
Hollingsworth

Absolute

Fall 1982

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This issue of **Absolute**, an array of images and echoes of the past, is dedicated to the spirit of all those remembered and forgotten people of "the territory ahead," the frontier, who have loved the land we now call Oklahoma.


DRY GOOD

Contribution: **Page:**

How It Was: A Story Told By Ronald "Pete" Mulkey, A Man Filled With Knowledge And Memories, To Linda Mulkey...

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Grandpa Mulkey and family lived in a dugout made of dirt and roofed with sod. When it rained, the dugout floor was filled with water, so to protect the baby from drowning, he was nested high off the floor in a dresser drawer.

Food was whatever could be grown from the land or obtained by hunting. Rabbits, squirrels, and wild fowl were the game Grandpa hunted to put meat on the table. Life was so difficult that to have money needed for the winter, Grandpa had to leave his family for a while and go back to Kansas to work for cash earned at the harvest.

Despite the hardships of frontier life, there were many good times. Grandpa was a musician; he could play the fiddle and play it well. He could read music and also play many tunes by ear. A musician was in demand for neighborhood barn dances, where everyone danced, ate, and had fun while troubles were, for the moment, forgotten.

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But troubles there were. People got sick and sent for the doctor—who made housecalls in those days. He was paid, sometimes, with coffee, a meal, or food to take home to his own family.

Neighbors were loyal friends you could count on. When one family had problems, all would pitch in and help—bringing in the harvest or building a new barn. On Sunday mornings everyone came together for church services (non-denominational) in the one-room sod-roofed schoolhouse.

As Grandpa remembered, one Christmas their tree was a nicely-branched limb from a peach tree, wrapped with cotton and festooned with strings of popcorn. All the gifts under that tree were handmade.

Winters were difficult, but—like a friend—you could count on spring. Then ladies put on their bright, hand-sewn gingham dresses. Sunbonnets and high-top shoes with buttons were worn with pleasure when the weather turned fine. Young girls dressed much like their mothers, but until they were fifteen, all the boys wore short pants.

The nearest small town—where farmers bought what they couldn't grow, hunt, or make—consisted of a bank, hardware store, grocery store, and about a dozen saloons. Getting together in town, the men would talk, chew tobacco, and spit into the street.

After an outing in town, everyone got back to work. Boys and girls alike were taught how to hunt, fish, garden, tend animals, and share household chores.

Grandpa liked telling a humorous story about one of his sons, Verney. It seems Verney was playing with matches behind the hen house. Well, the hen house caught on fire (it was a dugout with a straw roof) and all of a sudden there were chickens flying out of the dugout with their tailfeathers on fire. As the story goes, Verney blamed his sister for the fire. It was years before the whole truth came out—as truth will.

Pete remembers Grandpa Mulkey slapping his knee and laughing. "All we are, are poor dirt farmers," he said, "but we have a good time!"

— Linda Mulkey

Oklahoma's Heritage

Wichitas and Caddoes were early settlers,
Comanche, Kiowa, and Osage their encroaching neighbors.
Chouteau, the Frenchman, came to show his wares,
While his kinsmen came to trade for furs.

When Jefferson bought Louisana it was on the frontier,
The ideal place to move Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw and ease the white man's fear.
Seminole, Sac, and Potawatomi were relocated in ensuing years,
Along with Cherokee at the end of a Trail of Tears.

Jesse Chisholm made a trail that cowboys followed,
While David Payne made a claim that Boomers swallowed.
Cheyenne and Arapaho moved south from Montana,
While Pawnees were moved 'cause folks didn't want them in Nebraska.

Sooners came to claim what was left; 1889 was the date,
And in 1907 Miss Indian Territory married a cowboy and Oklahoma became a state.
Through the year of the turnip, the oil boom, and the dust bowl, they struggled to survive,
But only a moment can they spare to celebrate: Oklahoma is Seventy-five.

— Thomas L. Hedglen

The Chosen Few

We measure our dreams
against the sky
and watch as
night covers this land of wild...

We are honored
by the secrets
Nature has revealed to us,
the chosen few.

We shall stand tall
in the embrace of the horizon—
there will be room to grow.

We have blazed a trail
for generations to follow—
this is a journey
that history will preserve.

We have come so far
into this land of vision,
there is no turning back—
we shall harvest
our hearts
from this Earth.

