THE SQUATTERS IN NO MAN'S LAND

By Oscar A. Kinchen*

Old No Man's Land, which embraced the rectangular strip of

territory now known as the Oklahoma Panhandle, has witnessed two
distinct periods of settlement, the few but eventful years of squatter
occupation in the later eighties, and that of the large-scale settlement
in the opening years of the present century when homesteaders ar-
ived in still greater numbers to exploit the resources of this virgin

land. This article will be devoted to the earlier and more nearly
unique settlement that took place before this area was joined to Okla-

homa, while no constitutional government or rights to life or property
yet existed within its borders.1

Despite this state of lawlessness, cattlemen had grazed their stock
in this maverick land since the later seventies. For a brief span of
years, herds of five hundred to twenty-five thousand head roamed
the grasslands of this strip, until a devastating blizzard in the winter
of 1886 well-nigh wiped out the range cattle of this region, leaving
their bones scattered far and wide, to mingle with those of the buffalo
slain by hunters with high-powered rifles years before.2

Prior to the year 1885, the Cherokee Indians had claimed a kind
of overlordship to No Man's Land, and are known to have levied occa-
sional tolls upon herds that grazed within this strip. Many cowmen,
also, believed this area to be really an extension of the Cherokee Strip,

since the Post Office Department was known to have classified this
section as a part of the Indian Territory.3 But in 1885, the Secretary
of the Department of Interior, L. C. Q. Lamar, ruled that all valid
Indian claims really ended at the 100th Meridian, and that the
rectangular strip of territory west of this line was a part of the

public domain. Though its lands had been surveyed into townships

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XIV September 1936; "Pioneers of No Man's Land," in West Texas Historical
Annual, December, 1942; "The Abortive Territory of Cimarron," in Chronicles of
Oklahoma, Vol. XXIII, Autumn 1945; and "Boon or Bust in Southwest Kansas,"
in West Texas Historical Annual, December, 1948.—Ed.

1 For a study of the provisional government organized by squatters in this area,
see Doctor Kinchen's article, "The Abortive Territory of Cimarron," op. cit.

2 Boss Neff, Some Experiences of Boss Neff in the Texas and Oklahoma Pan-
handle, (Amarillo, Texas, 1941) p. 15, column 2.

3 An Interview with Mrs. Arbella Mackey by a representative of the Daily
Oklahoman," Sunday Oklahoman, June 14, 1936. In those years, Mackey, "a cow-
girl," resided at a camp near the Cimarron River in the northeastern part of the
Strip.
only, this area was presumably subject to "squatter's rights." Probably with Lamar's ruling in mind, a bill was introduced in Congress early in the following year by Representative James N. Burnes of Missouri to provide a territorial government for this neutral strip, and to secure its lands to "actual settlers." To many of the land hungry near its borders, it must have appeared that the way was being opened for an eventual influx of agricultural settlers into this region.

As destiny had already decreed, hundreds of adventurous home-seekers were close at hand. In the years 1885 and 1886, a great tide of settlers had swept into southwestern Kansas. In the language of E. M. Deane, one of the first to arrive, "They came like swarms of grasshoppers on a hot summer day, totally ignorant of the ground they were to light upon." Millions of acres lay open to settlement under the homestead laws, and within the short space of about two years all the available lands had been claimed and scores of town-sites laid out. Townsite speculation became a passion, and "easy money" was speedily acquired from gullible victims in the east. Among the thousands of immigrants who came flocking in, a large portion came merely to acquire a title to a homestead, a mortgage on the newly-acquired property—then to move away, never to return. By the spring of 1886, settlement was already approaching the saturation point, while hundreds continued to arrive intent on gaining a stake in the new land of opportunity.

