

PAYNE COUNTY

Historical Review



VOLUME VI

NUMBER 1

SUMMER 1985

Cover Photo:

Clayton School District children pose in front of their school building about the year 1912. This frame building was later replaced by a modern brick one. The school district was discontinued July 7, 1949, and the area annexed to both Ripley and Perkins.

Families with children attending the Clayton school were Tom Berry, Manley Bess, Frank Bush, Rutter, Broyles, Elmer Nugent, Monroe, Barth, Todd, Goodenough, Cherry, Wilson, Kirk, Longfellow, Kincade, Slater, and Ira Hays.

Photo Courtesy Veneta Berry Arrington

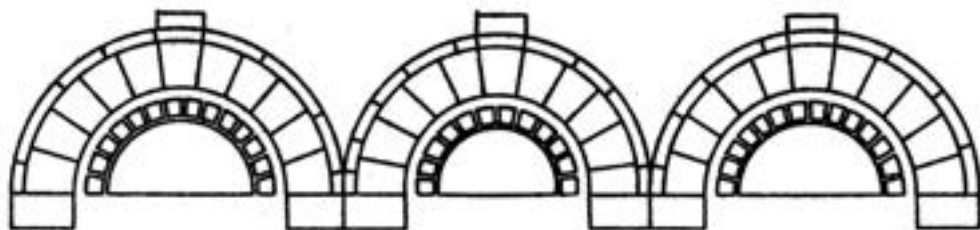
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PAYNE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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The *PAYNE COUNTY HISTORICAL REVIEW* is published quarterly by the Payne County Historical Society. It is distributed without additional charge to members of the Payne County Historical Society. Single issues, when available, may be purchased at \$2.50 each.

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

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by Mark C. Miller

Downtown Commercial Buildings of Small Rural Towns in Payne County, Oklahoma 1889-1915

I n t r o d u c t i o n

Downtown commercial structures in the small rural communities of Payne County were and still are among the most important structures and locations within these towns. These buildings housed the institutions which made urban and rural life possible. Bankers, lawyers, physicians, merchants of all sorts, and hoteliers, all provided services that stimulated the growth of a community, and their relative success or failure is still reflected in the buildings that they constructed.

At one time or another, the communities of Yale, Main, Ripley, Mehan, Clayton, Ingalls, Quay, and Glencoe were all thriving communities and served as local agricultural market centers. Political, economic, social, environmental, and technological factors combined to provide the stimuli that resulted in the establishment, growth, and in some cases, the decline of these small communities. To understand exactly how these factors were important to these towns,

it is necessary to understand the history of Payne County which at this time was little more than an isolated backwater in Oklahoma Territory.

History of Oklahoma Territory

Early in the nineteenth century, the idea that the western part of the Louisiana Purchase would be reserved for Indians became increasingly popular with the federal government. During the 1820s and 1830s, the Five Civilized Tribes, the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole, were forced to cede their land in Georgia, Alabama, Florida, Tennessee, and South Carolina in exchange for areas in Oklahoma. The claims of the tribes who had lived in Oklahoma for centuries, the Osage, Wichita, Caddo, Comanche, Kiowa, and Kiowa-Apache, were ignored by the federal government, except for the Osages who were given lands in Kansas. The Five Civilized Tribes obtained claim to all the land in the present state with the exception of the Panhandle, which was then part of Mexico and later Texas. However, the Five Civilized Tribes only settled in the eastern part of the state because they feared the depredations of nomadic tribes such as the Comanche and Kiowa.

The Civil War considerably changed the situation of the Five Civilized Tribes in Oklahoma. Because much of the economy and wealth of prominent tribesmen was based on plantations worked by black slaves, there was strong sentiment to side with the confederacy at the beginning of the war. Although some factions wanted to remain

neutral, all of the Five Civilized Tribes and several western plains tribes, the Wichita, Caddo, and Comanches, signed treaties with Confederate representatives. This action, plus the formation of several regiments for the Confederate Army, resulted in harsh reconstruction treaties at the end of the war. In these treaties, the Five Civilized Tribes were forced to cede their western lands to the federal government who would use the land for reservations for other tribes. The Cherokees retained title to their western lands called the "Cherokee Outlet," but they had to sell sections of their land to other tribes who needed reservations.

The western plains tribes were the first group to be assigned reservations in the newly ceded lands. It was felt that they urgently needed pacification because of their attacks against white settlements in Kansas during the Civil War. The final boundaries of the reservations assigned to the Cheyenne, Arapahoe, Comanche, and Kiowa-Apache in the Medicine Lodge Creek Council of 1867 were made in the 1870s when a reservation for the Wichita-Caddoes was created.

It was also during the 1870s that encroaching white settlements in Nebraska, Kansas, and Texas forced the federal government to move Indian tribes from reservations to central and northern Oklahoma. The Poncas, Tonkawas, Osages, Kaw, Sac and Fox, Shawnee, Pawnee, and Pottawatomies were assigned new reservations in areas that had once been part of the old Cherokee and Creek lands. For some of these tribes, this move represented the third or

fourth relocation in less than two generations.

When the boundaries of these many reservations were finally set in the 1870s, a single large section of territory remained unassigned to any tribe. This section of land became known as the Oklahoma District or the "Unassigned Lands."

At the same time, a movement began within the federal government to end the Indian reservation policy by allotting to each Indian his own land. This policy had earlier resulted in the destruction of Indian reservations in Kansas and Nebraska and was now being aimed at Indian Territory. This policy change culminated in the Dawes Act of 1887, which provided for the general allotment of reservation, excepting the Five Civilized Tribes. The provisions of the Dawes Act were intended to teach the Indians the value of property and thereby to 'civilize' them, but the measures were also intended to strip the tribes of land that could be used for white settlement. This measure was a major part of the federal government's preparations for opening segments of Indian Territory to white settlement.

A politically potent combination of land hungry railroad companies, unscrupulous land speculators, and potential homesteaders had begun to push for the settlement of the lands as early as the 1860s. By 1885 this pressure had become intense, and on more than one occasion, Federal troops had to be used to expel overeager "Boomers" and cattlemen from these lands. By 1889, the last legal obstacle to the settlement of the

newly appropriated land was eliminated; Creek and Seminole representatives relinquished their tribal claims to their western lands in return for payments totaling \$4,192,228. And just before Congress adjourned on March 3, 1889, settlement advocates in congress succeeded in attaching a rider, called the Springer Amendment, to the Indian Appropriation bill. The rider provided for the opening of the Oklahoma District, the unassigned lands (see Figure 1).

