

Milton W. Reynolds ***(Kicking Bird)***



The Man Who Named Oklahoma ***“Land of the Fair God”***

By D. Earl Newsom

In the years immediately preceding and for several years after the 1889 land run, Oklahoma became widely known as “Land of the Fair God.” Many pioneers and the press of that era considered the man who gave Oklahoma that name, Milton W. Reynolds, the individual most responsible for bringing about the opening of the territory to homesteading. He also is the forgotten man of Oklahoma history.

Known widely by his pen name, Kicking Bird, Reynolds was probably the most effervescent and dynamic personality along the

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frontiers of Nebraska, Kansas, and the Indian Territory in the mid-to-late-nineteenth century. Dan W. Peery, a boomer and member of the first Oklahoma territorial legislature in 1890, wrote:

Throughout the entire country [Reynolds] was known as a brilliant newspaper correspondent and graphic writer. It can be truthfully said that he was the most prominent and distinguished man . . . elected to either House of the first Territorial legislature. . . . He had long been considered the most reliable authority upon Indian affairs and his views pertaining to the opening of the public lands to white civilization were read everywhere.¹

Although Reynolds became an expert on Indian affairs and the Indian Territory many years before David L. Payne and the boomer movement, it is little wonder that he has been overlooked by historians. He was a powerful political leader and a member of the territorial legislatures of Nebraska and Kansas, but he exerted much of his influence through his writing.

Moreover, Reynolds was known to many only by his pen name, and some people thought he was an Indian chief. He adopted the pen name in 1875 to honor the Kiowa chief, Kicking Bird, who had saved his life at the Medicine Lodge Council in 1867.² Reynolds' articles about the Indian Territory signed "Kicking Bird" were so prolific that many people, even in Washington, never knew his real identity.

Although Reynolds knew both Payne and William L. Couch, he had little in common with them. Unlike many swashbuckling boomers, he was a small man, perhaps no more than five-feet eight-inches tall. Frontier newspapers often referred to him as "the Little Skeleton."³ Whether on main streets of frontier villages or at Indian councils, he always wore a suit and tie. Reynolds also was a gifted scholar.

His father, Alexander, came to the United States from England in the early days of the colonies and settled first in Elmira, New York, where Milton was born on May 23, 1833. When Milton was four, his father purchased a farm near Coldwater, Michigan. Milton and his two brothers, George A. and P.G., spent much of their boyhood working on the farm. Milton was an avid reader and by the age of twelve had completed all the readings required in high school. At age sixteen he was so advanced that he was employed to teach Greek and literature in the village high school.⁴

At age nineteen Reynolds attended Wesleyan Seminary at Albion, Michigan, where he taught Greek and Latin while pursu-

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ing studies in the classics and philosophy. After one year he transferred to the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor where he continued his study of languages and the classics. Honored as valedictorian when he graduated in 1856, Reynolds spoke six languages and quoted from memory long passages from the literary classics.⁵

After graduation Reynolds returned to Coldwater to help his father with the farm. He also became editor of the weekly *Coldwater Sentinel*. Less than a year later he received news that was to change his life and the future of what was then called the New West. His college chum at both Wesleyan Seminary and the University of Michigan, J. Sterling Morton, had gone to Nebraska, where he purchased a struggling weekly newspaper, the *Nebraska City News*. Morton had been elected to the Nebraska legislature and needed someone to run the newspaper. He turned to his college friend. Milton Reynolds was excited at the opportunity and quickly accepted the editorship for \$1,000 a year.⁶



Milton W. Reynolds exerted his greatest influence on the Oklahoma movement while publishing the Parsons (Kansas) Sun from 1871 to 1879. The home he built in Parsons in 1872 still stands at 1712 Grand Avenue (Courtesy Parsons Sun).

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Within a few weeks, the twenty-four-year-old editor attracted attention in the Middle West and the East when he began publishing several thousand copies of the small weekly. He mailed them to members of Congress, other public officials, and leading newspapers. He believed the West needed railroads—which he called “the great civilizer”—and “thousands of immigrants.” His slogan, “Come West! You Can Do Better,” brought a flood of inquires from hopeful immigrants and comments from the press. Reynolds always reprinted those comments in his newspaper.⁷

Horace Greeley called the *News* “without exception the best local and political journal in either Kansas or Nebraska.” Similar comments came from the *New York Herald*, *Detroit Free Press*, *St. Louis Republican*, and other newspapers.

Reynolds also became a political force in Nebraska. In 1858 he led a movement of residents of the South Platte area who wanted to secede from Nebraska and become a part of Kansas. In the fall of 1859 voters elected him to the Nebraska territorial legislature. In December, 1861, fellow legislators nominated him for the speakership of the house. He won a plurality of the votes, but could not gain a majority and was finally defeated. In addition, Reynolds led a movement in 1858 to organize the Democratic party in Nebraska.⁸ He also was an organizer of the Nebraska Press Association and became its first president.

