

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE OKLAHOMA
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Chronicles of Oklahoma here presents an excellent picture of the Board of Directors of the Oklahoma Historical Society taken during the Board meeting in the Directors' Room of the Historical Building on April 23, 1964. Governor Henry Bellmon (a native of Oklahoma, descendant of a pioneer family in the Cherokee Strip), Ex-Official member of the Board of Directors of the Society, and four regularly elected members of the 26-member Board were not present when the photograph was made.

Directors absent and not in the picture are: Lou Allard, native of Oklahoma (Illinois family, 1902), Publisher of the *Drumright Derrick*, member of the House of Representatives, State Legislature, Chairman of Oklahoma Semi-Centennial Commission (1957), past president of Oklahoma Press Association, Drumright; Jenkins Lloyd Jones, Editor and Publisher of *Tulsa Tribune*, member Board of American Society of Newspaper Editors, syndicated columnist (75 papers), author, Tulsa; H. Milt Phillips, native of Oklahoma (descendant of pioneer family, 1889), 1st Vice President of Oklahoma Historical Society, Editor and Publisher of *Seminole Producer*, veteran of World Wars I and II, past President of Oklahoma Press Association, Seminole; Mrs. Anna B. Korn, active in patriotic societies, organizer and past President of Oklahoma Memorial Association, Inc., with its "Oklahoma Hall of Fame" ceremonies held annually on Statehood Day, Oklahoma City; R. M. Mountcastle, veteran of World War I, former member of State Legislature, a Fort Gibson historian, attorney, Muskogee.

Directors present and appearing in the photograph shown on the opposite page, reading clockwise (to left) from end of the table in foreground: George H. Shirk, native of Oklahoma (a descendant and present head of Oklahoma City law firm established 1864) President (presiding) of Oklahoma Historical Society, veteran of World War II (Colonel on General Staff Corps, U. S. A.), past President of Oklahoma Philatelic Society, state history writer, Oklahoma City; James B. Morrison, native of Oklahoma (Virginia family in state, 1919), Dean Southeastern State College, local civic and historical activities, teacher of history, author, Durant; Robert A. Hefner, former Justice of State Supreme Court, former Mayor both of Oklahoma City and Ardmore, founder of the Hefner Company (oil), attorney, Oklahoma City; Miss Genevieve Seger, native of Oklahoma (descendant western Oklahoma pioneer family—John H. Seger, 1872), Principal public school, teacher of history, President of Blaine County Historical Society, active in educational organizations, Geary; Emma Eastill-Harbour, President Emeritus of Oklahoma Historical Society, active in educational organizations, teacher of history, former head of the History Department in Central State College, Edmond.

Henry B. Bana, member pioneer family in Cherokee Strip (1890's), head of Bana Construction Company, collector-historian Lincoln poetry, Chairman Oklahoma Civil War Centennial Commission, writer, Enid;



THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE OKLAHOMA
HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEETING APRIL 23, 1964

Mrs. George L. Bowman, Treasurer of Oklahoma Historical Society, past State President and present National officer in P. E. O., active in educational, historical and civic organizations, Kingfisher; Joe W. Curtis, native of Oklahoma (Cherokee descent-Adair family west 1830's), President of the First National Bank of Pauls Valley, Governor of Rotary International, Vice President National Hall of Fame for Famous American Indians, attorney, Pauls Valley; Q. B. Boydstun, native of Oklahoma (pioneer family of Caddo, Indian Territory—1820's), General Counsel for the Grand River Dam Authority, veteran World War I, former member of State Legislature, Chairman of Old Fort Gibson Stockade Commission (stockade restoration), attorney, Fort Gibson; R. G. Miller, Editor "Smoking Room Column" in *Oklahoma City Times* and *Daily Oklahoman*, organizer of Annual Tour of Oklahoma Historical Society, also, of "Foliage Tours" to eastern Oklahoma, statewide-local history writer, Oklahoma City.

