

# THE EDITOR AND THE MAGIC CITY: FRANK H. GREER AND THE BEGINNINGS OF GUTHRIE, OKLAHOMA TERRITORY

By *Valerie J. Grant\**

On April 20, 1889, Frank Hilton Greer kissed his young bride, said good-bye to his mother, and boarded a train bound for Oklahoma Territory. He was on his way to join in the great land rush, but with the private intention of being somewhat "sooner" than others. Hidden among timbers on a flatbed car, Greer eluded cavalry guards assigned to stop illegal sooner entries. A few dollars in a brakeman's hand and the train slowed enough for Greer to jump off within a few miles of Guthrie, the townsite he believed the most promising in the soon-to-be-opened territory.<sup>1</sup>

The young sooner spent the evening of the twenty-first waiting on the outskirts of Guthrie, studying the town and deciding where the choicest lots were located. At precisely noon, on the 22nd, Frank Greer walked out of a grove of cottonwoods and onto the townsite. Within fifteen minutes he claimed a homestead lot and a business lot. By his actions, Greer fused his life and future with the life and future of Guthrie.<sup>2</sup>

Born July 21, 1862, Greer was the fourth child of Samuel W. and Clothilda Hilton Greer. Married in Iowa, the couple moved to the newly organized territory of Kansas. There, Samuel served as superintendent of schools at Leavenworth, and later as territorial superintendent of public instruction of Kansas. Responding to his country's call, Samuel served as a captain in the Union Army, returning to Kansas after the war to face failing health and severe financial difficulties. For health's sake, the family decided to take a homestead in Cowley County, Kansas, where they remained until 1878. Frank's older brother, Edwin, left the homestead and moved to Winfield, the county seat, seeking employment. Edwin soon found work as an apprentice, or "devil," in the print-shop of the *Winfield Courier*, advancing until he became sole owner of the newspaper.<sup>3</sup>

Samuel Greer's death in 1880 encouraged his widow to move Frank and her two younger sons to Winfield, near Edwin. For educational purposes,

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Frank Greer, pictured here as a young man, used his newspaper position to promote and guide Guthrie during the town's early years (Courtesy of Oklahoma Historical Society).

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Mrs. Greer persuaded Frank to apprentice himself to his brother Edwin. Working the next nine years for the *Winfield Courier*, Frank reached the position of city editor and manager. Young, intelligent, and ambitious, he became discontent with second place, for the young editor dreamed of establishing a newspaper of his own. So, with a growing interest, Frank Greer watched the events that finally led to the opening of part of the Indian Territory. There lay the opportunity he had awaited.<sup>4</sup>

After carefully canvassing the entire matter, Edwin agreed to back Frank in the enterprise. Along the Santa Fe Railroad would be one or two good towns, for it was the only line crossing the area designated for settlement. Some men, connected with the legal department of the Santa Fe Company, were citizens of Winfield, and Edwin's position enabled him to glean inside information. One of those towns would receive the favor of the railroad, giving it distinct advantage over the other towns being established. Information said the town thus favored was Guthrie.<sup>5</sup>

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The embryonic town stirred magical images within the young man's mind. His imagination easily turned empty prairie land into a bustling, productive metropolis. Greer knew he needed more than dreams to create this "magic city"—it took people, particularly those with ambition, capital, and profession. Within reach of his hand stood the means to encourage such people to settle in Guthrie—the presses of the *Winfield Courier*. Using Edwin's presses, Greer printed the first issues of his own paper, the *Daily State Capital*, beginning March 30, 1889. In the weeks prior to April 22nd, the young journalist advertized and expounded the praises of a land he had never seen, a town not yet built.<sup>6</sup>

Full descriptions of the countryside presented a portrait sure to please everyone. Persons interested in town lots read of "a slightly rolling elevation, . . . eighty rods from Cottonwood River, a crystal, swift stream, . . . well-skirted with mixed timber."; these were the necessities required for a good townsite. Farmers read that Guthrie's countryside "is good, the bottom land along the Cottonwood and Cimarron being unexcelled in richness, . . . the uplands of reddish, sandy soil"; to Greer, it was a land perfectly suitable for farming wheat, corn, and cotton. Moreover, Greer predicted Guthrie would break the world's record in town building and be a completely established city within six months.<sup>7</sup>

The editorials flowed and the people came. The evening of April 22nd saw an estimated ten to fifteen thousand persons camped within the Guthrie townsite. Indeed, homesteaders far outnumbered town lots, resulting in the establishment of four Guthries: Guthrie proper, East Guthrie, West Guthrie, and Capitol Hill. In less than twenty-four hours, more than 3,000 tents filled the town, while businesses opened their tent flaps and Guthrie breathed life. The *Daily State Capital*, in a tent on Harrison Avenue, published its first Oklahoma edition by mid-afternoon on the 22nd. With that publication, the editor and the city joined destinies.<sup>8</sup>

Greer's success depended on owning his own business enterprise in a town of size and prominence. That potential could best be realized if Guthrie became the territorial capital, for the town winning the capital gained honor, glory, and wealth. To that end young Greer dedicated himself and his paper, promising "the *Capital* is a permanency and proposes to put forth its best efforts for Guthrie and its citizens."<sup>9</sup>

Progress reports printed in the weekly editions combined town-boosterism with promotion; cheering and encouraging the townsfolk while keeping the outside world current on Guthrie's spectacular progress. Greer boasted, "Nobody has been shot, nobody killed, and no one is suffering, no quarrels have taken place, and a better class of people than those who have settled

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Encouraged by Greer's editorials in the *Winfield Courier*, thousands of land-hungry lot-seekers rushed to Guthrie on April 22, 1889 (Courtesy of Oklahoma Historical Society).

