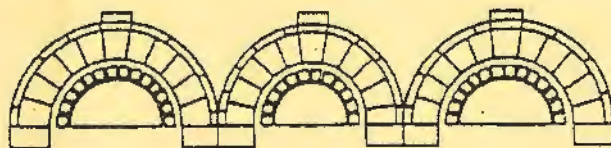


Payne County Historical Review

Stillwater's Historical Hall of Fame, Part 2



PAYNE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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

Editor's Note

Beginning in 1989, the Stillwater Chamber of Commerce has named up to three persons annually to the historical category of the Stillwater Hall of Fame. There have been some years during which no one was awarded the honor. The Chamber also names persons who are alive or who have been deceased fewer than ten years to its modern Hall of Fame. Currently, the Payne County Historical Society, in cooperation with the Stillwater Chamber of Commerce, accepts nominations and selects the members of the historical category of the Stillwater Hall of Fame. The nominations of those not selected in a particular year will be held for consideration in following years.

This issue of the *Payne County Historical Review*, as well as the previous issue, is devoted to those who have been named to the historical Stillwater Hall of Fame. The text accompanying each photograph provides a brief summary of the lives of those honored. The ones listed in this issue of the *Review* are the ones named between 1995 and 2005.



Orlando Murphy Eyer
1853-1928

Orlando Murphy Eyer was born on April 10, 1853, in Rushville, Illinois. In 1886, he moved west, settling at Dighton in Lane County, Kansas. There, he began to show an interest in politics and civic activities. He assisted in the organization of Lane County and helped lay out the town of Dighton. While residing in Dighton, he alternately was proprietor of a meat market and butchering business and a farmer.

Eyer moved to Payne County after the Land Run of April 22, 1889, arriving in September of that year. He purchased a lot in Stillwater and soon erected a small store of cottonwood lumber.

In addition to being a pioneer merchant, Eyler contributed to Stillwater's early progress in many other ways. He was among those citizens who subscribed to \$1,000 bonds needed to secure the location of Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, now known as Oklahoma State University. In 1890, he was elected to the school board, serving as its treasurer during the period in which all the early school buildings were constructed. In 1891, Eyler was elected police judge and subsequently was re-elected three times. He also served as justice of the peace for Stillwater Township, and for two terms presided over the board of city aldermen. His political leadership continued as a councilman from the fourth ward, during which he chaired the ordinance committee and was a member of the finance committee. He was elected as Stillwater's justice of the peace in 1921. He continued to serve at the post until his death on September 21, 1928, at the age of seventy-five.

Orlando M. Eyler married Miss Pena Miltenberger in 1875. They had five children: Charles Fred, George, William, Clara, and Dora L. Four grandchildren are still living: Gene Ricker and Wilma Thome of Stillwater, Helen Oaks of Duncan, Oklahoma, and Mike Ricker, of Whittier, California. Great-grandchildren Shelley Hartman and Larry Ricker reside in Stillwater.

Orlando Murphy Eyler was named to the Stillwater Hall of Fame historical category in 1995.



Lee A. Ward
1907-1982

A native of Pilot Point, Texas, Lee Arthur Ward was born October 13, 1907. He entered Langston University in 1928, receiving a bachelor's degree four years later. He also earned a master's degree in administration from Colorado State College in 1949.

Ward taught and held administrative positions in a number of Oklahoma school systems before coming to Stillwater in 1941. For the next 24 years, he served as principal of Washington School. In 1965, after desegregation had closed Washington School, he became principal of Highland Park Elementary School, remaining at the post until retiring in 1972.

A leader throughout the entire educational community, Ward was one of the first vice-presidents of the Stillwater Parent-Teachers Association Council and a vice-president of the State Parent-Teachers Association. His service to the community, however,

was far wider. He sat on the boards of the Stillwater Mission, YMCA, Selective Service, Housing Development Board, Payne-Noble County Housing Authority, Stillwater Parks & Recreation, and Community Chest Fund. He is also remembered as a founder of St. Paul Methodist Church and an active Mason.

Ward was married to the former Valerie Duncan of Muskogee and they had two daughters, Versie Dale Alford and Ella Pearl Reese. After retiring from the Stillwater schools, the Wards moved to Oklahoma City. Lee Ward died on March 21, 1982, at the age of 74.

Lee Ward was named to the Stillwater Hall of Fame historical category in 1995.



