



~ **Part 4** ~

**Reflections on a Common Theme
Uncommon People who
have Lived in the Solomon Valley**

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Uncommon People who have Lived in the Solomon Valley

SHERIDAN COUNTY

Estelline Pike

by Jennifer Spresser

Estelline Pike was born in 1908 in Amarillo, Texas to Jackson and Ada Lovin and reared in Hoxie, Kansas. Estelline graduated as valedictorian of her class at Hoxie High School, went to Barnes Business School, and was working for an attorney in Hoxie when sword swallower John Lucky Ball spent a winter in Hoxie, around 1927, working for a local farmer and doing an occasional show. Estelline and Lucky met, he whisked her off her feet, and they were married in Hoxie in 1928, where she learned sword swallowing from him at the age of 20. They went on the road together, and after about a year of married life, Estelline was "holding her own" like a veteran swallower, and that is how she gained her notoriety.

In 1935 their son Jim Lucky Ball II was born. After learning to swallow swords, Estelline became a show owner and manager of several different sideshows with many different carnivals throughout the Midwest. Estelline divorced Lucky in 1941 and married D. W. Pike in 1943. She was widowed in 1947.

Estelline taught her son Jim to swallow swords at the age of 12, and he was known as the "World's Youngest Sword Swallower." Pike moved to New York around 1954 at the request of Hubert's Museum on 42nd Street to ply her talent. She was a featured performer at Hubert's for many years, taking her vacation during the spring to work with the Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey Circus sideshow during their Madison Square Garden engagement six weeks each spring. In 1958, she and her son appeared on "What's My Line?" as a sword swallowing team. Estelline was the last American sword swallower to perform in Cuba before Fidel Castro took over. The revolution was in full progress while she was there, and at one point while she was performing grenades were exploding in the parking lot.

According to one article, in 1961, at the age of 53, "Mrs. Pike could smoothly slide a 22-inch sword down her throat." Her throat was so "educated" that it didn't gag when she came to the climax of her act - swallowing six swords at once. She said, "The trick to sword swallowing is to be completely relaxed. You have to relax to control of your throat and your emotions." A widow and a grandmother, Mrs. Pike had already been swallowing swords for 33 years. In 1963 she worked briefly with a circus sideshow in Hawaii, but the next year she returned to her regular schedule in New York.

The last time Ringling Brothers had a sideshow at Madison Square Garden was in 1967, as the side-show and menagerie were eliminated when Ringling Brothers moved into the new Madison Square Garden above Penn Station in 1968. Pike continued for several more years at Hubert's and when the museum show closed, she remained to work as cashier for the arcade at the same location

until the end of her life in 1990. Pike swallowed neon tubes and up to six swords at once. She was also a jazz pianist, an accomplished songwriter who had written over 50 songs, and she enjoyed authoring numerous children's books in her spare time, which were in demand by the publishers. Estelline died in New York on June 8, 1990, at the age of 82. She is buried in her hometown of Hoxie.

GRAHAM COUNTY

W. L. Sayers

by Lowell Beecher

The American Dream suggests that any man or woman, disregarding race, religion, or birthright, may find success in this, our land of unlimited opportunity. Some struggle and fall short; some have fortune bestowed upon them; others light their own way, finding success in spite of—or perhaps because of—humble beginnings.

William Lincoln Sayers, his six siblings, and his newly-widowed mother came to Graham county and Nicodemus, Kansas, in the spring of 1887 from Fall City, Nebraska. Anyone acquainted with Mary Jan Sayers and her family recognized that the eldest boy, a lanky fifteen-year old, was a prodigy. Almost immediately upon his arrival to the area, the ambitious and enterprising youth attended teachers' institute and, after having waited for the certificate available upon achieving his sixteenth birthday, taught for a number of years in Graham county schools while fostering his dream: to become an attorney.

"W. L." or "Bill," as the soft-spoken African-American came to be known by black and white clients and constituents, alike, came to Hill City from Nicodemus in 1898 to begin his tenure as Clerk of the Court. In a span of time which followed—approximately five years—Sayers "read law" in the office of George Washington Jones, Graham County's African-American county attorney.

Sayers, like his mentor, was elected Graham County Attorney—serving for three terms—and quickly became known throughout the state as an extraordinarily clever—and extremely successful—trial lawyer.

Flamboyant? Dramatic? Sayers' courtroom style was neither. W. L.'s soft-spoken and disarming demeanor was typically conversational—but probing— and exhibited a kind of genuineness and sincerity that elicited truthful responses from the most stoic and stubborn of defendants. Judges and opposing attorneys became accustomed to hushed courtrooms as principals and spectators alike leaned forward from their benched, exhibiting their captivation with Sayers' hushed tones and carefully-calculated questions.

