

A HISTORY OF HARPER COUNTY

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A HISTORY OF HARPER COUNTY

By

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Chapter I

Early History of Harper County

The history of Harper county, like that of the state of Oklahoma and the United States, has been modified by physical environment. Harper county, which during its recorded history has existed under more than a half dozen names, is located in the northwest part of Oklahoma. It is bounded on the north by Kansas, whose southern boundary line was established by Congress in 1854 at 37 degrees north latitude.¹ The eastern boundary is marked by following the course of the Cimarron river and is also bounded by Woods and Woodward counties to the east.² It is bounded on the south by Woodward and Ellis counties. The western boundary is marked by the hundredth meridian, established in 1803³ by the purchase of Louisiana and reestablished by the terms of the treaty of February 22, 1819, ratified February 19, 1821, between Spain and the United States.⁴

It extends from townships 25-29 N., inclusive, and from

¹ Cong. Globe, 33 Cong., 1 sess., 1854, pp. 44-87.

² Oklahoma Geological Survey, Bulletin No. 5, May, 1911, pp. 152-153.

³ T. M. Marshall, History of the Western Boundary of the Louisiana Purchase, p. 8.

⁴ Hunter Miller, Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States of America, III, Arts. 3, 5.

ranges 20-26, inclusive. The county includes twenty-two entire townships and parts of twelve others. Throughout the extent of this territory of 661,120 acres or about 1,075 square miles, there is a variation of climate, but the mean temperature is mild.⁵ The variation has been due to frequent wind storms in recent years and the unequal distribution of rainfall through the seasons. The rainfall is light, averaging little more than 20 inches annually prior to 1930. The average annual rainfall from 1930 to 1939 was 14 inches, with only 12.30 inches recorded for the year 1937.⁶

The eastern portion of the county lies in the area of the Gypsum hills, while the remainder of the county lies in the High Plains region. Gypsum hills are quite numerous in the northeastern part of the county, and the drainage of this portion is east into the Cimarron river, principally through Buffalo creek. The southwestern part is drained to the southeast through the Beaver river to the North Canadian river.

The altitude of Harper county is 1,850 feet; the surface is high plain broken by steep-sided canyons. The topography of the land is rolling, but in many parts of the county it is very rugged.⁷ The soil, which is a disintegrated outwash from the Rocky Mountains, is varied, ranging from hard

⁵ Oklahoma Geological Survey, Bulletin No. 40, (July, 1930), II, 10-13.

⁶ Federal weather reports for Harper County. Local Observer.

⁷ Oklahoma Geological Survey, Bulletin No. 5, p. 153.

prairie land to sandy loam, intermingled with rolling-sand sections. The soil is generally drouth-resisting.⁸

The population of Harper county in 1907 was 8,089; in 1930, 7,761.⁹ The estimated population for 1939 is 6,500.¹⁰

There has been much speculation concerning the inhabitants of this region prior to the visit of Coronado. No organized archaeological excavations have been made in this particular locality, and it is not definitely known that Indians made this land their permanent home at any time. Many fine archaeological specimens, however, have been found in widely separated areas in the county at various times. During the recent wind storms, which shifted a large area of sand near the Beaver river, a large number of arrowheads, a bone sewing needle, and other articles were uncovered.¹¹ Many additional arrowheads have been found along the streams, and a large number have been found in the vicinity of Doby Springs. These findings indicate that Doby Springs was a very desirable camping site for the Indians, perhaps because of the abundant water supply and the grove of trees.¹²

On the banks of Otter creek west of May, Oklahoma, a highly-engraved brass powder-horn was found by Roger and L.

⁹ The Oklahoma Almanac, pp. 56, 157.

¹⁰ Based on 1939 School Census Report.

¹¹ Reminiscences of T. V. Terbush, Rosston, Oklahoma, March 10, 1937.

¹² Reminiscences of W. N. Miller, Buffalo, Oklahoma, April 6, 1937.

D. Dungan in 1935. Several other articles have also been found in this region, including several arrowheads, a gun barrel, two gunstocks with flintlocks still attached, and several loose flintlocks.¹³

In the Cedar Canyons north of May, some interesting articles have been uncovered. In the spring of 1937 a party of students from the May school uncovered what appeared to be a cave high upon the side of the canyon. By digging into this area they uncovered several silver buckles, beads, arrowheads, and human bones. On a farm six miles northwest of May a part of the jawbone of a mastodon with the teeth still intact was plowed up a few years ago. This specimen measured more than two feet in length.¹⁴ Several mastodon bones have been uncovered in sand and gravel pits in various parts of the county.

Perhaps one of the most interesting archaeological specimens found in Harper county is a very fine Indian spear found by S. H. James in 1893. He found this spear while gathering buffalo bones. It evidently had been driven through the body of an animal by a hunter and remained in the animal until he had traveled far and then died. The spear was made of steel and had a blade twenty-one inches long with five and one-half inches of steel in the handle.

¹³ Reminiscences of Roger Dungan, May, Oklahoma, October 20, 1937.

¹⁴ Reminiscences of Lynn T. Miller and Roy McMillian, May, Oklahoma, March 15, 1937.

It was undoubtedly made in Europe and was used by the Indians in killing animals for food.

Mr. James, who was an old buffalo hunter and had spent several years among the Indians, described how this type of spear was used as a hunting implement. The Indians, on horseback, threw at the animals from long distances. The spear sometimes went through the animal into the ground and sometimes might be carried in the body of the animal for several miles when improperly thrown.¹⁵

Regardless of speculation concerning early human inhabitants, it is evident that great herds of buffaloes roamed the prairies for hundreds of years. Because these animals were known to have lived in this section, and because arrowheads and spears have been found, it is believed that these lands were frequented by the Indians as they slowly moved from one hunting ground to another.

Buffaloes were common in all parts of the state, though they did not gather in immense herds in the timbered regions as they did on the treeless plains.¹⁶ In the accounts of Coronado's march thousands of cows or buffaloes were reported in the plains region, which includes the western part of the state. Hundreds of buffalo wallows existed in Harper county at one time, and a few may yet be seen in places where

¹⁵ Reminiscences of Mrs. H. M. McClung, May, Oklahoma, May 20, 1939. This spear is in the possession of Mrs. McClung, who is a daughter of Mr. James.

¹⁶ Joseph B. Thoburn, History of Oklahoma, I, 6.

the land has not been plowed.

George Catlin, in 1831 and 1832, spent some time in the plains country and became familiar with the buffaloes and many of their habits. Catlin describes how the buffalo wallows were made in the heat of the summer by these huge animals. They often grazed on the low grounds in the prairies, where there was a little stagnant water lying in the grass. The ground underneath, being saturated, was soft, and the enormous bull, lowered upon one knee, would plunge his horns and at last his head into it. He tore up the earth and soon made an excavation into which the water filtered. This formed for him in a few minutes a cool and comfortable bath, into which he plunged like a hog into the mire. In this laver, he threw himself flat upon his side and forced himself violently around with his horns and the huge hump on his shoulders. He ploughed up the ground by this rotary motion and sank deeper and deeper in the ground, until at length he became nearly immersed in this enlarged pool.

It was generally the leader of the herd that made this excavation. He stayed in the pool until inclination induced him to step out and give place to the next in command. The animals advanced forward in their turn to enjoy the luxury of the wallow, until the whole band had passed through it. Sometimes a hundred or more passed through the wallow in the space of half an hour, until an excavation of fifteen or twenty or more feet in diameter and two feet in depth

had been formed.¹⁷

Coronado crossed western Oklahoma in 1541, seeking "Quivira," that fabled land of wealth and happiness which Indians had described to him. Through his explorations the claim of Spain was established to a great amount of territory which comprised the southwestern portion of the United States. The route which Coronado followed from Texas started near the one-hundredth meridian and followed a parallel route along this meridian to the north, traversing the present Harper county and crossing the Cimarron river at the Kansas and Oklahoma boundary line in the northeastern part of the county.¹⁸

The route of Coronado in his famous expedition from the Pueblos of New Mexico across the prairies of Kansas to the populous tribes of the Missouri will ever remain a question. The only point located with reasonable certainty is the salt plain of the Cimarron, just within the Kansas line, the only place where salt rock can be obtained on the surface in the plains country. This salt was known and used by the Indians, and was an article of trade from the Gulf to the British line. This locality was a well-known geographical point from which distances were reckoned.¹⁹

17 George Catlin, North American Indians, pp. 380-381.

18 William Shepherd, Historical Atlas, p. 190.

19 J. R. Mead, "Coronado's Route," Kansas Historical Collection, V, 89.

In 1682 Robert de La Salle reached the mouth of the Mississippi river and claimed the majestic river and all the land it drained for his sovereign, Louis XIV of France. The country was named Louisiana. This was the first name given to the country which included the area later to become Harper county.