— Wanda Lea Brayton

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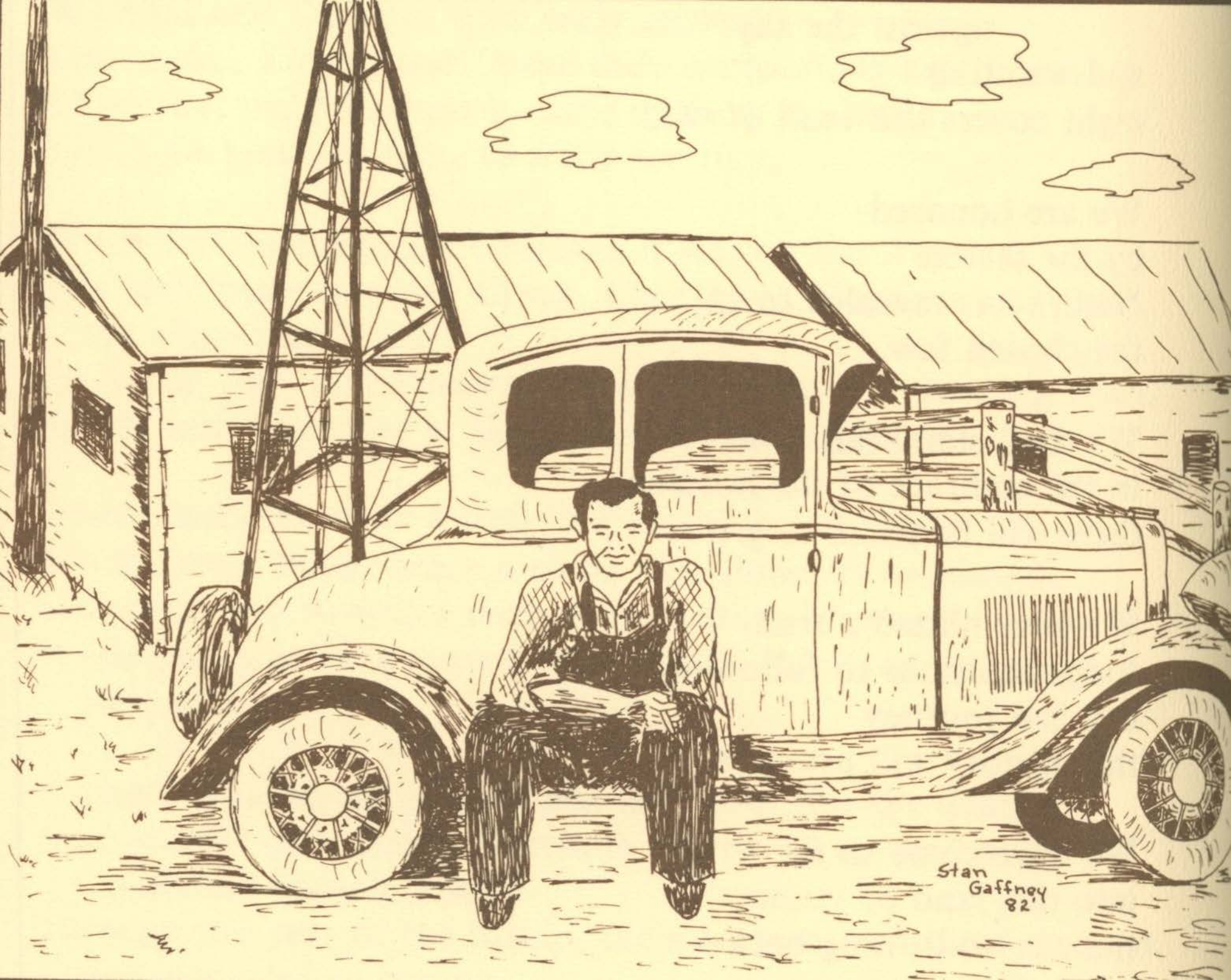

Stan
Gaffney
82'

The Depression

Emily didn't know when or where she first heard the terrible word and had absolutely no idea what it really meant, so she looked it up in the dictionary and learned it wasn't that bad: "de-presh'un,(n.), the sinking or falling in of a surface; abasement; dejection of the spirits; debility; diminution or dullness of trade." She went over each meaning, and still was a bit hazy. It always seemed that when the grownups spoke the word they did so in whispers...like the way she had first heard Mrs. Mullins had cancer, or that the new baby at the Welton's wasn't quite right. That kind of whispering.

But to Emily it was another kind of word entirely. It was as if a tornado was rumbling in the distance, a constant threat that caught up with people at different times. The storm hadn't seemed to find some folks as yet, but Emily first noticed fear in the air in 1934.

She guessed her first clues were from what was going on at school. The older boys remained home to help work on the farm, on land covered with a thin coat of powdered red dust which was easily scattered and scurried about in swirls of wind that turned the shining sky to rust. Emily thought about the poem she had studied long ago: "Who Has Seen The Wind?" Well, she had, for one, and right here in Oklahoma, where the wind was so loaded with red dirt, the few times it did sprinkle "rain" it was splatters of mud! She had seen the wind, felt the grit of it in her mouth. The wind was nothing like a poem.

Next she saw that classmates came shoeless in warm weather and without stockings in cold. They carried cans which had once contained lard but were used now as lunch buckets. Inside were cold fried pies, made from dried fruit, or perhaps biscuits and sorgum. And even the clothes they wore were different somehow.

They smelled funny. Odd. She supposed hanging clothes outside left them so full of dust they were now dried indoors, where there were coal-oil lamps, and were pressed with irons heated on wood-burning stoves. That's what they smelled like, anyway.

Emily's best friend lived on a farm, and her clothes were just like the others. Besides that, Sara's skin was always cracked and chafed as if she had endured too many scourings with the harsh soap her mother *made.* Well, Emily would like to see how Mrs. Johnson did that! Mother bought bars of Lux from the grocery store, and it was sweet smelling. But Sara said they couldn't buy soap anymore. Too bad.

Sara used to like to play jacks at recess. But now she preferred to stand huddled in the archway at the front door of the schoolhouse. She was always cold, with the March wind tearing around all over the place, and had only a thin cotton jacket that used to belong to her big brother to keep her warm. Emily felt a little guilty in her warm, new coat, even if it was the first one she had had in two years and had been her mother's, cut down to fit.

Parents of friends were changing, too. Their faces grew grim and they seldom smiled. Even Sara seemed to be growing away from Emily. Try as Emily might, it was getting harder and harder to get her to come as usual and spend Saturdays in town. But she was coming this Saturday, and the day was planned so that every minute they'd be having fun!

Saturday came at last. Mr. Johnson's farm wagon stopped in front of the house, and Sara lugged in a box of eggs. Mother put money in Sara's hand and she ran to give it to her father, who pocketed the cash and rumbled away. The girls raced to the back yard, where they ordered an ocean to appear and turned trees into pirate ships. (Their games were punctuated with the expression "play like" until it became a single word, "plike.") Tired of

swashbuckling, they went around the house to the big front porch. It was now a castle for royalty, the swing a golden throne, and they imagined themselves robed in ermine, covered with jewels. No one was richer or more powerful than they.

After lunch Mother gave each of them two of the farm-fresh eggs, which they swaddled in newspaper, cradled in a brown bag, and took carefully to the moving picture show downtown. There, each child with two eggs was admitted to the magic inside that dark, cool room. Emily had no idea what the family who ran the show did with all those eggs, and she didn't care. Not as long as she and Sara could sit there dazzled by heroes who righted wrongs, rounded up cattle stolen by rustlers, and seldom, if ever, kissed their pretty co-stars, who wore ruffled gingham dresses and waved goodbye as the words "THE END" flickered across the darkening screen. When the strains from an old victrola poured out "In The Valley Of The Moon," the show was over. The children rushed home to reenact the entire film from start to finish. Tomboys, they became those heroes—Ken Maynard, Hoot Gibson, and Buck Jones—a role going to the first one to call out the name of her favorite. They pursued and fought hordes of evil riders who could never survive their shouts of "Bang! You're dead."

