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The Great Health Giving Mecca and Summer Resort:

Platt National Park, The Early Years

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Historic Resources Study
National Park Service
Santa Fe Support Office
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Contents

Preface i

Chapter 1: Opening Up the Country 1

Chapter 2: "So Many Problems to be Solved 32

Chapter 3: A Period of Adjustment 74

Chapter 4: Uncle Sam's Newest Playground 101

Chapter 5: "The All-Together Pull 128

Chapter 6: "A Golden Opportunity:" Platt and New Deal 145

Addendum: Rock Creek Campground Development 175

Bibliography

Preface

This study examines the early history of that section of Chickasaw National Recreation Area originally known as Platt National Park. For many decades, Platt enjoyed a reputation for being the National Park System's smallest national park, at somewhat over 600 acres, yet it became one of the most heavily visited due largely to its location midway between two growing metropolitan areas, Oklahoma City and Dallas/Fort Worth. There were, in fact, political attempts to transfer it to the State of Oklahoma, or at best, demote the park to the status of a national monument, because of a perception that it lacked the exceptional resources normally associated with the likes of Yellowstone and Grand Canyon. Nevertheless, the park survived, due in no small part to the fervent support of the townspeople of adjacent Sulphur, Oklahoma.

When the Bureau of Reclamation dammed Rock Creek below the park in the late 1960s, a large reservoir was formed that eventually covered more than 2,400 acres and increased the total park area to nearly 10,000 acres. An agreement between the bureau and the National Park Service gave the latter responsibility for managing the recreational

aspects at the newly formed Arbuckle Lake. During the next few years, support grew for combining Platt National Park and Arbuckle Lake into a single unit administered by the National Park Service. The consolidation was achieved in 1976 with the passage of legislation establishing Chickasaw NRA, a designation recognizing the American Indian tribe that had originally ceded the land at the turn of the century. Merged into the larger recreation area, Platt National Park lost its identity.

A few special studies have been completed previously concerning the area's natural, geologic, and ethnographical aspects, but more recent human history of the park has attracted less attention. In fact, only one comprehensive treatment has reached publication. Dr. Palmer H. Boeger, a long-time seasonal ranger and professor of history at nearby East Central Oklahoma State University, authored *Oklahoma Oasis: From Platt National Park to Chickasaw National Recreation Area* in 1987. Despite the general reliability of that comprehensive work, park staff more recently recognized a need for another treatment casting Platt National Park against the backdrop of Indian Territory and early Oklahoma. This study, therefore, was initiated to focus on development of the region surrounding Sulphur Springs during the nineteenth century, subsequent formative years as a health Mecca and recreational attraction, and the park's first half-century under government administration.

The author has necessarily retraced much of Dr. Boeger's trail through the park archives. I have, however, expanded upon that foundation by investigating additional primary and secondary sources in an attempt to provide sharper focus on the creation and early development of the park. I have relied heavily upon agency records at the Southwest Region of the National Archives in Fort Worth, Texas, combining those with letter files and reports in the park archives to flesh out some aspects of the story presented by Dr. Boeger. The annual reports of the Secretary of the Interior, as well as local newspapers, also contained much useful information. A wide range of secondary sources contributed to a discussion of the early Chickasaw-Choctaw occupation in the region, and how their presence, coupled with incursions by Anglo-Americans, led eventually to the settlement and early economic development of south central Indian Territory. Particularly significant was the network of transportation routes that eventually crisscrossed the area, mere trails initially later followed by railroads, thus laying the foundation for tourism and making possible the successful transition of Sulphur Springs from a recreating place for local residents to a full-fledged park attracting visitors nationwide. To my disappointment, I found that Sulphur Springs remained largely invisible in the historical record until the early 1890s, except for vague references that Indian peoples may have visited the place for many years previously, and no doubt they did. Still, the Chickaws, comparative latecomers to the region, apparently attached no particular significance to

the spot, largely because their cultural heritage lay in their former homeland, Alabama and Mississippi.

The story of Platt National Park is inseparable from the early development of the town of Sulphur, which originally occupied the area in the immediate vicinity of the springs. In a truly unique circumstance, the Euro-American inhabitants recognized and seized upon the recreational potential of the mineral springs and encouraged government acquisition of the property, thus sealing the fate of the original village. However, that movement gave rise to an entirely new town on adjacent lands. Thus, a common thread throughout this narrative is the unusually close relationship between the park and local citizens. While that bond was certainly not devoid of stressful moments, most residents and most government officials recognized that cooperation was as essential as it was mutually beneficial. Indeed, the pride and sense of ownership demonstrated by the residents of Sulphur for "their" national park figured significantly in its success over the years.

I extend my profound appreciation to Barbara Rust and her staff at the Fort Worth branch of the National Archives for their generous assistance, always cheerfully rendered, during my visits to the facility and to my follow-up requests. DeAnn Blanton and Carolyn Bernowski of the National Archives Main and College Park branches, respectively, in Washington, D. C. graciously responded, as always, to my special long

distance requests. Superintendent Rick Schireman and the staff at Chickasaw National Recreation Area did everything possible to accommodate my research at the park. In particular, Park Ranger Judy Kahlor, who served as project coordinator, went beyond the call in facilitating my work, familiarizing me with the collections, and orientating me to the park and the surrounding area. I am also indebted to staff members at several repositories, including the Mary Logsdon at the Newspaper Department, Oklahoma Historical Society; Josh Clough, graduate assistant at the Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, Norman; the Sulphur Public Library, the Davis Public Library, East Central Oklahoma State library, Ada; and the Special Collections staff at the University of Arizona library. Once again, my friend Venice Beskey with the Wyoming State Library went beyond the call to retrieve documents not readily available elsewhere. Joseph Ditta, reference librarian with the New York Historical Society, and Joyce M. Cox, Nevada State Library and Archives, are commended for their prompt and thorough responses to my e-mail requests. National Park Service colleagues Robert L. Spude and Art Gomez in the History Division, Santa Fe Support Office, lent encouragement and assistance, as always, throughout the duration of the project.

Chapter 1

Opening-Up the Country

Much of the year, Sulphur Springs was a drowsy little village nestled in the folds of the prairie skirting the northern fringe of the ancient Arbuckle Mountains. A few hundred residents, mostly whites and mixed bloods of Chickasaw and Choctaw Indian ancestry, inhabited an assortment of simple frame dwellings strewn haphazardly near the confluence of Rock and Sulphur Creeks. The business district was not unlike other rough-hewn frontier towns in the Indian Territory during the 1890s—two general mercantile stores, a druggist, grocery stores, a couple of livery stables and a blacksmith, restaurants, and that always essential symbol of community stability, a bank. There were hotels too--in fact, Sulphur boasted an inordinate number of hotels for a town its size. Among them were small board-and-batten affairs like the Brown Cottage, providing beds at budget prices, to intermediate-class accommodations exemplified by the Harper Hotel and the

Shannon House. Occupying higher ground, and commanding commensurately higher prices, was the first class White Sulphur Inn.

Unique to Sulphur were natural mineral-water springs gushing forth in several places, most prominently, Seven Springs—right in the middle of the town square. Nearby were a few primitive bathhouses, where visitors suffering from various maladies might immerse themselves in the reputedly healing waters. They also came to drink the various waters--bromide, sulphur, and fresh spring water—because they were touted as a cure digestive disorders. During summer, in fact, people came from all over, including places as far away as Dallas, Fort Worth, and Oklahoma City, to partake of the waters. The town of Sulfur Springs was transformed seasonally into a bustling place out of all proportion to its size and comparatively remote location.

Just when people began using the springs for such purposes is uncertain. Archeological evidence suggests that indigenous Native American people, ancestors of tribes later identified as Caddos and Wichitas, camped in vicinity of the springs as early as the 1100s during hunting forays. There were, however, no indications of permanent habitation.[1]

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[1] Clare Sue Kidwell, "Ethnographic Overview: Phase II – American Indian Occupation and Use of the Chickasaw National Recreation Area," typescript, no date, filed in library, Chickasaw NRA.

Euro-Americans took little, if any, interest in the area for centuries, even after the occupation of New Spain. Perhaps the first white incursions into the region occurred when the Spanish established a trail along the Red River connecting the towns of Natchitoches and Nacodoches with their far-flung outpost at Santa Fe. At that, only a few priests, trappers, and traders ventured along the wilderness route. They apparently clung closely to the river both as a guide and a reliable source of water and did not depart from it to strike northwest until they reached the Deep Red, southwest of modern-day Lawton, Oklahoma.[2]

Following American acquisition of the Louisiana Purchase, President Thomas Jefferson sought more detailed information concerning the presumed western boundary of the new territory. To accomplish that, Congress funded an expedition in 1806 headed by Nachez scientist William Dunbar and surveyor Thomas Freeman, accompanied by a small military escort, to explore up Red River from its mouth. Spain, however, remained extremely sensitive to Americans, particularly United States soldiers, intruding on its territory. The Dunbar-Freeman party had proceeded only about 635 miles, to a point near the present-day southeast corner of Oklahoma, where they encountered a Spanish patrol

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[2] Grant Foreman, "Early Trails Through Oklahoma," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, (June 1925), p. 100 (hereinafter cited as "Early Trails").

sent to intercept them.[3] Outnumbered, the explorers were compelled to turn back downstream. That proved to be the only American penetration of the region until Major Stephen F. Long, returning from his 1819 trip to the Rocky Mountains, mistakenly turned down the Canadian, rather than Red River as he had intended. In so doing, his expedition circumvented the Arbuckles some distance to the south of his line of march. Long failed to discover his error until he suddenly encountered frontier settlements in western Arkansas.[4]

Nomadic tribesmen occasionally frequented the mineral springs in subsequent decades, but there is no record indicating that whites found the place until considerably later. Colonel Henry Dodge conducted the only other significant military reconnaissance of the region in 1834 when he led a column of the First Dragoons from Fort Gibson southwesterly to strike the Washita River few miles above its mouth at a point northwest of present-day Durant, Oklahoma. There he established camp and was soon joined by troops from nearby Fort Towson. Taking half the command, Dodge proceeded northwest with the intention of making a peaceful contact with the Wichitas and Comanches on the plains to pave the way for the arrival of the Chickasaws in their eastern hunting range.

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[3] The western boundary of the Louisiana Purchase would remain uncertain until it was officially defined as a provision of the Adams-Onis Treaty of 1819. Thomas A. Bailey, *A Diplomatic History of the American People*, (New York: 1964), p. 173.

[4] William H. Goetzmann, *Army Explorations in the American West 1803 – 1863*, (New Haven: 1959), pp. 34-35, 42-43 (hereinafter cited as *Army Exploration*).

The expedition followed the Washita nearly due west for some distance, passing within about twenty miles of the natural springs without being aware of their existence.[5]

The army had established Fort Gibson on the Arkansas River, a few miles above its confluence with the Canadian, more than a decade earlier for the purpose of averting intermittent warfare between the transplanted Osage and Cherokee people residing in that area. Soon afterward, Major Alexander Cummings, Seventh Infantry, was sent to construct a second post, christened Fort Towson, on Gates Creek, six miles above the Red. Its mission was to control the U. S. - Texas border, as well as preserve order among the Chickasaw and Choctaw Indians. These were the first military posts to be established in Indian Territory, and both stemmed from the federal government's policy to displace the so-called Five Civilized Tribes (Cherokee, Creek, Seminole, Chickasaw, and Choctaw) from their homeland in the South during the 1820s and 1830s.[6]

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[5] Stan Hoig, *Beyond the Frontier: Exploring the Indian Country*, (Norman: 1998), pp. 140-41; For a general map of Leavenworth's route, see John W. Morris, Charles R Goins, and Edwin C. McReynolds, *Historical Atlas of Oklahoma*, (Norman: 1982), pp. 17-18. This map indicates that the expedition veered away from the Washita about where it bends north, perhaps near present-day Dickson, Okla.; Foreman, "Early Trails," pp. 102-03.

[6] Fort Towson, first established on Gates Creek above Red River in 1824, survived only five years at that location. In 1831 it was relocated about a mile distant from the original site, near the present town of Fort Towson, Oklahoma. Its mission was to guard the frontier boundary between the U. S. and Texas and protect the Choctaws and Chickasaws from lawless elements as well as marauding plains tribes to the west. The army later established Fort Washita, near where Dodge's 1834 camp had stood, in response to requests for protection by the more recently arrived Chickasaws and Choctaws. Robert W. Frazer, *Forts of the West: Military Forts and Presidios and Posts Commonly Called Forts West of the Mississippi River to 1898*, (Norman: 1977), pp. 125-26 (hereinafter cited as *Forts of the West*).

The Chickasaws, most central to this story, were probably first contacted by Europeans about 1540, when a Spanish military force under Hernando DeSoto moved from Florida up the Tombigbee River toward its headwaters in what would later become northern Mississippi. Although initial interaction between the Chickasaws and the Spanish was amicable enough at the outset, the relationship rapidly deteriorated when the Indians became disenchanted with the interlopers, whereupon they killed several of De Soto's men.

Not until late in the seventeenth century did Europeans again venture into Chickasaw territory, beginning with explorations by the French. Upon discovering the rich economic potential of the Mississippi Valley, they seized the opportunity to develop it as a convenient avenue from the Gulf of Mexico to their settlements in the Ohio country. The British, concurrently extending their frontiers westward, quite naturally opposed any expansion of French influence in the region by initiating a brisk competing trade in manufactured goods with the Chickasaws, in exchange for slaves and furs. Both countries introduced the Indians to Christianity by inserting missionaries throughout the region. The struggle for control eventually pitted the Chocktaws against the neighboring Chickasaws, and divided the latter into French and British factions. Intrigue and economic competition eventually culminated in the Seven Years War, in which France lost much of her influence in the New World, including the cession of Canada and Illinois

to Great Britain and Louisiana to Spain. The Chickasaws, at the same time, gained British assurances that their lands would be reserved from white settlement.

While the Chickasaw alliance with the British worked to the tribe's favor in the short term, they found themselves in opposition to the upstart colonists during the American Revolution. The most significant action in that region occurred at Fort Jefferson on the Ohio River, where Chickasaws laid waste to the countryside by destroying farms, then kept the fort's garrison under siege for a year. American forces eventually saved the garrison, but the strength of Chickasaw resistance nevertheless forced abandonment of the post.

The three decades following the Revolution were crucial for the Chickasaws, as well as the other Civilized Tribes. Although Great Britain had surrendered its claim on most of the country west to the Mississippi, Spain still held the lower Southeast. The newly formed United States government was too preoccupied with its own affairs at that time to devote attention to Indian affairs or to exert authority over the Chickasaw Nation. The Spanish, meantime, took advantage of that opportunity to negotiate agreements with the tribal factions in the south in an attempt to retain their allegiance, thereby solidifying an economic advantage over their recent enemies, the Americans. They even went so far as to pronounce themselves protectors of the Indians and encouraged the tribesmen to resist any kind of U. S. traffic over their lands. Discovering the ploy, Congress authorized

a commission to conclude new treaties favorable to the United States. Traders and agents immediately went among the various tribes in an attempt to win their loyalty through bartering and supplying better quality manufactured goods than their Spanish competitors. For a number of years, agents from both countries vied for the Indians' favor for their respective nations, including handing out liberal quantities of gifts. Eventually, in early 1786, the Chickasaws signed the Treaty of Hopewell with the United States, creating the first official relationship between the two entities. Significantly, the treaty specified that the government would have exclusive right to regulate commerce in the Chickasaw Nation.

Despite the supposed sovereignty of Indian lands, state and territorial boundaries were imposed over Indian reserves. That circumstance gave rise to certain legal issues when it came to the application of state laws to Indians. Moreover, a seemingly innocuous clause in the treaty granted the government complete authority to manage the affairs of the tribe in the best interests of the Indians. That was to have far-reaching effects on the tribe.

While the Spanish element of the Chickasaws settled near their benefactors, the American faction, actively supported by the United States with supplies of arms and munitions, carried out a war against the pro-Spanish Creeks. In 1795, a large Creek force invaded Chickasaw territory with the intention of capturing Long Town, headquarters of

the Chickasaw loyalists. But, the well-prepared Chickasaws soundly defeated the Creeks, thus weakening the position of their Spanish allies. A subsequent treaty with Spain confirmed U. S. dominion over the previously disputed lands north of thirty-one degrees latitude, thus defeating a Spanish plan to create an Indian buffer in Alabama and Mississipi. A separate agreement brought a lasting peace between the Creek and Chickasaw tribes.

During the period 1800 – 1818, the United States concluded four additional treaties with the Chickasaws, all aimed at reducing their land holdings in the so-called Natchez Trace. Resident agents and commissioners, advantageously using a keen understanding of intra-tribal relationships and politics, played off tribal factions against each other to obtain willing signatories. The taking of twenty million acres of land from the Chickasaws in those years bore mute testimony to the effectiveness of their methods. A positive development, at least from the white perspective, was the arrival of missionaries, the establishment of schools, and the temporary placing of Chickasaw children in the homes of white settlers. Full-blood Chickasaws, however, viewed the erosion of traditional tribal culture with skepticism. Nevertheless, over time nearly all

Chickasaws gained a fluency in English and exposure to white society that were to benefit them as individuals and as a tribe in the future.[7]

Government efforts to wrest land from the Chickasaws intensified during the 1820s. Working hand-in-glove, both Mississippi and Alabama adopted laws placing the Chickasaw Nation under their respective jurisdictions and, in the same stroke, seriously eroded the authority of the tribal government. The Indians, meantime, began considering the government's suggestion that they relocate on public lands west of the Mississippi in the Louisiana Purchase. Their former neighbors, the Choctaws, had resigned themselves to exchange their lands in central Mississippi and to move west as a result of an accord signed in 1820. Despite increasing personal abuse from local white interlopers, the Chickasaws stubbornly refused to relinquish their lands until another decade had passed. Only when Congress enacted legislation granting the president executive power to remove the tribes from their lands and to relocate them in the West did they finally concede to the inevitable. The states, anxious to complete white acquisition and settlement of their territories, began organizing counties and towns within Indian tracts. In the 1832 Treaty of Ponotoc, the Chickasaws succumbed to the inevitable by

[7] The foregoing is a synthesis drawn from Arrell M. Gibson, *The Chickasaws*. (Norman: 1971) and Grant Foreman, *The Five Civilized Tribes*, (Norman: 1934).

consenting to move to Indian Territory as soon as suitable lands could be found.[8] This decision had far-reaching effects on the Chickasaws because it tended to segregate the members. Elderly full-bloods were emotionally tied to the land of their forefathers, and even younger, but more practical mixed bloods were loath to leave their businesses, farms and hard-earned developments. Removal only accelerated the gradual disintegration of traditional culture that had been degenerating for centuries as the result of the introduction of alcohol, previously unknown diseases, and intermarriage with whites.

Finding most of the lands suitable for agriculture in Indian Territory already claimed, the advance party discovered that the Choctaws were willing to allow the Chickasaws to settle upon the central and western portions of their enormous tract (which they were unable to fully utilize anyway) and establish their own tribal government. In return for that privilege, the Chickasaws would pay their Choctaw brethren $530,000, though people from both tribes could live in either section. The trail across the prairie left by Colonel Dodge was used to define much of the eastern boundary of the Chickasaw district.[9]

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[8] The Chickasaws ceded some 6,422,000 acres, their total southeastern domain. Homesteads temporarily held by whites within the nation accounted for about one-third of the total. The remaining four million acres were disposed of at public auction from time to time, the last being held in 1854. Gibson, *Chickasaws*, p. 179.

[9] Ibid., pp. 178, 217; Foreman, "Early Trails," pp. 103.

The great migration occurred in two phases, the first one in fall 1837 followed by another a year later. Traveling overland and by steamboat, the people disembarked at Fort Coffee, on the Arkansas below Fort Gibson, four to six weeks later. At the time of their arrival on the frontier, a smallpox epidemic was devastating settlements along the Arkansas and the Canadian. The Chickasaws sought to minimize the dangers by separating into five groups, each establishing its own camp approximately a hundred miles distant from the others, but all within the Choctaw district. This precaution, however necessary under the circumstances, nevertheless had the effect of further fragmenting the tribe and destroying its former sense of community.

Licensed traders Edwards and Shelton soon established a post, later known as Edwards' Post (or Settlement), at the confluence of the Little Red and the Canadian to supply the newcomers. As business expanded, trading caravans began plying a trail from Camp Holmes southwesterly into Texas and back, crossing the Red River about where present-day Ryan stands. That route passed a short distance north and northwest of the mineral springs, but there is no record of any travelers straying from the trail to examine the nearby Rock Creek area.[10]

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[10] Edwards' Post was situated southeast of present-day Holdenville, Oklahoma, where Dodge's trail crossed the Canadian River. Nearby was abandoned Camp Holmes, established by Dodge in 1834 and maintained for about a year thereafter. From the Canadian, this route approximated Oklahoma Highway 1 on a southwesterly course from Atwood to Ada to the Davis area, perhaps intersecting the Interstate 35 corridor near Exit 51. It traversed Ponotoc, Murray, Carter, and Jefferson counties. ibid.; Frazer, *Forts of the West*, pp. 121-22.

The very presence of the Chickasaw and Choctaw settlers lured Comanche raiders and Texas outlaws to the eastern district seeking livestock and whatever loot they might steal. The problem reached such serious proportions by 1841 that the tribes appealed to the government to provide them with military protection. Soon after Colonel Zachary Taylor assumed command of Military Department No. 2, headquartered at Fort Smith, he saw the advantages of establishing a fort in the vicinity of Dodge's old camp on the Washita. At that strategic point, U. S. troops would be positioned to thwart hostile incursions from both Texas and the plains west of that stream. Taylor also foresaw the day when steamboats could ascend the Red and the Washita to simplify supply and communications with the new post. Captain George H. Blake, Second Dragoons, arrived in the area in April to select a site about thirty miles above the mouth of the Washita. A battalion of that regiment had just been transferred from service against the Seminoles in Florida to the far-western frontier, one company taking station at Fort Towson and two forming the garrison at new Fort Washita.[11]

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[11] Camp Washita was garrisoned by federal troops until 1861, when it was evacuated in the face of invasion by Texas Confederate forces. It was burned when abandoned by the Confederates at war's end. The military reservation was granted to the Chickasaw Nation in 1870. Frazer, *Forts of the West*, pp. 125-26; Raphael P. Thian, *Notes on Illustrating the Military Geography of the United States 1813 – 1880*, (Austin, Tex.: 1979), pp. 36-37; Herbert M. Hart, *Old Forts of the Southwest*, (New York: 1964), p. 14; Theophilus F. Rodenbough, *From Everglade to Canyon With the Second United States Cavalry*, (Norman: 2000), pp. 83-84.

The post thus became a crossroads for several important travel routes through the region. A military road led eastward to Fort Towson, while another route diverged northeast to Boggy Depot, established as the annuity distribution point for the Chickasaw tribe shortly after their arrival in 1837.[12] A third route, tracing the old dragoon trail east of the Washita, led to Edwards' trading post and Fort Gibson. The promise of land in the young Republic of Texas created a rush of homesteaders from the States. Subsequently during the mid-1840s, emigrants pioneered the Texas Road leading from Fort Gibson to the Red River. The road forked at Boggy Depot, one branch crossing the Red nearly due south of that point, the other reaching a more westerly ford on the river via Fort Washita.[13]

Because of its central location, Indian Territory (sometimes referred to as "the Nations") soon figured into westward expansion. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, ending the Mexican-American War, resulted in the surrender of Mexico's entire northern frontier to the United States. Santa Fe continued to be a vital center of commerce and

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[12] Boggy Depot stood on the Clear Boggy River, flowing southeasterly to its confluence with the Red. Accessible by boat, the depot was a logical distribution point for government annuity supplies shipped from the gulf. It was located within the eastern, or primarily Choctaw district, where many Chickasaws initially resided. A history of the place is found in Muriel H. Wright, "Old Boggy Depot," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, (March 1927), pp. 4 – 17.

[13] The Texas Road served as a major artery of emigration and commerce for several decades beginning in the mid-1840s. It also facilitated Southern troop movements during the Civil War and figured in the Battle of Honey Springs. Proving the practicality of the route, major portions of it came into use by Texas cattlemen after the war as the Shawnee Trail to reach shipping points in Missouri. Foreman, Early Trails," p. 117; Morris, et al., *Historical Atlas*, maps 17 and 46.

territorial government, as well as the terminus of the ancient Camino Real linking Chihauhua and Mexico City. The discovery of gold in California immediately after the war inspired the nation to seek an all-season southern route to California and the Pacific to facilitate emigration and mail service. Accordingly, in April 1849, Captain Randolph B. Marcy was ordered to conduct a reconnaissance-in-force by escorting an emigrant train from Fort Smith to Santa Fe, and in so doing, evaluate that route as a possible corridor for a transcontinental railroad. Marcy's column essentially traced Abert's old trail westward following the south side of the Canadian, confirming its potential for a railroad, but at the same time recognizing that such a venture would be impractical until the region became more densely populated. Taking a more circuitous route on his return, Marcy hoped to chart a feasible wagon road from Fort Smith to the Rio Grande to connect with the extant trail to San Diego. That in mind, he marched southward from Santa Fe along the Rio Grande as far as Dona Ana, a farming village above El Paso, before turning east. His journey took him across the headwaters of the Brazos and eventually to Fort Washita. From there, he simply followed the Texas Road until he intersected his own trail back to Fort Smith. Marcy's expedition would have no immediate practical value, but in less than a decade it would prove to be of enormous significance.[14]

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[14] Goetzmann, *Army Exploration*, pp. 212-18.

The army constructed a second post farther up the Washita River in spring 1851 to augment protection for the Chickasaws and Choctaws, who continued to serve as prey for their less hospitable neighbors to the west. A military presence at that strategic location also served to discourage Comanche war parties from molesting traffic on the nearby trails leading to Texas and Santa Fe. Troops laid out Fort Arbuckle about five miles up Wildhorse (also called Wild Mustang) Creek, a tributary of the Washita flowing from the west. When completed, the post boasted eight sets of officers' quarters, barracks for three companies, and a number of auxiliary buildings. The establishment of the new post necessitated extending the military road from the supply depot at Little Rock via Forts Towson and Washita.

In addition to possessing a healthful environment on elevated ground, the post received an abundant supply of water from natural spring emanating from the Arbuckle Mountains. "It would be a great blessing," wrote the post surgeon, "if the men were content with this wholesome beverage of nature, but such is not the case."[15] Like most soldiers of that era, the garrison spurned "Adam's ale" in preference to rot gut whiskey dispensed by the post sutler. Members of the garrison almost certainly were aware of the

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[15] Hart, *Old Forts of the Southwest*, p. 17; Frazer, *Forts of the West*, pp. 116-18; The site of Fort Arbuckle lies a few miles southwest of Davis, Oklahoma.

mineral springs only a few miles east of the post, and may have partaken of their waters, yet the surgeon made no mention them.[16]

Long and close association with whites in the Southeast had at once benefited and degraded Chickasaw society. Traditional customs were diluted through widespread interracial marriage with whites during and after the colonial era, creating a societal gulf between mixed bloods and their kinsmen. The mixed bloods tended to accept more readily farming and business interests, and became actively involved in governmental affairs. The tribe had embraced the concept of representative government by adopting their own constitution in 1834 and organizing an elected body of three chiefs and a general council composed of twenty-seven representatives. Like many Southerners, Chickasaw land owners often were slave owners as well. However disconcerting removal may have been for both elements of the tribe, it was probably more traumatic for the traditionalists steeped in the old ways and with strong ties to the land of their heritage. That factor also had the effect of widening the gulf between the two factions. Those difficulties notwithstanding, the ability of the Chickasaw people as a whole to adapt to

[16] Beginning in 1868, army doctors were charged with maintaining post medical histories, including observations on weather, flora, and fauna, and geology in the vicinity of each station. Presumably, the army thought such information might prove useful militarily. Even though Fort Arbuckle was active until 1870, and therefore should have had a brief medical history, the National Archives does not have it in their holdings. Perhaps, since the fate of the post was foretold in a treaty concluded with the Chickasaws in 1866, the surgeon simply did not comply with the requirement. Author's note.

their new circumstances and meet challenges creatively bore mute testimony to their resiliency. The adjustment to the West:

> . . . generated a renaissance of personal and group pride and produced a fresh sense of purpose and direction. The impact of these forces assuaged the chilling pangs of the Chickasaw Trail of Tears, provoked those resources essential to adjustment in the new land, and committed the Chickasaws to forge a society and way of life to match the challenge of the new land.[17]

By the 1840s, however, one Indian Bureau official declared there was little perceptible distinction between the Chickasaws and the Choctaws, with whom the former had intermarried extensively. Their languages were nearly the same, and because the Chickasaws were guests in the Choctaw Nation, and therefore subject to an 1837 pact, the former began to realize they were losing tribal identity, as well as control over their own affairs. Choctaw domination engendered an undercurrent of dissent among the Chickasaws, a burgeoning movement expressed in a sense of renewed nationalism and unity. Support for dissolution of the relationship led to an independent Chickasaw Nation created by formal agreement in 1855. With the concurrence of the Choctaws, Indian Commissioner George W. Manypenny defined a separate Chickasaw District, carving out

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[17] Gibson, *Chickasaws*, p. 224.

a large tract from the central portion of the former Choctaw domain in which the Chickasaws would enjoy tribal autonomy.[18]

The mid-1850s, however, saw few Chickasaws residing very far beyond Tishomingo, the tribal capital. Assistant Surgeon Rodney Glison, serving at Fort Arbuckle in 1854, noted the absence of permanent settlers in the area surrounding the post.

> With the exception of some seven or eight families, there are no inhabitants in the neighborhood of this post. The only Indians that temporarily encamp in its vicinity are roaming bands of the Kickapoos, Witchitas, Keechies, and hunting parties of Caddoes, Wascoes, Creeks, Cherokees, Delawares, Chickasaws, and Choctaws.[19]

Nevertheless, the next few years saw the Chickasaws, particularly the more acculturated mixed bloods, seizing economic advantages presented by the various trails crisscrossing the territory. The Butterfield Overland Mail route, joining the Texas Trail

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[18] The Chickasaws paid the Choctaws $150,000 for clear title to their own district, bounded on the north by the Canadian River, on the south by the Red River, on the east along a line from Island Bayou, on the Red, northward to the Canadian, and on the west by the 98th meridian. The district embraced over 4,700,00 acres. The zone west of the 98th meridian, originally belonging to the Choctaws and later occupied by both tribes, was leased by the government as a future reserve for plains tribes. The established council grounds at Good Spring, later named Tishomingo, became the Chickasaw capital. Muriel H. Wright, *A Guide to the Indian Tribes of Oklahoma*, (Norman: 1986), pp. 90-91; Gibson, *Chickasaws*, p. 254.

