

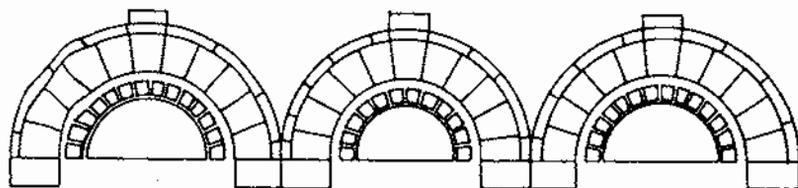
PAYNE COUNTY

HISTORICAL REVIEW

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**PAYNE COLONY 1884-1984
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William L. Couch at Stillwater

by Edna M. Couch

November 11, 1884, was a red letter day in Payne's Oklahoma Colony. All day and away into the night the glow of victory lingered on boomer faces. They slapped each other on the back and laughed at their good fortune. Homestead lands would soon be theirs.

At Topeka, Judge Foster of the United States Court rendered his decision: The boomers committed no offense against the United States when they settled on certain lands in the Indian Territory, commonly called the Oklahoma lands.

"And for this reason," Judge Foster said, "the indictments must be quashed."

The Colony members hoped Judge Foster's decision would convince Washington officials that citizens had a right to settle on the Unassigned lands.

The next boomer invasion was planned for November 20. Judge Foster's opinion must have time to reach Washington City. The next move into the territory was postponed until December 1.

David Payne had not yet recovered from the thirty-day rigorous prison-wagon ride from Rock Falls to Ft. Smith, Arkansas. On November 20 William Couch conducted the colony meeting. A week later David Payne, somewhat recovered, spoke eloquently at the regular colony meeting at Wellington. (Boomer meetings were held every Thursday night in some town along the Kansas border.)

The next morning, November 28, David Payne died at the breakfast table at the Barnard Hotel, Wellington. Government officials felt no regret. "The Boomers deprived of their chief, will more likely succumb to the forces brought against them."

In the opinion of Col. Edward Hatch, the remaining cavalry could be withdrawn from the Oklahoma District. This opinion did not take into account the stubborn determination and leadership of William L. Couch, vice-president of Payne's Oklahoma Colony.

The planned invasion was again postponed while the boomers buried their beloved leader. Grief quickened boomer determination. Enthusiasm among the heavy-hearted settlers reached a fever pitch. The invasion must go forward. Dave Payne's dream must be realized by the homestead settlement of the Oklahoma country.

William Couch reached his thirty-fourth year just a week before Payne died. Grizzled old veterans of the War Between the States insisted Couch must be their chief. The St. Louis Globe-Democrat said of Couch: "There is every reason to believe he is as persistent and courageous as his predecessor."

Couch announced the boomers would again invade the Unassigned Lands and "if necessary die to the last man in defense of the boomers just rights."

On December 8, 1884, Couch stepped into Payne's boots. Fifty wagons rolled south from Arkansas City a few at a time. Wagon wheels swirled the road dust and erased fresh hoofprints of cavalry horses. Only hours earlier a military detail crossed that trail looking for boomers.

The wagons followed the Agency trail south, passed the Ponca Agency, crossed the Salt Fork on the Otoe reservation and passed through the 400,000 acre pasture of the McClellan Cattle Company leased from the Cherokee Strip Livestock Association.

Not satisfied with their leased range, the McClellan Cattle Company extended their three strands of barbed wire further south to fence another 100,000 acres of the Unassigned Lands, often called the Oklahoma Lands.

Anger knifed William Couch as his wagon passed hundreds of fat cattle grazing in the Unassigned Lands where no cattleman or company had any lease rights. The CM brand was a little hard to see through the shaggy winter hair on the hides of the McClellan cattle. But the brand was there, the same CM brand he saw on cattle grazing on the legally leased range of the Cherokee outlet.

Four days and sixty-five miles south, the boomer wagons pulled up beside a great horseshoe bend in an unnamed tributary of Stillwater Creek, where the land raised in terraces up from the water.

