

A HISTORY OF COUNCIL GROVE  
IN OKLAHOMA

By Ray Asplin\*

The history of Council Grove is an old, interesting and varied as any part of Oklahoma. The place was an ideal meeting place for the Indians in the early times, because there was a good spring of water near the river and a large grove of oak, cottonwood and elm trees which furnished a shade. It was called Council Grove because tribes of the Plains Indians including the Kiowas and Comanches, gathered here during the years for councils. There was also an Indian burial ground nearby, but there is no evidence of it now. Mr. J. Roy Abernathy tells of seeing many Indians gathered at the spring, periodically, even after 1900.<sup>1</sup>

The area of Council Grove covered approximately three and a half square miles. It included the land south of Northwest Thirty-ninth Street in Bethany and Warr Acres, along U.S. Highway 66, extending south to the Rock Island Railroad tracks near West Reno Street in Oklahoma City and from the North Canadian River east, three miles to the vicinity of MacArthur Boulevard. The old spring is located between the Northwest Tenth Street Bridge and the Lake Overholser Dam, in the willows below the dam.<sup>2</sup>

In 1858, Jesse Chisholm opened a trading post at Council Grove, just east of the North Canadian River, on land that was later homesteaded by Mr. J. A. "Uncle Jimmy" Young in 1889. Chisholm was on friendly terms with all the Indians of the Southern Plains region, and could go among them to trade, even when they were at war with the white people.<sup>3</sup>

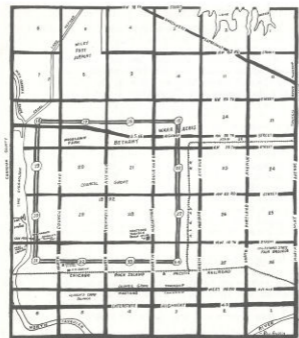
Jesse Chisholm was born in Tennessee in 1806. He became a famous scout, guide, interpreter and trader. His father, Ignatius

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<sup>1</sup> Unpublished manuscript, "Council Grove," p. 1, by a Committee of the Council Grove Chapter of the D.A.R. in the Newspaper Department of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph P. Thoburn, *A Standard History of Oklahoma*, Vol. I (Chicago and New York: American Historical Society, 1915), p. 168.



### MAP OF COUNCIL GROVE

Military Timber Reservation in Twp. 2 N., R. 4 W.—Fort Reno, Indian Territory, established by Order of the President of the United States, April 20, 1860. The Township (36 sections) shown gives present day streets and highways within limits of Oklahoma City. Council Grove (shown within double lines =) covers four sections (20, 21, 24, 25) and parts of sections (15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 22, 27, 28, 31, 32, 33, 34). Queen's Camp School was south in Section 5 of Mustang Township.

Chisholm was a white man of Scotch descent and his mother was a Cherokee Indian woman. He migrated west, before the Cherokees left Arkansas, and settled for a while on Spadra River in Western Arkansas.<sup>4</sup>

About 1825, he and his mother and his aunt Tiana Rogers arrived at Ft. Gibson in the Indian Territory. A few years after their arrival at Ft. Gibson, his aunt Tiana Rogers married Sam Houston who had known them in Tennessee. In a few years Sam Houston went to Texas to fight in the Texas Revolution and became the president of the Republic of Texas. Tiana refused to go to Texas so the couple was separated. For over forty years Jesse Chisholm was a factor in the affairs of the Southwest, not only in the old Indian Territory, but also in Texas, New Mexico, Kansas and Arkansas.<sup>5</sup>

Jesse Chisholm made his way west and stopped at Edward's Store, which was located five miles south of the present city of Holdenville, Oklahoma on the south bank of Little River. After three years at the Edward's Store, he married Miss Eliza Edwards, a member of the Creek Tribe. He entered into partnership with his father-in-law and started those memorable treks to the west and traded with the civilized Indians as well as with the roving Plains Indians. Jesse Chisholm was a traveling trader.<sup>6</sup>

Jesse Chisholm had established a store at Chisholm Spring, two miles east of the present town of Auber, Oklahoma, about the time of his marriage to Eliza Edwards. The large spring along the trail gave clear cool water and served as a camp ground for Indians on their way to Edward's Store. This was a midway point between Edward's Store on Little River, thirty-two miles to the east and the Chouteau Trading Post near Lexington to the west.<sup>7</sup> He had learned that the Plains Indians were adverse to traveling trails through timbered country, and for this reason found this location more favorable than that at Edward's Store.

In 1850 he took possession of the trading post which had been established by Colonel A. P. Chouteau, shortly before his

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 304.

<sup>5</sup> T. U. Taylor, *Jesse Chisholm* (Bendern, Texas: Frontier Times, 1889), p. 24.

