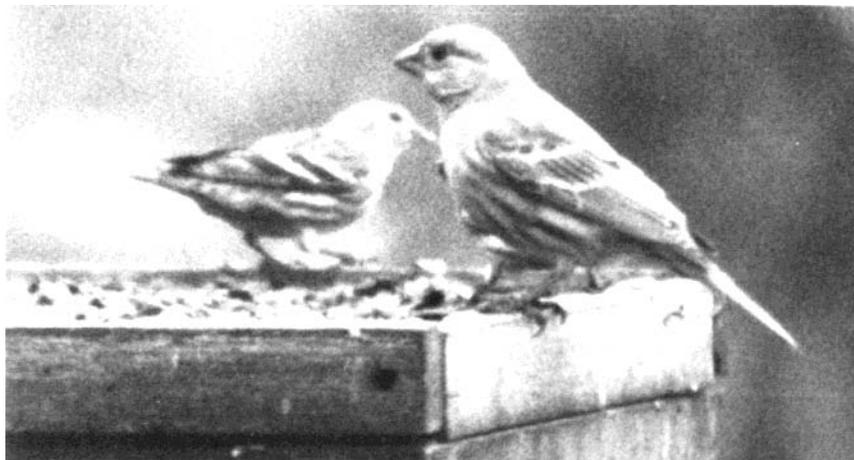


EASTWARD EXPANSION OF  
THE HOUSE FINCH'S RANGE IN OKLAHOMA

BY MITCHELL OLIPHANT AND INA S. BROWN

The House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*), or linnet, has long been known as one of the most common birds of the western United States. Its range extends from British Columbia south through California to southern Mexico, thence east to the Great Plains. In 1940, a small number of birds was released into the wild on Long Island, New York. They had been captured in California and shipped to New York City, where they were to be sold as "Hollywood finches" (Bent, A. C., *et al.*, 1968, Life histories of North American birds, U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. No. 237, Pt. 1, pp. 290-291). From this small beginning, they multiplied prodigiously. Today they occupy a vast area of the eastern United States, and are still rapidly expanding their range to the west, having already crossed the Mississippi River. In 1983, they nested at Jennings, Missouri, a suburb of St. Louis, and were reported from Davenport, Iowa (Peterjohn, B. G., 1983, *Am. Birds* 37:995). It now seems probable that before long the western and eastern populations of the species will meet.



**MALE HOUSE FINCH WITH PINE SISKIN**

*Note the bigger bill, relatively larger size, and boldly streaked flanks of House Finch on right. Photo taken in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, by Mitchell Oliphant sometime between 20 February and 20 March 1984.*

While the House Finch has been spreading through the East in a manner reminiscent of the House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) in the nineteenth century, it has also been expanding its range in the West, though here at a slower pace (Williams, F., 1981, *Am. Birds* 35:956). To illustrate this point, it is useful to examine in detail the history of the species in Oklahoma.

The first record for the House Finch in Oklahoma apparently dates back to the summer of 1919, when fewer than a dozen (mostly males) were observed by E. P. Rothrock in a cottonwood grove 5 miles north of Kenton, Cimarron County, far northwestern Oklahoma (Tate, R. C., 1925, *Condor* 27:176). The species became increasingly more common until, by 1922, Tate had discovered several nests in and near the town of Kenton itself. In the spring of 1925, he described the southeastern limits of the range as being about 9 miles southeast of Kenton (Tate, 1925, *loc. cit.*). During subsequent years, there were records from Cimarron County in 1926 (Ortenburger, A. I., and E. L. Little, Jr., 1930, *Publ. Univ. Oklahoma Biol. Surv.* 2:193) and in 1932, 1933, 1936, and 1937 (G. M. Sutton Summary of Bird Records, Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist., Univ. Oklahoma, Norman). No other reports were published until 1952, but since then the species has been recorded virtually every year (Sutton Summary, *op. cit.*), leading Sutton (1967, *Oklahoma birds*, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 590) to list the House Finch as "resident" in Cimarron County. Interestingly, the species often nests in walkingstick cholla cactus (*Opuntia imbricata*), which is common in the Black Mesa country. By 1957, House Finches were repeatedly being seen eastward to Boise City and in woods along the Cimarron River 13 miles north of that town, although no nests were found in these locations (Sutton, 1967, *loc. cit.*). On 3 February 1957, the first sighting of a House Finch in Oklahoma outside of Cimarron County was recorded. On that date, Sutton and others saw two (adult male, UOMZ 2908 collected) in Red Rock Canyon State Park, Caddo County, west-central Oklahoma (Sutton, 1967, *loc. cit.*).

