

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

LITERARY ACHIEVEMENT MEDALS

Oklahoma A. and M. College is enriched by deposit in the Library of three gold medals, the first to be offered for literary achievement in the College. These beautiful awards of valuable size and rare beauty are a complete collection offered by Alexander Covington Magruder, first professor of agriculture and horticulture in the College. Kate Neal won the first medal in 1893, George W Bowers the second in 1894, and Arthur W Adams won the third medal in 1895.

The first two medals were offered in freshmen contests in declamation, and the third medal was given for the best oration written and delivered by a junior on an agricultural or scientific subject. Miss Neal and Mr. Bowers are living. The medals will be on permanent display in the library

The story of the medals and their collection grew out of the preparation of a three volume Record Book of manuscript materials. It was prepared by an Oklahoma History Class, alumni and friends of the College in 1941, for the centennial celebration in 1991. A two volume set entitled, "Selections from the Record Book," was presented to the Oklahoma Historical Society.

SEMI-CENTENNIAL OPENING OF THE CHEROKEE OUTLET

One of the most spectacular and best advertised single events in the history of Oklahoma was the opening of the Cherokee Outlet, popularly called the "Opening of the Cherokee Strip," on September 16, 1893. Owing to World War II, the general semi-centennial celebration of this Opening, which had been tentatively planned with special programs and colorful pageantry, was not held this year in the Strip lands, a tract now included in thirteen counties and parts of counties, lying between the eastern boundary of Osage County and the 100th Meridian, in Northern Oklahoma.¹ Newspapers in the region, however, carried interesting historical accounts and feature stories commemorating this fiftieth anniversary. Golden Anniversary editions were published by *The Alva Review-Courier*, *The Perry Daily Journal* and *The Helena Star* The latter, the weekly paper printed at Helena, Alfalfa County, Gaylord

¹ For history on the Cherokee Outlet see the following articles: Joe B. Milam, "The Opening of the Cherokee Outlet," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, IX (September, 1931), pp. 268-86, (December, 1931), pp. 254-75, and X (March, 1932), pp. 115-37. Also, Berlin B. Chapman, "How the Cherokees Acquired the Outlet," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, XV (March, 1937), pp. 30-49; "How the Cherokees Acquired and Disposed of the Outlet," *ibid.*, (June, 1937) pp. 205-25, (September, 1937) 291-321, and XVI (March, 1938), pp. 36-51.

T Newby, Editor and Owner, carried an interesting display of local and historical notes including a short article on "The Name 'Cherokee Strip.'"

The following letters written by A. M. Thomas of Tonkawa to a daughter in Colorado, who was a small child at the time of the Opening of the Cherokee Strip, were contributed to the Historical Society by Homer S. Chambers, a resident of Tulsa and contributor to *The Chronicles*. In making this contribution, Mr. Chambers in part wrote (1941):

"These letters tell the story of an early day family and community with fidelity and are so typical of the early Strip days as to be worthy, I think, of a place in our historical archives. Mr. Thomas, the writer, was one of the first set of county commissioners of Kay County elected after the Opening, and has been active ever since in the political, civic and agricultural affairs of his community. He still owns his original homestead (on which there are a few producing oil wells now) but lives in Tonkawa, the past year being in very poor health. In the second of these letters, particularly, there is a heart-throb in practically every paragraph, and as I read this number and my mind goes back to those hectic days, a lump rises in my throat as each stark incident in this recital is retold."

Tonkawa, Oklahoma
December 31, 1929

Mrs. Niles North, Arriola, Colo.
My Dear Girl:

When you were visiting us recently you asked me to write some of our early experiences in Oklahoma for your memory book, so here goes:

"THE OPENING OF THE STRIP"

On the 10th of September, 1893, I came to Arkansas City on the train and there met my father who had preceded me with a team and wagon.

As all of the old settlers will remember, we had to register and swear that we were half white, fully free and various other things before we were even permitted to make the race into the Cherokee Strip. The registration booth was south of Arkansas City and if I remember correctly, about a quarter of a mile from where the railroad crosses the state line. The population of Arkansas City at that time was without doubt the greatest in its history, for around every place that water could be had or where there was a vacant lot, one could find a camp of boomers in wagons or tents awaiting the strip opening.

We lined up for this registration on Monday and the fashion was then to divide your group, part of them staying in line and holding the place until they got through and the others taking out water and provisions for the parties in line.

The first two days of this registration one would not dare to leave his place in the line or someone else would have it when he returned. After the second day, however, the "would be" settlers formed an organization out of the lines by which each tenth man was designated captain of that particular squad of ten men. It was his duty to see that no one "soonered" in on that squad. I happened to be the tenth man in one bunch and it fell to my lot to sleep on the ground rolled up in a blanket on that particular night. On Friday I made it through and got my certificate which entitled me to try to beat somebody else to a claim in the "Promised Land."

I should have said in the beginning that there were four in our party. My father, my brother, a man who had been working for us and myself made up our group.

On Friday evening, the 15th of September, we moved out of Arkansas City and camped that night at the northwest corner of the Chilocco reservation. This camp was crowded in every direction for a half mile for the reason that it was about the only place along the state line that water was obtainable.

We had only a team and wagon in which to make this race and we provisioned the wagon with four days' rations for ourselves and the team and filled a barrel, which we had obtained, with water.

The morning of the 16th we broke camp and drove west along the state line to the west bank of Bitter Creek, where a dim trail took off into the strip to the south. The entire distance from the corner of the Chilocco reservation to the ridge on the west side of Bitter Creek and as far west from that as we could see was one solid mass of wagons, buggies, carts and horsemen. As the hour approached for the opening, this entire distance from the reservation to the ridge was a solid line of horsemen standing knee to knee as far as the eye could see. Back of this line of horsemen were the carts and buggies and lighter vehicles of every conceivable description. Then came the heavy wagons with their covers, driven by old men or the women of the families in most cases.

