

Don't Knock It: The Holding Company, the Funeral of the Hammer, and the Transformation of Enid, Oklahoma, 1907–12



*By Aaron Preston**

The festivities began on August 17, 1911, at 3 p.m. Moving at the slow pace of a funeral procession, the band led the parade through the streets of Enid, Oklahoma, beginning at the northeast corner of the town square in front of the Chamber of Commerce Building. Thousands bore witness to, or participated in, the event. Following the band marched madrigal clubs singing jubilant parodies of “Take Me Out to the Ball Game” and “Has Anybody Here Seen Kelly?” The songs depicted Enid as a united, optimistic town. Following the bands of singers paraded mourners in automobiles, carriages, and buggies “in a procession which nearly reached around the [town] square.”¹ Pursuant to the mourners came a hearse, driven by the town’s undertaker, W. B. Penniman, in what must have been a strangely macabre scene. Thousands stood along the streets, celebrating as the hearse rolled by. At first blush, it might have seemed as though the citizens of Enid were heartless to take such delight in death. Upon closer examination,

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however, the funeral parade was not a celebration of the death of a person at all, but rather to mark the burial of a hammer.

Atop the hearse sat a giant hammer adorned with the words "Bury Me Too."² The hammer, or "knocker," signified those people who had "knocked" the city of Enid, plans to improve it, and who said that improvements to the city could not, or did not, need to be made. The hammer was set afire and its ashes buried. The *Enid Daily Eagle* dubbed it the day Enid united in banishing pessimism.³ In an August 18 article William H. Scarff of the Enid Chamber of Commerce remarked of the hammer, "Our sympathies go out to who still mourn his loss, if any there be, but we realize that their loss is our gain."⁴

It is easy to fathom why a town would decide to unite for the purposes of elevating collective morale. What is more interesting are the steps that led to this display of unity. The funeral of the hammer was not just a random, kitsch gesture, but rather a methodical act. It served as a symbol of the town's success in becoming an industrial hub, simultaneously guarding against the populace dwelling on the city's failures as it worked toward that goal. The parade was the brainchild of a committee of the Enid Chamber of Commerce called the Enid Industrial & Holding Company. The city had undergone rapid economic growth in the five years prior to the hammer parade, with the Holding Company as a driving force. Because of these rapid advancements, the town had faced economic growing pains as well, causing concerns among some citizens, who were labeled "knockers" for questioning the changes. It is only by examining both the successful and unsuccessful town building initiatives put forth by the Holding Company during this time that one can better understand the excitement and apprehension that conflicted Enid's citizens, making the hammer parade possible and necessary.

Having sprung from successful efforts to industrialize the city, the idea for the hammer parade was hatched between March and April 1911. The Enid Industrial & Holding Company, a committee of the Enid Chamber of Commerce, held meetings every afternoon and evening to consider new ideas for ways to grow industry in the town.⁵ Holding Company members felt that if the town stayed primarily agricultural, it risked losing its established industries and might not attract new industries in the future. While the presence of the Rock Island and Pacific Railroad prior to the 1893 Cherokee Outlet Land Run guaranteed Enid a sound economic foundation, the Holding Company argued that should Enid refuse to industrialize, railroads may eventually be tempted to leave, and the city would suffer.⁶

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Hammer Parade, the emblem of the “knocker” being escorted to its final resting place by Enid town boosters, August 17, 1911 (2009.095.005, Cherokee Strip Regional Heritage Center Archives, Enid, Oklahoma, OHS).

