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GRADUATE COLLEGE

THE ETHOS OF THE OKLAHOMA OIL BOOM FRONTIER

1905-1929

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

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ACADEMIC THESIS

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

Scholarship is a conservative enterprise. Without the factual substance of life in the Oklahoma oil fields provided by interviews, manuscript collections, books, articles, and newspaper accounts, this thesis would not have been written. To those men and women who worked and wrote in the oil fields, and to the interviewers, archivists, and librarians who collected the records, I wish to express my appreciation for preserving a rich and colorful heritage.

Professor Walter Russell, Jr., formerly my adviser and now Chairman of the Department of History in Iowa State

University, first encouraged me to pursue this topic. In many ways, great and small, Professor Russell helped me sharpen my intellectual tools during my first year as a graduate student and prepare me to write this thesis. As a professor, adviser, and friend, he has been a constant support and source of fine advice.

Professor Donald E. ... the past year, and I benefit from his advice and criticism. Professor ... Bureau Crockett have assisted and encouraged me throughout

By



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most of those men is sincerely appreciated.

I also want to acknowledge the very special under-
standing and assistance of my wife, Betty, and our children,
Kendra and David. **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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professor, scholar, and friend he commands my deepest re-
spect and esteem. His assistance is gratefully acknowledged.

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American development has exhibited not merely advance along a single line, but a return to primitive conditions on a continually advancing frontier line, and a new discovery for that area. American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this plasticity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity

Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in Annals of the American Historical Association for the Year 1904 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), pp. 37-52.

THE ETHOS OF THE OKLAHOMA OIL BOOM FRONTIER

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CHAPTER I

THE TURNER THESIS AND THE OIL BOOM FRONTIER

When Frederick Jackson Turner presented an essay entitled "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" to a meeting of the American Historical Association in 1893, he did not mark the end of the frontier in American history, but rather its discovery.¹ Turner's thesis, though announcing the conclusion of "the first period of American history," actually inaugurated a new era of American historiography. Of central importance to Turner's thesis was his argument that:

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¹Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1893 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1894), pp. 197-227.

of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character. The true point of view in the history of this nation is not the Atlantic coast, it is the Great West.²

Turner, his students, and succeeding generations of American historians have subsequently investigated various frontiers of American history and they have cumulatively expanded the historian's knowledge and awareness of this phase of national development. In a descriptive analysis of the literature evoked by the Turner thesis, Walter Rundell, Jr. has observed that "In Turner's mind there was nothing of greater significance about the frontier than free land."³

Free land was indeed the central theme of Turner's thinking, but the "new opportunities" offered by "expansion westward" were also important. It is significant that Turner's paper was presented soon after the United States census for 1890 revealed that the agricultural land of the nation was almost fully occupied. The farmer's frontier had largely passed and Turner predicted that "with its going has closed the first period of American history."⁴ The end of the farmer's frontier, however, was only part of the broader

²Ibid., p. 200.

³Walter Rundell, Jr., "Concepts of the 'Frontier' and the 'West'," Arizona and the West, I:1 (Spring, 1959), p. 19.

⁴The Superintendent of the Census for 1890 reported that the "frontier of settlement . . ." could no longer be defined. To Turner, the frontier of settlement was synonymous with the agricultural frontier. Turner, "Significance of the Frontier," pp. 199, 215, 227.

frontier of American development. Both "passed"; but the farmer's frontier passed into history while the frontier of American development has continued. The closing of the frontier of settlement in 1890 marked the end of a vast national resource of readily available free land in the West, but the continuing development of other natural resources has assured successive waves of "new opportunities" and "expansion westward."⁵ The conquest of various frontiers by miners, railroaders, cattlemen, farmers, and others left an imprint on Turner's palimpsest, but the frontier of American development is the palimpsest itself.

That Turner envisioned a broad definition of "frontier" is implicit in his own multiple uses for the term and his interchangeable use of "frontier" and "West." In seeking a broad and full meaning, Turner once described the frontier as "a moving section or rather a form of

⁵William H. Lyon has suggested that Turner's interpreters should "think in terms of the open-ended society in which history unfolds . . ." instead of a deterministic environment. Lyon believes that "the closing of the last land office [did not] divide one period of American history from another" even though some historians have attempted to divide history at that point. William H. Lyon, "The Third Generation and the Frontier Hypothesis," Arizona and the West, IV:1 (Spring, 1962), p. 47. Turner himself referred to the West as "a treasure house of new resources, a reservoir of opportunity" in 1908, and by 1920 he was predicting that the economic changes resulting from the exploitation of these resources would lead to new frontiers. Wilber R. Jacobs, ed., Frederick Jackson Turner's Legacy (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1965), pp. 175, 61.

society, . . . "6 It is as a form of society that the various frontiers identified by Turner share common characteristics. It is also as a form of society that the Oklahoma oil boom can be identified as a frontier experience.

The discovery and exploitation of oil in Oklahoma during the first three decades of the twentieth century resulted in the growth of a form of society that was similar to that found on earlier frontiers. Scant notice has been accorded this oil boom era of Western history as a frontier.⁷ While this oversight may result from preoccupation with other frontiers or the near contemporaneousness of the oil boom, the omission remains unjustified. The oil boom was a unique experience as was each frontier experience but similarities, not differences, define the recognized frontiers of American history. Many of these similarities--the rapid growth of population, abridged standards of living, inflation, inadequate transportation, society's apparent unwillingness to maintain law and order, and the growth of a distinctive culture and form of society in the wake of the "cutting edge of civilization"--were common to the mining,

⁶Rundell, "Concepts," pp. 15-17; Frederick Jackson Turner, The Significance of Sections in American History (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1932), p. 183.

⁷While many surveys of Western history conclude with the last decade of the nineteenth century, John Hawgood has observed that the opening of new western oil fields in the twentieth century "tended to produce 'frontier conditions' once again. . . ." John A. Hawgood, America's Western Frontiers (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), p. 409.

railroad, cattle town, and oil boom frontiers. It is therefore important that serious consideration and study be accorded the oil boom as a frontier as significant as others which have been the subject of far more intense research and analysis. Such study should confirm as this writer postulates that the oil boom experience was indeed a Turnerian frontier.

Oil booms were not limited to Oklahoma during this period; in fact the first western oil boom in the twentieth century occurred at Spindletop, Texas in 1901. Nor were the men who lived and worked in the oil fields confined to specific states and areas. They followed the boom. Oklahoma was a leading producer of oil and many Oklahoma oil boom experiences were common to other oil booms throughout the Southwest. Consequently, an understanding of the oil boom in Oklahoma is in large measure an understanding of the oil boom of the entire Southwest, and one that affords insight into much of American history in the first third of the twentieth century. This study is therefore directed specifically at understanding the Oklahoma oil boom and the character of the men and women who made the boom. It is not entirely a local study. Rather its goal is an understanding of the broader issues that have characterized Western history through a detailed investigation of the Oklahoma oil boom and a selective comparison between the oil boom and other frontier experiences.

The demand for oil annually increased during the early years of the twentieth century, but demand and production were seldom synchronized. New discoveries of oil or declining production in established fields caused fluctuation in the value of the black gold and thus affected the tempo--the boom--of prospecting and production. But the growing importance of the internal combustion engine assured that the long range demand for oil would continue to increase. Henry Ford's assembly line technique annually accelerated the manufacture of automobiles and the flight of the Wright brothers in 1903 heralded the arrival of yet another use for the internal combustion engine and petroleum products. Efforts were underway early in the century to adapt the newly invented diesel engine to railroad locomotives and ships. Though diesels were rapidly developed for use on ships, the excessive weight of these engines precluded efficient use on locomotives until smaller engines could be designed.⁸ In Indian Territory, this growing awareness of the value of oil was complemented by minor discoveries of oil at the turn of the century. These factors combined to encourage an optimistic economic outlook that was favorable to land values and business activity.

Oil was known to exist in Indian Territory for many years before the oil boom started. Pipeline connections,

⁸Harold F. Williamson, et al., The American Petroleum Industry, Vol. II: The Age of Energy (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1963), 185, 190.

however, between the oil fields and eastern refineries were needed to make Indian Territory oil a valuable commodity. Oil "springs" had been used by Indians for medicinal purposes, and later, by farmers to grease wagon axles. The discovery of large oil producing areas at Cleveland in 1904 and Glenn Pool in 1905 led to the construction of a major pipeline in 1906. When completed, this eight-inch line connected the Glenn Pool oil field in Indian Territory with the Standard Oil refinery at Whiting, Indiana. It was the largest diameter pipeline then in use.⁹ Together, the discovery at Glenn Pool in 1905 and the Whiting pipeline caused the first oil boom in Indian Territory and established a pattern that the boom followed for the next twenty-five years in Oklahoma.

In seeking to understand the ethos of the Oklahoma oil boom, topical rather than chronological development has been selected. There were many boom towns across Oklahoma throughout the twenty-five years encompassed by this study. Most of them exhibited remarkably similar characteristics during the boom. It is upon these similar characteristics that attention should be focused, keeping in mind that the characteristics were slightly modified by the chronological occurrence of the boom in specific towns. Thus Kiefer's

⁹Ibid., pp. 70, 91; Frank F. Finney, "The Indian Territory Illuminating Oil Company," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXXVII:2 (Summer, 1959), 15; and Paul H. Giddens, "One Hundred Years of Petroleum History," Arizona and the West, IV:2 (Summer, 1962), 137.

boom in 1907 was similar to the Seminole boom in 1927 and although by the latter date automobiles had largely replaced horses for transportation, the roads near both towns remained nearly impassable.

Several studies concerning specific Oklahoma oil districts were helpful in preparing this thesis, but the most valuable source consulted was a collection of interviews recently deposited in the University of Oklahoma Library.¹⁰ These interviews were gathered by Ned DeWitt as part of the Works Progress Administration Writers' Project in Oklahoma. The interviews cover a wide range of activities and personalities associated with oil in Oklahoma and they contain a wealth of raw information. It is regrettable that the individuals interviewed are often only identified by occupation rather than by name, but the evident candor engendered by anonymity adequately compensates for this defect. It was these same interviews that led this author to conclude that the Oklahoma oil boom was indeed a frontier experience.

¹⁰The Oil in Oklahoma collection was deposited in the University of Oklahoma Library by Professor Savoie Lottinville and represents the surviving oil interviews of the W.P.A. Writers' Project in Oklahoma. The Writers' Project, sponsored by the University of Oklahoma, was directed by Professor Lottinville. Other interviews were collected and sent to Washington where they were lost during the hectic early days of the Second World War. W.P.A. Writers' Project, Oil in Oklahoma, Boxes 42-43, Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library, Norman.

CHAPTER II

THE EVOLUTION OF AN OIL BOOM

Optimism was the catalyst that transformed many quiet farm communities into oil boom towns throughout the southwestern United States after oil had been discovered at Spindletop, Texas in 1901. Knowledge of the fortunes made at Spindletop and the optimism kindled by even doubtful signs of oil attracted a host of wildcatters in the first third of the twentieth century. These wildcatters were often aided and encouraged by farmers and townsmen who were anxious to secure for their town the growth and wealth popularly associated with an oil boom.¹

Wildcatters used "creekology" and other crude prospecting methods to select promising drilling sites until the second decade of the century when geology became a recognized

¹Roger R. Moore, "The Impact of the Oil Industry in West Texas" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Texas Technological College, 1965), p. 120; Samuel W. Tait, Jr., The Wildcatters: An Informal History of Oil-Hunting in America (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), p. 127; and "Latest Big Strike of State's Mammoth Oil Industry," Harlow's Weekly, IX (August 14, 1915), 157-159.

tool for locating oil.² Creekology involved nothing more sophisticated than finding an oil slick on a creek and following the creek upstream until the slick disappeared. The wildcatters hoped by this method to find an area where oil was sufficiently near the surface to be reached by the cable tool drilling rigs then in use. Describing the early years of oil development in Oklahoma, Earl Spaulding has claimed that "Oil was not an industry. It was a gamble."³ Certainly prior to the acceptance of geology as a necessary tool, the search for oil was more speculative than scientific.

The mere selection of a site for possible drilling caused an influx of oil men and money to areas primarily dependent upon a farm economy.⁴ Prior to drilling and

²Charles N. Gould, Covered Wagon Geologist (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959), p. 178. P. L. Drossman who participated in much of the early oil activity in Oklahoma later wrote that of the thousands of people who flocked to the Red Fork discovery in 1901, there was "not a geologist in the lot." Heydrick papers as cited by Carl Coke Rister, Oil! Titan of the Southwest (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1949), p. 84. A former professor at the University of Missouri recalled that a boom started "soon after geologists located the Augusta, Kansas field [in 1916] . . . , and that in turn started a geologists' boom when the oil companies leaped in to sign up the best prospects in the universities. I quit teaching to go in with the old Empire Oil Company. . . ." "The Geologist," W.P.A. Writers Project interviews, Oil in Oklahoma Collection, Box 43, Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library, Norman.

³Earl Spaulding, "Oil Hells in Oklahoma," Outlook and Independent, CLVII (February 11, 1931), p. 214.

⁴Before the Seminole boom for example, Dr. M. M. Turlington was occasionally paid for his services with farm

"proving" a field, leases were usually sought throughout the district. The quest for leases aroused hopes for wealth. Merlin F. Sailor, a former lease-man, recalls that landowners who possessed mineral rights often tended to see themselves as "another Rockefeller, Hunt, or Murchison . . ." though their chances for great wealth were "mathematically about the same as the chances of winning the grand prize in the Irish sweepstakes." But instead of buying a sweepstakes ticket, the landowners were asked to sell a lease. They retained the chance of also making a fortune on royalty if a producing well was drilled on their land. In either case the landowner had more money in his pocket than before oil prospects were known.⁵ The effect of speculation on oil leases was to immediately increase property values even if the lease was later allowed to lapse.

Lease money found its way to towns as money was banked, mortgages were paid, and previously unattainable merchandise was purchased. Farmers frequently used their lease money to pay the mortgage on their land and the banker

produce, but during the boom, his record books reveal that he was paid in cash. Marcellus M. Turlington Collection, Box 4, Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library, Norman.

⁵Merlin F. Sailor, You Might Strike Oil (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965), p. 3; and "The Royalty Broker," Oil in Oklahoma Collection, Box 42, Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library, Norman.

then loaned the same money to town businessmen who, anticipating an oil boom, increased inventories and expanded their business establishments.⁶ With or without the actual discovery of oil, if residents believed there was oil on their land, and if their optimism was encouraged by lease money, the affected communities experienced the initial stage of an oil boom.

Although optimism and speculation could initiate an oil boom, the discovery of producing oil fields and the construction of long-distance pipelines were needed to sustain it. Several towns in Indian Territory including Red Fork and Cleveland felt the impact of oil optimism during the first few years of the twentieth century, but little oil was actually produced. Local pipelines were constructed to connect these oil discoveries with nearby railroads, but rail transportation of oil proved expensive and the limited production of these early discoveries did not warrant the cost of constructing and operating long-distance pipelines.

Conditions were greatly changed when the discovery of oil at Glenn Pool in November, 1905 revealed for the first time that there were significant oil deposits in Indian Territory.⁷ Each of the first three wells drilled at Glenn

⁶Moore, "Oil Industry in West Texas," p. 223; and Rister, Titan of the Southwest, p. 89.