Harry Jones

1859-1938

Harry Jones was born June 6, 1859, in Bedfordshire, England. He left home at age 11 to be a baker's apprentice and then spent six years as a baker traveling on ships back and forth to America.

He decided to make America his home in 1880 and settled first in Kansas and then the Indian Territory. He made both the 1889 and 1893 land runs and took a claim near Quay, east of Stillwater. He moved to Stillwater in 1916. He served two terms as county commissioner and in 1922 was elected state senator. In 1932 he was elected to the city commission and became acting mayor when the incumbent, George Thompson, died while in office. He was elected in 1933 and served until his death in 1938.

Harry Jones is remembered most for guiding Stillwater through the Great Depression and Dust Bowl years. Because of the Great Depression, Jones declined to impose city taxes on citizens during most of his tenure as mayor. In 1936, he was asked by Carl Blackwell, Dean of Agriculture at Oklahoma A&M College, to support efforts for a new lake west of Stillwater. He provided the city's full backing of the project, including the passage of a bond issue that would ensure a permanent water supply for Stillwater. Stillwater was undergoing its most severe drought. The water supply from Boomer Lake was down to a two weeks supply. Mayor Jones asked citizens to have faith and patience. Rain had not fallen for months. "Once the lake is completed," he told them, "we'll never have to go through this again." He arranged to have water wells drilled near Perkins and to have lobbyists sent to Washington to ensure the lake's completion.

Jones' greatest dream was for Stillwater to have a municipal hospital. He worked hard to help get the project underway. He died in November of 1938, before his dream was realized in 1939.

Harry Jones was named to the Stillwater Hall of Fame historical category in 1996.



William R. Wright

1905-1981

In 1995, approximately 2,600 Stillwater residents were employed in various manufacturing jobs. These jobs, and the firms providing them, are testimony to the vision of William R. Wright, longtime executive secretary of the Stillwater Chamber of Commerce and director of the Stillwater Industrial Foundation.

Born May 3, 1905, Bill Wright, as he became popularly known, came to Stillwater in 1959 to become executive secretary of the Chamber. At the time of his arrival, no major manufacturing existed in Stillwater. He remained with the Chamber until assuming the directorship of the Industrial Foundation in 1973. With the assistance of his wife, Mary K., whom he married in 1935, he devoted his energies to promoting

Stillwater's economic development. This included the recruitment of its first industries.

Attracting manufacturing firms to Stillwater proved a complicated and delicate process, but one in which Wright excelled. In many respects, it all began with a meeting at the Holiday Inn between Wright, Mayor Larry Hansen, a local business leader, and the representative of an unspecified industry expressing interest in coming to Stillwater. The local party tried diligently to learn for whom the representative worked. This effort involved an unsuccessful attempt to trace his license plate, but the car had been rented. However, in the discussions and negotiations which followed, Stillwater ultimately landed its first major industry, Moore Business Forms. Before Wright stepped down from the Industrial Foundation, others followed, including Mercury Marine, National Standard, and World Color Press.

In 1980, Bill Wright retired to his ranching and cattle operations outside of town. He passed away on July 25, 1981.

William Wright was named to the Stillwater Hall of Fame historical category in 1996.



Otto and Florence Gray

Otto and Florence Gray are known for their influence in the development of the “western” part of country and western music. In 1926, Otto became the manager of the Oklahoma Cowboy Band from Stillwater, Oklahoma. The band had started out as the Billy McGinty Cowboy Band, based in Ripley, Oklahoma. Florence, known as “Mommie,” sang with the band and was one of country and western music’s first female singers. Together with the cowboy musicians, they traveled on the vaudeville circuit throughout the Midwest and Northeast for a decade.

The Oklahoma Cowboy Band played before packed houses. They also reached a wide listening audience, playing over many of the country's major radio stations, in addition to performing on stage and making records.

Otto Gray and His Oklahoma Cowboys appeared on the cover of The Billboard magazine in 1931, the first country or western band to be featured on the magazine's cover.

At the height of their popularity, the band traveled in a caravan of custom-built Cadillacs that served to attract attention as soon as the band arrived in town. One long coach had a "cowcatcher" like a locomotive's, and another had steer horns attached to the front hood. One of the cars was outfitted with loud-speakers that sent the message loud and clear that the Oklahoma Cowboy Band was in town.

