

☆ NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

A LETTER FROM OKLAHOMA, 1905

Edited By H. Roger Grant

The following description of life in Oklahoma on the eve of statehood is both fascinating and informative. Written by an unknown individual, identified only as Ed, it was received by J. B. Feitus, a shop employee of the Chicago Great Western Railway, in Oelwein, Iowa. Likely the author was either a former fellow worker or an ex-neighbor.

Some spelling and punctuation changes have been made for greater readability. The flavor of this 1905 letter, however, remains.

Pawnee, Oklahoma
May 10, 1905

Friend Feitus,—Regarding the Indian Territory, it is a very good country generally speaking, has a lot of good towns, considerable railroads and more building all the time. Many natural resources and when in a condition that whites can develop them it will unquestionably be a great country. However the conditions at present and for some years to come are so varied and peculiar and cover such a scope it would take much time and space to enumerate them. Some of them, however, are all [land] titles outside of towns and cities, and some of them in such are very liable to be clouded and much litigation is and will continue to come up. Another is most of the land (all at the start) is yet in the hands of Indians and . . . Negroes and the restrictions are such that much of it will remain so for the next 20 years.

As compared with the whole, very little of the country is under a state of cultivation and with a few exceptions what is [is] under a lease system. In some sections you can travel for miles and whole townships through a rolling country covered with a rather inferior growth (caused by annual fires) of black jack, hickory and post oak with cedar, pecan, birch, sycamore and numerous other varieties in and along creek bottoms, without seeing signs of habitation with the exception of an occasional blind trail or bridle path leading off of main trail to some Indian or white man's abode on some bottom along a creek.

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

You will find the Indian with a squaw patch and a few ponies. He hunts deer, turkey, coon, possum, rabbits, squirrel and quail of which there is more or less of each in this country. Upon your approach you will always be greeted by a pack of "sofka" curs. His abode invariable [*sic*] is a dilapidated old log house built without any idea of architecture and regardless of points of compass. The white or squaw man's arrangements and situation is covered with about the same description, except he possibly cultivates more land and has a bunch of cattle and his dogs are hounds.

Much of this timber land is and in time will be under a high state of cultivation. Again a part of this country is very rough and rocky and good for nothing but a poor quality of grazing with a possible exception of mineral and oil. Yet there is open grain country as fine as the sun ever shone on that has been brought to a considerable state of cultivation. The Indian Territory at present is town building. Every town they expect to be a city and every city they expect to be a Chicago or Kansas City. You can draw your own conclusions what the outcome will be.

The Indian Territory has no local form of government, except municipal towns and cities. The laws are all administrated by U.S. court with Arkansas statutes governing their actions. Outside of incorporated towns all officers are appointed by the government. The only vote you have is at city election. These cause more agitation than a presidential campaign. There are no taxes collected outside of cities or incorporated towns neither on realty or personal. In such incorporated towns taxes are assessed to cover school purposes along [with] what is necessary to cover other general expenditures. Invariably their schools are good. There is no school for whites in the country outside.

Taking up Oklahoma, the western part is like western Texas and West Kansas, covering a period of time history and results prove to us there is not sufficient rainfall. Middle Oklahoma like the states mentioned gets more moisture and consequently produces more satisfactorily covering a specified period of years, but is not subject to diversified farming to the extent eastern Oklahoma and Indian Territory is on account of the increased precipitation. Eastern Oklahoma and Indian Territory are very much alike as to typography [*sic*] and agricultural and mineral production. The oil and gas fields of eastern Oklahoma are at present the greatest in this country and bid fair to be greatest ever known. Eastern Oklahoma and Indian Territory lie principally between the 95 and the 97th meridian and consequently are directly south of eastern Nebraska and western Iowa and well within the rain belt which is clearly defined as you approach the west of the 100 meridian, if you will look on your map covering settled portion of North

America. You will note your map shows very little agriculture from Old Mexico through western Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, Dakotas and on to Hudson Bay along the 100 meridian.

Oklahoma is under territorial form of government, which is same as state government except governor and judicial judges who are appointed. . . . The laws are made and executed by the people's representatives the same as in the states. County, township, municipal and school elections and government are the same. We have a representative in congress, but he has no vote, nor do we have any presidential electors. There's no government land in middle or eastern Oklahoma. The inhabitants will average a family and a half to 160 acres outside of towns. This is caused by tenement houses on much of the quarter sections for the purposes of a family to have about 20 acres in cotton, potatoes or vegetables. Most land owners prefer to farm cotton especially this way. Others will not plant cotton at all and utilize their land for wheat, corn, oats or other products along with production of cattle, horses, mules and swine. These are our successful men that have their homes and a bank account. Land in eastern Oklahoma varies in prices from \$3,000 to \$5,000 a quarter section according to location, quality and improvements. Very few farms exceed in distance from railroad market farms in Iowa, ten or twelve miles. Good water and usually soft is not hard to get by putting down a well not to exceed 100 feet. Some quarter sections can be purchased for less than amount stated, but in making figures it is my aim to give an idea of what good general purpose land can be got for.

