

OKLAHOMA  
TERRITORY

## TERRITORIAL TALES

Bits of  
History  
Before  
Statehood

INDIAN  
TERRITORY

# Few State Settlers Came by Accident

Settlers came to the Territories for a variety of reasons, just as people come to Oklahoma nowadays. One pioneer who came by accident was John F. Moyer, who settled near Antlers. Probably there were others.

River excursions from Little Rock to Fort Smith were frequent in the 1880s. Fort Smith was regarded as a frontier community where all manner of Indians and white men met in the streets surrounding the famous court of Judge Isaac Parker.

An excursion steamer brought Moyer, then 19, to Fort Smith and left him there, although he had not planned it that way. While viewing the sights of the town, he met a man who had driven there in a wagon from Savannah, in the coal mining region of Indian Territory.

The man was looking for someone to make the return trip with him. Moyer saw a chance for adventure and took it. Having \$50 in cash he bought overalls and a cotton shirt and they set out for Savannah. When they got there, Moyer found he had no interest in coal mining and a few

dias later left for Stringtown, where he heard a lumber business was developing. There he worked at a lumber mill owned by Sam Scratch.

Next he went to Atoka, where he had been told a fullblood Choctaw Methodist preacher named Colonel Nelson wanted a man to help him run a store and post office. The location was called Nelson, and later it became part of Pushmataha County.

Moyer crossed the mountain country on foot, got the job and learned to trade with Choctaw Indians in their own language. When the town of Antlers was platted, Nelson moved his store to Antlers and Moyer went along. He never did get back to Little Rock.