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Hometown Oklahoma Special edition series

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Editor:

Paula Dawes

Data Masters:

Debbie Hines
Sherry Smith

Ad Sales & Creation:

Debbie Hines
Debbie Mitchell

Research:

Renetta Tottress
Debbie Hines
Sherry Smith
Debbie Mitchell
Paula Dawes

Assemble:

Doug Stone
Lenee' Adams
Renetta Tottress
Cassandra Chuculate
Stephanie Baker
Stacy McKeever

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This month we visited Big Cabin and White Oak. The response and help we got from the people of these two towns was amazing! We would like to thank everyone who helped us gather information and pictures for this issue.

It's nice to know there are so many people who still take pride and interest in preserving the history of their communities. It is our pleasure to share with our readers what we learned about these two towns!

Big Cabin History

While Big Cabin is said to have been established about 1887, there was a post office by that name as early as 1871, according to George Shirk in his book "Oklahoma Place Names." Historians believe that some sort of settlement existed along the Old Military Road, part of which was also the Texas Road, and the name came from Big Cabin Creek, so called because of a large cabin on the Texas Road near the creek.

The large cabin stood on a hill near the present town site and was earlier called Planche Cabin because it was constructed of planks, not logs. It is said that Indians who migrated there during the summer and went back to the timber hills, where it was warmer, during the winter, built the cabin. What looked like one very large cabin was actually two cabins connected by a hall, which was closed on the north side, creating a protected area for the Indians to unload their supplies. The hill where this cabin stood was later the site for the home of Dr. Charles W. Day and his family.

When the M.K.T. railroad was built through the area, a smaller cabin was constructed near the tracks and was occupied by Bud Parks, a checker for the cattle shipped in and out of Big Cabin. The first stockyards were on the railroad right of way, west of present day Big Cabin.

The first building was a hay barn and scale house built in 1888 by Dr. S. Kennedy of Parsons Kansas. Looses hay was hauled in, baked in the barn, then loaded into freight cars and shipped. According to an early farmer, Ed Dixon, in a 1942 interview, more hay was shipped from Big Cabin during the years 1883 to 1910, than any other town in the United States. It was called "The Hay Capitol of the World."

There were several hay barns built along the Katy right-of-way, including King's, Fred Kelley's, Fred Higginbotham, Dillon's, J.W. McClure's, Browns, Jim Haney's, and Joe Maillon's hay barns. The J.T. Haney hay barn opened in 1901 and has continued in the family up to the present day. It was sold to J.T. Jr., then Mae, then to Dutch Haney.

In those early years Big Cabin was also home to large grain elevator owned and operated by Jim Haney, Sr. and there was also a cotton gin operated by a Muskogee firm.



Big Cabin Depot 1903



Big Cabin Depot 1911



Main Street 1912

Photos courtesy of George Jennings

Fred Charlesworth built the first store in 1892. It is said to have been operated by Millard Renfro until he was killed at a dance given at his home. Clarence Jones was the second person to open a business, and a short time later another man started a livery stable.

Around this same time, the post office was established in the scale office of J.F. Dixon. Later the post office was moved to a store on Main Street. Dixon's daughter, Kate Coble operated the store. The first train depot was a one-room boxcar type structure built by the citizens of the community in 1903. Eight years later this building was replaced by a much larger building.

In 1904 the town was laid out by the Dawes Commission on land owned by T.W. Thompson. George W. Trout, who operated a large general merchandise store, along with Sam Parks and Mr. Renfro are credited with helping establish the town. Clyde Shepherd operated a hardware store, which sold just about everything, including caskets.

One of the early hotels in Big Cabin was the Dixon Hotel. In 1895 Sarah (Sallie) and John Butler built a large hotel, which is said to have been located at the site of what is now the telephone company. It was called the Colonial Hotel. For several years it was operated as a rooming house for single schoolteachers.

As the town grew, the residents saw a need for a school. They started a subscription school in 1895. The school was located in a house later occupied by Adele Blackwell Fears. The first teacher, Miss Emma Dixon lived with the families who had children in school.


In 1909 bonds in the amount of \$5,000 were voted on to build a brick school building. In 1912 the building was enlarged by adding an upper story, and a basement was added. This building was used until 1957 when it was replaced. The last graduating class at Big Cabin was the class of 1992.

Three churches were established early in the twentieth century: the Baptist Church in 1905, Methodist in 1907, the Christian Church was built in 1910. In the earlier years, congregations shared the Union Church building.




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In the early years, water for the town came from an Artesian well in the center of the street, and water was piped to all the buildings. Water wells were used until the rural water district was formed in 1965. In the 1920s electricity was installed and sidewalks were put down. In 1937 the city streets were hard surfaced and streetlights were installed.

The Big Cabin Cemetery was officially created in 1903. The Cherokee Nation sold the town 9.16 acres for \$45. The money was raised from donations and pic suppers. In 1982 the town was deeded another parcel of land for \$4,574 to enlarge the cemetery.

The Bank of Big Cabin was chartered in 1907. J.W. Orr was president; L.S. Robinson was vice president, and Robert E. Lee was cashier. Records show that later "At" Cobb managed the bank until it closed in the 1930s, when so many banks went under.

The telephone company was first called "Central Office" and was located in a home. Later it became the Atlas Telephone Company.

The first lumberyard was built about 1904 and was owned by Ray Foster and Dr. F.M. Adams. That same year William F. Emerson bought shares in the business. In the 1930s Emerson and his son, R.L. became the sole owners.

Dr. F.M. Adams started his medical career in Big Cabin then moved to Vinita. The Eastern Oklahoma Hospital for the Insane was established by act of the second Oklahoma State Legislature in 1909. Governor Lee Cruce appointed Dr. Adams as the Hospital Superintendent in August of 1912. His original 4-year appointment turned into a lifetime job, as he served until his death in December of 1955.

