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Pistol Pete goes to state Capitol

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A portrait of Frank "Pistol Pete" Eaton was officially unveiled Thursday at the state Capitol in Oklahoma City.

The portrait was commissioned as a gift to the Capitol by Sen. Mike Morgan, D-Stillwater. It was one of two original paintings presented. The second, a portrait of William "Bill" Tilghman, was commissioned by Sen. Brad Henry.

"Most Oklahomans probably think of Pistol Pete as OSU's mascot," said Morgan, "but may not realize he was a real person and very much the product of the Wild West.

"As a young child, he saw his father murdered. At 15, he had become such an excellent marksman that he was able to outshoot the best soldiers at Fort Gibson, earning himself a marksmanship badge and the nickname Pistol Pete. At the age of 17, he became a deputy U.S. Marshall under Judge Isaac Parker, better known as the hanging judge."

"At 29, he joined the land rush to Oklahoma and settled near Perkins where he served as sheriff and then later as a blacksmith. After seeing Eaton ride a horse in the 1923 Armistice Day parade in Stillwater, a group of Oklahoma A&M College students decided he was just the character to be their mascot. But it wasn't made official until 1958, the same year he died."

Approximately 40 Perkins residents and 20 members of Eaton's family attended the unveiling.

"I'm so proud of Perkins," Morgan said "and I'm so glad all of you could be here today for this dedication. These paintings aren't free. There were a lot of underwriters who made this gift possible."

Perkins residents who helped fund the painting included Randy and Katrina Jarvis, Steve and Kristi Willingham, Jack and Pat Vassar, Lynn Kinder, Bill Anderson, Harland Wells, Richard Raines and Tommy Roper.

Sen. Charles Ford, president of the Oklahoma State Senate Historical Preservation Fund, Inc., formally dedicated both paintings in a ceremony in the Senate Chamber.

"With these latest additions, our organization has now commissioned 26 pieces of original art for the Capitol," said Ford. "This is part of our law enforcement series, from a time when there were more outlaws than there were lawmen."

Both paintings were created by Kremlin artist Harold "H. T." Holden.