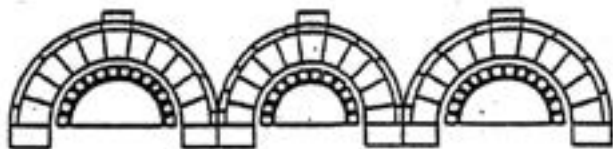


Payne County Historical Review



The P. H. Sullivan Hardware Store is on the right in this photograph of the early Payne County town of Marena.



PAYNE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Volume XXVII No. 1

2004

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The *Payne County Historical Review*, P.O. Box 2262, Stillwater, OK 74076, is published semiannually by the Payne County Historical Society. It is distributed without additional charge to the members of the Payne County Historical Society. Single issues, when available, may be purchased at \$3.50 each.

The *Payne County Historical Review* welcomes readers' comments, news, or requests for information. Family histories, photographs, or maps are also welcome. No payment is made for articles published in the *Review*. For more information about the Payne County Historical Society, visit the Society's Web site at:

www.cowboy.net/non-profit/pchs/

The
Waller
General
Store at
Marena



Remembering Marena

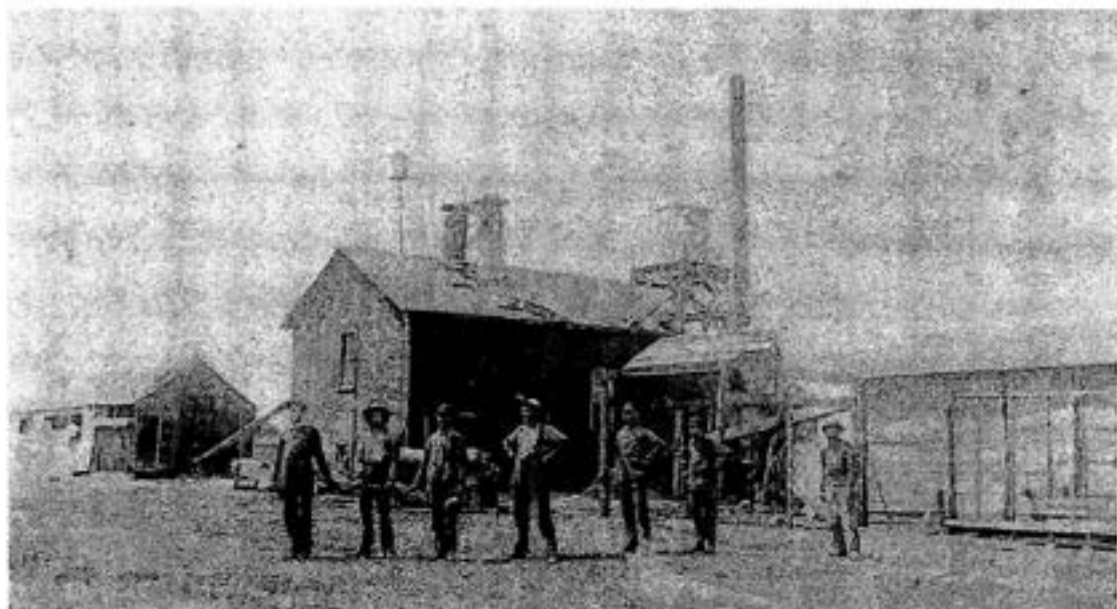
by

Jeanette Waller Sneed*

Many of you have never heard of my hometown, Marena, nor could you find it on a map. There is nothing out there now to remind you of where a very important part of history once stood. The cemetery is still there and is used occasionally. It is now under perpetual care. The doctor's home still stands, but that is all that is left of the town. The doctor's house also housed the post office, and I believe you can still see the little cubbyholes that once held people's mail. For many years my grandparents' house and the old store sat as a reminder of what once was, but they are no longer there.

First, I would like to remind you of how and when our state was born. We were part of the Louisiana Purchase, and became a United States Territory. In 1825 the land that was to become

*Jeanette Waller Sneed lives in Stillwater, Oklahoma. She has published a book about the history of Marena and its inhabitants, as well as a book about the Waller genealogy. Both are in the Stillwater Public Library and the archives of the Washington Irving Trail Museum.



The Thompson Cotton Gin at Marena about 1908

Oklahoma was designated as Indian Territory. Beginning in 1830, the U.S. government moved the five civilized tribes to the territory. Later they moved others into the area, too.