The girls munched oatmeal cokies and drank milk just before it was time to meet Mr. Johnson down at Murphy's store. As they walked on Main Street, they looked in the windows at all the Easter finery on display. And there, high on a pedestal, in the center of Murphy's big window, were the most beautiful white pigskin pumps they had ever seen. Pumps with heels. Well, of course, the heels were only about an inch high—but *heels* just the same. Emily looked down at her own scuffed Roman sandals and thought them baby shoes.

"Ooooh." Sara sucked in her breath. "Wouldn't you love to have those shoes?"

"Sure, but look at the price. They cost more than any of the others. Two dollars and ninety-eight cents!"

"Golly. That would buy Ben new overalls."

"Or take my whole family to eat at the cafe and then to the movies."

"Or buy stacks of tablets and buckets of candy."

"Uh-huh. And a million other things. I wonder who's going to wear those pumps on Easter Sunday."

"Probably that stuck-up Mary Ann Smith. They're rich."

"I know. Probably her. She gets everything."

Mr. Johnson's wagon rumbled around the corner, and Sara climbed onto the seat beside him, waved her arm, and echoed the words the girl in the movie had shouted at the end: "Goodbye. And thanks. Thanks for everything."

Emily had meant to tell her mother about the white shoes, but decided not to. As she did the dishes that evening, she went over a page of typewritten words pinned to the curtains over the sink. She had already learned them, words she would recite at the church Easter pageant in a couple of weeks. They had picked her to be the narrator just because she sang off-key, and they were afraid she'd mess up the program.

Then everything happened at once. Something *bit* her on the chin, and the bite got infected. Even though Mother had her treat it with cloths dipped in hot water and epsom salt, it got worse. Her

face was blistered from the applications until her whole chin was discolored and painful. It hurt to talk. Then, during the week, Sara's baby brother fell, and Daddy rushed out to the farm to bring him in to the doctor. Sara and Emily thought it was the death knell. No one went to the doctor unless they were dying. But Bobby had only broken his arm. The girls discussed the accident in serious voices.

"How did it happen?"

"He fell off the porch. The doctor told my dad that Bobby's bones are brittle. The doctor said he doesn't get the right kind of food."

Emily wondered what other kind there was, but before she could ask, Sara said, "It's terrible, being poor. Being tenant farmers! We don't own the land. Dad rents it—he gives Mr. Smith part of the crops. Only there just haven't been any crops. What the wind doesn't blow away, the sun burns up, or the winter freezes. It's been awful for a long, long time."

"I know. And then there's the DEPRESSION." Emily had *said* it! She had actually uttered that hush-hush word and immediately clapped her hand over her mouth, as if she had cursed.

Sara looked at her with eyes of wisdom. "I know. I wonder—is it ever going to end?"

But like Emily's Daddy always said, "Things are never so bad that they can't get worse." Now her chin had to be bandaged with gauze and adhesive tape. The bandage came clear up to her bottom lip. She looked as bad as she felt and plotted hundreds of ways to get out of being in the pageant at all. Still, she knew it was far too late for someone else to memorize those lines. There was no hope. None at all. She'd have to stand up there, facing the whole congregation with that horrible bandage, and go through with it.

Friday, at school, Sara fired the fatal shot. The Johnsons were moving. To California. The girls found the state on the geography map, and it was far away, and pink, like Kansas. Oklahoma was green.

"Why?" was all Emily could say.

"Why not? At least it's warm, and we'll have all the oranges we can eat. We're going to pick them!"

"Who's gonna pick them?"

"All of us. Well, those of us big enough to reach the limbs of the trees." Sara clasped Emily's hands. "But I'll miss you."

"Me, too. I just may die of grief."

"No. You won't. You'll do fine. You'll see."

Emily walked home alone. "If I don't know what *depression* means now, then I never will. My spirits can't get more dejected."

All too soon it was Easter morning. The grownups had already decided not to have the annual egg hunt, and Mary Ann Smith wasn't giving a birthday party this year. It was just another part of the definition—"the sinking or falling in of a surface."

Emily was getting dressed for church, and there in her closet was a new white dress with a yellow sash. (She had never like those two colors together until Mother explained they were Easter colors—found inside an Easter egg—the silky white and the rich yellow of the yolk.) She put the dress on, and it fit perfectly. She went to Mother so she could tie the long sash. And mother handed her a shoe box. Emily opened it with trembling hands. She dared not speak. The tissue paper whispered as she pulled it back, and there were the white pigskin shoes. The pumps!

"How did you know?"

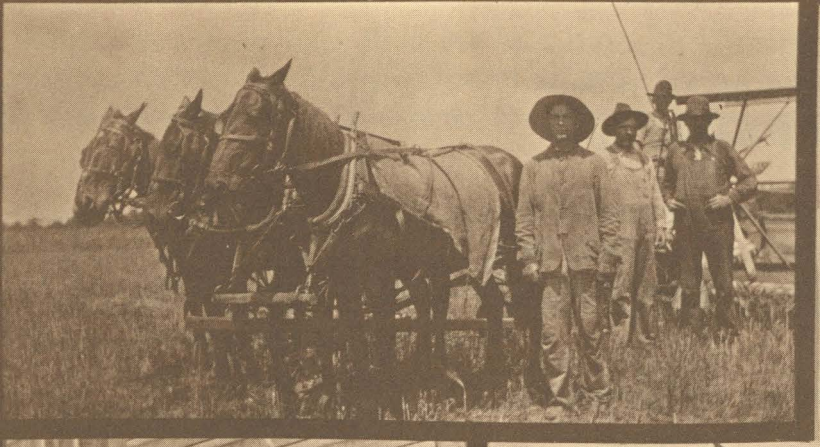
"I was twelve years old once. And I'm so proud of you. I know how you feel about being in the Easter pageant, honey, but you haven't whimpered or complained. You're growing up, Emily."

