



## NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

### **The Collection of Theodore H. Barrett, Surveyor of Indian Territory, 1870–73**

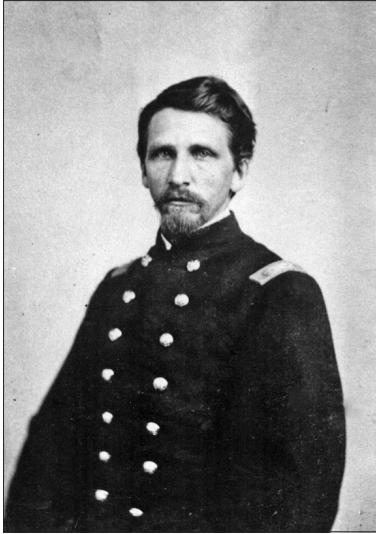
*By William D. Welge\**

At the conclusion of the Civil War (1861–65), the U.S. government began to remove additional American Indian tribes to Indian Territory. However, the government, envisioning the possible future statehood status of Indian Territory, decided to survey the vast area. In July 1870 contracts were awarded to two individuals, Ehud N. Darling and General Theodore H. Barrett.

Barrett was born in New York State in 1835. At some point he migrated to Minnesota and was surveying town sites prior to the Rebellion. When the war began, Barrett enlisted in the U.S. Army, and in August 1862 he was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Ninth Minnesota Infantry. The Ninth participated in a campaign against Sioux Indians in the fall of 1862. On December 29, 1863, Barrett became the commander of the U.S. Army's Sixty-second Colored Infantry. The unit saw action in south Texas and had the distinction of participating in the last battle of the war, the Battle of Palmito Ranch, May 12–13, more than a month after Lee had surrendered to Grant at Appomattox Court House.<sup>1</sup> By that time having risen to the rank of colonel, Barrett was quoted as stating that the "last volley of the war was fired . . . about sunset on the 13th of May 1865."<sup>2</sup>

In March 1865 Barrett received the rank of brevet brigadier general. He was mustered out of service on January 19, 1866. His activities between the end of the war and the start of his surveying contract with the United States is not known. Most likely he returned to Minnesota.<sup>3</sup>

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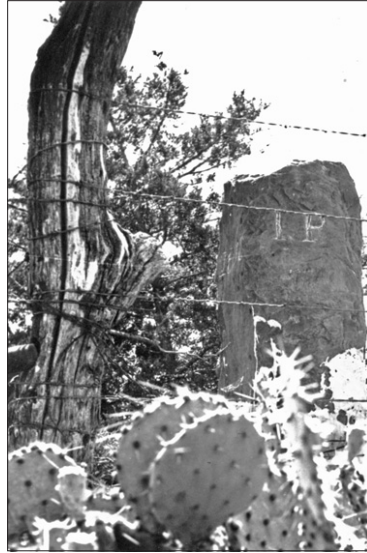
*Gen. Theodore H.  
Barrett  
(Courtesy Massachusetts  
Commandery, Military  
Order of the Loyal  
Legions and the  
U.S. Army Military  
History Institute).*

Although Barrett's and Darling's names appear on the various plats throughout the surveying of Indian Territory, teams of surveying parties consisting of nearly three hundred men carried out the work. Darling is credited with placing Initial Point, from which all range and townships in Oklahoma radiate. Barrett's team surveyed mostly western Indian Territory.<sup>4</sup> Barrett had perhaps the more dangerous assignment because the tribes that had been recently removed and placed on government-established reservations were still not "settled" in their new homes. These nomads of the Plains found confinement on reservations alien to their nature. As Barrett would soon discover, some of his surveying parties would be harassed by Cheyenne warriors. Efforts to get the military to protect the men became bogged down in military "red tape." As a result, tragic events occurred.

