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James Hart
History Department Chair,
University of Oklahoma

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III: MAKING MODERN AMERICA

DISCOVERING THE GREAT DEPRESSION & NEW DEAL
(PRESIDENTIAL DREAM COURSE, UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA, F15)

SARAH CLAYTON, DIGITAL SPECIALIST, OU LIBRARIES
KEITH GADDIE, CHAIR, DEPT. OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
DAVID WROBEL, DEPT. OF HISTORY

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http://ou.edu/content/dreamcourse/past-courses/fall-2015/making-modern-america/

Supported By:
Office of the President, Office of the Provost, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, Dean of the OU Libraries, & the OU Osher Lifelong Learning Program
A) Archival Research
Working with Primary Source Documents in the Western History Collections
Discovering Materials within the Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center
Group Exercise:

- Review your group’s research question.
- Develop a plan for completing the research.
  - What search terms will you use?
  - How will you gather the results?
- Conduct your research using the resource provided:
  http://www.newdeal.cacexplorer.org
- In 20 minutes you will report the results back to the group.
B) Field Research
C) Oral Histories
D) Mapping
THE PROJECTS
Reconstructing the Built Environment
The University of Oklahoma
President William Bennett Bizzell
Fifth President of The University of Oklahoma (1925-1941)
When William Bennett Bizzell became president of the University of Oklahoma in 1925, the United States was experiencing unprecedented prosperity. The rapid growth with little regulation or infrastructure coupled with a global economic crisis propelled the nation into a severe depression. In Oklahoma, this economic downturn coincided with a major ecological disaster—The Dust Bowl.

In Bizzell's first year, the university implemented a ten-year building plan to build infrastructure to accommodate the needs of a growing student body. This plan was essentially halted with the start of the depression [1].

While many universities, including the University of Texas, Louisiana State University, and the University of Arkansas took advantage of federal programs like the Public Works Administration (PWA) and the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to support and expand their institutions.

However, because of Oklahoma Governor Bill Alford, Murray's staunch opposition to both federal interference and higher education, initially OU was not able to take advantage of federal funding. During Murray's tenure as governor, Bizzell had to regularly respond to massive budget cuts and other threats to OU and higher education across the state.

During this period, the OU's student body continued to grow. In 1928-29 school year, OU had 5,989 undergraduate students and 1,108 graduate students. By 1934-35, those numbers had risen to 6,034 undergraduates and 1,092 graduate students [2]. This growth exacerbated the pre-existing space problems and the university desperately needed new and updated facilities.

When Murray's successor, E. W. Marland, who ran on a pro-federal funding platform, took office in 1939, President Bizzell quickly applied and received funding for much needed projects on campus. While he could quantify these projects in terms of dollars and employment, it is difficult to understand how many individual lives were impacted, changed, and/or spared because of these funding appropriated for the construction of a building during these times.

Several prominent structures on the main campus of the University of Oklahoma remain today as a physical reminder of the lasting legacy of the New Deal. The Great Depression was an exceptionally complicated time in American history as there was tremendous human suffering yet amazingly there was incredible human perseverance. While each of these projects tells a unique story, they stand witness to a place in time, including a lasting symbol of President Bizzell's legacy.

See the full exhibit at newdeal.oucreate.com
The University of Oklahoma

Adams Hall

William Bennett Bizzell published an article in the November 20th, 1935 edition of the Daily Oklahoman calling for an expansion of the University of Oklahoma's campus. Bizzell hoped for larger and greater building projects which could accommodate the growing student body, saying that "If the state is to build a university adequate to the needs of our people, means must be found to enlarge the physical plant." The Public Works Administration, or P.W.A., would seem supply these means in the form of legislative appropriations.

In 1936, the college of Business Administration was located on the third floor of the Administration building with part of the mathematics department. An article in the Sooner described the crowded conditions:

"Classrooms are filled with students from 8 o'clock in the morning until 5 o'clock in the afternoon. Faculty members occupy small offices that are scarcely large enough to accommodate their desks." [1]

The Business Administration building, or Adams Hall as it was soon to be called, offered space and a permanent home for the business college. The Business Administration building was completed in 1936, photos of the construction can be found below.

The construction of Adams Hall began in January of 1936 and would last until 1937, and the building would provide 58,000 square feet of much needed space. The building, located on the corner of Apar and Brooks streets, would feature a Todee-style arched doorway which faces south towards the Bizzell Library. The building also features statues, located above gables on each side of the entrance, representing "Industry" and "Commerce." [Cited Reference Pending] Both statues were designed by Julius Strumpek, who also created the Holmeun Hall Murals, which are also featured in this exhibit.

