OKLAHOMA
The Sooner State

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Angie Debo was one of Oklahoma’s greatest historians. Books she wrote are pictured behind her in this portrait which hangs in the Oklahoma Capitol. It was painted by Oklahoma artist Charles Banks Wilson.
1710 LaHarpe’s expedition

1800

1803 Louisiana Purchase

1804 Lewis and Clark expedition

1806 Wilkinson and Pike expedition

1807 Ft. Smith established

1817-1834 Frontier forts and roads built

Chouteau Trading Post established

1819 Long expedition

Enter Coronado by Oklahoma artist Charles Banks Wilson.
THEORETICAL ORIGINS OF AMERICAN INDIANS. Recorded history began in Oklahoma in 1540 when Coronado crossed the plains with his conquistadors. Some believe the Spanish were the first Europeans in Oklahoma. For centuries before that, however, people moved back and forth across this area and many lived here. Some may have had European origins.

There are many theories today concerning the origin of the American Indian. The Indians had their own beliefs, even in 1540 and earlier. Most tribes had legends or traditional histories. These were passed orally from generation to generation and contained stories of migration. Many legends claimed that early members of the tribe came from “the land of the setting sun,” or somewhere to the west of California. Others claimed to have come from the north. Some even say they came from the south or the east.

ICE AGE MIGRATIONS. The theory most commonly accepted among experts concerns the Pleistocene Age, or Ice Age. Scientists and historians differ widely on how many years ago huge glaciers formed an immense ice cap which covered most of the northern half of the Northern Hemisphere. However, they agree that this ice cap caused a lowering of the ocean’s water level. It exposed a land bridge between present-day
POSSIBLE MIGRATION ROUTES FROM BERINGIA

- Laurentide ice sheet
- Cordilleran ice sheet
- Ice free corridor

BERINGIA

PACIFIC OCEAN

NORTH AMERICA

Gulf of Mexico

ATLANTIC OCEAN
Inhabitants of northeast Asia walked across the bridge, called Beringia, into North America. From entry, it is easy to conclude that those early travelers migrated southward, populating the land all the way from the Arctic Circle to the southern tip of South America. While the conclusion is easy, however, the actual accomplishment took many centuries and was probably one of mankind’s most difficult migrations.

Archeologists are able to trace migration routes of various groups and to reconstruct the lifestyles of ancient people. The cultural and physical differences of Indian tribes indicate not only that early settlers may have arrived in North America through many entry points but also that the people who crossed the land bridge may have come from several different places. Physical characteristics indicate that early Americans may have been descendants of the Mongols or of various Chinese tribes. Some may have actually been Indians — from India.

This varied evidence strongly suggests that American Indians should not be grouped together in one class called “Indian.” Rather, they should be divided into groups according to their differences and similarities. In fact, scholars of Indian history have divided them into classifications according to language, cultural, and physical differences. They rarely refer to any group merely as “Indian.”

Thor Heyerdahl, a 20th century explorer, went to a great deal of trouble to prove the possibility of Egyptian origin. In 1970, Heyerdahl sailed the RA II, a vessel styled in the tradition of ancient Egypt and made of papyrus reed (once used for paper), from Africa to North America. The Norwegian ethnologist simulated as nearly as possible the conditions under which the Egyptians would have traveled. While some scientists say his findings were inconclusive, his journey may have proved that it was possible for sailors from ancient Egypt to have made similar trips thousands of years ago.

Theories developed from artifacts. Sculpted pieces found in Mexico in 1961 have been identified as Roman. Japanese pottery, five thousand years old, was found in Ecuador, and artifacts of Phoenician and Pompeiian origin were found in other places. All these items have been scientifically dated and are believed to have been lying in their discovery locations for hundreds, even thousands, of years before Columbus stumbled into this hemisphere looking for the Orient.
All this evidence points to two obvious possibilities:
1. The ancestors of the American Indian tribes came from many places.
2. Ancient Americans carried on trade with ancient people from around the world.

Perhaps both possibilities are true. This would account not only for the differences among tribal cultures but also for the similarities of some to ancient cultures in other parts of the world. Some Inca pyramids bear a striking resemblance to pyramids in Cambodia. Maps believed to be copies of ancient Egyptian maps depict parts of Antarctica and South America with amazing accuracy. Tales were told in ancient Chinese and Irish literature which appear to be talking of the Americas and the American Indians. The possibilities are endless, and scientists are sharply divided on what the probabilities might be.

**PREHISTORIC OKLAHOMA.** The land area now called Oklahoma measures some 69,000 square miles. It is divided geographically into two areas by the Cross Timbers, a natural barrier of very dense scrub timber and thickets, which impeded travelers as recently as one hundred years ago. The belt of thick vegetation ran along a line from the central part of the state toward the southwest. Much of the land east of that line is rough woodlands, while western Oklahoma is largely flat prairie land. According to archaeological studies, lifestyles of the inhabitants east and west of the Cross Timbers were as different from each other as the land on either side was different.

The oldest archeological find in the state is the Domebo mammoth kill site located near Stecker in Caddo County. Not only is it the oldest in the state, but it marks the easternmost place where Clovis points have been found in North America. Clovis people were hunters believed to have lived about 12,000 years ago. According to Arrell M. Gibson, author of *The American Indian* (published in 1980 by D.C. Heath and Co.), Clovis man “lived in scattered, temporary camps and built no shelters.” Gibson asserted that the climate of the country at that time was “generally tem-
perate,” making the need for shelter minimal. Clovis man’s main source of food was probably the mammoth, a huge, hairy creature resembling an elephant, which once roamed the Great Plains. Other food sources were camels, small horses, ground sloths, large bison generally referred to as the “huge early bison,” and very small antelope.

Archeologists at the Domebo site unearthed several bones of a mammoth that had evidently been killed by prehistoric hunters. Three spear points were found, two of which were identified as Clovis points. Radiocarbon dating marked the age of these items as somewhere near 12,000 years, although some experts using other methods disagree. Regardless of dating methods, however, the find verifies Clovis man’s existence in the Oklahoma area at one time.

For several reasons, including better human hunting skills, the mammoth and many of its companions became extinct in this part of the world. Clovis people, as they are classified by modern scientists, also disappeared. People became more sophisticated; their lifestyles changed. They made different tools, and moved on. The most important contribution made by Clovis people was the **atlatl**, a spear thrower. The **atlatl** was a stick-like device about two feet long, weighted and fashioned to
hold a spear securely. It allowed greater velocity and whip action and enabled the hunter to hit an animal as far away as 300 feet with a great deal of force. Folsom people, the next known inhabitants of Oklahoma, also used the atlatl.

Said to have lived some 10,000 years ago, Folsom people lived a cooperative existence. They hunted in groups and worked together for the common good of everyone in the group. Their primary source of food was the huge early bison. One method of killing bison was driving a herd over a cliff. This provided a large, easy harvest, but much was wasted. More commonly, a single bison was isolated from the herd and surrounded by several hunters, who killed the animal by throwing spears into its body.

Agriculture and Trade. Although progress continued, there is no evidence that ancient Oklahomans lived in towns in the western part of the state, but there are long periods of time for which there are no clues concerning their existence. As recently as 800 years ago, however, it appears that there were still no towns in the west. At best, groups of farming Indians built their homes close together and in large enough numbers that they might be classified as farming villages. The farmers worked together and gave each other support and protection from raiding enemy tribesmen. They hunted rabbits with small nets, and they hunted larger game, such as the buffalo.

Western Indians planted three main crops — squash, corn, and beans. In fact, those crops have appeared in archeological studies so often together that scientists have named them the American Vegetable Triad. The varieties of corn, and sometimes of squash and beans, varied from place to place. But basically these three crops were the main staples of tribes all across the Americas.

Western Oklahoma Indians were fine craftsmen, making excellent stone knives and points. These were often traded to tribes from farther west who brought pottery from New Mexico, obsidian (volcanic glass) from Montana, chalcedony from Colorado, and even a few seashells that possibly came all the way from California. The most important trade item Oklahoma tribesmen had to offer was salt. The Great Salt Plains still exist today as a natural phenomenon and as a reminder of the unknown numbers of people who survived during hundreds of years because of salt obtained there.

Life in western Oklahoma was more difficult than in eastern Okla-
Earliest Oklahomans

The western half of the state received little precipitation, and most of that came all at once in the spring, flooding rivers and streams that merely trickled or dried up the rest of the year. Vegetation was carefully cultivated and sheltered as much as possible against the high winds.

