

## The Historic Preservation Movement in Oklahoma



*By LeRoy H. Fischer\**

In Oklahoma, as elsewhere, historic preservation began with human interest in both prehistoric and historic sites. Perhaps the earliest such indication was in the site of the Civil War Battle of Honey Springs, the Gettysburg of Indian Territory, located about seventeen miles south of Muskogee, often walked, rode horseback or drove carriages through the area by way of the Texas Road, which ran lengthwise through the center of the battleground. They sought out familiar natural features, viewed trees shattered by the Federal cannonade, and enjoyed the scenic beauty of prairie and dense forest enroute to Honey Springs Station, originally a stage stop and provision point on the Texas Road. Honey Springs was usually the focal point of these excursions, and picnics were sometimes held near the clear-flowing waters of the spring area or the ruins of the stone building purportedly used by the Confederate forces to house their powder. In later years, visits to the battlefield area continued with increasing frequency despite the closing of the Texas Road with the coming of

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United States Highway 69. The well-known Oklahoma historians, Dr. and Mrs. Grant Foreman of Muskogee, for example, sought out the battle site several times during the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>1</sup>

It was Joseph B. Thoburn during his career on the faculty of the University of Oklahoma from 1913 to 1917, who in modern times was the first person to become interested in Oklahoma's prehistoric sites. In the summer of 1916, Thoburn explored Big Mouth Cavern near Grove, Oklahoma, in Delaware County with a group of University of Oklahoma students. The archaeological dig continued for several weeks inside the cave and yielded bones and teeth of game animals, shells of mollusks, pieces of pottery, arrowheads, needles, awls and shuttles. The situation became complex when about two dozen local citizens congregated at the site of the dig and demanded to see the gold-filled teeth they had heard about. This resulted from a legend of the area that told of Spanish gold being buried near Big Mouth Cavern. To counteract the gold rumor, the young men on the dig spread a rumor that the cave was haunted by the awful Hecome-hicome monster which they said lurked deep within Big Mouth Cavern. The monster was reported to make ear-piercing screams and wails late each afternoon. The following Sunday afternoon large numbers of people gathered at the mouth of the cave to hear the monster. Inside the cave was John Joseph Mathews, one of the young men on the dig and a part-Osage Indian who later distinguished himself as an able writer and historian. First he played a flute some distance in the cave and then concluded with a variety of groans, wails and cries which crescendoed near the mouth of the cave. Then the other young men on the dig screamed at the top of their lungs, "It's the Hecome-hicome! He's coming out!" The visitors fled in terror, while the archaeological party acted its role of also fleeing. In the future the Thoburn party worked undisturbed.<sup>2</sup>

Although Thoburn pioneered in Oklahoma's archaeology, he likewise pioneered in the history of the state, his subject of primary interest. He carefully placed history in its geographic context, thus relating it closely to sites. His most important historical writings were his four comprehensive histories of Oklahoma. The first two were planned as school textbooks. The first edition of the textbooks appeared in 1908. Although Thoburn considered the book hastily done with numerous mistakes, it provided the basic outline for his remaining survey books on Oklahoma history. In 1914 he brought out a second edition, utilizing new materials and correcting mistakes.<sup>3</sup>

Thoburn in 1916 produced a multi-volume massive survey study of Oklahoma history. The first two volumes of the set contain history, and the remaining three volumes consist of biographies of subscribers. The two history volumes are based almost exclusively on primary research

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*Left: George H. Shirk, president of the Oklahoma Historical Society for nearly twenty years, spent much of his life identifying, exploring, researching, and writing about Oklahoma's historic sites (12962, George Shirk Collection, OHS).*

*Right: Joseph B. Thoburn, pioneer Oklahoma historian and archaeologist, wrote many site oriented articles and books (3732, W. P. Campbell Collection, OHS).*

materials because there were few secondary research materials to use. In 1929 he collaborated with Muriel H. Wright, the future editor of *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, in revising the multi-volume 1916 study. The set contains four volumes—two history, two biography. The two history volumes are characterized by more subject-matter footnotes, much historic site orientation, massive amounts of information and a relatively readable style. During his historical career between 1907 and 1940, Thoburn published many articles in *Sturm's Oklahoma Magazine*, *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* and in Oklahoma and Kansas newspapers. His articles dealt with military affairs, Indians and biography. He believed that history should be both accurate and readable.<sup>4</sup>

