

THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF CUSTER COUNTY

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By

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PREFACE

An attempt has been made by the Author to create a clear picture of the region, now legally designated as Custer County in the State of Oklahoma, from the time of its first European claims up to the present time. It has been the purpose of the writer to describe and explain some of the significant factors which led to the growth and development of Custer County.

It has been the intention of the writer to catch something of the "fever of enthusiasm" that motivated these homeseekers and adventurers as they made progress in the field of agriculture and industry.

The writer wishes to express his gratitude for the assistance rendered him on this project by the following persons:

Dr. T. H. Reynolds, Professor and Head and Dr. B. B. Chapman, Professor, both of the History Department of the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College; Dr. E. E. Dale, Head Emeritus of the Oklahoma University History Department; Mr. Charles Engleman, Editor and Publisher of the Clinton Daily News, Clinton, Oklahoma; and Mr. Clint Strong, pioneer resident of Custer County and at present, Business Manager of the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College.

Wayne S. Wallace

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CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Custer County, located in the Cheyenne-Arapaho Country of Oklahoma, was claimed at one time by Spain, France, and England. There is no evidence, however, that this area had any direct contact with European civilizations. It is significant to note, however, that Coronado's expedition in 1540-42 gave the country of Spain a claim to this region,¹ and it is possible, although not probable, that Coronado's expedition traversed part of the area of what is now known as Custer County. French claim to this region began with LaSalle's expedition in 1682² wherein he claimed for France all areas drained by the Mississippi River which would include the South Canadian and Washita Rivers, both of which flow through Custer County. The grant of the regal domain of Charles II of England made in 1665 to the colony of Carolina included this vicinity, giving England her claim to this region.³

France emerged dominant in the claim for this region in 1800 when Napoleon whose power was steadily rising in Europe was considered the legitimate owner and possessor of present Custer County. Only in 1803, when President Thomas Jefferson prevailed upon Congress to purchase the Louisiana Territory, did it officially become a part of the United States.⁴ Even at that time, however, the southwestern limits of the Louisiana Territory were very indefinite as the boundary between it and New Spain had never been established or discussed. Nevertheless, an agreement made with Spain in 1819 (The Florida

Treaty) left all the present state of Oklahoma in the possession of the United States except the narrow rectangle projecting west of the 100th meridian, now known as the Oklahoma Panhandle.⁵

Nothing of exceptional importance is recorded in the history of what is now Custer County until 1833 when a treaty made by the United States with the Creek Nation of Indians ceded this area to the Creeks who held it for approximately a third of a century by fee simple title.⁶ This region was used by the Creeks mainly and primarily for a hunting area, and no known permanent Indian villages were ever established here during this era. Having sided with the Confederacy during the Civil War, the Creeks found themselves in the position of being forced to cede this area back to the United States in the year 1866, to be sold and used for homes for such civilized Indians as the United States might choose to settle thereon.

Two of the typical plains tribes of Indians who were later to occupy the region of Custer County were the Cheyenne and Arapahoe Indians. These Indians belonged linguistically to the great western division of the Algonkian stock,⁷ and before the period of white contact appear to have migrated southwest across the Red River valley of Northern Minnesota where, according to their traditions, they lived a sedentary agricultural life. When driven to the plains, however, these tribes became nomadic buffalo hunters. These Indians culturally resemble each other and have, since approximately 1808, been allied with each other in a confederacy and have even had common councils. It should be noted, however, that they have always considered themselves

two distinct tribes and have always camped separately from each other.⁸

These tribes, particularly the Cheyennes were among the wildest and most warlike Indians in North America. Both the Cheyennes and the Arapahoes had met with United States Commissioners at the Great Council of Medicine Lodge in the State of Kansas in the year 1867 and had here been assigned lands in the Cheyenne-Arapaho territory including a part of the Cherokee Outlet north of this territory.⁹ They did not like these lands, however, and never accepted them. By the following summer a portion of them were on the war path. It is claimed that the misunderstanding of this treaty on the part of these tribes was responsible for these Indians resorting to war as evidenced by the report of the Cheyenne-Arapaho Indian Agent, E. W. Wynkoop.¹⁰

A narration of all the details of the winter campaign waged against the Cheyennes and Arapahoes by General Sheridan in command of the Department of Missouri would constitute a lengthy paper. However, mention should be made of the "Battle of the Washita", one of the bloodiest battles ever to be fought on Oklahoma soil.¹¹ This battle took place near Cheyenne, Oklahoma, near the vicinity of Custer County when General George A. Custer led his Seventh Cavalry south to attack and destroy Chief Black Kettle's camp on the Washita River on November 27, 1868. It is in honor of General Custer that Custer County derives its name.¹²

After the Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians had been sub-

Jugated, a new reservation was set aside for these Indians by President U. S. Grant's executive order, issued in 1869. This reservation covered an area of about four million three hundred thousand acres, on which three thousand five hundred Indians of whom approximately two thirds were Cheyenne and one-third were Arapahoes. It was by far the largest reservation formed from the lands ceded to the U. S. Government by the Five Civilized Tribes in the treaties of 1866.¹³ It was bounded on the north by the Cherokee Outlet, on the west by the Panhandle of Texas, on the south by Greer County and Kiowa-Comanche-Wichita reservations, and on the east by the Wichita reservation and the Oklahoma lands. It was a fertile area traversed by the North and South Canadian and the Washita Rivers while the Cimmarron River formed its northeastern boundary for some distance and the North Fork of the Red River its southwestern boundary.

President Grant, prompted by the War Department, initially attempted to place military personnel as Indian agents. This effort was blocked, however, by Congress which was long accustomed to dispensing this type of patronage. Finally a policy was established by Grant which, although not desirable to many members of Congress, was acceptable. This policy was one to allow churches to nominate Indian agents.

Soon after President Grant inaugurated his Quaker "peace policy" among the Indians, an agency was established for the Southern Cheyennes and Arapahoes, on the bank of the Canadian River where Darlington, Oklahoma, now stands.¹⁴ Brinton

Darlington, for whom the agency was named, was appointed the first agent. He was a staunch Quaker and fully in sympathy with the belief that the government could best civilize the Indian by bringing him in contact with Christian people. He also believed that by confining him to a reservation lawless whites could be excluded. Major Wynkoop, the military agent, gladly turned the commissary over to Agent Darlington, who began at once to lay out the grounds of the agency. Quaker employees came in from Iowa, Indiana, and other states. But it was soon found that it was one thing to develop a theory of how to civilize the Indian and quite another thing to put it into execution. Agent Darlington served until about 1872, when he was succeeded by another Quaker agent, John D. Miles.¹⁵

Miles was a remarkable man. For more than twelve years he ruled wisely and well these wild tribesmen in spite of difficulties and dangers that might well have brought despair to the stoutest heart.¹⁶ At first he was almost entirely without protection, but the establishment of Fort Reno in 1874 placed a small force of cavalry near the agency. Even so the garrison was so weak that it is doubtful if it could have successfully withstood the Cheyennes if a serious outbreak had occurred.

NOTES

- ¹ Berlin Basil Chapman, The Founding of Stillwater, p. 1.
- ² Ibid.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Roy Gittinger, The Formation of the State of Oklahoma, 1803-1906, p. 1.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ C. J. Kappler, Indian Affairs; Laws and Treaties (1904), II, p. 933.
- ⁷ The National Encyclopedia, II, p. 571.
- ⁸ Fredrick W. Hodge, Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico, I, p. 72.
- ⁹ C. J. Kappler, loc. cit., p. 984.
- ¹⁰ Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1867, pp. 310-314.
- ¹¹ E. E. Dale, "The Cheyenne-Arapaho Country," reprinted from the Chronicles of Oklahoma, Dec., 1942, p. 1.
- ¹² The Chronicles of Oklahoma, II, p. 81.
- ¹³ E. E. Dale, "Ranching on the Cheyenne-Arapaho Reservation, 1880-1885," reprinted from the Chronicles of Oklahoma, 1928, p. 1.
- ¹⁴ John H. Segar, Early Days Among The Cheyenne and Arapahoe Indians, (Stanley Vestal, ed.), p. 15.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., p. 17.
- ¹⁶ E. E. Dale, The Cheyenne-Arapaho Country, loc. cit., p. 2.

CHAPTER II

RANCHING IN THE CHEYENNE COUNTRY

Long before the coming of Agent Miles, however, ranchmen had seen the value of the rich pasture lands of the Cheyenne-Arapaho reservation and were eagerly seeking to occupy them with herds of cattle.¹ The great drives of cattle from Texas to the north had begun in 1866, but the first trails opened were far to the east of the Cheyenne-Arapaho country. With the establishment of the Kansas "cow towns", however, trails further west were made. One of these, the famous Chisholm trail, extended north along the eastern boundary of the reservation while the great Western Trail ran directly across it from south to north. It crossed the South Fork of Red River near Doan's Store and continued north across Greer County and the western part of the Kiowa-Comanche reservation, crossing the southern line of the Cheyenne-Arapaho reservation a little south of the store and post office later known as Wood. From here, it extended north, crossing the Washita River near Butler in Custer County, and the South Canadian River just west of Camargo, and continued north past Fort Supply to Dodge City, Kansas.²

The Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians had from time immemorial been accustomed to subsist largely upon the buffalo,³ using the meat for food, the hides for clothing and shelter, the bones for weapons, implements, and beads, and even the "chips"⁴ for fuel. These animals had been somewhat abundant in this region, but in the 1870's and 1880's reckless, white buffalo

hunters had almost caused the extinction of these animals, not only in this region but in the whole of the western area of the United States. Probably foremost among the reasons why the plains Indians were so warlike and hard to subdue was their hatred of the white buffalo hunters who ravaged the great buffalo herds of the west, taking only their hides and wasting the meat and bones.⁵

Agent Miles allowed the Indians to hunt Buffalo in certain seasons of the year; however, with the buffalo rapidly nearing complete disappearance and extinction, the government had to find some way to provide a supplemental meat ration to the Indians to make up for the loss in buffalo. As a result, contracts were entered into by Agent Miles and the Indian Bureau with "beef contractors" or certain ranchmen to supply the Indians with beef.⁶ The United States Government, however, had not taken into consideration just how much the Indian was dependent upon the buffalo and consequently had not given them a sufficient beef ration. Soon the hungry Indians began to increase their depredations upon the herds of the beef contractors and the trail drivers. As a matter of fact, such depredations had been common ever since trail drivers from Texas began to cross the reservation with their herds. Indians would camp beside the trail and demand a toll of several beeves from every passing herd on the ground that this was in payment for the grass consumed by the animals on the drive across the reservation.⁷ The wise trail boss would usually give them a beef or two, for if he

refused they would return to stampede the cattle at night, thereby causing great vexation and delay. Yet, if he were too generous and gave the Indians all they asked, the news quickly spread by way of the "Moccasin Telegraph" with the result that further up the trail he would be visited by other bands all eagerly demanding generous gifts of beef animals.

The problem was complicated by the fact that the western trail was remote from the agency, particularly in Washita and Custer Counties, and in consequence the agent was not able to exercise much supervision over his wards on that part of the reservation. Also the trail drivers would frequently linger for days or in some cases weeks and even drive their herds several miles off the trail where the grass was better than along these well-traveled routes, in order to give the cattle an opportunity to rest and gain in flesh. It was not long, moreover, until the cattle of ranchmen along the border of the reservation began to stray across the line or in some cases were driven across by their owners. From these early beginnings it was not long until ranchmen began to seek the privilege of pasturing herds permanently upon the reservation.⁸

While contrary to law this was not too great an obstacle to certain ambitious and resourceful cattlemen. The ranching firm of Dickey Brothers, consisting of William and Valentine Dickey, eventually made a bargain with a band of Cheyennes remote from the agency by which these ranchmen were to give the Indians beef and money in exchange for the privilege of

pasturing cattle on the northern part of the reservation. By 1882 they had some 22,000 head of cattle grazing on a range partly in the Cheyenne-Arapaho reservation and partly in the Cherokee Outlet. These Dickey Brothers, who incidentally are ancestral relatives of J. O. Dickey and Sons who are at present well known Hereford cattle-breeders in Weatherford in Custer County, worked well with the Indians of this reservation in their agreement of raising cattle in this area. Many other ranchers began to infiltrate into this area, and soon Agent Miles found himself in a serious predicament in that the Interior Department considered this unlawful on the part of the ranchmen.

Agent Miles finally embarked on the policy of looking the other way towards the presence of the ranchmen inasmuch as the Interior Department had not given a sufficient beef ration to the Indians. Later, however, because of the presence of so many cattle, President Grover Cleveland ordered all cattle removed from the reservation within forty days.⁹ The ranchmen complained bitterly and declared that they never recovered from the effects of the order since the removal of their 210,000 head of cattle to the already over-stocked ranges of the adjoining states resulted in the death of a large part of the animals during the winter of 1885-86.¹⁰

Since it was impossible to rid the reservation of all the small ranchmen and small groups of cattle, many of this element remained on the reservation with private arrangements with the Indians up until, and even later than, the opening

of this reservation to white settlement in 1892. Because much of the western part of this reservation was not claimed until after 1900, trail drivers continued to linger in this territory with their herds.

