



OKLAHOMA
HUMANITIES

Fall | Winter 2021

Culture | Issues | Ideas

CROSSROADS

PERSPECTIVE

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



CAROLINE LOWERY

Executive Director
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As the calendar closes on the year 2021, Oklahoma Humanities (OH) is looking forward to an exciting new initiative commemorating the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. “A More Perfect Union: America at 250” endeavors to reengage us with our history as we prepare to celebrate this monumental national milestone.

The Oklahoma-specific programming we’re developing is part of a larger initiative launched by the National Endowment for the Humanities and includes humanities councils in 56 states, territories, and districts. Across the country, communities will come together to explore and reflect on our quest for a more just, inclusive, and sustainable society. The pursuit of a more perfect union, founded on equality, liberty, and the common good, is one of the most important responsibilities we have as citizens.

Using historical and contemporary experiences, this initiative will examine what it means to be an American. Through the multi-faceted lens of the humanities, we will explore the evolution of our nation and the principles behind our constitutional governance and democracy. A thorough exploration demands new and diverse perspectives—from Native Americans, African Americans, and others, whose voices have been underrepresented in our shared narrative.

I encourage you to engage with the programs and resources we’re cultivating as we listen, share, and reimagine “A More Perfect Union.”

- Enjoy one of the new reading and discussion themes with our ultimate book group, *Let’s Talk About It* (details on page 5).
- The “APMU” page on our website is filled with online resources, including *BrainBox* podcast episodes, award-winning articles from *Oklahoma Humanities* magazine, and links to learning resources (visit: okhumanities.org and neh.gov/250).
- Thousands of public school students, statewide, will compete in the annual Oklahoma National History Day. OH will support programs and resources in collaboration with the Oklahoma Historical Society and National History Day (more at okhistory.org).



OKLAHOMA HUMANITIES

Culture | Issues | Ideas

mikeklemme.com



Todd Johnson



Todd Johnson



Todd Johnson

CONTENTS

CROSSROADS

FALL | WINTER 2021 | VOL. 14, NO. 2

7 AN AMERICAN SUNRISE

Reflections from the U.S. Poet Laureate.
By Joy Harjo

9 MISREADING CROSSROADS

Embracing the potential cost of choice.
By Ken Hada

12 THE ABSENTEE SHAWNEES AND THE TRUE STORY OF LAKE THUNDERBIRD

A modern-day trail of tears.
By John Truden

17 TRAILS OF OKLAHOMA

Before we were a state, we were a hub for international crossroads.
By Michael R. Grauer

22 CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF THE MOTHER ROAD

A conversation with Lieutenant Governor Matt Pinnell.

24 CROSSROADS: CHANGE IN RURAL AMERICA

Preview the Smithsonian exhibit tour.

26 OKLAHOMA CROSSROADS

The heart of rural America.
By Jason Harris

30 THE WOMAN AND THE CAR

Dorothy Levitt, "premier woman motorist."
By *The Public Domain Review*

33 OKLAHOMA—A SENSE OF PLACE

On angels, ghosts, and finding home.
By Michael Wallis

42 CHARTING A COURSE FOR TRUE NORTH

Remarks on the Tulsa Race Massacre Centennial.
By Caroline Lowery, OH Executive Director

IN EVERY ISSUE

- 2 Perspective from the Executive Director
- 4 Post: Mail | Social Media | Messages
- 6 The Editor's Desk
- 43 Noteworthy: OH News
- 46 2020 Annual Report

ON THE COVER: *Spring Rain* (Carmen, OK) by Mike Klemme. See more of Mike's work on pages 33-40 and mikeklemme.com.

Reader Feedback



I just finished reading the Spring/Summer HOPE issue of your excellent magazine. Congratulations on the publication. It's very impressive. In particular, I loved reading the essay by our very own Dr. Tonnia Anderson. All of us at USAO are so pleased to see this!

—JP Audas
Vice President for Development
Univ. of Science & Arts, Chickasha

Lovely piece by Britton Gildersleeve in the HOPE edition of *Oklahoma Humanities* magazine. Beautifully placed and a fitting finale to a great issue. I also loved David Levy's article.

—Gordon Taylor, Tulsa

You have done it again. The magazine is timely and extremely well written. Your ability to find contributors that have a unique perspective makes reading it from cover to cover an educational experience.

—Ken Ferguson, Altus

Just wanted to say thank you for a great issue. I always enjoy the magazine but was pleasantly surprised with this wonderful content.

—Rev. Dr. George E. Young, Sr.
Oklahoma State Senate District 48

I just finished reading this hopeful issue and loved every page. Sandra Soli's poem makes me want to drive out into the country and listen for the meadowlark!

—Martha Pendleton, via Facebook

Well, mother of pearl, what a beautiful, inspirational issue of *Oklahoma Humanities* magazine.

—Bill McCloud, via Facebook

Dorothy Alexander's essay was just exceptional. I found the whole issue amazing.

—Britton Gildersleeve, via Facebook

I love your publication and enjoy keeping up with Oklahoma history and news. Best wishes and keep up the good work.

—Mac R. Harris, Brookings, SD

We in Oklahoma need to sustain the humanities. Thank you for the invaluable service you provide to our state.

—Marcia Haag, Norman

Congratulations for the CITIZEN 2020 *Oklahoma Humanities* edition [Fall/Winter 2020]. The publication has always been a creative and extremely professional publication, but the CITIZEN 2020 issue is exceptional.

—Lynn McIntosh, Ardmore

2021 Magazine Awards

Oklahoma Humanities is proud to announce our recent success at the 2021 Great Plains Journalism Awards. OH staff and contributors were honored across eight categories in magazine writing and page design for a total of nine awards, a record high for the publication.

Hosted and sponsored by the Tulsa Press Club, the Great Plains Journalism Awards is a regional competition among eight states: Oklahoma, Kansas, Missouri, Arkansas, Iowa, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota. More than 600 entries competed for the 2021 honors that recognize excellence in writing, design, and photography among newspaper,

magazine, web, and TV journalism. OH magazine contributors placing among finalists were:

- *Oklahoma Humanities* editor Carla Walker for Column Writing: "The Editor's Desk." (Judge's Comments: "Carla Walker's *The Editor's Desk* column is among the smartest columns I've read this year. She's a sharp observer with a truly interesting style. This is someone I would definitely read on a regular basis because I know I'll emerge smarter as a result of having done so.")
- Andy Rieger, with Cindy Allen, David Craig, Dick Pryor, Rich Lenz, Susan Ellerbach, and illustrator Art Lien for News Writing: "Ask a Journalist." (Judge's Comments: "An important public service element runs through this project. It's written in a way that elevates the issue, explains things well and doesn't talk down to the reader.")
- Ayelet Tsabari for Food Feature Writing: "How Food Connects Us to Home." (Judge's Comments: "This was a beautiful essay, one that connects to the reader on many levels. A powerful piece of food writing.")
- Kimberly Roblin for Arts and Culture Writing: "Hardship, Hope, and Home" and Reader Service Writing: "Popcorn, Politics, & the Press."
- Anne Richardson for Design Portfolio; Reader Service Page Design: "Popcorn, Politics, & the Press"; and two layouts for Profile Page Design: "Hardship, Hope, and Home" and "Mapping Woody Guthrie" with art by Sara Bowersock.

"It's an honor to be judged award-winning among so many prestigious publications," said editor Carla Walker. "Our success is a direct result of the generosity of scholars, writers, artists, and archives that share their work for the greater good."

See these award-winning entries from the HOME (Spring/Summer 2020) and CITIZEN 2020 (Fall/Winter 2020) issues online at: okhumanities.org/archives

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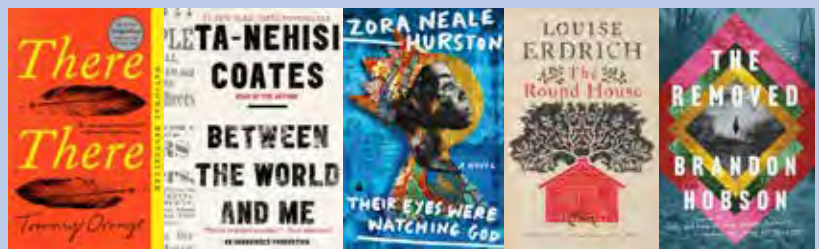
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Oklahoma Humanities magazine is an award-winning collection of culture, issues, and ideas—a rich mix of humanities scholarship, insightful narratives, informed opinions, and beautiful images, for a read that is smart, balanced, educational, and entertaining. Subscribe online: okhumanities.org or call (405) 235-0280.

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Oklahoma Humanities awards include 44 Oklahoma Society of Professional Journalists awards, including multiple first place honors for Best Writing, Best Cover, and Best PR Publication; 18 Great Plains Journalism awards, including firsts for best Magazine Feature Writing and best Magazine Page Design, and as a finalist for the Great Plains Magazine of the Year; 3 Central Oklahoma IABC Bronze Quill Awards; the State Historic Preservation Officer's Citation of Merit; and an Oklahoma Heritage Distinguished Editorial Award.

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LET'S TALK ABOUT IT fosters meaningful interaction through books and scholar-led conversations. *LTAI* announces three new discussion themes prompted by "A More Perfect Union," an initiative of the National Endowment for the Humanities to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. New themes highlight the quest for a seat at democracy's table, paralleled with the larger pursuit of a more perfect union. Find a discussion group at: okhumanities.org/events

OF SHADOWS AND LIGHT: STORIES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN RESILIENCE
Dr. Tonnia Anderson, Theme Scholar | Explores the theme of resilience in the struggle against marginalization and exclusion that have historically shaped Black life.
A Matter of Black and White by Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher
Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates
Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston
Citizen: An American Lyric by Claudia Rankine
The Cross and the Lynching Tree by James H. Cone

MEMORY, MEMORIALS, AND PAINFUL PASTS
Dr. Benjamin Alpers, Theme Scholar | Examines cases in which the public memory of painful pasts has profoundly impacted present communities.
The Unfinished Bombing: Oklahoma City in American Memory by Edward Linenthal
The Submission by Amy Waldman
How the Word is Passed by Clint Smith
Down Along with that Devil's Bones by Connor Towne O'Neill
The Memory Monster by Yishai Sarid

NATIVE AMERICAN IDENTITY: FROM PAST TO PRESENT
Dr. Brian Burkhart, Theme Scholar | Challenges stereotypes by presenting Native American identity through the lens of Native writers and Native experiences.
The Removed by Brandon Hobson (Cherokee)
There There by Tommy Orange (Cheyenne and Arapaho)
The Round House by Louise Erdrich (Chippewa)
Firekeeper's Daughter by Angeline Boulley (Ojibwe)
Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir by Deborah Miranda (Esselen and Chumash)

Generous support for *LTAI* is provided by: Kirkpatrick Family Fund, Oklahoma City University, McCasland Foundation, and the Chickasaw Nation.





Winnie-the-Pooh (1927) frieze by illustrator E. H. Shepard for the book chapter "In Which Christopher Robin Leads an Expedition to the North Pole." From *Winnie-the-Pooh* by A.A. Milne. Sign says, "North Pole, Discovered by Pooh, Pooh found it."

THE EDITOR'S DESK

CARLA WALKER

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Depending on your age, life experience, and worldview, the idea of "crossroads" will have you vibrating with excitement or send you into a tailspin of dread. If you'll allow, I'll borrow from A.A. Milne and a few characters from the Hundred Acre Wood that reveal our varying reactions to the inevitable crossroads we all meet at some point in our lives.

For we Eeyores (masters of worst-case-scenario), facing a crossroad comes with unbearable byproducts: choice, commitment, and change. We eat the same thing every day, restaurant waiters know us by first name, and changing passwords is just one more thing to have to remember. No, we don't have an app to keep track—that would involve trust . . . and technology . . . and The Dark Interweb. Even in the best of times, we're at one with a blue donkey: "Could be worse. Not sure how, but it could be."

Now the Piglets among us are always searching for the next opportunity. You know, those people who rearrange the furniture with the seasons, take in stray cats, buy lottery tickets, and throw darts at a world map to choose their next vacation destination. They race headlong at crossroads, knowing something grand is just around the corner: "I say, I wonder what's going to happen exciting *to-day!*"

Thankfully there are plenty of Christopher Robins around to give it to us straight: Time will pass, change will come, and, if nothing else, we'll cope, we'll be wiser. The Christopher Robins of the world will not be shaken by the untried or the unknown—they move forward, ever forward with faith: "I say, Owl, isn't this fun?"

The fictional characters of great works of literature are a wonderful way to look at ourselves from a distance. "Choice and human culture are forever joined," Ken Hada notes in his essay (page 9). The juncture of crossroads demands

that we choose—and then live with what comes of that choice—a human experience repeated through eons and, thus, a common literary theme. "The consequence of choice, depicted in scene and verse," says Hada, "is the very essence of literature and the arts."

Crossroads are the story of human experience, of us—especially so for our state. Oklahoma sits squarely in American Heartland. Indigenous peoples, settlers, cattle drovers, and the Mother Road itself have crisscrossed our state for generations—indeed, thousands of years. The intersections of people and place are echoes of our history and the key to our future. The great storyteller Michael Wallis says it best (page 33):

If the broad western plains and golden wheat fields, where winds are born, act as the lusty lungs of the state, then the vibrant heart of Oklahoma lies here in old Indian Territory, where so many traces, trails, paths, and highways converge and become the crossroads of the nation.

We timed the theme of this issue to coincide with *Crossroads: Change in Rural America*, the Smithsonian traveling exhibit that will tour six small Oklahoma communities through the coming year (pages 24-29). It's fitting programming for Oklahoma Humanities sponsorship and partnership, supporting the vibrant and varied ways these places are creating and maintaining "community." The exhibit, like Oklahoma's rural population, focuses not on the wind-swept Dust Bowl of the past but on the engaged and determined efforts these folks employ to move toward the future—and it's a bright one.

Lest I give away all the crossroads stories in these pages, I'll close with the help of Winnie-the-Pooh: "Oh, bother." It's hard to let go, to send this magazine out into the world. There are never enough pages to say what should be said. Still, Pooh's enthusiasm moves me on to the next thing: "We're going on an *Expotition*, all of us, with things to eat. To discover something."

Happy reading. And I'll see you on down the road.



AN AMERICAN SUNRISE

JOY HARJO

REFLECTIONS FROM
THE U.S. POET LAUREATE

ROAD

We stand first in our minds, and then we toddle
From hand to furniture
Soon we are walking away from the house and lands
Of our ancestral creator gods
To the circles of friends, of schooling, of work
Making families and worlds of our own.
We make our way through storm and sun
We walk side by side or against each other
The last road will be taken alone—
There might be crowds calling for blood
Or a curtained window by the leaving bed
It is best to not be afraid
Lift your attention
For the appearance of the next road
It might be through a family of trees, a desert, or
On rolling waves of sea
It's the ancient road the soul knows
We always remember it when we see it
It beckons at birth
It carries us home

PROSE ENTRY:

My grandfather Monahwee (also spelled “Menawa”), of some generations back, was allowed to visit his home, at Okfuskee (near what is now known as Dadeville, Alabama), to stay there one night before being exiled to the West. He is reported to have said to “a highly reputable gentleman,” after gifting him with his portrait:

“I am going away. I have brought you this picture—I wish you to take it and hang it up in your house, that when your children look at it, you can tell them what I have been . . . for when I cross the great river, my desire is that I may never again see the face of a white man.”

After he left, he never turned back. He kept walking forward with his beloved people.

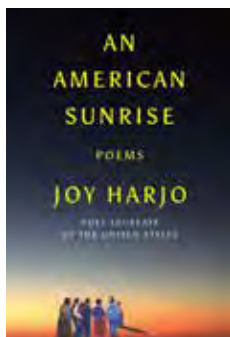
I returned to see what I would find, in these lands we were forced to leave behind.

MAMA AND PAPA HAVE THE GOING HOME SHIPROCK BLUES

(based on T. C. Cannon painting titles)

Song 5: Zero Hero

The way it is told, is we are one people
Then there was a disagreement.
Some went east. Some west.
We were bound to meet up.
We could have had a feast and helped each other.
Made an alliance.
We could have run horses together, gone hunting
For food, cooked and stayed up sharing stories
About where we came from and where we are going:
Together.