In 1870 the Territory was surveyed, and Indian Base Line, or as we know it today, Indian Meridian, was established. This was completed in 1875, and 14 years later the Unassigned Lands were opened for settlement. The Homestead Act was signed by Grover Cleveland on March 6, 1889, and the land run to settle the Unassigned Lands was held on April 22, 1889. This area included six counties: Kingfisher, Logan, Payne, Canadian, Oklahoma, and Cleveland.

There were several requirements for homesteading. Among these requirements were that you had to make improvements to the land, and after five years you were entitled to own it by paying \$1.25 per acre to the government. At that time there were no houses, fences, or any other improvements, and people built their homes as they had time, using whatever was available. Many lived in dugouts until they got their houses built. They were true pioneers.

The first post office was established at Marena on January 5, 1892, with Hollis Thompson

named as the first postmaster. The post office was discontinued on September 27, 1893, and reestablished November 22, 1893. The post office was permanently discontinued in 1907. Other postmasters were Billie Butterfield, P. H. Sullivan, Dr. A. L. Hamilton, and C. C. Holt. The mail came from Orlando via Yates by Star Route carrier. After the closing, the area was put on the Mulhall route, and sometime around 1940 the route was changed and the mail came out of Stillwater.

Marena was at the crossroads on the line that divided two townships. Cherokee Township was on the north side and Paradise Township on the south side, with the dividing road in the middle of town.

The people who came to Marena were mainly farmers, and farming was the only way they knew to make a living. They plowed up the land and tried their hand at farming. Since the land was not particularly good, many of them sold their interest to others who came later and moved on to other things. My grandfather was one who came a little later and bought a claim from someone who gave up on the area. In 1891, my grandparents settled three miles east of Marena. After receiving the land patent, they moved to Marena in the early 1900s. I still have the land patent. Grandfather learned that he needed to make more money than he did in his farming operations, and he and my grandmother operated a general store. Grandfather also was the buyer for the Thompson Cotton Gin.

My father was raised in Marena, and that is where he brought my mother on their wedding day in June 1923. They lived there when I was born. I was born at my mother's parents' home in Mulhall, but my first home was at Marena. I was always interested in the town, although it was not a town by the time I arrived on the scene. All that remained was my grandmother's house, the old store building, the doctor's house, and a filling station and small store on the northwest side of the intersection. Morgan and Ida (McKee) McQuain operated it.

The town has always had something of a hold on me. When I go out there, I still say I am going to Marena, although one of my sons is the sole inhabitant of the once vibrant little town. After my retirement in 1987, I became interested in genealogy, and in doing the research necessary to find my roots, I decided to learn something about the place that I had called home for the first eighteen years of my life, and for at least 15 of the later years. After all, Marena was part of

my roots, too—a very big part.

I went to the public library and hunted for information on Marena and there was very little available. So I decided that the town needed to be remembered. There were many little towns that sprang up after the settling of the territory, and they were all important and deserving of being remembered, although most of them are no longer there. In many cases there is nothing left to designate even where they were. All of these little towns were there because there was a need for them and the services they provided. Most of them at one time had a post office and at least one general store, a school, and at least one church. Marena filled those basic needs, as there were several stores. It was a long way to go to Mulhall or Stillwater to get small supplies, and transportation was not very fast. All of the transportation was by horse or horse and buggy, or by draymen with wagons that hauled supplies from the railroad in Mulhall, 10 miles away, or by wagon from Stillwater, 12 or so miles away. I believe most material came on the railroad from Mulhall.

Marena in the early days had several houses, a church, and businesses. The school house was a mile south of the actual site of the town. School districts had been established before the town was platted, I think, because of the location. The school was a one-room school and there was only one teacher for the entire eight grades. Teachers had quite a challenge, for they had lots of students and their ages ranged from 6 to 17 or 18 years of age. I have the school register for the 1911-1912 school year. That year there were 53 students enrolled. The school continued until its consolidation with Coyle in 1937.