⁷Charles F. Colcord Collection, Box 25, Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library, Norman; and Albert Raymond Parker, "Life and Labor in the Mid-Continent Oil Fields, 1859-1945" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation,

Pool averaged over nine hundred barrels of good quality oil and succeeding wells proved to be equally prolific.⁸ As new wells were brought into production, the construction of a long-distance pipeline was started and the first full-blown oil boom in Indian Territory was underway. Where other oil activity in Indian Territory had been of transitory and local importance, the Glenn Pool boom lasted several years and attracted nation-wide attention. The Glenn Pool boom also set the tone and style that was frequently repeated for the next twenty-five years as other large oil fields were discovered in Oklahoma.⁹

Great problems confronted area residents as an oil boom developed. When news of the discovery of oil spread, there was a rapid increase in the population of the boom area as oil workers, farmers hoping for oil work, and opportunists arrived. Demands for food and lodging frequently exceeded the local capacity to satisfy these needs. Oil wages bid the price of existing accommodations and commodities to unusually high levels and inaugurated an

University of Oklahoma, 1951), p. 45. Bartlesville, site of the "first commercial well" in the territory, was, in 1897, the first boom town according to Rister, Titan of the Southwest, pp. 22-23. But Rister points out (p. 119) that it was not until the discovery of Glenn Pool in 1905 that Oklahoma achieved first place in regional production. The issue of which oil discovery first constituted an oil boom is one of degree and remains open to interpretation.

⁸Rister, Titan of the Southwest, pp. 89-90.

⁹See supra, p. 7.

interval of frenzied building. Hotels and restaurants were hastily erected and the boom area was rapidly transformed into a densely populated community.

While all boom towns experienced a period of rapid population growth, there were other characteristics which gave a distinctiveness to each town. In some cases, there was no town near the oil field and one sprang up as the result of the efforts of an enterprising promoter.¹⁰ Sometimes the oil companies built a camp for their employees. In some oil fields where the land was leased in large tracts, the turmoil of offset drilling was largely avoided and the boom was more restrained. And finally, the demand for oil had a decided effect upon each boom town since the oil market was reflected in the boom field wages, and wages set the pace for the local boom economy.

While oil boom towns blossomed and captured the imagination of boomers and the newspaper reading public, the crime and debauchery for which boom towns became famous resulted from only about three per cent of the boomers. According to Merlin F. Sailor, "The rest of the story was just hard work and rewarded or unrewarded hope, mud, flies, cold, heat, rain, [and] dust."¹¹ But it was optimism that attracted Sailor and the others to the boom. Whether it was

¹⁰Jack Dillion interview, "Indian-Pioneer Paper," Vol. XXIV, p. 408; Fannie Evans interview, "Indian-Pioneer Papers," Vol. XXVIII, pp. 311-12.

¹¹Sailor, You Might Strike It Rich, p. 110.

hope for wealth, a search for adventure, an attempt to vanish into the mass of humanity in the boom towns, or just curiosity, all who came expected to find the reward they were seeking. Town residents who saw their farm community suddenly transformed into an oil boom town were forced to adjust to the changing conditions or move.

Wildcat wells being drilled in areas suspected to contain oil usually employed only a few men until oil was actually discovered. Newspaper reporters tried to follow the progress of these wells closely. Local newspapermen in particular tended to write glowing reports of nearby wildcat wells and thus enhance the attractiveness of their towns. But not all wildcatters were anxious to have their progress reported and if they were drilling a "tight hole," other oil men and inquisitive reporters sometimes found their approach to the drilling site barred by armed guards.¹² Tight holes were characteristic of the more speculative areas where leases were inexpensive and would remain so unless oil was discovered. Under these conditions, wildcatters hoped to find oil and buy additional leases before the news of their discovery attracted other oil men and competitive bidding increased the price of the leases.

¹²Tonkawa News, June 23, 1921; Harlow's Weekly IX (September 4, 1915), 208; Moore, "Oil Industry in West Texas," p. 38; and C. B. Glasscock, Then Came Oil: The Story of the Last Frontier (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1938), p. 141.

Although optimism and lease money combined to start the oil booms, the influx of oil boomers gave the newly discovered oil fields their true character. When it became known that oil had been discovered, an army of men descended upon the area: company men seeking leases, oil field workers looking for a job, and others looking for a start in the oil field business. These were soon joined by oil field businessmen who followed the boom to sell lumber, open restaurants, hotels, oil field supply stores, gambling joints, and sporting houses. They were all boomers and William Owens has justifiably claimed that they were "a special breed." Booms, Owens points out, "from the nature of things . . ." were short and the boomers knew that ultimately the frenzy of the present would yield to more orderly activity as the boom gave way to settled production.¹³

While the boom lasted, the wages, the hope for rapid wealth, and the excitement of the boom towns attracted many people. John Fortson, reflecting on the impact of oil in Pottawatomie County, observed that "oil meant work. Oil meant money and prosperity." In 1927 during the height of the Greater Seminole oil boom, Pottawatomie County gained seven new towns and thirty-five county towns filed additions with the county clerk. Thousands of people came to the boom

¹³William A. Owens, Fever in the Earth (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1958), p. 63.

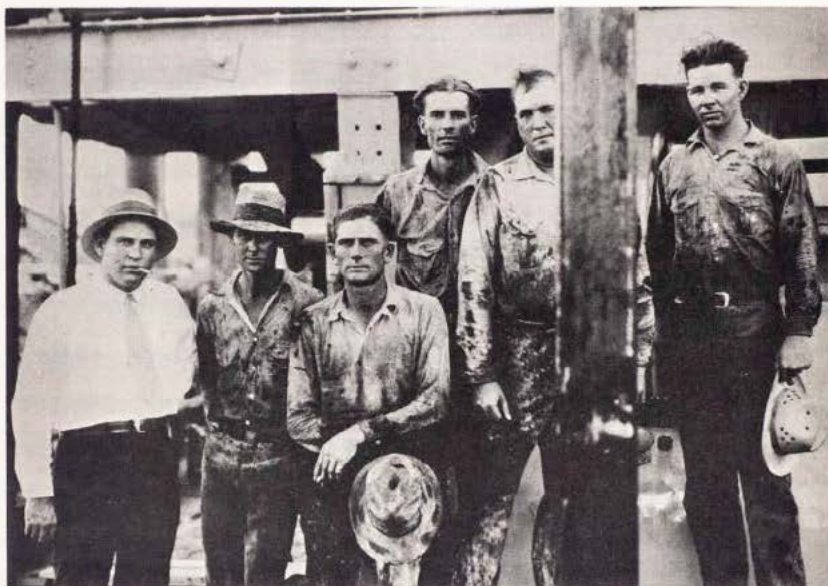


Fig. 1.--"Oil boomers gave the newly discovered oil fields their true character."

Photograph courtesy of the Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library.

towns "to dig the money out of the ground."¹⁴ Maud, a Seminole County boom town, had a population of 1500 before oil was discovered. During the boom in 1927, Maud experienced a six hundred percent growth. In that same year, 15,000 families arrived in the town of Seminole where the boom was centered.¹⁵ Describing the type of people who made such spectacular growth possible, Carl Coke Rister noted that they included "millionaires, laborers, hoboes, gamblers, prostitutes, and men of small means--all hopeful that fortune would smile on them."¹⁶ Certainly the boom attracted a colorful and heterogeneous population and represented a wide spectrum of American society.

One oil field worker later candidly described his contemporaries in the booms as both decent and tough--a cross section of humanity that would yield every extreme of human nature from "tramps" to "men you would not be afraid to take home to meet your wife."¹⁷ Many boomers were people without roots and although they complained about their

¹⁴John Fortson, Pott County and What Has Become of It: A History of Pottawatomie County (n.p.: Pottawatomie County Historical Society, 1936), p. 27. The Greater Seminole oil district included ten major oil fields that were discovered in 1926 and 1927 in the immediate vicinity of the town of Seminole, Oklahoma.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 75; and Seminole Producer, July 16, 1936.

¹⁶Rister, Titan of the Southwest, p. 120.

¹⁷"The Old Hand," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma collection.

nomadic life, most of them accepted it and looked forward to their next boom. One cat-head claimed that for the few years that he worked in a Tennessee sawmill he voted, but while he was in the oil fields, he was "never in town long enough to register. . . ." ¹⁸ A roughneck was similarly disfranchised because of "having to move from one location to another every few months or weeks. . . ." ¹⁹ A rig-builder in this rootless society pointed out that "the oil fields keep moving away, and all a man can do, rig-builder or whatever he is, is to keep following 'em." Home, furniture, and family had to move with the boom or be left behind. ²⁰

For some oil workers the frequent movement was enjoyable. One boomer known as "Bulldog" described the attraction of the booms for him as an "itch" that could only be satisfied by going to the next boom. This "itch" lead him from the Healdton boom in 1914 to the "little ones" in Osage County, to East Texas, West Texas, and back to the Tonkawa boom in Oklahoma in 1923. ²¹ But the boomers

¹⁸"Take It Away, Cat-head!" Box 43, Oil in Oklahoma Collection. A cat-head is an oilworker who operates the machinery that pulls pipe and casing out of the hole.

¹⁹"The Roughneck," Box 43, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

²⁰"The Rig-Builder (#2)," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

²¹"The Work's Safer Now-days," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

recognized that they were leading a hobo life. They were tramps, as one oil field worker expressed it, but "high class tramps": they were always moving but during the twenties they were driving their own cars from field to field rather than riding freight trains or thumbing rides.²²

In addition to the experienced oil men, every boom attracted inexperienced men, or "boll weevils," as they were known in the oil fields. The Glenn Pool boom, for example, attracted local farm boys and other job seekers from the nearby states of Kansas, Arkansas, and Missouri as well as men from more distant areas. But many of them, according to Albert R. Parker, "failed to find work in the oil fields, or at best found only casual employment."²³ This placed them in the difficult position of paying boom town prices without earning the corresponding wages, thus causing abnormally low standards of living to prevail in the "ragtowns" or "shack-towns" that grew on the edge of the boom towns.

Oil field work demanded strength and attracted many young single men who were unskilled and attempting to find their first employment away from home.²⁴ The optimism of youth was therefore incorporated into the speculative

²²"The Old Hand," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

²³Parker, "Life and Labor in the Mid-Continent Oil Fields," p. 40. Also see "The Oil Field Cook," Box 43, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

²⁴"Hot Oil," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

optimism of the boom towns. In addition to the drilling crews, there were teamsters to haul pipe and lumber from the supply houses in the boom towns to the drilling sites, pipeline crews to connect new fields with the growing interstate pipeline system, and "tankies" to build holding tanks for the oil that was not immediately sold to the pipeline companies or refineries. Farmers with teams were always in demand for hauling and for scraping large earthen oil reservoirs in the red Oklahoma dirt when tank construction and pipeline connections both lagged behind production.²⁵

Numerous accounts reveal why men were first attracted to the boom. That of a refinery worker is typical:

When they struck oil here [Cyril, Oklahoma] in 1918 I knew for sure I was through with the farm. There weren't any real oil men around when it opened up and for awhile they were crying for hands; I was just an old spindling country boy that hadn't seen any real money of his own yet and I wasn't going to let 'em cry long. I run across a fellow one morning that was getting rigged up to drill but he didn't have a tool-dresser. He owned his own drilling outfit and did all the drilling himself, so when I got to talking to him I hit him for a job. I'd learned how to swing a sledge and sharpen and temper tools and repair the combine and tractor and plows, so I knew I could dress tools."²⁶

A Colorado man recalled that he had been a small town soda jerk in his father's drug store when he decided to go after

²⁵Gerald Forbes, "Southwestern Oil Boom Towns," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XVII (December, 1939), 394-395.

²⁶"Refinery Worker," Box 43, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

some of the "easy money" in the oil fields,²⁷ and a Kansan remembered that he watched an oil well being drilled on his dad's farm and then followed the rig to the next location as part of the crew.²⁸ One roughneck claimed that he went to work in the oil fields because he liked outside work and the gamble that "a man might make a million . . . or . . . lose his wad. . . ." ²⁹

In addition to those who came to work in the oil fields, there were boomers who saw the economic upheaval of the boom towns as an opportunity and an adventure not to be missed. Tom Slick, one such opportunist, helped open the Cushing field in 1912. Slick and an associate, Charles Shaffer, leased a drilling site on the Frank Wheeler farm and hired a crew to drill, but they did not have the money to lease all the promising land in the area. When the well struck oil, Slick hired all the livery rigs in the vicinity of Cushing and sent all the nearby notary publics on a paid vacation while he borrowed money to buy more leases. Other oil men arriving in Cushing by train from Tulsa had to walk to the oil field to seek leases and then locate a notary

²⁷"The Shooter," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

²⁸"The Driller," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

²⁹"The Roughneck," Box 43, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

public before the leases could be purchased. Slick later sold his Cushing interests for over two million dollars.³⁰

Though less spectacular than the activities of Tom Slick, the enterprises of Sadie Purley, cook and restaurateur, are more characteristic of many boom town business activities. Sadie was a cook in Louisiana when she first heard about the oil boom in Texas. She was immediately attracted to the boom by the money and excitement and the following week she opened her own cafe in a boom town tent. She later followed the boom across Texas and into Oklahoma. Her "home-cooked" meals were popular and assured her of a comfortable profit.³¹

One of Sadie's waitresses, a girl known as "Lovie," was also popular and probably contributed to the popularity of Sadie's business. Lovie was not after wealth in the boom--Sadie paid her only ten dollars a week and board--but Lovie liked the social laxity of the boom towns. Sadie claimed that Lovie was "married" in practically every town for the duration of the boom. Sadie explained that Lovie "wasn't what you'd call a bad girl . . . , not a regular oil field whore, but she just couldn't say no to any guy that kept after her." Lovie's adventures were for fun, not for

³⁰Tait, Jr., Wildcatters, p. 129; and Lerona Rosamond Morris, ed., Oklahoma, Yesterday-Today-Tomorrow (Guthrie, Okla.: Co-Operative Publishing Co., 1930), p. 798.

³¹"The Oil Field Cook," Box 43, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

profit, and she was as casual about leaving her paramours as she was about finding them.³²

Unlike Lovie, some adventurous women sought more lasting and profitable associations. Miss Edith Davis came to the boom town of Muskogee in 1906 looking for a wealthy husband instead of a job. Soon after her arrival, she secured a job as a waitress at the Hotel Hoffman and on Sunday morning met Louis McGibbon, "a wealthy and influential member of the Creek tribe. On Monday morning they were engaged. On Tuesday evening they were married." Edith's success, when publicized, attracted a plethora of "potential waitresses of all colors, conditions, and creeds . . ." to Muskogee.³³

With the rapid increase in population, oil boom areas were immediately in need of hotels, rooming houses, and restaurants. Even though hotels and "shot-gun" houses were started early in the boom, there never seemed to be enough lodging for the throngs of boomers. "Shot-gun" houses were so named because they were a succession of attached rooms rather than a planned house. A shot gun fired through the front door could send some pellets out the back door without hitting any obstructing walls. Many towns had no hotel when the boom started and it was common for farm families to

³²Ibid.

³³Glasscock, Then Came Oil, p. 164.

collect some of the boom money by providing room and board in their homes and barns for the first rush of boomers.³⁴ These improvised arrangements soon became too crowded to accommodate all who sought a meal and a bed, however, and there were also objectionable characteristics not originally apparent. Since many of the oil field workers were young, single, and well paid, their close association with farmer's daughters at meal time had a decided social impact. One rig-builder recalled that as a farm hand he could not compete with the boomers for the farm girls' favors. The boomers rented the best available livery rigs for courting and he was seldom able to borrow a plow horse for the same purpose. Consequently, he went to work in the oil fields.³⁵

The accommodations afforded by farm wives-turned-hostelers were not always satisfactory. E. L. Malone wrote his wife from Ramona, Indian Territory, in 1904 that he was not pleased with his "boarding house," but it was the best to be found. He slept upstairs in a bed "propped upon store boxes and [on a] tick stuffed with prairie grass." He complained that bed and room were both cold and his sleeping area was so cramped that he could scarcely stand up without

³⁴Forbes, "Boom Towns," p. 396.

