

Final Report

**Reconnaissance Level
Architectural/Historic Survey of the
"Conoco Buyout Area"**

Ponca City, Oklahoma

September 30, 1991

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Submitted to:

**The Historical Advisory Panel for the City of Ponca City
Department of Planning and Community Development
P.O. Box 1450
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Submitted by:

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September 30, 1991

The firm of Meacham & Associates is pleased to present the Final Report to the Historical Advisory Panel for the City of Ponca City of the Reconnaissance Level Architectural/ Historical Survey of the area in Ponca City known as the "Conoco Buyout Area." This report was done at the request of the Advisory Panel in March of 1991 for the purpose of documenting a historically significant residential neighborhood which was scheduled for complete demolition by the end of that same year.

Maryjo Meacham

September 30, 1991

Table of Contents

	page
Abstract	4
Introduction	5
Project Objectives	6
Description of Survey Area	7
Research Design and methodology	9
Results	10
Types of Properties Identified	10
Description and History	12
of the "Conoco Buyout Area"	
Architecture of the Neighborhood	12
Marland's Influence on Residential Development	15
History of the Study Area	17
Summary	23
Bibliography	
Appendix	

Abstract

This report for the Reconnaissance-Level Architectural/Historical Survey of the "Conoco Buyout Area" project contains the project objectives, an explanation of the area surveyed, the research design and methodology, the kinds of properties sought, the boundaries of the area surveyed, the results of the survey, and the kinds of historic properties present in the surveyed area. It also contains the specific properties identified and techniques of information collection, an annotated bibliography, and a summary.

A reconnaissance survey of twenty blocks of the "Conoco Buyout Area" located directly east of the Conoco Refinery, was conducted by Meacham & Associates, as directed by the Historical Advisory Panel for the City of Ponca City. Eighty (80) representative properties were individually surveyed to document the types of housing present in the area. The area surveyed is also known as the Circle Drive area.

It is within this area that the Conoco Oil Company has purchased approximately 375 homes as a result of legal action regarding seepage of contaminated groundwater which in some cases has entered basements. Conoco plans to move or destroy these homes to create a "greenbelt" park area for the enjoyment of the community. Many of these homes are currently being moved, and the Historic Advisory Panel supported an immediate survey of the buyout area in order to document the properties before the area was entirely destroyed.

Many of the homes in the district were built for the workers of the Marland Oil Company, especially the refinery employees. The removal or demolition of an entire district is unprecedented in Ponca City's history, and it was important to document these resources for a better understanding of the evolution of the City.

Introduction

In accordance with the Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Office Comprehensive Historic Preservation Planning Process and Historic Context Development, an Architectural/Historical Reconnaissance-Level Survey of the Conoco Buyout Area in Ponca City was conducted by Meacham & Associates. The primary goal of the project was to survey representative houses and structures located within the designed twenty blocks in order to document the neighborhood before it was cleared of all housing.

The period of significance of the area spanned the years from approximately 1917 until 1941. The neighborhood was developed primarily during the 1920s and is significant as the location of many homes of Conoco (Continental Oil Company) employees as well as many other blue-collar workers. During this period of the company's history, E. W. Marland, the original owner, was well-known for offering his employees a wide variety of benefits, including good and sound housing. In fact, within one-half mile of the "Conoco Buy Out Area," Marland had a model neighborhood designed by Layton, Smith, and Forsythe, a well-known Oklahoma architectural firm during the first half of the twentieth century.

The survey was conducted in accordance with the Secretary of Interiors Standards and Guidelines for Identification and Evaluation, and the guidelines established by the State Historic Preservation Office.

Research was conducted to establish the dates the additions were platted, the dates of construction of properties in the area, the history of the Conoco/Marland Company, and the history of Ponca City. The history of the oil company and a brief history of the city is included. Records from the Ponca City Library, local museums, and the Kay County Courthouse were used during the research.

Project Objectives

The survey focused on the following objectives:

1. Through a reconnaissance-level survey, the identification of properties in the twenty-block area representative of the types of housing of the area known as the "Conoco Buyout Area."
2. The photographic documentation of each property selected as a representative example of the housing from the "Conoco Buyout Area."
3. The identification and annotation of all reference material associated with the "Conoco Buyout Area."
4. The preparation of files for each property identified by the field surveyors.
5. The preparation of a photograph index to accompany the negatives.
6. The preparation of a Final Report.
7. The preparation of a map to identify each property surveyed.
8. The inclusion of all data from the individual files to be incorporated within the Oklahoma State Preservation Office computer system.

