

☆ NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

OKLAHOMA COMMUNITIES ENACT PRESERVATION ORDINANCES

By Melvena K. Thurman

During the past few months, three Oklahoma communities, Guthrie, Oklahoma City, and Hammon, passed preservation ordinances. Local statutes such as these provide one of the most valuable tools for the protection of structures and districts of cultural significance. The effectiveness of such local statutes received an important test in a recent case before the United States Supreme Court, when a majority opinion was issued on June 26, 1978, stating that a New York City law which provided for the designation of historic landmarks was constitutional. The result of this decision was protection for the Grand Central Terminal, one of the city's most noted landmarks. With this ruling has come an increased awareness of the importance of such local ordinances, and Oklahoma communities are making rapid progress in the enactment of similar laws.

While the ordinances enacted in Guthrie, Oklahoma City, and Hammon differ somewhat, basic ideas are exhibited in each. The ordinances include definitions of terms; restrictions for erection, moving, demolition, restoration, reconstruction, and alteration of structures designated as having historical or architectural significance; and regulations for landscaping, signage, and maintenance. Provisions for appropriate use are also included. Each code incorporates a provision for an historic preservation commission. The membership of these commissions are charged with several duties and powers including issuance of certificates of appropriateness for erection, demolition, alteration, restoration, or reconstruction activities within a designated historic district or of an individually designated property; service as an advisory board to the city government; assistance in technical areas for individuals or groups interested in preservation of structures or districts; and aid to those undertaking such efforts as the installation of historic markers or publication of literature concerning the noted structures or areas of the community. Also, the commissions are responsible for the promotion of educational programs for the general public concerning the conservation of the cultural environment, and for conducting surveys to identify those structures which are of significance to the individual communities.

In addition to the benefits of the codes, which provide for preservation of historic properties, these local ordinances also encompass economic benefits

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for the individual property owner. Structures which have been designated individually, or are included in a district designated under the local ordinance as having historic or architectural significance and are used in a commercial venture, may be eligible for economic advantages provided through the Tax Reform Act of 1976. For the property owner to realize these benefits, however, the local ordinance which designated the property as significant must be certified by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service of the United States Department of the Interior. The City of Hammon is the first Oklahoma community to submit its ordinance for such consideration. The importance of local ordinances such as those passed in Guthrie, Oklahoma City, and Hammon is evident. These codes provide the basis for the success of preservation efforts in Oklahoma, as well as in other sections of the country.



HISTORIC PRESERVATION MOVEMENT IN OKLAHOMA REPRINT AVAILABLE

A limited number of "The Historic Preservation Movement in Oklahoma" by Dr. LeRoy H. Fischer are available from the Historic Preservation Office of the Oklahoma Historical Society. Request should be sent to Dr. Howard L. Meredith, Historic Preservation Office, Oklahoma Historical Society, Historical Building, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73105.



EARLY MILITARY FORTS AND POSTS IN OKLAHOMA: AN INTRODUCTION*

By *Odie B. Faulk*

In our reflections about the proud, colorful history of Oklahoma during the nineteenth century, most of us call to mind the heroic tragedy of the "Trail of Tears," the brave struggle of the Plains Indians to maintain their way of life, the romance and glamour of the cattlemen and cowboys, and the stoic patience of the homesteaders seeking to wrest a living from the red soil. Perhaps we remember that the lawyer, doctor and merchant also were part

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of our heritage. However, few of us pause to recall that the soldier equally was a pioneer Oklahoman and that he played as vital a role as sodbuster, cattleman and Indian. Almost from the moment officials in Washington conceived the scheme to remove Indians east of the Mississippi River westward to the land that would become known as the Indian Territory, the soldier and the lonely frontier military post were a part of the land and would remain so until the end of the nineteenth century.