Eastern Oklahoma, on the other hand, enjoyed heavy rainfall and lush vegetation, and its inhabitants enjoyed a more leisurely lifestyle. People lived in towns 800 years ago. They built their towns close to rivers, lived in permanent dwellings, and were primarily farmers and small-game hunters. They grew a different variety of corn from that grown in the west, but their main crops were squash, beans and corn, nevertheless.

Giant mastodons roamed North America from 3.75 million to 10,000 years ago. Mastodons are related to mammoths and modern-day elephants.
SPIRO MOUND. Unearthed in the 1930s, one of the nation’s most important archeological locations is near Spiro, Oklahoma, in LeFlore County. An enormous man-made mound constructed of cedar logs covered with tons of soil, it was a ceremonial center and burial ground. When opened, it revealed numerous details of a highly advanced, sophisticated culture. Although no written material was found, the elaborate artwork and other artifacts made it possible for archeologists to reconstruct the lifestyle of the Spiro people.

Believed to be ancestors of the Caddoan tribes, these people lived in eastern Oklahoma from about A.D.500 to about A.D.1300. Their culture was so far advanced that much of their work was specialized. Probably most people were farmers and hunters, but some were weavers, spinning fibers and weaving cloth from wild hemp, wild cotton, nettles, and feathers. (Wild hemp was used in making rope for many years.) Others were builders and architects. Still others developed special artistic talents, such as pottery-making. Part of the artwork found in the Spiro location bears a strong resemblance to art designs of the Mayan culture.

The Spiro economic system was very advanced for its time. Some of the people were successful merchants and traders. Some Spiro traders traveled far away to trade with people in other places, just as distant traders traveled to eastern Oklahoma. They came from places as far away as the Gulf of Mexico and the Great Lakes. Spiro traders likely traveled similar distances on their business trips.

As in the west, salt was the most valuable trade item, although it was obtained quite differently in the east. Some of the eastern Indians worked at salt “mining,” extracting salt from salt spring water by evaporation. They placed the water in large flat pans made of pottery and set them over low fires. When the water was gone, salt was left in the pan.

Other trade items were semi-precious stones such as amethyst and garnet, surplus field crops,
fabrics and carvings, pottery and artwork. In exchange, Spiro Indians received copper from the north, pearls from the south, and other raw materials and items scarce to their country from various places in the eastern part of the continent.

Other groups of people in eastern Oklahoma lived in a style similar to that of the Spiro people. They observed similar customs, made similar pottery, and built similar homes. They were great artists and produced work so near to that of ancient Aztecs and Mayans that many scientists believe they were related to one of those tribes. These people are believed to be related to the people at Spiro mound. Other groups of eastern Oklahoma Indians lived very differently from the Mayan-like groups, however, and are believed to have different origins.

Although much conjecture is made concerning the tribal connections of early people in Oklahoma, there is no certain proof of any of it. The only records of any of the early dwellers are the artifacts and rubbish uncovered in “digs” and analyzed by modern archaeologists, and even scientists disagree sometimes on what a “find” tells. We can be certain, however, that these early peoples did exist. They did live, and they hunted and farmed the land now called Oklahoma. Perhaps someday someone will find more artifacts which will help explain more about prehistory and the origins of the people who lived here. More especially, perhaps we will discover what became of the early inhabitants of the state.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

The following questions may be used for classroom oral discussion, independent practice, or essay tests. Each question should be discussed fully, orally or in writing.

1. Explain the most commonly accepted theory of Indian origin in North America.
2. How did living conditions differ between eastern and western tribes during the early prehistoric era?
3. Describe the oldest archeological find in the area that would become the state of Oklahoma.
4. Discuss the advanced state of civilization reached by the Spiro people as evidenced by artifacts found in the Spiro Mound.
The atlatl was a stick-like device about two feet long, weighted and fashioned to hold a spear securely.

View from Mt. Scott near Lawton in southwestern Oklahoma.
First White Visitors

**EARLY WHITE VISITORS.** There is almost as much uncertainty concerning the origins of the first white people to visit Oklahoma as there is concerning the origins of the first Indians. For many years, Francisco Vasquez Coronado was thought to have been the first in 1540.

The discovery of *runestones* near Heavener in eastern Oklahoma at one time pointed strongly to Viking visitors some 500 years earlier than the Spaniards. *Runes* are the letters of the *Teutonic* alphabet, an ancient writing system adopted by the people of Northern Europe, particularly the Norsemen, or Vikings.

If the *runestones* are genuine, then in November, A.D.1012, some travel-weary Viking was following the treacherous Arkansas and Poteau rivers, making his way through the Winding Stair and Sugar Loaf mountains. He stopped along the way to record the journey he and his companions were making. Perhaps he anticipated its find by some future explorer or inhabitant, and he wanted it known that he had been there before them. Perhaps he feared that he would never again see his homeland, and he wanted someone to know where he had gone.

On the other hand, if the *runestones* are not the work of an eleventh-century Viking, they may be the sentimental carvings of the Swedish leader of a group of Germans who tried to colonize that area for the French in the early 1700s. If this is the case, as some scientists believe, then Coronado and his army were probably the first Europeans to enter the area that is now Oklahoma.

Today, reputable scientists believe that these are colorful stories but consider the Heavener *runestone* a “hoax” which means the stories of early Vikings and other visitors are not true.
CORTES. In Latin America, Cortes had defeated the Aztec nation by capturing one man, Montezuma, their god-king. The Spaniards assumed that all Indians were ruled by the same type of government as the Aztecs. Therefore they failed to control the Indians to the north, even after defeating them in battle. In fact, the god-king concept of the Aztecs was that one ruler ruled many clans and segments of the mighty nation. In the north not only did separate tribes have their own chiefs, but most tribes had several chiefs. The religions and governments of northern Indians were diverse, and each tribe was a separate nation. The Spaniards did not come prepared to deal with that situation.

CORONADO. In 1540, Don Antonio de Mendoza, “the good vice-roy,” had been appointed by Spanish Emperor Charles V to rule New Spain. He sent the Spanish cavalry under the command of Coronado into the unknown north country to search for gold. The conquistadors were invincible, and they considered all strangers their enemies. Spain was the most powerful nation in Europe, even in the world. Mendoza was confident that Coronado and his army would find and conquer the fabled
Seven Cities of Cibola. It was said that common utensils there were made from gold and that jewel-studded houses were built many stories high.

Had the Spaniards been less powerful and more friendly, history might have set quite a different course, for after crossing Oklahoma and turning west, the army did find the famous cities. From a distance the houses, well-fashioned pueblos built several stories high, sparkled as though weighted down with precious jewels. Greedy for gold, the Spanish army attacked and defeated the settlement, only to find that their “jewels” were nothing more than gypsum glistening in the sun. The conquering Spaniards found a little silver, some fine clay pottery, and a few trinkets. They found no gold.

Coronado and his men defeated all the cities. Coronado hoisted the flag of Spain and claimed new territory for the emperor. He recorded what he had seen in places no other white man had traveled. He found food and salt in Indian storehouses. He sent out scouting parties that explored the Little Colorado River and found the Grand Canyon. He executed many of the people he had conquered. For a year, Coronado and his men moved back and forth across the plains and mesas, fighting and searching. They never found gold. In the spring of 1542, they returned to Mexico.

The Spaniards defeated the inhabitants of Cibola with relative ease. They had three distinct advantages — the horse, the gun, and the wagon. They were able to ride in and attack and to flee swiftly because of their horses. The Spanish guns made death much more certain at greater distances than the Indians’ arrows and stones. With their rolling boxes, the Spaniards were able to carry necessary ammunition, food and other items for life and defense wherever they went. These items bore the element of surprise against an otherwise able enemy and left the Indians at the mercy of the Spanish Conquistadors.

During their search for riches, Coronado had traveled back across part of Oklahoma and western Kansas and had found a Wichita-type village inhabited by a tribe of tattooed farmers. Friar Juan de Padilla, a chaplain with the expedition, decided to return there when Coronado’s army returned to Mexico. Padilla wished to establish a mission for the tribe. He was accompanied by Andres de Campo, a Portuguese soldier. They ministered to the tattooed people during most of 1542 and then traveled back through central Oklahoma to visit another tribe. En route, they were attacked by a hostile tribe, and Padilla died. DeCampo and a handful of Mexican-Indians escaped. Following that time, these men spent several
Scraping tools were made from chipped stone by early Oklahoma Indians.

months in Oklahoma, and some historians believe that they may have stayed in the area for several years. There is no record of what their eventual fate might have been.

