

THE FOUNDING AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF
KINGFISHER, OKLAHOMA

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PREFACE

The first years after the initial settlement by a land run were important ones for the development of the city of Kingfisher. They witnessed the events and marked the birth and growth of the major institutions which shaped the character and determined the destiny of the city. An attempt is made to relate the major events which occurred during the territorial period from 1889 until statehood in 1907. An effort is also made to analyze some of the problems faced by the early inhabitants and to trace the major social, cultural, economic and political currents which influenced their lives.

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CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND FOR SETTLEMENT

Before the outbreak of the Civil War, the area of present-day Oklahoma had been designated by the United States government as a separate area in which the Indians would be isolated and completely free of whites. In the decade preceding the Civil War the hoped for sanctity of the Indian Territory was repeatedly violated by whites and in the two decades immediately following the War the government's attitude toward the Indians underwent a drastic change.¹

During the course of the Civil War the Five Civilized Tribes, for the most part, had become allies of the Confederacy and after the war the government in Washington used the Indian's participation on the side of the Confederacy as a basis for disregarding previous treaties. New treaties were forced upon the defeated Indians in 1866, which marked the beginning of the end of the Indian occupancy of western Oklahoma.² These treaties abolished slavery within the Indian nations and allowed the settlement of friendly Indian tribes in their territory. A hint of further white encroachment was revealed when these treaties contained concessions granting right of way to railroads across Indian Territory.³ By 1867 the

¹U. S. Senate Documents, 36 Cong., 1 Sess., I, Report of Commissioner of Indian Affairs (1023), p. 380.

²U. S. Statutes at Large, XIV, pp. 755-761, 769-792. Henceforth cited as U. S. Statutes.

³Ibid., p. 771.

government's original policy of Indian isolation was clearly ended and efforts to segregate the Indians from the whites were abandoned, although the Indian Intercourse Act of 1834 was still in force.⁴

Another change had occurred in the southwest after the Civil War which greatly influenced the future of Oklahoma. The cattle industry thrived in Texas and large herds of cattle were driven across western Oklahoma to rail outlets in Kansas. One of the more popular cattle trails was the Chisholm Trail, sometimes referred to as the Abilene Trail, which passed near the present site of Kingfisher, Oklahoma.⁵ The Texas cattlemen also took advantage of the virtually unoccupied portion of western Oklahoma and leased this area from the Indians as grazing lands for their cattle. Included in this area was a large portion of west-central Oklahoma, referred to as the Unassigned Lands and which had not been allotted to any Indian tribe. During the early 1880's cattlemen frequently allowed their herds to wander into this unfenced area. In one instance in 1884 the Indian Agent at Muskogee reported that cattle were allowed to freely roam over the entire Unassigned Lands.⁶ The cattlemen, while ostensibly only driving their herds through Oklahoma, actually made use of this land during the grazing season without cost. As this situation became known the grazing lands of the Indians, and especially the Unassigned Lands, were hungrily eyed by the tide of white settlers moving westward.

Seemingly unmindful of the westward movement, the government had

⁴Ibid., IV, pp. 729-735. This act made it a criminal offense for a white person to enter an Indian reservation without permission.

⁵Grant Foreman, "Early Trails Through Oklahoma," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, III (June, 1925), p. 119.

⁶John Q. Tufts to H. Price, Letters of March 5 and May 21, 1884, U. S. Senate Executive Documents, 48 Cong., 2 Sess., I (2261), No. 17, p. 90.

largely ignored demands made during the 1870's that Oklahoma be opened to settlement; but by 1879 the land-hungry whites were determined to force the opening of the Unassigned Lands. Taking matters into their own hands when Congress refused to act, they organized groups which planned and carried out white invasions of the Indian Territory in defiance of the government. Foremost among these agitators was a group of men called "boomers" led by Colonel C.C. Carpenter, Captain David L. Payne and Captain W. L. Couch. Payne was determined to force the opening of Oklahoma and made numerous attempts to form a colony although he was arrested and removed from the territory after each invasion from Kansas. Payne died in 1884, but his efforts aroused public opinion and hastened the eventual opening. C. P. Wickmiller, who later became a familiar figure in Kingfisher after the opening, accompanied Payne on one of his invasions.⁷

By the mid 1880's the activities of the Boomers were highly publicized and numerous petitions were sent to Congress urging that western Oklahoma be opened to settlement.⁸ In 1888, Congressman William M. Springer from Illinois, Chairman of the Committee on Territories, introduced a bill providing for the creation of an Oklahoma Territory out of the Indian land located west of the ninety-eighth meridian. This bill died because of opposition based on a lack of a title to this land which was still held by the Indians.⁹

It had now become evident to both the Seminole and the Creek Indians

⁷W. H. Osburn. "Tribute to David L. Payne," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, VIII (March, 1930), p. 22.

⁸A Boomer convention met at Kansas City in February, 1888, and sent a petition to Washington asking that western Oklahoma be opened to white settlement. Carl Coke Rister, Land Hunger, David L. Payne and the Oklahoma Boomers (Norman, 1942), pp. 203-204.

⁹U. S. Congressional Record, 50 Cong., 1 Sess., XIX, Part 7, p. 6741.

that they could no longer hope to retain title to their lands in western Oklahoma and in January, 1889, they sent a delegation to Washington and offered to sell their remaining claims to the lands. Events now moved rapidly. President Cleveland, through the Secretary of the Interior, William F. Vilas, negotiated a treaty with the Creeks on January 19, wherein they agreed to relinquish their title to all of their lands west of the ninety-sixth meridian for \$2,280,857.¹⁰ The last major obstacle to settlement of the Unassigned Lands was now removed and the fight to open this land was led in Congress by Representative Charles Mansur from Missouri and his colleague, William M. Springer. On February 1, Springer introduced a bill to open the country to settlement which passed in the House of Representatives, but the Senate promptly referred it to the Committee on Territories where it died.¹¹ All efforts to have it considered in the Senate failed.

Later, with adjournment of Congress nearing, the Springer Bill was attached as a rider to an Indian appropriation bill. This rider threw the Unassigned Lands open to white settlement under the terms of the Homestead Law. The Senate, rather than reject the appropriation bill, passed this law on March 2, 1889. Congress also passed an appropriation bill on this same day which satisfied the implied claims of the Seminoles to this land.¹² The Springer Act provided for the President to open the Unassigned Lands by proclamation, reserved sections sixteen and thirty-six of each township for the benefit of the public schools, and limited

¹⁰U. S. Senate Executive Documents, 50 Cong., 2 Sess., III (2612), No. 98, pp. 1-8.

¹¹U. S. Congressional Record, 50 Cong., 2 Sess., XX, Part 3, p. 2010.

¹²U. S. Statutes, XXV, p. 1004.

individual land holdings to one quarter-section of land per person. It further provided that no person would be permitted to enter the territory and occupy land before the opening date and warned that any person violating this provision would be prohibited from acquiring any right to any of the land to be opened. Townsites were limited to no more than one-half section of land. Section fifteen of the Act provided for the President to create no more than two land districts and was empowered to locate land offices for the carrying out of the settlement.¹³

The rider to the Indian Appropriation Act of March 2, 1889, contained no provision for territorial government. In spite of this deficiency, newly elected President Benjamin Harrison went ahead with a proclamation because of the large number of people who were pressing to enter the territory. On March 23 he issued the eagerly awaited proclamation which defined the Oklahoma lands and declared them open to settlement at twelve o'clock noon on April 22, 1889.¹⁴

Less than a month remained before the land was to be opened and preparation for opening the territory was hastily carried out. The demand for land was great and the government made plans to enforce the provisions of the law limiting settlement to claimants making the run at the appointed moment. The army was instructed to make certain that only authorized personnel were in the territory before the opening date. The Department of the Interior, to prevent intrigues by their agents, later ruled that those who were in the territory legally prior to the opening would not be permitted to homestead.¹⁵

¹³Ibid., pp. 1004-1006.

¹⁴U. S. Statutes, XXVI, Proclamation No. 2, pp. 2-4; U. S. House Executive Documents, 51 Cong., 1 Sess., XI (2724), pp. 98-100.

¹⁵U. S. House Executive Documents, 51 Cong., 1 Sess., XXXI (2746), No. 209.

President Harrison also ordered that two land offices be established, one at Guthrie and the other at the Kingfisher stage station. The Guthrie site was on the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad line, with the Kingfisher site approximately thirty miles west of Guthrie. The Kingfisher stage station had been a stopping point on the military trail between Caldwell, Kansas, and Fort Reno.¹⁶ The Presidential Proclamation reserved one acre of land in the southeast corner of the NW/4 of Section 15, Township 16 North, Range 7 West, of the Indian Meridian, as the location of the Kingfisher land office.¹⁷

Shortly after President Harrison issued the proclamation opening the Unassigned Lands to settlement, Senators John J. Ingalls and Preston B. Plumb of Kansas recommended to the President that Jacob V. Admire of Osage County, Kansas, be appointed receiver of the land office in Oklahoma. Senators Charles F. Manderson and Algeron S. Paddock of Nebraska, also recommended that J. C. Robberts of David City, Nebraska, be appointed one of the officers of the land offices in Oklahoma.¹⁸

Admire had served in the Union Army during the Civil War and reached the rank of Captain. He had participated in General William T. Sherman's invasion of the South when he marched through Georgia. After the war he

¹⁶An early day cattleman by the name of King Fisher established a ranch near the point where Uncle John's Creek joins with Kingfisher Creek. Soon afterward a stage line was developed connecting Caldwell, Kansas, with Fort Reno, Indian Territory. The station was located on the north side of the creek which was named King Fisher's Creek. John Alley, City Beginnings in Oklahoma Territory (Norman, 1939), p. 47.

¹⁷Annual Report of the Commissioner of the General Land Office, 1889, p. 95.

¹⁸Kingfisher Free Press, April 4, 1955. Henceforth cited as Free Press. This article was written by Dr. B. B. Chapman who secured his information from the National Archives.

attended Asbury University at Greencastle, Indiana, practiced law, edited a newspaper, worked as a postmaster, and served two terms in the Kansas legislature.¹⁹

Robberts, the son of a Congregational minister, practiced law in Iowa and Nebraska and served in the Nebraska legislature for three years.²⁰ Both Admire and Robberts were active Republicans. On April 2, President Harrison appointed Robberts as register and Admire as receiver of the Kingfisher land office. Strother M. Stockslager, Commissioner of the General Land Office, made a request to the Secretary of the Interior that four clerks be assigned to assist the registers and receivers at the Kingfisher and Guthrie land offices and that they be permitted to be present on the day of the opening.²¹ Permission was then given by the army for the officials and clerks of the land offices to enter the territory early.²²

Meanwhile, the government had contracted for the construction of a frame building on the government acre at both Kingfisher and Guthrie. The carpenters were either rushed for time or careless, or both, and when Robberts arrived in Kingfisher on Sunday evening, April 21, he found "the office not enclosed, no shelves, counters or anything of the kind."²³ Robberts and the other members of the office staff immediately made temporary counters with the material available, unloaded their personal effects,

¹⁹Portrait and Biographical Record of Oklahoma (Chicago, 1901), pp. 811-813.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 1080-1083.

²¹U. S. House Executive Documents, 51 Cong., 1 Sess., XI (2724), p. 60.

²²U. S. Senate Executive Documents, 51 Cong., 1 Sess., IX (2686), No. 72, p. 4.

²³Free Press, April 4, 1955.

and prepared to open the land office on the morning of April 23. The land offices were not opened on the day of the run in order to give claimants time to select, stake their claims, then proceed to the land office to file their claims. When the sun went down on the evening of April 21, there were great crowds massed along the borders of the Un-assigned Lands, crowds who sensed the dramatic and historic role which they were to play on the following day. The long awaited day of the run was now at hand.

CHAPTER II

BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE UNDER PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT

Monday morning April 22, 1889, dawned bright and clear over the plains of central Oklahoma. Great crowds lined the borders of the Unassigned Lands, anxiously awaiting the signal which was to start the run. The tension and anxiety increased as the designated hour approached and it seemed as if the people sensed their role in this historic occasion.

The army stationed soldiers in the territory who had been patrolling the border for several days prior to April 22 in order to exclude people until the opening hour. Soldiers riding along the border on the morning of April 22 faced countless horses, wagons, carriages and people who had no means of conveyance other than walking. A large crowd had assembled on the line which was approximately one and one-half miles west of the Kingfisher land office. They waited along the ninety-eighth meridian of west longitude which formed the dividing line between the Unassigned Lands and the Cheyenne and Arapahoe Indian reservation. A few women were in the crowd gathered west of Kingfisher stage station but most of the land seekers were men who had left families behind in other states and planned to send for them after they had established a claim in the new land. Admire later reported that many of these people came from the "short grass regions of Western Kansas where they had literally starved out."¹ The vast majority of the people who settled in Kingfisher were people of moderate means but a few were extremely poor.

¹Free Press, December 28, 1905.

Among the crowd awaiting the signal from the west line was a group who planned to stake claims on town lots of the potential city rather than on quarter sections of farm land. A delegation of these promoters was led by a man named D. F. Smith. The group was familiar with the requirements for settling a government townsite and had even platted the town of Kingfisher while waiting along the west border before the opening. Their plats listed the principal business streets, including the alleys. These streets were named Main Street, Robberts, Admire, Miles and Broadway Avenues.² These names were adopted after the town was settled and the streets are so named to this day. The objective of these men was to make a quick profit by staking and then selling their claim to a business lot in the belief that these lots could be disposed of more readily than a quarter section of land.

The group assembled along the west border were called "West Liners" because of their starting point of the run. A large number of people had also massed along the Kansas border near Caldwell several days before the opening. Because these people were separated from the border of the Unassigned Lands by the Cherokee Outlet, the government authorities decided to permit them to cross the Outlet to the north line of the lands to be opened. Troops maintained patrols through the Cherokee lands to make certain that no persons remained in this area after the run was over.³ The group entering the territory from the northern border were called "North Liners." The people in this group desiring town lots in Kingfisher were still at a disadvantage, however, because they had to travel more than twenty miles before reaching the site of Kingfisher, whereas

²Ibid., December 21, 1905.

³U. S. Senate Executive Documents, 51 Cong., 1 Sess. IX (2686), No. 72, pp. 2-3.

the West Liners were but minutes away. Consequently, the West Liners had first choice of town lots.

The only people legally present in the territory prior to the opening were the land officers, their staffs, a number of United States marshals and their deputies, military personnel, and a few employees of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad. In spite of government efforts to keep unauthorized people out of the territory there were several civilians illegally at the site of the Kingfisher land office before the opening gun was fired. One of these men, H. H. Allen, of Atchison, Kansas, had managed to enter the territory and later claimed land under the special rights of Civil War veterans.⁴ Sixteen years later this man's claim had not been settled and was still involved in litigation. W. H. Scott, another newcomer, had erected a large tent one block south of the land office which he planned to use for a temporary hotel. Admire, writing about these people sixteen years after the opening, recalled their names and the problems caused by their illegal entry. In relating events of the day before the opening which included an account of the ill prepared office and the presence of the "newcomers," Admire commented somewhat bitterly, "We ate everything eatable in sight, I think we all rolled up in our blankets for the night, hungry as well as tired, if not also disgusted."⁵

On the following day, April 22, 1889, the signal to start the mad scramble into the territory was given at twelve o'clock noon by the soldiers firing their guns. Admire described the run as he witnessed it from the land office as:

⁴Free Press, December 28, 1905.

⁵Ibid. The term "Sooner" had not yet been used.

