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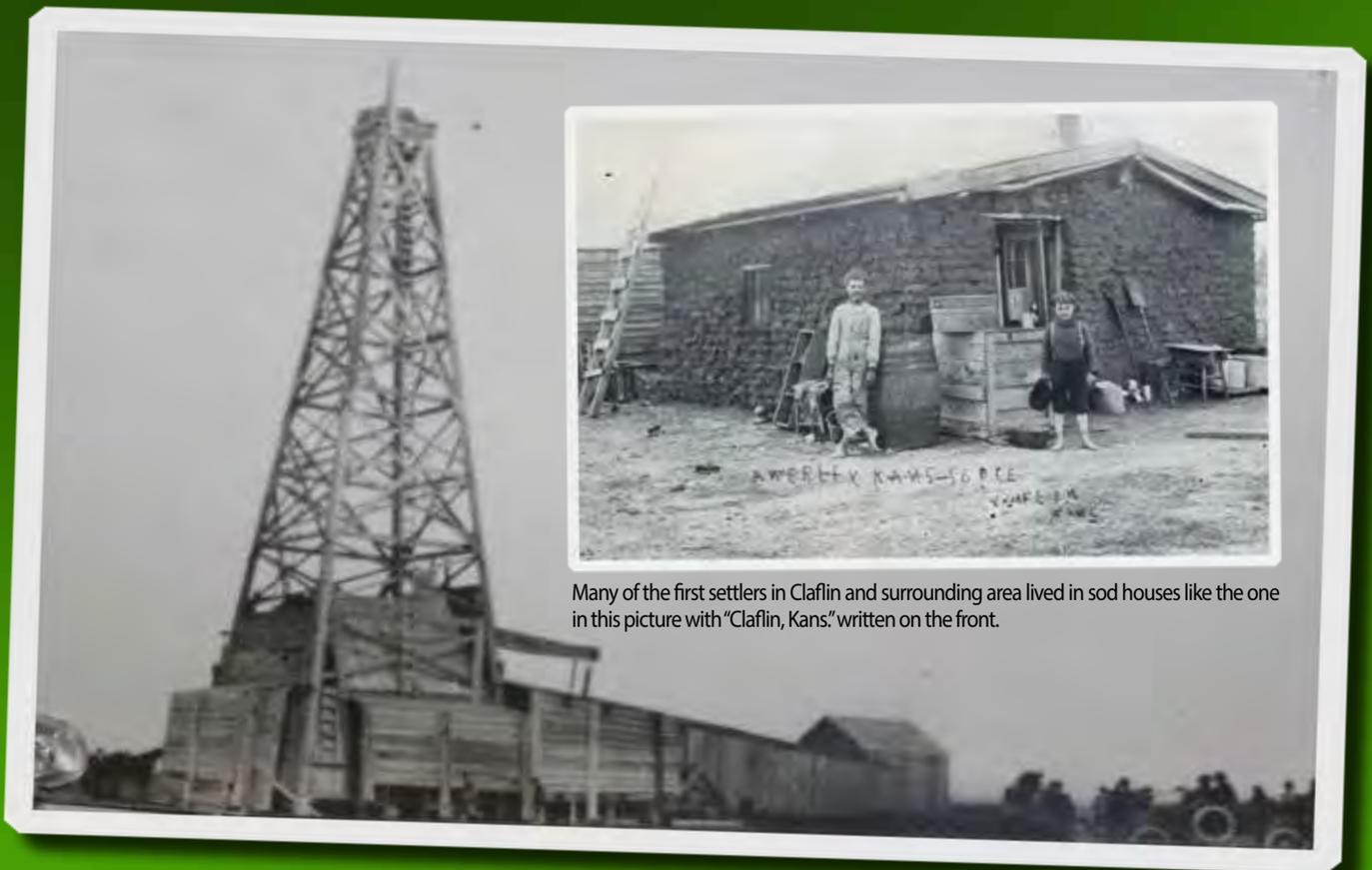
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Claflin – A Sense of Time



Claflin's Main street as it looks today. (photos courtesy of the Claflin Historical Museum.)



