

THE BEGINNING OF PERRY OKLAHOMA

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THE BEGINNING OF PERRY OKLAHOMA

By

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PREFACE

During one of his lectures at A. and M. College, in the Summer of 1937, Dr. Ault, Head of the Department of Economics of George Peabody College, Nashville, Tennessee, declared that one need look no further than one's own back yard for a thesis topic. In line with this idea, the subject, "The Beginning of Perry" was chosen to write upon.

The purpose of this study is to give an accurate account of the events which took place when the city of Perry was in its formative stage. An attempt has been made to point out details concerning its growth and development and to show its transition from an Indian Reservation to a city swarming with town-builders.

Materials for this work were gathered principally from early day newspapers, periodicals, county and city records, and conversations with "Old Timers", original pioneers at Perry.

The writer wishes to express her sincere appreciation to Professor T. H. Reynolds for his suggestions and helpful criticisms.

E. K. K.

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THE BEGINNING OF PERRY OKLAHOMA

CHAPTER I

THE OPENING AND FIRST DAYS

Aug 19, 1893,
 On ~~May 2~~, 1890 notice was given that four land districts were established in Oklahoma.

The Perry District was bounded and described as follows: Beginning at the main channel of the Arkansas River where the same is intersected by the northern boundary of Oklahoma Territory; thence west to the northwest corner of township 29 north, range 2 west of the Indian Meridian; thence south on the range line between ranges 2 and 3 west to the southwest corner of lot 3 of section 31, township 20 north, range 2 west; thence east to the southeast corner of lot 4 of section 36, township 2 north range 4 east; thence south on the range line between ranges 4 and 5 east to the middle of the main channel of the Cimarron River; thence down said river, in the middle of the main channel thereof, to the western boundary of the Creek country; thence north to the northwest corner of the Creek country; thence east on the northern boundary of said Creek country to the middle of the main channel of the Arkansas River; thence up said river to the middle of the main channel thereof, to the place of the beginning; the local land office of which will be located in the town of Perry, in the county "P".¹

It is difficult for the staid, conservative Easterner who lives in a country which develops slowly, to conceive of a city springing into existence in one night's time. He forgets that the most energetic and prosperous sons and daughters of the East have brought to the West the spirit of independence that was planted on Plymouth Rock by our forefathers, and that this is now their home.²

At twelve o'clock at noon, on September 16, 1893, the plain of Perry was as vacant as on the morning of creation; it was an area with

1 James D. Richardson, Messages and Papers of the Presidents IX, 423 Bureau of National Literature and Art, Wash. 1903.

2 The Noble County News, July 4, 1902

no inhabitants. Then, over the dry and dusty region, a pistol shot rang out; immediately came a transformation. Thousands upon thousands of people sprang into action; crazed by excitement, they moved in frantic disorder; yet, within a short time they settled into comparative quiet. They came, all classes and kinds, from all directions, afoot, horseback, or lumber wagons, carriages, and railroads. There were honest men and thieves, bankers and paupers, adventurers, who wanted nothing but excitement, and real farmers who wanted homes.³ At two-thirty on the same day, a teeming mass of twenty thousand souls, homeseekers, composed Perry's population.⁴ Within the afternoon, unbelievable and miraculous, came order and repose; from the mob leaderless at noon, leaders were developed before sunset. Out of the confusion rose government.⁵

The nearest point to enter was from the south side of Orlando and a few miles east. Clustered about the registration booths along the lines of entry were many tents where lunches and coffee were served. Bunco men and card sharks were scattered through the crowds, and while they did not carry on a profitable business, they attracted the masses. The shell game seemed to be the most popular attraction. Sometimes a minister could be found, standing on a soap box, preaching to an interested congregation. The first persons arriving from this line of

3 Kay County Oklahoma, published by the Kay County Gas Company, Ponca City, Oklahoma, 1919.

4 Perry Daily Times, September 16, 1893.

5 E. W. Jones, Early Day History of Perry, Oklahoma, Perry, Oklahoma, 1931.

entry were surprised to find the townsite covered with settlers.⁶ These "sooners" had evidently started before noon or had hid in the bed of Cow Creek near the new city until noon, and then within fifteen or twenty minutes, they had their lots staked out for ownership.⁷ The record for distance is claimed by Jack Tearney who made the original run. He started from the county line and reached the present site of Perry in thirty-one minutes and had the "Blue Bell" saloon operating at four o'clock.⁸ The United States government had a case against Tearney for selling liquor without exposing the government stamp. Judge Dale fined Tearney five dollars and sixty cents.⁹ Before coming to Perry, Tearney was conspicuous in Guthrie sporting circles. He now lives on his ranch in Red Rock Township.

At one minute until twelve o'clock, along the line of entry, there was not a sound to be heard except the quiet milling of the stock and the suppressed breathing of that great mass of humanity.¹⁰

When the gun that opened this town and the surrounding country to settlement was fired at high noon on September 16, 1893, not a tree nor shrub was to be seen; Perry was a bald spot on the prairie, but by

6 Perry Daily News, September 16, 1893, also Chandler New, September 22, 1893.

7 L. P. Thompson, The Daily Oklahoman's Outline of Oklahoma History, Daily Oklahoman, Oklahoma City, 1931.

8 Perry Daily Journal, September 14, 1934, p. 5.

9 District Court of County "P", Vol. I, December 16, 1893, p. 87.

10 E. E. Dale, Readings in Oklahoma History, Row, Peterson, and Company, Evanston, Illinois, 1930, p. 80.

nightfall, as if by magic, a city of canvass was built, with a population of twenty thousand or more. The inhabitants were spread out for four miles on either side of the railroad. When, in the course of time, the tent city was replaced by houses, trees and shrubbery were planted, and soon the vast tract of uninhabited land became a populous country with fertile fields and busy, prosperous towns and cities.¹¹

In opening this reservation an attempt was made to eliminate the abuses that marked former openings. Booths were established along the border and everyone who could not produce a booth certificate to prove that he was not a sooner was permitted to file on land.¹²

One hundred and fifteen thousand certificates had been issued from the different booths, and it is probable that one hundred thousand people took part in this, the wildest and most exciting run that ever took place.¹³

The Court House Square or Central Park, is an acre tract of ground reserved in the center of the business section of the city when the townsite was laid out by the government. A few minutes after twelve o'clock noon, of the day the town was opened to settlement, this court house reserve was occupied by squatters who had been misled and did not know it was a public reservation. Hundreds of business men located on

11 Alvin Rucker, Oklahoma History in Pictures, Daily Oklahoman, Oklahoma City, 1929.

12 Charles N. Gould, Geography of Oklahoma, Bunn Brothers, Ardmore, Oklahoma, 1909, p. 46.

13 Reports of the Secretaries of the Interior, Washington, 1893, III, p. 1460.

the four sides facing the streets; they had been informed by some unknown person that this was opened for settlement instead of block "B" which lay just south of it. By some means and for some reason never discovered, block "B" was declared to be a public reserve and the present court house block was to be opened to settlement. Different persons were accused of changing the government plot of the townsite for mercenary reasons, and supporting this accusation was the fact that the soldiers who were here as peace purveyors were either posted as to the trick or mistaken in that they refused to allow settlers to squat on block "B" for the first two or three weeks. Block "B" was kept clear of claimants by this company of soldiers until certain favored ones were said to have been located, thence the balance was turned over for public settlement, and also the order was given out that the government acre was reserved and no settlement could be made thereon. This was the busy commercial spot of the city until a month later, when an order came out from the depot at Washington to clear the square of settlers. The matter was later taken through the courts, but it was decided that the settlers were the losers.

For a year the square remained windswept and dusty, the expanse broken only by the small post office building on the northwest corner of the government acre. C. P. Drace and a corps of assistants were in charge and it was not long before the wooden shack was replaced by the present stone building. The new building was constructed by subscription from the merchants on the north and west side of the square and it was leased to the government at one dollar a year. Not so many years ago (1911) the building was donated to the treasury department and it became government property.

The public square, which characterized the county seat in the Cherokee Strip, is the result of southern influence. Under Cleveland's administration, Hoke Smith, Secretary of the Interior, was in charge of the opening of the strip. Smith, a Georgian, employed a group of engineers from his home state to plan the county seats of the new country. Therefore, in southern style, Perry, Enid, Pawnee, Newkirk, and Woodward possess a public square.

A government land office was authorized at Perry in the county of "P" and the lands were taken by settlers in a run similar to the other strip openings. Before Perry was established, down on Cow Creek, north of Wharton, stood a newly constructed shack, the land office building, which alone marked the townsite of Perry, the city to be. J. E. Nolan, of Wisconsin, and J. H. King, of Alabama, were in charge of the Perry land office.¹⁴ Racked and shaken by the storms of winter and the sand-laden wind of many summers, the land office building stood for sixteen years on the west side of the square, then its business completed, the old shack was condemned and sold to the highest bidder for kindling. After the building had been moved to the government acre, day after day, from a few minutes after the hour of opening, home-seekers lined up to gain access to the office to file their homestead entries. From the beginning, to avoid confusion with the struggling masses, numbers were given out to those in line, and when one man was through with his official business the next number was called. Sometimes it would be from two weeks to a month after a number had been drawn before the holder would be admitted to the office to make his entry. Possibly by

14 V. E. Harlow, Oklahoma, Harlow Publishing Co., Oklahoma City, 1934, p. 263.

that time the land upon which he had made settlement had been filed upon,¹⁵ so the only alternative was to file on another quarter section or find a lawyer and institute a contest against the person who had filed upon the land he had made settlement upon. Positions upon the line of filing were worth anywhere from one dollar to five hundred dollars according to the claimant's circumstances or other conditions. With all the roughness displayed, the ladies received every courtesy at the hands of this day and night homesteading mob and were granted the privilege of presenting their applications to file without the necessity of waiting in line.

