

Oklahoma Historical Society

Historic Context Review

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INTRODUCTION

Since 1893 the guiding light of the Oklahoma Historical Society has been “to preserve and perpetuate the history of Oklahoma.” Success in achieving that mandate is testimony to the individual efforts of directors, staff, and a concerned public. It is essential, therefore, that the Society adopts an overall plan for future achievements.

The “Historic Context Review Report” is a planning document and framework that will enable all divisions and committees of the Society to function as one unit. In effect, it will provide a thematic “language” for integrating the efforts of collecting, preserving, interpreting, and marketing history.

This language is context-based, providing the flexibility of applying any program area to the contexts of (1) geographical regions, (2) chronological period, and (3) historical theme. Any one of the three can be used as a context base, a starting point from which to begin. As evaluations progress, other contexts can be used to further define the task.

For example, a collection of rare coins can be evaluated in the context of chronological period by analyzing whether or not all periods of Oklahoma history are represented. If it is decided more coins are needed from the Civil War era, then historical themes contexts, such as military or American Indian, can be used to further define what is to be collected. On the other hand, coins can be evaluated first in the context of collecting coinage used by the tribes as a priority, and then the study could be extended to the context of geographical region, focusing the collecting process on eastern or western tribes.

This report attempts to define the “language” for that context analysis. Once adopted, these themes can be used for evaluating programs and for long-range planning. Through such analysis, the Society can set goals and objectives, determine cost and time necessary for completing projects, and suggest who would best be qualified to undertake any given task.

GEOGRAPHICAL REGIONS

So that historical themes and topics can be used in practical application, and to provide a physical context against which the themes and topics can be visualized, the state has been divided into geographical regions. Using environmental factors, historical themes, and public perception, three broad regions have been identified:

Eastern

This region covers the area east of Oklahoma Territory in 1906 plus Osage County and all of the Chickasaw Nation. Major themes that hold this region together include environment (Ozark Plateau, Ouachitas, Kiamichis, Red River Valley, Arkansas River Valley, Cooksons, mountain rivers, timber, average rainfall exceeding thirty-five inches), Mound Builders, Five Tribes, military forts and battlefields, borderlands, KATY Railroad, and coal.

