

grew rapidly. One after another "Bartles' Posts" sprang up through the surrounding countryside. First one at Allowee, then another at Pawhuska, another at Claremore, Milltown, Nowata, and at last one in Caney—just across the Kansas border. For a time it seemed he might reign supreme over the entire territory.

Yes, he was zooming like a rocket through the frontier skies when suddenly—KA-KLAM-MEE—enemy fire brought him crashing back to earth. His fall was not the less painful for the circumstance that two former friends were responsible. William Johnstone and George Keeler—both trusted assistants—had in 1884 abandoned him to open their own trading post on the west bank of the Caney River, directly across from Bartles' mill.

Unlike previous rivals, these two young men offered a serious threat to Jake's success. Both were married into the Cherokee tribe and thus allowed to reside in the Indian Nations. Both could speak the various tribal tongues and knew well the whims and ways of red men. And, most important, both were possessed of keen intellect and high business potential.

Johnstone had been one of Jake's earliest employees. A native French Canadian, he had married a cousin of Nannie Journeycake Bartles. He had foreseen the future that lay in the Indian Territory and decided to make his home there. When Cap'n Jake opened his first trading post at Crystal Lake, he had been among the first to offer his services. He was appointed the firm's second in command and thus began his career in business. Later he took charge of the trading post lying between Pawhuska and Coffeyville, Kansas.

With George Keeler it was different. Almost his entire life had been spent in the role of an Indian trader. When little more than a boy he had come West seeking his fortune. He had followed the trail Jed Smith and Bill Sublette blazed through the South Pass of the Rocky Mountains and helped to settle the wild lands that lay beyond. He had joined John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company and rose through the ranks to become that firm's second in command.

Serving in that capacity, he arrived in Oklahoma in 1871. His commander, Lewis P. Chouteau, was killed in an Indian attack late that year. Shortly thereafter he was grabbed up by the growing Bartles enterprise. Cap'n Jake appointed him his chief clerk and collector, little suspecting he would one day rue the fact.

Johnstone and Keeler remained for many years Cap'n Bartles' trusted employees. Then, one day, in January, 1884, Keeler began totaling up his employer's profits for the previous season.

"Hell," he whistled softly, "this man's making a fortune."

"More than that," Johnstone corrected. "Three fortunes."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Just what it sounds like. Jake's right now making three fortunes. But tomorrow he might be..." he paused and looked quizzically at Keeler. "He might be making just one."

"And the other two?"

"Could be coming to me and you," cried Johnstone.

Yes, Johnstone and Keeler were suddenly getting ideas. Admittedly just cubs, they had always disagreed with the big daddy lion on certain issues. Jake had long ago decreed that Bartlesville should grow east from the river toward Kansas. His two young employees had always privately agreed between themselves that greater opportunity lay on the west bank facing the Osage Hills. The town would most undoubtedly offer its special appeal to the Indians who resided westward. There were other towns—white man's towns—far greater towns—in Kansas. What the firm should do, they had always believed, was move west—and direct its appeal toward the savages.

Jake, when faced with the choice of either building a mill on the west bank or losing his best two employees, became furious. The veins swelled out on his neck, his chin tucked in and his head lowered like that of an angry bull.

"Hell, no!" he bellowed through the tusks of his walrus mustache. "Ye're threatenin' me with treason. Ye owe me everything ye are. Ye weren't nothin' but tramps when I met ye. I took ye in 'n' made ye men. Now ye wanna betray me."

"Listen..."

"I ain't about to listen. Ye'd best listen to me. I started this town for a purpose. I wanted to see it grow—grow bigger 'n' bigger until maybe it's bigger than Chicago. That was my dream, 'n' I made ye a part of it. Ye've prospered 'cause ye're a part of it. Now ye wanna take from me everything that my life is built on..."

Jake found himself unable to continue. His head dropped to his desk and great sobs shook him. When his eyes cleared the two most promising of his young employees were gone.

"Damn old fool," Johnstone said, fondly.

"Yeah. These darn coots don't know much. Just the plains and the stars and the skies. That's all they know."

"Guess we'll have to do it ourselves."

"Yupp... Ole Jake doesn't understand!"

A few days later the two young traders announced their intention of breaking off with Cap'n Jake. They were opening their own trading post on the west bank of the Caney River—directly across from Bartles Mill.

Despite Jake's efforts to avoid it, the establishment was completed and immediately began to prosper. And then—after the Oklahoma land rush of 1889 a town—a thriving town that still today bears his name—sprang up around it. Exactly what he didn't want had happened! Bartlesville

had grown west from the river bank. Cap'n Jake Bartles, hero of the Kansas 6th Cavalry, conquerer of the Oklahoma frontier, vanquisher of the wheat dissenters, had at long last been proven vulnerable to defeat.

Bartles' star wasn't long to remain in eclipse. One day in 1896 he picked up a newspaper and read of the spreading use of Alexander Graham Bell's telephone. "Well, well," he said to his top aides, "this means great things."

"Yes," his clerks agreed, "for the folks back East. For the folks who live in New York, Baltimore, and Chicago..."

"Yes," Bartles smiled, "and also for us. I'm going to have a telephone line connecting all our different trading posts. It'll save me the cost of keeping scouts and messengers moving from one to the other. Also make it easier to transport supplies."

"What?" Bartles' employees groaned. "Again?"

During the days that followed this reaction was shared by practically every white man carrying on trade in the Indian territory. Once again fellow merchants were calling Jake "some kinda fool." Once again they were balking and sneering at "another of Bartles' follies."

"Too much expense," they all said. "This here tell-ee-phonie thing ain't a gona last. Jake'll be left with all them lines—and the property under which they run—on his hands."

But once again Jake got the last laugh. And this time almost immediately. A few hours after the line went into operation all his rivals found their posts deserted. Not a single person—red skin or white—was to be found within shouting distance. And why? Every human being—red and white—man, woman, and child, was crowding into Jake Bartles' trading post. Each and every one awaiting his chance to peek or pipe, shout or bellow into the tell-ee-phonie and then receive a like reply. Curiosity alone paid for putting the line into operation.

Jake Bartles had once again proved himself a visionary extraordinary—by stringing the first telephone lines above the mountains, the plains, the rivers, and valleys of Oklahoma.

But yet to come was the highlight in Cap'n Jake's life as a promoter of fortune. His big moment didn't arrive until April of 1897 when the first of Oklahoma's oil was pumped from the banks of the Caney River. This time he, more so than anyone else, was astounded by what could be brought about through his promotional genius. The magic of his imagination had converted the twin territories entirely. And while doing so had brought to light the brutal envy and petty jealousy that is inherent in all mortal men.

Men who only yesterday had been barely able to eke out an existence from their