



# Matchbook Memories

by Dr. Jerry G. Nye

The main street of Bradley was my window on the world. Cars would stop at McCann's store, Sonny Mitchusson's service station, or Bomhak's cafe. The people in the cars would light their cigarettes and throw the empty match book covers on the dirt street that was both State Highway 19 and Bradley's Main Street.

In the years of 1946 to 1952, I collected 246 of these match book covers and kept them in cigar boxes. Now, over fifty years after I began my collection, I can recapture those days by browsing through my collection. Some of the match book covers advertised businesses as far away as California and some as close as Bomhak's cafe, only a few feet from the street in Bradley. Some match books were campaign advertisements for political candidates long dead now. Others advertised products forgotten in the modern world. Many promoted bars and cafes, implement companies, service stations, and department stores. There are match book covers for the U.S. Army, the Seabees, the Military Sea Transportation Service, and the 45th Infantry Division. My favorite match book cover of them all is one from 1948 for the Hot Springs Bathers, an Arkansas minor league baseball team in the Cotton States League.

These match book covers fueled my imagination of a world outside of Bradley. In my mind, I traveled to these cities, visited these places, and lived the lives promised by these products. Even now, I am still fascinated by my memories of this time so long ago in Bradley. These match book memories return me to a more innocent world and to a time when dreams were still possible. Through the mists of time, that world emerges as real as it was when I collected these match book covers from the dirt Main Street of Bradley half a century ago.

Time has erased some of the products and places promoted by these covers. Names

that have disappeared in time are Oliver Farm Machinery, Roe Caldwell Windmill Pumps, Deep Rock Gasoline, Anderson Prichard Gasoline, and Veedol Motor Oil. The Biltmore Hotel in Oklahoma City has fallen victim to the wrecking ball, and only a few housewives remember Mrs. Tucker's margarine and Fall Cream Flour. And there is no longer a Coronet Magazine.

Political candidates, the famous and the obscure, used book matches in their campaigns. Famous political candidates represented in the collection are Roy J. Turner, Governor; Robert S. Kerr, Governor and U.S. Senator; and Wilburn Cartwright, who held numerous offices in the state. Bob Turner was a long-time Oklahoma County sheriff. Alva Timms was a Grady County commissioner for many years. Another cover requests re-election for DeArthur Wilson, "The People's Choice," for sheriff of Grady county. Ironically, only a few feet from where I found this cover, DeArthur Wilson had shot Doyle Denney to death in a gunfight on the porch of the Bradley store owned in by boyhood by my friend George McCann's parents.

Public transportation was represented by match book covers promoting rail passenger service on the Wabash Railroad and the Frisco Railroad from St. Louis to San Francisco. Mid-Continent Airlines, with headquarters in Kansas City, flew routes in the center of America from Minot, North Dakota, to New Orleans with passenger service to Tulsa, Muskogee, and McAlester.

Of course, many of the match book covers were from local restaurants. D.A. Bomhak's station and cafe in Bradley advertised "A Good Place to Eat" and featured pictures of dogs such as Boxers, Bulldogs, Terriers, and Great Danes on the back of the covers. Field Tavern in Pauls Valley claimed to be "Oklahoma's Oldest Drive

Inn." Cack Roller, a Lindsay resident and my good friend, will remember Shorty's B-B-Q, owned by his parents, Buck and Shorty Roller. Their match book cover read "Eat and drink at Buck and Shorty's place south of Chickasha on Hiway 81." Their phone number was 836-J. Gladys M. Cantrell owned Lindsay's Rainbow Drive Inn "Where You're Most Welcome." Maud Payne owned Maud's Cafe in Lindsay which had "Good Stakes."

Bars were well represented by covers with the advertisements on the front and pictures of a pin-up girl on the back. Chock's Tavern, owned by Chock and Jackie Dillard and located at 125 North Main in Lindsay, claimed to have the "coldest beer in town." Another of Chock and Dillard's businesses in Lindsay, the Shamrock Bar, proudly proclaimed the "best service on earth." Henry's Cafe at 27 North Main in Lindsay featured cold beer, sandwiches, and dinners. Popular bars in Chickasha were Hunter's Bar and the City Limits Drive In.

The Lindsay business community of the 1940's and 1950's comes alive through the match book covers. Car dealerships were Garrett Chevrolet and Mayfield Chevrolet. The Miller Motors advertisement for the 1950 Ford called it "the one fine car in its field" and described it as "50 ways new for '50." Stephens Service Station was the Cities Service dealership. Jack Simms Super Service offered Conoco products. Other Lindsay businesses employing match book cover advertising were the Archie Jones Dairy, Curry Implement Company, F.D. Stephens Grocery, Pryor's Department Store, Casada Jewelry, Smith and Northcutt Tire and Appliance, the A-One Fence Company, owned by Harold Lawson and Ray Norton, and Ridings Plumbing and Electric.

The old Main Street of Bradley where I collected these match book covers is deserted now. Only one building remains at the foot of the hill where Bradley stood until the tornado of March 13, 1953, destroyed all of the other buildings. The building that once housed McCann's store stands deserted now, a mute reminder of a time gone

by. In memory, I can still sit on the porch of McCann's store and drink a Dr. Pepper with peanuts in it, can still smell the delicious aroma of hamburgers cooking in Bomhak's Cafe, and hear Sonny Mitchusson's laughter as he serviced cars in his driveway beside McCann's store. These match book covers make that world possible again.

The world has turned over many times since my days as a boy in Bradley. Since those more placid times, I have spent time in the Army Engineers in the Korean War, coached basketball and baseball in high school and junior college, and recently retired from Southwestern Oklahoma State University after thirty-two years as an English professor. As the sands of time run low in my own hour glass, I am able to capture once again a special time in my life and visit again an era long gone by looking through my collection. As I put away my collection after writing this article, I was fascinated to notice on my desk top a fine film of sand from the Main Street of Bradley a half century ago that had fallen from the folds of the match book covers. The sands of time were literally there on the top of my desk. It was a memorable moment.