

### Slaughterville, Oklahoma

Slaughterville is a town of roughly thirty-six hundred residents. The 2000 United States Census was 3609.<sup>1</sup> It encompasses 24,960 Acres or approximately thirty-nine square miles in south central Cleveland County. It is located Southeast of Norman, east of Noble, and north of Lexington. State Highway 77 crosses through the western edge of the town. It is the third largest city in the county by landmass, preceded only by Norman and Oklahoma City. Even though Slaughterville has been a town for just over thirty years, it has a very unique and interesting history.

Before Slaughterville could become a town, it had to meet certain state requirements. First, the proposed town could be no closer than three miles to an existing town. Second, the proposed town had to be surveyed. Third, a census of the proposed town had to be taken. Fourth, a majority of landowners in the proposed site needed to sign a petition requesting a vote to be taken for incorporation as a town. Lastly, a vote had to be scheduled and taken. A proposed town that meets all of these requirements and has a majority vote in favor of incorporation can then file with the County Clerk's office.<sup>2</sup>

In 1968, Jim Brown, had a desire to incorporate the Maguire Community into a town.<sup>3</sup> The Maguire Community is now part of the town of Slaughterville, but at this time, it was on the northern border of the future town. Jim Brown had recently purchased the Maguire Farm Store, located in the Maguire Community. Annette Brown said one reason for incorporation was that "we wanted a fire department and did not want to be annexed by those cities that would not provide anything".<sup>4</sup> With this desire to incorporate

Maguire into a town, he hired a lawyer from Norman. Upon investigation he found that Maguire was within three miles of two existing communities, therefore it could not be incorporated into a separate town.<sup>5</sup> Maguire was only one mile from Noble to its west and one mile from Norman to its north.

Around this same time, two primary groups sought the incorporation of the Town of Slaughterville. The first and most prominent of these groups at the outset were those individuals who wanted to maintain a rural community. Three men headed this group: Al Barnes, who later became the first mayor, Bill Hightower, and Raymond Wenthold. In the late 1960's, many of the towns surrounding what is now Slaughterville were annexing additional property. Bill Hightower remembers that: "Norman and Newcastle were annexing square miles coming and going. We wanted to remain a farming community and live by our own rules and regulations".<sup>6</sup> Noble to the west, Norman to the north, and Lexington to the south were all investigating the possibility of absorbing Slaughterville, or parts of it, into their communities. Annexation would bring regulation. This produced fear and anxiety in many of the residents.

Slaughterville had long been an agricultural region, and the residents were proud of this fact. The worst possible scenario was seen as the possibility of Norman annexing the community. Norman was known for its lengthy and cumbersome regulations, and for a community with none, this was a concern. In Slaughterville, farmers were free to build barns where they saw fit. They were free to add driveways to roads for access to fields without permits. Farmers were free to park vehicles and tractors in their yards, and individuals could hunt and fish without harassment. The projection was that Norman

would attempt to annex a strip of land two to three miles wide running from the present city limits to the Lexington Wildlife Refuge south of Slaughterville.

The second group sought incorporation for a different reason. This group of individuals was substantially smaller in number than the first group. The area of Slaughterville had no fire protection. If Lexington or Noble annexed Slaughterville, it was believed that neither town could, nor would, improve the fire protection. While Norman probably had the financial resources, it was feared that a rural area would not receive a fire station. The reason was simple; Norman was growing quickly and fire stations were needed in more populated areas. This second group of individuals believed that the best way to solve the problem was to incorporate and use the resources of the town to provide their own fire department rather than sending the tax revenue to towns that would provide little or nothing.<sup>7</sup>

Al Barnes, Bill Hightower, and Raymond Wenthold began the incorporation process in 1969. A census was taken of the proposed town site during the winter of 1969-1970. This census showed an initial population of fifty-one families totaling one hundred fifty-eight people. A petition was circulated in early 1970, securing enough signatures to call for a vote. On November 20, 1970, a vote was taken for incorporation. The vote was thirty-four in favor, with zero opposed. Papers were filed with the Cleveland County Clerk's office on November 25, 1970. Slaughterville had become a town. There was now no more reason to fear the regulations of outside entities; the greatest concern now was what to do, if anything.

