

SPEECH FOR STATE PEO BANQUET, OKC, April 22, 1980

MADAM CHAIRMAN, PEO MEMBRS and BILS:

Today is an historic occasion---for two reasons.

One is that delegates from PEO chapters all over Oklahoma are peaceably assembled in Oklahoma City.

TWO, this is the 91st anniversary of the famous HOMESTEADLAND RUSH that took place right here in Central Oklahoma April 22, 1889.

I have been asked to say no more about the PEACEABLE ASSEMBLY.
Tomorrow is another day!

I have been requested to present the BIG PICTURE OF THE RUN OF '89.

Giving the BIG PICTURE usually means a long boresome account of things that probably never happened.

RELAX! I'm not going to stand up here reciting historic data and spend an hour boring you to death.

I'M GOING TO TRY TO DO THAT IN 20 MINUTES.

In spite of what you might think by looking at me,

I was not an actual participant in the Run of '89.

I am not a REAL INDIAN, either, but I propose to offer you a streamlined, unbiased summary of what took place FROM THE INDIANS' POINT OF VIEW.

Many people think of Oklahoma as being shaped like a skillet and refer to the extreme western counties as THE PANHANDLE.

We Indians regard Oklahoma as being shaped like a TOMAHAWK, and those western counties are the TOMAHAWK HANDLE.

Most of the people who live in Oklahoma are aliens or the descendants of aliens. This includes most of us Indians, because nearly all of the state's 65 tribes were moved in here from somewhere else.

NOWADAYS they are saying that aliens shouldn't be allowed to own land

A lot of early settlers came to Oklahoma Territory or Indian Territory for their health. Their previous activities made it unhealthy for them to stay where they were.

The first Indians arrived here long before white men came along and brought in what is called CIVILIZATION.

Archeologists have found dinosaur bones indicating that huge animals 15 to 30 feet tall once inhabited these prairies.

All the early-day Indians had to do was to bring one these critters back to their teepees and they had cheap meat for a month.

After they ate up the dinosaurs and that species became extinct, the INDIANS still had buffalo and antelope plenty. At least, they did until white men came in and almost made those species extinct, too.

Times were better back then. No utility bills to pay. If you got cold, you moved south. If you got too hot, you moved north.
No government regulations. No taxes, and women did all the work.

The white men ruined this wonderful system when they came into Oklahoma and got everybody more or less civilized.

The Spanish explorer Coronado cut across Oklahoma twice when he looking for seven fabulous cities of gold. Gold was worth maybe \$20 or \$30 a pound and Coronado came clear across the Atlantic ocean to find it. Some of the Indian tribes had a lot of it, but they kept it hidden until the Spanish and French explorers exterminated them to get it.

Nowadays gold is selling for \$500 or more per ounce, and people seem to be more anxious to get their hands on it than when it was cheaper. Not long before Oklahoma became a state there was a sort of "gold rush" in the Wichita mountains north of Lawton. The trouble was it was so thinly distributed in those granite rocks that it cost more to get it out than it was worth. It was easier to make money other ways.

Later on, English, Dutch, Spanish and French settlers landed all up and down the east coast of North America. They were looking for freedom and free land. So they took the Indians' land and the Indians' freedom.

A population explosion followed, due both to influx of immigrants and to the fact that the settlers were more anxious to get more offspring to help them work their farms than they were to practice birth control.

As it became more crowded, the settlers loaded things into covered wagons and headed westward in long wagon trains. After they left, it was still crowded, so the bureaucrats in Washington had the Indians marched westward, too. Remnants of some 65 tribes of Indians were resettled in Indian Territory that became White man's territory about as rapidly as anything like that can be changed gradually.

The Great White Father promised the Indians that they would possess these lands "as long as the Grass grows and the Water flows." When the Indians looked skeptical, the veteran politician said: "I wouldn't lie to you, would I?"

That clause about the Indians possessing the land as long as the water flows just lasted until the first dry year, which wasn't long coming. As soon as the grass didn't need mowing and the creeks weren't flowing, the white men took back the land and became known as "Indian givers."

The Chickasaws, Choctaws, Cherokees, Creeks, Seminoles, Comanches, Kiowas, Apaches, Cheyennes, Arapahoes, and Otoes got a sort of revenge on descendants of these Indian givers. They named post offices in Oklahoma.

They gave them names which newspaper people can't spell and TV announcers can't pronounce. Names like BOKOSHE, Bokchito, CHECOTAH, Keota, EUFAULA, Lenapah, OKMULGEE, Muskogee, OWASSO, Oologah, and OCHELATA, Pocola, POCASSETT, Sallisaw, Tushka, TAHLEQUAH, and Tuskahoma. WAPANUCKA, Waukomis, WAKITA, Waurika, WATONGA, Wewoka, WETUMKA and Weleetka, just to mention a few.

