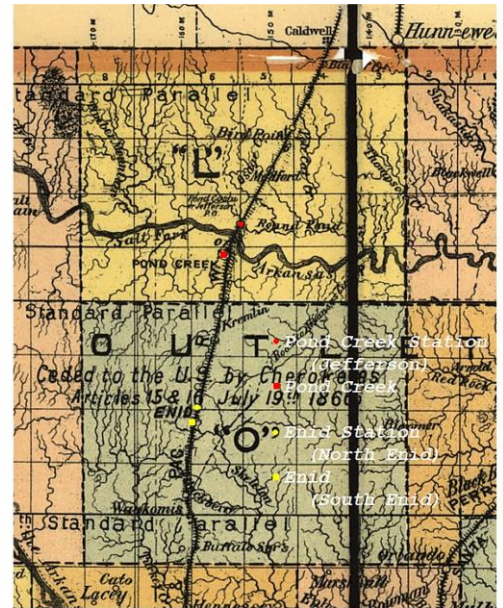


# The Enid-Pond Creek Railroad War

by [Arrel Toews](#)

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The [Enid-Pond Creek Railroad War](#) occurred in [Oklahoma Territory](#) between 1893 and 1894, just after the [Cherokee Outlet Land Run](#) of 16 September 1893. OK Territory was designated [Indian Territory](#) before the land run. The war pitted the citizens of two county seats (designated by the US government) against citizens in nascent towns which had stations on the [Rock Island Railroad](#). Note that the "war" was not between Enid and Pond Creek, as the name might imply, but rather between pairs of competing towns (N Enid and Enid; Round Pond and Pond Creek). Basically the Rock Island Railroad chose towns where their trains stopped, and the government chose different but nearby towns for county seats. What could possibly go wrong?



Annotated detail of 1894 map  
Library of Congress

In the late 1880s, the [Rock Island Railroad](#) built a rail line into [Indian Territory](#), entering near Caldwell KS and following the [Chisholm Trail](#) south (see [Kremlin and the Railroad](#) for details).

The company established railroad stations near existing stage stations along the trail. The original stations, [Round Pond](#), built at Pond Stage Stand on Round Pond Creek (near current [Jefferson](#)), and [Skeleton Station](#) (later known as [Enid station](#)), located in [N Enid](#) near the [Skeleton Ranch headquarters](#), would become involved in a controversy between the railroad, the new county seats, and the US Department of the Interior.

The troubles began when the United States Department of the Interior set about opening the [Cherokee Outlet](#) (often incorrectly stated as Cherokee Strip) to settlement. Hoping to lessen the problem of [county seat wars](#) - a common event in newly settled areas of the American Old West - the Department divided the outlet into counties and assigned them county seats. They picked [Pond Creek](#) in "L" County (now [Grant County](#)) and [Enid](#) in "O" County (now [Garfield County](#)).

A land run opened the Cherokee Outlet in 1893, and settlers occupied all four town sites: [railroad Pond Creek](#) (near [Jefferson](#)), [government Pond Creek](#), [railroad Enid](#) (North Enid), and [government Enid](#) (South Enid). The Rock Island responded to the government's action by refusing to stop trains at the government towns. Citizens in the government towns at first applied political pressure to get the railroad to provide service, and the OK Territorial government and US House of Representatives backed them up. But the US Senate took the railroad's side and refused to act. Government officials then notified the Rock Island that they had to furnish mail service to the two government towns, so the Rock Island responded by installing a hook to pick up and deliver mail, without slowing their trains. When the mail pouches broke open, citizens accused the railroads of purposely strewing their mail along the tracks.

With the stalemate in Washington, D.C., and intransigence by the railroads, citizens of both government towns began direct actions. Enid passed an ordinance setting a speed limit on trains passing through town and the Rock Island ignored it. Citizens in both government towns began attempting to flag down trains, placed dummies on the tracks, and then left wagons and debris across the rails. All to no avail. With no relief in sight from Washington or the railroads, citizens began further actions.

