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December 10, 2004

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Miami, Picher, Vinita, and Welch Revisited

This issue of Hometown Oklahoma marks our first anniversary. We revisited a few of the towns we have already been to, bringing you recaps, updates, and things we missed the first time around.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank our readers and the business owners who have shown their support through advertising. It is their continued support that enables us to bring this publication to you, the readers, free of charge.

This past year we have learned many interesting things about each town we visited. We also met some very nice and helpful people. We would not be able to do as good a job as we do, without YOUR help!

We take the most pride in our Hometown Heroes features and our Veterans Issues. It is with great pride and heartfelt thanks we pay tribute to those who have served our country. We plan to continue The Hometown Heroes features and the Veterans issues. They will be published in May and November.

We also plan to expand our Hometown Heroes features to include local police and firefighters, as they are indeed true Hometown Heroes who put their lives on the line every day they report for duty. As with the veterans, we will need your help to inform us of their stories.

This coming year, we will continue to visit towns in Craig, Delaware, Mayes, Ottawa, and Rogers counties. So, if you have any interesting stories about any of the towns in those counties, please contact us. If we have already been to the town, we will put it in an updates issue at the end of the year.

We would also like to take this opportunity to wish each and every one of you the Happiest of Holidays and a safe and prosperous New Year!



*Seasons
Greetings*

Story of Tragedy and Grief for the McCord Family of Welch

This story was brought to our attention too late to be included in the Welch issue. After the issue came out, we received letters from readers asking why we had not covered this story. Thanks to the Genealogy Department at the Vinita Library, we found the information we needed. This is indeed one of the saddest stories we have ever done!

On June 14th, 1953, 19 year old J.R. McCord, his 17 year old sister, Rovenia, and his 16 year old fiancée, Mary Vail were headed to Oswego when their car ran into the back of a truck, fatally wounding the brother and sister. Mary died two days later.

John and Leeot McCord were devastated by the loss of their children. Their neighbors said the couple made daily visits to the graves of the children at the Williams Cemetery. The neighbors also said the couple had been despondent since the accident.

Soon after the deaths of the children, the McCords purchased and had erected what was described as the most expensive monument in northeastern Oklahoma.

In the early morning hours of February 16th, 1954, John and Leeot carried out a suicide pact they had made with each other, after setting fire to their home and outbuildings on their farm 10 miles northeast of Welch.

Lloyd Griffith, a neighbor of the couple, discovered the fires after being awakened by a loud explosion. By the time he arrived at the scene, the roofs of the buildings were beginning to fall in.

The Welch and Chetopa fire departments answered the call, but the buildings were a total loss by the time they arrived.

John and Leeot were found some three hours later by Welch fire chief John Patch and Lloyd Griffith. They were found in the garden, 100 yards from their home. They were wrapped in a blanket. Leeot had been shot twice in the head with a .32 caliber pistol. John had been shot once, just above the ear. The pistol was found between them on the blanket. John was still alive and was transported to the Welch hospital, where he died a short time later.



Leeot was believed to have been dead for over 4 hours. They were both fully dressed, but neither was wearing a coat. Leeot was wearing an apron. Suicide notes and several letters were found in the pocket of her apron. The letters were addressed to family and friends of the couple.

In one of the letters John wrote, "Please lay no blame on no one as this is a pledged agreement between the both of us."

In another letter addressed to the Miller Funeral Home in Chetopa, John wrote, "This death is from a broken heart that cannot mend as the main jewels are missing. The loss of my baby children is too great to overcome, as I love and worship my children with all my heart, and may God bless and receive me in some way."

Leeot wrote to Mrs. Miller at the funeral home, "Just a few last requests that I would like for you folks to take care of us in the same way you did for our dear children."

Two weeks before the deaths, John had gotten his brother in law, John Thomas, to help him put all the farm equipment in buildings on the farm. John had told him that they were planning a trip to California and wanted to store all their belongings. The two also stacked two loads of hay around the machinery. John had also recently sold all the livestock and poultry they owned, and taken his bird dog to a friend.

The loss of property was estimated to be between \$20,000 and \$30,000. Also destroyed were a combine, two tractors, a truck, wheat drill, motorboat, plows, and numerous tools. Their late model Buick was found in the ruins of the barn.

The only two serviceable things not destroyed by the fire was a butane tank located about 25 feet from the house and a gasoline storage tank beside the barn.

Leeot was born in 1901 in Craig County. She had two children from a previous marriage who were living in Kansas at the time. She married John in 1923. They lived in the Neosho Valley district for a year before moving to the Welch area. Her mother, seven sisters, three brothers, her two children from her first marriage, and six grandchildren survived her.

John was born in 1899 in Missouri, coming to Oklahoma in 1921. He was survived by five brothers and five sisters.

A double service was held for the couple on the following Friday at the Welch High School gym-auditorium. They were laid to rest at the Williams Cemetery, where they are "FOREVER NEAR OUR DEAR ONES" as the inscription on their head stone states.



3

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A History of Picher

The following excerpts are from an article we found in an Ottawa County Historical Society publication. The article was by Betty J. Pulley. We found it interesting because it covered some things we didn't learn about when we did the Picher issue.

In 1905 four men from Miami had invested money in drilling some test holes north of their city. They were looking for zinc ore, which had been found in nearby areas of Kansas and Missouri. The fifth exploration hole was where they discovered extremely rich ore. They formed the Commerce Mining and Royalty, and began leasing surrounding land. The small town of Hattonville formed near the mines. The name was later changed to Commerce.

Upon hearing the news of the Hattonville operation O.S. Picher, owner of the Picher Mining Company in Joplin, sent Roy Blosser and his drilling rig to Oklahoma. The rig was steam powered and pulled by horses. They started across the flat prairie and became mired down in mud. Since the rig couldn't be moved until the ground dried, they decided to drill some test holes there. They discovered they were sitting on a rich vein of zinc and lead ore!