**SPANISH LEGACY.** When they departed, the Spaniards left a legacy of distrust, hatred, and violence. Most important, however, they left horses. Nothing changed the life of the western tribes as did the horses. Hunting was easier from horseback. The use of horses made them more powerful in warfare, just as they had made the Spaniards too powerful to defeat. Horses soon became the mark of wealth among those tribes. Two hundred years later, when white men again encountered the western Indians, their horses made them more formidable foes than Coronado had faced.

**DE SOTO.** Other animals brought for the first time into North America by the Spaniards were pigs, goats, sheep, cattle, and chickens. Hernando De Soto brought many of them because he didn’t know if sufficient food would be available to feed his army. De Soto had been sent to the New World to conquer Florida, and the Spanish emperor had made him governor of Cuba and Florida.

De Soto’s army expected to find wealth in Florida similar to the jewels and precious metals found in South America by Cortes. When they failed to find what they were seeking, they pushed on into the interior of the country. They fought the Choctaws in the Mississippi Valley and continued westward. They crossed the Mississippi River in May, 1541, and persisted onward.

De Soto’s private secretary, Rodrigo Ranjel, kept the official record of their journey. When the army reached the Grand and Arkansas River valleys in eastern Oklahoma, he recorded intricate details of what they saw. He wrote about “wild cows” that the Indians killed and about how the “cow skins” were used in many different ways. He described the complicated stockades which protected many Indian towns and villages. He told of elaborate temples in which complex rituals were performed. He told of friendly native people wearing beautiful clothes and adornments of shell
and pearl. These inhabitants guided them through the wilderness from place to place, until the Spaniards made it plain they considered the natives as nothing more than beasts to be chased by their dogs.

Finally, tired of being mistreated and robbed, the Indians became hostile toward De Soto and his men. The Spaniards, at last convinced that they would find no gold, turned back to the Mississippi River, where De Soto died of an illness on May 15, 1542. Half of his original force survived to return to Panuco, Mexico, by following the river south.

**Controversy** has arisen as to whether De Soto actually came within
the borders of present-day Oklahoma. Ranjel’s writings seem to indicate, however, that the expedition reached the Arkansas River and perhaps came even further into the eastern part of the state.

**ONATE.** The last major Spanish expedition into Oklahoma was led by Don Juan de Onate in 1601. Again it was a search for gold. Taking artillery carts and more than 700 horses and mules, Onate and his men followed the San Buenaventura (Canadian) River to the Antelope Hills in the western part of the state. They marched northward into Kansas and on to the country of the tattooed people. The Quivira, or tattooed people, probably lived near the location of what is Wichita, Kansas, today.

Upon their arrival, Onate’s army was attacked vigorously by the Quivira, who had greeted Coronado quite placidly 60 years earlier. The fight was so violent that most of the Spaniards were injured and forced to return to their encampment on the Rio Grande.

Although he was not interested in it as a prize, Onate recorded the beauty of the virgin land of the Great Plains, the huge herds of buffalo which grazed upon it, and the remarkable fruits and grasses he saw growing there.

**La SALLE and La HARPE.** Just as the Spanish came to seek their fortunes in the new land, so did the French — but the French did not want to conquer. The French wanted to trade, and to trade for furs in particular. Robert Cavalier, Sieur de la Salle, never saw Oklahoma, but in 1682 he claimed the area for France. He claimed not only the Mississippi River Valley, but the rivers which flowed to the Mississippi as well. He named the area Louisiana in honor of the French ruler, King Louis XIV.

The French sought peace and trade with the Indians, but their feelings toward the Spanish were not so friendly. Louis XIV wrote in his memoirs that La Salle hoped to gain control of trade in Louisiana by securing two advantageous ports. He particularly wanted one approximately sixty miles upriver from the Gulf on the banks of the Colbert (Mississippi) River. In addition, by enlisting large native forces, supplemented by 400 or so French soldiers, the explorer planned to expel the Spaniards from the area. La Salle was certain that the Indians’ hatred of the Spaniards would seal any necessary pact between the natives and the French.

Actually, La Salle’s plan might have worked had the French army not encountered so many misfortunes. Lost in the wilderness, seeing their companions die from disease, and further weakened by desertions and
Indian attacks, the French soldiers turned against their leader and killed him in his sleep. The survivors returned to France and left dreams of New World control buried with La Salle.

Less political fur traders carried on the trade with the Indians, however, and in 1718, Bernard de la Harpe began trading along the Red and Arkansas Rivers. He established no permanent trading post, but his records added to the knowledge of historians concerned with that time period.

**CULTURAL EXCHANGES.** European-Indian contact began to cause change right away on both sides. Each contributed items to the other’s culture. In addition to corn, beans, and squash, Indians introduced Europeans to pumpkins, avocados, pineapples, chewing gum, chocolate, and other edible products. The Europeans brought peas, pears, apricots and several other fruits the Indians had not tried. They also brought wheat and the animals previously mentioned.

From the Europeans, the Indians learned metal craft. Prior to the coming of the Europeans, the Indians’ primary materials with which to make their tools and utensils were clay, wood, stone, and bone. The Europeans taught them the art of metallurgy, heating metal and hammering it into a particular shape. The Indians began to make a few farm implements and small household items. Some tribes made beautiful silver jewelry, for which they are well-known today.

For many years, Indians continued to trade with Europeans for most of the metal items needed, as they perfected their own crafts. Like the whites, Indians wanted to own knives. However, the most powerful metal item introduced to the Indians by Europeans was the gun. Gun trading was a lively, prosperous, and oftentimes law-breaking business for frontier traders.

Most Indian tribes had some form of system by which the elderly and the disabled were supported. No such system existed anywhere in Europe in the form of a government agency. Sanitation and city planning were developed sciences among some Indian tribes. These abilities account for the absence of certain diseases among the natives, or so some experts believe. Europe, on the other hand, frequently suffered epidemics of various kinds which modern scientists attribute to the lack of proper sanitation.

Perhaps the greatest surprise concerning Indian culture at the time of the Europeans’ first arrivals was the lack of a wheel. In spite of their
advanced technology in some areas, the American Indian had never
developed the concept of the wheel. Therefore, some of their technical
advancement may have been hindered from the extensive growth that
could have occurred with the use of mobile conveyances and other mechanisms made possible by the rolling disc.

Nevertheless, excited explorers transported American art, food, and
technology back to Europe while natives employed new items and ideas
obtained from the Europeans, and both cultures began an intermingling.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

The following questions may be used for classroom discussion, reading checks, independent practice, or essay tests. Each question should be discussed fully whether in oral presentation or in writing.

1. Explain the purpose of the Coronado expedition and describe the results of the expedition.
2. What advantages did the conquistadors have over the Indians and how did they use their advantages?
3. How did European and American Indian cultures learn from one another?
4. What is the theory of Scandinavian expeditions into the area that is now eastern Oklahoma?
5. How did the attitude of the conquistadors, toward themselves and toward strangers, affect the outcome of the Spanish expedition?
6. Briefly describe Padilla’s expedition.
7. How did the things left behind by the Spanish affect the lifestyles of the Indians?
8. How did the French hope to succeed in their explorations and trade?
9. How did the Spanish and French explorers differ in their purposes and actions as explorers?
10. How did the explorers and the Indians make cultural contributions to one another’s lifestyles?
LOUISIANA PURCHASE. The European policy concerning land ownership in the New World was that the nation first discovering a region thereby secured legal ownership. The inhabitants of the land were insignificant, in the view of the European powers, and were considered *chattel*, or moveable property, of the discovering government. The explorer who made the discovery was considered the agent of his government. This policy was known as the “rights of discovery.” After a discovery was made and claimed, it became a pawn of peace, a spoil of war, or a tool of bargain, as the government saw fit. So, while European explorers were crisscrossing the new western continent, their rulers were playing geographical chess with their respective pieces of the New World.

LaSalle, who had actually seen very little of the territory he claimed, named Louisiana after King Louis of France in 1682. He claimed not only the Mississippi River valley but also the land into which all of its tributaries extended. This was approximately one-fourth of all the land which later became the United States.