The Holding Company set a goal to raise \$60,000 to further industrialize the town.⁷ They sought to raise the money by getting Enid’s own people to purchase town lots for a sum of \$250 each. The chamber of commerce would, in turn, use the money they raised to invest in mutually agreed upon city improvements. Essentially, the Holding Company asserted that citizens had an opportunity to invest in the city itself, and the profits generated by those investments would come in the form of the increased business to the community. As such, to Enid citizens, the Holding Company described lot sales not as a donation, but as an investment. In the newspapers the Holding Company assured a return on investment, stating that after a few months they expected \$10,000 in “monthly foreign money from the north and east.”⁸ Should their goal be met, they envisioned property values doubling citywide.⁹

Though some in the community dissented, the investment movement proved extremely popular citywide. Quotes from prominent citizens who had purchased lots frequently ran in full-page advertisements in the newspaper. Professor J. E. George of the Enid Business College stated, “Enid can never get up and make a big town unless it gets out of the agricultural class and into the commercial class, and it will never



People lining the streets during the Hammer Parade, with hammer in foreground, August 17, 1911 (66.027.004, Cherokee Strip Regional Heritage Center Archives, Enid, Oklahoma, OHS).

get into the commercial class unless we get some big, factory payrolls here.”¹⁰ An executive at the Corey Printing Company stated, “Factories make a city and the Holding Company will get them.” Eugene Watrous, a prominent druggist, stated, “I believe that the Holding Company’s way is the proper way and it deserves the support of all the people of Enid.”¹¹

The Holding Company met at the Loewen Hotel to discuss their future plans on April 6, 1911. From the outset, the Holding Company desired specific improvements for the city. Committee members sought to extend the city’s streetcar lines and build a meat-packing plant.¹² A packing plant was chosen for specific reasons. Many early townspeople were farmers. With cattle already being raised in the area, the committee proposed a vertically integrated economic model in which beef cattle would not only be raised in the area, but also be processed there. The plan was shrewd because, while it served to expand the town agriculturally, it also served the Holding Company’s interest in developing the town industrially. Something happened just two months later, however, that made the plan even more economically viable: the agreement of the Frisco-Santa Fe trunk line railroad to run through Enid.¹³

The Holding Company had decided long before to campaign for construction of the packing plant by the time the trunk line decided to

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Ice plant, Enid (71.004.010, Cherokee Strip Regional Heritage Center Archives, Enid, Oklahoma, OHS).

run through Enid on June 11, 1911.¹⁴ The railroad had the potential to be a major boon for the city; even before the line was run, the agreement made selling lots to the public for the packing plant far easier. Though the agreement was in place between the city and the railroad, there was one stumbling block, the Oklahoma State Constitution. Article IX, section IX-9 of the Oklahoma Constitution stated that “the Legislature may impose additional limitations or restrictions upon the rights of any railroad company.”¹⁵ No additional rail lines could be built within Oklahoma until this was amended. There was a growing movement to do so, however, and a resolution was passed to allow construction on May 6, 1911.¹⁶ After a referendum, the law was officially amended by State Question No. 46, Referendum Petition No. 18, and adopted through an election held on August 5, 1913.¹⁷

The trunk line’s importance cannot be overstated. At the turn of the century, being a rail hub meant a town had a ready supply of goods coming into and out of the community. From the availability of medicine to materials, being a rail hub meant a town was a viable place to settle. The town had a ready way to ship goods out as well, which in turn brought more wealth and industry. Shipments previously routed through Kansas and New Orleans were now routed through Enid, bringing business with them. The acquisition of the Frisco-Santa Fe trunk line meant more than just shipping in and out of Enid. New lines

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meant ten extra crews made their homes in Enid, bringing even more opportunities for commerce into the town.¹⁸

Freight trains carried large quantities of perishable mass, including fruit, which required the the establishment of an ice plant at which all refrigeration trains were to be iced. The construction of the ice plant was chosen as another major initiative for the Holding Company. A newspaper article described work on the ice plant, built to work in conjunction with an attached creamery and fruit company:

Work on the cold storage plant has been started and is well underway, the brick wall going up and nearing completion. This building will be occupied by the Dawson and Carpenter Fruit Company, and the Puritan Creamery Company, and when finished, in connection with the new additions, will be among the largest, if not the largest buildings, in Enid.¹⁹

The addition of the Frisco-Santa Fe trunk line proved to be in step with the Holding Company's plans for industrialization in the city. The trunk line not only guarded against the fear that Enid would remain economically stagnant should it remain agricultural, but it also grew the town into a rail hub, a "Queen City of the Prairie," by growing shipping and tourism.

