

James Cash Penney: The Impact of a Main Street Merchant on Oklahoma



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Although the J.C.Penney chain began in Wyoming in 1902, Oklahoma and James Cash Penney's department stores have almost always been part of each other's existence. J.C.Penney's retail presence in Oklahoma began less than ten years after statehood in downtown Okmulgee, and the company founder quickly embraced the Sooner State as a fertile place to expand his retail empire. His enterprise, the J.C.Penney Company, became the first national department store chain to operate in Oklahoma, and from 1916 to 1934 Penney opened locations on nearly sixty main streets across the state, not just in the cosmopolitan business districts of Oklahoma City and Tulsa, but in rural downtowns of tiny agrarian communities like Cherokee, Hominy, and Hollis.¹ For the better part of the twentieth century Penney's main street stores offered Oklahoma shoppers high quality mer-

chandise at low prices, as well as upward mobility for Oklahoma associates who joined his firm, with J.C.Penney Company presidents and chief executive officers (CEOs) eventually emerging from such unlikely places as Picher and Claremore. Penney also hired other ambitious Oklahomans like C. R. Anthony and Sam Walton, inspiring them to create their own retail empires throughout Oklahoma and the United States. For James Cash Penney, though, Oklahoma ultimately became more than just a place to make money. Beyond the commercial success of his main street stores, Penney took a personal interest in Oklahoma's progress and development, visiting its cities and its residents throughout his life, eventually earning induction into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame despite never having been a resident. James Cash Penney's eternal place in Oklahoma's history is not without merit. Arguably, no other merchant has ever had a greater impact on the state and its people.

Although Penney was born and raised in northwest Missouri, his personal connection to Oklahoma was forged early in life through one of his cousins named Anna Brosius Korn. Both Penney and Korn had been close friends since childhood, growing up in the Missouri town of Hamilton, where Penney's formative years were marked by stark rural poverty. In 1883 conditions were so bad for Penney that on his eighth birthday his father informed him he would have to start earning his own money to pay for clothing. Anna Korn's marriage to a railroad dispatcher in 1891 eventually took her from Missouri to Chickasha, El Reno, and Oklahoma City, where she established herself as a prominent Oklahoman and ultimately the founder of what would become the Oklahoma Heritage Association.² Penney's exodus from Missouri would come in 1897, when the death of his father and the risk of his own death from consumption forced him to leave Hamilton for the dryer climates of the West, first settling in Colorado, then Wyoming, and ultimately Utah before his business permanently brought him to New York City. The two cousins remained close, however, and visiting Anna B. Korn became one of Penney's personal reasons for traveling to Oklahoma, a practice he would continue long after his department stores had made him a household name.³

For all of Penney's childhood struggles in Missouri, success came quickly for him as an adult in the West. From 1899 to 1902 he had risen from a clerk position at a Golden Rule store in Evanston, Wyoming, to a manager and profit-sharing partner of another Golden Rule store in nearby Kemmerer. His mentors, Thomas Callahan and Guy Johnson, had guided Penney to develop his abilities as a merchant, showing him how to turn store inventories over as rapidly as possible

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to generate profit. However, Johnson and Callahan's business was not about profit maximization. They consciously operated their stores under the Golden Rule nameplate, with a business philosophy based on Christian principles and literally doing unto others as you would have done unto you. In a Golden Rule store that meant selling only quality merchandise at the lowest possible price, day in and day out. Penney was himself a devout Christian, and the idea of merging Christian doctrine into a retail business deeply resonated with him:

There were many golden-rule stores, doing many types of business throughout the West. But the name was a poignant link for me with my father's and mother's ideals and injunctions. For me it had the creative meaning of one of the most fundamental laws that can be expressed in words. . . . While Christ was not the first to give it expression, His was the perfect pronouncement.⁴

As Penney worked under Johnson and Callahan, he firmly believed that Golden Rule stores could not only succeed in emerging small towns throughout Wyoming, Idaho, and Utah but also in the entire Midwest. He persuaded his older mentors to open additional locations, and their immediate success brought him greater influence in their partnership. By 1907, just as Oklahoma was attaining statehood, Penney was already buying out his mentors, becoming the sole owner of four Golden Rule stores in Wyoming and Idaho. Five years later he was overseeing more than thirty stores and had set up a corporate office in Salt Lake City, Utah, from which he continued to scout small-town locations for new stores and recruit equally ambitious partners to join his growing firm.⁵

Despite operating out of the sparsely populated West, Penney frequently traveled to Kansas City, Saint Louis, and New York City on merchandise-buying trips that gave him numerous opportunities to return to Missouri and recruit friends and acquaintances into his organization. On an earlier buying trip to Saint Louis in 1904, he first became acquainted with Charles Ross Anthony, a young man from Holdenville, Oklahoma, who was placing merchandise orders at the same wholesale warehouse.⁶ C. R. Anthony was a Tennessee transplant, eight years younger than Penney but equally ambitious, who eventually became an adept merchandise buyer for the J. P. Martin stores of central Oklahoma. Over the next nine years Penney and Anthony would continue meeting in Saint Louis at least once a year, informally keeping tabs on each other's progress. By 1913 Penney began to relentlessly recruit Anthony to join his firm. "That fellow talked with me for three years about

going with him,” Anthony recalled, “and he promised that I would have my own store within a year, if I would go with him. But I was making \$125 a month, and he only paid \$75, plus a share in the profits.”⁷ However, Penney’s lures of profit sharing and store management finally convinced C. R. Anthony to leave J. P. Martin and join his company. In 1916 Anthony moved his family from Oklahoma to southern Idaho, where he became immersed in Penney’s merchandising methods, helping open new J.C.Penney stores and serving as first man, or assistant manager. Anthony had previously sold merchandise on credit with as high a markup as possible, but he saw the virtue in Penney’s cash only philosophy of selling high quality merchandise at the lowest possible price every day rather than resorting to gimmicky sales or offering credit to extend people beyond their financial means.⁸

However, the most attractive incentive for any new Penney associate, including C. R. Anthony, was the opportunity to become a manager and partner of a J.C.Penney store, sharing in its profits just as Penney and the majority of his early associates had done. As the company initially expanded, new J.C.Penney stores were typically paid for in house rather than externally financed through banks and lenders, just as new J.C.Penney managers for those stores were promoted from within the Penney organization. Whenever Penney approved a new location, he would personally put up one-third of the investment to open the store, while other senior associates would put up the next third, and the selected new manager would come up with the remaining third. Each partner, then, had a vested interest in the success of the store, drawing a proportionate share of its profits. However, when the opportunity finally came for C. R. Anthony to open and manage his first J.C.Penney store in Grace, Idaho, things did not go as he had planned. With a wife, three children, and a new baby on the way, Anthony did not have enough savings to pay his share outright, and he inquired if he could finance his share out of future store profits, as a few other Penney associates had done. Unfortunately, Edward Neighbors, one of Penney’s senior partners, would not permit Anthony to do so, and the partnership opportunity slipped away.⁹ Anthony’s disappointment in not getting his own J.C.Penney store was compounded by the heavy Idaho snowfalls that were taking their toll on his family, as well as his wife’s frustration over the absence of any Protestant house of worship outside of the Mormon faith.

