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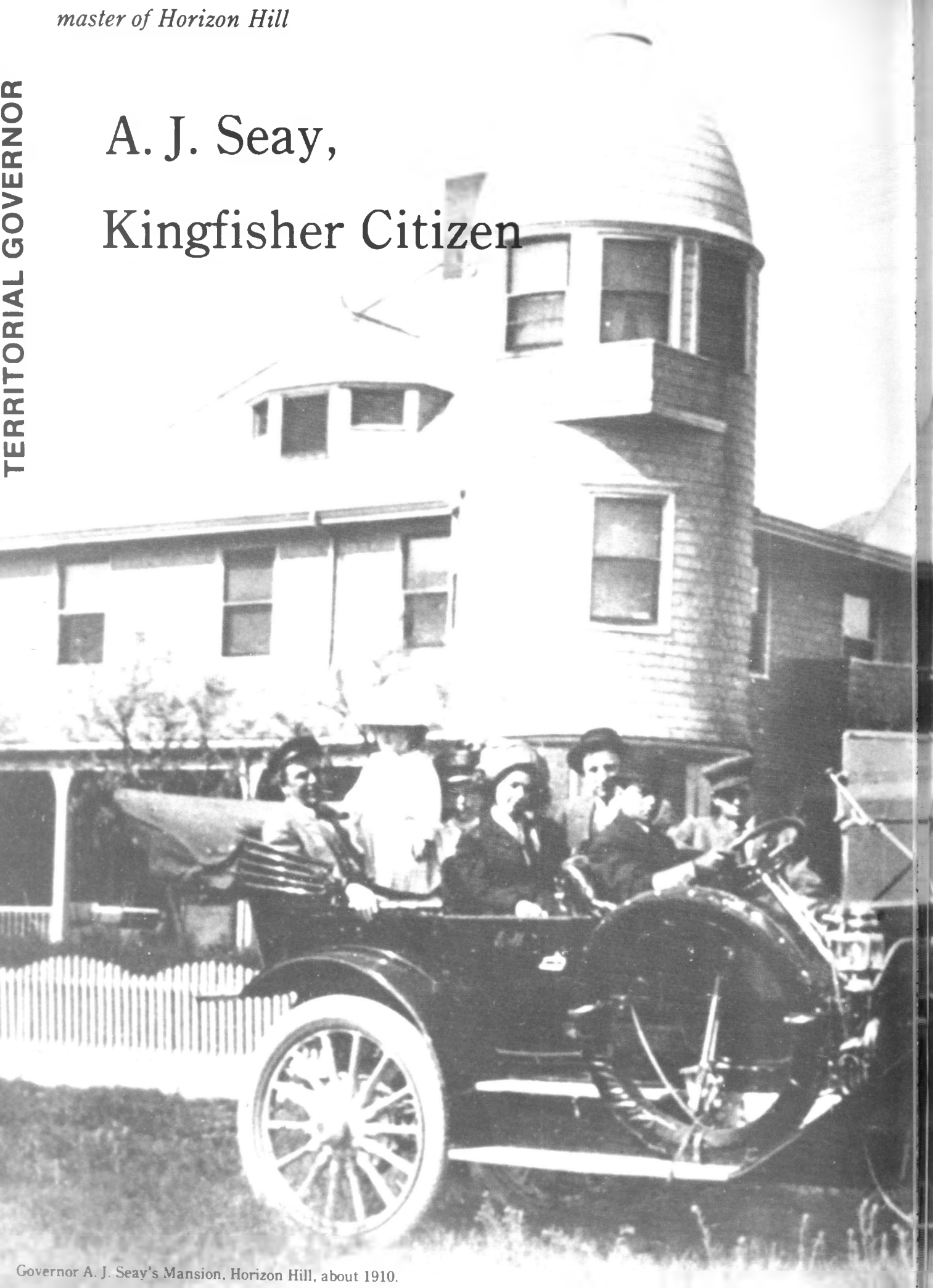
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*master of Horizon Hill*

TERRITORIAL GOVERNOR

# A. J. Seay, Kingfisher Citizen



Governor A. J. Seay's Mansion, Horizon Hill, about 1910.

By

Glen V. McIntyre

News reached Kingfisher on Tuesday afternoon, February 2, 1892, that newly installed Territorial Governor A. J. Seay, who made his home in Kingfisher, would drive from Guthrie on Wednesday to come through Kingfisher on the beginning of a tour of the Territory. Early Wednesday morning, the merchants began decorating their businesses, and soon the entire town was decked with bunting and flags.