"We started from Arkansas City with 200 men," Couch said, "and we moved slow as we expected reinforcements to follow. We reached Stillwater December 12 and concluded to stand there, and again to test the validity of our claims. We were on Oklahoma land, near reinforcements, supplies, and the mails."

The colony committee agreed with Couch, the camp location was a good place to make a stand against the army which might come to eject them. Tents were pitched and some settlers removed the covered wagon boxes from the running gear, set them on the ground for sleeping quarters with new canvas drawn tight against the cold winter bluster.

Eighty men organized a town company and made plans to build a village. But the first and most important business was to build warm dugouts to protect against the wintry blast of stinging sleet and smothering snow which was sure to come most any day.

Old soldiers among the settlers quickly pointed out that dugouts would also serve as fortifications against the military horde almost certain to des-

ced upon them as the dead-of-winter weather.

Disturbing thoughts nagged the settlers' minds. Would Washington officials agree with Judge Foster's decision that the settlers had committed no conspiracy in going on the Unassigned lands, even though there was a penalty for settling there?

There was hope the order would be changed, the order which directed the army to hustle the boomers off the lands. Some colony members expressed an opinion: if they could only hold out until March 4 the new president, Grover Cleveland, would be their friend and permit them to stay and homestead. With a little luck the soldiers might not find them until spring.

For twelve days the settlers worked on their dugouts undisturbed. No soldiers came to molest their happy settlement. Clear cold winter weather permitted the digging and building of about forty-two dugouts in the horseshoe bend of the creek "for the double purpose of shelter from the cold and as fortification for the boomers were determined not to again surrender to the soldiers." (Ira N. Terrell said 42 dugouts, later Sam Crocker said he saw the remains of 22 dugouts.)

Good sized rooms were dug in the earth of the second river bank just beyond the tents and wagons. Tree trunks were cut and laid across the excavations with well propped posts in the center. Smaller tree limbs and branches were laid crosswise on top of the logs to support the roof. Thick strips of sod, plowed up from the prairie, laid in overlapping layers formed a good firm roof. An earthen chimney passed through the roof to conduct smoke safely out. But there was little need for a fire inside if the settler draped a wagon sheet over the dugout door with the bottom fastened to a pole like a tepee flap.

Some men labored to construct dugouts, while others went out to choose homesteads all around. Harry H. Stafford kept busy everyday finding corners and surveying land. A. C. McCord, the colony

secretary, issued Oklahoma Colony Certificates of Location with the description of the land: Section, Township and Range of each man's homestead.

The boomer settlers wrote home about the wonderful rich land they found. They seemed proud of the handsome Certificates of Location which read in part: "His right in the same is hereby guaranteed to him or his assignees by all the power that can be afforded by this colony - each member hereof being bound to respect the interests of every other member against intruders. And this certificate, signed by the President and countersigned by the Secretary, with the seal of the Colony attached shall be evidence of any member's rights to protection herein before mentioned."

After a week of hard digging, the boomers settled into their snug underground shelters. A bakery was built where a woman colonist baked bread.

A town was platted and the town fathers built a school house and a few permanent log cabins.

The first black blizzard blew in the night of December 21. The boomers were cozy in their new dugouts. They had gathered plenty of firewood. There was water in the creek just below and in front of their dugout doors. When the creek froze, they chopped holes in the ice and dipped water or they melted ice in buckets beside a campfire for making Arbuckle coffee in granite or tinware pots.

Next morning, when William Couch stuck his head out, a savage north wind blustered a blinding snow into his beard. The men waded through snow to feed their teams tied to the wagon wheels. The horses and mules, a woe-be-gone sight, stood with heads sagged down, tails turned toward the biting wind whipping around them.

The campers made breakfast for themselves, the usual bread, pork sidemeat and gravy washed down with stout hot Arbuckle coffee. Successful hunters ate quail or other wild game. More experienced cooks made hot Dutch-oven biscuit or cornbread to sop in their gravy.

In spite of the bad weather, the hardiest old boomers went on with the business of deciding on claims they saw before the snow covered the land. Camp Stillwater was a busy place. New colonists came in almost every day. Their wagon axles needed greasing after the hard drive from Kansas. Harnesses always needed inspection and repair. Some settlers drove back to Arkansas City for more supplies. Men who had only shotguns sent for better weapons.

