

From teachers managing one-room schoolhouses during territorial times to the expansion of educational opportunities for Oklahomans of all racial and economic backgrounds during the twentieth century, Oklahoma's education system became more inclusive, accessible, and accountable over the course of history.

### Early Oklahoma

Before statehood, students usually attended one of the three types of schools: **subscription**, **mission**, or **tribal**. Each school used their own techniques to educate children.

The most common type of school in the 1800s was called a subscription school. Typically, parents made payments (around a dollar per child each month) to the school's teacher. With the money, the teacher bought supplies and rented a location to teach. Sometimes the locations turned out to be tents, **dugouts**, and churches.

The one-room schoolhouses included basic supplies such as desks with holes for **inkwells**. The rooms had no air conditioning, one central heater, and outside bathrooms, called **outhouses**. The students, in grades one through eight, shared the class and teacher. Imagine having to be in class with your older or younger sibling all day! The subjects studied usually consisted of reading, writing, arithmetic, history, and geography. The students would **memorize** and **recite** their lesson.



Students and school (2008.148.035.202, William Edson Photograph Collection, OHS).



Sod house school (67531, J. O. Walker Collection, OHS).

## The Oklahoma Education Association

Eleven teachers met in Oklahoma Territory (Guthrie) in October 1889, six months after the first land run. The teachers created an organization that would last for more than a century. The eleven teachers (known as the Oklahoma Teachers Association) paired with the Indian Territory Teachers Association and became known as the Oklahoma Education Association (OEA) in 1918.

The OEA worked to improve teacher pay and school funding, to provide a retirement plan for teachers, and to furnish a better education plan for students. They also fought for **compulsory** attendance, uniform textbooks, and school consolidation.



High School in Tulsa (5433, William Parker Campbell Collection, OHS).

## The School We Know Today

In 1830 Massachusetts State Board of Education Secretary Horace Mann led the American Common School movement. Mann liked the idea of free, public, **nonsectarian** schools (common schools) available to all children. He thought we should have schools to teach ideas of civic responsibility, democracy, and **Americanization**. Mann also wanted more facilities, higher standards for teacher certification, and better learning environments.

Although more and more children started attending these common schools as they became available, a large population of children living in rural areas continued to be left out. However, this changed in 1907 when the Oklahoma Constitution required free, public education for all children. Communities developed more schools offering grades one through eight. This became possible because of **school consolidation** in which the resources of multiple, small schools were combined.

The idea of school consolidation started in 1867 after Massachusetts passed the first consolidation law. They wanted to improve the quality of academic buildings, student interaction, adult education, and county roads (because students needed transportation). This process took place in Oklahoma in 1903.

The school laws of 1913 set forth the structure for schools similar to today's schools. It outlined types of districts that could be set up and addressed **curriculum** stating "in each and every district there shall be taught: **Agriculture**, Spelling, Reading, **Penmanship**, English, Grammar, **Physiology**, **Hygiene**, Geography, US History and **Civics**, as well as **Arithmetic**."

## Homeschooling

Article 13 of the Oklahoma Constitution required the legislature to establish compulsory attendance “at some public or other school unless other means of education are provided.” *Wright v. State of Oklahoma* (1922) required this “other means of education” to be equal to that offered by the state. In the 1957 case *Sheppard v. State of Oklahoma*, the Oklahoma Criminal Court of Appeals ruled that the state could **convict** parents for failure to provide an education when they refuse to send their children to public school. At that time in Oklahoma, a reporting system for homeschooling did not exist yet.

## American Indian Education

The majority of **tribal schools** opened because of the high American Indian population. The Five Tribes established many schools themselves. Indian schools became a key part of Indian policy. The Choctaw Nation, which opened twelve tribally funded schools by 1838, became a model for education systems in the Seminole, Muscogee (Creek), and Chickasaw Nations. Between 1841 and 1843, the Cherokee government established and operated eighteen public schools. By 1859 the Chickasaw Nation had opened five **boarding schools**.

After the Civil War, the United States renegotiated treaties with the Five Tribes. Some treaties required the nations to “pledge themselves to compel their children, male and female, between the ages of six and sixteen, to attend school.” The government then promised to provide a teacher and schoolhouse for every thirty school-age children. Many schools associated with Christian missions opened among the Five Tribes. By 1868, there were five in Choctaw Nation and four in Seminole Nation.

