahoma became a state, the territories had no laws or prisons. Mary has a letter that Governor Haskell sent to her father in 1915 indicating that the judges were to use the laws of Nebraska and take prisoners to Kansas until the state legislature could mandate laws.

Mary also remembers the early-day houses of Chickasha. She relates that one of the first houses in Chickasha was built by the Shannons. Mrs. Shannon was a Chickasaw Indian. Mr. Shannon was a cattleman. Until 1898, no one owned land because the Chickasaws still controlled it. By the Atoka Agreement in 1898, however, the Chickasaws gave up their land. For the first six years, people were hesitant to build much of a house because they didn't own the land they built on. For instance, they would put a one-room structure on one lot and another one-room on another lot. That was a hold down. When allotments were given in 1898, the Shannons had one at Shannon Springs. Their house was in the location the nursing home stands today.

Shannon Springs was a watering place on the Chisholm Trail. Mary has been told that the first religious event, a camp meeting, in the Chickasha area was held at Shannon Springs.

The three-story house in which Mary lives today was built in 1902. Her father bought it from the owner of the street car company. From the first, the house had central heat fueled by coal;



*Tabite*

*Mrs. Fred Harris' grandfather*

in fact, the vents and coal bin are in their original places.

Mary relates that Mr. Darlington got a franchise to start the street car company in Chickasha. She remembers two tracks in the middle of Chickasha Avenue and a street car barn between 18th and 19th streets. The tracks made a loop around the college to Montana Street. It went to Shannon Springs, around Rose Hill Cemetery, and back downtown. There were an enclosed car for winter and an open car for summer. The cost for the loop ride was five cents.

Mary likes to tell about Will Rogers visiting Ben Johnson, his roommate at Kemper Military Academy, who lived across the street from the Baileys.

She says that Rogers wasn't as dumb as he looked. Once when he came to speak at the college, he walked in and his hair was combed. Before he went on stage, he brushed his hair down onto his forehead. His opening was, "So this is the school that serves roast beef on Sunday, soup on Monday made from the leftovers of Sunday, string beans on Tuesday, and ice cream on Wednesday." The dietitian had just posted the menu, and she scooted lower and lower in her seat. The menu was changed the next day.

During the Great Depression, Judge Bailey supported three college students although times were difficult. Mary remembers seeing the kitchen table piled with land abstracts, which her father did for five dollars each. She says that most lawyers today wouldn't look at an abstract for less than \$150.

Early forms of entertainment for Mary's family included a croquet set in the front yard and a dirt tennis court on the back lot. A dirt roller from the high school kept the ground smooth.

Mary remembers going to the train depot to watch for the Firefly. It stopped at six o'clock so passengers could eat at the Geronimo Hotel across the street. This Harvey House was decorated with chandeliers made of three crossed arrows and a tom-tom in the middle. It was decorated with shields, baskets, pictures, and other Indian motifs. During the Depression days, the railroads didn't have much business. In 1936, the Geronimo Hotel was torn down. Today, its pictures are

in the Oklahoma National Bank and the First National Bank.

Mary's latest project has been to help Chickasha's Antique Car Club write a proposal to secure the old train depot as a museum site in order to help preserve memories through antique cars.

Mary Bailey's stories are many. She says that she has lived and heard so much that it's hard to know what she has actually seen, but she's always ready to share her memories. ■

*GWEN JACKSON, with this historical article, makes her second appearance in WESTVIEW. She's a history buff who enjoys the type of research required for an article such as this one on Mary Bailey.*



Mary Bailey — Chickasha Historian.

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