

PAYNE COUNTY

# HISTORICAL REVIEW

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VOLUME IV

NUMBER 1

SUMMER 1983

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The *PAYNE COUNTY HISTORICAL REVIEW* welcomes reader's comments, news, or requests for information from readers. Family histories, memories, diaries, letters, histories of groups or institutions, articles, photographs, or maps are also welcome. No payment is made for articles published in the *REVIEW*.

Correspondance should be addressed to the Editor. The Society assumes no responsibility for statements made by contributors.

# **From the President**

## **Payne County Historical Society**

This issue introduces the new logo for the Payne County Historical Society. The three arches represent the door and windows of the facade of the Citizens Bank Building which is headquarters for the society. This logo will be used on our stationery, membership cards, flyers, etc.

Initial preparation has already begun for the Unassigned Lands Centennial Celebration to be held in 1989. Our organization will be working closely with the Centennial Commission in Oklahoma City to coordinate activities for the event. We welcome any suggestions on how we might contribute to the festivities here in Payne County. Please share your ideas with us at one of our quarterly meetings or send them to PCHS, P. O. Box 194, Stillwater, OK 74076.

The purpose of this organization is to foster interest in history, especially that relating to Payne County. Through this publication and at our meetings, historical information is presented both formally and informally. If you have interesting material to share or have any suggestions for programs you would like to be presented, please let us know. This publication and the programs presented at our meetings are our way of sharing history with the community.

Carol Bormann, President  
Payne County Historical Society

# The Pioneer Families of Stillwater

## Volume II

Among the treasures accumulated by the Payne County Historical Society are two typed booklets entitled, "The Pioneer Families of Stillwater, Volumes I and II." Volume I was printed in the last issue of the REVIEW.

Two articles in Volume II were previously printed in the REVIEW: "A. J. Rutter" by Marguerite Downey was printed in Volume II, Number 3, and "Memories of Mrs. Josh A. Brock" by Marjorie Moore in Volume II, Number 4. The rest of the volume as it was written is contained in the remainder of this issue.

# **Our First Feed Store**

## **Owned by Mr. & Mrs. William Frick**

### **by Betty Schafers**

Mr. and Mrs. William Frick came to Stillwater when Main Street was only four blocks long. Billy Branner had come up from Guthrie with Fricks to help them get started in business. They moved into a two room building situated across the street from the Nichols Hotel. Here they established a feed store in the front room of the house and lived in the back. Mr. Branner used their two teams and wagon to haul flour and feed from Arkansas City and Guthrie until the railroad came in. In front of the store were the county scales, on which the people weighed their goods. Once the engine Mr. Frick used to grind feed was put out of commission accidentally, and he had to wait almost three months before repairs could be obtained from Oklahoma City. At this time the population was about 200.

In about 1890, the Fricks bought some property where eleventh and West Street are now located. It was in 1903 that they built on it and by this time they had three children. These children's favorite pastime was riding ponies. Knoll's had a bear penned up near their store and were keeping it to kill. But one day some children went by their store on a horse and as the horse saw the bear, he snorted and reared, throwing the children into the street. But by Christmas time the bear could no longer scare anyone, for he had been killed and his skin hung up on the outside to advertise that bear meat could be bought on the inside.

## John Jacobs

"Moved to a village that seemed to be mostly cow pasture in the year '01", runs the story of John Jacobs when musing over his moving from Missouri to Oklahoma Territory in general and Stillwater in particular.

Jacobs settled on what is now a college farm, the land being purchased as school land in 1905. He has lived in the vicinity since 1901.

Stillwater in 1901 as he remembers it seems to have been a half dozen brick stores, a motley collections of wooden saloons, and other business places. Main Street south of the old Nichols Hotel was pasture. A feed and fur store occupied the present site of Katz Store. Main Street was a dusty or muddy traffic lane, where sometimes the mud would be knee deep.

Nearly all the land west of the courthouse square was farm or pasture land. Jacobs remembers helping thresh wheat where Eugene Fields School now stands.

Stillwater's best or worst saloon was located next to the old First National Bank.

Mr. Jacobs at one time thought of purchasing the block on which Fiscus Hall is located, but turned it down for a lot two blocks south.

In 1901, the town was being honored by the erection of the magnificent new biology building.

Mr. Jacobs now can count on extensive line of descendents. One of his grandsons is attending A & M College. A son is a county agent, and another, George Jacobs, farms west of the city. His wife died several years ago, and Mr. Jacobs now lives with his neighbors.

# **W. O. Carpenter**

## **by Robert Whinton**

Along with the other homesteaders, Mr. W. O. Carpenter, present owner of the Stillwater Golf Course, staked his claim in 1889 on the same plot of ground he now owns.

Deer seemed to be everywhere, and on the first day he saw a herd of seven near his dug-out. Bob Coppar, a neighbor, shot eighty deer during the first year and shipped them off to market.