Part of the reason the US government promoted education so strongly is because many people who made Indian policy in the late 1800s believed American Indians should assimilate to the dominant way of life. These policymakers believed that Americans Indians would be happier and safer if they became Christian, started farming, and broke with their tribes. One way government officials tried to convince American Indians to **assimilate** was through education. Many schools attended by

American Indians in the late 1800s included the government’s goals in their education. Students would be forced to give up their tribal dress, they would be forced to pray and attend church services, and they would be punished harshly if they spoke their own language. Since many were boarding schools, the parents were far away and unable to have a say in what kind of education their child received.



Students attending Pawnee Indian School (477, Oklahoma Historical Society Photograph Collection, OHS).

## Segregation in Schools

After the Civil War and the end of slavery in the South, white citizens attempted to ensure Black citizens would not be able to live on an equal basis with their white counterparts. Whites often subjected Black citizens in their towns to violence and **lynching** to pressure them. Although some Black residents fled the violence of multiracial towns to form All-Black towns, many Black residents remained. Unable to create separate towns for whites and Blacks, white lawmakers passed laws to separate the lives of the two racial groups. A new territorial legislature banned racial mixing in school, and throughout the US, many protested the change. Schools were one of the first places of social interaction for children, so decisions about education could affect the ways Black and white students interacted many years down the road. In *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), the Supreme Court supported these separate or **segregated** schools for Black and white students, arguing the schools could be “separate but equal” and not violate the constitution. However, in reality, the segregated schools were anything but equal. Schools for Black students lacked the resources and funding that

white schools enjoyed. Not only were class sizes larger, but it was common for Black schools to have outdated textbooks and crumbling facilities, making it difficult to learn. Following decades of protests and community organizing by Black civil rights leaders in Oklahoma, such as Clara Luper, segregation in schools was eventually overturned. The ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* decided “separate but equal” was unconstitutional and demanded **integration**. Given that Oklahoma required separation of schools, legislators needed to work hard to undo it.

In order to integrate schools, Governor Raymond Gary came up with the idea to rearrange funding for schools based on attendance. He wanted to place all school taxes into a common school fund. He also wanted to end the county tax that kept the separate schools open. He proposed that in return, school systems will close the separate schools and combine them with the smaller schools. The Oklahoma Legislature passed an amendment for the funding method on January 7, 1955. Governor Gary signed this bill into law on March 9.

However, racial segregation did not end. Most schools remained segregated into the 1960s. By 1956, there were 273 integrated schools in Oklahoma. Despite that, there was still segregation among students, depending on where they lived within the district. Segregation continued even after the federal court cases *Dowell v. Oklahoma City* (1963). In this case, the school district of Oklahoma was sued in attempt to gain admission for Dowell’s son to an all-white high school. Not long after, on July 11, 1965, US district Judge Luther L. Bohanon claimed the dual school system operated by the Oklahoma City school district violated the **Fourteenth Amendment** of the United States Constitution. Judge Bohanon ordered Oklahoma to come up with integration plans. It took seven years to get this process started. This resulted in the creation of cross-district busing in 1972.



Students riding the bus (2012.201.B0982.0059, Oklahoma Publishing Company Photography Collection, OHS).



US District Judge Luther Bohanon (2012.201.B0095.0689, Oklahoma Publishing Company Photography Collection, OHS).

## Nursing Education

Before statehood, training for nurses took place in hospitals. Instruction prepared that person for employment at that specific hospital. In early Oklahoma, a system for registration or licensing for graduates of the programs did not exist. In 1908, the State Association of Graduate Nurses set out to change that. They wanted to ensure that the practice of nursing became regulated. They developed the Oklahoma Nursing Practice Act. Governor Charles Haskell signed the act on March 3, 1909.

Originally they called for voluntary registration, but in 1913 registration became compulsory. The measure also called for potential nurses to have a minimum of one year of high school education.

The first test for nurses took place in Oklahoma City on October 21 and 22 of 1912 with seven participants. Only a year later, a total of 278 nurses registered. Eventually, fifteen diploma programs (hospital-based nurse training programs) existed within the state. The programs primarily worked as **apprenticeships**, with students working in the hospital wards. The limited classroom time was usually led by physicians.