In 1858 Reynolds had made a trip that was to influence his future and the future of the Indian Territory. He quietly slipped away to Michigan and married Sarah Galloway, whom he had courted at Wesleyan Seminary.⁹ En route to Michigan he stopped in Lawrence, Kansas, to visit his brother George, who since 1856 had been agent in Kansas for the Seminole Indians in the Indian Territory.

In the report of his trip in the *News*, Reynolds wrote that he had studied the Indian Territory carefully as he journeyed through “the domain of the Osages, and Pottawatomies, and even ventured into the hunting grounds of the Cheyennes, Arapahos, and Kiowas.” Both Lawrence and the territory made great impressions on him.¹⁰

Discouraged when Kansas rejected his plan to annex the South Platte area of Nebraska, and when in 1860 Nebraska voters turned down his proposal to seek statehood, Reynolds left the frontier. He accepted a job as commercial editor of the *Detroit Free Press*. His absence from the frontier was brief. In May, 1865, he returned to Lawrence, and in partnership with Judge James Christian and

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W.C. Rankin, he established the *Kansas State Journal*, today the *Lawrence Journal World*.¹¹ When he arrived in Lawrence, he undertook another vigorous immigration campaign, sending thousands of copies of his newspaper to other parts of the nation. His new cry was "Come West! Come to Kansas!"

Almost as soon as he became settled, Reynolds had the opportunity to explore further the territory to the south that so fascinated him. During the Civil War, most of the Indian tribes in the Indian Territory had allied with the Confederacy. After suffering terribly during the war, most of them faced an uncertain future. After a grand council at Armstrong Academy in the Choctaw Nation, they asked for another council to determine their future relations with the United States government. The government agreed and scheduled the council to begin at Fort Smith, Arkansas, on September 5, 1865.¹²

Reynolds immediately decided to attend. His name had attracted attention in the East and both the *New York Tribune* and the *Chicago Republican* asked him to cover the council. Some newspapers predicted that as many as 50,000 people might attend the council, but when Reynolds arrived, accompanied by his brother George and General James Blunt, he estimated the number closer to 10,000 to 15,000. He met many men who were influential in dealing with Indian problems. Among those representing the government were Dennis N. Cooley, the superintendent of Indian affairs, Elijah Sells, the superintendent of Indian affairs for the Southern Superintendency, and Colonel Ely S. Parker of General Ulysses S. Grant's personal staff.¹³

Among the many Indian leaders were Peter P. Pitchlynn of the Choctaws, White Hair of the Osages, and John Jumper of the Seminoles. The most impressive to Reynolds, however, was Elias Cornelius Boudinot, whose father, Elias Boudinot, had been assassinated in 1838 for signing the Treaty of New Echota. Young Boudinot, then a leader in the Southern Cherokee faction, seemed to dominate the proceedings. Reynolds and Boudinot spent considerable time visiting between the council sessions.

During the proceedings Cooley told the Indians that since they had rebelled against the government they must be treated as a conquered people. They had "rightfully forfeited all annuities and interest in the lands of the Indian Territory." He wanted them to sign treaties agreeing to the abolition of slavery, the freeing of all persons being held in bondage, and more importantly, to cede to

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the government all lands not needed for their own people.¹⁴ Reynolds sat with the commission in its private sessions and he reported in his dispatches that Cooley carried in his pocket treaties already prepared and ready for signing.

Within a few days Cooley realized the futility of his mission. The Indians were angry. They said they had not been notified in advance they would be asked to make treaties and their delegates were not authorized to negotiate. On the fifth day Cooley compromised and arranged to meet with tribal delegations in Washington in 1866 to settle that and other matters.¹⁵ Reports that the Creek and Seminole tribes were willing to cede their lands in the central part of the territory elated Cooley and the Kansans attending the council.

When the government and the tribes negotiated the treaties in 1866, those cessions became a reality. The Seminoles ceded more than 2 million acres to the United States for fifteen cents an acre, and the Creeks more than 3 million acres for thirty cents an acre. That, in essence, was the first wedge in opening the land to non-Indian settlement and the beginning of the Oklahoma Territory.¹⁶

After the Fort Smith Council Reynolds accompanied a delegation to the Canville Post in the Osage Nation in Kansas. There, at the invitation of Elijah Sells, he participated in the discussions and served as official recorder for the proceedings as the Osages signed a treaty ceding a large area of their surplus lands to the government. Thereafter Milton Reynolds became virtually obsessed with the Indian Territory.

