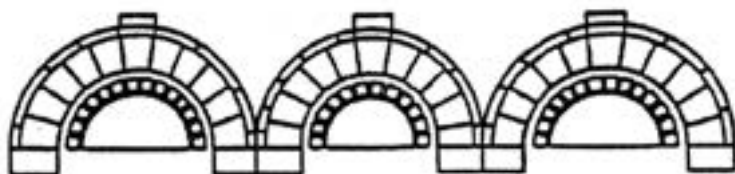


**Payne County  
Historical Review**



*PAYNE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY*

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## Editor's Notes

This issue of the *Payne County Historical Review* includes a fascinating look at the 1920s and some of the attitudes of the times in Payne County. Jim Showalter's "The Peculiar Tale of Sgt. Webber" reminds us that our history has some dark episodes and we need to remember those as well as the events and people that we celebrate. Other articles touch on some of the common themes of the 20th century: the railroad, the Dust Bowl, the Depression, and World War II.

I would like to express special appreciation to Jean Mehan Zetterberg for her history of Mehan. In late December 1999, this small community southeast of Stillwater marked the 100th anniversary of its founding. Another Payne County town turned 100 this year, and that town is Ripley, located on the banks of the Cimarron. The fall issue of the *Review* will include an article about Ripley's colorful history.

Finally, thanks go to Troy Frieling for providing information about the Perkins oral history project and to Alvena Bieri for the review, first published in the *Stillwater NewsPress*, of Mary Jane Warde's *George Washington Grayson and the Creek Nation 1843-1920*. Dr. Warde is a member of the Payne County Historical Society and a resident of Stillwater, as well as Indian historian for the Oklahoma Historical Society.

## The Peculiar Tale of Sgt. Webber

by

Jim Showalter

This is a story of a man who appeared and disappeared in the newspapers of Payne County in the space of a month: June 1923. He came out of obscurity and returned to obscurity, but in the period of his brief public life in the county he spoke to thousands, appeared in all the major cities and towns of the county, and was applauded by major organizations and leading citizens. The message he spoke connected with the thinking of the white citizens of the county of the period: It may be an unattractive message today, but it touched on the fears and worries of many in Payne County of 1923.

In 1923, Payne County was about evenly split between urban and rural people. Oil was a more valuable commodity to the county than agricultural commodities, and both oil and agriculture were still in a depressed state of economics due to the recession of 1920-21. In 1920 the county had 30,180 residents according to the U.S. Census, with 93.5% native born whites and 4.0% black.<sup>1</sup>

The county was strongly white protestant. In the religious census of 1926, 9,975 countians claimed church membership. The Disciples of Christ had 2,232, northern Methodists 1,989, Southern Baptists 1,668, Presbyterians 785, and Evangelical United Brethren 325. These five main denominations totaled 6,999 members, or 70.2% of the total churched in the county. They were all evangelical and cooperative, one with the other. To approach it from another direction, there were 791 Roman Catholics (8%), 740 blacks of various denominations (7.4%), 525 classified as "All other bodies" (5.3%), and a few Jewish people. This accounted for about 20.7% of those who were not evangelical, white protestants.<sup>2</sup> The county was full of revivals, Sunday Schools were large and attendance booming, and many countians spent all day Sunday, plus Wednesday nights, attending church.

One of the most frequently heard values in the Payne County of 1923 was "100% Americanism." It was assumed everyone knew the meaning of

this phrase, but if they did it was likely because it was an umbrella that sheltered many forms of "nativism." This nativism included fear of threats to patriotism and fear of foreigners with "un-American" ideas and habits. It included attacks on "slackers" from the war and it was implicitly racist, reinforcing the Jim Crow laws then in effect. The county's concerns for "100% Americanism" also stemmed from the vilification of dissent during World War I, the Russian Revolution which spread fear of "Bolsheviks" and "Reds" and led to the "Red Scare of 1919," and labor unrest after the War which conservatives often laid at the door of "radicals" and "foreign agitators." In short, "100% Americanism" was a package of fears and affirmations that was understood by the white countians.

The tale of Sgt. Webber pulls much of this together. The late spring of 1923 was a tense time in Stillwater and, more and more, the county and the state. Despite the resistance of President John Whitehurst of the State Board of Agriculture, which oversaw the college in Stillwater, the President of Oklahoma A. & M. College, James B. Eskridge, had been fired.<sup>3</sup> George Wilson was appointed by Governor Walton to the position in May 1923.

