In 1923, oil was struck in Wewoka in Seminole county. This excerpt gives a glimpse of how this could affect a town:

It was not so much a boom as an explosion. Over night, a village of 500 turned into a chaotic community of more than 20,000. There was no way to handle that many people, and that included nearly every social service. There weren’t enough doctors; not a street in the entire town was paved; water was insufficient; in fact, people had to get in line for drinking water from shallow wells. None of the stores could manage the rush. And the bank had to stay open 6 days a week. One teller said... that he had to bring a mattress to the bank and sleep on it overnight. He said he was so tired at the end of the day, he couldn’t make it home, and he didn’t want to fight that mud to get back the next day.

For women, it wasn’t easy, not only because of the sudden toughness that seemed to slap the town, but because it was so difficult just to get around. It was not uncommon for a woman to be dressed formally and wearing boots. In her purse would be the matching slippers into which she would later change.

The most critical problem, however, was where all of these people were going to sleep. The answer was simple: anywhere shelter could be found. They slept in cars, in trucks, in railroad cars, in tents. Whole fields were nothing but tents. Workers paid five dollars a week, often more, for a room in a house. Just one room with one bed oftentimes was rented to six men; three shifts of eight hours, two men to the bed... There was one instance of a man who even rented his roof to an oilfield employee. It was the only place he could find, so he slept on the top of a house for three nights. Charge: three dollars.

Another way to make a quick buck was to have a horse or mule, which would pull out stuck, mud-drenched autos for five or ten dollars. Because the road was many times impassable, cars were allowed to cut through front yards for “only” five dollars. That was done time and time again, and ultimately of course, the yard was as bad as the road.

All of these things were socially inconvenient, but people could and did live with them; what was a bigger concern... was crime.
Cushing experienced similar circumstances a decade earlier, as recounted here.

During the first three decades of the twentieth century, the impact of “black gold” or oil on Oklahoma’s economy proved to be a determining factor in the development of our state. With the exception of Oklahoma City and Tulsa, most oil boomtowns sprang out of sparsely populated, rural settings. The opportunity to earn high wages brought large numbers of young, healthy men into an area, and without the stabilizing influence of their families, these men were often plunged into an interesting cross section of humanity.

Millionaires, laborers, gamblers, prostitutes, speculators and men of modest means flocked to the boomtowns of Oklahoma with the hope of sharing in the proverbial pot of gold. With the discovery of the Cushing Field in 1912, men descended on the town of Cushing, overflowing the hotels, boarding houses, shanties, and tents. A large percentage of these men were men who followed the booms throughout the United States, flowing with the crude from one oil field to another. Hours on the job were long and demanding for roughnecks and roustabouts. Time was money in the oil business, and time wasted was money lost. One rig builder who traveled from field to field said, “We had to hit a hard lick every time we raised our hands and keep it up all day long. I worked until my shoes would squish every step I took with the sweat that had run down in them. And, at night I would take one hand and bend down the fingers on the other hand ‘cause my hands were so cramped from holding the rig hatchet all day.”

Oil Field work was extremely hazardous, and the rig builder recalled a serious accident that involved the machinery used on the rigs. “Me and another fella were standing by an exhaust pipe near the steam engine. The guy working the steam didn’t realize that we were there and he ‘fed it to her.’ That live steam blew outa there and scalded me from my waist to my heels. I couldn’t do a darn thing. I couldn’t even holler. I just dropped to the ground and laid there. By the time the doctor got there, I had big blisters raised up under my thighs, and the calves of my legs looked like footballs, only bigger. The doctor gave me a shot to relieve the pain and then he took out his knife and ripped the blisters open. A half gallon of old blister water poured outa each one of them blisters.”

The lives of the oil field crew were in constant jeopardy, and they courted disaster. One tool pusher recalled that the crew worked after dark by the light of black dogs kerosene drilling lamps that looked something like bombs suspended from the derrick. On one occasion a bit penetrated a pocket of gas and extinguished one of the lamps. The tool pusher said, “I climbed up on the derrick and struck a match to light the lamp when ‘whoosh’ the whole rig went up like a blowtorch. The rig was completely destroyed.”

One surveyor in the Cromwell Field recalled that he drove twenty or thirty miles to Wewoka to sleep every night because of the impending danger of escaping gas. It made for very long days and short nights, but the surveyor realized that the danger of explosion was too great, and he didn’t want to take that chance.

Some men with families were fortunate to have the luxury of food and shelter, but for the majority of workers these were hard to obtain. Every room in most boomtowns was taken, and many farm couples would open their homes to the oil field workers. Sam Barkley, an early day parts salesman was sent to Cushing to manage a store. He said, “The place was a heck of boom. Everybody was hog wild. Every room in town was taken; there was a line in front of every restaurant all day, and the drilling was spread out in every direction. I had to pitch a tent to sleep at the edge of town. I ate in a tent that an old farm couple had thrown up nearby. They had come from the country with lots of canned vegetables and fruit and home cured meat.
That kind of stuff would keep up for hours with the cash register dinging like a patrol wagon bell. I never saw anybody that could eat like those men. They would set down and eat a half dozen eggs, a side of bacon apiece, four cups of coffee, and push all of that down with a loaf of bread and a couple of pieces of pie.”