On the night of [5 June 1894](#), over 200 Pond Creek insurgents destroyed about 900 feet of railway S of town as a protest. The next morning, using red flags, they tried to stop any oncoming trains from both directions, but a freight train with 30 loaded cattle cars coming N from TX did not stop. Just before it derailed, killing over 100 steers, the engineer and brakeman jumped from the locomotive - they were promptly arrested and jailed by Pond Creek authorities! No one was killed but the train was demolished. (Photo below from Trails to Old Pond Creek)



June 6, 1894, a "Railroad War" milestone for Pond Creek.



[Territorial Marshals](#) and [Pinkerton Detectives](#) ("We Never Sleep!") hired by the railroad guarded bridges, crossings, and other key trouble spots along the railroad between Pond Creek and Enid. Yet, on the night of [22 June 1894](#), a massive explosion destroyed the CRIP railway bridge over the [Salt Fork River](#).

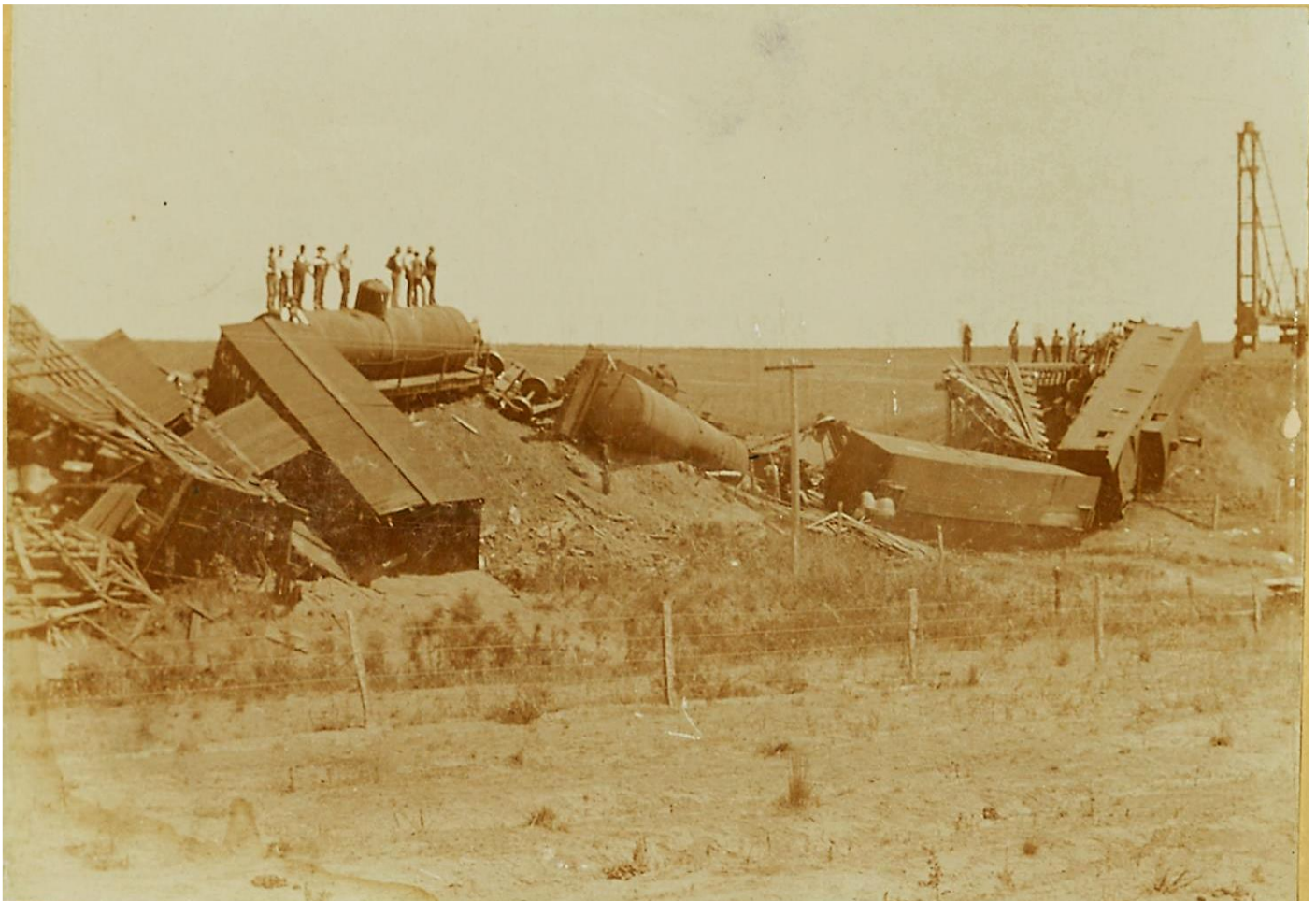




Also by then, citizens of both South Enid and Pond Creek were taking potshots at trains passing through (see [Great Plains Dispatcher article on p 8](#), with a first-person account by a CRIP brakeman). By July citizens were placing bombs on the tracks, and, in the most drastic action of all, on **12 July 1894**, unknown persons sawed partially through a number of supports on the railway trestle 4 miles SE of Enid, wrecking an unscheduled freight train preceding the scheduled passenger train (see photos below).



Note the caption below the photo - trains did indeed stop in Enid after this train wreck! OHS [Gateway to OK History](#) .



Original B/W photograph mounted on a cardstock-type mat picturing the famous Rock Island train wreck/sabotage where the trestle had been sawed to force the Rock Island to stop in South Enid. [Handwriting in ink on back of mat, "Rock Island train wrecked at South Enid on the night of July 12, 1894. All trains now stop at Enid."](#)  
 OK Historical Society [Gateway to OK History](#)

Agents of the United States Marshals Service and troops from [Fort Reno](#) and [Fort Supply](#) were sent in to restore order and patrol the railroad right-of-way, but violence continued.