In west-central Oklahoma, there has been a significant series of House Finch sightings in the vicinity of Elk City, Beckham County, since 1964. Records kept by Ina S. Brown reveal that from 15 January to 6 May of that year, she and her husband, Ivy R. Brown, repeatedly observed a small flock at a feeder in the yard of Nell Harris. Since then, the finches have returned to Elk City every winter, having been recorded at various locations in the city by Mrs. Brown and, during the period 1968-73, also by Eva Cheesman. On only one occasion — in the late winter of 1969 — did Mrs. Brown observe the species in the countryside near Elk City; in this part of the state, it seems to prefer living in towns. By 1980, the birds appeared to have become year-round residents of Elk City. In May of that year, Mrs. Brown frequently observed adult birds bringing young to a feeder in her yard. During the spring of 1981, while both male and female-like birds again visited her feeder, several fruitless searches for a nest were made by Mrs. Brown and others. In 1982, there were, as usual, numerous sightings in Elk City, but again no nest was found. However, Mrs. Brown was informed by Mrs. Henry Lowrance of a nest that fledged young in Erick, some 35 miles to the southwest. Finally, in April of 1983, a nest was discovered in Elk City at the Orval Phillips residence. It had been

built in half a coconut shell decorated with artificial flowers and hung beneath the eaves of the house. Five eggs were in the nest on 22 April and all five had hatched three days later. Four fledged on 10 May, one the next day. House Finches were also observed at feeders in Clinton, Custer County, west-central Oklahoma, in the early spring of 1983, and it appears likely that they may be nesting there as well (*vide*, Harriett Pedigo).

House Finches have been seen at several other locations in southwestern Oklahoma over the past 20 years. J. D. Ligon saw a single female-like bird 4 miles southwest of Hollis, Harmon County, on 6 August 1964 (Sutton, 1967, *loc. lit.*). Mrs. V. E. Estes saw a male in Altus, Jackson County, on 10-12 and 28 January 1973 (Tyler, J. D., 1979, *Birds of southwestern Oklahoma*, Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist., Univ. Oklahoma, Norman, p. 50), and Mrs. Brown observed a singing male there on 2 and 14 June 1979. In Lawton, Comanche County, the species was first reported on 11 July 1978 by Leonard and Esther Beavers. Since then, the birds have apparently become regular winter visitants in Lawton, having been seen repeatedly by the Beavers and Janet M. McGee from 1979 through March 1983. No nest has been found there (*vide*, Jack D. Tyler).

That House Finches have moved into west-central and southwestern Oklahoma should not be surprising, since the species has long been common in adjacent areas of Texas. Since 1978, as reported in *American Birds*, it has been recorded on every Christmas Count in Amarillo and on every count but one in Wichita Falls, which is scarcely 20 miles south of the Oklahoma border. The bird is also increasing rapidly in Kansas. As examples, in 1976 it nested in northwestern Kansas (Williams, F., 1979, *Am. Birds* 33:294); in 1983, 250 of them were banded at Hays City (Williams, F., 1983, *Am. Birds* 37:1004); and the species has been reported eastward almost to the Missouri border (Williams, F., 1979, *loc. cit.*).

In the Oklahoma Panhandle, no sightings were recorded east of Boise City until 1981. On 25 February of that year Kurt Schaefer, Professor of Biology at Panhandle State University in Goodwell, Texas County, saw one there (Sutton Summary, *op. cit.*). On 16 April 1984, John S. Shackford saw a pair fly from an eight-foot juniper tree near the Biology Building on the campus. They had flown from what appeared to be a half-finished nest, although Shackford could not be certain it was not an old nest. Upon inquiring, he was informed by Schaefer that in recent years, House Finches had nested in "every one" of four or five tall junipers near the building. Shackford noted that there were, in fact, old nests of some sort in virtually every upright juniper. Later, he saw and heard singing what may have been a second male on the opposite side of the building. On 26 June 1983, in Beaver, Beaver County, Shackford had watched a male as it sang from a telephone wire (*vide*, John S. Shackford).