Description of the Survey Area

The area surveyed for the Reconnaissance-Level Architectural/Historical Survey included approximately twenty blocks located in the south part of Ponca City, directly adjacent to the east side of the Conoco refinery. All or parts of the Southside, Boggess, McKinley, Smyths, England, Phillips, Plainview, Wikers, Cobb, Shaffers, and Jacksons additions were included. These additions were platted between 1917 and 1924. The area is slightly hilly and covered with a variety of types of trees and vegetation. One-hundred and twelve acres were included within the study area.

The majority of the area is located within Southside Addition, a V-shaped plat located adjacent to the east side of the original Empire Oil Company and the Marland Oil Company refinery, now known as Conoco. This addition was platted in 1922. Fifth Street, a north-south street, forms the core of the Southside Addition. The V is inverted and at the point of the V is a circle of grass which forms a round-about. Fifth Street continues in the same direction on the other side of the circle while Seneca and Lucas streets form the sides of the V and split off to the southwest and southeast respectively. The street circling the grassy area is known as Circle Drive.

The east-west streets which cut through the V are semi-circular and form curvilinear city blocks with irregularly shaped lots. The streets which cut through the V include Clinton Avenue, Hoover Avenue, Lawrence Avenue, Coolidge Avenue, Belmont Avenue, Erie Avenue and Wayne Avenue. The south side of the addition is bounded by Southside Avenue. East of the V is the rest of the addition which conforms both to the V-shape and the general north-side configuration of the other surrounding neighborhoods. Mercer Street, Brunswick, and Seventh Street are included in this part of the addition.

Between the Southside Addition and the land belonging to Conoco is a small section of land which was owned by the Empire Company in the early 1930s. A spur of the Chicago Rock Island and Pacific Railroad is located within 50 to 350 feet from the west side of the Southside Addition and were originally used by the Continental Oil Company and the Empire Oil Company. The Santa Fe Railroad tracks, which also run north-south, are located approximately 500 - 1,000 feet west of the Rock Island spur.

Also located within the "Conoco Buyout Area" are Smyths Addition (1922) and Smyths Second Addition (1923), part of England Addition (1918), Phillips Subdivision (1901), Jackson's Addition (1924), and parts of Plainview (1919), Wikers (1921), and Cobb (1923) additions, and part of Shaffers Subdivision (1917). These additions are located along Third, Fourth, Fifth and Sixth streets. South Avenue forms the north boundary of the area. The majority of the area is bounded by Seventh Street on the east, Harding Avenue on the south, and Seneca and Fourth and Third streets on the east. The west boundary is the Conoco Refinery.

McKinley Addition is located directly north of the Southside Addition and includes McKinley Pubic School (ca. 1928).

Research Design and Methodology

A reconnaissance survey of the "Buyout Area" was conducted in accordance to the guidelines set forth by the federal government and by the State Historic Preservation Office. All forms used in the survey are approved by the SHPO. The information on these forms has been submitted as requested by the Historical Advisory Panel.

Each property surveyed was identified by address and information concerning the property was also included on the form. Two photographs of each property were taken. These photographs are 35 mm, glossy, black and white and are included within each file.

During the project, the research team of Meacham & Associates took the following steps:

1. Archival research was conducted to establish the dates the additions were platted, the dates of construction of properties in the area, the history of the Conoco/Marland Company, and the history of Ponca City. The history of the oil company and a brief history of the city is included. Research was conducted in Ponca City at local libraries, museums, and the courthouse.

The methodology used for obtaining information concerning the survey included a combination of archival research and field surveys. The following procedures were followed:

1. Sanborn Fire Insurance Company maps for Ponca City were obtained.
2. Existing survey materials at the local and state level were reviewed, including:
 - a. Vertical files at the Oklahoma Historical Society
 - b. Vertical files at the Ponca City Public Library
 - c. Vertical files of the Advisory Panel
 - d. Records from the Kay County Courthouse
3. Research was conducted to locate material on the history of Ponca City and the history of the Conoco (Marland Oil Company).
4. A reconnaissance-level survey of the area was conducted.
5. Minimum-level documentation was completed on eighty (80) properties within the survey boundaries.
6. A map of the surveyed area depicting the location of individual properties is also included.