It will be recalled that, while the claims of France and Spain were not identical, they greatly overlapped, and that all of Harper county was included in the lands claimed by both countries. When the war between France and England developed in the middle of the eighteenth century it spread to the American colonies. Spain was involved in the war as a result of the Family Compact which existed between France and Spain. England was the victor, and as a result Spain lost territory in America to England, as did France. For the loss of territory suffered by Spain in this war, France ceded all the Louisiana lands to her by the Treaty of Paris in 1763, and in 1800 it was retroceded to France by the Treaty of San Ildefonso. In 1803 it was acquired by the United States, but the treaty made in Paris in 1803²⁰ simply stated that France ceded the Province of Louisiana with the same extent of territory that was in the possession of Spain when she ceded it to France. Texas was not included in the purchase, and the boundary lines between Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase and Texas, then a province of Spain, is

²⁰ Marshall, op. cit.

the present boundary line between Texas and Oklahoma. In the course of negotiations after Louisiana was purchased from France the Americans expressed the desire that the boundary line be definitely and accurately described.

Napoleon and his advisers took up this point, and Napoleon is reported to have said, "If an obscurity does not already exist, it would, perhaps, be a good policy to put one there."²¹

Plans made by France and the United States to survey the boundary line between Louisiana and the western territory were not carried out, but, after the Congress of Vienna and the retrocession to Spain, the United States made another effort to have this line drawn definitely.²²

As Spain laid claim to this territory, the United States had to make several proposals to Spain before the two came to an understanding. John Quincy Adams took up the task and carried it to a successful conclusion. After much diplomatic correspondence between the Spanish minister, Don Louis de Onis, and the American Secretary of State, John Quincy Adams, and after many proposals and rejections were made by both countries,²³ the negotiations were closed in 1818. They were resumed on February 11, 1819. The Spanish minister urged Adams to accept the Arkansas river instead of the Red

²¹ Ibid., p. 18.

²² Ibid., p. 66.

²³ Annals of Congress, 15 Cong., 2 sess., 1817-1818, pp. 1819-1900.

river as the boundary.²⁴ In reply Adams made his last proposition²⁵ to the Spanish minister, which ultimately resulted in ratification of a treaty on February 19, 1821.

Both Texas and the United States based their claim to the area in dispute under the terms of the treaty of February 22, 1819, ratified February 19, 1821, between Spain and the United States, so it is necessary to understand the boundary as agreed upon by Adams and de Onis:

The boundary line between the two countries west of the Mississippi shall begin in the Gulf of Mexico at the mouth of the river Sabine, in the sea; continuing north along the western bank of that river to the thirty-second degree of latitude; thence by a line due north to the degree of latitude where it strikes the Rio Roxo westward to the degree of longitude one hundred west from London and twenty-three from Washington; then crossing the said Red river and running thence by a line due north to the river Arkansas; the Arkansas to its source in latitude forty-two degrees north, and thence by that parallel to the South Sea. The whole being as laid down in the Melish map. But if the source of the Arkansas river shall be found to fall north or south of the latitude forty-two degrees, then the line shall run from the said source due south or north, as the case may be, till it meets the said parallel of latitude of forty-two degrees; thence along the said parallel to the South Sea.²⁶

Harper county was a part of the Louisiana territory from 1803 to 1812. When the State of Louisiana was created in 1812, the remainder of the territory was renamed the Territory of Missouri. In 1821 Missouri was admitted to the Union, and the remaining territory became Indian Terri-

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 2111-2112.

²⁵ Ibid., 16 Cong., 2 sess., pp. 2120-2123.

²⁶ Miller, Treaties and Other International Acts, Arts. 3 and 5.

tory, although very vaguely defined.

In 1828 the Cherokees West, as they were called, moved to their new homes west of the White river in Arkansas.²⁷ They soon became discontented because of the encroachments of the white man in this territory, so they petitioned the Government to give them new lands elsewhere for their land in Arkansas. The Cherokees selected for their new home seven million acres in the northeastern part of what is now the present State of Oklahoma. In addition to the lands thus granted they were given a perpetual outlet to the west, consisting of all the lands adjoining their home lands proper on the west as far as the sovereignty of the United States extended, which then was the hundredth meridian, or the present western boundary of Harper county. This treaty between the Western Cherokees and the United States was signed May 6, 1828, and the Cherokees moved to their new homes at once.²⁸

²⁷ American State Papers, Public Lands, I, 125.

²⁸ Charles J. Kappler, Indian Affairs, Laws, and Treaties, II, 286-291.

Chapter II

Development of Harper County

Harper county was originally prairie land covered with a luxuriant growth of buffalo grass, crossed by several small streams of running water, and with sufficient naturally protected areas to make it an ideal home for the buffaloes. With the coming of the ranchmen in the late seventies the buffaloes disappeared, and large herds of cattle replaced them.

Perhaps the largest ranch to be established in Harper county was started by Charles F. Colcord of Texas. He brought a thousand mares from Texas and started a horse ranch. This was soon superseded by the Comanche Pool Ranch, a cattle ranch comprising most of Harper county, Oklahoma, and Comanche county, Kansas. The headquarters for this ranch were located north of Buffalo creek near the present site of Buffalo.¹

For a time the cattlemen in Harper county were able to graze the lands without cost, but in 1880 the Cherokees changed their policy and collected a fee or rent money, permitting the ranchmen to remain with their cattle on the Indian lands as long as this annual fee was paid. In 1883 the Cherokee Strip Live Stock Association was chartered

¹ Reminiscences of George Rainey, Enid, Oklahoma, August 15, 1938.

under the laws of Kansas with headquarters established at Caldwell, Kansas. The organization leased for grazing purposes from the Cherokees the unoccupied part of the Outlet for one hundred thousand dollars annually for a period of five years. The lease was renewed in 1888 for two hundred thousand dollars as an annual payment and would have expired in 1893; however, President Harrison issued a proclamation, forbidding all grazing on the lands of the Cherokee Outlet, and all cattle were ordered removed by October 1, 1890.²

In the meantime other interests were busy, and Congress was being urged to open these lands to white settlers. In March, 1889, an act of Congress was approved creating a commission to negotiate with the Cherokees and other western tribes relative to the cession of their lands. The Cherokees were to be offered \$1.25 an acre for the Outlet, and, should they accept, the land would be opened to settlement.³ This offer, of course, was rejected by the Cherokees, because they had been offered considerably more by the cattle industry, should the land ever be for sale. Secretary of the Interior Noble expressed his views in a letter to General Lucius Fairchild, chairman of the Cherokee Commission, who was then at Tahlequah. He declared that \$1.25 per acre was sufficient and that their right even to use the Outlet was in doubt and likely to be removed entirely.⁴ Late in 1891, the Cherokees

² Edward E. Dale, The Range Cattle Industry, pp. 149-154.

³ United States Statutes at Large, XXV, 1005.

⁴ Edward E. Dale, The Cherokee Strip Live Stock Association, pp. 73-74.

signed an agreement with the Cherokee Commission ceding the lands of the Outlet for a little over eight and a half million dollars, or approximately \$1.40 an acre.⁵ The agreement was reached in December, and the Outlet was soon to cease being a cattle country.

From this point the history runs with amazing rapidity. It marks the coming of pioneer farmers who brought wives and children and household goods in the covered wagon that has played so large a part in the settlement of the Great West. These pioneers were men who dreamed dreams and made dreams come true, so that today Harper county might have all her modern organizations and towns. The phenomenal development may be attributed in the main to three factors: first, the indomitable will and energy of its people; second, the period when it was settled; and third, the vast richness of its soil.

