

# SOONER SPOTLIGHT ● THE MORGANS

Sharing a philosophy that "history is people," two widely respected historians — H. Wayne and Anne Hodges Morgan — have channeled their energies toward telling Oklahoma's rich story with vivid realism.

The Morgans — he is a George Lynn Cross research professor of history at the University of Oklahoma, and she is vice president for programs at the Kerr Foundation in Oklahoma City — strive to present the past in a way that will help people understand the present. They view history as much more why than what.

Their approach to history may seem unorthodox to traditionalists. In fact, *Oklahoma Memories*, a recent book which Anne edited with colleague Rennard Strickland, research professor of history and law at the University of Tulsa, drew some criticism from peers for not being "scholarly" enough.

"That was one of the nicest things people could have said to me," Anne insists, "because real people read that book, and real people loved that book. If history doesn't speak to the average citizen, it doesn't matter anyway."

Wayne contends that the "majority of professionals don't want a popular audience. They think that if a work is not accurately complicated, it isn't scholarly."

*Oklahoma Memories* is a collection of more than 25 personal stories of "real people" and the historical events that affected their lives — the land runs, the arrival of the railroads, statehood, oil booms and the Depression.

A newly published book which the Morgans co-edited, *Oklahoma: New Views of the Forty-Sixth State*, is intended for the professional. Wayne characterizes *New Views* as a collection of original essays designed to set the history of Oklahoma in national and regional contexts. "It contains theory, purely scholarly ideas."

Although they always have welcomed the opportunity to work together, they are equally well known for their individual writing accomplishments — Anne as the author of *Robert S. Kerr: The Senate Years*, and Wayne for numerous books on late 19th and early 20th century United States history.



Their first jointly authored book was *Oklahoma: A Bicentennial History*. They combined their talents again in an award-winning public awareness program on their adopted state's multicultural heritage, the Oklahoma Image project. Anne was project director for the all-encompassing look at Oklahoma's past, and Wayne edited a 10-booklet series, *Newcomers to a New Land*, on the ethnic groups that populated the state.

Their years of studying Oklahoma's past have brought both Wayne and Anne to the conclusion that Oklahoma's present is dominated by an increasing sense of confidence.

"There was a collapse of self-esteem following John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*," Wayne says, explaining that Steinbeck's intention was to create a heroic myth of survi-

val but that he created myths about Oklahoma in the process. "We've had to come quite a distance from the prohibitory mentality of Oklahoma's earlier years."

The Morgans rate the historical literature of Oklahoma as "one of the best in the country . . . and better than any in this region." Anne insists that the recording of Oklahoma's ethnic heritage, in particular, is "way beyond" that of surrounding states, and she credits the University of Oklahoma Press with the "encouragement of scholarship on the history of the state and the American Indian."

But when credit is given, a large share must go to writers like Wayne and Anne Morgan whose work has captivated present-day readers while providing an historical heritage for future generations.