At 3:00 p.m., a large delegation of citizens left the town in carriages and other vehicles to greet the Governor. Part of those eager to escort Seay into Kingfisher were members of the Kingfisher Post of the Grand Army of the Republic, of which Seay was a member. People in over two hundred carriages were in line to honor the Governor.

School was dismissed, and the children were trooped out to the bridge of Uncle John's Creek east of town to welcome Seay.

He arrived proudly in a cab with the top parted in the middle and dropped back. He bowed and tipped his high silk hat first to one side and then to the other. Later, he sent apples to treat each school child.

At the end of the line of carriages, Seay got out and shook hands all around. He was an imposing person, standing about six feet tall and weighing over two hundred pounds. He had fair hair and blue eyes but had a high-pitched falsetto voice which gave him the reputation as a poor public speaker.

Later that evening there was a reception at the courthouse and then a dance which topped off the festivities.

Kingfisher had a right to be proud. One of her adopted sons had just become Governor of the new Territory of Oklahoma; and with any luck, his Governorship might result in Kingfisher's becoming the capital of the Territory.



Governor Seay — after he had broken his hip.

Back of Seay Mansion when Governor lived there, circa 1895.



*Courtesy of*

*the Oklahoma Historical Society*

*Courtesy of the Chishom Trail Museum*

Abraham Jefferson Seay had traveled a long road to become the second Territorial Governor of Oklahoma. He was born in Virginia on November 28, 1832, but was reared in South Central Missouri. He qualified as a lawyer just before the outbreak of the Civil War. Instead of practicing law, he chose to go into the Union army, rising from Private to Lieutenant Colonel in the course of the war. A diary which he kept during the war has been preserved.

After the war, he returned to his law practice and later ran twice as a Republican for the United States Congress but was defeated because Missouri was a predominantly Democrat state. He continued to practice law and then later was elected as district court judge in Missouri for a term of six years to which position he was later re-elected. He also purchased a bank in Union, Missouri, of which he remained president until his death.

In April of 1890, he received a telegram from his Civil War friend, John Noble, then Secretary of the Interior under Republican President Benjamin Harrison. Noble offered him the position of

Associate Judge of Oklahoma Territory. Though preferring to be made Chief Justice of the Territory, Seay accepted and in late May of 1890 took up his duties as Associate Justice of the Territory of Oklahoma serving the third district.

The district consisted of the settled lands of the territory — Kingfisher, Canadian County, and the entire Panhandle of Oklahoma — then known as Beaver County. The Panhandle had been attached to the fledgling territory of Oklahoma by the Organic Act of 1890. Even though there were as yet no settlers in the Indian lands — the Cheyenne and Arapahoe Reservation; the Cherokee Outlet; the Wichita, Kiowa, and Apache lands — Seay's court held jurisdiction over these areas as well.

Holding court in Beaver, the county seat of Beaver County, could be quite a chore. Seay either had to go by rail via Wichita, Kansas, to Englewood, Kansas, and then take a stage from there for the fifty remaining miles to Beaver (a total of 300 miles) or go by buckboard or wagon up the old road along the North Canadian to Camp Supply then up

Beaver Creek to Beaver — a total of 200 miles. One pioneer remembers that Seay once took a party of twenty-seven people with him to Beaver to hold court — Seay, his court clerk, a stenographer, and twenty-four other people deemed necessary for business.

Seay was proud of his court's reputation as a "shotgun" court. He was also reputed to be more interested in what was right than in what was in the law books. A reputation of sternness and bluntness tempered with fairness was prized by judges in those days.

However, because Seay was concerned more with judicial business from 1880 to 1892 than in politics, he was not fully in touch with the political leaders of the territory, which could haunt him later.

The first Territorial Governor, George Washington Steele, was an old friend of President Harrison's from Indiana. Steele came to Oklahoma in May of 1890 very reluctantly and soon became involved with the major controversy of the day — the location of the Territorial capital.

The Organic Act specified that the

Governor A. J. Seay



*Courtesy of the Chishom Trail Museum*

capital would be at Guthrie, but other cities were vying for the valuable prize.

These forces got the House of Representatives and the Council (the territorial version of the Senate) to pass a bill making Oklahoma City the territorial capital. To get the votes of the people from Kingfisher, who naturally wanted that city to become the capital, the people from Oklahoma City promised to vote for Kingfisher as their next choice if the drive to get it for Oklahoma City failed.

Steele vetoed the bill making Oklahoma City the capital, in the process making everyone but people from Guthrie angry. As a result of their prior agreement, the legislators then pushed through a bill making Kingfisher the Territorial capital, which Steele also vetoed.