<sup>6</sup> T. U. Taylor, "In The Land of the Chisholms," *Frontier Times*, Vol. 15, pp. 495-496.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 498.

death in 1838, and conducted much of his Indian trade from this base, near the present site of Lexington.<sup>8</sup>

In 1858 he continued on northwest and established a trading post at Council Grove on the North Canadian River. Here he gained great influence among the tribes of the Southwest, by whom he was recognized, not merely as a friend, but as a counselor, arbiter and brother as well. He was an adopted brother of the Wichita and Caddo tribes.<sup>9</sup>

A large part of Chisholm's trading operations were on the open range with wagons drawn by oxen, horses or mules. He equipped his trains, and went into the center of the Indian tribe, for he had learned, early that the wild Indians did not like to come east into the Cross Timber region, and hence he would go to them. He packed his trains with the merchandise that they liked, such as red calico, beads, paints, but he never took them whiskey. He was methodical in his business transactions, employing a man to keep records and accompany him on the trading expedition into the wilderness where he bartered with the Indians in their camps.<sup>10</sup>

Jesse Chisholm himself was preeminently a man of peace, his services as a mediator and peacemaker were always in demand at every peace council in Kansas, North Texas and the Indian Territory. It is said that he could speak fourteen different languages and was frequently called upon to act as an interpreter between the army officers and the Indians of the wild tribes. He was known early as a "square shooter, a square dealer and a man with a straight tongue." He not only served as an interpreter for the United States Army officials but was a great influence among the Indian warriors as a peacemaker and pathfinder.<sup>11</sup>

He was always a good Samaritan. The Comanches found that they could capture white children in Texas and sell them to Jesse Chisholm in Oklahoma. The wild tribes including the Comanches of Texas, learned that the white children had a high commercial value and all that had to be done, was to get in touch with Edward's Store. Parents as far away as Bastrop County Texas went to Edward's Store to get news of their lost children.<sup>12</sup>

Jesse Chisholm, himself, bought nearly a dozen of these

<sup>8</sup> Joseph B. Thuburn, "Jesse Chisholm — A Stalwart Figure in History," *Frontier Times*, Vol. 13, p. 330.

<sup>9</sup> T. U. Taylor, *Jesse Chisholm*, pp. 62-63.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>12</sup> T. U. Taylor, *op. cit.* in *Frontier Times*, Vol. 16, p. 406.

children, who had been held in bondage among the Comanches and Kiowas. Some of these captives, most of whom were Mexicans were adopted and reared in his home as members of his own family and became useful citizens in this part of the country.<sup>13</sup>

In 1859, Colonel Benjamin L. E. Bonneville,<sup>14</sup> Congressman John S. Phelps of Missouri,<sup>15</sup> and Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Collins, with a troop of 180 soldiers went to Council Grove to meet with the leaders of the Comanches. The purpose of this meeting was to try to persuade the Comanches to cease their hostilities against the white people and to create a more friendly relation between them. The Comanches were unfriendly and suspicious when they saw the troops, no doubt mindful of the attack upon their camp while on the way to Fort Arbuckle on a peaceful mission in 1858. They refused to trust the peaceful intention and professions of the white man. They broke their camp on the North Canadian in great confusion and fled northward upon the approach of the troops, and the meeting at Council Grove failed.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Joseph B. Thoburn, *A Standard History of Oklahoma*, Vol. I, p. 304.

<sup>14</sup> Benjamin Louis Eulalie Bonneville, born in France in 1793, was an intimate friend of General Lafayette. The Bonneville family was disfavor by denouncing Napoleon Bonaparte and were exiled to America. Benjamin graduated from the United States Military Academy in 1815. He served in the army on the frontier posts until 1819, later he was engaged in the construction of military roads. During this time he served at Ft. Smith and at Ft. Gibson in Indian Territory. For a time he served in New York as secretary to General Lafayette. He later returned to Ft. Gibson and from there headed an expedition into the Rocky Mountains. He was away for four years, during which he made notes of his expedition, which he sold in Washington Irving who published the book, *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville*. Bonneville served with distinction in the Mexican War, was later advanced to the rank of colonel and retired in 1861. He entered active service again during the Civil War and in 1865 he was brevetted Brigadier General. In 1866, he retired from the army. He moved to Ft. Smith, Arkansas where he died on June 12, 1878. — W. J. Ghent, *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1934), Vol. II, p. 458.

<sup>15</sup> John Smith Phelps, born at Simsbury, Connecticut in 1814, was son of Congressman Elisha Phelps of Connecticut. He graduated from Trinity College in 1832, studied law under his father, and was admitted to the bar in 1836. He married Mary Whitney of Portland, Maine in 1837, and moved to Springfield, Missouri. In 1840 he was elected to the Missouri Legislature. In 1844 he was elected to Congress and served for eighteen years. He organized the Phelps Regiment which he led during the Civil War in battles in Missouri and Arkansas. In 1862 he served as Military Governor of Arkansas appointed by President Lincoln. After the Civil War he was elected Governor of Missouri. He died on November 20, 1886. — H. Edward Nettles, *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1934), Vol. XIV, p. 530.

