

OKLAHOMANS• ATTITUDES TOWARD

JOHN STEINBECK: 1939-1966

By

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PREFACE

Many individuals have contributed to the completion of this study. I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the librarians at Oklahoma State University, Mrs. Louise Cooke, newspaper librarian at the Oklahoma Historical Society, and all those librarians who responded to the questionnaire. My thanks also go to Mr. Lou Allard of Drumright and Mr. James C. Burge of Oklahoma City for giving so freely of their time for interviews. Dr. Alexander Osipov offered encouragement and helpful remarks and suggestions on the presentation of the material. My wife Mary typed the preliminary drafts and offered many valuable suggestions and constant encouragement. Kay McBride typed the final draft.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The proposition that a given book has changed men's minds and influenced history is often open to serious questioning, but there is little doubt that The Grapes of Wrath has, at the very least, affected the behavior of a considerable group of people. It is a "special" book to Oklahomans -- and thus John Steinbeck is a special author. Since the appearance of the book in March, 1939, its title and the name of its author have seldom been neutral words in Oklahoma. It is difficult to find an Oklahoman who has no opinions about John Steinbeck and The Grapes of Wrath. Even those who have defended him and his works have had to do so with a little more vehemence than is usual -- and to some degree they still must.

While it is not difficult to offer explanations for these violent reactions to Steinbeck's works, this study seeks mainly to describe them. No such reactions to Steinbeck's works occurred before the publication of The Grapes of Wrath. Its content and the date of its publication seemed to combine to produce emotional reactions. Neither the Oklahoma-California argument, the term "Okie," nor Oklahomans' somewhat self-conscious state pride were new. But add to these a public mind frustrated by depression and growing international problems, an author who was an "outsider" and a Californian to boot, and a book which soon became a best-seller and a motion picture -- and it is

relatively easy to assign some reasons to the phenomenon. The verification of this "cause-effect hypothesis" would require, however, extensive research beyond the scope of this study. It seeks then, only to reveal the nature of some of the reactions of Oklahomans to Steinbeck and his works; to see how long emotional attitudes have lasted; to find to what uses they have been applied; and to see if they have been more common to certain areas or types of communities than others. While The Grapes of Wrath stands out in any discussion of Steinbeck's image in Oklahoma, this study will also examine the treatment, after 1939, of his other writings.

The dates which frame this examination of Steinbeck's image in Oklahoma represent a natural period. The earlier date, as has been mentioned, marks Oklahomans' first widespread notice of the man and his works. The terminal year, 1966, has been selected for various reasons. It lies beyond -- in fact four years beyond -- Steinbeck's acceptance of the Nobel Prize for literature. However, 1965 represents the last full year, at this writing, for which information is available concerning circulation of the author's books from Oklahoma libraries. Perhaps most important is the fact that Steinbeck and The Grapes of Wrath are still very much in the minds of many Oklahomans; and, a terminal date of any sort being rather artificial, I felt that the study could, without distortion, cover material of relatively recent origin.

In the measurement of attitudes the historian encounters problems not unlike those which plague pollsters. If current public opinion polls seem to contradict one another, how might historians avoid pitfalls presented by the natural problems involved plus the passage of time? It is in this attempt to derive a valid picture of the "public

opinion of the past" that the historian might most fervently wish for a time machine. But he has none, and must rely upon that information which remains available to him.

This study employs essentially three sets of sources -- printed material, consisting mainly of newspaper articles; a questionnaire sent to 149 libraries in Oklahoma; and a few interviews with some public figures involved in Steinbeck-centered controversy. All of these types of sources present problems to the researcher. The questionnaire and interview techniques involve possible distortion from the source. A person being questioned might exaggerate or minimize his role in a particular affair depending upon its nature, or, failing to recall an attitude held many years ago, he might take the stance he thinks he is "supposed" to have taken. In general, emotional involvement with an issue easily leads to distorted emphases. Printed material might emphasize a certain aspect of a situation because it was "better news." With all of these factors in mind, I hope to present a credible picture of the nature and extent of Oklahomans' feelings about Steinbeck and his works.

The nature of the sources used in this study has determined the arrangement of the three chapters. The first deals with reactions to The Grapes of Wrath as reflected in the Oklahoma press from 1939 through 1941. It naturally employs, almost exclusively, newspaper articles, editorials, and letters to the editor. The next chapter examines the treatment of Steinbeck's works in libraries in Oklahoma. The information in it was derived principally from the questionnaire. The final chapter looks at manifestations of The Grapes of Wrath

controversy after 1941. It centers around the invitation that Steinbeck visit Oklahoma in 1957, offered by the Semi-centennial Exposition Commission, and uses both printed sources and interviews.

The questionnaire¹ yielded a great deal of information. Librarians, being for the most part professional people, responded quite reliably. The occurrence of doubtful answers, as in situations in which the response to one question contradicted that to another, was surprisingly low. Few of the returned questionnaires were complete, but response to each question was sufficient to permit some generalization.

Several considerations governed the selection of the sample to which the questionnaire was sent. It was balanced as to the yearly proportions of high school, public, college or university, and special libraries which existed in the state from 1939 through 1965. Similar considerations governed the selection of public libraries which received questionnaires, according to the population of the areas they served. Preference, in the sample, was given to those high school libraries which have most consistently responded to the State Library Commission's requests for information for their reports and directories. Of the 149 questionnaires sent, ninety-four were returned -- ninety of which were usable. The portion of the sample which was returned and usable represents a return of 60.4 per cent. Public librarians responded most fully to the questionnaire, probably because they are in a better position to keep sufficiently complete records than are

¹See the Appendices for a reproduction of the questionnaire and analyses of responses to it.

high school, college and university, and special librarians. Responses from special libraries was practically useless, since three-quarters of those sampled are technical libraries or for the most part serve readers who are not Oklahomans.

Some sources which might have been helpful in the study were not available. Bookstores, unfortunately, do not keep records of sales for a long enough time to furnish that kind of information. Random personal interviews, I decided, would have been more time-consuming and unreliable than valuable. In the course of the last year I have heard numerous unsolicited comments concerning my subject -- one, in fact, may have led me, indirectly, to the study. If some of them have crept into the text, that is an unavoidable result of my penchant for talking about my work.

I am indebted to Martin Staples Shockley, who published in 1944 a discussion of the reception of The Grapes of Wrath in Oklahoma.² Professor Shockley's article is very complete in its coverage, and was invaluable as a guide to newspaper sources. He also conducted a library study which will be mentioned in connection with my own.

With all due respect, I have taken a different approach than did Professor Shockley. I have included mention of a few articles which he overlooked or, more likely, left out for reasons of his own. His presentation of the 1939-1941 period, to my mind, does not reveal the developmental aspects of the "Grapes of Wrath" issue during that time. I have, therefore, attempted to present an account more closely

²Martin Staples Shockley, "The Reception of 'The Grapes of Wrath' in Oklahoma," American Literature, XV (1944), pp. 351-361.

related to chronology.

This study is not, of course, offered as the final word on the subject. As is usual, it has led me to consider those areas which could and should be pursued further. Perhaps a similar study of the pre-1939 period with regard to Steinbeck's works in Oklahoma, or the Oklahoma-California squabble, would present a "control" situation. Other control studies might involve similar work on reactions to Steinbeck's books in other states -- particularly California -- or on a national scale. The problem might be approached from the standpoint of comparing the attitudes of several generations of Oklahomans to his works. This approach might suggest more extensive use of the questionnaire and general interview. These methods could be applied by social historians to a broad range of topics. In short, the study has been enjoyable and has led to many speculations outside of itself.

CHAPTER II

"THE GRAPES OF WRATH" IN THE OKLAHOMA PRESS: 1939-1941

Before the publication of The Grapes of Wrath in March, 1939, John Steinbeck was a name familiar to few Oklahomans. Some must have read and subsequently judged his earlier works, such as The Pastures of Heaven (1932), Tortilla Flat (1935), Of Mice and Men (1937), and The Long Valley (1938).¹ Certainly only a handful knew that in the autumn of 1937 he visited Oklahoma, joined a group of migrant laborers, and traveled to California with them, sharing in their work.² Out of this experience, coupled with earlier contacts with migrants in California, came a book that rocked the nation³ and forever entered the minds of the great majority of Oklahomans, whether they read it or not. Such was its impact that today, after some twenty-seven years, many residents of the state -- even some born after the book was published -- fairly bristle at the mention of its title or the name of its author. The Grapes of Wrath has been to Oklahomans, as we shall see, "a stab in the

¹A chronological list of Steinbeck's major works will be found in the Appendices.

²F. W. Watt, John Steinbeck (New York, 1962), p. 64. See also Joseph Fontenrose, John Steinbeck, An Introduction and Interpretation (New York, 1963), p. 68 and Peter Lisca, The Wide World of John Steinbeck (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1958), pp. 143-144.

³Joseph Henry Jackson, "John Steinbeck and The Grapes of Wrath," The Grapes of Wrath (New York, 1940), pp. vi-xvii. See also Warren French, ed., A Companion to The Grapes of Wrath (New York, 1963), pp. 105-111, 115-116.

back," "obscene and inaccurate," and, to a few, "a damn good book."

The fact that the story presents Oklahoma in what some consider to be a bad light was in itself galling. But the immense popularity, even international popularity, of this work has made its existence even harder to accept. From shortly after its publication the book sold quite well abroad.⁴ On October 25, 1962, the radio announcement by Dr. Anders Osterling, Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy, that the Nobel Prize for literature would be awarded to John Steinbeck that year, confirmed the international reputation of The Grapes of Wrath.⁵ Adolph Hitler is said to have seen the motion picture version and to have "assumed that it represented the whole United States for all times."⁶ Many Oklahomans traveling abroad have been shocked to discover that the images of Oklahoma presented in Steinbeck's book and the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical production Oklahoma! are often the only conceptions of the state which have reached the world outside this country.

However disconcerting an international misconception might be, the one which has most disturbed Oklahomans is that harbored by their countrymen. It was the spread of this misconception that Oklahoma first resented, and the majority of subsequent reaction to The Grapes of Wrath has been prompted by this national image.

This consciousness of Oklahoma's image throughout the nation did

⁴Warren French, ed., A Companion to The Grapes of Wrath (New York, 1963), pp. 147-152.

⁵Ibid., pp. 145-147.