William E. McIntosh, native of Oklahoma (Creek and Scottish descent—McIntosh family west, 1828), present Chief of the Creek Tribe, former Treasurer of Tulsa County, an organizer and 1st President of the Tulsa County Historical Society, lecturer on Creek Indian and U. S. Civil War history, Tulsa; Richard H. Cloyd, Colonel General Staff, U. S. Army (Retired), Judge of Norman City Court of Cleveland County, Norman; Fisher Muldrow, a native of Oklahoma (descendant of Choctaw—Fisher family West, 1830's), 2nd Vice President of Oklahoma Historical Society, Executive Vice President Associated Motor Carriers of Oklahoma, Inc., 39th Mason, Rotarian, active in civic and in University of Oklahoma organizations, Norman; Orel Husby, member of Pontotoc County pioneer family (1860's), former Justice of the State Supreme Court (1882-1897), past member of Board of Regents of University of Oklahoma, organizer of State "Young Democrats," rancher, local history writer, attorney, Ada; N. B. Johnson, native of Oklahoma (descendant of Cherokee family west, 1830's), Justice of State Supreme Court, member of the State Governors' Indian Council nationwide (15 years), President of the National Hall of Fame for Famous American Indians, past President and active member in National Congress of American Indians, Oklahoma City.

W. D. Finney, President of the Washita Valley Bank, past President of the Oklahoma Bankers Association, past District governor of Rotary, President of Oklahoma Heart Association, active in preservation of local history, Fort Cobb; J. G. Clift, past City Attorney of Duncan (11 years), past Stephens County Attorney (4 years), U. S. Probate Attorney, organizer (1940) and present President of Stephens County Historical Society, past President Chamber of Commerce, Rotarian, Duncan; Berlin B. Chapman, Department of History, Oklahoma State University, President of Payne County Historical Society, active member Half Century Club, well known history researcher and writer; Edward Everett Dale, Research Historian Emeritus of University of Oklahoma, visiting Professor of History in University of Melbourne (Australia) and in University of Houston, also Anderson Professor of History in University of Houston (Texas), member of Boston Authors' Club and 20th Century Association (Boston), author, Norman.

Joe W. McBride, Publisher of newspapers, Investments, past President Oklahoma Press Association, former President of University of Oklahoma Board of Regents (22 years), past Governor of Rotary International, active in state history and civic organizations, Oklahoma City; Elmer L. Fraker, Administrative Secretary Oklahoma Historical Society, Member of the Council American Association of State and Local History, veteran World War I, former superintendent in state public schools, lecturer, writer, Oklahoma City.

DEDICATION OF OKLAHOMA HISTORICAL MARKER
AT BARTLESVILLE

An official Oklahoma Historical Marker indicating the site of "Oklahoma's First Commercial Oil Well" was unveiled and dedicated in a special program held on the afternoon of March 5, 1964, at Bartlesville. The marker was sponsored by the Historical Committee of the Oklahoma Petroleum Council, the historical site of the Nellie Johnstone No. 1 oil well having been approved and the inscription on the marker provided by the Oklahoma Historical Society. The inscription on the plaque reads:

Oklahoma's First Commercial Oil Well

Nellie Johnstone No. 1, first commercial oil well in Indian Territory completed April 15, 1897, by the Cudahy Oil Co., on south bank of Caney River. Site is 3.1 mi., N. W. of this marker.

The marker in co-operation with the Historical Society erected by the State Highway Commission is located on U. S. Highway 75 in a parkway across from the Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church at Bartlesville, the site of the Nellie Johnstone well indicated 3.1 miles northwest in the City's Nellie Johnstone Park. In this City Park, the Bartlesville Chamber of Commerce has sponsored the erection of full-sized replica of redwood derrick and drilling rig at the site of the No. 1 well, a unique outdoor museum exhibit commemorating the early history of the petroleum industry and its contributions made in the building and development of Oklahoma.

The schedule of events on the day of the dedication at Bartlesville began with a morning meeting of the Historical Committee of the Oklahoma Petroleum Council in the Historical Room of the Public Library, with John Steiger, Chairman of the Committee, presiding, members present including C. E. Cummings, first Chairman; James G. Kemm, Executive Manager of the Oklahoma Petroleum Council; Malcolm E. Rosser III, Duncan; Luther Williams, P. S. Hedrick and A. V. Bourque, all of Tulsa. Luncheon was served to the Historical Committee members and guests in the Executive Dining Room, Cities Service Building. The afternoon program began with a brief ceremony in

the shade of the redwood replica of the old oil well derrick and rigging in Johnstone Park where Mr. W. W. Keeler, Chairman and Director of the Executive Committee of the Phillips Petroleum Company, and Chief of the Cherokees, gave the following brief history:

*The Nellie Johnstone No. 1
Oklahoma's First Commercial Oil Well*

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

On this occasion when we are dedicating a redwood replica of the Nellie Johnstone No. 1, Oklahoma's first commercial oil producer, I thought you would be interested in the story of the well and of the pioneers whose vision and perseverance started commercial oil production in Oklahoma.

