

# OKLAHOMA CITY CORRESPONDENT TELLS STORY OF EXPLOSION

**WRITER TELLS HOW KENTUCKY HAS PLAYED IMPORTANT PART IN THE BUILDING OF ARDMORE. REVIEWS RAPID GROWTH OF CITY AND THE GENEROSITY OF THE SANTA FE RAILWAY COMPANY.**

(From The Louisville Courier-Journal)  
Oklahoma City, Sept. 23.—Of all the cities in Oklahoma, Ardmore is perhaps the most typically Kentuckian. While all of the cities of the state have a number of former residents of Kentucky listed among its inhabitants, Ardmore was practically built by people who had come to Oklahoma or the Indian Territory from Kentucky and had settled in or near where the city of Ardmore now stands. The bones and sinews of the city, the leading business and professional men of that section, the leading bankers and merchants came here years ago from Kentucky and began the building of the city. These people were not the ordinary emigrants, coming to a new country, but most of them were heads of families and brought with them for those times considerable wealth. The bulk of the Kentuckians who came to that section were from western Kentucky, many of them from Crittenden county. The Cruce brothers, five in number, Lee, A. C., Will L. Lawrence and Lefe, from Crittenden county;

the Harrellds, four in number, headed by Judge J. W. Harreld, born and reared in Morgantown, Ky.; the Woods family, the Lashers, the Pressnells, all from western Kentucky; the Hurleys, of whom there are four; Press Maxwell, formerly a member of the Kentucky senate, from Ollie James' district, and his nephews and nieces, were prominent and well educated people, all possessed of more or less wealth, who came to Ardmore, the county seat of Carter county, and who have been from the beginning among the leaders of this county and city. In all there are probably 200 former residents of Kentucky who reside in Ardmore, while many others reside in Carter county. These families, coming here before statehood, have married and intermarried until they hold all together more than a thousand persons who are either native Kentuckians or have married into Kentucky families.

#### Spirit of Kentucky.

The spirit of Kentucky hospitality prevails to a greater extent in Ardmore than any other Oklahoma city. There are more and better country clubs and other organizations looking to the entertainment of their members and their guests, more hunting and fishing clubs, club houses and lakes, golf links, etc., than possibly could be found in any city in Oklahoma regardless of size.

One of the principal, the Country Club, was organized by Perry Maxwell, a nephew of former Senator Press Maxwell, who is and has been president of this club since its organization. Young Maxwell is in the banking business, but he took time to raise this money, buy the grounds, map out the buildings and grounds, and no prettier or better country club exists, or is managed better than this one, to be found in the state of Oklahoma.

Ardmore has had a hard siege and several times its very existence was threatened. A disastrous fire, along with the general slump which pervaded all this section of the country for several years, struck Ardmore with greater force than any other city in the state.

In 1900 the city contained about 10,000 inhabitants. In 1910, ten years later, the government census showed that it was the only city in the state which had gone back in the ten years preceding and had fewer inhabitants than it had in 1900.

Shortly after this, about 1912 and 1913, the Healdton oil fields, among the best oil and gas fields in the world, were opened up and developed. The people of Ardmore were just recovering from the hard bumps to which they had been subjected and were thinking of the passing of the lean years and the prospects of better

and brighter times to come when the greatest disaster in its career came and came near wiping from the map the business section of the city.

September 27, 1915, at 2:27 o'clock in the afternoon, just one year ago next Wednesday, the terrific explosion of a tremendous gasoline tank occurred, shaking the city from one end to the other. This tank contained 250 barrels of casing-head gasoline, highly explosive, and was situated in the yards of the Santa Fe Railway company, almost in the heart of the city. The explosion threw the city into a panic, the like of which has seldom been gone through by anybody anywhere.

#### Forty-seven Killed.

As a result of this explosion forty-seven persons paid the toll of death. More than 200 more were injured seriously enough to require the services of a physician, many of them very seriously hurt. Four blocks of business buildings were completely destroyed, and four others practically destroyed, while many other buildings were damaged for eight or ten blocks away.

Then, indeed, did the residents of this game little city feel that their burdens were becoming heavier than they could bear. When they could gather up their thoughts and think at all the questions were: Could the persons who had suffered the losses afford to rebuild? Would those made homeless and put out of business be able to weather the storm and live through the long months of lawsuits, insurance adjustments and the rebuilding of other business houses and of other homes?

The Gulf, Colorado & Santa Fe Railway company in this matter did what has never before been done, so far as we know, by any great corporation. It sent its men higher up, President E. P. Ripley coming himself to the scene of the awful destruction, made a thorough and complete investigation and as a result of this investigation said: "The blame is ours. Insofar as we can our company will repair the damage and we will do it as speedily as possible."

After a few days, through President Ripley, the Santa Fe announced that it was ready to begin the settlement of personal injury cases and to pay for the property destroyed. The company proposed that all claims should be filed with its auditing committee or agents, that the mayor of Ardmore should appoint a citizens' committee, and that in case their agents and the claimants could not agree upon the amount of damages, that the claims should go to this citizens' committee and that the decision of this committee should be final. This proposition was gladly accepted and the agreement was signed by the officials of the Santa Fe Railway company and by practically every claimant.

#### Committee Named.

Mayor Val Mullen appointed his committee, composed of the very best business and professional men of the city, and this committee, busy men as they are and were, agreed to settle these matters without a cent of remuneration. The only proviso that the Santa Fe had to its proposal was that no attorneys were to be employed or paid out of this money, but that when the amounts were fixed that the entire sum should be paid direct to the person injured, or his representatives, and that all property losses should be paid direct to the claimants.

This was a big stunt for a big corporation. It was a big thing for the city of Ardmore to have within its limits men big enough and great enough to devote their time to the arduous labors which they knew must fall upon them for the months to follow.

However, they went to work, organized, and without loss of time began to settle these losses.

As a result, in less than a year (the year will be out next Wednesday) the Santa Fe Railway company has paid out within \$30,000 of a million of money in settlement of the claims caused by this explosion. In all, personal injuries and property losses, \$970,000 has been paid out to these claimants, without one dollar of expense to the persons holding the claims. This does not include the great loss sustained by the company itself.

Of the members of the committee settling these losses, two of them were former residents of Kentucky, former Gov. Lee Cruce, chairman, and Judge J. W. Harreld. As a result of the action of the Santa Fe Railway and the work of this citizens' committee, today practically every claim has been settled, the blocks of buildings have been replaced with newer and better and more modern structures, the damaged buildings have been repaired and the other residents of the city, catching the contagion of building and improvement, remodeled, repaired and repainted their old buildings, and at this time this thrifty and enterprising city of 18,000 persons presents the appearance of a city built to order, built within a year.

With the building of the passenger

depot of the Santa Fe, to cost \$50,000, the plans and specifications of which have been drawn and accepted, and with the completion of the freight depot at a cost of \$35,000, and the completion of the Pennington Grocery company building at a cost of \$65,000, both of which are now under construction, the little city of Ardmore will have arisen from its apparent destruction, better, bigger and stronger than it was before. All of the claims, ranging from \$1 for a slight personal injury to \$15,000 for the almost total disability of a claimant, and ranging from \$1 property loss for a damaged shoe, up to \$65,000 paid for the loss of the Whittington hotel, have been paid, and insofar as human action could go the great damage of one year ago has been finally wound up and settled.