Even as early as the autumn of 1885, home-seekers had begun to trickle into the extreme eastern part of the strip, selecting lands in the vicinity of Horse Creek, and in other localities still farther south. One of the first to arrive was Carter Tracy, a merchant from Ohio, who had settled temporarily at Englewood, Kansas, near the northeast corner of the strip. Here he was told of a valley about fifteen miles to the southwest where the buffalo grass was knee high and the soil therefore rich. Tracy and several other residents of Englewood hastened to the valley near the present town of Gate. Zinc markers that looked like pots set upside down indicating township lines were plainly visible, but no section lines had yet been surveyed. These adventurous squatters began staking off claims, estimating their boundaries by using ropes for surveyors chains. Other home-seekers soon followed, and

4 Fred C. Tracy, "History of Beaver County, Oklahoma," in Charles N. Gould (ed.), The Geology of Beaver County, (Norman, 1926), p. 63. Mr. Fred C. Tracy, a continuous resident of this section since 1885, is widely known as a merchant at Beaver, as being one of the framers of the Oklahoma Constitution, and more recently as County Attorney of Beaver County.
5 House Bill 4990, 49 Congress, 1st Session, February 3, 1886, XIX, p. 1036.
6 E. M. Deane to the author, Richfield, Kansas, June 8, 1947. Mr. Deane, who runs an abstract office at Richfield, has been a continuous resident of that section since about the year 1885.
by the end of that year "most of the desirable lands between Englewood and the valley had been claimed."

By the spring of 1886, a tidal wave of settlers was flowing over the Kansas line into the new land of promise. In-coming settlers were especially attracted to lands to the south of the Beaver River where they were soon to be seen measuring off their claims along the Kiowa, Mexico, Duck Pond, and Clearwater creeks. As the influx continued, squatters pushed on still farther to the bank of the Willow, and even as far west as the Palo Duro. Working out from the township lines, marked by the "zinc pots," settlers were able to arrive at a crude approximation of the boundaries of their claims. Some lived in tents for a time, others in their covered wagons or even out under the open sky, while a more permanent abode was being prepared. Sod was soon cut for the erection of a farm house, and a low structure of one or two rooms was hastily completed. The typical "soddie" was a rectangular building with walls two feet in thickness, and a door at the front and rear. Windows, if any, were in some cases closed by wooden shutters. From such timber as could be found along the streams, material was obtained for the ridge pole and rafters. A mat of green branches was spread upon the rafters, and a sod roof was then laid. There was seldom a shed or lot for the work animals. Horses and mules were staked out or "hobbled" when not in use. Milk cows were staked out to graze. The wagon, harness, and farming tools stood weather-beaten and rusting on the open prairie.8

Squatters were slow about improving their claims. Some lived for a time upon savings and supplies accumulated in previous years; others, less fortunate, were obliged to leave their families on the claim while in search of employment outside the strip. Some families were able to obtain fuel for their stoves by cutting timber or breaking brush along the banks of the creeks, while more often buffalo and cow chips was the sole source of supply.9

Squatters drifted afar in pursuit of wild game. Quail, jack rabbits, cotton-tails, and prairie chickens were fairly plentiful, and during the first year of settlement a deer or an antelope might occasionally be killed. During the cold months, some hunted and shipped

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7 F. C. Tracy to the author, Beaver, August 9, 1945.
8 E. E. Brown, "Squatters Take Choice Lands," in Herald Democrat, (Beaver), November 21, 1935. Brown came to No Man's Land in August, 1886, and edited the Territorial Advocate at Beaver City for nearly three years.
9 The "Old Overton House," erected in 1887 on the north bank of the Clearwater, twelve miles south of Beaver City, is a good example of the better class of "soddies." This structure, now in an advanced state of dilapidation, is about twenty-five feet square and divided into four rooms of about equal size, each ceiled overhead with beaded pine. There are two glass windows on each side and another near the door in front. To the rear, there appears to have once stood a crib and stables built, also, of sod.
wild game to eastern markets. As to fresh fruits, there was a great plentitude of wild plums and grapes along the banks of the several streams. Black-eyed peas were grown in abundance, and were a main reliance at all times of the year.10