Dr. Adams was a pioneer in mental hospital work. He devoted his life to keeping up with developments in psychotherapy so cure, comfort, and relief could be brought to the mentally ill. He was well thought of by the hospital staff, highly respected by his profession, and recognized nationwide as one of the foremost hospital administrators.

Dr. Adams was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1954. Governor Johnston Murray described Adams as one who did things he didn't have to.

A volunteer fire department was established in 1974 and a volunteer ambulance service in 1981.

From the Craig County History Book.



Emerson Lumber, Big Cabin



Colonial Hotel, Big Cabin



Big Cabin School

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White Oak History

White Oak came into being about 1895 when a post office was opened with B.B. Burnett officially listed as postmaster, but Andy Hampton is remembered by early residents as postmaster. Succeeding Hampton were W.D. Stout, Theo Jones, then Oliver Haynes, served in that capacity for 38 years. The post office closed in 1957.

White Oak was originally located north of the present site, moved to its present location after Theo Jones, early merchant, and Charley Brown built a stockyard in the new location and invited the people at the earlier site to join them. Other early-day leaders and business owners over the years included Jess Bulter, Mr. Kilgore, S.C. Clawson, Enoch Jenkins, Will Rafferty, Oliver "Barney" Vogel, Orvel Alumbaugh, A. W. Kennedy and O.M. Haynes.

Located on the Atlantic & Pacific Railroad, White Oak became a major shipping center for hay and cattle after the railroad was permitted to continue constructing their rails southwest of Vinita in 1882. The A&P became the Frisco, now the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad.

White Oak was known for its good prairie hay and the shipping of hay was a thriving business for a number of years. Large hay shippers included Fred and George Kelley, Monroe Bulter, Theo Jones, A.W. Kennedy, Lester and Dewey Rafferty.

For more than fifty years, cattlemen from the south and west sides of Craig County shipped in and out of White Oak on the Frisco Railroad. There were stock pens and a large pasture where the cattle could be held before or after shipping.

Miss Rhonda Carruthers was the station agent for Frisco, beginning in Tulsa during WWI, and retiring in the 1960s. Through her efforts the railroad leased 160 acres of pastureland for the cattlemen to use.

After World War II, the trucking industry became popular for shipping. The chutes and loading pens and the original depot along the railroad tracks are all gone.

The town is near a rich coal vein, which was mined for several years by the McNabb Coal Company. Coal was also shipped out of White Oak Frisco Station. McNabb allowed local people the opportunity to work and make a good living while staying close to home. A two-room house served as White Oak's first hotel, used principally by visiting cattlemen. Later Bud Miles built a hotel and rooming house, which he operated for a number of years.

Early doctors in the area were Dr. M.P. Haynes (father of Oliver Haynes) and a Dr. Maioller.



White Oak Depot



White Oak Hotel



Picture from early years of White Oak

Photos courtesy of Sharon Seaton

We would like to say a special "THANKS!" to Brenda Kelsey and Sharon Seaton for helping us gather information about White Oak.

Bill and Brenda Kelsey have owned the White Oak Rancher Convenience Store since October of last year.

In the early years, the community had general stores, a hotel and a post office. Postmaster Haynes operated one of the general stores. The town's early water supply came from private wells, but a rural water district was created in the 1960s to bring water in from Grand Lake. In 1985 only two of the original structures still stood; the hotel owned by Lawrence Seaton and former feed store owned by Edith Workman.

Present-day business located along Highway 60/Historic Highway 66 include the Rancher Convenience store for gas and groceries, a garage and a Shawnee Indian Smoke Shop on the highway to the south. There are approximately 175 residents within the city limits. Three of the streets are named for pioneers of the town: Kennedy, Jones, and Haynes along with Main Street. Two churches hold services in town: a Baptist Church and a Four Square Gospel Church.

White Oak residents take pride in their schools. In 1985 the Ranchers were second runners-up in their division of the state football championship.

Legendary in the community is former basketball coach Willard "Bill" Johnson who coached both boy's and girl's basketball for 13 years from 1954 until 1967. His boy's teams never had a losing season and always went to district finals or better. The girl's basketball team of 1957 made it to the first round of the state tournament. Johnson said, "Good athletes make good coaches." In 1994 he was inducted into the Oklahoma Coaches Hall of Fame.

The first dedicated school building was remembered as the "Old Rock Schoolhouse," built with hand-cut stones on the Cherokee allotment lands of Mrs. John Sweatman. The school burned at the site northwest of White Oak. The new school was built closer to the community. At present the school complex is across the railroad tracks from the major part of town.

Since 1970 White Oak has held annual school reunions. They are well attended and members of the classes are recognized. In 1974 the earliest graduating classes were honored. From the 1929 class were Pearl (White) Most, Elsie (Hayes) Klingsmith, Sarah (Fry) Looney; 1930: Malcolm Workman, Otis Jones, R.W. Underwood and Thelma (Sweet) Deal; 1931: Milford Harp and Jewell Harlan Goins.

Among the rural schools that consolidated with White Oak were Blue Hawk, Blue Bell, Bunker Hill, Centerview, Centralia, Estella, Gwendale-East Anthracite, Kelley, Riggs Chapel, and Willow Branch. The present White Oak Independent School District has 31 certified personnel with 211 students including K-12 and three and four-year-olds who are attending a day care preschool at the school for the first time, September 1999. Submitted by Dorothy J. Nix in the Craig County History Book.



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Grand Gateway Economic Development Association

Big Cabin based Grand Gateway Economic Development Association (GGEDA) represents approximately 125,000 people in northeast Oklahoma. Its service area is Craig, Delaware, Mayes, Nowata, Ottawa, Rogers, and Washington counties.

