



Oklahoma Bank and Commerce History Project

a program of the Oklahoma Historical Society

**Interview with V. Pauline Hodges, PhD
Beaver County Historical Society
First Security Bank, Beaver, OK, 8/19/2011
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Audio taped and transcribed by MJH**

MJH: It is Friday, August 19, 2011, and I am speaking with Pauline Hodges, who is president of the Beaver County Historical Society, and vice-president of the No Man's Land Historical Society, is that right?

PH: Yes, that's right. The No Man's Land Historical Society owns the museum. And the Beaver County Historical Society owns the Jones and Plummer Trail Museum.

MJH: And so, we are here at the First Security Bank in Beaver to discuss banking and commerce and the early days of Beaver County. So, take it back as far as you like, and tell me...

PH: One of the very first things in Beaver was the Bank of Beaver City. It was established in the early 1900s, by a pioneer who was also the owner of a department store. He had a hardware store, and was a founder of the town itself. And his name was Carter Tracy. And then later, in about 1912 or '13, a family named Cafky came and bought the bank, and they operated it until the 1970s, I believe. The family did: it was a father and two sons. That's the oldest existing bank in Beaver County. They also owned a bank in Forgan, which is seven miles north of Beaver, and in 1912, they established the First State Bank in Forgan. We have the original window from that bank at our museum here in Beaver, and Charles Kurault, who was a CBS newsman, came out and did a special program in 1984 when they took the window out. The reason he did that, is it was one of nine windows that has lining in gold leaf. Only nine in the entire country. It's really valuable.

MJH: So that's in your museum...

PH: That's in our museum. The Jones and Plummer Trail Museum. He came out and photographed their actual taking it out of the bank, because they did it very carefully, as you might imagine. And at that time, they changed the name of the bank in Forgan to the Bank of Beaver City.

The Cafkys were the prominent banking family for those two banks. No, of course, they have a branch in Liberal, Kansas, also, and they no longer have a bank in Forgan. The people of Forgan were very upset when they closed the bank and put an ATM machine there, because of a lack of population...

MJH: When did the bank close down in Forgan?

PH: About four years ago, I would say, about 2007. I'm sure exactly sure of that date, but that's close. And they built a new bank in Liberal. And I understand that, because Forgan's population has dropped significantly. At the time they established the bank in Forgan, the population there was about 2,000 people. And, thanks to the taking out of the railroad and the dust bowl, the population stays at about two hundred and fifty people, when everybody's there.

The Bank of Beaver has been a prominent bank in here in Beaver all these years. There is also another banking family. A man named W.H. Wells established the First National Bank. That was in the building that is now the library here—the Beaver County Library. And that was the forerunner of the bank in which we are sitting—the First Security Bank.

MJH: When did Mr. Wells start the First National Bank?

PH: I am not sure of the exact date, but I'm going to guess, really, that it was the early 1900s, partly because that's when the homesteaders first came. Up until then, it was ranch country. There was business, but we had a real influx of homesteaders from 1903 up until about 1912, '13, and there was a real need for more than one bank. And Mr. Wells was a very prominent man, and his son-in-law, Jim Lyle—L-Y-L-E—ran the bank as long as he lived. Then Mr. Lyle's son, David, and another son, ran it for a few years, and then sold it to First Security.

MJH: Interesting. And the sale to First Security would have been about...

PH: I'm going to—I'm not positive about this, so you'll need to check that fact with Chris Berry [First Security Bank president]—but I believe it was in the late 1970s or early 1980s. I didn't live here then, so that's part of it's a little bit hazy.

Mr. Berry was president of the bank when I moved back to Oklahoma from Colorado in 1989, and so, shortly before that, I believe that they changed the name, and a different family...

MJH: I just came in from the north and was driving down Main Street, and there's the Bank of Beaver...What is the bank building right across the street?

PH: That is the Bank of Beaver City. Beaver City was the original name. The "City" was dropped for convenience through the years. But officially, I suspect, we still are [Beaver City].

MJH: The bank...So the Bank of Beaver City—has that had continuous ownership?

PH: Yes. The Cafkys, and then in the 1970s...

First Security Bank President Chris Berry walked into the conference room, was heading to event in Balko...Introductions and small talk...

PH: The Bank of Beaver City was run by the Cafkys until, I believe, the early 1970s. And the original banker was named O.H. Cafky—C-A-F-K-Y. And they came here, I believe, from Woodward. And then his two sons—a son, George Cafky, ran the bank here, at Beaver, and his son, John, ran the bank at Forgan. George Cafky and his wife were quite prominent residents of Beaver all their lives. His wife taught school and did a lot of important things in the community, to build up the community. And then at Forgan, John and his family, his wife, Mary, same thing—they were prominent citizens.

