

## OKLAHOMA CITY HISTORICAL MARKERS

By Golda B. Slief\*

*The '89ers*, an organization dedicated to the purpose of perpetuating the history of pioneer days in "Old Oklahoma," decided early in their organizational work to investigate the possibilities of naming streets and placing historical markers as a means of commemorating the Run of 1889, to immortalize the early day builders of Oklahoma City and to measure progress made by the pioneers.

Many streets in Oklahoma City were named in memory of prominent citizens, among them are: Durland, Geary, Harvey, Hudson, Lee, Stiles and Walker Streets;<sup>1</sup> Classen Boulevard, Overholser Drive (West of the City) and Colcord and Couch Drives on either side of the '89er Circle which is around the large fountain on the east and in front of the Municipal Auditorium.

It was not until 1935 that the marking of historical sites in the City got under way. Mrs. John L. George, President of *The '89ers*, named a committee under the chairmanship of Mrs. Celene Reed to locate authentic sites and to make recommendations to members. The succeeding years, under the administration of Mrs. Jack Jones and Mrs. Mabel Carrico Holtzschue, were busy ones for *The '89ers* as we find the organization taking a prominent part in laying the cornerstone of the new Municipal Building on November 10, 1936, and in the development of Civic Center which followed. *The '89ers* were asked to name the streets adjacent to the new structure.

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<sup>1</sup> *Durland Street*, named for O. C. Durland whose homestead was east of Stiles Park developed into city lots; *Geary Street*, for James Geary, an early day officer of the Board of Trade; *Harvey Street*, for David Harvey, first Oklahoma territorial congressman; *Hudson Street*, for Edmond Hudson, townsite surveyor and member of first City council; *Lee Street*, for Oscar Lee, hotel builder; *Stiles Street*, for Captain D. F. Stiles, head of the Red Horse Cavalry here at the time of the Run of 1889; *Walker Street*, for C. P. Walker, secretary of one of the townsite companies; *Classen Boulevard*, for Anton H. Classen, builder, developer and philanthropist; *Overholser Drive*, for Henry Overholser, first President of the Board of Trade and builder of the first opera house; *Colcord Drive*, for C. F. Colcord, prominent pioneer builder in Oklahoma City, and President of Oklahoma Historical Society; *Couch Drive*, for William L. Couch, first Mayor of Oklahoma City; *'89er Circle*, in memory of pioneers who made the Run, April 22, 1889.

The names of Colcord and Couch drives also that of the '89er Circle were suggested and duly named by the City authorities under Mayor John Frank Martin who promoted these in the beginning. The City Park Department, Mr. Donald Gordon, Superintendent asked the co-operation of *The '89ers* in securing a memorial tablet to be placed near the reflecting pool at the east entrance to the Municipal Building.

The dedication program for the Memorial Tablet and the historical markers within the limits of Oklahoma City was held on April 22, 1939 in honor of the pioneers who founded this City in 1889. A short history of the founding in 1889 prepared by Dr. A. C. Scott and inscribed on bronze plates was placed in the vault of the Memorial Tablet. This tablet and the historical markers have been recently visited Miss Muriel Wright of the Historical Society and myself to ascertain the information placed on them. The inscriptions and the locations were found to be as follows:<sup>2</sup>

1. This tablet marks the location of the canal built in 1889 by the Oklahoma Ditch and Power Co. Charles W. Price, Pres. and C. P. Walker, Secy. The canal head was four miles west. The power plant was located at Broadway and Canal streets. It furnished power to operate an electric light plant for a brief period.  
Location: 819 S.W. Third Street, at entrance of present Oklahoma Operating Co.
2. The First Methodist Episcopal Church was organized June 23, 1889, with seventeen members. The Sunday School organized June 9, 1889 by Dr. D. W. Scott.  
Location: First Methodist Church, 131 N.W. 4th Street.
3. This tablet marks the camp site of Capt. David L. Payne prior to 1889. This ravine was known as Indian Springs. The company was known as Oklahoma Boomers.  
Location: 1200 North Lindsey, Northeast corner of Webster School grounds.
4. This tablet marks the site of the State Capitol which was moved from Guthrie and located in the old Irving high school Building.  
Location: 400 N. Walker, Irving School.
5. The Washington School was one of the first public schools built in Oklahoma City. It was opened January, 1895.  
Location: 315 South Walker, east entrance Washington School.
6. This tablet marks the location of the first city park, named "Riverside Park."  
Location: 200 East California, west door Wheatley School.
7. The Emerson School was one of the first public schools built in Oklahoma City. It was opened in January, 1895.  
Location: North Walker between 6th and 7th streets, east door Emerson School.

<sup>2</sup>These Oklahoma City historical markers are in the form of bronze plaques of uniform size, 11 x 16 inches. Beneath the inscription on each is a regulation design or insignia showing a covered wagon with two figures on the front seat, drawn by a team of horses. At the bottom of the plaques, beneath the insignia on each, appears the signatory line: "Sponsored by the '89ers."—Ed.

