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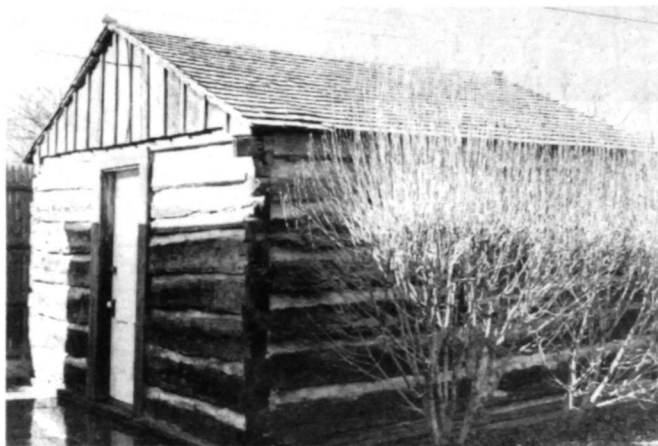
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## PUBLIC SERVANTS



The T. B. Ferguson home and museum, built in 1901, Watonga, Oklahoma.



U.S. Cavalry Way Station cabin, built near Watonga around 1870

*Pioneering that involved a variety of services*

# Watonga Museum Honors the T. B. Fergusons

By Opal H. Brown Garrity

Stately in looks and in history, the museum of Watonga stands a monument to the late Thompson B. and Elva Ferguson and pioneers of the Watonga area. The three-story white mansion with cupola, balcony, and balustrades was built in 1901 for the newspaper family who also served as sixth Oklahoma Territorial Governor and First Lady.

The downstairs, once used for entertaining, is filled with period furniture provided by people in the area. The second floor has bedrooms and a sitting room, where the Fergusons did much of their work. It was in the southeast bedroom that Edna Ferber, as guest of Mrs. Ferguson in 1927, began writing *CIMARRON*.

The third floor, once a guest room, is now used for the archives. Many old newspapers and magazines contain information by and about the Fergusons and other people of Blaine County.

A stockade fence at the back of the lots encloses the first Watonga jail, a log cabin, and a shed. The white, box-like jail was built in 1893. When a new jail was built years later, the original one was purchased and used as a shop. Doyle Pettis gave it to the city, which then restored it for the museum.

The structure is divided into the jailer's section and two cells. "Guests" of the cells left their fragmented mementoes on the walls. One has: "Wed. Apr. 18, 1894." One states: "10 days to go & \$2000 bond."

Other messages say: "Any man who occupies this cell is going to hell," "Hell hole," "God bless," and "Wilson Hotel." A caricature of two people probably represents the inmates.

The only indication of heat is a small, pot-bellied stove in the jailer's section, and the toilet is a hole in the floor with iron bars and board covers.

The cabin, built in 1870, in one of four, which surrounded the way station three miles west and three-fourths north of Watonga on the North Canadian River. It was ordered by Congress as part of a U.S. Cavalry post after the Northern Cheyennes in Nebraska and South Dakota were sent to the

area.

It was also a lodging place for Westward-bound emigrants. The shed, more recently constructed, covers old tools and vehicles.

Principal honoree, T.B. Ferguson, was a native of Iowa reared in Kansas and also married there to Elva Shartel. He made the run into the Unassigned Lands in 1889 and staked a claim near Oklahoma City. He settled in Watonga and with his wife established the *WATONGA REPUBLICAN*. It became one of the leading newspapers in Oklahoma Territory.

In 1897, President William McKinley appointed him postmaster at Watonga and in 1901, President Theodore Roosevelt appointed him governor of the new territory.

During his term, he eliminated deficit spending and prompted Oklahoma's participation in the Saint Louis World Fair in 1903. In addition, he advocated increased funds for education and prison reform; he also organized the Board of Agriculture.

At the end of his governorship in 1906, he returned to Watonga and his newspaper. He died in 1921, but Mrs. Ferguson continued to operate the business.

How did this home become a museum? The Mothers' Self-Culture Club, an affiliate of the Federation of Women's Clubs, initiated the project. The city bought the property for \$9000, and departmental workers assisted with the first jobs.

The Oklahoma Legislature appropriated \$35,000 for restoration, and the Department of Tourism and Recreation assisted. The first curator was Florence Tomlinson. More recent curators have been Iva Mae Hinkley, Lillian Cronkhite and Martha Bradford.

During the first ten years — 1972-1982 — some 34,000 people were escorted through the museum. It's free and open to the public weekdays from 9:00 to 5:00 and Sundays from 1:00 to 5:00. It's closed on Christmas Day. 