In an oral history interview, now held by the Oklahoma Historical Society, C. B. Willard remembered that application was made for military escort to safeguard the surveyors, but "the escort failed to come. . . ." He further stated that "I remember they lined us up one morning and those that wanted to work without an escort were to step to one side of the line and those that did not step to the other. Part wouldn't work and part did. We worked right on west. The first line we worked on after we come [sic] back was there at the river; then we went ahead to the 100th Meridian and finished our contract work."<sup>5</sup>

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*Initial Point marker (to the right of the fence post) is now almost disguised by vegetation (OHS Research Division photo).*



Other information comes from a man who worked as a survey team member. O. H. Todd, a resident of Osage County, Kansas, applied to Barrett for employment on a team surveying the Chickasaw Nation not far from Fort Arbuckle. In a speech given in 1899 to the Michigan Engineering Society, some twenty-five years after his adventure in Indian Territory, he stated that “at Fort Arbuckle, our party, being but recruits, was divided and assigned to the several camps in the field. The survey commenced in September of 1870, with headquarters at Fort Arbuckle. I [was] detailed to . . . Pratt’s camp near the Chickasaw capital, Tishamingo [*sic*].”<sup>6</sup>

One of Todd’s observations once at camp near Tishomingo was that the “camp was situated on a small island in the swamps bordering the Wichita [*sic*] Washita River.”<sup>7</sup> He continued by saying, “It had been formerly a camp-meeting site, and was shaded by beautiful trees. Logs had been placed on the ground as seats, but now were often occupied by diamond rattler and huge blacksnakes from the swamps.” Probably one of the more chilling sights Todd saw while surveying in the area was, as he put it, “lazy alligators, with upper jaw thrown back, floated down the river, occasionally bringing their jaws together with a snap to imprison and swallow the accumulated flies and mosquitos [*sic*].”<sup>8</sup>

With his work completed in February 1872, Todd left the Indian Territory to return to Kansas. In October 1873 he wrote to General

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Barrett to ask for a letter of support, as he was running for the position of county surveyor in a local election to take place that November. It is assumed that Todd was elected. Whether Barrett complied with Todd's request is not known.<sup>9</sup>

After Barrett's contract was completed, he settled back in Minnesota and acquired tracts of land in Stevens County for farming purposes. He married, raised a family, and died at the age of sixty-five on July 20, 1900.<sup>10</sup> His descendants placed his letters, documents, and maps in an estate sale at some time in the 1930s. The collection was acquired by a private collector, who, in April 2002, sold the collection to the Oklahoma Historical Society. The acquisition was made possible with the aid of the Indian Territory Posse of Oklahoma Westerners, the Oklahoma Society of Land Surveyors, and Friends of the OHS Archives, Inc.

The Theodore H. Barrett Collection, 1870–1879 [2002.11] comprises 4 boxes, 1 oversize large box, and 1 flat file of originals mixed with copies. The collection has now been placed in acid-free folders, items separated by acid-free paper, and placed in document boxes. It is accessible in the Research Center of the Oklahoma Historical Society in Oklahoma City.

## ENDNOTES

\* William D. Welge is director of the Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division.

<sup>1</sup> Francis Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army, from the Organization, September 29, 1789 to March 2, 1903*, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1903), 1:194.

<sup>2</sup> United States, War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series I, Vol. 48, *Part I, Reports, Correspondence, Etc., Operations in Louisiana and the Trans-Mississippi States and Territories, January 1–June 30, 1865* (Washington: GPO, 1896), 265–76; quotation on page 267.

<sup>3</sup> Heitman, *Historical Register*, 194.

<sup>4</sup> *Report of the Commissioner of the General Land Office for the Year 1871* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1872)

<sup>5</sup> C. B. Willard, interview by Frederick Barde, 1910, Frederick Barde Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

<sup>6</sup> O. H. Todd, "With the Early Surveyors of Indian Territory," *The Michigan Engineers' Annual, Proceedings of the Michigan Engineering Society for 1899* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: N.p., 1899), 89.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>9</sup> O. H. Todd to T. H. Barrett, October 15, 1873, Folder 8, Box 2, Theodore H. Barrett Collection.

<sup>10</sup> Heitman, *Historical Register*, 194.