Results

Eighty properties located within the boundaries of the designated survey area have been surveyed and photographed. The physical characteristics, style, and date of construction were taken into consideration in order to have a true representation of the neighborhood, which is scheduled for demolition. Five (5) houses were surveyed which had already been relocated to other neighborhoods within Ponca City.

Types of Properties Identified

Property types sought in the survey area included:

1. Residences
2. Schools
3. Neighborhood stores
4. Churches
5. Industrial Buildings

The following types of properties were identified in the Architectural/Historical Reconnaissance-Level Survey of the "Conoco Buyout Area":

Domestic Dwellings

Single Dwellings

Seventy-two (72) of the buildings included within the survey area are single-family dwellings. These dwellings, built primarily between 1917 and 1930, include several architectural styles. Without exception, they are medium-sized homes. The majority of the homes are Bungalows, however, several other styles popular between 1915 and 1930 are also included. The west of Fourth Street, with the exception of the houses facing Fourth, were built in the 1940s after that portion of the Southside Addition was replatted as the Boggess Addition (1940). These residences include the Minimal Traditional style and a few one- and one-half-story Cape Cod houses; both styles were associated with FHA housing loans.

Multiple Dwellings

Two Bungalow-style duplexes was found in the survey area. However, because some of the housing had already been demolished, it was impossible to determine if there were any others.

Educational Facilities

One school, McKinley Elementary, is located on the north side of the survey area. Built in the 1920s, it is not within the buy-out area. It is a one-story, brick school, linear in form, with a tradition school plan of a center hall and classrooms on either side.

Landscape (Parks)

Located at the intersection of Fourth Street and the Southside Addition is a circular area which gives the name "Circle Drive" to the neighborhood. The large, grassy circle in the middle of Fourth Street was designed as part of the Southside Addition. It is reminiscent of a "round-about," commonly found in Britain and used for continuous traffic at an intersection. There is no evidence that this was used as a park or that it was at one time landscaped.

A second park is also located at the north end of the survey area and is connected to McKinley School. There is no formal landscaping, trees and bushes are scattered throughout the park.

Commercial

Five commercial establishments are located within the survey area. Most of these are located at the north tip of the Southside Addition, just south of the grassy circle. These include a bottling plant and a two-story commercial building with a first floor storefront and an upper floor apartment. One commercial building is located on Sixth Street, near the school. It was not found to be historically or architecturally significant.

Description and History of Ponca City and the "Conoco Buyout Area"

Description

The "Conoco Buyout Area" is a twenty-block neighborhood located in the southern part of Ponca City adjacent to the Conoco refinery, originally the location of the Continental Oil Company. Ponca City is located in north central Oklahoma in Kay County within one mile of the Arkansas River. The city is approximately ten square miles in size and has a population of 26,359.

The neighborhood is located one-half mile south of downtown Ponca City. The main arterial of the area is Fourth Street, which runs north-south. The southern boundary of the neighborhood is Harding Avenue, which serves as the southern boundary of the city proper.

Consisting of a number of additions platted between 1917 and 1924, the area was almost completely developed by the early 1930s and was primarily a Bungalow neighborhood. However, throughout the 1930s and 1940s there were some houses built which represent the architectural style referred to as Minimal Traditional. The Phillips Addition, platted in 1901, is located at the corner of South Avenue and Third Street. Although it is platted much earlier than the rest of the study area, the architecture in this addition is not similar to the housing which is located directly to the north. This area is was the southern boundary of Ponca City until the mid teens.

There is a two block area on the east side of Third Street, which faces the Conoco refinery, where there are possible a few "company houses." These houses were built in the early years of the development of the Continental Oil Company and may have been constructed for this site or moved in from other locations.

The Bungalow

The Bungalow, popular between 1905 and 1930, is the predominant architectural style of the area. While the size of this style ranged from small to large, typically the residences built here were small, four-room houses built to house the employees of the adjacent oil refinery. The majority of the houses were built for single families; however, there are a few duplexes. Characteristics of the Bungalow style include low-pitched roofs with wide, unenclosed eave overhangs; exposed rafter tails; decorative beams or braces; and full- or

partial-width porches supported with brick piers and tapered wood columns.

Company Housing

Also located within the district are a few "company houses." Examples of these houses, featured in Kay County, Oklahoma (1919), show simply-designed, square National Folk idiom houses with gabled, hipped, and shed roofs over the porches and square, wooden posts for porch supports. Directly across from the original site of the oil refinery on South Third, one block south of South Avenue, are possible examples of these homes. Because of their small size and light construction, it is possible that some were demolished, removed, or incorporated into the surrounding structures as part of residences, outbuildings, or garages. These are particularly historically significant as some of the few remaining examples of "company housing." These houses were probably constructed between 1915 and 1920.