Central

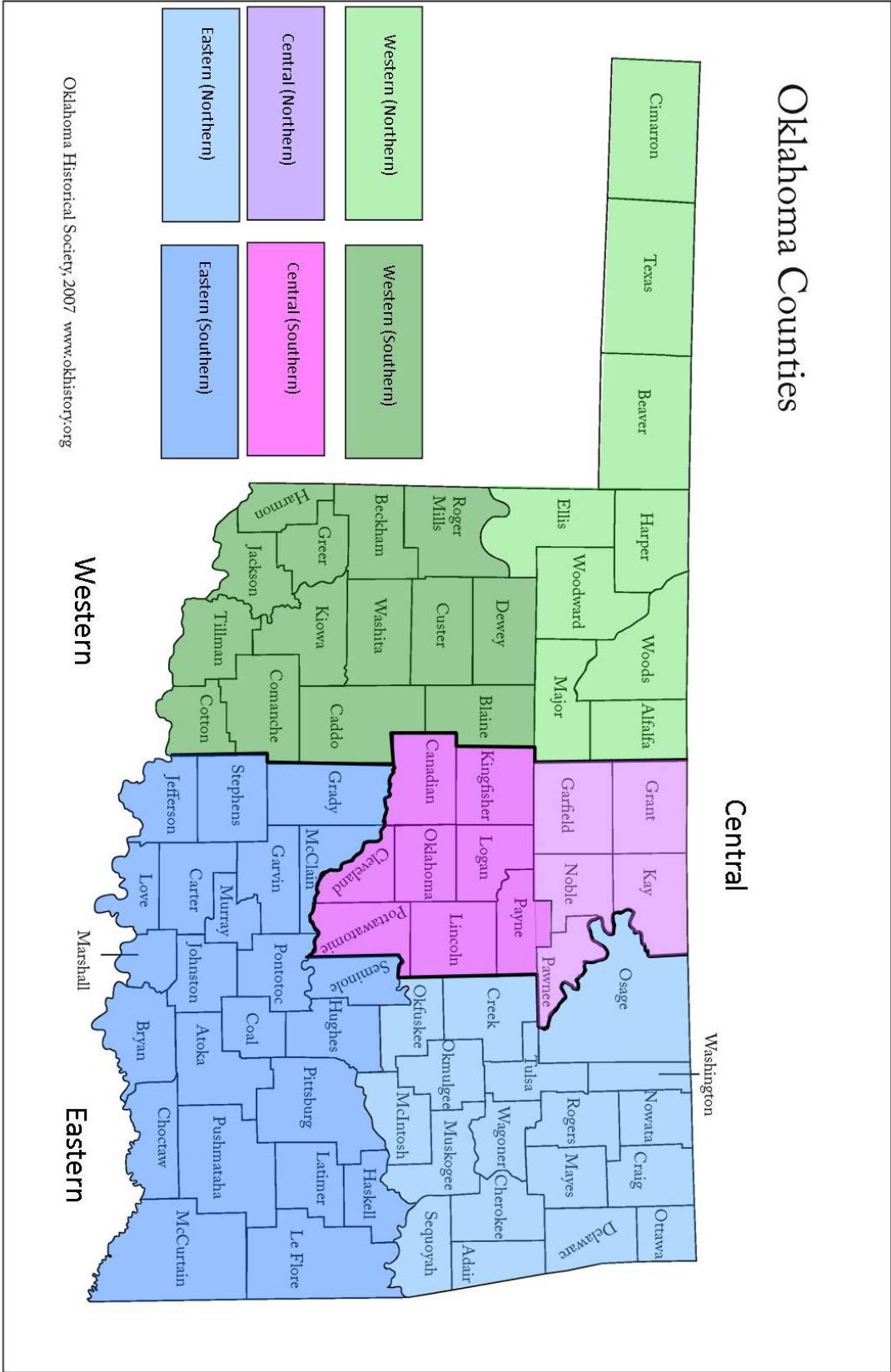
This region covers the area of the Unassigned Lands in 1889 plus the eastern five counties of the Cherokee Outlet. Major themes that hold this region together include environment (Crosstimbers, prairie rivers, average rainfall of thirty to thirty-five inches), boomer invasions, land runs, Santa Fe Railroad, early urban development, and territorial government.

Western

This region covers the area west of the Unassigned Lands plus the Panhandle and old Greer County. Major themes that hold this region together include environment (Great Plains, higher elevation, arid climate, low density of settlement patterns), Southern Plains Indian culture, reservations, military posts, cattle trails, homesteading after 1900, and the Dust Bowl.

To accommodate the existing management regions established for the Oklahoma Comprehensive Preservation Planning Process, each of the three regions can be divided roughly into northern and southern halves. Flexibility will have to be built into the regional contexts, determined by individual applications.

Oklahoma Counties



Oklahoma Historical Society, 2007 www.okhistory.org

CHRONOLOGICAL PERIODS

In addition to historical themes and topics, there should be a chronological format that focuses on the integration of diverse topics. Using a broad brush, the following eras with identifiable themes provide natural divisions of Oklahoma history.

Pre- European contact, before 1541 A.D.

This period emphasizes Pre-Columbian, indigenous Indian cultures and lifeways, beginning with the first hunter/gatherers who entered the region following big game animals. From the Archaic period, the people of the region passed through the woodland stages and developed agriculture by approximately A.D. 1. Subgroups thereafter include the Plains farmers (800. to 1400 A.D.), the Caddoan Mound Builders (600. to 1500 A.D.), and the protohistoric tribes (800 to 1541 A.D.).

Empire, 1541 to 1803

The first Europeans entered the future state in 1541, initially in search of gold, later to establish ties with Indian tribes and trade for furs. Although Spaniards and Frenchmen frequented the trails and rivers of Oklahoma, the area remained under the control of powerful Indian tribes. Native lifeways were changing more rapidly, altered forever by horses, trade goods, guns, and disease.

Westward Expansion, 1803 to 1861

After the Louisiana Purchase, westward expansion of the nation touched the state, at first through diplomatic relations with Indian tribes, later with the determination that the “Great American Desert” was suitable only for Indians. While exploration continued, tribes from the East were removed to the Indian Territory, undermining the principle of tribal sovereignty. There, the Five Tribes continued their fight for sovereignty while some tribal members continued the embrace of Christianity, the Southern cash crop economy, and the institution of slavery. This also was the golden age of the Southern Plains tribes.

