

Joseph Brese

February 19, 2018

Boswell: A Look Back

I grew up in the very small town of Boswell, Oklahoma. The Boswell that I grew up in would be almost unrecognizable compared to the Boswell that my grandmother grew up in. For such a small town, Boswell has a surprisingly interesting history.

Mayhew, Indian Territory, was established shortly after the removal of the Choctaws to Indian Territory. A Presbyterian church and mission school were established in 1839 causing the settlement to begin to grow. On the road from Fort Townson to Boggy Depot and Fort Townson to Fort Washita there was a tavern built by Noah Wall. The tavern soon grew into a trading post and in 1845 the U.S. Postal Service designated a Mayhew post office. Growing into a seat of civilization, Mayhew became the Choctaw Nation's Pushmataha District Capital and court grounds. Mayhew grew and prospered until *The Curtis Act* was passed in 1898. *The Curtis Act* allowed for the break-up of “The Five Civilized Tribes” tribal governments and 90 million acres of tribal land in Indian Territory allowing for Oklahoma to become admitted as a state. With the abolishment of the Choctaw government, Mayhew began to dwindle. Larry O’Dell writes in *The Oklahoma Historical Society* website that, “By 1901 the town had an estimated population of twenty-nine, one cotton gin, and one general store” (O’Dell). The Arkansas and Choctaw railway laid tracks through the region in 1902, causing the residents and business to begin migrating south to the tracks. The post office moved to the new town in honor of Amity V. Boswell, who surveyed the railroad right-of-way.

When I look back at me growing up in Boswell, I had no idea about any of my town’s history. I spent untold hours walking countless miles up and down those same tracks, and I

never had any idea that they were responsible for the birth of the town that I made so many childhood memories in. It is hard for me to imagine that small town once being a hub for any type of civilization, but *The Oklahoma Historical Society* website says that “In 1911 the town had two banks, a telephone connection, a cotton gin, two hotels, and several retail outlets. Farming and ranching anchored the economy, with cotton, corn, and fruits shipped from the railroad depot. The 1920 population stood at 1,212, but declined to 934 in 1930. In 1932 three cotton gins operated there” (O'Dell).

My great grandfather, Bus Parmley, was born in 1905 in New Mexico and settled in Boswell during the 30's after arriving at the railhead in Bennington, the neighboring town. The place that he settled was located about 10 miles from both Bennington and Boswell. My grandmother, *Mildred Parmley*, was born in 1941 in a log house on the very place where her father settled. She grew up in the early days of the town's history and is a wealth of knowledge about life during the times. Growing up in a pretty remote area, even though they were only 10 miles from town, she lived a pretty secluded life. Vehicles were already common in most parts of the country, but because there were no roads, most of the travelling that her family did was either walking or by horse and wagon. Because of this most of the travelling that they done was exclusively to and from school and maybe 2 or 3 trips to town per year (Parmley).

Because they lived such a secluded life, when they got to go to town it was pretty amazing trip. “Back then,” she said, “there was a movie theatre in town, two grocery stores, and even a jail” (Parmley). Even though those things were readily available in town they didn't usually get to do any of them. Money was very scarce, so what money they did have was spent on things like coffee, sugar, and flour. Whatever money they lacked for supplies, they made up for by trading goods that they had grown at home.

There is one story that she told me that she still hasn't forgotten despite all of these years. She said that she was about 7 or 8 years old, and she ran out the front door and jumped off of the porch. There was a metal coffee can on the ground that someone had thrown down, and she landed right on top of it. It cut her foot and peeled the skin back up to her ankle. Her daddy, as she still calls him, wrapped up her foot, and they headed into town. It was a long slow ride, but after a few hours, they made it. She saw the town doctor and got her foot stitched up, and her daddy was able to charge the bill, promising to pay it the next time he came to town. "People's word went a lot farther back then," she says (Parmley). After the business with the doctor was finished, they headed out of town, and he stopped and bought her an ice cream. She said that that was the only time that she ever went to town with her daddy and none of the other kids, and that was the only time that he bought any of them an ice cream.

The Boswell that I remember was completely different. There was a lot of old run down buildings in town, I assume abandoned and left from the prosperous time that my grandmother grew up in. Most of the businesses were gone; there was a couple gas stations and one grocery store that went out of business when I was a teenager. Drug and alcohol abuse was pretty prevalent during my youth. By the time I was a teenager, every family was, and still is, affected by drugs in some form or another.

Homecoming was always a big event looked forward to all year. There was a parade and booths set up all along main street where people sold everything from snow cones to knives and ninja stars. One year I bought a small envelope that had a label on it that said **Caution!!! Rattlesnake Eggs**. Inside the envelope was a metal washer with a rubber band tied through it. When the rubber band was twisted tight, the washer would spin when the envelope was opened

and make a rattling sound like a baby rattle snake. It seems like I scared my whole family with it.

During the summer months when school was out my brother, sister, and I stayed in the hay field with our grandparents. They cut and baled hay while we ran wild in the pastures and woods. We had a pet deer, racoons, skunks, and all kinds of other wild animal pets that we had caught throughout the years. Once I was old enough, around 10 years old or so, I started working in the hay field cutting hay. A few years later I started hauling hay, and that is how I worked and made money until I was 18 and joined the Army.

All in all I can say that I loved growing up in Boswell. It was a lot of things, and it definitely was as far from Maybury as you can get, but it was my home. It is where I grew up, and sometimes when I look back, I still miss it.

Works Cited

O'Dell, Larry. *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*. 2009. web.

Parmley, Mildred. *Boswell: A Look Back* Joseph Brese. 20 February 2018. personal communication .