JOY HARJO is an enrolled member of the Muscogee Creek

Nation and was named Poet Laureate of the United States in 2019. She is the author of nine books of poetry, several plays, and two memoirs, and is Executive Editor of the anthology *When the Light of the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through—A Norton Anthology of Native Nations Poetry* (2020). Harjo's awards include the prestigious Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize from the Poetry Foundation, the Jackson Poetry Prize from Poets & Writers, the Wallace Stevens Award from the Academy of American Poets, and a Guggenheim Fellowship. She lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and holds a Tulsa Artist Fellowship. She is the creator and curator for one of the most popular themes in Oklahoma Humanities' *Let's Talk About It* reading and discussion program: "Coming and Going in Oklahoma Indian Country." The poetry and prose included here are reprinted from her book *An American Sunrise*. Copyright © 2019 by Joy Harjo. Used with permission of the publisher, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. All rights reserved. Find interviews and podcasts featuring Joy, and more on her extensive work at: joyharjo.com

PROSE ENTRY:

Until the passage of the Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978, it was illegal for Native citizens to practice our cultures. This included the making and sharing of songs and stories. Songs and stories in one culture are poetry and prose in another. They are intrinsic to cultural sovereignty. To write or create as a Native person was essentially illegal.

BOURBON AND BLUES

for T. C. Cannon, a brother of poetry and song

We were wild then,
As we emerged from bloody history
Into the white clothes of pious religion and rules.
Then sent off to Indian school to learn how to forget
Our mothers, fathers, the grandparents who loved and love us.
We were still in the embrace of the God of the plains,
Horses, of where sky and earth meet—
Every day was a praise song, every word or act had import
Into the meaning of why we are here as spirits
Dressed in colored earth.

We were wild then,
They said, because we spoke a different language
And would not give over our spirits to them.
And though they tried, they could not ever remake us
No matter how hard they drilled and forced us.
We died over and over again in those stiff desks,
As our hearts walked home.
We sat on the fire escapes outside our dorm rooms on cold winter nights
And made plans to escape history.

We were wild then.
We didn't take well to mind imprisonment.
Our dreams could not be confined by the walls of institutional green
of misbegotten bureaucracy.
We found alcohol, smoke and anything else to *break on through to the other side*
Where our visions shivered there near the hills outside of campus,
waiting for us to recover from the sick of forgetfulness.

. . .
Some of us did not make it.
We carried their bodies far away
From the cities and set their spirits free.
This moment is for them—gives them nourishment
Of our love to keep moving toward home.

We were wild then.
I will always remember that night far south
Of town where we sat at the bar after our escape.
You had gone to war and had become a painter, poet and singer.
I was a poet, mother and I was learning how to sing.
We talked of history, heartache, the blues, and what it means
To be an artist with nothing to lose, because we lost everything,
here, at the edge of America.



Theatre of Shadows, Natasha Mylius

Misreading Crossroads

KEN HADA | ART BY NATASHA MYLIUS

Embracing the potential cost of choice

Crossroads is a common literary trope that puts a character, and ostensibly a reader, into a predicament that requires choice. From the humorous Yogi Berra quip (“When you come to a fork in the road, take it.”) to more serious examinations of philosophy and theology, choice and human culture are forever joined. Indeed, the consequence of choice, depicted in scene and verse, is the very essence of literature and the arts.

Perhaps the most famous misreading of a literary crossroads, at least in American poetry, occurs with Robert Frost’s poem “The Road Not Taken.” Although the text clearly describes the two paths in question as “fair” and “both that morning equally lay / In leaves no step had trodden black,” how many times have we heard, in speech and sermon, a speaker advocating one road as preferable, exalting it as the superior moral choice which, in the end, makes “all the difference”? Such pronouncements aim to inspire audiences to choose wisely, the assumption being that a correct choice leads to fortune, safety, or blessing, while an unwise choice results in misfortune, danger, or curse. Still, we can all look back to at least one time in our lives when we watched the “best laid plans” go awry. Conversely, we can also remember times when we simply decided on a whim and our intuition turned out fine.

Frost’s poem certainly ends with those wonderful words “all the difference”; yet, isn’t it a *misreading* to presuppose that this “difference” is a matter of triumph rather than catastrophe? The untaken road in Frost’s poem is just that, an untaken path, and therefore the consequences of choosing it remain unknowable. Its residual effect becomes a choice denied. The nature of choosing is that once a choice is made and acted upon, the opposing possibilities left unchosen cannot be realized. Consequences always accompany choice.

Interestingly, Frost had no significant philosophical aim in mind when he stumbled on his literary crossroad. Almost humorously, the idea of “the road not taken” occurred to the poet somewhat at the expense of his confidant. According to Jackie Lay, writing in



By the River, Natasha Mylius

THE ROAD NOT TAKEN

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

—Robert Frost, *Mountain Interval*
(Henry Holt and Company, 1916)

The Atlantic (which first published the Frost poem in 1915), “Frost wrote the poem to tease his chronically indecisive friend, Edward Thomas, who misinterpreted the meaning and enlisted in the military shortly thereafter, only to be killed two years later in WWI.” The unfortunate fact of Thomas’ death, though not the original inspiration for the poem, may have since contributed to the seriousness often associated with it, a seriousness that Frost never denied. (Funny how great literature, with its enduring profundity, sometimes arises in its author and remains with its audiences by simple, offhand, or mundane observation.)

Choice matters and crossroads offer real dilemmas, often with moral consequences. One thinks of the legend of the famous blues guitarist Robert Johnson. Details of his life are limited and he remains, mysteriously, relatively unknown. How this young, otherwise indistinct guitar player became legendary is imbued with the theme of crossroads. The legend is recounted, and its import expounded, by Thomas Taylor in *Far Out Magazine*:

Through the mist drove Robert Johnson, bidding a solemn farewell to town and civility, “with a \$10 guitar strapped to his back, looking for a tune.” . . . At the crossroads where four dusty black roads met, Robert dropped to his knees summoning the might to meet with his maker. He stretched out his guitar

and up rose Lucifer with a bargain in tow. . . . For the cost of Robert’s soul, Beelzebub would bestow upon him musical greatness. He returned to the bluesy booze joints a year later like a champion prodigal son; a songsmith virtuoso, the crowned king of delta blues and the forefather of rock and roll . . . till the Devil took back what was rightfully his.

Though much of the actual biography of Robert Johnson is unknown, the legend persists and there is little doubt about his influence on American music, inspiring a host of successive musicians including Eric Clapton and the Rolling Stones. His lasting influence resounds in the songs he left us. His blues tunes resonate with heartache and longing, but they also are replete with acts of choosing. Choice and consequence are at the heart of blues music, and these themes are especially tragic when the choices are rendered as no-win situations, ill-advised acts, or inherently unjust.

One thinks of Cormac McCarthy’s chilling novel *The Crossing*, in which young protagonist Billy Parham, son of a southwestern rancher, traps a pregnant wolf. Rather than kill the wolf as his father demands and others advise, Parham determines to return the wolf to its presumed original habitat across the river in northern Mexico wilderness. His choice to allow the wolf to live not only violates his father’s command but also

initiates the young man into a series of misadventures that cost him dearly. Billy Parham misreads his options—but it is his ability to see his choices through to the end that severely tests his metal. These harrowing scenes force us to contemplate the worth of good deeds. *The Crossing*, like much of the tragedy in western literary tradition, challenges the assumption of good intention. Indeed, much of McCarthy’s staggering *Border Trilogy* (which includes *The Crossing*) involves good-willed young men making humane choices that, ironically or not, result *not* in blessing but in serious hardship—for themselves and others with whom they associate.

What is the cost of misreading crossroads? With Frost’s poem, no doubt many have been inspired to take a “less traveled” road, interpreting it as a matter of virtue over vice or honor over dishonor. However, few of us would say we’d sell our soul to the devil to gain what we most desire. We wink at Johnson’s dilemma, knowing that selling out is unlikely to be the better deal. Reading *The Crossing*, we are frustrated, wishing that choosing correctly were easier, that it did not come at such terrific cost.

McCarthy’s *Border* novels, the legend of Johnson’s dilemma, and even Frost’s simple but enduring poem articulate the moral predicament of proceeding in an uncertain existence. These narratives remind us of the absolute necessity to find courage, and hopefully solace,

within ourselves as we confront the unknown. The possibility of failure can be a profound deterrent to acting, to venturing into ambiguity. Embracing the potential cost of a choice (even a choice motivated by humane and gracious intention) is essential for accomplishment, for progress.

Every newly realized success is first presented as a choice, a crossroads. To be human is to face choice. Our truest sense of self is linked to *how* we choose, *what* we choose, and, perhaps most important, *why* we choose. The fact that we may misread the crossroads fills the human experience with tragedy and comedy. No matter the outcome, it will have made “all the difference.”

KEN HADA is a professor at East Central University. He is the author of nine poetry collections, including his latest, *Contour Feathers* (Turning Plow Press, 2021) and *Sunlight & Cedar* (Vacpoetry, 2020). kenhada.org

EXTRA! READ | THINK | TALK | LINK

- “Letters: How to Interpret a Poem,” March 25, 2018, *The Atlantic*. Readers share interpretations of “The Road Not Taken.” theatlantic.com
- “A Misunderstood Chestnut,” *Poetry Off the Shelf* podcast, Oct. 4, 2016. Lets listeners in on the inside joke behind “The Road Not Taken.” poetryfoundation.org
- “The Crossing.” Synopsis of the second book in Cormac McCarthy’s *Border Trilogy*. cormacmccarthy.com
- “Crossroads Myth,” J. Michael Butler, July 10, 2017, *Mississippi Encyclopedia*. The uncertain origins of the legendary intersection and the enduring association with Robert Johnson. mississippiencyclopedia.org



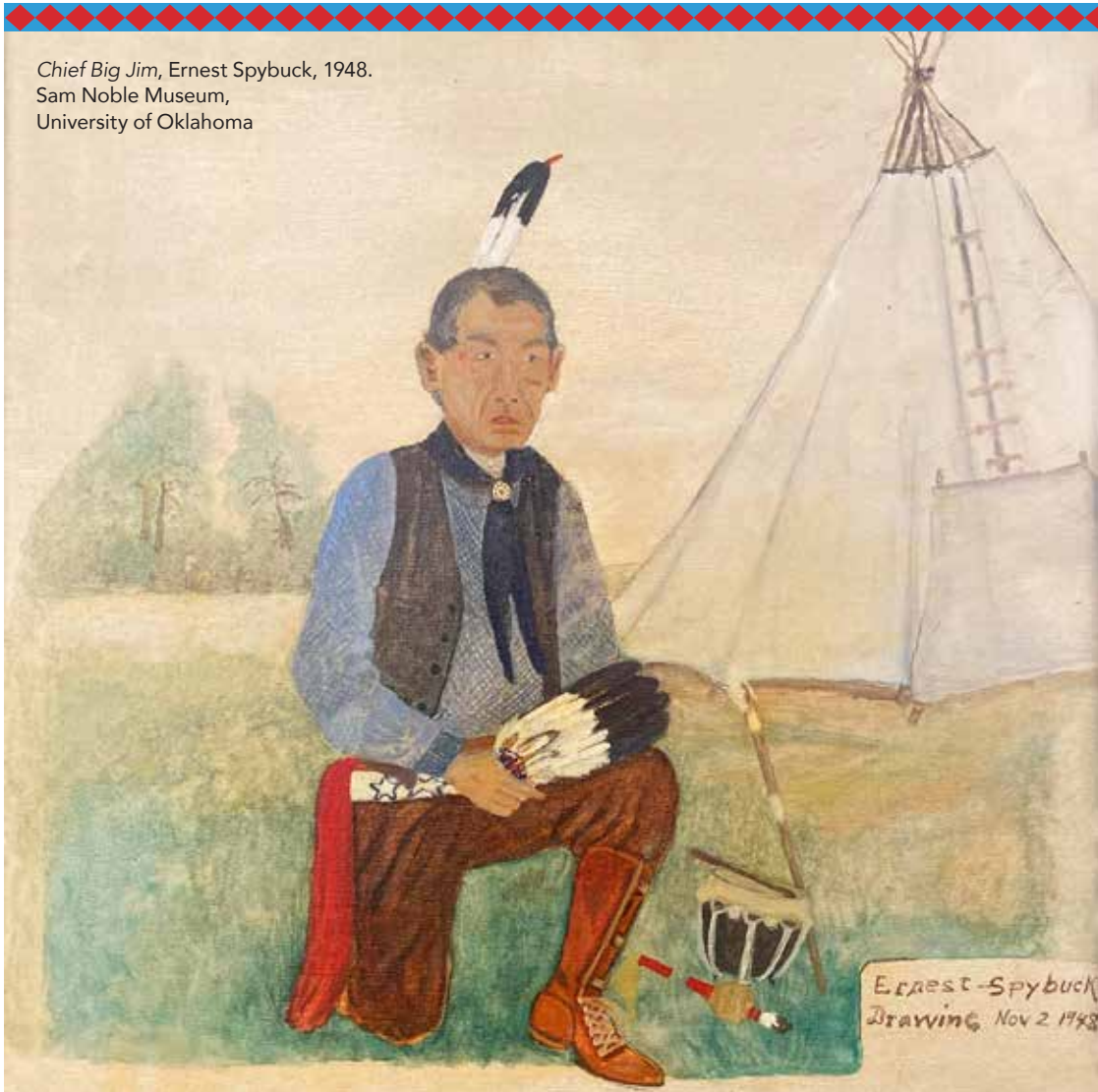
Robert Johnson,
Natasha Mylius



Song, Natasha Mylius

NATASHA MYLIUS paints famous faces and landmarks from around the world. With a love for using impressionism to reflect her worldview, she works in oil on canvas using a palette knife, building color in multiple layers to create a visceral experience. She was born and raised in Russia and is currently based in Austin, TX. See her work at: gallerynandm.com and her YouTube channel, Art Lounge by NM.

Chief Big Jim, Ernest Spybuck, 1948.
Sam Noble Museum,
University of Oklahoma



The Absentee Shawnees *and the True Story of Lake Thunderbird*

JOHN TRUDEN

A modern-day trail of tears



For many Oklahomans, Lake Thunderbird is familiar landscape. A manmade body of water in the center of the state, this reservoir and the surrounding forests have drawn naturalists, boaters, bicyclists, campers, fishermen, and swimmers since the 1960s. Yet few know the unsettling story behind the lake's construction, a tale of Native American persistence and forethought in the face of enormous loss and unresolved injustice.

In the eighteenth century, Shawnee tribal communities stretched across eastern North America, sharing a common culture and language, but acting independently of one another. Between the 1790s and the 1810s, Shawnee leaders such as Blue Jacket, Tenskwatawa, and Tecumseh battled an expansionist United States. Other Shawnee communities chose to move south and west to escape encroachment on their lands.

One Shawnee group, often called the Big Jim Band after its most prominent leader, resettled in Indian Territory (modern-day Oklahoma) after generations of migration and forced removal. Big Jim was born in the early 1830s to a Shawnee family living in Mexican Texas. In 1836, the Republic of Texas seceded from Mexico and began waging an increasingly violent war against Native peoples. Along with their friends and neighbors, Big Jim's family decided to move across the international border into Indian Territory, out of reach of these tribal and government skirmishes. American officials labeled Big Jim's people "Absentees" because they were not present with the larger gathering of Shawnee groups in Kansas for the Treaty of 1854, hence the augmented name, Absentee Shawnees.

Reflecting a longstanding tradition of Shawnee free thought and political independence, the Absentee Shawnees split into two distinct entities in 1875. Some of Big Jim's friends and relatives believed cooperation with an increasingly powerful United States was essential to their continued existence. They settled near modern Shawnee, Oklahoma, and became known as the White Turkey Band. Other Shawnees led by Big Jim moved to a neighboring Kickapoo village, about thirty miles north, farther away from settlers and government interference.

Although the Kickapoos and Shawnees lived peacefully in an area only marginally controlled by the United States, bureaucrats in Washington, D.C., sent soldiers to separate the tribes. In 1886, U.S. troops stormed and burned the Shawnee village before forcibly marching the inhabitants back to the location they left a decade earlier. This removal was a small part of a much broader U.S. effort to control Native Americans. In the late nineteenth century, the federal government mandated that the Office of Indian Affairs (OIA)—a bureaucracy with white employees assigned to every Native American nation in the United States—erase Native cultures. Backed by the U.S. Army, OIA agents suppressed Native religious and cultural practices, broke apart

Native territories into individual tracts to be sold to white settlers, and dissolved tribal governments. With these actions, agents hoped that Native peoples like the Absentee Shawnees would gradually assimilate with white settlers.

◆ A Tradition of Self Determination

After two years living near an OIA agent, Big Jim and his supporters could see these threatening changes on the horizon. The lush river valley where the Army had moved them was ideal for cattle ranching and farming, but the band left in 1888 rather than remain near American officials who could interfere in their ways of life. Big Jim's people journeyed east to a patch of dense forest and sandy hills along the Little River, about fifteen miles from modern Norman, Oklahoma. They did so because they valued their cultural traditions and long-term existence more than immediate prosperity. The inaccessibility of the surrounding forests shielded the Big Jim Band from the worst consequences of the OIA's efforts. To carry out restrictions, OIA agents needed to keep track of Native peoples. In a 1918 report, an OIA agent responsible for monitoring the Big Jim Band found them to be "in a rather remote territory . . . ten to fifteen miles from the railroad . . . [with] the wagon roads . . . in poor condition." Surveillance was so difficult that in the 1890s the OIA employed a spy to ascertain who lived in that stretch of the Little River.