According to Mr. Carpenter, Stillwater was of no prominence, and he usually went to Clayton when he wished to go to a town. But Clayton was not much, he explained; it consisted of two stores, two saloons, a hay barn, and a house or two.

It was there that he saw the Doolin and Dalton brothers, the most noted Oklahoma outlaws. Often he had seen them ride past his claim, but he had better chances to get a closer glimpse of them in the restrictions of a town.

Mr. Carpenter's brother had a closer communication with the outlaws than he, himself, had, as once he treated Bob Doolin for rupture and was paid fifty dollars.

The present golf course owner moved to Perry in 1898 and opened a drug store, but he moved back in a few years.

He never owned many cattle, sticking mostly to straight farming, but one year he bought 100 head. These got Texas Fever and twenty-two died in 18 days. He finally cured them by covering them with crude oil, but by this time he had lost one-half of his herd.

Mr. Carpenter enjoys his work and expects to continue with his golf course as long as he is able.



# **The Development of Stillwater**

## **by Annabeth Lowry**

### **as told to Wanda Barker**

A bugle call, shrieks of terror, demolished wagons, and runaway teams! Oklahoma was opened.

Such pioneers as Duck, Duncan, J. H. Barnes, J. E. Sater, Robert A. Lowry, and many others made the run and homesteaded quarter sections about the present site of Stillwater. They found the land to be fertile and good for crops. They built their homes and settled down to peaceful farming.

Then in the summer of 1889, J. H. Hodges and a company of men came down from Winfield, in Cowley County, Kansas, and wished to establish a town.

An agreement between Robert A. Lowry and J. H. Barnes was that if Lowry gave the west half of his homestead he was to receive in return from Barnes eighty acres of land adjoining the south end of the east half of his homestead. The town was then surveyed by J. E. Sater.

How this town got its name is very interesting. When other parts of Oklahoma were in drought there always seemed to be a supply of water in the creek, which is near the town, hence the town was called Stillwater.

Many more people came to this small town and from then on Stillwater progressed rapidly and soon was made a mail receiving town. The first post office was a rudely constructed log building. The mail was brought over from Perry, the nearest railroad. Later a railroad was sent to Stillwater. The first post-master was Robert A. Lowry.

Stillwater was soon to send a representative to the

First Legislature, which met in Guthrie, then the capital. The people of Stillwater chose Robert A. Lowry for this position. At the legislative meeting the citizens of Stillwater were given the choice of the State Penal Institution or the Oklahoma Agriculture College. Their choice was the college and this they were awarded, with the understanding that the citizens would raise money to build the first building. The money, ten thousand dollars, was raised by bond issue and Old Central was built, and is still being used after some recent repairs. A clipping from the Payne County Populist on March 6, 1896, showed the total enrollment of A & M College to be 150 students, of which six had reached the senior class. Today's enrollment of 5,000 or more is more equally divided into classes.

On March 31, 1911, Stillwater voted to change their form of government from the old Council form to the Commissioner form. The charter of the city of Stillwater was submitted by the board of Freeholders to the voters and adopted on said date. The members of the boards of Freeholders were as follows: C. L. Burdick, Chairman; C. H. Lowry, Secretary; R. N. Andrew, E. M. Blancett, R. J. Smith, G. L. Holter, and G. N. Hutto, Members.

Stillwater has been using this form ever since they changed to it and have so far found it to be very satisfactory.

Stillwater's fire department is one of the great improvements. The first fire truck was like a water wagon drawn by horses. They now have four fire engines and two large water towers to put force behind the water.

Stillwater's greatest improvement is in buildings of all kinds.

The First National Bank and the Stillwater National Bank both occupy practically new buildings. The American Legion Building was an improvement in the beauty of Main Street. Stillwater has two new

improvements along the hotel lines. W. E. Going, former county treasurer, built a \$70,000 hotel and named it the "Going Hotel".

The improvement of Stillwater schools came with the growth of the city. The first public school in Stillwater was a subscription school taught by Carrie Du Pree, a citizen. Later the Alcott building was constructed. About 12 or 13 years later the Horace Mann building was constructed by Frank McKee, son-in-law of Robert A. Lowry. Many others have been built, and are as follows: Jefferson, Lincoln, Washington, Eugene Fields, and Junior and Senior High schools. The Junior High is the newest and largest of the schools, not including the Senior High.

Other improvements are paving, churches and new additions.

On Main Street in 1910 the people were seen watching workers laying brick for the first paving in Stillwater, which was completed in 1911. The next street was Lewis. Stillwater now has over 30 miles of pavement.

The Agricultural and Mechanical College of Stillwater has made a most wonderful growth in building and in the number of students enrolled. After the First Legislature of Oklahoma located the college at Stillwater, enrolling was begun at once and the classes proceeded in the Presbyterian Church. About a year later the Old Central building was built and classes then changed to it. Now the campus is adorned with more than 20 buildings which represent more than one million dollars worth of real estate, not including the money in the many valuable farms which are used for agriculture experiments.