National Style

Other styles in the neighborhood include subtypes of the National Folk idiom such as the front-gable-and wing. Located at 201 Lawrence and east side of the 1500 block of Fourth, these two structures do not appear to have been built in the neighborhood originally and it is speculated by the Consultant that they may have been moved in and set upon new foundations. In both cases the foundations are concrete blocks. They may be farm houses or simply older housing from another part of the city.

Minimal Traditional

Primarily located in the west half of the Southside Addition, which was replatted in 1940, are houses commonly referred to as Minimal Traditional style. Built during the war to accommodate defense workers and also through the later part of the 1940s, these houses are very simply designed. Almost devoid of decoration, they are most commonly identified by their shape: a rectangular box with a side-gabled roof. Often there is just a hint of a front stoop; full- or partial-width porches are practically nonexistent on this style. A large picture window sometimes graces the front facade; generally it consists of a metal casement window with a fixed center section and operable side sections. Exposed roof rafters are sometimes used, but rarely. This style is the only architectural style in the study area which has attached garages. After 1930 it was popular to have an attached garage, however, during the war the lack of materials restricted the construction of such attachments.

Cape Cod Houses

A few one-and one-half story Cape Cod houses can also be found throughout the survey area. These houses can be identified by the twin gabled dormers located on the front-facing

slope of the side-gabled roofs. The entry door is generally centered and has either a Colonial-styled door surround without a porch or a small, enclosed, front-gabled entry. Metal casement windows with multi-panes are generally present. Shutters may be added. The exterior cladding is often painted wood shingles.

Overview of Marlands' Influence on Residential Development in Ponca City

E. W. Marland left a permanent mark on the residential development of Ponca City by not only supporting public improvements such as parks, landscaping, and public buildings, but also providing the opportunity for his employees to build their own homes. Contracting with outside architects and planners, Marland had plans for a Model City drawn up to be located across the street north of his refinery. In this neighborhood he planned to give his employees the chance to own their own home.

In September of 1919 the Ponca City News reported that employees could apply for housing applications for new homes in the model city addition. By the next month work had begun on eleven homes. By February of the following year twenty-one, one-story cottages known as "bungalows" were constructed at an average cost of \$4,200 and seven two-story homes had been completed. Three apartments were also under construction. The paper described the small bungalows as four-, five-, or six-room homes. The mortgage notes held on these homes were to be paid within a period of approximately six years. In addition to the homes, Marland also built a recreation park with tennis courts and a baseball diamond.

While the Model City development is not included within the "Conoco Buyout Area," the two neighborhoods are located within one-half mile of each other and it is certainly possible that employees could also obtain loans to build houses in the Southside Addition. In fact, a 1924 Ponca City News article reports that one-half of the employees of the Marland refining plant owned homes. This percentage was considered to be high when compared to other industrial areas located in the United States.

Several years later, in 1927, the City of Ponca City hired Jacob L. Crane, Jr., an engineer and landscape architect from Chicago, to develop a comprehensive plan for the city. In this plan, Mr. Crane credited the efforts which had been completed in Ponca City to date. Ponca City considered itself a progressive community; within two years after the Oklahoma State Legislature passes a law enabling cities the authority to appoint a Planning Commission (1923), Ponca City had established such a commission and authorized a plan to be developed.

When the Southside Addition was constructed in 1922 it was at the very south end of the city limits of Ponca City. The southeast corner of the Southside Addition was replated as the Boggess Addition in 1940. A circa 1931 map, prepared by Joseph A. Williams, a local cartographer and, later, a surveyor, show that the Southside Addition, excluding the Boggess Addition, was almost completely developed by the early 1930s. Houses are shown on the majority of lots on this map. A 1931 Sanborn Map also shows the Southside Addition almost completely developed. It also indicates that the area directly west of the Boggess Addition (west side of the V) was adjacent to the Cities Service Oil Company and at one time was platted for residential housing. However, housing was never built west of Seneca, the west leg of the V and the west boundary of the Southside and Boggess

Additions.

Today few of the houses in the area are occupied. Many of the houses have already been moved out of the area or have been demolished. Only six families have elected to stay in the area.