In 1917 C. R. Anthony tendered his resignation from the J.C.Penney Company, moving his family back to Cleveland, Oklahoma, where J. P. Martin was waiting eagerly to rehire him. However, Anthony’s brief exposure to Penney’s retail chain indelibly changed the rest of his life

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and the lives of many Oklahomans. By the early 1920s C. R. Anthony would create his own chain of small-town department stores throughout the state, first under the Dixie name and ultimately under his own name, heavily basing his stores and his company on James Cash Penney's philosophies, ideas, and methods.¹⁰ Within twenty years Penney's and Anthony's department stores would compete on friendly terms in many communities throughout Oklahoma.¹¹ The personal friendship between Anthony and Penney also continued for the rest of their lives. Decades later when Penney was Anthony's dinner guest in Oklahoma City, he remarked to his former protégé, "If you had stayed with my company there is no question that you would by now be president of the chain." "Yes," Anthony jovially responded, "but I had to pull out and give you good competition before you could really appreciate me."¹²

As early as 1913 Penney and his associates had already made the decision to break with the Golden Rule franchise, gradually rebranding their stores under the J.C.Penney nameplate and relocating their company headquarters to New York City to take better advantage of manufacturers, financial institutions, and transportation systems.¹³ Ironically, Penney himself was initially opposed to giving the stores his abbreviated name, as well as to expanding them nationwide.¹⁴ While Penney would have been satisfied with the company remaining a regional chain, his senior partners, particularly Kansas protégé Earl Corder Sams, convinced him that the J.C.Penney Company could and should become a national department store chain. By 1916 J.C.Penney stores had begun their move into the central and lower Midwest. Penney's first Oklahoma location opened less than ten years after statehood in downtown Okmulgee, followed by additional locations in Muskogee, Blackwell, Enid, and Ardmore.¹⁵ By 1920 these five Oklahoma stores were part of a chain of more than two hundred locations nationwide.¹⁶ However, under the senior leadership of Penney and Earl Corder Sams, whom Penney had entrusted as president in 1917, the company experienced unprecedented nationwide growth and expansion throughout the 1920s, rising to nearly fourteen hundred stores and \$209 million in sales by the end of 1929.¹⁷ Oklahoma remained particularly ripe for new locations during the decade, with Penney, Sams, and Earl A. Ross, company real estate director, well aware of Oklahoma towns that offered potential for new J.C.Penney stores.¹⁸ From 1920 to 1929 Penney was able to open new J.C.Penney department stores on the main streets of more than forty additional Oklahoma communities, in towns as small as Tipton and in cities as large as Tulsa.¹⁹



Penney poses with his prize-winning Guernsey cow, 1928 (DeGoyler Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, A2004.0006 and A2004.0007).

Ironically, opening a J.C.Penney store in Tulsa was somewhat of an aberration for the J.C.Penney Company, as the majority of Penney's early locations were typically in smaller Oklahoma communities. While the company operated stores on the main streets of regional trade centers like Bartlesville, McAlester, Lawton, and Enid, J.C.Penney stores also did business in towns as small as Barnsdall, Hominy, Madill, and Okemah. The initial rural character of J.C.Penney store locations was consistent with the character of James Cash Penney himself. Despite his own metropolitan setting in New York City, not to mention his eloquent command of the English language and fashionable taste in apparel, Penney remained a country boy at heart, and he easily identified with the needs of rural people and the small-town working class. Three years after moving to New York City Penney began to embrace farming and ranching as a second career, studying the breeding of both beef and dairy cattle on farms he acquired in New York, Florida, and his native Missouri. Even his work in agriculture was based on the golden rule: Penney believed that creating better cattle for farmers and ranchers would help bring them greater prosperity, which in the long run would bring prosperity to the J.C.Penney stores that served their rural areas.²⁰

In October 1929, with a chain of fourteen hundred stores and national sales of nearly \$210 million, James Cash Penney finally took his

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company public, securing a listing on the New York Stock Exchange.²¹ Any celebration of this event was short-lived, as the stock market crashed one week later and the Great Depression formally began. The following year annual sales at J.C. Penney stores nationwide had dropped by \$17 million.²² Nevertheless, the company was still able to expand in Oklahoma throughout 1930, opening new stores in Carnegie, Cordell, Elk City, Hollis, and Hugo, bringing the total number of locations statewide to fifty.²³ Despite the agrarian and economic hardships across the state, only the Barnsdall and Tipton locations fell victim to the Depression, and every one of Penney's remaining Oklahoma stores survived even the subsequent population losses brought on by the Dust Bowl. In 1931, however, Penney's personal finances were in complete ruin. Prior to the stock market crash he had put up all of his shares of J.C. Penney stock as collateral for philanthropic organizations he had created, and he subsequently lost his entire savings in a failed bank he had overseen in Florida. Although bank failures were widespread across the nation, depositors in the Florida bank needed someone to blame, and Penney, despite being broke, soon found himself the target of their million-dollar lawsuit. He quietly sank into a deep emotional depression, believing himself to be, in his own words, "a complete failure," even contemplating suicide until a profound religious experience galvanized his Christian faith and gave him the strength to move forward.²⁴

Claremore J.C. Penney store in early 1940s (DeGoyler Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, A2004.0006 and A2004.0007).





J.C. Penney visiting local associates inside the Enid store, 1931 (DeGoyler Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, A2004.0006 and A2004.0007).

Throughout the Depression Penney found visiting J.C.Penney stores to be a therapeutic distraction from his personal problems. He also believed that his presence inside local stores could be therapeutic for his associates and customers. As an agriculturalist he additionally hoped his visits could bring him insight into how economic and agricultural conditions in the Midwest could be improved, since most of his locations were operating there. In spring 1931 Penney set aside three weeks to visit J.C.Penney stores in the region. As he made his way through Oklahoma, he spent considerable time visiting stores in the northeastern part of the state, as well as a stretch of his stores from Enid to Ardmore, walking through sales floors, talking to managers and associates, interacting with local customers, and inspecting sales records and stock room inventories. Penney visited his locations in Miami, Picher, Claremore, Vinita, and Perry before making his way west to Enid.

The residents of Enid were well aware of his coming and took advantage of his limited time in their city. Penney was invited to formally speak to five different local groups during the mere two days he was in Enid, and he accepted all of their invitations. On the evening of April 28 he gave a talk at a Sunday school banquet. The next morning at nine o'clock he addressed students at Enid High School, followed by students at Enid Business College at ten o'clock, next by students at Phillips University at eleven o'clock, and finally by a joint meeting of Enid civic clubs during the lunch hour. The rest of Penney's day was spent inspecting his Enid store and, after it had closed for the evening, hosting a meeting for regional associates in the store's upper merchandise balcony.²⁵ Penney's notes from this trip indicated his great pleasure with what he saw both inside and outside of the Enid J.C.Penney store, particularly regarding its manager, A. H. "Gus" Ehly:

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This is a fine-looking store—one of the best I have seen; in fact it is the store of the town. The stock is good—and clean—and Mr. Ehly has a good personnel who are “on their toes.” The Newspapers in Enid are very friendly to us; chain store agitation seems to have affected us but little. Mr. Ehly stands as high as any man in town. He is president of the Rotary Club, is on the board of the University Boy Scouts and is active in church work. He admits frankly that he has slipped the last two years and that his outside activities have interfered with his store operation, but he is remedying the situation.²⁶

The euphoria Penney experienced in Enid quickly faded the following day when he quietly arrived in Guthrie to visit the J.C.Penney store there and its manager, C. C. Hoag. “This store is very dark, dingy and unattractive—really junky,” wrote Penney. “Mr. Hoag had the hardest luck story regarding conditions and prospects that I had heard thus far on the trip. I am of the opinion that a change in management at this point might be productive of good results.”²⁷ Despite the fact that Penney had more than fourteen hundred stores nationwide, he remained well acquainted with each of his managers, their stores, and agricultural and economic conditions in their communities. Although Penney was founder and chairman of the board, it was not unusual for him to personally follow up on any letters he received from J.C.Penney associates once he returned to his office in New York City.²⁸

By 1934 J.C.Penney sales nationwide had finally begun to exceed their 1929 levels.²⁹ Ironically, Penney’s personal financial recovery had come about from the generosity of his own associates, who had heard

Interior of the downtown Oklahoma City J.C.Penney store at 303 Main, 1935 (DeGoyler Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, A2004.0006 and A2004.0007).