<sup>16</sup> Joseph B. Thoburn and Isaac M. Helcomb, *A History of Oklahoma* (San Francisco: Doubt and Company, 1908), pp. 70-71.

Chisholm abandoned his trading post at Council Grove in 1861, because of the Civil War. He was among the Loyal Creeks, Shawnees and other Indians in the exodus or migration to a place of safety on the Arkansas River in Kansas. They settled on Chisholm Creek, just east of the present city of Wichita, Kansas.<sup>17</sup>

The influence of Jesse Chisholm prevailed in central Oklahoma and many of the Indians remained neutral during the Civil War. Toward the last years of the war, the Comanches and other wild tribes in the Indian Territory came to the Wichita village on the Arkansas River to trade with him. He eventually was persuaded to return to the Canadian River region as a trader.<sup>18</sup>

In March 1865, Jesse Chisholm loaded some wagons with the usual hunter and trader supplies of coffee, tobacco, sugar, blankets, and small items of hardware, accompanied by James R. Mead, another trader, proceeded southward on the faint traces of the trail made by the retreating Federal garrisons of Indian Territory military bases in the spring of 1861. Chisholm made his way to the Canadian valley and reopened his trading post at Council Grove.<sup>19</sup>

The route selected on his return to Council Grove was a good one. A few years later it became part of the famous Chisholm Trail, used by Texas cattlemen seeking a northern outlet for their cattle at Abilene, Kansas. While Jesse Chisholm had little to do with the cattle industry, the trail was named for him. A few years later the Chicago Rock Island and Pacific Railroad followed this same route into Texas, and today U.S. Highway 81 in Oklahoma parallels this same route, with markers designating it as the Chisholm Trail.<sup>20</sup>

Chisholm re-established his trade in beaver and otter pelta and in deer, elk and buffalo hides. Early in 1866, he had collected a great pile of pelta, beaver, otter, deer, elk, wolf and buffalo, which he hauled to Kansas City. He extended his business activities up the North Canadian River into the present Blaine County where he established a salt works.<sup>21</sup>

Disorder and uncertainty reigned in the Indian Territory, during the last year of the Civil War. Most of the leaders in the

<sup>17</sup> Unpublished Manuscript, "Council Grove," p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> Joseph B. Thoburn, *op. cit.*, *Frontier Times*, Vol. 13, p. 331.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 331.

<sup>20</sup> T. U. Taylor, *Jesse Chisholm*, p. 191.

<sup>21</sup> Unpublished Manuscript, "Council Grove," p. 2.

Five Indian nations now began to realize that they had been and were being used as a buffer to protect the Confederate States on their borders. With that realization came a desire to change this situation.<sup>22</sup>

The Confederacy could no longer protect the Civilized Indians from the Plains Indians when the forts which had formerly been the barrier against the raids of the wild tribes would not be manned by the troops of the United States. The devastation of their country and chaos among their people caused them to seek redress by an organization of themselves into an Indian league.<sup>23</sup> While the Confederates showed little inclination to curry favor with the United States by repudiating their alliances, they did make strong efforts to unite with the Plains tribes and Union Indians as a means of approaching peace talks.<sup>24</sup>

Early in 1865, Major Israel J. Vore, Confederate tribal agent for the Creek Nation under General S. Kirby Smith, Commander of the Trans-Mississippi Department of the Confederate Army sent word to the Plains Indians that some commissioners with authority from the Confederate States should meet with them at the great peace council of all the Indian tribes. It was proposed that this meeting be held at Council Grove on May 15, 1865, and this was strongly urged in General Smith's communication. He was firm in the belief that an alliance could be made with these tribes.<sup>25</sup> Governor Throckmorton of Texas and General Albert Pike were originally named delegates to represent the Confederacy. General Pike refused to serve and Colonel W. D. Reagan was appointed in his place.<sup>26</sup> The Plains tribes sent delegates, and upon arriving in the vicinity of Council Grove, word was brought in by scouts that a Federal military force was being organized in Kansas to prevent or disrupt the meeting at Council Grove. Thereupon the delegations that had already gathered, proceeded south and west to Cottonwood Grove, two miles west of the present town of Verden on the

<sup>22</sup> Anna Lewis, "Camp Napoleon," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* Vol. IX, (1931), p. 306.

<sup>23</sup> Victor E. Harlow, *Oklahoma—Its Origin and Development* (Oklahoma City: Harlow Publishing Company, 1934), p. 100.

<sup>24</sup> Edwin C. McReynolds, *Oklahoma—A History of the Sooner State* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press 1954), p. 222.