[19] Richard H. Coolidge, "Statistical Report on the Sickness and Mortality in the Army of the United States Compiled from the Records of the Surgeon General's Office Embracing a Period of Sixteen Years, From January, 1839, to January, 1855," *Senate Executive Documents*, No. 96, 34th Cong., 1st Sess., (Washington, D. C.: 1856), p. 275.

east of Boggy Depot near Atoka in the Choctaw Nation, became a major artery for mail, commercial caravans, and emigration after 1857.[20] Marcy's route was also a thoroughfare used by New Mexico-bound emigrants, though it was less popular. Troops and army supply trains frequently plied the military road from Little Rock to Forts Washita and Arbuckle. Some Chickasaws, seeing an economic opportunity, began settling along those roads to supply travelers with food, forage, and replacement draft animals for their teams, while others established farms near the forts to secure contracts for wood, hay, fresh vegetables, and beef. But the burgeoning Chickasaw cattle herds, grazing on the lush prairie grasses of the region, quickly exceeded the army's needs, a circumstance that prompted the industrious tribesmen to seek additional markets in Missouri, Louisiana, and Arkansas. Cattle raising flourished as Chickasaw ranchers migrated farther westward across the district. In addition to four licensed trading houses owned by white men, the Indians themselves capitalized on the influx of traffic and residents by establishing a number of additional posts in the district.

A few particularly imaginative individuals developed primitive resorts at the natural oil seeps along the southern base of the Arbuckle Mountains. In a statement that

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[20] The Butterfield Mail route, charted in 1857, crossed Red River at Colbert's Ferry, then took a wide curving course across the Texas and New Mexico plains to El Paso and Dona Ana before striking west to California. Service over the route did not begin until September 1858. Muriel H. Wright, "The Butterfield Overland Mail One Hundred Years Ago, *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, (Spring 1957), pp. 55-71.

could have served as a model for later promotional advertisements, the agent for the Chickasaws reported in 1853:

> The oil springs in this nation are attracting considerable attention, as they are said to be a remedy for all chronic diseases. Rheumatism stands no chance at all, and the worst cases of dropsy yield to its effects. The fact is, that it cures anything that has been tried. A great many Texans visit these springs, and some from Arkansas. They are situated at the foot of the Wichita [sic] Mountains on Washita river, and also on Red River. There is one or two of great medicinal properties.[21]

The operators of these establishments even placed notices in Texas and Louisiana newspapers extolling the medicinal virtues of warm oil and sulphur water baths. Although the record is silent as to whether any of those enterprises were located farther north on Rock Creek, the Arbuckle Mountains undeniably became the cradle of the territory's resort industry.[22]

The outbreak of the Civil War found the Confederates coveting Indian Territory both for what it might contribute to the cause and as a potential avenue for the conquest of Kansas and Colorado. By 1861, the Chickasaws numbered about 5,000 people, only about 200 being slave owners. The majority of Chickasaws were initially loyal to the

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[21] Report of A. J. Smith, Chickasaw Agent, August 29, 1853, Annual Report of the Indian Bureau, *House Executive Documents*, 33rd Cong., 1st Sess., (Washington, D. C.: 1853), pp. 401-02.

[22] Gibson, *Chickasaws*, p. 226, 229.

Union, and held deep animosities for Alabama and Mississippi over tribal removal, however tribal political control rested in the hands of the mixed-blood minority, that also happened to be advocates of slavery. After Texas seceded in March, the tribe cast its allegiance with the South in return for promises of military protection. Their choice seemed validated when Federal troops evacuated Forts Arbuckle and Washita in the face of a Texan advance later that spring, actions prompting the Chickasaws to formally declare their independence from the United States in May. The tribe sealed the pact, and its own fate, by contributing men to the Confederate Army.

The Chickasaws lived to regret those decisions after the South capitulated five years later. Federal authorities subjected the nation to undergo reconstruction, much like the Southern states, forcing the Chickasaws to not only free their slaves and renounce the practice forever, but accept them as tribal members. Each ex-slave choosing to reside in the nation was granted forty acres of land. In exacting further retribution, the government demanded the Chickasaws and Choctaws relinquish the Leased District as a reservation for the Comanches and Kiowas, in return for a compensation of $300,000.[23] United States regular troops again occupied Fort Arbuckle in 1867 to re-establish federal authority in the region and to serve as a buffer between the neighboring plains tribes.

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[23] Ibid., pp. 276-77.

In the wake of the war, the United States also concluded a new agreement with the Chickasaws and Choctaws because their alliance with the Confederacy effectively nullified the Doaksville Treaty. The 1866 accord imposed several conditions that the Indians, as conquered nations, were in no position to contest. The Choctaw and Chickasaw tribal governments were subsequently segregated into autonomous bodies, and in a move calculated to change the racial composition of the tribes forever, Washington conferred tribal citizenship to all whites marrying Indians. Many Caucasian men, consequently, took advantage of the situation to acquire land in the Nations. Another provision having significant and far-reaching consequences, removed any right of tribal opposition to the construction of land-grant railroads across their territory.[24] Despite assurances to the contrary, it became all too apparent to the Indians that the government foresaw the day when their title would be extinguished, and Indian Territory would be thrown open as public domain. Indeed, the government was even then engaged in negotiations that would lead to permission for the Union Pacific- Southern Branch to construct a north-south railroad, and for the Atlantic and Pacific to build east to west.

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[24] Muriel H. Wright, *A Guide to the Indian Tribes of Oklahoma*, (Norman: 1986), p. 92 (hereinafter cited as *Indian Tribes*).

Such an intrusion portended the end of the Five Civilized Tribes as semi-independent nations.[25]

Those negotiations, however, did not result immediately in rails being laid through the territory. While the Chickasaws continued to resist railroad grants, Texas cattlemen developed overland trails northward to reach shipping points to eastern markets. Even though the Civil War had brought an end to Butterfield's "Ox Bow" mail route, in favor of the Central Route across the Rocky Mountains, the old Texas Road was a natural course to reach advancing railheads in Missouri. By the early 1870s, the famed Chisholm Trail also bisected the Chickasaw Nation as a cattle highway connecting with the Kansas-Pacific Railroad.[26]

Meantime, railroad entrepreneurs were not idle. Since the tribes ceded only one right-of-way in each direction, the Union Pacific-Southern Branch combined with three other firms in 1870 to be reconstituted as the Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad, popularly known as the K-T, or "Katy." The new line built south from Baxter Springs, Kansas,

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[25] James D. Morrison, "The Union Pacific, Southern Branch," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, (June 1936), p. 174.

[26] The livestock industry became increasingly important to the Chickasaws when they realized that Texas herds could be taxed for grazing on their ranges on their northward treks. Some also constructed toll bridges over streams along the way. One source claimed that over 400,000 head of cattle crossed the Chickasaw Nation in 1872 alone. As they became aware of the economic advantages of the cattle business, the Chickasaws themselves consequently took up ranching. It developed into a leading industry, particularly in the western portion of the district along the valleys of the Washita and the Canadian Rivers. Gibson, *Chickasaws*, p.288; Wright, *Indian Tribes*, p. 93; Opal Hartsell Brown and Richard Garrity, *City of Many Facets*, (Oklahoma City: 1981), p. 7.

where it connected with routes to Kansas City and St. Louis, coursing to Fort Gibson and the Red River via Muskogee, virtually paralleling the old Texas Road. When the K-T reached Dennison two years later, it was hailed as the first railroad to penetrate the northern boundary Texas.[27]

The arrival of the railroad at Boggy Depot relegated that former wagon road and cattle trail hub to being a supply station for two new army posts, Forts Cobb and Sill, located some two hundred miles west. A short-line stagecoach also carried mail and passengers to a growing number of ranches and villages along the way. The road traced the existing ruts along the divide between the Washita and Blue River, via the Chickasaw capital, Tishomingo. Fording the Blue at Nail's Crossing, coaches turned northwest, passing a small settlement on the site of the now abandoned Fort Arbuckle, to Paul's Ranch, thence points beyond.[28] An intermediate station was established at Mill Creek, home of Chickasaw Governor Cyrus Harris. An enterprising young businessman, Noah

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[27] The federal government had a vested interest in developing railroads both for economic reasons and to enable the army to more easily transport troops and supplies. Because only one railroad was permitted to cross Indian Territory north-south, the Union Pacific vied with the Missouri River, Fort Scott, and Gulf Railroad for that lucrative advantage. Others would have to wait until the territory was declared public domain. Thus, the two companies staged a race to determine which would be the first to enter Indian Territory. The U. P., under the guise of the M-K-T, won the race on a technicality. Morrison, Union Pacific," pp. 178-80; Walter A. Johnson, "Brief History of the Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad Lines," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, (Autumn 1946), pp. 340-58.

[28] The development of this road, which skirted the Sulphur Springs area to the northeast, is discussed more fully in Anna Lewis, "Trading Post at the Crossing of the Chickasaw Trails, *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, (December 1934), pp. 447-53 and Czarina Conlin, "Platt National Park, *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, (March 1926), 11-13. The two accounts cited are not in complete agreement. The author considers the former to be the more authoritative.

Lael, arrived at Mill Creek about 1872 and shortly afterward secured a contract with the El Paso Stage Company for shoeing the firm's animals on its many routes throughout Indian Territory, Texas, Louisana, and Arkansas. Financially well off within a few years, Lael won the hand of the governor's daughter and settled on Rock Creek in 1878. His four-mile-square Diamond-Z Ranch was headquartered at a new house overlooking the natural springs and was soon known as "the Sulphur Springs Place." Four years later, Lael sold his improvements to Perry Froman, who resided there for the next two decades.[29]

Indian Territory experienced rapid transition during the 1880s. Previously, the sedentary tribesmen had been perfectly content to farm or raise livestock in comparative isolation from the rest of the country. An influx of Christian missionaries throughout the Nations during the previous decade served as a powerful influence reinforcing European ethic and culture among the Chickasaws. Still more significant were the railroads. The Katy exercised a monopoly over north-south traffic for years, until the Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe (AT&SF) obtained permission to survey three potential routes from the

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[29] Since the lands lay within the Chickasaw Nation, the occupants were accorded all rights of use, but not ownership. Conlin, "Platt National Park," p. 11; Other ranches founded in the area during the late 1870s included Grant's at old Fort Arbuckle, Roff Brothers, and Turner's Ranch in the Arbuckle Mountains. Brown and Garrity, *City of Many Facets*, p. 8; Lael conveyed an unspecified property, known simply as "the Sulphur Springs Place," in return for $350.00 on September 26, 1882. The deed agreement is quoted in Perry E. Brown, "Platt National Park," typescript (1954), p. 12, Chickasaw NRA archives.

southern border of Kansas to Texas in 1884. All three traversed the Chickasaw District, near what would later become Platt National Park, but construction was delayed two more years while the company negotiated a charter satisfying both the tribes and the government. In the interim, the AT&SF quietly negotiated with the Gulf Colorado and Santa Fe Railway, building northwest from Galveston, to conclude a joint venture to obtain a coastal port terminus. The GC&SF, already in financial straits and anxious to secure additional capital, obtained an amendment to its government charter permitting the company to construct a branch road into Indian Territory to meet the AT&SF. The selected route ran from Arkansas City, Kansas to Temple, Texas, with track laying crews from both companies building toward each other to effect a junction in the vicinity of Purcell, a station established on the Canadian River in Indian Territory. The line, passing through the Arbuckle Mountains and up the Washita Valley a few miles west of the Sulphur Springs, was completed in June 1887.[30]

Other railroads entering Indian Territory included the Atlantic & Pacific, which had planned to build a line across the territory and west to California until financial

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[30] Route A paralleled Rock Creek, west of Mill Creek village, and crossed Buckhorn Creek to the south, thus it passed across or very near the later site of Platt National Park. Route B lay just east of Cherokee Village (modern Paul's Valley), crossing the Washita at Price, Oklahoma. James W. Moffitt, "Reconnaissance of H. L. Marvin, Chief Engineer for the Kansas Southern Railroad in 1884," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, (June 1939), pp. 212-28; The charter was actually granted to a subsidiary of the AT&SF, the Gulf, Colorado, & Santa Fe Railway Wright, *Indian Tribes*, p. 93; Keith L. Bryant, Jr., *History of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway*, (Lincoln: 1974), pp. 132-34; James Marshall, *Santa Fe, The Railroad That Built An Empire*, (New York: 1945), p. 231.

problems finally halted its progress only a short distance beyond Tulsa in 1886. The company was eventually forced into foreclosure and was sold to the newly organized St. Louis & San Francisco Railroad Co., popularly known as the "Frisco," more than a decade later.

The territory witnessed an even greater railroad boom during the late 1890s. The AT&SF line bisecting the Chickasaw Nation brought with it heretofore unknown urbanization. Numerous towns, among them Davis and Ardmore, sprang up along the line as Anglo-Americans flooded into the Washita Valley. Federal laws aimed at maintaining native integrity in Indian Territory proved impotent and by the last decade of the century over a quarter million whites had moved in, many of them residing in the Chickasaw Nation. Additionally, the population included some 5,000 blacks claiming freedmen status, even though the tribe had never owned more than a thousand slaves. "These settlers," according to government officials, "have improved farms and built villages and towns, but they have no legal status—no property rights—and are merely tenants by sufferance."[31] Indeed, the interlopers, referred to as "nesters" by their Indian hosts, were leasing lands that had been legitimately granted by treaty to the Five Nations.

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[31] *ARSI*, 1897, p. xxxi.

Because Native Americans had allowed whites to gain a firm foothold in the region, territorial administration had fallen into chaos. Some Indians had taken advantage of their positions in tribal government, and the lack of sufficient federal oversight, to acquire enormous tracts of land to the exclusion of other tribesmen. Some even charged that an "Indian aristocracy" had developed. The situation became so corrupt, in fact, that federal courts had to be established to exercise jurisdiction over Indian Territory and Congress granted the president review authority over all acts of the various tribal councils.[32]

The government recognized that keeping whites out of the Indian country had always been an impossible task. The national objective, moreover, was not to segregate the races, rather it aimed at assimilating American Indians into the dominant society. To that end, Congress had passed the General Allotment Act in 1887 to sub-divide reservation lands and assign parcels to individual tribal members. That accomplished, surplus lands were to be offered for sale to non-Indians, tribal governments would be dissolved, and Indians would be accorded individual rights of U. S. citizenship.

Senator Henry L. Dawes of Massachusetts chaired the committee assigned to execute the statute. The Five Civilized Tribes were initially exempted from the act because according to treaty, they had been granted fee-simple title to designated lands in

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[32] Ibid.

Indian Territory. In 1893, however, Congress authorized the Dawes Commission to negotiate with the five tribes in an effort to coerce them into accepting the allotment plan. It was a predictably laborious process. Only after four years of discussions did the Indians reach partial consensus regarding the issues of land allotment, the creation of official tribal rolls, town sites, and restriction of coal and asphalt deposits exclusively for the tribes. It was agreed that equal shares of land would be apportioned to each bonafide tribal member, with additional acreage pro rated for a wife and minor children. Of overwhelming significance was the provision dissolving the autonomous tribal governments by the year 1906, at which time tribal members would become U. S. citizens. The act thus cleared the way for Indian Territory to be merged within the proposed new state of Oklahoma. But, the Chickasaws strenuously objected to certain elements of the so-called Atoka Agreement, namely those concerning granting lands to railroads and to blacks claiming tribal status. Despite their protests, the Chickasaws represented a shrinking minority in the regional population, a factor that finally influenced them to reconsider their stance. Fearing the federal government would usurp tribal authority and assign lands equally, even to freedmen that nearly equaled their own numbers, the Chickasaws relented. By agreeing to submit the allotment scheme to a popular vote, the Chickasaws won a small concession that provided only forty acres to

each freedman. After tribal members defeated the proposal, a dissatisfied Congress overrode the decision by imposing the Curtis Act on the tribe in 1898. That legislation, embodying the Atoka Agreement, mandated a second vote on the measure, including additional provisions that further paved the way for the abolition of tribal independence. Having little choice but to submit to overwhelming federal power, the Chickasaws ratified the act in a referendum vote that clearly spelled the doom of their nation as an autonomous Indian government.[33]

[33] *ARCIA*, 1899, 124-25; In addition to consolidating various laws aimed at abolishing tribal autonomy, the Curtis Act (approved August 24, 1898) authorized the survey of town sites, the sale of lots, and the liquidation of tribal treasuries in the form of per capita payments to tribal members. It also incorporated the 1897 Atoka Agreement calling for land allotment and the termination of the Chickasaw tribal government effective March 4, 1906. For further details on the activities of the Dawes Commission, see Gibson, *Chickasaws*, pp. 300-07.

Chapter 2

"So Many Problems to be Solved"

The Interior Department lost no time in dispatching survey crews to Indian Territory to carry out the provisions of the allotment act and to appraise town lots. The assigned values, representing tribal assets, were to be paid to the Chickasaw Nation through the Indian Bureau, and in turn pro rated, with proceeds from excess lands disbursed equally among tribal members. Among the existing towns was a village that had taken root on the site of the Froman Ranch at Sulphur Springs. Exactly when and how that occurred remains unclear, but as whites began settling in the region, they were drawn to the lush haven at the confluence of Sulphur (later called Travertine) and Rock Creeks. They were attracted not by its scenic wonders, for the area was not exceptional in that regard, but because it represented such an oasis-like contrast to the uninspiring prairie stretching away in all directions. In summer, it afforded an opportunity for people

to briefly escape the heat of the plains, where they could bask in the cool shade, swim, or fish in the streams. Others came to partake of the mineral waters for their alleged curative properties in a time when the medical science was still primitive by present-day standards. Because Perry Froman had no legal title to the land or the springs, he had little choice but to allow others to recreate there. In fact, he probably welcomed people in what began as nothing more than rural socializing and neighborly hospitality.

By 1890, however, an unidentified entrepreneur had opened a store and a blacksmith shop near the springs to supply visitors with basic supplies and services. Further development for recreational purposes may have started soon thereafter when a group of sportsmen coming there regularly to fish the streams constructed a clubhouse for their own use. Four years later, Davis businessman Cy S. Leeper added the most permanent structure up to that time when he built a two-room limestone cabin, originally intended for seasonal use, which was later incorporated into a lumber yard complex overlooking Hillside Spring.[1]

If Leeper envisioned the economic potential of Sulphur Springs, he was not alone. The General Allotment (Dawes) Act had underscored the government's intent to

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[1] Leeper managed a lumber yard in Davis for his brother Jim of Gainesville, Texas. A typical advertisement is found in *Davis Progressive*, July 19, 1894; The Leeper complex above Hillside Spring eventually included one three-deck lumber shed, a frame office, a two-story sach and door house, and a house with a picket fence. Entry 794, "List of Structures to be Offered for Sale, Situated on the Reservation, Segregated by the ACt of Congress Approved April 21, 1904," Buildings, box 6, Central Files, Platt National Park, Records of the National Park Service, Record Group 79, National Archives, Fort Worth, Texas.

assimilate the people of the Five Civilized Tribes into mainstream America, thereby dissolving their respective governments and tribal land holdings. Despite the exemption of the five nations from the initial legislation, the negotiations Senator Dawes initiated in the mid-1890s became widely known and the outcome predictable. The time was at hand for whites to reserve by occupancy contract with Indian landowners, or the Chickasaw Nation, any lands that promised a financial return. Accordingly, Richard A. Sneed of Paul's Valley organized a group of developers under the banner "The Sulphur Springs Improvement Company" and purchased rights of occupancy from Froman to nearly a section of land surrounding Seven Springs, the principal attraction.[2] The company contracted to have the property surveyed, subdivided into lots, and fenced. Each member of the company selected a number of lots proportionate to his investment, thus accounting for the entire acreage.

Sneed and his partners immediately laid plans to promote Sulphur Springs as a "great health giving Mecca and summer resort," thereby assuring the appreciation of their real estate.[3] A national obsession with the benefits of hydrotherapy had been attracting modest numbers of people to the springs for years, but Sneed intended to reach

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[2] Palmer H. Boeger, *Oklahoma Oasis: From Platt National Park to Chickasaw National Recreation Area*, (Muskogee, Okla.: 1987), p. 40; Sneed, a Confederate veteran of the Civil War, was often addressed as "colonel," an honorary title he must have encouraged. However, military records indicate that he was an enlisted member of the Eighteenth Mississippi Infantry, rising from private to ordnance sergeant by the war's end. "Civil War Soldiers & Sailors System," National Park Service, Internet site.

[3] *Davis Progressive*, April 25, 1895.

beyond the sparsely populated local area by developing accommodations and negotiating with the railroads for special rates to transport tourists from elsewhere. Once there, people suffering from any of a number of maladies would have options for drinking the purportedly medicinal waters, bathing in them, or encasing themselves in a body poultice of healing mud. That neighboring towns also stood to benefit was reflected in an article appearing in the *Davis Advertiser*:

> The famous Sulphur Springs eight miles east of Davis have been bought by a company and bath houses and a large hotel will be erected at once. The Santa Fe road has agreed to advertise these springs and run reduced excursions to Davis where visitors will take livery rigs for the famous health resort.[4]

As early as August 1894, the press reported as many as three hundred visitors, some from as far away as Gainesville and even Galveston, Texas, were camping near Seven Springs. Sneed also accommodated visitors by constructing a footbridge across the creek and was publicly commended for having "the park in fine condition."[5]

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[4] The quotation is taken from *Davis Advertiser*, May 16, 1895; As early as 1894, local newspapers noted visitors coming from as far away as New York. By that time, people from the region were already beginning to construct summer cabins at Sulphur Springs and camp meetings were held during summer. *Davis Progressive*, August 2, 1894; The City Livery offered rigs, with or without drivers, for rent to accommodate travelers arriving by rail at Davis.

[5] *Davis Progressive*, August 16 and 23, 1894; *Davis Advertiser*, June 27, 1895.

Sneed and his fellow investors were keenly aware of unfolding events, as were all other Anglo-Americans already residing in the territory. Their interest in developing Sulphur Springs extended beyond merely profiting from a recreational attraction. They knew full well that the only legitimate land owners within the Chickasaw Nation were the Chickasaws themselves. No other persons, including Froman, had legal title to the lands surrounding the springs lying along Rock Creek. But, the proposed rules for disposing of "excess" Indian lands, beyond those allotted to tribal members, circulated quickly. The key provision held that, "The owner of the improvements on each lot shall have the right to buy one residence and one business lot at fifty per centum of the appraised value of such improved property, and the remainder of such improved property at sixty-two and one-half per centum of the said market value."[6] In short, the town site provision created a bonanza in land speculation by giving non-Indians a fifty percent discount on two properties, and a 37 ½ percent deduction on all other "improved" lots, for which, incidentally, there was no prescribed definition. By laying claim to proposed town site property and erecting any sort of shack or other structure, reported the commissioner of Indian Affairs, "a great many people were jumping lots in towns in the Indian Territory and hurriedly making improvements with a view to purchasing the lots at one-half the

[6] *Senate Documents*, 60th Cong., 1st Sess., (Report No. 612), p. 2.

appraised values."[7] When Department of Interior officials became aware of the practice, the secretary imposed a moratorium on further town lot acquisitions, threatening at the same time to bar any violators from acquiring property under the Curtis Act. It was not until late summer 1899 that the Chickasaw town site commissioners finally began the survey and appraisal work from their Ardmore headquarters.

Meanwhile, Sulphur continued to boom and by the turn of the century it boasted a population of approximately 1800 residents--and even a telephone company. In fact, the town was growing so rapidly property owners in nearby Davis were uprooting small rental houses and moving them overland to meet the demand in Sulphur. Were that not encouraging enough, excitement was growing over the prospect of the Frisco building a spur line to the town to provide visitors a direct rail connection.[8]

As a result of the government move to checkmate land grabbing in designated town sites, and the consequent evaporation of the profit motive, the citizens of Sulphur reassessed their situation. The vision of exploiting the springs through outright ownership suddenly gave way to a public-spirited movement to have the waters, and the town, set

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[7] Following passage of the Curtis Act, an interim period ensued when no appropriated funds were available to begin surveying town sites. Numerous whites took advantage of this to lay claim to as many lots as possible by placing some sort of structure or other development on it. *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, (Washington, D. C.: 1899), p. 125 (hereinafter cited as *ARCIA* with year).

[8] Brown and Garrity, *City of Many Facets*, p. 11; *Davis Weekly News*, February 7, 1901.

aside as a public resort similar to Hot Springs Reservation in Arkansas.[9] No one at that time knew precisely how that might affect property rights, but since the "nesters" legally had none, it seemed worth petitioning members of Congress to get things moving. At best, current occupants would maintain a monopoly over the hydrotherapy and recreational business. At worst, they might have to vacate the property, but would nevertheless benefit indirectly by having an adjacent government-funded resort. Even so, the government would be forced to compensate them for improvements already made on their lots.

Soon thereafter, the town dispatched a delegate to make the rounds in the national capital. Among those contacted was Texas Senator Joseph W. Bailey. A lawyer-turned-congressman from Gainesville, Bailey was certainly no stranger to Sulphur Springs. Completion of the AT&SF railroad to Oklahoma City had enabled citizens from his district to frequent the Arbuckle Mountains for years seeking relief from the heat of north

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[9] One source suggests that the impetus for a park originated with Joseph A. Swords, an appraiser for the Dawes Commission. Swords, allegedly, was politically connected with Senator Platt of Connecticut and was later appointed the first superintendent of the park in 1903. However, at least some of the biographical information therein is incorrect, e.g., that Swords commanded the Ninth New York Regiment during the Civil War. He was actually an enlisted musician in the 83rd New York Infantry from 1861 - 1864. He later served as a lieutenant in the Ninth Regiment, a New York National Guard unit. However, considering the early publication date of the work cited, it is entirely possible that Littleheart obtained her information directly from Swords himself. Aside from the embellishment of his military service, the information may have some credence. The claim that Swords served in the U. S. State Department and in 1882 was appointed consul to Trinidad has been confirmed in other sources. Oleta Littleheart, *The Lure of the Indian Country and Romance of Its Great Resort*, (Sulphur, Okla.: 1908), p. 145 (hereinafter cited as *Indian Country*); *Annual Report of the Adjutant General of the State of New York for the Year 1901*, (Albany: 1902), v. 30, p. 720; *New York Times*, April 14, 1865, p. 3; George A. Hussey, *History of the Ninth Regiment, N. Y. S. M. – N. G. S. N. Y. 1845 – 1888*, (New York: 1889), p. 611. It is of interest that "Oleta Littleheart" was a pen name used by early-day town businessman and promoter, A. Abbott. Brown and Garrity, *City of Many Facets*, p. 18.

Texas. Bailey fully appreciated the lure of the area and initially lent his support to the proposition of preserving the springs, with the understanding the land would be purchased from the Indians and afterward transferred to private management. However, the Sulphur representative quickly disabused the senator of that notion by stating that the townspeople "did not want to have those springs pass into private ownership, so that men may be charged for the waters."[10] Personally opposed to permanent government ownership of the springs, Bailey nevertheless agreed to use his influence with the Interior Department, hardly expecting anything to come of it.

Secretary of the Interior Ethan A. Hitchcock in turn instructed the head of the United States Geological Survey to send a crew to conduct a scientific evaluation of the springs. The closest one happened to be a survey party under the supervision of Joseph A. Taff working near Tahlequah, northeast of Muskogee. One of the geologists, Charles N. Gould, recalling their displeasure at being taken away from work they considered more important at the time, later wrote: ". . .we were the victims. So after considerable grumbling we arranged to leave our camp on Sallisaw Creek for a week and go to see what we could see." Taff's crew took a train as far as Scullin, the nearest depot at that

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[10] *Congressional Record: The Proceedings and Debates of the Fifty-seventh Congress, First Session*, vol. 35, (Washington, D. C.: 1902), p. 7294 (hereinafter cited as *Congressional Record*).

time, and made the last seven miles of their journey in "a hack over rocky roads to Sulphur Springs and put up at a rickety shack of a hotel."[11]

The next morning a delegation of the town's most prominent residents greeted the geologists, proffering a tour of the area. Sulphur was even less impressive in daylight than it had been in the previous night's darkness. "At the time we visited the place," Gould remembered, "none of the springs had been improved. The town of Sulphur was a little village of wooden shacks, with a few straggling board hotels sprawling over the hill sides, which had grown up in the valley around the larger groups of springs . . . Camp litter of most unsightly character was very much in evidence in the most unexpected places, and there was little semblance of order."[12] Taff and his men, accompanied by townspeople extolling the virtues of the place, spent the next several days riding horseback to examine the various attractions. Despite initial reactions, the geologists concluded that the springs had some merit after all, therefore Taff subsequently recommended to his superiors in Washington that the area might indeed be worthy of protection.

By the following spring, the Committees on Indian Affairs in both houses of Congress had drafted legislation to implement the 1898 Atoka Agreement. As debate in

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[11] Charles N. Gould, "Platt National Park," typescript essay, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma.

[12] Ibid.

the respective chambers swirled around the determination of citizenship in the Choctaw and Chickasaw tribes, a major sticking point in settling the forthcoming land allotments, the legislators paid scant attention to Section 64 outlining the acquisition of the mineral springs at Sulphur. When the Senate version eventually reached the floor for discussion in late June 1902, the issue of town sites proved contentious, yet the bill finally garnered reluctant majority support.

The Senate vote had just been taken when the House version of the bill arrived. Senator William Morris Stewart of Nevada, chairing the Indian Affairs Committee, preferred the language of the House draft and immediately filed a motion to indefinitely postpone further action on S. 4848, in favor of considering H. R. 13172. Although Stewart considered some aspects of the House bill to be almost as objectionable as the Senate draft, he was convinced it dealt more equitably with the town sites problem. The following Monday, debate over tribal citizenship and property entitlement droned on for hours. Apparently no one bothered to question the proposal to establish Sulphur Springs Reservation until Bailey called attention to that section in the bill. He expressed his objection to the language, which appeared to obligate the federal government to not only purchase the land, but also to become "the keeper of bath houses and the dispenser of mineral waters . . . While I would be glad to see those springs devoted to the use of those

people, if they are willing to maintain them, or it could be maintained without the Government becoming the proprietor of bath houses, I could overlook the question of expense."[13] Bailey, obviously feeling betrayed by the prospect of a government-subsidized operation, something he had never intended, moved to strike Section 64 entirely. Senator Aldrich (Rhode Island) thereupon queried Stewart why the proposition had been made in the first place, to which the embarrassed chairman admitted, "I do not know why it is proposed. The treaty was made between the Secretary of the Interior and the Indians, I do not know the character of the springs or the importance of them."[14] Just then, Bailey rose again to offer an informed perspective on the provision. Explaining the concerns of local residents that outside commercial interests would control the springs, Bailey clarified his position:

> I am utterly opposed to governmental ownership of such a plant, I will support heartily a proposition to acquire title from the Indians and pass it to that community, or pass it to any company that will improve and maintain the property, but I am utterly opposed to the Government of the United States becoming the proprietor of bath houses and springs. We have had a good deal of trouble about such an arrangement at Hot Springs, Ark. . . . But while it is very

[13] *Congressional Record*, vol. 35, p. 7293.