On September 16, 1893, the Cherokee Strip of six million acres was opened to white settlers. The east portion of the Cherokee Strip to a line just west of Garfield and Grand counties was opened with the provision that \$2.50 per acre be paid by the homesteader. From this line to about nine miles east of Alva a price of \$1.50 per acre was charged; then, from this line to the hundredth meridian \$1.00 per acre was to be paid by the settlers. Harper county was, of course, included in the western portion, and the graduated charge set by the Government indicates the approximate value of these western acres in comparison with the rest of the Cherokee Strip.

⁵ Kappler, op. cit., I, 489-494.

Free homes were soon advocated in Congress, and, finally, a second bill calling for "Free Homes", which was introduced by Dennis T. Flynn, became a law May 17, 1900. The only charge to be made was the usual and customary fee for a patent to the land, which was to be paid at the land office.⁶ There was, indeed, great rejoicing by all homesteaders throughout the Cherokee Strip.

Harper county was originally a part of "N" county and was designated as such by the Secretary of the Interior during Cleveland's administration in August 1893, prior to the opening of the Strip in September. The name remained "N" county until 1894, when each political party in each county was to select a name to be voted on by the people at the first general election, which was in November 1894. In this election the name Woodward county was selected by the people, the name being taken from the town of Woodward which was named for an executive of the Santa Fe Railroad, B. W. Woodward. When the Constitutional Convention met at Guthrie in 1907, a committee on counties was appointed with Charles N. Haskell presiding as chairman. Harper county was named for a clerk in the Constitutional Convention, Oscar C. Harper, a prominent citizen of Buffalo. The name was suggested by Delegate Williams from Woodward county at the Constitutional Convention. Harper county was created from the northwest part of old Woodward county.

⁶ United States Statutes At Large, XXXI, (1899-1901), 179.

The Buffalo townsite was designated as the temporary county seat until an election could be called to determine the permanent county seat location by a popular vote of the residents of Harper county.⁷ O. G. Harper, McMinn, and Miller, formed a townsite company, and the whole of Miller's 160 was platted and placed on the Woodward county records as the town of Buffalo. Of course, this action anticipated securing the county seat in the center of the county.⁸ The townsite was a bare prairie owned by W. H. Miller, a farmer. Harper county is approximately forty by twenty-eight miles in size and was without a single organized town government in 1907. Brule, a county post office, located in the same section as the new town site of Buffalo, had two or three trading stores, but it was not a town. The nearest railroad station to Buffalo was Ashland, Kansas, which was thirty miles distant. The location of the seat of Harper county at Buffalo became a scandal in the Constitutional Convention. Delegate Williams, who lived in the county, and O. G. Harper, for whom the county was named and who was employed as a clerk in the Convention, were accused of improper conduct in having the seat located at Buffalo. Brule was also a rival for the temporary location. The charge was investigated and declared unfounded by the Convention.

There were three major groups in the county, each seeking to win popular opinion in favor of their particular townsite

⁷ The Brule Post, January 17, 1907.

⁸ Ibid., January 11, 1907.

⁹ The Harper County Democrat, April 19, 1907.

as a permanent location for the county seat. One group contended that the location should be made at Doby Springs, another favored the original Brule location, while still another group strongly favored the new townsite of Buffalo, which was made the temporary county seat. For a time the Buffalo and Brule factions would not harmonize as these two locations were on the same section near the central part of the county. The two groups were finally united in getting the location established at Buffalo; however, the efforts of the Doby Springs faction were renewed to strengthen their contentions for the location to be made at their townsite.

A newspaper publicity campaign was soon inaugurated, which was an important factor in getting the county seat location where it is today. The two or three remaining buildings of Brule were moved to Buffalo in the spring of 1907. Buffalo is situated in the geographical center of the county. Located upon a beautiful rolling site, Buffalo presents to the eye the scene of an ideal location for a county seat, born to beauty and romance. The county was given five lots in each block and an additional entire block for county buildings; another block was set aside for public school purposes.¹⁰

The Buffalo townsite was opened up the last of May, with one of the largest crowds ever seen in that part of the country. George E. Ford of Guthrie, commissioner in charge of the Buffalo townsite, said that it was the biggest

¹⁰ Ibid., April 26, 1907.

business he had ever done in opening a townsite.¹¹ Three thousand dollars worth of lots was sold, and contracts were taken for over seventeen thousand dollars worth of buildings, which were to be constructed of brick, stone, or concrete.¹²

¹¹ Brule Post, May 31, 1907.

¹² The following poem was an important factor in popularizing Buffalo as the proper location for the county seat. It made its first appearance in the Brule Post and later in the Harper County Democrat after its establishment.

Buffalo

An Indian had a vision,
Saw a town here long ago,
While the mirage painted pictures
'Mong the grazing buffalo.

He rode his pony homeward,
To the village of his tribe,
And he told his story plainly
Spite of many a jeer and jibe.

Then he prophesied the coming,
Of the white man in a horde.
That should occupy the country,
Build a city at the ford.

Build a city large and stately,
That would strive and thrive and grow,
Said the vision meant the fading
Of both tribe and buffalo.

Well, the buffalo has vanished,
And the tribe is long dissolved,
And the building of a city
Is officially resolved.

By mandate of the people,
Of a new state yet to be,
A county seat of government,
There established for the free.

It might be explained that the town of Buffalo received its name from Buffalo creek, which is located a short distance north of the town. Some of the very early maps of the country long before the Cherokee Outlet was thought of as a suitable place for homes show this Buffalo creek. This fact causes one to assume that the creek was undoubtedly a favorite watering place for the buffalo herds which roamed this section at an early date.

Doby Springs, in the meantime, was continuing to grow and expand, and the future plans for its growth were carefully kept before the people through the newspaper columns, because the time was drawing near for the selection of the county seat location by popular vote of the people. The election

And the white man farms the land,
And a thousand products grow,
In the valley of the vision,
On the banks of Buffalo.

And the city in its burning,
Steps agiant in its stride,
While the vision spreads the story,
Of its coming far and wide.

Now the Indian and the vision,
Are but memories here below,
So the city in the making
Takes the name of Buffalo.

Harper county is the carving
Twixt Cimarron and Beaver,
Twelve thousand farmers,
From wilderness retrieved her.

And the new state of Oklahoma,
Fecund "Land of the Fair God,"
Heart's choice of white and Indian,
Of all the lands they trod.

was a bitter contest, and the vote was close; however, Buffalo won over Doby Springs, and the permanent county seat location was established at Buffalo in 1908.

County officers were elected Tuesday, September 17, 1907, by the people according to a proclamation of Governor Frank Frantz to vote on the constitution and the election of county and state officers. In the first election the democrats made a clean sweep, capturing every county office and carrying the county for every state officer except Haskell. The following county officials to serve were: J. L. Griffiths, judge; E. L. Hubbard, clerk; W. A. Davis, Treasurer; M. P. Terry, sheriff; W. L. Little, register; Mrs. S. A. Criswell, superintendent; W. H. Miller, surveyor; H. F. Stecker, coroner; E. J. Dick, attorney; G. B. Carpenter, J. W. Clark, and J. R. Litz, commissioners. J. E. Foster was appointed as deputy sheriff.¹³

When the new county began business, there was no court house, no records, and no funds with which to carry on the government. The old county offices were over the old Carl building and over the old Central Bank building. They have been located in various buildings over town until the construction of the present court house in 1928.

Harper county has always gone Republican in the general election prior to 1932; however, since that time it has gone Democratic. The explanation for this apparent struggle in politics is readily found in the merging of settlers from

¹³ The Harper County Democrat.

the north and the south. Thus, the southern influence contributed to the Democratic political policies, as opposed to the Republican policies from Kansas and the states to the north.

From Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Texas, and other states of the middle west and south, came the hardy pioneer settlers of Harper county. They were of many nationalities, and only in a community north of the present town of Selman was there an entire group of one nationality. This group was of German descent and still lives in the same community. These include the Yauks, Hopps, Martins, and many others.