...a mad, furious rush of people as they came swarming in from the west line. . . . They came in every conceivable fashion--on horseback, in wagons and buggies and on foot. In a few instances horses, being ridden at break-neck speed, fell and threw their riders over their heads. Wagons and buggies were turned bottom up, but fortunately no serious accidents occurred. It was more like the wild rush of an excited mob in pursuit of its victim.⁶

The competition for lots in Kingfisher was brisk, especially for those that were believed to be the choice business sites. In many cases two or more people claimed the same lot.⁷ U. S. Marshals and their deputies were kept busy settling disputes over these lots and conflicting claims were generally settled without violence even though there were many disappointed and bitter settlers.⁸ The problem was usually solved by the loser taking a less desirable location further from the land office site. In less than one hour after the opening a town had been born on the prairie. By one o'clock both sides of Kingfisher's Main Street from Kingfisher Creek on the north to the south line of the townsite were occupied by lot claimants. These settlers, in order to establish their claims, immediately made improvements with whatever they had available. They erected tents, spread out bedding, dug holes, or set out stakes. Main Street was easily defined because it ran north and south past the land office but east and west streets were not so easily located and many settlers drove their stakes into alleys from which they were later ejected by rulings of the provisional city government.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Reference to Kingfisher indicates both townsites of Lisbon and Kingfisher City unless otherwise designated.

⁸U. S. Marshals present in Kingfisher were J. H. Walters, Captain D. F. Wyatt and W. L. Jarrett. Deputy marshals were W. W. Ansley and Edward Collins. Exhibit B, prepared by T. B. Needles, Marshal of Indian Territory, U. S. Senate Executive Documents, 51 Cong., 1 Sess., V (2682), No. 33, p. 4.

The problem had its origin in the absence of land laws relating to the establishment of townsites. The Springer Act of March 2, 1889, declared that townsite entries were permissible in accordance with Sections 2387 and 2388 of the Revised Statutes. However, these sections provided for application to be filed with the register of the land office by the authorities of the town, or by the county judge, in those cases where the town was not incorporated.⁹ But there was no way that towns could legally elect authorities and there were no counties or county judges; therefore, there was no way for a legal town to be created in the territory which had just been opened.¹⁰

Another handicap facing cities in the territory was the limitation placed upon the size of townsites. Under the existing law no more than three hundred and twenty acres could be included in one townsite, but adjoining townsites of equal size could be utilized without any limit as to number. Each townsite need merely to have a different name and a different government. This is why Kingfisher was originally a two-town city. Kingfisher City occupied a portion of the north half of Section 15-Township 16N, Range 7W, while the people who occupied the south half of

⁹U. S. Revised Statutes, 43 Cong., 1 Sess., 1873-1874, p. 439.

¹⁰John W. Noble, the Secretary of the Interior, was fully aware of this situation and reported to Congress as follows: "Section 13 of the Act of March 2, 1889, contains the following provisions representing townsites in Oklahoma. The Secretary of the Interior may, after said proclamation and not before, permit entry of said land for townsites under sections 2387 and 2388 of the Revised Statutes, but no such entry shall embrace more than one-half section of land. Inasmuch as sections 2387 and 2388 of the Revised Statutes designate certain officials who alone can apply to make townsite entries, and as no Territorial or State government exists in that Territory having authority to provide for such officials . . . no entries can be allowed there until further legislation is had." Report of the Secretary of the Interior, U. S. House Executive Documents, 51 Cong., 1 Sess., 1889-1890, XI (2724), p. 61.

Section 15 organized a separate townsite which was called Lisbon.¹¹

Still another problem facing the new city was that the four quarter sections of Section 15-Township 16N, Range 7W, the site of both towns, were entered as homesteads with the land office. W. D. Fossett filed homestead entry Number 5 for the NW/4, J. C. Wood made entry Number 3 for the NE/4, Rufas F. James made entry Number 2 for the SE/4 and Charles W. Van Eaton filed entry Number 7 for the SW/4.¹² The register had to receive these entries although the three quarters of land to the northeast and south of the land office and the southeast forty acres of the NW/4 of Fossett's entry were covered with townsite claimants. It was clearly evident that the failure of Congress to provide adequately for townsites was a major oversight and would cause many legal problems. But even before the opening, responsible government officials foresaw the problems which would arise and sought to relieve the anxiety of townsite claimants. S. M. Stockslager, Commissioner of the General Land Office, noted that "as it appears that there are neither laws for incorporating towns nor county organizations now existing in Oklahoma, it does not appear to be feasible for entries to be effected under said Sections while this condition continues"¹³ Stockslager, taking a practical approach to the problem then further stated that:

. . . any lands actually settled as the site of city or town, or any lands actually settled and occupied for purposes of trade or business and not for agriculture, by bona fide

¹¹According to J. V. Admire the south half of Section 15 was named Lisbon because a Post Office Department clerk chose this name after his home town of Lisbon, Ohio. Free Press, January 18, 1906.

¹²Ibid., January 11, 1906.

¹³S. M. Stockslager to Senator G. G. Best, April 5, 1889, U. S. Annual Report of Commissioner of General Land Office, 1889, p. 61.

inhabitants, are in a state of reservation from disposal under the homestead laws . . . until such time as they may be enabled to secure the right title to their lots under further legislation.¹⁴

In the case of Kingfisher City and Lisbon townsites, Wood, James and Van Eaton relinquished their claims but Fossett stubbornly refused to give up his claim and won out after a long and somewhat bitter fight before the Department of the Interior. One incident arose in connection with Fossett's claim which almost ended in violence. Admire witnessed the incident and his quick thinking probably helped prevent bloodshed. Fossett had run a barbed wire fence along the east and south boundaries of his claim which angered the townsite claimants. Admire described the incident as follows:

The townsite settlers cut a portion of the fence wire, and made a threatening demonstration against Fossett personally. For a while the situation was alarming. Fossett stood like a statue at a point a few rods northwest of the land office, firmly holding a loaded Winchester which rested on the ground in front of him. The crowd, probably a hundred strong, was wildly shouting, yelling and threatening him with a vengeance. He stood there immovable, determined, and white as a ghost, never batting an eye. I expected him to be shot dead in his tracks, and he has often said to me since that he himself expected nothing else. At the first temporary lull in the excitement, I walked over to him, told him he was foolishly endangering his life; that by so doing he could not make his case any stronger, and advised him to walk over with me and deposit his arms in the office. He did this without objection and went about his business and was not afterward molested or disturbed by threats¹⁵

This incident illustrated the intense feelings aroused by Fossett's attempt to thwart the claims of the land-hungry settlers. Six weeks after the opening there was a growing concern among townsite claimants about the legal title to their lots and the editor of the New World sought

¹⁴Ibid., p. 62.

¹⁵Free Press, January 11, 1905. Fossett later became a deputy United States marshal. He served under another Kingfisher resident, William Grimes. Grimes was appointed United States marshal for Oklahoma Territory in August, 1890, replacing the first marshal, Warren S. Lurty.

to alleviate their worries. He sent a telegram to Stockslager requesting an opinion and the response assured lot claimants that in due time they would receive a clear title to their land.¹⁶

Fossett later entered the southeast forty acres of his tract for townsite purposes and established a value of ten dollars per acre. Thus lot claimants in the SE/4 of the NW/4 of Section 15 were able to buy their lots for a very reasonable sum. Fossett also received a final certificate for one hundred twenty acres upon payment of \$1.25 per acre as required by law for commuting a homestead claim. Thus by the summer of 1889 townsites of Kingfisher City and Lisbon comprised a total of five hundred and twenty acres.

The inadequacy of existing townsite laws was evident because it is estimated that more than fifty thousand people entered the Unassigned Lands on April 22, 1889. According to W. B. Perkins, "this story . . . exceeds anything in history or in romance. When the sun went down that night, almost every quarter section of land in Oklahoma had an occupant and claimant, and cities of eight thousand inhabitants had sprung into existence."¹⁷ Between the hours of noon and sundown on April 22 the joint

¹⁶New World, June 8, 1889. The story of Stockslager's reply was printed on the front page as follows: "Reports of the General Land Office show that up to this date fourteen applications to enter town sites have been made in the Kingfisher and Guthrie land district. Land Commissioner Stockslager said today that no action would be taken in these town site cases except to refer them to the registers and receivers for the purpose of ascertaining whether the land is used for business purposes. If such is the case then the land cannot be subject to homestead entry. Mr. Stockslager stated that no title could be given in such cases until some action was taken by Congress . . . but that persons, who in good faith settled upon and occupied lots in such sites would without doubt ultimately receive titles and that as long as there was plenty of good land in Oklahoma for agricultural purposes, people would not be allowed to fence a townsite."

¹⁷Report by W. B. Perkins of the Committee of Territories, January 6, 1890. U. S. House Reports, 51 Cong., 1 Sess. (2807), No. 4, p. 1.

cities of Kingfisher City and Lisbon were born. Two days later the population of both towns combined was estimated to be about three thousand.¹⁸

The citizens of the new cities lost no time in establishing governments. Provisional governments were established for both towns on the evening of April 22. A mass meeting was held at the intersection of Main Street and Robberts Avenue. Robberts Avenue was the dividing line between Kingfisher City and Lisbon. The first order of business was the election of a chairman and secretary and immediately following came nominations for mayors of both cities. All men present were allowed to vote. John D. Miles, former Indian agent for the Cheyenne and Arapahoe tribes at the Darlington Agency, was well known and was easily elected mayor of Lisbon, but the selection of a mayor for Kingfisher City was more difficult. Admire was present at this gathering and described the election of a mayor for Kingfisher City as follows:

Several names were suggested. At each nomination the crowd demanded that the candidates should show up, and a pile of lumber was used for this purpose. The candidates first named were turned down for a number of reasons, the most objectionable of which were a good suit of clothes and a white collar. J. W. Creech was ambitious, so prior to making his appearance . . . he stooped down, filled both hands with sand and dust, spread it over his head, neck, ears, and shoulders, giving special attention to his white collar, and then mounted the pile of lumber. 'He'll do! He's all right, he's no dandy, hurrah for Creech!' yelled the crowd, and Creech was thus unanimously chosen as the first mayor of Kingfisher.¹⁹

And so it was, two towns had been established at the site of the Kingfisher land office and provisional governments formed within hours of the opening. The act creating the territory was not passed until May 2,

¹⁸ Brigadier General W. Merritt to Major General George Crook, April 24, 1889. U. S. Senate Executive Documents, 51 Cong., 1 Sess., IX (2686), No. 72, p. 11.

¹⁹ Free Press, January 18, 1906. Another election was held on April 24 at which time George E. Hubbard was elected mayor.

1890, approximately thirteen months later, but in the interim period each town elected a mayor, councilmen, and members of a board of education. Each city was staffed with marshals, police judges and a city attorney. Ordinances were enacted, taxes were levied and collected, arrests made, fines and imprisonment imposed, just as if the government had been entirely legal. It was remarkable that life and property was generally as safe in Kingfisher as if there had been a legal government in operation.

The town awakened early on the morning of April 23. Tents, wagons, carriages, horses, and bedding were scattered about the land office. By early morning homesteaders were pouring in from the surrounding countryside to make entry for their claims. When the land office opened at 9:00 A. M. a long line had formed. In addition to Robberts as register and Admire as receiver, the staff consisted of J. M. Speice and J. M. Paesley as inspectors. The first application for a homestead was made by James D. Dent on the SW/4 of Section 22-Township 16N-Range 7W.²⁰ Forty-four other persons made homestead entry on the first day. The long line of homesteaders waiting to enter claims became a familiar sight at the land office. Frank Coke, the eight year old son of an army veterinarian, had accompanied his father who was sent to Kingfisher. Coke remembers this line well because he, along with several other boys, frequently held places in the line for settlers while they went to eat or tended to other business. The price for holding a place in line was ten cents. Coke also washed dishes for a cafe, owned by John Chamberlain, which was housed in a tent behind the land office. Boys carried water from Kingfisher Creek, heated it over an open fire, and washed dishes in a wash tub. Coke

²⁰Marion Tuttle Rock, Illustrated History of Oklahoma (Topeka, 1890), p. 173. Henceforth cited as Rock, History.

recalled that one of the greatest problems confronting the cafe, and indeed, the entire town, was the cloud of dust which was always present.²¹ After the city had become organized, efforts were made to keep the streets sprinkled during the dry periods.

Amid the dust and bustle of activity, two days after the run the army reported on conditions at Kingfisher. "Everything had progressed in a quiet and orderly manner," and the "incoming settlers were cheerful and well disposed."²² This report contrasted considerably with conditions at Guthrie where there were instances of fraud uncovered in connection with the acquisition of land.²³ The Kingfisher district was free of fraud and the land office was conducted efficiently and properly under the direction of Robberts and Admire.

While the land office began operating under competent management, the provisional government of Lisbon held their first meeting on April 24. The meeting was called by Mayor John D. Miles with the following newly elected councilmen present: M. M. Duncan, J. W. Creech, H. H. Huff, W. A. McCartney, and John Garvey. The first business requiring their attention was to plat and survey the city. Miles appointed C. F. Childs as city engineer who was directed to carry out this task.²⁴ With this meeting

²¹Interview with Frank Coke, December 29, 1964.

²²Brigadier General W. Merritt to Major General George Crook, April 24, 1889. U. S. Senate Executive Documents, 51 Cong., 1 Sess., IX (2686), No. 72, p. 11.

²³Cornelius McBride, Inspector of the Department of the Interior, charged that frauds were common in the acquisition of land at Guthrie. "U. S. deputy marshals and deputy collectors caused more trouble, more friction and perpetrated more wrongs calculated to disturb the public peace than all the other citizens of Oklahoma put together," McBride to John W. Noble, May 8, 1889. U. S. Senate Executive Documents, 51 Cong., 1 Sess. (2682), No. 33, p. 12.

²⁴Minutes of City Council, Lisbon, Indian Territory, April 24, 1889, p. 5.

the city government, although lacking legal basis for its existence, began to function and through the support of the citizens of Lisbon was able to effectively administer the ordinances which they enacted.

One of the first needs of the new government was to raise revenue and create an agency to enforce their laws. D. F. Wyatt was appointed the first city marshal²⁵ and T. B. Johnson was appointed assistant city marshal.²⁶ Meeting again on April 29, the council levied a property tax on all lots within the city. Lots on Main Street were taxed \$1.00 each while other lots were assessed \$0.75 and \$0.50 respectively, depending on their location and distance from the land office. The city marshal was ordered to collect this money.²⁷ The streets were also officially designated at this meeting. The street running east and west by the land office which was also the half section line and north boundary of Lisbon, was named Robberts Avenue. The streets parallel to Robberts Avenue southward were named in the following order: Admire, Miles, Broadway, Sheridan, Euclid, Wyatt, and Tyro Avenues. Streets running north and south were designated numbers one through sixteen with Main Street separating sixth and seventh street. Broadway Avenue was made one hundred feet wide.

The city council met often during the course of the next few months in order to formulate a code of laws which could cope with rapidly changing conditions. A rough, drinking, and gambling element had formed and saloons and gambling flourished. The early city council saw in this element the means whereby they hoped to finance the major cost of the

²⁵Rock, History, p. 172.

²⁶Minutes of City Council, Lisbon, Indian Territory, April 26, 1889, p. 9. Johnson served as deputy city marshal for only three weeks, resigning on May 17.

²⁷Ibid., April 29, 1889, pp. 10-11.

city government. They met on May 6 and ordered the marshal to collect the following taxes on gaming tables: \$5.00 per week on draw poker tables and chuck-a-luck tables, \$15.00 per week on stud poker tables. This tax was to be collected every Monday morning in advance by the city marshal and if the business establishments refused to pay he was instructed to close them.²⁸ Despite questionable legality of this directive, the marshal apparently met little opposition in collecting these taxes, probably because the saloon owners wished to avoid risking general public disfavor by a direct challenge to the city authorities. Although this was an extremely high tax, the volume of business at the saloons was apparently high enough to bear this burden without too much difficulty.

The first official ordinance was passed on May 7 which prohibited the erection of buildings or tents in the streets and alleys.²⁹ The second ordinance enacted was a tax upon street vendors of staple goods who sold their goods from wagons. This measure was evidently intended to encourage and aid permanent businesses. The city council met again on the evening of May 7 and passed a law which made Kingfisher unique among cities of its size in Oklahoma. They passed a law "reserving a portion of land east of Uncle John's Creek for a city park" which they named Oklahoma Park.³⁰ This action represented considerable foresight on the part of the councilmen and in the future the city was justly proud of this park. The following day the city council met again and voted \$27.75 for the digging of a public well.³¹ They also ordered that a city election be held to select

²⁸Ibid., May 6, 1889, p. 13.