By 1866 Reynolds was publishing 10,000 copies a week of the *Kansas State Journal*. The content included special dispatches from correspondents in New York, Chicago, Washington, and western cities. Some of his contemporaries compared his newspaper to the *New York Herald* and called him the "Henry Raymond of Kansas."¹⁷ After the Fort Smith Council he wrote more and more about the Indian Territory.

In June, 1867, the *Chicago Republican* invited Reynolds to do an analysis of the Indian Territory. That resulted in the most profound article about the territory to date. He included an evaluation of each of the Five Tribes and the resources of the territory, including potential railroad routes. He also made an impassioned plea for "A great nation of forty million people . . . to do justice to a weak and inferior race of 300,000 Indians." Reynolds asked:

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Will it not be the lasting shame of the American people if, after having robbed the Indian of his lands . . . they shall neglect to provide at least that the remnant of a once proud and dominant race shall have some hope for the future, by affording educational means and facilities for their mental, moral, and spiritual improvement?¹⁸

That question represented one of the first appeals for breaking up tribal ownership of the lands and allotting 160 acres to each member of the tribe. Reynolds published "The Indian Question" in his own newspaper and mailed hundreds of copies elsewhere. Many other newspapers reprinted the article.

An indication of Reynolds' growing stature came in July, 1867, when he attended the Medicine Lodge Council as a member of the press corps. On July 20 Congress authorized President Grant to appoint a commission to treat with the Plains Indians in an effort to end hostilities between the tribes and settlers after atrocities by both had increased. Among those on the commission were Nathaniel G. Taylor, the commissioner of Indian affairs, Generals William T. Sherman and W.W. Harney, and Alfred H. Terry. General Christopher C. Augur later replaced Sherman.

Federal officials permitted only six press representatives to attend. In addition to Reynolds, they included the noted traveler, Henry M. Stanley, and reporters from New York and Chicago. During the council, both the commissioners and other correspondents considered Reynolds a consultant on Indian problems. He traveled and stayed with the commission and other correspondents addressed him as "Mister Reynolds."¹⁹ He sent daily dispatches to New York and Chicago as well as to his own newspaper.

During the council Chief Black Kettle of the Cheyennes reportedly attacked Reynolds, and Reynolds later wrote that Chief Kicking Bird of the Kiowas saved his life, but he did not elaborate on the circumstances. Reynolds' coverage of and participation in the council further established him as an authority on Indian problems. In May, 1868, Taylor asked him to serve on a commission to resolve problems between the Osages and the railroads in Kansas. They reached a settlement before the month ended.

An even more exciting assignment came in November, 1868. Taylor asked Reynolds to head a three-member commission to travel into the Indian Territory to choose reservations for the Potawatomi and Sac and Fox Indians. The other two commission members were G.T. Shipley and E.R. Roxbury.²⁰

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The Potawatomis refused to go and the expedition began without them in early March, 1869. Chiefs Chekos-kuk and Moses Keokuk represented the Sac and Fox tribe, also known as the Sauks. It took the party about two weeks to reach the fork of the South Canadian and Arkansas rivers. From that point, the commissioners laid out a reservation for the Sauks that formed a rough triangle extending northward up the Arkansas River, west along the South Canadian River, and then about forty-six miles north to a point near where the Red Fork River (Cimarron) flowed into the Arkansas.²¹



Kicking Bird (All photos courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society unless noted).

Their efforts proved fruitless as the Sauks later chose another site, but it enabled Reynolds to realize his dream of exploring the Indian Territory. Instead of returning to

Lawrence, he traveled on an Indian pony through the nearly trackless territory. For nearly two months he rode largely through the Creek and Cherokee nations, camping and eating with the tribes, studying their customs, farming techniques, and their needs. He estimated he had traveled nearly 1,000 miles when he returned to Lawrence.²²

Word of his journey into the territory spread and he received many requests for information on the fabled land. He answered the inquiries with a series of articles that totaled about 20,000 words. Again he entitled the articles "The Indian Question" and circulated them widely in the East. He methodically analyzed the status of the tribes and the resources of the territory. He continued to urge consideration for sectionalizing the lands and eventually opening them to non-Indian settlement. Even some of the Indians favored the idea, he wrote, but were afraid to speak out for fear they would be assassinated. By way of explanation he noted:

The ablest men among them see that the resistless march of civilization that breaks down all barriers . . . will not suffer this magnificent domain always to be held in common by comparatively few Indians,

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and that they will have to adapt themselves to the regulations of the whites and divide up the lands in severalty.²³

With "The Indian Question" circulated, Reynolds began writing a report on his trip for the commissioner of Indian affairs. That treatise also proved rather lengthy, twenty-eight pages in his own handwriting. At the request of Kansas governor Sam Crawford, he decided to deliver the report in person. In spite of the Medicine Lodge Council, hostilities had increased between Indians and settlers. Crawford also wanted Reynolds to discuss the problem with President Grant.

