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VOLUME 1, ISSUE 8

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SPECIAL EDITION SERIES

July 10, 2004

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MidAmerica Industrial Park, located south of Pryor was created in 1960. The 9,000-acre park is owned and operated by a public trust. It is Oklahoma's largest industrial park, and the country's largest rural industrial area. The park is home to approximately 60 businesses and employs over 4,000 people.

The site was originally home to Oklahoma Ordnance Works. OOW was created by the federal government, at the beginning of WWII. The installation produced powder for U.S. military munitions.

The OOW was a grand scale operation, employing 12,000 to 14,000 people at any given time. A part of the grounds was set aside for a Prisoner of War camp for German officers captured during the war. As unlikely as it may seem, most of the prisoners were content to be there.

At the end of the war, many of the POWs stayed in the area and began new lives. Some of those who returned to their native land have made reunion trips back to Pryor.

The POW camp was closed after war correspondent Walter Winchell disclosed the location to the general public, during one of his radio broadcasts. Another account maintains the camp was closed after an escape was made.

After the war, OOW was cut back to a skeleton crew of maintenance personnel to keep the equipment in working order.

Read more about MidAmerica and OOW in articles in this issue.

# History of Pryor

Pryor is the county seat of Mayes County. The area that became Mayes County is rich in history, containing the location of the first white settlement in what is now called Oklahoma. In 1796, Major Jean Pierre Chouteau, an Osage Indian trader and agent, established a trading post at the junction of the Grand/Neosho River and Saline Creek, at what is today called Salina. Flat boats plied their trade along the river and as early as 1817 keel boats from Ft. Smith (Arkansas) were known to travel up the river to the Chouteau Trading Post. The trading post flourished through the Osage occupation of the area, which ended with the formation of Indian Territory and this area was assigned to the Cherokee Nation. Christian missions were established here as early as 1820-1823.

But even before 1890 the non-Indian population, both legal and illegal, had grown to over 70 percent of the total population of Indian Territory. The first U.S. census of Indian Territory in 1900 shows a further influx of non-Indians had occurred between 1890 and 1900; most of the non-Indians being former residents of the adjacent states of Arkansas, Missouri, Texas and Kansas. Prior to the land allotment, the lands of the Five Civilized Tribes had been held in tribal ownership. No individual Indian owned any land, but they were free to use as much as they needed if it did not infringe upon their neighbor's needs. However, they did own their improvements; the home, barn, the planted crops, cleared fields and such. While these improvements could be traded or sold, tribal law restricted the transaction to another citizen of the same tribe.

The land was distributed by allotment to citizens of these Nations on the basis of their enrollment on the 1902-1906 Dawes Roll. The average land allotment to each Cherokee "citizen by blood" was 110 acres of average grade land. Freedmen (the former slaves of the Cherokees) were allotted 40 acres each of the Nation's land. But since the Indians had no concept of land ownership, in just a few short years most of the land was in the hands of non-Indians.

Mayes County was formed at statehood (1907) from parts of the Cherokee Nation, plus a small area of the Creek Nation of Indian Territory and was named in honor of Samuel Houston Mayes, who served his people and the Cherokee Nation as Principal Chief from 1895 to 1899.

Samuel Houston Mayes was born at the old Mayes homestead near the present town of Stilwell, Oklahoma, on May 11, 1845. The middle name of Samuel Houston Mayes was in tribute to the famous Sam Houston with whom his father Samuel Mayes had been acquainted back in Tennessee.

Young Mayes attended the tribal schools and at the age of sixteen entered the Confederate army, in the Civil War as a private in Company K, under Capt. Benjamin F. Carter and in the 2nd Cherokee Regiment under Col. Clem Vann, and served intermittently until the war was concluded. After the war he lived for a brief time in Texas where and when he attended school for a year in Rusk County.

The political career of Samuel Houston Mayes began in 1880 when he was elected and served as sheriff of Coo-Wee-Scoo-Wee District. From 1885 to 1891, he served as senator from the same district, those being the years when his illustrious brother was the tribal chief. He was elected chief of the Cherokees at the tribal election of August 5, 1895, on the Downing party ticket defeating Robert Ross by a substantial majority. The tenure of Samuel H. Mayes as chief was rather passive.

In the beginning.... Indians called the area "Coo-Y-Yah" meaning place of the huckleberries. It would later be called Pryor Creek in honor of Nathaniel Pryor, who was a descendant of Pocahontas. He was born in Virginia about 1775. In 1803 Pryor was the first volunteer accepted by the Lewis and Clark expedition.

Pryor was commissioned as a first lieutenant of the 44<sup>th</sup> United States Infantry in 1813 during the second war with Great Britain, and was promoted to the rank of captain. He served gallantly with General Andrew Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans.

After the war he came to the area of present day Oklahoma and is said to have been employed by Jean Pierre Chouteau and his brother, who had a trading post on the east bank of Grand River. Pryor ended up with his own trading post located five miles southeast of Pryor. He died there in 1831. In 1982 the Mayes County Historical Society moved his grave to the Fairview Cemetery, east of Pryor.

The MK&T (now Union Pacific) Railroad determined the final location of the City of Pryor Creek when it opened the depot in what was then Coo-Y-Yah. The post office officially dropped the word "Creek" from the name on January 26, 1909 although all other legal records retain the word.

The first school was a subscription school organized in 1887 in a one-room building. By 1894 the school had enlarged two rooms, and in 1896, a large, two story, eight-room building was erected.

On June 28, 1898, by Act of Congress, towns were given permission to incorporate under the laws of Arkansas, and to create public school systems. The first free public school system in the city opened October 2, 1902. An additional building was erected in 1915 which was used for the high school and the 1908 building was designated a grade school.

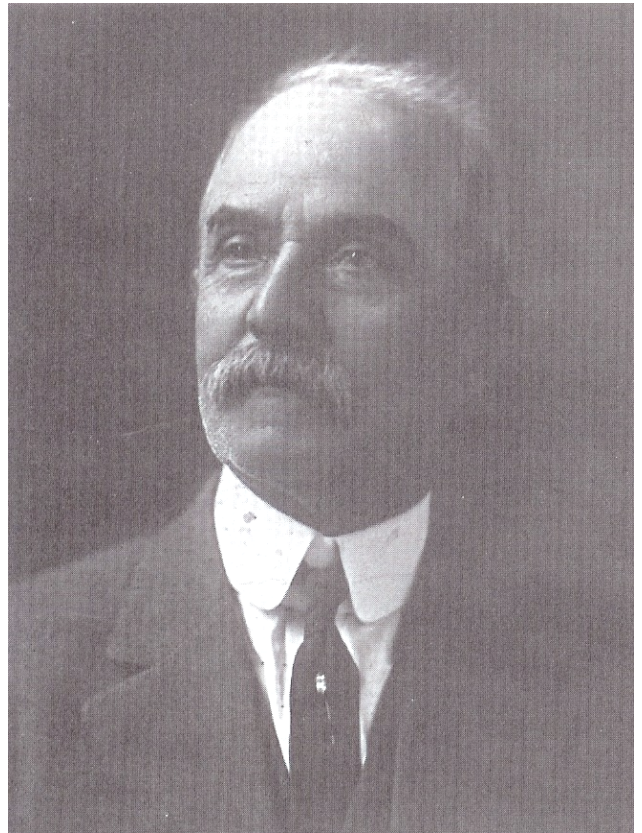
Pryor Creek was incorporated as a city under the laws of the State of Oklahoma. A city charter was adopted at a citywide vote on January 16, 1951. Governor Johnson Murray signed the charter for the State of Oklahoma on January 30, 1951.