Many of the first settlers in Claflin and surrounding area lived in sod houses like the one in this picture with "Claflin, Kans." written on the front.

Claflin was founded in 1887 as a farming community, and oil was discovered in the nearby Cheyenne Bottoms in 1923. It was found at Sooy No. 1 in 1923, but there was not enough oil to warrant commercial production. Claflin, however, turned out to be located right in the center of the Central Kansas Uplift, and it was only a few years before more drilling took place, and all the major oil companies were in business in Claflin and the rest of Barton County.

By Barbara Oringerderrff
After a glowing report on Claflin, KS by our Wichita friend Dick Schremmer, who was born and raised near there, my daughter Carol and I set out on a Wednesday road trip to see just what was going on in this little Barton County hamlet.

Claflin is a classic small Kansas town, population about 700, but it's a town where the innovative folks who live there seem to be creating their own sense of time. Claflin was founded in

1887 by farming families, and oil was discovered in the area in 1923 when the first commercial oil well, the Sooy No. 1, was drilled in the nearby Cheyenne Bottoms.

Today the village of Claflin has a big grain elevator, a tall water tower, tree shaded streets with frame houses both large and small, and green lawns mostly trimmed to perfection. There is a beautiful Catholic church, a well-stocked small-town grocery store and even a park.

So what is unusual about Claflin? When you drive down-



Bill Miller and the author in the beautiful main Miller furniture store in Clafin. (Photos by Carol Schuetze.)

town you enter a Main street that looks like the set of a period movie just waiting to be filmed. The fronts of most of the old buildings are covered with colorful frame facades that are duplicates of what the buildings on Clafin Main street originally looked like. What's behind the facades? Each building has



We toured the Miller store with Brad Miller, who proudly showed us this antique photograph of J. W. and L. A. Miller, that Brad's daughter, who is an artist, had enlarged and reproduced on canvas panels for him.

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been renovated to hold a delightfully decorated showroom for Millers of Claflin Furniture Company. One building holds all the bedroom furniture, another dining room tables set for dinner, and so on. It was certainly the most amazing Main street we had ever seen!

Our hosts, brothers Brad and Bill Miller, were waiting for us at their Main Street store, and told us Miller Furniture was started in 1903 on this very Main street (across the street from their present location) by their great grandfather R. L. Miller.

“Our grandfather was in the mill business when he came here,” Brad Miller explained. “He and his partner started a general merchandise business and sold farm implements and furniture. In the 1950s Dad went into TV’s and appliances to go with his fine furniture.”

And what about the unusual storefronts? “We bought one building and restored it so we could put in a showroom,” continued Brad, “and then we saved up our money and bought another building, and then another, and we just kept building,” he laughed.

“Each time we bought a building on Main street I just went out and found a picture of what the buildings on Main originally looked like and then had the store front built,” explained Brad, like that was an easy task.

“I tell everyone that we have the largest furniture store between Kansas City and Denver,” added Bill proudly. “We have 90,000 square feet of showrooms. We also have furniture stores in Hays and Salina, but this is our largest store. We recently had 17 sales from 15 different towns here,” he explained.

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Brad said it was time for the next part of our tour, and that was the "new" Claflin Museum, which is on the second floor of the old high school, which was later a grade school.

"Claflin had a museum many years ago," Brad explained, "but it was in an old building and the roof leaked so everything was removed and put into storage. The city owns the three-story brick building that was built in 1916,"