²⁹City Ordinance Book, Lisbon, Indian Territory, Ordinance No. 1, p. 1. Henceforth cited as Ordinance Book.

³⁰Minutes of City Council, Lisbon, Indian Territory, May 7, 1889, p. 14.

³¹Ibid., May 8, 1889, p. 16. The actual cost of the well was \$61.20. It was thirty-four feet deep.

a board of arbitration which was authorized to decide ownership of contested city lots.³² Subsequently, this board was elected and carried out this function. Their rulings were recognized by the city council and surprisingly enough by the contestants who had no appeal. The acceptance of this board's decisions clearly illustrated the people's willingness to abide by the laws enacted by the provisional government.

The city had considerable difficulty keeping the city marshal's office fully staffed. One man, H. L. Korb, for example, served as deputy city marshal for only four days.³³ The marshal's pay was low, only twenty-five dollars per month, and in addition to enforcing the laws he had the somewhat onerous duty of collecting taxes. In any case, the tax collecting phase of the marshal's duty was destined to increase. By late summer it was apparent that the taxes collected from gambling was insufficient for the city's needs and on August 9 an ad valorem tax of 0.5% of 1% was imposed on all real estate in the city.³⁴ This money was placed in a general fund for city expenses. An annual tax was also imposed upon all occupations and businesses. Among these, taxes were levied on the following occupations and businesses as follows:

Barber shops	\$2.00
Physicians and surgeons	2.00
Livery stables	2.50
Gaming tables of all kinds	7.50
Feed stores	1.00
Chinese laundries	7.50
Banks	5.00 ³⁵

³²Ordinance Book, Ordinance, No. 4, p. 5.

³³Minutes of City Council, Lisbon, Indian Territory, June 21, 1889, p. 32.

³⁴Ordinance Book, Ordinance No. 7, p. 11.

³⁵Ibid., Ordinance No. 8, p. 18.

It is perhaps significant that Chinese laundries, along with gaming tables, shared the highest tax rate imposed on businesses. A small number of Chinese had come to Kingfisher shortly after the opening and operated laundries. Frank Coke recalled the existence of anti-Chinese feeling in Kingfisher which was also apparently reflected in the city council.³⁶ The Chinese stayed only about three years.

The Lisbon city council also passed ordinances to assure the peaceful growth of the city and called for new elections. The erection of barbed wire along streets and alleys was prohibited as was the discharging of firearms within the city limits. They also called for a regular general election for the office of mayor and city councilmen which was held on July 23.³⁷ John D. Miles was elected mayor and F. L. Wallis, Cash M. Cade, A. R. Banks, F. L. Boling, J. V. Admire, John Garvey, O. K. Rogers, and J. C. Cross to the city council. Officials of Kingfisher City were George F. Hubbard, mayor; and A. Ragland, J. J. Denny, C. A. Morris, O. V. Hays, and Walter Ellis, councilmen. J. W. Sain was appointed city clerk.³⁸ Virgil M. Hobbs was chosen mayor of Kingfisher City at another election held on June 6.

During the summer while the city councils of both towns were busy establishing the machinery of government and maintaining law and order, the

³⁶Interview with Frank Coke, December 29, 1964. Coke remembered the Chinese were occasionally harassed when they appeared on the street. He recalled one incident in particular. Harry Hurt, astride his horse, ran down a Chinese who was crossing Main Street with a basket of clean clothes. Hurt then scattered these clothes along the dusty street. The Chinese Exclusion Act was passed by Congress in 1882 primarily because of anti-Chinese sentiment in California. It appears there was also some anti-Chinese sentiment in Kingfisher, although the evidence is somewhat inconclusive.

³⁷Ordinance Book, Ordinance No. 5, p. 6.

³⁸Rock, History, p. 172.

physical characteristics of the town changed daily. A steady stream of wagons brought lumber from Kansas on the north and Guthrie on the east. Tents quickly gave way to frame buildings as stores and houses were completed. Sidewalks were built, trees were planted, and streets became clearly defined as building progressed.

The development of the city was regularly reported by the first newspaper published in Kingfisher, the New World, which was founded by Walter M. Ellis, Joe S. Ross, and Edward H. Ellis, under the firm name of Ellis, Ross and Ellis. This paper had begun publication in Wichita, Kansas, prior to the opening and bore the name of Wichita World. The paper was moved to Kingfisher, renamed New World, and published its first issue on May 18, 1889. This newspaper described the rapid growth of the city under a headline which read: "Hear the Noise of the Hammer as it tells, Boom! Boom! Boom!"³⁹ The story related how one could see business blocks and residences under construction over a wide area, and the extent of growth since the opening:

On the opening day there stood one frame building, the United States Land Office. Now, twenty-five days later there are one hundred fifteen frame buildings completed, fifty in the course of construction, and one hundred twenty-six where the foundation has been commenced. Only an occasional tent is to be seen here and there.⁴⁰

The prairie had seemingly sprouted a city. On May 2 the town could count eleven drug stores; by May 18 it had ten lumber yards and four livery stables and two hotels were under construction. The editor of the New World, Walter Ellis, estimated the population of the city to be in excess of two thousand. He was highly enthusiastic and expressed unlimited optimism about the future of Kingfisher which he described in

³⁹New World, May 18, 1889.

⁴⁰Ibid.

glowing terms:

Kingfisher is beautifully located. It is near two beautiful clear water streams. Pure sparkling water. There are cottonwood, oak, elm and walnut along the streams The country around is fertile, well watered, and will produce numerous crops when cultivated Within two years what is now prairie covered with grasses green and blossoming flowers will be decked with pleasant farm homes, orchards, vineyards, cultivated fields, and growing crops, while birds will make the air resonant with songs all the live long day and happiness, prosperity, and plenty prevail, not only in Kingfisher county but in the beautiful county seat of the same name.⁴¹

Although Ellis' vision of Kingfisher becoming a paradise of prosperity and plenty within two years may have been somewhat exaggerated, it was spring and he had good reason for his optimism. A few farmers had already begun planting corn, the city population was growing rapidly, but most important, the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad had announced that it would extend its railroad south from Caldwell, Kansas, and through Kingfisher. In 1889, if any one thing assured the growth and prosperity of a community it was the presence of a railroad.

While the inhabitants could look forward to the coming of the railroad, the establishment of ten lumber yards stimulated the growth of the city. The price of lumber dropped from eighty dollars per one thousand feet on April 23 to only thirty dollars per thousand on May 15. The price had decreased at a time of extremely high demand which further served to stimulate construction. It would seem that Ellis had ample reason for declaring that "truly the age of progress exists in and about this city."⁴² A week later Ellis was still in this tremendously optimistic frame of mind as he now envisioned more than a prosperous agricultural county seat town;

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid.

he saw in Kingfisher the future capital of Oklahoma:

The growth of Kingfisher . . . will so continue until it reaches the pinnacle of greatness of Oklahoma cities. Surrounded by the finest agricultural land . . . Kingfisher is bound to grow and outrank and outrival every city in this territory With the advent of the railroad it will push ahead of any city in the territory Vast crowds will come to secure property and homes in the future capital.⁴³

But at the moment the average citizen was too busy to devote much thought to politics or where the future capital might be located. Businesses were rapidly being organized and expanded to meet the demands of the new community. The Bank of Kingfisher was organized on May 1 with a paid up capital of \$50,000. D. P. Doak of the well-known banking house of D. P. Doak and Company of Kansas City was president. T. C. Post was vice-president, and W. A. Doak held the position of cashier.⁴⁴ C. P. Wickmiller moved his drug store from a tent into a newly completed two-story frame building. He named his store the Pioneer Drug Store. By June 15 more than one hundred lawyers had settled in Kingfisher in anticipation of a great mass of litigation over conflicting homestead claims.⁴⁵ By June 1 over two thousand entries for homestead had been filed at the land office.⁴⁶

Business was good considering the limited capital which many settlers brought with them. B. J. Conley established a livery stable in April.

⁴³Ibid., May 25, 1889.

⁴⁴Rock, History, p. 167.

⁴⁵These attorneys were busy the first years. When the first territorial governor, George Steele, arrived in the territory thirteen months after the opening, he reported that in some cases as many as five people claimed one quarter section. Report of Governor of Oklahoma, 1891, U. S. House Executive Documents, 52 Cong., 1 Sess., XVI (2935), p. 450. One of the attorneys who made the run into Kingfisher was Patrick S. Nagle who later became active in the affairs of the Socialist Party in Oklahoma. Nagle was thirty years old at the time and came from Westmoreland, Kansas.

⁴⁶New World, June 15, 1889.

Gilmore H. Logan opened a dry goods store in May and his original stock was completely sold out within ten days. Ed Hockaday made the run and staked a lot one half block south of the land office. He arranged for thirteen wagon loads of lumber and hardware to follow him into Kingfisher. He sold hardware from a tent while a frame building was being erected. The farmers needed equipment and Hockaday's business prospered after the first crops were produced. Earlier predictions of the railroad reaching the city by July 1 did not materialize but in July a representative of the construction company employed by the Rock Island contracted the hire of over two hundred teams to work on the grading. Men and boys from both the city and surrounding farms thus secured desperately needed employment.⁴⁷

The city acquired a communications outlet to the outside world in June when the Rock Island extended their telegraph line from Pond Creek to Kingfisher. The nearest railroad, the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe, was located at Guthrie. But the Rock Island Stage Line ran regular schedules to Pond Creek, the terminus of their railroad. They took great pride in being able to cover this distance of about sixty-four miles in approximately ten hours, including stops for change of horses and meals. The trail to Pond Creek was over rough roads and across unbridged streams which became impassable during heavy rains.

The city population continued to grow throughout the summer as newcomers arrived daily. In July, R. Pappé arrived with his family from Pratt, Kansas, and established a bakery. Many of the settlers who had come alone in April now sent for their families. Admire's family arrived in July and moved into a new house on South Main Street which had been

⁴⁷Ibid., June 8, 1889.

built at a cost of \$1,200.⁴⁸

After permanent housing was completed and more normal city life developed, peoples' interests crystallized into definite channels and various organizations were established which reflected these interests. On July 6 the New World announced plans to organize a Masonic lodge. An Opera House Company was organized in June with D. F. Wyatt, the city marshal, as president, M. B. Miller, manager, and N. Campbell as secretary. This group announced plans to engage a musical comedy for a week's run in Lisbon. Professional organizations were also established. A medical society was organized early in May with Drs. A. J. Northrup as president and A. M. Holmes as secretary. Members were Drs. S. S. Crabtree, C. H. Field, J. R. Shine, F. E. Locke, C. D. Arnold, J. A. Overstreet, and H. M. Winn.⁴⁹ With nine medical doctors present it appeared that Kingfisher citizens would receive more than adequate health care.

Churches, like other institutions of Kingfisher, endured a short period of hardship and struggle. For the first few years the local churches usually had to rely on financial assistance from outside of Kingfisher. Services were held in homes or any available space. The first evidence of the establishment of religious activity was on May 25 when a simple announcement appeared in the New World, "There will be Sunday School at 2:30 P. M. every Sunday at the Rock Island Hotel." It is not known who or what denomination conducted these services but it may have been a Presbyterian minister, because The Reverend Frank Sheldon organized the First Presbyterian Church on May 26. Their building was dedicated on January 19, 1890. The Kingfisher Methodist Episcopal Church

⁴⁸New World, July 27, 1889.

⁴⁹Ibid., May 18, 1889.

was organized on June 13. Their first services were held in a tent which the night before, had been used for a prize fight. The Reverend E. C. Delaplain, the first pastor, had arrived in town on June 12. A committee was appointed to select a site and raise money to build a church and parsonage. This committee consisted of H. B. Grable, J. C. Trout, J. W. Preston, G. E. Hubbard, and James Jones. A week later the committee reported they could raise no money but that the mayor, John D. Miles, had offered them a building site at Sixth and Miles. They accepted the mayor's offer. They later moved their services to a room over Wick-miller's drug store where they met until their church was built.⁵⁰ The Union Congregational Church was established by the Reverend J. H. Parker on November 5, 1889.

The religious needs of the community were also partly filled by the New World which ran a series of sermons by The Reverend T. De Witt Talmage. These sermons reflected a strong fundamentalist type theology. The early churches had some difficulty in gaining members for the first few months because the people were concerned with providing the material necessities of life for themselves and their families. Also, the people who joined the early churches usually had meager resources and could provide little financial support.

Education, along with religion, was relegated to a position of secondary importance for the first few months as the settlers faced more immediate and pressing problems. Initially, the community had to rely on private schools which were later supplemented by city financed schools, for a period of about twenty months because the First Territorial Legislature of 1890, worried about the location of the capital, did not pass a

⁵⁰ Church Records, First Methodist Church, Kingfisher, Oklahoma.

school law in time for a fall term.⁵¹

The first private school was taught by a Miss Ward who opened her school in July, 1889.⁵² She taught alone for two months and in September was joined by Miss Nellie Lee. These two women opened their school in a tent located near the government acre. In November they moved into a building. This school was known as the Ward-Lee School and was conducted for a term of about six months. Several other private schools were established in the spring of 1890. A Mrs. Eaton conducted a school in her home and Miss Maggie Wilson taught in Kingfisher City.⁵³ A man by the name of Phipps opened a school which was held over Wickmiller's drug store.⁵⁴ He had about thirty students of both sexes. Among his students were Elmer Solomon, Eli Admire, Cliff Watkins, Charles Johnson, Art and Will Tanner, Bert, Bessie and Margaret Robberts. These private schools, called subscription schools, charged a tuition of one dollar per month per pupil.

The city also took action to establish a school. Upon the recommendation of a Committee on Education, the city council on December 16 voted one hundred and sixty dollars for school purposes. The Education Committee was then directed to select a site for two schools and a teacher was hired at a salary of forty dollars per month. Children living outside of the city limits were charged a tuition of one dollar per month.⁵⁵

⁵¹The first township school law did not become operative until December, 1890.

⁵²Miss Ward's given name was not listed in this or subsequent issues of the newspaper and is unknown.

⁵³Free Press, January 23, 1902. Mrs. Eaton's given name is unknown.

⁵⁴Phipps' given name is unknown.

⁵⁵Minutes of City Council, Lisbon, Indian Territory, December 2, 1889.

The first city-operated school conducted a three month term.

Shortly after the opening the settlers began to realize the disadvantages of transacting business without law. In June the citizens of Guthrie called for a convention to be held at Guthrie on July 17 for the purpose of establishing a provisional territorial government without waiting for Congress to act. It was also suggested that the territory be divided into four counties. It was assumed that the suggested provisional government would be located at Guthrie. This announcement aroused the people of both Kingfisher and Oklahoma City who felt this was definitely an effort to have the capital established in Guthrie and they quickly called a convention to oppose the Guthrie proposals. On July 6 a front page story of the New World stated that the territory did not need a provisional government and that it would only be an unnecessary burden on the territory. Mass meetings were held to oppose Guthrie's action. The opposition, consisting primarily of Kingfisher and Oklahoma City citizens, met on July 15 at Frisco, an abandoned town site located near the present site of Yukon. This convention issued a series of resolutions outlining the needs of the people for congressional legislation and asked that Congress immediately establish a territorial government.⁵⁶ Lisbon delegates consisted of John D. Miles, W. M. Duncan, J. V. Admire, J. W. McLoud, Chester Howe, and Cash M. Cade while Kingfisher City was represented by the mayor, Virgil M. Hobbs.⁵⁷ In spite of the opposition convention, the Guthrie group met on July 17 as planned and sent a memorial to Congress stating the problems which handicapped the territory because of the absence of the legal government. In the face of opposition from both Kingfisher and Oklahoma City, no further joint effort was made to establish a provisional territorial government.

⁵⁶Dan W. Peery, "The First Two Years," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, VII (September, 1929), p. 308.

⁵⁷Ibid.