Then in a few days it was learned that it was not necessary to "line up". The home-seeker was shown a person who showed him to another person who could see another person, and so on, that, for a consideration of a certain stipulated amount deposited with another person, could help one to obtain the homestead entry without any delay whatever. Comment on this endless chain of grafters brought on an investigation by the government and the registrar of the land office. James E. Malone was indicted in the early spring for making false papers.

Incident to the office was a small army of "boosters", who, for the necessary price, could "steer" the home-seeker to a place in line or to the office of the "best lawyer in town", whichever was needed. The latter act was done gratuitously to the home-seeker of course, the "best lawyer in town" paying the "booster" his bit for the "steer" in proportion to the amount the client had paid. "Affidavit" Murphy was

15 Perry Daily Journal, September 14, 1934.

the "king bee" of the "steering bunch."

The west acre of the park was reserved for the federal government; the other part was deeded to the city of Perry. In the spring the park ground was plowed and sowed to alfalfa to keep down the suffocating dust and sand. Another year, and Will T. Little, a newspaper-man and claim holder from Blackbear township, came before the commissioners and asked that he be allowed to plant the square to elm trees. He planted eight thousand six hundred seedling Wisconsin white elm sprouts. From his crop, Mr. Little sold enough trees to repay the county for all expenses of the stock and planting, and also to plant a city park of three acres and two school reserves of three acres each. There now remain in the court house park three hundred handsome shade trees, each of which is from eight inches to over a foot in diameter.¹⁶

Woman's hand has played no small part in beautifying the city park. It was through the women, who fostered the idea and carried on the correspondence, that the old land office site was converted into a desirable location for the \$10,000 Carnegie library which was later erected.¹⁷ The land on which the library was to be built was contested. A bill conveying to the city of Perry certain land for a city library, was instigated in Congress by our representative, Bird S. McGuire.¹⁸ Mrs. Boyes carried on the correspondence with Mr. McGuire who secured

16 Perry Daily Times, September 16, 1893.

17 Lucy Minor Boyes, conversation August 5, 1937.

18 House of Representatives 20735 Report No. 1493, 60 cong., First sess., Washington, April 20, 1908.

the passage of the bill. Then Mr. Carnegie sent his check for ten thousand dollars to the city council after said council had levied one mill on the taxable valuation of Perry to maintain the library.¹⁹

County "P", of which Perry is the county seat, later had its name changed to "Noble" county in honor of John W. Noble, Secretary of the Interior in President Harrison's cabinet.²⁰

The opening of the Cherokee Strip drew larger crowds of people than any that had participated in previous land openings. Perry is located in the central part of Noble county, or what was early known as county "P". The town was first known as Wharton, but was later named for J. A. Perry, one of the township location commissioners.²¹ It is situated on the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe railroad at a point about sixty miles south of the Kansas border. Being located on one of the great national trunk lines, Perry is placed in easy communication with the east and the west.²² At this time no trains were stopping at Perry. { Wharton, a mile south had the depot and the trains went through Perry at a high rate of speed. An ordinance limiting the speed through the city limits to four miles an hour remedied the matter and the depot was moved to Perry and later to a half block north of the present location.²³ The city council passed a resolution that the

19 Resolution by Mayor H. A. Smith and the City Council February 16, 1909. Letter from James Bertram, private secretary to Andrew Carnegie, February 13, 1909.

20 Seth K. Corden and W. B. Richards, Oklahoma Red Book, Oklahoma City, 1912, in 2 vols., (Vol. I. p. 490.)

21 Journal of Ordinances County "P", p. 4.

22 Lerona Rosamond Morris, Oklahoma, Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow, Co-operative Publishing Co., Guthrie, 1930, p. 324.

23 Journal of Ordinances County "P", p. 4.

Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe railroad offices be requested to change the name of Wharton to Perry and that the owners of the townsite of Wharton and the business men there be requested to acquiesce therein.²⁴ The chief of police was instructed to arrest the conductors of all the trains that violated the city ordinance by running through the city limits at a speed greater than four miles per hour.²⁵

From the time of the promulgation of the President's proclamation to the eventful September afternoon, newspapers, magazines, travelers, and public speakers had proclaimed the riches of the Cherokee Strip. Its natural resources and climate had been a subject of praise. Its soil was said to be marvelously productive, and its future prospects bright. It had been fixed upon by the government for settlement, a price attached to its acres, presumably because they were more valuable than any others that had been thrown open to settlement. Perry had been settled as the seat of the United States land office for the better part of these lands. She had been made the county seat of the best county in the Strip, and even before one settler had placed his foot upon her townsite, she was the recognized metropolis of the Cherokee Outlet.²⁶

Surrounding Perry in all directions for many miles is a rich, undulating plain, destitute of forest growth save here and there where the landscape is traversed by running streams, along which grow elm, hackberry, cottonwood, and oak, or where it is depressed to the level of the

24 Record of Council Proceedings No. I City of Perry, p. 5.

25 Ibid.

26 Perry Oklahoma, op., cit., pp. 2-3.

river bottoms. The soil is a rich red-brown loam which in its virgin state has produced, for generations, a luxuriant growth of prairie grass. Broken by the plow, the compact and fiber-knitted furrows mellow rapidly under implements. The river bottoms are exceedingly rich; the soil is very much the same composition as that of the prairies of Illinois. For the raising of potatoes, and all roots, the land is particularly well adapted. This fine farming country abundantly produces wheat, corn, oats, alfalfa, and cotton. Climate, soil, and nearby markets combine to make cotton one of the most sure, prolific, and profitable of any crop known to husbandry.²⁷

Within a few months after the opening every kind, style, and manner of store was in operation. The tramp of thousands of feet of human beings and horses rendered the air unbearable, almost to a degree of suffocation from the dust created. For the first three weeks one could not see for the distance of twenty feet ahead in the government acre. The black sand covered everything. Men went to the creek to wash their clothes and hang them out to dry, finding a friend to guard their lots while they were away doing their laundry work. Each lot had from one to a dozen claimants. Fighting and turmoil began. The sheriff and his score of deputies were kept busy; a dozen deputy marshals were assisting. The county officials took up their quarters in tents and hastily constructed shacks. Water was scarce, while beer sold for one dollar a bottle the first day. The "Buckhorn" saloon came in with thirty-eight thousand bottles which they disposed of at this figure; the next day

27 Charles N. Gould, Travels Through Oklahoma, Harlow Publishing Co., Oklahoma City, 1928, p. 38.

the price was reduced to fifty cents.

During the early territorial days, Perry was in the northern judicial district. At least two terms of the United States court were to be held each year at such regular times as the judge of the district should fix and determine. The judge had in the judicial district all the authority as to matters and causes, both criminal and civil, pending, or that might be brought into the district. An attorney and a marshal were appointed by the President for the court and the marshal had the power to appoint one or more deputies.²⁸

The criminal laws of the state of Arkansas were applied in Indian Territory. No appeals in civil cases were allowed where the amount of the judgment, exclusive of cost, did not exceed twenty dollars.²⁹

By proclamation of the governor, Perry was declared a city of the first class and a city election was held.³⁰ Conventions were held and many tickets were placed in the field. John Brogan, who conducted a grocery store, was the Democratic nominee for mayor. E. B. Mentz, prominent in legal circles, led the Republican ticket. Volney Hoggatt was nominated from the same element "for the good of the city," but later withdrew in favor of Brogan. G. W. Doughty, a one-armed pension attorney, was another mayoralty candidate. For the moral welfare of the city, Green B. Raum, late of Washington, was "put out" by himself

28 U. S. Statutes at Large, 53 cong., Washington, 1893;-1895, XXVIII, pp. 693-694.

29 Ibid., p. 696.

30 Guthrie Daily News, September 29, 1893.

and friends. The campaign was as unique as any that ever happened and was full of excitement. Dick Plunkett handled Raum's campaign with entire satisfaction to himself and to the saloons of the city. Booths were erected around the square to give the orators the opportunity of properly advising the "dear people" what was best for the city and of discussing the merits of the different candidates. After this strenuous campaign there were one thousand five hundred and ninety-seven votes cast for mayor; Mr. Brogan was elected, defeating Mentz, his nearest opponent by one hundred eight votes. John N. Brogan's election was the result of a spontaneous movement upon the part of his friends and acquaintances. His wise judgment attracted wide attention and respect. Mr. Brogan discharged his numerous duties with fidelity and rare executive ability. His administration was progressive and he so ordered his conduct that no word of criticism was attached to any official act. Brogan Street was named in his honor. At this election, George Farrar was elected treasurer; A. Duff Tillery easily defeated his opponents for city attorneyship; and Lon Wharton became city clerk by the highest majority in the city election, showing thus his extreme popularity. A. Jacobs became police judge and George S. Livingston was elected assessor. For councilmen from the first ward, C. A. Weideman and J. T. Hill were elected; both were prominent saloon men. In the second ward, J. C. Dulaney and Howard Friend were chosen. Lawrence Drake and Henry Flock were successful in the third ward, while J. P. McKinnis and W. T. Cutler won out in the fourth ward.³¹

The first body of law makers for the new city met on the upper

³¹ Record of Council Proceedings No. I, City of Perry, p. 1.

floor of the Hill Brother's saloon and gambling house. The gambling tables were brought into legitimate use while the hired help took a welcome rest for the night. The first ordinance offered and adopted defining the corporate limits of the city, was presented by Drake of the third ward.³² The Evening Democrat was made the official city newspaper.³³ Mayor Brogan appointed William Tilghman chief of police and John Thornhill, "Fatty" Hopkins, and H. A. "Heck" Thomas, policemen.³⁴

The first city council of Perry has occupied a conspicuous place in the annals of local and municipal government. It had to do with many public considerations which shaped and directed the future growth and development of the city. It set the precedent for the future city management by establishing an honest and economical government. In its political aspect, the first council was democratic by a large majority; of its entire membership, only one republican had a place. The first council was liberal and progressive and from the beginning it was confronted with the assaults of individuals inspired with selfish greed, seeking to grasp its most valuable franchises, and to give in return only a mess of pottage; by political "shysters" having in mind only personal ambition, and by the conflict and tumult of jarring individual interests at home. Through it all, the council maintained a creditable decorum and steadfastly adhered to a high standard of official rectitude.