In spite of his successes as a trial lawyer, W. L. Sayers declined to dwell upon his achievements in the courtroom. Instead, he took unwavering pride in the fact that he served as Home Service Chairman of the American Red Cross from a time during World War I through the Conclusion of World War II. Among his volunteer responsibilities was obtaining benefits for widows and dependents of deceased or disabled Graham county servicemen. Then too, Sayers served as the appeals agent for the local Selective Service (draft) board, offering further testimony to the respect and confidence county residents place in the black, country lawyer.

Inevitably, when metropolitan newspaper reporters interviewed the mild-mannered attorney, he deflected questions regarding the high profile murder trials and compensatory litigations; instead, he talked about his volunteer service and what he attempted to do "for the people." In fact, few amateur Sayers historians are aware that he established the O. K. Theatre on property north of his Pomeroy Avenue law office in Hill City to guarantee that the country's African-American population would have their own movie house. Those better versed know that one of W. L.'s brothers, John Q. Sayers, was also a Hill City attorney and the W. L.'s son, Wendell, first in this class of 75 at Washburn Law, was a Hill City attorney for 10 years and Assistant Attorney General of Colorado for most of his professional career.

W. L. Sayers died on March 26, 1956, at age 84. Over the last years of his fruitful life, he had come to be known by the town's youth, those who regularly busied themselves with Bill Kobler's drug store jukebox, as the quiet and well-dressed black man who came into the Main Street establishment each evening to obtain his newspaper. Most did not fully appreciate the respectful "Good evening, Bill" his presence elicited for the parents and others of generations more familiar with Sayers' work at the across-town court house.

W. L. Sayers' funeral service was conducted by the Reverend J. D. Wilson of the Nicodemus Baptist Church at the Hill City Community Methodist Church. Sayers was buried in the Hill City Cemetery.

According to the provisions of W. L. Sayers' will, the outstanding attorney's race and roots were carefully considered. One-fifth of the new income from his held-in-trust estate was to be used "for the purpose of acquiring suitable places and accommodations to enable minority groups to procure food and lodging and not be rejected by reason or race." He also admonished the estate's trustees "to encourage maintenance of the Nicodemus community and to take an interest in the Western Kansas Industrial Training School," an entity established to aid underprivileged children in acquiring an education.

During the more than 50 years W. L. Sayers practiced law in western Kansas and before the Kansas Supreme Court, he accumulated both moderate wealth and legions of friends. Indeed, while over 95 per cent of Sayers' clients were white, race was not a factor in W. L. Sayers' selection as a attorney: his clients simply wanted the best.

ROOKS COUNTY

Lorenzo Fuller, Jr.

by Roger Hrabec

Lorenzo Fuller, Jr., a musical prodigy from Stockton, was born in Stockton in 1919 and left Kansas in 1945 for New York City. He is the son of Effie Green Fuller, the first Black child to be brought to Rooks County, and the grandson of pioneer homesteaders "Cap'n" Giles Green, a member of the 79th Colored Regiment of Kansas during the Civil War and Rebecca Green. His father, Lorenzo D. Fuller, Sr., was a self-made man who flourished in careers as a publisher, barber, and later as a musician. Fuller, Sr., founded the Fuller Concert Company, which entertained audiences from Kansas, throughout the Midwest, and as far away as Canada and Mexico.

At the age of eight, Lorenzo, Jr., was pleasing audiences while performing in his exceptional family's troupe. Most of the audiences the company played for rarely saw Blacks, let alone Black musical talent playing classical music. Ever the businessman, Fuller, Sr., sent cleverly-stated press releases ahead of appearances with headlines like: "Colored Musicians to Appear in Concert" and "See Professor Fuller Play the Harp with his Feet!" The articles included glowing reviews from previous shows, along with show posters. The company presented a mixture of styles, including vaudeville, classical, popular tunes, animal calls, and comedy.

At age 15 Fuller, Jr., was accepted as a sponsored student at the University of Kansas, where he received training in opera and other classical forms. While a KU student, Fuller performed monthly on KFKU radio and became the first Black man to sing with the KU Symphony.

In 1945, Fuller went to New York to study voice at Juilliard. While in New York, his ability to sing in several languages and play multiple musical instruments placed him in immediate demand by every medium of show business. He had his own radio shows on WLIB, where he was known for his jingles, and at the Mutual Network Radio, where he would occasionally speak about the people of Kansas in his broadcasts.