Wilson was the "Manager" of the Farmer Labor Reconstruction League, an organization whose Shawnee Platform candidate Walton had subscribed to in the 1922 campaign. Wilson and his organization, plus many of the advisors of Walton, were labelled as "socialists" by their opponents. Wilson proposed making the college everyman's school, with a tendency on his part to slight academics and research in favor of practical instruction. When he was appointed, several professors resigned from the college in protest. Stillwater held rallies and sent a delegation to the governor. Walton was not pleased and told the group to get back to their city. President Wilson spent several days on campus, guarded continuously by Highway Patrolmen. Pressure mounted against the appointment and Walton had second thoughts. Wilson was forced to resign under pressure from the town and the state in late July 1923.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time as the Wilson affair was being played out in Payne County, Walton was beginning his struggle against the "whipping parties" he claimed were ravaging the state. Most observers then and now saw this move as an attempt to distract the public gaze from Walton's failure to

work with the state legislature. Whatever his reasons were, Walton was soon to declare martial law in selected cities, and eventually the whole state, as he carried out a much-publicized fight against the Ku Klux Klan. In November 1923, after a constitutional crisis and the final Supreme Court decision allowing the state legislature to call itself into session in the case of an impeachment charge, Walton was impeached and convicted.<sup>5</sup>

In the midst of these tumultuous times, "Sergeant" Webber briefly shot across the landscape of Payne County. On June 13, a Thursday, Mr. Arch Flood of Cushing swore out a complaint against a "street speaker," William Franklin "Sergeant" Webber, for public drunkenness. Mr. Flood claimed to have observed the sergeant drunk on a street in Cushing on June 4. Judge Brown Moore in Stillwater, a man described as pro-Walton and who was head of the Democratic Party in the county, issued an arrest warrant and Webber was arrested. Sheriff Tull made the arrest but later told the newspaper that he thought it was a frame-up.<sup>6</sup>

Quickly the American Legion post in Stillwater, and a group of fifteen Stillwater men, forced a hearing and paid Webber's bond. Some arrived at the court house before Webber's arrest at 8 p.m. Wednesday. Representing Fludd in this matter, as he had defended him in several previous matters, including a charge of moonshining [which garnered a guilty plea from Fludd], was Walter Mathews. A Cushing attorney, Mathews had been whipped the previous September by thirteen men, two from Cushing and the rest from Shamrock in Creek County. The Cushing men included the head of the Ku Klux Klan in Cushing and a minister who was in that "Klavern" of the Klan. All the men in the whipping party were eventually acquitted.<sup>7</sup>

The judge was forced to have a hearing that evening and had to set bail, which was promptly paid by various citizens. After the court hearing, he and the judge met in the judge's chambers, arguing over the date for his trial. As they parted, the judge said, "I will not argue with you here in my office, but you can go camp in the streets and preach my funeral every night if you want to." "Don't Worry, Judge, I'll Lay it on," was the reply. And he did.

With his arrest and immediate bail on June 13, Sgt. Webber began a

speaking journey through the urban county. Webber spoke that night on the streets of Stillwater, after which he was hustled to the American Legion hall for a fete. He claimed to be an "ex-secret service and Legion man." At the Legion Hall, "Maj. J.B. Pate, in a brief speech, commended him for his 'fearless and open stand' against the 'reds,' the bolshevists, the communists, the socialists and the I.W.W. organization, and proposed that a collection be taken for the speaker. A letter of endorsement by the post was ordered prepared."<sup>8</sup>

Sgt. Webber continued to speak in Stillwater streets on Thursday. He had claimed he would go to Perry Thursday, but he later cancelled that trip. Friday morning he went to Cushing.

In Cushing on Friday evening, an interesting confrontation occurred as he spoke on the streets. Sgt. Webber had, in:

...several addresses on the streets of Stillwater last week, made some remarks in his last talk Thursday night about Mrs. A.L. Bowline that he retracted Friday night when faced by A. L. Bowline in Cushing, so he signed following:

'To Whom It may Concern: I did not mean to infer that Mrs. Bowline, in using the New Republic in her classes, is herself representing socialism, free love, bolshevism or any 'red' tendencies whatsoever.

Sergeant William F. Webber'<sup>9</sup>

It is interesting how many fears can be bundled together in a run-on sentence.