Through the Great Depression, Oklahoma hospitals struggled to support education for nurses and the number of diploma programs began to lessen. For this reason, by the 1950s a nationwide initiative to provide academic nursing facilities began. The first to be offered in Oklahoma was at the **baccalaureate** level.



Guthrie Hospital and Nurses' Training Center (2012.201.B0276B.0223, Oklahoma Publishing Company Photography Collection, OHS) .

## Dental Education

The dentistry program at the University of Oklahoma (OU) began in 1923 as an oral surgery program included in the surgery department. In 1969 OU created a college of dentistry with William Brown as the dean. Education included general dentistry, orthodontics, periodontics, and an oral surgery specialty.



The University of Oklahoma Dental School (2012.201.B0393.0370, Oklahoma Publishing Company Photography Collection, OHS).

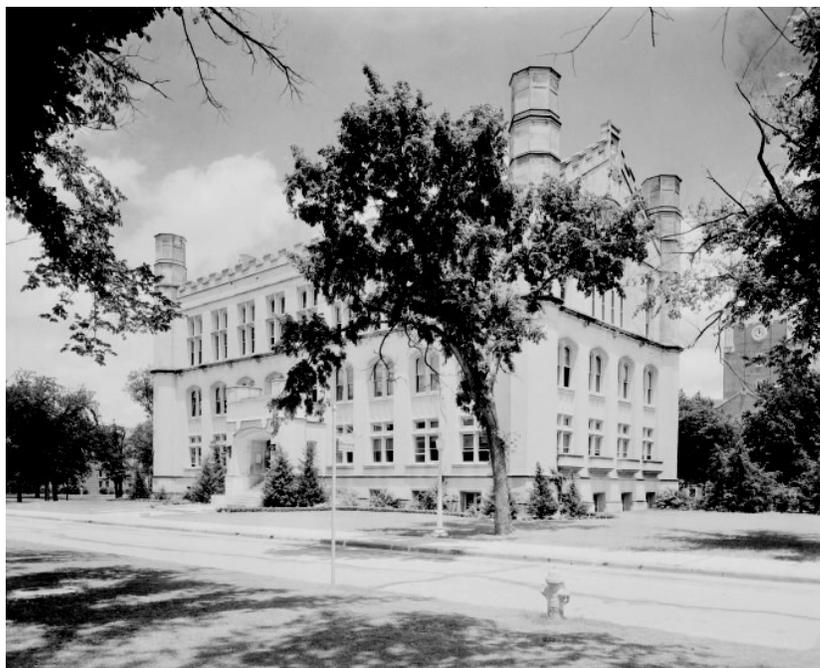


Twyla Chadwell, 13, in the dental chair at the OU Medical School (2012.201.B0241.0328, Oklahoma Publishing Company Photography Collection, OHS).

## Law Schools

In 1907, a higher learning Methodist institution (known now as Oklahoma City University) established the first law school in Oklahoma. Charles B. Ames was named dean of the school, then known as Epworth University. Classes started in autumn of 1907 with fifteen students taught by three full-time members along with some attorneys.

As part of the school's establishment, they agreed to close after the spring semester of 1910. A new facility soon took its place. Two years later, the University of Oklahoma School of Law began their first classes, serving as Oklahoma's first and only publicly supported law school. Originally a whites-only school, the law school began to accept Black applicants in 1949, with the acceptance of Ada Lois Sipuel after a Supreme Court victory.



Oklahoma University Law School (21412.BH2568, Z. P. Meyers/Barney Hillerman Photographic Collection, OHS).

## Medical Education

Many legitimate medical schools existed in the eastern part of the United States after the Civil War. Oklahoma, like many other places, needed qualified doctors and dentists. Around the same time, the abundance of “**diploma mills**” began to rise. In addition to diploma mills, hundreds of other schools provided a minimum of easy, nonacademic courses just for money. This meant that unqualified students could pay their way into a medical degree instead of earning it through hard work, studying, and good grades.

Before 1900 Oklahoma had no legal system to determine if a doctor was actually qualified to do their job. Medical societies representing Indian and Oklahoma Territories campaigned for required testing and licensing. Both accomplished their goal by statehood. The medical societies also led a movement for state-supported medical schools to be founded. By 1906, only 106 medical schools existed in the United States.

