

## **FINALLY.... IT'S OKAY**

**It's doubtful that any small town in northeastern Oklahoma has had more of an identity crisis than Okay, in Muskogee County. At one time or another, the community answered to Creek Agency, Falls City, Verdigris Falls, Verdigris Landing, Coretta, North Muskogee, Sleepyville and Rex until finally becoming Okay in 1919.**

**Salina, is officially recognized as the oldest town in the state, first established as a camp on the Grand River in 1796 by Jean Chouteau, then re-established as a trading post in 1802. But soon after in 1806, 70 miles downstream near the confluence of the Grand, Arkansas and Verdigris Rivers, a French-Canadian settler and trader, Joseph Bogy, established a trading post. Called Three Forks, it was an ideal location for trade inasmuch as rivers were the super highways of the era. Bogy had barely set up camp, when, he was followed by an onslaught of trappers and traders, courtesy of the Louisiana Purchase, recently acquired by the United States from France. And, because of its location on the Verdigris, just seven miles from the junction of the three rivers, Verdigris Falls with many more names in it future, proved to be indomitable.**

**Commerce grew rapidly as more and more traders arrived, constructing crude homes and trading Indians for pelts, beeswax and bear oil. Business surged when the war of 1812 ended and even more surplus goods were available. All of this activity attracted the attention of A. P. Chouteau who had taken over his father's business at Salina. In 1823 he purchased the Barbour and Brand Trading Company and began building large flat boats to carry cargo to New Orleans.**

**Three Forks continued to increase in population and, during the 1820's and 30's, when the federal government was enforcing the Indian Removal Act, it became part of the Creek Nation. As a result, the Creek Agency another of Okay's names, was established. In 1828, the steamboat Facility, with two keel boats in tow, arrived with 780 Creek Indians who would begin to populate their allotment. And about this time, Sam Houston, one of a long list of icons of American History who would pass through the region, built a trading post nearby that he called "Wigwam Neosho."**

**The mid-1800's were marked by a series of troubling events that caused upheaval. War parties involving the Cherokee and Osage tribes frequented the area, trading for guns and ammunition. Crimes generally went unpunished for a lack of law enforcement other than troops stationed at Fort Gibson. These years were followed by the Civil War that caused total devastation as Union troops stationed at nearby Fort Gibson, fought Confederates for possession of Indian Territory.**

**A few years after the war in 1871, tracks for the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad were laid a few miles west of the community, and suddenly the rivers were no longer the important highways they had been. This could have been the beginning of the end of the Three Forks - Okay community except in 1888 another railroad, the Kansas and Arkansas Valley or Iron Mountain as locals called it, was constructed from Van Buren, Arkansas to Wagoner then continued to Coffeyville, Kansas. The Coretta Switch, a railroad siding was installed about four miles north of the settlement, and for a short time the community became known as Corretta.**

**After the turn of the century in 1907, G. D. "Gid" Sleeper began construction of a meat packing plant and the town briefly became Sleepyville. However, that venture did not materialize and since the first occupant of the plant was the Rex Stove Manufacturing**

**Company, the town became Rex. Following the failure of stove manufacturing, the next industry to emerge was the J. B. Woods Plow Works, but no name change was affected.**

**The series of names labeling the community finally ended when in 1919, O.K. 3 Ton Trucks and Trailers manufactured by the Oklahoma Auto Manufacturing Company moved into town. Details remain unclear, but the United States Postal Service designated the town as Okay and that name stuck. In fact, the town's name may have become a household word if the country hadn't fallen into the Great Depression in 1929. In 1928, several Kansas investors determined that the old truck factory, abandoned once again, would be the ideal site for manufacturing airplanes. Aircraft development and construction was just emerging as a national industry with great potential. This new venture, the Okay Airplane Company, produced a marketable product designed to train pilots, a dual control low wing monoplane with two cockpits. Although the plane was a success, timing because of the depression was terrible and the company "never got off the ground."**

**In addition to numerous name changes, the ravages of war and the Great Depression, Okay survived floods, tornados and fires. Obviously resilient, this historic community along the Verdigris River is OK and here to stay.**















