

THE EARLY DAYS OF ANADARKO

By Sara Brown Mitchell*

Anadarko is a city with a fascinating past. To discover all of its interesting history,¹ we must begin with the establishment of the Wichita Agency in May or June of 1859. It was situated about eight miles west of the present site of Anadarko on what is now known as Leeper Creek.² Samuel A. Blain was the first agent.

Matthew Leeper was the acting agent when the Confederates took over the agency in 1861. He remained in charge until October 23, 1862, when the agency was the scene of a bloody Indian massacre, which was carried out by a group of renegade Indians. Some of the employees were murdered, but Agent Leeper escaped with his life.³ The buildings were burned, and the agency was not rebuilt until after the Civil War.

William Shirley, who had been a licensed Indian trader for many years, founded Shirley's Trading Post in 1859 to do business with the Wichitas. By studying his old ledger, it is apparent that he sold many types of articles. The following are among those listed: food, clothing, tobacco, soap, looking glasses, rope, playing cards, saws, knives, padlocks, blankets, canned goods, hunting equipment, candles, ribbon, and buffalo robes.⁴ It is interesting to note that Shirley outfitted General Albert Pike, who in August of 1861 purchased a large amount of supplies from Shirley. Jesse Chisholm was quite a steady customer in the spring of 1862. Of course, Shirley sold a great deal to the white men of the Agency and a large quantity to the Indians of that area. Apparently, there was a Negro who was also a frequent customer.

The Wichita Agency was re-established in 1871. It was situated across the Washita River north of the present site of Anadarko. Shirley's store was set-up near by. This was the period of the

* Sara Brown Mitchell is an advanced student of Dr. E. E. Dale, Research Professor of History, The University of Oklahoma, at Norman.

¹ For other articles dealing with this region see *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*: C. Ross Hume, "Historic Sites Around Anadarko," Vol. 16, No. 4; Samuel Y. Allgood, "Historic Spots and Actions in the Washita Valley up to 1870," Vol. 5, No. 2; E. H. Linzee, "Registration and Drawing for Opening of Kiowa and Comanche Country, 1901," Vol. 26, No. 3; Sidney H. Babcock, "John Jasper Methvin," Vol. 19, No. 2; Muriel H. Wright, "The American Indian Exposition in Oklahoma," Vol. 24, No. 2; A. Emma Estill, "The Great Lottery," Vol. 9, No. 4; Berlin B. Chapman, "Establishment of the Wichita Reservation," Vol. 11, No. 4.

² J. J. Methvin, *In the Limelight*, p. 6.

³ C. Hume, *op. cit.*

⁴ *Copy of Ledger of Shirley Trading House* (June 7, 1861-August 18, 1862), copy in Phillips Collection, University of Oklahoma.

Quaker agents, and Johnathan Richards was the first one sent here. According to Reverend Methvin, the Quaker Agents made a fine record in this region.

In September, 1878, the Kiowa and Comanche Agency was consolidated with the Wichita office, and the Anadarko Indian Agency became a larger and more important concern. It was now responsible for the safety and well-being of 4,117 Indians.⁵ By September of 1901, it was reported that the Agency had jurisdiction over some 3,626 Indians. This number included the following tribes: Apache, Kiowa, Comanche, Wichita and affiliated bands, and the Caddo.⁶

The name "Anadarko" also has a picturesque legend behind it. In 1875, a post-office was established at the Agency. The men there wanted to name the post-office after Shirley, but he declined the honor and suggested that they call it "Nadarko." Mr. Shirley's wife was a member of a nearly extinct tribe, the Nadarkos (Nadakos). They had been moved to the Leased District from Texas and had settled among the Wichitas. In 1869, they camped near the present-day Anadarko. Their history, however, goes back to 1539, when they were mentioned by De Soto as the Naidaches Indians. He found them in Louisiana at that time. The name of the agency became "A-nadarko" supposedly through a mistake in the spelling in agency records.⁷

The religious work done in this area must be given its rightful place in this discussion because of the important role it played in bringing civilization to the Indians. The Baptists had sent missionaries to the affiliated tribes north of the Washita River, but "beyond the work of the Friends in their official capacity and the efforts of Battey, nothing had ever been attempted among the warlike tribes south of the Washita River."⁸ The Episcopal mission was brought here in 1883, but it was not permanent. Reverend J. B. Wicks was in charge of it, and when he retired, there was no mission in this area for some time.