Approximately two-thirds of present day Payne County was opened to settlement on April 22, 1889. This region was bordered on the east by the western boundary of the

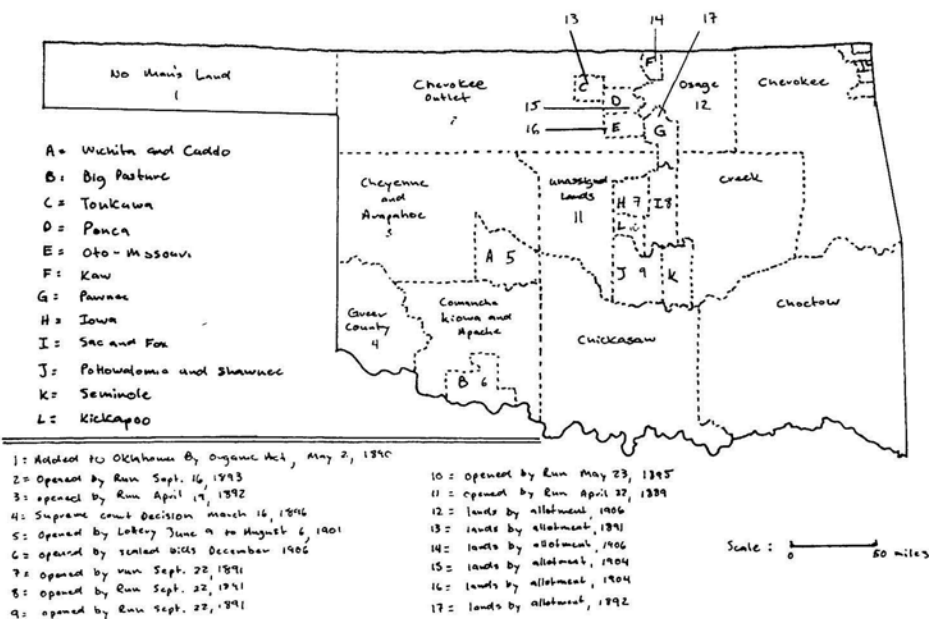


Figure 1. Indian reservations and land openings in Oklahoma.

Pawnee reservation, on the south by the Cimarron River and the northern boundaries of the Iowa and Sac and Fox reservations, and on the north by the southern boundary of the Cherokee Outlet.

The physical environment of this area was somewhat restrictive to agricultural practices of the day. Much of the area is fertile, rolling grassland with thick, mixed forest along the historical stream and river channels. Even though there are several significant sources of surface water and a yearly average rainfall of 32 inches, there is so much variation in climate that productive farming year in and year out is difficult at best. These climatic conditions were unrecognized by the homesteaders who had heard stories of soil so fertile that it would grow anything planted in it. Upon settlement of the region, the homesteaders found that careful cultivation of the proper crops could and often did produce bountiful harvests, but in many instances the climatic extremes of drought, flood, and freeze made profitable agriculture uncertain.

At the time of the opening, Payne County was isolated from railroad service, the major means of communication and transportation. As early as the 1860s, large railroad companies had begun to lobby for the right to lay track through Indian Territory and the unassigned lands. At stake were thousands of acres of land that the railroad companies would receive in "compensation" for their expenses. The railroad companies had realized astronomical profits from the sale of similar grants of land in other western states and territories and looked

greedily toward the Oklahoma lands. These lands represented the only remaining areas in the United States in which land grabs of this type would be possible. The Indian tribes were moderately successful at protecting their land holdings, but by 1889, the major companies had obtained grants.

The major lines bypassed the Payne County area and left it without rail service for a number of years. The Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe railroad was the closest rail line, and it ran north and south along the western edge of the future county, 19 miles west of present day Stillwater. The closest stops were at Mulhall (20 miles to the west) or Guthrie (35 miles to the southwest).

In 1889 before the advent of the motorcar and paved roadways, travel was difficult and time consuming in rural areas without rail service. Communities were established in agricultural regions to serve as local trade and commercial centers. The location of these small market centers was primarily a function of the predisposed settlement pattern and travel time.

The unassigned lands and Indian Territory had been surveyed in the 1870s as part of the post-Civil War reconstruction treaties. Under the United States rectangular survey system, the area was divided into townships and ranges composed of square mile sections. Each square mile section was further divided into quarters, each containing 160 acres.

Under the Homestead Act, each individual could claim only 160 acres. In practice, most land holders obtained ownership of more land than their original claims, but a

relatively even rural population distribution in areas that could support agriculture was still produced. Because an individual could either homestead his land or plat it in hopes of establishing a town, speculators often had scouted the various regions and staked out the best locations for cities. They profited by the sale of their platted lots to potential residents.

The success or failure of a venture to establish a town partially hinged on a sufficient local, rural population in need of a market center. A small community could usually be established and supported if the rural population distribution stayed relatively constant.

The location of communities was also a function of travel time. Towns had to be located spatially so that a resident could leave home, travel to the market center, trade, and return home before nightfall. This meant that there was some sort of small urban trading center for every ten to twelve square mile area. In less productive areas where the population base was smaller and more spread out, these centers were spaced even further apart.

In addition to local trading centers, most areas contained a community that served as a regional trade center, offering services that were unavailable at the local level. These communities often evolved from a smaller market center as a result of some outside stimuli such as the introduction of a railroad line or the establishment of a new source of livelihood or even the establishment and presence of an agency of the federal, state, or local government.

Even larger communities existed if transportation patterns, capital assets, and population patterns were able to support them.

The settlement pattern that emerged in Payne County corresponds to this structure except that there was no immediate rail service to any of the communities in the region. Stillwater, Perkins, Mehan, Ingalls, Quay, and Clayton were established as local market centers. When the region south of the Cimarron river was added to the county as a result of the opening of the Iowa and Sac and Fox reservations in 1891, the communities of Cushing and later Ripley were established as agricultural trading centers. In 1893 following the opening of the Cherokee Outlet, three townships (in which Glencoe was later established) were added to the county just north of Stillwater. Thus, by 1894 the present day boundaries of Payne County were in existence, and the network of local and regional agricultural market centers was in place (see Figure 2).

This market was not static, however. Communities evolved and declined according to any number or combination of factors beyond the control of residents. In order to understand the factors at work in each community, it is necessary to look at them individually.

NOTE: The histories of Stillwater, Perkins, and Cushing are included because their presence within the county generated forces that influenced the development of all of the other communities in the county. Stillwater's influence in the rise and fall of Perkins is a good example.