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about his troubles and donated portions of their own salaries and stock shares to help him recover.³⁰ The year 1934 was also significant for the J.C.Penney Company within Oklahoma, as the chain was finally able to open the first J.C.Penney store in downtown Oklahoma City at 303 Main.³¹ Oklahoma City had rapidly attained big city status after statehood, growing from just ten thousand people in 1900 to more than one hundred eighty thousand by 1930.³² Strangely, the capital's metropolitan size had actually worked against its attractiveness as a J.C.Penney location. While the Tulsa store had opened in 1929, J.C.Penney had traditionally avoided larger cities until 1931, when the company successfully opened a six-floor metropolitan J.C.Penney store in downtown Seattle, Washington.³³ Despite the significance of finally having a store in the capital city, Penney was unable to attend the grand opening. However, Lula Ammerman Sams, the wife of company president Earl Corder Sams, had grown up in Oklahoma City. As a personal and professional homecoming she returned with her husband to preside over the entire event on behalf of the J.C.Penney Company.³⁴



Lula (Ammerman) Sams and her husband, J.C.Penney President Earl Corder Sams, 1909. Lula was raised in Oklahoma City (DeGoyler Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, A2004.0006 and A2004.0007).

A year after the Oklahoma City store had opened, Penney set aside almost four weeks exclusively to visit his Oklahoma stores, associates, and customers. In fall 1935 he made contact with every location across the state, and from September to November he was personally able to visit thirty-six of the Oklahoma towns where J.C.Penney stores were located. The size of each community had no bearing on how much at-

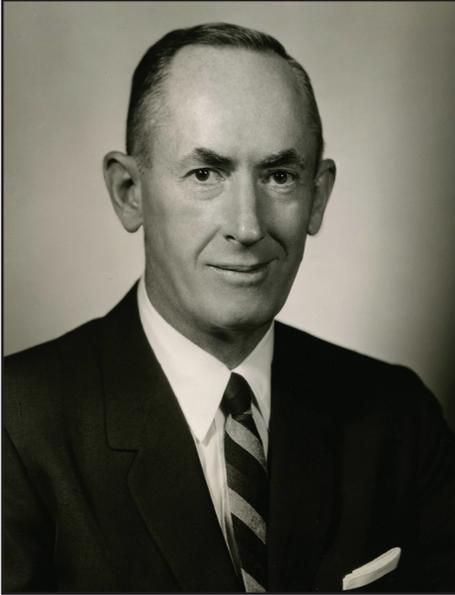
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tention he gave each store, as Penney spent as much time in Carnegie, Cordell, Hollis, Madill, and Picher as he did at larger J.C.Penney stores in Bartlesville, Lawton, and Oklahoma City. Penney also held in-depth store meetings inside J.C.Penney stores in twelve cities, ranging in size from Tulsa and Enid to Clinton and Pawhuska, where he could address crowds of his associates from area stores and motivate them in an atmosphere akin to a pep rally.³⁵ Although Penney was unable to visit all of his Oklahoma locations, he made sure in 1936 to swing by his stores in Hugo and Durant, which he had missed the previous year.³⁶

James Cash Penney was not shy about expressing his fondness for Oklahoma and its people. "You know," he opined in a later interview with the *Daily Oklahoman*, "Oklahoma has always been good to J.C.Penney in a business way. But, I think, even more important, it has been extra good to our company because of the men it has produced. Some of the finest managers we've ever had have come from Oklahoma."³⁷ Ray Haskell Jordan in particular had progressed from working at the tiny J.C.Penney store in Picher to being appointed president of the J.C.Penney Company in New York City. Like Penney, Jordan was also a Missouri native but had spent most of his adult life in Oklahoma, first as a student at the University of Oklahoma (OU) and then as a young school principal in Hominy. In 1929 Jordan became acquainted with Ellis James, his boardinghouse roommate who happened to be a management trainee at the Hominy J.C.Penney. Ellis's older brother, J. H. James, also worked for the company, managing the J.C.Penney store in downtown Tulsa. Ray Jordan soon became well acquainted with both brothers and their respective J.C.Penney stores. In 1930 Ellis James was given a promotion to manage Penney's store in Picher, a lead-mining boomtown near the Kansas border, and he successfully convinced Jordan to leave Hominy for a position alongside him in the J.C.Penney Company as a management trainee.³⁸

Ray Jordan was idealistic about his career move until he arrived in the rough, blue-collar town. The J.C.Penney store itself was located in the only building the company could lease in downtown Picher, far beneath the standards Penney would have preferred. The storefront was just twenty-eight feet wide, situated on top of an undermined portion of the business district. An unused basement perpetually held about a foot of what had to be lead-infested ground water. However, what lay beneath the sales floor was the least of Jordan's worries. Directly above the store's entrance on both sides of a vertical "J.C.PENNEY CO." sign that protruded from the building's second floor were cheap rooms utilized by prostitutes for perpetually serving the mining clientele as they

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Ray Jordan, J.C.Penney executive in late 1950s who began his career with the company in Picher, Oklahoma (DeGoyler Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, A2004.0006 and A2004.0007).

Picher J.C.Penney store, 1926 (DeGoyler Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, A2004.0006 and A2004.0007).



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surfaced from their subterranean shifts. “We constantly had to shoo the girls away from soliciting in front of our premises,” Jordan recalled in his 1990 memoir. “The valiant ‘nice’ ladies of the town were understandably somewhat skittish about the activities on the street.”³⁹ Jordan also realized that illegal activities of the women were quite mild in comparison to those of the men:

We were advised before we came to keep our bank deposits in Miami, Oklahoma, about 20 miles away. The local bank was robbed frequently. There were occasional gunfights in the street. It was said the desperadoes got rid of their victims by dropping them down the many empty mine shafts. . . . We were robbed at the Store several times at night. They came in through the skylight. Ellis and I took turns for a while hiding in the Store with a shotgun waiting for the robbers to show up. We undeniably demonstrated more “brawn” than brains. . . . Our only glass showcase in the front of the store was shot into from overhead twice during my stay in Picher, quite a drastic action from an unhappy client.⁴⁰

When the company promoted Ellis James to manage the J.C.Penney store in Frederick, Jordan did not hesitate to move with him before taking a promotion to work with J. H. James at the J.C.Penney in downtown Tulsa. Within a year Ray Jordan would find himself personally interacting with James Cash Penney during a Tulsa visit from the company founder.⁴¹ Even Jordan’s drafted service into the U.S. Navy did not stop his rise through the ranks of the J.C.Penney Company, culminating in his appointment to the corporate office in New York City where he would eventually be named company president. Just as Penney and his Kansas protégé Earl Corder Sams shaped the J.C.Penney Company into a national main street chain, Ray Jordan, in tandem with West Virginia native William “Mil” Batten, defined the second half of the century for J.C.Penney, with massive shopping mall prototypes, expanded product lines, catalog shopping, and credit sales.⁴² Jordan’s leadership of J.C.Penney would also clear the way for William R. Howell, Jr., another Oklahoman, to prepare the company for the twenty-first century. In time the downtown Tulsa store would become known throughout the company for producing several prominent J.C.Penney Company executives, including Jack Allmon, Karlis Knight, and future J.C.Penney President Jack B. Jackson.⁴³

Kingfisher native Samuel M. Walton also had joined Penney’s company in 1940 as a management trainee at the J.C.Penney store in downtown Des Moines, Iowa. Many of Walton’s initial ideas about

retail and merchandising were formed during his time with the company, which included working under highly regarded J.C.Penney store manager and trainer Duncan Major and even interacting with James Cash Penney himself during a store visit. "I worked for Penney's about eighteen months," recalled Walton in his autobiography, "and they were really the Cadillac of the industry as far as I was concerned."⁴⁴ Walton was so enthusiastic about J.C.Penney that he persuaded his younger brother Bud to join the company as a management trainee.⁴⁵ However, with the outbreak of World War II both of the Walton brothers, along with Ray Jordan, were forced to leave J.C.Penney for service in the U.S. armed forces.⁴⁶ Ironically, Sam Walton's permanent departure from J.C.Penney in 1942 would lead to a brief residency in Claremore and his introduction to Helen Robson, a local bachelorette and banker's daughter who would become his wife and eventually the *de facto* matriarch of the Walmart empire. The influence that Rogers County ultimately had on American retail in the late twentieth century is nothing short of phenomenal, considering the crucial role that longtime Claremore banker L. S. Robson played in helping Walton get his retail business off the ground and the fact that future J.C.Penney CEO William R. Howell, Jr., was growing up in Claremore at the exact same time.⁴⁷

