

Address delivered by Stephen Jones before the Enid Rotary Club, May 2, 1965.

**Enid: A History of Five Centuries**

It was approaching dusk in the Eternal City of the Caesars: Rome, in the Spring of 1953. The sun was still good for an hour of supreme splendor, and across the shining folds of the country, the low profile of the city barely fretted the skyline – indistinct except for the dome of St. Peter’s bluish grey against the fading copper light of the evening sky. High above the noise of afternoon traffic on the crowded streets, in a monastic apartment a solitary figure dressed in white sat at his desk. Three paragraphs in Latin covered the page. The first paragraph set forth the regrettable fact that his Excellency, the Most Reverend Bishop of Bure was deceased. The second paragraph recited that the Titular See of Bure had consequently fallen vacant. The last paragraph read:

“By virtue, therefore, of the authority transmitted to us in unbroken descent from Peter the First Disciple, we declare and publish our desire that the Right Reverend Stephen Leven, Papal Chamberlain and Dean of St. Francis Xavier’s Parish in Enid, in the Diocese of Oklahoma be consecrated Titular Bishop of Bure and Auxiliary Bishop of San Antonio, and that he shall enter at once upon the powers, duties, and obligation laid upon him by the solemn oath of his office. In testimony whereof we have given this Apostolic mandate.”

The figure in white affixed his signature, Pope Pius XII, in ink and beneath it made the imprint of the fisherman’s ring. In June, 1965, the Manned Space Craft Center, near the salt waters of the Gulf of Mexico, announced that Owen K. Garriot, a physicist and President of the graduating class of Enid High School, 1948, was among the six scientist astronauts who would make the first American trip to the Moon.

Thus from the ancient Catholic See of Bure on the shores of Carthage where, according to legend, Hannibal massed his elephants for the siege of Rome, and where the Apostles Peter and Paul preached, to the lunar surfaces of the Moon reaches the history of Enid.

*Mainstream of America* was the title of a series of books on American history a few years ago, but this title could equally as well be applied to a history of Enid, for it is impossible not to identify Enid in some significant way with many of the major events of our national history.

In the summer of 1542, only sixty years of Columbus discovered America, and eighty-eight years before the pilgrims would land at Plymouth Rock, the Spanish explorer Coronado marched his exploring army of over 1,000 men through or near Enid in search of the Gold of the Seven Cities of Cibola and Gran Quiveria. Finding no gold here, he pushed on, but he claimed what is now Enid for Spain. Enid remained a Spanish possession under the Castile Monarchy, until 1682 when Robert de LeSalle claimed it for the Bourbon King of France.

In 1803, events in Europe and Napoleon's preoccupation with the conquest of the continent cause him to cede what is now Garfield County and the Louisiana Territory to the United States in the Treaty of Paris for \$755.00, that being the portion of the \$15 million paid for the whole Louisiana Territory represented by Garfield County.

The Spanish approach to the Great Plains had emphasized finding gold and silver. The French had emphasized trade and commercial development, establishing a trading post within a few miles of Enid in the early 1700s, but the United States, first exercising jurisdiction over what is now Enid in 1803, was interested in population settlement. In order to make room for the Westward migration across the Appalachian Mountains, the federal government executed treaties with the Five Civilized Tribes, moving them to eastern Arkansas and Oklahoma. To the Cherokee Nation was given a perpetual outlet West, the Cherokee Strip.

Only a generation later, in 1820, the Civil War came almost 40 years early. A resentful South, apprehensive over attempts to restrict slavery, insisted upon its protection. Henry Clay drew a line across a map of the United States at 36 degrees, 30 minutes. North of this invisible line was to be

forever closed to slavery, and South of it, slavery would be protected. This line, known as the Missouri Compromise of 1820, runs across Northern Garfield County and actually prevented the outbreak of hostilities for 40 years. In 1854, at the insistence of Senator Douglas of Illinois, this line was erased from Garfield County, and the rest of the country, with the passage of the Kansas Nebraska Act which repealed the Missouri Compromise. The Kansas Nebraska Act provided that either State could enter the Union, free or slave, depending on its constitution. The passage of this act, erasing the line of 1820, angered abolitionists in the North, led to the disruption of the major political parties, hastened the outbreak of the Civil War, and provided the stage for the emergence of Abraham Lincoln as the 16<sup>th</sup> President of the United States.