Territorial, 1861 to 1907

The Civil War and its aftermath continued the assault on tribal sovereignty, a process accelerated by white intruders, railroads, closing of the frontier, and tribal disunity. Meanwhile, the Plains tribes were defeated and confined, then quickly assigned to individual allotments during the era of land openings. The abolition of slavery and the rights of citizenship for people of African descent created a new class of stakeholders in the twin territories. Beginning in 1887 with the passage of the General Allotment Act, the long process of dispossessing the Indian tribes of communally owned land began. The run of 1889 followed quickly, beginning the flood of non-Indian settlement, followed by runs, lotteries, auctions, and homesteading, including the rise of All-Black towns. The

farming, cattle, oil, and railroad frontiers developed during this era, setting the stage for urban growth and territorial government.

Early Statehood, 1907 to 1941

After statehood joined the two territories, the economy periodically boomed and contracted under the combined forces of agriculture, oil, industry, and urban growth. It was the age of turbulent politics, with a combustible mixture of agrarian philosophy, progressivism, populism, socialism, urban conservatism, and racism. The rural-to-urban shift began during this era, accelerated by the Great Depression and the decline of the cotton culture.

Industrial, 1941 to 1982

The modern industrial age in Oklahoma began with World War II and its aftermath. It was a period when homegrown companies such as C. R. Anthony's, Kerr-McGee, CMI Roadbuilding, Inc., and Phillips Petroleum expanded to become regional, national, and international firms. The transportation revolution contributed to the changes, with interstate highways, turnpikes, the McClellan-Kerr- navigation system, a declining railroad network, and more advanced aviation. It also was the era of big government, the growth of the military-industrial complex, changing party politics, expansion of civil rights, suburban sprawl, women in the workplace, and immigration from Asia.

Modern, 1982 to present

The modern era of Oklahoma history has been shaped by the information age and the accelerated change to interstate industrial and financial institutions. The era started with widespread economic suffering, the decline of the oil and gas industries, and a greater reliance on a diversified economy. Politically, the lines of party affiliation changed dramatically, with the Republican Party taking every congressional seat at one point. Other defining trends included issues of tribal sovereignty, revitalization of tribal governments, equal opportunity, the revival of downtown urban development, the expansion of the higher education system, government employment, immigration from Latin America, and the impact of technology.

HISTORICAL THEMES

The most common approach to Oklahoma history is thematic. Because some themes are so inclusive, it is necessary to identify subtopics where necessary, each with specified subdivisions.

1) American Indians

Although American Indian history overlaps most other themes, the influence of American Indians on Oklahoma history and the tremendous differences between the various tribes justify a separate category. Subtopics include migration patterns, trade,

warfare, hunting, government, native religion, Christian missions, villages, art, removal, slavery, reservations, allotment, detribalization, Indian New Deal, relocation, boarding schools, tribal schools, self-determination, sovereignty issues, cultural adaptation, and cultural revival. Topics should be treated in the context of individual tribal groups.

2) Settlement Patterns

For a broad perspective of Oklahoma history, it is necessary to understand migration patterns, land use systems, and the multitude of ways that people have interrelated with the land and their neighbors. Major subtopics include:

Environment/Cultural Ecology: Underlying virtually every other theme of development in Oklahoma is the environment and how it has influenced the course of history. Subtopics include climate, water, landforms, wildlife, plant life, man's attempt to cope with the limitations of nature, the impact of human development on the environment, and conservation.

Land Openings: Oklahoma was settled through a land policy unique to the American experience. Subtopics include allotment, land runs, lottery, auctions, homesteading, and subsequent land use patterns.

Urban Development: Although Oklahoma has been predominately an urban state for only the past few decades, its urban heritage dates to the first domestication of plants. Subthemes include villages, trading posts, farm communities, boomtowns, urban rivalry, rural-to-urban demographics, All-Black towns, growth of the large metropolitan areas, community redevelopment, rural development, urban renewal, and historic preservation.