Cold weather was fine for hunting wild game. Hunting parties went out to fetch in deer, antelope and quail for dinner.

Along toward two o'clock, December 24, a hunter returned to Stillwater camp at a hard run.

"The soldiers are coming," he shouted in breathless excitement.

"Soldiers! Soldiers coming!" echoed and reechoed along the row of dugouts.

William Couch left his work in the headquarters dugout. He climbed up the river bank. Through the snow he saw horsemen approach, slowly, four abreast. As they came nearer, he made out the blue uniforms and black hats of soldiers. As he watched, thirty black soldiers and one white officer rode up and dismounted in a skirmish line some distance in front of the camp. Two supply wagons came up and the drivers threw down, what later proved to be, two heavy bags of handcuffs. The soldiers looked and acted like they meant business.

Whiskered old and young boomers commenced to climb up the river bank. Each man carried a Winchester, a double-barrel shotgun or a nondescript old squirrel rifle. A few women and children scattered among the men. They formed a line four or five deep.

When they were all assembled, the boomers numbered over two hundred. Settlers glared at the soldiers across the snowy abyss of the Oklahoma war about to commence. Every man was ready to defend himself and shoot back with lead if necessary.

The crusted snow crunched under his boots as William Couch walked forward with steady tread some thirty feet in front of the boomer line. He clutched the barrel of his Winchester in his gloved left hand.

Out in front of the military skirmish line, Couch recognized Lieutenant Mathias W. Day in command of Troop I, 9th Cavalry. It was the same troop that arrested him and his party of settlers on the Cimarron last May. Last spring Lieutenant Day faltered when the number of soldiers against the boomers was about equal. Now with the odds six to one against him, the Lieutenant might be forced into a retreat.

Lieutenant Day stood ramrod straight. "Consider yourselves under arrest," he said in his crisp military command voice.

"By what authority?" Couch asked.

"I have only one authority!" Day shouted, "The carbine."

"That is an authority we do not recognize," Couch replied. "I refuse to surrender to anything but civil process!"

As Couch stood there in the snow, he remembered his caution to the boomers, "Defend yourselves to the best of your ability. Return the fire only after the soldier's first shot if necessary to prevent capture and to save your lives and property."

He could trust the old veterans of the Civil War, frontiersmen accustomed to arbitrate difficulties by the threat of a revolver. The thing he feared most might happen. Some young farmer might get trigger itch in his first finger and set off the "fireworks."

"Turn your dogs loose!" Couch shouted. "Fire if you dare, to defend ourselves we will return the fire."

The Lieutenant ordered five soldiers to seize and tie Couch. The boomer leader stood still, fingered the barrel of his Winchester, the butt of the gun still resting in the snow.

As the soldiers advanced, Couch snapped his right arm straight out, his palm toward the advancing soldiers making the sign to stop. The soldiers halted.

"If you lay a hand on me I will consider it an assault and treat it as such," Couch said.

The soldiers stood shivering in the snow while Couch made a little speech: For years the army had broken faith with the settlers. Time after time the Payne boomers were promised a trial in the United States Court if they would surrender. They did surrender. But instead of trials, they were dragged to some state line and released with no opportunity to establish their rights in the Court.

Prominent attorneys told Couch these arrests by the military were illegal and boomer resistance to such arrest was lawful. Last spring they resisted arrest by the cavalry. Even though Lieutenant Stevens swore out indictments against them before a Kansas Grand Jury, no trial was ever held.

"Now," Couch said, "We will resist to the end by force of arms."

Lieutenant Day ordered the soldiers back to the skirmish line and commanded them to load their carbines.

Day held his watch in his hand, "I'll give you five minutes to surrender."

When the settlers did not throw down their guns, the Lieutenant extended the time another five minutes.

As the minutes ticked away, Couch felt the Lieutenant's determination waver. Day did not give the command to fire, not one boomer laid down his gun.

"At ease!" Day put his watch back in his pocket and the soldiers lowered their carbines.

