

way of life in those days. Most commodities were dispensed from burlap sacks, wooden barrels, or boxes. If one was wise he brought his own tote sack or box. Some of the more fancy merchandise, such as some drugs, spices, powders, etc. were kept in fruit jars or in stoneware crocks on the shelves along with an assortment of other essentials. Ralph tells that on a rainy day the Store was the gathering place for visiting, trading, or just loafing. Then also it was a joy to buy a nickel's worth of rat cheese and eat lunch, as the crackers from a big wooden barrel were free with the purchase. A big pot-bellied wood stove was in the center of the store and the assembly sat around 'jus' 'glat' to be here. It was common courtesy to always leave spitting space. Many of the men chewed tobacco and in expectorating would try to make placement in the ash pan at the bottom of the stove. Some missed, but it can be said that bugs never ate up the wood floor around that stove. It was there one cold rainy day that the older men were telling of seeing the now extinct passenger pigeon (or wild pigeon as they called them) so thick along Big Cabin Creek that their weight would break the branches from the trees. The last known passenger pigeon died in the St. Louis Zoo in 1913.

Ralph recalls when there was no such thing as a padlock on a shed door or a lock on a house door. In his early days he says that if anyone ever stole anything in his home community no one ever knew about it. It might be hard to believe but such a time and era did exist in this land. People of that time had an outlook and attitude toward living that was foreign and strange to the young generation of to-day. Then, there was a little call for office paper work, as a man's word was his bond and was so accepted. Crime and the low-brow of society was almost unknown. Bank robbers, train holdups, and highwaymen did exist, but they seemed to be far away. Once in a great while a couple would settle their differences with the fast draw, and the activity was generally looked upon as something that concerned only the participants, a part of the way of life of that long ago. He says for outlaws to come into the country in the old days looking for something to steal or someone to rob would find slim pickings, as no one actually had much worth anything.

About a quarter mile south of Pheasant Hill School was where possibly the only oil and gas wells were ever drilled in Craig County. That was back in about 1920, and the wells (two or three) did flow a little oil, and a couple farm houses piped the gas to their homes. The gas was so loaded with salt and sulphur it ate up nearly everything in the house.

Ralph has been caught in bad wind and rain storms, seen a cyclone take his barn away, waded snow four feet deep, seen grasshopper plagues, prairie fires, smallpox and flu epidemics, buried the dead wrapped only in a blanket, gone hungry, and once nearly froze to death. His longevity speaks of a hardy and humble life, and of one who has lived very close to his God.

Nine miles to the southeast was Vinita town. He chuckles when he recalls walking down the board sidewalks and the boards rattling ever step, of sows and pigs wallowing in a mudhole in the middle of the street, of cows being driven down Main Street with dust so thick you nearly choked, and of the public well at the intersection of the main streets that ran a stream of strong artesian sulphur water you could smell for a mile.