

Liquor sales voted down

Railroad agent led movement to form town

Ahoskie was not incorporated in 1890, and there were probably only 50 people living within the present-day corporate limits.

However, the logging and milling operations, railroad, post office and associated commercial trade became the nucleus for the town.

The first three years of the 1890's prepared the way and set the pace for the future development of the town.

Liquor vote spurred town

In the early 1890's, the pastor of the Ahoskie Baptist Church, the Rev. Braxton Craig, led a movement beginning the perennial argument over the sale of intoxicating liquors within the town limit.

Craig's supporters requested a vote under the prevailing local option laws, an election was held, and the church and native landowners cast majority ballots for outlawing the sale of liquor within one mile of the Baptist church.

Fear that the law would be repealed if the town was incorporated generated a campaign of opposition against incorporation.

Among the issues was the charge that the "preacher and bootlegger had lined up together." And the charge was made that some local shopkeepers were joining up against the local sale of liquor, because they wanted to continue to sell a concoction manufactured and advertised as a patent medicine, called Scheidam-Schnapps.

Parker credited for town

A.J. "Jack" Parker is credited with initiating the movement to incorporate the town because of his real estate interests.

Parker, who moved to Ahoskie in 1880 as the agent for the Norfolk and Carolina Railroad, also promoted land sales and acted as agent for Dr. Jesse H. Mitchell. As Dr. Mitchell's agent, he sold business lots on North Railroad Street, which were later involved in the dispute over "No Man's Land."

House Bill 167, introduced by State Rep. W.P. Taylor, to incorporate the town of Ahoskie, was enacted into law on Jan. 24, 1893.

The corporate limits were established as 600 yards each way from the crossing of Main Street and the Norfolk and Carolina Railroad.

The following town officers also were named in the act — Mayor Dr. Jesse H. Mitchell; Commissioners (Fletcher) Powell, W.S. Dukes and A.J. Parker; and Constable J.H. Downs.

72 people in Ahoskie

Thomas R. Belch, advertising manager and clerk for Cockey and Powell, later wrote of the time of incorporation:

"I remember setting on the steps of Cockey and Powell one evening with a friend and we counted the population of Ahoskie, Black and White, large and small, and there were exactly seventy-two souls."

He also wrote, "There was not a foot of paved street or sidewalk in the town at that time, and the main street served as a thoroughfare for cattle, pigs and sheep as well as pedestrians."

When Ahoskie was incorporated, the original roads were much the same as they were in earlier days when Ahoskie was a Baptist church and a logging center.

Ahoskie started slowly in 1890's

By Clarence S. Newsome
Centennial Education Committee

The early days of the town of Ahoskie, from 1891-99, was a period of gradual growth with no particular mass migration to town, although the population did double.

The folks who did come did so to make a living and be a part of the new settlement.

Ahoskie was essentially a service town, a meeting place for the population of surrounding areas, and the trading center for well-defined areas in Hertford and Bertie counties.

Families moving to Ahoskie during this period included R.H. "Bob" Holloman, T.H. "Tom" Overtone, J.W. "John Bill" Godwin, W.J. "Billy" Green, R.E. "Bob" Cowan,

S. Jack Dilday and the three Hill brothers — Joe, Tom and Jim.

New residence for white families were built along East Church Street; and for black families, in the northeast section along Catherine Creek Road.

J.R. Garrett moved his mill to North Maple Street, and the area just north of the depot was used as a dumping ground for logs to be carried by rail to the large bandsaw mills.

Families settle

Coming to Ahoskie during the period immediately before incorporation in 1893 were several families who remained during the years to

(See AHOSKIE, Page 17A)



Town council meeting in 1961

The mayor of Ahoskie, Stanley "Slim" Vinson (left front) conducts a town council meeting in July, 1961. Seated around the table are (from left) Councilmen T.E. Ward and James Joyner,

Town Manager Hulse, City Clerk J. Hayes Brett and Councilmen Mervin Early and Jim Sessoms. (Photo courtesy of Carolyn Mitchell)

Ahoskie council increased from 3 to 5

Town governed by mayor, council

Ahoskie was governed by a mayor and three councilmen during its early years.

The first mayor was Dr. Jesse H. Mitchell, regarded as one of the founders of the town. He served from Jan. 24, 1893, to 1905.

Two of Dr. Mitchell's five living granddaughters, Ms. Nedra Holloman of Ahoskie and Mrs. Jessie M. Curry of Ayden, took part in the 100th birthday party for the town on Jan. 24, 1993, at the town gymnasium.

The other three living granddaughters are Ms. Jessie Lois Holloman of Ahoskie, Ms. Irene Moore of Greensboro, and Mrs. Louise M. Walker of Knoxville, Tenn.

Robert Holloman served as mayor from 1905-1911.

Two stints as mayor

Then W.E. Rogers served two stints as mayor, from 1911 to 1915 and 1931 to 1947. His daughter-in-law, Marjorie Rogers, resides in Ahoskie.

F.G. Tayloe was mayor from 1915-1917. His son, Jonathan Tayloe, lives in Ahoskie, and his daughter, Mrs. Bruce T. Smith, resides in Atlanta, Ga.

World War I interrupted the terms of L.C. Williams as mayor. He served from 1917-19 and from 1923-27.

W.L. Curtis, whose son Stuart is an Ahoskie attorney and former town councilman, was mayor from 1919-23.

Then came Alvah Early, who was mayor from 1927-31. His daughter, Mrs. Jesse W. Barnes, lives in town.

Mayor Rogers was joined in the administration of the town with Councilmen James C. Sessoms, E.R. Evans and N.S. Godwin from 1935-38.

Council increased to 5

Then the number of councilmen was increased to five by means of special legislation. W.H. Basnight and A.W. Greene were added to the council with Sessoms, Evans and Godwin.

J. Carlton Cherry served as mayor from 1947-49. A prominent local attorney, Cherry gained fame as one of the first professional sports agents when he represented baseball pitcher Jim "Catfish" Hunter of Hertford in a landmark free agency dispute with Major League Baseball. Cherry's son, Thomas, practices law in town.

For the next six years J.B. Burden was Ahoskie's mayor. His wife, Frances Burden, remains in town.

J. Stanley Vinson served as mayor from 1955-63.

Charles I. Pierce was Ahoskie's mayor for 10 years from 1963-73, and he attended the 100th birthday party.

Merrill J. Evans was mayor from 1973-85. However, he missed the birthday party because of illness.

Mitchell S. "Mickey" McLean served as mayor from 1985-91. He and his family attended the birthday party.

James Hutcherson, a retired North Carolina Power Co. official, is the current mayor.

Lawsuit filed

Since the council was increased to five members in 1939, the town

board has remained at that number.

However, a current lawsuit (Ahoskie Civic Association v. Town of Ahoskie) may result in a reduction of council members from five to four. The voting rights court case was filed to insure more minority representation on the council.

The Ahoskie Civic Association wants two councilmen to be elected from each of two districts — one predominantly white and one predominantly black — and the mayor elected at-large, or by the entire town.

The town countered with the same plan but with a fifth council-

man elected at-large in order to prevent the mayor from having to break many ties.

From 1893 to 1993, only two African Americans have been elected to serve on the Ahoskie Town Council — Henry Roy Marsh from 1969 to 1985 and Clarence S. Newsome from 1983-1991.

Mrs. Angela Early, a member of the current council, has been the only woman to serve on the council from 1893 to the present time.

In the 1991 election, Newsome was the first black person to run for mayor, but he was defeated by Hutcherson by 47 votes.

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