In February 1947 James Cash Penney returned to Oklahoma City, not on business or pleasure but for what he felt was his Christian duty in postwar America. He joined fellow preacher W. C. Huckabee to present a two-day seminar on promoting and preserving world peace through Christianity; more than three thousand people showed up just to listen to Penney's speeches.⁴⁸ Two years later in 1949 the J.C.Penney Company opened an additional store in downtown Oklahoma City at 313 W. Commerce Street in the Capitol Hill Shopping District.⁴⁹ While this second Oklahoma City store was a conventional main street location, the postwar growth of suburban populations around Oklahoma City and Tulsa was forcing Penney and his company to develop new Oklahoma stores outside of their main street paradigm. By 1952 J.C.Penney had opened its first Oklahoma store away from a downtown business district in the Mayfair Shopping Center on North May Avenue between Warr Acres and what was then the northwestern fringe of Oklahoma City.⁵⁰ Two years later the company unveiled another suburban location in Tulsa at the Sheridan Village Shopping Center on East Admiral.⁵¹ By the late 1950s the success of these locations prompted the company to begin serving ever-increasing populations of Oklahoma suburbanites with additional shopping center stores. W. P. "Bill" Atkinson's creation and development of Midwest City as a

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formidable Oklahoma City suburb led the company to open its first store there in 1957 as part of Atkinson Plaza. In 1959 J.C. Penney also opened its first store in Norman on a freestanding location just west of downtown complete with its own parking lot.⁵²

Throughout the 1950s Oklahoma-based retailers such as Anthony's, OTASCO, and TG&Y had already begun to relocate their downtown stores outside of the city core, largely into open-air shopping centers and strip malls on suburban outskirts.⁵³ Nevertheless, the J.C. Penney Company remained dedicated to its main street presence in fifty of Oklahoma's central business districts. Nearly every downtown location across the state was modernized and remodeled during the decade with smooth-cladded storefronts, large J.C. PENNEY CO. lettering, improved interior lighting, carpeted and tiled flooring, cash registers, and air conditioning.⁵⁴ In addition, J.C. Penney significantly expanded its downtown stores in Altus, Ardmore, Bartlesville, Muskogee, Okmulgee, and Ponca City and built completely new, larger downtown locations in Clinton, Enid, Lawton, Perry, Shawnee, and Tulsa.⁵⁵ Despite these modernizations many of Oklahoma's J.C. Penney stores still retained the main street charm of James Cash Penney's original layouts and designs, notably high ceilings above the sales floor and wide merchandise balconies elevated over the back half of the store, accessible by an L-shaped staircase typically on the left side of the balcony.⁵⁶

The 1950s also marked a number of significant visits from James Cash Penney himself. At the beginning of the decade Penney traveled from New York City to Guymon, personally presenting the local J.C. Penney store and its associates with the company's Star of Stores Award.⁵⁷ In 1951 Penney made a trip to downtown Muskogee, holding a district meeting for the company inside the J.C. Penney store at 411 West Broadway.⁵⁸ Two years later Penney returned to Oklahoma City with his wife, Caroline, accepting invitations to address the Oklahoma legislature and the University of Oklahoma. On the evening he arrived in Oklahoma City, the Penneys were guests of honor in Anna B. Korn's home, attending a formal dinner that included Lieutenant Governor James E. Berry, House Speaker Jim Nance, and their wives. Penney formally addressed the Oklahoma legislature the following Monday, then traveled to Norman a day later to deliver a public lecture at OU's Business Administration Auditorium.⁵⁹ For a Missouri native who ostensibly resided in New York City, Penney had practically become an adopted son of the Sooner State, and his affection for Oklahoma was reciprocated by its people. In early 1955 the Oklahoma Memorial Association unanimously agreed to induct Penney into the Oklahoma Hall

of Fame, explicitly for “his success in holding the cost of quality goods within the price range of low income groups in Oklahoma,” as well as his numerous philanthropic activities.⁶⁰ In November 1955 Penney returned to downtown Oklahoma City to join his fellow Hall of Fame inductees, including Judge F. Hiner Dale, Tulsa philanthropist Annetta Childs, and archivist Dr. Gaston Little, for a lavish induction ceremony at the Biltmore Hotel.⁶¹

While the Hall of Fame ceremony was one of the most regal affairs in the state, James Cash Penney would continue returning to Oklahoma without regard to the stature of Oklahomans who invited him. In September 1957 the First Christian Church in Perry inquired if Penney could attend a church reception in his honor and possibly deliver a sermon for an outdoor religious service at Perry High School. Local organizers were pleasantly surprised when Penney accepted both offers. Coincidentally, a new J.C.Penney department store was also under construction on the square in downtown Perry, but Penney chose to focus his energies on the church’s events.⁶² He arrived in Oklahoma City two days ahead of the event, taking time to meet with Oklahoma J.C.Penney managers at the Skirvin Hotel before having one of them drive him to Perry the next morning to attend the reception at the church.⁶³ After the reception Penney was taken to the football stadium at Perry High School, where he delivered an interdenominational sermon titled “Christian Principles” in front of a large crowd. The event naturally became the top story in the *Perry Daily Journal*.⁶⁴

In August 1958 Penney made another trip to Oklahoma, traveling directly from a working vacation on his hometown Missouri farm to celebrate the grand reopening of a remodeled and expanded J.C.Penney store in downtown Ardmore.⁶⁵ Although he was nearly eighty-three, Penney gave four days of his time and energy to the southern Oklahoma town and its people. Penney was formally staying at the Ardmore Hotel, but his first evening was incredibly informal, having supper at the personal home of local store manager Alfred “Eddie” Plume and his family.⁶⁶ The next morning Penney spent time visiting with associates inside the Ardmore J.C.Penney store, including Maggie Fountain and Edna Wilkinson, women who had both worked for his company since the 1920s.⁶⁷ Penney broke away from the store at lunch to formally address the Ardmore Rotary Club, speaking to that group about the ethical role of the Bible in business before mingling that evening with about one hundred other J.C.Penney store managers and their families at the Lake Murray Lodge. On August 7, Penney’s third day in Ardmore, he formally opened the new downtown J.C.Penney store in front of a large, enthusiastic crowd, greeting customers for most of the day,

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even personally waiting on some of them. Penney spent his final day in Ardmore attending a Gideon's breakfast at his hotel, sharing his religious thoughts and convictions with a local group of Gideon's club members during their weekly meeting. Despite his near-celebrity status Penney was completely accessible to the general public and asked for no preferential treatment throughout his time in Ardmore. When he was finally ready to leave town, he informally requested that Eddie Plume's wife drive him to Will Rogers Airport. The following morning he was back to work in his New York City office at the nationwide company that bore his name.⁶⁸

A year later Penney would make a similar trip to Tulsa in celebration of a massive new J.C.Penney store downtown at the corner of Third and Main. Throughout the 1950s the J.C.Penney Company had been planning for a true metropolitan store in the heart of Tulsa, one that could tastefully compete against the prominent locations of downtown competitors like Brown-Dunkin, Froug's, Street's, and Vandever's. In the late 1950s J.C.Penney had arranged to construct and lease a completely new building: a modern four-story behemoth at 300 Main, just down the street from its existing store.⁶⁹ The new Tulsa store would become the largest Oklahoma location in the J.C.Penney chain, and Penney wanted to be on hand for its unveiling. During the grand opening events in August 1959 Penney's personal presence in downtown Tulsa became the front page story for Tulsa's newspapers on two consecutive days. In an interview with the *Tulsa Tribune* Penney disclosed that J.C.Penney was finally testing credit purchasing, a move he still morally opposed despite being outvoted by the rest of his board.⁷⁰ However, he was remarkably energetic and upbeat during the store's grand opening, shaking hands and joking with customers and their children throughout the festivities.⁷¹ Although Penney was staying at the Mayo Hotel, he readily accepted the invitation of Oral Jones, the Tulsa store manager, to attend a barbecue in the backyard of Jones's home, where he informally socialized with Tulsa associates and their spouses while eating hamburgers.⁷²