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in Guthrie . . . cannot be found anywhere." Improvements that might induce men of capital to invest or further invest in Guthrie filled the editorials of the *Capital*. An example of this can be seen in a survey Greer conducted on the differences between Guthrie and her main rival, Oklahoma City. Results showed Oklahoma City with 4,138 population, 1,131 buildings, and 472 tents; Guthrie boasted of 15,970 population, 3,370 buildings, and 410 tents. Such growth, declared Greer, "assured consequence of its [Guthrie] being the capitol. . . . Her prosperity is assured; her greatness guaranteed; her crown of glory already setting on her fair brow as the Queen City of Oklahoma."<sup>10</sup>

Holidays lent their hand to promotion. The July 4th celebration, more than a time for honoring the nation's independence, represented an opportunity for Guthrie to shine. Hundreds of persons, encouraged to make pilgrimages to Guthrie for the holiday, might decide to remain, adding their futures and fortunes to Guthrie's. The editor encouraged the townspeople to plan a grand celebration. Members, chosen as a committee, sent invitations to a long list of dignitaries, paying particular attention to those who

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might benefit Guthrie when Congress met later to deliberate territorial legislation for Oklahoma. Included on the list were Senator J. J. Ingells of Kansas; Senator Dan Voorhees of Indiana; Honorable William McKinley of Ohio; Senator Edward Wolcott of Colorado; and Honorable W. P. Hackney of Kansas.<sup>11</sup>

Guthrie's grand celebration succeeded in drawing many visitors, but failed in drawing the important congressional law-makers to Guthrie. A printed list of events and speakers showed the dignitaries' names as conspicuously absent. Undaunted, Greer turned attention to a celebration of Guthrie's birthday which offered another promotional opportunity.<sup>12</sup>

Full of enthusiasm, the editor believed even President Harrison and Secretary Noble, as well as other prominent members of the Cabinet, would attend Guthrie's birthday party. Before plans could be formulated, however, Guthrie received word of a planned congressional delegation visit to Oklahoma on September 16, only a few days prior to the birthday celebration set for September 22nd. Their arrival gave Greer and Guthrie a chance to personally impart knowledge on Oklahoma's legislative needs, and ask for help in obtaining it. Two of the visitors, Bishop W. Perkins, of Kansas, and W. M. Springer, of Illinois, proved later they were staunch friends of the territory, both introducing in Congress bills to provide territorial organization for Oklahoma. The congressional visit proved as beneficial for Guthrie as Greer had hoped.<sup>13</sup>

Avidly concerned with all aspects of Guthrie's growth, Frank Greer meticulously recorded each step of progress in the *Capital*. The boast of a city within six months had to become reality. This meant a lot of hard work, capital investment, city improvements, and business growth. Before dealing with those, however, the matter of city lots had to be resolved as equitably as possible.

Guthrie contained no streets, alleys, or thoroughfares, just a series of consecutive lots. The mayor and city council, elected April 25th by the citizenry, appointed a survey committee headed by Colonel Ross of Ft. Smith, Arkansas, to resolve the situation. They hired Engineer C. C. Howell of the Oklahoma and Toledo Investment Company to plat the town. Howell presented the completed plat to the survey committee and city council on May 12. After citizen endorsement, the plat officially went to Secretary Noble for registration with the United States government. Remarkably, the plat caused little trouble, with those losing claims to the streets taking the situation philosophically. Breathing a sigh of relief, Greer announced, "The official plat . . . filed, the streets cleared, staked, and named, . . . a man is now safe in buying property in Guthrie."<sup>14</sup>

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The town plat registration encouraged business investment. Now secure in their land holdings, businessmen felt free to establish their businesses on a permanent basis—and business abounded in the new town. Three months after its founding, Guthrie boasted of five banks, fifteen hotels, ninety-seven restaurants and boarding houses, twenty-three laundries, forty-seven lumber yards, seventeen hardware stores, forty dry goods stores, twenty-seven drug stores, and fifty grocery stores. Altogether 973 business houses, 315 lawyers, and 275 doctors had established themselves within the city.<sup>15</sup>