32 Journal of Ordinances County "P". p. 3.

33 Record of Council Proceedings No. 1, City of Perry. p. 2.

34 Commissioners Court Proceedings County "P" Vol. I. p. 18.

There was a "cleaning up" of the police force and "Fatty" Hopkins and H. S. Miller resigned; "Heck" Thomas was dismissed. Mayor Brogan retired from office and resolutions were spread upon the minutes of the council commending Brogan for his courteous and dignified manner in dealing with the council.

"Resolved that the members of this council, do hereby tender to the Honorable John M. Brogan their most cordial, hearty, and sincere thanks for the able, courteous, and dignified manner in which he has presided over its deliberations, and we shall ever be grateful for his wise, earnest, and honest counsels to our body.³⁵"

Brogan undoubtedly made a good mayor, considering the conditions of the city during the life of his administration.

At the close of the official term of Mayor Brogan the indebtedness of the city amounted to \$18,950 and the funding bonds were issued in that amount, but the bonds were bad and were not sold. When the official census of the city was taken in 1907, Perry had a total of 2,881 people; 2,533 were whites; 348 were Negroes.³⁶

35 Record of Council Proceedings, City of Perry, No. I, p. 159.

36 Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of Census, Bulletin No. 89 "Population of Oklahoma and Indian Territories", Washington, 1907.

CHAPTER II

HELL'S HALF-ACRE AND ITS EARLY DAY INHABITANTS

It would be difficult to find anywhere such a mass of incongruous humanity as was gathered together on the block bounded on the north by "D" Street, on the west by the alley running through the block north and south, on the east by the Santa Fe tracks, and on the south by "C" Street. Saloons, restaurants, and grocery stores, the principal business institutions, were housed in shacks which were packed close together, savoring of a "carnival layout." Large, gaudy painted signs announcing the merits of the goods for sale were conspicuous. Here was where outlaws, criminals of all classes, business men and professional men of questionable repute, with those of the highest rank and respectability--as afterwards proved-- ate, slept, and drank together, transacted their business without asking each other or anyone else a question as to who he was, what he was, or where he came from.

Here, from the north and the south, came men outlawed in their own communities; some had met financial reverses, were discouraged, down and out; some had served their prison terms; some, scouting from the law, came to start anew. And Perry was a wonderful asylum for those, who in a new environment, were trying to forget and making an honest effort to beat back. It was an even break for all obtained without social or financial handicaps in gaining a substantial foothold. Climate, freedom, and new surroundings could not cure the natural instinct for wanderlust or inherent laziness. They came in droves, in an estimated thirty thousand to the town site, and within the year, possibly four thousand had found it worth their while to continue their

citizenship, and retain their faith in the new common-wealth.

Here the homesteader lined up, awaiting his turn to gain an entrance to the land office; slept in the narrow passage between the tents for a month until the land office moved to the court house square. Not for one minute did Hell's Half-Acre belie its name. No night passed but the discharge of firearms was promiscuous and every person sleeping in a tent lay a little closer to the ground as the bullets traveled over-head. But only a single death was reported, that of a poor fellow who was found lying in a tent with a hole in his head from a bullet which had entered the right eye and passed through.

It was really a wonder that any order was maintained, because, for a time, Perry had one hundred ten saloons, to say nothing of the "blind pigs." There were countless gambling houses on the ground floor flush with the street, but there were still plenty of them upstairs. Here came in with the first rush, much of the riff-raff of the entire Indian Territory, and the cream of the toughs and thieves and bad men of the whole southwest.¹ E. D. Nix, United States marshal, was in charge of one thousand deputies to assist in the orderly handling of the tremendous crowds that surged to the boundary lines of the Strip to await with breathless impatience the signal that would release them seething and fighting toward the land they aspired to own. Nix started with the first train from Orlando and rode into the Strip on the last car of the last train. There were about six thousand lots available in Perry and a half a dozen claimants were clamoring for each one.² Nix

1 Jones, op. cit., p. 29.

2 Evett Dumas Nix, Oklahombres, St. Louis, 1929, p. 96.

placed Bill Tilghman and Forrest Halsell in charge of the peace officers at the land office. Tilghman was one of the most noted peace officers of the west and had already won a reputation as a law enforcer in Guthrie. He was killed a few years ago in Cromwell, Oklahoma, by a bullet³ from a drunken fellow officer. There was a federal order that no man should carry a gun into the Strip.⁴

With the thousands of people who gathered from all portions of the country to make up the little world of Perry, there were those, of course, which were designated as "town characters". To be a "town character", one must be original, and to be original one must have brains. Originality is always entertaining and certainly there was always a full gallery of the "rounders", "captains of industry", and "promoters" standing by to be entertained.

Old Bobby Gill was undoubtedly the patron saint of the sporting fraternity. Bobby had upon a time been worth a great amount of money; he had been through the mining camps in their "palmy" days; he had experienced the "tough times" in Dodge and other cattle towns of the frontier and was an authority on all games of chance and on the record of every gamble or bad man that had ever made a reputation in the western country. After a year Bobby tired of Perry, so he went to his home in Wichita to spend his last days.

"Hon." Dick Plunkett arrived at the opening day with all his pomp, vanity, and two hundred pounds avoirdupois. Dick was undoubtedly the greatest man the west ever produced, at least that is the impression

3 Romance of Oklahoma, Oklahoma Authors' Club, Oklahoma City, 1924, p.8

4 Guthrie Daily News, September 17, 1893.

formed on the first acquaintance by the stranger after he had taken a few drinks which Dick ordered and for which the aforesaid stranger always paid, and the opinion of Dick's greatness either paled or rose according to what the stranger was drinking. Dick said he was from Creede, Colorado, where he had acted as marshal during the "tough days" just before he went to Dodge City to "christianize" the lawless community. He also posed as a prize fighter and never tired of telling how he "put out" Pat Crowley and other notables with knuckles or six-ounce gloves. Dick "fell in" with Mayor Stone and was appointed to the police force, and during his service had a record of never using his gun in making an arrest. His capture of a fellow who had taken refuge under a pile of boards in the Hanson and Nims lumber yard was very dramatic. "O'll stay here a week waitin' fer ye to come out," said Dick, and the poor fellow, rather than go hungry, crawled out where Dick met him with the necessary handcuffs and shackles. But Dick soon had difficulty with the administration and lost his place on the police force, so he left for Washington and New York.

"Old Calamity" Peter Long was the Irish wit and philosopher of early Perry. Calamity was a type rather than a character.

He came from Leadville way up high,
Where the snow capped mountains touched the sky,
Where men dry up but never die,
And his name is Old Calamity.

The "Chandler Gang" stood sponsor for Calamity, for

He came to Chandler in the rush,
He studied law in the underbrush,
He was always broke and never flush,
And his name was Old Calamity.

Calamity was a hard worker, was energetic, and was himself, his only enemy. He settled on a lot in south Perry and it was a battle royal

between him and "Doc" Reed upon meeting. Calamity found a deserted house on one of the lots belonging to "Doc" Reed and proceeded to appropriate it. Some one added this verse to the already long poem:

For the fun he's had, he's now in jail,
 He'll stay 'till court, for he can't give bail,
 But to keep him longer, they'll surely fail,
 For his name is Old Calamity.

There have been greater men in Perry in the early days but none better or more entertaining than Peter Long.

Harry McMann was a peculiar type of person. A short time before the Strip opened, Harry was one of the wealthiest cattle men in Texas. He met reverses and occupied himself with doing porter work for various saloons in the new city. He was the totem (luck) of the Buckhorn saloon at the opening, and as a side issue, he furnished whiskey to the Indians. For this illicit trade he escaped with but few jail sentences.

* No record of characters would be complete without the mention of "Beau Brummell, the King of Advertisers", Angus Miller. The fashion plates of New York and San Francisco did not allure Angus. His wardrobe was made along the lines of his own ideas and so well that no one dared follow his conception of style and color; probably no one had the nerve. For street work, his usual dress was the black Prince Albert, flowing red vest, and pants of pearl gray, a silk plug topping his blond locks, with all, well groomed and appropriately decorated with flashy jewelry. Angus was likewise at home in his make up of long trailing faun-tinted coat, patent leathers, and white tie, as the five-cent-package street fakir, or in dealing out the Quaker remedies at a dollar a bottle. His loquacity and breezy manner were irresistible as testified to by a local merchant who for some years retained some of the awful cigars sold him

in the winter of '93. Angus moved to California and lived on "east street", the cigar king of Los Angeles.

(R. J. "Dick" Barnes was known to every man, woman, and child in the county. Dick was born in Canada but came here with Spear, the grocer, from New Mexico on the opening day. After Spear went away, Dick was connected with every grocery store in the city. He was always cheerful and accommodating and possessed the faculty of remembering every person who came to make a purchase. It was "come easy, go easy", with Dick, and as a result, as age came upon him, it was live today and let tomorrow take care of itself. He acted as deputy county weigher for two years and was so acting when he left for New Mexico where in a short time he died.