Another wonderful beauty spot in Stillwater is the Payne County Court House, which was built by money obtained through taxation. It was built in 1915, at a cost of one hundred and twenty five thousand dollars which is much cheaper than it could be built for now. The

district court room is one of the most beautiful in the state. Lawyers will tell you it is the easiest room to talk in of any that they have ever had trials in.

The churches of Stillwater are a great drawing card for the daughters and sons of people who send their children to the Agricultural and Mechanical College. There are the following churches: Methodist, North and South; Baptist; Christian; First Church of Christ, Scientist; Presbyterian; United Brethern; Catholic; and German Lutheran.

At the College there are the Young Men's Christian Association and the Young Women's Christian Association, which are both religious societies and helpers of the churches. Many of the above named churches have built new buildings in the last two or three years, which have improved the appearance of Stillwater a great deal.

Another improvement in the size of Stillwater is the new additions, such as the Metzger and Bradley, Tucker, and Norwood, and College Circle, and College Gardens.

The one improvement of the day is the new United States Post Office building which has recently been built.

The boom days of the little towns of Oklahoma have apparently ended and many of them are deteriorating. But the progress of Stillwater continues, and although many Oklahoma towns have surpassed it in size and population, its fame as an educational center is gradually reaching the highest mark in efficiency.

## Back in '89

by Geneva Cochran

Coming first from Nebraska, Mr. and Mrs. G. F. Knowles and two children, Maud and Roby, moved to Texas where Mrs. Knowles became ill with a fever, something like typhoid, and her doctor suggested a change in climate.

They then moved to Stillwater, in December, 1889; here Mrs. Knowles' father, G. B. Waters, ran a grocery store. The store was located where J. C. Penny is now. For awhile they lived above the store with Mrs. Knowles' parents.

One morning Mrs. Knowles went down to get something for breakfast. As she stepped out onto the walk she notice a crowd of people standing in the street. She asked her father what all the excitement was about, and he told her the people had come to town for charity. That was the first charity ever given in Stillwater.

The night before the Black Bear Run in September, 1893, a fire broke out in Swiler's store and spread over the entire block. At that time there wasn't a fire department, so all the men got buckets and tried to put out the fire. They worked all night and until time for the Run next day. Mr. Knowles had worked so hard that his wife was afraid he wouldn't be able to make the Run, but he did.

Mr. Knowles and Mr. Budworth made the run together. Mr. Knowles homesteaded a farm fourteen miles north of the college, and Mr. Budworth cornered him on the west. Other neighbors were Mr. Owens on the south; Mr. Winfred Mitchell on the east; Mr. Bob Mitchell on the north; and Mr. Hughes across the road.

The Knowles family lived on the farm for seven years and then moved back to town locating on 9th street. Mr. Knowles then established a meat market business.

After making several other moves, the family moved to 1024 Chester Street where Mrs. Knowles lives now.

Mr. and Mrs. Knowles had six children, one daughter, Mrs. Forrest Boaz, living in Stillwater now. Roy Knowles lives in Pawnee where he runs an I.G.A. store; Fred Knowles lives in California on a ranch; Mrs. Earl Orr lives in Wichita, Kansas; Mrs. Richard Borne, who was born and married in Stillwater now lives in Oklahoma City; and Maud Knowles, who was born in Nebraska, died about 1917.

## John W. Thatcher

For almost a score of years John W. Thatcher has been engaged in the business of drilling wells and sinking shafts for coal and salt. He so thoroughly understands mechanics that he not only does this, but also manufactures and repairs drills and engines, and carries on a general line of work in this direction. He has invented many tools and devices for his special business, and is a practical mechanic in every sense. The Stillwater Well-Drill, which he manufactures, has an enviable reputation throughout the middle-west, and today it appears under the style of the Improved Stillwater Drill. Everything about it, save the castings, are manufactured here, the local firm being known as Thatcher & Sons.

Born in Cardinton, Ohio, August 15, 1851, Mr. Thatcher who was the only child of Dr. John W. and Elizabeth (Chase) Thatcher, was given the name which had occurred in every generation of the Thatcher family as far back as can be traced. His father was a native of the same town, and there was actively engaged in medical practice until his death. His paternal grandfather, John W. Thatcher, was a farmer in the Buckeye state, and the maternal grandfather, Paul Chase, a native of Vermont, was an early settler in Ohio. He carried on a farm in Morrow county until 1853, when he moved to Muscatine County, Iowa, and entering land near Moscow, resided there until his death. Mrs. Elizabeth Thatcher makes her home with John W. Thatcher.

The youth of the latter was passed with his grandfather Chase, in Iowa, and after leaving the common schools, it was his privilege to attend the Wesleyan College at Mount Pleasant, Iowa, for a year. Then until 1870, he engaged in farming in Muscatine

County, Iowa, and subsequently he bought and improved new land in Audubon County, same state.