Then, disgusted with Oklahoma Territorial politics, Steele resigned as Governor to return home to Indiana, leaving Robert Martin, Secretary of the Territory, as acting Governor until a replacement could be appointed.

Three men were considered for the post — Acting Governor Martin, Angelo

Scott of Oklahoma City, called the boy orator because of his youth, and Seay. Acting for Seay, U.S. Marshal William G. Grimes got both Scott and Martin to write President Harrison to support an Oklahoma nominee and recommended Seay. Seay's continuing support from Noble clenched the deal.

With Seay as Governor, Kingfisher had high hopes of finally becoming the Territorial capital. Here, however, Seay met one of his major defeats as Governor.

The Organic Act had made no provision for re-election of a legislature, so Seay lobbied the U.S. Congress to allow a new election for the legislature. The bill which Congress passed stipulated that the capital should remain at Guthrie. Thus, Seay got his legislature to run the territory but lost his push to make Kingfisher capital.

One of the first big occasions after Seay became Governor was the opening of the Cheyenne and Arapahoe reservation by land run on April 19, 1892. In one day, the Territory of Oklahoma more than doubled in size.

The date of the land run also coincided

with the completion of Governor Seay's magnificent new home, "Horizon Hill," on the south side of Kingfisher. Tradition in Kingfisher has it that Seay intended to give the mansion to Oklahoma as the Governor's Manse if Kingfisher became the territorial capital.

The opening of the Cheyenne and Arapahoe lands gave Seay one of his greatest challenges. He had to appoint ten positions for each of the six new counties to be made from the new lands. Because he had not been active in Republican Territorial politics, he was not very knowledgeable concerning the personalities and qualities of the many men who hounded him for office. There was some criticism of his appointments but little evidence that he picked too many unsuitable men for the job.

By the time the Territorial legislature met in the spring of 1893, Seay knew that he was a lame-duck Governor. Benjamin Harrison had lost to the Democrat Grover Cleveland in the fall Presidential election, and Cleveland naturally would want to appoint a Democrat as Governor.



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Still, Seay managed to accomplish a great deal during his short term. He oversaw a reapportionment of the territory beginning in August of 1892, and the University of Oklahoma was officially opened during his term. The seal of the Territory of Oklahoma, which survives as the center of the Great Seal of the State of Oklahoma, was adopted. He convinced the legislature to fund an exhibit from Oklahoma Territory at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. He himself went to the exposition's formal opening at the beginning of May, 1893. There he met President Cleveland and had a brief talk with the new Secretary of the Interior — probably an unsuccessful lobbying attempt to keep his job.

As Ex-Governor, he remained active in politics and the life of the territory. He attended the original organizational meeting of the Oklahoma Historical Society at the Kingfisher Courthouse on May 27, 1893, and served on the original board of directors of the society. He was active in the Free Home's League and attended a meeting of the Trans Mississippi Congress of July

1897, which was held in Salt Lake City, and pushed for a stand supporting the Free Homes concept.

He prospered financially, owning two hotels in Kingfisher, serving as president of three banks, and holding considerable stock in four others. In 1908, he donated the money for Seay Hall at Kingfisher College. Seay Hall was to serve as a dormitory for boys who were working their way through Kingfisher College.

Seay sold the Mansion in 1901 and in 1903 suffered an accident which ruined his health. In 1903, he was standing in the doorway of the Kingfisher Hotel when a gust of wind blew a door open and caused him to fall to the pavement and break his hip. His condition eventually deteriorated to the extent that he was confined to a wheelchair.

On his doctor's advice, Seay went to California to try to recover his health. He was in San Francisco in April of 1906 when the widely publicized earthquake struck. He had to be carried from his hotel by his Black attendant.

In 1912, Seay settled in Long Beach,

California, where he died on December 22, 1915. He left an estate in the neighborhood of \$500,000 to numerous nieces and nephews. He had never married. He was buried in the Kingfisher Cemetery beside his favorite sister, Isabel Seay Collins, who had been his hostess for official functions when he had been Governor.

Seay's time in office had lasted only from February 1, 1892, to May 7, 1893; but he still served as one of the founders of Oklahoma Territory. His mansion, Horizon Hill, still stands in Kingfisher, is open to the public, and stands as a memorial of what might have been if Seay had been successful in making Kingfisher the Territorial capital. ■

*GLEN V. MCINTYRE, when he isn't busy as curator of the Chisholm Trail Museum in Kingfisher, enjoys writing poetry and prose articles.*