³⁵"The Rig Builder (#3)," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

bumping his head on the rafters.³⁶ Malone was also disparaging of the boarding house food and he wrote his wife that in the first lunch pail prepared by his landlady:

the bread was wrapped up in paper with no butter on it. . . . Where you always put the pie they had that half full of hash with an old spoon laid on top of it. In the bottom of the pail was some fat-pork and some cows liver. That was our first pail and the rest has not been much better. I told her I wanted some pie in my pail so I get pumpkin and dried apples regular now. And we have to pay \$5.00 straight. The board is not worth \$2.00 per week but we have to put up with it.³⁷

With no apparent alternative, Malone was compelled to remain in this farm home for several months. With the growth of towns in the boom districts, there were alternatives to farm homes, but these seldom offered more comfort.

Boom town hotels were hastily constructed and provided few comforts and conveniences. The cost of sleeping accommodations varied from about two dollars a night to more than thirty dollars a week and that sum was customarily collected from three people who slept by shifts in the same bed. Occasionally, no doubt, the beds were still warm from the last occupant when the next "roomer" retired. Sheets were rare. Frequently only a blanket was provided for warmth and the same one was used successively by each

³⁶Letter, E. L. Malone to Jennie Malone, Dec. 11, 1904, Minor Archives, Box M-38, Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library, Norman.

³⁷Letter, E. L. Malone to Jennie Malone, Dec. 23, 1904, Minor Archives, Box M-38.



Fig. 2.--"Boom town hotels were hastily constructed and provided few comforts and conveniences."

Photograph courtesy of the Division of Manuscripts,
University of Oklahoma Library.

occupant. Vermin were common and described by one boomer as "big enough to haul off your shoes with you in them."³⁸

Yet, hotel beds were seldom empty and there were frequent instances of men, unable to find a hotel room or unable to pay the price, sleeping on pool tables, in cots in alleys and hallways, in barber chairs, and in theaters. Joe Grayson recalls that on at least one occasion hotels in Okmulgee were "overflowing instead of just full." On that evening he and fourteen other men spent the night at City Hall after unsuccessfully looking for a hotel room.³⁹ These circumstances assured that there would be patrons for hotels as soon as they could be built.

The 1926 Greater Seminole boom described by C. S. Choinski, a field clerk for the Empire Oil and Refining Company, indicates that Greater Seminole was a construction boom as well as an oil boom. At Bowlegs, a small town a few miles south of Seminole, confusion reigned with "lumber scattered everywhere, everybody rushing around and hammering and sawing on a hotel building, stores, dance halls, and movie houses."⁴⁰

After Choinski negotiated the muddy five mile road that led north from Bowlegs, he might have observed the same

³⁸"The Shooter," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

³⁹Joe M. Grayson interview, "Indian Pioneer Papers," Vol. XXXV, p. 441.

⁴⁰Seminole Producer, July 16, 1936.

confusion and feverish construction at Seminole where W. H. Clark was erecting a garage, the third "boom town building" in the town. Clark's garage had "a large upstairs room which he converted into a rooming house. The room was jammed full of beds. . . . Often as many as three men, absolute strangers to each other, would occupy the same bed while others bunked on the floor." Clark collected from fifty cents to as much as ten dollars per bed each night, depending on the demand.⁴¹

Even Clark's hotel and the others that rapidly appeared in Seminole failed to meet the initial demand and theater seats were used as beds by many people who could find no other accommodations. W. E. Ebaugh, owner of the Oil Field Photo shop in Oklahoma City, recalls that he and his partner paid five dollars for their first night's lodging in Seminole and considered themselves fortunate at that. Their hotel room was "eight feet square and the wall cracks were so wide that occupants of all the rooms could look through and see each other." Their bed was a mattress on the floor and the furnishings of the room consisted of a packing box and a tin wash basin.⁴²

Some Seminole residents converted their homes into rooming houses to meet the demand for boom lodging. Dr. and Mrs. Marcellus Turlington owned a large house that was known

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid.

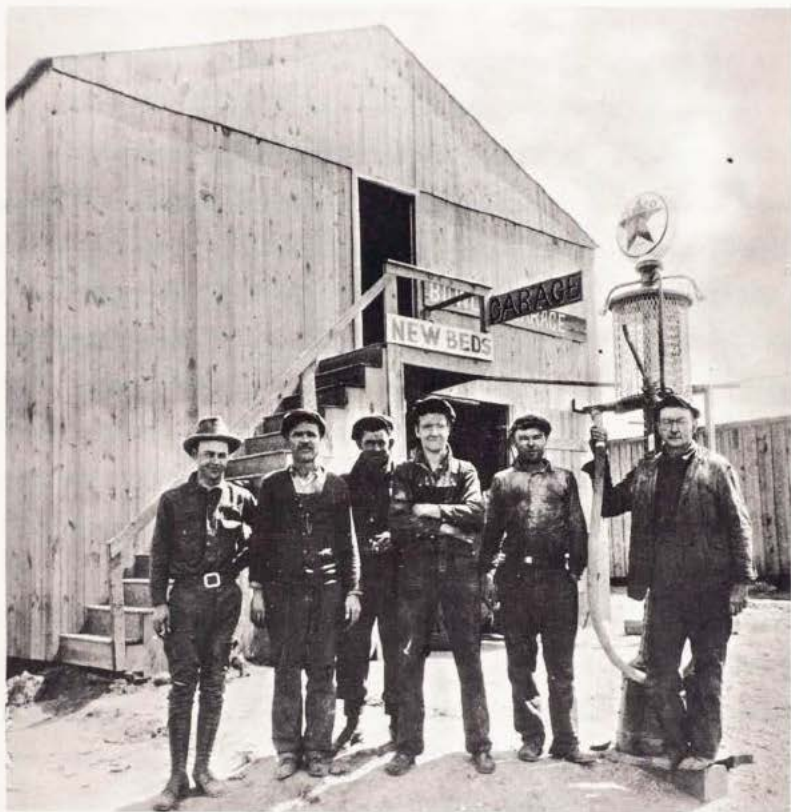


Fig. 3.--Clark's garage and hotel in Seminole, 1927.

Photograph courtesy of the Division of Manuscripts,
University of Oklahoma Library.

in Seminole as the Billington place. During the boom Mrs. Turlington rented rooms in the house and even converted the barn into an eight-room bunk house. The Turlington's paid four thousand dollars for the Billington place in 1918, but at the peak of the boom in 1929, Mrs. Turlington sold it for twenty-five thousand dollars.⁴³

The demand for boom town lodging was so great that rooms were usually occupied before the entire building was completed. One boom hotel started as a shot-gun house built by the owner who rented his own bed while he worked to add additional rooms. Eventually this "hotel" rambled over half a city block. Rooms rented for three dollars a night or two dollars and a half during the day. As in many boom hotels, prostitution was common, and with girls, rooms rented for five to ten dollars a night.⁴⁴

When a man was fortunate enough to locate a hotel room, that did not assure that his rest would be undisturbed. A Negro porter in one of the boom hotels recalled that when the oil boom started, there were so many people in town that it was difficult to even get to the hotel and for those

⁴³M. M. Turlington v. Lula Turlington, W. W. Pryor Collection, Box 16, Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library, Norman. The Turlington's were residents in Seminole, Oklahoma for many years and this brief of their divorce trial sheds much light on Seminole before and during the oil boom.

⁴⁴"I'm Just Gettin' Started," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

lucky enough to find a room, the noise from drunken people and the many trucks on the street made it almost impossible to sleep. People worked "can-to-can't" hours and then fell exhausted into bed to try to sleep in spite of the noise. The porter also worked long hours, but he earned as high as fifty dollars a week in tips.⁴⁵

Hotels are credited with bringing oil wealth to Tulsa despite its distance from the oil fields. When oil was discovered at Glenn Pool, Sapulpa and Red Fork were nearer to the new oil district than Tulsa, but only Tulsa had a hotel that boasted the convenience of a bathtub. The Alcorn Hotel, a remodeled livery stable, attracted company oil men and horse flies. As it became a regular meeting place for the oil executives, the horse flies were gradually eliminated. Due to the difficulty of fording the Arkansas River, the oil field workers stayed in Red Fork. Tulsa therefore benefited from the boom income but avoided some of the boom town excesses. When the Robinson Hotel was erected and a bridge was built across the Arkansas River, Tulsa's importance as an oil town was increased though Tulsa remained largely a management boom town rather than a worker's

⁴⁵"They Ain't No Room Fo' A Black Man," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

boom town.⁴⁶ But hotels only filled part of the need for accommodations. Restaurants and cafes were required also.

"A man's worked in oil fields he's always wantin' to farm. You get damned tired of payin' three prices for sumthin' to eat and not gettin' enough at that, so I'm buyin' me a place to grow my own."⁴⁷ With these words one boomer summed up the reaction of many who endured the tent cafes and flimsy restaurants that appeared overnight in the oil field towns. The men, however, had to eat and the customary twelve hour work-day left little time for them to cook for themselves, although the night shift sometimes had an opportunity to bake potatoes for breakfast. Grocery store owners felt the full effects of the demand for food, and consequently, according to the Seminole Producer, probably saw little of the boom outside of their stores. "People came from everywhere," commented the Producer, "and many of them had been jobless for a long time. But when they hit the land of plenty and got on somebody's payroll, boy, how they could eat."⁴⁸ Grocery stores were so busy that many stayed open around the clock to meet the heavy demand for food.

⁴⁶Speech by Glenn Condon, November 17, 1955, Grisso Papers, Box 18, Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library, Norman; Glasscock, Then Came Oil, p. 167; and Gerald Forbes, Flush Production (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1942), pp. 25-26.

⁴⁷"I'm Just Gettin Started," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

⁴⁸Seminole Producer, July 16, 1936.

The man who did not have a wife or landlady to cook for him resorted to the boom restaurants for his meals. The restaurants were always crowded and often dirty. Though there were exceptions, most boomers remember them for serving meager quantities of poorly prepared food. One cafe in the Tonkawa oil field town of Three Sands served from 1,000 to 2,500 meals a day. There were no paved roads in Three Sands and after a rain the roads turned to a sea of mud that was tracked into every building in town including the cafe. It became so difficult for the waitresses to walk through the mud in the cafe that the manager bought rubber boots for them to wear during rainy weather.⁴⁹ It is with some justification then that Roger R. Moore has observed that boom town diners "had to be careful about what they ate."⁵⁰

Many oil field workers in Oklahoma had experience in other oil fields around the world. "Judge" Payne, an Oklahoma drillér, worked a few years in Mexico for a British oil company. The company allowed two dollars a day per man for food and the food was all shipped from England. "If what I ate was any sample," claimed Payne, "those Britishers eat damn good." Food in the Oklahoma booms, by comparison, was poor fare indeed to this oil field epicurean of "pickled walnuts and candied fruits, from England, and India, and Persia,

⁴⁹"I Take A Small Profit," Box 43, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

⁵⁰Moore, "Oil Industry in West Texas," p. 46.

and France" served in quantity.⁵¹ No doubt there were less fortunate oil men in Mexico or elsewhere who would have welcomed the appearance of an Oklahoma oil boom restaurant in all its squalid glory. Certainly food served in the boom town beaneries of Oklahoma was often poorly prepared and outrageously expensive, but eating, as Sadie Purley sagely observed, was an important part of the oil game.⁵² The boom restaurants and the boomers needed each other until more stable conditions could be established after the boom subsided.

Sadie Purley owned and operated a restaurant in each boom town that she moved into and she usually did her own cooking. She pointed to her volume of business and her profit as proof to substantiate her claim that "the food was good and there was plenty of it. . . ." But Sadie was responsive to boom town conditions. When a company camp opened nearby and the camp kitchen began to compete with her for business, she successfully met that competition by opening a "family-style" cafe that appealed to the boomers because the food was placed on the tables and they could eat all they wanted.⁵³

Company camps were uncommon in the Oklahoma oil fields in the first and second decade of the twentieth

⁵¹ "The Driller," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

⁵² "The Oil Field Cook," Box 43, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

⁵³ Ibid.

century, but by the 1920's they were characteristic of many oil booms. Unlike boom town promoters, the builders and inhabitants of company towns never believed they were establishing a permanent settlement.⁵⁴ Some camps consisted of prefabricated houses that were moved to the oil fields in sections and then bolted together. When the houses were no longer needed in the camp, the bolts were removed and the houses were moved to a new camp or sold.

Even though the company camps were not permanent, nor intended to be, some were relatively comfortable. Thirty years after the 1927 boom, Cities Service Oil Company pointed to the Walker Camp near Seminole as "the best oil camp in the Mid-Continent" in its day. The camp provided "recreational and office space, plus limited living and eating facilities."⁵⁵ Walker Camp, however, was the exception.

Company camps were normally established near the oil fields, but they were established to benefit the companies rather than the workers. The camps were often as uncomfortable and filthy as the boom towns, but the companies restricted the sale of liquor in the camps more effectively than liquor sales were controlled in the boom towns, thus reducing violence to the benefit of both the boomers and the company. By building and maintaining a camp, the company

⁵⁴Tait, Jr., Wildcatters, p. 154.

⁵⁵"Planned Progress," Cities Service Empire (August, 1957), p. 12.

could always find men for work should an emergency arise. The companies were also more certain to find men sober enough to work every morning.⁵⁶ The camps were a natural development as the bigger companies consolidated their activities in the oil fields and looked for ways to increase their efficiency. Farmers "boarding houses" and the boom town hotels, rooming houses, and restaurants were less satisfactory to the companies than camps that expeditiously provided the necessary services of the boom towns but attempted to avoid some of the debauchery.

Company camps were particularly necessary for pipeline crews since the crews had to move as the pipe was laid. The practice of the Prairie Oil and Gas Company was to establish a camp for the workers about five miles ahead of the pipeline. The line would gradually approach the camp and when it passed about five miles beyond, the camp would be relocated ahead of the line.⁵⁷ Each morning the crews would trudge the miles from the camp to the pipe line, and each night they would retrace their steps.

Living conditions in the oil field boom towns were seldom comfortable by even modest standards. The uncertainty

⁵⁶"Hot Oil," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection. In an effort to control drunkenness in the camps and the boom towns, some companies paid their men daily "so there would not be as much money to spend at one time." "Tankie," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

⁵⁷"The Rig-Builder," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

of the boom's duration tempted people to accept and adjust to the prevailing substandard conditions engendered by "shot-gun" houses and flimsily constructed hotels, boom town beaneries, and company camps, but one of the more annoying and pervasive characteristics of the boom towns was mud. A deep sticky ooze filled the streets, impeded traffic, stuck to boots, and eventually was tracked into homes, hotels, businesses, restaurants, and all but the most inaccessible areas until it seemed as though the town was slowly being submerged in an opaque quagmire.

Street paving was uncommon in the small towns of Oklahoma at the turn of the century. Their dirt streets became a morass after rain and excessively dusty without it. Perhaps it was because of their outdoor work, but many boomers associated the oil towns and oil fields with mud. One even claimed that of the several booms he had seen, he could not recall one without a flood!⁵⁸

The floods may have been imagined, but the mud was certainly real. In the oil fields it resulted not only from rain, but from salt-water and oil run-off from the wells, and from the considerable use of fresh water required when drilling wells with rotary tools. There was also some suspicion that farmers near the oil fields intentionally flooded roads and created impassable mudholes to force

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, and "The Farm Boss #2," Box 43, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

traffic off the road and across their land. Of course, there was a fee for this "convenience" and a shot gun totin' farmer to collect it.

