

TURNER, GOLDIE

HUNTING GROUNDS and
CATTLE GRAZING GROUNDS

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Hunting Grounds and Cattle Grazing Grounds

In the bend of the Arkansas river close to the mouth of the Red Rock creek is an old Indian hunting ground.

About the only evidence of this today is the few arrow heads one finds scattered here and there over the prairie, although only a few years ago they could be picked up everywhere. One boy said he had picked up two large buckets full of them and had gathered only those that were not broken.

It is an ideal hunting ground, for the south bank of the river is not steep, neither is it densely wooded and the land south for miles is level and thickly grass grown.

Before the settlers came, herds of buffalo and antelope as well as wild turkey abounded here. When the Indians first came to Oklahoma this was a common hunting ground for the Osage, Oto and Pawnee Indians. Even after the Strip opened, there were still antelope and turkey but the buffalo had all been killed.

This land is still used principally for grazing. After the opening of the Strip the cattlemen came in and leased all the land for grazing and thousands of cattle were soon to be

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seen instead of the buffalo and deer. A few fences were put in, and the country became known as "The Otoes or Big Pastures." No public roads were opened. There were a few trails of course, and a few houses where the caretakers of the cattle lived. A few little patches were broken out around the houses but little farming was done.

Even today there are no section lines to this hunting ground although it has dwindled to only a small part of its original size. It is no more thickly settled except in a few places than in early days, although by opening innumerable gates one can travel the trails in cars to the few houses. The cattle instead of grazing over thousands of acres are now divided in smaller herds and have only a few hundred acres to graze over.

~~This land is in the Otoe Indian reservation and about~~
half of it is allotments; the rest is owned by a few cattlemen. Very few of the Indians now live on their allotments but lease them for grazing purposes.

When the Frisco Railroad was built through this country about 1904, the little town of Morrison was established. This town is at the southern edge of the grazing country,

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and it soon became important as a shipping center for cattle. Some of the Texas cattlemen now use it as a shipping point when they bring in their cattle to summer here before shipping them on to market.

In the early twenties oil was discovered on the Watchorn allotment about ten miles north of Morrison in the center of the grazing land, and a thriving little town by the name of Watchorn sprang up. It was a busy little place for a few years boasting of three or four stores, school, church and dance hall. The oil findings were not extensive, however, and today there are left only about a half dozen pumping wells, a few company houses and one filling station. Most of the empty houses have been torn up and moved away and cattle are now to be seen grazing around the oil wells.

To the west and south of Watchorn is one small ranch owned and operated by Mr. T. T. Gilbert. Mr. Gilbert owns and leases about a thousand acres of land, over which his cattle graze. He lives in a very modern house that boasts of electricity and running water. This ranch has not been established so many years however and there are no early day landmarks to be found here.

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To the east of Watchorn live the two Laird brothers. They are Mr. Claude and DeWitt Laird. Both came here in early days and homesteaded their homes. They have bought up several sections and also leased some allotments. A large part of their land is at the south edge of the grazing land. Since the soil is more adapted to growing crops, they farm extensively although they have large herds of cattle and sheep.

Between the homes of the Laird brothers, out on the bare prairie with no house closer than a mile, stands a little school house known as the Laird school. It has never had any other name. The two Laird brothers have been continuously members of the school board since the school was established for their children soon after the opening of the Strip. There has never been a large attendance and many of those who did attend had to come from such a distance that they could not attend regularly. Until about ten years ago the school house could only be reached with a motor vehicle by taking zig zag course through a big pasture. For a few years the school was discontinued for lack of pupils and the two or three children of school age living in the district were transferred and transported to other schools. During the last few

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years however several families with children have moved in the neighborhood, a road was built along the section line passing the school house and the school has been continued. A teacherage has also been built on the school grounds which makes the school house look a little less lonesome.