

## FRANCIS, CHICKASAW NATION, 1894

By Reita Sturdivant\*

Material for this historical sketch was taken from Governmental records, from newspapers printed in the Territorial days and from talking with people. Records from the Post Office Department, Washington, D.C., show that the post office at Francis, Pontotoc County, Oklahoma, was established as Newton, Chickasaw Nation, Indian Territory, on April 17, 1894. Its name was changed to Francis on June 5, 1902.

W. I. Cleveland was the first appointed postmaster in 1894 and held that position for a number of years. Newton was the beginning of one of the most thriving and colorful towns in the Chickasaw Nation. It grew slowly at first and then seems to have sprung up over night. Newton consisted of one store and the post office and was established on the present townsite of Francis, but later was moved about one mile east near what is now Cedar Grove. When the Frisco railroad was laid in 1900, it missed Newton by a mile and the town was moved back to the present site.

Francis was surveyed by the United States Government January 7-15, 1898. The town was approved by the Department of Interior, six years later, on November 12, 1903. During the intervening years, 1898 to 1903, there was some difficulty in getting the name changed from Newton to Francis. There was already one post office by the name of Francis in the Indian Territory, about three miles out of Sapulpa, and the Post Office Department refused to allow the name to be changed. The post office remained Newton, but the station was called Francis. Thus we find a town with two names. Perhaps it is the only town in the state which can claim this distinction.

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\* Mrs. Reita Sturdivant was reared in Francis, Oklahoma, and moved to Ada in 1924 entering East Central State College with her daughter Lucille. In recent years she has devoted her interests to handicraft, restoration of old furniture and wood carving. She is also an artist and talented in music, which she taught in public schools for several years. In her interest in antiques, she found an almost mutilated copy of *The Francis Banner* printed in 1901. This is a "Special Trades Addition" giving many notes on the history of this once thriving town on the Frisco Railway in Pontotoc County. From this old paper and additional research among some of the old-timers, she has produced a history of Francis for *The Chronicles*.

Mrs. Sturdivant is the daughter of the late L. C. Oliver, a business man of Alton, Oklahoma. Her mother Mary Etta Latta was seven-eighths Choctaw Indian. Her daughter Mrs. Lucille Braithwaite of Virginia now holds a position in the State Department of Virginia. Her son, C. O. Sturdivant operates a manufacturing business in Houston, Texas.

Mrs. Sturdivant's home in Ada has much of her art work and handicraft, including chairs which she carved and made. In preparing this history of Francis she produced a complete copy of the old newspaper, *The Francis Banner* column for column, including her own drawings of the prints of individuals and scenes that appear in this paper.—Ed.

Francis, named after ex-governor David R. Francis of Missouri, President of the St. Louis World's Fair Association, was a very popular man in St. Louis. Some of the "Old Timers", however, say the town was named for Bob Francis, Assistant Superintendent of the railroad. The records show that Francis was really named for ex-Governor David R. Francis, who was very proud of his namesake and well pleased with her bright prospects.

A few years prior to the birth of Francis the Indian Territory was a vast unknown country—a veritable forest and prairie combined—the abode of the "Red Man" who reigned in peace serene, as given in glowing accounts of this region.

The general topography was that of rolling prairies, level prairies and hills with streams, ponds and lakes intermingling. Mineral and stone was found in abundance, plenty of wild game such as quail, turkey and deer. In winter and spring, ducks and geese were added to the list. The fertile soil consisted of three types, the black loam, the red and the gray. Any kind of vegetable, fruit and grain could be grown in either one soil or the other. The luxuriant growth of native grass was especially good for raising stock. There was also plenty of oak timber for manufacturing purposes, fencing and fuel.

All of these qualities boosted the Chickasaw Nation as the "cream of the country", truly a "land flowing with milk and honey," which was believed to have more commercial worth than any other area of equal size, affording thousands of opportunities to the farmer, stockman, the business and professional man. The laws of the Chickasaw Nation were enforced by both its own officers and the United States Government, making it a safe place in which to live.

