

## **Downtown Commercial District:**

### History:

The presence of the railroad played a crucial role in ensuring the viability of the downtown area. Early commercial development took place along East Choctaw Avenue, which roughly paralleled the route of the Union Pacific. In time the downtown grew in all directions from the railroad tracks. Diverse businesses developed on Choctaw Avenue including hotels that provided room and board for miners, traveling salesmen, and others. Choctaw Avenue also attracted various court and legal offices. By the start of the second decade of the twentieth century, the east end of Choctaw, in the vicinity of Fifth and Sixth Streets, had acquired an ice plant, the National Biscuit Company, and the Armour Packing Company. Other businesses that developed along Choctaw were quite varied and included as a skating rink, a business college, and a bank.

Development on Carl Albert Parkway, known as Grand Avenue for most of its history, was somewhat different from that on Choctaw Avenue. At least two coal companies, the Dow Coal Company and the Great Western Coal and Coke Company, established offices on Grand Avenue. Several churches also located on Grand Avenue, including the Mary E. Phillips Memorial Methodist Church, which later became the Grand Avenue Methodist Church. The Christian Church also located on Grand Avenue. A final construction spree, dating from about 1914 and lasting though the end of the 1920s, would help solidify the architectural character of Grand Avenue. In 1914 the Post Office, later named the Carl Albert Federal Building, was constructed. It reflects the Classical Revival style. Between 1924 and 1926 the Grand Avenue Methodist Church and the First Christian Churches constructed new buildings. They reflect the Classical

Revival and Tudor Revival styles. In 1926, the Busby Hotel, later to become the Pittsburg County Courthouse, would add a touch of the Beaux Arts style. Finally, the construction of the 11-story Aldridge Hotel between 1929 and 1930 proved not only a testimony to the wealth that McAlester had accumulated but also made East Grand Avenue (Carl Albert Parkway) a landmark street in the city.

The eastern portions of both Choctaw Avenue and Carl Albert Parkway thrived until the late 1920s when the boom associated with the coal industry ended. Since that time, increasing maintenance costs and urban renewal projects have impacted some of the properties in the area. However, these two streets warrant further study as components of a potentially National Register eligible district because together they reflect the breadth of McAlester's historical experience in terms of business, industry, and architecture.

Description:

The Downtown Commercial District comprises a four-block area along East Choctaw Avenue and East Carl Albert Parkway between First and Fifth Streets. This district also includes a one-block extension along Choctaw Avenue to Main Street. Moving in a clockwise direction the specific boundaries include the following streets: both sides of Carl Albert Parkway between First and Fifth Streets, the west side of Fifth Street between Carl Albert Parkway and Choctaw Avenue, both sides of Choctaw Avenue between Fifth and First Streets, and only the east side of First Street between Choctaw Avenue and Carl Albert Parkway. Finally, the boundary of the district also includes the south side of Choctaw Avenue between First and Main Streets. Beyond these boundaries the character of development changes and outlying streets lose the feel of the

historic downtown. For example, east and south of this district contemporary commercial development prevails. To the north one encounters a combination of residential and contemporary commercial development. To the west the MKT railroad as well as contemporary commercial development along Main Street provide another clearly defined boundary.

Although there is a slight incline between Choctaw Avenue and Carl Albert Parkway, the terrain in the Downtown Commercial District is fairly level. The streets in this district occupy the bottom portion of the hill that rises steeply towards Washington and Adams Avenues. A grassy median with some small trees and shrubs stretches down the center of Carl Albert Parkway for nearly the length of the district. By contrast, Choctaw Avenue does not have a median and small trees and shrubs are generally confined to planters placed in front of buildings or along the sidewalks.

#### Architecture:

Approximately 120 properties are located in this district, and about ten percent of those are not primarily commercial in nature. These exceptions include the Aldridge Hotel which has recently been converted into an apartment complex for senior citizens; the Busby Office Building, which now houses the Pittsburg County Genealogical and Historical Society; the Pittsburg County Courthouse; the International Order of the Rainbow for Girls; the Carl Albert Federal Building; the Grand Avenue Methodist Church; and the First Christian Church. This district includes four properties that have already been listed in the National Register of Historic Places. These properties include the Aldridge Hotel which was listed in 1995, the Pittsburg County Courthouse, listed in

1984, the Busby Office Building, listed in 1979, and the Southern Ice and Cold Storage Company which also gained a listing in 1979. Still another property in the Downtown Commercial District is potentially eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, and that is the Carl Albert Federal Building.

Architecturally, the Downtown Commercial District comprises numerous different styles. The prevalent style is the Commercial Style (1875-1920), and is represented by approximately 50 percent of the properties in the district. The remaining properties exhibit a variety of styles including several examples from the Eclectic Period (1880-1940) such as the Classical Revival style, the Tudor Revival style, and the Beaux Arts style. The Victorian Period (1830-1910) is represented by a few properties constructed in the Romanesque style. Also, some properties built in the Art Deco and Moderne styles reflect the Modernistic Period (1935-1950). Good examples of the Classical Revival style are located at 101 and 223 East Carl Albert Parkway, and good examples of the Tudor Revival style are at 300 East Carl Albert Parkway and the southwest corner of North Third Street and East Washington Avenue. The Pittsburg County Courthouse at 115 East Carl Albert Parkway provides an excellent example of the Beaux Arts style. A good example of the Romanesque style stands at 101-106 East Carl Albert Parkway. The best example of the Art Deco style is located at 18-22 East Choctaw Avenue, and an excellent example of the Moderne style stands at 313 East Carl Albert Parkway. The degree of architectural integrity of the properties within this district is rather variable, although when viewed as a whole the district does possess a visible unity.

Noncontributing Properties:

At present there are only about two or three vacant lots in the Downtown Commercial District, and no more than 20 percent of the properties are noncontributing resources. Intrusions in this district include properties such as the Jim Settle Magnolia Gas Station at the corner of Fifth Street and Choctaw Avenue. This property is in great need of rehabilitation. A newer structure (built in 1971) that constitutes a noncontributing property is the First National Center, an office complex and parking garage anchored by the First National Bank. The First National Center spans the entire north side of Choctaw Avenue between Second and Third Streets.

Recommendation:

The Downtown Commercial District qualifies for a National Register of Historic Places district nomination for at least two reasons. First, it includes four properties that have already been listed in the National Register, and a fifth property that is also National Register eligible. Second, it contains a significant concentration of buildings that are historically related. The streets in this district were a focal point for the early development of the city of McAlester, and that is revealed in the architecture of many of the properties here. The integrity of the historic fabric and setting are given additional consideration below.

The integrity of the Downtown Commercial District is essentially intact. However, one important concern is that alterations seem to be rather prevalent. For example, the Southern Ice and Cold Storage Company, a property that was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1979, has been drastically altered. In fact, it appears that most of the original structure no longer exists. The following example

illustrates an even more extreme case. In 1980 the McAlester DX Station, located at Fifth Street and Carl Albert Parkway, was listed in the National Register. Today, that property no longer exists although the red horse that used to identify it was salvaged and has been moved to the Red Horse Tire store at 110 South Sixth Street. Similarly, changes to the first floors of some of the buildings are starting to affect their integrity. The R. K. McAdams building at 315 East Choctaw Avenue provides an example of this.

For preservationists, the rate and intensity of alterations such as those described above raises the level of urgency of action. The Downtown Commercial District is in need of more intensive-level research before additional alterations erase the historical and architectural integrity of the district. With this in mind, the following 18 properties constitute contributing resources to the Downtown Commercial District.

- (1) **South McAlester/Eufala Telephone Company Building** (100-106 East Carl Albert Parkway). Built circa 1905.

This is a two-story sandstone clad professional building designed in the Romanesque Revival style. It has a flat roof and recessed entry, and the north elevation features ribbon windows with round arches and hood moldings. Also, seven sets of paired round arch windows with hood moldings stretch along the second story on the west side creating an arcaded effect. A corbeled cornice and four full-height pilasters decorate the front façade. The frieze contains decorative recessed niches. Four rows of sandstone decoratively cut in small squares form an attractive band that stretches across the front façade above the windows. There is a partial inset portico that has decorative tiles in the ceiling. The pilaster/porch

support on the northwest corner appears to be a recent replacement. The first floor has beaded mortar that is also probably not original. Windows have been altered and most have some wood in-fill. This is still a very good example of the Romanesque Revival style.

(2) **101 East Carl Albert Parkway.** Built circa 1910.

This is a one-story, flat-roofed, limestone clad, professional building constructed in the Classical Revival style. Decorative details include two freestanding Ionic columns that support an enframing wall (*distyle in antis*). The front entrance is slightly recessed with arched windows above and on both sides. The west elevation of the building consists of seven tall arched windows, and four Ionic pilasters separate five of these. The front (south) and west sides have a dentiled cornice. Also, the front façade contains a crest with a decorative scroll design, and the frieze contains low relief carvings in blocks along the east and west ends. All windows have some wood in-fill.

(3) **Busby Office Building** (113 East Carl Albert Parkway). Built 1903-1907 (N.R. listed 1979).

Built by the Great Western Coal and Coke Company, this building served as office space for Colonel William Busby. Today it houses the Pittsburg County Genealogical and Historical Society. This property is a brick clad, two-story Commercial style research facility. It has a flat, parapeted roof and a large centered cartouche with leaves, horns of plenty, and the letter "B" inscribed on it. Other decorative features include a corbeled stone

cornice, ribbon windows with a continuous label mold also decorated with leaves, corbeling above the label mold, and two pilasters with corbeled caps. There is a white stone string course that matches the coping along the tops of the walls. The east elevation contains ranked segmental arch windows. The front façade has been altered with the addition of a new door and windows. There is also some metal in-fill in the top half of the first story windows.

- (4) **Pittsburg County Courthouse** (115 East Carl Albert Parkway). Built in 1926 (N.R. listed 1984).

This is a three-story, brick and stone clad, flat-roofed building in the Beaux Arts style. It features a stepped parapet and a recessed entrance situated between two large wings. Four engaged and fluted stone Ionic columns enframe the entrance along with tall keyed round arches. The stone within each of the arches above the doors has been carved in the form of a fanlight. A dentiled cornice capped with a balcony stretches above the columns. All second story windows on the outer walls of the wings are decorated with balconets.

- (5) **J. B. McAlester Building** (120-122 ½ East Carl Albert Parkway). Built circa 1900.

This is a two-story brick clad Commercial style professional building. It has a basement, and a flat-roof. Architecturally, it features a battlemented parapet, windows capped with soldier brick lintels, and a clerestory across the façade. The property also has a recessed entry. Four paneled pillars



that appear to have been altered support the second story. Windows on the front façade appear relatively new.

- (6) **Knights Templar Building** (124-126 East Carl Albert Parkway). Built circa 1905.

This is a three-story brick clad Commercial style professional building with a basement and a flat roof. The property has a simple cornice, and the frieze on the north and east sides contains some modest horizontal bands. Two false chimneystacks rise from the west side of the roof. Except for the fixed pane display windows on the front façade, all windows have plywood in-fill. There is also some corrugated aluminum in-fill above the fixed pane display windows.

- (7) **Grand Avenue Methodist Church** (223 East Carl Albert Parkway). Built in 1922.

This is a three-story brick clad Classical Revival style religious structure with a basement and a flat roof. It features six freestanding concrete Corinthian columns. Two pilasters with Corinthian capitals support a pedimented portico. The portico is full-height and full-width. The pediment has a brick tympanum and a dentiled cornice. Stained glass casement windows located above the doors decorate the front façade. The east elevation has six round arch windows with keystones and soldier brick voussoirs. Multiple pilasters with composite capitals also decorate the east wall. A small pediment rises above a partial-width and single

story portico on the east elevation. A three-story wing with a partial-width porch adjoins the building on the west.

- (8) **First Christian Church** (300 East Carl Albert Parkway). Built in 1925.

This is a two-story, brick clad, Tudor Revival style religious structure with a cross gable roof, a basement, and a crenellated parapet. The northwest corner features a square tower while the southwest corner features a false square tower. Gable ends have parapets and the tower tops have stepped parapets. The north and south gable ends have pointed arch windows with tracery. There are smaller versions of these windows spanning the second story on the west side. All of these windows have concrete Tudor-arched hood moldings. Brick in-fill separates the top and bottom portions of these windows on the north, south, and west sides. Slender brick buttresses capped with shaped concrete mark the corner and the walls primarily on the north and west elevations. A continuous concrete belt course encircles the building. The entry is recessed and covered by a compound segmental arch.

- (9) **Carl Albert Federal Building** (301 East Carl Albert Parkway). Built in 1914.

This is a three-story buff-brick clad government building built in the Classical Revival style with a hipped roof. It features a second story portico supported by four freestanding Corinthian columns and seven engaged pilasters with Corinthian capitals. The portico also has French doors and a metal balustrade. Six oval cartouches decorate the wall around

the portico. The first story features an arcaded entry with keyed round arches. Decorative brickwork on the first story consists of the American bond alternating with three or five courses of corbeled stretchers to each course of headers. Flemish bond marks the top two stories. The window style becomes more simplified from the lower to the upper stories. The first floor has round arched windows with keystones in a scroll design, and the windows have brackets with the same scroll design. The second floor has flat arched windows marked by stone lintels, and the third floor has only a simple keystone above the windows. A continuous stone belt course and dentiled cornice encircle the building. A pedimented parapet also decorates the front façade.

- (10) **Order of the Rainbow for Girls** (313 East Carl Albert Parkway). Built in 1951.

This three-story, buff-brick clad, organizational-related building is constructed in the Moderne style and has a flat roof. The front façade features two prominent two-story rounded bay windows. The entry is slightly recessed and distinguished from the rest of the structure by its marble veneer. Two slender vertical strips of fixed windows help frame the entry. The east and west walls have double-ranked, tall, narrow windows. All windows lack lintels and are flat-headed.

- (11) **18-22 East Choctaw Avenue**. Built circa 1910.

This is a three-story flat-roofed brick clad theater built in the Art Deco style. The front façade includes a stepped parapet, vertical striations,

chevrons, and stylized floral motifs on the frieze. There is one large glass block window as well as the original marquee. Two windows on the front façade have concrete in-fill. The Art Deco façade may be the result of alterations dating from the 1930s.

- (12) **F.W. Woolworth Company** (110-112 East Choctaw Avenue). Built in 1945.

This is a two-story brick clad store built in the Art Deco style. It is flat-roofed and has a stepped parapet. Chevrons decorate the parapet and second story lintels. Below the windowsills stretch two bands of soldier bricks. Pilasters separate the windows on the second story. An enframed window wall with fixed pane display windows and two recessed entrances dominate the first story façade.

- (13) **Cornish Building** (111 East Choctaw Avenue). Built circa 1905.

This is a two-story flat-roofed building built in the Commercial style. It possesses a brick façade and a sidewall that is half brick (bottom) and half sandstone (top). The front façade is parapeted and has a corbeled cornice below which stretches a band of chevrons. A large aluminum awning has been added (date unknown) to the front. The windows on the second story of the west wall have brick in-fill.

- (14) **J. J. McAlester Building** (123 East Choctaw Avenue). Built in 1902.

This is a two-story brick clad building in the Commercial style. It has a flat parapeted roof, name plate, and pronounced corbeled cornice with molding. Three large glass block windows dominate the front façade. Two

pilasters, connected by a baskethandle arch, separate the windows. The glass-block windows also have small casement windows set within them. Three brick piers support the façade and create a covered entry with recessed doors. Quoins decorate the northeast and southeast corners. On the east elevation stand six pilasters which originally separated paired arched windows. These windows have been replaced with brick in-fill (date unknown). The front façade has some wood in-fill as well.

(15) **McMurray Building** (202-204 East Choctaw Avenue). Built in 1897.

This is a two-story flat-roofed Romanesque Revival style building with sandstone cladding and a battlemented parapet. It features a corbeled cornice capped with crown molding. The second story has a band of eight tall and deeply set windows. The two center windows have segmental arched lintels outlined with molding. A single continuous sandstone sill underlines all eight of these windows, which appear to be relatively new. The first story façade has a full-width metal awning.

(16) **R. K. McAdams Building** (315 East Choctaw Avenue). Built in 1896.

This two-story flat-roofed Commercial style building features a sandstone façade and an uncoursed rubble side wall. Decorative details include a pedimented parapet containing the nameplate. Four of the stones on the parapet have sunburst motifs. The second story has four tall, narrow, and deeply set windows. Alterations to the first story include the addition of stained glass, woodwork, a cloth awning, and rock-faced concrete block pilasters that do not match the sandstone on the second story.

- (17) **International Order of Odd Fellows Lodge No. 388** (326 ½ -328 East Choctaw Avenue). Built circa 1910.

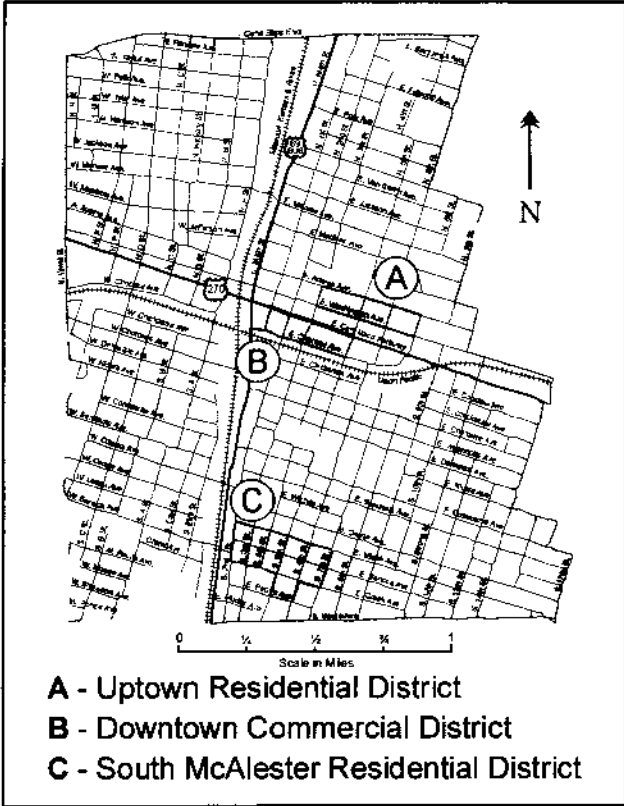
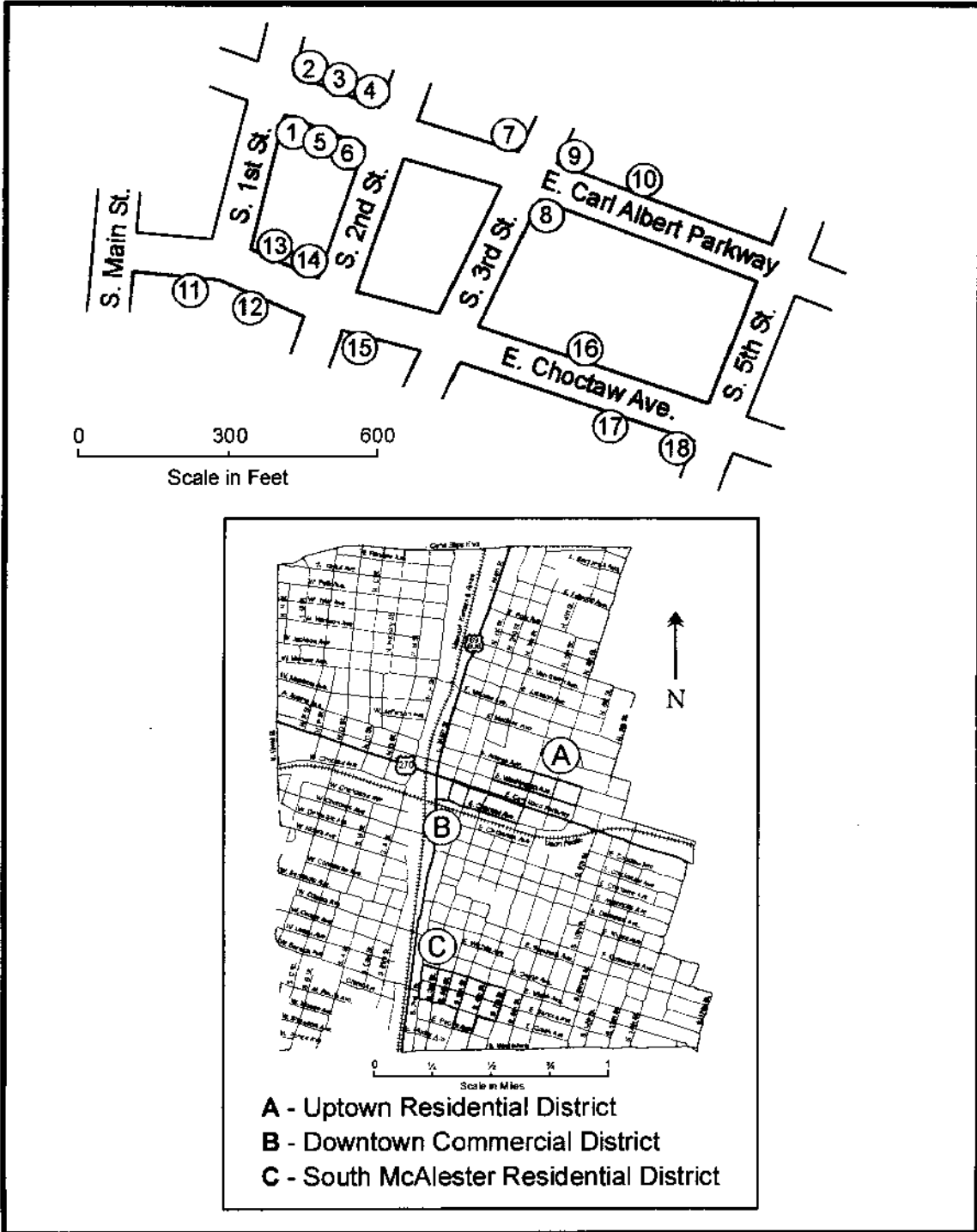
This is a brick clad two-story Commercial style building with a flat roof and concrete coping. Stepped parapets mark the sidewalls. Other decorative features include horizontal banding and a row of square niches across the frieze. Corbeling also decorates the front façade. Eight segmental arched windows stretch across the second story with two bands of rowlock bricks forming the voussoirs. Alternating bricks in the intrados are recessed. All second story windows on the front have corrugated metal in-fill. There is additional metal in-fill above the transom as well.