All during the fall the people anxiously awaited the coming of the railroad as it progressed steadily toward Kingfisher. But the railroad brought problems before it brought progress. The construction workers who built the railroad were forced to live in temporary shacks or tents for several months as construction progressed, and Kingfisher found itself with a number of temporary citizens. Among these workers were those who augmented the rough element in Kingfisher which was associated with the saloons and brothels. The railroad reached the city in October and the New World joyfully announced the first passenger train would arrive on October 21.⁵⁸ In a sense the arrival of the railroad marked the end of the pioneer period for the city residents. While there was still much to be accomplished before the city could compare with well developed towns beyond the borders of the territory, it was now only hours away from Wichita or Kansas City.

Building construction continued at a rapid pace throughout the fall in both the business and residential sections. D. W. Solomon established a furniture store in October and the post office received a new name. The Post Office Department changed the name from Lisbon to Kingfisher which indicated that the two-town anomaly would soon end.⁵⁹ In October, Admire announced that the land office had received over five thousand homestead entries.⁶⁰

Much had been accomplished as the year ended. The people could look back on the last eight months with considerable pride. A city of over two thousand now stood where before there had been only broad prairie. The

⁵⁸New World, October 5, 1889.

⁵⁹Ibid., July 27, 1889. This announcement was made two months before the name was officially changed by the Post Office Department.

⁶⁰Ibid., October 5, 1889.

townspeople could look forward to increased business activity generated by good crops from the surrounding virgin land. The railroad had arrived and pushed on southward toward El Reno. The people had faith in the future for themselves and their town. But if 1890 ushered in hope, it also brought problems.

All during the winter the rough and lawless element associated with the saloons, gambling and prostitution was proving more difficult to control without any legal authority. Fortunately, federal troops were still stationed in Kingfisher and their presence helped preserve order.⁶¹ Kingfisher's red light district flourished during the winter of 1889-1890 and there is no evidence of any significant public indignation over its presence at this time. Perhaps this can be explained by the income from taxes and fines derived from this element. The city gave tacit approval of this group, which, while admittedly not desirable, nevertheless provided a considerable portion of the city's income.

The first evidence of opposition to the red light district came from the editor of the New World. In a news story of an incident occurring in connection with the lawless element he declared, "It's time for the dance house to go. It has been a black eye to Kingfisher long enough and the city authorities should take the thing in hand and remove it"⁶² Apparently this call for reform fell on deaf ears because it went unheeded. Very likely the city did not wish to eliminate this major source of its income and furthermore, they had no legal basis for taking action. The only action taken by the city council was to increase the marshal's

⁶¹It was not until October, 1890, that conditions permitted the removal of soldiers to Fort Sill. Grant Foreman, A History of Oklahoma, (Norman, 1949), p. 243.

⁶²New World, February 8, 1890.

salary from twenty-five dollars to thirty dollars per month, undoubtedly because of the steadily increasing hazards of his occupation.⁶³ A killing occurred in one of the gambling houses on April 12 and the murderer also attempted to shoot the arresting officer.⁶⁴

As spring arrived the city diverted its attention from the element on the north side of town to other things. On March 31 the city council passed an ordinance changing the name of the city from Lisbon to Kingfisher.⁶⁵ Not only did the city now have a new name but it was expected that with Congress in session, provision would be made permitting cities to cover an area of more than three hundred and twenty acres in which case both Kingfisher City and Kingfisher could be united. Despite this hope for future unity both cities held general elections. Kingfisher held an election on April 4 at which time John Miles was re-elected mayor with J. A. Cooper, W. J. Bonnet, F. L. Boling, D. A. Garrison, C. P. Wickmiller, J. E. Tincher, W. A. Cunningham, and J. R. Shiver, as councilmen.⁶⁶ On April 24 Kingfisher City held a general election at which time George F. Hubbard was elected mayor, A. Ragland, J. J. Denny, C. A. Morris, O. V. Hays and Walter Ellis elected councilmen. S. P. Leightner was appointed city marshal.⁶⁷

⁶³Minutes of City Council, Lisbon, Indian Territory, March 11, 1890, p. 120.

⁶⁴New World, April 12, 1890.

⁶⁵Ordinance Book, Ordinance No. 20, p. 35. This name change was legalized on June 14, 1890, when the county commissioners accepted a petition from two hundred residents and declared the "south half of Section 15, Township 16N, Range 7W, an incorporated village . . . under the name of Kingfisher City." Proceedings of County Commissioners, June 14, 1890. Listed in Minutes of City Council, Kingfisher City, June 15, 1890, pp. 142-143.

⁶⁶Ibid., April 7, 1890, p. 129.

⁶⁷Rock, History, p. 172.

The city also witnessed the forming of more organizations. A Sportsman's Club and Commercial Club were organized. On March 24 Kingfisher Lodge Number 4 of the Independent Order of Oddfellows was chartered with J. S. Crabtree as Noble Grand.⁶⁸

Spirits were high as the city approached its first birthday. Walter Ellis reported that "Money is easier in this city and more plentiful than ever before."⁶⁹ On April 22 the city held a day-long observance of the first anniversary of the opening. Farmers poured in from the surrounding countryside and a large number of Indians from the Cheyenne and Arapahoe Reservation joined in the celebration. The proclamation which President Harrison had issued opening the Unassigned Lands for settlement was read before a public gathering. Festivities included a street parade, a concert, singing, speeches, horse racing, foot racing, and Indian war dances.⁷⁰ It was a happy day. The people had survived the most critical period, the first year, and the future looked promising. Even while the city was observing its first anniversary the period of provisional government was nearing an end. Ten days later, on May 2, Congress passed legislation creating the Territory of Oklahoma. The period of legal uncertainty was ended.

⁶⁸Records of the Independent Order of Oddfellows Lodge, Kingfisher, Oklahoma. Charter members were D. A. Colton, George Hubbard, Abslom Clark, John S. Crabtree, S. G. Gillispie, Howard Lucas, A. J. Eggleston, William White, G. E. Gage, J. R. Paradis, Thomas Craig, and George A. Kinkade.

⁶⁹Kingfisher Daily World, April 10, 1890. With this issue the editor of the New World started publication of a daily newspaper. The paper proved uneconomical and suspended publication after four months.

⁷⁰New World, April 19, 1890.

CHAPTER III

CULTURAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The Organic Act, signed by President Harrison on May 2, 1890, created the Territory of Oklahoma.¹ The laws of Nebraska were extended to cover Oklahoma Territory until the territorial legislature had time to enact a new code. Seven administrative units or counties were created. What was later to become Kingfisher County was designated County Number Five with Kingfisher as the county seat. A separate law was passed on May 14 under which the adjustment of town sites and town site disputes were to be determined by a board of three men appointed by the Secretary of the Interior. Town sites were allowed to extend over 1,280 acres instead of three hundred and twenty acres.² Kingfisher now had a legal means to settle disputes and exercise civil authority. The immediate problems of territorial existence had been solved by the Organic Act which remained in force and provided a basis for government for the next seventeen years, or until statehood.

This legislation came at a time when Kingfisher was in the process of rapidly developing a social life and establishing appropriate social institutions. The churches were among the fastest growing institutions. The Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational Churches had been organized shortly after the opening. Early in 1890 a missionary priest, Reverend Felix De Grasse, pastor of the Catholic Church at Guthrie and a

¹U. S. Statutes, XXVI, pp. 81-100.

²Ibid., p. 109.

member of the Benedictine Community at Sacred Heart in what is now Pottawatomie County, Oklahoma, conducted services "in a building east of the railroad track."³ Catholic services were also conducted in various homes throughout the town until 1892 when a church was erected at Eighth and Wyatt Streets under the direction of Reverend Joseph Beck.⁴

The existing Protestant churches continued to grow. Shortly after the Presbyterian Church had been completed in 1890, the first pastor, Reverend Frank Sheldon, was called away. A new pastor, C. H. Miller, arrived on November 10, 1890, and on January 18, 1891, a new formal organization was completed.⁵ The First Christian Church was organized May 28, 1891, by the Reverend E. F. Boggess of the American Christian Missionary Society.⁶ The first Lutheran services were conducted in the home of J. A. Themer in 1902, by a Reverend Neitzel of Concordia Seminary of Springfield, Illinois. The church was officially organized on September 2, 1904, as the Emmanuel Lutheran Church.⁷ The First Baptist Church was organized on December 30, 1894, by Reverend Job Ingram following a revival meeting. Reverend Ingram was a missionary pastor appointed by the American Baptist Home Mission Society of New York and came to Kingfisher

³New World, February 8, 1890.

⁴Free Press, August 6, 1931.

⁵Church Records. First Presbyterian Church, Kingfisher, Oklahoma. Charter members were Mrs. James Wagner, Mr. & Mrs. Jacob Descumbus, Mrs. W. W. Sheldon, Mrs. Walter Palmer, Mr. & Mrs. R. Pappé, Mrs. Grace Roberts, Mrs. W. H. Bleschke, Mrs. Mary Kittrell, E. Bleschke, F. W. Lamar, Mrs. Sarah Wills, Mrs. Ada Lamar, Elliss Descumbus, Mrs. & Mrs. Thomas Ellenyer, Mrs. Laura Cummings, Mr. & Mrs. Victor L. Payne, Mrs. Fanny Rvask, Mrs. Martin Potter, Mrs. McCartney.

⁶Church Records, First Christian Church, Kingfisher, Oklahoma.

⁷Church Records, Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Kingfisher, Oklahoma. Reverend Neitzel's given name is unknown. Charter members were J. A. Thelmer, B. J. Post, C. Meier, Sr., Fred H. Meier, Henry C. Meier, C. Meier, Jr., and H. Redeke.

from Meadville, Missouri.⁸ The Friedens Evangelical Church was organized in October, 1900, by Reverend W. Schaefer, a traveling minister of the German Evangelical Synod of North America. The first pastor was Paul Sandrezski who served from 1900 until 1902. The original congregation consisted of about ten families.⁹ Another religious group, the Seventh Day Adventists, made a brief appearance in Kingfisher in September, 1899, when they conducted services in a tent on the edge of the city. The editor of the Free Press attended their meeting "with his notebook" and in a plea for tolerance he reported that while "they were peculiar and distinct from other denominations because they did not observe Sundays, in reality they were upright and honest citizens."¹⁰

By 1905 Kingfisher could count nine well established churches, the German Evangelical, Presbyterian, Methodist, Christian, Baptist, Lutheran, Catholic, Congregational, and German Baptist. The churches became highly influential shortly after 1900 and dominated the social and cultural life of the community. They also exerted a strong influence in the political affairs of the city.

Paralleling the growth and development of the churches was the development of the public and private schools. Kingfisher Academy, a Congregational private school, was opened on September 7, 1890, in the basement of the church which had just been completed.¹¹ This school was under the

⁸Church Records, First Baptist Church, Kingfisher, Oklahoma. The first trustees were M. A. Sprague, J. Q. Waddell, Jacob Fauble, J. F. Gary, and J. H. Stringer.

⁹Church Records, Friedens Evangelical Church, Kingfisher, Oklahoma. The first members were of German origin and services were conducted almost entirely in German for the first few years.

¹⁰Ibid., September 28, 1899.

¹¹New World, September 4, 1890. Five years later this school developed into the Kingfisher College. The first public high school was organized for the term 1891-1892. These pupils were sent to the

direction of Reverend J. H. Parker and had three faculty members, G. D. Moss, principal, J. F. Lusk and a Miss Wolf.¹² The first high school class was graduated on June 12, 1891 and consisted of seven students.¹³ In 1891, the Academy curriculum included bookkeeping, typewriting, shorthand, music and modern languages and the term had been lengthened to thirty-six weeks.¹⁴ Miss Della Smoke served as principal during 1891-1892 and a Professor Shull held this position in 1893-1894.¹⁵

Although the Academy appeared well established, both private and public schools suffered from inadequate financing the first few years. Under the Organic Act Congress had appropriated \$50,000 for the establishment of public schools and Kingfisher's portion of this money was enough to provide for three and one-half months of school.¹⁶ In December, 1890, the first territorial legislature passed a Township School Law and all schools operated under this system until March, 1893, when the legislature established a district system.

South Kingfisher established a two-room school in the spring of 1891 which was taught by Wilson Pratt and Miss Zeda Lilly. Pratt taught for two and one-half months before leaving his post whereupon Miss Lilly

Kingfisher Academy and the school board paid the sum of \$50 per month for their instruction. "There was apparently no objection to the use of public funds for this purpose." Reminiscences, Lee Boecher, Free Press, 75th Anniversary Edition, April 13, 1964, p. 125.

¹²Miss Wolf's given name is unknown.

¹³Erna Wolf, Minnie Davis, John McCartney, Vincent Brennan, Elmer Solomon, Willard Whistler and Arthur Duncan.

¹⁴Free Press, September 17, 1891.

¹⁵Professor Shull's given name is unknown.

¹⁶U. S. Statutes, XXVI, p. 93.

took over his pupils. This increased her enrollment to about eighty. One can only wonder how she found the courage and stamina to teach eight grades of eighty students.¹⁷ Public funds were exhausted after three and one-half months and the school operated on subscriptions until the middle of July for a total term of five and one-half months.

Both whites and Negroes attended the same schools in 1890 and 1891 and it was not until September, 1892, that the school board, although extremely short of funds, voted to build a separate school for Negroes.¹⁸ Segregation in the schools marked the beginning of Negro-white friction which was manifested throughout the early growth and development of the schools.

The schools grew steadily and by 1895 there were two hundred and forty white and ninety-two Negro pupils. The school board, in anticipation of future growth, purchased a building site on Broadway Avenue.¹⁹ By 1898, the continued increase in enrollment prompted the school board to call a vote for a bond issue of \$10,000 to build a school of brick or stone. This election was scheduled for March 29, 1898. Apparently the Negroes of the community threatened to ally themselves against this bond issue because they felt it benefited only the white pupils. Five days before the bond election the Free Press ran an editorial which declared the school for Negroes was more than adequate and that "Negro children had been treated as well as the white children in regard to school facilities."²⁰ The presence of strained Negro-white relations was further

¹⁷Free Press, September 17, 1891. Miss Lilly was paid \$30 per month for her services. She later married E. A. Pemberton.

¹⁸Ibid., January 3, 1902.

¹⁹Ibid., January 30, 1902.

²⁰Ibid., March 24, 1898.

revealed when the editorial charged that Negro boys of school age, roaming the streets, frequently failed to show "respect enough even for ladies" whom they encountered. He continued: "The white people of this community pay about 95% of the taxes, yet make no complaint because thirty-five percent of the amount paid for school purposes is appropriated for the benefit of Negro children."²¹ Unified opposition to the school bond issue failed to materialize and it won in every ward with a total vote of 251 to 89. A week later it was announced that "the old building would be fitted up comfortably for the Negro children."²² Another incident also occurred during March which indirectly involved Negro-white relations. The Negro teachers had not received their pay and they immediately staged a strike. The school board assured the striking teachers they would receive their pay and they resumed their teaching.²³

The only qualification required of the first teachers was an eighth grade certificate and a willingness to assume the responsibility of teaching. By 1895 this policy had changed and prospective teachers were given examinations before they were hired. These examinations covered arithmetic, orthography, reading, penmanship, physiology, grammar, United States History and the Constitution. As a public service the newspaper duly reported teacher applicants and the results of their examinations.²⁴

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid., March 31, 1898.

²³Ibid., February 6, 1902. Reminiscences, J. A. Mann. The presence of strained Negro-white relations was illustrated by a letter to the editor of the Free Press asking the "difference between a Negro and a nigger because the word Negro had been so prominent in the paper recently." The answer in summary was, "Whenever you have any doubt whether a man is a Negro or nigger, just step up to him and call him a nigger, if he is a Negro he will knock you down." Free Press, April 7, 1898.

²⁴Ibid., June 11, 1896. A great fire swept through north Kingfisher on February 22, 1893, destroying forty-four buildings. All north

A minor crisis confronted the schools in 1900 when a smallpox epidemic swept the community. A number of students refused to be inoculated, whereupon the County Health Board recommended to the school board that these students be refused admission and that the schools be closed temporarily. Two rather bitter factions developed, those who demanded the schools be closed and those who wished them to remain in session. In March, the schools were closed for two weeks and upon their reopening the school officials denied admission to those students who had not been inoculated. The non-vaccinated students then conducted a virtual mutiny and gathered on a downtown street. A week later the Board of Education passed a resolution condemning the street demonstration staged by the students but the board rescinded their compulsory inoculation order. Dr. Charles Fisk, vice-president of the school board, had strongly supported the compulsory inoculation order and after he was overruled by the other board members he resigned his position.²⁵ Smallpox was prevalent again the following year and those students who had cases in their families were temporarily suspended.

