

Reviews

Historical Atlas of Oklahoma

Written by Charles Robert Goins and Danney Goble
Cartography by Charles Robert Goins and James H. Anderson

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The *Historical Atlas of Oklahoma* is comprised of 119 individual essays that explore various aspects of the state's rich history. Each essay is visually complemented by maps, charts and graphs. This book was originally published in 1956, but has been updated and re-released to coincide with the 100th anniversary of Oklahoma statehood on November 16, 2007.

Charles Robert Goins is Professor Emeritus of Regional and City Planning and Architecture at the University of Oklahoma. Danney Goble is Professor of Letters at the University of Oklahoma. These co-authors, along with seventeen other contributors, provide the essays that document Oklahoma history. James H. Anderson, Manager of Cartography for the Oklahoma Geological Survey at the University of Oklahoma, collaborated with Charles Robert Goins to provide the book's extensive cartographic elements.

The State of Oklahoma was created from the twin territories of Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory. The original Oklahoma Territory forms the western part of the current state, including the familiar Panhandle, while the original Indian Territory makes up the eastern portion of the current state. A small area between the two territories was once an Osage reservation. The state's name is derived from Okla-Homma, which is Choctaw for "red people."

Oklahoma is the 20th largest state in the United States, with a total area of 69,898 square miles. Census 2000 recorded a state population of 3,450,654.

The *Historical Atlas of Oklahoma* is presented in six parts. Part I, *Native Oklahoma*, provides maps and essays about the land itself. The local terrain is clearly mapped, and varies in type from the Granite Mountains region to the High Plains to the Cimarron River Valley.

Topography in Oklahoma tends to slope downward from the west side of the state toward the east. The state's highest elevation is on Black Mesa (4,973 feet), which is located within the Panhandle. The lowest elevation in Oklahoma is 287 feet, diagonally across from Black Mesa near the southeast corner of the state.

Just as the land slopes from west to east, so does precipitation increase from west to east across Oklahoma, with the Panhandle area being the driest. Oklahoma has the dubious honor of being located within "tornado alley," averaging anywhere from 17 to 145 tornadoes per year. Many of the tornado forecasting and warning systems that are relied upon today throughout the United States were developed in Oklahoma in response to a very deadly tornado there in 1947. Atlas maps show Oklahoma's overall location within the greater area of "tornado alley," and document the specific locations of some of the state's worst storms.

The Red and Arkansas Rivers flow in part through Oklahoma. Looking at the accompanying maps, it is easy to visualize how these rivers assisted early settlers with the transport of people and supplies. The Red River forms the southern border of Oklahoma.

The opening of Oklahoma land to settlement in the 1880s ultimately set the stage for the Dustbowl of the 1930s. Farming meant breaking up tough prairie sod comprised of thickly matted grass roots and soil – sod so thick, it could be stacked like bricks to build sod huts for early residents. But breaking up the prairie sod opened the delicate soils underneath to wind and water erosion. Each subsequent year of plowing by eager farmers further exacerbated this condition. In drought years, dust storms occurred. The prairie winds simply blew the loose soil at will, just as northern winds blow snow into deep drifts. In 1934 and 1935, dust from Oklahoma and surrounding states actually traveled eastward as far as the Atlantic Ocean to blanket eastern cities in dust. The dust was so dense on the horizon that it actually blackened the sky as if it were evening. Startled New Yorkers and other eastern residents had to turn their lights on during the day and hold handkerchiefs over their mouths to filter the air, just as Oklahomans had done for decades. The vast extent of the dust storms finally made soil conservation an important concern.

Oklahoma is the fifth largest producer of crude oil in the United States, and the third largest producer of natural gas. Maps show large natural gas fields in the Panhandle, with smaller oil fields scattered throughout the central portion of the state. Other mapped

resources include coal, limestone and salt.

Part II, *Humans on the Landscape*, begins 40,000 years ago and continues chronologically to the present. Maps show evidence of early settlements in Oklahoma, including important archaeological sites. Spanish explorers such as Coronado were searching for fabled cities rich in gold and turquoise during the 16th and 17th centuries, but such cities were never found. French explorers came in the 18th century to establish trade with native tribes. Many of the mountain ranges, rivers and towns in Oklahoma still bear the names left by early Spanish and French explorers.

