

THE MAGIC CITY: GUTHRIE

Kansas City Times, July 22, 1889*

At high noon three months ago today Oklahoma was thrown open to the waiting multitudes. By nightfall it probably contained more people than are within its boundaries today, but this does not prove that the territory turned out a disappointment—that the promised land was not what it had been represented. Many who came here and secured claims have returned to their homes temporarily and many who own town lots would be glad to do so, but it is the era of the “jumper” and they feel that a watchful eye must be kept upon their possessions. No, Oklahoma has proved very far from a disappointment, so far as its towns go, at any rate. Everybody here swears by it, but especially by their particular town or locality.

A newcomer, if he be politic, will declare at each town he enters that it is the very best in the territory and should have the capital by all means. He needs no further credentials. There is all the bitter rivalry for supremacy between some of these places that ever characterized the struggles of eastern commercial centers. The people stand by their own first, last and all the time and even honest criticism is not tolerated. The boom spirit is a most vigorous, jealous and kicking one.

Guthrie and Oklahoma City are avowed rivals, and so with other towns here and there. Each is fighting for itself and against the others, and, possibly, all are thereby benefited. But one must get into the territory to appreciate the earnestness and often bitterness of the struggle.

The Oklahoma-bound still form the bulk of the Sante Fe's passengers from Arkansas City, some returning from trips to former homes, many on their first visit. There is no line to indicate the northern boundary of the territory, but ten to one some old boomer will be in the seat in front or behind who'll draw a long breath and announce that the Cherokee Strip is left and Oklahoma is entered. And certainly it must be. Away over to the left is a dugout which no Indian on earth could ever have constructed, and a minute later you are at the first town in the territory—a dozen tents and one small frame building—Orlando. It's too new to have been heard much of.

*When Guthrie was three months old the *Kansas City Times* described the “Magic City,” telling of graded streets, miles of sidewalks, and street sprinklers. Dr. B. B. Chapman found the article in the *Kansas Historical Society* while working under the auspices of the Research Foundation of Oklahoma State University, and it is here reprinted in full.—Ed.

And, by the way, comparatively few tents are seen in Oklahoma today. In the towns they are scattered here and there, but they are probably only one in twenty to the little one story frame houses which make a nest so hot these summer days that one would better be smothered with a bolster, for it's quicker. That it's warm in Oklahoma everybody must admit. Calling on Captain Kavanaugh, in command of the troops here, early last week his thermometer registered 102° quite late in the afternoon, and there have been some warmer days since—warmer by several degrees. But so far there has been scarcely a day without a slight breeze stirring and the nights are deliciously refreshing.

Back to the line of the Sante Fe: Seven miles from the north line of the territory is Alfred [now Marshall]—booming like everything else—with twenty or thirty frame buildings and as many tents, the drug stores prominent by their substantial look here as elsewhere. "They can't use a tent, you see, they'll get caught at it," observes a returning pilgrim who has evidently "been there." But he's inclined to libel the territorial towns. It is to be presumed that almost anywhere a man can get his whisky and quinine, and be trusted to mix them to suit himself. But prohibition under martial law here is a little different from Kansas prohibition. Even the drug stores have to be mighty careful in the bitters they sell, and such compounds as Hostetter's are not permitted.

In Guthrie last Saturday the sale of cider was stopped. There were doubtless some honest dealers, but some had abused the privilege and all had to suffer, so now none of the so-called cider is to be had nearer than the Kansas line. Outside of the undeniably soft drinks the only beverage to be had is hop-tea, and some of the straight-laced are calling for an analysis on this. Captain Kavanaugh has it, as is not generally known. It shows 1.82 per cent of alcohol, 96 per cent of water and the balance heaven knows what, but nothing to intoxicate. The beverage looks amazingly like beer and tastes like slop. It is drunk on its looks, and so long as it is not tampered with by the addition of spirits it will be permitted.

From Alfred it is a short run to the great and glorious Guthrie, in as fine a location as city ever had, the land rising from either side of the Cottonwood in long waves, tree-dotted everywhere, and of a delightful green that is a rest and pleasure to the eye at all times. It will admit the best of drainage, and from not being upon a level but upon rolling ground much is added to the attractiveness of its streets, which in time will be the pride of the city. Of a uniform width of 80 feet, the blocks 300 feet square, and some of the boulevards 100 feet in width, Guthrie has a system of streets that could scarcely be

improved upon, and which may be improved to make a boulevard of every one. It is amazing what ninety days have accomplished. All the main streets are graded, there are miles of sidewalks, cross walks are being put in and everything looks as neat as a pin. Sprinkling carts are run upon the main streets and keep down the dust, which nowhere is very bad, thanks to light breezes,

Guthrie has been a mighty expensive town. Enough money has been expended here in three months to run a good many towns three years. It is the same here as in many other places—men don't run public business as they do their own. And while the same might have been accomplished for much less, certainly the result of the improvements in Guthrie is to be none the less commended.