For central Oklahoma, three sightings are on record. A single bird was seen by George M. Sutton at Hospital Lake (now the Sutton Urban Wilderness) in Norman, Cleveland County, on 14 September, 1968 (Sutton, G. M., 1974, *A check-list of Oklahoma birds*, Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist., Univ. Oklahoma, Norman, p. 43). On 16 February 1979, in Wakita, Grant County, north-central Oklahoma, L. L. Byfield and his wife Ann saw a male in their yard (Byfield,

L. L., 1979, Bull. Oklahoma Orn. Soc. 12:34). On 20 February 1984 *Carpodacus mexicanus* was observed in Oklahoma County, central Oklahoma, for the first time. At about 1630, on a feeding tray in his backyard on the near-northwest side of Oklahoma City, Mitchell Oliphant discovered a male House Finch. This bird Oliphant saw almost daily for a month after the initial sighting. It was banded and photographed on 12 March 1984, but continued to visit the feeder after being released. It was not seen again after 20 March.

The increasing number of House Finch sightings eastward in Oklahoma and elsewhere during recent years strongly implies that the species' range expansion is continuing.

3116 N. VIRGINIA, OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA 73118 AND 106 SUNSET, ELK CITY, OKLAHOMA 73644.  
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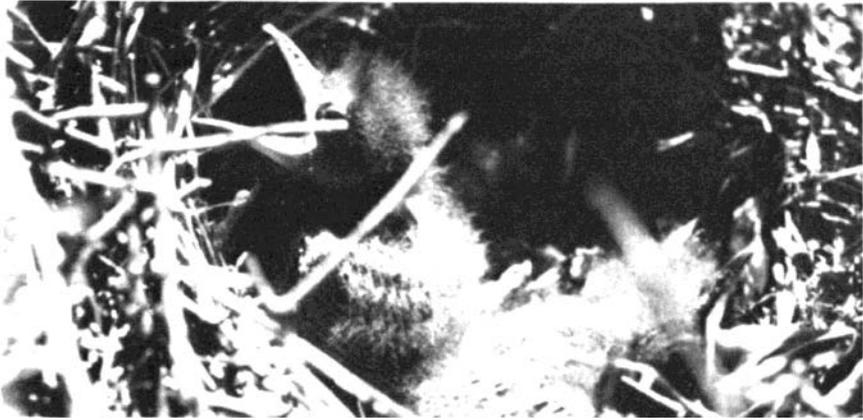
## THE CURVE-BILLED THRASHER IN SOUTHWESTERN OKLAHOMA

BY JOHN W. AULT III

The Curve-billed Thrasher (*Toxostoma curvirostre*) is a resident of the thorn scrub, semidesert shrublands, brush and cactus country of the arid southwestern United States. It reaches the northeastern limits of its range along an irregular line through northeastern New Mexico, southeastern Colorado, extreme western Oklahoma (Black Mesa region), and southwestern Kansas (1983, American Ornithologists' Union Check-list of North American birds, 6th ed., p. 572). H. C. Oberholser (1974, The bird life of Texas, Vol. 2, Univ. Texas Press, Austin, p. 653, gives the Texas range as "resident . . . in Trans-Pecos, southern Panhandle, and south Texas brush country; uncommon in middle Panhandle . . . north locally and irregularly to northern Panhandle (non-breeders) . . ." However, occasional vagrants show up far outside this range and have been reported as far north as Manitoba, Nebraska and Wisconsin, west to the coast of southern California, and east to Florida, one even in New Hampshire (see map in Newlon, M. C., 1981, Iowa Bird Life 51:23).

*Toxostoma curvirostre* was first reported from Oklahoma in September 1933 by George M. Sutton (1934, Ann. Carnegie Mus. 24:35-36), who also discovered the first nest on 5 June 1936 near Kenton, in northwestern Cimarron County (1936, Auk 53:434). At that time the species was considered rare. It has been more frequently recorded since its discovery, but has not extended its range eastward (Sutton, G. M., 1967, Oklahoma birds, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, p. 425). Sutton wrote that walkingstick cholla cactus (*Opuntia imbricata*), which was used exclusively as a nesting site in Cimarron County, appeared to have been the factor limiting the species' range (1948, Condor 50:40-43).

