

Centennial 2007

Gangsters blast way through county

BY LEO KELLEY
Staff writer

ADA — Crime was big business in Oklahoma and elsewhere across the United States during the 1920s and 1930s. Prohibition had spawned gangs of illegal liquor traffickers and sellers of other vices.

Bank robbers like Charles "Pretty Boy" Floyd blasted their way from one bank to another.

Floyd, like Bonnie and Clyde and George "Machine Gun" Kelly, became Public Enemy No. 1 and was placed on the FBI's Most Wanted List.

The Floyds made their way to Indian Territory from Georgia just after statehood. Settling in Sequoyah County near Sallisaw in southeastern Oklahoma, most of the Floyds were hard-working folks who picked cotton and as one described, "worked the sand hills for a corn bread living."



'PRETTY BOY' FLOYD

The *Ada Evening News* headline in April 1932 was alarming to some, thrilling to others: "'Pretty Boy' Floyd hits Stonewall bank." The article went on to say that the First State Bank of Stonewall was robbed by "Pretty Boy" Floyd and his gang. This was the third time the bank had been robbed in two years. Floyd and his gang got away with about \$600 and headed

toward Ada.

The *AEM* headlines continued the suspense on April 21, 1932: "Search continues in the Lula, Citra and Atwood areas for Pretty Boy Floyd."

Longtime educator Kenneth Murphy was born in 1924 at Ada but grew up in Owl Creek/Stonewall area and was raised by his grandparents, Wayne and Eula Murphy. He was 9 years old when news of the Stonewall bank robbery came.

"One of our neighbors called and said 'Pretty Boy' Floyd and his gang had robbed the Stonewall bank and were headed north on our road," Kenneth Murphy said a few years ago. "My grandmother took me to the porch and said we were going to wave at 'Pretty Boy' Floyd when he came by. My grandfather warned her that one of us could get hurt. He wouldn't hurt an old woman like me or a little

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— Brenda Muntz Allen

in those days."

Brenda Muntz of Allen is a distant relative of "Pretty Boy."

"I grew up hearing stories about 'Pretty Boy' Floyd," she said. "He was related to my grandmother, who lived in Tishomingo. My grandmother said 'Pretty Boy' had showed up at her front door, running from the law after one of his bank robberies. Although he had visited on several occasions, she — as the story goes — told 'Pretty Boy' he had better leave. She didn't want trouble."

Michael Dean, public information director for the Oklahoma Historical Society, recalls his dad Elmer telling him about a "Pretty Boy."

"My dad was working at a gas station on Classen in Norman in the early 1930s," he said. "A big limousine drives up and he recognized the driver as 'Pretty Boy' Floyd. The gangster gave my dad a \$5 tip. That was a lot of money in those days."

No one knows just how many banks Floyd robbed in the early 1930s. He told an interviewer that he could recall robbing 32 but thought the total was closer to 60.

After tracing "Pretty Boy" down, federal agents killed the elusive gangster on Oct. 22, 1934, at East Liverpool, Ohio. His body was shipped back to Oklahoma with money raised from friends of the Floyd family, including a sizable donation from the Sallisaw Bank — the same bank he had robbed in 1932.

Stonewall, Frisco united by history

BY LEO KELLEY
Staff writer

STONEWALL

Oldtimers of Stonewall will tell you that their community has had its share of excitement over the years. On Jan. 5, 1910, bank robbers used nitroglycerin to blow open the First State Bank safe. The massive explosion — the perpetrators had used too much nitro and almost destroyed the entire bank — alerted residents and an old-fashioned shoot-out occurred on Main Street.

In April 1932, "Pretty Boy" Floyd and his infamous gang knocked off the same bank. The Stonewall marshal chased the bandits in a Model T as they fled toward Ada. The elusive Floyd eluded capture but was still recovering months later from a gunshot wound he received in the fierce battle.

A year before, oldtimers recall, Will Rogers had visited the town and quickly drew a large crowd with his rope tricks and hilarious commentary.

Two months later most of the downtown businesses were destroyed by a mysterious fire.

In fact, the Stonewall area can boast of one of the most vivid histories of any community in Oklahoma. It was sort of ironic that the new State Highway 3, completed a few years ago, bypassed the city of Stonewall because for hundreds, perhaps thousands of years, major trails had passed through the area.