8. This tablet marks the site of the military post established by the War Department to maintain order until Territorial government was formed. Capt. D. F. Stiles was Provost Marshal.  
Location: 400 North Walker, west door Board of Education Building.
9. St. Joseph's Church was founded May 19, 1889. Rev. N. F. Scallon, Pastor, J. T. Martin, Chr., Joseph Crisney, Sec'y. and Col. J. T. Hickey, Treas., were the first officers. The Cross was raised July 31st.  
Location: 4th and Harvey, south door St. Joseph's Church.
10. The first newspaper published in Oklahoma City was located here. The Oklahoma City Times owned by A. C. Scott and W. W. Scott. The first issue was May 9, 1889.  
Location: 21 West Main, entrance old "Bass Building."
11. This tablet marks the site of the Arbeka Hotel, the first hotel in operation at the time of the Run of '89. It was named by Mr. James McGranahan.  
Location: 17 South Santa Fe Street, southeast corner of present building.
12. This tablet marks the location of the first Oklahoma City post office on April 22, 1889. It was a one-room log shed where thousands called for their mail during the first two or three weeks. G. A. Biedler was Postmaster. The task of handling tons of mail arriving daily required almost superhuman effort.  
Location: In unit block on South Santa Fe Street, on northeast corner of building.
13. This tablet marks the site of the Citizens Bank. The first bank opened for business May 30, 1889. James Geary, President, L. A. Gilbert, Cashier and A. L. Welsh, Asst. Cashier.  
Location: 20 North Broadway, at entrance Huckins Hotel.
14. This tablet marks the site of the first public Library called the "Oklahoma City Library." The charter was granted December 10, 1889.  
Location: 132 West Grand, inside column or corner post of Commerce Exchange Building.
15. This tablet marks the site of the First School (subscription) in Oklahoma City which was opened in June, 1889 by Mrs. L. H. North.  
Location: 124 N.W. 5th Street, entrance to building, "Siloam Lodge, 276."
16. This tablet marks the location where the first Y.W.C.A. was organized on April 7, 1907 in the Empire Building. Mrs. J. F. Warren, President, Mrs. John Threadill, Vice-President.  
Location: 124 West Main, east wall of entrance to Empire Building.
17. The first Hardware Store in Oklahoma City was established on this site by W. J. Pettee & Co., April 22, 1889.  
Location: 121 West Main Street, directly in front of Pettee's Store, in sidewalk near curbing.

Tablets were also made to mark the sites of the first Fourth of July celebration in Oklahoma City, at Stiles Park; the first City Hall, at the northwest corner of Grand and Broadway; and the first Y.M.C.A. rooms, in the Baltimore Building. The marker at Stiles Park was not found in the spring of 1951, probably covered with grass and earth, or taken away. The other two tablets, the City Hall and the first Y.M.C.A. rooms, seem never to have been erected, according to a letter received from Mrs. Byrd W. Bottoms, former

Secretary of *The '89ers*.<sup>3</sup> The organization records of *The '89ers* give the following inscriptions and data for these three tablets:

18. This tablet marks the first Fourth of July celebration held here. Horse racing was the chief diversion. During the festivities the temporary grandstand collapsed, killing some and wounding one hundred persons.

Location: N.E. 8th and Stiles Streets, in Stiles Park.

19. This tablet marks the location of the first City Hall. The City obtained title to the lots under the provision of the old "Squatters' Rights" law.

Location: Northwest corner of Grand and Broadway.

20. This plaque marks the location where the first Y.M.C.A., was organized in 1900 in the Baltimore Building. Gen. F. S. Cramer, President; A. C. Scott, Vice-President, and Harry DeWolfe, Secretary.

Location: Corner of Grand and Harvey Streets.

Other activities of *The '89ers* of historical value have included the publication of a book containing stories of the Run and of the early days written by citizens who made the Run and by their sons and daughters. This book was published in 1943 under the title of *Oklahoma—The Beautiful Land*.

Special space for historical exhibits has been allotted *The '89ers* in the Oklahoma Historical Society building near the State Capitol. Many historical documents and objects are on display there that pertain to the early history of the portion of Oklahoma opened to settlement in 1889.

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<sup>3</sup> A letter to Miss Golda B. Slief from Mrs. Byrd W. Bottoms, Apt. 204, 2635 Durant, Berkeley, California, received in March, 1951, states in part as follows:

"In regard to the Historical Markers sponsored by the '89ers, a complete record is, or was, in the files of the City Park Department at the time Mr. Gordon was the Supt. . . . .

"I regret my memory fails me about the first City Hall on Grand and Broadway but I have a hazy memory of the reason it not being placed, that the building was to be torn down but the marker was made for it.

"The marker for the first Y.M.C.A. rooms in the Baltimore Building, corner of Grand Ave. and Harvey was cast but not placed. The owner at the time was the widow of a banker, (sorry I cannot recall the name now) and she refused to give her consent, thought placing the marker would detract from the possible sale of the building. . . . .

"The marker for the Fourth of July celebration in the Stiles Park was placed there cemented in a concrete slab and faced the west, very near the center of the Circle. . . . .

"Preserving all records of historical events mean so much, and I am glad to hear of your work along this line. I wish everyone was as much 'sold' on Oklahoma history as I am. You should hear the proud voice of these Californians say, 'I'm a Native Son or Daughter' . . . . ."—Ed.