[14] Ibid.

> necessary that people shall have baths, it is equally necessary that they shall learn to provide them for themselves. I do not know any better reason why the Government should maintain public baths than why it should not maintain a hotel for the accommodation of those who will go there to enjoy the waters. It is simply a proposition for the Government to engage in the private occupation of maintaining a pleasure or health resort for the people of the United States.[15]

Aldrich responded sarcastically that he had assumed someone had a valid reason for making the proposal. Chairman Stewart, however, could offer only a lame defense that he thought the Interior Department had some worthwhile reason for acquiring the land, although he personally "did not see that there was anything of any great importance in it."[16] The senator then hastily back-peddled, conceding he would not oppose Bailey's amendment to strike out the entire Sulphur Springs proposal. A quick vote disposed of the matter.

The measure would have died at that point had not Senator Orville H. Platt re-entered the senate chamber following a brief absence. When he was apprised of the change that had just been executed, Platt secured the floor and voiced his objection to the deletion of Section 64, thus revealing himself as the heretofore-anonymous champion of

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[15] Ibid, p. 7294.

the proposal. He informed the assembly that there was already a town at the springs hosting some 15,000 people a year and, in his view, no better disposition could be made of the place than to set it aside for public enjoyment. Imploring the joint committee to reconsider the measure for the good of the citizens and the springs, Platt explained that were it to be divided into the required 160-acre tracts, "they [springs] will simply go into the hands of speculators . . . ." Platt further revealed that he had consulted with the tribes, Secretary Hitchcock, and the Dawes Commission attempting to arrive at an acceptable solution for preserving both the waters and the local economy. The department's assistant attorney general, sitting in on one of those meetings, suggested that the best way to protect the springs was to simply purchase the surrounding land from the Indians, then hold it in trust until some other disposition could be made. Platt insisted, however, that he had no intention of burdening the government with the management of another health resort, offering as proof the lack of an appropriation to support its operation. Platt's assurances notwithstanding, Senator Aldrich remained skeptical. "Next year," he argued, "the Senators from the territory around there, including, I have no doubt, my friend the Senator from Texas, will be here asking for an appropriation to build some buildings which are necessary to develop the springs that the Government has bought of the

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[16] Ibid.

Indians, and the next year after that we well be called upon to do something else."[17] Bailey rejoined that he had no desire to impose any long-term responsibility upon the government. After nearly four hours of wrangling, the legislators finally concluded to submit all the proposed amendments to the House bill for consideration by a joint conference, with Platt, Stewart, and Jones (Arkansas) representing the Senate.

Three days later, the committee returned its suggestions for resolving the stalemate over the agreement with the Chickasaws and Choctaws. The report restored the establishment of a reservation at Sulphur Springs, and added a significant proviso stipulating: "in the future the lands and improvements herein mentioned shall be conveyed by the United States to such Territorial or State organization as may exist at the time when such conveyance is made, and the Senate agree to the same." Similarly, the House of Representatives declared that "the purpose of Congress in regard to the Sulphur Springs referred to in said section, which is not to permanently hold the said land."[18] Congressional intent was clear - the federal government was to be temporary custodian of the springs until the issue of Oklahoma statehood was decided. The mineral springs would then be transferred to the appropriate local government authority to ensure they did not fall prey to profiteers. The compromise at once protected the springs, and avoided

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[17] Ibid., p. 7295.

[18] Ibid., pp. 7502, 7543, 7608, 7705, 7654, 7697, 7782; 32 U. S. *Statutes At Large,* 655.

long-term federal obligation. Both bodies ratified the conference report, and H. R. 13172, as amended, became law in a final vote taken on July 1, 1902.

Regardless of the lofty motives for setting aside the springs, there was the matter of compensating the rightful owners—the Chickasaw and Choctaw Nations. Meeting with tribal representatives the previous March, Senator Dawes and his commissioners had negotiated a price of $20.00 per acre, paid to the tribes for later disbursement among their members when the nations dissolved. Although the Indians were dissatisfied with the low price offered by the government, they nevertheless accepted. Based on Taff's earlier recommendations, the agreement authorized the secretary of the Interior to select a tract of land, not exceeding 640 acres, surrounding the springs. The precise boundary would be fixed by formal survey within four months after ratification of the legislation by tribal members. In addition to paying the tribes for the land, the government would appraise and purchase at fair market value all improvements made by occupants and speculators.[19] Interestingly, the intent of the original act was not designed so much to preserve the springs in a natural state as it was to designate enough land to control their use. The

[19] Agreement Between the United States and the Choctaw and Chickasaw Indians, *House Documents*, 57th Cong., 1st Sess., (Doc. 512), p. 16; The final survey encompassed 629.33 acres. *ARSI*, 1903, p. 226.

proposal further stipulated that the land acquisition should have the least possible impact on the proposed adjacent town site.[20]

Immediately after Congress approved the act, the Department of the Interior imposed rules governing public use of the reservation, including the prohibition of all commercial interests within the boundaries. The regulations also outlawed the possession and consumption of liquor.[21] Without anyone to enforce the rules, however, their immediate effect was all but nil.

A surveying party supervised by Inspector Frank C. Churchill of the Indian Bureau determined a proposed boundary following tribal ratification of the agreement that fall.[22] In the process of their work the geologists noted that sewage from neighboring homes and businesses on the nearby hillsides threatened to pollute the springs. When townspeople learned of Churchill's recommendation that the reserve be expanded from the original acreage to correct the problem, they voiced objections directly to Secretary Hitchcock. The secretary laid plans to visit the site personally to evaluate conditions for himself, meantime authorizing the immediate appraisal and payment for improvements

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[20] Ibid.; An interesting sidelight to the creation of the reservation was Joseph Sword's public suggestion that "an Indian mound" be erected atop Bromide Hill to memorialize leading Chickasaw chiefs Piomingo and Minga Tuska. Both men were instrumental in early tribal negotiations with the U. S. government. *Davis Weekly*, June 26, 1902.

[21] 32 *Stat.* 641.

[22] *Annual Report of the Indian Inspector for the Indian Territory*, (Washington, D. C.: 1902), p. 49; *ARSI*, 1903, p. 47.

within the existing boundaries in an attempt to soothe public sentiment. However, the onset of winter and pressing business in Washington prevented Hitchcock from making the trip until May 1903. After conferring with Churchill and local property owners, the secretary came away convinced "it was absolutely essential to exclude from the town site limits a certain tract of land adjoining Sulphur Springs Reservation" for the purpose of enlarging the government holding.

A few months after his return to the capital, Hitchcock authorized the Geological Survey to make a thorough investigation for the purpose of backing his conclusion with scientific evidence. Property owners' fears were confirmed when the Geologist Gerard H. Matthes recommended the segregation of an additional 216.68 acres, taking in much of the new business district created subsequent to delineation of the first boundary. Some of the buildings, in fact, were still under construction. Hitchcock cut short any meaningful public debate over the additional acquisition by exercising his authority over Indian matters to simply redefine the town limits to exclude those portions, and burying the action in the 1904 Indian appropriation act.[23]

During his visit to Sulphur, Hitchcock had noted, perhaps with some surprise, that the reservation was already experiencing heavy public use. It became clear to him that the

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[23] A tract comprising 78.68 acres lay on the north side of the reservation, while the remaining 138-acre parcel was on the south. The tribes were paid $60.00 an acre. *House Documents*, 58th Cong., 3d Sess., (Doc. No. 5), p. 484.

presence of an official would be essential to care for and oversee the reservation. Moreover, the United States was suddenly landlord over more than two hundred buildings within the boundaries, including the recently completed ninety-room Hotel Bland. Those assets, which the government had appraised at $87,462.85, would have to be protected from fire and vandalism. The best way to assure that was to keep them occupied, either by temporarily leasing them back to the former owners, or to new tenants, until the government was in a position to dispose of the structures. Considering that the springs had been set aside under the auspices of the Indian Service, the dominant bureau in the territory at that time, the secretary appointed Inspector Churchill to the position on an interim basis. Churchill, whose primary duty was to collect the rental payments, while exercising a degree of security over the property, was already familiar with conditions on the reservation as well as the local populace.

Churchill's first act was to promulgate a notice on August 1 advising town residents that upon receipt of payment for their improvements, they would be allowed ten days to vacate the premises. Pending lease agreements, they might be permitted to return temporarily, but only until the government made arrangements for the sale of the structures.[24]

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[24] Perry E. Brown, "A History of Platt National Park," typescript (1954), p. 22. Copy in archives, Chickasaw NRA (hereinafter cited as "History of Platt NP")

Back in Washington, meantime, the secretary selected Joseph A. Swords, a Civil War veteran, former newspaper editor, businessman, and appraiser for the Dawes Commission, to take charge of the reservation.[25] Swords, already a resident of Sulphur for two years, faced a daunting challenge as he attempted to bring some sense of order to the reservation. Not only did he have to contend with thousands of free-spirited visitors using the reservation, he alone had to enforce a body of rules governing their activities and behavior, including prohibiting gambling, liquor consumption, and preventing people from camping within a thousand feet of any spring. The new rules were also at odds with the practices of local cattlemen accustomed to unrestricted grazing along the creeks within the reservation. Compounding matters, Swords had no budget. Because Congress had refused to authorize an appropriation, all expenditures had to be approved by the secretary on a case-by-case basis. Swords attempted to describe conditions:

> I . . . have seen five thousand people . . . men, women, and children congregated around the seven springs at The Pavillion in the Basin, drinking the waters, buckets dipped in the spring to water horses, and repeatedly returned to be replenished. I have seen the oldest and most respected citizen of the town lead a

[25] Joseph A. Swords to secretary of the interior, September 16, 1903, Letters Sent, Platt National Park, archives, Chickasaw National Recreation Area (hereinafter cited as LS, PNP); Swords was credited with having commanded the Ninth New York Infantry during the war and was therefore commonly addressed as "Colonel" Swords during his term as superintendent. See note 7; Commissioner of Indian Affairs W. A. Jones to Swords, October 15, 1903, Buildings, leases, box 49, Central Files, Platt National Park, Records of the National Park Service, Record Group 79, National Archives, Fort Worth, Tex.

horse to one of the springs and allow the animal to drink therefrom. The people of the Indian Territory come here in mule wagons to camp, and be relieved of fevers, engendered by living on creek and river bottom lands, where they had been drinking impure water. They find the waters of much benefit, and return home with jugs full of the water for those who could not come here . . . .[26]

Some local residents lost no time attempting to exploit the new reserve. Swords was peeved to learn that City Marshall Ira T. Tate had leased one of his lots within the reservation for the purpose of erecting a merry-go-round, while a St. Louis man proposed building a swimming pool fed by the overflow from Seven Springs. The same individual also presented a plan for piping water out of the park to be sold commercially. Still others wanted to build a bowling alley and other "outdoor amusements."[27]

Swords' patience was further tested when he encountered an unauthorized survey crew belonging to the Sulphur Springs Railway Company, a recently formed local enterprise intending to construct a spur line connecting with the Frisco at Scullin. They informed the inspector of their plans to install water and coal stations south of a depot situated on Base Line Avenue, at a point within the reservation. Although Swords

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[26] Swords had resided in a house on Fourth Street in Sulphur for the previous two years. ibid.; Swords to Secretary of the Interior, November 10, 1903, LS, PNP; An unsubstantiated source credits him as being related to Senator Orville H. Platt, which may explain his appointment. Littleheart, *Indian Country*, p. 19.

[27] Swords to SI, November 21, 1903, LS, PNP; Swords to SI, November 20, 1903, ibid.; Ryan to Swords, April 26, 1904, Buildings, leases, RG 79.

ordered the men to cease their activities immediately, at least until he could contact the secretary, he found them back at work within the boundary a short time later, cutting down trees and building a road bed near Rock Creek. By the time Swords received authority from Hitchcock to eject the railroaders, they had already installed a pumping station and coal dump, nevertheless he ordered the company to remove the illegal facilities immediately, or face charges.[28]

Those were not the only indications that matters were getting out of hand. Even though the reservation had been withdrawn from Indian Territory, Marshal Tate and the mayor's court continued to exercise law enforcement authority over persons committing offenses on what was now exclusively federal land. Swords learned from some of the accused that the marshal made arrests for supposed violations of town ordinances, hauled them before the mayor, who in turn fined them, "the proceeds going into the pockets of these officials as part of their compensation."[29] He added that in those instances when the accused had no money, he was released immediately and the charges dropped. There was little Swords could do beyond exposing the racket. But to affirm government authority he

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[28] Swords to SI, December 7, 1903, December 23, 1903, and January 7, 1904, ibid; A proposal to construct a spur line west from Scullen was advanced as early as spring 1902. The Sulphur Springs Railway was completed until a year later and the right of way was sold a short time later to the St. Louis and San Francico line. The company built a station, which became the Frisco depot, "within 300 feet of the town end of the bridge, on Base Line St." Swords to SI, February 5, 1904, LS, PNP; *Davis Weekly*, March 2 and 20, April 3 and 17, 1902; James L. Allhands, "History of the Construction of the Frisco Railway Lines in Oklahoma," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, (September 1925), pp. 237-38; Brown and Garrity, *City of Many Facets*, p. 11.

[29] Swords to SI, December 26, 1903, ibid.

suggested the secretary urge the Justice Department to move the local U. S. Commissioner's court to the reservation, something that was later accomplished.

A few individuals demonstrated their dislike for government involvement in the springs by openly challenging Swords' authority. J. P. Lockwood, his son William, and H. H. Cassidy, for example, refused to pay the required rent on their "old town" properties. The senior Lockwood, Swords opined, was "not possessed of moral stamina or passable reputation," causing him to suspect that Lockwood was controlling his son's actions and was attempting to incite other residents as well. One of those was the proprietor of the Texas Mercantile Company, Thomas F. Gafford, who also refused to pay rent on his store. "No opportunity is wasted by men of the Lockwood stripe to bring the government into disrepute in this community," Swords added.[30]

By late fall 1903 Inspector Swords concluded that the government needed to exert greater control over the reservation if the resources therein were to survive at all. Penning his thoughts to Hitchcock, Swords inspired the idea bringing the springs under an even more protective covenant:

> In my opinion, the buildings therein should be removed, a map made of the area, location of springs designated, grades properly established, and a plan and scope

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[30] Swords to SI, February 3, 1904, ibid.; SI to Swords, November 27, 1903, Buildings, leases, box 49, CF, PNP, RG 79.

> of improvements outlined by the most competent experts in the employ of the government . . . There are so many problems to be solved looking to the great future of this place. It should be made a resort for rest and recreation for the people of the great South West, for whose benefit the protector of the reservation commenced his work. The ideas and intention of a few speculators should not be considered. Kansas, Oklahoma, and Northern Texas are contiguous to our locality, and many visitors from these states and territory have expressed a wish that the National government should be liberal in its treatment of the Sulphur Springs reservation, even to a point where the charge of paternalism might be charged or suggested.[31]

Numerous occupants had already abandoned their property in the old town in favor of relocating outside the reservation. Swords found it difficult to rent many of the buildings because of their poor construction, dilapidated condition, and what he believed to be disproportionately high rental rates established by the Interior Department. Moreover, the vacant structures tempted some townspeople to return at night to abscond with lumber, doors, windows, and other material for use in their new homes and businesses. Swords proposed reducing the rates in hope of attracting more tenants as a precaution against both vandalism and fire, but the onset of winter thwarted his plan.

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[31] Swords to SI, November 20, 1903, ibid.

Those citizens who did stay on the reservation were viewed by many townsmen as traitors, and the situation began to assume ugly proportions. Swords characterized the malcontents as "lawless, especially with government property . . Threats were made to 'smoke out' tenants who preferred to remain within the reservation."[32] During following months, Swords was all but helpless to prevent vandals from pursuing their nocturnal activities, while loose cattle roamed about the old town, often entering the vacant buildings causing further damage.

Regardless of those that resisted the government, the majority of Sulphur townspeople demonstrated genuine interest in cooperating with Swords for mutual benefit of the community and the springs. A number of persons, in fact, had previously petitioned the Department of the Interior, through Swords, for permission to fund and construct a bridge across Rock Creek on Baseline Street, the main road leading west to Davis. At that time, the town still lacked its own rail connection, therefore mail had to be hauled by buckboard to and from the A.T.& S.F. depot at Davis.[33] Residents complained that it was not unusual in times of heavy rains for the mail to be delayed by high water for three or four days. Even though the crossing lay just inside the established reservation

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[32] Swords to SI, November 5, 1903, LS, PNP; Swords to SI, May 28, 1904, ibid.

[33] Presumably, the A.T. & S. F., rather than the Frisco line running through Scullin, had the mail contract at that time. Author's note.

boundary, both Swords and Hitchcock readily agreed to the proposal. For Swords, the bridge presented an opportunity to cooperate with community leaders and, in the same stroke, improve transportation connections at no cost to the government. A few months later, however, the St. Louis and San Francisco (Frisco) Railroad completed a line branching west from the main line at Scullin, thus resolving the problem.[34]

In the interest of engendering favorable relations, Swords also allowed the community to retain a low-water ford beside the bridge for crossing herds of cattle. Nevertheless, he confided to the secretary his concern for an existing "driveway" through the Central Park section of the reservation, crossing Sulphur Creek approximately half a mile above its confluence with Rock Creek. "With increased travel by this route," Swords wrote, "herds of live stock, hacks and freight drays will pass through the park, the detriment, and perhaps injury of women, children and forestry."[35] Knowing the government would be obligated to close that avenue sooner or later, Inspector Swords requested, and was granted, permission to fence it off using salvaged materials on hand.

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[34] Swords to SI, October 9, 1903, ibid.; Acting Secretary Thomas Ryan to Swords, October 26, 1903, Bridges –repair and construction, 1903-07, Box 52, CF, PNP, RG 79; The Frisco broke ground at Scullin for the new line in August 1902. *Davis Weekly News*, August 14 and 28, 1902; Presumably, Swords had been conducting business out of his own residence prior to this time. Author's note.

[35] Swords to SI, February 5, 1904, LS, PNP.

The new span, named Washington Bridge, was officially turned over to the government and opened for use February 22, 1904.[36]

New Sulpher rapidly materialized in three zones outside the reservation, west of Rock Creek, north of Sulphur (Travertine) Creek, and southeast of the latter stream. But for Swords, the greatest task was managing and eventually disposing of the improvements left in the old village.[37] Most of the former residents had already left, abandoning their leaky ramshackle dwellings in favor of better housing in the new town. One owner, controlling about 350 acres of allotment land to the southeast, informed Swords that he would be taking down his fences when he departed, thus exposing the reserve to encroachment by wandering herds of cattle.

Appraisers, meantime, had inspected the lots and by early 1904 the secretary's office was able to report it had authorized payment on 846 claims totaling $148,481.00 for land, and $205,714.00 for improvements.[38] Many owners, not surprisingly, felt they had been given short shrift with the assigned amounts.

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[36] SI to Swords, February 19, 1904, Bridges 1903-07, RG 79; Swords to SI, April 24, 1904, LS, PNP.

[37] About that time, the town adopted the name "Sulphur," dropping the word "Springs." Apparently, this was done to avoid confusion with the park. Later, however, some townspeople regretted that decision, feeling the city had lost its identity as a health resort. Others advocated calling it either "Artesia" or "Platt City." *Sulphur News*, Sepetember 21, 1906.

[38] Ryan to Swords, January 12, 1904, Lands, private holdings, box 48, CF, PNP, RG 79.

One of the properties acquired by the government was a stone building, measuring 25 feet by 60 feet, in which George H. Schwiening had formerly operated a hardware store. The store was centrally located on the south side of Pavilion Square near the springs. The north facade, having large plate glass windows, was built of dressed white limestone blocks, while the other three walls consisted of rubble laid up with lime mortar. Inspector Swords selected the Schwiening store as the best building available for use as the reservation office. The author has not determined exactly when Swords established his office there, but it was probably during winter 1904.[39]

With the arrival of spring, Inspector Swords realized something had to be done to improve the condition of the reservation prior to the seasonal onslaught of visitors. He quickly concluded that he would need help, but that hiring laborers was probably not a

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[39] George H. Schwiening was granted a lease on the building, previously purchased by the government, on August 26, 1903. He rented it at the rate of $18.00 per month, and presumably operated his business there for several months while he constructed a new store in nearby Sulphur. The author has not determined exactly when he moved, but by April 1904 he had a brick-front establishment, as well as a residence, in New Sulphur. When the government expanded the reservation, Schwiening's new structures fell within the re-defined boundary, whereupon he was forced to sell out a second time. W. A. Jones to SI, October 15, 1903, Buildings, leases, box 49, CF, PNP, RG 79; "List of Structures to be Offered for Sale, Situated on the Reservation, Segregated by the Act of Congress July 1, 1902 (321 Stat. 641)," Buildings, sale & removal, ibid.; "List of Structures to be Offered for Sale, Situated on the Reservation, Segregated by the Act of Congress Approved April 21, 1904," Buildings, sale & removal, 1904-05, box 49, CF, PNP, RG 79; Swords canceled the lease on the first Schwiening store effective June 30, 1904, but the former owner probably had vacated it several months earlier when he completed his new store. Since the government had already purchased the old building, it seems reasonable to assume that Swords moved in when Schwiening stopped paying rent, perhaps in late 1903 or early 1904. Ryan to Swords, December 1, 1904, Buildings, leases, box 49, CF, PNP, RG 79; The Schwiening store, converted to the reservation office, was one of the buildings Swords requested be withheld from the final sales conducted in 1905. Swords to SI, July 3, 1905, LS, PNP; Ryan to Swords, September 27, 1905, Buildings, sale & removal, 1904-05, box 49, CF, PNP, RG 79; The confusion between the Leeper house and the Schwiening store being one and the same building arose through faulty oral tradition. That the erroneous information was established as fact by the mid-1930s, is documented in "Report on Reconstruction of BSC – Public Works Project #124, Platt National Park, n. d., filed with Superintendent's reports, archives, Chickasaw National Recreation Area.

realistic expectation under the congressional restrictions governing the reserve. Not to be defeated, Swords struck upon the idea of trading building materials for day labor. By the end of May 1904, he had moved eleven shacks from "the long row of very poor and dilapidated wooden structures" lining Beach Avenue to the designated public camp ground along Rock Creek, immediately west of the old business district. The removal of those buildings at once reduced the danger of fire among the formerly close-packed structures in the town and provided visitor accommodations when Swords rented them out for $2.00 a month. Collecting payment, however, was not always easy because transients frequently left at night without paying. He also put men to work removing pig pens, cattle corrals, and some twenty outhouses, "with contents." The workmen also relocated a sixty-horse livery stable from its former position only 120 feet northwest of Pavilion Springs to a more distant site near Rock Creek where it could be used by campers. Hillside Spring, cited by the local public health officer as a source of typhoid, was walled up to prevent people from dipping buckets directly into it. Swords apparently also considered the two-story dance pavilion over Seven Springs as both a safety and health hazard, causing him to raze the structure and replace it with a more modest one some distance away. A more difficult job was raising the Seven Springs Hotel "from a

hole, where it rested on rotten supports," but after stabilizing and repairing the building, Swords was able to rent it out for $25.00 a month.[40]

The task of managing Sulphur Springs Reservation had been overwhelming from the outset and by Sword's second summer there, he convinced the secretary of the interior that he needed help. In mid-June, just as the usual tide of visitors was rising, he was granted permission to hire Forest Townsley, whose father Willis L. Townsley had owned a bakery in the first town, as patrolman. Swords arranged to have Townsley deputized by the U. S. marshal for the Southern District of Indian Territory. It was none too soon because during the following month, Swords was reporting 125 wagons, averaging 5 persons each, in the campground on a daily basis. Townsley was kept busy handling liquor and gambling violations, and preventing visitors from camping from building their campfires beneath trees.

Likewise, Swords' closure of the cattle lane through the reservation prompted ranchers to seek other shortcusts across the reserve. Although Sneed and his partners had erected a fence around portions of the property years earlier, Swords reported that most of it had been "carried away by that class of marauders which frequent this country."[41]

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[40] Swords to SI, May 25 and 28, 1904, LS, PNP; Swords to Frank C. Churchill, June 10, 1904, Buildings, construction & repair, 1903-13, Box 49, CF, PNP, RG 79.

[41] Swords to SI, September 12, 1904, LS, PNP.

Having no appropriated funds to build a new fence, his solution was to barter salvaged material in exchange for posts in hopes he could amass enough to construct a boundary fence.[42]

The approach of winter spurred Superintendent Swords, wearing a new title since July, to urge the department to expedite the sale of the buildings remaining within the second town site. By that time he had already terminated 170 leases either for infractions of rules, or non-payment of rent. Many buildings had been dismantled for sanitary reasons or to further reduce the potential for fire, as well as to produce the salvaged materials required. Swords emphasized that it was time "to place the reservation in the condition for which it was segregated, namely a place for the rest and recreation of the people of the Great Southwest." He explained that fall and winter posed the greatest fire danger for structures having wood-burning stoves and faulty flues, not to mention the water damage resulting from leaking galvanized tin roofs. Also to be considered was the lower rent that could be commanded for hotels during the winter, simply to keep them occupied temporarily. He advised that it would be best to terminate the leases on all but the stone buildings as quickly as possible. Concurring with Swords' assessment, department officials cancelled the leases and informed the superintendent that he could dispose of them by sale or demolition at his earliest convenience. Swords lost no time

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[42] This practice was legally sanctioned by 33 *Stat.* 220.

publishing notices that dozens of buildings in the old town were to be placed on the auction block, inviting bids on forty of them immediately.[43]

The secretary sent Frank Churchill back to Sulphur to help A. W. Heffley of Ardmore open the bids at Swords' office on December 15. And, spelling the final doom of the rapidly disintegrating village, the *Sulphur Journal* announced early the next month that claimants of improvements within the second acquisition were soon to be paid, in fact Churchill had gone to Washington to get the checks and would return any day. "This is gloriously good news for the people of Sulphur," Editor Frank Dunham proclaimed. "Building operations in all parts of town will open up with renewed vigor, and will progress in a way that will astonish even this country in which towns are built in a week."[44] Less than a week after that story appeared in print, Churchill forwarded a list of recognized claimants that was to be posted for public information. Churchill advised that he intended to make payments strictly in numerical order, starting with No. 1—the Schwiening store—and that he wanted the recipients to be present with the proper

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[43] Ryan to Swords, September 22, 1904, Buildings, leases, box 49, CF, PNP, RG 79; Swords to SI, October 25, 1904, LS, PNP; SI to Swords, November 3, 1904, Buildings, sale & removal 1904-05, box 49, CF, PNP, RG 79; The quotation is taken from Swords to SI, November 5, 1904, LS, PNP; The Department of the Interior honored Sword's request by canceling 169 leases, effective June 30., 1904 that he submitted for action in November. Added to that number were 21 more having an effective date of September 30. Act. Sec. F. L. Campbell to Swords, November 12, 1904, Buildings, leases, Box 49, CF, PNP, RG 79; Ryan to Swords, December 1, 1904, ibid.; Ryan to Swords, December 12, 1904, Buildings, leases, ibid.; The government sold the first forty buildings in January 1905 for a total of $,1559.00. "Annual report," Swords to SI, October 25, 1905, LS, PNP.

[44] *Sulphur Journal*, January 6, 1905.

documentation. He had no intention of being in town long, and those claims not settled on the spot would be returned to Washington.[45]

Churchill arrived in Sulphur a few days later and, as promised, began making payments on the twenty-third. He completed the process by the end of that week, notifying the recipients that they had a choice between vacating their property within thirty days, or continuing to live there, and pay rent to the government for up to ninety days. Most still residing on the reservation abandoned their homes and immediately began moving their belongings.[46]

But, new problems arose when Churchill made payment using government vouchers, rather than the cash people had anticipated. The residents of Sulphur were cash-poor already and having a piece of paper that would take time to process did them little good. Some called for a congressional investigation, but in fact Congress had stipulated that form of payment in the legislation. Not a few citizens wanted to submit sealed bids for their old buildings, then move the structures to lots previously claimed in New Sulphur on the prospect of purchasing the lots at reduced values according to their interpretation of the Atoka agreement. Secretary Hitchcock intensified frustrations by

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[45] Churchill to Swords, January 10, 1905, Lands, private holdings, box 48, CF, PNP, RG 79; Hitchcock to Swords, December 7, 1904, ibid.

[46] SI to Churchill, January 16, 1905, Buildings, sale & removal, box 49, CF, PNP; *Sulphur Journal*, January 20, 1905 and January 27, 1905.

announcing that he wanted government appraisers to begin assigning values to new town lots during March, informing Swords simultaneously that he could begin selling the structures remaining on the reservation after May 1. That decision created a dilemma for property owners because many of them had been planning to use the proceeds of the recent sale to re-purchase the buildings and to finance their removal to new locations in time to enhance the values prior to appraisal. The voucher system delayed payment, and in any event winter weather made it impractical to undertake the work until the ground dried sufficiently to support the heavily laden wagons.[47] With a large segment of the populace up in arms, Swords attempted to mediate a solution by asking Hitchcock if the appraisement might be postponed until July 1. Swords was confident that if the department would process the vouchers expeditiously, he could sell at least sixty per cent of the buildings during the two weeks between April 15 and May 1, whereupon the buyers could take immediate possession. By deferring the appraisement, townsfolk would have time to move their buildings to New Sulphur, thereby "improving" their properties so lots could be bought at the reduced rates Congress had established. Swords, however, foresaw difficulty with disposing of the Hotel Bland, and requested it be exempted from immediate removal.[48]

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[47] Photographs indicate that the buildings were raised from their foundations and placed upon special wagon running gear towed either by numerous teams or steam tractors. Author's note.

[48] Swords to SI, March 1, 1905, LS PNP; Swords to SI, March 4, 1905, ibid.