As automobiles replaced buggies and wagons, the condition of oil field roads became an even more serious obstacle because T-Model Fords and supply trucks could not negotiate the roads as well as horse drawn vehicles. The arrival of the automobile presented farmers owning horses with another opportunity for profit. When cars became stuck it frequently took horses to pull them out of the mud. It was not uncommon for a car to be pulled out of one mudhole and to the edge of another whereupon the farmer unhooked his team and patiently waited for the motorist to try his luck again.

The mud in the oil fields and boom towns accentuated the already deplorable living conditions that customarily prevailed. The long hours that men worked were preceded and followed by long periods on the muddy roads going to and from restaurants and lodging. Several men recalled working until they fell asleep on the job, and only then taking a few hours to rest. A machinist later explained the long hours by remarking that "when there's a boom on there isn't a man working that's worth as much to a drilling contractor or an oil company as the oil." Drilling was continued day



Fig. 4.--"When cars became stuck it frequently took horses to pull them out of the mud." Seminole, 1920's.

Photograph courtesy of the Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library.

and night and even when men were almost asleep on their feet, equipment had to be repaired.⁵⁹

When the men returned to their boom town lodging, they could not escape the hectic living conditions that characterized the boom towns. Illustrative of the existing conditions is a roughneck's colorful recollection of Seminole as:

the widest-open town I ever heard of even [with] fighting and shooting and people getting drunk all the time, and boilers whistling loud as the boilermen could make 'em pop off and the mud-hogs bellering till you couldn't hear yourself half the time. I used to stand out on the upstairs front porch to watch it, and I can still remember how it looked, especially at night. They'd pipe off the waste gas[es] and use 'em for flares for lights instead of electricity, and the flames from them and the boilers lit up the leases like it was day, and men running back and forth and trucks gunning it through the mud and dust with their cut-outs wide open, and every once in a while a well'd catch on fire or maybe a tank and then there would be some excitement.⁶⁰

The fire, explosions, rain, and mud made the already dangerous work in the oil fields even more hazardous. Accidents were frequent and occasionally fatal. Derricks and tanks had to be erected in fair weather or foul, and pipe, boilers, nitroglycerin, and other necessary materials had to be delivered to the oil fields even at the risk of men's lives. There will probably never be an accurate tally of the number of men maimed or killed while drilling for oil in Oklahoma, but if the remembered experiences of those who

⁵⁹"The Old Hand," Box 42, and "The Machinist," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

⁶⁰"The Roughneck," Box 43, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

survived the oil fields are accurate, the number must be great. Falling tools, collapsing derricks, gas explosions, and burning wells each took their toll and the same muddy roads that caused so many "soup-wagons" to bounce once too often or too hard stood between injured survivors and the nearest doctor.⁶¹

Boom town residents not directly involved in the drilling operations shared some of these dangers because the towns were often surrounded by the oil fields. Explosives were trucked the shortest distance to their destination, even if that meant going through a town. Fires were a constant danger from the oil and gas that escaped from wells and storage tanks. Those people who had lived in the oil producing district before the boom and remained after the discovery of oil unwillingly shared these disturbing living conditions with the boomers.

One woman who lived near the Oklahoma City oil field became ill soon after oil was discovered and she associated her illness with the gas and fumes from the nearby oil field. She owned some chickens and, during a cold snap, she built a fire to keep them warm. The chickens were killed by carbon monoxide but she blamed the oil well fumes and, feeling ill, feared she would soon follow her chickens. She sued the oil company and was examined for them by Dr. Lewis

⁶¹Ibid. Also see the Turlington Collection, Boxes 4-6.

Moorman. Dr. Moorman assured her that her infirmity was the result of old age, not oil and the suit was settled out of court.⁶²

Mr. Dillingham, a farmer living north of Oklahoma City, also found the arrival of the oil boom disturbing but for more concrete reasons. He homesteaded a quarter section in 1889 and through many years of hard work, built a prosperous farm. He found that while the discovery of oil added to his prosperity, the sudden oil wealth undermined the values and ambitions of his twelve children and drove them "oil-crazy." Mr. Dillingham bought three cars during the first two years of his oil prosperity and his sons unconcernedly wrecked them all. Where before the boom his children were content to work on the farm, with boom times they saw no reason to work and "got so they didn't even like their ma's cooking." The effect of oil wealth on his family led farmer Dillingham to regret that oil was ever discovered on his land.⁶³

While farmers and townsmen certainly felt the ill effects of a nearby oil boom, the families of the oil workers suffered most from boom conditions. These migrant families followed from one boom to another, never sure of where they would live but always certain that it would be flimsy and

⁶²Lewis J. Moorman, Pioneer Doctor (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951), pp. 131-32.

⁶³"I Wish They'd Never Found Oil," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

expensive--if they could find a place at all. Jobs were usually uncertain in the next boom, but the decline of prospecting in older fields led to unemployment and encouraged men to move in search of work.

The boom town environment was particularly hard on wives with small children. Sanitation in the boom towns was casual and disease posed a constant threat, especially to babies. When wells and streams became contaminated, water had to be carried from distant wells or purchased in the boom towns from water wagons. The danger from malaria was so great that even water thought to be pure was often boiled as a precaution. Rather than expose their families to these conditions, many men left them behind, but some families were present during every boom. As children grew to maturity in these migrant families, some attempted to follow in their father's footsteps by seeking work in the oil fields.

Oil workers were not always in favor of their sons seeking oil field employment. Many of the boomers, feeling trapped between their need for employment and their inability to find a job outside of the oil fields, wanted to save their children from the same trap. A cat-head demanded that if his son was determined to work in the oil field, at least he should learn a trade "like being a machinist" that offered hope for employment outside of the oil fields.⁶⁴

⁶⁴"Take It Away, Cat-Head!" Box 43, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

Other boomers shared this attitude. Not all young men wanted to follow their fathers into the oil fields and one boomer boasted proudly that he had sent both of his children to college. He also raised three other children whose fathers had been killed in the oil fields and they also obtained college educations.⁶⁵

The widespread reluctance of boomers to see their sons employed in the oil fields is revealing. Optimism initiated booms and attracted men to the oil fields, but that optimism was soon tempered by the explicit reality of crowded and inadequate hotels, unsavory restaurants, and the sudden influx of a migrant population. Unlike some frontiersmen, oil boomers could seldom watch the frontier pass them by because after the wells were drilled, only a few men were needed to maintain them. Farmers could settle on the frontier and improve their land as "the cutting edge of civilization" moved westward. They could expect, sooner or later, to displace frontier conditions with comfortable homes and profitable farms. But boomers, by the transient nature of their work, were compelled to remain in the vanguard--the cutting edge--of the oil boom and endure marginal living conditions.

⁶⁵"The Old Hand," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

CHAPTER III

ECONOMIC FACTORS AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS

During the oil boom period in Oklahoma, living standards were frequently depressed in the oil field towns. The optimism and lease money that initially stimulated the boom contributed to local inflation. Inadequate transportation intensified the inflation because food and merchandise had to compete with oil field equipment for space on available wagons, trucks, and freight cars. The demand for food, clothing, and shelter frequently exceeded the supply. Municipal services, if they were available, were strained to the breaking point as water, power, and sanitation needs soared. Crime and vice flourished when social restraints and community mores were submerged by the transient and heterogeneous population that followed the boom.

The high wages that attracted men to the oil fields often failed to offset high prices in the boom district. During the Burbank boom for example, one worker recalled that he earned twelve to eighteen dollars a day and worked every day, but shoes cost fifteen dollars a pair, boots thirty,

work pants ten, and a shirt five.¹ A "shooter" recalled that he roughnecked for six dollars a day in the oil fields, but he had to work twelve hour shifts. After six years, he had nothing to show for it but his clothes because "anytime you hit a town, no difference how big it is, and they find out you're working for an oil company the prices go up double at least." After he paid for his meals and lodging, bought a pair of shoes to replace the ones rotted by oil, and paid for a ride to the next job, he "didn't have coffee money left."² Another boomer remarked that there was a long waiting list for shirts, even at ten dollars each, so he ordered his work clothes and had them mailed to him.³

Boom town economic conditions led to speculation. People sensed an opportunity to become wealthy when an oil boom started and rising prices encouraged those with capital to invest in land or business. The search for oil was, by its nature, a gamble. The existence of oil and the depth at which it could be found was speculative until a new well was actually completed.

The most conspicuous form of oil boom speculation was in land and royalty. In 1906, G. W. Barnes, Jr., bought

¹ "Hot Oil," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

² "The Shooter," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection. "Shooters" work with explosives. Their job in the oil fields involves transporting nitroglycerin to the field and exploding it in the wells to increase the flow of oil.

³ "The Old Hand," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

some land near Kiefer and Glenn Pool for thirteen dollars per acre. By February 1907, Barnes' property was producing over three thousand barrels of oil a day according to W. E. Campbell who wrote to his father describing the "possibilities of an oil field when one hits it right."⁴ For years before the boom in Seminole, speculator O. D. Strother believed there was oil nearby and he invested every dollar he could spare in leases.⁵ He became wealthy overnight when oil was discovered near Seminole. Mrs. Lula Turlington, another Seminole resident, purchased some nearby property before the boom and sold it for five times the purchase price a few years later after oil had been discovered nearby. She also speculated during the boom, buying royalty east of Seminole for one thousand dollars and selling it later for ten thousand.⁶

The royalty market encouraged frenzied speculation because as new wells were drilled and became producers or

⁴Letter, W. E. Campbell to R. B. Campbell, Feb. 2, 1907, Minor Archives, Box C-1, Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library, Norman.

⁵Glasscock, Then Came Oil, p. 246.

⁶M. M. Turlington v. Lula Turlington, W. W. Pryor Collection, Box 16. When companies leased land, they entered a partnership with the landowner. The company would pay a fee for the right to produce oil, but the landowner usually retained ownership of one-eighth of any oil produced. This one-eighth interest was known as royalty. It could be subdivided and sold. Royalty speculation attracted many small investors as well as those with wealth.

dusters, the value of royalty fluctuated wildly. Brokers had to sell while people believed the leases were valuable. As one broker explained the situation, "if it's a producer the royalty booms out of sight, and if it's dry you couldn't sell it for a weak cup of coffee."⁷ When the Spencer Oil and Gas Company struck oil on the Alberti lease near Blackwell in September, 1915, leases nearby boomed to a thousand dollars an acre.⁸ Earlier the same year drilling at Wewoka was financed by local capital and a "feverish activity in leases in all the surrounding country" resulted from the discovery of oil. One lease was reportedly purchased for three hundred dollars, sold a few days later for three thousand dollars and sold again for four thousand six hundred dollars when oil was found on it.⁹

Fortunes were made and lost in royalty and leases. A tool dresser and a Negro lawyer combined to take a disputed claim on a lease to court and they won. They formed the Black Panther Oil Company, "getting the name from the Creek name the Indians had given the Negro [lawyer] when he married into the tribe." The Black Panther Oil Company lease paid more than sixteen thousand dollars for every one

⁷"The Royalty Broker," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

⁸"Oklahoma's Most Promising New Oil Field," Harlow's Weekly, IX (September 4, 1915), 208.

⁹"Latest Big Oil Strike in State's Mammoth Oil Industry," Harlow's Weekly, IX (August 14, 1915), 158.

hundred dollars invested in it.¹⁰ Another speculator recorded that he bought a lease in the Tonkawa field and sold it for a forty thousand dollar profit within five hours. He used the forty thousand dollars to drill three good producing wells which he sold for three hundred and fifteen thousand dollars. He went broke on his next venture, however, when he drilled thirteen consecutive "dusters."¹¹ No doubt there were many other oil men who lost money in the oil fields, but existing records tend to emphasize successes and minimize failures.

The growth of many small businesses in the boom towns represented another type of speculation. Much of the speculation in leases and royalty was based on buying and quickly selling for a profit, but small businesses represented a more permanent speculation and a stabilizing influence. If business could be attracted during the boom, a town's post boom prospects were enhanced. Those businesses first attracted to the boom towns included restaurants, hotels, clothiers, and oil field equipment houses. There was often a glass factory later too if gas was discovered because gas provided cheap power needed to manufacture glass and Oklahoma sand furnished the necessary raw material. Banks were also

¹⁰"The Royalty Broker," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

¹¹"I Take a Small Profit," Box 43, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.



Fig. 5.--"The growth of many small businesses in the boom towns represented another type of speculation." Three Sands in the 1920's.

Photograph courtesy of the Division of Manuscripts, University of Oklahoma Library.

attracted as were feed dealers and automobile service stations.

Townsmen were eager to attract new business to their area. In Cyril, Oklahoma, local businessmen raised the necessary capital to build a refinery. By 1929, however, the Cyril refinery was bankrupt because the owners knew nothing about operating it and the Pennsylvanian they hired to manage it was a thief.¹² But many fortunes were made by men who started with small businesses: W. E. Pine started his career as an Okmulgee mechanic; H. A. Champlin was a hardware merchant; and Champlin, Frank Phillips, Charles Colcord and many other oil men had banking interests across the state.¹³

Banks, traditionally conservative institutions, were slow to enter the boom towns because many bankers distrusted the boom even though the business opportunities were obvious. "The oil booms of the Southwest," according to Gerald Forbes,

caused the failure of hundreds of banks, because the petroleum industry required a type of financing with which the bankers were not familiar. Before the coming of the oil industry, most of the bank loans were agricultural. But with the discovery of a significant oil pool hundreds of farmers abandoned their crops for the

¹²"Refinery Worker," Box 43, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

¹³H. H. Champlin interview, "Indian Pioneer Papers," Vol. XVII, pp. 131-134; Speech by W. D. Grisso, October 27, 1964, Grisso Papers, Box 18; and Rister, Titan of the Southwest, p. 197.

good wages of the oil industry, subsequently invalidating their agricultural mortgages. The bankers turned to the financing of the oil industry, with the speculative risks of which they were not familiar, and the failure of a few such ventures was sufficient to bankrupt a small bank. Generally a bank would not enter business in a boom oil town unless the size of the pool indicated that the town would be relatively permanent. . . .¹⁴

Banking in the oil industry as in many enterprises proved to be of critical importance. The need for banks in the boom towns was apparent early, but the need was not always immediately fulfilled. Fannie Evans recalled that she made over twenty-six hundred dollars profit from her Drumright boarding house during the boom but she had to deposit it in a bank in Jennings, Oklahoma until one was founded in Drumright.¹⁵

In one north Oklahoma boom town that lacked a bank, the boomers resorted to leaving their money with the railroad depot agent, a man who was known to all because of his job. The agent had to protect freight shipped on the railroad and he always had a gun handy. He soon had several thousand dollars "on deposit" and unknown to his depositors, he used it to buy leases and drill a well. He struck oil, paid back the boomers who had "loaned" him the money and had a nice profit left.¹⁶

¹⁴Forbes, "Boom Towns," pp. 397-98.

¹⁵Fannie Evans interview, "Indian Pioneer Paper," Vol. XXVIII, p. 308.

¹⁶"The Tankie," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

Tulsa banks established an early reputation for importance and competence in the oil industry. This resulted from the active participation of oil men in the management of Tulsa banks and also from Tulsa's early reputation as a business center for the surrounding oil fields. W. E. Grisso recalls that there were no banks that specialized in the oil business and accepted the risks of oil financing until Tulsa oil men helped establish them. The Exchange National Bank of Tulsa was organized in 1909 by Sinclair, White, McFarlin, Chapman, Crosbie and other oil men.¹⁷ J. E. Crosbie, a Scot who combined the talents of driller, promoter, and banker also owned controlling interest in the Central National Bank of Tulsa and under his direction that bank's capital increased from one hundred thousand dollars to one million dollars in eighteen years.¹⁸

Banking in Oklahoma was greatly stimulated by the boom. Other changes including statehood and agricultural growth occurred during the first third of the twentieth century, but the oil boom alone attracted substantial sums of investment money to Oklahoma and many of the banks managed to use that money to grow. Banks therefore retained a major part of the oil wealth produced in the state and that capital was available for additional investments. The Tulsa

¹⁷Speech by Glenn Condon, November 17, 1955, Grisso Papers, Box 18.