In 1803, Oklahoma was included in the Louisiana Purchase and became part of the United States. Various expeditions explored the region in and around Oklahoma between 1806 and 1821. Trading routes were established, and military posts were built to provide protection and ensure safe passage. Political boundaries began to be delineated. The familiar Panhandle was designated as "No Man's Land" until 1890, when it officially became part of Oklahoma Territory. The development of the present day borders of Oklahoma is further documented with an intriguing map, as latitude, longitude and local politics delicately converge to create a new state.

Part III, *Oklahoma as Native America*, explores the state's important tribal heritage. Cherokees, Creeks, Chickasaws, Choctaws and Seminoles were among the major Indian tribes relocated to the Oklahoma region in the 19th century. They had been pushed steadily westward across the Mississippi River as the American settlement expanded in the east. The Cherokee territory in particular was an extended source of conflict. A large portion of what is now Tennessee and Kentucky, along with smaller portions of the Carolinas, Georgia and Alabama, was considered Cherokee land until the Cherokees were removed by force in 1838. The "Trails of Tears" map poignantly marks their difficult treks westward toward self-governed territory in Oklahoma. The Cherokees occupied much of northern Oklahoma as well as a portion of Arkansas and Kansas for the next fifty years. Congress ultimately purchased it all back by 1893 to allow for expansion of non-Indian settlement in Oklahoma. Similar fates befell the Choctaws, Creeks, Chickasaws, and Seminoles during that period.

Many Indians in Oklahoma kept African American slaves during the early 19th century, as did many whites in the southern portion of the United States during that same period. But in Indian society, the slaves were permitted to establish their own homes and communities as long as they continued to perform the duties required by their masters. Numerous slave communities were formed, and some still exist today as predominantly black communities. Scores of Indians sided with the Confederates during the Civil War

and fought with them in vain to retain their shared institution of slavery. The end of the Civil War brought freedom to the slaves of Indians as well as Confederate whites in Oklahoma.

In Part IV, *Where the Frontier Ends*, a clear vision of the Old West emerges, with Oklahoma taking center stage. The buffalo herds that once extended from the East Coast [*sic*] to the Rocky Mountains provided food and clothing for local Indian tribes. But completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1862 brought buffalo hunters to Oklahoma and other areas where buffalo were plentiful, and made it possible to transport meat and hides to ready markets. The great herds were decimated by the end of the 19th century.

Military forts were built and served as refuge during the many Indian Wars between 1847 and 1878 in Oklahoma's Indian Territory. Roads were also created to connect the forts and allow movement of people and goods. The military was expected to provide protection to new settlers in the area, but many Indian raids continued to occur throughout the frontier in nearby Kansas and Texas. In response to these raids, and to increasing government pressure to exact revenge, George Armstrong Custer led the Massacre on the Washita in 1868. An entire Indian village was destroyed near the present day town of Cheyenne, Oklahoma.

From the end of the Civil War until the mid-1880s, millions of Texas cattle crossed through Oklahoma territory on their way to Kansas, where they would be shipped by railroad to northern and eastern markets. Of all the cattle trails shown on the accompanying map, the Chisholm Trail was perhaps the best known. It was relatively safe from Indian Territory, where monetary payment was often required in return for safely crossing the land. The Chisholm Trail also provided ample grazing and water along the way.

As railroad lines extended into Oklahoma beginning in 1870, cattle, coal and agricultural products began to be shipped by rail. Treaties had to be negotiated with Indian tribes to allow construction of the railroads through Oklahoma's Indian Territory.