Such a massing of businessmen in a vicinity does not in itself ensure prosperity. Aware that much of Guthrie's success rested in the hands and pocketbooks of business establishments, the editor sought all means of aiding and expanding trade. He suggested patronage of all the neighboring towns, making Guthrie the region's commercial center. The difficulty herein lay with Oklahoma Avenue being the only available route into Guthrie from the Cimarron River. Its inadequacy prompted Greer to suggest opening Harrison Avenue as a second route. This brought an immediate clash with the Santa Fe Railroad, which owned the right-of-way at the end of Harrison Avenue. Refusing the expansion across their tracks, Santa Fe officials asserted the two avenues were too close together. Although angered by the refusal, Greer conceded the point, then turned to the idea of opening Villa Avenue, 710 feet south of Oklahoma Avenue. When the Santa Fe proved adamant in refusing any opening across their tracks, Greer decided a bridge across the Cimarron might solve the problem.<sup>16</sup>

In proposing a bridge, the editor noted that "Farmers and overland immigrants are continuously harassed by miring in the quicksand of this treacherous stream." A bridge would enable farmers and others access into Guthrie even when the waters rose high. When merchants proved reluctant to shoulder the cost of building a bridge, Greer suggested a ferry at reduced cost. One or the other was an absolute necessity, and he bluntly told the townspeople that if the merchants failed to act, then Guthrie-at-large must do so for the commercial interests of the town. The citizenry met September 24th, creating a committee to undertake the project of a bridge, and to ascertain the farmers' willingness to contribute. Town architects Joseph Foucart and L. Villeroy were commissioned to design a bridge and estimate its cost. Foucart and Villeroy presented their design in early October. Guthrie's lumbermen donated \$500 worth of lumber while the farmers offered to furnish piles for the bridge free and to grade the approaches. It only remained for the businessmen to contribute the \$1,000 needed to finish the project. Hounded by their city editor, Guthrie's businessmen dug into pocketbooks and the Cimarron River gained a bridge.<sup>17</sup>

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Earlier in September, Greer became aware of another trade source not exploited by the merchants of Guthrie—the Indian trade. Within a thirty-five mile radius of Guthrie lived the Iowa, Sac and Fox, Kickapoo, and Pottawatomie Indians, who needed a trading center. Additionally, these Indians received more than \$200,000 annually from the government, an amount not to be overlooked by shrewd businessmen. Those Indians already trading in Guthrie often ended up robbed and mistreated, a situation discouraging repetition. According to the young editor, treat the Indians as they would whites, give them equal trade, offer fair prices, and Guthrie would secure a major portion of the Indian monies. Responding quickly, merchants sent drummers to the various tribes with samples of available goods to advertize the advantage of trading in Guthrie. Shortly afterwards Guthrie began to enjoy a lucrative Indian trade.<sup>18</sup>

By early May, with the city platted and trade flourishing, real estate prices spiraled. Two days after settlement, homestead rights on staked lots sold for \$50. They jumped to \$450 in May, and in June the *Capital* reported a man being offered \$3,000 for his claim. As a deepening sense of security prevailed, Guthrie's citizens turned willingly to the task of making their town a "metropolis."<sup>19</sup>

Guthrie's city council, anxious to obtain that exalted title, granted M. L. A. Brown franchises for a street railway, a full system of waterworks, and an electric light system. The waterworks system, installed first, earned from Greer the description of not being so bad. At least when the fire hoses were tested, "the pressure is sufficient to worry most any fire." Electric lights were a different matter, for citizens were undecided on its desirability. The city council, agreeing to the franchise, hesitated to act without public support. Accordingly, in May, Greer launched a series of articles favoring installation of a complete Westinghouse incandescent light system. He reported that city attorneys, examining the ordinance, found no "game" in it. Nor did the ordinance require public investment in the plant, being a private enterprise. More importantly, he pointed to the plant's exhibiting faith in the future of the city, making it "chief in the great improvements clinching Guthrie as the leading city of Oklahoma." East Guthrie acted promptly in granting a franchise, while Guthrie's council debated another two weeks before agreeing to the enterprise. Completed in September, Guthrie proudly added street lights to her list of improvements.<sup>20</sup>

The street railway franchise proved to be a disappointment. The city council authorized the Electric Street Railway Company, under Mr. Brown, to install a system based in Guthrie, but connecting the four Guthries. Al-