While Kingfisher's schools were being developed, an event occurred outside of the community which stimulated local interest in education. In 1891, the first Territorial Superintendent of Public Instruction, J. H. Lawhead, died, and after A. J. Seay became governor, he appointed Reverend J. H. Parker to replace him.²⁶

Kingfisher school records were lost in this fire. Seven years later, on August 26, 1900, all existing south Kingfisher school records were also destroyed when the court house burned.

²⁵Ibid., March 15, 1900.

²⁶Diary, A. J. Seay, p. 25, Division of Documents, University of Oklahoma Library, Norman, Oklahoma.

Accompanying the growth of the common schools came the establishment of an institution of higher learning. The Association of Congregational Churches met at El Reno in 1894 and voted to establish a college in Kingfisher because it appeared to be one of the more promising towns in Oklahoma. Another factor in the decision to build a college here was the location of the Kingfisher Academy which was currently being administered by Reverend Parker, who also held the position of Superintendent of Home Missions for the Congregational Church in Oklahoma.

The charter for the college was issued September 26, 1894, and Parker initiated the development by giving a personal note for \$2,500 for one hundred and twenty acres of land located approximately one mile east of town.²⁷ The Academy was disbanded and Kingfisher College opened in the fall of 1895 in the Central Hotel with an enrollment of fifty-one students. The faculty consisted of Mr. & Mrs. J. T. House, C. E. Enlow, Miss Lillie Lyons and Winnie Parker.²⁸ Ground breaking for Parker Hall, the first building, was held on February 25, 1896, and was witnessed by an enthusiastic crowd who had gone to the site in carriages, on bicycles and on foot. Among those taking part in the ceremonies were Mayor P. P. Smith and former Territorial Governor A. J. Seay, who predicted a bright future for the college and for Kingfisher, a city which in his opinion, was destined to become "the Athens of Oklahoma."²⁹

While the future may have appeared bright to Seay, the financial position of the college gradually deteriorated. In 1895, the school moved

²⁷Free Press, 60th Anniversary Edition, April 18, 1949.

²⁸Free Press, September 5, 1895.

²⁹Ibid., February 27, 1896. Seay made his home in Kingfisher after his term as territorial governor and became a prominent businessman.

out of the Central Hotel to the Beard Building, a less expensive location and in 1896 it was forced to move to the Baptist Church. In May, 1896, T. J. House became president of the college, replacing Parker. House immediately left for the East where he engaged in an extensive fund raising campaign. His brother, H. C. House, took his place on the faculty in his absence. Both Parker and House struggled to raise funds to complete the erection of Parker Hall which, though unplastered, was occupied in 1897. The shortage of finances continued to plague the college and in March, 1898, it was announced that if \$3,000 were not raised by September it would be forced to close its doors.³⁰ The Free Press, a strong supporter of the college, aided in conducting a vigorous local fund raising campaign, and printed the names of all contributors and the amount of their donation. Nevertheless, contributions from people who lived in the East, primarily Massachusetts and Connecticut, exceeded those from Kingfisher and the surrounding community. The new community obviously had little extra money to donate to the college. Yet, six weeks after the start of the campaign the Free Press proudly announced that \$3,228 had been raised.³¹ Later, the outlook for the college was brightened when an Eastern supporter, Miss Julia Gilbert, gave \$5,000 toward the erection of a boy's dormitory. Ground was broken for this building in June of 1899 which was named Gilbert Hall.³² A third building, Osgood Hall, was completed in December of 1901.³³

³⁰Ibid., March 3, 1898.

³¹Ibid., April 21, 1898.

³²Ibid., June 1, 1899.

³³Ibid., 60th Anniversary Edition, April 18, 1949. The fourth and final building, Seay Hall, was completed in 1908.

With three buildings now completed the future looked brighter and hopes for the college as a permanent institution seemed justified. Kingfisher College offered a liberal arts curriculum with an emphasis on music. The school sponsored competitive sports consisting of track, basketball and football. The football teams competed with both the Edmond Normal School and the University of Oklahoma.

Kingfisher College functioned throughout the territorial years but was continually faced with the problem of underfinancing. The Congregational Church had few members in Oklahoma and state-supported schools were multiplying. Kingfisher was justly proud of this institution which made a substantial contribution to the community but there was insufficient wealth and population in this small town to adequately support a church-operated school.³⁴

The cultural development of Kingfisher was not limited to the college, churches and common schools. Adults had the opportunity to broaden their knowledge during the winters through lyceums which were held in the opera house, while Chautauquas were conducted during the summers in Oklahoma Park.³⁵ The Chautauqua program for 1903, for example, consisted of a total of twenty-four lectures which emphasized religion but nevertheless covered a wide range of topics. Among the 1903 lecture titles and speakers were the following:

- "The Great Struggle," by Eugene V. Debs
- "Happy Though Married," by Dr. George W. Briggs
- "When a Woman is Single," by Dr. George W. Briggs

³⁴The first class was graduated in 1900, the final class in 1922. The first two graduating classes had one member each. A total of one hundred and seventeen students were graduated before the college closed in 1922. The library amassed a total of approximately 6,500 volumes.

³⁵Free Press, April 23, 1903.

"A Plea for Black Sheep," by Dr. George W. Briggs
 "Through Ireland on a Bicycle Built for One," by Dr. Thomas
 McClary.³⁶

By 1906 the Chautauqua programs utilized motion pictures which proved a novel attraction. The programs had also shed much of their religious character and were devoted to the more practical problems of a farming community. Among the titles were:

"The American Farmer"
 "Farming Upland Profitable"
 "The Time to Fight Insects"
 "Oriental Magic"³⁷

Accompanying the development of religious and educational institutions were social, fraternal and cultural organizations. The Independent Order of Odd Fellows had been organized in April of 1890, and on August 16, 1892, the Masonic Lodge was granted a charter.³⁸

The Kingfisher Rebekah Lodge Number 4 was organized on January 9, 1894.³⁹ A Current Events Club was organized by Mrs. Newton Burwell in the fall of 1895. The purpose of this organization was self improvement and community service. In the course of the years this organization changed

³⁶Ibid., June 25, 1903. The fee for these lectures for the season was \$2.50. The officers of the first Chautauqua were F. L. Boynton, president, and J. R. Lankard, vice-president.

³⁷Ibid., May 24, 1906.

³⁸Records of the Grand Secretary J. Fred Latham, Masonic Lodge, Guthrie, Oklahoma. The first officers were: David Badger, Worshipful Master; Henry H. Watkins, Senior Warden; Fred A. Belt, Junior Warden; J. C. Post, Treasurer; D. W. Solomon, Secretary; A. Mehew, Senior Deacon; Howard Felton, Junior Deacon; Spencer Sanders, Senior Steward; George E. Gage, Junior Steward; and Henry Amey, Tiler. This lodge was designated Lodge Number 52.

³⁹Free Press, 60th Anniversary Edition, April 18, 1949. Among the charter members were: Mr. & Mrs. W. N. Gilbert, Mr. & Mrs. J. A. Carlberg, Mr. & Mrs. W. H. Rufe, Dr. Henry Coke, Lou E. Christy, E. Lucus and Mr. & Mrs. G. D. Moss. On February 9, 1894, the Lodge completed a formal organization and elected William Gilbert as Noble Grand. Records, Kingfisher Rebekah Lodge No. 6, Kingfisher, Oklahoma.

its name several times until it took the name of Kingfisher Study Club.⁴⁰ Another women's organization, the Federation of Women's Clubs, was also active in Kingfisher during the 1890's.⁴¹ A veteran's organization, the Grand Army of the Republic, held regular encampments in Kingfisher during the early period but by 1907 death had taken its toll among the members and the organization had lost much of its strength and vigor.

The Oklahoma Historical Society was organized at the annual meeting of the Oklahoma Press Association in Kingfisher on May 27, 1893. Several Kingfisher residents were present at this meeting. Among these were A. J. Seay, J. C. Robberts, J. L. Admire, Frank Purcell and W. P. Campbell. Kingfisher was selected as the headquarters of the newly formed society and Campbell was chosen as secretary and custodian of the Society's records.⁴² The Society grew slowly and had very little support during its first years because few people felt they were living in an historical period.

The center of entertainment and cultural life in Kingfisher was the opera house which had a seating capacity of about eight hundred. Traveling troupes made regularly scheduled stops at Kingfisher and the actors often advertised their plays "by appearing on the streets with painted faces, fiery red wigs and loud clothing while handing out handbills."⁴³ The shows were usually melodramas but sometimes a musical was held and

⁴⁰Free Press, 75th Anniversary Edition, April 13, 1964, p. 46.

⁴¹Free Press, May 25, 1899.

⁴²Thomas H. Doyle, "History of the Oklahoma Historical Society," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, X (June, 1932), pp. 162-165. The early records were stored in a small room of the court house.

⁴³Reminiscences, Lee Boecher, Free Press, 75th Anniversary Edition, April 13, 1964.

magicians were always popular. Occasionally a play was produced by local people and "every year or so the Women's Christian Temperance Union sponsored Ten Nights in a Bar Room."⁴⁴ The opera house was also used for all plays presented by the high school, the high school graduating exercises, Kingfisher College debates, glee club performances and similar activities.⁴⁵

Newspapers occupied a unique place in the cultural history of Kingfisher. They indirectly revealed public opinion and although an exact measurement of the extent of their influence is not possible, one can reasonably assume they helped form social, economic and political thought in varying degrees.

The first newspaper, as indicated earlier, was the New World which began publication less than a month after the run. Another newspaper, the Kingfisher Journal, was established on March 30, 1890, with J. C. Hill as editor. The Journal and New World frequently waged bitter editorial battles in highly colorful language.⁴⁶ Both the Journal and New World were purchased by J. V. Admire, consolidated into the Kingfisher Free Press on June 18, 1891, and became the community voice of the Republican Party. Admire's son, James L., was associated with the Free Press from August, 1891, until March 1894, when the sole management was again assumed

⁴⁴Ibid. A typical play title was The Little Country Maid, Free Press, January 15, 1903, and Tried For Her Life, Ibid., September 22, 1904.

⁴⁵Ibid. The opera house was used extensively during the territorial period and was not abandoned until about 1920.

⁴⁶In one instance the Journal declared, "The New World now slobbers like a sick calf." The New World countered by stating, "The only slobbering we have seen recently has been the columns of the Journal, which is now vomiting all over itself all the sour grapes and green gall it has swallowed the past six months of its existence." New World, September 20, 1890.

by J. V. Admire. The Kingfisher Reformer, a Populist newspaper, began publication in August, 1893. This paper was almost entirely political in nature and only rarely included local news. It was strongly opposed to the Republican Party which it identified with large corporations. The Reformer devoted most of its space to Populist Party thought and political activities centered about Nebraska and William Jennings Bryan. The chief Democratic Party newspaper was the Kingfisher Times edited and published by Frank Purcell.

These and all subsequent newspapers were published weekly with two exceptions. The New World published daily for a four month period but this proved uneconomical and impractical for a small town.⁴⁷ Another daily, the Kingfisher Star began publication in 1905 with M. L. Webb as editor and publisher. The Star supported the Republican Party.⁴⁸

During periods of hard times the early newspapers frequently had difficulty maintaining their circulation despite the low subscription price.⁴⁹ In an effort to increase circulation the Free Press once offered a "free" novel with each renewal or new subscription.⁵⁰ Advertising

⁴⁷From March until July, 1890, it published daily as the Kingfisher Daily World.

⁴⁸Other newspapers in Kingfisher were the Kingfisher Democrat established in 1889, and published by E. H. Ellis. Later, in 1890 the Kingfisher Courier moved to Kingfisher from Hennessey. Both of these papers sold out to the Kingfisher Times. Das Kingfisher Journal, a German weekly, started publication in 1893 with John Hoenscheidt as editor and publisher. This paper was printed in Wichita, Kansas. The Kingfisher Constitution was first published in 1894 in the interest of Negroes. The Kingfisher Echo, a politically independent weekly, was established in 1905. Carolyn Thomas Foreman, Oklahoma Imprints, 1835-1907. A History of Printing in Oklahoma Before Statehood (Norman, 1936), pp. 344-345.

⁴⁹The annual subscription rate of the Free Press when it was organized was \$1.50 per year. This was later reduced to \$1.00.

⁵⁰Free Press, April 8, 1897. Among the choice of titles were: Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte, The Spy by James Fenimore Cooper and A Sinless Secret by "Rita."

frequently occupied the entire front page of the newspapers during the early period. The makeup and style of the Free Press underwent a change, however, and by 1903 it carried regular stories from outlying communities and more news on the front page. It had also abandoned the practice of printing syndicated sermons and serials. Under the direction of J. V. Admire the Free Press became the town's leading newspaper. It waged a continual battle in behalf of the Republican Party but often acknowledged that local opposition candidates were capable and qualified. It was a strong supporter of the schools and especially Kingfisher College. In 1898 it became instrumental in a stirring battle for reform which occupied the attention of the community for the next five years.

While Kingfisher was in the course of developing its cultural institutions during the first years there was another type of institution present which, although confined to the edge of the community, occasionally disrupted the peace and routine of the town. This was the red-light district that was common to frontier towns.⁵¹ Kingfisher's red-light district was located in the bend of Kingfisher Creek at the north end of Main Street and was called Sandy Point. A wooden bridge crossed the creek and linked the dance hall with the town. Lee Boecher, an early resident of the community, described the city's attitude toward this

⁵¹A. J. Seay, Associate Judge of the Territory from May, 1890, until February, 1892, described territorial law and order as follows: "Thousands of homeseekers from all parts of the country staked their claims Peace and order prevailed among the homesteaders except an occasional shooting affray between rival claimants for the same quarter section. But in the towns it was different. There was a rough, disorderly gambling, drinking, bawdy-house element which was aggressive and to some extent overawed the better element, who, though in the majority, were negatively good but had no taste for the firing line. Gambling houses and unlicensed saloons ran wide open, day and night. Their keepers denied the existence of any law requiring a license or regulating their business in any way." Clark Brown, Biography of A. J. Seay, 1921, Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library.

element as follows:

To please the church people, the city aldermen enacted an ordinance outlawing this ancient occupation and providing fines for its infraction. However, no one was brought into court and the chief of police called regularly at the hall and collected fines from the girls. This had the effect of licensing the business and segregating sin.⁵²

Boecher also noted, "The good women of the town spoke of these places only in whispers and pretended they did not exist."⁵³ In addition to the dance hall there were numerous saloons which also conducted wide-open gambling.⁵⁴ For the first ten years the town generally ignored the lawless element insofar as was possible and managed to live with it while maintaining a somewhat uneasy truce.

The truce with the lawless element ended in the summer of 1898. The Free Press formed an alliance with the churches whose influence had steadily been increasing and launched a campaign to arouse public opinion against the vice and corruption which the community had seemingly condoned for so long. The pressure for reform was precipitated by immediate conditions which could be ignored no longer. A large number of migrant threshers, unable to work during the wheat harvest because of rains, flocked to town. These idle men, hot weather, whiskey, loose women, and gambling had all the ingredients for trouble and it was not long in forthcoming. In addition to word of mouth accounts, readers of the Free Press were regularly given descriptions of violence under headlines which

⁵²Reminiscences, Lee Boecher, Free Press, 75th Anniversary Edition, April 13, 1964, p. 32.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Although the total seems slightly exaggerated, one eighty-niner reported that Kingfisher once had thirty-six saloons. Kingfisher Panorama, Free Press, 1949, p. 8. J. A. Willits, owner of one of the stores, the Chicago Fair, reported the demands for playing cards was so great that he ordered them in ten gross lots. Reminiscences, J. W. Willits, Free Press, 60th Anniversary Edition, April 18, 1949.

read: "Man's Throat Cut" and "Threshers on the Rampage Defy Police."⁵⁵

The war against lawlessness was unofficially declared on July 21 by the Free Press which ran a series of stories related to disorder associated with the saloons and the reaction of the church people. One headline read: "War on Saloons, the Preachers Aroused and Up in Arms, the Drunkenness, Fighting and Disgraceful Disorder of Last Sunday was the Straw Which Broke the Camel's Back. Every Saloon in Town was Wide Open Last Sunday."⁵⁶ The ministers, thoroughly angered, turned to the city officials. Reverend J. W. Sherwood of the Methodist Church and Robert B. Adams of the Presbyterian Church appeared before the city council, demanded that peace and order be preserved and that the law requiring saloons to close on Sundays be enforced. Mayor Winkler countered by pointing out that many stores in addition to the saloons remained open on Sundays.⁵⁷ The city council responded to this immediate pressure by passing an ordinance making a drunkenness within the city limits a misdemeanor.