⁶Gerhard L. Weinberg, "Hitler's Image of the United States," The American Historical Review, LXIX (1964), p. 1010.

not begin with the popularity of The Grapes of Wrath. The term "Okie," for example, was in use at least three years before Steinbeck's book appeared.⁷ Friction between Oklahoma and California over the migrant problem had reached the press by mid-1938. On August 5, 1938, the Forum Page of the Oklahoma City Times bore three tiers of headlines reading: "The Forum Page Today Will Make Oklahoma Go To War with California," "Slavery Asked for Sooners!", and "Ten Cent An Hour Work and Sterilization Urged for Oklahomans." The subject of all the excitement was a letter to the editor of the Fresno, California Bee which, said the Times editor, "should arouse the ire of Oklahomans generally." The Californian began with the proposition that all migrants, regardless of origin, be called by the popular term "Oklahomans." Furthermore, he advocated the erection of camps in which migrants would be forced to live. This, he thought, would create a pool of labor to be hired at one dollar per person for ten hours of labor, and would cut down on theft, relief costs, and disease. Since such measures would cause the migrant population to increase, he further proposed that California's law for sterilization of criminals be amended to include such "Oklahomans."⁸

The editor of the Times responded the next day under the heading "Its Enough to Justify a Civil War." He objected to the Californian's reference to all migrants, be they from Texas, Arkansas, or wherever, as "Okie riff-raff." The dust bowl was over and never did extend into Arkansas, he told the writer. The editor concluded: "Oklahoma has

⁷Jackson, p. xii.

⁸Oklahoma City Times, August 5, 1939, p. 18.

contributed numbers of fine lawyers, doctors, and businessmen to that state [California]. And this is the thanks we get!"⁹

Some four months later a similar article derided California publicists who engaged in the "campaign against Oklahoma" without knowing how little of the Dust Bowl was in Oklahoma and how few (less than one hundred) families had left the high plains area of the state. The editor again insisted that Oklahoma had contributed many prosperous, productive citizens to California. The article entitled "So California Wants Nothing But Cream," countered with a reference to the coastal state's image:

It would be human to say, 'Sure, stay out of California, whether you have a job or not. Stay out of the empire of earthquake, flood and forest fires. Avoid the commonwealth of cults, the fertile field of pension promoters, the paradise of religious racketeers, the haven of a thousand roadside chiselers, the land that idolizes a man when he is on top and kicks him when he is down!'

But wouldn't it be more charitable...[to say that] no state so altogether attractive as California can fail to lure some parasites along with the prosperous.You can't have only the cream, California.¹⁰

The above are a few indications of the rather strained relationship between Oklahoma and California which arose out of the Great Depression, the Dust Bowl, and the ensuing migrations to the west coast. What could such a book as The Grapes of Wrath do at such a time but shorten tempers and heighten everyone's awareness of an already explosive situation? It caused especially heated reaction in California and Oklahoma, as might have been expected. But the

⁹Ibid., August 6, 1938, p. 14.

¹⁰Ibid., November 28, 1938, p. 18.

Oklahoma response seemed much more widespread and intense.¹¹

The first response of the Oklahoma press to the book was entitled "Grapes of Wrath, Obscenity and Inaccuracy."¹² The first sentence of the article revealed the writer's awareness of his state's image in other sections of the country -- "How book reviewers love to have their preconceived notions about any given region corroborated by a morbid, filthy-worded novel!" The rest of the editorial is as much an indictment of literary critics as of Steinbeck.

It is said [that] the "Grapes of Wrath" by John Steinbeck shows symptoms of being a best-seller, by kindness of naive, ga-ga reviewers. It pictures Oklahoma with complete inaccuracy and absurd untruthfulness, hence it has what it takes.

That American literary tradition is still in its nonage, being thereby diametrically different from the suave, informed realism of the English Galsworthy, for instance, is amply proved by the fact that goldfish-swallowing critics who know nothing about the region or people pictured in a novel accept at face value even the most inaccurate depiction, by way of alleged regional fiction.¹³

The editorial ended with a statement which seems to have become a fairly widespread attitude among Oklahomans -- "No, the writer of these lines has not read the book. This editorial is based upon hearsay, and that makes it even, for that is how Steinbeck knows Oklahoma."¹⁴

A more complete and balanced review appeared on the front page of the same paper in "The Tiny Times" column of W. M. Harrison,

¹¹French, pp. 116-117.

¹²Oklahoma City Times, May 4, 1949, p. 30.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

editor of the Times. Harrison did not completely condemn the book, but admitted that "it is difficult for any Oklahoman to give [it] fair consideration." He criticized Steinbeck's use of language and regarded it as an excuse for realism which detracted from the finer parts of the book. He wrote, "If you have children, I'd advise against leaving the book around home. It has 'Tobacco Road' looking as pure as Charlotte Bronte, when it comes to obscene, vulgar, lewd stable language." He cited factual inaccuracies in the book and criticized Steinbeck's acceptance of "anti-capitalism propaganda." He called the author a "radical thinker" and a "hard-boiled writer." Harrison seemed concerned with Steinbeck's economic outlook:

Steinbeck's indictment of our economics is terrific. It is strongly communistic. It blasts the system without offering any solution. Perhaps its value is that it may make people think.¹⁵

Harrison's comments were not entirely negative. He refers to "some beautiful writing" -- particularly chapter three (the now-famous description of the turtle crossing the highway). He concludes:

But these criticisms, though valid, may be written off and yet there remains a stark, clumping narrative that will pound itself into your innards as a powerful, grisly piece of writing.¹⁶

Scarcely six months after publication Twentieth Century-Fox had announced that Darryl F. Zanuck would film a motion picture of The Grapes of Wrath in the Dust Bowl.¹⁷ Protests came quickly from

¹⁵Ibid., May 8, 1939, p.1

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Twentieth Century-Fox had paid \$75,000 for the film rights by April 20, 1939. Production began soon under the title "Highway 66." The film had its premiere on January 24, 1940, in New York City. See French, p. 163.

Stanley Draper, secretary-manager of the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, and Dr. J. M. Ashton, research director of the State Chamber of Commerce. Neither wanted to allow Zanuck to film the motion picture in the state, objecting to his "reputation for vivid inaccuracy" as witnessed in an earlier film about Jesse James which had offended Missourians. The Times announced that Draper would suggest that the Mayor of Oklahoma City protest, and Ashton would carry a similar request to the governor. The article concluded:

Both want to do a little research on fact first. They feel that somebody ought to do a little research on facts. Probably the protests, like most protests, will be ignored. Make way for the boy genius!¹⁸

The fears of both men and the Times were unfounded. Protests were not forthcoming, but Zanuck kept his troupe in California. After the appearance of the motion picture in January, 1940, protests were more widespread. It appeared that more Oklahomans were willing to watch a movie than read a book. Nevertheless controversy over the book continued throughout 1939.

On October 2, the Times revealed that Governor Leon C. Phillips had "confessed ruefully" to a name-calling "row" with an unnamed Detroit physican (a syphilologist). The doctor, having read The Grapes of Wrath, had written the governor for explanations. A partial text of their correspondence, printed in the Times, might reveal a not unusual attitude and reaction centering about Steinbeck's work:

¹⁸Oklahoma City Times, August 7, 1939, p. 6. In reference to this article, Shockley quotes from it, "Enough fault was found with the facts in Joseph [sic.] Steinbeck's book..." (p. 359). The "Final Home Edition" of the Times contains no such mistake. It is possible, of course, that Shockley used an earlier edition.

Physician: If this [book] be a true picture...then it is a most horrid and disgusting expose....I am wondering whether you, my dear governor, have read the book in question; for I understand that in some counties in Oklahoma and California the book is forbidden to circulate.

Governor: I have not read the thing. I do not permit myself to get excited about the works of any fiction writerThere is no place in the world where a poor man has a greater opportunity than in Oklahoma. I would suggest that you go back to reading detective magazines so that you won't have the terrible nightmares you experienced in reading your sordid story.

Physician: You say you did not read 'the thing!' Perhaps so. Even the Bible, Calderon, and Goethe are in certain places sordid...yet we do not call them things....In your letter you use uncultured and insulting phrases. I do not blame you. You cannot snap yourself out of your environment or your background. I never read detective stories in my life:...[but] I will do so, my dear governor, at your behest, for, who knows, I might meet your prototype there.

As a governor you are uncultivated, prejudiced and within your proper milieu, you belong to Oklahoma. You had better read up on English literature and become a little more educated.

Governor: Bray on, stranger, I am not entering the conflict with you.

You cannot insult our people. We are too far above you. The incident is closed. In some contests, the skunk is supreme and you win in yours. Confine your activities to syphilology.¹⁹

The above is an example of a non-Oklahoma reader who seems to have read Steinbeck's book rather superficially and naively. It is to his credit that he sought truth. It is unfortunate that his correspondent replied only in vivid generalities. As a result the exchange degenerated into an argument, and The Grapes of Wrath was lost in the shuffle. Too often non-Oklahomans have taken the book as absolute truth, and overly defensive Oklahomans have resorted to emotional responses

¹⁹Ibid., October 2, 1939, p. 2.

rather than explanations.

Much has been written about the "truth" of Steinbeck's picture, and little of it has been conclusive. The popularity of the book and the motion picture have clouded the issue of their validity and made that issue secondary. Had The Grapes of Wrath been a documentary study, it could have been, perhaps, approached on a more rational plane by all concerned. But Steinbeck did write a novel, which thus became fair game for all.

One of the early attempts to "test" Steinbeck's picture was that of California author Frank J. Taylor in an article in The Forum and Century.²⁰ The work was reprinted, with minor deletions, in the Daily Oklahoman of October 29, 1939. Taylor concentrated on the California situation, stating that he had failed to find, in condition, size, and general outlook, a single counterpart of the Joads. "The lot of the 'fruit tramp'," he wrote, "is admittedly no bed of roses, but neither is it the bitter fate described in 'The Grapes of Wrath'." He emphasized the appeal of California -- higher wages, more steady work, free medical treatment, and better relief programs. Some families, he said, had come to California and gone back to the plains states many times.