Although many thousands joined in the great run of 1892, a very considerable part of the lands of the Cheyenne-Arapaho country were not occupied until some years later. According to Dick Mitchell, pioneer resident of this country, and, at present, the editor and publisher of the Arapaho Bee, the oldest newspaper in the Cheyenne-Arapaho country, most of the eastern section and most of the fertile valleys of the western region of this country were settled during the first year, but extensive areas of upland in the western sector remained unclaimed and unsettled until the end of the century. This fact is also substantiated by Cy Howenstine, one of the oldest residents of this area, who is at present the owner of the Custer County State Bank at Arapaho. Mr. Howenstine entered this country long before the opening and "ran" cattle in this area.

Naturally, since so much excellent pasture land was as yet unsettled and unoccupied, the cattle business still lingered for years in the western part of the country. Small ranchmen, mainly from Texas, came in, leased many school sections and Indian lands, took homesteads along the streams and had their cowboys do the same, thus controlling the water supply.¹¹ Their cattle grazed mostly, however, on the unoccupied public lands and many of these men believed that they

would have ample free range for a generation. Many of these ranchmen and cowboys are still remembered by the old time residents of Custer County. The Lorraine Brothers,¹² Tom Shahan and Alf Taylor were well known to Custer Countians.

NOTES

- ¹ E. E. Dale, The Cheyenne-Arapaho Country, loc. cit., p. 3.
- ² Ibid.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Howard Fast, The Last Frontier, p. 183.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ E. E. Dale, Ranching on the Cheyenne-Arapaho Reservation, 1880-1885, loc. cit., p. 1.
- ⁷ E. E. Dale, The Cheyenne-Arapaho Country, p. 3.
- ⁸ E. E. Dale, op. cit., pp. 8-9.
- ¹⁰ United States Statutes at Large, XXIV, 1885-1887, 1023.
- ¹¹ Ibid., p. 8.
- ¹² Ibid., p. 9.

CHAPTER III

NEGOTIATIONS

With the opening of the Oklahoma Lands to settlement in 1889, another "front" of white people was established on the reservation in addition to the one already in existence in the Texas Panhandle and Greer County. Cattle strayed across this eastern border line, and the Oklahoma settlers frequently cut wood on the Cheyenne-Arapaho reservation and hauled it to their homes. This activity, coupled with the tenure of these elements of small independent cattle raisers and small ranchers, constituted a menace to the permanency of the Cheyenne-Arapaho reservation. The foremost factor in the clamor for the opening of this gigantic reservation for white settlement was the people of the Oklahoma Lands. They made it inevitable that other Indian lands in the region be opened to settlement in the near future.¹

The opening of the Cheyenne-Arapaho reservation had been a topic of discussion and of vital interest for many years before it was opened to settlement. Even before the formal opening of the Oklahoma Territory in 1889, there was much clamor for this vast area of the Cheyenne-Arapaho territory to be opened. Undoubtedly Congress realized this state of public sentiment and authorized the President to take the necessary steps to get the territory ready for opening.²

An agreement for allotment was reached with the Cheyenne-Arapaho Indians in October, 1890, and approved by Congress March 3, 1891. During the following year allotments were made

to these Indians in preparation for the opening.

A corps of allotting agents came to the territory in May, but found that the Indians were refusing to proceed with the allotment until they had received the payment stipulated in the October agreement. This held the work up until the middle of July.

On the thirteenth of September the appropriation of \$15,000.00 for prosecuting the work became exhausted and allotment was halted.⁴ Congress, however, soon made a special appropriation, and the work was finished March 30, 1892, with a total of 3, 329 allotments being made.⁵

The Cheyenne-Arapaho reservation, bounded on the east by the 98th meridian, on the west by the 100th meridian, lying between the 35th and 37th parallels of latitude, was set aside by an executive order of August 10, 1869.⁶ These Indians did not hold it by the same tenure or title by which the Indians in other parts of the Indian Country possessed their reserves.

The question of title was brought to a close by an act of Congress under date of February 8, 1887, providing in general for the allotment of lands in severalty to Indians on various reservations. Section 4, of this same act, made it possible for any Indian not upon a reservation to make settlement upon any surveyed or unsurveyed lands of the United States not otherwise appropriated. When said Indian made application to the local land office for the district in which the lands were located, the same would be allotted to him or her,

and to his or her children, in such quantities and manner as provided for Indians living upon reservations. ⁸

These allotments were made so that the head of each family received one-quarter of a section; each single person over the age of eighteen years, one-eighth of a section; each single child under the age of eighteen years, one-eighth of a section; and to each other single person under eighteen years of age, then living, or who might be born prior to the date of the direction of the allotment, one-sixteenth section. It was further provided that in case there was not sufficient land to go around, each Indian should get his pro rata part, and if there was a surplus, the land should be allotted according to previous treaties. In cases where the land was only suitable for grazing purposes, an additional allotment, in quantities as previously allotted, was to be made. ⁹ Thus the "loss of autonomy" for the mighty tribes of Cheyenne and Arapahoe Indians was completed.

The Secretary of the Interior was now empowered to negotiate with all Indians to whom allotments had been made for the purchase and release by said tribe of all unused lands to be used for homesteads of actual bona fide settlers, in tracts of, and not to exceed, one hundred sixty acres each. ¹⁰

Thus we come to the close of this brief résumé of the early history of the territory known as the "Cheyenne and Arapahoe Country", consisting of 3, 500, 562.05 acres, and of which Custer County is a part. ¹¹

NOTES

- 1 E. E. Dale, The Cheyenne-Arapaho Country, p. 7.
- 2 House Executive Documents, (2934) 1891-92, p. 42.
- 3 Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1892, p. 371.
- 4 House Executive Documents, loc. cit.
- 5 Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1892, p. 371.
- 6 Ibid., 1873, p. 61.
- 7 Ibid., 1886, p. 53.
- 8 Statutes at Large, XXIV, 49th Cong., 1885-87, p. 389.
- 9 Ibid., p. 388.
- 10 Ibid., pp. 389-390.
- 11 Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1892, p. 81.

CHAPTER IV
THE OPENING

President Benjamin Harrison issued a proclamation April 12, 1892, which opened the Cheyenne and Arapahoe country at 12:00 o'clock noon April 19. Just one week intervened between the proclamation and the actual opening.¹

The territory to be opened was specified by giving its outer boundaries in the following manner:

Commencing at a point where the Washita River crosses the ninety-eighth degree of west longitude, as surveyed in the year 1858 and 1871; thence north on a line with said ninety-eighth degree to the point where it is crossed by the Red Fork of the Arkansas River (sometimes called the Cimarron River); thence up said river, in the middle of the main channel thereof, to the north boundary of the country ceded to the United States by the treaty of March 21, 1866, with the Seminole Indians to the one hundredth degree of west longitude; thence south on a line with said one hundredth degree to the point where it strikes the North Fork of the Red River, thence down said North Fork of the Red River to a point where it strikes the North line of the Kiowa-Comanche Reservation; thence east along said border to a point where it strikes the Washita River; thence down said Washita River, in the middle of the main channel thereof, to the place of beginning; and all other lands or tracts of country in the Indian Territory to which they have or may set up or allege any right, title, interest or claim whatever.²

Sections sixteen and thirty-six of each township were not subject to homestead entry, but were to be held by the United States and finally sold for public school purposes. It was, however, specified that where any member of the Cheyenne and Arapahoe tribes had heretofore made improvements upon and were at the time living upon said sections sixteen and thirty-six, he might make his selection of allotment within the boundary of said section.³

Article IV of this act provides that:

Wherever in said reservation any religious society or other organization is now occupying any portion of said reservation for religious or educational work among the Indians, the land so occupied may be allotted and confirmed to such society or organization not, however, to exceed one hundred sixty acres of land to any society or organization, so long as the same shall be so occupied and used, and such land shall not be subject to homestead entry. ⁴

It became the duty, under section seventeen of this statute, for the Secretary of the Interior to divide the Cheyenne and Arapahoe Country into counties, containing as nearly as possible, not less than nine hundred square miles in each county. ⁵ This the secretary did, designating the counties, C, D, E, F, G, and H. ⁶ Later these counties became known respectively as, Blaine, Dewey, Day, Roger Mills, Custer, and Washita. These names were selected by the voters at the first election for county officers, the name securing the greatest number of votes being the winner.

Thus we note that Custer County, the main topic of this writing, was originally designated and called "G" County. Although some counties were re-shuffled during the period of statehood, "G" or Custer County kept its original boundaries and legal description. As heretofore mentioned, the Secretary of the Interior, under the provisions of section seventeen of the enabling statute, divided the Cheyenne-Arapahoe Territory into counties, each county containing as nearly as possible, and not less than, nine hundred square miles. The Territorial Governor, however, designated the location of the county seats, and Arapahoe was designated the county seat of county G, or what was to be later known as Custer County.

In order to avoid some of the disorder that had characterized earlier "runs", and so many "sooners" the President's proclamation was issued only a week before the date set for the opening instead of thirty days as had been the case with the Oklahoma Lands.⁷ Even so, it is estimated that over twenty-five thousand people had gathered around the border of the country by the morning of the nineteenth of April, 1892. Here they waited impatiently nearly all on horseback, until exactly twelve o'clock noon. A few blue-clad cavalrymen had been posted at intervals along the line. These men sat on their horses, and as the hands of their watches pointed to noon, each fired his pistol into the air to give the signal to go. With a great shout the eager watchers dashed across the line and joined in the mad race for homes.⁸

There were perhaps some twenty-five hundred people who gathered at a spot about two miles east of the present city of Weatherford to wait for a chance to go into Custer County from that area.⁹ The first day of the run showed only about four hundred staked in Arapahoe, the county seat of G County.

In spite of the shortness of time between the presidential proclamation and the actual opening, many "sooners" had slipped across the line to occupy a considerable number of choice claims. Men who rode hard from the line to that part of the Washita Valley in the western part of the reservation reported most of the best land occupied by sooners and asserted that some of them had evidently been there for several days.¹⁰

An account of the mad scramble for homesteads, recorded

by the Clinton Daily News Pioneer Edition published on April 18, 1937, is as follows:

Thousands of homeseekers gathered at El Reno on Friday noon before the run. There they loaded up with supplies. Friday night the group camped at Mince. Saturday night found them at Devil's Canyon, where Hinton now is located. Sunday noon was enjoyed in the shade of Deer Creek, near what is now known as Hydro and Sunday night camp was pitched at Elliott crossing. Monday the caravan went up the South Canadian River bed about twelve or fourteen miles to Bear Creek, where it made camp that night. By noon Tuesday, the group had reached the starting point for the run and were ready for the signal to begin that unforgettable dash for a home and government land.

There was no order and there was no thought of danger in the man-made stampede. The scene resembled a patchwork of running horses, wagons, and men on foot, going in all directions, criss-crossing and seeming to get nowhere.

However, late afternoon presented an entirely different picture. Claims had all been staked with any sort of a stake that would identify the claimant. And the men who had adventured into the new territory were faced with the problem of finding a place to camp for the night.

Claims in the northern half of "G" County had to be filed at Kingfisher and those in the southern half at Oklahoma City; either place meant taking a long tiresome ride. After filing on the claim, the homeseekers were given six months in which to make actual settlement on the land.

In the late autumn of 1892, many prairie schooners could be seen moving across the western plains. Many days of travel over uncharted roads marked the weary trudge toward the claim sites of this band of homeseekers. Adding to the hazards of travel was the treacherous South Canadian which had to be forded.

That first winter on the treeless plains of "G" County was not without its hardships for blizzardy weather prevailed throughout the mid-winter months, making the improvised shelters inadequate for comfort.¹¹

N O T E S

¹ James D. Richardson, Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1908, IX, p. 275.

² Ibid.

³ Statutes at Large, XXVI, 1890-1891, p. 1023.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., p. 1024.

⁶ House Executive Documents, (3763) 1898-1899, p. 744.

⁷ E. E. Dale, The Cheyenne-Arapaho Country, p. 8.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ The Clinton Daily News, Clinton, Okla.; April 18, 1937.

¹⁰ E. E. Dale, loc. cit.

¹¹ The Clinton Daily News, loc. cit.

CHAPTER V
EARLY TOWNS

ARAPAHO

As mentioned previously, Arapahoe was designated as the county seat of "G" County, or what later was to be known as Custer County. Arapahoe, the oldest town and perhaps the most colorful of all the typical frontier towns in Custer County, was named after the Arapahoe Indian tribe, the name of which was spelled with an "E".¹ When the application for the post office was sent to the United States Government Postal Department in 1892, just after the opening of the townsite, by error one of the postal clerks in Washington left off the "E" and the name given to the post office was Arapaho instead of Arapahoe. Old files of the Arapahoe Bee, the oldest newspaper in the Cheyenne-Arapahoe Territory, spell the name with an "E" as do many old county records. The general usage, however, has been Arapaho, and the town is thus recorded on maps and other official data.²

Arapaho was the main trading center for a vast area of ranch and farm lands from 1892 to 1898 when Weatherford was established. Its first decade was marked with great prosperity; within one year, its population had grown to three-hundred and fifty people, and within a few more years, it had grown to be a populous town of fifteen-hundred people, and the largest town in Custer County.