The establishment of the Frisco Railroad system in 1900, was an important factor to the growth and prosperity of the town. Francis was made the junction of the Red River Branch of the Frisco line. The first train service was December 16, 1900; the first United States mail agent and his car was put on the road March 26, 1901. H. E. Harkrider was local agent, a native of Texas who had been railroading since 1880. He was also agent for the Wells-Fargo Express Company, and issued money orders to all parts of the world. He was always found at his post of duty.

With the railroad came the roundhouse where the big steam engines were repaired and kept in good condition; also, the turntable where the engines were guided into different stalls or turned around for a return trip. Francis was selected as the location for a freight division due to the fact that it was almost exactly mid-way between Sapulpa, Oklahoma and Sherman,



(Photos Courtesy, George Dale of Francis)

**FRISCO RAILWAY STATION, ABOUT 1901**



Texas. Also because of its bountiful supply of soft water. With the establishment of the Frisco Railroad system, people were attracted to the community. Francis began to grow and prosper. Businesses were established in tents while the people waited for materials to be brought in from adjoining states. Rawhide lumber buildings were next established and later were torn down and buildings of stone and mortar were made.

Excerpts from the Special Trades Edition of *The Francis Banner* printed Thursday, July 11, 1901, will give a general idea of what was going on in Francis at that time:

Hotel Galusa, owned and operated by Mr. and Mrs. D. F. Galusa, is a credit to Francis. The well prepared meals and well furnished, lighted and ventilated rooms, have a good impression on the traveler, and serve as a booster for the town.

Mr. C. S. Norman came from De Witt, Arkansas and established a hardware and lumber business. He handles nothing but first class articles, the Charter Oak store is a specialty. He also carries furniture and mattresses.

The modern mercantile establishment is conducted by W. T. Meadows. In this store there is an array of goods of all descriptions, suitable for every taste and adapted to every purse. Mr. Meadows has earned a reputation for reliability, honest and square dealings of which he can justly feel proud. He carries a line of groceries, a complete stock of furniture, implements, harness and millinery. Mr. Meadows is a native of Kentucky, he came west in 1898, to Holdenville, where he was engaged in the cattle business. He came to Francis at the birth of the town.

W. I. Cleveland was born in Newton County, Mississippi in 1868. He came to the Territory eighteen years ago. He was appointed Post Master in 1894, and was the only Post Master Newton ever had until the present one was appointed. Mr. Cleveland is now Manager of the R. S. Floyd General store. Mr. Cleveland owns a forty acre farm which is well improved and has a good orchard.

#### OTHER PROGRESSIVE BUSINESS MEN

Leon Lance was born in Davis County, Iowa, and has been in the Indian Territory twenty-one years. He moved into Francis among the first. He owns ten lots, a large feed yard, a fine stallion known as "Steel Dust", he owns the best Kentucky jack in the Territory. Mr. Lance also runs a water tank distributing good water throughout the village. He is one of the largest property holders in Francis.

Coulson and Jeffrey's is a modern mercantile enterprise which has a record of steady and continuous growth in public favor. J. R. Jeffreys is a native of Alabama. He came to the Indian Territory six years ago and engaged in farming near Dougherty, coming to Francis in January, 1901.

J. E. Coulson is a native of Mississippi. He came west six years ago, and to Francis six months ago. He has had fourteen years experience in the general merchandise business.

Mr. J. S. Robbins is one of the pioneers, having lived in this section twenty years. He is a native of Alabama. He came to Francis five months ago and is engaged in the general merchandise business. His store is the "Red Front," 24 x 60 feet and he owns it. His stock consists of dry-goods, boots and shoes, groceries, furniture, hardware and harness.