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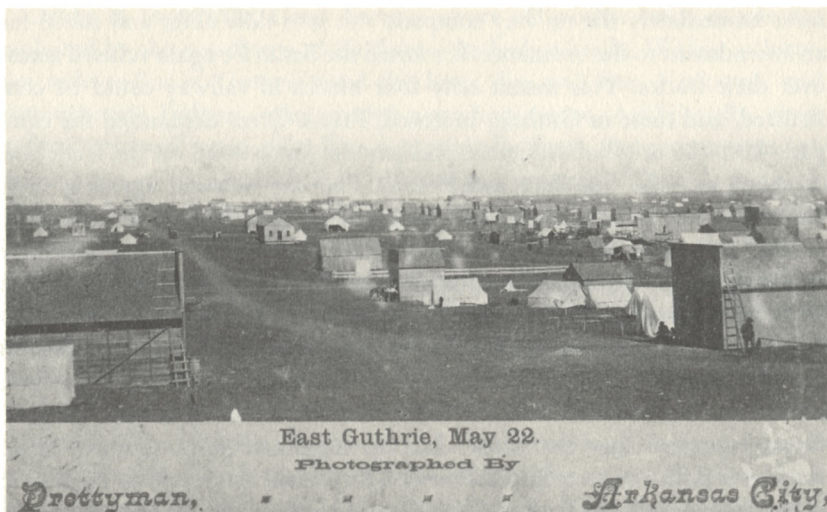
most immediately the railway company ran into difficulties and asked for an amendment to the ordinance. It seemed the Santa Fe again refused access over their tracks. This meant only four blocks of railway could be constructed, and these in Guthrie. Incensed, Frank Greer demanded the company keep the original ordinance and pay the \$1000 bond on the franchise, or relinquish the franchise completely. The city council, agreeing with Greer, refused to amend the ordinance, whereupon the railway company refused to post bond. After considerable argument the railway company agreed to accept the original ordinance, posted bond, and promised to begin work in ten days. When more than a month lapsed without construction beginning, the journalist again attacked the company. This time he pressed the city council to demand forfeiture of the bond; if Guthrie could not have a railway, they could have the revenue. Guthrie's council decided to wait. Greer expressed fear that their inaction might result in Guthrie being cheated of both a railway and the bond. The council acted, taking possession of the \$1000 bond on behalf of Guthrie, and temporarily the railway system was set aside.<sup>21</sup>

Though the street railway fell through, other improvements continued at a brisk pace. Street grading commenced upon completion of the town plat. Each man in town gave his labor or funds to pay for the labor of others. A city hospital opened its doors in August. The Public Improvement Committees of the four Guthries met jointly to set a uniform width of sidewalk. A title guaranty company opened business in Guthrie, providing guarantees to lot titles and strengthening the city's position in land holdings. Brick buildings replaced frame structures, the first being the Commercial Bank of Guthrie. In October George Mundy completed an entire brick block on Oklahoma Avenue. These improvements, while greatly enhancing the city, served as further inducements to encourage settlement in Guthrie. One major improvement remained before the citizenry could applaud themselves on their endeavors—public schools.<sup>22</sup>

Early in September Greer reported that Guthrie contained approximately seven hundred children of school age and no schools for them to attend. Many families faced the choice of moving to towns where schools were attainable or sending their children away to schools. Either would be detrimental to Guthrie. Schools, then, were a matter of self-preservation. Pooling their resources the four Guthries had means available to take the matter in hand. East Guthrie's city hall, vacant during the day, could be commandeered as a school building, while the East Guthrie council could levy a lot tax to secure funds. Guthrie's charter provided for the sale of school



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East Guthrie, which eventually merged with Guthrie, shared many of the problems addressed by Greer in the *Guthrie Daily Capital* (Courtesy of Oklahoma Historical Society).

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bonds. West Guthrie, having sold the town's university grounds, had ample funds for schools. And Capitol Hill, lacking both funds and buildings, could busy itself devising plans for implementing a school system.<sup>23</sup>

East Guthrie moved immediately on Greer's proposals, passing ordinances on both the city hall usage and lot tax levy. The four school boards, meeting to discuss the problem, made motion to consolidate, making the school system uniform throughout the four Guthries. Their motion floundered, the point of dissension being the proposed bonds. Citizens of Guthrie were loath to bear the main financial burden, while the sentiment was shared equally by the other three Guthries. There the matter rested for almost a month. Not content to sit idly watching the matter dissolve, the young editor campaigned for consolidation. Through his articles Greer argued the benefits that could be reaped and chided the people for their inactivity. Early in October the motion passed, the Guthries sharing expenses by means of a tax of \$1.00 for every \$100 evaluation on property. Guthrie's schools opened October 11, 1889, for a six-month term. Under the direction of Professor Frank Terry, the schools opened with ten teachers and an average attendance of 525 students divided into eight grades. When the

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schools closed April 5, 1890, the *Capital* proudly bragged, "This is the first case history recorded where a system of graded schools was conducted before laws were formed." When it came to matters handled without benefit of law, Guthrie took the lead.<sup>24</sup>

The congressional act granting settlement of the Unassigned Lands within Indian Territory contained no legislation regarding the establishment of any government, either territorial or municipal. Homesteaders arriving in Guthrie and other towns realized the responsibility of creating laws and municipal governments rested upon themselves. Faced with an unprecedented situation, the citizens of Guthrie met en masse on the evening of April 22, 1889, to consider possible solutions. Finding no acceptable proposal, the meeting adjourned until the following morning. At 9:00 A.M. on April 23, representatives of thirty-two states and territories answered a roll call. Each of the thirty-two groups designated a spokesman, these forming a "Committee of Thirty-Two." This committee chose Charles W. Constantine, former mayor of Springfield, Ohio, as chairman, and Robert A. Hill as secretary. Federal law permitted 320 acres to constitute a townsite. Because Guthrie contained four townsites, Chairman Constantine advised each townsite to establish a separate town government. Agreeing to the recommendation, the settlers of East Guthrie, West Guthrie, and Capitol Hill left and elections for officers of Guthrie proper commenced.<sup>25</sup>

