



Land Hunger: David L. Payne and the Oklahoma Boomers

Carl Coke Rister

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The restless land hunger that drew thousands of men into the Boomer Movement to open the "Oklahoma" district of Indian Territory to settlement is a phenomon of power and human determination. The movement was best expressed in the character of David L. Payne, an Oklahoma Boomer and border adventurer in the mold of Sam Houston or Buffalo Bill Cody. Payne was not content to settle down to the tedium of a sedentary life.

He was a border leader, searching for places where a restless spirit could meet the challenges of a hazardous life. American Indians of the "Five Civilized Tribes," cattlemen, and the federal government offered strong opposition to opening the territory, but that only made Payne work with greater effort to force the opening of the unassigned lands to white settlement.

Land Hunger is more than a biography, because David Payne's life from 1879 to 1884 was so dedicated to the Boomer cause. His story also portrays one of the most bizarre and exciting episodes of the frontier—the opening of the last lands in America available for free settlement—leading ultimately to the great land run of 1889 and the formation of the state of Oklahoma.

Payne's death in 1884 inspired W. L. Couch and other Boomer leaders to carry on. Carl Coke Roster illuminates the role of Payne and other Boomers against the background of a raw and cruelly exacting frontier.



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