

MITCHELL, QUINCY

INTERVIEW

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Interview with Quincy Mitchell
Durant, Oklahoma.
Field Worker, Lula Austin,
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GLIMPSES OF DURANT IN THE NINETIES

Let us take a backward look. As we see Durant in the early nineties, it is a progressive little town of some five hundred inhabitants in Blue County. All the business houses in number ten face the Katy Railroad tracks. The stores are all in a row. There are no brick buildings. As might be expected the sidewalks are wooden and the hitching rack is in evidence. The post office is run by a Mrs. Butler in her residence - a log house.

Most of the dwellings are very ordinary and near the stores. However, the town boasts of one fine home, that of Bill Durant across the Katy tracks.

The streets are typical of most towns of five hundred inhabitants - very little attention ever being given to them. Consequently, great holes are common in rainy weather. There occurs one little incident which makes the people of Durant conscious of their poor streets. A farmer is urging his trusty team down the main "thoroughfare" when one of these holes is encountered. The team bogs down, the farmer quickly unharnesses the struggling pair, but one of the unfortunate horses drowns in the mire. J. C.

Haden, Sr., then made up money for the hole to be filled.

Durant's first church was a Presbyterian Mission built in 1880, near the old cemetery. The missionary was Rev. J. W. B. Lloyd. In 1880, we see the second place of worship appear. It is the Methodist church built by John Davis. It is a little pine building. In 1894 the first Presbyterian Church organizes in this little Methodist Church. It is organized with thirteen members. Later their meetings are held in the Calvin Institute until a small brick church is built where the fire station now stands. The first wedding that takes place in the new church is that of Miss Maggie McCarty to R. B. McBee.

In 1893 we see a terrible fire raging among the stores of Durant. Rebuilding is begun immediately. It is now that Main Street comes into existence. Here John Davis and Bill Durant built the first business house. The stores that did not burn are moved to this new business center. We see the first big dry goods store come into existence - that of C. C. Jinks and W. T. Clark.

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At this period we do not see Durant an agricultural center as we might expect. Instead we see huge cattle ranches about the surrounding country. There is very little agriculture.

It is true, too, that we do see some outlawry here, especially when the "fire water" arrives and the Indians imbibe freely. It is a common sight to see at night a drunken Indian or some ruffian ride his horse into each business house, shoot out the lights and "raise Cain" in general. The only alternative the frightened proprietor has is to seek cover when the inopportune visitor arrives. There is only one business man, W. L. Pool, to whom these "Rough Riders" fail to pay nocturnal visits. He waits with a gun, determined to shoot if he sees the white of their eyes. Even inebriation does not bolster their courage to the extent that they will face his certain bullets. It is not a rare thing for a penitent offender of this sort, feeling remorseful in his sobriety, to return the following day and make material amends for the damage done.

We see the first school building in Durant in 1892. Mr. R. R. Halsall builds on the lot where the

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fire station is now, a two story frame building. It is a subscription school and "anything taught the patrons called for." Two years later we observe the Presbyterians buying this. It is now called Calvin Institute, in memory of Mr. Halston's little son, Calvin, who died. His insurance was given to the institution. School is conducted here during the week and church on Sunday.

In 1898, we see an election for Mayor which has never been equaled since. An election for Mayor in Indian Territory is no trite affair. Since this is the first election ever held in Durant, we can't wonder at the animation and all-absorbing interest each citizen is giving it. It has been preceded by a campaign for months. The politicians of Durant at last have their chance to vent their pent-up fire. The Democrats nominate W. L. Pool and the Republicans W. H. Hilton. A peculiar thing happened - the Democrat party splits. Many Democrats bolted the ticket and the first Mayor of Durant is elected - a Republican. The Press, "The Durant Eagle," edited

by Noah Carter, supported Pool. Betting was rampant - thousands of dollars were wagered on the favorite candidate - homes, businesses, and anything that had value. Altercations of no mild degree were numerous; however, no casualties were reported.

Even though Durant is very young it is not lacking in social activities. The "gayety of the nineties" is evident here as much as in the large cities. The political home of the Nails on Blue River near Caddo is the social center of this section. Mr. Nail built a large race track which attracts the "sporting blood." His beautiful home is the scene of many festive occasions, brilliant dances with negro orchestras. The owner of this house can give his check for more than a quarter million. He is Indian and he little dreams that, typical of his race, he will die penniless. We see an Opera House in Durant in 1898, where surprisingly good shows played to a capacity house regardless of weather, one of the light operas showing at this time being "The Mikado." Hunting and fishing parties attended by both men and women comprise some of the most popular sports. The country side abounds in game and the streams are full of fish.

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In 1894, we see economic conditions good. On a bright morning of the spring of this year we meet Dr. R. A. Lively. He is quite jubilant over the fine deal he has just turned. He has sold the corner lot where the Durant National Bank now stands, for \$50.00.

The close of the nineties witnesses a general property boom in Durant. It is typical of most of Indian Territory and Oklahoma at that time. Youth with its vigor and energy is at the helm of affairs, both political and business. There is a steadily increasing population with the whites gaining the majority and the Indians becoming out-numbered. The young ambitious visionary leaders of the community are looking forward to the dawn of a new century, trusting that by their labors and talents a city will come into being of which they and their descendants will be justly proud.