The establishment of the Frisco-Santa Fe Railroad trunk line was perhaps the biggest town building effort to occur in Enid since its founding, spearheaded by lobbying from the Holding Company. The announcement, however, came as a surprise to the public. One newspaper reported that people were "stunned" with the announcement and it met with some skepticism. To the townspeople the line coming to the area "seemed too big, and too far from their own plans to seem true at first."²⁰ Though it was a surprise to the public, the railroad line was no accident. The Holding Company, just as they had begun seeking construction of a packing plant, had lobbied for the trunk line.²¹ The possibility of the trunk line transformed Enid into an important railroad city on the transcontinental line, and made it a principal traffic center for the Southwest. An article openly dreamt on the possibilities:

Florida, Georgia, the Port of New Orleans, and all inland states formerly routing either farther south or north will now stop at Enid on the new line for dinner, and what not. . . . St. Louis and all movements of freight and passengers originating in Frisco Territory east and west will go through Enid, and the possibilities of the arrangement loom larger when it is remembered that these

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Enid railroad depot and Enid Mill and Elevator Company (19413.90.31.14, Cherokee Strip Museum Collection, OHS).

shipments will mean tariffs and rates that will attract people who need their advantages. It is expected that equally as much freight business will originate in the southeast for the west as in the west for the east.²²

The news of the trunk line allowed the Holding Company to sell their vision of an industrialized Enid far easier when asking the town's citizens to invest in the city for other improvements.

In the years following statehood, Enid grew rapidly and there was reason for its citizens to be optimistic about the city's future. After a lengthy drought in 1910 and the first half of 1911, less than a year before the parade that would "bury pessimism," the rains finally came. The total rainfall in 1911 far surpassed that of 1910. Farmers across the state began to report fair crop yields. One Enid businessman, Harry Louthan, remarked of the rains, "Enid looked pretty blue a few weeks ago, but the hard rains and the Holding Company enterprise have changed my point of view."²³

There were other reasons to be optimistic. This city had lobbied for and brought Oklahoma Christian University (later called Phillips University) to the community in 1907. On August 1, 1910, Enid opened a Carnegie Library on its town square. Town leaders felt a library would aid in drawing people to settle in the community.²⁴ The library also served as an outlet for information and culture in what was still

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Enid stock pavilion, 1908 (192, Cherokee Strip Regional Heritage Center Archives, Enid, Oklahoma, OHS).

an isolated community. City leaders clearly made strides to improve the town culturally as well as industrially.

More on point with the Holding Company's mission, the town boasted several economic improvements as well. In 1909 community leaders successfully lobbied to build one of the largest stock pavilions in the country, boasting electric lights, seating for five thousand people, and an arena large enough to exhibit more than three hundred head of cattle. Holding Company member J. M. Brandt was named its president. Other improvements initiated by the Holding Company included the building of a new federal building, post office, and shirt factory downtown.²⁵

The city also decided during this time to pave its streets. Talk of street paving began by 1906 in Enid. Prior to 1907 there were no paved streets in Enid. The chamber of commerce met and discussed how and where to pave the streets. One source of people knocking the city and its improvements later arose from the selection of which streets the city initially decided to pave. Some merchants around the city square were upset that streets were paved on one side of the square and not another. When it rained, unpaved sidewalks became muddy, and neglected merchants felt shoppers were more apt to go to the other side of the square for business. During this time, the Enid City Railway had been ordered to pave in between its streetcar tracks as well. The rail company saw no reason for the streets to be paved there, as they had already laid tracks. They saw it as nothing more than an inconvenience and a cost to them. Roads continued to be paved throughout the late

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Oklahoma Christian University, Enid (18827.386.B, Albertype Collection, OHS).

