

Tillman County Chronicles

Tillman County Historical Society Column

by Joe Wynn

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“That Man Amos” was early Frederick Photographer

In the early years of Tillman County, photography was important. As citizens built homes and businesses, they wanted a photographic record of their prosperity, and no photographer was more proficient than “That Man Amos” of Frederick.

During his years in Frederick, “That Man Amos” photographed countless Tillman County homes, public buildings, street scenes, businesses (inside and out), and farm scenes. In addition to traditional studio portrait work, he also took class pictures of early county schools. On most of his photos, neatly stamped in one corner or printed in handwritten script, are the words “That Man Amos.”

No other person did more to document in photographs the early days of Tillman County. Today, many of the photographs that depict early Frederick, Tipton, Manitou, Davidson, Grandfield, and other county communities bear the Amos mark.

Who was he?

“That Man Amos” was his professional name and his carefully crafted public identification.

A 1919 Frederick directory identifies “That Man Amos” as Bert E. Amos. His photography studio and residence was on the second floor at 108 North 10th Street.

Although there is no easily located record of how long “That Man Amos” worked in

Tillman County, according to a 1916 *Leader* article, he came to Frederick in 1915.

Excerpts of the 1916 article read as follows:

“The history of modern photography is an epic of scientific research and achievement. Without going into the details and data of its history, which has

been written practically in America during the last century, or attempting to trace the various experiments and efforts through which the art of photograph making was brought to its present state of perfection, it is nevertheless interesting to reflect on what the world today would be without photography, and for those of even middle age it is easy to appreciate what the art has accomplished in the last half century. Just



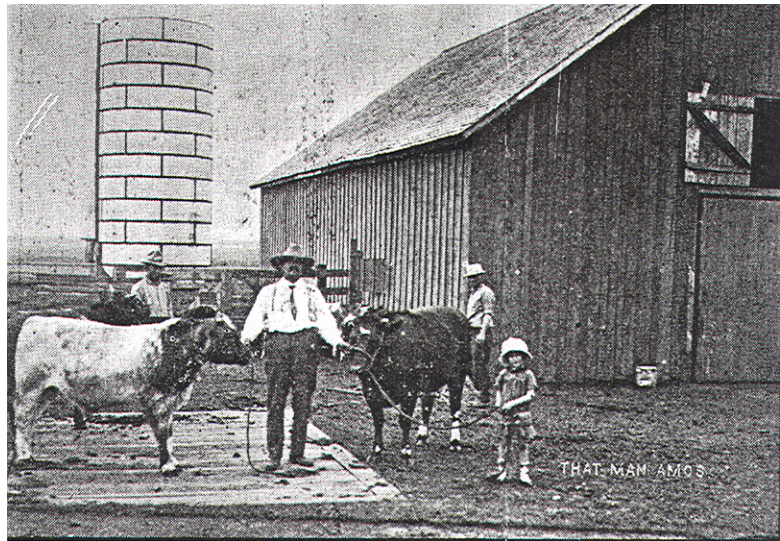
“That Man Amos” from 1916 publication

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compare an old fashioned daguerreotype with the perfect photography of the present and you will note as great an improvement in the last over the first as would be shown in a 1916 product of the Baldwin locomotive shops compared with an engine with the civil war period.

"That Frederick should have an establishment that is able to turn out a product of the photographic art equaling that procurable anywhere is but natural and of course to be expected, but that Frederick possesses a studio and an artist who can turn out work which few if any studios in the state can equal, may be news to many people. 'That Man Amos' is a phrase known all over the eastern part of the state.



That Man Amos picture of area farmer J.T. Godard with prized shorthorn cattle in 1916 is representative of a popular kind of photography in early-day Oklahoma.

"Mr. Amos was located in Muskogee 14 years, was staff photographer for the *Muskogee Phoenix*, official photographer for the State Fair association and the Commercial Club of that city, a member of the Manufacturers' association, and before coming here spent 15 months in a search for a new location, having grown tired of Muskogee. In all his travel during that 15 months search, Frederick, as he expresses it, looked like the best of them all and he decided it was the town to settle down in. There was some delay about procuring quarters, but he finally got possession of the upper floor of the L.T. Martin building on North Main street and moved in the 27th of last April.

"Mr. Amos makes a specialty of commercial work, something no photographer ever did here before. By commercial work is

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Photograph of the Frederick First Methodist Church, 12th and Grand, taken in 1916, is representational of countless landmark Tillman County photos of schools, homes, and other public buildings taken by That Man Amos. Note his name at bottom right, etched into the negative.

meant that of showing photos of the various parts of machines, from a nut or a bolt up to the completed machines and the various stages of its progress toward completion, or the various parts or processes of mechanical apparatus or construction.

“Another special feature in his work is his cirkut panoramic outside views, in which the photograph may be made in a straight line, a semi-circle or a complete circle. The peculiar spelling of the word ‘cirkut’ comes from the distinctive class of work which it is used to describe and does not mean exactly ‘circuit’ in the sense in which that word is usually used.

“Since coming to Frederick the studio has done a good business and it is growing. As the work of ‘That Man Amos’ becomes known it is safe to predict that the phrase will soon become as well known in this part of Oklahoma as it is in the eastern part, and while boosting his own business Mr. Amos will at the same time be spreading the fame of Frederick and Tillman county, which he has already come to regard as the best place on earth.”

Joe Wynn is a member of the Tillman County Historical Society Board of Directors.