The news spread fast and in 1915 minors from near and far came to the area any way they could. It was reported that as many as 1000 men arrived in a 24 hour period. There were stories that some had even jacked up their small houses, put wheels under them and pulled them to the site.

Under the management of A.E. Bendelari, Picher Mining Company was the leading developer. George W. Potter, under the direction of Bendelari, surveyed and platted the original town site on 8 acres. Almost all the land was on Quapaw Indian land and could only be purchased through negotiations with the U.S. Department of Labor. At first lots were leased for thirty-day periods.



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103 S. Connell
Picher, OK.

The first resident on Connell Avenue is believed to be Bert Luther. He bought a lot on 2nd and Connell in early 1915. Mr. and Mrs. W.C. Jones secured a lot lease at 103 Main, pitched a tent and began selling groceries. Mr. Luther also established a grocery store. Both were still in business 20 years later.

Soldiers of fortune, gamblers, crooks and scalawags appeared as quickly as the minors did and Picher gained the reputation as one of the wildest mining camps in the Midwest.

The first church in Picher was the Union Church. The church served as a community meeting place and the first public school was held there in 1916.

Realizing the burgeoning community needed direction and organization, eleven business leaders formed the Picher Commercial Club on March 3, 1917. One of the first actions taken was hiring law enforcement.

Through popular subscription the Commercial Club raised \$5,000 to build the first school building for the 2000 school age children in town. Through other donations of money and labor, street improvements, culverts and bridges were made possible. The first taxi service was started using 1917 Fords, and ran as far as Joplin.

Picher was incorporated in March of 1918. Mail delivery was started on the first of July that same year. Permanent business buildings were erected as fast as possible. There was a hospital, a hotel and a theater.

A special census was taken of Ottawa County in December of 1918. Picher was the largest city with 8,172 residents, compared to Miami's 6,898. Commerce and Cardin were third and fourth. The mining towns were not even in existence in the federal census of 1910. The county had gained 30,000 people in eight years!

By 1919 the city limits had grown to 1,160 platted acres. All but 128 acres were still on Indian land. About 20 mines and 14 mills were operating, plus a vast number of mines and mills within two miles of the city.

Two to three thousand students attended school in four eight-room buildings, plus an addition two-room structure. There were five churches and 32 clubs and organizations in the community. The city had natural gas, electric service, and telephone lines. A new municipal water system was installed within the year. There were hotels, boarding houses, two ice plants, two theaters, and just about any other kind of business that could be found in the more established towns.



Businesses on Main



Martin's Store



Scott-Livingston Variety in the 1960s

The pictures seen here are courtesy of John Schehrer. Please visit his web site to see more vintage photos from all over Ottawa County. He also has photo CDs for sale. www.homestead.com/schehrer2/



Artist Mike Larsen's "Flight of the Spirit" hangs in the Oklahoma Capitol Building.

Flight of the Spirit

The 20-foot mural entitled 'Flight of the Spirit' adorns the rotunda of the state capitol building. The oil painting portrays five Oklahoma Native American ballerinas who rose to the highest level of artistry and acclaim in the international world of ballet. Two of those ballerinas were born in northeast Oklahoma.

Yvonne Chouteau, a Cherokee, was born in Vinita in 1929. She performed with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. In the 1960s, she and her husband, Miguel Terekhov developed the dance department at the University of Oklahoma in Norman.

Moscelyn Larkin, of Shawnee-Peoria decent, is a native of Miami. She too performed with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. She and her late husband, Roman Jasinski founded the critically acclaimed Tulsa Ballet Theater. In recognition of her many civic contributions, Larkin was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1979. She was a 1993 inductee into the Oklahoma Women's Hall of Fame.

The other three dancers are Rosella Hightower, a Choctaw born in Ardmore; and sisters Maria and Marjorie Tallchief, Osage, born in Fairfax.

All five dancers were in attendance when the mural was dedicated on November 17, 1991. Information for this story was found in the November 2004 issue of Northeast Connection, a publication of Northeast Oklahoma Electric Cooperative. The article was by Clint Branham, Communications Specialist.

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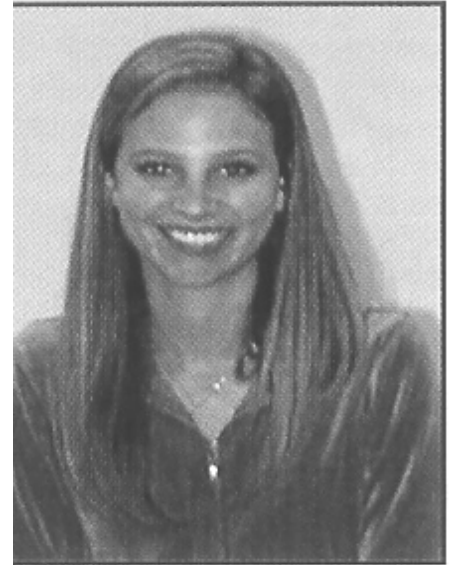
Art of Dance in Vinita

Kristin Hanson's love affair with ballet began when she was a teenager living in London. It was likely confirmed when she witnessed the performance of cultural icons Margot Fonteyn and Rudolf Nuryev at the Royal Opera House.

Kristin later took up ballet as a young adult back in the United States. It was effective stress relief in a hectic lifestyle. She was persistent in her training and became adept enough to appear in various productions at the Tulsa Ballet Theater.

Hanson continued taking lessons throughout the pregnancy of her firstborn child. Noting her determination and skill, instructor Moscelyn Larkin insisted she have the opportunity to someday instruct Kristin's child. When Mouissa (pronounced muh-wee-sa) is doing the insisting, saying "No" simply isn't an option!

Kristin's daughter, Lauren Cox began taking those lessons at the age of three. She spent 18 years with Larkin, and under her tutelage, Lauren found herself on the fast track to ballet's elite ranks.



Lauren Cox

Lauren turned heads of representatives from the Kirov Academy of Ballet at an audition. She was one of ten selected from thousands to attend the prestigious school in Washington D.C.