- (18) **Southern Ice and Cold Storage Company** (338 East Choctaw Avenue). Built in 1900. (N.R. listed 1979).

This is a two-story flat-roofed Commercial style building with brick and weatherboard cladding. It has four full-length pilasters decorating the front façade. The frieze consists of a row of square niches and brick corbeling that continues on the west side as well. The second story has a row of seven flat-headed windows that are not original and have some weatherboard in-fill. The entrance has considerable recent weatherboard in-fill as well. A cloth awning has been added to the front. Most of the structure that was listed in the National Register in 1979 no longer exists. This building seems to have been additional storage area for the original company. Other alterations include sizeable new additions on the east and west sides.

# Downtown Commercial District:

Properties That Warrant Further Study and are Contributing Resources



## **South McAlester Residential District**

### History:

Although the South McAlester Residential District was platted as part of the Original Townsite in 1900, at least one residence had already been constructed here. It was the “Conway Castle,” at 914 South Second Street, which was built in 1898. Shortly thereafter, other residences were constructed. The following list represents a partial sample of some of the early residences built in the South McAlester Residential District:

- the McGinnity House (1903) at 702 East Seneca Avenue
- the Robert Bingham Home (c. 1905) at 500 East Creek Avenue
- the George C. Cochran Residence (c. 1905) at 202 East Miami Avenue
- the George A. Mansfield Home (c. 1905) at 318 East Miami Avenue
- the R. R. Hall House (c. 1910) at 501 East Creek Avenue

With the construction of these homes, this district became an area recognized for its “high style” architecture. According to one source, for example, the “Conway Castle” was labeled “the showplace west of the Mississippi . . . one of the tastiest and costliest residences” in Indian Territory.<sup>1</sup> Like the Uptown Residential District, the South McAlester Residential District also attracted some of the city's prominent individuals. J. J. McGinnity was a famous baseball player from McAlester who was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. George C. Cochran, for example, owned the Cochran Grocery Company in McAlester. George A. Mansfield was a lawyer with the McAlester firm of Mansfield, McMurray, and Cornish. Finally, R. R. Hall served as President of the Oklahoma State Bank.

By the late 1920s, much of the neighborhood that exists today had been established, though additional properties would be built here through the 1940s. In 1920,



V. P. Buell, President of the Choctaw Pressed Brick Company, lived at 617 East Creek Avenue. That same year F. C. Russell, President and Manager of Russell Hardware Company lived at 401 East Miami Avenue; C. T. Hardeman, Secretary and Treasurer of Hardeman-King Company Flour Mill resided at 411 East Miami Avenue; and E. E. McInnis, a lawyer with the firm of McInnis and Moore, resided at 412 East Miami Avenue. Similarly, Arthur Krone, President of Doss Oil Royalty Company lived at 525 East Creek Avenue. Clearly, this residential area attracted a number of the people whose names are closely associated with the early growth of McAlester and its businesses.

Description:

The South McAlester Residential District occupies a portion of the south central part of the city. Moving in a clockwise fashion, the specific boundaries include the following streets: both sides of East Miami Avenue between South Second and South Seventh Streets, both sides of Seventh Street between Miami and Creek Avenues, both sides of Creek Avenue between Seventh and Sixth Streets, both sides of Sixth Street between Creek and Peoria Avenues, the north side of Peoria between Sixth and Fifth Streets, both sides of Fifth Street between Peoria and Creek Avenues, both sides of Creek Avenue between Fifth and Second Streets, and the east side of Second Street between Creek and Miami Avenues. Uneven residential development on the north, east, and south sides works to provide this area with fairly tangible boundaries on those sides. Commercial development on Main Street and the MKT Railroad tracks together create a definite boundary on the west.

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<sup>1</sup> Goins, Charles R. and John W. Morris. 1980. *Oklahoma Homes Past and Present*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, p. 159.

Like the Uptown Residential District, the South McAlester Residential District also occupies a hilltop location. The inclines are more gradual here, however, and throughout the district the slopes are fairly gentle. Nearly all of the properties in this district are residential, and more specifically, almost all of them are single-family dwellings. One notable exception to this is a hospital/rehabilitation center. As a whole, the lots are medium-sized, the houses set back from the streets, and the properties generally very well maintained.

Architecture:

There are approximately 120 properties in the South McAlester Residential District, and probably 90 percent of those have maintained a high degree of architectural integrity. One property in this district is potentially eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Most of the architectural styles represented in this district reflect the Eclectic Period (1880-1940), while a small number reflect the Victorian Period (1860-1900). The most prevalent styles here include Tudor Revival, Prairie School, Colonial Revival, and Bungalow/Craftsman. A majority of the residences can be classified in one of those styles, while a sprinkling of other residences are in the Classical Revival, Queen Anne, Folk Victorian, and Shingle styles. A good example of the Tudor Revival style stands at 420 East Seneca Avenue, while a good example of the Prairie School is located at 527 East Seneca Avenue. Excellent examples of the Colonial Revival style stand at 601 and 625 East Creek Avenue, and at 202 East Miami Avenue. At 914 South Second Street there is a National Register eligible property that provides an exceptional example of the Queen Anne style.

Noncontributing Properties:

No more than 10 percent of the properties in the South McAlester Residential District constitute noncontributing resources. There are only one or two vacant lots in the area, and only a handful of properties that need rehabilitation or maintenance. The most notable intrusion is the hospital/rehabilitation center located at the southeastern end of the district on Creek Avenue between Sixth and Seventh Streets.

Recommendation:

The South McAlester Residential District meets the criteria for the National Register because it possesses a high density of historic homes of excellent architectural integrity. One of the residences in this district is potentially eligible for the National Register, while numerous others provide very good or excellent examples of some of the high styles of architecture. It is recommended that the South McAlester Residential District be given strong consideration for an intensive level survey because of the number of individual properties that constitute contributing resources. The following list identifies and describes those properties deemed to be contributing resources.

- (1) **George C. Cochran Residence** (202 East Miami Avenue). Built circa 1905.

This is a two-story Colonial Revival style single dwelling. It features a gambrel roof, two interior chimneys with corbeled caps, and three dormers that also have gambrel roofs. Other decorative features include a full-height (two-story) and full-width portico supported by four fluted Ionic columns and four Ionic pilasters. The portico is not integral but is

connected to the roof by a shed roof extension. The dwelling has boxed eaves with a dentiled cornice. The west end of the attic story has a Palladian window, while lattice windows and lattice sidelights decorate the front façade. Vinyl siding covers most exterior surfaces.

(2) **300 East Miami Avenue.** Built circa 1930.

This two-story Colonial Revival style single dwelling has vinyl siding, a side gable roof, two exterior chimneys on the back (south), and a two-story wing on the east. Decorative features include bracketed eaves, and a modest pedimented portico, also with brackets. Sidelights and a transom frame the door.

(3) **George A. Mansfield Home** (318 East Miami Avenue). Built circa 1910.

This is a two-story Classical Revival style single dwelling with vinyl siding, a hipped roof, two interior end wall chimneys with corbeled caps, and arched chimney crowns. A prominent partial-width and full-height (two-story) pedimented portico marks the entry. Two sets of paired, fluted classical columns and two pilasters support the portico, which has a false balustrade on the second story. Multipane sidelights and a transom decorate the entry.

(4) **F. C. Russell Home** (401 East Miami Avenue). Built circa 1918.

This is a vinyl sided, one-story Bungalow/Craftsman style single dwelling. More specifically, it is an airplane bungalow. It features an unusual parallel gabled roof. Also, the center of the house rises to a second story where there is a single room under a cross gable roof. Exposed roof beams

decorate the eaves. The gable end chimney has decorative banding. Paired sandstone pillars support a full-width porch. Some windows have metal awnings.

(5) **C. T. Hardeman Home** (411 East Miami Avenue). Built circa 1918.

This is a two-story, brick clad, Prairie School style single dwelling. It includes a pyramidal roof, asymmetrical façade, shed dormer, and end wall chimney. The portico is not integral and is only partial-width but it has a modest pediment and two square porch supports raised on brick pedestals. The upper sashes of the second story windows on the front façade have geometric patterns on the glazing.

(6) **E. E. McInnis Home** (412 East Miami Avenue). Built circa 1918.

This is a two-story brick clad Prairie School style single dwelling. It possesses a hipped roof, and both interior and exterior end wall chimneys with arched crowns. The façade is asymmetrical and includes a full-width porch that has three square brick porch supports. Windows have concrete lintels and sills. There has been some modification of the exterior chimney on the west wall and some concrete in-fill of the foundation in that same area.

(7) **306 East Seneca Avenue**. Built circa 1925.

This is a one-story, brick clad, Tudor Revival style single dwelling with a cross gable roof and flared eaves. Windows generally lack lintels, but those on the north and west elevations have blind round arches created with rowlock bricks. Round arches of rowlock bricks also decorate the

entrance and a small, shuttered window in the north-facing gable peak. A continuous soldier brick course marks the sill of the house. There has been some modification of the wall beside the front door including the removal of bricks and replacement with concrete in-fill.

(8) **401 East Seneca Avenue.** Built in 1937.

This is a one-story brick clad Tudor Revival style house with cross gable roof, front wall chimney, and gabled roof dormer on the east side. The chimney has two chimney pots and a segmental arched niche on the lower part of the stack. Gable ends contain false half-timbering. Semi-elliptical arches mark the entrance to the integral, partial-width porch. Windowsills and lintels are modest, consisting of a course of rowlock bricks.

(9) **420 East Seneca Avenue.** Built in 1934.

This is a one-story brick clad Tudor Revival style single dwelling with a cross gable roof, flared eaves and three chimneys. The cladding features scintled brickwork, and the front wall chimney has random range work of native stone inset within the chimney stack. The door is round arched, and the arch consists of native stone. Most windows have soldier brick lintels, except for those on either side of the front wall chimney which have blind round arches of rowlock bricks. These same windows also have corbeled sills. The windows on the wing addition are sliding windows and lack distinctive lintels. A continuous soldier brick course marks the sill and encircles the house.

- (10) **Milton J. Smith Residence** (527 East Seneca Avenue). Built circa 1905. This is a one-story brick clad Prairie School style single dwelling. It has a hipped and cross gable roof, two interior chimneys (one with a corbeled cap), and a prominent through-cornice dormer on the west side. Slender paired classical columns on brick pedestals support the partial-width porch. The east elevation has a one-story bay window. The transom has wood in-fill.
- (11) **O. J. Finley Home** (602 East Seneca Avenue). Built in 1921. This is a one-story stucco and brick clad Bungalow/Craftsman style single dwelling with cross gable roof, eave wall chimney, and interior chimney. The porch has its own separate gable element, and porch supports consist of short tapered square piers raised on brick pedestals. The porch has been altered and made into a screened porch, and windows look relatively new.
- (12) **J. A. Smith Home** (610 East Seneca Avenue). Built circa 1915. This is a two-story weatherboard clad Prairie School style house with pyramidal roof and hipped roof dormer. Decorative features include two bracketed side bay windows and exposed (false) roof beams on the dormer, roof, and porch eaves. Full-width porch has slender fluted classical columns. The windows appear to be new.
- (13) **McGinnity House** (702 East Seneca Avenue). Built in 1903. This is a two-story stone clad Queen Anne style single dwelling with hipped and cross gable roof of slate. It features a prominent three-story corner turret with a wood shingle spire, decorative finial, and Queen Anne

windows. Lattice windows decorate the second story. The chimneystacks have decorative stonework and corbeled caps. Ten freestanding classical columns of cement support a wraparound porch and are raised on cylindrical pedestals. One of the back rooms has a metal roof and a portico with a metal shed roof supported by two more classical columns. This property has not been well maintained.

(14) **428 East Creek Avenue.** Built in 1911.

This Bungalow/Craftsman style single dwelling has two stories, a gable roof, and stucco cladding. Specifically, this residence illustrates characteristics of both the side and front gabled subtypes. Both roof slopes have centered shed dormers. Triangular knee-brace brackets decorate the eaves on the front gable. The front gable also contains false half-timber detailing. The entrances on the north and west have small overdoors which are also bracketed. A decorative, semi-elliptical transom and sidelights frame the main entrance. A full-width porch under a separate shed roof stretches along the west side. The porch is supported by square pillars raised on brick pedestals, and has been enclosed with screens.

(15) **Robert Bingham Home** (500 East Creek Avenue). Built circa 1905.

A two-story brick clad Prairie School style single dwelling. It has a basement and a pyramidal roof of red ceramic tile with two hipped wall dormers. In addition, it includes two chimneys, one exterior and one interior. Eaves on the dormers and roof of the house are bracketed. The full-width porch is not integral and has a shed roof. Three, square brick



pillars support a balustraded porch. The west elevation has a similar porch except that it is partial-width. Two of the windows on the front façade have leaded glass with geometric patterns. Some windows on west elevation appear new.

- (16) **R. R. Hall House** (501 East Creek Avenue). Built circa 1910.

This is a two-story Shingle style house with sandstone cladding on the first story and wood shingle cladding on the second. An unusual feature of this house is the saltbox roof. The roof has two prominent centered shed dormers. An integral porch rests on four square sandstone pillars. Other decorative features include large multipane fixed windows on the south and west elevations.

- (17) **525 East Creek Avenue**. Built circa 1930.

This is a Tudor Revival style single dwelling with brick and stucco cladding, two stories, and a cross gable wood shingle roof. The gable end chimney has decorative cone-shaped chimney pots, and the second story has some false half-timber detailing in the south-facing gable. That gable also has a decorative pendant. Awnings cover a number of second story windows, and the window above the door is distinguished by a bracketed balconet. Where the walls are clad in brick, soldier brick lintels prevail. The north elevation has an unusual bracketed window consisting of three double casement windows surrounded by false half-timber detailing and supported by four large decorative brackets.

- (18) **C. V. Kieser Home (601 East Creek Avenue).** Built circa 1920.

This is a two-story weatherboard clad Colonial Revival style single dwelling with a wood shingle gambrel roof. There is a flat-roofed single story balustraded wing on the east end. The gable end chimney has a decorative chimney iron as well as corbeling on both sides of the chimney shaft. The gambrel roof has flared eaves and eight shed dormers. Six square paneled columns support the pedimented portico. A fanlight and sidelights decorate the doorway.

- (19) **H. E. Coffield Home (611 East Creek Avenue).** Built circa 1920.

This is a two-story weatherboard clad Colonial Revival style single dwelling. It has a side-gabled aluminum roof, a two-story wing on the east side, and a one-story addition behind that. The house features a symmetrical façade with boxed eaves and a plain cornice. There is one interior gable wall chimney and a shorter exterior eave chimney on the back addition. Two freestanding classical columns support a modest, partial-width portico. Sidelights and a transom frame the door.

- (20) **V. P. Buell Residence (617 East Creek Avenue).** Built circa 1910.

This is a two-story Bungalow/Craftsman style single dwelling with slate roof and parapet gables. Gable peaks have false chimneys. Other decorative features include a continuous corbeled lintel course/frieze encircling the second story. Where pilasters separate the windows, they have corbeled capitals. By contrast first floor windows have soldier brick lintels. Soldier arches decorate the porch. Upper window sashes contain

glazing with geometric designs. Windowsills on both stories form part of the continuous rowlock belt courses. One window on the west end of the front façade has some brick in fill.

(21) **625 East Creek Avenue.** Built in 1936.

This is a brick clad Colonial Revival style single dwelling consisting of two stories, a basement, garage, and hipped wood shingle roof. Decorative features include a semi-elliptical arched entrance with a fanlight, sidelights, and quoining. The north elevation contains a bay window projecting from the second story. Patterned brickwork gives the cornice a dentiled appearance. The same design decorates the tops of the chimneystacks.

(22) **Conway Castle** (914 South Second Street). Built 1898.

This is a two and one-half-story, brick clad, hipped and cross gable Queen Anne style single dwelling. It possesses a two-story round turret with finial. The front façade consists of a partial-width, two-tiered, pedimented portico. The portico is supported by two sets of paired brick pillars on both levels. This property exhibits numerous decorative details including an eyebrow dormer, three balustraded balconies with turned posts, sandstone quoining, segmental arched windows with sandstone keystones and soldier brick voussoirs. In addition, both of the chimneys have corbeled shafts, and the gable ends contain a mosaic decoration consisting of glass and tile shards.

- (23) **1006 South Second Street.** Built circa 1920.

This is a weatherboard clad one-story Folk Victorian style single dwelling with an l-shaped porch that extends on two sides of the house and is supported by three square tapered porch supports raised on brick pedestals. A fourth pedestal exists but lacks a support. Gable ends have wood shingles, decorative brackets in the shape of sunbursts, and fanlights above the windows. Cut-away bay windows decorate the southwest corner, north side, and south side of the structure.

- (24) **P. M. Enloe Residence** (1101 South Fourth Street). Built circa 1925.

This is a one-story with basement Tudor Revival style single dwelling clad in buff brick. It features a tapered gable wall chimney with a decorative diamond-patterned design in red brick. The east elevation has a row of ribbon windows while the windows on both the north and east elevations have blind round arches. The arched entry consists of a large semi-elliptical arch braced with small wall buttresses, and a smaller round arch. Gables above the entry are clipped. A continuous soldier brick sill encircles the house.

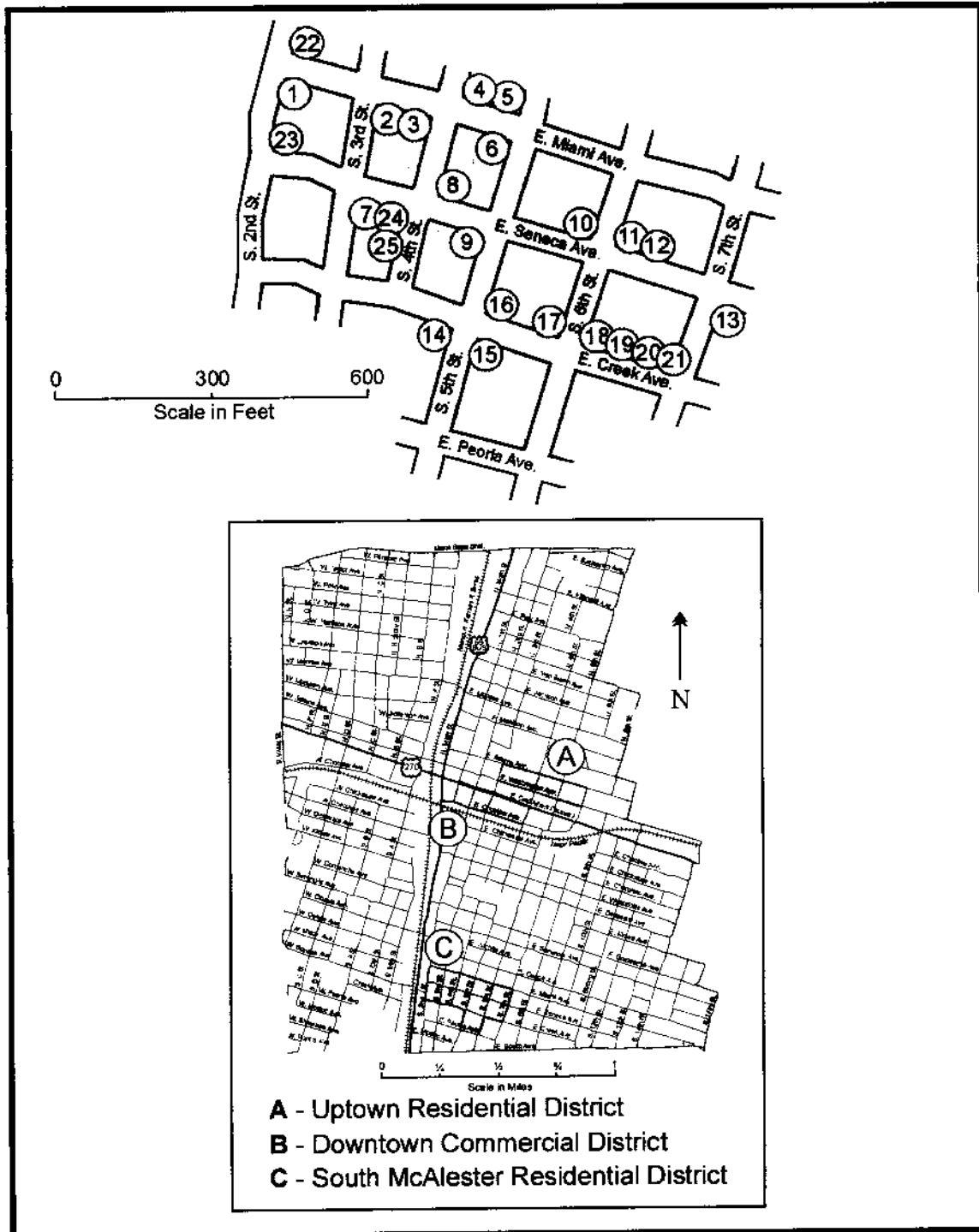
- (25) **N. D. Alexander Home** (1105 South Fourth Street). Built circa 1925.