Swords' superiors, however, did not view the situation in such simple terms. There were, Hitchcock pointed out, other factors the public failed to understand. First, the secretary had not yet approved the extent of the new town site, consequently the appraisers could not begin work until it was officially platted. Rejecting Swords' suggestion that buyers be allowed to take the houses as soon as the bids were opened, Hitchcock explained that his examiners would need time to review the bids to make certain all conditions had been met. Only when the bids were found to be in order would the government award possession. With regard to the appraisement, existing law required that it be completed prior to July 1. Hitchcock informed Swords that persons purchasing buildings, including the Bland, would be given sixty days to remove them.[49]

Attempting to thwart the land speculation that had been rampant in the territory for years, the secretary assured Swords that the public would not inform citizens exactly when the appraisement would be done because "the new town as recently surveyed, is undoubtedly largely composed of vacant lots, and parties holding or claiming an 'occupancy right,' to same will endeavor to dispose of them to parties to move buildings thereon prior to the time of the appraisement, and other purchase buildings on the

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[49] Ryan to Swords, March 9, 1905, Buildings, sale & removal, box 49, CF, PNP, RG 79; SI to Swords, March 15, 1905, ibid.

reservation."[50] Key to widespread misinterpretation of the law was the provision that improvements had to be in place *prior* to the ratification of the 1902 agreement between the two tribes and the federal government. Acting Indian Commissioner C. F. Larrabee confirmed that anyone improving lots by erecting or moving buildings after that date was obligated to pay the full value.[51]

Superintendent Swords was particularly sympathetic to those individuals having no other dwellings, as well as those who had purchased material on credit to erect new houses outside the reservation, while waiting for the government to pay for the old ones. To do that, they also had to buy occupancy rights on credit until the town site issue was settled. The citizens reasoned that while most owners were satisfied with the prices paid by the government, "the United States should permit them to put themselves in like position to that occupied by them prior to the passage of the act . . . " Swords clearly sided with the townsfolk by forwarding their petition, along with his opinion that the government might not be legally compelled to make an equitable settlement, "but has a moral obligation to its citizens."[52] He prevailed on the secretary to reconsider, especially in view of current weather conditions that were delaying moving operations, at the same

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[50] *Indian Inspector George W. Wright to SI, March 18, 1905, ibid.*

[51] Acting Indian Commissioner C. F. Larrabee, to SI, April 11, 1905, ibid.; S. V. Proudfit to SI, June 6, 1905, Lands, sale of lots, box 48, CF, PNP, RG 79.

[52] Swords to SI, April 28, 1905, LS, PNP.

time driving up the movers' prices. Swords empathy notwithstanding, the decision stood. He had no choice but to forward the bids to Washington in May.

One property, however, posed an unforeseen hurdle—the Hotel Bland. A Wynnewood, Oklahoma contractor offered to raze the huge building, clean and stack the bricks, and organize the other material for $6,000.00, an offer Swords favored because the materials could be used for future construction on the reservation. C. J. Webster of the Hotel Bland Company itself bid $11,500.00 for the property, a price that actually exceeded the amount authorized by the board of directors. Webster pointed out that the basement, measuring 75 by 90 feet, had been blasted out of solid rock, after which a concrete floor and walls had been installed. That investment represented a total loss to the company, as would the plaster and lath walls because they could not be salvaged. The department nevertheless rejected both offers as too low, Bland's representing only twenty-five percent of the government appraisement. Swords began to realize he had a white elephant on his hands.[53]

The offers received from the sealed bid sale of May 1 proved disappointing—a total of only $3,824.00. The former owners obviously wanted to purchase the buildings as cheaply as possible, probably assuming the government would take what it could get.

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[53] C. J. Webster to Swords, May 24, 1905, Buildings, Bland Hotel, 1905-08, box 49, CF, PNP, RG 79; Hitchcock to Swords, June 15, 1905, ibid.

Numerous structures, like the Bland and the Park Hotels, attracted little or no interest because of their size or condition. But Secretary Hitchcock, unwilling to suffer such a significant loss of taxpayer funds, had rejected ninety-seven offers. He instructed Swords to begin holding public auctions in an attempt to get a higher return on its investment in those properties. Swords subsequently hired the senior Townsley to conduct a house-by-house auction in July. Almost as an afterthought, Swords applied to the department for permission to withhold certain structures, among them the Schwiening store and a few frame buildings that he suggested retaining for use as comfort stations and employee residences. His request approved, Swords distributed an inventory of the remaining properties to be sold, and a schedule of auctions beginning August 1. Successful bidders had ten days to pay for the buildings, after which they were to remove them. The first two auctions were more encouraging than the spring sale had been, netting the government $13,640.50. Still, no one wanted the hotels.[54] The secretary may have regretted his rejection of the Hotel Bland Company's previous offer when no one submitted bids on either hotel. It was impossible to move the buildings, and the costs of razing them would exceed the return for salvaged materials. Swords had no alternative but to let them stand.

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[54] Swords to SI, June 22, 1905, LS, PNP; Swords to SI, July 3, 1905, ibid.; Lists of buildings sold at Auction August 1 and August 8, 1905, Condemnation of Lands, box 48, CF, PNP; Ryan to Swords, August 12, 1905, Buildings, sale & removal, box 49, CF, PNP, RG 79; Ryan to Swords, September 27, 1905, ibid.; In April, Swords hired Una Robert as a clerk stenographer to assist with the paperwork created by the leases and sales. Brown, "History of Platt NP," p. 59.

By summer 1905, Swords had employed a temporary caretaker, Robert A. Earl, to assist with maintaining and operating the reservation. Earl was an ideal candidate since he had lived in Sulphur for the previous ten years and was familiar with the reservation and the local community. Trouble was, there was no money to pay him, but Swords circumvented that by reducing Earl's rent on his "old town" home as compensation for his services.

One of the most vexing problems was gaining the cooperation of local cattlemen, who persisted in moving herds across the reservation. Townsley and Earl drove 20 – 50 head off the reservation weekly, but there was nothing they could do to prevent the animals from returning to the abundant grass inside the boundary. Swords had his men post printed notices prohibiting such trespasses, but the ranchers blatantly ignored the warnings, even shooting up the signs to express their disdain for government authority. One local man, W. H. Douglass, claimed it was the government's responsibility, not his, to keep the cattle out by fencing its property. Ignoring Swords' warnings, Douglass continued to allow this animals to drift onto the reservation until the superintendent, pushed too far, finally impounded them and charged Douglass a dollar a day per head for care and feeding. Rumors about town were that Douglass and others wanted to force the issue to a legal challenge in which they intended "to best the government" for damages.

Swords even suspected that the local federal commissioner was sympathetic to the ranchers when he repeatedly failed to take any action.[55]

Meantime, Superintendent Swords grew increasingly distressed about what to do with the two derelict hotels. The summer auctions had attracted no bidders for the Bland, though one party had offered $1500.00 for the Park.[56] Swords recommended the Interior Department accept the offer, but Washington auditors were still undecided. The Bland, Swords reported, was in "precarious condition, needing constant care and supervision to prevent injury to the many plate glass windows [worth $60 – $90 each] by mischievous boys, and other persons who are evil minded, especially when under the influence of liquor."[57] He also claimed that strong winds vibrated the upper floors, which probably said something about the quality of construction. Fearing the elements would damage the building, Swords hired a man to remove the cupola and flagstaff surmounting the front corner of hotel and store the materials inside.[58]

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[55] Swords to U. S. Attorney W. B. Johnson, October 19, 1905, LS, PNP; The superintendent had erected a livestock pound in December 1903, but with little effect on local ranchers. Swords to SI, October 6, 1905, ibid.

[56] A sealed bid in the amount of $1,111.50 was submitted for the Park at the May 1 sale, but the government rejected it. Apparently, the same party continued an interest in subsequent auctions, bidding $1,400.00 on August 1 and, finally, $1500.00 on August 22, 1905. Swords to SI, October 21, 1905, Buildings, sale & removal, 1905-08, box 49, CF, PNP, RG 79.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid.; Ryan to Swords, November 16, 1905, ibid.; A. H. Reeves offered to remove the cupola and repair the roof for $17.50. Reeves to Swords, November 28, 1905, Building, Hotel Bland 1905-08, ibid.; Ryan to Swords, January 5, 1906, ibid.

Near the end of the year, the secretary and his staff formulated a new plan for divesting the department of the Bland. He directed Swords to announce yet another sale; this time the terms would require a minimum bid of $15,000.00 and removal of the structure within ninety days. After all, they pointed out, the building had been appraised at approximately $46,000.00 and the bricks alone, numbering over 1.2 million, had a value of nearly $15,000. They calculated that the rest of the material ought to be worth nearly as much. While that all sounded very reasonable to the seller, potential buyers viewed the situation quite differently. No one was willing to pay that much for a building that would require an enormous amount of labor to tear down and haul away. The Bland Hotel, standing on the hill not far from Swords' office, was to remain an albatross for some time to come.

Swords, nevertheless, was able to declare success in other quarters. All the private buildings, except the two hotels and those withheld for government use, had been sold. Many had already been removed. Townsley and Earl had labored hard to tear down old fences, cut weeds, fill in toilets, raze and salvage unwanted structures, and restore some of the former building sites. Most vestiges of the old town were now gone. In its place was the new town of Sulphur, divided into three districts—north, south, and west--by the

intervening reservation.[59] But, because there were no funds to construct a boundary fence, cattle continued to wander onto government property, much to Swords' annoyance. Swords and his men had made some improvements on the springs, but many townspeople came to the reservation for domestic water. In fact, some were filling tank wagons with fresh water from Hillside Spring, then selling it in town for twenty cents per barrel. Residents from the southeast section of town, known as Hillside Park, still used a formerly public well that had been constructed near Pavilion (Seven) Springs. The superintendent had overlooked the practice initially, when people had no wells of their own in the new town site, but Swords realized he must curtail the continued wholesale exploitation of the springs. As an alternative, he recommended that a 100,000-gallon reservoir be constructed on Sulphur Creek, to be named Travertine Lake, with water piped to the reservation boundary, where it would connect to a municipal system.[60]

As a new year dawned, old Sulphur was fast fading. A few people still occupied homes on the reservation, but the government purchasing process was largely completed by the end of January. The secretary of the interior, through his agent Churchill, issued an eviction notice advising the remaining residents that they had to vacate both old and new

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[59] The population of Sulphur was estimated at 3,200, although the local newspaper editor made a distinction in the "actual" residents, probably those living within the defined town limits. He placed that number at 1200 – 1500. *Sulphur Journal*, February 3, 1906.

[60] Swords to SI, October 25, 1905, LS, PNP; Swords to SI, November 1, 1905, ibid.

reservations by May 1.[61] This was actually good news for many in town that viewed the government as a competitor for the rental business. Additional people moving into New Sulphur meant greater demand for houses there, as well as an influx of capital to bolster business. "New Sulphur," announced the newpaper editor, "is springing Phoenix-like, from the ashes of governmental destruction." By March, construction on twenty-eight places of business was underway, including a new Hotel Bland on the north side of town—this time well away from the reservation border to avoid any further land acquisitions. Indicative of growing stability, the town also boasted a new bank and a Methodist Church.[62]

Among those occupying houses on the reservation were the superintendent, Patrolman Townsley, and Caretaker Earl. Swords had reserved a small cottage directly east of the Leeper lumber yard for his own use, while Townsley and Earl resided in other modest accommodations near Bromide and Antelope Springs, respectively. Thus, a government employee resided in each of the three principal districts of the reservation.[63] There were also comfort and change houses for the public, albeit primitive ones adapted from former town buildings. And, Swords and his men were imposing greater control

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[61] Churchill settled the last claims during February 1906 and departed en route for New Mexico on February 22. *Sulphur Journal*, February 17 and 24, 1906.

[62] *Sulphur Journal*, February 3, 1906; ibid., March 3, 1906.

[63] Ryan to Swords, September 30, 1905, Buildings, construction & repair, 1903-13, box 49, CF, PNP, RG 79; "Public Notice," October 6, 1905, LS, PNP.

over the springs. The hectic year 1905 had been pivotal in the development of Sulphur Springs Reservation. It was at last emerging as the resort it was intended to be.

Chapter 3

A Period of Adjustment

Settlement of the town site issue, as well as the creation of the government reservation, at last brought a degree of economic stability to Sulphur. The promise of permanence inspired the community's Commercial Club to appeal to the Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe for a rail connection with Oklahoma City as a further boon. The company saw the profitability of a route to the region's only significant tourist attraction and in late 1905 announced its plans to construct a branch line from Chickasha and Paul's Valley, via Sulphur, to intersect the existing AT&SF line between Shawnee and Durant. As a further inducement to the company, the town commission pledged a bonus of $20,000.00 to insure that Sulphur was designated as a regular stop for the convenience of

tourists visiting the springs. The depot would be located on the west side of Rock Creek, only a block from the Frisco tracks, to take advantage of the nearby wagon bridge.[1]

With old Sulphur rapidly becoming a ghost town, Swords turned attention to cleaning up the refuse about the site and restoring the springs to some semblance of its natural condition. Also important was the need to increase federal control over the reservation by enforcing existing regulations. Local cowboys were particularly troublesome, as Swords related: "Persons come into the Reservation in an intoxicated condition from liquor procured in the town, and riding through the roads at a breakneck gallop, whooping, and firing pistols."[2] Drovers also continued to herd horses and cattle through the lane, or "driveway," he had created connecting the north and south sections of the town, but all-too-frequently cattle strayed and meandered all the way up the creek to Buffalo and Antelope Springs.

Manifesting Senator Aldrich's sarcastic prediction made during the 1902 hearings, Swords had been on the job only a short time when he started asking for an appropriation to enable him to hire additional staff. As early as 1904, he asked the secretary to request an appropriation of $25,000.00 for a hydrologist, a water analyst, another patrolman, and a clerk-stenographer. The funds would also provide for a one million-gallon reservoir to

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[1] *Sulphur Journal*, November 4, 18, 25, and December 15, 1905.

[2] Joseph A. Swords to U. S. Marshall G. A. Porter, March 22, 1906, Letters Sent, Platt National Park, Chickasaw National Recreation Area archives (hereinafter cited as LS, PNP).

serve both the reserve and Sulphur. Although Swords' pleas had been ignored for two years, Congress responded in its 1905 session by approving enough funding for the additional patrolman as a concession to protecting the resources until the place could be given to another agency.[3]

Swords subsequently requested permission to employ Robert Earl as a second patrolman and forester, deputized like Forest Townsley, at a salary of $60.00 a month. Swords explained to Secretary Hitchcock that Earl had been renting a house (formerly his own) on the reservation and in view of the work that he had done to improve the place, coupled with his past commendable service as an unpaid temporary caretaker, Earl deserved preferential consideration. He would be assigned responsibility over the public campground, Bromide and Bromide-Sulphur Springs, the Bland Hotel, and the cattle pound. And, faced with overwhelming clean-up work in the wake of the great exodus, the superintendent also wanted permission to hire Willis Townsley, with whom he had become well acquainted during the auctions. Townsley was to be appointed caretaker as a replacement for Earl, and be compensated by a reduced monthly rent of only $10.00. The secretary immediately approved both appointments.[4]

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[3] *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, (Washington, D. C.: 1904), p. 66 (reports hereinafter cited as *ARSI* with year); ibid, 1905, p. 56.

[4] Swords to SI, February 22, 1906, LS, PNP; The information presented herein relating to these appointments is synthesized from Joseph A. Swords to Secretary of the Interior E. A. Hitchcock, January

Swords' request for additional staff was well timed. Hitchcock was keenly aware that problems had already arisen over the sanitary condition of the springs over which he was ultimately responsible. Dr. T. B Lauman and other physicians had lodged a formal complaint the previous summer stating they had become ill after visiting the reservation. Lauman claimed that Swords had taken no action after the doctors had brought certain conditions to his attention, therefore they strongly recommended to the secretary that "The old rags and filth left by the removal (of the buildings), and the weeds should all be burned and not left to decay."[5] Swords had been chiefly occupied with property matters since his arrival, yet had done his best to care for the reservation by creative means, despite a critical shortage of appropriated funds. Hitchcock was forced to recognize that managing a place like Sulphur Springs, even on an interim basis, demanded more than one or two employees.

Because of the way the reservation had been created, it was not surprising that the citizens of Sulphur maintained a strong interest in its development. The tensions that arose during the government's purchase of the buildings notwithstanding, a de facto

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12, 1906, ibid.; File note, January 6, 1906, ibid.; Appointment certificate for Robert A. Earl, January 24, 1906, ibid.

[5] First Assistant Secretary Thomas Ryan to Swords, December 11, 1905, Complaints 1909-37, box 9, Central Files, Platt National Park, Records of the National Park Service, Record Group 79, National Archives, Fort Worth, Tex.

partnership emerged that benefited both the town and the park. Even then, approximately 5,000 people availed themselves of the springs and related recreational opportunities, yet regulations restricted visitor accommodations within the reserve. Catering to the tourist trade thus became the underpinning of Sulpher's growing economy. Town leaders again demonstrated their willingness to promote use of the park early in 1906 when the Sulphur Springs Commercial Club filed a petition offering to build a bridge across Rock Creek at Muskogee Avenue. The citizens proposed to finance a steel bridge at no cost to the government, then convey ownership to the Department of the Interior, just as they had done with the Davis Avenue bridge three years earlier. Both Swords and Secretary Hitchcock favored the proposal, but when the town submitted plans, government engineers declined to approve the design. Meantime, the townsfolk circulated a second petition calling upon the government to construct a new and larger bridge to replace the one they had funded on Davis Avenue. The secretary refused to approve the request, probably because he was reluctant to make further investments in capital improvements that would be handed over to the state anyway.[6]

Undeterred by that defeat, the Commercial Club adopted another resolution shortly thereafter calling upon the government to rehabilitate the rather primitive catch

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[6] Swords to SI, February 11, 1906, LS, PNP; J. G. Wright to Swords, March 14, 1906, Bridges, repair & construction, box 52, CF, PNP, RG 79; Ryan to Swords, March 23, 1906, ibid.; Wright to Swords, April 30, 1906, ibid.; Swords to G. M. Weems, president, Sulphur Commercial Club, May 3, 1906, LS, PNP; Swords to SI, March 15, 1906, ibid.

basins at several springs within the reservation. Superintendent Swords forwarded the request, noting in his letter of transmittal that the town's population had mushroomed from approximately 1600 the previous year to nearly 4,000. The springs remained the primary source of water for the populace and that, coupled with the increasing number of visitors, had doubled the demand for water. At Bromide, for example, people still dipped all sorts of vessels directly into the spring. Town leaders suggested that a covered stone retaining wall, provided with an outlet pipe, just below the spring to control both output and access. While Swords appreciated the need for such improvements, he had certain reservations about allowing "a local expert" to do the work, preferring instead to hire a professional to ensure that the springs were not damaged. Swords recommended Charles N. Gould, one of the same hydrologists that had evaluated the springs back in 1901. Hitchcock gave permission for Swords to contract Gould to assess the condition and chemical content of the springs, and make recommendations for protecting them. Gould responded that he would conduct the inspection, but other scheduled work would prevent him from coming to Sulphur until late summer.[7]

Washington approved the contract for Gould's services, but disallowed the proposal for an additional $400.00 to implement his suggestions. Swords' superiors again

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[7] Weems to SI, April 21, 1906, Lands, repairs & improvements, box 48, CF, PNP, RG 79; SI to Swords, May 7, 1906, ibid.; Swords to SI, May 15, 1906, LS, PNP; SI to Swords, May 22, 1906, Lands, repairs & improvements, box 48, CF, PNP, RG 79; Gould to Swords, June 1, 1906, ibid.

expressed their hesitancy to invest too much money in the reservation because of the statement in the Enabling Act of June 16, 1906 calling for the land and all improvements to be transferred to a local entity. Oklahoma and Indian Territories would, in fact, be officially combined to form the State of Oklahoma the following year.[8]

The superintendent also alerted the secretary to even more immediate threats of contamination posed to Hillside Spring. Since Gould could not travel to Sulphur for another three or four months, and the summer season was nearly at hand, Swords asked Hitchcock for funds to undertake some emergency measures right away.[9] At the same time, he advised the secretary that the public was already complaining about the lack of comfort stations and other basic accommodations in the park. He predicted that approximately 5,000 people would come to Sulphur Springs Reservation that summer, notably several hundred members and families belonging to the Oklahoma Pharmaceutical Society that would be there attending a five-day convention. Additionally, the Baptist Young People's Union planned to hold their summer

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[8] Assistant Secretary of the Interior Jesse E. Wilson to Swords, July 12, 1906, ibid.

[9] Hitchcock approved Swords' request to repair Hillside Spring, but the superintendent considered the bids too high, whereupon he requested and received permission to perform the work with day labor. Wilson to Swords, May 29, 1906, ibid.; Hitchcock to Swords, June 21, 1906, ibid.

encampment on the reservation in July. Two months later, Hitchcock approved constructing five of the ten privies Swords had requested.[10]

Although Swords usually made every effort to cooperate with the townspeople, he was less enthusiastic about a proposal for a new municipal sewage system that would traverse the park. Swords admitted that a network of pipes would be an improvement over the existing open drainage ditches flushed by artesian wells that carried "all insanitary [sic] matter . . . into Sulphur Creek by devious ways."[11] Nevertheless some of the lines would cross through Central Park within the reservation to connect the town subdivisions. Of even greater concern was a large main that would carry raw sewage down the bed of Rock Creek and discharge it directly into the stream at a point approximately six hundred feet below its confluence with Sulphur Creek. Swords favored the proposal to the extent that it would benefit the town, but objected to the impacts it would have on the reservation.

Although, the Committee on Indian Affairs had carefully crafted the original legislation creating Sulphur Springs Reservation to appease those members of Congress that objected to imposing a long-term financial obligation on the federal government, subsequent events influenced that stance. The reservation's most vocal advocate, Senator

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[10] Swords to SI, May 12, 1906, LS, PNP; Swords to SI, May 23, 1906, ibid.; "Public Notice," July 24, 1906, ibid.

[11] Swords to SI, May 16, 1906, ibid.

Orville Platt, died in April 1905. His passing should have ensured that congressional intent regarding the reservation was carried out without further objection. However, when legislators considered the act permitting Oklahoma and Indian Territory to merge as a single new state, the bill included a provision stipulating that the United States would retain authority over the park and all other federally owned lands embraced within the state.[12] Thus, responsibility for the resort at Sulphur Springs was imposed on the Department of Interior, regardless of whether it wanted a park. Just two weeks later, the Connecticut delegation moved to change the name of the reservation to Platt National Park, thus elevating its stature and ensuring its future as a unit in the fledgling park system.[13] While the park felt no immediate effect, the act boded well for its future because at last the department could request a regular appropriation, rather than having to continue the tenuous existence it had experienced for the previous four years.

Professor Gould completed his survey and submitted his report on the condition of the springs in August. His analysis revealed eight groups of springs, thirty-three in all,

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[12] The language of the bill reads: "That nothing in this act contained shall repeal or affect any act of Congress relating to the Sulphur Springs Reservation as now defined or as may be hereafter defined or extended . . . ." 34 *U. S. Statutes at Large* 267. The reasons for this are unclear, but the author suspects that local citizens and territorial legislators, desirous of preserving national park stature and economic benefits of the reservation, without imposing the costs on the State of Oklahoma, may have conspired to ensure that it remained federal property. The influence of President Theodore Roosevelt's strong conservationist views during that era likewise cannot be overlooked as an influencing factor. Author's note.

[13] 34 *Stat.* 837.

situated within the park boundaries. He determined that six contained fresh water, four had high iron content, three were classed as bromide, eighteen were sulphur, while only one was a mixture of bromide and sulphur and another was of predominantly soda content. Swords' challenge, like all other park superintendents before and since, was to permit public use of the park, and at the same time preserve the springs from being abused by those same visitors. Within a month after Gould left the park, Swords invited bids for carrying out his recommendations. Gould had offered to do the work himself for a total cost of $697.00, a price the superintendent considered too high. Although six local men offered to make the improvements, Swords thought the lowest bidder lacked the necessary experience for such a critical job. The remaining bids were higher than the price Gould had quoted. He therefore requested and received the secretary's permission to carry out the work using day labor under his own supervision at a cost not exceeding Gould's estimate. The town fathers were so pleased with the results that the City Council forwarded a resolution commending Secretary Hitchcock for his efforts in behalf of the new national park.[14]

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[14] By August 1906, Swords had increased his staff to four persons: Patrolmen Forest Townsley and Robert Earl; clerk-stenographer Una Roberts, and a recently added forester, John J. Zeigler, described by Swords as a "practical tree culturalist" whose experience included three years' work at the St. Louis Exposition. Swords to SI, August 31, 1906, LS, PNP; "Public Notice," September 22, 1906, Lands, repair & improvement, box 48, CF, PNP, RG 79; Hitchcock to Swords, October 31, 1906, ibid.; Ryan to Swords, November 14, 1906, ibid.; "Resolution," City Council of Sulphur, December 3, 1906, ibid.; Swords to SI, December 22, 1906, LS, PNP; That fall, T. J. Cox was contracted to relocate the main comfort station father away from Pavilion Springs, and to construct the five new ones. Swords to SI, September 11, 1906, ibid.

By late summer 1906, Swords had increased his staff to four employees—Patrolmen Townsley and Earl, clerk-stenographer Una Roberts, and a new man, John J. Zeigler, hired as a forester. Zeigler's experience included three years doing similar work at the St. Louis International Exposition. Preparing his annual report just before Chistmas, the superintendent praised his staff for their ability to do whatever was necessary to keep the park operating smoothly. Townsley and Earl, for example, removed roaming cattle from the park, a problem that had persisted since the reservation was established; repaired buildings, carried the office mail, ejected tramps who attempted to take up residence in the park, and supervised day laborers. Reflective of the time and social standards, the patrolmen also drove "Negroes out of the park, which individuals are an annoyance to women and children."[15] Zeigler, meantime, trimmed trees and performed carpentry work on the buildings and bridges.

Now that the Department of Interior had permanent responsibility for managing the park, Swords addressed his dissatisfaction with the old hardware store building that had served as a makeshift office up to that time. It had been the best accommodation available in 1903, but Swords had already spent nearly $400.00 on emergency repairs just to make it habitable. Still, the roof leaked and mortar continually eroded from joints in

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[15] Swords to SI, December 5, 1906, LS, PNP.

the masonry walls. Runoff from the adjacent hills drained into the basin around Pavilion Springs, at times flooding the office floor with an inch of water, damaging the books and records. Swords further complained, "It is almost impossible to keep the office warm in winter, although a fire is kept burning as long as is possible during the night." With the coming of winter, Swords impressed on the secretary the need to construct a 25-foot by 50-foot frame office nearby. To bolster his case, he suggested that the Schwiening store could be sold at auction and torn down, the proceeds used to offset the costs of the new building.[16] However, Hitchcock was not inclined to approve the request without considering future development in the park.

The newfound status of Sulphur as a national park created additional concerns for Swords. Attempting to make the best of things in his drafty, leaking office that winter, Swords was inundated with a variety of demands by the public. The town council, for example, wanted to build a 100,000-gallon reservoir to supply domestic water to Sulphur. Swords sympathized with the city's needs, and Gould had warned him that continued drilling of artesian wells in town could diminish the mineral springs, but he objected to the proposed reservoir site in the heart of the park. Heeding Gould's advice, the new secretary of the Interior, James R. Garfield, instead granted the Mayor E. K. McGinnis

[16] Swords to SI, August 23, 1906, ibid.

permission to withdraw water from Sulphur Creek using a temporary pipeline.[17] He also received no less than eighteen applications from various entrepreneurs wanting to establish bathhouses in the park, development that Swords resisted as inappropriate and potentially costly. He did, however, respond to the town's appeal for the park to repair the main Sulphur Creek footbridge, leading to Pavilion Springs, built by the citizens in 1902.[18]

When an aging Superintendent Swords retired at the end of April 1907, Secretary Garfield appointed Albert R. Greene from Portland, Oregon to fill the post.[19] When Greene arrived in town, he took up temporary residence at the Artesian Hotel until Swords had time to vacate the superintendent's quarters, situated near Pavilion Springs and the office. However, he was taken aback when he inspected the clapboard frame house Swords had been occupying, which Greene described as being "little better than a shanty."[20] Unlike Swords, who had only a wife, the Greene family included seven members. He immediately informed the secretary that the cottage was hardly large

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[17] Swords to SI, August 17, 1906, ibid.; Secretary of the Interior James R. Garfield to Mayor, Sulphur, March 25, 1907, ibid.

[18] Mayor E. K. McGinnis to Swords, January 28, 1907, Bridges, repair & construction 1903-07, box 52, CF, PNP, RG 79; Swords to SI, February 20, 1907, LS, PNP; Hitchcock to Swords, March 2, 1907, Bridges, repair & construction, box 52, CF, PNP, RG 79; Wilson to Swords, April 20, 1907, ibid.

[19] Swords settled in Sulphur Springs after his retirement. He apparently suffered from an old injury and became partially paralyzed in his later years. Palmer H. Boeger, *Oklahoma Oasis*, (Muskogee: 1987), p. 68; Greene assumed his duties on May 1, 1907.

[20] A. R. Greene to John G. Haskell, architect, Lawrence, Kansas, May 3, 1907, LS, PNP.

enough for his needs, and modestly requested that the department build him a modern two-story, ten-room house in the park.

To reduce construction costs, Greene suggested using materials that could be salvaged by demolishing the old Bland Hotel, which he characterized as "an eye-sore and a white elephant." Since prospective buyers had offered only $11,000.00 for the derelict building, Greene considered the lumber, bricks, and other material to be of more value to the government. A local contractor, in fact, offered to raze the hotel and sort and stack the components for a mere $6,000.00. Garfield, however, was opposed to making any further investment in the Bland, regardless of Greene's reasoning. Because Greene's family had not yet joined him, he still had time to find an alternative—and he was not yet defeated in his quest.

The deplorable condition of the superintendent's quarters was not the only deficiency revealed in Greene's inspection of the park.[21] Like Swords, he found the old Schwiening store absolutely unacceptable for use as the park headquarters. Just two weeks after his arrival, the new superintendent suggested that the office be relocated in the stone Leeper cabin on the hill overlooking Hillside Spring. That building, measuring

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[21] Other projects Greene proposed included: repairing the Coney Island ford, building a protective barrier around Bromide Spring, constructing a footbridge across Rock Creek at Twin Rocks, installation of electric lights in the park, painting several buildings, and the addition of a janitor/messenger on his staff. Green to SI, May 14, 1907, LS, PNP.

23 ½ feet by 44 feet with a porch 10 feet wide extending across the east (front) and north sides, had not sold during previous auctions, probably because it could not be moved and would be too costly to tear down for the materials it contained. Greene estimated that it could be repaired for $100.00, and would afford a better location for the headquarters because its distance from the most congested area of the park. Garfield approved the request in early June, generously authorizing the superintendent to spend up to $180.00 to rehabilitate the structure, erect a flagstaff, and put up a sign designating it as the park office.[22] Platt, at last, was showing manifestations of a full-fledged national park.