The cavalry was in front of us, one to about each quarter of a mile along the line to see that no one crossed the 100-foot strip before the hour of noon.

A rather distressing incident occurred, we learned afterwards. At the west corner of the Chilocco reservation, about three minutes before noon, a man, who was slightly deaf and whose mount was very excitable, either by intention or accident, made a break for the open prairie. He was ordered to come back but did not heed the order and the Lieutenant in charge of a nearby squad ordered a soldier to shoot at him with the result that the rider was killed. This soldier faced the courts in Newkirk the following year but was acquitted.

The sound of this gun apparently precipitated the race. From where we stood on top of this hill we saw the race start to the east of us and spread out like a vast fan. The soldier in front of our division fired a six-shooter at about the time we could see the bunch to the east starting. Then we were off.

There was some rather amusing things happened along this line. One that I recall was that of a woman standing the front ranks among the horses, and I wondered what was going to happen when the race started. She wore the regulation sunbonnet and carried an umbrella. When the rush began, she jerked off her sunbonnet, grabbed a handful of her skirts and made as pretty a foot race as I have ever seen. When she was sure she had gotten over the line, she sat down, stuck her flag in the ground and raised her umbrella. As far as I know she proved up on her land.

I drove the team in this race and to say that we went about as fast as a wagon ever went is putting it mildly. We followed the dim trail and were ahead of the other wagons. Before we had gone half a mile, the horsemen were all out of sight and the lighter vehicles had mostly disappeared, with a few overturned, the horses running away and belongings scattered all over the prairie.

The prairie had been burned off the night before or early that morning and in places was still burning. There was a haze of smoke all over the country.

We followed this dim trail almost to where Blackwell now is and crossed the Chikaskia River. As nearly as I can remember the ford was located near the corner of what was afterwards known as the Rube Kerns' place. Now there are two or three oil wells on either side of the road.

By the time we reached the river, the horsemen were "ganged up" in groups of two to five on this bottom land and each was sure that he had been there first.

After crossing the river we went south without a trail or land mark until finally we intersected the trail where it crossed Stink Creek, north of the present townsite of Tonkawa, about the middle of Section 15-26-1 West. We then followed the trail to the Yellow Bull crossing on the Salt Fork which was located west of where Tonkawa now stands. There was a cabin on this Indian allotment at the Yellow Bull crossing and also a spring of fresh water. The stream from this spring was so small that it would take about three to five minutes to fill a cup.

That night, September 16, settlers drove in from every direction to this spring to get water and were lined up all night long trying to get enough water to wet their tongues. We had the barrel of water in our wagon out of which we watered our team and managed to make out, although the water was warm and stale. I had to sit on top of the barrel until midnight to keep the thirsty travelers from appropriating what little water we had left.

None of our party was fortunate in finding a piece of land on which to stop that did not have from one to a dozen already there, on account of the speed with which the horsemen came.

The next day, Sunday, September 17, the sun came up in a round disk, red and angry looking and the wind began to blow from the south. As the day advanced the wind reached the velocity of a gale, and the dust and sand were so thick we could scarcely see one hundred yards. Many of the people who had camped at the spring that night and who failed to get even a contest on a piece of land, and even some who thought they had staked a claim, were so tired and disgusted with the barrenness of the country, and the wind and dust, that they immediately took out for Kansas and civilization.

It was necessary for my brother and the other one of our party to return to eastern Kansas, so about noon on the 17th of September we broke camp at the Yellow Bull crossing and started for White Eagle station on the Santa Fe, in company with some acquaintances who had set up with us at the camp the night before.

The trail led across the present townsite of Tonkawa and I remember an old farmer, who was among the acquaintances mentioned above, calling my attention to the fresh mounds the gophers had dug, saying, "Look at that ground! I wouldn't give a dollar for a whole township of it. I will go back to Kansas and stay there five years and buy 160 acres, if I want it, for five or six hundred dollars." The last I heard of this friend of mine, he was still back east and he never did have the five or six hundred dollars to buy the farm that he talked about.

These two parties took the train at White Eagle station and father and I went on to Arkansas City through what is now Ponca City, Kildare and Newkirk, which were at that time nothing but tent cities. In Arkansas City we loaded up with enough provisions, hay and grain to last for a week or more. We then started back southwest across the prairie down through where the Dilworth Oil Fields now are. We followed the old trail to the place where Blackwell now stands. I think this was on Wednesday following the opening.

We crossed the river east of what is now Blackwell at an old ford, but there was no water in the river, it being dry and sandy. Some enterprising genius had foreseen the lack of water and had set up a sand point and pitcher pump and furnished all and sundry, weary and thirsty travelers with water at the price of ten cents a bucket. I have no idea who this man was, but he was certainly a Napoleon of finance at the time.

Coming into Blackwell from the east, we found a bunch of surveyors surveying the townsite of Blackwell. Having a slight acquaintance with one of the boys, he told me that they were surveying government land, which I believe was called the Potts eighty, at least it was the eighty acres on which the First National Bank now stands, which is located on the southwest corner. He also told me that if we wanted a town lot we could stake some when they got to a certain point to the north of where they were then. Each one of us was entitled to four lots.

A young man by the name of Ball was with father and me at that time so we took these lots. As nearly as I can remember at the present time, they were somewhere just south of where the Frisco railroad crosses the river.

We camped there that night, and since I had a set of carpenter tools I was anxious to get a job. Ball was a kind of carpenter also, so we took a piece of a packing box and stuck a stake in the ground with the following inscription, "Thomas and Ball, Contractors and Builders." After we had made camp, we went up town; that is where the city well and the bank corners are now. On the way up there we encountered a couple of young men who had a tent and an old army printing press and we learned that they intended to publish a newspaper. The name of this paper, as I recall, was to be "The Blackwell Record."