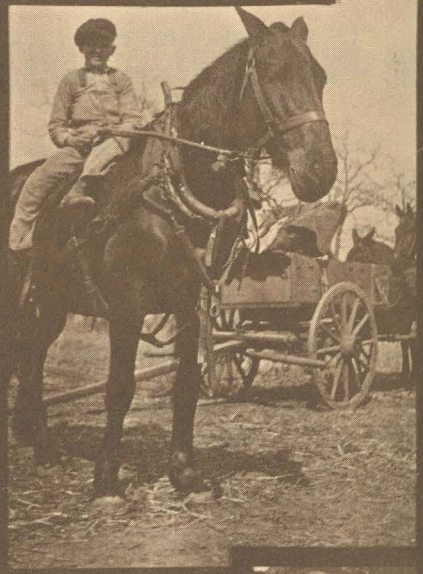
"Do you really think I am?"

"Of course. And every grownup young lady wears Easter shoes with heels." Mother hugged her.

Emily didn't thank Mother then. She was too afraid that, if she spoke, the miracle would dissolve into a dream. But she thanked her later—many, many times.

— Vida Mathey





Echoes Of Yesteryear

When I pause to think of yesteryear,
In my mind I see and hear
Tall grasses rolling, blown by the wind,
The buffalo and the Plains Indians.

It all brings a smile, and then I think
That somehow I was born too late...
Those days will never come again,
But I hear their echoes on the wind.

An Indian brave speedily rides
A race beside me in my mind.
We laugh together, feeling so free,
And pull up sharply by our teepee.

Inside, lounging on buffalo robes,
We know the Great Spirit is guarding our home.
Tonight, round the campfire, we'll dance and see
That all of our dreams will come to be.

Echoes of yesteryear keep drifting by.
You too can hear them—if you try...
Pause and listen, for now and again
Echoes of yesteryear ride on the wind.

— Carrie L. Walker

Okla Loam

Ageless am:
old as Indians
shuffling hide-clad
across
dirt ribs

Remember:
the uneven trod
of dark
musket-bearing
foreigners
awe-struck
plunderers
searching for
golden-walled
Cibola

Felt:
valiant braves
sweat brown
galloping windward
under
Sky
plunging points
into thundering toppling
shag-dusty beasts

Built:
turf mounds
covered
wet weary
settlers
mud-grass
safety

Shaped:
ruts
crafted from
rain and wheels
wooden rubber
rolling across
sun-forged
expanse

Support:
black steel structures
inky smooth bile
bubbling forth
rupturing
cloud-ward

Feel:
the weight of
custom
sawdust honkey-tonk
nicotine stained
dominoes
clacking on
scarred card
tables
jelly-jar glasses
of
dark tea
empty plates
of chicken-fried
grease

Feel:
joyous glory-gallop
of Nike-hooves
red jerseys
breeze-blown
swirling leather brown

Feel:
the boot marks
of a proud
people
dauntless
firm
as the
Wichitas.

— Allen C. Rice

Starlight In The Arbuckles

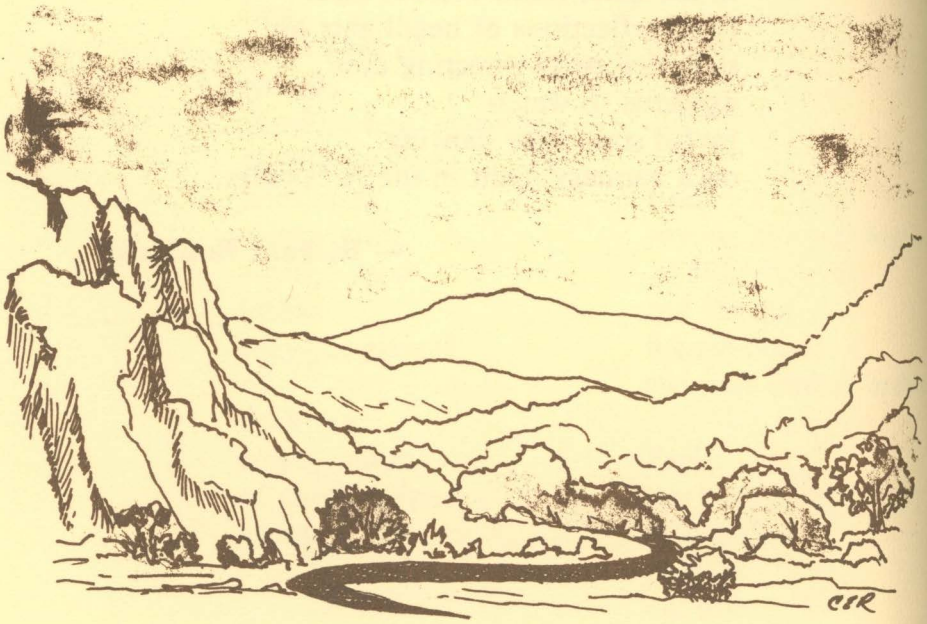
Inspired by *Cosmos* I stick
my nose against the cold glass window
and peer out into the skies to
watch the stars. There is peace
in the quiet hum; there is light
from reflections of headlights on
stratified walls directing eyes
upwards to watch
joyful stars slow dancing
on a January night in the Arbuckles.

— Richard Rouillard

Arbuckles In The Rain

Filmy gauze droplets float down
and in the gray morning suspended mists
bathe acres of yellow daisy-likes
on the mountain sides. Even in the gray,
colors washed by rain seem brighter.
I drive. Silently, selfishly, I sing the rain a song.

— Richard Rouillard



Sunset In The Arbuckles

In contrast to the gray morning
and my selfish silent musings on
raindrops and yellow flowers,
the evening's sun paints the
sky dusky; the man-notched walls
deeper grays and irons; and the flowers gold
while conversations move from
museums to moments, binary black and white
and high tech to high human.
Willy sings, and in related silence
We each sing along to the tune of
relationships shaping, forming, growing.

