**Andy Payne** 

Andy Payne, an Oklahoma Cherokee, was twenty years old when he decided to enter the 1928 Trans-Continental Foot Race. When asked why Andy said “I just thought I could do it”. Andy would finish in first place after the 84 day ordeal.

Andrew Hartley Payne was born at home, on a ranch near Chelsea, Oklahoma on November 16, 1907. Andy was the oldest son of Andrew J. L. Payne and Zona Mae Hartley Payne.

Andy’s father, known as “Doc” left home at the age of 11 to find work. His first job was on the Clem Rogers ranch. Doc learned to farm and ranch right beside Clem’s son Will Rogers.

When Andy was four or five, his parents purchased a farm near Foyil, OK and went into farming for themselves. Andy attended school at Foyil and finished elementary and high school there.

Andy participated in high school track, running the mile and half-mile competitions and won a number of tournaments. He was to say later, “I just enjoyed running and had a knack for being able to cover the ground on foot.” The distances never really demonstrated his potential.

The Paynes made a modest living, but farming was hard. As the oldest of seven children, Andy was expected to pull his weight and was often put in charge of his younger siblings around the farm. Those who were old enough to work had to help with the chores.

Andy had no interest in becoming a farmer like his father. His primary interest was school and everyday he would run to the schoolhouse after finishing his chores. He often arrived before his siblings, who rode horseback across the fields to school.

In his senior year at Foyil, he met a young schoolteacher, Vivian Shaddox. Vivian, age 17, had been hired to finish out the school year at Foyil when the math teacher quit. Andy was one of four seniors in her math class. They found each other attractive, but dating was out of the question.

Andy graduated and Vivian went home to Tahlequah when the school year was over. Jobs were scarce in Oklahoma and Andy decided he might have better luck in California. He hopped a freight train and rode out to Los Angeles, trying to find work.

Work was as scarce in California as it was in Oklahoma. By chance Andy saw an ad in the sports pages announcing C. C. Pyle’s Inter-national Transcontinental Foot Race. He later told an interviewer, “I knew I was strong and could run. And I just concluded that I would stand as good a chance as any.”

Andy asked his dad for help and together they raised the entry fee of $125. Andy went back to California in February of 1928 to the training camp at Ascot Parkway in Los Angeles.

The runners left Ascot on March 4th, 1928 on the first leg of a race that was to take 84 days and cover 3,422.3 miles. When the runners reached New York on May 26th, Andy Payne was the first place winner. The prize was $25,000.

When Andy returned to Oklahoma he paid off the mortgage on his family’s farm and built his parents a new home. He bought some land of his own and a car. He continued his courtship of Vivian, driving to Tahlequah as often as he could to see her. Andy and Vivian married in late 1929.

Andy never ran again. In 1934 with no job and the country caught in the throes of the Depression, Andy did a different kind of running. He ran for clerk of the Oklahoma State Supreme Court and won. He continued to be re-elected, leaving only for a two-year hitch in the army during World War II. After Andy turned 40 he went to law school at night and earned a law degree.

His real interest lay in land acquisition with an eye towards oil production. He had held onto the land he bought with his winnings and bought more. He studied geology to help make his land purchases. Eventually it paid off in the discovery of coal, gas and oil. Although a wealthy man, Payne continued his job as clerk of the Oklahoma Supreme Court until he retired in 1973. By this time he owned over 1,000 acres of land in 17 counties in Oklahoma. It’s said that he never sold any. Andy Payne died suddenly in 1977, leaving his family a small fortune and a large legend.