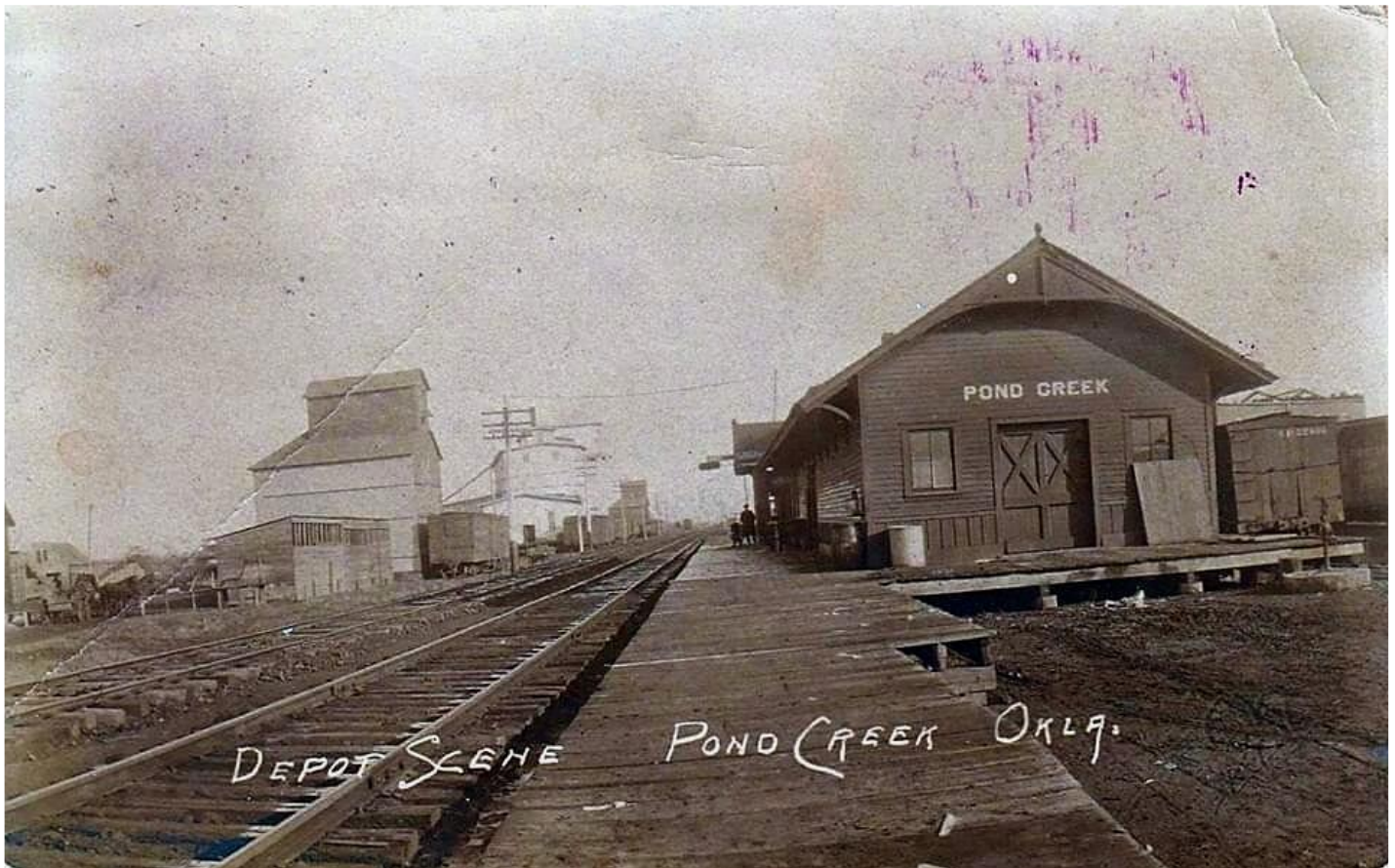
[OK Territorial Governor William Carey Renfrow](#) (R) helped arbitrate the settlement of the "Railroad War" with [Rock Island President Ransom Cable](#). Renfrow persuaded Cable to back off his hard line, but Cable insisted he would only abide by any law approved by Congress - the Railroad would "never surrender to a mob." Opposition to House Bill 3606 ceased on Cable's instructions, and finally the U.S. Senate decided to move and on 8 August 1894, President [Grover Cleveland](#) signed an act (28 Stat. 263) requiring railroads "to establish and maintain passenger stations and freight depots at or within one-fourth of a mile of the boundary limits of all town sites established prior to August 8, 1894, in said Territories."





The [ultimate aftermath](#) of all this was that [Railroad Pond Creek](#) was renamed [Jefferson](#) (2010 population 12, now 11) and relocated to higher dryer ground nearby - see maps on following page. [It still flooded and is now almost non-existent.] [Government Pond Creek](#) (often called [Round Pond](#) by the Rock Island) remained as [Pond Creek](#), but the [Grant County seat](#) (formerly "L" County) was eventually moved to [Medford](#). [Railroad Enid](#) became [N Enid](#); [government Enid](#), or [South Enid](#), became simply [Enid](#), the county seat of Garfield County (formerly "O" County).

