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Interview with Mr. John W. Beard  
Born May 1, 1868. Sweet Springs, Missouri.  
Father-A. B. Beard.  
Mother-Catherine C. Gee

A Story Told by Mr. John W. Beard.

I, John W. Beard and my brother, H. G. Beard, made the run on April 22, 1889 and located at Oklahoma City, where we were associated together in various business undertakings.

During the month of December, 1890, in company with Dave Perriman, who has long since gone to his reward, I took an overland hunting trip from Oklahoma City, down into the Seminole nation where we spent three weeks. On this trip we crossed the southend of the Sac and Fox country close to where the city of Shawnee now stands. The terrain of this section of the territory so impressed me that upon my return to Oklahoma City, I told my father A. B. Beard and my elder brother H. G. Beard. During the spring of 1891, my father A. B. Beard and M. J. Bentley explored this region using a team and buckboard furnished by me for that purpose, and upon their return to Oklahoma City, it was decided that we would assemble a bunch of our friends, and take homesteads there, when this land became subject to settlement.

And in the summer of 1891 the Sac and Fox and Pottawatomie

reservations were declared to be opened for settlement on September 22, 1891, at 12 o'clock noon. I finished sowing wheat on a school house land lease about eight miles east of Oklahoma City for my father on the 18th of September 1891 and on the 19th of September a party assembled at my father's house, northeast of Oklahoma City, packed wagons and proceeded to the promised land. We left father's place about six o'clock in the afternoon, of September 20th, drove north and crossed the river at the head of the Nine Mile flat, on the North Canadian river and proceeded around the bend of the river until we hit the Kickapoo country. We passed clear around the old 7 C. ranch. The reason for taking this circuitous route was for the purpose of evading the necessity of crossing that portion of the Pottawatomie reservation, which was a part of the territory to be opened for settlement. To enter upon that land would have made us "sooners" and we would not then have been eligible to file homesteads on the land.

Members of the party were as follows: Joe Clark, Dr. Munger, Mr. Alley, A. B. Beard, H. G. Beard, J. T. Farrell, M. F. Bentley, L. E. Troxell, Miss Etta B. Ray, Miss Lola G. Beard, J. W. Gee, Lyman F. Beard, Phillip Ray and myself,

John W. Beard. We camped at the western border of the Kickapoo Indian reservation about three o'clock on the morning of September 21st and rested for two hours, then our caravan moved on, finding our way as best we could without roads, through timbered sections and blue-stemmed grass. In order to find crossings or ravines and creeks I rode on horseback and acted as lookout or guide. The horse I used upon this occasion was an old cow horse, which had been in the family for years, at that time being sixteen years old. He was known as "old Dick", and he was the hardest piece of horse flesh and the surest footed dependable animal I ever rode; therefore he was subjected to hard service the whole day long in finding trails for our progress. I could give many stories about this nervy little cherokee nation mustang, that always had "what it took" in an emergency. I had an exceptionally fine thoroughbred mare that I had fitted for this race, which was being led behind a wagon in the party and being given the very best of attention, but when our party landed on the evening of the 21st about 200 yards west of what is now Kickapoo street, we went into camp and saw the virgin forest and high blue stemmed grass covering the land, I decided to let a cousin have the thoroughbred mare, as he had been envious of me, of the horse all

the way. I decided to trust "Old Dick" to carry me through that jungle on the morning of September 22nd. I gave "Old Dick" a good going over. I massaged his legs with witch-hazel and alcohol. A few minutes before 12 o'clock noon, we assembled on the line of what is now Kickapoo street. I started about 200 yards south of what is now Highland Avenue at a place where a woodland road ran out in an easterly direction through the timber. In order to lighten the load for "Old Dick" I threw off my boots, spurs and hat and laid them down by a tree, and with a six shooter in a scabbard on one side and my hatchet in a scabbard on the other side, I held "Old Dick" in hand until one minute to 12 o'clock noon. There were about 60 men assembled at this point and at one minute to 12 o'clock noon I mounted "Old Dick" and when the shot was fired that started the race, "Old Dick" went out in front and was never headed. About 200 yards down the trail, the road took an abrupt turn and "Old Dick" was going so fast he could not make the turn, so he plunged head-long into the woods. I lay flat on his back and let him have his way. I stopped "Old Dick" about 50 yards east of what is now Woodland park and I staked my claim. After which I proceeded to trace out