In 1963 the voters of the community decided not to drop the word "Creek" from the city's name, as the feeling was one of historical significance. Therefore "Pryor Creek" remains the official name, although most residents and visitors know the community simply as Pryor.

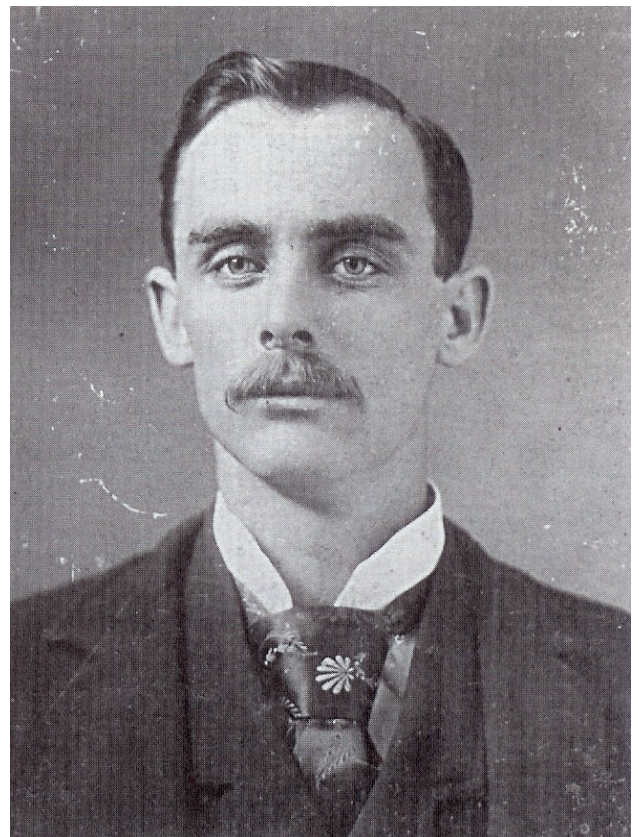
Until the coming of the railroad no one apparently had even considered settling where Pryor Creek now stands. Traffic through the area either followed Grand River or Texas Trail, both of which passed several miles to the east.

In 1870 the MK&T railroad began building a line across Indian Territory and by 1871 the shining ribbons of steel had passed the point where the future city of Pryor Creek would one day be located. In fact, the tiny section house built by the Katy stood completely alone on the prairie until James M. Gambill built his home near the tracks some two or three years later. He also dug the first well in the new settlement, approximately in the center of the present day U.S. Highway 69, just north of where Oklahoma 20 intersects.

Charlie Gambill, 64-year-old son of James Gambill, who retired from the U.S. Postal Service August 12, 1964 after 42 years in the Pryor Post Office, said his father's house was built on what is now the northwest corner of Graham Avenue and Mill Street, and the barn was located to the east on the present northeast corner of the intersection. He said the well was dug about halfway between the house and the barn.



Mayes County was named for this man.  
Samuel Houston Mayes



Pryor Creek's first Mayor, James Lee Mills

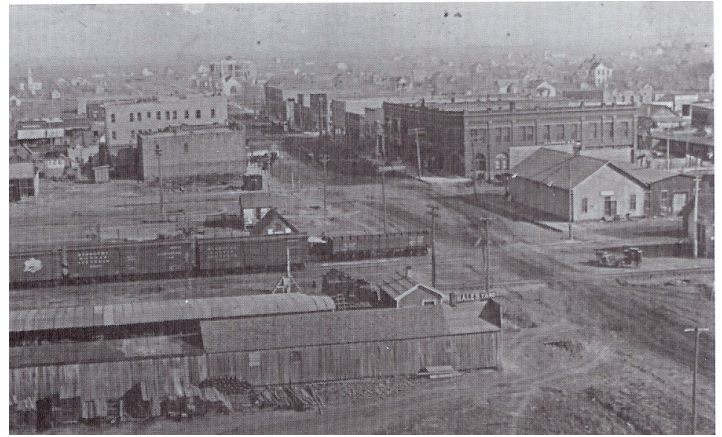
It has been noted that only two dwelling houses were in evidence when W.H. (Tip) Mayes established the first store in the town in either 1874 or 1875. Mayes was a brother of Joel B. and S. H. Mayes, both of whom later became principal chiefs of the Cherokee Nation. Their great-niece, Miss Mayme Mayes of Pryor, a retired English teacher of Tulsa Central High School, contributed much of the information contained in this account.

The little town wasn't called Pryor Creek yet; though a meandering stream just west and south of the settlement bore that name in honor of Capt. Nathaniel Pryor.

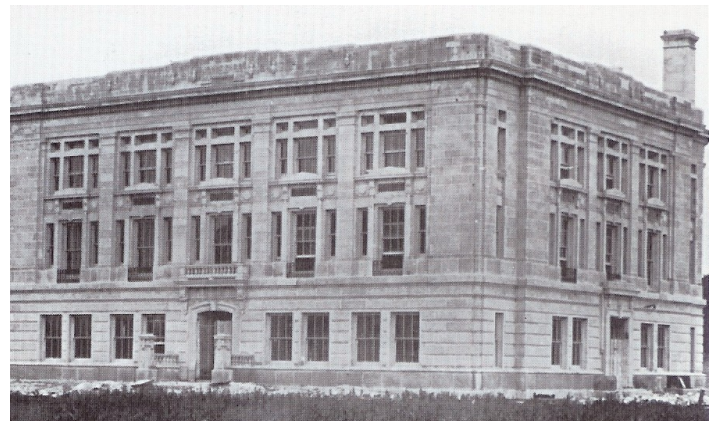
The first post office in what is now Mayes County was established at Coo-Y-Yah, but several miles to the south. It was called Pryor's Creek and was later to become the town of Chouteau. Another Post Office was then located on the creek banks some four miles northwest of Coo-Y-Yah and was called Pryor Creek, without the possessive spelling. This post office was discontinued, re-established and discontinued, several times during the next few years, but was finally a permanently discontinued in October of 1884. Residents of the area were notified that all mail service was being transferred to Coo-Y-Yah where another office had been established to years previously.

But the white mans difficulty in both spelling and pronouncing the Cherokee name of the town soon forced postal officials to formally change the name to Pryor Creek on April 23, 1887. In 1909 the post office, for the sake of brevity, dropped the Creek From the name and shortly afterward both the Katy and the map publishers followed suit.

Like all frontier settlements, Pryor Creek had its experiences with outlaws. Most famous of these perhaps, is the one described by the famous short story writer, O. Henry in his "Robbing a Train". It is the story of a Dalton gang train robbery scheduled for Pryor Creek, but which did not actually happen until the train reached Adair, nine miles north.



Bird's eye view of Pryor, 1909



1922- Mayes County Courthouse was completed at a cost of \$140,000. It was remodeled to the present look in 1959 with a \$373,000 grant from the W.A. Graham estate trustees.



The "Graham Block" about 1900

James M. Carselowey, Adair author and historian in his book "Cherokee Pioneers", places the date as July 14, 1892 when the Daltons in a spirit of Braado announced in advance they would hold up the "Katy Flyer" at the Pryor Creek station.

