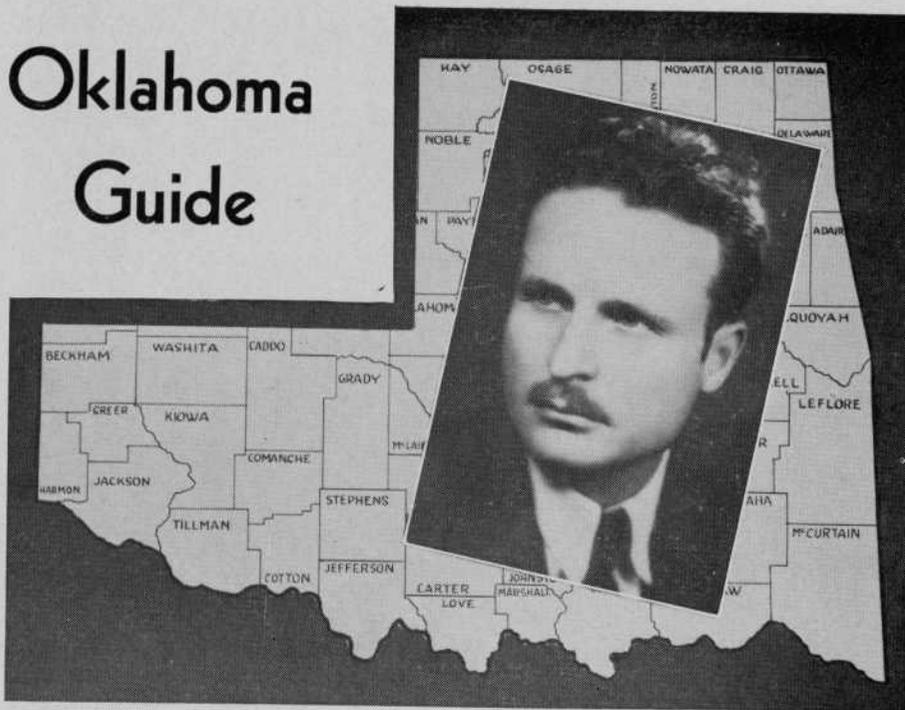


# Oklahoma Guide



*William Cunningham, '25, who directed writing of the Oklahoma Guide.*

**T**HE longest straight line you can draw across Oklahoma is longer than a line drawn from Oklahoma to Florida. Oklahoma is not a mountainous state but its highest point is higher than any peak in the mountains of Alabama, Arkansas, Connecticut, Kentucky, Missouri, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Vermont, or West Virginia. It is a new state, but there were white men here 35 years after Columbus died and long before John Smith was born. William Henry Harrison was the first American governor of this territory. The first Boy Scout troop in America was organized in Pawhuska.

Jesse Chisholm did not discover nor was he the first to travel the Chisholm Trail. *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot* was composed by an Oklahoma Negro slave. Oklahoma has its dust bowl, but for every acre damaged by the wind there are four acres that have been badly damaged or ruined by sheet and gully erosion.

These believe-it-or-nots are important only as indicators of the size and complexity of Oklahoma. No individual can know very much about forty-four million acres of land nor understand very well the two million people living on these acres. Certainly no one on the Federal Writers' Project of Oklahoma, when the Project was established two years ago, understood the magnitude of the task of writing an *Oklahoma Guide*, and even now, with the task almost completed the general feeling is that Oklahoma is a vast and mysterious land, and actually very little is known about it.

William Cunningham, University of Oklahoma graduate in 1925, has super-

vised the work as director of the Federal Writers' Project.

The project has employed from thirty to one hundred workers from time to time, few of them professional writers, and it has secured the help of hundreds of specialists and thousands of old-time residents of the state. Patiently it has gathered material, checked its own errors and those of well-meaning friends, boiled down lengthy essays, until at the present time a manuscript of about 180,000 words is ready for the printer.

Recently, a bright young man who had read the manuscript and was critical of both the writing and the time consumed, wrote us as follows:

"Why not hire a professional writer, provide him with a car and a stenographer, and let him ride up and down the highways of Oklahoma, recording his impressions? This method would be much simpler than the one used . . . and the text would be more colorful."

