

THE AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT  
OF KIOWA COUNTY

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THE AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT  
OF KIOWA COUNTY

By

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### Preface

The author wishes to take this opportunity of expressing his appreciation to Dr. T. H. Reynolds, Head of the History Department, Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, for his assistance and guidance in the preparation of this thesis.

To Joseph Bradford Thoburn, outstanding Oklahoma historian of Oklahoma City, sincere thanks and appreciation for information concerning purposed irrigation projects in Kiowa County during his term as Territorial Secretary of Agriculture.

Thanks is due also to members of the A. and M. College Library staff and to the pioneers of Kiowa County who were interviewed by the author, namely: Howard A. Tucker of Oklahoma City, early day newspaper man of Hobart, Oklahoma; Mrs. Corwin Boake of Gotebo, Oklahoma, whose father was former Superintendent of Kiowa Indian School; Mr. and Mrs. A. J. Stoops, pioneer teachers and farmers of Roosevelt, Oklahoma; and Mr. and Mrs. B. F. Smith, pioneer farmers of Cooperton, Oklahoma, parents of the author.

W. P. S.

Contents

Chapter	Page
I. Opening of Kiowa County for Settlement	1
a. Drawing by lottery	
b. Class of people	
c. Types of soil	
d. Crops best adapted	
e. First methods of farming	
f. Livestock	
g. Transportation	
II. Social Institutions	17
a. Government	
b. Churches	
c. Schools	
d. Indian School for Kiowas	
e. Recreational activities	
III. Rise of Commercial Agriculture	23
a. Early day interest in irrigation	
b. Introduction of machinery	
c. Effect on farming	
d. Desire for larger farms	
e. The tractor and combine	
f. Decrease in population	
g. Mortgage companies take possession	
Bibliography	46

Chapter I  
The Opening of Kiowa County  
For Settlement

The opening of Kiowa County for settlement came with President McKinley's long awaited proclamation to open the Kiowa-Comanche-Apache Indian Reservations for settlement. President McKinley signed this proclamation on July 4, 1901.<sup>1</sup>

The proclamation stated that the lands ceded by the Wichita, Comanche, Kiowa, and Apache Indians would be open for entry on August 6, 1901, at 9:00 A. M. The reservations were divided into land districts with land offices at El Reno and Lawton. Commencing at 9:00 A. M., Wednesday, July 10, 1901, and ending at 6:00 P. M., Friday, July 26, 1901, registration was held at these two land offices. An applicant registering at either land office could enter either district if he so stated at the time of registration.

To obtain registration, each applicant was required to show himself duly qualified to make homestead entry of these lands, and to give the registering officer such identity and description to protect the applicant against impersonation.

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<sup>1</sup> United States Statutes at Large, 57 Cong., XXXII, part 2, 1981.



The applicant could apply for registration only in person and not by mail or agent. No person was permitted to register more than once or under any other than his true name. Each applicant, at the time of registration, was given a non-transferable certificate to that effect, which entitled him to examine the lands to be opened in the district in which he elected to make entry. The purpose of this was to enable the applicant later understandingly to select the land which he desired to homestead.

Each applicant signed a card stating the land district in which he desired to settle, giving description and identity of himself. These cards were sealed in a separate envelope. The cards were divided according to districts, carried to the place of drawing, and turned over to the committee in charge of the drawing, who drew out and opened the envelopes and gave to each card a number in the order in which it was drawn. The drawings for each district were held separately but on the same days. The drawing began on August 6, 1901. One hundred and twenty-five numbers were drawn each day until all lands had been entered.<sup>2</sup> Notice of the drawings, stating the name of the applicant and the number assigned to him by the drawing, was posted each day at the place of drawing; and each applicant was notified of his number by a postal card mailed to him at the time of

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 1979.

registration.<sup>3</sup> One hundred and sixty thousand persons were registered. When a person's name was drawn, he was allowed to file on any remaining piece of land he wanted.<sup>4</sup>

There were "locaters" at the places of entry--men who knew the country and would locate desirable claims for a fee of \$25.00 per client. These men made money because so many of the homesteaders had never been in the country.<sup>5</sup>

Three hundred and twenty acres of land in each of the three counties were set aside for a county seat town. On the day when entry was started, the lots were sold at auction to the highest bidder, for cash. After expenses of the sales were paid, the \$725,000.00 was turned over to the counties for the building of courthouses, other public buildings, and to pay the expenses of county government.<sup>6</sup>

No person was allowed to purchase more than one business lot and one residence lot.<sup>7</sup>

Only three hundred and twenty acres could be reserved for a townsite. The blocks were to be 320 feet by 420 feet. The business lots were 25 feet wide and the residence lots

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 1978.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph B. Thoburn and Isaac M. Holcomb, A History of Oklahoma, (San Francisco, 1908), 202.

<sup>5</sup> Mrs. A. J. Stoops, homesteader in Kiowa County, 1901.

<sup>6</sup> James Shannon Buchanan and Edward Everett Dale, A History of Oklahoma, (Evanston, Ill.: 1929), 224-225.

<sup>7</sup> United States Statutes at Large, 57 Cong., XXXII, part 2, 1980.



were 50 feet wide. The business streets running east and west were to be 100 feet wide; those running north and south 80 feet wide; and the alleys 24 feet wide. The total amount received from the sale of lots in Hobart was \$182,595.00. The first lot sold in Hobart brought \$40.00.<sup>8</sup>

Hobart was named for Garret A. Hobart, who was vice-president of the United States during President McKinley's first term as president.<sup>9</sup>

It was the most interesting of all openings, the most exciting while most of the hardships had been done away with.

When it was definitely known that these lands were to be opened for settlement, some members of most every class of society were seized with the desire to get something for nothing. Among the homesteaders to register were farmers who had land but wanted more; merchants who wanted to extend their activities; young lawyers, just out of college, who thought the new country possessed golden opportunities for their budding ambitions; old lawyers who had made failures in the "States", but who still felt that they could reach a commanding position at the bar or at least eke out a respectable living; bankers who had plenty of capital and who saw golden harvests in the country where banks had never

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<sup>8</sup> "Kiowa and Comanche Drawing", El Reno American, (Feb. 18, 1932), Oklahoma Chronicles.