James Cash Penney celebrated his eighty-fifth birthday in 1960. Although he was well beyond a normal retirement age, he remained busy opening new and improved J.C.Penney stores across the nation, giving speeches and sermons, writing books, and occasionally even performing manual labor on the Missouri farm where his life had begun. He also returned to Oklahoma two more times before the end of his life. In the summer of 1964 after buying Aberdeen Angus bulls in Kansas, Penney swung through Oklahoma City to personally spend time with Anna Brosius Korn, his ninety-five-year-old cousin.⁷³ Korn had suffered

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a debilitating stroke but still enjoyed Penney's visit during what would become the final year of her life.⁷⁴ Aside from visiting Anna Korn, Penney was also planning another trip to Oklahoma City that November when a massive new J.C.Penney store was scheduled to open at the newly constructed Shepherd Mall. The J.C.Penney store at Shepherd Mall was significant for Penney and his chain, as it would begin the company's exodus from Oklahoma's main streets into the postmodern world of regional shopping malls. Former Oklahoman Ray Jordan, as J.C.Penney company president in New York City, was now responsible for creating gigantic, full-line Penney's department stores across the nation. These stores were moving beyond Penney's traditional offerings of clothing, shoes, linens, and accessories to additional J.C.Penney product lines such as furniture, hardware, automotive batteries and tires, major Penncrest appliances, music, and sporting goods.⁷⁵ The new suburban mall stores all capitalized on cheaper land, ample free parking, lower taxes, and significantly larger buildings outside of the traditional downtown core, leading to greater product selection,

J. C. Penney waits on a customer as the new store in Shepherd Mall, 1964 (DeGoyler Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, A2004.0006 and A2004.0007).



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J.C.PENNEY DEPARTMENT STORES IN OKLAHOMA DURING JAMES CASH PENNEY'S LIFETIME ¹			
CITY	YEAR OPENED	CITY	YEAR OPENED
Ada	1925	Lawton*	1924
Altus*	1925	Madill	1929
Alva	1923	McAlester*	1925
Ardmore*	1918	Miami	1920
Barnsdall	1929	<i>Midwest City*</i>	1957
Bartlesville*	1920	Muskogee*	1917
Blackwell	1917	<i>Norman*</i>	1959
Bristow	1924	OKC #778*	1934
Carnegie	1930	OKC #1155	1949
Cherokee	1926	<i>OKC #1634</i>	1952
Chickasha	1923	<i>OKC #177-6</i>	1964
Claremore*	1927	Okmulgee	1916
Clinton	1929	Okemah	1928
Cordell	1930	Pauls Valley	1929
Cushing	1924	Pawhuska	1925
Duncan	1929	Perry	1925
Durant	1926	Picher	1926
El Reno	1920	Ponca City*	1923
Elk City	1931	Sapulpa	1923
Enid*	1918	Sayre	1929
Frederick	1924	Shawnee*	1922
Guthrie	1923	Stillwater*	1927
Guymon	1928	Tipton	1929
Henryetta	1929	Tulsa #1058*	1929
Hobart	1927	<i>Tulsa #1657</i>	1954
Holdenville	1929	<i>Tulsa #781*</i>	1965
Hollis	1930	Vinita	1923
Hominy	1927	Wewoka	1940
Hugo	1930	Woodward	1929
Kingfisher	1925		

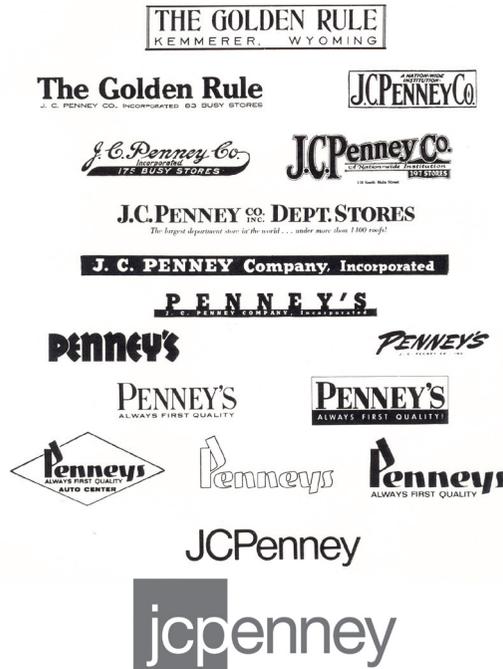
*Asterisks indicate cities currently served (as of 2011) by J.C.Penney department stores in shopping malls or suburban locations, including Moore (OKC) and Owasso (Tulsa). J.C.Penney stores in bold italics were opened in suburban shopping centers, rather than traditional "Main Street" locations downtown. Penney's last downtown location in Oklahoma closed in 2004.

Tulsa store #781 in the Tulsa Promenade Mall on South Yale Avenue is the only current J.C.Penney department store in Oklahoma that was actually operating in the same location (then known as Southland Center) during James Cash Penney's lifetime.

¹ Data for chart acquired by author, courtesy of the J.C.Penney Company Records at DeGolyer Library (dCPCR) and the current J.C.Penney Company department store locator at jcpenny.com.

increased customer traffic, faster inventory turnover, and ultimately higher profits for the J.C.Penney Company.

Although James Cash Penney had embraced main street locations from the very inception of his company, Ray Jordan and CEO Mil Batten believed that it would be virtually impossible to create new, full-line J.C.Penney stores in traditional downtown districts.⁷⁶ In addition, as suburban populations began to sprawl, downtowns were increasingly losing their prestige and customers to larger suburban shopping centers outside of the city core. Downtown Oklahoma City, despite having an elaborate revitalization plan from renowned architect I. M. Pei, had already lost fifty-two businesses to the suburbs just in 1962.⁷⁷ Even the massive J.C.Penney store Penney had personally unveiled in the heart of downtown Tulsa had lost much of its luster in the short time since it had been open; the company was already planning to augment that



Evolution of J.C. Penney logos, 1902-2011 (J.C. Penney Company; DeGoyler Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, A2004.0006 and A2004.0007).

store by opening another full-line store in a new shopping center on south Yale Avenue.⁷⁸ J.C. Penney had operated profitably two stores in downtown Oklahoma City since 1949, the original 1934 location at 303 Main and the larger, newer store in the Capitol Hill shopping district on Commerce Street. However, the Main Street store, even with forty thousand square feet of space, was increasingly regarded by the company as too small for Oklahoma City, where the urban population alone had nearly doubled in the thirty years since the store had opened.⁷⁹ As a result the J.C. Penney Company had actively been looking to relocate Oklahoma City's Main Street store to a bigger and better location, while still retaining its highly successful manager Charles V. Truhitte. When commercial developers bought the Shepherd Farm along Northwest Twenty-third Street and proposed building a regional shopping mall on its rural land just west of Pennsylvania Avenue, Truhitte, Jordan, Batten, and Penney all embraced moving Oklahoma City's Main Street store to that site, with a Penney's full-line location that would cover more than two hundred thousand square feet, in addition to featuring a Penney's Automotive Center with sixteen service bays.⁸⁰

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*William R. Howell, Jr., 1979
(DeGoyler Library, Southern
Methodist University, Dal-
las, Texas, A2004.0006 and
A2004.0007).*



Even though he was almost ninety years old, James Cash Penney was not about to miss the grand opening for the largest J.C. Penney store Oklahoma had ever seen up to that point.⁸¹ Penney flew into Will Rogers Airport the day before the grand opening, arriving in a cowboy hat and a suit. After he had carefully navigated the airport's stairways, he quickly began to move about as he spoke to local press and the public. "One of the reasons I've always liked to come to Oklahoma City," Penney told the *Daily Oklahoman*, "is that I've always been very fond of Charley Truhitte. He has done a peach of a job in Oklahoma City in a store that wasn't really the kind of operation your city deserved. But we're proud of our new store, and it is worthy of this community."⁸² James Cash Penney and his company made the grand opening for the new Oklahoma City store a major event for the entire metropolitan area, with popular musical group The Lettermen showing up to sign autographs for hysterical teenage girls and iconic *Bonanza* actor Lorne Greene dropping by the store for a live performance of his number one hit single, "Ringo."⁸³ Penney himself was actively on hand for the grand opening festivities, spending most of the morning greeting and interacting with excited shoppers, occasionally even ringing up merchandise at cash registers. He then spoke at a luncheon for the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce before flying out the next morning.⁸⁴