By now the churches were fully committed to a reform campaign. In a Sunday evening sermon, Reverend Sherwood declared, "The saloon is the enemy of good society, of the home, of the Bible. It is the arch-enemy of Christendom."⁵⁸ The Free Press also continued its attacks upon the saloons and gambling but despite newspaper stories, talk and sermons, the city government did nothing to regulate the saloons that operated

⁵⁵Free Press, August 4, 1898.

⁵⁶Ibid., July 21, 1898. The paper also reported that "Church services were disturbed by howls and profanity of drunken persons."

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid., September 29, 1898.

unmolested until the following spring when another series of incidents caused the reform issue to erupt anew.⁵⁹

In March, 1899, a man by the name of Mert Rickey was shot and killed by a woman associated with the dance hall.⁶⁰ The woman was arrested and held in jail while the incident became a topic of conversation and sermons. One minister charged that the laws of the city against the maintenance of houses of prostitution were openly violated and that "it is even rumored that tribute is levied upon the inmates of these houses, and that a small amount of it has found its way into the city treasury."⁶¹ The minister then sought to form a community conscience by asking, "Who are morally responsible for the murder of Mert Rickey? Is it only the person, who, having been permitted to set all moral and statute laws at defiance, fired the fatal shot?"⁶² The city council responded by assessing a \$500 annual license fee upon the saloons, presumably in the hope that this would placate the reform element.⁶³

Shortly after the city had enacted the ordinance increasing the

⁵⁹In one instance the Free Press denounced a saloon operated by Richard Pappé who responded by filing a \$5,000 suit for defamation of character. A follow-up story described this lawsuit with the following comments: "Pappé's saloon has been defamed.--The Free Press did it. The price is \$5,000 to say that a saloon is not a nice place. Preachers and churches must quit talking about dives . . . saloons are respectable A dive is not a dive--it is a nice place, people should go to dives and let the churches go. He objects to the publication of accounts of the fights, brawls and disorders that have occurred in and about his sweet scented place of business. Has a newspaper the right to tell the truth when the public is interested in knowing what the truth is?" Ibid., September 22, 1898.

⁶⁰Ibid., March 23, 1899.

⁶¹Ibid., April 6, 1899. The news story did not identify the minister.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Revised Ordinance Book, Ordinance No. 26, p. 45.

license fee the community was further shocked when assistant city marshal Bill Hitchcock, attempting to quell a fight, was shot and wounded by a John Brown who was allegedly under the influence of alcohol. City marshal T. P. Christy engaged Brown in a gun battle who was then captured and lodged in the jail. The public was now thoroughly aroused; a law enforcement officer had been shot and moreover, Brown was a Negro. An angry crowd quickly gathered in front of the jail and threatened to lynch Brown. Two city councilmen, W. H. Mead and W. A. McCartney, persuaded the mob to disperse and that evening Brown and the woman who had shot Rickey were secretly removed from the jail by the authorities and taken to El Reno on the train. This was a wise decision for about midnight another mob assembled and marched on the jail with a rope but found only empty cells.⁶⁴

These incidents were indeed cause for alarm and further inflamed public opinion against the saloons. All that remained for effective action was for the reformers to organize. In September, H. E. Swan, the Superintendent of the Anti-Saloon League of Oklahoma and Indian Territory spoke at the Christian Church and the Free Press published the names of Kingfisher members of the League.⁶⁵ It is significant that among these names were several prominent and influential citizens of the city who were now willing to identify themselves with the reform movement. Membership of the League grew rapidly as the churches rallied behind a common front. By December, the League sensing its growing strength in the community and while continuing to exert pressure on the city officials, resorted to a new tactic, that of economic coercion. Following a meeting

⁶⁴Ibid., July 20, 1899.

⁶⁵Ibid., September 14, 1899. Among the members were Mrs. C. P. Wickmiller, A. D. Trindle, A. E. Bracken, Mrs. J. C. Robberts, J. V. Admire, J. J. Fegtley, E. A. Pemberton, Mrs. J. T. House, Earl Walton, and C. T. Prouty.

held in the Methodist Church, the League reminded businessmen of the town that they would be watching them and would patronize only their friends.⁶⁶ This announcement brought forth opposition from a surprising quarter. A minister from Hennessey, Reverend George N. Keniston, declared that "he was opposed to the Anti-Saloon League methods, that while he supported the temperance movement, he was not in the town to police it but to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ."⁶⁷ Later, opposition to the League took a different character and came from another source. In April, 1901, the Methodist minister, J. E. Wagner, accompanied by another minister from Texas, conducted a temperance meeting in El Reno. As they were returning home after the meeting closed they were assaulted with rotten eggs.⁶⁸

Following this incident, the battle lines were clearly drawn. On one side were the militant reformers and on the other the arrogant and blatant saloon element. As a tense and hostile atmosphere developed the city officials were confronted with a dilemma. They wanted to satisfy the reform group yet were reluctant to curtail the saloons because they were a source of city revenue.⁶⁹ To placate the reformers the city council passed an ordinance which while not curtailing the saloons, might perhaps restrict their influence insofar as the youth of the community were concerned.⁷⁰

⁶⁶Ibid., December 14, 1899. The saloon keepers also put pressure on the businessmen.

⁶⁷Ibid., January 4, 1900. There is no evidence that any minister from Kingfisher took this position publicly. The League later scored a minor victory which was more apparent than real. They persuaded the county commissioners to refuse to renew Pappé's liquor license. A petition was immediately circulated by Pappé's friends to grant a license to his bartender. Ibid., July 19, 1900.

⁶⁸Ibid., May 2, 1901.

⁶⁹The saloons were fully legal during the territorial period but the city had the authority to regulate their hours.

⁷⁰The newspapers occasionally reported instances where the saloons served boys.

They passed an ordinance authorizing a curfew forbidding children of fifteen years of age from being on the streets after 8:15 P. M. unless accompanied by an older adult.⁷¹ Although this law seemed vague it represented an effort on the part of the city council to regulate behavior not directly related to the lawless element.

Despite the growing opposition, the saloon operators apparently made no effort to police themselves and for the next few months the Free Press continued to report disturbances associated with the saloons. The editor also never missed the opportunity to castigate the city police for their reluctance to take effective action.⁷²

At this time another law enforcement agent joined in the battle and produced results. An energetic young attorney, George L. Bowman, served as county attorney from 1902 until 1907. During this period he filed an action in Federal court asking permission for the sheriff to confiscate and destroy gambling paraphernalia. Permission was given and the county waged an effective war upon the lawless element.⁷³

⁷¹Revised Ordinance Book, Ordinance No. 47, p. 95.

⁷²An example of the type of incidents and manner of reporting is as follows: "Saturday afternoon, about the hours that liquor begins to get in its work, scores of men were seen to rush upon the sidewalk in front of the saloon just south of Lowery's barber shop to see what the uproar was about. In a short time a man, with his face covered with blood, blaspheming and screaming with rage, was pitched out headlong on the sidewalk. Bystanders picked him up and dragged him off, while he was struggling to get loose, return and renew the battle in which he had been engaged in the saloon. His oaths could be heard a block away. At this time two policemen came walking up leisurely and peacefully asked what was the matter. No arrest. No wonder women and decent men avoid this locality." Free Press, October 9, 1902.

⁷³Reminiscences, George L. Bowman, Free Press, 60th Anniversary Edition, April 18, 1949. During this period, according to Bowman, "over \$5,000 worth of gambling equipment was burned and the houses of ill fame were closed." The saloons, however, continued to operate until state-wide statutory prohibition in 1907. But after Bowman's action there was a marked decrease in disturbances caused by drinking.

By 1903 the passionately intolerant reform group had gained the advantage and the saloon supporters, deprived of gambling and on the defensive, faced a hostile and formidable group which increased rapidly.⁷⁴ Meanwhile, the character of the reform movement had undergone a subtle change. The reformers, frustrated in their desire to completely eliminate the saloons, were nevertheless determined to impose a rigid moral code upon the entire community. Change was in order and the city council, reflecting the mood of the times, went from one extreme to the other. After tolerating a wide open town for over thirteen years, they passed an ordinance prohibiting the playing of baseball or other sports on Sunday.⁷⁵

⁷⁴A revival was conducted in the Spring of 1903 by Reverend F. E. Oliver which attracted crowds in excess of one thousand people. Free Press, May 7, 1903.

⁷⁵Revised Ordinance Book, Ordinance No. 63, p. 125.

CHAPTER IV

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

A study of the economic growth and development of Kingfisher must also include the surrounding area. After prospects for the city's becoming the territorial capital were dashed, its future became entirely linked with agriculture. The city now relied on the prosperity of the surrounding farms, a prosperity which in turn depended upon the type of crops grown, weather, farm prices, farming methods, equipment and transportation facilities.

Kingfisher had many economic advantages in 1890. It had the land office for the Western District of Oklahoma Territory; it was the county seat; it had the Rock Island Railroad; it was the trading center for a thickly populated farming community; and finally, it was adjacent to the unoccupied Cheyenne and Arapahoe lands which were soon to be opened to settlement. In 1890 the county population was 8,332 which included Kingfisher's 1,134 inhabitants.¹ The average size of farms in 1889 was 158 acres and 99.74% of the farms were owned and cultivated by the owners.² The county farm population thus comprised a relatively stable and responsible citizenry.

The farmers generally had a much longer period of hardship than city dwellers. They, too, had to overcome the immediate problem of shelter and many lived in crude dugouts the first year. Many had very meager

¹U.S. Bureau of Census, Eleventh Census of the United States: 1890. Population, I, Part 1, p. 283.

²Ibid., Agriculture, V, pp. 174-175.

financial resources to tide them over until a crop could be harvested. The opening came too late in 1889 to plant crops, other than a few plots of corn. The following year, 1890, was unusually dry and the economic plight of the farmers became critical. Seeking relief for the farmers of Oklahoma Territory, Governor George Steele appealed to the management of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe and the Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific railroads to send \$10,000 worth of seed wheat which was to be repaid by farmers after crops were harvested the following year. Both of these railroads responded by distributing wheat along their lines at actual cost, free of transportation charges and without interest.³ This helped relieve those farmers who otherwise would not have been able to plant any crops. The harvest of 1891 brought the first real cash income to the farming community but this, too, was a disappointing crop. Furthermore, farm prices were low. In September, 1891, the Kingfisher market report listed the following prices for farm products: wheat \$0.65/bushel, corn \$0.30/bushel, oats \$0.30/bushel, potatoes \$0.80/bushel and eggs \$0.15/dozen.⁴ Despite the poor crops, W. D. Cornelius erected a cotton gin in anticipation of the cotton crop the following year. Business activity had increased over the previous year and the Free Press, commenting on the volume of goods arriving in the town declared, "The merchants must be doing a big business."⁵

But even better business was in the offing. The trade area of Kingfisher was greatly increased when the Cheyenne and Arapahoe lands were opened to settlement by a run held on April 19, 1892. The Cheyenne and

³U. S. House Executive Documents, Report of the Governor of Oklahoma, October 9, 1891. 52 Cong., 1 Sess., XVI (2935), p. 450.

⁴Free Press, September 17, 1891.

⁵Ibid., May 19, 1891.

Arapahoe land represented a vast agricultural area extending west to the Texas border and the farmers who settled in this area were closely bound to Kingfisher by virtue of it being the site of the nearest railroad. The unbridged Cimarron River tended to keep farmers who settled northwest of the town from trading at Dover or Hennessey and the absence of a railroad extending westward into the newly opened lands soon made Kingfisher one of the world's largely primary wheat markets. Wheat was hauled to Kingfisher from as far as northwest Oklahoma near the Kansas border. Grain was transported by professional grain haulers who utilized canvas covered wagons drawn by four horses.⁶ Kingfisher's prominence in the wheat market was partly reflected by their having two officers in the Oklahoma Grain Dealer's Association which was organized in 1898. The first president of this organization, W. R. Binkley, and the secretary, J. L. Robb, were both from Kingfisher.⁷

Although Kingfisher County initially had a great wheat growing potential, the first years were lean years for the farmers. Ground had to be broken, weather was generally unfavorable, and crop yields were less than anticipated. In spite of this, land values climbed and seven years after the run farms near Kingfisher sold for as much as \$1,500.⁸ The long period of poor crops ended in 1897 when a bumper wheat crop was harvested. Nevertheless, retail prices in Kingfisher reflected the many poor years.

⁶Reminiscences, Earl M. Worl, Free Press, 60th Anniversary Edition, April 18, 1949. Another settler recalled that Kingfisher drew wheat from as far as 100 miles west. Reminiscences, A. H. Evans, Ibid.

⁷E. H. Linzee, "Early History of the Grain Business in Oklahoma," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, XIX (June, 1941), p. 167.

⁸Free Press, February 27, 1896. Farms from a greater distance and perhaps poorer quality, sold for less. A farm located eighteen miles northwest of Kingfisher was offered for \$800. At this time the average five room house in town sold for approximately \$300.

Men's trousers could be purchased for \$0.19, men's shoes \$0.98, ladies waists \$0.39, children's shoes \$0.19, and ladies summer vests \$0.04.⁹

Relatively low retail prices provided a slight measure of relief to the hard pressed farmers. Then in 1898 the Spanish-American War stimulated a rapid though short-lived rise in the price of wheat to \$0.90 per bushel while favorable weather produced another good crop.¹⁰ The community was again overjoyed in 1899 when the third successive bumper wheat crop was harvested and Kingfisher shipped more wheat than any other city in Oklahoma Territory. By then Kingfisher could boast of ten grain elevators with a capacity of over 200,000 bushels.¹¹ Farm prosperity did not depend entirely on wheat, however, and many farmers produced oats, barley, corn, cotton and livestock. One farmer, Alex McCartney, introduced pure-bred Jersey cattle.¹² Agriculture was finally on its feet, farmers grew more diversified crops and the economic future looked promising.

Meanwhile, the businessmen of Kingfisher shared in the growing prosperity of the farmers and in 1898 a number of merchants reported that business was exceptionally good.¹³ Logan and Snow, successors to Logan and Kennedy, operators of a dry goods store, had moved into a new building

⁹Free Press, August 12, 1897. School teachers received \$35.00 per month salary and wage earners generally earned less than \$500 per year.

¹⁰Ibid., April 28, 1898. The price dropped to \$0.62 per bushel by July. Free Press, July 14, 1898.

¹¹Ibid., February 16, 1899.

¹²Oklahoma Review, IX (April 15, 1898).