Big Jim and his successor, Little Jim (Big Jim's son), steadfastly refused to cooperate with U.S. government attempts to forcibly school the band's children, restrict its religious ceremonies, and apportion its lands as allotments to be sold. Through at least the early 1950s, Shawnee elders held ceremonies publicly, so far away from the agency that the OIA could not stop them. Little Jim's council of elders remained intact despite federal attempts to dissolve Native governments across the United States. OIA representatives struggled to maintain any kind of regular contact with the Big Jim Band.



The OIA's allotment program, a national effort to break apart and give the majority of tribal lands to settlers, was extremely destructive. The dismantlement of Native American governments that might have protected tribal lands compounded that destruction. Isolated Native landowners in central Oklahoma consistently lost their titles to predatory lenders, unscrupulous contractors, and fraudulent investors, so rapidly and at such a volume that overwhelmed OIA personnel at Shawnee could not keep track of the transactions. When he resettled his neighbors and friends on the Little River, Big Jim believed that the poor quality of the land would discourage settlers and that the region's dense forests would protect their beliefs and traditions from the OIA, thus evading the consequences of allotment.

Little Jim proved his predecessor right. County records in Norman show the Big Jim Band lost almost no land through 1960. By design, they lived on land white settlers considered too unproductive to pursue. Shielded from the OIA by their location, Little Jim's government

prevented what few sales might have occurred. Until his death, Little Jim maintained that his people were independent and sovereign.

◆ Dollars and Displacement

Despite this careful planning and decades after formal Indian Removal policies, "progress" threatened to upend the Big Jim Band. In the 1950s, fifteen miles to the west, Norman's municipal administration, businesspeople, and boosters wanted to grow the city but struggled to provide fresh water to support a larger population. Creating an artificial lake seemed the best solution. Some sought to use the proposed reservoir to bring in tourism revenue. For a time, they hoped to turn the lake into a pathway to the Gulf of Mexico, much like the Port of Catoosa in eastern Oklahoma.

Between 1960 and 1962, the coalition convinced the Norman city government to annex the region east of town and the U.S. Congress to authorize funds for the creation of a reservoir, ignoring the reality that 30 families representing 200 people

of the Big Jim Band sat squarely in the path of these plans and would be displaced. Absentee Shawnee landowners held 3,279 of 4,000 acres slated to create Lake Thunderbird and two state parks on the shoreline. City leaders argued that this artificial lake was key to future growth, but Little Jim's wife, Ella, told the *The Daily Oklahoman* in June 1962, "It looks as though [they're] trying to take the last remaining land from the Indians."

From 1963 into late 1964, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, responsible for constructing reservoirs like Lake Thunderbird, waged a campaign to remove Big Jim Band landowners by buying them out or condemning their lands in court. Most removal contracts stipulated landowners could remain on the property until late 1963 to harvest their last crop. Even before Reclamation negotiators began offering removal contracts, tribe members knew the buyout price of roughly \$50 an acre would not be enough to buy new lands. In March 1962, *The Daily Oklahoman* noted that the value of neighboring properties was \$350 an acre.



IMAGES, FROM FAR LEFT: *Fish Dance*, *Chicken Dance*, *Procession Before War Dance*, *Leader Dance* by Ernest Spybuck (1883-1949). Commissioned in 1910 by anthropologist Mark Raymond Harrington (1882-1971), Museum of the American Indian staff member, during fieldwork sponsored by George Heye. Images pp. 14-16 courtesy Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian.

Little Jim's death left the Big Jim Band without a leader and the now renamed Bureau of Indian Affairs provided only minimal legal protections. Few landowners could withstand the federal pressure to sell; those who tried to negotiate found themselves in court. Lawrence Snake, one of many litigants in a 1963 U.S. District Court case, complained that even the \$60 an acre offered for his property interests was far too low to buy equivalent acreage. At an average of \$50 an acre for 3,279 acres (versus nearby land worth \$350 an acre), Absentee Shawnee landowners received just under \$164,000, only fourteen percent of their land's market value of one million dollars. With so little money, displaced Absentee Shawnees moved in with relatives; those who lived in faraway places such as Los Angeles lost lands that connected them to friends and family, severing important ties that held the Big Jim Band together.

◆ Folly Most Foul

With the opening of Lake Thunderbird State Park in 1965, land

values six miles from the shoreline shot up as high as \$1,750 an acre. State officials speculated about the construction of a hotel and airport. These fevered dreams spiraled into nightmare as the lake quickly became a slow-moving disaster of overpopulation, crime, and pollution. The lake became too popular. By 1972, visitors to Lake Thunderbird totaled 2.3 million annually, overwhelming the park's staff of eleven employees and two park rangers. On peak weekends, 25,000 people camped at the park.

In 1973, a Norman municipal committee investigating environmental damage at the lake found that in one summer season visitors made "refuse equivalent to that generated by a city of 97,000 people." Crimes such as petty theft, trespassing, and property destruction soared. Initially, swimming was banned to maintain the drinking quality of the water. State administrators (who thought they could stop visitors from swimming on the honor system) did not have the foresight or manpower to build sanitation facilities, monitor boaters to stop them from running

over swimmers, or prevent motorists from driving up to the shoreline where vehicle exhaust drained into the water. By the early 1970s, the lake was highly polluted.

◆ From Tears, Triumph

As this nightmare was playing out, the Absentee Shawnee Tribe experienced a renewal brought about by decades of patient persistence and careful forethought. After establishing a headquarters in Shawnee, Oklahoma, in 1964, the Absentee Shawnee government, including the Big Jim and White Turkey Bands, expanded beyond a few legislators to a multifaceted Native American state. In 1973, the Absentee Shawnee Tribe bought thirty-five acres east of Lake Thunderbird and used that property to build housing and bring employment and healthcare services to tribal members. Improvements continued and the *Shawnee Sun* (May 3, 2000) reported that the tribal government spent one million dollars on a new community building. After decades of rebuilding, the Absentee Shawnees are experiencing a much-deserved resurgence.

Shawnee Home Life About 1890,
Ernest Spybuck

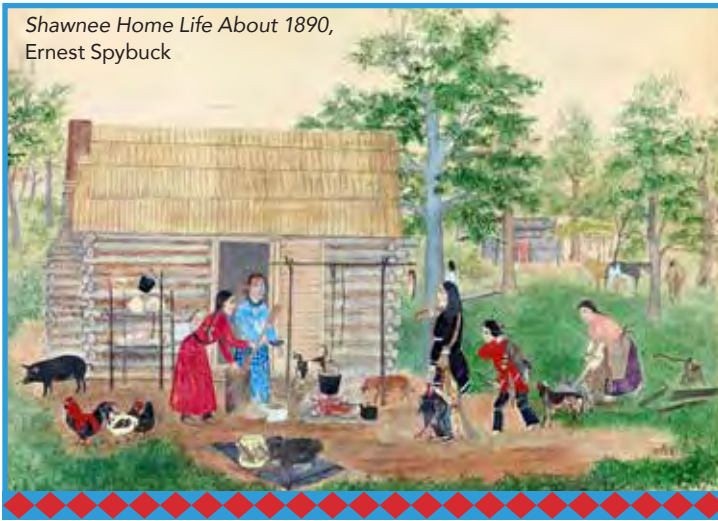


Photo by Mark Raymond Harrington, 1910



ERNEST SPYBUCK Artist of the Absentee Shawnees

Ernest Spybuck (ca.1882-1949), sometimes identified as “Earnest” in his signatures, was born near present-day Tecumseh, Oklahoma, as a tribal member of the White Turkey Band of the Absentee Shawnees. As a young boy he “would sit all day long and draw or paint,” according to Harriet Patrick Gilstrap, his teacher at Shawnee Mission School. He married and started a farm and family but continued to paint. His art was known in the community, and one piece was sent to the 1907 Jamestown Exposition in Virginia.

When anthropologist M.R. Harrington arrived a few years later to study local tribes, Spybuck showed him some of his art. The ranching scenes of cowboys and cattle impressed Harrington. Spybuck had no formal art training but had developed a unique style, working primarily in watercolor and pencil. To Harrington, the most compelling characteristic was Spybuck’s attention to accurate detail—a necessity for recording anthropological fieldwork.

Harrington commissioned Spybuck to document ceremonies, dances, games, and other aspects of daily life among the Absentee Shawnees and neighboring tribes. Today, those paintings are in museums across the country and are an important record of people, place, and time. They demonstrate early Oklahoma’s cultural intersections and the diversity of Native communities.

Spybuck depicted these communities not as outsiders imagined them to be, but how they were. A close look at his paintings is an almost auditory experience: conversations between women, feather dance bustles rustling, dogs barking and children playing. These were not a “vanishing” people as many believed, frozen in sepia-toned stoicism—they were vibrant and resilient: Laughing. Talking. Dancing. Living.

Still, much remains unresolved. Some Shawnee family cemeteries were never disinterred and remain at the bottom of Lake Thunderbird. No municipal, state, or federal agencies have apologized or offered market-value compensation. In fact, the City of Norman has yet to formally acknowledge the Big Jim Band’s presence, even though the administration has counted them as city residents for sixty years.

Most people living in Norman, Del City, and Midwest City do not know their water comes from a twentieth-century trail of tears. The stories and memories hidden beneath Lake Thunderbird’s murky waters will forever be part of Absentee Shawnee history. But it is more: The outcome is Oklahoma history. It is *our* history.

JOHN TRUDEN is a doctoral candidate at the University of Oklahoma and has published articles in journals such as *Western Historical Quarterly* and the *Online Journal of Rural Research and Policy*. He does not represent the Absentee Shawnee Tribe. In 2019, he interned with the tribe’s Cultural Preservation Office and discovered that the destructive impact of the creation of Lake Thunderbird was neither widely known outside of Shawnee communities nor well documented. Post-internship, he has independently researched the events to add to the historical record. Upon graduation, Truden aspires to continue research and teaching at a tribal college.

EXTRA! READ | THINK | TALK | LINK

- “Norman Project,” 1962-1973, Carl Albert Center Congressional and Political Collections. Correspondence and newspaper clippings related to the creation of Lake Thunderbird. bit.ly/3gjeWHI
- “Shawnee Indian History Class and History of the Absentee Shawnees,” Julia Jordan, Spring 1969. Overview of Shawnee history. bit.ly/3AYcv4X
- Clifton Blanchard interview, April 15, 1968. Oral history transcript, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma Libraries. Origins of the Shawnees’ distrust of white people. bit.ly/3mjOgtX
- Webb Little Jim interview, February 2, 1969. Oral history transcript, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma Libraries. Life story and history of the Absentee Shawnees. bit.ly/3kee1sT
- *Civilization: As Told to Florence Drake by Thomas Wildcat Alford* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1936). Alford’s first-person account of his family history and that of the Absentee Shawnees. bit.ly/3j0S0y



The Old Santa Fe Trail, John Young-Hunter, ca. 1919. National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City. 2021.17. Image courtesy Heritage Auctions, HA.com

TRAILS of OKLAHOMA

Before we were a state, we were a territory—
and a hub for international crossroads.

MICHAEL R. GRAUER

Human beings have traveled across Oklahoma, establishing routes north to south, east to west, northeast to southwest and vice versa for millennia. Clovis and Folsom peoples occupied western Oklahoma 10,000-12,000 years ago, creating trails and trade between cultures. Caddoan societies participated in complex trade networks (between 800 and 1400 C.E.) that stretched to the Mississippi Valley and the

southwestern United States. Antelope Creek peoples traded with Puebloan peoples in New Mexico on routes formed before 1400. Subsequent generations hunted, drove livestock, and carried goods across Oklahoma, searching for “opportunity” and new vistas. From contact, conflict, and connection, crossroads formed, intersecting people and place and forever changing the territory that is now a bustling state.



The Herd Quitter, Charles Marion Russell, 1897. Montana Historical Society [PD] Wikimedia

CATTLE TRAILS

To meet the demand for beef after the Civil War and to avoid inflated freight charges for hauling cattle to midwest and eastern states, Texas cattlemen walked their cattle north through today's Oklahoma to railheads in Missouri and later in Kansas. This industry changed the American diet and helped drive the American Industrial Revolution.

SHAWNEE TRAIL: In the first recorded large cattle drive, Edward Piper trailed 1,000 head of Texas cattle north to Ohio through Indian Territory in 1846. The trail crossed the Canadian and Arkansas Rivers and passed through the Choctaw and Cherokee Nations, the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, and near the Sac and Fox Agency. North of Fort Gibson

(near present-day Tulsa), it split into different branches toward Missouri and Kansas. The Shawnee Trail may take its name from a Shawnee Indian village or the Shawnee Hills in northwestern Pittsburg County, northwest of McAlester. The route followed a hunting and raiding trail long traveled by American Indians. U.S. Army Captain Randolph B. Marcy may have been the first to describe the Shawnee Trail in print in 1850.

CHISHOLM TRAIL: We call it the "Chisholm Trail" today, but the cowboys who used it generally referred to specific sections: the Eastern Trail in Texas, the Abilene Cattle Trail in Indian Territory, and the Abilene or Texas Cattle Trail that ran north of the Cimarron River. They pushed their cattle from a trading post and along a wagon road

named for Jesse Chisholm. Born of Scottish and Cherokee parents, Chisholm (ca. 1805-1868) was multilingual and a critical mediator between the Cherokee Nation, the Republic of Texas, the United States, and western Oklahoma nations. He established trading posts near Asher and Council Grove.

Drovers—the men hired to push cattle safely north to Kansas—averaged 15-25 years old. Roughly 75% were white; the remaining 25% were either African American, Hispanic, or Native American. Drovers faced the greatest challenges while attempting to ford rivers with their herds of cattle and horses. Quicksand, flash floods, and spooked livestock tested these drovers, most of whom could not swim. Far more died by drowning or stampedes than at the hands of another person. They

“The ordinary supplies for each man’s consumption during the journey [from Missouri to Santa Fe], are about fifty pounds of flour, as many more of bacon, ten of coffee and twenty of sugar, and a little salt. Beans, crackers, and trifles of that description, are comfortable appendages, but being looked upon as *dispensable* luxuries, are seldom to be found in any of the stores on the road. The buffalo is chiefly depended upon for fresh meat, and great is the joy of the traveler when that noble animal first appears in sight.”

—Josiah A. Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, Vol. I, 1844

tolerated poor food, bad water, lack of sleep, unceasing work, and sorry wages on the trail.

WESTERN TRAIL: During the 1850s, when cattlemen drove herds from Texas to Illinois, domesticated cattle in the Midwest began to die from an unknown source. “Texas fever” carried by Texas cattle was blamed and most midwestern states passed quarantine laws against Texas cattle entering by foot; they could be brought by train if they had been wintered north of Oklahoma. These quarantines slowly crept westward to include Missouri and eastern Kansas. Abilene, Kansas, the first cattle town, stayed just ahead of the so-called “dead line,” but ultimately the quarantine included Abilene and kept moving west. The U.S. Department of Agriculture determined in 1893 that ticks on longhorns were the source of “Texas Fever.”

Cattle quarantine laws in Kansas forced routes to northern markets and ranges westward. In March 1874, Captain John T. Lytle blazed a new cattle trail from the Bandera, Texas, area to the Red Cloud Indian Agency in western Nebraska. Lytle and his 3,500 steers crossed the Red River south of Altus, Oklahoma, and continued north through western Oklahoma. This new Western Trail, as it came to be known, stretched from south Texas all the

way to Alberta, Canada, and was well traveled from 1874 to the 1890s. Texas drovers moved more cattle up the Western Trail than all other cattle trails combined.

TRADE & TRANSPORT

Trails are the original information superhighways. Before railroads and interstates, trails made the exchange of ideas, cultures, and commercial goods possible, connecting people not only to places and opportunities, but to each other.

SANTA FE TRAIL: Clipping the Oklahoma Panhandle is the southern branch of one of the most famous trails in American history. The Santa Fe Trail was the first international road for commerce and immigration in U.S. history. Although Hispano traders had been traveling east to St. Louis and on to the eastern United States since the 1780s, the arrival of William Becknell in Santa Fe from Missouri in the fall of 1821 is usually recorded as the “opening” of the trail. Established in 1822, the southern branch known as the “Dry Route” or “Cimarron Cutoff,” crossed west of Boise City. Although a shorter and better option for wagons, it carried significant risks. The fifty-mile waterless stretch between the Arkansas River and the Cimarron River was called the *jornada del muerto*

(day of death). The Trail crossed the Cimarron River at Willowbar Crossing and continued southwest to Cold Springs, where travelers carved their names and messages into the sandstone ledges at Autograph Rock, now on private land.