History

Historical Overview

Ponca City is the industrial metropolis of that portion of Oklahoma originally known as the Cherokee Outlet. The name derives from its use as an outlet for the Cherokee tribe of northern Indian territory to their hunting lands to the west. Its nearly rectangular shape--roughly eighty miles wide by a hundred ten miles long--accounts for its popular designation as the Cherokee "Strip."

On March 3, 1893, Congress authorized the termination of Cherokee claims to the area and its opening to homestead settlement. In August of that year President Grover Cleveland issued a proclamation declaring that the land would be opened to settlement on September 16, 1893. The mechanism would be a "land run"--not the first but probably the largest and most dramatic of Oklahoma's history.

In anticipation of that event, Burton Seymour Barnes left his failed furniture factory in Adrian, Michigan, for Arkansas City, Kansas, in June of 1893. There he purchased a handsome surrey and two fine, black horses, crossed the Outlet's border with Kansas, and went looking for a place to build a city. Traveling crude trails across the Otoe and Ponca reservations, he found his site when he stopped to water his horses at a spring near a convenient ford of the Arkansas River. Back in Arkansas City, Barnes found followers and the mechanism of their settlement: the Ponca Townsite Company.

Some 2300 people bought stock in the new company. For two dollars, each thereby purchased the right to take lots in the future town. Within days of the great land run, they had done just that. Purchasing releases from those who had any claim to an entire section of land, they surveyed the site into 194 blocks, each containing 20 to 24 lots. Cards bearing the lot designations went into one barrel. Another bore cards with the name of each stockholder. As two girls drew cards from alternating barrels, the town thereby was born, a town of 2300 living in tents or hastily erected shacks, their "property" marked by stakes and ropes. Within weeks, they even had a post office and an official name: New Ponca. It was only a few years before its official name matched the first residents initial dreams and their original informal designation. The Post office agreed to call the site Ponca City.

For some time, however, the "city" part was more in the title than in the fact. Though blessed with good and abundant water and easily accessible to the Ponca reservation office at White Eagle and to the Osage reservation across the Arkansas ford, Ponca City's population declined before stabilizing at a level appropriate to a city than to a town--a town that, like many others, to service a regional farming population. At the time of Oklahoma's statehood (in 1907) the town's future was secure but not especially promising.

That, however, was the year that a young Pennsylvanian trained in the law but self-taught in geology came to the area. Ernest Whitworth Marland was his name. Oil was his object.

Ponca City's future was his legacy.

In the gently undulating plains just south of the little community, Marland believed that he had found the anticlines that indicated the presence of oil. Undeterred by an initial dry hole, Marland continued his search. Seven more times he drilled, and seven times his discovered gas. Although valuable in its own right, it still was not the petroleum that was his goal. In June of 1911, his persistent search took him to the allotment of a Ponca Indian by the name of Willy Crys-for-War. Between the crest that provided Crys-for-War's people their sacred burial site and the line of trees that marked Bois d'Arc Creek, E. W. Marland drilled the well that finally tapped a reservoir of oil. It was the first of many discovery wells, wells that not only struck oil but opened entire fields. In quick order, Marland's drill bits opened pools in Newkirk, Garber, Mervine, Billings, Tonkawa, and Blackwell. Collectively, these become the heart of a huge system of underground lakes of oil--the famous Mid-Continent Field. As other companies rushed to share in Marland's discoveries, each of the host communities was transformed. But the most important transformation was in Ponca City.

Organizing companies almost as swiftly as his drilling rigs tapped oil, Marland formed the 101 Ranch Oil Company. His Kay County Gas Company took charge of the seemingly endless gas production. Coordinating the spreading empire was the Marland Refining Company of Ponca City, Oklahoma.

Originally operating out of a nondescript one-story frame building--complete with a frontier "store front"--the Marland Company swiftly outgrew those quarters to move to a handsome brick structure. Soon, it operated out of a great winged building located at the city's southwest corner. Surrounding it was a tank farm capable of storing nearly two million barrels of crude and a refinery with a daily capacity of 14,000 barrels. Neither three miles nor three decades from the place and time of Burton Barnes's watering of his two black horses, E. W. Marland had created what would compel a local historian to reach toward the poetic in describing in 1919:

Within the vision of one's eye, from a single point, is a field producing high grade crude, a gasoline plant, a refinery with all its departments, storage tanks, loading racks, tank cars, general office buildings, gas distributing systems, and just across the Arkansas River, a virgin oil and gas territory . . . awaiting development.