Of course, being newspaper men they "hit us up" for some advertising, and in that issue of the paper appeared a card "Thomas and Ball, Contractors and Builders." This to my certain knowledge was the first newspaper ever published on the ground in the town of Blackwell. It came off the press on Friday morning, September 22, 1893. It was a small paper, probably sixteen inches by twenty-two. It was published by H. S. Chambers and I am not sure, but I believe his partner's name was Nall.

Ball and I got a job of work helping built a restaurant which, aside from the township office, was the first building built in the town of Blackwell. As I recall, it stood about the middle of the block north of the First National Bank.

The dust made by teams and men was about ankle deep on Main Street and nearly as bad on all the other streets, and the wind blew a hurricane all this time. Ball picked up a fourteen by twelve plank and started around the building. The wind upset him, crippled him up and he had to quit work for that afternoon. The dust was so thick that when I drove a nail, I struck at where my fingers were and hammered at the nail by guess.

The only place to eat at this time was in a tent, which was full of dust and sand, and with every mouthful one got about as much sand as "grub." There weren't any clean faces in that country then. On the Saturday night following this, there came a glorious rain which laid the dust and things were much more pleasant.

A few days later, however, I learned of a vacant or abandoned claim on the south side of Salt Fork west of Tonkawa and immediately went down and settled on it, by making temporary improvements in the way of a dugout.

Your loving Dad,
A. M. THOMAS.

Mrs. Niles North,
My Dear Girl:
Arriola, Colorado.

Tonkawa, Oklahoma,
April 30th, 1930.

In a former letter I described the incidents of a race on September 16, 1893, and its results. After obtaining the claim that was afterwards our home, I went back to Iola, Kansas, the latter part of November, 1893, and hauled off a little wheat crop that we had there and received thirty-four cents a bushel for most of it; paid up what debts I could and prepared to leave for the new land.

On January 2, 1894, I hitched the team to the old wagon, loaded in about ten bushels of shelled corn, about half a hog, the only one that we had, and with \$10.50 in my pocket, started by myself for Oklahoma. I had three horses with me and it took me six days to make it to where Tonkawa now is. I had in the wagon a little folding rocking chair, an old ramshackle cooking stove and a few joints of pipe, which was the stock of furniture we owned at that time. I left your mother and you and Ruth at the old home in Kansas. You were two years old at that time and as Ruth was born the first of December, 1893, she was only a month old. The first of February, your mother and you children came to Arkansas City to your Aunt Fannie's on the train, where I met you. I think it was the fifth of February we left Arkansas City, a cold wintry day, in a wagon and started across the prairie for the new home.

I had bought a sod plow for \$10, on time, and had it tied on the wagon and a trunk rather badly battered held all of the clothing for you two children and your mother, and I might add that I was wearing all the clothing I had, which consisted of a pair of overalls and a canvas coat. The trip was made from Arkansas City to where Tonkawa now is, that day, and it is needless to say that it was a long, cold, hard trip on mother and you babies.

We camped there that night in an old Indian cabin and the rats were so thick around there that they kept you terrified most of the evening. The next morning we forded the river and took across the country, without any road or track to go by, for the claim. We arrived at the dugout, which was about 12 x 14 feet, and took stock of our earthly possessions which consisted of a wagon more or less dilapidated and the before mentioned sod plow and three horses, with some chain harness, an old cook stove and a few boxes for chairs. When we counted up the cash, we had twenty-five cents in money and no prospects to get any more anywhere. This in mid-winter without even a spear of grass, dry or any other way, in sight. We had to haul water in a barrel from the spring where Tonkawa now is for use, which is about eight miles. Of course, I had a box of carpenter tools, but no one had any money to buy lumber with or build houses and the settlers were not yet coming into the country.

We got settled in there and that day or the next I took the sod plow and plowed a little patch of the best sod I could find around there and cut it up in chunks and covered the board roof of the dugout with it. We had traded for some wheat on an Indian allotment and had some straw to feed the horses and fill a bedtick to sleep on. The bedstead was some pine boards nailed together, without springs, and was rather a crude affair. The table was likewise made out of pine boards and home-made and for light we had a No. 2 lantern. If you remember the floor was of dirt and the walls were the same. When you got out of the wagon and looked around at that place and your mother wanted to take your coat off, you said: "No, let's go home. I don't like this place." And it took you quite a while to get used to the idea of staying in a hole in the ground like that.

After we had been there a week or two, we ran out of coffee, sugar, and of course, never had any milk and about everything to eat that we had was flour and a little meat. We were then getting our mail at Blackwell, nineteen miles away. One morning I got up early and told your mother that I was going to Blackwell to do a little trading and she wanted to know what I was going to trade and I told her that I had some lots up there and plenty of nerve. I went to Blackwell and traded four lots that I had, for seven dollars worth of groceries and five dollars in money, and when I came home I had three packages of Arbuckle's coffee and that old coffee mill that you now have that your mother gave you as an heirloom, a wash board and tub and a big piece of Battleaxe tobacco, for I had been out of tobacco for two weeks and had been out of money for more than that.

You will better appreciate the condition in which we were in if you can visualize the landscape as it was then. There was not a house or dugout of any kind in sight from there, and only two between our place and where Tonkawa now is. I expect you wonder what we thought and what we did. We did not think much about the condition of affairs, but we had come there with the determination to stay. I had taken some boards and penciled crude signs on them and stuck them up wherever there was a crude trail, notifying any who might pass that I was a carpenter and ready to work at almost anything. Along the latter part of February there came one of the biggest snow storms we have ever had in the thirty-six years that we have lived in Oklahoma. Fortunately it found us with enough cottonwood wood that we had swiped off the limbs and fallen timber along the river to last us through the cold spell.

Your Uncle Howard was staying with us at that time and when that snow fell we started out with the intention of getting a rabbit or something of fresh meat. We walked all day in that snow, knee deep, and never even found a rabbit track, so you see the country was pretty bare.

