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coverage of the 1986 Eakly celebration

Pioneer Spirit Of Our Town

By Jean Kenedy



As Thornton Wilder stated in *OUR TOWN*, "The sun comes up in the east and sets in the west every day of the year," so it does in a small town in Caddo County.

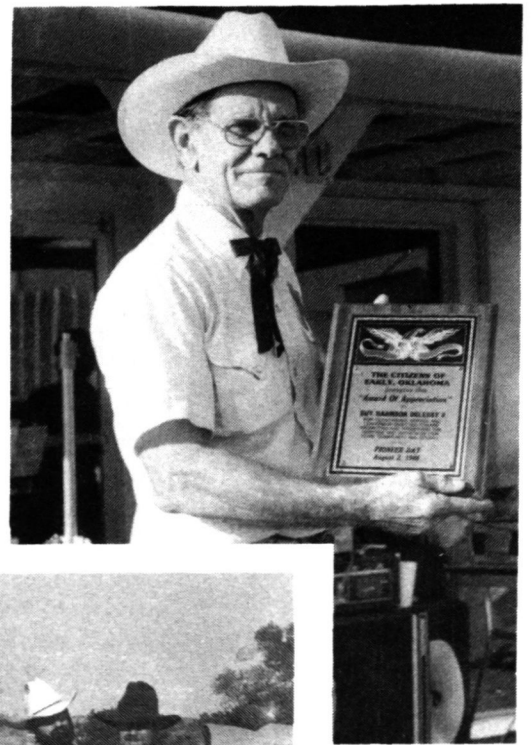
Eakly is a little town that has had the good fortune of being located in an excellent agriculture area and in the Anadarko Oil Basin. As everyone knows, the oil business has almost stopped, and the agriculture problems get greater and greater. These adversities affect the small towns such as Eakly since all the businesses depend on agriculture.

The residents of this town are great people. As one resident, Kay Williams, said, "The spirit of the town was at an all-time low. We needed something to rejuvenate this spirit, so the idea of Pioneer Day began." The first Saturday of August was selected as the date since it came between planting season, wheat harvest, and fall harvest.

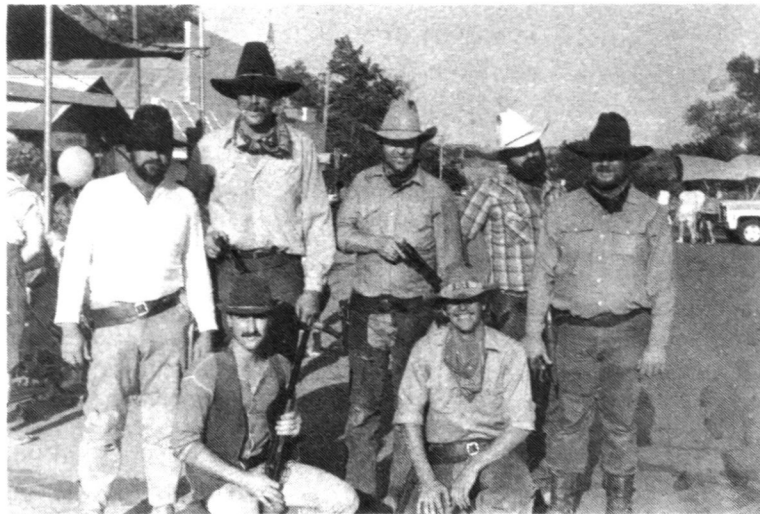
A typical day in Eakly starts at six o'clock when the lights go on in the local restaurant. A few men in pickups begin to arrive for that early morning coffee and daily discussion of the weather. But on Pioneer Day, people are scurrying around hammering that last nail in the platform that will be used for entertainment, booths are being assembled for food and crafts, the street is blocked off, and so the day begins.



Live entertainment all day.



Guy Oglesby, Jr., mayor, with the 1986 Pioneer Day plaque.



Gun fighters perform mock gunfights of the old west.

Eakly had its first Pioneer Day in 1985; it was so successful that it has now become an annual event. Months of planning go into the special day. Committees are formed and the work begins, getting volunteers involved. The day truly becomes a community effort so that everyone who attends will have a good time. Three couples who are considered pioneers are selected from the community, and a contest is held to pick "Mr. and Mrs. Eakly Pioneer." It costs a penny to cast a vote. Mr. and Mrs. John Cox were selected as the first honorees; Mr. and Mrs. Russell Suter were the winners in 1986.

The crowd begins to gather early, but the day doesn't officially begin until the parade that assembles in the local Co-op yard. The parade for 1986 consisted of floats, horses, vintage cars, bicycles, three-wheelers, and farm equipment; since 1986 is an election year, there were also many politicians on hand.

Live entertainment goes on all day with excellent talent from the area performing. Games and contests are held for the children. Some of the contests this year were a turtle race, stick horse race, Soap Box Derby, and a sack race. A pie-baking contest was held for the first time at the 1986 celebration. An added attraction was an art display by local artists in the City Hall. Crafts booths lined the sidewalks, and local organizations set up food booths to offer a variety of items for sale.

Everyone brought his own lawn chair and tried to find a cool spot to enjoy the day. Souvenirs--as well as life-sized posters of Mike Moore, a local boy who plays baseball for the Seattle Mariners--were sold.

The Pioneer Day ends about 10:30 for the weary participants. The money that is made goes into the town treasury to make Eakly a better place to live.

The highlight of the day is listening to the old-timers renewing acquaintances. Many have moved away, but they come back every year. The phrase "remember when" is used all day.

The people who conceived the idea of Pioneer Day and who work so diligently are to be commended. It's not just a fun day; it's a day that commemorates the pioneer spirit, community effort, love, friends, and a bond of fellowship that keeps Eakly, Oklahoma, alive and well.