During Penney's hectic, final trip through Oklahoma, a reporter inquired if he ever planned to rest. Penney smiled and replied, "When

I'm dead. And the doctors tell me that I'm good for at least a hundred—barring accidents.”⁸⁵ Although Penney's eyesight was rapidly failing, his body, mind, and soul were still vibrant. He continued traveling on behalf of his company throughout the 1960s and, whenever he was not on the road, showing up for work at his New York City office Monday through Friday even into the 1970s when he was well past ninety.⁸⁶ His daughter's husband, a physician at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, had noted during his medical examination that Penney's calf muscles resembled those of a powerful athlete due to his almost constant movement and activity on his feet.⁸⁷ Penney's mind remained equally fit, and even as he entered his tenth decade of living, he envisioned the twilight of his existence as possibly his greatest opportunity to contribute back to society through his philanthropic foundation and personal interactions with people, particularly youth in 4-H clubs.⁸⁸ “God willing,” he wrote in his personal testimony, “I hope to live to reach the century mark. I want the remaining golden years of my life to be the best and most useful ones of all.”⁸⁹ On February 12, 1971, Penney was just five years shy of that mark, lying in a New York City hospital bed, when a heart attack quietly ended his incredible life.⁹⁰ Nine months later when the new Oklahoma Hall of Fame gallery was completed at the Oklahoma Heritage Center, James Cash Penney's portrait was the first to be installed, with its placement personally overseen by his friend Charles Ross Anthony.⁹¹

In 1972 former Tulsa associate Jack B. Jackson became president of the J.C.Penney Company.⁹² Although Ray Jordan had retired as president two years before Penney's death, he remained on the board of directors until 1976, just as another ambitious Oklahoman was rising to take his place.⁹³ William R. Howell, Jr., a native of Rogers County, had practically grown up inside Oklahoma J.C.Penney stores; his father had a long and successful tenure managing Penney's location in downtown Claremore.⁹⁴ Even when Howell was an infant, his mother Opal had brought him into the store every night after closing, where he would sleep while she and her husband restocked shelves and processed store paperwork.⁹⁵ After graduating from OU in 1958 Howell quickly rose from being a J.C.Penney management trainee to a store manager in Tulsa, eventually earning an appointment as a junior executive at the company headquarters in New York City. By 1975 W. R. Howell was executive vice president, analyzing socioeconomic retail trends and planning future J.C.Penney stores for future J.C.Penney customers.⁹⁶ For the rest of the twentieth century, Howell would largely be responsible for J.C.Penney's transformation from a main street department store in rural communities to the suburban shopping mall

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anchor that Oklahoma and the rest of the United States have known for the past four decades.⁹⁷ As the CEO of J.C.Penney from 1983 to 1995 Howell would also be instrumental in establishing the J.C.Penney Leadership Program at OU, as well as relocating the J.C.Penney company headquarters from its urban skyscraper in New York City to a pastoral campus northwest of Plano, Texas, just an hour south of the Oklahoma state line.⁹⁸

While James Cash Penney's main street department stores have evolved into nineteen suburban locations across the state, Oklahoma's other downtown dynasties such as John A. Brown, Halliburton's, Kerr's, Froug's, Vandever's, and Brown-Dunkin have disappeared in their entirety. Even the retail chain of Penney's protégé Charles Ross Anthony is no longer identifiable by either the Anthony's name or its Oklahoma heritage.⁹⁹ Oklahoma has exponentially changed both culturally and commercially over the course of its first century, with its retail landscape now dominated by the likes of Walmart, Target, and Dillard's. Yet James Cash Penney's abbreviated name remains visible and relevant to virtually every Oklahoman today, from JCPenney stores in their suburban shopping centers to the jcpenney.com website on their computer screens and smartphones. Amazingly, almost fifty years have passed since James Cash Penney last set foot on Oklahoma soil, but his impact on the state and its people can still be seen and felt.

Endnotes

¹David Delbert Kruger is the agricultural research librarian at the University of Wyoming in Laramie, Wyoming. His childhood fascination with J.C.Penney department stores in small agrarian towns has evolved into research on the historical significance of James Cash Penney and his retail chain. The author would like to thank Joan Gosnell, Southern Methodist University archivist (and former J.C.Penney Company archivist) in charge of the J.C.Penney Collection at DeGolyer Library, and Mary Frances Wagley, daughter of James Cash Penney, for their assistance in researching this article.

²J.C.Penney was unique in bringing a national department store to rural communities rather than simply merchandising to rural customers via catalog as Sears, Roebuck, and Company and Montgomery Ward had historically done. Although Penney opened his first department store in 1902, Sears, Roebuck, and Company had no retail stores until 1925, while Montgomery Ward was strictly a catalog operation until 1926, with its first store opening in Plymouth, Indiana. By contrast, J.C.Penney had retail stores since 1902 but no catalog operations until 1964.

³"Report of Necrology Committee of Oklahoma Press Association," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 11 (June 1933): 875-76; Mark R. Everett, "In Memory of Anna Lee Brosius Korn," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 44, no. 2 (Summer 1966): 144-46. The Oklahoma Heritage Association was originally created by Anna B. Korn in 1927 under the name Oklahoma Memorial Association. Korn also founded the Oklahoma Hall of Fame that same year.

⁴"Penney Would Make a Change," *Daily Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City), February 22, 1953, 27; Gilbert Hill, "Vision Carries Penney to New City Frontier: Store Founder Likes Brand of Managers from Oklahoma," *Daily Oklahoman*, November 5, 1964, 34. Penney

continued visiting Korn in Oklahoma City when she was ninety-five and he was nearly ninety.

⁴ James Cash Penney, *Fifty Years with the Golden Rule* (New York City: Harper, 1950), 51.

⁵ For further details about the genesis of Penney's enterprise, see James Cash Penney, *J. C. Penney: The Man with a Thousand Partners* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1931), 14-68; and Mary Elizabeth Curry, *Creating an American Institution: The Merchandising Genius of J. C. Penney* (New York City: Garland, 1993), 109-43.

⁶ Roy Stewart, *One of a Kind: The Life of C.R. Anthony* (Oklahoma City: Western Heritage Books, 1981), 32-34. Penney and Anthony both bought merchandise through the Ely Walker Dry Goods Company warehouse in Saint Louis. When they first met in 1904, Anthony had just brought up a load of cattle to sell before placing orders at the warehouse.

⁷ "The Chief: Mr. C. R. Anthony was born with a Dream," unauthored pamphlet celebrating the centennial of C. R. Anthony's birth, 1984, 5, vertical file, Charles Ross Anthony, Research Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, OK (hereafter cited as VFCRA).

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Ed Neighbors had been one of Penney's first partners and had direct authority over Anthony. Although Anthony was clearly unhappy with Neighbors's decision, financing J.C.Penney store ownership with future store profits was more of an exception than a rule. See David Delbert Kruger, "Idaho and the Development of the J.C.Penney Chain," *Idaho Yesterdays* 51, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2010): *online*. <http://134.50.3.223/idahoyesterdays/index.php/IY/article/view/23/67>.

¹⁰ "The Chief," 5, VFCRA; Stewart, *One of a Kind*, 36-37.

¹¹ In local newspaper advertisements during the 1920s and 1930s it was not uncommon for either chain to welcome the other to an Oklahoma town whenever a new location was opened, in some cases, immediately next door. Like their founders, the managers of C.R.Anthony and J.C.Penney stores typically became good friends.

¹² Quoted in Stewart, *One of a Kind*, 38.

¹³ David Delbert Kruger, "J.C.Penney: Missouri Man, Wyoming Institution," *Annals of Wyoming* 80, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 28.