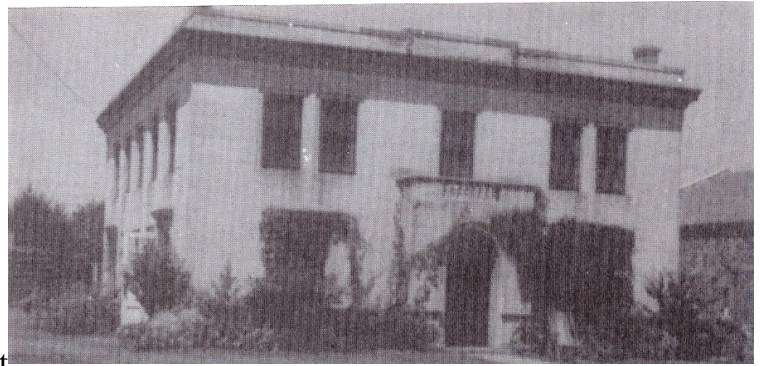
When the train pulled out of Muskogee it was loaded with deputies and others were hidden around the Pryor Creek station, but when the train pulled in, not a Dalton showed up. At Adair, however, as the deputies were telling what they would have done had the gang attached, suddenly there was a burst of gunfire and the Daltons where there. The element of surprise carried the day and the Daltons escaped with a reported \$27,000,00.

In 1888, Whitaker, with the aid of others, had built the first church and school; the first telegraph office was opened in 1889; and in 1900 Graham had organized the first bank, which today is the First National Bank of Pryor. Graham remanded president of the bank until his death in 1951, just under six weeks short of his 101st birthday.

It was in 1888 that Pryor Creek was first surveyed and platted under the laws of the Cherokee Nation by I.P. Bledsoe of Chouteau. An indication of the value may be seen from an original deed for "a city lot" now in the possession of the Pryor Public Library. It is conveyance from S. H. Mayes to C. D. Markham and the price is listed at \$22, but neither the location nor the dimensions of the lot are mentioned.

Under Cherokee law, Pryor Creek was in the Coo-Wee-Scoo-Wee (White Eagle or Big Chief) District, but after the U.S. Government survey in September of 1902 it was place in the Fifth District of Indian Territory and made a court town. Shortly afterward the first courthouse was built. Pryor Creek was incorporated under Cherokee Law about 1889, with the bill being introduced in the Cherokee Council House by Councilman D. W. Vann (the old white rock house on the road to Claremore was his home), and in the Senate by Sen. Sam H. Mayes of Pryor. On October 13, 1898, Pryor Creek was incorporated under the laws of Arkansas.

Information from the book History of Mayes County.



Original County Jail



Pryor High School in 1921. It was destroyed by the 1942 tornado.



First Gas Station



Station and Cafe

## Pryor Now

The population of Pryor is estimated to be 8,675. Pryor is the county seat of Mayes County. Mayes County's population is estimated to be around 38,369. Pryor has the Mayor-Council form of government. All are elected officials. The Mayor is Jimmy Tramel. There are 2 council members from each of 4 wards in the city. Ward 1: Ronnie Sharp and Roy Ray, Ward 2: LuAnn Sanderlin and Tony Smith, Ward 3: Gary Harris and Darrell Lansford, Ward 4: Misty Caraway and Cindy Proctor.

Eva Smith is City Clerk, Lois Thompson is City Treasurer, and Gary Pruett is Municipal Utility Department Manager. Chief of Police is Dennis Nichols. Tim Thompson is the Fire Chief. Ben Sherrer is the City Attorney, Kevin Dodson is City Court Judge, Julia Neftzger is Alt. Judge, and Carolyn Wise is Court Clerk.

The Pryor Public School system consists of the high school, junior high, and four elementary schools. They also have a WA-Ro-Ma Head Start program, and there is the Bradford Christian School.

A third party, non-profit, charitable organization, the Pryor Academic Excellence Foundation was formed to develop supportive community and private sector relationships with the Pryor School System. The Foundation was formed for the purpose of collecting and distributing contributions from individuals, businesses, and organizations for the benefit of students in the Pryor Public School District. The Trustees are comprised of a cross section of community leaders.

The Pryor Area Chamber of Commerce has a long-standing tradition of helping the area's business community prosper. The PACC has only two employees...and many volunteers. The President, a part-time employee, and the full-time Executive Secretary operate the office and handle the business, but it is the volunteers, the area's business people, that are the backbone of the program. They have many committees and special projects. The PACC also sponsors many events during the year.

Pryor is home to many events and places of interest. We detail some of those, later in this issue. If you would like to learn more about what's happening in Pryor, visit them on the web at [www.pryorok.com](http://www.pryorok.com)



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## Upcoming Events in Pryor

**September 9-13:** Mayes County Fair takes place at the Mayes County Fair Grounds located on old Highway 20 east of Pryor. For more information call (918) 825-3241

**September 11:** DAM J.A.M. Bicycle Tour is sponsored by the Pryor Area Chamber of Commerce. DAM J.A.M. is Oklahoma's most scenic one-day bicycle tour. A fabulous fall family event, featuring fun rides of 25, 50, 72, or 100 miles! The tour starts and finishes in Pryor, Oklahoma in the gentle foothills of the Ozark Mountains. Located in the heart of Oklahoma's Green Country in beautiful Mayes County, it's within riding distance of more than 2,500 miles of lake shoreline. You'll experience lush countryside, well-paved, shady rural roads, DAM J.A.M.'s world-famous festive rest stops, and some of the best support of any bicycle ride...anywhere. For more information call (918) 825-0157.

**October 2:** MidAmerica Industrial Park EXPO takes place at the Industrial Park's Expo Center. There will be a classic car show, arts and crafts, Warbird display, free hot air balloon rides, children's activities, and food. For more information call (918) 825-3500.

**December 2:** Pryor's Christmas Parade of Lights in downtown Pryor. For more information call (918) 825-0157

## COO-Y-YAH Museum

The museum located at <sup>th</sup>8Street and Highway 69, is housed in the Katy Railroad Depot. The Depot was moved to the present site in 1980 and opened in November 1982. Mayes County Historical Society operates the museum. They are open Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday from 1 to 4pm.

Among the many interesting items on display is an exhibit of Osage and Cherokee Indian art and artifacts. There are exhibits dedicated to the 1942 Pryor tornado, the Whitaker Home, and the Pensacola Dam, to name a few.

The museum is a great place to spend the afternoon, and a fun way to learn about early day Mayes County. For more information or to schedule a tour, call 825-2222 or 825 2575.

We would like to say a special "Thank You" to Betty Thomas and Clesta Manley from the museum for all their help with the history and vintage photos of Pryor. Clesta is an artist, and many of her paintings are on display in the museum.



# Deadly Tornado of 1942

Monday afternoon, April 27, 1942, was a typically hectic day in Pryor. Construction at the powder plant was in full swing and the town was a boom in every sense of the word. Each evening trains from Muskogee and Parsons, Kansas arrived, transporting workers from surrounding towns back home at the end of a long day of work at the powder plant. Traffic jams on the highways; in all directions were commonplace from 4:30pm to 6:30pm.

On this day, as workers returned home, or stopped in town to pick up a few things, they probably noticed that a springtime thunderstorm was approaching from the west. The people of Pryor paid little attention to the darkened sky.

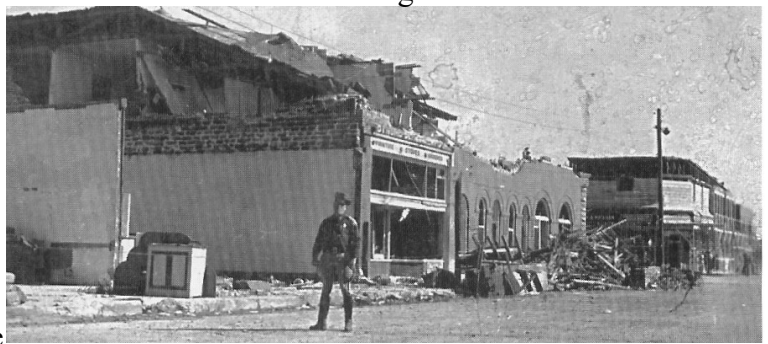
Unknown to the people in town that day, an extremely heavy rain and hailstorm was forcing motorists off the road between Claremore and Pryor on Highway 20. Such was the case with George Wolfe, a truck driver, who witnessed the funnel cloud touching down, after he had pulled off the road. The following is his story.