Now desperate to provide housing for a family that would soon join him, Greene devised an alternate plan. Forester Zeigler had been assigned a small house at Webster Park, a short distance east of the new office and just beyond the public road. Greene outlined his proposal for modifying that house for his own use, since it was only a short walk from the new headquarters. For only $300.00, he could construct a two-room addition on the building, thus making a seven-room house adequate for his family. However, Greene determined that the existing women's public comfort station, a

[22] Greene to SI, May 15, 1907, ibid.; Wilson to Greene, June 8, 1907, Buildings, contruction & repair, box 49, CF, PNP, RG 79; The Schwiening store was abandoned as the park office in late May 1907 and put up for sale to anyone who would purchase it for salvage. Finding no immediate buyer, it stood until fall 1908 when a contract was finally let to Liberenz & Robinson, Sulphur, Okla., to demolish it for a payment to the government of $200.00. Greene to SI, September 30, 1907, LS, PNP; Pierce to Greene, July 22, 1908, Buildings, sale & removal 1905-08, box 49, CF, PNP, RG 79; Wilson to Greene, September 18, 1908, ibid.; Notice of invitation for bids, A. R. Greene, July 28, 1908, ibid.; First Asst. Secretary Frank Pierce to Greene, September 29, 1908, Buildings, sale & removal 1905-08, box 49, ibid.; The Leeper home would serve as park headquarters until early 2002. Author's note.

compulsory component of Zeigler's quarters, would not be appropriate for the superintendent's residence. It would therefore have to be relocated elsewhere—Sword's old house near Pavilion being the logical alternative. Greene further suggested that Zeigler's family could be moved into a five-room house at the east end of the park formerly occupied by Willis Townsley, and the watchman could be relocated to Bromide, and given a one-room shack moved from yet another location.[23] The secretary quickly consented to Greene's plan, but his letter had no sooner arrived than Greene had an even better idea. Why not, he countered, remove the additions from the old superintendent's quarters, along with the fence and chicken house, move them up the hill, and attach them to the Zeigler house, rather than paying for new construction? Moreover, since the remnant could not be legally leased to anyone not employed by the government, it could be provided for another on-site watchman in return for his protective services at Pavilion

[23] Useful details concerning park buildings extant at the time are found in Greene to SI, September 30, 1907, LS, PNP; A Watchman King, at Bromide Springs, is mentioned therein and apparently was the man moved from W. L. Townsley's former home to the latter location.

Springs.[24] Secretary Garfield's July 1 approval of Greene's ideas set off a chain-reaction of relocations within the park.[25]

The project failed to go as smoothly as Greene had predicted. In August, he was embarrassed to admit to his superiors in Washington that the funds authorized would not be sufficient to complete the work after all. Obviously, Greene had not examined the old superintendent's cottage closely enough before making his optimistic proposal. As it turned out, it was even more poorly constructed than he had indicated because moving the additions only 250 yards had caused the joints to separate, thus the frames became so deformed the doors and windows were jammed. The workmen also discovered that the floor beams were not properly braced, something that should have come as no surprise considering the generally shoddy quality of the improvements people had built on the

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[24] The man hired for this job may have been Thomas E. McDaniel, referred to as a ranger in later correspondence. McDaniel resigned after Greene threatened to dismiss him for several instances of public drunkenness. He was replaced by Carl F. Maxey, age 32, who had been an unsuccessful candidate for sheriff in a recent election. Greene to SI, December 30, 1907, LS, PNP; Greene to SI, January 18, 1908, ibid.; Pierce to Greene, January 23, 1908, ibid.; Maxey served only a short time, resigning in October. Rangers and Watchman Reports 1908-12, PNP, Chickasaw NRA archives (hereinafter cited as R&W reports with date).

[25] Greene to SI, June 3, 1907, LS, PNP; Greene to SI, June 26, 1907, ibid.; Greene to SI, August 17, 1907, ibid.; Wilson to Greene, July 3, 1907, Bridges, repair & construction 1903-07, box 52, CF, PNP, RG 79; Greene was also abhorred by the condition of Ranger Earl's house, although he did not report on it until a few months later. He described the place as a flimsy "box house" comprised of two or three sheds brought in from around the old town and joined into a single dwelling. It was of board-and-batten construction, the walls covered with muslin and paper on the inside. It had no insulation—only one-inch plank walls. "It is scarcely better than a tent as a place of human habitation," Greene wrote. It was located in a ravine six hundred feet east of Panther Falls, with no closer source of water. Greene to SI, October 16, 1907, LS, PNP; French to SI, June 30, 1911, Superintendent's reports, PNP, Chickasaw NRA archives; Ranger Townsley's house was situated six hundred feet southeast of Pavilion Springs, and the watchman's shack was "10 rods" north of Bromide Spring. ibid. The employee residences and other buildings are shown on "Map of Platt National Park, Murray County, Oklahoma," U. S. Geological Service, March 1909.

reservation. Were those deficiencies not discouraging enough, the paperhangers informed Greene that the old paper-over-muslin wall covering was completely infested with vermin. There was nothing to do but remove all the old fabric and replace it before hanging new paper. Also unforeseen was the quantity of paint required. Greene's estimate of ten gallons to paint the entire structure fell far short of the twenty-one gallons it eventually took to coat the parched shingles alone. Perhaps after informing his wife of the living conditions she would encounter, Greene changed his mind about the feasibility of carrying their domestic water from Hillside Spring—150 yards from the house. Surely, he reasoned, the secretary would approve piping water to the quarters prior to his wife's arrival.[26]

The new superintendent's proposals for improvements did not end there. It was, after all, the twentieth century and Sulphur already boasted a telephone company. Greene thought every park residence should have a phone to improve the after-hours response to emergencies. To strengthen his justification, he cited a recent incident when a hack full of local drunken hellions rampaged through the Bromide Springs area. He recounted that "by their profane and vulgar language, and an indecent exposure of their persons created

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[26] Greene to SI, August 17, 1907, LS, PNP.

a panic among the ladies and children present, and took possession of the spring by intimidating the watchman and the few other men who happened to be present."[27]

Disorderly conduct was only one of myriad problems that steadily increasing visitation and a neighboring community imposed on the park staff. Greene reported that park visitors frequently took the existing park road, leading from Coney Island Ford and Pavilion Springs across Sulphur Creek back into the northern section of town. The road then re-entered the park in the vicinity of Buffalo and Antelope Springs. In short, there was no direct connection between Central Park and the east district. The rough circuitous route, Greene opined, deprived visitors of much of the scenic beauty. He also expressed his concern that if,

> . . . their curiosity to see these beauty spots is sufficient to induce them to leave their conveyance and explore the creek through the dense woods, they are more than likely to discover persons bathing in a nude condition. The rangers frequently report to me that they have found bathers, both men and women, in several of the pools along the creek, feeling safe from detection owing to the dense foliage. Personally, I have found two groups of children and young women within the last month, who were bathing in Suophur Creek in a nude condition.

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[27] Greene to SI, August 20, 1907, ibid.

Their excuse given to me was that they felt perfectly secure from intrusion by the cover of the surrounding woods.[28]

Greene bolstered his justification by citing another recent incident when a gang of robbers had broken into several houses in the town of Palmer during Sunday morning church services. A posse and accompanying bloodhounds tracked the men to Platt National Park, where Townsley and Earl joined them in the search. The trail led to woods near Bear Falls, where the robbers opened fire on the lawmen, "but owing to the smokeless powder being used, it was impossible to definitely locate them."[29] Both parties continued exchanging fire until the robbers eventually made their escape.

Besides being an eyesore on the park, the deteriorating Hotel Bland afforded some visitors a place for even more scandalous activity that further compounded Greene's frustrations. On a Sunday morning in May, Rangers Townsley and Earl quietly approached the back of the building and burst into a small room where they found nineteen-year-old Oscar Medlock, a local saloonkeeper, and Lena Rodgers "engaged in the act of adultery." After being presented to Greene for questioning, the two were placed in the custody of the local marshal and jailed in town. The superintendent wanted the offenders to appear before the U. S. Commissioner in Ada the following day, but the

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[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

commissioner remanded them to city officials. Late that afternoon, Mayor Kendall and T. J. Gafford, a prominent citizen, came to the park to request custody of the amorous couple. The men attempted to placate the superintendent by trivializing the offense as "a common one in the Hotel Bland ever since it had been vacant, and that they thought that I should not be too hard on the boy, who had fine parents, for an act of that kind committed in the night." Greene promptly corrected them that the licentious activity had occurred at midday "while dozens of visitors, men, women, and children were passing and repassing in the vicinity of the Hotel Bland." Apparently, that was enough to throw a different light on the matter, and the two men returned to town. Meantime, Rodgers "escaped" from the city jail, and no charges were pressed against Medlock.[30]

Perhaps the most glaring deficiency in the park, and the one uppermost in the minds of local citizens, was the lack of a sufficient number of bridges, and the poor condition of those already extant. The bridges over the two creeks had in fact become a point of contention in bitter factionalism between the citizens of "north" Sulphur, in the area north of the stream re-named Travertine Creek, and "west" Sulphur, that part of the new town lying beyond Rock Creek. While the western portion of the park, embracing the Bromide group, was easily accessible from that section of town, Rock Creek formed a

[30] Affidavit by A. R. Greene, June 6, 1907, LS, PNP; The incident cited herein is only one of several such cases recorded. An interesting tabulation of arrests for serious offenses during the first several months of 1908 is found in Greene to SI, August 17, 1908, LS, PNP.

barrier to the larger central and eastern districts. Within weeks after his arrival, Greene recommended building a structure across Rock Creek in the vicinity of Bromide Spring to serve the hundreds of people coming there for water to cure illnesses. Visitors complained that there was no convenient place to cross the creek without going all the way upstream to Coney Island Ford. Both groups schemed to dominate park affairs for their own benefit. Members of the so-called "30,000 Club," along with north side bankers, merchants, clergymen, and dozens of residents petitioned Greene to improve the ford, the principal crossing on the main east-west road through the park. "It will require no small degree of tact and forbearance on the part of the Superintendent to secure the best results under such circumstances," Greene observed. "Heretofore, the North Side has received the greatest benefit from the existence of this Park, and the influences which have produced this result will undoubtedly seek to maintain their advantage by every means within their power."[31] He noted, however, that although north side people benefited most from Pavilion Springs, several hundred persons also visited Bromide Springs on a daily basis during the season. Hotels, restaurants, and affiliated merchants in the respective parts of town fiercely competed for the burgeoning tourist trade.

One of former superintendent Swords' actions had particularly galled the townsfolk, especially the west-side residents. A period of high water the previous year

[31] Greene to SI, May 14, 1907, ibid.

had completely washed out Coney Island Ford. Rather than repair the damage, Swords had elected to simply abandon that segment of the road, which happened to be the primary route to West Sulphur. When citizens began using Bromide Lane, south of the Bland Hotel, as a crossing over Rock Creek at a lower ford, the superintendent had also closed that avenue ostensibly to prevent cattle from straying out of the fenced lane connecting the southern section of town. Consequently, visitors and residents alike were forced to detour through North Sulphur to use the Davis Avenue bridge. Swords' perceived partisanship favoring the north side had contributed in no small way to the hostility between the two rival neighborhoods. Greene immediately seized upon this bitterly contested issue as a way to restore confidence in the department. "As the purpose of the Government here in establishing and maintaining this Park is for the benefit of the whole people, irrespective of faction, creed, or political affiliation," he wrote, "the attitude of its representatives must be one of conciliation and impartiality."[32] Putting his philosophy into action, Greene immediately restored the ford and re-opened the road to West Sulphur.

Greene considered improved access to the Bromide district to be an equally critical need because of its relative isolation from the rest of the park. He forwarded two

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[32] Ibid.

alternative plans for a new bridge at Bromide, one a wooden structure to rest on Twin Rock, just below the spring, the other a more elaborate cable suspension bridge spanning the creek directly opposite the spring. Greene expressed his preference for the latter, a design prepared by local architect H. V. Hinckley. In Greene's view, the wire bridge would be more compatible with the natural surroundings and "would be a feature of adornment" in the park. Department of Interior officials concurred with Greene's choice because they thought the truss bridge was too intrusive, but advised the superintendent to have Hinckley alter his design to increase the strength of the suspension bridge. Once that was accomplished, Greene was authorized to seek bids for its construction.[33] Perhaps not coincidentally, Hinckly himself, who also happened to be the president of the "30,000 Club," submitted one of the proposals.[34] All of the bids, as it turned out, exceeded the available funds, but the project was advertised a second time and the contract was eventually awarded in November. However, winter would intervene by the time materials could be shipped from St. Louis to the park, therefore construction was deferred until the following spring.[35] Meanwhile, Greene put his men to work constructing a concrete basin

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[33] Greene, to SI, June 22, 1907, LS, PNP; Acting Secretary George W. Woodruff to Greene, July 23, 1907, Bridges, repair & construction 1903-07, box 52, CF, PNP, RG 79.

[34] Hinckley's proposal stipulated that if he were not awarded the contract, the successful bidder would pay him $50.00 for the use of his plans, and would hire him as the project supervisor. The seceretary of the Interior demanded that be stricken and that Hinckley be paid $25.00 for his drawings. Woodruff to Greene, September 17, 1907, ibid.

[35] SI to Greene, November 8, 1907, ibid.; Greene to A. Leschen Rope Co., St. Louis, Mo, December 7, 1907, LS, PNP.

and roofed enclosure over Bromide "making the splendid curative waters of that famous spring for the first time clean and fit to drink."[36]

Meantime, Greene was plagued with other bridge issues. An inspection revealed that the wooden truss bridge spanning Rock Creek at Davis Avenue--the one built by the town only three years earlier and given to the government—was already deteriorating. Even though the park had repaired it just two years after it was built, the structure became so shaky that Greene felt compelled to post warning signs on both ends to discourage heavy vehicles from crossing. Despite those precautions, heavily loaded omnibuses conveying tourists from the nearby railroad stations continued to use the bridge. Equally ignored were warnings for horsemen not to unnecessarily vibrate the bridge by trotting across. In the interest of public safety, Greene finally ordered his rangers to close the bridge to public use on November 30 by nailing timbers across both ends, then standing guard for the remainder of the day to insure that no one crossed. It was obvious, however, that a substantial new span was needed at that location.[37]

The old wagon road leading east from Coney Island Ford to a bridge across Travertine Creek, thence directly into town had largely isolated the Antelope and Buffalo

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[36] Resolution by 30,000 Club, February 13, 1908, ibid.

[37] Greene to SI, November 26, 1907, ibid.; Report by Ranger Forest S. Townsley, December 4, 1907, ibid.

Springs district, a circumstance that encouraged visitors to violate park rules, and made it more difficult for park personnel to reach that area. In early 1908, Greene blocked off the old road approximately 200 yards above Travertine Falls and laid out a new route closely paralleling the stream all the way to the springs. At the same time, he rehabilitated the ford at Rock Creek to make a smoother crossing for wagons.[38]

Greene, however, reached the limits of his cooperation when civic and business leaders prevailed on the government pay for a sewer system with a capacity to serve up to 50,000 people. They reasoned that the park was the primary cause of a rapidly increasing populace, therefore the Department of the Interior had an obligation to bear most, if not all, of the costs necessary to accommodate those people. In a thinly veiled ploy aimed at bolstering their claim, some residents used septic tanks only a short distance outside the park boundary, with the result that raw sewage was discharged into Rock Creek. The Vendome Hotel, just north of the park for example, used a septic tank that Greene described as "little better than a cess pool, the obnoxious odors pollute the atmosphere to such a degree as to render it exceedingly unpleasant for persons crossing the Park in that vicinity, and driving visitors away from one of the principal entrances thereof."[39] The superintendent countered the city's contorted argument in a letter to the secretary: "When

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[38] Resolution by 30,000 Club, Sulphur, Okla., February 13, 1908, LS, PNP; The old wagon bridge across Travertine Creek, east of Pavilion Springs, was dismantled in May 1908. R&W reports, PNP.

[39] Greene to SI, November 26, 1907, LS, PNP.

the park needs a sanitary sewer, it should construct it, but I fail to understand why the Government should construct a sewer for the City of Sulphur any more than it should construct a system of water works for the city, or install electric lights and telephones for its use."[40]

Despite that minor defeat, Greene's many improvements to the park, along with his firm-but-fair diplomacy with the community, made a highly favorable impression on local citizens. His generally positive responses to their concerns, coupled with involving them in developing solutions, won the park many friends and at the same time did much to allay the animosities that had previously divided the townspeople. Greene demonstrated that a cooperative effort would mutually benefit the park, the town, and local business. As an expression of community satisfaction with management of the park, the "30,000 Club" lauded "the zealous, efficient, and absolutely fair and impartial manner in which the said Colonel Greene performs his official duties as Superintendent . . . ."[41] Platt National Park had come of age and Greene's arrival on the scene portended the dawn of a new and brighter era.

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[40] Greene to SI, December 13, 1907, ibid.

[41] Resolution, February 13, 1908, ibid.

Chapter 4

Uncle Sam's Newest Playground

Superintendent Greene's improvement program corresponded with a concerted promotional effort by both the railroads and the town of Sulphur. The Commercial Club, trumpeted Platt National Park as the government's "newest playground and outing place. High up in the ozone of the Arbuckles."[1] Further extolling the benefits of the park and its waters, the AT&SF lured visitors to Sulphur with the suggestion that they might find a cure for "rheumatism, nervousness, insomnia, stomach, liver, kidney or bladder troubles." As a bonus, visitors would find comfortable hotels at rates ranging from $1.00 - $5.00 a day, moreover they would not encounter a single mosquito.

Sometime prior to Greene's arrival, the rangers had started wearing military-style uniforms to enhance their identity as park employees. In summer they wore blue chambray army shirts, khaki trousers and leggings, and olive-drab Stetson campaign hats,

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[1] This and other advertisements were reproduced in Oleta Littleheart, *The Lure of the Indian Country and a Romance of its Great Resort*, (Sulphur, Okla.: 1908), p. 153.

replaced in winter by olive drab woolen coats, trousers, and shirts, along with leather leggings.[2] In fall 1907, the department sent silver National Park Ranger badges to Platt for issue to the rangers. "This combination," Greene opined, "makes a very genteel and military appearance and the Rangers, three in number at present, are willing to incur the expense."[3] Greene liked the idea of uniformed rangers so well, in fact, he asked Secretary Garfield if the government might not provide standard outfits, since his men had been purchasing them at their own expense. "They informed me that they were no more costly than other serviceable clothing and that they had been found to serve a very useful purpose in enforcing discipline and maintaining order in the discharge of their duties." The Platt request was actually part of a larger movement to uniform park employees, something the secretary was disinclined to do, probably because of the costs. Assistant

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[2] Park files contain Townsley's receipt, dated September 10, 1907, for "one German silver National Park Service badge, which I agree to wear at all times when on duty as Ranger in the Platt National Park." Letters Sent, Platt National Park, Chickasaw National Recreation Area archives (hereinafter cited as LS, PNP); The style was undoubtedly the two-inch circular badge adopted for wear by Service personnel in 1905. R. Bryce Workman, *National Park Service Uniforms: Badges and Insignia 1894 – 1991*, (Harpers Ferry, W. Va.: 1991), pp. 2, 3, 13; Platt employees ordered their uniforms from the M. C. Lilley Co., a well-known military outfitter in Columbus, Ohio. Superintendent A. R. Greene to Secretary of the Interior (SI), March 9, 1908, LS PNP; The uniform coat worn by Platt rangers was likely the pattern adopted by the U. S. Army in 1902, having a low falling collar and four bellows pockets. The chambray shirt was used by the army for fatigue purposes for only a short time during the early 1900s. William K. Emerson, *Encyclopedia of United States Army Insignia and Uniforms*, (Norman: 1996), pp. 487, 499-501; Personnel at Platt probably heard about such uniforms through word of mouth. The National Parks were initially managed by the army before being transferred to the Department of the Interior. Forest rangers, who were under the department until that agency was placed under the administration of the Department of Agriculture in 1905, began wearing army-style uniforms about the same time. During the winter season, Townsley and Earl probably appeared much like the forest rangers pictured in Workman, *National Park Service Uniforms: In Search of an Identity*, (Harpers Ferry, W. Va.: 1994), p. 9.

[3] Greene to SI, March 9, 1908, LS, PNP.

Secretary Frank Pierce cut short further discussion on March 17, 1908 when he notified the superintendents that "after due consideration of the matter [the secretary] does not deem it advisable at this time to adopt any uniform for employees in the several parks" though he had no objection to the men furnishing their own.[4]

The question of what to do with that decaying "white elephant," the Bland Hotel, was still to be resolved. During the previous August, Greene had advised Interior Secretary Garfield that the structure, even though only a few years old, was becoming so unsound he feared it might collapse when buffeted by strong winds. During the years since its abandonment, vandals had broken numerous windows, exposing the interior to rain that was causing the plaster to fall in many of the rooms. Many local citizens, however, supported an effort to have it renovated into a soldier's home or a hospital. Still other folks thought it should be leased to one of the railroads for use as a Fred Harvey hotel. Greene confided his own preference to a friend: "I personally want the thing pulled down and a museum of Indian history and relics made of the best part of it."[5] Whatever the outcome, he was resigned to make the best of a bad bargain for the long-term interests of the park. "It is useless to lament the fact that the Government paid $50,000 for a

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[4] Workman, *In Search of an Identity*, p. 12.

[5] Greene to J. G. Haskell, September 25, 1907, LS, PNP. Haskell, incidentally, was a pioneer architect that had designed the buildings at the Haskell Institute, an industrial school for Indians at Lawrence, Kansas. Established in 1884, it was named for Congressman Dudly C. Haskell, chairman of the Indian Affairs Committee 1881 – 1883. "The Early History of Haskell Institute," Lawrence (Kans.) Community Connections web site, Internet.

building which in all probability did not cost to exceed three fourths that amount . . .," he wrote.[6] Even though government appraisers later estimated the value of the materials contained in the 125-room building at only $30,000, they had failed to consider a lack of local market interest in a relatively isolated location. The Interior Department had made a bad bargain, made worse by its obstinacy in holding out for a higher price than anyone was willing to offer. Having no option than to sell the place for whatever it could get, the secretary certainly must have regretted his predecessor's decision to turn down the $11,500 sum offered by the Bland company a few years earlier. The department probably would have been elated even to accept the $6,000 a contractor had offered to raze the structure and sort the materials for future government use, but that opportunity too had passed.

Nevertheless, Greene had little choice but to re-advertise during March in hope of finding another interested party. He was not encouraged by the three responses. The lowest bidder offered only $300.00 for the building, while the next higher came in at $4,000.00, still far below what the government hoped to realize from the sale. C. E. Higinbothom, a Sulphur contractor, offered to tear down the hotel, remove all the material, fill in the basement, and level the site for $7,011.00. It was still a pitifully small

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[6] Greene to SI, August 20, 1907, LS, PNP;

return on the government's investment, but Assistant Secretary Jesse E. Wilson accepted the bid on April 11. Higinbothom was given ninety days to complete the project, and by summer 1908 the park had finally rid itself of the Bland, though at a substantial loss to the government.[7]

Other development also reflected Greene's commitment to transform Platt into a bonafide national park. Work on the suspension bridge at Bromide had gotten underway by February, but since its completion would require several more months, Greene began using a boat as a temporary measure to ferry people across the creek to get water from Cliff Bromide Spring. The new structure, eventually known as "Swinging Bridge" because of its tendency to move laterally, springing up and down as people crossed it, was completed June 20 and immediately opened to the public. It proved to be immensely popular with tourists, some five hundred using it that first season, including aging Union veterans attending the Grand Army of the Republic reunion. The rangers also improved "Cliffside Trail," leading to the top of Bromide Hill, by grading and installing iron railings at several dangerous points. Using a special allotment, Greene had his men construct a number of portable benches that could be placed at popular areas as needed

[7] Assistant Secretary Jesse E. Wilson to Greene, April 3, 1908, Buildings, Hotel Bland 1905-08, box 49, Central Files, Platt National Park, Records of the National Park Service, Record Group 79, National Archives, Fort Worth, Texas; Wilson to Greene, April 11, 1908, ibid.

during the summer, and they added nine permanent seats around the bases of trees in the vicinity of various springs.[8]

Less well received was Greene's fencing project to enclose the park boundary. By November, a wire fence had been completed around the nine-mile perimeter, except for a section facing the Vendome Hotel that would be made of boards. He also intended to realign the principal north-south road leading past Pavilion Springs and the park headquarters. Once that was accomplished, he would move the fence line to correspond. Even though the fence was an inconvenience to many local people accustomed to entering the park wherever they chose, they adapted to the new situation more easily than Greene had anticipated. "I have been agreeably disappointed thus far in the attitude of the public toward the work of inclosing the park, and the exclusion of livestock therefrom," Greene reported. "As a rule they have accepted the position of the Government with a good grade, and not a few who discommoded thereby commend the act of fencing it as being in the line of accomplishing its ultimate purpose as a health and pleasure resort."[9]

The park and its popular, energetic superintendent quickly drew the attention of friends in high places. In fact, things were moving almost too fast. When the

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[8] Monthly reports for March – May, 1908, Rangers and Watchman Reports 1908-12, PNP, Chickasaw National Recreation Area archives (hereinafter cited as R&W reports); Greene to SI, July 5, 1908, Superintendent's reports, PNP, ibid.; R&W reports, September and November 1908; Greene to SI, November 7, 1908, Superintedent's reports, PNP.

[9] Greene to SI, November 7, 1908, ibid.

congressional Committee on Public Lands favored submitting a $250,000 budget for Platt that spring, Secretary Garfield had to admit that the department was not yet fully prepared to utilize such a large amount. More thought and long-term planning would be necessary before development projects could be outlined comprehensively.[10]

With Travertine and Rock Creeks forming an obstacle on two sides of the park—those adjacent to Sulphur's hotels, bathhouses, restaurants, and railroad connections—Greene continued his efforts to facilitate access across the streams. As an interim measure pending a decision to install a substantial permanent bridge, his rangers tore down the now rickety wooden footbridge across Travertine Creek, a short distance above its confluence with Rock Creek. During October, Townsley and Earl constructed a replacement nearby using salvaged lumber.[11]

Because the trail from Pavilion Springs led directly into North Sulphur, Greene's decision to construct a "stone arch foot bridge" at that location further enhanced his standing with the community. The contract was awarded Liberenz & Robinson, an Oklahoma City firm, in late November 1908 and work began soon thereafter. It was not entirely coincidental that Liberenz & Robinson were handed the job because just two months earlier they had also been hired to raze the old office building. So certain were

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[10] Report No. 652, *Senate Documents*, 60th Congress, 1st Session (serial 5219).

[11] R&W reports, October 1908.

they of getting the second contract, they had requested a ninety-day extension for removing the rubble left from the Schwiening store, with the intention of using the stone in building the arch bridge. That material gave them an edge on the bridge project because having several tons of already-cut limestone only a short distance from the construction site saved both quarrying and transportation costs. The bridge, of rustic style sporting four round towers and circular flowerbeds at both ends, was finished in record time and dedicated as "Lincoln Bridge" on February 12, 1909.[12]

Bridge building proceeded at fast pace that winter when Greene directed his attention to the single-track wooden truss structure on Davis Avenue. The park still encompassed a narrow thumb of land extending approximately 850 feet up Rock Creek, between the Frisco and Santa Fe depots, north of the street. Even though the townsfolk of Sulphur had paid for the bridge, it was immediately transferred to government ownership, thereby making the Interior Department responsible for its future maintenance. Davis Avenue had become more than just the principle east-west thoroughfare through town;

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[12] Pierce to Greene, September 29, 1908, Buildings, sale & removal, 1905-08, box 49, CF, PNP, RG 79; Greene to SI, November 7, 1908, LS, PNP; Greene to SI, January 26, 1909, Bridges, construction & repair, 1909, box 52, CF, PNP, RG 79; The flowers were planted by the Civil League of Sulphur, another example of the superintendent's efforts to involve the community in park improvements. Greene to SI, July 5, 1909, Superintendent's reports, PNP; Between fall 1908 and spring 1909, employees also constructed several other minor bridges in the park in addition to those described in the narrative. Included were: a wagon bridge across Antelope Run on the Brookside Trail, a foot bridge across Travertine Creek at East Sycamore Falls, another spanning a deep gully at Black Sulphur Spring, one at the mouth of Spring Run, and one across a rocky gulch in East Central Park. ibid.

Sulphur's new streetcar system had also laid its rails across the bridge. Greene informed the secretary in November 1908: "This rotten old structure is a source of constant care and apprehension. It may be necessary to close it before the work of replacing it with a new bridge is undertaken. It is beyond repair."[13] Shortly thereafter he closed the bridge and set his men to work tearing it down. The park, meantime, developed a ford for crossing vehicles and the rangers laid a few old planks alongside to accommodate pedestrians.

In preparation for construction of the new bridge, the department contracted with a local firm in January to raise the height of the abutments and construct wing walls on the upstream side to better protect the banks from erosion. The superintendent simultaneously had the rangers erect a temporary footbridge beneath it, using materials from the main bridge. "This will answer a very useful purpose as long as it stands," Greene wrote, though he predicted the rather fragile structure would require frequent repairs to keep it in a safe condition.[14]

The secretary's office accepted a bid from the Midland Bridge Company of Kansas City on January 18 to construct a modern steel structure over Rock Creek. The

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[13] Ibid.

[14] Greene to SI, January 16, 1909, Bridges, construction & repair 1909, box 52, CF, PNP, RG 79; R&W reports, January 1909.

company offered to build a prefabricated iron bridge, with superstructure, and to have it complete by early May, just in time for summer crowds. The project also called for stone abutments to be constructed at the ends, as well as retaining walls and a sidewalk. Not part of the original design were electric lights added as an afterthought to each of the four corners. Although the contractor encountered delays along the way, causing it to request a thirty-day extension to complete the work, the new Davis Avenue bridge was nevertheless opened for public use in mid-June. The 80-foot, double-lane structure was officially christened "Washington Bridge," during a dedication ceremony attended by 3,000 people. "It is, all things considered," Greene proudly announced, "the most useful improvement that could have been made in the park,"[15]

For all the progress being made in developing the national park, there were still clear reminders that Oklahoma was not far removed from its frontier heritage. The park just happened to be in the way of the most direct route to the shipping pens on the railroad, causing thousands of cattle to be driven through the park every fall from ranches in the Arbuckles. On one occasion when a wild west show troupe camped in the park,

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[15] Midland Bridge Co. to Assist. Secretary Frank Pierce, January 18, 1909, Bridges, construction & repair 1909, box 52, CF, PNP, RG 79.; Midland Bridge Co. to Greene, January 22, 1909, ibid.; Greene to SI, January 23, 1909, ibid.; Greene to SI, March 9, 1909, ibid.; Pierce to Greene, March 12, 1909, ibid.; Jesse E. Wilson to Greene, April 12, 1909, ibid.; Pierce to Greene, April 29, 1909, ibid.; Pierce to Greene, June 26, 1909, ibid.; Greene to SI, July 5, 1909, Superintendent's reports, PNP.