BUILDING DURING HARD TIMES

In the 1930's, Oklahoma was weathering both literally and figuratively, storms of change. The State of Oklahoma, like the rest of the western industrialized world, was plunging fast into a deep and long-standing economic downturn known as the Great Depression. Over several years, industrial output was slowing, spending and investment was in a free-fall, and unemployment was rising. This combination set in motion one of the darkest periods in economic history. And for a young state like Oklahoma, building necessary infrastructure came with great struggle.

From the Builder

Manhattan Construction Company was founded in 1894 by Laurence H. Roney when Oklahoma was still a Territory. Over a century has passed and ownership still remains within the Roney family. As the first company to incorporate in the new State of Oklahoma, in 1907, Manhattan has played an integral role in the development of the Southwest. Today, Manhattan is one of the nation's largest privately-held construction firms and still maintains a close and long-held relationship with the University of Oklahoma.

The following is a reflection from chairman, L.F. Roney on being a builder during the trying times of the Great Depression:

"For a construction company in Oklahoma the Depression was especially severe, having been preceded by the well-known drought that had precipitated the emigration of the "Okies" to California. For years in Oklahoma, and many other states, the only construction activity performed was by the federal government. Much of which was conducted under the auspices of the PWA and WPA which involved the employment creation organization known as the C.O.E.

Interestingly, however, Manhattan actually increased market share in Oklahoma by dominating the county court house construction market of which those agencies funded. The drawback of being based in a poor, small state was offset by the limited competition for what were at the time significant projects and the fact that as a new state, Oklahoma's government facilities were not yet built out. The courthouse work was accompanied by related county and city infrastructure; educational construction like Langston, the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University (formerly Oklahoma A&M), Veterans Affairs health care like in Muskogee and Little Rock, Arkansas; and ultimately, as war broke out, in military construction.

The construction of important military facilities in the Southwest like Camp Gruber, near Muskogee, the Tulsa bomber plant, and other air force and army training bases in Kansas and Arkansas as well as Oklahoma drove the company to an all new level of capability and experience which would later, after WW II, provide the company an opportunity to become a major, national construction company. The company earned several of the Army-Navy "E" awards and the bomber plant achieved international acclaim as the largest enclosed building in the United States.

President Roosevelt's New Deal was successful because the projects were actually necessary infrastructure rather than wasteful spending. They were executed by capable people who sought tangible results and rarely has an allegation of fraud or waste been made against the New Deal projects."

The Design of the Building

From the Builder

See the full exhibit at newdeal.oucreate.com
The University of Oklahoma

Richards Hall

In 1935, through a grant from the Public Works Administration, the University of Oklahoma began the process constructing a special building for the Biological Sciences. In honor of the late head of the Department of Zoological Sciences, Dr. Aune Richards, a position he held from 1920-1942, the building not only stands as a historical marker of a changing landscape, but of progress during the crippling years of the Great Depression.

Richards Hall is located on the northeast corner of the South Oval on the main campus in Norman. The director of the university's School of Architecture, Joseph (Joe) Simay, designed the building. While in the design of the building is in the collegiate Gothic style that is reminiscent of times, the Biological Sciences Building however is uniquely decorated. There is a series of geological mints above the West and North entrances of the building, designed by Virgil Johnson, a zoology graduate student; and executed in stone by Joseph R. Taylor, of the art faculty. Inside the building, there are laboratories, classrooms, libraries, museums, and exclusive housing for specimens and plants.

Building During Hard Times

In the 1930's, Oklahoma was weathering both literally and figuratively, storms of change. The State of Oklahoma, like the rest of the western industrialized world, was plunging into a deep and long-standing economic downturn known as the Great Depression. Over several years, industrial output was slowing, spending and investment was in a free-fall, and unemployment was rising. This combination set in motion one of the darkest periods in Oklahoman history. And for a young state like Oklahoma, a building necessary infrastructure came with great struggle.