¹⁸Glascoek, Then Came Oil, p. 142.

World noted in February, 1920, that the rate of growth of Oklahoma banks exceeded that of any other state. Bank growth in oil rich Texas had also been rapid.¹⁹ The impact of oil on banking was significant because oil attracted outside investments to Oklahoma and it also made many Oklahoma fortunes.

In addition to the growth of Oklahoma banks, oil development stimulated the growth of transportation and communications throughout much of the state. In the first rush, boomers made their way to a newly discovered field as best they could over country roads. However, as equipment for drilling was ordered and oil was produced, transportation became a bottleneck to the field's development. Transportation facilities or a lack of them greatly influenced the growth of boom towns. In many cases, transportation arteries determined which towns near a new oil field would boom and which towns would wither as the boom passed them by.

Bartlesville was a small community conveniently located near the Kansas and Oklahoma oil fields, but until the Santa Fe railroad was constructed into the area, there was little market for the otherwise untransportable oil. When the Santa Fe tracks were laid a half mile west of Bartlesville, the citizens moved the town to a new site on

¹⁹"Oklahoma Banks Had Big Growth," Tulsa Daily World, Feb. 1, 1920, p. B-10.

the railroad. With the opening of the rail link to oil markets, more wells were drilled, people came to work in the growing oil fields and to speculate on land, money became available for development, hotels were built, and stores were opened to supply the growing oil industry--all because oil and transportation were linked.²⁰

Kiefer, near Glenn Pool, was not even a stop on the Frisco Railroad before oil was discovered. In late November, 1906, the Gulf Pipe Line Company began unloading supplies at Kiefer for the Glenn Pool oil field and in ninety days the freight receipts of the town were fifteen thousand dollars a month and still growing. The Frisco put in an extra siding and the volume of freight continued to grow until for one month Kiefer was the busiest station on the Frisco line, including Chicago.²¹

Although Kiefer's freight facilities were expanded, they were still inadequate and much of the equipment was piled on the prairie. Thieves could and did haul it off in broad daylight and then try to resell it to the rightful owner.²² The same pattern of transportation growth was repeated at Cushing in 1913 when the MK&T Railroad daily ran

²⁰Glascock, Then Came Oil, pp. 118-19; and Rister, Titan of the Southwest, p. 23.

²¹Rister, Titan of the Southwest, p. 91. Seminole experienced a similar transportation growth during the 1927 boom, averaging over a million dollars per month in freight for that year. Seminole Producer, July 16, 1936.

²²"The Driller," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

a special train between Tulsa and Cushing for the convenience of the oil men and the movement of oil field equipment. But Cushing and other boom towns had the benefit of Kiefer's experience and consequently, transportation facilities were expanded more rapidly during the early days of those booms.²³

Oil men themselves took a positive role in the development of Oklahoma transportation as indicated by the role of oil man Tom Slick who was president of the Oklahoma Southwestern Railroad. In 1920, Slick's railroad built a new line from Bristow to Okmulgee through country which Slick claimed was the most promising oil land in the State.²⁴ Slick's judgment was confirmed when oil was discovered, and the new oil boom town that grew up beside the tracks was named Slick in his honor.

In at least one instance, a boom occurred near a railroad that was still under construction. The Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Pacific Railroad, later known as the Ringling Road, was developed by Jake Hamon and financed by the circus owner John Ringling to penetrate the cattle country of South Central Oklahoma. While the railroad was under construction in 1913, J. M. Critchlow, a retired

²³Harlow's Weekly, II (January 4, 1913), p. 4; and Isaac F. Marcossan, The Black Golconda: The Romance of Petroleum (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1924), p. 193.

²⁴Tulsa Daily World, Jan. 11, 1920, p. C-8; and Morris, ed., Oklahoma, p. 798.

minister, drilled the Healdton discovery well on the Wirt Franklin farm within ten miles of the proposed route.

Ringling, a new town at the railhead, soon became a wide open boom town from which over a thousand freight teams daily hauled equipment to the oil field.²⁵ Oil rather than cattle assured the economic success of the Ringling Road.

"Latter-day oil towns," according to Samuel W. Tait, Jr., "differ from their predecessors chiefly for two reasons: automobiles and improved roads."²⁶ Where railroads and pipelines were important in moving oil and equipment long distances, automobiles and trucks were necessary to oil workers in their search for jobs and to oil companies in the transfer of equipment from freight stations to the drilling site. But the improved roads for which Tait saw a pressing need were slow in coming. One wildcatter even claimed that of all the dangers in the oil business, the roads were the worst.²⁷

²⁵"Big Town Lot Sale in New Oil Town," Tulsa Daily World, Feb. 28, 1914, p. 3; and Jerry Sullivan, "The Ringling Railroad," Oklahoma Today, XVII (Summer, 1967), 38-39. An interesting description of the competition between rival towns near the Healdton oil field, each vying for a railroad depot that would greatly enhance their economic future, is provided by Gilbert L. Robinson, "Transportation in Carter County, 1913-1917," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XIX (December, 1941), 371-372.

²⁶Tait, Jr., Wildcatters, pp. 153-54.

²⁷"The Farm Boss #2," Box 43, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

The mud or dust that prevailed on the oil field roads changed with the weather, but the roads always remained busy during the boom. Traffic seemed to be formed into "endless caravans," and travel for only a few miles was slow. A reporter for the Tulsa Democrat said of the road from Kiefer to the Glenn Pool field in 1907, "two continuous lines of wagons and teams stretch out as far as the eye can reach, one string going, the other coming."²⁸ Similar road conditions prevailed in 1913 when it took nine hours, from eight o'clock in the morning until five in the afternoon, to travel the thirty miles between Ardmore and Healdton.²⁹

Improved roads and automobiles became more common in the oil fields during the second and third decade of the twentieth century. Some oil workers began thinking of a car as a necessity in their nomadic employment. If "a man's [sic] without a car in the oil fields he might as well quit trying for a job because he couldn't get there quick enough if he did hear of one," as one boomer expressed it.³⁰ Another added that a car was not only vital for finding a job, but important in keeping one, because without a car

²⁸Tulsa Daily Democrat, Jan. 3, 1907, as cited in David Craighead, "Glenn Pool, A Forest of Derricks," Oklahoma Today, XVI (Winter, 1965-66), 11.

²⁹"The Work's Safer Now-days," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection; and Marcossan, "Golconda," p. 190.

³⁰"Take It Away, Cat-Head!" Box 43, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

it was difficult for a man to get from his lodging to the rig.³¹ While the usefulness of a car was real, no doubt the boom town environment led many men to invest in one when ownership was in fact a luxury being disguised as a need. Boom wages of the moment encouraged men to mortgage the future for a car. To make the payments, they were often compelled to make the next boom. For some it became a vicious circle.

Oil in a boom field had only potential value until some method of volume transportation was available. Trucks were totally unsuited for this purpose and the railroad was never adequate or economical. Pipelines were needed to carry oil from the rig to the refinery and the Oklahoma oil boom coincided with and encouraged the growth of pipelines throughout the United States.³² Like the earlier generations who dug the Erie Canal and graded the roadbed for the Union Pacific Railroad, Irish laborers "contributed much to the color of the oil country . . ." as they dug pipeline trenches in Oklahoma and nearby states.³³

During the early days of the boom at Glenn Pool, wooden tanks and man made lakes were used to hold the oil

³¹"The Shooter," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

³²For example, rail transportation of all the oil produced in the Healdton field would have been "too expensive, too slow, and very nearly impossible." Six hundred and twenty tank cars would have been required daily! Robinson, "Transportation in Carter County, 1913-1917," p. 375.

³³Tait, Jr., Wildcatters, p. 151.

that was being produced while pipelines were being laid. Waste from seepage and evaporation in this type of storage was great. One lease in the Glenn Pool field even became more valuable for the oil caught on it in a ravine rather than for the oil produced by its wells.³⁴ W. E. Campbell wrote his father in 1907 that "a large force of men and teams . . ." were busy building dams to contain the oil for lack of a pipeline. Campbell recommended to his father that, except for offsets, drilling be curtailed until two eight-inch pipelines then under construction could be completed.³⁵

The Glenn Pool experience was repeated a few years later at Healdton when an overproduction of oil there and at Cushing exceeded the capability of existing pipeline facilities. The Magnolia Pipe Line Company owned the only connection to the Healdton field and refused to take all the oil produced. When the price of crude oil fell and the construction of new pipelines was not expected, the Ardmore Oil Producers Association discontinued drilling for three months.³⁶

³⁴Forbes, Flush Production, p. 28.

³⁵Letter, W. E. Campbell to R. B. Campbell, Feb. 2, 1907, Minor Archives, Box C-1.

³⁶Tulsa Daily World, Apr. 16, 1914, p. 6; One of the many fortunes made in the oil industry during these years was that of Harry Sinclair who purchased oil from wildcatters for ten cents a barrel before pipelines were connected to newly discovered fields. Sinclair and a partner, Patrick J. White, stored millions of gallons of ten cent oil until the pipelines were connected and then they sold it for \$1.20 a

In nearly every oil field community the boom stimulated economic growth and transportation sustained the boom. But the boom towns themselves were compelled to improve municipal services to add an aura of permanence to their increased economic activity and industrial importance. If water and sanitation services existed in the town prior to the boom, they were inadequate for the influx of people that came to exploit the oil field. Few towns had city electric generators, but electricity became more important to both the boom town and the oil field as new equipment was developed to drill for oil. Even postal facilities, if they existed, failed to meet the boomers' needs and there were frequently long lines of begrimed oil men and speculators standing in front of the general delivery window waiting to pick up their mail. Merchants were quick to point out that streets should be paved too if a town aspired to be a respectable city. Another difficulty facing a boom town was the need for dependable police and fire protection. The need for these municipal services no doubt existed in some towns before the boom, but the boom emphasized the need and the usefulness of these services to permanent residents transcended the boom.

In 1921, a U.S. Bureau of Mines report called attention to unsanitary conditions existing in the Oklahoma

barrel. Sinclair Oil Corporation, A Great Name in Oil: Sinclair Through Fifty Years (n. p.: Sinclair Oil Company, 1966), p. 15.

boom towns. Mr. C. P. Bowie called the boom fields in Oklahoma and Texas "deplorable" and he compared them unfavorably with the oil fields of the eastern United States. The contract system of drilling, common in Oklahoma before the industry was centralized, discouraged the growth of company camps. "In the contract system," argued Bowie, "the company bargains for the development of its holdings with a contractor who provides . . . the material and labor. . . ." Thus the company absolved itself of all responsibility for camp or boom town conditions.³⁷ Centralization and a search for greater efficiency during the 1920's compelled the companies to assume a larger responsibility for boom town conditions.

When left to the boomers, sanitation was primitive. Privies were built of any materials that were handy, and little thought was given to their location except for convenience. Most of the privies "gave off such odors that the populace refused to use them. The result was that the ground for acres about was defiled."³⁸ It is not surprising therefore that disease was widespread, particularly typhoid, because of polluted water.³⁹

³⁷U.S., Department of the Interior, Bureau of Mines Technical Paper 261, Oil-Camp Sanitation, by C. P. Bowie (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1921), p. 5.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 6-7.

³⁹"Hot Oil," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection; and Letter, James T. Jackson to W. D. Grisso, Nov. 26, 1963,

Many of the boom towns faced a daily shortage of pure water. A Seminole resident, W. E. Grisso, later recalled that during the boom the town water supply was completely inadequate to meet the needs of the "tens of thousands of workers who poured in. . . . I can personally testify," claims Grisso, "having been born there and living there at the time, that no person in the town had adequate water with which to flush a toilet after 7 A.M."⁴⁰ Tulsa never suffered to the same extent as many of the "rag towns" that blossomed near the oil fields, but her source of water, the Arkansas River, was contaminated by oil. Tulsa's city government recognized the threat and solved the problem by constructing a reservoir.⁴¹

Of less prosaic importance and more interest to the boomers was the need for a convenient post office. Fannie Evans recalls that Wheeler Camp, predecessor of Drumright, organized a committee to lay out a townsite and petition the Post Office Department for a post office. Lou Allard, publisher of the Drumright Derrick, remembers that when he was a boy in Drumright in 1915, "They'd just empty the mail pouch out onto a pool table and people would rummage through the

Grisso Papers, Box 18. Jackson recalls that after a newspaper scare about a smallpox epidemic, seventeen hundred people left Seminole within twenty-four hours.

⁴⁰Speech by W. D. Grisso, Oct. 27, 1964, Grisso Papers, Box 18.

⁴¹Harlow's Weekly, IX (August 14, 1915), 156.

pile to find their letters. It was almost a joke to try to get a letter to someone in the oil fields. No one knew where anyone was." The new town needed a name before the post office could be approved, and the committee adopted "Drumright" in honor of Aaron Drumright, one of their number.⁴² Even with a post office, however, mail was often difficult to pick up because of the volume that had to be handled by a few men.

The production of oil and gas constituted a serious fire hazard that was accentuated by the flimsy temporary nature of nearly all boom towns. Gas, generally considered less valuable than oil, was frequently vented through a pipe and burned because if simply released, it would occasionally settle in low places and explode with the first spark. There was also the danger that gas or oil from a new gusher would be ignited by boilers or the vented burning gas from controlled wells.⁴³ Boom towns like Three Sands and Wirt which were in the oil fields shared this danger. Ward Merrick, an Ardmore oilman, recalled that no one at Healdton thought of shutting off a well when there was no storage for the oil produced. Instead, oil that could not be stored was allowed to run down Whiskey Creek "where farmers set it afire to

⁴²Fannie Evans interview, "Indian Pioneer Papers," Vol. XXVIII, p. 314; and David Craighead, "The Cushing-Drumright Oil Rush," Oklahoma Today, XVI (Spring, 1966), 26.

⁴³"Kiefer Partially Levelled by Fire," Tulsa Daily World, Mar. 10, 1914, p. 1; and "The Driller," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

keep it from ruining their crops." Wirt, in the middle of the Healdton field, burned several times.⁴⁴

In 1913, Drumright had no water system or fire fighting equipment and the town suffered several fires. A large rooming house burned, killing one woman, and in the same year some frame buildings on Broadway caught fire and the entire business section was destroyed. With the embers still smoking, plans were made to meet the next emergency. A water tower was soon erected in the middle of Main Street. The tank was filled by an engine driven pump and a water line was laid the length of Broadway.⁴⁵ The water in the tank was available for general use and for fighting fires.

The need for fire protection was evident, especially after a fire, and boom town residents generally favored it. Police protection, however, was not as easily agreed upon. Crime and violence were common in boom towns, but unlike a fire, crime was a profitable enterprise for some who opposed or attempted to control law enforcement officers. Two major problems retarded law enforcement in the boom fields: a large population distributed over a considerable area was difficult for the customarily small police force to control; and, police effectiveness was largely a reflection of the

⁴⁴David Craighead, "The Wickedness of Wirt," Oklahoma Today, XVI (Autumn, 1966), 29; and Rister, Titan of the Southwest, p. 133.