Oklahoma Christian University, Enid (20699.72.152.8.4, State Museum/Linden Maker Collection, OHS).





Warner Quinlan Asphalt Company paving the streets in Enid for the first time, 1907 (2008.148.035.178, Cherokee Strip Regional Heritage Center Archives, Enid, Oklahoma, OHS).

1910s. By September 7, 1909, more than five miles of concrete sidewalk had been laid.²⁶

One of the early improvements the Holding Company sought was an extension to the street rail system. They argued that streetcar lines needed to be extended on the east side of town to the new industrial areas where the meat-packing plant was planned. This industrial area was to be called “Burton’s East Enid Addition.” On August 1, 1911, the Holding Company’s campaign closed, having raised a total of \$69,850.²⁷ This massive investment, combined with the unparalleled growth both culturally (Oklahoma Christian University, Carnegie Library), and economically (Frisco-Santa Fe trunk line, ice house, pavilion) seemed like exemplary town building for Enid. What possible reasons would there be to knock the progress the city had made?

In the five years following Oklahoma’s statehood, there was much advancement in the city of Enid, much of which was spearheaded by the Enid Industrial & Holding Company. More than \$60,000 was raised successfully to erect the meat-packing plant and lengthen the streetcar lines. Holding Company members’ lobbying had been the impetus that led to the Frisco and Santa Fe Railroads to agree to run a trunk line through the city, making Enid a nationwide rail hub. The Holding Company had been the driving force behind a new post office,

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a shirt factory, and new federal building. While there had been many advancements in the city, there were several other reasons for concern and pessimism, and criticisms of the Holding Company's plans to industrialize at breakneck speed were valid.

Northwest Oklahoma underwent trying times in the early part of the twentieth century that tested the resolve of all of its residents. In 1910, just a year prior to the parade, the Cherokee Outlet experienced its most severe drought to date, recording only 18.8 inches of rainfall the entire year.²⁸ The June 8, 1911, edition of the *Enid Daily Eagle* reported record-setting temperatures all over central Oklahoma, including 108 degrees at Guthrie and 103 degrees at Oklahoma City. It reported that crops of all kinds, including corn and cotton, were "suffering generally."²⁹ There was not just concern for crops. The May 14, 1911, edition of the *Enid Daily Eagle* reported that the drought conditions that had prevailed for a considerable length of time in the past year had "seriously affected the water supply in many communities" and "it is believed that the shortage will become a menace to many cities."³⁰ The drought had ruined multiple harvest seasons and sent the price of wheat and corn up. Money was tight, particularly for farmers to whom the Holding Company were now appealing for money to continue to reinvest in the city to build the packing plant. When the rains came in summer 1911 it was certainly cause for celebration, but many were merely taking a deep breath and not ready to invest their savings in a packing plant or other ideas. Even following the parade, the Holding Company found knockers, not among those in business and industry, but among the community's farmers. In an editorial in 1913, local farmer Val Johnson wrote:

Pete says I'm a "knocker." He forgets that I led the parade that buried the Old Hammer. Furthermore, it is better to be a knocker for the farmer than like Pete who has always been for the corporation man and a knocker against the farmer.³¹

Though improvements in the city, such as the Frisco-Santa Fe trunk line and the Carnegie Library, built a case for optimism in the city, one can clearly see why the Holding Company felt the need to put on the Hammer Parade for those who knocked city improvements, and to bury pessimism in the city once and for all. There were critics. One editorial questioned how the word "knocker" was being used:

The word knocker has been misused recently. The word has recently been used very generally by groups of persons and even

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Chamber of Commerce Building, Enid, Oklahoma, c. 1909 (21460.18, Kathleen Mauck Collection, OHS).

individuals who initiate projects which are opposed or criticized by others. The term has been employed too, in cases, where a project was being promoted at the expense of the public on such a basis as to benefit only the owners. Frequently when a public spirited citizen dissents from a line of action proposed by one or more citizens he is termed a knocker by them.³²