On Broadway he performed in several shows. He brought the house down in Cole Porter's Kiss me Kate with his high Fahrenheit rendition of the song "Too Darn Hot." Fuller recently recalled his visit to Stockton when the song was at its height in popularity: "My father was performing a religious selection at one end of town and strains of 'Too Darn Hot' could be heard coming from a local juke box." That song, with Fuller singing on the original cast album of the show, became so popular that a single was produced with Fuller singing the song on the "A" side of the record and Sarah Vaughn singing "Tenderly" on the flip side.

In television, Fuller was a versatile talent and performed both before the camera and behind the scenes. Fuller hosted a 15-minute musical show on NBC in 1947 and went on to become a musical director and special materials writer.

Lorenzo Fuller, Jr., was a man of firsts. His show, Van and the Genie, on WPIX in NYC, broke racial barriers: it was the first show in the nation where a Black man starred opposite a white woman. Van and the Genie was so successful that its sponsor's product, Scotty Pops Lollipops, was soon outstripped by demand as 3,300 new distributorships were created. Another first occurred with

the advent of his show Musical Miniature. Fuller became the first Black in the nation to have his own show—a few years before Nat King Cole had his show.

George Gershwin took him on the world tour of Porgy and Bess to play the role of Sportin' Life and to serve as an assistant musical director. The international troupe of Porgy and Bess made history by being America's first cultural ambassadors, being the first American production at La Scala, and being the first American troupe to perform in Russia during the "Cold War." In Russia, Fuller spoke to the opening night audience in their language and received a standing ovation.

Lorenzo Fuller's contribution to television has been largely overlooked. However, in the documentary Lorenzo Fuller: Black Pioneer in Early Television, many of his colleagues from TV, radio, and Broadway came together to acknowledge his contributions as part of Kansas history, American history, broadcast history, and Black history.

There is a Fuller exhibit at the Rooks County Historical Society Museum in Stockton, including musical instruments from the family's concert days.

OSBORNE COUNTY

Russell Stover

Alton, in Osborne County, claims with pride to be the birthplace of Russell Stover, of Russell Stover Candy fame. His journey from sod house to candy shops had many sweet turns.

Stover was born May 6, 1888, in a sod house south of Alton. His family moved to Iowa City, Iowa, and he attended Iowa City Academy, then Iowa State University. He studied chemistry there. In 1911 he married Clara Lewis and they moved to a farm in Canada. Not long after, they moved in order to work in candy companies in Chicago and Omaha.

Russell Stover had a role in developing the Eskimo Pie. The I-Scream Bar, patented in 1922 by Christian Nelson, Onawa, Iowa, was chocolate covered ice cream on a stick. Stover became a partner of Nelson, and they took out the stick to make a sandwich and called it Eskimo Pie. It was marketed under the brand of the Russell Stover Company.

In 1924 they sold the company and moved to Denver, Colorado. There they began "Mrs. Stover's Bungalow Candies," operating out of Clara's bungalow kitchen. By 1925 they opened candy factories in Denver and Kansas City, Missouri. The company headquarters moved to Kansas City in 1931.

At the time of Stover's death, May 11, 1954, the company was producing eleven million pounds of candy each year, selling through 40 Russell Stover shops and in about 2,000 department stores. Clara operated the company until 1960, at which time she sold it to Louis Ward who transformed it into an international company.

MITCHELL COUNTY

Clarence E. Pickett

by Carldon Broadbent

Clarence E. Pickett, the executive secretary of the American Friends Service Committee for 22 years, director of the relief and rehabilitation across the globe, and the man who was responsible for the Friends Service Committee winning the 1947 Nobel Peace Prize. How many readers know of his humble beginnings near Glen Elder in Mitchell County?

Yes, in the little Quaker community, three and one half miles southwest of Glen Elder, in this devotedly religious neighborhood, he grew to manhood. His family settled there, next to the Grellet Academy, after leaving Illinois, because of the 1887 depression. Clarence was born in Illinois three years earlier to a family of eight children, with his brothers and sisters being a decade and more older, and to him they seemed like aunts and uncles. Because of this, his mother felt that this burden of birthing a child in her later years was meant for great work for God, perhaps as a minister or a missionary.

After his grade school education in the country schoolhouse next to the farm, he drove his pony cart the four miles into Glen Elder, where the school house had added on a structure to be used for a high school. The Grellet Academy which stood near the Pickett farm had burned a few years earlier.

Clarence spent the summers working the farm, and in those hard times, it became a struggle to pay off the debt of \$2500. Clarence was the only child in the family still at home, His older sister Minnie was in Japan, sent by the Friends of Philadelphia to teach in the Friends Girls' school. No member of the Pickett family had ever attended college. But traveling Quaker ministers were beginning to stir in Clarence the desire to go on and to extend his influence to the outer world. But after high school graduation he felt compelled to help his ailing father. Therefore, he taught for two years, the little country school, sometimes called Grellet, but was district number 19, Pleasant Valley. Farming in the summer, he had the debt paid off, and some of the land was rented out.