There were several stores in Marena, and for that time and place, they were pretty modern. They catered to the needs of the people. I have a couple of ledgers from the Waller General Store, and it is very interesting to see the items that were purchased, the cost of them and the way people paid their bills. The ledgers are in such bad condition that I typed the entries from one of them so people could see the purchases and the other interesting things in them. The town had a hardware store, general store, café, two cotton gins, ice plant, blacksmith shop, a barber, doctor, and veterinarian. I never did find any indication of a saloon, but I can't imagine there was not one, as most small towns did have one.

Social life in the early days mostly included church, baseball games, lodges, and country



The home of Warren and Nettie Waller was built in 1907. Shown in front of the house are Warren and Nettie with sons Rodney and Hugh.

dances held in individual homes.

The Methodist Episcopal Church was the main church in town. It was built in 1897. The members cut logs off their farms and hauled them to a saw mill and donated labor and soon they had a building. They later built a parsonage, too. Many years after the Methodists discontinued services, the church was still used for funerals and protracted meetings. There was also a Missionary Baptist Church and a Christian Church in town. The Salem Lutheran Church was not in town, but a group used the name Salem Lutheran Church of Marena.

Entertainment took many forms. There were regular dances upstairs over one of the stores. Florence Henderson told me that someone would decide to have a dance and get in touch with someone to play the fiddle and someone to play guitar and have a dance. The couples were charged a meager amount and the money was given to the musicians. My father was one of the musicians who played for the dances. At one time there was a dance platform on the southeast side of the intersection.

There was a grove of trees just south of town and they used this for picnics and horse races, and Lou Hagan had a carousel that he had there part of the time. It was a treat for the children. There were also horse races held there.

The Modern Woodmen of America was a lodge that was active in Marena. It was chartered January 12, 1901, in Marena, with 17 charter members. The Modern Woodmen held an annual picnic in the grove south of town. Horse stealing was so common that they established an Anti-Horse-Thief Association Chapter at Marena. They were active in the Marena area for many years. They met at different locations and many of the residents were members.

Brush arbor meetings were held down in the grove, too. Many revivals were held there. My father told me that one time when a revival was really going strong, the people had put their sleeping children in the wagons and returned to the meeting. Several of the older boys decided to have some fun, so they moved the children from one wagon to another and when the families got home they discovered that they didn't have their own children. Some could not identify the ones they had and they didn't have a clue where to go to find their own. This was an ornery thing to do, but it goes to show that boys then were the same as today.

There were other social events, including meetings of the Literary Society. There was always a debate at these meetings, and they provided another opportunity to get together with neighbors. Ice cream socials were also popular. The Extension Clubs were another form of education and brought many of the women together for an afternoon a month. Horse racing was held on occasion, as well as baseball games. The local men would challenge a neighboring community to a good game on Sunday afternoons.

Transportation was by horse and buggy or by team and wagon. Many young men courted their girls in a buggy, and most people attended church by coming in a buggy. If they had a big family, they hitched up the team of horses to a wagon and put hay on it and attended things this way.

The early settlers had a sense of humor, too. I found a picture that someone drew of Claud Darby and put a chicken body on him. I thought that pretty clever and was amused by the picture. In my genealogy research I found a great-niece of Claud's and sent her the original. I

preserved the picture to show that they had a sense of humor.

The cemetery was established at least by 1891. There are two graves there that are dated 1891, and some unmarked graves before that time. The cemetery is located on land that was owned by P. H. Sullivan. The cemetery remained the property of Mr. Sullivan until August 26, 1930, when Patrick and Lucy Sullivan made a deed to the Marena cemetery. The location is the SW 1/4 section 33, Twp. 19, R 1 E. A few years later Dr. Norman Durham and his wife bought the quarter, minus the cemetery plot. On September 20, 1982, the Durhams donated another acre on the north edge of the cemetery to the present plot.

I believe that about the start of World War II the town finally existed no more. It was a very important social, cultural, and trading place for the early settlers, but with the improvement of transportation there was no need for the town, although I still go to Marena when I go to visit my children. My youngest son is the only inhabitant of what was once Marena, and the other son lives a half mile west of the old townsite. Many Marena boys served in the war in France and Germany during World War I, and I came to the conclusion that you can't keep them down on the farm after they have seen gay Paree.





Billee “Babe” Fisher

by

Carla Chlouber

Born in 1915, Billee “Babe” Fisher looks back on a life that is filled with family, work, and community—and talks about it all with a zest that is contagious. Her memories of Stillwater and Payne County include some of the events central to the development of the Oklahoma State University campus, as well as the small, everyday happenings that distinguish a particular time and place and help to tell us what it was like.