At the University of Oklahoma, there was a pressing need for classrooms, laboratories, and classrooms for the sciences. Between 1938 and 1939, the university was working on various plans for a building to house the biological sciences. Either through lack of funding or by the governor, the University of Oklahoma had little success moving this project forward. In 1939, the Public Works Administration (PWA) was established as part of the National Recovery Act. Going to the Board of Regents, President William Bizzell requested permission to apply for Federal support to erect the critically necessary building on campus. The initial request was to acquire funding for one building, but the Board of Regents amended the request for two: a building for the biological sciences and one for the business school. Since the university had not received appropriations since 1929, the legislature appropriated $250,000 and the PWA approved both projects with matching funds with a total to exceed criteria of approximately $504,000. In the fall of 1939, Manhattan Construction Company was awarded both projects, under separate bids, to begin construction on the approved projects.

Recalling a Changing Campus

The University of Oklahoma

Interactive Map
A Changing Campus
Adams Hall
Adams Hall Murals
Richards Hall
Holbrooke Hall Murals
Memorial Union Tower
Pall in McGuinness Field House

The Design of the Building

Professor Simay and Dr. Aune Richards were not only working together to design a building, they were carefully executing a vision. The building required many details to be addressed. From technical elements that spun due to heating and cooling, to ease of learning and teaching. Both paid close attention to form and function yet this building moves from a functional structure, to an advancement in facilities. It is a timeless structure on the campus that was formed with care.

During our research, we were able to obtain the original blueprints for Richards Hall from Manhattan Construction Company. Manhattan had several prints of prints for Richards Hall. See a selection of things below. Click on the images to see other sheets from that series.

Robert Geins is Professor Emeritus in the College of Architecture and also serves as Senior Fellow in the Institute for Quality Communities. He holds a Master's Degree in Regional & City Planning and a Bachelor's in Architecture, both from the University of Oklahoma. He is a member of the American Planning Association and the American Institute of Certified Planners. During his career, he has served on a wide-range of University committees as well as public service organizations for the City of Norman.

Robert's recent teaching focus has been in the areas of urban history and design of cities. His professional practice has concentrated on residential subdivision planning and parks & recreational design. As part of the State's Centennial celebration, he designed and oversaw the development of Legacy Trail for the City of Norman. In addition to his lifelong love of cities, he has developed a passion for the history of Oklahoma. He co-authored the fourth edition of the Historical Atlas of Oklahoma which received the 2007 Oklahoma Book Award for best non-fiction.

Robert earned his Bachelor and Master in Regional and City Planning at the University of Oklahoma.

The Artist and the Sculptures on Richards Hall

Joseph Taylor, an OU faculty member, created the carvings on Richards Hall. Taylor also worked with his student, Julie Struppek, on Adams Hall.

See the full exhibit at newdeal.oucreate.com
Lincoln Park & the Oklahoma City Zoo
Lincoln Park and the OKC Zoo

II. OKC Zoo ZooZeum

The structure that now houses the ZooZeum was built by Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) workers with funding from the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in 1935 to serve as the Lincoln Park bath house. Park attendees could change in the facility before going swimming in nearby Northeast Lake.

In the subsequent decades, the building served a variety of purposes. In the 1950s, it was used as a storage space for the Zoo's train. In the 1970s, it housed all of the props from the haunted the Zoo Event.

Eventually, the building was repurposed to serve as museum focused on the history of the Zoo. The ZooZeum officially opened in 2011. The inside of the building has undergone an extreme makeover. New tile floors and stained walls match the granite rock work. The ZooZeum also serves as an additional gift shop for the Zoo.

In this video, Amy Dee Stephens, Zoo Historian and Education Supervisor, describes the evolution and uses of the building from 1935 to today while standing in the ZooZeum. Learn more about the creation of this video.

"Sometimes they would go down to Northeast Lake and go swimming, and sometimes there would even be an elephant swimming with them."

—Amy Dee Stephens on the Zoo in the 1930s and 1940s

The photographs on the left are views of the ZooZeum today. Great care was taken with the renovations. Notice how all of the renovations made efforts to match the materials and architectural style of the original structure.

We would encourage everyone to visit the ZooZeum to learn more about the history of the Zoo. It was a great place to begin our research into the Zoo and the New Deal.

See the full exhibit at newdeal.oucreate.com

Lincoln Park and the OKC Zoo

III. New Deal’s Impact on OKC Zoo

New Deal era program did more than help create physical infrastructure at Lincoln Park and the OKC Zoo. The funding provided to construct these projects employed people and resulted in facilities for recreational activities for the community.

In these videos, Sherri Vance and Amy Dee Stephens explain the historical climate surrounding the New Deal projects while offering some interesting anecdotes on the interconnected history of New Deal projects.