Lieutenant Day marched forward and he and Couch stood there and talked in the somewhat abated snow-storm. The Lieutenant called the boomers insurgents. They would not lay down their guns and Day, with only thirty soldiers was too weak to slip handcuffs on over two hundred settlers who defied him.

"Well, Captain, where is a good place to camp?"

Day asked. "My men are freezing here,"

Couch grinned. "Camp down the creek; we will be neighborly."

Lieutenant Day gave the order. The skirmish line broke. Soldiers mounted their horses, rode toward the creek. Two military supply wagons rattled and bumped over crusted snow. Troop I of 9th Cavalry went into cold bivouac a quarter mile down creek from the boomer dugouts.

The boomer crowd melted away. Couch called a meeting. Colony leaders gave vent to their anger at being called insurgents. Ira N. Terrell expressed his view of the situation: "The boomers wish for a trial to test the title of the land, but the cattle barons and their political allies do not want and will not permit a trial."

The excitement of the afternoon subsided and the calm winter dark of Christmas Eve settled over Stillwater camp. Christmas celebrations commenced in various ways in different dugouts. No doubt the Kangaroo Court convened somewhere. By the light of a barn lantern the Kangaroo officials, Sheriff, Judge, Attorneys, Bailiff, Jailor, would try some innocent boomer on some ridiculous, trumped up charge. The charge no more ridiculous than those that hauled the boomers into court where there was never a trial. The Kangaroo Court was good experience, someday there would be trials. Colony members would be ready to defend themselves.

Along toward eight o'clock, William Couch wrote the editor of the Wichita Beacon a report of the colonists encounter with Lieutenant Day's army. In addition he wrote, "The colonists are in good spirits and fully determined and will never submit to anything except an arrest authorized by law. Now is the time for our friends to come to our relief."

Payne's Oklahoma Colony settled into their snug winter dugouts and waited.

On December 29, 1884, the first telegram was sent from Stillwater, Oklahoma Territory, via Arkansas City, Kansas. It was addressed to His Ex-

cellency, Chester A. Arthur, President of the United States, Washington, D.C. William Couch explained the situation: A large number of law-abiding citizens residing on the Oklahoma lands were confronted by U.S. troops who demanded surrender by threatening to fire. The colonists objected to being called insurgent citizens of the United States. They were occupying the public domain since the land was not Indian country. "We pray your excellency to order a stay in the action of the troops pending your action in this matter. An early consideration and reply will be gratefully accepted by thousands of honest homeseekers throughout the United States. Reply to Arkansas City, Kansas. Obediently yours, W. L. Couch."

No reply was ever written or received.

The Stillwater Town Company commenced drafting a memorial to Congress. Charles E. Streeter wrote the document in his precise penmanship. "We the people of Oklahoma, assembled in public meeting, at the town of Stillwater, in Oklahoma, do most earnestly and respectfully request the immediate attention of Congress to the following facts: Oklahoma was bought by the United States from the Creek and Seminole Indians eighteen years ago. . . . No Indian or tribe of Indians, owns, controls, or claims to control, one foot of these lands. . . . all the western part of our country has been settled and improved, exactly as we have settled and improved this country, in advance of official invitation, we have repeatedly been driven from our homes by military force, our houses burned, our property destroyed, and our bodies dragged hundreds of miles into out of the way places, and held for weeks, beyond the reach of civil process, and then dismissed without trial or explanation."

The memorial cited other grievances: "Our right to make homes for our families would not have been questioned had it not been for the fact that rich cattle syndicates were here ahead of us.

"These men as few in number, but strong in the

use of unlimited capital.

"They do not pretend to have a lease of these lands. . . yet they hold and enclose them with wire fence, and the federal army is used as their private police.

"We are here to stay. . . We do earnestly request that Congress henceforth guarantee to us our plain and undeniable rights under the laws and Constitution of our Country.

"And as a means to secure those rights, we request that Congress order the withdrawal of the Federal troops, and at an early date organize Oklahoma as a Territory of the United States, and provide for the appointment of a Governor and the election of other necessary officers."