That territory did not wait long. It was the decade of the 'twenties that gave the Marland Company its greatest period of growth. Leaping across the Arkansas River into the western portion of the former Osage reservation, Marland struck his largest pool yet when he opened the Burbank field. One discovery led to another, not only in Osage County or even in Oklahoma, but across the nation and beyond its borders. Texas, Kansas, California, Mexico--seemingly everywhere Marland sought oil, there he found it. By ship tanker, railroad, and pipeline, he brought much of it to his every expanding Ponca City refinery. Pouring millions into new facilities and the latest technologies, Marland

developed a refinery that was a model of efficiency. If the Chicago meat packers could claim that they used "everything out of the hog but the squeal," Marland's engineers could boast of nearly the same intensity as each drop of crude was squeezed to yield the maximum product for heating, lighting, fuel, and lubrication.

But, of course, they measured production neither in drops nor gallons but in barrels--in millions of them. In 1926, alone, Marland's wells pumped 13,137,048 barrels of crude oil, and his Ponca City refinery processed 7,528,196 barrels. The Marland Oil Company ended that year with a stock of 5,603,117 barrels in reserve.

By that time, Marland had moved beyond the production and refining stages of his industry to fully integrate the company. In 1920, he had purchased a single used gasoline station, from which he intended to market Marland products produced at the Marland refinery from Marland crude oil. Shaded by four-foot red triangles bearing the name "Marland Oils," other retail outlets soon flourished. By 1928, Ponca City's newspaper could carry the headline:

MARLAND COVERS LARGE TERRITORY
Products sold in Every State in the Union
and in 17 Foreign Countries

However boastful the local media, theirs was no idle boast. More than 600 Marland Service stations blanketed the middle west by then, and more than eight times as many were necessary to service the eastern states and Canada. Five thousand Marland tank cars, each bearing the red triangle, supplied this domestic market. From Marland's Gulf port terminal at Texas City, Texas, huge tankers steadily sailed for England and the facilities of Sealand Petroleum Company, the Marland subsidiary that distributed his products across Europe.

If all of these Marland routes eventually led to Ponca City, he was hardly the only one making that trip. The city's proximity to so many rich fields brought other oil men to it. At least one other came (like Marland) from Pennsylvania. Lew Wentz was his name, and if the Wentz Oil Company never made quite the towering impact of Marland's, it was, nonetheless, most significant for the city's development. The Empire Oil Company also operated a refinery in Ponca City, one representing an investment of \$15 million and capable of handling 12,000 barrels a day. Virtually every nationally significant oil company also maintained branch offices there. In addition, the community continued to service an agricultural hinterland that grew steadily larger and steadily more productive during the 1920s.

Marland's Employees

As important as those developments were for Ponca City's economy, they only provided the necessary foundation for what may have proven to be even more important. Between

1920 and 1930, the city's population soared by 129 percent. In large part because of the singular vision of E. W. Marland, the newcomers found themselves not only employees with good jobs in a growing industry but citizens of a unique community.

In his company's headquarters, one entire floor was reserved for the benefit of his employees. There, they found shower baths, locker rooms, lecture halls, and reading rooms. Even before the great expansion of the 1920's, Marland voluntarily provided his employees insurance policies. Although state law required workmen's compensation coverage, he went well beyond that to provide medical and hospital coverage for employees' sicknesses or accidents of whatever cause and form. Permanent employees also were protected with provision for full salary during their sicknesses or recoveries from nonoccupational accidents. The company also insured every employee's life with coverage ranging from one to five thousand dollars (depending upon length of service)--payable to any beneficiary designated by the worker.

That, though, was just the beginning. For the city, itself, Marland set aside grounds west of his office for an athletic field, clubhouse, and grandstand. He gave too, a 100-by-140-foot tract of land as the site for a Masonic lodge, an American Legion Post, and a Y. M. C. A. He followed that up with a \$100,000 cash donation toward their construction. For the handsome new high school (built in 1926 and inspired by the work of his own architects) there went a quarter-mile track and football field. Meanwhile, his philanthropy reached beyond the city limits to the Boy Scouts, to the Girl Scouts, to the American Legion Orphan's Home, and to nearly any church that needed pews, pulpits, land or buildings. To the Smithsonian Institution went a Marland check to finance the publication of a dictionary of the Osage language. To the state university at Norman went Marland money to build a student union and athletic stadium.