the lines and found about thirty men on the same claim, most of whom were cowboys. They asked the question, "Are you the man who rode the spotted horse"? and I said I was "Well nobody beat you" and being true sportsmen they evacuated. I blazed a number of trees around the boundary, wrote my name on fifty or more of them and went back to the camp and got an axe and cut four trees and made a four log foundation that afternoon. My sister, Lola G. Beard, had staked one of the claims next to the Kickapoo line, being the southwest quarter of section eighteen and Etta B. Ray, who afterwards became the wife of my brother, H. G. Beard, staked the northwest quarter of section nineteen. My sister and Miss Ray prepared supper that evening, after which I hitched up a team and drove a party to Oklahoma City for the purpose of filing on these claims, Among the party was my sister and Miss Ray. We arrived in Oklahoma City about three o'clock the next morning and stopped at a friend's house. The girls retired for a few hours sleep, while I went to the home of an attorney, J. H. Everest, who still practices law in Oklahoma City, who prepared our filing papers and we filed on these claims early in the morning of the 23rd of September 1891.

From that day I have been interested in Shawnee. It

was there I spent nine years of my life in helping to develop plans for the purpose of promoting the community welfare. It was there I learned the many arts of woodcraft, in fact every log in the cabin of H. G. and Etta Beard, now in Woodland Park, bears the mark of my axe. It was there I learned to swing a broad axe, to rive home-made shingles with a froe and to shave them on a home-made shaving horse. It was there I volunteered my services in company with a number of other young men to defend the American flag in 1898 in the war, with Spain. I was one of the only three white men to spend Christmas day 1891 on the town site of Shawnee, the other two being Captain Richard A. Timmons and Gus Darrow. I prepared a dinner, rode over to the dug-out home of Mr. Timmons and asked him and Mr. Darrow, who was living with him at that time, to come over to my cabin for dinner. Mr. Darrow had a cold and could not come, Mr. Timmons, however, did come and we feasted on wild turkey and prairie chicken.

During the spring of 1892 the western part of section nineteen, belonging to J. T. Farrell and Etta Beard tract, was platted into town lots and as a result the Village was started, William Morris built the Blue grass hotel there.

During the fall of 1894 the Choctaw, Oklahoma and Gulf



railroad officials visited Shawnee and it became necessary for us who had realty holdings to part with some of our land in order to secure the building of the railroad into our midst. I, being owner of 160 acres of land, deeded and gave free of cost to the promoters of the railroad 100 acres of the western border of this 160 acres. This road ran through the southern part of the Kickapoo Indian reservation, which was not then a part of Oklahoma territory and because the railroad did pass over this strip of Indian land the citizens of Tecumseh sought to enjoin through Federal court, the building of this road across the Kickapoo Indian reservation, Tecumseh, being a county seat at that time, having been designated as such by the Federal government, when they opened the territory to settlement in 1891. Upon one occasion the Deputy Marshal swooped down from Tecumseh and arrested something like one hundred railroad workers who were grading this road across the Kickapoo country, on a bleak winter day, and started to Oklahoma City with them. When they got near Choctaw City, they turned them loose to find their way back as best they could. Some almost froze their hands and ears before they could get back to camp, Early in the spring of 1895, the Federal court dissolved this injunction in chambers,

about nine o'clock at night. Oscar G. Lee, who was at that time interested in Shawnee real estate, was in the court room in Oklahoma City at the time Judge Scott dissolved the injunction and he immediately went to a livery stable and got his team and Buggy and drove to Shawnee that night, that being the quickest messenger possible, at that time, as there were no railroads or telephone lines reaching our community. Mr. Lee arrived about 3:30 o'clock in the morning and proceeded to wake up the community immediately and let them know that the injunction had been dissolved, whereupon the residents of the community poured forth to celebrate. I, in company with several other men, went down to where Mr. Lee had a warehouse and broke the lock off the door, <sup>and</sup> Lark Fruit, Brent Clark and myself took two dozen sticks of dynamite, wrapped it in a wet gunny sack, tied it with baling wire, and attached a fuse and set it off in a trench that was being dug at that time for the foundation for the First National bank. The explosion knocked out all of the glass in the upper part of the saloon and gambling house directly across the street south, which was known as the "House of Lord." and by eight o'clock that morning every resident of the town was assembled on Main street and at this time I claim the honor of putting on the biggest champagne party ever put on in that community.

