

Hugo's History Makes Interesting Reading

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As time goes in Oklahoma, Hugo is an old town, dating back to late 1901, when a concentration of people began appearing here. They lived in tents, built shed-like quarters and, although today's research does not verify this, probably also lived in dug-outs.

By August, 1902, the official survey and plat was completed, setting aside 415 acres of land as the original townsite. Four additions in the next few years had raised it to 765 acres.

Researchers now rely mainly on the March 8, 1906 issue of an early-day newspaper (ancestor of the Hugo Daily News of today) for facts concerning Hugo in its infancy. Location of only one copy of that paper is known - it lies today in the cornerstone of Hugo Junior High School, from which it was removed when the new school was built a few years ago and held out overnight in custody of the then secretary of Hugo Masonic Lodge, the late Carl Hansen. An enthusiastic local history buff stayed up most of the night copying the information verbatim before the paper was re-sealed inside the cornerstone.

From that information today's residents learn that:

Hugo was founded in the latter part of 1901, its location determined by a crossing made by the Arkansas and Choctaw railway, then built, and the Monett and Paris branch of the Frisco railroad. The west part of the town was surveyed and sold by S.B. (Bailey) Spring (later listed as the town's first postmaster) and J.J. Terry. The east side of the townsite was controlled by J.C. Kirkpatrick. The latter for years prior had resided on the townsite and at the time the new railroad was built was cultivating ground now covered by Hugo's main business section.

Titled "Some Figures on Hugo," published in the Feb. 22 issue of the Husonian and referred to in the history published in the March 8, 1906 issue these facts emerge:

In late November or early December F.M. Hopkins, a general merchandise man, began erection of the first "permanent" type building that marked the location of Hugo. By March 1906, that number had increased to 398 structures, completed or in process of completion.

F.M. Hopkins was the founder of the Raymond Trading Company and the booming town took its original name of Raymond from that source. However, the Post Office department advised leaders that there already was a community named Raymond in the Territory and another name would have to be chosen.

Mrs. W.H. Darrough, wife of a pioneer local builder and mother of W.H. Darrough Jr., who lives here now, suggested the name, Hugo, in honor of her favorite writer, Victor Hugo. This was accepted by the Post Office Department.

Modern postal service began here in November, 1901. The federal building was a part of S.B. Spring's general store on what today is West Main Street east of the Frisco property.

Other business establishments serving the rugged men and women carving this community out of cotton patches and woods, included Kelly-Smith Grocery, Thomas Dry Goods Company, Goodland Trading Company, O.S. Kingston, F.N. Ellison, W.N. Campbell, D.B. Davenport, A.H. Lockwood – all identified as mercantile store operators. The first livery stable was started in December 1901, by an R.W. Caviness.

About March, 1902, the first group religious services were held here by a Methodist church minister and shortly thereafter a Sunday school was organized. It was non denominational, apparently, its summer meeting place being air-conditioned – outdoors under the trees. First regular worship services were held monthly by a Disciples of Christ minister. First revival services were by the Baptist faith. By 1906 the Presbyterians, Methodists and Baptists had constructed church buildings. Today Hugo boasts a Catholic church and a representative of most of the major Protestant denominations.

Hugo's history as a municipality began Sept. 3, 1903, when, according to the 1906 newspaper, an order incorporating the town became effective. J.W. Greer was elected mayor the following October, he and the other original officials serving until the first regular election was held the following April.

In addition to Greer, the town's first officials were C.G. Shull, city attorney; W.L. Lance, recorder; I.B. Rainey, J.P. Ward, E.L. DeWitt, J.L. Goolsby and Floyd Caylor composing the council.

Elected in April were R.L. Jones, mayor; C.G. Shull, city attorney; Hugh Davis, recorder; and J.T. Brian, town marshal. Apparently, the council body "carried over."

Other men who have guided the destinies of Hugo as mayor have been, in order of their service: J.F. Larecy, M.L. Webb, R.L. Jones, Lyman W. White, R.L. Jones, J.W. Milam, O.W. Hanna, W.A. Musgrove, Ed Linthicum, W.E. Terry, R.L. Jones, F.M. Caldwell, R.L. Jones, W.Y. Webb, R.D. Margrave, R.L. Jones, Carl Sager, C.A. Kimmons, Carl A. Sager, Ennis M. DeWeese, W.P. (Pat) Patterson, Fowler White, Sam Sorum, Fowler White, Goran Campbell, Fowler White, Joe G. Pierce, and the current mayor, Gene Thomson, now in his first term. The above list from the term of J.W. Greer, through the last term of Carl A. Sager is according to information contained in the Revised General Ordinances of the city of Hugo published in November 1941.

History of Hugo schools – now a \$728,000 business offering 12 grades of instruction in a nearly \$2 million plant to 1,951 boys and girls studying in ten classroom buildings under the direction of 83 instructors – dates back to January, 1902. This was a subscription school, to which parents paid a monthly fee for each child instructed.