Mr. F. Henman was born in Missouri. He came here at the birth of the town and erected a fine livery, feed and sale stable. Mr. Henman, whose large livery barn is well known, makes it a point to keep good horses and

vehicles with competent drivers. If you want a good team and carriage to drive, either for pleasure or business, call at his barn and it will be furnished you in a prompt manner. This barn is head-quarters for eastern horse buyers.

Mr. L. Vincent is a native of Missouri, a barber of four years experience. He came here at the birth of the town and is the leading tonsorial artist. He has a two-chair shop 12 x 10 feet. He is agent for the Pierce City Laundry, and is a very enterprising citizen.

Mr. A. S. Johnson is a native of Kentucky. He came to the Territory twelve years ago. He owns and operates a small general store. He carries a diversified line of groceries, dry-goods, tobacco, teas and coffees. Country produce is taken in exchange for goods.

Dr. W. B. Wynn is a native of Texas, and educated in the common schools. He graduated in medicine at Ann Arbor and has been practicing twenty-three years. Nineteen in the Territory. In Dr. Wynn the town is possessed of a physician, surgeon and pharmacist of unusual ability and skill. The drug store occupied, known as the "Little Gem", is stocked with every drug, chemical, proprietary remedy, etc. Also perfumes and toilet articles. A specialty is made of the Single Blade cigars and mixed paints.

W. M. Broughton owns a shop 18 x 30 and is engaged in blacksmithing, woodworking, horseshoeing and repair work. Horseshoeing has become almost a science and few are the defects in a horse's gait that can not be overcome by one who has made such a deep study of the subject as has Mr. Broughton. He has been successful in curing interfering, knee knocking etc. He guarantees to overcome all defects occasioned by inferior work.

Captain Thomas J. West was born in Maryland, was left an orphan at the age of ten years. He was cabin boy on a ship for two years. He came west at the age of sixteen and located in Kansas. He moved into the Indian Territory forty-two years ago. He resides upon an old homestead on the south banks of the Canadian river and in sight of the Frisco road, one mile and a half north of Francis. He served in the War in the Chickasaw Brigade four years. He owns a two-story building (24 x 60 feet) in Francis, with the Masonic Lodge above. He has always played a prominent part in all affairs of the Nation, has been a friend to the poor and a willing helper in any laudable enterprise. The Chickasaw Nation is much indebted to him for valuable service rendered during the pioneer days of her existence.

#### REPRESENTATIVE FARMERS

The Chickasaw Nation contains some of the finest and most productive farms in the Territory, and upon which are some magnificent homes. Seemingly it is but a few years ago when this country was covered with a luxuriant growth of blue joint grass, prairie pinks and spurge hills. This was suggested to us by a visit to the farm home of L. C. Oliver, one of the Chickasaw Nation's representatives and progressive agriculturists. Mr. Oliver is a native of South Carolina and he came west about twenty years ago [1899] and has been in the Indian Territory about fourteen years. He married an Indian woman of Chickasaw and Choctaw descent, whose maiden name was Marietta Letts. Mr. Oliver owns 400 acres of land and an 80 acre farm about three quarters of a mile east, well improved with a fine orchard and a beautiful home. His name will certainly be entitled to mention among the pioneers who helped to civilize and develop the Indian Territory.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In the early 1890's Mr. Oliver moved to a farm four miles west of Francis. Here he built a one room schoolhouse and set up a subscription school. Farmers and people living in the neighborhood sent their children here to school. The price was the same as in other subscription schools, one dollar a month for each child that attended. This school was maintained until a public school was established in Francis. The Webster Blue Back speller was used in this school along with the McGuffey's fourth and fifth readers, and the Baldwin's Third reader.

T. M. Fannin is a native of Kentucky and was reared in Missouri. He came here six months ago and he owns three lots and one business home. "The Home of Bargains," you will find here a line of groceries, tobacco, flour, the Oklahoma corn meal and all kinds of feed for man and beast. Mr. Fannin is an enterprising citizen and deserves the success he is meeting.