Everybody lined up at the "House of Lords" for a drink on John W. Beard. Nothing but champagne, the payment for which made a very sizeable check, the largest ever paid for one round of drinking in the city of Shawnee.

On July 4, 1895, the Choctaw railroad laid its track into Shawnee. Shawnee was located in the southwestern corner of the Sac and Fox country and bordering on the Kickapoo Indian reservation, with saloons within her border, yet I never saw a resident of the community drunk. Theft was unknown except when perpetrated by an outsider, no homicide or serious tragedy occurred to stain the fair name of Shawnee during the years from 1891 to 1895.

During the spring of 1892, I had the honor of being the first assessor of all that portion of Pottawatomie county embracing Shawnee and all north of the North Canadian river in addition to that portion of the country on the Seminole line, and back north to the river at Econtuchka. In making this assessment it was necessary to travel on horseback over this sparsely settled country and well do I remember family after family that I found living in sod houses, dug-outs, tents, and other improvised shelters who had come upon these claims, where no improvements had been made nor was a single

acre in cultivation. To establish a temporary abode, and break up the raw turf and raise a crop, was the task that confronted these people. Their earthly possessions were but little, consisting in the majority of cases of a team of some description, wagon and harness, probably one or two cows, and a dozen or two of chickens. Upon numerous occasions I have sat down to eat mid-day meals with these people in their humble abodes, the dinner consisting of cornbread, fat bacon, coffee, wild greens, and in some cases wild onions. Yet, in the six weeks that it required for me to make this assessment, I heard less complaint about hard times and hard conditions than one will find to-day in walking one block in any city and pausing to converse with a dozen of people.

I left Shawnee with a team of mules, and wagon and my personal belongings together with a tent and an office desk, and landed in a cotton field at 11:00 o'clock on April 19, 1900, and stopped at what is now the northwest intersection of Main and Broadway <sup>[of Ada, Oklahoma]</sup> when I met for the first time the man with whom I was to be associated in the town-site sale of lots, Mr. A. H. Constant, who has like myself been a resident of this community ever since, and who has been my near neighbor and loyal friend. Together we pulled up the

cotton stalks and erected a tent, put our desk down in the mud and began business. There were no titles to lots except the right of possession and when a sale was made the purchaser was given a quit-claim deed or right of possession. Almost from the start people came flocking in from other parts of the country, making the journey overland and the song of the hammer was heard on every side as new residences and business houses sprang into being. Many of these homes were small but constructed in such manner that additions could be made later. There were no loan companies to assist in financing these homes because they had no titles that would be approved by a loan company and no so-called "easy terms" were to be had, yet these people had the will to do something and the determination to provide for themselves and did not look to the government or to anyone else for support. They belonged to a class of citizens that appears to be rapidly approaching extinction. I have seen many cases where families were in dire need yet they were too proud to admit it and some way managed to pull through and by the application of business principles plus personal ambition and industry have been able to make the grade and are now in comfortable circumstances. The old town business centered around what is now the corner of 4th and Oak Avenue

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and consisted of about eight or ten wooden buildings. Mr. Constant and I arranged to give these people lots if they would move to the new townsite. We built a bridge on North Stockton wide enough for the trucks to move these houses over. Lovin Brothers were the first to move to the new townsite. The post-office was moved over between ~~sun-dawn~~ and sun-up. ~~and~~ Uncle Sam was notified of the change after it had taken place; it was housed in a small frame building located on a lot where the Woolworth store now stands. Miss Hall, who was a sister to G. C. Hall of this city, was postmaster.

On April 19, 1900, I pitched my tent in a cotton field and opened a townsite office, which is now the beautiful city of Ada, Oklahoma, where I have lived since that time.