Meanwhile, Spain agreed to support France against England, and the two allies were defeated in the French and Indian War. (In Europe, this was called the Seven Years’ War.) Spain lost Florida to England and *demanded remuneration*. France ceded Louisiana as *compensation*, and Oklahoma was under Spanish rule in 1763.
In 1800, Napoleon Bonaparte of France and the king of Spain signed the Treaty of San Ildefonso, which returned Louisiana to France. With Napoleon waging war all over Europe, some Americans feared that the port of New Orleans would be closed to American traffic. In 1801, Robert Livingston, American minister to France, began trying to buy the Isle of Orleans, a narrow strip of land along the lower Mississippi leading to the Gulf.

At first, France denied owning Louisiana, as the treaty was to have been a secret, and in making the treaty, Bonaparte had promised Charles of Spain that he would not sell Louisiana. Talleyrand, the Chief Minister of France, finally acknowledged the treaty but declared that France had no wish to sell any part of the territory.

However, with several of his campaigns going badly, Bonaparte found himself in need of funds. He decided to sacrifice his dreams of French Imperialism in the New World for the money he needed to fight his wars. He instructed Talleyrand to sell — not only New Orleans but all of Louisiana. In May, 1803, the United States virtually doubled itself in area by purchasing Louisiana from France for the sum of $15 million. Thus, Oklahoma became a part of the United States of America.

**LEWIS AND CLARK EXPEDITION.** Thomas Jefferson was President at the time of the Louisiana Purchase. Of immediate concern to him was the exploration of the new territory. The people were moving continually westward in search of new land, but few had ventured farther west than the Mississippi River. Most people guessed that more hostile Indian tribes lived in the West. There were fantastic stories of Indian giants in the north, of salt mountains, and of strange beasts, but little was generally known about the area.

Moreover, no clear boundaries had been set for the territory, but Spain controlled the land to the California coast, and Jefferson knew an exact boundary needed to be established as soon as possible.

The first expedition sent out by the President did not venture into Oklahoma. Captain Meriwether Lewis and Lieutenant William Clark were commissioned to explore the Missouri River westward to its source.
and to find a passage across the high mountains in the west. This expedition covered the northern part of the territory. They set out in May, 1804, one month after the formal transfer of land from France to the United States.

**WILKINSON AND PIKE EXPEDITION.** The second expedition commissioned by President Jefferson was the first official expedition into Oklahoma. Lieutenant Zebulon Montgomery Pike, 27 years old, and Lieutenant James B. Wilkinson set out in July, 1806. They accompanied a group of Osage and Pawnee Indians back to their homes from a trip they had made to Washington, D. C. They were to follow the Arkansas River, exploring the territory all the way to its source, and to establish friendly relations with any people along the way. Their explorations were to include the mountains surrounding the headwaters of the river, the area later known as Colorado.

Crossing Kansas, Lieutenant Wilkinson became ill. It was decided that Pike should take part of the men and continue to the source of the Arkansas. Wilkinson took the rest and explored to the mouth of the river, giving the young lieutenant a chance to recover without facing the rigors of the western mountains.

Pike took his men on to discover Pike's Peak in Colorado but then wandered into Spanish territory, where the group was captured. They were escorted back to American territory and released, after being held in several places in Mexico. While in the custody of the Spaniards, the explorers were relieved of the papers on which descriptions of explored territory had been recorded. The Spaniards kept those papers, and Pike was left with only the information he and his men could remember concerning their trip west from St. Louis.

Lieutenant Wilkinson, however, kept detailed records of all he had seen, and these became the first official records of Oklahoma. In his reports he referred to the land along the Arkansas River as a “paradise,” and claimed that he saw “enough deer, buffalo and elk . . . to feed all of the Indians in the United States for one hundred years.”

Wilkinson and his men spent Christmas Day in an Osage village near the present site of Claremore and then moved on down the ice-clogged river to Webbers Falls, which he estimated to be seven feet high. He reported meeting a few Cherokee and Choctaw Indians, who had apparently come west to hunt. He even found some white men, mostly trappers and traders, in this remote western land.
THE GREAT SALT PLAINS. The next expedition did not take place until 1811, when George C. Sibley, Osage Indian Agent from Fort Orange, Missouri, traveled with several Osage chiefs as they returned to their homes after a trip to Washington, D. C. Curious about the many stories and strange tales he had heard about the salt mountain and about the buffalo, Sibley was led across the prairies of Kansas, Nebraska, and northern Oklahoma. He finally came to the Great Salt Plains, which he said was “glistening like a brilliant field of snow in the summer sun.” The Indians, using turkey wings as brooms, swept the salt into bags to be taken home. Sibley made the first official record of the site, which geologists later reported had once been a great salt sea. The Salt Plains soon became a life-sustaining stop for pioneers moving west across the continent.

THE SPARKS EXPEDITION. While Wilkinson and Pike were exploring the Arkansas, Captain Richard Sparks followed the Red River to its headwaters. Preparing in New Orleans for the trip, he and his men traveled up the Mississippi River to the mouth of the Red River. They floated that stream until they found it blocked by the “Great Raft,” a mass of logs, debris, and plants. This tangled phenomenon choked the river for miles, and finally Sparks and his party took to the land route. Stopping for lunch, they were surprised by a column of Spanish soldiers, who warned them either to turn back or to face arrest. While the boundaries of the territory were still unsettled, the Spaniards suspected every American explorer of trying to claim Spanish lands. Considering that they were largely outnumbered, Sparks and his party returned to Natchitoches without completing their mission. They had just reached the edge of what is now Oklahoma when they turned back.

FIRST LONG EXPEDITION. The first of two expeditions led by Major Stephen H. Long was for the purpose of establishing a fort in the Far West. The site selected was at Belle Point, a ferned and flowered location near the mouth of the Poteau River, where it empties into the Arkansas. Named for Colonel Thomas A. Smith, and founded
in 1817, Fort Smith became a center of activity for trappers and traders. The fort itself, designed by Major Long, consisted of a stockade of heavy pickets set deep into the ground, with barracks at the corners of the stockade and other buildings inside the enclosure. It was first occupied by the Rifle Regiment, under the command of Major William A. Bradford. Fort Smith was destined to become very important in the development of Oklahoma.

SECOND LONG EXPEDITION. In 1819, Major Long and his party set out on their second expedition to complete Captain Sparks’s mission, finding the source of the Red River. The War Department also instructed them to explore the Arkansas to its mouth, or where it empties into the Mississippi River. In July, 1820, at the headwaters in the Rocky Mountains, the party split. Captain John R. Bell and his party followed the Arkansas, and Major Long and his men were to find and follow the Red River.

Four days after separation, a creek was sighted which was thought to be a tributary of the Red River. They followed it to the river and set out down to the main channel. At the 100th Meridian, moving east, they camped for the night and were pleased with the resources there. Short of supplies, especially food, they found wild plums and grapes and plenty of good hunting. Dr. Edwin James, a botanist, recorded that there were excellent grasses in the area and that the soil appeared good for agriculture.

Many hardships were suffered on the trip because of the lack of sufficient food and supplies, however, and especially at one point because of a shortage of water. Apparently disillusioned by these hardships, three of the men stole away one night. They took most of the best horses and several saddlebags containing many of the records of the expedition, along with clothing and gifts for the Indians. The men were never found nor the records recovered, although an intensive search was launched by those left behind.

This incident sharpened the disappointment of the remaining members of the party when they found the mouth of the stream they were traveling and discovered that they had been exploring the Canadian River, not the Red River. Only three days away from Fort Smith, short supplied and weary, they did not attempt to find the Red River but reported instead back to Major Bradford. Captain Bell and his men awaited them there with their own tales of hardship. Although they had not completed the mission given them, the records which remained of Long’s journey and
the records which they managed to rewrite from memory were of significant value a short time later, when the government decided to build additional forts in the West.

TRADING EXPEDITIONS. In 1821, a party led by Colonel Hugh Glenn, a trader on the Verdigris River, embarked on a private expedition into the West. Twenty men left Fort Smith that September morning, including Kentucky surveyor Jacob Fowler and his slave, Paul, an interpreter called “Baptiste Roy,” and Nathaniel Pryor, who had also accompanied Lewis and Clark in 1804. Fowler kept a diary of the trip, which later became invaluable to historians, despite his poor spelling.