Although Thoburn did more than anyone to establish a broad base of interest in Oklahoma's historic and prehistoric sites, others were soon to follow. Grant Foreman's many books on Oklahoma are site oriented, especially *Down the Texas Road*, *Fort Gibson*, *Muskogee* and his collegiate textbook, *A History of Oklahoma*. Angie Debo published two site-related books, *Prairie City* and *Tulsa*. In addition, Arrell Morgan Gibson's *Oklahoma: A History of Five Centuries*, *The Chickasaws* and *Wilderness Bonanza: The Tri-State District of Missouri, Kansas, and*

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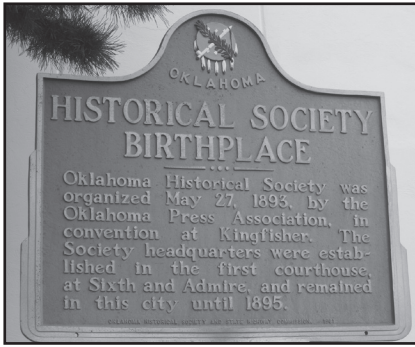
*Left: Grant Foreman, a prominent Oklahoma historian, wrote many site oriented books on the state's heritage (7367, Grant Foreman Collection, OHS).*

*Right: Muriel H. Wright, long-time editor of *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, promoted and personally engaged in extensive Oklahoma historic site research and publishing (20262.1357.1, Richard Lee and Hillerman Collection, OHS).*

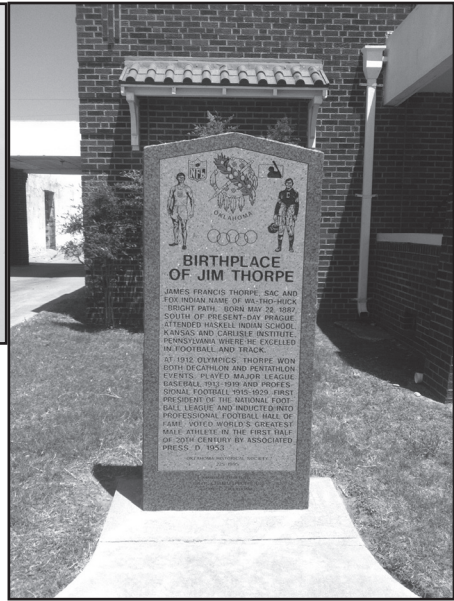
Oklahoma are also heavily site dominated. Kent Ruth's *Window on the Past* and *Oklahoma Travel Handbook* are significant site studies. Likewise, *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, in continuous publication since 1921, has regularly brought out many site-related articles. Thus the public of Oklahoma has had wide exposure to the significance of its historic sites over many years.<sup>5</sup>

As early as the 1920s, systematic identification and study of Oklahoma's prehistoric and historic sites began. This also was an important step in the development of historic preservation in Oklahoma. Leading this effort was Muriel H. Wright. Her interest in historic sites began as a child and adolescent when she visited such locations as Boggy Depot accompanied by her parents; climbed Mount Scott with her uncle, Frank Wright; and traveled a section of the Butterfield Overland Mail Route with another uncle, James B. Wright. Her first historic site article titled "Old Boggy Depot" was published in *The Daily Oklahoman* in 1922 and, after further research and revision, appeared in the March, 1927, number of *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*. In the summer of 1930, with J. Y. Bryce, a former administrative secretary of the Oklahoma Historical Society, and his wife, she made a six-week tour

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Above: Example of cast aluminum marker located in Kingfisher (Museums and Sites Division, OHS).