All was well until she suffered an ankle injury after being dropped by her partner. The accident occurred while the two were rehearsing for a performance in 1997. Lauren never fully recovered. It was a sad ending to a promising future in ballet.

With her performing days behind her, Lauren remains dedicated to ballet in her spare time as an instructor. She prides herself on using the same methods Larkin used. Lauren says Larkin was very well known for teaching fundamentals to younger students and her methods worked.

Lauren has classes for younger students as well as advanced classes. She covers everything from terminology, to steps, to variations.

Lauren says anyone interested in ballet should be prepared to be dedicated both mentally and physically. It isn't something you can partially commit to.

For information about requirements and classes, call Lauren at 918-256-2698.

Information for this story was found in the November 2004 issue of Northeast Connection, a publication of Northeast Oklahoma Electric Cooperative. The article was by Clint Branham, Communications Specialist.



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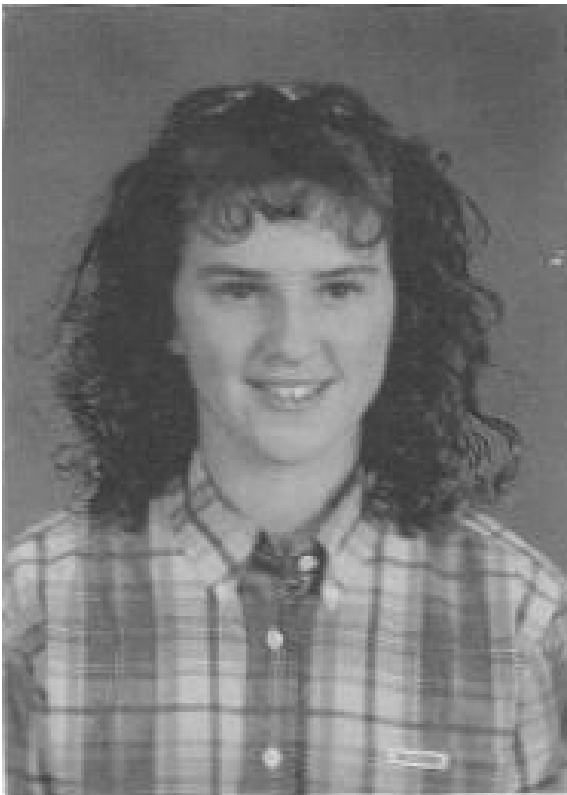
Remember Lauria and Ashley!

Once again, we would like to remind our readers about Lauria Bible and Ashley Freeman of Welch.

Late in the evening of December 29, 1999, or early in the morning of December 30, 1999, a crime occurred in Craig County, Oklahoma. Danny Freeman, and his wife Kathy (Tracy) Freeman were shot to death in their rural home, northwest of Welch, probably before midnight, on the 29th. It is surmised that the Freeman's daughter, and only surviving child, Ashley Renae Freeman and her best friend, Lauria Jaylene Bible were kidnapped after the shootings, and taken from the area. Later in the morning, the perpetrator(s) or their accomplices returned and set the Freeman's mobile home afire.

Due to the fire, and several lapses in the investigation process, much of the evidence at the crime scene was either destroyed or tampered with. By the time the OSBI and FBI came to the scene, they had little to work with. At any rate, the girls had seemingly disappeared without a trace, with no money, and no identification on them.

The surrounding communities have rallied around the grieving families, seeking answers. The reward fund currently stands at \$50,000.00.



Lauria Bible



Ashley Freeman

Endangered Missing

LAURIA BIBLE



DOB: Apr 18, 1983
Missing: Dec 30, 1999
Sex: Female
Race: White
Hair: Brown
Eyes: Hazel
Height: 5'5" (165 cm)
Weight: 130 lbs (59 kg)

Age Progressed



ASHLEY FREEMAN



DOB: Dec 29, 1983
Missing: Dec 30, 1999
Sex: Female
Race: White
Hair: Lt. Brown
Eyes: Blue
Height: 5'7" (170 cm)
Weight: 145 lbs (66 kg)

Lauria's photo is shown age-progressed to 19 years and Ashley's photo is also shown aged to 19 years. Lauria and Ashley were discovered missing after a fire destroyed the trailer Ashley and her family lived in. The bodies of Ashley's parents were discovered in the trailer but Ashley and Lauria have not been seen since. Lauria has a mole under her nose. Ashley has a scar on her forehead.



ANYONE HAVING INFORMATION SHOULD CONTACT
National Center for Missing & Exploited Children
1-800-843-5678 (1-800-THE-LOST)

Federal Bureau of Investigation (Oklahoma) - 1-405-290-7770

Two Vinita Men Receive High School Diplomas.... 50 Years Later!