<sup>9</sup> The Hobart Democrat Chief, (Oct. 27, 1935).

been before; bankers who had less capital but who had sagacity enough to see that money was to be made in a community where two per cent a month could be charged without doing violence to one's conscience; young doctors, just out of medical schools; old doctors who had been crowded out of old settled communities and who had, perhaps, been the undertaker's greatest asset.<sup>10</sup>

Many of the doctors and lawyers did not have licenses. The law stated that they must have a diploma and a certificate of character before they could be granted a license. Nothing was done to investigate the qualifications of the men and it was impossible for the citizens to know the doctors, with the result that many were afraid of them and many were the victims of "quacks".<sup>11</sup>

The pioneers lived in various kinds of houses, dugouts, half dugouts, sod houses, and frame houses. A house of more than two rooms was considered a large house. Their food consisted mostly of beans, salt pork and jack rabbit meat. Cowchips was the prairie coal.<sup>12</sup>

There were many who drew farms who soon became tired and discouraged. When the summer sun began drying up their

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Mrs. B. F. Smith, pioneer in Kiowa County, 1901.

pitiful sod crops, the longing for the comforts of the older settled states increased and they sold their land for whatever price they could get, pulled up stakes, shook the dust from their feet, and returned from whence they came.<sup>13</sup>

The New Colony Company and the American Tribune Company of Indianapolis, Indiana sent out circulars inviting people to become members of the New Colony Company. These companies were going to purchase 30,000 acres of land in the Kiowa-Comanche country. Any person buying as much as four shares at \$25.00 a share would be entitled to 160 acres. The Company assured the people that only those people who would make "good neighbors" would be allowed to enter this colony.

The Department of the Interior declared that the conditions which were contained in the circulars were false and would be impossible to fulfill. Steps were taken to prevent the further sending out of pamphlets.<sup>14</sup>

Wildman was a sure-enough, wild-west, hard-shooting, get-rich-quick mining town, located three miles east of the present site of Cold Springs. Grizzled miners, unscrupulous gamblers, and bandits formed a large portion of the population.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The Hobart Democrat Chief, (Oct. 27, 1935).

<sup>14</sup> Kiowa County, Cherokee Advocate, (Aug. 25, 1900).

<sup>15</sup> The Hobart Democrat Chief, (Oct. 27, 1935)



Just across the border in Washita County was another town of the same kind, old Mountain View. It was one of the toughest western towns, made up of saloons, dance halls, feed yards and livery stables. Here the cowboys spent their vacations on big drunks and card games. When these failed to amuse, they ended up in a shooting-scrape.<sup>16</sup>

The bearded lady, the three-card monte man, the snake eater, the shell game and roulette wheel operator, the faro dealer, the saloon keeper, and other characters familiar to American life appeared upon the stage in one grand final ensemble as the curtain was going down on the close of the hilarious nineteenth century and going up on the twentieth.<sup>17</sup>

The soils of Kiowa County are classed as red prairie and granitic soils.<sup>18</sup>

Kiowa County is underlaid principally by redbeds rocks but considerable areas in the southern and southeastern portions are in the Wichita Mountains and consist of peaks of granite and related rocks which protrude through the level-lying redbeds. Physiographically the county lies in the Wichita Mountains and Gypsum Hills region. The surface, except for the peaks of granite, is nearly level, the streams

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<sup>16</sup> Mrs. B. F. Smith.

<sup>17</sup> The Daily Oklahoman, (July 28, 1929).

<sup>18</sup> J. O. Ellsworth and F. F. Elliot, "Types of Farming in Oklahoma", Oklahoma Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin 181, (Oklahoma A. and M. College), 16.

having made only slight indentures into the general surface of the plain.

The drainage of the greater part of the county is into the North Fork of Red River, which forms the western boundary. The northeastern part of the county is drained into the Washita River, which touches the northeastern part of the county. Timber occurs only along the streams.<sup>19</sup>

Gold, Silver, and copper are known to occur in small quantities at various localities of the Wichita Mountains but so far, none of the deposits has proved to be of commercial importance.<sup>20</sup>

Granite occurs in enormous quantities in the Wichita Mountains and varies greatly in color and texture.<sup>21</sup>

The limestone found in the Wichita Mountains is of great thickness but so badly cracked and checked by the forces which folded the mountains that it is of value only for crushed stone or Portland cement.<sup>22</sup>

The soils of 95 per cent of the area of Kiowa County are heavy in texture either in the surface soil or subsoil, clay loam mainly in both, and the rest, which occur in

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<sup>19</sup> L. C. Snyder, Oklahoma Geological Survey, Bulletin 27, (Guthrie), 286.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 112.

irregularly shaped areas in different parts of the county, are sandy. One area of these sandy soils forms a narrow belt along the western county line and another crosses the northeastern corner.

The heavier soils, mainly clay loams, range in color from very dark grayish brown to reddish brown. They have friable surface soils ranging from very fine sandy loam to silty clay loam in texture. The surface soil extends to a depth ranging from 4 to 8 inches, where it grades into a clay subsoil that is, in most places, very plastic when wet and very hard when dry, especially at the greater depths. Between the depths of 18 and 30 inches, lime is present, both in the form of hard concretions of calcium carbonate and in the finely disseminated form of the same compound, as determined by acid tests. Wherever the surface of the soil has been badly eroded, lime is exposed.

The sandy soils have brown or reddish-brown friable surface soils that range from sand to very sandy loam. The surface soil extends to a depth ranging from 6 to 12 inches, where it passes into a red-brown friable sandy subsoil which, in turn, continues downward with no apparent change in color or texture to a depth of 36 inches, where the material contains a little more clay, making it slightly sticky when wet. None of the surface soil or subsoil contains sufficient lime to produce effervescence with acid, although acidity tests indicate that there is sufficient lime for the needs of growing crops.