Grand Gateway partners with municipalities, counties, state and federal agencies, private sector businesses, school districts, other EDA planning districts, and local Indian tribes, to assist with grants and grant writing preparations. It benefits communities by saving existing jobs, creating new jobs, fostering growth, and diversifying the economy, thus increasing the tax base and helping rebuild rural Oklahoma.

The board of directors is made up of elected officials, rural water districts, school districts, Indian tribes, minorities and special government entities from the seven county service area. Currently there are 55 board members who serve voluntarily, representing all areas of the communities. Each January the board is reformed.

GGEDA's primary role is to provide technical expertise for the members and coordinate various planning, safety, infrastructure and service needs among the counties, cities, and towns. Some of the issues focused on include local and county transportation, fire protection, services for the ageing, community development, and eliminating environmental hazards. The communities pool their human, financial, and physical resources to identify local and area wide problems, then find suitable funding and services to bring about the best solutions.

The Area Agency on Aging (AAA) is one of the many services of GGEDA. Its goal is to insure that older persons have the services necessary to retain their dignity, independent lifestyle, and maintain a voice in their care. Services consist of information and assistance, legal services, in home services, an Ombudsman Volunteer Program, nutrition program, health screening, prescription drug, elder abuse awareness, disaster assistance, and Pelivan transportation, which is the largest program.



Grand Gateway Executive Director, Ed Crone



The Pelivans provide transportation for senior citizens, disabled persons, and the general public within the city limits of Claremore, Grove, Miami, Pryor, and Vinita. The vans are wheelchair accessible, and provide low-cost transportation for medical and employment purposes, nutrition, social, recreation, education and shopping. There are no age or income limitations. To learn more about Pelivan services call Grand Gateway at 1-800-428-4594.

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AAA receives funding for programs through the Older Americans Act, Department of Human Services, and local sources. Local support is essential to the present and future of these programs, and allows the programs to expand and better serve the senior citizen population in northeast Oklahoma.

Grand Gateway also assists the 70 rural fire departments in the service area by administering financial assistance programs. The Rural Fire Protection Program Fund Act assists with the purchase of equipment and training of fire department personnel. The 80/20 Program is a competitive matching grant program, and the Rural Fire Equipment Revolving Fund helps the departments purchase firefighting supplies.

The Rural Economic Action Plan (REAP) is another way Grand Gateway helps revitalize small rural towns. This grant helps finance improvements to water and sewer systems, fire protection, streets, housing demolition, and building senior citizen centers. REAP has been very successful in aiding towns to keep up with new technology and to meet and stay in compliance with federal mandates.

In the past ten years, Grand Gateway has assisted communities in the service area to obtain over \$18,000,000 in grants. They provide assistance with grant writing and help implement them once the grants are acquired.

The main office is located in Big Cabin at what was once the Big Cabin School. They also have a satellite office in Miami. For more information call, Grand Gateway at 1-800-428-4594. For information about AAA services, call the Senior Info Line at 1-800-211-2116.

Information used in this story was found in an article in the 'Northeast Connection,' a publication of Northeast Oklahoma Electric Coop. Earnestine Helmick wrote the article.



Picture of dedication ceremonies for the tollgate at Big Cabin (1950s)

Ted Haney is the speaker.

Photo courtesy of George Jennings.

Gene Autry Worked at White Oak Depot

Since starting this publication we have learned that Gene Autry worked at several of the railroad depots in northeast Oklahoma. Most have heard the story about Will Rogers "discovering" Gene at the Chelsea Depot. We also learned he worked at the Foyil Depot, and now we've learned "The Singing Cowboy" worked as a telegrapher at the White Oak depot.

O.B. Campbell recalled some of the stories about Gene working in the area in a 1977 issue of the Vinita Daily Journal. In the article, White Oak resident Ted Shadlebar shared his story about working with Gene.

Ted also worked as a telegrapher during the same time as Autry. Ted said they had a special association because "I had played the guitar all my life."

"Gene played the saxophone before he did the guitar and enjoyed it," Ted said. "I remember one time at Bristow, where we were working, they made him check out of the hotel because he was playing his saxophone at all hours of the day and night in his room and disturbing the other guests."

Ted added, "We were moved around from place to place and Gene took up the guitar and we played together for the enjoyment of it. In December 1929 and January 1930 we were working at the Frisco Depot in White Oak. We roomed together at a rather large rooming house at the end of the street there, and ate at a little café across the street."

Ted said he and Gene were in Oklahoma City when Jimmy Rogers, the famed western singer invited them to his room. "Jimmy gave Gene a lot of encouragement to launch a singing career. It was soon after 1930 that he made his first record."

It was at the Chelsea Depot where Autry got his greatest encouragement. A customer overheard him and told him he had enough talent to get a job on the radio. That customer was none other than Oklahoma's favorite son, Will Rogers.



Gene Autry (Photos found online)



Sgt. Gene Autry

May 28, 1944
Cleveland, Ohio

Ralph Terry

Ralph Terry was born in Big Cabin, and moved to Chelsea at an early age. Ralph graduated from Chelsea High School in 1953. He began his Major League baseball career in 1956, with the New York Yankees. He played 12 seasons with 4 different teams, and ended his playing career in 1967. He could well have been remembered as the pitcher who gave up Pittsburgh Pirates' Bill Mazeroski's winning home run in the 1960 World Series, but he redeemed himself with an All-Star season in 1962. Highlighted by an outstanding World Series, in which the Yankees faced the San Francisco Giants. He got his first World Series win in game 5, and pitched a 4 hit shutout in game 7. He was named Series MVP.