Nominations made it apparent that Guthrie included numerous qualified office-seekers. A sharp struggle developed over the mayoral position, finally being reduced to three candidates. When an oral vote failed to determine a winner, the innovative settlers instituted another method. Three farm wagons lined up, a candidate standing in each one. Voters then formed a line before the wagon supporting the candidate of their choice, a teller counting heads as they passed by. A means of "stuffing the ballot" by returning to the line's end and being recounted soon nullified this method. Despairing of reaching a peaceful solution, the committee adjourned. The next day proved no better, for they again adjourned without a decision. Becoming apparent on April 25 that the homesteaders would settle matters violently, the three candidates hastily reached a compromise. One withdrew while the other two agreed to pick three representatives each. These six chose a seventh to form a nominating committee. This seven-man committee nominated Colonel D. B. Dyer of Missouri for mayor. Dyer received unanimous approval of the citizens on the afternoon of April 25. Concluding the mayor's election, the citizenry quickly elected members for a city council. The new officials assumed office on April 26, "in the tent used as City Hall." Concerned about the lack of legal authority, Greer be-

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lieved "public sentiment, and the necessity for self preservation, will uphold the officers in keeping order and decency."<sup>26</sup>

Mayor Dyer and the city council also felt the lack of legal sanction for actions they might take. In order to have a legal basis for their municipal government, the council ordered the secretary to:

procure for use of the council all laws of Congress and proclamations of the President of the United States pertaining to the opening and settlement of the territory of Oklahoma . . . [they elected] a committee to wait upon U. S. Marshalls located in Guthrie and confer with them as to the authority of the City and U. S. Marshalls, and report at the next meeting.

Despite reservations, the council went to work. The citizens' survey and arbitration committees (formed the 22nd) now functioned under the council's authority. Temporarily the council placed all licensing power in the mayor's hands, forbade games of chance on grounds used as public highways, and created a committee on ordinances to report at each meeting until otherwise ordered. Guthrie's municipal government assumed an active role.<sup>27</sup>

The gambling ordinance provided contributions to the treasury from the city's less desirable elements. Another method for raising revenue was the occupation tax, which provided for the levy and collection of a tax on every occupation, business, and profession being conducted in Guthrie. Extremely difficult to collect, delinquencies mounted until the council was compelled to take action. They enacted another ordinance allowing them to bring charges against anyone failing to pay the tax, and place a lien against their property until they paid the tax in full. Frequently Greer admonished the citizenry: "Pay your occupation tax, if you are delinquent. There is no excuse sufficient to let you out of it." He believed that men, truly determined to see Guthrie succeed, would consider it a matter of honor that their town receive adequate operating funds.<sup>28</sup>

Money and arbitrary authority brought the city council into conflict with Greer in May. Expenditures mounted and new ordinances were enacted until the citizens raised the cry of fraud and tyranny. In less than one month the city council passed twenty-five ordinances and created several new offices. The council even authorized the payment of salaries to officials, arousing the citizens. Originally elected for the purpose of surveying and platting the town, Greer deemed these other attempts at legislation a "willful violation of the compact with the people and usurption [sic] of authority." Raising his voice with others, he advised the council to set up a regular election. The people could voice their approval or disapproval of the

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council members at the polls. Responding to the outcry, Mayor Dyer and the council held a meeting with the townspeople on May 17. The following day he signed Ordinance # 34, providing not only for a city election, but also for a convention to prepare a city charter. The election was set for June 4, 1889. Responding to the charge of fraudulent expenditures, Mayor Dyer invited the *Capital* to examine the city treasurer's books and print an official report. That report, issued June 2, "utterly disproves the demagogue's cry about fraud," wrote Greer. Impressed by Mayor Dyer's record, the editor gave Dyer the *Capital's* endorsement as candidate for mayor.<sup>29</sup>

In endorsing Dyer, Greer wrote, "He has done all in his power . . . to promote the harmony and interest of every citizen. The people owe . . . that he be retained." The touchy subject of the occupation tax entered the campaign when A. V. Alexander became Dyer's main opponent. Alexander had earlier led the lumbermen in rebellion against the occupation tax, refusing to pay until the council reduced the amount to half. In presenting a list of "10 Reasons Why Dyer Be Re-elected as Mayor" versus "10 Reasons Why Alexander Not Be Elected Mayor," Frank Greer reminded the citizens of that fuss, and that Alexander represented a special interest group. Such a man could not appropriately represent Guthrie with her many diversified groups and interests. Greer's campaign cost Alexander the election, "amply demonstrating that the voters of Guthrie have implied faith in the honor, integrity and ability of Col. Dyer."<sup>30</sup>