Much credit for the drilling of this well is due to George E. Keeler, William Johnstone and Frank Overlees, former prominent citizens of the Bartlesville area, all now deceased. Keeler had observed an oil seep in the vicinity of the discovery well as early as 1876. During his spare time he began negotiations to have a well drilled, arousing the interest of other citizens of that community in the plans.

Keeler and Johnstone operated the first store in what is now Bartlesville. They felt that if oil could be found in the vicinity it would do much to speed economic development. None of the group were oil men, however; and they began to cast about in an effort to get somebody to drill a test well.

They contacted John F. Overfield, who had heard of the oil possibilities of the area through Galey of the firm of Guffey and Galey. Overfield became interested in the proposition, and from then on took an active part in their plans.

Guffey and Galey were contacted, and they agreed to drill a well if they could secure a lease on a large enough tract of land surrounding the test well. The land in this area was in the Cherokee Nation. George Keeler, Wm. Johnstone, Frank Overlees and others made trips to Tahlequah, the Cherokee Capital, in the attempt to secure a lease covering the rights of drilling for oil and gas. After much delay, a lease was approved covering fifteen square miles.

By this time (1890), Guffey & Galey had sold their interests to the Forest Oil Company and were not interested in drilling in Indian Territory.

Overfield then induced the Cudahy Oil Company to drill a well on the property; and the lease, which originally had been granted in the name of John F. Overfield, was assigned to the Cudahy Oil Company. Overfield then became Manager of Cudahy's operations in that area, and had supervision of the drilling of Oklahoma's "first commercial Oil Well."

McBride & Bloom of Independence, Kansas, were hired to drill the Bartlesville well. A rig was moved about 70 miles overland from near Red Fork to Bartlesville in January, 1897. The hauling was done by George Keeler.

Drilling started late in January, 1897. The well found the Cowage Linn at 880 to 942 feet, the Layton Sand at 975 to 1087 feet, a gas sand at 1252 to 1287 feet. At 1303 feet drillers encountered oil in a formation later to be called the "Bartlesville Sand." It was drilled to



Oklahoma Historical Marker sponsored by the Historical Committee of the Oklahoma Petroleum Council, under the auspices of the Oklahoma Historical Society, dedicated March 5, 1964 at Bartlesville.



Redwood replica of the derrick with rigging on the original site of Nellie Johnstone No. 1, "Oklahoma's First Commercial Oil Well," in the Nellie Johnstone Park at Bartlesville.

1320 feet. The producing formation was shot with glycerin. Mrs. Jennie O. Morton, wife of A. D. Morton and daughter of George Keeler, dropped the "go-devil" that set off the shot. A column of oil shot over the derrick top and Oklahoma's first commercial oil well was born. No tanks were available and a test of the well was not made at this time, although it was estimated to be capable of producing 50 to 75 barrels per day.

As Toby LaForge so aptly stated in the *Tulsa Tribune*, "In the comparisons of today ... that first commercial well was infinitely small, yet this fact remains, it marked the birth of a new empire and the dawn of a new era in this greater southwest, a dawn that was to spread its contagion all over the world ..."

With the allotment of the Indian lands, Mrs. Howard Cannon, the daughter of William Johnstone and direct descendant of the last principal chief of the Delaware tribe, Charles Journeycake, received the tract on which the Nellie Johnstone No. 1 now stands as her allotment. She deeded the plot where the well stands to the city for park purposes in 1917.

As we commemorate this historic well today, we particularly want the many fine citizens of Bartlesville whose generous contributions made the rebuilding a reality.