Webber was reported speaking in Yale Saturday afternoon and evening, where the editor reported that he hit "...socialists, the reds, the I.W.W.s and others...." and also gave "...several packages to Judge Brown Moore and to Arch Flood...."<sup>10</sup> He was expected the following Tuesday evening (June 19) in Ripley. More than two-hundred citizens came out that evening to hear Sgt. Webber, but he had auto problems which delayed and then cancelled his appearance. "It was after 10 o'clock before the crowd dispersed upon learning that it would be impossible for the speaker to get here in time for a talk."<sup>11</sup> They rescheduled him for Thursday evening. The crowds

returned to downtown Ripley.

An immense crowd gathered here last Thursday night to hear Sergeant Webber deliver an address on Bolshevism, Anarchism and Socialism. The sentiments of the speaker were indorse [sic] by many, but there were also dissatisfied ones who criticised the lecture. Sergeant Webber has made addresses in most every town in the county and has been greeted by large audiences.<sup>12</sup>

The next day he seemed to have spent the afternoon in Cushing, but that evening he went to Perkins. "Quite a number from Free Silver vicinity [a district directly south of Ripley] attended the speaking at Perkins Friday night by Sergeant Webber. All were much pleased with his speech."<sup>13</sup> Two days later, on Sunday, he spoke at Mehan. "Sergeant Webber spoke to a large and appreciative audience here Sunday afternoon. His talk was well received and seemed to please everybody, with one or two exceptions."<sup>14</sup>

Sometime in the beginning of the next week, the Sergeant was up in Yale and the American Legion hosted him at a hastily called special meeting. About fifty were present "on a hot night" and he spoke for two hours. He claimed to have served almost three years with the Gordon Highlanders and Canadian Expeditionary Force, then was an instructor for the U.S. Army upon his return to the U.S. There was no mention of his being an "ex-secret service man" as he had told the Stillwater Legion post: the Sergeant's actual service record seemed factually malleable.

Sergeant Webber's work carried him into some of the hotbeds of radicalism and I.W.W.ism, and after becoming familiar with their methods and efforts to destroy our government and our institutions, he has made it his life's work to oppose their activities and to awaken people to a realization of their duty and their responsibility. He is preaching a thoroughly sound doctrin [sic] of Americanism. It is not the purpose of this article to even make an outline of his talk which lasted about two hours; but suffice to say there was no sign of fatigue visible on anp [sic] o [sic] his audience — everp [sic] bit of his talk was interesting and important.<sup>15</sup>



Possibly the truest measure of how rampant these nativist ideas were in Payne County at the time is the fact that fifty men sat in a hot room for two hours listening to it, all without fatigue.

Finally, we hear of Sgt. Webber one more time. The meandering readers from the Free Silver district reported to the *Ripley Record* that they had again travelled to hear the speaker.

A large crowd from this community attended the public naturalization [initiation] of the K.K.K. east of Cushing last Thursday night [June 28, 1923]. The Free Silver bunch enjoyed Sergeant Webber's speech as he unfolded real facts which they have been knowing for years.<sup>16</sup>

At that point the itinerant Sergeant seemed to disappear from the county records. The fact that he knew about Mrs. Boline's class in Cushing would seem to indicate he spent some time in that vicinity, but the fact he claimed a self-appointed crusade to inform people of the red menace and other things leaves open the possibility that he might have been an itinerant speaker. In a cynical age he might have been judged a crazy ranter or, maybe even more sinister, a flim-flam man who had found a great scam. The fact that there are two descriptions of his military past would tend to confirm a certain nebulousness about "Sergeant" Webber. But his veracity is not of great concern here. What was important was that he attracted large crowds who largely agreed with him, and these included local leaders.

The fact that he ended at a Klan naturalization gives mixed signals. At those events, counted sacred by the organization, I know of no other case where a non-Klansman spoke. One reason for this was that the initiates at a Klan "naturalization" were without hoods until they became members. That's why crowds were kept behind them at some distance. An outsider could have pierced their veil of anonymity by standing in front of them to speak. On the other hand, what he was saying and the connections, sometimes great leaps, he was making between issues, was not unusual in Payne County, Oklahoma, at that time, both within and without the Klan.

Sgt. Webber's travels through Payne County in that hot summer of martial law and confusion in Oklahoma suggest some intriguing points.