The veteran barber, Henry Ross, was connected with the Ellis barber shop. Henry came of good Kentucky blood, but like thousands of easterners, drifted west to "grow up" with the country, spending his earnings as acquired and thinking nothing of, and apparently caring less for, the proverbial "rainy day". The rough and tumble life of the early days told on him, and with age, his eyes became affected, resulting in near blindness. His hand had lost its cunning as the old customers deserted him for the younger talent; he saw the end, and fearful that he might become a charge upon his friends, he went out to the banks of Cow Creek and ended his troubles by taking morphine.⁵

X The Buckhorn saloon did business from the first hour of the opening in a large tent, which resembled Barnum's, located near the land office, and on the acre amassed a fortune during the first few days. Under the management of Ted and Joe Hill, the resort afterwards became known as the "Honk-a-Tonk" saloon, dance hall, and gambling house, com-

5 Jones, op. cit., pp. 15-16.

bined in a frame structure which succeeded the tent. Every game of chance known to the frontier, to say nothing of the games where there was no chance for the outsider, was housed in this building.⁶

One saloon, with foot-tall letters, proclaimed "The best whiskey in town for \$1,000." The "Carolina grocery, the "White Elephant", the "Ark", the "Old Crow", and the "Original Blue Bell" saloons were all here. Others bore such names as: "Hawkeye", "Antlers", "Pawnee", "Oriental", "Anchor", "Midland", and "Board of Trade". At any hour of the day or night, the festive "rounder" or broken homeseeker was to be found on "Auction" corner which was at the junction of Sixth and "C" Streets.

The headquarters of the Kentucky Liquor Company was a popular resort for those relishing high grade goods, and it was a well appointed place where the pleasure of guests was looked after by the most courteous and hospitable caterers. A large assortment of fine imported and domestic liquors, brandies, and cordials were carried in stock. "Red Horse" Hays was in charge of the bar.⁷

With the opening came organizations of men from foreign communities and of these organizations, none was so important as that known as the "Chandler Gang". The members were town boomers and speculators, with more or less magnitude and distinction, banded together for protection and mutual assistance in their business ventures in the new city of Perry. This group was composed of pioneers of the Old Oklahoma and Sac and Fox land openings. The headquarters of the "gang" was the "Coney Island" saloon and Park's saloon and "Gambling Emporium". The

6 E. E. Dale, op. cit., p. 930.

7 Jones, op. cit., p. 13.

"gang", as a rule, kept open house day and night. They had a special orchestra and "Calamity" Peter Long furnished the principal comedy, while singers murdered the night hours with the popular songs of the day. All of this once proud and haughty gang have departed; some died peaceably; some through violence.⁸

There was also a smaller clique designated as the "Colorado Crowd", but their work was of a different order, and was confined more to the organization of north Perry and its civil and political government. Many of these men became town officials. W. A. Stone, the mayor, had gained the political hatred of this crowd because they were not allowed to secure all the appointments on the police force and other offices.⁹

Riot reigned supreme day and night. Each saloon on the acre, as well as over the city for that matter, had its music; the fiddler and the piano were the limit in orchestration, and the latest popular airs of the day and the night were "on tap" at all times; sung better or worse, depending on the condition of the singer, from an alcoholic standpoint. "After the Strip is Opened", a very appropriate parody on "After the Ball", was the reigning favorite among the vocal classics. It was sold on the streets for the small sum of ten cents, and one singer in the "Blue Bell" made twenty-three dollars by singing that many verses or one verse that many times to a disappointed homeseeker who ran against a "Sooner" on his contested farm, and was trying to drown his sorrows. It was indeed a pathetic and touching ballad.

Prize fights were numerous at the "Buckhorn" and Ed Shaughnessy.

8 Ibid., p. 17.

9 Perry Daily Journal, September 14, 1934, p. 9.

of some pugnacious reputation, shown with more or less scintillation. Lewis Lawless, the colored heavyweight, made pugilistic history in Perry in the great battle with Bill Wells, a six-foot, two-hundred pound colored opponent. Lewis knocked his man out in a few rounds and went home. The crowd, eager for more, sent for Lewis and made him continue the fight when in about fifteen rounds he was put down and out.

Jack Crowley, later on the police force, was one of the eager aspirants for pugilistic honors and did wonderful battle before a packed house with Paddy Shea of Wichita.

With the removal of the land office, the lawyers departed, saloons went out of business, buildings were moved off, and today the north half of "Hell's Half-Acre" is vacant and is given over to a show lot for small tented aggregations that visit the city.¹⁰

Crime in the early history of Perry has probably been greatly magnified. Of the sundry and numerous outlaws laid low by the trusty guns of Bill Tilghman, "Heck" Thomas, and others, there is no record of a grave marked or unmarked where rests the body of a single person who died with his boots on. The violent deceased list of early citizens of Perry is much shorter than would be generally expected.¹¹ One night two men entered a tent on the east side of the square and went to bed on the ground, using their saddles for pillows. One of the men, named Stephens, had a saddle worth about a hundred dollars. The next day found Stephens with a bullet hole through his head and his partner gone. The mystery was never cleared up, but the common

10 Jones, op. cit., p. 14.

11 Ibid., p. 29.

belief has always been that the guilty person was the one who disappeared and was never captured.¹²

"Three Fingered "Jack" was a cheap outlaw, a patron of the bar and dance tents, a "tinhorn" gambler type. In the "Buckhorn", there presided from the midnight till the morning shift, a slow, easy-going, easy-mannered westerner named Billy Haney. Jack had his "Lady Lou", a patron of the "Buckhorn", who was enamoured of the bartender Haney. It was past two o'clock one morning, with business quiet, waiting for the breaking up of the wild dances and social events, that the lady was visiting Haney, and was sitting on his lap at the head of the bar. Then appeared the three-fingered gentleman, and noting the relative position of his sweet-heart and his rival, he pulled his gun and fired. The bullet struck the woman in the arm. Another shot; this from Haney's gun, and "Three-Fingered Jack" fell mortally wounded. Haney, coolly walking around and picking up the three-digit victim, carried him cross the railroad tracks and dumped the body in the back of a dance hall where it was found shortly after by the early morning revelers. Haney afterwards married the lady who caused all the commotion and together they took up their home at the "101 Ranch". They lived, later, on a farm west of Red Rock. Years after his wife died, Haney ended his life with a six-shooter and he and his lady now rest in a little cemetery at Ceres.

The only other near killing, aside from the gun plays between jealous officers, was the incident of Jack Baugh, a big, tough, six-foot negro meat cutter. He met Lew Bolapue, a bartender, coming along

12 C. D. Merrell, conversation, September 1, 1937.

the railroad track in the east part of Perry early one morning, and in an attempted holdup, put a bullet through Bolapue's hat. Baugh served a short jail sentence for his indiscretion and was the first prisoner in the new county jail on Cow Creek. As for the primeval jail, the stone walls remain and a plebeian junk yard occupies the site.

The Dalton boys were the only organized band of outlaws in Oklahoma. They often used caves and other convenient hiding places near and around Perry. Frank, Groton, and Bob had been commissioned as deputy marshals in Indian Territory. Although they were officers, they soon became engaged in a number of minor depredations against the property rights of settlers and the three of them stole a herd of horses. In the outlaw band which they organized were also Bill Doolin, Dick Broadwell, Bill Powers, and "Black Faced" Charley Bryant. They made plans for a series of wholesale robberies which would establish them as superbandits. They combed the territory for the best riding horses they could find and made a raid on a colony of Missourians at Orlando, stole their horses, and rushed back to the Indian Territory. Next the gang held up the Santa Fe train at Red Rock. The Red Rock telegraph operator was killed and the bandits got away with only three hundred dollars. The Missouri, Kansas, and Topeka passenger train was next held up. The Dalton gang succeeded in carrying away all the valuables and money which they found and wounded several of the Indian police on the train as well as some of the passengers. The ambition of the Dalton gang was now to establish a reputation more fearful than that of the James boys or the Youngers. The majority of the Daltons, as well as the Doolins, were ex-cowboys, skilled shots, and use to riding. The express companies sent extra guards on the trains, and at one time re-

fused to accept large shipments of money to pass through Oklahoma and Texas.¹³ Their most daring plan was to rob two banks simultaneously at Coffeyville. Within fifteen minutes after the robbery, four of the Daltons were dead, and one was captured.¹⁴

Bill Doolin was a man of more mature judgment than the Daltons. He and his gang rode wildly into Wharton (Perry) a few minutes before the arrival of the Santa Fe train. They held up the train and within a very short time were off toward the Osage Hills with several hundred dollars. They were at last killed by "Heck" Thomas who had established his reputation as an outstanding law enforcement officer in Texas when he captured single-handed two desperate outlaws, the Lee brothers.¹⁵

Ben Cravens and Will Crittenden were cattle-stealers and stole many animals around Perry. A local butcher identified them. This resulted in their being placed in the Perry jail from which they escaped. The first jail was a notoriously flimsy structure and the least carelessness on the part of the guards resulted in a wholesale jail delivery. Ben Cravens, single-handed, went into the Red Rock postoffice to rob. He killed a man there and hid around in Oklahoma and Arkansas until he was captured at Caney, Kansas, by Ed Nix. He escaped the jail only to be captured and sentenced to the federal penitentiary at Leavenworth, Kansas. Cravens led the prisoners in a dash for freedom when he gained

13 Oklahoma Authors' Club, op. cit., p. 86

14 Nix, op. cit., pp. 33-53.

15 Ibid., p. 230.

his, but was later captured and is today serving his time in the Leavenworth penitentiary.

Two girls, "Cattle Annie" and "Little Breeches" were outlaws and good shots. They were captured by Bill Tilghman, taken to Perry, and brought to trial before Judge Bierer and were sentenced to the reformatory at Framingham, Massachusetts. They were escorted east by Charles Colcord and Ed Nix. The Oklahoma girl outlaws were a curiosity in Boston, where great crowds gathered to see them.¹⁶

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 132-137.