— Richard Rouillard

Center Of The Universe

hollow out
a small space
between the cedar
and red ant den
settle in and
touch
hard ground
with the heat
of your eyes

sun captures you
bold and child laugh
reveals stomach hard
and hip bones shining
red dirt on white
gauze spirit

love grass swimming
wheat swimming
inhale the sting
of golden beards

mind-dance
where the house once stood
reach arms into
soul of rooms
and people gone

sit immovable
under gaze of rusted
windmill
wait for twilight
silence to
bring you home

— Mary Ann Peters

Prairie Wind

It speaks loneliness to
one alone
shouts through banners
at carnival
allows you to
come in and go out
of your door
of your field
of your mind.

It gathers red sand
lashing your
bare face and
bare arms and
bare legs until
you are earth color
parched and blown about
the prairie.

And you cannot control
the wind or
life and
sometimes
not even
yourself.

— **Claudia Weber Hill**

First published in *Three Part Harmony,* 1982, this poem is reprinted by permission of the author.

Southwestern Refuge

I found a few acres of silence once
Just off I-40 on a road to nowhere.
Hollow brown barns and empty chicken houses
Rested there — broken and full with summer.
They kept vigil over silent voices
Chattering in the sunlight
About another time,
A time I did not know.

I wanted to lie in tall, tangled weeds
Dig in red earth
Sink invisible roots into hot water
And become a landscape memory
become a portion of midday peace
become a flower dance
(strong and alone)

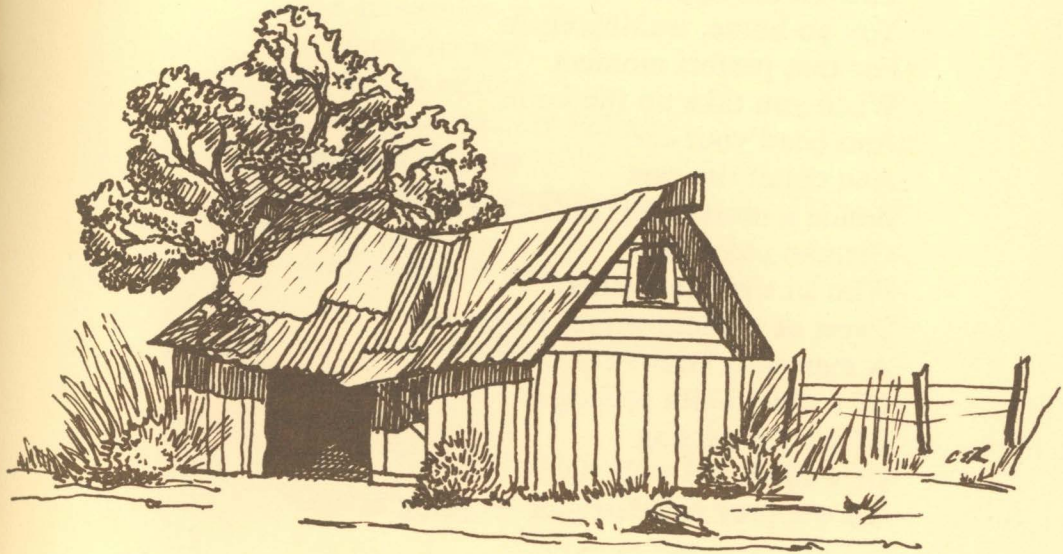
Instead, I took a picture.

Now when city animals come with greedy mouths
I no longer turn my wet face to a shadowed sky.

I crawl into my photograph and
Return to ripe clay earth —
I travel back to myself
Found on someone else's forgotten farm

It is never a long way to go . . .

— **Karen Holt**



Peeling Apples At The Age Of Five

— to Papa Lohner —

You take the knife and begin peeling
But you do it casually
You do not watch
Apple ribbons curling
Instead — you listen —
The train is coming
You can feel its beat
You tremble on the grassy hill
And wait silently
Next to the old man,
The man who knows everything
About the fine art of peeling
Peeling green sour eye-watering apples.
You wait and count the cars.
You eat the apple.
You go home, waiting again
For that perfect moment
When you take up the knife
And bend your ear
And count the cars
Beside a mustached, milk-cheeked
German old man
Who smells like leather,
Sweet as a damp winter basement
A man who knows the magic
Of a quiet knife peeling
Of a train passing
Of a small girl walking
On wet grey cobblestones — going home

— Karen Holt

Smoke

I never thought of smoke
as substance
But odor in the air—
And yet it darkens
the small abandoned web
Left by spiders
of summers past.

I never thought of spiders
worth the mourning.

Fire flickers from
an ember burning,
Casts images on webs
upon the wall,
And life as smoke
an odor quickly fading—
And yet it darkens
the small abandoned web
Left by Loves
of summers past.

— **Janice Faulkner**

Winter

Hard fell the blows of mighty winter
Down amok as if to splinter
Posts of time that bore the crashes
Of a million frenzied lashes.
Stoic they were. They did deplore.
The villain passed this way before.

— **Jan Merkurieff**

They Say Oklahoma Is No-Place-To-Live

Swimming in a cattle pond
Digging my toes in the soft mud
Fearful of turtles that hang on to
A child's foot for life,
Yours or theirs,
Whichever ends first

I was born here

July sweats out any problems
I come up for lethargic air
And fat mulberries staining
My soul for centuries,
The purple of prairie wind