This is a one-story brick clad Tudor Revival style single dwelling with a gable wall chimney that has decorative rectangular and round arch niches in it. Other decorative features include a wide, round arch entry and cutout round arches on the wing wall of the front façade. The front gable peak

also has a blind round arch with honeycomb brick in-fill. A soldier brick sill encircles the house.

# South McAlester Residential District:

Properties That Warrant Further Study and are Contributing Resources



### XIII. THUMBNAIL SKETCHES OF AREAS NOT WARRANTING FURTHER STUDY

#### **West Central Mixed Residential and Commercial Area**

##### Description:

The West Central Mixed Residential and Commercial Area in McAlester constitutes a region bounded on the north by West Carl Albert Parkway, and on the east by the MKT Railroad. The southern boundary includes the zone between the railroad tracks and West Kiowa Avenue, Kiowa Avenue between South Elm and A Streets, the west side of South A Street between Kiowa and Comanche Avenues, the north side of Comanche Avenue between A and D Streets, and the zone between D Street and the western limit of study area boundary. The western boundary of this area turns north to follow the western limit of study area boundary to West Street where it continues north along West Street to Carl Albert Parkway.

Carl Albert Parkway, which runs in a slightly southeastern to northwestern direction, is the main artery through this area, although both A and D Streets provide continuous north-south routes across it as well. A segment of the Union Pacific Railroad tracks, formerly the Choctaw, Oklahoma and Gulf Railroad, also crosses this area and generally parallels the Carl Albert Parkway. All of the lots found here comprised part of the Original Townsite as platted in 1900.

This area includes approximately 300 properties, half of which are commercial and half of which are residential. Commercial properties in the area include businesses such as car and tire repair shops, hair salons, convenience stores, gas stations, chiropractic care centers, veterinarian clinics, and pet stores. Other businesses include an

auction center, welding company, trailer shop, lock and key store, and computer store. Several professional businesses are found here including a real estate agency, a physician's office, and the office of a certified public accountant. This area also includes some city services such as the McAlester Housing Authority. One light industry, the Charles Komar and Sons Seamprufe Corporation, exists in the area. This facility is located at 400 West Chickasaw Avenue and produces women's lingerie.

The West Central Mixed Residential and Commercial Area contains about five different churches, including, for example, the First Free Will Baptist Church and the West Bethel Baptist Church. This area also contains one school, Jefferson Elementary, and two parks. The Albert Funderburk Park is located near Cherokee Avenue and West Street, while the Sidney Komar Park is near Comanche Avenue and C Street.

#### Architecture:

The Bungalow/Craftsman style is the dominant architectural style of residences in the area, however a few examples of the Prairie School, National Folk (Shotgun and Pyramidal types), Tudor Revival, and Colonial Revival style houses exist as well. Delaware Avenue also has some one-room boxcar type shacks. West Carl Albert Parkway, from the 200 block to the 500 block, constitutes a sort of "Bungalow Row." Most of the properties in this three-block area were originally built as residences, either single dwellings or, in some instances, duplexes. However, many of these properties have been adapted for commercial or professional use. In a few places there are newer commercial properties and they have been built in the contemporary commercial style.



### Noncontributing Properties:

Most of the residences in this area are over 50 years old, however, a large percentage of them have been altered. Three types of alterations are common and include the addition of non-original siding, modifications to the porch area, and the installation of new windows. It is possible to find many residences with asbestos or vinyl siding in the West Central Mixed Residential and Commercial Area. Likewise, it is difficult to find residences that have not had some alterations to the porch. The extensive use of iron porch supports here exemplifies this. Also, as new businesses have occupied buildings originally designed as residences there have been renovations including changes to the windows and doors on the front façade and this has affected the integrity of the properties. Finally, there is an area of public housing on Settlers Drive, the circle that runs south from West Kiowa Avenue. These properties were constructed during the early 1970s and are of insufficient age to warrant further study at this time.

### Recommendation:

This area constitutes one of the older sections of McAlester, and does contain four properties that warrant further study. These include the properties at 312, 400, and 600 West Carl Albert Parkway, and another at 101 South D Street. The first two of those fall within the “Bungalow Row” along Carl Albert Parkway. As a whole, however, many of the properties in this area have been altered or are in need of rehabilitation. In addition, the mixed character of development in this area detracts from its cohesion. For example, the numerous car repair shops on South A Street, the lingerie factory, and the new contemporary commercial development on West Carl Albert Parkway, are interspersed

with residential development. Also, intrusions of properties of insufficient age present another problem. Moreover, there are a number of overgrown and vacant lots along the railroad tracks. Trains no longer run on this section of track, and this has become a place to store large equipment once used for track maintenance as well as old boxcars. Much of this equipment is now rusting and is covered with overgrowth. On this basis it is recommended that the West Central Mixed and Residential Area not warrant further study at this time.

### **Northwest Residential Area**

#### Description:

The Northwest Residential Area comprises a region that is roughly rectangular in shape and is situated west of the MKT Railroad tracks. Gene Stipe Boulevard, formerly Electric Avenue and part of the OK/SHPO study area boundary, forms the northern boundary of the area. The MKT Railroad tracks provide the eastern boundary, the north side of West Washington Avenue forms the southern boundary, and West Street--also part of the OK/SHPO study area boundary--forms the western boundary. All of the lots in this area are part of the Original Townsite as platted in 1900. Interior roads providing north to south routes across the area include B, C, D, and F Streets. Adams, Madison, Monroe, Jackson, Tyler, Polk, and Taylor Avenues provide east to west movement across this area.

This area comprises approximately 750 properties. About 80 percent of these properties are residential, while the other 20 percent consist of a combination of commercial and church-related properties. Commercial properties occurring in this area

include: motels, a service station, an auto sales and repair shop, a paint and body shop, a tire store, an apartment complex, a day care center, a grocery store, a pest control business, a company that provides secretarial services, a trucking company, a company that builds coaches, and a convalescent care center. This area is adjacent to property that is part of the Oklahoma State Penitentiary. Seven different churches have buildings in this area including the First Church of the Nazarene, Jehovah's Witnesses, Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, Living Word Church, Pentecostal Holiness Church, Seventh Day Adventist Church, and the United Pentecostal Church. There is one school in the area, the William Gay Elementary School. This area includes two parks, the B Street and Jefferson Park, and the Pete Rosso Park at West Monroe Avenue and North E Street.

#### Architecture:

Architectural styles in the Northwest Residential Area are diverse. Bungalow/Craftsman style homes prevail but there also exist some residences built in the Prairie School style. The majority of residences are between 40 and 50 years old, and as one moves north across the area the number of Ranch houses increases. It is possible to find some Classical Revival, Colonial Revival, Queen Anne, National Folk, and Folk Victorian style homes but these styles are generally less common. A good example of the Colonial Revival style stands at 401 West Jackson Avenue. Concerning the commercial architecture, much of it is of fairly recent construction and is in the contemporary commercial style.

### Noncontributing Properties:

Most of the Bungalow/Craftsman houses in this area have been altered with the addition of non-original siding or porch supports. In addition, much of the development along Gene Stipe Boulevard, formally Electric Avenue, occurred after 1967. This is true for some sections of Polk and Tyler Avenues as well. Much of the east side of A Street in a five-block stretch between Jackson and Fillmore Avenues remains undeveloped land.

### Recommendation:

This area lacks the cohesiveness of a historic district. The different intrusions of nonresidential properties, areas of recent construction, and portions of undeveloped land do not enable the Northwest Residential Area to meet the criteria of a historic district. The numerous alterations to many of the properties in this area are also a problem. For these reasons it is recommended that this area not warrant further study at this time.

## **Southwest Residential Area**

### Description:

The eastern boundary of the Southwest Residential Area coincides with the MKT Railroad tracks. The boundary turns west from the tracks and includes the south side of Kiowa Avenue to A Street where it turns south and includes the east side of the street to Comanche Avenue. The boundary then follows the south side of Comanche Avenue to the western limit of the study area, turns south and follows that to the southern limit of the study area boundary. The southern boundary of the study area coincides with the southern boundary of the Southwest Residential District and extends east to the MKT

Railroad tracks. This area does not include any schools, but does have one park, Chaney Field, at Miami Avenue and B Street. Church-related properties in the area include the Good Samaritan Outreach, the Hillcrest Baptist Church, and the Pentecostal Church of God. Perhaps not surprisingly, the southwestern quadrant of McAlester was referred to as "Baptist Hollow."<sup>1</sup>

Together, this area contains approximately 370 properties, 85 percent of which are residential. Only a few commercial properties exist here and include a day care center, golf cart shop, a marking products shop, and a barbecue restaurant. In general the streets closest to the railroad have a slightly higher concentration of commercial properties. This is true for Elm and Oak Streets, as well as the eastern portions of Creek, Seneca, and Ottawa Avenues.

#### Architecture:

The Southwest Residential Area incorporates a neighborhood that was once known as "German Hill." Seminole Avenue, Oak Street, Osage Avenue, and C Street bound this area, which also happens to be situated atop another one of the McAlester hills. This portion of the Southwest Residential Area possesses a few notable examples of high style architecture including one property that is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. This is the property at 223 West Seminole Avenue. Good examples of the Tudor Revival style and Colonial Revival styles stand at 301 West Osage and 64 West Osage, respectively. Although the density of these high style dwellings is not enough to constitute a district, their presence and association with a particular

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<sup>1</sup> "Commission to the Committee: Full Text of Dr. Sterrett's Letter to Chairman Genung." *South McAlester Capital* Thursday, January 4, 1900, p. 6.

neighborhood is important. Beyond the “German Hill” neighborhood, the number of Bungalow/Craftsman style homes increases.

Noncontributing Properties:

In the Southwest Residential Area noncontributing properties include properties that have been significantly altered such as the property at 404 West Seneca. Vacant or undeveloped land also constitutes a noncontributing resource. This area includes the most southwestern portion of the study area and also one of the most southwestern portions of the McAlester city limits. Relatively speaking, the density of settlement in this area is lighter and there exist fairly sizeable sections of wooded lands. Part of the explanation for this is that a creek drains part of the Southwest Residential Area. Residential development here has clung to the hills above the creek rather than the small valley (perhaps subject to flooding) through which it flows. The absence of streets in the area south of Creek Avenue and east of A Street, and south of Seneca and north of Peoria provides a good illustration of this.

Recommendation:

The uneven density and character of development in the Southwest Residential District detracts from its cohesiveness. Although one property in this area is potentially National Register eligible, the majority of properties do not merit additional study. For these reasons it is recommended that the Southwest Residential Area not warrant further study at this time.

## **Southeast Mixed Residential and Commercial Area**

### Description:

Sizable sections of the boundary of the Southeast Mixed Residential and Commercial Area coincide with the OK/SHPO study area boundary. This is the case along the eastern side of the study area between Carl Albert Parkway and South Avenue. The southern boundary of this area then extends west between Seventeenth Street and the MKT Railroad tracks, again coinciding with the OK/SHPO study area boundary. These tracks then form the western boundary of the area, while Carl Albert Parkway forms the northern boundary of the area. As indicated on the map, two districts that warrant further study constitute enclaves within the Southeast Mixed Residential and Commercial Area. These two districts are the Downtown Commercial District and the South McAlester Residential District.

Stated differently, the Southeast Mixed Residential and Commercial Area includes those portions of McAlester within the study area boundary that lie south of Carl Albert Parkway and east of the MKT Railroad tracks. This area excludes those portions constituting part of the Downtown Commercial District and South McAlester Residential District as defined in Section XII of this report. All of the lots within the Southeast Mixed Residential and Commercial Area are part of the Original Townsite as platted in 1900. Important interior east to west arteries include Cherokee, Wyandotte, Delaware, Comanche, and Seminole Avenues, while interior north to south routes include Second, Third, Sixth, Ninth, and Strong Streets.

This area contains approximately 1900 properties. About two-thirds of them are residential and the other one-third are commercial. The commercial properties run the

gamut of possibilities. There are numerous professional offices including home health care offices, loan agencies, mortgage companies, realtors, banks, investment companies, law offices, dentists, doctors, counseling centers, and insurance agencies, to name just a few. In addition to these professional services there are businesses such as music stores, convenience stores, fast food restaurants, car repair shops, auto parts stores, used car dealers, florists, photography stores, furniture stores, gas stations, tire stores, clothing stores, and dollar stores. This area also contains some federal and state government buildings, including the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration property on South Third Street. The state government has a Bureau of Investigation on Carl Albert Parkway, the Department of Human Services on East Cherokee Avenue, and the Employment Security Commission on East Wyandotte Avenue.

The Southeast Mixed Residential and Commercial Area contains a number of churches. These include the Calvary Baptist Church, East Lawn Church of God, East Star Baptist Church, Full Gospel World Outreach, Mt. Triumph Baptist Church, Seventh Day Adventist Church, Trinity Baptist Church, Mt. Olivet Church, Ward Chappel A.M.E., and Beebee Chapel, C.M.E. There are three schools in the area, Washington Elementary, Will Rogers Elementary, and Puterbaugh Middle School. One of the primary parks in the area, Chadick Park, stretches east and west between Third and Sixth Streets, and north and south between Delaware and Comanche Avenues. A smaller park, Puterbaugh Park, is located on Tenth Street between Seneca and Miami Avenues. A third park in the area is the Michael J. Hunter Park and Pool complex. This facility was initially built to serve McAlester's black community. The pool, really just a wading pool, is no longer in use.



### Architecture:

There are several properties in this area that warrant further study. In addition, this area contains two properties that are National Register Eligible. One of these properties is L'Ouverture Auditorium. Located on the eastern boundary of the study area at Chickasaw and Fourteenth Street, this property illustrates the W.P.A. Standardized style of architecture. It is also significant in the context of McAlester's black community because it was once the gymnasium of an all-black high school, and is now the only structure from that complex which remains. The second property that is National Register eligible is the Michael J. Hunter Park and Pool. This facility is located across the street from L'Ouverture Auditorium and it constitutes another important cultural resource with significant ties to McAlester's black community.

Broadly speaking, most of the residential properties in this area are built in the Bungalow/Craftsman style or a more recent style. However there are some homes constructed in the Tudor Revival style, Queen Anne style, National Folk (I-house and pyramidal) style, and Colonial Revival style. The far southeastern section of this area, though it is still within city limits, has a much more suburban feel to it. There the Ranch style prevails, lots are noticeably larger, and houses are set back farther from the road. Most of these homes were built in the 1950s and 1960s. Concerning commercial architecture within the Southeast Mixed Residential and Commercial Area, there has been some adaptive reuse of buildings originally designed as residences. However, most of these have been significantly altered. The most common commercial style is contemporary commercial.

### Noncontributing Properties:

Several of the streets crossing this area have attracted considerable commercial construction. For example, Carl Albert Parkway, Choctaw Avenue, Chickasaw Avenue, Cherokee Avenue, Wyandotte Avenue, and Delaware Avenue all contain sizable stretches of commercial development. The same is also true for Main Street and Strong Street. Another issue to consider is that Strong Street, like Carl Albert Parkway, has been developed as a major north to south artery and is four lanes wide. As a result it carries much cross-town traffic. Finally, a majority of the residential properties have been modified with the addition of non-original siding, and in the far southeastern section of this area the homes are not yet of sufficient age to meet eligibility criteria.

### Recommendation:

The sections above have illustrated how assorted the properties in this area are, in terms of both their functions and their architectural styles. Fairly extensive sections of contemporary commercial development intermix with residential development. Also, some portions of the residential areas are of insufficient age to warrant further study at this time. On the basis of the existence of varied types of development, significant zones of commercial development, the intrusion of multilane roads which disrupt the cohesion, and neighborhoods of insufficient age, it is recommended that the Southeast Mixed Residential and Commercial Area not warrant further study at this time.

## **Northeast Mixed Residential and Commercial Area**

### Description:

Fairly extensive portions of the boundary of the Northeast Mixed Residential and Commercial Area coincide with the OK/SHPO study area boundaries. For example, part of the northern boundary of the study area, Gene Stipe Boulevard between the MKT Railroad tracks and North Sixth Street, provides the northern boundary for this area. Similarly, the eastern boundary of the study area between Gene Stipe Boulevard and Fourteenth Street also provides the eastern boundary of this area. The southern and western boundaries diverge from this pattern. Instead, Carl Albert Parkway provides the southern boundary while the MKT Railroad tracks provide the western boundary. However, the Northeast Mixed Residential and Commercial Area is interrupted by a district that warrants further study, the Uptown Residential District. Likewise, another interruption occurs along Carl Albert Parkway, where part of this street constitutes a segment of the Downtown Commercial District. Interior roads that cross the area from east to west include Polk, Harrison, Van Buren, Jackson, Monroe, and Madison Avenues, while north to south arteries include First, Second, Fifth, and Sixth Streets. All of the lots included here were part of the Original Townsite as platted in 1900.

The Northeast Mixed Residential and Commercial Area contains about 675 properties. Approximately 40 percent of the properties are commercial, while about 60 percent are residential. Main Street contains a large concentration of commercial properties, but other commercial properties are interspersed throughout the area as well. Commercial properties include a vast array of shops including, but not limited to the following list: truck equipment shops, picture frame stores, car washes, funeral homes,

television repair shops, electronic supply stores, restaurants, service stations, express lube centers, office supply stores, window tinting shops, appliance repair shops, auto repair shops, cleaners, smoke shops, boot stores, and wireless communication stores.

This area also includes an Indian health center, a youth emergency shelter, several realtors, and the National Guard. There is a day care center here as well as two schools. One of the schools is Emerson Elementary, and the other is the McAlester Senior High School. In addition, there is one park, the Jeff Lee Park, which has an outdoor swimming pool. Churches here number approximately four and include the Fellowship Free Will Baptist Church, Victory Park Baptist Church, New Life Assembly of Faith, and the Church of God Seventh Day.

#### Architecture:

The Northeast Mixed Residential and Commercial Area already includes three properties that have been listed in the National Register of Historic Places. These properties include the McAlester Scottish Rite Temple at Second Street and Adams Avenue. It gained National Register listing in 1980. The Jeff Lee Park, Bath House and Pool was listed in 1988 and is located at Third Street and Fillmore Avenue. That same year the McAlester Armory, at Third Street and Polk Avenue, was also listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The Scottish Rite Temple illustrates the Beaux Art style, while the other two structures were built in the W.P.A Standardized architectural style. This reconnaissance level survey suggests that a fourth property in this area be considered eligible for listing on the National Register. That property is the old McAlester High School and is located across from the Scottish Rite Temple at Second

Street and Adams Avenue. It is an excellent example of the Collegiate Gothic style and has a long association with the educational development of the city.

Residential architectural styles encountered in the Northeast Mixed Residential and Commercial Area include, from most frequent to least frequent: Bungalow/Craftsman, Ranch, National Folk, Classical Revival, Queen Anne, Prairie School, and Colonial Revival styles. A good example of a Shotgun house stands at 121 East Madison. The majority of residences are Bungalow/Craftsman houses. In terms of the commercial architecture, much of it is of relatively recent construction and in the contemporary commercial style.

#### Noncontributing Properties:

Development along Main Street and Gene Stipe Boulevard is too recent for it to warrant further study. Similarly, most of the residences date from the 1940s, 1950s, or 1960s and several of the properties along Gene Stipe Boulevard appear to be more recent than that. This is also true of the construction that has taken place at Ninth Street and Monroe Avenue where, for example, the Indian Health Center is located.