3) Agriculture

The bedrock of Oklahoma's economy has always been agriculture, beginning with Indian villagers and continuing to the present day. Subtopics include:

Farming: Farming is the touchstone of Oklahoma's history, spanning the spectrum from economic development to a distinctive way of life. Subtopics include subsistence farming, cash crops, irrigation, farm life, international markets, the rise of agribusiness, corporate farming, silviculture, the planned management of timber, sharecropping, dry farming, and the Dust Bowl.

Ranching: Although usually integrated with farming, the history of ranch and range should be separate because of its diverse nature and major role in the economy. Subtopics include herding, cattle trails, open range, leasing, cow-calf operations, feedlots, cowboys, sheep, horses, exotics, and other livestock industries.

4) Transportation

In a land of vast distances and prairie rivers, transportation has always been an important factor in development. Subtopics include trails, fords, bridges, toll roads,

stagecoaches, water transport, railroads, streetcars, light rail, pipelines, aviation, highways, trucks, automobiles, travel, and tourism.

5) Natural Resources

Exploitation of the earth's bounty attracted people to Oklahoma and formed a capital base on a cash-starved, colonial frontier. Subtopics include:

Timber: The most accessible resource available for human exploitation was timber, first for food and fuel, later for shelter and commercial harvesting. Subtopics include native nuts and fruit, American Indian building types, log cabins, and the first-cut timber industry, to include cutting methods, saw mills, marketing of both raw and finished products, and mill towns.

Mining: Extracting the mineral bounty of the land was another pillar of the pre-territorial, territorial, and early statehood economy that provided some of the most colorful episodes of intensive, sometimes short-lived development. Subtopics include flint, salt, coal, copper, gold, lead and zinc, glass, sand, gypsum, mining towns, and ethnic groups.

Petroleum: The search for and production of oil and natural gas has been one of the most important aspects of Oklahoma's economic development in the twentieth century. Subtopics include exploration, oilmen, drilling technology, pipelines, refining, marketing, boomtowns, liquefied natural gas, compressed natural gas, liquefied petroleum gas, and land reclamation efforts.

Water: Vital to the exploration, settlement, and development of Oklahoma has been access to water, the most fundamental of natural resources. Subtopics include transportation, industrial and domestic use, hydroelectricity, conservation, drought, reservoirs, irrigation, recreation, and interstate commerce.

6) Industry/Business

Whether on the farm or in the city, the ability to produce income has always been affected by industry and business. That broad heading can be subdivided into the following categories.

Manufacturing: The process of converting raw materials into finished products can be traced to the earliest toolmakers. Subtopics include the effects of inventions, the impact of technology on the marketplace and lifestyles, the history of individual businesses and businessmen, and the economic interrelationships of raw materials, capital, processing, transportation, and market development.

Indian and Frontier Trade: The first economic activity in what would become Oklahoma was the trade of surplus merchandise ranging from raw materials to finished products. Subtopics include intertribal trade, Spiro Mounds trade, European influences on trade, the fur trapping industry, frontier traders, and trading posts.

Retailing: To most Oklahomans, business means Main Street, where services and goods from haircuts to hardware are purchased. Subtopics include frontier trade and barter, rural trade business, wholesale distribution, mass merchandising, online merchandising, retail chains, rise of the service economy, shopping malls and the Main Street Program.

Mass Communication: In a democratic society such as Oklahoma, communication has always been both an essential element of economic development and an outlet for personal and collective expression. It also has been a reflection of technology. Subtopics include journalism, print, radio, television, advertising, photography and digital information.

Energy Generation: From the earliest days of settlement, Oklahoma's citizens have exhibited an entrepreneurial spirit in their approach to the discovery, development, marketing, delivery, and use of alternative forms of energy. Subtopics include, electrical generating plants and grids, solar energy, wind energy, biofuels, and other nontraditional energy sources.

7) Military

It is no accident that most historic periods are defined by wars, for military conflict has usually been either the last act in any long-term pattern of change or the catalyst that began that change. In Oklahoma, the military has also acted as the vanguard of frontier evolution and, more practically, as an agent of employment, business, and integration. Subtopics include military societies, exploration and road building, frontier forts, the Civil War, state militia, the 45th Division, military installations, the technology of weaponry, and Oklahomans in the service.