When it was discovered shortly that the teaching credentials of the operator had been stolen in Pennsylvania, the imposter left here in a hurry, and Miss Mamie Smith, (later mother of C.G. Shull Jr., Citizens State Bank officer today) continued the school.

The public school system of today was inaugurated by the municipal government, supported by a ten-mill tax levy voted early in the R.L. Jones primary administration. First school board was headed by Dr. B.W. Caldwell; first superintendent of schools was W.C. Taylor, who also was a teacher. He and other faculty members – S.P. Hendricks, principal and also a teacher, Miss Warner Hill, Mrs. C.G. Shull and Mrs. Charlie Weddington. The old newspaper now resting in the cornerstone reveals “The schools were successfully conducted for seven months at a cost of \$2,300.” The following year’s cost was \$3,000 for eight months, the same source reports.

The city issued \$15,000 in school bonds in 1906 to build the large brick building which was razed in 1954 to clear the site for today’s Hugo Junior High and Benjamin Franklin elementary school. Today School District 39 has under construction a \$280,000 Eugene Field school to replace a building in use since 1910.

If predictions of a 1970 census population of 7,200 persons living in Hugo proves correct, the community will have nearly doubled its population in the years since the early history was published.

In that issue the writer stated that "The transformation of a cotton field into a city of 4,000 people in four short years is no small matter but such has been the growth of Hugo."

Every progressive community requires services of a bank and an institution called the First National Bank originally filled this role in Hugo.

Application was made for charter in December, 1901, and was granted in February, 1902. Its first president and organizer was J.J. Thomas. S.B. Spring and F.M. Sterrett and others (not listed in available information). F.M. Sterrett Jr., was the first cashier. The following August both he and Mr. Thomas resigned. A Mr. Nixon, of Ft. Smith, Ark., was elected president and Richard Miles was chosen cashier. Miles held that post 28 days and W.F. Miller, succeeded him.

Another early bank was the Choctaw Exchange Bank, promoted by R.D. Wilbor, whose name still is familiar to old time Hugo residents, who remember him as one of the later presidents of First National.

A Dr. Fling established the first local drug store early in 1902, followed by the Hugo Drug Store, established by B.F. Lee. Dr. Fling was a pioneer medical doctor in Hugo. In 1903 he and his wife opened a sanitarium on Ethel Street. Location of this street now seems buried under dust in the archives of time.

As has every community in the United States, Hugo has had its economic and civic setbacks. But to quote an old timer, the town has proven that how a community handles its problems determines how it will emerge from them.

Along that line of thought, readers may contrast the foregoing information with these 1970 facts:

Hugo School District 39 serves an area of 130 square miles. It enjoys accreditation by the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, highest rating of accreditation that can be accorded in the nation.

The City has a modern, fully equipped and staffed fire department that meets all underwriter requirements; good and adequate police protection and one of the lowest crime rates of any city of its size in the nation; the city now is in Phase I of construction of a new water distribution system at a cost of more than \$2 million.

The voters of this community voted in a special election to pledge the entire revenue from a one per cent municipal sales tax to the payment of \$1,350,000 bonds voted to finance installation of this distribution system.

There are 23 churches conducting services in Hugo.

Every area in Hugo and most of the adjacent area is said now to be accessible to the city's sewage disposal system, which was enlarged and modernized in recent years through a bond issue.

The city operates a garbage collection system manned by a full time crew of four men. It was one of the first towns of its size in Southern Oklahoma to add this service.

In the classification of recreation and entertainment Hugo has a nine hole golf course and another – a grass greens course – is under construction. There is a swimming pool, a football and track field, tennis courts, stadium, ball park, school gymnasium which also can be used as an auditorium. There is a drive-in theater and an uptown theater.

Picnic and playgrounds facilities are available at beautiful Ansley Park. There are outdoor fireplaces for cooking, tables and benches. The park has a full time caretaker who lives in a three bedroom cottage on the grounds.

More than 200 new housing units have been built here in recent years, the biggest residential construction boom since our pioneers, in 60 working days built an aggregate of 360 structures.

Hugo has five motels, several trailer parks, two hotels. There are five supermarkets, four drug stores, four auto supply stores, four ladies ready-to-wear shops. Also four department stores, two variety stores, two furniture stores, three hardware firms, four automobile dealerships with garages in connection, ten stores handling major and small electric appliances. Also dry cleaning and laundry establishments, two banks, three jewelry and gift stores, two large lumber yards, four building contractors, four funeral homes with ambulance services, three implement dealers, two discount shoe stores, two mail-order catalogue stores, several grocery stores and cafes.

A 75 bed hospital, two private and one public health clinic, five licensed nursing homes, medical, osteopathic and chiropractic physicians and one optometrist guard the health of the community.