

RAY, PAT

SECOND INTERVIEW

#12249

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Hazel B. Greene,
Journalist,
Nov. 25, 1937.

Interview with Pat Ray
Idabel, Oklahoma

Pat Ray was born in what is now McCurtain County, on what was as nearly a plantation as was ever in the Indian Territory. His father, W. L. Ray, improved and cultivated land; built houses for tenants, his own home, a cotton gin and a store on a farm of about a thousand acres, which was out about half way between Idabel and Cerro Gordo, Arkansas. That was where Pat was born in 1905. Pat has been Court Clerk at Idabel for several years.

Mr. Pat Ray stated; I have just this moment returned from the funeral of the man who has done more good in this town than any one man. He was J. W. Blanton, a minister, eighty-eight years of age, who helped to organize the first Methodist Church in Idabel. That was in 1904. They organized over the protest of a lot of undesirable citizens and overcame what then looked like insurmountable vicissitudes. A lot of the people wanted no church at all, consequently it was a long time before they built one. The members were so few and all

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of them were struggling to build new homes in a new town, in a newly-developing country, hence they had a pretty hard time putting up any sort of a church building. They met for the first year or so in the school house.

The minister just lived around with the members until they could build him a home. He did not sit down and wait for his flock to build the church and his home; he worked.

That Methodist Church that the members and A. J. Blanton worked so hard to construct was a frame building and was blown down, beyond repair, in a storm about ten years later.

The first blacksmith was John Derryberry and he was a dandy blacksmith, too. His home and shop were located on the present site of the McCurtain County Court House.

He had wagon loads of horse shoes piled beside his shop door, stacked as high as the top of the door itself. In front of that shop the street would get so muddy I have seen wagons, with yokes of oxen, bog down in the mud, right out in front of the court house.

The first postmaster was Charles Townsend. He married Scotta Davis, school teacher and step-daughter of E. L. Nelson, McCurtain County's Treasurer.

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Tom Graham was the first sheriff, and my daddy was the first County Clerk. He was W. L. Ray.. T. J. Barnes was the first County Judge.

The first marriage license was issued to William N. Skinner, twenty-one, and Mary E. Terry, aged twenty, of Valliant November 20th, 1907. They were married by S. M. Scott, Baptist minister at Peaceful Home, a little church community out northwest of Valliant. Prior to that time and prior to statehood the people down in here had to go to Antlers for marriage licenses or go over into Arkansas or Texas and get married.

I knew one fellow who secured his marriage license in Texas and came home to get married. The minister told him he would have to be married in the county in which the license was issued so they got a hack and took the wedding party across Red River and were married by the Indian Territory minister, who had no right to marry folks in Texas. They had the second ceremony by a Texas minister in Texas.

The first picture show in Idabel was an airdome affair, with a tent wall, the seats were planks laid across logs and the pictures were slides and the man explained each view as he showed it. Sometime later we had illustrated

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songs. Then we were putting on style. A pretty girl would sing the heart-throb songs about "Far across the fields of cotton, my old homestead I could see", and show the picture of the house across the field of cotton, and so on. Then we got the slides in colors and a little later the magic lantern with its flickering reel. Sometimes a vaudeville troupe would show to a house filled to capacity. That theater was on the site now occupied by the Rouleau Hotel.

There were hitching racks all along in front of the business places. We had alleys then but we did not know what they were for. We thought the proper place to hitch a horse was right out in front of the place where one had business. And, boy! The way those young riders would show off as they hitched their horses. They would ride at a moderate rate until they were in the edge of town, then they would spur up and gallop up to the hitch rack, alight with a flourish and all the time watching out of the corner of their eyes to see who might be noticing the riders, their beautifully brushed and curried horses and polished saddles. Those were the young bucks. Of course an old married man would not put on such a show.

There were benches outside the stores against the walls, where all of the problems of the nation and country were settled daily by the whittlers, who lounged there to talk and chew tobacco, whittle and spit, and incidentally, observe the girls who passed along the plank sidewalks that were along in front of every business place, high up out of the mud.

The ladies wore dresses that swept the ground and some of the girls wore long dresses, too, by the time they were sixteen. The longer the dress, the more stylish and "smart". Later, common sense caused them to be made shorter.

The first waterworks in Idabel were put in, I believe, about 1912. The waterpipes were creosoted wooden ones, held together by iron bands or heavy wires. The water was pumped from Little River without benefit of a filter. I can never forget the first hydrant I ever saw. To me it was marvelous. I got a lot of fun turning it off and on. Prior to the waterworks being put in, people depended for water upon wells which would sometimes go dry, due to their shallowness.

In that new town everything was put in, and up, hurriedly, so some of the wells were not dug deeply enough to keep water

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the year round. There were some enterprising citizens who conceived the idea of hauling water in barrels and selling it. Some busy housewives who had wells would rather buy their water for laundry purposes than to draw it out of a well. Then lots of them did not have wells and had to buy water by the barrel. Water sold for fifteen cents per barrel or two barrels for a twenty-five cent piece.