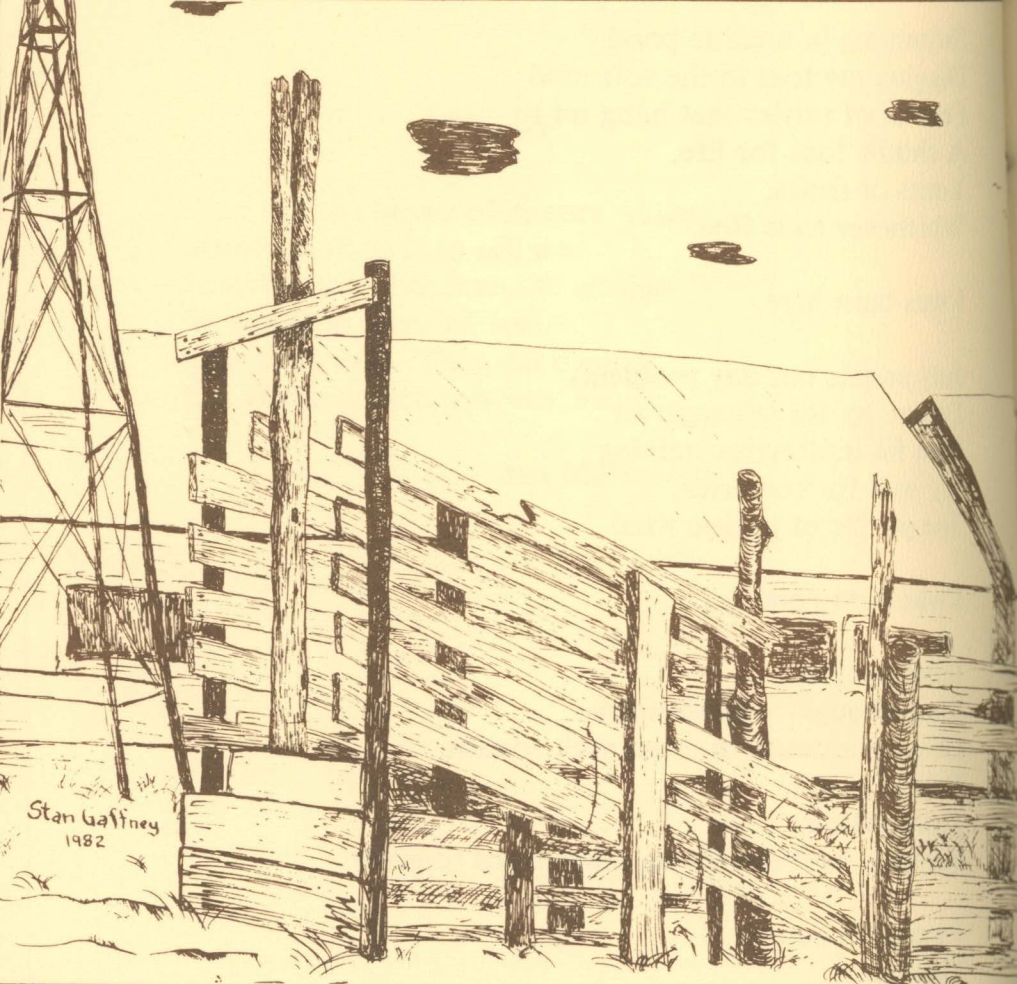
I was born here

Love and hate,
Rain, drought, tumbleweeds.
Give me a newborn crookneck squash,
Pale as butter
Firm, delicate
Growing as if there's no other place to grow

I am born here
Every day
Every minute

— Mary Ann Peters

First published in *Three Part Harmony,* 1982, this poem is reprinted by permission of the author.


Stan Gaffney
1982

The House Of Five Gables

The huge two-story house, weathered with age, stood deserted among other homes nearby. An icy November wind blew steadily as I walked toward the front porch. Without the bricks that had once formed the outer walls, the frame facade looked naked in the grey morning light. But in Tuttle the house was an historical landmark, and it was special to me because my great-grandparents, Joseph and Laura Rooker, had owned it from 1935 to 1942.

Constructed in the early 1900s—veneered, then, with red brick—the house presented a fine porch extending all across the front and half-way down each side. The porch roof was supported by eight sturdy white columns. White trim adorned the eaves and the windows. On the roof were five lightning rods, one for each gable. Even during the 1930s and 40s, it was still one of the finest houses in town.

As I approached the front door, I paused, fascinated. Though I had never been inside the old house, I remembered my dad describing happy Sunday afternoons he had spent there.

Perhaps because of his memories, which were now a part of mine as I thought of his stories, from the moment I stepped into the foyer, I was enthralled. Instantly this desolate house cast a spell over me and turned back the pages of time. I walked into the parlor and could see—right where she wanted it—Laura's handsome black bed: the bedstead was decorated with small, plain, vertical rods, the larger part of the frame curving gently around an overstuffed feather mattress. White linens were topped with a bright patchwork quilt. Opposite the bed was a small couch, its cushions supported by a wooden frame. One corner of the room was filled by a ponderous bureau, and close by sat a platform rocker—covered in a lovely, soft, red-embossed material—that looked inviting. The room was cosy; I could feel warmth radiate from the Round Oak Duplex coal stove. It was long and narrow with an opening in front for easy loading.

Appetizing scents permeated the whole house, wafting their way into the parlor, where Joseph and his sons had often sat, patiently waiting for a delicious dinner. As I walked into their kitchen, I could smell cornbread baking, roasted chicken, and sage-spiced dressing. On a counter, an elegant angelfood cake, on a lovely pink-glass plate, was ready to be served for dessert.

A rush of cold air brought me back to reality, and what I saw grieved me more with each step. In truth, the parlor was cold and desolate; vandals had damaged the walls and torn off the trim; in the foyer they had even splintered an exquisite stained-glass window. Despite cracked panes that let in the chill autumn air, I realized the house smelled of dust and mold, not of family feasts savored years ago.

From the hall, I wandered up the curving staircase and was greeted by empty, wasted rooms. Where partitions had been torn away, pieces of wood and plaster lay on the bare floor. I could only imagine how this part of the house had once offered comfort. Probably in each room a big featherbed had been covered with quilts for wintertime warmth. In summer, lovely lace curtains had framed pleasant vistas, and in all seasons the tops of heavy bureaus had been decorated with family pictures: parents, children, aunts, cousins...

But now, at the top of the stairs, I felt the north wind. This once-magnificent home, rich with memories, was being slowly destroyed by the elements—and by neglect and vandalism.