Reverend J. J. Methvin was sent by the Methodist Episcopal Church South to work among the "wild tribes" of all of the western portion of Indian Territory. He arrived in this region in 1887. Reverend Methvin was to fix mission locations and to plan mission work. He finally centralized his attention upon Anadarko, where he worked with the three tribes south of the river. Here he built a parsonage with a church annex and held regular services.

⁵ *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1879, p. 62.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1901, p. 320.

⁷ Philip J. Dickerson, *History of Anadarko, O. T.*, pps. 31, 33, 35.

⁸ Methvin, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

Reverend Methvin founded a school for Indian youth, called the Methvin Institute, which was opened in 1890.⁹ He began with fifteen pupils, which soon became thirty, and in two years there were over seventy-five pupils in attendance. Reverend Methvin managed to get some government funds for his school, and it was also given 160 acres of land. By 1901 there were 120 pupils, four teachers, and eight employees in the industrial department. A commendable job was done in preparing the Indian youth for living full and worthwhile lives in the white man's society.

The new Anadarko was built right up against the school property, and this made it quite valuable. Methvin Institute was closed after over twenty years of creditable service. It was purchased by a syndicate of four men, much against Reverend Methvin's wishes.¹⁰

Reverend S. V. Fait established a Presbyterian school and mission in 1892. He built a church at the Agency and founded his school, the Mary Gregor Memorial School, or Mautame, four miles east of Anadarko. It had an excellent reputation and the enrollment was about twenty-two in September of 1901.¹¹

Saint Patrick's Mission Boarding School was for many years a government contract school. It was founded in 1892 by Father Isidore Ricklan, who acted as superintendent. The Sisters of Saint Francis were in charge, and this Catholic mission school also contributed its large part to the care and training of the Indian youth of this area.

The present day Riverside Indian Boarding School was established by A. J. Standing on September 23, 1871, at the Wichita Agency. There had been little educational work among these Indians before this time. Thomas C. Battey took over as superintendent on October 31, 1871. The school's meager beginning was with from six to eight pupils. They had only the crudest accommodations, and the children slept out-of-doors until November 15 of that year when the school actually became a boarding school. There were eleven pupils at this time, most of whom were Caddo or Delaware with a few Creeks. Battey was there only a short time, as he soon went on to do work among the Kiowa.¹²

A modern and more adequate building was constructed in 1879 when the school was re-built after having burned. The new building was filled almost to capacity. In 1901 the Riverside School had several wood and brick buildings and complete water and sanitation facilities. Along with their regular classroom studies, the boys

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 89, 90.

¹¹ *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1901, p. 321.

¹² Thomas C. Battey, *A Quaker Among the Indians*, pp. 27, 30, 72, 73.

received instruction in farming and the girls in domestic duties. The school's average attendance in 1901 was 161.¹³

With two organized churches, four schools in and around the Agency, and the Rock Island Railway which had been built through the town site of Anadarko while it was still on the reservation, the Agency employees early shared most of the advantages of a small town. The little settlement included the agent's office, two commissaries, a physician's office, saw mill, shops, homes, traders' stores, and the Masonic Lodge, which was chartered in 1884.¹⁴

The women of the Agency had in January, 1899, organized a literary society, the "Philomethic Club," which was "composed of those who are interested in improving their leisure hours by literary and social pursuits."¹⁵ It was still active in 1901, and was contributing its part toward making the new Anadarko a cultural community. That year, its sixteen members were studying Caesar among other subjects.

The opening to settlement of the Fort Sill Country was the last great land opening in Oklahoma. The day selected was August 6, 1901, when the reservations of the Kiowa, Comanche, Apache, and Wichita Indians were opened to the white man. This region was divided into three counties; Comanche, Kiowa, and Caddo. The registration for lands in the "Kiowa-Comanche Country" was held at El Reno and Ft. Sill. Registration for the vicinity of Anadarko was conducted at El Reno. The drawing for all land was at El Reno and began on July 29.

This plan was used in subsequent openings in other parts of the country with the same success, and "the old days of the 'horse race' were over."¹⁶ The lottery was a better and more satisfactory system.¹⁷

The plan of opening was a very good one, and it was carried out in excellent fashion. The feature of selling the lots of the county seat towns at auction and giving the proceeds to the new counties for roads, bridges, public buildings and the expenses of local government until taxes could be levied and collected, was a particularly good arrangement, and the results were very satisfactory.