Arapaho was chosen as a government townsite because of

its ideal location in "G" County. It was close to the Washita River and other tributaries of the Washita including Barnitz Creek. However, most of the bottom land in the vicinity of Arapaho on the Washita River was taken by the original Indian allotments.

County officials had previously been appointed by the Territorial Governor, A. J. Seay,³ and they arrived in Arapaho within a few days and set up offices in tents. The first newspaper, the Arapahoe Arrow, later named the Arapahoe Bee, was published in a tent about ten days after the opening of the town.⁴

Arapaho's real boom did not start, however, until fall. Since the homesteaders all had six months to settle on their claims, most of them went back home after staking their claims to get their families and belongings, returning around September or October of the same year. Then building began in earnest. Lumber was hauled from El Reno, the nearest railroad point, and soon the settlers were constructing homes, most of which were half-dugouts.⁵

With the establishment of the post office, the mail was brought to Arapaho from El Reno on a twice-a-week schedule. Since Arapaho was the midway point between Cheyenne and El Reno and Taloga and El Reno, there arose a great demand for various types of business such as general merchandise stores, hotels, barbershops, saloons, livery stables, blacksmith shops, and restaurants. One early issue of the Arapaho paper even carried an advertisement for a sawmill located a mile and a half southeast of Arapaho.⁶

The court house, a frame building, was built in 1893, and the Arapaho bank was established by A. J. Seay, former Territorial Governor in the same year.⁷ Churches and schools were erected during these early years of the town's existence, but it still remained a cowboy center. Homesteaders and cowboys for miles around came to Arapaho on weekends. Their manner of shopping in these early days was very different from present day shopping methods. The people came into the stores when they first came into town with long lists of their needs. Sometimes the list would cover several sheets of paper. This they would leave with the merchant and not come back for their packages until they were ready to go home, perhaps several days later when they had finished visiting and gossiping. It was not infrequent that the visitors would ride their horses down the walks and even into the stores which always stayed open until 10:00 o'clock at night. Arapaho was a Saturday night town, and the Saturday nights were usually rough with stray bullets whizzing through the air, sometimes in fun and sometimes for the purpose of intended murder. The town's water supply was furnished by a "dug" well which was located in the middle of the principal intersection of the town, and around the water trough near this well many exciting events and conversations took place.⁸

Because of its strategic situation Arapaho became a freight-center, and freight wagons were almost constantly passing through the town on their way from El Reno to Cheyenne, or to Taloga in Dewey County. Freight rates were thirty-five cents per hundred pound weight. By 1884 the stage coach line was

making a daily schedule from El Reno to Arapaho, carrying mail as well as passengers. It left Arapaho at 4:30 A.M. and reached El Reno at 7:00 P. M. the same night. Horses were changed three times on the route, and the coach crossed the South Canadian River at the present site of Bridgeport, Oklahoma.

When Arapaho was in its infancy, witnesses in criminal trials received fifty cents a day for appearing in court. The county's oldest criminal dockets show that punishments, like witness fees, were low in comparison with present day standards. A record for amounts paid witnesses in 1895 is as follows:

W. W. Asher, 1 day, 44 miles, \$2.70
 William Bekati, 1 day, 40 miles, \$2.50
 William Canary, 1 day, 44 miles, \$2.70
 William Price, 1 day, 40 miles, \$2.50

In 1895 two Indians were charged with rape during the month of June and were both acquitted. During the same month another defendant was found guilty of slander and given a jail sentence of one hour and a fine of \$50.00 and court costs.

The courthouse at Arapaho was destroyed by fire in 1896, four years after the establishment of the town, and the only record book of tax rolls saved showed that there were 1605 taxpayers in County G at that time and that the biggest end of the revenue came from personal taxes, also that tax collections were very good, even in these days of little money. For example in Barnitz Township where the personal tax levy was \$2, 435.49, the delinquent taxes amounted to only \$18.96. There were two towns in the county in that year, Arapaho city

and Independence city, where the bulk of the real estate taxpayers resided. Outside of the towns only thirty-three people paid tax on real estate because in the rural areas settlers had not yet proved up on their claims. These thirty-three people paid on real estate a tax of \$485.47, which made a total revenue for the county of \$16,850.47.¹⁰

There was no tax for city government in Arapaho or Independence, and nothing was provided in the county fund for construction of roads or bridges. There were no school district sinking fund levies. The \$16,850.87 was used as follows:

General Territorial Tax	\$ 1,135.89
Salary Tax	4,814.45
Court	853.72
Poor and Insane	566.91
County Supply	853.70
County Sinking Fund	853.70
Township road and bond tax	2,056.02
School District Tax	4,862.59

When the Rock Island Railroad extended its line west from El Reno to Amarillo, Texas, Arapaho was left off the route, and this subsequently led to the rise of Clinton and to the decline of the county seat. Several efforts have been made by people of Clinton to take the county seat away from Arapaho, but each maneuver has come to naught, and although the population of Arapaho has dwindled to a mere three or four hundred and the buildings are in a dilapidated state, Arapaho is still the county seat of the thriving and extremely important Custer County.

INDEPENDENCE

Independence, Custer County's second town, and the one

believed at one time destined to become Western Oklahoma's metropolis, was located six miles west of the present site of Custer City. It was one of the two government townsites in the county, and in the early day was considered the county's best trading point.¹¹ As late as 1896, Independence and Arapaho were the only two towns in the county shown on the tax rolls, although several other trading points had been established. An advertisement of the small town, published shortly after 1900 by Everett Veach, an early editor, expressed in his Independence Courier, the city's faith in its future:

"Independence, with railroad facilities which she is sure to get, is destined to become the metropolis of Western Oklahoma." Editor Veach recalls that Independence made the fatal mistake of believing the railroad couldn't miss Independence.¹² Scarcely two years later Independence was a "ghost town"--the Orient railroad missed the townsite about six miles. Custer city was established on the railroad line, and soon the town's merchants and citizens were moving to Custer City.¹³

At the time that the "Orient" Railroad was making its survey through Custer County preparatory to securing right of ways and laying out the line, an agent made Independence the proposition that the line would veer off its course provided that Independence would secure the right of way from that town to Thomas. Veach recalls that the right of way was secured, but cash contributions fell \$1800 short of the amount asked by the railroad officials. Consequently the tracks missed the town.

The Independence townsite was laid out by the Federal

Government at the opening of the territory in 1892 and was acquired by the Deerhead Investment Company, a company chartered under the laws of the territory. The first officers of the investment company were G. M. Ellis, president; Bird V. Cummins, secretary; Samuel Cummins, treasurer.¹⁴

The first merchant and first postmaster of Independence was H. P. Grow, who homesteaded the quarter section of land adjoining Independence on the Northwest shortly after the opening. Mr. Grow established the first general store in 1892, which he operated until the town was completely moved to Custer City.¹⁵ He opened the store in Independence in a small frame building which had been constructed by J. S. Jones and rented by Mr. Grow. A blacksmith shop was also located at Independence. A small barber shop was operated by Sam Bullard, and other businesses soon began to make their appearance in Independence. Within a year, Independence was made a Post Office, and Mr. Grow was made postmaster. Previously the mail had been brought from Kingfisher and El Reno and later from Arapaho, where the county's first post office was located. Mr. Grow brought his family to Independence in 1894, which at that time was the trading point in the center of a prosperous farming territory, and while the town itself never had a population in excess of 300, farmers for miles around would come to the town to trade.¹⁶ Independence at one time did more business than Arapaho according to the tax rolls. Tom P. Stone, an early resident, made the statement that "If a railroad had come through Independence it would have been an awful good

town."

By 1902, when the town was at its peak, it had two schools, two churches, a flour mill, a cotton gin, a lumber yard, four general merchandise stores, two hardware stores, a livery stable, two blacksmith shops, two barber shops, and two physicians.

Three secret orders had been established; the I. O. O. F., the M. W. H. and the G. A. R. The oddfellows lodge met every Saturday night and had a membership of fifty-two while the Woodmen's lodge organized in 1900 met on Monday nights and had a membership of thirty-six.¹⁷

The white school had an enrollment of sixty-four and was taught by J. H. Garlow; the other school, for colored children, had only a small enrollment and was taught by W. T. Thornton. The Congregational church, built in 1894, had sixty-two members. The Methodist Church had fifty members, and the Reverend W. S. Vandervait was the first pastor.¹⁸

A. D. Klopfenstein was one of the city's leading business men. He opened the E. A. Humphrey Company Cash Store at Independence. Owen Campbell built the first dwelling house in 1894 and later opened a blacksmith shop. He later started the first hardware store in Independence. William S. Dearing, a minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church, purchased the Henry Stall furniture store and operated it in partnership with Jeff D. Wilson. Frank C. Harding established his lumber company in October of 1900. Henry Harman opened his drug store also in 1900. J. W. Morrison was cashier of the bank that opened in Independence in April of 1901.¹⁹

Independence truly had a bright future until the establishment of Custer. Then almost overnight businesses moved away and it became only a ghost town.

Details of the first store robbery at old Independence effected in early outlaw fashion are remembered distinctly by Mrs. Tom Stone of Clinton, daughter of the owner of the store.

It was in 1894 when all the men folks of the small village had all gone to Kingfisher after lumber which was needed for the construction of homes. They had left a single man, Fred Wycoff, to look after the women while they were away. The town's general store was run by H. P. Grow, and the building was one of the few in town. Mrs. Grow and Wycoff spotted three strange-looking men early in the morning and suspected that they were planning to rob the store. The ill-dressed and tough looking men staked their horses in a pasture and loafed around all day. Everybody felt sure that they intended to rob the store, but there was nothing that anyone could do. However, during the day the town's wealth, such as jewelry and money were carefully hidden, and the women, fourteen in number and terribly frightened, all gathered in one house that night.

Late that night the outlaws rode into town, smashed open the door of the store, and made for the cash register which contained only one lone nickel, the rest of the money having been removed and put in a secure place. The outlaws loaded up underwear and all kinds of clothing and took the one nickel out of the cash drawer. They asked the blacksmith where the

women of the town were, and when they were told that they were all together in one place, they must have decided it would be unwise to molest them, so they rode to the edge of the town where they put on their new clothes and left the old discarded ones and vanished from sight.

The next issue of the Arapaho Bee newspaper carried a startling story with this headline, "Nickel Store Robbery".²⁰

Independence, although now a ghost town, still has a very progressive school system including a first rate high school. This school system is under the leadership of Superintendent Fred Barr and high school Principal Elbert Mitchell.

WEATHERFORD

The town of Weatherford came into being after one false start, on August 3, 1898, in a corn field belonging to a citizen in that area named John Jones. By afternoon of that same day a bank was opened for business.

Two months later, a count showed fourteen saloons, five dance halls, fifteen wagon yards, and eight lumber yards. Booming Weatherford was on the way to having one of the wildest and wooliest reputations in the West.

Weatherford, however, had its start six years earlier about a half mile east and a mile north of the present city limits. The man who gave his name to the city was a peace officer from Alabama, named William J. Weatherford.²¹ Mr. Weatherford has been considered by many as being the most colorful character of Custer County.

Weatherford built his home, and a small settlement grew up around it. At its top growth, old Weatherford consisted of only Bill Weatherford's place, a general store, a saw mill, a blacksmith shop, and the post office. It was only natural that the name of Weatherford was retained for the city when the townsite was changed in 1898 after it was ascertained that the Choctaw, Oklahoma, and Gulf Railroad, building out of Geary, would go south of the old location of the town.²²

It was at the home of Mrs. "Bill" Weatherford, the first postmistress of Weatherford, that a Baptist Church was founded and Mr. and Mrs. Weatherford's home was considered, by most people to be the social gathering place for the people of this area.

T. P. Keen owned the first general store in old Weatherford, and his wife was a daughter of Mr. and Mrs. "Bill" Weatherford. Mr. Keen later moved his general store to the new townsite.²³

The first Weatherford lay on the trail between El Reno, the nearest railroad point, and Arapaho, which was the largest town in what was then "G" County. Along this trail, federal soldiers came to prevent Indian trouble that might occasionally flare up in this area. Many times they stopped at the "Bill" Weatherford place where Mrs. Weatherford served them cold buttermilk. Over this trail too, farmers and stockmen of this region had to take most of their products to market. According to Al Smith of Clinton, who was a pioneer resident of "G" County, many farmers, including himself, hauled corn over this trail to El Reno where they received twenty-five

cents a bushel in the year 1895. Most of the supplies were hauled back from El Reno, by wagon freight until the railroad pushed west to Geary and then to Weatherford in 1898.

The trail, of which traces still remain, crossed the South Canadian River at a ford near the present city of Bridgeport, which was a very treacherous crossing. It presented a problem for the United States Cavalry Troopers with their equipment. It was stated by a pioneer resident of Weatherford that a forward looking pioneer who once attempted to get a steam-powered threshing machine across the ford had to watch it sink inextricably into the quicksand.²⁴

The present site of Weatherford was plotted after the "Choctaw" Railroad extension had been surveyed. Residents found that "Bill" Weatherford's settlement was about a mile too far to the north for the proper topography of the railroad line. Beeks Erick, a good promoter and town builder, laid out the present townsite on the north bank of Little Deer Creek.²⁵ In addition to his civic ability he was also a banker by profession, but he later moved west with the railroad and established in Beckham County the City of Erick, which bears his name.