Published Oklahoma records for the species east of the Black Mesa have been from the following counties: Ellis, 26 December 1968 (Sutton, G. M., 1974, A check-list of Oklahoma birds, Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist., Univ. Oklahoma, Norman, p. 31); Beckham, 3-10 January 1971 (Sutton, 1974, *loc. cit.*); Jackson, late January to 24 February 1965 (Sutton, G. M., 1968, Bull. Oklahoma Orn. Soc. 1:19), 12 and 31 October 1972, and 20 November 1973 (Sutton, 1974, *loc. cit.*); Kiowa, 27 March to 7 April 1968 (Carlton, B., 1968, Bull. Oklahoma Orn. Soc. 1:19-20); Comanche, 1, 18, and 29 December, 1976 (Fears,



### *CURVE-BILLED THRASHER CHICKS*

*This nest, the second known for southwestern Oklahoma, was located 4 miles north and a half mile east of Eldorado, Jackson County. It contained four chicks, but only two are visible. The photograph was made on 5 May 1979 by Wesley S. Isaacs.*

O. T., 1977, Bull. Oklahoma Orn. Soc. 10:24); Oklahoma, 31 May to 30 August 1970 (Sutton, 1974, *loc. cit.*); and Cleveland, 1 October 1980 (Grzybowski, J. A., 1983, Bull. Oklahoma Orn. Soc. 16:22).

Since 12 October 1972, and during every month of the year, there have been more than 40 unpublished sightings of Curve-billed Thrashers by me and others within 10 miles of Eldorado, in southwestern Jackson County, Oklahoma (Sutton Summary of Bird Records, Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist., Univ. Oklahoma, Norman). Except for one observed in extreme southeastern Harmon County, all of these birds were in Jackson County. In every instance, the thrashers were in or adjacent to mesquite (*Prosopis juliflora*) woodlands, which predominate in the area. Walkingstick cholla cactus, which Sutton thought restricted the thrasher's range in Cimarron County, is not native to southwestern Oklahoma.

Thus far, three Curve-billed Thrasher nests have been located in this part of the state, all near Eldorado. The first, built entirely with twigs of Russian thistle (*Salsola kali*), I found on 17 June 1975, 1½ miles south of town (Tyler, J. D., 1979, Birds of southwestern Oklahoma, Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist., Univ. Oklahoma, Norman, p. 38). It was nine feet off the ground in a mesquite tree 13 feet tall, and contained four naked young thrashers that I estimated were about six days old. The second nest, discovered by several members of the Oklahoma Ornithological Society on 5 May 1979, was 4 miles north and a half mile east of Eldorado. Barely 3½ feet up, it was nestled in a lotebush (*Condalia obtusifolia*) 6 feet tall and it, too, held four nestlings (see photo). On 16 June 1979, approximately 40 yards south of the second nest, I located a third. This one contained two young birds and was 7½ feet high, again in a mesquite, this one about 12 feet in height. Because of their close proximity, I suspected the

latter two nests to have been built by the same pair of thrashers.

Other evidence of breeding has been found on three occasions. On 3 August 1976 (not 6 August, as reported incorrectly in Tyler, 1979, *loc. cit.*), two young thrashers were observed in mesquite land 6½ miles north and a half mile east of Eldorado. These had a yellowish tinge to their bills, a "scruffy" appearance, and were only two-thirds adult size. A family group of at least six birds was noted 3 miles north and 1½ miles east of town on 31 August 1976 in similar habitat (Tyler, 1979, *loc. cit.*). In a mesquite pasture 4¼ miles north and a half mile east of Eldorado, another family of five thrashers was seen on 1 September 1977.