With the support of the WPA and CCC, Oklahoma City was able to continue the growth the city had experienced in the 1930s. Sherri Vance compares this to the growth occurring in downtown Oklahoma City today.

In the video below, Amy Dee Stephens and Sherri Vance describe how the WPA and the community helped sustain the zoo during the Depression era.

Locals cared about the zoo. Stephens describes records held in the Zoo archives that report neighbors bringing leftover milk from their supper table to feed the animals. However, as much as they wanted to support the zoo, many Oklahoma City residents were struggling in the harsh economic climate of the 1930s. Without federal funding and the influx of jobs created by WPA projects, the zoo may not have survived the depression.

"Many zoos that exist today would not have survived without WPA work."

—Amy Dee Stephens

The zoo was a free source of entertainment throughout the 1930s. The Zoo, including the WPA built amphitheater, was a place where people could temporarily escape from feelings of despair or hopelessness.
Lincoln Park and the OKC Zoo

Exhibits (Then and Now)

U.S. approves zoo project

Work on $130,000 program to start Monday.

The Zoo was a major priority for WPA administrators in Oklahoma. In 1935, shortly after New Deal funding had begun to flow into the state, the zoo was allotted 50,000 dollars. The city then diverted an additional 80,000 dollars from other projects deemed a lower priority. By the dedication of the Zoo in 1935, 250,000 dollars had been contributed to the project.

Based on the extensive coverage of the project in The Oklahoman and the massive outpouring of money and support from the city and county governments, it is clear that the zoo was important to the local community. The zoo was a free form of entertainment for citizens who were coping with the hardships that accompanied the economic downturn of the 1930s. As Amy and Sherri discussed on the previous page, community members would support the zoo and its animals even when they were struggling to support themselves. So it makes sense that the city would be interested in projects that provided jobs and improved a beloved city attraction.

One of the major undertakings was to construct new animal quarters. Although, these exhibits may seem dated now, after the construction, Oklahoma City had some of the best facilities in the nation. Some of these exhibit spaces are no longer used while others have been updated to match current standards in animal housing and are still in use.

In the pages that follow, we will guide you through the WPA built facilities via images and videos. Of course, when possible we would highly recommend going to the zoo to see the sites that are still publicly accessible for yourself.

The Entrance

As we begin our virtual tour through the zoo, what could be a better place to start than the entrance, which has changed drastically since the Great Depression.

The WPA funded a new entrance opening onto Monkey Island. (Learn more about Monkey Island on the next page). Even before the zoo had officially received funding, a drawing of the new entrance appeared in The Oklahoman (see image on the right).

The WPA entrance welcomed visitors to the zoo for over sixty years. In 1998, the zoo replaced the entrance with a more modern structure.

See the full exhibit at newdeal.oucreate.com
Downtown Oklahoma City
Downtown Oklahoma City

OKC County Courthouse and Jail

The Oklahoma County Jail and Courthouse began construction in 1936 and was finished in 1937.

There was a previous courthouse, but it was not safe and was condemned by a fire marshal. The new building was constructed out of Indiana limestone and aluminum and uses an Art Deco style of architecture. Although the initial application was rejected due to not hiring unionized electricians, the project ultimately was completed at a cost of $1.4 million.

Senator Elmer Thomas spearheaded the construction of this building and corresponded frequently with PWA and County Commissioners in order to get approval for the building. Due to the fact that only 45% of applications are accepted, Senator Thomas was in a bind. He continued to persevere and look for outside resources and ultimately was successful in building a beautiful, new county courthouse and jail.

Source:
The Municipal Auditorium, now known as the Civic Center, finished construction in August 1937. This building contained the most seating of any other building in Oklahoma City, accommodating 6,000 as opposed to the previous 2,000. This arrangement was ideal for public meetings. The ultimate cost for the construction reached $1,265,783 along with a project cost of $1,920,000. The project received funding from the Public Works Administration.

The exterior walls of the auditorium were constructed with limestone and brick truimphed with limestone, creating a semi-fireproof building. Building safety was important to keep in mind during construction of these WPA and PWA projects, because many buildings were condemned during this time by local fire marshals for being unsafe.

As with most New Deal projects, federal funding was matched by local funding. The elaborate the process further, private companies were often hired to do the construction. In June 1938, a budget deficit of $480,000 was revealed. This deficit resulted from a higher contractor bids than expected. The article from The Oklahoman, “Municipal Budget Must Provide Cash for Balance,” details the cause of the deficit below.

