

Rediscovering Oklahoma's Past

By M. L. Wardell, '19

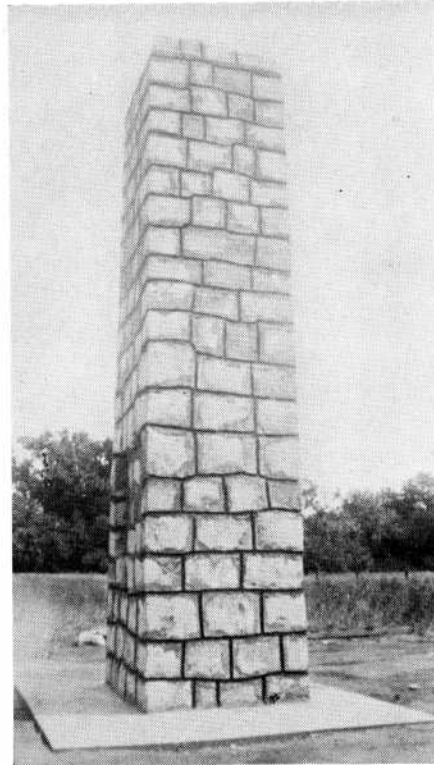
OKLAHOMA is unique in many respects and only with intensive study of its history does it reveal the thousands of secrets found within its borders.

A casual observation inclines one to believe that a new state could have only a meager story but such is by no means the case. To the Spanish who settled southwestern United States and moved into the east, Oklahoma, an area unknown by that name, was the "way out east" which was the frontier to serve as a buffer region against foreign encroachments. Here then in Oklahoma are found certain place names and vestiges of a past that is historically older than those of the eastern coastal region. During the eighteenth century, the French attempted to break through the Indian barrier which the Spanish set against its rival, but without much success; however, the eastern portion of Oklahoma remained open to French trade. Consequently, Oklahoma became the French frontier and truly became the "out west" to that people. There is found in eastern Oklahoma much that is French by way of place names and families of French origin. In fact, the first permanent white settlement in our state was made by the famous Choteau traders.

The struggle for ownership of the Mississippi Valley was decided finally in 1803, when the United States secured from the French the so-called Louisiana Purchase. After much negotiation and some show of force, the boundary was determined in 1819. The southern and western boundary of present day Oklahoma, except the small line separating the Panhandle from New Mexico, was then established as an international boundary.

Conditions were such that a portion of the newly acquired land was set aside for an Indian Territory into which eastern tribes might be removed. It is possible to study the entire United States Indian policy in the history of Oklahoma. Within its borders are approximately thirty-five tribes wholly or partially represented. As a result of this, no state in the Union has so many Indian place names, many of which cause the visitor much trouble in pronouncing them—even, for that matter, many of our own citizens will make grave errors, but they are our errors. Hundreds of historical sites come from this Indian occupation.

The Indians who removed from the East



This type of stone marker will designate the recently rediscovered historical sites of Oklahoma. A metal plaque attached to the stone column shown above will describe the place as the site of Sewell Stockade. It is in Grant County.

brought with them a great desire for education. The eastern portion of this state is literally dotted with sites of mission schools, academies, and schools established by the Indians themselves. Many of these sites are almost forgotten and have to be searched for as a relic of the past. These old educational centers are filled with romance and tragedy, but always remembered by some persons who once knew them as joyous spots—memories can be revived only by work here and there among those who once frequented sites in better days.

When Oklahoma was the frontier of the United States and an area of contest, many forts were established here. These were not only advance stations but points from which troops might be sent in emergencies among wild Plains Indians or to afford protection to the removed Indians. Forts, both permanent and temporary,

and military trails abound in great numbers. In fact, it may be safe to assume that with one or two exceptions and probably with no exceptions, Oklahoma has more military sites of importance than any other state.

All this has led many students of Oklahoma history to wonder if it might not be worthwhile to seek these old and almost forgotten places and make them historical spots for future generations of the state to hold in high regard. Beyond the borders of Oklahoma, many people think of this portion of the United States as one inhabited by Indians, a few white people—cowboys in particular—and dotted with oil wells. The time has come when the state's history should be told and when those who pass through can be made acquainted with the story of an area rich in history, folklore, and romance.

Consequently, nearly two years ago a WPA project was set up whereby it would be possible to gather facts about the hundreds of historical sites. Since WPA routine sometimes moves slowly, it was not until November, 1935, that work actually started. Since that time, with the exception of one thirty-day period, from twelve to fifteen persons have been busy collecting data which could not otherwise have been assembled.