The outstanding difference between the sandy soils and the clay loam soils is that the material in the former is much more friable throughout the surface soil and subsoil, continuing to considerable depths. This has its influence on the agriculture, in that the methods and practices used in cultivation and the kinds of crops predominantly grown on the sandy soils differ from those grown on the clay loam soils.<sup>23</sup>

The leading crops, cotton, wheat, and oats, are produced on the clay loam soils.<sup>24</sup> The sandy soils embrace a small percentage of the cultivated lands. These soils used in the production of crops are not so productive as the extensively cultivated clay loam soil. However, during certain seasons when the moisture supply is small, the crops on the sandy soils are better than on the clay loam soils. This is especially noticeable during abnormally dry years. On account of the friable character of both surface soil and subsoil, the sandy soils provide a more favorable physical condition for the growth of roots than the clay loam soils with their heavy surface soil material and impervious clay subsoil.

These sandy soils are better adapted to growing small fruits and vegetables than the clay loam soils. Peaches and

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<sup>23</sup> A. W. Goke and C. A. Hollopeter, "Soil Survey of Kiowa County, Oklahoma", United States Department of Agriculture, Bulletin 14, (1931), 7.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 8.

apricots are the principal kinds of fruits grown in the county.<sup>25</sup>

The principal crops grown, in order of their importance, are cotton, wheat, oats, barley, and corn. The total acreage devoted to cotton is almost equal to the combined acreage of wheat, barley, oats, and corn.

Cotton and wheat are cash crops which provide the chief source of income on most farms. Cotton and wheat are preferable to crops that can be converted into feed for livestock, because they are more adapted to the existing climatic conditions than corn and other forage crops.<sup>26</sup>

A survey of acreage of principal crops in 1924, taken from 1925 census ( in thousands of acres), shows that in Kiowa County there were 125.3 acres devoted to cotton; 86.4 acres devoted to wheat; 21.7 acres devoted to oats; 15.5 acres devoted to forage; 10.1 acres devoted to grain; 11.6 acres devoted to barley; 8.9 acres devoted to hay; and 6.7 acres devoted to corn.<sup>27</sup>

The climate of Kiowa County is characterized by a frost-free season of two hundred and thirteen days, extending from

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>27</sup> Ellsworth, op. cit., 71.

April 2, the average date of the last killing frost, to November 1, the average date of the first.

The average annual rainfall is 28.13 inches. The wettest year on record at Hobart is 1908, when 43.33 inches of rain fell; and the driest is 1910, when there was 12.72 inches of rain. The rainfall is so distributed throughout the year as to be most beneficial to growing crops. About 60 per cent or more of the annual amount comes during the times when the crops are making most of their growth.<sup>28</sup>

The original vegetation of Kiowa County consisted of grasses and a scattered growth of mesquite trees. Such trees as cottonwood, elm, and pecan grow only on the banks of the major streams. The grasses in the valleys grow more luxuriantly than those in the uplands, and for that reason, before the county was opened for settlement, the land in the valleys was prized highly among the Indians for grazing purposes. During the winter, the grasses in the valleys provide the chief source of feed for livestock.

Agricultural occupation of the land began in 1901 with the opening of the public land to homestead settlement. Each settler grew the crops to which he was accustomed. Farmers from the northern states selected cereals as their major crops and those from the southern states grew cotton principally.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Goke and Hollopeter, op. cit., 3.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 4.



The early settlers of Kiowa County were, as a whole, poor people and brought with them only the necessary equipment. The ground was broken with a sod plow which had a rod moldboard. This type of moldboard made the plow pull much easier and turned the sod completely over, causing it to rot better. Disk-cover cultivators were used in preference to the shovel type cultivator, because of the grass roots that hung on the shovels. The disk harrow was also used to chop up the sod.

Some good crops were raised on the sod the first year, namely: kaffir corn, cane, cotton, and corn on the bottom lands. By many different kinds of devices the seed was dropped in every third furrow, while the ground was being broken the first time. It was almost impossible to cultivate these crops, but with the absence of weeds, plenty of rain, and the sod to form a mulch, there was no great need for cultivation.<sup>30</sup> In the first few years the crops planted depended on what the settler had raised in the part of the United States from which he came. The Northerner tried wheat and corn. The latter he found was not well adapted because of the lack of rainfall. The Southerner planted cotton, and it proved to be the most successful crop, remaining so even to now.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> B. F. Smith, pioneer farmer.

<sup>31</sup> Howard A. Tucker, early day newspaper man.

The first livestock brought in by the settlers consisted of a team and a milch cow which was usually led in behind a wagon. Those settlers who did not bring their cow with them, would buy a range cow from a cattle man and break her to milk. A few chickens and hogs were also brought along.

The first few years the cattle brought in from the North died from Texas fever. The Government finally forced the settlers and cattle men to dip or spray all cattle and horses and as a result, the fever tick was eradicated.<sup>32</sup>

The number of livestock per 100 acres of crops and pasture in 1924 for Kiowa County was: cows 2.8, other cattle 2.4, hogs 1.6, poultry 4.5.<sup>33</sup>

The number of livestock in the county on April 1, 1930, as reported by the United States Bureau of the Census, is as follows: horses 9,849; mules 5,106; cattle 32,110; sheep 3,558; goats 124; swine 6,433; and chickens 222,379. The number of turkeys raised in 1929 was 34,656.

About one half of the cows milked are of the beef types, principally Shorthorns. Jersey and Guernsey are popular breeds of the dairy type.

Hogs are raised on an extensive scale on only a few farms. Poland China is the most popular breed. The few sheep raised are kept chiefly on farms composed mainly of

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<sup>32</sup> B. F. Smith.

<sup>33</sup> Ellsworth, op. cit., 74.

pasture land. Chickens are raised on practically all of the farms.<sup>34</sup>

In the last few years, a good number of farmers have started raising sheep and they are proving to be a very satisfactory means of improving the income to the farmers of this region.<sup>35</sup>

When the Blackwell, Enid, and Southwestern Railroad was built through Kiowa County, Mexicans were employed in large numbers to do the work. Native food was scarce and shipping fresh meat was very expensive. The situation was readily solved, however, while the gang was working in the vicinity of the present site of Roosevelt, for prairie dogs were numerous and the Mexicans ate them.<sup>36</sup>

Today the county is well served by railroads. The Vernon branch of the St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad crosses the county in a north-south direction. The Quanah branch crosses in an east-west direction and the Mangum branch of the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific in an east-west direction. The Kansas City, Mexico and Orient crosses the northwestern part of the county.

