

## Chapter 19: A City is Born

As the town approached the end of its first decade, town leaders decided it was time for the town to move up what might be called the “ladder of incorporation.” Having grown in area and population, the town now qualified under state law to become a full-fledged city with expanded rights and powers.

In 1958, the town Board of Trustees, who at that time consisted of Ben McCammon, Fred Blagg and Dr. Neil C. Allen, called for an election to select six “freeholders” for the specific task of drafting a proposed home-rule city charter. Among those elected to serve on this most important body were Clark Horton, Wayne Schooley and Dr. Neil C. Allen.

Following the election, the freeholders met to organize. Wayne Schooley was chosen to lead the board as its chairman. To help them with the sobering and monumental task at hand, the board decided to employ the services of a prominent member of academia whom they trusted would put to good use his extensive knowledge and experience in this particular discipline. Dr. C. F. Spencer, President of East Central State College in Ada, Oklahoma, was selected to fulfill this important advisory role.

Over the course of the next several months, the freeholders labored expeditiously to draft a home rule city charter. Completing their work in early 1959, the draft was submitted to the Town Board of Trustees. The trustees, in turn, wasted no time in calling for a special election on the question of adoption of the proposed charter. The important election took place on April 7, 1959. Turning out in great numbers, --3,568 to be exact, voters handily approved the charter and thereby elevated their town to the status of full-fledged city.

The atmosphere surrounding the effort to adopt the charter, to some extent, was characterized by a deep-seated fear of the ever-expanding behemoth, otherwise known as Oklahoma City. In the mid to late 50's, the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce embarked on a campaign which envisioned the City of Oklahoma City expanding its borders to six hundred square miles by 1960. Their slogan, “600 by 60”, most certainly sent chills up and down the spines of many wary folks who happened to live in the outlying areas around Oklahoma City.

Oklahoma City leaders, of course, were happy to oblige and proceeded to gobble up adjacent areas at an alarming rate. To make matters worse, Oklahoma City actively engaged in lobbying efforts to amend state annexation laws to their advantage. In this context, it is easy to understand why local leaders felt threatened and subsequently sought to consolidate and strengthen the community's independence by vigorously opposing Oklahoma City's lobbying efforts and by pushing for the town to become a city in its own right.

According to Gene Bumpass who served as the city's first city manager, "it was certainly a hot issue for Village residents."

One not so subtle clue to this undercurrent can be found in the very first section of the city charter which reads as follows:

*"The City may not be annexed by any other city or be merged into a combined county-city government or other governmental unit unless a majority of the qualified electors of the City of The Village voting on the question at an election approve such annexation or merging."*

According to the provisions of the newly adopted City Charter the first City Council took office on May 7, 1959. Chosen to serve as the first Mayor of the City of The Village was Fred Blagg. Filling the two remaining seats were Clark Horton and Jerry Bell. Although, the new City Charter provided for two additional wards to be added, these two council seats were not filled until the Spring of 1960 with the election of Tom Graham and Eugene Mathews who filled wards 4 and 5 respectively.

Ironically, one of the first official acts of the new City Council was to beat Oklahoma City at the annexation game. Apparently, getting wind that Oklahoma City would annex the general area where Casady School is located, The Village City Council moved decisively, and perhaps more importantly, quietly, to block Oklahoma City's move.

In a manner reminiscent of the midnight raid to steal the state seal from Guthrie, The Village City Council met in special session early on the morning of May 18, 1959, --hours ahead of the scheduled Oklahoma City council meeting. One can only imagine the look on the faces of the Oklahoma City Council when it was announced at their Council meeting that The Village had beat them to the punch by annexing the land first.

In the ensuing weeks, through the passage of a string of ordinances, The Village moved to annex the remaining unincorporated areas in the half square mile area between Britton and Hefner and Waverly and Penn. The last annexation took place on June 8, 1959 in which approximately 160 acres of land located in the far northeast part of the city and known as the Meeker property was incorporated.

Nonetheless, as the saying goes, "it ain't over till its over" and Oklahoma City, which was obviously not amused by the antics of its much smaller neighbor, managed to get the last laugh. In an apparent attempt to cut off further growth of The Village, Oklahoma City stabbed across the north and thus put an abrupt end to The Village's northward progression. The finality of that action is being felt today as the landlocked city struggles to make ends meet with its finite tax base.