A large crowd attended the dedication of the Historical Marker on U. S. Highway 75 in spite of a high cold wind threatening weather. Mr. and Mrs. Howard Cannon were the outstanding honorees present. Mrs. Cannon—*Nellie Johnstone*—in person—unveiled the marker with the assistance of Miss Muriel H. Wright of the Oklahoma Historical Society. Mrs. John Steiger, Chairman of the Petroleum Council that had sponsored the erection of the marker, officially presented it to Mr. Elmer L. Fraker, Administrative Secretary of the Oklahoma Historical Society. Mr. Arch Little, President of the Bartlesville Chamber of Commerce, spoke briefly stressing the point that the oil industry has been instrumental in stabilizing Oklahoma's economy and that one-third of the State's revenue comes from the petroleum industry. Besides the tremendous impact of the constant research, the oil industry has contributed men and women—60,000 oilmen of the "pioneering stock that made the Nellie Johnstone discovery possible." Mr. Little continued in his conclusions:

"It is especially fitting that this first marker should recognize the part the Nellie Johnstone discovery well played in molding this industry. Rising from this humble beginning just 67 years ago, this industry has built over 1,200 miles of pipe line within Oklahoma's boundaries. Today it operates 14 refineries, 9 petrochemical plants, and 74 gas processing plants in our state.

"This great industry has touched each of Oklahoma's 77 counties, and in each, the local economy has felt the impact. Indeed, not one individual in our state and nation can help but feel grateful when he considers the contributions made by the petroleum industry to our day-to-day comfort and convenience ... To you in the oil industry, I say on behalf of us who are not, thank you for all that you are doing."

CHICAGO, ROCK ISLAND AND PACIFIC RAILROAD COMPANY
HISTORICAL RECORD AND NOTES

The following notes on the history of the operations of the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad Company are contributed by Dr. Berlin B. Chapman, Department of History of Oklahoma State University:

The Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad Company at my request recently presented to the Oklahoma Historical Society a microfilm copy of typed records concerning its operation in Oklahoma. Included is the *Official History of the Rock Island Railroad* by George H. Crosby, former secretary and treasurer, covering the period from the beginning to about 1902, giving charters, officers, and corporate history. This is "a Rock Island publication for information of the Company's own organization." It is a brilliant summary of 44 pages.

The study begins in 1827 when Congress made a grant of lands to aid in the building of a canal from Chicago to LaSalle on the Illinois River. The State of Illinois entered upon the construction of other canals, and some railroad construction. The "magnificent scheme collapsed," leaving the state in debt. However, the experience was of "some value in the study of the problem of state ownership and operation of railways."

In 1847 an act of the legislature of Illinois created the Rock Island and LaSalle Railroad Company and empowered it to construct a railroad from Rock Island to LaSalle. In 1851 an act of the legislature permitted the company to change its name to the "Chicago and Rock Island Railroad Company," and to extend its road from LaSalle to Chicago. The extension was completed in 1854.

The author proceeds in a scholarly and clear manner to narrate the expansion of a great railroad system. It encountered the competition of free enterprise, and learned the advantage of entering into alliances with rival companies. Legislative acts, judicial matters, finance, and the story of subsidiaries are given careful attention.

The first consolidation, called the "consolidation of 1866," merged the company with that of the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad Company of Iowa, and the corporate name became the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad Company. A consolidation of June 2, 1880, made it a "railway" company.

The Chicago, Kansas and Nebraska Railway Company was the first company involved in the entrance of the Rock Island into Indian Territory. By an act of March 2, 1887, Congress empowered the company to construct a road from the east end of the Oklahoma panhandle to El Paso; and from Caldwell, Kansas, via Fort Reno to the Red River.

Construction was completed from Caldwell to Pond Creek on July 15, 1888. The train reached Enid and Hennessey without incident. The first train reached Hennessey on October 14, 1889, and brought among other things, the first high grade seed wheat for the farmers. The road was built through El Reno and reached Minco on February 14, 1890. This segment in the Indian Territory was 120 miles long. Construction from Pond Creek to Minco was finished entirely by the Rock Island.

On default of the Chicago, Kansas and Nebraska Railway Company to pay its coupons on maturity, foreclosure proceedings were had, and the Rock Island acquired the property. A deed was executed on April 30, 1891, and delivered at the date of sale, June 17.

The author compiled a list of officials of the Rock Island, giving dates of their service. He traced the expansion of the Rock Island system. For Oklahoma, one notes facts such as the following: The road from Minco to Terral on the Red River was completed in 1892. In 1900 the line was extended from Chickasha to Mountain View, and work was continued on a branch line from Anadarko to Fort Sill, and Lawton, which was completed in September, 1901. In 1902 the company acquired the properties of the Choctaw, Oklahoma and Gulf Railroad Company by "tendering \$80.00 per share for the common stock and \$60.00 per share for the preferred stock."