Country roads are generally fair. Practically all of the section lines, except in the Wichita region, have been

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<sup>34</sup> Goke and Hollopeter, op. cit., 6.

<sup>35</sup> B. F. Smith.

<sup>36</sup> The Hobart Democrat Chief, (Oct. 27, 1935).



opened for roads. The granite peaks of the Wichita Mountains furnish an inexhaustible supply of building and road materials.<sup>37</sup>

The estimated population of Kiowa County in 1931 was 29,630, with an area of 1,062 square miles and an altitude of 1,536 feet. The total 1930 equalized taxable values was \$19,854,853.00.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Oklahoma Geological Survey, Bulletin 27, 286.

<sup>38</sup> Oklahoma Almanac, (Oklahoma Publishing Co., 1931), 33.

Chapter II  
Social Institutions

When the pioneers came to settle Kiowa County, they brought their different religions with them. Within a very short time churches were established in the various towns. In Hobart, a Baptist Church was organized four days after the opening, with the first services in a tent.<sup>1</sup> Rev. Erastus H. Reynolds, a Methodist minister, who came to Hobart in the opening, organized a Sunday School of sixty members on Sunday following the opening. The Methodist Church was organized on August 1, 1901.<sup>2</sup> The Presbyterian Church was organized on June 5, 1902, by Rev. E. M. Lunn. Meetings were held in the school house.<sup>3</sup> In the country, where people lived a long distance from the towns, Sunday School was held in the homes until the school houses were built, then they were used for Church and Sunday School. These were known as Union Sunday Schools because they included all denominations.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Hobart Democrat Chief, (Oct. 27, 1935).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> A. J. Stoops, pioneer teacher and farmer.

The pioneers realized the need for schools, also. The first school in Hobart was a tuition school taught by Mrs. Alla B. Foster in 1901. She organized this school about a month after the opening. J. P. Evans was the first County Superintendent of Schools and to him fell the work of organizing the county preparatory to the opening of schools at the beginning of the following year.<sup>5</sup>

The first school in Roosevelt was a three months term held in the Presbyterian Church Building and was taught by A. J. Stoops. He and his wife lived four miles northwest of Roosevelt, and Mr. Stoops walked the four miles to and from school each day. Mrs. Stoops walked four miles in the opposite direction to teach a country school of nine pupils.

The next year school terms were six months long and the average salary for teachers was \$40.00 per month. In order to secure a certificate to teach, teachers were required to take an examination. These examinations were made out by teachers of the Normal School at Edmond.

The children sat on homemade benches and their text books were those which had been approved for use in the Oklahoma Territory.<sup>6</sup>

The schools of Kiowa County have developed until today there are fifty, one-room schools, two dependent consoli-

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<sup>5</sup> The Hobart Democrat Chief, (Oct. 27, 1935).

<sup>6</sup> Mr. and Mrs. A. J. Stoops.



dated schools, eight independent consolidated schools, one joint district (districts 39-82), one common district high school, one consolidated common school, and one city system.<sup>7</sup>

Scholastic Enumeration, 1930-39<sup>8</sup>

	:1929-30	:1930-31	:1931-32	:1932-33	:1933-34
Total	: 9692	: 9105	: 8628	: 8665	: 8607
Ind. Dist.	: 5958	: 5616	: 5371	: 5239	: 5586
Dep. Dist.	: 3734	: 3489	: 3257	: 3426	: 3021

  

	:1934-35	:1935-36	:1936-37	:1937-38	:1938-39
Total	: 8040	: 8278	: 7519	: 6863	: 6720
Ind. Dist.	: 5198	: 5206	: 4870	: 4552	: 4479
Dep. Dist.	: 2842	: 3072	: 2649	: 2309	: 2247

The scholastic enumeration of Kiowa County shows that since 1929 there has been a total loss of 30 per cent.

There was one government school for Indians in Kiowa County before the county was open for white settlement. The Rainy Mountain Indian School was organized in 1892 with about forty or forty-five pupils, one stone building, and one frame building. Mr. Cox was the superintendent. In 1896

<sup>7</sup> Kiowa County Superintendent's Office.

<sup>8</sup> Scholastic Enumeration Records for Kiowa County, (Oklahoma City: State Department of Education).



the number of pupils increased to one hundred and fifty. A. M. Dunn, from Missouri, became superintendent.

The children were taught to speak English, to sing, and to do the work required for the school, such as sewing, etc. They made all their own clothing. Most pupils only reached the fourth or fifth grade, and when these went home they taught English to their younger brothers and sisters. The children went to school one half day and worked one half day.

The Government employed a superintendent, a cook, a laundress, two farmers, three or four classroom teachers, a seamstress, and a matron for each building. An estimate was made once a year with a record kept of everything--even the minutest things. Cattle were given by the Government.<sup>9</sup> Meat was brought from Gotebo every morning. One hundred loaves of bread were used daily, with biscuits once a week. Dried fruits were used, and on Sunday the children had cookies. Sunday night lunch was served in paper sacks.<sup>10</sup>

The school was closed in 1917 and the equipment was taken to Anadarko and Lawton. The Kiowas were sent to white schools, to Riverside, near Anadarko, or to school with the Comanches at Lawton. They didn't like the Comanches; and

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<sup>9</sup> Mrs. Corwin Boake, daughter of A. M. Dunn, Supt. of Kiowa Indian School.

<sup>10</sup> Mrs. B. F. Smith.

they were too far away from their own people.<sup>11</sup>

There were several Baptist Indian Missions in Kiowa County: Rainy Mountain Mission, south of Mountain View; Elk Creek Mission, south of Hobart; and a mission at Saddle Mountain.

The Government issued flour, beans, coffee, and sugar to all Indians once a week. During the summer and at mid-winter, each member of every family was paid \$50.00. The Indians called it grass money. The money was brought from Fort Sill in silver dollars, and was guarded by soldiers.