Taylor pointed to several inaccuracies in Steinbeck. Police, he said, entered migrant camps only at the request of health authorities. California law, furthermore, prohibited any hospital from refusing a mother in labor. He rebuked the Okies for their

²⁰F. J. Taylor, "California's Grapes of Wrath: Joad Family Not Typical," The Forum and Century, CII (1939), pp. 232-238.

shiftlessness and refusal to cooperate with health authorities, and concluded:

Their [California relief agencies] accomplishment is a challenge to shiftless Okies and an answer to broad accusations hurled so heedlessly in *The Grapes of Wrath*.²¹

The article was accompanied by a short editorial comment:

'*The Grapes of Wrath*' is the most controversial story that has come along in many a moon. Oklahoma...has been a center of controversy since the...novel involved this state in the story of the sorry Joad family. Rebuttals have been many. Oklahoma has told its side of the story: California has done likewise. But the best explanation or the California situation to appear yet is that in a recent issue of *The Forum*. Here, Frank J. Taylor has made an exhaustive and graphic survey of the situation. He debunks a lot of Steinbeck.²²

Late 1939 and early 1940 saw more widespread response to both the novel and the motion picture. Both media evoked more editorials, letters to editors, and even short-lived organizations to "boost" Oklahoma's image. One editor in early December sought to show that, with all her faults, Oklahoma did amount to something.

Oklahoma may come in for some ridicule in other states because of such movie mistakes as 'Oklahoma Kid' and such literature as the current rage 'Grapes of Wrath'. The roaring and yessing of some of our politicians may cause the rest of the nation to pity us. Naturally we may rank near the bottom in the number of good books purchased and in the amount we pay our teachers. But when the biggest live-stock and Four-H Club show comes along each year the nation finds out that somebody amounts to something in Oklahoma.²³

²¹Oklahoma City Daily Oklahoman, October 29, 1939, section D, p. 6.

²²Ibid.

²³Oklahoma City Times, December 5, 1939, p. 24.

A more violent protest came from the Honorable Lyle Boren, Congressman from Oklahoma's fourth district.²⁴ The Daily Oklahoman reprinted a portion of his speech from the Congressional Record:²⁵

I cannot find it possible to let this dirty, lying, filthy manuscript go heralded before the public without a word of challenge or protest.

Oklahoma, like other states in the union, has its economic problems, but...no Oklahoma economic problem has been portrayed in the low and vulgar lines of this publication. As a citizen of Oklahoma, I would have it known that I resent, for the great state of Oklahoma, the implications in that book....

Today I stand before this body as a son of a tenant farmer, labeled by John Steinbeck as an 'Okie.' For myself, for my dad and my mother, whose hair is silvery in the service of building...Oklahoma, I say to you...that the painting Steinbeck made in his book is a lie, a damnable lie, a black, infernal creation of a twisted, distorted mind.

Take the vulgarity out of this book and it would be blank from cover to cover. It is painful to me to further charge that if you take the obscene language out, its author could not sell a copy....

The only apology that needs to be made is by the state of California for being the parent of offspring such as this author....²⁶

Thus was the protest of an Oklahoman to The Grapes of Wrath entered in the Congressional Record. Few Oklahomans have taken the book so personally and offered criticism on such a personal level.

Some Oklahomans, however few, even regarded Steinbeck's effort

²⁴The fourth congressional district in Oklahoma included in 1940, Coal, Creek, Hughes, Johnston, Lincoln, Okfuskee, Ponotoc, Pottawatomie, and Seminole counties. Mr. Boren was a Democrat from Seminole. See U.S., Official Congressional Directory for the Use of the United States Congress, 76th Cong., 3rd Sess., 1940, p. 94.

²⁵U.S., Congressional Record, 76th Cong., 3rd Sess., 1940, LXXXVI, Part 13, pp. 139-140. Boren never spoke, concerning The Grapes of Wrath, from the floor of the House of Representatives, but entered the speech in the Congressional Record as an "extension of remarks."

²⁶Daily Oklahoman, January 24, 1940, p. 8.

as a timely, compelling call to rectify a situation which was national in scope. In a letter to the editor of the Times entitled "Is Steinbeck Another Mrs. Stowe?" Mary E. Lemon of Kingfisher wrote, "To many of us... 'Grapes of Wrath' has sounded the keynote of our domestic depression, and put the situation before us in an appealing way." Steinbeck, she felt, presented a "sympathetic exposition" of the economic situation and, although he offered no solutions, painted a picture "pregnant with suggestions." He pointed out, she said, the danger of legislation which ignored the needs of the powerless segments of society, and implied that the treatment of symptoms of the depression along could not end the nation's economic anguish. She concluded, "Is not 'Grapes of Wrath' the 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' of the masses?"²⁷

The letter mentioned above indicates the writer's ability to see The Grapes of Wrath for what it was intended to be -- a social novel -- and not as a work by a "wicked Californian" aimed at smearing the name of Oklahoma. The more open-minded response has generally come from readers rather than those who heard rumors or merely saw the motion picture. Contrast Miss Lemon's letter with another which appeared in the Times:

After reading the preview of [the motion picture] 'Grapes of Wrath' I think the state...should take definite steps to prevent the use of the name of our state in such a production.

They are trying to disgrace Oklahoma and I for one am in favor of stopping them before they get started.²⁸

²⁷Oklahoma City Times, December 22, 1939, p. 14.

²⁸Ibid., January 26, 1940, p. 20.

Californians' proposals continued to appear in Oklahoma newspapers. A Stillwater weekly carried a front-page story about a solution offered by an unnamed California Congressman. The house member advocated the establishment of projects in the home states of the "Okies" and "Arkies" to lure migrants home from California and influence others not to travel westward.²⁹

Controversy continued over the truthfulness of Steinbeck's picture of Oklahoma. O. D. Duncan, chairman of the sociology department at Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, expressed his general agreement with Steinbeck in an Oklahoma City Times interview. Duncan said that "all the available data prove beyond doubt that the general impression given by Steinbeck's book is substantially reliable." He emphasized the opinion that, given similar conditions, anyone would respond like the "Okies." He saw migration as a result of "Privation, insecurity, ...impoverishment in matters of education and cultural opportunities and a lack of spiritual satisfaction." Rural life had been stripped of its leaders and must attract capable new ones to remedy its ills. Commercial farming, the sociologist concluded, had compounded the farmer's problem.³⁰

Houston Ward, county agent in Sequoyah County, the home of the Joads, was interviewed on radio station WKY in March, 1940, on a program sponsored by the state agricultural department. Ward felt that The Grapes of Wrath bore a "good social lesson" but hurt its message by presenting glaring factual errors. He pointed out that the area

²⁹Stillwater Gazette, March 15, 1940, p. 1.

³⁰Oklahoma City Times, February 5, 1940, p. 11.

of Oklahoma which Steinbeck wrote about had but forty small tractors, no corporation farms, no such farms as were depicted in the motion picture, and as many new residents as lost migrants. Many migrants, he said, worked winters in California and spring and summer in Oklahoma. Migration had been more an effect of urban dislocation than a "farm problem," and poor farming methods rather than mechanized corporate farming had caused what agricultural problems there were. He again stressed the book's moral lesson and decried the factual errors which obscured it to Oklahomans.³¹

Thirty-six Oklahomans agreed with Steinbeck and, as "Okies who didn't go," picketed the state capitol. Led by Eli Jaffe, president of the Oklahoma City Workers Alliance, they petitioned Governor Phillips for a special session of the legislature to deal with Oklahoma's "farm tenant unemployment problem." Phillips' reply, if milder, was in the same vein as was his answer to the Detroit physician. Their protests were to no avail.³²

Ministers in Oklahoma apparently did not extensively enter the printed controversy centering around The Grapes of Wrath. A Wewoka clergyman, one of a decided minority, praised the book as "truthful" and "of literary as well as social value, resembling in power and beauty of style the King James version of the Bible."³³ More typical was a pastor in Ardmore, who expressed the opinion that any Ardmore

³¹Ibid., March 16, 1940, p. 1.

³²Stillwater Gazette, March 29, 1940, p. 8. Shockley gives the date of this source as March 23, 1940. Since the Gazette was a weekly publication, and appeared on March 22 and 29, 1940, he is evidently in error.

³³Shockley, p. 358.

minister who attended the motion picture should be fired. He objected strenuously to the "sexual roles" of "Preacher" Casy and Rose of Sharon and the "Communitistic base of the story." He denounced the work as "one hundred per cent false to Christianity."³⁴

Perhaps the most good-natured response to The Grapes of Wrath and the whole California-Oklahoma squabble was that of employees of the Mid-Continent Petroleum Company's refinery in Tulsa. In April, 1940, they organized Oklahoma's California Hecklers -- dedicated to the proposition that "the grapes of wrath have soured and this time it's the Californians who'll get indigestion." Their motto was "A heckle a day will keep a Californian at bay," and their program was:

- 1) Turn the other cheek, but have a raspberry in it.
- 2) Inspect all cars and bags in California-licensed cars... and if they have any 'Grapes of Wrath' in them, make the...occupants eat them...
- 3) Heckle all Californians in sight provided you are bigger than they are.
- 4) Provide stickers...and paste them on the windshield so neither the driver nor anyone else can see...the beauties of Oklahoma's natural scenery (that by courtesy of the Tulsa Chamber of Commerce).
- 5) Furnish super-colossal...propaganda concerning the glammers of Oklahoma women and magnificent weather -- including all dust storms blown in from the coast.
- 6) Be able to advise...[Californians] that Oklahoma has plenty of people to handle its...industries...and [to] look elsewhere for employment.
- 7) Provide Chamber of Commerce publicity to all Californians who can read.³⁵

One Californian, perhaps lacking a sense of humor, responded with a plea for no more migrants and a chance to "have a breathing spell"

³⁴Oklahoma City Times, March 30, 1940, p. 6.

³⁵Stillwater Gazette, April 26, 1940, p. 2.

from its "tremendous relief load."³⁶

The publicity arising from The Grapes of Wrath had thus far done little to settle the strained relationship between the two states. The job of peacemaker fell to a Congressional investigating committee chairman, Representative John H. Tolan of California. The committee was charged with investigating conditions which led to interstate migration by destitute citizens of the United States.³⁷ Tolan's diplomacy during the committee's stay in Oklahoma seems to have done much to quiet the mounting protests of outraged "Sooners." The subject of Steinbeck and his book virtually disappeared from the newspapers after the departure of the investigators. The findings of the committee gave Oklahoma editors someone to blame and, along with growing coverage of international crises which crowded the pages of the newspapers, seemed to bring about the death of public controversy by 1941. The issue of The Grapes of Wrath, as we shall see, was never to leave the memory of Oklahomans, but it lay virtually dormant, only to be raised in the press during certain times of crises.

