

OKLAHOMA
TERRITORY

TERRITORIAL TALES

Bits of
History
Before
Statehood

INDIAN
TERRITORY

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Pests and Insects Filled Territory

When the first Boomers and the earliest Sooners settled in Oklahoma Territory, they had to contend with swarms of insects and other pests that also had taken up homesteads.

Harvey Olds, a Michigan newspaperman who rode the first train into Guthrie, described the situation in an article he sent back to his paper. He later operated several Oklahoma papers.

"If Noah took into the ark every kind of bug, beast and reptile that infest this country, he made the greatest mistake of his life," Olds wrote. "He now comes in for a large share of the abuse, vituperation and profane criticism that is called out by the bite of a rattlesnake, tarantula, centipede, chigger, Albuquerque flea, Texas gadfly or an occasional viper, all of which are here in abundance.

"Small boys carry the tarantulas around in a can or on a string and offer them for 25 cents apiece. Hundreds of people sleep on the ground every night but not one bite is reported by these hairy monsters. But chiggers, may heaven help you and protect you from them. They are infinitesimally small, the merest atom as it were. It is only when they pre-empt a quarter section of your anatomy and settle down to business that you fully appreciate their great magnitude."

Olds reported there were no mosquitoes in the territory at the time but that the chiggers did a good job of taking their place. He mentioned the "horny toad" as a curious, harmless reptile and said that wolves, badgers, wildcats, foxes, coons, prairie dogs, squirrels and gophers frequently were caught alive and offered for sale.