All of eastern Oklahoma as well as Indian Territory is undoubtedly underlaid with oil and gas in greater or less quantities which will be developed as needed in years to come and can be considered a lawful asset to the man owning the land at some future time. The development of these are only in their infancy in this territory. Yet I would not advise a purchaser paying more than general agricultural value unless on or near proven ground.

The climate is exceptionally fine and soil production beyond reasonable expectations producing a greater variety than any other of almost every state and territory west of the Mississippi which I have traveled into a greater or less extent. Four years residence with my family here warrants one in asserting that with the exercise of common sense and sanitary requirements it is exceedingly healthy. We have had no occasion to employ a physician, and general observations leads me to the belief that there is less sickness than in colder climates. True it gets very warm during June, July and August, but there is always a breeze blowing and the nights are a dream for comfort. Not cold, but simply delightful. We do not get the western Kansas blizzards or winds, neither are we subject to the cyclone

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

or tornado conditions that northwestern Iowa and country tributary are subject to.

Regarding titles in Indian Territory to make myself more plain. Land there to which you can get a title are freedman [Black] lands on which congress passed a bill supposed to remove the restrictions. The wording of the act along with conditions arising are in most instances such that it leaves a question of doubt and careful investors don't wish to invest. Another is when for good reason the government removes restrictions and allows the Indian to sell. The other is where under certain conditions the government allows the Indian to have his land appraised and advertised and Indian agents receive sealed bids for same with a certain amount of bid put up with offer. If the highest bid is equal to or greater than the apprais[al] and the Indian don't [*sic*] change his mind the sale usually goes through if Secretary of Interior approves same. Heirs property comes under this order for sale. The prospective purchaser must bear in mind in none of these instances does Uncle Sam guarantee the title from the Indian. The Indian or freedman holds two patents from the government. One for 120 acres and one for 40 acres. The forty is his homestead and under no circumstances can be sold during his or her life time for a period, I think, of 5 years from date June 24, 1902, I believe when law was passed. As heirs property it is subject to sale under conditions mentioned. These Indians and Negroes have intermingled, married and divorced among themselves without legal form or records. Many of them are polygamists or have been. Consequently it is hard to tell when all the heirs to a piece of property have signed up. These are questions arising and will continue to come up through the efforts of the legal fraternity of which that country is sufficiently blessed as well as having some to spare of almost every profession.

Yours, Ed



OHS LIBRARY IS REORGANIZED

By *Vicki Sullivan*

USE POLICY

1. New researchers or those unfamiliar with the Oklahoma Historical Society's resources should attend the orientation classes scheduled at 9:00 a.m. on Tuesday and Thursday. If one is unable to attend these

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

- organized sessions, an appointment may be scheduled with a staff member.
2. Persons under the age of sixteen must be accompanied by an adult. Adults will exercise proper supervision of their children at all times; those failing to do so could have Division privileges revoked.
 3. Material in this Division does not circulate. Material from outside the Division should not be brought or used in the Division.
 4. Only paper and pencil will be allowed in the public areas of the Division. It is recommended that large handbags, briefcases, knapsacks, etc. be left in one's automobile. If brought into the Division, they must be checked to the attendant in charge while patron is utilizing the research materials.
 5. Everyone must sign the register. First time users must read and sign the policy statements on the use of the Division. The signed statement will then be filed for further reference. Researchers are urged to discuss their research interests and needs with staff members for suggestions on materials to consult.
 6. Everyone using the Division must fill out a "Reference Request and Reference Memo" to request materials from the attendant.
 7. Smoking, eating, and drinking are prohibited in all areas of the Division.
 8. Researchers must use pencil ONLY. They may not use fountain, ball-point, or felt tip pens. Researchers should handle materials and use microform machines very carefully. No marks or erasures should be made on any material. Researchers should not lean on large documents or place papers on top of materials while taking notes. Patrons who abuse materials or machines will be instructed in their proper use by a staff member.
 9. All materials will be retrieved from and returned to closed areas by staff members. While patrons may retrieve from stacks and cabinets in public service areas, the material will be left on tables for staff replacement.
 10. Rare or scarce items from the vault will be returned directly to the attendant on duty when the researcher is finished using them.
 11. Photocopy; Archives and Manuscripts; Photograph Archives; Oklahoma Living Legends. See Separate Policies.
 12. Any person or organization not abiding by these regulations may be denied access to all use of materials in these collections.
 13. The Oklahoma Historical Society reserves the right to change these policies at any time without prior notice and the amended version has full force of policy.