Some ready cash could be obtained when it was learned that buffalo bones would bring eight to ten dollars a ton, and horns an even better price. Many a proverbial "wolf" was kept from the door by gathering bones and hauling them to the nearest shipping point at Dodge City, Kansas. The late Boss Neff, a well-known cowboy of the strip, relates that at the time of settlement he had seen as many as "fifty to a hundred skeletons within a radius of a few hundred yards." Bone haulers, would put several side boards on a wagon, and by breaking the larger bones with an ax or a sledge hammer they were able to load more than a thousand pounds of skulls, thigh bones, ribs, and vertebrae on a single wagon. H. S. Judy, a pioneer of No Man's Land, writes that a settler might earn enough money by gathering bones to buy clothes for himself and family, and such vital necessities as flour, brown sugar, molasses, and green coffee.11

Before the end of the first year of settlement, subscription schools were started in most communities by teachers from the states. These pioneer schools were usually held in small sod houses where the tuition fee for each pupil was one dollar per month. Beaver City claimed the distinction of having established the first school in No Man's Land, opened in September 1886, in a sod building which stood on the north side of the street, opposite the site of the present county court house.12 Already there were several preachers in the strip, some living on their claims, others locating in the towns. By the spring of 1886, there were two preachers at Beaver City, the Reverend Robert Allen, a Methodist, and the Reverend R. M. Overstreet, a Presbyterian. Both "held preaching services for a good sized congregation of Christian people firm in the faith during those trying years." In June of the following year they erected the first church house within the strip.13

By the spring of 1888, the settlement of No Man's Land had reached its peak. The area of settlement extended about eighty or ninety miles west of the eastern border, or about half way across the strip, diminishing somewhat in density from east to west. Beyond

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the western fringe of settlement, there were a few isolated communities, such as that around Mineral and Carrizo near the western border. Judge Tracy, a resident of No Man's Land since 1885, estimates the squatter population at its height at about twelve to fifteen thousand, though the Cimarron Council, in a memorial to Congress in May 1888, claimed a population of fifteen to twenty thousand. Twenty-eight post offices had been established up to this time, six by the end of the first year of settlement, ten in the year 1887, and twelve in the early months of 1888.

As early as the spring of 1886, several townsites were being laid out in the strip, upon some of which not a single house was ever built. The first to be surveyed and platted was Beaver City, promoted by the Beaver Townsite Company of Wichita, Kansas of which M. McLease was president and William Waddle the local agent. On March 6, Waddle and Ernest A. Reiman, a civil engineer, descended upon Jim Lane's saloon and supply store on the south side of the Beaver River, and informed the proprietor that the strip in which he resided was public land and therefore subject to settlement, and that they had come to survey a townsit. Since Lane, as an actual settler, could hold 160 acres of the land they desired for a townsit, an oral agreement was reached wherein Lane waived his right to claim a homestead on condition that two blocks in the new town be reserved to him. When the survey of the 640 acre townsit was complete, officials of the Company hastened to the national capital to enter their townsit in conformity with Federal law. There they learned that since the survey of the "neutral strip" was incomplete and no land office or federal court had control of this area, they were nothing more than squatters, and, as such, could hold only those lots—two in number—which they built upon, and then wait for a title when this land was officially opened to settlement.

In the meantime, Kansas newspapers were replete with glowing accounts of the new boom town on the banks of the Beaver, and prospective settlers were flocking in, soon to learn that they need purchase no lots at all, but simply to squat on those unclaimed, improve them, and gain a legal title "when the strip comes in." By the end of spring about twenty sod houses were complete or under construction and the "new metropolis of the plains" had gained its stride.

Among the buildings in use during the squatter regime, the pioneers recall Jim Lane's store, erected in 1879, on the west side.
of what is now Main Street, and Lane's two-room sod residence on the opposite side of the road.\textsuperscript{18} D. R. Healey's livery stable was excavated out of a bank which sloped toward the street. Three walls were formed of the dirt banks, the front built of logs, and the roof made of sod. Jim Donelly's saloon was built with walls of sod, but covered by a wooden roof. A sod store, ten feet wide and fourteen long, housed a stock of dry goods owned by Palmer and Chilcott. Thomas Hunter owned a boot shop on the west side of Main, while Dr. J. R. Linley ran a drug store on the opposite of the street. O. P. Bennett's dance hall, on the east side of Main Street, was perhaps the largest of the earlier structures built of sod, fourteen feet wide and fifty feet long.