By all accounts, Billy McGinty's Cowboy Band was the first cowboy band to play over the radio, in May 1925. Beginning in early 1926, Otto and Florence Gray led the band across the country, playing before large audiences over the radio and on the stage in the most populous areas of our nation. The success of Otto and Florence Gray with the Oklahoma Cowboy Band from Stillwater stimulated interest in western music and themes that is still seen today.

After retirement from show business in 1936, Otto, whose parents had homesteaded nine miles southeast of Stillwater, returned with Florence to ranching and eventually became a partner in a real estate business in Stillwater.

Otto and Florence Gray were named to the Stillwater Hall of Fame historical category in 1997.



Robert Reed Russell

1896 -1971

Robert Reed Russell, known as Reed, was a well known educator and civic worker. Reed was born in 1896 to Mr. and Mrs. W. D. Russell of Milton, Iowa. He held an A.B. degree from Phillips University and M.A. and Ed.D. degrees from Oklahoma State University. He was superintendent of schools in Dover, Kingfisher, and Woodward, Oklahoma, before coming to Stillwater in 1951, where he served as superintendent of schools for 10 years, retiring in 1961. In 1966-67, he interrupted his retirement to serve as superintendent of schools at Creed, Colorado.

Reed was a World War I veteran and a member of the American Legion and served as Vice District Commander and State Americanism Chairman. He had 25 years of perfect attendance in the Rotary Club and was Rotary District Governor in 1933. He was a member of the Methodist Church, serving on several boards of the church. He gave much time and service to the Chamber of Commerce and United Fund, serving on the board of directors of both organizations. He served his community well until his death, October 10, 1971, at age 75.

Robert Reed Russell influenced and impacted the lives of thousands of youth, as well as many adults, in Stillwater. The community has been the benefactor of his vivacious and giving personality.



Ruth Strode

1879-1946

Ruth Strode was born September 27, 1879, and was a graduate of Knox College, Macomb, Illinois, with a major in music. She knitted sweaters for soldiers during WWII. Her only son served in the European Theater during WWII. Ruth was active in BPW, PEO and was a charter member of Rebekah Lodge and the Order of the Eastern Star.

She became the first female elder in the First Presbyterian Church in Stillwater, as well as in the nation. Ruth was also the first female funeral director in the state of Oklahoma. During the early 1930's, she helped organize the United Council of Churches to help distribute food, clothing, and money. The group met at her office once a week,

and she served as secretary-treasurer for many years.

She and her husband, Walter Strode, left Tulsa and came to Stillwater in 1914. Her husband was the first auto fatality in Payne County in 1917.

She was an accomplished musician, sang in the choir in the First Presbyterian Church and sang for many weddings and hundreds of funerals.

She was an active member of the Stillwater Chamber of Commerce. Mrs. Strode was a staunch Republican in an era when Republicans were rare in Oklahoma.

She provided ambulance service to the community without charge and for those who were unable to pay she would also transport them to the University Hospital in Oklahoma City. She organized the Strode Burial Association so people could have a respectable funeral for 50 cents per month per family. She also made available an inexpensive health program. She passed away on March 3, 1946.

The First Presbyterian Church named their Stephen Ministry program after her.



James E. Berry

Born in Jackson County, Missouri, in 1881, James Edward Berry moved to Payne County when he was nine years old. He attended school in Stillwater, went to A&M and then finished at a business college in Illinois. He married Edwina Morrison, a Stillwater girl, and together they reared seven children.

Jim Berry started working in the Stillwater National Bank as a young man. He served in every capacity, finally becoming president after the death of his father. His election as president occurred on the day of the market crash in 1929. Under his strong

leadership, the bank weathered the depression and World War II. He was a banker who also loved farming and valued those who farmed. He clerked farm sales and was an active promoter of farm youth activities.

In 1913, James E. Berry organized Stillwater's first National Guard unit: Company 1 of the First Oklahoma Infantry. With the men of his company, he served eight months on the Mexican border in 1916 and then went with his unit to France. After the war, he organized the Headquarters Company of the 45th Division. He retired as a major in 1940.

James E. Berry was elected Lieutenant Governor of Oklahoma in 1934 and served in that office until 1955, using the office to promote Stillwater and Oklahoma. As Lieutenant Governor, he worked with the Stillwater Chamber and other civic groups on projects to benefit Stillwater. He was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1953. He was a 50-year Mason and Past Commander of the American Legion.