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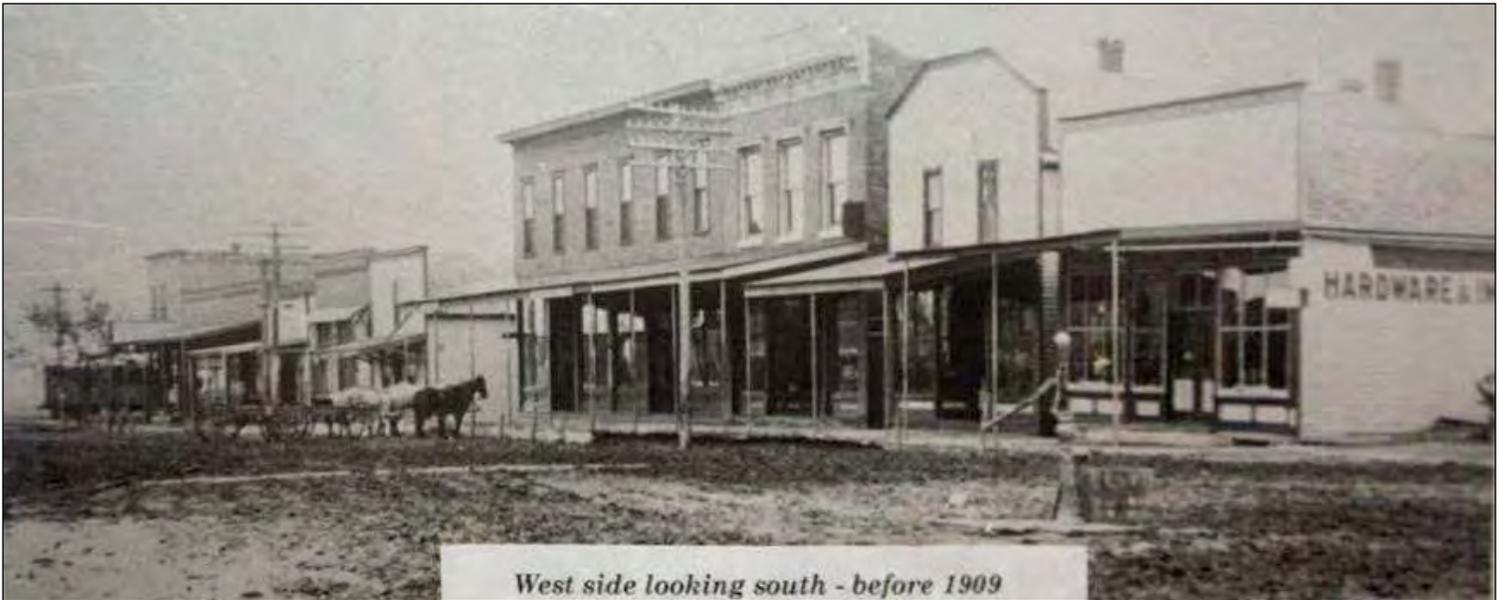
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he continued. "Folks in the community had already renovated and started new projects on the first floor of the school. When we started working with putting the museum on the second floor, there was a fitness center, a yoga classroom, a senior center, and the old gym had been made available for events. The second floor was perfect for the museum, and we had a great group, Friends of the Museum, really put this museum together, and did it in time for our 2015 Memorial Day celebration! Luckily,





West side looking south - before 1909

The west side, looking south, of Clafin Main street before 1909.



Carol in downtown Clafin.



The museum and several other community projects are located in this 1916 brick school building.





Fred Beck, who owns Classic Well Service in Claflin showed us his awesome collection of early oil company signs and other oil company memorabilia. "My Dad," Fred told us "was an oilfield pumper for NCRA and I guess that's how I got interested in collecting these big signs."



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the group included a plumber, an electrician, a carpenter and a lot of other hard-working people willing to spend their spare time getting the museum put together.

"Everybody got behind it," said Brad. "And there hasn't been a month go by since it opened that someone hasn't brought in an old telephone or something for the museum. I just take everything," he laughed. "Actually we have another whole floor above the museum that can be used. In the museum display rooms now, we have a popular high school room with yearbooks, cheerleader outfits, etc., and a place where someone can sit down and go through the old books. We have a special room that has the history of the oil industry in the Claflin area, and lots of town and farming history, too."

After Carol and I had enjoyed the fine history displays and were getting ready to leave, Brad suggested we stop and see Fred Beck at Classic Well Service at the edge of town. "Fred's family has been here a long time, and Fred has the best collection of oil company signs, early gasoline pumps, and other oil company memorabilia," said Brad, as he gave us directions to Fred's.

As we drove away from Claflin, with its temperament of a typical small town was quiet, but unlike many other small towns, it isn't dying. Claflin is very much alive because folks like the Miller brothers continue to breathe life into their community with unique ideas and exciting new projects.