Anadarko was selected as county seat of Caddo County, and Colonel Janes F. Randlett, the Indian agent, was asked by the government to locate a site for the new town. He decided it should be situated between the property of the Indian Agency on the north

¹³ Annual Report, *op. cit.*, 1880, p. 75, 1901, p. 323, 324.

¹⁴ Hume, *op. cit.*

¹⁵ Dickerson, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

¹⁶ Edward E. Dale, "The Opening of the Fort Sill Country," MS. in Frank Phillips Collection, University of Oklahoma.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

and the Methodist Mission land on the south. This area was a corn field full of tall corn which was dried and withered due to the long drouth.

On August 6, 1901, the town lots were sold at auction to the highest bidders. The property was sold for cash, and each person was allowed to purchase only one residence lot and one business lot.

Those who wanted to settle in the new townsites flocked to the outskirts to await the day of the auction. A camp grew up on the edge of each one. The future citizens of Anadarko, like those of other towns, established their "Rag Town." It was made up of tents and covered wagons methodically arranged like the buildings of any other small town. Various shops and establishments opened up and carried on business in normal fashion.

There were 1,129 lots bought in Anadarko, and the total amount received from their sale was \$188,455. The expense of the sale was only \$2,489.62 plus the surveying expense. When this was subtracted, it still left quite a "tidy sum with which to set up house-keeping for themselves."¹⁸ This paid for the erection of a court house and jail, and it also furnished funds for the establishment of a light and water system.

Reverend Methvin gives a very colorful account of the "opening" in Anadarko in his book, *In the Limelight*, a part of which is quoted here:¹⁹

The multitudes came, some 20,000 strong and more. From every direction the people came—from the north and the south, from the east and the west, from every state in the Union and from nearly every country beneath the sun: of all casts and colors and creeds; Jew and Gentile, Catholic and Protestant, Democrats and Republicans, Socialists and Societs, Holy Rollers and Shouting Methodists, staid and placid Presbyterians and elected aggressive Baptists—all a conglomerate mass of live, restless, writhing, eager humanity.

Here were honest men seeking homes, and adventurers hunting prey like wild beasts in the night. Here were lawyers hungry for a fee and ready to represent anything beneath the sun, and advocates of caste equipped for honest counsel; doctors of skill along with the quack and patent nostrums; editors and newspaper men with printing press quickly adjusted for business; preachers who got but a meager hearing above the din and noise and clamor and onrush of writhing multitudes.

The Politician was loud in the land, proclaiming his love for the "dear people," and his superior fitness for serving them in office.

Great trainloads of intoxicating liquors rolled in, and the saloon man plied with rapid gain his iniquity, and the strange woman with brazen face walked unashamed. The saloon, that rendezvous of all iniquities, and its associate evil, the bawdy house, did a big business.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Methvin, *op. cit.*, pp. 101, 102, 103.

The saloons were constantly violating the law, but it was impossible, before the courts, as they then were, to convict one of them. . . .

Crime stalked abroad for days and nights, and an occasional murder was committed. The provisional carpet bag Government that ruled at the time seemed helpless or indifferent to the enforcement of law.

The Indians seemed to catch the spirit of dissipation and tried to drink all the booze that was shipped in, and each morning the police station was filled with 'drunks'

On account of unsanitary conditions, much sickness prevailed, and there came an epidemic of typhoid fever and many died Frequent mourning mingled with the mirth and hilarity of the times. It was a wonderful day in the history of Anadarko that was duplicated in other towns at the same time. But at last the storm blew over and the surf on the flood of humanity floated on, and Anadarko settled down with a citizenship worthy of the name.

When the white man came, the problems of the Indian Agency greatly increased. The Indian copied the white man's drinking and gambling. The merchants also extended the Indians credit far beyond their ability to pay, "so a system of credit and debt paying had to be arranged by the government." Louis McNight, a young attorney, was employed by the government to handle this situation.²⁰

Of the 20,000 that arrived to take part in the opening, only around 10,000 stayed in Anadarko. After several months, the population of this new frontier town shrank to about 3,000.²¹

The Congregational, Christian, Methodist, and Baptist denominations all set up churches in the new Anadarko. The Methodist Church built a tabernacle and held services in "Rag Town" on Sunday, August 4, and on the following day an "anti-saloon league" was organized under its guidance. The Methodists moved into the city proper on the day of the opening. The Congregational and Christian Churches were also brought to the city on August 6. The Baptists followed on the eighth. By December of 1901, all four denominations had permanent church buildings and memberships of up to fifty.²²

The two banks were the first and second businesses started on the town site. They were simply tents equipped with iron safes and armed guards for protection at all times. The two lemonade stands were the third and fourth establishments, and an auditorium near the auction stand in which people rested while they waited for lots was the fifth.²³

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 106, 107.