After leaving baseball in 1967, Ralph turned to Pro Golfing. He was a Club Pro in New Jersey. When he turned 50 he joined the Seniors Tour and earned \$250,000 in 100 events. He said it was a thrill to get to play with some of his golfing idols, such as Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus, and Lee Trevino. In 1996 he joined the Celebrity Players Tour and plays 10 to 12 events a year, to raise money for charity.

Ralph has 2 sons. Rafe lives in Wichita and has 2 children, Olivia and Corbin. Gabe lives in Oklahoma City. Ralph and his wife, Tanya, live in Larned Kansas. He said Kansas has adopted him, and has been very good to him, but he says he will always be an Oklahoman at heart!



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White Oak Man Worked in Iraq

A little over a year ago, White Oak's Louis Nel was beginning his one-year contract with Halliburton, driving a wrecker used to recover government vehicles in Iraq. Actually he worked for KBR (Kellogg-Brown and Root), which is a subsidiary of Halliburton. Nel was an employee of Elliott trucking when he learned of the job in Iraq.

Now that he's back home, his family is breathing a sigh of relief. Nel's job in Iraq was filled with as much danger as any American soldier serving in the war torn country.

"Every time I went on a mission, I was escorted by American troops, driving Hummers," Nel explained. "My last months were spent at Mosul, where I was shot at a number of times. I would just keep my head down and I would drive fast so I would be a hard target to hit."

Before leaving for Iraq, Nel was sent Houston for 12 days to be issued a military identification, receive a background check, and get his passport in order.

With a job that carries lots of stress, and most days working double digit hours, seven days a week, it's easy to see why Nel was given a 10 day pass every four months. Nel said the pay was good, and the first \$80,000 they made was tax free, "IF" they stayed the entire year. And that is what kept most of them there.

Before moving to White Oak, Nel was a native of South Africa, where his father had lived until just a few weeks ago. During Nel's first leave, his wife, Teri and their son, Luke met him there. During his second leave, he came home to White Oak.

Nel gave some examples of the most stressful situations he faced. "The scariest mission was when a truck traveling in front of me was hit in the back of the truck. You just keep on going, you don't want to stop in the kill zone and you will do anything to get out," Nel said.

"We also recovered Iraqi and Turkish trucks, which most had bodies in them. We had to wait until we got back to the base for the medics to remove them."

Besides dodging incoming fire while traveling, Nel explained that their camps were mortared regularly. "There were bunkers all over the place which we would run to."

Nel had only been back home a couple of days when the dining facility was hit by a suicide bomber. "There were four or five civilians killed who were under contract with Halliburton, and many soldiers were killed and injured."

Nel said that the news just shows the bad stuff. "There is a lot of good being done." He spoke of schools and hospitals being built, and supplies being distributed to the Iraqi people by American soldiers.

Nel said the last 6 months he was there the temperature on a normal day reached 125 to 130 degrees and at night it would dip to 85 to 90. They did have air-conditioned quarters.

Besides his own family, Nel is very thankful for his church family at the White Oak Baptist Church. He said he owes them a great deal of thanks for their continued prayers while he was in Iraq.



Louis Nel



Big Cabin Website

We have all heard the old saying, "One picture is worth a thousand words." Former Big Cabin resident, George Jennings has created a website that has over 1,600 pictures and newspaper clippings pertaining to people and places in Big Cabin. If that old saying is true, then George's website is a whole library!

The website is hosted at MyFamily.com and to view it, you have to be a registered user of MyFamily. For those of you interested in checking it out, you can contact George at: georgepatty@sbcglobal.net (be sure to put Big Cabin website in the subject line).

The vintage pictures of Big Cabin used in this issue are just a small sample of what is on the website. Many people from the area have shared old family photos with George. George offers a CD of the data hosted on the site. The CDs are \$20 plus \$1.50 shipping and handling.

George says, "I have the entire web site in PDF files so that all the photos and news can be scrolled through. There are 99 photos per file, 16 files of photos. There are also old photos of Vinita included. I am interested in any old photos of Oklahoma towns. This has been a hobby of mine since I started the web site in 1999. I don't intend to make money, just recover some of my operating costs."

George and his wife, Patty live in Marionville, Missouri. George was a 1959 graduate of Big Cabin.



Patty and George Jennings



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SECTION 8 HOUSING VOUCHERS ACCEPTED



Hometown Heroes



We dedicate this issue of Hometown Oklahoma to everyone in Big Cabin and White Oak who 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.



Private First Class Billy Lee Goins

Billy graduated from White Oak. As a member of the Army, PFC Goins served our country until December 11th, 1968 in Thua Thien, South Vietnam. He was 19 years old and was not married. He died from small arms fire. Billy was born on September 26th, 1949.



Statue at the Vietnam War Memorial

Sergeant Millard Wade Farbro

As a member of the Army, SGT Farbro served our country until November 24th, 1967 in Binh Duong, South Vietnam. He was 19 years old and was married. Millard died from small arms fire. Millard was born on February 3rd, 1948. He attended White Oak schools.

SP4 Michael Lee Sloan

Michael served our country until March 29, 1968 at Hua Nghia, South Vietnam. An undetermined explosion killed him. He was 20 years old. He was born in Big Cabin January 9, 1948.



Marine Sgt. Jake Rhinehart

Marine Injured During Second Tour in Iraq

Marine Sgt. Jake Rhinehart, who was born in Big Cabin and raised in Yukon and Vinita, was serving his second tour in Iraq when an improvised explosive device hit the armored vehicle he was a passenger in. The incident happened July 1 of last year.

The blast killed the driver, wounded two other Marines, and tossed the burning vehicle 100 yards before it stopped rolling.

Jake suffered severe burns to more than 25 percent of his body, had one kidney removed, suffered shrapnel wounds to his foot, had holes in his lungs, and had to have portions of his intestine removed. He spent weeks in an induced coma.