Governor Phillips responded to the announcement of the Congressional investigation by once again denouncing Steinbeck and his book and by appointing a fact-finding committee to see that Tolan's group would "get facts." On the governor's committee were Henry G. Bennett, president of Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, and State

³⁶ Ibid., Citing the San Bernadino Sun, n.d.

³⁷ A complete report of the committee's hearings in Oklahoma City will be found in, U.S., Congress, House, Hearings Before the Select Committee to Investigate the Interstate Migration of Destitute Citizens, 76th Cong., 3rd Sess., 1940, pp. 1759-2200.

Senators Julius Cox of Boise City and Robert Harbison of Altus. They were to be given counsel by Clarence Roberts, editor of the Oklahoma Farmer-Stockman, Newt Graham, a Tulsa banker, and C. B. Bee, of the state corporation commission. The last two were said to be familiar with freight rate discriminations which operated against agriculture and other industries in Oklahoma.³⁸

Irvin Hurst, editor of the Payne County News, followed hot upon the heels of the governor's announcement with an editorial suggesting that a rectification of freight rates in Oklahoma would end emigration. He accused California of delusions of superiority and said that the coastal state had reaped a just reward for the misleading and excessive advertisements of its real estate promoters.³⁹

Tolan and his committee arrived in Oklahoma City on September 18, 1940. The chairman did not hesitate to attempt to set Oklahoma's mind at ease. "This is," he said, "Oklahoma's greatest opportunity... to get its story before the nation....to offset some of the unfavorable publicity it has received from a certain book and movie." He declared, "the terms 'Okie' and 'Arkie' are taboo with this committee." Migration, he said, was a national problem.⁴⁰

The Daily Oklahoman's account of the committee's arrival also seemed designed to pacify the public mind. A banner headline read "Okies No Worse Than Yorkies Prober Says." Tolan, the paper said,

³⁸ Payne County News, August 16, 1940, p. 2.

³⁹ Ibid., August 16, 1940, p. 2.

⁴⁰ Daily Oklahoman, September 19, 1940, p. 1.

represented a district in California which contained not one "migratory camp." Furthermore, his resolution, which had brought about the creation of his committee, had been introduced before The Grapes of Wrath was published. An illustration accompanying the article showed the committee arriving at Oklahoma City, and the caption described them as "tired as Okies."⁴¹

The next edition of the Daily Oklahoman carried a front-page report of the hearings. The committee, it said, had found that the Joad family could be matched by any state in the union. Mechanization might be blamed by some, but workers had testified "that they had been forced off the land by landlords who changed from the tenant system to hire labor in order to get all of the benefit payments [from the federal government]."⁴²

Almost as if on cue the next editorial page of the Daily Oklahoman featured "Mechanized Farms and 'Okies'." The editor had found the reason for migration -- the Agricultural Adjustment Administration and the Works Progress Administration. The farmers, "egged on by AAA," tended to raise only cash crops with mechanized equipment. The WPA in turn took sixty-four per cent of its workers in Oklahoma from farms. When "WPA stadium and city hall work played out" the unemployed became "Okies." He concluded, "It is a disagreeable fact... that two of the chief factors that produce 'Okies' are AAA and WPA."⁴³ Steinbeck might have agreed that AAA and WPA were much more concrete institutions

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid., September 20, 1940, p. 1.

⁴³Ibid., September 21, 1940, p. 8.

to blame than were banks - - and thus perhaps more satisfying.

Whatever the reason, The Grapes of Wrath controversy disappeared from the headlines after September, 1940. Had Oklahomans grown tired of it? Did they consider it a dead issue? Was their attention attracted to more important concerns, such as growing international tensions? Perhaps all of these factors interacted, but it appears that the Tolan committee did much to bring the issue to a temporary close. Oklahoma was told in public, by a California Congressman, that the term 'Okie' was meaningless, and that "a certain book and movie" were erroneous. Even if the public argument was ready to die of its own accord after a few years, it was provided with a timely incident to bring it to a close agreeable to the great majority. The issue went underground, only to be revived by the press when Oklahoma's pride, or that of an Oklahoma public figure, seemed threatened.

Nearly a year after the hearings, an article in the Daily Oklahoman proclaimed that the Oklahoma City Lions Club would "attack 'Okie' literature." The district club planned to do something "to offset 'Grapes of Wrath' publicity" at the next international convention of their organization. They seemed interested in getting a better representation from Oklahoma.⁴⁴ The article did not have the ring of those of a year earlier. It seemed as if the Lions Club was the principal issue and The Grapes of Wrath had been picked as a label which would attract public notice. The tenor of the article was that which would characterize almost every later public reference to the

⁴⁴Ibid., September 1, 1941, p. 16.

Steinbeck issue -- that is it became more a flag to wave and less a real issue.

The only other reference to the controversy to appear in 1941, and for a long time thereafter, was a cartoon published during the State Fair. Better than anything else it sums up the attitude of Oklahomans after the first and greatest controversy over The Grapes of Wrath. It pictures an Oklahoma farmer atop a large pile of wheat, corn, pumpkins, canned goods, chickens, and cows labelled "Oklahoma State Fair Exhibits." He is towering over a rather intimidated-looking Steinbeck holding The Grapes of Wrath. The caption -- "Now Eat Every Gol-Durn Word of It."⁴⁵

⁴⁵Ibid., September 25, 1941, p. 10.

CHAPTER III

STEINBECK'S WORKS IN OKLAHOMA LIBRARIES: 1939-1965

While the nature and extent of the general public's concern over John Steinbeck and his writings have been reflected in the Oklahoma press, it is likely that the treatment of his works in Oklahoma libraries might reveal the attitudes of the reading public and, to some extent, those of the educational system. Yet it is no easy task to determine librarians', teachers', and readers' uses of a given work for a period of almost thirty years, since few libraries keep records of circulation and accession for that long a time. Thus one must rely upon those which do so, and perhaps even more upon people's memories.

As has been mentioned in the introductory chapter, the memory of even the most well-meaning person may distort his reconstruction of the past. But when one considers that professional integrity, in this case, is involved, and that few would have reason intentionally to give inaccurate information, it seems that a reasonably clear picture of a part of the whole might emerge from a study such as this one. The passage of time, then, is the factor which contributes most to any differences between what is recorded here and what has actually happened.

Professor Shockley did conduct a poll of libraries sometime before 1944. His aforementioned article revealed some information about his findings. He received replies from thirty Oklahoma libraries, but gave no indication of the nature of his sample. Four of the thirty

respondents, one of which was a college library, did not own a copy of The Grapes of Wrath. The librarians "generally agreed" that Steinbeck's book ranked second only to Gone With the Wind in circulation, with three reporting equal circulation for the two books, while one said that The Grapes of Wrath circulated more widely than any other book. "A few" had restricted circulation to adults, and "about half... mentioned long waiting lists."¹

Although this study deals with a period now more remote than did Shockley's, the sample of libraries used herein is three times as large as his. It is based on the replies of thirty-seven public libraries, thirty-nine high school libraries, ten college or university libraries, and four special libraries.² The great majority of these have been in existence since 1939, although few of the responding librarians have held their present positions that long. The number of libraries in Oklahoma has risen from about 250 to 370 during the period 1939-1965.³ The responding libraries, then, represent from twenty-four to thirty-six per cent of all libraries in Oklahoma during any given year from 1939 through 1965. Replies to a given item on the questionnaire were sometimes lower than these percentages, but never low enough

¹Shockley, pp. 351-352.

²Information from special libraries was very limited. Because of this fact, and because virtually none maintained themselves for more than a few years during the 1939-1965 period, mention of them has been slight in this study. Special libraries include club, technical, WPA, and mobile libraries. See Oklahoma Library Commission: Biennial Reports (1939-1948), and Annual Reports and Directories of Libraries in Oklahoma, compiled by Library Extension Division, Oklahoma State Library.

³Ibid.

to prevent generalization.⁴

Of the ninety libraries which responded to the questionnaire, nineteen certainly owned at least one copy of The Grapes of Wrath by 1940. It is likely that several more possessed copies, however, for example the high school library at Newkirk and the public library at Erick, both of which reported that the book had been removed at an unknown time by a former librarian. The Henryetta public library listed only the fact that eight copies had been "worn out" since publication. Panhandle Agricultural and Mechanical College at Goodwell was able to give data only for 1965, indicating "unknown for other years." It seems likely, especially considering Shockley's finding that twenty-six of the thirty libraries which he consulted owned the book,⁵ that more than nineteen of the ninety had it on their shelves in 1940, but that several were in 1966 unable to be certain.

Of the ninety respondent libraries proportionately more public libraries owned The Grapes of Wrath in 1940, and in every year since, than did high school libraries. College and university libraries after 1955 held more copies in proportion to their numbers, than did public libraries. The number of copies per library and the number of libraries holding copies has risen steadily in all three types of libraries from 1939 through 1965, although this trend was less marked in high school libraries.

Of eighteen libraries which indicated with certainty that they

⁴All of the information presented in chapter three and the Appendices has been derived from the ninety returned questionnaires unless otherwise indicated.

⁵Shockley, p. 351.

had never owned The Grapes of Wrath, fifteen were high school libraries, the rest public. A few librarians offered reasons for their institutions' lack of the book. Some had definite objections to Steinbeck's work. The Cushing High School librarian wrote, "There are many parents who would object to having this book on the shelf...therefore I do not have it." Mrs. Lois E. Dilbeck of Guthrie High School indicated that she had "never purchased The Grapes of Wrath because it is controversial and there are plenty of other books to read." She admitted, however, that if English teachers asked for the book she would purchase it. Another school library, at Okmulgee, purchased its first copy in 1966, the librarian explaining that her predecessor had considered the book "objectionable."

Other secondary school libraries did not circulate The Grapes of Wrath, but not because of any particular objections to the book. A librarian in Oklahoma City reported, "Our only copy of Grapes of Wrath has been out of circulation for some time -- certain passages had been underlined." Broken Arrow High School indicated "lack of money" as the reason for their failure to purchase The Grapes of Wrath. They did, however, "prefer other books of Steinbeck." The librarian at Velma-Alma wrote that there were no copies in the library, but she was sure the English rooms had their own copies.