"The cone was purplish black in color and clearly defined. It was the most awful looking thing anyone could imagine. It moved across the country in a zig-zag fashion and from all sides of it were spitting cows, calves, whole trees, telephone poles, wire fences, and roof tops. All of a sudden everything got pitch black and started to hail. Somebody said it had probably lifted and we got in our cars. But as some of the cars pulled off, they ran into the center of the tornado."

"There wasn't time to think. I just slammed the car against a bank of earth and Leonard Wallace and I jumped out. From where we were standing we could see automobiles being picked up off the road and carried a quarter mile over the fields. Some that were dumped all around us were just twisted masses of junk."

The funnel began to follow an extremely straight path down the north side of Highway 20. Those people who had fallen to the ground after getting out of their cars surely hoped the tornado would lift soon. Little did they know the twister would remain on the ground, killing and destroying for the next eleven miles.

Tornado Damage Photos





The people in town were completely unaware of the intensity of the storm. At about 4:30pm sprinkles of rain started to fall, but not enough to chase anyone of the streets. The train to Parsons, passengers loaded, was ready to pull out.

Sometime around 4:40pm a car that had been outrunning the funnel, pulled into Pryor. Joe Buland of Tulsa and Ernest Gilmore of Turley raced ahead of the storm stopped in Pryor and took shelter in a restaurant. Thinking they had seen the funnel rise they did not mention anything about the storm.

Buland and Gilmore could not have warned the town in time. When they arrived, most were in inside out of the rain, but very few people saw the tornado before it hit.

The clock in the Post Office Book Store stopped at 4:45pm. At that same moment life stopped for many residents of Pryor. The tornado cut a swath two blocks wide through the entire town. Not a business on Main Street came through undamaged.

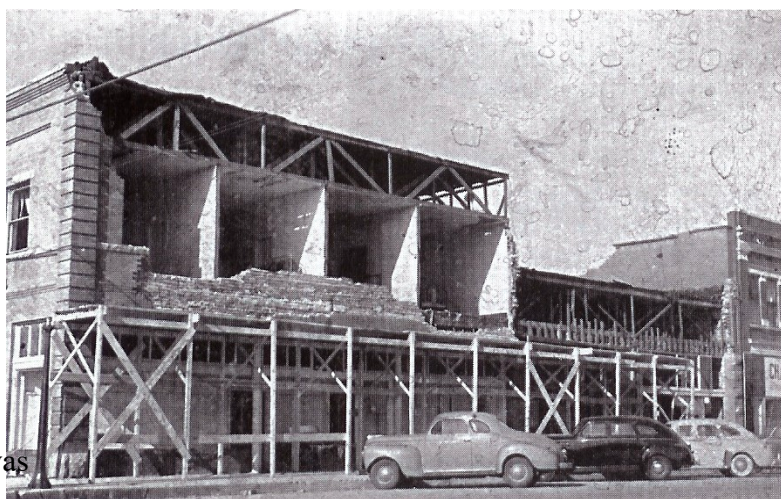
The shuttle train carrying workers from the powder plant was blown off the tracks and smashed to the ground. Several workers were killed or injured.

As the storm lifted and the rain subsided, people staggered onto the streets. What these people witnessed in the following hours was never forgotten by any of them. Main Street was completely covered with debris, bricks, crushed automobiles, and buried citizens.

As attempts were being made to organize rescue and cleanup operations, several injured were already being taken to get help. The two hospitals in Pryor had to be abandoned because of damage and rising water. Emergency facilities were set up at three cottages at the Whitaker State Home and the Christian Church. All the towns doctors and two local dentists worked throughout the night treating the injured.

Traffic on Highway 69 from the powder plant came to a standstill. As word of the tornado spread, dozens of workers left their cars and walked to town to aid in rescue operations. They arrived to find the town in ruins as if it was the scene of a European battlefield.

## More tornado damage photos



Major Langley, who was attending flight school Oklahoma Military Academy, arrived for class that afternoon; watched the menacing storm to the east and decided to fly over the area to check for damage. He witnessed the devastation and flew to near Vinita in an effort to get where conditions would permit him to use his radio. He contacted the Tulsa airport with a request for help in Pryor.

It is not known if this was the first contact with the outside world after the storm, but it is said that it was this call that brought aid from around the state. Planeloads of doctors and nurses, and ambulances from as far away as Oklahoma City converged on Pryor. Sirens were heard throughout the night and well into the next day. People from all walks of life and professions got to Pryor any way they could, to help in the aftermath.

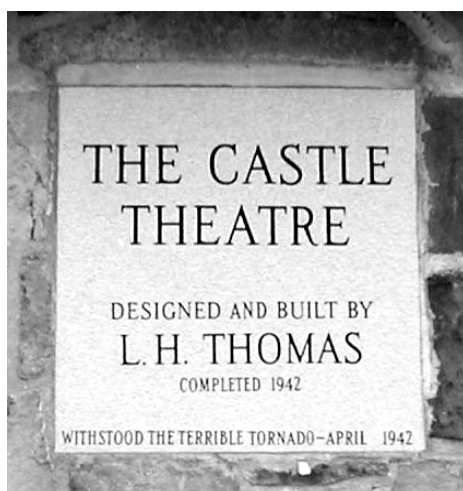
Within two hours after the storm, heavy equipment and crews from the powder plant converged on the town. The workers wasted no time recovering the dead, rescuing the injured, and finding shelter for the homeless.

By nightfall Governor Phillips had ordered the state highway patrol to centralize on relief work in the area. WPA officials requisitioned beds and cots and sent relief workers to the area. The governor sent State Safety Commissioner, Walter B. Johnson to take charge of operations.

In two short minutes 52 people had been killed, 402 had been injured and hundreds of people were left homeless. Property damage was estimated at \$2,000,000. It only took eight months to erase the physical scars of the town, but the memories will remain forever.

This story was found in the Mayes County History book. Rick Elliot submitted it to be included in the book.

Pryor Youth Organization is housed the Castle Theatre Building. Plaque states the building, which was under construction at the time, withstood the terrible tornado.



## Whitaker Children's Home

W.T. Whitaker was one of Oklahoma's first philanthropists. He was born in Andrews, North Carolina on February 14, 1854. He came to the Indian Territory in 1871, settling in Tahlequah. He returned to North Carolina, where he took Miss Stacy L. Hood as his bride on April 25, 1875. They then returned to Indian Territory, settling in Muskogee, later moving to Chouteau. The Whitakers moved to Pryor in 1887.

Whitaker was a successful businessman. His first business in Pryor was a mercantile business, and then sometime later owned the Pryor Bottling Works. He was instrumental in establishing the Pryor Creek Academy and building the first church in Pryor. He helped secure approval for Pryor to be designated as a court town.

The Whitakers are best remembered for establishing a home for orphans. The home was established in 1897, and was maintained at the expenses of the Whitakers until 1906. At that time the U.S. Government made an appropriation for the Indian children who had been in his care since 1903, when the Cherokee Indian Orphanage in Salina burned.

In 1908 the orphanage became a state operated institution and Mr. Whitaker retired from active management. He continued activities on behalf of the children until his death on December 26, 1922. Stacy died December 20, 1919. They are buried in Fairview Cemetery.

The Whitakers had 11 children. One son, William Jerry born September 8, 1881, graduated from Kansas City Medical College in 1900. He practiced medicine in Pryor and was a doctor at the orphanage.