Ultimately the money was found to complete the project, but this example shows how complicated the process for funding New Deal era projects could be. (See the article below).

Even after its completion, the auditorium remained involved with New Deal programs. The Municipal Auditorium was used to house traveling WPA musicians and art shows. From its erection in August 1937 to the end of the Great Depression, the building embodied the goals of the New Deal. The WPA Art and Music programs not only created jobs for those unemployed in the fine arts, but also provided free or low-cost entertainment to Oklahomans during the Great Depression.

The Municipal Auditorium is part of four buildings that make up the original Civic Center Complex. All of those four buildings were products of either the WPA or PWA, part of different New Deal Legislation. The Municipal Auditorium is still in use today for the same purpose it was designed for in the 1930s, but today it is known as the Civic Center Music Hall.

### Downtown Oklahoma City

**Federal Building**

The U.S. Post Office, which also contains the Federal Courthouse, was built in 1923 and was completed in 1924. In 1932, the building was expanded with New Deal funding. The additions included a tower in the center of the building and a western wing and showcases Art Deco architecture and limestone. The building’s interior was fully restored in 1991, including murals that were painted in the lobby in 1933 with funding from the Works Progress Administration Arts Program.

**Sources**


Correspondence between Senator Elmer Thomas, a supporter of FDR’s New Deal legislation, and varying departments including the Treasury regarding the construction of the Federal Building and the WPA funding to begin the operation. Initially, Senator Thomas did not have sufficient funding in order to be approved for the project, but as was a common cliche around Congress, “If you need anything, Elmer will figure it out.” Ultimately Senator Thomas was able to get the adequate funding and the project was completed. Had it not been for Senator Thomas’ persistence and belief in the New Deal and the programs it provided through different legislation (WPA, PWA), Oklahoma City’s downtown metro may not have been revitalized so successfully.

**Sources**

- "Some text taken from Brook, Browse, "Elmer Thomas Brings the New Deal to Downtown OKC", 2005. Submitted for Making Modern America: Discovering the Great Depression and New Deal."
- "Elmer Thomas Collection, Carl Albert Center.

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See the full exhibit at newdeal.oucreate.com
COPY OF
WESTERN UNION TELEGRAM


Sir,

Mr. H. S. Jones, Collector,
Internal Revenue,
Federal Building,
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Reference my message of yesterday, I have talked with
Mr. Doyle of Procurement Division Department Treasury who advises
he has checked into the status of the proposed project for addition
to Federal Building Oklahoma City and states it is in the formative
stage at this time he assures me that they are making a thorough study

Of these proposed projects, getting together dates for consideration along
with other Oklahoma projects when funds are made available for additional
Federal buildings.

WESTERN UNION

Send the following message, subject to the terms on back hereof, which are hereby agreed to


J. V. DOBBS, Chairman,
Board of County Commissioners
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

and MIKE DONELLY MEMBER
(also) to GOVER E. FENDLEY Member,
COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLA.

INVESTIGATION DISCLOSES APPARENTLY REQUEST HAS BEEN
DISAPPROVED DUE TO FACT THAT APPLICANTS FOR SUPPLEMENTAL
GRANT FOR COUNTY COURTHOUSE AND JAIL HAS ON HAND INSUFFICIENT FUNDS
TO COMPLETE THE PROJECT HOW EVER IF CERTAIN FEATURES ARE ELIMINATED
AND OTHER FEATURES ADDED PUBLIC WORKS CONTINUING A USEFUL
PROJECT CAN BE COMPLETED WITHOUT ADDITIONAL FUNDS AND CONTINUE THAT
SUPPLEMENT FUNDS ARE IN HANDS OF SPONSORS FOR COMPLETION OF BUILDING.

Mr. H. S. Jones,
pro-se of Mr. Jones.

THE QUICKEST, SUREST AND SAFEST WAY TO SEND MONEY IS BY TELEGRAPH OR CABLE.
Recreating Oklahoma: A Guide to the Sooner State Tours
Tour 16: From Watts to Gore
Tour 16

Eastern Oklahoma During the 1930s

Within its boundaries, Oklahoma has some of the most diverse ecosystems within the nation. Unlike the western part of Oklahoma, that rests in a semi-arid zone, Eastern Oklahoma is a rich landscape of rolling hills, dense woods, streams, and soils compatible for smaller-scale farming.