A few days after this snow fell and while it was still very deep, a man built a house over just south of Tonkawa and got word to me some way that he wanted me to help him put the roof on, so I got on one of the horses early one morning, bareback, and went over there and put in the day nailing shingles on his house. There was snow on the ground and nasty. I had intended to get home early as I knew your mother would be uneasy, but along about four o'clock the scaffold we had put up broke and let all of the men down except myself. The owner of the house was badly hurt by the fall and kind of half crazy and I thought he was going to die, so I stayed with the bunch until pretty late that night, before I started home and when I did get home your mother was just about crazy for fear I had got lost on the prairie. I got one dollar and a half for this day and night's work and it was the first money I earned in Oklahoma.

A little while later I got to build a house a mile south on the Fulton place. You will remember that house as it still stands to this day. A story and a half high, fourteen by twenty-eight feet completed, and I built it for twenty-eight dollars. Then I got a house to build of the same size for Marion McGaha, which was five miles away, and I got twenty-eight dollars for building it. That was too much money and I was rich.

In the meantime, your grandfather had sold an equity that he owned in Kansas and he, your Uncle Howard and Uncle Jim had come down to the Indian lease by Tonkawa. Your Uncle Howard had the claim, which you know very well, at that time, and the school land was to lease. Neither he nor I had a dollar in the world but we bid on the lease on the west half of the school section, one quarter at thirty-five dollars a year and the other at twenty-five a year. We had no idea where we would get the

money but we were determined to get by in some kind of way, so by the first of April your Uncle Howard and myself controlled 640 acres in that vicinity and about all we had was our nerve. We also had an interest in and lease on 320 acres that lays now joining the townsite of Tonkawa on the west, and your Uncle Jim and grandfather lived there that first summer.

The townsite of Tonkawa was laid out in May of that year and between trying to break sod and raise a crop on the Indian lease, your Uncle Jim and myself did some carpenter work. Built a few houses whenever we could get a job and, in fact, covered the country for ten miles around pretty thoroughly with our box of carpenter tools working for any kind of price we could get, from seventy-five cents a day, for ten hours work, up, often walking five miles night and morning. The summer was dry and hot. We managed to plant a little sod corn, and the hot winds cooked it, likewise the kaffir corn we had. The corn we planted on the allotment did not make decent fodder, but we had to cut it up for fodder through the winter and hauled it the eight miles from where Tonkawa is out to our place.

When your grandfather came down from Kansas, he brought a couple of cows and some chickens, and they were the source of a lot of trouble for we had no fences of any kind. We managed to lay up a kind of log pen that answered for a chicken house and mother tried to raise some chickens, but the coyotes were so thick and impudent that she did not have much luck. One moonlight night, they made a mass attack on the chickens and she got out, together with your Uncle Howard, with some broomsticks and clubs and actually clubbed the coyotes away from the chickens. We raised nothing this year that amounted to anything but got some of the ground plowed and managed to sow a little wheat. The next year was just as bad. We had no grain to feed the horses and would go out early in the morning and plow sod until about ten o'clock and then unhitch and unharness our horses and turn them loose to grass. Then catch them up again about two o'clock and plow with them until they got so weak they could not pull the plow. Then we would unhitch and cold hammer the shears for the next morning.

The next year we raised a little more and your Uncle and myself ran a threshing machine all summer and let your mother herd you kids and one cow and stayed by herself in that dugout while we were trying to get enough money to buy a few clothes and groceries we needed.

The third year we raised a crop and built the house, got a little fence and kept on going. Of course, from that time on, you have a fair recollection of how we got along.

I am writing you this little note that you may see the kind of time we had in our younger days and all I can say to you is that if you and the rest of the kids had as much nerve as your mother and your dad had, there is no reason why you should not succeed. The most of the younger people at the present time are troubled with "Can't's," but there is nothing impossible if you make up your mind you are going to do it.

I have no apologies for the things I did not do and no boasts to make for the things I did, and only wish that I had the youth and strength to tackle a proposition in the same manner in which I did this one and I must say, too, that your mother certainly had strength and nerve and a whole lot of patience to go through the years of hard work and sacrifice that she did, raising the family that she did under conditions as they existed at that time. If these experiences, put down in cold type, will do you children any good, it will have accomplished its purpose.

Affectionately,

A. M. THOMAS.

Mrs. Niles North,
Arriola, Colorado.
My Dear Mable:

Tonkawa, Oklahoma,
September 15, 1933.

As in a former letter I described to you some of the early day experiences, I thought it might interest you to know something further about other conditions and problems that were encountered after we moved on the place.

You will recall that your mother and I moved on there to stay permanently in February, 1894. The place, of course, was nothing but a bald prairie. There were no schools, churches or roads. The school laws of the territory required that before we could organize a school district and obtain any public school funds, we must have held at least three months of school. The funds for holding the three months had to be obtained by subscriptions from the settlers and, in April or May, 1894, we went to work on this proposition and took up a subscription to pay a teacher. To the best of my recollection, the salary was five dollars a month. The school was held in a dugout on what, I believe, was known as the Shanefeldt place.

After we had certified to the proper authorities that we had held this school, our school district was organized and we had a winter term of school during 1894-5, taught by Mrs. Chas. Nix in her residence on what is now the North Herbig place, just across the road from the Cottage Hill school house. The next year, in the fall of 1896, we voted bonds and built the old Cottage Hill school house, the lumber for which we hauled from Ponca City.

The first church and Sunday School that we had in that neighborhood was held on the place now owned by Jim Smith, which we always termed the "Dad" Chambers place. This was in the summer of 1894, and we continued to have Sunday school and church until the new school house was built in 1895.