Sadly I went downstairs, listening as the house creaked, crying out to be restored to its original beauty.

Outside, as I turned for one last backward glance, a passerby stopped to greet me. She told me the house had been sold and would soon be refurbished by its new owners. Joy filled my heart to know that this big old house of five gables would come back to life and again wrap loving walls around a family. Walking to my

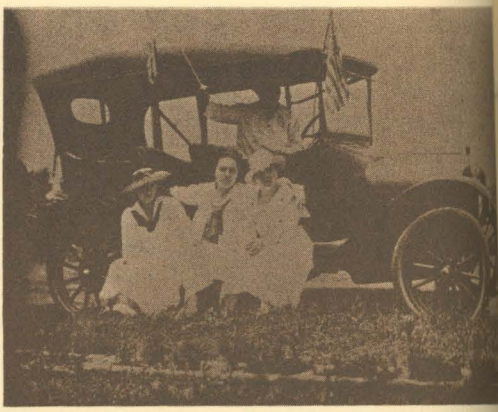
car, I remembered the words of Joyce Kilmer:

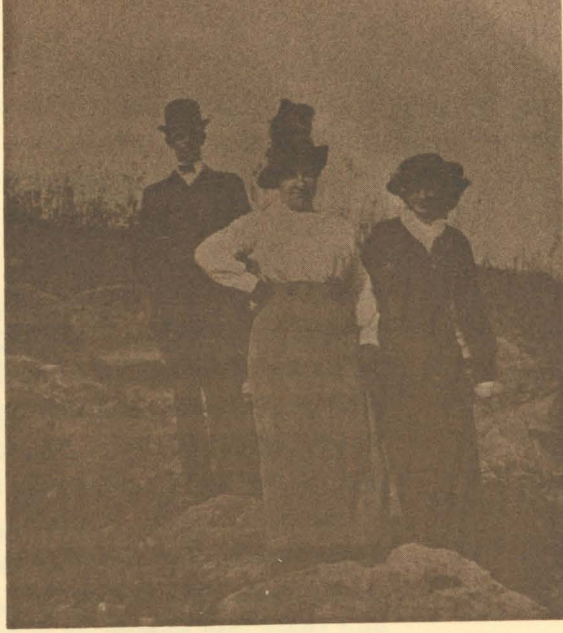
> But a house that has done what a house should do, a house that has sheltered life,
> That has put its loving wooden arms around a man and his wife,
> A house that has echoed a baby's laugh and held its stumbling feet,
> Is the saddest sight when it's left alone that ever your eyes could meet.

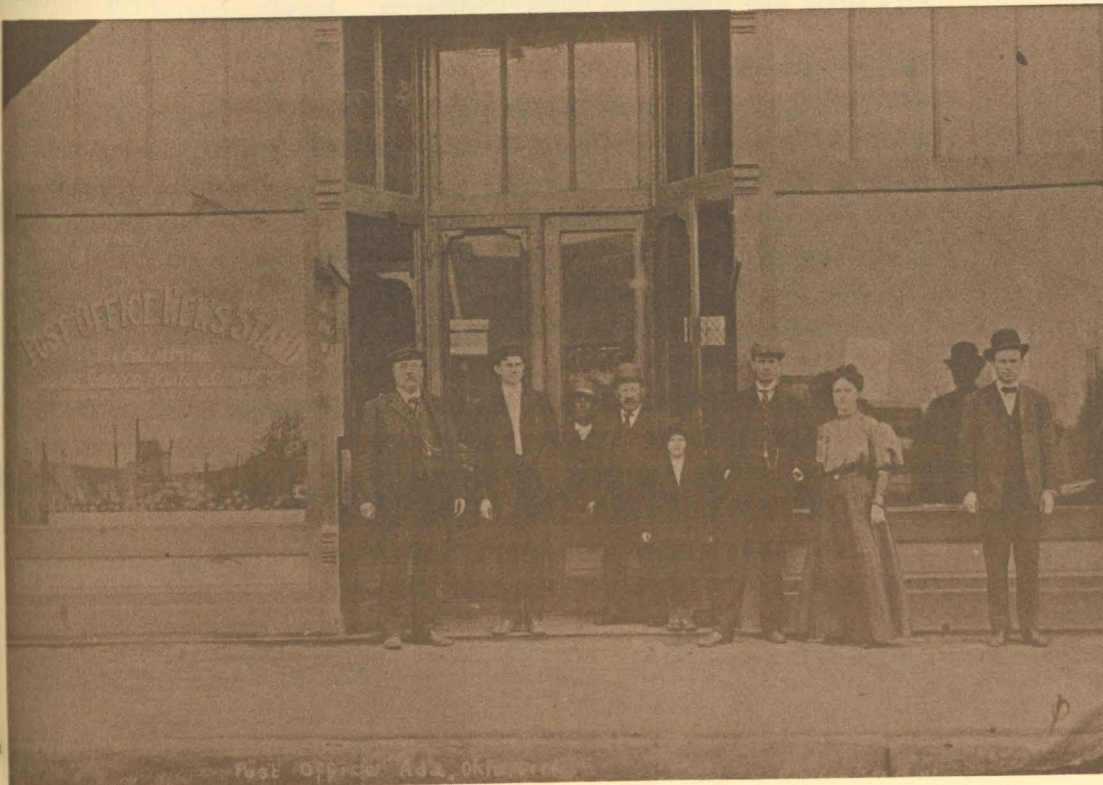
And, as I drove away, I rejoiced that this old house would no longer be a "House With Nobody In it."*

— Kathy Wynn

**The Best Loved Poems Of The American People* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Inc., 1936), pp. 533-534.






POST OFFICE

Episode

We drove along the busy road.
I was not driving. My mind was indolent,
seeing and not seeing suburban streets.
There were, suddenly, standing at their gate,
people I'd known in an earlier time.
I waved.
They saw and expressed, by movements of their hands,
an elusive... something,
and their lips parted as if to speak.