Ranger Townsley was forced to order the members out of the park because the "cowboys" refused to turn over their guns during their stay.[16]

Except for occasional instances of nude swimming, liquor violations, and commercial photographers operating without permits, most visitors at Platt abided by the rules and were simply out to have a good time. Some were even becoming curious about the natural features of the park. In one of the earliest recorded interpretive contacts, Ranger Robert Earl reported that he was approached by "a number of visitors who asked me questions about the Park. Guided them to points of interest and gave them other information."[17] But educational activities were only in their infancy at Platt, as elsewhere in the National Park System. A few months later, the superintendent was compelled to inform a returning visitor that while the "virtues of the water of the springs are the same; I beg to advise that it is not the policy of the Department to furnish any printed matter relating to the Park, so the only printed matter I am able to furnish you is a little folder gotten up by the Fricso Ry. Co. which sets forth the medicinal qualities of the water of the springs and their curative properties, as well as giving a list of the hotels in the city with their rates."[18]

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[16] *R&W reports*, August 1909.

[17] Ibid.

[18] French to W. G. Cain, Tyler, Texas, November 24, 1909, LS, PNP.

An ever increasing flood of visitors, along with that growing town next door, caused Greene to reconsider his position on a jointly-owned sewer system. Preparing his annual report for 1909, Greene proposed that the secretary submit a request to Congress for $35,000.00 to install such a system, complete with a concrete dam across Rock Creek. A dam two hundred feet long by about thirty feet high, he suggested, could generate enough electricity to support the local power plant, and the mile-long lake thus formed could serve as a sewage receptacle.[19] His case was reinforced when a Congressman Scott Ferris vacationed at Sulphur in Septmeber. Writing from the Artesian Hotel, Ferris complained directly to Secretary of the Interior R. A. Ballinger that he was "impressed with the belief that there is imperative and immediate necessity that some measure of relief should be granted to the people who visit the Park, as well as the citizens of Sulphur relating to the non-sanitary conditions which now exist."[20] He demanded that the park superintendent, the mayor, and sanitary engineers "endeavor to remedy the evils which now exist." Ballinger responded by immediately ordering Greene to investigate the matter. The principal area of concern lay north of the park, just outside the boundary. The gently sloping land between Fifth Street East and Fourteenth Street West contained several gullies that drained directly into Travertine Creek, some of them near a fresh

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[19] Greene to SI, July 5, 1909, Superintendent's reports, PNP.

[20] Scott Ferris to R. A. Ballinger, secretary of the interior, September 18, 1909, Complaints, 1909-37, box 9, CF, PNP, RG 79.

water spring where a number of families obtained their drinking water. Another leading from the Deaf School drained raw sewage into the creek as well, and a private cesspool leached into Travertine a short distance above Lincoln Bridge. "The odor from this discharge is so offensive," Greene wrote, "as to be an occasion of unfavorable criticism by visitors and the public generally. It discolors and contaminates the water to such a degree that thirsty animals refuse to drink it." Other sources of contaminants finding their way into Rock Creek included the Frisco depot, several hotels, the septic tanks of numerous homes, as well as runoff from barns and livery stables in the north section of town. Mayor Charles B. Emanuel recognized the problem, but appealed to the government to correct it because the City of Sulphur lacked the financial resources for so large a project.[21]

Greene, however, was spared having to deal with the situation when he transferred on October 22. He was replaced the next day by William J. French, who rendered his own pithy report two months after his arrival:

> The health of the citizens of the town, as well as the employees of the Park and the visitors who come here, is constantly menaced by the terrible stench which arises from the septic tank at the foot of First Street West. In addition to this,

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[21] Mayor Charles B. Emanuel to Greene, October 16, 1909, LS, PNP.

> some 200 deaf students are quartered just east of this septic tank and use East Central Park as a playground. The septic tank empties into an open ditch at Davis Avenue, and every wind from the south and west sweeps this polluted air over the playground and straight into the windows of the dormitory, and classrooms of the deaf school. The result of these conditions, if allowed to continue, will be an epidemic of typhoid fever in the school, as well as the City of Sulphur, and the effect to this beautiful health resort will be disastrous in the extreme . . . .[22]

But there the dilemma reached an impasse. The city admitted to generating the sewage that polluted the park, but reasoned that since the government had established the park at that location, it was responsible for correcting the problem. Secretary Ballinger took an opposing view that the city should bear the cost of installing a sewer system, for its own benefit as well as the park's. The matter would go unresolved, and pollution would continue unabated, for two more years.

Near the end of summer, prior to Greene's departure, the largest of the springs in the Pavilion group, Big Tom, broke through the surrounding tile and six-foot galvanized container Sulphur citizens had placed there several years earlier. Efforts by park employees to install a temporary barrier to bring it under control proved ineffective, and Big Tom continued to gush water at the rate of approximately ninety gallons per minute

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[22] French to SI, December 15, 1909, Superintendent's reports, PNP.

for the next several months, until a prevailing drought caused it to go dry. French took up the effort to devise a temporary remedy that fall, finally concluding that nothing short of a major overhaul—estimated at $3,000.00--would fix it. Funds were slow in forthcoming and Big Tom remained in a ruined state until spring 1911 when the secretary finally approved its rehabilitation. Park employees tore out what was left of the original retaining wall and the rusted-out iron liner, replacing it with a joint of fifteen-inch-diameter sewer tile sunk in the ground to protect the outlet. About a year afterward, with more funds available, French undertook a more elaborate project by installing a 26-foot by 29-foot stone enclosure 5 to 8 feet deep around the mouth. Additionally, workmen covered the sand floor of the spring with concrete over a tamped red clay base.[23]

The appropriation also funded construction of a new "pagoda-style" pavilion covering Hillside Spring, as well as pavilions at Black-Sulphur and Bromide Springs. The unusual one at Hillside consisted merely of a shingled roof structure resting on four native stone corner supports, surrounded by a retaining wall and grassed banks sloping away from the spring. Workmen revitalized the spring by scooping out a large amount of sediment that had accumulated in the basin, then laid a concrete floor in the bottom to

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[23] Ibid.; Emanuel to Greene, October 16, 1909, LS, PNP; French to SI, September 6, 1910, Superintendent's reports, PNP; "Appropriations Necessary for the Protection and Improvement of Platt National Park for the Year Ending June 30, 1911," Superintendent's reports, PNP; French to Secretary of the Interior Walter L. Fisher, September 18, 1912, ibid.

keep the water clear of sediment. To facilitate access from the town, French constructed a concrete dam, incorporating a wagon bridge atop, across Rock Creek at the foot of First Street West, and another at Atoka Avenue.[24]

The two-year drought that gripped the region also caused Buffalo and Antelope Springs to diminish during 1910, and to finally cease flowing altogether early the next spring. Consequently, visitation also declined, for without the springs there was little else to attract people to Platt. The park recorded only 768 people camping in the park longer than three days during fiscal year 1911.[25] So severe was the drought that both Superintendents Greene and French nevertheless invited cities in the region to obtain water via rail tank car, though none availed themselves of the opportunity. The springs recovered somewhat by the following spring and in April both Antelope and Buffalo began flowing again, but at a greatly diminished rate. French tried to revive Cliff-

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[24] Ibid.; French to SI, June 30, 1911, Superintendent's reports.

[25] Platt recorded 124,078 visitors to Bromide Spring during 1911, but that number decreased to only 35,000 just two years later. Many of those were repeat visitors from the town of Sulphur. Also of note, the park began issuing vehicle permits in 1910. During the following year, rangers registered 7 automobiles and 7 hacks. Act. Secretary Jesse E. Wilson to French, October 14, 1910, Buildings, c&r, 1910-13, box 49, CF, PNP, RG 79; *Report on Platt and Wind Cave National Parks, Sullys Hill Park, Casa Grande Ruin, Muir Woods, Petrified Forest, and Other National Monuments, Including a List of Bird Reserves - 1911*. (Washington, D. C.: 1912), p. 3 (hereinafter cited as *Report on Platt NP*); *Report of the Superintendent of the Platt National Park to the Secretary of the Interior*, 1913, (Washington, D. C.: 1914), p. 9.

Bromide Spring by drilling into the surrounding rock and installing a new pipe, but the attempt failed.[26]

French, meantime, was dissatisfied with the headquarters building and with the condition of park residences. In fall 1911 he wrote to Washington requesting funds to construct a new office, and to buy a safe, to better protect government records and other property. Although French's recommendation advanced to the point of preparing plans, the secretary advised him a few months later that the Interior appropriation for Platt, only $5,000.00, was hardly enough to cover employee salaries, much less construct a new office. A year later, French renewed his appeal, complaining that the old Leeper cabin leaked and was infested with rats and snakes because it had been "cheaply constructed of rock and lime and sand cement, the intention of the two old Germans who built it being that it was to serve merely as a summer camping house."[27] He asked for $10,000.00 to build a new permanent office at a more convenient location in West Central Park near the entrance to Second Street West. French's request, however, failed to generate the needed funds.

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[26] French to SI, April 15, 1912 and May 13, 1912, Superintendent's reports; Boeger, *Oklahoma Oasis*, pp. 87-88; Eight new comfort stations also were built under contract at various locations around the park.

[27] Clement Ucker, chief clerk, DOI, to French, October 24, 1911, Buildings, c&r, 1903-13, box 49, CF, PNP, RG 79; Ucker to French, November 21, 1911, ibid.; Assist. Sec. C. A. Thompson to French, February 13, 1912, ibid.; The quotation is taken from French to SI, September 18, 1912, Superintendent's reports, PNP.

Pollution of the streams with raw sewage continued to plague the park. French persisted in his justifications, even though he estimated the cost at over $50,000.00. But the 1912 budget for maintenance totaled only $10,000.00, with most that obligated for salaries. And, there was the department's stance that the town should bear the financial burden of its construction. Superintendent French, however, worked to broker an agreement between the town council and the secretary of the interior to jointly fund the project for common good. A refined estimate reduced the cost to about $35,000.00. Congress concurred with the proposal by including it in legislation that year. In his 1913 annual report, French announced that Sulphur had met its commitment, prompting the secretary to send an inspector to the park for the purpose of designing the system based on a plan prepared some years previous. The main line started at the Artesian Hotel and ran southward into the park, crossing Rock Creek near Lincoln Bridge. It then paralleled the north side of the creek to a point about one thousand feet below Bromide Springs, where it discharged into the stream. The town council promised to construct a septic plant near there to dispose of the waste. Two branch lines served the northern and eastern parts of town, including five new buildings being constructed at the Deaf School. When it was discovered that the sewer had no connections west of Rock Creek, an additional branch was later added to appease West Side residents, who became decidedly surly over the omission. The contract was awarded to E. M. Eby of Wellington, Kansas in September.

The arrival of Engineer E. A. Keys on October 13, 1913 as project supervisor happened to coincide with French's departure for another assignment, thus Keys was appointed acting superintendent until a new man could be transferred to replace French. By the time Richard A. Sneed, one of Sulphur's earliest promoters, took charge in mid-February the sewer system was all but complete.[28] The appropriation had also allowed for surveying and constructing almost two miles of roadway along Travertine Creek. "It traverses a very beautiful section of the park, following the meanders of the Travertine Creek," Sneed commented, "so that pretty waterfalls along this creek are easily visible by occupants of passing vehicles and the beautiful wildflowers and overhanging trees on both sides of the road complete the attractive scenic effect."[29] The task of building the road, however, was not an easy one. Construction began in early May and required three months to complete.

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[28] By 1913, the park had an inventory of five employee residences, five barns, seven pavilions, and an office building. Only one building had been constructed by the government--a barn measuring 20 feet by 28 feet located just south of the superintendent's house. The others had been built by townspeople prior to the creation of the reservation in 1902. Inspector to SI, November 10, 1913 and November 15, 1913, Buildings, box 50, CF, PNP, RG 79; Long-time employee Robert A. Earl was terminated effective October 12, 1912 for unspecified reasons. Earl's house was boarded up for about a month until French gained permission to rent it to R. E. Pullen, a local citizen who agreed to perform "scavenger" work picking up litter in the park in exchange for paying rent. French to SI, October 7, 1912, Buildings, C&R, 1903-13, box 49, ibid.; W. B. Acker to French, October 12, 1912, ibid.; French to SI, December 14, 1912, ibid.; Pullen was hired in January 1913. Asst. Sec. Lewis C. Saylin to French, January 20, 1913, ibid.; The sewer was declared complete on March 15, 1914. *Report of the Superintendent of the Platt National Park, 1914*, (Washington, D. C.: 1914), p. 16.

[29] Travertine road cost $3,600.00 to build. Ibid., p. 8.

Visitation remained low during 1913 and 1914, partially because Congress failed to enact the appropriations bill including operating funds for Platt. Consequently, French had been forced to cease maintenance functions after July 1, just at the peak of the season. Weeds proliferated at an alarming rate "and the park generally assumed a neglected appearance which caused the visitors to return to their homes, or to move on to other resorts, carrying with them the report that the park had been abandoned by the Government . . . ."[30] A deficiency bill, finally passed in October, allowed activities to resume, although by that time of the year the damage to visitation was irreparable.

The ups and downs Platt experienced reflected conditions in the national parks and monuments on the whole. All park areas were under the umbrella of federal protection, yet several disparate agencies exercised administrative control over them, depending in large measure on the respective agency responsible for the land at the time each park was established. In an odd contradiction of missions, the U. S. Army managed Yellowstone, the first national park, along with Yosemite and all the national battlefields. Other parks set aside from timberlands operated under the auspices of the Forest Service. The Indian Bureau or the General Land Office oversaw parks, including Platt, carved from former Indian lands. For a number of years in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Congress saw no particular conflict in that arrangement. The prevailing attitude

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[30] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

seemed to be that federal protection was all that mattered, but as the system expanded to include a greater diversity of resources, special interest groups like the Sierra Club became concerned that the various agencies functioned under different mandates. The Forest Service, for example, existed to control timber harvesting, grazing, and other utilitarian uses of public lands. None were charged with preservation of natural or historical properties. The Sierra Club therefore began lobbying Congress in 1910 to create a special new agency within the Interior Department whose sole mission would be to administer parks and monuments. The Sierra Club and other public interest groups also began sponsoring annual national parks' conferences the following year to advance preservation ethic by heightening awareness among officials and the general public. The concept was given further momentum when the Taft administration lent its support to the creation of a new agency specifically for that purpose. Superintendent Sneed attended the 1915 conference, held in Berkeley, California during March and presided over by Assistant Secretary of the Interior Stephen T. Mather, who was destined to become the first director of the National Park Service. Sneed returned convinced that, "The interchange of ideas and experiences pertaining to the administration of the various national parks necessarily were helpful to each park representative . . . and was what I

consider a long step toward placing all the parks on a common footing under a business administration."[31]

Fired with enthusiasm for the potential of a unified national park system, Sneed succeeded in giving the old stone office a general facelift that spring. He was authorized only $250.00 for the work, an amount barely sufficient to cover the materials. But, by combining emergency funds with that amount, he had workmen tear out the original chimney, which was supported on the ceiling joists in the center of the house, and construct a new one within one of the walls. At the same time, they demolished the old porch and replaced it with an entirely new structure resting on new stone piers. After clearing vermin from the attic space and walls, the superintendent had his men hang new paper, paint all woodwork, and re-shingle the roof. Preparing his annual report, Sneed proudly informed the secretary: "The office now presents a very neat and attractive appearance and will serve very well for this park for some years to come."[32]

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[31] R. A. Sneed to SI, May 13, 1915, Superintendent's reports.

[32] In June, Sneed also constructed a causeway across Rock Creek suitable for automobiles and planted some two hundred trees within the park. Sneed also changed his mind about leasing out bathhouses inside the park, something he supported prior to the national parks conference. Sneed no doubt discussed the subject with colleagues more experienced than himself, perhaps the superintendent from Hot Springs. In any event, Sneed became convinced that such facilities should be owned and operated by the government. ibid.; see also his 1914 annual report, p. 9.

It may have been fortunate that Sneed's predecessor had not been successful in building a new office along the creek bottom. A minor disaster struck the park when floodwaters raged down Rock and Travertine Creeks during the night of January 21, 1916, demolishing almost everything in its path. Portions of the new Travertine Road were taken out, along with entire sections of roadway along Rock Creek. Both Washington and Lincoln Bridges suffered damage. But the flood's greatest force struck the Bromide area, completely destroying the wire suspension bridge and the pavilion, and carrying away the watchman's house. Water-born debris from town, including parts of houses, furniture, trees, clothing, and tons of hay, lodged in the tree tops along the stream and broke down some 6500 feet of recently built park fencing. Old-timers later informed Sneed that the water was nine feet higher than anyone had ever seen it. The superintendent initially attributed the cause of the flood to a three-inch snowfall that night, combined with rain and sleet. While those undoubtedly contributed to the disaster, later investigation revealed the true culprit—an old grade put up across a ravine north of town by the long-defunct Inter-urban Railway. That roadbed had acted as an earthen dam, retaining tons of water until the structure finally gave way, releasing a torrent all at once directly through town and into the park.[33]

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[33] Sneed to SI, August 26, 1916, Superintendent's reports, PNP.

Sneed and his men devoted the next several months affecting repairs and attempting to restore Platt in time for the summer visitor season. Removing debris and generally cleaning up the park was an enormous, time-consuming job, but replacing the facilities lost to the flood was even more challenging. Fortunately, the creation of the National Park Service within the Department of the Interior that year elevated the parks from stepchild status, giving them a dedicated budget that was not forced to compete with the mandates of other departments and agencies. It could not have come at a more fortuitous moment for devastated Platt National Park.

Sneed lost no time in justifying emergency funds to replace those recently destroyed. Amid the process of establishing the new agency, Congress approved a special $10,000.00 appropriation on March 31 for repairs at Platt and an engineer was dispatched from Washington to lay plans for constructing a new bridge near Bromide. He selected a suitable location 350 feet upstream from the site of the former wire suspension bridge, positioning the new structure to cross the creek diagonally to make it more resistant to the force of any future floods. The department executed a contract with the Illinois Steel Bridge Company on June 26 to construct a 10-foot wide by 120-foot long steel truss structure resting on concrete piers and provided with electric lights. Park laborers also dismantled the remnants of the ruined Bromide pavilion during April and early May, and began erecting a new one over the original 20-foot by 48-foot concrete floor. However,

Sneed took advantage of the available funds to extend the floor 14 feet east to provide a paved approach leading from the proposed truss bridge. He described the new pavilion, which required most of that summer to complete, as a "bungalow style with 4 whole and 2 half windows along is front." The interior was plastered and lattice work extended between the supporting piers.[34]

About the same time, the park contracted with John T. Chapman to build a new four-room cottage for Laborer W. K. Milligan, the watchman at Bromide Springs that had watched helplessly as the flood carried his little frame home downstream, crushing it against the trees below.[35] As a result of the flood sweeping away almost everything man-made at the Bromide area, the park had to build two new comfort stations at that location, as well as another near Lincoln Bridge. Also gone were the thirty-six wooden benches installed near the spring a few years earlier. The arrival of warm weather, coupled with the effect of the flood waters, again created a prolific growth of weeds and other vegetation throughout the park, making it nearly impossible for employees to control it. "The damages done by this flood have been the cause of a great deal of inconvenience in

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[34] The steel bridge at Bromide cost $4353.00 to build and was completed April 21, 1917. It was also necessary to rebuild the northeast wing wall connected to Washington Bridge, two retaining walls at Lincoln Bridge, and to replace the gravel floor of the latter structure, all of which had been damaged by the January 1916 flood. ibid.; Sneed to SI, September 3, 1917, ibid.; A drawing of the "New Bromide Pavilion" is in Pavilions, box 50, CF, PNP, RG 79; E. Ayers to Sneed, July 5, 1916, Construction Projects, box 50, CF, PNP, RG 79; Water containers were added to Bromide Pavilion in 1918. Superintendent to Director, National Park Service, June 20, 1918, Pavilions, box 50, ibid.

[35] A plan for the laborer's house is appended to Supervisor to Superintendent of National Parks, Dept. of the Interior, July 24, 1916, ibid.

the administration of this park during the present season," Sneed lamented, ". . . especially because of the fact that there are a greater number of visitors here this year than at any previous season for the past eight years."[36]

During the next two years, Platt regained a sense of normalcy. However, Sneed installed elevated vehicle causeways at the four creek crossings along Travertine Road, and another across Rock Creek on Bromide Lane as a safeguard against future flooding. Once freed of restoration work, the superintendent finally had time for improving recreational facilities in the park and improving the springs. A major addition was the construction of a sixty-seven foot long dam across Travertine Creek, just below Panther Falls, that would serve a dual purpose as a flood control and a swimming pool for park visitors. "Sodium-Chloride Spring," so named for its chemical content, had been discovered near Bromide in 1915, but the flood precluded any follow-up investigation until two years later. After it was determined that the new spring promised a long-term flow, Sneed negotiated with the foreman of the bridge work to construct a concrete retaining wall to isolate its waters from nearby Rock Creek.[37]

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[36] The benches were rebuilt at Bromide, as well as 6500 feet of smooth wire fence and the repair of another 2,000 feet. The fence work was accomplished under contract with Willim H. Ray. Sneed to SI, August 26, 1916, Superintendent's reports; Sneed to Director, NPS, September 3, 1917, ibid.

[37] Ibid.

The first decade of Platt's existence as a national park had been marked by a long period of financial hardship wrought initially by its tenuous status with the federal government, and later as an unappreciated stepchild foisted on the Indian Bureau when the new state of Oklahoma failed to adopt it. While Joseph Swords had placed the park on a more substantial footing during his tenure, his biases with the local community had unnecessarily prolonged the riff between competing factions. Superintendents Greene and French, both professionals transferred to Platt from elsewhere in the department, did much to improve relations by their even-handed treatment and dedication to developing the park for the benefit of Sulphur, the region, and the nation. Although the 1916 flood devastated Platt, it proved to be a blessing in disguise. The destruction of primitive facilities that might have served in makeshift fashion for years longer had been swept away in a single night, forcing the government to make a large capital investment in the park just when it was brought under the administration of the National Park Service. That fortuitous coincidence created an opportunity for the new agency to utilize its newly established design office to plan replacement facilities sensitive to resources and in keeping with national park standards.

Chapter 5

"The All-Together Pull"

Summer 1919 witnessed the arrival of a new superintendent, Thomas Ferris, and the reinforcement of amiable relations with the Sulphur community. Ferris assumed his duties just in time for a huge two-day picnic, sponsored by the town, honoring the returning veterans of World War I. With the conflict in Europe now over, the nation--and the National Park System--stood at the threshold of a promising new era. That picnic and Ferris's enthusiasm for expanding recreational opportunities at Platt reflected the management strategy of Director Stephen T. Mather. Mather believed that the success of the National Park Service would depend on a delicate balance of public relations and salesmanship promoting park philosophy, combined with wise management policies to preserve the resources for which those lands were set aside. Both Mather and his assistant, Horace M. Albright, adhered to the concept that parks were good business for local communities and that they should be as accessible as possible. Both officials

worked closely with the national press to publicize the park system, recognizing that public awareness of the agency's mission equated to strength and broad-base support. They also saw great value in the delivery of tangible benefits to the public, especially local constituencies.

Despite Ferris' desire to further develop the park, Washington apparently felt that Platt had received its share of new facilities for the present, thus it was two years before he could make significant headway. Ferris, in the interim, made good use of the time cultivating allies in Sulphur. By late 1921 he had organized an informal advisory committee of town businessmen to be directly involved in identifying park needs and planning facilities. For that era, it was an unusually progressive move, yet higher officials in the Service conceded it was probably appropriate given Platt's circumstances. The Park Service chief civil engineer, George E. Goodwin, recognized that Platt was not only one of the smallest parks in the system, but because it lay within the city limits of Sulphur, "its proper development represents rather a different problem than that effecting our larger western and more remotely located parks." He also noted that most visitors were from Oklahoma "and for the people of Sulphur it takes the place of a city park and is used by them largely as such."[1] That, in fact, was exactly what Congress had contemplated and

[1] George E. Goodwin to Director, National Park Service, January 11, 1922, Inspections, box 10, Central Files, Platt National Park, Records of the National Park Service, Record Group 79, National Archives, Fort Worth, Texas.

hoped to avoid when it authorized Sulphur Springs Reservation a decade earlier. But, subsequent events had altered the destiny of Platt.

Heavy public use, disproportionate to the size of the park, made the demand for restrooms especially critical—with 2,000 – 3,000 people being forced at times to rely on a single toilet, according to the superintendent. The partnership Ferris formed with the community paid dividends immediately when citizens offered to underwrite the costs of two new comfort stations, and to enlarge two other temporary restrooms built that year as a stopgap measure at Bromide. But, public involvement also had its price. Yielding to pressure from the planning committee, Ferris agreed the park might also construct a community building for their use, and increase the size and number of campgrounds to accommodate more long-term visitors, who, not coincidentally, would bring a corresponding influx of business to the town.

After convincing Mather of the toilet shortage, Ferris obtained the services of Landscape Engineer D. R. Hull from Yosemite National Park to come up with a suitable design for the structures. Hull visited the park that fall and forwarded a draft design in December. The "local committee in charge of the park development," however, had two objections. First, the members preferred the structures be made of concrete, with stucco finish, rather than frame, to reduce vandalism. Concrete, they pointed out, would also be more fire resistant. They soundly rejected Hull's concept that the community building

could house a comfort station because it would be impossible "to keep down the scent from the rest of the building."[2] Reflecting 1920s propriety, the committee also thought men's and women's facilities should not be under the same roof. In the interest of avoiding conflict, Hull consented to redesign the buildings to incorporate the suggested changes, adding pessimistically, "although I will say I have never heard of a comfort station being lost by fire. As for the jackknife artist, he will have ample opportunity to display his art on whatever material we might use for the buildings."[3]

Ferris was well aware of the rancor that had divided the citizens of Sulphur for many years, but largely through the efforts of recent superintendents their energies had been re-directed to embrace Assistant Director Albright's theme that "parks are good business."[4] Ferris optimistically announced that, "they have gotten together, have buried the hatchet, and are now working in harmony and with a perfect understanding that each side is to be fair to each other in every respect."[5] He confided, however, that maintaining the balance imposed on the Park Service a responsibility to make improvements in equal

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[2] D. R. Hull to Superintendent Thomas Ferris, December 15, 1921, Community Building, box 50, CF, PNP, RG 79; Ferris to Hull, December 25, 1921, ibid; Farris to Hull, December 19, 1921, Buildings, leases, box 49, ibid..

[3] Hull to Ferris, January 5, 1922, Buildings, construction & repair, box 49, CF, PNP, RG 79.

[4] Albright wrote a speech on this theme that he delivered on numerous occasions to "sell" chambers of commerce on the benefits of promoting the national parks. Ronald A. Foresta, *America's National Parks and Their Keepers*, (Washington, D. C.: 1984), p. 24.

[5] Ferris to Goodwin, January 17, 1922, Buildings, construction, box 50, ibid.

proportions to the respective sections of town to avoid any perception that the agency was favoring either East or West. Ferris' evenhandedness resulted in a pledge by the town to raise $16,000.00 for new park developments, an action that also empowered the townspeople to influence design.

That became readily apparent when Ferris, on behalf of town leaders, objected to Goodwin's plan for a campground at Bromide Springs. West Sulphur, he explained, would feel "discriminated against" because only 100 – 150 families could be accommodated with toilets and shade in the area Goodwin proposed. He added that large numbers of invalids camped there, sometimes for lengthy periods, to drink the waters. Preserving natural areas of the park would be a secondary consideration to increasing visitor facilities, but "with careful protection of the trees in this space, and some nice walks laid off and graveled and . . . some flower beds where practical. This would leave us some 6 or 7 acres of beauty spot land, which is more than we would have time to tend and keep in good shape along with our other duties." Yet, in attempting to promote peaceful coexistence with the town, Ferris belied erosion of his own professional objectivity. "I assure you," he wrote to Goodwin, "I think it very important and very necessary for the all-to-gether pull we have been trying to make for our little park that we

concede the East half of the beauty spot as laid off in your map as a campground, at present at least."[6]

Again bowing to community wishes, Goodwin directed Hull to modify the drawings and plans to reflect the desired changes. The comfort stations would be constructed of concrete with a rough spatter finish to present a more natural appearance, and they would have screened windows on the gabled ends. The community buildings, housing showers and dressing rooms, were to be frame construction, which Hull considered more economical and esthetically compatible in the park setting. By mid-summer 1922, the park had new community buildings—one each at Bromide and Cold Springs—and new comfort stations at each of the two campgrounds serviced by an extension added to the existing sewer system. Upon completion of the expanded campground and new buildings, Mayor R. L. Merrill expressed the town's satisfaction with the project, to which it had contributed $13,095.00. Nevertheless, the mayor wrote to Director Mather informing him that while the town had willingly assisted the park to accommodate visitors from at least a dozen states, "the appropriation for Platt National Park should be, by far, greater that [sic] any time in the past."[7]

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[6] Ibid.

[7] R. L. Merrill to Director, National Park Service, August 7, 1922, Buildings, c&r, box 49, CF, PNP, RG 79; Other documents relating to the comfort stations/community buildings are: W. L. Scott to Hull, January 12, 1922, ibid.; Mather to Goodwin, February 10, 1922, ibid.; Hull to Ferris, March 14, 1922, ibid.; Hull to Ferris, May 3, 1922, ibid.; Hull to Ferris, May 17, 1922 (with plat showing the locations of the new buildings), ibid.; Ferris to Albright, August 15, 1922, ibid.

Despite the new conveniences, Ferris' successor, Superintendent Robert G. Morris, found it difficult to convince some long-time park patrons to modify their habit of pitching their tents wherever they pleased. Morris notified the public that all overnight guests must use the designated campgrounds. An Ardmore physician, Dr. E. F. Comegys, for example, had established what he considered to be an exclusive semi-permanent bivouac on Rock Creek, opposite the new facilities. When rangers discovered unauthorized parties using Comegys' tents during his winter absence, they evicted the interlopers, notifying the doctor that no one was looking after the property he had left in the park. "These people are dirty, have cut down several large grape vines, small trees and are objectionable in several ways," Morris informed Comegys, advising him at the same time about the new policy. Ignoring the favor Morris had extended, Comegys took Morris to task over the restrictions, stating that he had used the old site for many years and had always kept it well maintained. Moreover, he preferred not to use the regular Bromide campground because of the diseased persons acquiring water there. Comegys accused Morris of abusing his authority, "without giving me any reason whatever other than that you have 'DECIDED,' which is your privilege and power . . . ."[8] Morris

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[8] Dr. E. F. Comegys to Supt. Robert G. Morris, April 15, 1925, Complaints 1909-37, box 9, CF, PNP, RG 79. Additional letters relating to this incident are: Morris to Comegys, February 15, 1924, ibid.; Morris to Comegys, March 13, 1925, ibid.

nevertheless stood by his decision to confine overnight use to the established campgrounds.