Beyond the weather, some of the Holding Company's planned improvements concerned knockers in the city. The Holding Company was eventually successful in raising more than \$60,000 from locals to finance the construction of the packing plant, but the city never saw operation. The packing plant was to be built in Burton's East Enid Addition. The addition was to cover what is now most of township twenty-two north, range six west, section ten in Garfield County. A warranty deed was signed on February 12, 1910, stating that the Peoples Realty Company, a shell company of the Holding Company that dealt with real estate, officially granted the land to the People's Packing Company for the amount of one dollar.³³ Holding Company member J. M. Brandt was named the president. Though ground was broken on the plant, construction continually was pushed back on the project, and it was never completed. Finally, a lawsuit was filed against the People's Packing Company on March 30, 1912, in which the court

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found that the Holding Company “refused to comply with the erection of the plant,” and the land was turned back over to its previous owner, Caleb Risbringer.³⁴ The industrial addition, with the packing plant as its lynchpin, was a failure. The streetcar lines were never extended and the area remained a set of empty lots.

Other town-building efforts that were pushed through by the Holding Company also met with failure. The city had erected one of the largest agricultural pavilions in the country in 1909. The pavilion however, began to experience problems immediately. After its first year, attendance dropped sharply. President J. M. Brandt was publicly quoted as saying:

Our attendance has been a wonderful disappointment up to the present time and even last night when admittance was free to ladies there was not enough to make a respectable showing in the grand stand . . . I hope the people of Enid will appreciate the seriousness of the situation with the stock show, and before it is too late . . . if this show proves a failure, a blow will be dealt to the livestock industry of this county beyond repair.³⁵

Dropping attendance was only one of the pavilion’s issues. Another issue that led to the downfall of the pavilion may have been a crack-down on gambling. In June 1909 city attorney Horace McKeever, himself a member of the Holding Company, was approached by Frank Kirk, who operated the pavilion, about the subject of gambling. McKeever took a hard-line stance, stating that any “party who made an attempt would be arrested.”³⁶ With no possibility of races and gambling to draw locals to the pavilion, the economics of the facility changed.

In late April 1912 high winds caused severe damage to the roof of the pavilion.³⁷ Repair time, combined with growing disinterest in using the facility from breeders and farmers around the county, doomed it. Though the building had cost \$41,000 to construct only a few years earlier, it sat primarily unused by the late 1910s.

Factors such as the drought and the failure of the pavilion weighed on the minds of knockers as the Hammer Parade drew near. These failures fed into their pessimism that major steps to industrialize the town were not in the people’s best interests. His pessimism was reinforced when the packing plant failed to be constructed, despite a successful campaign by the Holding Company and significant investment by the town’s citizens. The town had made strides in industrialization, but one can see how apprehension over the Holding Company’s further large-scale industrial plans could be justified.

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Federal Building, Enid, Oklahoma (2007.037.083, Cherokee Strip Regional Heritage Center Archives, Enid, Oklahoma, OHS).

The Enid Industrial & Holding Company made many strides in industrializing the city in the years between 1907 and 1912. Among other improvements, a new library, university, federal building, post office, ice house, and pavilion were built. Perhaps most importantly, the Holding Company had lobbied for, and secured an agreement with, the Frisco-Santa Fe trunk line to run through Enid. There were, however, those who justifiably knocked some of the improvements the city leaders planned, pointing out not the Holding Company's successes, but its failures. The Hammer Parade ultimately may not have been a grand demonstration of town unity to celebrate the strides that the city had taken to industrialize. At least in part, the parade served as a necessary demonstration to convince town citizens that industrialization was the right course, and that the Holding Company's failure in the construction of the packing plant, arguments over where to pave the streets, and the worries over the previous drought were temporary.

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Endnotes

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¹ "Old Hammer, Knockers Emblem is Buried with Great Ceremony," *Enid (OK) Daily Eagle*, August 17, 1911, 1, 3.