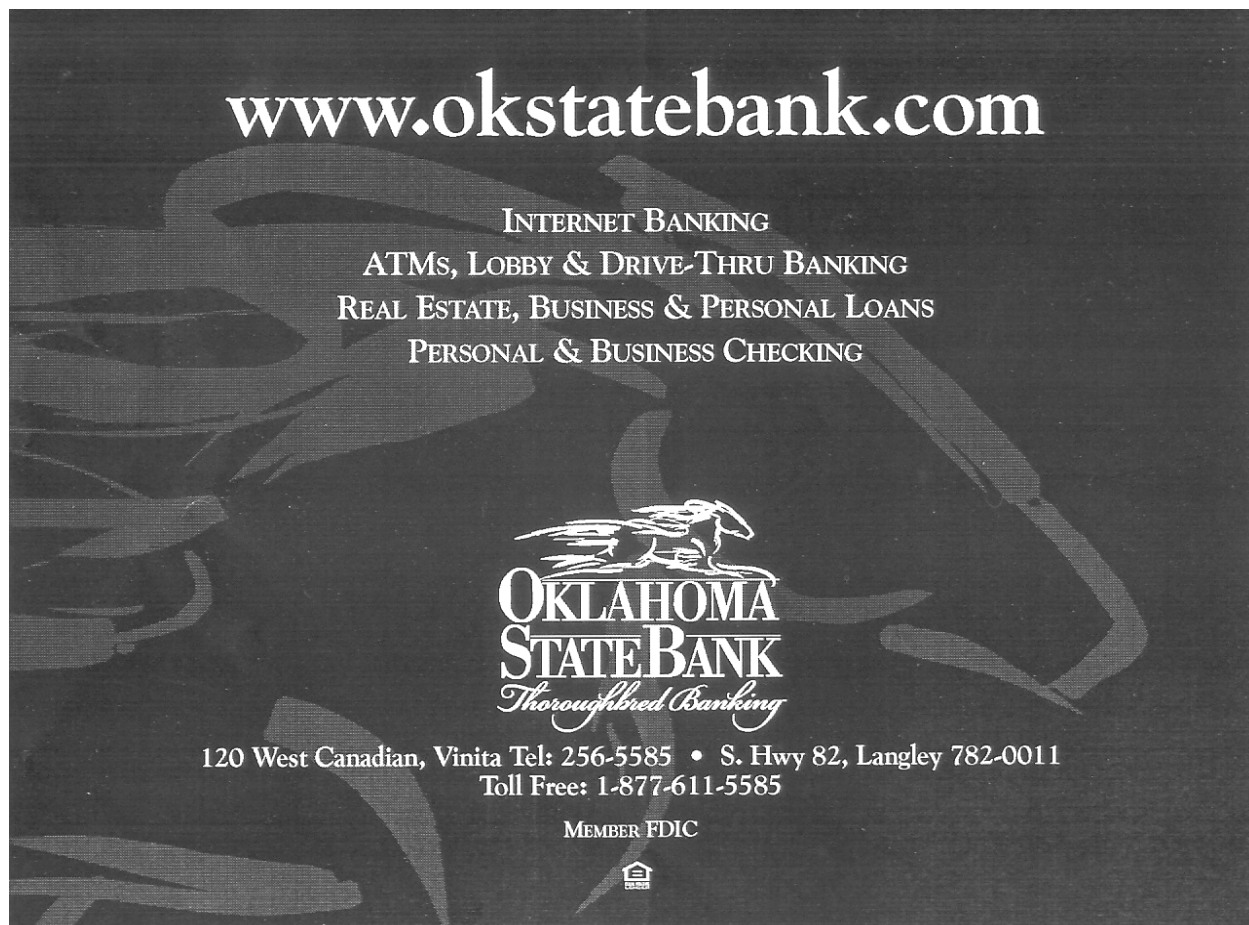
In the World War II years of 1941 to 1945, many young men who would have graduated from high school joined the service or were drafted before their studies were complete. Most only lacked a few credits to meet graduation requirements. Many finished their studies while in the service and some finished their studies when they returned home. Most of them settled into earning a living and a high school diploma was put on the back burner.

In 1994 two men who would have graduated with the Vinita class of 1944 wondered if it was too late to get their diplomas. Locating lost and misplaced records from the school system and service records wasn't an easy task. All seemed lost until Mr. Tom Nix stepped in to help.

Mr. Nix found records, pulled strings, and made things happen. He got Don Vande's records from the Navy and William 'Tick' Johnston's records from the Army. Then he enlisted help from Henry Haynes who was the Vinita Superintendent at the time. Soon the authenticated diplomas were signed and ready for presentation.


Tom kept the newly acquired diplomas secret until the annual Vinita All School Reunion. On August 27, 1994, the class of 1944 was honored. That night Vande and Johnston were called to the front of the class. They thought they were in trouble, but instead they were presented with their diplomas signed by Jerry Greenwood and Henry Haynes.

We found this story in the Craig County History book while we were doing research for the Vinita issue. Unfortunately we ran out of space and didn't get to use it for that issue. We filed the story for future use, as it is an inspiring story, and it is with pride we bring it to you now.




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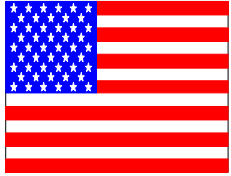
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Hometown Heroes



We dedicate this issue of Hometown Oklahoma to all who have served our country. To those currently serving, and those who served and returned home, we say a special "Thank You!" To the families of those who didn't make it home, we extend our heartfelt sympathy.

Several former POWs from Ottawa County shared their stories in the book History of Ottawa County.

It is with great pride, we share some of those stories with you.

James Allen

James served as Principal Chief of the Seneca Tribe of Oklahoma. He was inducted into the Armed Services with the National Guard Unit from Chilocco Indian School in September 1941. When war was declared, the unit became known as Company C, 180th Infantry, 4th Division (Thunderbird Division). Thunderbird Division was made up of all Indian personnel.

The Division was sent to Africa, where they became involved in "mopping up" operations. Upon the termination of the assignment, the unit made the invasion of Sicily, an island between North Africa and Italy. It was during this engagement that Chief Allen was wounded and taken prisoner by the German Army.

He was transferred to Italy and then to North Germany near the Russian border, to a place called Camp Stalag 4B. Later he was moved to Stalag Luft III near Stettlin, Germany.

While he was at this camp, the Allied Forces liberated the prisoners of war in May of 1945. He had been a prisoner for 22 months.

Later Allen was called into action to serve in the Korean Conflict with the Calvary Division. He received the Purple Heart and European Battle Stars, and then years later; he was awarded the Metal of Valor from the State of Oklahoma.

Joe Burkbile

Joe was drafted near the end of WWII. He was captured in Germany; held in a German camp, then transferred to Czechoslovakia. The journey took four long miserable months.

The following is a story Joe told about food they were served. “They would put a big pot in the middle of the compound. In it went a horse’s head, skin and all. Sometimes some vegetables, usually rutabagas, were added. It might make you sick at first, but after awhile it tasted good. When you’re hungry, really hungry, anything tastes good.” He added that people who lived near the POW camps were kind. When possible, they shared bread with the POWs.