8) Social/Culture

The ways people express themselves reveal much about their attitudes, beliefs, and heritage. The social/cultural aspect of Oklahoma history includes the following major subtopics:

Arts: A community can be evaluated in large part by the visual, performing, and literary art it produces and patronizes. Subtopics include painting, sculpture, music, theater, literature, folk art, dance, and architecture.

Religion/Philosophy: Religion and personal philosophy in Oklahoma is important not only as an agent of change but also as an expression of collective values. Subtopics include religion in daily life, missions, houses of worship, the role of reform issues, cultural interaction, fundamentalism, the Social Gospel Movement, and humanitarianism.

Recreational/Service: Much can be learned about a society by studying the way people spend their leisure time and how they care for each other. Subtopics include entertainment, sports, leisure, tourism, fraternal organizations, civic clubs, charities, and philanthropy.

Folklore/Folklife: Most Oklahoma traditions, passed down from generation to generation, are closely connected to community history. Everyone belongs to a group of some sort; therefore, everyone has folklore of some sort. Folklife traditions are learned informally by word of mouth, observation, and/or imitation and are made up of conservative elements (motifs) that stay the same through many transmissions. Traditions also change in transmission (variants), and folklife is usually anonymous in origin. Subtopics include ethnicity, family, region, occupation, religion, nationality, age, gender, social class, social clubs, and school.

Popular Culture: Reflecting the cultural diversity of settlement and the rise of mass forms of entertainment, Oklahoma became a crossroads of creativity during the twentieth century. The influence of Oklahomans on American and international popular culture can be seen in Wild West Shows, Route 66, powwows, tent shows, motion pictures, radio, television, recordings, graphic arts, popular fiction, and collecting. A common thread running through all forms of popular culture is music, which can be subdivided into folk, country, western swing, gospel, blues, jazz, rock and roll, soul, red dirt, funk, and punk.

9) Education

Settled under the flag of democracy and nurtured in the belief that each person can rise according to his or her own ability, Oklahomans have long understood the importance of education. Subtopics include missions, one-room schools, private schools, public schools, Indian education, segregated schools, career technology, higher education, school integration, non-institutional education, museums, libraries, publishing, and study clubs.

10) Health Care

Good health care is often mentioned as the most important cornerstone of a high quality of life. The means of achieving good health have ranged from home remedies and faith-based healing to good nutrition and modern medicine. Subtopics include doctors, dentists, psychologists, chiropractors, medical research, hospitals, medicine, and rehabilitation.

11) Government

Since the first nomads banded together for security, humans have developed mechanisms for internal control and external protection. Subtopics include native lawways, public service, international relations, political parties, elections, and the evolution of territorial, state, federal, county, city, and tribal governments.

12) Diversity

The interpretation of Oklahoma history, like that of the nation and world, has traditionally been told through the exploits of white, Anglo-Saxon males. This one-dimensional approach has overshadowed the wealth of Oklahoma's diversity. Subtopics

include demographic patterns of migration to Oklahoma, contributions of ethnic groups, challenges to ethnic diversity, immigration, ethnic cultural survival, women's issues and contributions, racial diversity, and linguistic diversity.

13) Civil Rights

A common theme throughout the history of Oklahoma is the struggle for civil rights and equal treatment under the law. Subtopics include the dispossession of Indian people, children's rights, women's suffrage, labor laws, desegregation, persons with disabilities, gender legislation, and lifestyles.

14) Family

The study of Oklahoma through the lens of family genealogy provides an accessible context to better understand the multigenerational impact on the choices people make, from occupation and religion to residency and service to others. The perspective gained through family genealogy is especially revealing in the following categories:

Migration: Oklahoma can be described as a land of immigrants. Although there are exceptions, most immigrants have come to the territory and state as members of family groups whose courage to leave their old homes was based on communal support. Subtopics where family genealogy can enhance interpretation include Indian removal, allotment, land runs, urban development, and ethnic communities.

Traditions/Core Values: The choices people make in life typically reflect the traditions and core values passed from one generation to the next. These influences are expressed through a number of subtopics including religion, political affiliation, work ethic, occupation, recreation, and artistic expression.

Sense of Community: Throughout life, many decisions made by people are based on a sense of community, such as where to live, where to raise a family, where to invest, where to serve others. This sense of community, typically based on intergenerational family connections, can be seen in subtopics such as business and industry, farming and ranching, the arts, public service, and philanthropy.