The Indians usually brought along a sack to carry home the family allotment. Gambling was the best way the white men knew of getting the Indians' money; but gambling was forbidden on the reservations. The white men would disguise themselves as Indians, slip in at night and play monte with the Indians to get their money.<sup>12</sup>

The recreational activities of the pioneer families consisted of gathering at the home of some family for community singing, prayer meetings, and parties. Their parties were usually spent in playing games, candy breaking, and taffy pulling. The old spelling bee was another popular pastime. Later on literary societies were organized for

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<sup>11</sup> Mrs. Boake.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

young and old. The rodeo was the most popular type of day-time pleasure. There was calf roping, wild steer roping, bulldogging, and bronco riding. There were driving races for the ladies as well as horseback riding.<sup>13</sup>



### Chapter III

#### The Rise of Commercial Agriculture

J. B. Thoburn, one of the standard historians and archaeologists of Oklahoma, and who was Secretary of the Territorial Board of Agriculture in 1902, tells of the early interests of the people of Kiowa County in irrigation. The story as J. B. Thoburn tells it is as follows:

When the Comanche-Kiowa and Wichita Caddo Indian Reservations were opened to homestead settlement, in 1901, three new counties were formed and named in Oklahoma Territory, namely: Caddo, Comanche, and Kiowa, and the county seats thereof designated respectively, at Anadarko, Lawton, and Hobart, by the Secretary of the Interior. The reservations for the county seat townsites were not large but the lands thereof were reserved for platting into lots, and blocks were held for sale to the highest bidders, after the surrounding lands had been subjected to homestead entry.<sup>1</sup>

The proceeds from the sale of lots for residence and business buildings constituted a public fund for the benefit of the county in each instance, such fund to be apportioned by the Secretary of the Interior, for the purposes of con-

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<sup>1</sup>

Personal interview with J. B. Thoburn.



structing roads and bridges, the erection of needed school-houses, the support of public schools during the first year after settlement, and for the erection of a courthouse for each county. This construction work was done under contract, under supervision of the Department of the Interior.

Schools, where needed, were organized, opened, and conducted in the usual manner with the co-operation of county superintendents and local boards of education. Courthouse construction was supervised with the usual safeguards to guarantee good faith and honesty in workmanship; as was also the case in the construction of roads and bridges.<sup>2</sup>

As superintendent of construction, there was selected by the Department, a young civil engineer from the Engineering Division of the United States Geological Survey, named Mathis, who was a native of the Netherlands. His principal office was at Lawton. Mr. Mathis was an industrious and enterprising worker in his line, as indicated by the fact that, in addition to performing his required duties, he also found time to consider other engineering possibilities in the area thus brought under his observation.<sup>3</sup>

For instance, he examined the valley and channel of the North Fork of Red River, which had formed the western boundary line of the former Comanche-Kiowa Indian Reservation and

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

made a tentative survey for the first suggested irrigation works of public importance ever proposed in Western Oklahoma.<sup>4</sup>

Selecting a site for a dam across that stream, which is now occupied by the dam at Lugert, (since built for the storage of a water supply of the city of Altus) he proposed the diversion of water from the stream at that point through a canal or artificial channel in a southeasterly course to the watershed of Otter Creek in the southwestern part of Kiowa County. He also proposed the construction of a masonry dam at the head of the Otter Creek Canyon, three and one half miles northwest of the town of Mountain Park, between two towering granite walls 100 feet apart and nearly 100 feet high, which would thus have flooded a storage area of more than 5,000 acres.

Incidentally, the construction of a straight line conduit from the dam on North Fork to the Otter Creek drainage area would have encountered an obstacle in the form of a small, low, granite mountain, which it was proposed to pierce by means of a tunnel--though a short detour could have been substituted at a tenth of the expense.<sup>5</sup> However, when the necessary roads and bridges had been constructed

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

and the courthouses had been built, Mr. Mathis' tour of duty was terminated for that area and he was withdrawn from the field and its irrigation possibilities. Moreover, a few months later, the passage and approval of the National Reclamation Act relieved the Geological Survey of further responsibilities in regard to such a matter; though that new governmental bureau, like the Geological Survey, was a part of the constituent organization of the Department of the Interior. In fact, the former chief engineer of the Geological Survey had been named as the administrative director of the newly created Reclamation Service.

Part of the Reclamation Act was the creation of the National Reclamation Fund, in the form of a provision, that beginning with the year 1901, all proceeds from sales of public lands, including fees and exclusive of salaries of registers and receivers, in the states of North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and of all states and territories west thereof, should constitute what should be known as the National Reclamation Fund in the United States Treasury, to be used for the conservation of water in the reclamation of arid and semi-arid lands within that limit.<sup>6</sup>

Immediately after the passing of this act, which took effect on July 1, 1902, the Reclamation Service was organized as a new bureau under the Department of the Interior. It was its first privilege, if not its first duty, to com-

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<sup>6</sup>  
Ibid.



pute the size of the Reclamation Fund which had accumulated during the preceding year, and to see how much money there was to the credit of each state and territory included in the group of states and territories in the area to be thus benefited. It may be wondered why the cause providing for the accumulation of this fund was made retroactive for the preceding year. Let it be remembered, however, that two big Indian reservations had been thrown open to settlement the preceding year, practically all of the surplus lands of which had been entered under the homestead act. In other words, Oklahoma's money looked mighty good even prospectively to the most ardent promoters of this unprecedented piece of national legislation.<sup>7</sup>

In those days, although most of the people of Oklahoma were interested to learn that their territory had over three million dollars to her credit in the National Reclamation Fund, with less than half that sum accredited to any of the other states or territories in the proposed reclamation group, it was the business of no particular part of the territorial government to take cognizance of that particular matter.<sup>8</sup>

In December, 1902, the Territorial Board of Agriculture was organized under the provisions of an act of the Territorial Assembly nearly two years before. In the organization of the Board of Agriculture, J. B. Thoburn of Okla-

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.



homa City was elected as its secretary. Now it had so happened that, several years before, Thoburn had spent six months in the National Capitol, where he was employed to do the active work of the Office of Secretary for the American Forestry Association. At that time, the chief engineer of the United States Geological Survey was the official secretary of the Forestry Association and, during the period of Thoburn's employment in the Forestry Association work, scarcely a day passed that he did not have to appear at the Office of the Chief Engineer of the Geological Survey for consultation concerning the work of the Association. Naturally, he saw much of the inside workings and operations of the Geological Survey and was conversant with the fact that it had a well organized press bureau to see that the world at large was duly appraised of the operations of the Geological Survey and the service thus rendered to the supporting public; and it was not long before the organization of the Reclamation Service noticed evidences of trained activity on the part of the publicity bureau as a subsidiary of the Reclamation Service.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Thoburn had probably noticed it very early.