Among the first Native Americans to be removed to the Indian Territory were the Cherokees. However, the land onto which they were to move was not empty. The Osage claimed it as part of their homeland, and when the newcomers began to arrive the Osage reacted by taking to the warpath. Open warfare came in 1817 with both sides conducting raids. The government's response was to establish a cordon of forts along the western edge of white settlement. Most of these were located on rivers because both Indians and whites used these as highways for moving people and goods.

Fort Smith, Arkansas, was erected in 1817 to control western Arkansas and the eastern portion of what soon would become the Indian Territory. Then in 1824 Colonel Matthew Arbuckle opened two new posts: Fort Gibson, named in honor of Revolutionary War hero, George Gibson, on the banks of the Grand River near its junction with the Arkansas; and Fort Towson, named for Nathan Towson, a hero of the War of 1812, on the Red River near its junction with the Kiamichi.

After passage of the Indian Removal Act of 1830, the Army found it needed yet more posts inside the Indian Territory, but many of these proved short-lived. For example, Cantonment Leavenworth, opened on the Red River near the mouth of the Washita in 1831, was soon abandoned. In 1834 Fort Coffee was erected on the banks of the Arkansas River between Forts Smith and Gibson; its purpose was to control the illegal liquor traffic, but whiskey continued to move westward despite the cannon at the fort, and it was abandoned in 1838. Other posts included Forts Washita, Arbuckle and Cobb. These never diminished the importance of Fort Gibson, which remained the major military installation in the Indian Territory until the eve of the Civil War.

During that tragic "Brother's War," those Union forts remaining in the Indian Territory were abandoned, some of them to be used by Confederates. Following that conflict yet more tribes of Indians were removed to the Indian Territory—at the same time that angry Texans, Kansans and New Mexicans were demanding that the Plains nomads be confined to permanent reservations and forced to end their wanderings. The result was yet another group of forts—Sill, Reno and Supply—and the sending of yet more troops to the region.

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These soldiers who came to the Indian Territory found a hard, lonely, thankless life filled with danger and difficulty. Almost always there were too few of them for the tasks demanded. Following the end of the War of 1812 the United States Army totaled only 7,200 men, a figure that remained constant until the outbreak of the Mexican War. When war was declared in 1846, Congress authorized the enlistment of 50,000 and more volunteers, but at the close of the conflict the Army was returned to near its pre-war size. Arguments were advanced in Congress that this number should be increased, for the nation's domain had almost doubled between 1845 and 1848. Therefore in 1850 Congress authorized a legal strength of 14,000; five years later Congress again proved generous, allowing the creation of four new regiments which brought the Army to some 18,000 men. Following the close of the Civil War, during which the Army increased to more than a million men, Congress in 1866 reduced it to 54,302 men, in 1869 to 45,000, in 1870 to 30,000, and in 1874 to 25,000. Such was the size of the Army called upon to man all Army posts in the United States, to enforce reconstruction during the years 1865-1877, and to contend with frontier Indian problems.

Moreover, Congress proved exceedingly stingy in voting funds for weapons and equipment for these troops. For example, Congress in 1866 decreed that the Army had to exhaust war surpluses before ordering new materials, which meant that for ten years almost all weapons and equipment were obsolete.

The men in the Army were volunteers except during the Civil War. From 1817 to 1890 their age averaged twenty-three, many of whom were recent immigrants. Some enlistees were attracted to the life by the steady employment it offered and by the challenge of soldiering. Until 1854 they received \$7.00 a month in the infantry and \$8.00 a month in the cavalry; this was increased by \$4.00 a month in 1854, and after the Civil War to \$13.00 a month for cavalry and infantry. In addition, they also received regular rations, free medical care and some other benefits. Other volunteers joined to "see the elephant," lured by tales of adventure in the West. The military life also attracted criminals and other undesirables who found it expedient to travel.