The original town was much smaller and less active in politics than it is today. The town originally incorporated only 7,948 acres, only about one third of its present

area. It was divided into three wards; each ward would elect a council member. The rural mentality of the majority of the citizens was evidenced by the fact that the first town meeting did not occur for nearly one full year. It seems that the people of the town were satisfied with keeping other towns away; they did not feel a great urgency to begin the workings of the town government. The first town meeting was held on November 10, 1971.<sup>8</sup> Al Barnes was elected the first mayor. No other business was on the agenda at this meeting.

There are many rumors as to the origin of the name for Slaughterville. Some are very interesting. First, it is rumored that a number of black slaves were executed by their owners in this area. Neither date nor specific location has ever been given by those who promote this rumor. Second, before township, several meat packing plants and slaughterhouses were located in the area. Some believed that the name came from this prominent industry. A third rumor was in relation to a bend on Highway 77 at Slaughterville Road. It is rumored that such a large number of motorists missed the curve and ended up in fatality accidents that the name naturally developed. A fourth rumor referenced a bar on Highway 77. The rumor alleges that a number of people have been killed in bar brawls. The actual story behind the name is much less romantic and exciting.

The name Slaughterville actually originated from a small business in the area. Jim Slaughter owned a store on Highway 77 and Slaughterville Road. This location, over time, became known as Slaughter's Corner. In the early days of seeking incorporation, the people involved decided that a recognizable name would help to identify the town. Bill Hightower remembers, "that corner was the most recognizable spot in the town".<sup>9</sup> Since Slaughter's Corner was widely recognized and known as a stop on Highway 77,

this name was chosen. It is interesting to note that the original town did not encompass Slaughter's Corner. The original town came within one mile. It was not until March 22, 1972 that Slaughter's Corner was included in the town.<sup>10</sup>

Beginning in 1972, Slaughterville began to annex surrounding communities. On March 22, 1972, 1.5 square miles on the southeast corner and 8.25 square miles on the west side of the original town was annexed. This western annexation included Slaughter's Corner. Later that year, on December 6, 16.5 square miles to the north were annexed. This area was predominately the Maguire Community that Jim Brown had sought to incorporate four years earlier. The last of the early major annexations took place on September 23, 1974. Another 6.25 square miles were annexed on the south side of the town. This brought the town to its largest size of approximately twenty-eight thousand acres. Today, the town is just over three thousand acres smaller than this peak.<sup>11</sup>

The next and perhaps the most important development in the history of Slaughterville is the creation of the fire department. The fire department has done much to build and maintain unity as well as provide security for the community. From the very beginning, there were individuals in the town who saw the need for fire protection. The fire department averages over ninety-nine runs per year. Marsha Blair remembers that there was a time when "if a structure caught on fire, there was nothing we could do except watch".<sup>12</sup> The Slaughterville Fire Department was formed in 1976, as an all-volunteer organization.

The fire department had little in the way of resources, so it relied upon community support. The first fire truck was a surplus civil defense vehicle used as a brush-pumper until 1994. The truck was outfitted in 1977 with pump equipment. On

October 15, 1978, Jim Brown, then serving as President of the Board of Trustees, issued a newsletter to the community. In that letter, the town requested help with either funding or materials to ready a second fire truck, as the town simply did not have the resources to purchase these items outright.<sup>13</sup> The first fire truck was kept at Maguire Farm Store, as the town did not have a building of its own.

The fire department has grown steadily and improved greatly over its history. It began with seventeen members.<sup>14</sup> The fire department now has twenty-two volunteers; six of these volunteers are state certified instructors. The fire department began with a donated civil defense truck; it now has eleven. With its four tankers, four brush trucks, two engines and one utility truck; the fire department is capable of dealing with most every situation. When the first seventeen members volunteered, they did not have fire protective clothing, uniforms, or a water distribution system. Today, the fire department boasts some of the best fire gear around. If asked, many residents will share that the fire department is what they are most proud of in Slaughterville.<sup>15</sup>

The town now has two fire stations. The first fire station was a combination town hall and fire station “on a one-acre site located in the east central part of Slaughterville” on Slaughterville Road and 120<sup>th</sup> Street at Shobert’s Corner.<sup>16</sup> The second fire station is located on Cemetery Road just west of 96<sup>th</sup> Street. A building was purchased on State Highway 77 in 2001. This building is to be remodeled and will serve as a third fire station and a new town hall. This will give improved fire protection to the west side of the town.