In the 1930s, climate change was not discussed on the global scale it is today. However, factors of climate has captured the nation as devastating drought wrought destruction across the Great Plains, creating the Dust Bowl. These devastating consequences has become a pressing concern for a developing state, including its relationship to human settlement. Although the Dust Bowl did not directly affect Eastern Oklahoma, the dynamic connection between man and land created many irregular socio-economic conditions that impacted the region.

Tour 16

Taking the Tour

Lake Francis
Camper and Recreational Area
Table Rock
Cookson
Glen
In The Future
Illinois River
Geo-History of Eastern Oklahoma

Accommodations limited to towns near the river banks: cabins and camping facilities at various points on the river. Between Watts and Tahlequah, vegetables may be purchased from farmers; between Tahlequah and Gore, the region is thinly settled, and the small farms are at considerable distances from the stream. A state fishing license (nonresident, 10 days $1.25; resident, $1.25) may be obtained at Lake Francis Dam, at Tahlequah or at the large camp along the river.

In November 2013 our group began the journey of recreating Tour 16 starting in Gore, Oklahoma. Although this is backwards from the original tour, it gave us a really interesting perspective and comparison over time. Many of the roads we traveled were now, as many of the areas described in the original tour are no longer in existence. It was exciting finding new information and rich stories along the way.

In our own words, we will tell of our experiences and will overlay the original words from the WPA Guide to tell the history of this region during the 1930s. Follow along as we explore Tour 16 from then to now. The route along the Illinois River in Eastern Oklahoma is alluring, incredibly beautiful, and speaks to the rich and diverse history of the state.

Camp By The Southside Near Spiro, Oklahoma

Photographer: Russell Lee

This family of agricultural laborer to obtain farm to live in Arkansas and California.

Migration was not always an available option nor an alternative consideration for the people living in this region of Oklahoma. In turn, they created their own cooperative networks that helped people survive during the bleak times of the 1930s. Families supported their neighbors through bartering and found innovative approaches, ranging from canning all imaginable foods, learning to hunt without guns, and fishing without bait as they worked towards reducing a dependency on cash. Those fortunate enough to receive assistance through New Deal programs — including the Farm Security Administration and work relief programs such as the WPA and CCC — were now able to contribute to the community's economic base.

In Eastern Oklahoma, government and politics came together in very dynamic ways. The roots of its political history run deep and are masked in its culture, including the settlement of Native American tribes and westward migration. During
Cookson
"COOKSON, 77 m. (592 s.f., 50 pop.), is the old Cherokee settlement (L) from which the Cookson Hills were named. Here, at STRATTON'S STORE and CAMP, the floaters may secure supplies and accommodations. In this region there is a striking succession of bloom from early spring to late fall beginning with dogwood and redbud and extending to wild asters and goldenrod. In between come the clumps of Cherokee wild rose, wild ginger, honeysuckle, dogfennel, and hornehound.

Along this part of the river the water flows swiftly between high and precipiceous banks, and there are few landing places. In the deep water here are found the best of the big blue channel catfish. Local fishermen put out trotlines, usually at night, but in any case weighted to a depth to prevent being caught by a passing boat. The floaters are advised to seek a quiet deep pool and use chicken liver or dough soaked with chicken blood for bait.

At 107 m. is a bridge over which US 64 (see Tour 2) crosses the Illinois River.

Congress has authorized the construction of a dam across the Illinois River at this point (approximately three miles above its confluence with the Arkansas River). It is a part of the projected $44,000,000 Mississippi River flood control project and will be known as the TENKILLER FERRY RESERVOIR. When completed, it will have a capacity of some nine hundred thousand acre feet and storage for more than 11 per cent of the waters from the Illinois River drainage area. The importance of the proposed project is indicated by army engineers' estimate that about 30 per cent of the waters which caused the disastrous Mississippi floods in 1927 came from three Oklahoma rivers - the Illinois, the Grand, and the Verdigris." "Tour 16, "Oklahoma: A Guide to the Sooner State, 1941: 416-411.

Discovering Cookson Today
As we approached Cookson we found ourselves in awe of the beautiful Fall foliage and the incredible views of Lake Tenkiller; we were all excited to see what we could learn about Tour 16.