In the winter of 1895 the first death occurred in our neighborhood and the question of a cemetery came up. Mr. Stalnaker, whom you remember, suggested that we lay out a cemetery on the southwest corner of his place, which we did, and in the spring of 1896 the county surveyor came out and platted one and one-quarter acres on the Stalnaker place and one and one-quarter acres on the place owned by C. J. Anderson adjoining it, which made two and one-half acres in the cemetery. It was called the Riverview Cemetery and was the first regularly platted and laid out and duly recorded country cemetery in Kay County. Some of the towns in the county, notably, Newkirk, laid out cemeteries before this, but no country communities platted and laid out cemeteries before this time.

During the winter and summer of 1895-6, Mr. H. A. Moulton conceived the idea of building a church in that neighborhood and proceeded to raise the money by subscription, and I believe solicited funds in every town from Wichita to Guthrie and of every one that he met. By early fall of 1896 he had accumulated enough money to pay for most of the lumber needed to build a church and the church was begun in October, 1896, and completed and ready for occupancy by December. The first Christmas tree you ever attended was put on in this old church on Christmas eve of 1896. I might add that this church, as far as I know, was the first country frame church that was built anywhere in the Cherokee Strip. There were a number of other country churches built at that time or before, but were all constructed either as dugouts or sod houses. To old Mr. Moulton, Uncle Dave Phillips, Timothy Chambers, W. L. Stalnaker and your Uncle Jim is due the credit for the construction of this church. There were other churches built in the towns around about in the summer of 1894-5 or one or two years before this was done, but at that time people could not go

to town in fifteen minutes as they can now, so it was necessary to have Sunday schools and churches where they could get to them.

You might be interested in knowing something of conditions and early history of the town of Tonkawa, as that was the only town you ever knew for a number of years. The present townsite was homesteaded by Eli Blake and Wiley Gregory and in the early spring of 1894, they, together with T. H. Martin, organized, under the Federal law covering the public domain, a townsite company and employed a civil engineer, Elmer Chapson by name, to survey and make a plat of the original townsite of Tonkawa. The plat shows that this was done from April 15 to April 25, 1894, and the town was opened for settlement at that time. The Townsite company gave certificates of purchase for the lots, but could not give deeds until certain formalities required by the United States Government were complied with. The first building on the ground of the new townsite was a little grocery store brought in by C. H. Martindale and was moved from a claim about four miles northwest of town.

During the summer of 1894, B. F. Robison, Mr. Truesdale and a few others, organized a Baptist church and a church was built on the site of the present Baptist church. Also the school district was organized and a frame school building was built that summer on the site of the public school building as it now stands in the town. The townsite was sandy, dirty and a few straggling stores, etc., were scattered around in the town.

The petition for a postoffice was written at the camp of the old Yellow Bull crossing in October, 1893, or a short time after the race, and was circulated among the settlers in this vicinity during the fall of 1893. Eli Blake and H. L. Wile wrote up the petitions which were granted by the Post Office Department a short time afterwards, and Eli Blake was named the first postmaster at about the time the town of Tonkawa was platted. The postoffice, for a time, was in Blake's residence on what is now Twelfth Street in Tonkawa, but was later moved up in the block west of Main Street.

During the summer of 1894, the roads were being changed from trails across the prairie to section lines as the settlers came in and plowed up their land or built fences, as the case might be, on their claims. The Yellow Bull crossing was closed that summer and we had to come up the hill west of Tonkawa where it was very steep and difficult to get up. We who lived west of town had a makeshift ford at the mouth of Deer Creek that we used a great deal. In the fall of 1894, there was a general election of county officers. From September 16, 1893, until this time, all officers of the county and township were appointed by the then governor of the Territory, whose name was Renfrow. Mid-summer of 1894 the political conventions were held for the nomination of the various county officers, and I was unfortunate enough to be selected for the Republican Convention as their candidate for county commissioner in this district and was elected at the election held in November of 1894. The following spring, through my influence and on petition of a number of residents of the town of Tonkawa, the road on the half-section line south of town was laid out as a county road and now the paved road south out of Tonkawa. We managed that summer to get this road open and to fix a makeshift ford across the river near where the bridge now stands.

In the fall of 1895, September to be exact, I managed to get an appropriation out of the bridge fund of the county to build a bridge and we built the old pile bridge across the Salt Fork River. You are, no doubt, kicking about the taxes at the present time. For your information, the entire road and bridge fund the commission had to use from July 1, 1895, to July 1, 1896, was \$3,820. The bridge four hundred and forty feet long across the Salt Fork River at that time, cost \$1,990.

A year later we were enabled to get a bridge built across the Chikaskia River northeast of Tonkawa which gave us a chance to get out in that direction to Ponca City on fairly good roads. It must be remembered that, up to this time and for a year or two later, there was no work done on the highways except such as absolutely had to be done in order to get over them with a wagon and team. There were no graders or other road machinery at that time.

Recounting these incidents in which I had a part, I want to say that the same things with variations, occurred in every neighborhood in the Cherokee Strip and that the cooperation of the people as a whole made it possible for us to go ahead with whatever degree of success we attained. Great credit is due to every one who participated in the development of this part of the country. One of the lessons from this experience which the present generation can learn is that there are no obstacles so large, no difficulties so great but what may be overcome by cooperation and intelligent application to problems in hand.

Affectionately,
A. M. THOMAS

Tonkawa, Oklahoma.
February 16, 1934.

Mrs. Niles North,
Arricola, Colorado.
My Dear Mable:

In my letter of September 15, 1933, I gave you what information I could with reference to the early days in our neighborhood from the time of the opening up until 1896. All of this is largely a local matter pertaining to that neighborhood and to finish off the items, many of which were mentioned in my last letter, I am supplementing it by this letter today.