When the war did come, what is now Garfield County was a part of the rival republic, the Confederate States of America as a result of a treaty of peace and friendship between the Cherokee Nation under Stand Watie and Richmond Government. Although no battles were fought in Garfield County, the area was represented in the Confederate Congress by Elias Boudinot, a Cherokee Native, and was included in the Confederate Military Department of Indian Territory.

At the end of the war the Cherokees were permitted to retain their Western outlet, the Cherokee Strip, but it was not to be occupied with homes, and thus the angry scar of Reconstruction was avoided in Garfield County.

On Good Friday, 1865, President Lincoln was shot in Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C., by John Wilkes Booth. For over 38 years, history regarded the Lincoln assassination as a closed chapter because official reports claimed that a troop of Union soldiers had tracked Booth to a barn on a farm in Northern Virginia where he had been shot and killed by a Union soldier, Boston Corbett.

However, in January 1903, an itinerant painter, David George, committed suicide in an Enid hotel room. Before dying, he grasped the shirt of a man near him and proclaimed himself John Wilkes

Booth. The man had been in Enid only six weeks, having come here in December 1902 from El Reno. Authorities checked with people who might have known him there, and it developed that fearing he was going to die twice before, George had confessed his true name and horrible identity to his landlady and two others. Almost overnight, the 'Enid Booth Legend' as it has become known, attracted national attention.

There was a striking similarity in appearance between the two men and evidence began to mount to give some credence to the story. One of the principal reasons for the failure of the Enid Booth to be discredited as a fraud is shrouded in secrecy and apparently at no time was a really adequate and complete identification made. The question of the validity of the Enid Booth has been debated in such national periodicals as *Harper's*, *Reader's Digest*, *Life* and *The Saturday Evening Post*.

But there is a strange, ironic twist to this tale. For Enid, curiously enough, was the very town where the last trace of Boston Corbett, the man generally credited with killing the real Booth, was found. Corbett was traced here through his job as a drug salesman. That Corbett's drift to Enid is in anyway connected with the pretended Booth is unlikely. If Corbett was still alive in 1903, when the news of the Enid Booth's death received so much credence and wide newspaper support in Oklahoma, it must have been something of a shock to have his famous deed so discounted. We do not know what became of Corbett. One can only speculate the end. The Lincoln historian, Lloyd Lewis, wrote that the myth makers are welcome to play with it. How they tell a tale about Boston Corbett, old man, meeting his supposed victim a generation before on the streets of Enid, Oklahoma, falling dead from the shock of recognition, even as he reached for his gun to kill this man again.

A kaleidoscope of Enid's history produces different pictures to different people. To some it is the run of 1893 when 100,000 people raced for six million acres. To other is it Marquis James writing of Sam Houston and Andrew Jackson because of youthful admiration for the greatest Oklahoma lawyer of them

all, Temple Houston. It is Henry Jackson Frantz, sire of a prominent Enid family, who helps make Rutherford Hayes President of the United States in the so called 'stole election' of 1876. It is Harry O. Glasser defending Herbert H. Champlin against the proration laws before the United States Supreme Court, and it is national guardsmen closing the First National Bank, which remained open in defiance of Governor Murray and President Roosevelt. It is Percy Simons defeating the famous 'Blue Eagle' of the National Recovery Administration I 1935 in federal court. It is W. J. Otjen, one of the 35 lawyers who handled the Butler case before the Supreme Court, defeating the Agriculture Adjustment Act of 1933. It is W. B. Skirvin of the hotel chain, retaining Harry Glasser to defend him against the conniving attempts of his daughter, the famous Washington hostess with the mostest, Perle Mesta, to take away from him control of his financial empire. It is the ten million head of cattle that passed through Enid on the Chisholm Trail following the Civil War as they made their way North from Texas to the railhead at Abilene. It is Charles McNary, John Bricker, Alben Barkley, Frank Knox, Bill Miller, Estes Kefauver, and Henry Wallace, all running for vice president and campaigning personally in Enid. It is Bert Woodring, for whom the airport is named, serving as Colonel Lindberg's personal escort on his tour of the United States following his famous solo flight to Paris. The same Woodring who carried the Treaty of London from Vancouver, British Columbia to Newark, New Jersey. It is Winfield Scott serving as U.S. Commissioner of Pensions under Calvin Coolidge and Douglas McKeever speaking before the 1956 Republican National Convention. It is Page Belcher who, as a Republican member of Congress, represents 17 Western states on the important Republican Policy Committee of the House of Representatives. It is M.C. Garber, who dedicated his life to the Cherokee Strip as a newspaper publisher, judge, and United States Congressman. It is H.H. Champlin who built a great name in the Great Plains, and George Failing whose invention of the portable drilling rig revolutionized petroleum exploration throughout the world. It is Garber oil field, Hoy Number One, the Beggs Lease, and the Enid lawyers who have argued more than 30 important cases before the United States Supreme Court. It is