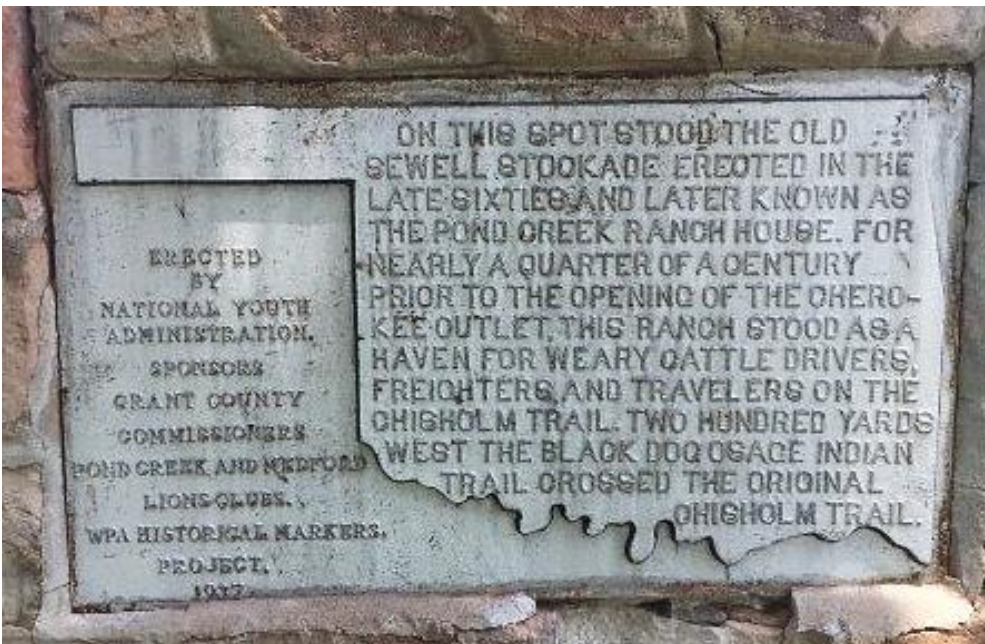
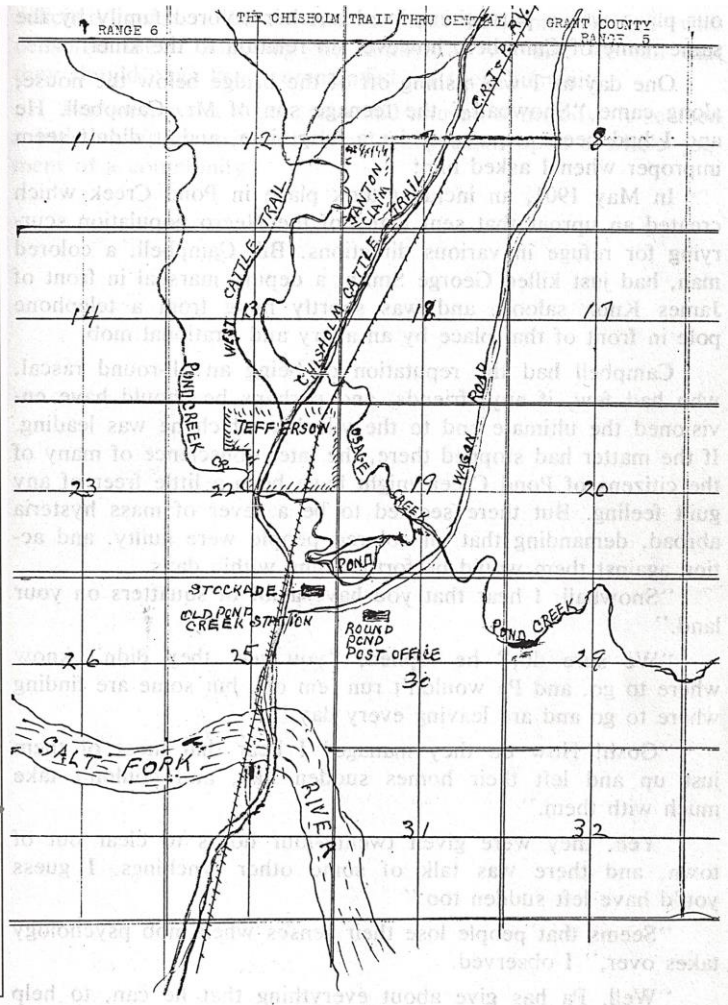
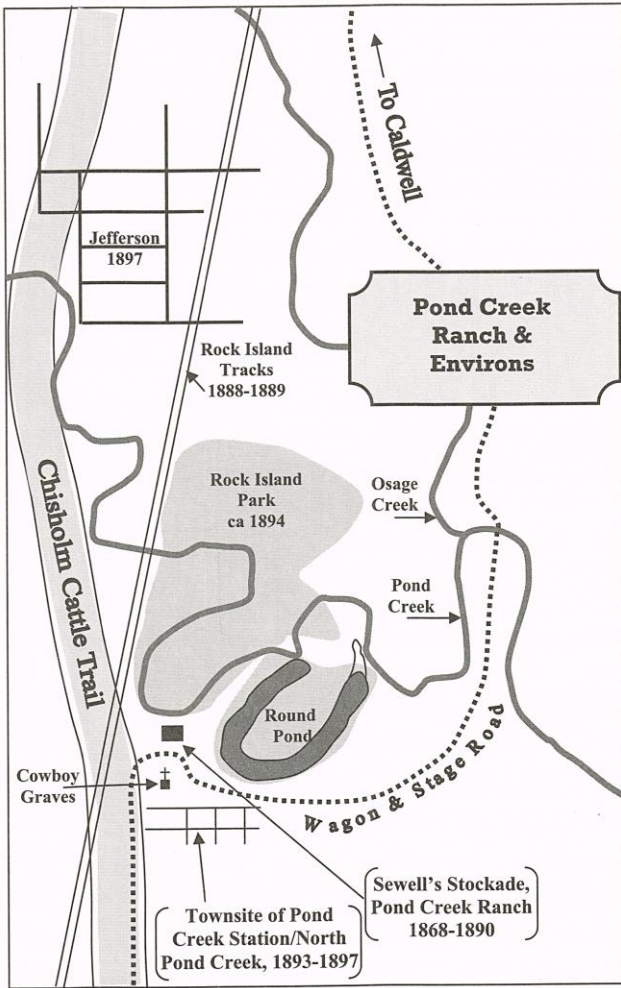
A [CRIP Railroad depot scene from Pond Creek OK](#), ca 1905-08, is shown below. This is in the current town of Pond Creek. Pond Creek History Facebook post.