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

PHOTOCOPY POLICY

1. In order to prevent damage and minimize loss of materials, all photocopying is subject to the approval of the librarian in charge.
2. Be selective of material to be copied because the process is ultimately harmful to the materials.
3. A "Copy Work Order and Invoice" will be presented with each order and payment is to be made in advance at the following rates:
 - Photocopies—10 cents per page
 - Reader/printer copies—25 cents per pageFor patrons who desire mail service, a \$1.50 charge will be added to cover preparation and postage. Unless otherwise specified, all mailing will be Fourth Class Bulk Rate.
4. Photocopy work places heavy demands on the staff. Therefore, immediate service, while our constant goal, may not always be possible. Please allow a minimum of four hours for your request to be filled.
5. Bound volumes of newspapers and original Indian archival records will not be photocopied because of immediate damage to the material.
6. 5 U.S.C. Sec. 552a (1976), Privacy Act of 1974, prohibits the photocopying of restricted materials.
7. Researchers requesting copies of material will assume all responsibilities for any violations of copyright laws.
8. Only one photocopy of requested materials will be duplicated (Copyright Law).

ARCHIVES AND MANUSCRIPTS POLICY

1. The exact order of all documents in a particular case or folder must be carefully preserved.
2. Access to an excessive or unnecessarily large quantity of material is not permitted. Staff members will service only a limited number of containers, folders, reels, or single documents for a researcher at a time. When the researcher has finished that group, the staff member will discharge these and replace them with another limited amount of materials.
3. Use of restricted Indian archival materials follows guidelines set forth by the National Archives.
4. Requested materials for copying shall not be removed from containers or folders, but shall be marked with provided acid free slips.
5. Researchers will be asked to use microfilms when collections have been filmed for conservation purposes.

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

6. All publications containing information from the Oklahoma Historical Society shall carry a credit line to the proper source. The suggested citation for archival and manuscript materials is as follows: Specific Reference/Collection Name/Archives and Manuscripts Department, Oklahoma Historical Society.
7. The researcher is responsible for complying with the laws of libel and literary property rights in using any materials in the Oklahoma Historical Society's collections.

PHOTOGRAPH ARCHIVES POLICY

1. A "Copy Work Order and Invoice" will be presented with each photograph request.
2. All specific requests for photographic materials will be filled in the order they are received and as time permits. Requests of a general or unspecific nature cannot be filled.
3. Each order must be specific as to how the picture is to be used. If for a magazine article, book, photograph display, etc., specify.
4. Permission will be granted upon request for a one-time, non-exclusive use of pictures for public exhibition or other purpose if the proposed use is specified. Any subsequent use of the picture will require written permission from the Oklahoma Historical Society. Restrictions may have been placed on the photographs by the donors.
5. Proper credit (Photograph Archives, Division of Library Resources, Oklahoma Historical Society) must always be given. The person ordering the picture and requesting permission for its use will be responsible for the credit line. Any person or publisher not meeting this requirement will be denied further use of the Photograph Archives.
6. The person or publisher who orders pictures from these files will be responsible for providing the Oklahoma Historical Society with verification that proper use and credit of the pictures have been made as specified in the original request and permission. This can be done by sending the Oklahoma Historical Society a copy of the publication or a copy of the material as used therein. In the case of audiovisual materials, written verification will meet this requirement.
7. The person ordering pictures will be charged a service fee to cover the cost of copying, labeling and handling of the picture for a one-time, non-exclusive use of the photograph for publication or other purposes.
8. Photographs will not be supplied to commercial archives or publishers for resale except by special arrangement.

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

9. Pictures from the Oklahoma Historical Society may not be captioned or used to illustrate something else unless evidence is given to show that our identification is incorrect. If a specifically identified picture is used to identify a similar subject, it must be stated in the caption as being a similar or typical view.
10. Copies or prints of pictures ordered from the Oklahoma Historical Society may not be deposited or placed on file in any other repository without written permission of the Oklahoma Historical Society.
11. All copy negatives will be retained in the Photograph Archives and will not be circulated beyond the staff, regular or contract, within the department.
12. The Oklahoma Historical Society is not responsible for any illegal or improper use of these materials.

OKLAHOMA LIVING LEGENDS (ORAL HISTORY) POLICY

1. Use of this collection is by appointment only.
2. While manual transcription of material is permitted, mechanical reproduction is prohibited.
3. All publications containing information from the Oklahoma Historical Society shall carry a credit line to the proper source. The suggested citation for oral history materials is as follows: Specific reference/Oklahoma Living Legends, Oklahoma Historical Society.
A free copy of all publications which rely heavily on the Society's oral history holdings should then be presented to the Society.
4. The researcher is responsible for complying with the laws of libel and literary property rights in using any materials in the Oklahoma Historical Society's collections.