

THE OKLAHOMA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

By Robert L. Williams

From the days of the explorer, trapper, Indian, trader, buffalo, the Texas Road, the California, Marcy, and Chisholm Trails, through the years of Indian wars and battles, down to the era of the various runs and openings to settlers, the story of Oklahoma illustrates adventure, romance, and interesting pioneer activity.

Coronado, La Harpe, De Soto, Nuttall, the Chouteaus, Albert Pike, Washington Irving, Bonneville, Chisholm, Worcester, Payne, Kingsbury, Byington, Harrell, Bacone, and Murrow, names every Oklahoman should have fresh in mind, with many others of equal or greater importance and no less engrossing accomplishments and deeds, are generally little known. More Oklahomans should be familiar with the work and the resources of the Oklahoma Historical Society and appreciate what a vital contribution it has made and is now making in its endeavors to preserve our history and make it available for use, study, and the promotion of knowledge.

The Society was founded on May 26, 1893, at the annual meeting of the Oklahoma Territorial Press association at Kingfisher. The following year another society was organized at the University of Oklahoma at Norman. In January, 1895, a charter was granted, creating the Society. Shortly thereafter an enactment by the Territorial legislature resulted in the consolidation of the two societies into one organization. With the Governor as an ex-officio member, the twenty-five directors of the Society are intended to represent the whole and different parts of the state, serving without pecuniary compensation or allowance for maintenance and traveling expenses. In 1929 the Legislature appropriated \$500,000 out of an accumulated public building fund for the erection of a building, including equipment and furnishings, for the Society and its collections, which was constructed under the joint action of the State Board of Public Affairs and the Board of Directors of the Society. An eminent historian has said, "The Society is now housed in an adequate building

of a class usually dedicated to similar purposes, surpassed by few and excelling in beauty and utility those of a great many other states."

Within its building is maintained a museum, Union Soldiers' Memorial Hall, Confederate Memorial Hall, library, newspaper collection, Indian and other archives, halls for World War organizations, an auditorium, and space for co-operating organizations, including the D. A. R. and the Eighty Niners. It takes care of rare books, newspapers, manuscripts, letters, diaries, pictures, statues, flags, and materials illustrative of the history of Oklahoma, to transmit to posterity knowledge of the lives and deeds of the explorers and pioneers and occupants of the Southwest, and collects typical specimens of the arts and crafts, and the legends and traditions of the Indian tribes. Information is afforded students, professional persons, writers, and many others by the co-operation of staff members through the use of its various collections.

The Chronicles of Oklahoma

The Society publishes a quarterly historical magazine, *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, sending it free to its members. In its articles the reader is given a clear picture of the leading figures and most interesting phases of Oklahoma history. The public frequently finds it helpful in gathering relevant information. This publication, promoting an interest in Oklahoma history, is available in the schools, colleges, and public libraries of the state. A sample, free copy of *The Chronicles*, will be sent upon request to a person desiring to become a member of the Society.

The Library

The Library has a well selected collection of 20,000 volumes, devoted largely to the history, characters, industries, and resources of Oklahoma, the Indians, and the Southwest. The Society receives the publications of many historical and other learned societies located in both this country and abroad.

Collections

We have many valuable collections, such as the J. B. Milam, the T. N. Athey, and the Grant Foreman, all of which, with many manuscripts and other data, are available for the use of students.

Public Archives

The archives of the Society contain minutes, debates, the journal of the Constitutional Convention; approximately 1,520,000 items and 14,000 volumes of historical data from county seats, including 112 volumes of Oklahoma City records; 8,774 pages relating to the Union soldiers and their organizations from the old Union Soldiers' Home and also valuable Confederate records.

The Indian Archives Division

The Indian Archives division, depository for official federal Indian documents, has received 2,380,000 pieces and 2,100 bound volumes, dating from 1840, including records from twelve Indian

agencies and Indian schools of the state and private collections of Indian papers. Lawyers who use these records recognize their legal importance as to evidence relating to titles. Data is elicited frequently therefrom as to heirship, which is available not only to the abstracter and title examiner, but also to the heirs and those interested in having a valuable storehouse of accurate information.

The Union Soldiers' Memorial Hall

In this room are found pictures of Abraham Lincoln and his cabinet, and of leaders and generals on the side of the Union in the War between the States. An interesting display traces the development of the American Flag from its earliest beginnings. Many different relics illustrative of the War for the Preservation of the Union are on display.

The Confederate Memorial Hall

The Confederate Memorial Hall contains volumes of Southern History and objects and relics relating to Confederate history, ranging in size and character from a Minie ball to the large Confederate Flag carried by the Louisiana "Tigers." On the walls of this room hang photographs and paintings of Confederate generals, the President, Vice-President, and all the Confederate cabinet members and many prominent Southern men and women.

The Newspaper Division

The Society has one of the largest collections of newspapers in the United States, there now being in its files 19,000 bound volumes arranged alphabetically and chronologically in steel cabinets in a fire-proof room, in constant use by research students in preparing masters' theses, doctoral dissertations, and historical works. A large number of others have used them in securing proof of legal publications, clearing titles, and vital statistics, and in procuring evidence where notices published as a part of judicial proceedings and records have been lost by fire or otherwise.

The Society now receives 59 daily and 220 weekly newspapers for use and preservation, which are bound and catalogued. Approximately 900,000 index cards of such papers to facilitate research, are available.

Pictures and Maps

A number of pictures dealing largely with Oklahoma subjects may be seen, both in the art gallery and in the museum. An extensive collection of maps and charts, both printed and in manuscript, are in our archives.

Biographical Index

Under the direction of Grant Foreman a biographical index was started in 1937 by Works Progress Administration workers, to eventuate into a card for each Oklahoman about whom there is information in the library.

The Museum

Thousands of persons visit the museum collections each year, and great numbers of school children come, accompanied by their teachers, to inspect many interesting objects illustrative of the life of the pioneers, Indians, and explorers.

The Sequoyah Home

The Oklahoma Historical Society, with the co-operation of the Works Progress Administration, restored the log home of Sequoyah, the inventor of the Cherokee alphabet, and built over it a durable stone house and enclosed its grounds with a handsome and enduring wall.

Fort Gibson

The Society also co-operated with the State in the restoration of the old barracks and ammunition building at this historic fort. Assistance was given by our Director of Historical Research in the reconstruction of the log stockade on the former frontier site.

Rose Hill

The grave and family cemetery of the well known Choctaw, Robert M. Jones—promoter and patron of education, supporter of missions, merchant prince, planter, and statesman (delegate from the Choctaw Nation to the Congress of the Confederate States of America)—was restored under the direction of the President of the Society with the co-operation of a special committee, and the State Administrator of the Works Progress Administration.

Membership

The Society has been fortunate through the years in enlisting the interest of many of the outstanding men and women of our state as officers, directors, and members. The annual membership dues are \$1 which include an accompanying year's subscription to the quarterly historical magazine, *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*. The life membership cost of \$25 includes a life subscription to *The Chronicles*, with fifteen available back numbers of the magazine. Oklahomans and those interested in Oklahoma history and its preservation are invited to become members. A membership is an opportunity to assist in such preservation and to encourage wider use and knowledge of the Society's facilities, and to place one's name on the historical honor roll of the state. Applications for membership may be sent with the dues to the Oklahoma Historical Society, Historical Building, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. A membership application blank will be sent gladly upon the request of those desiring membership, by the Secretary, James W. Moffitt.