And then the memorial was finished, one hundred fifty-four settlers came in and signed their names in two neat columns. As each page of names was filled, another page was pasted on. After the colony members had signed, the memorial measured fifty-four inches in length. Signers were:

Chas. E. Streeter, H. H. Stafford, T. W. Echelberger, A. W. McMillan, H. A. Stade, A. C. McCord, Kay Allen, Joseph Tincher, T. C. Cox, J. Kershner, Richard Courtright, Wm. Tuonsey, W. M. Wood, M. H. Couch, H. L. Marvin, Charley Linder, Mrs. Emilia Stade, Mrs. Josiphene Allen, W. H. Baxter, U. P. Shively, David Ross, F. E. Munn, R. Campbell, Thos. J. Adams, Wm. S. Adams.

E. L. Adams, Jos. W. Sproul, L. Hanrigan, J. Hanrigan, Y. M. Gillmore, Jno. Curley, N. T. Nix, Vernon Nix, Mark Sutherland, Arthur Sutherland, M. Haden, A. V. Hill, D. J. Bluebaugh, James Stewart, Jos. Ballinger, W. T. Colver, Lee Williams, John Gunkel, Millard Willhight, Lock Brown, A. B. Calvert, Wm. Shafer, John S. Koller, Larry Larned, Chas. Hoyet, Riley Funk.

M. Q. Couch, David Husbands, William Richardson, B. Stewart, W. Frasee, F. M. Sallady, W. J. Stewart, E. D. Phillips, Wm. Long, Thos. Fleming, Jr., J. H. Fisher, J. Keislar, Charley Soper, R. Soper, John

Soper, Abe Wheeler, Jas. Wolts, A. B. Calvert, J. B. Walker, W. Rup, N. Jacoby, Wilber Jones, Ansel Jones, Frank Martin, John McGrew, C. W. Kutter.

I. J. Hays, C. H. King, W. F. Tucker, Wm. Shepard, J. H. Thoroughman, J. P. Ellis, Jackson Walker, G. H. Spease, J. W. Hays, Geo. F. Brown, Dannel Hovund, John Bennett, George Burnett, John Elliott, E. H. Manwell, John Saylor, T. C. Sinclair, A. T. Ketchum, C. Norton, Walter Wood, E. E. McCaskey, J. Greene, Thos. J. Bowen, W. E. Gordon, Joseph Couch.

John Funk, A. King, Chas. L. Miller, W. T. Walker, Mrs. Lide Walker, James W. Tanner, Washington Hill, Hoseph Jackson, Frank Broughton, J. Grub, Frank Myer, Chas. E. Rhodes, S. L. Mosley, Joseph Leane, A. W. Sawyer, William Young, S. L. Thompson, Henry Stipp, W. S. Myers, C. W. Shewey, J. J. Christy, S. A. Craft, D. J. Odell, E. Kammerdiener, Frank Kammerdiener, Jacob Foscallo.

Frank Vaise, A. J. Martin, Ed Farmer, T. R. Keislar, J. H. Kittredge, Benjamin Warner, D. L. Brown, J. Roberts, James Roberts, Weldon Maples, Jno. Coates, J. W. Coates, W. H. Miller, A. Beyleau, E. K. Dumont, J. L. C. Miller, M. A. Miller, Wm. Tuder, M. G. Jones, W. L. Couch, J. Reiser, Edward S. Wilcox, Charles Moore, J. W. Jordan, Oscar Spease, Jno. Wheeler.

The committee prepared the undated memorial for mailing to the Honorable P. B. Plumb at Washington, D.C. as soon as they could send mail out to the post office.

On January 7, 1885, the memorial was presented to the Senate by Senator Plumb. It was printed in the Congressional Record, but the names were omitted.

On Christmas Day, 1884, Lieutenant Mathias W. Day made his official military report of the encounter with the boomers. They refused to submit to an arrest. "I had about 20 men on a skirmish line, as they were so densely massed I hesitated to give the command to fire as the slaughter would have been great. I have done all I can without resort to arms. . . . If I am compelled to arrest them with-

out firing on them I would request reinforcements."

Lieutenant Day's report continued, "The settlers call this place Stillwater."

The colony settlers and the soldiers became very friendly. The boomer doctor saw a sick soldier and gave him medicine. When the settlers learned that Lieutenant Day would not push the arrests, they stopped carrying guns in their hands.