O.H. Cafky and his wife lived in Forgan for many, many years. She was very prominent in the Oklahoma Democratic Party, and even did some things on a national level. Her name, I believe, was Ella. I remember her well, because she became a mentor to me and made sure that I was a Democrat—a Roosevelt Democrat!

MJH: What do you know about both of these banks during the Depression? Why did they survive when so many didn't?

PH: I think they both had a hard time, and I don't know—this is strictly my opinion—I think they had been cautious about loans, and...My father told me—and he was a farmer—that they probably waited until the very last moment to foreclose on any loans, thinking that either times would get better, or the person who had the money would find a way. I think that's it.

Now, there was another bank in Forgan during the dust bowl, the Depression, that did not survive, that was not related to either of his banks—and it was called the First National Bank of Forgan. There were also banks in two towns east of here: Knowles (K-N-O-W-L-E-S) and Gate. And they both—well, actually, there were three banks altogether—and none of them survived.

I think both Mr. Wells and Mr. Cafky were very conservative. They had been in business long enough to have a pretty solid foundation for their assets, whereas the other banks that I mentioned—I don't want to say were late comers, but they had sold stock, and they weren't nearly as solidly based as...Especially the Cafkys. The Cafkys were associated with a bank in Woodward. I can't tell you the name of the bank at the moment. They also had several—and so did Mr. Wells—ranching accounts, because ranching was very big here in Beaver County. And in the eastern third of the county, those ranchers weren't as adversely affected by the dust bowl as the western half or third, around Turpin and that area. And my father was one of those. We were wheat farmers, and he lost everything. And my father's loans were at Citizens State Bank in Liberal. I know...he told me that his bankers delayed foreclosure as long as they could...was all foreclosed on. He always spoke highly of that man because of that.

MJH: What about the experiences and turmoil of the 1980s? Were banks here big participants in energy loans?

PH: Now, I didn't live here. I lived in Colorado at that time. I saw my bank there do that! But I don't believe these two banks ever indulged in risky kinds of loans like that. In the first place, we didn't have the boom in land development that, say, my area in Colorado did, which was along the Front Range. And so, yes, people were building, but I know these bankers. They thought, if you couldn't pay the loan back, you weren't going to get a loan. We had a lot of drilling of gas and oil, especially gas, going on. But—and this is strictly a guess on my part, so don't quote it as truth—I'm suspicious that those companies were borrowing money from banks in other places, because they were companies from other places. Especially Woodward, and farther down state, and north Texas, and southwest Kansas.

MJH: That's probably true—participating with other banks...

PH: Right. I think that's probably the truth. And I don't know that for sure. But I have been close personal friends with the president of this bank, as well as with the bank across the street—that would be Beaver City Bank. I know they're pretty cautious. It's not impossible to get a loan, if you don't have much. But I know how thorough they are about checking out your potential assets as well as your current ones. I know that from personal experience, for which I am grateful!

MJH: What have these two banks meant to the community?

PH: I believe they have always been critical to this community. Because I am an historian myself, I have watched two banks where...I have watched how important it has been to people here, people who are trying to start new businesses, or trying to maintain their farming and ranching enterprises that they have. In my youth, I was one of those young ranchers, my husband and I, and without a bank behind us, we couldn't have acquired land that later had some gas wells on it. We couldn't have bought cattle. For farmers, there were some years when it would have been hard to put a wheat crop in if they hadn't been able to borrow some money. Maybe not a lot, but enough to get the wheat crop in. I would say those banks have been critical to the economy and these communities here, in Beaver County.

MJH: There really isn't much in the way of industry in Beaver County?

PH: No. Now, our saving grace has been oil and gas, and we have a ____ plant, two of them, actually, which has been a godsend to us. And we have pipelines coming through. But we don't have manufacturing. And we don't have a lot of other resources that larger communities have, and that industrial areas have. We don't have that.

MJH: Do you benefit at all from the big Seaboard plant?