Christine Salmon

1916 -1985

Christine Salmon was an OSU Associate Professor of Housing and Interior Design who contributed much to her community, culminating in her election as Stillwater's first woman mayor. She was born July 22, 1916, in Audenreid, Pennsylvania, and graduated from the University of Pennsylvania with a B.A. of Architecture in 1941 and an M.A. in 1943. Professionally, she specialized in interior design for people with handicaps or other special needs and held posts in numerous national professional organizations. She also was a partner with her husband, Cuthbert, in their firm, Salmon and Salmon, which specialized in design for the disabled. As a professor, she won Teacher of the Year awards in 1966 and 1971 and also served as graduate advisor in her depart

ment.

Her concern for housing and human environment extended naturally to the community of Stillwater, where she lived between 1959 and 1985. In Stillwater, she initiated the creation of the Sheltered Workshop and was involved with establishing the boards of Starting Point, an alcoholic rehabilitation center; the Arts and Humanities Center, later called the Sheerar Cultural Center; the Senior Citizens Center; Muligraphis Community Art Center, now called Multiarts; and Life Center, adult day care. At a time when Stillwater had no home care agency, she traded her architectural services to the owner of Home Call for a franchise in Stillwater, which she opened in partnership with her husband and Mary Leidigh.

She served as architectural representative on the Stillwater Planning Board of Adjustment between 1962 to 1972, and on the Planning Commission between 1973 and 1976. She was the third woman to be elected to the city commission for two terms, from 1977 to 1980, and finally, she was the first woman mayor of Stillwater, in 1982.

In her last twenty years she fought cancer four times, announcing her struggle and positive attitude openly at a time when few did. Her death from recurring cancer on October 10, 1985, caused an outpouring of tributes. Former Mayor Larry Hanson said, “She was always concerned about people—more so than anyone I ever knew. She worked for many programs that were to the benefit of elderly people, the handicapped, and the poor.”



Dr. Roxie A. Weber

Dr. Roxie A. Weber came to Stillwater in September 1942 to join the staff of the infirmary at Oklahoma State University, then Oklahoma A&M College, as a physician for women. After attending the University of Texas for her bachelor's and master's degrees, she received a degree from John Hopkins University Medical School.

Dr. Weber's career was filled with distinguished service to both the university and the community. She was the first woman appointed Director of Student Health Services in 1949. Her services to the university community continued as a spokesperson and planner for student health until her retirement in 1960.

Dr. Weber was always "a pioneer of sorts and crusader" in women's issues even when it wasn't a widespread or common endeavor. During her retirement, Dr. Weber

actively worked for and supported low-cost housing and housing for the elderly in Stillwater.

At the time of Dr. Weber's death in 1971, it was suggested that the new Student Health Center be named after her. Although this did not materialize, Stillwater's modern housing complex for senior citizens was named the Roxie A. Weber Plaza.



Thomas Hoyt

1865-1947

Tom Hoyt was one of the thousands that made the April 22nd Run of 1889 and was one of the several hundred that settled in the Stillwater Valley on that historic day.

April 22, 1889, was not the first time he had been in the Territory. Most likely, he had been one of the several hundred who accompanied William Couch in December 1894 and established “the town called Stillwater” as reported by Lt. Mathias Day, who had been directed to expel these Boomers, in a telegraph to his Army superiors.

Hoyt was a member of the Winfield Township Company and made the run specifically to help establish a town site for that group. The planned site was in the 6th Street and Country Club area. But as it happened, Sooners were on the site first. Eventually, the Winfield Company joined with the unnamed company led by Robert Lowry and the present City of Stillwater was established.

Hoyt was one of the signers of the 1890 Township application. In those early days, he worked as a carpenter and built several early wooden structures. In 1892-93 he did the finish carpentry in what was then called College Building. We know that building today as Old Central. In 1893, he built a two-story brick building on Main Street that still stands today.

On April 22, 1897, at high noon, he married Julie Jardot, the daughter of another pioneer family. He was 31 and she was 18. In that same year, Hoyt was elected Stillwater Town Marshal, a position to which he was elected three times. Ward Hayes, a local historian, has recalled Hoyt's days as marshal and after statehood as Payne County Sheriff in his book *Drifting Down Memory Lane*.

Payne County was a busy place in the early statehood days, with outlaws, oil field wildcatters and the "Boom Days" of statehood. By 1915, Tom was 50 years old and he hung up his gun and silver star to become a part owner of the Stillwater Opera House, which was built and operated by the Jardots. He also went into the automobile business, but didn't last long. He sold cars called Stars and Duryeas.