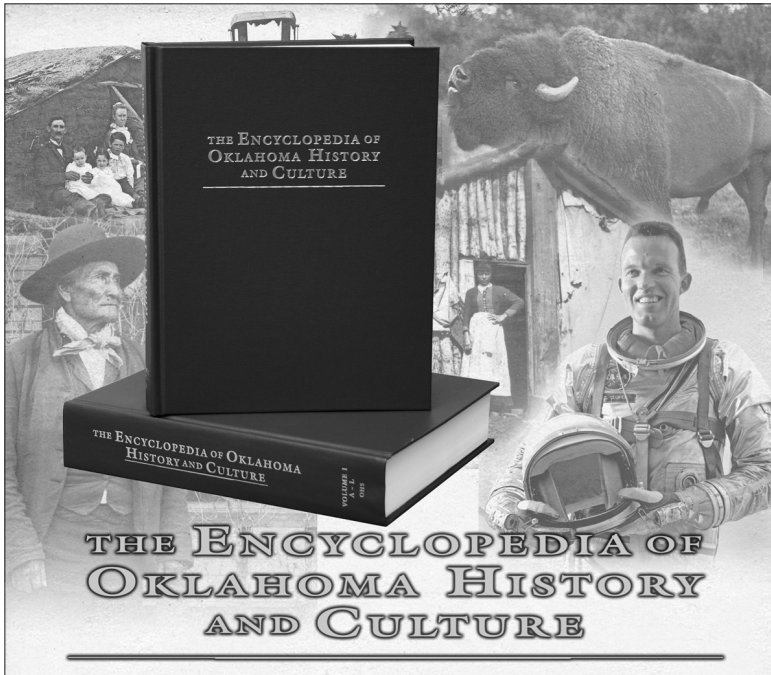
***The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma  
History and Culture* released by  
Oklahoma Historical Society in  
January 2010**

*By Dianna Everett*

*The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture* was released in January 2010 by the Oklahoma Historical Society. The purpose of the *Encyclopedia*, a general reference work, is to provide a thoughtful, scholarly retrospective of our state's past, in all of its varied aspects and including its varied peoples. We approach our past, and illuminate our present, by examining and presenting our history in basic, well-established historical themes and related topics. Each theme is informed overall by chronology, and each is complemented by cultural, regional, and geographical perspectives. The work encompasses time periods from pre-Columbian through the late twentieth century and includes a diversity of disciplines to provide a rounded portrait of the state's history, its physical properties, its many peoples, and their collective and individual pursuits.

The timetable for this multiyear project began in 1998 with a planning phase that extended into 2001. The National Endowment for the Humanities provided two grants totalling almost \$300,000 so that OHS could employ in-house historians and editors from July 2001 through July 2007.

Early in the project, the staff, professional historians, other scholars, and an advisory board of Oklahoma citizens collaborated to devise a set of mission goals and objectives. The consensus was that the book's content should revolve around twenty-six basic themes in Oklahoma history. These include social, cultural, and economic topics, as well as chronological overviews, and geographical features. The themes, developed from the Oklahoma Historical



Society's "Historic Context Review Report," a guidance document, include: African Americans; American Indians; Arts and Humanities; Civil War Era; Education; Environment and Cultural Ecology; European Exploration; Farming; Folklife; Government and Politics; Immigration; Military—Nineteenth Century; Natural Resources; Economic History; Petroleum Industry; Prehistoric Native Peoples; Ranching; Recreation and Entertainment; Religion; Settlement Patterns; Territorial Era; Transportation; Twentieth Century; Urban Development; Westward Expansion; and Women.

Using this list of rubrics as a framework, the staff and scholars developed the content. In 2000 a board of consultants was selected, each a noted scholar in his or her field of endeavor. One consultant advised on each of the historical themes. Each offered thoughtful guidance on creating a rubric outline and then prepared an essay on his/her selected theme. The essay, generally about two thousand words in length, is interpretive in nature, rather than strictly factual. A major purpose of each essay is to place its theme within the

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state's general historical context, to inform the topic with recent scholarship, and to illustrate important linkages to the other themes as well as to the history of the United States and the West.

