

Pumpkin Center

Written by Diana Firey
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Location: 8001 S. 145th W. Avenue - Sapulpa
Creek County, Oklahoma



*Possibly the original pumpkin on top of the
Pumpkin Center road sign.*



*Only remnants of Pumpkin Center - Original Tire Building
and Gas Pump Foundation near road.*

Since I married into the Firey family by marrying Ray Firey in July of 1983, I have occasionally heard in the older folks' recollections of an old country store northwest of Sapulpa in the Rock Creek area called "Punkin Center" or Pumpkin Center (however you prefer to call it). According to what I discovered, the name of the store, Pumpkin Center, became the name of the whole countryside surrounding it. For example, if someone died living anywhere near the store, then that person would be listed as being from Pumpkin Center. From what I've heard Pumpkin Center was the only store for miles around for people who lived in the area.



Ray's Aunt Kathern Firey Thomas remembers walking seven miles east and south with her sisters and mother to her Uncle & Aunt Mose and Mandy Haney's place in the community of Pumpkin Center in 1939. They spent the night at Pumpkin Center with their kinfolk and hitched a ride to Sapulpa the next day so they could see a brand new movie at that time, "Gone With The Wind". Kathern also mentions that one of the few phones for miles around was at Pumpkin Center and remembers going there to use it a time or two when a doctor was needed, etc.



*A sign frame on the property
with a pumpkin on top.*

Besides groceries, gas, and tires, the store even sold shoes and other useful items (according to Willa Dean Blackley, a granddaughter of Andy & Fannie Griffith, who lived north and west of Pumpkin Center a few miles.)



*Darrell Barton, who currently owns the property,
talking with J.W. "Bill" Firey at the Pumpkin Center
location May 8, 2009*

In recent years, I have researched some on the internet and also went exploring by car in the summer of 2009 with J.W. "Bill" Firey (Ray' then 83 year old uncle) who had personal memories of Pumpkin Center. I did find a line or two from an article published by Gene Curtis of the Tulsa World. The article is in a collection of articles published in a book entitled "Only In Oklahoma". I have the book and the information can also be found online. The article is entitled: "Names of Towns in State A Bit Bizarre". The article mentions Pumpkin Center in the first paragraph as follows:

"A small community that grew up around a general store established by Jepay Color in Creek County around the turn of the 20th century was supposed to have been



named after land owner John Weaver's daughter, Helen. But Color and Weaver got into a financial dispute and Color reneged on his promise. Instead, he named the community Pumpkin Center.”



Beginning with the information from the Gene Curtis article, I've been able to piece together a little more concrete information on Pumpkin Center, from personally visiting where Pumpkin Center used to be located to chancing upon a photo of Helen Weaver mentioned in the article.

On May 8, 2009, I phoned J.W. “Bill” Firey (who has since passed away June 6, 2010) and asked him about Pumpkin Center. Since he was not doing anything at the time and said he would enjoy the ride down Memory Lane, we decided to go out for a drive to see where Pumpkin Center once stood. He took me to what is now the modern location of 8001 S. 145th W. Avenue. All that remains of what used to be Pumpkin Center is a concrete foundation of where the gas pumps once stood and a small white metal building near the road. Uncle Bill said he remembered he purchased his first gas as a teenager at Pumpkin Center at 15 cents a gallon. Uncle Bill was born December 25, 1925, so this would have been in the early 1940's when he bought his first gas. He remembered the small building that still stands as holding tires and automotive supplies. He said the original store building burned down years ago. While pulled over that day, I got out my camera and took a few photos and the curious current owner of the property, Darrell Barton, came out to see what we were up to. I introduced myself and also Uncle Bill and told him why I had been snapping a few photos. He was



more than happy to help us out and asked if I would like to see some of the original signs from Pumpkin Center he now had in storage in a shed on his property. While Uncle Bill remained in the car, I walked back with Mr. Barton and took a few photos of the old signs. Of course, I was pleasantly surprised to find what looked like would have been the main Pumpkin Center sign that would have stood near the road. It had a pumpkin plainly painted on top.

Francis Ivey Griffith (1870-1953) on left standing next to Helen Weaver, the proprietor of Pumpkin Center. Fannie lived nearby on Rock Creek with her husband Andrew and was the grandmother of Bessie Claunch Bills (who loaned me this photo.)

Also, in recent months, I have become acquainted by email and phone, and now in person with Bessie Claunch Bills, who now lives in southern Oklahoma near Ada. She knew J.W. “Bill” Firey as a teenager and would spend time on Rock Creek while visiting her maternal grandparents, Andrew (Andy) & Fannie (Francis Ivey) Griffith. She has a photo in her collection of her grandmother Fannie Griffith standing alongside Helen Weaver. Helen's name was mentioned in the Gene Curtis article. Bessie believes the photo was taken at a store she knew to be east of where her grandparents lived. Bessie didn't know the name of the store but has since come to the conclusion this must have been Pumpkin Center where the photo was taken. Since Helen Weaver operated the Pumpkin Center store, the likelihood is that the photo was taken next to the actual building sometime before 1953 (the year Bessie's grandmother died.) The Griffiths resided in a log cabin north and west of where Pumpkin Center was then located.

These tidbits of information and photos are all I have collected about Pumpkin Center at the time of this writing. However, I believe this article is the most informative resource on Pumpkin Center in Creek County, Oklahoma, that exists at this time. If anyone who reads this article has more information or photos, I would love to add and include them in this article.