The story of the settlement of Harper county was a strenuous contest between these rugged pioneers and primitive conditions. The difficulties to be encountered were many and hardships manifold. The settlers lived off the meager savings which they brought them until their first crops could be grown and marketed. In many instances the wife and children were left behind in their dugout or soddie, while the head of the family sought work elsewhere or picked up dried buffalo bones from the prairies to secure a few dollars.

The first few weeks or months on a homestead were busy ones for the settlers and their families. The homes which consisted in most cases of sod or adobe had to be built. Some were dugouts or shacks of rough boards. A field and garden had to be plowed and planted, and shelter provided for the livestock consisting of a team of horses or mules and a milch cow. In most cases the purchase of enough wire to enclose a field and garden and securing windows and doors for the sod

house usually exhausted their little capital.

The account of S. H. James, who made the "run" to Harper county, illustrates the story of early settlement. After he moved to his homestead, near the present town of May, he gathered loads of buffalo bones, which were plentiful all over the prairie country, hauled these bones to Dodge City, and sold them, and with this money he bought lumber for the framework which was to go into his new home. With the help of T. H. Bonnett and two other men he built his first home, a sod and frame house. The house still stands on the farm and is in very good condition. The family lived in it thirty-four years before a new home was built in 1937.¹⁴

The first farm machinery used in Harper county was the old sod plow, usually homemade, and more improved plows were later used for turning the soil. The machinery used for the earliest wheat harvesting was the hand sickle and cradle. The first crops raised in the county were kafir, maize, and other small grains. Wheat was not raised extensively until several years after the turn of the century, and this was brought about by the demand for wheat during the World War.

Wheat claims the majority acreage of the 661,120 acres in the county. All land in farms April 1, 1930, totaled 594,120 acres. The report of January 1, 1935, showed an increase to 619,663 acres, or the proportion of the entire county in farms is 93.7 per cent, of which approximately

¹⁴ McClung, op. cit.

323,833 acres are in cultivation.¹⁵ This increase in farm acreage was due principally to two factors--lessening of the terrific dust storms and government assistance. These dust storms had caused several thousand acres to become unproductive; however, much has been done since 1934 to correct this condition and prevent the large amount of eroding soil that was characteristic of this period. Attention has been directed to cover crops. Crop rotation and terracing has been introduced to improve the conditions of the farm lands. The federal forestry service added ten miles of shelterbelt plantings in the county in the spring of 1939, which makes a total of fourteen miles of shelterbelt trees for the county since the federal government stepped in four years ago to combat drouth, dust storms, and crop failures with its vast plains shelterbelt program.¹⁶

The Red Menace swept into Oklahoma in the spring of 1934. Dust! Dust that blinded the sun, brought darkness at midday, spread desolation over miles of farm area and choked the throats and hearts of men. The black treacherous cloud that smothered crops and cities became a familiar sight to the state.

Hardest hit were the western and panhandle counties. Great dunes of sand and dirt covered fields, drifted to the eaves of buildings, hid farm machinery as it stood in the open. In the midst of a severe drouth, nothing could grow. People were without food, and government relief became necessary.

.....Thousands packed their belongings and started a trek for any place where there was no dust or where there was a possibility of work and food.

¹⁵ U. S. Bureau of the Census, United States Census of Agriculture, 1935, I, p. 718.

¹⁶ Reminiscences of W. E. Bland, County Agent of Harper county, May 25, 1939.

With the help of the government and the state, those who stayed won out. Miles of shelterbelt trees were planted across western Oklahoma. Rain finally came; the dust was not so frequent nor so bad. The dune covered fields have been reclaimed and are again green with crops for man and pasture for his stock.¹⁷

The most recent project established in the county is a Federal Civilian Conservation Corp camp, located adjacent to and west of Buffalo. Building of the barracks and the establishment of the camp was started in June 1939. Building of dams and terracing the farm lands of the county will be the work carried on by this camp under the direction of the federal government. This is another important step taken for the prevention of soil erosion in the arid west.

Stock raising was an important industry at the time the country was settled but soil conditions were later found to be best suited to wheat. Sorghum, milo, kafir, and hay also have a considerable acreage. The average wheat yield for the county is ten bushels per acre. There is some experimentation with cotton; however, only one farm reported any cotton grown in 1934. This was a field of twenty acres, which produced a total of two bales.¹⁸ There were fifty one farms reporting alfalfa grown in 1934 with a total of 897 acres which produced eight hundred and forty-six tons. In 1929 there were 1,306 acres in alfalfa. No timothy or clover is grown in the county.¹⁹

¹⁷ The Daily Oklahoman, June 11, 1939.

¹⁸ U. S. Census, p. 732.

¹⁹ Ibid.

The following comparative table for the years 1929 and 1934 is important, because it shows the trend of land use prior to and immediately after the drouth and dust storms, which had practically caused hundreds of acres to become sub-marginal land.

I. Farm land according to use:

1. Crop land harvested	1934	Farms reporting-732 Acres-64,105
	1929	Farms reporting-1,155 Acres-247,596
2. Crop failure	1934	Farms reporting-1,078 Acres-165,349
	1929	Farms reporting-79 Acres-4,307
3. Crop land, idle or fallow.	1934	Farms reporting-747 Acres-36,016
	1929	Farms reporting-79 Acres-4,307
4. Plowable pasture	1934	Farms reporting-139 Acres-15,840
	1929	Farms reporting-314 Acres-31,207
5. Woodland pasture	1934	Acres- 805
	1929	Acres- 708
6. Other pasture	1934	Acres-321,549
	1929	Acres-288,364
7. Woodland not pastured	1934	Acres- 401
	1929	Acres- 1,374
8. All other lands in farms ..	1934	Acres- 15,598
	1929,	Acres- 18,474

9. Land available for crops	1934	Acres-281,310
(harvested, failure, idle, fallow and plowable pasture)...	1929	Acres-285,897 ²⁰

The comparative study for the years 1930 and 1935 in the following table shows the relation of economic conditions, dust storms, and crop failures as potent factors in loss of ownership of farms. It is evident that there is a decrease in the number of part and full ownership of farms and an increase in tenant farmers during this period.

I. Farms and farm operators:

1. Number of farms	January 1, 1935	1,150
	April 1, 1930	1,204
2. Farm operators (white)	1935	1,150
	1930	1,204
3. Farm operators by tenure		
a. Full owners	1935	376
	1930	450
b. Part owners	1935	351
	1930	379
c. Managers	1935	5
	1930	2
d. Tenants	1935	418
	1930	373 ²⁰

II. Farm acreage, value, and land area:

1. Approximate land area 1935, acres --	661,120
a. Proportion in farms per cent --	93.7

²⁰ Ibid., p. 718.

2.	Average size of farms 1935, acres	---	538.8
	1939, acres	---	494.0
3.	All land in farms January 1, 1935	---	619,663
	April 1, 1930	---	594,817
4.	By tenure of farm operator		
a.	Full owners 1935, acres		154,080
	1930, acres		167,382
b.	Part owners 1935, acres		270,808
	1930, acres		272,504
c.	Managers 1935, acres		26,785
	1930, acres		22,260
d.	Tenants 1935, acres		167,990
	1930, acres		132,671

III. Value of farms (land and buildings):

1.	January 1, 1935, total value ...	\$	6,942,750.00
2.	April 1, 1930, total value		13,308,965.00
3.	Average value per acre, 1935 ...		11.20
4.	Average value per acre, 1930 ...		22.37 ²¹

IV. Dwellings on farms January 1, 1935:

1.	Occupied dwellings, total number	1,150
2.	Unoccupied dwellings, total number	119 ²²

V. All cows and heifers, 2 years old and over, January 1, 1935.

1.	Total number	14,598 ²³
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VI. Livestock, total number, January 1, 1935:

1.	Horses, all ages	4,887
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²¹ U. S. Bureau of the Census, I, (1935), p. 718.

²² Ibid., II, p. 724.

²³ Ibid., I, p. 729.

