



10-15-1983

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Recommended Citation

Brown, Opal Hartsell (1983) "Kenton Centarian Still Working," *Westview*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 1 , Article 10.
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview/vol3/iss1/10>

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John W. Duncan storekeeper at 103 years of age.

Kenton Centenarian Still Working

— by Opal Hartsell Brown

For a man taken west for his health in the early part of this century, John W. Duncan of Kenton, Oklahoma, is doing quite well, thank you. At age 103, he is still operating the only store in town, often walking a few blocks to get there. And he lives alone, keeping his house, but not his lawn.

The store, which Duncan bought twenty-five years ago, has a good supply of staple



Museum Corner, Duncan's Store.

groceries, some household items, and gasoline. Customers generally wait on themselves, but he controls the switch for gasoline.

Duncan works five hours a day. His daughters, Betty Book and Mildred Davis, and his sons-in-law, who live nearby, work the rest of the day.

Although Duncan's hearing and vision are slightly impaired and he takes shots

for diabetes, he does not wear glasses or a hearing aid, and he still has some of his natural teeth. He considers himself in exceptionally good health for his age.

"I eat anything I want," he said, "and always have. I've been in the hospital only once and that was long ago."

According to his daughter, Mrs. Book, Duncan came from a family of longevity. A disaster, however, almost shortened his life, becoming his most memorable experience.

When a young man, he was on a 125-mile train trip between Springfield and Newburg, Missouri, when "the train exploded, killing 22 people. A drunk engineer caused the explosion."

Born November 25, 1880, on a farm near Lebanon, Missouri, Duncan worked in a co-op store in that state. He married at the turn of the century and had two girls before his health began to fail. Doctors diagnosed his illness as tuberculosis.

"Where should I go?" Duncan asked. "West until you can breath better," the doctor said.

Mrs. Duncan loaded him and two small daughters into a buckboard and headed

west, settling in Colorado. Duncan soon became able to work. While accumulating land, he and his wife added another girl and a boy to the family.

In time, they established a large cattle and sheep ranch near Lamar, operating it fifty years. The discovery of oil helped.

After the children grew into adulthood with families of their own, the Duncans took in a grandchild when she was two years old. They bought the store to be nearer school.

At that time, Kenton had a high school, a bank, and even a dance hall. Little remains except Duncan's store, two churches, a post office, some empty buildings, and eight or ten occupied houses. The half dozen children are transported to Boise City Schools.

Yes, Duncan recognizes times have changed; he doesn't like it. "Things are in a mess," he philosophized.

Mrs. Book added that her father had always worked hard, practiced honesty, and taught his children to do likewise. He doesn't drink or smoke. He attributes his longevity to "having a wife to care for you."

Mrs. Duncan died three years ago.

The centenarian doesn't care for television. His diversion is keeping the artifacts in the corner of his store: arrowheads, animal horns, fossils, and talking with customers, researchers, and drop-ins. He enjoys telling people about Black Mesa, the dinosaur track nearby, and the way things used to be.



Dinosaur tracks near Kenton, OK.

(John W. Duncan, subject of this article, died on April 3, 1983 — several months after "Kenton Centenarian Still Working" was accepted for publication.)