The nearest known breeding localities to Eldorado are approximately 100 miles south-southwest in Kent County, Texas (Oberholser, 1974, *loc. cit.*), and 120 miles to the northwest in Randall County, Texas (Williams, F., 1975, *Am. Birds* 29:1002). A sight record from King County, Texas, is only about 65 miles south-southwest (Oberholser, 1974, *loc. cit.*). In a study of the summer birds of Wilbarger County, Texas, 25 miles southeast of Eldorado, R. L. More and J. K. Strecker (1929, *Contrib. Baylor Univ. Mus.* 20:3-16) did not report the Curve-billed Thrasher. Recently, however, it has been observed in several nearby Texas counties (Cottle, Foard, Childress, and Hardeman; pers. comm., Peggy Acord) and in a number of other counties in the central and northern Texas panhandle (pers. comm., K. D. Seyffert).

On the basis of the preceding observations, it appears that the Curve-billed Thrasher is a permanent resident in western Jackson County, and should be looked for in adjacent mesquitelands of western Oklahoma and north-western Texas.

240 NUTTING HALL, UNIVERSITY OF MAINE, ORONO 04473. 3 JULY 1979.

## GENERAL NOTES

**Wood Storks in Lake Texoma area.**—G. M. Sutton (1974, A check-list of Oklahoma birds, *Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist.*, Univ. Oklahoma, Norman, p. 4) reported that non-breeding Wood Storks (*Mycteria americana*) had been recorded from 1 May to 27 September in Oklahoma, westward to Alfalfa, Cleveland and Oklahoma counties. At 1445 on 19 July 1982, several Wood Storks were observed at the Fobb Bottom Public Hunting Area adjacent to northwestern Lake Texoma, Marshall County, south-central Oklahoma. McCarley and members of his natural history of vertebrates class from the University of Oklahoma Biological Station nearby were seining a small pond when five immature storks started to settle in willow trees (*Salix nigra*) around the pond. These birds flared away when they saw the students. Several minutes later, two birds, then three, flew over but they, too, veered off. McCarley could clearly see their yellow bills and "fuzzy" (partially feathered) heads, convincing him that they were all immature. This sighting apparently constitutes the first record for Marshall County.

On 21 July, 1982, Haller watched five immature Wood Storks at Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge, Grayson County, Texas, on the Big Mineral Arm of Lake Texoma and about 10 miles (16 km) SSE of the Marshall County

sighting. We believe that these were probably the same individuals seen on 19 July. On 12 August 1982, Haller saw four immature birds on the refuge, but it is not known whether or not these were part of the aforementioned group. Records between 1946 and 1969 at Hagerman Wildlife Refuge show that from 4 August to 25 September, in 1963 and 1964, sightings of from 1 to 58 storks were reported.—Howard McCarley and Karl W. Haller, *Department of Biology, Austin College, Sherman, Texas 75090, 18 February, 1983.*

**Cooper's Hawk nests in Cimarron County, Oklahoma.** — On 13 June 1980, at the Laurance Regnier ranch 4 miles south of Kenton, Cimarron County, far western Oklahoma, I was shown the nest of a Cooper's Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*) about 20 feet up in a middle-sized tree just north of the house. When Mr. Regnier's wife, Carrie, showed it to me, the female flew from it, voicing a harsh, cackled *ka-ka-ka-ka-ka* as she sped toward a cottonwood nearby and alighted. I did not climb to the nest, for I did not want to disturb the birds. When I returned half an hour later, the female again was there. Since I could not see the heads of young birds, I concluded that the nest probably held eggs or small chicks.

In 1981 a pair of Cooper's Hawks, presumably the same pair, again nested on the Regnier Ranch, this time about 40 feet up in a large cottonwood tree which was several hundred yards upstream (south) from the first nest site. On 6 June, Jack Tyler, John Newell, Wesley Isaacs, John Tomer, Neil Garrison, and I saw the female fly from this nest while the male circled about near the canyon rim. Since we could not see the heads of any young, we concluded that the nest held, once again, eggs or small young.