The microfilm includes, *The Rock Island in Oklahoma*, a study of 110 pages by Arthur W. Large, general agricultural agent of the company. He prepared it about 1950. There is an index.

The first chapter, "Settlement and Development," shows "the important role which the Rock Island Railroad played" in this matter. For the land run of 1889, the railroad brought settlers to Caldwell, and on the opening day many went as far as the railhead at Pond Creek.

Unbroken prairie sod and drought during the first years made hard times for the settlers. Their seed wheat was of such a low grade that it would not have amounted to much if it had made a crop. Marcus A. Low had served as president of the Chicago, Kansas and Nebraska Railway Company. He was "one of the great men of the Rock Island of that day." He arranged for an abundance of "the best seed wheat that could be purchased in Kansas" to be made available to farmers through the local agents of the railroad. Farmers secured the wheat by signing promissory notes. They were told to "pay when you get a crop."

The effect of this "program was simply amazing. It put new life, hope and confidence in the hard pressed farmers and businessmen and filled them with determination to go ahead and make this one of the finest wheat and farming sections in the Southwest." The railroad secured the good will of the farmers and businessmen, and "the notes were all paid except two."

In 1890 there were several of the Chicago, Kansas and Nebraska Railway Companies of identical name, and there had been some consolidations. It was difficult to determine which company was referred to in a given transaction. While this complicated matter was before the federal courts, Congress passed an act on June 27 granting to the Chicago, Kansas and Nebraska Railway Company the power to convey to the Rock Island all of its property, rights and franchises. The act gave the Rock Island legal status in Oklahoma. Large says:

"It is very unusual, in fact, almost unheard of for Congress to legislate upon a matter while it is pending in the federal courts. The circumstances were so complicated that we believe the act of Congress was fully justified, and may have been suggested by the court in charge of the case."

There is a good account of the Choctaw, Coal and Railway Company in its relations with Oklahoma City. There are gems of information, such as that following the completion of the railroad from Liberal, Kansas, to Texhoma in 1902. The company located Menonites near Guymon, and the colony grew to 200 families. Their wheat production "made a valuable contribution to the limited traffic of those days."

There is a construction time table from 1888 to 1947. It gives the Oklahoma mileage, completion dates, terminal points, and the names of companies constructing the lines. There is a table of mileage abandoned in Oklahoma, giving effective dates, names of lines abandoned, and mileage of each. Note is made of mileage sold to other railroads. The general patterns of settlement in Oklahoma is stated as follows:

"First came the original wave of new settlers. In a few years half or more of them were gone to other sections, and then came the second wave; and the second immigration with those who had remained from the first wave stayed and made the country. This is where the work of the Rock Island's Immigration Department was so important and valuable to the newer sections as their continuous campaign for new settlers and greater development attracted a more or less constant stream of new immigrants to the less developed regions."

CENTENNIAL COMMEMORATION OF THE CIVIL WAR:
CAPTURE OF THE FEDERAL STEAMBOAT *J. R. Williams*
ON THE ARKANSAS RIVER

A centennial commemorative program noting the capture of the Federal steamboat the *J. R. Williams* during the Civil War, on the Arkansas River, at Pleasant Bluff, now the location of the old village of Tamaha, eighteen miles northeast of Stigler, Haskell County, Oklahoma, was held on Sunday afternoon, June 14, 1964. The program was sponsored by the Oklahoma Historical Society, George H. Shirk, President, Oklahoma City; Oklahoma Civil War Centennial Commission, Henry B. Bass, Chairman, Enid; Inter-tribal Council—Five Civilized Tribes, Frank Belvin, President, Okmulgee; Lions Club of Stigler, J. R. Watkins, President, Stigler; Marion Roye, Local Chairman, Stigler; Ben P. Choate, General Chairman, McAlester and Oklahoma City.