Reynolds traveled to Washington on eight different railroad lines so he could evaluate railroads in terms of what might be needed once what had come to be known as the Oklahoma country opened to settlement. On his arrival Senator E.G. Ross of Kansas and General Sherman escorted him to the White House. After discussing with Grant the problems of Indians in Kansas, Reynolds talked with him at length about the Indian Territory. Grant reportedly nodded favorably on some of his suggested solutions.²⁴

Reynolds then called on Ely S. Parker, who had succeeded Taylor as commissioner of Indian affairs. His discussion centered on the urgency for action on the Indian Territory and the Unassigned Lands. He warned Parker that "the march of civilization would soon swoop down on the Indians and despoil them of their homes and lands." He urged sectionizing the lands, allotting each tribal member 160 acres, and opening the remaining lands to settlement.²⁵

After writing several news dispatches about the Indian Territory from Washington, Reynolds returned to Lawrence and found himself facing a dilemma. His newspaper, then called the *Lawrence Republican Daily Journal*, did not produce enough revenue to support three families. He announced in the *Journal* on April 9, 1871, that he planned to establish a newspaper in the frontier town of Parsons, Kansas. He wasted no time getting his new project underway and the first issue of the *Parsons Sun* came off the press on June 17, 1871.²⁶

Reynolds remained in Parsons for eight years and his achievements may have reached a peak during that period. While he was publisher of the *Sun*, he also served a year as superintendent of schools, helped found the Kansas State Historical Society, became president of the Kansas Press Association for two terms, was elected to the Kansas state legislature, and narrowly missed being

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chosen speaker. He also was one of a group of leading journalists who founded the *Kansas Magazine*.²⁷

In spite of those activities, his greatest interest remained in pressing for a solution to Indian problems and the Indian Territory. He had chosen an ideal place, for Parsons was already a hotbed of activity. The small village was a crossroads for the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad (Katy), and Robert S. Stevens, general manager of the line, had established headquarters there.

The treaties of 1866 permitted two railroads to cross the Indian Territory, one from north to south, the other from east to west. The Katy was the first line into the territory. By early 1871 it had reached Muskogee, which had been set up as a division point. Stevens and the Katy eagerly sought an opening of the Unassigned Lands.²⁸

Working with Stevens were George Reynolds, Milton's brother, and Elias C. Boudinot, whom Reynolds had met at the Fort Smith Council.²⁹ Anti-railroad sheets appeared frequently in the area, but Reynolds advocated railroads as "the great civilizer" and Stevens seemed elated to have his assistance.

Reynolds emphasized more and more the need to open the land to non-Indian settlement and often ridiculed the idea of maintaining a separate Indian Nation. In one editorial he asserted, "It is about time this tom-foolery of Indian nationality were wiped out and extinguished. The Indians are citizens or should be regarded. It is a broad burlesque - this idea of sovereignty, a nation within a nation."³⁰

Reynolds' messages received wide circulation. At first he published several hundred copies of the *Sun* each week. Then he began publishing monthly special editions of 5,000 and then 10,000 copies of the small four-page weekly, scattering them to all parts of the nation.³¹

In August, 1871, another prominent figure stirred interest in the Indian lands. Urging action much more direct than what Reynolds advocated, the author of an article in the *Lawrence Tribune* and the *Parsons Sun* contended that the Unassigned Lands were public lands and therefore already subject to homesteading under the Homestead Act of 1862. The author signed his name "Montauk," whom Reynolds readily identified as Elias C. Boudinot.³² Historians have often referred to Boudinot's letter in the *Chicago Times* in 1879 as a factor encouraging premature settlements in the territory, but the 1871 article may have been his first.

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Reynolds agreed with Boudinot's analysis of the territory, but he believed the Unassigned Lands belonged to the government and only Congress could authorize homesteading. Nevertheless, the article apparently received wide readership. By November, 1871, more than 500 settlers had moved into the territory to establish homesteads, but the United States Army promptly drove them out. Reynolds ridiculed the action and warned that such invasions would continue until Congress found a permanent solution to the problem.³³

Reynolds made clear what he thought should occur. In 1871 the literary men, scholars, and leading journalists of Kansas, including Reynolds, had established the *Kansas Magazine*, a high-quality publication which some Kansans compared to *Harper's Weekly* and *The Atlantic Monthly*. The first issue in June, 1872, featured an article by Reynolds entitled "The Indian State." His 5,000-word analysis again included a plea for granting each tribal member 160 acres of land, after which, he believed, the government should:

Abolish all tribal organizations, and declare the Indians citizens of our common country and sharers with us in its possibilities and future destiny. . . . Throw open the rest of the land, after Indian selections have been made, to actual settlement, at \$1.25 per acre, the proceeds to go to the establishment of schools, seminaries, colleges, and . . . to internal improvements.³⁴

The publishers printed 10,000 copies of the magazine and sent them to all parts of the nation.

