An Interview with Homer S. Chambers, Tulsa.
By - W. T. Holland, Investigator.
April 14, 1938.

GHOST TOWN OF KAY COUNTY.

Kay County probably holds the record for the number of

towns, would be towns and post offices, among the counties

of Oklahoma. There were Santa Fe, Cross, Parker, Kay Center,

Chikaskia City, Polk, Rock Falls, Vilott, Alert, Midway,

Peabody and others.

Originally considered as an agricultural district,

the object of so many post offices was to have them handy

to the farmers. These early settlers didn't seem to antici-

pate that there would be any large towns or cities in their

county. The first few years after the Strip opening saw a

multitude of small towns and post offices established, to

be abandoned later. The advent of the Santa Fe Railroad

caused the moving or desertion of a number of towns. Some

were moved to the railroad and their names changed. Later

on the discovery of oil caused still more towns to spring

up, later to be abandoned. Prior to the opening of the

"Strip" the County seat of Kay County was at Kildare. Later

on the county seat was moved to a site farther north and a

mile or two south of a place called Kirk. Kirk was on a

switch of the Santa Fe Railroad and was first called Santa

Fe, but the railway, for which the town was named, didn't

seem to show any interest, so the name was changed to Kirk

and later to Newkirk.

Chief Bushyhead, of the Cherokee Nation, had selected

an allotment at Cross, eight or ten miles south of Kildare,

and one or two railroad stations in the County. One of his

associates also located an allotment nearby. They also had

allotments at Blackwell, as well as at other prospective

townsites. These townsites were taken, hoping they would

be at a County seat when finally established. Kildare and

Cross grew and Cross out-stripped all other towns in the

County for a while. They had brick business houses, some

three stories high and a brick and stone hotel. Its banks

were second to none in the Territory. Its business district

spread over a wide area. Its two newspapers prospered;

Cross had two papers, "The Guide" and "The Register".

Kildare had two papers, "The Banner" and the "Journal".

Blackwell at this time was growing nicely although

3

fourteen miles off the railroad. A glance at the map

now fails to show a town of the name of Cross. Ponca

City can be given credit for this. A bunch of enter-

prising men secured a tract of land a mile south of

Cross and started a town there. This point was at the

gateway to the Osage and Ponca Indian Reservations which

were to the southeast. The railroads fought this project

and for two or three years, or more, they didn't even have

a station there, nor did the trains stop there. This,

however, didn't discourage the Ponca City men. About a

year later they were able to advertise and display cards

stating that:

> "All trains stop at Ponca City
> Just the same as at Chicago."

Cross moved over into Ponca City and what was once a flourish-

ing town, now became a suburb of a faster growing town, Ponca

City.

Kildare flourished a while, as it was at the end of the

stage line that accommodated Blackwell, however, Blackwell

soon got a railroad. Newkirk gained ascendency, while Kildare's

growth was retarded, and it returned to the status of a village.

4

Rock Falls, over in the northwest corner of the county and

the former seat of David Payne's old "Boomer Colony" be-

came a thriving village with hotels, stores and newspapers.

The extension of the Santa Fe Railway from Hunnewell, Kansas,

missed Rock Falls and it was abandoned, but Braman, a new

town, sprang up. Polk never grew beyond the post office and

blacksmith shop size. Owen sprang up but soon faded away.

Seven miles north on the Salt Fork there was a settlement

and post office called Alert - an inland town, it grew until

a railroad came through, missing it, so it was no more.

Eddy was established, and five miles east of Alert was Guiley,

a post office. Vilott was a mile or two west of Blackwell.

A few miles east of Blackwell was Parker, since abandoned.

Parker was at one time a thriving place. It had several brick

business houses and a newspaper "The Oklahoma World". But

when Blackwell, then off of a railway, got on a line it began

to grow fast. Blackwell contrected with the Hutchinson and

Southern Railway to build a line then from Medford. Soon

the Frisco came through from Arkansas City, Kansas. The

Santa Fe Railway, not to be beaten, changed its course from

Sumpter in order to beat the other lines to Blackwell. This

left Parker out in the cold, and it soon joined the parade
of "Ghost Towns" of Kay County. Lillyville and Wilber,
post offices northeast of Ponca City, and Mervine, east of
Newkirk, were other small towns of the early days. Three
Sands on the County line south of Tonkawa, attained a popu-
lation of twenty-five hundred to three thousand people in
its heyday. Now it is only a scattered remnant of its one
time self.

Dilworth, ten miles northeast of Blackwell, rose as
by magic to thirty-five hundred or four thousand within a
few months. In 1918 it had a refinery and a wide range of
businesses. The post office attained the rank of a first
class post office with receipts of $58,000.00 in one year.
Today, Dilworth is a grass covered field with concrete
sidewalks about, where once stood business houses, homes
and churches, water works, etc,.

Today Ponca City, Blackwell, Newkirk, Tonkawa and Kaw
City, not to mention other thriving and smaller towns, are
fine towns of which Kay County is proud.