

# Smithville Still Small Village

According to George Shirk's "Oklahoma's Place Names," the community of Smithville (pop. 133) in northeastern McCurtain County originally was named Hatobi. In 1890, the Post Office was changed to Smithville in honor of Joshua M. Smith, long-time resident.

However, it was a Chicagoan named Billy Burkhart who undertook to make this remote village a nationally known resort. It was 20 miles from a railroad and paved highways did not exist when Burkhart visited the area and became convinced that it was an ideal spot for building a mountainous metropolis.

Burkhart was a newspaperman and a visionary who may have gotten some of his inspiration from the development of a mountain hotel named Wil-

Bits of  
History  
Before  
Statehood

AUG 6 1982

OKLAHOMA  
TERRITORY

## TERRITORIAL TALES

INDIAN  
TERRITORY

helmina at Mena, Ark., some 50 miles to the southeast. Historian J.B. Thoborn wrote that Burkhart believed Smithville's natural qualifications were such that it would magically grow with a little publicity. He advertised the project throughout the country.

Settlers came and went. The village grew and declined. Burkhart remained and became the leading spirit in trying to make his dream a reality. But Smithville never reached the scale of popularity and patronage that its adopted one-man chamber of commerce hoped for.

Smithville was a small mountain village before statehood and that is what it is today.