

## HISTORY OF BETHANY

The site of what is now Bethany has had a significant place in the history of Oklahoma. At different times, it has been claimed by France and Spain. The certainty that it was a part of the United States was not established until sixteen years after the famous Louisiana Purchase. This came in 1819 when this nation ratified what was popularly known as the Florida Purchase Treaty.

By this time, our government was searching for an area in the west to which it hoped to move the Five Civilized Tribes. In their original grant, the Creeks received all of the land west of the Cherokee between the Canadian River on the south and the Cherokee Outlet on the north. Council Grove, which includes the site of Bethany, remained a part of the land owned by the Creeks until after the American Civil War. Because too many individual Indians of the five Civilized Tribes cooperated with the Confederate States in that war, the United States saw an opportunity to reduce their holdings and provide lands for Indians who were unwanted in Kansas. In 1866, by treaties with the Creeks and Seminoles, our government obtained all of the holdings of these two tribes west of the Ninety-Seventh Meridian. But the eastern portion of this was not assigned to any tribe and thereby acquired the name of "Unassigned Lands."

Council Grove was an important part of the "Unassigned Lands." Although it was in the Creek Nation, it was a gathering place for many of the Plains Indians. Its good spring water and its large grove of cottonwood, elm and oak trees made it an attractive spot for Indian Councils. It was here that the Confederate Indians decided to hold a council with the Plains Indians when it became obvious that the tide had turned against them in the Civil War. Because Union armies were too near this area, they moved to Camp Napoleon in what is now Verden, Oklahoma.

Just before the Civil War (1858), Jesse Chisholm opened a trading post at Council Grove. This great trader is remembered for the famous cattle trail named for him although he was never a part of the cattle business. He was also a nephew of Tiana Rogers, the Cherokee wife of Sam Houston. (One writer says: "Chisholm's part in the history of Oklahoma . . . is fully as important and no less romantically picturesque than that of Daniel Boone in Kentucky.") Council Grove had famous visitors in 1859. One of these, Colonel B.L.E. Bonneville who as a youth had been a close friend of LaFayette, but had been exiled to America because he found himself on the losing side when Napoleon came into power. He graduated from West Point in the same year that Napoleon started his sojourn at St. Helena. With Bonneville were Congressman J.S. Phelps of Missouri, and Superintendent of Indian Affairs Collins. These leaders came with 180 troops to have a conference with the Comanches in which they hoped to establish more friendly relations between these Plains Indians and nearby white settlers. But the expedition contained just 180 too many soldiers; so the Comanches, mindful of the attack upon their camp while on a peaceful mission in 1858, broke their camp at Council Grove and fled northward in great confusion.

The first attempt at a permanent settlement was a result of ignorance of the geography of the region. Thinking that he was in Chickasaw country, Montford Johnson started ranching operations that included "ground covered with acorns, a paradise for hogs in the fall of the year." His discovery of error seems to have coincided with a proclamation by President Hayes that warned homesteaders to keep out of the "Unassigned Lands." He, therefore, had to abandon his Council Grove Ranch. Johnson continued his ranching activities south of the Canadian River that was safely in Chickasaw territory and is credited with starting the first

bank in Minco.

In 1889, the United States Government set aside the equivalent of nine sections as a source of timber needed for Fort Reno. The area included all of Bethany south of N.W. 42nd Street and extended southward to a half mile south of N.W. 10th Street and from Council Road eastward for about three miles. It was soon deemed practical to move a sawmill from Darlington (near Fort Reno) to near the present N.W. 10th Street Bridge.

When the "Unassigned Lands" were opened in 1889, this part of Council Grove was exempted from settlement. People in the surrounding area were permitted to take fallen timber for fuel. Those who knew how to avoid the spirit, but live up to the letter of the law quickly abused this permission. One day they would cut down timber and the next day they returned to take this as "fallen timber."

The coming of what is now the Rock Island Railroad relieved the government's need for the timber reserve so this area was opened for settlement. Homesteaders who were a part of the "run" of 1889 purchased much of the land. The first sale was on December 1, 1896. Among the purchasers was I.F. Melrose, who obtained forty acres at \$2.00 per acre. This title had the signature of President Grover Cleveland. The next sale occurred in 1901, but this time, the price was \$17.50 per acre. Mr. Melrose purchased another forty acres but he decided to stop with this amount because that was too much to pay for land even if it did have the signature of President William McKinley on the papers.