Joe was freed by the Russians after eight months imprisonment.

C.E. Brooks

C.E., of Commerce, served in the European Theater. The following is the story he submitted for the history book. “We had crashed three quarters of the way through the Siegfried Line and were to take a cluster of five villages: Mullendorf, Wurm, Leiffarth, Lindern, and Beeck. We came through Suggesterath up Suicide Hill and were in the town of Mullendorf when I was captured, on or about the 2nd of November 1944, by the 9th Panzer Division and the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division. I was taken back to several POW camps. The last was Stalag 3B. I was there until the Russians liberated us around May 20th, 1945.”

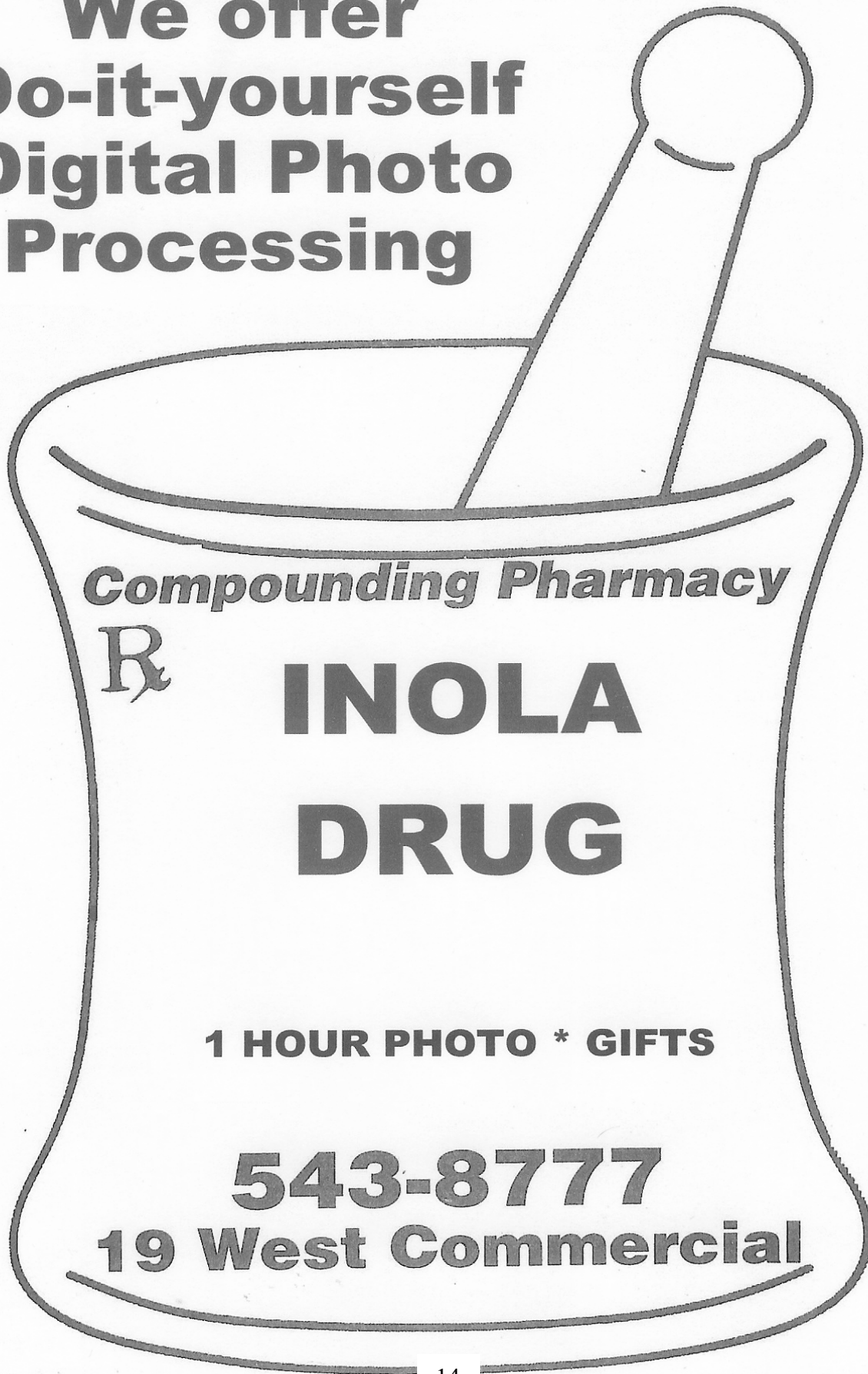
Leonard Cruzan

Leonard, a Technical Sgt. In the US Air Force was captured October 14th, 1943. He was a radio gunner and supposed to be flying his last mission. He was aboard one of the 500 B-17 Flying Fortresses and escorts leaving bases in England, Ireland, and Scotland for what became known as the Schweinfurt Raid. By the end of that day the United States had lost 75 planes and 642 men were casualties.

Leonard’s plane was hit by German anti-aircraft fire after it had made its bombing run. The plane came apart in midair. Evidently Leonard pulled the ripcord of his parachute before he lost consciousness. Several days later he awoke in a Catholic hospital in Germany. He had severe burns over his body, both thighbones were shattered and he had a broken hip. Catholic Sisters and a German doctor attended to his injuries. After 3 months of misery and partial recovery, Leonard was moved to Stalag Luf 6, a prison camp in Lithuania. He was liberated after 21 months as a POW, and returned to the United States, rejoining his family in Picher.



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Welch City Clerk Eva Triece

Eva Triece has been the City Clerk in Welch for the last 12 years. She has worked to bring over one million dollars in grants to the town of Welch. The last grant was through the Cherokee Nation for a city park. They have named the park "Tsa-La-Gi" which means "Cherokee."

The next project she will be working on, with the help of the Pumpkin Festers is a grant to make new baseball diamonds by Julianne Field. This new project will provide the baseball diamonds, a concession stand, restrooms and a parking area. These are all Community Projects.