Before Indian Territory, which included present eastern Oklahoma, was created, the fierce Osage tribesman followed the buffalo migration through the region. Millions of the shaggy beasts followed a north-south route trail that moved through the Allen area and past the present location of Stonewall. The Fort Gibson to Fort Sill road, surveyed and constructed in 1834 by the historic Leavenworth (Dragoon) Expedition, snaked through the present Stonewall area. Some say a major battle over hunting rights once occurred between the Osage and Comanche tribes near where Stonewall is located.

The fascinating history of Stonewall coincides with that of Frisco. One could argue that the two communities have a closer relation-



Now showing

The Main Theater at Stonewall was owned and operated by C.D. Bullard in 1950. "Bagdad" was playing at the time this photograph was taken.

ship than most other towns in the Sooner State. In fact, old Stonewall was once located on the Frisco town-site. Sound confusing? Well, even some local residents are unaware of the historical path the two shared during Indian Territory days and then after Pontotoc County became a part of the state of Oklahoma in November 1907.

Less than 30 years after the Chickasaws and the other Civilized Tribes were removed from their homelands in the Southeastern United States to Indian Territory in the 1830s, the nations were caught in the middle of the Civil War. While a majority of tribal members wanted to remain neutral, they were forced to enter the bloodiest conflict ever fought on American soil.

Unfortunately, the area of present Pontotoc County — because of the Union invasion in 1864 — received more damage than other areas of Indian Territory. Chickasaw homes were destroyed, animals killed or stolen and crops burned. It took great effort during the following decade to rebuild. It was during this period that Stonewall was founded.

However, Stonewall's his-

toric beginnings can be traced well before the Civil War when Robert L. Cochran opened a trading post about 5 miles south of present Stonewall on the south bank of Clear Boggy. Cochran moved his operation across the creek in 1868 and old Stonewall was formed.

One of Stonewall's early residents was William L. Byrd, who would become governor of the Chickasaw Nation.

In 1868 Aaron Harlan and C.C. Rooks established a grocery store on the banks of Clear Boggy Creek. One of Oklahoma's most historical characters, J.J. McAlester, who was the founder of McAlester, worked for Harlan and Rooks during these early years. Sometime around 1872, years before Ada was settled, the Chickasaws built the Pontotoc County

Courthouse at Stonewall. A post office was authorized Dec. 30, 1874, named in honor of Confederate Gen. Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson.

While the location of towns would follow the rail lines later, Stonewall was created because the Texas (Leavenworth) Cattle Trail, the Fort Smith to Fort Arbuckle (near Sulphur) road and Boggy Depot road ran through the area. A route of the Butterfield Stage Line also passed through. When the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad (commonly called the Katy) was built across the Choctaw Nation in 1872, Stonewall lost most of its north-south traffic.

Bill Tinsley, who lived in Ada for many years, is an expert on area history. He wrote in "The Chronicles of Oklahoma": "The old Fort Arbuckle road continued (after 1872) to be well trav-

eled through old Stonewall, even though Fort Arbuckle was abandoned shortly after the Civil War ended.

"Much of the supplies for Fort Sill and the surrounding countryside were hauled through Stonewall from points on the MKT Railroad at McAlester, Atoka and Caddo."

Tinsley said Stonewall "became a leading trade center of the Chickasaw Nation, second only to Tishomingo" and "had a population of only 75 to 100 people in 1887." The town "contained six general stores," and travelers ventured "for miles from all directions to obtain supplies."

By 1903, the survival of most communities depended on rail lines running through their towns. When the MKT constructed a line between

Stonewall

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April 1941, eight years after Oklahoma Central line was closed.

The Frisco Cemetery remains as a reminder of the pioneers who settled the Stonewall/Frisco area. Gone are the Chickasaw schools — Colbert and Collins Institutes — the old Pontotoc County Courthouse, Brown Livery Stable, Staggs Barber Shop, Truax Drugstore, the home of Tandy Walker, who was appointed captain of the Chickasaw militia and later a member of the Chickasaw Senate, and many other businesses and homes.

However, the sleepy community of new Stonewall continues to prosper. New businesses are opening and today's residents are optimistic as their ancestors who literally moved their town to meet the rail line. Locals can point to a fascinating history, including the day "Pretty Boy" Floyd emptied the vault of \$400, carrying around a bullet from Stonewall until he was killed in a gunfight two years later. Every time a resident mails a letter, he can recall the night the post office was moved from old Stonewall to new Stonewall with the postmistress inside.

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