For convenience, the state was divided into eight districts of interest and geographical significance. A field worker was placed in each district and the central office here at the University of Oklahoma was established to direct the activities. The field workers were chosen on the basis of qualifications, academic training and historical interest generally considered. The office personnel was selected from a group that had historical training, and clerical ability.

In no case did any worker in the office have less than a high school education; three hold Master's degrees or their equivalent; and one holds a Doctor of Philosophy degree. This assured those in charge of the project a fair piece of work. The high average of scholarship of research workers has been maintained to the present time, although workers have from time to time been replaced because of private employment making possible their leaving for other positions more remunerative.

The work of the central office consists

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man expecting to earn all his expenses during the first semester.

Kenyon's questionnaire revealed that only 26 students of more than 500 who answered had no money at all when they enrolled last fall.

The benefits and drawbacks of earning one's way are always debatable, but opinion among the students who answered the questionnaire is evenly divided. Of those who replied to the question, "Do you believe that working lessened the quality of your college attainment?" 113 said yes, and 119 said no.

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REDISCOVERING OKLAHOMA'S PAST

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of designating the sites of most historical interest, collecting all the available printed material, making bibliographies, and compiling field notes. In many cases the field worker may not know all the historical sites in his own community, therefore, he is furnished with certain facts, location of sites in general, and directions for work. He then visits the area, interviews all persons possible to secure additional information, secures the exact legal description of the site, consults the owner if possible, and makes his report.

These field notes show not only all facts mentioned above but consist also of maps showing the township, section, highways, and physical features of the area. The owner of the premises is interviewed with the intention of determining whether he would be willing for markers to be erected and investigation is made to determine whether the site is suitable for a park.

When the field notes are reported to the central office, and amplified with the material already collected from printed sources, they are then turned to an editor who prepares the copy for filing and indexing. The final reports of historical sites vary from one to fifteen pages. Several maps are always under construction showing the location of the sites.

The results of the work thus far have been most gratifying. More than a hundred important places of Indian history have been written about. These are villages, capitals of Indian Nations, homes of early Indian settlers, mills, ferries, courthouses, and scenes of events of historical significance. It is necessary to eliminate the less important ones on account of limitations of time and personnel.

In close connection with Indian history are the educational centers. Scores of such places have been recorded with all the information that can be collected. Eastern Oklahoma, as Indian Territory for nearly one hundred years, was filled with schools taught by men and women from

the East during the first three quarters of the past century, and reveals a deep classical training that is highly significant and still present. Many schools of this nature in time employed native Indian teachers and finally some of these schools were placed under the jurisdiction of the Indian governments, and even later became United States government schools.

At least one hundred and twenty-five military sites have been recorded with all the information available. This research project has brought to light more military points of interest than were at first even guessed. In fact, sites are found mentioned from time to time in printed material, letters, and memoirs that have not yet been located.

It is strange how soon a few decades hide from pages of history the facts that are sought; it seems probable that some sites will have to be finally reported with meager findings. The scores of military camps, cantonments, and forts necessitated many miles of trails. These cross the state in every direction, the traveler on any highway drives many miles on or near the routes that a century ago were fraught with hardships and dangers accompanied with death from enemies, hunger, thirst, and exposure.

Cattle trails once known to all trail drivers are today found hidden by the plow and section lines. It is difficult in most instances to reestablish the routes followed by the herds and their drivers more than a half century ago. Camp sites are sometimes determined by the remains of parts of broken wagons, pocket knives, cartridges, horseshoes, and whatever may have been useful to the cattlemen on their drives.

That tragic site of a "ghost town" is one of the most elusive places. Oklahoma, like many western states, has at least fifty or seventy-five such remains. The history of these locations can be found only by long searching for persons who knew the town in days gone by, by searching newspaper files, by reading military reports, and by any other methods the field worker may find possible.

Now that the project has to date revealed more than a thousand places of historical significance it is the task of the workers to assemble all the material and file it for use by the student of Oklahoma history. This is being done as rapidly as possible. The direct results are evident; there are already places being prepared for markers.

This is a program which will require much time, co-operation, and effort on the part of all historically minded persons. The NYA, the National Park Service, Women's Clubs, Civic Clubs and other organizations are doing their part in making possible the marking of historical sites. The first sites that are now marked and waiting dedication are on the old Chisholm Trail.

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At the south side of the little town of Jefferson in Grant County are the locations of the intersection of the famous Black Dog Trail, named for the Osage Chief, and the Chisholm Trail, the Sewall Stockade which was the first stage stand south of Caldwell, Kansas, established in the late sixties, and the graves of two cowboys who lost their lives in the early seventies as they drove their herds along the famous trail. Two monuments have been erected—one sixteen feet high, the other twelve. The former marks the Sewall Stockade, the latter the graves of the two riders of the western plains. In each of these monuments will be placed a metal plaque, twenty-four by forty inches, bearing the design of the outline of the State of Oklahoma, inside of which appears the legend. Dedication ceremonies will be held July the Fourth.