¹⁴ Penney, *Fifty Years with the Golden Rule*, 93.

¹⁵ J.C.Penney Store Open/Close Date Lists, Box 222, A2004.0007, J.C.Penney Company Records, DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX (hereafter cited as JCPCR, DeGolyer Library).

¹⁶ *Dynamo J.C.Penney Company Associate Newsletter* (June 1920): 32.

¹⁷ Curry, *Creating an American Institution*, 256.

¹⁸ Glen G. White, "Picking Sites for Penney Stores," *Chain Store Age* 1, no. 2 (July 1925): 5. In addition to Penney's Oklahoma ties to Anna B. Korn, Earl Sams's wife, the former Lula Ammerman, had grown up in Oklahoma City while J.C.Penney real estate director Earl A. Ross was born and raised just forty miles north of the Oklahoma state line in Clearwater, Kansas.

¹⁹ J.C.Penney Store Open/Close Date Lists, JCPCR, DeGolyer Library. Penney's locations in Clinton, Duncan, and Guymon were previously J.B.Byars stores; Penney had been friends with Byars since their early days in the Golden Rule syndicate and bought out the stores on friendly terms before converting them to J.C.Penney locations from 1928 to 1929.

²⁰ Penney, *Fifty Years*, 119-23, 127; Curry, *Creating an American Institution*, 208-12, 224. Penney remained involved in farming and ranching well into his eighties, with sizable operations in New York, Florida, and Missouri.

²¹ Curry, *Creating an American Institution*, 256-57.

²² *Ibid.*, 266.

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²³ J.C.Penney Store Open/Close Date Lists, JCPCR, DeGolyer Library.

²⁴ Mary Frances Wagley, interview by the author, August 18, 2010. Penney's experiences during the Great Depression, particularly his supernatural experience at the Kellogg Sanitarium in 1931, ultimately galvanized his Christian faith. Much of his subsequent personal writings, even books he wrote ostensibly about the J.C.Penney Company, explicitly address his belief and relationship with Jesus Christ. See Orlando Tibbett's *The Spiritual Journey of J. C. Penney* (Danbury, CT: Rutledge, 1999) for greater detail about Penney's Christian faith and his life-changing experience at the Kellogg Sanitarium.

²⁵ James Cash Penney, Report: Covering Visits to Certain J.C.Penney Company Stores in Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, Nebraska, and Iowa, April 26 to May 15, 1931, file C-1, box C-2, A2004.0006, J. C. Penney Papers, DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX (hereafter cited as JCPP, DeGolyer Library), 6-10.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 10. Handwritten company records for the Guthrie store indicate that Hoag "resigned" in 1934.

²⁸ James Cash Penney to W. A. Reynolds, April 20, 1933, correspondence to J. C. Penney Building Department, box C-1, JCPP, DeGolyer Library.

²⁹ Curry, *Creating an American Institution*, 256.

³⁰ *J. C. Penney: An American Legacy; A 90th Anniversary History* (Plano, Texas: J.C.Penney Company Communications, 1992), 16.

³¹ History for Oklahoma City, Oklahoma J.C.Penney Stores #778, 1155, 1634, 0177-6, 0799-7, 1122-1, 2682-3, December 1997, electronic files, JCPCR, DeGolyer Library.

³² Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, Volume I: Population, 1910: Population of Cities, Table 5.8 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1913), 86; Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Population Volume III, Part 2, Population Oklahoma, Table 21 (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1932), 598. Population figures for Oklahoma City were 4,151 in 1890; 10,037 in 1900; and 185, 389 in 1930.

³³ Curry, *Creating an American Institution*, 271.

³⁴ "President of Penney Firm to See Opening of New Store in City," *Daily Oklahoman*, October 17, 1934, 1, 2B.

³⁵ James Cash Penney, Recapitulation 1935 J.C. Penney Store Visiting Trips, 1935, file C-1, box C-2, JCPP, DeGolyer Library, 1-2; Wagley interview.

³⁶ James Cash Penney, Recapitulation—Arkansas-Texas Trip. February 17—March 13, 1936, file C-1, box C-2, JCPP, DeGolyer Library.

³⁷ Hill, "Vision Carries Penney," *Daily Oklahoman*, November 5, 1964, 34.

³⁸ Ray H. Jordan, *Something to Remember* (New York City: J.C.Penney Company Publications, 1990), 12, J.C.Penney Company Executive Biographies, box 1, JCPCR, DeGolyer Library. Over the past five years, Picher has become an abandoned Superfund ghost town, but it had a population of nearly eight thousand people when Ray Jordan worked there, with at least four other department stores downtown, including C.R.Anthony. Mickey Mantle married his wife Merlyn in Picher; Rascal Flatts country music star Joe Don Rooney also grew up in Picher.

³⁹ Jordan, *Something to Remember*, 13.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴² Barnaby J. Feder, "Ray H. Jordan, Innovator at J.C.Penney, Dies at 98," *New York Times*, September 19, 2003. Although CEO Mil Batten is regarded as a retail visionary during Jordan's time as a J.C.Penney executive, Jordan is widely credited for moving

J.C.Penney into the catalog business in 1964. When Jordan wished to retire in 1964, Batten persuaded him to stay on as company president until 1968.

⁴³ Jordan, *Something to Remember*, 17; Jack B. Jackson served as president of the J.C.Penney Company from 1972 to 1976.

⁴⁴ Samuel M. Walton and John Huey, *Sam Walton: Made in America* (New York City: Doubleday, 1992), 24. Walton was highly influenced by the training of Des Moines J.C.Penney manager Duncan "Dunc" Major. See also, Vance H. Trimble, *Sam Walton: The Inside Story of America's Richest Man* (New York City: Dutton, 1990), 34-36.

⁴⁵ James L. "Bud" Walton served as a J.C.Penney management trainee in Penney's Cedar Rapids, Iowa, store. He later became a crucial partner for his brother in creating Walmart and was an influential voice in that company until his death in 1995.

⁴⁶ J.C.Penney associates Sam Walton and future CEO Mil Batten both left J.C.Penney to serve in the U.S. Army during World War II, while Ray Jordan and Bud Walton left J.C.Penney for service in the U.S. Navy.

⁴⁷ In 1968 Claremore would also become Sam Walton's first Walmart location outside of Arkansas. From 1987 to 1992 Sam Walton, William R. Howell, Jr., and Helen Robson Walton would all be inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame.

⁴⁸ "Penney, Huckabee End Speaking Visit," *Daily Oklahoman*, February 15, 1947, 3.

⁴⁹ History for Oklahoma City, Oklahoma J.C.Penney Stores, JCPCR, DeGolyer Library.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ History for Tulsa, Oklahoma J.C.Penney Stores #1556, 2328-3, Tulsa, OK, April 1997, electronic files, JCPCR, DeGolyer Library. W. R. Howell, Jr., would eventually oversee this store and, like his father, firmly establish his reputation as an outstanding J.C.Penney manager.

⁵² History for Norman, Oklahoma J.C.Penney Stores #705, 1922-4, 2369-7, January 2001, electronic files, JCPCR, DeGolyer Library.

⁵³ Beginning in the late 1950s yellow page business listings for Anthony's, OTASCO, and TG&Y stores throughout Oklahoma showed increasing relocations away from previous downtown locations to strip center or freestanding locations on what would have been the outskirts of each city.

⁵⁴ Store renovations during the 1950s also involved the removal of the complex and antiquated cable system for sending and receiving cash, known as the Lamson Cash Conveyor, since secure cash registers rendered it obsolete.

⁵⁵ Store data sheets for Oklahoma J.C.Penney Stores: Altus, Ardmore, Bartlesville, Clinton, Enid, Lawton, Muskogee, Perry, Ponca City, Shawnee, and Tulsa, 1970, JPCR, DeGolyer Library.

⁵⁶ For greater detail on early J.C.Penney store designs and their evolution, see David Delbert Kruger, "Changing Times, Changing Spaces: the South Dakota Stores of J.C.Penney," *South Dakota History* 40, no. 4 (Winter 2010), 295-334.