Most early arrivals in a boom secured lodging in local farm homes. However, the accommodations were far from luxurious. The beds were nothing more than tick stuffed with prairie grass and propped up on store boxes. The meals, which were prepared by the farmer’s wife, were often just bread without butter, some hash, and some fat pork and cow’s liver. The going rate for such accommodations was $5.00 a week.

Opportunistic businessmen reacted quickly to the news of an oil strike, and constructed cheaply built dwellings near all of the oil activity. Many buildings served a dual purpose. During the height of the Cushing boom, pool halls were converted to hotels after midnight so that workers could sleep on or under pool tables at a price ranging from 50 cents to a dollar a night. Cots were rented out by the night or by the week. A worker often climbed into a bed still warm from the previous occupant and, when linen supplies were exhausted, a single blanket was all the bedding available.

Carpenters from surrounding areas swarmed to the site of a new boom to construct shelters, often called “shot-gun houses” because a shot fired from the front door exited the back door without obstruction. These dwellings were often so haphazardly constructed it usually required only three men working a single day to complete a small dwelling. As needed, rooms were added directly to the back of the building.

Those who found work in the oil field were paid between $6.00 and $15.00 per day, but they often spent their money freely to relieve the monotony of the work and the living conditions. Dance halls abounded, and every known method was utilized to separate a man from his money. Alcohol and gambling flourished and many areas of the boomtowns were breeding grounds for crime and violence.
Crime was a major issue in most boomtowns, such as that of Kiefer, circa 1906. The following excerpt highlights some of the challenges and lawlessness of the times:

Because of the frantic pace of drilling in the field, there was no time to store incoming supplies at Kiefer before shipping them to the wells. Equipment thus was unloaded from the trains directly onto wagons. Usually by 9:00 a.m. every morning there was a two-mile-long-line of vehicles making their way from the depot to the nearby field...

Under such a heavy volume of traffic, the road between Kiefer and Glenn Pool quickly broke down. Deep ruts were cut into its surface and the dirt was ground into a fine powder-like dust that choked both men and animals. After a rain, the dust was transformed into a thick mud which made travel almost impossible. However, it was heat rather than rain that caused much of the problems in the summer of 1907...

Combined with the lack of proper sanitation associated with a boom town, the heat created a very unhealthy association. Hastily constructed shacks housed many workers and their families, and their nearby outdoor privies reeked. With so little rain, the dust settled everywhere and clung to the sweat-covered workers until they were caked with dirt. The town soon gained the reputation of being a “hell hole.”

Even so, the lure of work and high wages attracted a horde of young men to Kiefer. Most were single. Few of those who were married were willing to bring their families with them to what one described as “A lawless hole of oil field workers.” With few of the conventional social restraints in place, many workers spent “their pay with utter abandon” to the benefit of a host of gamblers, prostitutes, bootleggers, and con men in a section of town called the Bowery.”

Here a worker could find saloons, brothels, dance halls, and gambling dens. In a place where “feminine society could be purchased” easily, it was not uncommon to see drunk women staggering through the streets “naked and cursing.” Because the oil fields operated in shifts, “from one-half to two-thirds of the men” always were at leisure, and thus the “dance halls operated day and night”...

The sound of gunfights was heard nightly, and “shootings, knifings, and killings were commonplace” in the district. Jack Dillon, who worked on the nearby oil field, recalled that when he was working with a crew tearing down old oil storage tanks in 1913, the men found the remains of six bodies in one tank, which had been built in 1906.

[Oilfield worker Charlie] Shobe once visited one of Kiefer’s “gambling joints,” located across from the railroad depot. “To reach there,” he explained, “you had to walk across a narrow plank walk that had been built on stakes across the slough”...

The narrow walkway to the gambling house was specifically designed for one purpose. It was only 24 inches wide and anytime someone “made a big killing at the tables” and started home he “was cornered in the middle by two men coming at him, one from each end of the walk.” Trapped in the middle, the winner could do nothing but surrender his money. “It was better than being knocked in the head and dumped into the slough which fairly swarmed with cottonmouth snakes,” Shobe explained.

Eventually the violence became too much to ignore and three lawmen were sent from Tulsa to investigate. One of them went to the gambling house and won a large sum of money. However, before starting home, he positioned the other two lawmen out of sight at each end of the walkway. “Sure enough,” Shobe recalled, “as he reached about the middle of the plank walk he saw a man step out on the end in front and he knew there was probably another behind him.”