Aside from the fact that this would obviate the necessity for a Federal Writers' Project, it sounded like a good idea. But we turned the letter over to our tour editor, who also is a bright young man. He replied:

"We have to have something more than impressions. If you can dig up a writer

who is an expert on geology, agriculture, mining, hunting and fishing, architecture—everything, in fact—okay. But he'll have to make four trips instead of one. The changing seasons, you know . . ."

It might be well to mention here, that the *Oklahoma Guide* is much more than a "guide." In many respects it resembles an encyclopedia. The book opens with a series of essays on the state's social and economic life: the educational system, transportation, racial elements, and many other topics. Following these, and occupying approximately three-fourths of the volume, are twenty-three tours covering every federal highway and several important state highways. The tours not only take cognizance of camping spots, recreational areas, historic sites, important towns and important people—the usual things—but also discuss the history, the mode of living, the industries and agricultural practices of each locality. Obviously, the one-man-and-stenographer idea has its drawbacks.

The writer in a work of this kind has a thousand chances to madden the reader and make himself ridiculous. "Fifty years ago . . ." he says, and the reader picking up the book a few years hence will have to guess the date referred to. "On your left," says the scribe, "is the largest Masonic Temple in Oklahoma." And the tourist, who has stubbornly entered town from the wrong direction, looks to his left and sees an undertaking parlor.

**T**HE perversity of the potential tourist-reader has caused us no end of trouble. If he would always come into the state over the same route—but we know he will not. And his interests will not be those of his brethren. Useless to tell him that it is one hundred and twenty miles to Oklahoma City when he is not on the Kansas border. Useless to drag him through the Kiamichi hunting country when he detests hunting and craves archeological sites. Baedeker tells the tourist what he should see, and the route to see it, and if he's disinterested or gets lost—that is too bad. Our own attitude is more solicitous.

Our tourist can never be lost because we orient him constantly and the orientation is not dependent upon red barns, haystacks, and whoops and hollers. He can start out on one highway, turn off on a country road, double back, and take another highway, and he'll always know exactly where he is and the exact distance to his destination. If he likes oil wells we'll take him right up to the derrick floor and give him the history of the industry from spring-pole to rotary; if he's a golf nut we'll show him the best courses. Whatever he does is all right with us.

A system of giving directions that works  
(PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 27)

By  
**Jim Thompson**

ball games with the Kansas Aggies and Missouri were shown.

▲

### California Sooners

A meeting of O.U. alumni in the Los Angeles vicinity in California was scheduled January 24. Approximately fifty attended the last previous meeting, which was held October 25. At that time Renato Laras, Mexican consul, was honor guest and the program included Mexican songs and moving pictures of the International Highway. A. C. Cooley, '17ex, is president of the club at Los Angeles, and Oliver Leeper, '11, is secretary.

▲ ▲ ▲

## Oklahoma Guide

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14)

backwards, forwards, and sideways and is simple without being repetitious, is a pretty neat accomplishment in itself. But we don't dwell upon it. As a matter of fact, it isn't our creation but that of the Washington office of the project. We are indebted to Washington for a great many other things, although we often acknowledge the debt grudgingly.

At the end of the first six months of our project we had a guide book written, and we sent it into Washington. The criticism that came back with it was thicker than the manuscript.

"Oklahoma has few folk tunes," we had written glibly. And Washington snarled "You have almost a thousand."

We had begun our Industry section with a discussion of the oil business. Said Washington: "How about the ship-yards of Auguste Chouteau, established near the town of Okay in the early 1800's?"

Our essay on education was inadequate; statements in our architecture treatise were "doubted"; we had ignored this and overstressed that. Slowly, it dawned on us that we were not writing a guide-book, but *the* guide book. And with this nice distinction before us we began work anew.

Now, after two years, we have some 4,000,000 words in our files, probably the largest collection of Oklahoma manuscripts in existence. Our guide-book manuscript of 180,000 words is the concentrated essence of the file material.

▲ ▲ ▲

## Junior Honors Plan

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15)

In addition to being interested in the constructive service they can perform for the University, the students see the program as one that will give them valuable opportunities to get acquainted with leading students and faculty members of other schools and colleges in the University.

When the first luncheons were held, the student committees selected popular faculty members to come as guests, two or three faculty members sitting at each table of students, and the chance to meet

IMAGE IS NOT AVAILABLE ONLINE DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS.

A paper copy of this issue is available at call number LH 1 .06S6 in Bizzell Memorial Library.