

## Chapter 12: The First Town Hall

During John Chiaf's term as Mayor of the town, meetings were held at Chiaf's home at 2113 Brighton and out of the homes of the other town trustees from time to time. According to Chiaf, meeting at residences became more and more of a problem over time. The town needed a formal place to conduct town business and Chiaf soon began working on obtaining the first real town hall.

Chiaf approached developer Floyd Harrison and asked him to donate the land and building for a new town hall. Chiaf's argument was that the developers hadn't given anything back to the community and that this would be the perfect way to help the town. According to Chiaf, Harrison was "a pretty nice guy and was very cooperative in his dealings with the town". Harrison agreed, and the first town hall was built in 1951 at 2201 West Britton Road. The public was invited to get its first glimpse of their new town hall at an open house held on December 30, 1951. The first official meeting at the new Town Hall followed soon thereafter on January 2, 1952.

The parcel of land where the first town hall was built, in itself has an interesting past. U.S. President William McKinley originally granted the land to Frank M. Light in 1899 when this area was still part of territorial Oklahoma. A year later, Joseph Ferrell acquired the land for the sum of \$3,500. Then in 1902 the land was bought by Leonard Mahler for \$6,200. In 1909, and in partnership with the Thompson family, C.H. Clarke purchased the land for \$14,500. The area at that time was known as "West Britton". Shortly after the Clarke purchase, the names of Britton Road and Pennsylvania Avenue were added to the plat of the area. The land to the north of the future Town Hall was divided into lots for future home sites with streets named after Clarke and Thompson in the vicinity of what is Carlton Way today. While these two street names have gone by the wayside, Mahler's name lives on to this day in Mahler Place. The descendants of C.H. Clarke kept the land until the early 50's when it was sold to developer Floyd Harrison at which time it was re-platted for both commercial and residential development.

So, thanks to the work of Mayor John Chiaf and the help of the town's co-founder Floyd Harrison, the town now had a new town hall. Yet, Harrison's philanthropy, however generous, was not without limit, and title to the "donated" town hall property actually remained in Harrison's name.

Then in August of 1953, the town trustees began discussing plans to purchase the land and building from Harrison. The actual sale took place on December 28, 1954, with the town agreeing to pay Harrison \$10,630.58. A controversial reversionary clause was attached to the deed, which would go into effect if the property were ever to be abandoned for municipal use. The clause essentially gave Harrison or his heirs first shot at re-purchasing the land at the original sale price less depreciation of 4% a year. Town officials worried that the

clause might hamper future development of city facilities. Nonetheless, when all was said and done, the trustees were unsuccessful in removing the reversionary clause from the deed. Harrison, having sold the building and property to the town at an extremely attractive price, probably insisted on the clause to prevent future officials from profiting from the sale of the property.

Besides providing necessary space for town administrative offices, the new town hall provided the facilities needed for the first fire department, which was created by Chiaf and his colleagues in April of 1952. The first fire truck was put into service by the town soon thereafter. With the newly equipped and organized fire department, insurance rates paid by residents of the town declined to the tune of \$50,000 a year.

The town's volunteer fire department was a huge step forward for the youthful town. The department had 50 volunteers and there was never a dull moment when the alarm sounded. Police Chief Jack Reed recalled the horrors of 50 volunteers racing with red lights and sirens to the fire station. Reed firmly believed that this might have been about as dangerous a situation as any he ever got into in all his years of law enforcement.

"Whenever we had a fire, all of them had to come by the station to find out where it was," recalled Reed.

According to Hazel Heil whose son Jim served as a volunteer, it was utter chaos every time the alarm sounded. "When the siren went off there were more volunteers than you could shake a stick at," recalled Heil. "It was just like a comedy," said Heil adding with a hearty laugh, "I'm glad I had a sense of humor."

(This section needs more. Plan to ask Bassil Tunnel for information)