Marland's biographer--John Joseph Mathews--has captured the apex of all of these ambitions: to "bring beauty to Ponca City so that the common man might be able to appreciate the beauty of the work without traveling a great distance to see it."

To an unusual degree, Marland succeeded. To the wind-swept, rolling prairies he brought a Japanese gardener, Hatashita, and charged him with developing plants and flowers that would grow in the red soil and survive the bitter winters. The gardener and the company's new Forestry Department went to work to develop the entire city. Along Ponca City's broad avenues, there soon sprouted three miles of Amur River privet hedge, as well as 400 mature trees transplanted from the banks of the Arkansas River. Because he loved magnolias, Marland also had twenty of the semi-tropical trees transplanted from their native home on Avery Island, Louisiana--and built special houses to protect them from the plain's harsh winter winds. Some critics smiled when he topped all of that off with a polo club and field for his employees, and those smiles did not disappear with his explanation: "If a man is a good horseman," E. W. Marland said, "he is an efficient employee."

Employee Housing

Those employees were not among those who smiled at another of Mr. Marland's convictions, the belief that his workers deserved "tight little four-room houses." To that end, the company maintained its own Housing Department, complete with a staff of architects. In the very early 'twenties, the department handled the construction of an entire "Model City" just north of the refinery. Unmarried employees would live in the Model City's "clubhouse," where they also would enjoy the housekeeping service of one Mrs. Earl Smith, the "wife of a local contractor and famous through the state for her culinary skill." Employees with families could borrow from the company (at 5 percent interest) to buy one of the many "bungalows." These "tight little four-room houses" spread rapidly in the area that surrounded both the Marland and the Empire refineries. By 1927, the entire Circle Drive area was covered by such bungalows, nearly all of them having been built after March of 1921.

When asked to explain such philanthropies, even E. W. Marland had no certain answer. Maybe, he confessed, it was his unconscious memory of his own "narrow escape from the ranks of the employed." Maybe, though, it was "intelligent selfishness--good business." Of one thing, though, he was certain: "I spent money like water on my people and my town--and they flourished and bloomed like the rose."

Flourish and bloom they did, enough that they have outlived E. W. Marland and the Marland Oil Company. With the collapse of oil prices at the end of the 1920s, the company merged with Continental Oil Company and lost its separate identity. The Marland name came down from the red triangles and another replaced it: Conoco. Through the Great Depression of the 1930s, the new company struggled to survive. Ponca City, which had bloomed so in the 'twenties, barely maintained its population over that decade. But the city survived the Depression, just as it later survived (in 1950) the relocation of Conoco's corporate headquarters to Houston, and just as it later survived the booms and busts of the contemporary oil economy. Ponca City may no longer be the nerve center of a far-flung empire, but it continues to lie in the shadows of its own past. Many of the employees of Marland, Wentz, and others still make their homes there, many in homes that exist only because of their community's unique past.

Circle Drive Neighborhood (Conoco Buyout Area)

Some of these homes are among those involved in the city's equally unique present. Beginning in 1986, several residents in the Circle Drive area began to complain of foul smells invading their homes, allegedly from groundwater polluted by hydrocarbons. After attempts to drain the affected groundwater proved unavailing, a group of residents filed, in 1989, a class action suit against Conoco, Jupiter II Joint Venture, and Kerley Agricultural Chemical Company. After considerable national publicity, Conoco and the plaintiffs negotiated a compromise settlement. Without admitting responsibility the company agreed to set aside \$23 million to buy up some 400 affected properties in the Circle Drive area. Nearly all of the affected residents participated in the settlement, selling the company their homes at 145 percent of their appraised values plus moving bonuses of \$6000 and additional bonuses of \$10,500 each. Conoco announced its intention to turn the land into a "green belt" once it was cleared of the houses and outbuildings, and the company hired a Saint Louis firm to handle the landscaping. Preliminary plans foresaw a nine-hole golf course, a softball field, and bicycle and jogging paths.

There was no mention of Amur River privet hedges or of magnolia trees from Avery Island.

Summary

The Reconnaissance-Level survey of the Buyout Area for Ponca City revealed that the neighborhood, once known as the Circle Drive neighborhood and now slated for almost total demolition, was potentially eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places as part of a historic district for both its architecture and its historical significance to the community. At the time of the survey there were approximately 250 houses left in the area. A total of eighty (80) properties were surveyed.

Architectural Significance

The Circle Drive neighborhood was significant as an example of the newly developing residential designs of the 1920s and for its collection of simple, one-story Bungalows, company houses, and other architectural styles representing the working man's neighborhood.