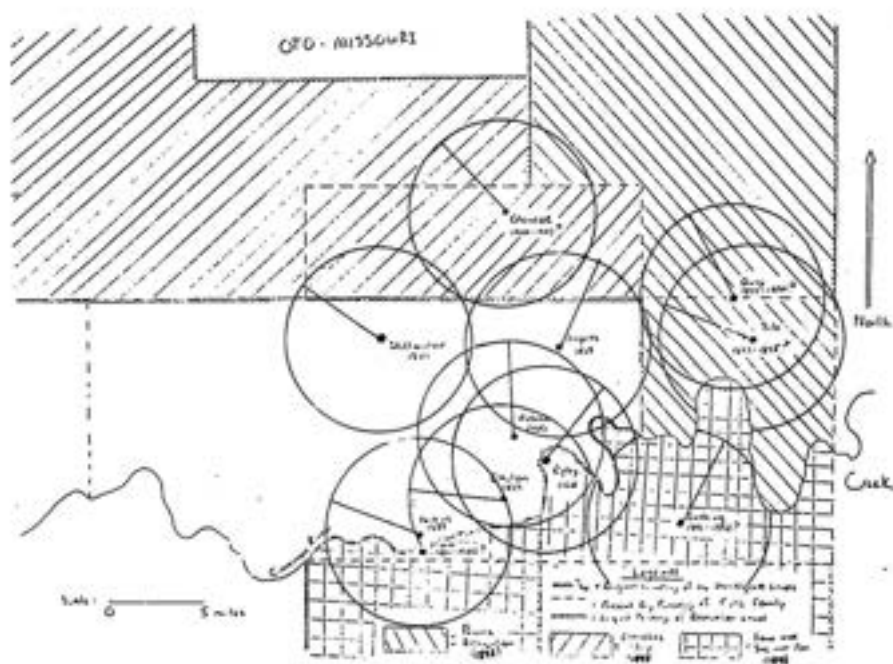


Figure 2. Market areas for communities in Payne County, Oklahoma.

Stillwater

Stillwater was originally founded as a small agricultural market center. It was located in a gently sloping valley produced by the juncture of two streams, Boomer Creek and Stillwater Creek. The site had been popular with Boomers before the opening in 1889, and some of the territory around the original townsite was staked out by "Sooners."

Stillwater evolved into a regional market center as a result of four factors: 1) its central location in the county proper; 2) the construction of a Santa Fe spur in 1900; 3) its location amid some of the best

agricultural land in the county; and 4) a good political organization. Shrewd political maneuvering by Stillwater's representatives in the territorial legislature and before the Secretary of Interior resulted first in establishing the town as the county seat and secondly, in the establishing of the state agricultural and mechanical college in the town. The combination of these four factors provided Stillwater with a financial and political base which ensured its continued dominance and future growth.

Cushing

Cushing was founded south of the Cimarron River shortly after the Iowa and Sac and Fox reservations were opened to settlement in 1891. Cushing quickly evolved into a local market center because the Cimarron impeded movement from areas south of the river to market centers in the north. Most of the area around Cushing was devoted to cotton production. The community supported two cotton oil mills and two cotton gins.

Cushing's continued existence was strengthened when in 1902 and 1903 two railroad lines were laid through the growing community. The Missouri, Kansas, and Texas (Katy) and the Eastern Oklahoma Railroad (Athison, Topeka, and Santa Fe) companies each maintained a depot in the community. The discovery of oil twelve miles east of town on the Frank Wheeler farm in 1912 assured Cushing's existence. The sudden influx of stupendous wealth and opportunity increased the population of Cushing tenfold in less than four years. This wealth also attracted merchants, doctors, and other entrepreneurs who turned a small farming

community into a regional trading center and the second largest town in Payne County.

Perkins

Perkins was platted in 1889 by Jesse Truesdale and other investors who established the community on the north bank of the Cimarron River, eleven miles south-southeast of Stillwater. When it became apparent that Payne County would be selected as the site of the state A&M college, the Perkins investors competed with Stillwater to gain this prime political plum. The investors knew that a proposed spur of the Santa Fe railroad was scheduled to be built along the north bank of the Cimarron sometime in the near future, and they felt that with this access to other parts of the territory, Perkins would have a stronger claim to these prizes than Stillwater. They also knew that a community established at this location would serve as an important market center for future residents in the northern areas of the Sac and Fox and Iowa lands once they were opened to settlement.

During the meeting of the first territorial legislature in 1889 the A&M College was awarded to Stillwater, but this only stimulated the Perkins backers to work all the harder to obtain the county seat. With the opening of the Sac and Fox and Iowa lands in 1891, the Perkins faction favored absorbing some of these lands just south of the Cimarron into Payne County. This, they believed, would strengthen their claims to the county seat and make Perkins the more centrally located community.

Three events ended the long running feud between Perkins and Stillwater. More importantly, these events also limited Perkins' potential growth. First, in 1893, the Secretary of the Interior settled the county seat and county boundary disputes by supporting the territorial legislature's decision to make Stillwater the county seat. This effectively reestablished Stillwater as the rough geographical center of the new county.

The construction of a Santa Fe spur to Stillwater came in 1900. At about the same time, a Santa Fe line from Cushing to Coyle and Guthrie was constructed. The railroad company had decided to build the line south of the river rather than along the north bank and through Perkins which destroyed most of the town's growth potential even though the community's central business district remained an important market center for the residents of southern Payne County.

Yale

Yale was established as a small agricultural community approximately twenty miles east of Stillwater. Wilbur and George Canfield purchased the property from a local farmer and platted the town in the mid 1890s. A United States post office was established in the town in October 1895. The community began to experience steady growth when the Santa Fe line to Cushing was laid through the town in 1902. A year later, the Katy railroad laid a second line through town. These railroads provided the transportation needed for Yale's primary product, cotton. By 1910, Yale was exporting 5,000 bales of cotton per year.

Although Yale's central business district provided a number of goods and services to the surrounding rural agricultural areas, it did not flourish until the discovery of oil between Yale and Quay in 1914. New hotels, boarding houses, banks, and other commercial structures were added as the oil boom stimulated growth and assured the community of continued survival.

Clayton

Clayton, located in a sheltered valley approximately six and one-half miles east-northeast of Perkins, was also established as an agricultural community. Clayton's population was never very large, and therefore, it did not support a substantive commercial district. The town did have a United States post office and a few businesses. Clayton had disappeared by 1905, probably as a result of an expanded and improved road system which made rural travel to markets in Mehan or Perkins more feasible and profitable.

Lawson - Quay

The town of Lawson was unique because it was established astride the northern boundary of Payne County. The northern side of Main Street is in Pawnee County while the southern side is in Payne County. It was platted in the early 1890s by Stonewall J. Lawson, a farmer who came to Oklahoma Territory following the first land opening in 1889. In 1894, a U.S. post office was established, and in February 1903 the town changed its name to Quay. At about this time, the Santa Fe railroad line was constructed contributing to the survival and

growth of the community before the oil boom years.

In 1914 oil discovered south of the community transformed the sleepy market town into an oil boom town of approximately 10,000 persons. Quay's commercial district swelled; the Main Street commercial district stretched for three-quarters of a mile and included hotels, boarding houses, groceries, hardware stores, restaurants, a pool hall, a drugstore, blacksmith shops, livery stables, and countless oilfield supply businesses.

The depression of the 1930s and declining oil production dealt a severe blow to Quay. Its population dwindled, and Quay eventually lost its post office.

Ingalls

Ingalls is located approximately nine and one-half miles east of Stillwater. It was platted in 1889 and served primarily as a local agricultural center. The founders hoped that they would be able to attract a railroad line to compete with Perkins and Stillwater. At its peak in 1893, Ingalls contained four or five doctors, a number of stores, livery stables, at least two saloons, hotels, and a blacksmith shop. Following the infamous battle between the Doolin gang and marshalls, the town began to decline. It never attracted a rail line, and this fact was the primary cause of the communities decline.