The expedition crossed the Osage Hills and followed the Arkansas River west to the Purgatory River, where they encountered members of the Cheyenne, Kiowa, and Arapaho tribes. The western tribes were pleased to trade with the explorers, exchanging pelts and furs for any items of use or interest offered them. This expedition was instrumental in opening trade with the western tribes, especially for the traders already stationed in what is now eastern Oklahoma.

William Becknell led a second trade expedition across the Great Plains in 1821, south from the Great Bend of the Arkansas all the way to Santa Fe in the Rio Grande Valley. Although Becknell’s party crossed Oklahoma only in the Panhandle, and left little knowledge of geographical value, they opened trade into that area, which brought a great deal of traffic across Oklahoma.

The explorers, both official and private, served several purposes in the early development of Oklahoma. They were the first to meet the native peoples and establish rela-
Prairie fire, by Blackbear Bosin, shows the burning of the plains. Lewis and Clark noted during their expedition, “a cloudy morning & smoky all day from the burning of the plains, which was set on fire by the Minetarries for an early crop of grass, as an inducement for the Buffalo to feed on . . .

In short, the courage and spirit of adventure possessed by a few made it possible for the rest of the nation to know what to expect in the land to the west. Pioneers began to trickle westward as soon as Lewis and Clark returned. By 1830, the traffic was steady and growing.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Explain how the United States came to own the Louisiana Territory.
2. For oral discussion or work outside of class, tell about each expedition below, its purpose, any important facts, its success or its failure:
   a. Zebulon Pike Expedition
   b. James B. Wilkinson Expedition
   c. Richard Sparks Expedition
   d. George C. Sibley Expedition
   e. Stephen H. Long Expedition
   f. Hugh Glenn Expedition
CHANGING BOUNDARIES. Spain protested vigorously the sale of Louisiana, reminding France that Napoleon had given his word that the land would not be sold. In no position to go to war, however, Spain was eventually silent, and the transfer was completed.

On December 20, 1803, thirty-year-old William C.C. Claiborne became the governor of Louisiana, the largest single territory ever owned by the United States. In an official ceremony in New Orleans, the French flag was lowered as the American flag was raised. Midway, the operators paused and the banners waved side by side momentarily, emphasizing the brotherhood of nations. Seconds later, the Stars and Stripes were flying over New Orleans, and thus over all Louisiana.

Some 20,000 non-Indian Americans lived in Louisiana Territory, most of them in or around New Orleans and St. Louis, with a few scattered settlements in between. In March, 1804, Congress passed an act which created two territories in the West — the Territory of New Orleans, south of the 33rd Parallel, and the District of Louisiana, or “Upper Louisiana,” north of it.

Temporarily, the District of Louisiana was attached to Indiana Territory, under Governor William Henry Harrison, who became the ninth President of the United States, serving a brief term in 1841. In March, 1805, the district was separated from Indiana Territory and became the Territory of Louisiana. General James Wilkinson, the father of Lieutenant James Wilkinson, became governor of the Territory of Louisiana in St. Louis.

In 1812, the Territory of New Orleans was admitted to the Union as the state of Louisiana. The Territory of Missouri was created and included the area that is now Oklahoma. William Clark, the famous explorer, was appointed governor of Missouri Territory.

In 1819, Missouri Territory was divided, and the Territory of Arkansas was created. Governor James Miller established Arkansas Post as the seat of government for Arkansas Territory. Its northeastern and southern boundaries matched those of today’s state of Arkansas, but its western boundary extended all the way to the Spanish holdings on the west, in-
Also in 1819, the southern and western boundaries of the area of the Louisiana Purchase were finally established. The Adams-Onis Treaty, an agreement between Spain and the United States, set the following as the absolute boundary between American and Spanish holdings in the West:

…along the west bank of the Sabine River from its mouth to the 32nd Parallel; thence, due north to the Red River; thence, westward along its south bank to the 100th meridian; thence, north along that meridian to the Arkansas River; thence, up the south bank of that stream to its source; thence, due north to the 42nd Parallel; thence, westward along that Parallel to the Pacific Ocean. . .

By the same treaty, Spain gave up all claims to both Florida and Oregon, and the United States relinquished any claims to Texas as part of the Louisiana Purchase. Further, two future boundaries were established for the state of Oklahoma — the Red River and the 100th Meridian.

THE CHOUTEAUS. As the nation grew in the East, more and more settlers began to spill into the West, and more people began to come to Oklahoma. The first to come were the traders. The Chouteau family were among the first of the traders.

Auguste Chouteau and his partner, Pierre Laclede Liguest, founded St. Louis in 1764 as a trading port. Auguste’s brother, Jean Pierre, established a healthy trade with the Osages, the Omahas, the Otos, the Kaws, the Poncas, and the Quapaws, all of whom were enemies of the Pawnees and moved about the Central Plains area.

Much of Chouteau’s business with these tribes was in guns and ammunition for their wars with the Pawnees, and he often took Pawnee captives back to St. Louis to be sold as slaves.

Auguste Pierre Chouteau, son of Jean Pierre and nephew of Auguste, established a trading post in 1817 near the site of present-day Salina, Oklahoma, on the Grand River, in the Three Forks area. Some 2,000
hunters and trappers, both Indian and European, traded with A.P. Chouteau, and the trading post shipped a huge volume of furs and pelts to New Orleans and St. Louis. There were hides of bear, beaver, buffalo, deer, otter, raccoon, rabbit, skunk, and many others, all of which were sold on eager markets in the more “civilized” areas of the country.

Chouteau himself lived luxuriously in the wilderness. He built a home described by a friend as a “two story log palace,” in which he entertained many travelers. Among those were the famous writer Washington Irving and Sam Houston, who later became the President of the Texas Republic. A.P. Chouteau married Sophie Labbadie, and the couple had six children — five daughters and a son. He also had four Indian wives and several children by them.

OTHER TRADERS. When Colonel Hugh Glenn opened up trade with Santa Fe, it became an important piece of business for both parties. There were no manufacturing centers in northern Mexico, so dry goods and hardware were especially valuable trade items there. Bolts of fabric, barrels of nails, horseshoes, and tools were shipped regularly. On return trips, horses, mules, and raw materials were transported for the eastern market. Glenn’s trading post on the Verdigris River thrived, and it became a regular stopover for wilderness travelers.

Other trading posts in the Three Forks area were owned by partners Brand and Barbour, by Nathaniel Pryor, the veteran of two exploring expeditions, and by Ben Hawkins. All these posts became stopping-off places, and traders became as deft at trading tales and hospitality as they were at trading goods.

Trading posts and merchandise were swept away in the greatest flood ever to hit that region. The Three Forks trading center began to decline after 1833 and the big flood. Chouteau alone suffered $10,000 in damages. The traders rebuilt and made improvements, only to
have them destroyed again in a fire a short time later. The trading center never fully recovered after that.

Not many miles away, however, Bean’s Salt Works had also become a favorite tourist spot in the early nineteenth century. Established in the spring of 1820 on the Illinois River, the salt mining business did well. Bean lived in a “comfortable log house,” did some subsistence farming, and raised some livestock. He used large kettles for mining salt by evaporation, in much the same way as had the prehistoric people of the same region. Saltwater was collected from a saline spring near the house.

FRONTIER FORTS AND ROADS. In addition to problems in the territories, the government had its eye on problems of its southern neighbors. In 1809, Mexico revolted against Spain. The southern boundaries of the Louisiana Purchase were only vaguely established. A series of forts was planned by the American government to protect the southern border, to protect white settlers in Indian country, and to deal with the Indians in the Far West.

The first fort, of course, was Fort Smith, established in 1817. The next fort, established after boundaries were set and Spanish control ended in North America, was Fort Gibson. Established in 1824, Fort Gibson stood between the Arkansas and Grand rivers and was named for General George Gibson, who served in the Revolutionary War.

Also in 1824, Fort Towson was constructed near the mouth of the Kiamichi River, some 120 miles south of Fort Gibson. This fort was named for Brigadier General Nathan Towson,
who had won national recognition in the War of 1812.

These three were the most active forts built in the frontier days of Oklahoma, but others also were important. Fort Coffee was built in 1834 near present-day Spiro. Fort Holmes was constructed the same year near the mouth of Little River. Fort Washita was built in southern Oklahoma, near the present town of Madill, in 1842.