Doctor D. C. Brady, a native of Mississippi, conducts one of the best pharmacies in the Chickasaw Nation. A varied stock is handled including, aside from drugs, fancy and toilet articles, proprietary medicines, stationery etc. After receiving a common school education he attended college and graduated in Medicine at the Chicago Medical College. He has been practicing twelve years, eight in the Territory. His practice is a general one and extends all over the nation. He is a member of the Territorial Medical Association. Mrs. Brady clerks in the store and is a registered pharmacist.

Mr. Will Newman, a native of Texas, came to the Territory twenty-one years ago, and to the Chickasaw Nation four years ago and to Francis six months ago. He runs a pool hall in a two-story building. He handles cold drinks, lemonade etc. His place of business is always quiet. He is a liberal citizen and will contribute his share toward the upbuilding of the town.

Mr. T. E. Miller established a drug store here last December in a building 24' x 80'. The stock carried includes everything in the drug line, patent and proprietary medicines, of standard reputation, trusses and other surgical appliances, dye stuffs, toilet accessories and luxuries of all kinds.

In conclusion, we desire to thank the many public spirited citizens of Francis for judicious support and kindly encouragement in making this special issue of the Banner a success. But to the enterprising citizens who were instrumental in making the city what it is and were the means of transforming these once vacant fields into the fine little village you now have, and who can recognize in a measure the Power of the Press, we doff our broad brimmed hat, and, as the breezes sweep through our floating tresses, make our profoundest, most respectful editorial bow.

*The Francis Banner* was owned and edited by J. S. Dearing and Sons. Burt Dearing was editor, J. S. Dearing was the all around hustler and experienced newspaper man. Jack Dearing was the "printer's devil" who did all the work and took all the castings. *The Banner* had a large circulation, a good job office, and the work was handled to the best possible advantage.

The first school was a subscription school and parents paid one dollar a month for each child that attended. In this way the teacher received his pay. Mr. Orrin Nelson was the teacher. As yet there was no appropriation for schools, but that came in due time as arrangements had already been made for a good school system.

Mr. Dave Watson, one of the early pioneers, came to Francis in 1902. When the railroad was established and came through Francis instead of Center, Mr. Watson's home town, he and his brother moved to Francis and established a General Mercantile Store. Mr. Watson was later Postmaster at Francis. On February 1, 1911, Mr. and Mrs. Watson moved to the farm about one half mile west of Francis. They reared nine children. Mrs. Watson passed away a number of years ago. Mr. Watson, at the age of ninety-two, had an excellent memory and loved to talk about his life at Francis. In 1963 when the Francis High School held its homecoming, Mr. Watson and seven of his daughters attended the program.

Mrs. Leona Edwards, who is ninety-five years young, yet is very alert and loves to recall things that happened there. Her husband came to Francis three weeks before she did and established an ice house. Mrs. Edwards arrived in March, 1901. She and Mr. Edwards came from Olens, Arkansas. Mr. Edwards was better known as "Icy" Edwards and folks still call Mrs. Edwards, Mrs. "Icy". She has one son living in Hot Springs, Arkansas, A. C. Edwards.

Mrs. Minnie Nelson is one of the pioneers of Francis. Her husband taught the first school in 1903, and later was Mayor of Francis in 1910. The Nelsons came to Francis and established a General Merchandise Store. Mrs. Nelson is ninety-eight years of age; she has a host of friends and as a shut-in loves to grow African Violets. She has quite a collection of them and loves to share them with her friends. Her daughter, Mrs. Hazel Huckins, lives in Ada to be near her mother. There are three grandsons and a number of great grandchildren. Mrs. Nelson was very active until a few years ago. She did paintings and kept her house until her health failed. She is very alert, has a wonderful memory and loves to talk of the "Good Old Days."

