



OKLAHOMA
TERRITORY

TERRITORIAL TALES

Bits of
History
Before
Statehood

INDIAN
TERRITORY

OCT 2 1982

Land Lotteries Worked Better

When offices opened in El Reno and Lawton for the "Great Land Lotteries" of 1901, about 150,000 people registered to claim about 16,000 quarter sections of land. The work of shuffling and drawing envelopes containing their names was an enormous task.

Every incoming train to El Reno was crowded. Numerous notaries public did thriving business completing and certifying registration applications. The centers of business streets were leased for refreshment stands.

Gamblers and sharpers fleeced the gullible and the unwary. Self-appointed crowd organizers (possibly with connivance of land office clerks) charged registrants 10 cents each for forming them into lines.

The situation in Lawton was similar. Hotels were filled and private homes in surrounding towns took in roomers. One old-timer reported that he rode on a board seat in a wagon from Marlow (on the Rock Island Railroad) to Lawton. The makeshift bus charged \$2 per head.

Although claims were made that there may have been some sleight-of-hand performances by which sealed envelopes bearing names of favored individuals were slipped into the drawings for the first day or two, the allegations never got beyond vague suspicions.

On the whole, the land lotteries seemed to have produced fewer complaints and disputes than earlier methods of opening Indian land to settlement.