Right: A typical granite monolith marker. This marker is located in front of the Prague Historical Museum in Prague, Oklahoma (Museums and Sites Division, OHS).

of eastern and southeastern Oklahoma for the purpose of identifying, photographing, mapping and temporarily marking the historic sites of the area.<sup>6</sup>

Also in 1930, accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Roscoe P. Conkling, Miss Wright searched out all twelve station sites in Oklahoma on the Butterfield Overland Mail Route first operated in 1858; this information was subsequently published in Conkling's book on the Butterfield Overland Mail and was used for the Butterfield Overland Mail onsite marker program of the Oklahoma Historical Society at the time of the Butterfield centennial in 1958. Throughout her lifetime, Miss Wright continued vigorously to seek out, identify, research and write about the historic sites of Oklahoma.<sup>7</sup>

At about the same time that Miss Wright began to give her attention to the prehistoric and historic sites of Oklahoma, Dr. and Mrs. Grant Foreman explored and identified innumerable prehistoric and historic sites of eastern and northeastern Oklahoma. Soon the Anthropology Department and later the Oklahoma Archaeological Survey of the University of Oklahoma began to give special attention to prehistoric archaeological sites. These were of but passing interest to Miss Wright and the Foremans. With the close of World War II, George H. Shirk of Oklahoma City developed a deep interest in identifying and exploring historic sites in the state, an avocation he followed until his death in

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1977. Together with Miss Wright and the Foremans, he contributed a number of historic site articles to *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*.

Of major importance also in the development of historic preservation in Oklahoma is the historic site marker program of the Oklahoma Historical Society. Previous to the beginning of the program in 1949, there were perhaps not more than twenty-five permanent historical markers erected primarily by civic groups throughout the state. The state historic site marker program had its inception when a twenty-two year old legislator, John E. Wagner of Chandler, then a law student at the University of Oklahoma, introduced the idea to Charles Evans, the administrative secretary of the Oklahoma Historical Society. Wagner related to Evans his highly favorable reaction to the new historical markers he viewed as he traveled through New Mexico and other western states enroute to California. "He believed that if the Oklahoma Historical Society would permit him and at the same time join him in this movement," Evans related, "he would frame and introduce a bill for \$10,000 for the erection of as many markers of permanent kind as this money would buy." It was agreed also at the meeting that the Oklahoma Historical Society Board of Directors would approve the locations of the markers and the inscriptions on the markers. The legislation emerged as House Bill 267 of the Twenty-second Oklahoma State Legislature in 1949, with \$5,000 appropriated for each year of the 1949–1951 biennium. A popular bill with both Republicans and Democrats, it passed the houses of the legislature without noteworthy opposition and immediately was signed into law by Governor Roy J. Turner. A Historical Marker Committee then was appointed by the Board of Directors of the Oklahoma Historical Society composed of William S. Key, Charles Evans, George H. Shirk, Grant Foreman, Edward E. Dale and Muriel H. Wright to take charge of the work.<sup>8</sup>

The Oklahoma State Highway Department agreed to erect the markers and to maintain them if located on state highway right-of-way. Miss Wright carried on the basic research for inscriptions on the historical markers. The work of writing the inscriptions was divided equally between Miss Wright and Shirk, then recently elected to the Board of Directors of the Oklahoma Historical Society. Following approval by the Historical Marker Committee, the inscriptions were sent to the Sewah Studios of Marietta, Ohio, for casting. Each marker was cast of aluminum and is 40 by 42 inches in size, weighs about 200 pounds and has the inscription on both sides showing as silver against a green enamel background. The central design of the Oklahoma State Flag appears at the top of the markers. Across the bottom of the markers, the date of erection and the names of the Oklahoma Historical Society

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*Fullerton Dam, west of Altus in Jackson County, was constructed for irrigation uses near the turn of the twentieth century (Museum of the Western Prairie, OHS).*



and the Oklahoma State Highway Commission appear. Most of the markers contain a directional line under the caption giving the air-line distance from the markers located on highways to the historic sites. Where directional lines do not appear, the marker is on the historic site or the site is mentioned in the inscription. Each marker is mounted on a steel post about five feet in height.<sup>9</sup>