Jake's wife, Elizabeth is also a Marine. They currently make their home at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. The couple's son, Brent Alexander was born while Jake was in Iraq. The first time Jake got to see his son was through a hospital window.

When Jake awoke he had an open incision running from his sternum to his belly button, and couldn't sit up. Since that time he has undergone nine surgeries, many of them skin grafts. He continues to improve and was able to return to work in November of last year.

Jake said, "If I had to do it all over again, I wouldn't change a thing. I think that it's been worth it. I'm doing pretty good and I've done a lot of healing." He also said, "My son has changed my life a lot. I'm trying to get better so that I can take care of him. The first time that I saw him was through a window. It was very hard. I just wanted to go home and be normal.

Jake's mother, Julia Roberts, visits her son at the medical center on a daily basis. "Everybody at the hospital told us not to touch him," Roberts, from Vinita, said later. "But I had to touch him." "The helplessness is the worst part," Roberts said. "The unknowing is what is scary. ... I keep thinking this is just a bad dream, and we'll wake up at any time."

"Jake has sacrificed what every other Marine, sailor, soldier and airman has sacrificed," said Elizabeth Rhinehart. "They've lost time away from their families. The birth of their children, a baby's first birthday ... this is time they will never get back. ... Some have given their lives. I just look at it this way: If it wasn't him, it would have been someone else. I thank God every day he is alive. So many are dead who won't be coming back."

The information used here was found in a November issue of the Vinita Daily Journal. The story was by Denton Thomason.

We at Community Links and Community Options of Chelsea would like to say a special thank you to all the outstanding people serving our country! Our thoughts and prayers are with each of you!



Andrew Michael

Andy has been active with the Army National Guard since December of 1996, when he graduated from basic training at Fort Benning, Georgia. He is attached to the 120th Engineer Battalion out of Pryor. They are currently serving under Operation Iraqi Freedom.

He and his wife, Jennifer have two sons, Newley and Levi. They live in Vinita. Andy is the son of April and the late Arch Ball, and brother of Josh Ball. He is the son in law of Bob and Imogene Morgan and Nancy Markel.

The family is anxiously awaiting his return home!

Big Cabin Man was W.W. II P.O.W.

While serving as a machine gun operator in World War II, Big Cabin resident Robert Brown was shot down behind enemy lines, taken as a POW and forced to walk many miles with American bombs dropping all around.

Brown's story appeared in the June 6, 2002 issue of the Vinita Daily Journal. He asked that his story be dedicated to the memory of all the men who lost their lives on D-Day, June 6, 1944.

Brown can be found every Memorial Day, placing flags on each veteran's grave, including his father's, who served in WW I.

Robert and his family moved to Big Cabin from Kansas City when he was 2 years old. "My dad's parents were farming in Pensacola, so my dad, Carl Brown bought the store in Big Cabin, called Carl Brown's General Merchandise," Brown said. "He was in business there for 41 years."

After graduating from Big Cabin High School in 1943, Robert said he was drafted in July and gone in August.

He did basic training at Fort Sill, and then was sent to flight school at Wichita, Kansas. He said, "While I was in flight school, they decided they had enough pilots, so they sent me to gunnery school in Las Vegas. I was trained to use a .50 caliber machine gun, then sent to Alexandria, Louisiana."

Brown made one more stop in the U.S., at Camp Kilmer, N.J., before shipping out to join the 95th bomber group Horham, England.

While on a mission to destroy a synthetic oil refinery, Robert was forced to bail and ended up south of Berlin.

"We had to do a lot of walking after being taken as a prisoner of war. We met up with some Russian prisoners coming from the east. There were about 27 of us traveling south."

"They first took us to the Buchenwald concentration camp," Brown recalled with a slight tremble. "Hitler considered gassing some U.S. prisoners, but later changed his mind. We left there in the middle of the night, walking of course. What hindered us most was the U.S. bombs. They were dropping real close."

Robert said the next stop was a regular POW Camp in Nuremberg. "When the Americans got closer, we started walking south till we got to Moosburg in Bavaria, near the Alps. We did not have much to eat, maybe a couple of potatoes between all of us, and just once in a while."

With a big smile on his face, Robert said, "I was liberated almost one year after D-Day. Afterward I visited Omaha Beach, where D-Day occurred, and it was quite moving. Nothing had been moved; there were obvious signs of the battle."

As soon as he could, Robert came home. He said it took 45-60 days before they got home. He went to work in his father's store for a while. He has done various jobs around the Vinita area since WW II. He and his wife, Shirley were married on April 29, 1945.

"When we got married, I was only 20, so we had to go to Chetopa, Kansas, to get married. Ironically, Oklahoma law said I had to be 21 to get married, but only 18 to go to war." Brown said.

Robert served two terms a Craig County Assessor, before he retired.



Robert Brown putting flag on his father's grave

Remembering Milford "Santa Clause" Hanson

The White Oak resident was a friend to many in the Chelsea area. Affectionately known as Al or Santa Claus, many of his friends never knew what his first name really was until he was murdered on November 9, 1999. His body was found three days later, after Hanson's son, Michael allegedly told an informant, Tamera Guy, that he had shot his father and buried him near his home.

Craig County authorities were made aware of Milford Hanson's disappearance when his wife, Helen Hanson, filed a missing person report on November 10, 1999.

According to court documents, Milford Hanson had been shot in the head six times and had sustained apparent pickax wounds to his forehead, neck, back and arm during the attack. His plastic-wrapped body was found in a makeshift, shallow grave about 100 feet from his house.

A second-degree murder complaint was filed November 12, 1999, in U.S. District Court in Tulsa against 33-year-old Michael L. Hanson, in the shooting death of his 63-year-old father.

