

FOREIGN TRAVELERS IN OKLAHOMA, 1900-1950

*By Lawrence S. Thompson**

During the first part of the twentieth century nineteen foreigners who visited Oklahoma wrote about the state more or less extensively in the books that they published about their travels. Ten of these books are in German, four in French, two in Danish, one in Swedish, one in Dutch, and one in Portuguese (by a Brazilian). Two volumes report travels in the first decade of the century; two, between 1910 and 1920; five, between 1920 and 1930; seven, between 1930 and 1940; and three between 1940 and 1950.

Two outstanding facts of the culture of Oklahoma stand out in the eyes of these foreign writers, the oil industry and the Indian citizens of the state. Most writers refer to the oil industry, and Lazard, Lewinsohn, and Wollschlaeger discuss it in some detail. The sensational aspects of oil overshadow everything else in the state's economy for outsiders, and even agriculture is given very little attention. One writer (Müller), a cement manufacturer, does discuss the cement plant at Ada, but otherwise Europeans might easily believe that virtually all Oklahomans are in the oil business!

The contribution of citizens who are partly or wholly of Indian descent to the development of the state has been clearly recognized by foreign writers. Authors such as Demaison, Maurois, and Zimmermann give full credit to the original inhabitants of the state and their descendants for the remarkable development of Oklahoma's culture and economy. It is interesting to note that, while most Southern states (including Texas and Arkansas) are severely criticized by foreign writers for their treatment of the Negroes, such is not the case with Oklahoma, where, in general, they found a much greater degree of tolerance. Andrésen, who was in Oklahoma, criticizes adversely the American attitude toward Negroes in general, but he cites no examples of discrimination from Oklahoma. Ericsson, a Swedish hobo in search of the colorful, found an embryonic lynch mob in Guymon, but there is no evidence that this mob actually committed an act of violence.

The cities of Oklahoma are virtually ignored. A couple of writers refer briefly to Oklahoma City, another to Tulsa, and a few others to smaller communities; and they even by-pass the great cultural centers at Norman and Stillwater. Except for some of the hoboes and adventurers (Ericsson, Heye, Rosen-Carlé, and Schönauer),

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most of the visitors did not come to Oklahoma as tourists in search of recreation.

It is unfortunate that Europeans and South Americans have no full and fair picture of Oklahoma. Other states in the South and the Southwest of no greater cultural and economic importance than Oklahoma have been treated much more extensively by foreign writers. To some extent this situation is due to the fact that Oklahoma is not on the main routes followed by travellers from the east coast to the west coast; and to some extent it is due to the fact that agencies and organizations which sponsor the visits of foreigners have not routed them in this direction. Nevertheless, what the relatively few foreign writers who have visited the state have said about their visit is of considerable importance on account of their perspective and, in many cases, their objectivity. Chambers of commerce and promotional agencies can frequently gather all the facts but miss the mark completely in their interpretation of the spirit of the people.

The following bibliography summarizes briefly the books by the nineteen "Foreign Travelers in Oklahoma, 1900-1950":

ANDRÉSEN, GEORG. *Dette forbloeffende Amerika*. Aarhus, Forlaget Aros, 1949. 208 p. Date: Probably soon before publication. Andrésen does not refer to specific places and dates in Oklahoma, but he did visit the state. Like most Europeans, he is indignant at all evidences of racial discrimination, and he records his reaction to this situation in the chapter entitled "Det sorte Amerika og det 'hvide'" (p. 152-172). He makes many valuable observations on the social and economic condition of the United States in the prosperous era following World War II.

DEMAISON, ANDRÉ. *Terre d'Amérique (grands et petits chemins des États-Unis)*. Paris, Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1939. 336 p. Date: Probably soon before publication. The greater part of this book (up to Part V, p. 291) is devoted to the author's travels in Louisiana, Texas, Oklahoma, Florida, and Virginia. In general he is much more interested in traditions and manners than in social and economic problems, and he writes in a thoroughly delightful style. The treatment of the history and the present status of the Indian in Oklahoma is probably the best discussion of this subject available in any European book.

DOUYAU, JEAN. *Au temps où l'Oncle Sam se militarisait*. . . Paris, Jouve & Cie., 1921. 260 p. Date: 31 October 1917—20 October 1918. The author, a French army officer, was sent to America as an observer and instructor in military camps. His itinerary carried him to Fort Sill; but here he notes nothing that is typical of Oklahoma, only the uniform picture of the army camp that he had seen in other parts of the country.

ECKENER, HUGO. *Im Zeppelin über Länder und Meere. Erisbnisse und Erinnerungen.* Flensburg, Verlagshaus Christian Wolff, 1949. 565 p. Date: 1929. On the last leg of Captain Eckener's now famous circumnavigation via Zeppelin in 1929 he stopped at El Paso (p. 273-274), and he includes a brief description of the farming country in the area between El Paso and Kansas City, including much of Oklahoma.

ERICSSON, GUSTAF. *Bland fångar och filmhjältar i U.S.A.* Stockholm, Albert Bonniers Förlag, 1924. 265 p. Date: Winter of 1922. Ericsson, a Swedish hobo, left Kansas City one jump ahead of the police, and his first stop was Guymon, where he witnessed the activities of an embryonic lynch mob but left town for Dalhart, Texas, before an act of violence was committed.

HEYE, ARTUR. *In Freiheit dressiert.* Zürich, Albert Müller Verlag, 1940. 159 p. Date: Probably soon before World War I. This is the story of a German hobo in America in the early part of the century. He reports his adventures as an itinerant laborer and tramp in Oklahoma on p. 126 *et seq.* and sheds a little light on the life of this level of society. Heye's *Wanderer ohne Ziel; von abenteuerlichem Zwei- und Vierbein* (Berlin, Safari-Verlag, 1925; 304 p.) is based on the same adventures, although he omits Oklahoma in this earlier volume.