First, the *Cushing Citizen* made no reference to him despite the fact that this was the paper in the town where the events began and seemed to have ended. One crucial issue of the paper is missing during this period — the *Citizen* seemed prone to losing issues, especially around times of some crisis. But Webber was around long enough to warrant some remark unless the paper specifically chose to ignore the matter. Editor E.M. Green chose to ignore nearly all Klan initiations, including the one where Sgt. Webber spoke, so it may have been the policy of this very conservative but rather independent editor to actually try to ignore those he considered more conservative than himself. In his fine study of the reaction of ten Indiana newspapers to the Klan, Bradford Scharlot argues that ignoring the Klan was one strategy adopted by the press opponents to the Klan. In fact, it was possibly the best policy since even “objective” reporting publicized and seemingly legitimized the Klan.<sup>17</sup> In any case, the avoidance of both Webber news and Klan news is a rather intriguing omission by the paper in the largest town in the county.

Also, one reason people flocked to this itinerant street speaker was that Sgt. Webber’s street preaching was spectacle. In a county full of men and women who were daily engaged in hard, often isolated, labor, with none of the distractions we face today, something that not only broke the routine but drew crowds and was talked about was worth seeing. The “facts” preached by the sergeant were known or assumed by most of his hearers, except for the small number of doubters at the Ripley rally. People did not come to hear the sergeant to learn new “facts”: they came to be part of the event. At a certain level, the sergeant’s secular street preaching was similar to a very popular county institution of the time, the Protestant revival. Sgt. Webber and a revivalist might have talked about different subjects, but part of the appeal of both was in the speaking of known truths and predictable claims to people who sincerely wanted to hear them. And both created spectacles which incorporated the viewer in something close to a morality play. Evil was exposed, evil was condemned and attacked, and good triumphed. In Payne County, the summer of 1923 was a hot summer full of worries. The sergeant’s spectacular speeches reinforced ideas held by probably most of the countians. Thus it was something positive to go to on a hot evening after long labors were done.

But the most important thing about the tale of Sgt. Webber is that the county had the ideas before the sergeant opened his mouth. Sgt. Webber did not bring new ideas into the county. The sergeant was simply voicing the county's assumed truths. The County's newspapers portrayed Sgt. Webber almost as a latter day Old Testament prophet. Like the prophets, Webber was not propounding new "truths" but was simply calling his hearers back to the old ones. Unfortunately, Webber's "truths" were of human origin, not divine.

### **A Postscript:**

The author would appreciate hearing from anyone who has information about Sergeant Webber, Walter Mathers, or the Ku Klux Klan in Payne County in the early 1920s. He would also like to speak with anyone who lived in Payne County in the 1920s and is lucky enough to remember it. You may contact him at 405-743-0813, or write: Jim Showalter, 2402 W. 8th, Stillwater, Oklahoma 74074.

## **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup>Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910, vol. III, Population, 1920* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1923): 822.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Religious Bodies: 1926, vol. I, Summary and Detailed Tables* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1930): 661, 663.

<sup>3</sup>Alas, the firing of a college president when a new governor took power was a quite common thing. In this, Walton was not particularly bad, though he replaced both the President at the University of Oklahoma and at Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College. The rather short list of fired presidents probably is a reflection of his short time in office rather than his restraint. Probably the worst Governor for firing presidents and academics was William "Alfalfa Bill" Murray (1930-34).

<sup>4</sup>*Stillwater Gazette*, 25 May 1923, 1. For a complete account of the Wilson affair, see Philip Reed Rulon, *Oklahoma State University Since 1890* (Stillwater, Oklahoma: Oklahoma State University, 1975): 171-80.

<sup>5</sup>Sheldon Neuringer, "Governor Walton's War on the Ku Klux Klan: An Episode in Oklahoma History, 1923-1924," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 9

<sup>6</sup>"Street Speaker Stays 'To Lay It On' Moore," *Stillwater Gazette*, 15 June 1923, 8.

<sup>7</sup>*Stillwater Advance Democrat*, 28 September 1922: 1; *Cushing Citizen*, 6 October 1922, 8; *Cushing Citizen*, 12 October 1922, 5; *Stillwater Gazette*, 13 October 1922, 8; *Cushing Citizen*, 18 October 1923, 2.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*: "Webber Leaves 'To See Arch Flood At Cushing,'" *Stillwater Gazette*, 22 June 1923, 5. The Russian Revolution of 1917 brought fear of "bolshevists" to the United States in a big way. Socialists, strong in the state, were of course not "bolshevists", but the finer points of understanding the differences were ignored by the populace. And the I.W.W., the infamous Industrial Workers of the World, were the most radical labor organization of that time or any in the United States and had made a presence in the boom times of the Cushing Oil Field (1913 -c.1918) in pipelining camps. They were also lumped together with "bolshevists" despite the fact they were actually anarcho-syndicalists.