Authorities became suspicious of Michael Hanson when the information he gave authorities didn't match up with other evidence and statements given in the case. Officers painted the relationship between father and son as stormy at best. "The son had a history of drug problems and little work history," deputies said. Sheriff George Vaughn described Michael Hanson as "a kid kind of floatin' through life."

"Suspicious grew when he began flashing a lot of money" around, Vaughn said. Also, Michael Hanson was driving his father's 'prized possession,' a 2000 model Ford pickup. "He didn't want anybody else driving that truck -- especially his son," Vaughn said. Officers also noted that Milford Hanson's medication, which he couldn't do without was left behind.

Michael Hanson didn't have a job, and it was known that his father carried a lot of money, Vaughn said. When arrested, Hanson had about \$300 on him, deputies said. He also gave \$800 in \$100 bills to Guy to keep for him, Craig County Undersheriff Mark Hayes said. Hayes said it was also reported that Milford Hanson was wearing nearly \$50,000 worth of insured jewelry, including a Rolex watch, when he was killed. The jewelry was missing from his body when it was found, officials said.

Craig County sheriff's deputies, who arrested Michael Hanson on November 11, 1999, called the FBI and the Cherokee Nation's Marshal Service to take jurisdiction of the case after they learned that the

Hansons are American Indians living on the family's 120 acres of Indian-allotted land.

First Assistant U.S. Attorney Scott Woodward said this was the first murder-on-Indian-land case pursued in U.S. District Court in Tulsa since the 1991-92 prosecution of Jimmy Gene Kelly Jr.

In January of 2000, Michael Lee Hanson, 33, pleaded guilty to a second-degree murder charge as well as to using a firearm during a crime of violence.

The second-degree murder charge was offered as an alternative in a Dec. 9 federal indictment that also contained a first-degree murder charge in connection with the killing his father.

Assistant Federal Public Defender Jack Schisler conceded that the case was not exactly a "whodunit" and said there was no reason to prolong the case unnecessarily. Schisler said the plea to second-degree murder was about the best result Hanson could have hoped for.

A first-degree murder conviction would have required at least a life sentence, while the plea deal allowed the possibility that someday Hanson may eventually be freed, Schisler said.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Tim Faerber said the government agreed to the second-degree plea because there might have been problems proving the premeditation that would have been required to gain a conviction for first-degree murder.

Hanson claimed that his father was initially shot in the temple during a struggle over a gun, though he admitted shooting him "several times in the head" after that.

Federal prisoners are required to serve at least 85 percent of their sentences. Michael was sentenced to 35 years in prison.

The information used here was found in several articles published in the Tulsa World.



Al with friends in Chelsea
Photo courtesy of Rose Taylor

Omer Williams

Omer Earl Williams and his wife, Straucie retired to Big Cabin in the late 1960s, after Peabody Coal Company purchased his farm west of Vinita. He is still remembered by many in the Big Cabin and White Oak area.

Omer competed at rodeos in bareback bronc riding and bull riding. In 1929 he won World Championships in both events at Madison Square Garden in New York. He was awarded a silver belt buckle. Most of his life was spent raising cattle and racehorses.

Omer was born in Swedeborg, Missouri, on February 28, 1896. Straucie Lee Fields Williams was born in Craig County on February 9, 1900. They married on October 21, 1916. They lived in the Happy Hollow community. They celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary there in 1966.

Their daughter, Dortha was born December 11, 1917. She married Lundy "Tweet" Vaughan on October 28, 1935. They had one son, Brice Leroy. Dortha died June 14, 1977.

Brice Vaughan was an artist, specializing in Indian art work. He was also a barber. Brice was killed in an auto accident on Highway 69, near his home in Big Cabin on August 18, 1978. Brice had one son, Bo Brice Vaughan.

The Williams' son, Walter Brice was born on November 21, 1930. Brice became a jockey at an early age. Omer and Straucie enjoyed watching their son ride. Brice and his wife, Doris had two sons, Brice Richard and Thomas Omer.

Due to illness Brice Williams retired to Big Cabin with his family, in the late 1960s. He died on May 27, 1970. Brice's two sons moved to Ohio, where their mother was originally from.

Brice and his sister, Dortha and her son, Brice are buried at the Big Cabin Cemetery. Straucie, who died 1973, and Omer, who died in 1992, are buried at the Fairview Cemetery in Vinita.

Omer spent his later years at the Autumn Nursing Center in Vinita where his son in law, Tweet continued to see to his care.

The information used here was submitted by Pat Williams and was used in the Craig County History Book.

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR: Omer's grandson, Brice was a dear friend of mine. I recently donated a piece of his artwork to the Eastern Trails Museum. I think Brice would be

proud that his work is on display there. Some of his work is also on display at the Claremore Indian Hospital. I can remember seeing some of his paintings at the Clanton Truck Stop, when it was still open.

I remember meeting Omer once when he and his grandson, Brice were out and about. They made a very entertaining pair!



Omer and his son Brice are pictured with other members of the Vinita Roundup Club in 1934. Omer's niece, Thelma Dome, furnished the photo. O.B. Campbell used it in an article for the Vinita Daily Journal.

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Oliver Haynes

Oliver Haynes and his wife, Rachel spent over 49 years in White Oak, before moving to Vinita. The first couple of years they were both teachers. They operated a general store from 1912 to 1967. From 1937 until his death, Oliver served as a director of the First National Bank and Trust Company of Vinita.

Oliver and Rachel had one son, Oliver Maurice Haynes, Jr. who was killed November 19, 1944 while serving with the United States Army in Europe during WW II. The Maurice Haynes Memorial Building, which houses the Vinita Public Library and the Eastern Trails Museum, was named in his honor. Before entering the Army, Maurice was a letterman in basketball at Oklahoma State University, playing under coach Hank Iba.

