

WYANDOTTE, FROM PIONEERS TO PAINTBALL

It's not often that a rural Oklahoma community has the opportunity to re-invent itself, but Wyandotte, founded in Indian Territory, has accomplished just that. Until more recently, the town typified many shrinking communities in rural America, originated to address the needs of farmers and ranchers in a small area. But unlike many, Wyandotte has emerged with at least two relatively new industries, gaming which is familiar to many Oklahoma communities and paintball, one of the fastest growing sports in America.

The town's origins are typical of Oklahoma and after two previous name changes, the town honors the Wyandotte Indian Tribe. Following the mandates of the Indian Relocation Act, in 1867 the tribe ultimately negotiated resettlement on 20,000 acres in northeastern Oklahoma. In 1869, Quakers established a mission, and shortly thereafter, a boarding school near what would become the town site. In 1871, the Atlantic & Pacific railroad laid tracks near the mission that eventually extended to Vinita and beyond. By 1876, the community became known as Prairie City when that post office was moved from near the confluence of the Spring and Neosho rivers. Shortly thereafter, community residents changed the name again, this time to Grand River and that name "stuck" until 1894 when residents voted to change to Wyandotte.

By 1901 the community boasted six general stores, two hotels, two liverys, a blacksmith shop, millinery, meat market and drug store. For itinerant travelers, the Commercial hotel advertised "good beds, a bale of hay and a blanket," and noted "they could pay in the morning." City ordinances addressed a variety of issues including where a privy could be located, fines for any person "operating a 'bawdy house of ill fame,' and curfews for persons under 18. A fine of \$20.00 could be levied against the owner of a pony who was tied under a shade tree and ate it.

By 1910 the town's population had risen to 255 and like most rural communities in those "simpler times," children were amused by watching the blind horse, the sole source of power for the water pump, walk round and round filling the Frisco Railroad water tank west of town. Later, during the 1920's, Wyandotte received some notoriety as the "Petticoat City of Oklahoma." According to reports, the women of the community had organized, exercising their voting power by sweeping all major city offices. The source of their concern was related to "certain characters who ride horses up and down the board walks, shooting up the town and interrupting church services." It also was noted that law and order was no problem because the city marshal, also a woman, was said to be able to "rake any dive with a .45."

When the Grand River was impounded in 1940 forming Grand Lake, the town's population climbed from 240 to 358, the result of tourism activities, but then fell by 1950. Passenger rail service was eliminated about this time and, in 1980, the Seneca Indian School, offshoot of the original Quaker Mission, was closed. As a result it would have seemed that Wyandotte's future outlook was grim.

However, with the previous construction of the Wyandotte tribal administration building in 1978, a change in the fortunes of the community occurred. From that time, various tribal assistance programs began to have an impact on the community and the

most recent has been legalized gaming. In 2007, the Wyandotte tribe constructed a casino, The Lazy Turtle, which has attracted an influx of new visitors as well as provided employment opportunities.

While casinos have assisted in revitalizing many communities in Oklahoma, a more unique activity has further enhanced Wyandotte's visibility..... paintball games at the 740 acre Oklahoma D Day Adventure Park, northeast of town. Paintball has become one of the fastest growing internationally popular sports and experts estimate that over a million people participate in the United States. The sport, which can involve the whole family, requires organization, endurance and athleticism . Just one of many events at the Park, a war game dedicated to the heroism of veterans of World War II, attracted 135 participants in 1997, this year over 4000 took part, some drawn from the international community.

Many communities in northeastern Oklahoma have virtually disappeared or are struggling to find new markets, but both through planning, and the unique draw of paintball, Wyandotte is not one of them.

lies on Burlington Northern-Santa Fe Railroad

Town honors the Wyandotte Tribe moved to the area in 1867

In 1869, Quakers established a mission & in 1872 established a boarding school that closed in 1980.

In 1871 Atlantic & Pacific railroad laid tracks in the area.

In 1876 the Prairie City post office (established in 1872) moved three miles east to present Wyandotte & changed its name to Grand River, then in 1894 changed again to Wyandotte. The town was platted in 1895.

In 1901 the incorporated had six general stores, two hotels, two liverys, a blacksmith, a flour mill a millinery, a meat market and a drug store.

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Frisco railroad had a water tank west of Wyandotte. Water was pumped into the tank courtesy of a blind horse who walked round and round the tank to pump water into it.

A town ordinance decreed where a privy could be located and another provided fines for any person operating a “bawdy house of ill fame.” Persons under 18 were held to an 8:00pm curfew during the winter months and if a pony was tied under a shade tree and ate it, the owner could be fined \$20.00

Wyandotte suffered a major fire in the 1920’s

The Commercial Hotel offered “good beds, a bale of hay, and one blanket.” Boarders were advised they could pay the next morning.

In 1926 Wyandotte became noted as the Petticoat City of Oklahoma because all the city officials were women. Women exercised their voting power took after becoming weary of “certain characters riding up and down on the board walks, shooting up the town and interrupting church services. The city marshal, also a woman, was said to be able to “rake any dive with a .45.”

Wyandotte Nation from Wikipedia

Originated near Lake Huron & Niagara Falls & gradually move south to Ohio, Michigan, Kansas and Oklahoma

1842 Removed to Kansas, near Westport (Kansas City); removed a final time in 1867 to Oklahoma and settled on 20,000 acres in NE Oklahoma

Headquarters in Wyandotte. Wyandotte Nation is a member of the Wendat Confederacy.

Casino.....plan to build one in Park City, Kansas just north of Wichita

<http://newsok.com>

WW II Inspires paintball game in Wyandotte

More than 60 years later, 4000 paintball players from around the world travel to Oklahoma's D-Day Adventure Park north of Wyandotte to participate in a special re-enactment of the Allies historic invasion into Axis-occupied France.....the largest paintball game in the world. Many other events also occur.