⁴⁵Fannie Evans interview, "Indian Pioneer Papers," Vol. XXVIII, p. 318.

boom town inhabitants lack of a commitment to law and order.⁴⁶ Criminals and honest oil workers frequently moved from one job to another within an oil field and there was considerable movement between fields. They were therefore difficult to control or to apprehend. Many boomers broke the law with aplomb, especially the prohibition law, and this led to their toleration of other lawless acts. It is difficult to delineate this apathy toward law, but it is reasonably accurate to say that crimes against society (liquor traffic, use of dope, and prostitution) were overlooked or even encouraged by the boomers, while crimes of violence (murder, rape, and robbery) were opposed.

The first marshal in the boom town of Drumright was a man named Cook, but Mr. Cook was soon killed by a one-armed "hi-jacker" named "Hooky" Miller who was never tried for the crime.⁴⁷ Drumright was known as "the hi-jacking" town because of the number of robberies occurring there, and the marshal who succeeded Mr. Cook contributed to the reputation and was accused of being the worst outlaw in town. He "raped a telephone operator in her office," according to one

⁴⁶Moore, "Oil Industry in West Texas," p. 58. There were fifteen peace officers to control approximately 20,000 boomers at Wirt according to Gilbert L. Robinson, "History of the Healdton Oil Field" (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1937), p. 60. At Seminole there were only fourteen policemen and more than 150,000 people. "Seminole, This Is a Good Place to Live," Box 43, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

⁴⁷Fannie Evans interview, "Indian Pioneer Papers," Vol. XXVIII, pp. 315-16.

resident, "and the people got together and gave him three hours to get out of town. He got all the rest of his cops together and dared them to . . . run him out, but they didn't."⁴⁸ Jack Dillon, another Drumright resident, claims that he was playing poker one night and a "hi-jacker" interrupted the game to steal all the money on the table. He was caught later that night by his victims and they turned him over to the Justice of the Peace. The Justice of the Peace released the thief and fined Dillon and his friends twenty-five dollars each for gambling.⁴⁹

Drumright's corruption was not unique. "Hooky" Miller, the accused killer of Drumright's first marshal was himself the first marshal of Three Sands, Oklahoma. Miller's deputy was "Two-Gun" Johnny Middleton, "a killer and bad man" from Texas. Miller and Middleton owned several saloons and bawdy houses in Three Sands and they forced the owners of other establishments to pay for "protection." Miller was killed in Three Sands by an Indian in a fight over a cafe waitress.⁵⁰

Other towns faced the same corruption found in Drumright and Three Sands. Corruption was not completely

⁴⁸"I'm Just Gettin' Started," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

⁴⁹Jack Dillon interview, "Indian Pioneer Papers," Vol. XXIV, p. 406.

⁵⁰"I Take a Small Profit," Box 43, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

ignored, however, particularly when federal law was violated, as disclosed in the arrest of Ringling Police Chief Charles King by a government agent, George W. Mitchell, "on a charge of being a member of a whiskey 'ring' operating out of Wichita Falls, Texas."⁵¹ Corruption in Drumright was challenged when an aroused Creek county grand jury returned indictments against Sheriff Lew Wilder and several other crooked township officials.⁵²

While the Lew Wilders became notorious for their corruption, men like Charles B. Lake were trying to uphold the law. Lake was a sheriff at Kiefer, a town "so tough . . ." according to him, that he was the only one of five boom town peace officers to survive the experience.⁵³ Another boom town marshal, William Tilghman, was less fortunate than Lake. Tilghman was hired by the business men of Cromwell to "clean up" the town in spite of criminals and corrupt county officials who were trying to maintain lawless but profitable boom town conditions. When Tilghman attempted to break up the bootleg operations in Cromwell, he discovered that a federal prohibition officer, Willy Lynn, was in league with the lawbreakers. Under conditions that

⁵¹Robinson, "Healdton," p. 62; and "The Work's Safer Now-days," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

⁵²Harlow's Weekly, IX (September 15, 1915), 252.

⁵³Parker, "Life and Labor in the Mid-Continent Oil Fields," p. 46.

remain disputed even after Lynn's trial and acquittal, Lynn shot Tilghman to death in November, 1924.⁵⁴

In addition to corrupt officials, peace officers like Tilghman and Lake were often hindered by the lack of a jail. Even in some towns that had existed before the boom, jails did not exist and, as in towns born of the boom, they had to be improvised. In Three Sands, crooks unfortunate enough to be captured by "Hooky" Miller and unable to pay their fine were chained to a fence or telephone pole near the county line that bisected the town.⁵⁵ There was no jail in Three Sands and even the Kay County jail was not large enough to accommodate the four or five dozen prisoners that might result from a raid, so a wire stockade was constructed at the county seat, Newkirk, to meet the emergency.⁵⁶

In Seminole the nearest jail was at Wewoka, eighteen miles away. Jake Simms, a resourceful and reputable police chief solved this dilemma by moving an empty boxcar to the east side of town near the notorious Bishops Alley and using the boxcar for a jail. Simms claims to have had as many as

⁵⁴Zoe A. Tilghman, Marshal of the Last Frontier (Glendale, Calif.: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1964), pp. 349-74; and Jimmie L. Franklin, "Prohibition in Oklahoma, 1907-1959" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1968), p. 133.

⁵⁵"I Take a Small Profit," Box 43, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

⁵⁶Ibid.; and James Leslie Gilbert, "Three Sands: Oklahoma Oil Field and Community of the 1920's" (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1967), pp. 93-94.

sixty prisoners in this "jail" that would comfortably accommodate only about twenty people. To prevent fights between the prisoners, Simms had holes bored in the sides of the boxcar and leg irons fitted to each occupant. The other end of the leg iron was stuck through the side of the boxcar and attached to a long iron bar. Nevertheless, fights occurred and at least two people were killed in the boxcar. As in most boom towns, there were women who ran afoul of the law in Seminole but Simms only had one boxcar, so he put the men on one side and the women on the other. Federal authorities who later saw the Seminole boxcar said it was the worst jail in the country,⁵⁷ but it was certainly strong enough to contain the inmates.

Simms soon discovered that it was "too expensive" to buy meals from the boom restaurants in Seminole for his prisoners. The police chief therefore had a cook tent erected in back of the jail "at a cost of \$60 and within two weeks the city had saved enough on prisoners meals to pay for the investment. The actual saving to the city was 20 cents a day on each prisoner, which amounted to a considerable amount by the end of the week due to the large number of prisoners." The cook tent saved the city money and provided better meals for the prisoners too.⁵⁸

⁵⁷"Seminole, This Is a Good Place to Live," Box 43, Oil in Oklahoma Collection; and Seminole Producer, July 16, 1936, p. 2.

⁵⁸Seminole Producer, July 16, 1936, p. 2.

Bowlegs, another of the Greater Seminole oil field boom towns, could have profited by Simms example in the selection of a jail. Instead, the "Bowlegs bastile" was a hastily constructed wooden structure that could not withstand the efforts of the customary thirty or forty inmates to break out, and the jail was regularly torn down. All but those too drunk to stagger away escaped, and the revenue from fines was consequently low, thus making it difficult to raise enough money to build a substantial jail.⁵⁹ While the Seminole jail was disreputable, it was no doubt a more positive deterrent to crime than the "Bowlegs bastile."

Crime and lawlessness found a ready breeding ground in the oil boom towns. Money circulated freely in a socially uprooted and morally apathetic environment, encouraging vice and attracting criminals as well as honest boomers. Almost without exception, each of the boom towns earned the sobriquet of "the toughest town in the west" for a few weeks or months until displaced in the headlines by a new challenger.⁶⁰ There was a correlation between claims to notoriety and the areas of most intense and competitive oil development. Seminole was the focus of the only oil boom in the state in 1927 and the Greater Seminole field produced much of the world's petroleum for that year. The Greater

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Daily Oklahoman, April 23, 1939, Oil Industry section, p. 3; Seminole Producer, July 16, 1936, p. 1; and "Work's Safer Now-days," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

Seminole field boom towns, especially Seminole, felt the competition for this prolific wealth in the intensity of lawlessness and boom conditions that developed.

Cromwell, Ragtown which later became Healdton, Ringling, Drumright, Cushing, Three Sands, and many other oil field towns were accused at one time or another of being the "most lawless" town in the state. But Kiefer might well qualify as the most lawless town the boom produced, for in addition to the conditions arising there in 1907 from the first major oil discovery, it boomed during the transition period between territorial status and statehood. One boomer claimed that there were three days between the removal of territorial officials and the arrival of state officials when there was literally no law. "The people raised so much hell in those three days," he recalled, "and liked hell-raising so much that it lasted quite a while. Right up till now [1939-1940], I'd say."⁶¹

There was a little creek that flowed through Kiefer and by the "Mad House," the biggest saloon in town. The creek soon filled with oil due to inadequate storage or transportation, and its murkey depths became the shroud for many boomers who met a violent death in Kiefer. No less than twelve bodies were recovered from the creek in a two year period, and seven skeletons were found in the bottom of an oil tank behind the "Mad House" when the oil it contained

⁶¹"The Driller," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

was sold.⁶² Life was apparently cheap in the oil fields, for bodies were frequently found in other boom field oil tanks.⁶³

Murders were sometimes concealed, however, as in the case of oil man Charles W. Saddler. He was found dead in his Duncan, Oklahoma hotel room and the Duncan police reported that he committed suicide, even though his throat had been cut.⁶⁴ Robbery, or "hi-jacking" as it was called by the boomers, was common as were fights. The boom towns in fact represented a retreat to truly primitive social conditions where individual force was substituted for the laws of society and human life was of little value.

Saloons were one of the most prominent examples of boom town lawlessness and they were the wellspring of much of the vice, for the saloon keeper was often involved in gambling and prostitution. Tex, the manager of the "Mad House" in Kiefer, also had gambling and sporting houses, and "Hooky" Miller's control of vice in Three Sands was exercised from his saloon.

⁶²Ibid.: Jack Dillon interview, "Indian Pioneer Papers," Vol. XXIV, p. 405; and Marcossou, "Golconda," p. 11.

⁶³John P. (Slim) Jones, Ten Years in the Oil Fields (El Dorado, Ark.: Berry's Print Shop, n. d.), p. 1; "The Work's Safer Now-days," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection; and Rister, Titan of the Southwest, p. 121.

⁶⁴"Oil Man Is Believed to Have Killed Self," Tulsa Daily World, Feb. 6, 1920, p. 1.

Prohibition failed to impede the consumption of liquor in the boom towns; it only increased the price and fostered an attitude of contempt for law.⁶⁵ Oil men, once possessed of this contempt, did not confine their drinking to the boom towns, and liquor was readily available in Tulsa and elsewhere.⁶⁶ When Mrs. Ethel Renner informed a Shawnee Methodist Church Bible Class of conditions in nearby Earlesboro, a movement began which resulted in investigation by a federal grand jury. The good citizens of Shawnee were amazed to learn from the grand jury that over eight thousand gallons of liquor had recently been distributed to the oil fields from their own town.⁶⁷

Saloons existed to sell liquor, but offered the boomer an opportunity for entertainment and conversation along with his "choc" beer or bootleg booze. Entertainers ranged from Drumright's "vaudeville darling," Ruby Darby to the Seminole "peroxide blonde cuties [who] decided to do a Sally Rand without even a fan" and were promptly hustled off to Jake Simms boxcar jail.⁶⁸ Gambling was another form of "entertainment" found in most of the saloons--in Kiefer an

⁶⁵Jack Dillon interview, "Indian Pioneer Papers," Vol. XXIV, p. 405; "The Driller," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection; and Seminole Producer, July 16, 1936, p. 5.

⁶⁶Franklin, "Prohibition," p. 129.

⁶⁷Fortson, A History of Pottawatomie County, p. 28.

⁶⁸Seminole Producer, July 16, 1936, p. 2; and Craighead, "The Cushing-Drumright Oil Rush," p. 26.

eyewitness reports that the gambling profits had to be collected in six or eight bushel baskets.⁶⁹ Less lucrative games were more common, however, such as twice weekly poker games at Tonkawa that only involved some thirty thousand dollars.⁷⁰

If a man wanted female companionship rather than liquor or gambling, he often found it in a dance hall. For twenty-five cents he purchased the privilege of a one minute dance. He could easily waste half of the minute buying the ticket and picking a partner. But there were many dance halls and they were usually crowded all hours of the day and night since the men worked shifts both day and night. The women earned ten cents for each dance and the management kept the other fifteen cents. It was not uncommon for the dance hall owners in Seminole to clear five thousand dollars a week!⁷¹

Prostitution was also common in the oil field boom towns. Since the oil business attracted many single men and the families of married men were not always brought to the boom, "professional" women found a considerable demand for their services. Nor was this only characteristic of Oklahoma or the mid-continent oil fields: the early Pennsylvania

⁶⁹"The Old Hand," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

⁷⁰"I Take a Small Profit," Box 43, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

⁷¹Forbes, "Boom Towns," pp. 396-97.

oil fields had attracted such enterprises as "the floating establishment of the notorious Ben Hogan on an Allegheny River flat boat, which dodged from county to county in accordance with the moral views and corruptibility of sheriffs."⁷²

"Corruptibility of sheriffs" was also an important consideration in Oklahoma, as the prostitutes learned in Three Sands. When the crooked sheriff of Three Sands, "Hooky" Miller, murdered a World War One Veteran, United States Marshals closed all illegal businesses and ran three hundred prostitutes out of town on a special train, scattering them through Kansas, Arkansas, and Texas.⁷³ But many found their way back to Oklahoma for the Seminole boom in 1927.

One of the women who came to Seminole was Annie, "a beautiful Madam with two gold teeth, a battered puss, and the form of a lopsided watermelon." Annie arrived in Seminole "with the first load o' pipe and went out with the Laws" but before leaving, she and her business associates contributed much to Seminole's notoriety.⁷⁴ The Daily Oklahoman reported in 1928 that "the oil that flows from Seminole County's wells is not one half so black as the

⁷²Tait, Jr., Wildcatters, p. 157.

⁷³"A Tale of the Booms," Box 43, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

⁷⁴Ibid.

smudge of vice and corruption it has left in its wake.⁷⁵ James T. Jackson, former editor of the Seminole Producer points out that prostitution was such an accepted facet of the boom that women of easy virtue who were unable to pay vagrancy fines were sometimes released to earn the necessary twenty dollars.⁷⁶ Prostitution was a tolerated if not approved part of Seminole's social existence. One resident later noted that, "having been born there and living there, I think I can testify that one of our ministers owned a whore house. I don't mean to say he ran it, but he rented it and knew the business of his tenants."⁷⁷

Although prostitution became more or less accepted in the boom towns, there was a general reaction against much of the violent crime associated with the boom. A national resurgence of the Klu Klux Klan was also felt in the boom towns, posing as a positive force against crime. In Healdton, leading ministers openly endorsed the Klan. The Klansmen were bold enough to publish a full page advertisement in the Ardmoreit admonishing law violators to mend their ways.⁷⁸

⁷⁵Daily Oklahoman, Oct. 4, 1928, p. 1.

⁷⁶David Craighead, "Seminole: The Oilrush That Produced More Wealth Than All the Gold Rushes in the American West Combined," Oklahoma Today, XVII (Spring, 1967), 13.

⁷⁷Memo, January 5, 1965, Grisso Papers, Box 18.

⁷⁸Robinson, "Healdton," p. 70.

In the same year, the invisible empire's presence in Drumright was disclosed when a lone horseman rode into town dressed as a Klansman and left an ultimatum at the local newspaper office warning wrongdoers that their evil would not go unpunished.⁷⁹ As early as 1915, the Drumright law and order league had organized to present evidence concerning liquor violations to a grand jury and this contributed to the indictment against Sheriff Lew Wilder.⁸⁰ The Anti-Horse Thief Association, another citizen's group that opposed crime, pointed to unstable home life and the automobile as twin causes for a national increase in crime.⁸¹ Both factors were prominent in the boom towns.