All of this background on what happened to us Indians is essential if we are to understand what happened on April 22, 1889, the day of the LAND RUSH!

In allocating part of the Indians' lands in Indian Territory back to them, the bureaucrats had misfigured the acreage involved. Oklahoma Territory was bigger than they thought. As a result, after settling the various tribes on tracts of land too small for them, the bureaucrats discovered they had a big chunk of UNASSIGNED LANDS right in the big middle.

These Unassigned Lands hadn't been assigned to any Indian tribe, so some white settlers called "Boomers" decided they had a right to come in and take it for homesteads. The area includes what now makes up seven counties in central Oklahoma---Noble, Payne, Lincoln, Oklahoma, Kingfisher, Cleveland, and part of Pottawatomie county.

Politics makes strange allies, and the Indians must have been surprised to find themselves on the same side as the bureaucrats who had moved them off their lands back east. Neither the Indians nor the bureaucrats wanted the settlers to take over the UNASSIGNED LANDS. Indian scalpers dared them to come in, but they came in anyway. The U.S. Army marched them right back out again, but they wouldn't stay out.

Political persistence paid off finally for the Boomers. They got a law passed which would allow them to come in legally and claim homesteads, but not more than 160 acres per family of settlers. As time passed, that size limitation proved to be another bureaucratic goof, but we won't have time to go into all of its ramifications.

It was decided that settlers would line up all around the borders of the UNASSIGNED LANDS on a certain day, under supervision of U.S. troops, and at a given signal everybody could head into the territory to stake a claim. Apparently, different signals were used in different places, the most common being an army bugle call or soldiers firing their rifles.

Every available kind of transportation was used. Santa Fe railroad ran several special trains loaded with settlers. Some walked, others ran. Thousands rode horseback. Families followed in buggies, surreys with or without fringe on top, or in ordinary farm wagons. A few rode bicycles and some may have jogged. There were some who didn't wait for the starting signal. They sneaked into the territory sooner than everybody else in order to be ready to claim what they regarded as the best lands. They were rightly called SOONERS.

Tactics they used still are practiced today in recruiting football players, scalping tickets, and claiming the best seats in the stadium. Bands play "Boomer Sooner" as the white man's war dance at football games.

The LAND RUSH drew a crowd even better than a free lunch. It was estimated that more than 100,000 people lined up to make the run at high noon on April 22, 1889. Whether they heard the toot of a bugle, the firing of a rifle, the bursting of a bomb, or a shootout at the Old Corral, they stampeded to stake their claims.

Within 24 hours more than 10,000 people had landed in what is now known as the DOWNTOWN OKLAHOMA CITY URBAN RENEWAL DISASTER AREA. Guthrie, the territorial capital, had just about as many people. Merchants brought in wagon loads of merchandise and set up businesses of all kinds in tents. One man didn't have anything but a tent and a table, so he put up a sign which said simply "BANK." After some venturesome settlers deposited some of their money with him, he decided to put in some of his own money

Immediately, a newcomer wearing a derby hat decided Oklahoma City needed a chamber of commerce, so he started bragging about the population and collecting dues.

It took the settlers less than a week to build a complete city, with post office, banks, hardware and grocery stores, saloons and gambling houses, livery stables, churches, style shows, blacksmith shops, hotels and restaurants, not necessarily in that order.

They had nothing to work with except native lumber, hand tools and elbow grease. No architects, no city planners, no government aid, and no mater plan. They just went to work and got things done.

Urban Renewal started out 20 years ago to rebuild the same area, with subsidies from taxpayers, regulations from Washington, master planners from New York, bureaucrats from all over, modern wrecking machines and dynamite, and all kinds of technology and power tools. They aren't half finished yet.

Modern civilization took over right after the LAND RUSH. It brought legislation, regulation, sanitation, frustration, taxes, television, education, and other social advantages over the years, but things haven't changed much.

Early photographs show that there was a terrific jam of horses, mules, wagons, and buggies on Main street every Saturday after the run, until street cars, and automobiles crowded them out. Traffic jams still exist. It now costs a dollar an hour to park your car downtown, while in the old days it cost perhaps a dollar a week to park your horse at the livery stable.

Oklahoma had a population of 1,414,177 when it became a state Nov.16,1907. That may have included transients and permanent residents of cemeteries, as census takers got paid so much per name and civic boosters were not inclined to question the liveliness or livelihood of anybody listed.

We have more than twice that many people in Oklahoma now, and chambers of commerce still want more. We have come a long way from TEEPEES TO TOWERS, from horseback to airplanes, from sod houses to condominiums, from outlaws to politicians, and from workfare to welfare.

