WALTER PATTON RECEIVES DISTINGUISHED CITIZENS AWARD

One phase of today's program is the study of the life and influence of one of Crawford County's most influential citizens, Walter Dyer Patton, who resided on Ash Street in Alma. The parents were James N. and Rebecca Dyer Patton. They moved from the vicinity of Dyer soon after their marriage and located at Henrietta, Texas, where our honoree was born October 22, 1881.

When young Walter was about six years of age, the family returned to Dyer and Crawford County and for 71 years his fortune in life has been vested and lived in the area among friends and related families. It has been said that all active men leave footprints in the sands of time from which to gage. a man's usefulness to society. Such would be a fair test in evaluating the life of Walter D. Patton. His early education was secured in the County schools. He later attended Ouachita Baptist College at Arkadelphia and the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville. During his early adult life Mr. Patton engaged in farming in Dyer, later entering other occupations in the business world.

As a young man he met and won the hand of Miss Lena Humphrey, the daughter of Osias and Rebecca Harris Humphrey of the Mountain View Community north of Alma, who had formerly emigrated from Tennessee. The older Humphrey's passed away when Lena was four years of age. The widowed grandmother of Mr. Patton operated the old stagecoach stand and station at Dyer and as a small lad young Walter spent much time playing around the home and the stage coach stop where he collected lasting impressions of the transition from the pre-war era into the post-war development of the lands of western Arkansas, as he listened to conversation of stage passengers who stopped at his grandmother's home enroute to other destinations. The town of Dyer received its name from the old stage stop station operated so long by the Dyer family.

Mr. and Mrs. Walter Patton were united in marriage on July 10, 1904, and resided in Dyer for about three years. They migrated to California where they spent the next three years, returning to Dyer the latter part of 1909. Soon after relocating in Dyer, Walter was elected cashier of the Bank of Dyer and served that institution and the surrounding business area for several years. Later on he became cashier of the Commercial Bank at Alma and served until it merged with the old bank of Alma, the combined institution taking the Commercial name where he continued to serve the Bank for three years more before resigning.

Walter next joined Dyke Brothers lumber firm at Fort Smith, which operated several branch yards in the County. The firms name was changed to Twin City Lumber Company and Mr. Patton became auditor of the combined organization. During the depression in the late 1930 he accepted employment with Crawford County Welfare Department as a home visitor. When the depression began to wane and business again took on an upswing because of war conditions looming overseas, he joined Alma Canning Company as an office employee where he continued until appointed Post Master at Alma by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on April 14, 1943. He served in this capacity for almost 15 years before retiring.

All this recital has indeed shown that the "sands of time" have been stamped over the years by our honored citizen, but that is only one line of tracing. In the intervening years the Pattons reared a choice family: J Fred Patton, our speaker of today, is a son who has emblazoned a record of trust, honor, and distinction in the field of education, religion, and business as well as performing very outstanding service in many civic bodies. He is Vice-President and General Manager of the far flung Gordon Transports. J. Fred Patton is married to the former Miss Bernice Garrison of Fort Smith, a member of an old Southern Sebastian family. They are the parents of Ann Marie, Mrs. Robert T. Dawson, whose business is in the armed service at Fort Hood, Texas. A son, Jim Fred Patton, is a senior at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville.

Next to J. Fred Patton in the Patton home is the only daughter, Jeannette, Mrs. James Niven, residing in Russellville, Arkansas. The Nivens have four children: Jo Evelyn Nivens, whose husband, Captain Harley Burks is stationed with his family in Germany; James J. Nivens and Richard Nivens, senior and sophomore, respectively in Russellville High School. Then there is a group of growing great-grandchildren of the Pattons. Jo Evelyn Niven Burks's little brood consist of Vickie, (5) and Leslie (2), and Charles has one little daughter, Jo Lynn.

A third child of the Walter Pattons is Walter D. Patton Jr, who is an employee of Fort Smith Gas Company and resides with his parents in Alma.

There are several side trails along the Patton pathway of life: Mr. Patton served at both Dyer and Alma on the Board of Education and was a Board member during the Consolidation Era of the County Schools, a very outstanding honor as viewed from 1960, but might have been given far less distinction during these hectic days of regrouping the school boundaries of the County. But with Crawford County's well organized five school Area Consolidation as we now know the school set-up, one may well view with pride the decisions made by those representatives of the public school system by taking a causal study in contrast of the schools of the 1920 versus the schools of 1960.

Another pattern of this man may be found by a brief perusal of the records of the City of Alma. As far back as May 3, 1926, thirty-five years ago, Mr. Patton was sworn in to the office as City Recorder. Then on June 4, 1918, he took the oath as Alderman. Again on January 2, 1956, he assumed the joint office of Recorder-Treasurer which he held continuously until his voluntary retirement on December 31, 1961. The Quorum Court of Crawford County which is the levying authority of the County reveals the name of Walter D. Patton as Justice of Peace in Alma Township with the jurisdiction beginning January 1, 1959, and in which position he is still active today ***[as of pre-1986]*** at 80 years of age.

In his religious affiliations and practice, Mr. Patton united with the Dyer Baptist Church about 1910, later being ordained a Deacon. When the family moved to Alma, February 15, 1921, he transferred his Church membership to the Alma congregation and has served on its Board of Deacons for numerous periods of rotation. Furthermore his name appears regularly and consistently on the various phases of Church activity: Sunday School Superintendent; Brotherhood president; Church treasurer; teacher for many years; Class president; Association treasurer for Clear Creek Baptist Association comprising three Counties and as official Board member in their Association work and etc.

Fraternally, this man was affiliated with the Masonic Lodge at Dyer about 1910, transferred to Alma and, when the Lodge surrendered its charter, he transferred to Fine Springs Lodge until a new charter was secured for Alma Group when he again became affiliated with the Alma Lodge where his present membership is vested. At one time he served as Chancellor Commander of the Knights of Pythias Lodge at Dyer and later in the same official capacity in the K. of P. Lodge at Alma.

Mr. Patton's long years of residency in the County together with widely recognized experience in many interest of the livelihood of its people, mark him for special recognition for his share over the years in supporting these causes which are recognized as essential to the general welfare and continued growth and expansion of the County.

Other immediate members of the family include Mrs. Callie (Bill) James of Dyer whom we are glad to recognize at this session, and, also, we record the memory of a deceased brother, Fred Patton, who served the County well and efficiently as Sheriff and Collector during the period 1939-1942.

It can well be said that the Patton family influence included also the life of James N. Patton, father of today's honoree, who served as a Commissioner for the Town of Dyer at the time of its incorporation and also served as a Deacon in the Dyer Baptist Church, as well as for many years on the Dyer School Board.

It is recognized that the County has many older citizens who have shared in the progress in the many phases of County development and who qualify for the honor of outstanding leadership and service.

The Executive Council of the Crawford County Historical Society has placed its approval of your selection and the Society as a whole is extremely gratified to honor you as a Distinguished Citizen and entitled to receive the honor award at this session of the Society.

The presentation of this life story was delivered by J. Fred Patton from notes prepared by J. A. Burns. That portion relating to J. Fred's personal history was omitted by him has been included by the editor for publication. J. A. Burns.

(1985: all three of the children of James N. and Rebecca Dyer Patton are dead. Mrs. Callie Patton James was buried here in the Dyer cemetery beside her husband.)

(Lorena Lancaster)

***Filename: WeRememberDyer post-1986 Book 03, 022-024 ~ Walter Patton***