When Morris's replacement, Forest L. Carter, arrived in the park shortly thereafter, he leveled his own criticisms of the condition in which he found the park. Morris himself, according to Carter, had been keeping four cows, five horses, and about fifty chickens near his residence, and when he moved out, Morris absconded with all the government furniture. Continuing his initial inspection, Carter discovered the trails were in poor condition, the springs rundown, tools and other park equipment poorly maintained. He also reported the existence of some permanent camps used intermittently by local people, like Dr. Comegys, who wanted exclusive use of the sites at all times. The new superintendent found fault as well with the sewer and water systems, complaining they had never been laid out properly, in fact, the park sewer was an afterthought connected to the town's main line. A disgusted Carter voiced his displeasure to the director in Washington: "The shortcut and plainout way of explaining the conditions found in Platt National Park when I arrived is to say that to me the park resembles in this condition nothing more or less than a pretty well run down ranch."[9] Carter apparently was so discouraged with his assignment that he left Platt after less than six months. Perhaps his most significant contribution was putting into motion a request for $48,000.00 for

[9] Supt. Forest L. Carter to Director, NPS, May 25, 1925, Inspections 1922-33, box 10, CF, PNP, RG 79.

road improvements, which Congress granted in 1925. The existing park roads, he noted, "were made for horse-drawn vehicles and they are being widened, graded, and re-surfaced and made as good as the highways leading to Platt."[10]

William E. Branch reported to fill the vacancy left by Carter in November. Branch, too, had definite ideas for elevating Platt to national park standards. He began aggressively pursuing his vision by once again having Architect Hull detailed to the park to conduct a thorough inspection for the purpose of formulating a comprehensive plan for bringing it up to Service standards. Branch, meantime, had his men tear down old outbuildings near park headquarters while Hull laid plans for remodeling the office, dividing the interior into more functional spaces. The condition of employee housing concerned both men. "Half a dozen houses now scatter themselves over the area like so many run-down farms, each with its fences, farm lot and outbuildings," Hull remarked in his report. He recommended demolishing the extraneous structures at the present sites and moving the houses to a central location, perhaps near the superintendent's residence, where they could be consolidated in a single compound. As for the superintendent's residence, a makeshift composite to start with, he suggested replacing it with an entirely new house.

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Hull had no previous experience with an "urban" park like Platt. Many city streets led directly into the park. Distressed with the uncontrolled access, he urged that some entrances be closed. "Platt, so far as I know," wrote Hull, "holds the record for number of entrances to a National Park, having at present 11 of great or less importance."[11] Branch and Hull moved immediately to have the principal roads resurfaced with "Troy brown gravel" to reduce dust clouds stirred up by vehicles, creating at the same time a more pleasing visual effect by blending with the surroundings. He also proposed constructing a mile-long "Skyline Drive" atop Bromide Hill leading from the springs to Robber's Roost to enable visitors to view the surrounding countryside.

Unfortunately, Branch, like his predecessor, did not remain at his post long enough to realize most of the changes he envisioned for the park. When he left at the end of September 1926, Branch had managed only to install rather elaborate water dispensing systems at Bromide Pavilion, Medicine Spring, and at Sodium-Chloride Spring. Platt otherwise witnessed little change during the next few years, though it could take pride in hosting a yearly average of nearly 50,000 visitors.

The recent era of amicable relations between the Park Service and the local community was jeopardized in late 1928 when the a representative of the National

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[11] Report of Inspection by D. H. Hull, March 13-15, 1926, ibid. Hull also recommended concentrating the herds of buffalo, elk (transplanted from Yellowstone years earlier) , and deer, then separated and fed in three areas within the park. In fact, he questioned whether the elk should be kept at all, since they were not indigenous to the region.

Loyalty League complained to Superintendent King Crippen that one D. McCarroll, purportedly a physician, "every day harangues the crowd in the park, slandering Catholics and thereby inviting public discorder."[12] McCarroll and his partner, Dr. Calvin D. Gulley, operating under the guise of the "Twentieth Century Health Association," established themselves near Bromide Spring to give lectures using "violent and disturbing" language, including criticism of public officials, to induce visitors to join their organization, for a fifty-dollar membership fee. In return, the doctors offered free physical examinations, which presumably would reveal maladies that only they could cure. But, when Crippen attempted to eject the two for violating the park regulation prohibiting commercial enterprises, they became insolent and abusive. Following the confrontation, Gulley and McCarroll circulated a petition among visitors objecting to "the management of Platt National Park in stopping free speech and religious services, and educational and scientific lectures and denying American citizens their constitutional rights, leaving nothing in the way of entertainment for visitors."[13] So few were the recreational opportunities at the park, one petitioner even complained there was not so much as "baby swing." The plaintiffs sent the petition, bearing some four hundred

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[12] Ignatious I. Murphy, vice president, National Loyality League, to Superintendent King Crippen, October 14, 1928, Complaints, 1909-37, box 9, CF, PNP, RG 79.

[13] Petition, August 1, 1929, ibid.

signatures, to Oklahoma Senators W. B. Pine and Elmer Thomas with an appeal to take action on their behalf. Responding to his constituents, Thomas personally visited the park early the following spring to examine the situation.

Although the senator apparently skirted the inflammatory issue of free speech, the Sulphur Chamber of Commerce took advantage of the golden opportunity to support Crippen and the park by pointing out how it might be improved. Thomas ended his tour by requesting Secretary of the Interior Milton Keating to submit a list of park needs, no doubt generated by the superintendent. Included on the unabashed wish-list were boundary fencing, suitable entrances, road paving, additional staff, one hundred new park benches, and, for good measure, that new house for the superintendent.[14] The Chamber also highlighted its desire to see the skyline road developed over Bromide Hill and to pave the highway leading south of town through the park. Crippen, not surprisingly, advised Horace Albright, who had assumed the directorship a few months earlier, that he concurred with the town's recommendations, particularly the proposal for a new superintendent's house. The present one, he explained, "is old, illy planned and most inconvenient. It was constructed from buildings taken over by the Government when

[14] Milton Keating to Senator W. B. Pine, April 17, 1929, Lands, repairs & improvements, box 48, ibid.

Platt was acquired. The rooms are just boarded up with rough lumber and covered with cloth and papered."[15]

The still-simmering free-speech incident, even though it became encumbered by local politics, brought into sharp focus the long-standing difference of opinion about the purpose of Platt National Park. Did its resources truly possess national significance, or did the park simply serve the recreational needs of the local region? The issue came to the attention of one powerful member of Congress, Representative Louis C. Cramton, chairman of the Interior appropriations sub-committee. Stirred by the recent tempest over the lack of facilities at Platt, Cramton compared Platt with the likes of Yellowstone:

> It is an absurdity to use such a term [national park] in connections with the 'Platt institution,' It consists of a very limited acreage and a few springs and is absolutely without distinctive scenic features which should be possessed by an area given such a designation . . . and [it] should not be permitted to enjoy a distinctive designation that it does not deserve.[16]

Cramton called loudly for Congress to either reduce the status of Platt by re-designating it a national monument, or transfer it to the State of Oklahoma "as a public playground as a

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[15] Crippen to Director, NPS, May 29, 1929, ibid.

[16] Quoted in *Sulphur Times-Democrat*, January 16, 1930. Indeed, Cramton's argument may have been based in part on the fact that Platt even incorporated a nine-hole golf course at that time. Undated report, "The Civilian Conservation Corps and Its Work at Platt National Park," filed in Superintendent's reports.

part of the state park system."[17] Backing his words, Cramton drafted legislation to remove Platt from federal jurisdiction.

Oklahoma residents were quick to counter the congressman's challenge to their only national park. "America has but one national park [Yellowstone] that attracts more visitors than Platt National Park in the Oklahoma Arbuckles," trumpeted the *Daily Oklahoman*. "That is the best answer to the Michigan representative who has introduced a bill authorizing its abandonment."[18] Beyond the claims of Platt's "scenic beauty and national wonders," supporters expressed their concern that the position of superintendent would degenerate into a political plum were the state to administer the park. Besides, the press concluded, "The Government took the land and people took their losses in silence in order to have the park established." As unfounded as that statement may have been, it nevertheless made good copy for already infuriated local readers. The Sulphur Chamber of Commerce immediately mustered its forces to insure that the Oklahoma delegation in both houses of Congress rose in the park's defense.

Amid the firestorm that erupted from a relatively minor infraction, Crippen left for another job. His replacement was none other than William E. Branch, who had served at the park during the better part of 1926. Branch, whose experience included three years

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[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

as a ranger at Mesa Verde, had taken a higher paying position with the Indian Bureau at Muskogee, but had been persuaded to return because of his popularity and the confidence the director had in him to handle the current situation at Platt.

Whether or not Crippen's departure was a direct result of the uproar, Director Albright exercised diplomacy by pleading ignorance, telling the legislators that the problem may have derived from questions of policy rather than the ill-advised actions of any superintendent. The director was more forthright in his explanation about the lack of traditional development at the park:

> Unfortunately, one of the things that militated against Platt National Park from a national standpoint is that so many of the visitors from local communities regard it in the nature of a city park – more a place where all sorts of amusements like Coney Island entertainments, hurdy-gurdies, and the like should be permitted, including extensive playground development in the way of swings, slides, bathing pools, and the like . . . Furthermore, I have heard that our superintendent has had trouble through the insistence at occasional periods of so-called Bolshevik orators and also patent medicine venders to avail themselves of the congregation of large masses of people in a national park by speech-making and the like, and of course this is something from which we must protect our visitors at all times.[19]

[19] Albright to Senator Elmer Thomas, January 31, 1930, Complaints, 1909-37, box 9, CF, PNP, RG 79.

Meantime, Albright instructed Branch to investigate the matter with a view to determining "just what the problem from our standpoint to which objection is made." He suggested that Branch surreptitiously contact some of the individual petitioners in an attempt to find out if they really supported the complaint, or if they had simply signed it in response to peer pressure. Albright was convinced that the superintendent should rely on the support of the Chamber of Commerce "in whose civic judgment and public-spiritedness we have always had the greatest confidence."[20] Branch carried out his assignment with great success. Just few days later an anonymous, and probably embarrassed, group of citizens sent a note directly to Albright confessing that most of the petitioners had affixed their names to the document without realizing the true nature of the complaint. The townspeople not only concurred with Superintendent Crippen's actions, but felt he would have been justified in physically ejecting the snake-oil salesmen from the park.[21] They assured him that despite the misunderstanding, the Park

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[20] Both quotations here are taken from Albright to Branch, January 31, 1930, ibid.

[21] Further details relating to this incident are found in [anonymous to Frank Lee, U. S. district attorney, July 11, 1930, ibid.; The government declined to prosecute Gulley and McCarroll on the ground that park regulations were vague regarding what constituted "business" activities. The U. S. attorney suggested that the Interior Department needed to formulate a more specific rule "prohibiting speeches, addresses, or sermons in the park without permission in writing from the superintendent." The secretary approved the measure. Director Arno B. Cammerer to superintendent, August 11, 1930, ibid.

Service could rely on the support of the community.[22] With the fate of Platt teetering on the brink, the time was at hand to mend fences.

Congressman Cramton pursued his vendetta against Platt for several more months, but the measures he proposed were eventually defeated.[23] It had been a close call for the park that served to awaken community leaders that potential enemies—with long memories--occupied the halls of Congress. However, no one could have foreseen that world economic events were about to have drastic and far-reaching influences on Platt.

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[22] Anonymous to Director, NPS, February 4, 1930, ibid.; The park and Sulphur cooperated on two key projects at that time. They combined resources, as part of a larger state program, to pave Route 18 through the park during fall 1930. Additionally, the town passed a bond issue to raise $30,000.00 as its share of the proposed new sewer project serving both the city and the park. The National Park Service agreed to provide $15,000.00, contingent on passage of the bond issue. Even though the agency honored that commitment, Congress did not approve the appropriation until later, thus deferring construction. *Sulphur Times-Democrat*, April 3, 1930; ibid., August 28, 1930; "Final Completion Report," March 3, 1931, filed with Superintendent's reports.

[23] Acting Assistant Director A. B. Demaray to superintendent, April 28, 1930, Proposed Legislation, box 6, CF, PNP, RG 79; An important factor figuring in the failure of Cramton's defeat was the lack of a state park system in Oklahoma at that time. The Oklahoma State Park Commission was created in 1935 in as result of New Deal funding. Suzanne H. Schrems, "A Lasting New Deal Legacy: The Civilian Conservation Corps, The National Park Service, and the Development of the Oklahoma State Park System," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, (Winter: 1994-95), p. 371.

Chapter 6

"A Golden Opportunity:" Platt and the New Deal

As the Great Depression tightened its grip on the nation in the early 1930s, thousands of Americans were left jobless. Unemployment skyrocketed from a pre-depression rate of three percent to over twenty-five percent. The effect was apparent even at Platt National Park. "The general economic depression throughout the country has not decreased the number of visitors to the park," Superintendent Branch observed. "However, the length of time spent in the park by the average visitor was very short in comparison with former years. For this reason the camp grounds have not been as crowded at midseason as usual."[1]

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[1] Visitation was 257,664, compared with 178,188 the previous year. Annual report for 1931, Superintendent's reports, archives, Chickasaw National Recreation Area; The sewer system shared by the park, the City of Sulphur, and the Deaf School was finally built during 1931. It consisted of a "four hopper Imhoff sewage disposal plant and sprinkler filter . . . installed at a place remote from the town and Park . . . at a cost of $45,000.00. This removes the menace of sewage contamination from Rock Creek at Bromide and is of untold benefit to the park in health, appearance, and reputation." ibid.

One of the ideas newly elected President Franklin D. Roosevelt advanced for stimulating the economy, as part of his New Deal legislation, was the creation of government work programs to provide meaningful employment and basic income for financially destitute families. The Emergency Conservation Work (E. C. W.) program, however, was aimed at much more than simply providing jobs. Designed for young men, the E. C. W. offered skills training in a disciplined environment involving both physical and spiritual nourishment. Beyond conservation projects to restore and protect vital agricultural lands, Roosevelt envisioned the National Park System as an ideal setting for instilling in the nation's youth a regard for hard work, individualism, and pride in accomplishing something meaningful for the nation.

In early 1933, soon after taking office, Roosevelt summoned his secretaries of labor, agriculture, war, interior, and labor to a meeting for the purpose of establishing the E. C. W. The resulting divisions of responsibility called for the Labor Department to oversee the hiring of unemployed men through state and local welfare agencies. Enrollees were required to be unmarried U. S. citizens between ages eighteen and twenty-five. The basic salary was set at thirty dollars per month, twenty-five of which would be sent directly to the enrollee's family. The U. S. Army would construct and oversee the camps, maintain discipline, conduct physical training, and provide transportation—all areas in which it had vast experience. Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes, working closely

with his counterpart in the Department of Agriculture, took charge of planning and coordinating projects to be accomplished in the national parks and forests. The National Resources Board, comprised of one representative from each department, served as the E. C. W. advisory council to administer the program and establish priorities.[2]

Assistant Director Harold C. Bryant's visit during the previous summer was a timely boon to the development of Platt National Park. Bryant had spent the entire season touring a number of parks and monuments in the West to determine first-hand their condition. Making his first stop at Platt, Bryant remarked, "My main reaction is that Platt is more of a park than I had thought." He noted, however, that it afforded almost nothing for visitors beyond the springs and primitive camping. Suggesting that some of the trails might be developed into fine interpretive nature trails, Bryant proposed that "a naturalist . . . could serve a large number of people and could make the stay of people something more than just a trip to healing springs." Also needed were modern comfort stations in the campgrounds, despite the existing ones being little more than a decade old.[3]

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[2] The E. C. W. was created by P. L. No. 5, March 31, 1933. By the end of the first season in fall 1933, enrollment stood at 248,740 men, plus 14,915 supervisors. Eighty-two percent of the camps and personnel were located in national forests, while national parks accounted for eleven percent. All qualified enrollees, even though they were unmarried, were expected to have dependents. The government estimated that each man was supporting, completely or partially, four or five others, thus an estimated 1,400,000 to 1,700,000 persons benefited from the program. *First Report of the Director of Emergency Conservation Work*, (Washington, D. C.: 1934), pp. 1, 7-8, 10.

[3] All quotations here are from Asst. Director H. C. Bryant to Director, National Park Service, January 27, 1933, Inspections, 1922-33, box 10, Central Files, Platt National Park, Records of the National Park Service, Record Group 79, National Archives, Fort Worth, Texas.

Superintendent Branch undoubtedly made a point of hosting Bryant at his quarters, an experience obviously having the desired effect on the assistant director. By fall 1932, a modern house for the superintendent was under construction on a hilltop in the southern part of the park, adjacent to Buckhorn Road (State Route 18). It was a modest, though attractive, one-story frame cottage with separate garage.[4]

The selection of that location marked the reversal of an earlier decision to centralize employee housing in a single compound. A Park Service architect explained:

> The housing of Park employees at Platt National Park constitutes a unique problem in National Park administration. Because of the limited area of the Park, the great concentration of visitors, and the nearness to the town of Sulphur, instead of concentrating the employee housing at one spot, in order to properly police the area, it is necessary to have residences near the principal campgrounds, and the utility area. Most of the existing residences were built before the establishment of the area as a park, and both are ill-suited architecturally to park usage, and are also poorly located for park purposes. Consequently, the principal problem is to render them less conspicuous. An effort is also being made to limit the amount of space around them, to remove all out-buildings save one garage and

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[4] "Construction Report, Conservation Work, C. C. C. Camp No 808 (NP-1), May 16, 1933 – April 1, 1934," Charles A. Richey to Chief Architect Thomas C. Vint, June 12, 1934, Superintendent's reports. (hereinafter cited as "Construction Report, 1933-34").

woodshed, to limit the gardens, and to prevent the keeping of domestic animals and fowls, an unpopular but necessary procedure.[5]

Bryant's inspection was the impetus for a long list of construction projects Superintendent Branch submitted for the following year. Branch included comfort stations, the new sewer line, and a variety of improvements to the springs, trails, and campgrounds. When Engineer H. A. Kreinkamp spent two weeks in the park in late November 1932 inspecting the work on the almost-completed superintendent's residence, he echoed Bryant's calls for new comfort stations, stating he doubted if any of the obsolete toilets throughout the park would pass inspection. Since the project had not been funded in fiscal year 1933, he strongly urged they be built the next year.[6]

Superintendent Branch immediately recognized that the Civilian Conservation Corps, as the E. C. W. became known, presented "a golden opportunity for Platt National Park."[7] Branch prudently adopted a comprehensive approach to planning improvements in accordance with professional standards and National Park Service values:

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[5] Ibid.

[6] F. A. Kittredge to C. C. Vint, Washington Office, NPS, November 2, 1932, ibid.; H. A. Kreinkamp to Vint, December 1, 1932, Buildings, box 50, CF, PNP, RG 79; List of proposed construction projects, Platt NP, June 22, 1932, ibid.

[7] The Emergency Conservation Works program became so widely referred to as the Civilian Conservation Corps that the name was officially changed in 1937. John Paige, *The Civilian Conservation Corps and the National Park Service, 1933 – 1942*, (Washington, D. C.: 1985), p. 11(hereinafter cited as *CCC and the NPS*).

> The two major plans for the park design proved to be the re-arrangement of the Park road system, and the relocation of the area for the Buffalo and Elk. As soon as these problems were solved, the general plan of the park came into being, and the detailed plans for the various events could be made. In developing the detailed plans every effort was made to insure proper accuracy and to study the problem thoroughly before drawing the plan in its final shape . . . Because of its limited area and the unusually large number of visitors, portions of Platt Park have had almost unbelievably hard usage, and one of the first problems was that of the distribution of crowds, together with provision for camping, picnicking, and the parking of cars so that visitors were assured the maximum of comfort and enjoyment in the Park, while the natural beauties were preserved insofar as possible.[8]

Branch coordinated the preparation of a an extensive renovation program incorporating the expertise of trained foresters, engineers, and landscape architects detailed to the park that spring. "The Springs of Platt National Park constitute its most unique and valuable attraction, and all our Landscape work is being built primarily about

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[8] The first work performed by the C. C. C. involved planting a lawn and landscaping the yard of this residence. As soon as the garage was completed, the driveway was paved with asphalt and in fall 1935 a crew transplanted a number of mature trees, including four large elms. Other ornamental plantings included a hedge, red bud, hawthorn, and native shrubbery. Very early photographs of the house, prior to landscaping, are included in this report. "Construction Report 1933-34."

them," Branch noted in establishing the priorities. Yet he also acknowledged the "antiquated and totally inadequate circulatory system of both roads and trails" that "gives no idea as to the general nature of topography of the park and also because it is poorly organized . . . ." The best way to correct that, he proposed, was to construct a new "Perimeter Road" that would allow visitors to make a complete circuit of the park, seeing as much of it as possible without retracing their course.[9] Branch's vision for Platt was undeniably aggressive, yet he was confident the C. C. C. program represented an unprecedented opportunity to upgrade the facilities to a level commensurate with its more famous counterparts in the National Park System.

Meanwhile, the army laid plans for Camp 808 (also designated Camp NP-1) with military precision and fervor. Brigadier General Cruikshank of the Eighth Corps Area was on-site in April to meet with Branch on the selection of a location within the park. They initially settled on a site meeting the necessary requisites in the southeastern sector of the park. The first contingent of 50 local men erected and activated a tent camp on May 16, 1933. Within another week, the force grew to 169, all Oklahomans. An anonymous author, perhaps Branch, wrote, "Most of the boys in the Camp were without

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[9] "The Civilian Conservation Corps and Its Work at Platt National Park," (undated, c.1933) provides an important overview of planned work, as well as Branch's desire for a comprehensive approach to planning and design. Filed with Superintendent's reports (hereinafter cited as "CCC at PNP").

technical training and many had never before held jobs of any sort."[10] W. L. Scott was designated as camp superintendent; his son, W. L. Scott, Jr. was placed in charge of field operations. One of their first tasks was to identify natural skills and segregate the young men into a variety of job types, including stone masons, sign painters, electricians, tree surgeons, engineers, draftsmen, truck drivers, and concrete workers.[11]

As a result of the haste in which the program was developed, and because C. C. C. members lacked training initially, much of the work during the first season was devoted to labor-intensive activities aimed at keeping the crews busy while the architects planned more complex projects. Scott assigned most of the men to removing an accumulation of logs, brush, and sediment from the creek beds. They also extracted some 1600 large willow trees that had been snaring debris causing congestion, that in turn eroded the banks along the south side of Flower Park.[12] Other crews carried out general cleanup work park-wide to remove rubbish, abandoned fences, and old buildings that were either not needed, or were to be replaced. At Central Park, laborers eliminated the last vestiges

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[10] "Six Months in a C. C. C. Camp," (c. fall 1933), ibid.

[11] The camp was initially commanded by Captain Fred W. Adams, Twenty-ninth Infantry. He was assisted by Captain Robert Bradly, a reserve Engineer officer, and Lieutenant Joseph E. Bain, camp medical officer. Adam was succeeded on November 1 by a Captain Dobbins. This report, incidentally, contains a roster of all camp supervisory and technical personnel. "Construction Report, 1933-34;" Camp activities also included weekly religious services and competitive sports events among teams formed at neighboring camps. The latter, organized by the army, were designed to improve physical conditioning and to promote esprit de corps through camp identity. ibid.

[12] Undated press release, (c.1934), filed with Superintendent's reports.

of Old Sulphur, clearing away still visible foundations, filling holes, and obliterating former streets.[13]

Scott assigned some members to more skilled work, incorporating on-the-job training, making improvements at Black Sulphur Spring, where the architects and engineers laid out a new parking area, a driveway with turn-court, and a sidewalk made of native flagstone. The project provided valuable experience that would be put to good use on future work.

While part of the crew executed that work, other workers cleaned sediment and debris from Buffalo Spring and began building a stone basin twenty-five feet in diameter, surrounded by a six-foot wide walkway and low stone wall incorporating a bench along the inside. The architects also designed a stone wall between the spring and the adjacent picnic area to prevent the trees from being injured by people driving automobiles among the tables. Topping off the project was the addition of stone barbecue pits and space for parking twenty-two cars across the road. Architect Charles A. Richey, Jr., overseeing the construction, pronounced it "in all respects a very beautiful piece of work and constitutes

[13] "Emergency Conservation Work, Camp NP-1, Narrative Report Oct. – Dec. 1934," Superintendent's reports.

a splendid tribute to the skill of Mr. Walkowiak in directing the untrained C. C. C. boys."[14]

The heat and humidity of summer, however, made the camp untenable when swarms of flies from a nearby dairy descended on the hapless occupants. After the men endured what must have been an agonizingly long summer housed in tents at the old site, permanent buildings were erected along the northwest side of Rock Creek just below Black Sulphur Springs during October. The camp was moved to the new location on November 5.[15]

During its first season, Camp 808 made significance progress toward the transformation of Platt, but the momentum only inspired Branch to craft even loftier plans for the future. He wanted three distinctively landscaped entrances to the park, modern bridges, better campgrounds, new pavilions at the springs, and improved park administration and maintenance facilities. Fifteen-acre Flower Park, the superintendent opined, ought to be considered "a sort of spacious front yard to Sulphur" because it was contiguous to the town and was the area most frequented by local residents. In addition to laying plans for planting approximately one thousand shrubs, Richey designed two wading pools and a new comfort station, which he modestly considered "a new standard

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[14] Edmund B. Walkowiak was the camp landscape architect. "Construction Report, 1933-34," Superintendent's reports.

[15] The permanent camp buildings were constructed under contract. ibid.

in Park architecture for Platt."[16] Construction began during winter and by mid-June the park had a native stone building to replace "the two unsightly buildings . . ." adjacent to the main entrance.

The C. C. C. hit full stride during summer 1934. Not only had camp staff gained more experience in administering and planning the work, Branch thought the men were of generally higher quality than those enlisted during the first season. Preparing his annual report, he described them as, "a steadier type – the fickle, gold bricking type having apparently practically disappeared entirely."[17] Those who had joined with the impression the work would be easy were quickly disabused of that notion. In the second season, for example, the banks near the confluence of Travertine and Rock Creeks were stabilized with rip-rap consisting of enormous boulders, most weighing five to eight tons. After the boulders were placed, much of the back filling was accomplished by hand. Crews also removed an estimated 75,000 cubic yards of sediment from the creeks near Flower Park.[18]

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[16] "Platt Park News," undated typescript, box 52, CF, PNP, RG 79.

[17] "Emergency Conservation Work, Camp NP-1, Narrative Report Oct. – Dec. 1934," Superintendent's reports.

[18] The ongoing rip rap project at Flower Park, extending along approximately 900 feet of the nearby creek, was not actually completed until 1935. "Emergency Conservation Work, Camp NP-1, Narrative Report April 1 – October 1, 1935," Superintendent's reports.

By year's end, the C. C. C. had accomplished an impressive array of projects. In addition to the foregoing work, they had carved out a 25-car parking lot along the roadside near Hillside Spring and had built another in Flower Park to accommodate 150 vehicles. A new one and one-half mile trail extended southward from Bromide Hill, skirting the bison pasture, forming a circle back to the park headquarters area. Crews also constructed a one-half-mile section of Travertine Drive Trail over elevated terrain in the south part of the park. One of the most important accomplishments, in Branch's opinion, was "the work in eliminating from the park area the remains of the old town which occupied a goodly portion of the central park area, and the old buildings together with rubbish, old fences, and the old buildings as fast as replaced with more suitable structures."[19]

In keeping with Branch's and Richey's concepts of what a national park ought to look like, a decision was made to dismantle the steel suspension bridge across Rock Creek at Bromide Spring "because it does not properly harmonize with the park's general design . . . ." Richey drew up plans for a new stone structure having "a definite relationship with the proposed Bromide Spring house . . . ."[20] The old low-water causeway across Travertine Creek was removed in late 1933, whereupon C. C. C.

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[19] "Emergency Conservation Work, Camp NP-1, Narrative Report Oct. – Dec. 1934," Superintendent's reports.

[20] Narrative Report, April 1 – October 1, 1935.

workmen constructed a 38-foot wide concrete and masonry structure having sidewalks along each side. About the same time, the causeway at Black Sulphur underwent major renovation with the addition of a culvert to prevent water from flowing around both ends, as it had been, threatening the stability of the structure. The Perimeter Road proposed by Superintendent Branch, the most costly element of the development plan, necessitated new stone auto bridges spanning Nigger Run, a minor tributary flowing into Travertine Creek in the east end of the park, and across Rock Creek below Bromide.[21]

The arrival of the C. C. C. pointed up a particular administrative deficiency in the park—the lack of a practical maintenance facility. There was, in fact, nothing of that sort beyond an old frame building, surrounded by an unsightly array of equipment, piles of materials, and accumulated junk, near park headquarters.[22] Suddenly imposed on the park were some two hundred workers and supporting technical staff to execute the extensive program intended at Platt. Branch and his colleagues decided early on to build a new utilities complex in a less conspicuous place. The site they selected was approximately two hundred yards southeast of headquarters, where terrain and trees (also planted by the

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[21] The causeway was completed November 16, 1933. "Report on Reconstruction of Bromide Sulphur Causeway – Public Works Project #124, Platt National Park," Superintendent's reports; "Platt Park News."

[22] The old utility building, pictured in the Superintendent's Annual Report for 1936, may have originally been the office for Leeper's lumber yard, although the author has been unable to confirm the supposition. "List of Structures to be Offered for Sale, Situated on the Reservation, Segregated by the Act of Congress Approved April 21, 1904," History, box 6, CF, PNP, RG 79.