The first children were housed in a rented building. When the cornerstone for a new building was laid there were 21 children in the Whitakers' care.

The original 40-acre location of the home was a part of Whitaker's Indian allotment. The Home grew to include 590 acres, and thirty buildings. It was almost self-supporting in providing for their daily needs; a full dairy, raising their own beef, hogs and chickens, planting, raising and preserving food for both the residents and the livestock. As the children grew up they took on their share of the workload.



Whitaker Hospital



Whitaker Whiz Kids Bus



Constructing a roof over the pool in 1950  
Whitaker's State Home

There was also a lack of schools in Indian Territory for non-Indian children. The Whitakers provided for this with teachers, classrooms and training facilities. There was a special building where the older girls learned to sew by making not only their own clothes. There was also an on site hospital.

Today the facility is home to the Thunderbird Youth Academy, and home to a satellite unit of Rogers State College, bringing college-credit courses and training to the people of this area.

Many of the former residents maintain communications with other members of the Whitaker Home Family and there have been several reunions held. The Whitaker Alumni donated a monument in Fairview Cemetery, honoring the Whitakers.

There is a small cemetery that is maintained for the children who died while residing at the home. The original tombstone has been maintained, but is weather worn. The people of Pryor copied the entries and have a new stone located nearby.



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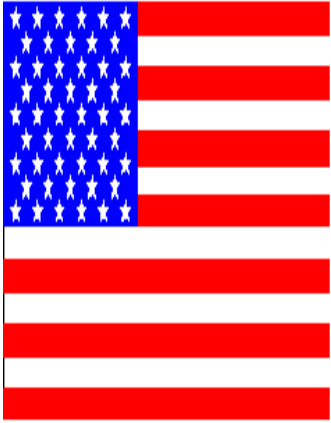


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# H o m e t o w n

# H e r o e s



*We dedicate this issue of Hometown Oklahoma to the memory of Kyle Brintee. We share the pride and sorrow the family must feel for the loss of this outstanding young man. Our thoughts and prayers are with you, as well as all the troops from the 120th Combat Engineer Battalion and their families.*

*It is with great pride we salute all Mayes County veterans!*



*Mural at the Mayes County Court House*



## Kyle Brinlee Showler

Kyle was a 2001 graduate of Pryor High School. He had joined the National Guard before graduating. He was a carpentry and masonry specialist. Kyle was deployed to Iraq in March of this year with Detachment 1, Company B, 120th Combat Engineer Battalion.

Kyle was killed in a convoy when a homemade device exploded in the vehicle in which he was riding. No one else was injured. He was the first Oklahoma National Guard member to die in conflict since the Korean War.

Speaking at the funeral, Governor Brad Henry says Brinlee's sacrifice will not be forgotten. After his death, Kyle was promoted to sergeant and awarded the Bronze Star and Purple Heart medals. Both honors were presented to his family.

Kyle was born February 17, 1983 in Claremore, Oklahoma to Robert and Tracy (Davidson) Showler. Kyle had been a lifetime resident of Pryor. While attending Pryor High School he was a member of the football team. Kyle enjoyed doing all types of carpentry work and laying wood tile floors. He was part of the crew that laid the floor at the new gym at Pryor High School. He liked to play baseball and golf. Kyle also liked Harley motorcycles and working on cars.

Kyle is survived by his father and step-mother Robert and Tammy Showler of Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, sister Kaylee Brinlee of Pryor, brother Micheal Showler of Broken Arrow, step-brother Jeff Wheat of Broken Arrow, grandparents Johnny and Leah Davidson of Pryor, Linda and John Jennings of Vinita, Bob and Betty Showler of Vinita, step-father Ronnie Brinlee of Chelsea, Oklahoma, step-grandparents Louis and Millie Brinlee of Chelsea, great grandmother Virginia Hill of Fairland, and step-great grandmother Helen Davidson of Salina, Oklahoma. Kyle was preceded in death by his mother Tracy Brinlee, grandmother Judy Davidson, great grandparents Stanley and Zelda Huggans and great grandfather Norman Davidson.

Friends and family remembered Kyle as a kind-hearted young man, who was very forgiving, and if you were his friend you were his friend forever. He was remembered as a fun-loving, witty man. It was said Kyle had a way of making people happy.

It was said Kyle joined the National Guard to make a difference and he did, at home anyway. Several towns in the area are paying tribute to his memory. Pryor's 4th of July fireworks display featured a tribute to him.

## **Local Merchants' Military Families Support Train**

Some local merchants came up with a way to help families of troops who are now on active duty. Keeping things going on the home front is not an easy task. Many families income has changed and being thrown into a "single parent" situation can be overwhelming.

To access the benefits offered by the participating businesses, military dependents are being issued a Military Dependent's Family Pass, also know as the "Support Train Pass."

The Daily Times is coordinating efforts to communicate this offer to military dependents. Families wishing to acquire a "Train Pass" are encouraged to visit the Daily Times at 105 S. Adair on Mondays from 10:00am to 4:00pm.

Dependents should bring with them copies of military deployment orders, photo military ID cards for all family members, and for children who do not have a military ID, social security cards, military insurance cards or birth certificates will work.

The participating merchants offer free or discounted goods and services. We at Community Links of Chelsea would like to extend a special "Thank You!" to the following merchants for their continued support of the military families in the area.

### **Allred Theater**

**Sharp's Department Store**

**Mike's Tire & Auto Care**

**Pryority Printworks**

**Another Wild Hare**

**Roberts Auto Center**

**Ages Computer**

**Brenda's Boutique**

**Pryor Barber Shop**

**Mid-America Grille**

**Steve's Conoco**

**Beggs Pharmacy**

**The Village Shoppe**

**Boys & Girls Clubs of Green Country**

**Blevins & Sordahl Law Firm**

**John Wingard CPA**

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## Rabbit Studio Gallery

The mural pictured is one of two that can be seen at the Mayes County Courthouse. More of Bill and Traci's work can be seen throughout Pryor. Pictures cannot do the works justice. It would be worth a trip to Pryor just to see their work!

Bill Rabbit was born in Wyoming of Cherokee ancestry. He chased rabbits, listened to the wind, old legends and stories, watched colors changing in the skies and noticed the form of things around him.

He is self-taught in jewelry making and acrylic painting. He says, "I am influenced by all artist." He tries to capture something of their spirit through experimentation, out of admiration for their skies, colors, and forms. Viet Nam taught him that life's moments are precious and so he is especially pleased to be working at what he loves.

He does little preliminary sketching, allowing color to shape his forms, his paintings. He is a member of IACA, SWAIA, the Cherokee Historical Society, Who's Who in American Art and IACA's 1989 Artist of the Year.

Bill and Karen's daughter, Traci is making her own way in the art world. She is the recipient of many awards from competitive art shows and her work is represented in numerous galleries. She holds a bachelors degree in Business Administration from Northeastern State University.

Currently her artistic efforts are focused on capturing the grace, strength, and determination of today's Native American woman, and sharing that beauty with everyone.

Traci says, "Through my artwork, I try to convey the contemporary Native American woman, each having her own identity, with remembrances of her past."

Traci says many people have influenced her in her career, but her main inspirations have been her parents. "My dad has given me invaluable advice and a wonderful and creative outlook on life. My mother has been the backbone and driving force in my artwork.

The Rabbit Studio Gallery is located at 213 S. Taylor in Pryor. You can also visit them on line at [www.rabbitstudios.com](http://www.rabbitstudios.com) and see more samples of their beautiful works.