Circulation figures for The Grapes of Wrath since 1939 were harder to determine than was possession, judging from the responses to the questionnaire. Total circulation in the state seems to have increased steadily, but the tally from the questionnaire could, in this case, be misleading. Twenty-seven libraries which owned the book failed to

offer information concerning its circulation. Those which did respond were often unable to give figures for periods before about 1955. Some which failed to respond with figures indicated circulation to be constant.⁶ Responses showed that the book circulated only a little more widely from public libraries than from those of educational institutions. Twenty-three libraries have clearly had waiting lists for The Grapes of Wrath. Of those which gave dates, the public libraries more often had readers waiting during the first year after publication than did other types of libraries. College and university libraries have, in three cases, used waiting lists within the last five years. In general it seems that the circulation of The Grapes of Wrath has risen steadily over the state since 1939. This is partially due to the fact that more libraries owned the book each succeeding year. Circulation has risen in about equal proportion from all types of libraries.

Although Professor Shockley found that the circulation of The Grapes of Wrath before 1944 was high compared to that of all other fiction,⁷ this study indicates that in the long run its circulation has been average. By 1966, twenty-nine librarians ranked the circulation of Steinbeck's book as average. One public librarian reported that it had circulated more widely than all other fiction. Only eight libraries had circulated it more than most other fiction. Five

⁶These were all public libraries. Their responses were; Madill - - "constant"; Elk City - - "copies are always out"; Wagoner - - "continuous...probably heavier during the last few years"; Geary - - "circulation good"; and Poteau - - "no great demand".

⁷Shockley, p. 351.

indicated its circulation was below average. The proportions of such responses were similar with regard to each of the three kinds of libraries.

When librarians were asked to compare the circulation of The Grapes of Wrath with that of Steinbeck's other works, their answers revealed that no other book has exceeded it in total circulation. Several had equalled or surpassed it during given years, however, especially since 1960. The Pearl, which has most often both equalled and surpassed The Grapes of Wrath in circulation, did in one case circulate more widely from 1947 to the present than did the story of the Joad family. The easy explanation is that many high school librarians reported The Pearl as required reading in literature courses. Four other works by Steinbeck have at one time surpassed The Grapes of Wrath in circulation. They are, in order of the frequency of this occurrence, The Red Pony, The Winter of Our Discontent, Of Mice and Men, and Travels With Charley. All of these works have also, in other libraries, been recorded as equalling The Grapes of Wrath in circulation. The Moon is Down and East of Eden have also circulated as much as The Grapes of Wrath from some libraries during certain years.⁸

Those cases in which other works of Steinbeck have equalled or surpassed The Grapes of Wrath in circulation suggest a pattern. This conclusion has been reinforced not only by responses to the question, but also from comments volunteered by the responding librarians. It seems probable that The Pearl and The Red Pony have enjoyed this

⁸See the Appendices for a full listing, with dates of the works of Steinbeck which have surpassed or equalled The Grapes of Wrath in circulation.

comparatively wide circulation for two reasons. They are the most often required or suggested readings from Steinbeck in high school literature courses, and, which may be more important, their general tone and nature make them more likely to be on a high school library shelf, regardless of teachers' requirements, than The Grapes of Wrath and many of Steinbeck's other works. Both are regarded as a part of "American Literature," both are good stories, and both present morals which can be understood without much difficulty by the average high school student. All value judgements aside, this cannot be said for very many, if any, of Steinbeck's other works. Of Mice and Men, one of Steinbeck's most consistently popular works, almost meets the above criteria, but its wide circulation, as might be expected, has been more from public than high school libraries. In any case it ranks below Steinbeck's more recent works with regard to circulation since 1960.

The Winter of Our Discontent and Travels With Charley have circulated rather widely since their publication, both occasionally equalling or surpassing The Grapes of Wrath. This record was probably caused by their appearance almost simultaneously with Steinbeck's Nobel Prize for literature. Steinbeck's other works which have equalled or surpassed The Grapes of Wrath in circulation offer no pattern but seem to be isolated cases. East of Eden and The Moon is Down, for instance, are the only two to have achieved such circulation from college or university libraries. This observation could easily reflect only the subject matter of one course during one semester. East of Eden might have gained some circulation from its presentation

as a motion picture, especially since its appearance on television.

Oklahoma libraries' holdings of Steinbeck's works other than The Grapes of Wrath are extensive. It was difficult to rank these writings quantitatively, but some have predominated. Those which appeared most widely on the lists received from libraries are:⁹

1) Cannery Row (1945)

This book was most often found in public and college university libraries. The results of the questionnaire discovered no high school library which owned it. Few libraries held more than one copy. Most have purchased it either shortly after it was published or since 1960.

2) East of Eden (1952)

Public and college and university libraries have purchased far more copies of this work than have high school libraries. Few have acquired more than one copy. Acquisitions have been spread equally over the years since its publication.

3) The Moon is Down (1942)

This work has been acquired by all types of libraries, but by public libraries principally. Most copies were purchased shortly after its publication or after 1957. Few libraries have held more than one copy.

4) Of Mice and Men (1937)

This work, in the form of a short novel or a play, had been bought by some high school libraries, but by considerably more public and college and university libraries. Several have purchased more than one copy. Many libraries acquired it in the 1950's.

5) The Pearl (1947)

High School libraries have bought this work more often than have others. Many have had more than one copy and have purchased them throughout the period since the book's publication.

6) The Red Pony (1945)

Like The Pearl, this book has been more often found

⁹These titles, as are those in all lists in this chapter, are listed alphabetically to avoid any suggestion of rank within the group.

in high school libraries, and many hold more than one copy. Most have purchased it since 1960.

7) Travels With Charley (1962)

This recent work of Steinbeck's has been acquired widely by all kinds of libraries. Few, however, have bought more than one copy.

8) The Wayward Bus (1947)

Many public and college and university libraries have purchased this novel. Only one high school library reported owning it. It has been purchased steadily since its publication. Few libraries have owned more than one copy.

9) The Winter of Our Discontent (1961)

This work has been purchased by all types of libraries but seldom in duplicate copies.

Ranking below these nine works, which are Steinbeck's best known, were six other volumes, popular but less so. They are:

- 1) Cup of Gold (1929)
- 2) In Dubious Battle (1936)
- 3) The Short Novels (including Tortilla Flat, The Red Pony, Of Mice and Men, The Moon is Down, Cannery Row, and The Pearl)¹⁰
- 4) The Short Reign of Pippin IV (1957)
- 5) Sweet Thursday (1954)
- 6) Tortilla Flat (1936)

Ranked below these works were those which have been less popular.

Several have been purchased mostly by college and university libraries. They are:

- 1) Bombs Away (1942)
- 2) Burning Bright (1950)
- 3) The Forgotten Village (1940)
- 4) The Log from the Sea of Cortez (1941)
- 5) The Long Valley (1938)
- 6) Once There Was a War (1958)
- 7) The Pastures of Heaven (1932)
- 8) The Portable Steinbeck (1946)¹¹

¹⁰All of these titles except Tortilla Flat appear as separate works in the previous list.

¹¹This volume is a collection of Steinbeck's works selected and edited by the Viking Press.

- 9) A Russian Journal (1948)
- 10) The Sea of Cortez (1941)
- 11) To a God Unknown (1953)

In general there is nothing surprising about the distribution and incidence of Steinbeck's works in these libraries. His most popular books have been found in more libraries than have his lesser known ones. Those which present the most controversial subjects and language have not been included as often in high school library collections as in public and college and university stacks.

The University of Tulsa Library has owned, since 1963, the largest and most varied collection of books by and about John Steinbeck. Purchased from a private collector, this collection has been kept in a locked room, but is used "constantly." It consists of forty-five titles and seventy-nine volumes, several of which are in German, French, or Spanish. They have never been checked out since many copies are autographed or first editions.

This study has revealed only three cases of restrictions upon or protests about works of Steinbeck's other than The Grapes of Wrath. The librarian at Chelsea High School reported that the school superintendent had her remove Tortilla Flat from the shelves. A mother had read the first two pages of the book and, discovering that the word "damn" appeared twice on the first page, had protested to the superintendent. The Grapes of Wrath was not a part of the collection at Chelsea. The Ponca City public library had owned The Grapes of Wrath and Cannery Row since shortly after their respective dates of publication, but had both restricted to "adults only" until 1963. They were then put on open shelves with the arrival of a new head librarian. The librarian at Tonkawa Public Library reported no protests about

The Grapes of Wrath, but some criticism of Of Mice and Men. All of these restrictions or complaints seem to have been rather isolated events involving individual viewpoints rather than widespread public feeling. Limitations on the circulation of The Grapes of Wrath seem scarcely more widespread. The case of the "adults only" condition at the Ponca City public library has been mentioned. The Walters public library reported a similar practice when the book was "first published." Two high school libraries have regulated the circulation of the book. Since 1962 John Marshall High School has required teacher's or parent's permission to let a student charge out the volume. The librarian at College High School, Bartlesville, now supervises the circulation of The Grapes of Wrath because, as she wrote, "When left in open shelves the copies 'disappear'." These four are the only such cases reported, and do not indicate a widespread suppression of the work. The last case might indicate, in fact, a special interest in the novel.

Two high school libraries reported that they had received requests to remove The Grapes of Wrath from circulation. A woman in Carnegie, after listening to a radio minister who included the work on his list of "dirty" books, demanded that the librarian put a stop to the circulation of the novel. Her request was politely ignored. "Individuals and church groups" who were not otherwise identified were reported as having presented a list to the librarian at John Marshall High School in Oklahoma City, asking if the library owned any of the books included on it. The Grapes of Wrath, one on the list, was already circulated only with teacher's or parent's approval. This arrangement apparently satisfied the protestors.

The general comments of librarians revealed a few more instances of disapproval both by the public and by librarians themselves. A leader of a youth group in Wagoner, according to Kate Heisman, the public librarian, advised her charges "to choose some other book which would serve as well from a reading list." Mrs. Monta Balding of the Walters Public Library wrote that she remembered criticism of The Grapes of Wrath, especially about "Okies," but had heard none for "a good many years." The public librarian at Altus reported, "High school students demand it for book reports. Being Oklahomans we just can't recommend it too highly." The Grapes of Wrath was required reading in an eleventh grade English course in 1964-1965 at Pryor. Cornelia Sifferman of the Pryor public library reported that some parents objected to the requirement. She added:

The Steinbeck books continue to be very much in demand. The reason they weren't read more widely here was because they were not available. I have purchased them and they are read mainly by our college students and their parents. The parents want to read what their children are reading. Most parents (fathers) read 'Grapes of Wrath' first and then....the others.