¹³Ibid. Among these businesses were: Conley and Phillips, hardware; T. A. Vaughn and J. L. Admire, general merchandise; J. A. Martin and H. Buckingham, grocers; J. W. Billing, livery stable; Boynton and Smith, J. W. Walton and David Gamble, real estate.

and Ed Hockaday announced plans to open branch hardware stores in El Reno and Enid. Increased income made it possible for farmers to buy new equipment and total sales of implement dealers during 1898 amounted to \$396,000.¹⁴ In 1899, the Free Press boasted of the city's six implement dealers, six hotels, ten grain elevators, three newspapers, one opera house, nine churches, one Masonic hall, the land office, two flour mills, two cotton gins, four lumber yards, nine grocery stores, three hardware stores, three drug stores, two furniture and undertaking stores, one tailor, five livery stables, one creamery, one boot and shoe store, two book stores, two photographic galleries, eight real estate and loan agencies, six blacksmith and wagon shops and two brick manufacturers.¹⁵

Banking institutions were plentiful during the early development of Kingfisher. The Bank of Kingfisher had been established in May, 1889, and on March 1, 1891, the Peoples Bank was organized by George Newer, and Mr. and Mrs. J. C. Smith.¹⁶ In 1899, the Central State Bank was organized by A. J. Seay, J. A. Overstreet and Guy Condit. The Kingfisher National Bank was established in 1901 with F. L. Potter as president and G. A. Nelson as vice president.¹⁷ The Citizens State Bank was organized on November 8, 1905, by J. W. Worl, W. P. Kimerer, and W. M. Hawkins.¹⁸

¹⁴Free Press, February 16, 1899.

¹⁵Ibid. The paper failed to mention any banks, and saloons are conspicuous by their absence.

¹⁶Bank Records, Peoples National Bank, Kingfisher, Oklahoma. In June, 1899, the bank was sold to John F. Stone, F. L. Winkler, C. B. Brooks, and F. L. Boynton. Stone was later killed by an irate bank customer and Ed Hockaday, D. Badger, and G. H. Logan purchased Stone's interest in the bank on March 3, 1900. In January, 1898, the president, George Newer and the cashier, J. C. Smith, were each paid a salary of \$65.00 per month.

¹⁷Free Press, March 14, 1901.

¹⁸Kingfisher Panorama, p. 26.

With banks and other businesses flourishing, both the city and county had made significant economic progress as the end of the century neared. The increased number of merchants in the city reflected the good crops of the rural area where there was a growing tendency to practice diversified farming. Total crops produced in the county in 1899 were as follows:

Barley	59,480 Bu.
Corn	1,585,400 Bu.
Oats	431,800 Bu.
Rye	1,350 Bu.
Wheat	1,943,030 Bu. ¹⁹
Cotton	1,359 Bales ²⁰

There were also 2,248 farms which sold and produced dairy products.²¹ A highly significant change had occurred in farm ownership during the ten year period from 1889 to 1899. Whereas 99.74% of the farms had been operated by their owners in 1889, only 67.1% claimed this distinction in 1899.²² The people who had made the run for purely speculative purposes had either sold their farms or rented them. Hard times had also taken its toll and inefficient farmers were in the process of being eliminated along with those who lacked the resources to carry them through the initial lean years. The population of the county had more than doubled, increasing from 8,332 in 1890 to 18,501 in 1900. Kingfisher had increased from 1,134 to 1,301 inhabitants.²³ Included in the total population of the

¹⁹U. S. Bureau of Census, Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900. Agriculture, VI, Part 2, p. 179.

²⁰Ibid., p. 433.

²¹Ibid., V, Part I, p. 616.

²²Ibid., p. 115.

²³Ibid., Population, I, Part 1, p. 470.

county were 2,453 Negroes and 896 foreign born persons.²⁴ The economic impact of the opening of the Cheyenne and Arapahoe lands was clearly reflected in the population statistics.

By 1902, the population was expanding and there was a growing belief that the future economic well-being of the community depended upon the farmer. The city, being fully aware of its reliance on agriculture, took steps to encourage the development of better farming techniques and livestock improvement. A County Agricultural Fair Association was formed and the first county fair was held in 1902. This fair received the enthusiastic participation of the farming community and thereafter became an annual affair.

While the county fair emphasized the community reliance on agriculture, there was always the possibility of other resources. In October, 1905, the Free Press optimistically declared, "Between 1,500 and 2,500 feet below this pretty city of ours is a great lake of crude petroleum."²⁵ A group of men formed the Kingfisher Mining Company and launched an oil test located two miles northeast of the town in May, 1906.²⁶ Drilling was slow, reaching a total depth of about 1,000 feet in November of 1906 when a string of casing was run and immediately collapsed. Technical difficulties and leasing problems cast a shadow over this particular venture but the investors were convinced that fortune was just a few feet deeper. A new test was started adjacent to the original hole in March of 1907 but the hoped for riches never materialized.²⁷ The failure

²⁴Ibid., pp. 553, 778.

²⁵Free Press, October 26, 1905.

²⁶Free Press, 60th Anniversary Edition, April 18, 1949. Among the stockholders were: C. E. Sockler, George Adams, C. E. More, W. J. Brown, J. V. Noel, D. K. Cunningham, R. Pappe, W. L. Reynolds, J. R. Lankard, J. S. Patrick, and Gross Longendyke.

²⁷Ibid. This second test never found oil in commercial quantities

of the oil test, while disappointing, had little influence on the growth of the community.

The economic growth and development of the community had been largely dependent upon a network of county roads leading into the city and the main artery, the Rock Island Railroad, which connected the county and city with the outside world. The county roads were virtually non-existent for the first year. One pioneer woman, Mrs. J. J. Weimer, homesteaded with her husband five miles north and one-half mile west of Kingfisher. While in the process of erecting a building on their land, Mrs. Weimer started for Kingfisher to buy some nails. On the way she became lost on the trackless prairie. This event is related as follows:

There were no landmarks, no roads and the grass was about two feet high. I got into the wagon and started out across the prairie in the direction of Kingfisher. When I had driven long enough that I thought I should be there, not a thing was in sight. I turned the wagon around and followed my own tracks back home²⁸

It was not long, however, before fences were erected and travelers were confined to the right of way provided for section line roads. These roads often became impassable during extended periods of rain, especially the roads which were heavily traveled. In 1898 the road leading west from Kingfisher past the cemetery became a sea of mud filled with large holes. Several of the townspeople donated their labor and money to repair this road, but efforts to enlist this type of volunteer labor for road construction proved impractical and revealed the necessity for a governmental agency to assume the responsibility for building and maintaining roads.

However rough they may have been, by 1896 a network of roads linked

although it eventually reached a total depth of 1800 feet where it was abandoned.

²⁸ Reminiscences, Mrs. J. J. Weimer, Ibid.

Kingfisher with virtually every small town in the county. Three mail stages made daily runs as follows: The Watonga stage passed through Omega, Winnview and Altoona. The Okeene stage made stops at Kiel, Oneida, Cooper and Homestead, while the Guthrie stage also served Downs. In addition, the Rock Island had three northbound and three southbound trains daily.

The railroad station was the center of activity and of interest during Kingfisher's early period. Virtually all of the goods which the city consumed passed through the station and a crowd was always on hand to meet incoming trains. The economic well being of the town depended almost entirely on the presence of the railroad but it directly served only those communities which lay either north or south. Many felt that it would be to Kingfisher's advantage to have a railroad extending east and west and efforts were made to attract an additional railroad. From 1903 until 1907 a constant succession of railroad promoters descended upon the town and unfolded various schemes which, according to them, assured the building of another railroad. Most of these schemes were of a highly suspicious nature but even so, the mere rumor of the possibility of a new railroad coming to town brought forth exaggerated predictions of the benefits to be derived by an additional rail outlet.²⁹

One of the many promotional schemes appeared reputable and plans were made for the forming of the Guthrie, Fairview and Western Railroad Company which was intended to serve Kiel, Okeene and Fairview. Some grading was

²⁹Usually these promoters wanted local businessmen to provide financial support. In one instance a promotor met with the Commercial Club in an evening session after having arrived that afternoon. He asked the city to provide a right of way on each side of the town for a distance of three miles plus an immediate \$25,000. He then informed his listeners they must either accept or reject his offer at once because he was leaving on the early morning train. They rejected his offer. Free Press, June 28, 1906.

actually started in the summer of 1903 for the railroad but it was halted shortly afterwards. The Free Press, anxious to have the railroad completed, charged that the Rock Island had a hand in terminating its construction.³⁰ In any event, for several years the possibility of a railroad extending westward was uppermost in the minds of many Kingfisher merchants. There were some however, who did not look with favor upon such a project. George L. Bowman recalled that the Rock Island had once sought financial support from Kingfisher businessmen to acquire a right of way toward the west. This proposal was strongly opposed by a group of merchants who feared it would create a new town ten or fifteen miles out which would deprive Kingfisher of part of their trade area. Bowman felt the town lost an important opportunity for economic advancement when the Rock Island built west from Enid instead of Kingfisher.³¹

While the prospect for additional railroads was of concern to many businessmen, the major interest of the city government during the initial period of settlement was the collection of revenue and the maintenance of law and order. It was not long, however, before the need for providing additional services became evident. The possibility for a public water system was discussed before the city council in 1892 but no action was taken although the town still relied on the public well, private wells, and a water peddler who made daily rounds selling water. Later, the Pabst Brewing Company supplied water to the city from their plant in Kingfisher until a dispute ended the arrangement.³² The need for an adequate water system was forcefully impressed upon the city on August

³⁰Ibid., August 27, 1903.

³¹Reminiscences, George L. Bowman, Free Press, 60th Anniversary Edition, April 18, 1949.

³²Free Press, August 22, 1895.

6, 1900, when a major fire destroyed the court house and all the buildings in the block. The city had neither a water system nor a professional fire department and the Free Press disgustedly commented, "Three times the cost of a water works burned up in the past year and a half, pigheaded economy has its reward. There is no protection for property in this town."³³ Following the court house fire, opposition to a public water system was overcome and both a steel water tower and municipal power plant were completed in 1901. Progress, though delayed, seemed inevitable.

The completion of a water tower provided some measure of protection, yet fires remained a constant threat to property. Almost all of the city's buildings were of frame construction and if a fire occurred during a high wind the quickly formed bucket brigades proved totally ineffective. The first fire department, composed entirely of volunteers, had for its only piece of equipment a hose cart given to the city sometime during the 1890's by the Pabst Brewing Company. Progress in the establishment of a modern fire department was also slow and it was not until February, 1905, that the city purchased its own team of horses to pull a hook and ladder wagon.

The development of other services had preceded the establishment of a more efficient fire department. Telephone service was initiated in the 1890's. In November, 1898, the city granted J. W. Steele a twenty-five year franchise to operate a telephone exchange.³⁴ By 1903 the city

³³Ibid., August 30, 1900.

³⁴There were several telephones already in operation in the city at this time which connected the railroad station, ice plant and one of the hotels. On February 21, 1893, the city granted Henry P. Shimer the right to establish a telephone exchange but it is not known whether Shimer installed these phones. Ordinance Book, Ordinance No. 56, p. 104.

residents had telephone, power, and water services. Free mail service had also been provided to both the city and rural area. With the completion of these services which are now regarded as essential, the city had come a long way from the empty prairie of only a few short years before. By 1906 the town had become a comfortable place in which to live and its economic well being seemed assured by a fertile agricultural base.

CHAPTER V

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

Under the terms of the Organic Act the legislative power of the newly created Oklahoma Territory was to be lodged in a legislative assembly comprised of a council and house of representatives. The territorial governor, appointed by the President, had the right to veto legislation which could be overridden by a two-thirds vote of both houses. All laws passed were subject to the approval of Congress. The Act also provided for the election of a delegate to Congress who could speak but not vote.¹

On May 15, 1890, President Harrison, in carrying out the terms of the Organic Act, appointed George W. Steele of Indiana as the first territorial governor. Steele arrived in Guthrie on May 22. The Kingfisher Daily World pledged a welcome and stated, "He has no personal ends to serve and has no other object . . . but to serve the highest and best interests of the people of Oklahoma."² Kingfisher held a parade in his honor when the Governor made a visit on May 30 and it appeared that he returned to Guthrie with the good will of the community.

One of the first tasks facing the Governor was to form a territorial government and in July he called for the election of the legislative assembly on August 5. In the first legislative Council, Kingfisher County

¹U. S. Statutes, XXVI, 51 Cong., 1 Sess., pp. 81-100.

²Kingfisher Daily World, May 27, 1890.

was included in the Sixth District. Daniel Harraday and W. A. McCartney were elected to the Council. Green I. Currin, Darius C. Farnsworth, Joseph C. Post and Edward C. Tritt were elected to the House of Representatives from Kingfisher County.³

One of Kingfisher's Representatives, Currin, was a Negro who had made the run and settled six miles east of Dover. He had come from Kansas and was well educated.⁴ It was fitting that Kingfisher County had elected a Negro to the legislature because it had the highest proportion of Negroes of any county in the territory. While the county had only 11.1% of the total white population of Oklahoma Territory, it had 43.3% of the total Negro population.⁵ Negroes played an important role in the political affairs of the city and county during the territorial period.

The presence of a Negro in the legislature undoubtedly evoked some comment but when the newly elected legislature first assembled, the location of the capital was uppermost in the minds of the political leaders of the three contending towns, Guthrie, Oklahoma City and Kingfisher. Steele, aware of this rivalry, urged in his inaugural address before the legislative assembly that they concentrate their efforts toward the establishment of a school system, highways, taxation and the erection of public buildings. The Governor's recommendation fell on deaf ears, however, and the issue of the capital grew stronger. On September 20 the

³Journal of the 1st Session of the Legislative Assembly of Oklahoma Territory (Guthrie, 1890), p. 9. Henceforth cited as Journal.

⁴Most of the Negroes who made the run in 1889 came from northern states and were well educated. In contrast, many Negroes who made the run into the Cheyenne and Arapahoe lands in 1892 came from the South and lacked formal education.

⁵U.S. Bureau of Census, Eleventh Census of the United States: 1890. Population, I, Part 1, p. 512. Kingfisher County had 1,304 of the total territorial Negro population of 3,008.

the New World, which had mentioned the possibility of Kingfisher's becoming the capital a year earlier, declared, "Prospects for the capital to be located here look good."⁶ In this same month a bill providing for locating the capital in Oklahoma City was submitted to both houses. While this bill was being considered in the assembly, a deal was effected between the Oklahoma City and Kingfisher representatives. Dan W. Peery, a member of the Oklahoma City delegation, recalled the series of events concerning Kingfisher's efforts to acquire the capital as follows:

Four of the representatives from Kingfisher joined us there that night and we had a caucus with them. Joe Post was the spokesman. Their proposition was that they would join us the next day . . . and would stay with the Oklahoma City combination and in good faith . . . provided we members from Oklahoma County would agree to vote to locate the capital at Kingfisher in case Governor Steele should veto our bill. D. K. Cunningham, one of the Kingfisher boosters reduced this agreement to writing and we all signed it.⁷

When the bill to move the capital to Oklahoma City came to a test vote on October 2 the Kingfisher representatives voted with the Oklahoma City force and succeeded in passing the bill which was sent to the Governor. On October 13 the Governor returned the measure with a veto.⁸

The capital controversy entered its second phase when J. C. Post, according to plan, introduced a bill in the House to locate the capital in Kingfisher. A heated debate was waged in the House and considerable legal maneuvering occurred before the bill was approved and sent to the Council where it was amended, approved and returned to the House. By now the Oklahoma City delegation no longer willingly gave their support and according to Peery, "Kingfisher was fretting and disappointed, wanting us

⁶New World, September 20, 1890.

⁷Dan W. Peery, "The First Two Years," The Chronicles of Oklahoma, VIII (March, 1930), p. 112. Henceforth cited as Peery, "The First Two Years."

⁸Journal, p. 290.

to deliver the goods as we had promised in our signed agreement."⁹

While the bill in amended form was being reconsidered in the House, the Governor sent for Peery. In the course of their conversation Peery recalled Steele making the following statement:

'Mr. Peery, if the House passes that Kingfisher capital bill I know of no reason that I should not sign it and make Kingfisher the Capital of Oklahoma. The principal reason that I did not sign your Oklahoma City bill was that when the Cherokee Strip and those western reservations are opened to settlement, your town would not be near the center of this Territory. I cannot make that objection to this Kingfisher bill, for when the new lands are opened, Kingfisher will be well located.'¹⁰

Steele then indicated to Peery that he thought the Oklahoma City people did not want the capital to be moved to Kingfisher whereupon Peery told him they "were under an obligation to Kingfisher for helping us pass our Oklahoma City bill and I must vote for Kingfisher."¹¹ At this point the Governor revealed some surprising information to Peery who described the next few minutes of conversation. Steele spoke,

'Those people have been playing double with you. Look here at this petition,' and he unrolled a long scroll that reached the floor, I read it. It was a petition that had been filed while our capital bill was in the hands of the Governor asking his Excellency to veto the bill locating the capital at Oklahoma City. I do not know how many names were signed to that petition but it must have contained the name of nearly every man, woman and child in Kingfisher.¹²

While Peery was talking to the Governor the sound of people coming up the stairs was heard. Steele told Peery it was the Kingfisher group calling on him and he asked him to go into a side room and not to appear until they had left. Peery did this and listened to their conversation which

⁹Peery, "The First Two Years," p. 118.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 118-119.

