

Echoes From the Past

GROVE SPRINGS, HISTORICAL ICON

The city of Grove is home to an icon particularly relevant to northeastern Oklahoma history, Grove Springs a constantly flowing spring now part of the city park located at the north end of Broadway. An ideal camping site, the spring may have been used by prehistoric man and was undoubtedly a summer destination for later Native Americans from farming villages along the Canadian River who made pilgrimages north to the area around 1400 AD. Later it would have been a camp site for the Osage hunting parties who claimed the whole region as their hunting ground, and after that a welcome respite for pioneers and settlers in the mid-1800's coming from Southwest City, Missouri to points further west. That trail, probably one of many "Indian traces" that honeycombed the area, became a virtual highway accommodating a constant stream of covered wagons and individuals on foot and horseback streaming westward to seek their fortunes.

Several west bound trails converged at the eastern point of what might be called the Grove Springs Trail by 1836 on the border of the new state of Arkansas and Indian Territory. The first settler of record at that site was Robert Louderdale who built a cabin along Honey Creek in 1834. Shortly thereafter and further west on the creek, John Ridge and his family, Cherokee Indians recently relocating from Tennessee, established a trading store for early settlers. In the late 1860's Louderdales cabin site had become the thriving community of Southwest City, boasting three stores with merchandise available to outfit westbound pioneers.

By this time the Indian Trace had become a well worn trail winding its way northwest past Bud Fields house and the village of Dodge and south of Cayuga Hill, then on over the rolling hills of Cowskin Prairie to Grove Springs a journey of approximately 22 miles. The spring, located at the base of a small hill and surrounded by trees most surely would have been a welcome site for both man and beast. Although generally known as Grove Springs over time there were more names ascribed to the site. Even before the Civil War locals often referred to the area as "Monroe Grove" for a Cherokee family who farmed the land but fled south at the beginning of the war. During the Civil War Grove Springs was referred to as "Round Grove" in military reports of skirmishes between Confederate and Federal troops on June 1, 1862 at Cowskin Prairie, near the spring on June 5, 1862, and another skirmish on January 18, 1863. Eventually, when a post office was added, the community simply became "Grove."

After resting at the spring pioneers would have continued generally northwest following the trail which today would be Highway 59 and then turned left on West 63rd Street until where it ends at today's Carey Bay. Following the trail to the Grand River travelers in earlier times would either have contracted with Thomas Carey to cross the river on his ferry, a business he established before the Civil War, or if the river was low attempted to ford it. At that point they would travel on to Echo, now inundated by the lake in the vicinity of Echo Bay and take one of two trails either north to Chetopa, Kansas or west to Vinita and beyond.

The completion of the Frisco Railroad from Southwest City in 1899 reduced traffic on the trail at least for those who could afford the fare as well as the fact that Grove Springs, now “Grove” was becoming a final destination. In November, 1902 the original survey and plat of the city was approved by the United States Secretary of the Interior.

After the town became an established community and as travel on the trail continued to diminish, the spring began taking on a new life celebrated by the community as a gathering spot. In 1908 a gazebo was built to cover it and it continued to be a site for events and family gatherings for many years afterward. But that recognition diminished with the passage of time. Today the spring and its environs like so many historic icons has become a victim of benign neglect. The gazebo is in need of paint and repair and the surrounding environment once meticulously kept, is overgrown with weeds and surrounded by trash. Not a deserving fate for such an important reminder of our northeast Oklahoma history.