Precisely 100 historical markers were erected statewide in Oklahoma as a result of the \$10,000 appropriated for the purpose by the Oklahoma State Legislature in 1949. Most of the markers were placed along highways at turnout points so as to provide minimal danger to traffic, but a few were placed at or on historic sites. Following the erection of the initial markers provided by state funds, individuals and groups were encouraged to finance privately the erection of additional markers where needed. It was the decision of the Oklahoma Historical Society that the markers be of the same design, that the society write the inscriptions, superintend placements and make the marker purchases with private funds. According to Charles Evans, the administrative secretary of the Oklahoma Historical Society at the time, the initial marker effort in Oklahoma “stirred the whole state and made it, perhaps, more historically conscious than it had ever been.”<sup>10</sup>

Through 1977 ninety-three historical markers of the same design as those placed 1949 and 1950 by the Oklahoma Historical Society were erected under the supervision of the society with private funds. With increased speed of traffic on the highways, roadside markers were becoming more of a traffic hazard, and thus the program did not thrive. Meanwhile, to cope with the problem, the Oklahoma Historical Society encouraged the erection under its supervision of large onsite granite monolith markers, sometimes privately financed and sometimes subsidized in part by the Oklahoma Historical Society. Through 1977 thirty-four of these markers were located. Meantime, another marker need

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developed in Oklahoma with the construction of turnpikes and interstate highways. Again the Oklahoma Historical Society filled the need by developing roadside sign-type historical markers containing brief inscriptions that could be read at high vehicular speeds. Several of these have been erected. Soon after the original marker program of the Oklahoma Historical Society was developed, the organization worked out a design for small onsite markers and began the program. These markers consist of a small bronze plaque mounted on a concrete pedestal about two feet in height. Through 1977 sixty-five of these markers were erected. In the years since 1950, several local historical societies in Oklahoma have placed historical markers and the statewide Oklahoma Heritage Association began a historical marker program in 1975.<sup>11</sup>

The initial research work required for the historical marker programs of the Oklahoma Historical Society suggested a need for a systematic statewide survey of historic sites. This came less than a decade later in 1957 when the Oklahoma Historical Society was assigned the work of acquiring, maintaining, cataloging, marking and preserving the historic sites of the state by House Bill 573 of the Twenty-sixth Oklahoma State Legislature. In response to this mandate, William S. Key, President of the Oklahoma Historical Society, appointed the Oklahoma Historic Sites Committee, chaired by George H. Shirk, to conduct a historic sites survey. Thus another major step was accomplished for historic preservation. In 1958, when Shirk became president of the Oklahoma Historical Society, Dr. James D. Morrison, a professor of history at Southeastern Oklahoma State College, became chairman of the committee.

Most of the research for the historic sites survey rested with Muriel H. Wright, then the associate editor of *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*. She prepared a preliminary list of 512 historic sites for additions and modifications by the committee. The list as it finally came from the committee in 1958 contained 557 historic sites arranged by counties in alphabetical order. The brief site listings provided the name of the location, geographic orientation, sometimes even the land-call legal description and often a key date. When this list was published in the autumn, 1958, number of *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, and then republished as a reprint pamphlet, this was the extent of the work of the committee. The committee at the time anticipated further study on legal descriptions, easements and historical significance of the sites. "There will also be a study of the sites to be acquired by the Oklahoma Historical Society," the committee promised, "and the needs for their preservation." Although no further action was taken by the



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Left: *The last Cherokee National Capitol, completed about 1872, is in Tahlequah (2393, Grant Foreman Collection, OHS).*

Right: *An 1891 business structure in the Guthrie Historic Preservation District, presently restored and occupied by the Guthrie News Leader (OKSHPO, OHS).*

committee, the completion of the basic sites survey produced among many historically minded people an appreciation for the first time of the magnitude and significance of Oklahoma's historic sites.<sup>12</sup>

Following the initial historic sites survey of the Oklahoma Historical Society, interest continued over the years in Oklahoma in historic sites study and identification. The prime movers continued to be Muriel H. Wright and George H. Shirk. In the same year that the initial historic sites survey appeared in *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Wright and Shirk compiled and edited a booklet titled *Mark of Heritage: Oklahoma Historical Markers*. This publication listed 131 historic sites, described the location of the historical markers, gave the inscription on each marker, supplied many photographs and contained additional information on each historic site. A new edition of this publication was brought out in 1976 when Kenny A. Franks, the director of publications of the Oklahoma Historical Society, joined Wright and Shirk in producing a revised and updated *Mark of Heritage*. This book lists and illustrates 166 roadside markers, 30 granite markers, 57 onsite markers, all erected by the Oklahoma Historical Society, and 12 historic sites and 6 museums owned and operated by the Oklahoma Historical Society.<sup>13</sup>