General of the Army Philip H. Sheridan was disturbed when Lieutenant Day's reports came to his attention. He had the Stillwater problem investigated. As a result there filtered down through military channels a reprimanding telegram. "This officer is on entirely too familiar terms with the intruders; . . . the performance of duty should not be embarrassed by exhibitions of sympathy. . ." (I have a copy of the telegram.)

Lieutenant Day was ordered back to Camp Russell. His final report must have further disturbed Washington brass. Day reported he was leaving Sergeant Wilson and four soldiers camped on Stillwater Creek. "There is now a most amicable feeling existing between the colonists and the troops." The boomers loaned Day a spring wagon to bring back supplies to the military camp. Ever after the boomers called Lieutenant Day a friend and a gentleman. Later William Couch stood with him in a photographic studio and had tintypes made.

On December 28, Colonel Edward Hatch, at Fort Riley, Kansas, received orders to take command of the Oklahoma war and remove the intruders. He ordered fur-lined clothing and arctic overshoes for the troops. Horses were rough shod for marching over ice and snow. Because the prairie grass was covered with snow it was necessary to haul both long and short forage for the animals.

January 11, Colonel Hatch and 159 soldiers rode toward Stillwater Creek. Cavalry horses floundered over icy trails. Then a warm rain set in, river ice broke up and swollen streams had to be bridged. One newspaper reported that Colonel Hatch swam the

five hundred foot wide Salt Fork through nine feet of water and chunk ice.

Gossiping civilian drivers of military supply wagons said Hatch hurried ahead to the warm hospitality of the B and M ranch house where he "bunked and supped" with the cattlemen every night he was in the Territory.

January 13, General Sheridan telegraphed General Augur for an immediate report of the "attitude of the invaders toward the troops in Indian Territory, the exact number of troops sent to carry out the provisions of the President's proclamation, and other orders directing the removal of the intruders."

General Augur replied that Colonel Hatch had orders to remove them without violence, if possible. Hatch had seven companies of cavalry to remove 250 men and a few women.

Augur described the attitude of the invaders, "Couch, the leader, is reported to be a fanatic who believes himself in the right and is willing to risk a collision, as likely to invite sympathy and compel favorable congressional action."

The Commanding General impressed upon Hatch the importance of avoiding loss of life. Also to cut off all supplies and reinforcements.

Colonel Hatch decided to employ other effective ideas which might suggest themselves.

January 19 Colonel Hatch was ready to oust the boomer colony. He made many hand written copies of a "paper" which Sergeant Wilson circulated through the camp in the evening "leaving copies at many huts." The "paper" warned, "There is no necessity to resort to arms. . . . Should a collision occur to which it is the intention of your leaders to compel you, the military will not be responsible for loss of life or stock. . . . All trouble can easily be avoided by. . . peacefully leaving the Territory. Edward Hatch, Bvt Maj General, Col 9th Cavy."

Sunday morning, January 25, William Couch turned

down a demand to surrender. He said he would fight in self defense.

Because of friendship between soldiers and settlers, all day Sunday several soldiers worked on the feats of the timid. Fearful settlers cowered in their dugouts, beset by shortage of food. Some timid souls packed their wagons and, with the permission of military officers, drove up the cold, snowy trail toward home. But not so Mrs. Allen.

Mrs. Josiphene Allen received a note from a teamster who urged her to leave very early the next morning. The courier added that Colonel Hatch would give her shelter and protection in his camp until the battle was over.

She did not hesitate. Her reaction was quick and decisive. In the presence of her two young children she snatched up a revolver and thrust it into the hand of her husband.

"Take that and stand by the boomers," she said.

Slowly she turned toward the messenger. Proud contempt lifted her shoulders and her voice dripped disdain. She said she felt more safe and under better protection with her boomer friends than with "General Hatch and his cowardly soldiers." (Sam Crocker)

Quickly word of her reply spread through the Stillwater camp and "put new life, courage and determination into the manly breasts of every homesteader there to locate claims now given into the murderous hands of a soulless cattle syndicate, backed by designing army officers and a corrupt administration." (Samuel Crocker)

Later in the day, Couch received another order to surrender which he refused.