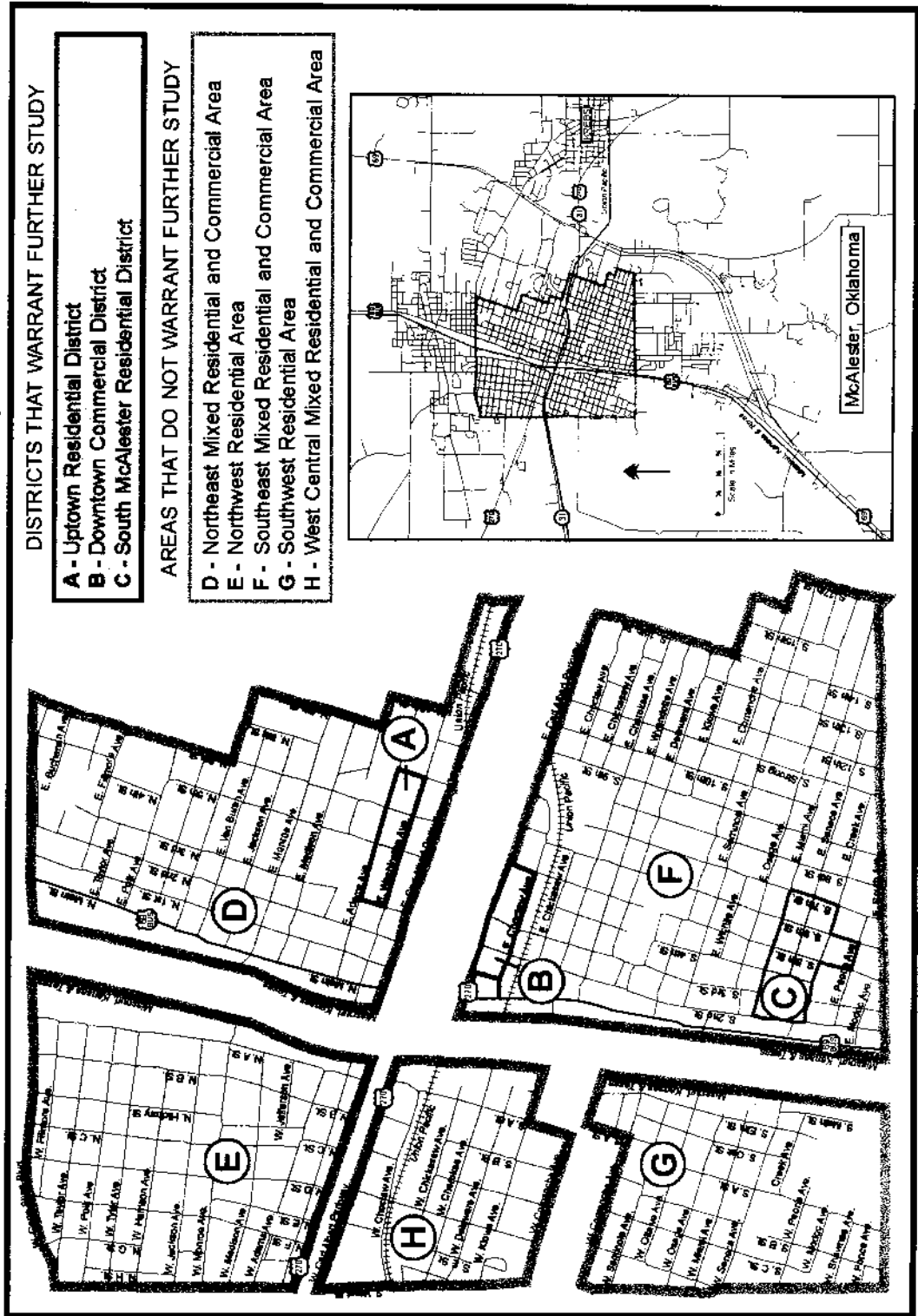
#### Recommendation:

The Northeast Mixed Residential and Commercial Area possesses some good examples of different architectural styles. One individual property is National Register eligible, the old McAlester High School, and a few other individual properties warrant further study including the properties at 639 East Harrison Avenue and at 328 East Madison Avenue. However, the mixed residential and commercial character of this area

together with the fact that it is bounded by areas of fairly extensive recent development work to diminish the cohesiveness of it. Also, several of the streets near the western border of this area contain a number of properties in poor condition. In light of these findings it is recommended that the Northeast Mixed Residential and Commercial Area not warrant further study at this time.

# The McAlester Study Area:

Showing Proposed Districts That Warrant Further Study and Areas That Do Not Warrant Further Study



XIV. THUMBNAIL SKETCH OF INDIVIDUAL PROPERTIES NOT WARRANTING FURTHER STUDY

(1) **A. H. Preston Home** (213 East Van Buren Avenue). Built circa 1918.

This is a two-story, stucco and weatherboard clad Queen Anne style single dwelling. It has a cross gable roof and partial-width porch. Porch supports consist of two round classical columns raised on stone pedestals. A cartouche embellished with carved leaves decorates the porch frieze, and exposed roof beams decorate the eaves. Gable ends have wood shingles, and the chimney has a corbeled cap. Major alterations to the entrance include the addition of a sunroom with large fixed pane display windows and transoms. Due to loss of integrity this property does not warrant further study.

(2) **301 East Monroe Avenue**. Built circa 1910.

This two-story, brick clad, gable roofed single dwelling illustrates the Colonial Revival style. Exterior features include two interior gable end chimneys with corbeled caps. The entrance is marked not by a typical portico, but by an enclosed projecting antechamber. The front façade has semi-elliptical arched windows on the first floor. Second floor windows and windows on the gable ends are flat-headed and have soldier brick lintels. A number of the windows have a decorative wood framing device that makes flat-headed windows appear arched, and vice-versa. False window brackets have been added beneath the second story windows on the front façade. This property does not warrant further study due to loss of integrity.



- (3) **601 North Fifth Street.** Built circa 1925.

This two-story, hipped roof weatherboard clad multiple dwelling displays no distinctive architectural style. It has three large centered cross gable wall dormers. The wraparound porch is not integral and the porch supports are not original. This property does not merit further study due to loss of integrity.

- (4) **308-310 West Carl Albert Parkway.** Built circa 1930.

This is a one-story with basement Bungalow/Craftsman style specialty store that was originally built as a multiple dwelling. It is brick clad and has a cross gable roof with clipped gables on the back and side. The front (north) roof slope is punctuated by two gablets with louvers. Turned porch posts support a gabled entry. Rafter tails are exposed above the entry and on the eaves on the north and east elevations. A continuous soldier brick course encircles the structure, and the slope chimney has a corbeled cap. The windows on the front façade have been altered. This property does not warrant further study due to loss of integrity.

- (5) **R. L. Landes Residence (300 West Carl Albert Parkway).** Built circa 1920.

This is a one-story with basement Bungalow/Craftsman style medical/business office that was originally designed as a single dwelling. It features weatherboard cladding and a cross gable roof. Decorative features include a low-pitched roof with exposed rafter tails and triangular knee-brace brackets. Also, an eave wall chimney has a corbeled cap. Three square tapered stone posts support a partial-width porch. The windows on the front façade have been altered at an unknown date. Due to loss of integrity, this property does not warrant further study.

- (6) **Hale-Halsell Grocery Company** (111-115 South Main Street). Built circa 1905. This is a three-story flat-roofed Commercial style building with parapeted sidewalls. It features brick cladding, a corbeled cornice, simple horizontal bands across the frieze, and decorative corbels above the windows on the second story. All service bays, windows, and doors on the original building have brick in-fill. The south side has a newer corrugated metal addition also with service bays. This property does not warrant further study due to loss of integrity.
- (7) **239 West Cherokee Avenue**. Built circa 1910. This multiple dwelling has brick cladding, a hipped roof, and two full stories. It is built in the Bungalow/Craftsman style and belongs to the pyramidal family. The front façade includes a full-width porch supported by four freestanding square brick pillars raised on brick pedestals. These pillars also support a second story addition with clapboard walls and a shed roof. Both roofs have exposed rafter tails. The windows, exclusive of those on the second floor addition, have segmental arches marked by rowlock brick voussoirs. One of the windows on the west elevation has brick in-fill. This property is in poor condition and does not merit further study due to loss of integrity.
- (8) **Marshall House** (404 West Seneca Avenue). Built in 1904. This is a one story stone clad Bungalow/Craftsman style single dwelling. It has a gabled roof with the front façade on the north-facing gable end. The front façade includes a full-width porch with its separate gable element. Alterations to the dwelling include replacement of the original porch supports with narrow square wood posts. There is also some metal in-fill in the porch gable, and some

windows on the front appear relatively new. This property does not warrant further study due to loss of integrity.

(9) **703 South Fifth Street.** Built circa 1920.

This is a two-story weatherboard clad single dwelling with a hipped and cross gable roof. The gable ends on the cross gable portion of the roof are clipped. The property does not display any distinctive architectural style, yet it possesses a very prominent central roof dormer and small side dormers. The dormers have wood shingles and hipped roofs. The porch is integral to the structure, but is supported with turned porch posts that do not appear to be original. Some new windows have been added to the first and second stories. Because of loss of integrity this property does not merit additional study.

(10) **727 South Fourth Street.** Built circa 1905.

This is a two-story Queen Anne style single dwelling. It features weatherboard cladding, a cross gable roof, a roof turret that has wood shingle walls, and a wraparound porch. Other decorative features include wood shingles in the gable ends, a transom above the door, and porch windows with geometric patterns on the glazing. Alterations to the property include the placement of wrought iron posts on sandstone pedestals in order to support the porch. In addition, many of the first story windows appear new. This property does not warrant further study due to loss of integrity.

(11) **506 East Seminole Avenue.** Built circa 1918.

This is a two-story National Folk single dwelling with a hipped or pyramidal roof. For this reason, it belongs to the pyramidal subfamily of the National Folk style.

This property has aluminum siding. It also has a full-width portico with its own gabled roof. The porch is supported with four turned posts. There is an attached carport on the west elevation. Due to loss of integrity, this property does not warrant further study.

(12) **508 East Seminole Avenue.** Built circa 1915.

This is a two-story National Folk single dwelling with a pyramidal roof and interior chimney. It has two front doors with pedimented entries. The pediments still have the original weatherboard cladding. Square columns support one of the pediments, and knee-brace brackets support the other. Aluminum siding has been added to the exterior walls of the structure. This property does not warrant further study because of loss of integrity.

(13) **326 East Osage Avenue.** Built circa 1900.

This single dwelling has two and one-half-stories, a basement, and has vinyl siding. It is built in the Prairie School style and features wide eaves and a portico that extends on two sides. Both ends of the portico have modest pediments. The porch supports consist of tall square brick piers topped with square columns that have vinyl siding. Many of the windows appear relatively new. A transom and sidelights frame the front door. The east elevation has a two-story canted bay window. This property does not merit additional study because of loss of integrity.

(14) **Mine Superintendent's House** (8 West Park Avenue). Built in 1896.

This property was listed in the Oklahoma Landmarks Inventory file for the 1980s. It is a two-story, asbestos-sided house that displays no distinctive style. It does

have an unusual gable-on-hip roof and a gabled wall dormer centered on the north elevation (front). This structure has been significantly altered and is presently having more changes made to it. For example, asbestos siding has been added, a full-width porch has been removed, and additions have been added to the east and west elevations. This is outside the study area boundary and does not warrant further study due to loss of integrity associated with these alterations.

(15) **2716 North Main Street.** Built circa 1910.

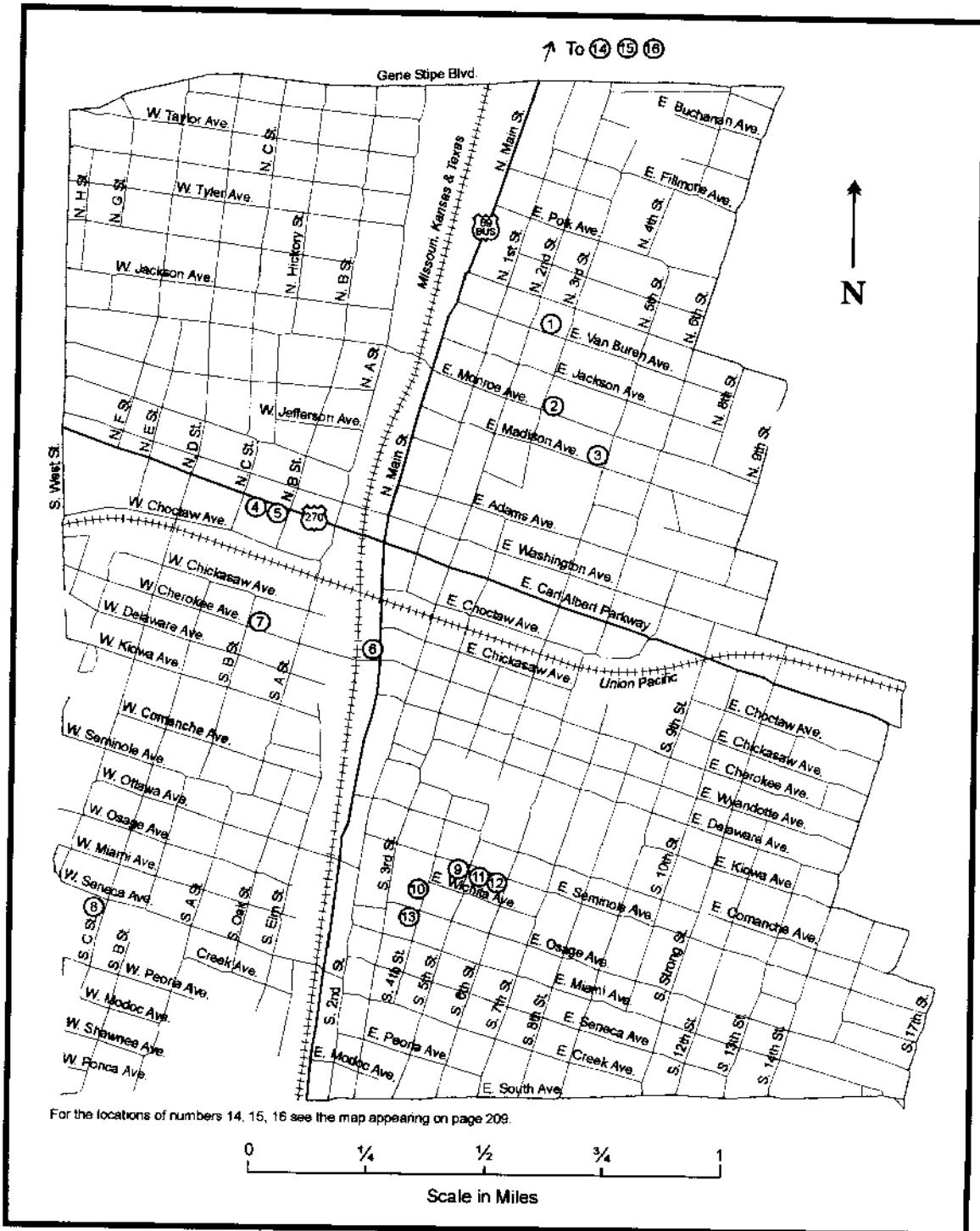
This is a one-story flat-roofed brick clad Romanesque Revival style building. The front façade includes a stepped parapet, and decorative corbeling. It also features a continuous label mold that spans the front façade and caps a round arched door, four round arched windows, and a semi-elliptical arched window. The windows have lug sills but have been altered with the addition of awnings. One door has in-fill, and a one-story stucco addition has been added on the south side. Also, the semi-elliptical arched window has had major alterations including the addition of a door as well as other in-fill. This property is not in the study area and does not warrant further study due to loss of integrity.

(16) **Osage Coal and Mining Company House** (201 West Park Avenue). Built circa 1900.

This property was listed in the Oklahoma Landmarks Inventory file for 1989. It is outside the boundary of the study area. The structure was demolished circa 1998.

# Individual Properties That Do Not Warrant Further Study

Reconnaissance Level Survey of McAlester, 1999



For the locations of numbers 14, 15, 16 see the map appearing on page 209.

## XV. HISTORIC CONTEXT

### **McAlester: The Establishment and Evolution of a Crossroads Town**

For planning and preservation purposes it is essential to know how a town came to be established, what forces, groups, and individuals have shaped its growth, and, as a result, what significant architectural resources it possesses. The purpose, then, of a historic context is to provide a scholarly presentation and analysis of the history of a particular place or area. The following discussion begins with an overview of McAlester's geographic location, and moves to a thematic survey of the city's development over time.

The geographic **location** of McAlester is 34.55° north latitude and 95.45° west longitude. These coordinates place McAlester in southeastern Oklahoma, and more specifically, in the central part of Pittsburg County where it serves as the county seat. McAlester is about 90 miles south of Tulsa, about 120 miles southeast of Oklahoma City, and about 80 miles from the Oklahoma - Arkansas border. McAlester belongs to a region of Oklahoma that is known vernacularly as "Little Dixie."

The location of McAlester also yields insight into the **physical geography** of the place and its surrounding region. McAlester falls within the southeastern portion of the Sandstone Hills physiographic province. As a result, McAlester has some considerable local relief with ridges and valleys giving topographic definition to the city and its vicinity. The hills in the area owe their formation to the presence of resistant sandstone. Some observers have gone so far as to say that McAlester is in the foothills of the Ozarks.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"McAlester Whips Its Troubles." Vertical File-"McAlester," Oklahoma Historical Society.

The McAlester portion of the Sandstone Hills differs from other areas in this physiographic province. Here the ridges tend to more closely follow an east to west alignment while in places beyond McAlester to the north and west the ridges more closely approximate a north to south alignment. Despite the topographic variety McAlester possesses, the elevation of the city is only about 740 feet. Nevertheless, in parts of McAlester the surface expression of these ridges is quite dramatic. Both East Washington and Adams Avenues follow the crest of one of these ridges. In fact, it is possible to obtain a rather expansive view of the downtown from the north side of East Washington Avenue. Not surprisingly, the Masons selected this prominent ridge as the place to build the Scottish Rite Temple. This temple remains an important landmark in the city and occupies a commanding location.

McAlester possesses a humid subtropical climate. This is a moderate climate generally characterized by mild winters. For example, the average daily temperature in January is 36 degrees, and the average daily temperature in July is usually in the 80's. Southeastern Oklahoma is one of the wetter parts of the state, and rainfall totals in the McAlester vicinity average about 45 inches per year. In terms of drainage systems McAlester, and in fact all of Pittsburg County, fall within the drainage basin of the South Canadian River. In addition, McAlester has benefited from access to a potable water supply. Historically, Lake McAlester provided a plentiful supply of water the locals considered to be soft. This lake still supplies the city with water today. Even so, McAlester finds itself just a few miles southwest of the Eufala Reservoir, the largest man-made lake in the state and an increasingly popular recreation center.



McAlester's location puts it in the Arkoma Basin or geologic province. Topsoils in the area, especially along ridges, tend to be thin in part because of the underlying and resistant sandstones and shales. By contrast, richer black loam soils generally have developed in the valleys. Together, these climatic and soil conditions of the McAlester vicinity support the growth of vegetation known as the Cross Timbers. This is considered a savanna and woodlands type of vegetation and generally consists of a mixture of post oak and blackjack oak trees. These oaks are sometimes called "scrub oaks," and there is an observable pattern to their distribution. This vegetational assemblage often develops along the tops of ridges particularly where sandstone outcrops exist. In places the composition of the forest constitutes a mix of oak and hickory trees, and farther south the mixture consists of oak and pine.

**Forest resources** such as these would prove highly useful for the settlers who moved into the area, and would effectively complement McAlester's burgeoning industry. Of still greater importance for the development of McAlester would be the **mineral resources** below ground. Coal dominated the economy of McAlester for the first fifty years of the town's existence. Coal was first mined commercially in Oklahoma not far from what is now North McAlester. However, the development of the coal industry cannot be fully understood without giving consideration to the role of **transportation**. From the outset, transportation played a major part in the growth of McAlester. McAlester has long benefited from the confluence of various transportation routes, and the city traces its beginnings to the growing network of trails that crisscrossed Indian Territory. McAlester developed as a provisioning center where the California Trail crossed the Texas Road.

Like many Oklahoma towns, the development of railroad transportation played a central role in the growth of the city. McAlester is somewhat unusual in that the town actually came into existence prior to the arrival of a railroad. Subsequently, McAlester benefited from the multiplier effect. Knowledge that coal existed in the area influenced the routing of railroads across Indian Territory. Immigrants, from other parts of the United States and abroad, came seeking employment. In time McAlester developed into an important railroad junction where the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas (MKT) Railroad crossed the Choctaw, Oklahoma and Gulf Railroad (now a Union Pacific line). Today, McAlester still occupies a crossroads location. In fact, a network of highways now serves McAlester including U.S. Highway 69, which links Durant and Muskogee. Similarly, U.S. Highway 270 passes through McAlester and crosses U.S. Highway 69 as it connects Poteau to Shawnee and ultimately provides access to Oklahoma City. Finally, McAlester is just five miles from the Indian Nation Turnpike, a toll road linking Tulsa to Hugo.

From the outset **agriculture** has occupied an important but often secondary place in the economy of McAlester. Where the ridges give way to valleys, the soil becomes more friable, fertile, and suitable for both crop cultivation and pasture. After statehood, cotton gained importance as a cash crop. Cotton has a long history of cultivation over much of the southern portion of the state of Oklahoma, including Pittsburg County. By 1918, for example, cotton was sown in every Oklahoma county.<sup>2</sup> The downturn of the cotton economy in the 1920s stimulated a much-needed shift away from the cultivation of that cash crop towards cattle. In time this gave way to greater agricultural diversification. Field crops such as corn, peanuts, sorghum, and soybeans were cultivated and were

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<sup>2</sup>Morgan, H. Wayne and Anne Hodges Morgan. 1984. *Oklahoma: A History*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, p. 149.

supplemented by raising cattle, hogs, and pigs. Where the terrain was too irregular, vegetables and small fruit such as grapes could be grown.

In terms of population, McAlester experienced explosive growth. Although early population figures for McAlester vary, one estimate provided by the Sanborn Fire Insurance Company suggested that by 1886 McAllister (the settlement that would become North McAlester) had a population of 900.<sup>3</sup> By 1894 North McAlester's population had declined to between 600 and 700 people.<sup>4</sup> By 1899, South McAlester recorded a population in excess of 1,000.<sup>5</sup> Within another year its population had swelled to 3,470—an increase of 247 percent, and it ranked as the third largest city in Indian Territory, behind Ardmore and Muskogee.<sup>6</sup> At statehood just seven years later the city's population had more than doubled reaching a total of 8,144.<sup>7</sup> In 1910 the Federal Census recorded a population of 12,954.<sup>8</sup> That figure would remain fairly steady for the next several decades. Then McAlester's population experienced an increase with the Baby Boom, and by 1950 the city was home to nearly 18,000 people.<sup>9</sup> Modest increases after that enabled it to climb to 20,000 by 1954. Today McAlester is home to more than 16,000 people.

The growth and expansion of coal mining triggered the development of a sizable **industrial** sector in McAlester's economy. Extracting coal, building and maintaining the

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<sup>3</sup>McAllister (McAlester) Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1886.

<sup>4</sup>McAllister (McAlester) Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1894.

<sup>5</sup>"McAlester: As History Recorded It a Half-Century Ago." *McAlester News-Capital*, 29 September 1949.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, and Morris, John W., ed. 1979. "Introduction." In *Cities of Oklahoma*. Oklahoma City, OK: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1979, p. 6. Note: The population of South McAlester in 1900 is variously reported as 3,470 and 3,479.