Land on which New Weatherford was built was located on Erick's homestead which includes the present location of the city's high school. Sixty acres of this townsite belonged to John Eads, and a quarter section belonged to Marvin Jones, his widowed mother, and Marion Truex. Erick was one of the leaders in the fight to have a state educational institution lo-

cated at Weatherford, and his influence is said to be responsible for the location of a state normal college later named Southwestern State College.²⁶

During the early months of the founding of New Weatherford, practically all stores were located in tents. The first wooden building recalled by Mr. L. O. Wilkes, president of the Guster-Washita Pioneer Celebration in 1949, was an unpainted wooden building and members of all Christian denominations were invited to attend the services held there. A brick building appeared in 1899.

Mr. Busch of the St. Louis Anheuser-Busch Brewing Company paid the City of Weatherford a visit in the year 1900 and stated that he purposely chose Weatherford to visit because he had heard that it was one of the roughest towns on the western frontier.²⁷

December 14, 1898, was a day to be long remembered in Weatherford. That day hundreds of persons were in town to welcome the first train. Weatherford remained for some time the farthest point west that people could go by train in this region. Consequently it supplanted El Reno as the center where farmer and cattlemen in the Cheyenne-Arapaho country could market their crops and other products, including beef cattle. Thus Weatherford became the distributing point for eastern wholesalers and jobbers.²⁸ Mr. Erick lost the fight for the north-south railway, the B E S line because he could not get his fellow citizens to provide \$5,000 for the contractor. The narrowness by which he missed his goal is shown by

the fact that about a mile of track actually was built at the north edge of Weatherford. W. O. Mounts, a printer, started the first newspaper in Weatherford with a press belonging to his father. The paper was still young, however, when he sold it to Adolf Bollenbach, who made it famous throughout western Oklahoma.²⁹

The location of a state college at Weatherford was probably the greatest factor contributing to the growth of this city. The fact that this school's enrollment in the school year 1949-50 reached eleven-hundred students and the administrative, instructional, and maintenance staff numbered over one-hundred is not to be considered lightly in estimating the economic value derived from this State Institution.³⁰ It must be remembered, however, that the rich farming area surrounding the City of Weatherford also contributed greatly to the city's growth and development. Weatherford is located in the trade territory of one of the richest agricultural regions in the State of Oklahoma, and in Custer County probably ranks second only to the City of Thomas. It embraces the trade communities of Corn, Colony, and part of the rich Thomas area.³¹

Doubtless there were many other economic factors which led to the growth of Weatherford such as the location of the Memphis to Amarillo division of the Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific Railroad and of the heavily traveled United States Highway 66, over which pass daily thousands of cars through this city.³²

At the time of this writing, Weatherford has an estimated

population of 5,000. It is a progressive city and maintains its own water system, but the gas and electricity are furnished by privately owned companies. It has only one bank, the Security State Bank with deposits of over two million dollars. Most of the city streets are paved and a municipal swimming pool and park are located in this city. Its industries include its fine elevators and gins.

Weatherford also has one of the finest public school systems in the State of Oklahoma, according to Dr. Oliver Hodge, State Superintendent of Public Instruction and Dr. George Cross, president of the University of Oklahoma. At present this public school system is under the very able leadership of Superintendent Elmer P. Cecil and the school is accredited by the North Central Association of Secondary Schools.³³

N O T E S

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- 2 The Clinton Daily News, April 18, 1937.
- 3 The Arapahoe Bee, Arapahoe, Oklahoma, April 15, 1905.
- 4 The Clinton Daily News, op. cit.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 The Arapahoe Bee, July 31, 1895.
- 10 The Clinton Daily News, op. cit.
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- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Gould, op. cit., p. 83.
- 22 The Clinton Daily News, April 13, 1949.
- 23 Interview with Milton Keen, prominent Clinton Attorney and grandson of "Bill" Weatherford and T. P. Keen, revealed this information, February 20, 1950.
- 24 The Clinton Daily News, April 13, 1949.
- 25 The Weatherford Booster, Weatherford, Oklahoma, May 15, 1905.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Ibid., April 7, 1918.
- 28 The Clinton Daily News, April 18, 1937.
- 29 Carolyn Thomas Foreman, Oklahoma Imprints, 1855-1907, p. 426.
- 30 Southwestern State College Annual Catalog-Quarterly Bulletin, Weatherford, Oklahoma, 1949-50, pp. 8-15.
- 31 Letter to Author from the Honorable Harold Hutton, President of the Oklahoma State Board of Agriculture, Oklahoma City, April 3, 1950.
- 32 Letter to Author from Jack Outberth, Clinton, Oklahoma, Special Representative for the United States Highway-66 Association, February 12, 1949.
- 33 The Clinton Daily News, April 20, 1950.

CHAPTER VI
NEW RAILROAD TOWNS

CUSTER CITY

In July of 1902, the Frisco Townsite Company opened the Custer townsite after the railroad had reached the present location of the town. E. E. Kressler, who had come from Okeene, Oklahoma, had charge of the townsite company. The townsite was located on 210 acres of land, 160 of which was purchased from A. B. Overly, 40 acres from Phillip Graves, and 10 acres from J. Hamilton. The three original owners had homesteaded in the section.¹

Almost ten years before the town of Custer was opened, Mr. Graves had opened a post office named Graves in his dug-out home, located only a few blocks from what is now the heart of Custer City. When the town was opened, he moved the post office from his home to a downtown building, and its name was later changed from Graves to Custer.²

Graves had made the run in 1892, coming from Pittsburg, Kansas. He selected his homestead on what was later to become Custer City, purely by accident. He had ridden steadily since the opening at noon on April 19, 1892, with his son, Albert. The two came upon the present site of Custer late in the afternoon of the same day. They were both tired after the long ride on horseback. At the top of the barren hill, the elder Graves' horse "threw" him, and he drove his stake where he fell. He soon opened a post office in his residence which served a small surrounding area during the 90's, and maintained it at this

same residence until the founding of Custer City.³

The Frisco Townsite Company paid approximately \$2,000.00 for the 210 acre site, and it was opened for settlement in July of 1902 by Kressler and his partner, Mr. Chambers. They retained ownership for about a year when they sold the remaining lots to A. C. Stoddard and his son, Frank. The Stoddards sold lots under the name of Stoddard and Son for the ensuing few months. Next, the Custer City Townsite Company was formed, and the unsold lots purchased from the Stoddards for about \$6,000.00.⁴ Nearly all of the lots were soon sold out in the township sale drawing, a common method used widely in disposing of lots during that period throughout many northern states.

Independence merchants, whose town had been by-passed by the railroad, began to move into Custer City.⁵ By December, 1902, most of the residents of Independence had moved to Custer city along with all but a few of the merchants of Independence. T. C. Harding brought his lumber company, J. H. Pyeatt, his general store, A. D. Klopfenstein the E. A. Humphreys Grocery, T. P. Stone and Henry Lindley their hardware store and Henry Harmon his drug store. Everett Veatch moved the Independence Courier to Custer City and changed the name to Custer Courier. Charley Wycoff brought his barber shop, others also made this change during the first few months.⁶

The first business in Custer was operated by Charley and George Smith, brothers who opened a small restaurant several months before the opening of the townsite. They had previously operated a restaurant at Independence, and when the rail-

road began laying its track, the two brothers constructed a small building at the later site of Custer to feed the railroad workers. The restaurant thrived six months before the opening of the town.⁷

The first residence built in Custer City was constructed for Mrs. A. B. Harding, and the workmen had to cut down cornstalks to lay the foundation. However, two other houses stood on the original townsite. A. B. Oberly had a residence on his homestead, so he purchased the lot on which his house stood in the townsite sale. Graves' dugout and house also were located in the townsite.⁸

A. B. Hassock of old Independence came to Custer City in 1903 and established the first mill and elevator. Later in the year, T. P. Stone and Jim Chalfant bought the mill, and after operating it for awhile, took out a charter and incorporated the Custer Milling Company with Stone as president. After securing the charter, the company communicated with various milling interests with the view of securing a large mill for Custer City. They succeeded in interesting R. B. Miller in moving a mill from Kansas in an agreement in which the milling company was to sell \$30,000.00 worth of stock.⁹ The new company was formed by Harman, Stone, Miller, Emory Lash, Johnny Pyeatt, and others. The stock was easily sold, and thus Custer City received its greatest industry. The first gin was established by John Miller when the townsite was opened, and the first hotel was established by Billy Pickens in 1903 and was named the Pickens Hotel.

The townsite had been opened only about a year when the Orient Railroad(Kansas City, Mexico, and Orient) brought its first train into this thriving city. This road was later purchased by the Santa Fe Railroad Company, and today, two major railroads traverse this area which contains some of the best agricultural land in the state of Oklahoma. Foremost among the agricultural products produced in this area is wheat, much of which is milled by the Packard Milling Company of Custer City which superseded the old Hassock Milling Company. Today, it is the only milling company in Custer County, and is an industry of vital importance to the economy of Custer County.¹⁰

Thus the two small railroad lines, the BES line and the Orient line, both later taken over by two major railroad lines, the Frisco and the Santa Fe respectively, traversing the Graves' post office area, were primarily responsible for the growth and development of the town of Custer, by common usage called Custer City.

THOMAS

The city of Thomas, located in the extreme northeast corner of Custer County, received its charter in August of 1902. When the Cheyenne and Arapaho territory was thrown open to settlement in 1892, a few of the hardy pioneers opened what was known as "Old Thomas" on a quarter section of land one mile southwest of the present location of the town. It consisted of a general store, post office, and blacksmith shop and was named for Judge W. W. Thomas of Guthrie, Oklahoma, who became its founder.¹¹

The "DES" railroad line, which in 1903, became the St. Louis and San Francisco, but is better known as the Frisco railroad, already had its tracks laid across the new country about a mile from the first location of Thomas. A group of promoters headed by George Roe, Henry Roe, and J. T. Riley, bought up the present townsite and proceeded to sell, give away, and distribute in various other methods, including lottery, the lots which they had obtained. The speculators possibly distributed most of the land by the lottery method.¹² Included in the promotional activity was the item of donating a quarter section of land to the Kansas City, Mexico, and Orient Railroad as an inducement to build their railroad through the city of Thomas. This inducement, plus the granting of a bonus, brought the second railroad line to Thomas. Thus with two railroads Thomas was provided with a growing stimulus. Subsequently, the "DES" line was taken over by the Frisco as heretofore mentioned and the Orient railroad was taken over by the Santa Fe; hence two of the country's major railroad lines traverse the City of Thomas. The lines, however, are located about a mile apart; the Frisco running on the east side of town; whereas the Santa Fe passes on the extreme west side of town.¹³

The group promoting the city of Thomas were incorporated under the name of "The Oklahoma Central Development Company". George Rice served as secretary of the company and personally supervised the real estate transactions. Henry Roe, serving as Vice-President, also was present to help with the development of Thomas.¹⁴

After J. L. Housekeeper had surveyed the town and the charter was drawn, Dr. Fred Curphey, recognized as the town's first medical doctor, became the first mayor. W. J. McClung was also considered one of the civic leaders in this early period. W. A. Dunnell, who runs a clothing store in Thomas, relates that wheat was threshed in early days on the exact spot where the city of Thomas now stands. Corn, however, was considered the principal crop in this area during this early period, with cotton, kaffir, and wheat assuming major importance somewhat later.

The old First National Bank building was moved to the old Thomas townsite, but was later torn down. There is perhaps only one old building still standing which was constructed at the time Thomas was chartered. This is the present Thomas Tribune Building. Fred Stevenson and Bill Tracy are reported to have opened the first hardware store and implement business at Thomas; they have since gone out of business. Fred and Frank Willard, the first carpenters in Thomas, built the first store there for Crosby, the clothing merchant, for whom Dunnell was working at the time of the founding of New Thomas. The Crosby store hauled five loads of dry goods to Thomas from Kingfisher at that time.¹⁵

The newspaper history of Thomas dates back prior to the founding of the present city. The first newspaper was a small daily owned by Charles Scoval. When it started and how long it was in existence cannot be ascertained; however, citizens say that it was not published for any great length of time.

The present newspaper, The Thomas Tribune, was founded by Edgar S. Bronson and N. H. Nichols, at the time the city received its charter and was published in a tent for some time. Bronson and Nichols sold out this publication, but the newspaper kept its name, and since that time a number of owners have published the paper including P. E. D. Underwood, Bryce Lowell and others. The present owner is Mr. Lowell. Each August 22, the date of the founding of Thomas, an anniversary edition is published by the Thomas Tribune.¹⁶

As did other early day towns, Thomas had its saloons, the first one being owned by Bill Berry. The first restaurant was owned by Bella Griffith and Mr. J. Beanblossom. A. J. Welchel who built and managed gins all along this Frisco route, built a gin in Thomas. What is believed to be the first church in Thomas was built by the United Brethren.