The publicity that reached Oklahoma newspapers and those of neighboring states that circulated in portions of Oklahoma manifested a very keen interest, if not a tender solici-

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Ibid.

itude in regard to Oklahoma and her share in the National Reclamation Fund, and it was noticeable that there was a studied effort to discourage any influence that might be exerted in Oklahoma in behalf of the utilization of such a fund for that purpose within the limits of the Territory. Among the stories that thus emanated from Washington, were the following: ". . . . that Oklahoma wasn't interested in irrigation"; ". . . . that the cattlemen of Western Oklahoma did not want their grazing ranges cut up by irrigation ditches"; ". . . . that the real estate investment folks at Oklahoma City, Shawnee, and Guthrie did not want irrigation talked in Western Oklahoma, lest it injure property values locally in those places"; and other equally vivid spasms of imaginary wisdom from a bunch of bright minds in Washington who were incapable of doing Oklahoma's thinking for her.<sup>10</sup>

When Thoburn took charge of the newly opened office of the Territorial Board of Agriculture, there was very little to be done. Since he was a newspaper man himself, territorial correspondents of larger papers published in neighboring states suggested that he could at least be a press agent for Oklahoma farms and farming. Without previous training as a press agent, he adapted himself to the conditions so readily that he was threatened with a libel suit within the first three weeks. But press bureau stories about Oklahoma and her Reclamation Fund still continued to come in and some of these were published in Oklahoma. Naturally, Thoburn would have liked to stop this peculiar show-

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

ing of interest in Washington, but he was at a loss to decide upon a course to that end. Finally, however, in sheer desperation, he decided to reply in kind.<sup>11</sup>

Evidently some of his comments reached Washington through the medium of press clipping bureaus for, very shortly, he received a communication from the Reclamation Service expressing the hope that he would use his influence to prevent the holding of any conventions or the circulation of any petitions in advance of the possibilities of irrigation development in Oklahoma by the engineers and experts of the National Reclamation Service. To this, Thoburn made answer that he might exert such an influence if it were deemed wise and expedient, but that, under no circumstances would he do so if there were any more press bulletins coming out of Washington which seemed to reflect upon the intelligence of the people of Oklahoma in regard to the matter under discussion.<sup>12</sup> And so, from that time forward, Oklahoma's interest in the Reclamation Fund received no further publicity from Washington.

In September of that year(1903), Secretary Thoburn attended the National Irrigation Congress' annual session at Ogden, Utah, where he talked with Reclamation officials and spent three long days in the sessions of the Committee on Resolutions.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.



When he returned, he informed Governor Ferguson that Oklahoma would lose her share of the Reclamation Fund if she did not make a fight for it. In reply, the Governor asked what suggestions he had to offer. To this the Secretary said, "We will have to keep the subject alive in the minds of our own people and we will have to make a demonstration with a big delegation at the next meeting of the National Irrigation Congress which will meet at El Paso next year." To this the Governor said, "Go to it and let us know if we can help."<sup>13</sup>

During the late autumn and the early winter which followed, Thoburn attended numerous county Farmers' Institute meetings in the western part of Oklahoma, in each of which he stressed the importance of strong local public interest in the effort to see that Oklahoma was fairly well treated, in regard to this matter, at Washington. The people of the town of Mountain Park, in southwestern Kiowa County, were especially interested in the matter because of the suggestion which had come in the form of a preliminary survey by the engineer of the Department of the Interior several years before; and they did their part to keep the matter before the people of Oklahoma.<sup>14</sup>

Again, in the summer of 1904, Secretary Thoburn made

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<sup>13</sup> Reminiscences of J. B. Thoburn.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.



another round of Farmers' Institute meetings in Western Oklahoma. This time he urged that each county should send at least one delegate to the National Irrigation Congress at El Paso, with the result, that considerable interest was manifested.

The only railroad company operating in Oklahoma that showed any interest in the matter, was the Frisco System, whose industrial commissioner, Mr. Schulter, promised to attend the Irrigation Congress meeting at El Paso. In October, about a month before the date of the Irrigation Congress, Thoburn attended a meeting of the American Association of Farmers' Institute Workers which held its sessions at the World's Fair in St. Louis. The last day of his stay there, he went down into the city and visited Mr. Schulter's office in the Frisco Building. In the course of conversation between the two, Mr. Schulter asked Thoburn if he would like to have passes for several of his friends to go to El Paso, to which Thoburn replied, "Of course, that would be fine; but I would not like to discriminate." Schulter then looked at Thoburn and asked, "Do you mean that you want passes for the whole bunch?" Thoburn's answer to this was, "I think we could make a much better showing at El Paso in such event." At this, Schulter gave a long deep whistle of amazement, and said, "I might as well go and get a whole book of passes and send my assistant down there with them to help in their distribution."<sup>15</sup> As all this took place nearly two

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

years before the passage of the Hepburn Act, there were no objections; and largely as the result, Oklahoma had forty-two delegates wearing long, white ribbon streamers with the name of their commonwealth printed thereon, sitting as delegates in a great convention.<sup>16</sup> Reclamation Service officials were plainly impressed and, on the day before the beginning of the sessions of the Irrigation Congress, the entire Oklahoma delegation was invited to attend the session of all the Reclamation Service employes who were there.

