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# Go West, Young Town Go West



producer of much talent in diverse areas

By Dr. Dale Teeters

Many people in the pioneer days headed west to make their fame and fortune. The saying "Go west, young man, go west" was the motto of a great number of the settlers of Western Oklahoma who obtained their land by mad dashes in the various land runs just before the turn of the century. These settlers founded small communities throughout Western Oklahoma. One small community of settlers especially demonstrated this can-do spirit, this willingness to move and re-settle in hopes of a better life. This town literally picked up its stores and homes and moved west for what it saw as an opportunity for a better future. Today this community called Fay is a small town of approximately one hundred people located next to State Highway 33 in the southeastern corner of Dewey County. Before 1900, circumstances were much different, however. . .

On April 19, 1892, twenty-five thousand settlers rushed into what had been the Cheyenne and Arapaho lands in Western Oklahoma for a chance to obtain land that they could homestead and farm. Farmsteads were established overnight with as many as four families to every square mile. Along with these settlers came a need for mail service. Post offices dotting the Western prairies

every six or eight miles seemed the best way to provide a means of communication for everyone. The post offices were located in small communities, or in some instances communities sprang up around the isolated post offices. It is not certain how the small town located at the sandy, desolate intersection of Blaine, Dewey, and Custer counties came in to being. However, on April 19, 1894, exactly two years after the opening of the Cheyenne and Arapaho land, Leander Fiscos established a post office at this intersection and became the first postmaster. He named the post office *Fay* after his son *Fay Fiscos*.

Fay developed into a "typical" Western Oklahoma settlement. During its early years, it consisted of a general store, hardware store, blacksmith shop, sawmill, a few houses, and the post office. There was also a saloon, which oldtimers have described as a "lively place" with a dugout area beneath it used for gambling. An occasional fight was known to break out in this subterranean spot. One of the proprietors of the saloon, J. B. Sober, was known to run the establishment with a great amount of dignity even though the frequenters of his business thought that his last name was unusual for this line of work. The

mood of the saloon and the spirit of its clientele can best be described by the following pun, which was popular in the tavern:

Mr. Sober keeps a dram shop  
in the festive town of Fay;  
No matter how much he drinks,  
He is Sober every day.

There were a physician and a justice of the peace in residence who were no doubt needed on many occasions. In the center of the town, nearest the intersection of the three counties, was a hand-dug well used by the whole community. An issue of the THOMAS TRIBUNE of this era described the people of Fay as "progressive and wide-awake." Just how progressive was yet to be shown.

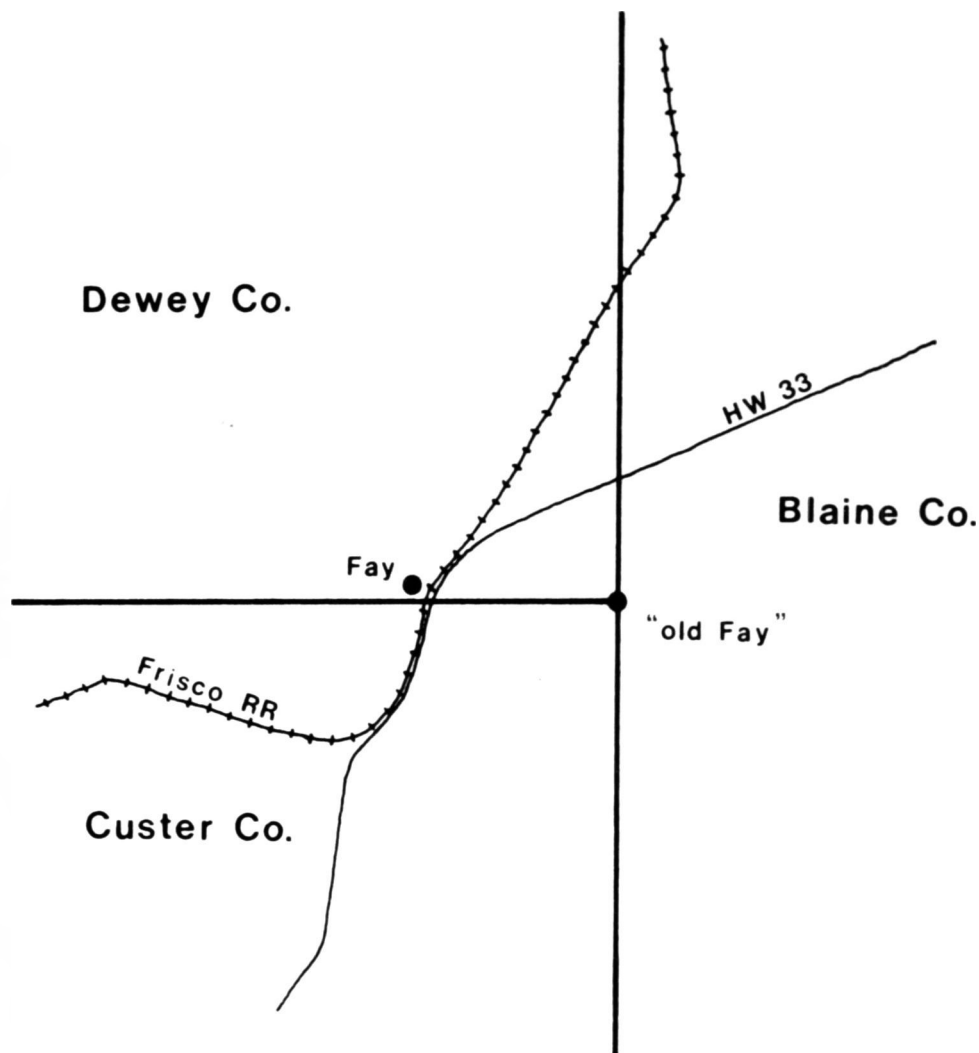
At the turn of the century, a railroad could be the lifeblood of any community. The nearest railroads to the westernmost part of the Oklahoma Territory were the Rock Island running through Enid, El Reno, and Chickasha, and the Waynoka Branch of the Santa Fe across the old counties of Woods and Woodward at the extreme northwest. The western part of the state of Oklahoma and Fay were without a railroad—but not for long, however. In 1901,