Mehan

Established along the Santa Fe right-of-way between Ripley and Stillwater around 1900, Mehan was a railroad boom town at its

inception.

The railroad served as the community's lifeblood until it was closed in 1949. Located about nine miles southeast of Stillwater and approximately two miles northwest of Ripley, the community contained a U.S. post office that opened in February 1900. It served as an agricultural market center for areas north and west of Ripley and southeast of Stillwater. At its peak, Mehan was served by a small number of commercial buildings. Mehan's decline began when the Santa Fe spur was closed eliminating the town's primary industry and means of attracting the surrounding rural population.

Ripley

Ripley was founded in 1900 by William A. Knipe of Perkins. Knipe had received the authority from the Santa Fe to establish towns along the proposed railroad routes. Knipe and William B. Cook purchased the southwest quarter of section 20, township 18, range 4 east from Thomas Nugent who had homesteaded it in 1891. An auction was held at Guthrie on January 19, 1900, for the purpose of selling lots in the townsite. Within three months Ripley had over 1,000 inhabitants and was an important agricultural center for cotton production in the surrounding rural areas.

Because of Ripley's location at the junction of two spurs of the Santa Fe railroad, it quickly became an important market center for agricultural areas nearby, including areas that had originally been serviced by Ingalls or Clayton. Ripley's growth came at roughly the same time as the decline of both Ingalls (located about six miles to the

north) and Clayton (located about five miles to the west).

At its peak, Ripley had a large and bustling commercial district that included a bank, a livery stable, two rooming houses and a hotel, doctor's offices, stores, a barbershop, a theatre, and a blacksmith shop. Two cottons gins were located near the railroad depot on the northwest side of town.

Ripley benefited from the discovery of oil near Cushing in 1912, but began to decline as a result of the depression. Today the town still serves as a local market, but it no longer has a railroad and is only half of its former size.

Glencoe

Glencoe was also established as a Santa Fe railroad boom town on property that was originally homesteaded by the Shell family. Located approximately eleven miles northeast of Stillwater in land that was part of the Cherokee Outlet, it was established in an area that was much flatter and more rolling than areas in southern Payne County. Although without access to a source of surface water, it still served as a local agricultural center for areas north and east of Stillwater. It, too, had a small but prosperous central business district and contained doctors' offices, banks, rooming houses, merchantile establishments, a blacksmith shop, and a livery stable.

A fire, destroying much of the commercial district in 1914, retarded the community's growth. Because the surrounding land was

less supportive of agriculture and had a lower population than other areas of the county, Glencoe relied heavily on the railroad for subsistence. Fortunately, an active and functioning Santa Fe spur has continued to serve the community to this day.

Main

Main, later known as Vinco, was founded by a Mr. Main following the opening of the Iowa and Sac and Fox lands and the construction of a railroad line from Cushing to Guthrie along the south bank of the Cimarron River about two and one-half miles south of Perkins around 1901. The community was established as an agricultural center at the junction of the Santa Fe railroad line and the road from Perkins to this line.

Vinco

Although located adjacent to the railroad line, Vinco did not experience any significant growth because of its proximity to Perkins. There were very few businesses, and most residents travelled to Perkins to obtain needed services. The community never really evolved into anything more than a rural satellite community of Perkins, and it exists in this capacity today.

Commercial Structures

The commercial structures that were constructed in these communities were subject to the same forces that contributed to the growth or decline of the communities themselves. Successful communities

attracted more wealth and therefore, could support and provide more services. The relative success or failure of the individuals who provided these services and built these buildings reflected the success and stability of the communities. Towns such as Stillwater, Cushing, Ripley, and Perkins were able to support fairly substantial commercial districts while smaller communities like Ingalls, Mehan, Clayton, Quay, Glencoe, and Yale were only able to support two to four large buildings.

The type of construction material used and the design of the buildings were also functions of the location and general success of the community. Payne County lacked any type of usable timber resources so all lumber had to be shipped into the area by railroad. The area did possess large deposits of sandstone that could be quarried, but this took time and was expensive to haul.

The first commercial buildings in any of these communities were usually constructed of wood, purchased by the board foot and hauled from the nearest railhead. At this early stage of growth, cost and time were the prohibitive building variables. The larger the intended structure, the more wood was needed. The longer it took to construct a building, the more profit was being lost. Unimposing wooded structures were the norm during the very early days.

As communities grew and capital became more plentiful, businessmen were able to plan for more elaborate structures. Because time was no longer an overriding factor, quality construction techniques could be utilized to

build structures that were more permanent in nature. Sandstone and bricks could be quarried, shaped, or imported to provide better structural support and better protection against the elements. A building could incorporate a second floor providing more floor space for rental or storage purposes.

Frank D. Hall, an early resident of Oklahoma Territory, wrote from personal experience explaining why territorial buildings did not have a third story. He pointed out that before the advent of the elevator, renters and customers would not walk up three flights of stairs to reach business establishments located on the third floor, and therefore, most of the top floors of the early three story structures stood vacant while the building owners lost considerable amounts of money. These simple economic considerations limited vertical growth but stimulated horizontal growth. Commercial structures in a community were strung out horizontally on either side of a main artery through town.

Discussion of Potential Resources

On the basis of the factors presented above and the known histories of each of the communities in the study area, predictions can be made in regard to what types of structures may have existed in these communities. All of these towns, regardless of their size, had structures that housed vital institutions during the first few years of existence. These included blacksmith shops, livery stables, some sort of hotel or rooming house, dry goods stores,

and the post office. These buildings were undoubtedly wooden, single story, frame structures.

The boom towns, both oil and railroad, started out in this manner but evolved quickly. The commercial districts expanded rapidly in size when many new single story, wood frame structures were built to house new services. As money continued to flow into these communities, larger and more grandiose buildings could be built. Two story wood and sandstone buildings housing merchants, doctors, social clubs, hoteliers, and other entrepreneurs sprang up. A steady capital flow also allowed owners to purchase corrugated tin which was used in the construction of many agriculturally related buildings such as cotton gins, livery stables, and early automobile garages.

In Quay and Yale, one could expect to find a fair number of two-story, brick, wood, or sandstone structures along with a reasonable number of single story structures made from the same materials. All these buildings would date to a few years after the oil boom began, anywhere from 1913 to 1915 and beyond.

The same thing could be expected in the railroad boom towns. Ripley, Mehan, and Glencoe were established along the railroad right-of-ways so they too experienced a period of time before structures of a more permanent nature could be constructed. One could expect to find buildings in these three communities dating anywhere from around 1902 up to 1915 and beyond.

Glencoe and Mehan never had large

populations and could not support a large number of structures. There probably was not a need for extra floor space so one can assume that there were only a few, if any, two-story structures in these towns.

Ripley, however, was successful and had a growing population until the depression era. One could expect to find a fair number of two-story buildings constructed of wood, sandstone, or brick. The topography in Ripley also points toward the need for multi-story construction. The main commercial district was limited to less than a quarter square mile area because of steep slopes, creeks, and gullies.