The pride of Beaver City was a two-story frame building, erected by Dr. O. G. Chase in 1887. This structure was fifty feet square, and stood on the west side of Main. On the ground floor, Chase's son-in-law, W. B. Ogden, operated a drug store; while the second story became the headquarters of the provisional territorial government. When the Cimarron Council was in session, a curtain was drawn diagonally across the room to separate the two branches of the legislature.\textsuperscript{19}

It was not until September 15, 1887, following some disorders in the streets, that a provisional municipal government was formed. A mayor and six councilmen were elected, and a city marshall employed, his salary paid by a levy of three dollars upon each business established in the town.\textsuperscript{20} On the sixth of the following December a charter was received from the Cimarron Territorial government.\textsuperscript{21}

Other new towns were soon laid out in the eastern half of the strip. Shortly after the founding of Beaver City, Carter Tracy together with a liveryman from Englewood named Whitfield and a carpenter named Brownrigg started a town about two miles from the eastern border and a mile and half northeast of the present town of Gate. The new town was named "Gate City," signifying "the gateway to the public lands." After buying off a squatter who had settled upon the location of their choice, they surveyed a townsite; but while waiting for information as to procedure for recording a plat, they learned of the failure of the Beaver City promoters to obtain either a title to townsite lands or to find any department where a town plat could be filed. It had been learned, also, that the public land strip lay outside the jurisdiction of any court, and that no law of the United States was in force within its boundaries. Never-

\textsuperscript{18} This house, enlarged by two additional rooms, is now the residence of Superintendent Lee Hulse, and is the oldest sod house in the Oklahoma Panhandle.

\textsuperscript{19} Interview with H. C. Peckham and Clarence Hibbs, Beaver, June 30, 1945. Mr. Hibbs and Mr. Peckham, both of Beaver, Oklahoma, have resided in this section since the years of squatter occupation.

\textsuperscript{20} Spears, \textit{loc. cit.}, Section IX.

theless, Tracy erected a store upon the townsite, and on April 13, Jesse M. Gresham obtained a post office for the new town, the second to be established in No Man's Land. The postmaster and a brother then erected a building and established a store of their own. A blacksmith shop was built, "and Gate City was considered a town." 22

At about the same time that Gate City was established, a group of squatters largely from Southwest Missouri, started another town four miles to the west and named it "Neutral City." At the height of its prosperity, it possessed a number of saloons, two mercantile stores, and a blacksmith shop. But the life of the town was "brief and full of trouble." It was widely known as a "wild and wooly" center, and at least one "bloody murder" was committed there. Rivalry between Neutral City and Gate City was exceedingly strong, and at one time a virtual state of war prevailed between vigilance committees from each of these towns. 23

Another center, equally notorious in the early days of settlement, was "Old Sod Town," located near the banks of the Kiowa in the southeastern part of the strip. Founded in the first year of settlement it reached the heyday of its prosperity in 1887 when it contained about a dozen sod buildings. The liquor traffic flourished there, much of the product being sold in the Cherokee Strip just over the eastern border. A vigilance committee is said to have existed at Sod Town, and a hanging to have taken place at that point. The town was frequented by the notorious Chitwood Gang, and one of their number was slain in 1887 by Smith Ellis, a leading resident of the town. 24 This center appears to have well-nigh vanished before the end of the squatter regime.

Late in the spring of 1886, the town of Benton was established on the west side of Mexico Creek, about two miles from its junction with the Beaver, and a post office was established there in the following autumn with B. D. Fowler in charge. One of its leading promoters was E. H. Eiklor who had worked as a cow hand on a nearby ranch. When the provisional territorial council divided the strip into seven counties in January 1889, Eiklor, then a member of the Council, succeeded in having Benton designated as the county seat of "Benton County," the easternmost division of Cimarron Territory.

22 Tracy to the author, Beaver, August 9, 1945; George Shirk, "The First Post-offices Within the Boundaries of Oklahoma," op. cit., p. 240.

Gate City remained upon the original site until the strip became a part of Oklahoma, when it was moved to a section corner about half a mile southeast, and platted. When a railroad was built through this section about ten years later, the town was moved to its present site and its name changed to Gate. —Tracy to the author, August 9, 1945.