Sidney Clarke, a member of Congress from Kansas and later a powerful force in the Oklahoma movement, said "The Indian State" had a powerful effect in determining the great controversy in favor of settlers. Marion Tuttle Rock in her *Illustrated History of Oklahoma*, published in 1890, described it as "outlining fully the policy of the government to be pursued in settling the Indian question." In later years Reynolds himself remembered the article as the beginning of his "unflinching faith and persistent purpose" in getting the territory opened to non-Indians.³⁵

Until 1875 Reynolds signed all his articles with his own name, but after Kiowa chief Kicking Bird died in May, 1875, he began to use "Kicking Bird" as his byline. His new pen name soon became widely known as his newspaper contemporaries often quoted him.

In 1879 Reynolds ended his *Parsons Sun* campaigns. Disgusted when the business people in the village would not support his idea of publishing 100,000 copies of the newspaper, he sold the *Sun* to

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H.H. Lusk. For a time he was in charge of a federal office called the Exodus Bureau in Parsons, but in December, 1881, he returned to newspaper work as Washington correspondent for the *Topeka Commonwealth*.

For a year he flooded Kansas newspapers as well as those in other areas with articles from Washington on the Indian problem, all signed "Kicking Bird." He pleaded for speedy legislative action on the Oklahoma country, but also appealed to whites to accept the Indians into their society. He wrote in one dispatch:

The West should now revise its shibboleth that there is no good Indian but a dead Indian and admit that the Indian may be civilized and the cheapest way to do it is to corral the children and young warriors in the schools. Let the Eastern spelling book go with the western engine and the Indian problem can be solved, for the difference is not so much in races as in individuals.³⁶

The year 1879 became a historic one for the Oklahoma movement. On February 17 Boudinot wrote a letter to the *Chicago Times*, again proclaiming the Unassigned Lands "an integral part of the public domain" and subject to settlement under homestead laws.³⁷ That letter, much the same as the one that appeared in the *Parsons Sun* in 1871, again stirred excitement among settlers gathering on the southern Kansas border.

In 1879 Captain David L. Payne arrived and began organizing his Oklahoma Colony, whose members became known as boomers. Payne had been in Washington serving as assistant doorkeeper of the House of Representatives. On a trip to Wichita, Payne recruited William L. Couch as his vice-president. The combined efforts of Reynolds, Boudinot, Payne, and Couch meant the Oklahoma movement would not be forever contained.

As momentum grew, Reynolds returned to Kansas to be closer to the action. He purchased the *Leavenworth Press* in December, 1882, but after only three months joined the editorial staff of the *Kansas City Times* where he became the principal writer of the newspaper's Oklahoma editorials. During that period the "On to Oklahoma" slogan originated and many of his *Times* editorials carried that heading. Reynolds left the *Times* in 1885, spent several months on the *Lawrence Daily Gazette*, and then two years on the *Lawrence Weekly Journal*. On each publication he continued his promotion of opening the Oklahoma country.

By 1884 Payne had led the boomers on more than a dozen invasions of the Unassigned Lands, each time attempting to set up

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a permanent colony. In all instances army troops evicted them. When Payne died suddenly on November 28, 1884, Couch succeeded him and gave the boomers the same forceful leadership. Couch led the boomers on an invasion to Stillwater Creek in December, 1884, just after Payne's death and on another colonization trip to near present Oklahoma City in 1885.³⁷ But Couch realized, however, as did Reynolds and others, that they had to take the fight to Washington. The boomers had thrust the Oklahoma problem into the national limelight, and Congress faced great pressure to open the Unassigned Lands to settlement.

Sensing the impending climax of the Oklahoma movement, in October, 1887, Reynolds changed tactics and established a newspaper he called the *Herald* in Geuda Springs, just a few miles above the southern Kansas border. He began to boast of Oklahoma as "Land of the Fair God." In addition to writing his newspaper articles, he took the lead in organizing delegations to Washington to lobby for Oklahoma legislation.

