

VESTAL, OPHELIA D. COUNTY SEAT PROMOTION. 10510

413

VESTAL, OPHELIA D. COUNTY SEAT PROMOTION.

10510

Indian Pioneer History, 3-149.  
April 21, 1938.

Ophelia D. Vestal, Investigator  
County Seat Promotion.

In 1909 a movement was instituted to divide the county court of Comanche County, holding half of the sessions at Temple. Petitions were circulated asking Governor Haskell to issue a call for an election to form a new county, of which Walters was ambitious to become the county seat.

The petitions proposed to cut off the south end of Comanche County, six miles below the base line and to take a row of government townships from the east side of Tillman County. Walters was situated just two miles east of the center of the proposed county east and west and six miles from the north line. The petitions were generally signed but the people outside of Walters took but little interest in the new move.

On January 7, citizens from Randlett came to Lawton for the purpose of securing facts from County Clerk Haynes concerning the formation of the new county being

-2-

advocated by Walters.

A member present, Mr. Hannefin, said the people in his section were opposed to making Walters the county seat and with Temple, Randlett, Deval, Faxon, and Chattanooga opposing her he could see nothing but defeat for Walters, the county seat movement being regarded as one of selfishness. He said the people of these little towns would destroy themselves and increase their taxes without securing a benefit for themselves. Therefore, they were prepared with data furnished by Mr. Haynes to defeat Walter's ambition and preserve Comanche County from being parceled out to gratify the selfishness of a coterie of designing politicians. Mr. Hannefin further stated, the Big Pasture people could never be made to believe that with a railroad line running direct to the then county seat and no method of travel, other than wagon roads to Walters, they could be benefitted by changing the county bounds and adding materially to their present taxes.

VESTAL, OPHELIA D.. COUNTY SEAT PROMOTION.

10510

-3-

Walters' advocacy of a new county seat moved swiftly. On January 9th citizens of Lawton and of Comanche Counties were aroused and found it expedient to send strong delegations to Guthrie for the purpose of protesting against the issuance of a proclamation calling an election proposing to divide Comanche County into halves, running east and west as proposed by county seat boosters of the city of Walters. A delegation of more than twenty-five Lawton and Comanche County citizens went to the state capital to talk with Governor Haskell. The Chamber of Commerce of Lawton appointed ten business men to go. Invitations were sent to city and county officers, and other loyal citizens, to join the delegation. Nearby towns sent men with the Lawton men.

A delegation of the Walters citizens went to the capital with a petition for county division and demanded immediate issuance of an election proclamation, but upon request of the Lawton officials, Governor Haskell agreed to hold the proclamation in abeyance until protest could be heard.

VESTAL, OPHELIA D. COUNTY SEAT PROMOTION. 10510

The delegation appointed consisted of John M. Young, P. G. Fullerton, F. W. Hammond, Robert Landers, R. J. Ray, C. C. Hammond, Fred Ellis, J. Ray Williams, J. H. Franklin and R. A. Sneed.

With Walters seeking a new county in the southeast and Snyder desiring to annex a portion of the extreme west, Comanche citizens had problems sufficient but still other movements were in the making.

Still another project for securing a slice from Comanche County had developed - Jefferson County was securing a petition asking an election for secession of the eastern half of the Texas township in order that it might be added to that county. Thus far, the county seat project of Grandfield had not materialized. Grandfield was asking the southwestern corner of Comanche and part of Tillman County.

On January 11, representatives from Walters and from Comanche County were in hand at the state capital. Representative Leslie P. Ross sought to prevent a division by legislation and introduced a bill in the house providing for the repeal of the law vitalizing portion of the consti-

VESTAL, OPHELIA D. COUNTY SEAT PROMOTION.

10510

-5-

tution permitting division of old counties, Governor Haskell issued a statement regarded as favorable by Comanche County advocates, in which he stated that "petitions for new counties must meet the requirements according to the last federal census. This census gave the proposed new county a population of less than 11,000.

Because of the increasing epidemic of county division fever, it was believed some action would be taken by the legislature along the lines proposed by Judge Ross so that county seat boomlets would not be so easily promulgated. The legislature, it was believed, would at least provide payment of election expenses by those proposing to be cut off of old counties.

Spending a day in the Capitol, Comanche County supporters and Walters advocates used all their political influence for their respective contentions and the delegates of Comanche County won a victory on January 12th. Senator J. Elmer Thomas of Lawton introduced in the Senate a duplicated copy of a measure proposed the previous day by Representative Leslie P. Ross providing for the repeal of the law vitalizing the constitution permitting county

VESTAL, OPHELIA D. COUNTY SEAT PROMOTION.

10510

-6-

division by petitions and county elections. The Constitutional Convention had already carved Tillman County in whole out of Comanche and cut off one tier of townships to fill out Jefferson County. Comanche County was the second largest in the state, but on account of the Fort Sill and other federal reservations, the large amount of school land and a great number of non-taxable Indian allotments it was really rather small in taxable area. Comanche County had 962 square miles of taxable land. The new county would take away 625 square miles of that, leaving but 337 square miles.

In addition there was the Park County project which, if carried would take away 215 square miles, leaving Comanche County with only 121 square miles of taxable land.

Undaunted by their rebuff at Guthrie the walters boosters who sought to establish "Cache" County started a drive to secure a census order from the county commissioners,

Other complications arose over the division of the counties about this time, and commissioners from five counties met at the court house to discuss the disposition

VESTAL, OPHELIA D. COUNTY SEAT PROMOTION. 10510

-7-

of the remainder of the Lawton lot fund amounting to \$52,688.00. Counties other than Comanche represented were : Tillman, Jefferson, Stephens, and Grady, all of which had secured some portion of Comanche County in the past. Immediately after the division of county boundaries each made effort to secure some portion of this remaining balance.

Congress/<sup>man</sup>Ferris had introduced a law in Congress providing that the balance of this fund should be turned over to the county treasurer of Comanche County but great objection was registered by the other four contenders and the funds were held as unavailable for the time. Finally the commissioners of Comanche county decided to attempt arbitration rather than have the funds tied up further and it was for that reason the meeting was called.

At the meeting various county representatives attended. W. O. Weaver and H. E. Julian, Comanche; Squire Humble, J. S. Gather and J. W. Grant, of Tillman; Ed S. Jones, K. D. Beddingfield and M. W. Pursley of Grady; J. B. Mason of Stephens and N. P. Giles of Jefferson.



VESTAL, OPHELIA D. COUNTY SEAT PROMOTION. 10510

-8-

After a long discussion division of the \$52,688 lot fund was agreed as follows: Comanche County \$35,000; Tillman \$10,720; Stephens \$3,216; Jefferson \$2,680 and Grady \$1,072. Each of the officials signed the agreement and Milt Haynes, county clerk, was instructed to send copies to Senator T. C. Gore and Congressman Scott Ferris urging them to take steps to expedite release of the funds from the Department of Interior.