2. Mules, all ages	822
3. Cattle and calves	27,847
4. Swine, all ages	2,380 ²⁴

In 1895, a company of farmers was formed in the Ditch Valley Community along the Cimarron river in northeast Harper county, and large irrigation ditches were built all over that part of the county for use of subscribers in the company. This is a strip of valley land nine miles long and from three to four miles wide, comprising approximately 4,000 acres of land. A competent engineer was employed to lay it out and only one change has been made in the system as it was first laid out. This change was made necessary because of damage done by high waters in the river. The system, however, has been extended and improvements added at various times in recent years.²⁵

Irrigation has always been handled as a private project. Each farmer does a certain part of the necessary work on the main ditch or pays for having it done. The ditch was built in the first place with this same arrangement, and as a result the initial cost would be difficult to figure. The principal costs in maintaining the main ditch is cleaning it out about every two years and the work at the river, turning the water into the main ditch.

There is no dam in the river, but the water is diverted into the ditch by means of a temporary sand dam which extends just far enough into the stream to divert the amount of water desired. It requires a man with a team and a slip scraper at this temporary dam

²⁴ Ibid., p. 734.

²⁵ Reminiscences of Kinney Lockspeach, May 25, 1937.

nearly all the time when water is being used from the ditch.

The size of the ditch varies somewhat as the fall varies, but the average width is about 10 feet, and the depth in midstream about 2 feet. The amount of water flowing in the ditch when it is running near its capacity is about 12 cubic feet per second.²⁶

From the main ditch the water is spread over the fields by using laterals or small ditches. There is no regular time for irrigation since the rains are depended upon for an adequate supply of water in the Cimarron river. The amount used is generally uncertain also, since there are not gates or measuring boxes in the main ditch or laterals. In some instances some farms may get too much water, while others may get too little. The water of the Cimarron at this place is somewhat salty, and, were it not for the fact that this irrigated land is naturally well drained, it would not be possible to use the water many years without ruining the land. In some few low spots where the water does not drain well and is allowed to stand the land will not produce because of the salt deposit left by the water.²⁷

This valley is irrigated by gravity flow and the tract is south of Englewood, Kansas. The pitch of the land at this point causes all the land available for irrigation to be on the Oklahoma side of the Oklahoma-Kansas boundary line. The Cimarron river in the irrigated area is flanked by high sand ridges, in which a few gaps make possible the flowing of the

²⁶ R. Bently, Extension Division, Oklahoma A. and M. College, Irrigation. Circular No. 111. January, 1920.

²⁷ Ibid.

water through the ditches across the flats on the south side of the river. This plan has served the area through the years and was extensively used in 1937 when the early spring rains gave promise of a bumper wheat crop and then ceased at a critical period. The water from the river was poured into the drying fields, and almost over night the fields became green and produced abundantly while others across the road that were not given the benefits of irrigation dried up and died.²⁸

The land irrigated is in possession of comparatively few persons. They produce wheat and alfalfa principally, getting from four to six crops of alfalfa from the land each season. This is the largest irrigated area in Oklahoma, and the only irrigated area devoted nearly exclusively to wheat. The tracts of irrigated wheat land range from half sections upward, with none of the tracts less than half sections.²⁹ The county assessor's books list the value of the Ditch Valley irrigated land at \$25.00 per acre, 1939 assessment.³⁰

Much is to be said about the value of irrigation in the county. The water comes from wells in most instances and represents a considerable investment for those who see fit to use this method. Some pioneers in the county, however, have been very successful in their attempts at well irrigation. Equipped with centrifugal pumps, capable of producing as high as one thousand gallons a minute, the wells will produce an

28 Ibid.

29 The Harper County Journal, July 20, 1937.

30 Harper County Assessment Books, (1939).

inexhaustible supply of water at this terrific rate. Alfalfa, sorghums, truck gardens, and other crops have been grown successfully the past few years in spite of the lack of rainfall.

J. C. Holmes, Lyle Ball, and the Robertson brothers of Iaverne have made successful attempts at well irrigation, prompted by the shallow water in the Beaver river bottom lands.

The County Chamber of Commerce has always upheld irrigation and has done much to promote it in the county. Former State Senator, R. L. Howsley of Guyman, was vitally interested in well irrigation as the salvation of the arid west and supported legislation, which would have brought about extensive core drilling all over the northwest part of the state. State equipment was to be used, and the drilling was to determine definitely how far the farmers might go in providing irrigation for their crops. The senator was defeated in the primary election in July, 1938, and to date nothing has been done on this projected plan.³¹

Irrigation by pumping water to the surface by windmill and then letting it run through small ditches onto the crop to be irrigated has also been successful for garden plots. The success of this type of irrigation was proven by Mrs. E. Z. Paulk, west of Buffalo, who for three consecutive years won the highest rank in a garden project sponsored by the Home Demonstration Clubs of the county. This type of irrigation, however, is not extensively used over the county and

³¹ Reminiscences of R. L. Howsley, May 20, 1938.

is employed in irrigating small plots.³²

In 1928, an extension of the large lakes in the Gate region, which are in Beaver county and adjacent to the northwest part of Harper county, was proposed. The water from these lakes would be used to irrigate the northeastern part of Beaver and the northwestern part of Harper county. An attempt to form a company in this same year failed, and the project was dropped for several years. The most recent project along the line of irrigation is the proposed Cimarron river dam project, which would be built on this river over the Kansas line near Englewood, Kansas, which would serve northwest Harper county. This is merely embryonic, and procedure is awaiting favorable reports from government engineers who visited the site in the summer of 1938.³³

Early transportation in the county was far inferior to the present modern streamline type, emerging from the freight wagon and horses to the present developed system. The nearest railway centers were located outside the county at Englewood, Kansas, Woodward and Cage, Oklahoma, which would require two or three days to make the round trip.

Before there were any stores at the present site of May, each family got their food and clothes from Woodward or Cage. Traveling in a wagon, it would take two days to make the round trip, and enough groceries to last from four to six

³² Reminiscences of Milo W. Watson, Harper County Journal, August 22, 1938.

³³ Watson, Op. Cit.

months were bought. They got their mail at ~~Cadron~~ which was about thirty-five miles from this new community. The trip was usually made on horseback and usually required two days for the round trip.³⁴ This is representative of the entire county as there were no trading points or post offices established in the county until 1897. The railroad was also late in being built through the county. The first telephone line established through the county was completed in the spring of 1907; the line ran from Supply in Woodward county to Kibby and from this point on to Buffalo.³⁵

A newspaper reporter for the Brule Post counted fifty-three teams, wagons, and buggies, and eleven saddle horses at one time the latter part of January, 1906.³⁶

A proposed railroad route in 1907 was to have been built from Raton, New Mexico, to Oklahoma City, which would have traversed the county from northwest to southeast.³⁷

The first railroad to be completed in the county was the Beaver, Mead and Englewood, which was completed in 1912, and serves the southwestern part of the county. The towns served are May, Laverne, and Rosston, and only a grain elevator remains at Dunlap, which developed into a small town when the railroad was first put through. This line was run from Woodward to Forgan at first and later extended to Keyes, Oklahoma,

³⁴ McClung, Op. Cit.

³⁵ Brule Post, May 31, 1907.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ The Harper County Democrat, April 19, 1907.

when the Missouri, Kansas and Texas railroad purchased the line in 1930.

Buffalo is the western terminus of a Santa Fe railway extension completed in 1918 from Waynoka. This road is fifty-five miles long, and the citizens of Buffalo will long remember its completion. After years of effort in trying to secure a railroad through the county seat, the Santa Fe project was begun, only to be discontinued when half completed because of a lack of funds. The citizens of Buffalo and others along the line of the new road bought several thousand dollars of railroad stock to get the line completed. Selman, the other town in Harper county to be served by this line was built after the railroad was completed and was named after Jim Selman of Woodward, whose ranch partially lies in this area.³⁸

Highways in the county were long neglected, and prior to 1930 there was not a hard surfaced road to be found. This had long been a problem as the roads were very bad, especially when there was an excess of rain at any one time. Since 1930 roads through the county have been improved and extended, and today there are three federal hard surfaced highways and one state highway covering the county from north to south and from east to west. The federal highways are U. S. 64, 283, and 270, and the state highway is number 34.