In consequence of a severe fire, which destroyed his buildings and crops, besides injuring him personally, he removed to Jewell County, Kansas, in 1879, and located a claim. About that time he found employment in a mill at Cawker City, and thoroughly learned the trade of a millwright. After running what was known as the Waukonda Mills for several years, he returned to his farm, and began drilling wells. Since 1882 he has given his attention exclusively to the latter calling, and besides drilling wells in his own county, he has been similarly employed in Mitchell, Republic, Cloud, Washington, Riley, Smith, Osborne, and Root counties, and also in parts of southern Nebraska. For about eleven years he has been located in Stillwater, and has kept two drills in operation most of the time. Orders continually come to him for work and he and his sons have drilled many of the numerous wells which have been drilled in eastern Oklahoma and in the western part of the Indian Territory.

March 20, 1873, Mr. Thatcher married Frany, daughter of David and Jane (Hamilton) Romig. Both she and her father were natives of Tuscarawas County, Ohio, in which locality her grandfather, Gabriel Romig, was an early settler. The seven children born to Mr. and Mrs. Thatcher are Mrs. Jennie E. Reed of Stillwater; Jessie Olive of Cleveland, Ohio; Leslie E. and Edward T. who are in business in Stillwater; Charles Ira, a member of the high school class of 1901; Hester, Alice, and John W. Jr.

Miss Jessie O. was engaged in teaching at Stillwater. She also was graduated from the Agriculture and Mechanical College in 1897, with the degree of Bachelor of Sciences, and was the first woman to receive a degree in an Oklahoma institution of learning.

Politically Mr. Thatcher is a true-blood Republican, and for one term served as a member of the city council from the third ward. He was one of the organizers of



the Ancient Orders of the United Workmen in this territory, is a charter member of the lodge, for two terms served as an officer, and was chosen to act as chairman of the finance committee of the Grand Lodge, being a grand trustee of Oklahoma. An honored member of the Odd Fellow Society, he is past grand of the lodge. He is living at 1201 Husband and can stand as one of Payne County's best citizens.

# **J. W. Swope**

## **by Marjorie Moore**

"Stillwater was organized in Winfield, Kansas," says J. W. Swope, one of the original settlers in the city and long a resident of Stillwater.

The city was organized by a group of one hundred men from Winfield, and Robert A. Lowry, David Husband, Frank Duck, and Sanford Duncan. The last four were already in Oklahoma and joined the group after the plans for settling had been made.

The group searched through Oklahoma until they found eighty acres that were unclaimed and there set up the town of Stillwater. It was on June 14, 1889, that Tom Megrow and Charles Hixon pitched the first tent. It was placed on the corner of Lowry and eighth. The tent served as the town's head building until they could build something more substantial.

Each member of the company was allowed to draw one business lot and two residence lots. The drawing was held in the center of Main Street, and Mr. Swope's business lot was on the corner of Lowry and Eighth, across the street from the town's main office. His residence lots were on Duck Street near Eighth.

The first building was constructed in the seven hundred block on Main Street.

Mr. Swope remembers all of the old settlers of the town. He remembers who built the first stores, who was the first postman, and the first city officers.

Dr. Evans, of Winfield, was the first mayor of Stillwater. George Madden was elected to the office of city clerk and treasurer, but he died soon after the election; and J. E. Sater was selected to carry on his work as city clerk, and Mr. Swope became the town's second treasurer.

Robert A. Lowry was the first postmaster. The

mail was brought from the train at Perry to Stillwater by stage coach. Lou Meyers owned the stage coach, and it served as a passenger route as well as a means for mail delivery.

The Swiler brothers started the first dry goods and clothing store. They brought their building to Stillwater from Guthrie and set up business here.

W. J. Hodges started the first hotel. Hays Hamilton opened the first grocery. The first lumber yard was organized by Harry Bullen. The first newspaper was published by Joe Merrifield. Later the paper was moved to Perry and for a while Stillwater had no paper.

Mr. Swope's father, A. W. Swope, started the first bank in the city.

The question now came up in the state legislature as to where to put the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College. Jimmy Mathews, A. W. Swope, Hays Hamilton, Henry Keller, Frank Wykff, C. W. MacGraw, Frank Hutton, J. W. Swope, and several others met with the representative to the legislature to decide whether to back Stillwater as a possible site for the college or for the penitentiary. This representative, a Populist, was George Gardenhire. Gardenhire held the balance of power in the legislature since six of its thirteen members were Democrats and six more were Republicans.

After much debate they decided upon the College, and the legislature agreed. The first building was a two story frame one had held an auditorium and the office of Dr. Barker, the president of the college.

The next building was constructed between the present day engineering building and the library. Both of the two original structures have since been torn down.

"Stillwater has grown gradually. She has never had a boom. She has just spread out in all directions and I'm glad to have had a part in bringing about her development," says Mr. Swope.

