

COUNCIL MEMO NO. 2336

November 19, 1968

TO: Mayor and City Council
FROM: City Manager
SUBJECT: Operation "Millstone".

Recently an item of historical importance has been directed to the city government.

The "Millstone" used in the first major industry in Oklahoma City was located at the northeast corner of Broadway and California Streets. Attached is a brief historical resume of the history of the Millstone and its significance to the community and its history. The discovery and authenticity of the Millstone is a result of intensive research by former Mayor George H. Shirk.

The Millstone has apparently been a part of the sidewalk in the area for approximately 50 years. With its discovery it seems appropriate that this part of Oklahoma City's history be recovered and properly displayed. To this end the administrative staff has made arrangements for the Millstone to be recovered and made ready for proper display. To assist in determining a display location, it would be desirable for the City Council to establish a Council Committee to review and recommend a permanent display location.

It is the recommendation of the administrative staff that Council adjourn its regular meeting on November 19, 1968 to the site of the Millstone at approximately 11:00 - 11:30 a.m., to "supervise" the recovery operation. It is further recommended that the Mayor appoint a special Council Committee to review and recommend possible display sites.

Respectfully submitted,



Robert H. Oldland
City Manager

HISTORICAL RESUME OF THE MILLSTONE

This millstone, which around the turn of the century was put in its present lowly state as a paving or sidewalk stone, is all that remains today as visible evidence of Oklahoma City's first great industrial project. The Run of April 22, 1889 was hardly over when the civic leaders resolved to put Oklahoma City in the forefront of all the new towns that had been born on that same day.

The community remembered the success of a canal in Arkansas City, Kansas that generated water power for industry. It was agreed that the same system could work here in Oklahoma City, mainly a canal to cut off the twists and turns of the North Canadian River and by diverting the river into the straight and center canal additional fall could be developed so as to provide water power.

On September 26, 1889, a corporation was organized under the laws of Colorado with the name Oklahoma City Ditch and Water Power Company. Stock was sold and the project, Oklahoma City's first enterprise, was on the lips of every new citizen. The plan was to go up the river at a site just south of the present fiargrounds and dig a canal east and south and returning to the river at the south end of present Broadway just east of the Robinson Avenue underpass.

The groundbreaking was on December 9, 1889, with Captain W. L. Couch presiding. Captain Couch had been Oklahoma City's first provisional mayor, but had resigned office about a month earlier to protect his homestead claim west of town.

At the same time, Oklahoma City's civic leader, C. G. Jones, whose efforts in this project earned him forever the nickname "Gristmill" Jones; agreed to erect a flour mill at the terminus of the canal. Immediately adjoining this site a light plant was erected. It had been chartered at the same time and was known as the Oklahoma City Light and Power Company. On November 26, 1890, the City Council by Ordinance No. 23 granted a franchise to this company to sell electricity to be generated by the water power.

The digging of the canal occupied the spring and summer of 1890 and by fall 1890 everything was in readiness. It was agreed that the light plant and the gristmill would be placed in operation Christmas Eve 1890 as the finest Christmas present possible for the infant city. Intense excitement prevailed throughout the city's 5,300 citizens as preparations were completed to turn the water into the newly dug ditch. Mr. Jones' gristmill was ready for its power supply and the light plant had strung wires north on Robinson as far as the present Park Avenue to illuminate the Christmas Eve celebration.

Water was turned into the canal as scheduled but alas, something was wrong. Notwithstanding the frantic efforts of everyone, sufficient supplies never reached the gristmill nor the power plant to turn the wheel. The canal ditch was just too sandy and the hopes of Oklahoma City's first project along with the water merely and quickly disappeared into the sand of the river bottom.

Typical of Oklahoma City, however, as with our recent bond issue, with a "we lose first, we try again" C. G. Jones and the power company quickly converted to steam and by the summer of 1891 both plants were in operation.

The electric plant became the forerunner of OG&E. It was soon outgrown and a new modern plant was erected two blocks to the north. The company still occupies this second location.

As to the gristmill, it fell into disuse because of the untimely death of its owner "Gristmill" Jones at the age of 45.55.

Around 1906 the mill was in a shamble and W. D. Gault, the son of Oklahoma City's first mayor under our present government, brought the millstone up to California Avenue and saw to it that it was placed in its present location. Mr. Gault's own real estate office was at 207 West California and the Daily Oklahoman was published at the northeast corner of California and Robinson.

CITY of OKLAHOMA CITY

OKLAHOMA CITY, 73102

MUNICIPAL BUILDING 200 NORTH WALKER



14 February 1967

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CITY MANAGER

R. M. TINSMAN

Mr. Elmer L. Fraker
Administrative Secretary
Oklahoma Historical Society
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Dear Elmer:

In connection with my research on the forthcoming article on the early-day Oklahoma City canal, I have determined to my satisfaction that one of the original grinding stones in the mill constructed by Mr. C. G. Jones at the south end of Broadway is yet in existence and that it is located in the sidewalk at California and Broadway streets.

I believe it is too early for this to become known publicly, as the Urban Renewal Authority is not yet in a position to acquire this block in connection with the forthcoming plans for the Convention Center.

However while the information is still available, I have secured the following affidavit from an early-day resident who is very conversant personally with the facts. I believe this original affidavit belongs in your files but that we should not make the same a matter of public knowledge until the Urban Renewal Authority is further along with its plans.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "George H. Shirk", written over a horizontal line.

George H. Shirk
Mayor

GHS:tw