Clayton was an agricultural center without direct access to a railroad and without a large population. It probably was limited to buildings housing essential services. The buildings, probably of wood, were undoubtedly single story. They would be dated from 1889 to around 1903.

Ingalls was also without direct access to a railroad. It had a larger population base than Clayton and was more accessible. Here again, one could expect to find buildings that housed essential services as well as a few other types of commercial enterprises. There probably were buildings constructed of both wood and sandstone, very few of which were two story. The buildings would date anywhere from 1889 to 1915 and beyond.

We know that Main (Vince) never had a substantial commercial district. It did have a post office and therefore probably had buildings that housed essential services. The buildings were probably built

of wood and they probably were limited to a single story.

Existing Resources

Mehan has two single story, attached, random rubble sandstone commercial buildings. Unfortunately they are in ruins. One contained a dry goods store but the function of the other is unknown. Foundations of other buildings are visible, but it is impossible to determine what they were constructed with or what they were used for from a field survey.

Quay presently has only one commercial structure remaining. The Root Hotel building is a two-story, wood frame building that now serves as a private residence. It has weatherboard siding and a pyramidal roof. Most of Quay's central business district was destroyed when two fires swept through the town in the 1920s.

Clayton disappeared completely before 1905, but it contained at least one large sandstone building that housed a saloon and the post office. The coursed ashlar blocks from this building were used to construct two large, stately, two-story homes northeast of Perkins. These homes were constructed in 1905 and survive in excellent condition today.

Main has no commercial buildings remaining.

None of the early day structures of Ingalls have survived in their original condition. Dr. Pickering's house and a wooden church building are the only structures from this period that remain. The OK Hotel, the focal

point of the Doolin gang infamous battle, was moved to a location in Stillwater. It was a two-story wooden frame building. The church was a single story, clapboard structure with a gable roof. It is presently being used as a storage barn for hay. There is a two-story, wood frame, detached commercial building in Ingalls today, but it is located west of the original townsite and was constructed after the time span covered in this paper.

Glencoe has three commercial buildings that survived the 1915 fire. The Peterson building was constructed on the southwest corner of Main and Peterson Streets prior to 1910. It is a one story, attached, random rubble sandstone building that originally housed the Peterson family hardware store. The building presently houses an electric appliance retail and repair store. The adjacent building, the Bradley building, was constructed in 1912 by Charles Bradley who operated a dry-goods store. It, too, is a single story, random rubble building presently housing Roy Baker's dry goods store. Across Peterson Street to the east there is a single, detached, random rubble sandstone building built by a Dr. Cash in 1905. This building stands empty today.

Ripley has five commercial buildings that fit into this study. The original livery stable constructed of corrugated tin is still standing on the southeast corner of Morton and Knipe Streets. It presently serves as a garage. The Hastings building was built in 1903 by Misters Crane and Cantrell on the northwest corner of Main and Morton Streets. It is a two-story, brick building with arched doors and windows, a

parapeted flat roof, coursed ashlar sandstone surrounds over the first floor windows, and corbelled brick friezes at cornice level. It housed at various times a grocery store, a clothing store, and a shoe store.

The Planters State Bank building was built in 1910 by Thomas Berry. It is a single story structure built of coursed ashlar sandstone with a bevelled corner. It has many Richardsonian Romanesque features including arched doors and windows with keystones and voussoirs and a parapeted flat roof. This building is empty today.

In 1904 Crane and Cantrell also designed and built the Morton building located on the northeast corner of Main and Morton Streets. It is a two-story, random rubble sandstone building with a flat roof and parapet. It has arched windows and a bevelled corner. It contained the only hotel in Ripley and later housed a physician's office. It now houses the U.S. post office.

Misters Crane and Cantrell also constructed the Jackson building between 1905 and 1910. Located on the southeast corner of Main and Morton, it is a one-story, brick building with a flat roof and parapet, arched doors and windows, corbelled brick friezes at cornice level, and brick surrounds on the doors and windows. It presently stands empty.

Yale has two structures constructed as a result of the oil boom. The Yale State Bank building and the F. M. Burdick building were constructed in 1915. Both structures were attached brick buildings with flat roofs and parapets. Presently both are occupied.

Conclusion

This paper attempts to provide the reader with a catalogue of the remaining commercial structures in the small communities of Payne County, Oklahoma. But more importantly, it attempts to analyze the factors that influenced the existence and construction of these buildings. It is obvious that the existence of commercial buildings in a community was and is dependent upon the location of the town in relation to transportation routes, surface water resources, good agricultural land, rural population densities, and the proximity of state or federal governmental agencies. What was not obvious, however, was what resources existed at one time and which of these have survived.

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Whatever Happened to Downtown Ripley

A Letter to Alvan Mitchell from Martha Norton

Editor's Note: Alvan L. Mitchell left Ripley, Oklahoma in the late 1920s. When he returned for a visit some time later, he noted the absence of the downtown area as he had known it. The two letters from Martha Norton were sent to Mr. Mitchell as an explanation. Mr. Mitchell entrusted a transcript of these letters to the Payne County Historical Review before his death in 1982.

April 14, 1971

Dear Alvan:

Did I ever get a surprise this morning when I received a copy of your letter to Thomas Berry.

Alvan, I remember you well and had often wondered about you. If you will answer this, I will tell you a lot of things you might like to know.

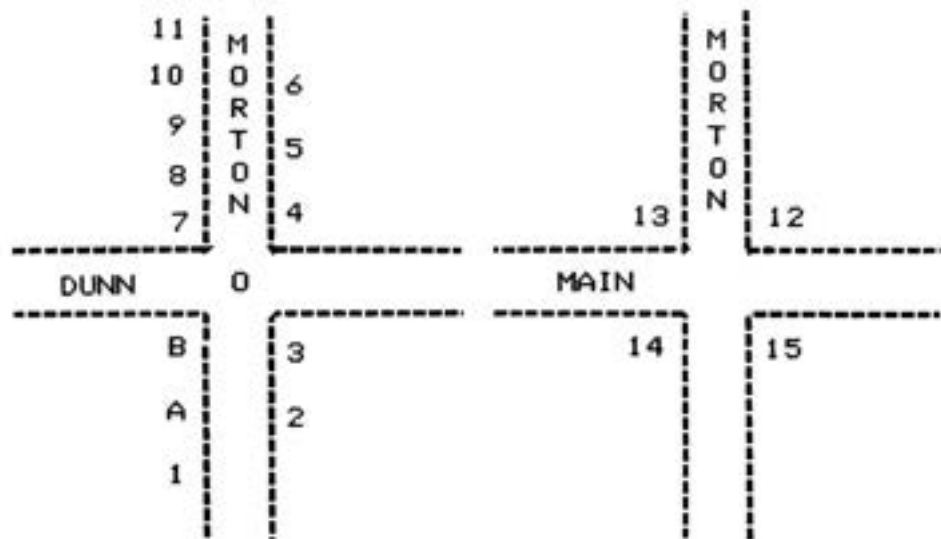
I thought a lot of Marie and Mr. Van Pelt [Alvan's mother and grandfather] and yes, you too. Please answer if you get this.

