

OTIS HOOVER RICHARDS: 89'ER

By Glenn A. Welsch*

Otis Hoover Richards was born in Independence, Missouri, August 13, 1867, the son of John R. Richards and Euphrasia Hoover Richards. His paternal grandparents were Jacob W. Richards and Louise Carmichael Richards of Belmont County, Ohio; maternal grandparents were John G. Hoover and Eliza McGraw Hoover of Clermont County, Ohio. Mr. Richards came to Oklahoma Territory in 1889 and was a part of the history of Oklahoma from that date until his death near Arnett, Oklahoma on January 1, 1961.

Mr. Richards grew up on a farm on the Walnut River in Cowley County, Kansas. As a youth he exhibited the interests and enthusiasms that continued throughout his life as a pioneer in Oklahoma. During his early life he studied literature, penmanship, and history. In his teenage years he became interested in writing for *The Winfield Courier*. Throughout his life he continued to write for newspapers and periodicals. A number of his vignettes on the history of Oklahoma have been published in *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*.¹ As a youth Ote, as he was known to all of his friends, moulded the lead bullets for his father's muzzle-loader, and became an expert marksman.

This skill led to many interesting and sometimes humorous incidents in his early adult life.

At the age of twenty-one, Mr. Richards made the run into Old Oklahoma arriving at Guthrie April 22, 1889. He filed on a claim twelve miles northwest of Guthrie on Wolf Creek. An interesting account of these experiences, written by Ote himself, was entitled "Memories of an 89'er," in *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*.

In December 1892, Mr. Richards disposed of his claim in Logan County and entered the Cedar Rapids Business College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa. During his stay from 1889 to 1892 on a claim near Guthrie, Mr. Richards continued to write special dispatches

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1. Articles published in *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* were: "Memories of an 89'er," Vol., No. (1948); "1890 Conditions on an Oklahoma Claim," (Notes and Documents), Vol. XXXI, No. 1 (1953); "Dr. O. C. Newman," Vol., No. (19); "O. E. Null," Vol., No. (19); "Old Day County," Vol. No. (19).

for the *Winfield Courier* under the pseudonym "An Oklahoma Traveler." An interesting event in his life occurred when in 1952 the *Winfield Courier* published its 100th anniversary edition. Ote was pleased to read in this edition one of his original dispatches entitled "Conditions on an Oklahoma Claim," that he had written fifty years before. Needless to say the *Courier* was pleased to learn of the identity of the author and subsequently published additional dispatches.

Upon completion of study at Cedar Rapids, Mr. Richards taught in similar schools and became known as a penman of rare ability. Many of his works today hang on the walls of homes and public buildings in Oklahoma and Texas. Mr. Richards retained this unusual ability well past eighty years of age.

In 1896 Mr. Richards was in Denver, Colorado teaching and doing penmanship. He engaged in mining for gold and silver at Leadville, Colorado and during the bloody strike there he joined the Colorado National Guard and remained on duty throughout.

In 1897 he returned to Oklahoma Territory entering the Cheyenne-Arapahoe territory which had just been opened to settlement. His father filed on a claim since Ote had used his filing rights near Guthrie in 1889. He purchased a relinquishment on a claim near his father's claim on the Canadian River near old Grand, the county seat of old Day County. At his death Mr. Richards still owned these two acreages.

Immediately upon his return to Oklahoma Mr. Richards became active in building the new country. Shortly after his arrival in Day County, he was appointed Deputy Clerk of the District Court. One of his principal duties in this capacity was to take land-files for all of the settlers. He also took the first census in Day County in 1900. Pioneers arriving in Day County very soon became acquainted with Ote and came to think of him as a true friend, always willing to help strangers and new-arrivals. His high standards of honesty, competence and morality were recognized and respected by these hardy pioneers. Mr. Richards took an active interest in the political developments of the area. In 1907, Old Day County was broken up and two other counties were formed. Mr. Richards served as Registrar of Deeds in Ellis County from 1911 to 1915. His last public office was as clerk of the District Court in Ellis County from 1930 to 1934. Even today interested persons in perusing the public records now on file in Ellis County for various purposes admire the beautiful handwritten records prepared over the years by Mr. Richards, personally.