A few librarians reported that they encountered no controversy about The Grapes of Wrath. The Wynnewood High School librarian wrote that she had noticed no "particular feeling toward" the novel. Parents had requested the removal of only one book, and it was not by Steinbeck. D. S. Richardson of Panhandle Agricultural and Mechanical College at Goodwell indicated that people in that area "have not shown much resentment" toward the book, but have upon occasion pointed out minor inaccuracies in it.

Several librarians revealed a very positive attitude toward The

Grapes of Wrath. Leda S. Dover, of Bacone College, offered the observation that she disagreed with criticisms which she had heard of the book. She wrote that she had "grown up in eastern Oklahoma and [had] known people who talked like the characters in the book." Mrs. Earl E. Arnold, head librarian at El Reno's public library, wrote:

I was working in this library when the Grapes of Wrath was published. I have not known anyone in this community who resented it, but we are on Hi Way 66 and we saw the people every day exactly as Steinbeck described them. Our new patrons, from others sections of the country expect us to resent the book and are surprized [sic] that we do not. This is history and some of us remember it. The reading public is alert enough to know that the Joads were from many states.

According to the librarian at John Marshall High School, the closed-stack status of The Grapes of Wrath did not constitute suppression of the book, while her staff's discussion of it always pointed to its literary value. Mrs. Helen Hawkins of the Pond Creek public library wrote that a high school English teacher in the community was an "avid reader of Steinbeck" and charged her students to read The Grapes of Wrath "with an open mind." Mrs. Hawkins believed that "most all" of the high school students had read Steinbeck's books. The most enthusiastic advocate of The Grapes of Wrath was a public librarian at Bartlesville. He wrote:

John Steinbeck did Oklahoma a great Favor - - perhaps not recognizable for another 100 years. A good shock is a fine thing and besides it's a damn good book and picture of a great time in our country's history.

The librarians' responses revealed that reactions of readers and library patrons to The Grapes of Wrath have been neither as negative nor as widespread as might be anticipated from an examination of the volume's treatment in the Oklahoma press. Isolated cases of protests

against the work have not been lacking, but the great majority of responses indicated a general curiosity about and subsequent acceptance, if not hearty approval, of the novel. It also appears that Steinbeck's other works have not been subjected to any widespread suppression or censure arising from the reputation of his one work about Oklahoma. The Grapes of Wrath has nevertheless been a special book, one which has aroused Oklahomans. But it is safe to say that, in spite of the fact that many high schools have not owned it, the novel has been available to almost any Oklahoman curious enough or disturbed enough to want to read it.

CHAPTER IV

OKLAHOMA LEARNS TO FORGIVE: 1952-1966

The decline in the early 1940's of Oklahomans' concern about The Grapes of Wrath was not a temporary phenomenon. Criticism of Steinbeck never again reached the fever pitch it attained from 1939 into 1941. The trend, in fact, seemed to be acceptance or disregard of the man and his novel. The Grapes of Wrath even came to be considered by many Oklahomans as Steinbeck's greatest work, and the author himself a giant of American literature. When cries against him were raised they were ignored by the general public.

An example of Steinbeck's growing reputation as an artist, and the subsequent consideration of The Grapes of Wrath as his magnum opus, can be found in the Oklahoma press. Victor A. Elconin, reviewing East of Eden for the Daily Oklahoman in 1952, wrote:

The discouraging fact which must be faced by those who decry the air of pessimistic futility in the contemporary novel is that the writers of such novels are still producing better work than those who seek to affirm more positive values.

Steinbeck here is on the side of the angels, but he does little to correct the balance.¹

The review continued to bemoan the fact that the weakness of the new book's characters could not support its "grand theme." In general

¹Daily Oklahoman, "Sunday Magazine Section," December 14, 1952, p. 16.

the reviewer treated the book roughly, but expressed his regard for the author's motives. His praise of Steinbeck was restrained, almost as if he was conscious and respectful of the feelings of his Oklahoma audience. Mention of The Grapes of Wrath was conspicuously absent. Nevertheless the review expressed a strong positive feeling about Steinbeck, and its tone bordered on one of disappointment over his latest book.

By 1961 a reviewer in the Oklahoma press asserted the value of Steinbeck's work and proclaimed openly that The Grapes of Wrath was one of his best efforts. Van Allen Bradley reviewed The Winter of Our Discontent in the Daily Oklahoman:

If it is to have any enduring quality...the contemporary novel must inevitably become a part of the moral history of its time. In John Steinbeck's best books, including The Grapes of Wrath, we find that seriousness of purpose.

But in recent years his reputation has surely suffered because of the triviality of 'Sweet Thursday' and 'The Short Reign of Pippin IV' and the theatricality of 'East of Eden.'

It is my pleasant duty to report today that Mr. Steinbeck is back in stride again.²

The arrangement of the review on the page almost seemed to say "Welcome Back John Steinbeck." Its heading covered the full top line, and it was set off from the rest of the page by a strong black border.

These two reviews may be considered reflections of a trend which was pronounced in Oklahoma in the 1950's. Steinbeck became almost someone to be proud of. No longer did Oklahomans resent the linking of his name with that of their state. The Grapes of Wrath was accepted as a reference point for Oklahoma progress. The whole state

²Ibid., July 2, 1961, section D, p. 4.

seemed to say, "Yes, we were poor and ignorant then, but look at us now." Some even added, "Yes, we were poor and ignorant, but we had our own brand of dignity."

One expression of these attitudes came in 1956 when Fred R. Harris, a rising young lawyer from Lawton, spoke before a delegation of the Oklahoma Historical Society. Harris' address dealt with improvements in agricultural methods since the Dust Bowl and concluded with a poem depicting the return of an "Okie" family to their home. The source of Harris' inspiration was an article in Coronet magazine, one of a series of "memorably events in American life."³ The article, also a depiction of "Okies" going home, referred directly to Steinbeck: "Feller named Steinbeck wrote a book about us. Good book, made a lotta people think; but they soon forgot."⁴ Harris' poem, which made no direct reference to Steinbeck or The Grapes of Wrath, was brought to attention again in 1964 during the Oklahoman's campaign for a seat in the United States Senate. Having become popular among Dr. Berlin B. Chapman's students of Oklahoma history at Oklahoma State University, the work was given a name, "The Return of the Okies":

'Fill 'er up with regular,' the old man urged.
 'We're going home. We're Okies. You prob'ly
 Hearda us. We give it up once; once when
 The dust blew; once when the kids cried, while
 The old lady stood at the door and stared
 Down the fence row with sand
 Up to the second wire.

³Theodore Norman, "The Long Journey Home," Coronet, XIX (January, 1946), p. 42.

⁴Ibid.

'Yeah. We beenta California.
 We been workin' for one of them big farm comp'nies.
 There's a lotta people out there; and you know what?
 Ain't none uv 'em like home folks.
 We had a lotta time to think. Land's
 Like anything else; you get out about
 What you put in. 'Ever thoughta that?

'Dust Bowl? Naw! That's all gone. They planted trees and
 Learnta farm right. We was back on a visit and
 A lotta things've changed back home.
 Things've grown a ho' lot.
 Those that stayed on built a state.
 Looks like it did in the ole days, 'cept there's more
 Buildin' and doin'. We oughta keep it lookin' thataway.

'Yeah. Things've changed a ho' lot. But you know what?
 The folks ain't changed. Nobody like 'em anywhere.
 A man's a man if he wants ta be bad enough.
 Yuh know what I mean?
 We're going home. Things is gonna be different this time
 Ever thing's goona be all right.
 Fill 'er up. Fill 'er plumb up.⁵

The attitude represented by "The Return of the Okies" was expressed widely during an incident in 1957 involving a proposed visit to the state by Steinbeck. The California author was invited to attend the Oklahoma Semi-centennial Exposition in Oklahoma City. James Burge, director of the exposition, extended the invitation, saying:

We believe that if Steinbeck returns now, he will find absolutely nothing bad to write about the state... and his appearance here would tend to dismiss the indictments he made of Oklahoma in his book.⁶

Burge's principal motive seems to have been publicity for the state. As a public relations man he saw that a new furor over The Grapes of Wrath would put Oklahoma and the celebration before a national reading

⁵Lawton Constitution, February 4, 1964, p. 6.

⁶Oklahoma City Times, March 21, 1957, p. 8.

audience. His efforts were to some degree successful.⁷

Oklahoma legislators reacted immediately to the situation. George Nigh, house member from McAlester, was appalled by the invitation, saying that Steinbeck had "done more to create a stench and smell against us than anything else."⁸ He continued:

...The name 'Okie' is a good name now. I'm alarmed that they would try to honor that man by officially inviting him to come to our state. The stench will be back with Steinbeck.⁹

Another house member, J. H. Belvin of Durant, noted that the Choctaw Indians, having no word in their language for Steinbeck, called him "Stab in Back." Belvin also said that, in spite of the possibility that the author might learn something by visiting Oklahoma, he did not want Steinbeck "to have a thing to do with celebrating the blessed achievements of Oklahoma."¹⁰ The Daily Oklahoman reported that while the majority of legislators approved of the invitation the critics of the invitation were "noisy."¹¹

Some voices were raised in approval or qualified approval of the invitation. State Senator George Miskovsky of Oklahoma City cited advances in Oklahoma since publication of The Grapes of Wrath and hoped that Steinbeck might visit the state and "write another book that will

⁷James C. Burge, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, personal interview with the author at Mr. Burge's offices, March 23, 1966.

⁸Daily Oklahoman, March 22, 1957, p. 1.

⁹Oklahoma City Times, March 21, 1957, p. 3.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Daily Oklahoman, March 22, 1957, p. 1.

electrify the United States and the world."¹² State Senator Everett Collins of Sapulpa proposed that former governor Johnston Murray, who had written a critical magazine article at the end of his term of office in 1955, be invited also. Miskovsky opposed him, saying "He [Murray] knew the truth and he lied."¹³ Lou Allard of Drumright, house member and chairman of the semi-centennial commission, believed that if Steinbeck would visit Oklahoma and say "I'm sorry" the state would receive "a lot of good publicity."¹⁴ State Senator Gene Stipe of McAlester used the issue to chide good-naturedly his colleagues from Oklahoma City. It would be all right, he declared, for Steinbeck to observe progress in Oklahoma, but the author should be kept away from Oklahoma City's Reno Street "or he will have a better story than the last one."¹⁵

By March 25 a representative of Steinbeck replied to the commission's invitation. The author, he reported, was shortly to sail for Europe and would be abroad until late July. He assured Oklahomans that Steinbeck knew of their progress since the 1930's and concluded:

...those dreary depression-ridden days of the 'thirties' [were] bad days for all of us everywhere. What greater tribute could there be to any state than the fact that

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid. The two Senators referred to an article by Johnston Murray, "Oklahoma is in a Mess!," Saturday Evening Post, CCXXVII (April 30, 1955), pp. 20-21, 92, 96.