Thomas has not developed in "boom town" style but has had a steady growth and has made substantial progress in gaining a rich trade territory. The little city has never gone backwards. It depends on farming and ranching for its livelihood. It is located in the area of probably the richest upland agricultural area in Oklahoma, and its merchants are considered very progressive. Custer County's best elevators are located in Thomas, one on the Frisco tracks, and one on the Santa Fe. Clyde McNeil is the manager of both these as well as others owned by his firm which has expanded to take in several other wheat elevators in this area of Oklahoma including Hydro, Canton, and other cities.

Mr. Forest Watson, recently deceased, was for a period of four years president of the Flying Farmers of America, indicating the progressiveness of the Thomas resident farmers. A sweet potato plant concern exports thousands of plants yearly to all parts of the United States.

PARKERSBURG

Growth and development for one town sometimes means stagnation and destruction for another, and such is the case of the famous ghost town of Parkersburg, a town having a population of over seven-hundred in the year 1903. One year later, after the founding of Clinton in 1903, the town had been evacuated almost completely, and most of its hundred buildings had been torn down or moved. Today there are not even any landmarks. The quarter-section of land on which the town once stood is now in cultivation. The property that was once worth thousands of dollars is now no more valuable than other farm lands nearby. ¹⁷

Parkersburg was once the "cow town" of Custer County, a town which typified the wild and wooly west. It had thirteen saloons, two banks, and two grocery stores.¹⁸ There was nothing "sissy" about this town that was located strategically on the "Choctaw" railroad near the Washita River and was the gateway to a new western Oklahoma. Perhaps no other town in Custer County was so typically western as was Parkersburg. It served a huge ranching area and was a mecca for cowboys who came to town on Saturday with two six-shooters and an urge for strong drink.² There were as many gambling houses as

there were saloons, and in Parkersburg these combined businesses were very profitable.¹⁹

Parkersburg was founded by the Choctaw Townsite Company of which Beeks Erick was president and H. E. Bonebrake, Secretary. The town's dedication was filed on March 30, 1901, on a windy day. Previous to that date a few business buildings had been erected and the town started. It was located on eighty acres of the homestead of J. N. Parker, a pioneer resident on the northwest quarter of Section 29-12-17. Mr. Parker died in 1899, and the site was acquired from his widow, Mrs. H. N. Parker, after it was surveyed the previous year by V. O. Boone.

The town was given impetus when the Choctaw, Oklahoma, and Gulf, Railroad built into the townsite in June, 1901.²⁰ Parkersburg had a handsome depot which was later moved to Canute, Oklahoma, after the town fell. About the first business established in the town was a wagon-yard, operated by George Churchwell who later opened a cotton gin there, which was one of the first in Custer County. The second business, a food store, was opened near the railroad track by Mr. Scott. Other businesses operating profitably during the flourishing days of Parkersburg were widely recognized by businessmen in all the surrounding towns in Custer County. There was a rush of prospective saloon owners at the opening of the townsite and several saloons began operations almost at once. There were two lumber yards, the Herman Smith Lumber yard and the Crews and Carter Lumber yard. There were also a drug store,

two hardware stores, and a bank operated by Jake F. Cantalon and Leon Hoyt. R. E. Nelson opened and operated an elevator. At one time there were probably fifty business buildings in Parkersburg, all one-story frame buildings except the Coldwin Hardware Store which was a two-story building.²¹ The first well in the townsite was located in the Bonebrake store.

Mrs. Cloyd was the first postmistress of the Parkersburg Post Office though several others served during the brief period of its life. Records of the old post office are on file in the post office at Clinton, Oklahoma. The first school, taught by Miss Ethel Cloyd, was held in a building located a short distance from town, but later it was moved a mile south of town to a place where it now stands as a landmark on United States Highway Number 66 west of Clinton.²²

There were many colorful characters in Parkersburg in the early days, among whom were Mr. Turbeville, a tall immense man who worked in a saloon and Bob Cannon, a cow man, who handled thousands of cattle and always carried a huge roll of bills. Once when Cannon was serving as deputy sheriff, someone in the city got a judgment against the railroad. One day at train time, Cannon took a huge log chain to the depot, and when the train pulled in, he attached the chain through the spokes in its wheels. The train never moved until the railroad paid off the judgment.

When the two important railroads intersected east of Parkersburg at the point where the city of Clinton now stands, Parkersburg residents and merchants realized that Clinton was

the coming place and that Parkersburg was doomed to fall. There was no particular opposition to Clinton, as was in the case of Arapaho, and the merchants and citizens made a rush for ringside seats in the new and promising town. That was in 1903, and within a year the town of Parkersburg was all but forgotten. Many of the houses and buildings were moved to Clinton; others were moved to farms and other places. The post office remained about a year and was closed. Thus Parkersburg became just another ghost town of Custer County²³

This account of the rise and fall of Parkersburg was given by the April 18, 1937, Clinton Daily News of Clinton, Oklahoma. This story has been substantiated by Clint Streng, former resident of Parkersburg and present business manager of the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, Stillwater, in an interview with author May 2, 1950.

N O T E S

¹ The Clinton Daily News, April 18, 1937.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., April 13, 1949.

⁸ The Clinton Daily News, April 18, 1937

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Charles W. Gould, Oklahoma Place Names, p. 17.

¹² The Clinton Daily News, op. cit.

¹³ The Thomas Tribune, Thomas, Oklahoma, April 12, 1940.

¹⁴ The Clinton Daily News, April 13, 1949.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., April 18, 1937.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ This information was revealed to the Author by Clint Strong, former resident of Parkersburg and presently employed as Business Manager for Oklahoma A. and M. College, Stillwater, Oklahoma, in an interview on March 9, 1950.

²⁰ The Clinton Daily News, April 18, 1937.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ This account of the rise and fall of the town of Parkersburg was given in the April 18, 1947, issue of the Clinton Daily News; this story has been further substantiated by Clint Strong, an original resident of Parkersburg and one of the last persons to leave.

CHAPTER VII

CLINTON, THE "HUB" CITY

Clinton Townsite was opened for settlement on June 3, 1903, after months of protracted battle for the right to buy 320 acres of Indian land at the intersection of the two railroads, the BES line running north and south from Enid, Oklahoma to Vernon, Texas, later to become the Frisco Railroad, and the Choctaw, Oklahoma, and Gulf Railroad running East and West later to become the Rock Island Railroad. The intersection of these two railroad lines was originally called Washita Junction. There was no depot here at that time, for the Choctaw or the BES Railroad trains stopped on the east side of the river at the section house to unload passengers and freight for Arapaho.¹

While waiting for the train one day, Mr. J. L. Avant and Mr. Blake climbed upon a box car and surveyed the green Washita River Valley and decided that a city should be built where the two railroads crossed. The two then related this idea to Mr. Tom Nance, a wise financier of this area and influenced him to help finance a company which would make a city of this strategic location. Three men, Tom Nance who operated a bank at Arapaho, J. L. Avant, in the Government's Indian Service, and E. E. Blake, the attorney for the Rock Island Company, formed a townsite company, and a fourth partner F. E. Rickey was later added to conduct the sale of lots when Washita was finally opened for settlement.²

First, the founders selected a tentative site for the

city which was an exact 320 acre square composed of 80 acre plots, each plot from four different allotments since an Indian was not allowed to sell more than half of his allotments, and then only if The United States Congress through legislative action had granted them special permission.

Arapaho quite naturally opposed the establishment of another town only four miles distant, and the opposition developed to the extent that Arapaho sent a lawyer, Mr. Tom Hunt, to the nation's capital to see what could be done to prevent the passage of the bill authorizing the sale of this Indian land. The proposed bill rocked along until the closing hours of the congressional session in 1902. Then attorney Blake spread the word around that he planned to attach the bill as a rider to the Indian appropriation bill. This was a clever manipulation by Blake, and it is said that this action threw the Clinton opponents off guard; the Arapaho attorney had watched carefully to see that no such scheme slipped through in an appropriation bill. When this appropriation bill came up for vote in the closing hours of the congressional session, the Washita rider was not attached, and attorney Hunt, supposing that the victory was won, was thrown off guard. It was then that Blake brought up the measure allowing sale of the Indian land and secured congressional passage of it.⁴

The original plans of the townsite company called for the purchase of 80 acres from the Indian, Night Killer, to provide the Northwest corner of the townsite, 80 acres from Darwin Hays for the Southeast corner, 80 acres from the Indian

Nowahy for the Northeast quarter, and 80 acres from the Indian Shoe Boy for the Southwest quarter. As soon as the bill passed, Mr. Tom Mance received a telegram from Blake informing him that Congress had approved the sale of eighty acres from each of these four Indian allotments. This meant that it was anybody's land who could first secure deeds from the Indians.⁵ Avant had already secured deeds from Nowahy and Shoe-boy, but Darwin Hayes was in school at Red Moon at Hammon, so Avant and Mance decided immediate action was necessary, and Avant immediately boarded a train for Elk City and from there drove to Red Moon and secured a deed from Hayes. Difficulty was, however, encountered in obtaining the land from Night Killer, and only after another fight was the transaction negotiated. The Indians were paid \$2,000.00 each, which made the land cost \$8,000.00. Soon afterward, the company had the Washita townsite surveyed, and an intensive advertising campaign was conducted over much of the nation, telling of the sale of this land in the strategic location of Washita Junction on June 3, 1903. It was then that Rickey who had wide experience in conducting sales joined the company. He received as compensation ten percent of the net sales. Many other lot salesmen were employed, however, for three days.

The lots were all priced and marked before the opening of the townsite on June 3. Both the Rock Island and "B&O" line ran excursion trains, and the town was swamped with people. The first day's sales receipts were approximately \$25,000.00, and the next two days netted approximately the

same amount making a total of \$50,000.00⁶

The rise of Washita was rapid, and it became a city almost overnight, despite the threats of Arapaho opponents to establish a sheep ranch in the center of the townsite block. Only three buildings stood in Clinton on the day of the sale. The first was the building of the Custer County Chronicle which J. T. Shive had erected after much difficulty with Arapaho in securing materials. The townsite office structure was erected on Frisco Avenue and the corner of Fourth Street on the Southwest side where the old First National Bank building now stands. When the Post Office refused the name of Washita, the town was named Clinton after the late Judge Clinton Irwin, a Federal judge in Oklahoma previous to statehood.⁷

As heretofore cited, Clinton is located in the fertile Washita River Valley. The course of this important river touches the city area on the east and north sections of Clinton proper. The growth of this hub city of western Oklahoma has been phenomenal, and as heretofore mentioned, the important factor contributing to the growth of this city was its highly strategic location on two intersecting railroads. This favorable transportation factor continued to provide a stimulating influence on the development of Clinton when two more important railroads, The Kansas City, Mexico, and Orient, and the Clinton and Western Oklahoma Railroad made their appearance in the city. The coming of these two additional railroads brought the total number of railroad lines in Clinton to four; whereas most cities in this new frontier area

were fortunate to have one.⁸

The location of United States Highway #66 running from Chicago to Los Angeles was another strategic advantage of the city of Clinton; also its intersecting north-south highway, United States Highway #183, had a further bearing on its continued growth. As it has been stated many times by Dick Mitchell, pioneer editor of the Cheyenne-Arapaho Territory, "Clinton was just one of those "naturals". This city didn't go through the usual cyclical process of becoming a village, then town, then city; it began as a city and had big city ideas. This is evidenced by the establishment of an electric trolley line⁹ which traveled the long main street, Frisco Avenue, from the Frisco Depot on the extreme east to the Orient Depot, on the extreme west. This was done, of course, primarily to accommodate the train passengers transferring from one line to the other.

Clinton is called the proverbial "hub" of Western Oklahoma, and one look at the railroad and highway maps of this town will convince the reader of the reason. It is probably more centrally located in the middle of Western Oklahoma than any other city of any size, and it contains the transportation facilities to radiate its trade territory.

As the result of its location, many wholesale establishments have been created and located in Clinton, and for years it was considered the wholesale center of Western Oklahoma. Its phenomenal growth indirectly influenced the establishment of several state institutions and agencies in or near its locality. But Clinton also began to develop industrially.¹⁰

Some of the present manufacturing concerns, and processing plants, as well as wholesale and retail firms attribute their success to Clinton's development, but they also claim to have played a definite part in providing the payrolls which will be spent with Clinton's merchants and contributing taxes for the fine municipal improvements.

Although by necessity many concerns will be omitted, attempts will be made to relate some of the factors of these businesses. Attention will be given the amount of payroll and total financial outlay as well as the number of employees in an effort to show the interdependency of these firms to Clinton and Clinton to these firms.

The Acme Brick Company located one mile south of Clinton was founded May 1, 1929, by the Hope Engineering Company at an initial cost of \$200,000.00. It was sold by the Hope Engineering Company to the Hope Brick Company in 1933, and was named "The Western Brick Company". Basic clay for this plant is located in Custer and Washita Counties. For years railroad transportation figured in the production of brick and tile; now, however, most of the basic clay is hauled in by truck. The plant has been operating continuously since 1929, with nominal shutdowns, due to mechanical breakdowns. In 1937, the Acme Brick Company, the home office of which is in Fort Worth, Texas, purchased this plant. Today, the plant has a daily operating capacity of 55,000 brick or 110 tons of tile.

