

OKLAHOMA
TERRITORY

TERRITORIAL TALES

Bits of
History
Before
Statehood

OCT 4 1982

INDIAN
TERRITORY

Early-Day Proviso Is Still Debated

While debate was going on in Congress over the Omnibus Statehood bill for Oklahoma, New Mexico and Arizona in 1903, Sen. Benjamin R. Tillman raised a question that continues to be debated to this day. It is the geographical "wet and dry sides" of Oklahoma.

Tillman stated that he had visited the region and knew that people in Oklahoma Territory were better situated than those in Indian Territory because provisions had been made for free schools and machinery of government. He said everything in Indian Territory was tied up by the conditions of ownership of Indian lands.

Tillman called attention to a proviso for attachment of all or part of the Indian Territory to the proposed state of Oklahoma, extinguishing tribal claims and making Indian lands subject to taxation.

"What does that proviso mean?" he asked. "It means that Oklahoma is to be created into a state with all the rights of statehood conditioned upon her accepting hereafter, in whole or in part, other lands now in Indian Territory and the populations thereof.

"In other words, the provision of this bill puts it in the power of the politicians of this chamber to take the arid or semi-arid, the dry end of the former Indian Territory, great as are its resources and great as its capacity for maintaining a dense population and making a state out of it, and ignore the claims and rights of the white men in the other end of the former Indian Territory, the present Indian Territory.

"That is the wet end, the rainy end, with land which is as rich in natural fertility as any land on this continent . . .

"You would allow the arid end, Oklahoma, to locate the state capitol, to locate all of the public institutions, the penitentiary, the state colleges, to get all of those benefits, and then you would graciously admit thereafter these people in the other end to come in as wards in chancery, or as subjects, to pay taxes."