<sup>25</sup> *The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, D.C.: The Government Printing Office 1890-1901), Vol. XLVIII, Part II, p. 1269.

<sup>26</sup> Unpublished Manuscript, "Council Grove," p. 3.

Washita River and set up camp which they called Camp Napoleon. They called the meeting ten days later.<sup>27</sup>

Most of the Western tribes, including the Cheyenne, Arapaho, Lipan, Osage and Caddo were represented and numbered 6,000 or more.<sup>28</sup> The principal chiefs of the Creek and Seminole Nations, joined in an address urging all Indian tribes or bands, including those who had adhered to the Federal government and opposed the Confederacy to drop all past differences and become parties of a peace compact.<sup>29</sup>

The council was highly successful. It resolved on a permanent peace among the Indians and renewed their pledges to union. The purpose of the Civilized tribes is apparent in the compact which the tribes signed. This provided for perpetual friendship among all Indians, forbade the warpath among themselves forever and stated: "The motto or principle of the Confederate Indian Tribes shall be; 'An Indian shall not spill another Indian's blood.'"<sup>30</sup>

In 1866 when Jesse Chisholm and his friend James R. Mead took the load of furs to Kansas City, they went to Leavenworth, Kansas. They happened to pass a photographic shop, and Mead induced Chisholm to enter and have his picture taken. Mead did not know the contribution he was making to history when he induced Chisholm to have his picture taken. This was the only photograph ever made of Jesse Chisholm.<sup>31</sup>

Although Jesse Chisholm was in poor health after 1865, he continued in pursuit of his trading business. He was a good business man and a successful trader, yet such was his generosity and charity that he never amassed as much wealth as a more selfish man might have done under similar circumstances.<sup>32</sup>

In 1866, he saw the first herd go up the trail that he had followed from Wichita. This herd was driven by Captain Henry Spikes of what is now Bryan County, Oklahoma. Later many herds were driven over this route to Abilene, Kansas, and was known far and wide as the Chisholm Trail. Before Jesse Chisholm died, over a half-million Texas steers were driven over this trail.<sup>33</sup>

In 1867 a great hunting expedition was organized by Mont-

<sup>27</sup> Joseph B. Thoburn and Muriel H. Wright, *Oklahoma: A History of the State and Its People*, (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., 1929), Vol. II, p. 849.

<sup>28</sup> Victor E. Harlow, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

<sup>29</sup> Joseph B. Thoburn and Isaac M. Holcomb, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

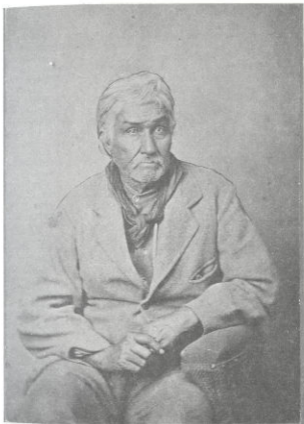
<sup>30</sup> Victor E. Harlow, *op. cit.*, p. 187; Anna Lewin, *op. cit.*

<sup>31</sup> T. U. Taylor in *Frontier Times*, Vol. 13, p. 541.

<sup>32</sup> Joseph B. Thoburn, *A Standard History of Oklahoma*, Vol. I, p. 304.

<sup>33</sup> T. U. Taylor, in *Frontier Times*, Vol. 13, p. 334.





JESSE CHISHOLM, CHEROKEE

ford T. Johnson,<sup>14</sup> Sam Garvin, Bill Williams and Jesse Chisholm. They finally camped on Walnut Creek some ten miles northwest of the present town of Purcell, Oklahoma, in the vicinity of what is now Washington, Oklahoma. A herd of buffalo was discovered the next day and the hunt was very successful. The hides, tongues and humps were taken as the choice part of the buffalo. The whole party turned into a skinning party to preserve the hides which were of commercial value and part of the meat was preserved by the "jerkin" process. Montford T. Johnson and Jesse Chisholm were impressed with the wonderful possibilities of this country along Walnut Creek for cattle grazing purposes. Jesse agreed to intercede with the Indians and have them not to disturb Montford Johnson in his ranch proposition. In the spring of 1868, Mr. Johnson established his ranch on Walnut Creek with the permission of the Chickasaw Nation.<sup>15</sup>