E. W. Marland's interest in making Ponca City a model city, in terms of architecture and amenities for its citizens, is displayed in the unusual design of the Southside Addition, the largest addition in the buyout area. Although the person responsible for the design remains unknown, the layout of the semi-circular streets within a V-shape illustrates the exploration of city planners in the early 1920s. Their goals of restoring the pedestrian scale, integrating neighborhoods with neighborhood schools, and lessening the amount of unnecessary transportation were achieved by this alternative to the grid system. The circular streets broke the long vista associated with the grid system and allowed neighbors to be visually connected to each other. The Southside Addition was platted adjacent to land which was to become the site of a school and also was across the street from the Marland Company. The location allowed for both workers and children to walk to their daily destinations. The curvilinear streets also slowed down traffic and provided that Fourth Street would be the only collector street in the neighborhood.

The residential architecture of the area is indicative of a working man's neighborhood and shared a resemblance to the neighborhoods located north and east of the buyout area. This would include most of the housing south of South Avenue, east of Third Street, north of Harding Avenue, and west of Fourteenth Street. The majority of the houses built in this area were constructed in the 1920s to house the growing population of oil field workers and other laborers associated with the developing oil industry. The architectural styles are similar throughout the area and include primarily Bungalows, some National Folk houses (possibly some company housing), and a few Tudor Revival residences. During the 1930s and 1940s many Minimal Traditional style homes were also constructed in the neighborhood.

Historical Significance

Ponca City's history is closely tied to the oil industry. The oil boom economy of the 1920s is illustrated in downtown Ponca City with its excellent examples of Spanish Eclectic and Early Commercial architecture and it is portrayed in the Eclectic-styled large homes and mansions which were built for the industry's management-level personnel. But, it is also important to recognize the properties which were built by the working men and women and families who supported the oil industry. The Circle Drive neighborhood is such an area.

The Circle Drive neighborhood and the surrounding properties which are located south of South Avenue are significant for their association to the working class. Built during the boom of the 1920s, this neighborhood is equally important as neighborhoods with high-style architecture. The history of the neighborhood, included within this report, illustrates its importance as part of the heritage of Ponca City.

In conclusion, the Conoco Buyout Area represents the lives of the people associated with the oil industry, and the impact of the oil industry on the those who lived under its auspices. It is gone, but not forgotten.

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Maps

Sanborn Map Company. New York. 1931.

Property status map. City of Ponca City. 1990.

Southside and McKinley Additions. Prepared by Joseph A. Williams. Date unknown (ca. 1930 with 1940 revisions).

APPENDIX

LIST OF SURVEYED PROPERTIES

Address

300 E. SOUTH AVENUE
913 3RD
915 3RD
917 3RD
919 3RD
923 3RD
1101 MADISON AVENUE
1113 3RD
1115 3RD
1209 3RD
1219 3RD
1100 CIRCLE DRIVE
203 HOOVER
210 HOOVER
308 HOOVER
318-320 LAWRENCE
316 LAWRENCE
312 LAWRENCE
213 LAWRENCE
208 LAWRENCE
204 LAWRENCE
311 COOLIDGE
100 BELMONT
108 BELMONT
120 BELMONT
248 BELMONT
320 BELMONT
345 BELMONT
353 ERIE
315 ERIE
212 WAYNE (ERIE)
265 ERIE
133 ERIE
252 (254) WAYNE
226 MERCER
217 MERCER
121 MERCER
124 MERCER
204 BRUNSWICK
126 BRUNSWICK
110 BRUNSWICK
417 COOLIDGE
EDWARDS, BETWEEN 5TH AND 6TH

1505 5TH
1508 6TH
1504 6TH
1517 6TH
1602 7TH
1522 7TH
1510 7TH
1500 7TH
2200 7TH
2202 7TH
2214 7TH
1223 4TH
1222 4TH
1305 4TH
1313 4TH
1314 4TH
1316 4TH
1320 4TH
1321 4TH
1521 4TH (APPEARS TO BE "311")
1902 4TH STREET
1914 4TH
2000 4TH
2205 4TH
2209 4TH
2212 4TH
2315 4TH
106 LUCAS
112 LUCAS
609 LUCAS
405 LUCAS
515 EDWARDS

512 E. Detroit
508 E. DETROIT
502 E. DETROIT
500 E. DETROIT
701 S.9TH