Maps of the [Round Pond/original CRIP Pond Creek Station](#) and of the [Jefferson area](#) are shown on the next page (L, [Trails to Old Pond Creek](#); R, [Early Legends Along Osage Creek](#), Ralph Tanton). Note the location of the original [Pond Creek Station/North Pond Creek town](#) (1893-97) and later town of [Jefferson](#) (1897) on both maps.

There are historical markers for the [Sewell Stockade/Pond Creek Ranch](#) and the [Cowboy Grave](#), commemorating two cowboys killed by Indians in 1872-73. Both are about a mile E and 1 S of Jefferson OK, and near each other. Worth a stop if you're ever passing by.

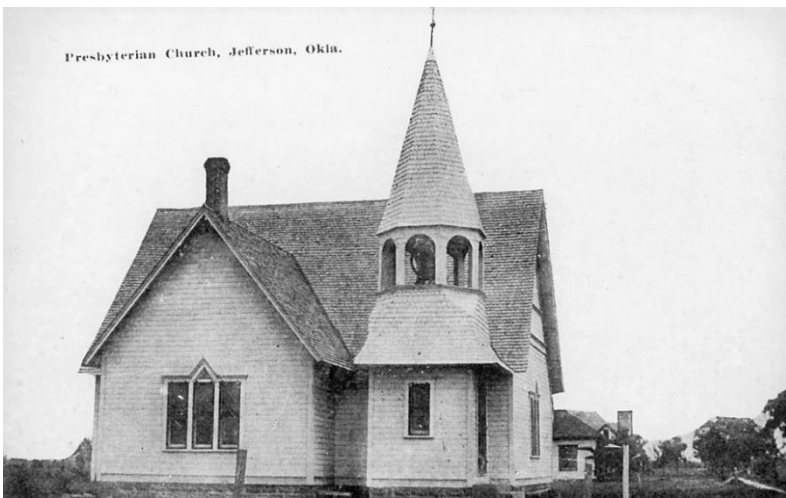






Additional information on [Jefferson OK](#) can be found on the [OHS website](#). Some photos are also included below. The town itself has an interesting history. According to "[Ghost Towns of Oklahoma](#)" by John W. Morris, it was established in 1866 by [James R. Mead](#) as a trading station at what was then called [Round Pond Creek](#) on the [Chisholm Trail](#) in the Cherokee Outlet. Jefferson is located on the low divide between [Osage and Pond Creeks](#) and is about a mile from the confluence of the two streams. Therein lies one of the principal causes of the demise of Jefferson - the area is subject to heavy flooding. Today it is a ghost town.

