

## CLEORA, CHANGING WITH THE TIMES

Ed Lunday had a problem he had opened a general store on the family allotment in northwest Delaware County a couple of years ago, and now his customers wanted more. His original idea was to provide some basic necessities for folks so they wouldn't need to go so far. Vinita was ten miles away, Afton about seven, and Needmore, several miles to the east, was on the other side of Horse Creek. But now, the spring of 1900, his customers had pressured him to apply for a post office and, according to regulations, it needed a distinct identification. After considerable thought, Ed decided to name the site after one of his six sisters Rebecca, Flora, Lula, Rosie, Cleora or Maude. Upon drawing the name from a hat, the second from youngest, Cleora Ann, was chosen. So, on November 28, 1900, located on what cartographers call "a road correction," the curve on Highway 85 just north of the present day Baptist Church, Ed's general store and post office officially became Cleora.

Earlier, in 1895, education minded settlers had constructed Valley View school, overlooking the valley a mile south of Lunday's store, and it had opened with an enrollment of 45. In 1906, Monroe School was built on land donated by the Monroe family in what, after statehood, would become District 6. Cleora was also located in District 6, and as new families arrived and others grew, still another school was constructed. This one near Ed's store, was named Cleora, later "Old Cleora," was a two story building that not only was used to instruct local children, but also as a lodge hall and community meeting place.

Under ordinary circumstances it might be assumed that Cleora, like most surrounding communities originating at that time, might grow into a thriving community, but such was not the case. When rumors about a railroad being built from Baxter Springs, Kansas to Wagoner became a fact, residents around Cleora wanted to take advantage of this bonanza. The fever in the region to be next to the railroad was contagious. At the same time a new town, Bernice, was founded by folks moving from Needmore, then located on today's Monkey Island, residents around Ketchum Crossing on the Grand River moved a mile or so north, and other towns like Pensacola and Strang were created. So when the Kansas, Oklahoma and Gulf Railroad (KO&G) became a reality in 1912, Ed Lunday moved his store and post office, to be near the new site. Remnants of the railroad grade are still visible today. As travelers going north on S 4510 Road, pull up to the stop sign and look to the northeast, the grade toward Bernice can be seen. Looking back to the southwest, Kahoots Store straddles the grade and the storage units further south are beside it. Customers, dining at Kahoots, can look southwest and conceptualize sitting on the tracks watching the approaching train

Cleora grew, speculating on the possibilities of the good times ahead. An elementary school, "New Cleora," was constructed just south of what local residents today call "the cutoff," and a grain elevator was located along the right-of-way near the west bound stop sign. A few houses and several businesses emerged, mostly located around today's new development, Old Town. Included were a doctor's office, hardware store, a two story hotel, lumber yard, livery stable, and scales for weighing hay and grain to be shipped on the train. Later, several area schools were consolidated and on July 28, 1928, Cleora High

School became a reality and fielded its first football team. For all practical purposes, Cleora was “on the map” and the town prospered for the next decade.

However, similar to several communities in northeastern Oklahoma that were built on dreams, dark clouds began to emerge, and Cleora suffered setbacks. Like many trunk railroads in Oklahoma, the KO&G had been created through speculation and, in this case, with money from French entrepreneurs. When World War I broke out, those funds dried up, and after the war the KO&G was sold and renamed the Missouri, Oklahoma and Gulf. From its inception in 1912 until it ceased to exist, the railroad never made a profit of note. That, coupled with the fact that portions had to be re-routed when Grand Lake became a reality and finally closed when Lake Hudson was created in 1965, ended hopes of local transportation connecting to the rest of the world. But, a second and more significant event was the creation of Grand Lake. Ever since Henry Holderman had floated the Grand River in 1895, either he or others had promoted building a hydro-electric dam somewhere along its course. Finally, in 1935, a consortium of businessmen succeeded and they eventually involved the State of Oklahoma and the Federal Government. By 1938, land that would constitute the lake was being purchased, and local residents were advised that their school and some other buildings would be inundated by the backwaters of Duck Creek. Acting quickly, the local school board purchased 151 acres a mile north and, in 1941, through the efforts of the Works Progress Administration, a new school was opened. Later, in 1957 the high school, grades nine through twelve was closed, leaving an elementary school, Cleora, the only reminder of a once thriving community.

If there is some confusion regarding what consisted of “Old Cleora,” “New Cleora,” or simply “Cleora,” the Federal Government’s description is of no assistance. Local residents would be surprised to know that the Cleora of today is described as including 12.4 square miles incorporating a population of 1,113. However, even though there is little evidence that Cleora ever existed, the founders might be pleased that the town prospered...at least from a bureaucratic perspective.