C. C. C.) would screen it from view by passing visitors. The complex as finally designed comprised three buildings--a shop with foreman's office, a barn with loading platform, and a garage—arranged around the south, west, and north sides, respectively, of a 90 foot by 100 foot graveled courtyard. In the basement level of the barn was a stable with doors opening to a fenced corral for draft animals. Construction of the new facility began in early spring 1934 and was completed by summer's end.[23]

From the time A. R. Greene had relocated headquarters in the old Leeper house, successive superintendents had made the best of the confined, makeshift accommodations. Platt's expanding operations and newfound status as a genuine national park called for better facilities. Branch declared his need for a private office within the building, along with an open work area for the clerk and other staff, an indoor bathroom, and a dark room for processing photographs. For years, visitors had sought out the headquarters as place to obtain information, therefore Branch suggested devoting part the remodeled building to a "public room for visitors." The porch extending around the north and east facades of the building would be retained and repaired. An addition measuring

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[23] "Construction Report 1933-34;" "CCC at PNP;" "Report of the Chief Architect, Field Trip," July 13, 1934, filed with Superintendent's reports; Report to the Chief Architect by Charles A Richey, July 13, 1934, ibid; Reports to the Chief Architect by Jerome C. Miller, dated July 27, 1934 and August 27, 1934, ibid.; "Platt Park News;" A photograph showing both old and new old utility areas is in "Report to the Chief Architect Through the Superintendent of Platt National Park – Construction Report, C. C. C. Camp No. 808 (NP-1), October 1, 1934 to March 31, 1935," March 31, 1935, Superintendent's reports; By 1935, the permanent staff included four laborers, supplemented during summer by additional custodians to care for the campgrounds. "Annual Report – Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1936," ibid.

37-feet long by 23-feet wide, constructed of matching native stone, would be attached to the rear of the old building, forming a tee, to house a small museum, herbarium, and file room. Although Branch did not refer to it in those terms, the park was nevertheless destined to have its first visitor center.[24]

Work commenced on the extension November 23, 1934 and progressed quite rapidly despite the season. Making every effort to blend the new walls with the old, workmen obtained stone from the same quarry that Leeper had used decades earlier and masons cut and dressed the stone to duplicate the original work. They concurrently cleaned and recessed all joints in the old walls and re-pointed them with new mortar. Once the freshly cut stone weathered, the addition was hardly distinguishable from the old. A large viewing window in the north end of the addition, along with a open-hearth stone fireplace, emulated the alpine-style lodges found in the large national parks. Remarkably, the addition was ready for occupation by early spring.[25]

The early C. C. C. period also saw the construction of native stone entrance structures at the main (north) entrance on Buckhorn Road and at Bromide Spring to

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[24] A herbarium containing "the flowering and fruiting stages of all plants in the park" was first organized by Landscape Foreman George M. Merrill in 1935. "Report to the Chief Architect – Construction Report, April 1, 1935 – September 30, 1935," ibid.

[25] Details relating to the construction of the museum addition on the park headquarters building are in "Specifications for an Addition and Alteration to Administration Building," December 4, 1934, Superintendent's reports; "Report to the Chief Architect" March 31, 1935, ibid.; Ibid., September 30, 1935 Enrollment at Camp 808 (NP-1) reached 220 men during this period. "Emergency Conservation Work – Camp NP-1, Narrative Report, October 1, 1934 – April 1, 1935," April 15, 1935, ibid.

further enhance the identity of the park as a full-fledged unit of the system. Each unit bore the park name in black iron letters, though those at the main entrance were removed shortly after completion and replaced with larger ones at Branch's suggestion. The main entrance consisted of a massive, semi-circular wall-like structure of brown sandstone surrounded with transplanted red cedars. A similar monument was planned for the south entrance to the park, however the project was deferred temporarily pending a proposed realignment of Buckhorn Road.[26]

The Bromide entrance was even more elaborate, consisting of a visually pleasing combination of Mississippi limestone and gray and brown flagstone. Twin pylons with the park name flanked the road at the park boundary to visually frame an artesian fountain, projecting a thirty-foot vertical steam, about one hundred feet within the gateway. The accompanying sulphur water pool was surrounded by a court consisting of flagstone walks and semi-circular stone benches. Upon completion of the complex, Architect Richey boasted that the fountain could be seen for eight blocks up Twelfth Street and was already one of the major attractions in the Bromide area. It was, according to Superintendent Branch, "a fitting introduction to this area of medicinal water."[27]

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[26] Construction of the main entrance began in June 1934 and was completed within two months. The design incorporated plantings and other landscaping, as well as a box culvert to carry runoff water from town to Travertine Creek, about 600 feet distant. "Report to the Chief Architect – Field Trip – May 19 – June 5, 1934, ibid.; "Report to the Chief Architect, July 26 – August 26, 1934," August 27, 1934, ibid.;

[27] "Reports to the Chief Architect," March 31, 1935 and September 30, 1935; "Emergency Conservation Work," April 15, 1935; "Narrative Report – Fifth Period – April 1, 1935 to Oct. 1, 1935," all filed with

The year 1935 marked the high tide of the C. C. C. nationally and at Platt when President Roosevelt increased enrollment to 600,000 men and extended authority for the program another two years. Of that total, the National Park Service received a disproportionately large share for such a small agency—150,000 workers—a positive reflection of the Conservation Corps' many accomplishments in the parks, as well as the economic benefits in countering the depression.[28] Morale remained high among the C. C. C. personnel at Platt, despite a three-week setback early that year when the army quarantined the camp because of a suspected case of spinal meningitis. Another blow came about the same time when camp superintendent W. L. Scott resigned, yet progress continued unabated, and at an astounding rate, after his son assumed the reins.

Complementing the recently completed parking lot at Hillside Spring, C. C. C. men removed the old frame pavilion and other equipment as they undertook a complete renovation of the area. At the mouth of the spring, they erected a retaining wall of dressed limestone with stepped wings extending to either side. The water flowed from an arched culvert in the center of the structure, in front of which was a semi-circular stone wall to

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Superintendent's reports; Other small projects, too numerous to detail here, included the development of picnic areas at Travertine Island and Buffalo Spring. Large stone tables and benches, with attendant fire places. Additional parking areas were constructed at Little Niagara Falls, Buffalo, Black Sulphur, and at park headquarters above Hillside Spring. In accordance with Assistant Director Bryant's observations, a new hiking trail was laid out and constructed between Pavilion Springs and the summit of Bromide Hill. In conjunction with this, the C. C. C. built several log bridges and a stone arch bridge along the route. ibid.

[28] The age range for enrollees was expanded to 17 – 28 years in 1935 to accommodate more men. Paige, *CCC and the NPS*, p. 16.

protect the opening and control the outflow. At one side were two public drinking fountains to accommodate visitors and promote sanitation, as well as a concrete pool for those who wished to fill containers.[29]

Much of the C. C. C. effort that year was devoted to executing a major face-lift of the Cold Springs area. A maze of old roads through the campground, created by visitors driving wherever they pleased, was closed and the roads obliterated to the degree possible in favor of a planned network of footpaths. Crews installed sewer and water lines to serve two new comfort stations built of large brown and gray sandstone boulders. The architecture blended more unobtrusively with the natural surroundings than the chiseled limestone of the former structures. These buildings, according to Richey, were "fine examples of rustic architecture and without doubt are the most picturesque buildings in the park."[30] In contrast to using stone for the picnic tables, carpenters constructed 114 sawed pine tables with integral benches that could be moved or rearranged in the campgrounds as necessary. Enrollees built low stone fireplaces with iron cooking grates at each campsite.[31]

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[29] The Hillside project, begun in early 1935, was completed in June. "Construction Report, April 1 – September 30, 1935," Superintendent's reports.

[30] "Report to the Chief Architect, September – October 1935," ibid.

[31] The development at Flower Park was completed with landscaping and construction of a 130-car parking lot. All of these projects are detailed in ibid.; It should be noted that the C. C. C. program was highly developed by 1935 with the inclusion of classes, supplemented by training films and discussion groups on forestry, landscaping, carpentry, engineering, equipment operation, trail building, blacksmithing, and other

As government public works projects reached fever pitch during summer 1935, the interests of various agencies sometimes conflicted. This was exemplified when a team of inspectors from the Treasury Department arrived in Sulphur seeking a location for a new federal building incorporating a post office and space for other government functions. The officials examined various properties for sale in town before finding one they considered nearly perfect. That it lay within the park boundary was only a minor consideration. The postal officials, and many Sulphur residents, thought the 145-foot by 180-foot lot on Davis Avenue near the east end of Flower Park made an ideal location, reasoning that the land was already in government ownership, it was centrally located, and, moreover, it made a beautiful setting. When the recommendation landed on the desk of National Park Service Director Arno B. Camerer, he immediately forwarded it to Branch for comment, asking particularly how such a development might affect the park. The director confided his initial opposition to the proposal, stating that were it approved, the lot would have to be legislatively withdrawn from park holdings. In his view,

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skills. Camp leaders additionally provided hands-on training and practical experience. "Narrative Report – Fifth Period" ibid.; Early in 1934, Architect Richey designed plans for one-car garages at the employee quarters in the park. He described these as, "wood frame structure covered with wide pine siding an stained a dark brown. A wood and coal compartment is incorporated in the rear of each structure." Garages were built at Quarters No. 1 and No. 2 during summer 1935; at No. 3 and No. 4 that fall. Ibid.; "Report to the Chief Architect October 1, 1935 – March 31, 1936," ibid.

however, Platt was too small to sacrifice even a small parcel from an already convoluted boundary, especially when the town itself afforded suitable alternative sites.[32]

Surprisingly, Superintendent Branch favored the proposition, though his motives were thinly veiled. In his lengthy justification, Branch enumerated no less than eight reasons for placing the post office on the recommended site, none of which posed any benefit for Platt National Park. In his letter to Camerer, however, Branch revealed the motivation for his bias: "It is assumed should the Post Office be erected on land transferred from the park, office space would be provided which would be available for park officials."[33] With the mortar hardly dry in the recently remodeled headquarters buildings, the director was unimpressed with the superintendent's justification. Camerer gently reproved Branch by clarifying his position: "We feel . . . very strongly that one of the greatest detriments to park work is the use of park land for other than park purposes, and that it is very bad policy to agree to furnish building sites for other than park purposes, and that it is very bad policy to agree to furnish building sites for public buildings on park land, regardless of their importance . . . it [Platt] is a small area and its

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[32] Stephen B. Gibbons, acting secretary of the treasury, to Secretary of the Interior, November 9, 1935, Buildings, box 50, CF, PNP, RG 79; This tract was located at the foot of West Second Street. Director Arno B. Camerer to Branch, November 19, 1935, ibid.

[33] Branch to Camerer, November 27, 1935, ibid.

completeness, without intrusion of a building site, is one of its important values."[34] Branch quickly retreated from his initial position, but the matter did not end there.

When many townspeople became convinced the post office should be in the park, the issue turned political. Some citizens expressed their appreciation to Branch for all the recent improvements at Platt, as well as their desire to promote a good relationship with the Park Service. But, long-time Sulphur resident and businessman A. Abbott, who happened to be on a first-name basis with President Roosevelt, claimed that only a small number of citizens having "selfish interests" objected to the plan. Those individuals, he protested, were "going to block the selections of the national park site and dictate the selection of a site in the city. Local privilege, greedy and inhuman for the sake of the small profit that would accrue from the sale of a site in the city, and other small profits that would result from enhanced value on adjoining and nearby properties, is ignoring the wishes of ninety percent of the people of Sulphur, and the wishes of all of the visiting 300,000 annual patrons of Platt National Park."[35] Acting Director A. E. Demaray countered Abbott's charges by pointing out that placing the post office in the park would not only be an intrusion within the park boundary by attracting a great deal of inappropriate activity there, but "Sulphur would be doing itself and Platt National Park a

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[34] Camerer to Branch, January 10, 1936, *ibid.*

[35] A. Abbott to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, February 25, 1936, ibid.

serious injustice . . . now being developed as one of the beauty spots of the Southwest, which development inevitably will be primarily beneficial to the town of Sulphur.[36] At that, the secretary of the treasury made yet another attempt to move the Park Service from its position, but the Interior Department stood firm that such a concession "would not only be adverse to the policies under which our national parks are maintained, but also would establish a precedent for further nibbling for local purposes extraneous to the park's welfare."[37] It proved a successful defense and the Sulphur post office eventually found a home on West First Street, a block north of the park boundary.

As economic conditions worsened nationally, Roosevelt considered reducing the size of the C. C. C. by half, but at the same time establishing it as a permanent government agency. Public and political pressure eventually influenced the president to fix enrollment at 350,000 men, a move that compelled the Park Service to eliminate 68 winter and 61 summer camps.[38] Nevertheless, the success of the program could hardly be

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[36] Acting Director A. E. Damaray to A. Abbott, March 28, 1936, ibid.

[37] Charles West, acting secretary of the interior, to Secretary of the Treasury, April 13, 1936, ibid.

[38] At the same time, the NPS reduced administrative overhead by consolidating eight E. C. W. regions into only four. Platt fell within District A, Region 3 effective July 1, 1936. The size of camps was reduced from 200 men to 160 in an effort to comply with overall enrollment limits, while maintaining benefits to the degree possible at the local level. In addition the federal camps, all forty-eight states, including Oklahoma, received funding to maintain their own camps. Many of those laid the foundation for and marked the birth of state parks systems throughout the nation. Paige, *CCC and the NPS*, pp. 1621-22, 26; The C. C. C. contribution to the creation of the Oklahoma State Parks System is traced in Suzanne H. Schrems, "A Lasting New Deal Legacy," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* (Winter 1994-95); Acting Regional Director Milton J. McColm to Superintendents, May 11, 1936, Organization, box 7, CF, PNP, RG 79.

questioned. Superintendent Branch's praise of Camp 808 echoed that of his counterparts throughout the National Park System:

> The camp has become an accepted institution, a part of the permanent organization of the park, in performance if not in reality . . . The good accomplished under this work would fill a large volume. There is hardly an acre of the park's area that has not in some way benefited. It is believed the work accomplished during the past three years is equivalent to 20 years accomplishments under the regular park program considering the work accomplished during the years preceeding [sic] the E. C. W. as the basis for estimation.[39]

Indeed, that brief period had seen Platt transformed from "a pretty well run down ranch" to a modern park offering professionally designed and executed campgrounds, pavilions, comfort stations, bridges, trails, and properly graded roads. The springs, too, were in better condition than at any previous time. It was a spectacular achievement and so successful that Branch and camp officials were becoming hard-pressed to find suitable projects to occupy the C. C. C.

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[39] "Annual Report – Platt National Park – Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1936," Superintendent's reports.

During the last years of the program, attention focused on three principal areas: completing the park road system, the sewer system, and erecting, at long last, a suitable boundary fence. As work progressed on building and grading the tour road, engineers drew up plans to straighten Buckhorn Road in the north district of the park. The existing route traced the original wagon road from the termination of West First Street across the Travertine bridge to the old Sulphur townsite, where it made a sharp curve around the east side of Pavilion Springs. Architect Richey determined the curves were "too sharp for modern high-speed traffic" and therefore proposed that the road be straightened by re-routing traffic in a long curve around the west side of Pavilion. The realignment project was completed by early summer 1936. Meantime, construction continued at a slower pace on that portion of the perimeter road leading from a proposed new crossing over Rock Creek to the new parking lot atop Bromide Hill. Work on that section was to consume yet another year, and the massive concrete causeway over the creek would not be completed until 1939. Other crews, meanwhile, continued to apply asphalt surfacing on segments previously graded. When the tour road was eventually finished in 1939, Branch declared it "the most important single project ever completed at Platt."[40]

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[40] The Rock Creek causeway, costing $20,000, was described as "a massive concrete slab 30' x 120'" containing three large culverts. "Annual Report – 1937," Superintendent's reports; Branch to Director, NPS, September 11, 1937, PWA, box 48, CF, PNP, RG 79; "Field Report," July 1938, Inspections by headquarters officers, ibid.

Less skilled workers concurrently erected a woven wire fence with steel posts along the park boundary, though Branch expressed his desire to expand the park by acquiring an additional six hundred acres of land contiguous to the park south and west of Bromide Hill. Presumably, his immediate concern was that the road to the summit required rights-of-way across two small corners of the town limits. The town of Sulphur and the Works Progress Administration was also building what would be known as "Veterans' Lake" in that sector, causing Branch to fear uncontrolled recreational developments immediately adjacent to the park.[41] The Service took no immediate action on his recommendation, however.

The C. C. C. accomplished its last two significant construction projects during 1937 when enrollees demolished the old pavilions at Bromide and Pavilion, and replaced them with commodious new buildings. The architectural style was in keeping with that of the other C. C. C.-constructed buildings in the park, typified by shake roofs, stone walls, and flagstone floors.

By the time one last comfort station was erected at Buffalo Spring two years later, the program had diminished for lack of funds, lack of enrollees, and lack of meaningful

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[41] "Annual Report – 1936," Superintendent's reports.

work.[42] Perimeter Road was hard-surfaced in 1940 using a small crew, and stone masons continued to produce more picnic tables, but by the following year the war in Europe and Japanese aggression in Asia prompted the nation to begin gearing up its defense industry. With jobs becoming more plentiful in metropolitan areas, and the reinstitution of a military draft, the C. C. C. had little reason to exist. During1941, in accordance with instructions from Washington, the National Park Service began closing all camps having an enrollment of at least 165 men. One-fifth of them had to be abandoned by the end of summer. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December intensified the shift in national priorities to a wartime footing, causing the government to terminate all C. C. C. camps not directly involved with defense-related projects.[43]

Despite the president's best efforts to convince legislators that the C. C. C. was still viable in 1942, Congress refused to pass an appropriation for its continuation. The Axis powers had conclusively reversed America's economic woes by revitalizing industry through a demand for all kinds of materiel, and with millions of young men joining the

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[42] The Buffalo Spring comfort station was completed in spring 1939, as was the park sign program and trail system. Another comfort station was finished at Travertine Island near the end of that year. "Field Report November 1939," Inspections, box 10, CF, PNP, RG 79; The Davis Avenue bridge, constructed by the government in 1909, collapsed in 1941as a result of age and heavy usage. Platt National Park had been maintaining the structure over the years and repaired it after the collapse, but engineers recommended that it be replaced. The Park Service and the State of Oklahoma negotiated an agreement whereby NPS would provide $15,000.00 and the state would carry out the work under the W. P. A. "Annual Report for Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1941," Superintendent's reports.

[43] Camps were allowed to remain active if they were doing war-related construction or developing natural resources to support the war effort. Some NPS camps providing forest fire protection remained open for that reason. Paige, *CCC and the NPS*, p.31-33.

armed forces, labor was suddenly in great demand. Little, if any, justification remained for a public works program. Most C. C. C. camps were authorized only enough funds to close down operations and dispose of equipment. Nevertheless, the president had been so impressed with the accomplishments made by the C. C. C. and other public works programs that he was loath to abandon the concept, war or no war. Looking to the future, Roosevelt created a Federal Works Agency "to prepare programs of needed capital improvements and required new or expanded public services" following the conflict.[44] The F. W. A. was directed to work in close cooperation with the Works Progress Administration (W. P. A.) to prepare and update annually a list of projects in parks and on other public lands to help absorb the predicted influx of returning veterans at the end of the war. Superintendent Branch drafted a so-called "plans-on-the-shelf" program for Platt to include a new domestic water system, electric system, a modern pavilion over Black Sulphur Spring, and several additional improvements to complete the extensive renovation begun at the Bromide campground. A few months later, Branch took advantage of the potential for fleshing out Platt's facilities by adding plans for a major new campground west of Bromide on Rock Creek.[45]

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[44] Press release, Federal Works Agency, June 23, 1941; Construction projects, box 50, CF, PNP, RG 79.

[45] John M. Carmody, FWA, June 20, 1941, Construction projects, box 50, CF, PNP, RG 79; Acting Regional Director Milton McComb to Superintendent, PNP, August 9, 1941, ibid.; Harvey H. Cornell, chief of planning, Southwest Regional Office, August 21, 1942, ibid.; Cornell to regional director, SWR, November 21, 1942, Inspections by headquarters officers, box 48, ibid..

The New Deal was truly an era of golden opportunity for the National Parks. Even though the Civilian Conservation Corps succumbed to the demands of World War Two, the decade of its existence brought unprecedented and lasting improvements to many units in the system. Not the least of those benefiting from the program was Platt. The C. C. C. had done much to enhance the park's key resources, namely the springs, through cleaning the outlets and erecting attractive stone structures over or around the principal features. Visitors found aesthetically designed camping facilities throughout the park, and they were able to conveniently tour the park by automobile over modern paved roads. Masonry causeways eliminated the necessity of fording streams, and the structures retarded stream flow sufficiently to create natural swimming pools at some points along the creeks. Foot trails from the campgrounds accessed both old and new areas of the park, increasing the recreational opportunities in an unobtrusive, traditional way common to other national parks. Employee morale and efficiency were boosted by new administrative facilities and housing by improving both working conditions and the quality of life for employees. When Superintendent Branch transferred from the park in 1944, Platt was a far different place than he had inherited fourteen years earlier. It now had all the trappings of a real national park. There was no question that the park afforded an attractive outdoor recreational setting, nor could anyone argue that disproportionately

high visitation figures underscored its popularity with the public. Still, there remained a lingering doubt in the minds of those who looked beyond the new man-made features. Some officials continued to question whether Platt embraced resources that were truly of *national* significance. One of those realists, surprisingly enough, was none other than Branch himself, whose annual reports consistently conceded: "There are no claims of outstanding scenic features and no boasted spectacular characteristics, and its chief claim to fame, if any, is still based on . . . its mineral waters."[46]

The medicinal springs, undeniably, had been the justification for setting aside Platt at the turn of the century, even though Congress had not originally intended that it be a permanent federal establishment. While some of the springs, particularly Bromide, continued to enjoy popularity for their reputed healing properties, the World War Two era witnessed great medical advancements and exposed millions of veterans, male and female, to professional care that they might not otherwise have experienced. A strong post-war economy, bolstered by a housing boom and widespread opportunities for higher education through veterans' benefits, spawned a heyday of recreational travel in the U. S. Americans on the whole became more sophisticated, and comparatively few now came now to partake of the waters for treatment of physical ailments. When Superintendent Perry E. Brown prepared his 1951 annual report, it was significant that he recognized a

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[46] An example is Branch's Annual Report July 1, 1934 – July 31, 1935, Superintendent's reports.

sharp increase in visitation at the park, and the continued popularity of the bison herd, but failed to even mention the mineral springs.[47] The business of Platt had become, and would continue to be, recreation. The springs were largely relegated to a mere curiosity, a nostalgic reminder of days gone by.

A quarter century after Brown rendered his report, the contradiction some had perceived in Platt National Park would be officially resolved in the process of combining the springs, Arbuckle Lake, and additional surrounding lands to form a much larger Chickasaw National Recreation Area. Even though the Travertine district was forever stripped of the prestigious national park title so valued by many supporters over the years, former critics of the park's status were at once silenced. Local commercial and tourism interests, blessed with the creation of a 10,000-acre public facility in the midst of rural Oklahoma, could hardly quibble over semantics. In the end, the establishment of Chickasaw National Recreation Area merely validated what Platt had always been for the people of the region—a great summer resort.

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[47] "Superintendent's Annual Report – Fiscal Year 1950," Superintendent's reports. Thomas C. Miller, formerly at Aztec Ruins National Monument, replaced Branch on April 1, 1944. Brown arrived from Mesa Verde (assistant superintendent) to succeed Miller exactly nine years later. Perry E. Brown, "A History of Platt National Park," (1954), 53, 58.

Addendum

Rock Creek Campground Development

The Civilian Conservation Corps had a tremendous impact on improving facilities, roads, and landscaping at Platt National Park, consequently little development took place in the park during years immediately following World War Two. With the demise of the C. C. C., President Franklin D. Roosevelt asked civilian government agencies to maintain lists that collectively would comprise a "Public Work Reserve" in anticipation of post-war labor surpluses. In accordance with that request, Superintendent William E. Branch enlisted the aid of architects at the Park Service's San Francisco office during 1943 to design a campground facility that would be placed on a small parcel of land acquired by the park for that purpose the previous year.

This 63.75-acre tract lay just beyond the boundary at the extreme western end of the park, beyond Bromide Hill. Camping had been permitted at the Bromide area, north of Rock Creek, throughout the lifetime of the park, even after other facilities were developed. Faced with continually rising visitation, however, park management wanted

to curtail overnight camping at Bromide to reduce congestion and heavy impacts on the vegetation there. Trouble was, the park had no suitable alternative location. The most appropriate site was on land owned by the G. W. Giles estate. After the estate managers were approached and refused to sell the property to the government at an appraised value agreed upon by six local real estate agents in 1940, the National Park Service initiated condemnation procedures under the rule of eminent domain. The parcel was later appraised at a value of $2,490.63 and was acquired early in 1942, thus increasing the total park area from 848.22 to 911.97 acres.[1]

Superintendent Branch outlined the reasons he thought the site was so desirable for the proposed campground. Not only did it have a lush growth of deciduous trees, it was ". . . also located as to be removed from the main traffic of the park and the bustle of the town nearby and will probably be used by many desiring the quiet of the semi-

[1] Legislative authority for adding the tract to the park was enacted by H. R. 7272, July 18 1939. Acting Chief Counsel A. J. Knox to Superintendent, Platt National Park, December 5, 1940, Condemnation of lands, box 48, Central Files, Platt National Park, Records of the National Park Service, Record Group 79, National Archives, Fort Worth, Texas; The legal description is presented in Secretary of the Interior to Attorney General, December 18, 1940, ibid.; Special Attorney Curtis P. Harris to Supt. William E. Branch, January 4, 1941, ibid.; The judgment by the District Court for the Eastern District of Oklahoma was rendered in favor of the U. S. on October 9, 1941. The property was legally titled to the government on March 11, 1942. Chief Counsel G. A. Moskey to Branch, March 11, 1942, ibid.; Additional references to this transaction are in "Annual Reports" – Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 1941, 1942, and 1943, Superintendent's reports, archives, Chickasaw National Recreation Area; The NPS officially took possession of the land January 28, 1942; Rep. Monroney's bill also included language changing the park name to "Platt National Recreation Area." Ben H. Thompson to Branch, June 26, 1941, Proposed legislation, box 6, CF, PNP, RG 79.

primitive conditions, yet within easy walking distance of a large town."[2] Acquisition of the Giles tract was doubly advantageous because it would allow realignment of the scenic road up Bromide Hill, thus improving the approach to the future campground and making a better connection with the road to Veteran's Lake. However, it was later determined that only minor work, rather than the major realignment proposed initially, would be necessary.[3]

Funds for the National Park Service remained meager throughout the war years, and afterward there was no immediate progress made on the Rock Creek campground. In fact, it was not included in the construction program until Fiscal Year 1950.[4] The original plans had not been closely reviewed or revised since they were originally approved seven years earlier. When they were, Regional Landscape Architect Harvey Cornell objected to the wooden picnic tables adopted during C. C. C. days. He pointed out that they required re-painting regularly, they were subject to vandalism, and the splinters they produced posed a safety hazard. Cornell argued that the tables should be constructed of concrete, which would eliminate all of the objections to wood. He admitted the fresh concrete

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[2] "Annual Report – Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1942," Superintendent's reports.

[3] Harvey D. Cornell to Regional Director, November 21, 1942, Inspections by headquarters officers, CF, PNP, RG 79; Cornell to Director, NPS, January 12 and 20, 1943, Construction projects, box 50, ibid.

[4] Funds for one of the comfort stations was approved in 1946, but was later withdrawn and used for emergency ruins stabilization work at Hovenweep National Monument. Cornell to Regional Director, Southwest Region, December 23, 1946, Policy, box 8, CF, PNP, RG 79.

would initially be a stark contrast to the natural surroundings, but assured everyone that the tables would age to a more subdued tone. Work on the new campground was further delayed when Superintendent Thomas C. Miller expressed his preference for gas-fired, rather than charcoal, stone grills. A compromise apparently was reached to build them of formed concrete.[5]

Once construction finally began in late winter 1950, the work proceeded rapidly. By April, the roads and turnouts had been graded and were ready for asphalt paving. A large portion of the bases for the sixty-four concrete tables and fireplaces also was finished, and the contractor was ready to start work on the two comfort stations. Part of the campground was opened for use during June, but the comfort stations were not completed until near the end of summer.[6]

Platt's visitors came largely, if not overwhelmingly, from the local region, and included many regulars that returned season after season. That in mind, it should have come as no surprise to Superintendent Miller when several citizens sent letters to their congressman complaining that they could no longer camp at Bromide Springs, effective with the 1951 season. J. R. Griffin objected to the new campground not only because he

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[5] Cornell to Superintendent, PNP, October 12, 1949, Construction projects, box 50, ibid. Cornell to Superintendent, February 8, 1950, ibid.; Cornell to Regional Director, March 22, 1950, ibid.

[6] Cornell to Chief, Planning & Design, Southwest Region, June 16, 1950, Construction projects, box 50, ibid.; Architect John B. Cabot to Regional Architect, June 6, 1950, Inspections, field, box 10, CF, PNP, RG 79; Marsh to Assistant Regional Director, August 21, 1950, ibid.

was used to camping at Bromide, but "with all the underbrush still standing, . . . it will be hot and Sultry and we think the Knatts [sic] and Musketoes [sic] will be terrible in this thicket like place." Griffen amplified his complaint about Rock Creek on ground that, "for us people who do not care to be thrown to camp perhaps by a bunch of rowdies who want to be in an isolated place and most of them just enough of clothes on to not be classed as Nudest [sic]."[7] Other discontented citizens circulated a petition to keep the Bromide area open for camping.

Director Arthur B. Demaray responded personally to the inquiry subsequently submitted by Oklahoma Representative Victor Wickersham. Demaray explained that Bromide had never been intended as a campground and it was simply too small to accommodate both day and nighttime uses. Moreover, human traffic prevented the area from re-vegetating and so compacted the soil that mature trees had difficulty surviving. Park officials were in no position to negotiate. "We hope that he [Griffin] has many pleasant memories of his former visits to the area," Demaray wrote, "and feel sure that if he can be persuaded to come again this year he will be pleasantly surprised with the newly opened campground."[8]

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[7] J. R. Griffin to Victor Wickersham, June 26, 1951, Complaints, box 9, ibid.

[8] Director Arthur B. Demaray to Rep. Victor Wickersham, July 3, 1951, ibid.; Regional Director M. R. Tillotson to Superintendent, July 3, 1951, ibid.; Director, NPS, to Wickersham, July 11, 1951, ibid.

Perry E. Brown, who arrived from Mesa Verde as Platt's new superintendent that spring, immediately made efforts to mend fences with the local populace by speaking with chamber of commerce and other civic groups. In early June, he explained the Service's reasons to a crowd gathered at the first campfire talk of the season. Some of those in attendance admitted to signing the petition, but confessed they did so either without understanding the situation, or to appease friends. They pointed out that even the instigator of the petition was camping contentedly at Rock Creek at that very moment. Dissention quickly subsided and the Rock Creek campground took its place as one of the park's newest facilities, being classed as one of the finest campgrounds in the entire Park System at that time.[9]

[9] Superintendent Perry E. Brown to Regional Director, August 3, 1951, ibid.; Perry E. Brown, "History of Platt National Park," (1954), p. 49.

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