

**Ferdie J. Deering**

## Oklahoma City Has Head Start

**T**HIRTY years ago, Elmer T. Peterson, longtime editorial writer for The Daily Oklahoman, edited a book (published by the University of Oklahoma Press) under the title "Cities Are Abnormal."

It included dissertations by Louis Bromfield, Jonathan Forman, Ladd Haystead, Paul B. Sears and other noted writers. Theme of the book was that crowding people into cities is a major contributing cause of people problems and that decentralization would benefit both social and economic structures.

Passage of time has confirmed the authors' views that cities are prolific breeding grounds for people problems, but what has happened in decentralization probably would disappoint them.

There has been a scattering of industries, shopping centers, recreational facilities and housing developments, but this has produced new problems, rather than solving inner city troubles.

Whether cities are abnormal or not, we have them and must live with them and in them. Scattering our population — Oklahoma's, our nation's, or the world's — over land needed for food production is and will be counterproductive. Many think that too much land already has been taken out of agriculture and put to less essential uses.

We may have arrived at a point where the "Back to the Land" movement is meeting a "Back to the City" trend. How fast people move either way will be determined by the rate of renovation of central cities and control of crime for safe living.

During the past decade in Oklahoma City, hundreds of old, obsolete,

inadequate and rundown buildings have been razed, with handsome new structures raised to replace them. The process has been painfully slow in the eyes of remaining downtown business men and merchants, but it is still alive and it is moving.

Announcement that a 9½ block area will be cleared to build residential housing adjacent to the downtown business area is a major step toward a lively market place. The projected retail Galleria and Myriad Gardens must have people—lots of them!

Downtown parking facilities are well-filled now by office workers driving in from suburbs, but an active central city ought to be populated outside business hours, too. Downtown never again will be the city's only business district, but it is essential.

Some builders visualize space age cities, where people will dwell comfortably in high rise, climate-controlled structures connected to nearby working places.

Critics refer to this type of "elevated people center" living as "metropollyanna," and it certainly can't be what everyone wants.

Changes come, nevertheless. Those cities which revitalize their downtown areas first may gain a large lead on those which struggle along without an identifiable focal point.

Oklahoma City is moving in the right direction. Its new downtown district is scheduled for completion by the centennial of the "Run of 1889," and adaptation to space age living could put this city in the forefront among all cities before the year 2000.