The first Oklahoma Land Run took place as a result of the Homestead Act. On April 22, 1889, a small expanse of land in the center of the state was formally opened to settlers, and included the area that today comprises Guthrie and Oklahoma City. About 50,000 homesteaders gathered all along the border of the unsettled territory, waiting for the chance to stake their claims to 160 acres each. Bugles and cannons sounded to initiate the land run, and prospective settlers raced in on horseback or by covered wagon to look for the boundary markers left by government surveyors. Once a marker was located, the prospective settler needed to take down the information from the marker and proceed in haste to the nearest federal land office

to ensure a claim for that location. The Homestead Act required each settler to live on the land for at least six months out of each year for a five-year period before ownership of the land was provided free and clear. Each settler also had the option of paying \$1.25 per acre for the land after living on it for twelve months in order to obtain ownership more quickly.

Part V, *Brand New State...Gonna Treat You Great*, examines the political and social elements surrounding the statehood of Oklahoma. County lines were drawn with quantity in mind, since more counties meant more government jobs, contracts and services. Due to the extreme poverty among farmers, Socialism was a major political presence between 1907 and 1920.

As in other southern states, segregation was enforced by state law during the early part of Oklahoma's statehood. The 1920s saw the rise and fall of the Ku Klux Klan in the state, and a violent race riot occurred in Tulsa in 1921. The main thoroughfare in the local black community was destroyed in just over a day, and countless people of both races were injured or killed.

Although the production of corn and oats declined in Oklahoma over the last century, the production of sorghum and rye has increased significantly. Cattle ranching is one of the state's leading businesses.

In Part VI, *You're Doing Fine, Oklahoma*, maps provide a tour of Oklahoma's geographical regions, while political boundaries, highway systems, colleges and universities, museums and historic sites, and state parks and recreation areas are also explored.

Unfortunately, no new chronicle of Oklahoma would be complete without some reference to the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Building in Oklahoma City. A Bomb Damage Assessment Map shows the tremendous power of the explosion, which not only destroyed the Murrah Building, but also caused damage ranging from collapsed structures to broken windows for a radius of over half a mile. Photos show the devastation as well as the evocative memorial that rose in its place.

Oklahoma has a proud history of athletic, literary, theatrical, artistic and musical accomplishments. These are amply illustrated with photographs and maps. The final two essays describe specific men and women as "partners on the land" of Oklahoma. Brief biographies, photographs and maps of birthplaces illustrate their accomplishments. An extensive bibliography and index complete the atlas.

In the preface of the *Historical Atlas of Oklahoma*, the authors make some intriguing statements regarding why the original version of this book, which was published in 1956, was not noted as a first edition. "There must have been some who unthinkingly presumed that geography and history are, after all, two aspects of human affairs that are utterly impervious to change,"

they theorize. "The physical planet is not going to change. History lies entirely in the past, and that past is not going to change either." It is easy to believe that physical changes like global warming, and historical changes ranging from population growth and related development to local and international terrorism could not possibly have been foreseen in the 1950s. From the vantage point of 2007, however, it is just as easy to believe that future editions of this atlas will necessarily be inevitable as the world and its societies continue to evolve.

Prior to reading this book, my knowledge of Oklahoma was based more on films like Edna Ferber's *Cimarron*, John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* and Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* than on anything I ever learned in geography or history classes. The *Historical Atlas of Oklahoma* provided an enjoyable way to increase my understanding of Oklahoma's unique role in American history. The simultaneous presentation of essays and accompanying cartographic elements ensured that I never lost my sense of place within the state as historical events unfolded. The maps were easy to read and understand, and the division and progression of the essays, though overlapping at times, was largely chronological throughout the course of the book. I did not have the impression that the *Historical Atlas of Oklahoma* was simply the retelling of an older edition with some new information tacked on at the end to bring it up to date. The sense of continuity and overall flow of the book was seamless.

The enthusiasm of the co-authors and other contributors for all things Oklahoma is apparent in the text, yet it does not preclude the unbiased presentation of the unflattering aspects of the state's history, such as slavery and racism, in tandem with the noble ones. The *Historical Atlas of Oklahoma* is a very comprehensive volume for a broad range of academic studies, including cartography. I would highly recommend it for anyone with an interest in American history, American geography, the Old West, or Oklahoma in particular. To quote from the title song to Rodgers and Hammerstein's great musical, which has since become Oklahoma's state song: Oklahoma, and the historical atlas named for it, is "OK."