23 Tracy to the author, Beaver, August 9, 1945; Rev. R. M. Overstreet, loc. cit.

The town is believed to have possessed no more than six or eight buildings, and was almost completely abandoned by the summer of 1889.26

Early in the spring of 1886, a town named "Nevada" was staked off about eight miles northwest of Benton, on the west side of Duck Pond Creek, near its confluence with the Beaver. In spite of extensive promotion the venture failed. The Reverend R. M. Overstreet, in route to Beaver City in the spring of that year, was told of the new town of "Nevada," but upon reaching the spot, he found "not a living creature . . . only the stakes that were set to mark out the plat of a townsite."26 Later in that year, George Healey started another town, named Alpine, less than a mile to the south. His son-in-law built a store on the new site and a post office was opened there in March, 1887. Scarcely more than half a dozen buildings were erected during the years of squatter settlement. A short time after the founding of Alpine, Riverside was established on the south bank of the Beaver, near the mouth of Camp Creek, five miles to the northwest; but during the period covered by our study it contained scarcely more than a post office and a store.27

About twelve miles west of Beaver City, on Willow Creek, the town of Rothwell was established toward the close of the first year of settlement. There was a store and post office operated by James S. Hart, a blacksmith shop, several other buildings, and a rather pretentious two-story hotel owned by "Spot" Nixon, so called because of a bald spot on the back of his head. When the Rock Island Railroad reached Liberal, Kansas, in the spring of 1888, a wagon road was laid out from Rothwell to this new shipping point.28 Rothwell was the scene of the political convention sponsored by the Cimarron Council, September 14, 1887, for the purpose of nominating a delegate to Congress.29

About sixteen miles to the southwest of Rothwell, near the west bank of Fulton Creek and a mile south of the Beaver, a little trading center named Grand Valley was started in the year 1886, and a post office was located here two years later. A few miles to the west, on the bank of the Palo Duro stood a post office and supply store called Paladora,30 in the vicinity of which was the residence of J. G. Snote, a leader in the territorial movement and a member of senatorial council.

27 Rev. R. M. Overstreet, loc. cit.
28 Clarence Hibbs to the author, Beaver, June 30, 1945; Shirk, loc. cit., p. 237.
29 Lee Hulse to the author, Beaver, August 11, 1945.
30 John R. Spears, loc. cit. Nothing remains of old Rothwell except a few graves in an old cemetery there.
31 Boss Neff, op. cit., p. 15, column 3; H. C. Peckham to the author, Beaver, June 30, 1945.
About nine miles farther west, at the mouth of the Coldwater, was the original site of the town of Hardesty. “Old Hardesty” was founded at this point in the first year of settlement, on the Texas and Montana Cattle Trail which had been laid out in 1885. Among the well-known business establishments were W. A. Sullivan’s supply store in which the post office was located, Herb Craig’s and Jim Millikin’s saloons, and Rattlesnake Bill’s blacksmith shop—all built of sod. Here Dick Quinn, a step-son of Sullivan’s, founded the Hardesty Herald, in 1890, the second newspaper to be launched within the strip.31 Several miles northwest of “Old Hardesty,” between Pony Creek and the Beaver, Optima was founded by an advance guard of squatters in the spring of 1886, and a post office was located there as early as September of that year.32

In the extreme western part of the strip, in what is now Cimarron County, two small trading centers came into existence during this period. Carrizo, later renamed Kenton, is said to have been founded as early as 1885, starting with a lunch counter and three saloons. It was located near the Black Mesa, and not far from the headquarters of the original 101 Ranch.33 Several miles to the south of Carrizo, Mineral City was launched at about the beginning of the year 1888, when a thin vein of coal was discovered in that vicinity. A company was organized in Kansas to mine coal in this region. A two-story rock building was erected, and a post office established in February of that year, but owing to the limited quantity and poor quality of the coal mined there, Mineral City proved an abortive venture.34