Billee was the fifth and last daughter of a couple whose families both homesteaded in Payne County in the Run of ‘89. Her paternal grandparents, Davis Edward Williams and Mary Ann Doleman, settled two and one-half miles west of Mehan, southeast of Stillwater. Her maternal grandparents, Thomas Alexander Hager and Lucretia Show, settled a mile south of the Williams homestead.

Billee’s parents, Albert Davis Williams and Bertha Hager, called their youngest child Baby and then shortened the nickname to Babe. Billee still likes the name, and when she talks about Payne County history to groups of schoolchildren, which she does frequently, she is “Granny Babe.”

One of the stories she tells took place before the Run, while her father and his family still lived in Kansas. Her father, who was a teenager at the time, took his horse and followed an Indian trail south of Ponca City until he heard chanting and mournful singing. He investigated and saw an Indian burial ceremony taking place, with the body on a platform. He quickly left

and found a place to settle down for the night, curling up between the hooves of his horse. When it was almost dark, he felt something in his side. He looked up and saw “the tallest man in the world” looking down at him. The man, a U.S. marshal, told young Albert to get back to Kansas. “There ain’t nothing but outlaws and wild Indians here,” he said. Albert left, minus his gun, which the marshal told him would be more likely to get him killed than anything.

Later, her father took part in the land runs, even though he wasn’t old enough to file a claim. He also served briefly with Teddy Roosevelt in the Spanish-American War.

Another story Billee likes to tell about her father involves a family photograph taken in front of the cabin on her grandparents’ homestead. The picture, which includes the family’s hired girl, was published in the *Stillwater NewsPress* a few years ago. Billee received a call from the hired girl’s granddaughter, who recognized her grandmother in the picture. The granddaughter then shared a story that had been passed down in her family. She said that her grand-



Taken at the original homestead cabin of Davis Edward Williams, this photograph shows, left to right, the family’s hired girl, Mary Ann Williams, Davis Edward Williams, Cyrus Williams, and Albert Davis Williams.



Billee Fisher's grandfather, Davis Edward Williams, homesteaded southeast of Stillwater.

mother (the hired girl in the photo) would wash the family's clothes in large iron kettles with a scrub board. Then she would hang them out on a clothes line to dry. One time she was hanging Mrs. Williams' pantaloons on the line, when Albert came by and mischievously asked, "What are those things you're hanging up there?" The girl said, "Uh, uh . . . those are pillow cases."

Although many of the stories Billee tells about her family are humorous, some are serious and remind the listener of how an individual's family history can be part of crucial events in our nation's history. One of those tales is that of Billee's maternal grandmother, Lucretia Show. During the Civil War, Lucretia's father joined the Union forces as a cook. He took his family with him, with the children riding in the back of a covered wagon. Lucretia said it would

break her heart to look out and see the soldiers walking behind the wagon, many of them bare-foot and some of them bleeding. So she and her brother would toss food to the hungry men following the wagon.

On a lighter note, the same grandmother, Lucretia Show, liked to startle the new members at her church's missionary meeting by saying, "I used to be a 'Show' girl."

Billee's maternal grandfather, Thomas Hager, helped build the Eden Chapel church, southeast of Stillwater. Billee notes that the church was not named for the Biblical Eden but for the first pastor, Frank Eden.

After Billee's parents were married, the young couple farmed as they raised their family of five daughters. When their oldest daughter entered high school, they bought a house on Duck Street in Stillwater, where they lived during the school year. Summers were spent on the farm.

Later, Billee visited her older sister, who then lived on the homestead near Mehan. She can

still see Paul Eby's grocery store in Mehan, where four or five men would be sitting around the potbellied stove. Mr. Eby kept a barrel of crackers near the stove, and anyone who came in could get some crackers. Billee always got a piece of candy when she visited the store.

Another memorable moment in Mehan occurred when Billee and her sister went to the greenhouse owned by Dave Lewis. They looked into a big barrel and saw two baby alligators.

Other childhood memories revolve around Christmas and other holidays. The family always had a Christmas tree that touched the ceiling. Billee says her father would always cut a cedar tree in the woods, but they would never use candles because of the danger of fire.