From the time Oklahoma Territory was formed in 1891 Guthrie had been the territorial capital. When Oklahoma became a state, the constitution provided that an election would be held in 1910 wherein citizens could choose their own location of the state capital. Naturally, a number of towns wanted to be selected. By the time the first election was held, Guthrie, Oklahoma City and Shawnee were the prime contenders. When the votes were counted, Oklahoma City led, with Guthrie second and Shawnee running well behind. Guthrie citizens got election results set aside on some sort of technicality and a second election was held, with only Guthrie and Oklahoma City on the ballot.

Oklahoma City won again and Governor Charles N.Haskell immediately directed that the state seal and offices be moved from Guthrie to the Huckins hotel at Main and Broadway in Oklahoma City. Guthrie citizens cried "FOUL!" because they thought the location couldn't be changed until 1913.

Oklahoma didn't have a capital building until 1916. We will have to skip over some of the interesting yarns about how the capitol was built. Most state capitol buildings have domes. Most domed roofs leak. Oklahoma is known as the state with a domeless capitol building. That is not quite correct. Our capitol has a dome, but you have to go inside to see it. By keeping our dome under the roof, it doesn't leak. Usually, it is overlooked but it's there.

There is oil under our state capitol. The governor's office on the ground beneath the governor's chair has at times produced revenue even faster than the legislature could spend it. That situation proved to be temporary. Our legislature has now demonstrated that it can spend any amount of money, without even considering tax reduction.

Agriculture and oil are Oklahoma's two biggest industries. Single crop farmers have a hard time making any money, but those who diversify get along pretty well. The best farming system in this state is a good rotation of crops, livestock, and oil wells.

The geography of Oklahoma is interesting. In most places rains and melting snow run down out of the mountains to water the plains. In Oklahoma things are different. Most of our rivers run out of the plains into the mountains. That doesn't mean water runs uphill. It is because Oklahoma is tilted so that it slopes from west to east. The lowest point in Oklahoma is in the Kiamichi mountain area of southeastern Oklahoma, where it is only 324 feet above sea level. The highest point is Black Mesa in the west end of the Tomahawk Handle. I don't recall its exact altitude but natives have told me that it is about 200 miles from Black Mesa to Pike's Peak and that it is downhill all the way.

Texas brags about its six flags. Oklahoma has been under 14 flags, not to mention the banners of 65 Indian tribes represented here. Those 14 white men's flags are flown on the south side of the State Capitol whenever it isn't too windy for the custodians to put them out.

Surveys show that one of every 332,000 Oklahoma citizens can name everyone of those 14 flags, including at least two PEO members.

Oklahoma is 460 miles from west to east, 210 miles from north to south. This includes 70,000 square miles of land and about 200,000 lakes and ponds, every single one of them man-made.

We have 141 varieties of native trees and 175 species of birds spend all or part of the year here. Reliable studies show the birds come here voluntarily.

Official temperatures get as hot as 120 degrees (Tishomingo) and as low as 27 degrees below zero (Watts). For those of you who can spell CELSIUS that's 50 above zero and 30 below zero. Fahrenheit figures are more impressive.

The wind blows so hard in Oklahoma that nobody has yet invented a device strong enough to measure the wind in an Oklahoma tornado nor the gusts coming from candidates campaigning for political offices.

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Oklahoma has enough cattle to provide every man, woman and child in the United States with a 66 quarter pound hamburgers and enough wheat to make buns for them and a lot of other good things to eat besides.

Now, this is a very sketchy, selective history of how things happened in the Run of '89 and what they led to.

Of course, I have taken literary liberty in adapting the facts to fit the time and language available, but if you doubt anything I have said, you can look it up in the book.

Oklahoma is a great state, with a great name. One story is that the name came from a combination of two Choctaw Indian words, OKLA and HUMME, meaning RED MAN. That's the Indian version and most likely the true one.

Another story, probably contrived by a white man, is that a Claremore writer named Lynn Riggs wrote a play about territorial days and called it "Green Grow the Lilacs." This play was so successful that New York producers Rodgers & Hammerstein made a musical from it and called it "Oklahoma!"

The musical was so successful that Hollywood made a movie of it, and also called it "Oklahoma!" The movie went over so big that Congress made a state out of it, and called it "Oklahoma!" I rather doubt that story.

Oklahoma's official motto is "Labor Omnia Vincit." That's Latin, I am told. Nobody seems to know why our motto was written in Latin instead of Cherokee, Chickasaw or Choctaw, so people could understand it. But the Latin means: "Labor conquers all."

Oklahoma is a great state, and if you love labor, you ought to be happy here. There's a lot of work to be done to make it an even better place to live.

Oklahoma is OK! Thank you!

THE END