Mead recalled "Mr. Chisholm's teams and my own were the first which ever passed over the route and marked out what afterward became known as the Chisholm Trail." There, at [Round Pond](#), the cattle route crossed an old Indian warpath, [Black Dog Trail](#), named for an Osage chief. In November 1879, a post office named Pond was located at this place. The station and post office were closed in 1887. The Cherokee Outlet was opened for settlement in 1893. In 1894 the town of Jefferson came into existence." The [1895 United Methodist Church](#) is still in use today - see photo at R. Above from [RideOK.com](#)



[Jefferson OK Presbyterian Church](#)

date unknown ([OHS William Edson Photo Collection](#))



[Hacker Flour Mill, Jefferson OK](#)

(1935) Pond Creek History FB post

I remember the brick flour mill and grain elevator still standing in my childhood days.

The [2005 Great Plains Dispatcher article](#) below about the [Enid-Pond Creek Railroad Wars](#) is a fun read. It contains a [first-person account of CRIP brakeman Billy Bowman](#).

# GREAT PLAINS DISPATCHER

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and the Wichita Chapter National Railway Historical Society

November 2005

Volume IV

Number 11

## HISTORIAN RECALLS ENID, OK. RAILROAD WARS

In the early part of the 20th century railroads were essential to a community's development. Small towns sprang up in a number of places immediately after the Sept. 16, 1893, land run into the Cherokee Outlet, according to historian Phil Brown writing in the *Enid News and Eagle*. Commerce and travel depended almost solely on the railroads. Everything moved on the railroad.

And, if the railroad wouldn't come through their town, sometimes the townsfolk would physically pick up the town and move it to the railroad. However in cases like that of Enid and Pond Creek where the railroad came through the town, but refused to stop it was a different scenario.

Take Enid for instance: Before the land run, the Rock Island trains were stopping at what now is North Enid. They had a depot there. The railroad had named the town Enid.

Just before the land run, U.S. government officials in Washington, D.C., got wind of an illegal land deal brewing in what now is North Enid, and moved the government-designated town of Enid south to its present location.

But, the railroad refused to stop its trains at the newly designated town site of Enid. It ignited a war of sorts.

Enid passed an ordinance establishing a speed limit on the Rock Island trains passing through Enid. It was designed to slow them down, but the trainmen ignored it and continued to speed through the town at 40 mph.

Some Enid residents turned to acts of violence, and began firing on the trains as they whizzed through Enid.

A man named Billy Bowman was a brakeman on the Rock Island at about this time, and in 1907 told of his experiences passing through Enid on a Rock Island train in early 1894.

Bowman said: "One night in passing through Enid, I heard a shot as the train crossed Broadway and my lantern went out instantly. In examining the lantern, I discovered that it had been shot.

"Always after that in going through Enid I placed my lantern one or two cars behind, or in front of me for safety for myself, not the lantern. Now as an actual fact, my lantern was shot six times during that year, I

have often wondered what would have become of me had I been behind those six lanterns, or one of them, as I could not have been killed more than once.

"However, us railroad train fellows at that time recognized the justice of Enid's fight and I could tell you boys for a fact that in going through this town we went lively and every man on the train hid out as best he could. I tell you a railroad trainman's life was in his hands in passing through Enid from Sept. 16, 1893, to Sept. 16, 1894, when the fight ended."