The University of Oklahoma developed the state’s first publicly supported professional program. Created in 1893 as a two-year program, the Pharmacy Department graduated its first students in 1896. From 1898, the University of Oklahoma had two classes in the Premedical Department until the University of Oklahoma School of Medicine opened in Norman in 1900. In 1910 the school merged with another similar program, Epworth University of Medicine (opened in 1904). When Robert F. Williams became dean after the merger, OU became a four-year program, rated as a class A medical school in 1918.



State University of Oklahoma Medical School (21412.M183.15, Z. P. Meyers/Barney Hillerman Photographic Collection, OHS).

## Junior College

In 1907 the Oklahoma Constitution mandated the establishment of liberal art colleges and agricultural vocational schools for various trade training. Many students attended those larger colleges, but those who did not often still wanted further training. So, the idea of a two-year “junior college” developed. In an effort to use tax money to push education past the secondary level, the American Association of Junior Colleges was founded in 1920.

As **urbanization** increased, people needed to make money in non-agricultural jobs. Therefore, junior colleges became quite popular. They offered college-level courses with subjects such as English, history, and arithmetic. The state board had a way to ensure they were offering quality programs but junior college students faced other obstacles. Often, the schools shut down temporarily or permanently during economically challenging times. This changed with the Oklahoma Junior College Act of 1939 that let the school districts charge for tuition.



Northern Oklahoma Junior College, 1950; now Northern Oklahoma College (2012.201.B0940.0285, Oklahoma Publishing Company Photography Collection, OHS).



The newly renamed Eastern Oklahoma State College, 1967 (2012.201.B0150.0229, Oklahoma Publishing Company Photography Collection, OHS).

## Colleges and Universities

Higher public education began after the Land Run of 1889. On May 2, 1890, Congress passed the Organic Act, which established Oklahoma Territory. By December, three colleges opened, created by the Territorial Legislature: the University of Oklahoma (OU), the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College (now Oklahoma State University), and Central State Normal school (now the University of Central Oklahoma). In 1908, two more opened—the Oklahoma Industrial Institute and College for Girls (now University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma) and the Oklahoma School for Mines and Metallurgy (now Eastern Oklahoma State College). Despite there being more availability with public institutions, the majority of students in the nineteenth century enrolled in private institutions, perhaps for prestige.

## House Bill 1017

In the 1980s, many people became concerned about Oklahoma's poor performance in education compared to other states. Since the Better Schools Amendment, the state government had taken a hands-off approach to education policy, leaving it to local school boards to make decisions about their local school district. The 1980s were very hard for Oklahoma economically, and this impacted the decisions those local school boards made. In many districts, students attended classes with too many other students. The teachers were poorly paid and there was little money available to spend on students in the classroom. After protests and appeals from teachers, the state legislature passed House Bill 1017 in 1990, which set up a system of funding designed to permanently improve school funding. They also included rules about the size of classes, scheduled teacher pay raises, and standards for what was taught and minimum qualifications for teachers.

## Oklahoma Teacher Walkout

On April 2, 2018, public school teachers walked out of school to protest school funding cuts, low salaries, and inadequate resources for the first time since 1979. The **strike** lasted ten days, with many teachers and students joining together to persuade lawmakers at the state capitol with handmade signs and chants. Although there is still improvement to be made in terms of ensuring adequate funding and resources in schools, the 2018 walkout led to the first raise for teachers in nearly a decade and brought public school education to national attention.



Teacher protest, 1990 (image courtesy of the Associated Press).



Teacher walkout, 2018 (image courtesy of the Associated Press).