Mr. Haynes was born October 20, 1887 in Vinita. He attended Willie Halsell College. He graduated from the Cherokee Male Seminary, Tahlequah in 1910. His father was Dr. H.P. Haynes, a physician who came to Vinita in 1881 from Dalton, Georgia. The Family moved to White Oak, then a thriving shipping center for cattle and hay, in 1885.

Oliver and Rachel married May 28, 1912; the same year he opened the general store. Two years later he was named postmaster of the White Oak post office. He was appointed by President Woodrow Wilson. Haynes held the position until his retirement in 1957. The post office was then closed after serving the area since December 1, 1889.

In 1961 Oliver and Rachel sold their home in White Oak and moved to Vinita. He sold the store in 1967. Oliver died in 1971 and Rachel died in 1973. They and Maurice are buried at the Fairview Cemetery in Vinita.

From the History of Craig County.

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Big Cabin Lumber Yard

The first lumberyard was built about 1904 and was owned by Ray Foster and Dr. F.M. Adams. In 1904, William F. Emerson bought shares in the business and about 1930 he and his son, R. L., become sole owners of the business. In 1984, the lumberyard was operated by the third generation of Emersons. This information was found in Craig County History Book one.

In 1988 local businessman Sam Yeoman purchased the Lumberyard. He had been operating his Auto Repair and Machine Shop since 1974 at his home on 2nd & Oak Street in Big Cabin. He built his Tire Shop in 2001.

Sam was born and raised in Big Cabin. He is the son of Margery " Sloan" Yeoman. He is married to Becky (Sears) Yeoman and they have two children, Stacey and Brandon. Mr. Yeoman was a 1964 graduate of Big Cabin. He attended College at Pittsburg, Kansas and N.E.O. at Miami, also Okmulgee Tech. He was in the Army and stationed in Vietnam from 1966 to 1968.

Mr. Yeoman's daughter Stacey was of the last graduating class of Big Cabin in 1992. She is now the Director of Finance at the St. Francis Hospital in (Broken Arrow Division). She attained this position at the young age of 26 years. Her family is proud of this accomplishment. Their son Brandon operates their second business, which is a Tire and Auto Shop in Pryor, which they bought in 2002. Mrs. Becky Yeoman is the Bookkeeper for both businesses. Sam has eight employees, four in each shop.

Sam would like everyone to be aware that not only do they provide good quality service in Auto / Machine Repair, but also do custom built Golf Carts.

We would to Thank Mr. Sam Yeoman for his information about Big Cabin History, details of his family and business.

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR: Co-worker Debbie Mitchell recalls living in Big Cabin years ago and helping with Big Cabin Pioneer Days. She told us about Sam with his custom-built extended drill bit, which he used to mix large containers of potato salad. Sam and his family along with others like Stacy Guthrie, Everett Purcell, Spike Horton and many others worked long and hard to make Big Cabin Pioneer Day a memorable event!



Photos of Ted Haney courtesy of George Jennings Haney's Filling Station in 1956. Pictured above during WW II.



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P.A.M.S. Banner

Carrying on a tradition started by her mother, 10 years ago, Angie Nail - Free can be found four days a week, at PAMS Custom Products in White Oak.

"Mom had worked for the Vinita Flag and Apron Company when the Hartley's owned the business," Free explained. "She had always sewed for us kids, and she would mend stuff for the neighbors. She decided she would like to try it on her own, as well, make more money."

"I was involved with the business on and off," Free said. "I am actually a RN and have worked at Craig General Home Health Hospice and for St. Francis. Since mom passed away on Dec. 5, 2003, I have been a regular here."

The company specializes in flags and banners for all occasions, as well as, U.S. State and military flags.

Locally, PAMS produced the spring banner for Vinita, which were turquoise with yellow flowers. They have produced many of the rodeo banners.

There are four employees plus Free. "At one time, mom had 11 employees. Now we employee one full-time and three part time employees," Free explained. The one full-time employee, Lucy Duwell has been with the company since Pam founded it.

"One time we had to complete 160 banners in two weeks," Free said. "Usually we get orders for 1- 6 or 1- 8 flags which are customized. Once we had a contract to make 100 American flags for Arlington Cemetery. PAMS also made the rainbow flags designed for the Oklahoma City bombing.

Some of their flags have even been featured in movies, and one even traveled into space with one of the shuttle flights.

"We often make an Oklahoma flag which measured 30 feet by 60 feet," Free said. "We had one flag measuring 30 feet by 80 feet and we had to take it to the White Oak School gym to spread it out to make sure it was square. Once the product was made, this process was no longer necessary."

"We have made and sent many flags to Disney World," Free said. "Besides producing and shipping out flags, PAMS also has flag, flag poles, flag and garden stands available for sale at their location in White Oak.

PAMS Custom Products is the first building on the right when you enter White Oak, coming from Vinita. You can reach them by phone at 918-256-4777.

We would like to Thank Angie Free for supplying this article printed in the January 28, 2005 Vinita Journal.

R.E.M.O. AMBULANCE SERVICE

Rural Emergency Medical Organization was established in 1982 as a volunteer service. The funeral homes were no longer going to respond to emergency calls. Ambulance services were something new to everyone.

The service in Big Cabin was established by a handful of people. They raised money by holding benefit dinners and through donations. REMO purchased their first ambulance in 1981, which was 1969 Suburban. In 1982 REMO become licensed through the state as a basic ambulance service. At this time REMO had only volunteers to staff the ambulance.

REMO survived only through grants, donations, memberships, and billing. All of which came from the people of Big Cabin. The people of Big Cabin have always been the top supporters of REMO. In 2000 REMO received a grant for the purchase of a new ambulance. Which is still in use today.

In December of 2003 when Craig County was faced with not having an ambulance service REMO stepped in and answered the call to help not only the citizens of Big Cabin, but also the people of Craig County.