Eva is married to "Strawberry" Triece, a life long resident of Welch, whose mother is a retired Welch schoolteacher. Strawberry and Eva have been together for 26 years and have lived in Welch the whole time. Eva graduated from Miami High School in 1977.

Eva and Strawberry have no children of their own, but they have adopted two brothers, Cody & Sky. The boys have been in their home for the last six years. Eva and the two boys are dancers in the Ponca Nation. She was "Head Lady Dancer" at the Memorial Dance in Ponca City this year.

We would like to send a special "Thank You" to Eva for all the work she has done for the town of Welch, and for all the help she has given us. It is people like Eva who make our job so much easier. She is one of the nicest people we had the pleasure of meeting this past year.



Eva Triece



Cody Triece

Welch Student is a Local Hero!

Cody Triece, a student at Welch Public School System, is a hero! While spending time with his family at the lake this past summer, Cody came to the aid of his grandfather.

When a large boat came by the pontoon boat the family was aboard, causing very large waves; Cody's grandfather, Thomas Downing" was pushed under their boat and was unable to get out by himself. Cody showed his bravery by grabbing a hold of his grandfather, pulling him out from under the boat and didn't let go until his mother got to them.

Cody is the son of Eva and Strawberry Triece.

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Ottawa County Spook Light

Ottawa County's claim to ghostly phenomena has been around for a long time, like over a hundred years. It came to public attention around 1886 when residents near the little village of Hornet, Missouri, eleven miles southwest of Joplin, became alarmed about a giant ball of light bouncing over the hills and through the fields scaring cattle, causing dogs to howl, and a few folks (who hated haunting) to leave their homes.

But for all its Missouri promotion, the light concentrates most of its appearances along the Devil's Promenade road northeast of Miami, on the old Quapaw reservation. Since Spooklight is said to have been known to Quapaw Indians long before 1886, it seems to realize that it owes a kind of loyalty to them, and for the most part, nocturnal maneuvers near the old reservation, particularly during the time of the annual Pow –Wow held in July.

During the peak (summer) season an estimated 1,000 cars a week visit the area. It has become a place for teenagers to 'hang out' thus creating annoyance for serious researchers or other who simply want to see the light. Oklahoma and Missouri law officers now patrol the viewing area when Spooklight viewing is heaviest.

There is no scientific explanation of Spooklight, although it has been studied by scientists, engineers and persons knowledgeable in the ways of such lights. Theories of what cause it are about as numerous as the people who go to see it. Persistent among those who have lived longest in the area is the legend of an old Indian who had a few words with his spouse and in the fracas that followed, lost his head- literally! Seemingly in a fit of pique she hid the head and now his sprit forever goes looking for it. Another story has a miner decapitated in an accident; the light is his lantern bobbing over the fields as he searches for his head.

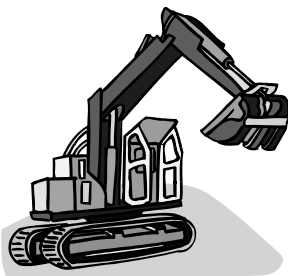
For those who insist on scientific reasons for the ghost light (and some old spoilsports always do) there are theories that it is a refraction of automobile lights from Highway 66 near Quapaw. This theory is indignantly rejected by old timers who insist the light was there long before there was a highway, automobiles, and for that matter, any Quapaw. Apparently the light was seen by curious Indians long before any white man lived here or tried to make a tourist attraction of it. They still say somberly "Leave it alone," as if dealing with an unfriendly sprit.

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During War II the U.S. Corps of Engineers from nearby Camp Crowder spent several weeks in the area, testing caves, mineral deposits, nearby streams and highway routes to find a logical explanation of Spooklight. They failed. The very constancy of the light over a century of time explodes the theory that it caused by gas from marsh grasses or old stumps, or by mineral deposits. The cause of such gases changes during the years and the light would have worn itself out by now.

A recent researcher believed it might be a rare form of ball lighting somehow produced as an effect of the magnetic anomaly. "The only oddity that shows up any where near the light is a magnetic anomaly, a distortion in the earth's magnetic field which sets square within range of the Spooklight road," he speculated.

A Spooklight "community hall" was established in 1965. It is a mecca for tourists and teenagers. The owner, the late Arthur Meadows, capitalized on the curiosity of people. There's a song about it, "See the Spook Light Tonight." There's a telescope to view it's nightly performance. "Spooksville" has a little "museum", a framed case holding clippings of stories about the light. Souvenirs are sold, there's a jukebox, a Spook Light auto license, and you can buy spook dust! The latter is a fluorescent power that imparts a ghostly glow if rubbed on hands and face. Venturesome youngsters about to risk an encounter with the light sometimes favor it.

The light bounces, sometimes enters a car, floats, sometimes looks like "a search beam" and vanishes if you walk toward it.

A ghost light? A mysterious phenomenon? An unfriendly spirit? What ever you believe, it is one of Ottawa County's great attractions. It can only be photographed from a distance – if the camera moves too close, the light disappears.

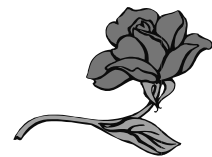
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Nashville Singer/Songwriter Still Calls Miami Home

It has been over eight years since Keith Thompson, the kid with big dreams and the talent to match, bid farewell to his family and friends in Miami and headed for the bright lights of Nashville.

The decision wasn't easy for Keith. 'Music City' was going to be a big change of pace from Miami. He had heard the stories of wounded pride and shattered dreams, but he thought it was worth the risk.

Looking back now, Keith knows he made the right decision. Nashville is in his blood. He's worked with big name artists, recorded solo and group albums, and signed impressive publishing contracts.

Keith's most notable achievement was signing a publishing deal in April of this year with Canada-Europe based MacCanuck Records, contributing to a breakthrough year for the 31 year old singer and songwriter who now performs and records as Darrion Keith. An album is in the works, as well as Canadian and European tours.