The first sale in what is now Bethany occurred on December 6, 1899, when Martin L. Turner purchased the southwest quarter of Section 16. He paid at a rate of \$5.00 per acre for all except the forty acres, which now includes the Youth Center (Fred Floyd Center) which cost him \$6.05 per acre. This quarter section is from Peniel Street west to Rockwell Street and north of N.W. 36th Street, including the SNU campus, except the site of Garey Hall and the athletic field. Two days later, Benjamin F. Hafer purchased the southeast quarter of Section 16 for this he paid \$8.00 per acre for 120 acres and \$15.50 per acre for the additional forty. It seems clear that real estate values were climbing rapidly in this future city.

Another ten years were to pass before this part of the old timber reserve was to have its beginning as a town and to assume the name of Bethany. With the prospects for an inter-urban line extending from Oklahoma City westward to El Reno, three institutions (an orphanage, Beulah Heights College and Bible School, and a rescue home) moved from Beulah Heights in Northwest Oklahoma City to this new location and formed the nucleus for the town which was platted in the summer of 1909. Arthur Beaver, C.B. Jernigan, W.H. Roberts, Mattie Mallory and Minnie Morris signed the dedication of the plat on July 18, 1909.

Construction of the necessary buildings proved to be a slow and difficult process. Because the railway had not been completed, it was necessary to use wagons to haul the building materials from downtown Oklahoma City. These pioneers were satisfied to live in tents until they could improvise the necessary buildings for the college. By October 1909, they had two buildings (the girls dormitory and boys dormitory) near enough to completion that they could be used. When school started that fall, young women lived in the attic of the girl's dormitory while the lower stories were being completed. In those first few years of operation, the lower floor of the boys dormitory was used for classes and the parlor of the girls dormitory was used for church services and prayer meetings.

One of the first businesses in Bethany was owned by O.P. Frees and located on Lot 16,

Block 10, Bethany Original townsite, which he bought on November 20, 1909. This location is where the Social Science building is on the Southern Nazarene University campus. Mr. Frees sold the business and property to E.O. Craft June 29, 1910. It was very difficult for Mr. Craft to get his merchandise from Oklahoma City, as the wholesale houses would not deliver. Mr. A.J. Peck of Duncan, Oklahoma, the father of Otis Peck, Florence (Peck) Davis, and Mrs. Herman Beaver, living in Bethany, gave the college a span of mules and someone else donated a brand-new wagon with sideboards. Mr. Craft made a deal with the college that he would feed the mules if the college would furnish a driver and let him have use of the mules and wagon for hauling his merchandise. Mr. Lee Martindale got the job as mule driver. It took all day to make the trip to Oklahoma City for merchandise because Mr. Martindale also had to pick up coal for the college which they used for cooking and heating of the dormitories. About a year later, the store building became too small and Mr. Craft moved his business into a building that had been built on what is now N.W. 39th Expressway, just east of College Avenue. This was the location where Bethany's Post Office was located and Mr. Craft was the postmaster. Bethany originally got its mail at N.W. 36th Street and West Avenue (now Rockwell Avenue). Everyone in town had a small box there, so many that it was not much trouble getting a post office located in town. On September 11, 1919, Mr. E.O. Craft sold to Arthur Beaver who opened a good general merchandise store.

Homes and other institutional buildings began to be constructed. Two of these pioneered institutions have survived. The orphanage is now The Children's Center (formerly Children's Convalescent Hospital) operated originally by the Children's Welfare League of Oklahoma City. The college has undergone three name changes. It came to Bethany in 1909 as the Oklahoma Holiness College and retained that name until 1920, when it merged with Texas Holiness College and became Bethany Peniel College. In 1955, this was changed to Bethany Nazarene College then in 1986 the name changed to Southern Nazarene University.

Because of the college (university) relationship to the Church of the Nazarene, it was inevitable that the community's beginnings should be Nazarene oriented. Early Council Members included the district superintendent of the Nazarene church, the local pastor and the president of the college. This status did not long continue, but at an early date, the local government enacted its "blue laws" which were to contribute to the town's uniqueness and thereby give it an advertising advantage not accorded to the average small community.