Three specialized historic site surveys of Oklahoma have materialized. In 1966 Muriel H. Wright and LeRoy Fischer cooperated in preparing "Civil War Sites in Oklahoma" which appeared first in the summer, 1966, number of *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* and then as a booklet. Eighty-six historic sites concerning the Civil War in Oklahoma are listed; of these, twenty-nine are combat locations,

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while fifty-seven are war related. Whenever possible, the exact land-call legal description is given, together with the nearest highway and proximity of the site to it. The Civil War significance of each location is provided, and material is presented on the non-combat, war-related sites before and after the conflict, thus giving the essential historical setting. In 1967 the Oklahoma Arts and Humanities Council, the Oklahoma Chapter of the American Institute of Architects and the School of Architecture of Oklahoma State University cooperated to produce a specialized historic sites survey booklet titled *Oklahoma Landmarks: A Selection of Noteworthy Structures*. For the first time, historic architectural sites in Oklahoma were selected and studied. The booklet lists seventy-seven structures, provides a photograph of each and gives locations and descriptions.

Another new dimension appeared in 1974 with the publication of *An Inventory of Historic Engineering Sites in Oklahoma*, the work of Duane S. Ellifritt of the College of Engineering of Oklahoma State University. The project was underwritten by the Historic American Engineering Record of the National Park Service with the assistance of the Oklahoma Historical Society and Oklahoma State University. The existing historic structures of the state's transportation systems, commerce and industry, water supply and surveying are recorded, described and evaluated in detail. The sites are listed in three priority groupings. In another specialized site category, prehistoric archaeological surveys of Oklahoma are not published because of the vulnerability of prehistoric archaeological sites to vandalism. Approximately 5,000 prehistoric archaeological sites in the state are identified and in the records of the Oklahoma Archaeological Survey of the University of Oklahoma.<sup>14</sup>

Federal interest in state historic and prehistoric sites dates from the Antiquities Act of 1906, but not until the initiation of the Historic American Building Survey in 1933 and the National Historic Landmarks Program in 1960 did serious survey work commence in the National Park Service of the United States Department of the Interior. Then, in 1969 the Historic American Engineering Record was established under the direction of the National Park Service. In the main, sites in Oklahoma on these lists were designated without suggestion or urging by the Oklahoma Historical Society and were part of a larger program of national heritage themes worked out by the National Park Service. Under the authority of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, historic sites selected for these programs are listed automatically on the National Register of Historic Places.<sup>15</sup>

Oklahoma ranks well as of February, 1978, in the National Historic Landmarks Program with sixteen historic sites meeting the

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*The Heilman House, designed by Joseph Foucart, a noted French architect, is a residential structure in the Guthrie Historic Preservation District (OKSHPO, OHS).*



stringent criteria of national significance. They are Fort Washita in Bryan County; the Murrell Home and the Cherokee National Capitol in Cherokee County; Camp Nichols in Cimarron County; Fort Sill in Comanche County; the Deer Creek Archaeological Site and the 101 Ranch in Kay County; Wheelock Academy in McCurtain County; Fort Gibson in Muskogee County; Boley Historic District in Okfuskee County; the Creek National Capitol in Okmulgee County; Washita Battlefield in Roger Mills County; Sequoyah's Cabin and the Parris Mound in Sequoyah County; the Stamper Archaeological Site in Texas County; and the McLemore Archaeological Site in Washita County. The Historic American Building Survey as of February, 1978, lists two sites in Oklahoma; they are the Guthrie Historic District in Logan County and Fort Gibson in Muskogee County. The Historic American Engineering Record as of February, 1978, also lists two sites in Oklahoma: they are the Fullerton Dam in Jackson County and the Jenson Railroad Tunnel in Le Flore County. With increasing study in Oklahoma of its building and engineering historic sites, and greater emphases in the Washington offices concerned, more designations of national significance in these areas will likely be forthcoming for Oklahoma.<sup>16</sup>