At the election of June 4, citizens chose members for their charter commission. Dennis T. Flynn, postmaster at Guthrie and later congressional representative of Oklahoma Territory, served as chairman. Charter delegates met at City Hall on June 10th to begin their arduous task. To provide examples with which to work, the convention gathered charters of Wichita, Kansas City, Chicago, Ft. Worth, and other important cities. They expedited proceedings by forming standing committees on the executive, judiciary, franchise and taxation, general legislation, real estate, and education. Work went smoothly until convention members adopted a resolution for compensation of members at \$3.00 a day. Outraged, Greer reminded convention members of Guthrie's depleted treasury. Rather, the members ought to consider the fame gained by such a momentous occasion as ample reward. When charter members indicated their preference for cash, Greer remarked that the mayor and council of Guthrie received no compensation for their work, and were certainly more entitled. Nevertheless, a special committee approved the resolution, the delegates receiving pay for time actually spent working—when the council had the money, Greer sarcastically added.<sup>31</sup>

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The charter convention's second monetary proposal did gain the editor's approval. This proposal authorized Guthrie to issue \$20,000 in bonds, providing revenue for the municipal government to function properly and to establish schools. Striving for the townspeople's approval, Greer pointed out that the funds from the bonds allowed for major city improvements and that no civilized town could exist without schools. Both added inducements for drawing more settlers to Guthrie. Greer privately realized the deep commitment of the citizens to Guthrie by accepting such a financial burden. The joint city charter-bond issue was submitted to the people's vote and adopted on July 23, 1889. The charter remained fundamental law until Guthrie organized a legal government under congressional authority on July 28, 1890.<sup>32</sup>

Civic affairs in Guthrie seemed constantly deluged with problems. During an absence of Mayor Dyer in July, the council shocked Guthrie and Greer by passing an ordinance granting the right to operate a lottery. Colonel Ross, acting mayor, notified Dyer of this, while Greer attacked the ordinance through his *Capital*. The lottery ordinance fell to Mayor Dyer's veto on July 9. The matter did not end there, for within a month a second lottery ordinance, granted to John E. Orrstoth and associates, passed the council. Justifying their actions, the council declared that proceeds from the lottery would be used to help fund a public school system in Guthrie (The bond issue was not proposed yet). Declaring that men of families and means would not want a public school system supported by a lottery, Greer called the lottery a "gambling scheme under another name." The Louisiana lottery served as a prime example: "Her institution is a nest of swindlers who bleed the fools of the nation to the tune of millions a year." He also philosophized that her government was debased and her cities were ruled by the lottery operators. United States law refused recognition of lotteries and prohibited transmission of lottery mail through the post office. Greer intended for Guthrie's citizens to realize the serious consequences of championing a lottery operation. Simply put in his opinion, it means the destruction of Guthrie and its future.<sup>33</sup>

The council continued agitation for a lottery. One councilman and a cohort attempted to steal Mayor Dyer's written veto, which, if withheld from council for ten days, made the lottery ordinance law. Their attempt failed. Mayor Dyer had placed it on file with the city clerk before the first regular meeting after the charter's passage July 23, as required by the city charter. The veto stood as part of the city records. Refusing to give up, Howard and Orrstoth tried another trick. Following the city charter's adoption, the *Guthrie Daily News* became Guthrie's official newspaper.

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When an ordinance was published in the *News*, it became law. Howard intended sneaking the ordinance out of council chambers and having it published in the *News* before anyone realized what happened. George W. Paxton, another councilman, obtained the ordinance first, keeping it on his person to prevent such action. Mayor Dyer's veto came before the council in September, and by a vote of five to one the lottery ordinance was defeated. Greer jubilantly wrote, "The lottery ordinance at last is dead and buried beyond question."<sup>34</sup>

Guthrie's new charter set November 5, 1889, for regular election of the mayor and council members. This became the most controversial of Guthrie's early elections. Dyer refused re-election, though numerous other candidates promised a lively mayor's race. A citizens' reform movement organized in early October to ensure a clean, aggressive administration won the election. They placed J. J. Boyles on the ballot. T. J. Hart, a councilman, received the second ward's nomination; George E. Ford and several other citizens nominated themselves. Greer watched the nominations, endorsing none. Since the next mayor and council were likely to shape the destiny of Guthrie for years to come, his immediate concern lay in electing men of clean character, property, and integrity. Greer maintained neutrality until Colonel Ross received nomination for the mayor's race. Although favorably impressed by Ross during his early tenure in office, the lottery scheme had brought them into bitter conflict. Ross had voted for the second lottery, and now his nomination evoked Greer's animosity. "The same doughty Col. has held down the city's advancement . . . for the past three months," wrote Greer. To Greer, it was imperative Ross not win the election and cause more harm to Guthrie.<sup>35</sup>

Of the numerous candidates, James Dooley, former state senator from Iowa, came closest to fitting Frank Greer's demanding qualifications; thus, Dooley received the *Capital's* full endorsement. Determined to defeat Ross, but not be thwarted himself, Greer investigated the backgrounds of both Ross and Dooley. Information obtained from T. P. Haughwaut, former representative of the Missouri legislature and former prosecuting attorney of Jasper County, Missouri, disclosed charges held against Ross by the state of Missouri. These charges included Ross embezzling his partner, attempting to burn the store he owned to collect the insurance, and later, involvement in the theft of a valuable watch. Failing in his attempts to repudiate the *Capital's* charges, Ross acknowledged their truth on election day. When Dooley won the bid for mayor, Ross encouraged his friends to allow Dooley to be inaugurated peaceably. Applauding this gesture, Greer also encouraged harmony, that Guthrie might continue to prosper.<sup>36</sup>