Once a man was assigned to a regiment, he rarely transferred out of it, no matter how long he remained in the Army. In fact, he usually did not transfer out of the company to which he was sent. Even at small posts consisting of only a company or two, a man had little contact with anyone other than the men of his own outfit. In this company he found himself almost completely at the mercy of his noncommissioned officers. He could not even speak to an officer without the permission of his first sergeant, who actually ran the company. And an ability with fists was one of the first requisites for

promotion to noncommissioned officer status. These men, along with the officers, could be brutal and sadistic or humane and gentle, depending more on personal temperament than on regulations. Because of isolation and ignorance, few soldiers knew how to go about complaining of injustices, and few court martials were held to punish officers and noncoms for brutality. Punishments for enlisted men ranged from marching doubletime around the parade ground to suspension from thumbs, wrists or arms in the guardhouse for a full day at a time. Harsh and unusual punishments could be given with relative impunity.

The food was not good. A typical daily menu started with a breakfast of salt pork, fried mush and strong black coffee; lunch usually consisted of dry bread and "slumgullion stew," a concoction of debatable ancestry; and the evening meal normally was more dry bread and more coffee, occasionally with three prunes for dessert. Men at the frontier forts, as in Oklahoma, tried to supplement their diet with buffalo, deer, wild turkey, fish and other game; and they purchased fresh vegetables from Indian farmers where possible.

The medical service available to these soldiers was primitive, to say the least, and the death rate among these men was appallingly high. Cholera, dysentery, fevers, even scurvy were commonplace according to medical reports forwarded to Washington, while venereal disease was epidemic.

Duty at posts in the Indian Territory therefore was hard and dangerous. The men had to erect their quarters themselves, cutting the logs or quarrying the stone, moving these to the desired location, and erecting them according to plans drawn by their officers. They fought malarial and bilious fevers, ate the government's hardtack and bacon, escorted supply wagons, scouted new territory, and, sometimes, fought Indians or white renegades, all for eight to thirteen dollars a month. Little wonder that the average annual desertion rate of enlisted men between 1848 and 1861 was twenty-eight percent, and from 1867 to 1891 inclusive was thirty-three percent.

Almost three-quarters of the officer corps prior to the Civil War—seventy-three percent—were graduates of West Point, men whose names would fill the command ranks on both sides during the Civil War. Principally they were young, competent, energetic and proud of their records; however, prior to the Civil War, many in the upper ranks were political hacks, martinets, petty tyrants, even downright incompetents.

Soldiering was difficult for the officers, just as it was for the enlisted men. Isolated from polite society, the officer could associate only with his fellow officers, for fraternization with enlisted men was forbidden. He thus had a very limited circle of people from which to draw his friendships. His pay was small, a lieutenant after the Civil War drawing only \$40.00 a month; from this he had to pay for his mount, his equipment, and his clothing and

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support his family if he had one. After the Civil War there were too many high-ranking officers, and promotion became intolerably slow. For the officer promotion came within the regiment, as it did for the enlisted men within the company. Only through the death or retirement of senior officers was promotion open, and then it came from seniority rather than merit; this system crippled the Army with old, even ancient officers whose ambitions were severely limited.

In a report made on November 22, 1875, General John Pope summarized the Army's attitude about the wars against the Native Americans: "It is with painful reluctance that the military forces take the field against Indians who only leave their reservations because they are starved there, and who must hunt food for themselves and their families or see them perish with hunger I desire to say with all emphasis, what every Army officer on the frontier will corroborate, that there is no class of men in this country who are so disinclined to war with the Indians as the army stationed among them. The Army has nothing to gain by war with Indians; on the contrary it has everything to lose. In such a war it suffers all the hardship and privation; and, exposed as it is to the charge of assassination if Indians are killed; to the charge of inefficiency if they are not"

Given the circumstances that prevailed in the Indian Territory, as well as in Congressional appropriations committees, the wonder is not that the soldiers at the forts herein described performed as poorly as they did but rather that they performed as well as they did. The frontier soldier played a vital role in the history of Oklahoma, for which recognition is long past due.