<sup>9</sup>"Retracts Statements," *Stillwater Advance Democrat*, 21 June 1923, 4.

<sup>10</sup>"More Stillwater Excitement," *Yale Democrat*, 21 June 1923, 1.

<sup>11</sup>*Ripley Record*, 21 June 1923, 8.

<sup>12</sup>"Local and Personal," *Ripley Record*, 28 June 1923, 1.

<sup>13</sup>"Free Silver News," *Ripley Record*, 28 June 1923, 8.

<sup>14</sup>"News of the Neighbors," *Stillwater Gazette*, 29 June 1923, 7.

<sup>15</sup>"American Legion Notes," *Yale Democrat*, 28 June 1923, 1.

<sup>16</sup>"Free Silver News," *Ripley Record*, 5 July 1923, 8.

<sup>17</sup>Radford W. Scharlott, "The Hoosier Journalist and the Hooded Order: Indiana Press Reaction to the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s," *Journalism History*, 15 (Winter, 1988), 122-31, especially p. 130.

# The Story of Mehan

by

Jean Mehan Zetterberg

Picture two people, John and Elizabeth Catharine (also known as EC) Mehan, as they waited in their home for a visit from Mr. U. C. Guss and Mr. W. C. Coyle. They probably couldn't help but think how their lives had changed since John had made the run on April 22, 1889, to claim the land on which they waited now. Mr. Guss and Mr. Coyle represented Eastern Oklahoma Railway, a subsidiary of the Santa Fe Railroad.

A grueling horseback ride from Guthrie, Oklahoma Territory, had started it all. After staking his claim, John found a Sooner on the land. The arguments that took place led to John Mehan being shot. He returned to Kansas, where EC nursed him back to health and then made the return trip with his family and all their possessions. It took hard work to make a living and build a home in that day. The tornado of April 26, 1893, claimed that home. Along with losing their home, they also lost their daughter, Pearl, who died when a piece of wood penetrated her skull. Mehan didn't have a cemetery, so she was buried somewhere on the place. (After all these years, her grave cannot be found.) John and EC had managed to put their grief behind them and carry on.

Sitting in their parlor now, it appeared that life would have another twist and turn to it. They were excited as well as apprehensive. These railroad men had been there before, but this time they would bring a document that would change the Mehans' lives.

One thing that is prominent in most people's minds as a key factor in developing the United States is the railroad. The railroads inched their way across our land from East to West, and now it wished to go through Payne County, Territory of Oklahoma.

So on this particular day, December 18, 1899, these four people sat around a table and signed the agreement stating that the Mehans would donate the right of way for this railroad to go through their property

and, in exchange, the railroad would establish a depot and a townsite, naming that town Mehan.

The agreement also stated that the Mehans and the railroad would "equally bear" the expenses of surveying and platting the town, the "costs to be paid for out of the sale of lots in said town." The revenue remaining after all these expenses would be divided equally between both parties.

As these four individuals signed their names, the course of history changed for this little part of the world. The Mehans would no longer farm for their living, but instead, would be in the business of selling lots.

Some of these lots were 25' wide and some were 50' wide. The hopes that John and EC had for the town were realized. The town was a commercial success for years, even though the roads were never paved. The railroad depot was established along with a house in which the railroad agent lived. A post office was established on February 8, 1900, followed by houses, a cotton mill, nursery, stores, a dance hall, hotels, and with God's leading, a United Brethren Church. Other places of business were an implement store, livery and blacksmith shop, and, very important, a lumber yard. Stock yards were developed on the Barker farm just south of Mehan.

In 1925, the Shaffer Oil Company struck oil just south of Mehan and the well flowed at a barrel a minute. This created a huge demand for lumber to build oil derricks, platforms, and other items needed for oil production. This brought in lots of men who were speculators, explorers, and workers, and they needed places to stay. Rooming houses sprang up almost overnight. Suddenly, the streets of Mehan became unsafe, and nice young ladies made sure they were at home before dark.

