

★ NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

The Oklahoma Historians Hall of Fame

**L. V. and Pat Baker, Steven K. Gragert,
Mike Larsen, and Arthur L. Tolson**

*By Paul F. Lambert**

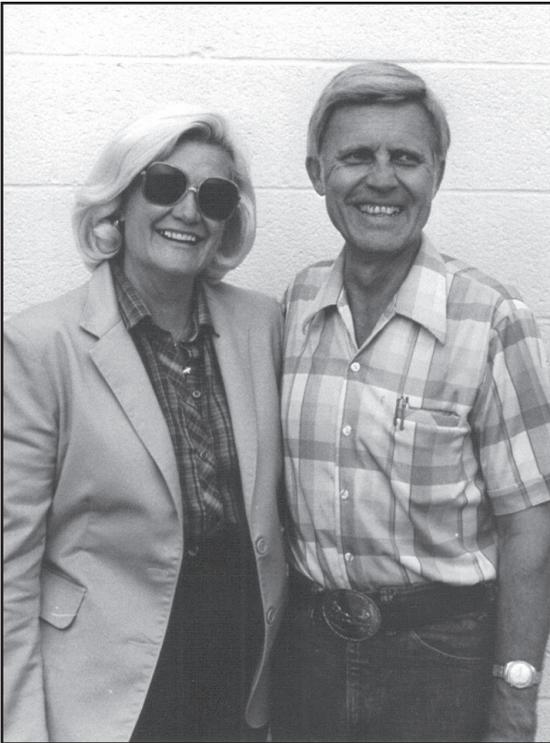
Since 1993 the Oklahoma Historical Society has annually honored up to four inductees, both professional and amateur, in its Oklahoma Historians Hall of Fame. Recipients are selected on the basis of their contributions to the preservation, collection, interpretation, and dissemination of Oklahoma history. These criteria were first published in *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 72 (Summer 1994). To date, ninety-seven individuals have been inducted.

Early honorees included Grant Foreman, Joseph B. Thoburn, Muriel H. Wright, Edward Everett Dale, and Angie Debo. In addition to historians, the award has been bestowed on artist Charles Banks Wilson, Cherokee genealogist Emmet Starr, author John Joseph Mathews, and Apache educator Mildred Imach Cleghorn. The inductees are honored at the awards banquet held during the Oklahoma Historical Society's Annual History Conference in April each year. In April 2016 L. V. and Pat Baker, Steven K. Gragert, Mike Larsen, and Arthur L. Tolson were inducted into the Oklahoma Historians Hall of Fame. The inductees are featured in this issue of *The Chronicles*.

L. V. and Pat Baker

Dr. L. V. and Pat Baker were inducted into the Oklahoma Historians Hall of Fame as a team for their outstanding work, beginning in the 1960s, to preserve the history and culture of Elk City and western Oklahoma. They were founding members of the Elk City Museum Board, both serving as chairperson of that board. They spearheaded the successful efforts to acquire and open to the public the Elk City Museum site, building, and exhibits. They led successful efforts to enhance the museum and then expand the concept to include the Old Town Museum, a representation of early day Elk City; the Farm and Ranch Museum, including tools used in early farm and ranch life in Oklahoma; and the National Route 66 Museum, displaying antique cars, artifacts, and historical documents about the Mother Road. For years, Pat served as the volunteer executive director and principal designer.

L. V. and Pat were cofounders of the Western Oklahoma Historical Society and the Western Oklahoma Hall of Fame, into which they were



Pat and L. V. Baker

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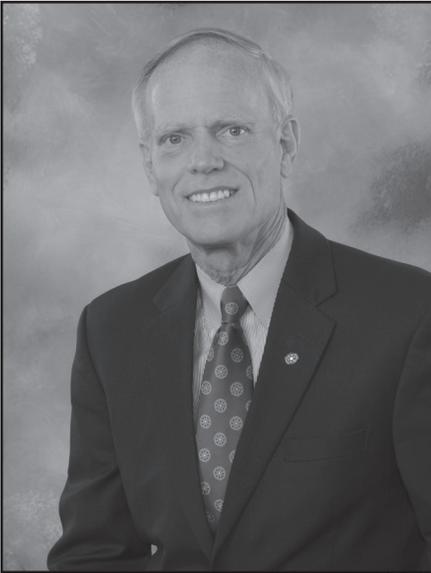
OHS Board President Bill Corbett (left) and OHS Executive Director Bob Blackburn presenting Oklahoma Historians Hall of Fame medallions to Pat and L. V. Baker at the OHS Annual History Conference Awards Luncheon, April 29, 2016.

inducted in 1979 for “bringing attention to, preserving the heritage of, or providing a more prosperous future for western Oklahoma.”¹ The Bakers have given generously of their time and treasure for more than fifty years in a variety of ways in addition to preserving Elk City’s and Oklahoma’s history and culture. A physician and surgeon, L. V. delivered more than three thousand babies and, with Pat, operated the nationally recognized Safari B Ranch, raising longhorn cattle. Yet, they found a remarkable amount of time for more than half a century to devote to preserving local and state history. The Oklahoma Historical Society is pleased to welcome L. V. and Pat Baker into the Oklahoma Historians Hall of Fame.