Recalling his impressions of No Man’s Land years later, Editor E. E. Brown characterized these so-called towns as “mostly made up of three or four sod houses grouped around a larger sod structure housing a country stock of merchandise.” Beaver City, alone, he declared, “reached the dignity of a village. At its best, in those days, its population reached no more than six hundred. . . . Beaver was the only town in the Territory big enough to take sides in a controversy.” “These towns,” he observed, “were overbuilt and overstuffed with merchants, but the hope that Congress would act caused them to hold on for the golden harvest when Congress would enact a law permitting settlers to prove up and mortgage their claims.”35 While some of these towns hoped to become county seats, as Brown suggests, it was the burning desire of Dr. O. G. Chase and

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31 Boss Neff, op. cit., p. 27, col. 2. Some mounds of fallen sod walls and a graveyard nearby are the sole remaining relics of “Old Hardesty.” Several years later, the town was moved to its present site.
32 Ibid., p. 15, col. 3; Shirk, loc. cit., p. 238.
33 George Rainey, No Man’s Land, (Enid, 1937) p. 112.
34 Ibid., p. 223; Shirk, loc. cit., p. 242.
a small coterie of kindred spirits to make Beaver City a territorial
capital, and Cimarron Territory was launched with this end in view.36

As early as August, 1886, settlers, both in town and country,
were becoming sorely worried about the security of their claims.
Claim-jumping was already a common occurrence, and as there was
no law or court to protect "stripper's rights to their claims," a
mass meeting was held in the sod school house at Beaver City on
August 26. "To discourage claim-jumping and avoid discord among
settlers over claims to town lots and homesteads," a group of thirty-
five squatters resolved themselves into a "Respective Claims Com-
mittee," and worked out a plan for the security of all legitimate
claims. A board of directors was chosen, consisting of Dr. O. G.
Chase, Dr. J. A. Overstreet, and J. C. Hodge—all of Beaver City.
The newly elected board was "to proceed at once to prepare a code
of laws for our future adoption, also to prepare a form of quitclaim
deed for our common use in the transfer of claims from one party
to another." All claimants to lots or homesteads in No Man's Land
were urged to join the organization, pay a fee of one dollar, and
have the validity of their claims investigated; and members were
pledged to co-operate in defense of all rightful claims, so recognized
and recorded by the "Respective Claims Board."37

A second meeting of the Respective Claims Committee was held
on October 16, and it was at this session that "the last batch of
rules" governing disputes over claims was adopted.38 Under these
rules, any person of legal age might hold a claim of 160 acres until
the first of April of the following year if by that time he had broken
at least five acres, or made other equivalent improvements. Such a
person could also hold a claim for each member of his family of
legal age, provided he make the required improvements on each
claim and specify the member of his family for whom it was to be
held. Claim-holders who had made the required improvements, but
went away with the intention of returning were allowed four months
in which to enter upon their claims. Finally claim-jumpers or tres-
passers upon valid claims were to be punished by "measures suffi-
ciently severe."39

Judging by its meager official records, it would appear that
very little service was rendered to the squatters by the Respective
Claims organization. Indeed, this body did meet at intervals until

37 "Record Book of Beaver, Neutral Strip, Indian Territory," (original MS)
Oklahoma Historical Society. This book was kept by Dr. J. A. Overstreet, secretary
of the Board. It contains the minutes of its meetings up to March 30, 1887, and
entries of claims formally recognized by the Board.
38 Owen G. Chase, Common Sense Remarks and Suggestions on the Neutral Strip,
or No Man's Land, or Cimarron Territory, (Beaver City, Nov. 1, 1886), p. 11.
39 These rules, strangely, are not found in the "Record Book," but are sum-
marized by Spears, loc. cit., Section IV.
the thirtieth of the following March, but surprisingly few entries of claims are shown, and less than a dozen fees marked "paid." Though little activity is indicated by the minutes of its meetings, it may at the same time have been, to some degree, a deterrent to lawless invasions of "squatter's rights." On the first of the following April, 1887, its functions were presumably taken over by the "Judicial Committee" of the Cimarron Council, while the provisional territorial government was being set up for operation.