In the oil fields, as on earlier frontiers, citizens' attempts to enforce the law by subverting it proved both contradictory and transitory. Activities of the Klu Klux Klan were often as illegal as the criminals they claimed to oppose. Additionally, citizens groups only reacted in extreme cases. Therefore, while extrajudicial measures occasionally worked for the temporary betterment of the community, they did not establish law and order.

The transition from a lawless society to one where the rule of law prevailed was sometimes slow and often

⁷⁹Tulsa Daily World, Sept. 15, 1921, p. 1.

⁸⁰Harlow's Weekly, IX (August 21, 1915), 175.

⁸¹Anti-Horse Thief League, "Proceedings, West Oklahoma Division, 1926," p. 6.

imperceptible to the residents of the boom towns. Law can seldom if ever be imposed--instead it must be voluntarily accepted and supported by society. In the early stages of an oil boom town's development, society--the boomers in this case--were either apathetic or openly opposed to law because the hope and optimism that attracted them to the boom did not seem to require law for fulfillment. Speculators and lease men were looking for a profit even if the law had to be "bent." Oil workers wanted a job and the excitement of the boom conditions while criminals were attracted by the money in circulation and the absence of law.

The conditions which dissuaded many boomers from bringing their families to the oil towns began to gradually change as the boom gave way to stabilized production and as families arrived in the oil fields. Men who winked at licentiousness before the arrival of their wife and children became less tolerant of boom conditions. Their numbers grew as the boom subsided. According to Jack Dillon, a resident of Drumright, "with the coming of statehood came law and order. Churches and schools appeared and the 'boomers' disappeared. Order was gradually restored and the rough element went their way or reformed."⁸² In addition to the arrival of churches and schools, one more institution, a community

⁸²Jack Dillon interview, "Indian Pioneer Papers," Vol. XXIV, p. 408; and Robinson, "Healdton," p. 58.

newspaper, should be mentioned. Together these three helped transform the society of the boom towns.

When E. L. Malone arrived in Indian Territory in December, 1904, he wrote his wife that he might have to work on Christmas day because "the people do not know what a church is down in here. . . ." ⁸³ But churches there were and after boom towns sprang up, nearby congregations assisted in the organization of new churches. Initially, services might be held in saloons or stores until a building was acquired. In older communities that were suddenly part of the boom, new churches were often built. In Seminole, a preacher known as "Scottie the Baptist" began discussing the possibilities of a new Baptist Church soon after his arrival in 1926. His temporary church was a downtown building, but he soon raised the amazing sum of seventy-five thousand dollars for a new building which was erected in 1927. ⁸⁴

The Methodist preacher in Drumright, known as "Sky Pilot," initially had less success than did "Scottie the Baptist" in Seminole. "Sky Pilot" started an active campaign against gamblers and bootleggers in Drumright and they threatened to run him out of town with a horsewhip. But with a six shooter on his hip, "Sky Pilot" defied the .

⁸³E. L. Malone to Jennie Malone, Dec. 23, 1904, Minor Archives, Box M-38.

⁸⁴Seminole Producer, July 16, 1936, p. 2; Tait, Jr., Wildcatters, p. 158; and Forbes, "Boom Towns," p. 398.

criminals and, supported by growing public sentiment, he soon forced many lawless activities out of town.⁸⁵

In the Healdton field, religion preceded crime since the discoverer of the field was a retired preacher, J. M. Critchlow. Through many years as an oil man, Critchlow always closed down his rig on Sunday. When the Healdton field was proven by his well and the boom was underway, Critchlow sponsored a church in the new town of Wirt and brought Reverend Albert Bean to the town as the first pastor.⁸⁶

In addition to ordained ministers, there were often lay preachers in the oil field who worked during the week and preached on Sunday. William A. Owens' fictional character "Preacher" was such a man but real counterparts existed and called themselves home-evangelists. "Preachers naturally goes [sic] with an old field . . ." reported one of these lay ministers, "because the people have been sinning so long and so much and they are so wore-out they're cryin' to be saved."⁸⁷

When churches existed in an area that became an oil field, oil men were sometimes tempted to pursue their

⁸⁵Fannie Evans interview, "Indian Pioneer Papers," Vol. XXVIII, pp. 311, 316-17.

⁸⁶Craighead, "The Wickedness of Wirt," p. 29.

⁸⁷"Oil Mixes Right Handy with the Lord," Box 43, Oil in Oklahoma Collection; and Owens, Fever in the Earth, p. 18.

search for the black gold onto church property. Even cemeteries were not safe. As early as 1910, E. W. Marland had drilled in an ancient Ponca Indian Cemetery on the 101 Ranch and discovered oil.⁸⁸ Some superstitious oil men began to suspect oil under every cemetery. Geologically, there was some justification for this, since oil was often found under "domes," and cemeteries, for better drainage, were frequently situated on hills.

In Tonkawa, a lease was acquired on two acres of church property and preparations began for drilling in the cemetery, but members of the church drove the oil workers away from the lease and posted armed guards to assure they would not return.⁸⁹ The churches were not unaware of the practical possibilities however, and wells were sometimes drilled in church yards, if not in cemeteries. Churches also profited from increased contributions and even commercial activities. In Pawhuska during the Osage lease sales, churches served meals to the lease men. Both Methodists and Presbyterians served chicken at noon, but the Methodists charged \$1.50, fifty cents more than the Presbyterians.⁹⁰

⁸⁸John J. Mathews, Life and Death of an Oilman, The Career of E. W. Marland (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951), pp. 80-84.

⁸⁹Marcosson, The Black Golconda, p. 208.

⁹⁰Gilbert, "Three Sands," p. 101; and Rister, Titan of the Southwest, p. 202.

In addition to the appearance and growth of churches, another sign of increased social responsibility and a declining boom was the appearance of schools. As boomers' families arrived, schools were opened in private homes or existing schools were expanded, though the latter solution often failed to keep up with the demand. Counties and towns were well aware of the transitory nature of the oil booms and resisted building schools that might be needed immediately and vacant in a few years. The school facilities at Three Sands, for example, consisted of a one room school enrolling twenty-eight children and presided over by one teacher before the boom. Then in a few months the enrollment increased to one hundred and six pupils.⁹¹ Crowded conditions were relieved some by a three percent production tax levied on petroleum and also by donations from the oil companies, but many boomers were still reluctant to bring their families to the oil fields. Some used this pretext to sustain an irresponsible existence, but in many instances schools were indeed inadequate.⁹² Teachers as well as schools were unprepared for the boom. Lalia Phipps Boone, a third grade teacher, found the language of oil workers' children so

⁹¹Gilbert, "Three Sands," p. 109.

⁹²Harlow's Weekly, IX (September 11, 1915), 230; "Hot Oil," Box 42, and "Production Foreman," Box 43, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

astonishing and unusual that she studied it and wrote The Petroleum Dictionary to preserve it.⁹³

A third element that stimulated community identity and responsibility in the boom towns was a local newspaper. Information about the progress of various wells and oil development across the state was important to oil men. Newspapers therefore found a ready market in the boom community. But newspapers, ideally by publishing advertisements and local news, told boomers about themselves as well as oil, and the newspapers consequently served as a focus, stimulus, and record of social progress.

Some editors found the challenge of the boom unwelcome. The editor of the Jennings News, R. L. Stewart, noted in 1920 that another oil boom was beginning in Jennings and although the town needed a newspaper and could support one, the News was going out of business. While Stewart did not admit that it was the oil boom which led him to this decision, the proximity of the boom to his departure and his recognition of its imminence indicate that the boom was at least an influential if not decisive force.⁹⁴ But newspapermen were also attracted to the boom towns.

In 1927 a new daily, the Producer, was established in Seminole. In the first issue the editor justified the

⁹³Lalia Phipps Boone, Petroleum Dictionary (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1952), p. vii.

⁹⁴Tulsa Daily World, Jan. 4, 1920, p. 3; and Jennings News, Dec. 18, 1919.

arrival of the Producer by declaring that "it is thought that the people of so large a community will appreciate and patronize a daily digest of their doings and if that belief is correct the publishers will have achieved their ambitions for they, too, are in search of the flowing gold."⁹⁵

Before the boom, an earlier Seminole paper, the News, had focused attention on the expected "wonderful development in the oil business . . . ," but in 1927 the Producer reflected a shift of interest from oil development to oil people and "their doings."⁹⁶ The distinction is subtle but significant. Both the News and the Producer were looking to Seminole's future; the News to its economic success and the Producer to its growing social awareness. The News forecast and encouraged the boom that the Producer attempted to describe.

Newspapers, in effect, circumscribe the boom period and contribute greatly to bringing this telescoped and compressed social experience full circle. Newspapermen were often instrumental in launching a boom because they encouraged people to be optimistic--to believe what they wanted to believe--that oil was discovered and that fortunes were waiting to be made. Once the boom was underway and the period of flush production was past, the newspapers tended

⁹⁵Seminole Producer, Mar. 1, 1927.

⁹⁶Seminole News, Jan. 10, 1924.

more toward a crusading role that, with religion and education, evoked increased social awareness and stability.

CHAPTER IV

THE OIL BOOM FRONTIER

Oil, for all its blackness, bulk, and stench, was the gold of Oklahoma. It was the catalyst that broke the bond of custom and transformed the land. Like the California Argonauts a half century earlier, the Oklahoma oil boomers shucked off their accustomed mores and polity in their search for mineral wealth and returned to man's fundamental struggle to conquer nature. From this primitive condition, a new social order evolved and the pattern of that evolution in the gold camps and oil fields was remarkably similar.

The American West witnessed the passage of many frontiers. To Frederick Jackson Turner, each of these precipitated a "perennial rebirth" of a "form of society" characterized by "a return to primitive conditions."¹ The frontier was "evolutionary" according to Ray Allen Billington, and best viewed,

¹Turner, "Significance of the Frontier," p. 200; Turner Sections in American History, p. 183.

as a vast westward-moving zone, contiguous to the settled portions of the continent, and peopled by a variety of individuals bent on applying individual skills to the exploitation of unusually abundant natural resources. As the westward movement gained momentum, a number of frontier 'types' emerged, each playing a distinctive role in the advance of civilization. Although varying with time and place, each is identifiable on the successive frontiers until the conquest of the continent was completed.²

The frontiers of the miner, the cattleman, and the rail-roader are three of several that share the basic patterns of social development and resource exploitation described by Turner and Billington. Similarly, the search for oil in Oklahoma called forth a "form of society"--a frontier society--that dominated the oil fields for nearly a quarter of a century.

Several "booms" concentrated population and economic investment in various geographic areas of the west. The California gold rush is perhaps the best known in western history because of the considerable attention it has received from both scholars and popular writers.

California was little more than an isolated Mexican outpost when gold was discovered at Sutter's mill in January, 1848. San Francisco's population numbered only 812, and Sacramento could scarcely claim to exist. Ranching was the primary occupation of the Californians and the non-Indian population, some fifteen thousand in 1848, was spread

²Ray Allen Billington, Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier (3rd ed.; New York: Macmillan Company, 1967), p. 3.

thinly over the land near the coast.³ The war which erupted in 1846 between the United States and Mexico transferred California to the Americans, and the discovery of gold in January, 1848, submerged the pastoral existence of the California Dons in the social ferment of the gold rush.

Towns and ranches in California were largely deserted during the summer of 1848. The bulk of the population, captivated by the prospects of sudden wealth, camped on the banks of Sierra streams to search for gold. In 1849, thousands of hopeful prospectors arrived from the Eastern United States and other parts of the world. Ships arriving in San Francisco were often stranded when their crews, seized by gold fever, deserted to join the passengers in the search for wealth.⁴

Since mining was a physically demanding enterprise but one that required relatively little capital, many ambitious young men were attracted to the gold camps. The society that evolved was youthful, masculine, boisterous, and optimistic. It was a society in which the individual miner could hope for sudden wealth, though with the arrival

³Walton Bean, California: An Interpretive History (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1968), p. 197; and John Walton Caughey, California (2nd ed.; New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1953), p. 254. Walton Bean's California is a particularly valuable study of that state's history because he takes a fresh look at longstanding interpretations of the gold rush.

⁴Ralph J. Roske, Everyman's Eden: A History of California (New York: Macmillan Company, 1968), pp. 240-241.

of each new schooner in San Francisco, the chances were reduced by the increasing number of miners.

The oil fields of Oklahoma also attracted many young men in search of wealth, but unlike the quest for gold, oil prospecting was an expensive enterprise that required considerable capital. In Oklahoma, it was not the oil, but oil wages that lured men to work on the derricks.⁵ During the gold rush, a prospector could hope to make a fortune with a pick, a pan, and luck. In the Oklahoma oil fields opportunities were more limited, but opportunities did exist. Men who could not afford to buy an oil rig might invest in oil royalty or a small business. The same sense of optimism was evident on both frontiers. The natural resources of the land and the corresponding opportunity for exploitation seemed unlimited.

Rapid population increase during the gold rush and the oil boom caused a serious shortage of facilities providing food and lodging. New arrivals on both frontiers found cafe food expensive and often unsatisfactory. The possibility of finding gold in the next pan of gravel proved a strong temptation to the miners to neglect cooking and chores not directly related to the search for gold. Therefore they often turned to the tent cafes and boom camp hotels for their meals, or they tried to cook enough for themselves at

⁵See supra, p. 16.

one time to last several days.⁶ Meals in the cafes were expensive but with gold waiting in the streams to be collected, time was more precious than money.

The miners customarily erected a tent or shack near the gold deposits and one man's success attracted others. Camps of several hundred miners were common. Panning for gold was back-breaking business. The discomfort of standing in an icy stream by day was exchanged at night for an almost equally uncomfortable tent or shack that seldom provided adequate protection from the elements.⁷ Temporary "hotels" were sometimes erected in the mining camps, but these offered few comforts. The Angels Hotel in Angels Camp was, for example, just an enormous tent.⁸

In the larger towns like San Francisco, many hotels were constructed with wooden frames and canvas or paper walls.⁹ Construction nearly always lagged behind the demand for rooms, and in both towns and camps, men often paid for space to sleep on the floor. Richard Van Orman

⁶Caughey, California, p. 252.

⁷Ibid., p. 253.

⁸Robert O'Brien, California Called Them: A Saga of Golden Days and Roaring Camps (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1951), p. 37.

⁹Sarah Royce, A Frontier Lady: Recollections of the Gold Rush and Early California, ed. by Ralph Henry Gabriel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932), p. 110; and Richard A. Van Orman, A Room for the Night: Hotels of the Old West (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966), p. 31.

captures the spirit of the gold rush hotels when he argues that,

no houses typified the male influence or the boom-and-bust extremes of Western life as much as mining camp hotels. The flimsy structures, the product of fast, often sloppy construction programs, reflected the temporary nature of mining camp booms. One-story and filthy, they contained plenty of bar accommodations but only one or two large bedrooms filled with tiers of wooden bunks, pillows made of hay, never-washed blankets, spotted and broken mirrors, brown soap in sardine cans, and water barrels crawling with 'wiggle tails'--all for one dollar a night.¹⁰

Unlike gold miners, oil boomers seldom erected their own lodging. Instead, they relied on rooming houses, company camps, and boom hotels for accommodations. This resulted partially from the different nature of the two booms. In the gold camps, lumber or timber was usually available to build sluices and shacks. In the oil fields, lumber had to compete with oil field equipment for transportation to the boom towns, and the lumber that arrived was frequently pre-empted by the oil companies.¹¹

The Oklahoma oil boomers were also more dependent on cafes than the Argonauts. Since the oilmen worked twelve hour shifts that left little time for cooking and the hours were regulated rather than optional as in the mining camps. The rooming houses sometimes provided "board" as well as lodging, but many boomers patronized cafes.