In 1981, the town received its first town sign. The sign was installed at the curve on Highway 77 at Slaughterville Road. There was a problem though. The sign indicated Slaughterville was to the east.<sup>17</sup> Slaughterville had incorporated the curve in 1972, so the

sign was actually inside the town limits. It seemed that even the state officials did not know the location of the town. This seems to be the norm in Oklahoma, many have heard the name Slaughterville, but few can actually locate it on a map.

As Slaughterville made its way through the mid 1980's, perhaps the saddest chapter in town history developed. Slaughterville was growing at a very rapid rate. By 1977, the town population exceeded two thousand people.<sup>18</sup> Developers were entering the area and creating subdivisions. Some of these subdivisions placed water wells and septic systems in such proximity that there was a legitimate health fear and most new structures were of questionable quality. Many in the town felt that the time had come to develop a set of regulations to curb the growth of the town so that the rural appeal of Slaughterville would not be lost. Oil and gas companies were also entering the community. With no regulations, wells were being drilled very close to residences and many holding tanks were of questionable quality. A few years earlier, an issue arose concerning the conservation of water resources inside the city limits. This culminated with a suit being filed by Purcell in protest to Slaughterville's policy to limit commercial water wells.<sup>19</sup> These good intentions would spark a conflict that would divide and nearly destroy the town.

On September 20, 1983, the largest town meeting up to this date was held to discuss possible regulation of the town.<sup>20</sup> The size of this meeting showed the interest in zoning and regulation throughout Slaughterville. A straw pole held at this meeting found three to one in favor of regulation, although a formal vote was not taken. At the meeting, an interim-zoning ordinance was voted into effect. This was to last for one year so that the town could have ample time to research which ordinances would best fit with the

town.<sup>21</sup> Within two months, the discussion of zoning had developed into conflict. The planning commission had gathered data from a number of surrounding towns. Their purpose was to research and determine the regulations that would best work in Slaughterville. Unfortunately, many people began to fear that the town was going to attempt to regulate heavily, much like Norman or Nichols Hills.<sup>22</sup> During the October town meetings, a group of individuals opposed to any type of regulation caused a substantial disruption in the meeting.<sup>23</sup> By November, the issue had become so political that Shirley Mobely of the Norman Liberation Party sited Slaughterville as an example of excessive government in a paid political advertisement.<sup>24</sup>

The greatest change in the political landscape of Slaughterville came in 1985. Fueled by the zoning and regulation controversy, six candidates worked together to be elected. The main issue dividing the community and sending people to the poles on April 2, 1985, was not political affiliation, but rather support or opposition to zoning. Bobby Tarp, E.V. Smith, Randy Shobert, Delta Jean Moffet, Carl Herbert and Carol Sellers all ran for office on the same platform. These six were opposed to regulation and were willing to offer de-annexation for those who wished.<sup>25</sup> All six of these individuals won their respective bids for election.

The newly elected trustees began to “dismantle the town’s planning commission, municipal court, and oil and gas ordinance”.<sup>26</sup> This brought about an even greater amount of conflict. The new trustees were true to their word about de-annexation for those who wanted to be out of the town. On June 18, 1985, the trustees approved the de-annexation of ten acres owned by Roy and R.D. Wilkins.<sup>27</sup> De-annexation became so popular over the next few months that the town retained the services of Cleveland County Abstract Co.

The company was used to verify legal description for the over one hundred requests for de-annexation.<sup>28</sup> On October 17, 1985, a resolution was brought to de-annex nearly twenty square miles of the town; this measure passed. Interestingly, the trustees de-annexed themselves. This action forced them to step down from their positions, leaving no one to run the town.

As of 2002, Slaughterville remains the only city in the state of Oklahoma to have required the state government to step in and run the city. The state of Oklahoma has a constitutional provision, which allows the Governor to appoint trustees to a town so that it can have an operating government. Governor George Nigh was required to enact this provision. He contacted Jim Brown and asked if he knew the names of any individuals who would make good appointments. Jim Brown recommended Bob Powell, Lynn Davenport, and Mike Kouri.<sup>29</sup> Governor Nigh appointed these three men. These three then appointed Terry Childress and Jim Blair to complete the board of trustees.

Those individuals left inside the town began the process of rebuilding. The town was now only about half of the size it was just days before. Many in the community and in the surrounding areas held grudges, some even to this day. Many, who had poured their lives into the town, were devastated by the recent events. The first order of business was to reestablish a working government. With the town a patchwork of what it once was, the former wards would no longer work. Starting in 1985, the trustees were elected by general election from the entire town, no longer did they come from individual wards.