In 1868, Chisholm took a caravan to the salt district of present Blaine County, about thirty miles northwest of the present site of El Reno, Oklahoma on the bank of the North Canadian River. Here he had met with the Comanches, Kiowas, Wichitas, and other Indians, and were supplying them with goods.<sup>16</sup> It seems that a party had gathered at the spring and a bear was killed and the choice bits were rendered into a stew by boiling it in a brass kettle. The results were disastrous. During the night, Jesse Chisholm was seized with a serious illness. Whether it was ptomaine poison or some other ailment is not known. There was no physician within one hundred miles, and he died in a few hours. It would have taken at least four days to transport his body to the residence of his son, William Chisholm, who lived in the Chickasaw Nation, south of the present site of Asher, Oklahoma. They buried Jesse Chisholm near the Left Hand Spring, five miles east of the present Greenfield, Oklahoma.<sup>17</sup> With him at the time of his death were his friends, James R. Mead and P. A. Smith, one of Chisholm's foremen, and a negro boy, Joe Van.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Montford T. Johnson was born at Old Boggy Depot, Choctaw Nation, in 1843, the son of Charley Johnson, a native of London, England who had gone to Mississippi and married a Chickasaw girl, Rebecca Courtney. The young couple came to the Indian Territory during the Chickasaw removal to the west. Montford attended the Chickasaw Academy at Tahlequah. During the Civil War, he served with the Chickasaw troops around Ft. Arbuckle. In 1862, he married Mary Elizabeth Campbell. He operated large ranches in the Chickasaw Nation and founded the first bank at Mize in 1890. — Hilary Cassel, "Miscellaneous Tour of the Chickasaw Nation," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. 34, p. 412.

<sup>15</sup> T. T. Taylor, *Jesse Chisholm*, pp. 141-142.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 143-144.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

The grave remained unmarked for years but finally the school children of Oklahoma erected a small marker to bear the testimony to this patriot, pioneer, peacemaker and pathfinder.<sup>39</sup> Chisholm's death was a serious blow to the tribes of South-western Oklahoma, and he was mourned as if he had been a chieftain. The news of his death was flashed from tribe to tribe by swift runners. The greatest tribute ever paid to a man of Oklahoma, was paid to the memory of Jesse Chisholm when the Indians without respect to tribe, mourned him as a brother.<sup>40</sup>

Jesse Chisholm had lived among savage men and beasts and savage conditions, but in all phases during his thirty years in the wilderness he emerged as an example of the truest type of manhood.<sup>41</sup> His religious belief was that of his Cherokee ancestors. His "paganism" consisted in the belief in one Supreme Being whose innate goodness he trusted implicitly, and in manifesting peace and kindness and brotherly love and charity toward his fellow man. Jesse Chisholm's part in the history of Oklahoma and some portions of the neighboring states, is fully as important and no less romantically picturesque than that of Daniel Boone in Kentucky.<sup>42</sup>

The Council Grove section was soon included in Montford Johnson's ranching operations. It had a large timber area about three and a half square miles with the ground covered with acorns, a paradise for hogs in the fall of the year. In this timbered area there were many bears and panthers that had to be trapped, killed or driven out, in order that the hogs and cattle could be raised in this area.<sup>43</sup>

Jesse Chisholm had logs stored at Council Grove to build a large store at Council Grove, but William Chisholm, his son, sold the logs to Montford Johnson after his father's death.<sup>44</sup> These logs were moved to the east side of Council Grove and were used in constructing a ranch house about 1873, in the vicinity of North MacArthur Boulevard, Oklahoma City. The ranch was run for Johnson by Vasey Harmon, Long Gray and Frank Dyes, all Chickasaws. These people may have been the first permanent inhabitants of Oklahoma City.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>39</sup> T. U. Tynze, in *Frontier Times*, Vol. 13, p. 501.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Joseph B. Thoburn, in *Frontier Times*, Vol. 13, pp. 331-332.

<sup>43</sup> Neil B. Johnson, *Chickasaw Rancher* (Stillwater, Oklahoma: Red-Limb Press 1911), pp. 125-127.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>45</sup> Howard P. Vanaukt, "The History of Camp Holmes and Chontau's Trading Post," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XIII (September 1935), p. 326.

Montford T. Johnson had a large stock of cattle and hogs at the Council Grove Ranch which covered about 3,600 acres.<sup>46</sup> He maintained his headquarters at Silver City, which is now near the town of Tuttle.

During the early part of the 1860's, Montford Johnson discovered that his Council Grove Ranch on the North Canadian River was not in the Chickasaw Nation. In February, 1860, President Hayes issued a proclamation which warned homesteaders to keep out of the Oklahoma District. Johnson had to abandon his Council Grove Ranch by 1866.<sup>47</sup> The United States Government set aside more than 1,000 acres of woodland in the Council Grove area, as a source of timber needed for Ft. Reno. This reservation extended from the present Northwest 39th Street in Bethany to the road a half mile south of the present Northwest Tenth Street, and from the present Council Road eastward for about three miles.<sup>48</sup>

This is the same belt of timber that Montford Johnson had to drive, trap and kill bears and panthers, before he could establish his ranch. It consisted of post oak, western white oak, black jack and cottonwood, some of these trees measuring from three to five feet in diameter. Even today some of the large trees are still standing. Thousands of prairie chickens roosted in the branches of these trees, because they could find abundant food in the great timbered area. This timberland was also known as Johnson's Grove in the early days.<sup>49</sup>

