

Author earned fans through details

By Moira K. Wiley

Staff Writer (Published in the Stillwater NewsPress – Circa March 2002)

Not many Stillwater residents can say they have their own fan club. Glenn Shirley could.

A fan club was formed in 1992 for Stillwater's best known author who believed in "telling it like it was" in the accurate recounting of stories based on famous outlaws and lawmen. Writing about outlaws, lawmen and famous events in history was a passion of his, which he pursued right up to his death on Feb. 27.

Shirley's background in law enforcement, which included stints with the Stillwater Police Department, Payne County Sheriff's Department and a position as assistant chief of security at Oklahoma State University, led him to a full-time career in writing that spanned almost 60 years. With 28 books to his credit and more than 800 articles, novelettes and short stories published in regional and national magazines and journals, he was an acknowledged expert on law enforcement in the Old West.

He was a meticulous researcher who believed the real story was better than anything that could be made up. His depiction of the lives of such notable figures as Henry Starr, Belle Starr, Pawnee Bill and U.S. Marshals Heck Thomas and Bill Tilghman separated fact from fiction.

"He was a stickler for details and facts," said Dale Chlouber, friend and curator of the Washington Irving Trail Museum where Shirley's various books are on display. "He was a strict advocate in believing that thorough research and well-written non-fiction was much more interesting than stories embellished so far from the facts."

"If someone was presenting something as factual and he knew otherwise, he would say so in no uncertain terms," Chlouber said. "He was candid and outspoken, but he almost always knew what he was talking about."

Shirley was well prepared to take on the task of retelling history with accuracy. He was an experienced detective and during his years with the police force, he studied law and received his diploma from the IAS School of Criminology in 1937 and an LLB from the Chicago Criminologist School in Seattle in 1948.

Shirley's training in law enforcement and his interest in getting the facts straight helped him search through and understand old court records, newspapers and government documents. Events that had become embellished were retold with accuracy and detail.

In 1981, he was inducted into the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame. The U.S. Marshals Service awarded him the American Star Award in 1989 and the University of Oklahoma presented him with the Professional Writing Award in 1990. He was inducted into the Oklahoma Professional Writers Hall of Fame in 1992 and the Oklahoma Historians Hall of Fame in 1999. In 2001, he was awarded the Western Outlaw-Lawman History Association Outstanding

Contributions Award and the National Association for Outlaw and the Lawman Literary Award for outstanding contributions to Western Historical writing.

Past president and charter member of the Stillwater Writers' Group and Oklahoma Writers' Federation, he wasn't shy about helping aspiring writers. He gave many lectures and provided insight on the art of researching and writing for beginning writers.

"Glenn Shirley was an inspiration to us all, both aspiring writers and published writers. His dedication to accuracy and his work ethic was phenomenal," said Mary Ellen Cooper, a local writer of true crime and historical mysteries.

"I admired him," Chlouber said. "You always knew what his position was. If he told you something, you could count on it. He told it like it was and he didn't take a position without being as informed as he thought he should be.

"Glenn's accomplishments were of his own making through his perseverance, organization and sheer effort in pursuing his writing and his goals. He exemplified the characteristics of rugged western people and relied on himself and his own determined efforts."