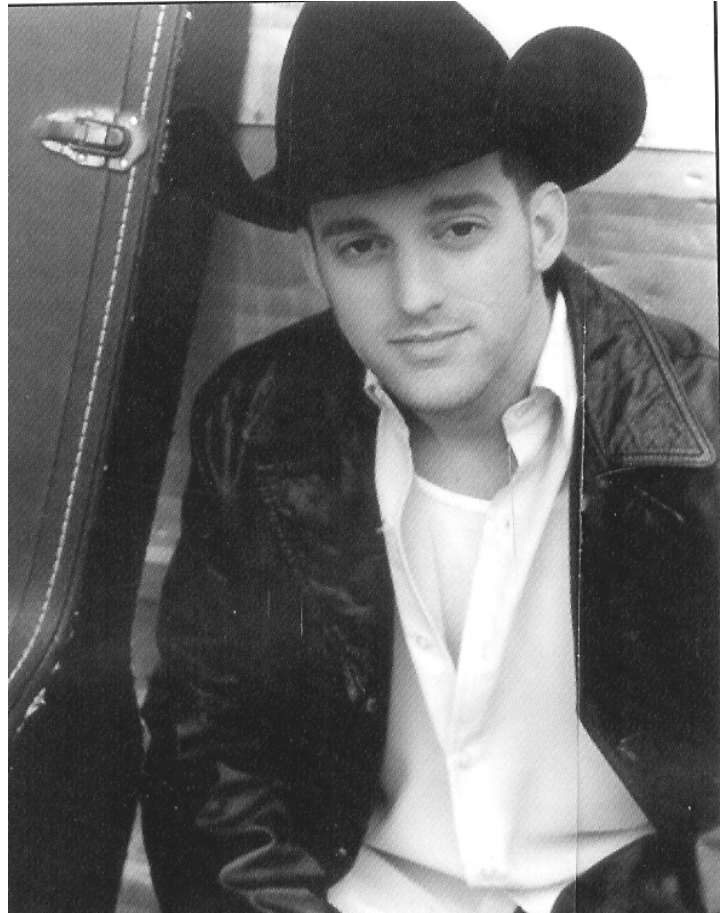
"I've really been blessed this year," Keith said. "Everything that has happened this year has just been great. If nothing else ever happens, it's still been a phenomenal year. We've been able to do things we never would have been able to accomplish, working like we were."

Success didn't come over night, but then he didn't expect it to. He said he was told that if he was willing to stay there ten years, he would see some success; so he did just that. Keith says moving to Nashville was an absolutely perfect fit. "I don't ever see myself leaving."

Keith loves returning home to Miami whenever he can. He plays a yearly show at the historic Coleman Theater, usually in April. He says that show gives him a chance to come home and see everyone and do a little singing for everyone there.

When Keith does return to Oklahoma, he finds that many don't remember him for his music. He was no child prodigy, and he gravitated toward sports throughout high school. Even in college, musical pursuits were secondary to him.

Keith graduated from Northeastern Oklahoma A&M College in Miami, and later graduated from Missouri Southern in Joplin with a bachelor's degree in psychology.



Darrion Keith Thompson and Shawna Lashae



“I played ball all they way through high school. I wasn’t doing a whole lot of singing in public,” Keith said. “So, growing up, a lot of people probably didn’t even know I sang at all. It wasn’t like my parents had me in contests when I was a kid. I don’t think I even really started singing out until I was sixteen.”

By his late teens Keith had immerse himself in the musical styles of Merle Haggard, Elvis Presley, Etta James, and Stevie Ray Vaughn, to name a few. Armed with these impressive influences, he began testing the waters through singing contests and shows at small town opryhouses around the region. Then he tried his hand at song writing.

He became a regular a place in Fort Scott, Kansas, where he was eventually hired on as a male vocalist. While there he established a connection with former Atlantic Records president Nelson Larkin. That connection would land Keith in Nashville.

With a college degree in hand, and acceptance into the Master’s program at Pittsburg, Kansas, Keith made the decision to follow his musical dreams instead. He graduated from Missouri Southern in May and in June he was headed to Music City.

Upon his arrival in Nashville, Darrion Keith Thompson became intent on seizing every opportunity to showcase his abilities. He won the first contest he entered, and within six months he had joined up with an established band.

“I did that for about three years and really cut my teeth on the whole Nashville numbers system. I learned how to play and sing at the same time and really got a lot better in a much shorter period of time,” Keith said.

The goal oriented Keith eventually felt the need to move on to bigger and better things. He went off on his own and formed his own band, Runaway Gypsy, with whom he recorded an album.

Keith says, “I put my own thing together and started playing and started getting some really good gigs. I’ve been part of some really great bands since I’ve been here.” He toured with Ty Herndon, opening the shows and was also Ty’s bandleader.

Undoubtedly the most important contact he made during his time in Nashville was when he met a young vocalist named Shawna Lashae during a gig where they both performed. An Alabama native, Lashae was a small town girl also trying to hit it big in the world of country music. She is now Keith’s wife.


The chemistry between the two is undeniable. While they have separate careers, they often perform together at shows and contribute to whatever recording project the other is working on at the time. Keith says Shawna is his toughest critic. “If I play something for her and it stinks, she’ll tell me. She doesn’t pull any punches.”

Keith says they have sung backup for each other, “and for some reason it’s a really nice sound with the two of us.”


Darrion Keith and Shawna Lashae performed at this year’s annual meeting for REC members. The show was September 18th at the Grove Civic Center.

Keith understands that he is in the vast minority of small town kids who have Nashville success stories to share. The competitive music environment chews up and spits out most of the hopefuls. It was something he had to try, no matter the cost.

Information for this story came from the September issue of Northeast Connection. The article was written by Clint Branham, Communications Specialist.



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THE OTTAWA COUNTY POOR FARM

The poorhouse was built in 1924, when the old, the indigent, often the friendless of Ottawa County were forced to depend on charity. There was no welfare program, as we know it today, no social security, no Medicare, no old-age pension, no food stamps, and certainly no commercial nursing homes.