The reservation was set aside by the government to furnish fuel and fence posts to Ft. Reno. Later the interest was turned to lumbering operations here. A saw mill was set up at the Darlington Agency, but it was difficult to find desirable logs nearby to supply Fort Reno with the lumber needed in its construction. The nearest and most available timber that was suitable for logging and sawing was at Council Grove. The distance was too far to haul the logs to the saw mills, so the saw mill was moved to a site near the logs.<sup>50</sup>

In 1884, Mr. Edwin F. Williams, who was an experienced engineer and mechanic was placed in charge of the removal and reinstallation of the engine, boiler and saw mill, and directed its operation thereafter. The mill was located just northeast of the

<sup>46</sup> Hilkey Case, *op. cit.*, 5a, 24, p. 412.

<sup>47</sup> Nell R. Johnson, *op. cit.*, pp. 120-127.

<sup>48</sup> Unpublished Manuscript, "Council Grove," p. 4.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>50</sup> H. E. Collins, "Edwin Williams, Engineer," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. X, p. 366.

present Northwest Tenth Street Bridge. J. A. Davis, an early settler told Joseph B. Thoburn of having seen the timbers which had formed the base of the saw mill, almost buried in the sand when he arrived there in 1868.<sup>51</sup> Soldiers, before the opening in 1869, were detailed to cut the timber and to guard it against timber thieves. Rude barracks were built across the road from the old I. P. McIrose home. Sergeant Gray was in command of the soldiers.<sup>52</sup>

The heavy lumber such as sleepers, sills, joists, studding and rafters were cut and used at Fort Reno. Most of the slabs and loose lumber was used at the fort for fuel. Mr. Claude Hensley, a pioneer newspaper man of Oklahoma tells of seeing several thousand cords of wood piled in front of the Post Trader's Store at Ft. Reno.<sup>53</sup>

When this area was opened for settlement on April 22, 1869, a Negro, whose name was Porter was designated to plow furrows around the government reservation as a fire guard and to mark it off as government property; hence no land claim could be staked within the boundary. People of the surrounding neighborhood were allowed to take the fallen timber for fuel. Some unscrupulous men got around the rule by going out one day, cutting the timber and returning the next day for the fallen timber which they had cut the day before.<sup>54</sup> Government officers soon checked this depredation.

When the Choctaw Coal & Railway Company, now a part of the Rock Island Railroad, was built and trains started running from Shawnee to Ft. Reno, coal could be obtained for fuel. Less wood was needed and eventually the sawmill was abandoned. The lands in the reservation were thrown open for sale in December, 1899.<sup>55</sup>

In 1865, a colony of settlers under the leadership of Captain William L. Couch appeared in the vicinity of the Council Grove Ranch. They shot and butchered Montford Johnson's hogs and even killed some of his calves. When Johnson investigated this colony, which was settling in the North Canadian Valley, Couch informed him that he supposed that the hogs and calves belonged to no one. He announced that he was going to colonize the Oklahoma country. The following year, the Council Grove Ranch was abandoned.<sup>56</sup> Captain Couch and his colony were removed

<sup>51</sup> Unpublished Manuscript, "Council Grove," p. 4.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>55</sup> Hubert E. Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

<sup>56</sup> Neil B. Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

by troops under the command of Lieutenant Colonel E. V. Sumner, of the Fifth United States Cavalry on November 10, 1885. This was the last organized effort of the boomers to effect a settlement in Oklahoma.<sup>57</sup>

All of the Council Grove reserve area was opened for settlement except that part in the timber reserve, on April 22, 1889. Some of the early settlers were: William Lytle, Jack A. Lawson, R. C. Knight, John Oshes, I. F. Melrose, William Pigler (a "sooner", whose place was bought by Oliver Russell), John N. Abernathy, Mason S. Maxwell, Edgar and Charles Knight, Dr. Jewell Trader, John Trader, Sim Kaufman, Scott Ticer, Newt and Bond Baker, A. E. Broady, Lee Stinchcomb and others.<sup>58</sup>

J. A. Young was urged by his wife, Mary Rosalee to settle in Oklahoma. She had once pioneered as a small girl from Iowa to Sumner County, Kansas, with her parents. Mr. Young came to Council Grove during the run and bought a relinquishment to a farm from another man who had staked a claim there. Young's wife and children joined him, coming by train.<sup>59</sup> Signs of the old Jesse Chisholm trading post were still to be seen in 1889 on the farm of J. A. Young. There was the well, where Mr. Young built his barn, and broken pieces of china and traces around the log buildings could still be seen.<sup>60</sup> Other reports on "Council Grove" say that "Boomer" Miller, so called because he arrived before the opening in 1889, claimed the land and refused to yield to Mr. Young's claim. The case was taken to court and after several years of litigation the title was awarded to Young, and the Miller family left this part of the country.