Martha Norton

Dear Alvan:

Just received your letter today. You spoke of Billy McGinty saying he took care of your mother's and Mr. Van Pelt's graves. He and Mr. Hastings both did a lot of work in the cemetery. You also asked me what happened to downtown Ripley. I really did not know you were living. But, I had thought of you so often and wondered about you. Your mother was Elaine's piano teacher, and your mother so wonderfully entertained the Payne County Rural Letter Carriers at their annual banquet in the I.O.O.F. Hall over the old stone drugstore building. That building had a full-sized basement. It became so weak it was condemned. It was not allowed to be used for anything so it was torn down. There had been a garage in the building straight across the street, and an old truck was stored in it. The tale was told that the owner of the truck set fire to it to collect the insurance on it. But I don't know whether there was any truth to that or not.

Bill Kelly's brick building was next to the frame building and my daddy owned the brick building next to it. The Fire Department saved both the brick buildings. The ones that Tom Berry has now. His office is in the front of the Kelly building and the rest of it and the other building was used for storage. See below the street intersection and the buildings near it.



1. The Van Pelt newspaper and print shop.
2. A one-story stone building. Tom Jordan had a general merchandise store there.
3. A two-story sandstone building. Drug store first floor. I.O.O.F. Hall above and it was there in 1902.
4. Two-story frame building. First floor was the Planter's State Bank. The upper story were offices. I knew Dr. T. A. Love had his office in that building.
5. The Kelly Store. His widow is the one Tom Berry sent your letter to. She took it to Mrs. V. Patterson and Mrs. Patterson sent it to me.
6. Is a red brick building my father had built and had a store in it for several years, then rented the building to John Fitzgerald for a drugstore. Tom Berry has

it now for storage. Along north of that and years before, there was a two-story frame building on the same one-half block.

7. A two-story building. Mr. Shultz had a general merchandise store in that building for many years. It became old and rickety and was torn down. It was one of the earliest buildings.

8. After #7 was torn down, a small building was built; and I don't remember what or who was in it first, but there was a barber shop there once, then a broom factory. A filling station is there now.

9. Daddy built a store building there and rented it to Harry Hackney, and he was still there in 1936.

10. This was my daddy's meat market and living quarters on the alley in the same building.

11. In 1929, daddy had a grocery store here for a short time.

12. In a very early day Mr. Carnahan operated a hotel here. Then Yenser had his drugstore there. Now the Ripley Post Office is in the south part downstairs.

13. W. S. Hastings had a general merchandise store in this big two-story building. He and my dad went broke by crediting people who never paid their bills. North of #13 on the alley was a livery stable years before automobiles.

14. I can't remember what was there first. But the Ripley Bank was there and the building of stone is still there.

15. A brick one-story. A cafe was there a while, but before that it was a hardware store, and before that a Racket store, such as our ten cent to one dollar stores, before my dad went into the meat market around 1904.

Now Alvan, please refer to my first building location map and see "A". There was a building along there that was two story and I am not sure it was where the print shop was or if the print shop was #1 or "A". "B" was Plogs (Plogues, I think) hardware store. He sold to someone else and I guess you can tell I can't remember. I was quite young when some things happened and I am not sure who was running that hardware, implement and harness store about 1915. But that building was vacant for sometime George (Norton) and my daddy bought it, tore it down, and sold a lot of lumber and we used the lumber also to remodel our house in 1929.

The only person I knew who lived in Ripley in the very early days is a cousin of mine who lives in Oklahoma City now. I lived in Ripley over sixty years.

I worked with Mrs. Joyce Stanton when she was writing some chronicals of Oklahoma and together we went to OSU and read the old Ripley newspapers where we found a lot more things.

Oh yes, the McGinty's Cowboy Band you asked about: Whitie McLaughlin had a lot of old pictures but would not let Mrs. Stanton have any of them. But I've heard Whitie is dead and if so, I don't know what has been done with his pictures. But when Ripley was new a bandstand was built in the intersection and it is marked "O".

The Shultz boys and other young men had a band organized and would have band practice in that stand evenings. George bought the old bandstand about 1915 and moved it to his mother's home and enclosed it for an extra room.

Whitie's first wife, Ruby Betz, died and he married again. But Ruby's mother still lives in Ripley. She might be able to tell you about his friends. Her name is Mrs. Millie Betz, Ripley, 74062.

Well Alvan, I've run down. Hope this will help you out. Oh yes, one more thing: the only tornado that ever struck Ripley was maybe five years ago. Never before then.

There was a fire on Main Street west of Morton Avenue that burned some buildings.

Your old friend,
Martha Norton

P. S. Well, I can't quit now. About the depot, I don't know who built it, the lunchroom I mean. Carl Radabaugh ran it for a long time. George and I rented the building and ran it for a long time. Sometimes there would be three freight trains and a passenger in the yard at one time. The railroad bridge across the river washed out and later all the tracks were taken out. The old stone school building was built in 1902, and it was condemned, sold and torn down years ago, so it was only fire that destroyed any business buildings. The rest were torn down to keep them from falling down.

Note: I wrote an answer thanking Martha for her effort and interest, but it was returned from Santa Ana, California. A while later I wrote another one. It was returned also. It is my hope that the publishing of her letter might some how thank her. She was my idea of a true Ripleyite.

A. L. M.

by L. D. "Bill" Melton

Early Day Automobiles in Stillwater

Both my life and the automobile age began at about the same time. By December, 1903, a few inventors in England, France, and Germany had produced vehicles moved by their own power, and Henry Ford up in Michigan had just organized the Ford Motor Company and was close to starting productions of his Model T. When I was born in Stillwater, there may not have been a single auto to be seen on the streets; but they began arriving very soon afterward.

My earliest recollection of automobiles began about 1908 or 1909. Fords were by far the most numerous, thanks to Henry's policy of low prices and to the industry of John Barnes, Stillwater's first Ford dealer. John Barnes lived in an old red brick house at the south end of Main Street that the new highway wiped out. He serviced Fords in his barn.

My father's first car was a second-hand 1908 or 1909 Ford (without doors) purchased from Harry Donart, I think in 1910. Family rumor had it that this car probably saved my mother's life, by getting her out of that terribly hot house for pleasant summer evening drives around town. I recall a

meeting one evening on Main Street between our family and Harry Donart in which C. A. (my father) was telling Harry how fortunate he had been in not having any tire trouble during the month he had owned the vehicle. Before we had gone another block, two tires blew out. Tires in those days caused more trouble and cussing than the vehicles themselves. There was no such thing as "state of art" when it came to tires--very little "art" had yet been learned in the manufacture of tires.