The first roads in the territory were constructed to connect the forts. The first to be surveyed, between Fort Smith and Fort Gibson, ran approximately the same course as today’s Highway 64. Thorough exploration of most of present-day Oklahoma was finally accomplished through the building of military posts, the surveying of roads, and the movement of troops and military supplies.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Give four important facts about the Adams-Onis Treaty.
2. Discuss the establishment of forts in the area (give names) and explain the effects the forts had upon completing the exploration of Oklahoma.
3. Describe the ceremonies that took place when the Louisiana Territory was transferred from France to the United States.
4. Name the son of an early family of traders and tell how he succeeded in establishing a trading post in Oklahoma.
5. Why was Glenn’s trade with Santa Fe important?
6. Describe the Osage Indians as a tribe (culture, reputation, general appearance, etc.)
7. Describe the typical Osage warrior.
Oklahoma’s Climate
And Geography

Oklahoma’s geography influences its climate. In the spring, ferocious thunderheads well up over the horizon, usually from the southwest. Thunderstorms and the clash of cold and hot air spawn tornadoes that skip across the land, sometimes causing death and destruction. In July and August, warm moist air from the south brings high humidity along with high summer temperatures. The fall season brings great beauty and temperate weather. Winters vary. Sometimes they are mild, but more often they are cold and damp with cold north winds sweeping down the plains and across the state.

Oklahoma’s climatic zones are influenced by a humid belt in the south, a cold climatic belt in the north, a humid belt from the east, and a dry belt from the west. The blending of these climatic conditions produces weather that is usually pleasant but is capable of extremes.

Oklahoma’s average temperature is 60 degrees Fahrenheit, but many summer days exceed 100 degrees. Some winter days see temperatures below zero. However, the days of extreme temperatures seldom last long.

The most unpleasant side of Oklahoma’s weather lies in the occasional blizzard or the more frequent spring tornadoes. Modern weather warning...
systems and radio-television media help Oklahomans to observe safety precautions during times of danger.

Wind movement dominates much of Oklahoma’s climate. Few days occur when there isn’t at least a gentle breeze. The western half of the state, a part of the Great Plains, gets a steady flow of wind movement.

Rainfall varies widely in the state. The northwest, an arid part of Oklahoma, averages only eighteen inches of annual rainfall. On the other hand, the southeast gets about fifty-six inches. Some areas of the Panhandle have received less than ten inches in a year. But, in 1949, part of southeastern Oklahoma received nearly seventy inches of rainfall.

Oklahoma’s geographic location in the United States causes some difficulty in placing it in a specific region. Some writers place it in the Southwest while others claim its location is in the South or South-central parts. It is situated between 94° 29’ and 103° west longitude and 33° 41’ and 37° north latitude. It shares state borders with Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, and Arkansas. The latitudinal location of the state places it between the forests of the East and the grasslands of the West and between the low elevations of the Coastal Plain and the high elevations of the Rocky Mountains. Even the growing season lies between the long growing season of south Texas and the shorter growing season of the northern states.

Oklahoma ranks eighteenth in land area in the United States with a total area of 69,919 square miles.

Landforms in Oklahoma are dominated by small ranges of hills and mountains. The Ouachita Mountains are formed by curving ridges made up of the Kiamichi Mountains and Winding Stair Mountain. These mountains have rough, rugged terrain, covered with thick forests. The San Bois Mountains make up the northern part of the Ouachitas.

Western Oklahoma is mostly plains, but small, rocky mountain ranges jut upward from the surrounding prairie lands. The Wichita Mountains and their neighbors, the Quartz Mountains, are landforms in southwestern Oklahoma.

The Arbuckle Mountains lie in south-central Oklahoma. They are the subject of study for geology students throughout the south-central and southwestern United States. The Cookson Hills in eastern Oklahoma form a part of the Ozark Plateau of Arkansas and Missouri. The Antelope Hills in western Oklahoma and Black Mesa in northwestern Oklahoma dominate the western plains of the state. The Osage Hills are a part of the Flint Hills of Kansas. The Glass Mountains lie between the North Cana-
dian and the Cimarron Rivers in northwestern Oklahoma.

Of all the mountain ranges, the greatest interest is directed toward the Arbuckles. The Arbuckle Mountains cover a large area in south-central Oklahoma, just north of Ardmore. They are of particular interest to geologists because the base materials of which the mountains are made are exposed to the surface. This makes it possible for geologists to see formations that usually are hidden below the surface of the land. The mystery of the Arbuckles is found in an article written by Dave English, published here by his permission.

THE ARBUCKLES
by Dave English

Until the last half of the 20th century, scientists believed that the Earth's crust was basically stable, or unchanging. However, discoveries and observations during that century proved the opposite to be the case. Through new accumulation of knowledge, much can be discerned about the origin of the Arbuckle Mountains.

The Earth's crust, a far cry from being stable, is divided into pieces, much like a jigsaw puzzle. These pieces are called plates. Some are large. In fact, entire continents can make up only a portion of one plate. Others are smaller. It is believed that about twenty plates exist around the Earth's crust.

Not only is the Earth's crust composed of individual plates but each plate also happens to move in its own individual direction. How could this be? The answer can be seen by comparing the movement of the Earth's plates with a pot of cold tomato soup.

Cold tomato soup develops a thin, dark, dry layer of scum over its surface. But when slowly heated, the wet soup below begins to convect, or move in circles from the bottom of the pot to the surface, just below the layer of scum. The current of convecting soup then begins to drag on the bottom of the dried layer. As the current increases speed because of rising temperature, the scum cracks and is eventually carried in individual pieces across the soup.

The Earth's plates move in the same way. The molten mantle below the Earth's crust convects, and the plates are moved by convective drag.

But the plates do not move in the same direction. Another example: if cars could travel any direction on the highway, collisions would occur. The same occurs with the plates. As cars collide, their fend-
ers heap upward into crumpled piles. It is the same with the Earth’s plates. The crumpled piles occurring when the Earth’s plates collide are called mountains. The Arbuckles were formed by the colliding, faulting, and folding of strata of limestone, shale, sandstone, and other materials.

The Appalachian Mountains on the East Coast and the Arbuckle Mountains of Oklahoma were both a part of some ancient collision of the Earth’s plates. The collision caused the Arbuckles to crumple in such a way as to expose the base of its own formation.

Elevations increase rapidly across Oklahoma. The lowest elevation is found in the Coastal Plains, south of the Ouachita Mountains in the southeastern part of the state. There, the elevation is only 287 feet above sea level. The highest elevation occurs at Black Mesa in the Panhandle. Black Mesa is 4,973 feet above sea level. The capital, Oklahoma City, lies 1,243 feet above sea level. Elevation at the southwestern corner of the state is 1,558 feet. When one looks at the elevation from the southwestern corner to the southeastern corner, it is apparent that the Red River, which forms the state’s southern border, falls 1,253 feet as it flows along.

Two of Oklahoma’s rivers form the state’s major drainage systems. The Arkansas River carries about two-thirds of the state’s excess water drain-
age. The Red River carries the other third of run-off. The Arkansas flows from Colorado and gathers waters from the Cimarron, Verdigris, Illinois, and Grand rivers. Before the Arkansas leaves the state, it gathers water from the Canadian rivers. The Red River begins on the Texas high plains and flows along the southern boundary of the state. It gathers water from the North Fork, Washita, Boggy, Blue, and Kiamichi rivers.

One of Oklahoma’s most scenic areas is found south of Davis at Turner Falls. The falls nestle among the rocks of the Arbuckle Mountains. At seventy-seven feet, Turner Falls is the state’s highest and largest waterfall and is a favorite recreational area for people of the state.

Oklahoma’s vegetation is as varied as its climate and topography. More than 130 different kinds of trees grow in the state. In the east are oak, pine, maple, sweet gum, hickory, pecan, walnut, sycamore, dogwood, and the state tree, the red bud. One of the most unusual trees in Oklahoma, the cypress, is found at Beavers Bend. In fact, the state’s tallest tree was a cypress tree that grew in McCurtain County. It was killed by lightning in 1983. Pine trees grow rapidly in southeastern Oklahoma. Pine trees are harvested, planted, and re-harvested as a major crop in southeastern Oklahoma. In other parts of the state, pecan and cedar are major timber crops, as is oak.

In the western half of the state, cottonwood, elm, willow, cedar, hack-
berry, and blackjack trees grow along waterways.