<sup>7</sup>*Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910. Abstract of the Census with Supplement for Oklahoma*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1913.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup>McAllister, W.C., comp. 1921. *Directory—State of Oklahoma*. Vol. 1. Oklahoma City, OK: State Election Board.

railroads, and laying the tracks for McAlester's interurban rail network demanded the use and supply of heavy equipment. In order to meet these demands, McAlester acquired an iron foundry known as the Union Iron Works. Also, the city built a generating station in order to provide the electricity to operate the rail cars on the interurban lines. Still other industries established in McAlester included a cottonseed oil mill, which is still in operation today, a cotton compress, a grain and feed mill, dairies, livery stables, and brick factories. In addition, the establishment of the state penitentiary in McAlester has ensured the development of the prison industry. Finally, one company that played a significant role in McAlester before the advent of refrigeration was the Choctaw Ice and Cold Storage Company, later known as the Southern Ice and Cold Storage Company. Established at the turn of the century, this company supplied ice year round. Initially, horse-drawn wagons delivered 200 or 300-pound blocks of ice for both industrial and domestic use. This company remained an important regional supply center through the late 1970s.

As McAlester's industry developed, so too did its **commercial and professional** sectors. For many years a number of coal and mining companies maintained their headquarters in the city. McAlester became an important banking center as well. Choctaw Avenue emerged as one of the town's focal points. The Kali-Inla building, constructed on Choctaw Avenue in the 1890s, housed the general offices of the railroad companies. Banks, hotels, furniture stores, hardware stores, grocers, cleaners, and saloons are just some of the businesses established downtown. As the county seat McAlester also acquired numerous government functions, most of which were handled through the

courthouse and city hall. Doctors and lawyers also became an important component of McAlester's service economy.

That citizens of McAlester were concerned about the provisioning of **public services** is evident in the connectivity of the various parts of the city. McAlester had and maintained a surprisingly effective infrastructure. The construction of the Electric Interurban transit system provides a testimony to this. Similarly, as early as 1913 McAlester had its own public service company. In time the People's Ice Company would become the Public Service Company of Oklahoma. Early on then, the infrastructure for supplying water, electricity, telephone lines, fire protection, and medical care was established. As early as 1877 McAlester had its own newspaper, the *Star-Vindicator*.

McAlester thrived **socially and culturally**, and emerged as a regional hub of entertainment. Many of the town's buildings reflect a past that was simultaneously elegant and ostentatious. One building that encapsulates this past extravagance is the Busby Theater. Although it no longer exists, this theater was a major entertainment venue until the late 1920s. It was also reputed to be the finest theater between Chicago and New Orleans, or according to another source, the finest between Kansas City and Dallas.<sup>10</sup> When completed in 1908 it had 1,350 seats, a balcony, and a stage large enough to accommodate a production of *Ben Hur*. In addition to entertainment, McAlester claimed over 15 different fraternal societies including familiar ones such as the Masons and the Order of the Odd Fellows, as well as less familiar ones such as the Independent Order of

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<sup>10</sup>Vertical File-"Busby Theater." Pittsburg County Genealogical and Historical Society.

the Republic and the Junior Order of United American Mechanics. Furthermore, by 1909 McAlester had some 17 different churches.<sup>11</sup>

The following sections examine these themes in much greater detail.

### **The Establishment of McAlester**

With the Louisiana Purchase, the government of the United States acquired land that it deemed appropriate for the resettlement of Indians from the eastern part of the country. At the time of the purchase the area that would become Oklahoma contained no permanent settlements.<sup>12</sup> In 1830 Congress passed the General Removal Act. This piece of legislation had a dramatic impact on the cultural geography of Indian Territory. The Five Civilized Tribes, then living in the southeastern part of the United States, were forced to relocate to Indian Territory where they would live in assigned areas. Choctaws, for example, were removed from their lands in Mississippi to southern Oklahoma during the early 1830s. In time, the boundaries of the Choctaw Nation would come to coincide with the southeastern portion of Indian Territory.

By law Indian Territory was off-limits to non-Indian settlers unless they had secured a special permit from the tribe whose land they inhabited. In practice, however, this law proved difficult to enforce. Although each of the Indian nations had its own law enforcement and court system, their jurisdiction was limited to citizens of the Indian

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<sup>11</sup>R.L. Polk & Company. 1909. *McAlester City Directory Including Alderson, Busby, and Krebs*. Sioux City, IA: R. L. Polk & Co.

<sup>12</sup>Morris, John W., ed. 1979. "Introduction." In *Cities of Oklahoma*. Oklahoma City, OK: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1979, p. 3.

nations. As a result, there existed no mechanism with which to regulate or enforce this law.<sup>13</sup>

Initially non-Indian movement into Indian Territory was little more than a trickle. Until the end of the Civil War, it has been estimated that there were perhaps “a few thousand” non-Indians living in Indian Territory.<sup>14</sup> By 1890, however, the non-Indian presence had grown to nearly 129,000 and comprised 71% of the population in Indian Territory. White settlers accounted for almost two-thirds of that figure. At the close of the next decade, the white presence in Indian Territory had more than doubled with whites accounting for over three-quarters of the population.<sup>15</sup> What forces worked to bring about such rapid expansion of settlement? In this context it is useful to examine the emergence of McAlester, a town that developed in the Choctaw Nation.

A fundamental geographic problem was that Indian Territory was situated in between settled places in Texas, Arkansas, Missouri, and Kansas. Long before the Civil War a number of military trails and significant routes already existed. Three of these routes would play a role in the establishment of McAlester, would affect the development of land in Indian Territory, and would foreshadow developments in the transportation network of the region. The three significant routes include: (1) the Texas Road, (2) the California Trail, and (3) the Butterfield Overland Stage Route.

The Texas Road linked Illinois to Texas via Missouri and the Indian Territory, and may have been used as early as 1802.<sup>16</sup> By 1840, Perryville had been established on the Texas Road, just three miles south of present-day McAlester. Perryville served not

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<sup>13</sup>Baird, W. David and Danney Goble. 1994. *The Story of Oklahoma*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, p. 287.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 284.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 284.

only as a place for travelers to replenish their supplies and to overnight, but also as the capital of Tobucksy County, which was part of the Choctaw Nation. As early as 1849 Perryville had become one of the most important market centers in the Choctaw Nation.<sup>17</sup> The Texas Road became a very important avenue of movement, and might be thought of as an Indian Territory thoroughfare because it carried thousands of people and their wagons across Indian Territory and into Texas. A similar situation existed with the California Trail. Commissioned in 1849, the California Trail connected Arkansas to California and became the route of choice for many of the California gold seekers. Finally, the Butterfield Stage Route officially opened in 1858 and established a mail route between St. Louis and San Francisco. The Butterfield Stage differed from both the Texas Road and the California Trail in that it provided passenger service.<sup>18</sup> Approximately 14 of its stages were in Indian Territory.

Significantly, each of these roads passed through the land that would become Pittsburg County. In fact, the town of McAlester can trace its beginnings to the establishment of a tent store at the "Cross Roads," literally the intersection of the California Trail and the Texas Road. During the Civil War a decisive Union victory at Perryville resulted in the destruction of the town, and paved the way for the town of McAlester to eventually eclipse Perryville.

James J. McAlester, an Arkansas native who had served in the Confederate Army, and associate J. T. Hannaford opened their tent store in 1869. The store was located near what is now North McAlester. It has been suggested that J. J. McAlester came to Indian

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<sup>16</sup>Pittsburg County Historical and Genealogical Society, Inc. 1996. *Pittsburg County Oklahoma: People and Places*. Wolfe City, TX: Henington Industries, Inc., p. 451.

<sup>17</sup>Wright, Muriel H. and LeRoy H. Fischer. 1966. "Civil War Sites in Oklahoma," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 44 (1966), p. 204.



Territory, and specifically to the intersection of the California Road and the Texas Trail, because he had learned of the existence of coal outcrops in the area. In fact, McAlester obtained notes on the geology of the area. These notes had been prepared as part of an earlier government-sponsored exploration.<sup>19</sup>

Within a few years Hannaford sold his interest in the store to McAlester, and in the meantime McAlester had married a Chickasaw woman by the name of Rebecca Burney. By law it was now possible for a person of non-Indian descent to obtain citizenship in either the Choctaw or Chickasaw Nation as a result of intermarriage. For McAlester, this meant he would have the right to claim as his any land where he found minerals. Royalties collected were to be split between the claimant and the Choctaw-Chickasaw government.

It is quite possible that McAlester knew that railroad officials were seeking information about potential routes across Indian Territory. Just three years earlier Congress enacted legislation that awarded certain privileges, such as a free right-of-way, to the railroad that first reached the boundary of Indian Territory.<sup>20</sup> This hastened the pace of railroad expansion, and set the stage for greater contact between Indians and non-Indians. The MKT Railroad won the race, reaching the boundary of Indian Territory in the summer of 1870. It is difficult to know how closely McAlester followed these events. Nevertheless, it seems he was keen that his town should have access to a rail line, and sought to influence the decision about where to place the railroad tracks.<sup>21</sup> Although this claim remains unsubstantiated, legend has it that McAlester carted a load of coal to

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<sup>18</sup>Baxter, Scott. 1986. "Resource Planning Project: Transportation in Oklahoma to 1920. Region #4." (Report on file at the State Historic Preservation Office), p. 12.

<sup>19</sup>Impson, Hiram. 1949. "McAlester Golden Anniversary Celebration," p. 21.

Parsons, Kansas in order to demonstrate to railroad representatives there the quality of coal located in the vicinity of the Cross Roads. Indeed, by 1872 the MKT Railroad had laid tracks that passed very near the McAlester store, then called the J.J. McAlester Mercantile Company. That same year McAlester established the first commercial coal mine in Indian Territory. By winter the tracks for the MKT crossed into Texas and the route the railroad company followed closely approximated the route of the old Texas Road. It was only a short while before the value of coal moving by rail vastly exceeded the value of cattle.

Interestingly, the railroad station was named "McAlister." Similarly, when a post office for the settlement was opened, in 1873, it too bore the name "McAlister." One observer has suggested that this is how J.J. McAlester's family in Arkansas spelled their name.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, the post office retained the name "McAlister" until 1885 when it was officially changed to "McAlester." What prompted the change is uncertain, though one suspects it reflects a desire to have the town spelling properly match that of the individual after whom it was named.

J. J. McAlester was not the only person interested in influencing the railroad routes. In 1885 a man by the name of Edwin Chadick had arrived in McAlester and after studying the situation realized the value of having another rail line service the coal fields that had developed in the area. Chadick wanted to buy the right of way for an east to west running segment of the Choctaw, Coal and Railway Company (CCRC). Although the details remain obscure, it appears that Chadick and McAlester failed to reach an

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<sup>20</sup>Debo, Angie. 1961. *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, p. 117.

<sup>21</sup>Impson, Hiram. 1949. "McAlester Golden Anniversary Celebration," p. 22.

agreement. Instead, Chadick reached an agreement with Fritz Sittel. German by birth, Sittel owned land just one and a half miles south of McAlester. By 1889, tracks for the CCRC, subsequently known as the Choctaw, Oklahoma and Gulf Railroad and later the Rock Island Railroad, reached Sittel's land and intersected the MKT. This "crossroads" location provided the impetus for yet another town in Indian Territory. Within another year this new place, called South McAlester, had established a post office. The impact that these intersecting rail lines had on town development is nowhere as clearly indicated as it is with population totals. By 1900 McAlester recorded a population of 642, while South McAlester boasted a population of 3,470.<sup>23</sup> It would take another six years and an act of Congress for these two towns to be officially merged and recognized as the place that we now call McAlester.

### **Natural Resources**

Pittsburg County traces its origins to statehood. At that time the county was carved out of Tobucksy, a county in the Choctaw Nation. By this time the region's association with coal was well-established. The county's name derives from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, another town that grew up on coal. Pittsburg County possesses a reasonable range of natural resources including good timber stands, productive sandstone, shale and clay formations, and high-quality coal.

The hills around McAlester are timbered with stands of post oak, blackjack oak, and hickory. To the south and southeast of the city the land is more heavily forested with similar hardwoods as well as softwoods, especially pine. These oak-pine stands proved

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<sup>22</sup>Pittsburg County Historical and Genealogical Society, Inc. 1996. *Pittsburg County Oklahoma: People and Places*. Wolfe City, TX: Henington Industries, Inc., p. 517.

<sup>23</sup>"McAlester Whips Its Troubles." Vertical File-"McAlester," Oklahoma Historical Society.

valuable for the railroads, which needed a supply of sawn lumber for railroad ties, bridges, and other general construction.

In addition to forest resources, the McAlester area possesses an abundant supply of sandstone. This is also considered to be of high quality because it tends to be a harder variety. Because of its outcroppings near the surface of hills and ridges, the sandstone is also relatively easy to access and quarry. For these reasons it was commonly used in the construction of local buildings. Much of McAlester's downtown originally consisted of sandstone edifices. Two final resources that deserve mentioning are shale and clay. Both of these are often found in series with sandstone. In the McAlester area the shale is quite soft and more easily eroded. This helps explain why it is typically associated with the valleys and areas with low rolling hills. By contrast the sandstone is commonly associated with the ridges. The shales in the area were used to make tiles and bricks. Even more valuable for brick manufacture are the layers of clay that exist below the coal seams. This clay constitutes "fire clay," meaning that it can be burned in kilns in the process of manufacturing bricks for paving, construction, and other uses.

The coal-bearing geologic formations in Oklahoma exist in the northeastern and south-central regions of the state. They comprise the western portion of the Interior Coal Province, a region that reaches from central Iowa across northwestern Missouri, southeastern Nebraska, eastern Kansas, eastern Oklahoma, and western Arkansas. Oklahoma counties possessing coal-bearing strata include sizable portions of land formerly set aside for the Choctaw Nation.

Essentially two ingredients made this region so conducive to coal formation: the presence of organic matter and forces of compression. The land that would become

Pittsburg County spans a region of the state with just these characteristics. The Choctaw or Atoka fault crosses Pittsburg County as it runs in a northeastern to southwestern direction from the border of Arkansas to the vicinity of Atoka. Between the Canadian River to the north and the Choctaw fault to the south stretches a series of formations—synclines and anticlines—that comprise the Choctaw Coal Field. As one moves south from the Canadian River the amount of folding and faulting that has taken place increases, as revealed in the rougher topography of the area. The coal in this area is a high-quality bituminous coal. The coal contains a low sulfur content and was valued as a steaming coal or coking coal. McAlester's location literally becomes central; that is, it occupies a position almost in the middle of the coal field.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of natural resources, and specifically coal, to the development of McAlester. Unlike some of Oklahoma's oil towns, which experienced the boom and bust cycle in a matter of days, weeks, or months, McAlester proved different. Its boom period came on very quickly but also lasted for a long time. This does not mean that there was work for everyone or that most people prospered. The labor situation was tense, strikes were a concern, and work conditions were considered to be among the worst in the country. Also, as a commodity the price of coal was inherently volatile. Nevertheless, when viewed from the standpoint of overall productivity, Oklahoma in general, and McAlester in particular, enjoyed a succession of four highly productive decades. The following table illustrates both the amount and value of Oklahoma coal produced.

Table 1. Production and Value of Coal Mined in Oklahoma, 1884-1924.

<b>Decade</b>	<b>Quantity Produced (Short Tons)</b>	<b>Value</b>
1885 – 1894	8,610,007	\$14,994,105
1895 - 1904	20,561,775	\$32,357,277
1905 - 1914	33,027,047	\$67,695,044
1915 – 1924	37,006,455	\$117,231,031

Source: Shannon, C.W. 1926. *Coal in Oklahoma*. Oklahoma Geological Survey Bulletin No. 4. Norman, OK: n.p., p. 28.

McAlester differs from other boom towns in still another significant way.

McAlester itself was not established on a coal seam. The coal seams that were worked were in the McAlester vicinity, including places like Krebs, Alderson, Haileyville, Hartshorne, and Wilburton. McAlester's success derives from its centrality within this coal-rich region of southeastern Oklahoma and from its ability to function as a distribution center. The arrival of the railroads secured this opportunity for McAlester. The histories of the coal and railroad industries in Oklahoma are intricately intertwined. Just as the presence of coal affected the route of railroads, so the coming of the railroads ensured a market for the coal. It was also common for the railroads to own and operate the mines.

### **Agriculture**

Agriculture has always been important to McAlester, yet it has not been the attention-getter that coal has. Historically, two items have been associated with agricultural success in the McAlester area: cattle and cotton. Cattle formed a major component of the agricultural economy until roughly the time of allotment, then lost

importance as cotton cultivation spread. Raising cattle regained a place in the agricultural economy in the 1930s.

The Choctaws raised cattle, and viewed ranching as an important economic enterprise for the tribe. Furthermore, the East Shawnee Trail, a cattle trail, crossed Indian Territory in the same vicinity as the Texas Road. In the words of one observer, before the arrival of the railroad "... Indian Territory became the grassy highway connecting the Texas ranches to the stock-shipping yards in Kansas."<sup>24</sup> During the years following the Civil War a number of Choctaws ranched on such a large scale that they were considered cattle barons.

However, several events that took place toward the end of the century significantly changed the agricultural landscape of Indian Territory. One of the events that had a major impact on ranching, and particularly the large enterprises, was allotment. The process of dividing the land equally between citizens not only made it difficult for smaller enterprises to compete but also worked against people who sought to support themselves by ranching alone.<sup>25</sup> Another event that worked to diminish the role of ranching in the agricultural economy was the spread of cotton cultivation. Cotton had been grown in Indian Territory largely for domestic use. The arrival of the railroad in the 1870s helped commercialize its production, and an increase in the size of the harvest reflected that.<sup>26</sup> What had changed by the turn of the century was that most of the cotton produced in the Choctaw Nation was no longer grown by Indians but by whites. The amount of acres devoted to the cultivation of cotton expanded rapidly, and McAlester

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<sup>24</sup>Morgan, H. Wayne and Anne Hodges Morgan. 1984. *Oklahoma: A History*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, p. 43.

became an important processing center. As early as 1908 McAlester boasted two cotton gins and a cotton compress. In another few years it would build a cottonseed oil mill as well.

As a processing center, McAlester did not experience the same type of economic turnover. That is, even as the city enjoyed the industry generated by the cultivation and processing of cotton, meatpacking remained important. In that same year, 1908, McAlester still operated three meatpacking plants. Regionally, however, ranching would not regain its agricultural prominence until the 1930s when the cotton boom had passed and farmers realized it had so diminished the fertility of the soil that it could support little else than cattle. By the 1950s agriculture had diversified considerably and industries were adapted to handle the processing of new products. In the middle of that decade, as one newspaper article reported, the cottonseed oil mill had become the leading soybean and peanut processing plant in the southwest.<sup>27</sup>

### **Industrial Activity**

From the outset, the town of McAlester developed as an industrial center. J. J. McAlester's Oklahoma Mining Company, located near Krebs, represented an exploratory venture into coal mining in Indian Territory. By 1875, when his venture showed signs of success, he gained partnership in the Osage Coal and Mining Company. In this way he is credited with launching the first commercial coal mine in Oklahoma. Within just a few years this mine employed nearly 200 miners.<sup>28</sup> Mine operations were also established at

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<sup>25</sup>Baxter, Karen Bode. 1986. "Resource Protection Planning Project. Ranching in the Eleven Counties of Southeastern Oklahoma 1830s to 1930s. Region #4." (Report on file at the State Historic Preservation Office), p. 15.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>27</sup>"McAlester Whips Its Troubles." Vertical File-"McAlester," Oklahoma Historical Society.

<sup>28</sup>Puterbaugh, J.G. n.d. "Sketches Past and Future of Bituminous Coal Industry in Pittsburg County." MS on file at the Pittsburg County Historical and Genealogical Society.



Alderson, and Wilburton, and railroad spurs were soon built to service these towns which came into existence as company towns. At the start, North McAlester resembled a company town because the Osage Coal and Mining Company operated the Little Bolen Mine there and maintained a company store. McAlester, however, was never a company town. By contrast, it developed as the coordinating center and headquarters for the mines and the railroads. The pace of growth throughout the region was remarkable. One estimate suggests that by the turn of the century 39 coal mines were in operation in the Choctaw Nation and coal from 26 of these moved through McAlester.<sup>29</sup>

The city of McAlester, still known as South McAlester at the time, experienced phenomenal growth just after the turn of the century. Actually, the period from 1900-1909 has been described as one of the most rapid periods of growth for the city.<sup>30</sup> The town's population surpassed 12,000, supported a number of mines, and hosted a wide range of different industries. The industries encompassed both light manufacturing and heavy industry. Each of the heavy industries really owed its existence to the establishment of commercial mining. For example, at East Grand Avenue and North Ninth Street an iron foundry, the Union Iron Works, had been established. In addition, both the Mexican Gulf Coal & Transport Company and the Osage Coal & Mining Company had built coke ovens. However, in 1908 the Osage Coal & Mining Company was no longer operating their coke ovens. Finally, adjacent to the tracks of both the MKT and the CO&G railroads stood brick factories. The McAlester Brick Company and its seven kilns were established on the MKT line while the Choctaw Pressed Brick Company, with a total of five kilns, adjoined the CO&G tracks.

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<sup>29</sup>“McAlester Whips Its Troubles.” Vertical File-“McAlester,” Oklahoma Historical Society.