During the early months of settlement, lawless elements made their appearance in No Man's Land. Aside from the claim-jumpers, already mentioned, there came such disreputable characters as were so often found in new boom settlements. Men who had left their lawful wives behind are said to have chosen other consorts and brought them into the strip where there were no laws to restrain them. In the northeastern corner of the strip counterfeiters flourished during the first year or two of settlement. Here a sod house had been erected, where two men manufactured bogus coins which circulated in Kansas as well as in No Man's Land. They escaped punishment for a time by racing back over the line when pursued by Federal officers in that state.

The manufacture and sale of moonshine whisky was a thriving business through the earlier years of squatter settlement. The average town was overstocked with saloons, for anyone with the necessary capital could establish a saloon which was subject to no restrictions. A distillery is said to have been operated on the bank of the Clearwater several miles south of Beaver City, its products sold by peddlers who extended their business beyond the northern border into a state presumably "dry." About two miles south of Gate City, L. M. Hubbard, who became "Attorney-General" of Cimarron Territory in 1889, operated a moonshine distillery in partnership with a brother. Facing keen competition, they imported an expert distiller from Kentucky and turned out as much as two barrels of "good whisky" per week, much of it being sold in Kansas and possibly within the Cherokee Strip on the east side of the border. Probably the last and most notorious liquor center to flourish within the strip was "Beer City" which grew up on the south side of the Kansas line, opposite Liberal. The Rock Island Railroad reached that point in the spring of 1888 and the stock yards at its terminus, just over the line, soon became a rendezvous

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40 "Record Book of Beaver, Neutral Strip, Indian Territory," above cited, pp. 150, et seq.
41 Council of Cimarron Territory, Official Journal, for March 4, 1887, p. 4. On the above date the "Judicial Committee" was set up, and among its functions was the settlement of disputes over claims.
42 John R. Spears, loc. cit., Section XIV.
43 Spears, loc. cit. Kansas had adopted state-wide prohibition in 1881, as the result of a colorful crusade led by Governor John St. John.
44 Tracy to the author, Beaver, August 9, 1945.
for cowmen arriving with their herds at the new shipping point, as well as for thirsty Jayhawkers from up the tracks. The place became widely known as a haven for disreputable characters. Saloons, gambling dens, bawdy dance halls, and houses of prostitution thrived through the later years of the squatter regime.45

It is the conviction of aged pioneers of No Man's Land that the overwhelming majority of the squatters stood for law and order and respect for property rights, and that the "underworld" constituted but a very small fraction of the whole population, even in the first year of settlement when disorder was at its worst. Editor E. E. Brown observed that the lawless elements declined after the first year, due in part to the restraining influence of vigilance committees, but also largely to the fact that "the underworld starved out." When the initial boom had subsided and the hard realities of pioneer life were to be met, "there was a dirth [sic] of funds for Poker Dick and Queenie."46 Judge Tracy, also a keen observer of passing events, believes the accounts of disorder of those years to be grossly overstated. There were less than twenty homicides, he declares, during the five year period of settlement, five of these occurring in Beaver City, and four at or near Gate City. Probably one third of these, he believes, were really "executions" by vigilance committees, with the gun or the rope. "Vigilance committees were organized around most community centers, and though they seldom functioned, their existence was a deterrent to crime."47 H. S. Judy, then a squatter in the eastern part of the strip, recalls "a considerable amount of confusion and lawlessness" in the boom days of settlement, but he bore witness to the time when "the fear of vigilance committees prevented crime, and when the criminal element was eliminated, there was a spirit of friendship and co-operation among the people which is rarely seen today."48

By the spring of 1888, the settlement of No Man's Land had passed its peak and the boom days had long since vanished. Crops had been scanty in former years, but in the spring of 1888 a great drouth had spread over the land, and no crops could be planted or pasture obtained for such live stock as settlers still possessed. Savings and supplies brought along by homesteaders had been long exhausted. Bones and cow chips were increasingly difficult to obtain; and the much-needed cash, realized by bone haulers in former times, was no longer in sight. Hopes for titles to claims, "the nearest thing to stripper's hearts," were fading with each passing month. A memorial to Congress from the Cimarron Council, on May 8, enum-