Albert and Bertha Hager Williams raised a family of five girls, including the youngest, Billee "Babe" Fisher."

Billee started the first grade in Stillwater at Alcott a school, named for American author Louisa May Alcott. The school was located on Duck Street and Ninth. She has happy memories of her school years, including her high school years, when she began dating "that Fisher boy." The Fisher boy's name was Wilbert, but he was always called Bill.

The young couple was becoming serious, and Billee's parents thought the best thing to do was to send their daughter off to college in Missouri. Billee went, but she stayed only one semester. She returned to Stillwater and Oklahoma A&M (now Oklahoma State University), and in 1937 she and Bill "ran off to Chandler and got married."

Billee's family accepted the marriage, and the newlyweds were given a traditional Stillwater shivaree. Bill was thrown into Theta Pond, on the A&M campus, and Billee waded in to help



The Williams daughters are, from left to right, Billee (called Babe), Lucretia, Oriole, Velma (known as Pickie), and Edith (known as Mudge). In front are their parents, Bertha and Albert Davis Williams.

him out. Wet and muddy, the pair began walking home until they were given a ride by a friend.

Bill, a civil engineer, began his career in Idabel, where he worked with the WPA. He later moved with Billee and their children to Muskogee, where he was the city engineer. When the city wanted to tear down the old headquarters of the Five Civilized Tribes, he protested, saying that the buildings could be repaired. Finally, Billee says, he was given permission to repair the buildings, thus saving a significant part of Oklahoma history.

Bill Fisher was also instrumental in developing Muskogee's beautiful Honor Heights Park, which attracts thousands of visitors each spring to see the azaleas in bloom. He was filling the role of park superintendent when he approved a plan by a man named Bill Phillips that included the design of the gardens and the planting of azaleas.

The Fishers returned to Stillwater when Bill accepted a job with Oklahoma State University. In his new position, he oversaw the construction of the new Student Union. Billee relates

a story that is probably not in any of the official accounts of the building's history. While still in Muskogee, Bill brought the architects' plans home to preview, unrolling them on the living room floor. The family's kitten, as Billee puts it, "knew what papers on the floor were for." The result was a small bleached-out shape on the plans. All through construction, the contractors would ask, "Bill, what's that, a free-form swimming pool somewhere?" Billee says that Bill never did tell them how the shape got there.

The Fishers had three children—Curtis Hoy, Davis Allen, and William Albert. When the boys were young and the Fishers lived in Perkins, Billee would take her Cub Scout groups to visit Frank Eaton, better known as Pistol Pete and the model for the Oklahoma State University mascot. He would tell stories to the boys and try to teach them to rope.

In 1959, when the boys were older, Billee began a career in real estate, becoming the first woman realtor in Stillwater. She worked with Lloyd Dougherty for sixteen years before retiring



This Williams family dinner took place at the family's homestead when Billee's sister Oriole lived there.

to be with her husband, who retired from OSU in 1976.

The next chapter in their lives included a house on Beaver Lake in Arkansas and boating and fishing. They also enjoyed following the successful careers of their sons. Bill has passed away, but Billee remains active, visiting

her sons and grandchildren and taking part in church and club activities in Stillwater. Four years ago she went parasailing in the Bahamas.

She enjoys reading about history and talking about her own family's history, particularly as it relates to Payne County, but she doesn't live in the past in the usual sense of the phrase. She's very much involved with the present and with her family and community. As "Granny Babe" she may tell stories about the "olden" days, but as Billee Fisher she puts those stories in perspective, seeing her own family's history as part of that of the larger community and the nation.



In 1949, Bill and Billee Fisher lived in Perkins with their two older sons, Curtis Hoy and Davis Allen. Their youngest, William Albert was not yet born.

Frank Eaton, who lived in Perkins, was the model for OSU's mascot, Pistol Pete.



Letter from Leonard Herron Recalls Early A&M Spirit Songs and Characters

Editor's Note: The Payne County Historical Society received a letter from Leonard Herron, a long-time resident of Stillwater, pointing out the very interesting history of the "spirit" songs and characters that have represented Oklahoma State University over the years. Thanks go to Adelia Hanson for additional information and assistance in preparing this article, and thanks, also, go to Mr. Herron for sending the letter on which this article is based.