with backing from St. Louis financiers, a railroad, the Frisco, was started from Blackwell. It was to run almost due southwest to Enid and then to Arapaho. From Arapaho, it was to go almost due south to Vernon, Texas. The railroad would be laid in order to pass next to some of the larger towns, but the small town of Fay was not so lucky. The Frisco was to pass 1½ miles west of the town, taking advantage of a small valley to enter the flat river bottom next to the South Canadian River. The track would then cross the Canadian and go through Thomas as it made its way to Arapaho.

A town located next to a railroad would be posed for growth and prosperity. In that day of horse-and-wagon and rutted sandy dirt roads, a mile and a half was a long distance. it was such a long distance that the community of Fay decided to travel it only once. The whole town would move west! According to an old issue of the THOMAS TRIBUNE, "the inhabitants of Fay are watching the location of the new Frisco station with much interest. As soon as the side tracks are laid, the Fay business people and residents will move over to the railroad--in fact, they are ready to go now." The settler's spirit was still alive, so much so that it would be an entire town making the land run this time.

The Frisco line opened late in the year 1902. It is believed that Fay made its move in the summer and fall of 1903. The T-shaped house of J. B. Sober, the saloon proprietor, was moved on wagons one section at a time. As many as ten or twelve horses had to be used to pull the wagon supporting a section of the house. Other houses, the hardware building, and the post office were moved in a similar manner, but even ten or twelve horses wouldn't be enough to move the large general store. To move the store, the strongest mechanical device available to the residents at that time would have to be used--a stump-puller.

A stump-puller was designed to be anchored firmly in the ground next to a tree stump that was to be extracted. Its highly leveraged winch, when connected to a horse, could pull with a tremendous force, but only for a short distance. It would move the stump as far as its mechanical limits would allow and then be anchored again for another pull. The process would then be repeated until the stump was removed. The piece of equipment was not built to pull



■ A map showing the location of "old Fay" and the present town of Fay. ■


a large building over dirt roads for a mile and a half, but it would have to do. A group of men started the monumental task. The general store was placed on rollers, the stump-puller was anchored firmly in the ground, and the store was moved a short distance. The process was repeated over and over again until the "run" of the store to its new location next to the Frisco was completed several long, hard days later. The few people still alive who can remember this event say that the store remained open during the move even though no one can remember anything being sold. We can only imagine what a lone rider topping a nearby hill would have thought upon seeing a general store open for business lumbering across the barren Western Oklahoma prairies.

The move located Fay at the site it occupies today in Dewey County. As the residents hoped, being next to the railroad caused the town to thrive. By 1918, Fay had a population of 200; and in addition to the businesses that were in "old Fay," there were two sorghum mills, a real estate office, a drug store, a mercantile company, a telephone company, a veterinarian and livery, two grain elevators, a restaurant, telegraph agent, garage, a cotton gin, a school, a Christian church, and a Methodist church.

Today with the advent of paved roads and automobiles making travel very easy, this small community has experienced the same loss of business and population that many other small towns in Western Oklahoma have



Looking west from the location of "old Fay" one can see the sandy dirt road that was used to move the town. The slight jog in the road is where the intersection of Blaine, Dewey and Custer Counties occurs. Nothing remains of the old town of Fay today except for an old, long ago deserted farm house that is not shown in this photograph.

suffered. Even Western Oklahoma as a whole with the present downturn in the oil industry and agriculture is experiencing problems. However, the state is populated with the descendants of settlers that had the same desire and grit that the people of "old Fay" demonstrated. Today's "settlers" may not have to move a town, but they will do whatever is necessary to bring more prosperity to Western Oklahoma. 



Fay as it appears today. One grain elevator remains in Fay very close to the site of one of the original elevators.

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