The white Overland touring car owned by Robert A. Lowery, prominent local attorney, stands out in my mind among the early autos seen around town. Also Grover Sheidler's racy little two-passenger Briscoe. Most of the town's leading citizens owned a car of some sort, including Walter Strode (who was killed three miles north of town when his car turned over on him), Dale Lytton, M. W. J. Holt, Will Swiler, and numerous others, but I don't remember their particular choices among automobiles. Jake Katz was slower to move into the automotive age; but when he did, he went all out totus porcus--with a huge straight eight Imperial 7 passenger sedan. I recall that M. J. Otey first drove a Ford before purchasing a Hudson from Wyche Murphy along about 1916. Professor A. C. Baer, head of the dairy department at the college, had an Overland. Jim Berry had a family-sized Buick and a Ford for business.

The very oldest car I can remember was an old Cadillac, stashed in H. B. Bullen's barn in the 300 block of West Street. I found it when I was exploring in back yards as a boy. As I recall, it was a 1906 model, but I never saw it in operation.

Doc Gray used an Oakland on his professional calls. I don't remember the kind of car Freeman E. Miller had, but I do recall the team of horses he kept in his barn up the alley from where we lived. I think he was slower to adapt to new ideas. He also had a pasture out north of town that provided hay for his horses. It was something of a playground for us boys. We used to play "S. F. D." out there (Stillwater Fire Department) and set fire to his pasture to enjoy the juvenile pleasure of trying to put it out with wet gunny sacks. We didn't always succeed. We also had fun fighting bumble bees with home-made paddles, until they made it too hot for us. But that is another story.

Another notable addition to autos in Stillwater was that of C. Ray Smith, or perhaps his father, who boasted of the first air-cooled Franklin automobile. Val Schott's long-time addiction to the Studebaker was a subject of some comment around town. He stayed with that car a long time; and, indeed, the early Studebaker was a notably dependable automobile.

One of the fanciest cars brought to Stillwater was Jimmy Hoke's Stutz Bearcat with four large cylinders, high style, high speed, and much noise. When first received along about 1919, this car was a modest grey in color, but Jim had it painted a more suitable yellow. A year or so later, he and Paul Brock each bought a Harley-Davidson motorcycle and drove them one summer out to Colorado Springs and back—an adventure almost as hazardous on those sandy roads as crossing the plains in a covered wagon had been a few decades earlier. Paul should put

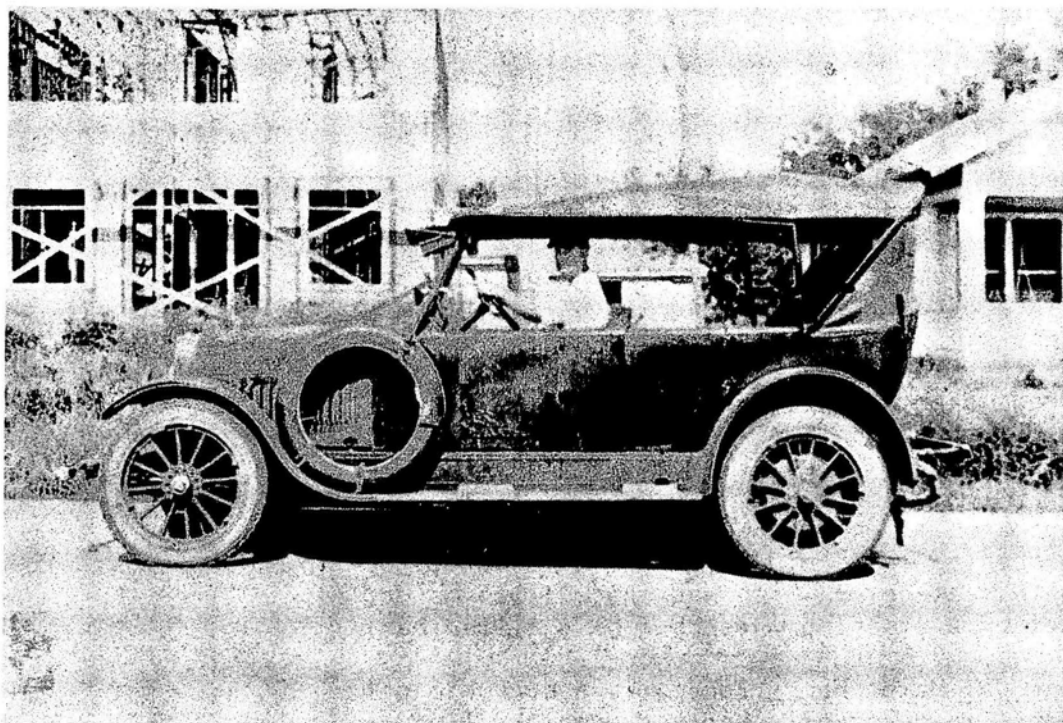
an account of that trip on tape while he is still able.

Some of the other early-day cars I remember were W. B. Swinford's Chandler, Walter Hert's Flanders, Dr. M. A. Beeson's Mitchell, and Harry Swope's Hudson. These cars all knew the roads to Manitou Springs during summer months, for Colorado took the place of air conditioning for Stillwater's more affluent families in those times. Some of the other popular makes of cars to be seen were the Dodge, Reo, Huppmobile, Oldsmobile, Pontiac, and now and then a Packard.

For a while one summer I helped deliver groceries in an old chain drive Maxwell, the main feature of which was that it was guided not by a steering wheel but by a tiller bar.

One day Mayor Harry Jones, in a hurry to get home, inadvertently knocked over the fire plug on the northwest corner of Seventh and Main in front of Charlie Pearson's news stand, with his large green Buick sedan (subsequently reimbursing the city, of course).

Any account of early day autos familiar to Stillwater citizens would not be complete without mentions of C. A. Melton's Stanley steamer, which he owned and pampered for about 20 years from 1919 to 1939. C. A. traded a five-room frame bungalow on Lowery Street for this used steamer; then he was forced to educate himself as a steam engineer so as to learn how to steam it up and drive it safely. It was used mostly on week-ends, hauling the South Methodist Church choir or other groups out to Yost



C. A. Melton bought a Stanley steamer automobile. Regardless of its cumbersome appearance, the Stanley steam car was for its time a low-slung, long car. It had a pick-up and speed unequalled by the gas-motored cars of the times. The engine-hoods of gas cars were much smaller, and even then their engines left considerable space; the steamer's boiler filled all of the space under the hood.

Lake for picnic suppers. The car operated on kerosene with a gasoline pilot burner to get the main burners started. It held about 50 gallons of water that, in due course, became steam fed to a two-cylinder, double action, steam engine located on the rear axle. It had tremendous pick-up and one of his favorite tricks (there were several) was to encourage a race on some dusty road with a gasoline engine car, then running away and leaving the other folks eating dust.