"Way down in Oklahoma, in that far-off jungle land,
There lives an A. and M. tiger that will eat right from your hand,
But when it comes to battle with the other beasts of prey,
It's roar! roar! roar! roar! roar!
Listen to that A. and M. tiger roar."

This early spirit song refers to the spirit animal, the tiger, which was likely brought to Oklahoma A&M by some early-day faculty members, several of which had come from Princeton

University, a prestigious university located at Princeton, New Jersey. The spirit animal there was a Bengal tiger.

But along came 1915. The college had joined the S.W. Intercollegiate Association, and Ed Gallagher had been named director of athletics. The cowboy modeled on Pistol Pete became the new symbol for the college, and the old spirit song and mascot were no longer applicable.

In 1908, another spirit song had been adapted by speech and theater professor Howard Seldomridge from a popular operetta, *In Old New York*, written by the famous playwright Victor Herbert.

“OAMC, OAMC, we’ll sing your praise tonight,
To let you know where ‘er we go,
For the Orange and Black we’ll fight.
We’ll sing your worth o’er the earth,
And shout, ‘ki-yi, ki-yee,
In books of fame, we’ll write your name, OAMC.”

After Oklahoma A&M’s name was changed to Oklahoma State University in 1957, the song was modified to “Oh, OSU.”

Oklahoma’s colorful early history was taken into consideration when the spirit figure became a cowboy. Cowboys were already publicized in the movies and in songs, rodeos, and cattle drives across the state. A&M athletes became known as “the Cowboys.” The tiger was remembered only by using orange and black for the school’s colors. It now exists only as the name of one of the leading drugstores in Stillwater, the present one having been moved to the southwest part of town from its former site at the southeast corner of the campus.

The present OSU spirit individual, Pistol Pete, was a true cowboy, modeled on Frank Eaton, of Perkins. Wearing an exaggerated red and yellow costume with a cowboy hat, pants, and boots, he was quite a spectacle at OSU athletic events. It is also considered quite an honor for an OSU student to be chosen to perform as Pistol Pete at these athletic events.

James Ronda Talks About Washington Irving

The Payne County Historical Society met on March 5, 2004, to hear historian James Ronda talk about the Library of America's recently published book, *Washington Irving: Three Western Narratives*. Dr. Ronda, the book's editor, holds the H.G. Barnard Chair in Western American History at the University of Tulsa and is a past president of the Western History Association.

The title of Dr. Ronda's talk was "Out West with Washington Irving." The three narratives by Washington Irving that make up the Library of America's new volume are *A Tour on the Prairies*, *Astoria*, and *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville*.



At the spring meeting of the Payne County Historical Society, Dr. James Ronda signed copies of the Library of America's Western narratives of Washington Irving, which he edited.

Irving wrote *A Tour on the Prairies* to describe his 1832 trip through the area that eventually became Oklahoma. He spent three nights in Payne County: one near Yale, another near Mehan, and another a few miles west of Perkins.

He was America's first internationally acclaimed writer, and readers eagerly awaited the story of his trip to what was "the far west" at that time.

Ronda said that *A Tour on the Prairies*, along with *Astoria* and *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville*, constituted the first body of writing about the

American West to capture a large audience. He noted that Irving had an eye for colorful characters and introduced the reader to an ethnically diverse group of people. He said, "Irving sought to understand American distinctiveness."

Commenting that "Irving is always more modern than we think," Ronda pointed out that

Irving recognized how conflict and confrontation shaped the West. In the Western narratives of Washington Irving, Ronda said, we can see “the awe and wonder of the exploration of the American West.”

Dr. Ronda, who is the author of many books, has also served as a consultant and commentator for television documentaries made by PBS, the Arts & Entertainment Channel, C-SPAN, the British Broadcasting Corporation, and others. In January of 2003 he gave the keynote address for the official opening of the national Lewis and Clark Bicentennial.

The Payne County Historical Society hosted a reception for Dr. Ronda after his talk, which was held in the Peggy V. Helmerich Room of the Oklahoma State University Library. Sponsors of the talk were the Library of America, which is based in New York City; the OSU Library; the Washington Irving Trail Museum; and the Payne County Historical Society.

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.

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

- \$12.00 for Individual Membership
- \$17.00 for Family Membership
- \$20.00 for Institutional Membership
- \$100.00 for Life Membership

(Membership includes subscription to the *Payne County Historical Review*.)

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