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Guthrie managed, despite conflicts, to maintain harmony within herself and with her sister Guthries. The Guthries worked together as closely as possible. The city plat, made of the whole town, was approved by all four city councils. Uniform lot sizes, streets, alleys, and sidewalks gave cohesion to the whole town. The public school boards consolidated to provide adequate educational facilities for the town. Citizens of each townsite accepted and paid a uniform lot tax in support of the public school system. East Guthrie and Capitol Hill both established charter conventions, with the stipulation that their charter conform as nearly as possible to the charter of Guthrie. Throughout the fourteen months of individual existence the Guthries acted upon the assumption that with legalization they would become one Guthrie.<sup>37</sup>

Guthrie's harmony supported the city in another way. It provided a clear contrast to Guthrie's main rival for the territorial capital, Oklahoma City. Oklahoma City, composed of four townsites, faced the same problems as Guthrie, though their solutions differed considerably. Violence threatened over title of Oklahoma City's town lots, between the Seminole and Kickapoo townsite companies. The Seminoles held title to most of Oklahoma City's town lots to which the Kickapoos severely objected. The situation became so tense at one time that Oklahoma City's chief deputy marshall sent for troop assistance to keep order. Oklahoma City voters turned down a city charter, leaving their municipal government unorganized and the city handicapped. Even so, Oklahoma City let it be known she was a contender for the capital from the start.<sup>38</sup>

Two days after settlement in Guthrie, Frank Greer rang a bell, assembling all settlers claiming lots in a ten acre plot known as Capitol Hill. He and two mayors spoke to the claimants and by the next morning the entire area was cleared. There, hopefully, stood the future location of the territorial capital. Responding, Oklahoma City also set aside an area for the territorial capitol. Greer considered this rivalry trivial, for Guthrie possessed a federal land office and the backing of the Santa Fe Railroad, Oklahoma City lacking both.<sup>39</sup>

The people of Guthrie assumed that their town was already the capital. In July they proposed a convention:

To the people of Oklahoma . . . a committee appointed by the people of the city of Guthrie, . . . have been instructed to call a convention of all the people of the territory of Oklahoma . . . to meet through delegates . . . for the purpose of framing a provisional territorial government, said convention to be held at the city of Guthrie on Wednesday, the 17th day of July, 1889.

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Dennis Flynn, like Greer, was an early leader and promoter of Guthrie (Courtesy of Oklahoma Historical Society).

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Outraged by the open, aggressive self-promotion of Guthrie for territorial capital, town promoters in Oklahoma City refused to send delegates. Unaffected by the rival's refusal to participate, Greer gave his whole-hearted support to the convention. His main concern again dealt with the nature of men chosen as delegates. The success or failure of a well-constructed and acceptable provisional government demanded that the best men be elected as delegates.<sup>40</sup>

Convening July 17, 1889, in Guthrie, representatives of every town in the Oklahoma District, save Oklahoma City, met to write a constitution providing territorial government for Oklahoma. Finishing August 23, the people of Oklahoma adopted their first constitution on October 22. No specific provision named the capitol, that being too daring even for Guthrie.<sup>41</sup>



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The people of Oklahoma City retaliated, calling for their own convention in November. Greer advised Guthrie's citizens to refuse any involvement, for participation would discredit Guthrie's convention and constitution, as well as embroil the town in Oklahoma City's Seminole-Kickapoo conflict. Heeding their editor's advice, Guthrie ignored the entire incident. Besides, her citizens were involved in the major problem of settling town homestead claims.<sup>42</sup>

Guthrie proper had been cleared of contests in early November. When Congress convened in January 1890, Guthrie faced the unresolved contests of her sister towns. Congress would not consider consolidation of the Guthries until all claims-contests had been settled. Fearing the bleak prospect of failure after so much struggling, Greer urged the city councils to accelerate pace in settling claims. The *Capital* waged a full-scale war against the sooners, determining to rid Guthrie of them bodily if necessary. The sooners returned the attack, accusing Greer of soonerism. Repudiating the charge, Greer proclaimed it another lie in an already long list of falsifications.<sup>43</sup>

Lot improvements were equally as important in gaining the favor of Congress. Any townsite bill would require substantial improvements of property in order to retain title. Many of Guthrie's lots belonged to outsiders, who hoped to sell at higher prices once Congress passed territorial legislation. These vacant lots encouraged lot jumping, compounding the problem of claim settlement. A landmark case of March 15, 1890, helped solve the problem. The first decision rendered by the General Land Office in Washington disqualified the claims of a United States deputy marshal, a Santa Fe employee, and a man who relied on a relay of horses for an advantage during the run. The major lot contests in Guthrie dissolved with this decision, clearing the way for consolidation.<sup>44</sup>