The Cooper's Hawk has been seen regularly in Cimarron County since the turn of the century, but the nests discussed above are the first to have been reported from there since 1922 (see Nice, M. M., 1931, *The birds of Oklahoma*, Rev. ed., Publ. Univ. Oklahoma Biol. Surv., Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 71). The species is nowhere common in Oklahoma today. — John S. Shackford, *Rt. 1, Box 125, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73111, 23 June 1981.*

**Common Grackle nest in tree cavity.** — A recent paper describing a "cavity nest" of the Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*) observed in Oswego, New York (see Maxwell, G. R. II, J. M. Nocilly, and R. I. Shearer, 1976, *Wilson Bull.*, 88: 505-507), prompts me to report a "cavity nest" that I found on 31 May 1971 in a dead tree among cottonwoods along the Cimarron River near Kenton, Cimarron County, far western Oklahoma. I had been following a female Lesser Goldfinch (*Carduelis psaltria*) about that morning, for she had had what appeared to be nest material in her bill. While watching her, I noticed that several Common Grackles were flying about above me, one of them a female carrying nest material. The goldfinch flew across the river and out of sight among some willows. Believing that I might lure her back, I "squeaked" loudly, thus exciting the grackles. The goldfinch did not reappear, but almost directly above me I heard the muffled scratching of a female grackle as she moved up and out of a cavity about eight feet from the ground in a not very large tree, probably an ash (*Fraxinus* sp.), whose base was only a few yards

from where I sat. Her excited *chacks* summoned first a male grackle, likely her mate, then a second female grackle. Climbing to the nest was easy enough, but the entrance to the cavity, which was about a foot deep, was narrow, so I had difficulty reaching the four eggs. These I collected. I could not see the nest very clearly, but it felt as if well lined. I collected first the male bird, then the female that had flown from the nest (UOMZ 7133, 7134). The eggs proved to be fresh. The clutch may not have been complete.

A fairly large colony of Common Grackles has nested for years about an iron bridge that crosses Carrizozo Creek, a major tributary to the Cimarron about a mile west of Kenton. I am not sure, however, that a colony nested there in 1971.—George M. Sutton, *Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist., Univ. Oklahoma, Norman 73019, 15 December 1976.*

**Say's Phoebe nest in Beaver County, Oklahoma.**—On the 27th of June, 1983, at 0618, Wayne Lewis, Paul Nighswonger and I, while conducting a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Breeding Bird Survey (Route No. 035) in Beaver County, Oklahoma, heard the call note of a Say's Phoebe (*Sayornis saya*) 9 miles west and 2 south of the town of Beaver. Because survey regulations stipulate that observers must remain exactly three minutes at each half-mile interval, we took note of the location and returned at 1030 after we had completed the route, hoping to find a nest. Near the spot where we had heard the call was a 10 x 16 foot open-face shed adjoined by a small corral. As we approached, a pair of phoebes was perched on the corral fence.

Entering the wooden shed, we soon located the nest, which contained four white eggs, possibly a full clutch. However, the birds did not appear to be incubating them yet. The nest, situated on a sill about eight feet off the floor, was composed principally of weed stems but also of leaves, grasses, and other fibrous material.

The species is not known to have bred outside Cimarron County, Oklahoma, at the west end of the panhandle, but according to H. A. Stephens, Say's Phoebe has nested in Seward, Meade, and Clark counties of southwestern Kansas, immediately north of Beaver and Harper counties, Oklahoma (Sutton, G. M., 1967, Oklahoma birds, Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman, p., 340). It has been observed in Oklahoma on numerous occasions during migration as far east as Garfield, Cleveland, Tulsa, and Nowata counties (Sutton, G. M., 1974, A checklist of Oklahoma birds, *Stovall Mus. Sci. & Hist., Univ. Oklahoma, Norman, p. 25*). — Laurence Dunn, *Gate, Oklahoma 73844, 20 September, 1983.*

FROM THE EDITOR — I wish to express my appreciation to the associate editors for their indispensable help since 1982. They have corrected grammar, suggested changes, gone out of their way to check references, corresponded with authors, and functioned in various other ways to assure the high standards of writing maintained in the *Bulletin*. John Shackford has been especially helpful with photographic material. Authors may elect to send their papers to one of the associates rather than directly to the editor. Their names and addresses are: William Carter, Biology Department, East Central University, Ada OK 74820; Joe Grzybowski, 1701 Lenox, Norman, OK 73069; John Shackford, Rt. 1, Box 125, Oklahoma City, OK 73111; and John Tomer, 5911 E. 46th St., Tulsa, OK 74135 — Jack D. Tyler.