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Indian Pioneer History, S-149  
June 26, 1937

Interview with Hon. Governor  
Wm. M. Jenkins, eighty-one years of  
age. Born August 25, 1856, in  
Alliance, Ohio, Stark County.

Mr. Wm. M. Jenkins, former  
territorial Governor of Oklahoma  
Territory, appointed under  
President, Wm. McKinley.

Mr. Jenkins told me the  
history, and of the men that  
helped make the great young  
State of Oklahoma possible.

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INDIAN TERRITORY.  
and  
OKLAHOMA.

For more than a half century Indian Territory had appeared on our maps with little explanation. In 1872 a bill was offered in Congress to create a territorial government called Oklahoma. In this great area the southern cattle growers had for many years enjoyed undisputed free range. The rapid settlement of the public domain in the southwest, the rapid tide of migration westward warned these cattlemen that if they expected to hold these grazing privileges they would have to brace themselves against this public demand. They arranged with the Cherokees to lease the grazing privilege at a small amount rental.

They operated under the name of the Cherokee Live Stock Association and sublet this vast area to individuals and companies at an advanced rental, in tracts ranging from a hundred thousand to several hundred thousand acres. These sublessees fenced their holdings.

The Indian reservations, Osage, Pawnee, Ponca, and Otoe, were also leased. In this way quite a stream of revenue was turned to the Indian which caused his voice to be heard in Washington contending for the status quo. And back of this

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voice was the shrewd potential influence of the cattle interests in the southwest. The cowmen, as they were called, were vociferous in asserting that the country was not fit for farming, but simply for grazing. This, briefly, was the situation in Oklahoma covering a period of nearly two decades.

Captains Payne and Couch are given more credit for the opening of this land to settlement than the importance of their acts warrants. They organized two invading colonies upon the theory that it was public land and they had a legal right to homestead it. In this contention they were not upheld by the courts, and the fact of their arrest and transfer to the state of Kansas without resistance or tragedy of any kind was not in itself sufficient to attract much public attention.

This land was under Federal control. There was no local government whatever. If a thief stole a saddle blanket worth one dollar he was guilty of a felony, and, if convicted, he was sent to the penitentiary. The entire country was policed by Federal troops which were stationed at Fort Sill and Fort Darlington. It was shown on our maps and known as Indian country and it required legislation by Congress to change its Indian Territory status and make it available for homestead settlement.

From 1884 to 1888 southern Kansas improved very rapidly. All available public land in that state was settled. The Wichita land and lot boom attracted nation-wide attention. Arkansas City was a growing young city located in the third Kansas Congressional District. This was the southern terminus of the Santa Fe Railway. Our Congressman was B. W. Perkins of Oswego, who was chairman of the committee on Indian affairs of the House.

The Santa Fe Railway extended its line south to Fort Worth and on to Galveston. The Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific then extended its line through the territory about thirty miles west of the Santa Fe. Our Chamber of Commerce at Arkansas City began a systematic campaign to get Congress to open Oklahoma and provide for a territorial government. A friend and associate of mine, J. O. Campbell, combined the two local papers, purchased a power press, and published a daily morning paper with full associated press dispatches. The Arkansas City Republican Traveler is still published. And R. C. Howard, one of the active young newspaper men of that time, still lives at Arkansas City. This paper fed to the general public through the Associated Press, news of every important event that happened in Indian Territory.

In cooperation with Dr. Munford of the Kansas City Times, a convention was called at Kansas City in which delegates from

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all surrounding states participated. The convention was very enthusiastic and passed strong resolutions urging Congress to action.

Washington heard the call and the Senate appointed a committee to visit the territory, investigate, and report. This committee was headed by Senator Dawes, who for years had been the recognized friend of the Indian. The other members were Senator Cullum of Illinois and Senator Blackburn of Kentucky. They came to Arkansas City and were piloted through the territory from Arkansas City south to the Canadian River, then to Muskogee and Okmulgee. They found the "nigger in the woodpile." Instead of being a country unfit for farming they found in fact that the country extending south and southwest from Arkansas City was exceptionally fertile, well watered and timbered, resembling a great national park, and especially well adapted for home making. But they found it fenced up and occupied and paying a large tribute to the Indian governments of the five tribes, which tribute was of very questionable value to those Indians as a whole. And that the dream of erecting in Indian Territory a sovereign Indian state was impractical and repugnant to the spirit and plan of the republic.