The actual marking of Oklahoma's historical sites is now under way. Within a few years, scores of places will be suitably marked and in this way our history will be read by those who drive along the highways, visit parks which are being prepared by both the State of Oklahoma and the National Park Service, and by others who may be interested in the history of one of the most colorful states in the Union.

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PORTRAIT OF A SOONER

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for the irrigation of thousands of acres of Jackson county farm land.

Often kidded because of his continual insistence for improved highways in his section, Mr. Wimberly nevertheless keeps right on pleading editorially and through personal requests.

Once a golfer, he gave up that hobby for aviation and later turned to fishing. But now he is the victim of a bite from the "photography bug" and he snaps pictures of everything and everybody, many of which are in the *Times-Democrat*. With a small movie camera he often takes pictures of his family and intimate friends and then puts on a "show" with a projection machine in his home.

Author of "The West Side," one of the most quoted daily newspaper columns in the state, Mr. Wimberly likes the Fourth Estate because he believes it is the "only thing."

As a leader of the Oklahoma press group, which is nationally known for its effectiveness, Mr. Wimberly this year will drive hundreds of miles all over the state in all kinds of weather, will make scores of speeches, attend many group meetings and conferences and perform other tasks. But he will do it and do it well because he is a "born newspaperman."

20 LIFE MEMBERS!

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continued in this position after his graduation. He was a leader in student activities, as colonel in the R. O. T. C., member of Scabbard and Blade, Ruf Neks, Skeleton and Key, and winner of the Oklahoma Public Speaking League award for the student doing the most to promote student speech work. Mrs. Gunning is the former Eleanor Aderhold, a junior in the School of Art during the last school year.

Alfred Naifeh, '38, who has been active in student affairs as president of the Mens Council, member of the President's Honor Class, and president of Phi Eta Sigma, freshman honorary scholastic society. Other activities included Bombardiers, Congress, debate, chairman Student Emergency Loan Fund Committee, state chairman Roosevelt First Voters League, president O. U. League of Young Democrats, Activities Trust Fund Committee, Ruf Neks, Phi Beta Kappa, and president of the Southern Federation of College Students.

Brunette Shanklin, '30, secretary in the office of James F. Findlay, dean of men. Counselor and friend to hundreds of students who carry on the program of the Independent Men's Association from the dean's office, Miss Shanklin performs many important services for the student body.

Sam Pack, '37ex, Norman, supervisor for the state WPA project for gathering facts about historical sites in Oklahoma. Mr. Pack was outstanding as an orator and debater while in school, and won several forensic contests.

Mrs. Arta Maginnis James, '32bus, former secretary to T. M. Beard in the University Extension Division and now a housewife at Duncan.

Albert Clinkscales, '17, Oklahoma City. Mr. Clinkscales is a petroleum geologist. He was president of the Class of '17, and was in charge of the highly successful 20-year reunion of the class which was held June 6 of this year.

Ralph Kenyon, '38law, president of the Men's Council during the last year and prominent in many activities. He was awarded the Dads Association scholarship for 1937, and is a member of Phi Delta Phi, Skeleton Key, League of Young Democrats, Congress Literary Society, and the Progressive Democrats Association.

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Believes in education

Dr. James G. Binkley, '17, whose son Frank C. Binkley received a B. S. in Medicine degree this spring, is rapidly assuming top rank for loyalty to education and to the University.

When Frank receives his M. D. degree, Dr. Binkley will have paid for and ob-

tained a total of seven degrees from O. U. and one from Harvard! How many Oklahomans could beat that record?

Dr. Binkley started the string of degrees by working his own way through school, entering at the age of 33. His oldest daughter, now Mrs. H. A. Ireland, obtained an arts and science degree; his elder son, Dr. J. Samuel Binkley, received two degrees—B. S. and A. B.—from O. U., and the M. D. degree from Harvard; a daughter, Anna Margaret, received a degree in art at Norman, and Frank is getting the sixth and seventh degrees from O. U.

Disclaiming personal credit for his achievement, Dr. Binkley says, "I am indebted to O. U. for our opportunity."

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Johnsons cancel trip

Neil R. Johnson, '15, '17law, and Mrs. Johnson, '16, were forced to cancel plans for a European trip this summer because Mrs. Johnson became ill suddenly a few days before they were scheduled to leave.

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Muskogee chairman named

A. Camp Bonds, '29law, Muskogee county attorney, has been named chairman of a committee to arrange for organization of Sooners at Muskogee and to plan a football dinner meeting in early fall.

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