The night of January 25, military orders were issued. The troops would go into action early the next morning. Care was observed that the order "would reach the boomer camp that night." The military orders of the morrow, purposely leaked by the soldiers, spread from dugout to dugout and from boomer to boomer.

Colonel Hatch learned from the soldiers that the food supply in the colony camp was running low. "It was discovered that there was dissention among the boomers as to what course to pursue."

Colonel Hatch had his own trouble. On account of the terrible blustery weather, Hatch could not be sure of receiving sufficient rations and forage. Teamsters who would risk their lives going into the Territory in such weather were hard to find. In Caldwell a strike was brewing. The drivers demanded \$10 a day. And some of the drivers were boomers who did not propose to take military supplies to be used against their brother members.

Hatch wrote in his report: "The fact that we would be out of forage and rations in two days, not being assured that the rations on the way would reach me, promptly decided to move boldly upon them in the morning, trusting the result would be favorable."

In the dark hiatus between dusk of 25 January and the dawn of the next day, William Couch faced his most trying night. A hot-tempered rebellious faction of the settlers threatened to fire upon the soldiers at day break. They spent the night casting lead bullets and reloading cartridges and brass shotgun shells with buckshot.

William Couch went back and forth from one rebel dugout to another, all night long. He tried to convince the defiant settlers of the folly of their intended assault upon the military, but they would not listen. They laughed in his face.

At first light, exhausted from worry and loss of sleep, Couch looked out that morning and saw soldiers in every direction and two Hotchkiss guns in sight, their ugly barrels pointed toward him. His temper flared at the sight of cattlemen, just beyond the soldiers, loitering around like vultures waiting for the kill. Any minute the mutinous settlers might open fire upon the military.

About eight o'clock, Couch watched Major Dewees and four dismounted armed troops move directly to-

ward the American flag which waved loyally above the colony headquarters dugout. Captain Moore with three soldiers marched on Dewees left, guns ready. One company of infantry, deployed to the rear, was about to sieze a hill overlooking the rifle pits and defensible dugouts.

Colonel Hatch and his adjutant, Lieutenant Walter S. Finley, rode directly to the colony headquarters and asked what the boomers proposed to do.

William Couch, stalling for time, replied, "As long as we are free American citizens, we will not submit to being harassed by the military, since we are committing no crime."

During the night a committee checked the food supply and reported. The settlers could eat for about five more days. The military would not allow them to hunt for game. For the past several days no supply wagons had come through the Hatch blockade. Wagons loaded with food had been turned back within sight of Stillwater camp. William Couch knew he must make the best deal he could in the face of Hatch's threat to fire on him and his fellow settlers.

Without food they had little chance to resist. Many years later the two sons of Thomas J. Adams remembered they were down to a starvation ration of cornbread and fat pork and they were mighty tired of the cornbread. (Shawnee News-Star)

Couch delayed his answer as long as he could. He conferred with the colony leaders. They decided to break camp and return to Kansas although some of the rebellious settlers still wanted to fight the soldiers.

In several conferences between William Couch and Colonel Hatch, certain conditions were agreed upon. Couch would keep his men together, guns and ammunition packed in their wagons and transport all their own property in their own wagons. The boomers would furnish their own rations and feed for their teams. They would march to the Kansas line, subject to being placed in the hands of the U.S. Mar-

shal at any time. Couch would call in any boomer parties out in the territory, and turn back any wagons he was aware of coming into the country which might be missed by the soldiers.

Colonel Hatch said he would have preferred to move them out under arrest and close guard. If the boomers were placed under guard, it would have devolved upon the army "to ration them and forage their animals." This Colonel Hatch could not do because his own rations and forage would last only two days for his three hundred man army. He could not feed the settlers and forage their stock.

Couch admitted to Hatch the colony was "abundantly supplied with money." In a days march they could reach the Pawnee Indian Agency where they could buy rations and hay.

On January 27 the thermometer dropped to 10^o above zero and held. The boomers moved out with the American flag flying from the first wagon. The Territory was a broad carpet of snow, six inches deep. "It presented a bleak, barren, almost Siberian wintry appearance at this season of the year."