Excitement grew on January 7, 1888, as congressional champions of the Oklahoma movement intensified their actions. Among the leaders in the House of Representatives were William M. Springer of Illinois, General James B. Weaver of Iowa, Charles Mansur of Missouri, and Bishop W. Perkins of Kansas. On January 8 Springer introduced a bill for the organization of the Oklahoma country and the opening of certain lands to settlement.³⁹

Citizens along the southern Kansas border and from nearby states reacted quickly by calling for a convention in Kansas City to show that support for the Oklahoma bill extended far beyond that of the boomers. Reynolds helped organize the convention on February 8, 1888, and members elected him a member of a nineteen-man delegation to present a resolution to President Grover Cleveland urging his support for opening the Unassigned Lands to settlement. He also joined Dr. Morrison Munford of the *Kansas City Times*, Colonel Sam Crocker, a boomer leader, and several others in a preliminary visit with Cleveland to arrange for the more formal meeting.⁴⁰

The entire delegation then met with the president with Sidney Clarke as their spokesman. The president asked many questions about Oklahoma and seemed satisfied with the answers. Reynolds expressed great delight in June when a headline in the *Hutchinson News* stated, "Kicking Bird's Voice Heard and Heeded by Congress - The House Committee on Territories Reports Favorably the

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Bill to Organize the Territory." Reynolds predicted the House would act on the bill within ten days.⁴¹

His optimism was very premature. The Creeks and Seminoles, learning the land they sold to the government was about to be settled by whites, demanded a higher price. As 1888 drew to a close no action had been taken on the Oklahoma bill and proponents feared they might not secure passage before Cleveland's term ended on March 4, 1889. Finally, on January 12 the government reached an agreement with the two tribes to pay a sum that would bring the price of their lands to \$1.25 an acre. On February 1 the House passed the Springer bill.⁴²

Excitement swept through southern Kansas. Organizers called a mass meeting for February 13 in Arkansas City to gain support for getting the Oklahoma bill through the Senate. Reynolds traveled from town to town urging each community to send delegates to the meeting. In Kansas City he learned local citizens had raised enough money to send a delegation to Washington and had chosen him and Munford as delegation members. Reynolds eagerly and immediately left for Washington.

Reynolds believed the bill would pass if it could be brought up for a Senate vote, but he advised his readers that even a single amendment could kill it. On February 18, 1889, the Senate Committee on Territories cleared the bill with a favorable report. Still the Senate refused to bring up the bill for a vote in spite of Springer's efforts. Finally, its supporters conceived a plan to force the issue. Reynolds described it as follows:

For his noble efforts for Oklahoma, Congressman B.W. Perkins of Kansas will always be revered in this Territory. Judge Perkins was on the Indian Committee. The Indian appropriation bill in conference was placed in his hands. He attached a rider. . . . He said to the Senator in conference who had defeated the Springer Bill: "Pass the Oklahoma legislation as a rider to the Indian appropriation bill, or the Indian appropriation bill shall not pass." The Senator surrendered and the bill passed.⁴³

Thus, on March 3, 1889, just one day before the end of Cleveland's term, the great victory was achieved. For thousands, that meant homesteads and a new lease on life. For Milton W. Reynolds, it was the realization of a dream and a chance for him to be a part of his "Land of the Fair God."

When the great land rush began on April 22, 1889, Reynolds was aboard a train heading for Guthrie. He soon moved his newspaper

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equipment from Geuda Springs to Guthrie, where it became the *Oklahoma State Herald*. In June, because of the overcrowded newspaper field in Guthrie, he moved his plant to nearby Edmond. There on July 18, 1889, he published the first issue of *The Edmond Sun*, which still survives. He filed a claim on a quarter-section northeast of present Edmond which he called Signal Mound farm. His wife, Sarah, and their daughters, Edwinna and Susan, soon joined him there. He established his newspaper office on Edmond's main street in a frame building he shared with a lawyer, Anton Classen, also a graduate of the University of Michigan. His fifteen-



Reynolds (eighth from l, second row) was among the delegates to the first territorial convention in Guthrie three months after the land run to make plans for a territorial government. Signal Mound farm (opposite) was located one mile northeast of Edmond.

year-old printer's helper was Everett B. (Ed) Howard, who later became a United States congressman.

The new settlers revered Reynolds and many believed they owed their new homes to his efforts. The area's leading men began a movement to have him appointed Oklahoma's first secretary, a position he coveted. Many territorial newspapers supported him, and both political parties endorsed him. But following passage of the Organic Act on May 2, 1890, President Benjamin Harrison appointed Robert Martin of Ohio to the post.⁴⁴

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Newspapers then began a campaign to have Reynolds appointed territorial printer, but the *Oklahoma City Times* suggested instead that Reynolds be nominated for a seat in the territorial legislature. "The high esteem in which this gentleman is held will assure his success at the polls," the *Times* stated.⁴⁵

The Organic Act specified that a representative would be elected from each of twenty-five districts, plus one in an at-large category. Some historians believe the government created the latter position as an honor to Reynolds so he could represent all the people of Oklahoma.⁴⁶ Reynolds eagerly accepted the challenge.