When the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, which established the National Register of Historic Places, and Executive Order 11593 of May 31, 1971, which specified that the "Federal Government shall provide leadership in preserving, restoring and maintaining the historic and cultural environment of the nation," became operational, historic site identification, study and preservation in Oklahoma and throughout the nation experienced dynamic renewal. Listing on the National Register of Historic Places brings eligibility to private and local public property for federal grants-in-aid consideration for historic preservation through state programs. The National Register also provides protection of historic sites through comment by

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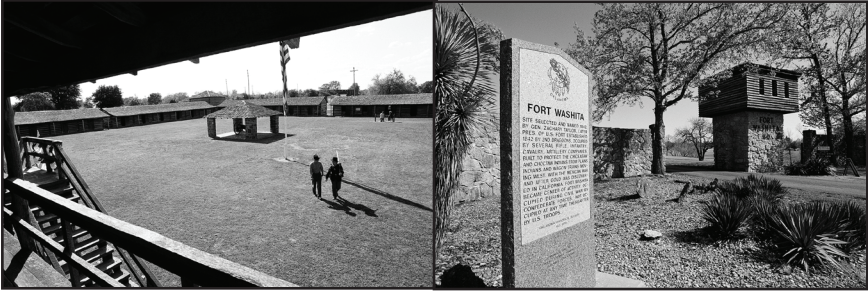


*The Murrell Home, the finest antebellum house remaining in Oklahoma, was erected in 1844 and is at historic Park Hill in Cherokee County (Museums and Sites Division, OHS).*

the National Advisory Council on Historic Preservation on the effect of federally financed, assisted, or licensed undertakings on historic properties. Thus, the federal government now provides substantial assistance to Oklahoma and the other states for the development of historic preservation in its varied aspects.<sup>17</sup>

The substantial historic preservation efforts of Joseph B. Thoburn, Muriel H. Wright, George H. Shirk and the Oklahoma Historical Society began to pay off when Shirk was appointed the Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Officer, under authority of the national Historic Preservation Act of 1966, by Governor Dewey F. Bartlett in February, 1967. Governor David Hall removed Shirk and named Donald G. Coffin of Guthrie to the post in August, 1974. Governor David L. Boren reappointed Shirk as Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Officer in January, 1975, and he continued in that capacity until his death in March, 1977. Governor Boren designated Dr. Harry L. Deupree, a doctor of medicine of Oklahoma City, for the post in April, 1977. The Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Officer has not worked for compensation since the creation of the post in 1967. During the first years of work of the Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Officer, a full-time office staff did not exist, but in November, 1975, Howard L. Meredith became full-time Director of Historic Preservation for the Oklahoma Historical Society and for the Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Officer, with an office in the Oklahoma Historical Society Building in Oklahoma City. Working fulltime also in the office is Melvena K. Thurman, an architectural historian; Bill E. Peavler, AIA, an architect; and archaeologist Richard Drass. Part-time staff members are archaeologists Donald G. Wyckoff, Larry Neal, and Lois Sanders, and Kent Ruth, a field deputy. Present members of the Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Review Commission are Guy W. Logsdon, chairman, LeRoy H. Fischer, Robert E. Bell, James L. Loftis, Roy P. Stewart, Frederick A. Olds, and Gerald Galm. A ten-member Advisory Committee to the commission is chaired by Fischer.<sup>18</sup>

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*Left: The Fort Gibson stockade as it presently appears. The reconstruction dates from the 1930s and is in the town of Fort Gibson.*