"We moved out without escort," William Couch wrote later.

Horses and mules toiled through stubborn snowdrifts. Men jumped out and pushed when the going was rough. A squad of soldiers followed along at some distance, far enough away that the boomers could not complain of being escorted.

The trail was snowed up and there were few landmarks to go by. Scattered all along the trail were hundreds of carcasses of dead cattle and many more cattle starving for want of feed and water. The grass was covered with sleet and snow. Watering places were frozen solid. The storm had taken its toll of the cattlemen's herds.

Settlers and soldiers alike were anxious to get across the Salt Fork of the Arkansas while the ice held firm. A sudden warm spell could melt the ice and everybody would be in trouble. With an ice breakup the Salt Fork was known to become a raging

torrent for days. Their luck held. The wagon train crossed without incident.

Colonel Hatch and the soldiers camped near the boomers until January 30, when Colonel Hatch hurried away toward Caldwell.

In the afternoon the boomer wagon train approached Arkansas City. A friendly newspaper reported that between three and four thousand cheering citizens met 175 boomers in fifty-six wagons and escorted them to a big banquet. The streets were a mass of humanity and loud cheers fierced the frigid air. And the Arkansas City band blared "Hail to the Chief."

The boomers called a public meeting in a rented hall. People and press crowded in, eager to hear more details of the boomer struggle. Couch recounted their experience from beginning to end. The pleasant trip to the promised land, the encounter with Lieutenant Mathias Day on Christmas Eve. Everything went well until January 24 when the U.S. troops hemmed them in. General Hatch starved them out.

They had surrendered but they were not defeated.

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News and Notes

Oklahoma State University Museum will host the "Spiro Mounds" exhibit from April 4 - June 2 in Room 370 in the Student Union. To open the show an open house will be held Sunday, April 6, 1-4 p.m. The focus of the exhibit is the rich Spiro culture which had at its center the Spiro Mounds archaeological site in La Flore County between 1,100 and 600 years ago. The exhibit is designed to help viewers gain an appreciation and understanding of this complex and sophisticated society and to recognize its accomplishments and failures. It illustrates the "gateway" effect and the far-reaching influence of the Spiro people throughout the Southeast and the Mississippi Valley.

The exhibit features some 35 artifacts and replicas found or constructed during the excavations at the Spiro Mounds site. These include effigy pipes, shell cups, gorgets, copper plates and pottery.

On April 17th at 7:30 Don Wyckoff, director of the archaeological survey will give a lecture, "Questioning Some Myths About Spiro," in the Bartlett Center Lecture Hall. Using slides, he will relate the current knowledge about Spiro to the overall picture of prehistoric societies which functioned between 1000-1550 A.D.

The exhibit was funded by a special merit exhibit grant to Stovall Museum from the Oklahoma Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

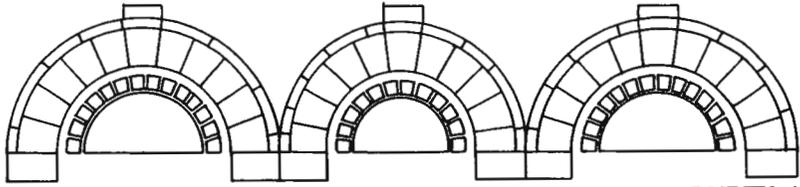


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Payne County Historical Society is organized in order to bring together people interested in history, and especially in the history of Payne County, Oklahoma. The Society's major function is to discover and collect any materials which may help to establish or illustrate the history of the area.

Membership in the Payne County Historical Society is open to anyone interested in the collection and preservation of Payne County history.

All members receive copies of the *Review* free. In addition, the Society sponsors informative meetings four times a year, the first Tuesday in March, June, September, and December, 7:30 p.m. Two outings; one in the fall and the other in the spring, are taken to historical sites in the area.

Board meetings are held the second Tuesday of each month that a regular meeting is not scheduled. These luncheons are held at 11:45 a.m. in Stillwater at the Luncheon Junction. All members are encouraged to attend.

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