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INTERVIEW WITH C. H. LAMB
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A VANISHED TOWN

A case wherein true merit did not bring a reward.

Old Augusta, Oklahoma was located about twenty-four miles southeast of Alva and forty-five miles northwest of Enid, Oklahoma. It was established in the fall of 1893, shortly after the opening of the Cherokee Strip on September 16, 1893. Its geographical position was almost the exact center of what was then "M" county, later Woods County. The spot it occupied is now in the southwest corner of Alfalfa County. Its inhabitants were thrifty, active, and enterprising, though few in number. They were of all classes and stations, ranging from English royalty to plain Americans, who stood on their own records. The homesteaders living within six miles in all directions could be designated as the citizens as well as those who lived in the town proper because they took an earnest and helpful interest in all its needs, hopes and plans. They were all typical pioneers. This does not mean adventurers looking for new experiences. Throughout history real pioneers have been men and women who sought new regions for the purpose of bettering their

financial conditions. It was no pleasure jaunt or an effort to acquire glory. Grim necessity has ever been back of it. So it was with the settlers of old Augusta and vicinity. In 1893 the United States was suffering from a terrible financial crisis. Droughts had followed one another for several years. Neither land nor livestock had any value. Horses were given away and calves were killed when born. At that time the middle west was an agricultural and stock raising country solely. Therefore, city dwellers and farmers were affected alike. When forced to do so people can live for long periods on very limited rations and require but little money and clothing. The early nineties tested this statement fully and proved it is true. It was a time that tried the souls of men and women. Oklahoma Territory offered cheap lands and a chance to build new towns and new homes. In desperation all who had lost hope of making progress in the old settlements turned to Oklahoma for these reasons.

In all pioneer countries there are two sources from which the settlers derive great pleasure and encouragement. One is that everything is on an equality. There are no classes or distinctions. There is no inequality in wealth. The other is, all hatreds and dissensions are left behind.

Therefore, there is a spirit of friendliness and good fellowship not found under any other situations. A feeling of freedom pervades the whole community and lasts for a number of years. Thus it was in old Augusta and the surrounding territory. Neighbor introduced himself to neighbor. Each was greatly interested in the other. Their interests were common. Roads had to be opened. Churches and schools had to be organized and buildings built. All was friendliness and activity. But due to the fact that all the land was virgin prairie and had to be first broken before crops could be planted, production for the first few years was very restricted. No one can explain how the settlers got along so well. However, by 1897, crops were so good, income was sufficient to cause everyone to feel independent. Their thoughts turned to larger things. Being in the center of the county, why should they not have the county seat? The Missouri Pacific railway ended at Kiowa, Kansas, only thirty miles north, why could it not be induced to build on to Old Augusta, thereby acquiring all the business of a rich new territory? Immediately plans were made to carry these hopes into execution. Petitions were prepared and circulated all over the county, calling for

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an election at which the question of moving the county seat from Alva to Augusta would be voted upon. Practically everyone signed the petitions and to the good people of Augusta it seemed the county seat would surely be moved. A high official of the Missouri Pacific railway was invited to visit Augusta for the purpose of discussing a plan whereby the railway company would build an extension to that town. He came and gave every encouragement that this would be done. The farmers and townspeople joined together. A right-of-way was donated for a distance of six miles north and east from Augusta toward Kiowa, Kansas. Work was donated and grade thrown up. Dreams of a fine city, great wealth and contentment came to all. Had they been told that within a few short years, their town would be no more, they would have laughed at the prophet. Nevertheless, this came to pass. The county seat election was never called. The Missouri Pacific extension was never built. Instead two rival railroads proposed to build through the country at the same time. One, the Kansas City, Mexico and Orient, stated it would build from Kansas City, Missouri, to Topolampo, Mexico, a point on the western coast of Mexico on the gulf of Lower California. It said this route would be five hundred miles shorter than any other road

to the Pacific Ocean and therefore, would get all the business to and from the Orient. The other would build from a junction on the Choctaw, Oklahoma and Gulf at Geary, Oklahoma, to a connection at Alva, Oklahoma, with the main line of the Santa Fe. The Orient bought land and opened up a townsite, called Carmen, two miles east of the town of Old Augusta. This was in 1893. Although it gave only the promise that it would build a railroad, it induced the leading merchants and most of the residents of Old Augusta to move overland, business houses and residences, to the new inland town of Carmen. The other railroad actually built through Old Augusta. But it was too late, although it reached Old Augusta before the Orient reached Carmen.