W.J. Otjen introducing Governor Thomas Dewey, the 1944 Republican Presidential nominee in Oklahoma City, in which Governor Dewey made his famous speech which lost for him the 1948 election. In it is the same Otjen receiving a telegram from Wendell Wilkie in 1944, just a few days before Wilkie's death, so that the Otjen telegram, made famous by front page coverage in the *New York Times*, was the last political testament of Wilkie.

It is the collapse of the Garber State Bank, the railroad war, Edmund Frantz's Denver, Enid, and Gulf Railroad, Miss Blossom Fleming, and Horace Greely McKeever working to locate Phillips University in Enid. It is Dean Burch, the chairman of the Republican National Committee in 1964 who was born in Enid in 1927. It is the wreck of the Santa Fe, and *Life* magazine covering Enid at the end of World War II. All of this too is part of a history of five centuries.

But perhaps the most dramatic event in Enid's history is also the most dramatic even in United States history, the closing of the Frontier in 1893.

The Frontier was opened in 1492 with the discovery of the new world by Columbus. It is probably the most dramatic historical event in modern history. Its opening precipitated a boom in the metropolis of Western Europe that lasted so long, as long as the Frontier was open, that it came to be regarded as permanent, but it wasn't. Historians have traced the development of modern institutions such as capitalism, free enterprise, democracy, and individual freedom to the Opening of the Frontier. The Opening of the Frontier killed mercantilism, governmental paternalism, and developed in their place capitalism and democracy. The American Frontier provided an escape valve where one could always go regardless of his fate, be it mortgage foreclosure, floods, crop failures, or fleeing the older communities back East where patterns of culture were already established. The "Cherokee Strip" was the last of these escape valves, and perhaps you have seen the pictures of the covered wagons waiting for the run into the Strip with crudely painted signs:

“In God we trusted,  
in Kansas we busted.  
Now let ‘er rip,  
for the Cherokee Strip.”

If the Opening of the Frontier was one of the most significant events in Western Civilization, then perhaps the most notable event since the Opening of the Frontier was its closing. The world Frontier closed with the Opening of the Cherokee Strip in Enid on September 16, 1893. The six million acres of the Strip were the last great section of uninhabited arable land which was given away just for staking a homestead. There were no existing social institutions or government, the men and women who settled the Cherokee Strip built their own institutions. Walter Prescott Webb, a distinguished historian, wrote in his best-seller *The Great Frontier*, “The opening of the Cherokee Strip was the last dramatic chapter of the Frontier, which began in 1492.” What Columbus began in 1492 with his flagship, the tiny Santa Maria, ended under the cottonwood tree on U.S. 81 at the Garfield-Kingfisher county line.

Now that the Frontier has closed, what will become of the institutions it gave birth to? Just as mercantilism and the feudal society died when the Frontier opened, will democracy, individual freedom, and capitalism end?