At this joint session, the director of the Reclamation Service made a brief address and introduced Secretary Thoburn, who talked very plainly in his concluding address. The Director of the Reclamation Service informed the visiting delegates that their interest and zeal were greatly appreciated, and he assured them that one of the most able reconnaissance engineers in their bureau would be sent to Oklahoma to examine the ground personally; and if there were a feasible irrigation project in Oklahoma, it would be built. His final words were, ". . . and all we ask of you is that you keep your man Thoburn off of our necks until we can get it done."<sup>17</sup>

The Territorial Legislative Assembly convened for its last session in January, 1905. Thoburn was there, not as a legislator, but rather as a lobbyist. He had no personal axes to grind, but he did show up with twelve legislative

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

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bills carefully formulated and ready to be introduced for legislative consideration.<sup>18</sup>

All of these bills pertained to agriculture and rural life, including nursery regulation and the sale of fruit trees, seed, and stock; food inspection, irrigation, drainage, highway legislation, etc. Of the twelve bills presented, he saw six safely through both houses and approved by the Governor--a better record than any member of either house.<sup>19</sup>

One afternoon, while he was in the lobby of the assembly, a stranger appeared and asked for him. The visitor proved to be Mr. James G. Camp, an irrigation reconnaissance engineer from Idaho, who wanted to talk with him. The Secretary led the way to the Board of Agriculture Office, where he produced a map of the Territory and hastily outlined his view of the situation. The North Fork-Otter Creek Project was particularly described in detail and enlisted Mr. Camp's warm interest.

He left for Kiowa County immediately, where he went over the North Fork-Otter Creek plan very carefully and concerning which he became very enthusiastic. He made a preliminary survey and, shortly afterward, began to make a permanent survey.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.



A district engineer of the Reclamation Service was assigned to supervisory duty in the field of possible irrigation development in Oklahoma, and he made application for the surplus waters of practically every stream of appreciable size in Western Oklahoma, asking that the waters thereof be reserved for development and use on Reclamation projects in Oklahoma. Since there were no indications of continued opposition from Washington, the proponents and supporters of such a policy in the western part of the Territory seemingly had every reason to feel encouraged, even though it would have been timely to have recalled the ancient adage to the effect that there were "other ways of killing a cat besides choking it to death with cream."

Recurring to the beginning of the movement for irrigation development of irrigation construction under Federal auspices, it may be stated that primarily, the United States Geological Survey was not designed and organized to operate in that field. However, the planner and organizer of the United States Geological Survey, Major John W. Powell, was so justly distinguished for his tireless energy and industry, for the keenness of his observation, and for the notable versatility of his attainments and activities, as to cause him to be regarded as one of the most useful men ever employed in the service of the Federal Government. He it was who first called public attention to the opportunities for irrigation development on a large scale under governmental



auspices.<sup>21</sup>

The investigations thus begun eventually led to the creation and organization of the Reclamation Service, which began its operations in succession to the preliminary investigation of the Geological Survey. Among the projects that had been subject to preliminary investigation at the hands of the Geological Survey, was the proposed Elephant Butte Dam in the valley of the Rio Grande in South Central New Mexico and the projected Roosevelt Dam and Reservoir, in the Salt River Valley in Southern Arizona.

It was known that the magnitude of these two projects was such that each would entail an expenditure of several million dollars which were not yet in sight. As already hinted, the Reclamation Fund appropriation had been made retroactive throughout the fiscal year, very probably to gain control of the unusually large land office receipts in 1901-02 by reason of the opening of two important Indian reservations during that brief period. The lands to be watered from the proposed Roosevelt Dam and Reservoir were all situated in Arizona and were tributary to one single transcontinental railway company. The lands to be irrigated from the Elephant Butte Reservoir were located largely in New Mexico, but also in part, south of the international boundary line in the Republic of Mexico and partly in the State of Texas; neither of which lands were contributing a dollar to the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

National Reclamation Fund. These last mentioned lands were tributary to several railway lines and, seemingly, corporate influence of the inhabitants of sub-humid Western Oklahoma was destined to win in the struggle for Oklahoma's share in the Reclamation Fund and the favoritism of the Reclamation Service officials.<sup>22</sup>

Just what passed, in the way of negotiations between representatives of such corporate influences, will probably never be known; but the President of the Oklahoma Board of Agriculture suddenly, though quietly, let it be known that the Secretary of that organization should be retired at the close of his term. The story of this bit of intrigue leaked out three months ahead of the scheduled time and created a sensation, though the possibility of corporate influence and interference was not suggested. When word reached Washington, a telegram was immediately dispatched to Reclamation Engineer, James G. Camp, at his office in Snyder, Oklahoma, instructing him to discontinue operations on the permanent survey on the North Fork-Otter Creek Irrigation Project; and to conduct a careful examination of other supposedly feasible opportunities for irrigation development in Oklahoma.<sup>23</sup>

Engineer Camp's enthusiasm over the merits of the North Fork-Otter Creek Project thereupon vanished like a light

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<sup>22</sup> Personal interview with Mr. Thoburn.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

snow before a warm spring sunshine. He proceeded to select another site, lower down on North Fork, in fact, below the confluence of these waters with Elm Fork, which were generally known to be strongly impregnated with salt. There, with a force of assistants and employes, he spent more than a year of time and several thousand dollars of Reclamation Fund money on an alleged "project" that any layman should have recognized as impracticable.<sup>24</sup> Then, along in the summer of 1906, there came a torrential flood down the shallow, sandy channel of the North Fork, such as come, at times, in the channels of all large water courses throughout the entire arid region, and this destroyed Mr. Camp's poorly constructed irrigation "works" with the result that he hastened to inform Reclamation Headquarters at Washington that Western Oklahoma had so much rain that it needed no irrigation.<sup>25</sup>

The Reclamation Service officials at Washington accepted this insincere and untruthful dictum with joyful alacrity, directing its pliant underling to transfer the locale of his further useful and informative activities elsewhere. As a matter of fact, beginning three years later, there was a ten-year period, extending from 1909 to 1918, inclusively, in which there were eight years of excessive drouth that cost Oklahoma agriculture the enormous aggregate loss of over

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.