## **Pryor's Forgotten Hero**

### **Pfc. John Reese Jr. won Congressional Medal of Honor posthumously in World War II**

Pryor was home to a Congressional Medal of Honor winner. But you wouldn't know it. Nothing there marks his passing, or his heroic service to country. Terry Roberts, a 1983 graduate of Pryor High School, who served two years of active duty in the U.S. Army and four years in the Army Reserves, found out about Private First Class John Noah Reese Jr. and has written an historical account about Pryor's World War II hero and his unit. Roberts was surprised to learn that Pryor was home to a winner of the highest honor an American citizen can receive.

Reese only lived in Pryor about a year. He tried to get his parents to stay because he liked the town and the people who lived there, and he wanted a home to come back to after the "war." Reese wrote in a letter home, "We will have a fine home one of these days if Pop keeps working on the place. I sure hope you get to stay there for a long time, in fact, forever, and I would like a place to call home."

The Native American hero, at least one-quarter Cherokee, was born in Muskogee and grew up in Tulsa, graduating from Central High. After graduation Reese worked for Barnes and Manley Laundry. It wasn't long before he chose to follow in his father's footsteps as an entry level ground man, learning the ropes to becoming a lineman. When his father went to work at Oklahoma Ordnance Works, John Jr. went along as his apprentice.

The family purchased land on the western edge of Pryor in 1941 and began building a home in early 1942. A good deal of the unfinished home was carried away in the April 27, 1942 tornado. Like many other Pryorites, the family rebuilt.

In December of 1942 Reese entered the Army, taking basic training at Fort Sill. He was a member of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon of Baker Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 148th Regiment of the 37th Infantry Division. In February of 1945, Company B was in position to frontally assault the Paco Railroad Station in Manila.

(Continued on next page)

### **Ladybug's Merle Norman Cosmetics & Studio**



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Pfc. Reese and Pfc. Cleto Rodriguez of San Antonio won the Congressional Medals of Honor for simultaneous action during an assault on the heavily defended railroad station.

Reese and Rodriguez were BAR gunners, manning an ugly, clumsy, 20-pound automatic weapon that could fire up to 600 rounds per minute. It was dubbed "The Fixer" because, in a tight spot, it could "fix" it.

The following is Roberts' written account of what happened: Of all the heavily reinforced defenses in Paco, none was more daunting than the Paco Railroad Station. The several-storied building was an array of trenches, pillboxes and foxholes. Each end was anchored with pillboxes armed with 20mm cannons with a third gun in between. Near the center was a concrete pillbox with a 37mm cannon, and seven heavy 50-caliber machine guns were spread throughout the station.

Sgt. Bob Green was one of the witnesses who later testified to what happened. "Slowly crouching and creeping, the two men reached a position behind a ruined house after crawling 60 yards from the station."

Considering their weapons, ammo and personal gear, each man was packing in excess of 120 pounds. From this point the intrepid team could observe every movement and portal from where the Japanese were firing. For a full hour, despite thousands of rounds being fired from the station, Reese and Rodriguez alternately, and sometimes simultaneously shot everything moving, 35 enemies in all.

Reese motioned Rodriguez to follow him to an empty pillbox where they spotted a 40-man team of reinforcements coming out of the station to fill unmanned defenses. "At this time, 'the quiet, sensible boy' as Reese was known, reportedly made his only comment: "We'll see about that."

Reese and Rodriguez fired in unison until all 40 were mowed down, stopping any further attempts to man defenses. Angling under the rapid-fire cannons, they reached a spot 20 yards from the corner of the station. A 20mm was fixing to open up on their comrades and Reese and Rodriguez had to stop it.



Gravesite of Nathaniel Pryor in Fairview Cemetery



With the undivided attention of enemy soldiers inside the station, Reese drew all of the attention on himself as he peppered the building with gunfire, allowing Rodriguez to slip around and throw five hand grenades in rapid succession, killing seven men gunning the 20mm and a heavy machine gun.

On less than a full bandolier of bullets, they slowly withdrew to their line after two and a half hours of continuous exposure to enemy fire. In all, the two had unloaded 1,600 rounds at the station. They withdrew with the Army's standard, 'You move, I'll cover.' Especially short of bullets, since he had drawn fire to himself, Reese scrambled for his last bullets to cover Rodriguez. It was in that split moment that one of the thousands of Japanese bullets fired finally found him.

The 37th would take the station the next morning, but most of the Japanese had pulled out over night. Reese and Rodriguez had 82 confirmed kills in the battle.

Reese and so many others who won the Congressional Medal of Honor were largely infantry privates from meager backgrounds. They gave up the only thing of value they had – their lives, writes Roberts.

On Nov. 8, 1945, Brig. Gen. William Colbern and his staff from Fort Chaffee came to Pryor for a ceremony organized by American Legion Post 182 and Pfc. Reese was honored posthumously and later interred Fort Gibson National Cemetery.

In 1959, the John N. Reese Jr. Army Reserve Center was dedicated, a ceremonial cannon at Fort Sill bears Reese's name and, in 1993, Tulsa Central High School added him to the "Wall of Fame" with a plaque. But the Reese Army Reserve Center is now closed and Reese's monument is stored away at the new Armed Forces Center in Sand Springs.

The story of John N. Reese Jr. is a sad one. He was a 'Johnnie Come Lately' to combat, who was 'Dear John-ed' just before Valentine's Day in the only major battle he fought and died in.

As of today, in the town of Pryor where he wanted he and his family to 'live forever,' there is still no physical tribute to the man who crawled through a hundred yards of hell for friends and country, writes Roberts.

This story was found in an issue of "The Paper" in Pryor Creek, Oklahoma.

Veterans Monument at Fairview Cemetery



## 60,000 Caught "The Fever!"

There's a new "Fever" that has hit northeast Oklahoma.... Country Fever, that is. The "treatment center" is located just off 69 Highway, north of Pryor. Treatment of the fever includes, but is not limited to four days of live country music by some of country's most popular performers, and partying with family and friends till you drop! It is recommended that a "booster" treatment be received every year.

It is estimated that 60,000 people attended the Country Fever Festival this year. Improvements to the grounds and road and much better weather is credited with doubling the attendance from last year.

Country music fans from far and wide were entertained by local talent, country music new comers and veteran country music stars. Some of those who appeared during the four-day festival were: Hank Williams Jr., Wynonna Judd, Martina McBride, Diamond Rio, Gary Allen, Blake Shelton, Joe Nichols, Neal McCoy, and many more.

Permanent facilities at the Pryor Creek Music Festival Grounds include the main stage, and side stages, marked campsites, showers and restrooms, jumbo screens, a convenience store, and VIP seating and restaurant.

The creation of this festival has given a much-needed boost to economic development of not only Pryor, but also towns throughout the area. The festival also provides seasonal employment to approximately 2000 people. Pryor Creek Music Festivals Inc. owners are based in Wisconsin. The story of how they picked Oklahoma for the location of this event should be interesting. We will check into that, and get back to you another day.

Check out the festival website to see pictures of this years event.

[www.countryfeverfest.com](http://www.countryfeverfest.com)



Keith Urban entertained at Country Fever



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#### CLOTHING AND ACCESSORIES! RED HAT ITEMS

## Oklahoma Ordnance Works Authority

Beginning in 1941 and lasting through WWII a 15,867-acre site between Pryor and Chouteau was home to a government owned, DuPont operated powder plant. Constructed at a cost of 84,000,000, the Oklahoma Ordnance Works produced primarily smokeless powder as well as nitric and sulphuric acids and tetryl for explosives and detonators for war munitions.