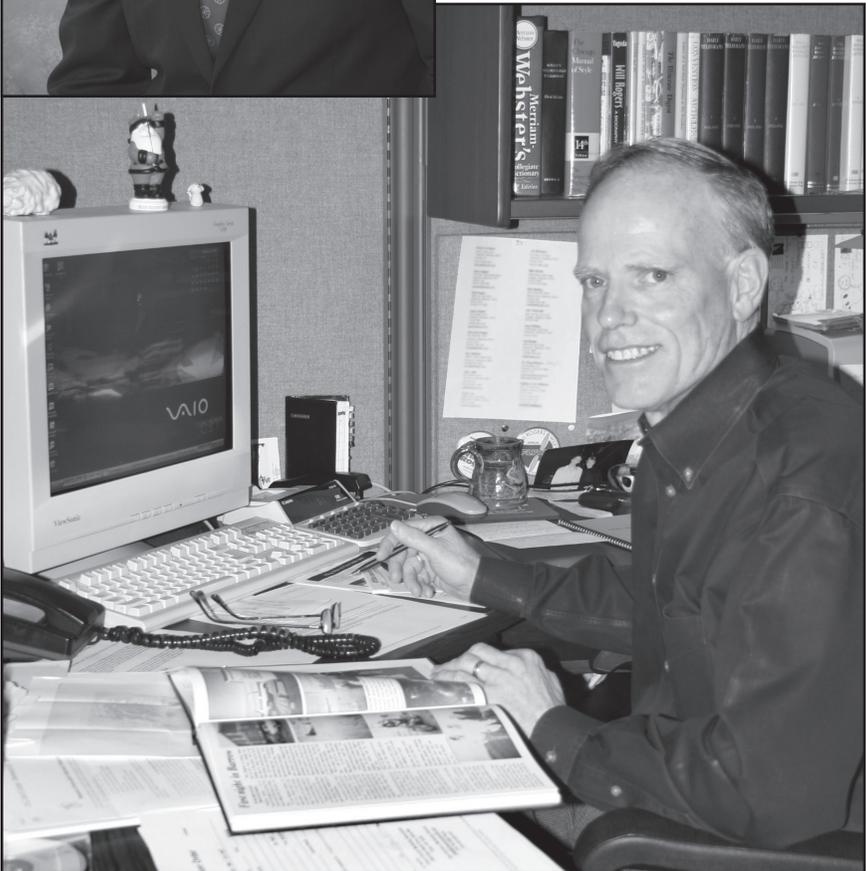
Steven K. Gragert

Steven K. Gragert of Claremore, Oklahoma, is a native Kansan who holds degrees from Bethany College at Lindsborg, Kansas, and Wichita State University. He pursued graduate studies at Oklahoma State University (OSU). Throughout his career he has played a predominant role in preserving the legacy of Oklahoma’s Favorite Son, Will Rogers. From 1976 to 1981 he served in various roles, including assistant editor

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Steven K. Gragert retired from his position as director of the Will Rogers Memorial Museum and Birthplace Ranch in 2014.



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of the Writings of Will Rogers project at OSU and from 1981 to 1983 he was the director of the Will Rogers Research Project at OSU. He served as a faculty member and coeditor of the Will Rogers Papers at Rogers State University from 2000 to 2004 before joining the staff at the Will Rogers Memorial as historian and head archivist in 2005.

Through the years, he has edited seventeen books of the various writings of Will Rogers, and compiled a cumulative index on the writings of Rogers. His most recent book, *The Papers of Will Rogers, Volume Five: The Final Years, August 1928–August 1935*, was published by University of Oklahoma Press in 2006. The work includes letters written by Rogers and a first-hand description of his funeral, among other documents.

In addition to his body of work on Will Rogers, Gragert served as president and publisher of Western Publications, a company headquartered in Stillwater that published internationally distributed books and magazines on Western Americana. He also was manager of Evans Publications, Inc., at Perkins, Oklahoma, where he was in charge of the publisher's book division. For his contributions to preserving the legacy of Will Rogers, the OHS welcomes Steven K. Gragert into the Oklahoma Historians Hall of Fame.