Porter, the Negro who had plowed the fire break around the timber reservation, occupied the farm homesteaded by Mr. I. F. Melrose, but he occupied this land before the opening in 1889. Since Melrose had filed a claim according to law, Porter had to relinquish his rights.

"Uncle Johnny" Baker and Vincent Anderson owned the farms which are now included in Lake Overholser and the dam. Mr. Anderson's land was between Baker's and Northwest Thirty-ninth Street. His farm was first occupied by a Negro, "Uncle Davy" and his wife Mary, who had been slaves belonging to an uncle of the Hon. Hoke Smith of Georgia, Secretary of Interior under President Cleveland. In a contest over the title, "Uncle Davy" threatened to kill anyone who laid claim to the land, upon which he was living. He even made a trip to Washington,

<sup>57</sup> Joseph B. Thorburn, *A Standard History of Oklahoma*, Vol. II, pp. 604-605.

<sup>58</sup> Unpublished Manuscript, "Council Grove," p. 8.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

D.C., by train in behalf of his claim. Vincent Anderson was ultimately granted title to the land.

Mr. Lee Stinchcomb was the last of the 89'ers to be living on his original homestead.<sup>61</sup>

The first murder in Council Grove was committed May 1, 1889. A small boy found the body of a man floating in the water at the crossing, where the Northwest Tenth Street bridge is now located. Various tales were told about this incident. There is even a story that an old man in Kentucky confessed on his death bed that he was guilty. The murdered man was unknown, and the facts concerning the murder were never learned. He was buried on the bank of the North Canadian River. The County later paid \$10.00 to have the body moved when the Northwest Tenth Street Bridge was built, and the body was buried in a small graveyard which was located on the Colley farm. Since this plot has been plowed under, all traces of his burial place are gone. The old settlers still call the place, on Northwest Tenth Street, "Dead Man's Crossing."<sup>62</sup>

The Choctaw Coal & Railway Company started construction eastward from El Reno to Oklahoma City where it was intended that the line would connect with the Santa Fe Railroad. Construction was halted on the line in 1891 when the company was forced into receivership. However, additional funds were found and construction was soon resumed at Yukon and the junction was made at Oklahoma City. The railroad established a station at Council Grove, and a small village sprang up around it with several small stores. It was located east of Council Road and north of Reno Street.

The first school was erected on the William Style place in 1890. The building was moved to Council Grove in 1893. The first teacher was Mr. John Holmes. He was followed by Mrs. F. I. Miller a very dignified lady from Vermont who considered western people very uncultured. However she was well liked, and remained a teacher for many years. She returned to Vermont and continued to correspond with her former pupils for a long period of years.<sup>63</sup>

In the fall of 1890, the Reverend A. J. Worley, a Methodist minister and his wife opened a private school for girls at Council Grove with about forty students.<sup>64</sup> The school was located on a Mr. Worley's 180-acre claim, which was one-half mile south of the village of Council Grove at Reno and Council Streets, backing up to the North Canadian River.<sup>65</sup> The name of the

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

school was Queen's Camp. It had several buildings, and a beautiful campus with a number of elm and cottonwood trees. One of the buildings was a large frame structure, in which the upper story was used as a dormitory with the lower floor partitioned off for class rooms. The dining hall was in a separate building one hundred feet away, adjoining the kitchen and living quarters for the helpers.<sup>64</sup>

Mr. Worley did not teach in the school, since he was on the circuit establishing other Methodist Churches. Mrs. A. J. Worley taught music, piano and singing. Her brother, Dr. James Brown of St. Louis, Missouri was the resident physician and teacher of mathematics and history. Mr. Worley's advertisement in a national church paper for an English and Latin teacher, was answered by a Mrs. Butterfield who came from Boston for the position.<sup>65</sup>

According to Junia Worley, (later Mrs. E. L. Keyes of Wynnewood and the mother of Mrs. Harold Freeman), the school mascot was a pet deer named Reno that was followed around by thirteen pet cats padding along in single file.<sup>66</sup>

The school drew its enrollment from a wide area including Guthrie, Kingfisher, Hennessey, and El Reno. The girls were of eighth grade and high school qualifications, according to Mrs. Pearl McCracken Trooper who was a student there.<sup>67</sup>

The Queen's Camp School was moved to Norman, in 1894, where it was combined with the High Gate Female Academy, located on the present site of the Central State Hospital grounds. Both schools had been established by the Southern Methodist Church. When the Queen's Camp School was discontinued at Council Grove the buildings were torn down and the site itself was obliterated. Students who transferred from Queen's Camp School to High Gate Female Academy were: Maude Wingate and Dora Van Trees of Hennessey, Elmer Fabion of Cleveland County, Jean Williams of Norman, May Arnes of Kingfisher, Viola Hughes of Moore; and Junia Worley, daughter of the Reverend A. J. Worley, of Council Grove.<sup>68</sup>

Although High Gate Female Academy also was closed in a few years and nothing remains of the two schools, evidences of the work of the Reverend Worley are preserved in the records of St. Luke's Methodist Church, in Oklahoma City, where

<sup>64</sup> Newspaper clipping from the local press in the files of Mrs. Harold Freeman.