While Guthrie is referred to and considered by outsiders as one town, there are, in fact, three Guthries, with another already platted, but almost bare of residents. This comes from the limitation of a townsite to one-half a quarter section or 320 acres. There is Guthrie, East Guthrie and West Guthrie, with South Guthrie waiting to develop, all practically one town but under three mayors and three distinct sets of city officers.

East Guthrie was the first to adopt a charter, which was accomplished last week by a small majority, when a set of officers was elected, the list as long as your arm. It was the large number of officers and the ground of expense which excited opposition to the charter, and it is a question if the city has acted wisely. Many of the officers have jurisdiction coextensive with the United States courts, in civil offenses to the extent of \$300 and also in quasicriminal cases. The government, which ran affairs from April 24 to the election, had T. H. Soward at its head as mayor, and against it the cry of extravagance was raised, as it has been against all the Guthrie governments, while the recorder was openly charged with incompetency. Up to July 1, remembering that the town was unknown before April 22, the expenditures do look steep, footing up \$12,668, the receipts being \$9,263—and the city has no gambling houses to call on, either. Counting the assets, however, the city is only \$67 in debt. It has a city hall of its own—a commodious two story building—costing with lot, some \$2,000, and a fairly good jail. It is the first of the Guthries to come to the front with buildings of its own. The others rent. The court of arbitration cost the city \$1,500 and a hospital building \$150.

Until a few days ago very few in Guthrie knew that there had been three smallpox cases here. They were removed to a hospital, have recovered and gone and now that there is no danger the fact is out.

These boards of arbitration, let it be said, have caused as much kicking and dissatisfaction among the people as any other three movements made. The members were paid \$10 a day each and there were five on each board. They pretended to adjust matters for weeks, and cost the people small fortunes. They did, it is claimed, adjust admirably for themselves and those who stood in with the rings. After the first boards came others. Cases were resubmitted, and in cases, how many it is impossible to determine, two parties hold certificates to the same lot. These certificates are issued by the mayor, and are supposed to give title to the lot, for no lot can be sold unless the supposed owner has a certificate. This duplication of certificates will no doubt work many innocent parties great injustice and loss. Another thing, in issuing certificates the city is supposed to guarantee the lot. But it offers little protection, and lot jumping is of almost daily occurrence.

Only yesterday the *Times* correspondent met a gentleman who has bought several lots on which certificates have been issued. On one he had discovered that a jumper's tent had been up for over two weeks. "I'll beat him out of his boots in the end," he remarked, "but it's the worry and bother and trouble of such things that almost make me sorry I came here, although I've made money." Everything has to be watched constantly and with an eagle eye. A man who has property in Guthrie has to stay right here and watch it all the time.

The same gentleman had just bargained for a lot 20x100 feet at First Street and Oklahoma Avenue, one of the most desirable lots in the city, for \$2,200, but he backed out of the bargain, discouraged at the outlook. This gives some idea of property values here, and a good many claim that they are down to bed rock. Plenty of good business lots can be had for \$2,000, but good locations can be had for much less. There are some desirable residence lots at \$300 and \$400.

The towns of Guthrie and East Guthrie were established practically at the same time and are east of the Santa Fe tracks and the sluggish, deep-red Cottonwood.

West Guthrie was born several weeks later and at the risk of stopping the sale of a few town lots, a matter which is kept decidedly quiet is here mentioned. The town is upon a quarter section duly located. At the time it came into existence this was known and there was a spread eagle announcement to those here that the military would not interfere. Since then the subject is not referred to. The *Times* correspondent inquired of the officer commanding the military what would be done if the claimant of the quarter section, half of which was summarily taken for the townsite, should complain. The ans-

wer was right to the point: "Move them off. Just as soon as the man who located the quarter section complains the people of West Guthrie will have to go. There has been no complaint and so of course I have not interfered." So some of these days, unless matters are arranged, there may be a memorable exodus from West Guthrie, which has built up rapidly as to homes, but is lacking in business houses.

Here is where Guthrie proper holds the palm. It has six banks and about as many business houses of all characters in proportion. Two morning and evening papers, some of which will not for long fill a long felt want, are struggling. Guthrie has been booming. Just now she is holding her own remarkably well. Some look for great improvements before fall. But many careful observers do not look for much substantial advance until the question of titles is settled and deeds are issued for the lots. This can not be until Congress meets and the townsite is proved up. And until then it seems that Guthrie must stand just about where she now is.