Around 1926, George Tietz established the Tietz Addition to the Town of Mehan. The current church [Mehan Union Church] stands on that addition. The *Stillwater Gazette* announced on February 19, 1926, that the population of Mehan had grown from 40 to 395.

Mehan enjoyed this prosperity until the Great Depression of 1929. Oil prices dropped to as low as 16 cents a barrel. The old wooden

### When the Mehan Church Was Moved\*

When we arrived in the Mehan community [in the spring of 1934] we started attending [church] there. The church was two blocks east of the present one. Then in the late 1930's the attendance dropped off. Some families west of Mehan realized they were in the majority and moved the church building (a one-room building) to their community. Of course, our group didn't think they could get it across the bridge, but they did and we were without a church — until the Zetterberg family came. Isn't it amazing what a family with the Lord's help can do!

\*From a letter written by Harold Mehan in 1999 to his cousin Jean.

derricks and many buildings were either moved off or torn down. Like the whole nation, Mehan began a decline and, unlike many other places, was unable to resurrect the good times.

In 1943, the U.S. government took notice of Mehan's declining population and closed the post office. Then in May 1957, after several days of torrential rains, the railroad bridge across the Cimarron River washed out. Santa Fe decided not to rebuild, and rail service to Mehan abruptly came to an end. Workers followed and dug up the ties and tracks, and one more nail was put into the coffin of a dead town.

But Mehan didn't die! It remained a small community where children could play without worries or concerns of parents. Today, approximately 35 people live in Mehan. And even though the church was moved off, a new fellowship developed and evolved into the current Mehan Union Church, where suddenly, on a Sunday, the population of Mehan explodes to 300.

None of the Mehans ever became famous or well-known, but the family has never been in trouble with the law and were always honest and above-board. The new territory of Oklahoma needed this type of

family and many other like families to make Oklahoma what it is today.

God had a plan for this little town. Possibly, it's not exactly like we or John Mehan imagined it would be, but the people of this country town and church are a compassionate and caring people, and the Mehan Union Church of Mehan, Oklahoma, has been a force for good for a very long time.



## How We Remember: An Oral History Project by Students of Perkins-Tryon High School

by  
Carla Chlouber

In the fall of 1999, students of Perkins-Tryon teacher Penny Palmer interviewed residents of the Perkins area for an oral history project. They were assisted by Troy Frieling, of Stillwater, whose aunt, Felsa Hastings, was one of those interviewed. Students involved in the project were Josie Hilley, Christie Gill, Mandi Hickman, Kerri Gallahar, Kara Lawson, Lacy Smith, Jeremy Mobley, Ryan Shelton, and Kerilee Springer.

Copies of the videotaped interviews have been donated to the Payne County Historical Society and are part of the Society's archives in the Stillwater Public Library.

Following is a list of the people who were interviewed, along with highlights of those interviews:

**Howard Springer.** Howard Springer, an Iowa Indian and leader in the Native American Church, was born in 1924. He remembers the days of the Dust Bowl, when his family would put rags around windows and under doors to keep out the dust. He says his family raised corn, cotton, and wheat near Perkins. "We done pretty good," he says. He also remembers how Frank (Pistol Pete) Eaton bought suckers for him when he was a small boy.

He went to school at Buzzard's Roost, a country school with one teacher for all eight grades. When it snowed, he wrapped his feet in gunny sacks to walk to school. He says he got married instead of graduating from high school.

In 1952 he went to Arkansas City, Kansas, to look for a job. He applied for a job at a flour mill but was told they weren't hiring. He says that he then saw a white boy apply and get a job. So he went back later and talked to another supervisor, who hired him. He worked for the company 35

years.

He now lives near Perkins on the allotment that originally belonged to his grandmother, Josie Springer. He was elected chairman of the Iowa Tribe for a two-year term in 1991, but he says when his term was up he was “glad to get out of there.”

As for the Iowa heritage, he says that it “seems like nobody is interested in it.” He says his mother could “talk Indian” but his dad wasn’t very good at it. He says that now no one can speak the Iowa language. He knows a little bit but not enough to carry on a conversation. He comments, “Everybody comes to me like I know everything, but I don’t.” He says he passes on what he remembers hearing, but that’s all.