one billion dollars.<sup>26</sup>

But, what of that Elephant Butte and the Roosevelt Reservoir? Had their chance and the Oklahoma share in the National Reclamation Fund helped to guarantee the completion? Indeed, it was not until several years after the admission of Oklahoma to the Union, that Congress performed the operation of separating Oklahoma from its share in the National Reclamation Fund, in 1910,<sup>27</sup> and believe it or not, all of the members of the Oklahoma delegation in Congress--two senators and five representatives, three of whom actually lived west of the 98th meridian, voted in the affirmative.<sup>28</sup> And, by the way, what became of the Reclamation Service and its press bureau? Well, it may spoil a secret, but the latter has been out of a job for 10, these years, because, forsooth, the extravagant financiering ability of the Reclamation Service proved to be no more reliable in action than did the sincerity of its attitude toward the people of Oklahoma, in shamelessly betraying their interests in the field of contemptible intrigue.<sup>29</sup> And now have been consigned to the tender mercies of the army engineers, with whom the de-

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.



serving people of the arid region must ever be secondary and subservient to "flood control", so called, and to river"improvement" ! And are the army engineers any less extravagant in their plans and operations than were the engineers of the Reclamation Service? True, the Reclamation Fund was bankrupt in a few years, but is there any danger of bankruptcy staring the corps of engineers of the United States Army in the face, at least while Congress, state and municipal governments and chambers of commerce stand breathless in the presence of the youngest subaltern of the "Corps Elite" and unquestioningly accord to it honors due to a spirit of self-satisfied omniscience?<sup>30</sup>

It is not unlikely that the early part of the twentieth century will be looked upon as the mechanical power epoch in agriculture, just as 1850 is regarded as marking the end of hand production in farming. The mechanical power epoch, however, is more significant since the application of the internal combustion engine and the electric motor have brought electric lights to farmhomes, supplied water under pressure for the isolated farmsteads, provided mechanical milkers for the dairy, and made possible many other labor-saving devices. In addition, there are great savings accruing in crop and animal production from the utilization of improved field machinery.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> H. B. Walker, Research in Mechanical Farm Equipment, Misc. Pub. No. 38 of U.S.D.A., 5.

Farmlands that would have been considered marginal under hand methods of production, are now supporting prosperous farmsteads. Furthermore, these influences have resulted in marked population changes. In the early history of our nation, 90 per cent of our people were rural; while today less than 30 per cent are directly dependent upon production of farm products.<sup>32</sup> At the time of the first census (1790), seven rural families had only one townsman to supply with food; while in 1928 that same seven would have supplied about eighty-four townsmen, and there should be no question that today they would supply even more.<sup>33</sup>

The present tendency in agriculture - as in other industries - is to operate on smaller margins per unit of production and to rely upon more units of production per worker.<sup>34</sup>

Farming today is more than the gaining of a mere livelihood. The farm family desires the same comforts and luxuries in life that are enjoyed by the urban classes. The farmer's motive for industry is to secure a better living, which includes, in addition to more desirable conditions of labor, better home and social conditions, such as education-

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

al facilities, opportunity for religious training, and active community spirit. The equipment for production is a means to an end in which other equipment and commodities secured through the exchange of surplus of production may contribute to the comforts and enjoyment of life.<sup>35</sup>

The one to three-man crew of the combine has replaced the harvest crew of from three to ten men used with the binder or header. This reduction in the size of the crew is significant in that it was not always possible to secure sufficient satisfactory labor for the peak load, even at high wages. The housewife is also a beneficiary of the new method. The burden of cooking for a large harvest crew passed with the advent of the combine. Observations indicated that many farmers harvested 200 to 400 acres of wheat with no hired labor. Other operators handled their crop with one hired man.<sup>36</sup>

Labor for hauling the grain from the combine is usually hired at a flat rate per bushel, the price depending upon the distance hauled. Usually, the hauler supplies the truck, gas, and oil, and boards himself.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> J. O. Ellsworth and R. W. Baird, "The Combine Harvester on Oklahoma Farms", Oklahoma Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin, (Oklahoma A. and M. College: 1926), 7.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.



The price of combines in 1926 ranged from \$1,043 for the eight-foot one-man machine, to \$3,315 for the large twenty-foot machine. It takes an average of \$56 per season for repairs on the older machines.<sup>38</sup>

Through a method which has been tested by counting the number of heads left in the field, the average loss of grain was 2.6 per cent for combines, 3.3 per cent for headers, and 6.1 per cent for binders. The average loss of grain carried over with the straw was 1.9 per cent for stationary separators.<sup>39</sup>

Elevator men generally agree that the combined grain is of slightly inferior quality to the stacked and threshed grain. The farmer who stores his grain cut with the combine in early season has an added problem because of the tendency to heat when stored. However, the loss from this factor has not been definitely determined.<sup>40</sup>

The stimulation of agriculture resulting from the World War has caused the horses and mules to be supplemented by tractors, trucks, and automobiles. The first tractors were mostly of the large, slow-moving type. The lighter fast-moving tractors with modern units of equipment are in use today.

Man-labor requirements that, under the old system of

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

agriculture, amounted to from ten to fourteen hours per acre, have been reduced to from two to three man-hours per acre under present conditions.<sup>41</sup>

Records from individual farms show that with horses it is possible for one man with some help at harvest time to handle 320 acres of crop land; with the light modern tractor 1,000 acres; and with the modern heavy-duty tractor of thirty drawbar horsepower, 1,600 acres.<sup>42</sup>

The introduction of the tractor, combine, and other modern units of equipment has caused a desire for more land for the farmer, and as a result, has caused the population to drift toward the cities or leave the state in search of a livelihood. The scholastic enumeration of Kiowa County shows that since 1929 there has been a thirty per cent decrease in children of school age.

The depression caught up with the people of Kiowa County in 1936, when the mortgage companies made eighty-five foreclosures; in 1937 they made forty-eight foreclosures; in 1938 they made thirty-six foreclosures; and from January 1, 1939 to June 24, 1939, there were twenty-two foreclosures made.<sup>43</sup>

The decrease in foreclosures since 1936 shows that the

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<sup>41</sup> Farm Mechanization, U. S. D. A., (Year book of Agri.: 1932), 411-455.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Court Clerk Records, Kiowa County.

people of Kiowa County are gradually outliving the effects of the depression in their land of diversified agriculture.



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