The Western Trail System (1874-1897), © 2010, Gary & Margaret Kraisinger



Miners in the Sierras, Charles Christian Nahl and Frederick August Wenderoth, c. 1851-1852. Smithsonian American Art Museum [PD] Wikimedia. BOTTOM LEFT: *The Indian of the Plains as He Was*, Charles M. Russell, c. 1899. Library of Congress. BOTTOM RIGHT: *The Western Trail*, H. D. Bugbee, c. 1948. Courtesy of Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, TX

FORT SMITH-SANTA FE ROAD: In 1839, well-known Santa Fe Trail trader and author of *the* book on the Trail, *Commerce of the Prairies*, Josiah Gregg determined to “abandon the regular route from Missouri for one wholly untried, from the borders of Arkansas.” In April 1839 his wagon train set out from Van Buren, Arkansas, west across Indian Territory, through the Texas Panhandle, and on to Santa Fe. He returned the following year with a



Comanche guide named Manuel and blazed the Fort Smith-Santa Fe Road along the “south side of the Canadian River.” They traveled “a distance of four hundred miles over an entirely new country” back to Van Buren. That “new country” would become Oklahoma.

TEXAS ROAD: An 1830s emigrant trail called the Texas Road brought northern pioneers to Texas through eastern Indian Territory, primarily through the Cherokee, Choctaw, and Chickasaw Nations to Rock Bluff Crossing near Preston, Texas, on the Red River. After Texas statehood in 1845 emigrant traffic increased, and with the discovery of gold in California, the Texas Road became part of the route to the gold fields. The

Butterfield Overland Mail Company also used part of the Texas Road and a ferry operated by Chickasaw citizen Benjamin Colbert.

After the Texas Revolution, the new Republic of Texas had only one real asset: land. When Texas became a state in 1845, it retained all its public lands. Before the Homestead Act of 1862, land speculators encouraged Texas-bound immigrants to travel from the Midwest down the Texas Road. The Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railway (MKT or Katy Line) and the Jefferson Highway of the early twentieth century overlapped or paralleled parts of the Texas Road.

CHEROKEE TRAIL: In 1849 the Cherokee Trail was blazed from Salina, Oklahoma, to the West

Coast—a lengthy trek through Kansas, Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, Idaho, and Nevada. Before the Civil War, it was a major route to northern California. The trail was also a main stage road from Denver, Colorado, to the Overland Trail and to the Montana gold fields in the late 1860s. Familiar with placer mining in their ancestral Southeastern homelands, Cherokees joined the 1849 Gold Rush. By late spring of 1850, Cherokee leaders became alarmed at the exodus to the California gold fields. *The Cherokee Advocate* published articles on California’s lawlessness and lack of government and on June 10, 1850, lamented the loss of tribal members lured by fortune seeking:

In this universal rising his majesty *tul-lo-ni-ca* [Cherokee for “yellow”] has driven numerous Cherokees into the chase, and it is to them too, gold for riches at once, and through the journey of life repose in golden dreams.

BUTTERFIELD MAIL ROUTE: In 1857, Congress authorized Aaron Brown, the U.S. Postmaster General, to contract for an overland mail route from the Mississippi River to the West Coast. Until then ships and freighters carried mail across the Gulf of Mexico, the Isthmus of Panama, and to the Pacific before reaching California. Proposed land routes followed emigrant trails across the Great Plains and over the Rockies where winter weather delays were common. The Butterfield Overland Mail Company instead proposed a 2,800-mile route across the Southwest. Brown awarded the company a six-year contract at \$600,000 per year. John Butterfield negotiated

with the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations to cross from the Choctaw capital at Scullyville to Boggy Depot and then south to the Red River crossing at Colbert’s Ferry (established by Benjamin Colbert, as before noted, along the Texas Road).

WATERWAYS

The number of rivers across Oklahoma seemed ideal for trade and transportation as well as immigration. Unfortunately, the shallowness of these rivers—or the fact that many ran dry during summers—did not allow for water travel, so foot, horseback, and animal-drawn vehicles remained the travel standards through most of the nineteenth century.

ARKANSAS & RED RIVERS: French explorer René Robert Cavelier, Sieur de la Salle, claimed Louisiana Territory (which included present-day Oklahoma) for France in 1682. Seeking trading possibilities in 1719, Jean-Baptiste Bénard de la Harpe, voyaged up the Red River, through eastern Oklahoma, and down the Arkansas. Claude-Charles du Tisé headed into Oklahoma from the north at about the same time to explore Osage territory for a trade route with Spanish settlements on the Rio Grande. Traders such as de la Harpe and du Tisé set up trading posts, including one at the site of a Pani (Caddo) Indian village, called Fernandina or Ferdinandina, that some claim was Oklahoma’s first white settlement.

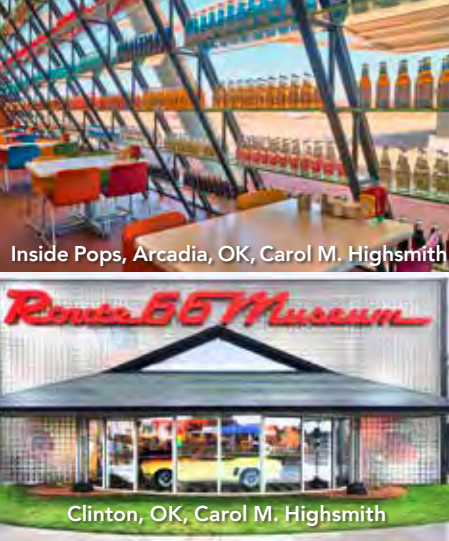
CANADIAN RIVER: French Canadian brothers Paul and Pierre Mallet(t) traveled to Santa Fe in 1739, then returned to New Orleans

along the Canadian and Arkansas rivers. The Louisiana governor sent André Fabry (Fabre) de la Bruyere to follow the Canadian River to Santa Fe, but low water forced a halt to the mission. France ceded part of Louisiana, including Oklahoma, to Spain by the Treaty of Paris in 1763. France regained Louisiana Territory in 1800 only to sell it to the United States in 1803. The Canadian was likely named using the Spanish word *cañada* (canyon or ravine). Some scholars believe *cañada* may refer to “sheepway” or “droveway” due to the luxuriant grasses growing in the Canadian River bottoms on which Hispano *pastores* from eastern New Mexico grazed their sheep herds into western Oklahoma and back.

NEOSHO & VERDIGRIS RIVERS: The brothers Auguste and Jean-Pierre Chouteau, established fur traders in St. Louis, moved into the Three Forks Area, north of present-day Muskogee, around 1802. Jean-Pierre oversaw trading at the site known as Saline (now Salina). His son, Auguste-Pierre, ran the trading post on the Neosho (Grand) River and built a larger post on the Verdigris River. By the time of his death in 1838, his trade network included posts in today’s central and southwestern Oklahoma.

GRAUER | cont. p. 41





Tulsa Route 66 sign, 2017, Gorup de Besanez

CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF THE MOTHER ROAD



ROUTE 66 IS ONE OF THE MOST ICONIC CROSSROADS IN AMERICAN HISTORY.

In concert with the five other states that share segments of the road, Oklahoma will celebrate the centennial of the “Mother Road” in 2026. Leading the statewide charge is the Route 66 Centennial Commission, established to plan, coordinate, and implement associated activities and events. Lieutenant Governor Matt Pinnell is Chair of the Centennial Commission. In this conversation with OH Executive Director Caroline Lowery, he discusses the importance of the Mother Road, the economic impact on our state, and Commission plans for the celebration ahead.

A CONVERSATION WITH LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR MATT PINNELL

OKLAHOMA HUMANITIES: You wear many hats as Lieutenant Governor, including serving on multiple boards and commissions and presiding as President of the Oklahoma State Senate and as State Secretary of Tourism, Wildlife, and Heritage. What are the cultural aspects of your job?

MATT PINNELL: As Secretary of Tourism, Wildlife, and Heritage, I oversee the Department of Tourism and Recreation and the state’s efforts to promote tourism, which is Oklahoma’s third largest industry. No state can match the heritage and history of our state. From Native America to Route 66, to the Chisholm Trail and beyond, it’s a remarkable fabric of history and heritage that I get to share with the world.

You’re an enthusiastic advocate for cultural tourism and its impact on our state. What initially drew you to travel, tourism, and the arts and culture sector?

I was raised in Oklahoma and have always loved traveling around our state. Since my wife and I had our four children, I can relate to families that are looking for something they can do on a tank of gas. There is so much history and culture right here. I love highlighting those opportunities to Oklahomans while also promoting our state to tourists from across the country and around the world. The

longest stretch of Route 66 runs across Oklahoma, and with the state’s Native American history and beautiful landscapes of mountains, meadows, lakes, and state parks, we have the authentic American experience that tourists look for.

How has the COVID pandemic affected Oklahoma’s tourism sector?

COVID restrictions have had global impact on the tourism industry. In Oklahoma, the Department of Tourism (TravelOK) did a great job making tactical adjustments that helped our tourism industry thrive. Typically, we focus on out-of-state advertising to encourage tourism from other states. TravelOK switched gears to focus marketing to our own state citizens, reminding Oklahomans of close-to-home opportunities to practice social distancing in our great outdoors. The #OKHereWeGo campaign brought an estimated \$17.3 million in lodging revenue alone. TravelOK has also been promoting the Oklahoma Fishing Trail and Road Trip campaigns, which have generated over \$14.4 million. From hiking and boating to camping and fishing, Oklahomans are taking advantage of the beautiful natural environment our state has to offer. Tourism generated \$9.7 billion in revenue that benefitted the whole state.



Welcome mural on historic U.S. 66, Carol M. Highsmith, 2020. Highsmith photos courtesy Library of Congress



"Myrtle," National Route 66 Museum, Elk City, OK, Carol M. Highsmith

In 2026, U.S. Highway 66 will celebrate 100 years as the "Mother Road." As Chairman of the Oklahoma Route 66 Centennial Commission, what are the key projects and outcomes the commission hopes to accomplish? What is the "big picture" for celebration activities?

We're developing that project list now. The Commission's vision is not just a one-day event, but an investment for years, leading up to and beyond 2026. It's a unique opportunity to pull together the private and public assets that make Route 66 an iconic destination. Our focus is on promoting economic development, historic preservation, and tourism marketing. Bringing more tourists to Oklahoma means more revenue for local businesses. Last year, 2.8 million out-of-state visitors travelled Oklahoma's section of the Mother Road. The Commission is taking advantage of the historic buildings, attractions, and roadbed the highway has to offer and working with dedicated community leaders to make this centennial impactful for our state. We hope to collect, preserve, and share the amazing history and culture of Route 66. People travel from all over the globe to see what some Oklahomans don't realize is right outside their door.

Your family enjoys traveling the state and having local adventures. What are some of your top Oklahoma Route 66 stops?

There are so many great places. One of our favorites is the Oklahoma Route 66 Museum in Clinton. It's so well done. This museum takes guests through a timeline of the history of Route 66. Through artifacts, signs, cars, and memorabilia, it tells the story of the Mother Road in an immersive way. We also love to visit Pops in Arcadia. This ultra-modern addition to Route 66 has delicious food, a fun outdoor area, and over 650 kinds of soda. My family loves trying different soda flavors each time we visit. You don't have to leave Oklahoma to have a fun-filled family experience.

What is the importance of Route 66 to our state, both culturally and historically?

There's a reason why there are so many Route 66 references in music, film, and literature—the highway is integral to Oklahoma and represents the hope and promise of the American Dream. The fabric of Route 66 is culturally embedded in our state. During its glory days in the late 1940s through the 1950s, Route 66 became the perfect destination for quirky roadside attractions and fun vacations. As the phenomenon of the family vacation grew, so did the popularity of Route 66. This highway gave many

small Oklahoma towns their first access to a major road, which brought economic prosperity. Though the popularity of the Mother Road waned through the 1970s and 1980s, it was too ingrained in American culture to fade away. The comeback of this iconic road over the last fifteen years or so has brought tourists from around the globe to Oklahoma. There is something special and uniquely American about "getting your kicks on Route 66" that tourists can't get enough of. The Centennial Commission is working hard to ensure that this road will remain an economic and cultural staple of our state for many years to come.

MATT PINNELL was elected as the 17th Lieutenant Governor of the State of Oklahoma on November 6, 2018. Among his many roles as Lieutenant Governor, he oversees the Oklahoma Department of Tourism and Recreation to promote tourism, the third largest industry in Oklahoma. Pinnell led the successful rebranding of the State of Oklahoma, a component of the overall effort to retain and recruit more jobs to the state. Pinnell currently serves on the Department of Commerce executive committee focusing on small business growth, entrepreneurship, and workforce development. Pinnell is a graduate of Oral Roberts University with a degree in advertising.



TISHOMINGO

Johnston County Library
116 W. Main Street | (580) 371-3006
September 11, 2021 – October 23, 2021



Main Street, Tishomingo, by Rudy Ellis

INTERSECTIONS: As the Chickasaw Nation’s historical capital, Tishomingo was originally known as Tishomingo City, located along the road from Fort Washita to Fort Arbuckle. Founded in 1856, the township was named for Chickasaw Chief Tishomingo, who died on the Trail of Tears when Chickasaws were forced to move west from Mississippi. Upon arrival in Indian Territory, they leased land in the western half of the Choctaw Nation. It was not until 1856 that the U.S. Senate approved a formal separation treaty between the two nations. Following the Civil War, cattle ranchers, immigrants, and the railroad dramatically impacted the Chickasaw economy. The area was eventually joined with Oklahoma Territory at statehood.

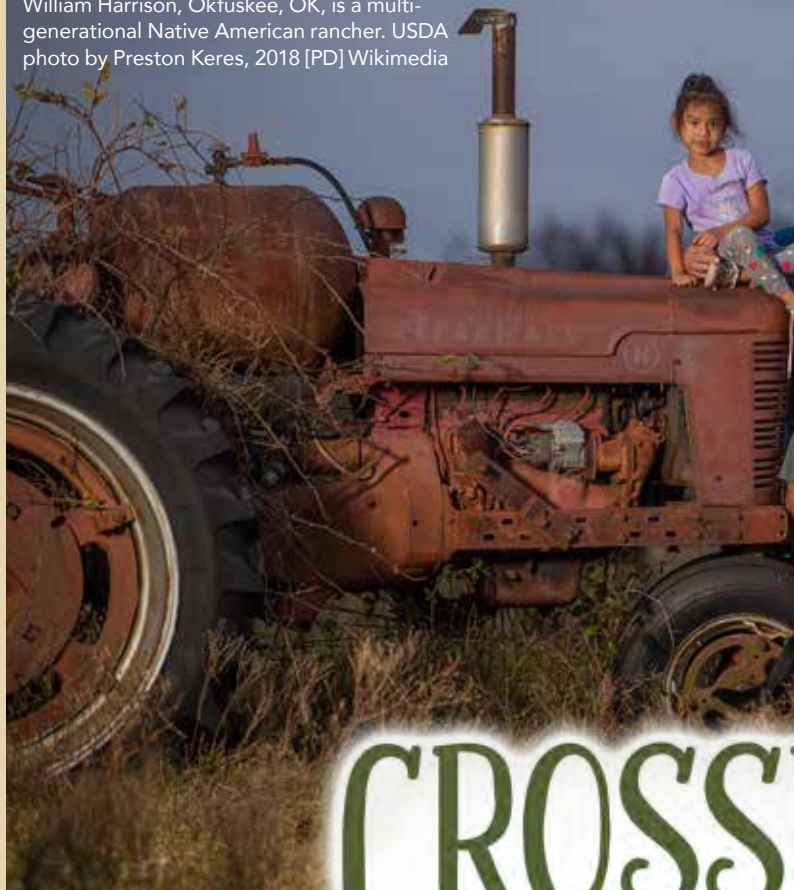
CHOOSE YOUR ADVENTURE: On the corner of Main Street, Johnston County Library connects residents with learning opportunities—from book clubs to classes to traveling exhibitions. Explore the Chickasaw Nation’s past and present on downtown’s Capitol Square. Start at the Council House Museum to see the original 1856 log Council House and experience one of the largest collections of Chickasaw art and artifacts. Continue the history lesson next door at the Chickasaw National Capitol Building. Both offer free admission. For outdoor adventure, spend time in the Tishomingo National Wildlife Refuge, a birders paradise. For trout fishing, try the Blue River.