Francis continued to grow, but with the coming of statehood, came also the panic of 1907, which paralyzed business for a time and greatly retarded its growth. As a result of the hard times caused by the panic, the Superintendent's office was temporarily abandoned and the work of this division was handled from Sapulpa. But with the reorganization of the Frisco, the Red River Division was restored and headquarters located permanently at Francis. Plans were approved for a new office building, a twelve stall addition to the roundhouse, a new machine shop, new turntable, new storage track and numerous other improvements.

A wonderful Harvey House, managed by H. R. Hochstrasser, better known as Mr. "H," was one of the best in the country and was said to serve better food than the Big Harvey House in Kansas City. Two passenger trains at noon, one going north and another going south, had twenty minutes for lunch. While the travelers ate, the engines were supplied with water and coal. This same thing was repeated again in the late afternoon when two other passenger trains, one northbound and another southbound, had a twenty minute stop over.

A newspaper borrowed from R. G. Davis of Francis, shows that by 1910, Francis had a population of 1,350. A good school with a four year highschool course. Seven instructors were employed in the system. The school was under the supervision of Professor A. G. Bowles, a graduate of the State Normal School.

R. G. Davis is the son of L. H. Davis, one of the pioneers of Francis. L. H. Davis was foreman of the repair department

in the Frisco Yard. Was Mayor of the town in 1906-7. L. H. Davis was a third cousin of Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy, and was connected with the families of William Henry and Benjamin Harrison. He was a Mason and a member of the Scottish Rite.

By 1910, *The Francis Banner* had changed hands twice. First to Felter, who gave it the name "The Wigwam," which was continued by L. R. Clarke who was editor and manager. The "Booster" addition of the "Wigwam" printed February 3, 1910, shows that Francis had asphalt, rich soil, soft water, fine climate, hospitable people, a railroad division, four general stores, a live commercial club, a wide-awake newspaper, four exclusive grocery stores, one exclusive dry goods store, the Bank of Francis, The Woodward Hotel, Carson Lumber Company, H. A. Kroeger real estate and loans, and a pay roll of \$17,000 monthly.

Francis was for a time the home of Wayne King, the "Great Waltz King of Music." His father was Assistant Superintendent of the Frisco in 1912. When going home from school, Wayne liked to walk behind Edith Sampson and tantalize her by blowing his horn in her ear, and pulling her hair.

From about 1914-1918, the town seemed to be at its peak. Francis was located about twelve miles northeast of Ada, and during these years many young people came from Ada, to Francis to enjoy music and dancing. The dancing took place in the Palace Drug Store, which was owned and operated by Mr. and Mrs. John Vickory. They were interested in the young people and they provided the place for dancing, a second floor which was called "The Mezzanine" or "Dance Platform." Music was furnished by the talented Miss Johnnie Anderson, who came with a group of young people from Ada. She played the piano entirely by ear. She could play anything she ever heard. When one of the young folks wanted her to learn to play a new piece, he or she would simply hum the tune, phrase by phrase, and Johnnie would play it phrase by phrase. Once over was enough, from then on it was hers. When the weather was too warm for dancing inside, the dancing took place in the street. Fred Fentle-roy, another one of the group, played a saw. There were others too that played some kind of instrument. The music of these young people was much in demand, playing for dances all around the country.

Even though Francis was a thriving community it was not without its tragic moments. One incident was when wheat was being shipped to the mills by freight. It was reported that the engines were being serviced when the railroad inspector noticed blood dripping from one of the cars. The car was set out and an investigation was made. The body of a small boy was found



in the wheat. Later on it came out that his step-father had murdered him and had thrown his body in the carload of wheat.

Another incident, a small boy started to cross the railroad track and a group of men were standing at the crossing. One man told him he could make it across, while cars were being set out. Another told him not to try it. The boy became confused, started across the track, was caught between the switching cars and killed instantly.