Over the course of ten or fifteen years, he virtually rebuilt that car: a new Baker boiler manufactured in Pueblo producing 600 pounds of steam pressure, smaller wooden-spoke wheels so as to accommodate new balloon tires which came into use in the mid-1920s, new leather upholstery, a new top, and a locomotive whistle--which figured in another trick. He used to stop just short of the railroad track on the Yost Lake Road (close to the old North Star School), waiting until some approaching car came up onto the tracks, then blowing his locomotive whistle and scaring the occupants of the approaching car half to death. This, of course, would never do today, with our over supply of eager young lawyers waiting for some excuse to file a lawsuit regardless of justification. In those days, before radio and television provided our entertainment, people had to make their own fun, and this was Charley Melton's way of having fun--along with that big imitation spider which he allowed to drop slowly below his lapel in front of some unsuspecting victim.

The main burners of this steamer would occasionally "pop back," with the kerosene starting to burn outside the combustion chamber, giving the impression that the vehicle was on fire underneath, as indeed it was, but without serious result usually. When this happened, it was a common experience for some man to dash off of his front porch waving and shouting, "your car is on fire, your car is on fire." To which C. A. would respond by waving back, smiling, and shouting, "I know it, thank you," and drive on. The fire department was also called out now and then when it became necessary to blow out the boiler tubes, and

the resulting noise, smoke and steam gave people the idea that the garage or barn was on fire. C. A. finally grew tired of steaming it up and succumbed to the entreaties of a retired locomotive engineer who had just lost his wife and needed a plaything to keep him occupied and sold the steamer for \$600 as I remember. Today it would bring perhaps one hundred times that amount. But the older generation are not the only ones who made business mistakes. I have made a few myself.

Many early day prideful auto owners felt frustrated for lack of any paved road on which to test their vehicles' speed. About the only stretch of pavement anywhere around was a three-mile stretch north of Cushing that led out to a refinery. Motorists from all over the county would drive to Cushing to see how fast they could go on that narrow stretch of paving before its fast-approaching end forced them to decelerate. Some even got up to 60 miles per hour, but few exceeded that speed. Another testing ground for new cars was depot hill on East Ninth Street in Stillwater, to test acceleration from a standing start to the top of the hill or perhaps to see how slow their cars could move up in high gear without bucking. These two facilities were hardly adequate but had to serve for several years before paving became more general.

Rivalry between different makes of cars was pretty intense in early years. I remember one 4th of July along about 1912 or 1913 when a much ballyhooded race was whopped up between a Ford driven by Grover Sheidler and some larger make of car driven by a local character named Jack Robinson. This race

came off as planned at the fairgrounds before a large crowd; the Ford won handily by virtue of its much quicker getaway. At the end, seeing defeat, Robinson drove his car off the track into a pond and never finished the course.

It was not essential that early day auto dealers have a garage for servicing the vehicles they sold. Independently owned garages, such as Ricker's on South Main Street, took care of such details. I remember C. E. Hull's dealership of the Willys-Knight with its sleeve-valve engine. My father, who came to Stillwater in 1900 and whose main business was loans, insurance and real estate ("Barrels of money to loan" being his slogan), yielded to temptation and obtained the Hudson Super Six dealership in 1916. He sold Hudsons and Essex cars for a few years as a sideline. It was not until about 1920 that bona fide agencies, such as Ward Chevrolet and Harley Thomas' Ford agency, began to institutionalize this line of business by providing complete service.

Early businessmen were great boosters for their communities, and each summer they would organize booster trips around the county. They would parade 25 or 30 automobiles (raising a lot of dust on route) going first to Ripley (which had growth aspirations of its own), then on to Cushing (Stillwater's biggest competitor) for lunch and speeches, then on to Yale, Morrison, Glencoe, and finally back home--tired, dusty but happy. On one such booster trip I remember seeing Bob Lowery's white Overland beside the road several times while he sweated over punctures and blowouts. It was reported that he had to make more than 20

tire repairs on that day. Such were the tribulations of early day boosters at the beginning of the automobile age.

Those were great days not only for Stillwater, but for the nation and the world. The automotive age lifted the conveyance of people to an entirely new plateau--from the slow eight to ten miles per hour of the horse and buggy up to a speed many times that. Automobiles forced the building of new roads and highways across state and nation, expanded business opportunities and volume, gave birth to the vacation industry, and made life much more pleasurable for individuals and families--not to mention the tremendous aid and assistance to the serious business of courtship.

Those of adventurous spirit--and some funds--were the first to avail themselves of this marvelous invention, but Henry Ford soon made it available to most everyone to have and enjoy.

There must have been a hundred or more different makes of automobiles manufactured in the early days all around the nation (including even the Tulsa Four here in Oklahoma) before General Motors began its consolidation process and competition forced most independent car makers out of business. Other old-timers around Stillwater and Payne County will have their own recollections of this stimulating era and will be able to supplement my personal recollections with their own. This period was a giant stride forward for mankind in transportation, and it is being matched today in the field of communications. It was an education and a delight to have lived in those days.

Minutes

Payne County Historical Society

June 18, 1985

The Payne County Historical Society met on June 18 at the Knights of Columbus Hall. Dinner was catered by the Luncheon Junction.

President Carol Bormann presided at the meeting. Treasurer Bill Warde announced a balance of \$953.35, a savings account balance of \$383.93, and CD interest of \$38.00.

David Baird presented a certificate to Mr. H. F. Donnelly in appreciation for his promotion of local history especially in the public schools.

Carol Bormann presented certificates of thanks to David Baird and Lawrence Erwin for their promotion of the Payne Colony Centennial. She also expressed our appreciation to Ann Carlson and Doris Dellinger.

David Baird announced the city is looking for an alternate site for the power station. The first proposed site was the land surrounding the old school house on 19th and Sangre.

Chairman of the nomination committee
announced the following slate of officers:

- President: Lawrence Erwin
- Vice-President: Bill & Virginia
Thomas
- Secretary: Peggy McCormick
- Directors: Carol Bormann
Winfrey Houston
Frank Echardt

The program was presented by Winfrey
Houston. He related the story of the
restoration of the 7th Avenue Center.

The Historical Society is considering a
project for the publication of a Payne
County History Book. A sample of the books
was presented.

Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Peggy McCormick
Secretary



Officers

Lawrence Erwin, *President*
Bill and Virginia Thomas, *Vice President*
Peggy McCormick, *Secretary*
Doris Scott, *Treasurer*

Board of Directors

W. David Baird, *term expiring 1986*
Carol Bormann, *term expiring 1986*
Doris Dellinger, *term expiring 1987*
Winfrey Houston, *term expiring 1988*
Frank Eckhart, *term expiring 1988*

Payne County Historical Society is organized in order to bring together people interested in history and especially the history of Payne County, Oklahoma. The Society's major function is to discover and collect any materials that 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. Membership dues are: annual individual, \$10.00; annual family, \$15.00; annual contributing, \$25.00; institutional, \$20.00; sustaining, \$50.00; life, \$100.00 paid in one year. Membership applications and dues should be sent to the treasurer.

All members receive copies of the *Review* free. In addition, the Society sponsors informative meetings in September, December, March, and June. Board meetings are held on the second Tuesday of each month that a regular meeting is not held. Meetings are held at noon at the Luncheon Junction in downtown Stillwater. All members are encouraged to attend.

Payne County Historical Society

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