Even the lighter industries that developed in McAlester were already surprisingly diversified. For example, McAlester counted two cotton gins, a cotton compress, a pulp and plaster company, three lumber yards, a hydro carbon light manufacturer, a flour mill, three meatpacking plants, an ice company, and a macaroni factory. One of the meatpacking plants included the Armour Packing Company, which was located on Choctaw Avenue. Perhaps the most unusual was the McAlester Macaroni Company. Located at 301-309 East Chickasaw Avenue, this company had been in business since 1896. It was started by two Italians and was a testimony to the ethnic diversity of the McAlester region.

A major industry that McAlester would next acquire was the prison industry. Because Oklahoma did not have a penitentiary, its convicted criminals were sent to the penitentiary in Kansas. The arrival of statehood raised the likelihood that this would change, and Oklahoma did indeed acquire its own prison system. When this possibility became a reality the business leaders of McAlester lobbied to have the penitentiary built near their town. They were aware of the economic potential it could bring to the city. As a result of their success, the first state prison was built on the northwest side of McAlester in 1909. It was originally designed to hold almost 1,300 inmates, a little less than half the number it accommodates today. The prison remains an important component of McAlester's economy, and is the second leading employer in the area.

McAlester and the surrounding region enjoyed relative prosperity until the latter part of the 1920s when many of the mines closed. The ten-year period stretching from 1927 to 1937 has been described as "the most economically depressed period of

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<sup>30</sup>Pittsburg County Historical and Genealogical Society, Inc. 1996. *Pittsburg County Oklahoma: People and Places*. Wolfe City, TX: Henington Industries, Inc., p. 520.

McAlester history.”<sup>31</sup> The state’s oil boom had ushered in two new fuel resources that cost coal its competitive edge: oil and natural gas. Fuel oil was cheaper than coal, and this caused railroads to shift to oil instead of coal to power their trains. In addition, natural gas was increasingly being used as a fuel both industrially and domestically. By 1927 the industrial landscape of McAlester reflected this change. A number of oil companies already had businesses in town. Continental Oil Company, High Test Oil Corporation, Magnolia Petroleum Company, Marland Refining Company, Pierce Petroleum Corporation, Sinclair Refining Company, are some of the major oil companies in McAlester at the time.

The Second World War helped revive the McAlester economy and brought another industry to the city. In 1942 construction of the Naval Ammunition Depot, a facility that produces and stores ammunition, was completed. The site for this plant is located about ten miles southwest of McAlester and was selected for at least two reasons. First, it provided the government with inland defense production facilities. Second, because of its location and rail connections it had good access to both coasts. This was important to the creation and maintenance of the “Two Ocean Navy” that the government was trying to create.<sup>32</sup>

The Naval Ammunition Depot employed sizable numbers of people. During the war years the payroll included nearly 10,000 employees. After the war the number employed was about 2,000, a mere fraction of its former size. During the Korean and Vietnam wars employment again increased temporarily. The fluctuations in work have

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<sup>31</sup>Dieste, Tony, Stringer, Gary, and Lorraine Heartfield. 1984. “An Archeological Overview and Management Plan for the McAlester Army Ammunition Plant, Pittsburg County, Oklahoma.” Prepared under contract CX-5000-3-0771 with the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. Monroe, LA: Heartfield, Price and Greene, Inc., p. 2-22.

been an issue for the maintenance of the local economic base and have certainly sustained the boom and bust quality of the economy in McAlester. In 1977 the Navy gave control of the depot to the army, and the facility is now known as the McAlester Army Ammunition Plant. The Department of Defense considers this plant to be its second largest facility. With 900 employees the plant is presently the largest employer in the McAlester area.

Since the 1960s McAlester has worked to continue to diversify its industrial base. In addition to the ammunition plant McAlester boasts other factories charged with the manufacture of aerospace electronics, floating docks, oil pumps, automobile engines, and ladies lingerie. Recently the city has experienced expansion in the service economy, particularly in the area of medical care. McAlester is now home to a regional health center that constitutes the third largest employer in the area.

### **Commercial Establishments<sup>33</sup>**

Little has been written about McAlester in its early days. This owes in part to the circumstances by which it came into existence. South McAlester was founded in 1885, but was not incorporated as a city until five years later. That same year it received a post office and became the operating center for the Central District of federal court. In the view of one contemporary in 1891, South McAlester was little more than a village connected to Krebs and North McAlester by mere trails. The picture he painted of the town was an unaccommodating place with poorly developed streets exacerbated by the difficult terrain of the site and livestock loose in the streets. In his words McAlester

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<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 1-5.

<sup>33</sup>Unless otherwise noted, much of the information in this section derives from Pittsburg County Historical and Genealogical Society, Inc. 1996. *Pittsburg County Oklahoma: People and Places*. Wolfe City, TX: Henington Industries, Inc., pp. 517-18, 520, 523.

possessed “not more than 300 persons, chiefly railway officers and attaches of the United States court which had just been established here.”<sup>34</sup> Indeed, the town of South McAlester was not officially surveyed and platted until 1900.

The foregoing description of McAlester would not suit the town for long, however. By 1891 the Choctaw, Coal and Railway Company had begun construction on the infamous Kali-Inla Building. This structure was reputed to top in size and grandeur all other buildings in Indian Territory.<sup>35</sup> A proposed five-story building, the Kali-Inla would be the nerve center for all the business associated with the railroad. Two floors would house railroad offices, another two floors would have rooms for rent, and one floor would contain storage space. The corner of Choctaw Avenue and First Street was the site selected for this building. However, the structure gained notoriety because it was never completed and the top two stories, owing to their wood construction, were found to be a fire hazard. For this reason the top floors were removed and the building went through a number of phases as a hotel before it was finally demolished.

The 1890s proved to be a period of rapid growth for South McAlester. As previously mentioned, by 1899 South McAlester counted more than 1,000 people. Because of the presence of the federal court McAlester attracted a number of attorneys. McMurray and Cornish, both of whom have buildings on Choctaw Avenue, were lawyers for the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations. Despite this concentration of development on the east side of the MKT tracks in the vicinity of Choctaw Avenue, a number of businesses trace their beginnings to the west side of the MKT tracks. The first hotel in South McAlester was the Mize Hotel and it was located at 11 West Choctaw Avenue.

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<sup>34</sup>Impson, Hiram. 1949. “McAlester Golden Anniversary Celebration,” p. 27.

Similarly, the first pharmacy and hospital also started on the west side of the city. For many years an iron bridge connected the two sides of the city via Grand Avenue across the MKT tracks.

With its proximity and access to both rail lines, however, Choctaw Avenue emerged as the heart of McAlester's business district, which stretched north to Grand Avenue and south to Cherokee. This downtown area attracted a wide range of commercial enterprises including hotels, dentists, cleaners, grocers, and banks. In fact, the first bank was established at a hotel. This was the South McAlester Bank and it was located at the corner of First Street and Grand Avenue. In 1896 the First National Bank was established, on Choctaw Avenue. This bank is still in operation, though it occupies a new building. Before the turn of the century McAlester could also boast having a telephone and telegraph company that enabled connections between places as distant as Fort Smith, Arkansas and Denison, Texas.

By 1908 McAlester's commercial establishments were quite diverse. McAlester had six banks, two express companies, and five newspapers. The city also recorded nine different hotels, including the Mize Hotel, Commercial Hotel, and McFarland's European Hotel. All of these were established downtown in the vicinity of Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Cherokee Streets. In 1908 McAlester could also claim that instead of having two railroad depots it had one grand depot in the form of the recently constructed Union Railroad Station replete with a restaurant on the second story. Among the first grocers in McAlester were the P.A. Vance Grocery Company and G.C. Cochran Grocery Company. Importantly, they would soon be eclipsed by the Hale-Halsell Grocery Company and the

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<sup>35</sup>Pittsburg County Historical and Genealogical Society, Inc. 1996. *Pittsburg County Oklahoma: People and Places*. Wolfe City, TX: Henington Industries, Inc., p. 517.

Griffin Grocery Company. In addition to hotels and grocers, McAlester was well-supplied with furniture stores, livery stables, harness shops, tailors, tin shops, and undertakers.

At this time, two-story buildings were the norm and the majority of McAlester's business district consisted of two-story structures. Some of the more substantial buildings include the Romanesque Revival style South McAlester/Eufala Telephone Company (1905) Building at 100-106 East Carl Albert Parkway, and the McMurray Building (1897) at 202-204 East Choctaw Avenue. One of the early sizable three-story buildings that still stands is the Knights Templar Building, formerly the Dow Coal Company Building (circa 1900) at 124-126 East Carl Albert Parkway. The construction of the Busby Hotel in 1905, the Busby Theater in 1908, and the post office in 1914 would usher in additional substantial three or four-story buildings. The Busby Hotel stood at 115 East Carl Albert Parkway. This was a very lavish hotel designed to accommodate the guests attending shows at the Busby Theater. It burned in 1924, and was rebuilt in 1926. The Busby Theater stood at Washington Avenue and Second Street. It was listed on the National Register in 1979 but has since been razed. The post office was built at 301 East Carl Albert Parkway, the site of the present Carl Albert Federal Building. It is potentially eligible for the National Register.

McAlester's business district prospered in the 1920s and this is predominantly reflected in the construction that took place along Carl Albert Parkway. Within a decade following the construction of the post office in 1914, new buildings were erected for the Grand Avenue Methodist Church (223 East Carl Albert Parkway) and the First Christian Church (300 East Carl Albert Parkway). The Busby Hotel (115 East Carl Albert

Parkway) was rebuilt in 1926 becoming, in the process, the Pittsburg County Courthouse. The end of the 1920s witnessed the culmination of this construction boom with the completion of the 11-story Aldridge Hotel (200 East Carl Albert Parkway).

The 1930s and the early 1940s dealt heavy blows to McAlester's commercial establishments and some closed. During the 1930s McAlester became a Works Progress Administration headquarters. As a result, new building projects were initiated and McAlester acquired such facilities as the McAlester Armory, built in 1936 at 309 East Polk Avenue; L'Ouverture Auditorium, a gymnasium built in 1934 for McAlester's all-black high school and located at Fourteenth and Chickasaw Avenue; and the Jeff Lee Park, Bath House, and Pool built in 1935 at Third and Fillmore Avenue.

The middle part of the 1940s ushered in another period of relative growth and prosperity for McAlester. Establishment of the Naval Ammunitions Depot just southwest of the city stimulated the local economy and provided jobs for many of the people. Some mines that had been closed were put back into production for another ten years. In 1945 the F. W. Woolworth Company built a store downtown at 110-112 East Choctaw Avenue. Economic growth slowed some following the war and the downscaling of production at the Naval Ammunitions Depot. For McAlester, economic growth has since been rather closely tied to the work generated by the Naval Ammunitions Depot. The Korean War, for example, brought another upsurge to the local economy in the 1950s.

In terms of commercial establishments the 1960s may prove to be the most detrimental to McAlester's historic and cultural resources. In the words of one historian,

In the early 1960s, downtown McAlester underwent a complete face-lift through a U.S. governmental long-range program of Urban Renewal. Many of the old original native stone buildings along Choctaw Avenue and collateral streets were razed and replaced with



modern brick and concrete. Two of the more prominent ones were the beautiful old Union railroad station and the Co-Mar Hotel (once the Kali-Inla building).

### **Education<sup>36</sup>**

Emphasis on education has been an important component of McAlester's history. In the McAlester area, however, schools were first provided by the Choctaw Indians. As early as 1888 the Presbyterians, under the leadership of Edmond Doyle, had established a school in North McAlester. Public schools were not instituted in McAlester until after North and South McAlester had been incorporated and the city was able to raise funds through property taxes. Prior to incorporation, children could attend school on a subscription basis. Before statehood schools typically consisted of two-room structures that were established in four of the city's six wards. These wooden schoolhouses gradually gave way to two-story brick elementary schools. In time, each of McAlester's six wards built an elementary school.

The city's first high school was constructed at 200 East Adams. A more substantial building was erected on the site in 1908, but it burned in 1919 and was rebuilt that same year. The structure that now stands on the site is the "old" McAlester High School. It is a National Register eligible property. The first all-black high school in McAlester, called L'Ouverture School, was built in 1906 at Fourteenth Street and Chickasaw Avenue. The structure was razed circa 1950 but the gymnasium, built in the 1930s by the W.P.A., still stands. The destruction of L'Ouverture School was actually part of the city's long term goal of updating and improving its education facilities. Through the 1950s McAlester replaced and rebuilt all of its elementary schools and

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<sup>36</sup>Much of the information in this section is based on Pittsburg County Historical and Genealogical Society, Inc. 1996. *Pittsburg County Oklahoma: People and Places*. Wolfe City, TX: Henington Industries, Inc., pp. 518-520.

added a second elementary in the southeastern portion of the city. The middle schools, and subsequently the high school, also obtained new buildings. It is interesting to note that as early as 1908 McAlester had a business college. The emphasis on business skills and vocational-technical training has endured in that McAlester is now home to the Kiamichi Vo-Tech Campus.

### **Religion<sup>37</sup>**

As early as 1889 the Catholic church had erected a stone building on their lot at 302 East Washington Avenue. That building would be replaced in 1948 with a Late Gothic Revival style structure. By contrast, the Choctaw, Coal and Railway Company built the first Protestant religious structure in McAlester in 1891. Each week Sunday school was provided and a different denomination conducted its services there. By 1893 the Baptists had purchased the building from the railroad company and continued to hold worship services there until 1911 when they built their church at the corner of First Street and Washington.

The sale of the building in 1893 proved a catalyst for Protestant congregational organization and the construction of church buildings. That same year two congregations of Methodists formed. The Methodist Episcopal Church built a structure at Second Street and Washington, while the Mary E. Phillips Memorial Methodist Church built on West Grand Avenue. These two congregations joined in 1925 and began worshipping at the then newly constructed Grand Avenue Methodist Church on East Grand Avenue (now 223 East Carl Albert Parkway). This church is built in the Classical Revival style.

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<sup>37</sup>Much of the information in this section is drawn from Pittsburg County Historical and Genealogical Society, Inc. 1996. *Pittsburg County Oklahoma: People and Places*. Wolfe City, TX: Henington Industries, Inc., p. 518.

The Christian Church was also organized in 1893. In 1925 they built a new church, in the Tudor Revival style, at the corner of Third Street and Carl Albert Parkway. The Episcopalians organized a year later, in 1894. They too built a new church in the 1920s and it is a very good example of the Mission/Spanish Colonial Revival style. Their church stands at 325 East Washington Avenue.

A similar situation developed with the Presbyterians who had also initially formed two congregations. The Presbyterians united as of 1911. In distinct contrast to all the other denominations discussed thus far, the First Presbyterian Church is the only original church remaining in McAlester. It provides an excellent example of the Shingle Style and was listed on the National Register in 1979. The building is now owned and occupied by the Christian Science Society.

From very early on McAlester's black population had also established several congregations. These include the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the Beebee Chapel Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, and the East Star Baptist Church. Each of these churches was established between 1893 and 1900. These churches provided an important sense of community for the black population, and the Beebee Chapel, located at Tenth and Chickasaw Avenue, is an important symbol of this.

### **Cultural Events and Social Clubs**

McAlester has long enjoyed the presence of a variety of cultural events and social clubs and is considered the "birthplace of Royal Arch Masonry in Indian Territory, now Oklahoma."<sup>38</sup> The first Masonic lodge organized was the A.F. & A. M. Lodge. It was organized in 1877, in what was then North McAlester. The brick clad building that was erected circa 1896 still stands today. It was not long before South McAlester had a

Masonic lodge as well. It was originally located on East Washington Avenue. By 1907 the Masons had moved into a new building at Second Street and Adams Avenue.<sup>39</sup> This building was replaced between 1928-1930 when a new Scottish Rite Temple was erected. In 1980 the McAlester Scottish Rite Temple was listed on the National Register.

Social and fraternal organizations in addition to the Masons were quite prominent in McAlester from a very early time. A partial list of these organizations, many of them in existence since 1900, includes the following: Blue Lodge Chamber and Council and Comandery of the Knights Templar, Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythis, Modern Woodmen, Woodmen of the World, Independent Order of the Republic, Junior Order of United American Mechanics, Daughters of America, Order of the Eastern Star, Order of Unity, Daughters of Rebekah, Order of Railway Conductors, Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, and the Order of Railway Trainmen.<sup>40</sup> Of these, the Knights Templar and Independent Order of Odd Fellows are still associated with specific buildings in McAlester. The Knights Templar building is at 124-126 East Carl Albert Parkway, and the I.O.O.F building is at 326 ½-328 East Choctaw Avenue.

In addition to these social and fraternal organizations, McAlester is the place where the Order of the Rainbow for Girls was started. Organized in 1922 by one of the ministers of the First Christian Church, this group promotes love of and respect for home, school, church, and service. Over 1,000 cities have local Rainbow for Girls organizations.<sup>41</sup> Because of its association with Mark Sexson, the founder of the

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<sup>38</sup>Impson, Hiram. 1949. "McAlester Golden Anniversary Celebration," p. 23.

<sup>39</sup>Pittsburg County Historical and Genealogical Society, Inc. 1996. *Pittsburg County Oklahoma: People and Places*. Wolfe City, TX: Henington Industries, Inc., pp. 517-519.

<sup>40</sup>Puterbaugh, J.G. n.d. "Sketches Past and Future of Bituminous Coal Industry in Pittsburg County." MS on file at the Pittsburg County Historical and Genealogical Society, p. 32.

<sup>41</sup>"From a Crossroads on the Old Texas Trail to City of 20,000—McAlester." Excerpts from *McAlester News-Capital Anniversary Edition*, 29 September, 1949.

organization, McAlester is recognized as the permanent headquarters for this order.<sup>42</sup> The Rainbow for Girls is now housed in a Moderne style building at 313 East Carl Albert Parkway.

In the history of McAlester there is one person who did more for McAlester's social and cultural atmosphere than anyone else. That person was Colonel William Busby. In an attempt to improve the hotel accommodations in McAlester, he built the Busby Hotel at a cost of approximately \$240,000 in 1905.<sup>43</sup> This was a large, four-story hotel that made very elegant use of space and architecture. The Busby Hotel suffered a fire in 1924 and in the process of rebuilding it was decided to use it as the Pittsburg County Courthouse.

By 1908 Busby had also built the Busby Theater, at an approximate cost of \$100,000. It stood adjacent to the hotel and was the culmination of his attempt to make McAlester into a cultural and social hub. The theater opened in 1908, had 1,350 seats, a balcony, a large stage, and very elaborate decor. It is reported that special trains were run in order to bring people into McAlester to go shopping, get dinner and view a stage production at the theater.<sup>44</sup> Many famous actors and actresses performed at the Busby Theater until the 1920s when stage productions gave way to motion pictures. At that time the Busby Theater continued to operate, but the Depression brought an end to its profitability. In the late 1970s the Church of Christ purchased the theater and remodeled it some. In the early 1980s the First Baptist Church purchased the theater. In 1983 the theater was razed in order to build a parking lot for the church.

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<sup>42</sup>Puterbaugh, J.G. n.d. "Sketches Past and Future of Bituminous Coal Industry in Pittsburg County." MS on file at the Pittsburg County Historical and Genealogical Society, p. 47.

<sup>43</sup>Pittsburg County Historical and Genealogical Society, Inc. 1996. *Pittsburg County Oklahoma: People and Places*. Wolfe City, TX: Henington Industries, Inc., p. 521.

## Conclusion

The history of McAlester reveals a place that has experienced a series of quiet revolutions. J. J. McAlester's establishment of his tent store at the "crossroads," a place in Indian Territory, provides an example of rather bold behavior that would have revolutionary outcomes. His discovery of high-grade bituminous coal in the McAlester area was no less revolutionary in impact. The discovery of this coal was integrally connected with the railroad routes established by the MKT and Union Pacific Railroad companies. The arrival of the railroad, and specifically the Union Pacific, spurred the development of an entirely new town—South McAlester. In typical boom town fashion South McAlester grew rapidly, and quickly outpaced its predecessor, North McAlester. In both agriculture and industry sometimes the turnover was just as rapid. Consider for example the shift to cotton, then the move away from it again.

McAlester has always been a service center. Though it developed in close association with the mining industry it has not been another company town. For this reason it often comes as a surprise to many visitors to discover its examples of high style architecture, not to mention an 11-story hotel. Indeed, a number of McAlester's citizens were moneyed and sought to develop the city such that it would be remembered as more than "the coal mine capital of Oklahoma." However, the revolution in the fuel industry, and specifically the shift from coal to oil and natural gas, tempered McAlester's growth in the late 1920s. It would be another two decades before McAlester's economy enjoyed such prosperity again.

More recently, McAlester's leaders have sought to diversity the city's economic base in order to lessen the swings between boom and bust periods. As a result, quite a bit

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 521.

of new development has sprung up on the outskirts of town. Even so, unlike many small towns, McAlester still enjoys its downtown. In addition, a number of properties both in the downtown and across the city provide valuable insights into McAlester's storied past.

## XVI. ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abbott, Devon. "Gentleman Tom Abbott." **Chronicles of Oklahoma** 68 (Spring 1990): 24-37.

Author follows the life of her grandfather, Tom Abbott, who became one of McAlester's leading citizens (chief of police) and sports figures (boxing) around the turn of the century.

Albert, Carl Bert. "Recollections of My Early Life." **Chronicles of Oklahoma** 52 (1974): 30-37.

An autobiographical account of one of Oklahoma's most famous native sons who was reared in North McAlester. Includes a sketch map of early North McAlester.

Aldrich, Gene. "A History of the Coal Industry in Oklahoma to 1907." Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1952.

A comprehensive study, including discovery of coal and its early development as an industry, especially in southeastern Oklahoma. It covers the emergence of coal towns, importance of railroads and connection to markets, organization of labor unions and strikes in the coal fields, and social conditions of coal miners.