But it took more than just firing on speeding trains to persuade the railroad to establish a depot at what now is Enid. There were several reports of rail trestles and track being damaged, resulting in train accidents aimed at persuading the railroad.

The final one was the sawing of the supports of a rail trestle southeast of Enid that wrecked a train and finally persuaded the U.S. government to order the Rock Island to establish a depot in what now is Enid.

As far as I can determine, no one ever was prosecuted for any of the incidents involving firing on the trains or sawing through the rail trestle supports southeast of Enid.

I have read at one of the early-day Cherokee Strip celebration parades around the downtown Square, a man walked in the parade carrying a big cross-cut saw over one shoulder, and grinning at the parade watchers, insinuating of course, he had something to do with sawing the trestle that resulted in the Rock Island establishing a depot in Enid.

There were several other rail lines through Enid, and without all of them Enid might never have blossomed the way it did. *Enid News and Eagle*

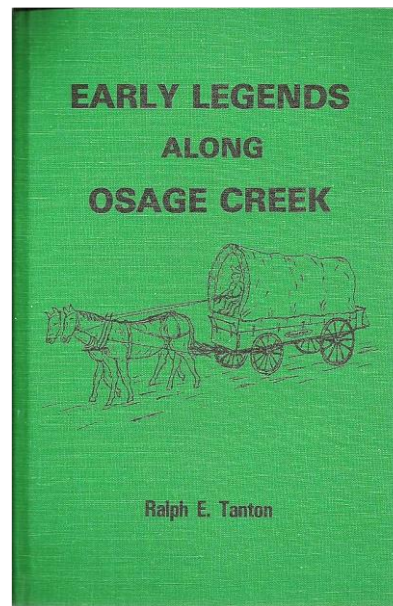
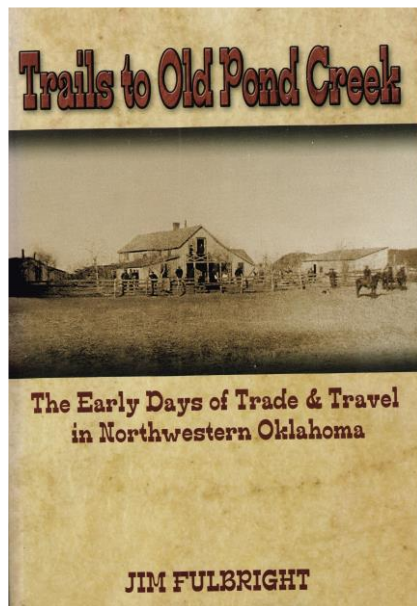


## REFERENCES

[Wikipedia](#) has perhaps the best short summary of the [Enid-Pond Creek Railroad War](#), but there is also useful information on the OK Historical Society's [Gateway to OK History](#) website as well.

The 1965 [Chronicles of Oklahoma "The Enid Railroad War - An Archival Study"](#) (72 pages) has much more than you could ever bargain for! But still a very interesting read for anyone taking the time!

An excellent, more comprehensive account of this railroad war is "[Hell on Rails: OK Towns at War with the Rock Island Railroad](#)" by [Jim Fulbright](#), author of [Trails to Old Pond Creek](#), highly recommended for local history aficionados. In fact, an entire chapter (18 - [War on the Rock Island](#), pp 156-184) of [Trails to Old Pond Creek](#) is devoted to this quarrel. [Early Legends Along Osage Creek](#) by Ralph E Tanton (1975) has excellent maps and the author's first-person memories, along with lots of interesting history through which he lived.



There are also numerous interesting posts on the [Pond Creek History](#) and [Forgotten Oklahoma Facebook groups](#). The [1893 Land Run Historical Center](#) in [Medford OK](#) (open W-Sat) also has much information on this Railroad War.

[Active weblinks](#) are [underlined in purple](#). Please email me with any corrections or suggested additions and photos. This document is posted on our [ToewsBrothersKremlin](#) history website.

[Arrel Toews](#)  
[atoews@hotmail.com](mailto:atoews@hotmail.com)  
Carrboro NC  
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