At first we weren't sure where we were; all we knew to look for was "STATTON'S STORE" and we couldn't believe it still existed. Hungry, lost, and in desperate need of a restroom, we were compelled to stop at the Cookson Country Store.

Our unscheduled stop at this store proved to be one of the most interesting stops along the tour. We first discovered that it was actually "Stratton's Store" and that the WPA Guide had misspelled the store's name. Furthermore, to our surprise, we had actually just stepped foot into the original Stratton's Store.

We learned that the dam that was built to create nearby Lake Tenkiller had forced the relocation of the town of Cookson and, specifically, Stratton's Store, which had to be moved to a different location to avoid being flooded by the formation of the lake. The original 1930s WPA Tour of Cookson is actually under water with some remnants of the town that was not relocated. The area has now become a popular tourist destination for bass divers.

Stratton's Store, now known as the Cookson Country Store, had been added onto to accommodate the greater needs of a modern day convenience store. However, the original part was actually operating as a café, and it is where we decided to eat lunch. As we took this time to review the WPA guide, a group of senior individuals sat down at the table next to us. We immediately thought they might be able to tell us something about the town and we were right; a man named John was more than willing to share his knowledge with us. After a brief interview, John had us follow him in the car to a house that was known to have an escape tunnel that was used by gangsters in the 1930s. Although we couldn't get access into the house to check out the tunnel for ourselves, we still stumbled upon some really interesting and unexpected history.

History of Cookson
In the 1890s, the Ballew Family settled on the gentle, crystal clear Illinois River. The location of the homestead was under a bluff that spanned over 200 feet high. In the early 1890s, the Ballew Family operated the Ballew Brothers Store, which supplied the local families with everything from guns, to general household goods, to wagons, and even custom-built caskets. With the coming of the post office in 1896, which was operated from the home of Jack Cookson, the Cookson Indian Territory address was born.

In 1947 the Corps of Engineers began building a dam across the Illinois River, creating Lake Tenkiller. All of the affected structures that could be moved were relocated to higher ground, many of which are still being used today. What you may know as the Cookson General Store is the original store that was housed on the river and operated by the George Stratton family. The structures that could not be moved are now covered by beautiful Lake Tenkiller.

At the bottom of Lake Tenkiller, some sites from "old" Cookson are still accessible, where you might find some artifacts left behind by the settlers; horseshoes, buggies, roofs, houses, farm equipment, personal possessions that leave room for imagination about those past lives are all protected by state law and may not be removed, but can certainly be admired and enjoyed. There is even an old jailhouse, wagon wheels, and rare artifacts such as Native American pottery, jewelry, and arrowheads.
Tour 1, Section B and Route 66
Tour 1, Section B

Follow our journey through the Sooner State, revisit Tour 1, highlighting some of its most famous landmarks.

Tour 1, Section B

"Oil Capital of the World" - Tulsa Metro

Tulsa was established before 1879 as a postoffice that ran through Indian Territory and was first called Tulsa City by the Creek Indians who belonged to the Tallassee or Tulscoy community. As a result of Tulsa's position in Indian Territory it has always been an ethnically diverse town, despite 98 percent of the population being American born. To this day, it is one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the nation.

Tulsa is the second largest city in the state and used to be the oil center of the great Mid-Continent area because it was Oklahoma's largest oil refining center. The city is unique in that it cherishes its southern values but it melds eastern influences into the city. The oil boom in the 1920's led to wealthy citizens reinvesting into the city's architecture and it is now home to the largest concentration of Art Deco in the country.

Route 66 runs right through Tulsa and it became one of the prominent stops along the journey through the Sooner State.

For more information about Tulsa, follow these links to the WPA Guide and Tulsa travel guide.
Tour 1, Section B

Catoosa

Catoosa is covered in Tour 1; Section A, but because it is part of the Tulsa metro area and has a major Route 66 landmark, it is included in this exhibit.

"CATOOSA, 943 m. (818 at., 465 pop.), was named for "Old Catoos," the rounded hill just west of town. The name is said to be a derivation of the Cherokee expression, "Ola-ua-ali," meaning "Here live the People of the Light." The story is that the "People of the Light" clan formerly met on the summit of the hill.

