

WADDLE, WILLIAM (MRS.)

INTERVIEW.

13761

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April 27, 1938
Investigator.

Interviews with Mrs. William Waddle,
Elmer J. Bigham and others.
Miami, Oklahoma.

The Miami Townsite Act was passed by the United States Congress March 3, 1891, authorizing the purchase of land from the Ottawa Indians to be used as a townsite, the same not to be regarded as any part of the surrounding Indian Nations and where the purchaser could secure title to land purchased by him and enjoy all the benefits of an independent landowner. This move had been sponsored by the leading men of the Miami, Peoria and Ottawa Nations among who were Chief Thomas Richardville of the Miamis, W. C. Lykins an adopted Peoria, Samuel Abrams an adopted Quapaw and others.

The site selected for the new town, the first in the Indian Territory where the purchasers could secure a deed to their property, was a three cornered tract of land lying on the north side of the Neosho River which formed the southwest boundary of the town and at the extreme west end of the Ottawa Reservation. However, it lay not far from the Miamis whose homes and allotments

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came to the north edge of the townsite and the Peorias crowded to Tar Creek on the Northeast with the Ottawas owning the land to the east.

The town or village of Ottawa was already located five miles east and one mile south. Peoria was a small hamlet to the northeast and so no doubt the name of Miami was a compromise of the friends who had worked for the establishment of the little town.

At this time the location was covered with a high growth of blue-stem grass and within the limits of the original townsite there was only one house, and that a one room log house occupied by an Ottawa Indian named Ti-wah. There were two other homes occupied by the Jones Brothers who had married Ottawas that joined the town and their home sites are now included in the present city. One was east, this side of Tar Creek and the other in the southeast part of the present city.

The ground was first surveyed and platted into lots and blocks, being completed by the latter part of May. This being completed the day was appointed and a lot sale was held. Many lots were sold, the prices received were

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very small compared to the value today of the same. The corner lot where the five story Security Bank Building now stands, sold that day for fifty-five dollars. W. L. McWilliams, the pioneer doctor of the little city, purchased for the sum of thirty dollars the lot at the corner of Central and B Streets, east of that now occupied by the Barnsdall Oil people. To him goes the distinction of receiving the first deed given in the Indian Territory. This deed was issued by the Miami Town Company under the date of June 29, 1891 and signed by Benjamin S. Warner as its President, and O. J. Nichole as its Secretary. Later, the Miami Town Company established an office in a small frame building on the rear lot now occupied by the "Miami Building" and was in the charge of W. C. Lykins.

The news of the establishment of the new town had gone out and between March and the sale of the town lots, six families had come to the new location and established themselves in tents, near the bank of the Neosho River in what is now the southwest part of the city.

The families living in tents at this time included the families of Niles Brown (the father of Mrs. Waddle),

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the Tuttles, Nichols, Connor, Steve Dristie, and the tent of George Nicely, a single man.

Many speak of Mr. Brown having built the first house here and the building referred to was a combination tent and house for he realized that it would be some time before he could provide his family with a better so he fixed his tent home as a permanent home for the family in the meanwhile.

The town now being assured, George W. Bigham of Melrose, Kansas, came here in June and purchased the log house of Ti-wah which stood at the southwest corner of the present B Street and 2nd Avenue. He brought from Melrose a young man, John Cheyene to take charge and to remain as clerk in the store that he intended to establish.

The morning after his arrival, Mr. Cheyene came to the tents and asked if anyone there could drive a nail and Niles Brown volunteered his services and built a rude board counter across the room after which a load of general merchandise from Melrose arrived by wagon for the store. The son of George W. Bigham (Uncle George) as he was often called tells me that he hauled the goods from

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Melrose here most of the time until the establishment and completion of the Frisco Railroad to Miami in 1896.

The following summer, Uncle George built a large frame store building at South First and Main Streets. With Mr. Cheyene still in charge they branched out in their merchandise to include hardware and farm implements. The son, Elmer, is still conducting a large implement business in Miami only one block east of his father's old location on Main Street.

The post office from Jimtown, three miles north, which was located in the home of James Palmer was moved to Miami and O. J. Nichols was appointed the first postmaster.

There was no road here and at that time there was a short cut from south of the Neosho River from the old Military Road which crossed the Neosho here near the foot of now South Main Street. With the establishment of the new town, C. P. (Charlie) Williams, Scott Audrain and Walter Breedlove all Cherokees then built a ferry boat at this crossing which was a flat boat and operated on a cable. John Whitely was the first ferryman.

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George Cox who had had a sawmill north and west of Miami at the Horseshoe Lake had sold it to Al Cook who was now operating it but with the establishment of the little town, Cook moved his mill to the river here and later sold a half interest to George Nicely who soon acquired the entire mill. This mill did not supply all of the material needed and some was floated down the river from Chetopa, Kansas, and much was hauled from the mills south of Miami in the Cherokee Nation, from Grand River and else where.

Miami, however, on the banks of the Neosho had good stone for building purposes and the quarrying of building stone provided employment for men here for a number of years. The first stone building located at 30 South Main is still in use and the Miami Building with its handsomely dressed stone from this quarry is still one of the most attractive buildings here.