CHAPTER III

DEVELOPMENT OF THE BUSINESS DISTRICT OF PERRY

The first buildings erected around the square were built with no regard for the grade of the streets or sidewalks. As a result, when Street Commissioner Buck cut the streets down to grade, some of the buildings were left four or five feet above the street level. Board walks were constructed leaving a drop of some feet from the sidewalk to the street. This was convenient for wagons backing up to take a load of hardware or groceries, as well as for horseback riders to step off for an easy mount. With the erection of permanent buildings evacuation was necessary to bring the buildings to the common grade around the square. Cement sidewalks replaced the board ones. Later the streets were paved with bricks.

Hitch-racks were a necessity for the farmer folk and the wooden structures of the first year were removed and stone blocks with chain attachments were put up. With the retirement of "Old Dobbin" and the coming of the automobile, these blocks and chains were thrown into the discard.

The automobile traffic was inaugurated when O. H. Hovey, a traveling salesman, printer, musician, and a man of other numerous occupations and various vocations, drove into town with his one-cylinder Oldsmobile. This car had bicycle tires, inflated by a hand pump, and no inner tubes. Its owner was able to make about eighteen miles per hour at top speed. Mr. Hovey put on some wonderful exhibitions around the square and was stopped often by Chief of Police Boright for engaging in dangerous and reckless driving.¹

1 Jones, op. cit., p. 13.

In the early day the people used banks for convenience and not especially to safeguard their money which was scarce and inflated.¹ One was regarded as a rich man if he had two hundred and fifty dollars in cash or in property.

The bank examiners were men of the world--some were extraordinarily so--and the banker was often asked to go to the saloon just to pass the time away, as the examiners were in no hurry to get through. There were no early state laws governing banking and any one with one hundred dollars could organize such an institution.²

After the Exchange Bank had been organized and opened, it was moved into what had been a saloon building. Fred G. Moore, the first president, established the bank. He was a member of the Territorial Bankers' Association and was one of the town's most prominent citizens.³ One of the first customers was a saintly colored woman who came to the bank door, and with lowered head, asked for fifteen cents worth of whiskey. When she looked up and saw the cashier of the bank, Harry McCandless, whom she well knew, she exclaimed, "My goodness, what are you doing here? I was getting this for a sick friend."

The Noble County Bank, which was organized by L. C. Parmenter, was absorbed by the First National bank, and the new business was moved into the building originally occupied by the Noble County Bank.

The Bank of Perry headed the list of banks with a capital of fifty

2 Perry Daily Journal, September 9, 1935, p. 5.

3 Genealogy and Biography, "Portrait and Biographical Records of Oklahoma", Chapman Publishing Co., Chicago, Ill., 1901, pp. 32.

thousand dollars and was the only incorporated bank in the city. F. K. Robinson was the first president, Fred Farrar the cashier, and V. C. Talbert was assistant cashier. The bank came to Perry with high esteem and good will of everyone who knew its officers. It numbered among its stockholders some of the best men of the state of Kansas. The Bank of Perry began under more favorable auspices than any bank in the new country. Its resources were great and its management was by men of known ability and sterling worth. It possessed a fire-proof vault, the only one in the city.⁴

The Farmers and Merchants Bank was one of the early institutions in Perry. It was a private bank and had a capital of thirty-five thousand dollars. H. L. Boyes was the president and L. D. Treeman was the cashier. Jim Taylor graduated from the Coyle grocery to the bank. These men transacted a general banking business, lent and received money on deposit, and bought, sold, exchanged, and discounted negotiable papers.⁵

Newspapers came to Perry with the opening. Bert Green came with the Perry Times, a daily and weekly. The issue of September 16, 1893, was printed in Guthrie and brought to Perry for distribution during the afternoon. After a few years Green sold the Times to V. C. Welch, who consolidated it with the Enterprise Times. The Enterprise Times was in turn absorbed by the Perry Republican. This paper later consolidated with the Sentinel, and the Sentinel with the Perry Journal. The Evening Democrat, a newspaper of importance, was owned by Tom Stumbaugh and Bob

4 Jones, op. cit., p. 24.

5 Perry, Oklahoma. Pamphlet printed by the Perry Daily Times, 1894.

Galbreath, and was on the street a few days after the opening. This was the first official organ of Perry, as the resolution by the County Commissioners of County "P" testifies:

"Resolved that the Evening Democrat published in the city of Perry, Oklahoma Territory, be and the same is hereby designated as the official paper of "P" County, and the county officers of said county are hereby directed to have all legal publications required to be published, published in said paper.

Approved this 28th day of October 1893.

T. D. Nichols, Chairman."⁶

The Patriot, a Populist paper, took advantage of the wave of Populism, but as it became involved in blackmailing, it soon collapsed, and was absorbed by the Democrat, becoming the Democrat-Patriot. This paper was sold to the owner of the Perry Republican. The Republican and the Sentinel were later consolidated into the Perry Journal.⁷

Other sheets came and went, namely, the Perry Independent, The Perry Rustler, The Kiowa Chief, The Oklahoma Herald, The Perry Eagle, The McKinley Teller, and the Oklahoma Neurkerten, a German weekly publication, put out in support of the Democratic party by Gustav Pietrusky.⁸

Lon Wharton came over from Chandler the first day with his Perry Sentinel. His outfit consisted of a Washington hand press. Newspaper life with Mr. Welch was one continued round of pleasure; he fought the grafters; he liked argument; he was blackmailed and abused, burned out, started anew, and finally sold out. A great deal of the newspaper

6 Commissioners Court Proceedings, County "P", I, p. 6.

7 Jones, op. cit., p. 27.

8 Carolyn Thomas Foreman, Oklahoma Imprints, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1936, p. 248.

business came from publishing divorce notices.⁹

Perry was pre-eminently a city of young men since all of the opportunities were easily within their grasp. It was one of the places on earth where every man was esteemed according to his worth, and there was no handicap for the great race of position in business and in the social world.¹⁰

Perry's present (1938) mayor, Mr. H. H. Reynolds, has many memories of the early days of the Cherokee Strip and of other land openings. He made the run in four other land openings in Oklahoma: Old Oklahoma in 1889, the Iowa, the Sac and Fox, Shawnee and Pottawatomie Indian Countries in 1891, Cheyenne and Arapahoe in 1892, the Cherokee Strip in 1893 and the Kickapoo in 1894. Before Mr. Reynolds began following the Strip openings, he was a mail carrier in "No Man's Land." He also attended the Kiowa and Comanches drawing at El Reno. Mr. Reynolds states that the Cherokee Strip opening was the greatest and most spectacular. Soon after the opening he was appointed United States deputy marshal.¹¹

"The Clothiers", a dry goods store, owned by Knox and Stout was a successor to the "Knox Brothers". The father, Bethuel Knox, a short, stubby good-natured old fellow, opened for business on the south side the first week with a line of tin ware and a push cart; as a side issue, he was an auctioneer. He later opened a small novelty store where the

9 C. D. Merrell, op. cit.

10 Perry Oklahoma, op. cit., p. 17.

11 H. H. Reynolds, conversation, December 15, 1937.

youngsters, John Allen, Philip, and Charley, received their first mercantile lessons.

James Lobsitz was one of those who experienced the disappointment that so many found when they arrived to obtain the choice town lots. He came in on the first train that left Orlando at noon on the opening day, sitting next to a big fat woman. When the train slowed up Mr. Lobsitz found the aisle blocked by his enormous traveling companion, so his only outlet was through the train window. Finding some lots that had apparently not been taken, he stepped off one hundred feet and dug his stake, and squatted there until three o'clock in the afternoon. When no one attempted to contest his claim, he began to inquire and discovered that he was on the untouchable government acre. At last he got settled on the south side of the square, but like many others, he had a lawsuit before his title was clear. He was contested by George Levy, who employed the lawyers, Allen and Diggs. W. M. Bowles won the suit for Mr. Lobsitz.¹² "The Famous", Perry's oldest department store, opened its doors a few days after the opening of the Strip and has been doing business in the same spot ever since, with James Lobsitz as its founder. Morris Gottlieb, a young man of experience in the mercantile business, joined the Lobsitz force. Two years later his brother Sam became connected with the store in the shoe department, and two years later another brother, Rudolph, took over the dry goods department. The Knox and Stout Clothing Company purchased the store but soon sold it to the Gottlieb brothers.¹³

¹² Civil Appearance Docket County "P", I, p. 552.

¹³ Perry Oklahoma, op. cit., p. 17.

After selling it to Knox and Stout, Mr. Lobsitz began the hardware business which he still has today. Mr. Lobsitz relates that a boy going through a graveyard at night has mild fright as compared with what he experienced nightly when he returned from the store, always in possession of the money earned that day. On the corner of Seventh and Holly was the residence of Captain Morris surrounded by a high board fence, a perfect hiding place for attacking robbers. Past this Mr. Lobsitz had to go every night, but not once was he ever accosted. However, the board fence of Captain Morris remained in his memories as one of the worst things of the early days.

Will T. Little was perhaps Noble County's greatest patriot and public benefactor. He was born of the great outdoors, of the woods, and fields, and was imbued with the love of nature. In the mature years of his life, he resigned everything else to devote his mind and energy to making pleasure for future generations. Teaching soil-culture and out of door life, preaching nature's beauties, inculcating in the minds of youth and adult the idea that health and happiness are the results of communions with forests, vines, and blossoms. He published Oklahoma, a quarterly magazine, a review of reviews for farmers and city tree growers. This excellent paper was full of sound advice about the planting and care of trees, about soil and irrigation, and it must have filled a great need in the early days when it appeared. It is one more evidence of the great and lasting service performed by Will T. Little in his crusade for the planting of trees.¹⁴ He built in Central Park

14 Foreman, op. cit., p. 242.

his monument--the elm trees that are now so stately and majestic, in grace and splendor, a fitting, living memorial.