The program was held on the school grounds at Tamaha, opening with an invocation by Mr. Rex Pettijohn, Postmaster of Stigler, and introduction by Mr. Ben P. Choate of special guests among the large crowd in attendance. Mrs. Mary Jean Hansen, member of the Oklahoma City Civil War Round Table, gave some notes on the early history of Tamaha, a trading post in the Choctaw Nation on the Arkansas River, established during the Choctaw removal immigration about 1832, early settlers had traders here at "Pleasant Bluff," including the Rev. Joseph Smedley (Baptist missionary), Robert M. Jones and Tandy Walker, noted Choctaws. The principal address of the commemorative exercises was delivered by Dr. James D. Morrison, Dean of Southeastern State College, Durant. The Benediction was by the Stigler Bugle Corps (Lars Vinge and Mac McCrory). Dr. Morrison's address is given here:

CAPTURE OF THE J. R. WILLIAMS

June 15, 1864

Ladies and Gentlemen:

We are gathered here today to commemorate an unusual event which occurred a hundred years ago tomorrow, June 15, 1864, the capture of a Union river steamboat by Confederate cavalry under the command of that gallant Confederate hero, General Stand Watie of the Cherokees. This is neither the time nor the place to pronounce a eulogy for Stand Watie, although it is fitting to remark in passing that he has been named by some as, "The foremost soldier ever produced by North American Indians." Others may dispute this, but few will refuse to acknowledge that his was a powerful, magnetic personality, that he was a natural leader of men, a man of courage and integrity who was worshiped by the men he commanded. Such words as "simplicity" and "sincerity" and "consideration" also must be included in any attempt to characterize this great Cherokee leader in both war and peace.

Before discussing the capture of the *J. R. Williams*, a little background discussion of the events preceding this incident is in order. During the first two years of the Civil War, 1861-1863, the Indian Territory was generally controlled by the South for reasons which will not be explained here. The tide of war turned, however, in the spring and summer of 1863 so that first Fort Gibson and then Fort Smith fell into Yankee hands and it appeared that the whole of the Indian Territory might be returned to Northern control and the way to Texas finally opened for Federal troops through the Indian nations.

That this complete Federal occupation did not occur in 1863 or 1864 was not entirely because of strong Confederate resistance, as any student of the Civil War in Oklahoma will agree, but because of top-level decisions on both sides concerning major strategy and problems of logistics. For example, General Grant, who took over chief command of all Federal armies early in 1864, believed in a policy of not wasting his strength in outskirt operations but rather one of concentrating on the subjugation of the important Confederate armies under Lee and Johnston. Destruction of these great armies to end Confederate resistance was Grant's goal, and of course that is what Grant finally accomplished. Thus the fringe areas, such as the Indian Territory, were ordinarily allotted only those men and supplies necessary to maintain a sort of status quo. This allowed the North to control that part of the Indian Territory north of the Arkansas and South Canadian rivers during 1864 and 1865, leaving southern Indian Territory, the Choctaw and Chickasaw nations, to the Confederates. Each side crossed this line on occasion, as Stand Watie's raids will indicate, such as the capture of the wagon train on Cabin Creek in September of 1864. For the North an illustration is the march by the Union commander, Col. W. A. Phillips, deep into the Choctaw country in February, 1864. But each side returned to sanctuary following raids into territory held primarily by the enemy.

Thus today we are on the line which roughly divided the North from the South during the last two years of the Civil War. Neither side had the power to drive the other out of the Indian country and a sort of unstable tension existed along this line, since neither could prevent raids into its territory by the troops of the enemy. Each side also had refugee problems. Southern refugees from north of the Arkansas-Canadian river line were clustered along Red River and strained the capacity of the Choctaws and Chickasaws to feed the visitors as well as themselves. Likewise, refugee Indians who had

aided with the North and had been driven from their homes early in the War were now returned to their ravaged homesteads in areas of Federal control and depended on the North for subsistence. In June, 1864, one estimate states that nearly 18,000 refugee Indians were located in the vicinity of Fort Gibson, dependent on the North for subsistence which the United States Indian Superintendent found it difficult to provide because of the activity of Southern raiders like Stand Watie.

When possible, supplies in quantity were brought to Fort Gibson by river steamboat, since a vessel of 100 tons could carry an amount of supplies equal to that of a train of 100 wagons and be more easily defended from attack by guerrilla raiders. The Arkansas River from Fort Smith to Fort Gibson was not useable, however, unless the volume of water in the channel was sufficient to allow passage over Webber's Falls, perhaps sixty-five river miles above Fort Smith. In the spring of 1864 navigation to Fort Smith had been fairly good, but it was not until the middle of June that a rise in the Arkansas River was thought to be great enough to allow passage over the falls for boats bound for Fort Gibson.