H. N. Arnold, of Buffalo, appointed chairman of the State Highway Commission during Governor Murray's administration, was reappointed by Governor Harland, serving a portion of the

term as chairman and the remainder as a member of the Commission. During the Murray administration, Buffalo was made a divisional center for the State Highway Department with offices and equipment buildings located there. In 1937 a fine brick residence, costing several thousand dollars, was built on the same site for the chief engineer and his family.³⁹

³⁹ Reminiscences of H. N. Arnold, September 18, 1937.

Chapter III

Educational Development of Harper County

A modern hospital is located two miles northwest of Buffalo, owned and operated by Dr. E. F. Camp. The hospital was established in 1937, when Dr. Camp purchased the county farm upon which was located a home which he constructed into a modern and well equipped hospital, easily accessible from all parts of the county.

Schools have evolved from soddies to modern structures. The early settlers of Harper county believed in education, and in many communities the first enterprise was the erection of a school building. Mrs. A. L. Rodkey, who came to the county with her husband at the time of the opening of the Cherokee Strip, was among the early school teachers. She served without compensation until the settlers could make a crop and funds were made available. Her first school, located in the northeast part of the county, was conducted in a sod house, and the length of the term was four months.¹

The only settlers in the vicinity of the present town of May, until 1895, were S. H. James and H. J. Bonnett. Mr. James had three small children and Mr. Bonnett had five; together the men built the first school house, which was located just northwest of the James homestead. The building

¹ Reminiscences of Mrs. A. L. Rodkey, November 7, 1936.

was a small structure made of sod; and the only children to attend at first were from these two families. The first teacher for the school was Mr. Bonnett.²

Other early school teachers were Mrs. Fennie Miller, who taught at Brule; Mrs. S. A. Griswell, who taught in the north part of the county; Mrs. S. A. Griswell later, after statehood, became the first county superintendent. W. D. Drake, another pioneer teacher, also later became county superintendent.

The first schools were financed by the subscription plan, or the teachers gave their services free to the struggling communities which operated their schools for approximately four months. Textbooks were selected by the teachers; however, the child was usually taught to read in whatever book he brought to school, whether it was the Bible or the McGuffey reader. A graded school was unknown during these earlier years, and the children studied reading, writing, arithmetic, spelling, and sometimes history and geography were added if the teacher saw the practicalness of these subjects. There was no promotion from one grade to another, and the ability to spell certain words or perform certain operations in arithmetic determined the educational achievement of the pupils and the right to pursue advanced work.³

The educational influences in the pioneer days were not wholly confined to the school room, as contacts were made with

² Reminiscences of W. D. Drake, April 20, 1937.

³ Ibid.

the few travelers when they passed through the territory and conveyed news and information. There were numerous occasions on which people assembled and discussed current problems brought from all sections of the country. There were many socializing influences, such as singing conventions, literary societies, and picnics.

Pie suppers and dances were common enterprises to raise funds for a school building or school furniture after the turn of the century. A new school house was built at May, in 1905, and the funds were raised by giving pie suppers and dances. County superintendent B. B. Smith, of Woodward, helped to organize a large district for several miles around May. When school opened there were seventy-two students; however, they had expected to have about a hundred. S. H. James, who was a member of the local school board, received fifty applications principally from eastern Oklahoma from teachers wanting to teach the school when it opened.⁴

The Pleasant Valley School, southwest of Buffalo, gave an ice cream supper to raise funds to buy desks, which netted \$11.50.⁵ Through similar efforts, the school room was equipped, and greater effort was put forth to extend the school term. By 1905 a few of the schools were able to have a six months term. This was true of district 178, where W. D. Drake was the teacher. Mrs. Fannie Miller in the same year was employed to teach two schools of four months each--one was

⁴ McClung, Op. Cit.

⁵ Brule Post, July 28, 1905.

the Brule school and the other was the Shane district.⁶

The towns of Buffalo and Laverne today have modern semi-fireproof school buildings with approximately sixty and eighty-two square miles in their respective districts. Each town has an enrollment which averages about four hundred and fifty, including all grades. They have an enriched curriculum which includes home economics, manual training and woodwork, commerce, vocational agriculture, and instrumental and vocal music in addition to the academic subjects.

May, Rosston, Selman, and Kibby are the other town schools with an area and enrollment considerably smaller than the Buffalo and Laverne schools. The subjects offered by them, however, rivals the larger schools.

In addition to the town schools there are fifty-four rural schools in the county, which still maintain their individual school program under the supervision of the county superintendent.⁷

Of the fifty-three churches which have been organized in Harper county, only twenty-six are still active--sixteen in towns and ten in rural areas. There are twelve denominations represented in the county, ten of which have active organizations.

The active denominations are Methodist, Baptist, Christian, Disciples of Christ, Assembly of God, Catholic, Full Gospel, Nazarene, Lutheran, and True Followers.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Reminiscences of Lee Adams, County Superintendent, April 28, 1939.

The ten active rural churches are at Speermore, Selman, Mount Olive, Ellendale, Pleasant Valley, Charleston, Lone Tree, Paruna, Pleasant Hill, and Girard.⁸

The first church was a Baptist church at Doby Springs and was organized in 1895. Another church to be established about this same time was on Otter creek in the southwest part of the county. Other churches followed in rapid succession as communities developed at Brule and Mount Olive. The first church in the northwest part of the county was organized in the Liberty Union Community. The building was constructed of sod and very little remains of this early structure today. The church was organized by J. K. Baker, in 1905.⁹

A historic old rock church still stands in the southeast part of the county as a monument to the pioneers. The church was of the Southern Baptist denomination and was organized in 1903 with a log cabin school first used for services. In 1906 the members of the congregation erected a beautiful building of natural stone, which still stands, although it has not been used since 1919. Mr. James Odell, was the first pastor of the church.¹⁰

There are no public libraries except those in the schools. Various clubs in the county have talked of establishing a library for several years, but their funds have always found

⁹ J. K. Baker. The Reminiscences of J. K. Baker, April 29, 1939.

¹⁰ The Harper County Journal, April 22, 1939.

other disposition before anything was actually accomplished. The civic minded citizens recognized the serious need of establishing public libraries in the county, however, the school and private libraries are the only sources in any of the towns at present.

Municipal parks and playgrounds in the towns of the county have, only recently, been given much attention. Laverne has a municipal park in which is located a municipal swimming pool, recreation grounds, and a Boy Scout hut. These improvements were brought about by a bond issue by the town of Laverne and a federal grant in 1936.

Buffalo has a city park which for several years has been neglected because of the lack of funds on the city's part. However, a local club has frequently come to the rescue by providing funds for the upkeep and care of the grounds and tennis courts. The latest addition is a new roadside park, located at the south side of town on U. S. Highway 64 and constructed under the auspices of the State Highway Commission and completed during the summer of 1938. The town of Buffalo sponsored the construction of a swimming pool in the park, and it was opened to the public August 19, 1938. The pool, thirty by seventy feet, ranges in depth from three feet to ten feet. A wading pool fifteen by twenty feet, ranging in depth from one to two feet, has also been built to accommodate smaller children. Fireplaces and tables are also here for the convenience of tourists or any person in the community.¹¹

¹¹ Watson, Op. Cit.

The most noted and probably the most widely used park in the county is Doby Springs, the history of which dates back preceding the opening of this land to settlement in 1893. This park is located eight miles northwest of Buffalo, and affords ample grounds for large picnic groups, such as schools and clubs. There is a small lake in a natural setting of trees which is continuously fed by a dozen springs. The lake in the past has been used for boating, swimming, and fishing quite extensively, and there is still considerable fishing at the lake, and many large fish, such as bass and blue gill, are frequently caught.

The annual Doby Springs rodeo is held near the park each summer and is co-sponsored by the town of Buffalo and Ace Soward, a rancher near Buffalo. During this annual affair, the park grounds are used by carnival concessions and other entertainment, as well as a camping place for those who wish to stay. The popularity of Doby Springs is due mainly to the pleasant grove of trees and the good spring water of which there is an abundance.

The town of Buffalo has a deed to the springs and after years of difficulty in laying a substantial line; a successful water system was completed in 1938, which serves adequately the needs of the town. There is a fall of one hundred and forty feet from the springs to the town which provides a natural gravity system, eliminating the necessity for forced pressure.