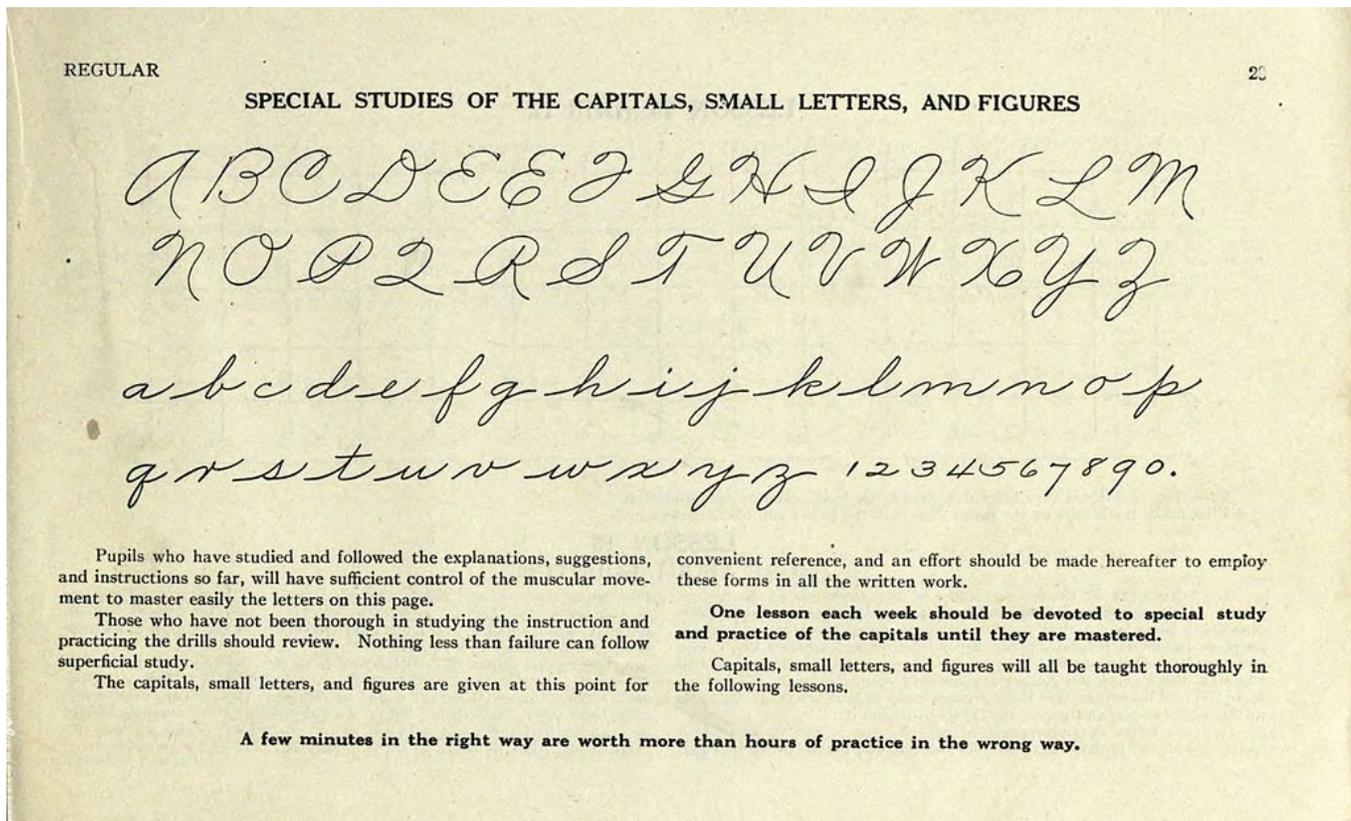
## Activities

### Penmanship

Penmanship is the art of skill of writing by hand. Teachers today spend far less time on penmanship than in classrooms a hundred years ago.

#### Why do you think that is?

One of the types of writing students practiced was cursive, which you may already be familiar with. If you are not, try spelling different words by making letters shown in the picture.



If you like improving your ability to write by hand, you can take a look through this book on penmanship that is almost a hundred pages long!

<https://archive.org/stream/palmermethodofbu00palmrich#page/28/>

## Memorization and Recitation

Educators in Oklahoma Territory shared the belief that memorizing large amounts of information showed progress in learning. Most people during this time also valued people who could speak well. Speeches and lectures were very popular throughout the country as a form of entertainment in addition to learning. Today, the ability to memorize and speak publically remains important, but not as important as they used to be. It can still be fun to challenge yourself, though! One activity that many students participate in every year is memorizing the Gettysburg Address. They work on memorizing the short speech. Then, they practice giving the speech. They want to make sure they can be heard, they have the correct pronunciation, and they speak persuasively. You can try, too!

### President Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address November 19, 1863

Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth, on this continent, a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived, and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives, that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate—we cannot hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.

It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they here gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

You can also take a look at Getty Ready's website to learn more about the address and the national effort to learn and present the address at <https://gettyready.org/>.