In the race for homestead claims at the opening of the Cherokee Strip, fine race horses were used by the more enterprising homeseekers. One of the finest of these, La Junta, was ridden by his master, Mr. Little, who was a born horseman. This sure-footed, swift steed was notorious for his vicious temper; he was reputed to have killed two men already and was only waiting to kill more when opportunity afforded. La Junta had never been harnessed, yet Mr. Little harnessed him, hitched him to a buggy, and drove him. When Will Little was nominated for the office of representative to the legislature from Noble County, he rode La Junta up and down the country in his campaign of personal visitation until nearly every one for miles around knew the rider and his horse. Little declared, "La Junta elected me to the legislature." When the horse was sold for the race track, the grooms were afraid of him and the jockeys would not ride him; so, La Junta never won another race.¹⁵

On Mr. Little's death the following resolution was drawn:

"RESOLUTION

WHEREAS: Death has called from our society and from public usefulness our esteemed and worthy citizen, Honorable Will T. Little, and

WHEREAS, his past record reminds us of his public spirit, his earnest and successful efforts to increase the happiness of all citizens and his pride and ambition that made the Court House Square of Noble County a lasting credit to his memory, therefore be it

RESOLVED, by the Board of County Commissioners of Noble County, Oklahoma, that the county court house be and is hereby ordered closed and all business of a public nature in said county, be suspended during the hours of funeral

¹⁵ Perry Daily Journal, September 14, 1934, p. 10.

service of this noble citizen, William T. Little, which shall be on the seventh day of July, A. D., 1908, from the hours of two o'clock P. M. till four o'clock.

Attest

J. E. DOLEZAL
Co. Clerk

D. A. HURLEY
J. W. YOCE Board of County
S. M. BELDERBACK Commissioners." 16

The quarter section upon which north Perry is now located was claimed the first day by Henry Linn, he having tried to establish proof of his prior settlement and occupancy against thousands who were upon the land staking and claiming lots within an hour after the opening. A contest resulted between Linn and the settlers, the same being instituted in the local land office. The case was fought through the departments at Washington with the result that after three or four years of expensive litigation, the settlers won.¹⁷

Linn was a speculative genius, a genuine Oklahoma rustler, and had been "through the mill" in the land openings for years prior to the opening of the Strip. Had he won this case it would have made him a handsome fortune, as north Perry has since grown to be a fashionable portion of the city. After losing his contest, with his nerve as his solitary asset, Linn drifted farther west and when last heard of was exploiting a gold dredging scheme in the rivers of Idaho.

Northwest Perry was homesteaded by "Billy" McCoy, one of the clerks in the local land office. His contest was short lived, the claimants getting rid of him within a few months. Bill was a Milwaukee product and after the boom days of the town had subsided, he went back to Wis-

16 Commissioners Journal Noble County, p. 363.

17 District Court Records of County "P", I, p. 94, also Civil Appearance Docket of County "P", I, p. 4.

consin and resumed the place on the police force which he had resigned to come to Perry.

John Malone, brother of the registrar of the land office, was the contestee of northeast Perry. The settlers defeated him in his fight and soon he became insane. He was taken to Jacksonville, Illinois, and committed to the asylum, where he died.¹⁸

The contest over west Perry was a battle royal. Henry Bowie, one of the real characters of the early days, filed his homestead entry on the quarter section and against him were a thousand lot claimants. Bowie had come here from Texas. He was a direct descendant of the illustrious defender of the Alamo. The contest for west Perry continued for several years, but eventually Bowie lost, and like Henry Linn, down and out, he wended his way back to his old home in Texas.

South Perry was a battlefield where various and sundry characters made their mark in early history. Charles E. "Doc" Reed, a veterinarian and practical horseman, Charles "Buffalo" Jones, a pioneer plainsman, later game warden of Yellowstone Park, a friend of President Roosevelt (T. R.), and a breeder of the "catalo", a cross of the domestic cow and the buffalo, John McClintic, Jack Combs, a soldier of fortune who died a few years ago in the Kiowa country, all were contestants for the homestead rights while against them were arrayed hundreds of settlers seeking town lot titles. This was the last of the townsite additions and resulted in "Doc" Reed winning against all claimants, the first case in the history of land opening of a homesteader winning against settlers. Reed obtained a deed to the land and later transferred it to T. H.

¹⁸ Jones, op. cit., p. 6.

Doyle. Reed was a reckless fellow and had not too pleasant a disposition when sober. He had but few friends at the finish of his local career, and he realized practically nothing after his claim to the land was recognized. The story of the run made by him and "Buffalo" Jones, as recited in the record of the land office, was most exciting. Their relays, change of horses, and break neck speed, demoniacal riding and driving, coming through from Orlando over the rough country, makes a story of dime novel interest.

Amos B. Fitts was one of the members, the disturbing agent, of the "Townsite Board". He served about six months and retired to take up his profession as journalist, assuming the editorial chair of the Perry Democrat and doing work for eastern publications. In the latter field he had a wonderful reputation. His versatility won for him the title of the "Perry Liar". This came about principally from a story of a sand storm sent out to the Associated Press that started the whole world. People from all over the United States and from abroad who had friends within hundreds of miles of Perry wrote, wired, and cabled to learn the fate of their dear ones in the awful holocaust where the burning sand was reported to have smothered live stock, drifted over fences, covered small buildings, and caused the death of thousands of people. Amos emphatically denied the authorship of the story, he being at the time a pillar of one of the local churches.

+ The successor to Mayor Brogan was Mr. W. A. Stone, a prominent lawyer. He was a real instigator of law and order and quite a character in Republican circles. W. A. Stone and Thomas H. Doyle formed a law partnership on the north side of the square. Doyle was one of the active promoters of civic industries of the city and county. He was a

factor in statehood convention work, was a member of the fourth and fifth session of the territorial legislature, and was adviser in all lobby work of the various legislatures.

X During the first month A. Kraemer opened his one man shoe shop and became one of Perry's town builders. He soon carried a full line of high quality men's wear and still owns the only man's store in Perry.

Christoph and Newton, furniture dealers, were in Perry at the opening. The undertaking branch of their business was added within the next few years. The furniture building is located on the corner where the "Old Crow" saloon once stood. When the store opened Mr. Christoph dealt in strictly second-hand furniture. He was one of the successful merchants, having come here from Colorado with a set of carpenter's tools and gone to work at his trade. He had an argument over wages, and started a second-hand store with the tools as his stock. His stepson, George Newton, soon joined him.

Few legitimate merchants began business around the square. The speculators and lot boomers were the first and buildings erected merely for the purpose of holding the lots and suitable only for restuarants, saloons, and real estate offices. Consequently the bigger business men occupied buildings on the side streets of the square.

The first hotel in the new city was the "Perry House" owned and operated by Mrs. Vervalin. This enterprising lady first operated in a large tent on the public square. She had shipped a carload of fine furniture from Denver previous to the opening of the country and for many weeks her place was the only establishment where ladies and gentlemen could obtain suitable lodging. The "Perry House" was located on Sixth Street between "B" and "C" streets. The hotel was well arranged

for the large business it maintained; the accommodations were ample to lodge from sixty to sixty-five people. The rooms were elegantly fitted with oak furniture, brussels carpet, and everything necessary for the comfort of the guests. Mrs. Vervalin was a genial landlady and was thoroughly devoted to the welfare and entertainment of her guests.

Bob Kite and family came from their farm near Red Rock and opened the "St. Louis" restaurant. A new building was later erected and it became the leading hostelry of the city, the "St. Louis" hotel. For years Bob plied his carpenter trade while Mrs. Kite conducted the hotel. Mr. Kite died some years ago, but Mrs. Kite-Shimmer still is the proprietor of the hotel.

A favorite resort was the all-night restaurant of the Rueb brothers, Albert, Alex, and LeRoy. These boys were located in a dug-out near Wharton before the depot was moved to Perry and came to town when the trains quit stopping at Wharton. A bakery was annexed to the restaurant. The boys were good providers and kept the best eating house in the city, but they had plenty of troubles. They were on the street up town from the "red light" district, whose turmoils and battles kept the town supplied with midnight and early morning static. Every rounder, after midnight, when there was nothing to do around the saloons, ambled down to Rueb's. It was a nightly occurrence for the late wayfarer to see any number of fleeing forms go by down the line from Rueb's. "Catch him Alex!" "Give it to him, LeRoy!" rang out on the after-midnight air and throughout the battle, the night policeman, Bill Penn, waited on the half-sober customers and complacently took his midnight lunch. Instinctively, every battler reached for the catsup bottle as his first weapon. But, other than Bill, only one person won the battle at Rueb's;

strangely enough it was Angus Miller, the Beau Brummell salesman of the city. On an early morning parade he drove the proprietors to call the police reserves. Finally the Rueb partnership was broken up and the last of the brothers have departed from the city.

The "Blue Point" restaurant was famous the first winter for jack-rabbit stew and kaffir corn cakes. The latter, as a dish of society, promised to prove a revolution in good eating.

The pioneer of the school of pharmacy, E. E. Howenboler, was located in Perry for a number of years. Fred Beers was graduated from this school. Dr. D. D. Brengle was an auxiliary of the Howendobler force and in the early days traveled about the country in a highly decorated show-wagon drawn by four or six white ponies with liveried colored drivers, advertising the doctor's wonderful catarrh cure. Angus Miller acted as orator in the towns visited.