Even the second summer you could count fifty small haystacks on the townsite and the cows were turned out to graze. One day while Mrs. Waddle and her brother were searching for their cows they became lost in the high grass.

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where the Stone Methodist Church stood at the corner of A Street northwest and 2nd Avenue which is today within a block of Miami's seven story fireproof hotel.

People attracted by the fact they could make a home for themselves in the Indian country began to come here and after the first summer, building increased and then came the question of schools. Mrs. Cavinaw who had a three roomed frame house where the Cooper Undertaking Establishment now stands taught the children in one room of her home.

By the next winter, a small frame building had been erected about where the City Ice Plant now stands and Miss Claudia Orr taught, still a subscription school. By the next winter, the number of pupils increased until Mrs. McGuire assisted her. As the number of pupils increased the various churches and buildings were used until the Summer of 1900, the citizens realizing the need of a free school, banded together and by popular subscription built and equipped a two story eight room frame building with basement. This school opened the last Monday in November of 1900 with a corps of eight teachers and a

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janitor. Mrs. Waddle began her school experience in Miami at the beginning of this term and in later years taught here in the same building that she had attended school in company of many of the present residents of Miami.

The little frame school building was also the first church, of no denomination but just church. Within the first two years a frame building was built by the Baptists on the site of their present building. The next church to be organized was the Christian which was organized in the home of Mr. and Mrs. L. B. Zilar, the city photographer.

The first hotel was a large ten 20x50 feet run by John Ewing and his wife where you could secure board and lodging for \$2.50 per week. The rooms were partitioned off inside but later a frame hotel was built on Main Street. Large flat rocks from the stone quarry on the river provided the first walks, later replaced by board walks, and still more recently by brick and then the present concrete walks and pavement.

The first newspaper to be published in Miami was a small sheet in the Fall of 1891 and called the Miami

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Chief. It was printed on a small hand press ^{and} /edited by Charles and Ester Dagenette.

Miami has the distinction of being the only town in the old Indian Territory that allowed saloons to operate. The townsite being deeded land, the various tribal governments of the surrounding tribes had no jurisdiction over the city government and the Fall of 1891 saw the establishment of the first saloon and in the second year there were four in operation. This attracted men of various types to the town and the early citizens tell me that there were often strangers that would ride in, stay a day or maybe longer and drift on, but that with the exception of one killing which occurred here, there was no lawlessness. The killing ^{was} /of Lincoln Keeney by Bill West which was in no way connected with the saloon but arose from the fact that Keeney had arrested West for shooting out the windows of the Baptist Church and had taken his gun and watch from him. West escaping from the jail sent Keeney word that if he did not return his gun and watch to him that he was coming after them. When West entered Keeney's shop, Keeney fired and ducked

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and the return shot from West's gun killed Keeney. A committee was appointed by the citizens of Miami, including W. C. Lykins to go to Washington and secure legislation that would close the saloons which was speedily accomplished and the saloon days were over.

During its first few years Miami was only an inland country town but with the promise of a railroad building south from Baxter Springs, Kansas, in 1895, the town began to attract more people and new businesses began to start up.

In anticipation that year (1895) the first bank was organized in Miami under the management of John Cheyene. The president and ~~one of the~~ directors of that old institution are still living. The same year George Nicely built a mill and elevator on the north bank of the Neosho at the southwest end of A Street.

The little city saw the first train run into Miami over the completed track September 12, 1896 which brought a large crowd of people to help the Miamians celebrate the event which lasted into the night with a big dance. This remained the end of the Frisco Railroad and the service consisted of a freight train that left Miami each

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morning with a passenger coach attached for Baxter Springs and returned each evening with empty hay cars and supplies for the town and community. The engine was turned around each morning on a turn-table and after gathering up its cars was ready for the return trip. This continued until the year of 1900 when they began to extend the railroad south to unite it with the Frisco main line at Afton. This road was completed and the golden spike was driven at Miami, October 10, 1901, which was another milestone in the city's early progress and the occasion of another huge celebration.

The first United States Court Session was held in Miami, November 5, 1895. Miami during its first few years had an entirely white population with no colored people and there not being any here it was not an attractive place for any to locate here and this continued until some began to want their services and so some colored help was brought to a hotel. Their presence was discovered and a committee of citizens called on them and asked them to leave. At first the darkies refused but they were convinced that it would be best for them to leave and they were gone by morning.

Again one of our citizens invited a negro preacher from Welch to drive over and that night a rock hit the

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roof of the church building and soon another rock on the other side and when two of the congregation went out to investigate, the darkey was pointed out by some that were armed with rocks and r, pes. The darkey had to be guarded that night and he left the next morning. Realizing that this might occur again a committee of four men was selected to handle the situation in the future and this committee has functioned several times since then very successfully, especially after Miami began its rapid growth with the discovery of the rich mineral deposits in this county to the north of here. A few persons coming here have attempted to keep colored help but none of the colored people have been allowed to locate and we have not today and have never had any colored citizens living in this county which is very unusual.

With the discovery of ore, Miami which on Statehood became the county seat of Ottawa County has made rapid progress until today it is spoken of favorably in any direction and strangers never fail to notice its many modern business buildings, its schools and attractive homes.