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A MAJOR FOUNDER

By Felicia Neparko

A train line ran where there would be a town. J. L. Avant stood and looked around and decided there should be a town built.

Another man thought the east side of the Washita River would be a good place, but Avant had seen the Washita River flood, and the east side was under water. The four men finally agreed on the west side of the river.

Four different Indians owned the land the men wanted to build their town on. The government would allow the Indians to sell only eighty acres of their land. Before the sale could be final, Congress had to approve the sale of the four eighty-acre tracts.

Many people didn't think the town would last because four miles away, there was a thriving town, Arapaho. Avant thought it would be a good idea to have a town at the junction of railroad tracks because the passengers and their freight going to Arapaho were unloaded there and they would have a place to rest. As soon as the Indians agreed, Tom Hunt was sent to Washington, D.C. to seek Congress' approval.

Avant got a banker from Arapaho to finance the town. Later Tom Nance moved his bank to Clinton.

The men had a plan in case Congress didn't approve their bill. They had a feeling that they might not approve of it because it was coming near to the end of their session. The man they sent used their plan because Congress was starting to reject their proposal. Tom Nance introduced the proposal as a separate bill at the end of the session to assure the approval of Congress. As soon as this happened, Tom Nance sent a telegram to Avant and then returned home again.

Advertisement began nationwide for the sale of the townsite. They set a date of June, 1903 for the sale.

Their total advertisement cost was \$8,000-\$2,000 for each of the eighty-acre tracts. It seemed like a great deal of money, but it paid off in the final sale.

On the first day, the land brought \$25,000. Each of the four men got ten percent of the total profit of the sale. There were many salesmen hired to conduct the sale of the total 320 acres.

Almost overnight it became a city-- from the quiet river valley owned by four Indians just months ago. Many people got off the trains that came through day and night. Most people were really glad that there was a place where they could stretch and visit with the townspeople and get a newspaper before they had to get back on the train and continue their long journey on the hot, dirty, noisy trains.

Most people wanted the name of the town to be Washita, but the town post-office officials refused. After "Washita" was knocked off the list along with many other names, they compromised and chose the name of Judge Clinton F. Irwin. He served as judge for Custer County for many years.

There were three original buildings in Clinton when our town was first established in 1903. The Clinton newspaper was first called THE CUSTER COUNTY CHRONICLE. The First National Bank was the second building in the town. It is now standing in its original place at Fifth and Frisco. This bank did quite well in the newly established town in "Indian Country." The other building was "The Townsite Office Building."

I feel that Avant was a major founder of Clinton, and he played a key part in actually having a town built. There's a street named after him, and our town's history files are full of information on him.

FELICIA NEPARKO, daughter of Dr. Ed and Mary Neparko, is an eighth grader. Her hobbies include ballet, piano, and training dogs. Her favorite subjects are Math and Science.

Further essays from this collection will be published in future issues of WESTVIEW.

Illustration by Tony Neely