R. T. "Lord" Brook was the sport of all sports of the early days, with the beautiful Maude Parker, as his companion. He was of the English aristocracy with an income from the old country that he took delight in spending. In the beginning he was easy for the western rounder and speculator to handle, but the "Lord" enjoyed the workings of the gangs as much as they enjoyed separating him from his money. The "Lord" and his lady were the leaders of the "400" of the society of the first winter, a group which the rounders designated as the "dirty dozen". The "Lord" found Perry gradually slowing up with society's reformation and went to live on a farm near Tonkawa which he bought. In this town he opened an elevator and went into the grain business. His companion, Miss Parker, had a claim which was contested and when one of the contestants became too obstreperous around the premises he was shot and

killed by Brooks. Brooks had received several months training in Perry with the "Chandler Gang"---crooks and outlaws---and was an excellent shot. He was acquitted of the charge of murder, but his activities led to much argument and gained for him some enmity of the rural and town elements in Tonkawa. So Brooks bought the Tonkawa newspaper and ran a free subscription list with himself as editor, just to play even with his enemies. He had an automobile of the finest type, a pack of bloodhounds, and a special trainer, one hundred Angora cats, and a tribe of imported parrots, in fact a large sized zoological park at his home. He occasionally took a "spurt" of paying from ten to twenty cents over the market price for wheat just to please the farmers. Tonkawa too became civilized in a short time and Brooks disposed of his possessions and moved to Arkansas where there was plenty of room to exercise his sporting proclivities and to spend his money without being criticised by gossiping neighbors.

† On the north side of "C" street, Ed Coyle erected the first cotton gin. Later he moved it to the north and west along the right of way of the Frisco where it now stands.

Nels Darling presided over the sash and door and general lumber business. When he left Perry he made quite a reputation for himself in state commerce and on the lecture platform.

† The city of Perry boasts of the largest and most thrifty commercial organization in Oklahoma Territory. It was organized soon after the Strip was opened and has enjoyed from the first the hearty and united support of the citizens of the city. The board of trade was incorporated under the laws of the Territory of Oklahoma and chartered for twenty-one years. The important work accomplished the first year consisted in the

dissemination throughout the United States of accurate information relative to the city of Perry and the surrounding Cherokee Strip. At home its efforts have been directed toward the promotion of all commercial and municipal enterprises which have for their object the betterment of local conditions. These standing committees were provided for: ways and means, municipal affairs, railways, manufactories, advertising, membership, territorial affairs, and public institutions.¹⁹

The Excelsior Steam Laundry, owned and operated by J. G. Hill, was complete in every particular, comprising all the latest machinery, and had a capacity sufficient for a city of ten thousand people. The work turned out excelled that of any foreign laundry doing business in the city. The plant which had been established, employed from ten to fifteen people and helped build up Perry. A fine delivery wagon called for and delivered the laundry.

Shortly after the opening, the matter of fire prevention was taken up by the city council and a committee advertised for bids for a chemical engine, hook and ladder wagon, and fire department fixtures. Then Mayor Brogan called an election to vote sixty thousand dollars for water works bonds.²⁰

In the early days the water supply was a domestic problem as well as a fire prevention one. The government had one well dug on the town site in the center of Brogan and Flynn Streets. A spring on east "A" Street furnished drinking water and supplied a laundry resort where one could retire and do the family washing. Wells were dug for residence

19 Perry Oklahoma, op. cit., p. 8.

20 Record of Council Proceedings, No. I. City of Perry, p. 55.

properties as well as for business houses. Bill Gates, the water man, supplied the business houses from his wagon, making the rounds continually all day long.²¹

One of the most destructive fires of the early days burned down four frame buildings on the northeast corner of the square. In an upstairs room of one of the buildings, a group of men were having their nightly poker game, and by accidentally upsetting the coal oil lamp, the men set fire to the old frame structure. In those days the bucket brigade did noble service and to this day there is an ordinance of the city requiring two barrels of salt water to be kept in front of each business house for use in case of fire. With no fire alarm siren, the alarm was given by six-shooters, a forty-four gun being one of the accessories of every business house, saloon, and gambling house.

The Perry water and light plant was established by private individuals and operated thus until the city purchased the concern through a bond loan. The fire department soon came to be recognized as one of the most efficient in the state.²²

Henry Beard, later United States marshal of the eastern district, was the first fire chief of Perry. The Pabst Brewing Company presented to the city a hose cart, hand-drawn. Then came the water works with a horse-drawn truck; the team of white horses was lent to the city by C. O. Burch, a livery man.²³

21 Ibid., p. 45.

22 Perry Daily Republican, September 23, 1902.

23 Perry Daily Journal, September 13, 1934, p. 14.

CHAPTER IV

"LAWYERS AND NEAR-LAWYERS"

(In the early day Perry was a mecca for lawyers as well as saloon keepers. Between one hundred and one hundred twenty-five lawyers, attorneys, barristers, judges, legitimate and otherwise, some of the latter class self-confessed, were available at any hour of the day or night to assist the anxious claimant out of or into trouble. These men rushed into the Cherokee Strip on the first day and fought and bargained for their make-shift offices.¹ The presence of the land office sustained many of the lawyers. The ninety-day divorce law brought many clients for them to fight over. In view of this fact, several of the attorneys favored special boarding houses as their own, sent their clients there and registered them. In ninety days the client could come back, prove by the boarding house record that he or she had been a resident for the required length of time and be granted a divorce. However, with the removal of the land office, and the enactment of a law by congress requiring a year's residence for divorce, the greatest source of income for the lawyers was cut off, and one by one they left, presenting a fair example of the "survival of the fittest." At first, all this only embittered the strife and made the enmity between individuals or groups the more extreme. Rackets were profuse; court fights were plentiful, and the lawyers fought their cases on the theory that noise was argument. The first records of the probate court were of the nature of an overworked justice-of-peace-court. Hundreds of cases of fighting, destruction of property, and the carrying of con-

1 P. W. Cress, conversation, September 19, 1937. Mr. Cress was one of the "early day" lawyers and is still practicing in Perry.

cealed weapons, occupied all the court's time.² Many of the lawyers left of their own volition, for greener fields and newer pastures; others were taken by death, and some by the sheriff. It was a motley group. (Some were youngsters starting with their diplomas and new hopes; some were aged, had made failures in other localities and came to Perry for a new start. Some were really high class attorneys and legitimate practitioners, while many had never perused even the rudiments of Blackstone but had been admitted to practice only to pettifog and graft on the unsophisticated homeseekers.) (Many of them got no farther than having their names entered on the docket; some did not stay long enough to get acquainted. Many of them did well consequent to "the survival of the fittest," and are with us today, over the state or nation, prospering in their profession. Of those scores of good and bad lawyers in the earliest days, there are still practicing in Perry; Henry S. Johnston, W. M. Bowles, P. W. Cress, and H. A. Johnson. "Bob" Williams stayed long enough to take a course in the finer points of legal ethics, then he traded his standard library of one volume of the Oklahoma statutes for a ticket to Muskogee. Thence he returned as governor of the state and later became federal judge on the east side.

Thomas H. Doyle, long a member of the state criminal court of appeals, is now chairman of the state industrial commission. He was the author of the "Free Range Bill." Doyle was one of the active promoters of civic industries in the city and county. He was a factor in statehood convention work; was a member of the fourth and fifth sessions of the territorial legislatures; promoted the Carnegie library for the city; aided in securing the two townships annexed from Payne County; and

² Attorney's Docket County "P", 1893, pp. 1-173.

in fact, was connected with every promotion of any moment for the betterment of the city and county. Doyle was doubtless the biggest and best known character of the multitude of great and near-great sent out from our city.³

Dick T. Morgan went to congress for a term. He was the author of Morgan's Manual of the United States Homestead, Townsite Mining Laws. He also published Morgan's Digest of Oklahoma Statutes and Supreme Court Decisions. He was chairman of the first Republican convention in Oklahoma and was for ten years president of the Oklahoma Christian Missionary Society.

Henry S. Johnston, after serving as county attorney, was a member of the territorial legislature, a member of the constitutional convention, a member of the first state legislature, and governor of Oklahoma. He is now at home practicing law.

W. M. Bowles was elevated to the district court bench after serving as city attorney, county attorney, and a member of the territorial legislature. He is now one of the old school, practicing law in the city.

In the legal profession, the judges and attorneys of the early days who had responsible positions, were men of character and ability. Judge Sam Harris was the first county attorney. A. S. G. Bierer served as Perry district judge. He was appointed by President Cleveland and has long been a familiar figure in Oklahoma politics.⁴

A. Duff Tillery was the first city attorney, was three times county judge, and a member of the legislature. E. D. Nix and Charles Colcord

³ Jones, op. cit., pp. 10-12, 28.

⁴ Rex Harlow, Oklahoma Leaders, Harlow Pub. Co., Oklahoma City, 1928, pp. 403-405.

were United States marshals. Colcord made the run on a thoroughbred saddle horse trained for the occasion. He established the Kentucky Stock Farm of one thousand acres near Perry and raised thoroughbred horses and shorthorn cattle. Later he moved to Oklahoma where he was a financier.⁵

In the beginning, Pawnee and Osage Counties were attached to "P" County for judicial purposes, and the judge here also held court in the Panhandle. Young lawyers obtained free transportation to and from Pawnee by getting themselves appointed deputy marshals to aid the United States marshal in taking his prisoners to court.⁶

5 Genealogy and Biography, op. cit., p. 479.

6 Jones, op. cit., p. 12.

CHAPTER V

ORGANIZATIONS, SOCIETIES, CHURCHES, AND SCHOOLS

The Methodists answered the call of Reverend Thomas Wolcott and on October 8, 1893, their first regular church services were held on the north side of the square in the Banks and Wade building. The first Methodist Episcopal church was built in February, 1894, at the cost of one hundred and sixty-five dollars on the corner of Tenth and Elm Streets. The next church was erected in 1900 at a cost of four thousand dollars. It was dedicated with an indebtedness of eleven hundred dollars. During the morning services pledges to the amount of eleven hundred forty-three dollars and eighty cents were made.

The ground was broken for the erection of the Christian church on November 1, 1893. For six months meetings had been held in a tent and later in Smith's Hall on "D" Street. Dick T. Morgan helped with the organization of this church.