²¹ *Oklahoma, A Guide to the Sooner State*, p. 268.

²² Dickerson, *op. cit.*

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

The following is the list that Dickerson gives of the businesses operating in Anadarko in December of 1901:²⁴

- 2 abstractors
- 2 artists
- 2 banks
- 7 bakeries
- 10 barber shops
- 2 building and loan
- 6 blacksmiths and repairing
- 4 contractors and builders
- 3 clothers, furnishers, and shoes
- 13 doctors, physicians, and surgeons
- 1 dentist
- 6 druggists
- 3 embalming and undertaking
- 7 furniture
- 7 feed and produce
- 3 groceries, feed, and grain
- 5 general groceries
- 6 candies, fruits, cigars
- 3 coal
- 13 dry goods and shoes
- 13 general merchandise
- 6 hotels
- 4 harness shops and shoe repair
- 15 hardware
- 7 insurance—fire and life
- 4 jewelers and watch repairing
- 21 liveries and feed stables
- 11 lumber yards
- 3 millinery
- 3 meat markets
- 5 papers and printing offices (3 city papers and 1 county)
- 2 news stands and books
- 9 notary public
- 2 painting and wall papering
- 26 real estate, law and loans
- 22 restaurants and short orders
- 31 saloons
- 4 second hand stores
- 5 surveyors
- 2 tailors (and repairing)
- 3 transfers and deliveries
- 5 tanners
- 8 wagon and feed yards
- 3 brick yards
- 2 works and bottling
- 8 miscellaneous (including pool rooms, bowling alley, light company, lamp company, post office, telegraph company, and Rock Island Depot)

It is interesting to note that there were more saloons than any other single type of business establishment. Many of them were

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pps. 36-54.

expensive establishments and apparently were well supported by the male population of Anadarko. Dickerson states that: "Not less than \$15,000 to \$20,000 are invested in the fine sideboards and bars alone, besides the buildings and the cost of running them From \$5,000 to \$10,000 per month is invested in the luxury of drinking."²⁵

In December of 1901, a cemetery was planned, and many good buildings had already gone up in Anadarko. Almost all of the tents had given way to more permanent types of structure. There were also numerous cottages, and several two story homes were under construction.

Anadarko had an active commercial club, which worked for the progress and enlargement of the city. The citizens of Anadarko felt that "the possibility of good water power from the falls in the river and the timber, and perhaps mineral near Anadarko would make the town a fine manufacturing center."²⁶ The incorporation of the Anadarko Ice Company and its definite plans for construction was a venture of great interest to Anadarkoans in 1901.

Apparently the city was somewhat over-weighted with the spirit of frontier optimism. Some of the numerous business establishments would have to fail, because the town was too small to support all of them.

Regular public schools were functioning in less than ninety days from the sale of the first lots. They had an adequate and well-trained staff of teachers, and the course of study included eleven years of work. The Superintendent received \$100 a month, the principals \$75, the grade teachers \$50, and the primary teacher \$65 a month. Also, Anadarko's colored population of nearly 100 was not neglected in the educational system. They had a well-trained teacher who received \$50 a month for teaching from fourteen to twenty Negro children. There was one Negro grocery store in the town, and the teacher for the colored youth was the daughter of the owner of this business.²⁷

Cultural and moral advancement, as well as progress in business and educational development, were quite evident by December of

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pps. 59, 60.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

1901. A twelve-piece band was organized very early; there was also a literary club and a historical society; and an ordinance closing barber shops on Sunday had been passed; there was an agreement by drug stores to close on Sunday; and vigorous attacks upon the bagnios of the city were being conducted.²⁸ The number of church members was growing steadily, and the churches were becoming well established. By the winter of 1901, Anadarko was looking forward to a bright and prosperous future.

²⁸ *Ibid.*