The answer to this question is found in Enid. Here when the Frontier closed, strong men and women came upon a new land, inspired with an independent, rugged, individualistic spirit. With vision, they forded the rivers and prairies. With determination, they created schools, churches, parks, and factories. Within one generation the Cherokee Strip and its principal city, Enid, went from prairie sod houses to modern, totally electric suburban homes. These people of the Cherokee Strip and Enid are still achieving and still exploring new frontiers. Look around and ask yourself this question, where else within a single lifetime has man built so greatly.

The accomplishments of Enid in light of the closing of the Frontier are not limited merely to material things. The art which washes away from the soul the dust of the everyday life has been realized here in Enid with the talented voice of opera singers Kay Creed and Leona Mitchell, and the haunting folk melodies of Ann White and the New Christy Minstrels. Russel Crouse, one-time editor of the Enid High School newspaper was one of the most talented playwrights in the world until his death. Crouse wrote such famous Broadway plays as "Life with Father" and "The Sound of Music". Marquis James is one of the only two Americans to win the coveted Pulitzer Prize for biography. Among the graduates of Phillips University are numbered 28 authors and composers.

In the preservation of a democracy, men, of far less brilliance of mind and sturdiness of character have advanced further in the political world than Senator W.J. Otjen, Governor Frank Frantz, and W.O. Cromwell. As a member of the legislature in 1923, Otjen was one of the leaders in the successful attempt to remove Governor Jack Walton from office for his autocratic, dictatorial suspension of the sacred writ of Habeas Corpus. In a period of our state's history that few can be proud, Otjen was one of the few moderates between the extreme left represented by the Farmer-Labor Reconstruction League and the extreme right typified by the Klu Klux Klan who lent stability to state government and prevented the outbreak of a state civil war between the hooded night riders and the river bottom socialists. Territorial Governor Frank Frantz who, with his Attorney General W.O. Cromwell, by decisive action preserved for the school children of Oklahoma over \$200,000,000 worth of mineral land owned by the state in 1906. It was Governor Frantz who was responsible for the elimination in the proposed State Constitution many of the anti-negro features. All of these men were ahead of their time and each paid the price for the courage of their convictions; political defeat, but they knew that a Democracy to be vital on the Frontier requires leaders who are willing to stand alone.

And finally, there are those qualities of human spirit that are developed on the Frontier which have been preserved here in Enid and with its people. These qualities are exemplified in the life of

airline pilot Charles Kimes who prevented death in the sky for 143 passengers on Pan American flight 813 when one engine and almost half a wing fell off the plane over San Francisco. But this graduate of Enid High School did not panic even as it appeared that death was his co-pilot, and the ship landed safely. Leon Vance and Harold Kiner, both of Enid, gave up their lives so that their fellow men might live in World War II. A proud nation recognized both by awarding them, posthumously, the nation's highest award for military bravery; the Congressional Medal of Honor.

That Enid has kept the Frontier spirit is recognized in the human qualities that cause a person such as Mrs. Pearl Mayberry to devote a lifetime to charity and civic consciousness. It is exemplified in the corporate sense by the George E. Failing Company receiving the coveted "E" flag from the Secretary of Commerce, and in the unselfish act of Enid fireman, Ed Kelley, who saved the lives of two small children overcome by smoke in their burning frame house, or the youth in his early teens who gave his life to save a friend from drowning in Government Springs Park, or the Garber cattlemen who sell their cattle to raise funds for their church, or the Enid radio ham who secured a rare leukemia drug for a small child in South America, or the Enid farmer who died and left an estate of more than \$100,000 to the Salvation Army.

In 1925, the distinguished husband and wife team, Robert and Helen Lynd, made academic history with their new classical study of Muncie, Indiana, entitled *Middletown* which purported to be a study of an average American middle western community. Perhaps it would not be inappropriate for the world to see by a study of Enid or through some other dramatic gesture such as the one proposed by the *Enid Morning News*, that the Soviet leaders visit Enid on a tour of the United States to show that here, on the Great Plains, are the opportunities and tools for New Frontiers.

This, I believe, is the true significance of five centuries of Enid's history. That here in the fertile agricultural interior, a pioneer democracy has adjusted itself to the realities of modern industrial

capitalism in the presence of the closing of the Frontier within the framework of the quality of man,  
individual freedom, and human liberty.