HOPPÉ, EMIL OTTO. *Die Vereinigten Staaten; das romantische Amerika, Baukunst, Landschaft and Volksleben.* Berlin, Atlantic-Verlag, 1930. 304 p. Date: 1927 (?). In this collection of 304 photographs from all over the United States by a master of the craft there is a remarkable picture of White Horse Eagle, Oklahoma Osage chief, on p. 90.

LAZARD, DIDIER. *Contrastes américains.* Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1940. 236 p. Date: September 1939. On p. 228-230 Didier describes Oklahoma City, which he finds promising and progressive by virtue of the dynamic oil industry. On p. 230-231 he contrasts Oklahoma City with Charleston, S. C., and finds the latter as moribund as the former is progressive. In general Lazard's observations are rather superficial.

LEWINSOHN, RICHARD. *Die Welt aus den Fugen: Amerika in der Krise.* Dresden, Carl Reisener Verlag, 1932. 275 p. Date: Soon before date of publication. On p. 163-174 there is an account of the crisis in the oil industry in Texas and Oklahoma. Lewinsohn gives a brief historical sketch of Oklahoma and an account of the measures taken by "Alfalfa Bill" Murray to put an end to the crisis.

LÜTHI, GOTTLIEB. *Wanderjahre in Amerika; Reiseerlebnisse schweizerischer Jungbauern aus Kanada und den Vereinigten Staaten.* Bern, Selbstverlag des Verfassers, 1932. 159 p. Date: May 1929.

Lüthi, an adventurous young Swiss who took a transcontinental tour, gives a few brief notes on the geography, economy, and demography of Oklahoma on p. 142-143.

MAUROIS, ANDRÉ. *États-Unis 39; journal d'un voyage en Amérique*. Paris, Les Éditions de France, 1939. 198 p. Date: 15 February—17 May 1938. Maurois, although fair and reasonable, does not pretend to give more than a few fleeting impressions of the South and Southwest. He visited Tulsa and while there jotted down a few notes on the history and present status of the Indians in Oklahoma, a brief but honest picture of this important group.

MÜLLER, ALFRED. *Meine Reise nach Amerika. Vortrag, gehalten auf der Sommerversammlung des Vereins Deutscher Portland-Cement-Fabrikanten E.V. vom 8. bis 10. September 1926 in Hannover*. Charlottenburg, Zementverlag G.m.b.H., 1926. 37 p. Date: Three months in 1925. On p. 17-18 Müller describes the Oklahoma Portland Cement Company's plant in Ada.

NIELSEN, ROGER. *Amerika i Billeder og Text*. Copenhagen, H. Aschehoug & Co., 1929. 319 p. Date: Probably soon before publication. This work by a press attaché at the Danish Legation in Washington is a monumental collection of geographical, historical, political, ethnological, sociological, economic, commercial, educational, and agricultural information; and he has matched his data with typical photographs from each state (including Oklahoma) to form a virtual encyclopedia of the United States. Each state is given a separate section.

ROSEN-CARLÉ, ERWIN. *Der deutsche Lausbub in Amerika; Erinnerungen und Eindrücke*. Stuttgart, Verlag Robert Lutz, 1911. 3 v. Date: From about 1894 until about 1900. After miscellaneous adventures in Texas, Rosen-Carlé becomes a knight of the rails and departs from the southwest via Guthrie, whose physical aspects he describes briefly.

SCHÖNAUER, GEORG. *Tramp und Farmer in USA; fünf Jahre kreuz und quer durch die Staaten*. Berlin, Im Deutschen Verlag, 1938. 270 p. Date: Five years in the early 1930s or possibly the late 1920s. Schönauer, like Rosen-Carlé, was an adventurous German who travelled over the entire United States as a hobo. On p. 99 he describes Oklahoma City as he saw it by night, but his main impression is that the population is predominantly Negro!

VERISSIMO, ERICO. *Gato preto em campo de neve*. Porto Alegre, Edição da Livraria do Globo, 1941. 420 p. Date: Probably 1941. P. 283-288 are devoted to brief visits to Houston and Oklahoma City, about which he gives basic geographic facts only.

VLEKKE, BERNARD HUBERTUS MARIA. *Amerika en wij*. Boermond, J. J. Ronen & Zonen, 1948. 344 p. Date: Soon after World War II.

While the author does not give his itinerary, he did visit Oklahoma. His book is an understanding and rational account of the United States as a whole, its political, economic, educational, and religious problems.

WOLLSCHLAEGER, ALFRED ("A. E. Johann," pseudonym). *Amerika: Untergang am Überfluss*. Berlin, Im Verlag Ullstein, 1932. 256 p. Date: Winter of 1931-32. Wollschlaeger, a doctrinaire Nazi even before the assumption of power by Hitler, was one of the first journalists to promote the "hate America" campaign in the Germany of the thirties. He attempts to find fault with everything he observes and reports unfavorable facts to the exclusion of favorable ones. Thus on p. 83-90 he tells the story of the oil crises in Texas and Oklahoma in this tone.

ZIMMERMANN, KARL. *Onkel Sam: Amerikanische Reise- und Kulturbilder*. Stuttgart, Verlag von Strecker und Schröder, 1904. 251 p. Date: Several years prior to publication. On p. 81-83 there is a brief history of the Indians of Oklahoma and a general account of the history of the state as a whole. Zimmermann (like most German travellers in America) is extremely annoyed by the nascent prohibition movement.