George Steele, Oklahoma's first territorial governor, issued a proclamation on July 1, 1890, setting an August 5 election date. Although Reynolds had only token opposition, he campaigned vigorously. The weather was hot and dry as he spoke in several towns each day. At night, he performed his editing chores on the *Sun*, often working until dawn.

On election day, Reynolds arrived at his home at twilight. As he stepped inside the house, he suddenly collapsed. For four days he remained in a coma, then died on August 9 without knowing he had been elected.⁴⁷

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A small marker in front of the Edmond Evening Sun building honors Reynolds, who founded the newspaper as a weekly on July 18, 1889 (Courtesy the author).

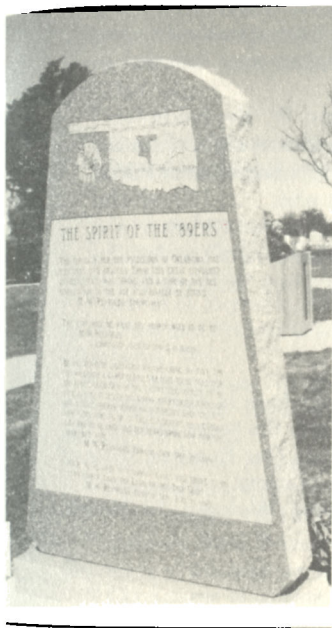
Farmers, business people, editors, and political dignitaries attended Reynolds' funeral the following day. Sidney Clarke, his friend since 1865, delivered the eulogy. After the funeral his helpers returned to the *Sun* office where they found an editorial Reynolds had just completed. His last words expressed his love for Oklahoma, "Our lot is cast in a goodly land, and there is no land fairer than the Land of the Fair God."⁴⁸

For many years Reynolds' burial site remained a mystery for historians. At the time of his death, his family buried him on school land east of Edmond, since the town had no cemetery. In 1895 his daughter Susan had his remains transferred to Gracelawn Cemetery. For many years two grave markers there have borne his name. Through painstaking research, Lucille Warrick of the Edmond Historical Society in 1994 established lots in section eleven of Gracelawn as Reynolds' burial site.

It is safe to assume that most Oklahomans know about David L. Payne and the boomers, the Unassigned Lands, and the run of 1889, but few seem aware of the contributions of Kicking Bird. If Payne was the man of action, Milton Reynolds was the definitive theorist.

When non-Indian Oklahomans commemorate the historic land opening, they would do well to consider the words of historians Joseph Thoburn and Muriel Wright. Writing in 1936 they noted:

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In Edmond, Reynolds' memory is preserved through a golf course (upper r) on land that was once Signal Mound farm, a movie theater (middle r), a housing subdivision (lower r), all carrying his name, and a granite marker (upper l) erected and dedicated by the Edmond Historical Society in April, 1995 (Courtesy the author).



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[H]ad it not been for the newspaper space that was given to the preliminary agitation for the opening of certain unoccupied lands [in Oklahoma] . . . all of the organized movements to that end probably would have ended in failure. Moreover, the newspapers in neighboring states and in Eastern states would have failed to carry any Oklahoma news or stories had it not been for a very few correspondents, who never failed to throw a glamour[ous] . . . and picturesque interest in everything they wrote.

The dean of this little corps was . . . Milton W. Reynolds. . . . Distinguished more for the brilliancy of his rhetorical style than for the absolute accuracy of his statements, his contributions never failed to attract instant attention and hold it to the end. . . . [O]ver the signature of "Kicking Bird" . . . he made the name of Oklahoma a household word. Payne and Couch might be the leaders of the forlorn hope . . . for settlement in the Oklahoma country, but "Kicking Bird" was always and ever its prophet.⁴⁹

ENDNOTES

* D. Earl Newsom, a native of Drumright who currently lives in Stillwater, is a former journalism professor at the University of Maryland. His books include *The Cherokee Strip, Its History and Grand Opening, Stillwater, One Hundred Years of Memories*, and a forthcoming book on the history of Payne County.

¹ Dan W. Peery, "Milton W. Reynolds," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 13 (March, 1935): 50.

² *Ibid.*, 50.

³ *Parsons (Kansas) Sun*, February 2, 1912.

⁴ *U.S. Dictionary of Biographies, Kansas* (Chicago, 1879), 602-604.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Nebraska City (Nebraska) News*, August 15, 1867, January 9, April 24, 1858.

⁸ *U.S. Dictionary of Biographies, Kansas*, 602-604.

