

Noteworthy Events

1981

As the clerk of the Oklahoma Senate for nearly 50 years, Willie Elizabeth Shipley recorded the colorful history of a young state. She was always aware that her career was only possible thanks to a scholarship that allowed her to go to college and she wanted to make that opportunity available to others like her. In 1981, a bequest from her estate established a scholarship endowment with the instructions that it be used to help “needy” Oklahoma children who desire to pursue a higher education. Today, her fund helps provide scholarships to former foster care children.

1985

Nancy B. Anthony was hired as the fourth executive director. When she joined the organization, she was the only full-time employee. The next year, Carla Pickrell was hired to oversee the administration of investments. Both Nancy and Carla remain with the staff that now includes 29 employees.

1986

Since its inception, the Oklahoma City Community Foundation had been housed within the Kirkpatrick Oil Company building at 1300 N. Broadway. In 1986, the Kerr Foundation gifted a building on Park Avenue to the organization. The building at 115 Park Avenue would remain the home for the Oklahoma City Community Foundation for eight years.

1989

In celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Land Run of 1889, the Oklahoma City Community Foundation provided \$175,000 in grants to support seven major projects including the publication of a map outlining the historical highlights of the Land Run. The experience launched our focus on developing new programs and helping the community meet emerging needs and opportunities.

The Eighties 1980s

Bill Payne: Doing for others

From humble beginnings, William T. “Bill” Payne would establish himself as a well respected and successful oil man known for his business acumen and integrity.

While attending Oklahoma A&M College where he studied chemistry and bacteriology, he supported himself by selling pots and pans door to door. He went on to study microbiology as a graduate student at Massachusetts A&M and Amherst and was hired as a bacteriologist for the city of Detroit. During World War I, he joined the Army Sanitation Corps where he helped to isolate the influenza virus that caused an outbreak in 1918.

After the war, he changed the course of his life by going to work as an oil scout for Charles Colcord. In 1920, he joined with Walt Helmerich to form H&P, an oil and gas exploration company. The company would make its mark in 1936 first, with a major strike that would secure its success and second, by creating a landmark with the construction of a working rig on the lawn of the state’s capitol building. That same year, Mr. Payne would leave H&P to form Big Chief Drilling Company in Oklahoma City. His success in the industry would lead to many honors including being named the 1965 Oklahoma Oil Man of the Year.

Throughout his life, Mr. Payne lived by the adage “the price we pay for living on earth is what we do for others.” While he was appreciative for all his hard work had earned him, he never forgot where he came from. Throughout his life, he volunteered his services and time in leadership roles for more than 40 civic, educational, religious and youth organizations. He died in 1981 and through a bequest in his will he left a significant gift to the Oklahoma City Community Foundation that at the time more than doubled the organization’s assets. For the past 28 years, three generations of Mr. Payne’s family have recommended grants from the William T. Payne Fund to a variety of organizations like the Boys & Girls Club of Oklahoma County, Oklahoma Heritage Association and the Dean McGee Eye Institute.

“I think he would be pleased to know his great-grandchildren are participating in giving back to our community and state,” Nancy Payne Ellis says of her father-in-law. “We are very grateful for the opportunity he has given our family to learn about philanthropy.”



Over the past two decades, the William T. Payne Fund has recommended grants to benefit the Dean McGee Eye Institute, one of the largest ophthalmology institutes in the country. In addition to providing top-notch care for more than 120,000 patients a year, the Oklahoma City-based institute conducts an active research program into the mechanisms and treatments of eye disease. Inset photograph: Bill Payne, right, talks with a worker at a Big Chief Drilling Company site.

Photograph Courtesy of Dean McGee Eye Institute