Architectural/Historic Intensive Level Survey of Coal Mining Related Resources of Pittsburg County.

Report prepared by the Department of History, Oklahoma State University in 1989. Located at the State Historic Preservation Office in Oklahoma City, OK.

Asfahl, Milton Ernest. "Oklahoma and Organized Labor." Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1930.

This is one of the first scholarly treatments of organized labor in Oklahoma. It covers the United Mine Workers District No. 21 which included the McAlester coal fields.

Badinelli, Don F. "Coal Miners Strike." **Chronicles of Oklahoma** 72 (Fall 1994): 292-311.

Author discusses the origin, evolution, and results of the first major labor confrontation in Indian Territory when Choctaw Nation coal companies announced a wage reduction in 1894.



Baird, W. David and Goble, Danney. **The Story of Oklahoma**. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994.

The most recent history of the state that mentions McAlester on pp. 7, 181, 191, 199, 281, 289, 310, 325, and 365.

Barnhill, John. "Triumph of Will." **Chronicles of Oklahoma** 61 (Spring 1983): 80-95.

Focuses on Pete Hanraty, the United Mine Workers of America, and the series of strikes (1899-1903) in the southeastern Oklahoma coal fields.

Baxter, Karen Bode. "Ranching in the Eleven Counties of Southeast Oklahoma: 1830s to 1930s, Region #4" (1986)

Report prepared by the Department of History, Oklahoma State University. Located at the State Historic Preservation Office, Oklahoma City, OK.

Baxter, Scott. "The European Ethnic Experience in Oklahoma: 1870-1920, Region #4" (1986).

Resource Protection Planning Report prepared by the Department of History, Oklahoma State University. Located at the State Historic Preservation Office, Oklahoma City, OK. Covers the region where McAlester is located.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Transportation in Oklahoma to 1920, Region # 4" (1986).

Resource Protection Planning Report prepared by the Department of History, Oklahoma State University. Report located at the State Historic Preservation Office, Oklahoma City, OK. McAlester is located in Region # 4.

Bernard, Richard M. **The Poles in Oklahoma**. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980.

The chapter on "The Coal Miners of the McAlester District" (pp. 14-29) contains some insights on the importance of Polish workers in the McAlester District coal fields.

Blackburn, Bob L. **Images of Oklahoma: A Pictorial History**. Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1984.

Contains a photograph of the McAlester Macaroni Factory, owned by Joe and John Fassino (1930).

Blessing, Patrick J. **The British and Irish in Oklahoma.** Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980.

Discusses the scores of skilled immigrants from the British Isles who came to work in the McAlester District coal fields.

Bollinger, C. J. **The Geography of Oklahoma.** Chicago: Rand McNally, 1930.

Among the earliest comprehensive geographies of Oklahoma, it contains valuable information on the physical geography of the state as well as excellent maps prepared by Rand McNally, one of the best cartography companies.

Bray, A. C. "Railroads and Railroad Building in Oklahoma." Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1923.

One of the best early accounts of railroads in Oklahoma before the Hofsommer anthology.

Brown, Kenny L. **The Italians in Oklahoma.** Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980.

Based on his M.A. thesis, Brown has completed an extensive study on the most important ethnic group in the McAlester area.

\_\_\_\_\_. "A History of the Italians in Pittsburg County." Unpublished Master's Thesis, Oklahoma State University, 1975.

An exhaustive analysis of one of the most important ethnic groups in the county where McAlester is located.

Buchanan, James S. and Dale, Edward E. **A History of Oklahoma.** New York: Row, Peterson, and Company, 1924.

Designed and written as a textbook, this book is historically sound and one of the best brief surveys of Oklahoma history up to 1920.

Buck, Solon J. "The Settlement of Oklahoma." **Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters** 15 (1907): 325-380.

This research monograph is one of the most detailed and well documented sources on the settlement of Oklahoma and Indian Territories.

Burbank, Garin. **When Farmers Voted Red: The Gospel of Socialism in the Oklahoma Countryside, 1910-1924.** Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1976.

A rather complicated, but detailed study of the Socialist movement in Oklahoma with relevance to the southeastern section of the state where McAlester is located.

Chappel, Joe. "Oklahoma, as Seen by Joe Chappel." **Sturms** 6 (April 1908): 33-66.

A contemporary description of the new state of Oklahoma including a discussion of the quality of the coal deposits in the southeastern part of the state.

Clark, Carter Blue. "The Genesis of County and County Seat Contests in Oklahoma." Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1970.

Valuable source for county boundary and county seat contests.

Clark, Stanley. "Immigrants in the Choctaw Coal Industry." **Chronicles of Oklahoma** 33 (Winter 1955-56): 440-55.

Another exceptional article on the influence of European immigrants in the McAlester coal fields.

Cooper, C. L. (ed.). "Coal in Oklahoma." **Oklahoma Geological Survey Bulletin No. 4.** Norman: Oklahoma Geological Survey, 1926.

This important geological bulletin covers the McAlester coal district.

Crowder, Samuel Herbert. "History of the Mullen Coal Company." Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1956.

This thesis focuses on W. P. Mullen's background and his formation of the Mullen Coal Company in McAlester. It traces the operational methods, production, marketing, and finances of the Mullen Coal Company.

Debo, Angie. **Oklahoma: Footloose and Fancy-Free.** Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1949.

Authored by one of the most knowledgeable scholars on the Oklahoma story, this book chronicles more than mere political history. It gives insight to the character of Oklahomans, especially their social and cultural history. Mentions McAlester on pp. 18, 23, 87, 101, 103, and 166.

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**The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic.** Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961.

Discusses the importance of the coal industry in and around McAlester and its effect on Choctaw affairs.

Dieste, Tony. **An Archeological Overview and Management Plan for the McAlester Army Ammunition Plant, Pittsburg County, Oklahoma.** Monroe, LA: heartfield, Price and Greene, Inc. 1984.

A publication produced under contract for the National Park Service, this book details the natural history of the land encompassed by the Army Ammunition Plant (AAP). In addition, it explains the historic role of the AAP, a major employer in the McAlester area.

Doran, Michael Frank. "Origins of Culture Areas in Oklahoma, 1830-1930." Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Oregon, 1974.

This dissertation by a geographer is an exhaustive treatment of migration sources into Oklahoma and how these migrants affected the cultural regionalization of the state.

"Early History of South McAlester." "McAlester—South." Vertical File. Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

An important source for studying the origins of South McAlester.

Ellsworth, J. O. and Elliott, F. F. "Types of Farming in Oklahoma." **Oklahoma Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin No. 181** (June 1929).

This is an invaluable analysis of the state's agricultural regions up to about 1930. Divides the state into wheat and cotton belts.

Everest, Herbert A. "The Coal Fields of the McAlester Quadrangle, Choctaw Nation, Indian Territory." Unpublished Thesis, School of Mines, University of Oklahoma, 1908.

This thesis provides a useful overview of the coal formations in the McAlester vicinity. Though it primarily presents information from a geologist's perspective, it does contain brief discussions of types of mines in the area and labor conditions.

**Facts, Figures, and Future of McAlester, Oklahoma.** McAlester, OK: McAlester Commercial Club, c. 1910.

Some early historical data on McAlester shortly after statehood. Prepared by the Commercial Club, forerunner of the McAlester Chamber of Commerce.

Foreman, Grant. **A History of Oklahoma.** Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1942.

A standardized account of the state written by one of the most prolific authors on Oklahoma history.

Fugate, Francis L. and Roberta B. **Roadside History of Oklahoma.** Missoula, Montana: Mountain Press, 1991.

One of the most recent travelogues on Oklahoma. McAlester is covered on pp. 54-55.

Gibson, A. M. **A Guide to Regional Manuscripts in the Division of Manuscripts—University of Oklahoma Library.** Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960.

This guide gives several collections dealing with McAlester, especially the McAlester Anniversary Corporation collection (No. 386) and the James Jackson McAlester papers (No. 388).

Gibson, Arrell. **Oklahoma: A History of Five Centuries.** Norman: Harlow Publishing, 1965.

This book became the most widely used textbook for Oklahoma history classes in the state's school system. Authored by a University of Oklahoma history professor who was the state's leading historian until his recent death.

Gittinger, Roy. **The Formation of the State of Oklahoma, 1803-1906.** Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939.

A scholarly history of events leading up to the creation of the state.

Goble, Danney. **Progressive Oklahoma: The Making of a New Kind of State.** Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980.

Excellent section (pp. 60-66) on J. J. McAlester and the founding of the town that bears his name.

Goins, Charles R. and Morris, John W. **Oklahoma Homes: Past and Present.** Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980.

This handsome collection of photographs plus introductory text categorizes Oklahoma homes by chronological period. Covers four houses in McAlester, including the McAlester House (1870), Conway Castle (1898), McGinnity House (1903), and McCauley House (1970).

Gould, Charles N. **Oklahoma Place Names.** Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1933.

Before the Shirk book, this was the only book-length treatment of the origin of names of cities, rivers, towns, and mountains in Oklahoma.

\_\_\_\_\_. **Travels Through Oklahoma.** Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1930.

This source authored by a University of Oklahoma professor gives superb physical geography information, especially topography, soils, and vegetation.

Grant, H. Roger and Hofsommer, Donovan L. "'Katy' Depots of Oklahoma." **Chronicles of Oklahoma** 52 (Fall 1974): 331-41.

Discusses the McAlester "Katy" Depot and includes photograph.

"Greater McAlester, The Premier Coal City of the Great Southwest." **T.P.A. Magazine** (Travelers' Protective Association of America) Special Edition: Indian Territory, 2 (May 1906): 25-27, 113-125.

A contemporary account of McAlester including a discussion of the city's history, natural resources, transportation, municipal and retail development, as well as a discussion of the status of segregated and surplus lands.

Green, Donald E. (ed.) **Rural Oklahoma.** Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1977.

This collection of readings edited by one of the state's most reputable historians consists of articles on specific crops and livestock that played an important role in Oklahoma's agricultural history. Discusses the significance of McAlester as a cotton processing center in Indian Territory on pp. 41-42.

"Guy C. Reid." **Chronicles of Oklahoma** 41 (Summer 1963): 228-31.

A biographical account of the architect who designed the Aldridge Hotel, constructed in 1930, in McAlester.

Hagle, Paul. **McAlester Planning Atlas: Population and Housing**. Stillwater, OK: Department of Geography, Oklahoma State University, 1972.

A useful atlas prepared by an economic geographer. It is based on 1960 and 1970 United States census data.

Hale, Douglas. "European Immigrants in Oklahoma." **Chronicles of Oklahoma** 53 (Summer 1975): 179-203.

A good starting point for an examination of the substantial number of European groups that migrated to Oklahoma. Some excellent maps and graphs.

Hamm, Clyde (ed.) **Labor History of Oklahoma**. Oklahoma City: A. M. Van Horn, 1939.

The first historical account of labor union activity in Oklahoma.

Harris, Clyta Foster. "A History of the Oklahoma Prison System, 1967-1983." Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1985

Although the author's emphasis is on the period from 1967 to 1983, and particularly the riot at "Big Mac" in 1973, she also provides background material on the establishment of the state prison in McAlester in 1909.

Hefley, A. D. "Tobucksy County Courthouse." **Chronicles of Oklahoma** 50 (June 1970): 25-38.

This article discusses the history of a McAlester landmark.

Henderson, Arn, Frank Parman, and Dortha Henderson. **Architecture in Oklahoma: Landmark and Vernacular**. Norman, OK: Point Riders Press, 1978.

This book includes a collection of excellent photographs on a wide array of buildings and structures taken throughout the state. It is organized by chronological periods. Unfortunately, no buildings or structures in McAlester are included.

Hendrix, T. A. "The McAlester District." **Geology and Fuel Resources of the Southern Oklahoma Coal Fields**. Washington, D.C.: United States Geological Survey Bulletin No. 874D. United States Department of Interior, United States Government Printing Office, 1939.

An authoritative government document that gives significant details on the McAlester coal fields.

Hibdon, James Howard. "Productivity in the Coal Mining Industry of Oklahoma." Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1949.

An economics thesis that covers the 1900 to 1945 period of the coal mining industry in Oklahoma, including coal production, size of mines, number of employees, value of coal, and underground and strip mining.

Hightower, Michael J. "Cattle, Coal, and Indian Land." **Chronicles of Oklahoma** 62 (Spring 1984): 4-25.

Author traces the interrelated traditions of coal mining and Indian lands in southeastern Oklahoma, from turbulence in the Indian Territory to strip mining in the modern era.

Hill, Luther B. **History of the State of Oklahoma**. Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1908.

An early attempt to tell the story of Oklahoma from the date of the Louisiana Purchase through the formation of the state.

Historic Context for the Native American Theme, Management Regions # 4 & 5: 1830-1939.

Report prepared by the Department of History, Oklahoma State University in 1987. Located at the State Historic Preservation Office, Oklahoma City, OK. McAlester is situated in Region #4.

Hofsommer, Donovan L. (ed.) **Railroads in Oklahoma**. Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1977.

This author probably knows more about Oklahoma railroad history than any other student of the subject. This anthology provides general information as to dates of construction of the railways, especially Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad and Choctaw Coal and Railway Company (later the Rock Island), that influenced the development of McAlester.

Impson, Hiram. "McAlester Golden Anniversary Celebration." McAlester: n. p., n.d.

One of the best treatments of the early history of McAlester, especially the settlement of North and South McAlester. Contains several useful photographs.

Institute of Community Development. "A Plan for Development: McAlester, Oklahoma." Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Research Institute, 1959.

A study on the urban design of McAlester that gives attention to land use patterns, traffic flow, recreational areas, educational areas, and the amount of vacant land



within the city limits. Conclusions find the grid system of town layout inadequate, numerous obsolete areas in the central business district, and blight on the southwestern edge of the business district.

Johnson, Kenneth et al. **Geology and Earth Resources of Oklahoma**. Norman: Oklahoma Geological Survey, 1972.

A handsome booklet laced with numerous maps, charts, and graphs developed by one of the leading geologists of the state.

Joyce, Davis D. (ed.) **An Oklahoma I Had Never Seen Before: Alternative Views of Oklahoma History**. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994.

Several new interpretations of Oklahoma history are given in this collection of nineteen original essays.

Knox, Lee G. "Development of the Coal Industry in Oklahoma." Unpublished Master's Thesis, Oklahoma State University, 1949.

A thesis by a geographer that emphasizes the geology and physical geography of the coal fields in Oklahoma, especially underground and strip mining.

Logan, Leonard. **A Social and Economic Survey of Six Counties in Southeastern Oklahoma**. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1946.

Includes Pittsburg County where McAlester is located.

Mason, Alma. **Pittsburg County History**. n.p., 1989.

This is one of only two county histories that cover Pittsburg County. Though brief, it provides a good overview of the county's geographic situation, the establishment of McAlester, and the growth of the city. A portion of this work also treats emergence of McAlester's prison industry. A copy of this is available at the Pittsburg County Historical and Genealogical Society in McAlester.

**McAlester: A Model City**. n.p., circa 1970.

From 1967 to 1972, 147 different cities were selected as "model cities." As such, they received federal grants to help revitalize blighted neighborhoods. McAlester was one of the model cities. This publication is an outgrowth of the model city project and provides a useful economic review of McAlester. It includes material on local government and industries; education, community, and health facilities; utilities; and even shopping areas. This report is available at the Oklahoma Department of Libraries.

**McAlester City Directory, Including Alderson, Busby, and Krebs, 1909.** Sioux City, IA: R. L. Polk & Company, 1909.

Excellent source for location of business establishments, churches, schools, and other facilities around the time of statehood. Also has a street and avenue guide.

McAlester News-Capital & Democrat. **A Pictorial History of McAlester and the Surrounding Area.** Marceline, MO: D-Books Publishing, Inc., 1998.

A very useful collection of photographs of people, businesses, industries, places, and events in McAlester's history. It includes images from McAlester as well as surrounding communities like Alderson, Krebs, Blocker, and some of the mining sites.

McReynolds, Edwin C. **Oklahoma: A History of the Sooner State.** Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954.

A detailed political history of the state written by an Oklahoma State University history professor, it became a college textbook for Oklahoma history courses.

Meredith, Howard L. "A History of the Socialist Party in Oklahoma." Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1969.

A well-documented study of the Socialist movement in Oklahoma and an excellent supplement to the Garin Burbank book.

Meredith, Howard L. and Meredith, Mary Ellen. **Of the Earth: Oklahoma Architectural History.** Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1980.

This collection of readings covers a myriad of house types, building materials, and renowned architects in the state. No information is provided on McAlester.

Morgan, H. Wayne and Morgan, Ann Hodges. **Oklahoma: A Bicentennial History.** New York: W. W. Norton, 1977.

This was the commissioned bicentennial history of Oklahoma in 1976. Authored by a husband-wife team, it is an outstanding overview of the state with some new interpretations. McAlester is covered on pp.151-53.

Morris, John W. (ed.) **Cities of Oklahoma.** Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1979.

A useful anthology that includes some information on McAlester on pp. 37, 61, 104, 149, and 156 as well as a short history of McAlester on pp. 45-47.

Morris, John W. (ed.) **Drill Bits, Picks, and Shovels: A History of Mineral Resources in Oklahoma.** Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1982.

The chapter on "Oklahoma Coal, Coal Miners, and Coal Mining," pp. 82-111, contains some useful information on the McAlester Coal District and the formation of such companies as the McAlester Consolidated Coal Company and the McAlester Fuel Company.

Morris, John W. **Ghost Towns of Oklahoma.** Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977.

Dow, Alderson, and Adamson are coal mining ghost towns located in Pittsburg County with McAlester as the county seat.

\_\_\_\_\_. **Geography of Oklahoma.** Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1977.

McAlester is mentioned on pp. 16, 84, 95, 116, 141, 147, and 148.

Morris, John W. et al. **Historical Atlas of Oklahoma.** Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986.

This is the best atlas on Oklahoma. It covers a variety of topics ranging from cattle trails to railroads. The textual material accompanying the maps is brief, but informative. McAlester is mentioned on pp. 2, 4, 6, 33, 39, 52, 57, 59, 60, 64, 66, 74, 75, 76, and 80.

Nesbitt, Paul. "J. J. McAlester." **Chronicles of Oklahoma** 11 (1933): 758-64.

A journalistic account of the life and times of Colonel J. J. McAlester and how he came to Indian Territory from Arkansas to become involved in the coal industry in and around McAlester.

**Oklahoma Almanac.** 2 vols. Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Publishing Company, 1930-31.

Now dated, this two-volume set is a storehouse of statistics on Oklahoma during the period from statehood through the 1920s.

**Oklahoma Almanac Forty-Sixth Edition Revised.** Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Department of Libraries. 1997-98.

Some valuable recent statistical information on Pittsburg County and McAlester as its county seat.

**Oklahoma Landmarks: A Selection of Noteworthy Structures.** Stillwater, OK:  
School of Architecture-Oklahoma State University, 1967.

Includes information on three buildings in McAlester, including the McAlester House (c. 1870) at 14 East Smith Street, Tobucksy County Courthouse (1850s), located in the north edge of the city on the west side of U.S. 69 Highway, and Presbyterian Church (1896) at First and Washington Streets, with a photograph of the latter building and the architect listed as J. J. Walsh.

Park, Robert. **History of the Oklahoma State Penitentiary: Located at McAlester, Oklahoma.** McAlester, OK: McAlester Printing and Binding Company, c. 1914.

The first detailed history of the Oklahoma State Penitentiary in McAlester.

Parnell, Percy R. **The Joint.** San Antonio: Naylor Publishing Company, 1976.

A more recent study than the Park history of the Oklahoma State Penitentiary located in McAlester.

Patterns of White Settlement in Oklahoma, 1889-1907—Region # 4 (1986).

Resource Protection Planning Report prepared by the Department of History, Oklahoma State University. Located at the State Historic Preservation Office, Oklahoma City, OK. McAlester is located in Region # 4.

Peach, William Nelson. **Human and Material Resources of Pittsburg County: A Profile for Growth and Development.** Durant, OK: Technology Use Studies Center-Southeastern State College, 1965.

A useful document for analysis of Pittsburg County where McAlester is located.

Pittsburg County Historical and Genealogical Society, Inc. **Pittsburg County Oklahoma: People and Places.** Wolfe City, TX: Henington Industries, 1997.

The most recent and most detailed county history of Pittsburg County. Includes more than 400 pages on family histories as well as some valuable information on the California Trail and Texas Road, Butterfield Overland Mail Route, Law Enforcement and Courts in Indian Territory and Oklahoma, railroad development, churches, and schools.

**Portrait and Biographical Record of Oklahoma.** Chicago: Chapman Publishing Company, 1910.

Several of McAlester pioneer names are included in this directory.

Roark, Michael. "Searching for the Hearth: Culture Areas of Oklahoma." **Chronicles of Oklahoma** 70 (Winter, 1992-93): 416-31.

A useful article on settlement patterns in Oklahoma by a cultural geographer who gives source areas for migrants into the state and how they shaped its political and religious history.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Oklahoma Territory: Frontier Development, Migration, and Culture Areas." Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Syracuse University, 1979.

Excellent analysis of migration, settlement patterns, and cultural regionalization of Oklahoma Territory.

Ruth, Kent and Argo, Jim. **Window on the Past: Historic Places in Oklahoma.** Oklahoma City: Western Heritage Press, 1982.

None of the historic places in McAlester are covered in this publication.

Ruth, Kent. **Oklahoma Travel Handbook.** Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977.

Compiled by one of Oklahoma's most noted historians, this is a travelogue of the state, but contains brief histories of each community including McAlester on p. 151.

Ryan, Frederick. **The Rehabilitation of Oklahoma Coal Mining Communities.** Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1935.