*Right: Historic Fort Washita, established in 1843, is in Bryan County.*

Largely through the personal work of George H. Shirk, the first Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Officer, planning and initial developmental efforts commenced in Oklahoma under authority of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. A few historic sites were nominated to the National Register of Historic Places, and Shirk personally prepared the text for the first *Oklahoma Statewide Historic Sites Survey and Preservation Plan*, published in 1970 and submitted for approval to the National Park Service of the United States Department of the Interior. The inventory lists 220 historic and prehistoric sites and locations in Oklahoma by three methods: (1) alphabetical, (2) by county and (3) by theme. Initially, 125 of the sites were proposed for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. The book also contains a comprehensive historic sites plan for Oklahoma which categorizes the locations into four groupings: (1) sites where acquisition is desirable at once, (2) sites where acquisition is desirable on a long-range basis, (3) sites where preservation is planned through cooperative agreement with other governmental agencies and persons and (4) sites where no further action is planned. Elaborate descriptions explain the significance of each site. Additionally, the volume contains thirty-seven photographic illustrations and a foldout locations map and picture collage. Kent Ruth edited, assembled and collated the study; Paul LeFebvre prepared the graphics and took charge of reproduction. The plan soon won the praise of the National Park Service.<sup>19</sup>

The creation of the first Oklahoma comprehensive historic sites and preservation plan was basically the work, both in concept and content, of George H. Shirk. He drew upon his vast, first-hand knowledge of Oklahoma history and his hopes for historic site development to compose the basic framework of the survey and plan. Over the years he

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personally visited many times each of the 220 sites listed in the book. When the comprehensive historic sites survey and preservation plan was needed, he took several weeks from his law practice to work full-time at writing it. Periodically, new editions of the survey and plan have appeared, but the basic content and organization continues to be his work.<sup>20</sup>

The Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Officer and the Oklahoma Historic Preservation Review Commission supervise a variety of prehistoric and historic site survey and preservation activities. Of much importance is the research, survey and writing needed to submit worthy state prehistoric and historic site applications to the office of the Secretary of the Interior for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. By February, 1978, 169 prehistoric and historic sites in 57 of Oklahoma's 77 counties were on the National Register of Historic Places. Currently, contracts for site submission work are being conducted for the office of the Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Officer by the University of Oklahoma and the Oklahoma State University. Federal matching grants-in-aid for public and private historic site development are another concern of the Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Officer. A number of matching grants have already been made for Oklahoma historic sites on the National Register of Historic Places and with increases in federal funding, the program is growing. During the federal fiscal year of 1977, work was carried out with grant money on twelve projects and completed on five. From the beginning of the federal grant program through the federal fiscal year of 1978, Oklahoma received \$924,768.86, from a low of \$82,082 in fiscal 1973, the first year of the program, to a high of \$382,000 in fiscal 1978. Oklahoma's federal fund expenditures for historic preservation were interrupted by the removal of George H. Shirk as the Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Officer for an interim period in 1974 during the Governor David Hall administration. Other work of the office of the Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Officer and the Oklahoma Historic Preservation Review Commission includes the compilation and publication of the annual preservation plan and occasional pamphlets designed to explain and encourage historic preservation, including a bi-monthly brochure titled *Outlook in Historic Conservation*. Additionally, the office maintains a continuing inventory of historic sites and each year conducts many review and compliance activities.<sup>21</sup>

In Oklahoma the development of historic sites falls primarily on the state. Two state departments, the Oklahoma Historical Society through its Historic Sites Division, and the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department through its Parks Division, have developed most historic sites. The preservation programs utilizing historians,

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archaeologists, planners, engineers, and architects in addition to state and federal monies. Although the Oklahoma Historical Society had its beginnings in 1893 and the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department origins extend back only to 1931, the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department was the first to develop a number of historic sites. Likely the first was the reconstruction of the Fort Gibson stockade in the 1930s; soon came the restoration of the Murrell Home at historic Park Hill. Not until House Bill 573 of the Twenty-sixth Oklahoma State Legislature became law in 1957 was the Oklahoma Historical Society in a legal status to acquire and develop historic sites. Beginning in the middle 1960s, numerous historic sites and museums were acquired and developed by the Oklahoma Historical Society. The historic sites usually came as gifts, and the museums were developed through legislative appropriations or acquired by transfer from the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department. At the close of 1977, the Oklahoma Historical Society had twelve staffed historic sites open to the public, two of which contain museums. The Oklahoma Historical Society also had seven staffed museums under its supervision. In addition, the Oklahoma Historical Society has jurisdiction over about sixty non-staffed historic sites. The Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department at the close of 1977 had seven staffed museums and nine staffed historic sites under its jurisdiction. Five non-staffed historic sites are also its responsibility. Thus, jurisdiction of state controlled historic sites and museums is shared by the Oklahoma Historical Society and the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department, with the major responsibility for historic sites in the hands of the Oklahoma Historical Society.<sup>22</sup>