Earl Ward of Pryor spearheaded the effort to secure Pryor as the site of the powder plant. Mr. Ward was born in Texas in 1894. When Earl was eight, the Ward family moved to Indian Territory. Earl and his wife moved to Pryor in 1926. They raised their four children there.

In 1933 Earl was appointed Secretary of the Pryor Chamber of Commerce. He served as a member of the Grand River Dam Authority for seven years, serving two years as Chairman of the Board. In 1941 he was elected to the Oklahoma House of Representatives for Mayes County.

On learning the U.S. War Department proposed a powder plant, he was authorized to go to Washington D.C. for the purpose of trying to get the plant for Oklahoma. After five weeks of lobbying for the location in Oklahoma. The War Dept. met with the DuPont Co. and a contract was signed to produce powder at the location outside of Pryor.

When the plant opened and production was in full swing, to say there was a housing shortage in Pryor and the surrounding area was an understatement! Every available space was fixed as sleeping quarters and rented out. Chicken coops were converted to sleeping space and farmers even pitched large canvas tents, renting sleeping space to workers. Sleeping spaces were rented at a very good price.

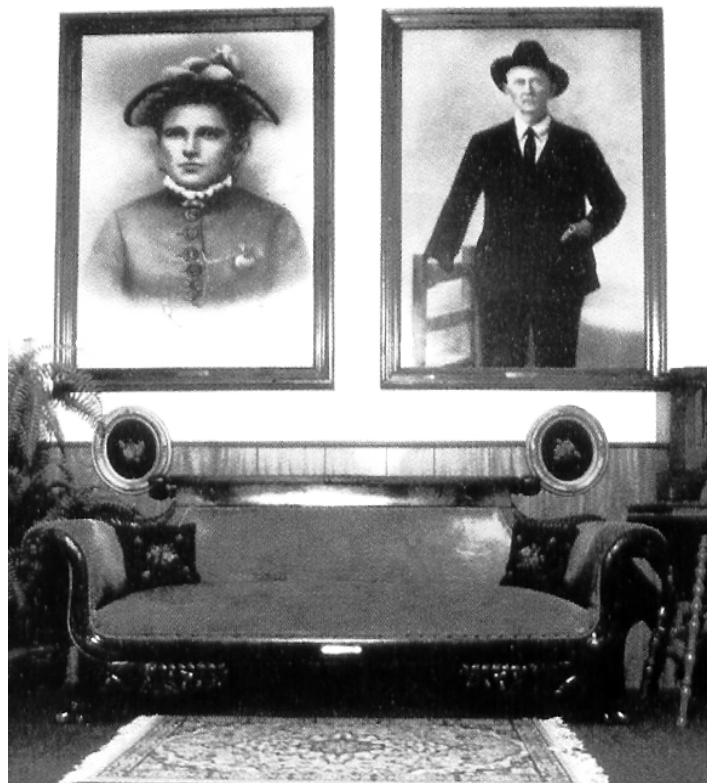
Eventually some housing was added to the plant site, but as housing developments sprang up in the area the housing at the site was surplus and that is when the POW camp was opened.

When it was learned that the plant was coming to the area, the news was greeted with mixed emotions. The people welcomed the opportunity of growth and progress and the additional income to the area, but the nature of the plants business was not a welcome one.

The plant proved to be a valuable asset during the aftermath of the 1942 tornado. The machinery and plant workers were there throughout the cleanup efforts.



President Lyndon Johnson visits Pryor



Portraits of the Whitakers on display at museum



Katy Depot after the 1942 tornado

At the conclusion of the hostilities in 1945 the facility was closed. The closing ended employment for thousands of people.

Gene Redden of National Gypsum Co. was put in charge of management of the closed facility. Keeping National Gypsum as caretakers of the facility cost the government \$250,000 a year. Their job was to watch and maintain the buildings and equipment. The facility was reduced to just over 10,000 acres.

The area housed 509 buildings, 153 of which were unsafe for human occupancy due to chemical residue. There were 38 miles of railroad spur, four complete water systems and three complete chemical plants. A value of \$65 million was put on the facility.

When speculation became public that the area was to be declared surplus, Pryor and Mayes County businessmen became interested in the possibility of a lease or purchase of the area to create an industrial park. The Pryor Area Chamber of Commerce called a special meeting where a plan was set in progress.

After months of planning, negotiating, cutting through bureaucratic red tape, and setting up a public trust The Oklahoma Ordnance Works Authority was officially created on December 30, 1960. Finally a firm offer of \$1.7 million (appraised value less \$3.5 million decontamination cost estimate) was made. Included in the offer was an agreement to purchase 10,046 acres of land, the buildings, and all existing utilities. The site was purchased by the State of Oklahoma in 1961. At last the MidAmerica Industrial Park went from dream to reality.

By 1965 the economic growth from industries in the park was a welcome addition to the surrounding communities. On August 26, 1966 President Lyndon Johnson spoke at groundbreaking ceremonies for a new water sewer system funded by the Economic Development



William Alexander Graham  
1851-1952

Graham was born near Adairsville, Georgia on May 18, 1851. He lived in this area March 25, 1884 until his death.

Graham was a rancher, merchant, banker, civic leader, and philanthropist.

When the First National Bank of Pryor Creek was established in 1900, Graham was elected President and continued to serve for nearly 52 years.

Mr. Graham gave the Pryor Community Building to the City. He also funded the Electrical Distribution System of Pryor.

The bulk of his estate was left to the City of Pryor, Mayes County, and the State of Oklahoma.

# Thunderbird Youth Academy



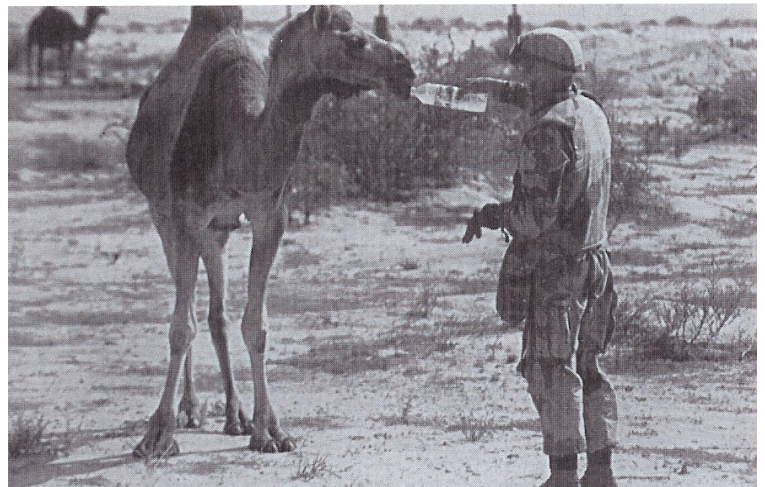
The Thunderbird Youth Academy was launched in September of 1993 under the National Guard Bureau, as a three-year federally funded pilot program. Permanent funding was obtained in September 1996 when the state of Oklahoma allocated funds to support the program. Since 1993, Oklahoma's ChalleNGe program has made continuous improvements and enhancements keeping the Academy in the lead of Oklahoma's youth-serving organizations. There are currently 32 Youth Challenges programs across the United States .

The primary mission of the Thunderbird Youth Academy (TYA) is to intervene in the lives of at-risk youth. Specifically, TPA targets 16 to 18 year old (male or female) high school dropouts giving them the opportunity to gain control over their lives by increasing academic performance; improving self esteem; and teaching essential life skills enabling them to compete in the work place and manage a healthy family environment. The program utilizes a 'quasi-military' approach capitalizing on military assets, doctrine and principles to teach self-discipline, improve self-esteem and physical fitness thereby addressing the needs of the 'whole person'.