The Baptist church was officially organized in December, 1893, with twenty-three charter members. They met regularly in a tent where the church now stands. In 1894 the church was built. The first minister was Reverend F. M. Barry.

In December, 1893, the Presbyterians also were in a tent in the rear of the present location.¹

Reverend S. P. Meyers was the dean of the ministry in Noble county. He made the run from the Orlando line and settled on a good quarter section, which he still owns, a mile and a half southwest of Perry. Parson Meyers delivered the first sermon in Perry, holding the meeting in an

1 Daily Enterprise Times, July, 1901.

unfinished hardware building on the north side of the square. Beer kegs and boards were used for seating the congregation. The group finally raised the price of a tent and it was erected on the present location of the Presbyterian church. With cold weather coming on, the Woodward building on the corner north of the Merchant's Hotel was used. Here services were held until the rection of the church in 1895. After the change in Perry, the Reverend Mr. Meyers and his invalid wife went back to their farm.²

In the new town of the Cherokee Strip, four weeks after the opening, a young priest who had just arrived from Belgium and who was little familiar with the English language, and not at all with western life, inaugurated his ministry by looking up the Catholic people in Perry. He was the Reverend A. Borremans, assistant to Father Felix de Grasse of Guthrie. The church was organized with a membership of between ninety and one hundred families. Several priests stationed at Guthrie were placed successively in charge and made regular visits, administering to the spiritual needs of the people. The historic barn of the old Coyle place at Ninth and "C" Streets was converted on several occasions into a place of worship. There Mass was celebrated, the sacrament administered, and the first marriage performed. Mr. Coyle gave the lots for a building and the church was completed the following year. The solemn blessing of the edifice was performed by the Reverend Bishop Meerschart, D. D. The church remained a mission until the next year when Father Willebrord was appointed rector and became the first resident pastor. Stillwater, Ingalls, Marshall, Garber, Red Rock, and other

² Perry Republican, Vol. XVII, No. 37, September 13, 1911.

stations were dependent upon the Perry mission. In 1900 a two-story Catholic school was erected. The academy was in charge of the Sisters of Divine Providence whose order is devoted exclusively to education.³

It was not until the winter of 1900 that the Lutheran mission was opened in Perry. Reverend Jul Huchtansen was the pastor. In November, 1901, the Lutheran Church was officially organized and in 1904 the present church was built.⁴

As things were in a more or less chaotic condition, it is impossible to get a complete history of the growth of the schools in the early days.⁵ However, the settlers made various provisions for schooling. Short terms were maintained in all sorts of places--dugouts, sod houses, shanties, and tents. These early schools were greatly handicapped for want of room and in many instances they were far from inviting as to convenience and equipment. Teachers were paid by popular subscription and other expenses were met in the same way. When the town was barely six months old, it found itself with a board of education, a superintendent of schools, and a complete corps of teachers. At the city election a school board was elected, consisting of A. J. Garvin, W. M. Bowles, Dr. O. W. Long, R. E. Bagby, T. J. Taylor, J. A. Cruickshank, W. H. Dyer, and Dr. W. J. Gillett.⁶

The first school consisted of many kinds of children from all parts of the United States representing cultured and refined communities, and communities of no educational privileges whatever. They were a

³ Ibid., May 29, 1917.

⁴ Perry Daily Journal, September 11, 1935.

⁵ The Noble County News, July 4, 1902.

⁶ Record of Council Proceedings No. I., City of Perry, p. 46.

heterogeneous mass of children thrown together in crowded, poorly lighted and poorly heated quarters, with as many different kinds of text books as there were families represented, and of various editions. The teacher bridged the chasm. The terms the first year were of two to four months. The teachers received from twenty to thirty dollars per month, and very few of them were able to cash their warrants at par.

During the spring, taxes were levied but none were collected. The teachers were being paid in school warrants which were being discounted at fifty per cent on the dollar; so, they effected a strike. At this time the superintendent received seventy dollars per month, the elementary teachers fifty, and the colored teachers forty-five. The first permanent record of the school board was for the term of 1895-1896.⁷

✓ The Tuesday Afternoon Club was organized in 1894 by a few ladies in the vicinity of Seventh and "C" Streets. Mrs. Bullen's hospitality furnished the "Club Home", the motto is "Mutual good will and mutual benefit." The club limit is twenty-five and each member must be married. The Progress Club was organized in 1899 and was federated in 1900. Its motto is "Not matter, but mind." Membership is limited to thirty, either married or single.

No one knows when the lines of society were first drawn in the new town. Dances, socials, and parties were held regularly the first winter. The Cherokee Dancing Club, promoted by the handsome Corrigan, the attorney, and Henry Decker, was the first of its kind in the new city, and Pedro, the harp player, was in demand at all functions.⁸

7 The Noble County News, July 4, 1902.

8 Perry Republican, September 13, 1911.

The Grand Army of the Republic was a strong organization in Perry. Judge Wesley Taylor of Perry was Department Commander of Oklahoma and C. H. Rice was Commander of the Homer G. Jones Post No. 43 of Perry. S. P. Strahn was Adjutant General. The Woman's Relief Corps was organized with eleven members.

The Stonewall Jackson Camp No. 1611, United States Confederate Veterans, was established with thirty members representing nine southern states. The objects organization were historical, benevolent, fraternal, and social. The officers were: W. H. Primrose, commander, Hamilton Ellis, adjutant, W. McKay Dougan, first lieutenant, and J. B. Trail, chaplain.

The Woman's Christian Temperance Union was organized with Mrs. Mentz as president, Mrs. Fulton, secretary, and Mrs. Davenport, treasurer. This organization tried to develop temperance sentiment by union gospel temperance meeting lectures, loyal temperance meetings, and mother's meetings. The sixth annual convention was held in Perry in 1906. Congressman Flynn represented the territory in an address of welcome. A state convention was also held in Perry the following year. Noble County had one of the largest gains in membership during the year. The absence of sectionalism was stressed.⁹

The Anti-Horsethief Association met at the opera house in 1906 with six hundred and seventy members present. The organization was a terror to that class of criminals. It was composed of honorable, upright citizens who believed in law and justice and who were organized to protect themselves against thieves and lawbreakers. The notorious

⁹ The Noble County News, July 4, 1902,

"Lee Gang" of horse thieves was captured. They had committed a number of robberies and at last were discovered along the banks of Cow Creek. All the Lee brothers finally found their way to the penitentiary.¹⁰

The Anti-Saloon League organization of Perry was one of the largest and best in the territory. It stood for law and order enforcement in every line of business. Through its efforts a number of crooked slot machines were removed from the city and many saloons changed their mode of operation. Its membership increased rapidly and its influence was felt by many.

The first wedding in Perry was that of Miss Alice Mateer and C. D. Merrell which took place in the Baptist church with three hundred guests. Mrs. Merrell imparts the information that instead of a charivari, they were serenaded by a splendid string orchestra. Mrs. Merrell was an early teacher in the rural schools of Noble County and Mr. Merrell was the publisher of the Perry Democrat.¹¹

The Perry Opera House was located on "D" Street between Fifth and Sixth Streets. Mr. John Dulaney, the proprietor of this magnificent and extravagant building was a genial gentleman of education and refinement. He had a fine library and was known among his friends as a reader and philosopher.

The main entrance to the opera house from the street was spacious and well lighted. There was a twenty foot stairway in the center and a six foot stairway on either side; the one on the right led to the gallery, while the one at the left led to the balcony. The box office

10 Noble County News, September 19, 1901.

11 Mrs. Merrell, conversation, September 1, 1937.

stood to the right in the entrance and there was also a cloak room for the convenience of patrons wearing heavy wraps.

It would have been impossible to secure a seat where full view of the stage could not be had. The ceiling was of steel, handsomely decorated, and the walls were frescoed with red and trimmed with pink and blue, with flower and scroll design outlined in gold. Two boxes were located on either side of the balcony, both elaborately decorated. The ventilation in the balcony was all that could be desired; two windows were placed on either side, and the glass was stained to harmonize with the interior. There were four aisles on the floor, two leading to the dress circle, and one on either side of the boxes. The handsome drop scenery curtain was immense. The first curtain depicted a scene representing a lady in a boat with two white swans playing about. The other was an "ad" curtain in artistic design. Two wings to match every curtain were provided. Mr. Dulaney had more scenery for stage use in the Perry Opera House than could be found in all the other Oklahoma opera houses combined. According to early day pleasure seekers, the house alone was "beautiful as a dream", an attraction in itself. But the theatre was built in such an extravagant manner that it was soon "burned down"---perhaps to pay the mortgage.¹²

The first show that came to town spread its spacious tents on the court house square. It was the "Cutler Comedy Company", a family of musicians and performers who had been turned out from Edmond. Joe Keaton broke in on this company and his acting was so very bad that Cutler fired him without notice knowing that all the applause Joe got

¹² Noble County Sentinel, October 18, 1901.

was from a "bunch of rounders" who had been brought in by Joe as "boosters". Joe afterwards got even with Cutler by marrying his daughter, and from this union three children were born, the oldest being Buster, the famous film comedian.

Bill Banks came along with his medicine show as the next attraction and played a whole week.

∟ The first baseball game played in the city took place between two picked teams of the city shortly after the opening, on the square now occupied by the school building.

∟ The first brass band, after the departure of the Hill Brothers "Honk-a Tonk" musicians, met for practice at the Banks and Wade furniture store. The music of this organization was confined, not only to classics, but principally to the "rip and tear" concert work.¹³

∟ Perry, from its beginning, has always been a town with many organizations. Several of the original ones are still in existence and numerous others have been added. Many of the more recently established organizations have followed civic ideas rather than social lines.

13 Jones, op. cit., p. 17.

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