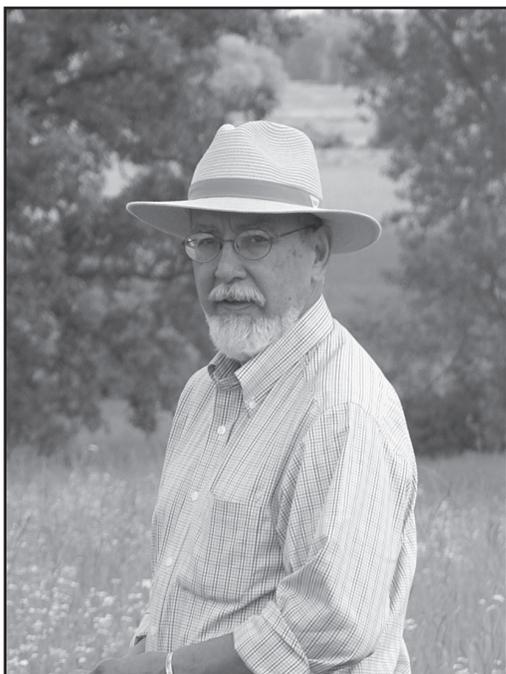
Mike Larsen

Mike Larsen describes himself as “a painter and sculptor of history.”² He is a nationally renowned artist who has preserved the history of the American West, tribal history, and Oklahoma history through his remarkable paintings and sculptures. A native of Texas and a member of the Chickasaw Nation, Larsen chose Perkins, Oklahoma, to be his home. As a child, he contracted polio, which affected his right side. He compensated by learning to use his left hand. Determined to become an artist, he studied art at the University of Houston and the famed Art Students League in New York.

Larsen is known for his emphasis on the hands and eyes of individuals in his paintings, believing that you can learn all you need to know about an individual by looking at their hands and eyes. He also is renowned for emphasizing historical accuracy in his work, spending a remarkable amount of time researching his subjects to depict all of the details in a historically accurate manner.

Among his many works are the *Flight of Spirit* mural (1991) in the Oklahoma State Capitol featuring Oklahoma's famed American Indian ballerinas, the monumental sculpture *The Arrival* (2012) at the

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Above: Mike Larsen

Below: Mike Larsen working on Flight of Spirit in the Oklahoma State Capitol Building, c. 1991.



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Chickasaw Cultural Center, eight historical murals illustrating the history of the Pokagan Band of the Potawatomi Tribe (2008), a painting depicting the Battle of the Washita, the Oklahoma Centennial postage stamp (2006), and forty-eight portraits of elders of the Chickasaw Nation. He currently is working on murals depicting the Civil War in Indian Territory for the Honey Springs Battlefield Visitors' Center under construction near Checotah, Oklahoma.

The OHS is delighted to induct Mike Larsen into the Oklahoma Historians Hall of Fame for his attention to historical detail in creating beautiful works of art.

Arthur L. Tolson

Arthur L. Tolson, who passed away in 2015 at the age of ninety-one, was Oklahoma's pioneer academic historian of the African American experience in the state. The son of internationally renowned poet and educator Melvin B. Tolson, Arthur Tolson was the first African American to earn a master's degree in history at Oklahoma State University (OSU), and he was the first African American to earn a doctorate in history from the University of Oklahoma (OU). He thereby blazed the path for subsequent African American graduate students in history at OSU and OU.

Tolson's thesis, "A History of Langston, Oklahoma, 1890–1950," and his dissertation, "The Negro in Oklahoma Territory, 1889–1907: A Study in Racial Discrimination," were groundbreaking studies in the field. His book, *The Black Oklahomans: A History, 1541–1972*, also was a pioneering work on the subject. Additionally, he did important research and writing on Oklahoma's All-Black towns.

Tolson taught at Colbert, Oklahoma, before joining the faculty at Butler College in Tyler, Texas. He then taught at Texas College in Tyler and Jarvis College in Hawkins, Texas, before joining the history faculty at Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in 1967. He taught at Southern for forty-five years, becoming a revered member of the department.

For his contributions to the scholarship on the African American experience in Oklahoma, the OHS is proud to induct Arthur L. Tolson into the Oklahoma Historians Hall of Fame.

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Above: Arthur L. Tolson

Below: Arthur L. Tolson, on right, paved the way for African American students to earn graduate degrees at both OU and OSU.



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Endnotes

* Dr. Paul F. Lambert recently retired from the Oklahoma Historical Society. He served as the director of development and annual conference coordinator for the OHS.

¹ Cheryl Overstreet, "WOHS Hall of Fame Inductees Named," *Elk City (OK) Daily News*, October 17, 2015, accessed May 17, 2016, www.ecdailynews.com/wohs-hall-of-fame-inductees-named.

² "About Mike & Martha Larsen," Larsen & Larsen Studio, accessed May 17, 2016, www.larsenstudio.com/about.html.