He went back into construction and real estate and developed Gene's subdivision, which adjoins Hoyt Grove Park, where the Land Run celebration is held each year on the weekend closest to April 22.

When Hoyt died in 1947, the *Stillwater NewsPress* reported the passing of a town founder and said of him, "He was the head of one of our leading families in bringing order out of chaos in those rough and tumble times in the late 1800's and early 1900's.

Tom Hoyt did many things in his 82 years, but what he and all of those who made the Run and settled Oklahoma will be most remembered for, is their pioneer spirit. The Boomer spirit which made Stillwater Boomtown even before the unassigned lands were opened, was epitomized by Hoyt.



Edward Clark Gallagher

1887-1940

Edward Clark Gallagher was born in 1887 on a farm just north of the Oklahoma border. After attending schools in Kansas and Oklahoma, he entered Oklahoma A&M in 1904 as a preparatory student. As a collegian, he excelled in both track and football. He graduated in 1908 with a degree in electrical engineering.

Gallagher remained at Oklahoma A&M as a track and football coach before leaving in 1913 to become the physical training head at Baker College in Baldwin, Kansas. He returned to A&M in 1915 and became a physical education instructor for a wide variety of sports.

among those who helped establish the first frame school building in the 1100 block of South Lewis in 1891.

Hamilton is credited with persuading Stillwater's young pioneer leaders to forget trying to get the state capital or state prison for Stillwater and to go for the land grant college. This may be his most important contribution.

He earned his living as an abstractor and preserved many early legal documents. He was on the board that established the First Presbyterian Church and was later a charter member of the Rotary Club.

His home at 1509 West Ninth Street still stands and is occupied by his granddaughter, Margaret Cross.

Seth Hays Hamilton was named to the Stillwater Hall of Fame historical category in 2005.



Angie Debo

1890 - 1988

Angie Debo, born near Beattie, Kansas, on January 30, 1890, moved with her family in 1899 to a farm near Marshall, Oklahoma Territory. She attended one-room rural schools before graduating from high school at the age of 23. She went on to earn a bachelor's degree in history from the University of Oklahoma, a master's degree in history from the University of Chicago, and a Ph.D. in history from the University of Oklahoma.

Over the years, she taught and did extensive research and writing about Oklahoma history. She wrote or edited thirteen books and published many articles. Her first book, *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic*, was awarded a major prize by the American Historical Association. Her next book, *And Still the Waters Run*, named names

in telling how Indian lands and money were stolen during Oklahoma's early days. Other books followed, including *Prairie City*, a fictional treatment of the history of her hometown of Marshall. Her last book, *Geronimo*, was published when she was 85.

She was the curator of maps at the OSU library from 1947 to 1955. After she retired from OSU and returned to Marshall, she continued to write and to work for Indian rights. During these years she received numerous honors and awards, and her portrait was placed in the Oklahoma state capitol.

Stillwater was Angie Debo's home for some of the most important years of her life, with the town and the university providing a supportive environment for her research and writing. She lived in homes on Lewis Street, North Knoblock, and West Maple and was a lifetime member of the Payne County Historical Society. She continued to maintain her friendships and professional ties in Stillwater until her death.

When Angie Debo died, state flags were lowered to half staff. She left her papers and manuscripts to OSU's Edmon Low Library, which maintains the Angie Debo Room in her honor. In 2004, the Edmon Low Library was named an Oklahoma Literary Landmark in honor of Angie Debo.

The recognition that Angie Debo brought to OSU extends to Stillwater, as well. The books she wrote continue to be read by people around the country, and she continues to be recognized as one of Oklahoma's foremost historians.

Angie Debo was named to the Stillwater Hall of Fame historical category in 2005.

Payne County Historical Society

The Payne County Historical Society is organized in order to bring together people interested in history, especially the history of Payne County, Oklahoma. The Society's major function is to discover and collect any materials that may help to establish or illustrate the history of the area.

Membership in the Payne County Historical Society is open to anyone interested in the collection and preservation of Payne County history. All members receive copies of the *Payne County Historical Review* free. In addition, the Society sponsors informative meetings and historical outings several times a year.

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

- \$12.00 for Individual Membership
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(Membership includes subscription to the *Payne County Historical Review*.)

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