One of the most interesting growths of trees historically is the vegetation belt called the Cross Timbers. Trees grew so thickly that early pioneers had to go around the Cross Timbers. They couldn’t go through them. The Cross Timbers were between five and thirty miles wide and ran along a line from the central part of the state to the southwest. The Cross Timbers served as a dividing line between the forests of the east and the prairies of the west. The stunted growth of blackjack, post oak, and other kinds of oak, with their wild grape and greenbriar vines, made traveling through them almost impossible.

Wildflowers and grasses cover the land seasonally. Red, yellow, pink, purple, and white blossoms decorate the pastures and highways. The colorful Indian paintbrush and the Indian Blanket, along with Black-eyed Susans, blooming purple thistles, wild roses, sunflowers, and buttercups grow profusely. The Indian Blanket is the state’s wild flower.

All of the large lakes in Oklahoma are man-made and serve as reservoirs for towns and cities in the state. The largest natural lake is Lake Roebuck near Grant. The man-made lakes have been created for flood control and for conservation purposes. They also provide recreation and power. They are a valuable source of income from the tourist trade in the state.

Oklahoma’s location, along with its temperate climate and its unusual topography, make the state an interesting and beautiful place to live or visit. Its greatest resource is its people. A multi-cultural citizenry bring a
wide variety of activities to the state’s calendar of events. From the Indian Exposition at Anadarko to the Czech Festivals at Prague and Yukon to the Italian Festival at Krebs to celebrations of Oriental New Year, the state’s many ethnic groups proclaim their pride in their origin as well as their pride in their state. Oklahoma! OK!

Indigenous Tribes

When the first explorers reached the land that is now Oklahoma, the early peoples who had built mounds and developed a technically advanced society were gone. Archeologists and anthropologists have never learned what happened to them.

Occupying the area once claimed by the Spiro people were the Quapaws, the Osages, and the Caddoes. The Wichitas, called Quivira by the Spaniards, are said to be cousins of the Quapaws. They were in the southern part of the region, and the Lipan or Plains Apaches were in the west.

The Plains Apaches roamed the southern Great Plains and depended on the buffalo for their livelihood. The Spaniards wrote of the Plains Apaches’ many uses for every part of the buffalo, including the use of dried “buffalo chips” as fuel. Much later, pioneer settlers in western Oklahoma would use the same fuel in their difficult quest for survival in the short grass country.

Plains Apache women tanned buffalo hides to make clothing and to make tipi covers. The tribe ate buffalo meat and used buffalo bones for tools. Some internal organs became pouches.

These nomadic people followed herds of buffalo across the plains. They bundled their household goods and placed them on travois poles pulled by dogs to move from one hunting ground to another. After the white people came, horses replaced dogs in transporting these burdens. One horse could pull the bundles of several dogs.

Apaches were Athapascan-speaking people. They were fierce warriors, very good with bows and arrows. They were hunters and gatherers and raiders, and they often preyed upon more peaceful agricultural tribes. When raiding a village, they were careful not to destroy completely the settlement or to take all the grain the settled tribe had stored. They left enough to encourage the farmers to continue to farm, so there would be more grain for the taking the next year.

Their nomadic lifestyle limited their cultural and technological development. They traveled in small bands, usually clusters of extended fami-
lies. They had no central government, and they made few baskets, woven fabrics, or pieces of pottery or art.

Physical skill or ability was very important to the Apaches. Their leaders won their positions by their physical strength and their skills in battle. Young boys were encouraged to develop physical endurance and to strive for personal achievement. They were schooled in the military skills and prepared for a dangerous life. Public ceremonies marking the passage of boys into manhood, usually included demonstrations of physical feats.

Girls were important to the Plains Apaches, too, and they received a great deal of public attention. They were especially honored for their ability to bear children, and because of this, they were considered the “hope of the Apaches.” Elaborate religious ceremonies and festivals, sometimes lasting for days, announced that young girls were becoming women.

In fact, Lipan Apaches were matrilineal and matrilocal. Matrilineal means that families were counted through the mother’s line of descent.
rather than the father’s. Matrilocal pertains to the home territory of a wife’s kin group. Therefore, when a man married a woman, he moved to the home area of her parents, and his children were said to be of the family of his mother-in-law and later of his wife.

Tribal government was generally run by men, however. Each village was governed by a council of elders, or older men, who had proved themselves to be leaders in battle. As with earlier peoples, the Plains Apaches in the west lived very different lives from their more settled neighbors in the east.

The Caddoes and their cousins, the Wichitas, were of the Caddoan language group. They were a skilled agricultural people, and they were talented traders. They almost always produced surplus crops of corn and tobacco, which they could trade to other tribes for hides, meat, and other items. Their abilities in commerce endeared them to Europeans, who made them middlemen in the Indian trade.

Called “Taovayas” by the French, the Wichitas and Caddoes dominated the southwestern fur trade. In addition to tobacco and the American “vegetable triad” (corn, beans, squash), they grew melons and pumpkins and traded them to the western Indians for hides and pelts. They also traded French goods, such as guns, knives, hatchets, blankets, and mirrors. After the trades were made, they took the pelts and hides back to the French traders, called coureurs de bois, and collected their pay in goods.

French traders took bales of beaver, otter, other pelts, and buffalo robes to trade centers down river by flatboat and Indian dugout. They sold their valuable furs and hides and purchased more trade items, then went back to their posts, and often to their Indian wives, on the Arkansas and Canadian Rivers.

Osage war parties often raided Taovayan villages, and finally, the traders, both French and Indian, were forced to move to the upper Red River. By 1749, only one village remained on the Arkansas. That village, Ferdinandia, fell to the Osage raiders in 1757.

The Caddoes and Wichitas lived in large farming villages. Their houses were dome-shaped and made of grass and were about forty feet in diameter. They made pottery and baskets, and they had many religious festivals, including a green corn dance.

The Wichitas and Caddoes were also called Picts because of the tattooing used to adorn the bodies of many of them.

Another group of Indians living in the area and operating as middlemen for the French was the Quapaws. They were of the Siouian language.
group. They were possibly the first of the tribes to arrive in the area.

The Quapaws lived mainly by “garden agriculture,” supplemented by hunting small game and fishing. They had a tribal chief form of government, and the chief was assisted by a council of elders. The elders acted as judges in settling disputes among tribe members.

Quapaw women enjoyed equal rights with the men in the tribe. They were regarded highly in social status, but most events in their lives were controlled by custom — marriage, divorce, inheritance, and property rights.

At one time, the Quapaw tribe claimed ownership of most of Oklahoma and Arkansas and part of Louisiana. In 1818, they ceded all of their land south of the Arkansas River and east of the Kiamichi to the United States government.

By 1833, about 200 surviving but impoverished Quapaws were living among the Caddoes on the Red River. A few more were in Arkansas. They were reportedly starving. They asked to relocate near Pine Bluff, Arkansas. Instead, they were given a 96,000-acre reservation in the far northeast corner of what is now Oklahoma. This tract of land, lying be-
between the Neosho River and the western boundary of Missouri, extended north a half-mile into what is now Kansas.

The Quapaw tribe moved into a land that they were told was theirs. They *established* homes and farms and made a new life. A few years later, however, it was learned that the Indian agent had mistakenly moved them onto land belonging to the Senecas. Their own land was sitting idle, still waiting for them. Once again, they were uprooted and moved to another land to start over. Later, their land was subdivided and parts of it given to other tribes.

The Quapaws were thought to be relatives of the mighty Osage, another Siouian tribe in the area.

The Osages, related by language to the Sioux, lived in southwestern Missouri before many of their tribesmen moved into Oklahoma. However, the Osage hunters and war parties ranged across most of eastern Oklahoma. The Osages were more warlike than the Quapaws or Caddoes. The tall, aggressive Osage warriors were feared by whites and Indians alike.

The Osages were also respected, particularly by the French. They were intelligent, skillful traders. They were a clean people who bathed daily, winter and summer, and often found the habits of the fur traders offensive.

In Oklahoma, one of the first encounters between the Osages and European explorers occurred near where Hartshorne is located today. Bernard de la Harpe and his *expedition* met a party of Osage warriors. Both La Harpe and his Caddoan guides feared the Osage. The Osage warriors, with their faces painted black with a touch of blue, made their way into La Harpe’s camp. There they were fascinated by the black men in the *expedition*. They harassed the Caddoes, pretending to scalp the Caddoan guides. Finally, the Osage party accepted the gifts offered to them by La Harpe and went on their way leaving the party unharmed.