FORKS IN THE ROAD: Great food and a great time are on tap at Blake Shelton’s Ole Red, where the restaurant teases, “Just show up—you’re gonna love what happens next.” Bait, burgers, and all-day breakfast have lured trout fishermen for thirty years at Scotty’s Blue River One Stop. Gonzalez Mexican Restaurant will satisfy with enchiladas, carne asada, and churros. Want to sip and socialize? Try the Mulberry Wine Bar with a large selection of wine, beer, and made-in-Oklahoma products.



Tishomingo National Fish Hatchery,
by Robert H. Pos, USFWS

William Harrison, Okfuskee, OK, is a multi-generational Native American rancher. USDA photo by Preston Keres, 2018 [PD] Wikimedia



CROSSROADS
CHANGE
America

To the uninitiated, small towns might seem static and quiet, but don’t let the single stoplight fool you. They are complex intersections where people and ideas converge and evolve. Oklahoma Humanities (OH) partners with the Smithsonian Institution’s *Museum on Main Street* (MoMS) program to present an exhibition that explores this unique history—*Crossroads: Change in Rural America*. Traveling to six sites across the state, the exhibit examines identity, land, community, persistence, and managing change.

Americans come together at the crossroads. They invest in places and build their futures where their paths cross. Throughout the nineteenth century, most Americans lived in rural areas. They established their lives around the work of harvesting what the land could produce—the food, fuel, fiber, ores, and minerals crucial to a growing nation. They built communities at rural crossroads, small towns that became centers of



ROADS IN RURAL America

commerce, politics, and culture. For some, the crossroads affirmed a new life in a new place. For others, the crossroads meant hard work and hard times.

Early in the twentieth century, however, growing urban populations shifted economic investment and political influence from the counties to the cities. Since then, the pace of rural change has accelerated. In 1900, approximately sixty percent of Americans lived in rural areas. By 2010, it had dropped to seventeen percent.

Despite the massive economic and demographic changes, America's small towns continue to be creative, focusing on new opportunities for growth and development. They face challenges with conviction. Some communities have declined, but most survive.

Don't miss the story of these resilient people and places. Read more about our host sites in the sidebars here and the pages that follow.

(Adapted from *Crossroads* exhibit materials)



FORT GIBSON

Fort Gibson Historic Site
907 N. Garrison Ave. | (918) 478-4088
October 30, 2021 – December 11, 2021



Fort Gibson Dam by Dustin Moore (CC BY-2.0/Flickr)

INTERSECTIONS: Established in 1824, Fort Gibson is Oklahoma's oldest fort. Fort Gibson and the surrounding area served as a terminus for Cherokee and Muscogee Creek citizens forced from their southeastern homelands on the Trail of Tears. In 1857, the federal government abandoned the military post and returned the property to the Cherokee Nation. After the Civil War, throughout the 1870s and 1880s, the 10th Cavalry occupied the post, maintaining order, providing protection to newly established Freedmen, and removing non-Native intruders. Fort Gibson was officially incorporated as a town in 1898.

CHOOSE YOUR ADVENTURE: For history lovers, Fort Gibson Historic Site is a must-see. Did you know Washington Irving, author of *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, traveled through the area in 1832? Tour the twelve historic buildings and the National Cemetery and see the final resting place of soldiers from every war since 1812. Nearby is the Cherokee National Citizen's Cemetery where you'll find both prominent and infamous individuals, including the outlaw Cherokee Bill. Nature lovers, don't despair: Fort Gibson Lake and Sequoyah State Park are ideal for fishing, swimming, boating, hiking, golfing, and horseback riding.

FORKS IN THE ROAD: Need a drink for the road or a walk around town? Drop by the AB Coffee House for hot and iced options. For lunch, head to La Isla Mexican Grill for flautas, tamales, or chile rellenos; or Fajita Rita's for the molcajete, chimichangas, salads, and buffet. Don't forget extra napkins if you land at Sizzlin' Bones BBQ Commissary—if it's not messy, it's not BBQ. For sandwiches, soup, and salads, pop into the Fort Gibson Bakery and Café, but save room for dessert. Three words: German chocolate cupcakes.



Activities at safety expo,
Fort Gibson project office,
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers



NOWATA

Nowata Museum
136 S. Oak St. | (918) 273-1191
December 18, 2021 – January 29, 2022



Nowata County Courthouse, by Stugarrett/Wikimedia

INTERSECTIONS: Native peoples have occupied north-eastern Oklahoma for more than 3,500 years. Hunter-gatherers established seasonal camps before settling more permanently in small homes approximately 2,700 ago. The big and small game that attracted them ultimately drew early trappers and traders centuries later. Nowata, originally a small trading post, quickly grew when the Kansas and Arkansas Railway extended through the community. One of several railroad lines established across Indian Territory in the 1880s and 1890s, it made travel faster, bringing more people to, and through, the territories.

CHOOSE YOUR ADVENTURE: The Nowata Museum has collected and shared county history since 1969, with indoor and outdoor exhibitions that trace daily life. Nashville comes to Nowata at the Country Jubilee, a music show with a Grand Ole Opry feel. Tap your feet to country, bluegrass, and Western swing or enjoy stand-up comedy. Visit the Glass Mansion, home of early oil pioneer J. Wood Glass, a house largely unchanged since the early 1900s. More than 3,000 bowling balls are transformed into yard art at Mr. Barbee’s. Head to Oolagah Lake for mountain biking, sailing, fishing, hiking, or horseback riding—but BYOH: bring your own horse.

FORKS IN THE ROAD: Find your perfect caffeine kick at Wise Beans Coffee. See a train whistle past while you eat breakfast, lunch, or dinner at the local favorite Nowata Depot Café. Guns & Gals, equally unique, serves up soup and salad in a gun shop. El Tapatio delivers Mexican staples in a fun atmosphere. Finally, step back in time at SLO Acres Soda Fountain for a chili dog and shake or a scoop of your favorite ice cream. Try the hometown flavor: Nowata pothole.



Nowata Historical Society and Museum



OKLAHOMA CROSSROADS

The Heart of Rural America JASON HARRIS

As a sense of place, “rural” can be difficult to define. Is it the family farm in western Oklahoma? The tiny community along the winding roads in southeastern Oklahoma? Or the wide-open fields of the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve in northern Oklahoma? No matter the location, small communities across our state face the challenges of maintaining services, improving the quality of life for residents, and finding ways to grow amid cycles of boom and bust and younger generations leaving for broader opportunities in the city. Despite these challenges, rural landscapes and community life are inherent to American and Oklahoman identity.

From our early colonial roots through the end of the nineteenth century, expansion of the “frontier” led to a uniquely American identity based on economic prosperity, personal liberty, and equality. Popular culture reinforced this nostalgic view of rural America as bustling small towns and prosperous main streets—the romanticized foundation for the American dream, populated by hardy pioneers who settled the nation,



Except where noted, all photos by Todd Johnson



Native American farmer and retired teacher Jerri Parker, Cromwell, OK. USDA photo by Preston Keres, 2018, [PD] Wikimedia



Rural: in, relating to, or characteristic of the countryside rather than the town.
 – Oxford English Dictionary

built schools, churches, and town squares through hard work and determination.

At the heart of American identity is land. Since its founding, Americans have linked the idea of independence with land ownership. For rural Oklahomans, the land is key to economic success, the place where they build homes, farms, and communities. For city dwellers, unpopulated public forests, parks, and recreational areas are a source of escape from the urban environment. These two conflicting senses of place frame Americans' connections to the rural landscape as we intertwine personal memories with nostalgic views of "city" and "countryside." Whether we make our living off the land or simply visit for recreation, we sense the importance of open rural spaces.

Oklahoma rural life revolves around "crossroad communities." Our small towns are dynamic places where people connect, attend schools and church, frequent stores, and do business with co-ops. Rural Oklahomans seek economic growth, cultural cohesion, and an ever-improving quality of life. At the heart of these creative efforts are bustling



WOODWARD

Plains Indians & Pioneers Museum
 2009 Williams Ave. | (580) 256-6136
 February 5, 2022 – March 19, 2022



Crystal Beach Lake, by Woodward CVB

INTERSECTIONS: Part of the Osage Plains and Gypsum Hills, Woodward was home to Folsom-era big game hunters dating back more than 10,000 years. In more recent years, tribes such as the Plains Apache, Comanches, Kiowas, Cheyennes, and Arapahos traveled the area searching for game. In the 1860s, the United States Army established Fort Supply, a nearby military post. By the late 1870s, cowboys drove large herds of cattle through the area on the Great Western Trail, most headed to Kansas beef markets, but the trail reached all the way to Alberta, Canada. (Read about the trail on page 19.) In 1887, the town was founded as a railroad stop.

CHOOSE YOUR ADVENTURE: Exhibitions, programs, and more at the Plains Indians & Pioneers Museum present northwest Oklahoma's cultural crossroads. Tour Covington's Customs factory and store, featured on the Discovery Channel, to see how they build one-of-a-kind motorcycles. Interested in genealogy? Stop at the LDS Family History Center and search millions of historical, international records. Built in 1929, the Woodward Arts Theatre still entertains audiences with concerts and stage productions. Head to Boiling Springs State Park for fishing, swimming, hiking, and golfing.

FORKS IN THE ROAD: Woodward's restaurants are worldly. Baked ziti, tortellini, pizza, tiramisu—Diarti Italian Café won't disappoint. Hector y Amigos features Sonoran-style Mexican favorites like fajitas, chili poblanos, and street tacos. Head to Chase's BBQ Shack for ribs, brisket, or pulled pork, and don't forget the banana pudding. Carlito's Café appeals with salads, sandwiches, smothered hamburger steak, and seafood. Grab a bite of history at the Polly Anna Café. Since 1928 they've baked, griddled, and fried homecooked classics: cinnamon rolls, pancakes, burgers, chicken fried steak, and mile-high meringue pies.



Fuller Park, by Johnny McMahan



PAWNEE

Pawnee Bill Ranch & Museum
1141 Pawnee Bill Road | (918) 762-2513
March 26, 2022 – May 7, 2022



Pawnee Bath House, by Marc Carlson (CC BY ND 2.0/Flickr)

INTERSECTIONS: For centuries, the Pawnees lived a semi-sedentary tribal life characterized by agriculture and hunting in northern Kansas and Nebraska. In 1874, the Pawnees began a multi-year removal to Indian Territory as settlers moving west brought disease and increased competition for resources. In 1893, the Cherokee Outlet land run opened the area to non-Native settlement, the largest of four land runs in Oklahoma history. The Pawnee Agency post office was re-designated Pawnee and the town officially incorporated in April 1894.

CHOOSE YOUR ADVENTURE: Experience a bit of the “Wild West” at Pawnee Bill Ranch & Museum. See bison grazing the 500-acre ranch from the mansion atop the hill. Drop by the Pawnee County Historical Society to learn about the town’s history. The county courthouse, a classic Art Deco building, commemorates Pawnee’s cultural crossroads in several bas-reliefs. Perfect for a picnic lunch is the 1939 WPA bathhouse, just north of town, overlooking a freshwater pool. Nearby Pawnee Lake offers fishing and boating. The Steam and Gas Engine Show, Pawnee Bill’s Wild West Show, and the Pawnee Veterans’ Powwow are just a few events on the town’s calendar.

FORKS IN THE ROAD: Early risers have great options for breakfast and a cup of joe. Start your day at Bear Claw Bakery for homemade pastries or Rise and Grind for a cappuccino, coffee, tea, and more. Lindo Veracruz serves up Mexican favorites for lunch and dinner, while Ranch Burger specializes in, you guessed it, burgers and shakes. The mushroom, swiss, and jalapeno-loaded Jersey Joe is famous. Serving up steak and seafood since 1962, Click’s Steakhouse is a local hangout for lunch and dinner. Their Texas Toothpicks are a spicy twist on onion rings.



Vaqueros in Pawnee Bill Parade, by Marc Carlson (CC BY ND 2.0/Flickr)



main streets that provide access to commercial resources and cultivate community pride. The health of a small-town main street can gauge the health of the community. In 1980, the National Trust for Historic Preservation launched the Main Street program to encourage the creation of vibrant downtowns. Main street revitalization helped preserve countless local economies by building partnerships between residents, business owners, cultural partners, and governments. Over the last two decades, smart rural communities have invested heavily in saving their historic downtowns, renovating and preserving century-old brick storefronts, filling them with new dining spots and boutiques, and finding innovative ways to reuse space.

How we define what it means to be rural continues to evolve, but the traits and character associated with rural roots and traditions—hard work, honesty, and family—remain the standard for today’s rural Oklahomans. Here, in the heartland of America, rural communities are embracing their futures, creating new opportunities for those who call small town Oklahoma home.

I invite you to see the Smithsonian’s *Crossroads: Change in Rural America* traveling exhibit at one of the host sites across our state, to learn more about how rural communities developed and how they continue to flourish as centers of commerce, trade, and culture, while contributing to our state’s and our nation’s success.



Smithsonian Institution



OKLAHOMA HUMANITIES



Born in Mexico, Margarita Munoz, Perkins, OK, has made her American dream a reality. USDA photo by Preston Keres, 2018 [PD] Wikimedia



JASON HARRIS is the State Scholar for the Smithsonian exhibit tour. He has nearly 20 years of experience in the management of local, state, and national non-profit humanities-based programs and organizations and is currently the executive director of Chisholm Trail Museum in Oklahoma. He serves on the board of directors for Oklahoma Museum Association and the Mountain Plains Museum Association.

TODD JOHNSON has been producing evocative visual images since the 1980s, when he joined the ranks of several Oklahoma newspapers. A member of Oklahoma State University's Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources for the past 31 years, his work has been showcased in a wide variety of university, industry, and news media reaching international audiences.

CROSSROADS: CHANGE IN RURAL AMERICA has been made possible in Oklahoma by Oklahoma Humanities. *Crossroads* is part of *Museum on Main Street*, a collaboration between the Smithsonian Institution and state humanities councils nationwide. Support for *Museum on Main Street* has been provided by the United States Congress.

THANKS TO OUR GENEROUS SPONSORS: 2 Fellas & a Big Vehicle; The Kerr Foundation, Inc.; OG&E; The National Endowment for the Humanities



BOLEY

Boley Community Center
11 W. Grant St. | (918) 667-9790
May 14, 2022 – June 25, 2022



Boley Rodeo Parade

INTERSECTIONS: Oklahoma has been home to more than fifty All-Black towns. Located in the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, Boley was the largest and most well-known. From the end of the Civil War through the 1920s these towns grew as formerly enslaved African Americans came together to create prosperous farming settlements, supporting schools, churches, businesses, and more. Founded in 1903, the Boley township covered six square miles. “All Men Up—Not Some Men Down” was the motto of the town’s newspaper, *The Boley Progress*. At its height, Boley had more than four thousand residents and was home to five grocery stores, five hotels, seven restaurants, a jewelry store, a school, and a lumberyard. Like many rural communities, its population began to drop in the 1930s as the Great Depression drove residents into urban areas for employment. Today, Boley is one of only thirteen existing All-Black towns in Oklahoma.

CHOOSE YOUR ADVENTURE: On Memorial Day weekend, cowboys, cowgirls, and cooks compete at the Boley Rodeo and BBQ Festival, one of the oldest African American community-based rodeos in the country. Watch the parade, sample secret recipes, then head to the rodeo grounds for barrel racing, bronc riding, team roping, steer wrestling, mutton busting, and, if you stay late, maybe some live music. Between events, explore the town’s unique history through artifacts and exhibitions at the Boley Historical Museum. Make the quick fifteen-minute drive southeast to Okemah, birthplace of Woody Guthrie, to see the murals dedicated to him.

FORKS IN THE ROAD: J&L McCormick’s serves up breakfast, lunch, and dinner. This family-owned restaurant prepares everything fresh to order: eggs and bacon, waffles, burgers, BBQ, catfish, and more.



Illiana Hicks picking collard greens at Boley’s Organic Community Garden



Photos by Horace W. Nicholls

THE WOMAN AND THE CAR*

A CHATTY
LITTLE BOOK



✦ YOUR NEXT MOVE IS TO TAKE OFF THE SIDE BREAK ✦



✦ PULL UP THIS SMALL ROD TO ENABLE THE USED OIL TO RUN OUT THE BASE-CHAMBER ✦



✦ IN FRONT OF YOUR CAR YOU WILL NOTICE A HANDLE ✦



✦ UNSCREW THE CAP AND PEEP IN ✦



✦ THE USEFUL OVERALL ✦



✦ THIS LITTLE DRAWER IS THE GREAT SECRET ✦

In the early twentieth century, Dorothy Levitt, *née* Elizabeth Levi (1882-1922) was “the premier woman motorist and botorist [motorboat driver] of the world.” The first Englishwoman to drive in a public competition, she triumphed during races in the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, defeated all challengers at the Championship of the Seas in Trouville, and set the women’s world record in the Brighton Speed Trials: a whopping 79.75 miles per hour—lightspeed, circa 1905.