## Working with Primary Sources: Teacher Walkout

In 2018, teachers throughout the state engaged in a protest over poor school funding and a lack of resources for students. You might remember it, but you may not remember all the details or why it was important. You can learn these things by looking at a kind of primary source: newspaper articles. A primary source is a record created during or immediately after the historical event. Often, they are about very specific parts of an event, and you have to review several primary sources to build a story.

Use the news search to find articles from 2018 about the teacher walkout. After you have read several articles, answer these questions:

What was the teacher walkout?

When did it happen?

Where did it happen?

What individuals or groups were involved in the teacher walkout?

How did the teachers protest?

Why were they protesting?

What was the response from other groups?

Were they successful in achieving their goals?



Teachers in Oklahoma City, 2018 (image courtesy ABC News and AP).

## Working with Secondary Sources: School Desegregation

After the Civil War, throughout the American South, children attended segregated schools. Legally required school segregation began during Oklahoma’s territorial period. African Americans made it clear that they did not believe segregated education was fair or just. Efforts to eliminate segregated schools were directed both at the federal and state levels. Oklahoma’s African American community was an important part of both campaigns. You can learn the story of desegregation in Oklahoma by working with secondary sources.

A secondary source is a source that was not created first-hand by someone who participated in the historical event. They are usually written by someone who has studied the event extensively by working with many other sources to try to understand the event as much as possible. *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture* is a secondary source that will help learn the story quickly and thoroughly.

Take a look at these articles in *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture* to learn about Oklahoma’s desegregation campaign:

James M. Smallwood, “Segregation,” *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*,  
<https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=SE006>.

Jimmie Lewis Franklin, “African Americans,” *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*,  
<https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=AF003>.

Robert H. Henry, “Civil Rights Movement,” *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*,  
<https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=CI010>.

John H. L. Thompson, “Dunjee, Roscoe,” *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*,  
<https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=DU007>.

Melvin C. Hall, “Fisher, Ada Lois Sipuel,” *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*,  
<https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=FI009>.

Alfred L. Brophy, “*McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents* (1950),” *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*,  
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<https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=NA001>.

Melvin R. Todd, “Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers,” *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*,  
<https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=OK017>.

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L. David Norris, “Gary, Raymond Dancel,” *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*,  
<https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=GA018>.

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## Glossary

**agriculture:** The science of farming, includes the cultivation of the soil for the growing of crops and the rearing of animals to provide food, wool, and other products.

**Americanization:** To make a person or group more “American” in character, culture, and nationality.

**apprenticeships:** When someone learns an art, trade, or job under the advisement another.

**arithmetic:** The part of mathematics that involves the adding and multiplying, etc. of numbers.

**assimilate:** To become part of a group, country, society or to make someone or something become part of a group, country, society.

**baccalaureate:** Four-year college degree; also known as bachelor’s or B.A.

**boarding schools:** A school where students live on campus during the semester.

**civics:** The study of the rights and duties of citizenship.

**compulsory:** Mandatory.

**convict:** Declaring someone to be guilty of breaking a law.

**curriculum:** The subjects that make up a course of study in a school.

**diploma mill:** A term for a place that sells medical diplomas without any training.

**dugouts:** A hole dug into the ground, used as shelter, that can be dug into a hillside or fully recessed under the earth with a flat roof covered by ground.

**Fourteenth Amendment:** All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

**hygiene:** The practice of keeping yourself and your surroundings clean.

**ink wells:** Small container to hold ink used for writing in the past.

**integration:** Bringing together or mixing something previously separated.

**lynching:** The killing of someone by a mob without a trial.

**memorize:** To commit to memory.

**mission school:** Schools developed by Christian missionaries, in order to “Americanize” the local people.

**nonsectarian:** Not connected or restricted to a specific religious group.

**outhouses:** A small building separate from the main building containing a toilet, typically with no plumbing.

**penmanship:** The art or skill of writing by hand.

**physiology:** The science of the individual mind and behavior; today, known as psychology

**recite:** To repeat aloud from memory.

**school consolidation:** Combining two or more schools for educational or economical benefits.

**segregation:** The enforced separation of different racial groups with a community.

**strike:** A refusal to work organized by a body of employees as a form of protest, typically in an attempt to improve working conditions or salaries from their employer.

**subscription school:** Schools funded by a monthly tuition fee paid by the students' parents.

**tribal school:** A school that is controlled by an American Indian tribe, band, or nation.

**urbanization:** Movement of people from rural areas and farms to cities and towns.

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