He journeyed off to Penn College in Iowa. There he discovered a talent for public speaking. With scholarship assistance he went to Hartford Theological Seminary planning to become a minister. He met his future wife at Penn College, Lilly Peckham, and after their marriage, they began their life in Toronto, Canada where he was minister of the Friends Meeting. In 1917, they removed back to Penn College as minister of their Meeting, and struggled with the young men making decisions on whether conscientious objection to the war was the right course of action for their lives.

A brief survey of his activities after this includes being secretary of the Young Friends Movement. Then in 1922 he became professor of Biblical literature at Earlham College in Indiana. Here he continued the quest for a way to apply the teachings of Quaker religious faith to the social problems of the times. In 1929 came the invitation to become the executive secretary of the American Friends Service Committee, headquartered in Philadelphia. His life work began as secretary of the AFSC, leading to that organization winning the 1947 Nobel Peace Prize.

Two daughters were now part of the family, later providing much pleasure of numerous grandchildren and family events.

Clarence's record of his 22 years with AFSC would be exhaustive, but entails getting a good many persons working at home and abroad at hard jobs, especially during the war years of 1939 through 1940s. Providing refuge for the Jewish families fleeing Europe was a huge undertaking, involving many organizations and government sponsorships. Traveling in Germany before war was declared was a futile attempt to find some cooperation with the Nazis to let the Jewish families leave the country. Lilly and Clarence were chased out of Germany just ahead of the Nazi Gestapo and reached safety in Switzerland. Their endeavors provided many Jewish persons havens of safety in the U. S. and elsewhere.

Pickett worked closely with the president's wife, Eleanor Roosevelt, in her many projects with the downtrodden. Getting cabin homes for the poor in the South was an early endeavor on which they worked together. President John Kennedy appointed Pickett advisor for the Peace Corps.

In 1962 Clarence and Lilly Pickett were guests at the White House at a dinner hosted by President John Kennedy. Clarence Pickett enjoyed a long life, dying in the midst of family members on March 17, 1965. Eight hundred people were in attendance at the Friends Meetinghouse in Philadelphia at the memorial services. Later in March other memorial services were held in New York, Washington, and elsewhere. The world recognized the work of the AFSC under Pickett's leadership, but few knew of his nurturing influences in the small Quaker community south of Glen Elder, which led to his leadership abilities in this great humanitarian work of the American Friends Service Committee. The Clarence E. Pickett Middle School in Philadelphia honors the memory of this outstanding humanitarian. We honor the Pickett family and the Glen Elder Friends who produced this great American man.

CLOUD COUNTY

Lorean F. Davidson

L. F. (Tude) Davidson was born on a farm in Solomon Township, Cloud County, in 1874. His grassroots support for road development led him to work with farmers in the Glasco area to set aside acreage from which proceeds of crops went to build good roads. This action on farmers' behalf anticipated the value of good farm-to-market roads that laid the ground work for hard surface transcontinental highways.

Davidson represented Kansas on a 365 day road investigation to Detroit, Chicago, and Milwaukee, in July 1917. Kansas passed the Good Roads Amendment in 1920.

He was appointed a Kansas State Highway Commissioner, 1923-1925. He attended the 1925 meeting in Washington where action was taken to adopt the numbered system for federal highways

in response to requests from the American Association of State Highway Associations. The confusion resulting from 250 named highways had to be resolved with a uniform federal system.

Davidson was a leader, thinking ahead of his time: driving, selling, and promoting the auto. He owned the first auto in Cloud County, a one-cylinder Pope Tribune, and established Davidson and Co., a garage and auto dealership in 1911. He was president of the highway associations that boosted the highway that passed through Glasco: the Red Line, the Red Line Division of the Midland Trail, the Midland Trail, the Roosevelt Midland Trail, U.S Highway 40, U.S. Highway 40-N, and U.S. Highway 24.

One of his most colorful promotions was the Red Line Basketball Team. This Glasco town team was created in 1914 to bring attention to the towns on the Red Line Division of the Midland Trail. The team played basketball from Kansas City to Denver in early 1915, playing games along the way in the evening, and painting telephone poles with the highway red stripes to mark the route by day. The unanticipated success of the team, winning 35 games and losing none, brought them renown—and helped establish public awareness of the Red Line Division of the Midland Trail.

Lorean F. Davidson was described as “one of the most progressive good roads boosters in the state.” He died September 12, 1944, and is buried in Glasco.