PH: Oh, yes! Oh, sure we have! Now, that's a sore point when you talk to people, because we have a lot of issues...I moved back here about the time Seaboard came, and my goodness, I thought we were going to have range warfare, again! But in the big picture of things, it has really helped us economically, in my opinion. Now, you'll get a few

different, probably, different stories, but they have turned out, in my opinion, to be environmentally safe and friendly. Now, that doesn't mean I want to live in the same section with them, but all the dire predictions that were given did not come about. They have brought many jobs to Beaver County. More, of course, in Texas County, but yes, especially in the Forgan area—Flores (sp?), we call it the Flores (sp?) area, between here and Turpin—yes, they have been a godsend. The National Beef Packing plant in Liberal has also helped us economically, because we have a number of people, particularly in the western part of the county, that drive.

And going back to the Bank of Beaver City, they have a branch bank in Turpin, and that has been a real asset to that little tiny community. Yes, they are only ten miles, thirteen miles, from Liberal, but if you need cash, thirteen miles is a long way.

MJH: I was hoping to visit with Larry Mikles, but we had a hard time making connections. So, is that the one branch?

PH: Yes.

MJH: Does this bank [First Security Bank] have a branch?

PH: No, we do not. I say we...I'm not a...I'm only a depositor in this bank, and have a loan here. But it is my bank.

I did manage, for ten years, manage a very large charitable trust scholarship fund, and we had accounts in both banks, CDs in both banks, and that was a real asset to our...The scholarship is still in operation. I turned it over to somebody else a year ago. But the banks have been so helpful with that, because the money comes from an estate that a farmer, ____, left us. He left us a two and a half million dollar asset, and asked us if a scholarships would be the county seed. And my late husband, who was a lawyer, managed it at first, and then he came to me, and then he became ill, and I ran it through the two banks. I pretty much just evened it out. Both presidents of the banks, as well as other employees in the banks, were just a godsend to us.

MJH: Who is president of the Bank of Beaver City?

PH: His name is Greg Weber—W-E-B-E-R. And both presidents served on the selection committee for the scholarship, as well as, one of the vice presidents from the Bank of Beaver City, ____, was on that board also, because she was also a school board member at the time. And we had to have a Beaver County School Board member on the committee, according to Mr. ____ will.

MJH: So Greg Weber there and Chris Berry...

PH: Chris Berry here. I found both of them easy to work with, and most accommodating. I bought some CDs through them, and managed the accounts through the two banks. I found it was a real benefit because they were right here.

MJH: Any other milestones—robberies...anything come to mind about the bank's history?

PH: I can tell you a funny story about the robbery at Forgan. But before I do that, let me add a little bit. Both banks give out small scholarships to Beaver County students. There are only four schools in Beaver County. That's been a real asset to Forgan and Beaver and Turpin and Balko students, because it may not sound like much, but I have been a college professor, and when kids are paying fees and tuition, that's a godsend. And they have been very good about that—both banks.

MJH: I'm glad you mentioned that. You were a professor at Panhandle State?

PH: I was a professor at Colorado State University, and took early retirement, and moved back here, and did not mean to work anymore. As I said earlier, I do not know how to say "no." First, the Forgan schools were desperate for somebody to come work with at-risk students. So I did that, off and on, for about ten years. And then Panhandle State was desperate for a professor, and I went out and was chairman of the Education Department for six years...Panhandle State University, which was my first alma mater.

MJH: I had never been there before today, but it's a beautiful campus. What a jewel!

PH: Yes, it's a wonderful school, and it has a fabulous president, who has done wonders for it.

MJH: I can't think of a better thing...I taught for a little while at the University of Virginia...

PH: I have to confess that, when I was at Colorado State, I served on an intake accreditation committee, to check out your teacher education program, years and years ago. That was my introduction to Virginia. Small world.

Well, I have to give you my bank robber story. This would have been in the early 1960s, I believe, I lost track of the year. Two young men robbed the bank at Forgan. One of them was nineteen. I'm not sure about the age of the other. And the branch vice president's name was Verl—V-E-R-L—Eoyler—E-O-Y-L-E-R. And he told me that he was so scared when that happened, because of the customers in the bank, and he said that this young man who was holding a gun on him, his hand was shaking so hard that his gun was shaking. And he said, "I was afraid he was going to shoot me by mistake, by accident." Anyway, they herded the...I think there were three customers, and the employees of the bank, into the vault, and shut the door. Well, these young men didn't know there was a telephone inside the vault, and so Verl called the Highway Patrol and the Sheriff's office, and got somebody alerted. Well, the young men hadn't elected to put enough gas in their car so they could get away, so they stopped at the local service station in town and filled up with gas. So by the time they got east of Forgan, the Highway Patrol was waiting for them. I was teaching at Forgan in those days, and so when I would talk to my students about being prepared, I always told them that story—that you need to do your homework and be prepared for whatever is going to happen.