However, this time the other two lawmen rushed up with their guns and captured the hijackers. “With guns in their backs,” Shobe continued, “they were marched over to the lights at the depot where their masks were removed.” The hijackers were the Kiefer marshal and his deputy.
Workers were paid well for their labor, and entrepreneurs both within and without the law found plenty of ways to help relieve them of their wages. Oil may have been the source of the wealth, but there were plenty of ways to share in the prosperity without stepping foot on an oil patch, as described in this account.

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William B. Osborn, Jr., whose father was involved in the development of the Greater Seminole Field, remembers that his mother would always take him through the back door of the bank in Sasakwa, to avoid the ever present brawls on Main Street. In the boomtown of Keifer, “The Bowery” was the name applied to the row of saloons, brothels, and gambling dens. In Seminole, “Bishop’s Alley” occupied four blocks and was perhaps the worst of them all. Some say Seminole was one of the roughest cities in the United States at the time.

The Rainbow Dance Hall in Seminole was an establishment where a man could pay twenty five cents for a ticket that allowed him to dance with one of the girls. The girls kept a dime for every ticket they accumulated, and the house kept fifteen cents. William T. Payne, pioneer oilman recalls dancing there one evening with a girl who had caught his attention. He was astonished by her rough language. Later, he discovered that he had been dancing with the girlfriend of “Pretty Boy” Floyd, the notorious gangster.

In Keifer, near the Mad House Saloon, a small creek flowed that was covered in crude oil that had escaped from the field’s storage tanks. It was a popular place to deposit murder victims, and it was reported that twelve dead men were found in its murky waters within a two year period. Other “convenient” disposal sites for unwanted bodies were the hundreds of oil storage tanks that dotted the landscape. A tank behind the Mad House Saloon yielded seven skeletons when drained.

Despite their notoriety, the lawless element of an oil community was in the minority, and the majority of the workers were law abiding citizens, who only occasionally violated the law. To offset the more unsavory character of the community, churches in nearby towns established congregations in the boom area, and if enough volunteers were located, they constructed a building to hold services. A burly individual named A.L. Snyder bought an old nightspot in Three Sands and converted it to a mission catering to the oil field workers. In Seminole, “Scottie the Baptist” conducted services in a downtown building until he raised enough money to construct a church building. “Sky Pilot,” a Methodist minister attempted to cleanse the town of Drumright of vice with the aid of his revolver. As the churches became more firmly established with restoration of law and order, rowdies were jailed and driven from town.

Once the more “civilizing” aspects of society began to spring up, schools were built and a more stable environment was established. Oil companies organized sporting events, card clubs, and dances. As the business areas of the communities grew, streets were improved and services were expanded.

Oklahoma’s boomtowns had all the characteristics of previous scrambles for wealth in America. They were an attraction to those individuals in search of riches, and they lacked nothing: glamour, excitement, adventure, and violence. Fortunes were made, lost, and in some cases made again. The quest for oil in Oklahoma ranks among the most romantic and flamboyant eras in American history.
Writers observing the effects of oil wealth in Oklahoma were quick to distinguish between the mindsets and lifestyles of the Midwestern farmers and those of entrepreneurial oilmen who were often relative newcomers to the state. While the simple wants and needs of the farmer were sometimes glorified and sometimes merely good for a laugh, Shepherd highlights at least one instance when one man’s simple solution to waning circumstances outsmarts everyone, oilman and fellow farmer alike.

It is not often that a farmer who has made a fortune in oil by no efforts of his own, sinks any of his wealth in oil gambles. Enough money to live on in comfort or luxury the rest of their days seems to be about all that the average farmer and his family ask from oil. It is difficult to create new wants after one’s life has been set in the mold, and to be able to get what you want when you want it is about all the average new rich ask of fortune. All above that is a comforting abundance which lies undrawn in the bank.

Now and then, however, in a waning field, the farmers take a renewed interest in affairs as they see the attention of the oil men directed to other areas than theirs. In the town of Cushing there is a hero of the community who has put new wealth in the farmers’ pockets. The oil craze of some years ago died out and left Cushing somewhat flat. Everybody had money laid away, but it looked as if the incoming flow of gold had ceased. Milton Thompson, who owned 160 acres, on which he had made a small fortune in previous years, conceived the idea that the wells were failing because they had not been drilled deep enough in the first place. He figured out that 800 feet more would bring in a new oil supply. All the other farmers were holding their leases at the old high figures, with no takers. Thompson surprised the community by giving away a lease on his farm. The company that drilled went down to the usual 2,700 feet, and found no oil. Thompson begged them to continue. At 3,500 feet they brought in a huge well. Thompson’s fortune, as well as that of everyone in the community, was immediately multiplied. One farm which Thompson had bought for $2,000 he sold, it is said, at Cushing, for $575,000 within a few days. The population of the town increased fourfold within the next year, and in one year the bank deposits jumped from $1,713,000 to $3,500,000.

As a town boomer Thompson is famous far and wide in the Cushing country.