The municipal water system of Laverne has a capacity of fifty thousand gallons per day which is supplied from wells.

The other towns of the county must depend upon the cisterns and individual wells, while in the rural sections an additional source of water is supplied from springs. Some wells contain good water, while others contain hard gyp water, because much of the county is underlaid with gypsum and other mineral deposits.

There are but two newspapers in the county at the present time--one is located at Buffalo and the other at Laverne, with publications once each week. At one time there were as many as three newspapers at Buffalo, one at Laverne, and one at May. The first newspaper to be established in Harper county, which was then a part of Woodward county, was the Brule Post on June 6, 1905, by William Forster who was editor, publisher, and proprietor. The paper was issued once each week. The next paper to be established was The Harper County Democrat in April, 1907, by E. Lee Adams of Yelton, Oklahoma. The paper was located at Buffalo, and one publication was made each week.

The present newspaper plants are very modern, and the Harper County Journal located at Buffalo has been given State Fair awards as follows: first place in 1935 for press work among dailies and weeklies, fifth place in 1936 for special edition of weeklies and dailies, and again first place in 1937 for general excellence for weeklies of towns less than 2,000 population.¹²

¹² Reminiscences of S. E. Lee, Publisher of The Harper County Journal, April 29, 1939.

CHAPTER IV

ECONOMIC PROGRESS OF HARPER COUNTY

Perhaps the greatest rival of the Chisholm Trail was the trail in the western part of the state that carried cattle to the Indian reservations and ranges far to the north. It was perhaps the best known and longest used.¹ After the traffic shifted to Dodge City and after 1880, much of the driving was diverted to this western trail.²

The old Western Trail was a transcontinental cow path beginning at Paso Grande, Texas, at the point where the Rio Grande flows into the Gulf of Mexico. Its route threaded northward across the state into the Indian Territory and Kansas, then diagonally to the southwest corner of Nebraska, on the the northeast corner of Wyoming and into Montana, crossing the Yellowstone River at Frenchman's Ford across the Missouri River at Fort Benton, and northwest to the Black-foot agency. The trail crossed the Red River into the Indian country at Dean's Crossing, north of Pease River. It swung slightly northwest through old Greer county and crossed the Salt Fork near the western boundary of the state. After crossing the North Fork, the trail turned back slightly northeast crossing the Washita near the present location of Cheyenne in Roger Mills county, veered northward to Camp Supply

¹ E. E. Dale. Range Cattle Industry, p. 64.

² H. E. Collins, Warpath and Cattle Trails, p. 262.

on the Canadian River, ran due north through Harper county, and crossed where the river bows out into Kansas.³

The first herd of cattle was driven up the trail in 1874 by Maxwell and Morris. In 1877 Carwin F. Dean located and established a post on the south bank of Red River. In 1881 the trail reached the peak of production; in this year three hundred thousand cattle were driven by this post to shipping points in Kansas.⁴

In following the West Texas Trail through Harper county it entered from the south at Otter creek, south of May, crossed the Beaver creek near the mouth of Clear creek which is located about three miles northwest of May, then on north by or near Buffalo Springs, now called Doby Springs, and then over the divide into the headwaters of Redoubt creek in the northwestern part of the county and then on north into Kansas.⁵

Melch Ortiz worked approximately sixty years as a cow-hand and worked in and around Harper county for years. He was born of Mexican parents but did not know the exact date. His birth occurred possibly in Victoria, Texas, however, he did not remember his parents. He grew to manhood in south Texas and participated in cattle drives through Indian Territory to Dodge City and the Dakotas. He started work on the Grimes ranch when he was twelve years old and made his first cattle

³ E. E. Dale. "Ranching on the Cheyenne-Arapaho Reservation", Chronicles of Oklahoma, VI, p. 35.

⁴ E. E. Dale. Cattle Range Industry.

⁵ H. S. Tennant. "The Texas Cattle Trails," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XIV, p. 86.

drive at the age of fourteen years. By the time he was sixteen years old he was "trail boss" of an outfit of hands. B. R. Grimes, a Kansas and Oklahoma rancher, is the son of the man for whom Ortiz started working. The aged puncher died at Buffalo in March, 1938, at the age of seventy-nine. His life was undoubtedly representative of hundreds of other hardy old characters who blazed trails through this part of the country, when the Indians were trying to halt the encroachments of the ranchers and white settlers. One instance about which he told transpired while he was working with a band of cattle herders near the present site of Buffalo. The camp was attacked during the night by a band of Indians, and one cowhand was slain. He was buried near the present home of Mr. Ray Pittman in the northwest part of what is now the town of Buffalo. The attack came as a complete surprise, but the cowboys were able to drive the Indians off without further loss of life.⁶

Ortiz worked for the Grimes brothers for thirty-six years and came up what was then called the Western Trail in Texas, in 1877 and 1884, with herds of cattle that were driven from Texas to Dodge City, Kansas, for northern markets.⁷

Mr. C. C. Deby, another "old timer", rode the cattle trails for forty-five years for different companies in Indian Territory and several adjoining states and made the run into Harper county in 1893. He had been around Buffalo Springs

⁶ Reminiscences of Melch Ortiz, September 15, 1937.

⁷ H. S. Tennant, Op. Cit.

with herds of cattle and was familiar with the desirable surroundings of this locality before the land was opened to settlement. Mr. Doby filed on the claim at Buffalo Springs in 1893 and lived on the place until the year 1912. Similar to other choice spots in the Cherokee Strip, the Buffalo Springs, later called Doby Springs, with its everlasting supply of spring water and pleasant grove of trees was regarded as a very desirable place for a home. The race for this location the day of the "Opening" started from Englewood, Kansas, and the race was hotly contested; however, Doby won the race, because he had the fastest horse.⁸

One of the most interesting stories of a Harper county pioneer is the life of Samuel Houston James, cousin of the notorious Jesse James. He was born in Tennessee in 1851 and moved with his parents to Missouri and Kansas immediately after the Civil War. When hardly more than a boy he began work as a freighter between Leavenworth, Kansas, and Santa Fe, New Mexico. Fights with the Indian bands were all too frequent, and in one of these Mr. James had a brother killed by the redskins. All of James' experiences with the Indians were not unfriendly; he spent several years among the Indians and hunted buffalo in the Dakotas. While among the Indians he gained a knowledge of nature's working and knew the secret signs fortelling weather, crop prospects, medical knowledge, and many other gifts which became a part of his life. He

⁸ Reminiscences of Mrs. Maud Mix, February 20, 1938.

became regarded as a sort of sage by the people of May.

In 1887, he moved with his family to No Man's Land where he engaged in farming and stock raising. During the years of residence there he held contracts for supplying hay to the government cavalry post at old Fort Supply. While engaged in this work he became familiar with the country along the Beaver River, and, when the Cherokee Strip was opened for settlement, he filed as a homesteader near May.

Mr. James made the "run" on his big bay horse with enough food tied on his saddle to last a few days until he could properly stake his claim. The interesting part of this particular run was the fact that there were only two families in this particular neighborhood who staked claims. The country was wild prairie, unbroken by cultivation, unpeopled, and almost desolate except for the buffaloes, antelopes, deer, and smaller animals that lived there, which were plentiful for several years after the settlement by James, but as more people came in the animals were killed or were driven from the country.

The first store in this community was established on Otter creek in 1897, by Porterfield. The selection of a name for the new village was made by Mr. James. While the men were trying to decide on a name, Mr. Porterfield had been standing holding his baby girl, May, and taking part in the discussion. The name May was accepted for the town, which is located near the Beaver river in the southern part of the county.⁹

⁹ McClung, Op. Cit.

The first case to be tried in Harper county was that of Tom Crouch, who on Saturday evening while the grand statehood ball was going on got in a mixup with one of the musicians. Several holes were shot through the walls of the Odd Fellows Hall before he could be arrested by sheriff Terry. He was released the following Monday under a \$200 bond. Returning the following Wednesday, he plead guilty of carrying a revolver and was fined \$25.00 and costs by county judge J. L. Griffitts.¹⁰ The wheels of justice were not slow in getting started in the new county as this incident shows.