MJH: They had a long time in jail to think about that!

Laughter...

PH: Actually, it was robbed a second time, but I think those robbers were probably more efficient, and I don't know the story about that. Anyway, I have laughed through the years about, "If you are going to rob a bank, you should probably put gas in the car first."

Laughter...

MJH: Does anything else come to mind...

PH: No. Some of the dates and the facts I gave you, you probably need to double check, because I am doing it from memory, and I was gone from here for twenty-five years, and that's a long time. I came back every month because my mother was living in Forgan, and my two sons were here, off and on, between college and jobs and things. And so it wasn't that I was totally absent, but I didn't pay attention then like I have since I have been back here.

And I put together seven books about Beaver County history, and so I have it in my head. It's just that I can't always give the exact dates.

MJH: I'll have to keep an eye out for your books.

PH: I am going to mail you this most recent one.

Turned off tape recorder; small talk...

PH: A man named Jones, and another man named Plummer, Bill Plummer, hauled freight from _____, Texas, to Mobeetie—M-O-B-E-E-T-I-E—Texas, and then eventually, they hauled freight on up to Dodge City. And they came right through where we are sitting, at the moment, and went on to Dodge. In 1879, an enterprising man from Woodward came and built a, I guess you would call it a hostel—it had a saloon, which was essential, I am sure, a place to eat, place to sleep, and a place to board your horses. So the freighters could stay there, and have a place to rest, and refresh their horses, and so on. And that was built in Beaver. Gradually... There was a post office across the river in the sand hills, and it had been there a year or two. Well, they moved it into that same building. And then people started building down here on the very north edge of town. And I know it's hard to believe today, but that kept flooding out from the river. With no water in the river...

MJH: I didn't see any water at all...

PH: Beaver River, yes. And then because of that, they started building up this hill. And the very place that you and I are sitting was a very popular saloon. And I am going to send you a book with a picture of that saloon in it. And the man who ran it decided that he would then build a saloon in what is now the next block. And by that time, there were three churches in town. And the church ladies picketed him and the saloon, and he decided that maybe that wasn't such a good idea after all.

And then, in 1886, because we didn't belong to anybody—we had no law and order of any kind—we had belonged to Spain, France, Mexico, and the Republic of Texas—but then when Texas decided to become a state, they cut the northern boundary off at 36-30, because that's what _____ .

And then when Kansas decided, five years later, to become a state, they cut it off on the north side at the Compromise of 1850 line. So that left thirty-four miles up here that didn't belong to anybody. And Oklahoma Territory wasn't in existence yet. The land designated to relocate Indians was the hundredth meridian, which is the east edge of the county. And New Mexico was on the west end, about a hundred and sixty miles or so from here, and we didn't belong to anybody at all. So we have a very colorful past. There are a lot of stories that I could tell you, some of which would even be true!

Laughter...

At one time in Beaver County, we had thirty-seven town sites, and fifty-three schools. Now we have four schools and four towns.

MJH: So there are just four towns in the whole county.

PH: Well, we have some kind of abandoned towns, and what's left of...Beaver, Forgan Turpin, and Balko still exist...

MJH: Some of the places you go through, you can just imagine the optimism that went into building these places, and then a railroad passed them by, or something...

PH: ...Beaver is still mad at Forgan because Forgan got the railroad before Beaver did.

MJH: Is that the Rock Island?

PH: No, it was called the MK&T—the Katy. It came to Forgan. They didn't come to Beaver, although Beaver was existence, because of the sand hills. You went across the river to the sand hills. State law said, if you come within seven miles of a town, you had to go through it. So what they did was, when they left Knowles, they started angling the tracks northwest, and came out a little over seven miles north of here, and then came back one mile and established the town of Forgan.

Manuscript including story about railroad by-passing Beaver...

He managed to get some people together and got the money to build a spur between here and Forgan. Eventually, they ran it on out to Hooker. That was very important.

MJH: I was talking to Charlotte Butler, and I was trying to think, it was the Katy rather than the Rock Island.

PH: Rock Island came through Liberal, and then on to Guymon. That's how Guymon got started. And then it went on to Dalhart, Texas. That was really important.

Talked about woman with book about history of Liberal (?), importance of railroads. Similar stories to Altus' renaming to Leger...Highways are the new railroads...

Beaver is still mad at Forgan!

Laughter...

MJH: Well, Pauline, it was nice visiting with you.

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