<sup>65</sup> Letter from Mrs. Harold Freeman, granddaughter of Rev. A. J. Worley.

<sup>66</sup> Newspaper clipping in files of Mrs. Harold Freeman.

<sup>67</sup> Letter from Mrs. Harold Freeman.

<sup>68</sup> *IBid.*

<sup>69</sup> Newspaper clipping in files of Mrs. Harold Freeman.



he was the second pastor. His photograph hangs with succeeding pastors with an inscription honoring him. Today, the name and location of Queen's Camp School at Council Grove is unmarked except in the minds of a few of its students who remain. The name was significant of the idealism which prompted the founder of the school for the young girls in this new settlement.

The Council Grove postoffice was established on June 11, 1882 and the first postmaster was Milton O. Craig.<sup>71</sup> Mr. John Abernathy operated a combination store and postoffice and later was the railway station agent. The store was also operated by Mr. Will McCarter for a year or so, after which Mr. Abernathy took charge again.<sup>72</sup>

The name of the community was changed from Council Grove to Council, in 1894. The name was changed because mail and freight was often delivered to Council Grove, Kansas instead of Council Grove, Oklahoma Territory. The post office was discontinued on August 15, 1906 and the area was served by the Oklahoma City postoffice. The small town began to die with the removal of Queen's Camp School in 1894 and the change of the name in the same year. The railroad depot was removed in 1934. Today there is no evidence of there having been a town at this place. The Council School and Council Road are the only remaining names in what was once Council Grove.<sup>73</sup>

Other small towns sprang up and are still in existence, but that was not true of Council Grove. Bethany came into existence in 1913 on the north edge of Council Grove and the post office was established there on March 11, 1913.<sup>74</sup>

The dam for Lake Overholser was completed in 1916, near the site of the Chisholm trading post and the lake covers most of the river bottom in the Council Grove area. In 1930, a tornado visited the Council Grove area causing extensive damage, and lives were lost in and near Bethany. When the area was visited by T. U. Taylor and Joseph B. Thoburn in the summer of 1930 the grove of trees were still standing on the side of the road, but there were no signs of the ranch house or trading post. Modern farms and dwellings showed a high state of cultivation.<sup>75</sup>

On April 22, 1941, a marker of red sandstone which bears a bronze plaque was dedicated, just east of the Northwest Tenth

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> George H. Shirk, *Oklahoma Name Places*, (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965), p. 84.

<sup>72</sup> Unpublished Manuscript, "Council Grove," p. 6.

<sup>73</sup> George H. Shirk, *op. cit.*

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>75</sup> T. U. Taylor, "Up The Cattle Trail In 1867," *Frontier Times*, Vol. 8, p. 104.



**HISTORICAL MARKER ON SITE OF COUNCIL GROVE,  
OKLAHOMA CITY**

Inscription on the bronze marker states:

1854—Jens Christolm opened a trading post.

1856—Colonel T. L. E. Bonneville and troops escorted Congressman J. S. Phelps to meet the Comanches.

1866—Council called between Comanche and Kiowa Tribes and Confederate leaders.

1884—Sawmills set up and barracks built for troops detailed to cut timber for Ft. Reno from 1000 acre government reserve.

1889—Opened for settlement.

**Street Bridge.** It commemorates many historical events that took place at Council Grove.<sup>76</sup> The marker was presented by the Daughters of the American Revolution, and was set up by the Oklahoma City Park Department. The dedication was made by Mrs. S. I. Flournoy and Mrs. John Lantz Hill, in charge of the program, attended by Dr. J. B. Thoburn, Miss Muriel H. Wright and many 89'ers.

Since World War II, many changes have come about in Council Grove. The cities of Bethany, Warr Acres, Oklahoma City and Woodlawn Park have annexed all of Council Grove. Streets have been laid out and homes have been built among the large trees that are still standing. The Western Electric Company manufacturing plant is located on Reno Street south of the small village of Council Grove, and across the street from the site of Queen's Camp School. Interstate Highway 40 runs between Reno Street and the North Canadian River through what was once the campus of Queen's Camp School. Council Grove is gone, yet its story will linger on as a very important historical site in the history of Oklahoma City.

<sup>76</sup> "Historical Notes," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XIX (1941), p. 186.