# **J. P. Talbot**

**by Ted Baird**

Mr. J. P. Talbot homesteaded near Stillwater in the spring of 1892. He, with his family and household goods all piled into a spring wagon, drove across the plot on which the A & M College is now situated, to find a new home in Indian Territory. He bought a school quarter 4 miles east of town, which he later sold, and his homestead of 160 acres which lay five miles and a half southeast of Stillwater and near what was then Payne Center.

Payne Center claimed to be the county seat of Payne County then, and had built a large hexagon courthouse. A dispute arose as to whether the courthouse should be located at Payne Center or Stillwater, and several elections and many hot arguments ensued. It was finally decided that the courthouse should be located at Stillwater, so a group of men undertook to move the building. B. Guthrie, an infuriated citizen of Payne County, decided that the building would not be moved, whereupon he drove his wagon and team across the road in order to stop any further progress. He was shot in the hand, thus being persuaded that maybe Stillwater wasn't such a bad place after all. The courthouse, however, broke to pieces on the route, so it was abandoned, and a new courthouse built in the new county seat.

Mr. Talbot bought lots in the city limits during the winter on '97 so that his children might go to college. At this time many of the classes were held in churches, as there were no college buildings. The northern boundary of town was along north of the courthouse square.

Talbot bought a camp barn from a Mr. Wiles. It was

situated off the southeast corner of the courthouse where the Shidler Skating Rink is now located. A camp barn was a place for transient people to shed their wagons and horses for the night, and perhaps to sleep upstairs in the bunks provided. Many Indians stayed there, and Mr. Talbot had several startling experiences with them, as they often stopped at this place on their travels from reservation to reservation. Talbot also owned the quarter of a block on which the Hoke building now stands. These lots were used as a camp yard, connected with the barn.

All the mail and groceries for Stillwater had to be freighted or brought over in stage coaches from Horton. Horton was a small railroad town which stood two or three miles down the tracks from the present city of Perry. Mr. Talbot transported groceries from Horton to Stillwater with two four-horse teams.

Mr. Talbot was a member of the city council during the early days. It was this council which contributed most toward bringing a railroad through Stillwater.

Talbot states, "Stillwater was a first class city even before the railroad was here." The council had trouble with a man named Lowe when he refused to sell his property to make way for the better method of transportation. Talbot finally made provision with the man to buy his plot of land. As nearly as Mr. Talbot is able to remember, the road came through in 1899.

Mr. Talbot was responsible for Stillwater's first band. He went to Kansas City and bought six musical instruments. The band played for Stillwater's first celebration, and performed many times at the college. The band made a trip to St. Louis with all expenses paid to a printer's convention. Talbot hired L. O. Woods for two years to direct the musical organization.

A water supply was one of Stillwater's early problems. Wells were dug on the college campus, one being near Old Central, but they all gave forth salt water, so drinking water had to be hauled from a well on

**West Street.** A mule transported the water by means of a barrel on his back. The first city water came from above the dams at Tourist Park.

Talbot recalls that Jake Katz, owner and manager of the Katz Department Store, was a traveling man from Omaha, Nebraska. Fred Stallard was the mayor of Stillwater, and Robert A. Lowry was the first postmaster and the most prominent lawyer. The stage coach station was near the location of Hull Motor Company, 113 East Ninth Street, across the street south from Stillwater's old opera house. Three or four saloons were strung along Main Street. The streets in Stillwater were named for prominent residents. Mr. Knoblock, for whom Knoblock Street was named, was a barber.

# Shermans Here Since the Run

by Maxine Johnson

Mr. and Mrs. H. H. Sherman have lived in the vicinity of Stillwater since 1899. Though Mr. Sherman came in that year, he did not make the run, but came a few months later. Mrs. Sherman, then Miss Emma Glendenning, came with her family in 1893. Mr. Sherman settled ten miles west and three miles south of Stillwater, and Mrs. Sherman's folks located by the Number 9 school house.

The trip into the new country was accomplished in a covered wagon. Mr. Sherman was two weeks on the road from Missouri, but the party which included the Glendenings made the journey from Marshall County, Kansas, to this country in 18 days. They were bringing a number of cattle, colts and other stock, and had to travel slowly. There were Indians all along the way, and though they weren't hostile, the people did not trust them quite implicitly.

There was one trick the Indians enjoyed playing on the pioneers. Both Mr. and Mrs. Sherman said it happened to the wagon trains they were in. The Indians stopped the train, pointed to a certain horse, or horses, and claimed them. They said the animal had been stolen from them when it was a colt, and they wanted it. Of course, even though the people knew that wasn't true, they usually gave in rather than risk incurring the Indian's wrath. Mr. Sherman, however, tells of a clever trick played on the Indians; many people used it to save their stock. They stalled the Indians off until nightfall. Then a number of the party would take the horses and go on ahead along the wagon route, and the next day the train would pick them up.