Like many larger-than-life figures, her origin story is modest, accidental, and layered with hearsay. As a child, she enjoyed cycling, horse-riding, and had a natural talent for riflery. One day, a friend of her parents came to visit their family home in the West Country, leaving his automobile idle for the long weekend. When it was time for the visitor to leave, Levitt had already mastered the physics of petrol combustion.

At least, that’s the story we get from C. Byng-Hall, in his prefatory

remarks to Levitt’s *The Woman and the Car: A Chatty Little Handbook for All Women Who Motor or Who Want to Motor* (1909). Other biographical tidbits suggest that Levitt worked as secretary for Selwyn Edge, a racing enthusiast and businessman who first popularized the six-cylinder engine, and who, in a bid for publicity, may have handed Levitt the keys. As Jean Williams argues in her contemporary history of women’s sport, Levitt’s West Country heritage has remained “unsubstantiated so far,” a possible autobiographical stunt to obscure her

Jewish descent. Before long, however, Levitt was known for burning rubber around the world, often accompanied by her Pomeranian, whom she called Dodo. (Other racers poked fun at her eccentricities by pinning plush canine emblems to their racing caps.)

The Woman and the Car is a practical, how-to guide for those who wanted to take to the roads but did not quite know how. Many of the extensive recommendations regarding mechanics, etiquette, and the temptations of car culture hold true today. There have always been lemons, it seems, for Levitt remains skeptical of purchasing second-hand cars advertised “as good as new.” And like many enthusiasts, Levitt refused to share her wheels with others. “I have made it a rule never to allow anyone to drive my own little car—and this is a rule that everyone will find useful.”

In Levitt’s “little handbook,” we find a similar hunger for the fraught freedom of the road that would eventually preoccupy the mid-century American imagination—exploited in novels like *On the Road* and *Lolita*, and in films such as *Easy Rider*—and which continues to provide a mesh of mechanist escapism in the British television program *Top Gear*:

There may be pleasure in being whirled around the country by your friends and relatives, or in a car driven by your chauffeur; but the real, the intense pleasure, the actual realization of the pastime comes only when you drive your own car.

Long before motoring became the dull labor of suburban commuting, it held the mystique of an emergent individualism—aimed here, with the reference to chauffeurs and countryside friends, at a certain class of

leisurely ladies. “If you stop the night at a friend’s house,” Levitt proffers somewhat cryptically, “you will find it spick and span in the morning with water in the tank and your petrol-tank also replenished.” Oh to have friends like Levitt’s.

Other advice in the “chatty little handbook” is wonderfully dated, providing an ossified image of a different motoring era. She recommends, for instance, a single-cylinder engine for women drivers. And her prose swells with delight while describing a proto-version of the glove compartment: “This little drawer is the secret of the dainty motoriste.” On the topic of dress, Levitt offers definitive advice. “As to head-gear, there is no question: the round cap or close-fitting turban of fur are the most comfortable and suitable.” Should you find yourself driving alone on the highways and byways, she thinks you ought to carry a small revolver and even suggests a specific make. “I have an automatic ‘Colt,’ and find it very easy to handle as there is practically no recoil.” Though, as she concedes, this only works if, like her, you “practice continually at a range.” There is a kind of merciless practicality throughout. While Levitt advises “to sound the hooter” when approaching pedestrians, she has no time for other creatures interfering on the road. “Dogs, chickens and other domestic animals at large on the highway are not pedestrians, and if one is driving at a regulation speed, or under, one is not responsible for their untimely end.”

Above all else, *The Woman and the Car* endures as a pamphlet of petrol-feminist empowerment:

You may be afraid, as I am, of driving in a hansom through the crowded streets of town—you

may be afraid of a mouse, or so nervous that you are startled at the slightest of sudden sounds—yet you can be a skillful motorist, and enjoy to the full delights of this greatest of out-door pastimes, if you possess patience—the capacity for taking pains.

She ends her treatise with a reflection on recent historical progress. “Twenty or thirty years ago, two of the essentials to a motorist—some acquaintance with mechanics and the ability to understand local topography—were supposed to be beyond the capacity of a woman’s brain.” Levitt was not only instrumental in advancing equality behind the steering wheel, she also forever altered the automobile form. Decades before rearview mirrors became standard issue, she recommended that ladies carry a hand mirror, for holding up to the landscape receding in their dusty tracks.


This article was originally published in *The Public Domain Review* under a Creative Commons CC-BY-SA license. Photographs by Horace W. Nicholls. A copy of Levitt’s book is held in the collections of McGill University Library. Read it online at: publicdomainreview.org



OKLAHOMA A SENSE OF PLACE

On angels, ghosts, and finding home

MICHAEL WALLIS | PHOTOS BY MIKE KLEMMER
mikeklemme.com



Once upon a time, there was no state of Oklahoma, no Indian Territory—and nobody knew the difference. There was always, however, this land, this place. Long before the arrival of the first tribal people, the nomadic warriors and hunters, the adventurers, the relocated tribes with their slaves, the outlaws and misfits, the land-hungry sodbusters, the oil barons, and all the rest, this land was a clean canvas. There were no towns or cities, no roads or highways, no jailhouses, cemeteries, casinos, marinas, or country clubs. The grassland meadows and old-growth timber were the temples and cathedrals. The mountains, hills, valleys, and hidden hollows near clear creeks were the universities and schools. The best entertainment came from prairie light shows—spectacular concerts of thunder, lightning, and wind.



mikeklemme.com

Then change came. The land evolved from being a place where a vast variety of land-life forms met and mingled—a true transition zone—to become a crossroads for human traffic.

Thankfully, there are still remnants from the past. There are still isolated places that survive as a tribute to long ago, when the odds were in favor of the wild creatures. These places survive to teach and remind. They survive to help us understand what we have lost and what could still be lost unless we dare to imagine and to remember. Unless we truly appreciate our sense of place.

A sense of place is more than geography. It offers a sense of belonging and being, which are essential parts of life. A sense of place is a feeling you get when you belong somewhere. It is a place that you cherish no matter where it may be.

During the nineteenth century, Oklahoma occupied a strategic but peculiar place in the national life. As a special federal territory, it served the national purpose as a military-defense frontier. Most of the early non-Indians who came here were soldiers manning the various forts and military posts. By 1890, Indian Territory had become the home of sixty-seven different tribes. Once they were relocated here, mostly under duress, many of the tribes were moved again to make room for others.

When the Creeks started on the forced journey from their Alabama home to Indian Territory, they carried a firebrand and an earthen pot filled with ashes and embers from their council fire. Each night when they pitched camp, the Creeks ignited a new council fire with the brand and the following morning a new brand was taken to light a fire again that night. The fires were rekindled in this way all along the route from the banks of the Chattahoochee to the bluffs of the Arkansas River.

Only ten years after the Creeks' arrival, the jingoistic term "Manifest Destiny" had become a rallying cry with politicians who believed the United States had a divine mandate to expand from "sea to shining sea." This concept galvanized proponents of expansion and pro-slavery Southerners eager to increase their domain. The resulting years of turmoil and war shook this land. It became uneven, out of step, and without rhythm. Without rhythm there can be no balance.

A well-balanced and wise Wallace Stegner said it best: "Neither the country nor the society we built out of it can be healthy until we stop raiding and running, and learn to be quiet part of the time, and acquire the sense not of ownership but of belonging."

As a writer of American history and culture, nothing matters more to me than a sense of place and the opportunity to wander through the places where my subjects lived. Although the landscape may be changed and the people themselves are long gone, I envision them in their own surroundings and know their essence remains forever.

I stalk the dimensions of the old 101 Ranch, where grizzled cowboys rode with Tom Mix and Bill Pickett, and I look into the eyes of Buffalo Bill and Geronimo. I catch a whiff of Frank Phillips' bay rum and cigars, the scent of Pretty Boy's pomade, the smell of a thousand Route 66 blue-plate specials, and the perfume of ancient peonies in a garden once tended by Thomas Gilcrease.

I watch a spindly walkingstick make its way up Wilma Mankiller's shoulder and start up her hair, as Wilma gently shakes the creature free. I see Quanah Parker's stoic gaze, Will Rogers grinning on stage at Miami's Coleman Theatre.



I memorize the music of Woody Guthrie, a national treasure, just a boy from Oklahoma on an endless one-night stand. I hear the poetry and song coming from the varicose and scarred lanes of the Mother Road. And I smile when the grand tune “Oklahoma Hills” tumbles out the door at Cain’s Ballroom.

Way down yonder in the Indian Nation,
I rode my pony on the reservation,
In those Oklahoma Hills where I was born.
Way down yonder in the Indian Nation,
A cowboy’s life is my occupation,
In those Oklahoma Hills where I was born.

I was born and raised in Missouri, but it is Oklahoma where I belong. It is here I have a sense of place. I came as a fully-grown man with my wife Suzanne. We made the conscious decision to adopt this land and make it our home.

I have always looked westward. I bleed St. Louis Cardinal red. I prefer two-lane roads to turnpikes. I consider rhubarb pie sacred. And I believe in ghosts and trust in angels.

That was true when I was a boy watching my mother find work for the dusty men of the open road who came off the old alignment of Route 66 near our place. They’d appear at the back door and doff their caps, looking to do some work in exchange for some food. My mother always found work for them and then she fed them. And as they ate in the shade of the yard I stood on a chair by my mother’s side at the sink and we watched from the window. The men ate, and we made up stories about them. We gave them names and decided where they had come from and where they were going. That was how I first learned about storytelling.

When the men finished eating, they gave my mother the dishes and thanked her and then walked off, back to the Mother Road. And every time, every time, my mother would tell me, “Son, you must remember this. Never ever turn anyone away from your door. They may be angels, angels in disguise.” Her words stay with me to this day. In this land, right here, “Way Down Yonder in the Indian Nation,” I have found many angels in disguise and plenty of ghosts as well.

Footloose ghosts are at large all across the land, stalking the prairies and valleys. They find cover among thickets of sumac, bois d’arc, sassafras, and persimmon, and they mingle in stands of cedar, walnut, honey locust, and sycamore. Ghosts roost along the banks of the contrary Arkansas, the sluggish Verdigris, the scenic Illinois, and a slew of tributary streams and creeks. Some ghosts perch on sharp bluffs or on the lakeshores of Tenkiller, Oologah, Spavinaw, Eufaula, Skiatook, and Keystone. (No ghosts at Grand Lake—too many people and powerboats.)

Specters from long ago and others from only yesterday patrol the boulevards and alleys of Tulsa, Muskogee, Tahlequah, Bartlesville, and Commerce, and frequent the parks, museums, and churches of those cities. They sleep at the top of towering catalpa trees, in clumps of fiery azaleas and, like purring cats, on windowsills of homes built before there was an Oklahoma. They congregate in small-town cafes, courthouse squares, and schoolyards at Okmulgee, Sapulpa, Poteau, Sallisaw, Heavener, Checotah, Pawnee, and scores of burgers no bigger than a minute.

Timeless sentinels, serene as a Sunday morning benediction, visit empty oil patch towns, farms and ranches, pecan groves, melon patches, and stockyards. They straddle rodeo fences, hang out at beer joints, kibitz over backgammon boards, eavesdrop at every cafe’s liar’s table, hover in the upper reaches of corporate palaces.



mikelemme.com

Mostly they go unnoticed and unheard, mistaken for shifting evening shade, a coyote's distant song, the twilight serenade of a mockingbird, summer breeze caressing an ocean of big bluestem. They are confused for shooting stars streaking the night heavens or for renegade tornadoes spawned by humid air floating up from the Gulf of Mexico, colliding on the prairies with the old winds of spring sweeping down from the north.

It is only fitting that the distinct countryside and communities of old Indian Territory provide sanctuary to so many ghosts. This great expanse of land always has been part of the restlessness that pushed people across North America in persistent quest of richer soils, the earth's treasure, better opportunities, and a new beginning. If the broad western plains and golden wheat fields,

where winds are born, act as the lusty lungs of the state, then the vibrant heart of Oklahoma lies here in old Indian Territory, where so many traces, trails, paths, and highways converge and become the crossroads of the nation.

You could say I truly discovered this crossroads in the sweltering summer of 1980, while I was working out of the Caribbean Bureau in Miami for *Time-Life* and I had occasion to spend some time in Tulsa. I was hunting a good story and was nested at the Mayo Hotel with plenty of ice and the AC set so low I could see my breath.

One late afternoon, I moseyed down to the Arkansas River to have a look. Long before there was a Tulsa, there was the river—the longest tributary in the Mississippi-Missouri system. Near its headwaters in the

Colorado Rockies, at Tennessee Pass on the eastern slope of the continental divide, glacial lakes and snowmelt feed the river before it flows 1,450 miles south-east through Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas.

The river was historically as moody as a water moccasin and just as cruel. A temperamental river prone to devastating floods, the Arkansas dared to be tamed. That, of course, finally happened but for many years the river did as it pleased, for the Arkansas is rich in history. Indians bathed their ponies in the river, adventurers camped on the sandbars, and cowboys paraded cattle through the shallows.

Zebulon Pike explored the Arkansas and in 1832 noted author Washington Irving chronicled the river's sandy shore bordered by cottonwoods and willows as he made his famous tour of the prairies. Irving and his entourage rode the banks of the Arkansas and paused to quench their thirsts. Cool water still pulses from the underground spring that surfaces there. Irving saw the sun shining through leaves tinted by autumn and was reminded of the stained glass and clustering columns of gothic cathedrals.

"The river scenery at this place was beautifully diversified, presenting long, shining reaches," Irving wrote in his journal. "It was a bright sunny morning, with a transparent atmosphere that seemed to bathe the very heart with gladness."

Generally known for his humorous rendition of romanticized tales such as *Rip Van Winkle* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, Irving's prose is much more than sentimental travel writing. It is a depiction of landscape that transcends the romantic frontier metaphor and sheds light on the environment's impact on Irving himself. While others viewed this land and its creatures as something to be conquered and used, Irving became woefully aware of its infinite nature, something that some today still fail to comprehend.

On that hot June afternoon in 1980, when I made my own trek to hopefully catch a morsel of what Irving witnessed, I was more concerned with reaching the cool shade provided by the cottonwoods along the riverbank. And it was there that I encountered a fellow who put me in mind of those silent men with empty eyes who occasionally appeared at the back door of my boyhood home in Missouri. Those "angels in disguise." This fellow sitting beneath a gnarled cottonwood on the edge of the river had those same empty eyes. We nodded at each other and as we watched the sun lowering in the sky, he spoke to me.

He told me he was pleased it was twilight and he was a day closer to dying. A long time ago, he had heard that a person could wear out his heart by sleeping on his left side. He said he had slept in that position ever since. He told me straight out that it had been years since he liked himself—almost a lifetime ago, when he was young and strong and gave a damn.

He told me of his Cherokee lineage, his growing up years in the Cherokee Nation. He said he had been an Oklahoma cowboy and could ride, rope, and holler like a banshee. He made the circuits, mostly performing at the big Mother Road venues—Oklahoma City, Amarillo, Albuquerque, Flagstaff, Barstow, and many others. Then his life came all apart. A crippling fall from a bucking bronco left him with a broken back, a permanent limp, and a bad attitude. For good measure, a steady diet of ninety-proof whiskey stopped him from ever climbing into a saddle again.

The man allowed that he had lost everything. He had no more family, no more friends, and no more high-speed gallops on spirited cow ponies. He had no self-respect. It had been years since he looked in a mirror. He said he had become a street person—just a nice way of saying, "bum."

I walked a ways with the man. We headed up the trail toward old Route 66 making its way across the chocolate-colored river. We passed the spring and reached the old bridge. I recalled the many times I had sped across those waters on my way west, chasing the sun and the moon and my dreams. We went below the bridge and the man showed me his makeshift camp of cardboard boxes and Goodwill blankets. Like the man, the bridge had been abandoned. No longer used for vehicular traffic, it sat neglected and forlorn next to a newer bridge.

Back on the trail again, we stopped and watched the river. Neither of us spoke for a long time. I let my thoughts take me back to the years before any bridges spanned the Arkansas. I considered the Creek people who came this way to build a new home and start their lives over. I thought about cattlemen herding Texas longhorns across the rocky ford in the shallows of the river. I imagined the ferryboats loaded with passengers, and the first railroad bridge, erected back in the late 1800s. Then I recalled reading about the crude toll bridge that had been built in 1903. Workers and machines crossed it to get to the rich oil fields waiting on the other side, helping to assure Tulsa's "oil capitol" future.