A large white population had settled within the jurisdiction of this Indian government and married Indian women. These people were all native born citizens of the United States. A great light

at this time illuminated the vision of the senatorial committee and of the people of the United States. The conditions that prevailed made it plain that it was the duty of Congress to proceed at once to pass such legislation as might be necessary to prepare this vast area for statehood on the same terms and conditions as the other states. Laws providing for the termination of the Indian governments and the allotment of their lands were introduced and pending in Congress.

During the years, 1887, 1888, and 1889, Oklahoma occupied much attention of Congress. The Senate seemed committed to the idea that no portion of Indian Territory should be opened to settlement until the whole of Indian Territory was prepared. The members of the house, as is usually the case, reflected more clearly the urgent demands of the American people. Streeter of Illinois, Mills of Texas, and Perkins of Kansas prepared bills providing for a territorial government which were widely discussed, but all failed of adoption. Our congressman from the third district of Kansas, who had in charge the Indian appropriation bill, in the closing hours of Congress attached a rider, a provision that the land, included in the original opening, consisting of about 3,000,000 acres, to be thrown open to settlement under the provisions of the homestead laws. On the 22d of April, 1889, at high noon the bill with this rider went to conference and the senate conferees were induced to consent. Just what preliminary

maneuvering took place in securing the appointment of suitable Senate conferees, will never be known by the public.

Some of us at Arkansas City did know however that Congressman Perkins and Congressman Wm. McKinley of Ohio were ready at all times to serve the people of Arkansas City, Kansas. And we knew also that they each fully understood that the opening of Oklahoma to settlement was the thing nearest our hearts. The result again demonstrated the fact that it is better to have a few strong friends at court than a multitude of brass bands.

The conditions in Indian Territory were not generally understood. For more than half a century it had been shown on our maps as Indian country occupied by the Five Civilized Tribes, who maintained their own government. During this time the Federal government had authority by executive order to locate other Indians in the territory, and by virtue of this authority practically all of the Indians of Oklahoma, except the Five Civilized Tribes, were located.

There was a great deal more involved than the legal question whether the 3,000,000 acres described in the Indian appropriation bill by Congressman Perkins was public land, and it is not strange that Congress and the country should be in doubt as to how they



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should proceed. It was necessary to make a beginning and those of us who lived on the border and our friends in Congress knew that the many questions of legislation including that of a territorial government could be worked out better after the country was opened than before. It was a big question and when you ask now how it was accomplished we are reminded of the story of Columbus. When he was being entertained at a dinner he was asked how he discovered America. Handing his questioner an egg he said that if he would make the egg stand on end he would answer the question. After repeated trials they said it could not be done. Columbus then took the egg and set it on end with sufficient force to crack the shell.

No Oklahoma History has given W. McKinley and Bishop W. Perkins the credit to which they are entitled for the opening and development of Oklahoma.

To quote from my report to the Secretary of the Interior, September 15, 1901: "This land was opened on April 22, 1889, and then occurred the first great Oklahoma rush. The brief legislation opening the land provided no form of government, and for over a year the people of the territory were a law unto themselves. The only government during this period was that created and maintained by common consent, yet there was no lawlessness or outlawry and property and life were adequately

protected at all times.

"In June, 1890, the territorial government came into existence and by the same act of Congress the strip of country known as 'No Man's Land', embracing 3,621,000 acres, was added as Beaver County. In September of the same year the 1,283,434 acres embraced in the Sauk and Fox, Iowa and Pottawatomie reservations in the eastern part of the Territory were opened to settlement; and <sup>the</sup> following spring came the 4,297,771 acres of Cheyenne and Arapaho land. September 16, 1893, the Cherokee Strip was opened to settlement and the counties of Kay, Grant, Woods, Woodward, Garfield, Noble, and Pawnee created from its 6,014,239 acres of fertile land; in 1895 the Kickapoo Reservation of 206,662 acres was settled, and the year following Greer County, which had previous to that been considered a portion of Texas, was given to the Territory by a decision of the Supreme Court of the United States.

"All these, with the <sup>the</sup> Kiowa, Comanche and Apache, and Wichita Indian reservations just opened, gave the territory a settled area of 24,000,000 acres, 1,725,646 acres still being included in Indian reservations. The total population of this area in 1900 was about 400,000 people.

"This, in brief, is the story of the creation of Oklahoma Territory but of the long struggles to secure the various

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enactments of Congress required to bring it about, of the successive great rushes of settlers to the country, of the struggles to build up here an ideal American commonwealth, and of the great measure of success attained, volumes might be written."