The county commissioners tried valiantly to take care of this class of citizens, often working with inadequate funds. County records disclose that they did it very well, with sympathy and concern. Building and operating the poor farm developed into a program that lasted into the early 1960's. But there is no record of how many persons spent their last days in the old home.

The county acquired the 80 acres where the poorhouse was built in 1923, purchasing it from Josie Churcelate McConnell. She is indicated as "a full blood Cherokee, Roll No 2513."

Records of the construction of the home are sketchy. Joe Booth of Miami remembers that his father, William R. Booth, was the contractor and overseer of the project.

The house was built of stone and chat hauled in from the mines by wagon and team. No well had been drilled, so Booth and his helpers hauled water from Coal Creek to use in the cement work. No record of the actual cost of constructing the poor house has been found. Apparently the labor of people already working for the county was utilized, and one informant believes that prison labor also was used. L.W. Karr had the contract to plant shade trees.

A well, said to be the deepest in the county, became part of the improvements and at one time the O.K. Plumbing Company installed pumps and storage tanks. As late as 1955, the house was rewired for electricity, a fire detection system was installed and three fire escapes built.

In 1928 the minutes note that funds for the home were inadequate and the clothing and other articles were being donated through efforts of the commissioners. Churches, individuals and civic organizations took an interest in the home and promoted various activities.

Religious services were a regular event. Birthday parties, ice cream socials, Christmas and other holiday programs made the lives of the residents a little brighter.



Welch Homecoming Royalty



On May 3, 1927, Mrs. Robbie Joseph met with the commissioners and asked them to consider a hospital there for tubercular patients of Ottawa County; especially those of the mining district who were not being properly cared for.

She previously had suggested that miners donate \$ 1 each month to a hospital fund and said 8,000 miners had responded. The commissioners were told that miners would contribute heavily to a hospital fund if the county would erect a TB hospital. It was resolved to reserve a site at the poor farm for the hospital and agree to furnish water from the deep well. However, the hospital never materialized.

In later years the commissioners set aside a 10- acre plot on the poor farm and established the Ottawa County Memorial Cemetery. The first burial was in October 1966. Today there are some 40 burial plots, persons ranging from stillborn to 91 years of age.

In 1975 the county was in the process of having markers made for each grave. Turning the pages of the cemetery book, one notes that most of the persons buried in the cemetery died of diseases associated with old age. Two graves are marked as veterans' graves.

The poor farm was vacant for eight years before 1975, the year it was razed. The county rents the land for farming. For over half a century the old home stood there. It became like some of the aged persons for which it once was a refuge. Like them it was a shabby but proud old derelict of history. Some may remember it with pain or sorrow but many remember it as a beautiful well-cared-for part of the county's early history.

When the memorial cemetery was established in 1968, the county extension home economic clubs adopted it as a project and provided planting and other additions to beautify it. More than 400 pine trees were set out along the quarter-mile drive leading to from the highway. The clubs were aided by local youth through the Community Action Program's Youth Corps. The State Forestry Department provided the pine seedlings for the driveway.

This story was found in the Ottawa County History book.



Welch High School Cheerleaders



Miami High School Cheerleaders



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Craig County Poor Farm And Hospital

The Craig County Poor Farm was probably established in the 1920s. The records have been lost. The facility was located east of the present Craig County Fairgrounds.

The residents and employees at the farm raised vegetables, cared for and milked cattle, and fed hogs. Most of the food was raised on the farm. The county provided funds for salaries and utilities.

Edna Hendren was manager of the hospital and took care of the ill patients. At one time she was the administrator of the Vinita Hospital, which was located in the 100 block of South Scrapper.

After several years the facility became known as the Hillcrest Hospital. The farming was phased out and it became a hospital-nursing home. Edna, who was a practical nurse, remained in charge for a number of years.

Edna married Cerse Taylor in the 1940s, when she was about 45 years old. Cerse, who was part Indian, owned a good deal of land in the area.

After they married, the Taylors built a home on a hill northeast of the city limits. They then built a hospital across the section line from their home acreage and named it the Taylor Memorial Hospital.

Edna operated it as a private hospital until her husband died in 1965. It was vacant for several years.

Today it is known as the Home of Hope, which was founded in 1968. Home of Hope got its start in 1968 as a non-profit, residential alternative to nursing home care for persons with developmental disabilities. The original founders were Jane Hartley, Laura Neely, and Dr. Dehart.

They opened with 7 residents. Over the next few years the residential facility filled to capacity. Expansions were started and additions in services were added. Little renovations have been made to the original building. In fact, the lead lined x-ray room is still there.



Taylor Memorial Hospital



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Rascal Flatts Update

Picher-Cardin grad Joe Don Rooney, and fellow members of Rascal Flatts were named County Music Association's Group of the Year for the second time in as many years.

After a stellar acoustic performance of their new single, *Bless The Broken Road*, the Flatts took home the CMA Group Of The Year Award for the second year running. In accepting the award, the guys thanked their families, management, record label, agent, promoter, and most importantly, their fans. "Here's to you, Baby!" cheered bassist, Jay DeMarcus, as they took the award from the stage.

The guys will continue there tour dates through mid December, appearing in Tulsa on December 9th. Then they are taking some time off to enjoy the holidays. They will resume their tour in January.

On December 6th the guys performed their new smash single "Bless The Broken Road" on The View. They did the song acoustically as they have been on their "Here's To You Tour." The song is written by Marcus Hummon, Bobby Boyd and Jeff Hanna.

The single is the second off Rascal Flatts new album *Feels Like Today*, which made a stellar debut scanning with over 200,000 copies in late September placing it at #1 on Billboard's Top 200 Album Chart for all formats in addition to the #1 position on the Top Country Albums Chart. *Feels Like Today* is now certified platinum.



Jay Demarcus, Gary LeVox, Joe Don Rooney

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