

SELFRIDGE, JENNIE

EARLY DAY POLYTICS, ETC
78088

331

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PRE-STATEHOOD POLITICS
JIM MILLER GANG

PRE-STATEHOOD POLITICS.

Just because people living in Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory were denied the privilege of voting in national affairs was no sign they didn't take their politics seriously, aye, sometimes violently as many in Ardmore well remember when it was almost necessary to call out the national guard to maintain order in a convention to elect a national committee, and to the Democratic National Convention in Kansas City in 1900. Two able men were pitted against each other for national committeeman; Dr. A. J. Wolverton of Ardmore and Colonel Thomas Marcum of Muskogee; lines were closely drawn and the situation was tense. The convention was called to meet in Ardmore on June 11th and delegates from all parts of the territory were in attendance. The convention was held at the Compress that was decorated for the occasion. Nothing could alleviate the uncomfortably hot weather

that prevailed and caused delegates to swelter in the heat. The convention was to be held on Monday, and every train entering the city Sunday was loaded with delegates, all more or less in a state of exuberance for their favorite candidate. When the convention was called to order by Judge John L. Galt Monday, it was evident that trouble was in the offing. Delegates were about equally divided and decidedly unyielding and the fight was on. Clint Graham was delegated to deliver the address of welcome but he never got away with it. He tried, faithfully enough, but cat-calls, boos, and whistling from the Marcum delegates caused him to sit down before he could hand a giant key to the visitors, and invite them to paint the town red. The chair appointed Dan Kendall master at arms and he immediately appointed 19 assistants, feeling he would need that many to maintain order in a crowd bent upon being rowdy. Included in the roster of delegates attending the convention were names of men who later loomed large in political annals of the territory and state. For instance: Ben F. Layette,

SELFRIDGE, JENNIE. EARLY DAY POLITICS, ETC. #8088

3

Judge Lewis, of McAlester, J. B. Lucas, Checotah,
 J. E. Long, Wagoner, Colonel R. A. Sneed, Pauls
 Valley, Jim Davenport, Vinita, John Cocke, Antlers,
 S. M. Rutherford, Muskogee, W. H. L. Campbell,
 W. H. Murray, Tishomingo, R. L. Williams, Durant,
 Joe B. Thompson, Pauls Valley, Preston Davis,
 Vinita, Judge Henry Furman, Claude Weaver, Pauls
 Valley, Reford Bond, Chickasha, S. M. Rutherford,
 Muskogee, W. A. Ledbetter, A. C. Cruce, W. M. Franklin,
 S. H. Davis, Davis, R. W. Dick, Judge Yancy Lewis,
 Judge George B. Barefoot, Chickasha, and numerous
 others.

It was not long after delegates assembled for
 the morning session before it was discovered there
 was a fight brewing and it came as soon as Chairman
 Galt announced that the central committee had decided
 upon James S. Davenport, of Vinita, for temporary
 chairman. Hats went up in the air from the Marcum
 side of the house and Colonel W. T. Hutchings of
 Muskogee mounted a chair and shouted "All members of
 the Marcum delegation follow me", and led them out

SELFRIDGE, JENNIE.

EARLY DAY POLITICS, ETC.

#8088

4

to the courthouse where they had a convention of their own and selected their favorite candidate for national committeeman. Meantime, Wolverton adherents did the same thing for their candidate and here the situation rested. It was decided to let the rival candidates go to the national convention with half a vote each. The convention developed sectional feeling that was not easily allayed. The Marcum followers were bitter at the treatment accorded them in Ardmore, and the followers of Wolverton were equally as vehement in stating that the visiting delegation would have gotten a square deal if they hadn't bolted and held a rump convention.

When delegates to the national convention at Kansas City met on July 5, Wolverton and Marcum forces met for the final struggle for seats in the convention. After a bitter fight in which every political trick known to Indian Territory politicians was used, and they knew plenty, the Marcum delegation was seated and Wolverton and his followers wended their disappointed way back to Ardmore.

Ardmore has witnessed several hectic campaigns and political gatherings since it came into being fifty years ago, but nothing ever held approached the intensity of feeling and bitter partisanship the Marcum-Wolverton fight for national committeeman did. Scars inflicted at that convention were a long time healing, many never healed, and were carried to the grave by participants in that riotous gathering.

WOBLING WILLIE.

Violent deaths were frequent in the early days of the town and it was not unusual to record one every week during the hot season when people were irritable. The last general feud that caused the death of several people was staged on Caddo street about 1912, when Irb Forshee was shot and killed by "Wobbling" Willie Ballew. Only one death resulted from the shooting at that time but it ended when Ballew was killed in the county court later where he went to stage a gun battle with James H. Mathers, county attorney. That was one time when Ballew

overdrew his hand. He thought he had the county attorney where he wanted him and he did have, but the county attorney had friends who were prepared for any emergency. At any rate when the shooting in the courthouse ceased Ballew was dead.

Ballew was a killer who had no scruples whatever. His demise was not generally mourned.

Another feud that resulted in the death of a well known character in the city was between Les Segler, chief of police, and Bud Ballew, (no relation to Wobbling Willie), on the one hand and Dow Brazil on the other. Brazil was shot and killed in an East Main street restaurant one night, and later Segler was shot and killed on the streets of Fort Worth by a brother of Brazil's. Several minor shooting scrapes have transpired since statehood but the day of the six-gun is past for the reason public sentiment, as well as law and order have made it obsolete.

JIM MILLER GANG.

Hired assassins were not unknown in this section of the territory in early times and men met violent

7

deaths at frequent intervals with very little clue left to run down the killers. The most notorious quartet that ever operated in this section was under the leadership of Jim Miller; that continued until they came to the end of a rope at Ada one morning immediately after statehood. Ben Collins, Deputy United States Marshal, had been slain as he was on his way to his home one night. Shortly afterward Gus Bobbitt, another officer, was shot from ambush and killed in Pontotoc County.

Suspicion pointed to Jim Miller and he with three companions, Burwell, Allen and West, were arrested and were having a preliminary trial at Ada when the thing occurred. It looked as though they would be freed on bond; they had good alibis, and things were made brighter for them when two well known and wealthy citizens of Ardmore, together with a prominent attorney, went to Ada, with a certified check to put up bond for the quartet. Citizens of that section were convinced of the guilt of Miller and his gang, and they decided to do something about it.

When the trio from Ardmore arrived late in the afternoon to see that the defendants were set free, they were accosted by a grim faced old cattleman who informed them that the next train back to Ardmore was due to leave in five minutes and told them they had better be passengers. The men were mistaken, the train even then was fixing to pull out and the trio lost no time in getting aboard. They afterward maintained they had four minutes coming to them in Ada.

Late that night lights in Ada suddenly went out. At the same time a party appeared at the jail, "overpowered" the jailer and seized the four prisoners. They were conveyed to an old vacant barn near the railroad tracks, and hung from the rafters.

They were discovered the next morning suspended by their necks very dead. Of course an investigation was started but it never progressed very far; in fact it was the general concensus of opinion that the citizens of Pontotoc County did a pretty good night's work of ridding the country of as unscrupulous a band

SELFRIDGE, JENNIE. EARLY DAY POLITICS, ETC. #9088

9

of hired killers as ever infested the southwest. Miller was credited with the death of more than a score of men, all for hire. It was said he never inquired who the marked men were. All he wanted was time to get acquainted with the habits of his intended victim and a chance to establish an airtight alibi, then he was ready to act.

It was generally whispered in Ada, that there would have been seven victims of the hanging bee

had not Ardmore friends of the four victims departed when they did.

Note: The above information was furnished by Jack Snider - Field Worker.