Though it was only a few months after the run 1889 when Mr. Sherman came into this country, he r.

many wagons going back. They told him to return home for he'd be killed if he came down into this new territory. There was even a scarcity of coffins, they declared, because people were being killed so fast. However, those dire reports couldn't turn the home-seekers.

The homes in which the pioneers first lived were sod houses, dugouts, rough log cabins, when they could get the logs, or flimsy shacks made of box lumber. In the towns most of the dwellings were tents with a few box houses here and there. Mr. Sherman lived in a dugout strengthened with logs. The house where Glendening lived was a box house with the boards running up and down. It had two rooms and a tent in front for a kitchen.

The Dalton gang of outlaws was the most familiar one around Stillwater. Not many people really knew them, because of course, they wouldn't make their identity public. The way the settlers recognized them as outlaws was that they always had the fine horses, saddles, and other equipment. They didn't bother much around Stillwater, but they robbed the train at Perry, then a water station, almost every week.

The law did not amount to much in those days. The only law was the Federals or United States government officers, and they certainly couldn't be in all places at once. Consequently the people did mostly as they pleased. There were "shooting scrapes" over claims, but punishment was rare. Shootings around Stillwater weren't nearly so common as they were around the boom towns of Guthrie and Oklahoma City.

The times were trying for women. They all kept guns in the houses, and almost every man carried one. There were outlaws who sometimes rode past, and as everyone was strange no one knew whom he could trust. Mrs. Sherman tells this experience: "My sister and little brother and I were left alone one day. It was before the opening of the Cherokee Strip, and "Boomer" wagons could be seen anywhere, anytime, driving along



through the deep dust. We had a well near our house, and as water was scarce, people often stopped and asked to camp. This always scared us, and when we went to the door, we always held a gun behind our backs. But for all our fright, no one ever bothered us. Maybe they knew we had the gun."

Food was very simple in the early days. Cornmeal mush was one of the main items on the menu. When anyone made pancakes, he usually used kaffir corn flour and sweetened the cakes with sorghum molasses. There was no fruit to be had except what grew wild. Pie melons were the most common; they were used for preserves, fruit butter, and pies. Poor man's apples, a fruit which grew on a vine, were also used. Coffee was a rare thing. The substitute was parched corn, and the drink was sweetened with molasses.

There were a few turkeys and some deer in this country when it was opened, but as a rule, game was scarce. However, the settlers got around this difficulty in a way typical of the times. The Cherokee Strip was free range, so the men went up there and drove cattle down to be slaughtered. The cattle were humorously called "slow deer." In the winter the meat didn't spoil, but in summer it had to be dried.

The year 1890 was the famous "Turnip Year." All the people had to eat were turnips and rabbits. Whether it was a birthday dinner or not, that was the menu.

The food question for many of the homesteaders was a serious one. One young couple, newly married, found their food supply running low. To cover the deficit, they held dances in their crude home and used the proceeds to buy groceries.

Simplicity and serviceableness were the keynotes of fashion in both men's and women's clothing in the early days. That is, that applied to their "every day" or work clothes. The women and girls wore plain-cut calico dresses, and the men wore overalls and hickory shirts. Many people, old and young, went barefoot in the

summer and saved their shoes until they needed them.

In the community where the Shermans lived, some years after the run, Marena was the church and school house combined. There were two religious sects in the vicinity, the Methodists and the Baptists. They wouldn't join forces, so it was decided that the Methodists would have Sunday School and church one Sunday; the Baptists would have prayer-meeting the next Wednesday night; then the Baptists would hold forth the second Sunday, and the Methodists hold prayer-meeting the next Wednesday.

The school house was about sixteen by fourteen feet, and there were about eighty pupils enrolled. Of course they couldn't all be seated in the small space. They began the day with about half the children seated and the other half standing. Then later the seated half would rise so the standing half could sit awhile. This alternating arrangement was the only one possible in the small building.

Three months constituted the length of the school year, and the term was in the winter. They had no grade divisions except books. During the term they could cover only a limited amount of the book, and they never got any farther. The next year the teacher started the children from the front of the book again, and it is doubtful whether anyone knew what was in the back of the books.

The teachers were usually men, but even they couldn't keep order. The pupils laughed and played and had a good time, but they didn't learn much. The pupils usually knew about as much as the teacher, because anyone could teach school who could complete what is now the eighth grade and get a teacher's certificate.

# **The Wolves Did Howl**

**by Ren Saxton**

Ralph Duck, an old pioneer of Stillwater, came to town in the fall of 1889. Mr. Duck was eight years old when he came here but he remembers much of his early experiences.

He tells of the old town which extended from 9th Street south about two blocks. All the stores and horse stalls were wooden and at night the wolves almost deafened one because they were so close. In the early days there were no jackrabbits or quail but there were plenty of prairie chickens and wolves. There were very few trees and lots of prairie grass. The year after the opening there was a prairie fire which started north of Perkins and came through what would be Washington Street now and was stopped over near Lela. The fire was burning with a forty mile gale and did not burn in width more than two hundred yards.