² Ibid.

³ "Citizens of Enid Banquet and Talk," *Enid (OK) Events*, August 10, 1911, 1.

⁴ "What People Said About the Parade," *Enid Daily Eagle*, August 18, 1911, 1.

⁵ "Enid Journal of Commerce Title of Booster Publication," *Enid Daily Eagle*, July 19, 1911, 1, 6.

⁶ "Proposes Flat Rate By Railroads on All Shipments as Solution of Freight Rate Problem—Would District County," *Enid Daily Eagle*, October 31, 1909, 1.

⁷ "Lot Campaign Closed in Rousing Manner," *Enid Daily Eagle*, August 3, 1911, 1.

⁸ "Holding Company Breaks all Records by Selling 60 Lots in Yesterday's Campaign," *Enid Daily Eagle*, July 30, 1911, 1.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Trunk lines handle long distance transportation, and the addition of the Santa Fe meant Enid was to be on the main route of the railroad, while branch lines may go to other cities. "Coast Line Greater Good Fortune For Enid Than New Road Would Be," *Enid Daily Eagle*, June 5, 1911, 1.

¹⁴ "The Frisco Santa Fe Trunk Line Agreement Gives Enid Great Traffic Advantages," *Enid Daily Eagle*, June 11, 1911, 1.

¹⁵ Oklahoma Constitution, accessed August 9, 2015, www.oklegislature.gov/ok_constitution.html.

¹⁶ "Resolution on Art. 9 Sec. 9 Passed," *Enid Daily Eagle*, May 7, 1911, 1.

¹⁷ Oklahoma Constitution, accessed August 9, 2015, www.oklegislature.gov/ok_constitution.html.

¹⁸ "Coast Line Greater Good Fortune For Enid Than New Road Would Be," *Enid Daily Eagle*, June 5, 1911, 1.

¹⁹ "More Machinery for Storage Plant," *Wave-Democrat* (Enid, OK), March 25, 1910, 1.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ "Westerners Want Railroad," *Enid Daily Eagle*, April 19, 1911, 1.

²² "The Frisco Santa Fe Trunk Line Agreement Gives Enid Great Traffic Advantages," *Enid Daily Eagle*, June 11, 1911, 1.

²³ "Read What Scores of Prominent Citizens Think of the Holding & Industrial Company's Campaign," *Enid Daily Eagle*, July 30, 1911, 6.

²⁴ "Carnegie Library is Nearly Ready," *Enid Daily Eagle*, May 29, 1910.

²⁵ "Shirt Factory Employing Thirty People Has Located in Enid," *Enid (OK) Weekly Wave*, July 25, 1907, 1.

²⁶ "5 Miles of Concrete Walks in 3 Months," *Enid Daily Eagle*, September 7, 1909, 1.

²⁷ "Lot Campaign Closed in Rousing Manner," *Enid Daily Eagle*, August 3, 1911, 1.

²⁸ "Hot Weather Sends Prices Soaring Up," *Enid Daily Eagle*, June 8, 1911, 1.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ "New Water Works Operate This Week," *Enid Daily Eagle*, May 14, 1911, 2.

³¹ "Johnson replies to *Daily Eagle*," *Enid Events*, January 16, 1913, 1.

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³² “The Knocker,” *Enid Daily Eagle*, December 11, 1910, 4.

³³ Warranty deed, Garfield County Records book 62, 273, Garfield County Clerk’s Office, Enid, OK.

³⁴ Court record, Garfield County Records book 5, 145, Garfield County Clerk’s Office, Enid, OK.

³⁵ “No Day Parades After Tomorrow,” *Enid (OK) Morning News*, March 7, 1911, 1.

³⁶ “McKeever on Bookmaking,” *Enid Daily Eagle*, July 18, 1909, 1.

³⁷ “Damage from Storm,” *Enid Daily Eagle*, April 25, 1912, 1.