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The man and I walked on, back to the same place we had met. We turned around and looked up into the neighborhoods. Beyond I spied the art deco towers dotting the skyline. The old rodeo rider clutched a paper sack holding his few worldly possessions—a broken pocket comb, some raggedy underwear and socks, a sack of tobacco and rolling papers, and a tarnished belt buckle the size of a saucer which he had won long before at a rodeo. There was also a good-sized tomato wrapped in newspaper. He admitted to me that it had been liberated from a backyard garden the night before.

As we walked and swapped more stories, mostly about traveling the road, a morsel of survivor cried out from the man. He ignored the pleas of some passing pals to share their jug of vintage rotgut. Instead, he picked up his pace and told me he would go to a local mission for a hot supper and a shower and a night resting under cool sheets. He said all he had to do was endure a few hymns and listen to a fire-and-brimstone sermon delivered by a reformed drunk.

It was time for me to head back to the Mayo. We stopped in the shade and the man shook my hand and bade me farewell. As he walked away, he stopped and turned. He reached in his sack and gave me his prized tomato and told me to enjoy it. He thanked me for spending time with him and helping him remember. He said maybe he would sleep on his back for a while and give his tired heart a rest.

As he left, I bit into the tomato. It was vine ripened and warm and tasted of summer. The juice ran down my chin and droplets splattered on the red-hot sidewalk. When I looked up, the man was gone—making his way in a city that didn't know he existed.

Two years later I married Suzanne and we moved to Tulsa. That trip to Oklahoma to find a story had made an

impression on me. I had fallen deeply in love with the state and the people. I felt I had a true sense of the place. Not long after we moved here, I went down to the river and looked for the old cowboy. I roamed the shoreline and went down under the old 66 bridge. His camp was gone and there were a few young guys pan-cooking some fish. They didn't know any old cowboys.

Although the old rodeo rider is gone, that bridge is still there. Despite the odds it has survived. There is a reason for that I am dead sure. That old span of concrete is a symbol of the many layers of the Mother Road; it stands for the endurance and ingenuity of this country and of this state. That place on the Arkansas is where the East collides with the West. That is where they meet. Right there, where the bridge marks the spot.

The memory of that bridge man I met long ago stays with me. I find it slightly ironic that in this mineral-rich land that had produced so many oil millionaires, one of my dominant early recollections is of a salt-of-the-earth soul who was in my life for such a fleeting time and whose name I never knew. A Cherokee cowboy who, for a little while, lived beneath the Mother Road. Never could find him. Not a trace. I still look sometimes when I head for home or cruise down 66. Maybe he was an angel in disguise.

Oklahoma is a relatively new and precocious state that has always had more than its share of excitement and danger. This place is tailor-made for risk takers. It is a land for people not allergic to hard work, who are more than willing to take a chance. It has always been the risk-takers who have broken through and changed things. They were willing to risk their reputations, relationships, and resources to get the job done.

Sometimes, to get the job done, rules were bent. In the years after the Civil War, Indian Territory was a criminal's paradise and a legal and jurisdictional nightmare. One newspaper said this place was "the rendezvous of the vile and wicked from everywhere." Law-abiding residents were not immune to the outrages. Since many of the peace officers had once been outlaws, or else ended up as felons, it seemed a very thin line separated good and evil. Indian Territory became known as the consummate robber's roost, and its sinister reputation spread across the country.

Eventually, wave after wave of white intruders, all stripes of anxious settlers eager to grab a piece of land, raced into "the Nations." They built homes, established towns and businesses in what had been the domain of proud Indian peoples, who we had the audacity to label as the "Five Civilized Tribes," a pejorative and detestable name still in common use. What we often forget is that, according to the United States government, this land was to remain forever "Indian Territory," free of white men altogether and for all time. That, of course, never came to be. Starting in 1889, the various "runs," as they were known, ignited wholesale white settlement.

Besides the tribes, there were others who saw the land runs as questionable developments. On January 6, 1889, a story was published in *The New York Times* under the simple headline "The Truth About Oklahoma." It directly addressed the upcoming land run of 1889 and its implications.

The accepted definition of the word settler in the West is one who enters a country to take up a farm. . . . Settlers? Yes, in the vigorous vernacular of the plains they are settlers. They settle their enemies to rest. They settle town disputes with revolvers and repeating rifles. . . . Settlers! God save the country they settle in!

Even back then many of the negative images which some people accept as accurate characterizations of Oklahoma were based on wholesale generalizations, misconceptions, and blatant twisting of the truth. All too often we can be our worst enemies. Sometimes we are the ones most guilty of distorting the true image of Oklahoma. This can happen by rewriting or reinventing our invaluable history or, even worse, by ignoring the past and conveniently disregarding critical events, catastrophes, and controversies.

This denial of both the good and bad episodes of history has always been a problem. It includes not only the sometimes-murderous treatment of Indian peoples but also the shameful Tulsa massacre of 1921 and other acts of bigotry and blatant racial discrimination. Too often such events have been purged or swept under the carpet because of the perception that they reflected poorly on the land and the people.



This land has plenty of scar tissue. But it also has much to brag about, and a bright future. It is an unfinished story—a work in progress. Again, I go back to that sense of place. It cannot be ignored or avoided.

I really learned that on an October morning filled with sunshine and promise a few years past. Suzanne and I drove to Sequoyah County in eastern Oklahoma to attend a Literary Landmark ceremony honoring Sequoyah, the Cherokee scholar who created a syllabary for his people and for whom the county was named. The ceremony was to be held ten miles northeast of Sallisaw at the one-room cabin of hand-hewn logs built by Sequoyah in 1829.

En route Suzanne and I talked about some of our previous trips to the historic cabin and to the many other sites in the area I visited so many times while writing my biography of Charles Arthur "Pretty Boy" Floyd. Floyd was the consummate Oklahoma bandit, still remembered and often revered by the hardworking country folks who pass down stories about Pretty Boy like heirloom china.

Just a short way down the turnpike a lone Monarch butterfly flew into the windshield with a splat and became tangled in a windshield wiper blade. We were saddened to see the tiny creature end its short life in such a way. We knew that this was the precise time when the last generation of Monarchs of summer make their incredible journey of thousands of miles to their wintering grounds. This was the time they fly over the landscape and when they dance across old Indian Territory just as they have forever.

The Monarchs come to rest at Pismo Beach and Big Sur in California and others go even farther and congregate by the millions deep in the mountains of Mexico, where they cloak fir trees and cluster on boughs. There they rest all winter and flash their orange and black wings to soak up the sun. In the spring when it is time to move northward again, the butterflies cascade from the trees in a cloud bomb—waterfalls of sable and saffron.

Our conversation turned back to memories of coming this way with friends now gone and of other times, but each of us could not help but see the Monarch whose journey had ended unceremoniously on the car windshield. I knew Suzanne was especially touched since she was at the wheel, which meant she felt that she was in some way culpable for the butterfly's death.

At Sallisaw we made a pit stop at a convenience store. Suzanne got out of the car and carefully lifted the wiper blade and placed the crumpled Monarch in her palm. I took over as driver and Suzanne said she wanted to make a stop before we reached the event site. I knew in a heartbeat where she wanted me to go.

Without a word, I turned off the highway and into the Akins Cemetery. This quiet country graveyard was where the largest funeral in state history took place, on another October morning in 1934, when the slain Pretty Boy came home and was laid to rest with other family members. We had visited the graveyard many times and it seemed so familiar as we walked through formations of the dead marked by stones. We went directly to the Floyd plot where Pretty Boy lies next to his baby brother E. W. Floyd, remembered as one of the best sheriffs ever in Oklahoma. As we stood there, Suzanne gently placed the Monarch on Pretty Boy's granite tombstone. It was as if she were leaving the outlaw a flower or remembrance.

I can never explain what happened next. In seconds, the Monarch lifted its wings, which seemed whole and caught the sunshine. Suddenly the butterfly rose from the stone and fluttered above us before flying off to the



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south. Neither of us could speak. We just stood there and watched the Monarch until it was out of sight.

We went on the few short miles to the cabin where Cherokee tribal leaders, dignitaries, and citizens gathered to honor Sequoyah, a wise man who himself went south to Mexico and never returned. His bones are said to remain there in the warm sand. When I rose to speak during the ceremony, I told the story of the Monarch. I was compelled to share it. When I finished, I saw many of the Cherokee people nodding and some smiled. It seemed they were not surprised by my simple story of resurrection.

Later when I took time to consider the day, I understood the reaction. A Cherokee elder once told me that a butterfly brings special blessings when it passes over you. In some American Indian tribes, butterflies are thought to be the departed souls of ancestors. The emergence of the adult butterfly from a cocoon symbolizes the freedom of the soul. The butterfly metamorphosis is the greatest transformation in the animal world and stands as a symbol of new life, of change.

Like Monarchs, the people of this land have known long and arduous journeys. Like the fragile butterflies,

Oklahomans have endured much and never given up. Many have left on their own pilgrimages and traveled far. Some do not return but others come home. They keep their sense of place.

In my studio in Tulsa are my best icons and treasures—a piece of wood that was once part of Woody Guthrie’s home, D. H. Lawrence’s double-headed ax, buffalo skulls from Woolaroc, Pretty Boy Floyd’s death mask, my grandfather’s soldier medals inside a wooden necktie box, branding irons from the 101 Ranch, tarnished deputy sheriff badges, a lucky coyote fang from No Man’s Land, a Phillips 66 sign riddled with Okie bullet holes, a Mother Road shield. There’s a jug of genuine Creek County stump liquor, a hangman’s noose from Fort Smith, battered typewriters, baseballs bearing the signatures of boyhood heroes, stacks of books, mounds of letters, diaries, photos, and memories.

From my windows I see the Arkansas flow past and I dare to dream. I spy the old bridge that links east and west. Sometimes, from the corner of my eye, I catch a glimpse of an angel in disguise. And I look beyond the great oaks and magnolias, beyond the river and the bridge, to the eternal and everlasting West. It is then that I know the truth of this place—I feel it in my heart and in my bones.

I am home.

MICHAEL WALLIS is a historian and biographer of the American West who has also gained international notoriety as a speaker. A storyteller who likes nothing better than transporting audiences across time and space, he has published twenty books, including the award-winning *Route 66: The Mother Road*, the book credited with sparking the resurgence of interest in the highway. He has been nominated three times for the Pulitzer Prize and was a nominee for the National Book Award. In 2016 he received an Emmy Award for his work in the documentary film *Boomtown*. It has been said: “Reading a Michael Wallis book is like dancing to a romantic ballad. He offers his hand and gently guides you across the floor, swaying to the song of the American West.”

MIKE KLEMME is an Enid native who has spent the last 37 years traveling over four million miles and visiting 45 countries as one of the most widely published golf course photographers in the world. His photographs have appeared in *Sports Illustrated*, *Golf Magazine*, *Golf Digest*, *ESPN The Magazine*, *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and countless other national and international lifestyle publications. He is the author and photographer of several books, including *A View from the Rough*, *Golf Resorts of the World*, *Grand Slam Golf*, *Celebrating Enid!*, and *Celebrating Oklahoma! The Oklahoma Centennial Photographic Survey*, for which he logged almost two years and 80,000 driving miles to document his beloved state in all its glory. During the last decade, he has built a thriving business helping corporations, healthcare facilities, and other organizations brand themselves through art. See more of his work at mikeklemme.com

GRAUER | from p. 21

TRAILS TO TRACKS

The “progress” of the railroad spelled the end of the trails—and yet the remnants of these once-essential trails remind us of our history and the steady forward movement of the nation. When the Missouri, Kansas & Texas Railway Company (MK&T), known as the Katy Line, reached the Indian Territory-line south of Chetopa, Kansas, in 1870, it signaled the beginning of motor-driven travel across the future state of Oklahoma. Travel by foot, horse, muleback, and wheeled-vehicle continued well into the twentieth century, but the trails blazed by these means began to fade into memories.

Today, wagon ruts, swales, and cuts through ravines and riverbanks—along the Santa Fe, Cherokee, Western, and Texas Road/Shawnee Trails—are still visible. Touch the ground in these special places and you just might sense the tread of a moccasin, the clop of hooves, or the rumble of wagon wheels that crisscrossed Oklahoma crossroads forever embedded in the history of our state.

MICHAEL GRAUER is the McCasland Chair of Cowboy Culture, Curator of Cowboy Collections and Western Art at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum. He holds two BFAs in painting and in art history from the University of Kansas; an MA in art history from Southern Methodist University; and an MA in history from West Texas A&M University. He has curated over 150 exhibitions on Western art, culture, and history and authored 65 publications. His book *Making a Hand: The Art of H. D. Bugbee* received the 2020 Western History Association Wrangler Award for Best Western Art Book.

SANTA FE TRAIL

National Cowboy &
Western Heritage Museum
Oklahoma City, OK
Nov. 20, 2021 - May 8, 2022



Using material culture and art objects from the collections of the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, a new exhibition will recognize the bicentennial of this most important National Heritage Trail, exploring its role in connecting Mexico with the United States, its place in the Texas Revolution and the Mexican War, and how these events shaped the history of the American West. Information at: nationalcowboymuseum.org

CHARTING A COURSE FOR TRUE NORTH

CAROLINE LOWERY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

*From remarks delivered at the University of Oklahoma's
Tulsa Race Massacre Centennial Symposium, April 8, 2021*

As we reflect on, commemorate, and memorialize
the events of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre,
let us look to The Humanities.

The humanities serve as a temporally unbound compass,
helping us navigate our past, present, and future—
looking to the distant past to see our inevitable futures—
navigation that is vital to our society, our democracy, our legacy.

How can we change our course if we do not know our bearings?
How can we know our bearings if we do not know where we started?

The humanities point us True North
as we lay a course toward reconciliation
through civil discourse. True North
that cannot divorce the recourse
of past tragedies,
even as we hope for new trajectories.
Longitudes and latitudes of attitudes,
perceptions, misinformation, and misrepresentations.

As historians we carry this compass
not knowing what obstacles we may meet,
not knowing how to proceed or how to heed
the howling warnings of past misdeeds.

For there is no future without reconciliation of the past.
There cannot be change without the acknowledgment that
change is needed.

The humanities give us hope,
not from a place of naivety, but hope
as the ultimate act of faith in our humanity.

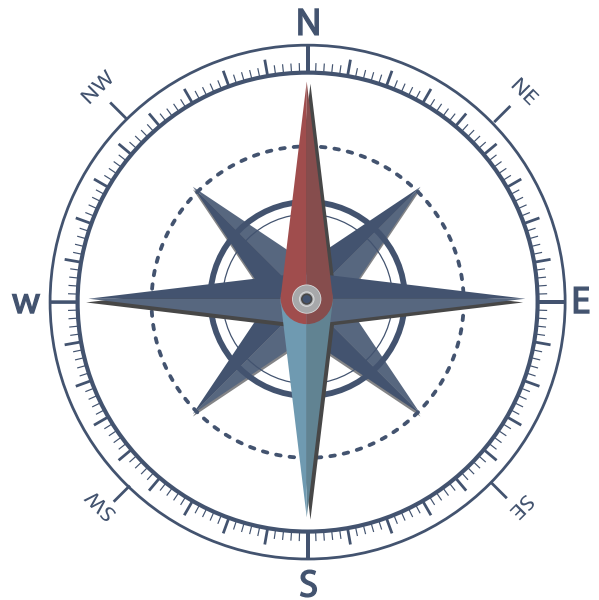
And—if “hope is the thing with feathers,”
then grief is the thing with tethers tying us together
as we work toward a better future for all.

How can we traverse the deepest valleys of our past?
How can we climb the seemingly unsurmountable mountains
of societal division?
How can we navigate the barren deserts of hate?

The humanities are our compass.
The humanities lead the way.

The National Endowment for the Humanities’
founding legislation declares:
“Democracy demands wisdom.”
I humbly suggest we add “reconciliation.”

So yes, let us remember the bodies that were buried.
And yes, let us be outraged at the redacted obituaries.
And yes, let us remember in a month other than February
that the story of this tragedy is the story of us.
And the story of hope is the story of us.



NOTEWORTHY

OH ADDS NEW STAFF

Executive Director Caroline Lowery announced the addition of two individuals to the Oklahoma Humanities staff. “Sarah Olzawski and Kimberly Roblin are experienced, enthusiastic humanities professionals,” said Lowery. “Adding them to our team will ensure that more Oklahomans will have access to our ever-expanding reading and discussion series and award-winning magazine.”



Sarah Olzawski joined OH in March as Program Officer to coordinate *Let’s Talk About It*, OH’s flagship reading and discussion program. She holds a BA in History and an MLIS in Library and Information Studies from the University of Oklahoma (OU). A lifelong Oklahoman and Cherokee

citizen, Sarah brings over a decade of experience in public and academic libraries. Most recently she served as Senior Academic Counselor at OU, where her work in reversing declining numbers of history majors earned accolades from the American Historical Association and the National Humanities Alliance, as well as the 2020 Provost’s Award for Outstanding Academic Advisor.