Few industries exist except farming and stock raising, for the country has never been industrially inclined; however, the Buffalo Community Creamery combines both industrial and agricultural interests of the county. It was organized under the direction of A. O. Archer, of Keytesville, Missouri, and sponsored by the Buffalo Chamber of Commerce. Plans were begun late in the fall of 1936 and the creamery was opened for business June 9, 1937. It is cooperative in design, although it was organized under the corporation laws of Oklahoma. This was done so as to permit the payment of regular monthly dividends to every patron of the creamery, regardless of whether he was a stockholder or not. In effect, the creamery really pays card price for a farmer's cream at the time it is delivered; then the cream is churned into butter, sold on the Chicago market, and the profit from the sale is divided among the patrons of the creamery. A cent, however, is set

¹⁰ Brule Post, November 22, 1907.

aside for each pound of butterfat purchased to form a sinking fund to take care of depreciation and improvements.

The creamery has been very successful and offers an outlet for another farm commodity, which in the past has been very much neglected and in many instances wasted. Each year it has meant a considerable loss to the farmers until the establishment of the creamery.

In a statement made by D. W. Green, manager of the creamery, at a stockholders meeting in May 1938, it was shown that the creamery had purchased one hundred eighty-two thousand, four hundred and eighty-one pounds of butterfat during the first ten months of operation, from which was churned approximately 220,000 pounds of butter. From this amount of butter a total of \$7,448.30 had been paid back to the cream producer in the form of additional profits, which he would never have realized had the creamery not been organized.¹¹

The story is just as strong since the statement was compiled. More routes have been established into an enlarged territory to bring the cream of more farmers to the creamery twice each week. During July of 1938, nearly 36,000 pounds of butter were churned. A program of dairy herd improvement is also under the sponsorship of the creamery.

In 1939, the construction of an addition to the creamery has been completed at a cost of \$2,000.00 including building and machinery. Pasteurized milk, buttermilk, and cottage cheese

¹¹ Reminiscences of W. D. Green, October 20, 1939.

are produced in the new department.

The creamery churned more than 400,000 pounds of butter during the second year of its operation, and plans to increase the amount to more than a half million pounds during the third year have been made.¹²

In the area of Harper county no well should be started unless it is planned to drill to a depth of 4,500 feet. Even a well drilled to a depth of 5,000 feet will not encounter the Pennsylvania beds unless it should so happen that the well is located upon a pronounced fold or structure, the evidence of which at this time is not known. It is certain that any well drilled less than 4,000 feet has but slight chance to find oil in commercial quantities. Development in Harper county will, therefore, be slow due largely to the expense involved in drilling.¹³

Natural gas wells were developed in 1930, east of Laverne in Harper county. These wells supply Laverne and Buffalo with fuel gas for domestic and general uses and for heating. There has been some drilling done for oil in the county from time to time, but to date there has never been a substantial showing. The deepest drilling in the state was done in the Gypsum Canyons in Harper county. The Sinclair Oil and Gas Company's drill reached a depth of 8,560 feet without finding oil.¹⁴

¹² Harper County Journal, June 12, 1939.

¹³ Oklahoma Geological Survey, Bulletin No. 40, II, July, 1930, p. 13.

¹⁴ Ibid.

After several years of inactivity in drilling and leasing, several thousand acres have been leased north and west of Buffalo during the years 1937 to 1939 by the Sinclair Company and other major companies. Drilling operations were begun in this new area five miles west of Buffalo in the spring of 1939, by the Sinclair Oil and Gas Company. On June 2, 1939, the well had reached a depth of 5,500 feet, but no showing had been reported.

In the early days of Oklahoma Territory salt from the Big Salt Plain supplied the local demand for miles around, and there was quite a thriving industry on a small scale. When the railroads were built through the territory it became possible to obtain imported salt in most of the region, formerly supplied from the Salt Plains, more cheaply than it could be hauled from the plain. The market was thus greatly restricted while the plains were still left so far from the railroads as to render them incapable of development. The amount of salt manufactured at the plains in the past few years has been almost negligible.¹⁵

There are a number of salt springs in a cove on the south side of the Big Salt Plain, and it is here that the rock salt of the plain is found. The crust of salt near the springs reaches a thickness of four to twelve inches in long continued dry spells. The amount of saturated brine going to waste on the Big Salt Plain and the Little Salt Plain is very

¹⁵ L. C. Snider. Oklahoma Geological Survey, No. 11, pp. 204-209, July, 1913.

difficult to estimate, but is undoubtedly very large.¹⁶

Perhaps the most noted of the salt plains from the standpoint of the historian is the Big Salt Plain of the Cimarron. The first white man to visit this place was probably Coronado in his journey across the plain in search of the seven cities of Cibola. The presence of a dozen or more trails now nearly obsolete, radiating from the plain like spokes of a wheel, bears testimony to the fact that this place was long used as a source of supply of salt to the various forts and settlements of the surrounding regions. Indeed, it is but a few years since salt from this plain was hauled for hundreds of miles in all directions, and not until the time of discovery of extensive beds in central Kansas did this industry wane.¹⁷

The two Salt Plains on the Cimarron in Oklahoma are known as Little and Big Salt Plains. Little Salt Plain lies just south of the Kansas line between Harper and Woods counties. Big Salt Plain lies fifteen to twenty miles farther down the river between Harper and Woodward counties on the southwest and Woods county on the northwest.¹⁸ Many farmers and ranchers in Harper County continued to get a supply of salt from the Big Salt Plain for their livestock until recent years. During this time the consumption has been declining because farm animals have been rapidly displaced by power machinery; however, some salt is still hauled from the plain by the ranchers.

16 Ibid.

17 Chas. N. Gould. The Oklahoma Salt Plains. Kansas Academy of Science, (1899-1900), XVII, pp. 182-183.

18 Snider, Op. Cit., p. 205.

The Blaine formation crosses the Cimarron just north of the Kansas line and then follows down the stream on the southwestern side. For several miles it forms a narrow belt along the southwestern bank with only a few narrow canyons extending as far as two miles back from the line of the bluffs, until Buffalo Creek is reached in the southern part of T. 21 N., R. 20 W. This creek flows in a narrow canyon in the gypsums from about five miles southwest of Charleston almost due east until it enters the river. The canyon is narrow, not exceeding a mile in width, until very near the Cimarron river. On the north side of the creek there are only a few minor irregularities in the outcrop, but on the opposite side Race Horse, Sand, and Sleeping Bear creeks carry the outcrop back to the south a few miles. The width of the outcrop varies from less than a mile to four or five miles. The line of hills leaves the county south of Buffalo creek T. 27 N. All the gypsum is selentic. Good sections of the Blaine are very rare. Probably the best exposure is near the Big Salt Plain on the Cimarron.

The gypsums of Harper county are well exposed for quarrying, and the amount which can be obtained is very great, estimated by Gould at 10,000,000,000 tons. Several locations along the Cimarron and along Buffalo creek and its tributaries furnish good situations for quarries, if transportation facilities were at hand.¹⁹

¹⁹ Snider, Op. Cit., pp. 138-141.

CONCLUSION

Harper county has made rapid progress since its settlement. Her life is still new; the resources of the county are still undeveloped. The foundations have been laid and the future is all before her.

The "run" into Harper county is not to be confused with other parts of the "Outlet", where a great drama was being enacted the day of the opening of the land to settlement; there were not thousands of home seekers lining the border waiting for the signal. Instead, only a few hundred found their way into this western part of the Oklahoma Territory on the opening day. This was perhaps due to the following reasons: the remoteness of the area to be settled, distance to markets, and poorer soil conditions.

The cattle trails and winding roads have been superceded by hard surfaced highways and the railroads, and the two day trip for supplies of food and clothing are but a memory today. When the traveller observes the modern farms with their commodious homes, spacious barns, silos, and machine sheds, it is difficult to realize, that in their place forty years ago stood adobe and sod houses. The little fruit trees have grown to be orchards. New school houses have been built. Telephones and eventually rural mail delivery have become common. Farming has been revolutionized and has developed as the principal industry. The county is not heavily populated and no large cities have developed; however, the people,

generally, in this western county have been very optimistic and have never been easily discouraged during the years of drouth and depressions.

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