The town of Tonkawa, the opening of which was mentioned in my former letter, was at this time a lively little place and in 1896 had one general store, a hardware, a drug store, three groceries, two saloons, and a feed and livery stable. It is to be remembered that at this time automobiles or any other transportation except team and horseback, were not in use. For the benefit of those who have forgotten what a feed yard means, will say that it was a corral containing probably two or three city lots with sheds all around to put the teams in. They always had a supply of grain and baled hay to feed the stock, and quite often had a small room with a stove in it and bunks on one end for sleeping accommodations for the freighters and teamsters.

At this time and until three years later, 1898 to be exact, all our communications with the outside world were carried on by star and freight route from Ponca City. The crops we raised in this part of the country until 1897 did not justify the construction of railroads, but in that year we raised an immense crop of wheat, much of it making better than fifty bushels to the acre, and a good crop of corn at the same time. This induced the building of railroads in here and the Santa Fe, or a subsidiary of it, built a road from Hutchinson, Kansas, through Medford to Blackwell, which brought our railroad facilities a little closer than they had been. As I recollect it, the crops of 1898 were all hauled to Blackwell and part of the crop of 1899.

In 1899 a party of Tonkawa boosters, headed by T. H. Martin, Mr. Richards and Mr. Gregory, organized what they called the Santa Fe Construction Company and induced the Santa Fe railroad to extend their line from Hunnewell, Kansas, to Blackwell and on to Tonkawa. If my recollection serves me rightly, the first wheat shipped out of Tonkawa

was in the fall of 1899. From then on we had our own railroad at Tonkawa. By this time the town had nearly doubled in population and business, but there was a great deal of dissatisfaction among the property owners where the right-of-way came into town and a number of lawsuits followed the extension of the right-of-way of the tracks and depot. This was the end of the Santa Fe branch and still is. Up until the construction of this railroad all the lumber, coal and supplies of all kinds for the construction of houses, graneries, etc., throughout this section of the country, was hauled by teams from Ponca City and often there would be a hundred or one hundred and fifty teams on the road between this point and Ponca City, hauling in grain and bringing out materials.

I cannot remember exactly when a telephone toll line was built into the town, but the best of my recollection is that the Pioneer Telephone company ran a single line in here and had a pay station at the corner drug store where Freeman's drug store now is, in the summer of 1896. They also built an exchange for the town about the time the railroad came in here or a little before and, as I recollect it, the first telephone exchange office was upstairs on the corner where the Odd Fellows hall now stands. The first rural telephones in this part of the country was an old three-phone telephone system that we had on the farm out there, connecting our place with your Uncle Jim's and your grandfather's places and was run most of the way on wire fences. We put in this little country system that began nowhere and ended nowhere, in 1899. Your Uncle Jim and I agitated for three or four years the construction of a rural system that would connect us with the telephone exchanges of the county. We finally succeeded in organizing the Farmers' Mutual Telephone company in the spring and summer of 1903 or 1904, and built a line connecting the towns of Billings and Tonkawa with the farmers all along taking stock in the company and putting in telephones. After we got this rural telephone started, it grew very fast. Before the organization of this rural system for the farmers, we had a number of interviews with the managers of the Pioneer company in an attempt to induce them to build rural lines in this part of the country. This they refused to do unless we paid the cost of the line at an exorbitant price, or what looked like an exorbitant price at that time, for the telephone service.

After the organization of this rural line, we had to have somewhere to stop, and our first telephone exchange was a central office in M. G. Kreger's store for the rural lines. This was very unsatisfactory, and another line being built for the farmers resulted in the demand for an exchange, which the Farmers' Mutual finally built in 1904 or 1905. Later on, the necessity of putting in extensive repairs on the telephone exchange and the maintenance of something like one hundred miles of rural line became unwieldy, the stockholders, who were farmers, generally disagreed on about every point necessary to conduct a telephone company, which immediately increased the rates of the rural lines from seventy-five cents a month to a dollar and fifty cents and also eliminated all free talks between the towns which the Mutual had formerly maintained, so another cooperative effort of the farmers went to the bad. In the meantime, from the period of 1896 on, the town and country continued to grow and prosper at an amazing rate and, from a little hamlet of a block and a half of business, by 1907 the town had grown to three blocks of business and a number of residences, and had acquired the construction and maintenance by the Territory of Oklahoma of the University Preparatory school, which, as you know, is located at the east end of Grand Avenue.

This school, as I recollect, was constructed about 1901-2, and, if my memory serves me rightly, the first school was held beginning in the fall of 1902. Great credit is due to Honorable Jim Wilkin, also to Dr. Goodman, Eli Blake, T. H. Martin and W. W. Gregory for the push and enterprise

that made it possible to obtain this educational institution. I like to think that I had some influence in the political campaigns immediately preceding this development which enabled us to elect Mr. Wilkin to the Legislature and that I had a small part in this improvement.

According to my recollection, an effort was made by an organization headed by Lincoln McKinley of Newkirk, who organized a small company, and in the summer of 1901 drilled one or two wells southeast of Newkirk. They had a showing of oil at eight hundred feet. This, at that time, was looked upon as a sort of crazy venture. However, we boys in this corner of the county got the fever and, in company with some parties who lived in Billings, your Uncle and I organized the Northern Oklahoma Oil Company; took a few leases, bought a star rig and drilled a couple of wells on the townsite of Billings. This was in 1902-3, but on account of the inadequate machinery and small knowledge of the formations we were unable to drill deep enough to get any results. Some years later than this, I think in 1912, or somewhere along there, the oil fraternity began to prospect in earnest and brought in a field south of Billings and drilled several dry holes over that territory. However, before this time, I think about 1903-4, the Blackwell Oil and Gas Company was organized at Blackwell and proceeded to drill some four or five wells at that time and brought in a very good gas well in the northwest corner of Blackwell. I am uncertain as to the years in which these things happened, but well remember that it was in the years 1902 to 1905.