There are forty-five men employed the year around and the weekly payroll approximates \$2,000.00. The brick and tile

are shipped mainly to points in Oklahoma; however, some shipments are made as far south as Houston, Texas, and as far west as Albuquerque, New Mexico. The working conditions for employees are considered to be excellent. Nice residences are furnished employees, and most of them get in forty-four hours of work per week with time and a half for overtime over forty hours. The labor turnover substantiates this fact inasmuch as it amounts to only ten per cent a year. This industrial concern is considered by workmen to be one of the best manufacturing concerns to work for in the state of Oklahoma. ¹¹

Other manufacturing and processing concerns located in the City of Clinton are as follows:

Swift and Company has a plant located in Clinton, the outlay of which exceeds one million dollars per year. This total outlay includes, maintenance, new equipment, salaries, and general overhead. This plant serving around eleven counties in Western Oklahoma, it engages in the buying of milk, poultry, and eggs of the territory of Western Oklahoma. Its manufacturing pursuits are the making of cheese, ice cream, and the dressing of poultry, much of which is shipped to all parts of the United States.

Bill's Bakery, an unusually large concern, is one of the largest bakeries in the State of Oklahoma. This firm engages in the sale of bread throughout the Midwest and Southwest area of Oklahoma, and its payroll is probably one of the largest in the city of Clinton.

The Collins-Maddox Company manufactures and distributes

feeds and seeds and their by-products to many points all over the state and into other states.

Clinton Meatpacking Company, although small, serves several counties adjoining Custer County.

Grays Manufacturing Company, a firm engaged in the manufacturing of certain types of farm equipment, including mainly hay lifts, has achieved national recognition for this accomplishment.

Harrell-Morris Candy Company engages in the manufacture of several types of candy which are sold in numerous states throughout the nation.

Sta-Max Corporation engages in the manufacture of waxes and furniture polishes.

Another of the principal industries located in Clinton is the Clinton Cotton Oil Mill. This concern was established prior to the year 1910 and in the year 1929 was purchased by the Chickasha Cotton Oil Company, manufacturers of cotton seed products with the home office located at Chickasha, Oklahoma. In 1930 the Clinton Cotton Oil Mill was considered the chief manufacturing concern in Clinton. ¹²

The number of people employed by this concern amounts to fifty employees, and its weekly payroll amounts to approximately \$3,000.00. ¹³ Although the payroll in the past has amounted to substantially more than this amount, it is evident that this is still a large industrial concern for the City of Clinton. This plant is one of the most modern of its type in the southwestern part of the United States and the physical plant covers

practically two square blocks. It has a daily crushing capacity of one hundred and twenty tons of cotton seed.¹⁴ Products from this concern are wholesaled and retailed in a dozen different states.

Ledger Mills Inc. has a concern in Clinton that engages in the buying and selling of grains, seeds, and feeds. This firm is one of a chain doing business in Western Oklahoma.

Other firms that constitute a good sized payroll in the City of Clinton include the gins and elevators, Nash-Finch, wholesale grocers, Bryson-Irwin, wholesale concern, Collier and Walton, wholesale candies and tobacco, Builders Concrete Company, H. V. Jones Incorporated, a concrete manufacturing company.

In addition to these concerns there are numerous state agencies located in the City of Clinton. The following federal, state, and district agencies are located in the "Hub" city of western Oklahoma.

A Federal Indian Hospital, located on the eastern outskirts of this city, State office of Unemployment, located in downtown Clinton, State Board of Public Welfare Office, and State Department of Public Welfare Office, both located in downtown Clinton, a Soil Conservation District office, A State Highway Patrol Division Office, and a State Highway Division Office, all employing many persons, handling thousands of dollars worth of equipment. All contribute favorably to the economic life of Clinton.

Clinton's present population is estimated at 11,876

people. This estimate was made during the Federal Decennial Census year of 1950, by the Chamber of Commerce. Clinton possesses one of the finest municipal parks in the State of Oklahoma. McClain Rogers Park is equipped with a fine swimming pool, tennis courts, an amphitheater containing over a 5,000 seating capacity, a miniature locomotive for children to ride, and playground and picnic facilities, and a large baseball park and grandstand.

Clinton's fire department is probably one of the best equipped and best housed in the State of Oklahoma. Recently the city's fire insurance rates were lowered two notches from a class 8 town to a class 6 town because of the splendid fire department.

This city has also a fine, modern water plant, including a reservoir, Lake Clinton, located some twenty miles west of the city proper. The city at one time was served by five railroads, but today there are only three major lines traversing Clinton. These are the Santa Fe, Rock Island, and Frisco Railroads. A short history of the railroads serving Custer County will be given in a subsequent chapter.

The city is served by two banks, The Oklahoma National Bank and the First National Bank, and the combined deposits of these two banks exceed seven million dollars. The city also contains a fine building and loan institution, the Clinton Building and Loan Association.

NOTES

¹ The Clinton Daily News, April 13, 1949.

- 2 Ibid.
- 3 The Arapaho Bee, March 12, 1902.
- 4 The Clinton Daily News, op. cit.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Charles M. Gould, Oklahoma Place Names, p. 78.
- 8 Preston George and Sylvan R. Wood, The Railroads of Oklahoma, Bulletin No. 60, pp. 35, 36, 42, 68.
- 9 The Clinton Daily News, op. cit.
- 10 The National Encyclopedia, III, p. 116.
- 11 Letter to Author from M. W. Cook, Manager, Acme Brick Company, Clinton, April 28, 1950.
- 12 The National Encyclopedia, loc. cit.
- 13 Letter to Author from Jahn Thornton, Mgr., Clinton Cotton Oil Mill, Clinton, Oklahoma, April 28, 1950.
- 14 Ibid.

CHAPTER VIII
LATER RAILROAD TOWNS

STAFFORD

Stafford, one of the younger towns in this part of the state of Oklahoma was founded in 1909 only two years after statehood. It was founded as the result of the Clinton, Oklahoma, and Western Railroad Line laying its tracks in this vicinity. Its birth and development are due wholly to the "COW" railroad as it was called by the early day residents of Custer County.

Walter Aycock, an officer of the "COW" railroad purchased a farm from E. P. Calmes, father of three men who were later to become prominent as Clinton business men. Aycock sold a fourth of the farm to the townsite company consisting of Clint Strong, Tom Nance, Jack and Charley Lamb, and Aycock.¹

According to Clint Strong, Stafford derived its name from Grant Stafford of Winfield, Kansas, who was a close friend of Mr. Strong. Strong City, located in Roger Mills County was named after Custer County's number one railroad promoter, Clint Strong. Strong mentions that a bonus was collected at Stafford in order to get the railroad located in this area.²

The first store to be established in Stafford, a grocery and general merchandise store, was owned by Clarence Christopher, who later became Stafford's first postmaster. A. D. Alexander bought the store and became the second postmaster.³

The first lumber yard was established by L. B. Grant who

sold the business later to William York and a Mr. Anderson, who converted the business into a general store. Roy Ritter operated Stafford's first blacksmith shop-----The first school building was the old Valley View School, a one-room affair, which had been moved from the George Morgan farm in the year 1911.

Other pioneer residents of Stafford were Mrs. E. J. Murphy, A. J. and Jude Alexander, and John Vowell. Vowell was a resident of the Stafford community long before the town was established.⁴

BUTLER

Butler, located in the high blue-stemmed grass region of Custer County, was known as Hatcher's Store prior to 1900. Dr. J. T. Frizzell, a former well known Clinton physician, was one of the first to settle in the vicinity. When he came in August of 1900, there was only a general merchandise store and a blacksmith shop. Dr. Hatcher, for whom the town was first named and who established a store, also practiced medicine; he also had some interest in cattle raising.⁵

For some time the question of a name for the town was in controversy. It is said that the post office department suggested the name Butler in 1900.⁶ At the time of the selection of the name of Butler for the town most people lived in dugouts; however a few people had small frame houses. Although this vicinity contained a great many Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians, this did not impede the growth of the town of Butler. People began settling around this town and within a

few months it had developed into a fair sized town. Butler, or Hatcher as it was originally called, was first located at an intersection to the Southwest of the present site.⁷

In 1902, a townsite was laid off a quarter of a mile north of the Hatcher store.⁸ The Butler State Bank, a gin, three or four general stores, a drug store, a lumber yard, and a hardware store were started soon afterward. Within a short time churches and schools got underway. The Methodists erected the first church building, which for a period of time was used without flooring.

Dr. J. T. Frizzell is said to have used the first telephone at Butler which was connected to a barbed wire fence. It wasn't long, however, until the Butler Telephone Exchange was established with Joe Moad as president. The line began at Coulter, moving east to Arapaho. Another telephone exchange was started in 1900, known as the Deer Creek Mutual which was organized by a group of farmers, all of whom possessed a certain amount of stock.⁹

In 1907, the Clinton, Oklahoma, and Western ("COW") railroad desired to build through Butler. This railroad company, promoted by Clint Strong and Tom Nance, was financed by sale of stock and by cities paying bonuses to get railroad facilities. Two quarters of land were given to the "COW" railroad and with the sale of this land the townsite was established at its present location. The first train came into Butler during the year of 1907, and the lots of these two quarters of land given the "COW" railroad sold for extremely high

prices. Very shortly, there were two newspapers, two banks, three doctors, two drug stores, and a mercantile business established by Benjamin Neu, a farmer who moved into the town. So spirited were these aggressive Butler merchants that several of them banded together in an effort to locate the county seat at Butler, but were unsuccessful in the attempt.¹⁰

Butler's first and only catastrophe occurred in 1911 when a cyclone struck, tearing down about half of the town, but missing the main business district. It demolished the first school house, killing one person and injuring several others. This was a sharp blow to the town of Butler, and it declined rapidly after this incident. Many of the destroyed residences were never rebuilt; however, the school building was replaced.¹¹

It is said that from this time until 1920, the town of Butler steadily declined. Since 1920, however, it has held a steady existence. Many brick and masonry buildings which were constructed shortly after the present townsite was established are still standing in Butler although some of them are not in use. Butler is at present a typical farming and ranching community, serving a very large land area in Custer County.

Mr. Al Smith who came to this country in 1892 and settled around the vicinity of Butler in 1892 has given this writer much information concerning the early settlement of Custer County and related items of cultural interest. One of the items submitted was a song sung frequently by the early settlers of "G" County.¹² The words of the song are as follows:

Frank Baker is my name.
 An ole bachelor I am,
 Keeping batch on an immigrant plan.
 You can find me out West
 In the county of "G"
 Starving to death
 For the lack of a fee.

My house it is made
 Of rich fertile soil.
 My walks, they are graded
 According to Hoyle.
 My roof has no pitch,
 but is level and plane.
 I am sure to get wet
 If it happens to rain.

How happy I am
 When I crawl into bed!
 The rattlesnake rattling
 a tune in my head.
 The shy little centipede
 the curse of all fears
 Down into my neck and
 Down into my ear.

Now don't get discouraged,
 My poor hungry men,
 You are all just as free
 As a pig in a pen.
 You are all just as free
 As can live at your ease
 On common sop sorghum
 And "G" County breeze.

But as for my part,
 I'll no longer remain
 And starve like a dog
 On a government claim.
 I'll travel back North
 And marry me a wife
 And live on corn dodgers
 The rest of my life.

Chorus

Hurrah for "G" County
 Land of the Free
 Home of the bedbugs,
 Grasshoppers and fleas!
 Where the sun never sets
 But is sure to remain
 Till it burns you to death
 On a Government claim.

NOTES

¹ The Clinton Daily News, April 18, 1937.

² Interview by Author with Clint Strong, loc. cit., February 9, 1950.

- 3 The Clinton Daily News, op. cit.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Letter to Author from Clint Strong, loc. cit., March 20, 1950.
- 11 The Clinton Daily News, April 13, 1949.
- 12 Letter to Author from Al Smith, pioneer resident of Custer County since 1892, Clinton, Oklahoma, April 25, 1950.

CHAPTER IX

RAILROADS

The history of Custer County, Oklahoma, cannot be considered complete without inserting at least part of the history of the railroads which traverse this county. According to the 1940 Federal Decennial Census, Custer County was the largest county in the Seventh Congressional District of Oklahoma which includes eleven western Oklahoma counties. The primary reason for this phenomenal growth has, no doubt, been the location of five railroads in Custer County.