⁹ Raymond E. Dale, "Biographical Dictionary of Otoe County, 1854-1870," unpublished manuscript, Nebraska Historical Society, Omaha.

¹⁰ *Nebraska City News*, June 5, 17, 18, July 3, 1882.

¹¹ Dale, "Biographical Dictionary of Otoe County."

¹² Victor E. Harlow, *Oklahoma, Its Origins and Development* (Oklahoma City: Harlow Publishing Company, 1949), 197.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 200; Peery, "Milton W. Reynolds," 48; Joseph B. Thoburn and Muriel H. Wright, *Oklahoma, A History of the State and Its People* (4 vols., New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1929), I: 377.

¹⁴ Harlow, 201; Thoburn and Wright, 377, 378; Marion Tuttle Rock, *Illustrated History of Oklahoma* (Topeka, Kansas: C.B. Hamilton, 1890), 8; D.N. Cooley, "Report of the President of the Southern Treaty Commission," *Department of Interior, Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1890*, 296-358.

¹⁵ Harlow, *Oklahoma*, 203.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 207, 208.

¹⁷ (Lawrence) *Kansas State Journal*, February 2, March 23, June 8, October 7, 1866.

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- ¹⁸ D.E. Newsom, *Kicking Bird and the Birth of Oklahoma* (Perkins, Oklahoma: Evans Publications, 1981), 34; *Kansas State Journal*, June, 1867.
- ¹⁹ Douglas C. Jones, *The Treaty of Medicine Lodge* (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), 41, 78, 126, 151; Newsom, *Kicking Bird*, 35–47.
- ²⁰ M.W. Reynolds, C.T. Shipley, and E.R. Roxbury, "Report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs by Special Commission to Locate Sac and Fox and Pottawatomie Indian Reservations," June, 1869, National Archives and Record Service, Washington, D.C.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*
- ²² *Ibid.*
- ²³ *Lawrence (Kansas) Republican Daily Journal*, May 30, 1869.
- ²⁴ Reynolds, Shipley, and Roxbury, "Report to the Commissioner."
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*
- ²⁶ *Parsons Sun*, April 19, 1971.
- ²⁷ Newsom, *Kicking Bird*, 88; *Parsons Sun*, October 16, 1971; *U.S. Dictionary of Biographies*, 604.
- ²⁸ Edwin D. Reynolds, Alice Marriott, and Estelle Faulconer, *Oklahoma, The Story of Its Past and Present* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978), 136; Harlow, *Oklahoma*, 224.
- ²⁹ V.V. Masterson, *The Katy Railroad and the Last Frontier* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1952), 70, 123, 167; *Parsons Sun*, October 21, November 4, 1871, January 20, 1872.
- ³⁰ *Parsons Sun*, August 5, December 2, 1871; Newsom, *Kicking Bird*, 72.
- ³¹ *Parsons Sun*, October 30, 1875, January 6, April 9, July 1, 1876.
- ³² *Ibid.*, August 12, 1871.
- ³³ *Parsons Sun*, December 2, 23, 1871; William Belknap, Secretary of War, to Secretary of the Interior, November 13, 1871.
- ³⁴ *The Kansas Magazine*, June, 1872.
- ³⁵ Rock, *Illustrated History*, 104.
- ³⁶ *Topeka (Kansas) Daily Commonwealth*, January 29, March 9, March 30, 1882.
- ³⁷ Harlow, *Oklahoma*, 245; Thoburn and Wright, *Oklahoma, A History*, 510–513.
- ³⁸ Berlin Basil Chapman, *The Founding of Stillwater* (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma: Times Journal Publishing Company, 1948), 6–12; Eugene Couch, "One Pioneer Family," unpublished manuscript in possession of author.
- ³⁹ Harlow, *Oklahoma*, 248, 252.
- ⁴⁰ "Colonel Crocker and the Boomer Movement," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 13 (September, 1935): 281–287; *Geuda Springs (Kansas) Herald*, March 21, April 21, 1888; Newsom, *Kicking Bird*, 105, 106.
- ⁴¹ Newsom, *Kicking Bird*, 105, 106.
- ⁴² Harlow, *Oklahoma*, 253.
- ⁴³ Rock, *Illustrated History*, 10, 11.
- ⁴⁴ Newsom, *Kicking Bird*, 121–123.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 124.
- ⁴⁶ Thoburn and Wright, *Oklahoma, A History*, 761, 762.
- ⁴⁷ Susan G. Reynolds to author, October 3, 1955.
- ⁴⁸ *Edmond (Oklahoma) Sun*, July 24, 1890, February 27, 1947; *Tulsa (Oklahoma) World*, April 22, 1942.
- ⁴⁹ Thoburn and Wright, *Oklahoma, A History*, 761–762.