We did not stop.
My lips said: Goodbye. Goodbye.
And we drove, settled in our own close communion,
away from the tree grown taller,
near the gate of their domain.
I was seeing, not seeing, bleached pigments
and bland tones,
the anticlimactic stubble of reaped fields.

— Joyce Marks

Oil Country

The infinite sky of the plains
overwhelms a stubbled winter landscape
scored straightforwardly with bands of unending highway.
Along them, arcs curve away,
departing from the broad roads,
rising,
banking,
veering off in search of the cities of the plain.

Travelers glance from the roadstrip.
Billboards ahead... passing... have passed.
A glance toward fields,
then back to the road,
discloses
sturdy primeval birds abiding in the land,
descended from ancient skies,
thirsting,
dipping their iron heads low,
they drink from the fossil bed,
dipping,
Then rise to stare,
Dipping again in metronomic time,
as though in cautious observation
of a primordial conflict.

— Joyce Marks

Celebration

You think the best of all things you
do not understand...
And so the highway is only paces from the red-
banked stream, the black oak, the scissortail and
coyote
While, in other parts of the world, people
yearn for truth never spoken, children
cry for education never given, peasants
beg for equality never received, and
refugees pray for peace never granted.
What cause to celebrate 1982?

You think the best of all things you
do not understand...
And so the mayor and council of the great
metropolis offer string-of-pearls parks, a
half billion to glorify the city, and place
it on the Map,
While defaulting moral support of a bond issue to
rebuild the shameless exploding school system,
the pearl of too-great price.
What cause to celebrate 1982?

You think the best of all things you
do not understand...
And so the state newspaper supports all inspiring
virtues—capitalism, self-determination,
freedom from federal meddling, tax breaks for
the suffering affluent
While rebuking all who would slow the flow of
money—environmentalists, minimum-wage advocates,
supporters of humane social health, school
lunches, affordable education.
What cause to celebrate 1982?

You think the best of all things you
do not understand...
And so your state capitol oil well indicates the
resourcefulness of the citizenry, oversees
the cream of the Beaux-Arts jubilee, underwrites
the statutes of your moral intent
While in the shadow of the well are pacing prostitutes,
children trading party regalia for quaaludes and
speed, the lawless spectacle of 10th Street decay.
What cause to celebrate 1982?

You think the best of all things you
do not understand...
And so the universities and institutions hold
fine American Indian art exhibits, historians
recall noble and intellectual chiefs, and the
state tourists board shouts the beauty of Oklahoma,
the red man's land,
While Indians lie on mattresses on moonlit
fields, lie drugged and beaten in the back
alleys of city and town, lie, still in waiting,
in cells and wards of all kinds, for any redemption.
What cause to celebrate 1982?

I thought the best of all things I
did not understand...
And so I came in 1974, following my great-great
grandparents, teachers and bargers by profession,
who left fond memories of fiddles and ice
skates on the Erie Canal to pioneer wild
Nebraska in 1870, leaving to pioneer a colony
for Union and Confederate soldiers in Georgia
in 1890, and in 1906 settling on a new frontier
called Oklahoma to build the foundations of
the electric companies on the state's
western border

While never knowing that 76 years would produce
such a yearning for fame, such a thirst for fine
possessions, such a hunger for power, as becomes
the wardens of the diamond celebration.

You think the best of all things you
do not understand...
And so the highway is only paces from the red-
banked stream, the black oak, the scissortail and
coyote
While the highway deteriorates, its bridges falling
down, half of your elected commissioners
await judicial processing, charged with corruption
of office, misconstruing the public will,
And cause for celebration explodes across the coming dawn.

— Bill Housden

Gentle Reader, This Poem...

Gentle reader, this poem, writ by "Anonymous,"
your great-great grandmother, is her garden
of *mille fleurs* design, embroidery of blossoms
from March to November; or, signed "Author Unknown,"
by a maiden aunt, is a quilt pieced of summery
colors—stitches fine as spiderweb; this poem
is the heirloom wedding-ring pattern spread on your bed
in the season of snow.
—It is the journal, forgotten,
in a dusty trunk in your mother's attic, a tale woven
warp and woof of the comic and tragic, birthing and dying.
This poem is a sister's last letter, shy of the word *I*
that reincarnates in your bold revolutionary verses...
This poem is the singing that comforted fevers,
soothed you—enchanted: the voice that bespoke your speech
and now floats like a ribbon of moonlit silk in your memory.

— Anon.

The Theatre Guild's Problem

The year was 1942. One of the most influential theatrical producing organizations in New York was on the verge of financial insolvency. In an attempt to save the Theatre Guild, organizational members Lawrence Langner and Theresa Helburn conceived the idea of producing a musical, their first since George Gershwin's *Porgy And Bess.* They were convinced that Oklahoman Lynn Riggs' play, *Green Grow The Lilacs,* produced by the Guild in 1931, would be just the vehicle they were looking for, the basis for their new show. Helburn approached Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart to adapt the play. Rodgers was willing, but Hart was tired and ill and urged Rodgers to find a new partner. Rodgers asked Oscar Hammerstein II to work with him, and the stage was set for what would become the most successful composer/lyricist team the musical theatre would produce.

In discussions regarding the nature of their adaptation, Rodgers and Hammerstein came to an early decision—to abandon old methods. Consequently, a great deal of their play defied tradition. The play had to open not with a crowded stage full of chorus girls and men, but simply with a woman churning butter while the hero sings offstage. Truly American ballets, fully in character with the setting, would replace formal dances. Every bit of music and comedy had to be germane to the plot—something not practiced in previous musicals.

Virtually everyone connected with the production, except Rodgers, expected that while it might well become an artistic triumph, it would surely be a disaster at the box-office. It had no stars; it had very little humor; its ballets and musical sequences were too high-brow for popular consumption; it had no traditional chorus-girl numbers; and it was based on a play that had been a failure (with only sixty-four performances).

How wrong they were!

This musical-play went on to make history. Its initial Broadway run played 2,212 performances over five years and nine weeks. It grossed seven million dollars and—most significantly—opened new vistas for the musical theatre. The musical, of course, was *Oklahoma!*

— Don Shirey