Meanwhile, throughout February, March, and early April, the inhabitants waited anxiously while Congress deliberated passage of Oklahoma's much needed territorial organization. Oklahoma citizens, considering the governorship, proposed John I. Dille or Horace Speed, both Guthrie men. Rumor spread that President Benjamin Harrison would choose an "outsider" for governor, denying Oklahoma the right to self-government. This mere threat sent Greer into a rage, advising the citizens to talk and write until Washington was compelled to submit to their demands for home-rule. The *Oklahoma City Times* joined forces with Guthrie's *Capital* in this fight. Before their campaign could gain headway, however, Congress passed the territorial bill—Oklahoma Territory gained legality. Greer's distress over the governorship dissolved into enthusiastic joy. Guthrie, his home, his city, his dream, "is not only a part of the young giant Oklahoma, but is her central star—her

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Mecca, her capitol." The Enabling Act established territorial government, consolidated the four Guthries, and named Guthrie temporary capitol. Thus, all that young Frank Greer had hoped for became a living reality. A grand and glorious future lay waiting, with the city and the editor eagerly reaching to embrace it.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph B. Thoburn, "Frank H. Greer," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XIV, No. 3 (September, 1936), pp. 270-273.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 273-275.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 265-267, 269.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 270.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 271.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 276.

<sup>7</sup> *Daily State Capital* (Guthrie, Oklahoma), April 13, 1889.

<sup>8</sup> Thoburn, "Frank H. Greer," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XIV, p. 276.

<sup>9</sup> *Daily State Capital*, April 27, 1889.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, May 26, June 21, 1889.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, June 13, June 26, 1889.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, July 5, 1889.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, September 17, August 29, 1889.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, May 4, May 11, 1889.

<sup>15</sup> Hamilton S. Wicks, "The Opening of Oklahoma," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. IV, No. 2 (June, 1926), p. 140.

<sup>16</sup> *Daily State Capital*, June 19, June 28, 1889.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, September 3, September 19, October 3, 1889.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, September 13, September 14, September 28, 1889.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, June 1, 1889.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, May 16, May 17, May 26, June 1, 1889.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, June 25, June 26, July 19, August 1, 1889.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, June 11, October 19, October 26, October 30, 1889.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, August 21, 1889.

<sup>24</sup> Council Proceedings, City of Guthrie, in Territorial Museum, Guthrie, Oklahoma, Ordinances 122, 136; Bobby H. Johnson, "Some Aspects of Life in the 'Land of the Fair Gods': Oklahoma Territory, 1889-1907" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oklahoma, Norman, 1967), p. 61; *Daily State Capital*, August 27, September 1, September 22, 1889, April 5, 1890.

<sup>25</sup> Roy Gittinger, *The Formation of the State of Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939); John Alley, *City Beginnings in Oklahoma Territory* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939); *Daily State Capital*, May 4, 1889 (reported Ed. P. Greer chosen as secretary).

<sup>26</sup> Council Minutes, City of Guthrie, p. 1; Wicks, "The Opening of Oklahoma," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. IV, pp. 141-142; Alley, *City Beginnings in Oklahoma Territory*, pp. 9-12 (original city council consisted of representative from each of the thirty-two groups, being reduced later to seventeen); *Daily State Capital*, May 4, 1889 (discrepancy on whether Hill or Kelley withdrew).

<sup>27</sup> Council Minutes, City of Guthrie, pp. 2-3.

<sup>28</sup> Council Proceedings, City of Guthrie, Ordinance 93, p. 96; *Daily State Capital*, August 27, 1889.

<sup>29</sup> *Daily State Capital*, May 22, May 25, May 31, June 22, 1889; Council Proceedings, Ordinance 34.

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- <sup>30</sup> *Daily State Capital*, June 2, June 4, June 5, 1889.  
<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, June 11, June 20, June 23, 1889.  
<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, July 12, July 16, 1889.  
<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, July 6, August 23, August 27, September 3, 1889.  
<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, September 5, September 19, 1889; Council Proceedings, Ordinance 100 (written into council minutes regarding *Daily News*).  
<sup>35</sup> *Daily State Capital*, October 13, October 25, October 26, October 30, 1889.  
<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, October 30, November 5, November 7, 1889.  
<sup>37</sup> Johnson, *Some Aspects of Life*, p. 61.  
<sup>38</sup> *Daily State Capital*, November 16, December 24, 1889; Gerald Forbes, *Guthrie: Oklahoma's First Capitol* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1938), pp. 8-9.  
<sup>39</sup> Alley, *City Beginnings in Oklahoma Territory*; *Daily State Capital*, September 22, 1889.  
<sup>40</sup> *Daily State Capital*, June 13, July 11, 1889.  
<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, July 19, August 23, November 17, 1889.  
<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, November 16, November 17, 1889.  
<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, December 11, December 12, 1889.  
<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, January 25, February 8, February 22, March 15, 1890.  
<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, December 29, 1889; January 4, February 15, March 15, April 27, 1890.