In 1902, he married Emma Belle Carper, who was reared also in Cowley County, Kansas and was an early day school teacher in Day County. Over the years Mr. and Mrs. Richards have lived

on their ranch now located in Ellis County. In later years Ote's great interest was his grand children and his great-grand child. The reader can be assured that an indelible imprint of the real history of Oklahoma was made on the mind of each of them.²

The *Ellis County Capital* "Reminiscences" was a series of articles that he wrote in the 1940's. He contributed to *The Northwest Cattleman*, official organ of the Northwest Cattleman's Association, published at Woodward, Oklahoma.

During the early years in old Day County the pioneers organized a Masonic Lodge. Mr. Richards joined Texmo Lodge No. 56, located at Texmo, Day County, on the south side of the Canadian River. When the lodge at Grand was organized he was one of the charter members. In later years he was a member of the St. Albans Lodge No. 192 of Arnett, Oklahoma. He was honored in 1952 by the Shattuck and Arnett lodges on the completion of 50 years of membership in the Masonic Order.

One of the most appropriate tributes to Mr. Richards was written by Mr. O. F. (Fant) Word, the son of another true pioneer of Old Day County and close friend to Mr. Richards. This tribute published in *The Ellis County Capital* in 1946 read as follows:

THE SAGE OF RED BLUFF

"Down in the hills, hard by the red banks of the predatory old Canadian River, there is a genial philosopher whose radiations reach far out from the sequestered homesite under the cottonwoods of his valley.

"His hair is touched by the snows of the bleak prairie winters he has known, and the burning suns of summer have marked his face with the brand of Out-of-Doors; but the wrinkles about the eyes and mouth were left by smiles, and the quizzical eyes are alight with humor and goodwill.

"There have been stirring phases in our short tumultuous history, as a territory and as a state, sometimes marked by violence, often with pathos—always by drama; and with his heaven sent gift, the Sage has been able to find in almost every event that priceless thing which makes life livable—humor.

² Mr. Richards is survived by his wife and their five children oldest, Lois Richards, formerly a school teacher in Oklahoma and now the wife of John A. Buckles. John C. Richards, the oldest son is a farmer and rancher in Ellis County, Oklahoma and resides on the family ranch with his mother. Linden J. Richards married Irene Worten of Pawhuska, Oklahoma. Irma Richards Welsch, is the wife of Glenn A. Welsch, Professor of Accounting at The University of Texas, Austin, Texas. The youngest child Otis Harold Richards married Hannah Worten of Pawhuska, Oklahoma. Harold is a geologist for the Continental Oil Company and resides at Abilene, Texas.

“To sit as auditor while this man delves in the veritable library of remembered things, spiced by shrewd commentaries from his own philosophy, is both a pleasure and a privilege. An artist in woodcraft, he etches the narrative in sharp outline, and the listener senses the background, the lights and shadows in the picture. These tales are factual, but the hearer’s fancy is given a ‘looser rein,’ and he can occasionally glimpse the bright face of danger, and hear the keen rebel yell and the pound of flying hooves that marked a turbulent era.

As an observer and commentator upon the lives and doings of his contemporary citizenry, the Sage has few if any peers. There was little that passed him in the brawling, ruddy torrent of life that he did not note, and in the mellowed light of years, he can see in retrospect the figures and events of our days as an animated film—a brave cavalcade of people, men and women, old and young, the generous, the mean, the good, bad and indifferent. They are all there, in his remembrance, figures of the folk he has known—and loved.

“His work as a scribe is invaluable, for much of the period of his observance would be lost to posterity were it not for his memoirs.”