In 2004 they expanded to Vinita. In April of 2004 the service was approved for individual ALS protocols for advanced medics. In June they were able to purchase another ambulance to help cover the heavy call volume. REMO is now currently running out of Vinita and Big Cabin, with the desire to place another ambulance somewhere else in the county. REMO, prior to 2004, was averaging approximately 50 calls a year. REMO is currently running approximately 80 calls per month.

Although, REMO has expanded throughout the county and not just serving the town of Big Cabin, they will always remember who supported them throughout the years, and to those people (the citizens of Big Cabin) they say, "THANK YOU!!"

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Eunice Alred Route 66 Historian

Eunice Alred of Vinita witnessed the paving of the gravel road that would become known throughout the world as Route 66. It was 1933 when she moved to White Oak with her mother, sister and two brothers. Her mother had married J.W. Copeland and relocated her family to his home in an area behind what is now known as Ranchers Convenience store in White Oak.

The paving work depended on manpower and crude equipment. "There were no bulldozers available back then," said Alred. "We would sit on the porch and watch our neighbors bring in horses, slips and plows... anything that would move some of the dirt. It did not matter."

They broke up the gravel road soil and then smoothed it to make way for the "batch men."

A "load of batch" was what they called a load of concrete. Delivering the concrete created a problem for the "batch men," as they came from surrounding areas and needed a place to stay at night. Mrs. Copeland decided to offer room and board to these men.

"She probably did not charge much more than \$5 a month and 50 cents a meal," Mrs. Alred said. "We had a big, old porch and Mom put five army cots out there. They covered the screen with canvas to protect them from the elements. We also used an old garage the men cleaned up. They put one of Mom's old rugs on the floor and stayed out there some."

After the road was paved Mrs. Alred said, "Oh my goodness, it was wonderful to get in our old car and get up on that new concrete and drive. It was nice and smooth. You didn't bump up and down."

Eunice Alred was excited about the 2004 International Tulsa Route 66 Festival, held June 10-13. The event drew thousands through Vinita.

"Vinita has an heirloom running through it, which everyone should be proud of. She told the story about the paving of the route. Not everyone can boast that they have hand prints under the asphalt on the original concrete of Route 66."

We would like to thank Eunice Alred for the information and pictures provided for the history of White Oak. Eunice also shared some family information and photos with us. We found the story of her sister, Mary Gallaway quite interesting and worth sharing with our readers.



Carrie Copeland shown here at the age of 102.
Born 1894-Died 1998

Mary and Waylon Galloway

These two 'little people' may have been small in stature, but there was nothing little about their spirit, determination, and accomplishments!

Waylon, who was born in Texas, attended Vinita High School for a brief period. It was there he met Mary. Mary grew up in Vinita and White Oak. She was the daughter of James and Carrie Richardson Copeland.

The couple married in December of 1945. The wedding was held in the Texas State Senate Chamber. Governor Coke Stevenson and many other state dignitaries were in attendance.

Every member of the wedding party was a midget. Mr. and Mrs. Johnny Clifton were in attendance. Mrs. Clifton served as a bride's maid, and Mr. Clifton gave the bride away. Johnny Clifton was the original Buster Brown of Buster Brown Shoes! (See photo below)

The wedding was also taped and shown nationally, back in the days when movie theaters started the show with newsreels.

In 1943 Waylon started working as a Senate messenger in the Texas State Capitol Building. He later transferred to the mailroom in the Secretary of State's office. He served a total of 17 Secretaries of State. In 1947 Mary went to work as telephone operator in the Texas State Senate. The Galloways retired in 1972.

Waylon and Mary were talented people. Waylon as an artist, and Mary was an accomplished seamstress. They both worked in ceramics.

At Waylon and Mary's 50th wedding anniversary celebration an old friend came and entertained. That friend was Jake Hess. Hess was an original member and lead singer of the Statesmen Quartet. In 1963, Hess formed The Imperials, who sang backup on gospel albums for Elvis Presley. It has been said that Jake was one of Elvis' favorite singers. (See photo below)

The couple shared 54 years together. Mary died on May 6, 2000. (Photos courtesy of Eunice Alred)



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Ultimately, McDonald was convicted in the murder of Epps. He received a life sentence and was himself murdered in 1978 while in prison. Pugh was not convicted in the Epps murder but was found guilty in the murder of Arlis Delbert Self, another grand jury witness. Pugh remains in prison in McAlester.

Epps' remains were buried in Sapulpa on Feb. 27, 1971. Among the 150 who attended the funeral were U.S. Rep. Ed Edmondson, District Court Judge Bill Hayworth of Muskogee, former state Sen. Everett Collins of Sapulpa, and city and county law enforcement officials.

Despite her reputation as a lawbreaker who had served time, she maintained a friendly relationship with several lawmen.

There were reports, after she had been sentenced on a bootlegging charge and placed in the Tulsa Jail in the '50s, that she never was locked in her cell. Reports were that she had "the run of the jail" and that she went home at night and reported back early in the morning.

Born in Arkansas, she moved to Oklahoma in the mid-1920s. She obtained a college education at a time when most men and women dropped out of school before high school. She taught school in Wagoner and Creek counties.

Epps married a Tulsa attorney but later divorced him because she believed that he drank too much. She married a second time, to a bootlegger.

A close friend said Epps "was always strictly against whisky. But when her husband started selling it, she decided, 'to hell with it,' and got in it all the way. That's the way Cleo was. She was either in or out."

According to Creek County court records after her death, her estate included 13 pieces of rural real estate, more than 1,500 acres, worth almost \$250,000, and 34 mortgages and notes valued at \$432,000. Her total estate was listed at \$740,452. She had no children.

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More White Oak photos



White Oak Mill



Ted Shedlebar at the White Oak Depot