Kimberly Roblin joined OH in May as Associate Editor and Communications Officer, working to expand knowledge of the OH mission and assist production of our award-winning magazine, *Oklahoma Humanities*. A Tulsa native, she holds a BA in History with minors in Native American Studies and Anthropology, and an

MA in Museum Studies from the University of Oklahoma. She has sixteen years’ experience working with archival collections and curating more than twenty exhibits at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum (Oklahoma City) and the Gilcrease Museum (Tulsa), where she also coordinated *The Gilcrease Journal*. She is an award-winning writer and has published more than twenty-five articles and book chapters.



ABOUT OKLAHOMA HUMANITIES

Oklahoma Humanities (OH) strengthens communities by helping Oklahomans learn about the human experience, understand new perspectives, and participate knowledgeably in civic life. As the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities, OH provides and supports programming for the general public that uses humanities disciplines (such as history, literature, ethics, and philosophy) to deeply explore what it means to be human. OH accepts grant applications from non-profits across the state for programs that may take the form of museum exhibits, film festivals, teacher institutes, oral history projects, or other formats that best serve local communities. OH also administers programs that provide free access to cultural humanities content, including: *Oklahoma Humanities* magazine; *Let’s Talk About It*, a reading and discussion series; the *BrainBox* podcast; and *Museum on Main Street*, a collaboration with the Smithsonian Institution to provide traveling exhibits in small rural communities. Visit our website to find an event near you, read magazine archives, listen to the *BrainBox* podcast, or explore OH programs and grant opportunities. We look forward to hearing from you. (405) 235-0280 | okhumanities.org | ohc@okhumanities.org

MEET OUR BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Oklahoma Humanities is governed by a 24-member Board of Trustees, comprising private citizens, industry leaders, academic scholars, and governor’s appointees. These dedicated volunteers are geographically diverse, representing rural towns, large urban cores, Indigenous communities, and mid-sized cities statewide. Trustees donate their time and talent to our organization and receive no compensation for their service. As you will read in the following biographies, our Board is an expert team with a passion for ensuring educational and cultural opportunities for all Oklahomans. We begin with our two newest members, noted below, followed by the next two pages, where you’ll meet our greatest cheerleaders. “I’m honored to introduce our dedicated and engaged Board of Trustees,” stated Executive Director Caroline Lowery. “We’re grateful for their leadership and expertise.”



DR. MOIRA WATSON

With interests and training firmly rooted in the humanities, Moira Watson is a shareholder at Hall Estill Law Firm. She studied History and Policy Studies as an undergraduate at Rice University and holds a JD from the University of Pennsylvania and a PhD in Law from the

University of Oxford. “I am a firm believer that the study of traditional humanities subjects are critical, both within academic institutions and the public-at-large,” Watson says. “Their study imparts not only substantive knowledge but also encourages critical thinking, analysis, and problem solving.”

DR. LYNNE SIMPSON

Lynne Simpson, Dean of University Libraries for Langston University, holds a BA in English from Langston University, an MSLS in Library Science from Clark/Atlanta University, and a PhD in Information Science from the University of North Texas. While working at Oklahoma

State University, she was a regular participant and presenter for *Let’s Talk About It* and is excited to join the Board. “Oklahoma Humanities uses the arts, history, and scholarship to promote cultural understanding to all economic levels and races in the state of Oklahoma,” says Simpson. “I look forward to participating in that.”





Oklahoma Humanities represents the best of who we are and supports communities working each day to make the state a better, more tolerant and understanding place to call home.—Dr. Kalenda Eaton

OKLAHOMA HUMANITIES BOARD OF TRUSTEES

*Denotes gubernatorial appointees

DR. BEN ALPERS

1. Ben Alpers is currently Reach for Excellence Associate Professor at the Honors College, University of Oklahoma, and is an intellectual and cultural historian of the twentieth-century U.S., focusing on political culture, film history, and questions of history and memory. He holds a PhD in American History from Princeton and is working on a book that explores how Americans in the 1970s processed social and cultural changes through explorations of the past.

DR. ELIZABETH BASS

2. Elizabeth M. B. Bass has worked at the Oklahoma Historical Society since 2005, serving as the Director of Publications and Editor of *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* since 2012. She earned her PhD in history from Oklahoma State University in 2020. She has contributed to several encyclopedias, two books, and co-writes a monthly newspaper column for *The Oklahoman* entitled "Connecting the Dots of History."

*JENNIE BUCHANAN

Jennie Buchanan is completing her tenth year as Director/Curator of the Museum of the Western Prairie in Altus, actively producing historical programs, art exhibitions, and chamber music recitals. After earning a bachelor's degree in education from the University of Oklahoma and a master's degree in education from the University of Central Oklahoma, she enjoyed a career in educational publishing with the McGraw-Hill Companies and then returned home to operate a cattle ranch with her brothers.

*SUZETTE V. CHANG

3. Suzette V. Chang is the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Thick Descriptions, a not-for-profit organization based in Oklahoma City. Rooted in the humanities, particularly cultural anthropology, it is governed by a working board of BIPOC, women, and members of the LGBTQIA+ communities who develop initiatives connecting the natural and social sciences. She is also the Executive Director of the Guthrie Public Library.

DR. DEWAYNE DICKENS

4. Dewayne Dickens is Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Tulsa Community College, and Associate Professor of English. He holds a PhD in Curriculum and Social Foundations (English emphasis) from Oklahoma State University and, in 2012, was listed among OSU's 100 Graduate Students of Significance. He is a member of the John Hope Franklin Center for Reconciliation Board of Directors and the Oklahoma Center for Community & Justice, and he serves as an expert mentor and scholar to improve persistence among African American males in higher education.

DR. KALENDA EATON

5. Kalenda Eaton is an Associate Professor in The Clara Luper Department of African & African American Studies at the University of Oklahoma. Her teaching and research areas include literatures by Black women, African Americans in the American West, and African Diaspora studies. Eaton is a Fulbright scholar, Associate Fellow of the Center for Great Plains Studies, and advocate for the Public Humanities.

CINDY FRIEDEMANN

6. Cindy Friedemann has served in Executive Leadership at Metro Tech for 11 years. In addition to serving Oklahoma Humanities, her national service includes Executive Board Leadership for the National Council of Local Administrators and United for Libraries. A life member of Leadership Oklahoma, Cindy chaired the OKC Museum of Art's annual fundraiser and currently serves on the Board of Advisors for the Oklahoma City Chamber, Creative Oklahoma, and the Oklahoma City Boat Club.

ERICK W. HARRIS

7. Erick W. Harris is an attorney with a focus on civil litigation, business litigation, and transactional matters. A graduate of the University of Oklahoma College of Law, he formerly worked as an Assistant Attorney General and prosecuted elder abuse, abuse of the mentally disabled, and Medicaid fraud. The Tuskegee University alum and Muscogee (Creek) Nation citizen received the "NextGen Under 30 Award" and volunteers for several organizations. Additionally, he is an Adjunct Professor of Political Science at the University of Central Oklahoma.

DON HOLLADAY

8. Don Holladay is a retired attorney specializing in constitutional litigation and is an adjunct professor at the University of Oklahoma College of Law. He has served on numerous boards and councils in both the legal fields and the arts and has received several awards for his service. He is also an artist and printmaker.

DR. SHAWN HOLLIDAY

9. Shawn Holliday is the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies at Northwestern Oklahoma State University in Alva where he also serves as Professor of English and directs the Master of Arts in American Studies program. He is the author of three books, including *The Oklahoma Poets Laureate: A Sourcebook, History, and Anthology*, as well as numerous articles that have appeared in such places as *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, *The Thomas Wolfe Review*, *The Encyclopedia of Appalachia*, and *The South Carolina Review*. He is an avid record collector, musician, and animal rescuer.

Making a difference in such a polarized world is why I love serving on the Oklahoma Humanities Council!—David Hooten





Being on the Board has meant partnering with humanities organizations across the state to enlighten and empower communities to the impact of the humanities such as literature, poetry, history, and so much more. —Dr. Sunu Kodumthara

***DAVID HOOTEN**

10. David Hooten is a multi-Grammy and Emmy nominated trumpeter, composer, and producer. He has been Oklahoma County Clerk since 2017 and has been married to his wife Whitney for 19 years. They have three lovely children.

***MARCY JARRETT**

11. Marcy Jarrett, Executive Director of the Midwest City Chamber of Commerce, has made a career of marketing cities for over 20 years and is the former director of *Visit Enid*, *Visit Norman*, and *Visit Lubbock*. A Woodward native, she is a Certified Destination Management Executive and serves on several arts, travel, and community boards. Her husband, Jim, is a teacher and their daughter, Carol, studies vocal performance at the University of Oklahoma.

DR. NYLA KHAN

12. Nyla Khan has been honored three times (2019-2021) by *The Journal Record* among its annual list of Oklahoma women who are "50 Making a Difference." In 2018, she was recognized at the Oklahoma State Capitol for her human rights work and honored by the Oklahoma League of Women Voters as one of "100 Trailblazers." She was awarded the President's Volunteer Service Award & Silver Medal by Happy World Foundation for her national public speaking and bridge-building work in the state of Oklahoma.

DR. THOMAS A. KIRK

13. A native of Oklahoma City, Thomas Kirk holds a PhD from the European University Institute in Florence, Italy, and taught History, Humanities, and English for 30 years. A published author, he is now Program Manager for the Oklahoma State Department of Education's Office of Federal Programs.

DR. SUNU KODUMTHARA

14. Sunu Kodumthara is a Professor of History at Southwestern Oklahoma State University and teaches courses in twentieth-century American history, the American West, and gender history. She holds a PhD in American History from the University of Oklahoma and has served on the Board for Oklahoma Humanities since 2017.

DR. SCOTT LAMASCUS

15. Scott LaMascus is Professor of English and Honors at Oklahoma Christian University (OC), where he also directs the McBride Center for Public Humanities. MCPH is a recipient of a 2011 Challenge Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and since 2004 has hosted free, public humanities programs, including events with literary greats such as Marilynne Robinson, author of *Gilead*, and social justice leader Bryan Stevenson, author of *Just Mercy*. He served as chief academic officer at OC from 2013-2020.

SARAH MILLIGAN

16. Sarah Milligan is the Hyle Family Endowed Professor and Head of the Oklahoma Oral History Research Program at the Oklahoma State University Library. Prior to returning to her home state of Oklahoma, she was the Administrator of the Kentucky Oral History Commission at the Kentucky Historical Society (2007-2014) and a folklife specialist for the Kentucky Folklife Program (2005-2007). Sarah has a BA in English and German from Oklahoma City University and a Master of Arts in Folk Studies from Western Kentucky University.

CHRISTOPHER MURPHY

17. Christopher Murphy is an Associate Professor of English at Northeastern State University, where he also coordinates the Creative Writing program. He serves on the editorial board for *Nimrod International Journal*, and his work has been published in *Gulf Coast*, *This Land*, *Jellyfish Review*, *Necessary Fiction*, and *decomp* magazine, among others. He has a collection of flash fiction, *Burning All the Time*, forthcoming from Mongrel Empire Press.

***ERIN PETERS**

18. Erin Peters was born and raised in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and earned her BBA and MBA, with a concentration in accounting. After working in the corporate world, she now dedicates her time as a community volunteer with the Alzheimer's Association, Cascia Hall Preparatory School, and the Oklahoma Humanities Council. She enjoys traveling, the outdoors, and sports. She resides in Tulsa with her husband, John, and two sons.

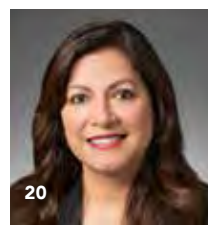
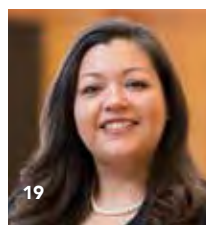
VALORIE WALTERS

19. Valorie Walters earned a Bachelor of Arts in Mass Communications with a concentration in advertising and public relations from East Central University. She has been employed with the Chickasaw Nation since 2002 and currently serves as the Under Secretary for the Department of Culture and Humanities, where she assists in elevating Chickasaw history, culture, museums, and language by promoting and sharing the strong and unique culture of the Chickasaw people. Valorie is of Chickasaw and Choctaw descent and is an enrolled citizen of the Chickasaw Nation.

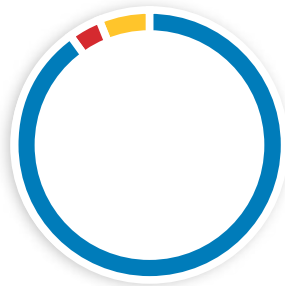
ALBA WEAVER

20. Alba N. Weaver, a graduate of the University of Oklahoma, serves as Manager of Economic Development for OGE Energy Corp. In her role, she oversees the planning and direction of activities to improve the economy of the organization's service territory by supporting economic and community development strategies and programs across the OG&E Electric Services service area. She currently serves on several boards and lives in Oklahoma City with her husband, Matthew, and daughter, Sofia.

All my neighbors on this tiny blue planet are such interesting human beings and have much to teach me, so why wouldn't I become an unabashed and optimistic advocate for public humanities?—Dr. Scott LaMascus

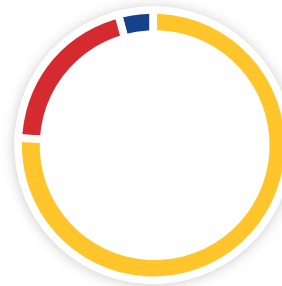


2020 ANNUAL REPORT



REVENUE: \$1,141,771

- Grants 90%
- Other 6%
- Contributions 4%



EXPENSES: \$1,548,671

- Programs 76%
- Administration 20%
- Fundraising 4%

Oklahoma Humanities is the state affiliate for the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). The NEH was established as a federal grant-making agency by the U.S. Congress in 1965 to support research, education, preservation, and public projects in the humanities. As the state affiliate, Oklahoma Humanities receives an annual General Operating Support Award to facilitate grantmaking for humanities education, lifelong learning, and public programs at the local level. The federal appropriation administered by Oklahoma Humanities in fiscal year 2020 was \$816,800.00.

THE YEAR IN NUMBERS



37,000

MAGAZINES
Delivered to individuals, educators, and non-profits



2,640

LISTENERS
Tuned into our *BrainBox* podcast



\$166,808

GRANTS AWARDED
Impacted an audience of 365,472 through 28 organizations



6,309

VISITORS
Explored the *Museum on Main Street* exhibit



1,563

BOOK LOVERS
Attended *Let's Talk About It* discussion events



\$489,567

EMERGENCY FUNDING
Distributed as HOPE grants to 37 organizations

INDIVIDUAL DONORS

Oklahoma Humanities extends its appreciation to the following individuals for support of our organization and programs:

\$2,500 AND ABOVE

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Peter G. Pierce III

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Alice Mankin
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Judy Burns

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Erika Huffman

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Cindy Friedemann

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William Michael McShan

In Honor of Dorothy Minor
Janis Farr

In Honor of Gary Mynatt
on his 82nd Birthday
Rev. Richard & Peggy Ziglar

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Joann Goodner

In Honor of Carla Walker
William Michael McShan

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Libby Thomas-Wheat

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Nancy Yoch

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UP TO \$2,499
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Tulsa Community Foundation

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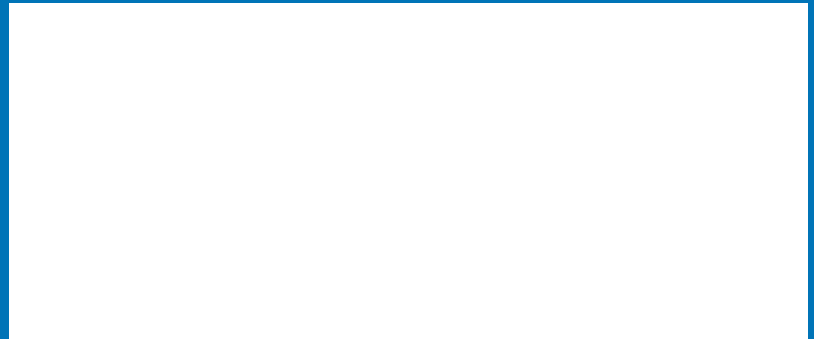


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- SPRING: Mandatory Draft, Mar. 1 | Final, April 1
- FALL: Mandatory Draft, Aug. 1 | Final, Sept. 1
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"Code" defies simple definition. From principles, rules, and laws to science, technology, and communication, code carries the framework of "how-to." It can be read as raised dots in Braille or heard as dots and dashes in Morse Code. Code can record and reveal cultures as well as track our secrets, preferences, and DNA. No matter the application, code is a key to information and understanding. Join us as we unravel the mysteries of code.