Since the need of the troops and refugee Indians at Fort Gibson and vicinity was great, the Federal authorities at Fort Smith decided to load a sternwheeler, the *J. R. Williams*, with the required supplies and send them up river. The *J. R. Williams* was a steam ferry-boat kept at Fort Smith for the purpose of ferrying troops and wagons across the river. In this emergency the vessel was hastily loaded with a cargo of commissary and quartermaster's supplies, as well as some sutler's goods, and placed in charge of Lt. G. W. Houston, quartermaster, 14th Kansas cavalry. A detachment of 25 men, 12th Kansas Infantry, commanded by Lt. H. A. B. Cook, was sent along as escort. But no cavalry force was sent out to reconnoiter and try to prevent a hostile force from attacking the boat somewhere on the route.

Just how the word came to General Stand Watie—commissioned brigadier general by Jefferson Davis on May 10 so that he probably had not yet received news of his promotion—that the *J. R. Williams* was headed up river is not clear. Fort Smith was full of Southern sympathizers and undoubtedly the Rebels had regular informers in the town who kept the Confederates notified about Union activities. In any case, Watie, whose headquarters were near North Fork Town in the vicinity of the present city of Eufaula, was advised of the departure from Fort Smith of the *J. R. Williams* and made preparations to intercept the boat with the forces available to him.

General Watie selected this point—about five miles below the mouth of the Canadian—then known as Pleasant Bluff, for his attack, since the channel approached the south shore and the steamboat must pass close by. He located three artillery pieces, each masked by bushes, about a hundred yards apart on the bluff and so placed that one could fire direct and the other two could establish a cross fire fore and aft. These guns were commanded by a nineteen-year-old Creek lieutenant, later principal chief of the Creek Nation, George Washington Grayson. Scouts kept an eye on the progress of the steamer and the Rebel forces were ready the moment the boat came into sight.

When the *Williams* was opposite the center gun the three artillery pieces opened fire, accompanied by a heavy volley of small arms, from the concealed position on the south bank. The crew and escort of the boat were taken completely by surprise, but recovered quickly to return the fire. The Confederate shot and shell damaged the craft from the front, hitting the smoke stack, pilot house, and the boiler. Damage to the boiler released steam so that those on deck could see

nothing and the boat became so unmanageable that the pilot ran her on a sand bar near the north bank. Lt. Cook and his escort promptly abandoned ship and floundered to the shore, but Lt. Houston and the captain of the *Williams* rowed over to the enemy on the south bank and surrendered themselves. The Confederates crossed the river after the flight of the escort and moved the steamer to a sand bar near the south bank where they began to unload the cargo.

The above events occurred on June 16. On the morning of June 18, while the unloading was still in progress, Col John Ritchie and troops of the Second Union Indian Regiment appeared on the north bank and opened fire. The Confederates then set fire to the *Williams*, which was allowed to drift down the river. As the river continued its rise, barrels and boxes of commissary supplies were also floated down river. Since Watie had no wagons, his troopers were able to carry away only a small part of the cargo. All the supplies were prevented from reaching Gibson, and for some time the Federals abandoned the use of the river for shipping supplies. Also, the capture of supplies encouraged the Southern Indians, whose morale had been at low ebb prior to this exploit. They could use the hominy, salt pork, bacon, flour, and other items such as clothing, and in addition the Northern troops and refugees had been denied the much-needed cargo.

This and other guerilla-type exploits in mid-1864 heartened the Indian troops of Watie and other commanders. Watie's Cherokees on June 27, only two weeks after the capture of the *J. R. Williams*, re-enlisted for the duration of the war. Only four days before this the first Choctaw regiment, commanded by Col. Tandy Walker, had enlisted before their term expired and passed resolutions asking that service in the Confederate army be made compulsory for all Choctaw men between the ages of 18 and 45.

But it was a vain hope which sustained them and the war came to its inevitable end in the spring of 1865, the hopes of the Confederacy crushed. Yet, for Oklahomans, it can be written of Watie and other Confederate Indian heroes the same words which appear on the monument to the Confederate dead at the University of Virginia:

"Fate denied them Victory, but clothed them with
glorious Immortality."

—James D. Morrison, Dean

*Southeastern State College,
Durant*