The development and exploration for oil and gas was very much handicapped by the geological reports of some geologists of that period who contended that a well drilled sixteen hundred feet was the end of the world and really an impossibility. As late as 1912 one promising geologist stated that it was useless to prospect for oil west of the Santa Fe railway's main line. Events since then have proven that a great many cut and dried scientific principles have been proven false.

In 1921 the Marland Oil Company drilled a well eight miles south of Tonkawa which precipitated a big drilling campaign which resulted in heavy oil production in the Three Sands oil field and on our old homestead. The Three Sands field, commonly called, south of Tonkawa, derives its name from the number of producing stratas that were encountered. The first was a gas sand at eleven hundred feet; an oil sand at sixteen hundred feet, another at nineteen hundred feet and at twenty-three hundred feet; and still another at twenty-nine hundred feet, with the best sand of all at four thousand feet, which resulted in the construction of as many as four and sometimes five rigs on one location. This was the most prolific field in point of production that had been discovered in the Mid-Continent area at that time. This field has been producing for a period of eleven years and is still paying a good dividend to those operating. The resources of oil in this part of the country are by no means exhausted if the geologists of the present day are to be believed.

Looking back over the forty years that are covered by these letters to you, the change from a bare prairie to the paved roads, the modern houses, both in city and country, the rapid means of transportation and communication by telephone and railroad are almost more than one can comprehend and to you, who are in the height of your prime of life, it falls the lot to carry on the civilization and improvements that we have accomplished up to the present time.

Affectionately,

A. M. THOMAS.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD
OF DIRECTORS OF THE
OKLAHOMA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

October 28, 1943.

The regular quarterly meeting of the Board of Directors of the Oklahoma Historical Society was held in the Historical Society building, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, October 28, 1943, with Judge Robert L. Williams, President, presiding.

The Secretary called the roll which showed the following members present: Judge Robert L. Williams, Judge Thomas H. Doyle, Dr. Emma Estill-Harbour, Mrs. Jessie E. Moore, Hon. George L. Bowman, Judge Harry Campbell, Dr. E. E. Dale, Judge Thomas A. Edwards, Judge Robert A. Hefner, Mrs. Frank Korn, Mrs. Blanche Lucas, Mr. H. L. Muldrow, Judge Baxter Taylor, Mrs. John R. Williams and James W. Moffitt, the Secretary.

On motion duly seconded the absentees were excused on account of other engagements or the gas and tire rationing restrictions.

Mr. H. C. Jones appeared before the Board and presented the request of the '89ers Association for the use of the Women's Patriotic Room for the monthly meetings of the Association.

Judge Thomas H. Doyle made the motion that the matter be referred to the committee on that room of which Judge Robert A. Hefner is chairman. Motion was seconded and carried.

The President introduced Judge C. Ross Hume of Anadarko, one of the members of the Society.

The President transmitted to the Society the uniform of Col. Lorenz Rodke, a member of the staff of Governor Williams and a group picture of Governor Williams and his staff at the laying of the corner stone of the Capitol November 16, 1915, the gift of Col. Rodke's daughter, Mrs. Marie Rodke Bailey, of Ada, Oklahoma.

Dr. Emma Estill-Harbour made the motion that this uniform and picture be accepted and that Mrs. Bailey be thanked for this contribution to the Society. Motion was seconded and carried.

Judge Thomas H. Doyle made the motion that the Secretary be instructed to have the picture framed and also to secure the identity of each person in the picture. Motion was seconded and carried.

Judge Robert A. Hefner made the motion that the Society request Gen. Pat Hurley to contribute his portrait for the art gallery. Motion was seconded and carried.

The President transmitted three books for the Library, the gift of Dr. Urban de Hasque of Manchester, Oklahoma, i. e. (1) *The Oklahoma Sacramental Wine Case*, (2) *History of the Catholic Churches in Oklahoma, 1874-1940* and (3) *St. Rose of Lima Parish Bulletins 1933*.

Judge Robert A. Hefner made the motion that these be accepted and that the President be requested to express the thanks and appreciation of the Society to Dr. Urban de Hasque. Motion was seconded and carried.

The President also transmitted the framed picture of the building in Kingfisher, Oklahoma, in which the Historical Society was organized in 1893, the gift of Hon. George L. Bowman.

Dr. Emma Estill-Harbour made the motion that this picture be accepted with appreciation and Mr. Bowman be thanked for his contribution of the picture of this memorable building. Motion was seconded and carried.

The President read a contract of gift by Sgt. Thomas V. Connor, presenting a buffalo robe overcoat and a large photograph of an "Old Scouts' Reunion."

Judge Robert A. Hefner made the motion that these be accepted with thanks and appreciation, and that the picture be framed. Motion was seconded and carried.

Mr. H. L. Muldrow presented the *Proceedings of a Conference of Grand Masters*, held at Philadelphia, June 1, 2, and 3, 1909, the first conference of Grand Masters held in the world.

Judge Thomas A. Edwards made the motion that this book be accepted and Mr. Muldrow thanked for this contribution to our collection of Masonic material. Motion was seconded and carried.

Mrs. Frank Korn in behalf of Mrs. M. Alice Miller, of El Reno, Oklahoma, presented the portrait of her husband, Dr. Charles Miller, to the Society, and requested that it be hung near her portrait and the case of books in the library which she had given to the Society. Mrs. Miller was assured that her request would be complied with. Motion was seconded and carried.

The President read the presentation of gifts from the files of Douglas H. Johnston, last elected Governor of the Chickasaw Nation, also gifts from her own collection, all contributed by Mrs. Juanita Johnston Smith, the daughter of Governor Johnston, consisting of photographs of Chickasaw subjects and people and newspaper clippings presented through the office of Miss Muriel H. Wright for listing the historical data on the pictures for the research department. The collection included a tin, money box that had belonged to Jane Hawkins Factor, great grandmother of Mrs. Smith.

Mrs. Jessie E. Moore made the motion that these be accepted with thanks and appreciation. Motion was seconded and carried.