He said he well remembers the Dalton gang and when they were almost all killed in Coffeyville, Kansas. The ambush which took place near Ingalls with the Daltons and the Doolins is easily remembered too.

The first football team of Stillwater was organized in 1900. The school had hardly enough players for a complete team, but they always got by. The team played college class teams and finally a game with Guthrie. "We just ran over them before they got ready," said Ralph Duck who played left end on Stillwater's team. When Stillwater played Pawnee the following year Mr. Duck said, "They had some boys I know were not in high school but we let them play so we could have a game. Football has changed since those days but they still use the same thing to throw around. The flying

tackle wasn't so dangerous as the way they tackle real low now."

It seems as though the old days are really the thing around this country. There are plenty of people who wish the days of 1889 were here again.

# **The Rough and Ready Days of Stillwater**

## **by August Koeller**

### **as told to J. C. Lytton**

"I was 17 years old when one night some of the other boys and I were in town," began August Koeller in speaking of the early days he spent in Stillwater. "We stepped into one of the saloons and went to the back where there was a cafe. We had been there a while when the saloon's swinging doors flew open and a man dashed in—throwing himself close to the wall. Close on his heels two shots flashed through the doors. Then Lee Doolin, one of the Dalton-Doolin gang, entered with his smoking gun in hand.

"A bar tender and the pursued man were quite friendly, and in a moment the man behind the bar whipped a gun from beneath the counter and made it clear to Mr. Doolin that the gun was loaded. Doolin turned and walked out so that his temper might cool."

August Koeller came to Stillwater in 1900 with his parents. "We came to Perry on the train and from Perry to Stillwater in a hack," he recalls. "My first glimpse of the town was from a hilltop seven miles north of Stillwater. It looked big from where we were. My parents bought the relinquishment rights on the place four miles east of the college." He later moved to town and became a butcher. Now, he lives on his old home where his parents lived.

"There used to be a cowboy here," Mr. Koeller started another story. "His name was Bill Doolin. Before he became an outlaw, he was manager of a part of the IXL ranch that extended from the southern boundary of the Cherokee Strip to Kansas and from the Cherokee lands in eastern Indian Territory to 'No Man's Land.'

"I remember Bill when he was still living on the ranch. On nights when he drank too much or felt too good, he and his friend, Bill Gibson rode down the Main street shooting out street lamps. The sheriff never interfered, and Stillwater people were afraid of him.

"One day after he had begun his career as an outlaw he was wounded but escaped to a little cottonwood shack two miles north of Stillwater on one of the Carpenter farms--the one on the west side of the road. Every day a girl came to the shack with food and water and bandaged his wounds.

"Another time I remember a cow hand we called "Slim"--Slim White. Every time he could get something to drink, he got drunk. One 4th of July he came into the Ritterbush saloon. Arthur Boyd was there too, and Slim was not any too friendly with Arthur. Before anyone knew what was happening, Slim was on Boyd beating him as hard as he could. Some of the men in the Ritterbush had heard Slim threaten Boyd's life and they thought that Boyd's time had come so they separated the men. Slim was somewhat sobered by then and he had to have another drink.

"White had to leave the Ritterbush for the evening so he went down the street to the Corner Saloon. The news of the fight had preceded him and when he walked through the swinging doors, the piano played stopped playing. The men stopped swearing. Drinks stopped midway between bar and mouth. All eyes focused on Slim White and on a Mr. Kerby, Boyd's brother-in-law.

"Then Slim, blinded by his own anger, rushed at Kerby and struck, but his blow was not true and Slim slumped to the floor--a knife pushed deep into his body only a fraction above his heart.

"Kerby was arrested but everyone who saw the fight swore that it was in self-defense and he was released. Anyway, Slim recovered after a long struggle. Later he committed suicide." Mr. Koeller finished his story and sat silent for a moment. "I still can't understand where

Kerby got that knife. I guess he was so fast that no one could see the draw."

Early residents of Stillwater will recall these locations. There was the Yost Saloon, at the present site of the Camera Theater, 719 Main, and the Ritterbush was at 806 Main where G & G store now stands. The Harris Saloon was two doors north of 9th Street on the west side of Main Street. The Kessler Saloon, usually called the Corner Saloon was on 9th on the east side of Main Street where the Model Grocery now stands.

The Youst Hotel was one of the first. It was on 8th and Main Street and it is now called the Stillwater Hotel. The Commercial was at 124 W. 9th. It is still called the Commercial. Later came the Lindon (now the Rex Apartments) on the south east corner of 9th and Lewis and the Nickols on the south west corner of 10th and Main Street. The latter is still called the Nickols.

The Sollers Livery Stable was located at 201 W. 9th where the Ward Buick Company is now. The Myers and Sons Livery Stable was on E 9th and the Shively Bros. stables were on south Main. The Shively building still stands. The Royther Livery Stable was on the N.E. corner of 218 W. 9th about where the Roy T. Hoke Lumber Company has its lumber yard. There was another livery barn on north Main.

