

Ray Wilson Pampa High School Class of 1921



The firstborn of eight children, born in the first year of this century, he was destined to be first in many things, including the following which involved PHS, Pampa and Gray County:

Quarterback of the first Harvester football team

Editor of first PHS yearbook ("The Harvest", Volume I)

First Gray County Auditor

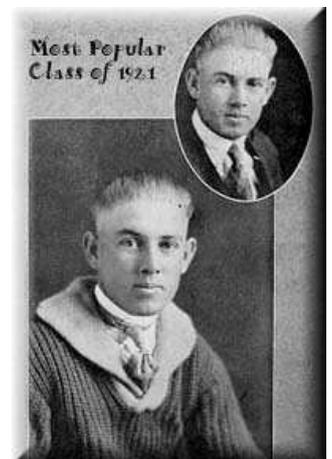
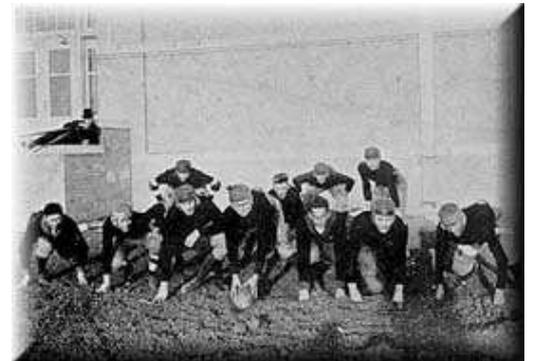
He and his wife, Hazel, were the first couple married in the First Christian Church on Starkweather Street

Pampa High School Traditions

Ray was also destined to play a leading role in the traditions at PHS. He suggested the school colors of green and gold, representing wheat - green when growing, and gold when ripe.

He also suggested that "The Harvest" be the name of the yearbook, representing a gathering of the year's events. Of course, the name was later changed to "The Harvester."

He quarterbacked the Harvesters in the first Pampa-Amarillo High game, which began the rivalry that continues to this day.



Education

Like most of his peers, Ray had no formal education beyond high school. But he did have a passion for knowledge, and read incessantly throughout his adult life. He was the consummate self-educated man. He believed strongly in the value of education, and saw that both his children were college educated. He also served on the Pampa School Board.

A Quiet Leader

The leadership Ray demonstrated while in PHS was to be characteristic of his life. While he never sought the limelight or the stage, he was regarded as a leader. He was a genuinely modest man whose stability and quiet strength drew people to him.

Ray and several of his PHS classmates, including Clyde Carruth, Charlie Duenkel and Lewis Meers, spent their adult lives here. Along with other community leaders, they helped guide Pampa through several turbulent periods, including the oil boom of the 20s, the Great Depression, and World War II.

Tax Man And Deputy Sheriff During The Boom

In the early days of Gray County, before the Courthouse was moved to Pampa from Lefors, the tax assessor-collector's department and the sheriff's department were operated as a single office. Ray's association with Gray County began in this office, where he worked days in the tax office, and nights as deputy sheriff.

In 1924, the first oil well was drilled on the Combs-Worley Ranch south of town, and the oil boom was on. Pampa's population grew from less than 1,000 to more than 10,000 by 1930, and the Census Bureau pronounced Pampa the fastest growing city in the nation. Those were rowdy times.

In comparison to the tent city of Borger, Pampa was tame. There was a time during the boom when Borger had almost no law enforcement - a bad situation with money flowing freely from the newly-found oil. Gamblers, prostitutes and underworld figures flocked to Borger. Life was cheap, and killings were frequent.

The Gray County Sheriff's department was the closest functioning law department, and Deputy Ray and Sheriff E. S. Graves were often called to Borger to retrieve victims' bodies, and bring them to Pampa for burial.

The Texas Rangers were eventually called to Borger to restore order, and our sheriff's department ended the unwanted association with our neighbor.

Service As County Auditor

By 1929, Pampa had become the county seat, and Gray County had grown to the point that a County Auditor was needed. Several men vied for the appointment, including young Ray, who was then 28 years old. The District Judges who would make the appointment felt he was too young for such a responsible position.

The Dallas accounting firm of Thomas Y. Pickett was outside auditor of most counties in Texas in those years. They had audited Ray's work when he was in the tax office. On the day of the appointment, Thomas Y. Pickett telegraphed the District Judges and the Commissioners Court saying "Ray Wilson

keeps the best set of books in the State of Texas. You should hire him." They did. Ray would serve as the first Gray County Auditor until his retirement 43 years later.

He ran a model office, and was held in high esteem by his peers who twice elected him President of the Texas County Auditors Association. Surrounding counties sent their new auditors for training under his watchful eye.

During his long tenure, he was known as a fiscal watchdog, carefully tracking the County's money. When speaking about the auditor's office, the late Foster Whaley, who was County Agent for many years before he became State Representative, would often say "Ray Wilson has kept more men out of prison than any man in Gray County." He tolerated no financial impropriety.

Service To The Community

Ray served on the Board of Trustees of Pampa Independent School District from 1942 through 1948. He was President from 1945 through 1948.

He was a longtime member of the Pampa Noon Lions Club which he served in many capacities, and had 45 years of perfect attendance.

He was a member of First Christian Church for 70 years, serving as an Elder, and as Church Treasurer for 25 years without pay. On his retirement as treasurer, the congregation recognized him for his long years of service, and presented him with a suit. Ray returned the suit to the store, got the money back and donated it to the church!

Recognition By The Annual Staff

Ray received many recognitions in his life. One he especially treasured occurred in 1971, when the PHS annual staff dedicated the 1971 Harvester to Ray on the annual's 50th anniversary.

Family

The lives of Ray and his family have been intertwined with Pampa High School to this day. He and Hazel had two children and three grandchildren, all of whom are PHS graduates.

Daughter Kay, an accomplished musician in Scottsdale, AZ, graduated in 1953. Son Jerry, a local CPA, graduated in 1961.

Grandchildren Kim, Chris and Greg graduated in 1985, 1988 and 1990. Daughter-in-law Susie, although not a PHS graduate, was assistant choir director of PHS.