The selection of subtopics linked to each theme was carefully approached. The editorial staff and consultants wrestled with "criteria for inclusion," especially for topics proposed at the shorter, entry level. What do researchers call, write, or visit the Oklahoma Historical Society to investigate? What kinds of information do students and teachers request? How inclusive can a book be and still be useful? This led to discussions with many scholars and also to surveys of appropriate "end users." As the participants proposed and discussed these questions, the resulting criteria were based on the concept of significance in national, regional, or statewide history and for significant association with one (or more) of the rubrics.

From 2001 through 2007 project staff and other authors, primarily university-based scholars, prepared articles and entries in their areas of expertise. More than seven hundred contributors, among them a handful of OHS staff, offered their knowledge and expertise in creating the *Encyclopedia*. The authors are scattered literally all across the United States at various colleges and universities and also include a number of local historians in communities around Oklahoma.

Within the work, the presentation of material is in alphabetical, rather than topical, order. There are biographies of individuals significant in Oklahoma history, of people from Oklahoma who were significant in the history of other parts of the country, and of all of Oklahoma's governors, U.S. Senators, and U.S. Representatives. All of the state's recognized American Indian tribes are included, as are ethnic groups such as Asians and Hispanics. European exploration, industry and business, the petroleum industry, environmental history, farming, and ranching are also represented. The state's military history has not been ignored, with major sections devoted to the Civil War, the Indian Wars, and other engagements. The Recreation and Entertainment rubric covers the major sports that Oklahomans love to watch and take part in, and well-known athletes are included. Art and artists, writers, musicians, and similar topics are also included.

To make sure that each part of the state has been represented, the encyclopedia project staff conducted a Community History Program. In each of ten regions a regional coordinator (a scholar, based at a regional university), worked with project staff and local/county historical societies to research and write entries on county, town,

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and local history. Each of Oklahoma's 77 counties and 586 incorporated towns/cities are profiled in the book.

The book went to press in December 2009. The product of the multiyear effort is two hard-bound volumes containing 2,455 entries and numerous illustrations provided by the photographic archive of the Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division. (The retail price of the two-volume set is \$100, plus the applicable state and local sales taxes and \$8 for shipping/handling. Contact the OHS Gift Shop at 405/522-5214 to obtain a copy; various discounts apply.)

*The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture* is designed to be "reader-friendly." Each entry offers cross-references to other articles for further exploring a topic. It is the hope of the editorial staff, scholars, and other contributors that consulting the *Encyclopedia* will engage a reader's interest and stimulate further investigation of a topic. Therefore, each entry offers a bibliography of suggested reading. The bibliography is not intended as a "footnote" for the entry but includes literature that a reader can access with relative ease at a local or regional library. Finally, each entry is signed by its author. The *Encyclopedia* is going to be an invaluable tool for many audiences, including students at all educational levels, teachers of humanities-related subjects in public and private schools, amateur historians, library users, genealogists, scholars in disciplines outside the humanities, and members of the general public.

Because *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture* is expected to remain a standard historical reference for many decades, contributions were required to be submitted with documentation. The original manuscripts and the documentation will remain publicly accessible in an extensive set of vertical files related to the encyclopedia project. These will be housed in the OHS Research Division.

As the staff, scholars, and other historians developed it, the book became a nexus of scholarship and public partnership in the creation of a valuable teaching and learning tool for Oklahomans. The book's creators hope that transmitting this information to the general public will refine and deepen a "sense of place" among the state's citizens. Readers across the United States will find in the *Encyclopedia* a clarification of the national understanding of Oklahoma and its place in the nation. Within the *Encyclopedia*, scholars may analyze, discuss, and explode misconceptions and stereotypes about Oklahoma. The project and the book are significant on two levels: they can create and disseminate an important hu-



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manities resource to assist Oklahomans in achieving enhanced historical self-awareness, self-analysis, and self-understanding; and they can also offer a national audience a better understanding of Oklahoma's position within the development of the nation. They can also assist in assessing Oklahoma's place within the West as a distinct cultural region.