The wood lots were on the east half of the ten hundred block of Main Street and the hay market was in the 900 block east of Main Street. Stillwater had three feed yards.

# Story of the Lyttons

by J. C. Lytton

1890. Red mud. Slushy streets rutted by a hundred wagons and horses. Stillwater was a boom town!

Dale Lytton, founder, made the run on the memorable April 22, 1889, locating on a claim two and one half miles east of Stillwater. The run was made with a balky horse hitched to a cart with a tepee tent, bedding, and camping outfit strapped to the cart.

The eighteen months spent on the claim were happy days. There were no laws, no courts, no debts, no enemies, no distraction. Everyone was on a common level.

Dale Lytton bought a small stock of implements and started business in 1890. These implements were freighted from the old Wharton station (now Perry). Business was started on a vacant lot. The shed was covered by the star-bedecked heavens. Vacant lots were not hard to get at that time, for most of Stillwater was vacant.

The first binder was sold to Mr. Joseph Tulley and Mr. Shepards. After that sale, the farm implement business grew with unbelievable rapidity and the following year Mr. Lytton purchased a building which he used for an office. People were killing the stray cattle that ran loose on the range, and they were breaking the new earth. Instead of prairie grass people were planting cotton, wheat, oats, and corn.

In '93, when the Cherokee Strip was opened, Stillwater got its share of free advertisement. More than two thousand people crowded the streets. In August, when Congress voted to open the Cherokee Outlet, people started arriving. By September, they



were camping on the creeks, in vacant lots, any place that seemed convenient, as the hotels and rooming houses had long since been filled.

When the day of the run came, Stillwater was nearly empty. Everyone was running! Even the students from the college were out on the starting line.

Naturally the opening of the Strip country was a boom to Stillwater trade—especially the farm equipment business.

Oklahoma's greatest piece of land was opened for settlement and it was changed from a vast cattle range to a fertile farm country.

The first school, if Miss Metta Lytton remembers correctly, was on the corner of 9th and Lewis Street. Later there was a two room frame school building on or near the present site of the Jefferson School—the three hundred block on Main and Lewis—and one near the twelve hundred block between Lewis and Lowry Streets. There were small schools all over the county. When Miss Lytton taught, the white and negro children attended the same schools.

In 1896 Mr. Lytton was elected to the State House of Representatives on the People's ticket. During his term, there was an effort made to remove the Agricultural and Mechanical College from Stillwater, but Dale Lytton, Robert A. Lowry, William Swiler, and other citizens took money from their private accounts and paid it to keep the college in this town. It was during his term too, that an attempt was made to divide Payne County, but through the influence of several Payne County residents, the county remained whole.

Dale Lytton became the second mayor of Stillwater, and during his term as mayor the city got its first light plant and water system.

Stillwater did not have a church for some time. The people met in the courthouse or in private homes and held prayer meetings, but it was not until the Rev.

Verties Williams came to town that church was regular. He preached in the courthouse for a year, then the First Christian Church was built at 124 W. 7th Street. The first building was a small white structure with a belfrey. Rev. Williams was pastor and for twenty years, Mrs. Dale Lytton played the organ.

As wood was Stillwater's earliest fuel, and the town was located on a prairie, it was necessary to haul this fuel in. Farmers brought the wood to town late Friday evening and left it in the wood lot that night. They took their teams to the feed yards. Saturday, citizens who were not so fortunate as to have wood of their own, went to the wood lot and bought the size and kind of fuel their stove would burn best. The wood lot was somewhat like the present Public Market. When the farmer's wood was sold, he could "trade" and return to his farm. There was also a hay market where any grade of hay purchased and any purse could be accommodated.

When people drove their horses to town and had no other place to leave them, they took the animals to the feed lot and paid a small fee to leave them. Usually the wagon lot and feed lot were connected. The wagon lot was run on the same order as the present-day parking lots for automobiles.

In 1901, Dale Lytton and Company built the building at 909 Main Street. In 1923, the company moved to 815 Main and occupied the building that is now operated by the Murphy Hardware store.

PAYNE COUNTY

# HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Payne County Historical Society is organized in order to bring together people interested in history, and especially in the history of Payne County, Oklahoma. The Society's major function is to discover and collect any materials which may help to establish or illustrate the history of the area.

Membership in the Payne County Historical Society is open to anyone interested in the collection and preservation of Payne County history.

All members receive copies of the *Review* free. In addition, the Society sponsors informative meetings four times a year, the first Tuesday in March, June, September, and December, 7:30 p.m. Two outings; one in the fall and the other in the spring, are taken to historical sites in the area.

Board meetings are held the second Tuesday of each month that a regular meeting is not scheduled. These luncheons are held at 11:45 a.m. at the Student Union, Stillwater. All members are encouraged to attend.

Payne County Historical Society  
P. O. Box 194  
Stillwater, Oklahoma 74076

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