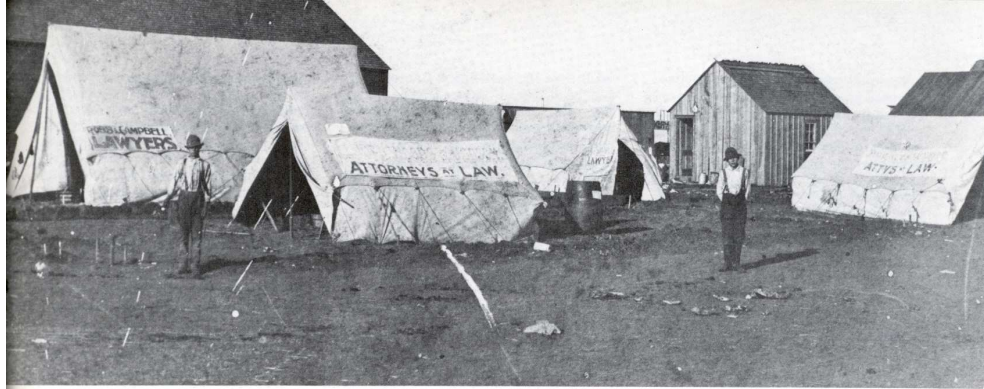


Enid Attorneys Helped Shape Our History

By Gary L. Brown



Enid Tent City: Shortly after Cherokee Strip Land Run

This year the Oklahoma Bar Association marks its 100th Anniversary. It was in 1904 that the Bar Associations of Oklahoma and the Indian Territories voted to unite into one professional association. This was an important event one hundred years ago as Oklahoma moved toward statehood in 1907.

When Enid was settled by land run in September of 1893, there were reportedly 147 attorneys in Enid within the first few days. Attorneys, operating out of tent offices, were attracted to the area by the prospect of legal work resulting from countless land claim disputes. The number had dwindled to about 50 by 1896, and today there are a little over 100 attorneys in Garfield County.

Lawyers Early Role

From the very beginning of Enid's history, attorneys have played a prominent role in the community. By November of 1893, the town organized and elected John Moore, an attorney, as its first mayor. Almost immediately the young town became embroiled in a dispute with the great Rock Island Railroad over locating a depot in Enid. Enid's attorney had their first big case! During the summer of 1894, tempers of the settler's boiled. City Attorney W.S. Whittinghill, together with fellow attorney John Curran, worked on Enid's behalf in the Territorial Courts while other attorneys preached the rule of law to the youthful over heated population of the new town. In one incidence, attorney W.O. Cromwell, backed up by other local attorneys, prevented the lynching of the U.S. Commissioner by a local mob who considered him too friendly to rival North Enid. Through shrewd legal and political maneuvering lead by Enid lawyers, mixed in with an act or two of civil disobedience on the part of Enid's citizenry, legislation was passed that resolved the dispute.

M. C. Garber

One of the many attorneys that made the land run in 1893 was M.C. Garber. Garber and his family (father, brother and several sisters) all staked their claims next to each other east of Enid, and founded the town of Garber. Garber had recently graduated from law school in Iowa. This was relatively rare in those days, most learned their profession by "reading the law." Garber moved to Enid in 1900 when he was selected probate judge and elevated to the Territorial Supreme Court prior to statehood. Garber would go on to play an important role in the development of the Garber-Covington oil field which was the first oil find in Garfield County. Garber invested his oil money in several businesses including the local newspaper. He then used the newspaper to launch a political career which would land him a seat in the U.S. Congress for

four terms during the 1920's. One of Congressman Garber's legacies to the community is Elmstead, his and Mrs. Garber's beautiful estate located north of Enid. Elmstead remains today one of Enid's architectural land marks and is the current home of Stephen Jones, who made history himself when he served as defense attorney for OKC bomber, Timothy McVeigh.

Parker & Simons Law Firm

Another pioneer Enid attorney, Charles Parker, rode the train in from Caldwell the day of the land run with the intent of establishing a law practice in Enid. He was one of the few original land run lawyers that would stay and build a practice in Enid. At statehood in 1907 he was selected to serve on the first Bar Examination Board for the State of Oklahoma and served on that board for a number of years. Parker was also appointed special referee by the Supreme Court to settle several County seat disputes including the infamous Creek County dispute between Sapulpa and Bristow. Parker was joined in law practice in 1906 by P.C. Simons, who had just completed a term as Oklahoma Territorial Attorney General. The Parker & Simons firm represented many of Enid's early day business men, including H.H. Champlin. Their firm grew in stature and was the only Enid firm listed in the prestigious Hubbell's Law Directory in 1918, the year of Parker's death. After Parker's death, P.C. Simons invited a young attorney, recently moved from Anadarko, by the name of Louie McKnight to join him in practice. Later Earl Mitchell was added as partner and from that partnership sprang two of Enid's most distinguished law firms, Mitchell & DeClerck and McKnight & Gasaway.