For almost a one-year period, the "blue laws" were contested resulting in one business owner being arrested many times for opening his business on Sunday. The particular merchant built a service station just outside the city limits, but soon after, his property was annexed into the City. He felt it was foolish to not open his business on Sunday and miss the opportunity to sell gasoline to the many people traveling Route 66 and going to attend church in Bethany. After all he said, "the local milk provider milked his cows on Sunday and delivered the milk to his customers on Sunday, so what was the difference of selling gasoline on Sunday." However, the Courts disagreed with the service station owner and he was arrested on several occasions. After many arrests, fines and jail time, the service station owner moved his business four blocks east of Bethany's city limits. The milkman said, "Yes, I milk my cows early Sunday morning, make my deliveries, but then I change clothes and go to church." His argument was, you can't milk cows on Saturday night and deliver on Saturday night because people want fresh milk. The "blue laws" stayed in effect for many years and even today questions are still asked if businesses are open on Sunday and if cigarettes and beer can be purchased in Bethany. All those things are possible now.

Bethany was incorporated as a town in 1910. At that time, only twelve votes were cast in

the election for its incorporation. With a population of 2,002 in 1930, it was able to organize as a city of the first class. In this election, 674 voters participated, with 498 voting in favor of this progressive move. In 1935, its residents began an effort to change its form of government to one that would provide for a city manager. In the next eighteen years and three attempts, Bethany succeeded in creating its present form of government, Council/Manager, which has proven to be a satisfactory one. The City Council consists of two elected officials from each of the four wards and the Mayor who is elected at-large. The City Council appoints the City Manager, City Attorney and Municipal Judge.

When the town of Bethany was started, the nearest cemetery was located 5 miles north of Bethany, dirt road all the way, and the cemetery in Oklahoma City was 7 miles away, 4 miles of which was a dirt road. There was a small country school by the name of Goff located on one acre of land at the northeast corner of the intersection of N.W. 63rd Street and West Avenue, (now Rockwell Avenue.) This school was consolidated with the Putnam City School prior to 1916. On June 17, 1916, Mr. C.F. Elrich, a trustee of this school, deeded to Mr. W. J. Spence this one-acre on which the school house was located and used as the school ground. On the same date, Mr. Spence sold to the Bethany Cemetery Association the same one-acre. On April 29, 1929, Mr. J. W. Wheeler sold to Brack McLain and J.N. Bales the west 5 acres of the section. These two men cut this 5 acres into burial lots and began to sell lots. December 17, 1941, these 5 acres were sold to the Bethany Cemetery Association. It was a happy day when cemetery lots were made available in the Bethany Cemetery because it was necessary to use a team and wagon as a hearse and when it rained it was really hard traveling those dirt roads. In 1958, Erin Investment Company sold the Bethany Cemetery Association a tract of land 281 feet east and west by 811 feet north and south this making up the present cemetery property.

Bethany's first school district was organized in December of 1910. It was composed of the south quarter of Section 17 from 36th Street north to 42nd and from Peniel west to Rockwell. Five years later, the district extended to 50th Street. The first building was a concrete block structure financed by a \$2,000 bond issue. In its beginning, this small district could afford only one teacher, but by 1914, the school population demanded an additional room and a second teacher. By 1921, there was need for a third teacher but there were not sufficient tax revenues to meet the need. The Children's Welfare League came to the rescue by providing and financing this need.

After World War II, Bethany began to expand. City facilities began to grow. Water, wastewater, police and fire protection was made available. The College began to grow because of the G.I. Bill. Barracks were moved in to house students. Many new homes were built between 1947 and 1949. In the late 40's, the farming community began to leave the Bethany area and the population grew from 2,500 to approximately 8,000. Bethany was extended to N.W. 63rd Street. The College property was expanded to N.W. 42nd Street. In 1950, a new high school was built and the railroad tracks which ran through the middle of what is now N.W. 39th Expressway was removed. Where the railroad was, it became merchant and church parking. Also in 1950, the area south of N.W. 23rd Street was being developed into housing and the population in the late 50's was approximately 15,000. The area of Bethany has increased from the 160 acres of original townsite to approximately 5.1 square miles at the present time. Population was 485 in 1920. According to the 1990 Census, the population had increased to 20,075. The population according to the 2000 Census was 20,307.

While growth has changed Bethany from a one congregation community to that of many churches, the town has not lost its original emphasis. Community objectives have continued to

center around religious and moral ideals. There are now more than 25 churches representing many different denominations.

The methods of achieving civic objectives of necessity have been modified. In the early days, the one local congregation provided the forum for civic and political issues. This, of course, had to change with the coming of other churches. Since civic and political leadership comes from different congregations, it became necessary to organize civic organizations.