Over time, the town began to come back together. As cooler heads prevailed and the emotions of the moment subsided, order was restored. People began to submit their names for re-annexation into the town. The fire department provided much of the

motivation for this move. Many people in the community were involved with the fire department or they knew someone who was. These friendships and ties seemed to help rebuild friendships and trust. The fire department was also a necessity. People liked the security of having a local fire department. Some people feared that being outside of the town limits would impede their fire protection. The Slaughterterville Fire Department would deny this, as they are the response department for a number of areas outside of the actual town limits.<sup>30</sup> The fire department also gave residents an economic reason to return to the town. The Slaughterterville Fire Department had become such a high quality department that homeowners inside their area were receiving a lower insurance rate. Many people were interested in these savings.

As the town began to draw back together, they still had to deal with the issue of regulation. In 1999, the town again undertook the task of zoning and regulating. This time, however, the town met with much lower resistance. The town was over three thousand in population and it was becoming evident to all that regulation was going to be necessary in order to slow growth. The town was successful in passing essentially the same regulations that had split the town fourteen years earlier.<sup>31</sup>

Slaughterterville has never had a large revenue base to draw from for improvements. It hopes that the new zoning laws will bring businesses to the town. Slaughterterville only has four convenience stores, a bar, and one restaurant. The town, therefore does not generate a large income from sales taxes. There are other sources of revenue. The town, like all towns, receives a percentage of the utility bills from its residents. The town has also secured various federal and state grants for improvement. The diligent pursuit of these grants has given Slaughterterville the opportunity to improve its fire department, build

a town hall, and maintain the community. Therefore, the town seems to be heading towards a bright future.

## NOTES

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1. United States Census Data, on file at Slaughterville Town Hall, 2000
  2. Marsha Blair, Town Administrator, interviewed by author, notes, Slaughterville, OK., 12 November 2002
  3. Jim Brown, interview by author, note, Slaughterville, OK., 15 October 2002
  4. Annette Brown, interviewed by author, note, Slaughterville, OK., 15 October 2002
  5. Jim Brown, interview by author, note, Slaughterville, OK., 15 October 2002
  6. Peggy Laizure, "Slaughterville Founded To Keep Rural Identity," Cleveland County Record, 14 November 1990
  7. Marsha Blair, Town Administrator, interviewed by author, notes, Slaughterville, OK., 12 November 2002
  8. Slaughterville OK., public records, minutes of meetings
  9. Peggy Laizure, "No Killing Involved In Naming of Town," Cleveland County Record, 14 November 1990
  10. Slaughterville OK., map on file in public records & The Noble News, 27 January 1977
  11. Slaughterville OK., public records, minutes of meetings
  12. Marsha Blair, Town Administrator, interviewed by author, notes, Slaughterville, OK., 12 November 2002
  13. Jim Brown to Slaughterville Residents, 15 October 1978, Public Records, Slaughterville Town Hall
  14. The Noble News, 29 December 1977
  15. Peggy Laizure, "Slaughterville Proud of its Fire Dept.," Cleveland County Record, 14 November 1990
  16. Ibid
  17. Larry Nemecek, "Don't Move the Town, Just Change the Sign," The Cleveland County Reporter, 5 November 1981

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18. Sue Carter, "Slaughterville? Better See If You Live There!," The Noble News, 27 January 1977

19. The Cleveland County Reporter, 25 March 1982

20. Big John, "Slaughterville News," The Cleveland County Reporter, 8 September 1983

21. Ibid

22. Marsha Blair, Town Administrator, interviewed by author, notes, Slaughterville, OK., 12 November 2002

23. Big John, "Slaughterville News," The Cleveland County Reporter, 3 November 1983

24. Shirley Mobley, "Slaughterville Zoning Inevitable?," The Cleveland County Reporter, 10 November 1983

25. John Burgeson, "Zoning Ordinances Become Main Issue in Slaughterville's Trustee Races," The Daily Oklahoman, 22 March 1985

26. Larry Nemecek, "Rumors of deannexation surround Slaughterville," The Norman Transcript, 19 June 1985

27. Ibid

28. Larry Nemecek, "Slaughterville sets action on deannexation requests," The Norman Transcript, 28 August 1985

29. Jim Brown, interview by author, notes, Slaughterville Ok., 15 October 2002

30. Marsha Blair, Town Administrator, interviewed by author, notes, Slaughterville, OK., 12 November 2002

31. Ibid