¹⁴Daily Oklahoman, March 22, 1957, p. 1. Allard strongly supported Burge in this issue, for the reason he stated. Lou Allard, Drumright, Oklahoma, personal interview with the author at Mr. Allard's office, March 21, 1966.

¹⁵Daily Oklahoman, March 22, 1957, p. 1.

it has grown so splendidly out of natural and economic disaster?¹⁶

On April 9, the Oklahoma House of Representatives viewed a filmed interview with Steinbeck. The author expressed his appreciation for the invitation and his warm regard for the people of Oklahoma:

I lived with them and admired them very much. They were people of integrity and they were people of invention...marvelous people.

I said bad things, perhaps, about the situation which put them in the position they found themselves.¹⁷

He denied making any derogatory comments about Oklahoma. In early May Steinbeck joined baseball star Mickey Mantle, ballerina Maria Tallchief, Washington hostess Perle Mesta, and singer Patti Page as an "Oklahoma booster," appointed by Governor Raymond Gary.¹⁸ He was the only one of the group not born in Oklahoma.

In late May Governor Gary and Steinbeck exchanged letters concerning the recent furor.¹⁹ Steinbeck wrote:

My most bitter critics have always been people who had not read my work. ...close scrutiny of the Grapes of Wrath will show that I denounced dust and poverty, greed and selfishness but never the Okies I know.... I found them strong, intellegent [sic], fine loyal people...they never...gave up.

...in California...they and their children have become respected and valued and valuable citizens.

It pleases me that a canard has been removed by you.... What I think happened then, cannot happen

¹⁶Ibid., March 26, 1957, p. 1.

¹⁷Ibid., April 9, 1957, p. 9.

¹⁸Ibid., May 2, 1957, p. 22.

¹⁹Ibid., June 2, 1957, p. 1.

again. I thank you for contributing to that fact.²⁰

Governor Gary replied:

There has been much misunderstanding...about the "Grapes of Wrath." As you suggest, much of this... has been among people who were told by someone else that their pride has been injured. They accepted someone else's judgement, rather than reading your book.

Perhaps this little flurry of publicity will cause more of them to go to the source for their information. I hope it will also cause you to pay us a return visit when convenient.

I think you will be amazed to see the general prosperity and progress which the energetic counterparts of the Joads have produced in today's Oklahoma.²¹

Oklahoma Today, a state publication, reprinted the letters in the 1957 winter issue. The editor offered them as "a service to history, and...a fitting close to an era of mistaken notions about Oklahoma cleaned once and for all by Oklahoma achievement, and the glory of this Semi-centennial year."²² Accompanying the correspondence was a paragraph from The Grapes of Wrath, superimposed over a picture of "The Other Pioneer Woman," a sculpture by Mahonri Young. The quotation from Steinbeck was a description of Ma Joad which, said Oklahoma Today, "is considered one of the finest tributes to motherhood in modern literature."²³

²⁰John Steinbeck, Florence, Italy, letter May 16, 1957, to Governor Raymond Gary of Oklahoma. Reprinted in Oklahoma Today, VIII (Winter, 1957-1958), p. 6.

²¹Raymond Gary, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, letter, May 27, 1957, to John Steinbeck. Reprinted in Oklahoma Today, VIII (Winter, 1957-1958), p. 6.

²²Oklahoma Today, VIII (Winter, 1957-1958), p. 6.

²³Ibid., p. 7.

It appeared that the rift between Steinbeck and Oklahoma had been healed. Oklahomans could point with pride to progress in many areas. They had accepted repeated public clarifications of, if not apologies for, the material in The Grapes of Wrath which had seemed objectionable eighteen years earlier. They could be magnanimous and even hospitable to Steinbeck and could identify his writing with such respected institutions as Motherhood. Those few voices which were still raised in protest found no following, prompted no letters to editors, and were themselves soon still. Certainly not every Oklahoman suddenly loved John Steinbeck, but by the end of the incident in 1957 the great majority of Oklahomans seemed to regard The Grapes of Wrath as a book, not an attack or a "stab in the back."

Evidence that the change in attitudes was to be lasting was offered in 1962 when the Oklahoma press reacted positively to Steinbeck's Nobel Prize for literature. Only The Oklahoma City Times referred to Oklahomans' feelings against Steinbeck. He would, the article said, "never win a popularity contest in Oklahoma." It called The Grapes of Wrath "the most hated book from Miami to Mangum." The 1957 incident was briefly recounted from both Oklahomans' and Steinbeck's viewpoints. The article did concede that The Grapes of Wrath was Steinbeck's best effort.²⁴ An editorial followed the next day saying that "most Oklahomans by now may have forgiven...John Steinbeck enough to congratulate him on winning the Nobel Prize." The editor wondered, however, why the award had come "after all these years," when the

²⁴Oklahoma City Times, October 25, 1962, p. 1.

quality of the author's work had fallen so sharply.²⁵

Other references in Oklahoma newspapers to the prize were considerably more favorable. An article in The Tulsa Tribune made no reference to Oklahoman's feelings against Steinbeck, but called him "a chronicler of social injustice."²⁶ The Daily Oklahoman article also expressed no resentment and said that the "champion of the underdog" had "mellowed in his writing and temperament since The Grapes of Wrath shocked the social consciousness of the nation." It called the novel "a powerful story" which "grew out of [Steinbeck's] feelings for the migrants after living with them."²⁷ Like the 1957 incident the Nobel Prize evoked no letters to editors. The man's name and the book's title seemed to have lost their sting for Oklahomans.

In a strange sense Steinbeck had become an "Oklahoma booster." The conditions he described were often accepted as a base line from which to measure the state's progress, and his name was linked in this way with pride in Oklahoma. The editorial page of The Tulsa Tribune carried a piece entitled "The Okies Again" in 1965. It represented a complete reversal in the usual reaction of Oklahomans to the term "Okie." It revealed that Oklahomans were still traveling to California and elsewhere to fill available jobs.

You can look at the...Okie...two ways.

You can say that they are stupider than the sullen reliefers who hang around Los Angeles and New York while the vegetables and fruits rot because they are going to

²⁵ Ibid., October 26, 1962, p. 36.

²⁶ The Tulsa Tribune, October 25, 1962, p. 1.

²⁷ Daily Oklahoman, October 26, 1962, p. 10.

get all sweaty while many relief-hounds will get checks of almost equal size by doing nothing.

Or, you can say that the Okies understand the anatomy of dignity, that no man has dignity who has made no effort to support himself, and that the most futile business in the world is to demand respect and admiration while you are shaking a tin cup.²⁸

The editor reported a recent conversation with John Steinbeck in New York, in which the author stressed the accomplishments of the "Okies" who had remained in California; "I told the story of the desperate Okie." The editorial concluded, "On this Labor Day it's a sort of proud thing to be an Oklahoman."²⁹ It seems that Oklahomans' ethnocentric outlook had changed little, but had gained a new focus. The article revealed a scorn for and suspicion of urban dwellers which was still widespread in Oklahoma. The "Okie," however, was no longer a stereotype to deny, but one of which to be proud. In this case a millstone from the past -- the "Okie" -- had become a source of pride, not only as a stereotype from which Oklahoma had freed itself, but as a thing in itself which still existed in contrast to less admirable types from other areas of the nation.

Steinbeck has remained in the news in Oklahoma until the time of writing. In the 1966 gubernatorial campaign Raymond Gary took occasion to comment, "A lot of people have been looking at Oklahoma through the eyes of John Steinbeck. We have changed from a poverty-stricken, dust bowl state to a progressive state."³⁰ Again it seems ironic that a image so strongly resented for many years has become a

²⁸The Tulsa Tribune, September 6, 1965, p. 40.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Daily Oklahoman, March 31, 1966, p. 30.

base line from which to measure the state's progress.

Steinbeck himself may have recently done more to secure his acceptance by Oklahomans. In July, 1966, Soviet poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko appealed to the American author to raise his voice in protest against American bombing raids on North Viet Nam.³¹ Steinbeck, whose son was at the time serving in Viet Nam, replied that the young Russian was really asking him "to denounce half a war, our half." The American's stand was clear:

You know well how I detest all war, but for this one I have a particular and personal hatred. I am against this Chinese-inspired war. I don't know a single American who is for it.

Surely you don't believe that [we bomb]...innocent civilians. This is not East Berlin in 1953, Budapest in 1956, nor Tibet in 1959.³²

This firm expression of support for the American commitment in Viet Nam has probably reached some of the few Oklahomans who still harbored negative feelings toward Steinbeck. The author of The Grapes of Wrath will probably never be regarded highly by all Oklahomans, but time and the spread of ideas have done much to alleviate the resentment which has been associated with his name.

³¹Ibid., July 8, 1966, p. 7.

³²Oklahoma City Times, July 11, 1966, p. 1.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

The evidence compiled in this study supports the conclusion that Oklahomans' negative attitudes toward John Steinbeck have declined since the early 1940's. This gradual acceptance of The Grapes of Wrath and its author has been more marked since 1957. There have been two periods during which denunciations of Steinbeck were many and violent. The first lasted from soon after the publication of The Grapes of Wrath until early 1941. The second encompassed but a few days in March, 1957, when several state legislators voiced protests against the Semi-centennial Commission's invitation to Steinbeck to visit the Semi-centennial Exposition in Oklahoma City.

The early protests against The Grapes of Wrath often involved denials of the accuracy of the work and affirmations that Oklahoma was just as good as any other state. The most violent reactions were to the inquiries or activities of citizens of other states. The Oklahoma-California controversy was well under way before the publication of the novel. Steinbeck's California citizenship added fuel to the fire as did the rumors that crews from Hollywood would visit Oklahoma to film a motion picture version of the novel. Governor Phillips' reaction to the inquiries of a physician from Detroit was intense and subjective. Those few Oklahomans, however, who agreed with Steinbeck were not challenged by their fellows. No one, for instance, seemed to

react to O. D. Duncan's support of Steinbeck's contentions or to those who picketed the state capitol proclaiming "Steinbeck was right."

