
Pearson and Oklahoma State Highway No. 18

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Present day Pearson is the remnant of a once prosperous agricultural and then later oil community. A tourist driving through the area today will probably note some pumping oil wells, a few oil smeared and vegetationless spots of land where tanks formerly stood, and that much of the area is covered with blackjack and post oak trees. At the junction of State Highway 18 with 56 the tourist may wonder why vacant store buildings stand at the intersection and what caused a settlement to be formed

in such a hilly and depressed area. In many ways Pearson is somewhat typical of the numerous hamlets and vilages of Central Oklahoma that have been subjected to the variations caused by changes in land utilization, oil production, and transportation.

Pearson was established about 1920, approximately twelve miles south of Tecumseh, at the place where the then much traveled dirt and gravel State Highway 18 paralleled the branch line of the Rock Island railroad that extended southward from Shawnee and Tecumseh to Asher. The valley of Salt Creek, in which the community was situated, is relatively narrow, but the soil was rich and the farms productive. The farmers in the vicinity needed a place to market some of their goods and also a place nearer than Tecumseh where they could buy their more common needs. A Mr. Downing, realizing this need, established a general store. Soon thereafter a filling station-blacksmith-garage combination, where a farmer could get his horses shod or his Model-T repaired, was started. Eventually a few homes were built and a flag stop station, called Pearson, was established by the railroad.

In 1928 oil was discovered near this hamlet and the producing field became known as the Pearson Pool. As was the case with all oil discoveries at that time, people flocked into the community and the small settlement rapidly expanded. Soon after the discovery well came in, an area approximately one-half mile from north to south and one-fourth mile from east to west was surveyed into twenty-four city blocks streets, subsequently, were marked off, lots sold, city officials elected, and the hamlet was incorporated as the town of Pearson.

During the "boom" years of 1928 to 1929 the population of Pearson was estimated at from 500 to 1,000. The entire residential area was covered with houses or tents and business buildings occupied the area along the highway adjacent to the railroad. The established businesses included:

2 Drug stores	2 Grocery stores
3 Hotels	3 Barber and beauty shops
2 Feed stores	2 Cafés
1 Rooming house	1 Pool hall
2 Lumber yards	2 Oil field supply companies
2 Garages	2 Filling stations

In 1928 the railroad built a new depot and enlarged its facilities to care for the enlarged freight shipments.

The three hotels were the most striking establishments in the oil-boom town. The buildings were two stories in height and of frame construction. Two were fifty feet and the other twenty-five feet in width, and each was about one hundred feet in length. Two were divided into numerous small rooms, each room containing a cot, chair, and wash stand with basin and pitcher. The other hotel had one large room on each floor crowded with cots and beds which were rented by the night. The rooms and beds rented for as much as \$5.00 per night with such comforts as soiled linens and bedbugs. As Russell Crumley stated, "If this inconvenience prevented your sleeping the price was the same nevertheless."

Pearson disappeared almost as rapidly as it had been built. The 1930 census listed sixty-six people within the incorporated limits. A grocery store, a filling station, and a garage were the only business establishments remaining. The death blow to the original Pearson came when State Highway 18 was rebuilt a half mile east of the original townsite. With the opening of this new road, the remaining businesses moved to the concrete highway in 1931 and the new Pearson came into existence. Soon it became like the other oil field hamlets in the Greater Seminole Area with its houses scattered along the highways and its business concerns, a garage a general store, two cafés, and two filling stations, located at the inter-

section. By 1940 all that remained on the original townsite was the depot. One could, however, still trace out the city blocks because of the deep ruts cut in them by the heavy trucks and the oil field equipment carriers.

In 1942 the Rock Island abandoned its branch line from Shawnee to Asher and removed the tracks. The depot was sold and moved to a nearby farm. Today (1964) there are no buildings on the site of "old" Pearson. With the exception of a road leading to a nearby farm house, all land within the original townsite is now in pasture.

In 1940 some twenty-six homes, seven occupied business buildings, one café, and one church were located in the "new" Pearson. Since that date the hamlet has failed to make any progress. Today (1964) twenty homes, one church, three garages, one café, and two vacant store buildings make up the structures in the hamlet. It is now necessary for the inhabitants to drive to Tecumseh or some other nearby place for their daily needs. The café, still operated by its original owners, is noted as a truck stop. Since most of the people living in the community are past middle age, perhaps the "new" Pearson is destined to follow in the path of "old" Pearson. Oklahoma State Highway 18 is now being resurveyed and widened. In the vicinity of Pearson it will probably follow a new route.