The decision of the land office on Saturday that claims could not be held if located by parties who were in the territory prior to noon of April 22, no matter if not located before that time, and that they can not be held if located by persons who arranged relays of horses and so got ahead of the common herd, will cause no end of trouble and dissatisfaction. Of course the decision will be appealed, but the chances are that the register was acting under information from the Interior Department, and that it will stand to the intense discomfiture of hundreds.

This applies, of course, only to quarter sections, but not a few are alarmed lest it shall become applicable in the end to townsites. Five hundred would probably be a low estimate of the claimants to town lots in Guthrie in possession before noon of the 22d. If the same decision should apply to town lots there will be endless confusion. It is claimed by some, however, that the Interior Department will only consider the townsite as a whole, and that the deeds for lots will then be issued by the mayor as trustee, and there will be no trouble. But it seems an open question. If town-lot claimants in the territory long before the time set are to be protected, then when the rest of the Indian Territory is opened, what is to prevent the occupancy of entire townsites so far in advance that everybody can even get a corner lot if he wants it? This is a question a good many expect the government to consider. And if the equity laid down by the decision is to be observed, then a good many citizens in Guthrie and elsewhere are in for it. In view of the possibility or probability a good many contests will probably be filed before Congress meets.

Guthrie is working hard for a provisional government for the territory. And the reason is that for a provisional government there must be a capital, and Guthrie wants it and wants it bad. But for this provisional government would probably never have been broached. But with the chance of it, with the probability with it established here Congress would make the same selection, her citizens are chipping in funds quite freely to bring provisional government about.

The convention last week cost some money, but it is a question if it did not defeat the very object aimed at. On a question of a provisional government the people of the territory might have been brought to ask for it. But when a convention, not representing many of the largest centers and most promising sections of the territory, sets itself up to divide the territory into ten bijou little counties and further to prepare a code of laws, thinking people are apt to hold that too many steps are being taken.

A convention at Frisco only a few days before declared unqualifiedly against provisional government, and that last week's convention will ever bring it about is a matter on which even some Guthrians are skeptical. And why should the territory not wait until Congress meets? The convention last week argued that Congress might be years in acting. This is hardly probably if the right influence is brought to bear. And really, there has been no demand for provisional government as yet. The cities have governments of their own, and the country has needed none.

At the convention endless pictures were drawn of what might be done—how a man having cattle might turn them in on somebody else's crops, how this and that wrong should be provided against. But really none of these wrongs have been attempted. The people are law abiding, well content with their possessions, satisfied to do right, and not fearing much wrong. The United States laws, too, cover a multitude of cases. Oklahoma is not overrun with blacklegs and disreputable characters. They are few and far between even in the towns. The people of Guthrie will compare well with those of any city in the land. The rough element of mining towns is wanting. There are gamblers and leeches here who in the town of Guthrie properly their vocation with open doors. But the bulk of the people are eminently respectable.

One sees almost as many ladies and children here as can be found in any town of its size. The visitor to Guthrie is coming into no top-boot, flannel-shirt, seven-shooter town. He's coming into a city where people dress as well and are quite as good morally as elsewhere. If Guthrie proper tolerates gamb-

ling houses there is this consolation—they pay in \$70 monthly each to the city treasury, and when even councilmen gamble openly—as was the case the other night—well, it may not be right, but there is no public kicking against the city government clique.

Guthrie proper is the only one of the three Guthries to have its gambling houses, dance houses, and houses of even worse character. The ground floor of the building on one of the best corners in Guthrie is a gambling den, doors and windows wide open. And it is noticeable that on the front of the first big fan constantly swinging back and forth over the tables, is the advertisement, in staring letters, of an undertaker. This may have something to do with the scarcity of affrays in Guthrie. The few little shooting scrapes have not proven serious.

Guthrie has its waterworks, hydrants being available on all the principal streets. The poles for a system of electric lighting are now being placed. The ties for a street railway are piled here and there on Oklahoma Avenue, but the gentleman who has an unlimited franchise will doubtless use his pleasure about putting them down.

And how many inhabitants has Guthrie? Enthusiastic Guthrians claim 10,000. The number is actually much less. There are doubtless between 6,000 and 7,000 people here. Such good judges as the captain in charge of the military place the number at something under 7,000, and this is doubtless near the correct figure.

There has been some fever, but the percentage of sickness is very small. Among the soldiers, where statistics are reliable, it is only 2.5 per cent. But unless the city authorities of Guthrie move very soon this can not last. Many of the alleys are filled up with decaying refuse of the worst kind, and unless the demands of health officers and citizens are soon heeded no one need be surprised at pestilence. Then again, south of Guthrie, to save a long curve or bridges, the Santa Fe changed the channel of the Cottonwood, leaving an old channel, some of it within the limits of Guthrie. Unless this is filled up look out for fevers. Even now its effect is being felt.