He says that “they claim at one time we were the Otoes, Iowas, Omaha, Sac and Fox, Poncas — all belonged to the Sioux Tribe before they branched off.” The name for great spirit is the same in Ponca, Iowa, and Otoe. As an aside, he notes that no one talks Otoe anymore, either. Joe Bassett, who passed away a couple of years ago, could talk Otoe, “but it’s gone now.”

**Eddie and Lodene Whitehead.** Lodene was born about three blocks from where she lives now in Perkins. She says her grandfather Knight is considered the founder of Perkins. Eddie’s father came to Oklahoma in the run and was a deputy sheriff. Lodene’s grandfather Knight donated a cemetery on his land for Catholics and Blacks, who couldn’t be buried in the Perkins cemetery.

Lodene remembers picking wild plums along the Cimarron and swimming in the river. They didn’t have a lot of toys, but they played dominos and the boys played with tops. She also remembers country dances, when they would take up the rugs and fiddlers would play.

Eddie and Lodene talk about the area’s Indians, reporting that Lodene’s grandfather “smoked the peace pipe” with the Indians.

The couple met when they worked at Oklahoma A&M’s Agricultural Experiment Station at Perkins, where Lodene’s job was identifying insects. Eddie’s first job after college was during the Depression. He says that a rich woman had donated ten acres along the river in Oklahoma City for a “packing box town.” Eddie taught the residents how to plant gardens.

Oklahoma's governor, Alfalfa Bill Murray donated the seeds.

Later, Eddie supervised the planting of shelter belts in Oklahoma. In the Dust Bowl, he says, "The dirt would blow and cover the road and the fences." The trees planted in the shelter belts were designed to stop the erosion.

Eddie, who is 90 now, was a county agent in Holdenville, Tishomingo, and Durant. He became the Extension Horticulturist for the state at Oklahoma A&M and lived in Stillwater from 1946 to 1959, when they moved to Perkins. When they moved to Perkins, Eddie says he wanted to show that you could make a living on five acres if you worked hard enough. They planted gardens, with Lodene raising and showing chrysanthemums, and orchards of apples, peaches, and pecans. They say they could have lived on what they raised on their five acres.

**Florence and Dale Holbrook.** Dale Holbrook was born in 1909 on the banks of Wild Horse Creek, west of Perkins. His parents came in 1889 from Kentucky and bought four 80-acre tracts of bottomland along the creek, paying for the land in gold.

After they settled on the land, their house was blown away by a cyclone, "and there were chickens with no feathers on them and hams hanging in the trees," but his grandmother's sewing machine didn't have a scratch on it.

He went to school at the IXL school house, walking one and one-fourth miles every day, "rain or shine." After high school he left home with ten cents in his pocket. Red Gilmore, the owner of Nine Mile Station, was sick and said he'd sell the store to Dale. Dale then borrowed \$100 from a relative and \$95 from an old man in Perkins, Mr. McClanahan, who said he didn't need to make him a note. When Dale went back to the store, Gilmore had already locked up the filling station and was waiting for the bus. Dale gave him the money and he got the keys to the station. He says he repaid the borrowed money "pretty fast." In talking about the 1930s, he says, "The Depression was awful."

After he married Florence, whose parents operated Baker's Store in Perkins, he sold the Nine Mile Station and moved into town, where he built the Phillips 66 station. During WW II he ran a bulldozer building air strips at such locations as Guadalcanal. About the war, he says, "We lost an awful lot of boys in our time." Once he left a hospital two hours before it was hit

by a bomb. Eighty-some people were lost. When he heard, "24th Battalion, prepare to leave, we're going to America," it was the happiest day of his life. When he returned home, he bought his filling station back and ran it for 34 years.

Florence, who was born in 1916, says that in Perkins when she was young the Sunday afternoon recreation was seeing the train come in. On Friday evenings they would go to town to hear Mr. McDaniels fiddle in a little park developed downtown.

The couple says that the biggest change they've seen over the years is that people used to be more neighborly. They helped each other out. Now, everyone is so independent. They don't even know their neighbors.

**Felsa Hastings.** Felsa Hastings is 85 years old. She remembers silent movies and "going to the show" for entertainment. Her family had a radio, and during WW II they listened to the radio for updates on the war. "We listened to that a lot."

She milked cows, fed the hogs and the chickens, and pumped water after school. She says, "You had your chores to do." She also helped her mother in the house, cooking, cleaning, and using a flat iron heated on the stove.