One of the most cited sources on the origin and evolution of coal towns in southeastern Oklahoma.

Scarpino, Philip V. "Industrial Development in the Eleven Counties of Southeast Oklahoma to 1930, Region #4" (1986).

Resources Protection Planning Report prepared by the Department of History, Oklahoma State University. Located at the State Historic Preservation Office, Oklahoma City, OK. Pittsburg County (McAlester) is included.

Sewell, Steven L. "The Dangerous Profession of Coal Mining in Oklahoma, 1870-1935." **Chronicles of Oklahoma** 70 (Spring 1992): 66-83.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Coal Strike of 1919." **Chronicles of Oklahoma** 75 (Summer 1997): 160-81.

These two articles are based on Sewell's dissertation and provide useful insights into the life and labor of southeastern Oklahoma's coal miners.

Shirk, George H. **Oklahoma Place Names**. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974.

This is the most recent study on the origins of city and county names in Oklahoma with McAlester covered on p. 148.

Skaggs, Jimmy M. (ed.) **Ranch and Range in Oklahoma**. Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1978.

Contains information on the founding of a livestock auction at McAlester in 1942, an indication that the cattle industry was moving into the eastern part of the state, pp. 118-19.

Smith, Joel K. **A Plan for Parks and Open Spaces**. McAlester, OK: Poe & Associates, Inc., 1971.

This report analyzes park space and facilities in McAlester in conjunction with the Comprehensive Plan for the city and suggests how improvements might be made.

Snider, L. C. **Geography of Oklahoma**. Norman: Oklahoma Geological Survey, 1917.

This study provides some excellent physical geography information on the state.

Snodgrass, M. **The McAlester Explosion, Mine No. 11; Krebs, Indian Territory, January 7, 1892**. Muskogee, I. T.: Phoenix Printing Company, 1892.

Gives names of those killed as well as survivors in one of the most serious coal mining accidents in the McAlester coal fields.

**South McAlester in 1904**. "McAlester—South." Vertical File. Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

One of the few historical accounts of the settlement of South McAlester and its status prior to statehood.

**Souvenir of McAlester, Oklahoma.** "McAlester." Vertical File. Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Another relevant source on the history of McAlester.

Sparks, Gerald L. "James Jesse McAlester, The Choctaw Nation's Omnipresent Entrepreneur, 1871-1894." Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1997.

This thesis provides a very brief overview of J. J. McAlester's life from his birth until he was elected lieutenant governor in 1911. It includes some interesting information on the operation of McAlester's crossroads store and his relations with the Choctaw Nation.

Starr, Emmet. **Encyclopedia of Oklahoma.** Oklahoma City: Private Printing, 1912.

The first statistical handbook on Oklahoma following statehood.

Thoburn, Joseph B. and Wright, Muriel H. **Oklahoma: A History of the State and Its People.** New York: Lewis Publishing Company, 1929.

A four-volume set that gives a detailed story on Oklahoma to the 1920s.

Tracy, Shelley E. "Social Conditions of the Miners of Oklahoma." Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1911.

Covers a variety of topics, including ethnic, racial, political, and religious composition of miners, as well as economic conditions of miners. Moreover, it discusses the sanitary conditions of miners and provides suggestions for improvement in the lifestyle of miners.

Tuttle, J. H. and L. B. Myers. **With the Colors: Pittsburg County, Oklahoma, 1917-1919.** McAlester, OK: Tuttle and Myers Publications, 1920.

A pictorial record of servicemen who were from Pittsburg County and served in World War I.

**Welcome to McAlester, Oklahoma.** McAlester, OK: McAlester Chamber of Commerce, 1985.

Data on the community of McAlester and includes map of Pittsburg County.

Withers, Vicki Dale. "A Check List of Theses and Dissertations Relating to Oklahoma History Completed at the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University Through 1972." Unpublished Master's Thesis, Oklahoma State University, 1974.

Although needs updating, this is a valuable source. Other disciplines need to follow this model. First part is organized by topic and second section is arranged by county and city names.

**WPA Guide to 1930s Oklahoma.** Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas. 1986.

With a new introduction by Anne Hodges Morgan, this is an updated version of the 1941 edition compiled by the Writer's Program of the Works Progress Administration. Contains an excellent section on McAlester, pp. 302-303.

Wright, Muriel. **A Guide to Indian Tribes of Oklahoma.** Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951.

A detailed section (pp. 97-118) on the Choctaw Nation and its relationship to the southeastern Oklahoma coal fields.

\_\_\_\_\_. **The Story of Oklahoma.** Oklahoma City: Webb Publishing Company, 1929-30.

Another valuable study on the history of the Sooner state authored by a noted Oklahoma historian.

Wright, Muriel H. et al. **Mark of Heritage.** Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1976.

Includes information on the Carl Bert Albert granite marker located on North A Street in McAlester.



## XVII. SUMMARY

This Reconnaissance Level Survey of a Portion of McAlester, Oklahoma identified and evaluated a total of 123 properties in the study area and an additional 10 properties outside the study area for a combined total of 133 properties surveyed. All properties were surveyed with minimum-level documentation including completion of the OK/SHPO Historic Preservation Resource Inventory Form and submission of at least two 5x7 black and white prints.

- (1) Seven (7) individual properties were recommended for National Register consideration.
- (2) Ninety-seven (97) individual properties were identified as warranting further study. This total includes 43 individual properties not in districts, and 54 properties surveyed as contributing resources to the three proposed districts—Uptown Residential District (11), Downtown Commercial District (18), and South McAlester Residential District (25).
- (3) Twelve (12) National Register listed properties were surveyed and updated with forms and photographs: Busby Office Building (1979), Busby Theater (1979), First Presbyterian Church (1979), Jeff Lee Park, Bath House and Pool (1988), Mass Grave of the Mexican Miners (1980), McAlester Armory (1988), McAlester DX (1980), McAlester House (1980), McAlester Scottish Rite Temple (1980), Mine Rescue Station Building (1980), Pittsburg County Courthouse (1984), Southern Ice and Cold Storage Company (1979).

- (4) Thumbnail sketches for three (3) proposed districts were written, and the districts were assigned tentative boundaries. The thumbnail sketches provide a rationale for conducting intensive level surveys.
- (5) Sixteen (16) individual properties were surveyed and identified as not warranting further study.
- (6) Six (6) noncontributing resources to the three proposed districts were surveyed.
- (7) Thumbnail sketches were prepared for five (5) areas that did not meet qualifications for intensive level surveys.
- (8) About 83, or 62 percent of the individual properties surveyed were residential (single or multiple) dwellings.
- (9) Approximately 26 of the individual properties surveyed in McAlester were commercial and this represents the second leading type of property.
- (10) Seven religious structures were surveyed, and this is the third leading type of property. These properties include the Grand Avenue Methodist Church (Classical Revival), First Presbyterian Church/Christian Science Society (Shingle Style), First Presbyterian Church (Tudor Revival), St. John the Evangelist Roman Catholic Church (Late Gothic Revival), All Saints Episcopal Church (Mission/Spanish Colonial Revival), First Christian Church (Tudor Revival), Beebee Chapel Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (No Distinctive Style).
- (11) Additional property types included social (5), government (4), recreational (3), educational (2), and industrial (2).

- (12) Residential areas in McAlester include the following architectural styles: Queen Anne, Tudor Revival, Shingle Style, Classical Revival/Neoclassical, Colonial Revival, Prairie School, Mission/Spanish Colonial Revival, Bungalow/Craftsman, National Folk (I-House, Shotgun, and Pyramidal subtypes), Folk Victorian, and Ranch. As this list reveals, the prevailing architectural periods represented include the Victorian (1860-1900), and the Eclectic Period (1880-1940).
- (13) The commercial area in McAlester is largely composed of shops that are between one to two stories high. Only a few three-story buildings were constructed, and only one 11-story structure, the Aldridge Hotel, was built. Historically, the downtown of McAlester consisted of predominantly sandstone clad buildings. Over time that has given way to a predominance of brick clad buildings. Also, the commercial architecture in McAlester is largely conservative in terms of decorative detailing.
- (14) The business district of McAlester is dominated by buildings designed in the Commercial style; however a few examples of the Romanesque Revival style still exist.
- (15) North McAlester or "North Town" contains eight of the 10 properties surveyed that were outside the designated study area. Of these eight, one was a National Register update. This is the J.J. McAlester Home at 14 East Smith Avenue. The other seven properties include one that is National Register eligible (315 East Krebs Avenue); three that warrant further study (2645-2647 North Main Street, 2700 North Main Street, 2701-2707 North

Main Street); and three that do not warrant further study (8 West Park Avenue, 2716 North Main Street, and 201 West Park Avenue). The map on the following page provides locations of these seven properties.

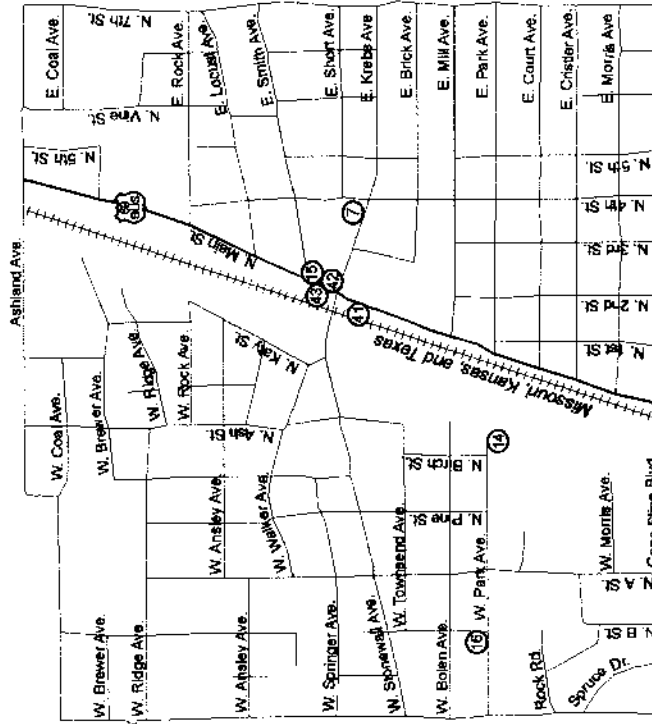
There are a number of components of the built environment in McAlester that are of sufficient age, have retained their architectural integrity, or have acquired historical significance. Because of this it is recommended that parts of McAlester qualify for an intensive-level survey. There is, however, considerable variability in the quality of McAlester's cultural resources. For this reason some properties and districts might be more easily nominated to the National Register while others will need some rehabilitation.

Another issue involves the destruction or significant alteration of properties that had been listed on the National Register. This reconnaissance level survey revealed that two of the properties listed in the National Register in 1979 no longer exist. These are the Busby Theater and the McAlester DX Station. In addition, another two properties listed in the National Register were found to be significantly altered. One of these is the McAlester House (1980 listing), which has had vinyl siding added, and the other is the Southern Ice and Cold Storage Company (1979 listing) which has had most of the original structure removed and replaced.

In view of this it seems some plan of action needs to be taken in order to raise the level of awareness on the part of local inhabitants *and* city officials about the existence of historically significant cultural resources in the area. For example, two historically significant properties that are endangered (in the sense that they are falling into disuse

# Individual Properties of Note Outside Study Area

## Reconnaissance Level Survey of McAlester, 1999



### Individual Properties That Warrant Further Study

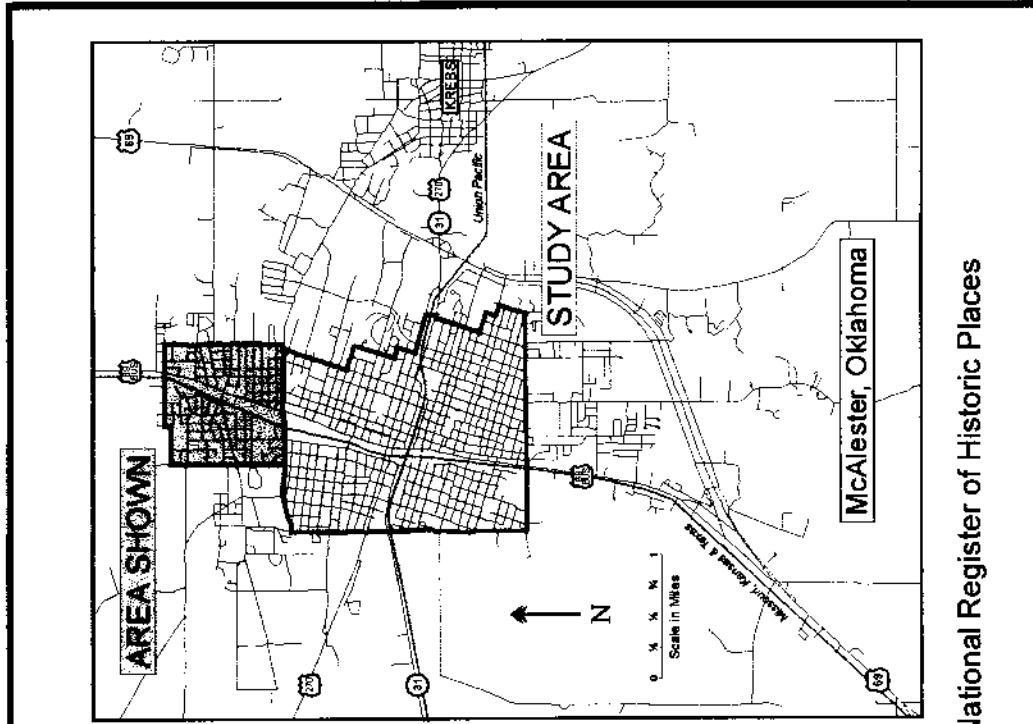
- 41. 2645-2647 North Main Street
- 42. 2700 North Main Street
- 43. 2701-2707 North Main Street

### Individual Properties That Do Not Warrant Further Study

- 14. 8 West Park Avenue
- 15. 2716 North Main Street
- 16. 201 West Park Avenue

### Individual Property That Warrants Consideration for the National Register of Historic Places

- 7. 315 East Krebs Avenue



and disrepair) include the L'Ouverture Auditorium and the All Saints Hospital. Both of these properties deserve immediate attention. L'Ouverture is significant to the black community and because it is a WPA-built property. The All Saints Hospital is historically significant to McAlester because it was the first hospital in the city. It is historically significant to the state of Oklahoma because it may be the first hospital in the state. Of the seven properties recommended for National Register consideration, these two properties should receive the highest priority.

Finally, the three proposed districts should also be given strong consideration for intensive level surveys. These districts include the Uptown Residential District, the Downtown Commercial District, and the South McAlester Residential District. The primary rationale for this is that all of these districts have relatively high numbers and densities of contributing resources and have been historically significant areas in the evolution of McAlester over time. Simply stated, McAlester's cultural resources deserve additional attention.

## XVIII. ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW

The built environment has long been understood to be a physical record of a society's values. For those versed in 'reading' the vocabulary of the built environment it is possible to identify, analyze, and draw conclusions about that built environment. Through this process one is able to see where a culture chooses to spend its time, effort and money, and, by extension, one is able to understand the values of the culture that built that environment. The purpose of this architectural review is to make observations, based upon the evidence provided by the built environment, as to the values of the early community of McAlester, Oklahoma, as well as to identify the most architecturally significant properties within the study area. This review begins with general comments about McAlester. This is followed by an identification and analysis of specific properties within the survey. Finally, a brief discussion of the values represented in the survey concludes this review.

Being tied to the railroad throughout much of its history, it is not surprising to see McAlester's urban organization influenced by these railroads. Looking at a map one can see the physical grid of the city's streets follow the orientation of the railroad tracks, which are shifted east of due north. Further, the downtown core is located near the intersection of the major north-south and east-west rail lines. Adjacent to this core are the earliest neighborhoods within the city. Finally, advanced modes of transportation encouraged (or at least permitted) the spread of neighborhoods beyond this core.

While the physical organization is obviously influenced by this rail heritage, the influence of the railroad on the city's building stock and building types is less apparent. There are no major industrial properties identified in the survey area. There are no remaining railroad properties within the survey area, and there are very few buildings that cater to a transient

public (i.e. hotels, boarding houses, etc.). In fact, all the significant buildings within the survey are related to creating and supporting a stable, permanent settlement. Given the properties identified within the study area, it is very interesting to note that the most elaborate, sophisticated, and substantial built works are those related to supporting the local residents. Examples of this may be seen in the public government architecture, the educational architecture, the WPA sponsored recreational projects, and most especially in the religious architecture of the city.

While the study has identified five periods of McAlester's architectural development, with the exception of one church and the WPA sponsored projects, the most significant architecture has been created solely during the first two of these periods (1890-1919 and 1920-1930). The earliest years were focused on the establishment of the community – financially, physically and spiritually. Most notably this was achieved through modest two-part commercial structures which utilized easily accessible native sandstone to create handsome understated buildings with great texture and simple details. Some excellent examples of this period are preserved in the modest Romanesque Revivalist South McAlester/Eufala Telephone Company Building located at 100-106 East Carl Albert Parkway, several buildings within the 200 block of East Choctaw (which includes the McMurray Building at 202-204 East Choctaw), and the Pittsburg County Historical and Genealogical Society Building located at 113 East Carl Albert Parkway (formerly known as the Busby Office Building and on the National Register). A slight variation on this theme is the original St. Mary's Hospital (now the Oaks Rehabilitative Services Building), which is located at 628 East Creek Avenue and has an eclectic mix of celebrated entry and permanent materials which are handled quite modestly. The pure honesty and modesty of these native sandstone buildings suggest a very simple but



special place, and it is unfortunate that so much of the other downtown buildings are covered by post-World War II 'modernization.' One can only hope that such 'modernization' has preserved the character of the remaining buildings for future generations to discover!

This initial sandstone construction gave way to what must have been considered to be more refined brick architecture. While the modest commercial brick architecture was not near as aesthetically successful as its earlier sandstone ancestors, the more elaborately designed brick and stone governmental, educational, social and religious architecture certainly stands out as the best architecture within the city. Interestingly, these designs are all executed in what many would consider more refined, formal aesthetic architectural styles.

The Pittsburg County Courthouse (115 East Carl Albert Parkway) and the Scottish Rite Temple (327 North Second Street) are beautiful examples of the Beaux-Arts style and are already listed on the National Register. Another fine example from this period is the Carl Albert Federal Building. This Classical Revival design was constructed in 1914 at 301 East Carl Albert Parkway, and its most notable features are the strong entry portico with Corinthian columns and its combination of brick and stone detailing. Nearby is also the stone Classical Revival design of the Pioneer Abstract Company at 101 East Carl Albert Parkway. Another fine public building is the Old McAlester High School, a brick and stone Collegiate Gothic design located at 200 East Adams Avenue.

Some of the finest designs in the city are found on the religious architecture in the survey area. While the oldest religious properties were rather modest (i.e. the original wood-framed First Presbyterian Church, which is located at 101 East Washington Avenue and currently houses the Christian Science Society), the religious examples from the 1920's stand out as excellent examples of the refinement which followed the establishment of the

community. This is certainly true in the Classical Revivalist Grand Avenue Methodist Church (223 East Carl Albert Parkway) and the Tudor Revivalist First Presbyterian Church (3<sup>rd</sup> Street and Washington Avenue). A bit more modest are the church facilities for the First Christian Church (Tudor Revival, 300 East Carl Albert Parkway) and the All-Saints Episcopal Church (an eclectic Mission/Spanish Colonial Revival church at 325 East Washington Avenue). Only the handsome Late Gothic Revivalist St. John's Roman Catholic Church at 302 East Washington Avenue dates from a period later than World War II (1948).

Given the economic situation of the 1930's the most significant buildings produced during this period were understandably those sponsored by the WPA. McAlester saw its share of WPA work, and the best examples of this type of Art-Deco-influenced design are found in the McAlester Armory (309 East Polk Avenue), the L'Ouverture Auditorium (originally the auditorium at the black high school, located at 14<sup>th</sup> Street and Chickasaw Avenue), and the structures at Jeff Lee Park on East Polk Avenue. Having reviewed many of these structures throughout the state, I can safely say that, while these are all modest structures, they are some of the better designs in the state.

Given the quality of the public architecture of the city, one might expect to see this same emphasis on high design in the residential properties within the study area. However, while there are examples of many different architectural styles exhibited in the residential architecture, all of these are done in a very modest way when compared to the quality of the city's public architecture. There were significant numbers of examples of Prairie-School-influenced designs as well as Craftsman/Bungalow, Tudor Revival, Classical Revival and Queen Anne designs, however, very few stand out as significant architecture. The best of these are the Prairie-School-influenced residences at 337 East Adams Avenue and 610 East Seneca

Avenue, the Queen Anne residence at 702 East Seneca Avenue, and the Classical Revival design of 537 East Adams Avenue. While these designs stand out above the rest, they are still only modest in their quality. The best residential architecture within the study area is representative of the Colonial Revival style and can be found at 202 East Miami Avenue and 401 West Jackson Avenue. The residence at 625 East Creek Avenue is also an interesting example of the Colonial Revival style.

In reviewing this physical record of McAlester's built environment, it is interesting to note the emphasis on design quality, building scale and public investment that has been placed on public architecture over commercial architecture, and on religious architecture over residential architecture. It is also curious to note that no banks are represented in the finest architectural examples of the city (something that is quite commonly seen when undergoing a survey of this sort). I believe these conditions reflect a society that began modestly, was well rooted in a stable environment, and valued the institutions of government, education and religion above personal and pleasurable gain. Given the fact that this situation has been permitted to continue to exist suggests that these values still hold true, at least to some extent. However, as an architect it is disappointing to note that there has not been a design of significant architectural quality within the study area since the 1940's.