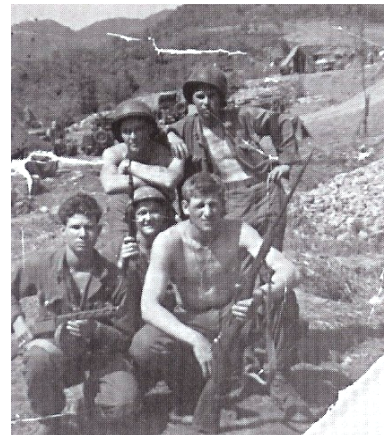
Thunderbird Youth Academy (TYA) located in Pryor, Oklahoma is a program of the Oklahoma National Guard. Thunderbird Youth Academy is a 17-month program that consists of a 5-month residential phase at the Whitaker Education Training Center in Pryor, Ok, and a 12-month community-based post-residential phase.

For the first 22 weeks, enrolled youth are in residence at the Whitaker Center 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The purpose of this phase is to instill in each cadet a sense of self-discipline and community spirit using a variety of methods built around the program's eight core objectives. This phase is divided into 2 parts, the first two weeks are called Pre-Challenge and the last 20 are called Challenge.

The Oklahoma Guard's Thunderbird Youth Academy has been named the Best All Around National Guard Youth Program in the nation at a recent awards ceremony at the United States Organization headquarters, Washington D.C.



1991 US Marine Cpl. Douglas Goff of Pryor During Operation Desert Storm



1951 Billy Lee Van Brunt (top right) of Pryor, with the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry, Fox Company, in North Korea



The National Guard Bureau requires that all TPA applicants meet specific criteria in order to participate in the program. To be eligible for admittance, applicants must be:

- A volunteer (cannot be mandated by the court)
- A high school dropout
- 16-18 years old
- Physically and mentally capable (with reasonable accommodation)
- A U.S. citizen (or legal resident)
- A resident of Oklahoma
- Drug Free
- Currently uninvolved with the legal system

Pryor

Mentor follow-up throughout the 12-month Post Residential Phase has proven to be the key ingredient of long-term success of Youth Challenge graduates. The role of the Mentor is to serve as a cadet's role model, friend, and advocate. Mentoring involves a caring one on one relationship between a youth and adult where constant support and guidance are provided.

During the Residential Phase, mentors maintain regular contact with their cadets via telephone calls and letters in an effort to provide support and guidance during this demanding time. As cadets move from the Academy's 5 1/2 month residential program back to their homes mentors help to ease their transition from the Academy back into the community.

You can learn more about the academy and the mentoring program by visiting them on the web at:

<http://12.160.213.125/state/ok/>



1957 Pryor Police Department



Maintenance crew at National Gypsum, which was one of the first industries in MidAmerica Industrial Park



Downtown Pryor in 1950. Graham and Mill looking east.

## Dry Gulch U.S.A

Dry Gulch is located on the shores of Lake Hudson and is one of America's premier recreation facilities. They are located 4.5 miles north and 9.5 miles east of Pryor, off 69 Highway.

Dry Gulch is a replica of an old west town complete with 1880s historical buildings, steam engine trains, wagon rides, and more than 100 horses.

The facility hosts more than 10,000 children for summer camp from June to August. Whether it's riding an old-fashioned steam locomotive, having a race down the water slide with a new friend, crossing the finish line on the go-kart speedway, taking a horseback ride or enjoying the many fun activities on Lake Hudson, Dry Gulch is sure to fill your child's heart with experiences to last a lifetime.

This camp was created by the innovator and pioneer of modern-day children's ministry, Pastor Willie George. His ministry to children, spanning more than three decades, has taken children's ministry to a level of excellence that has to be experienced to be appreciated.

Any great facility is only as good as the people who run it. That is why each Dry Gulch, U.S.A. counselor is carefully selected, trained and qualified to bring supervision and spiritual development into each child's camping experience.

With a large staff of seasoned professionals, including permanent medical and security personnel, Dry Gulch, U.S.A has a safety and health record which serves as a model to programs nationwide.

50,000 visitors take a ride on the Christmas Train every year, in December. The adventure starts with a trip by horse-drawn wagon into the 1880's Western town of Dry Gulch, U.S.A. Over one million Christmas lights adorn the buildings, creating a spectacular winter wonderland.

At the halfway point of the train ride, a stop is made at the North Pole for a tour of Santa's Village. Santa is available for pictures with the younger guests, and his sleigh and reindeer can be seen just outside his office. Santa's Village is also home to the Reindeer Café, where Pizza Hut® pizza, hamburgers, chicken sandwiches, and hot dogs are served in a cozy lodge setting. The North Pole Bakery specializes in gourmet coffee and delicious cookies. And Santa has a large play area for the kids to enjoy!

There are quaint gift shops, toy stores, and boutiques. They also have loads of tasty treats served nightly in several locations throughout Dry Gulch, U.S.A. Hot dogs, hamburgers, cowboy stew, chicken sandwiches, pizza, gourmet coffee, delicious desserts and more will be available. Besides the great food, there are plenty of activities for both young and old to enjoy.

Dry Gulch offers romantic getaways designed specifically for married couples. During the weekend getaway, couples can enjoy horseback riding, game room activities, coach rides, train rides, breakfast in bed, a candlelight dinner, two marriage workshops and much more. Accommodations are second to none in one of the apartments, cabin units, or special units. Each is furnished with a comfortable queen-size or full-size bed, towels, linens, and private Bathroom.

For more information, visit them online at [www.drygulchusa.com](http://www.drygulchusa.com) or call (918) 785-2156.

## Did You Know?

While doing research for this issue, we learned some interesting facts about Pryor and we thought we would pass a few of them along to you. DID YOU KNOW?.....

Did you know former Pryor Tiger football player Mayes McLain set an all collegiate record for most points scored in a single season? In 1926, while playing for the Haskell Indian Institute, McLain who was a fullback and kicker scored an amazing 243 points! His record still stands. He later went on to play professional football with the Chicago Cards, then the Detroit Lions. McLain switched to professional wrestling a few years later and soon rose to the top of that profession by becoming "Heavyweight Champion of the World."

Did you know the first "company" owned store in Pryor was Safeway? The second was Sherwin-Williams Paints, operated by Gene Schultz.

Did you know Pryor's first gas station was located on the northwest corner of Vann and Graham Avenue? They sold Hercules gasoline.

Did you know in 1903 the first Chamber of Commerce in Pryor went to bat and secured a bridge over the creek west of town to make a better road to Claremore and Tulsa?

Did you know it was the men and the women of the PACC that worked diligently to get the Markham Ferry Dam approved and erected, not just as a flood control measure, but they sold the concept of electrical generating for the benefit of the area?

Did you know the first "white" child born in Pryor was a baby girl born in February of 1881? Proud parents, Mr. And Mrs. McCausland named her Margaret. She remained in Pryor her entire life. In 1901 she married Jasper Smith. They raised a daughter and son who were both prominent business people in Pryor.

Did you know during the Great Depression Pryor was listed in "Ripley's Believe It Or Not" as a town with no vacant buildings?

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# Thank You!

We want to thank everyone who helped us, while doing research for this issue! It was a pleasure meeting all of you! We work with limited manpower and time. The help we get from residents of the community enables us to feature more interesting facts about the towns we visit. We apologize to anyone we didn't have time to contact, who had stories for this issue.

**NEXT STOP: Picher Oklahoma!**

We look forward to sharing with our readers what we learn about YOUR hometown!

## About Us

Community Links is dedicated to linking communities, increasing knowledge, expanding horizons, and offering opportunities. Links "The Little Green Paper" and Links "Special Edition Series" are published by persons with disabilities.

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