She remembers when there used to be four grocery stores in Perkins and telephones were on party lines. She says, "I could get in a Model A right now and drive it." Perkins also had a train depot, and you could get on the train and go anywhere. She says, "The kids today are missing something when they don't get to ride a train."

Like all longtime Perkins residents, she remembers Pistol Pete. She says he went barefoot a lot because one of the things he did was clean out wells. His footprints are in concrete in the well at their house.

When she was young, they slept outside in the summer on straw ticks. They didn't lock their doors. If someone came walking through the country and said they were hungry, you always fed them.

She says she would "turn the clock around anytime. Life hasn't been that bad to me." She's lost two husbands, but she would gladly live her life over. She says she occupies herself now with community service and "seeing about some of the older people."

## ***George Washington Grayson and the Creek Nation 1843-1920: A Review***

by

Alvena Bieri

The reader of Mary Jane Warde's new book, *George Washington Grayson and the Creek Nation 1843-1920* (University of Oklahoma Press) is struck by the complexity, not just of Oklahoma history itself, but also of the internal history of the Creeks and their relationship with our government. We are also impressed by the powerfully different perspective of things from the Indian point of view.

Warde, who holds a doctorate in history from OSU and is Indian historian at the Oklahoma Historical Society, evidently spent many years studying the Creeks. Historian Angie Debo earlier chronicled their history in *The Road to Disappearance*, but this biography concentrates on an outstanding Creek leader, Wash Grayson, and his struggle to maintain and save the Creek nation from obliteration by the United States.

It helps to have some basic Indian history in mind as we start to read. The Creeks and four other southern tribes, the Cherokees, Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Seminoles, were moved in the 1830s to Indian Territory, what is now eastern Oklahoma, under the policies of President Andrew Jackson.

The Five Civilized Tribes were so called because that had written languages, and most of their members respected education. Now we call them the Five Tribes, perhaps because to set them apart as civilized might reflect badly on other tribes, like the Kiowas, Apaches, and a dozen or two others. These Indians were regarded as inferior by the Five Tribes, whose members thought of them in the same way they did their own black slaves, that they weren't quite human.

In reading this book, we appreciate the tremendous task of Wash Grayson and others who tried to preserve the integrity of the Creeks by acting as cultural brokers between the whites and the Indians. Grayson struggled, not just with Washington, D.C., Indian policies and betrayals, but with differing opinions among the Creeks themselves.

The author presents much fascinating material on Grayson's early life. He was a mixed blood, and both his parents were illiterate. He had some early schooling at a Methodist boarding school and some studies at Arkansas College in Fayetteville.

During the Civil War he fought on the Confederate side. Warde shows how that conflict split Creek loyalties and how disorganized and demoralized the whole territory was at its end.

Wash was lucky to be able to go into business at Eufaula in a general store after all this was over, and he was also lucky to fall in love with and marry his boss' daughter. Their very happy marriage lasted more than 50 years; they had nine children. Ultimately, Indian efforts failed to prevent the allotment of land to individuals and the loss of their hopes in maintaining separate nations in the face of white settlement, but it was not for lack of talented and serious Creek efforts.

This book also makes us realize that history looks different from different vantage points. Most of us are used to seeing it from the white person's view.

Wash Grayson believed from an early age that the main characteristic of white people was their greed. When the boomers started to agitate for opening the Unassigned Lands, Indian leaders became alarmed. They were especially upset by the actions of David L. Payne, a person revered around here, the man for whom this county is named. But Grayson called white people in general "freebooters and robbers" and Payne's Oklahoma boomers, "the dregs of the white population of Kansas." Gives our history a little different twist, doesn't it?

Look for this good book at the Stillwater Public Library.\*

\*The book may also be purchased from the Oklahoma Historical Society Bookstore, 2100 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, OK 73105-4997. The price is \$25.95 plus \$1.92 tax and \$2.50 shipping and handling. The bookstore accepts Visa, MasterCard, or personal checks. You may also order by calling 405-522-5213. The e-mail address is: [bookstore@ok-history.mus.ok.us](mailto:bookstore@ok-history.mus.ok.us)

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## Payne County Historical Society

The Payne County Historical Society is organized in order to bring together people interested in history, 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. All members receive copies of the *Payne County Historical Review* free. In addition, the Society sponsors informative meetings and historical outings several times a year.

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Yes, I want to be a member of the Payne County Historical Society. Enclosed is my check for:

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