The Osages had a strong, well-organized tribal government with chiefs who had proved themselves in courage, strength, and wisdom.

Until the tribe divided, little change in customs, manners, or tribal organization occurred. But the importance of trade, particularly with the French, had a tremendous impact upon tribal economics. Osage traders exchanged furs for items of convenience, such as needles, axes, calico, mirrors, and blankets. The Osages could have survived without the French goods, but life would have been more difficult.

They also enjoyed the mobility given to them by the horse, another European import. The horse changed the total society and economy of the
tribe. Of all the things whites brought to the New World, it was the horse that became the most important factor in Indian lives. It was particularly so with the far-ranging Osage.

Young girls among the Osages were looked after by knife-carrying duennas. Duennas are older women who were charged with protecting young unmarried women. The girls were looked upon as carriers of future warriors. The objectives for marriage were warrior perfection and long life. Therefore, the tribe protected their young girls so they would be fit mates for the strongest, bravest, and most handsome young warriors. A formal ceremony marked the marriage of a young woman who was fit to be the bride of such a warrior.

Young men would parade in front of the young women and would sneak glances at them, but they knew the tribal taboos. They also knew that death could be the penalty for disobeying tribal customs.

The Osages believed that the way they protected their young women kept the tribe tall and strong. A tall, deserving, handsome young warrior
could have two or more wives, if he had proved to be strong and brave.

Osage warriors were often well over six feet tall. They wore their hair roached (a roll of hair combed upward from the forehead). If they were brave, they were allowed to wear eagle feathers, colorfully tinted, woven into their roached hair. Such young warriors were given much respect and honor by the tribe. It was important to each warrior that his parents and grandparents had been married formally and had followed tribal traditions. Children of Osage parents who had broken with tradition had no social standing in the tribe.

When a warrior was ready to marry, the parents of the eligible girls could do nothing to influence the choice of a bride. Usually an uncle was charged with finding a suitable bride for the warrior. When one was found, the uncle would go to the girl’s family lodge. When he revealed his mission, he would have to make arrangements with the girl’s uncle, usually her mother’s brother.

Weddings involved elaborate feasts and ceremonies, full of songs and gift-giving. Often the bride and groom would see one another for the first time at the marriage lodge. There, they ate a meal together. They were then man and wife. The warrior and his wife would then be given a lodge of their own among the wife’s people. The husband would still be a member of his clan and the wife of hers. Their children would live among the wife’s people, but they belonged to the husband’s clan.

A large band of Osage called Osages-of-the-Oaks settled in the Three Forks area in northeastern Oklahoma. Shortly after the War of 1812, the first of the Cherokees moved onto Osage hunting grounds. Trouble between the two tribes began.
In July, 1816, Major William L. Lovely, agent to the Cherokees, met with representatives of the Osages, the Cherokees, and the Quapaws. The Osages agreed to cede a tract of land to the Cherokees. But the agreement resolved nothing. Trouble still prevailed between the Osages and the Cherokees. It was not until 1822 that a peace treaty was signed between the two tribes.

When Auguste Pierre Chouteau, trusted by the Osages, opened a trading post near Three Forks, more Osages migrated into the region. Even there, they would have to struggle to keep their land from white settlers and other tribes.

In the 1980s the struggle to hold onto their land continued. Led by their chief, George Tallchief, the Osages won the struggle to hold onto the oil-rich, tall grass prairie region. It was proposed that the land be taken from the Osages and made into a national prairie preserve. The plan became a politically hot issue with officeholders backing away from their early support of a national preserve.

The issue was settled by the purchase of a large ranch for the tall grass preserve, leaving the Osage lands largely intact.

The Osages are a strong, religious people with many of their customs intact. Their annual pow-wow keeps alive Osage dress, dances, and religious ceremonies.

### Blending Cultures

European exploration brought the first blending of cultures to the Americas. Spaniards and Frenchmen brought white ways to blend with the Indian culture. European explorers were accompanied by African-Americans who added their ways to the cultures of the Native Americans and the European intruders. Later, English explorers brought their own cultures to the New World.

In Oklahoma, the earliest of the explorers, the Spaniards, crossed the land in their search for gold. The leader of the Spanish expedition, Coronado, was disappointed and wrote his king, “What I am sure of is that there is not any gold nor any other metal in all the country.”

A trailblazer for the Coronado expedition was an African-American man named Estevan. Although Estevan never actually reached Oklahoma, he played an important role in its exploration.

Estevan was not the first African-American man to accompany explorers to the New World. Some came with Columbus on his discovery
voyage. Others came with Balboa, Cortez, and Pizzaro. In fact, it was an African-American man who carried the murdered Pizzaro’s body into a church sanctuary.

Estevan, however, was the first African-American explorer associated with Oklahoma’s history.

Estevan’s story began when he sailed from Spain with his master, Pan-filo de Narvaez. Five Spanish ships carrying 600 men sailed for the New World. Tragedy struck the expedition. In Santo Domingo, 140 fearful men quit. Then, a hurricane struck when they were in Cuba. The fierce winds scattered the ships. Sixty men and twenty horses died.

The expedition met many other disasters. Estevan and two others, along with Cabeza de Vaca, were captured by Indians. They were treated as slaves. They escaped and found some friendly Indians to live with. No doubt, Estevan taught his Indian friends methods and ideas he had brought with him from Europe and Africa. He also learned Indian survival skills and languages. Later, he and his companions made their way to Mexico.

Because Estevan had won respect from the Indians and had learned to speak various Indian languages, he was sent on another expedition northward. In the meantime, Coronado waited for Estevan’s reports that would tell him whether or not it would be worth the effort and expense of a northern expedition.

Estevan, accompanied by Friar Marcos, explored the territory. They heard tales of the Seven Cities of Cibola. Estevan and Marcos separated, with Estevan trailblazing the way. Somewhere in New Mexico, Estevan was murdered, probably by Zuni Indians. The Zunis had not learned to like him as other Indians had, or perhaps they were tribal enemies of Estevan’s friends. They might have distrusted him because he looked different from them or because of his foreign ways — their cultural differences.

Although he lost his life before he reached Oklahoma, he went far to the north and sent back much information. As a result, Coronado made his journey northward and became the first European explorer to cross the state. If Estevan had lived, he might have been first instead of Coronado.

As Spanish, French, and English explorers crossed the land, they came to know the ways of the red people living here. Traders moved in and built trading posts. The posts themselves became places where people of different cultures met, traded, learned one another’s languages, and influenced each other. French traders lived in Indian villages and married
Whites and African-Americans ate Indian food and traded guns, ammunition, beads, knives, farm implements, cloth, mirrors, and blankets for fur pelts and buffalo hides. Bales of Oklahoma beaver, otter, and mink pelts found their way to European markets. Soon, they adorned the heads and backs of the people of Europe.

In the East, the Dutch claimed territory and monopolized trade between the Americas and the Orient. Furs traded by Indians to Dutch traders for iron pots and implements found their way to the closets of the rich men and women in Holland and Asia. On return trips, a few of the spices taken to Europe from Asia were brought across the ocean to tickle Native American palates.

Also in the exchange, the Native Americans learned European ways and customs. Many American Indians became dependent upon the metal pots and other new conveniences from Europe. They lost some of the old skills, and they needed European goods for survival. This fact made it easier for European governments to dominate Indian people later in history.

The horse and the gun made the greatest differences in the lives of Indians. The horse enabled people to travel farther and faster and to carry greater loads. The gun, on the other hand, gave some tribes power over others who had no guns or who did not use them as well, just as they had given the Europeans power over the Indians in the beginning.

Europeans took home new foods, new music, new art, and a few new native skills. The greatest difference, however, was that the New World provided escape for the oppressed, hope for the indebted, and new sources of income for businessmen. Therefore, most cultural blending took place on the new continent. Europeans and Africans came in large numbers, bringing their ideas, their methods, and their ways of life. They held on to many of their old ways, while adopting some of the Indian methods for survival. Indians resisted some of the foreign ways but were fascinated with others. The more the different peoples were exposed to each other, the more they mixed their ways of life.

In the beginning, Indians did not know that the white people’s numbers would grow and grow, and that they would be pushed westward. Many eastern tribes would be moved onto Oklahoma lands.

The blending of the cultures would be a painful process in Oklahoma’s and the nation’s history.