As a result of treaties made with the Indians after the close of the Civil War, the railroads made slow but inevitable advances west through Indian Territory, each step tapping a new reservoir of the St. Louis-San Francisco Railway before that line was extended to Tulsa. During this period, the town was typically frontier—the Saturday-night gathering place of roistering cowboys who had driven cattle here to the stockyards." - "Tour 1," Oklahoma: A Guide to the Sooner State, 1941: 223

History and Development of Catoosa

According to the Catoosa Historical Society's Museum, the original settlement was on the banks of Spensey Creek. After flooding the settlers moved "on the hill" to what is now the corner of Cherokee and Denbo streets. With the arrival of the A. F. Railroad in 1882, Catoosa became a prominent point for shipping cattle east. Herds were driven to Catoosa from Texas and further west to be transported to Kansas City and beyond [1].

Catoosa has grown drastically since the publication of the Guide in 1941. According to the 2020 census, the town had 7,112 residents. This expansion can be attributed to two major events. At Tulsa grew, Catoosa became a "bedroom" community for Tulsa commuters. Catoosa also experienced massive economic growth when the Port of Catoosa opened as part of the McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River Navigation System (MKARNS) [2].

Although approval for MKARNS was a part of 1946 Rivers and Harbors Act, it did not become a reality until almost three decades later. Congress allocated funding for the project in 1983. The Port of Catoosa was dedicated by President Nixon on June 5, 1971. The system was named for Oklahoma Senator Robert S. Kerr and Arkansas Senator John L. McClellan who guided the project through years of development [1]. The map on the left shows the full River Navigation system.

Route 66 Attractions: Blue Whale

One of the most memorable attractions along Route 66 is in Catoosa. The Blue Whale has been a cultural landmark since the 1950s.

The big Blue Whale in Catoosa was built by Hugh S. Davis, whom believed that you should enjoy life and live it to its fullest. He was always busy thinking, planning, and creating, and often had an ongoing project he was working on. After he retired from the Tulsa Zoo, he built an ark with cut-out wooden animals for the pond on his property so kids could celebrate birthdays there. Then he made the Alligator Ranch and Nature's Acres which had live alligators, snakes and prairie dogs. You could say that it was a passion of his to celebrate life and make everyday an amazing one for others.

At age 60, Mr. Davis started working on an anniversary gift for his wife, Zelta, by making sketches on napkins. He made doodles of a "fish" that he wanted to build at the pond and soon that doodle grew in size. It grew larger and larger to the point that Mr. Davis needed to draw on oversized sheets of paper. What came out of all these sketches and notes was not a fish but a large whale. He could not tackle this task alone and called upon his friend, Harold Thomas, to help him with the gigaframe. Mr. Thomas was happy to help a friend and lent 100 hours of his time. Mr. Davis however, spent a 200 hours applying cement to form the outer layer of the whale and in a years the whale was completed in 1972.

It did not take long for people to take a liking to the big blue whale. It became one of the best loved icons on Route 66 because from 11:00 a.m. until dark every day (except Mondays and rainy days) people could swim, picnic, fish and of course jump off and play on the big blue whale. The whale was closed in 1986 because of Mr. Davis's crippling arthritis and in 1990 he passed away. The whale is now owned by Lee Dee (Davis) Bilt and her husband. Restoration has been ongoing and in 1997 the Catoosa Chamber of Commerce refurbished the aging landmark. The Big Blue Whale and grounds are still maintained today and people can still come and enjoy this Route 66 landmark.[4]

The image below show the Blue Whale in 2015.
History of Chandler
Early History and 1897 Tornado
Chandler, OK was established in September 1891. It was supposed to be opened for settlement on September 22, but because the survey was not complete the opening was delayed until September 28. Purposefully located at the center of County A (later Lincoln County), Chandler serves as the county seat.

On March 30, 1897, a tornado struck Chandler causing massive damage, killing at least nineteen people, and injuring hundreds more. The event and devastating fire that followed received coverage across Oklahoma, and the nation with headlines portraying that Chandler had been wiped off the face of the earth. See some of the contemporary coverage below. Click any of the images to see more information or a larger version of the newspaper.

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Bennie Kent Films

"A moving picture history of the town was begun in 1904 by Bennie Kent, now a veteran newsreel cameraman; the picture is brought up to date each year." - "Tour 1," Oklahoma: A Guide to the Sooner State, 1941: 226

In addition to his work on newsreels, Kent was the cameraman on silent films made in Oklahoma including, The Wolf Hunt, The Bank Robbery, and The Dancing of the Oklahomas Outlaws. The Oklahoma Historical Society has made Bennie Kent’s films of Chandler available. This video shows part one of the compiled footage. Click here to view part two.