⁵⁷ Photograph of James Cash Penney presenting award to Guymon store associates, 1950, Historical Store Photograph Collection, JCPCR, DeGolyer Library.

⁵⁸ History for Muskogee, Oklahoma J.C.Penney Stores #136, 1406-8, 2288-9, July 2001, JCPCR, DeGolyer Library.

⁵⁹ "Penney Would Make a Change," *Daily Oklahoman*, February 22, 1953, 27.

⁶⁰ Jack Jones, "J. C. Penney Gets an Oklahoma Honor: Five Men, Woman Named to Hall of Fame," *Daily Oklahoman*, April 16, 1955, 22. Other inductees that year included broadcaster and Tulsa native Paul Harvey and Congressman Ross Rizley.

⁶¹ Jim Young, "Six to Get High State Honors," *Daily Oklahoman*, November 15, 1955, 10. Paul Harvey was unable to attend the ceremony that year.

⁶² "The East Side of Perry's Square will Be Vastly Different," *Perry (OK) Daily Journal*, October 24, 1957, 1. Within two months of Penney's visit the J.C.Penney store in

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Perry moved from the north side of the square to the Foster Building on the east side, occupying what had previously housed the Roxy Theater and Kroemer's Department Store.

⁶³ James Cash Penney travel log for 1957, box 45, JCPP, DeGolyer Library.

⁶⁴ "Penney to Speak After Reception on Sunday," *Perry Daily Journal*, September 13 1957, 1. "Public Invited to Reception for Penney," *Perry Daily Journal*, September 15, 1957, 1.

⁶⁵ History for Ardmore, Oklahoma J.C.Penney Stores #183, 0141-2, July 2001, JCPCR, DeGolyer Library.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* Eddie Plume had managed the Ardmore J.C.Penney for nearly three decades, retiring just two years after Penney's personal visit. If Penney knew a manager well, it was not uncommon for him to even stay overnight as a guest in their home.

⁶⁷ *Daily Ardmoreite*, August 6, 1958, 3B.

⁶⁸ James Cash Penney travel log for 1958, box 45, JCPP, DeGolyer Library.

⁶⁹ History for Tulsa, Oklahoma J.C.Penney Stores, JCPCR, DeGolyer Library.

⁷⁰ "Penney Stores Testing Credit, Founder Admits," *Tulsa Tribune*, July 20, 1959, 1, 29.

⁷¹ "Penney Customers Shake Hands With the Big Boss," *Tulsa Daily World*, July 21, 1959, 1.

⁷² History for Tulsa, Oklahoma J.C.Penney Stores, JCPCR, DeGolyer Library; James Cash Penney travel log for 1959, Box 45, JCPP, DeGolyer Library.

⁷³ Hill, "Vision Carries Penney," 34. Penney himself was a prominent cattle breeder, with his Angus bulls raised and sold on the family farm in Missouri. Anna B. Korn would die less than a year after Penney's final visit, on October 12, 1965.

⁷⁴ Everett, "In Memory of Anna Lee Brosius Korn," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 44, no. 2 (Summer 1966): 144-46. Despite her prominent identity as an Oklahoman, Anna Korn was buried in Hamilton, Missouri, where both she and James Cash Penney had been born.

⁷⁵ J.C.Penney CEO William "Mil" Batten was also largely responsible for J.C.Penney's initial move into shopping malls, even though most of the company's stores still remained in rural downtown locations.

⁷⁶ Audio transcript of interview with Mil Batten, May 16, 1996, box 7, A2004.0007, JCPCR, DeGolyer Library.

⁷⁷ Steve Lackmeyer and Jack Money, *OKC: Second Time Around* (Oklahoma City: Full Circle Press, 2006), 6.

⁷⁸ "J.C.Penney Opening Set," *Tulsa Daily World*, October 4, 1965, 3; History for Tulsa, Oklahoma J.C.Penney Stores #1556, 2328-3, Tulsa, OK, April 1997, JCPCR, DeGolyer Library. The new shopping center originally opened as Southland before eventually being renamed the Tulsa Promenade Mall. J.C.Penney would only occupy its newer downtown Tulsa store for twenty years, shutting it down as soon as the lease expired in 1979.

⁷⁹ History for Oklahoma City, Oklahoma J.C.Penney Stores, JCPCR, DeGolyer Library.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* Shepherd Mall ultimately bordered Northwest Twenty-third and North Villa Avenue, with a J.C.Penney location prominently visible from both streets.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* In 1974 the Shepherd Mall J.C.Penney store was eclipsed in size by an even larger location on the southern edge of Oklahoma City at Crossroads Mall. J.C.Penney closed its downtown Oklahoma City store on Commerce Street the following year. The massive J.C.Penney stores at Shepherd Mall and Crossroads Mall permanently closed in 1997 and 2007, respectively, in favor of newer locations at Penn Square Mall and Quail Springs Center.

⁸² Hill, "Vision Carries Penney," 34.

⁸³ *Daily Oklahoman*, November 5, 1965, 20; *Daily Oklahoman*, November 7, 1965, 7;

History for Oklahoma City, Oklahoma J.C.Penney Stores, JCPCR, DeGolyer Library. Store manager Charles Truhitte said that on the day of Lorne Greene's live performance, the store sold more than seven hundred copies of Greene's album.

⁸⁴ History for Oklahoma City, Oklahoma J.C.Penney Stores, JCPCR, DeGolyer Library; Hill, "Vision Carries Penney," 34.

⁸⁵ Hill, "Vision Carries Penney," 34.

⁸⁶ James Cash Penney, personal diary, 1970, box C-1, A 2004.0006, JCPP, DeGolyer Library.

⁸⁷ Wagley interview.

⁸⁸ Curry, *Creating an American Institution*, 314-16.

⁸⁹ James Cash Penney, personal testimony, 1971, box C-1, A 2004.0006, JCPP, DeGolyer Library, 4.

⁹⁰ Wagley interview.

⁹¹ Stewart, *One of a Kind*, 38. Like Penney, Anthony would be involved in his own stores even into his nineties, passing away in 1976 at the age of ninety-one.

⁹² After his retirement from the J.C.Penney Company in 1976, Jack B. Jackson spent the remainder of his life raising quarter horses on his ranch near Aubrey, Texas.

⁹³ Barnaby J. Feder, "Ray H. Jordan, Innovator at J.C.Penney, Dies at 98," *New York Times*, September 19, 2003, A25. Former Tulsa associate Jack B. Jackson also served as J.C.Penney president from 1972 to 1976.

⁹⁴ History for Claremore, Oklahoma J.C.Penney Stores #791, 2339-0, July 2001, JCPCR, DeGolyer Library. Howell's father, William R. Howell, Sr., managed the Claremore J.C.Penney from 1935 until his retirement in 1964.

⁹⁵ Timeline for William R. Howell, J.C.Penney Company executive biographies, box 1, A 2004.0007, JCPCR, DeGolyer Library. Howell was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1989.

⁹⁶ *J. C. Penney: An American Legacy; A 90th Anniversary* (Plano, TX: J.C.Penney Communications, 1992), 29.

⁹⁷ In the 1980s alone twenty Oklahoma J.C.Penney stores left their downtown business districts either for new shopping center locations or permanent closure. In 2004 the J.C.Penney Company shut down the last of its main street locations in the state, a sixty-year-old department store in downtown Duncan.

⁹⁸ The J.C.Penney Corporate Headquarters continues to operate out of its Legacy Drive campus near Plano, Texas.

⁹⁹ Gypsy Hogan, "Planned Sale of Anthony's Stores Saddens Customers, Employees," *Daily Oklahoman*, March 7, 1997. Since 1997 Stage Stores of Houston, Texas, has operated what had once been the Anthony's chain, retiring the "C.R.Anthony/Anthony's" name and the company's Oklahoma City headquarters soon after the acquisition. In sharp contrast the infamous creation of Sam Walton, another former Penney associate, has become the most dominant retailer the world has ever seen, with more than one hundred locations in Oklahoma and nearly eight thousand more across fifteen countries.