In spite of the initial concern over the coming of the Tolan committee to the state in 1940, the diplomacy of the chairman of that body did much to quiet the outcries of Oklahomans. Representative Tolan made it clear that the committee was not "picking on" Oklahoma and that conditions such as Steinbeck described existed in many states. The committee's refusal to use the term "Okie" and the revelation that the body had been instituted before the publication of The Grapes of Wrath surely served to allay the feelings of Oklahomans. By 1941 the issue had passed from public notice. Growing involvement of the United States in the international crises which led to World War II diverted the attention of the people of Oklahoma and contributed to the decline of concern over the Steinbeck issue.

The last reference to Steinbeck to appear in the Oklahoma press in 1941 represented a feeling which came to be a dominant expression during the 1957 incident. The cartoon was captioned "Now Eat Every Gol-Durn Word of It" -- addressed to Steinbeck and referring to The Grapes of Wrath. That was exactly what Oklahomans wanted Steinbeck to do in 1957. They had converted The Grapes of Wrath from an issue that most Oklahomans wanted to keep quiet to one which could be used as the "before" in a picture of amazing progress in Oklahoma. They could point with pride, by 1957, to real improvement in such areas as agricultural, industry, and highway building.¹ Steinbeck responded

¹Edwin C. McReynolds, Oklahoma; A History of The Sooner State (Norman, Oklahoma, 1964), pp. 397-413.

according to their wishes and affirmed his opinion that Oklahoma had come a long way since the Dust Bowl. Governor Gary responded by officially proclaiming Steinbeck an "Oklahoma booster." The whole incident closed with a two-page spread in the official state magazine which almost amounted to a tribute to Steinbeck.

If Steinbeck's image sometimes suffered in the Oklahoma press, his works received much gentler treatment in Oklahoma libraries. Incidence of protests about and restrictions of The Grapes of Wrath and his other works was very low. Circulation of all of his works seems to have been closely related to the degree of their popularity on a national scale. His books have been both widely purchased and widely read. Not a few librarians and readers have had high regard for his work.

Although the study of libraries revealed no marked regional differences in Oklahomans' attitudes toward Steinbeck, some of the public pronouncements against him might indicate that citizens of the southeastern part of the state more often resented him. Governor Leon C. Phillips had resided in that part of the state for twenty-one years before he became governor. Congressman Lyle Boren represented a district which bordered on the area about which Steinbeck wrote. He entered his complaints about The Grapes of Wrath in the Congressional Record in January, 1940. Oklahoma legislators from the southeastern part of the state were the most vocal opponents of the invitation extended to the author in 1957.

The evidence strongly suggests that, since the termination of the 1957 incident, Oklahomans' attitudes toward Steinbeck have been much less negative. There was no outcry against the Nobel Prize for

literature in 1962; most newspapers, in fact, offered congratulations to the author of The Grapes of Wrath. Only one paper mentioned Oklahomans' feelings against Steinbeck, and it followed with an editorial saying that The Grapes of Wrath was his best book and that most Oklahomans had "forgiven" him for it. Steinbeck's recent reply to the Russian poet Yevtushenko denouncing the "Chinese-inspired" war in Viet Nam and supporting the American commitment there has surely helped his image in the state.

All of this is not to say that there are not still many Oklahomans who have strong feelings against Steinbeck. But their outcries are faint and are expressions of personal feelings. The output of the Oklahoma press and the treatment of his works in libraries indicate that John Steinbeck has truly been forgiven -- or forgotten -- by the majority of Oklahomans.

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APPENDIX A

COVER LETTER ACCOMPANYING THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Librarian:

I am preparing a masters thesis in history at Oklahoma State University. My subject is the attitudes of Oklahomans toward John Steinbeck and his works from 1939 through 1965.

As a part of the research I am sending a questionnaire to libraries throughout the state. I would be grateful if you or your staff would provide the information requested on the accompanying form and return it to me. I would prefer exact figures whenever possible, but estimates will be helpful.

If you are unable to answer all of the questions, please return the form. A partial reply will be much more helpful than no reply. I have enclosed a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Your help and prompt reply will be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Bennie L. DeWhitt

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE SENT TO LIBRARIES IN OKLAHOMA

ALL QUESTIONS APPLY TO YOUR LIBRARY

1. How many copies of The Grapes of Wrath did your library own as of:

_____ 1940? _____ 1955?
 _____ 1945? _____ 1960?
 _____ 1950? _____ 1965?

2. What was the circulation of The Grapes of Wrath during the periods indicated?

CHECK HERE IF ESTIMATE

1939 through 1940	_____	_____
1941 " 1945	_____	_____
1946 " 1950	_____	_____
1951 " 1955	_____	_____
1956 " 1960	_____	_____
1961 " 1965	_____	_____

3. How has the circulation of The Grapes of Wrath compared with that of other works of fiction during the 1939-1965 period?

_____ a. Most widely circulated
 _____ b. More widely circulated than most other works of fiction
 _____ c. Circulation average
 _____ d. Circulation below average

_____ Check here if the above information is an estimate.

4. What other works by Steinbeck does your library own?

TITLE	NUMBER OF COPIES	DATE OF PURCHASE
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

5. (a) How has the circulation of The Grapes of Wrath compared with that of other works by Steinbeck?

- _____ a. The most widely circulated
- _____ b. One or more have equalled it
- _____ c. One or more have surpassed it

_____ Check here if the above information is an estimate.

(b) List titles of those of Steinbeck's works which have equalled or surpassed The Grapes of Wrath in circulation. Indicate dates if possible.

TITLE	EQUALLED	SURPASSED	DATE
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

6. (a) Has your library ever had waiting lists for The Grapes of Wrath?

Yes _____

No _____

- (b) If yes, indicate dates above.

7. (a) Has your library ever placed restrictions (such as "adults only" or a shortened charge-out period) upon The Grapes of Wrath or any of Steinbeck's other works?

Yes _____

No _____

- (b) If yes:

WORK(S)	NATURE OF RESTRICTION(S)	DATES
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

8. (a) Have any individuals or organization ever sought to persuade you to remove The Grapes of Wrath, or any of Steinbeck's works, from circulation?

Yes _____

No _____

(b) If Yes:

WHAT WORK(S)?	WHO?	UPON WHAT GROUNDS?
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

WHEN?	WERE THEY SUCCESSFUL?
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

9. Please indicate any additional information which you feel might be relevant to the study.

Signature _____

APPENDIX C

HOLDINGS OF THE GRAPES OF WRATH IN SIXTY

LIBRARIES IN OKLAHOMA: 1940-1965

I. HIGH SCHOOL LIBRARIES:

YEAR	Number of copies						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1940	2	-	-	-	-	-	-
1945	2	1	-	-	-	-	-
1950	5	-	-	-	-	-	-
1955	5	2	-	-	-	-	-
1960	7	3	-	1	-	-	-
1965	11	4	1	1	-	-	1

II. PUBLIC LIBRARIES:*

YEAR	Number of copies							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1940	9	3	1	1	-	-	-	-
1945	6	4	2	-	-	-	-	-
1950	8	4	2	1	-	-	-	-
1955	8	6	1	1	-	-	-	-
1960	11	5	2	-	1	-	-	-
1965	11	9	6	2	1	-	-	1

*The Director of the Oklahoma County Libraries reported that forty-two copies were in various libraries under her direction in 1965.

III. COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES:

	Number of copies								
	1	2	3	4	5	...	8	10	12
1940	1	1	-	-	-		1	-	-
1945	2	1	-	-	-		-	1	-
1950	1	2	-	-	-		1	-	-
1955	2	1	1	-	-		-	-	1
1960	2	2	-	-	1		-	1	-
1965	1	7	-	-	-		-	1	-

APPENDIX D

WORKS BY STEINBECK WHICH HAVE EQUALLED OR
SURPASSED THE CIRCULATION OF THE GRAPES
OF WRATH FROM OKLAHOMA LIBRARIES

I. WORKS WHICH HAVE EQUALLED THE GRAPES OF WRATH IN CIRCULATION:

<u>Work</u>	<u>Type of Library*</u>	<u>Dates</u>
a. <u>East of Eden</u>	Public	1963
	"	1965
	"	n.d.**
	College or University	n.d.
b. <u>The Moon is Down</u>	College or University	1950
c. <u>Of Mice and Men</u>	Public	n.d.
	"	n.d.
	"	1961-1965
d. <u>The Pearl</u>	Public	1965
	"	n.d.
	High School	1961-1965
	"	1965-1966
e. <u>The Red Pony</u>	High School	1963
	" "	1964-1966
	" "	n.d.
f. <u>Travels With Charley</u>	Public	1962-1963
	High School	n.d.
g. <u>The Winter of Our Discontent</u>	Public	1961-1963
	"	1964-1965

*Each entry represents one library.

**No date was given in the answer on the questionnaire.

II. Works which have surpassed The Grapes of Wrath in circulation:

<u>WORK</u>	<u>TYPE OF LIBRARY</u>	<u>DATES</u>
a. <u>Of Mice and Men</u>	Public	n.d.
	High School	n.d.
b. <u>The Pearl</u>	Public	n.d.
	High School	1947-1966
	" "	1964-1966
	" "	1964-1966
	" "	1965
	" "	n.d.
c. <u>The Red Pony</u>	Public	n.d.
	High School	1961-1965
d. <u>Travels With Charley</u>	Public	1963-1965
	"	1965
e. <u>The Winter of Our Discontent</u>	Public	1961-1962
	"	n.d.

APPENDIX E

**A CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF THE MAJOR
WORKS OF JOHN STEINBECK**

Cup of Gold (1929)
The Pastures of Heaven (1932)
To A God Unknown (1933)
Tortilla Flat (1935)
In Dubious Battle (1936)
Of Mice and Men (1937)
Their Blood is Strong (1938)
The Long Valley (1938)
The Grapes of Wrath (1939)
The Sea of Cortez (1941)
The Moon is Down (1942)
Bombs Away (1942)
Lifeboat (1944)
Cannery Row (1945)
The Wayward Bus (1947)
The Pearl (1947)
A Russian Journal (1948)
Burning Bright (1950)
East of Eden (1952)
Sweet Thursday (1954)
The Short Reign of Pippin IV (1957)
The Winter of Our Discontent (1961)
Travels With Charley (1962)

VITA

Bennie L. DeWhitt

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Thesis: OKLAHOMANS' ATTITUDES TOWARD JOHN STEINBECK: 1939-1966

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Biographical:

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