The first railroad to traverse the area of Custer County was the Choctaw, Oklahoma, and Gulf Railroad. This company was incorporated in 1894 under an act of Congress, for the purpose of acquiring the property, rights and franchises of the Choctaw, Coal, and Railway Company Control, acquired in 1902 by The Choctaw, Oklahoma, and Gulf Railroad Company through majority ownership of capital stock.¹ The local or popular name given to this railroad was "Choctaw". This road was originally built east and west from the McAlester coal fields but was finally extended to Little Rock, Arkansas, and Memphis, Tennessee, on the east, and to Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and Amarillo, Texas, on the west.² This road first made its appearance in Custer County when it came to Weatherford in the year 1898, and in 1901 it was extended from Weatherford west to Elk City, crossing the vicinity of Washita Junction which later became Clinton. The term "Choctaw" was used initially because the road crossed the Choctaw Nation of

Indians and gave access to the Choctaw coal fields of Oklahoma.³ This railroad was leased to the Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific Railway Company, popularly termed "Rock Island", in the year 1902 for a period of nine-hundred and ninety-nine years.⁴

The second railroad to make its appearance in Custer County was the Blackwell, Enid, and Southwestern Railroad Company. This company was originally incorporated under the laws of the Territory of Oklahoma on March 6, 1900, and it was commonly referred to as the "Bes" Railroad. The "Bes" road ran from Blackwell to Enid and thence southerly through Custer County and on south to the Red River. The date of its construction in Custer County is listed as 1901.⁵ It came through Arapaho since this city was the county seat of "G" County. From Arapaho the "Bes" Line went south crossing the Washita River at the site where the City of Clinton was later founded, and from this point it ran south into "H" or Washita County to "Bessie", a city in this county, which had derived its name from the "Bes" railroad. On July 20, 1907, the "Bes" Railroad was sold outright to the Saint Louis and San Francisco Railroad Company although negotiations of this transaction were publicly known before the sale.⁶

The next railroad to make its appearance in Custer County in chronological sequence was that of the Kansas City, Mexico, and Orient Railroad Company, popularly referred to as the "Orient". This road had as its termini Wichita, Kansas, to the Northeast of Custer County and Quanah, Texas, to the south.

It was originally planned for the road-bed to extend southerly to the Texas-Mexico border. This road made its incorporation in Oklahoma on May 5, 1900, and had its line in operation in Clinton on January 1, 1908. Later this company was acquired by the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad Company by lease consolidation agreement on October 19, 1928,⁷ and today it is known to residents in Custer County as the "Santa Fe Northern".

The next railroad line that made its appearance in Custer County was that of the Wichita Falls, and Northwestern Railroad Company. This railroad company was incorporated under the general laws of the Territory of Oklahoma on October 5, 1906. Controlling interest in this company was purchased by the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railway Company on July, 1911, and later this company consolidated with Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad Company, commonly referred to as the "Katy".⁸ This railroad serves the extreme northwestern area of Custer County including the cities of Hammon and Moorewood.

One of the most colorful chapters in the history of railroading in Oklahoma was that of the "Cow" railroad. "Cow" represented the initials of the Clinton, and Oklahoma Western Railroad Company which had its origin in Custer County. This company was founded in November 10, 1908, by Clint Strong and Tom Hance, one of the founders of the City of Clinton five years earlier. Strong, who came here from Arkansas where he had learned of the potentialities of Western Oklahoma became interested in railroad promotion through his association with

Ed Titsworth.⁹

Strong, Hance, W. J. Aycock, and Ed Titsworth organized the Clinton and Oklahoma Western Railroad Company and financed the construction of this road through the Mississippi Valley Trust Company of St. Louis, Missouri. Working on the principle of bonuses and the sale of townsites, this product corporation of Custer County soon began taking shape. Most of the right-of-ways were donated, and only in a few instances did land have to go through condemnation proceedings.¹⁰ All of this securing of right-of-ways was done by means of committees who were usually citizens eager to have the road come through this area of Western Oklahoma in order to provide a better market for their products.

As the tracks for this new railroad line were laid for the fifty-five mile run from Clinton to the northwest, townsite lots were both bought and sold in an effort to supplement the financing of this project. According to Strong, many times the profit from the speculation of buying and selling townsites was slim because of the indifference of farmers or their reluctance to buy or sell because of an anticipated profit for themselves. The trading points established along this road were Ralph Junction, Stafford, Butler, Herring, McClure, and Strong City, the latter being named for Clint Strong.¹¹

When lots were opened for sale in the town of Butler, some eight thousand people made the excursion trip on the "Cow" railroad, and during the two days of the sale of the

townsite lots some \$70,000.00. worth of lots were sold.

This line crossed the "Katy" track for its westward trek near Hammon at a place called Hammon Junction. Eventually this railroad was built west from Strong City to Pampa, Texas. However, this was done after much controversy, according to Strong.

After a series of changes in ownership, this railroad company was acquired in June of 1928 by the Panhandle and Santa Fe Railroad Company and then by the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad Company in 1937 by merger.¹² Today this line is referred to in Custer County as the "Santa Fe Northwest".

Thus we see the coming of the railroads to Custer County and their favorable effects upon the growth and development of this great county in Western Oklahoma.¹³

N O T E S

- 1 Preston George and Sylvan R. Wood, The Railroads of Oklahoma, Bulletin No. 60, p. 42.
- 2 Charles N. Gould, Oklahoma Place Names, p. 136.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Preston George and Sylvan R. Wood, loc. cit.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 James Marshall, Santa Fe, The Railroad That Built an Empire, pp. 440-447.
- 8 Preston George and Sylvan R. Wood, op. cit., p. 52.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Interview with Clint Strong, loc. cit., March 9, 1950

¹¹The Clinton Daily News, April 13, 1949.

¹²James Marshall, op. cit. pp. 440-44.

¹³Ibid., p. 441.

CHAPTER X
STATE INSTITUTIONS

SOUTHWESTERN STATE COLLEGE

The founding of one of the state's major institutions of higher learning in Custer County, The Southwestern Normal, was accomplished after a long fight. The Territorial legislature had chosen sites and established several state institutions and were preparing to locate others. Having intimate knowledge of this proposed activity, a trio of men composed of J. E. Keen, former county commissioner, Dr. Ballard, now deceased, then a member of the Territorial Senate from this district, and Beeks Erick, progressive town builder, got together and decided that the town of Weatherford should have one of these "plums", not particularly caring whether it was a college, penitentiary, or hospital, just so it was a territorial institution.¹ These same three men mapped their strategy and in February, 1899, six hundred of Weatherford's citizens, headed by their highest pressure salesman turned out to greet Territorial Governor Cassius M. Barnes, and most of the members of the legislature from Guthrie. After a series of pep talks and free meals and all types of entertainment, the governor and his legislators were escorted to a wide open space north of town, a sandy hill spotted with red earth mounds marking coyote holes, and uneven outcroppings of weathered gyprock, hidden by waist high blue stem grass. There, the Weatherford boosters told Governor Barnes was where

the Territory of Oklahoma should establish an institution.²

It should be mentioned, for our purpose, however, that this activity by the prominent citizens of the town probably was responsible for the location of the college in Weatherford. Having Governor Barnes and his legislative party visit the town so that they could lobby for the location of a territorial institution in this town was probably the greatest political maneuver ever accomplished in Custer County. Erick had the land for the site, of which 40 acres comprising the present college campus, was on his original homestead. Erick had arranged for a special train at Oklahoma City to bring the honored guests out west.¹ A large committee, which included practically every business man (except saloon keepers) in Weatherford, was formed to meet the dignitaries. Colonel Hamilton made the speech of welcome. Marion Truex, livery stable man, was in charge of conveyance and rounded up practically every rig in town to provide transportation for the governor and the legislators. E. A. Lillay, real estate agent was in charge of the entertainment.⁴

It was a gala day in Weatherford when the Governor and his lawmakers arrived to look over the town as a possible site for a college. The town provided free meals, the Keen hotel, feeding about thirty of the big boys and Ed Sullivan serving about 250 at his hotel.⁵ While most of the visitors haunted Weatherford's many saloons, Keen and Lillay entertained Governor Barnes in Lillay's private real estate office. The refreshments, at this private session consisted of a quart of

whiskey.⁶

The town leaders considered the reception a huge success, but in reality it was only the beginning of a hot court fight to secure the institution. The committee that Barnes appointed to select the site for the normal school did not approve of Weatherford. However, the committee went out of office when Barnes' term ended in 1901. The new committee chosen by Governor Ferguson selected Granite as the site, and a fight was on between these two cities. Dr. J. J. Williams, who was the territorial senator from this district, was the most prominent person directing this fight. George Reddell, a staunch republican, and Adolph Ballenback, editor of the Custer County Republican, a weekly newspaper that later became the Weatherford Booster, also aided in the battle.⁷

Construction was actually begun at Granite, but the Weatherford delegation of citizens, claiming the old committee's decision had been official, filed an injunction against the construction at Granite, and the injunction was sustained by Judge Bureem of the district court.⁸ The strong fight for Granite was led by Senator Frank Matthews of that town. With the whole southwestern area watching this fight of rivalry, Weatherford finally emerged victorious in district court, and the victory was upheld in the territorial supreme court.⁹

In September, 1903, the first school year began with James Robert Campbell as president. The first building, the old administration building that burned in 1939, was finished in December. Henry Vandenburg, a farmer and contractor liv-

ing northeast of town across Deer Creek, was the contractor. While the building was under construction, classes were held in several downtown buildings, including the Congregational Church, and a number of vacant saloon buildings. In 1908 this college had its first graduating class. In 1921 the name of this institution was changed to "Southwestern State Teachers' College". Then in 1939, it was changed to "Southwestern State College of Diversified Occupations"; in 1941 to "Southwestern Institute of Technology". In 1949 the name was changed again to "Southwestern State College" to meet requirements of the North Central Association of Colleges and Universities. Today, the college is fully accredited by this agency.¹¹

This institution has an administrative staff of approximately twenty persons and has an instructional staff of seventy-five. It has fifteen departments in its regular college facilities besides its technical or trade school.¹² They are as follows:

Art, Biology, Commerce, Education, English, Foreign Language, History, Home Economics, Industrial Arts, Mathematics, Music, Pharmacy, Physical Education, Physics, and Speech.¹³

There are four main divisions in the regular school of higher learning at Southwestern State College; they are: the division of Arts and Sciences----Pre-Dental, English, Pre-Law, Pre-Medical; the Division of Education includes, of course, teacher training primarily; the Division of Pharmacy is one of the most outstanding in the Southwestern portion of

the United States. The so-called father of this Pharmacy School is Mr. Albert Eaton,¹⁴ a highly regarded leader in the field of progressive pharmacy. Mr. Eaton resides in the city of Weatherford where he is owner and manager of the Eaton Drug. Another progressive druggist in Custer County is Bert Brundage, President of the Board of Regents of the State Schools of Higher Learning. Mr. Brundage also helped in the establishment of the Pharmacy School at Weatherford and is, at present, owner of the Brundage Drug Company at Thomas, Oklahoma, located 15 miles north of Weatherford. The Division of Technical training includes commercial art, business education in various categories, including short courses, 2-year courses, and 4-year courses, both in commercial art and in business education.

In the trade school category is, of course, auto mechanics, radio, refrigeration, air conditioning, and other trade courses which have right up-to-the-minute equipment and highly regarded instructors.¹⁵ The trade school also includes courses in cosmetology and horology (watchmaking). The watchmaking school at Southwestern State is recognized nationally by the National Institute of Watchmaking and is one of the few schools of this type in the middle and southwest and recruits students from all parts of the United States.¹⁵

All of these subjects are extremely practical for present day students.

THE WESTERN OKLAHOMA STATE HOSPITAL

The Western Oklahoma State Hospital and School of Nursing located in the city of Clinton in Custer County was or-

ganized December 3, 1937. This institution is owned and maintained by the State of Oklahoma.¹⁶

This hospital was originally owned by the city of Clinton. Later Dr. McClain Rogers assumed ownership and erected a hospital containing a bed capacity of twenty. The Clinton hospital and Training School was organized and a charter granted in 1911 with Miss Grace Irwin as Superintendent of Nurses. It graduated its first class of three nurses in 1914.¹⁷

The hospital was enlarged in 1930 to its present bed capacity of 125, and in 1935 was purchased by the Baptists who changed the name to "Western Oklahoma Baptist Hospital". Still later, Dr. Rogers re-purchased the hospital, and it became known as McClain Rogers Hospital and School of Nursing until 1937, when it was purchased by the state. It was then called the Western Oklahoma Charity Hospital until 1943 when the name was changed to Western Oklahoma State Hospital.¹⁸

As of June 30, 1949, this institution has an investment of \$184,000 in buildings and grounds and \$64,000 in equipment. During the fiscal year which will end June 30, 1950, the operating expenses of this institution will be approximately \$265,000,¹⁹ broken down into the following amounts: \$147,000 for salaries, \$11,000 for equipment, and \$107,000 for general operating expenses. Approximately \$100,000 comes from the institutional revolving fund. This revolving fund comes from private patients, admitted to the hospital.²⁰

The Western Oklahoma State Hospital serves indigent patients from Western Oklahoma, and admits patients when the beds

are available, from other sections of the State. During the calendar year of 1949, 726 indigent patients were hospitalized, and during this period much of the income derived from private patients was of material assistance in the operation of this institution.²¹

The hospital is approved by the American College of Surgeons and the American Hospital Association, and the School of Nursing is accredited by the State Board of Nurse Examiners.²²

The Nurses' Home was built in 1939, and under the Cadet Corps Program a new wing was added in 1943-44. Many nurses have been graduated from this institution and have participated in Military and Naval Service during the past ten years.