The greatest tragedy came when one of the young men who was employed by the Frisco, took a five gallon can of alcohol from a box-car that was enroute to Sherman, Texas. There was a tent show in town and he supplied the show people with alcohol. He also took some home. His mother made egg-nog and he and his mother and two older brothers drank it. The four of them died within a few hours time. About fourteen people lost their lives as a result of the alcohol which was wood-alcohol. A huge grave large enough for four caskets was dug and the mother and her three sons were buried in the one grave. This was a dark day in the early part of the year. A slow freezing drizzle added to the gloom of the tragedy. The roads were in very bad condition with rain and ice which kept the cars skidding around.

The coming of World War I, brought much strife and anxiety. Factions arose such as the "Industrial Worker of the World" (I.W.W.) and the "Working Class Union," (W.C.U.). These organizations rebelled against induction into the service of their country. They planned a march on Washington to demand that the government provide them with homes and food; that the people who had worked and accumulated a home and property, be made to divide with them. They seemed to be stronger in this area, creating much excitement in the community. They started their march at the school house in Francis, marching on through Francis with guns and ammunition. They were in wagons and on horseback. They crossed the Canadian River and camped in the vicinity of Seminole. There they stole a beef and killed it and roasted corn taken from the field of a farmer. This was to be their means of livelihood on to Washington. But at this point their luck ran out. The law finally caught up with them and many were arrested. Others fled and hid out in the brush and the countryside. They scattered destruction in many places. They burned the south end of the Frisco bridge across the Canadian river. By the time the word of the burning was received at the depot it was almost time for No. 589 freight train to approach the bridge. The only means of communication at this time was the telegraph and telephone and since these lines were broken when the bridge burned it was necessary to rush the switch engine crew to the river to try and stop the train. "D" Wilcoxson, one of the members of the crew on the engine, waded across the river and flagged the train and avoided what might have been

the worst disaster in the history of Francis. "D" Wilcoxon grew up in Francis and started working for the Frisco at an early age. He was the son of Jeff Wilcoxon who owned and operated a meat market and who was one of the early settlers in Francis.<sup>2</sup>

Edgar Caperton was the conductor on the No. 539 freight train which might have plunged into the river. Edgar dealt with the I.W.W. and W.C.U. often, as many of the trouble makers would try to steal a ride on the rains. When he put them off the train, they would flash their red card and say, "Just wait until we get into power." Edgar started working for the Frisco in December, 1911, as the station helper at Randolph, Oklahoma. In April 1914 he worked as time-keeper for an extra gang. He came to Francis in 1914, then started working as brakeman. In 1919 he was promoted to conductor of train-service. There were two divisions of service for the Frisco, that of train-service and that of engine-service. Edgar married Mary Cody of Francis, and they still make their home in Francis. They have one daughter, Ola Mable, who graduated from the Francis High School. She went on and took teacher's training at East Central College in Ada. She teaches Physical Education in Lakeland High School at Lakeland, Florida, an outstanding figure in the field of teaching. Ola Mable is one of the founders and a charter member of the Polk County Health, Physical Education and Recreation Association. She was the first state President of the Physical Education and Recreation Association, Lakeland. She accomplished a statewide survey of safety practices in physical education, and presented the findings to the National Convention. She edited a pamphlet titled, "Preparing Your High School Course of Study."

The induction of the boys into the service in World War II took many young people out of the town. From then on, it seemed to begin to fall apart. The First National Bank burned and was never restored. The adjoining buildings were damaged and later torn down. The Harvey House was destroyed by fire which spread to the depot, and it also was destroyed. Later the depot was re-built, though it was a smaller building. Francis then began to disintegrate. Little by little it has been demolished until there is nothing left except a few scattered buildings. Grass grows where the buildings used to be. Several walls are left standing. Debris is scattered around. This once thriving and colorful little town is nothing more now than just memories of what it used to be.

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<sup>2</sup> This trouble is known in Oklahoma history as the "Green Corn Rebellion," which occurred in Pontotoc and Hughes counties in 1917. For further mention of this subject see "Texas Fever in Oklahoma," by J. Stanley Clark in *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XXIX, pp. 429-43.—Ed.