Role at Statehood

Other Enid lawyers played important roles in early Oklahoma history. When Enid citizens selected their two delegates to the Constitutional Convention, they chose attorneys Charles Moore and Charles Pittman. When Convention President, "Alfalfa" Bill Murray needed help selling Oklahoma's proposed Constitution to President Theodore Roosevelt, he sent a three person committee which included Moore to Washington. The group returned with several proposals, including Oklahoma's unique "referendum and initiative petition" provision which was included in Oklahoma's Constitution.

Enid's Finest

Three of Enid's most distinguished barristers were W.O. Cromwell, H.G. McKeever and Harry O. Glasser. I have already mentioned Cromwell's role in calming an early day mob. Cromwell came to Enid shortly after the land run and quickly established himself as a community leader. In 1906 he served as Oklahoma's last Territorial Attorney General under Gov. Frank Frantz. His most important contribution to Enid's history was a series of railroad rate cases before the Interstate Commerce Commission. His victories won favorable rate tariffs for Oklahoma. These cases allowed Enid to secure its trade prominence in north-west Oklahoma, extending into southern Kansas.

H.G. McKeever came to Enid in 1900 and established a law practice with Cromwell. McKeever was City Attorney in 1903-1904 and was County Attorney in 1907 when Oklahoma as a new state adopted prohibition. McKeever, along with the local sheriff, closed 25 saloons around Enid's square. McKeever was on the local committee that persuaded the Disciples of Christ to locate their new university in Enid, later known as Phillips University. McKeever, like many of Enid's prominent early day lawyers, was active in the Republican Party. He was narrowly defeated for Governor in 1918. His most influential client was H.H. Champlin. McKeever successfully upheld the legality of Champlin's first oil lease on the Beggs Farm near Garber. Champlin's successful well on that lease launched his oil business. McKeever would continue to represent Champlin in both banking and oil company matters the remainder of his career. McKeever also served as President of the Oklahoma Bar Association in 1928.

Harry O. Glasser came to Enid after graduation from Michigan Law School at about the time Oklahoma became a state. He quickly got involved in politics, first as a State Representative and then as a State

Senator. He unsuccessfully ran for U.S. Senate in 1938. Glasser has the distinction of having more cases settled by the United States Supreme Court than any other Enid attorney. Many of these cases were on behalf of H.H. Champlin. Champlin was one of Enid's most litigious business men. Several of his cases settled important legal issues that had a broad impact on the oil and gas industry. The most notorious was a case that tested the constitutionality of Oklahoma's unique oil proration law in the late 1920's. Another tested the Interstate Commerce Commission's authority over interstate pipelines. Glasser also represented Champlin in three other Supreme Court cases and argued two other cases for other clients. One tested the validity of the white slave statutes under the commerce clause of the Constitution and another challenged the federal authority for creation of the Securities and Exchange Commission. Not a bad record for a "country lawyer" from Enid.

The List Goes On

Many other Enid attorneys have played important roles in our history. Another "Champlin Attorney" was Nathan Scarritt. While McKeever and Glasser argued Champlin's cases before the various courts, Scarritt worked behind the scenes. He is attributed with crafting Champlin's legal attack on Oklahoma's oil proration laws and later advised Champlin in his bank closing show down with Gov. "Alfalfa" Bill Murray during the Depression. To this day, the top graduating law student at the O.U. School of Law, is presented the Nathan Scarritt Medal, a tribute to one of Enid's finest legal minds.

The list of accomplishments of Enid's lawyers goes on and on. Noticeable are the names of James B. Cullison, who served on the Oklahoma Supreme Court, William J. Otjen who was national commander of the Spanish American War Veterans and Harry Glasser, who in addition to holding Enid record for appearances before the Supreme Court served two terms as national president of the U.S. Highway 60 Association in the late '40's.

Enid's lawyers throughout our history have played important roles professionally, politically, and in the civic affairs of our community and state. It is said the strength of any community is determined by the strength of its legal bar, and through the years Enid has had one of Oklahoma's finest.