Dr. McClain Rogers, noted surgeon of Clinton and member of the College of Surgeons, is the medical director of this institution. Mr. C. A. Wheeler is the business manager.

The last regular session of the State Legislature appropriated \$51,000. for the purpose of building and equipping a storage room and kitchen; an additional \$87,500 was granted for additional expansion from legislative appropriation in December, 1949.²³

THE WESTERN OKLAHOMA TUBERCULOSIS SANATORIUM

During the legislative session of 1919, it was decided that three sanatoria should be constructed to take care of the tubercular patients of the State of Oklahoma, two for white patients and one for Negro patients. Dr. A. R. Lewis, the State Commissioner of Health, in June of 1920, reported that he had selected sites at Talihina and Clinton for the white patients

and Boley for the Negroes.²⁴

In June of 1922, a one-story brick building and four cottages for patients were ready for occupancy. Later more money was appropriated for building and maintenance.²⁵

In 1925 the training school for colored boys was moved from the State penitentiary grounds to the site of the Sanatorium for Negroes at Boley. At the same time Negro patients with tuberculosis were transferred from Boley to Clinton, and a large brick structure erected on the south part of the Sanatorium ground for housing Negroes. This building was in use approximately sixteen years, or until such time that the employee situation became acute during World War II and it was felt desirable from the standpoint of the patients to move them all to the main building where they remain today. This building, at the time it was occupied by colored patients, cared for between fifty to fifty-five patients continually. In the present main building there are being accommodated sixty-seven Negro patients.²⁶

In 1931 the Nurses' Home, which is located on the northeast corner of the hospital grounds, was built and now accommodates approximately forty nurses. A little later the administration building and auditorium also were built immediately to the north of the main hospital building, and have since been used for their original purpose. Next to be added was the east wing extension, consisting of three floors and a basement, built in 1936 with Federal aid. This was followed in 1940 with a new power house, laundry building and the kit-

chen-dining room addition just to the south of the main hospital building.²⁷

Apparently, throughout the entire existence of the Sanatorium, it has been operated essentially at capacity. In 1929 the capacity was 112 patients per day. At the present time, the capacity is approximately 240 patients, with an average patient stay of 300 days.²⁸

In 1928 the cost to the state for the entire support of the institution for one year was \$69,000.00. During the present biennium there was \$387,000.00 appropriated for this same purpose.

There is, at present, a building program which will provide for approximately 200 more beds as well as additional facilities for employee housing, improving the dairy, the laundry, and other portions of the physical plant.²⁹

In addition to operating the laundry, the Sanatorium has approximately 500 acres of land under cultivation and in pasture. Garbage is disposed of by feeding it to hogs which are, in turn, marketed and are an added source of revenue to the Sanatorium. An excellent dairy herd is supported by the Sanatorium. There are approximately 75 registered Holsteins which are good milk producers. In addition to the herd of feeder hogs, there are some registered Poland-China sows which are kept for breeding purposes.

The Western Oklahoma Tuberculosis Sanatorium in Clinton, Oklahoma, is one of the largest eleemosynary institutions in the State of Oklahoma. Its patient load is, as previously

cited, around 240, and the employees and medical staff number approximately 140. Part of these employees are engaged on the Sanatorium farm and in the Sanatorium laundry, which, incidentally, provides milk and laundry service to the Western Oklahoma State Hospital for Indigents, located in downtown Clinton.³⁰

The Sanatorium is under the supervision of both the State Health Department and The State Board of Affairs.³¹ It is under the capable leadership of Dr. D. L. Goffman, a former tubercular patient, who has worked ceaselessly for the improvement of this institution and is widely recognized as an efficient leader in work of this type by the American Tuberculosis Association. The business affairs are ably supervised by Mr. Arnett Cross, former Superintendent of the Clinton Public Schools.

N O T E S

- 1 The Clinton Daily News, April 13, 1949.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 The Weatherford Booster, April 9, 1902.
- 8 The Clinton Daily News, April 13, 1949.
- 9 The Weatherford Booster, November 22, 1902.
- 10 Oklahoma Session Laws, 1949, p. 156.

- 11 The Weatherford News, Weatherford, Oklahoma; March 20, 1950.
- 12 Southwestern State College Annual Catalog-Quarterly Bulletin, Weatherford, Oklahoma, 1949-50, p. 8.
- 13 Ibid., p. 36.
- 14 The Oklahoma Pharmacist, August, 1948, p. 16.
- 15 Southwestern State College Annual Catalog-Quarterly Bulletin, 1949-50, p. 136.
- 16 Bulletin of the Western Oklahoma State Hospital and School of Nursing, Clinton, Oklahoma, 1949.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Letter to Author from C. A. Wheeler, Business Manager, Western Oklahoma State Hospital, Clinton, April 28, 1950.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Bulletin of the Western Oklahoma State Hospital and School of Nursing, 1949.
- 23 Oklahoma Session Laws, 1949, p. 574.
- 24 Letter to Author from Dr. D. L. Coffman, Superintendent of the Western Oklahoma Tuberculosis Sanatorium, Clinton, Oklahoma, April 25, 1950.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Ibid.

CONCLUSION

Everywhere in Custer County are scores of evidences of its amazing growth and development. The one-room sod-houses of early days have been replaced by commodious frame and rock houses, surrounded by beautiful tall trees and shrubs. On the farms are huge barns sheltering many pieces of farm machinery, which usually includes a tractor, and stores of feed for the farm animals. In fields of alfalfa, several hogs root contentedly, and on more the distant pasture land, sleek cattle and sheep graze peacefully. In nearly every yard, in both town and country, sits a fine car for the family's convenience.

Custer County has come a long way in the production of agricultural products. From the primitive type of farming of the early day period when the average farmer sowed his seed broadcast on virgin prairie and covered them the following day with ribbons of sod turned over by the share of a walking plow, drawn by either stubborn oxen or scrawny horses, agricultural methods have progressed immeasurably. This sod-crop, however, often produced quite well, especially cotton, kaffir, cane, and watermelons. There was no market for the last named product, for the great distance to a railroad point made it difficult for the farmer to get even his staple crops, such as a load of cotton or corn to market. The closest railroad point was, for a number of years, El Reno, a distance of about sixty-five miles from the center of Custer County.

"Going to the road", as going to a railroad town was termed in the early days, required about a week's time and was a some-

what hazardous ordeal. It meant traveling over uncharted prairies and crossing unbridged streams. In the winter a blizzard occasionally struck with fury and the farmer would have to find a place to camp where there was shelter from the wind so that he could build a fire to keep himself warm. In the summer, rain sometimes fell in torrents. The creeks would overflow and the pioneer farmer would wait hours, sometimes days, for the raging streams to recede so that he could cross these barriers.

Today, the greater number of farmers in Custer County travel in their trucks to a nearby market in less than an hour to dispose of their cotton, corn, wheat, and other products of the farm. In some instances they travel to Oklahoma City to market cattle and agricultural products and return to their homes in less than a day's time. Instead of one bale of cotton or one load of corn, many bales of cotton, hundreds of bushels of corn, and thousands of bushels of wheat are the amounts that a farmer markets these days. These changes have come about through use of modern farm machinery and a more thorough knowledge of agricultural methods, including a better understanding of soil-building and conservation.

Figures from a statement released from the Office of the President of the State Board of Agriculture, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, gives agricultural statistics for Custer County in 1948-49 as follows:

1949 Livestock Report

40,000 cattle and calves, 10,100 of these being milk cows.
 1,900 sheep.
 5,600 hogs.
 2,060 horses and mules.
 165,000 chickens.¹

1949 Production

Wheat- 273,000 acres planted.
 243,000 acres harvested with average yield of 11.5
 bushels per acre.
 2,794,000 bushel.

Oats- 17,100 acres.
 14,500 acres harvested with average yield of 25
 bushels per acre.
 362,500 bushel.²

1948 Production

Corn- 2,300 acres planted
 2,700 acres harvested with average yield of 24.5.
 bushels per acre.
 66,200 bushel.

Cotton-16,200 acres planted.
 224 lbs. per acre yield.
 7,550 bales.

Grain Sorghum- 39,000 acres planted
 36,500 acres harvested for forage and grain.
 14,800 acres harvested for grain 19 bushel
 per acre average.
 281,200 bushel.³

Most of the farm boys and girls of today are members of the 4-H clubs. These 4-H clubs have as their purpose the teaching of the newest farming methods and techniques to the younger generation and foster a love for farm work and rural environment. Even the town schools of Custer County have active chapters of Future Farmers of America, an organization of farm boys, and Future Homemakers of America, an organization of farm girls. Both of these organizations have as their purposes the dissemination of information concerning problems of the farm and their solutions, and information concerning soils,

crops, livestock, and community leadership.

With the building of hard-surfaced and all-weather roads, fine bridges, and railroads; and with the coming of the automobile, and airplane, transportation facilities have almost reached perfection. In spite of all this progress, however, there are a few people who still love the old days and still keep their saddles and riding horses. This point is evidenced by the various Round-Up clubs in Custer County, the most prominent being the Clinton Round-Up Club, which has for two successive years captured the first place trophy of the International Round-Up Cavalcade which is held yearly in Pawhuska, Oklahoma, where clubs from all over the United States attend and compete for prizes.

The little old sod-schoolhouses have been replaced with up-to-date structures, and today only thirteen one-room schools remain in the entire county. The School Re-organizational Law, which passed the twenty-second session of the Oklahoma State Legislature has given small school districts the opportunity of joining larger school districts.

Although Custer County is considered the main industrial county in the United States Congressional District Number Seven, agriculture is still the primary source of income. Last year farmers received an income of \$10,230,000 from their crops and livestock. This was accomplished from an investment of land, improvements, and equipment of \$65,000,000. In Custer County there are, at present, 2,222 farms with a land area of farms of 644,434 acres which shows the large size farms pre-

dominating in Custer County.⁴

Custer County has contributed very largely to the leadership of this state and nation. The following are only a few of Custer County's prominent men:

Leon C. Phillips, former governor of Oklahoma, was reared in Custer County and attended schools in the Arapaho Public School System and graduated from Arapaho High School.⁵

Walter S. Campbell, perhaps the greatest creative writer Oklahoma has yet produced and whose books are known throughout the nation,⁶ attended school in Custer County and graduated from the State College at Weatherford.

Bob Hawk, nationally famous radio commentator, attended school at Weatherford and graduated from the State College, located at Weatherford.

Tom Maybry, present Governor of New Mexico, was reared in Custer County and attended the public school and college in the city of Weatherford.

Donald Dickey, present Insurance Commissioner of Oklahoma, was born and reared at Weatherford.

Harold P. Hutton, a resident of Clinton, Oklahoma, is the President of the State Board of Agriculture in Oklahoma.

George Meacham, formerly a State Highway Commissioner of Oklahoma, is a Clinton resident, having lived in Custer County all his life.⁷

Dean E. D. Meacham, Dean of the College of Arts and Science of the University of Oklahoma, was a long-time Custer County resident.

Kenneth Kaufman, scholar, poet, and philosopher, and former literary editor of the Sunday Oklahoman and by far the ablest literary critic in Oklahoma, was reared in Custer County.⁸

Bert Brundage, President of the Board of Regents for Oklahoma State Colleges, is a long-time resident of Thomas, Oklahoma.

Albert Eaton, prominent leader in the field of Pharmacy, and considered to be the father of the Southwestern State College School of Pharmacy, is a resident of Weatherford.⁹

Sam Hawks, former State Highway Commissioner and advisor to former Governor William W. Murray, was one of the early residents of Clinton, Oklahoma.

P. G. Newkirk, member of the Board of Regents for the Oklahoma Military Academy at Claremore, Oklahoma, is an early resident of Custer County, residing in the city of Clinton.

Clint Strong, present Business Manager of the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, was an early resident of Custer County and was one of the foremost promoters of this area. Mr. Strong still claims Clinton as his legal residence.

Doane Farr, former District Governor of the 124th District of Rotary International and presently a director of Rotary International, was and still is one of Clinton's leaders.

Judge E. L. Mitchell, former Territorial Senator, and State District Judge, is considered one of the ablest legal minds in the State of Oklahoma. Mr. Mitchell claims Arapaho as his residence.

John Kiper, Secretary of the Oklahoma Fish and Game Com-

mission, is a resident of Clinton.

Dr. McClain Rogers, one-time president of the Oklahoma Medical Association, and at present a highly regarded member of the American College of Surgeons, pioneered in Custer County and is one of Clinton's best loved citizens. Dr. Rogers was, in 1947, elected President of the State Municipal League of Oklahoma, composed of mayors and city officials in the state.

Thus we see the evidence of the growth and development of Custer County not only in its physical and economic growth but also in the development of fine leadership in the various fields of endeavor for the State of Oklahoma and the nation in general.

N O T E S

- 1 Letter to Author from Harold Hutton, President of State Board of Agriculture, Oklahoma City, April 12, 1950.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 E. E. Dale, The Cheyenne-Arapaho Country, loc. cit., p. 11.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 The Oklahoma Pharmacist, August, 1946, p. 16.

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