¹⁰Van Orman, A Room for the Night, p. 35.

¹¹"The Machinist," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

The disagreeable meals that E. L. Malone endured in Ramona, Oklahoma,¹² were common on other frontiers. On the railroad frontier for example, the Union Pacific's Gandy Dancers were paid "three dollars a day and all they could eat."¹³ The railroad cooks sometimes sacrificed even perfunctory sanitation standards. Jim Kyner recalls that while visiting an end of tracks camp in Idaho in the 1880's, he noticed that the cook had nailed plates to the cook-tent tables. Food was then passed around in large containers, but the plates were never removed from the table. When asked the reason for this arrangement, the cook answered that by nailing the plates down, the men were forced to sit closer together and more people could be served in the tent at one time. After each meal, the cook swabbed the plates with a wet rag tied to a stick and thus saved himself the trouble of washing them.¹⁴ Similar unsanitary conditions existed at Three Sands when mud was so deep that restaurant waitresses were compelled to wear boots.¹⁵ Frontier conditions prevailed in both instances.

In discussing the California gold rush, John Caughey has remarked that "apart from the few who struck it

¹²See supra, p. 26.

¹³John Carson, The Union Pacific: Hell on Wheels! (Santa Fe: The Press of the Territorian, 1968), p. 9.

¹⁴James A. Kyner, End of Track (n. p.: University of Nebraska Press, 1960), pp. 150-51.

¹⁵See supra, p. 34.

tremendously rich, it seems obvious that the wisest forty-niners were those who turned to saloon keeping or merchandising or hauling or farming or dishwashing where the compensation was not only surer but higher."¹⁶ Compensation in the oil fields was surer than in the gold rush because most of the oil men worked for wages. Nevertheless, it seems probable that there was more profit in serving the needs of the oil boomers than in working on the oil rigs. Sadie Purley provides one example of the profits to be made. By the time she left Texas for the Oklahoma booms, she had saved over thirteen thousand dollars.¹⁷ Few oil field laborers accumulated that much money. Mrs. J. H. Killingsworth, an oil boom merchant, recalls that the dry goods business was brisk in Seminole. Boots were in such demand, that on one occasion when a truck loaded with them became stuck, Mrs. Killingsworth's clerks went to the scene and sold every pair of boots before the truck could be pulled from the mud.¹⁸

In Kansas it was the cowboy trade rather than the cattle trade that was the "life's blood of the cattle town economic organism." The towns were a market place for

¹⁶Caughey, California, p. 253.

¹⁷"The Oil Field Cook," Box 43, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

¹⁸Craighead, "Seminole," p. 12.

everything "from cabbages to dance hall Queens."¹⁹ Most of the big money involved in the cattle trade never circulated in the cattle towns, but the wages earned by the drovers did circulate, and the success of many small businessmen depended on cowboy commerce.

Transportation and open range were the essence of the Kansas cattle trade, and the westward migration of that trade resulted from the search for a satisfactory transportation environment. To be profitable, Texas cattle had to reach the railroads on the open range. The railroad was the vital link between the frontier environment of the cattle towns and eastern markets. But as the Kansas cattle trade developed in successive towns, the transportation facilities, land, and markets also attracted settlers. When the land around the cattle towns became settled by farmers, the cattle trade was forced westward in search of open range.

Transportation growth was characteristic of frontier development in the west. California was an isolated outpost when Sutter discovered gold on the American River, but the ensuing rush of people rapidly transformed the transportation patterns across North America and throughout California. California was tied to the East first by trails, then by the pony express, telegraph, and railroad--largely due to the gold rush.

¹⁹Robert R. Dykstra, The Cattle Towns (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), pp. 85-86.

During the Oklahoma oil boom, pipelines served the oil industry as the railroads had served the Kansas cattle industry. Pipelines were absolutely essential if oil was to be profitably marketed, and where pipelines did not exist, they had to be constructed. Roads and railroads were also built to tie each new field to the existing transportation system. As the frontier of the miner, the cattleman, and the oilman passed into history, they left a legacy of transportation facilities in their wake.

The frontiers also left a legacy of primitive social conditions. In its progress across the plains and mountains the railroad boom town at the end of tracks, known as Hell on Wheels because of its character and mobility, set a pattern that persisted in many permanent railroad towns. Hell on Wheels attracted gamblers, merchants, crooks, and easy-money females, all intent on separating the gandy dancer from his wages. Encouraged by government land grants, the railroad pushed across the plains beyond settled territory--beyond the law. In this frontier environment crime and vice were common.²⁰

The need to restrain outlaws and to reestablish law and order recurred on each new frontier. Wayne Gard has

²⁰Oscar Osburn Winther, The Transportation Frontier: Trans-Mississippi West, 1865-1890, Histories of the American Frontier (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), pp. 111-12; Glenn Chesney Quiett, They Built the West: An Epic of Rails and Cities (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1934), p. 42; and Kyner, End of Track, p. 157.

suggested that in many western communities "order often came before law," because the alternative was anarchy.²¹ The miners organized vigilante committees or miners' courts to dispense both civil and criminal law when they believed themselves beyond the reach of legally constituted law.

The civil law developed by the miners later served as the foundation for later western mining legislation, and in this respect, miners' courts were a positive and valuable contribution to restoring order on the frontier. The contribution made by criminal justice was less salubrious to western social development. Criminal trials were settled with dispatch and without adequate protection of the defendant's rights. Vigilantes customarily acted only when provoked. "Justice" was usually a social response to some outrage. In California, that response was less likely to be forthcoming for a Chinese or Spanish miner than for an American.²² Vigilante "justice" was therefore capricious, but the tradition of vigilante law that grew out of the California experience followed the mining frontier throughout the West and became as much a part of the miner's equipment as his pick and pan.

²¹Wayne Gard, Frontier Justice (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1949), p. vi.

²²John Caughey, Their Majesties the Mob (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 10-13; William Henry Ellison, A Self-Governing Dominion: California, 1849-1860 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950), p. 196; and Andrew F. Rolle, California: A History (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1963), pp. 241-46.

Vigilante law was also a feature of frontier society in the cattle towns and railroad towns. In 1867 the Union Pacific construction crews stopped for the winter at Cheyenne, Dakota Territory. The gamblers, saloonkeepers, and over two hundred prostitutes that followed the work train soon gained control of the newly established town. When the Cheyenne lawmen proved either unwilling or unable to control the horse thieves, murderers, and other criminals of the town, a vigilante committee was organized. During the first four months, the vigilantes hung twelve men and ran many more out of town. Vice and crime remained but order of sorts was established.²³

In the Oklahoma oil towns, boomers also employed extrajudicial methods when crime became intolerable. One oil tank construction man recalled that there were few thieves in the oil fields because the oil men ran them out. "They tell me," he added, "the old drillers used to get all the hijackers the boys caught and stuff 'em down in the hole and drill through 'em."²⁴ Though this story is unsubstantiated and sounds exaggerated, it reveals an attitude of vindictiveness and callousness characteristic of vigilante action.

²³Robert West Howard, The Great Iron Trail: The Story of the First Transcontinental Railroad (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1962), p. 277.

²⁴"The Tankie," Box 42, Oil in Oklahoma Collection.

The Klu Klux Klan was the agent of vigilante justice in the oil fields. Pawhuska, one of the "wildest oiltowns in Oklahoma," was divided in September, 1921, between those wanting law enforcement and those opposing it. The appearance of a lone "white-clad figure" who silently rode through the streets one evening with a banner demanding that "Gamblers and bootleggers beware," announced the Klan's participation in the conflict.²⁵ In the guise of either klansmen or vigilantes, mob action remained an intrinsic feature of extrajudicial "law" on the frontier.

Vigilante law, of course, did not define a frontier society, nor did population booms, speculation, crime, youthful ambition, scarcity of hotels, vice or any other single characteristic. But the frontier, whether in the California gold rush, the Kansas cattle towns, or the Oklahoma oil fields, exhibited these features and more. To Frederick Jackson Turner the traits of the frontier were,

coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy, that dominant individualism, working for good and for evil, and withal that buoyancy and exuberance which comes from freedom. . . .²⁶

The frontier was the sum of these traits; never only one or two of them.

²⁵Tulsa Daily World, Sept. 21, 1921.

²⁶Turner, "Significance of the Frontier," pp. 226-27.

These frontier traits were evident in the Oklahoma boom towns and oil fields during the first three decades of the twentieth century. There was a "coarseness" and inquisitiveness about Merlin F. Sailor,²⁷ and Sadie Purley;²⁸ a "practicality" about Lula Turlington;²⁹ a "power to effect great ends" about Tom Slick³⁰ and J. E. Crosbie;³¹ a "restlessness" about "Lovie"³² and "Bulldog";³³ and an "exuberance" about "Judge" Payne³⁴ and W. E. Grisso.³⁵ These boomers and their associates shared an optimism, opportunism, and restless energy that gave a dynamic quality to the ethos of the oil fields unknown in settled and regulated societies. These are the qualities and characteristics that made the oil boom a frontier.

The frontier was a creation of man, not of nature. The grasslands of the Great Plains, the gold deposits of California, and the oil in Oklahoma, all existed for centuries before man made them the focus of a frontier society.

²⁷See supra, p. 11.

²⁸See supra, p. 23.

²⁹See supra, pp. 31, 48.

³⁰See supra, p. 22.

³¹See supra, p. 54.

³²See supra, pp. 23-24.

³³See supra, p. 19.

³⁴See supra, pp. 34-35.

³⁵See supra, p. 64.

It was the unregulated exploitation of these natural resources that underlay the frontier experience. When the exploitation of natural resources became regulated, the frontier began to disappear.

In California regulation came about naturally as the gold deposits were depleted. From a peak production in 1852 of eighty million dollars, gold production declined by 1865 to eighteen million dollars, and hard rock or hydraulic mining replaced placer mining.³⁶ Production became stabilized in the hands of increasingly large corporations as gold became more difficult to find and more expensive to produce.

On the railroad frontier, the exploitable resource was land in the form of government grants for each mile of track. The competition for the vast land empire led to boom wages and the thrust of rails beyond settled territory. Without land grants or some other incentive, it is unlikely that railroad construction would have preceded settlement. As the rails expanded across the west, land grants became progressively more difficult to secure until 1872 when they ceased altogether.³⁷ The federal and state governments regulated the land resource and ultimately restrained the railroad frontier.

³⁶Bean, California, p. 199.

³⁷Robert Edgar Riegel, The Story of Western Railroads (New York: Macmillan Company, 1926), pp. 42, 86-87.

Oil was the exploitable resource in Oklahoma and during flush production in newly discovered fields, the supply seemed unlimited. Oil prices fluctuated sharply as the supply of oil increased or declined. The oil producers made attempts to regulate production and thus support oil prices, but their efforts were defeated by oil companies that were inclined or compelled to produce at any price to stay in business. Restraint by the big producers often encouraged wildcatters to drill and undersell the market.

In 1926 the discovery of the Seminole oil field swelled Oklahoma oil production well beyond the market demand. Prices plummeted, but new wells were brought into production everyday as the companies raced for the flush production of the field. Self regulation was attempted again by the producers, but unsuccessfully. By 1927, oil sold for fifteen cents a barrel.³⁸ When a massive new field was discovered at Oklahoma City in 1929, the already depressed market was glutted. The Great Depression which began in October, 1929, reduced the market for oil. The oil business staggered under the twin effects of increasing supply and decreasing demand.³⁹

³⁸Williamson, The American Petroleum Industry, II, 323.

³⁹The effects of the Great Depression were not felt immediately, but by 1933 gasoline consumption in the United States was down 7.5%, and the demand for asphalt was down 16.4%. Motor fuel exports from the United States declined 28.9%. Petroleum Times, May 27, 1933, p. 551; June 10, 1933, p. 608; June 24, 1933, p. 658.

In 1931, Governor William H. Murray became convinced that if the Oklahoma oil industry was to be saved from ruin, state enforced production restrictions were required to replace the industries unsuccessful efforts at cooperation. The Oklahoma Corporation Commission had attempted to restrict production as early as 1928, but enforcement was ineffective. Murray acted in 1931. He declared martial law in many Oklahoma oil fields and used the national guard to enforce production restrictions.⁴⁰

The prolific East Texas field was discovered in 1931 and Texas Governor Ross Sterling soon moved that state's national guard into the oil fields to restrict production. In both states, forced regulation was tested in the courts and upheld, but new legislation was clearly needed.⁴¹ On April 10, 1933, the Oklahoma legislature passed a proration statute confirming state regulatory power and providing the administrative muscle to enforce it.⁴² Other oil producing states later adopted proration, and section 9c of the National Industrial Recovery Act made production restriction a federal policy in June, 1933. Proration transformed the oil industry into a long term business rather than a short

⁴⁰Williamson, The American Petroleum Industry, II, 542.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 543; and Stanley J. Clark, The Oil Century: From the Drake Well to the Conservation Era (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), pp. 236-38.

⁴²Clark, The Oil Century, p. 184.

term gamble and thus provided the regulation of this natural resource.⁴³ Regulation of oil boom society followed regulation of oil exploitation.

At the present time, a new oil discovery in Alaska is attracting many Oklahomans to another boom, but one unlike any that occurred in Oklahoma before proration. Transportation is again a key factor in the boom, but in Alaska it allows the companies to control access to the oil fields and thus keep undesirable people out. The companies do not allow "women, guns or booze" in the North Slope camps.⁴⁴

If Sadie Purley, or Lovie, or Fannie Evans were allowed to join the latter day "Judge" Paynes and E. L. Malones in this new oil field, they would quickly see that conditions have changed in the oil industry. The men earn high wages and work long hours, but they live in warm prefabricated barracks in colorfully named camps like Deadhorse or Southeast Eileen. Movies are shown nightly in the recreation room of the company quarters, and gambling is discouraged.⁴⁵

⁴³Williamson, The American Petroleum Industry, II, 548. For a thorough discussion of expanding state and federal control of the oil industry during the Great Depression see Gerald D. Nash, United States Oil Policy, 1890-1964: Business and Government in Twentieth Century America (n. p.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1968), pp. 112-156.

⁴⁴International Herald Tribune (Paris), Sept. 18, 1969, p. 1.

⁴⁵Ibid.; "The Great Oil Hunt," Newsweek, September 22, 1969, p. 87; and "N. B. C. News," N. B. C. telecast, Sept. 10, 1969. Reporter, David Brinkley.

The men work twelve hour shifts for twenty-eight days, then have fourteen days "down South" in Fairbanks or Anchorage. Some even go home to the "Lower Forty-Eight," since the cost of travel to and from Alaska is no greater than the cost of maintaining a family in Alaska.⁴⁶

Unlike the early years in Oklahoma, the Alaskan oil boom is well regulated by both state and federal statutes. The expense of drilling in the Arctic eliminates all but the large companies, and even these are compelled to combine to share expenses and risks as well as profits. Cooperative rather than individual development is a distinct characteristic of the Alaskan boom. The climate in Alaska serves to separate the "men from the boys," and the companies separate the men from the women and the booze. Though normal society is modified in this Alaskan boom, it is not supplanted by the primitive conditions found in early Oklahoma oil booms. To the oil men who drilled at Seminole or Cushing or Three Sands before coming to the North Slope, Alaska would no doubt be an oil boom, but not an oil boom frontier.

⁴⁶International Herald Tribune (Paris), Sept. 18, 1969, p. 1.

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