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# Selecting the Better Places to Live

THREE Oklahoma cities are on a list of 50 "Best Towns in America," compiled by Hugh Bayless, who wrote a book by that title, further described as "A Where-to-go Guide for a Better Life."

Ardmore, Ponca City and Muskogee are the three Oklahoma cities mentioned, but if the list had been longer the author might have included many more of the good places to live in our state.

"Grow or go" was the attitude of city builders in early-day Oklahoma. Before statehood Oklahoma City and Guthrie counted even traveling salesmen as citizens trying to reach 10,000, the magic number required by territorial law for a city to vote bonds.

Growth still is regarded as a sign of a healthy economy and a reflection of progress. Thus, growth remains a major objective even when large population has generated problems. About one-fourth of Oklahoma's people live in Oklahoma City and Tulsa, and that many more live in nearby towns and countryside.

In a national newspaper article,

Hugh Bayless points out that hundreds of metropolitan areas are suffering from financial difficulties, overcrowding and pollution. He says urban decay is continuing, not improving. Higher incidence of crime, more costly housing, greater traffic problems and decline in neighborliness are also disadvantages.

It used to be said of small towns that "they roll up the sidewalks at 10 o'clock" because few people were seen on the streets. Now big cities have deserted streets after banks and offices close, while suburban shopping centers may have stores open all night.

Oklahoma City and Tulsa both have renovated their central business districts but civic leaders have given no reason to expect that they will again become the primary shopping centers.

Bayless says the ideal place to live is in cities between 25,000 and 100,000 population. Towns too small often lack stability, adequate schools and cultural opportunities, or good medical facilities. Cities too large "take on attributes of a big

city."

Employment opportunities, of course, are more plentiful in metropolitan centers, but people seem to prefer to live where they can get to and from work conveniently. People who have been accustomed to spending two hours or more per day commuting by car or train say it is a great improvement to move to a place like Oklahoma City where they can get to their jobs in 15 to 30 minutes.

By the same principle, those who move from Oklahoma City to towns like Ardmore, Ponca City or Muskogee often find they can be on their jobs in 10 minutes, perhaps even walking to work.

Population experts predict that Oklahoma population may increase as much as 50 percent by the year 2000.

According to the 1980 census Oklahoma had about 44 people per square mile, but 34 other states were more densely populated. Every city faces questions about where to get enough water and other essentials.