The Bethany Chamber of Commerce was organized in 1939 as the Bethany Commercial Club. In 2003, it expanded to include Warr Acres and part of northwest Oklahoma City and became The Northwest Chamber. In 1946, the Kiwanis Club came into existence. Other civic organizations which became active are: Lions Club, Rotary Club, Optimist Clubs, American Legion, Y.M.C.A., Jaycees, Bethany Development Authority (BDA) and Bethany Business Association (BBA), each of which contribute to an aggressive civic program and business retention and expansion program for Bethany in harmony with the original ideals and objectives of the community.

With the continued growth of the City came more expansion of City Government.

-A soft water filtration plant was constructed in 1962 and upgraded in 1996-97. Additional water wells were drilled and adequate pumping and storage provided to assure continued water service throughout the community. A 1-million gallon storage tank was put into service in 1996. Water is supplied by 23 water wells located throughout the City. The Utility Department maintains approximately 60 miles of sanitary sewer lines and approximately 83 miles of water lines. The water plant has become outdated and unable to meet current Oklahoma Department of Environment Quality (ODEQ) codes and requirements. As a result, construction on a new water treatment facility began in 2004 with projected completion in the Spring of 2006.

-A new award-winning fire station was constructed and occupied in 1965. The rolling stock of the fire department is continually kept up to date as well as the training of the employees. All of the fire department personnel are Emergency Medical Technician-Defibrillator certified (EMT-D), and in 1996, the department combined efforts with other metropolitan cities for Central Oklahoma Search and Rescue (COSAR) training. This training is for a specialized rescue team for confined space, high angle, swift water and trench rescue.

-A new police station and municipal court headquarters was completed and occupied in 1966. Over the years, the building became too small and in such disrepair that a new complex was constructed. The current Bethany Municipal Police and Court Complex was completed and occupied in 2005.

-In 1991, the Bethany Police Department became the first in the State to be accredited by the Commission on Accreditation on Law Enforcement Agencies. In 1996 the City's first Juvenile Justice Program was placed into effect and is proving to be a beneficial program for the youth of the community.

-In 1976, a new City Hall building was completed and occupied. At the present time, the City operates on a budget in excess of \$10 million and has an average of 140 employees to serve and protect the community.

-Recreational opportunities are major contributors to the enhancement of business and

residential quality of life. The Park Department maintains 15 beautiful parks with an aggregate of over 145 acres. In addition to playground equipment, some of Bethany's parks include shelters, tennis courts, 2.8 miles of walking trails, basketball goals, softball fields, volleyball courts and an Aquatic Center in Ripper Park which was remodeled in 1996. Bethany's Eldon Lyon Park is host to two annual festivals which have become well known events enjoyed by thousands, the Bethany Freedom Festival on July 4<sup>th</sup> and the Bethany Balloon Fest.

-Bethany's Public Works Department assures citizens of being able to drive on approximately 79.2 miles of well-maintained streets within the City limits. They also provide excellent solid waste pickup to more than 6,600 residences and more than 450 businesses each week.

-The City's Community Development Department offers guidance, information and direction to developers, and contractors desiring to acquire or develop property in Bethany. They work very closely with the Bethany Development Authority and keep very current statistical data to supply to all that inquire.

Along with the expansion in City Government, the school systems serving Bethany as well as other institutions expanded and improved. The City of Bethany is served by two school systems - Putnam City Schools and the Bethany Public Schools. Each of these schools has been improved and expanded to meet the demands of population growth and knowledge. Bethany is also fortunate to have a vo-tech training center established in 1989 to provide computer and health care training to a broader service area.

Bethany General Hospital (now Deaconess at Bethany), an 88 bed facility, was completed and opened in October, 1970. Bethany also has several different assisted living and convalescent centers.

A Bethany Public Library was completed and opened in 1965. This library has since been taken over for operation by the Oklahoma County Metropolitan Library system.

The Westside YMCA was completed in 1960 and serves citizens throughout the western section of the metropolitan area.

Some of the largest employers in the Bethany area are: Southern Nazarene University, SBC, Putnam City Public Schools, Deaconess at Bethany Hospital, The Children's Center, City of Bethany, Bethany Public Schools and Albertson's Food and Drug.

Bethany can also boast of famous people who were born here and/or attended public schools here. Some of the most famous is Astronaut Shannon Lucid and Baseball Star Allie Reynolds.

Despite the growth in population and development, Bethany remains highly individualistic in character, harking back to its beginnings, and promises to so remain.