45 Spears, loc. cit.
47 Tracy, "History of Beaver County, Oklahoma," in Gould, op. cit., p. 66.
erated at some length the hardships which the squatters had endured; and Congress was urged to come to their relief by such action as would secure legal titles to their claims—else a wholesale depopulation of this land would be the result.49

A peculiar ordinance, enacted by the Cimarron Council early in the following October, is highly suggestive of the hopeless state of affairs at that season of the year. This act forbade the gathering of such “territorial products” as bones, buffalo and cow chips, wood, wild plums and grapes by persons from outside the strip.50 Indeed, such items were probably their main reliance for fuel and subsistence as winter approached, since crops had failed.

The devastating blizzards of the winter of 1889, remembered by cattlemen as unusually severe,51 must have borne heavily upon the destitute squatters, with larders empty and fuel exceedingly scarce.

Spring came, and like a raging prairie fire, news spread across the treeless plains, news of “unassigned lands,” soon to be opened to settlement in the heart of Oklahoma where titles might be secured and crops be made to grow.

Emigration from the strip, in progress since the preceding autumn, turned into a veritable exodus when thousands of destitute squatters abandoned their claims to make the run for the new land of promise. The provisional territorial government folded its wings, and its chief proponents vanished from the strip. The editor of the Territorial Advocate “signed 30.”52 The squatter population which had numbered twelve to fifteen thousand at the peak of settlement sank to less than three thousand by the end of that year.53

Though more than three-fourths of the settlers of No Man’s Land had abandoned their claims in quest of greener fields, there were those who still remained to realize, in some measure, hopes they had long entertained. In May of the following year, 1890, this maverick strip of neutral land was joined to the new Territory of Oklahoma. The homestead and townsite laws were soon extended to this area. Squatters were given preference rights to entry on their claims,

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51 See Boss Neff, op. cit., p. 20, col. 2.
52 While Brown left for Oklahoma, the paper he had edited for nearly three years continued to be published, but its name Territorial Advocate was soon discarded. Dr. Chase, the chief promoter of Cimarron Territory, left for Colorado about the close of the spring.
53 Tracy, “History of Beaver County,” in Gould, op. cit., p. 68. It is of some interest to note that while squatters were in flight from No Man’s Land, the once boom settlement in southwest Kansas was suffering a similar fate, and by the year 1890 that region was almost completely drained of its population. (E. M. Deane to the author, Richfield, June 8, 1947).
and allowed a credit of two years from the five-year residence required by law, thus enabling homesteaders to "prove up" and obtain their patents three years from the date of filing.

Though "stripper's rights" had been secured, homesteaders continued to diminish for several years, largely as the result of successive openings of Indian lands in Oklahoma Territory. In the meantime, cattlemen, most of whom had left the strip in the spring of 1887, were already returning to lands grazed by their herds in former years; and even some remaining homesteaders turned cowmen and ranged their stock upon abandoned claims. Once again, old No Man's Land was the scene of cow camps, chuck wagons, rollicking cowboys, and thundering herds.

It was not until the dawn of the new century that a second tidal wave of settlers came rolling in. Coming, in part, as an overflow from older settlements in Oklahoma, no less than forty thousand home-seekers arrived between the years of 1903 and 1906 to establish claims upon lands of their choice. Soon virgin soil was turned by plows throughout the length of the strip, and a new era for old No Man's Land had arrived.

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54 Tracy, "History of Beaver County," in Gould, op. cit., p. 68.
55 Boss Neff to the author, letter dated from Hooker, Oklahoma, August 22, 1945; also, in Neff, op. cit., p. 20, col. 3.
57 The completion of this article by Oscar A. Kinchen for publication in The Chronicles represented extended research into the history of No Man's Land and field trips in this region begun early in 1945. Since Doctor Kinchen's manuscript was received by the Editorial Office, Carl Coke Rister's book, No Man's Land, has appeared off the University of Oklahoma Press (Norman, 1948), presenting an extended history of this interesting region. This article by Doctor Kinchen contributes further to the story of No Man's Land, in the way of human interest hitherto unpublished.—Ed.