Historic preservation in Oklahoma thus has a rich and varied heritage. The state has a sound foundation upon which to develop its historic site resources. Public interest in Oklahoma in historic preservation, almost a century old, seems as deeply rooted in the state's culture as the unique nature of its historic sites. The Oklahoma State Legislature, judging from its increasing appropriations each year for the development of historic sites, appears to be responding to strong and persistent public sentiment in support of historic preservation. All indications are that the federal government will continue with ever-increasing annual matching appropriations for the development of Oklahoma's historic sites. Debt-free Oklahoma is fiscally and culturally ready to meet the federal preservation challenge. No other state is better prepared by virtue of its historic preservation background and sound financing to lead the nation in developing its historic site heritage.

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### Endnotes

\* LeRoy H. Fischer became a professor of history at Oklahoma State University in 1946, where he taught for thirty-eight years and retired as the Oppenheim Professor of History. He served on the Oklahoma Historical Society Board of Directors from 1966 to 2009, and the OHS inducted him into the Oklahoma Historians Hall of Fame in 1995. He championed the preservation of Old Central on the Oklahoma State University campus and the Honey Springs Battlefield near Checotah, and was a member of the Historic Preservation Review Committee from 1978 to 2008. The author, coauthor, or editor of eight books and more than seventy articles on Oklahoma history, Fischer devoted his career to preserving and sharing Oklahoma history. The board room at the Oklahoma History Center in Oklahoma City is named in his honor. Fischer passed away in 2014 at the age of ninety-six. This article first appeared in *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 57, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 3–25. The text and citations appear as it did in the original publication, excepting the use of endnotes instead of footnotes and some photograph substitutions.

<sup>1</sup> Unidentified Newspaper Clipping, Battle of Honey Springs Folder, Grant Foreman Collection, Indian Archives, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Interview, Mrs. Grant Foreman, July 17, 1963; LeRoy H. Fischer, “The Honey Springs National Battlefield Park Movement,” *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XLVII, No. 1 (Spring, 1969), p. 515.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Frank Lambert, “Pioneer Historian: The Life of Joseph B. Thoburn” (Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, 1975), pp. 57–63; Elmer L. Fraker, “With Thoburn at Honey Creek,” *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 1 (Spring, 1956), pp. 44–52.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph B. Thoburn and Isaac M. Holcomb, *A History of Oklahoma* (San Francisco: Doub and Company, 1908), and J. B. Thoburn and Isaac M. Holcomb, *A History of Oklahoma* (Oklahoma City: Warden Company, 1914); Lambert, “Pioneer Historian: The Life of Joseph B. Thoburn,” p. 171.

<sup>4</sup> J. B. Thoburn, *A Standard History of Oklahoma* (5 vols., Chicago and New York: American Historical Society, 1916); J. B. Thoburn and Muriel H. Wright, *Oklahoma: A History of the State and Its People* (4 vols., New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1929); Lambert, “Pioneer Historian: The Life of Joseph B. Thoburn,” pp. 171–172.

<sup>5</sup> Grant Foreman, *Down the Texas Road: Historic Places Along Highway 69 Through Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1936); Grant Foreman, *Fort Gibson: A Brief History* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1936); Grant Foreman, *Muskogee: The Biography of an Oklahoma Town* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1943); Grant Foreman, *A History of Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1942); Angie Debo, *Prairie City: The Story of an American Community* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1944); Angie Debo, *Tulsa: From Creek Town to Oil Capital* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1943); Arrell Morgan Gibson, *Oklahoma: A History of Five Centuries* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965); Arrell Morgan Gibson, *The Chickasaws* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971); Arrell Morgan Gibson, *Wilderness Bonanza: The Tri-State District of Missouri, Kansas, and Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972); Kent Ruth, *Window on the Past* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Publishing Company, 1974); Kent Ruth, *Oklahoma Travel Handbook* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977).

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