Judge Thomas H. Doyle moved that a resolution be adopted expressing condolence to Gen. Charles F. Barrett and his family in their bereavement over the recent death of Mrs. Charles F. Barrett, and copy be forwarded to them. Motion was seconded and carried.

The President called attention to the passing of Col. Arthur Neal Leecraft and the sketch on his life, which will appear in the December issue of *The Chronicles*. A motion was made and seconded, expressing appreciation for his valuable services as a member of the Board of Directors for many years. Tributes were made to his memory by different members of the Board present.

The Secretary presented the minutes of the meeting of the Board held July 29, 1943. Upon motion of Judge Thomas A. Edwards, duly seconded, they were accepted as read.

The Secretary presented a letter from Mr. Thomas J. Harrison, relative to the Fort Gibson property, as follows:

"I find that I will not be able to attend the meeting on next Thursday, therefore I would like to make a report on our Fort Gibson property.

"I drove to Fort Gibson last Sunday afternoon, stopping at Muskogee for Dr. Grant Foreman to join me. We made an inspection of the property and find it to be in fair condition, with some improvement made by our tenants, Mr. and Mrs. Fronsberger, except the roof. The leak that we had repaired some time ago is still causing trouble, and we directed Mr. Fronsberger to see if the men who made the repairs would not give it some attention, even though we paid them for their additional work. However, if they will not attend to it we will have some one else make the repairs.

"Mr. and Mrs. Fronsberger are taking good care of the premises and are glad to co-operate with us in any recommendations that we make. I believe that I am speaking for the committee in recommending that they be retained as custodians of the property, and I believe that they would like to have the privilege of staying there at least one more year.

(Signed) Thomas J. Harrison."

Judge Robert A. Hefner reported that all outstanding claims against the Robert L. Williams portrait fund had been paid and that there remained a balance of \$14.92, and made the motion that this balance be transferred to the private funds of the Society. The motion was seconded by Mrs. Blanche Lucas and carried.

The Secretary called attention to the gift made by Mrs. J. Garfield Buell, a painting by Carl Sweezy, the Indian artist, representing a peyote ceremonial tepee. Upon motion duly seconded, the Secretary was requested to have it framed and the amount paid out of the transferred fund.

The Secretary presented the following list of applicants for membership:

LIFE: T. Jack Foster, Norman and David D. Price, Oklahoma City.

ANNUAL: Mrs. Phoebe W. Addison, Weatherford; E. S. Anthony, Norman; Mrs. D. H. Aston, Tulsa; T. R. Benedum, Norman; Wallace Brewer, Lookeba; George M. Brown, McAlester; Lowell C. Brown, Norman; J. A. Burkhart, College Station, Texas; Harold Bash Carey, Oklahoma City; John Richard Cavnar, Oklahoma City; Mrs. Harry W. Clegern, Edmond; Benjamin C. Conner, Tulsa; Harold S. Cooksey, Norman; Mrs. Hugh Cooper, Oklahoma City; James S. Downing, Norman; Prof. Mattie Driskill, Weatherford; Mose W. Endicott, Norman; Dr. James H. Felgar, Norman; Miss Hyla Ford, Norman; John W. Foster, Norman; James D. Fulton, Muskogee; Russell A. Gideon, Tulsa; L. L. Gill, Shawnee; Sam G. Hale, Norman; E. C. Henderson, Norman; Mrs. Clarence J. Hindman, Tulsa; Judge Justin Hinshaw, Norman; Clyde M. Holliday, Norman; Norman M. Hulings, Tulsa; Robert Walton Hutto, Norman; Ernest B. Jackson, San Marcos, Texas; Jerry B. Jeter, Oklahoma City; G. B. Johnson, Norman; Philip C. Kidd, Norman; Mrs. William A. Kraus, Bartlesville; James A. Lathim, Jr., Fort Sill; Herman E. Lautaret, Norman; F. F. Lindley, Oklahoma City; Dr. W. T. Mayfield, Norman; Henry P. Meyer, Norman; Frank O. Miller, Norman; Mrs. Edna Muldrow, Weatherford; Prof. W. K. Newton, Norman; Rev. Ernest F. Nolte, Kingfisher; Mrs. J. M. Owen, Oklahoma City; Robert Lee Owen, Tulsa; W. H. Patton, Norman; Mrs. Ed L. Peckham, Blackwell; Fred Reed, Norman; G. M. Roberts, Norman; Jasper Roberts, Oklahoma City; Mrs. Mary Rodgers, Konowa; Mrs. Edith Barrows Russell, Oklahoma City; Harry B. Rutledge, Norman; Robert D. Shaw, Tulsa; E. F. Sherman, Norman; Mrs. Alpheus L. Spencer, Norman; George W. Tarter, Norman; Dr. H. V. Thornton, Norman; J. V. Tully, Oklahoma City; Paul W. Updegraff, Norman; Dr. Andrew B. Walker, Norman; Mrs. A. L. Welsh, Oklahoma City; Mrs. L. G. West, Oklahoma City; M. G. Wicker, Oklahoma City; Lester A. Wiedman, Norman; Dr. G. A. Wiley, Norman; Dr. W. M. Wilson, Tulsa; and Dexter Woods, Oklahoma City.

Hon. George L. Bowman made the motion that they be elected and received as members in the class indicated in the above list. Motion was seconded and carried.

Mr. H. L. Muldrow, chairman of the membership committee, was commended for his success in securing new members.

Mrs. Jessie E. Moore reported progress in her endeavors to secure banners from the Choctaws, the Chickasaws and the Seminoles.

Mr. H. L. Muldrow, chairman of the map committee, reported that the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company informed him that it would be unable to furnish the map case as provided by action of the Board January 28, 1943. Mr. Muldrow made the motion that a committee be appointed to make other purchases to conserve this fund. Motion was seconded and carried.