¹¹Ibid., p. 119.

¹²Ibid.

lasted about an hour. The Kingfisher people attempted to persuade Steele to sign their capital bill but from what Peery overheard, the Governor was highly unfriendly to them and later expressed an intense dislike for the Kingfisher group.

From the foregoing it appears that had the Kingfisher boosters not attempted to influence the Governor to veto the Oklahoma City bill he would have rejected it anyway and may have been willing to approve the Kingfisher bill. But one can never really know because Steele obviously did not want the capital moved from Guthrie. In any event, despite the Governor's disclosure, Peery and the Oklahoma City group supported the amended version of the Kingfisher bill which was passed and sent to the Governor. The Oklahoma City group very likely felt safe in doing this because by now Steele was thoroughly hostile toward Kingfisher and on November 18 he returned the bill with a veto.¹³ For all practical purposes, Kingfisher's hopes for becoming the territorial capital were now ended. Needless to say, Steele's popularity in Kingfisher was thereafter quite low.

After making an apparent tactical error of judgment and timing in their efforts to influence the capital bill, the Kingfisher delegation now made a serious error of omission. They made little or no effort to compete seriously for the various territorial institutions and in the course of the remainder of the session, the State University was established at Norman, the Agricultural and Mechanical College at Stillwater and the normal school at Edmond. Had Kingfisher fought for one of these schools as vigorously as for the capital, its future might have been different, but again this is only conjecture and one cannot be certain they could

¹³Journal, p. 529.

have acquired a state school. When the first legislature came to the end of the session, the New World, disappointed at the loss of the capital fight, probably expressed the attitude of the Kingfisher community when it made the following comment, "The Legislature made Oklahoma a splendid Krismas [sic] present, they adjourned."¹⁴

With the capital fight completed, political parties in Kingfisher began to emerge into distinct groups. Initially, the Republican Party was in the majority but by 1890 another party came forth which cut heavily into what would normally have been Democrats. This party was the Farmer's Alliance, a third party movement of national significance based almost entirely on agricultural discontent which tended to grow as farm prices remained low. In Kingfisher County the Farmer's Alliance took the name of People's Party which came to be popularly called the Populist Party. This group gained considerable following early in the county and the concern of the Republicans mounted as the possibility of a political fusion of the Democrats and Populists became a subject of political conversation. In June of 1892 the editor of the Free Press indicated that little evidence of the People's Party existed in Oklahoma but by October he frequently expressed concern over the possibility of a union of Democrats and Populists. If fusion occurred these two groups would control local politics.

A change in Kingfisher's political climate occurred shortly after Grover Cleveland's election as president in 1892. Admire and Robberts, both strong Republicans, were replaced by Democrats E. G. Spilman and J. C. Caldwell as register and receiver of the land office in September, 1893.¹⁵ The Republicans were still the dominant party in Kingfisher in

¹⁴New World, December 27, 1890.

¹⁵Oklahoma Magazine (May, 1895), p. 336.

November, 1894, but the county vote for Territorial Delegate to Congress revealed a rapid growth of Populist sentiment. The vote was as follows: Flynn, Republican, 1,747; Beaumont, Populist, 1,443; Wisby, Democrat, 548. In the Ninth District Council race, Republican C. T. Prouty won but J. Y. Callahan, the Populist candidate, carried Kingfisher County 1,578 to Prouty's 1,567. From the foregoing figures it was evident that a fusion of the Populists and Democrats would defeat the Republicans at all levels.

The Republican Party, seriously challenged by the Populists, could ill afford to lose votes and a problem now reared its head which could very well jeopardize their plurality. In February, 1894, a group of Negro voters met at the courthouse to discuss statehood and southern immigration. It was also suggested that an independent Negro political movement be established but after consideration they decided to remain within the Republican ranks.¹⁶

By 1896 the Republicans had lost strength in the April city elections and Populists won several city offices although F. L. Winkler, a Republican, won the office of mayor. The Populists held a county convention in May in which the courtroom was packed. Every township and town in the county was represented. Speeches were delivered by J. Y. Callahan in which he identified the Republican Party with corporations, political bosses, and railroads. It is significant that not a single Negro was present at this convention.¹⁷ The absence of Negroes was more understandable after Callahan issued a public statement strongly supporting segregation in the public schools.¹⁸ Although the Populists apparently

¹⁶Free Press, February 15, 1894.

¹⁷Ibid., May 14, 1896.

¹⁸Ibid., September 3, 1896.

made no effort to attract Negro votes, the Republican Party could no longer count on their support. The Negroes, who had been loyal Republicans, met in a mass convention on July 14 and demanded "a fair representation in the distribution of the offices and patronage of said party."¹⁹ The Republicans now faced a dilemma. They needed the Negro support in order to hold their precarious position, yet were reluctant to permit them to have a voice in party affairs. A second mass Negro protest meeting was held in Dover and the Free Press, in trying to maintain party solidarity, urged "moderation and reason . . . there has been entirely too much threatening already."²⁰ The Populists also had problems. Many Populists feared that national party support for William Jennings Bryan, the Democratic presidential candidate, would mean the absorption of the Populist Party into the Democratic Party. Consequently, there was considerable opposition to a fusion of the Populists and Democrats at the local level. Nevertheless, this fusion did occur.

Negro political dissatisfaction was further manifested in November, 1896, when they ran two candidates, Russell and Robinson, for representative and county clerk on the Republican ticket. The Free Press, supporting the Republican Party, ran a front page story before the election calling attention to the fact that these two men were Negroes but that "they should be treated as white candidates."²¹ Both of these candidates lost and the election revealed that the Populists and Democrats had managed to join forces and the Fusion ticket generally swept the county offices.

¹⁹Ibid., July 16, 1896. They also voiced a demand that the County Superintendent apportion territorial funds to all of the county schools regardless of race or color.

²⁰Ibid., August 20, 1896.

²¹Ibid., October 29, 1896.

Also, J. Y. Callahan, the Fusion candidate, defeated Dennis Flynn for Delegate to Congress.²²

By 1900 the color line had been sharply drawn by the Republican Party and the Negroes no longer considered themselves a part of the local organization. They were excluded from the regular Republican Party affairs and as a result they held their own convention and nominated a full slate of candidates for all county offices. In the November elections the Fusion party had lost support and in spite of the Negro revolt, the white Republicans again carried the majority of county offices probably because the general level of prosperity had increased. Dennis Flynn also staged a comeback by winning the post of Territorial Delegate. Flynn carried Kingfisher County 2,235 to 1,810 for the Fusion candidate, Robert A. Neff.²³

The political campaign of 1902 again featured strained Negro-white relations. The Free Press accused the Democrats and Populists of fomenting a Negro revolt from the Republican ranks.²⁴ The basis for this charge was a petition which had been filed with the county clerk placing the name of a Negro, G. R. Washington, on a separate ticket called the John Brown Republican Ticket, for the office of Sheriff. If the Democrats were responsible, this maneuver succeeded because the vote was split and the Democratic candidate for Sheriff, J. P. Love, defeated his Republican opponent. This issue may have also influenced the city elections

²²The only county Republicans winning were George Moss, County Superintendent of Schools; Walter Stevens, Probate Judge; and W. W. Noffsinger, County Attorney. Callahan had made the run into the Cheyenne and Arapahoe land on April 19, 1892 and staked a claim seven miles northwest of Kingfisher.

²³The passage of the Free Homes Bill in June may possibly have helped local Republicans regain some of their strength.

²⁴Free Press, October 30, 1902.

of April, 1903, because for the first time the Democrats won all the city elections. From this point until statehood political interest focused on state and national politics rather than local issues.

State political issues came to the forefront after 1904 as agitation for statehood increased. For many years the people had anxiously awaited statehood and finally on June 16, 1906, Congress passed the Enabling Act which permitted Oklahoma to become a state after a Constitution had been adopted.²⁵ Delegates to a Constitutional convention were elected at a general election on November 6, 1906. The convention was overwhelmingly Democratic with ninety-nine Democrats and thirteen Republicans. Kingfisher sent one delegate, M. T. Kane, a Democrat. In the convention strong anti-liquor forces attempted to include a prohibition clause in the Constitution but there was a possibility this could defeat the prospect for statehood so a separate prohibition question was submitted to the voters. The election was held on August 6 after a bitter campaign between the liquor and anti-liquor forces which overshadowed the Constitutional question. Both the Constitution and prohibition carried throughout the state. In Kingfisher County the Constitution won easily 2,260 to 1,850 but the prohibition question was a close win for the anti-liquor forces, 1,896 to 1,857. In the election for governor, Frank Frantz, Republican and losing candidate, carried Kingfisher County 2,294 to 1,688 for Charles N. Haskell, Democrat. On the eve of statehood the county was still predominantly Republican.

On November 16, 1907, President Theodore Roosevelt issued a proclamation admitting Oklahoma into the Union. The territorial period had come to an end, but a new era began. In the course of the past seventeen years a city had been established. From a barren treeless prairie there

²⁵U. S. Statutes, XXXIV, pp. 267-285.

now stood a town with many storied buildings, a water tower, sidewalks, blazing lights, traffic along the streets and busy people. During the territorial years many different currents had developed from the social and racial units existing in Kingfisher and the town had matured politically and economically. The little prairie county seat town, with faith and confidence, looked forward to a new role in the formation of a state.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

The people who made the run into Kingfisher and the surrounding area were, for the most part, determined that this would be their permanent home. They were young, in their most productive years, and possessed a tremendous enthusiasm and optimism for the future. The permanent citizens were generally law abiding and honest as the settlement and operation of the townsite without legal government would indicate although the failure of Congress to provide adequately for townsites and legal government was inexcusable. Also, the government's method of opening of the territory by a land run encouraged fraud and dishonesty. The men with the fastest horses or those who entered the territory before the appointed hour acquired the best land. Kingfisher's land office personnel and the Federal marshals who maintained law and order for the first few months were honest and it is remarkable there were no land frauds involving the Kingfisher District. Early merchants frequently sold farm equipment and supplies to settlers on credit without any collateral. People trusted each other and this trust was usually justified.

It was almost a necessity that people trust each other during the early day. Life would have been much more difficult without a climate of honesty. Fortunately, the period of hardship within Kingfisher itself was relatively short. The city dwellers were isolated from civilization only from April until October when the railroad reached the town and during this time they were only thirty miles from a rail outlet at Guthrie. The people who settled in the rural areas can more properly be considered

as pioneers but even in the country there were people on nearby quarter sections. Nevertheless, even if spared some of the loneliness of former pioneers, many of these people lived primitive lives in dugouts and suffered considerable hardship for the first year or until they were able to erect more comfortable dwellings. Breaking the prairie sod and the fight for survival during the early years of drought truly tested the mettle of the farmers and those that survived could take pride in their accomplishment.

Kingfisher possessed an appreciation for culture to a degree unusual for a small prairie town. The Chautauquas and lyceums revealed an appreciation and respect for education which can partly be explained by the origin of the early inhabitants and the number of professional people in the city. Most of the settlers were comparatively well educated. Many came from northern states, especially Kansas and Nebraska, where public education was highly regarded. Kingfisher also attracted a large number of lawyers, doctors, druggists, ministers and educators who took an interest in cultural activities. Later, the presence of Kingfisher College fostered a cultural climate and because it was a religious institution, it was a major source of the reform spirit of the community. Religiously oriented educators, allied with the ministers, were imbued with a desire to build a better community. The reform movement was also very likely stimulated by the general agrarian and social discontent prevalent throughout the nation. In any event, conflict with the blatant, lawless saloon element was inevitable.

Rapid change characterized the social structure and the community attitude toward the Negro population of Kingfisher. Integration in the schools was accepted for the first two years because the people were more concerned with immediate pressing economic problems. Later, as individual interests crystallized and various organizations were formed, the

presence of the Negroes in the community took on new meaning. Conflicts between Negroes and whites emerged during the territorial period in those areas concerned with education and politics. The growth of the Populist and Democratic Party in Kingfisher during the 1890's influenced anti-Negro sentiment and strangely enough this attitude was also manifested within the Republican Party despite its tradition of sympathy for Negro rights. The Negroes suffered from a growing Republican rejection and could turn to neither the Democrats nor Populists who openly shunned them. Their inability to redress their grievances through political means during the formative period of the community meant they would have to wait for at least a half century.

Kingfisher benefited from having two political parties of almost equal strength. Both parties were forced to present capable candidates and although the city government was slow to react to the reform issue, the city was administered by competent people.

Could Kingfisher have become more than a county seat town? Their ambitious political leaders surely believed so and they waged an intense battle to acquire the capital. Yet they faced tremendous obstacles, competition with both Guthrie and Oklahoma City which had greater populations and a governor who was determined that the capital would remain in Guthrie. After Steele's veto of the Kingfisher capital bill and the various state institutions were located in other cities, Kingfisher's political future was limited to its being a county seat town.

Could the city have become larger through expansion of business? There is insufficient evidence to indicate a failure of any definite policy of Kingfisher merchants or their leaders. If an extension of a railroad westward from town had been economically feasible the Rock Island Railroad would surely have taken advantage of it. True, they did

build west from Enid but the very fact that this city lay forty miles further north gave it an advantage because it was better located geographically as the primary city of north-central Oklahoma and by virtue of its being surrounded by even more fertile wheat lands.

Although one can surmise what Kingfisher might have been, on the eve of statehood it remained a small county seat town with a relatively fixed population. In attempting to judge Kingfisher's failings and accomplishments one need not apologize for its lack of growth. It appears that the people of this town, though few in number, lived reasonably happy and contented lives.

Because both the city and county had the highest proportion of Negroes in the territory, they missed an excellent chance to set an example in the matter of equal educational and economic opportunity. The wisdom of effecting segregation in the schools seems questionable after having apparently been successfully integrated the first two years. Yet, the action of the school board probably reflected prevailing public opinion, national as well as local. The reform issue could also perhaps have been handled differently by both the reformers and the city government. Stricter enforcement of the laws regulating the saloons may well have tempered the demands of the militant reformers who came to view themselves as the self-appointed guardians of the city's morals. Nevertheless, the town indicated a willingness to better itself as revealed by the community leaders who waged a continuous battle to enlist financial support for Kingfisher College.

Finally, one should consider Kingfisher's role in the historic development of Oklahoma Territory. It was born in one of the great runs, had witnessed the passing of the frontier, and had shared in the building of a new land. For this it can justly be proud.

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The leading newspaper of Kingfisher from 1891 until statehood. Edited and owned by J. V. Admire, it was strongly Republican in politics. This paper was the source of much of the material for this study. It is the only source of the original school history because all school records were destroyed by fire. Admire was quick to voice his opinion on various social problems confronting the city and was instrumental in leading a battle for reform from 1898 to 1903.

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Frank Coke, the son of Henry Coke, an army veterinarian, was in Kingfisher when it opened. He tended bar in one of the saloons when he was seventeen years of age and was part owner of a saloon.

Interview with Mr. Er Thomas Lucas, December 29, 1964.

The Lucas family came to Kingfisher on May 13, 1889, from Gregg, Nebraska, and settled on a farm two and one-half miles north of town. His father, Howard, borrowed ten bushels of wheat from the Rock Island Railroad in order to plant his first crop. Lucas, although only nine years of age, drove a team and worked on the construction of the grade for the Rock Island Railroad in 1889.

Interview with Mr. Joe Wensler, December 19, 1964.

Wensler made the run into the Cheyenne and Arapahoe Territory on April 19, 1892, and homesteaded twenty-two miles northwest of Kingfisher.

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